

Singing Poets

Popular Music and Literature in France and Greece (1945-1975)
Reading Brassens, Ferré, Theodorakis and Savvopoulos

Ph.D.

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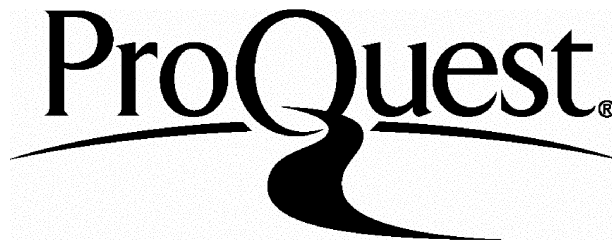
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on a comparative examination of popular music in Greece and France between 1945 and 1975. Its central claim is that the concept of the *singing poet* provided a crucial framing of the field of popular music in both countries and led to a reassessment of the links between literature and popular culture. The term singing poets is coined in order to regroup artists who used poetic texts for their songs or adopted a poetic persona themselves, but also accounts for the reception of a particular style of popular music in the period and the countries under discussion as *poetic/intellectual song*.

Adopting a Cultural Studies approach, this thesis thus outlines the role played by the prestige of literary institutions and an idealized view of oral poetry in the conceptualization of *high-popular music*. It questions the presentation of certain singer-songwriters as ‘poets in their own right’, as folk poets, auteurs, poet-composers, bards and troubadours.

Books, special editions and articles published in France in the 60s are extensively examined in the first part to reveal their traditionalist consensus about the poetic value of the work of certain *Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes*. Roland Barthes’s theorization of reading (and) *jouissance* provides a vivid counterargument by opening up the possibility of seeing literariness and pop pleasure as symbiotic rather than mutually exclusive.

The second part focuses on Greek popular music and reviews how the field of what was termed *Entehno Laiko* (Art-Popular) has been performatively shaped by the work of Mikis Theodorakis and Manos Hadjidakis. The significant input of literary ideals and the success of Theodorakis’s *Melopoimene Poiese* (Sung Poetry) project are fundamental to this process. The resulting cultural divide between ‘high’ and ‘low’ popular music spheres is reassessed by examining the ‘dislocating’ performance of singer-songwriter Dionysis Savvopoulos, who appeared in the mid-60s performing a hybrid mimicry of Georges Brassens and Bob Dylan. Through readings of his songs, performances and interviews, popular music emerges both as the space of a re-constructed utopia and as a subversive Other to high cultural forms.

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To Michael,

who made it happen

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who made it worth it

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Preface

This thesis was inspired by the observation that the popular music of both postwar France and Greece was dominated by discussions about what constituted a ‘good’ popular song, and that in these discussions literary criteria often predominated. I identify this as the impulse to create a field of well-defined *high-popular* music, which would in turn bestow visibility and acceptance on a larger field of popular music, for which the *high-popular* could subsequently function as a yardstick. Another point of initial comparison was that in both countries we can find a significant trend of setting published poems to popular music, which culminated in the early 60s.

I have thus coined the term *singing poets* in order to convey some of the central factors that shaped the work and reception of a series of celebrated popular musicians in Greece and France in the period between 1945 and 1975. The term obviously refers to those popular musicians widely recognized as ‘poets singing’ as well as those artists who created a style through ‘singing the poets’. Thus, in my discussion of the *singing poets* I have included figures such as Brassens, Ferré, Brel, Trenet, Gainsbourg, Theodorakis, Hadjidakis, Savvopoulos. These are very different artists who often produced widely different writing and performing styles. Some wrote the lyrics and music of their songs, others wrote only the lyrics in the songs they performed, while artists like Theodorakis and Hadjidakis wrote mainly the music of their songs, often taking their lyrics from pre-existing poems. What links all of them together is a discourse which views the popular song as a form of poetry and the popular musician as *auteur*. A primary aim of this thesis is to show how the concept of *singing poets* is discursively organized into a cultural field.

Even though critics have noted interesting parallels between French and Greek popular music, in particular in relation to the artists on whom I focus, there has not been a detailed comparison of the two countries and sets of artists thus far. Furthermore, the frequent claim that certain styles of popular music which emerged after the Second World War have played a crucial role in national representations and identity formations in both France and Greece, has never been paired with a detailed analysis of the precise

context in which these popular music styles emerged, evolved and interacted. This thesis does not go in search of sources and influences, even though some such cases will be discussed. The main aim of the comparison is to enrich our understanding of the parallel cases of two national music traditions and to reach a more sophisticated set of conclusions than we have at present, which may in turn be used for further study of popular music of the period in different countries.

