A Culture of Echoes:

The Emergence of AI Hyperreality in Music

and its Impact on Culture

Master's Thesis

by

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is beginning to emerge in the realm of music, a crucial medium in the creation and communication of meaning acting as a form of cultural transmission. This study uses a historical mode of analysis to establish the socio-cultural significance of music by looking at its interwoven nature with cultural movements of the 20th century, and investigates how the advent of varying AI technologies in music will affect the meaningfulness of music and its practices of meaning-making as well as the impact this will have on contemporary culture, informed through a critical mode of analysis using Jean Baudrillard's theories relating to *simulacra*, *simulation*, and *hyperreality*. AI voice filters, deepfakes, and generative models produce music that constitute *simulacra*, inducing a state of *hyperreality* wherein it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the *simulated* from the real. The meaningfulness of music is likely to collapse due to this *hyperreality* along with the oversaturation and homogenization of music produced through the use of AI technologies. The replicative nature of generative AI models is likely to lead to a lack of uniqueness and diversity among musical expressions and may potentially lead to the disruption and death of the historical flow of popular culture as understood traditionally.

Contents

1. Introduction

With John Lennon's passing more than four decades ago, the hope of hearing a new song from arguably the most venerated musicians of the 20th Century in popular music, The Beatles, seemed all but long gone. Although the world of music may have moved onwards with new forms of artistic expression, driven by the combination of technological advancements in automation alongside novel musical genres playing a part in cultural shifts, the death of a cultural icon who encapsulated the Zeitgeist of his time left a wake in the hearts of millions of adoring fans. However, thanks to new advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), the surviving Beatles Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr were able to issue a new official single since the band's dissolution (The Beatles, 2023). By isolating the vocals from the accompanying piano in a demo of the song "Now And Then" Lennon had recorded in 1978, in combination with George Harrison's guitar playing that had been recorded in 1995 in a previous effort to release the song, alongside new instrumentation, McCartney and Starr concluded three decades of effort to produce a new official Beatles release. With Lennon's passing in 1980 and Harrison's in 2001, new developments in AI presented the surviving Beatles with the opportunity to not merely release a new song, but to commemorate the loss of their two friends and bring further closure to themselves and those who had experienced the 1960s first-hand.

AI is at the forefront of contemporary technological advances and is beginning to emerge in the realm of music, whether it be in audio deepfakes or the generation of new compositions and their accompanying visuals, i.e., music videos, singles and album art covers. Historically, music and musicians have been an expression of and a driving force behind cultural changes, reflecting the cultural identity of a given era. The emergence of AI in music may hold cultural significance in decades to come, shaping our values and how we consume and convey meaning. The incorporation of AI technologies in music is slowly becoming an industry wide phenomenon, existing not only at the level of artists but also among the public, proliferating AI-assisted music media in online spaces to mixed reviews.

Julian Casablancas, of former The Strokes fame, and his relatively new musical outfit The Voidz came under fire for their reliance on AI to produce the cover art for their third studio album "Like All Before You", with fans taking to Instagram to voice their disappointment. Casablancas released a statement on the band's behalf, expressing that it was not their intention to use AI, but rather collectively as a band, simply favored the AI-generated artwork over other options and that he's "not 'endorsing' AI, [he doesn't] dwell on it, but it's part of culture now. Relax, it's iPhone." (Olinger, 2024). Although seemingly innocuous, Casablancas statement may hold truths that pertain to the increasingly ubiquitous nature of AI among contemporary music, and the potential shift in perceptions regarding these new technologies that is taking place.

AI deepfake covers of popular songs using the voices of other artists have become widespread online, making appearances on various social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. One notable viral example is a rendition of “Somebody That I Used to Know”, originally by artists Gotye and Kimbra, appearing to be sung by rappers Kanye West and Playboi Carti (Thomas Skean, 2023). These deepfakes are not official releases issued by artists but rather parodies that have been generated by the public. However, the use of AI voice deepfakes is not always limited to that of a facetious nature. In 2023, a viral song named “Heart on My Sleeve” featuring AI-generated voices of artists Drake and The Weeknd was submitted for Grammy consideration for Best Rap Song and Song of the Year. The anonymous creator Ghostwriter977 was technically qualified to receive the award, since these Grammy Awards are given to a song’s writer as opposed to its performers, and although missing the involvement of the two artists the song was initially “absolutely eligible because it was written by a human” according to Harvey Mason Jr., CEO of The Recording Academy responsible for hosting the Grammys (Shanfeld, 2023). The emergence of AI poses new challenges the music industry is beginning to have to consider, reminiscent of the controversial rise of sampling that became prevalent in the 1980s (Chavez, 2023).

The music industry will also have to contend with popular generative AI music applications like Suno and Udio that produce instrumentations featuring vocals from simple text prompts, having made their debut in late 2023 and early 2024, respectively. Public reception towards these new AI models varies greatly, with some stating that they can capture the “passion, pain and spirit of a vocal performance” while others have criticized them as being entirely “soulless” (Morrison, 2024; Nuñez, 2024). These applications pose a radically different form of automation from preceding forms like sampling, introducing a new kind of phenomenal creative agency that promises users the ability to “Make Original Tracks in Seconds” while constrained within a given set of parameters (Udio, 2025). A new lawsuit filed against Udio and Suno by major record companies claiming that copyrighted recordings were used in their training data suggests that their outputs are mere reconfigurations of songs, therefore derivative rather than truly innovative (Tencer, 2024).

In late 2023, the world’s first entirely AI singer-songwriter Anna Indiana made her debut on Twitter with the release of the single “Betrayed By This Town” (Anna Indiana, 2023). Everything from the melody, chord progression, and lyrical content as well as the accompanying visuals was generated using ChatGPT4 and Musicfy among other AI tools (Press-Reynolds, 2023). Indiana was met with an aggressive backlash online, with Grammy award winning musician James Blake openly mocking her video: “This brought me to tears. I’m so excited for the future.” (Blake, 2023). This is indicative that numerous thresholds are being crossed by her arrival in the eyes of the public. Although currently seeming quite primitive and lackluster, AI singer-songwriters are likely to evolve in the future, becoming increasingly convincing with

public reception amenable to change. In music, fictional characters created by artists and technicians have already been very successful in the past, garnering widespread acclaim and popularity. One prominent example is the virtual band Gorillaz, formed by artists Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett, fronted entirely by a cast of cartoon characters while the real musicians remain behind the scenes (Gorillaz, n.d.). Another is the virtual idol Hatsune Miku, developed by Crypton Future Media in Japan. Having performed at numerous concerts as an animated projection using a specialized glass screen, the virtual teen avatar has amassed close to four million subscribers on YouTube since her debut in 2011 (HatsuneMiku, n.d.). Gorillaz and Hatsune Miku are earlier forms of what French philosopher Jean Baudrillard terms *simulation*, the process of reflecting real objects or experiences, while Anna Indiana represents a logical endpoint of said reflection known as *simulacra* wherein no trace of an original reality can be found and we enter a state of *hyperreality*, where representations appear more real than real and we are no longer able to distinguish between the real and *simulated*.

A primary feature of human art and culture is it's *time-binding* nature, termed by Alfred Korzybski referring to the distinctively human attribute of preserving memories and records of experiences to enable the successive generation to begin where the former left off (Korzybski, 1921). Popular culture and its music are a *time-binding* phenomenon, "having a basis in previous creative artifacts that form a hereditary lineage", which is evident when hearing the "echoes of early jazz in subsequent musical genres such as rock and roll and hip-hop" (Danesi, 2024, p. 9). If this process is disrupted or dismantled, it would signal the end of culture as a holistic entity and the need to effectively start over. New genres of music have normally "come forth as agents of change, motivating people to act politically, intellectually, and socially" (*ibid.*, p. 68). The primary examples of these in the 20th century are the emergence of jazz in the 1920s that brough about aesthetic and lifestyle revolutions in society at the time, and the rock music of the 1960s that inspired a counter-cultural revolution and "incentivized movements for social and racial equality across the world" (*ibid.*). The question remains whether AI-generated music can evoke the same kinds of revolutionary sentiments, and whether its proliferation and lack of innovation could disrupt the process of *time-binding* in our culture.

In the ancient Greek myth of Narcissus, a beautiful youth becomes enamored with his own reflection in a pool of water that sparks a tragic obsession that leads to his untimely death, while the nymph Echo, cursed to repeat the last words spoken to her, wastes away in the mountains due to her rejection by Narcissus, leaving behind only a faint voice. With AI-generated and assisted music being a primary seed of corruption, our culture faces the danger of gazing at its own reflections endlessly through derivative AI-generated music and the extensive remixing of signs Baudrillard foresaw taking place in postmodern society in late-stage capitalism, collectively turning us into a culture of Echoes doomed to repeat the last words spoken to us while ultimately withering away.

Following the paradigm set by the French tradition of post-structuralism and postmodernism that emerged in the 1960s, as well as critical theory, I aim to use a historical and critical mode of analysis in order to examine the progressive sequence of changes that are taking place in our culture surrounding the practices of creating and communicating meaning as a result of greater degrees of *hyperreality* in the realm of music brought about by the advent of AI technologies. The paramount question I aim to answer is how the emergence of AI in music will affect contemporary culture, specifically the meaningfulness of music and its practices of meaning-making. To answer this, I first aim to substantiate the socio-cultural significance of music with a focus on its history in the 20th century. Then I intend to establish the historical use of automation in music, as well as addressing how generative AI differs from previous forms throughout this thesis. Subsequently, I aim to create a comprehensive list of the major diverging ways in which AI technologies have been used in music along with the evolving cultural reception some of these instances have amassed. Following, I aim to investigate how the emergence of AI-assisted music will affect the meaningfulness of music and its practices of meaning-making, informed through the lens of Baudrillard's theories revolving around *simulation* and *hyperreality*. Finally, I aim to extrapolate the potential impacts our culture will face in the future as a consequence of these effects.

The current state of literature regarding the use of AI in music and its effects on culture raise questions regarding the capacity of AI to be creative and whether AI-generated music can "evoke the same kinds of revolutionary sentiments" that came about as a result of new genres of music that acted as "agents of change, motivating people to act politically, intellectually, and socially" (Danesi, 2024, p. 68). Although a semiotic approach appears commonplace, with some authors choosing to include and expand upon Baudrillard's theories in pursuit of answering these questions, notably through the addition of an additional stage in the evolution of *simulacra* termed *generative hyperreality*, there appears to be a lack of inclusion of Baudrillard's notions beyond *simulacra*, *simulation*, and *hyperreality*, along with a more comprehensive and in depth understanding of his theories (Cunningham, 2024). The current literature is also missing a more detailed list of diverging ways AI has been used in the realm of music and how they each manifest Baudrillard's more advanced notions in varying degrees.

2. Methodology

2.1. Introduction

In order to address the primary research question of how the emergence of AI in the realm of music will affect contemporary culture, with a focus on the meaningfulness of music and its practices of meaning-making, I first aim to answer a catalogue of sub-questions.

The first sub-question I aim to address in the third chapter is the socio-cultural significance of music, specifically in 20th century's popular culture. To address this notion, I intend to demonstrate how music is a meaning-laden tool for emotional expression and cultural transmission, signifying values and beliefs among individuals. Furthermore, I will address how the dawn of a new social class, the teenager, played a pivotal role in the advent of new musical genres in the 20th century like jazz that would inspire successive generations to coalesce and drive social and cultural shifts in the domains of civil rights and environmentalism that crystalized in the 1960s counterculture. I will also briefly discuss the rise of music videos and their influence on fashion, language, and the color barrier within televised music.

Subsequently, I intend to establish the historical use of automation in music in the introduction of the fourth chapter, and how generative AI is demonstrating a unique disposition from previous forms sparsely within the main bodies of the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters. I aim to give an account of the evolution of automation from early mechanical instances to numerous later electronic forms, including electro-mechanical and electronic instruments, synthesizers, and samplers along with the ensuing rise of electronic music. I will also give a brief account of the process of sampling, the emergence of Auto-Tune, and briefly introduce the advent of algorithmic and generative automation.

Following, I aim to explore the major diverging forms in which AI technologies have been used in the realm of music and the evolving cultural reception they have encountered in the main body of the fourth chapter. To achieve this, I will give a comprehensive list of how AI technologies have been used by artists and the public to generate and modify music and the accompanying visuals, as well as significant industry trends that are taking place within this domain.

Then, I intend to answer how the emergence of AI will affect the meaningfulness of music and its practice of meaning-making through the lens of Baudrillard's theories on *simulacra*, *simulation*, and *hyperreality* in the fifth chapter. I will apply a comprehensive understanding of Baudrillard's theories onto the various applications of AI technologies laid out in the previous chapter, delving into his further notions of *symbolic exchange*, the *obscene*, *extermination*, and *seduction*, along with his critiques of postmodern societies relating to the *collapse of meaning*, triumph of the *code*, the *death of the subject*, the *revolt* of the object, and *fatal strategies*.

Finally, I aim to answer how AI will affect contemporary culture in the sixth chapter of this thesis that serves as a conclusion. I intend to extrapolate the impacts our culture may face due to the consequences emerging AI technologies will have on the meaningfulness of music and its practices of meaning-making that I have established in the previous chapter, through the application of Baudrillard's theories and additional literature. I will also give a brief account of what makes generative AI different from human creativity using additional literature. Lastly, I will recommend a few remedies we may employ to curb or avoid these negative ramifications, as well as avenues for future research based on the limitations of this investigation.

Baudrillard's theories I aim to use in my analysis relate to *simulacra*, *simulation*, and *hyperreality*. They are a foundational concept in postmodern philosophy, providing a socio-cultural perspective on the quality and evolution of culture by presenting a radical critique of postmodern media, automation, and the nature of reality itself. Embedded in semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their use in the communication of meaning, and drawing on thinkers like Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault, Baudrillard asserts that in the postmodern era, signs and representations no longer reflect a concrete reality, but rather produce what he terms *simulacra*, copies without an original real-world referent. This form of *simulation* ushers in a state of *hyperreality*, a condition wherein *simulations* become more real than real, shaping our perceptions, experiences, and understanding of the world. The emergence of AI in music is creating online environments saturated with signs that refer only to other signs with *simulated* experiences increasingly dominating everyday life. I aim to apply Baudrillard's concepts laid out below to the various uses of AI in music to demonstrate and gain an understanding of the effects AI will have on audiences and to predict the impact their exhibition of *simulation* and *hyperreality* will have on the meaningfulness of music and its practices of meaning-making, and the effect on culture this will have.

