The Event of Blues Music and the Effects of Technology on the Artistic Event

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism  
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy  
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Abstract

The goal of this dissertation is to find out whether or not blues music is an event. I explore what constitutes a musical or artistic event in modern times and to see how this has changed in relation to earlier periods. I also identify its essential formal elements. I divide blues music into two categories, namely, its technical playing qualities (the micro) and its historical changes (the macro). This division frames the entire project and illustrates that in order to discuss an artistic event, we must account for both its technical and historical aspects. I examine several theories of the event including those of Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, and Martin Heidegger. While Deleuzian events are common and happen at the most elemental stages in life, Badiou’s notion of the event focuses on rare historical occurrences. Heidegger, by contrast, offers an ontological look at the happening of artistic works. He claims that great works of art are happenings that tell the viewer something about the culture from which they originated. However, Heidegger’s theory falls short because of his exclusive consideration of static forms of art as well as his distrust of technology. In response to Heidegger, I turn to the works of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Benjamin provides a theory about the importance of mechanical reproduction and its effects on the work of art. While Adorno’s theory proposes that modern forms of music are essentially non-events. Adorno’s critique of jazz (and popular music in general, including the blues) comes from a misunderstanding of the importance of the medium on the general population. I conclude that blues music is an event and that it cannot be considered outside of its history as a musical form of reproduction. Ultimately, I will illustrate that the event of blues music changes the way we consider artistic events as a whole.

Keywords
Deleuze, Badiou, Heidegger, Benjamin, Adorno, Event, Art, Blues Music, Technology.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism and Western University for allowing me to pursue this project. I feel fortunate to be able to write about a topic that has been so important to me during my adult life.

Next, I would like to thank everyone on my supervisory committee, including Antonio Calcagno, Helen Fielding and Jonathan De Souza. Your hard work and guidance helped me shape this project. I want to give special thanks to my supervisor, Antonio Calcagno, who has helped me every step of the way. He has been very generous with his time and I am forever grateful.

I would be remiss not to mention a special group of friends from my undergraduate days. My friends in the King’s Philosophy department showed me how hard I needed to work in order to be successful. From that group I wish to thank Rachel Robinson for her help in editing this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife and the rest of my family for their support, especially my mom and dad, who always preached the value of education. Although at first I resisted the idea of going to university, it turned out to be the best decision of my life. This dissertation is dedicated to them.
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The Event of Blues Music - Introduction

Is blues music an event? This is the question I pursue in my dissertation. Although seemingly broad, it seeks to answer much more than the question of blues music and its place within event theory. By looking for an answer, I aim to explore what constitutes a musical or artistic event and to see how it has been impacted by technological changes. I will look at the question about the nature of events from several different viewpoints. The first will look at the history of blues music to show how it has evolved and to name the essential elements that make up its playing qualities. By doing so, I will divide blues music into two categories, namely, its technical playing qualities (the micro) and its historical changes (the macro). Through this division I will illustrate that if we are to explain its eventful qualities, blues music needs to be considered from both the micro and the macro perspectives. I will start from the origins of blues music and discuss why the blues was such an important break from traditional forms of music. From a technical standpoint, blues music was known for its improvisational style that did not depend on written notation. From a historical standpoint blues music was originally performed by African Americans in the early twentieth century, but that changed in the middle of the century when it began to appeal more to white audiences, which shifted its style dramatically. What I hope the reader will learn from this chapter is that blues music has a complicated history in which its style was influenced greatly by the individuals that played it.

The next step will be to look at several theories of the event in order to understand how blues music can be considered an event and whether or not certain aspects of the blues are events. Specifically, in Chapter 2, I will examine Gilles Deleuze’s and Alain Badiou’s thought because their theories complement one another even though in some aspects they drastically
differ. While Deleuzian events are common and happen at the most elemental stages in life, Badiou’s notion of the event focuses on rare historical occurrences. These two theories are each one part of the micro and macro division that I set out to explain throughout the entire project. I conclude that it is not possible to consider the blues event in merely the micro or macro forms. Both are needed if we are to understand artistic events at all, especially when it comes to blues music and its intricate history. Deleuze’s theory gives us a method of discussing the micro events of blues music, such as the “blue note” on a scale, or the minor variations we find in individual playing styles. Badiou’s notion of the new, however, helps us understand why blues music was an important deviation away from classical music.

Although Deleuze and Badiou each account for one aspect of the event, Martin Heidegger’s approach offers an ontological look at the happening of artistic works. Chapter 3 will explore Heidegger’s theories on the happening of the work and how the event of art can only be explained in its cultural context as a form of revealing of being. Heidegger believes that great works of art are happenings that tell the viewer something about the culture from which they originated. Thus, great works of art are events that bring-forth the being of a particular time and place. Where Heidegger’s theory falls short is in his exclusive consideration of static forms of art and lack of discussion on music, as well as his distrust of technology. Without a proper concern of how being is exemplified through other forms of art such as music or film, we are left with only a limited possibility for how truth can manifest itself in artistic form. Heidegger’s thesis that technology limits the revealing of being loses an essential aspect of blues music history, namely its recorded history and its place within the industry of music.

In response to Heidegger I turn to the works of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno in Chapter 4. What Heidegger fails to discuss with mechanical reproduction, Benjamin addresses
by providing a theory about the importance of reproduction technology for various art forms. However, once again I find this approach ultimately dissatisfying. This dissatisfaction is expressed by a number of critics who claim that Benjamin failed to consider how the aura may actually survive through reproduction. These authors open up conversations on the nature of reproduction in music and what impact it has had on the industry and its participants. We will be able to return to the issue of the micro and macro distinction by showing that blues history has been influenced by the subtle differences in individual artists, made possible in large part due to the advent of mechanical reproduction.

The final section of Chapter 4 provides an important critique of the culture industry and its potential to use works of art as a means to control the population. It explores Adorno’s theory that modern forms of music are essentially non-events. I argue that Adorno’s critique of jazz (and popular music in general, including the blues) stems from a misunderstanding of the potential effects that the medium can have on the listener. I draw the conclusion that blues music as an event cannot be considered outside of its history as a musical form of reproduction. Ever since blues music has been standardized, it has been recorded and its recording is what we know to be truthful. Technology, through mechanical reproduction does not need to be a negative aspect of blues history, and has in fact caused more exposure than ever previously possible. Technological reproduction has split the event by taking away the limits of time and space and blues music has developed parallel to this changing landscape. Ultimately, I will illustrate that blues music is an event that should change the way in which we consider artistic events as a whole. We can no longer consider artistic or musical events without considering the technologies from which and in which they develop.
Chapter 1 - Blues Music History

The history of blues music cannot be separated from the social, economic and cultural living conditions of those who performed and created it. As William Barlow states, “The blues tradition is therefore interwoven with the social conditions, concerns, conflicts, and shifts in consciousness among working-class African Americans.” Although we will see that blues music has had many contributors, its origins are primarily African. The task of this chapter will be to look at this history as well as the technical aspects of the music itself to better understand the music from both a technical and cultural standpoint. Just as an event is not merely a series of technical occurrences or happenings, neither are the complex qualities of art or music. This chapter is meant to be an introduction into the varying aspects of the blues, including the people who have been part of its history. The methodology of this chapter will be to look at some blues historians that have discussed various themes throughout the history of blues music. Although it would be impossible to go into depth for each one of these themes, I will discuss a wide breadth of topics in order to illustrate the complexity of this cultural phenomenon. My hopes are that this will lay the foundation for the chapters to come so that the reader has a general understanding of blues music theory and its history.

Origins

The primary location for the beginning of this study is the southern part of the United States. Places such as Mississippi, Texas, Georgia, Tennessee and Louisiana, all play an important part in the early development of blues music. It was this region that for a couple of centuries was referred to as the “Cotton Belt.” Although life for most African Americans around the country

was very difficult, life in this area is of particular importance for this study. Because cotton was such an important commodity to those areas, plantation owners required a vast amount of labour, often using slaves. Slave owners de-humanized African Americans in a number of ways, which justified their use of slaves in the labour force. The value of slaves was based solely on how much they could work, or in the case of many females, how many children they could bear in order to continue generational slavery.

One of slavery’s most devastating effects was robbing Africans of their identity and grouping them into a homogenous mass, so that they would no longer identify with their cultural origins. However, the complete annihilation of cultural identity was impossible. We find the earliest folk songs were done in groups and acted out in solidarity. It was a matter of achieving personal freedom over salvation, thus many early folk songs were a secular form of music. It became common for groups of slaves to sing in the fields, participating in either field hollers, or work songs. The latter was a group performance in the form of a call and response, in which one singer would sing a verse and then it would be repeated either identically or with some small variations by the rest of the group. Field hollers also sometimes followed this formula, but were mostly done as solo performances. These songs were meant to be a form of sorrowful expression and were one of the few means by which African Americans could communicate with one another. Other kinds of work songs used to voice displeasure, or to communicate during work, included arhoolies (a style without instruments that consisted of whoops, hollers, cries and arhoolies as they were called) and ballads as well. All these styles would later contribute to the formation of rural folk blues. These songs were done in communal settings, even if performed by

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2 Barlow, 17-18.
a single person. There was often a purpose to each kind of song which gave them meaning beyond entertainment value. The blues began to grow in popularity as more communal gatherings began to form. Blues was at its base a social, rather than solitary form of music that gave people a voice when they needed one. As we will see, this social aspect is what many critics will say is lacking in white musicians that overtook the blues scene in the 1960s. Whereas African American musicians sang because they felt a need to communicate with one another about their hardships, white musicians were criticized for appropriating the blues for their personal experiences, but could never convey any sense of communal or racial oppression in the same manner. The blues and early folk music gave African Americans an opportunity to practice their own culture away from the influence of slave, or land owners. Blues music is a perfect example, as it is a purely aural/oral tradition, an important aspect of many African cultures.

Unlike some of the songs that are produced for entertainment value, many of these songs were made for the purpose of human interaction. During the long working hours either on cotton or sugar plantations, this was one of the few times when the voices of the oppressed could be heard. This cultivated sentiments of solidarity that would not have otherwise been possible in complete silence.

I do not want to overstate the role of these songs in the formation of symbiotic relationships among workers, there were other times when African Americans could interact with one another. However, I want to emphasize the formation of a cultural happening that would later contribute to the creation of blues music. As Oakley writes, “The blues has always functioned as a form of cultural expression which not only provided real pleasure and uplifting entertainment, but also helped enable significant numbers of black people to negotiate their own

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4 Barlow, 18.
sense of identity." The blues was an expression of cultural values that was personal in nature and inaccessible to whites. It was one of the few things that African Americans could claim to be their own and stemmed from a common struggle. Despite having languages that were distinct from their captors, music became another form of personal expression that was created and played by African Americans, which allowed traditions from the past to live on and created new ones to pass down for generations.

During this time, other forms of music that included African Americans began to develop, sometimes positive, while other times they perpetuated negative stereotypes. The positive forms of music came during camp meetings near the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. As David Hatch and Stephen Millward explain, the meetings were interracial religious gatherings in which different styles of music would be shared. Because of the influence of African styles, religious music took on a tone previously unheard. There were various types of shouts, chants and rhythms practiced during the singing of these religious songs. These gatherings were the early origins of not only blues, but also gospel music. The two styles developed parallel to each other and oftentimes it was not clear which style was being played, because of the lack of standardization in both genres. Early gospel was very similar to blues, as it depended on simple patterns, often improvised and not written down. This oral practice was indicative of many styles during the time and resulted in a lack of standardization and replication. Each performance could be thought of as a unique occurrence that could never be identically replicated, even if two performances were similar. Part of the

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5 Oakley, 255.
reason why blues music was unique was that each performance was new and fresh, never relying on a standard set of notations given to the performer.

On the other end of the spectrum, not all forms of early folk music were positive. Minstrel shows were a form of live entertainment in which performers (mostly white) would dress up in black face and imitate what they believed to be various characteristics of African Americans. As one can imagine, these performances were based on negative stereotypes that were created and perpetuated by the white population. In the 1840s, characters were created that were meant to portray the average African American male. Some of these characters included the black simpleton, Zip Coon, Jim Crow and the Negro dandy, the latter was a portrayal of an African American who tried to behave and dress like a white person. African Americans would sometimes participate in these shows as a means to earn money. Later in the century, African Americans developed their own version of “Coon Songs” (a derivative of minstrel shows), which was a way of recapturing their identity. If audiences wanted to see black stereotypes, then some African Americans thought they could earn money themselves rather than allow whites to continue exploiting their image. Although it perpetuated black stereotypes, some saw it as a way of empowering black voices by allowing them to control their own narrative. Despite the controversy, Coon songs were one of the first organized forms of black entertainment and later used ragtime inspired music, which was also a primarily black form of music.

Despite the abolition of slavery in 1865, most African Americans continued to live in poverty. Over the course of the next century, progress would be made towards the civil rights
movement, but this progress was slow. Although technically free by law, most African Americans would live in a system that was designed to keep them in the poorest classes. Few had enough money to buy their own land or property, forcing many to take out loans that would essentially keep them in perpetual servitude to the land owners. Sharecropping\textsuperscript{10} and farm tenancy replaced slave plantations, but with very little effect on the African American economic situation. Everything, including the land, the materials, and the equipment was on loan at high interest. Even when profits could be made by working the land, all the money went back to repaying the loans. Along with the economic aspects, various social complexities began after slave liberation. African Americans were no longer forced into arbitrary groups and were able to experience more social mobility. As we shall see, the music of the blues reflects that mobility. For the first time, African Americans were able to travel around the country and experience the world outside of their small communities. That does not imply that their lives became easier, but things certainly began to change. What once could only be imagined (the idea of autonomous movement throughout the country), was now becoming a real possibility. It also allowed for the possibility to create real communities and not ones that were forced upon them by plantation owners.

Shortly after, new forms of music began to emerge primarily from African American communities, including what are known today as jazz, ragtime and the blues. Ragtime emerged in the 1890s and would later influence boogie woogie.\textsuperscript{11} Giles Oakley describes the music as melancholic with an addition of a left hand bass on piano.\textsuperscript{12} Along with the more melodic forms

\textsuperscript{10} Sharecropping occurs when the land owner allows a tenant to use their land in exchange for a share of the harvested crops.
\textsuperscript{11} Blues musician Robert Johnson’s popularity has a lot to do with his adaptation of boogie woogie on the piano to the guitar, which helped develop later rock styles.
\textsuperscript{12} Oakley, 32.
of music, some of the first songs published were spirituals that were about escaping bondage.\textsuperscript{13} But this turn in mobility and activity sparked the genre that is the matter at hand; blues music. For African Americans, life was not easy at the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, Dick Weissman calls the period from 1890-1920 one of “maximum oppression,” in which we saw sharecropping, lynching and raping of African Americans.\textsuperscript{14} It is not surprising that the blues developed out of this period. Despite already having developed other forms of music, there was no music like the blues that presented the African American situation better. Julia Simon characterizes the blues by its spontaneity, immediacy, feeling and its ability to stay in the moment, an idea agreed upon by David Evans who says blues music expresses “a remarkable sense of immediacy.”\textsuperscript{15} Simon explains that the carpe diem sentiment often expressed in blues music stems from the socioeconomic conditions experienced by its performers, who often felt as though they had no future prospects.\textsuperscript{16} This sense of immediacy is not only expressed through lyrics, but in blues music’s improvisational character, in which the musician has the freedom to choose their own path. But to explain blues music in more detail requires a more technical understanding of how it set itself apart from other forms of music.

\textbf{The Beginning of Blues Standardization}

After discussing the time period from which it developed, we have yet to explore the technical aspects of blues music. An interesting feature of the blues is that it does not have a clear origin and there is no definition of the blues as such. Several authors including Michael Neumann and Tom Lamont have noted the varying influences on early African and blues music. Neumann

\textsuperscript{13} Weissman, 13.
\textsuperscript{14} Weissman, 2.
\textsuperscript{16} Simon, 29.
suggests that Arab music made its way into Africa which influenced early blues. Lamont documented the blues and compared it to Egyptian “Sira Hilaliyya,” saying they have similarities in how they deal with life (particularly when dealing with the ruling order) and their origins are from poor African communities. Authors Hatch and Millward admit that the blues is a vague term that is not easily defined. For example, country blues, minstrel songs, and jazz all have songs with twelve bar structures. In their search for a definition of the blues, Wade Fox and Richard Greene cite Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance, in which a few members have similar qualities that are evident, but not necessarily on a conscious level. To be considered a “blues song,” a piece should contain a number of standard musical features, without necessarily having all of them at once. In defining the blues, we also need to account for emotional tone, which cannot necessarily be defined technically and certainly cannot be conveyed accurately in written form. Interestingly, as we will see in the next section, hillbilly and folk music tend to have more sorrowful themes than the blues. This may seem counterintuitive, but blues music is not strictly meant to be sad and depressing and even has a history of comedic elements. Although thematically the blues keeps pain at the forefront, it is ultimately about feeling better. The blues can be emancipating, through its themes of defiance, change and hope. Therefore, if we are going to find a definition for the blues, we must investigate as many of its qualities as possible.

Thus far, I have discussed some of the historical circumstances that gave birth to blues music, but now need to explain some of the technical aspects of the music itself. The blues is a musical style based around African folk music with an emphasis on strong downbeats. These

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19 Hatch & Millward, 35.
beats are countered with rhythmic inflections. There is also a building and falling of emotion through scales. With the addition of “blue notes” to scales, a rising tension builds throughout the song, and then is countered by a falling pitch. As William Barlow explains, “The use of blue notes was at the heart of the blues sound, they gave it its subversive character, a dissonance instantly recognizable in both vocals and instrumental renderings.”22 Blue notes on the 3rd and 7th notes of a scale are considered to take on an in-between sound that is not quite major or minor in tone. On their own, blue notes have very little impact, but when they are placed in a blues scale they have a unique sound. Thus, it is an event that must be heard to be appreciated. Standard blues songs also have a tension in the chord progression, which adds to the rising and falling quality of its sound. There is no one definitive form of blues, but these qualities are often part of what we know from twentieth century blues music. However, many different styles of songs have been called blues over the years, even in the beginning of its recorded history.

The first composer to copyright the word blues was a white violinist named Hart Wand in 1912, with his song “Dallas Blues.” However, Francis Davis claims the first song to be a blues song is “Oh, You Beautiful Doll” which was published in 1911, with a twelve bar opening.23 This is important because many blues songs are based on the twelve bar format, in which all the chords are played in a twelve bar progression and then repeated. Although during this time jazz and what we will later call “folk blues” developed parallel to each other, jazz musicians often departed from the standard twelve-bar format and altered its harmonic progression in various ways. When jazz musicians did play twelve bar blues, it was often played in b flat rather than natural E and A which were preferred by blues musicians.24 Blues tended more towards major

22 Barlow, 325.
24 Davis, 154.
chords, using the I, IV, and V chords within the major scale. This numbering system is based around a one octave scale in which the musician begins with the tonic note (I), then moves to the sub-dominant (IV), back to the tonic, to the dominant (V), back to the sub-dominant and finally moves back to the tonic in the end. The effect of this progression is that it creates a rising tension and then a release in a relatively short amount of time. It is worth noting that having a blues chord progression does not necessarily mean that it is a blues song. For example, many of Chuck Berry’s songs have this familiar progression, but are not blues songs as such. This point exemplifies the difficulty of trying to define the blues as such. In blues music these chord progressions coincided with a three-verse pattern that can be answered each time with a short response by the guitar. By the time blues became synonymous with folk styles in the late 1920s, the blues lyrical structure changed from iambic heptameter, to pentameter in order to allow for guitar response.\textsuperscript{25} Although this format became popular, it took over a generation to develop after some of the first songs were recorded.

Returning briefly to its story of origin, there is no musician we can definitively say was the first to create blues music. There is a story that is known to many about the “first time” a person ever heard the blues. I have pieced together this story from several blues historians who have re-told their versions.\textsuperscript{26} The story is of W.C. Handy (an African American musical composer), who happened to hear a style of music he had never heard before at a train station. It was a man playing a guitar and using a knife blade as a slide to produce a unique sound.\textsuperscript{27} The man repeated one verse three times with a basic three chord progression. There is no way we can confirm that this was the first blues song ever played, but it was certainly an important event in

\textsuperscript{25} Evans, 23
\textsuperscript{26} For a more detailed exposition, please refer to the works of either Francis Davis or Giles Oakley.
\textsuperscript{27} Oakley, 40.
blues history as it would inspire Handy’s “The Memphis Blues” in 1912, another one of those songs that is considered to be the one of the first official blues numbers.\textsuperscript{28}

Many other early songs have the word “blues” in them, but this was only titular. According to Francis Davis, the song “Crazy Blues” by Mamie Smith in 1920 is more of a pop song than a blues song, and the same can be said about W.C. Handy’s “The Memphis Blues.”\textsuperscript{29} Despite the fact that these songs are synonymous with blues culture, listeners would be hard-pressed to call them blues songs. However, Handy’s song stands apart from all others for several reasons. The first was that Handy was one of the first people to see commercial possibility in blues music. In publishing his songs, Handy set the standard for blues music in compositional form. Whereas most musicians within the same genre were players or performers, Handy was also a composer of music, which allowed him to set a standard for others to follow. With this ability, Handy used fragments of folk songs to create polished material.\textsuperscript{30} “The Memphis Blues” had a twelve bar structure and relied on a three chord progression. Both of these features are staples in most standard blues songs. For better or for worse, this was the first time that blues music became standardized in a formal way.

This standardized form would be highly influential on the rural blues musicians of the 1930s. However, the blues in the 1910s, 20s, and after WWII were very different. In the early 1920s, the blues were actually identified with African American women more than any other group. As noted above, “Crazy Blues” was another important variation of blues recorded in 1920. Although Davis hesitates to call it blues, the song has historical import on a number of levels. It sold 75,000 copies, making it the most successful “blues” record up to that date and

\textsuperscript{28} Oakley, 40–41
\textsuperscript{29} Davis, 58.
\textsuperscript{30} Simon, 147.
equally important, it was performed by an African American woman.\textsuperscript{31} Despite missing the
typical structure and harmonic progression of a standard blues song, “Crazy Blues” ushered in a
new era of female blues singers in the 1920s. Ma Rainey and Memphis Minnie were two other
female singers that were well known blues singers during this time. However, there is
controversy whether or not they were truly blues singers or if they used the blues as part of their
larger act. They would all sing blues songs, but they had large orchestras and almost never wrote
the songs themselves. As Oakley argues, female blues singers had a reputation of playing
contrived music that was too close to vaudeville.\textsuperscript{32} Hence, there is a reason why female blues
singers of the 1920s have been overlooked by many blues historians. Oakley believes that female
blues singers had as much of an influence on blues music as any of their male counterparts.

Despite the success of these female singers, the vaudeville style would not last for long.
By the end of the 1920s, the stock market crashed and vaudeville lost its popularity. A lack of
economic support for vaudeville developed and female blues singers were the first to suffer the
effects. During the depression, the cost of recording music began to be a factor and one of the
cheapest forms of music became southern blues music. With no need for backup singers,
orchestras, or songwriters, the solo bluesman became much more popular, which hurt female
singers, the majority of whom lost popularity in the 1930s. Despite a downturn in record sales
because of the depression, by the end of the 1930s, blues could be heard across the United States,
helped greatly by the advent of jukeboxes and African American-oriented radio programs. By
1932, a number of record companies had consolidated, which led to what David Evans calls an
“assembly line approach to blues recording.”\textsuperscript{33} Companies began to look for artists that could

\textsuperscript{31} Davis, 29.
\textsuperscript{32} Oakley, 110.
\textsuperscript{33} Evans, 33-34.
sing, play and write their own music. The history of black blues music has always been tied to the economic situation of its performers, and this was a primary example. Moreover, the beginning of standardized forms of blues music coincided with the pressures of industry and the technologies that came with it.

**Delta and Piedmont Blues**

As one era of blues ended, another began. By the late 1920s, several regions began developing and recording their own style of blues. Two main regions, the Delta and Piedmont areas were the main centres of blues music during this time. Texas and Memphis were two other important areas that will be discussed in this section. As we recall, W.C. Handy’s “Memphis Blues” was crucial to the standardization of blues music. Although the female singers of the 1920s adopted some of these aspects of the blues, the Delta and Piedmont players did it to a much greater degree. Many of the songs had twelve bars structures, three stanzas in an AAB pattern, and relied on the I, IV, and V chords from the major scale. Although there were many exceptions, this was by far the most common form of blues during this time, particularly in the Delta region.

As Delta blues began, it was actually a break with the older styles in the South. The guitar and harmonica replaced the fiddle and the banjo. The slide guitar was also able to recreate the arhoolies sound. With a renewed emphasis on the singular performer, bluesmen developed personae in their performances such as “the trickster.” These personae were ways in which various bluesmen could use their imaginations in song and in performance. The characters

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34 As Neumann, notes the banjo was originally an instruments associated with black musicians, while guitar was associated with whites. This reversal is an interesting point in the history of blues particularly when it comes to the notion of race and authenticity. Neumann, 178.
created often embraced their vices and were meant to be relatable to the average person. The flaws of each performer were celebrated, which gave the music a sense of realism that connected with the audience. No one was expected to be perfect, which was indicative of everyday life. The artists were revealing something about everyday life and the way people lived. Blues took on a tone that resonated with the average person, something which was evidenced by its humble structure and lyrical qualities.

A number of singers became more politically and socially relevant when their songs discussed more than just personal themes. It is often the case that those who suffer the most during difficult economic times are the ones that have the least, and this was very much the case during the 1929 market crash. African Americans often lost their jobs from their places of employment before anyone else and were hired last. The same happened with economic relief, which went to whites first. The themes of poverty and systematic racism could be heard in various blues songs, as they related to everyday life. This was in stark contrast to the blues from the 1920s sung by female artists, who rarely mentioned political troubles, instead focusing on more personal problems. Although male blues singers also sang about their own personal issues, Delta blues players generally discussed more pressing political and social issues of the time. Charley Patton from Mississippi was known for his social commentary, including being one of many artists to sing about the 1927 flood of the Mississippi basin in “High Water Everywhere,” as well as the 1929 Delta drought in “Dry Well Blues.” That said, Bessie Smith also sang about the 1927 Mississippi floods in “Back Water Blues,” so there were some socially relevant themes

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35 Barlow, 22-24.
36 Oakley, 147.
during the vaudeville era. Songs about the boll weevil (an insect that came to Texas in the 1890s) were also popular. The insect reached Mississippi by 1915 and wreaked havoc among farmers.\textsuperscript{37}

Several other themes also cropped up during this time. One of the most well known myths from the time was based on meeting the Devil at the crossroads. The legend asserts that at midnight at a deserted crossroad, the Devil appears in the form of a man. The Devil will then tune your guitar and give you the ability to play in exchange for your soul. Among the first to exploit this myth was blues musician Tommy Johnson from Mississippi. This same story was later echoed by another Delta bluesman named Robert Johnson (no relation), but his story became even more legendary because of his seemingly sudden emergence as a talented guitarist. One of his most famous songs was “Crossroad Blues,” where he explains this encounter:

\begin{quote}
I went to the crossroad
fell down on my knees
I went to the crossroad
fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above "Have mercy, now
save poor Bob, if you please

Mmmm, standin' at the crossroad
I tried to flag a ride
Standin' at the crossroad
I tried to flag a ride
Didn't nobody seem to know me
everybody pass me by

Mmm, the sun goin' down, boy
dark gon' catch me here
\hphantom{899999}oooo ooe eeee
boy, dark gon' catch me here
I haven't got no lovin' sweet woman that
love and feel my care

You can run, you can run
tell my friend-boy Willie Brown
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} Oakley, 53.
You can run, you can run
tell my friend-boy Willie Brown
Lord, that I'm standin' at the crossroad, babe
I believe I'm sinkin' down\textsuperscript{38}

As Barlow notes, the crossroads come from an African tale from the Yoruba people. He states that in “Yoruban folklore, a crossroads symbolizes the junction between the physical and the spiritual worlds, the human and the divine, where mortals sought out the god Legba in order to learn their fate.”\textsuperscript{39} For Barlow, this is an important form of defiance by African Americans against white hegemony. The combination of African and Christian folklore provided a modern interpretation of life for many African Americans during the time. Although Johnson used the Devil in his songs, this Devil is clearly the Christianized reincarnation of Legba in these tales, which preserves the African folk tale but in a modern form. In many ways, African American communities were at a crossroads themselves as they tried to navigate the “free” world, but with very little to their names.

These songs illustrate another important theme related to the crossroads, which is life beyond the everyday. In order to escape the everyday realities that most people faced, the blues took on themes of a better life away from the South. Similar thematically to gospel songs that discussed salvation and liberation, the blues discussed a life outside the world in which the artists grew up, but rather than Jordan, the new Promised Land was the North. As one of the earliest Delta bluesmen, Charley Patton’s work expressed what William Barlow calls a desire for a reality beyond the everyday.\textsuperscript{40} This was typical of many Delta blues legends who wanted to escape their immediate surroundings. Barlow points to “Pony Blues” and “Going to Move to

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Crossroad Blues Lyrics.}
\textsuperscript{39} Barlow, 49.
\textsuperscript{40} Barlow, 37.
“Alabama” as examples of the desire for social mobility. Robert Johnson also spoke about social mobility in even more of his songs, including the blues staples, “Sweet Home Chicago,” “Rambling on My Mind,” and “Walking Blues.” These songs contributed to the growing desire to leave the South for various reasons.41

By 1922, the row tractor decreased the demand for workers in the South. Although sharecropping was still common in the South in the 1930s, with 44% of African American farmers participating,42 by the 1930s, African Americans began to migrate north in significant numbers. While the cotton industry began to dwindle, the mechanical production of arms and other work developed in the North. These conditions are tied to the social mobility of which many bluesmen spoke during this same period. For them it was not simply a matter of arbitrarily leaving their homes, but as a means to finding a better life. This had profound effects on black culture and music, and changed the demographics of the United States. Chicago became a popular destination for many African Americans, because of its accessibility by rail from the South. It also had a history of accepting freed and runaway slaves prior to liberation. Lastly, Chicago was home to a well known black culture newspaper called the “Defender,” which drew national attention and was one of the few papers where African Americans were the target audience.43 As we will see in the next section, this became one of the new centres for an updated blues sound.

But before we move on to discuss Chicago and more urban blues, there are a few more things we need to take away from this era of blues music. Returning briefly to the discussion of

41 Julia Simon provides several examples of known artists having to flee the South, including B.B. King. Simon, 121-122.
42 Oakley, 184.
43 Davis, 181.
lyrical themes, Giles Oakley explains that the principal theme of the blues is sexual relationships. He states,

Almost all other themes, leaving town, train rides, work trouble, general dissatisfaction sooner or later reverts to the central concern. Most frequently the core of the relationship is seen as inherently unstable, transient, but with infinite scope for pleasure and exultation in success, or pain and torment in failure. This gives blues its tension and ambiguity, dealing simultaneously with togetherness and loneliness, communion and isolation, physical joy and emotional anguish.44

This is perhaps the best description of the blues. It always has this tension that resides at the surface and is exemplified both lyrically and tonally. Often times these problems are dealt with in a humorous or ironic manner, rather than melancholy.

I think one of the biggest misconceptions of the blues is that many people feel as though the blues must be sad and depressing. This cannot be further from the truth. If you study the lyrics and even listen to many blues songs, you will find a lot of irony and humour in the lyrics and the tone of the music often matches this feeling found in the lyrics. Irony was often used as a mechanism to overcome the grim realities that many people faced. The blues was often much more humorous and ironic than most people think. Take for example the lyrics of Robert Johnson from “Malted Milk”:

Malted milk, malted milk, keep rushin’ to my head
Malted milk, malted milk, keep rushin’ to my head
And I have a funny, funny feelin’ and I'm talkin’ all out my head45

In this example, Johnson is clearly not talking about malted milk, but rather alcohol and how it is beginning to affect his senses. This song illustrates the type of humour present in many blues songs from the time. In hearing the song, the listener knows the artist is singing in jest and the

44 Oakley, 55.
45 Malted Milk Lyrics
tone of the guitar matches his voice. Again, the fact that the song is not played in a minor key, contributes to the tone of the entire song.

After looking at the various qualities of folk blues, we have yet to discuss one of its most significant aspects, which was its improvisatory nature. The blues was no longer meant to be played in a large group that was rehearsed and planned out with technical detail. The improvisatory nature of the blues (and in jazz) represented more than an attempt to redefine how music can be played; through improvisation the artists tried to convey their release from social constraints and their freedom to express themselves as individuals. However, because there was improvisation, there was also a lot of borrowing of verses and chord progressions from one artist to another. There was often no record of who wrote certain songs, as they simply came to be known as part of the canon. This was one of the many drawbacks of not having recorded history.