In the Introduction, I provide the theoretical framework for my work and a brief survey of the discussion on popular music as it stands in the academic field today. I also present a detailed analysis of how the concepts of the singing poet and of the high-popular operate in France and Greece. I decisively adopt the interdisciplinarity of Cultural Studies as a framework, using a large array of work undertaken in many disciplines (literary theory, history, anthropology, social studies) while focusing predominantly on conceptual differences, different and changing value criteria and the production and reception of ideas that shape what we call culture and help us to account for our responses to it.

In Part 1 of the thesis, I focus on the French popular song after the Second World War. Chapter 1 analyzes the role poetry played in shaping new popular songs, and focuses on the concept of popular poetry and its ideological importance in post-war France. This allows me to locate the context in which a new intellectual song emerged from the clubs of the Rive Gauche.

Chapter 2 examines Georges Brassens and the immense popularity of his songs and persona in 50s and 60s France. I explore this songwriter's inclusion in the literary canon, culminating in the award of a national poetry prize by the Académie Française. Part 1 draws to a close with a detailed analysis of a series of collections of song lyrics that appeared in poetic format (Part 1-Chapter 3). Published by a well-known poetry editor during the 60s, they triggered a major discussion on 'chanson, poésie d'aujourd'hui'.

Part 2 shifts focus to Greece and analyzes the influential auteur persona put forth in the 50s and 60s by the popular composers Manos Hadjidakis and Mikis Theodorakis. This section of the thesis assesses their roles in a rearrangement of the field of Greek

popular music, as well as gauging the use of literary trends and poetic texts in forming the field of the high-popular.

In part 3, I turn to the work of singer-songwriter Dionysis Savvopoulos of the period 1964-1975. Supported by an analysis of the cultural politics of a new generation of Greek artists, I locate this artist's subversion of the concepts of the singing poet and the high-popular - both of which, undoubtedly, Savvopoulos upheld even at the very moment they were defied.

A note on transliteration, translations, references

There is no common framework for the transliteration of Greek words and names in English language Modern Greek Studies. I have thus based my transliteration practice on the style followed by the British Library catalogue. I differ from it in a number of issues, especially in the transliteration of the different sounds of h, in which case I follow the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, and in the omission of stresses and diacritics. Moreover, in the transliteration of names of Greek artists, journalists and scholars who have been known in the West or have published in languages using the Latin alphabet, I adopt the already known version of their names. Thus, I write Mikis Theodorakis instead of Mikes Theodorakes, Dionysis (instead of Dionyses) Savvopoulos, Costas Taktis (instead of Kostas Tahtses). The same applies to words that are already used by scholars in an accepted form in English. Thus, I write rebetiko, but still transliterate as rempetiko when the word appears in a Greek title in the bibliography. Greek titles in the bibliography are translated in parentheses whenever I believed that the meaning of the title was indicative of the book's argument.

All translations, especially of Greek texts not taken from an English edition, are mine unless otherwise stated. I understand that, in particular in my translation of lyrics, the result may not be as powerful as the original text, especially when my effort to keep the connotations of the original has led me to circumlocution. Furthermore, every translation is always already an interpretation, and I accept that the translation solution I prefer in some texts may sometimes bear the mark of my analysis.

In the reference to song lyrics I have made my own transcriptions from recorded versions of the songs - hence I am responsible for the versification. A very indicative list of recordings is given at the end of every chapter. Whenever I quote from a printed version of lyrics, I cite my source. However, in part 1 chapter 2, where the legacy of Brassens's printed text is also important for my analysis, I have taken into account in my transcriptions the version of his lyrics found in the collected *Poèmes et Chansons* edition as cited in the bibliography. Also in part 1, chapter 3 (Seghers), all quotations come from the discussed 'Seghers-Poètes d'aujourd'hui' titles, unless otherwise cited.

In my citation of newspaper and magazine articles I prefer, for reasons of style and following many scholars and large publishing house guidelines, not to load the reference with superfluous details (like newspaper issue number and issue year) and retain instead a date of issue, title of the article and author where available. Only a limited number of these articles are cited in my bibliography, mainly the ones I have drawn on most.

A list of works cited is given at the end of every chapter, including a number of important works consulted but not cited.