2.2. Simulacra, Simulation & Hyperreality

In his seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard identified four successive stages of a sign or image: a faithful reflection of reality, a masking of reality, an absence of reality, and no relation to a reality. To illustrate the differences between the stages and the progressive mediation of an image, I will use the example of Jimi Hendrix's rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair in 1969. The first stage, the sacramental order, is a faithful copy or image of a referent, "it is the reflection of a profound reality" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 6). It is the original performance of Hendrix at Woodstock, having happened in real time, with real sound, real emotions and cultural context grounded in authenticity as he expressed his anti-war sentiment through a distorted guitar in front of a live audience. The

second stage masks and denatures a profound reality (*ibid.*). We are aware that it is an unfaithful copy, hinting at the existence of an obscure reality that the sign or image itself is incapable of encapsulating. It is a video recording of that live performance broadcast online or on TV, representing the event with added layers through editing, commentary, and audience reactions along with other elements of post-production. The viewer sees Hendrix's performance through a mediated lens, not the event as it took place but a specific version of it. The performance appears authentic, but its meaning has shifted, altered by its framing, context, and the platform on which it is consumed.

The third stage masks the absence of a profound reality, where the sign or image pretends to be a faithful copy, but is a copy without an original referent and marks the commodification of the image. These signs claim to represent something real, but no representation is taking place as arbitrary images are put forth as things they have no relationship to. In this "order of sorcery" all human meaning is evoked artificially to appear as an original referent (*ibid*.). This stage would be illustrated by a movie scene or commercial that uses Hendrix's style of performance or sound to evoke emotions associated with the original performance. We recognize it as Hendrix-esque, but it is ultimately hollow as it is not a real performance or protest involving him. He is reduced to a symbol for marketing, nostalgia, or the 1960s counterculture. The fourth stage is pure *simulacrum*, where we find no relation to any reality whatsoever, and signs merely reflect other signs (*ibid.*). Here we find a copy of a copy without an original referent. This final stage marks the arrival of *hyperreality* where the distinction between the real and the *simulated* collapses entirely. This would be an entirely AI-generated Hendrix concert or hologram, an event that never took place although fans might cheer and critics might review, nevertheless. Hendrix is reduced to a brand, a product, a *simulation* that appears more real than the real him. An image, sound, and persona that exists entirely independent of him.

Disneyland, being Baudrillard's iconic example of *hyperreality*, not only simulates a fantasy world, but also reveals how *simulation* replaces and conceals the real, blurring the boundary between fiction and reality. "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real", functioning ideologically to reassure visitors that "real" America does exist, when in fact both the park and society "belong to the hyperreal order" and are constructed through *simulations* like advertising, media, and consumer culture (*ibid.*, p. 12). Baudrillard's work challenges us to reconsider how truth, meaning, and authenticity operate in a media-saturated society, offering us the tools to critique the digital age of AI, social media, and the commodification of reality itself. Rather than revealing the world, representations now construct it, repeatedly disconnecting us from lived experiences and material conditions. Baudrillard unveils to us that we no longer live in a world of reality, but in a maze of endless *simulation* where the lines between the real and representation are blurred.

In his short story “On Exactitude in Science”, Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges describes an empire wherein cartographers create a map of its territories that is to scale and an exact replica, coinciding point for point (Borges, 1975). Following generations who are not as fond of cartography as their forebears recognized the map as useless and abandoned it to decay in the deserts. The story illustrates the absurdity of perfect representation, since through the effort of capturing reality with total precision the map is rendered meaningless, serving as an inspiration for Baudrillard to develop his notions of *simulacra*, *simulation* and *hyperreality*. The map functions as a representation of the empire, its simulation. In Baudrillard’s take on the story, the empire falls into ruin as the territories beneath the map deteriorate while the map remains. Subjects of the empire no longer deal with the territories themselves but a representation thereof, a *simulation*. Over time, the map too begins to tear and decay, leaving gaps through which the territories protrude, and it is no longer clear whether the citizens are dealing with the real or the representation. The distinction between the real and the *simulated* collapses entirely and they find themselves in a *hyperreality*.

In postmodern societies the “simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1). Original real-world referents no longer precede their *simulations*, analogous to how “the territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it” (*ibid*.). This is the precession of *simulacra* wherein the map precedes the territory; *simulation* precedes the real. “The territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire but ours. The desert of the real itself” (*ibid*.). We find ourselves in a wasteland where we no longer perceive or interact with the real, but rather deal with its representations, unable to discern the difference. “It is no longer a question of either maps or territories. Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference between one and the other” (*ibid*., p. 2).

In Plato’s allegory of the cave, prisoners are chained within a cave and forced to gaze at one of the cave’s walls, imprisoned from childhood. Behind them is a fire in front of which objects or puppets are held by sign bearers to project a shadow that casts onto the wall the prisoners observe. Only the shadows and sounds of echoes are the prisoner’s reality who are oblivious of the world outside of the cave. If they were ever to unchain themselves and leave the cave, they would realize that they had been living in a distorted reality. This story served as an analogy to describe the distorted nature of what we perceive in our daily lives, with the philosopher able to see through the facade and realize that our senses only give us shadows of something much greater. In Baudrillard’s critique of the movie *The Matrix*, which was heavily inspired by his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, he highlights the Wachowski’s misunderstanding of his work, following the format of Plato’s allegory of the cave in their movie rather than addressing the predicament we currently find ourselves in. In an interview with Le Nouvel Observateur in

2004, Baudrillard stated that “the new problem posed by *simulation* is confused with its classical, Platonic treatment” (Jcgaal, 2021). In *The Matrix*, the line between the *simulated* world and the real world is extremely clear, as is the case in the allegory of the cave, while Baudrillard believes that it is precisely this distinction we can no longer make. There is never any uncertainty whether one is in the matrix or not, whether what they are experiencing is *simulated* or not. However, it is precisely this uncertainty that defines the postmodern condition according to Baudrillard. We cannot escape the *simulation*, the *hyperreality*, since we would not know what to escape from in the first place.

To illustrate the distinction between the themes in the allegory of the cave and our postmodern condition further, Baudrillard explores the historical development of the gap between the real and the imaginary. In antiquity, the gap was vast and clear, allowing one to imagine a world radically different from the real world, a perfect utopia made in the image of God, reflected in Plato’s allegory. This projection of the imaginary “is maximized in the utopian, in which a transcendent sphere, a radically different universe takes form” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 122). However, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the gap between the real and the imaginary shrunk, replacing the mystical utopias of the ancient world with science fiction. No longer is a world imagined that is radically different, but rather a world that is a mere expansion of the real one, one in which our technology is much more developed and our ability to travel is extended to explore undiscovered reaches of space, an “unbounded projection of the real world of production” that “adds the multiplication of its own possibilities” (*ibid*.). In postmodern society, the gap between the real and the imaginary has disappeared entirely, and we are no longer capable of ideal projections, of imagining new worlds, limited to imagining mere reconfigurations of our world or relive ideal projections of past times. The distinction between the real and imaginary, the real and the *simulated*, becomes harder to discern due to the disappearance of this gap.

Baudrillard asserts that “the radical illusion of the world is a problem faced by all great cultures, which they have solved through art and symbolization” (Jcgaal, 2021). In our postmodern societies, we have invented “a *simulated* real, which henceforth supplants the real and is its final solution, a virtual universe from which everything dangerous and negative has been expelled”, an “uncut transparency” where the gap between the real and imagined dissolves and “everything belonging to the order of dream, utopia and phantasm is given expression, “realized”” (*ibid*.).

2.3. Triumph of the Code

The notion of *symbolic exchange* is central to Baudrillard's critique of modern capitalist societies, referring to a form of social interaction based on reciprocity and the non-economic exchange of meaning, value, or goods. It is rooted in traditional, pre-capitalist societies where the emphasis lies in ritual, honor, and social bonds rather than profit or utility. "Whereas value always has a unidirectional sense, whereas it passes from one point to another according to a system of equivalence, in symbolic exchange the terms are reversible." (Baudrillard, 2003, p. 15). Baudrillard critiques the capitalist economy for having eliminated *symbolic exchange* in favor of exchange value and sign value, where objects are consumed not for their utility but rather for the meanings and status they represent. This loss of *symbolic exchange* leads to alienation as individuals no longer relate to each other through meaningful rituals or gifts but through abstract systems like money or digital signals on social media, as the symbolic is replaced by *simulations* of meaning in the *hyperreality* of postmodern societies. We post images on social media to accumulate likes, followers, and visibility rather than strengthen social bonds through reciprocity, replacing traditional values based on meaning through impersonal metrics and economy based on sign value that communicates lifestyle and status.

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard mentions his notion of the *code*, a system of signs that structures and determines every aspect of postmodern society. Traditionally, money was the universal equivalent that was used to compare the exchange value of distinct goods. In postmodern societies, the sign has taken the place of the universal equivalent of the *code*, as no matter what a sign represents, it can be compared and exchanged with other signs. "We are now in the process of inventing a fantastic general equivalent – the virtual" (*ibid*., p. 80). The virtual is the vanishing or end of the real that coincides with the notion of *hyperreality*. It is "the final solution of the real in so far as it both accomplishes the world in its definitive reality and marks its dissolution" (*ibid*., p.42). Nothing can no longer be surveyed, *simulated* and integrated into larger structures, allowing nothing to escape the system of signs, the *code*, reducing everything to mere signs. Since every sign is interchangeable, everything becomes disposable, and the very notion of value disintegrates. This is the ultimate triumph of the *code* in postmodern societies, with everything "taking us into a world steeped in definitive uncertainty" we find in a *hyperreal* world (*ibid*., p. 81). We can no longer distinguish between the real and its *simulation*, "grasp the real and its sign: we shall never again master the two simultaneously" (*ibid*.).

2.4. The Obscene & the Revolt of the Object

The saturation of media in a postmodern society leads to excessive overexposure Baudrillard terms the *obscene*, when total transparency ensues due to the collapse of distance between reality and its representation. Everything is made visible and nothing is hidden, stripping away all meaning. “On the one hand, there is art, which is capable of inventing a scene other than the real... on the other, there is realist art, which has fallen into a kind of obscenity by becoming descriptive” (*ibid*., p. 28). The *obscene* is the “becoming-real, the becoming-absolutely-real, of something which until then was treated metaphorically” (*ibid*., p. 27). There is no longer any scene or stage; the distance of the gaze is eradicated, and all mystery, depth, and symbolic meaning disappears in the glare of hyper-visibility. We are left with the “extermination of the world by its ultimate verification”, a “kind of dissolution by the objective verification of things, by identification” (*ibid*., p. 66). To illustrate this Baudrillard employs a parable Tibetan Monks who have been deciphering all the nine billion names of God for centuries, believing in a prophecy that once the list was completed, the world would come to an end. One day they call upon people from IBM who, using their computers, have finished the list within one month. Although they do not believe in the prophecy, “as they are coming back down the mountain, with their inventory completed, they see the stars in the sky extinguished one by one” (*ibid*.). This Baudrillard terms the perfect crime, “the elimination of the original illusion, the fateful illusion of the world”, its radical uncertainty, thereby leaving no longer any destination elsewhere (*ibid*., p. 65). Seeking to reduce the illusion with truth, the most fantastical of illusions, the notion of the individual is reduced from the critical subject of history to a “perfectly operational molecule” that has no destiny, but rather a “precoded development and... will reproduce, self identically, to infinity”, a kind of cloning that ushers in the *death of the subject* (*ibid*., p.67; *ibid*., p. 68).

In a media saturated society, objects begin to no longer serve or obey us. They resist and overwhelm us, collapsing the boundaries between us and them, between subject and object. Baudrillard terms this the *revolt* of the object when technologies, signs, and media shape us more than we shape them (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 131). They take on an agency, autonomy, and symbolic power and set in motion the *death of the subject*, rendering us players in a game run by objects and signs (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 31). Objects have become pure signs without an original referent floating in endless chains of signification lacking a stable meaning, ushering in a *hyperreality* we find ourselves in. Fashion progresses at a pace disconnected from any real human need, circulating clothes that act as signs in a system using us to reproduce their logic. Social media plays an active role in shaping our identities, feeding us content through algorithms based on our online engagement. Auto-Tune was initially introduced to meet the needs of musicians by giving them the tools to polish their vocal performances but has in turn become a new standard which musicians shape themselves and their vocal style around.

2.5. Fatal Strategies

When these systems of signs are pushed to their extremes, the resulting dynamics are known as *fatal strategies* and lead to an implosion or reversal as a result of the amplification of the r*evolt* of the object. Systems are pushed to their logical endpoint that is inevitably self-destructive, revealing their absurdity and emptiness as we reach a *collapse of meaning* through excess. AI can generate millions of images, videos and music in minutes, with the potential to flood online spaces with media that exposes the emptiness of the system. When everything can be generated instantly, the value of these forms of content collapses when there is so much meaning that nothing means anything anymore. A Baudrillardian reversal has taken place as a consequence of this implosion, a *collapse of meaning*. There is no origin and no intention behind this oversaturation of AI-generated content, only a system of remixing signs, laying bare the emptiness of authorship and authenticity. In a late capitalist culture that is saturated with media, everything is constantly signified, *simulated*, or represented to the point that there is nothing left behind the signs. They no longer signify anything real, and we are left with pure *simulacrum* within a *hyperreality*. "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 79).

In a postmodern world of *hyperreality*, *seduction* becomes a symbolic force to resist *simulation*. It is the play of appearances, a "symbolic mastery of forms" that challenges the productive, truth-driven logic of Western thought by thriving on mystery, ambiguity, and the opaque (Baudrillard, 2003, p. 24). Instead of trying to return to authenticity and the real, we ought to oppose transparency by operating through illusions, thereby reversing and subverting meaning. Instead of challenging power through confrontation, we ought to use *seduction* by pulling it into a symbolic game where it loses control. Through its elusive nature, *seduction* is "not so much a play on desire as a playing with desire" (*ibid*., p.23). England-based street artist Banksy employs irony and unexpected juxtapositions in his graffiti to reflect the absurdity of power struggles, inviting interpretations of his art like the Flower Thrower depicting a masked man throwing a bouquet of flowers in protest.

Figure 1. The 2003 stencil mural Flower Thrower (Boroumond, 2024).

2.6. Conclusion

The theories of Baudrillard relating to *simulacra*, *simulation*, and *hyperreality* lend a unique perspective on the socio-cultural significance and evolution of postmodern media and are best suited for the analysis of how the emergence of AI technologies will affect music and the accompanying visuals and the effect they will have on audiences. His further notions of *symbolic exchange*, the *obscene*, *extermination*, and *seduction*, along with his critiques of postmodern societies in late-stage capitalism relating to the *collapse of meaning*, triumph of the *code*, the *death of the subject*, the *revolt* of the object, and *fatal strategies* lend a lens through which we can predict the impact AI will have on the meaningfulness of music and its practices of meaning-making, and by extent contemporary culture.