Texas bluesman Henry Thomas borrowed from various minstrel songs, to create a mix of blues and traditional sounds, leading Oakley to say, “This is a characteristic of many blues, the lashing together of lines or verses often almost totally unrelated to form an impressionist sweep and linked only by the overall mood of the song.”46 This process of borrowing creates a tension between individual performers and the tradition. Julia Simon explains that with improvisation comes a whole set of traditions that is not merely a matter of individual expressions, but rather a set of culturally determined values.47 This tension plays out as a kind of dialectic in which the individual is free to pursue his or her own style, while adhering to the tradition.48

Because of the constant borrowing of songs in blues music, it became difficult to identify a single composer for some songs. Authors Hatch and Millward note that singers such as Blind

46 Oakley, 60.
47 Simon, 197.
48 Simon, 185.
Lemon Jefferson used what are called “stock phrases” in many of his songs, meaning that he borrowed parts of songs from other artists he knew and used them in his own recordings.\(^49\) Simon uses similar language when she refers to the blues tradition as a “virtual stock house” from which artists borrow lyrics, chords and progressions.\(^50\) Jefferson and many of his contemporaries used this method in their recordings because of the simple and repetitive structure of the blues. Other songs such as “Minglewood Blues,” or “Roll and Tumble Blues,” were recorded thirty times over a span of forty years in different styles and varieties.\(^51\) Similarly, Robert Johnson’s famous “Sweet Home Chicago” was influenced by Kokomo Arnold’s “Old Original Kokomo Blues,” which was a nod to Scrapper Blackwell’s “Kokomo Blues.” Even a versatile and original songwriter like Robert Johnson borrowed different material to suit his own. What makes borrowing even more important is the influence that Johnson’s song has had on the history of popular blues. Known by many enthusiasts as a blues standard, “Sweet Home Chicago’s” influence can be traced back rather easily, yet most people associate it with Robert Johnson.

Simon makes an important point on composition and performance, in which she references David Evans who states that they are often one and the same, as each time a song is performed, it is new. Although Evans claims this applies only to folk blues, Simon makes the case that vaudeville blues also has this quality.\(^52\) In either case, the improvisatory and loose style that blues music has makes it one of its most important and distinguishing factors. Rather than depending on a set of notes, performers were free to produce their own versions of songs without necessarily replaying every note exactly. In a discussion on the oral and textual tradition in

\(^{49}\) Hatch & Millward, 57.
\(^{50}\) Simon, 179.
\(^{51}\) Hatch & Millward, 24.
\(^{52}\) Simon, 178.
music, Robert Switzer states, “What matters is not ‘texts’ and not ‘artifacts,’ but lived (and originally, ‘live’) performative events.”53 The oral blues tradition undercuts the textual tradition that is exemplified in Western classical music. Blues music therefore, ushered in a new and exciting form of musical expression and to a great degree changed the way we must consider a musical event. Works became independent of their composition and the work was expressed more in the moment than ever. The temporal setting became crucial to how we experience a musical event, because of how it may deviate from one artist to another. As I will demonstrate below, these events became increasingly difficult to pinpoint when we add technological mediation to the equation. For now, I would like the reader to note the important shift from standard composition to improvisation.

Before concluding this section, I would like to briefly examine some of the other styles present in the South during this time. In our previous discussion of camp meetings, I noted that they were often interracial and led to the development of gospel and blues music. Both of these styles impacted later hillbilly music in the 1920s as well. Blues and country blues in the 1920s were very similar in tone and structure. Although not as popular as Delta blues, another form of blues that is not discussed as much today is “Piedmont Blues;” a form that was influenced greatly by ragtime. Piedmont styles were much less intense and emotional. Life in the south-east was comparatively less difficult than in the Deep South, which was reflected in the music. The Piedmont area also had white musicians playing more classic folk style blues. Other forms of blues included Memphis Jug Bands which had more ensembles. This resulted in a more complete sound that was not reliant upon a solo artist with a guitar.54 Lyrically, themes of poverty continued, but were now related to more urban settings. Memphis also had more “traditional”

53 Switzer, 27.
54 Barlow, 229.
forms of blues with singular artists, but had broader influences that came from areas across the South. All these styles contributed greatly to the general narrative of blues music during this time. Although they varied from one another in different ways, they were generally composed and sung by African American musicians. There were some influential white singers such as Jimmie Rodgers, a singer which will be discussed later, but by the time Robert Johnson was playing, blues and country music began to diverge and it became clear which race was associated with what music.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, the issue of borrowing from the tradition became much more contentious when we present different races and cultures into the situation. While Delta musicians were almost exclusively African American, this was not the case in other parts of the South. In the next several sections, we will see how these issues changed the face of the blues and how it developed.

**Urban Blues and the Advent of Rock n’ Roll**

The main centre for urban blues after WWII was Chicago. With the urban migration in full swing, African Americans were now moving north in greater numbers. To put it into more concrete numbers, six and a half million African Americans migrated north between 1910 and 1970.\textsuperscript{56} By WWII, half of the African American population lived in urban centres; this is in contrast to less than 20\% in 1900.\textsuperscript{57} The shift in demographics meant there was a shift in culture, particularly in music. Despite the growing popularity of what would be called “race records,” popular music was still dominated by white musicians, but this would soon change. The blues

\textsuperscript{55} There are many exceptions in both blues and country music. Just as white musicians had an impact on the blues, African American musicians impacted country music. For further reading, please see *Hidden in the Mix: The African-American Presence in Country Music*, edited by Diane Pecknold. (Duke University Press, 2013).

\textsuperscript{56} Davis, 48.

\textsuperscript{57} Davis, 134.
was also impacted greatly by this shift, as cities such as Detroit, Indianapolis, St. Louis and Chicago all began to develop their own blues sounds.

The most important musicians from the time were Muddy Waters, Elmore James, Willie Dixon, Howlin’ Wolf, John Lee Hooker and B.B. King. What made urban blues unique was not necessarily the instruments they used, but how they used them. Although not an entirely new technique, these musicians amplified the blues which changed the blues dynamic forever. It was no longer about the solo musician with an acoustic guitar, but an entire band usually consisting of a guitar, electric bass, drums and possibly a harmonica. With its broader and louder sound, Chicago blues was known for its amplification which was well suited for the roar of the city. In loud clubs, musicians would struggle to be heard, so this was a perfect solution. Although vaudeville blues musicians often had full backing bands, the new style of urban blues was different. Prior to amplification, guitars were not really considered a soloing instrument. They were often drowned out by horn sections in ensembles and provided a harmony. But with amplification, the guitar could be the focal point even in a large band, which shifted the centre of attention to the singer/guitarist and not just the singer.

Thematically, songs stayed very much the same, but with a more urban-centric focus. However, no matter where the musicians lived, everyday problems continued to be at the forefront of the blues. But, the Chicago sound was much different than the Delta or Piedmont styles. It was louder and in many ways sounded much more rugged because of amplification. The singers themselves also changed their technique. Although no one would call singers like Robert Johnson reserved, other singers such as Charley Patton, or Blind Lemon Jefferson were

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58 Davis, 181.
59 Davis, 181.
certainly much quieter in their delivery; this would no longer be the case in Chicago blues. Many songs were now belted out with the full raspiness of tone on display. Again, this was a way of matching the loudness of the full band and changed how the blues sounded. Of course, there would be backlash against this type of sound.

Taste in music began to change quickly by the 1950s, as there was a mood for change after the war. An example of this was when Muddy Waters decided to play the electric guitar in 1958 during a concert in England and was criticized for playing an “inauthentic” form of blues. Authenticity in this case meant playing rural style blues with only a single acoustic guitar. The next year, he decided to return and play on a Spanish guitar and once again faced criticism, this time for playing music that was deemed to be out of date.60 Ross Cole explains that this shift was part of a greater debate about blues authenticity and the changing demographics of blues listeners.61 This shift is a key point in popular tastes and perception of how “real” blues was meant to be played. The theme of authenticity would soon become a major issue in blues and other forms of music and is an important one for this work. However, before I explore it further, I want to continue outlining the changing landscape in music during this period.

Once the blues sound became amplified, it began to appeal to a younger and more active audience. Popular music was becoming more engaging and record companies soon began to realize its commercial potential. Musicians who grew up listening to the blues also began to explore new options that were blues hybrids such as rhythm and blues, rock n’ roll and other forms of pop. Styles such as rockabilly performed by Chuck Berry and Eddie Cochran among

others, was a blues oriented country style of music. Berry and Cochrane borrowed from white musicians, adapting southern country music to create rockabilly. Songs like “Milkcow Blues” by Cochrane and “Maybellene” by Berry, are perfect examples. The former is an important example because Cochrane added a riff to the song, which gives the song a distinct new sound. Rhythm and blues in general did not use the twelve bar structure and began using choruses, something which was not seen in blues. This was part of the shift towards a broader appeal. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, rhythm and blues replaced “race” records and encompassed many differing styles.

Eventually, the standard blues sound began to wane in popularity among both African American and white audiences. Rhythm and blues, as well as doo-wop, became the most popular form of “race music” with artists including Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Sam Cooke and Jackie Wilson. Davis also notes that record labels such as Chess, Crown, and Duke records were not doing too much to promote the blues, as it began to be associated with a southern rural sound, whereas many African Americans were now further North and in urban areas. By the time Chuck Berry released anthems such as “School Days” and “Rock N’ Roll Music,” mass cultural products like popular radio and American Bandstand were beginning to change how people experienced music. Radio and television programs appealed to young audiences and thus dictated what was popular among the youth.

Blues musician Muddy Waters believed that rock music hurt blues music rather than helping it. Waters, among others, could not compete with artists such as Ray Charles, James Brown or Little Richard in popularity. Rock music had a broader appeal and was a much

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62 Davis, 204.
63 Milward, 62-63.
friendlier kind of music to which one could dance and have fun. Rock was also much more conducive to larger gatherings where people went to have fun and not worry about the oppression seen in the world. Whereas blues was once a source for gathering people together, rock took over, but certainly with a different tone. However, the success of some of these artists would be short-lived and by the late 1950s, rock music was in trouble. Elvis Presley was in the army, Buddy Holly had passed away in a plane crash and both Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis were involved in scandals. British rock had not yet developed because Britain was still recovering from the effects of WWII. By the 1960s, many of those same young teens that listened to Berry, grew up and were ready for more mature music themselves. This was part of the reason why a blues revival began to form.

**Authenticity: The Narrative of the Blues Revival**

During the 1930s and 40s, the Proletarian Folk Revival was a group of white leftists promoting black music in New York City. Their goal was to record various artists for the sake of historical preservation. Two men that were well known through this movement were John and Alan Lomax. Part of the narrative of folk blues relied on its “purity” which people like the Lomax’s sought. For the Lomax’s, African American blues musicians possessed an authentic sound, meaning that they had a purity of sound that only African Americans could produce. Therefore, the authentic became associated with stereotypical images of African American blues musicians. Because of the relative isolation found in the South, a lot of the music was free from commercial influence. Although, the musicians were still playing music in order to make a living, they had limited local audiences. Thus, what the Lomax’s tried to capture was a purity, or authenticity that never existed, but was imagined by outsiders who heard the music. They pictured stereotypical...
images of bluesmen that played for the sheer love of music and that their skill to play the blues was an innate talent that needed to be shared. But in their insistence on the purity of folk blues, the Lomax’s were partly responsible for commercializing a “pure” sound from the South. Cole believes the blues revival period was marked by a new age of minstrelsy in which African American blues artists were forced to play “to fulfil white demand.”65 John Lomax in particular “was instrumental in promulgating the relationship between black masculinity, primitivism and institutional expressivity vital to white investment in the blues – initiating a turn towards the representation of individual musicians as ‘folk artists.’”66 This folkloric ideal placed African Americans at the centre of a primitivist image created by the Lomax’s. They wanted to capture an idealized version of African American culture associated with a purity that existed outside of the historical and cultural context from which they developed. This was the beginning of the search for authenticity in blues music, something which had never been important prior to this time.

Although many African American performers became quite successful, they were very susceptible to being exploited. Some would receive little to no royalties; others would not even get composer credits for the songs that they performed. Another way in which they could be exploited was through flat fee payments that came from recordings.67 Rather than wait for royalties, many performers chose to take an upfront payment that was very low in comparison to the royalties they would have received in a fair standard contract. However, in times of need, musicians took these deals in order to maintain basic living standards. There was a pattern of exploitation by record companies that were owned primarily by white people. Although there

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65 Cole, 174.  
66 Cole, 180.  
67 Barlow, 132.
were cases in which African American record executives exploited African American musicians, in general, during this time companies were run by white executives. In consideration of artistic exploitation, we must not forget that there were many “cover” songs recorded in the 1950s that were done in order to secure commercial property for record companies. Companies wanted to make money and one of the best ways was to maintain commercial property. Thus, many artists were influenced by companies into recording songs that were not necessarily of their choosing, but in order to continue making their own music, they would need to fulfill the demands of their contracts.

By the early 1960s, popular music was in the midst of major changes. As noted above, the rock n’ roll craze declined and a new generation of fans were ready for a new trend to form. Simultaneously, the more mature rock n’ roll fans were ready to settle into their own music as well. This created two different, but equally important movements that were relevant to blues music history. The first was the British invasion which was influenced by both blues and rock n’ roll and secondly was the folk blues revival. Both of these movements were crucial to understanding the development of blues music during this time.

With the new blues revival, came the desire to hear some of the “original” southern blues artists. Once again, Alan Lomax and his new partner Dick Waterman went to the South looking for some of the legends of the blues. They found musicians such as John Hurt, Skip James and Son House and decided that these musicians should be heard once again by the public. They also decided to brand many of these artists as “folk blues” for the purpose of marketing them to young white audiences, who were becoming increasingly interested in folk music, especially the

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68 Davis, 76.
69 Milward, 60.
blues. The mythology created by promoters is what attracted white audiences. Phil Spiro (the man who re-discovered Son House) admitted that his ego was part of the reason why he convinced House to come back and play. Spiro treated him like a rare record – a commodity – rather than a human being.\textsuperscript{70} Unfortunately, House could never live up to the image of his former self, as he had little interest in pursuing a musical career. Interestingly, after a lengthy period away from music, Son House had to be re-taught how to play his own songs by Al Wilson from the band Canned Heat. Wilson knew House’s songs so well that he would play them for House so that he could remember how to play them himself.\textsuperscript{71}

One of the main showcases for these “re-discovered” artists was the Newport Folk Festival. Several blues historians have noted the importance of this festival. Although the story of Bob Dylan at the 1965 festival is well known, Stephen Milward argues that another artist’s appearance was even more important to the history of blues music, that of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, featuring Mike Bloomfield on guitar, a sentiment shared by Francis Davis.\textsuperscript{72} This was an important point for the beginning of urban blues. During the concert, the musicians decided to plug in their guitars, rather than play a more traditional acoustic set. This drew criticism from crowds who were more interested in the “authentic” acoustic folk sounds, which consisted of solo artists playing an all acoustic set. Once again, the insistence of acoustic folk sounds perpetuated the notion of what real authentic blues was meant to be.

Although many have noted its various contributions to the cultural musical ethos, one of the most extensive studies of the festival was done by Ulrich Adelt who noted its negative

\textsuperscript{70} Milward, 98.
\textsuperscript{72} Milward, 72 and Davis, 221.
aspects. Adelt explains the festival was more responsible for creating reifications of negative imagery rather than positive ones.\textsuperscript{73} What organizers tried to attract were “authentic” musicians. Folk was meant to be a counter-cultural ideology, which promoted truth and authenticity. Bob Dylan and Paul Butterfield received some negative criticism when they decided to play a partially electric set which was seen as a move away from authentic folk music and a literal and figurative distortion of folk ideals. This ideology was determined by a primarily white audience and organizing body. The Newport Folk Festival decided to keep themes “traditional,” despite continual changes in African American musical tastes that were bound to changes in the political realm. Unfortunately, the blues became synonymous with what many African Americans wanted to escape, an old order which consisted of anger, anguish and alienation. Soul music became the new music associated with black empowerment and promoted themes of togetherness over solitude. Although other authors have mentioned it, Adelt explains in more detail how blues and soul began to diverge.\textsuperscript{74} While there were soul anthems such as “Say It Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud)” by James Brown and “Respect” by Otis Redding and later Aretha Franklin, in the meantime B.B. King was singing about sweet angels, becoming disconnected with African American audiences, especially the younger ones. This would be seen as the most definitive split between blues and soul music. Despite their inclusion of African American musicians, Newport organizers opted for more conservative styles they believed to be “pure.” Therefore, it is not surprising that musician John Hurt was so well received by audiences. He had a quiet personality and a gentle picking and singing style. Conversely, the case of Josh White exemplified the stereotyping seen during the blues revival period. White’s style was seen as too clean and

\textsuperscript{73} Adelt, 39-40.
\textsuperscript{74} Adelt, 15.
“cosmopolitan.” It did not resonate well with the raw and rugged sounds that many whites considered to be an authentic blues sound of the time. The organizers of the festival tried to capture an “authentic” sound and subsequently misrepresented the attempted shifts by African American blues artists during this same period. Their attempts to dictate the blues sound through “authentic” performances artificially altered the musical ethos. The electric blues and soul music of the time were much more aligned with the changing tastes of performers and audiences alike. Rather than try to understand the changing cultural landscape, Newport organizers were only interested in essentialist notions of authenticity and ignored the historical changes in African American culture.

Adelt explains that during the festival many audience members were discouraged from dancing. Despite the encouragement from various African American artists to get up and dance, crowds remained mainly sedentary. This diverged from blues history in which movement and bodily “groove” were at the heart of the music. But the sedentariness of audiences allowed them to observe the racial Other as objects of study. This response exemplifies the attitude of observation employed by many of the crowds at the festival. They seemed to be more interested in preserving a false sense of authentic culture rather than understanding the culture itself. However, Adelt admits this view was not held by all blues musicians. In an interview, Son House believed blues did not involve movement, unlike Skip James and B.B. King who thought movement was an essential part to the blues experience. Regardless, many of the white crowds were never interested in participating in blues culture, as much as observing what they thought were authentic blues musicians.

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75 Weissman, 102-103.  
76 Adelt, 40.  
77 Adelt, 40.  
78 Adelt, 40.
Importantly, prior to this event, the early 1960s folk blues revival was not nearly as commercially successful. One of the more surprising aspects of this turn was that as whites began to be the primary consumers of blues music, African American artists began to emulate white musicians, by performing longer guitar solos, which were uncommon up until that point.\textsuperscript{79} Thus, for the first time in its history, white audiences and musicians began to dictate some of the styles that drove blues music. As mentioned previously, there were white blues musicians, even dating back to some of its earliest forms, but because of the new narrative of authenticity, white musicians were no longer deemed to be on par with African American ones. The racial divide that had previously never existed, was being promoted primarily by white music promoters and audiences. Consequently, blues music was also beginning to change in terms of its sound. The folk festival revealed the desire for authentic folk blues music, while the more mainstream popular sound was also in the midst of significant changes. Around 1962-63, the British invasion was beginning to shape the pop industry. Bands such as The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, The Who and later The Yardbirds were coming to the United States and playing rhythm and blues inspired rock music. Muddy Waters, who was struggling to breakthrough in the 1950s, became more accepted after The Beatles and The Rolling Stones became popular. Both of those bands adapted rhythm and blues and consequently grew the sound with white audiences.

A noteworthy point is that race was not as much of a factor in Great Britain as it was in the United States. This made musical choices a lot simpler for many. Blues was based largely on youthful rebellion and the freedom to escape conservatism, and thus did not carry the same baggage that was found in the United States.\textsuperscript{80} One of Adelt’s main arguments is that whites

\textsuperscript{79} Davis, 226.
\textsuperscript{80} A point expanded upon by Dick Weissman. However, unlike Adelt, Weissman thought white musicians were able to carve out their own blues narrative by using new styles, particularly vocally.
created a de-politicized blues culture. Even though it was meant as a rebellion from old conservative views, it minimized the African American aspect of the blues experience. Adelt’s analysis of authenticity touches upon several musicians from this period, focusing his attention on Janis Joplin, Eric Clapton and B.B. King.

Eric Clapton was one of the most influential blues musicians from England during the 1960s. Clapton began his career with The Yardbirds, an all-white British blues band. He decided to leave the group after he felt they began to play too much pop music, while he was more interested in playing more traditional blues music. He would continue his career by joining John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers. Although he only played on one album with the group, it was arguably one of the most influential electric blues albums of all-time, mainly because of the equipment Clapton used. At this time, Clapton switched from a Fender Stratocaster to a Gibson Les Paul and paired it with a Marshall amplifier. This became one of the quintessential sounds of blues rock for the next decade and is still used widely today. In describing this event, Milward states “‘All Your Love’ was the opening track of the Mayall album, and the first sound one hears was the crude, thunderous squawk of Clapton’s Les Paul. Roots music, and the blues, would never again be quite the same.” By emphasizing feedback and distortion, artists like Clapton changed the sound of music permanently, influencing others such as Jimmy Page and Jimi Hendrix.

In his investigation of famous white blues musicians, Adelt saw Clapton as a perfect example of a white musician appropriating black music for his personal needs. Despite its history

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Weissman, 112.
81 Adelt, 2.
82 Milward, 43.
83 Milward, 46.
as a communally based form of music, Adelt says Clapton used blues music as an individualistic remedy to his problems. Adelt cites several examples of what he believes to be Clapton’s essentialism. Clapton always tried to achieve a more “authentic” blues sound that he claimed was only accessible by African American men. By playing the blues, Clapton merely used it as a platform to deal with his personal identity crisis, but never as a political form of music that is meant to exemplify the struggles of daily life of a people. One such song exemplifies this personal struggle during his time with another band called “Blind Faith.” In a song called “Presence of the Lord,” Steve Winwood (the lead vocalist) sings about having found a place to live, in the presence of the lord. Although initially it seems to be a song about spirituality and a search for inner peace, it was actually a line written by Clapton describing his new mansion. I believe this is part of what Adelt critiques in Clapton’s music. For Clapton, the music was a personal remedy, rather than a political and communal experience.

A particularly poignant example of this kind of personal struggle is found in another song entitled “Have You Ever Loved a Woman” by Derek and the Dominos Live at the Fillmore. It is a cover of a song written by Billy Myles for Freddie King. The reason why I picked this particular version and performance is the story behind it. At the time, Eric Clapton was in a state of depression and addicted to drugs and alcohol, an addiction that nearly destroyed his life. But the most important reason is that he was in love with someone, in this case his best friend’s wife, who happened to be Pattie Boyd, the wife of former Beatles star George Harrison. For Clapton, this song (and the album Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs) had a personal meaning, because he wrote and performed the songs as a declaration of his love for her. Much like many others, he

84 Adelt, 77.
85 Milward, 158.
86 Julia Simon does her own interpretation of this song, but the original interpretation by Freddie King. Simon, 127-128.
faced a dilemma that could not be easily solved. Either accept the fact that he could not be with this woman or proclaim his love for her publicly and potentially lose his best friend. In the end, he actually did the latter and did not lose his friend. Nevertheless, during this time, she refused his advances and this was partly the cause of his depression.

The song starts with a guitar solo in a typical manner found in many slow blues numbers.

The lyrics are in the common AAB pattern. Clapton sings the lyrics:

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Have you ever loved a woman
So much you tremble in pain
Have you ever loved a woman
So much you tremble in pain
And all the time you know
She bears another man’s name
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The lyrics themselves are typical of a slow blues song, but what gives them life is the way Clapton sings them. The words mean something to him, which is why he chose to cover this song on the album. There is evident pain in his voice and the audience can feel that these are not simply empty words to him, but ones that come from personal experience. There is one more similar verse that follows, at which point Clapton (who sings and plays lead guitar), says to the audience “let me tell you all about her” referring to Pattie Boyd. He goes into a riveting guitar solo which is full of passion and unbelievable emotion that the rest of the song builds towards. This is his way of revealing his love without explicitly saying anything through spoken language, but rather playing the guitar and letting his instrument do the speaking for him. The song features one more verse that goes as follows:

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Have you ever loved a woman
And you know you can’t leave her alone (x2)
Something deep inside you
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Won’t let you wreck your best friend’s home

Blues has always been a personal struggle to some degree. Even though his life has very little in common with African American blues musicians from the 1920s and 30s, it is almost certain that what he conveys in the playing of this song can be experienced by people of different races, genders, and time periods. The sorrowful experience of loving someone without the other reciprocating can be very painful and this song expresses that experience in a way that only Clapton can convey at that time. Surely he can play this song now and perhaps even copy his technique very closely, but he can never capture that moment in time when he was in a state of depression and the only way he could convey those emotions was through song. Despite Adelt’s criticism, I do not think you can completely separate personal experience from blues music. As written above, Oakley’s note that sexual relationships have always driven blues music thematically needs to be reiterated. This theme clearly goes beyond any class, race, or gender. Even though any blues singer can sing about travelling the rails, this theme hardly strikes a chord with anyone past a certain time. However, relationships have been, and continue to be, a concern for people of different backgrounds, thus connecting musicians and audiences across many different eras and communities. I would say that at least in this particular case, blues music had a genuine connection to Clapton’s experience which he shared with those of the past. Simon notes that we share in experience through compassion and empathy, even if we do not live under the same material conditions.

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87 Have You Ever Loved a Woman Lyrics
88 Simon, 213.
In a similar critique, Adelt looks at Janis Joplin who he says reduced blues music to suffering. This misses the humour often involved in many blues songs. As an example, Joplin changed “Ball & Chain” from a major to a minor key and from a shuffle to slow blues. However, we should ask whether it is necessary to dictate how one interprets or sings the blues. Adelt criticizes Joplin’s suffering, saying it was more of a choice than a fact of life, as she grew up in a middle class home and decided to live in poverty. In several instances, Joplin thought that she was incapable of suffering in the same way as an African American. She believed that her inability to suffer hindered her ability to properly sing the blues. Adelt critiques Joplin’s use of blues without catharsis. For Joplin, there was no overcoming of suffering, something which was often done with humour by African American musicians in order to escape the suffering of daily life. Although I believe Joplin’s suffering to be genuine, I can see why Adelt critiques both Clapton and Joplin. Realistically, neither Clapton nor Joplin experienced the same systematic hardships as the African American musicians whose music they played. Yet, I do not believe this to be the same problematic scenario as the Newport Music Festival. While Clapton and Joplin may have used blues music to express personal experiences, they certainly were not on par with the level of exploitation we saw from the organizers of the Newport festivals. Joplin and Clapton’s feelings and emotions were genuinely theirs, even if they did not always write the songs they used to express themselves. I would argue that in playing this music, they were paying tribute to the people who wrote and played them, as opposed appropriating them as their own. At the same time, they were intentionally altering the songs to suit the style of music which they knew. By playing the songs in this new fashion, they brought the songs into a new musical

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89 Joseph Lynch notes that according to musician Son House, the expression of suffering is a kind of liberation from it. Adelt’s critique of Joplin is that for her there was no overcoming of it. Lynch, 134.

90 Adelt, 105.
dimension rather than pretending to rehash old material in old styles. If they did the latter, then I would tend to agree more with Adelt, because that would simply be copying the songs without adding anything new. This sentiment is expressed by Julia Simon when it comes to the re-working of songs by white artists, as she compares Nick Moss and the Flip Tops to Muddy Waters.  

Both of these artists re-worked songs with different tempos and timing to suit their particular contexts. Simon believes that the heart of the blues genre lies in a “process of repetition with a difference.” While I alluded to it earlier, the notion of borrowing and re-working comes back into play but within a new context, one with a racial dimension. Therefore, moving forward we need to be careful about what constitutes a reproduction, or a copy and how do these categories change the way we should think about blues music as an event. For now, I would like to finish Adelt’s exposition before continuing on these themes.

For B.B. King, song styles were a matter of class and not necessarily race. King’s views on the matter changed during the 1960s when white management exposed him to more white audiences. Adelt quotes King as saying he was always somewhat uncomfortable with the attention and was saddened by the loss of African American audiences. Adelt also notes the problematic way that King’s biographers have described his move to playing for white audiences. They often described this transition as “progressive,” whereas before he was stuck playing for African American audiences that never drew the commercial success he would see with whites. This interpretation is highly problematic for several reasons. First, economic success is not always the best barometer for musical success. Some of the wealthiest musicians are not necessarily the best, as sometimes their sound must be compromised in order to appeal to

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91 Simon, 195.
92 Simon, 196.
93 Adelt, 18.
94 Adelt, 20-21.
a wider audience. Secondly, the idea that African American audiences somehow held King back does not factor in the changing desires for musical tastes in African American communities. It is not necessarily the case that there were no audiences, but perhaps they did not support that kind of music. As many authors have noted, African American audiences were no longer as interested in traditional styles like the blues, and were more interested in progressive black voices. White audiences had more recently discovered traditional black folk blues and thus were more welcoming of those styles. As we saw other authors note, B.B. King’s style during this time began to mimic some of the white blues musicians’ styles with longer, more drawn out solos, which happened to appeal more to white audiences.

During the 1970s, there was an attempt to reinscribe a more “authentic” black sound into King’s albums. For example, he played in front of African American inmates; however, this was done for a white consumer audience. What Adelt argues is that music producers and companies were interested in creating an authentic “black” sound in order to appeal to their white audiences. This was based around the essentialist notion that there was an authentic sound that only African Americans could achieve and that only the most sophisticated of listeners could hear and understand. What developed was a conservative blues culture based on a “safe” black tone, which was controlled and consumed by whites. Unlike soul music with its messages of black empowerment, blues became a form of music that was more accessible to whites, because of its more traditional ease of play. It was simply less threatening to the white agenda. Adelt believes this culminated when B.B. King played during G.H.W. Bush’s inauguration. Adelt states, “It is quite ironic that the blues, with its long history as an agent of liberation for oppressed minorities and women, had become the music at a party celebrating the highest member of the white male

95 Milward explains how Muddy Waters thought blues were “hurt” by rock musicians & their music, 62-63. Adelt notes the dichotomy between B.B. King’s style and artists such as James Brown, 15.
power structure.”\textsuperscript{96} The promulgation and promotion of an essentialist blues style infiltrated all forms of blues music, from the folk revival, to the urban blues of B.B. King, to white blues artists such as Clapton and Joplin. These three musicians are examples of an essentialism that grew out of the 1930s and continues until the present day. But it was only possible because of the people who promoted such an agenda.

Adelt writes that publications such as \textit{The Chicago Defender} said that the blues began to shift towards white audiences as early as the 1950s.\textsuperscript{97} By the late 1960s, blues became part of white popular culture. \textit{Living Blues} magazine (whose staff was primarily white) concentrated on black musicians and perpetuated further notions of segregation and an authentic blues sound. Similarly, magazines like \textit{Rolling Stone} and \textit{Sing Out!} provided similar accounts of blues as a racially pure genre.\textsuperscript{98} In his description of the founding editors of \textit{Living Blues} magazine, Adelt illustrates that many of them were introduced to blues through white musicians and that they equated black music with authenticity, realness and honesty.\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Living Blues} was hypocritical in their portrayal of the blues, as many editors were introduced to the style through white musicians and yet they were only interested in discussing African American musicians. Despite their claims that they discussed the living tradition of the blues, the magazine focused on the 1930s-50s time period rather than their own.\textsuperscript{100}

These examples raise the question of whether or not we need to take an essentialist viewpoint of blues music, or is there more subtlety to this question? Part of answering this question relies on knowing what makes blues music what it is. Meaning, what gives someone the

\textsuperscript{96} Adelt, 139.  
\textsuperscript{97} Adelt, 14.  
\textsuperscript{98} Adelt, 117.  
\textsuperscript{99} Adelt, 120-124.  
\textsuperscript{100} Adelt, 124.
privilege or capability to play the blues. In David Carr’s “Can White Men Play the Blues? Music, Learning Theory, and Performance Knowledge,” he explains that there is more to playing the blues than technical skill. He believes we need an understanding of behaviour to master it. Philip Jenkins shares similar sentiments, saying you must have certain experiences to play the blues. For example, Barry Manilow has not had those experiences. This is the difference in blues between form and expression. While one may have the technical skill in its formal aspects, that does not necessarily mean they are playing the blues. Along this point, we should ask if a child can play the blues? What does it take for anyone to play the blues? I am not sure there is a definitive answer to this question, but what is certain is that maintaining a stance that only African Americans have access to some notion of the blues that is inaccessible to everyone else can be highly problematic, particularly when it becomes objectified in the manner that we saw during the blues revival period. Musicians were treated like objects of study, rather than human beings and analyzed rather than understood. But that was not a universal experience in blues music. Many white blues musicians succeeded in developing a new style of blues, rather than stealing black blues for the sake of their own personal gain. To lump all white blues musicians together and say they were thieves is just as irresponsible as saying that whites played no role in the history of blues music.

One of the most common stereotypes perpetrated by those who say whites stole black music is the idea of sexual energy. This is misleading because white musicians such as Elvis Presley and many others have sexualized music themselves. To claim black music influenced white sexualisation puts forth the stereotype of the black sexual deviant. The idea that black

bodies are sexualized is a harmful stereotype that has been used to marginalize the African American population. Conversely, we should not rely on the trope that white people needed to “save” black music. Although blues music began to be consumed and played by white people as much as African Americans, this was more of a reflection of changing tastes than anything else. Ignoring the changing tastes of communities falls back into the belief that certain kinds of music or art should be associated with communities. In other words, blues music should be listened to and performed solely by African Americans because it has African American origins. But it became clear that many African Americans wanted to listen to other forms of music that was not associated with past struggles. Instead, they leaned towards soul music for black empowerment.