Introduction

Les feuilles mortes or On how to speak about songs

‘Les feuilles mortes se ramassent à la pelle’: a popular song narrative

In 1941 Charles Trenet performed, to a typical music-hall tune, a song whose lyrics were based on Verlaine’s poem ‘Chanson d’automne’:

Les sanglots longs
Des violons
De l’automne
Blessent mon cœur
D’une langueur
Monotone
[...]
Je me souviens
Des jours anciens
Et je pleure

Et je m’en vais
Au vent mauvais
Qui m’emporte
Deçà, delà,
Pareil à la
Feuille morte.

(Verlaine 1969: 39).

The title word ‘chanson’ and the symbolist sound imagery of the opening lines are replayed in Trenet’s bel canto singing and an orchestration dominated by violins, direct reference to the poem’s ‘violons de l’automne’. Trenet kept the poem intact, merely changing its title and calling his own song ‘Verlaine’ instead of ‘Chanson d’automne’. The new title, apart from a tribute to the poet, could be used to remind one that a poem turned into popular song is already a different text, opened to different use(s) and different modes of response. As Trenet put it in another well-known song from this period, ‘L’âme des poètes’:

Longtemps, longtemps, longtemps
Après que les poètes ont disparu
Leurs chansons courent encore dans les rues

la foule les chante un peu distraite
 En ignorant le nom de l'auteur
 Sans savoir pour qui battait leur coeur
 parfois on change un mot, une phrase,
 Et quand on est à court d' idées
 On fait la la la la la la
 La la la la la la

Longtemps, longtemps, longtemps
 Après que les poètes ont disparu
 Leurs chansons courent encore dans les rues
 Un jour, peut-être, bien après moi
 Un jour on chantera
 Cet air pour bercer un chagrin
 Ou quelqu'heureux destin
 Fera-t-il vivre un vieux mendiant
 Ou dormir un enfant
 Tournera-t-il au bord de l'eau
 Au printemps sur un phono.¹

Trenet's use of the words 'poète' and 'chanson' here is ambivalent; he could be referring to songwriters and songs, or to poets and their poems, or to poets and their poems turned into songs, since the word *chanson* has been used (as in the title of 'Chanson de l'automne') to describe lyrical poems, while the word *poète* can be used in French as a metaphor to characterize a person 'dont l'oeuvre est pénétrée de poésie' or simply 'un homme doué de poésie' (*Petit Robert*). My impression is, however, that Trenet plays on exactly this ambiguity, and on the fact that he himself had turned a poet's printed 'chanson' into a popular 'chanson' some years before, thus making Verlaine's poem 'circulate in the streets long after the poet had died'. 'L'âme des poètes' ends up a highly self-conscious description of the popular song as definable art

¹ Throughout this thesis I do not give references to song lyrics which I have transcribed myself from recordings. A list of recordings is included in the bibliography. Whenever I give a reference for a quotation of lyrics, it means that I have preferred to use a printed source or a published transcription of the lyrics.

form (one French critic has astutely called it 'la présentation de l' art poétique de Trenet' (Klein 1991: 103)).

Trenet reminds us that in a popular song the public can change the words, or even forget them altogether, that listeners can use and misuse the meaning (playing, say, 'Chanson d' automne', 'au printemps sur un phono'). After listening to 'L'âme des poètes', Verlaine's last verses from 'Chanson d' automne' seem to have been cast in a completely different light: 'Et je m'en vais/ Au vent mauvais/ Qui m'emporte/ Deçà, delà/ Pareil à la/ Feuille morte' now reminds us of the poem itself, turned into a popular ballad and circulated like a *feuille volante*.

In the 1940s, Trenet was the rising star of the French music-hall but also the protégé of such intellectuals as Jean Cocteau and Max Jacob (Cantaloube 1981). However, his 'art poétique' seems to be saying that like leaves falling from trees, popular songs are important not in the original meaning given by their 'auteurs', but by dint of the fact that they can be 'unimportant'. Like the dead leaves haunted by memories, popular songs circulate freely - but not uninterruptedly - through space and time, being used and re-used, piled up, changed or forgotten, left to moulder. Like leaves falling from trees, they lose their original status and find their new meaning in the fact that they can be used in different contexts, misused or thrown away.

Enter what is possibly the most popular French song of the 20th century, 'Les feuilles mortes', with lyrics by Jacques Prévert, music by Joseph Kosma, and first sung by Marianne Oswald, before famously becoming a hit by Yves Montand in 1953. Listening to the song, one feels that Prévert was not only influenced by Trenet's aforementioned songs, but directly referred to them:

Oh! Je voudrais tant que tu te souviennes
Des jours heureux où nous étions amis,
En ce temps-là la vie était plus belle
Et le soleil plus brûlant qu'aujourd'hui.
Les feuilles mortes se ramassent à la pelle,
Tu vois, je n'ai pas oublié...
Les feuilles mortes se ramassent à la pelle,
Les souvenirs et les regrets aussi.
Et le vent du nord les emporte dans la nuit froide de l'oubli.