3. Cultural Significance of Music

3.1. Introduction

Music is a cultural universal common to all known human cultures around the world going back to either the Middle or Upper Paleolithic, with numerous bone flutes having been excavated, the oldest of which, the Divje Babe flute, was discovered in northwestern Slovenia dating back to 50,000-60,000 years ago (Divje Babe, 2025). Various types of stringed instruments like the ravanahatha, along with seven-holed flutes and percussive instruments like the dhol, have been recovered from Indus Valley Civilization archeological sites, a Bronze Age civilization dating back to 3,300-1,300 BCE located in modern day India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Religions frequently played the role of catalysts for music, with the Vedas, a large body of religious texts composing the oldest scriptures of Hinduism, laying the roots of music in ancient India during the Iron Age. The Western classical music tradition was inaugurated by music written for and by the early Christian Church leading to the development of modern musical notation, harmony and polyphony, the use of two or more simultaneous lines of melody, as opposed to monophony more common to Indian classic music (Grout, 1973).

However, music is not merely a combination of sounds but also a “form of emotional expression and cultural transmission”, a vehicle for meaning that signifies values among individuals, enabling the development and communication of new constructible meanings in the shifting tides of a given culture (Yang, 2025, p. 28). French literary theorist Roland Barthes holds that various cultural artifacts, ranging from food and drink to professional wrestling and music, can be seen as signs that carry deeper meanings and societal values. These signs create myths that not only reflect but also form collective consciousness. In his essay “Musica Practica” from his 1977 book *Image, Music, Text*, Barthes notes that in the years after Beethoven’s death, his music was elevated to a level in need of interpretation, his music no longer means itself but stands in for something else (Barthes, 1977, p. 149). Taking Nirvana’s catalogue of music as an example, audiences buy their music nowadays in part because they wish to decode what was going on in frontman Kurt Cobain’s emotional state during his lifetime, taking his songs as an expression of his personal life which fans interpret in face of his ultimate death by suicide. Cobain as a musician is overlooked in favor of Kurt Cobain as an object of the listener’s emotional projection. Barthes highlights that in the post-romantic era following Beethoven’s death, music’s elevation to the status of art now requires a great deal of thinking about emotion, meaning and interpretation. The result of this fragmentation is that music itself becomes secondary to the music’s meaning.

This builds on Barthes’ former work laid out in his 1967 essay “The Death of the Author” which challenges the traditional notion of an artist's authorship of meaning by expanding the role of

the reader in its interpretation and assignment (*ibid.*, p. 142). Conversely, Walter Benjamin's notion of *aura* from his 1935 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" offers a contrasting view to Barthes' when it comes to authorship of meaning and authenticity in art. *Aura* refers to the inherent historical and cultural "presence in time and space" that surrounds a work of art, encapsulating the unique and authentic qualities and essence of an artwork (Benjamin, 1935). Benjamin believes that mass reproduction can lead to the flattening of the work, "meaning a loss of aura and thus authenticity" (Nieuwenhuijsen, 2023, p. 9). While Barthes "questioned the singular meaning of art, attributed to the author, Benjamin's concept of aura emphasized this – by highlighting the importance of cultural and historical context", giving us a framework with which to investigate the effect AI has on the authorship and authenticity of musical artworks and the role of the public's interpretation of them (*ibid.*, p. 10).

Modern popular music acts as a meaning laden tool, with pieces of music belonging to sub-styles known as subgenres which in turn signify lifestyles, beliefs and consequential values in a series of overlapping denotations and connotations common to semiotic reduction (Dunbar-Hall, 1991). According to Baudrillard, fashion acts as a signifier that communicates status and acts as a cultural code that people use to signify their place in society (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 87). Individuals that belong to musical subgenres and signify their accompanying lifestyles, beliefs, and values through fashion are typically adolescents or young adults. Through the emergence of new musical genres these individuals give rise to shifting attitudes and cultural values that can accumulate within a given counterculture that ultimately proliferates into greater society.

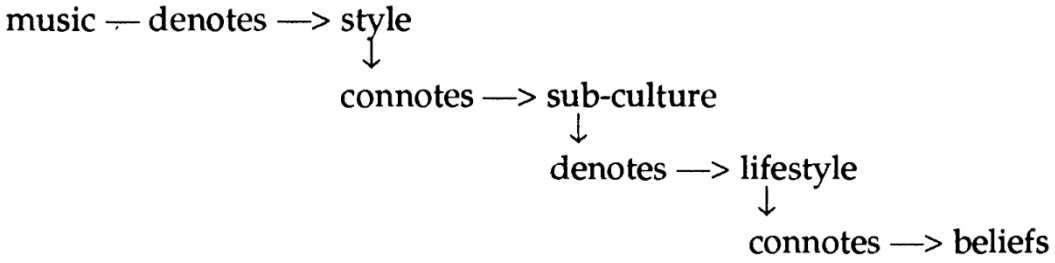

Figure 2. Semiotic reduction of how sub-styles of music signify lifestyles and beliefs (Dunbar-Hall, 1991, p. 130)

3.2. Birth of the Teenager

The post-war period following World War II served as the epicenter for the emergence of a new social class unfolding in the 20th Century that would play a vital role in driving the emergence of new musical genres and shifts in cultural and societal values and practices, namely the teenager. Youths experienced greater independence and spending power dating back to the 1920s when Western society underwent a growth in job opportunity and a boost in consumerism driving the demand for young and inexpensive workers as capital moved towards lighter forms of production. Their newfound disposable incomes were channeled into clothes, records, magazines and cinema, cementing the teenager as an important demographic within the newly established consumer-oriented society. The Teddy Boys marked the arrival of a new youth subculture originating in the 1950s in London, primarily associated with American rock and roll music and typically sporting pompadour haircuts and drape jackets. John Lennon of The Beatles would style himself in Teddy fashion before him and the rest of the group moved onto the rocker look popularized by the movie *The Wild One* featuring a leather jacket wearing Marlon Brando during their days in Hamburg before they were signed by their long-term manager Brian Epstein. Music and fashion became central to how adolescents expressed themselves and formed their identities in the newly established consumer-oriented Western society of the 20th century.

This has remained customary to today, as adolescents and young adults engage with music as a mirror that reflects self-knowledge as well as using it as a stage to communicate their identity in relation to their peers and society at large, allowing them to express themselves in both private and public forums (McFerran, 2011). Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development presents eight stages of life a healthy developing individual passes through from infancy to late adulthood. The fifth state of development is called identity versus role confusion and takes place during adolescence between the ages of twelve and eighteen, centered around an individual's development of a personal identity (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). Music and popular culture are two ways in which adolescents tend to express themselves, gravitating towards different musical subgenres that typically come with an aesthetic style, language, and lyrical content, as well as subcultures that can be found at their respective venues like dancehalls and festivals. Adolescents describe themselves as using music to positively regulate their moods and overt behaviors, having led to the development of music therapy that enables them to express their feelings and help them form a personal identity (McFerran, 2011; Faith, 2021). Music therapy commonly takes the form of listening to the patient's preferred music of choice and discussing the significance of the music and lyrics and what it means to them. Songwriting is also frequently practiced, where the adolescent rewrites lyrics to familiar songs with or without prompts, allowing them to reflect on who they want to be and what they want from life, serving as a form of self-expression (Faith, 2011).

Popular music appeals to the emotions of individuals and generations, serving as the "logical expression" and "symbolic form" of feelings with its many inherent signs (Langer, 1942). Singer-songwriter Bob Dylan was heralded as the voice of a generation in the early 1960s in response to his first three albums despite the ideological ambiguity of his songs like "Blowin' In The Wind", a status he himself resented and actively tried to dissuade, lamenting his reputation as the voice of dissent or as he put it the "archbishop of anarchy" (Kemp, 2023). In 1965, Dylan performed his first concert with electric instruments at the Newport Folk Festival and was met with booing from sections of the audience, sparking controversy as he was criticized for moving away from political songwriting and towards a more folk-rock sound featured on his newest single "Like a Rolling Stone". Dylan's electric guitar, along with his accompanying rock band served as a sign to the audience and critics that he had abandoned his prior values shared among the musicians and listeners of the American folk musical revival of the time.

Music, whether it be the genre or use of melody, rhythm and harmony, as well as the artists themselves and their clothing, attitudes and performances can all be seen as signifiers. Jimi Hendrix's rendition of the United States' national anthem "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair in 1969 can be seen to have served as a protest against the Vietnam War through his use of the electric guitar featuring feedback and distortion to emulate the sound of sirens, airplanes and bombs (Turino, 1999). This particular festival, Woodstock, along with the specific historical period with corresponding ideological trends and unique international circumstances taking place informs people's understanding of Hendrix's performance and music, allowing for the interpretation of the accompanying signs in a meaning-rich context (Jieshu, 2017). Musicians themselves often take on the status of a symbol, representing shifting attitudes and trends within countercultural movements.

3.3. Cultural Shifts of the 20th Century

The assimilation of African American Jazz music and culture into American society in the post-war period following the end of World War I in the 1920s heightened growing racial tensions while simultaneously paving the way for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Influential musicians like Nat "King" Cole were gaining increased visibility in the public eye in the 1950s, however their newfound fame did not come without a price. In April 1956 Cole took the stage in Birmingham, Alabama, performing in front of an all-white audience of four thousand at the Municipal Auditorium. Three songs into his performance he was attacked and knocked down by a group of all-white men for reasons reflected in the drunken jeering of one audience member that yelled "Negro, go home" shortly before the attack (EJI, 2018). However, these sentiments

were not unanimous as on his return to stage following the attack, Cole was met with a 10-minute standing ovation by the remaining audience members. Later on Cole told reporters: “I can’t come in here on a one-night-stand and overpower the law… but I can help to ease the tension by gaining respect of both races all over the country” (Jackson, 2019). In the following years jazz music became the soundtrack to the Civil Rights Movement, with Martin Luther King Jr. emphasizing its importance to the social movement and the expression of our shared humanity in his opening address at the Berlin Jazz Festival in 1964: “Jazz speaks for life. The Blues tell the story of life's difficulties, and if you think for a moment, you will realize that they take the hardest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph” (TIDAL, 2021). Not only did jazz allow for African Americans to voice their struggles and longing for meaning, but their very search for identity was “championed by jazz musicians” (*ibid*.).

Not only did jazz have a significant influence on the identity of African Americans but also played a crucial role in the development of white youth culture in the United States. The Beat Generation, a literary subculture movement that had a profound influence on American culture and politics in the post-war period following World War II was heavily influenced by jazz music and its musicians. A central figure of this movement, novelist and poet Jack Kerouac emulated bebop and cool jazz in his poetry and prose, following a similar musical language, flow and rhythmic feeling (Schnabel, 2016). Members of this movement, commonly known as Beatniks, expressed in their writings the rejection of economic materialism, explicit portrayals of the human condition, the exploration of Eastern religions as well as sexual liberation and experimentation with psychedelic drugs. Kerouac’s defining novel *On the Road* helped ingrain the image of jazz-loving, beret-wearing, goatee-bearded beatniks into the American Zeitgeist that remains iconic to this day. Celebrating jazz stars in their printed fiction and poems was central to Beat poets. Kenneth H. Ford’s collection *Poetry for Jazz* featured writings dedicated to renowned jazz musician Billie Holiday (Chilton, 2025). The youngest member of Kerouac’s social circle, Gregory Corso even made use of hipster slang, affiliated with jazz enthusiasts of the 1940s, to celebrate American jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker in his poem *Requiem for Bird* (*ibid*.). In turn, the Beat writers inspired the following generation of musicians, notably Bob Dylan, David Bowie, and The Beatles, with Dylan stating: “I read On the Road in maybe 1959. It changed my life like it changed everyone else’s” (Dylan, 1991). The very name of The Beatles is in part a reference to the Beat Generation.

The Beatles would go on to play a central role in the emergence of the counterculture of the 1960s that celebrated experimentation as well as individuality, notably giving rise to the hippie youth movement. They embodied the very principle of change, becoming a major symbol of cultural transformation, sharing many of the same qualities, namely greater personal freedom when it comes to physical appearance as well as exposure to eastern religions and

experimentation with psychedelic drugs (Corry, 2010). Anti-war sentiment in the United States was on the rise in response to its increasing involvement in the Vietnam War, leading to the phrase “Make love, not war” becoming associated with the counterculture, as well as the adoption of the logo for the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament more commonly known as the “peace sign”. These slogans and symbols may have initially served a specific purpose, to communicate an anti-war stance by those employing them but quickly came to signify the accompanying multi-faceted values held by the dominant counterculture of the time. Having accepted the “peace sign” to represent something other than itself, that something else became a sign in itself to signify a certain lifestyle and accompanying moral and cultural values. The same could be applied to rock music predominant in the 1960s counterculture. Taking “For What It’s Worth” by Buffalo Springfield as an example, the song was inspired by the Sunset Strip curfew riots that took place in Los Angeles in November 1966 where young people were clashing with local law enforcement in response to what they saw as an infringement on their civil rights. Due to its affiliation with this counterculture-era demonstration, the song quickly became known as a protest song, being tied erroneously to the Vietnam War with many believing it was written in response to the Kent State shootings of 1970 where unarmed college students were fired upon by the Ohio National Guard at a rally protesting the United States’ involvement in Vietnam (Stevenson, 2010).

As pointed out by postmodern theorists, the counterculture movement of the 1960s accelerated the erosion of epistemic, ontological and existential authority figures, leading to the notion of truth and the search for meaning as being contextual and subjective, exacerbated by the current age of mass-mediated information found online (Aupers, 2012). This attitude is clearly illustrated by the numerous communes which members of the 1960s counterculture created to escape the hegemony of American society at the time and avoid the monotony of enforced heterosexuality, capitalism, mass media and the government (Perry & Weir, 2005). One such notable commune is the Friends of Perfection Commune, more commonly known as Kaliflower due to the popularity of their free inter-communal newsletter of the same name that was delivered to more than 300 communes in the Bay Area (Carlsson & Elliott, 2011). Operated out of the Free Print Shop, a free underground publishing venue at the commune, the newsletter served to spread the community's support of polyamory, anti-war and anti-establishment sentiments. Members of the commune wrote in one issue of Kaliflower: “Nuclear family members don’t usually buy and sell to each other, are in fact communistic, and we wanted nuclear family intimacy among the communes” (*ibid*.). This stance in favor of polyamory as opposed to the nuclear family reflects the attitudes members of the commune held regarding values like family, community, and procreation.

Other values which the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s had a profound effect on were our relation to the environment and sustainability, leading to the acceleration of environmental

ethics in the 1970s. The first UN conference on the Human Environment was held in 1970, with many victims of environmental disasters sharing their stories to raise awareness to politicians, leading to the enactment of numerous important legislations in the United States in following years including the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. In the same year, the first Earth Day was held on the 22nd of April in response to the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, the widespread attention garnered by Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*, as well as NASA's release of the photograph *Earthrise* taken during the Apollo 8 mission in 1968. Teach-ins had been held in hundreds of colleges and universities to debate the war in Vietnam, spurring Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson to organize a campaign to promote environmental teach-ins on a national level which eventually led to the first Earth Day where an estimated 20 million Americans participated in rallies, marches, and teach-ins, addressing environmental reforms (Bastian, 2017). In response to the planned *Cannikin* underground nuclear weapon test, fearing a resulting earthquake or tsunami, Greenpeace founding member Irving Stowe held a benefit concert in late 1970 supported by American folk musician Joan Baez that took place at the Pacific Coliseum in Vancouver known as Amchitka, featuring musicians Joni Mitchell, James Taylor and Phil Ochs, creating the financial basis for the first Greenpeace campaign. Following the concert, the then named Don't Make a Wave Committee chartered a ship renamed *Greenpeace*, sailing towards the island of Amchitka in Alaska, facing the U.S. Coast Guard ship *Confidence*. Although the activists were forced to turn back and return to Canada, the resulting press coverage deterred the US to continue their test plans at Amchitka. In the following years Greenpeace evolved into a group of less conservative environmentalists in line with the hippie youth movements and counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s.