Adelt states that in some cases white people have classified blues more narrowly than African Americans. 103 Although his evidence seems more anecdotal than anything, if true, this often leads to an essentialist view about what blues can and cannot be. It is interesting to note that Adelt claims for example that Cream’s second album was less blues than psychedelic rock, even though it is very much based on blues chords. 104 This parallels a well known and influential magazine “Blues Unlimited” which claimed that Cream’s music was not blues, but purely rock. 105 Why is it fair to claim that Cream’s music is not the blues, or at least blues rock? This seems inconsistent with Adelt’s previous claims that blues can vary in form and tone. Nevertheless, I believe Adelt’s main point is that blues does not necessarily belong to any one race, or class of people. The problem lies in identifying blues in terms of authenticity associated

103 Adelt, 5.
Bruce Iglauer suggests the same idea.
104 Adelt, 69.
105 Hatch & Milward,105.
with a race. It is not as though white people cannot play or listen to blues music, but when it is fetishesized, the people who play it become objects of study.

Some other authors who have written on the topic of race in music have tended to take a softer stance than Adelt, citing a more complex history of white and African American artists borrowing and learning from one another. In a chapter dealing with appropriation, we find Dave Headlam being sympathetic to white musicians because of the varying backgrounds of rock n’ roll music. Country western, blues, pop, and rhythm and blues all influenced rock in some way. He cites the styles of Elvis and Chuck Berry who had been influenced by white and African American musicians alike. However, he calls the new blues context a “museum-like recreation.” He continues in his criticism of pop music saying, “These pop alterations have the effect of making the sound less personal and more objectified and predictable.” For Headlam, rock is a simplification of more complex blues modes. However, he notes that we should not ignore the borrowing and re-working of songs that has been a part of the history of blues when looking at appropriation. By claiming that someone has the right to a genre of music brings us back to ideas of purity and authenticity which we are trying to avoid. Ironically, it has often been whites who have perpetuated such notions of authenticity in the pursuit of re-creating an objectivity in music that never existed.

Whether or not some people would like to admit, white musicians, promoters and audiences changed blues music. Although many white bands and musicians would play covers of
old blues songs such as “Stop Breaking Down” by The Rolling Stones and the White Stripes, “Travelling Riverside Blues” by Led Zeppelin, “Spoonfull” by Cream and countless others, many of these arrangements were changed to suit the more modern sound. That is why I disagree with authors like Fox and Greene who claim that modern blues are empty “zombie blues” that lack “the authenticity of the earlier generations of blues players.” These were not cases of simply stealing music for the sake of profiting; they were genuine attempts to re-interpret the music in a modern form and for a new audience. Like any form of entertainment, some attempts were successful, while others failed, but to say blankly that white musicians stole the blues from African American players ignores a complex history.

White blues music was for the most part a genuine attempt to honour the music from the past, while creating a new style. Milward and Hatch divide songs into song families, song extensions and originals. For example, a song family involves doing covers or renditions of old songs with new musical developments. Someone doing a cover with a similar arrangement would be in the same family, while a song extension is something that Muddy Waters would do. By bringing amplification for Delta blues, Waters made older songs feel and sound different. New songs usually develop after years of learning to play standards and finding one’s own personal sound or voice. I believe many white and African American musicians could be classified in each of these categories when developing their own particular style. Although The Beatles started as a rhythm and blues band, towards the end they experimented with many different styles. They eventually created their own kind of music that had many influences.

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110 Hatch * Milward, 1-3.
The blues has been an influence on many artists and it is not always clear where the blues begins or ends in particular songs. Blues has always had a history of borrowing of lyrics, chord progressions and tones, which has led to a great deal of controversy, including the right to call a song one’s own. This is not an exclusively white or black matter, but rather a by-product of the nature of blues music as such. Artists such as Jimmie Rodgers influenced Howlin’ Wolf and B.B. King and these artists went on to influence thousands of other artists of all races.¹¹¹ Both Sonny Boy Williamson and John Lee Hooker were backed by British bands in England, consisting of many white musicians. The only conclusions that can be drawn from this, is that there are no clear boundaries of the blues other than creating a sense of solidarity felt between the crowd and the performers.

Can we gather from this exposition that there was a blues community? As Oakley explains, some artists like Henry Townsend felt like the blues was more than simply entertainment. Townsend believed blues spoke to people on a deeper level because of its themes and its origins; this made the blues relevant for communities and made the singers important to those communities. Blues has always been a matter of truth for Townsend, and the blues expresses that truth. In speaking about the blues, Townsend says that “these songs are dedicated to the truth.”¹¹² They are stories about the everyday happenings of a people. This harkens back to the point on self-expression, the blues speaks to the audience and is not just a matter of inner feelings being displayed by the artist. In an analogy between the blues and medicine, blues musician Roosevelt Sykes said that blues players do not have the blues themselves, but they play it for those that do. Much like a doctor who treats his ailing patients, in a similar sense the musician plays for those that have the blues. This implies that blues is not just a form of self-

¹¹¹ Neumann, 180.
¹¹² Barlow, 326.
expression, but rather a reflection of the audience’s feelings and desires.\footnote{Davis, 206.} There is a shared experience between the performer and the listeners that crosses spatial boundaries.

In essence, it is difficult to claim that blues belongs to any particular race or even class of people. Barlow makes the important point that we often find leisure time divided by social class or race.\footnote{Barlow, 346.} This often remains a point of division, but the blues has been a bridging point in which both white and African American people can participate. The fact that people of so many backgrounds seem to find blues music relatable is a testament to its openness and universality. It invites us to participate and offers a way of dealing with certain issues we find in the world, no matter what our background may be. Even music often considered “black music” such as Motown, was created for a national interracial audience. Thus, to call any kind of music white or black music ignores its varying roots and influences. One event that can be pointed to is the death of Jimmie Rodgers, who was a well known white blues musician. Having been an influence on various artists, his death was an important point in which music became increasingly segregated. Perhaps music depends on certain figures to bridge the racial gap.

Hatch and Milward note the importance of white musicians to history of blues. They question whether it is fair to call it all “black music,” knowing the complex history. They also criticize the scholarship, saying many white musicians were only mentioned in passing.\footnote{Hatch & Milward, 116.} Authors continue by noting the power base of southern blues music was predominantly white, meaning that many whites had an influence on the sound of blues music, even if it was not as significant as the contributions from African Americans. In this case, culture cannot be neatly divided by race, as doing so generates stereotypes and what Michael Neumann calls “cardboard

\footnote{113 Davis, 206.} \footnote{114 Barlow, 346.} \footnote{115 Hatch & Milward, 116.}
blacks and whites” and draws boundaries in blues music where there are none. Although we can safely claim that African Americans were responsible for the origins and development of blues music, white musicians certainly played a role, including influencing African American artists.

**Technological Mediation and the Blues**

Thus far I have discussed some of the historical background of blues music, but one important factor of the blues is our experience of it through technological advancements. It is a given that we listen to music, but how we listen to it and how that has affected our experience of music must be discussed. In its original form, blues was not recorded, but along with its standardization, came its introduction into the music industry. At that point the two facets of blues music (its playing and its reproduction) became forever intertwined, creating a complication in how we deal with its evental character.

> With the growing popularity of different kinds of folk music across the United States, record producers and executives saw a potentially profitable situation which could be exploited. As Barlow states “the record industry began to absorb black folk music into its sphere of capitalist production. The blues performance was transformed into a mass-produced commodity.” He believes that the blues gave way to imitations and “inauthentic” forms of music. Record producers essentially took African American forms of music and sold it back to them in lower quality, while earning significant profits. In his discussion of the development of mass production, Davis states that the blues was impacted greatly by technological advancement. Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” from 1920, opened the door for mass production and consumption

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116 Neumann, 188.
117 Barlow, 114.
of “black” music. From that point forward, African Americans were seen as a major consumerist market and had the potential to shape the world of music. Davis states “The history of the blues, in one sense, is the history of folk art in the age of mechanical reproduction.”

There is an important distinction between recorded and the unrecorded music that occurs when the boundary between performer and audience becomes mediated. The oral tradition that once existed as a vital aspect of African American culture was ruptured by the mechanically reproduced process. With the advent of recording technology, it was no longer necessary to gather in groups and listen to performers discuss their sorrows with a live audience. Recordings took over sheet music as the most popular form of musical medium by the 1950s. The switch in music from a written to an aural/oral tradition began, due in part to the price of records decreasing significantly by the end of the 1920s. Radio broadcasts also played a role, as the quality of radio was as good as any record, which rendered records less popular for a brief time. Records eventually rebounded and became collector’s items and once again people began to afford and use them on a regular basis. All of these technological changes played a role in determining how people experienced blues and music in general. It also played a role in how we view the blues historically.

Unlike visual mediums, the blues has aural/oral tradition, which means that musical notation was not the primary means by which the music was documented. Therefore, we must rely on historical recordings to know how it sounds. However, recordings were not possible when the genre originated. This is an important characteristic of the blues event, as the blues has always had an aural/oral tradition. This downside of this tradition is that we cannot be certain

118 Davis, 8.
119 Hatch & Milward, 8.
120 Hatch & Milward, 47.
how the blues sounded prior to being recorded. Weissman admits that our knowledge of the blues is limited by technology. Even when recording became possible, songs had to be limited to two and a half minutes long on a ten inch seventy-eight r.p.m disc. We are also limited by the fact that only some musicians were recorded, while countless others were not. Unlike today where we can hear almost any musician in the western world that has access to a computer, this was not possible early in the twentieth century. This problem is exemplified specifically in foundational forms of blues music such as field hollers. Although many people consider field hollers to be part of the foundation of the blues, it is difficult to know with certainty how much impact they had. As Davis points out, there were no recordings of field hollers until the 1930s, thus we cannot know with certainty how they may have sounded a hundred years prior.\footnote{Davis, 33.}

Although we know that the blues retained some technical aspects such as the call and response patterns that field hollers began, by the time field hollers were recorded, they may have already been influenced by the blues sound itself. The technological reproduction of field hollers has thus shaped the way we think of that type of music, as much as, or if not more than, any of the original participants back when the music began.

Davis raises an important point, did records codify blues music in the 1920s or did the musicians do this themselves organically? When you consider the fact that there were never any standard ways of playing the blues prior to the early work by W.C. Handy and Hart Wand, we have to wonder why southern blues music began to have so many variations of the twelve bar, three stanza and four chord progression. Perhaps blues simply evolved in such a way, but just as likely is the fact that recordings of blues influenced musicians to mimic what they knew. With reproduction changing and shaping music, we are forced to acknowledge the changing themes of
originality and authenticity. The notion of authenticity has changed with primacy now being given to recordings. As Ken Ueno notes, we often compare live music to how it sounds on the recording, not vice versa.\footnote{Ueno, 23.} We no longer prioritize the live aspects of music, but rather rely on the recording as authentic sounds. Thus, the history of blues is largely based on the technological advances that developed in the twentieth century. Prior to recording, we have no records of blues music, other than folk tales of people playing something similar to the blues. There were many musicians that played the blues across the United States who were never recorded, despite achieving local popularity. There are various stories of unrecorded artists, but discussing them only adds speculative thoughts about what the blues may have been. Because the blues has had such an aural/oral tradition, there has not been much written about the blues during this time period, either in terms of musical composition or historical documentation. Therefore, the notion that there is an authentic form of blues (often associated with folk blues) is problematic not only because of the history of authenticity in terms of race, but also how much mechanical reproduction drove people to believe this was what blues was meant to be, when in fact, this was simply the beginnings of an era of mechanical reproduction and not the blues as such.

Blues is a form of music that is very much tied to mechanical reproduction, which destroys the mythical qualities that many people have tried to inscribe into it. However, I do not want to imply that its cultural impact has somehow been lessened through reproduction. Rather, I think that in admitting that the blues is more of a modern form of popular music, we can begin to classify the differences between it and its origins more clearly and thus we are able to discuss the event of blues music as such much more accurately. The event of blues as a cultural phenomenon is tied directly to its recorded history and as a consequence the artistic event of blues music
illustrates the impact of mechanical reproduction on all artistic mediums. Blues music has an important place in musical and artistic history because of its ties to technological reproduction. Unlike some static forms of art such as painting or architecture, blues music in particular is in a state of constant change, something which was not repeatable prior to technological reproduction. With the advent of recording technology, the fluctuating quality of blues music was at once captured, as well as eliminated when the song could be repeated continuously. These technological advancements changed how we must consider the artistic event, specifically the musical event distinct from other forms of art.

**Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, I would like to add one final note to this chapter. In consideration of any event, whether artistic or not, we must look at it from many perspectives, otherwise we are liable to miss some of its most important facets. The blues presents us with a unique opportunity to consider the event both from a small and a large scale, or what I will call the micro and the macro scale. On the micro side, we have the songs and their unique properties, such as tone variation, chord and rhythm changes, and so on. These small or even minute changes can in fact be considered events in their own right and have shaped the complex landscape of this artistic medium. On the macro scale, we have the important changes in the history of blues music from its inception until today, whether this is the advent of mechanical reproduction or the way in which the audience went from a primarily African American to white consumer base. Both the micro and the macro elements play an important role in how we consider blues music as an event and what I hope to explore in the coming chapters. Only by looking at all its facets can we arrive at an answer of what constitutes an artistic event and what makes the blues unique in this regard.
Chapter 2 – Deleuze and Badiou – The Micro and the Macro Event

After reading the previous chapter on the history of blues music, the reader should have an idea of its complexity, as well as a basic understanding of how the music is played and sounds. It would be impossible in such a short exposition to know all the details surrounding blues music, but the reader should appreciate a few important points before we proceed further into the next chapter. First, blues music has a primarily aural/oral history prior to its recording, thus leaving us with no clear notion of what it sounded like prior to mechanical reproduction. Secondly, when it was recorded, it took on a standardized compositional form that included 12 bars, using the I, IV, and V chords and an AAB verse pattern that has been re-created by many artists throughout its history. This standardized form has led to what we today consider to be “blues music,” and has shaped our notion of it more than any other method. However, it also led to a great deal of copying and borrowing from artists, which can sometimes blur the lines of originality, copying and simulacra. This is further complicated by the fact that blues music is often improvised. Finally, the notion of the blues “event” must be considered on the micro and the macro levels in order to arrive at any definite conclusions. This chapter will begin to explore this last claim through the work of two important twentieth century thinkers, namely, Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou.

In this chapter I aim to present two very different views on what constitutes an event. I am particularly interested in Deleuze and Badiou because they present important cases for the philosophy of event(s). Their treatments of the event (particularly in Badiou’s case) are at the forefront of their respective philosophies and are essential to understanding the philosophy of the
I will use this chapter as a starting point for our discussion of the event and will contrast the theories of Deleuze and Badiou with those of Martin Heidegger. Although Deleuze never discussed Heidegger in much detail, there are some parallels that will be alluded to in this chapter, with particular attention given to the influence Heidegger had on Badiou. My comparison of all three of these figures will be limited to the context of the artistic event and blues music. Badiou admits he had a contentious relationship with Deleuze in which they shared ideas, but also clashed on various topics. I will illustrate that these two thinkers perfectly exemplify the micro and macro distinction that resides within the complexity of an artistic event.

**Deleuze and the Micro Event**

Peter Hertz-Ohmes explains that in translating words such as event we come across various issues. He explains that *événement* in French translates to event, while in German the word is *Ereignis*. For Deleuze, neither of these words properly capture the meaning of *événement*, which for him is a metamorphosis or transformation. The word “event” is not synonymous with happening, or occurrence, but with change, or more precisely with becoming. Crockett believes that Deleuze uses the term event to mean becoming rather than a happening, or something that happens. The event is what is occurring in the process of what is already happening. Thus, we will see that understanding the event for Deleuze is not about knowing a set of factual occurrences derived from a series of past facts, but knowing the process by which they happen.

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123 Although Badiou is known more for his philosophy of the event, Clayton Crocket calls Deleuze a philosopher of the event as well. Clayton Crocket, *Deleuze Beyond Badiou: Ontology, Multiplicity, and Event*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 8.
125 Hertz-Ohmes, 84.
126 Crockett, 77.
such as the variation of sense, intensity and emotion. However, one of the most complicated aspects of Deleuze and Badiou is that understanding a term like the event within their respective systems means that we need to look at a whole set of terms associated with it. That said, I will limit the discussion to a few concepts in order to stay focused on the concept of event. Another complication in both of their theories is the fact that the use of the term event goes through some changes. In this dissertation I will be focusing primarily on Deleuze’s notion of event in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. These texts contain his most thorough examinations of the concept of the event, and the former book is an important foundational work that contains several important concepts. However, at times I will address some of the works of Deleuze and Guattari as well.

Deleuze’s definition of an ideal event is a singularity or a set of singularities. This can be exemplified in a number of ways, such as the points on a mathematical curve, in a state of affairs, or a psychological or moral person.\(^{127}\) Deleuze draws an important distinction here when discussing the notion of the singular. Philosophy has traditionally opposed the singular with the universal, but in mathematics the singular draws its opposition from the ordinary.\(^{128}\) An ordinary point is where nothing new happens and is a continuation of a sequence, whereas in the singular something new happens which interrupts the sequence. For example, a square has four points at 90 degree angles which can all be considered singularities, or points of inflection. These singularities are sudden breaks with the ordinary points found along the lines that make up the square. The turning points can easily be applied to more concrete settings such as emotional variations, chemical changes, or even passageways in buildings that lead from one room to


\(^{128}\)Deleuze, LS, 52.
another. In each of these examples, we find a change in process, or a variation from one point to another, mediated by a singular point. The singular presents a break from the ordinary, producing a point where there is significant change. However, we noted that an ideal event is a singularity, which leads us to ask: what does the ideal mean for Deleuze and how does Deleuze move from the ideal to the real?

Deleuze distinguishes between what he calls the virtual and the actual. He is careful here in noting that despite conventional thinking, reality is not composed of the actual and the possible, but the actual and the virtual. There is a dynamism between the virtual and the actual as they are equally important for the formation of reality. The virtual can be considered the unactualized, or ideal aspect of reality, but that does not make it less real than the actual. Deleuze states that the “reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them,” as opposed to the actual, which has a concrete existence. To better understand how Deleuze draws these conclusions, it is important to understand some of the foundations of Deleuze’s theory. Deleuze sees a problem in how metaphysics has proposed the theory of difference. Specifically, Deleuze sees Plato’s concept of the Idea as problematic, as its basis is founded upon the notion of a fixed, eternal identity, placing difference and becoming in a subordinate position “to the powers of the One.” Miguel De Beistegui says that the concept of the Idea is “at once a political weapon, a moral tool, and an aesthetic ideal.” The Idea is meant to provide philosophy with a transcendent power over virtually every dimension of being, and divides being into things that are and things that

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129 Deleuze, LS, 52.
131 Deleuze, DR, 211.
132 Deleuze, DR, 209.
133 Deleuze, DR, 59.
resemble the things that are, with difference in a position between these two realms. This system places identity at the forefront of being by making Ideas unchanging and transcendent, while worldly beings are defined by their difference from those ideals. Notions of identity, analogy and opposition have prevented us from thinking of difference in itself.

De Beistegui emphasizes the distinction that Plato makes between a copy and simulacrum. Whereas the copy is meant to refer to the original, a simulacrum operates outside of this duality. De Beistegui explains that “the copy is defined in relation to the original, which it resembles more or less, or which it imitates to a greater or lesser extent, the simulacrum is defined by the fact that it seems to conform to the original, or the model, but in reality unfolds outside the relation between original and copy.” According to Deleuze, a copy is a “well-founded pretender” that tries to resemble the original, whereas simulacra are “false pretenders” that are complete perversions. The division between model, copy, and simulacrum allowed Plato to place copies into the category of icons and simulacra into phantasms. Plato tried to eliminate this kind of simulation as he saw it as a form of deception and imitation of being. Ideas are true, whereas semblances are not. The Idea can help us distinguish between images that resemble the original, versus those that are mere semblances. Thus, the Idea becomes the model from which all images can draw. This constructs part of Plato’s hierarchy as those who understand Ideas (philosophers) can tell the difference between it and a copy or simulacrum, while those that intentionally deceive are banned from the polis. Deleuze sees this line of thinking as problematic and states that, “overturning Platonism, then, means denying the primacy

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135 De Beistegui, 57.
136 Deleuze, LS, 256.
137 Deleuze, LS, 256.
of original over copy, of model over image; glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflections.”

Deleuze sees the importance of the simulacrum, as it possesses creative power outside of the model/copy distinction. It is the event of difference that the simulacrum creates, rather than the identity it tries to replicate. By emphasizing a fixed identity, Plato constructed a system that relegated worldly objects to copies of the Ideal, something which Deleuze believes can be overturned by looking outside of the model/copy duality.

Instead of looking at difference between two identities (as in the case of the model and copy), Deleuze seeks to find difference itself. He does this by overturning Plato’s view of the Idea through the notion of differential relations. Ideas are not static, eternal beings that shape the objects of reality; rather, they are “virtual multiplicities, made up of relations between differential elements.” This places difference in the foundational role, rather than a subordinate one. But for Deleuze, difference is not limited to the virtual; difference has a way of actualizing. For instance, an object can become something depending on the context in which it is placed. As it encounters other objects, it goes through the process of becoming something other because of how those other objects may interact with it. This process is the change from the virtual to the actual, or from an unmeasured ideal state to a measureable real state. The change that occurs between states is only possible through what Deleuze calls differenciation. Deleuze explains that “whereas differentiation determines the virtual content of the Idea as problem, differenciation expresses the actualisation of this virtual and the constitution of solutions (by local integrations).” Thus, difference can actualize through the process of differenciation. Differenciation actualizes in the world of extension through changes in what Deleuze calls intensity. Differences of intensity include differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, and

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138 Deleuze, DR, 66.
139 Deleuze, DR, 244.
140 Deleuze, DR, 209.
potential. Deleuze even states that saying difference in intensity is a tautology, as intensity is the form of difference itself. What differentiates the intensive from the extensive then is how they can be measured or divided. For example, if we take an extended object such as water and place it in a container and then divide the contents into two separate containers, only the volume of the water is divided, while the temperature is not. Therefore, things such as temperature are pure differences that alter the extended world and resist the same divisions we find in extended objects.

James Williams says Deleuze sees reality as a “manifold of communicating processes” and any significant change to these processes is called an event. Williams explains that there are many different kinds of events that further illustrate Deleuze’s point. For example, the water temperature presented in the paragraph above, animals that alter their course because of climate change, or citizens who become politically active in times of crisis. These events can be subtle or obvious, but occur because something is shifting within a series that alters the course of extended objects and bodies through changes in intensity. Thus, an event has actual relations between bodies, as well as virtual changes in intensity of Ideas in relation to those bodies. The move away from identity can only be done by distancing oneself from the notion that an Idea is tied to essences. Otherwise, we are forced to ask the question of “What is X?” as a way of finding the identity of a being. Deleuze seeks to overturn this line of thinking by focusing his

141 Deleuze, DR, 222.
142 Deleuze, DR, 222.
145 Deleuze, DR, 188.
attention on difference which he believes can be tied to the idea of an event. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze looks to stoic philosophy in order to expand on the notion of the event.

Deleuze’s theory was heavily influenced by the Stoics, whom he believes transformed the idea of the event. Sean Bowden and Michael James Bennett explain a great deal of Stoic philosophy including their logic, physics, epistemology and ethics. Rather than delve into the entirety of this system, I want to provide a summary of some of these points in order to show how Deleuze was influenced by their system. The Stoics posited a division between bodies (that exist) and four incorporeals (sayable, void, place, and time), which they claim do not exist in the same manner as bodies, but rather subsist or inhere, meaning they have a minimal being.\(^{146}\) Bennett explains that things such as the void are still things, but since the void is by definition in opposition to a body, it cannot exist like a body.\(^{147}\) Most importantly, Deleuze illustrates that incorporeals overturn any notions of substance found in Aristotle, as for the Stoics accidents such as quality or quantity have no less being than substance itself. This means that for the Stoics, the highest term for an entity is not being, but *something*, which consists of both being and non-being.

In terms of bodies, Stoic physics dictates that the cosmos is composed of things that act upon one another and cause changes in each other. This means that no thing is independent of another; however, these causes are distinct from event-effects.\(^{148}\) Bowden further explains that each body has within itself the capability to impose a force upon another body which is the event, or the effect. Corporeal bodies do not act upon incorporeal events, but rather cause them

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\(^{146}\) Deleuze, *LS*, 5.


by acting upon other bodies: “This event” Bowden states, “is not another body, but a predicate, a sayable, which comes to be true of the body whose effect it is.”149 Bowden’s example concerns a piece of wood that is burnt. Only because the wood has the natural properties of being burnable can it be burnt. In other words, the wood “will be the complete cause of the predicate ‘being burnt’ which is true of the wood.”150 These causes are only possible through the notion that there must be active and passive forces that allow for events to occur, for example, when a person imposes their will on something in order to move it. Bodies can be active or passive in this process, but are part of the same ideal event, e.g. the event of being burnt. Thus, the process of a stick burning someone is the result of several different bodies (the stick, the fire and a person) interacting and causing the event of being burnt. This is a qualitative change which occurs as a result of bodies interacting with one another and causing intensive changes such as temperature variations that cause the stick to become lit. This move causes a reversal of Platonism by reducing the incorporeal realm to a secondary level only produced through the interactions of bodies. Deleuze states “if bodies with their states, qualities, and quantities, assume all characteristics of substance and cause, conversely, the characteristics of the Idea are relegated to the other side, that is to the impassive extra-Being which is sterile, inefficacious, and on the surface of things.”151 Unlike the realm of bodies, the effects subsist in the regime of sense. This presents a complete break from Platonism, rather than a re-formulation in any way.

To further our conversation on incorporeals, we turn to what Stoics call sayables. It is evident that sayables are not themselves bodies, but things that can be said about bodies. The goal of these sayables is essentially to connect bodies and their corresponding events and to see

149 Bowden 31-32.
150 Bowden, 32.
151 Deleuze, LS, 7.
how they are either compatible or incompatible with one another.\textsuperscript{152} Incorporeals are not substances or bodies; they are the effects of actions in the world. There is a gap here between what is said and the states of affairs themselves, which Deleuze tries to resolve by claiming there is sense that gives both the sayable and the state of affairs meaning. For Deleuze, the point here is that the event is “an objective ontological ideality for the determination of states of affairs, but only in so far as it is also understood to be an ongoing sense-event.”\textsuperscript{153} This produces a state of affairs that is determined by various events and is ontologically dependent upon them. In this move, Deleuze reveals an important connection between the virtual and the actual that is dictated by the event of language.

Deleuze emphasizes the importance of language in relation to events, saying that events are meant to be expressible and utterable.\textsuperscript{154} To expand upon the significance of language in Deleuzian events, I turn to Leonard Lawlor’s point on events and their ties to verbs. Lawlor states, “the event expressed in the proposition ‘the tree is green’ is not found in the predicate “green,” but in the infinitive ‘to green.’”\textsuperscript{155} He goes on to say that for Deleuze this infinitive gives the verb a power to divide into other tenses and this power makes the event unlimited. Constantin Boundas agrees with the importance of the infinitive modes, saying that verbs in this way “guarantee reversibility between past and future by virtue of the fact that they themselves are untimely matrices. They stand for forces, intensities and acts, rather than substances or qualities.”\textsuperscript{156} That is why it would not be accurate to characterize Deleuze’s notion of an event as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{152} Bowden, 34.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Bowden, 46.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Deleuze, LS, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Leonard Lawlor, “Phenomenology and metaphysics, and chaos: on the fragility of the event in Deleuze.” In The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 114.
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a happening, as we will see in Heidegger. Events understood as happenings often take on the gerundive tone, such as the *spilling* of coffee or the *erecting* of a monument, whereas the infinitive verb “to green” has no such tone and subsists rather than exists. The happening of spilling of coffee is not what concerns Deleuze, but rather how this happening affects the material bodies as well as the effects that spilling has on those material bodies. For example, the spilling of the coffee creates anger or humour, or at a different level it can alter someone’s shirt by leaving a stain. This is why Deleuze does not wish to place events merely in an ideal world. Events take on the language of the infinitive as they traverse between the real modes of the actual and the virtual. Deleuze explains that events are virtual, but distributed in states of affairs. The virtual always exceeds the actual in its possibilities, as exemplified by the spilling of coffee. The variations are infinite, but the way the virtual actualizes is only one such possibility. This is the process of actualization that events go through when they are actualized in day-to-day activities.\(^{157}\)

Let us now turn to one of Deleuze’s famous examples of an event in the opening paragraphs of *The Logic of Sense* where he provides an analysis of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.\(^{158}\) He describes Alice’s growth as a pure event, in which Alice simultaneously grows larger while becoming smaller, by which Deleuze means that as Alice grows larger, she is larger than before, while also being smaller than she will be. Although at first glance this appears to be contradictory, Deleuze reveals that this event is possible when we consider time from a different perspective. The stages of becoming both larger and smaller are not contradictory at all, because her state of becoming pulls at both the past and the future while

\(^{157}\) Deleuze, LS, 53.

\(^{158}\) Deleuze, LS, 1.
eluding the present.¹⁵⁹ Alice’s state of flux cannot be discussed as a state of presence, but needs to be taken within the context of the dynamic sense of becoming that Deleuze wishes to establish. In terms of the temporal dimension, there is no way of assigning precise measured moments at each point of growth. As Bowden explains, the event is needed for temporal points to even exist, rather than the other way around. Without the pure event, points t₁, t₂, etc. would have no meaning.¹⁶⁰ The process of an event has a temporal aspect that moves it away from the past into a future that never comes, as it is always in the process of becoming something, which incidentally leaves out the present. Events should not be considered as occurrences that happen at a distinct place and time, and to which one can point to and say “there’s the event!” Events have subtlety and play out as a process that cannot be identified at any given point in time. Events are thus never fully in the present; they either have happened or are in a process of becoming.

To explain this unique sense of temporality, Deleuze turns back again to the Stoics and the distinction they make between the temporality of depths (Chronos) and surfaces (Aion). The former is the limited present which accounts for actions of bodies and mixtures. The latter is the unlimited past and future, which accounts for effects such as events at the surface. Deleuze defines Chronos as “the always limited present, which measures the action of bodies as causes and the state of their mixture in depth” and Aion as “the essentially unlimited past and future, which gather incorporeal events, at the surface, as effects.”¹⁶¹ Events “subsist and insist” in the infinitive form of Aion, meaning they do not exist like the bodies they affect.¹⁶² For Chronos, only present time exists, while the past and future are relative to the present. For Aion, the past

¹⁵⁹ Deleuze, LS, 1.
¹⁶⁰ Bowden, 18.
¹⁶¹ Deleuze, LS, 61.
¹⁶² Deleuze, LS, 53.
and future subsist in time and divide the present. These events have always already taken place and are about to take place in the future. Thus, time stretches for Deleuze from its middle point of the present towards the past and future. With the Stoic distinction between Aion and Chronos, events can be explained as extra-temporal. Rather than thinking of time as merely a chronological passage (Chronos), there is also Aion, an eternal sense of time, which houses events and gives them their unique place. Aion is the “in-between” time in which events take place and separates time from itself.

The event is the point at which something occurs with the past and future on either side. It is a passage from one dimension to another. In reference to Deleuze’s mathematical treatment of points in time, De Beistegui states that time “is still a line” with points, but those points “are the singular points of events, and not the ordinary points of states of affairs.” Thus, we have come back around to see how Deleuze’s singular points work within his scheme of temporality and the event. Even those singular points are not sudden interruptions, but the becoming of the new angle in the square. They are the points at which the previous angle comes to meet the new one and are the points at which the angle shifts. The singular is the stretching between the old and the new, or the past and the future. In this matter, each instance of becoming is an instance of a thing becoming something other. Where Deleuze differentiates himself from other notions of becoming is in his view of becoming as an immanent process, rather than a transcendent one. Events themselves are always conditioned by becoming and are only possible on the basis of difference. It is not the difference between identities, but the different processes that occur at level of the virtual and the actual.

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163 Deleuze, LS, 162 & 164.
165 De Beistegui, 72.
In consideration of this temporal factor in Deleuze’s theory of the event, we find that Deleuze’s primary concern was indeed the overcoming of Platonism, through a theory of immanence and becoming. Substances and Ideas limit our experience of the world by prioritizing the static and the present, rather than the constant becoming that is the basis of events. To some degree he shares this idea with Heidegger, who as we shall see is also an opponent of the “objective presence” found in Plato, albeit Heidegger’s conclusions and methods are certainly different from those of Deleuze, especially as he emphasises negativity. Events are not static substances; rather, they are changing, intensifying effects of bodies and their interactions, as well as the changes in intensity that occur between them. Therefore, Deleuze operates at the most minute levels of events, where things are not necessarily seen or experienced evidently. The Deleuzian event can be very subtle, but is nonetheless a vital change in which we pass from one state into another. These changing states are conditioned only by the fact that they are in a process of constant becoming. Here we have a beginning point of our discussion on the event which will now be countered by Badiou.

**Badiou and Badiou’s Deleuze**

To say that Deleuze and Badiou do not share the same views on the event would be an understatement. Jon Roffe states that their views of the event are so opposed that we can “conclude that Deleuze’s view excludes every important feature of the event in terms of Badiou’s own account.”