Tu vois, je n'ai pas oublié la chanson que tu me chantais.

C'est une chanson qui nous ressemble,
 Toi qui m'aimais et je t'aimais
 Et nous vivions tous les deux ensemble,
 Toi qui m'aimais moi qui t'aimais.
 Mais la vie sépare ceux qui s'aiment
 Tout doucement sans faire de bruit
 Et la mer efface sur le sable
 Les pas des amants désunis.

In this song, the *feuilles mortes* function both as a song within a song and as an already loaded metaphor, the stimulus but also the content of recollection and the act of recalling itself. The narrator sees dead leaves and remembers an autumn in the past - s/he also remembers a song about dead leaves which s/he starts singing (with the mention of the 'vent du Nord' and the 'feuilles mortes', the song remembered is, I believe, Trenet's 'Verlaine'); the recollection becomes more vivid through the repetition of the act of singing this old song about dead leaves and love lost ('nous étions tous les deux ensemble/ toi qui m'aimais, moi qui t'aimais'). The proof of the singer's enduring love is that s/he has not forgotten the song, that is, s/he can repeat her/his act of singing it; moreover, recollection has become singing, the two now indiscernable.

Prévert thus interweaves a symbol of how memory works with a description of how songs work within memory. He also combines both themes of the Trenet songs I have quoted: on the one hand *memory's machinations* (old experiences are piled up like the autumn leaves, which remain there spatially orchestrating life as a revisiting of things past - the 'Verlaine' theme) and on the other the *popular song's mechanics* (a song works through its repetition, it functions through and for memory, carrying and being carried by it - the 'âme des poètes' theme).

'Les Feuilles Mortes' is a song about songs and their association with repetition, recollection, plural temporality and the act of remembering. The same characteristics of a popular song take centre stage in Serge Gainsbourg's tribute to the 'Feuilles Mortes' in 'La chanson de Prévert' (1961). If Trenet was an exuberant figure, whose performance the audiences found poetic, and Prévert was the poet who wrote some of

the most famous song lyrics in postwar France, Gainsbourg was a typical figure of the early 60s: provocative, uneasy about the camera and his physical appearance, writing both the lyrics and music of his song with an irony ready to expand and touch on everything. In the following song he mentions the creators of the 'Feuilles Mortes', Prévert and Kosma (interestingly only the first, the poet, is mentioned in the title), but what emerges primarily is his own willingness to be acknowledged as the 'author' of a distinctive song with a characteristic bittersweet style:

Oh je voudrais tant que tu te souviennes
 Cette chanson était la tienne
 C'était ta préférée
 Je crois
 Qu'elle est de Prévert et
 Kosma

Et chaque fois les feuilles mortes
 Te rappellent à mon souvenir
 Jour après jour
 Les amours mortes
 N'en finissent pas de mourir

Avec d'autres bien sûr je m'abandonne
 Mais leur chanson est monotone
 Et peu à peu je m'indiffère
 A cela il n'est rien
 A faire

Car chaque fois les feuilles mortes
 te rappellent à mon souvenir
 Jour après jour
 Les amours mortes
 N'en finissent pas de mourir [...]

Gainsbourg remembers singing the song by Prévert and Kosma, which itself recalled the act of remembering a song by Trenet; the chain expands impressively since Trenet's

song was based on Verlaine's remembering 'les jours anciens', in a poem whose title had already been 'borrowed' from Baudelaire (see Verlaine 1969: 522). Gainsbourg not only refers to Prévert's 'Feuilles Mortes', he actively repeats their performative modality: he remembers, re-sings and revisits, weaving the image of actual dead leaves into the humming of an old song; in the end, he asserts himself as another 'player' in the same field in which the 'Feuilles Mortes' are the basic currency: a popular song. A decade later he would also allude to Verlaine's 'L'automne', in an analogous mood, in his song 'Je suis venu te dire que je m'en vais' (1973).

Je suis venu te dire que je m'en vais
 Et tes larmes n'y pourront rien changer
 Comme dit si bien Verlaine au vent mauvais
 Je suis venu te dire que je m'en vais
 Tu t'souviens des jours anciens et tu pleures
 [...]
 Je suis venu te dire que je m'en vais
 Tes sanglots longs n'y pourront rien changer
 Comme dit si bien Verlaine au vent mauvais
 Je suis venu te dire que je m'en vais.