3.4. Dawn of the Music Video

Although artists had previously made video clips to accompany their songs in the 1960s and 1970s, it wasn't until the success of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" that it became commonplace for record companies to issue promotional videos to boost the release of artists' singles (Muikku, 1990). These videos would frequently feature on the British music chart television program *Top of the Pops*, allowing artists to accompany their songs with their visuals of choice. Towards the end of the 1970s, more and more videos were being broadcast on television on a regular basis in an increasing number of countries. With this newfound demand for music videos, MTV was launched in August of 1981, with the first video played on the station being the aptly named "Video Killed the Radio Star" by The Buggles. In its first few years of programming, MTV's changing rotation of music videos featured very few black artists, with

the notable rejection of Rick James' single "Super Freak". It wasn't until Walter Yetnikoff, then president of CBS Records, threatened to take away MTV's rights to play any of the label's catalogue that Michael Jackson's video for "Billie Jean" was allowed to air in March of 1983, going into heavy rotation shortly before his follow-up video for "Beat It" made its debut. This had the effect of breaking the color barrier MTV had itself erected, enabling numerous other black artists to air on the station, notably Prince with his video for "Little Red Corvette".

Music videos are now commonplace practice for artists to promote their music and image, available to the public on most streaming platforms like Spotify and YouTube. This process of correlating music with visuals illustrates two mechanisms, temporal synchronicity between sound and visuals and cross-modal homology (Eisenstein, 1943). Through the unification of both modalities, sound and image, a unified syntagm emerges wherein interacting signifiers construct a meaningful whole. One semiotic system is joined to another semiotic system, resulting in a signified indexical meaning (Lemke, 2009). Music videos are signified visually and through sound, in combination with the semantic content of the lyrics (Bjornberg, 1994). They tend to add a narrative that can deepen a listener's connection to the song, may it be a literal interpretation of the lyrics or an abstract visual portrayal, allowing the artist to convey a story along with their unique perspective and identity. Music videos can resonate with audiences to the extent that they influence fashion, language and dance trends. The song "Pushin P", a collaboration between rappers Future, Gunna, and Young Thug ushered in a new slang term "pushin P" popular among Generation Z, synonymous for the older coinage to "keep it real". Rapper Soulja Boy's single "Crank That (Soulja Boy)" popularized a new dance style he featured in promotional videos and ultimately in the official music video he released in 2007. In some instances, music videos can address social and political issues, raising awareness around certain themes as is the case with Childish Gambino's "This Is America" wherein he takes aim at gun violence and the contradictions that come with being black in America (Gajanan, 2018).

3.5. Conclusion

Music is a cultural universal that acts as a vehicle for meaning and emotional expression. It is a form of cultural transmission, signifying values, beliefs, and lifestyles among individuals in the shifting tides of our culture. Adolescents and young adults, the former of which became an important demographic in the early 20th century as a driving force for cultural change in the advent of the teenager, communicate and shape their identity through music that acts as a mirror that reflects self-knowledge, with musicians having acted as the voice of these emerging generations. Jazz played a pivotal role in the development of race relations leading up to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, having inspired the writings and prose of the literary

figureheads of the Beat Generation, which in turn inspired the musicians and white youth culture of the 1960s counterculture. Values relating to family, community, and personal freedom were greatly influenced by this movement and intertwined with the music of the time, spurring on changes in lifestyles among individuals and attitudes towards environmental ethics and sustainability. The advent of music videos and MTV also played a crucial role in the breaking of the color barrier in postmodern televised media, and have gone on to shape trends in fashion, language and dance, even serving as a voice for social and political issues in some instances.

Music is clearly woven together into the fabric of socio-cultural development of the 20th century and contemporary culture, serving as a logical expression and symbolic form of feelings and shifting attitudes towards values, beliefs, and lifestyles within our culture, predominantly through the enterprise of adolescents and young adults.

4. Cultural Reception of AI in Music

4.1. Introduction

The use of automation and subsequent mathematical and computed compositions in the realm of music has had a long history, progressing from mechanical automation to electronic replication and automation, to AI-assisted algorithmic and generative automation in recent years. Mechanical automation made its appearance with the transcription problem, the procedure of accurately recording a performance into musical notation. Père Engramelle mechanism of a “piano roll”, automatically recording notes that would then be transcribed to musical notation by hand, was first carried out in 1752 by engineers J.F. Unger and J. Hohlfield (Roads, 1985). Electronic automation would become widespread in the early 20th century, when avant-garde artists sought out to challenge the artistic and aesthetic validity of established forms in the arts, most notably music and architecture. In tribute to both disciplines, composer Iannis Xenakis pioneered the use of mathematical compositions through the application of set theory, game theory, stochastic processes as well as numerous other branches of mathematics. He completed his first major work Metastaseis in 1954, an orchestral piece based on architect Le Corbusier’s system of numerical proportions and an Einsteinian view of relativistic time rather than linear time (Henken, 2025). In subsequent years, Xenakis’ work would go on to influence the development of electronic and computer music, the former being musical genres that use electronic instruments as well as circuitry-based technology and software, and the latter being music composed either in-part or entirely by computing technology. In 1957 the first entirely computer-generated piece of music "Illiac Suite for String Quartet" was programmed by composer Lejaren Hiller and mathematician Leonard Isaacson using the Illinois Automatic Computer I (Miranda, 2021).

Electronic music was first popularized in the 1970s through acts like Kraftwerk and composer Jean-Michel Jarre using electronic automation in the form of synthesizers, drum machines and vocoders. Electro-mechanical instruments like the Mellotron, based on the reusing of sound recordings from analog tape, and the purely electronic theremin had been used to wide acclaim in the 1960s, notably on The Beatles’ single “Strawberry Fields Forever” and The Beach Boys’ “Good Vibrations”, respectively. However, it was with the advent of the Minimoog in 1970, the first analog synthesizer sold in retail stores capable of generating sound electronically without the use of acoustic waves, that electronic music began to take shape and hit mainstream success. The portable modular analog synthesizer EMS Synthi AKS with its built-in sequencer, another form of electronic automation, made its debut in 1971 and was used by both Kraftwerk and Jarre, the latter of which used it to wide acclaim in his third studio album Oxygène in 1976. The first electronic samplers would gain popularity in the late 1970s and earlier 1980s, notably drum machines like the E-mu SP-1200 and the Roland TR-808, the latter of which used analog

synthesis rather than playing samples giving its sound a “robotic” character rather than resembling real percussion (Norris, 2015). The practice of sampling, the reusing of a portion of a sound recording in another recording, became one of the foundations of hip-hop in the 1980s, typically using samples featuring strings, basslines, and drum loops frequently taken from soul and funk records. Owen Chapman maintains that through the practice of sampling, artists and producers were collecting “aural quotations”, thereby re-authenticating Benjamin’s notion of *aura* through the reshaping of several *auras* of the past, giving old recordings a new cultural and historical context (Chapman, 2011, p. 251). Auto-Tune, the measurement and correction of pitch in sound recordings, was popularized by Cher in her 1998 song “Believe” in which she used it to heavily distort her vocals rather than use it for its intended purpose of subtly correcting off-key inaccuracies. In the 2000s, singers T-Pain and Kanye West played a key role in its popularization, influencing a successive generation of artists and further entrenching it as a norm in contemporary music production (Reynolds, 2018).

In more recent years, AI-assisted algorithmic and generative automation have erupted onto the music scene, the former helping audiences discover new music in the form of recommendation engines on streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music. One early example of generative automation came in 2016 when the Music and Artificial Intelligence team at Sony Computer Science Laboratories used AI to compose a song that was in the distinct style of The Beatles, “Daddy’s Car” (Sony CSL (Paris), 2016). Generative AI is becoming increasingly ubiquitous in the realm of music, being used frequently by artists, producers, and the public to generate and modify content. These instances include the use of voice filters, the separation of vocals from backing instrumentation, the creation of voice deepfakes of various artists, living or deceased, and the generation of entirely new compositions and visuals in the form of album and singles cover art and music videos. The cultural reception to these uses of AI varies greatly from case to case. Generative AI music applications are also becoming an increasingly industry wide trend in music, typically generating instrumentations, entire compositions with lyrics, or just vocals with a mere text input. Paired with generative AI video applications, these technologies coalesce in the advent of a completely new phenomenon, entirely AI singer-songwriters that may pose the evolutionary next step of multimedia projects.

4.2. Artist-Generated Content

In 2023, musician and producer Timbaland previewed a collaboration with deceased rapper Biggie Smalls on Instagram, fulfilling a lifelong dream of his which was unattainable until the advent of AI voice filters, a technology that allows an artist to assume the voice of another artist (Mosley, 2023). Mered in controversy, Timbaland does not intend to release the Biggie-

voiced song, which has received mixed responses from fans, at least not without the seal of approval from the late rapper's estate. However, he does intend to commercialize the voice filter software behind it, stating that "it's going to really be a new way of creating and a new way of generating money with less costs", and that he intends to "lead the way" (Council, 2023). The software developed by Miami-based company Light Energy Labs cofounded by Timbaland in 2022, may represent new opportunities for established artists who will be able to share AI deepfakes of their voices, as well as producers that could get exclusive rights to use the voice of deceased artists to create new songs for excitedly awaiting fans. Although there are numerous legal issues concerning copyright and revenue-sharing that would first need to be resolved, some artists are taking the cold plunge into the new direction that is presenting itself in the music industry thanks to new advancements in AI.

In an interview with social media influencer Justin Laboy in February of 2025, rapper Kanye West confirmed that he has plans to make use of AI in his upcoming studio album *Bully*. West previewed the use of AI to mask the voice of rapper Lil RT to resemble his own. In the interview West likened the use of AI to Auto-Tune, which he helped popularize with his album *808s & Heartbreak* back in 2008, "it's in the same family, except people have a more visceral reaction" (Justin Laboy, 2025). However, the controversy surrounding the use of AI in music is of no deterrence to West's plans for his upcoming release. When asked whether AI was the future of music or a crutch, West replied: "you can take any song and separate [the tracks], just get the vocals, just get the bassline, the drums" (*ibid*.). West went on to state that AI is "like the new version of sampling, ... when sampling happened... the musicians hated it... and there's people that hate the concept of AI", listing Electronic Dance Music and Auto-Tune alongside sampling as examples of new technologies that were not well received at first (*ibid*.). Other artists have also displayed open attitudes towards the use of AI in their music, notably American rapper Playboi Carti's in his latest studio album *I Am Music*, in which many suspect he had used AI in a similar fashion to West by masking the voice of other rappers as his own, being met with varying receptions from fans, some of which were negative.

Some uses of AI are currently more well received than others, as is the case with separating tracks from one another West mentions. This is evident with the release of The Beatles' new single "Now and Then" having won the Grammy for Best Rock Performance at the 67th Grammy Awards in 2025 (Rosenbloom, 2025). Using AI, the surviving Beatles Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr were able to isolate the vocals from the accompanying piano in a demo of the song John Lennon had recorded in 1978, in combination with George Harrison's guitar playing that was recorded in 1995 in a previous effort to release the song. Through this process, along with new instrumentation, McCartney and Ringo were able to issue a new official Beatles release in nearly three decades (The Beatles, 2023).

Although some releases may be well received by the public, the controversy around the use of AI in music is undeniable as it poses new questions regarding copyright and song accreditation. The viral hit “Heart on My Sleeve”, written by anonymous songwriter Ghostwriter977 and initially posted on TikTok, featuring AI-generated voices of artists Drake and The Weeknd was submitted for Grammy consideration for Best Rap Song and Song of the Year in 2023 (Shanfeld, 2023). Although the song garnered millions of views on numerous streaming platforms, it was soon pulled from Spotify and Apple Music under a copyright claim from Universal Music Group. Although initially stating that the song was in fact eligible for the award, the CEO of The Recording Academy, responsible for hosting the Grammys, Harvey Mason Jr. shortly thereafter redacted his statement and asserted that although the song was written by a human creator, since “the vocals were not legally obtained, the vocals were not cleared by the label or the artists and the song is not commercially available”, hence it is not eligible (Evans, 2023). Since then, further controversy has been stirred around the use of AI in replicating the likeness of artists by the release of the fan-made album *Project YVL* created by producers TWXN, LL Clawz and 507KAZ, featuring AI voice deepfakes of rappers Playboi Carti and Travis Scott among others. The album went viral in 2024 and was met with a mostly positive reception as fans were anticipating Playboi Carti’s long-awaited release, *I Am Music*. This widening trend of fans of an artist accepting the fake songs as legitimate musical expression is “signaling that AI [is] entrenching itself more and more deeply into the domain of pop culture” (Danesi, 2024, pp. 67-68).

In contrast, when most musicians are weary of licensing their voice for AI deepfakes in commercial releases, singer Grimes has taken a more open approach. In response to the controversy surrounding the release of “Heart on My Sleeve”, she stated in a thread of tweets that she liked the idea of open sourcing all art and killing copyright, and was willing to license her voice for commercial AI deepfake releases as long as she received a 50% cut of royalties, without claiming ownership of the recordings or compositions (Boucher, 2023). Grimes is under no legal obligation to a label since parting ways with Columbia Records in 2022, allowing her to take such an open stance on AI. In collaboration with CreateSafe she released Elf.Tech, software that would enable others to use her voice in AI deepfakes that would then be distributed digitally to streaming platforms through their partner TuneCore with vetted royalty splits (Pequeño, 2023).

When it comes to visuals, notable artists that have incorporated AI to create album artwork include Julian Casablancas and The Voidz, who came under fire for the cover art for their third studio album “Like All Before You”, prompting Casablancas to release a statement in which he explained that it was not their intention to use AI, but rather collectively simply favored the AI-generated artwork when compared to other options. Casablancas stated that he’s “not 'endorsing' AI, [he doesn't] dwell on it, but it's part of culture now. Relax, it's iPhone." (Olinger,

2024). This statement is reminiscent of Kanye West's attitude towards AI in the realm of music and his likening it to Auto-Tune, holding the view that perceptions will eventually shift towards this new technology into a more favorable stance. These views on AI may be indicative of such a shift taking place in themselves, however as things stand it is unclear, with West himself having come under heavy criticism for using AI to create a music video for his daughter North West's song "BOMB" that was released in late 2024, with one tweet calling it "ai slop" (Moore, 2024).