There is even some contention as to whether or not Deleuze and Badiou understood one another’s projects. For example, Bela Egyed cites several sources that

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say Deleuze’s treatment of Badiou was a fundamental misunderstanding of his work.\textsuperscript{167} Further Egyed himself says that Badiou’s analysis of Deleuze is only “somewhat more generous.”\textsuperscript{168} I plan to detail some of these disagreements as they pertain to the notion of the event and beyond. As the reader will see, these disagreements were never fully resolved, in most part because they simply had vastly different approaches.

To understand the differences between Deleuze and Badiou requires an analysis of Badiou’s thought as a whole. Badiou’s philosophy seeks a return to ontology over epistemology and a philosophy of language. Epistemology focuses on knowledge over truth, while ontology looks at what Badiou calls “truth procedures.” Truth is always something new, whereas knowledge is what repeats. The new for Badiou is what he calls the void, the nothing, or the coming-to-be of truth.\textsuperscript{169} These concepts draw a distinction between truth and knowledge. For Badiou, truth occurs in four domains: art (particularly in poetry), politics, science (particularly in mathematics) and love. These generators or conditions do not communicate directly, but through their relation to truth. For example, art produces its own truths, which conditions philosophy in a certain manner, while science may have its own set of truths that condition philosophy differently. The task for philosophy is to account for all of these truth procedures by looking at situations in a more general manner, outside of the particular ways of an artist or a scientist. In other words, philosophy must conceptually seize these truth generators and by doing so turns them into conditions of philosophy.\textsuperscript{170} Badiou believes that problems can occur when philosophy tries to become one of its conditions, such as the case of Heidegger’s philosophy and his

\textsuperscript{168} Egyed, 76.
\textsuperscript{169} Alain Badiou, \textit{Being & Event}. (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 56.
\textsuperscript{170} Badiou, BE, XVIII.
involvement with the Nazi party. In cases like this, philosophy tries to produce truth in domains that are external to it, rather than allow truth to happen and condition philosophy. Justin Clemens explains that philosophy can be sutured by the conditions which suppress it by making philosophy follow one general procedure. All of thought gets put through one problem, as exemplified by Marxism which sutures philosophy into political condition, or Romanticism to the artistic condition.\footnote{171} That is why it is crucial to maintain this difference and for philosophy to remain conditioned by these four domains. There are no philosophical events as such, only events created by conditions of philosophy.

Badiou resists prioritizing any single condition as the main producer of truth, but believes mathematics plays an essential role. Contrary to Heidegger, Badiou believes mathematics, rather than poetry, is what allowed Greek thought to emerge, although as noted by its conditions, both mathematics and poetry have an important place in Badiou’s theory. Christopher Norris states that poetry “has pride of place within Badiou’s conception of art as one of those enabling ‘conditions’ that allow us to grasp the history of truth as progressively revealed through a sequence of world-transformative events which set new terms for artistic, political, scientific or ethical fidelity.”\footnote{172} It is not that Badiou wants to devalue poetry, but that he believes it is not the sole site of truth.\footnote{173} The four conditions all play important roles in philosophy, particularly for the ancient Greeks. Although Badiou believes ancient philosophy was conditioned greatly by mathematics, it was done so in the language of poetry: “poetry is mother of philosophy,” while

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\footnote{171} Justin Clemens, “The conditions.” In Alain Badiou: Key Concepts. (United Kingdom: Acumen, 2010), 34
\footnote{172} Christopher Norris, Badiou’s Being & Event: A Reader’s Guide. (London: Continuum, 2009), 109.
\footnote{173} Badiou discusses a number of important poets in Being & Event including Stéphane Mallarmé and Charles Perrault.
“mathematics is father of philosophy.”\textsuperscript{174} Thus, both of these conditions have their rightful place in the production of truth, but with mathematics at the forefront.

Badiou’s insistence on the importance of mathematics stems from his belief that mathematics allowed the Greeks to break from doxa, or common-sense belief, and develop a more complete sense of the world.\textsuperscript{175} For Badiou, this development in knowledge was an event. Although Greeks undoubtedly advanced poetry, Badiou thought their advancements in mathematics, particularly in the field of axiomatic-deductive reasoning, was far more crucial.\textsuperscript{176} That said, Badiou relies on modern mathematics rather than looking back to Greek arithmetic. The idea of genus and species posits that there must be a limit point or specific difference (\textit{differentia specifica}), otherwise a series would infinitely regress. This limit point has been posited in different ways throughout the history of philosophy and includes such propositions as the omnipotent, infinite God, the One, the unmoved mover, or nature. However, we should not think of Badiou’s mathematical foundations as abstract expressions, as they have real consequences in the world. Badiou posits that there are “situations” that can be considered “any presented multiplicity,” meaning they have very broad possibilities.\textsuperscript{177} In his theory, the One is not, or is a derivative of the many, which is why Badiou emphasizes the multiple.\textsuperscript{178} He says this in an effort to move away from the notion that being can be unified. But what is presented and experienced in everyday life is unified. The only way to think being is to present it in a situation “which means that we have to subtract from this fundamental multiplicity an element that will

\textsuperscript{175} Norris, 110.
\textsuperscript{176} Norris, 111.
\textsuperscript{177} Badiou, BE, 24.
\textsuperscript{178} Badiou, BE, 23.
‘count-as-one’ in order to present it.”¹⁷⁹ This allows for multiplicity to be properly presented in a situation. For example, people live in a situation with pre-established givens that dictate to some extent their ethical, political, and aesthetic interactions. A situation can be many things including a country, a demonstration, or even an atom.¹⁸⁰ Coming to terms with a situation means recognizing what does and does not belong to it.

Badiou’s theory rests upon the distinction between belonging versus inclusion.¹⁸¹ Belonging is a relation of elements to sets and inclusion is the relation of sets to subsets. Something can belong and be included, which is the concept of normality. To belong but not be included is the singular and to be included but not belong is what he calls the excrescent.¹⁸² In political terms, the normal is a citizen of a state. Those that belong but are not included could be slaves, or any repressed group of people. The final category are those that are included but do not belong, such as spies in a state.¹⁸³ These situations can only be interrupted and altered by something extrinsic to being, which Badiou calls events. Events are contingent, new, outside of ontology; they are in the realm of the unthinkable. Events are ruptures in established “modes of conceptual grasp.”¹⁸⁴ Events are a kind of negation as the truth that is caused by the event makes a hole in knowledge. In an event, we must consider making the unthinkable happen, meaning that we can begin to include all those that belong. So for instance, the French Revolution overturned the dominant ideology of the monarchy and put in place democratic notions of freedom and liberty. This forced people to adopt a position which was not previously considered. It was a violent rupture that overturned a previously untouchable power and allowed for the

¹⁷⁹ Crockett, 108.
¹⁸¹ Badiou, BE, 84.
¹⁸² Badiou, BE, 108.
¹⁸³ These examples can be found in: Brent Adkins, “Deleuze and Badiou on the Nature of Events,” Philosophy Compass 7.8 (2012): 511.
¹⁸⁴ Norris, 124.
possibility of new forms of thought and governance. The opening of new worlds allows for the possibility of overturning the dominant discourse. This illustrates that Badiou’s theory of the event hinges upon the idea that there must be a fundamental negation or void. The new arises from this void and shifts the situation to something previously unthinkable.

The political consequences of Badiou’s philosophy are evident. Excluded parts are covered over by dominant ideology, but do not usually stay quiet for long. In cases such as the French Revolution, the excluded population or forms of thought were building under the surface even though they were held quiet by the dominant ideology. However, the exclusion of those beliefs from the dominant ideology prevented them from being managed and could thus come to the surface at any time. But an event is needed for the excluded part to become visible, otherwise it will stay beneath the surface. Once it comes to the surface, these excluded parts produce truths, subjects and systems. While this is a very simplistic explanation of the complexity of those particular situations and events, it is meant to show how a situation can be interrupted by something which was not previously possible. Badiou explains that the eventual site is an abnormal multiple, meaning that “none of its elements are presented in the situation.”\(^{185}\) The event interrupts the present situation to produce something new (a void) and a site is created that produces faithful subjects. That is why subjectivity has a special meaning for Badiou, as it can only arise from an event. Subjects are created by acting upon the event and countering the dominant ideology. However, events are random and very rare for Badiou. Political confrontations do not necessarily become events. They must change the situation to be considered events.

In the occurrence of the event, something new must happen that produces a truth. Truth appears only because an event interrupts repetition. In the case above, monarchic rule was a repetition of the same, while an attempt to establish democratic values was the interruption of those ideals. But the event is not a pure fact, as people must decide whether what has happened is an event. As the event is rare for Badiou, it can only come to fruition with continued fidelity by subjects, or what James Williams calls “militant fidelity.”\(^{186}\) This means that when something occurs, in order for the occurrence to become an event, people need to recognize its importance with continued support and devotion. With persistent fidelity, the event is named and eventually recognized as an event as such; otherwise the occurrence will only remain part of the status quo. Fidelity to the event is what keeps it alive. As soon as fidelity has dissipated so too does the event. For example, there are still those that are faithful to the events of May ’68, but there is no such fidelity to the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. Perhaps there are some abstract concepts that can be translated to present times, but politically and socially times are much too different to consider the ideas of the English Revolution to be an event in today’s era. There have been many events that overcome old ones and produce new paradigms. The fidelity to one movement helps name the event and produces a site in which we can say the event occurred.

A site is only evental retroactively and it is named as such.\(^{187}\) We cannot anticipate an evental site prior to the event occurring. Only when an event occurs can its site be deemed as such. People must be engaged with the happening in order to determine if an event has occurred. The decision to say that an event has occurred brings forth truth. The event is the truth of a


\(^{187}\) Badiou, BE, 179.
particular situation, the unfolding of a new regime of truth that covers over the hegemonic narrative by including the previously excluded. The unfolding of the new has practical and material consequences, as political, social or cultural changes can occur from an event. Badiou states that a new logic comes through, as exemplified by new artistic movements in which new forms come to fruition or scientific revolutions where new theories replace old ones.\textsuperscript{188} Truth finds its process in finite subjects but continues through different people and eras, thus the process of truth is itself infinite. Truth is inside the world of material objects and subjects, but is universal as it goes beyond the world.\textsuperscript{189} Therefore, despite being located in the finite world, the effects of the event are infinite and come back to affect the material world.

As the reader sees, events are rare occurrences for Badiou because they need continual support from loyal subjects. An event therefore distinguishes itself from an occurrence, as occurrences happen on a perpetual basis, whereas events are important breaks with the status quo. Badiou is not interested in sensation and the minute changes we see in bodies, but the major conditions that shape and alter bodily interactions within historical circumstances. Unlike Deleuzian events, which occur constantly, Badiouan events are rare and thus have an important place in the world. For Deleuze, changes in intensity come from repeated patterns. Consequently, events happen through people and not to them; as the intensity changes in people, altering their values and priorities. For Badiou, events require much more than changes in intensity and can only occur with fidelity to the event. As Clayton Crockett explains, “Badiou argues that for Deleuze there are too many events, and that therefore an event does not represent a break from the status quo, which means that Deleuze’s thought possesses no inherently radical politics and


\textsuperscript{189} Badiou, ET.
succumbs to the tyranny of the dominant capitalist practices.”

It is evident to see why Badiou critiques Deleuze for being aristocratic and detached from history, whether one believes the critiques are fair or not. I do not see Deleuze’s focus on the minute as a weak politics, as much as an attention to the detail of the everyday changes that we see. Bodily motion or shifts can be as eventful as traumatic experience, even if they are not as immediately evident. Consider a disease that slowly builds: there is a point of shift that alters the body that may not be immediately evident, but has as much of an effect on a person (or even a population if the disease is transmittable) as the firing of a bullet. Badiou however does not share this focus on the micro level, putting his attention towards the political and social changes we see in historical events. Only when people gather and decide on events can they be named as such. The focus for Badiou is on human political agents and their role in the world.

Badiou’s critique of Deleuze extends far beyond the rarity of events. In his exposition on Deleuze in Being & Event II, Badiou looks at what he believes are the four axioms of the event in Deleuze’s The Logic of Sense. I would like to outline each one of these axioms before I analyze their most important aspects. The first axiom states that unlimited becoming becomes the event itself. The event is the ontological realization of the eternal truth of the One, namely, the One of becoming. This particular axiom is probably the most controversial as it reduces Deleuze to a thinker of the One through his philosophy of becoming (a point that will be expanded upon below). The second axiom states that the event is what happened and what will happen, it is never present. There is a synthesis of past and future, as Deleuze does not want the event to be a barrier between one world and another. Badiou sees a problem with Deleuze’s notion of time as

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190 Crockett, 165.
191 Crockett, 12.
192 Badiou, BE, 382-383.
an eternal instance of being. Without any division of time, there is no room left for the void, a concept which we have seen is essential to Badiou’s own theory of the event. The third axiom is that the event is distinct from the actions of bodies, but it is caused by them. The event itself has an effect on and is an effect of those bodies. The final axiom is that life is composed of a single event. This last axiom comes out of Deleuze’s communicative events, where Deleuze capitalizes the term ‘event’ in some cases to denote a unique event through which all other events communicate.\textsuperscript{193} Though I have not mentioned this point explicitly, it should be of no surprise that Deleuze makes such connections between events since events connect to one another through constant change in processes in material bodies. The event can be considered a field of difference in which singular events occur.

Of these four axioms the first one stands out as the most problematic. Badiou claims that Deleuze is a philosopher of the One, citing \textit{The Logic of Sense}, in which Deleuze discusses events as being One, or under the idea of the One.\textsuperscript{194} At first, this claim seems implausible as Deleuze sees ideas of essence or the One tied to the Platonic ideal; ideals which we have seen he refutes in great detail.\textsuperscript{195} For Badiou, however, Deleuze’s theory expresses the One through unlimited becomings, meaning the state of constant becoming leaves no room for a void that is necessary in being. Thus, Deleuze’s idea of becoming replaces the One through unlimited becoming, rather than static essences. Jon Roffe thinks Badiou’s claim that Deleuze is a thinker of the One is problematic and the basis of this argument “leads Badiou astray from the very beginning.”\textsuperscript{196} Part of Roffe’s argument against Badiou is based on how Deleuze sees the event as essence, or essence as event, as well as Deleuze’s theory of becoming. These ideas enforce the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{193} Deleuze, LS, 56.
\item \textsuperscript{194} Alain Badiou, \textit{Deleuze: The Clamour of Being}. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 10.
\item \textsuperscript{195} Deleuze, DR, 188.
\item \textsuperscript{196} Roffe, 5.
\end{itemize}
idea of multiple changes over primary unity. Roffe explains that Badiou’s formulation of Deleuze’s events leads Badiou to conclude that since events are effects, they cannot be the basis of the new as they are not causes. Clayton Crockett also opposes Badiou’s claim that Deleuze is a philosopher of the One, saying that Deleuze opposed the one by liberating simulacra from models, copies and forms. In this case I tend to side with Roffe and Crockett in their critiques of Badiou. I do not see Deleuze’s theory being reduced to the One, as events in their singularity are still unique and reducing them under the umbrella of the One tends to downplay their unique character. The truth of an event for Deleuze cannot be reduced to the One, as their truth lies in their constant folding and unfolding.

Badiou’s entire critique reduces Deleuze to a kind a Platonist, which is further exemplified by how Badiou sees Deleuze’s formulation of the virtual as a kind of Platonism. Badiou’s claim here is that the Idea is simply the virtual for Deleuze, as it grounds the actual. Crockett refutes Badiou’s claim that Deleuze’s idea of the virtual is another name for being, in which Badiou says Deleuze’s virtual is ultimately creating the ontological difference of being versus beings. Crocket sees the virtual as a ground, but it certainly does not possess the transcendent properties of a Platonistic ideal and is not an ontological split. I do not share Badiou’s critique of Deleuze as a kind of Platonist, as that perpetuates the notion that the actual needs the virtual in the same way as a copy needs its model. Deleuze wants to reformulate this Platonistic model completely through radical becoming in which the virtual and the actual are in

197 Roffe, 109.
198 Roffe, 107.
199 Crockett, 5.
One other author who agrees with Crockett and Roffe is James Williams in Williams, IHT, 99.
200 Badiou, CB, 46.
201 Badiou, CB, 48.
202 Crockett, 13-14.
a constant state of flux, rather than the virtual as possessing any kind of ground to which the actual is meant to conform. Further, I do not see Deleuze’s omission of the void as a sign that he is a Platonist in any way. I can understand Badiou’s critique as he seeks radical change only possible with the void, but keeping in mind Deleuze’s micro scale, we would not see the same radical changes as we do in Badiou. No void is necessary in the changing states of emotion or sensation. These are subtle variances that are in constant flux and do not require sudden dramatic shifts. Thus, Badiou’s critique fails to account for the variation in scale between his and Deleuze’s theories. Next, I would like to discuss the impact of these differences on their respective theories on art.

Badiou and Deleuze on Artistic Events

In his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou lays out three schemata of how philosophy and art have been linked throughout different points in history. The first is the didactic schema, which comes from Plato’s theory that stipulates that art is incapable of truth. Plato’s theory deems some forms of art to be imitations or semblances of truth. This is exemplified in his dialogue *Ion*, in which Plato is critical of orators and their use of rhetoric. By using rhetorical speech, orators have the power to persuade the public with their use of language. Art must therefore be kept under careful surveillance and control so that it does not influence the public in any adverse ways. Furthermore, Ion himself, as he performs Homer, loses himself in imitation, thus art can have adverse affects on the performers as well. The problem with this schema, as Badiou explains, is that truth is considered extrinsic to art. In this schema, art is not immanent, meaning that it is not coextensive with the truths that it generates. Without intrinsic value, art can be

204 Badiou, HI, 9.
easily controlled and can influence the population by the will of its leaders, or in the case of *Ion*, through rhetorical practices. We have already seen Deleuze’s rejection of Platonism and how Plato deals with artists and art in the *Republic*, but Badiou’s writing on Plato is considerably different. Badiou explains there is more to Plato’s critique of philosophy than we have perhaps said.\(^{205}\) Plato does not dismiss art *tout court*, but has a problem with mimetic poetry, a point that is very similar to the one Deleuze makes. Plato makes a distinction between Ideas, the material objects, and the mimetic representations of those objects made by artists. For example, a bed has some correspondence to the ideal of a bed and the image replicated by the artist. Counter to Plato, for Badiou we can only find true life with poetry, as philosophy cannot be completely abstract. Badiou notes that poetry is always in material and natural language and can be found in any act of language.\(^{206}\) Even in texts that are not naturally poetic, poetry can be found, which is why Badiou believes that Greek mathematics were still poetic. In this sense, poetry can open the way toward truth, without falling into the mimetic trap. To some extent he shares this belief with Heidegger, but explains why he ultimately splits with Heidegger through his next schema.

The second schema is the Romantic schema, which holds that art alone is capable of truth, a position that he says is taken on by Heidegger.\(^{207}\) In his brief discussion of Heidegger, Badiou explains that for Heidegger anything outside of being is a negative counter to art. In the Romantic schema art’s relation to truth is immanent, as “art exposes the finite descent of the Idea.”\(^{208}\) The work of art for Heidegger opens forth *phusis* (being), while the nothing stands apart from being.\(^{209}\) Most importantly, in Badiou’s mind this schema exemplifies the ties between the

\(^{205}\) Badiou, PP.
\(^{206}\) Badiou, PP.
\(^{207}\) Badiou, HI, 3.
\(^{208}\) Badiou, HI, 9.
\(^{209}\) Badiou, BE, 177.
poet and the thinker, rendering the message of poetry the same as any philosophical truth. As we have seen, Badiou does not adopt such an extreme position, saying that art is not the only means of getting to the truth of being. Badiou’s problem with this approach is that art is not the sole producer of truths as Heidegger wants us to believe. Art is merely one of the conditions of philosophy that produces truth; otherwise, philosophy risks suturing itself to one of its conditions. I tend to agree in part with Badiou’s assessment that Heidegger limits his vision of truth as a process of revealing. As I will outline in the following chapter, this causes some of Heidegger’s limitations with respect to art and its modes of truthful productions, particularly when it pertains to technological advances.

The third schema is the classical schema that posits that art is incapable of truth, but this does not pose a serious problem for Badiou. This schema was proposed by Aristotle, contra Plato, and places art outside of philosophy. For Aristotle, the aim of art was therapeutic (catharsis) and not cognitive or revelatory. This absolves art of being untrue, because it deals with the sense and not thought. It assigns art an innocence by absolving it of any responsibility towards truth or even thought. Badiou states that art is “entirely exhausted by its act or by its public operation,” thus rendering it a public service. The most problematic aspect of this schema for Badiou is that unlike the second schema, the role of truth has no place at all. All three of these schemas have played a role in modern philosophy, as Badiou claims the twentieth century offered no new schemas. Instead, the twentieth century adopted these three schemas in different ways. Marxism took on the didactic view, psychoanalysis took the classical view and Heideggerian hermeneutics adopted the romantic view. Badiou emphasizes that art, or poetry in

210 Badiou, HI, 4.
211 Badiou, HI, 5.
212 Badiou, HI, 5.
particular is only one of the conditions of truth and should not be considered as the only site, nor should it be dismissed completely. Elie During explains that Badiou does not privilege art because it has no power to influence philosophy as such.213 Only through the event can we come to know the truth, which is the case for art as well.

As discussed in the previous section, we have seen that for Badiou, poetry or art has close relations to universal truths. Poetry is not a matter of plain facts: when reading it, one gets a sense of a happening or event. Truths are universal because they are based on events, as they reveal much more than what a local situation can say. Events are not necessarily limited by the place in which they occur. Truths go beyond ontological laws from which they arise.214 These notions of truth eliminate the spatial or temporal limitations of the set of facts that are presented by a situation. In dealing with finite dimensions such as objects or materials in the world, art creates truth that is concerned with the infinite. Therefore, the event is a reformulation of being and its situation, and alters being through the creation of something new. This is an essential aspect of Badiou’s artistic event, as During defines an artistic event for Badiou as a change in the formula of the world of art.215 In Badiou’s own words, “Artistic events are great mutations that almost always bear on the question of what counts, or doesn’t count, as form.”216 An artistic event is the coming to form of what was previously not within the situation of art; it is the formalization of something previously unformed.

The formalization of events is dictated by a strength and weakness of events. For example, there were abstract paintings during classical art periods, but they were ignored or were

213 Elie During, Alain Badiou: Key Concepts. (United Kingdom: Acumen, 2010), 85.
214 Badiou, PP.
215 During, 84.
not considered to be great art. Once the avant-garde revolution took over, abstract art became the norm and the event changed the strength of their existence from weak to strong. Something can therefore exist without being considered an event, as the setting of time and place can influence how we see particular works. We have discussed how this is often the case for Badiou as events require fidelity from subjects, something which is often not the case with artists who explore unknown genres during different artistic epochs. Thus, the situation dictates how a work may be seen, but only an event can alter the situation. The abstract works of the past were non-events for Badiou, which is why they did not change the artistic paradigm. He explains that individual works are not the events themselves, which is why a single work does not entail an event. One of the most important statements that Badiou makes is that a work of art is not itself an event, it is a fact of art. A work is also not a truth; truth is the artistic procedure initiated by an event, a procedure that is made up of various works, but not manifest in any of them. He goes on to say that a work is the differential point of truth and a subject point of artistic truth. This is to be differentiated from an event which is a group of works which he names a singular multiple of works. Thus, a group of works produces an artistic configuration, which is not to be conflated with a period or genre of art, but is an “identifiable sequence, initiated by an event.” This sequence in turn produces a truth. Although he explicitly states it is not a genre or period, Badiou points to Greek tragedy as an example of artistic configuration, which is a very broad term denoting both period and time. Nevertheless, strength comes out of artistic events that are made up of a multiplicity of works, rather than a singular work. The value Badiou that places

217 Badiou, HI, 12.
218 Again, we will see this is very different from Heidegger’s theory of artistic revelation.
219 Badiou, HI, 12-13.
220 Badiou, HI, 12-13.
here once again is on the larger, rather than the smaller scale. No single artist, composition, or work can produce an artistic event, which lessens the importance of singular compositions.

Badiou is also interested in overturning the idea of the artist as creator of art and thinks that we should try to locate subjects in works themselves and not at the source with its creator.\textsuperscript{221} He calls the creator of works a “vanishing cause,” implying that the origin of the creation is not what sets forth the events.\textsuperscript{222} Creators do not possess secrets that the works transmit. Subjects are constituted by works or groups of works. A system of works configures a new subjectivity through engagement with those works. No single work can constitute a new subjectivity; only a system made up of numerous works can create this new mode of thought. Thus, fidelity to a type of art produces and names the artistic event. This establishes a communal aspect to all kinds of events as they can never be an isolated incident that happens without the consent of a group of participants. This is in direct contrast to Deleuze, whose theory of the event does not necessarily involve humans, let alone their participation in something as large scale as what we see in Badiou. To some extent, Badiou’s theory also reduces some of the unique qualities of each work by grouping events into a whole. Although Badiou is never dismissive of individual works outright, his theory here implies that the importance of works only lies in their relation to a whole system that includes works and the subjects that are faithful to them.

Once again, this is in contrast to Deleuze who prioritizes the singularity of each work over a genre. In his remarks on Deleuze, Antonio Calcagno notes that for Deleuze, art works should not be grouped into styles or genres, as this obscures a work’s unique qualities. Each art

\textsuperscript{221} Badiou, PE, 69.
\textsuperscript{222} Badiou, PE, 72.
work has its own essence that makes up a multiplicity of works.\footnote{Antonio Calcagno, “Introduction.” In \textit{Intensities & Lines of Flight. Deleuze/Guattari and the Arts.} (London & New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 1.} This puts more focus on the detail of each composition rather than how it might fit in within a greater scheme. This focus on composition is made evident in Deleuze and Guattari’s work, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, in which they say composition is the sole definition of art.\footnote{Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 191-192.} In this work, the authors do not focus their attention on how art may be impactful on a large scale, but rather on what kind of affects and sensations art produces. This is an idea shared in part with Badiou who recognizes the affective role of art in the formation of the previously formless. For example, the truth of art reveals itself in the affective process of pleasure in the case “a new perceptual intensity.”\footnote{Badiou, LW, 76.} This means that subjects begin to become faithful to artistic events partly by their ability to be affected by particular groups of works. Deleuze and Guattari focus more on the process of change in individual works and subjects, rather than groups. They say that the materiality of a work passes into sensation, which produces an affect that is metallic, stony, etc. Materials blend into the other and we forget about it in our experience of sensation.\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, WP, 167.} These sensations become so powerful that we become other in the experience of the work of art, meaning that we engage with the work that the material aspects become replaced by the worldly objects they represent. How we confront an event is up to us, but it is nevertheless imposed upon us, forcing us to act. The goal is to ultimately “extract a bloc of sensations” in the work.\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, WP, 167.} What is then preserved in the work is the bloc of sensations. These are the percepts and affects which are beings whose validity lies in
themselves, rather than outside of them. Therefore, the work of art exists in itself and is preserved in itself, not by something extrinsic to it.\textsuperscript{228}

These two contrasting views of the event greatly impact their views on art and how they approach artistic works. Badiou notes the importance of works within their historical place as each work can only become an event if it has an effect on the world of art and its subjects, ultimately creating a regime of the artistic event. No single work has enough power to transform a paradigm without further communal fidelity. The communal aspects that make up Badiou’s theory impact each philosophical condition, with each event relying on fidelity in order to exist. A single work placed arbitrarily in history can have no impact, if there is no fidelity from subjects to consider it an event. In contrast to these grander views, Deleuze’s exploration of sensation and singularity place each work and potentially each brush stroke, each note, or each chisel within their own particular location. There is ultimately no need to reconcile these two viewpoints, as Deleuze and Badiou give us two distinct points of view on the event. What I aim to do next is to show how each one influences blues music.

**What Makes Blues Music an Event?**

Now that we have established two of the more important views of the event, we can begin to explore what makes blues music an event. As we have seen there are a number of factors that make blues music history a complicated one. Deleuze and Badiou’s theories centre the discussion on one particular theme, namely, the event. But even in this context we have two very distinct positions on what we call events and how art plays a role. As I alluded to earlier, we must consider events on two different planes: the micro and the macro. This means we need to

\textsuperscript{228} Deleuze & Guattari, WP, 164.
look at how blues music is played, as well as its place in history and its evolution as a musical form. These two philosophers are useful to our project as they each provide one element of the aforementioned dyad. On the micro side we have Deleuze, whose theory of events consists of micro changes in bodies and the sensations that they produce. On the macro side we have Badiou, whose events are large, paradigm shifting occurrences that alter being in significant ways. When dealing with a topic as broad as blues music, we need to consider it from both of these perspectives in order to understand it in greater detail.

Considering Deleuze’s evental connectivity, we can posit those ideas in relation to the field of blues and artistic events. There are two levels of events here that can be incorporated into a theory of artistic events. For example, blues music has its own set of codes, rhythms, and scales that unify the genre to some degree. In playing the blues, musicians participate in singular events that make up an Event that we can generally call blues music. It is only when those particular things are done that leads us to say this person is playing blues music. Taken out of context, the “blues” note in a scale has no meaning, it only garners its meaning when it is played within the relation of the other notes on the scale; this is what can be meant by the micro scale. The individual notes comprise a whole of a scale which constructs a whole of a song. This is paralleled on a larger scale when one takes a blues song and puts it within the context of blues music. Songs make up a genre, as they encompass some general rules of music, along with other musical properties such as tone or intonation. But as we saw earlier, we need to be careful in categorizing music in such a way with Deleuzian theory. There needs to be a focus on the singularity and uniqueness of each song without resorting to a categorization of genres or styles, otherwise we lose these unique singularities. That is why Nick Nesbitt looks at musical composition from the Deleuzian view of internal difference. Traditionally we have come to know
chords within their scale position (e.g. C major is the tonic or I chord in the scale of C, but the IV in scale of G). This creates a hierarchy of chords that differentiates each chord through its relation to the others in a scale. Nesbitt cites a couple of examples in serious music that changed this view including Wagner’s “Tristan chord,” which challenged the idea of where chords are meant to belong.  

Similarly, Schoenberg employed what Nesbitt calls “a music of sheer immanence,” where notes do not have reference to outside authority, giving each note its own moment.  

Both of these examples call into question how we should look at musical compositions as a whole.

I think challenging the idea of where chords may belong is essential to the progression and evolution of music, but disagree with Nesbitt’s view of how individual chords or notes have an immanent effect. Notes need to have some rule of hierarchy, otherwise they become arbitrary and to a great extent un-musical. If I were to pluck 70 random notes in an arbitrary sequence, with no rhythm, it would be difficult to necessarily classify what I did as music at all. The notes or chords need to have some relation to each other in order to be called music, otherwise we lose the idea of musicality completely. That does not mean we cannot explore musical limits and go beyond them, which is Badiou’s precise point on events. The ideas that are imposed upon situations that carry them onward and create something new are essential to building new sounds and even new genres and styles. But there is a need for some form, otherwise we collapse into complete chaos. I understand the desire to try and push Deleuze’s theory in this manner, with his focus on immanence and the individual, but even Deleuze believes there is relationality, which is at the forefront of his theory. This balance between the singular and the whole has to be

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230 Nesbitt, 61.
maintained; otherwise the singularities have no purpose. It is essentially a matter of the small and the large that is at question. Do we consider blues music from the point of view of the singular occurrence, or from the broad spectrum of happenings that make up its history?

Blues music straddles this line between the idea of the small and large scale that we see in both Badiou and Deleuze. There is no definitive answer, even when we consider only one of the two perspectives, evidenced by Nesbitt’s reading of Deleuze. I turn back to Badiou here, and how he considers events from a less magnified, larger picture. It should be of no surprise that both Badiou and Deleuze discuss music to some degree. For Badiou, musical events have a large scale structure, even if they are focused on one particular composer or artist. Specifically, Badiou believes there are important distinctions that can be made in different eras, and how one era can make way for another. For example, Schoenberg’s music reveals the truth of Wagner, or Mahler. 231 It is only when we come to know a novel form of music that we can then understand the impact of a previous form. With the contemporary form of serious music, we can understand classical forms of music better. This relates back to Badiou’s general theory of the event in which events are designated as such only retrospectively. There is no immediate event in Badiou, only ones that can be apprehended retrospectively through continued fidelity of subjects who name an event as such. Badiou admits that art allows us to see these differences more evidently than in other disciplines. In my view, this has to do with the fact that art plays on the senses so much that it becomes immediately evident when something new or revolutionary arrives. It is easy to see or hear an artistic event, but much more difficult for the average person to know a scientific event. That is why artistic events are so vital, as they can be seen, heard and understood almost immediately in many cases by anyone in the population. Political or scientific events are

231 Badiou, PE, 71.
often not understood by the average citizen, at least in an immediate setting. This is most likely why Badiou insists on the affectivity of events, as they play a crucial role in moving subjects in a particular manner. This is evident when a new genre of music forms, enabling subjects to designate its importance in relation to the situation.