The five songs I have presented so far all repeat and replay each other to form a dazzling network (I will henceforth refer to them as the *Feuilles Mortes* songs). Ultimately, however, these songs are not *about* older songs, but about the need *to repeat* older songs, to make them a part of our lives. They are about memories recalled and repetition residing in a fragmented temporal space.

Like the dead leaves gathered by the shovel, these songs present themselves as the excess of everyday life that is being picked up to reconstruct its most precious aspects. However, they also have an unexpected level of intertextual self-consciousness, and foreground their insistence on the song's authorship. From Trenet citing the author of the poem he uses in his song's title, and then meditating on authorship in 'L'âme des poètes' to Gainsbourg calling his own song 'La chanson de Prévert' (and not 'de Montand' or any other singer), the *Feuilles Mortes* songs are also typical in their

introduction of a web of authorship that objectifies, legitimizes and canonizes their references to songs.

Even today, people in France would identify these five songs as prominent representatives of an ‘intellectual’ or ‘poetic’ song style. This is neither incidental nor meaningless. I will argue in this thesis that during the period that these songs circumscribe (from the mid-40s to the mid-70s), the popular song became the object of intellectual attention and study and the site of a taxonomization of popular music that to an extent still hold true today. A view of the songwriters as authors and their works as forms of performed poetry was instrumental to this end.

At this point, I would ask the reader to put the *Feuilles Mortes* recordings on hold for some pages, as I shall briefly introduce my views on the study of popular music.

Conceptualizing popular music

From the moment one writes the word ‘popular’ and goes on to talk about ‘popular music’ and ‘popular songs’, one is aware of the need to clarify one’s terms. As has often been pointed out, it is very difficult to speak of popular music per se without referring to another set of cultural references.²

Frans Birrer has summarized the basic groups of definitions given for popular music as follows:

1 *Normative* definitions. Popular music is an inferior type.

2 *Negative* definitions. Popular music is music that is not something else (usually “folk” or “art” music).

3 *Sociological* definitions. Popular music is associated with (produced for or by) a particular social group.

² In a sense, the persistent analysis of definitions and their use at different times, characterizes the cultural studies framework for the study of popular music and distinguishes it from the descriptive frameworks of sociological and anthropological studies. Sociologists of popular music would define their enquiry by a set of questions regarding ‘who listens to what and why’. An anthropological enquiry would predominantly focus on ‘how’, on the ways specific types of music are heard, performed and danced by specific groups of people. Even though synthesizing arguments from both fields, the cultural studies perspective, as I understand it, returns to an overarching question of meaning: *what (and how) does popular music mean?*

4 *Technologico-economic* definitions. Popular music is disseminated by mass media and/or in a mass market (Birrer 1985: 104).

What all these groups of definitions have in common is that they come from outside popular music and impose its meaning and function on it, in a performative way. Most of these definitions are synchronic: they define popular music as a part of a cultural system at a specific moment. Many theorists have emphasized the advantages of such a synchronic approach to the cultural study of popular music today: what is important, they argue, is to see how popular music places itself in a given cultural milieu, what role it fulfills in a given cultural context and what value is associated with it (Hall 1981; Middleton 2001; Frith 1996). This synchronic approach does not preclude any reference to the historical background of popular music; moreover, it is emphasized that a narrative of 'key historical moments' in the development of the field is often used to arrange its synchronic structure. I would argue that such a minimal 'historicizing' is also very important if we want to shift the focus and see not which definition was imposed on popular music at a given moment, but which form of identification operated within the field itself; we will then realize that these 'narratives of the origins of the popular' are constantly reworked from inside popular music and often give rise to a discursive formulation that is selective and constantly rearranged.

Let us take a look at this 'stock of history', which begins with a view of the origins of popular culture. A heuristic definition of popular culture still at large today draws on Robert Redfield's old distinction between the 'great tradition' of the educated few 'cultivated in schools or temples' and the 'little tradition' which 'works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities' (Redfield 1956: 41-2). The two traditions, according to Redfield, 'are interdependent, [...] have long affected each other and continue to do so' (ibid). Peter Burke's work has elaborated on the historical aspects of this distinction (Burke 1978: esp. 23-65). It is within the little tradition that we can find 'the culture of laughter' in the Middle Ages, existing alongside official culture, ready to unsettle and turn it upside down (as analyzed by Bakhtin 1968; see also Attali 1985). Standardization and cliché formation of the 'little tradition' were reinforced after the 16th century when the growing popularity of chapbooks and broadsheets provided what could be seen as the birth moment of today's

popular literature and popular music, indeed, of the whole system of modern popular culture (“mass culture” as Burke prefers to call it): ‘To a modern reader, the parallel between broadside [ballads] or chap-books and the “mass culture” of the contemporary world is likely to be striking’ (Burke 1978: 254). With the advent of popular printing, theorists locate a radical break in the oral tradition, and several important evolutionary steps that we now recognize as constitutive of ‘mass culture’. Suddenly the performer of a song in public was not necessarily its author and the idea of authorship and copyright, unknown before in the little tradition, originated from this particular moment when the textual took over from the oral, when repetition took over from improvised performance.