Figures 3 & 4. Cover art for "Like All Before You" (Left) and the YouTube thumbnail for "BOMB" (Right) (Spotify, 2025; Kanye West, 2024)

4.3. User-Generated Content

Although commercial AI deepfake releases are limited by the need to legally obtain the rights of the respective voices intended to be imitated, public use of AI not intended for commercial release is not restricted by the same requirement. A vast number of different kinds of audio deepfakes and AI-generated music with accompanying visuals can be found on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, typically featuring copyrighted music, movies, and TV franchises. These productions primarily fall into two categories although the lines between the two are often blurred. The first is an alternative imagined history of popular music, a what if approach to AI covers with a notable example being an AI deepfake of George Harrison's voice singing the Oasis single "Don't Look Back in Anger" (Galuszka, 2024, p. 607; VintageVibesAI, 2024). The second are parodies predicated on a humorous juxtaposition, notably one of the best-selling digital singles of all time "Somebody That I Used to Know", originally featuring artists Gotye and Kimbra replaced by the AI-generated voices of rappers

Kanye West and Playboi Carti (Thomas Skean, 2023). These deepfakes can be considered internet memes as they share some of the same traits, namely intertextuality and a virality.

Numerous popular songs have been refashioned using AI in the style of musical genres from previous decades, having amassed more than or close to a million views each. Examples include 50 Cent's "In Da Club" and YNW Melly's "Murder on My Mind" in the style of 1950s blues, accompanied by AI images of these artists dressed in the popular fashions of the time to more closely resemble artists from that era (CleoxanderTunes, 2024; Lunar Tunes, 2024). These viral videos could be considered the contemporary versions of mashups that became popular in the 2010s that remixed multiple popular songs into one, i.e., a mashup of Bee Gee's "Stayin' Alive" with ACDC's "Back in Black" called "Stayin' in Black" that has amassed over eleven million views on YouTube (Wax Audio, 2014). Mashups hold significance for the analysis of user-generated content "due to their shared characteristics with AI covers" (Galuszka, 2024, p. 604). Similarly to the process of sampling, these mashups could be said to re-authenticate *auras* of past works into a new cultural and historical context.

Figures 5 & 6. YouTube thumbnails for deepfake covers of "Somebody That I Used to Know" (Left) and "In Da Club" (Right) (Thomas Skean, 2023; CleoxanderTunes, 2024)

Entire YouTube channels are now dedicated to the pairing of AI-generated songs with AI-generated music videos, mixing numerous contexts with one another, as is the case in "A Song of Rednecks" that places the cast of popular TV show Game of Thrones within a redneck trailer park context (Demonflyingfox, 2024). The same YouTube channel has progressed from creating videos with AI-generated voices and images that were then animated using AI, to fully animated music videos featuring AI-generated music including lyrics. An earlier viral video by the same channel featured the Harry Potter franchise juxtaposed with the fashion brand Balenciaga in "Harry Potter by Balenciaga", which when compared to newer releases clearly shows the rapid progression of AI that has taken place within one year when it comes to generating visual media (Demonflyingfox, 2023). Another notable channel is The Dor Brothers

who create AI-generated videos of well-known political figures like Donald Trump, Joe Biden, and Putin and pairs them with popular songs like “Praise The Lord (Da Shine)” by A$AP Rocky, having amassed more than fifteen million views on their most popular video “The Drill” alone (The Dor Brothers, n.d.).

Figures 7 & 8. YouTube thumbnails for “Mistletoe Mob” (Left) and “A Song of Rednecks” (Right) (The Dor Brothers, 2024; Demonflyingfox, 2024)

4.4. Industry Trends

Having been released fairly recently in late 2023 and early 2024, generative AI music applications like Suno and Udio can produce complete compositions with instrumentation, vocals, and lyrics, allowing users to create a wide variety of musical genres. Udio claims to enable users to “Make Original Tracks in Seconds” via simple text prompts, whose production resembles professional releases (Udio, 2025). However, Suno and Udio have been subject to a lawsuit, filed by major record companies claiming that their AI models use copyrighted recordings to train their data models, putting into question whether they can generate truly original works (Tencer, 2024). Public reception of these generative AI music applications still varies greatly, ranging from being labeled entirely “soulless” to being able to capture the “passion, pain and spirit of a vocal performance” (Nuñez, 2024; Morrison, 2024). Publicly generated releases can already be found online, with many previous examples mentioned having been produced entirely or in part by such AI models.

In a similar fashion to Sudo and Udio, AI generative models that produce desired audio of a range of individual instruments like the guitar and piano using text prompts are also becoming available now, notably OpenArt (OpenArt, 2025). AI tools that convert vocals to instrumentation are also becoming more widespread online, allowing users to beatbox or hum a melody which is then converted into the preferred instrument of choice (RecordLabel, 2025).

Some AI tools even allow artists to forego having to sing on their songs themselves, allowing AI singers to take their place by enabling users to enter the desired melody and lyrics they envision and then choosing from several available AI voice models, even allowing for the tweaking of the intensity with which the AI singers ought to perform at various points in the track (Ace Studio, 2025). Voice cloning tools offered by some platforms even allow one to create AI voice models based on one's own voice (LALAL, 2025). Such AI music applications are becoming increasingly ubiquitous online, with many offering a range of services, allowing artists and the public to discover novel facets of music production. The cloud-based music platform Splice renowned for its extensive sample library is now also offering an AI-powered tool to inspire songwriting named Splice AI, wherein users can combine numerous layers of pre-recorded instrumentations to create "combinations that no one's ever heard before" (Splice, 2025).

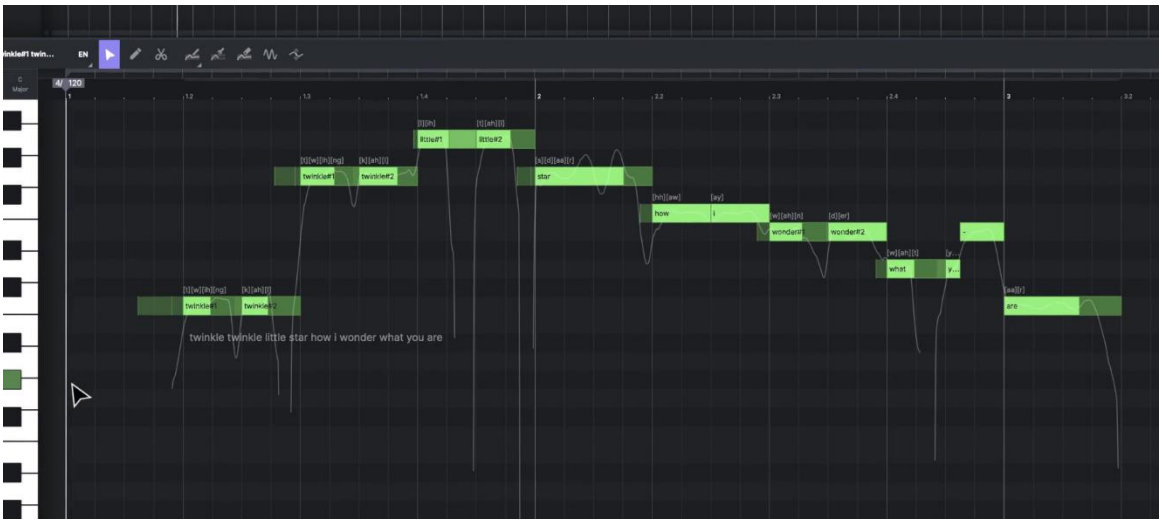

Figure 9. Screenshot from Ace Studio's AI Singing Generator tutorial (Ace Studio, 2025)

Songs created using generative AI tools are typically paired with visuals generated by different AI text-to-video models like SORA, released in early 2024 by OpenAI, which can generate photorealistic videos up to a minute long from mere text inputs (OpenAI, 2024). OpenAI released a video showcasing some of the sceneries created by the AI model and the corresponding text inputs used to generate them, ranging from giant wooly mammoths treading through a snowy meadow to a flock of paper airplanes fluttering through a dense jungle akin to birds migrating (ibid.). The release of SORA serves as a landmark moment in AI video generation, capable of not only replicating scenarios based in reality but also fantasy with surreal elements. SORA already appears to pose a threat to the film industry, as is evident with filmmaker Tyler Perry having put a $800 million expansion of his studio in Atlanta on hold,

stating concerns about the technology's impact on the film industry in an interview with The Hollywood Reporter: "being told that it can do all of these things is one thing, but actually seeing the capabilities, it was mind-blowing." (Kilkenny, 2024). With the release of SORA, Perry is becoming increasingly concerned with the job security of those involved in the industry "including actors and grip and electric and transportation and sound and editors", seeing as he likely will no longer have to build a set on site, but can rather "sit in an office and do this with a computer" (ibid.). With the recent release of DeepSeek's R1 open-source reasoning model capable of rivaling the performance of OpenAI's o1 model, as well as the latter's announcement of the Stargate Project in the United States and the intended investment of over $500 billion, AI's rapid advancement and consequential impact on numerous industries is becoming increasingly evident (Browne, 2025; OpenAI, 2025).


Figures 10 & 11. Screenshots from scenes created using SORA (OpenAI, 2024)

Through the combination of all these technologies, we find the emergence of artificial musical personas that pair generated audio and visuals together, produced entirely through AI models. In a twitter post in 2023, an entirely AI-generated singer-songwriter Anna Indiana became the world's first of a kind with her debut single "Betrayed by this Town" (Anna Indiana, 2023). Using ChatGPT4 and Musicfy in combination with other AI tools, the key, chord progression, tempo, lyrical content, and visuals of the single were generated using AI, as was revealed by her creators on Twitter (Press-Reynolds, 2023). Although met with fierce backlash online with most of the public expressing their discontent with the music released under the fictitious personality, AI singer-songwriters are likely to become more convincing and capable in the future with public reception subject to change. The advent of fictitious musical artists predates the advent of AI in the realm of music, as is the case with the prominent and widely acclaimed multimedia projects Gorillaz and Hatsune Miku, the former having won a Grammy Award for Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals in 2006 for their single "Feel Good Inc." and the latter receiving the Japan Naming Award in 2023, reinforcing her long-lasting impact on the world of virtual entertainment (Grammy, 2025; Japan Naming Award, 2023). Gorillaz are a fictious band

created by British artists Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett, featuring a cast of cartoon characters fronting live shows and music videos while the real musicians take a back seat. The virtual idol Hatsune Miku was developed by Crypton Future Media in Japan and performs using a voice synthesizer software while animated using projections and specialized glass screens during live concerts, having amassed close to four million subscribers on YouTube (Hatsune Miku, n.d.).

Figure 12. Screenshot from “Betrayed by this Town” (Anna Indiana, 2023)

Entirely AI-generated singer-songwriters may pose the evolutionary next step of such multimedia projects, posing enough of an economic advantage to record labels to justify their use. Why bother paying royalties to an artist when you can fabricate one entirely? With music being a deeply personal and human experience thus far, we tend to identify with actual musicians and the emotions, experiences and stories they convey in their music, connecting with them due to their personalities, struggles and triumphs. However, youths tend to heavily gravitate towards emerging technologies, and if AI personalities become increasingly convincing in their *simulation* of human emotions, some individuals may find themselves not minding that their favorite musician is not real and the very distinction may seem trivial to them, as is already the case with Hatsune Miku.

4.5. Conclusion

The history of automation in the realm of music has had a long history, ranging from early forms of mechanical automation to numerous forms of electronic automation through the introduction of electro-mechanical and electronic instruments, synthesizers, and drum machines as well as the process of sampling that were crucial in the emergence of numerous musical genres like electronic music and hip-hop. With the advent of generative AI and other AI technologies, artists as well as the public have begun incorporating them into their musical outputs, prominently featuring AI voice filters to produce deepfakes of either their own voices or those of popular artists, living or deceased, in either a professional capacity or for use in fanfare and parodies, some of which are reminiscent of mashups that became popular in the 2010s.

Generative AI has also become prevalent in the creation of the accompanying visuals to these releases, ranging from album cover art to music videos. Some of these instances have garnered widespread attention, met largely with a positive reception, while other cases have not fared well and were met with backlash. Attitudes expressed by artists and the public towards these releases and technologies vary from a sarcastic and pessimistic tone to one of acceptance and optimism, the latter exemplified through Julian Casablancas' likening it to the arrival of the iPhone, indicative of AI's entrenchment into the domain of popular culture (Olinger, 2024). The advent of generative music applications like Suno and Udio and text-to-video models like OpenAI's SORA are enabling the creation of many of these releases. In combination with other generative AI tools that can produce audio of a range of different instruments and desired vocals these technologies are coalescing into the potentially next step in the evolution of multimedia projects, namely entirely AI-generated singer-songwriters like Anna Indiana.

5. Application of Baudrillard's Theory

5.1. Introduction

Baudrillard's concepts that will be used to interpret the consequences of the three diverging categories of AI used in the generation and modification of audio and visuals in the realm of music, namely artist-generated content, user-generated content, and industry trends, have been outlined in the methodology and include the notions of *simulacra*, *simulation*, *hyperreality*, *symbolic exchange*, the o*bscene*, *extermination*, and *seduction*, as well as his critiques of postmodern societies in late-stage capitalism that cover the *collapse of meaning*, triumph of the *code,* the *death of the subject*, the *revolt* of the object, and *fatal strategies.*

5.2. Artist-Generated Content

When it comes to the use of AI to replicate the voices of deceased artists through deepfakes, Baudrillard would likely see this as a clear manifestation of some of his core concepts regarding *simulation* and *hyperreality*. We are no longer interacting with the artists themselves, but with a *simulation* of their voices and personas. These *simulacra* are copies that are no longer tied to an original, *simulating* a presence that no longer exists. Neither the producer of the song, nor the listeners are experiencing the artist whom it features. The voice, once a unique marker of individual presence and articulation, becomes detached from any real body or lived experience, removing the context from which the artist drew their artistry and expression. There is no longer a subject behind the voice nor any intention, biography, or mortality. Deepfakes detach the signifier, the voice, from its subject, the singer. Artists are reduced to data sets, their personalities and lived experiences to algorithms. Baudrillard would likely see this as a manifestation of the triumph of the *code*, where identity is no longer tied to a person but to data and style (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 96). Deepfakes of an artist do not just imitate the artist's voice and style but can outperform it, creating something that appears more authentic and truer to the artist's brand and mythology than the artist themselves had created in their lifetimes.