Blues music is a kind of opposition to serious classical music, in several ways. Rather than rely on classical forms of composition, blues music developed from a different musical paradigm that did not rely on classical training. To me, this signals a complete break from classical forms, even if blues is not the first form of music to do so. It is nevertheless an important break from tradition coming from a culture that had no access to classical training, at least in its beginning stages. This shift is the type of paradigm shift to which Badiou refers in artistic events. We can now see blues music as such an event because of its break from traditional forms of composition that move our focus away from the written score to the individual player. It not only created important individual methods of playing, but in Badiou’s terms established a complete set of playing possibilities that were never heard before. Similarly, the manner in which the blues is played also constitutes the new in a Deleuzian sense, because it constantly re-interprets each song. There is movement within each song when individual players improvise new segments. Therefore, the blues is a presentation of the new on both the micro and the macro scale.

However, Badiou disputes the importance of pop music, saying it has not done anything new that cannot be achieved or found in serious music. He clarifies that he does not like the term “pop” in reference to art or music, saying that there is “art of entertainment,” but does not like putting art in such a hierarchical structure. Nevertheless, Badiou does categorize some forms

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232 Badiou, PE, 79.
of art as purely for entertainment without necessarily saying what belongs in this category. He also admits there is one exception to the rule of pop or entertainment music that can compete or challenge serious music and that is jazz. As I will discuss extensively in Chapter Four, this view is contrary to Adorno’s discussions on the importance of jazz. Unlike Adorno, who is very skeptical of jazz’s importance, Badiou believes classical or serious music did not anticipate jazz. This lack of anticipation is essential to the extrinsic nature of events that is outside of the situation. Blues music is a perfect example of a rupture to white hegemony, which never considered this kind of music to be serious. But as soon as communities adopted the blues, it became an event, specifically one of black culture.

When analyzed from both of these perspectives the argument can be made that blues music is both the new rupture that caused a shift in musical thought and a kind of music that ebbs and flows in its playing, always becoming something different, never staying the same. Improvisation allows the blues to transform itself with every playing, thus not relying on a model, but participating in the Deleuzian simulacra, wherein the music can simply be played without the focus remaining on the score to act as a model which must be copied. Thus, blues music is a kind of difference in itself that exemplifies Deleuze’s point perfectly. This new manner of playing was also an important step away from the musical paradigm that dominated the cultural ethos. In Badiouan terms, although other forms of musical composition existed for an extended period of time, it was only after the abolition of slavery that it was allowed to flourish. Once subjects had the freedom to communicate, they forced the event of a new kind of music to the forefront. In this sense, the micro and the macro changes are both exemplified through blues music’s counter of written and classically composed music.

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233 Badiou, PE, 80.
At this point I would like to discuss some aspects of race and its effects on the micro and macro levels. As we know, at its roots blues music was influenced by field songs and various other forms of music performed by African American slaves. On a macro level, Western music was written, composed, and played primarily by white people, on the other hand the blues (and other contemporary forms of music), was played for and by African Americans. It was a complete break from white European notions of composition and gave African Americans a form of music they could call their own. Badiou’s philosophy is particularly important in this case, as field songs were an unanticipated break from traditional European music. Blues music is an important event because it was not anticipated, not only from a purely musical standpoint, but from a racial one as well. Western music certainly changed because of this event and blues music has contributed to overturning the white classical musical paradigm.

Neither Badiou, nor Deleuze account for the totality of blues music as an event, but both contribute significantly to the discussion. In the following chapter, I look at Heidegger’s views on the artistic event and contrast them with the ones presented in this chapter. As I have alluded to briefly in a few segments, Heidegger’s thesis has some similarities with Badiou’s in particular, but we will see that there are significant differences. Heidegger sees a particular work as a happening, something which differentiates him greatly from Badiou. Whereas Badiou sees events as a configuration of subjects and works, only possible in retrospect, Heidegger sees the work tied directly to its culture and consequently as a place where the truth happens. In fact, Heidegger’s theory does not allow for retrospective events, as events happen in and during the culture with which they are entwined. Works of art perish when they are ripped from those cultures and cannot continue on in the same way as they did at their point of origin. Thus,
Heidegger will move our project forward through a more object-oriented vision of the event.

However, we will see these ideas eventually arrive at a point of limitation themselves.
Chapter 3 – Heidegger and the Cultural Happening

In Chapter One, I explored some of the history of blues music alongside some of the changes we saw in music production and its listeners throughout the years. In the translator’s introduction to the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Gregory Fried and Richard Polt explain that according to Heidegger, things become accessible or intelligible through an event or happening. Being as such manifests itself through historical events, because for later Heidegger being is historically situated. In this chapter, I aim to expand upon these points in greater detail. The foundation of this chapter will be Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art*, an important piece in the later Heidegger’s theory on being and the event. The text will serve as a basis for discussions on art, truth, technology and most importantly, the artistic event. Although the *Origin* mostly examines art, it is complemented by Heidegger’s other works from both his early and his later periods. However, I will focus predominantly on his later period to show that these works illustrate Heidegger’s belief that being and history are tied together and that how being reveals itself depends on the culture in which we live. Art plays a role in determining that culture and thus alters the ways that we can experience being. For Heidegger, art’s eventful nature reveals its importance within a particular epochal horizon, which is pertinent to my discussion on how blues music is one such form of revealing. Exploring Heidegger’s theory on art will bring us closer to understanding how and why artistic events such as blues music develop.

In addition to examining the later Heidegger, I will continue the discussion from the previous chapter on Deleuze and Badiou with the hopes of showing that where their theories end, Heidegger’s begins. The micro and the macro scale which was posited in the last chapter will be further expanded upon to show how being manifests itself through culture and that blues music is

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a Heideggerian happening. Toward the end of the chapter, we will see that in the case of blues music there is an essential component that fundamentally alters this event, namely, technological reproduction. Without accounting for the impact of technology on the artistic medium, Heidegger’s theory ultimately fails to properly develop a complete analysis of the artistic event.

“Truth” in the Philosophical Tradition

Before I highlight some of the main points of this chapter, I want to remind the reader that despite its title, Heidegger’s focus in *Origin* is not art as such. He has never been interested in providing a philosophy of art or a theory of aesthetics. Heidegger critiques the aesthetic approach to art and its focus on beauty, consisting of what we find relaxing or pleasing. He explains that if art is merely considered in those terms, then art “belongs in the domain of the pastry chef.”

Heidegger believes that aesthetics reduces art along a subject/object divide by focusing on the reception of art and its relation to feeling - a divide he wants to eliminate. Works of art are not a matter of passive reception or sensory experience; rather, the focus of the work is and always has been, being and more specifically in this context, the unconcealment of being. That is why when we look to a passage in the *Origin*, we find an understanding of beauty as the shining-forth of truth. Heidegger explains, “This shining, joined in the work is the beautiful. Beauty is one way in which truth essentially occurs as unconcealment.” Thus, beauty participates in the unconcealment of truth and is not a matter of passive aesthetic reception.

Every one of Heidegger’s texts focuses on being and how we experience the truth of its shining. However, that is not to say Heidegger wants to brush art aside as a meaningless pastime.

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235 Heidegger, IM, 146.
236 Heidegger, IM, 146.
far from it. Art plays a significant role in our experience of being, and for Heidegger, it lies central to the question of epochal being. Art is not necessarily what we see on walls and observe for mere pleasure, it is part of the Zeitgeist and is a window onto how different epochs experience being. But the manner in which being reveals itself changes for Heidegger; while being reveals itself in numerous ways for the later Heidegger, the early Heidegger offered a different approach.

In Being & Time, Heidegger believes that the question of the meaning of being has been ignored, a point highlighted in his opening statement from the book. He thinks that the best way to get back to it is through the analysis of an entity he calls Dasein. Dasein is the being for whom being is a question. Thus, there is no better way of accessing being than looking at how Dasein exists in its average everydayness. But Heidegger knows Dasein is only another entity and not being itself. Dasein lives amongst other beings and has unique access to the meaning of being because it is the only being that ek-sists. Despite this unique position, Dasein is not being as such. This is why Heidegger believes that examining Dasein will only give us a preliminary sketch and not the complete picture of being itself. Nevertheless, he holds this is the best approach to resolving the question of the meaning of being in Being and Time. We cannot access being through art or culture in the same manner that we can through Dasein, because they are only activities with which Dasein occupies itself in its average everydayness and not Dasein’s main concern. Art and culture are relegated to the world of Das-Man, which is a

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238 My language, not Heidegger’s.
240 Heidegger, BT, 4-5.
241 Or ‘being’, distinct from Being in the larger sense.
242 This literally means to “stand-out”
243 Heidegger, BT, 123.
mode of inauthentic existence for Heidegger. This is not the authentic being-towards-death that ultimately concerns Dasein, and so art has a lesser value for the early Heidegger.

Further, in Heidegger’s *On the Essence of Truth* we find more of his early thoughts on truth and being. Although he begins to look at the epochal aspects of being and truth, he maintains that being is seen through particular beings in each epoch, and as a consequence being as such is forgotten. We pay attention to a limited range of being, which leads us astray from being as such. What we will see in his later texts is that Heidegger changes his views on how being and history work together. Whereas this text explains the limitation of being through historical epochs, later Heidegger will explain that truth and being as such can only reveal itself through particular historical epochs. In other words, being and history will be tied together much more closely for the later Heidegger. James Magrini explains that the difference between the early and later Heidegger should not be considered a complete break, but a turn toward a new way of thinking being.\(^{244}\) Whereas the early Heidegger considered Dasein as the site of truth’s disclosure, the later Heidegger developed concepts that included Dasein, but ultimately went beyond it. After Heidegger’s “turn” (*Kehre*), he begins to see being as historically situated and acknowledges the importance of culture, art, technology and history in how we experience being. As Gianni Vattimo states in the *End of Modernity*, for the later Heidegger “the world instead becomes a world, and this at least indicates that the unfolding of truth cannot be conceived of as a stable structure, but rather always as (an) event.”\(^ {245}\)

With this quotation, we can immediately begin to see the major differences between the later Heidegger and the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. First, being in this case does not need to

be mediated through Dasein. The work of art allows being to reveal itself as it is. Secondly, being is tied to a particular epoch. As I will demonstrate below, Heidegger illustrates that the cathedral in medieval times or the Greek temple were much more than buildings designed for worship or the appreciation of beauty.\textsuperscript{246} They are the places where God presences himself. This was a fundamental belief of the people of that time which is why the cathedral is not merely an object that has artistic value, but one that exemplifies the being of that time. Being is no longer disassociated from history, but rather is engrained in the historical and cultural practices of a people. This greatly impacts Heidegger’s idea of significance and relevance. If the projects of a people determine the being of a people, then the world of being is not a-historical. Being is fundamentally tied to the world of a particular time and place. Therefore, how someone experiences being can be determined by where and when they are born.

What we find in the \textit{Origin} is that the work of art has the ability to reveal the being of a particular epoch. The work of art is not a work of representation that re-presents an object in pictorial form. For Heidegger, the work of art has a much greater purpose; to reveal the truth of being as unconcealment (\textit{aletheia}).\textsuperscript{247} One of Heidegger’s main concerns with the tradition is its use of the word ‘truth.’ Overcoming metaphysics is the key to looking at art within a different horizon, one which does not look at truth through ideas of identity, causality, epistemological veridicality, or transcendental and dialectical explanation of beings.\textsuperscript{248} The way we look at truth alters the way we look at art and consequently how we look at being. This term (truth) has particular importance in Heidegger’s work and is worthy of further expansion before we go any

\textsuperscript{246} Heidegger, OWA, 167. \\
\textsuperscript{247} Heidegger, OWA, 181. \\
\textsuperscript{248} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning}. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999), 354.
further. Unconcealment in Heidegger’s work is synonymous with truth; a term he believes has been altered greatly since its usage in pre-Socratic times.

Among the many other texts of Heidegger’s that discusses truth in detail is one mentioned previously: *On the Essence of Truth*. Heidegger’s critique of the history of truth lies in the traditional misinterpretation of what truth means and how we use it in our language. Truth has traditionally been conceived of as a correspondence of knowledge to matter, or as the adequation of our intellect to the thing.\(^{249}\) To summarize briefly, there is a subject who thinks of an object in their mind and there is a corresponding object out in the world. The two come together in correspondence in a moment of conscious thought. This sets up the dichotomy between mind and matter, or inside and outside. For Heidegger, this presents a limitation on truth as merely a theory of correspondence and does not get to the heart of the situation. It creates a duality between the subject and object. The idea of truth is reduced to the mind-body problem; a problem he sees as unresolvable in its essence because it is methodologically flawed.\(^{250}\) We should not consider truth in terms of subject and object, or a theory of correspondence. Rather, we should try to recover the ancient definition of truth as unconcealment. Truth does not appear in propositions, but in our comportment and how we relate to being and beings. In other words, truth does not necessarily equate to *something* true, in cases such as facts. Although a fact may indeed be true in the sense of correspondence, the fact itself is not necessarily revealing. For example, if I list a number of provincial or state capitals, that may provide us with information, but not necessarily any truth. That is why Heidegger claims truth is revealed as freedom, or in letting beings be.\(^{251}\) By letting beings be, we leave space for being to flourish and to unconceal.
Truth is an unconcealment of beings, only possible when it has the freedom to show itself. Truth is, therefore, the revealing of beings and not a matter of correspondence to some outside world. But to say that truth reveals itself only scratches the surface of its meaning.

Perhaps one way to consider concealment and unconcealment is by thinking of the life and growth of an outdoor perennial plant. The seeds and roots of the plant are always present, although we only see the plant’s growth during particular parts of the year. The plant withdraws out of the earth and unconceals itself through its growth. During the other times of the year, the plant sustains itself within the ground, but we do not see its growth or its constant micro changes. However, just because the plant is not visible does not mean it is not present; it is concealed by the earth. Once it is time for it to grow and come out of the earth, the plant shows itself and blossoms to its full potential and comes out of concealment into unconcealment. That is what truth means for Heidegger. The plant was no less a plant, or no less truthful when it was in the ground, but it had not yet come out of concealment. Therefore, there is always a duality at play in truth that has a constant concealment and unconcealment. The plant does not go out of existence once it perishes for the year; rather, it goes back into concealment until the following year. This is how truth works for Heidegger; it is a constant withdrawing and revealing. It is not the mere fact that the plant exists that is at issue for Heidegger, but how it presents itself in the world. The plant’s existence is not the primary concern in how truth functions because we know it always exists in a technical sense. The plant’s blooming is the full shining-forth of which Heidegger speaks.

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252 My own example, not Heidegger’s.
253 A term not used in the technical sense that will be expanded upon later.
254 Heidegger, OWA, 189.
From this example we can proclaim that for Heidegger truth is an expression of being. We saw in Badiou that truth is an expression of the new, or the void. This is not the case for Heidegger, as the truth is not a radical break in the same sense, but the unconcealment of what is already there. This impacts the event, as Heidegger’s theory does not depend on such a radical break with the situation. Instead, Heidegger believes that being reveals itself in different manners depending on the situation, or the historical context. However, the questions of how and where the truth reveals itself for Heidegger remain to be discussed.

**Heidegger’s Further Critique of the Tradition**

Heidegger critiques the many constructed dichotomies in the history of philosophy. I have already discussed the dualities of subject/object and mind/body, but another equally important one is of *phusis* and *techne*. The former two are dealt with more in his early works, whereas the latter dichotomy becomes a central focus in his later work. Heidegger believes that the tradition changed drastically when Plato changed the notion of being from *phusis* to *idea*, a point which he addresses in great detail in his work *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Being for ancient Greeks meant appearing, but not in the derivative sense as in “something appears to be,” like when we say that something appears to be true. Rather, appearing means a “shining-forth.” Being as *phusis* is a letting-step-forth from out of concealment. As Heidegger states, “Being means: to appear in emerging, to step forth out of concealment – and for this very reason, concealment and the provenance from concealment essentially belong to Being.”

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255 Heidegger, IM, 200.
256 Heidegger, IM, 111.
257 Heidegger, IM, 112.
258 Heidegger, IM, 126.
In his work *On the Essence and Concept of Phusis in Aristotle’s Physics B,1*, Heidegger further explains the history of the term *phusis*. The Latin translation of *phusis* is *natura* or nature in English. Although we have commonly heard that *phusis* means what is natural, and *techne* refers to what is made or created by human beings, Heidegger believes this does a great disservice to the original meaning of both these terms. He explains that this translation formed dichotomies between nature and its counterparts such as art, history, and spirit. Heidegger believes *phusis* is closely related to *ousia*, but *ousia* should not be translated as substance or essence (as he says it has been in Latin); rather, it should be understood as beingness. It is a mode of presencing that relates to movedness or coming out of itself. *Phusis* is about movement and its relation to movedness. Objects have movement until completion, at which point they come to a stop as they reach their completion. Beings are always in movement and have a destination toward which they are always moving. For example, a piece of wood has potential to become a table. The piece of wood fulfills its movement when it becomes the table. Heidegger reverses the Aristotelian notion of actuality prior to potentiality. For Heidegger, a thing can only be that which it has potential to become. As he explains, “Surely in order for something to be ‘actual’ and to be able to be ‘actual,’ it must first be possible. Thus, potentiality is prior to actuality.” In other words, the wood that is meant to become a table must have the potential to become a table prior to it becoming that table. For instance, a fish, or a salad would not make for a very good table, because their potential is not destined toward being a table. They each have their own distinct ends, but neither tends toward being a table in the same way as a piece of wood.

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260 Heidegger, OECPA, 199.
261 Heidegger, OECPA, 218
262 Heidegger, OECPA, 218.
Heidegger goes on to say that *phusis* is an unfolding of itself or a “coming-into-
appearance.”\(^{263}\) *Phusis* is being itself, where beings first become observable. Heidegger places
emphasis on the unfolding of *phusis*, or its unveiling. *Phusis* is the event of standing forth and
arising from concealment into unconcealment. Therefore, *phusis* and truth are closely related in
that they are concerned with unconcealment and the revealing of being. As the reader can see,
the process of revealing is an unravelling rather than an abrupt appearance, as Badiou had
mentioned. For Heidegger, revealing is truth, and to alter that meaning, is to alter the meaning of
truth itself. One way we should not consider *phusis* is by thinking it somehow stands in
opposition to *techne* as we have done throughout the tradition. *Techne* is another term that he
considers to be historically misrepresented.

In the *Origin*, Heidegger gives his most detailed account of *techne*, but his focus on
*techne* extends through many of his later writings including *The Question Concerning
Technology*. Although often translated as art or craft, Heidegger explains that *techne* is a mode of
knowing.\(^{264}\) Heidegger believes we have lost the meaning of *techne*. He explains that *techne* is
not a matter of technical discussion, but a bringing-forth. *Techne* is *episteme*, or knowing in the
widest sense.\(^{265}\) In yet another essay on *techne*, Heidegger says that knowing the end of what
makes a bedstead is what drives the creator to completion.\(^{266}\) *Art as techne* is thus knowledge of
what will be, it is the knowledge of a thing’s *telos*. It is the role of the artist to know this *telos*
and to deliver the work over to its proper end, which varies depending upon what the thing may

\(^{263}\) Heidegger, IM, 15.
\(^{264}\) Heidegger, OWA, 184.
\(^{265}\) Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology.” In *Basic Writings*. (New York: HarperCollins,
2008), 318.
\(^{266}\) Heidegger, OECPA, 192.
be. Thus, art is not *techne* because it is about technical skill, but about knowledge of how to bring things to the fore.

By recalling the ancient definition of *techne*, Heidegger seeks to recover the idea that the role of the artist is a revealer, more than a maker. Heidegger is less interested in the technical aspects of the work and more so what the work can produce as a form of revealing.\(^\text{267}\) That is why he does not believe it is accurate to say *techne* was about craft; it was about revealing and the ability to reveal through knowledge. The artist has the ability to reveal the world which they create through various mediums. For example, it is not enough to say that the wood or the marble can become something more than its bare materiality; one must know how to create the sculpture, or the piece of furniture. This is also why Heidegger believes that we have strayed far from this notion of *techne* when we use it in the form of technology.\(^\text{268}\) Our *techne* (technology) reduces natural things to what he calls a “standing-reserve” which is to be used for our personal gain.\(^\text{269}\) We exploit the resources in our world through technology in order to use them for personal gain. This can include the cutting down of forests or how we use natural resources to create energy. In any case, we have come to a point where *techne* (or modern technology) means the ability to exploit, rather than the ability to reveal. His wariness of technology will be an aspect that I will dispute in later sections, but for now I wanted to point out that Heidegger does not see technology in a positive manner because of its perversion of *techne*. Technology is no longer a form of revealing as it once was, but rather a way of being that dictates our current cultural and economic landscape.

\(^{\text{267}}\) Heidegger, OWA, 184-185.  
\(^{\text{268}}\) Heidegger, QCT, 318.  
\(^{\text{269}}\) Heidegger, QCT, 322.
Heidegger explains the term Idea means a ‘look’ or a coming to presence of a thing.\(^{270}\) It is a thing’s whatness, but not its thatness, meaning the essence of what makes the thing what it is, rather than the mere fact that it is.\(^{271}\) The change that Plato makes to the thing’s look through his formation of the Idea means that being is relegated to resemblance and mimesis. Everything now becomes an image of what it should or what it can be. We become susceptible to treating everything in terms of their possibility as ideal things, rather than things in a concrete setting. As mentioned in the chapter on Deleuze and Badiou, in Plato’s doctrine we find that there is a hierarchy of being, with mimesis being one of the lowest forms of being. For Plato, certain kinds of mimesis are not considered being as such, but a perversion of being. Things such as art can be mimetic because they are a reflection of the world, but not the world itself, nor are they substantial like the tables that are created by craftsmen. Unlike Deleuze and Badiou, who make some effort to differentiate between different types of art in Plato, Heidegger makes no such effort, claiming that art for Plato has no direct relation to “true being.”\(^{272}\) Art is a deception, not a truth for Plato. In Heidegger’s exposition of Plato, art counters being, because being is supposed to be synonymous with permanence. This mimetic quality of art lowers all forms of artistic production to a different quality, defined by its distance away from being.

In discussing Plato, the Idea for Heidegger lets things be seen, or lets them come to presence in outward appearance. For example, the table maker in making a table does not produce the outward appearance (eidos). The Idea is already granted to him or her, prior to the production of the table. Therefore, the craftsman does not produce the being of beings, but rather produces particular beings. The eidos is the being of beings, because it is the thing’s telos, or

final creative purpose. This process of production results in what Heidegger calls the plurality of production.\textsuperscript{273} God has outward appearance, the craftsman makes the thing, while the painter creates images of those things. Heidegger explains that painters can only show one angle of the table that he or she may paint. The artist can therefore, never bring all of the being of a thing to the fore, because of their place in the world.\textsuperscript{274} Despite this limitation, the role of the artist is to bring forth this truth in any way that he or she can.

Furthermore, truth becomes a property of logos for Plato, which is problematic for Heidegger.\textsuperscript{275} Truth is an unconcealment for Heidegger and is possible in many forms. Heidegger’s understanding of truth can unveil itself through art-works, whereas Plato’s idea of truth is of a higher form which cannot be relegated to the mimetic realm. The definition of truth as logos is also problematic because truth as logos becomes antithetical to falsity and stands only for correctness.\textsuperscript{276} For Heidegger, truth is not necessarily determined by its stance in opposition to falsity, or its ability to be correct, but its role as unconcealment of being. To put it in his terms, truth reveals itself in culture, history, art and in various other manners, but there is no false way of revealing for Heidegger. To speak in those terms is nonsensical because revealing does not depend upon a theory of correspondence.

In his work \textit{Nietzsche Volume 1: The Will to Power as Art}, Heidegger describes art as anti-Platonic because of its willingness to say yes to anti-truth.\textsuperscript{277} Notice how he does not say falsity, as we must remember truth is not falsity’s antonym. Rather, anti-truth and truth work in unison and are always near to each other. Where one finds truth, inevitably anti-truth can also be

\textsuperscript{273} Heidegger, WPA, 182.  
\textsuperscript{274} Heidegger, WPA, 182.  
\textsuperscript{275} Heidegger, IM, 207.  
\textsuperscript{276} Heidegger, IM, 210.  
\textsuperscript{277} Heidegger, WPA, 74.
found, both of which are integral to being. Therefore, despite Heidegger’s unwillingness to say that truth comes from the void, he is willing to say truth and anti-truth share the same space. In this instance, Heidegger and Deleuze share in their sentiment that art can be an important method of revealing a different kind of truth. Both of these authors are clearly influenced by Nietzsche, who was staunchly opposed to Platonic theories on truth. Despite this influence, Heidegger does not maintain the same position on the importance of mimesis as a form of difference. Ultimately, Heidegger’s theory still rests upon the identity of being and not on difference and repetition itself as in Deleuze.

In his critique of Plato, Heidegger exposes some of the tradition’s biggest misconceptions about phusis and techne. The role of art is not to mimic or represent the world, but to reveal the world in a specific manner. The artist is the visionary and the vehicle by which the world can be revealed. By minimizing art, according to Heidegger, Plato reduced art to something untruthful or a lesser form of being. Heidegger’s intent is to reverse this claim and say that not only is art relevant, but it also plays a significant role in revealing being in our world. He also puts the artist in a precarious position by claiming that they have the capability to see things in their finality. Artists are to some degree visionaries that can produce things that others cannot. But, we will later see that this view of artists is not necessarily as important as it may seem at this moment. For now, I want to make clear that Plato’s alteration of the ancient meaning of being, changed art’s place in the world of being, which is why it was important for Heidegger to recover the definitions of these terms and restore art’s rightful place as a revealer of being. Rather than an afterthought in our society, art becomes a creator and revealer of worlds that places art at the forefront of culture and history. Art does not simply mimic the world, but has a part in creating the world.
The Event of Art

This brings us to the work of art and how it participates in truth. Before proceeding to discuss the artistic event, it is important to look at the translation of the word “event” in Heidegger’s work. The term “event” varies greatly in Heidegger’s texts and it is important to discuss the various translations in order to construct a cohesive term. Clayton Crockett explains that Heidegger transitions from Ereignis as an event of Dasein to the event manifesting itself in different cultures and historical periods. This also signalled a transition from Gelassenheit, meaning letting the being of beings be, to aletheia, as letting truth come forth as revelation. Although many translators often use the term “event” for Heidegger’s Ereignis, in Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning), the translators believe this has always been a poor translation, saying that the term event “does not even remotely approximate Ereignis.”

For these translators, the proper translation of Ereignis is “enowning” and not event. They believe the term ‘event’ does not properly capture the movement of Ereignis. But we must also consider how we think of the term event in this particular context. We are looking for an occurrence of something that comes from a particular time and place and consequently alters that time and place drastically. Among the various notes in his book The Event, Heidegger explains that being is “qua event-related beginning.” For Heidegger, the term he uses in the Origin for this kind of occurrence is “happening.” Happening in Heidegger’s German is “geschehen” and the event has often been translated as Ereignis. Here, when I use the term event I employ Heidegger’s sense of the “happening of truth,” which for him is the event of being that I have explained above and which is summarized by Heidegger in the quotation below:

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278 Heidegger, CP, XX.
279 Heidegger, CP, XX.
281 Heidegger, OWA, 162.
Our asking of the fundamental metaphysical question is historical because it opens up the happening of human Dasein in its essential relations, that is, its relations to beings as such and as a whole – opens it up to possibilities not yet asked about, futures to come <Zu-künften>, and in this way also binds it back to its inception that has been, and thus sharpens it and gives weight to its burden in its present. In this questioning, our Dasein is summoned to its history in the full sense of the word, and is called to make a decision in it – and this is not a derivative, useful application of this questioning in terms of morality and worldviews. Instead, the fundamental position and attitude of the questioning is in itself historical, stands and holds itself in the happening, and questions on the ground of this happening and for this happening.\textsuperscript{282}

This happening of being is an occurrence that changes or alters the paradigm of a given epoch. Unlike Badiou, who splits being from event, the event in-sists in being, letting the event come from outside of being to rupture through it, Heidegger’s event is located firmly within being as its coming-forth. Being is irreducible for Badiou, manifesting in beings as the count-as-one of a situation. The event is also irreducible, but not predictable like being. We can find being by looking at the situation, but cannot do the same with the event. For Heidegger, the event or happening of being is historical and located in history, not outside of being or history as it is for Badiou. This historical happening opens up the relation of Dasein to being and its relation to other beings. It is where people gather; it is a clearing in which being shows itself in its fullest. Heidegger provides several important examples of this kind of happening and I would like to expand upon them here.

It is well known that the “peasant shoes” in “A Pair of Shoes” were not those of a peasant, but Van Gogh’s own, but this does not minimize Heidegger’s analysis. The value does not lie in the fact of whose shoes they were, but what the shoes mean and more importantly what they reveal.\textsuperscript{283} In other words, if the shoes belonged to a peasant which we are led to believe is the case, they show us something about that world. The shoes are a window onto the world of the

\textsuperscript{282} Heidegger, IM, 49.
\textsuperscript{283} Notice here I did not use the term “represent.”
peasant and the life they lead. To put it more precisely, the work produces truth about a situation; in this instance it is the situation of a peasant. What the work produces is a happening of truth. Heidegger explains that the shoes reveal something about the equipmental being of equipment. Not only is the being of the world of the peasant opened up by the work, but the equipmentality of equipment is also shown.\textsuperscript{284}

A piece of equipment has only one purpose, and that is to be useful. Heidegger states, “The equipmental being of equipment consists indeed in its usefulness.”\textsuperscript{285} Thus, the equipmentality of the equipment sinks into the background when it is used. According to Heidegger,

The peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only here are they what they are. They are all the more genuinely so, the less the peasant woman thinks about the shoes while she is at work, or looks at them at all, or is even aware of them. She stands and walks in them. That is how shoes actually serve. It is in the process of the use of equipment that we must actually encounter the character of equipment.\textsuperscript{286}

As a result, the shoes are never made evident in their “shoe-ness” during their use. They are naturally there in their use, but almost as if they were not there, because they sink into the background in their usage. Otherwise if they were always immediately present, they would impede the peasant from doing her necessary work. This is true for any tool or piece of equipment. If it fails, then the tool no longer has the quality of equipmentality and it becomes present-to-hand and is reduced to just another object in the world. A tool that is present-to-hand does not capture a thing’s essence. By showing us the shoes in their rightful place, the work of art tells us something about where the shoes have been and what purpose they serve – it shows

\textsuperscript{284} Heidegger, OWA, 159.  
\textsuperscript{285} Heidegger, OWA, 160.  
\textsuperscript{286} Heidegger, OWA, 159.
the audience their equipmentality. As mentioned above, the shoes are not merely a representation of some pair of shoes, but show “the toilsome tread of the worker.”

For Heidegger, art is not about representation, even in the case of the shoes. Although they do represent real shoes, the purpose of the work is not to reproduce their likeness, but to tell the truth about the situation of the person to whom they belong. Notice that the situation in Heidegger’s case is what being entails, rather than the event imposing itself on the situation of being as in the case for Badiou. The work creates the possibility for the truth to happen by opening up the necessary space. If the work was merely about representation then how can we explain representation in other forms of art? For example, in architecture, the building does not represent something out in the world, it is itself a creation that stands on its own. A building does not stand in place of something in the world, but is itself a work that is in the world.

To further illustrate his point, Heidegger chooses the example of a Greek temple, which he says “portrays nothing.” The temple does not stand in place of something out in the world because it is the opening of a world, in this case the world of religion, spirit, and culture for the Greek people. Heidegger says the temple emerges out of itself. This is what the Greeks named *phasis*, an emerging truth as being. The earth becomes illuminated as the world sets itself back. It was built as the site where people could gather and worship. It is the place where people could interact with the holy. It is also a place that is determined by the duality of Heidegger’s theory of world and earth. There is a strife that arises between the world and the earth, each raising the other.

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287 Heidegger, OWA, 159.
288 Heidegger, OWA, 167.
289 Heidegger, OWA, 167.
Although the world is what Heidegger considers to be the horizon that determines our various modes of being within a given culture, the earth is far more basic and grounds the world.\footnote{Heidegger, OWA, 168.} Whereas the world is the emerging unconealing of \textit{phusis}, the earth is its pair that acts as a “sheltering agent.”\footnote{Heidegger, OWA, 168.} Heidegger further explains that the work in setting up a world, sets itself back against the materiality of its medium, whether it is the stone of the temple, or the colour of the paint; this is the ground of the earth.\footnote{Heidegger, OWA, 171.} So, in setting up a world, the work simultaneously sets-forth the earth, meaning that it brings forth the materiality of the material in its full shining. Heidegger states that the work causes the material aspects of the work to “come forth for the very first time and to come into the open region of the work’s world. The rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sing, the word to say.”\footnote{Heidegger, OWA, 171.} The world and earth work in conjunction with one another causing strife.\footnote{Heidegger, OWA, 174.} The earth shelters because it is impenetrable. When we try to penetrate a stone, or see the colour for what it is, we find nothing other than the stone or the colour. Breaking it down into compounds, atoms or any rationalistic terms does not provide us with the same sense of the material as when it stands in its proper place as a work. In trying to reduce something to its bare materiality, we lose a sense of what it is for us. The materiality of the work raises the question of a work’s thing-ness.