The structuring and ‘policing’ of copyright on material meant for performance was a definitive step towards the standardization and strict formulation of popular culture. The creation of the rights organization SACEM (Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique) in 1851 in France (followed by similar organizations in most Western countries) is a key point of reference here. As Jean-Claude Klein notes, at this period of professionalization of the popular arts, what was before an undefined ‘milieu’, a cultural substratum comprising diverse and often uncategorizable acts, became defined and standardized. Klein astutely remarks that during this period the popular song functioned as a metonymic representative and a shaping force for the whole popular field:

Ce milieu se dote de lieux - café-concerts et bals, dont le réseau finit par couvrir la France entière, carrefours et places, où l’activité des chanteurs et musiciens de rue est progressivement encadrée par les professionnels-, se donne une esthétique, résolument populiste et interclassiste, une police - la S.A.C.E.M. - et investit un objet encore mouvant, sorte de syncrétisme de tous les arts de la scène: foire foraine, vaudeville et théâtre, cirque, pantomime et danse. D’emblée, la chanson y joue un rôle fédérateur (Klein 1995: 65).

Modernity would base its project on this definition of the popular milieu and work towards reinforcing the cultural divide into a concrete high-low system. In the 19th century, popular culture became ‘Modernism’s Other’, as Andreas Huyssen has very influentially remarked. Modernism was associated with ‘male’ characteristics, such as

irony, distance and control, while mass culture was seen as tending towards chaos, dissolved boundaries and uncontrolled feelings; the latter was consequently seen as a feminized cultural space, as Huyssen's analysis of *Madame Bovary* demonstrates (Huyssen 1988: 44-63). The Great Divide was not simply an effect of Modernism's cultural ideology: it became one of its foundations.

It should be stressed that the growing distinctiveness and professionalization of popular culture in the 19th century gave rise to its definition as 'low' rather than, for example, 'other' or 'outside'. On the one hand, a cultural hierarchy was reinforced by the bourgeoisie through the imposition of a model of highbrow-lowbrow culture which, in the 20th century, would evolve also to include a middlebrow space (DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio 1992; Levine 1988; Rubin 1992). On the other hand, the high classes moved on to re-construct their own version of the 'little tradition' in an attempt to purify and authenticate what they saw as low and inately popular. Thus the growing divide also provoked the retrospective tendency to redefine 'the people' and their art, and gave rise to 'folk culture' as the 'authentic', rural and ancestral culture of the people, directly connected to 'the base of a nation' and 'a people's psyche' and opposed to the 'low popular' prevalent in the cities:

Ainsi, en opposition aux ouvriers des grandes villes, ces "classes dangereuses" réputées perverses par les mœurs citadines, le "bon peuple" des campagnes, hier encore relégué aux confins de la civilisation, se trouva magnifié et investi d'une fonction patrimoniale. On assista alors à l'essor du concept romantique du folklore et à l'invention d'une "chanson populaire", pure de toute contamination urbaine. Ce fut le temps des marquis et de médecins de campagne, transformés en ardents collecteurs d'une culture réputée immobile, souvent réarrangée et enjolivée pour les besoins de la cause' (Klein 1995: 66).

The results of the Great Divide and of the subsequent distinction between folk and popular cultures (often loosely seen as rural and urban traditions respectively) have been a constant source of tension and cultural restructuring during the 20th century. Huyssen believes that 'a critical postmodernism' appeared in the 60s, took up the challenge of the avant-garde movements of the first decades of the 20th century, and proposed a bridging of the gap between high and low by undermining its basic premises

(that is, mass culture's inferiority): 'Pop in the broadest sense was the context in which a notion of the postmodern first took shape... [challenging] modernism's relentless hostility to mass culture' (Huyssen: 189). Similarly, but in more cautious terms, theorists of 'late modernity' argue that well into the 20th century, and especially after the 60s, there was a 'cultural release', a period when the Great Divide was revisited and renarrated as a site of flux: 'The few but marked cultural divisions of modernity tend therefore [today] to be transformed into many different subcultures, each with its own hierarchies, distinctions and preferences. These subcultures are not clearly ranked vertically, rather horizontally. In late modern societies there is no longer any self-evident consensus on the cultural hierarchies' (Boethius 1995: 38).