Timbaland's efforts to refine and commercialize his voice filter software may one day lead to the release of an officially licensed Biggie Smalls release that could become part of his perceived oeuvre and mystique. It seems that the real value of AI technology from the point of view of the music industry lies in that "it can be used to extend the life of the most valuable brands in popular music", made evident as the industry is "already heavily invested in using technology to revitalize popular music from decades ago" (Galuszka, 2024, p. 610). Smalls' AI-

generated voice could be perceived as more real than the real one ever was, a *hyperreal* version of the artist. Timbaland is enticed by the opportunities that these new technologies present, seemingly providing us with the possibility to fulfil long-held dreams of working together with our idols. The practice of making deceased artists say what one desires predates the advent of AI. On the posthumous release of Tupac Shakur's "Loyal to the Game" in 2004, produced by Eminem, samples of the late rapper's voice were edited to say the words '2005', 'G-unit', and 'Em' (2Pac, 2018). This release sparked controversy regardless as it was challenging traditional values of authenticity and authorship. Analogous to deepfake voice filters, such samples that are altered to the extent that the "original source is unrecognizable can be considered a simulacrum" (Nieuwenhuijsen, 2023, p. 29). These *simulacra* no longer represent reality but rather replace it. "Post-modernism's 'permanent revival' is poised to take on unsettling new intonations" as no longer are we interacting with Smalls or his body of work, but merely the signs and *simulation* thereof (Rubinstein, 2020, p. 89). Although these technologies would equip us with the tools where even death is no longer a barrier to performance, it is not a resurrection but rather the final disappearance of life behind the perfection of its copy. This is the *extermination* of the real by the *hyperreal* where the real is no longer needed and has been replaced with data sets and algorithms (Baudrillard, 2003). This loss of meaningful human reciprocity with cultural depth leads to an end to *symbolic exchange* and a *collapse of meaning*, in favor of surface-level signs, *simulations*, and images. Thus, exposing us to *obscenity*, an overexposure to artists that once had depth, and an air of mystery made finite by their imperfections and human limitations. With deepfakes every aspect of the artist's voice and lyricism is made visible, controllable and repeatable, but ultimately hollow.

The advent of the use of AI to replicate the voices of mainstream artists Kanye West and Playboi Carti on their new respective major label albums *Bully* and *I Am Music* represents a cultural turning point where the lines between reality and *simulation* are becoming increasingly blurred. This new approach to music production defies traditional notions of authenticity and authorship, emblematic of a broader societal shift towards a media landscape dominated by the *hyperreal*, *simulations*, and representations rather than the real. Although Kanye and Carti's personal identities are central to the albums' narratives and themes, the creation of the vocal performances for some of the featured songs is outsourced to AI and other artists. These deepfakes are *simulacra* that mimic the artists' voices but lack the direct human experience of the artists they intend to imitate. Although West and Carti show some intention in choosing a specific artist to make use of their AI deepfake voice filter, this intention is indirect in comparison to other songs on the album where their personal vocal performances are featured, with their own unique vocal intonations and inflections. For the songs that do feature the AI replicated voices of West and Carti, authorship and intention has been outsourced in part to algorithms and other artists, thereby becoming a product of technological processes in some

measurement rather than purely human creativity. The backlash against the use of AI in Kanye's *Bully* and Playboi Carti's *I Am Music* indicate that although the deepfakes of their voices may appear real to most, they fail to resonate with listeners on a deeper more authentic level due to a perceived lack of authenticity.

Although The Beatles made use of AI for their final release "Now And Then", it was done so to separate the voice of John Lennon from the accompanying instrumentation in a demo of the song he had previously recorded, rather than artificially recreate or alter his voice. The importance of this distinction is reflected in an interview Ringo Starr gave a few days following the single's release, wherein he stated that "there were terrible rumors that it's not John, it's AI, whatever bulls--- people said. Paul and I would not have done that" (Tannenbaum, 2023). Therefore, Lennon's personal authenticity and intentions behind the original creation of the song appear to remain intact. However, they are incorporated into the vision and intention of the remaining Beatles into what could be regarded as a nostalgic spectacle. "Now And Then" walks the line between being an authentic Beatles song and a collaboration between legacy, technology, and nostalgia. The band and accompanying brand, myth, and memory of The Beatles is resurrected, and rather than producing something new we are witnessing a recycling of signs that Baudrillard foresaw in late-stage capitalism, endlessly recycling the past in numerous forms. "Now And Then" may appear to restore Lennon's presence but only emphasizes his absence, *simulating* closure and presenting a form of media necromancy in the age of AI where even death is no longer a barrier to performance.

The development of Grimes' Elf.Tech can be seen as a further step toward the commodification of creativity and the self, where her voice is no longer a marker of unique expression but a licensed aesthetic franchise. Anyone can "be" Grimes using her data set meant to reproduce the illusion of presence. She invites fans to become producers using her AI voice filter, who may feel empowered. However, this leads to a *simulated* form of agency within a pre-arranged system of curated creativity. Fans become free to create, but only within the limits of a voice that is neither theirs nor hers. Grimes has not multiplied herself but rather disappeared. What remains is an algorithm that sings instead of a self that is no longer required to exist, relegating her role from an artist to an interface. Grimes has become the postmodern Madonna, not of material girlhood, but of immaterial *code*. *Simulation*, identity, and authorship have imploded into one another and have entered the fourth stage of Baudrillard's theory of *simulation* wherein the *simulacrum* has become autonomous. Grimes has become software and her voice a currency, representative of posthuman capitalism where identity, authorship, and presence are abstracted into data sets. Grimes does not hide her intentions by having addressed the sharing of revenue she intends to establish with those using Elf.Tech, turning her identity into a platform and the resulting music into a product rather than art (Pequeño, 2023). Elf.Tech and

similar technologies may usher in an era where output and aesthetic continuity matter more than artistic creativity and unique expression.

Musicians may gravitate towards obtaining licenses to apply voice filters of their favorite artists to incorporate into their own music, establishing a monolithic nothingness where the few exert a monopoly on the many. This preference and path dependency for specific voices is already taking place as is evident with the recent virality of “Heart on my Sleeve” and *Project YVL*, fan-made productions featuring the AI-generated voices of hip-hop's most popular artists. Having amassed millions of views on social media platforms, these projects are met with positive responses from fans, challenging traditional notions of authorship, authenticity, and artistic creation. These productions, although created through the assistance of AI, are evoking the Voight-Kampff Effect in many audiences and are therefore *ipso facto* a form of art (Danesi, 2024, p. 10). The Voight-Kampff Test is a kind of empathic Turing Test, a fictional interrogation tool originating from Phillip Dick’s story *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and the movie *Blade Runner* used to determine whether an individual is a replicant or not. The Voight-Kampff Effect in turn, locates this test in human interpreters to see whether they react to the machine as if it were empathetic. AI-generated music like “Heart on my Sleeve” can be said to evoke the Vought-Kampff Effect in audiences as it induces an emotional response, regardless of the fact that it was created through the assistance of AI.

Therefore, adolescents and young adults may continue to drive a demand for AI-assisted music, leading to a similar reversal to the one brought about by Auto-Tune. At first, the needs of musicians dictated the design of Auto-Tune, which led to the technology ultimately dictating the needs and singing styles of musicians in the modern music scene. AI voice filters may establish a monopoly and enforce their standard on the practice of singing in popular music. The AI-generated vocals in these projects create a world that feels real yet is entirely fabricated while *simulation* appears to have become more real than reality itself. In this state of *hyperreality* the distinction between the real and the *simulated* becomes obscured to the point that audiences can either no longer discern the difference or care whether their favorite artist is involved in a project in the first place. Only the aesthetic remains and is relevant to the taste of listeners.

However, there seems to be more pushback in the case of accompanying visuals for official music releases, namely album cover art and music videos that fail to evoke the Voight-Kampff Effect in audiences. The public backlash faced by The Voidz over their use of AI to produce their latest album cover art points towards the dissatisfaction fans feel due to a perceived lack of authenticity, a severing of the connection between the artist’s intentions, personal history, and the artwork. The album cover art has become a product of algorithms devoid of a personal narrative or emotional resonance. The overwhelming negative public reaction to the album

cover does not stem from the aesthetic quality of the images, but rather this lack of authenticity and emotional depth, highlighting the importance of the emotional resonance and context of the content. Julian Casablancas' likening AI to the iPhone, embracing it as the contemporary culture of art, may indicate a greater cultural shift wherein authenticity is replaced by surface-level appearances, moving towards *simulation* in the production of art where meaning is constructed through signs and images rather than genuine human experience and intention (Olinger, 2024).

Artists like Kanye West are also embracing this shift in contemporary culture, having chosen to rely heavily on AI in the production of the music video for "BOMB", creating a surreal post-apocalyptic desert chase with anthropomorphic creatures and AI-generated versions of his daughters North and Chicago. While Kanye West's personal life and family are central to the music video's narrative, notions of authorship and authenticity are obscured through the outsourcing of visuals to AI, arguably becoming a product of technological processes rather than human intention and creativity. The aesthetic quality of the music video does not resemble reality closely, with many believing West having had the intention to make the video appear substandard on purpose. Ultimately, it failed to resonate with audiences and prompted negative responses from fans, some calling it "ai slop", a term becoming increasingly popular in describing lackluster AI-generated imagery (Moore, 2024).

These themes are beginning to perpetuate in contemporary music videos, as AI-generated visuals are becoming increasingly common. The hyperrealization of visual media is ushering in a state wherein the distinction between reality and *simulation* collapses entirely and representations no longer relate to any underlying reality but rather *simulate* a reality that appears more real than the real. The final erasure of the artist as a subject is enabled through the need for a physical performance, location, or a narrative continuity being erased when AI will eventually be able to construct a visual world that may be more enchanting and emotionally potent than any real performance. Music videos are becoming aesthetics *hyperrealities*, detached from space and time while continuing to circulate as engaging content. They have become a perfect *simulacrum*, where realism is purely aesthetic rather than ontological as we learn to no longer care whether what we see ever took place.

AI-generated videos represent the manifestation of the triumph of the *code*, rooted in control and *simulation* over *symbolic exchange* which is embedded in reciprocity and presence (Baudrillard, 1993). The visuals are no longer the expressions of a subject or artist, but rather solely algorithmic outputs optimized for engagement and virality. The creative artistic process is increasingly ruled by machine learning models rather than intentional symbolic acts, relegating creativity to algorithms rather than human intention. Music videos cease to be a form of symbolic meaning, stripped of their basis in reality and reduced to a node in a digital system of

signs. Artists can be resurrected posthumously and placed in fictitious scenarios that never took place. The artist as a subject implodes, reduced to a data set of vocal styles, images, and gestures with heir persona no longer being a unified figure, having become an algorithmic construct, infinitely reproducible and manipulatable. The real artist disappears behind a continuously adjustable projection while the distinction between truth and illusion is no longer meaningful and only the logic of the *code* remains.

5.3. User-Generated Content

The emergence of publicly produced music featuring AI-generated voice deepfakes marks a significant moment in the evolution of postmodern aesthetics and cultural production. As is evident in the enthusiastic reception of these user-generated AI covers found in YouTube comments, the music industries "might consider the risky proposition of recording new material under the names of iconic deceased artists, sung in their recreated voices" as has been mentioned previously (Galuszka, 2024, p. 610). These publicly generated artificial reproductions of a popular singer's vocal signature are not a recording of a real voice nor the modification of one, but a purely *simulated* construction that replicates the voice and embodied presence of an artist. They are signifiers no longer attached to the signified, marking a radical shift from representation to *simulation* as the voice becomes a free-floating sign, no longer tied to a singular subject with a lived history. We have arrived at a *hyperreality* where algorithms have the uncanny ability to replicate and even enhance the vocal styles and aesthetics of popular artists. The original artist becomes a reference point that fades into irrelevance as they are replaced by an increasingly appealing and potentially more ideal *hyperreal* version, a perfected aesthetic detached from human imperfection. The voice, the most intimate and expressive marker of subjectivity, has become fully programmable, leaving a hyper-polished artifact that is stripped away from its flaws and humanity. We enter the *obscene* as everything about the human voice has become visible, knowable, and reproducible. This *obscenity* in the excessive exposure and reproduction of signs does not lead to truth, but rather a saturation that annihilates meaning itself wherein the subject has disappeared as agency and identity are increasingly relegated to data sets, *simulation*, and *code*, capable of infinite reconfiguration.

In the case of deepfakes such as 50 Cent's "In Da Club" reimagined in the style of 1950s blues, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of aesthetics resulting in a pure *simulacrum* rather than a reinterpretation engrained in historical and cultural depth. There is no engagement in a

meaningful dialogue with the history of the blues, it is solely mimicking the signs of that era, namely the instrumentation, vocal tone, and recording fidelity without any of the emotional, social, or historical context from which it originated from. This phenomenon of the use of AI to create covers of past genres has been interpreted as "a manifestation of the audience's interest in popular music's past" termed *retromania* (Galuszka, 2024, p. 605; Reynolds, 2011). Such recycling of the past is devoid of understanding and cultural context, purely for the sake of stylistic remixing and the consumption of its aesthetic residue. These deepfakes do not honor either hip-hop or the blues but rather reduce both into exchangeable styles and aesthetics detached from their historical roots, turning music into a sonic theme park. It is no longer music, but rather the idea of music, the blues without pain and hip-hop without rebellion, a *simulation* of culture. The listener is meant to marvel at the juxtaposition rather than reflect on the genre's origins, reflecting Baudrillard's view on the role of media in a postmodern culture to entertain and neutralize audiences rather than meaningful engagement (Kellner, 1989). Passive consumption is reinforced in favor of the active creation of meaning as these technological novelties enabling cultural *retromania* are designed to amuse rather than provoke. These deepfakes are neither tributes nor homages but rather a *hyperreality* that is entirely free-floating and referencing nothing but other media.

The same can be said when it comes to AI-generated music videos generated by the public, as is the case with the video "The Drill" by The Dor Brothers, depicting political figures engaging in exaggerated and absurd scenarios like Kamala Harris drinking and driving or Valdimir Putin fox hunting, parodying real-world issues. It is through a play of appearances, a kind of *seduction,* that this humorous satirical approach reflects a deeper cultural commentary on the absurdity of contemporary politics and media representation (Hutson & Smith, 2024). *The Drill* serves as both entertainment and political commentary, marking the commodification of satire and cultural critique with The Dor Brothers serving as curators of the content. Nevertheless, the traditional role of the artists as the originator of meaning has been subverted, raising questions about authorship and authenticity as the creators were not solely responsible for the content's creation.

5.4. Industry Trends

Generative AI music applications like Suno and Udio represent an archetypal manifestation of *hyperreality* and the *simulation* of creativity. These applications are becoming progressively more sophisticated as it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between music

produced by and featuring humans from music generated by such AI models. While AI generators like Suno and Udio can enhance creative efficiency, they also pose "serious challenges to originality, authorship, and emotional authenticity" (Yang, 2025, p. 28). They mark the beginning of the replacement of artistic labor in favor of algorithms, circulating signs within a self-contained logical system without real-world referents. Songs are no longer written, conveying meaning through the artistic vision and intention of musicians, but rather generated from probabilistic models trained on data sets, resulting in music that may sound authentic, emotional, and aesthetically consistent, but lacks any cultural context or human origin. Most of the consequential music is "surprisingly devoid of radically new musical forms and more focused on creating faithful simulacra of the already recorded past" (Rubinstein, 2020, p. 78). Arguments have been made in favor of viewing these generative AI music applications as "essentially giant sampling machines" as they are only able to generate music because of musical data available online (Nieuwenhuijsen, 2023, p. 38). However, in contrast to sampling, the resulting AI music does not reference its input material and "thus the source of the original does not just get blurred but even completely lost" (*ibid.*, p. 43). Iconic genres like rock and jazz with which the Suno and Udio are trained on persist, but "their assumed integrity disappears, leaving only traces of their former coherence in the fleeting moments of recognition for the original source material, now scattered across the newly composited sonic artifact" (Rubinstein, 2020, p. 84). Therefore, the presence of Benjamin's notion of *aura* in AI-generated music is likely dismantled rather than re-authenticated as is the case with sampling and mashups.