An important discussion that arises from the \textit{Origin} and in many of Heidegger’s later works is the question of ‘what is a thing?’ In his work entitled, \textit{What is a Thing?} Heidegger details the history of things and “thingliness.” He explains that we have named many objects in
the world “things.” Everything from trees, to paintings, and to screws we call things, but we usually do not call numbers things. However, upon further analysis even numbers and signs can be called things. What is at question for Heidegger is not this or that particular thing, but the thingliness behind all things, the truth of things. For example, the perception of the sun is a question because we perceive the sun in a certain manner, while the “real” sun is another thing. When we see the sun, we see what it was because of the time it takes for light to travel to Earth. Our experience of it is mediated in this manner and our experience of the thingliness of the sun must be analyzed.

Throughout the Origin text, Heidegger discusses the thingliness of things in more ways than just equipment. In his discussion of the thing, Heidegger says we can point to many objects and call them things. Just like any other object, a work of art can also be named a thing. But reducing a work of art to a thing gives us only part of what makes a work what it is. The art industry objectifies the object by making it into either an object of study or by creating a monetary value. When we assign such values to works of art, we reduce them to objects, rather than works of truth. This limits a work’s ability to reveal and thus reduces its evental qualities to their thingliness. The art industry extends to the object-being of the work and not its work-being. In the same vein, a painting can be moved from one exhibition to another and becomes, as Heidegger says, shipped like coal. Dahlstrom and Grierson share sentiments on the difference that Heidegger draws between world and artworld. While the artworld is the

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296 Heidegger, WT, 6.  
297 Heidegger, WT, 13.  
298 Heidegger, OWA, 145.  
299 Heidegger, OWA, 166.  
300 Heidegger, OWA, 145.  
world of commercialization of the work, it is not the same as the world of art. The work of art opens up the possibility of a historical world, whereas the artworld preserves the work through various means. Museums and private collectors belong to the artworld, but the work of art is no longer in the process of creating worlds. It has reached a point of preservation and has decayed into a thing to be displayed. This is one of the traits of the aesthetic for Heidegger. The aesthetic relies on the distance that the artworld preserves for people to gaze at the beauty of the work. Any remnants of historical opening have long passed in the artworld. But that does not capture a work’s essence by any means. If a work of art was like any other thing, then it would not be significant. Rather, the work’s thingly element is not its singular quality. A work makes public something other than itself; the work is allegorical and symbolic, while still possessing a thingly quality.  

So what are we to make of a thing? Historical accounts from Aristotle and Plato tell us that a thing is the bearer of properties. In later Latin translations we find a thing to be a substance with accidents. A thing is not merely a collection of properties for Heidegger; rather, it is that “around which the properties have assembled.” The thing is the substructure of sorts, one that allows properties to assemble around it and come together as a cohesive whole. In discussing the thingly character of work, Heidegger explains that there is stoneness in a stone, wood in carving or sound in music, among other things. This mention of sound having a thingly element presents an important point in our discussion, but one which I would like to expand upon in my next segment. In the examples given, there is a stoniness in the stone that shines forth

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302 Heidegger, OWA, 145.
303 Heidegger, WT, 45.
304 Heidegger, OWA, 149.
305 Heidegger, OWA, 148.
when presented in a certain manner. The thingliness of the work of art creates a division in the work. On the one hand, we have the bare materiality of what the work consists, whether it be the stone, the wood, the paint etc. On the other hand, we have what lies beyond the material aspects, namely its being within the historical epoch and the impact it makes on a community. This parallels to a great extent our discussion of the micro and the macro scale. Neither of these two aspects takes precedent in Heidegger’s work and both are integral to the whole. This is why the event in Heidegger has to be composed of its elemental or material properties in the work, as well as its impactful revealing in the world. In consideration of these two aspects of the work, we now must ask how the work comes to fruition.

The standard view of the work states that the artist is the origin of the work. An artist has the capability to construct the thingly element as they engage with the material properties of the work. Artists and craftsmen have a foresight prior to the creation of the thing. Heidegger says that it requires vision and clarity in order to create something. Presumably, this is the reason why only some people can create works of art, since not everyone has an Idea prior to creation. The artist is responsible for elevating the thingly element of the materials they use. By using materials in a specific manner, the artist can reveal something about the element that is not always immediately visible. In the same way the sculptor can bring out a work from a piece of marble, the painter can use paint to illustrate something unique about the world. But Heidegger does not place emphasis on the artist as such, but rather how the work works. Meaning, the artist may be the one who helps out the process, but they are not what is important to the work as an event.

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306 Heidegger, PADT, 120.
Tom Greaves explains that Heidegger’s emphasis in art lies in the revealing object and not in its producer. Art is not the sum of its produced parts, but a mode of revealing only accessible to a culture and through the artist from that culture.\textsuperscript{307} However, an artist’s technical work does not necessarily produce an event, even if it is technically sound. Moreover, an artist can produce a similar work as another artist, but may not reveal the world in the same way. A mode of technical reproduction does not equal a reproduction in revealing. But before anything can be revealed, the work itself must be created. What we know for certain is that handicraft does not create works. In this case, Heidegger draws a distinction between making and creating, with creation being a higher form of bringing forth.\textsuperscript{308} Truth happens when a work becomes a work in its final form. This is the process of creation, it is the bringing forth of the work. However, we wonder at what point does this bringing-forth occur? For example, a piece of equipment is produced and done when the tool is ready for use. This is not the case when a work is created. The createdness or the process of creation is part of the created work. This point is tied to un-truth because in un-concealment there is the not-yet concealed element behind it.

To some extent then the artist has an important role to play because he or she is the producer or maker of the work, but Heidegger says there is something more basic and originary for the work of art: art itself is the source of the work and to a great extent the source of the artist.\textsuperscript{309} But the answer of origin is not completely clear. How can a work become what it is without art and how can art be called art without a work? Although seemingly a circular question, Heidegger believes that unfolding this paradox is necessary in order to understand art and the work. Logic tells us that we need to avoid circular reasoning, but Heidegger does not see

\textsuperscript{307} Tom Greaves, \textit{Starting with Heidegger}. (London: Continuum, 2010), 146.
\textsuperscript{308} Heidegger, OWA, 183.
\textsuperscript{309} Heidegger, OWA, 143.
this as a problem in the question of work and art. This is part of the philosophical task and not a meaningless paradox. Part of the hermeneutical circle involves going back and forth until we find our answer. The trouble resides in determining what art is through the work, or if we can know the work only by first knowing art.

The other aspect of the work of art is its preservers. Although Heidegger does not think we can preserve works eternally, he does recognize the role of preservers as equal to creators. Preservers are not to be confused with the connoisseurs of the artworld, but instead play a vital role in the unfolding of truth of works. The work brings forth something which was previously not there and consequently forces us to encounter a new way of being. We become preservers of the work by participating in the openness opened up by the work. Jason Atwood states “If a work has lost its world, its total significance is diminished because it cannot be fully preserved.”

Thus, art needs preservers in order to endure. This does not come from the art industry, but from the communities for which the works provide meaning. Therefore, the work of art is fundamentally about an event that places people within a community that can preserve the work. Once again we find another point of similarity between Badiou and Heidegger. However, whereas Heidegger emphasizes the preservation of works after the fact, Badiou’s idea of event is only possible with faithful subjects. Therefore, the event is not named or created retrospectively for Heidegger and depends more on the object as a place of happening. Even if the work is created by a person, Heidegger’s happening does not seem to rely on people in the same way as

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310 Heidegger, OWA, 196. A point which has similarities to Deleuze and Guattari who say it is art itself that preserves.
Badiou’s event. Yet, Heidegger’s happening of art necessarily needs human beings to create art and preserve it for the happening to occur.

This indefinite role of the creator further complicates the role of the artist and what impact they may have on the creation of particular works. Although we saw Heidegger discuss the impact of artists as visionaries, their impact comes within a particular historical horizon. The artist is limited by his or her place in the world and to some extent is at the mercy of what they can create. The artist may have the knowledge of how to create these works, but their impact cannot be known without the communities that make the works possible. This is why Heidegger does not want to overemphasize the role of the artist as creator of art, because they cannot control the impact of the art that they create after it is completed. They may be responsible in part for the work’s revealing qualities, but are not the sole reason why a work may impact the world as it does. The truth or its unfolding has a much richer process than simply applying paint to a canvas or in playing particular notes. These creations must resonate within a community in order to make a profound impact upon its people, which is an idea that both Heidegger and Badiou share. Often times, it is not one, but many artists who create multiple works that make up a style which defines an epoch, an idea that Badiou emphasizes. Therefore, the unfolding of truth is not simply a matter of creating a work, but creating a work that impacts a whole community in a profound manner. In the upcoming section, I would like to explore how blues music can be considered one such form of revealing in Heidegger’s work.

When Heidegger points to various happenings in art, they tend to be cases which are static and singular such as paintings or buildings. The process of creation has no real bearing on the outcome, which is the point at which revealing occurs. What is missing is the dynamism that art can have in cases of music. Even if we are to put aside the process of creation, in music we
find a more difficult task of pointing to where we can find revealing. Is the point at which revealing occurs in the recording of a song, in its playing, or in its written composition? The answer to this question alters the evental nature of art and music tremendously. If we limit events to the playing of a song, then all recorded material has a different kind of eventful nature and is thus a different form of revealing, at least in Heidegger’s terms.

**Heidegger and the Blues**

One of the biggest challenges that I faced was the lack of material written on Heidegger and music. Heidegger discussed music sparingly, even in his writings on art. Most of his points on music were either mentioned in passing or in conjunction with other forms of art such as painting, architecture, sculpture, etc.\(^{312}\) His only explicit mention of music is Beethoven’s quartets, which he says “lie in the storerooms of the publishing house like potatoes in a cellar.”\(^{313}\) Thus, authors (myself included) have had to speculate what he might say about certain types of music, or use Heidegger’s theories in ways that may not be immediately evident in his writing. Some of the authors that I will discuss in this section hold widely different interpretations of Heidegger’s theories and have very little common ground in their themes.

For example, John Mood in “Leadbelly on Angst — Heidegger on the Blues” believes Heidegger and the Delta blues musician Leadbelly share certain sentiments about death and anxiety. We should recall that for Heidegger, anxiety is not the fear of something specific but a fear of nothing in particular.\(^{314}\) To fear something, like a large predator for example, is not the same as anxiety of the nothing. Anxiety goes beyond the everyday fearfulness we may have of

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312 Heidegger, OWA, 145. Here Heidegger briefly mentions Beethoven’s symphonies.
313 Heidegger, OWA, 145.
314 Heidegger, BT, 136.
particular things and it resides deep within us, afflicting our very existence. For Mood, the blues is the same as angst or anxiety, because no particular thing causes the blues; the blues are the primordial reality.\textsuperscript{315} We live with what Mood calls “being-in-dread” and are thrust into playing the blues because of it.\textsuperscript{316} This is perhaps the most poignant example of Heidegger’s theories used in conjunction with blues music, but is not the best for this discussion. Although it serves as an interesting parallel, the article is concerned with details of Heidegger’s early work on mood and anxiety, rather than how blues operates as a historical art form. Nevertheless, it exemplifies some of the ways Heidegger’s theories crossover with music, including the blues.

In another case, David Lines believes that we tend to look at music in a functional manner, particularly when it comes to educating people on music. Heidegger’s theory of art is much less concerned with its functionality, which for Lines makes it more conducive to an ethical view of music education. Rather than focusing solely on the functional aspects of music, (such as its form, quality, etc.) Lines feels that we need to take a different approach if we are to gain an understanding of music as a whole. Heidegger’s theory comes into play because of his look at art within a greater context, particularly on his view of music within a cultural whole.\textsuperscript{317} According to Lines, this will help music students understand and think about music from a broader cultural perspective and not just how it is played, composed, etc.\textsuperscript{318} Lines calls our current educational view of musical creation an “object-being” in which creations appear as objects of the mind’s power.\textsuperscript{319} He is more interested in ethically engaging the music as an event,

\textsuperscript{316} Mood, 166.
\textsuperscript{318} Lines, 66.
\textsuperscript{319} Lines, 66.
meaning discussing the culture from which the music comes, with a focus on the communities rather than merely the technical aspects that tend to be taught in schools.

These perspectives promote the idea that Heidegger’s theories on art do not focus solely on the thingly quality of the work, but its place within a cultural context. It is interesting to note that Heidegger only considers the written form of music and not the music as it is played, or its recordings. Heidegger’s position in history tells us that during the period that he was writing the Origin, the primary form of purchased music was still in written and not aural form. Pertinent to our discussion, blues music was almost never written. This complicates the issue of the thingliness of the thing and how music is heard and seen. The transition from written to aural form alters the thingly character of the work. The thingly element of a song is much more difficult to identify than cases of visual artworks. It would be safe to assume that the thingly element of a blues song is not the physical vinyl record on which it was recorded. If it was, then how would we account for digital recordings? Would their thingly character somehow be the inside of a computer? It seems to me that the thingly element of music is the sound that is played, something that Heidegger alludes to in Origin. Thus, the thingliness of music differs greatly from the thingliness of a sculpture or a painting.

In his work “Heidegger and Jazz,” Trevor Thwaites says the being of jazz music is revealed through tone, duration, melody etc. He writes that, “The musician unconceals or sets free the nature of sound to become music.” This unconcealment is what distinguishes the work from a mere thing, because music is more than just a series of arbitrary sounds. It produces something that speaks to people through form, even if there are no lyrics. The poetic value thus

320 A point which I referenced in a previous chapter.
321 Heidegger, OWA, 145.
lies in the harmony of notes, rather than in the formal language. In discussing the work of jazz music, Thwaites says, “it ‘creates and gives form’ to our experiences of the world and reflects the style of a culture and articulates its practices and values.” Therefore, to discuss music in its relevance to different communities, we must go beyond the scope of the written work. Blues and jazz share the quality of being improvised to a great extent, which makes Heidegger’s analysis of music’s thingliness inadequate. Perhaps Beethoven’s sheet music lies in some storerooms, but the music in audio form still exists and is played today. But what does that entail? Does it still have relevance in terms of a happening in today’s world?

In terms of the artistic event, we have to carefully consider different types of mediums and how they may impact events. The types of mediums Heidegger considers are more static and eternal than what I discuss with blues music. Notably, a cathedral will not change in artistic quality, other than possible renovations, which are not really considered as part of its original creation, but rather are part of its maintenance. The same can be said of paintings, which have a clear beginning and end. Music on the other hand does not have such a clear designation, which is why Deleuze’s ideas on changing sensations are so important in this discussion. Music is a constant flux of becoming, particularly when we consider the improvisatory nature of blues music. There are elements of the blues that are strikingly different than classical compositions, which shifts the discussion of a musical event. A song may be written and performed, but that may be separate from the recorded product. We also must consider how songs are often played and then re-played by new artists. The same song may have new interpretations that alter its form significantly. A painting or a sculpture does not have this type of continual event quality; they

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323 Thwaites, 132.
are both created and maintained, but never re-contextualized in the same way as a song. There is a vitality to music that can be altered throughout different generations.

Is there any reason why we should prioritize one aspect of the musical event over the other? Should we consider the minute aspects of the micro event more fundamental than the grander scaled macro happenings, or vice versa? I argue that these two aspects must go hand-in-hand if we are to appreciate blues music as a whole. Take for example a song like “Stop Breaking Down Blues,” written and performed originally by Robert Johnson. On a micro scale we have a more up-tempo song than what we usually associate with Robert Johnson. In the first chapter we saw some of its lyrics, but nothing about the song is out of the ordinary for what Johnson did in those famous recording sessions. The song has since been recorded by several other famous artists, most notably by The Rolling Stones and The White Stripes. We transition here from the micro scale to the macro in looking at its history and then back in order to hear how the song sounds in different eras. What do these newer recordings offer (if anything at all) that the original one did not? Is there something about the way it is recorded? Is it the way the song is played that differentiates them, or maybe the fact that the latter recordings are done by white musicians that alters the meaning of the song? None of these questions can really be answered by looking at only one level, either the micro or the macro.

Although artists may copy certain art works, there seems to be a difference in what that entails as an event. For instance, if I were to re-create Van Gogh’s “Starry Night,” but with different colours, or slight variations, yet continue in the same style of post-impressionist painting, there would really be no continuation of the event here. Rather, I would be merely making my own interpretation of a particular style of painting. The same can be said in architecture, when there are “revival” periods of different styles or themes. There is a happening
in the temple or cathedral because it has meaning to the people from which it came. The Greek temple makes sense for the people of that time and place, as they have a connection and deeper understanding of what that work means. People during the Middle Ages had a more ubiquitous relationship to God than we do today in most parts of the Western world. Although there are many religious people today who follow many different religions, religious beliefs are far more fragmented. Europe in the Middle Ages had one predominant religion, which is not the case today. That is why the meaning of a particular church does not carry with it the same weight as it once did, at least not in Heidegger’s terms. Instead, what we find today is that those same churches that were once the central focus of a city are now places for tourist attractions. In these cases, Heidegger says things withdraw from worlds, despite attempts at communal preservation. This is part of the reason why Heidegger believes we have reached the end of great art.

Heidegger’s clearest explanation of why he believes art is in decline comes from his book *Nietzsche, Volume 1: The Will to Power as Art*, in which he proclaims that great art has lost its relation to the absolute. He states, “What makes art great is not only and not in the first place the high quality of what is created. Rather, art is great because it is an ‘absolute need.’ Because it is that, and to the extent it is that, it also can and must be great in rank. For only on the basis of the magnitude of its essential character does it also create a dimension of magnitude for the rank and stature of what is brought forth.”324 It is not a matter of stylistic quality or poor technique, but that art is no longer relevant in history and its relation to historical man. Philip Tonner echoes Heidegger in this statement: “A great work of art is a bringing forth; it is an event that opens up a historical world for a historical people. Historical worlds ebb and flow and when they end, like the Greek and the medieval world, their great art works are no longer alive because they are no

324 Heidegger, WPA, 84.
longer ‘opening up’ their worlds in the originary way that they once did.”

In this regard, Heidegger’s words hold true because of how our world has become increasingly fragmented despite its insistence on globalization. In our current era, people have the ability to access infinite sources of artistic creation and are not necessarily determined by one type of artistic expression. While it was easier to define ancient Greek art, or different styles of the past, it has become increasingly difficult to do so in our age. Now we look to smaller pockets where communities devise their own styles.

We must ask whether it is actually the case that artistic creations experience world withdrawal and if so, to what extent. Heidegger’s argument of world withdrawal is very persuasive, particularly in the examples he provides. Literary works are great examples that sometimes do not necessarily translate to present times, other than for historical purposes. People certainly read the works of Shakespeare or even older works such as Antigone, but in a different manner than they once did, because these pieces have a different relevance to today’s world. Many read them for the sake of study or to better their personal individual knowledge and understanding. Even though they are to be taken seriously as great works they no longer hold the same influence as they perhaps did during the time they were written. Heidegger calls this world-withdrawal or world-decay and believes this can never be undone. However, instead of considering these pieces as relics of the past that have no bearing on the present, we simply need to contextualize them differently. To what degree do the works of Shakespeare still influence individuals today? This is part of the question of the event and the relevance that works of literature or art have as time passes. The same can be said of great paintings or sculptures.


326 Heidegger, OWA, 166.
Various styles go in and out of relevance as time passes, while new styles build on older ones or in some cases are built completely anew by breaking away from the styles of the past.

Considering that part of this project is to discuss the notion of limits or ends in events, it is interesting to note that Deleuze does not associate events with ends. As François Zourabichvili states, there is no logical link between an event and an end for Deleuze. Unlike Heidegger’s epochs which are clear happenings that are brought forth by different kind of poetic or artistic events, an epoch for Deleuze does not denote a clear beginning or end. As Zourabichvili explains, “an epoch comes to an end only because another has already begun.” But what is to be said about blues music in the twentieth century? It presents a unique look at this question because of the way music is practiced and played by various artists.

Blues music does not have a clear linear path over the course of the twentieth century. As I alluded to in the first chapter, although blues music was originally part of African American culture in its inception, as time went on, it continually grew and became associated as much with white musicians as it did with African American artists. This dissolves any notion of a singular continuous event, at least as we have seen in either Badiou or Heidegger. Certainly Deleuze would not categorize it as such, since he is not interested in how styles or genres crossover cultural bounds. Blues is very much fragmented by the variety of people who played the music, as well as by its continual change in sound. We cannot necessarily point to one piece of blues music and say that encompasses all of the blues. So then what we have is a series of events or happenings that determine the whole of the blues. But to determine what constitutes a musical event is still unclear.

327 Zourabichvili, 52.
328 Zourabichvili, 53.
In music, the difficulty lies in knowing how to discuss a musical event. I have continually expressed the difficulty of identifying the point at which we can say a musical event occurs, as well as shown that there are many aspects when that we need to consider in doing so, namely the micro and macro scales. In Heidegger’s discussion of the Idea, the medium with which the artist works has a teleological purpose to it, which the artist brings-forth in the revealing of truth. But this is much easier to discuss with things such as chairs, tables, sculptures or paintings, rather than music. Let us look at a written symphony first. When the composer brings-forth the symphony in written form, the work has come to a partial completion. If we are certain in this case that no changes will be made after the publishing of the work, then the written form has been completed. But what is the written form of music without sound? Empty. If there is no sound attached to its written form, then we would not be so gripped by music. It is rare that anyone can find beauty or relevance in culture when looking at sheet music, at least in comparison to hearing the work being played. The vast majority of people (with the possible exception of those formally trained in musical theory) are drawn to music because of how it sounds, rather than what it looks like on paper. Music appeals to our ability to hear, just like visual arts appeal to our ability to see. Thus, without someone to play it there is an incompleteness to the purely written form of music. The musical event consists of a process that involves much more than the composer, but includes all of its players, and its listeners as well. The focus for Heidegger will always remain on the object of music, which we have yet to really determine in our discussion.

The matter of the objectivity of music is further complicated by the fact that blues music has rarely had a written form. There are some exceptions to this generality, including “The Memphis Blues,” written by W.C. Handy, the song which many believe to be the first blues song
ever written. But from the moment of its inception, the majority of famous blues musicians never wrote down blues music in any form. Even into the days when blues music became consumed and played by white people, the music often remained unwritten. Blues music was almost always played by musicians who had little to no formal musical training and it relied heavily upon the artists’ improvisational abilities. These two factors contribute to the difference in how blues differs greatly from other forms of music. However, similar to blues music, jazz also relied on improvisational abilities of artists. Thwaites discusses how jazz music is always in flux, because of its constant interpretation and re-interpretation of the previous works. Thwaites explains that the work is thus never complete or finished in a way. Each player brings with him or her their own version of the song, thus giving it new life. To a great degree, we find the same process in blues music with artists such as Robert Johnson using the works of the past to influence him in his own songs.

Thus, the creative process is altered in blues music because it has never been about a single composer sitting down and writing notation. Rather, blues has a fluctuating quality that can change at any time, with slight variations being promoted by different artists. The flux in blues music was never considered by Heidegger. Whether it is Beethoven’s symphonies, or Van Gogh’s paintings, Heidegger’s theories on art were concerned with finished products, a point which may be unproblematic when it comes to paintings or buildings, but is concerning when it comes to music. The next sequence in this line of thinking leads us to wonder whether one song, or its playing can be considered a happening in the same way as a painting, sculpture or any visual form of art. If Heidegger considers only the static written aspects of music, then we do not get the full analysis of what music is or what has become, which results in a lack of

329 Thwaites, 128.
consideration for the musical event. This is why Deleuze’s theory is vital to completing the task at hand, as Deleuze demonstrates the importance of becoming and internal difference, emphasizing the particular qualities of each piece. This nuance is missing in both Badiou and Heidegger, though more so in the former. Although both Badiou and Heidegger offer valuable insight into the event, both of their theories are missing the necessary elements to discuss the minutiae of a musical event. Neither can account for the manner in which blues music constantly changes on a micro scale. Although Heidegger’s analyses of works are detailed, they ultimately cannot account for these changes.

In his article “The Work of Art and Truth of Being as ‘Historical’” James Magrini uses Robert Bernasconi’s work to point out that not all of Heidegger’s examples of art should be considered great works, but more supplementary works. Similarly, Vattimo explains that for example there are paintings that can be considered representational by nature. For instance, a landscape only represents worlds, but is not responsible for founding new worlds. Magrini claims that Heidegger’s example of Van Gogh’s shoes merely expresses a world, rather than instituting one. Magrini goes further and explains that paintings preclude immediate power of the masses because of how they are exhibited. It is not as though a painting is necessarily or always unveiled to a mass audience reception. The temple is a better example of world expressing work as it allowed masses of people to stand in the clearing of a god or god’s beings. When originally created, it was not a matter of aesthetic gazing, but an event in which people could participate and was impactful. Perhaps the same can be said of music, because of its ability to reach the masses. Music can be participatory and engaging on communal as well as individual levels. It is also exhibited on a different scale. Popular music is now able to be heard online or

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331 Magrini, 355.
over the radio, giving it a very broad audience. In modern times, blues music is perhaps heard on a lesser scale because of its specific audience, but even on a vinyl recording it can be purchased and listened to by millions. Paintings can now be seen by millions at the touch of a button, but since its reproducibility, music can reach many more people than the visual arts.

I propose that to think about the musical event properly, we must recontextualize Heidegger’s as well as others’ theories of the event within a modern setting. Blues music is important in this case because of its origins. Although classical forms of music are now recorded and re-played, they relied heavily on the written form prior to recording devices. The origins of blues music also began when there were no recording devices, but this was more problematic because it was never written. What we know of blues music now is primarily based on recordings from the 1920s and 30s which shaped the blues sound. Thus, the happening of blues music and how it shaped communities fundamentally changed with the inception of recorded music. The music was not necessarily diminished in quality, but became subjected to the world of consumers, which greatly influenced its sound.

If we are to take the entire history of the blues movement into consideration, then we must think of how technology has changed the musical event. From an artistic standpoint, it is the case that a recorded piece of music like a blues song is not the same as a painting. However, because of the continuous and replayable nature of recorded music, we find a change in cultural happenings. We find Heidegger’s theories coming to their limits because he does not account for how art in its reproducibility changes the artistic event. Blues music in particular, with its unwritten history, is really dependent upon its replayability. Without continuous replaying, it would have never survived as a musical form. Thus, to say that a song exists as a cultural happening, means that we must consider all parts of it, including the way it may have evolved.
over the course of history. The event of music must lie partially in the form in which it is played and not merely in its written form. If that is the case, then we cannot ignore the impact of recorded material because it alters the temporal dimension of the event of any type of song.

Technology changes how events take up time. Because artistic events have been considered to be singular occurrences that can lead to the further proliferation of their genre of art, technology changes this process by potentially splitting the artistic medium. Therefore, it is not that technology destroys a thing’s ability to reveal as Heidegger has led us to believe, rather, technology profoundly changes it because of its impact on the temporal setting. Events are no longer bound by space (location) and time of “original” occurrence. There are perhaps exceptions like concerts in which a group is bound by a spatial and temporal location that unites them, but the playing/hearing/listening to of music is primarily experienced on a more individual and private level. With technological reproduction, events are replayed, reinvigorated and re-imagined. Most of all, they take on new life and can sustain themselves for longer in different cultures.

I once heard that when you create music, you must consider it from the point of view of the casual listener as much as the observant listener. Music is now listened to by more people at more times and very rarely do people sit down to listen to music. Instead, music is a background soundtrack to our lives: when we walk, when we workout, when we drive or even when we do chores around the house, music is often playing. Therefore, when the artist creates music, they must take this into account. No longer are they creating it as if everyone will sit and listen attentively. This does not mean that the music is of lesser quality, but it has changed, a problem not necessarily regarded by musicians prior to the advent of recordings. Visual artists may not have this problem, since it is not up to them how the work will be displayed. Museums or private
collectors are the ones who have the task of displaying the work in such a way that will bring out all the work’s properties for everyone to see. In music, the artist and production engineers have this task so that it will sound properly no matter the device on which it is played. Thus, the experience of music is varied greatly by how someone chooses to listen to it. Although Heidegger’s focus is solely on the objective point of the work, his disregard of technological mediation leaves a gap in his theory which must be reconciled with someone like Benjamin and the secondary sources that ameliorate his theories.
Chapter 4 – Benjamin and Adorno – Technology, Industry, and the Event

Following the preceding discussion of Heidegger’s views on art and being, it is important evaluate some of the critiques of Heidegger’s position. Notable critiques came from the Frankfurt School, as well as one of its major supporting figures, Walter Benjamin. In this chapter I aim to present the works of Benjamin and his colleague, Theodor Adorno. I will focus on Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s essay, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” as well as Adorno’s piece “On Jazz.” The latter work is not a response to Heidegger’s work, but I will illustrate its importance for this dissertation in its critique of modern music and why it is an unfair characterization of popular music in general. Despite the fact that neither Benjamin, nor Adorno, nor Horkheimer have been associated with the idea of the event, I aim to show that in our context, the event of blues music cannot be separated from the event of mechanical reproduction and its effects, namely, the effects it has had on the culture industry.

Up until this point we have examined how blues music has shifted on both the micro and macro levels. We have shown that in order to discuss blues music we must look at it from both of these perspectives, leading us to conclude that the blues’ most important turn happened when technological reproduction altered its path. Blues music has always been known as a primarily aural/oral type of music that was meant to be played in order to pass its history down to others. With the advent of mechanical reproduction in the form of records, blues music no longer needed to be heard in person for people to experience it. This calls into question the event of blues music and how we experience something like an artistic event in general, along with parallel notions of originality, authenticity and as we will see in this chapter, aura. Although I have established that
technological reproduction needs to be considered as an important point of change, we will need to further pursue it in order to more fully understand why this change impacted the event of blues music. I aim to show that Benjamin’s thesis on mechanical reproduction is the appearance of an important artistic event – the politicization of art. When art becomes politicized through reproduction, it becomes more accessible to the masses by destroying the aura. However, I will illustrate through various critiques that mechanical reproduction does not totally destroy the aura as Benjamin would have us believe; in fact, in blues music the aura is preserved through the individual performer. Therefore, the preservation of the aura is made possible through industry and the greater distribution of music to the general population. In this manner, mechanical reproduction can reveal micro differences on a macro level. The subtle variations of each artist are rendered permanent through recordings and can be heard by the general population. However, the advent of mechanical reproduction also allowed for the proliferation of the culture industry.

Adorno’s critique of jazz is an important look at the impact of mechanical reproduction on modern music. Adorno calls into question the evental quality of modern jazz, and as I intend to argue, modern music in general. I will illustrate that Adorno’s critique of jazz is part of a broader critique of the culture industry and one that dismisses similar forms of music such as the blues. Adorno’s classification of jazz as a non-event fails to take into consideration many important factors that separate jazz from previous forms of music, namely, its improvisatory quality and other aspects that make jazz unique. Adorno calls into question aspects of jazz that are similar in blues music, thus his critique against jazz as a non-event is an indirect attack on the blues as well. I will demonstrate below that Adorno fails to see the importance of mechanical reproduction and its effects on the artistic event.
Benjamin’s “Aura”

I would like to begin by outlining Benjamin’s thoughts in, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Benjamin’s essay has come to be known as somewhat of a response to Heidegger’s the Origin essay. The two essays are considered to be contrasting views on art, politics, and, to some degree, technology. In outlining the differences between Heidegger and Benjamin, Beatrice Hanssen says that they were at odds with each other ethically, politically, and in their thoughts on aesthetics. However, they shared in the belief that politics and art were intertwined, even if their conclusions were quite different.

In principle, throughout the history of art and craft, things have always been reproducible, as artists and craftspeople could copy the works of others. In Benjamin’s mind, this capacity for reproducibility differs from mechanical reproduction. Benjamin points to several instances of reproduction in the history of art, including Greek founding and stamping, and later woodcut graphic art. However, these forms of reproduction differed greatly from the modern forms we would see during the beginning of the industrial revolution. Nineteenth century lithography allowed artists to produce large quantities of art to sell on the open market. Photography soon surpassed lithography as the dominant mode of reproduction, and the public perception of art drastically changed. As Benjamin explains, “the process of pictorial reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech.” For the first time in history, film was able to capture motion and speech, something which was not possible through other

forms of reproduction. Although Benjamin does not explicitly mention it, these technological advances equally affected music production as well. With the advent of recording technology, people could capture and reproduce music in large quantities. This changed how we experienced music as people no longer needed to be at the physical origin of the music to hear it.

What develops is a division between the reproduced product and its “original.” Chris Barker explains there is a difference in time and space between the original and the reproduction, no matter how accurate the reproduction may be. Barker states, “A reproduction cannot reproduce down to the atomic level the structure of the original.” In his comments on the difference between the copy and the original, Benjamin introduces his most important term, “aura,” which he vaguely defines in “Little History of Photography” as “a strange weave of space and time.” In my reading of Benjamin, I understand the aura to be a quasi-mystical quality that is attributed to a work extrinsically by the public, which ultimately comes to define the object. The aura develops over time and comes to its fullest intensity once it is enmeshed within a particular tradition. Only when a community attaches itself to that particular work can the work then develop an aura. Thus, the aura can change with the values and tastes of a particular society. It can be said that an aura is similar to a Badiouan event in the sense that it can only develop with subjective fidelity to the artistic work. However, Benjamin’s theory differs significantly from Badiou’s because even though a work may have an aura, it does not necessarily mean the work itself was an event. An aura happens within the historical framework of a culture that deepens its devotion to that particular work. Although a work may be particularly well done, its stylistic excellence is not necessarily what characterizes a work’s place

within that tradition. There may be works that are more technically precise and of better quality, but do not necessarily have an aura. There is a significant element of chance as only some works develop an aura, while others of equal or greater quality may be forgotten with time. Therefore, a work’s technical qualities are not the sole determining factor in auratic development, which means something outside the technical precision of a work can determine its aura.