This last phase has been described in the context of popular music as 'a unitary 'virtual space'' where music is heard everywhere as the background to everyday life, where different types of music are 'for different times' rather than different people and instead of reflecting, become a resource for producing social life (Frith 2002; DeNora 2000: esp. 128-129; Middleton 2001). In this continuous 'virtual space', music is homogeneously organized into highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow and the move between these can be undertaken quite easily by people (working classes listening to Radio 3) as well as cultural products (classical music used for commercials or sampled in rap songs). However, this does not mean that the categories and hierarchies have simply been abolished. Contrary to what journalists alternately celebrate or deplore as the culture of 'nobrow' (Seabrook 2001), I believe that hierarchies still function as a constitutive aspect of popular music, elaborated by it and exploited for its success, at times reworked as sources of style, sites of irony, spaces of contestation and modes of address (Levine 1988; Collins 2002). Distinctions are still important and still mean a great deal. Even if they are not necessarily associated with class origins or easily decipherable cultural value, profit and prestige, they still give way to new denominations, hierarchies and regroupings. We may celebrate the inclusion of a popular song in Princess Diana's funeral ceremony as a sign of the effacement of a cultural boundary (Frith 2001: 93-94), but this does not mean that there is no value associated with it. Nor should we ignore the further associations with the political,

social, cultural and entrepreneurial milieu that prompted this inclusion, and, in the end, the new cultural boundaries and hierarchies generated through it.

This brings me back to the definition of popular music. When we try to define the field, we seldom question the origin, structure and addressee of this definition. It has been argued that popular music is often internally organized by borrowing criteria from neighbouring categories of art, classical music or literature, but critics seldom engage in a more detailed analysis of how the field itself renarrates these criteria, transforming them into a cultural ideology. In the analysis of a model of popular song³ in two countries (France-Greece) during a period of roughly three decades (1945-75), I will show how a concept of high art has been used to define and taxonomize the 'low field' of popular music and also review how new challenges in the 60s gave rise to a redrawing of cultural boundaries.

One of my working hypotheses is that popular music functions as a system in which different genres work together, while addressing different audiences, or the same audiences at different times and so on (a similar approach has been extensively argued by the Italian theorist Franco Fabbri, in Fabbri 1982a; 1982b; 1989; for an elaboration based on polysystem theory, see Ben-Porat 1984). The audience's knowledge of the generic formulations within the system channels music consumption, but also becomes the basis for a reworking of generic boundaries; the *system of songs* and its internal generic organization can be seen as constantly employed and exploited by the culture industry but also disturbed and reinvigorated by new works. As a whole, the system also assumes the role of a signifiatory model evolving around a central concept/genre which is thought to provide its core and the highest level in its taxonomy. Such an analysis has been undertaken to a great extent on the place occupied by rock music after the late 60s: rock music was seen as the 'authentic', 'new folk', truly oppositional part of popular music (Frith 1981), but this was also an act of signification after which a whole field was conceptualized (what was not rock was pop, an inferior model, or classical/art music, an inimical or simply indifferent model). In these terms, rock ended up being not

³ Strictly speaking, the popular song is only a part (most often the largest) of popular music, and thus should better be defined as 'vocal popular music'. However, in certain periods, the popular song tended to represent metonymically the whole field of 'popular music'. This also holds for the period I am studying, hence sometimes I will use *popular song* and *popular music* interchangeably.

so much a well-defined genre as a set of concepts that characterized the upper level of popular music and imposed a new taxonomy on it.

In this thesis I shall focus on another type of song that assumed a central place in the system of popular music between the 40s and the 70s, especially in the countries that will form my case studies, Greece and France. Again, what I shall be referring to is, more than a definable genre, a set of concepts that laid the foundation for a view of popular music. I shall call this conceptual framework 'the singing poet' and expand on its use in some detail.

My choice of the term 'system' does not mean that I see popular music as a stable structure with its genres clearly defined; on the contrary, one of my aims is to show how the popular song systems to which I refer are characterized by fluctuating criteria, fluid (but constantly re-defined) internal boundaries and an absence of closure. Furthermore, even though my approach is synchronic (focusing on what acted as popular music at a particular time and place), it also foregrounds how versions of a 'popular music past' crop up as identificatory references in the discursive formations of the song systems I analyze.