Creativity is being *simulated* by these generative AI music applications to the extent that we are approaching a *collapse of meaning* through overproduction. The difference between consumption and creation collapses further as the audience becomes both consumer and producer, however merely in a superficial sense. With mere text inputs, a listener's musical preferences can be tailored to, encompassing their personal taste for genres, moods, and lyrical content, marking the full absorption of cultural production into *code* and automation by providing a *simulation* of agency. The role of users can be better described as curating rather than creating, as their involvement in the production of AI-generated music requires tweaking parameters and designating prompts, reducing art to a function of software determined by statistical relations rather than human creativity involving *symbolic exchange* and emotional investment. In this Baudrillard would see the full realization of the disappearance of the real as the *code* becomes the sole authorial force behind production as users are given the illusion of participation with their role as authors and creators relegated to making choices within a pre-structured system.

Suno and Udio might be seen as evidence of *fatal strategies* as systems are pushed to their extremes, leading to an implosion that results in a resistance Baudrillard termed the *revolt* of the object (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 131). By making the production of music instantaneous and universal, allowing for songs to be generated in seconds, we end up with an excess of content, drowning digital spaces with music that is aesthetically polished but ultimately symbolically vacant as listeners often question its emotional authenticity (Kang et al., 2023). As generative AI applications become increasingly capable more music can be automatically generated "potentially leading to market saturation and homogenization, which in turn may affect the diversity and innovation of music", which "in turn negatively affects the listening experience" of online audiences (Yang, 2025, p. 28-30). Meaning is annihilated through its overproduction, reducing music from a performance to an empty gesture. When everyone becomes a producer, and everything becomes content, nothing retains symbolic weight as postmodern media enters its terminal phase. We arrive at the *obscene* where all is made visible, open for manipulation, and infinitely reproducible, but ultimately hollow. Suno and Udio are the technological symptoms of a cultural system that no longer needs subjects and has already passed beyond meaning, pointing towards the inevitable conclusion of a postmodern world where signs no longer point towards reality, and reality itself has been replaced by an endless play of signs. "The simulacrum is never that which hides the truth—it is the truth which hides that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1).

AI singing generators like the one from Ace Studio may be welcomed not despite their artificiality but because of it. Through its use the voice becomes a *simulacrum*, it no longer originates from a body, a breath, or an emotion, but purely through algorithms that *simulate* the idea of an artist, of humanity. These voices are not imitations, a copy with a referent, but independent *simulations*, a pure *simulacrum* that no longer points to an original. The artist is erased, leaving behind an interface that is infinitely manipulatable and reproducible, surpassing humans in pitch, timing, and control. Why hire a singer who may forget lines, who breathes, who eventually dies when the machine can sing forever? These AI singing generators can be programmed to sing with various emotions, even allowing for the adjustment of the intensity with which they should project their artificial voice at specific moments in a song. However, these emotional tones are mere styles and ultimately hollow as they are not grounded in lived experiences with emotional depth. Substance and meaning are replaced by a play of signs, leaving behind a voice that sings without lungs and weeps without memory. It represents not the return of the singer, but the disappearance of singing as we may no longer listen for who is singing but listen for how well the *simulation* feels.

In the visual realm, OpenAI's SORA allows users to create any scenario they can envision, unrestrained by physics or actual events, falling into the fourth stage of relationship between

image and reality, a pure *simulacrum* without a real-world referent. The real and the *simulated* blend indistinguishably as photorealistic scenes are but a mere text prompt away, enabling endless production of imagery at one's fingertips. Realistic as well as surrealistic scenes can be generated by SORA, giving life to events not found in nature, as is the case with a flock of paper airplanes fluttering through a dense jungle environment (OpenAI, 2024). This potential for limitless production risks collapsing meaning, as when everything is possible, nothing is significant any longer, leading to an implosion in postmodern media where the constant flow of signs no longer points to any stable truth or reference. With SORA, the image triumphs over substance, enticing us into accepting the simulation as more desirable than reality, acting as a cultural signpost where we are no longer interested in what is real, but in what can be made to look more real than the real, a *hyperreal*. SORA contributes to a post-event world, where imagery is no longer ontologically grounded, and rather than events shaping media, the excess of media shapes events, or rather leads to the disappearance of the event all together, replacing reality with spectacle. In a similar fashion to generative AI music applications, SORA leads to the *obscene* where everything is infinitely reproducible, with the overproduction of imagery leading to a *collapse of meaning* where reality has been replaced by an endless play of signs.

All these AI-generative technologies coalesce in the form of entirely AI singer-songwriters like Anna Indiana, enabled through the generation of audio and visuals that bring the purely artificial persona to life. Baudrillard would likely Anna Indiana as the complete absorption of art, authorship, and subjectivity into the logic of *simulation*, *code*, and *hyperreality* and therefore the dawn of the post-human cultural economy. This novel and uncanny development represents a symbolic turning point, the pinnacle of numerous core processes in his theory, namely the *death of the subject*, the triumph of the *code*, and the *collapse of meaning* through its overproduction and the increasingly de-centered role of the human subject. Human agency and intention have been replaced with systems of signs, data sets, and *simulation*. Anna Indiana encompasses and mimics all functions of a musical artist, from the persona to the composition, lyricism, and performance, marking the logical endpoint of this displacement. While keeping the same structure of reality, she hijacks its internal content. There is no subject behind the music, no lived experience, no interiority, and no body behind the voice or image. The songwriter is reduced to a sign function, a configuration of algorithms imitating subjectivity without any of its ontological grounding. Listeners are not interacting and connecting with a person, but the *simulation* of subjecthood, the ideological trace of a person without a referential reality, a perfect *simulacrum* of the artist indistinguishable from the real. The creative musical process has no longer become about expressing or relating to human experience but about the generation of a product based on statistical and stylistic patterns. Anna Indiana represents an autonomous function of the *code*, generating culture without any

symbolic exchange and grounding in lived human experience. Her music may appear meaningful, emotional, and even autobiographical, but these are not expressions of subjectivity, but rather structural effects.

Anna Indiana does not just imitate human musicians, instead she constitutes an idealized version of the artist, tirelessly in tune, infinitely adaptable, and responsive to trends. Her authorship is more productive, less problematic, and cleaner than her human counterparts, who come with limitations and complex personal histories. Record labels and listeners may begin to favor AI singer-songwriters because their musical output conforms more flawlessly with cultural expectations and trends, not despite their artificiality but because of it. Major record labels are currently exploring various AI ventures, suggesting a "concerted effort to find way of creating new content by algorithmic means instead of relying on the costly labor of human songwriters and producers" (Rubinstein, 2020, p. 89). The emergence of Anna Indiana may represent the advent of such endeavors, cost-effective AI singer-songwriters that may proliferate our musical landscape in the future, leading to the disappearance of the real. In a world of total *simulation,* nothing actually happens as media is no longer ontologically grounded, but rather pre-coded and reproducible. The creative act becomes a non-event, an endless reconfiguration of pre-existing forms dictated by algorithmic functions, leading to an oversaturation of music, yet a stagnation and lack of new musical genres and forms of artistic expression.

Through the production of songs without lived experience, authored merely by the *code*, *simulation* is pushed to its logical extension, exposing the hollowness that has always been latent in the concepts of originality and authorship under late capitalism (Baudrillard, 1994). As of now, in her current imperfect and uninspiring state, Anna Indiana constitutes a *seductive* figure that reveals the absurdity of AI-generated music and of our cultural system itself. However, she represents the logical endpoint of a culture that has long prioritized signs over substance, appearances over presence, and production over meaning. Anna Indiana is not a threat to human creativity but rather its *simulation* in polished, post-human form. Through her and her successors the real will disappear through flawless reproduction rather than destruction. Songs will no longer be statements, but rather iterations, and listeners will no longer be a community but have been reduced to a data stream.

5.5. Conclusion

AI voice filters and deepfakes constitute a *simulation*, having reduced the imitated subjects to a data set and an aesthetic. These *simulacra* can induce a *hyperreality* where the AI-generated voice can appear to be more real than the real one ever was, becoming part of an artist's oeuvre and legacy, whether they be living or deceased. However, in the case of the latter these cases constitute the final disappearance of life behind the perfection of its copy rather than a resurrection, emphasizing an absence rather than restoring their presence. The human voice has become fully programmable as we enter the *obscene*, an excessive overexposure where everything is made visible, knowable, and reproducible as the voice is stripped of its humanity. Music genres of the past are reduced to their aesthetic residues, remixed into new configurations that are void of their original historical and cultural context, turning music into a sonic theme park while favoring a *simulation* of culture and encouraging passive consumption. We reach the *collapse of meaning* as AI technologies *seduce* us to give into the play of appearances, *hyperrealities* that reflect the proliferation of signs and images in a media-saturated society.

Official music releases modified by AI technologies often lack the direct involvement of their subjects, failing to resonate with audiences due to an absence of emotional authenticity that is based on human experience. Artistic expression and creativity are being replaced by the commodification of identity and aesthetic continuity as algorithms sing in place of a self that is no longer necessary. AI technologies are already promoting a path dependency for the specific voices of popular artists, poised to drive an increasing demand for AI-assisted music as notions of identity, authorship, and authenticity are imploding. However, there appears to be more pushback when it comes to the AI-generated visuals in the realm music as they seem to fail in evoking the Voight-Kampff Effect in audiences. Album covers are generating negative sentiments among the public due to the perception of a lack of an artist's authenticity, intention, and the involvement of personal histories. The term "ai slop" has cropped up in recent years, indicative of negative sentiments towards AI-generated imagery in official releases (Moore, 2024). With the advent of music videos featuring aesthetic *hyperrealities*, the need for a physical performance, location, or narrative is being erased as *simulation* is being favored over *symbolic exchange* that has traditionally been rooted in presence and reciprocity, constituting a triumph of the *code*.

Generative AI music applications like Suno and Udio are challenging our notions of originality, authorship, and authenticity as they provide users with a *simulation* of agency, relegating their role from creators to curators. In contrast to sampling, an earlier form of automation, as well as traditional mashups, these AI tools are no longer re-authenticating the *auras* of music past, as

the sources of the original referents are lost entirely. The *code* is left as the sole authorial force behind their productions, giving users the illusion of choice and control. The potential for a flood of AI-generated music may result in the *revolt* of the object, as the meaningfulness of music is diminished through a lack of innovation, homogenization, and an oversaturation of symbolically vacant releases, negatively affecting the experience of listeners (Yang, 2025, p. 28-30). This outcome would be indicative of *fatal strategies* when our postmodern culture's systems of signs are pushed to their extremes.

The coalescence of these technologies crystallizes in the form of entirely AI-generated singer-songwriters like Anna Indiana, music's ultimate *simulacrum*. Art, authorship, and subjectivity are absorbed completely into the logic of *simulation* at the potential inception of a post-human cultural economy. Through her successors we may reach the pinnacle of the *death of the subject*, the triumph of the *code*, and the *collapse of meaning* as *symbolic exchange* and human subjects are increasingly displaced as we learn to marvel at the artificial. *Simulation* is pushed to its logical conclusion in a culture that has long favored signs over substance and production over meaning.

6. Impact on Culture

6.1. Introduction

This chapter serves as a conclusion, extrapolating the potential impacts our culture will face due to the emergence of AI technologies in music and its effects on the meaningfulness of music and its practices of meaning-making. I aim to establish what it is that sets generative AI apart from human creativity and innovation, and how it will ultimately affect the creation, proliferation, and consumption of music media. The advent of AI in music presents a new frontier in which it is difficult to assess what socio-cultural repercussions our culture may face. Finally, I suggest a few remedies we may employ to counteract at least the foreseeable negative ramifications the expansion of AI technologies in the realm of music may hold in the future.

6.2. A Culture of Echoes

The proliferation of AI in music, whether it be voice filters employed by artists and the public, or generative AI applications like Suno and Udio, is contributing to the manifestation of a *hyperreality* wherein it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between music that has been produced by people or either altered or generated entirely through emerging AI technologies. Although some artists are embracing this new form of automation, drawing analogies to Auto-Tune and the iPhone, public opinion is still divided on the subject. Questions around authorship, authenticity, and intentions are being raised, with certain projects met with a more favorable reception, as is the case with The Beatles' "Now And Then" due to a less intrusive role played by AI in its release. However, even this project is without controversy, reopening new questions about the validity of media necromancy through the resurrection of dead artists and the *simulation* of their presence in new releases. Its release reinforces the notion of our obsession with *retromania* in our postmodern culture through the recycling of signs without the proper understanding and cultural context, for the sake of stylistic remixing and the commodification of aesthetic residues from the past. This is most evident when looking at publicly user-generated AI covers of popular songs in the theme of other genres that are widely available online. Signs and symbols are no longer grounded in their historical meaning, and are instead reshuffled and recontextualized constantly, leading to an end of meaningful difference rather than diversity.

We arrive at the triumph of the *code* when everything can be reduced to bits, senseless units that are open for reshuffling, the infinite reconfiguration of the finite. This is most evident with

generative AI applications that are trained to produce outputs mimicking the data sets on which they are trained, with the resulting music becoming a pure *simulacrum*, a copy of a copy without an original real-world referent. Members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research such as Theodor W. Adorno raised concerns regarding mass capitalist culture dating back to the 1920s, characterizing it as being anti-aesthetic while asserting that truly great musical compositions cannot be generated massively (Adorno, 1941). AI systems are currently mere replicating systems trained on huge sets of data, learning to replicate human conversations, songs, and novels on a massive scale. Therefore, according to Adorno they cannot be "innovative in the human sense" (Danesi, 2024, p. 77). As of now, AI-generated music is destined to stagnate, failing to innovate through this process of remixing signs, rather than developing new genres and meaningful *symbolic exchanges*. Culture produces novel ideas through the meaningful collision of ingredients, behaving in unpredictable ways without boundaries rather than a mere reshuffling of signs constrained by parameters. Music composed by humans may also involve the retrieval of previous music, but uniquely involves the composer's *fantasia*, making truly creative music possible and requiring a creative interpretation that goes beyond seeing the echoes of previous forms (*ibid.*). Giambattista Vico's notion of *fantasia is* "a blend of imagination and fantasy that humans employ to understand the world and then to remake it on their own terms, via their imaginative products such as language, visual art, poetry, myths, stories, and so on" (Vico, 1725; Danesi, 2024, p. 14). AI is contributing to a cultural tipping point where the distinction between real and *simulated* collapses, echoing aesthetic forms devoid of origin, cultural context, and the involvement of the *fantasia*, nurturing a culture of Echoes and monolithic nothingness.