For Benjamin, the aura of the work disappears when it is reproduced because the work becomes detached from tradition. Reproductions undermine the aura and authenticity of the original in two ways. First, they may open up technical aspects of the original not necessarily seen by the naked eye. For example, with electronic versions of visual arts we can zoom in with precision to see particular brushstrokes that may not be noticed by the average viewer. Even prints can more precisely illustrate certain segments of works that were not previously noticeable in the original. In music we are able to pause, rewind, and choose different segments of songs, none of which are possible during live events. Secondly, reproductions reduce the distance between the object and the viewer. Benjamin reminds us that the uniqueness of the work is imbedded in tradition. A work’s unique quality and value often lies in ritual, as evidenced by religious relics. For example, religious works are meant to convey a hierarchy in society which the viewer is meant to feel when looking at it. The work has an authority over its viewer, creating a distance between itself and the viewer. When we associate the aura with particular works, we provide those works with an untouchable authority. Objects gain authority by being unapproachable, which is especially true in cases of religious monuments or paintings. Only the privileged few can see them and even fewer people can see them up close or physically handle them in some way. As Nathan Ross explains,

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338 Benjamin, WAMR, 223.
339 Benjamin, WAMR, 224.
For Benjamin, this is perhaps most apparent in the role of art within religious rituals, where it is not even meant to be enjoyed or even seen, in some cases, but meant to reinforce the feeling of distinction between sacred and profane. The prevalence of the phenomenon of aura within aesthetic creation and experience reveals the existential structure of a society that is organized around rituals that reinforce the feeling of hierarchy.\footnote{Nathan Ross, “The Polarity Informing Mimesis: The Social Import of Mimesis in Benjamin and Adorno.” in \textit{The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory: New Readings of Benjamin and Adorno.} (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 69.}

Again, the reproduction separates the work from ritual, which reduces the work’s authority over its viewers. In cases of pictorial reproduction, we tend to think of a picture of a religious monument as having less authority than the monument itself. Instead of ritual, for Benjamin reproductions are based on practice-politics because they become accessible to the public.\footnote{Benjamin, WAMR, 224-225.} Art loses its cultic value by being displayed in public venues rather than being kept in private collections or reserved for the privileged few. With the advent of mechanical reproduction, works become more accessible to the average citizen, which diminishes the authority of the original. When we can access most works through prints, at the click of a button, or the tap of a screen, we diminish the aura of the work because it becomes accessible to a significant amount of people at any time. In this regard, Christopher Long states, “Whereas auratic perception establishes an immediate hierarchy between subject and object by investing the object with a high level of independence and \textit{authority}, the perception at work in technical reproduction undermines the authority of the object thereby liberating the subject from the object’s mesmerizing power.”\footnote{Christopher P. Long, “Art’s Fateful Hour: Benjamin, Heidegger, Art and Politics,” \textit{New German Critique} 83 (2001): 93.} The reproduction diminishes the power and authority of the work by virtue of its very existence. There is no longer simply one work that stands as the unique authoritative figure, but a number of copies that share in the perception of the work. Although Benjamin wants to dispel the notion that an original work has more meaning than a reproduction,
it is curious to note that he admits an original work differs in time and space from even the most perfect reproduction. However, he critiques the idea of authenticity and what it has come to mean, maintaining that authenticity has become the basis of what an object can transmit to the viewer. Authenticity stands outside of reproduction because it has come to be an authoritative figure over the reproduction. By moving toward reproduction, we move closer to a more communal form of art and away from notions of authority and authenticity.

Unlike Heidegger, who emphasizes the importance of the original work as the sole site of being, Benjamin’s “event” is the ability to reproduce the original. It is not the aura that concerns Benjamin as the place where being shines, but the reproduced work that allows for community building. Therefore, the reproduction is the point at which Benjamin’s event occurs. What distinguishes Benjamin from the previous thinkers in this dissertation is that unlike the others, it is not the new that creates an event, but the reproduction of what already exists. However, saying that a reproduction merely produces what already exists does a disservice to the concept in general. Mechanical reproduction has value beyond its material means and produces something much more profound: the political.

It is no wonder then that Benjamin focuses on reproductive arts such as films because of their inherent reproducibility. Krzysztof Ziarek states:

It is symptomatic that Benjamin chose film as the focus and the engine of his argument, a ‘crossover’ genre between mass culture and art, between entertainment production and art creation. For it is film that instantiates the difficulty of maintaining the difference between high and low art, between popular culture and artistic endeavours, perhaps illustrating the progressive dissolution of art into the ever-multiplying products of mass culture and

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343 Benjamin, 220.
344 Benjamin, 221.
In essence a film is created for the sake of reproduction, so that it can be viewed by significant audiences. This changes the audience’s role from observers to critics because of the distance that is created by the camera in films. This is not the same kind of distance created by the authority of the aura, but one which allows the audience to be part of participatory politics. Mass reception becomes possible with film, while paintings could never be revealed on the same scale. Unlike paintings or sculptures that can be kept in private collections and reserved for the few, films are meant to be viewed on a larger scale, which place them in the realm of the political. When works of art become detached from tradition, they have the potential to be used in new ways. Rather than necessarily preserving the mythical value of works, we can re-contextualize works properly to separate them from their cultic meaning.

The events in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 show us how dangerous it can be when we attach an aura to works. In this case a statue of Robert E. Lee stood in the centre of the city and sparked protests by those who believed Lee was a symbol of oppression and violence. The statue was ordered to be taken down, which caused counter-protests in the name of historical preservation. When the alt-right tries to preserve works because of their “history” we attribute an aura to figures such as Robert E. Lee who was and continues to be a symbol of hatred and violence. The alt-right uses Lee’s status to promulgate the aura and cultic value of a man who wanted to keep African Americans in servitude. By dispelling the aura of these works, we can slowly undo the mythology that has been created by white conservative America, namely, that certain figures and works need to be preserved for the sake of so-called “history” and tradition.

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345 Ziarek, WA. 217.
Once we move past the myths, we can see works as the symbolic figures of violence that they are. For Benjamin, this is the move away from the aestheticization of politics to the politicizing of art. Art is now produced for the people, as it becomes politicized, rather than for genius or for mystical ends. It has become divorced from its cultic value. Therefore, reproducibility becomes the new when it tears down the ideas of originality and authenticity. The event of reproducibility has the unique function of reproduction of the new, rather than merely copying what already exists. For Benjamin, it is only when a work can be reproduced that it can lead us past idea of originality and authenticity and into new forms of practice politics. For Benjamin, the artistic event is the creation of political art.

**Critiques of Benjamin**

Despite the importance of Benjamin’s work, there are several critics who say that reproduction does not in fact mean the death of the aura. Unlike Benjamin, Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe propose just the opposite in “The Migration of the Aura or How to Explore the Original Through its Fac Similies.” Latour and Lowe describe the story of a woman encountering Hans Holbein’s work entitled *The Ambassadors* at the National Gallery in London, England. She was disappointed that the painting was not as bright and vibrant as she remembered, not from a past encounter with the original work, but rather from posters she had seen.\(^{347}\) This is an example of how a reproduction has as much of an effect on someone’s perceptions of a painting as an original. I will reiterate this point later when it comes to musical reproduction, but for now I want to express the significance of this statement. Furthermore, Latour and Lowe claim that the

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aura can re-develop in the original work even if it is reproduced. The insistence on aura and originality increases as copies and reproductions become greater in number and quality. We become obsessed with trying to ensure we protect what is “original.” The reproductions help us re-define originality and explore it further. One could pay homage to the original by copying it, thus revitalizing the original in a new context. They also claim that the reproduction can be costly and original on its own, depending upon the techniques, materials and time spent in developing a reproduction.

For Latour and Lowe, the economic factors of reproductions should not be overlooked. We assume when it comes to paintings, all copies will be easier to produce and cheaper than the original. However, in theatre the costs of production often increase over time, which changes our perception of the idea of originality. In painting we consider the original to be more “material” than its reproductions, but often reproductions can be very costly even in these cases. The costs depend on the techniques and medium used by the artist, for example paintings differ from lithographs insofar as each copy of a lithograph has the same production value, whereas copies of paintings vary wildly. Surely, there is a substantial difference between the original La Gioconda as opposed to a picture taken on a smart phone for the billionth time by a tourist. However, a quality print can be costly, depending on many factors such as composition value. We need to consider how we treat reproductions in their own right. If we begin to treat reproductions on their own merit, they can develop an aura as well. The labour and effort that go into certain reproductions can be extensive and these factors should be considered when we look at reproductions.

348 Latour and Lowe, 5.
Latour and Lowe underscore that technological changes have altered our views of originality. For instance, original manuscripts often have the same process of production now as their copies. Prior to the widespread use of typewriters or computers we may have had originally written manuscripts and reproduced copies, but now they are often digitally written and offer no substantial difference. Thus, it is reproductive techniques that alter the aura, and not necessarily reproduction as such. If we lump all reproductions into one mass, then we do not consider the complexities that come with certain reproductions. In music, the recorded song is equally valuable no matter which copy one chooses, as is the case with film, unless we consider the physical copy such as the vinyl recording or the film reel. Each non-physical reproduction is of equal value so in these particular cases we cannot determine what is original versus what is reproduced. Perhaps there are original vinyl pressings of songs, but these recordings question the very nature of the work of art itself, as we are forced to confront what encompasses the work of art in its totality. To do so we must question the materiality of works and how they differ from one medium to another.

Latour and Lowe explain that originality and authenticity are often confined to the medium of visual arts, in particular, painting. It is not always the case that someone is interested in experiencing an “original” or “reproductive” theatre performance. We judge performances, but do not consider any singular performance to be “original.” Each performance of a play brings out qualities of its original writing, depending on how the play is performed. Thus in performance art, the aura migrates or even disappears depending on the performance itself. However, in his critique of Latour and Lowe, Chris Barker says that the authors make a false analogy between performative and visual arts. Unlike paintings, plays need the stage in order to
come to fruition, otherwise they do not reach their completion. Barker says that all performances share in a “non-original equality” in relation to the script. Meanwhile, a painting, even if there is a model which the artist uses, is never a reproduction of something in the world, otherwise, Barker says we lapse into a Platonizing trap. The conclusion that Barker draws is that while Latour and Lowe say there is an unequal treatment in arts, Barker believes this to be a false analogy. We need to consider each form of art in its completed terms. This means a painting is complete when the artist finishes his or her last brush stroke and deems it to be complete. However, a theatre production is divided by its script and its performance. A script may be complete, but the whole of a theatre production means that it must be performed to come to fruition, otherwise the work is incomplete. Similarly, in order for a song or a symphony that is written down to be complete, it needs to be played. It would be almost absurd to consider music without the aural aspects, just as it is to consider a theatre production without the performance.

It is worth noting that Badiou considers each theatrical performance a singular event. He calls these performances “events of thought” that produce “theatre-ideas” only produced in theatre settings. Ideas in this context are produced on stage and cannot pre-exist the stage performance. A theatre-idea in text or poem is incomplete. Only in the time of a performance does this Idea come forth. Thus the Idea has a temporal factor, as it goes from being held in eternal limbo while unperformed to finite in time of performance. All components of the performance serve to complete the Idea. Therefore, much like Barker, Badiou considers the event in theatre only to be complete when it is staged. Although a reproduction of a painting can be

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349 Barker, 5.
350 Barker, 6.
351 This will be an important point later in the section on Adorno.
352 Badiou, HI, 72.
353 Badiou, HI, 73.
354 Badiou, HI, 73.
very easily made (exemplified by the earlier example of a picture taken in a museum), to reproduce a stage performance is not usually as simple. The totality of the work goes beyond the material components such as a script or sheet music. The work of art in music or theatre can only be considered complete when they are performed. Therefore, paintings or other visual mediums such as sculpture or architecture do not have the same kinds of reproductions as performance based arts. Blues music in particular has a unique place in this conversation because it is rarely written down. There is often no single original performance or written piece to which other musicians can refer, often because of the unknown origins of a song. Barker is correct in saying certain mediums have a non-original equality and it becomes especially true when there is no single point of origin as we see in blues music.

Barker, however, shares something in common with Latour and Lowe in his critique of Benjamin. Barker challenges Benjamin’s aura thesis by saying that the aura is not caused by uniqueness. Latour and Lowe exemplified how an aura can be created by a reproduction, if that reproduction is costly in terms of money and time. Barker even takes it a step further by saying highly reproduced photographs can also be art and develop auras. Things such as framing, composition and subject matter all play a role in determining its impact. Thus, according to Barker, Latour and Lowe, the aura that Benjamin sought to eliminate with the reproduction exists in various forms of reproduction.

In a similar critique, Robert Hullot-Kentor in “What is Mechanical Reproduction” states that Benjamin was wrong in dismissing the auratic possibility of reproductions, because reproductions can have authority as well. Hullot-Kentor states:

355 Barker, 11.
Each artwork rejects its factuality, as the thing it is, by its form, which is the process by which it consumes its appearance and reveals what is more than this appearance. The reality revealed in this process – however difficult it may be to specify, that reality – is the original of the artwork, regardless of its material. Because the reality of an artwork is external to it, our eyes find it hard to locate this work precisely, even when looking at it directly. The most important artworks, by the power and sometimes violence with which they shed their appearance, may make themselves irrelevant, as if they stand superfluously in the way of their content, and no longer need to be seen, heard, or read.  

Thus, if the factuality of the work is not its determining factor, then its aura cannot be solely based on its mere existence as an “original” work. Hullot-Kentor employs this critique from one of Benjamin’s own pieces, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, in which Benjamin claims that the origin of a work is not its beginning, but the work’s goal. Specifically, the work aims to free itself from its formal constraints and become a truthful comment on the world in which it was created. For Hullot-Kentor this is a major flaw in Benjamin’s own logic that hurts the notion of an aura being exclusive to an original. This is very reminiscent of what we discussed in the previous chapter with Heidegger and the truth of the work of art. The fact that the painting may be a pair of shoes is secondary to what it is meant to reveal about that world. If we are to believe Hullot-Kentor’s point, then Benjamin and Heidegger are actually closer to each other than normally assumed.

We gather from these critiques that each form of art needs to be taken in consideration under its own merit. Placing all works of art or all reproductions under one category reduces their unique particularities and does not capture their essence in any way. In the same way that Heidegger’s essay only considers static forms of art, Benjamin’s dismissal of the aura in reproductions cannot be considered in only one form of art. Whether it is film, theatre, painting,

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357 Hullot-Kentor, 164.
or music, each artistic form has unique properties that need to be considered when we look at reproductions. We previously discussed how the beginning of mechanical reproduction produced the end of the aura for Benjamin, signalling the advent of political forms of art. However, this section showed us that this is not necessarily the case, as various forms of art are reproduced differently, which can cause the aura to re-appear in the original, or even appear in a reproduction. Therefore, the artistic event that Benjamin claimed happens in reproductive arts is not as clear as he may have thought. Different kinds of reproductions mean that the aura may not necessarily disappear as Benjamin had hoped. But how do these changes in aura affect the event of blues music? We have discussed briefly that each blues performance has a non-original equality, seemingly avoiding the original/reproduction distinction. However, there is more to consider than merely the live performance. We have yet to discuss recorded material and the aura. Despite Benjamin’s apparent lack of discussion on music, there are actually several important texts on Benjamin and music that I will unpack in the following section. For the purposes of this dissertation, I would like to now consider how mechanical reproduction has affected music and what it means to blues music.

**Benjamin and Music**

Although not many authors have written on Benjamin and blues music, one essay that explores the relation is Karl Coulthard’s “Looking for the Band: Walter Benjamin and the Mechanical Reproduction of Jazz.” The parallels between that essay and my dissertation are significant and need to be expanded upon. Coulthard explains that jazz in its earliest form existed only in the “instant of performance” because of its constant variation and lack of written score.\(^{358}\)

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(much like the blues) had virtually no written form and thus could never be repeated exactly prior to the phonograph; jazz was always dictated by its “spontaneity and improvisation.”

Hence jazz could not be easily manually reproduced because of its transient nature. Coulthard states that “since jazz could not be manually reproduced, once it was technically reproduced, the music was even more profoundly alienated from its aura of originality than were most other art forms, to the extent that one might question whether an ‘original’ jazz performance exists outside the medium of mechanical reproduction.”

Coulthard continues his argument by explaining that there are two kinds of reproduction for Benjamin: manual reproduction, synonymous with forgery and technical reproduction, which challenges notions of authenticity. Coulthard explains that jazz does not fit within Benjamin’s reproduction categories. Coulthard divides art into two categories for Benjamin. The first is pre-reproduction art which includes paintings, architecture and sculptures. In these cases, reproductions remove the aura as they take the originals out of their physical and temporal setting. The second category includes art that is designed to be reproduced such as film or photos. For Coulthard, jazz falls in between both of these categories because its history includes a time prior to reproduction which would preclude it from falling solely within the second category. Similar to jazz music, blues could also be included within Coulthard’s second category.

To some extent I must disagree with Coulthard’s depiction of jazz and the position in which he places it. Although blues and jazz were both played prior to being recorded, what we know of both genres is limited almost exclusively to the recordings. There is no longer anyone

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359 Coulthard, 1.
360 Coulthard, 1.
361 Coulthard, 1.
alive who heard jazz or blues music prior to their recordings, thus our knowledge is very limited in that sense. Although there are some written records of people playing this kind of music, we cannot know with certainty many of the subtleties because of these limited records. Therefore, our knowledge is shaped very much by the recorded history, which places it squarely within the second category that Coulthard described. He even admits this is a significant issue in our narrative of jazz.\footnote{Coulthard, 1.} This marks a significant point in my dissertation, as it questions what we can know about jazz or blues music outside of mechanical reproduction.

In Chapter 1, I had mentioned recordings of field hollers done in the 1930s. The “authenticity” of these field hollers is unknown because of how far removed they are from their origin during slavery. What we hear from the recordings are an approximation (albeit a close one) to what they might have sounded like during the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the problem that arises is that we cannot know with any certainty how accurate they may be. Thus, the “original” recordings are what we know of field hollers today. The same can be said about jazz, blues music, and Coulthard’s statement that originality in these forms of music really does not exist outside of mechanical reproduction. This leads to a gap between live and recorded music. Part of what makes art ritualistic is a distance that creates the aura. Unrecorded jazz has this quality because we do not have certainty in re-telling its story which leads to the possibility of myth. Therefore, we have a split between the recorded and un-recorded history in jazz and in blues music.

Coulthard references Michael Chanan’s theory of \textit{musica practica}, which translates to music by ear rather than by the book.\footnote{Coulthard, 2.} Chanan’s claim is that music transmitted aurally can
only span two to three generations before it changes significantly. Music by ear has a spatial limitation based on the people who participate in the music directly. With the advent of the phonograph, this spatial limitation disappeared as music could be distributed to a greater number of people. Eventually, listeners of recorded music developed a conception of jazz music through recordings which would influence live jazz performers. For example, in what were called “tone tests,” female singers would imitate recorded songs, which led to changing their own sound, making way for live performances to imitate recordings.\textsuperscript{364} The expectations of what a live performance entailed were therefore shaped by the recordings. Recordings forced some musicians to play more conservatively because all their mistakes could be heard. Thus, when audiences heard such perfect recordings they began to expect the same during live performances, leading some musicians to become frustrated.\textsuperscript{365} Rather than being allowed free reign with their own music, musicians began to be typecast into certain styles which dissuaded them from pursuing other unexplored avenues. New standards were set as recorded music would be the performance by which all others would be compared.

In his piece “Benjamin on Art and Reproducibility: The Case of Music,” Rajeev Patke makes the case that Benjamin’s theories on the difference between the film actor and stage actor is analogous to recorded and live music. Recall that Benjamin explains the difference between the film and the stage actor lies in the nature of performance. While the stage actor has the privilege of performing for an audience to which he or she can react, the film actor performs only for the camera.\textsuperscript{366} Once again, this also means the disappearance of the aura for the actor because of the presence of the camera. While the stage actor can identify with the role they take on, the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{364} Coulthard, 3.
\textsuperscript{365} Coulthard, 4.
\textsuperscript{366} Benjamin, 228.
\end{flushleft}
film actor arguably cannot do so to the same degree because of the fractured methods of filming movies. The characters are pieced together with editing in films and the aura of the movie star is thus created by the film industry. The main difference thus lies in the breaking up of a performance and the fact that the producer and the audience do not share time and space. The result is that artists try to re-create the natural live performance through fragmented scenes. Patke explains that in music, “Natural performance-conditions are violated in order to produce their semblance. Ironically, when ‘live’ performances are recorded, either with or without the knowledge of the producer, the end-product often fails to match the finish of the sound in a recording perfected under studio conditions. Artifice thus provides a better illusion of actualization than natural performance, especially in the case of rock music.”\textsuperscript{367} This point can be once again applied to cases of blues or jazz music, in which the recording may be broken up and edited. Much like the actor, the musician has changed in the wake of recording technology. Songs do not necessarily need to be recorded at one time and can be broken up to fit a ‘mold’ that is generally accepted as a type of song. Of course, this technology was not present during the early days of music recordings, so Patke’s point relies on more modern recording techniques. Nevertheless, recording technology certainly changed the relationship between the artist and audience in both film and music.

Ken Ueno critiques the way we have given precedent to the recorded performance. Many people now compare live performances to the recorded ones. This has happened in part because how the general audience experience songs for the first time through recorded forms which causes them to form an identity of the song through repetitious listening. The song becomes known through its recorded version because audiences listen to songs repetitively and memorize

them (almost) exactly. Any deviation from this recorded performance leads the audience to question the authenticity of the new performance. Ueno believes that live performances still provide what he considers to be more “authentic” versions of songs. He notes the limitation of technological mediation on our ability to hear and listen to music. Blues cannot be considered in a fixed manner as it was always meant to be created and re-created, which can only be done properly in live events. Although Ueno’s effort to preserve the live aspects of music is admirable, I believe that mechanically reproductive aspects of music have transformed music too much for there to be any authenticity left in the live event. Even blues music has been altered in many ways by the artists who have tried to re-produce sounds that they have learned from recordings.

In one final critique of Benjamin, in his work “Reclaiming the Aura: B. B. King in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Ueno (a classically trained composer) discusses his experience of B.B. King coming to lecture at Harvard, during which King explained how different blues styles develop. For King, being a great blues musician has little to do with technique, and more to do with style. Of course any musician must learn the basics of their craft, but learning to play in a unique style is what distinguishes each artist. Ueno echoes this sentiment when he explains that during King’s performance, there were two distinct solos that he played. Both were done over a standard twelve bar blues backing track, but the second one was when B.B. King decided to “turn it on” and to perform in his distinct style. The music suddenly came alive and King expressed something by telling a story through his playing. Ueno states “It was almost like in the first solo B.B. had been merely reciting text whereas in the

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369 Ueno, 17.
370 Ueno, 18.
second he was preaching a sermon.” This anecdote is reminiscent of the story that Clapton told in his solo during the performance of “Have You Ever Loved a Woman” that was discussed in Chapter 1.

Through this performance, King was able to do something that was not always possible in classical music, display his personality through his playing. This performance leads Ueno to proclaim that the aura has shifted from the composer in classical music to performer in modern blues music. Whereas in classical music players were expected to “channel the composer’s original intentions”, through a written score, in modern recorded music we are not bound by the written score. As a further example Ueno cites the song “Wild Thing,” which has come to be associated more with Jimi Hendrix from his famous performance at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival than with the original band that composed the song, The Troggs. In blues music we can tell who the speaker or performer is by how they sing or play their instruments and not necessarily by the notes that they play. The notes themselves do not tell the story, but rather how they are played, whether through different bends, tones or distortions. It is the performer and his or her performance that creates the aura in music. Thus, the aura is tied directly to the artist, rather than the score. With the advent of recordings, different performances have been preserved and changed the way we listen and experience music. Ueno states “Audio recordings preserve and transmit bent notes on a guitar, B.B. King’s voice, the tone of the guitar, and all the special sounds that classical notation fails to transmit.” Unlike Benjamin, who said that mechanical reproduction destroyed the aura, Ueno believes recordings help preserve the aura and blues music is a perfect example because of how it relies on particular bends and tones to differentiate

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371 Ueno, 18.
372 Ueno, 19.
373 Ueno, 22.
each performer and performance. Therefore, according to Ueno, blues music has an aura that is
attached to its performer, even in its reproduced or recorded form. Classical music has always
stood by the hierarchy of the score over the performer, giving the aura to the score itself, rather
than its performance. This is not possible in blues music since blues has never been a matter of
notation. Each song is tied to certain performers, providing it with a unique set of qualities that
cannot be easily replicated.

Similar to Ueno, Bruce Baugh also takes the stance that we must consider music from a
player’s perspective, saying that if we only consider notation then we cannot tell the difference
between the playing of a song from one artist to another.\footnote{Baugh, 73-74.} As an example, he cites the song
“Spoonful” as he compares Hubert Sumlin’s version to the one by the band Cream. He states that
“Although the notes are the same, the results are entirely different, Sumlin’s being a competent
and fairly standard blues interpretation, Clapton’s a demolition of conventional expectations of
how the blues should be played.”\footnote{Baugh, 74.}  Ueno’s ultimate point is that he wants to create a different
paradigm of listening to music. Unlike classical music, which traditionally has had one paradigm
of listening to each score and any drastic deviation would be unacceptable, blues music and other
forms of popular music offer many variations because of the attachment of each song to a
particular artist. This allows for a more democratic form of listening where we do not prioritize
the score over its method of being played.\footnote{Ueno, 24.} Listeners are not forced to listen to music in a single
manner, listening for an exact replication. Rather, blues music allows for much greater variation
that is driven by the individual performer and recognized as such by the audience.


\footnote{Baugh, 73-74.}

\footnote{Baugh, 74.}

\footnote{Ueno, 24.}
Turning briefly back to Patke, he would disagree with how Ueno frames the question. An interesting point that Patke makes is that he considers music not to be an object, which makes it essentially virtual. For Patke, copies or reproductions do not inherently diminish music in any way, unlike visual mediums like paintings:

In the visual or plastic arts, the copy cannot bespeak or embody the unique material history of the original, nor its rootedness in tradition, which contributes to its authority and aura. In the case of music, the notion of a unique history cannot really apply to the score or script as material object. Since music comes into being in the time of performance, to give authority or authenticity to its physical objectification would mean little more than fetishizing the score. Even the event of recording (especially if it is in the studio), would not have the authority of an original painting or piece of sculpture, since the production takes place for the sake of reproduction.377

Therefore, in terms of recorded music saying a score can have an authority has no bearing. Perhaps they did prior to recorded music, but now they have significantly less relevance since music is recorded for the sake of reproduction, taking any authority away from written score. Only when music is played does it come to fruition and only when is it recorded does it complete its process. That is not to say all music is played purely for the sake of recording, but that in order for it to be heard on a large scale, it needs to be recorded. If it is not recorded or written down, then it becomes difficult to discuss it at all, other than through approximation.

We can conclude from these various essays that the aura has fundamentally changed with the advent of recording technology. Although Benjamin claims mechanical reproduction destroys the aura, it is not as clear in cases of music, specifically in jazz and blues music. Latour and Lowe, as well and Barker were right in their analyses that the aura can in fact remain in different forms of reproduction and that we must consider each form distinctly. Without the reliance on a written score, the aura shifts to the played piece of music and becomes associated

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377 Patke, 200.
with the player. In the example provided by Ueno, B.B. King’s style of playing distinguishes him from all other players, even if they happen to play the same song. That is because songs become associated with the subtle differences that the players can produce, namely, the player’s ability to bend and shift notes in their own unique styles. The recordings help preserve the auratic factor by revealing to us the subtleties of each player and song. Without recording technology, we are limited to what we hear in live performance, which as we learned becomes increasingly difficult to recreate further from the time of the original performance.

However, in these cases we are also presented with the problem of originality and authenticity. Our knowledge of blues music is almost strictly based on the recordings produced in the twentieth century. Although we have some information about its origins, blues music’s aural history can only be approximated prior to recording. Perhaps one of the most important points Coulthard makes is that we should not patronize musicians for learning their respective genres through recordings. Although the practice of learning music by listening to recordings is now very common, many purists may have frowned upon learning from reproductions rather than through live performances. This “new age” of recording artists is not composed of musicians that merely reproduce or imitate the past; many have developed their own sound and style by listening to recordings. Some musicians even claimed that the recording studio was a liberating force in which musicians could experiment and make mistakes.\(^{378}\) We must ask whether or not we should call modern blues musicians imitators or innovators. If what we know of blues rests upon its recorded history, then we certainly cannot fault musicians for relying on that history.

\(^{378}\) Coulthard, 6.
The transition from originality and authenticity to our reliance on reproductions is one that Benjamin seeks. Although he was wrong in saying the aura disappears with mechanical reproduction, having it shift to the artist opens the way to a more accessible view of music, one which is not defined by a single manner of listening or playing. Individual artists adopt and adapt older forms of music and sometimes improve upon what they learned. Regardless of race or class, blues music has always relied on the adoption of the past to create something new. In the same way that we need to overcome the ideals that are associated with the statues of Robert E Lee, we need to stop valorizing notions of purity in blues music. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the mystification of certain kinds of music can be dangerous and creates a false sense of racial purity. Rather than trying to attribute certain qualities to the music, we should let the music speak through the recordings we have. Those songs still have a story to tell, even if it may not be the exact same stories that were told during the nineteenth century.

If blues music (as we know it) is tied directly to mechanical reproduction and to the played form (becoming associated with particular artists), how does this impact our views on it as an artistic event? With respect to the micro and the macro scale, blues music in its reproduced form has an impact on both of these levels. On a micro scale, by tying the aura to the musician, we can hear individual nuances that become part of the song’s nature. Rather than considering the song as a static entity, its nature shifts with the styles of individual artists. On a macro level, these shifts become permanent and engrained in the cultural ethos with recording technology. Although the song may go through particular changes, those changes become associated permanently with the artist because of the possibility of constant repetition. The audience can listen to same song infinitely, which forever associates certain patterns or styles with a particular artist. Therefore, Benjamin was correct in saying that technological reproduction is the
production of the new, but wrong in completely dismissing the aura. Although the aura can be dangerous when it becomes associated with ideas of purity and authority over its viewers, it is not necessarily negative in cases such as blues music. We learn from the particularities of each performer, but that does not give the performer full authority over the song. Rather, each performance becomes an important happening that establishes a new paradigm for that particular song.

Recording technology has created the possibility of mass distribution, which can have positive and negative effects. Although technological reproduction allows for the possibility of a more accessible form of art, it also opens up the possibility of mass industry. Which begs the question, at what point do we have to consider mechanical reproduction as part of the culture industry and what are the consequences? Despite its seeming resilience to popular demands, any form of music that is distributed to the masses has to be considered from the perspective of industry, economics and marketing. On the surface, any mass distribution can be considered a negative effect of industry, but we have seen that mechanical reproduction can change how we listen to music. We will see that Adorno is skeptical of these changes to the music industry.

**Adorno’s Culture Industry & Art’s Place in Society**

I will begin this section of the chapter by examining Adorno’s view of what he and Horkheimer call the culture industry. Adorno’s critique of jazz must be read within the purview of his views on the culture industry as a whole. Adorno does more than simply judge the musical merits of jazz music; he analyses jazz’s place within industry and why popular music such as jazz is problematic. I will argue that Adorno’s critique extends more broadly than jazz music. For Adorno, all forms of music that succumb to the culture industry should be considered in the same
light as jazz. Blues music in particular shares several qualities with jazz which we could deduce would be problematic in Adorno’s view. Therefore, his critique of the culture industry impacts how he sees artistic events and how music such as jazz or the blues should be considered within that industry.

The basic premise behind Adorno’s view of the culture industry is that popular culture is a means to produce cheap products (whether tangible or intangible) and sell them to consumers, with the goal of assimilating the population into one large consumerist mass. What makes the culture industry ubiquitous is that it does not need to disguise itself as culture or art, because companies or industries have so much power. Adorno explains “The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce.” Companies use their status to promote products under the guise of necessity or luxury, but have no need to hide their intentions of making astronomical profits. The culture industry is an industry that is based solely on the creation of profit with no intention of creating culturally important products. It is an ideological campaign designed to suppress the population into full scale control. Everyone gets placed into categories that are designed by marketing campaigns that manipulate the population into buying goods and services they do not need. This is the ultimate goal of the liberal capitalist society, as it produces the myth that the products it makes must be consumed and are vital to life. People believe that these goods are necessary in their daily lives and lose focus of the larger social and political issues because they are distracted by the constant goal of consumption.

One of the characteristics of the culture industry is that it infects everything with sameness. No matter what the product, the differences always remain at the surface-level only.\(^{380}\) For example, once the culture industry sees that a particular plot in a movie is popular, it is repeated in other movies with slight variations. The same can be said for popular music in which chord patterns are repeated in different songs, or when songs follow common musical patterns meant to appeal to the general population. All of these forms of media rely on clichés that appeal to a large audience in order to maximize their profits. The end goal is not to produce anything of artistic merit, but simply to exploit the popularity of a particular formula until it is no longer desirable for consumption. By adhering to a formula, the culture industry takes out the necessary spontaneity for art to be great. The use of imagination is taken away, because artists already have a formula with which they can work.\(^{381}\) All they need to do is plug in their minor changes to the formula and the result is another product for the culture industry. All forms of risk are eliminated, which devalues art. Art has never meant to be safe and generic, but rather an act by the artist which ideally calls us forth towards social and political reality. Instead, we have become accustomed to the representation of art and the idea that it is merely supposed to mirror reality. This is all done under the guise of difference which further perpetuates the notion that these films or songs are all unique. Everything in culture becomes a commodity that can be easily substituted, revealing its fungibility. Despite the repetitious nature of the culture industry, things remain in constant motion so that they never seem the same. We see this with new car models, or products that update their software with very minimal modifications. Although there are certainly some differences, the essential qualities of the products remain virtually the same. Any superficial differences are there to promote the idea of “individuality” as a consumer. Each

\(^{380}\) As I will show below, this was one of Adorno’s major complaints about jazz music.

\(^{381}\) Horkheimer and Adorno, 100.
person seemingly has a choice between products to create their personal sense of individuality. Even at different economic levels, there are superficial differences in products, meaning that all individuals are forced to adhere to the rules of the culture industry. Thus, individual consumers are identified within the culture industry and must conform to it.

This culture of sameness impacts every aspect of daily life. We see it in politics when two seemingly opposing parties have similar goals of mobilizing the masses. The means to that mobilization may be slightly different, but the goal of controlling the population remains the same. Thus, in conjunction with the media, political leaders change the discourse in order to make sure each individual becomes a good citizen. The population is forced to take sides in a fight that they cannot win. This is why the culture industry is dangerous on so many levels. When the aesthetic becomes politicized, we are at risk of becoming a fascist state in which we are controlled by the image. In this state, art has no power because it becomes subsumed under the umbrella of industry. This is reminiscent of the points made by Benjamin, who believes art needs to be politicized. Otherwise, it stays in the hands of the few who perpetuate notions of authenticity and force the population into a submissive role. When art becomes more accessible, the population is less susceptible to these notions of authenticity because the narrative is no longer dictated by those in power. For Benjamin, that is when the event of art occurs and becomes political, rather than hierarchical. However, where there is mechanical reproduction, there is also industry. How do we differentiate from the power to create accessibility from the power of the culture industry?

Everything created is marketed as though it is unique and made solely for the individual. The reality is that each individual is merely one of millions of consumers buying the same product. There is a greater system at work that turns the whole population into consumers and
workers. We are left with no space in which we are unaffected by the culture industry. If our space for creativity is taken away and we are immersed in the culture industry, how can great art even exist? Adorno states that great art is produced if the artist “adopted style as a rigor to set against the chaotic expression of suffering, as a negative truth.” The suffering of the human condition is meant to be brought out by the artist. His or her job is not merely to present their own feelings, but to present the suffering inherent in society through the image. This is part of the enigmatic quality of art for Adorno. Although art must present suffering through the image, it must also be an autonomous entity, meaning that it cannot be influenced by forces such as the church or the state. Great art cannot be done for the sake of artistic technique itself, but must be done for socio-political reasons that present the possibility of another society. Art must be autonomous and still be able to critique systematic structures in the process.

What is the content of the work of art if it is meant to be a social critique? For Adorno, the content has never been the most important factor in art. He is interested in its formal aspects, namely that art is a semblance, because it gives appearance to what does not exist in society. Rather than mere representation, art acts as society’s double by showing the viewer what is possible. The culture industry tries to present reality as a technological paradise, to which Adorno responds “The more seriously art takes its opposition to existence the more it resembles the seriousness of existence, its antithesis.” Art is an implicit negation of society because it shows the viewer what society is not. Society is not creative or free, but rather in a state of cultural depression, in which its citizens are being exploited through ideas of systematic work in the name of social progress. Society represses individual subjects through totalitarian style systemization of the mind and the body. We are forced to live a life that is dictated by outside

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382 Horkheimer and Adorno, 103.
383 Horkheimer and Adorno, 113.
forces, leaving us little space for creativity in the workplace or at home. Thus, to say the work of art is an expression of the artist’s feeling is a misunderstanding of what great art should be. The individual experience is secondary to the experience of the collective within a society. If there is no expression of suffering, then the work of art is merely made for entertainment. Art is meant to provide a starting point for critical theory and we must engage with art if we want it to make an impact. Adorno does not offer a guide on how the human condition can change or if it is even possible. Rather, he offers a radical alternative through art that is meant to provide a new basis for critique. Whether this is effectively going to change things is never made completely evident. Considering that individual agency is not at the forefront of the culture industry, it becomes difficult to identify a clear direction that humans can take in order to escape corporate and institutional control.

What we see is that Adorno places a great deal of emphasis on the potential of art as a catalyst for change in society. Adorno believes there are only certain kinds of art that have the potential to change society. If art is meant to be counter-cultural, then it must have substance, which means it must be subversive to the culture industry. In order for art to be an event, it must be a counter force to the culture industry and stand as its antithesis. Therefore, anything constructed solely for the purposes of making money or for pure entertainment would not be considered great art. This would seemingly place blues and jazz music in a perfect situation, as they often deal with suffering and the exploitation of industry. We have seen in Chapter 1 that blues music has often dealt with themes of repression and exploitation. At its core, blues music was a non-notational form of music that challenged how music could be played. Similarly, jazz music challenged these same traditional practices through improvisation. However this is not how Adorno interprets these forms of music. As I will demonstrate below, in Adorno’s opinion,
jazz music never accomplished the goal of overcoming the culture industry; rather, it was part of the problem.

Adorno and the Case Against Jazz

Adorno’s dislike of jazz music has been well documented and in this section I would like discuss some of his writings and the criticism he has faced. I believe that Adorno’s critique is not against jazz as such, but musical forms that fail to break from the culture industry. This includes jazz, but also many other similar forms such as the blues. Adorno critiques jazz specifically because of its popularity during his time, but as we will see many of his broad critiques could be said about blues music as well. Although most of this discussion will focus on jazz, we can infer that some of these critiques extend well beyond jazz music. His non-inclusion of other forms of music, should not imply that he does not see problems with them, but rather that they were perhaps not as popular and thus were not of equal concern.

Adorno is well known for his love of different forms of classical or so-called “serious” music. Theodore Gracyk states that many academics tend to favour classical music and jazz often gets put under the rubric of “pop” music that is juxtaposed against “serious” classical music. Gracyk explains that Adorno often paints jazz with a broad brush, saying that jazz and classical music should not even be sold in the same place, because by doing so jazz reduces classical music to its level. This unfair categorization of jazz is problematic as it misses many of jazz’s intricacies. Robert Witkin notes that in comparison to Adorno’s writings on classical music, there are virtually no thorough investigations and analyses of particular jazz pieces,

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385 Gracyk, 527.
rendering Adorno’s analysis on jazz superficial and anecdotal. As Witkin explains, Adorno denies that jazz was a) improvised, b) good music, and c) had African origins. As we know, blues music also had similar origins and was a non-notational form of music. Therefore, Adorno’s critique of jazz is more of a critique against modern forms of popular music that did not conform to classical formulas of composition. Adorno essentially sees jazz as a non-event, because it fails to produce anything new or of significance, beyond what classical music already accomplished.

Adorno’s most prominent piece on the topic (and one which many of his critics cite) is his essay, “On Jazz.” Although there are many other instances in which Adorno critiques jazz music, this was his best known work devoted exclusively to this topic. Witkin gives Adorno credit for acknowledging that jazz was indeed a modern form of music, and that the only way to understand Adorno’s critique is through his critique of the culture industry. Adorno even admits that there are “good” jazz musicians, but calls their playing “good bad music.” What makes jazz so harmful is that it is part of a false consciousness created by the culture industry. Gracyk explains Adorno’s views, saying that despite jazz’s efforts to respond to social needs it has done so only in conjunction with technological progress. He continues by saying “Progress creates leisure time for the masses, but the emptiness of this free time must be masked by those who are in control.” The industry creates products to fill this void as a means to further control the population. I find this line of argumentation problematic as it implies that any music that relies on technological advancements must be a product of the culture industry. This anti-technological stance is problematic to all forms of music, not just jazz. As I argued in the

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387 Adorno mentions this in his work “On Jazz” on page 45.
389 Gracyk, 529.
previous section, blues music in particular cannot be separated from the technological advancements that have been made during the past century. Blues music’s non-notational form was captured in a way that was previously impossible and consequently changed the entire idea of the blues event. By negating all forms of technology, we often cannot experience the individual nuances of the performer, unless we happen to experience the performance live.

Gracyk continues by explaining that Adorno sees jazz as an analogy to the culture industry through its formal musical properties. Adorno believes that jazz’s simple and constant beat is its defining property. By simplifying its beat, jazz appeals to the masses and covers up the “boredom and angst of people’s purposeless existence.” Pop music in general, manipulates us by keeping the population distracted from social issues. So rather than signalling to the people the social inequalities that are pervasive in the capitalist system (something which supposedly great music can do), jazz perpetuates the false consciousness that “delights in the process of killing time, which is a substitute for confronting social reality.” Furthermore, jazz is not capable of producing a dialectical process necessary for it to be considered a great art form. Just like in society, in music there is a dialectical process where all the elements are connected and can change one another. Witkin explains:

The dialectical process was of the essence of Adorno’s utopian vision of the social and was, in his philosophy, the mark of everything liberational and grounded in individual expression. The image of an unchanging, rigid, or nondialectical structure made up of elements that are juxtaposed without developing out of each other or elements that are simply repeated or are homogenous was, for him, a vision of massification, of collective force, and of everything authoritarian.

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390 Gracyk, 529.
391 Gracyk, 529
392 Witkin, WAJ, 146.
For Adorno, this was why jazz was so harmful, not just on a superficial level, but also on a deeply social level. The absence of social commentary within jazz music is the driving force behind Adorno’s criticism, but is far from his only critique. Knowing that jazz perpetuates the culture industry and fails to be a critical force in art does not tell us much about the reason why Adorno has these beliefs.

In terms of its formal aspects, jazz is known for its improvisational character wherein all the musicians in a band play over a steady beat and each player has the freedom to pursue their own unique style. This is an important quality it shares with blues music. The essence of improvisation lies in the fact that there is no standard notation and the musicians have the freedom to explore different ideas. An important aspect of blues music is the shift of the aura to the individual performer because of their ability to improvise. However, Adorno is very critical of jazz’s improvisational efforts and calls improvisation in jazz “standardized.”

According to Adorno, despite their efforts to improvise, jazz musicians actually use formulaic or pre-planned pieces of music. Adorno sees parallels between jazz and the culture industry. Lewandowski explains that for Adorno jazz expresses “a kind of false happiness or positive Utopia – a claim about the possibilities for individual autonomy and happiness in the form of the ‘good life’ of the democratic collective.” Individuals are deprived of negativity and suffering in the world when listening to jazz. Jazz can be seen as an analogy to society in which we reward the people (individual players in a band) by adapting to a collective (jazz band) and staying within the prescribed limits. Jazz does not negate conventions and thus even in sequences that seem improvised, the rules remain the same with little to no deviation.

393 Horkheimer and Adorno, 124.
Adorno’s skepticism of improvisation lies in the fact that he does not think that jazz is a non-notational form of music. In other words, even without a written score, it borrows heavily from traditional pieces to the point where it reifies the old, while acting like it presents something new. To put it into the context of this dissertation, jazz lacks the evental qualities of the new, because it does not present anything new through improvisation, a point with which I disagree entirely. Once again, this point extends to blues music as we have seen borrowing has been an essential aspect of the blues. Adorno finds any notion of non-notational forms to be problematic. In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno is skeptical of non-notational forms of music that are deemed to be non-reifications, saying that they still reify but do so of past performances. This implies that despite jazz’s efforts to seem new through every performance, it actually falls short because it reproduces past performances. Jazz pieces fall into a mode of constant repetition of the same. This is contrary to serious music which remains socially important to Adorno and adapts to social circumstances. According to Adorno, jazz music is merely a change of “ornamentation” in which the beat and tone stay the same while the variations of other instruments only provide superficial changes. Jazz is part of the larger problem of sameness in a culture that only pretends to make changes, while actually remaining unchanged. Adorno explains that jazz is only modifying that which already exists and has added nothing new since the tango and fox trot, a statement which undoubtedly comes from a lack of knowledge on the matter. This is an important instance in which Adorno emphasizes the new in the formation of an artistic event, something which he believes does not occur in jazz.

This continued sameness in jazz is part of what makes it sellable as a commodity. Not only has jazz become a commercialized form of music, but that is part of its inherent nature.

Adorno explains, “The modern archaic stance of jazz is nothing other than its commodity character.” In this instance, Adorno questions if we can truly point to any “primitive” past for jazz, or whether this is simply part of the culture industry’s clever marketing of jazz as an “anti-bourgeois” form of music. Robert Switzer calls Adorno’s view on this matter elitist and racist, claiming the Adorno has a Eurocentric distrust of primitive music. No doubt, Switzer believes Adorno’s critique extends beyond jazz music, as the blues was also known to be a “primitive” style. Adorno’s critique in this case focuses on simplicity as a negative aspect of jazz music. However, having a simple beat that appeals to a broad audience does not negate the quality of a particular form of music. Again, Adorno is unwilling to admit that there can be a variety of ways in which music can be played.

Gracyk says there are several other critiques we can make against Adorno’s claims. The first is that there is no music in existence that does not draw from history in some way or another. Adorno’s claim that jazz remains the same and borrows from sources such as pop music or previous jazz standards should not necessarily dismiss it as a serious form of music. This is particularly important when we consider that technological reproduction has made music so ubiquitous. Musicians now rely on reproduced musical forms to learn new techniques and develop unique ones. However, claiming that jazz or any other form of music cannot develop the new because it borrows from pop elements is problematic. As I argue, the shift in aura to the individual has caused a new musical paradigm in blues music. Gracyk critiques Adorno’s claim that all jazz music draws from traditional pop standards, such as the 32-measure songs that were

397 Adorno, OJ, 54.
399 Julia Simon’s point comes to mind when she discusses the influence of pop music on folk music. Although many consider pop to be derivative, it can actually have as much influence on jazz or blues as vice versa. Simon, 147.
popular at the time.\textsuperscript{400} In this instance Gracyk addresses Adorno’s claim against Louis Armstrong, in which he said Armstrong played traditional pop music. To put jazz within such a narrow parameter shows Adorno’s lack of understanding of the topic as he insisted on jazz’s pop formula.

The second critique by Gracyk addresses listeners who may not be familiar with musical theory or the intricacies of music. Gracyk believes it is unfair to expect listeners to know the importance of “socially relevant” music if they do not know musical theory in the same detail as Adorno. Presumably, to have social relevance, music must appeal on a conscious level to a significant portion of the population, otherwise it will not make the impact Adorno seeks. However, in order to be influenced by music in such a way we would need a musically educated population, the likes of which we have never seen in the Western world. This point also seems to counter Benjamin’s idea that technological reproduction can be a liberating force for the masses.

The artistic event of political praxis occurs only when the masses are included in the event. Adorno wants an unprecedented level of musical knowledge to produce the artistic event. This idea is not feasible and is divorced from any realistic expectations we can have of the general public. Since the majority of the population does not have the same formal musical education as Adorno, how can Adorno’s preferred music make such an impact upon the masses? Witkin references Gracyk saying that Adorno believes jazz should be listened to in the same way as classical music, an idea that Gracyk finds problematic.\textsuperscript{401} Jazz and classical are two distinct forms of music with such varying qualities that it would be unfair to expect their listeners to have the same kinds of responses. Moreover, audiences do not necessarily listen to music for the same

\textsuperscript{400} Gracyk, 532.  
\textsuperscript{401} Witkin, WAJ, 161.
reasons. By expecting the same types of responses while listening to jazz, or other contemporary forms of music, as opposed to classical, we diminish both of their unique qualities.

The third critique addresses the historical changes in musical capabilities and taste. Listening to music during one period in history will have a different impact upon listeners than listening to it during another period. People do not necessarily identify with certain kinds of music in the same way as they may have during other points in history. This is reminiscent of what Heidegger says on the revelatory nature of art. Works can be relevant to certain cultures and then irrelevant to others. History plays a crucial role in the development of artistic events, as Heidegger illustrates his example of the temple that has a significant impact upon one population but then perishes. Music shares this temporal quality and its relevance may decline or completely perish from one culture, or one time to another. Similarly, Badiou’s theory of weak events applies, as different forms of art produce events during different eras. For Badiou, events need loyal subjects, and artistic events are no different. Abstract art may gain fidelity during the modern age, but would not have gained the same loyalty during the high Renaissance period. The fact that jazz has survived for such a significant amount of time implies that jazz must have meaning to the modern period, otherwise jazz would have never been an event. Therefore, unlike Adorno, who believes that jazz perpetuates sameness, Badiou believes jazz offers something completely new. It has never been made clear whether Badiou thinks blues music has had the same impact on music as jazz, however, a similar logic can be applied as blues music was and continues to be a unique form of music with loyal followers. As we have seen, blues music has similar roots to jazz and blues’ improvisational style has been a clear break from the written forms of the past. Thus, it can be argued that blues music is responsible for the production of the new, as much as jazz has been.
Lastly, one of Adorno’s greatest concerns with jazz is his emphasis upon the written score.\textsuperscript{402} Adorno believes audiences who merely listen to music miss important relationships between notes that can only be seen by looking at the written score. Again, this refers back to the second point in which we noted that a limited amount of people have such a specialized knowledge. Therefore, even fewer people will be capable of appreciating music if they are required to read the music. Although by this last point one may suspect that the “work” of music is restricted to the written score that is not the case for Adorno. The work is a process of performance that comes only through proper training and development. No single performance constitutes the work of classical music, because of the development of better methods of performance. Thus, the first performance or its written score does not necessarily constitute what the work may be, leaving us wondering where the work lies.\textsuperscript{403} In contrast to Adorno, Gracyk believes that jazz challenges the division between work and performance, saying the two elements work together as one.\textsuperscript{404} Therefore, to propose that the work must take precedence over the performance ignores just how jazz functions in practice. Importantly, blues functions in the same way as jazz in this particular case. The work is created and re-created with each performance, creating a new paradigm of musical creation that is not available to works with a written score. This process of re-creation allows the performer to perform the new on a micro scale with each performance.

Gracyk argues that because of the individuality of each work of jazz, each performance is unique. Gracyk states that jazz is inherently a “performer’s art” meaning that it is grounded in individual styles and capabilities. This is reminiscent of Ueno’s point in the previous section

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{402} Gracyk, 535.
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when he discusses the shift of the aura from the score to the performer. Jazz and blues are dependent on the individual player and their unique interpretations. The individual particularities of a performance are what distinguish each event. Adorno misses the importance of the individual performer because of his stubbornness and refusal to take jazz seriously. Clearly jazz and blues music are different than traditional classical music in terms of how they are performed. Although Adorno does not use the language of aura, he puts an emphasis on the written score and its place in music. It seems as though he refuses to consider how other forms of music can be important instances of artistic creation of the new.

Gracyk is far from the only author to critique Adorno on these matters. In terms of the idea of jazz being solely created for the culture industry, much like Gracyk, Witkin believes Adorno underestimates the autonomy of jazz. He quotes Heinz Steinart who describes jazz as “an event and a happening.” Steinart goes on to say that jazz “relies on incident and contingency,” and is thus much more important than what Adorno is willing to admit. For Steinart, jazz is not the repetitive and commercialized style that Adorno thinks it is, but an event where things are created and explored. Furthermore, the culture industry does not create innovative material; it uses existing material to control the population. Witkin explains that the pop industry is “parasitic” by adopting raw material it does not create. The culture industry takes whatever it needs to make money, including the talents and songs from various forms of music. However, that does not mean that music such as jazz or the blues are themselves pop music. This is where Witkin makes his most crucial point. Although jazz or blues may be part of the culture industry, the music itself is not necessarily made for the sake of selling as a

405 Witkin, WAJ, 163.
406 Witkin, WAJ, 163
407 Witkin, WAJ, 165.
commodity. The culture industry adopts any material it needs in order to sustain itself, even if it means appropriating forms of music that are not necessarily conducive to mass markets. The culture industry uses formulas found in jazz to create more popular forms of music and once those options are exhausted and the demand dwindles, they move on to find more material. The culture industry’s intention is to transmit music to a mass audience that would otherwise only be available to a small community, which increases its chances of selling its products to a larger audience.

Witkin makes an interesting point when he says that mass marketing can have a positive effect. By reaching millions of people, mass marketed art such as music can open the path for new exploration by new artists. Thus, the event of mechanical reproduction is not the creation of the culture industry. Even though the culture industry arose out of this new artistic paradigm, as there was an opportunity to make money, this alone should not reduce all mass produced music to the culture industry. Another author who agrees with Witkin and claims that Adorno misunderstands pop culture (particularly music) is Bruce Baugh, who contends that the goal of emancipatory art is to awaken dormant feelings of dissatisfaction which are masked by the culture industry.\(^{408}\) Pop music can appeal directly to the masses rather than to the elite. This is counter to Adorno who does not believe such a process is possible. Despite the often watered down music that the culture industry sells, it can lead to greater exposure, which in turn produces more musicians, which can lead to quality music being produced outside the industry.\(^{409}\) This would otherwise not be possible if the music was only available to a small group. Therefore, to say that mass sales are inherently bad ignores the subversive potential of future artists that are exposed to the music with mass marketing. In this case it is very much a double-edged sword.

\(^{408}\) Baugh, 66.
\(^{409}\) Witkin, WAJ, 166.
where on the one hand the culture industry appropriates a style that is not meant to be popular, but on the other hand exposes many different groups to music they would otherwise have never heard. In particular, white artists during the 1950s and 60s learning blues music and sharing their own form of it could be seen as a positive change that led to greater exposure of blues music. This transition does not represent a new appropriation of the culture industry, but a change in audience not previously possible. There is no doubt there were some misguided attempts such as the ones at the Newport Folk Festival when they tried to “revive” an old sound. However, for the most part, the transition to new audiences was positive and kept blues music at the forefront of culture.

**Musical Shifts in the Culture Industry**

The purpose of this section was to illustrate that Adorno’s view of jazz music is an important part of his misunderstanding of popular culture. For Adorno, jazz or pop music failed to produce individualized styles on a micro level and did not break from non-notational works on a macro level. He never saw jazz as an important event, but rather a form of music that is complicit in perpetuating the culture industry. We saw how many of his arguments extended beyond jazz music to include other forms such as the blues. However, it is difficult to completely deny Adorno’s stance on popular music, particularly in terms of standardization and its formulaic qualities. Often times we see popular music repeat trends that other successful musicians have had and the industry exploits these sounds until they are no longer popular. However, this idea lies at the centre of our analysis of the event. At some point, there must have been some force of change that altered the formula and shifted the trend; otherwise we would be talking about one standard form of pop music, something which has never been the case. Unless we are willing to say that The Beatles are no different than swing music, or that electronic musicians sound the
same as any crooner from the 1950s, we must admit that there have been significant changes to pop music during the twentieth century. Now perhaps there is room to say that pop music differences often remain at a superficial level (e.g. its attempts to sell itself have never changed, even if the sound has), but even that claim would diminish the efforts made by millions of artists. Since the technological reproductive stage, music has been able to evolve more closely to the needs and wants of individual demands and yes, even market demands. But should we take a reductionist standpoint and say it has all been for the sake of money? Surely, within that history there have been events that have changed the history of music for the better, even if the market forces have re-used that sound to the nth degree.

Although Adorno does not see it as such, jazz music had had a tremendous impact on musical history and should be considered along with any serious form of music. Even though he never discussed it, we can infer that for Adorno blues music would have more than likely fallen under the same category. But I believe that even more than jazz music, blues music resisted popular demands. Unlike jazz, blues music was never really associated with popular music in the early to mid twentieth century with the possible exception of vaudeville blues. The only time blues was popular was after the shift to white musicians in the 1960s, but that could be considered blues rock as much as pure blues. Yet, we can never completely deny the ties blues music has to the culture industry. What we need to consider is the prominent role of economics in popular forms of music, particularly for recorded music. The blues and almost all other forms of popular recorded music are tied directly to market conditions. In nearly every case, there needs to be an outside source to fund the recording, marketing and distribution of music. As mentioned in the first chapter, one of the reasons blues music shifted towards a more basic form during the 1930s was because of the cost. There simply was not enough money to fund large
orchestras and song writers for the women of the blues. Instead, studios chose to pay one person to write, sing, play, and record all the music. This change was vital to how audiences would come to experience the blues. For anyone outside the rural African American communities in the American South, the blues became synonymous with these musicians for practically an entire generation. That length of time is long enough to change the perception of any form of artistic creation, which can lead to the implementation of their techniques in new musical forms. For whatever reason, the blues became standardized based on these early recordings. Perhaps people felt more attached to this type of music because its personal elements could be conveyed better than the vaudeville blues. Nevertheless, to ignore the economic and cultural aspects of the blues would be a mistake and would do a great disservice to its complicated history. Although blues and jazz have a history of resisting market demands, we must ask: At what point do these forms of music associate or dissociate with the culture industry? As I have argued, since its standardization blues music has been a musical form associated with technological reproduction, but that is not to say it has been reduced to merely a commodity.

Without thinking of its place within industry as a form of mechanical reproduction, we lose an integral part of blues history. What we have seen from Benjamin and Adorno is that to consider art as an event requires us to think of how technology and industry change the artistic event. In the case of blues music, we need to consider its history as well as its playing. The unique aspects of the player need to be noted, and the means of doing so often comes from reproduced works of art. We have moved away from the origins of blues as a type of music that was passed down from one artist to another in person and are now at a point in time when this is not the primary form of learning, listening, or playing music. Blues music for generations has been changed because of mechanical reproduction and industry. We can hear the subtle
variations over and over with the click of a button and then repeat it ourselves. We are not limited to a particular time and place when we have all the recordings at our fingertips. This is not a normative judgement about technology, but a statement on how we must consider an artistic event. The event of listening to a song is not isolated to a single time and place, but occurs over the course of decades, or centuries and around the globe. The temporal shaping of blues music is shared by the audience, which can cross over boundaries of space, especially when the blues is recorded. My views are shared by Julia Simon in that we participate in a temporal event through recordings. Its listeners experience blues as present in the moment and enduring. Blues music traverses both time and space in its reproduction, as it is repeated over and over in the same manner.

A fundamental shift occurs when technology is introduced into the event. Technology can split the event into an infinite set of possibilities. A song that was once played for an audience as a singular event now occurs as an infinite playing. Its original playing has no effect as such, because each playing is a unique playing. The event becomes bifurcated into an infinite amount of playings. With each repetition we arrive at a unique event that was not possible prior to mechanical reproduction. Thus, the same playing or event is infinitely divided through its re-playing. In other words, the unique playing of a song that once occurred is now re-played infinitely the same but with difference. The song can derive new meanings with each playing and can be heard or interpreted in new ways based on the location, even if it is essentially the same recording. Events are no longer bound by space and time; they are free because of their re-playability.

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410 Simon, XIV.
Conclusion

I began this dissertation with the question “Is blues music an event?” In an effort to answer this question, I explored the history of blues music and the circumstances in which it developed. The blues developed in the Deep South of the United States, influenced by slave music. However, when the first blues song was performed is uncertain, due in large part to its unrecorded aural/oral tradition. We do know, however, that early in the twentieth century an effort was made to capitalize on its growing popularity. Blues songs began to be published and soon became codified and standardized in a manner never previously seen. Once those standards were in place, blues music could be identified much more easily. The blues is a humble form of music that relies on simple rhythms and melodies, while often telling stories of poverty and hardship. However, the ways in which those stories are told can be humorous and playful. Although these themes are serious in nature, by playing them in a humorous manner, the blues attracted a broader audience. With the advent of mechanically reproduced music, those themes could reach the general population, and soon the demographics shifted from a primarily African American audience to one that was more racially diverse. The combination of changing demographics and mechanical reproduction changed blues music significantly.

From this historical analysis, I develop a thesis that divides blues music into two categories: the micro and the macro. The way in which the blues is played is reflective of the historical situation from whence it came; therefore, our understanding of blues music is dependent upon both of these categories. By exploring the theories of Deleuze and Badiou, I found two distinct approaches to the question of the event. On the one hand, Deleuze’s perspective is essential to understanding how blues music can be understood on a micro level.
The small variations in blues music, particularly in its played form, are what set individual performers apart. Furthermore, blues music has the “blue” note that alters the path of a scale and, consequently, of many blues songs. For Deleuze, these notes present sudden shifts that affect the sound of a song and can change the mood abruptly. These are the types of micro events unique to blues music that can still have profound effects. The tension that certain notes create affects the listener and they are an important part of the dynamic shifts we find in blues music.

On the other hand, Badiou’s theory is much more focused on large scale events that create a rupture in being. For Badiou, events are unpredictable and fundamentally alter our view of the world. However, events happen retrospectively because of fidelity from subjects. Although events for Badiou are rare, he considered jazz music to be an event because of its unique style. Blues music is similar in this regard because of its complete break from the status quo. Perhaps blues music is not as widely recognized as jazz, but its impact upon music is equally noteworthy. The common theme found in the works of these thinkers is that the event is the production of the new. Although Deleuze and Badiou disagreed on the ways in which the new manifests itself, I believe that the blues event cannot be discussed without both of these thinkers. The unique style of blues music is reflective of the circumstances from which it arose and thus the event happens on both the micro and macro forms.

Once we established that the blues is an event, I thought it would be beneficial to explore Heidegger’s theory of the artistic event. Heidegger’s theory of the event accounts for the cultural happening of work of art. The way being reveals itself depends upon the works of art that are relevant in a historical circumstance. Many blues songs are examples of such cultural happenings. We have seen the ways in which blues songs can reveal the situation of the performer, for example, the poverty of African Americans in the South or the depression of
artists such as Eric Clapton. In many cases, blues is a method of revealing the being of a situation. However, Heidegger’s theory lacks any substantial discussion of technologically reproduced works. Art is meant to reveal being and if it does not do so, then its relevance has perished. That said, I have yet to discuss the demise or end of blues music in any way. Has the blues event perished or do we continue to live within its cultural sphere? What are the impacts of mechanical reproduction in considering this question? While we can understand how works of art perish when they are singular entities, it is more difficult to make that argument when the work is split infinitely by mechanical reproduction. In any event, whether artistic or not, we must consider points of origin and demise. There was no clear beginning to blues music and it would be difficult to argue that blues music has no relevance. Francis Davis notes that blues music was never more popular than in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{411} Davis claims that we cannot say that the blues is dead because we continue to stretch the definition of the blues.\textsuperscript{412} Blues musicians today continue to push the boundaries of blues music, including fusing it with different styles. Artists such as The White Stripes proved that the blues can even be fused with punk rock.

The infinite split of the mechanically reproduced piece of music must have an impact on the event. Blues music was once so reliant on the presence of an audience because as an improvised and non-notational style of music, it needed to be heard. However, when we introduce technology, we cannot discuss the event in the same manner, as there are infinite possible events, produced across different regions and timelines. I think that is the very essence of mechanical reproduction, insofar as it can reproduce the event and continually reproduce the new. That is why Adorno was unfair in his critique of the culture industry and the potential it has for creating the new. Although we may see commercialization and production of the same type

\textsuperscript{411} Davis, 241.
\textsuperscript{412} Davis, 254.
of genre, we cannot underestimate the powerful nature of the mechanically reproduced work to reproduce a new event. Music can be heard and re-heard with no spatial or temporal limitations. Furthermore, blues music has the unique feature of having an aura that is tied to the performer, rendering the work unique, but also reproducible. Although I may hear a song that has been recorded several times, it is the ability of the artist to create something unique which makes blues an important case. The performer channels the history of the song into their own performance. This history is passed down to audiences with the potential of creating new musicians, a process made possible with the advent of mechanical reproduction.

I believe that an event needs to be a point of change. The amount of time that an event needs to develop or occur is indeterminate. There is no definitive answer to what constitutes an event or on what scale it needs to occur. I certainly do not think that they are as rare as Badiou would have us believe, but I also do not think that simply any occurrence can be called an event. Therefore, to say that blues music is an event does not necessarily classify it as a large or a small event, but rather it is part of both scales in different ways. It is an interruption in many ways to the musical status quo and how we think of music in its non-notational form, as well as a cultural happening that is meant to reveal something about the artists who perform it. Furthermore, the notes it delivers are revealing of the particularities of the performer, as they illustrate the subtle ways in which notes can bend or shift. Even at the smallest level, blues music continues to affect us by producing and re-producing the event.
Bibliography


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