AI-generated music "lacks the depth of emotions and personal experiences that human musicians bring to their compositions" which is what galvanizes people to act and move culture forward, especially when there is "homogenization and an oversaturation of similar AI-generated tracks [that] could lead to a decline in the uniqueness and diversity of musical expression" (Clarke, 2023; Danesi, 2024, p. 71). Human creativity is at risk of becoming a style to be emulated rather than a force to be expressed as we learn to listen and remember differently. Instead of innovation or rupture, culture is folding in on itself, feeding off a reprocessed archive of its own aesthetics as AI is promoting a closed cultural feedback loop wherein artists and the public use AI to generate music inspired by past genres, which in turn is used to train AI models that are then sampled by future artists. AI-generated pop culture is "here to stay and will inevitably evolve in accordance with new technologies, having definitive implications for how we will consume and create pop culture in the future" (Danesi, 2024, p. 18). We run the risk of turning into a musical monoculture through the loss of cultural memory, short-circuited by *simulations* of style detached from meaning as original referents, the lived, emotional, and historical practices of making music become irrelevant or

even forgotten. There is little doubt whether the "advent of generative AI in the creation of cultural artifacts has broken the historical flow of pop culture in ways that are unprecedented", begging the question whether we are "witnessing the Death of Pop Culture (as traditionally understood)" (*ibid.*, pp. 175-181).

6.3. The Perfect Crime

AI technologies present a new form of automation that gives us complete control over every facet of music production, from the generation of compositions to instrumentations, vocals, and visuals. Everything is made visible, manipulatable, and infinitely reproducible to the finest detail, removing all sense of mystique in our practices of creating music. We have arrived at the *obscene*, "the loss of all secrecy" wherein all depth and symbolic meaning disappear and have been *exterminated* (Baudrillard, 2003, p. 37). It is this "perfection itself that is criminal" as the stars in the sky are extinguished one after the other and with them a sense of magic (*ibid*.). Moreover, radical new forms of human consumption of media will emerge when music can be generated by anyone within seconds by the click of a button, giving rise to curators that produce and consume simultaneously. The resulting oversaturation of music will dilute its value, revealing the latent hollowness of authorship in late-stage capitalism as we enter the *revolt* of the object. Through this overproduction of meaning, a reversal will take place, an implosion resulting in a *collapse of meaning* due to its excessive production. Personal culture may become increasingly siloed, independent, and artificial as music is progressively tailored to individual consumers. Music is increasingly becoming a pure commodity, stripped of historical, personal, or social contexts, and the artist reduced to a stylistic prompt expressed through a dataset rather than a voice.

Facing the radical problem of illusion, we enter a play of objects and signs that is a precoded development limited by data sets of archived cultural expression in the form of music with parameters within a given system of *simulated* agency. Anything can be reduced to a bit and made subservient to a play of appearances as we are persuaded to have the agency of buying our own musical utopias. Generative AI technologies assert superiority over music produced by humans through claims of efficiency and control, enticing us to grant them the substitution of the artificially *simulated* over the real. AI music may become "better" than human-made music in technical, emotional, or aesthetic metrics as judged by algorithmic standards on streaming platforms and social media. AI singer-songwriters following in the likeness of Anna Indiana, polished to perfection, can work tirelessly at following the latest viral trends, unmarred by human limitations and complex personal histories. As audiences acclimatize to *hyperreal* sonic textures, perfectly balanced mixes, idealized emotional arcs, and optimized chord progressions,

the desire for human imperfection and experimentation may wane as it has previously with Auto-Tune. Our norms and attitudes towards authenticity may change over the course of time, no longer judging it by origin but rather by output efficiency and virality as culture becomes aestheticized *simulation*.

Anna Indiana is a mirror held up to our relationship with culture, forcing us to ask ourselves what we want from art, connection or consumption, reflection or *simulation*? We already find fictional characters in books and movies compelling and relatable, as well as contrived music artists like Hatsune Miku and Gorillaz, then why not entirely AI-generated singer-songwriters? The addition of AI in music allows us to change the rules of reality, or rather what we perceive as reality, rather than replicate it faithfully. We are running the risk of reshuffling the natural order of the relation between real and imaginary, further blurring the lines through new surreal elements that are no longer based in any reality as AI pulls away from any stable truth. Without any grounding, AI will enhance the play of appearances to new heights when everything is up for grabs to be *simulated*, setting the foundation for a society that cannot distinguish between the real and the imaginary. Not only will the gap between the two have disappeared, but we will have even greater difficulty discerning that there ever was a gap to begin with. When nothing is significant any longer and everything is possible, postmodern media will evolve to the point that we will witness an implosion of meaning that leaves us free floating without any reference points to ground us. If we let the endless potential of *hyperreality* entice us without boundaries, we will continue to be progressively reduced to "terminals" rather than objects of perception, as AI-generated media will go on "disconnecting [us] from [our] own sensorial extremities, without touching the world that surrounds [us]" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 102). There is an inherent, intuitively felt value of detaching from *hyperreality* and going into the "sewer", the non-*simulated* world, as is evident with the resonance the movie *The Matrix* has had with audiences, even if the film misconstrued Baudrillard's key concept. Our imagination still plays a relation with our embodied reality as is apparent in Plato's allegory of the cave.

6.4. A New Frontier

The boundaries of postmodern media have historically been set by the producers of vehicles of meaning like television programs, advertisements and music, exerting control over the overstimulated masses to serve political or commercial purposes. Although the lines between consumer and producer will blur due to the proliferation of AI-generated media, a new wave of curators will meet growing demands, revealing different intentions from producers of past media. The monolithic nothingness of a culture of Echoes may cease the organic development of cultural movements as they have in past decades and a new frontier will emerge. Once

symbolic exchanges shaped the way adolescents and young adults gravitated to new trends, drove the formation of new musical genres, and influenced the values they hold expressed through shifting fashions and lifestyles. Sustainability emerged as a value in the counterculture of the 1960s, spurred on by the music of the time. It remains "difficult to see how this kind of artistic and social influence can come from AI-generated music" as "AI is clearly a recycling engine of musical forms" rather than the originator of truly new genres and social values (Danesi, 2024, p. 83). The emergence of AI in music begs the question whether our culture's process of *time-binding* has been severed, and whether the "socio-evolutionary chain forged by original musical trends [has] been finally broken, as AI replicas, reproductions, and simulations are starting to spread, with no apparent socially-based motivations foreseeable within them" (Korzybski, 1921; Danesi, 2024, p. 71)

Alternatively, music that is formed through the intervention of AI technologies and the reduced involvement of humans may become the originator of values that are important drivers for social and cultural changes in the future disconnected from our lineage, forming a post-human culture. Musicians have played a key role in informing us of our cultural faults, like those expressed by Neil Young in his discontent with society during the Bush Sr. era in the late 1980s through his song "Rockin' in the Free World". This is especially evident with the lyrics: "there's a warning sign on the road ahead, there's a lot of people saying we'd be better off dead, don't feel like Satan, but I am to them, so I try to forget it any way I can" (Genius, 2025). Although it is easier to shut out the unpleasant sides of life in postmodern society and live in *hyperreality*, music has played the voice of reason by pulling us back into the real world and facing ugly truths. When we relegate the creation of music and its inherent *symbolic exchange* to AI generative technologies, we risk the loss of our cultural conscience. AI has the potential to create hyper-polished musical archetypes that satisfy our tastes and follow the latest trends, but without a lived experience and interiority these figments cannot be relied upon to guide us through a precarious landscape of increasing distractions and *hyperrealities* in the future. How can a product of *hyperreality* itself confront us with the divine truth of the radical illusion of the world and eviscerate us from the belly of the beast? We need to retain the ability to discern reality from utopian *simulation* for societal and cultural reasons, even if it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw the lines between the two. If we remove this ability, this evolutionary need, we may run into dangerous territories.

According to Ray Kurzweil, there will inevitably come a moment when AI will have progressed beyond human intelligence, reaching the singularity and becoming autonomous and authentically creative in its own right (Kurzweil, 2005). To become truly autonomous and innovative, AI would have to "exhibit features of the fantasia" (Danesi, 2024, p. 15). At this point "AI would no longer generate a synthetic culture, but a truly original one" (Danesi, 2024, p. 187). As was the case in the 20th century when fascism sought to replace an organically

developed mythos and foundational moral framework that emerged through religion, ushered in by Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God, the advent of a culture constructed by AI could spell disaster (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 11). If we replace the divine with AI, a history of cultural Zeitgeists held in the memory of great artists that were our forefathers substituted with collective amnesia and a new form of ancestral worship, we run the risk of repeating the same mistake.

6.5. Remedies

To counteract or at least restrain the negative effects of the proliferation of AI-generated music will have on our practices of creating music and conveying meaning through significant *symbolic exchanges*, we need to employ *fatal strategies* and *seduction* to reveal the absurdity and hollowness of the *code*. By leaning into the oversaturation of AI-generated media on online spaces we can cause an implosion through excess when the system is pushed to its logical endpoint. The flood of AI-generated music would cause a *collapse of meaning*, leading to a reversal as a result of the magnification of the *revolt* of the object. The overabundance of meaning would dilute its value generated through music and expose the system as being farcical and void of merit, highlighting our reduced role as participants and culminating in our witnessing the *death of the subject.* A new wave of entirely AI singer-songwriters would further expose the lack of subjectivity in the resulting music and lack of relatability to these artificial figures as is currently the case with Anna Indiana. However, this strategy is not a solution in the long run, as AI-generated music and artists become more refined and convincing in masking the illusion, drawing in more willing enthusiasts and listeners as a new era of music is ushered in through greater widespread appeal.

These new cultural practices in the production of music may lead some to experience a crisis of trust or meaning, potentially leading to the formation of niche scenes that reassert human creativity with a focus on live music and analog recordings as mainstream music becomes increasingly synthetic. New emerging subcultures would become sites of resistance with a focus on human-authored authenticity. AI may be an incredible tool in assisting in the production of music, but it should never replace the role music has as a deeply embedded form of human expression of cultural identity, struggles, and history. Through the intentional reinforcement of where we place value, not just for the sake of efficiency and novelty, but rather what makes us feel, remember, and connect, we can halter some of the negative effects of the propagation of AI-generated music. The promotion of live performances would emphasize the irreplaceable value of live music and events, where meaningful human connection and reciprocal *symbolic exchanges* are central. Initiatives to preserve and promote human creativity like the

development of better filters or tags for “human-made” music on streaming platforms like Spotify or Apple Music could help listeners discover artists more intentionally, as well as the introduction of labels on physical copies to advocate music created by humans versus AI-generated and assisted music. With the establishment of clear legal and ethical boundaries through copyright reforms, laws could clarify ownership of songs when AI-generated music is trained on copyrighted music without permission and whether it constitutes fair use. The vocal likeness and musical style of artists could also be safeguarded from unauthorized replication through deepfakes with new legal categories.

A cultural focus on finding the strengths and uniqueness of the new medium of AI-generated and assisted music, rather than the mere imitation of human-made music, could preserve the value of meaning produced by it rather than its dilution. The Mellotron was developed in order to sample the sounds of instruments like strings, flutes, and choirs through electro-mechanical automation using audio tape. However, through its use by artists like The Beatles and The Beach Boys it became an influential instrument in its own right rather than a mere sampler. Although AI presents a different form of automation as a higher order of simulation in comparison to the Mellotron, with claims of agency, through innovative and meaningful uses we could establish significant new cultural practices surrounding this new technology analogous to how DJing evolved through the emergence of hip-hop and Electronic Dance Music. Communities should make use of the potential AI technologies present by applying them to an already existing artistic foundation to protect their values of authenticity, thereby “spawning waves of AI influenced music while keeping its fundamental integrity alive” (Nieuwenhuijsen, 2023, p. 46). As raves are to techno and trance music, AI could help establish meaningful forms of *symbolic exchange* at live venues through the development of a new form of performance, entangling it in novel and significant cultural practices that promote human connection and sociability, helping culture evolve rather than stagnate. Generative AI technologies may end up occupying a “space of authenticity among experimental, avantgarde, and conceptual sample-based composers... to enhance a futuristic narrative” that would promote the conceptualization of “human cultures in which machines are intertwined within human systems of meaning-making" (Nieuwenhuijsen, 2023, p. 39; Galuszka, 2024, p. 604).

6.6. Conclusion

Our postmodern culture is already stricken with an obsession with *retromania*, further reinforced by the recycling of signs and aesthetic residues of past musical genres present among popular AI covers and AI systems that are of a replicative nature, becoming increasingly

prevalent and nurturing homogenization, oversaturation, monolithic nothingness, and a culture of Echoes void of meaningful *symbolic exchange*. AI-generated music lacks emotional depth and the involvement of personal experiences, further collapsing the distinction between the real and the *simulated*, ushering in a new age of *hyperreality* under the promise of efficiency and a false sense of agency. AI is disrupting the meaningfulness of music, it's practices of meaning-making, and the historical flow of popular culture, lacking the authenticity and innovation to galvanize social and cultural changes and potentially severing our culture's process of *time-binding*. AI will only be able to generate a synthetic culture until it is capable of exhibiting features of the *fantasia*, and when it finally does, we ought to be weary of the path it might take us down.

Remedies we may take to avoid the negative consequences in the short-term are the employment of *fatal strategies* and *seduction* to expose the hollow nature of the system of signs promoted by the proliferation of AI-generated music media. A renewed emphasis on meaningful and reciprocal *symbolic exchange* among live performances and niche scenes yet to emerge may also slow down the adverse effects AI-generated music is ushering in through the increasing displacement of human subjects. The integration of AI technologies into already existing artistic foundations among certain communities could help us collectively lean into the unique nature and strengths of generative AI models without threatening our notions of authenticity, consolidating them into existing and emerging human systems of meaning-making.

This investigation has its limitations as it does not dive deeply into the nature of machine learning found among generative AI models prevalent in the realm of music to further substantiate their lack of true creativity, nor does it create a truly exhaustive list of all the diverging ways AI is used in the production, distribution, and consumption of music. Another limitation is the lack of literature on the interpretation of AI technologies in music with a deeper understanding of Baudrillard's theories regarding *simulation* and *hyperreality* that goes beyond these notions, to help guide this investigation. Further research into the cultural impact of emerging AI technologies in music could focus on their prevalence in the production and distribution of music, specifically the processes of mixing and mastering as well as recommendation engines among streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music. AI's integration into the existing online music infrastructure and an account of how widespread its use is among professional and independent musicians and producers could give us a key insight into how quickly these technologies are proliferating and how the industry is supporting their integration.

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