It is now time we took the *Feuilles Mortes* off pause.

The logics of the High-Popular: the case of the singing poets

In the 50s, French journalists claimed that Trenet's setting of 'L'automne' had started a trend which eventually changed the face of the French song. Evidently Trenet was not the first to have attempted to sing a well-known poem, and even if we put to one side all the 'art' composers who had written music based on symbolist poems, French popular tradition provides many earlier examples of such a gesture. To mention only a few, 'Gastibelza', a poem by Victor Hugo, had been sung in the style of the Caveaux by the songwriter Hippolyte Monpou in 1837. Also, at the beginning of the 20th century, Yvette Guilbert was presenting the programmes of her recitals as 'poems set to music', while Aristide Bruant, the chansonnier of belle époque Montmartre, was hailed as a poet by many of his contemporaries. The difference in Trenet's case was that in his prime, both the 'prestige of poetry' and the already well-established channels of literary production and evaluation played a key role in an emerging discussion about the art of popular

song, which led to a canonization of some of its genres. When this eventually happened, Trenet's 'Verlaine' seemed to have been the precursor to a whole movement that helped the popular song gain respect.

Well into the 60s, several new singer-songwriters who wanted to be included in the ranks of the 'serious French chanson' built their repertoire almost exclusively on poems turned into songs (the most famous of these was Hélène Martin); several French record companies and labels also specialised in the release of 'sung poetry'. As one critic noted in 1965, 'actuellement, la plupart des jeunes auteurs-compositeurs veillent à inclure dans leur tour de chant des poèmes mis en musique, pour bien marquer d'une part à *quel niveau* ils entendent *se situer* et d'autre part pour *affirmer* l'indissoluble unité de la chanson et de *la poésie*' (Charpentreau 1965: 39-40, emphasis added). Poems set to music could serve, then, both as a sign of high quality and a factor in generic identification. They would provide an easy reference to 'the indissoluble unity' between 'poetry and song', as celebrated in the popular imagery of the (sung) ancient lyric, the medieval troubadours, the folk storytellers and so forth (all of which were commonplace references for French music journalism of the 60s).

The five songs I quoted earlier are typical examples of a distinct trend that many critics were calling 'chanson intellectuelle' or 'chanson poétique'. We could use this as an umbrella term for many different genres that appeared in a number of countries after 1945. Employing different generic titles in each country and easily mutating into subgenres (singer-songwriters, political song, poetry turned into songs etc), these intellectual song-styles became the vehicle for the popular song's postwar 'legitimization'; to a very important degree, they were also considered as occupying the highest level of a system of popular songs ('à *quel niveau se situer*'), and were thus used as a measure for its taxonomization.

The territory I am describing is comprised of songs whose lyrics were written by acclaimed poets turned popular song lyricists (as is the example of Prévert), well-known poems turned into songs (like 'L'automne') and, finally, a more defined genre whose exponents in France would be called Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interpètes (a generic title

used to describe Trenet's and Gainsbourg's songs, for instance).⁴ What groups all the above cases together is the persistent reference to literary forms from the past or the present by both the artists concerned and the agents involved in the songs' production and reception.

Be it in the form of a poem previously published and then turned into a song by a songwriter, or in the form of songwriters who were hailed as poets and whose work was subsequently published in poetic format, the important discursive link here is the one between song and poetry. I would propose, thus, for reasons of consistency, the term *singing poets*⁵ to describe all those artists associated with this particular postwar cultural trend. I shall argue that through a web of critical acclaim and cultural politics, the singing poets occupied the highest level of an emerging rigid conceptualization and further taxonomization of popular music: they constituted what I shall thus be calling the space of *the high-popular*, and played a role in its turning into a hard currency within popular music.

My intention, first and foremost, is to study how the singing poet model came into being and how it was used as an argument to give shape and visibility to the modern popular song. I focus in particular on two countries, France and Greece, mapping the ventures and adventures of their singing poets, especially in the period from the mid-40s to the early 70s. I begin by discussing the decisive moment in the history of the French chanson when some of its exponents were seen to be elevating it into 'the pantheon of high art' (Part 1, Chapter 1). I describe in detail the emergence of the genre of the Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes and review the tendency, culminating in the 60s, to consider these artists as poets in their own right, with their lyrics published in poetic format in books and assessed as written poetry (Part 1, Chapter 3). I also review the impact of Léo Ferré's recording series 'Les Poètes', in which he undertook the task of turning a large number of canonical poems into songs. Georges Brassens's elevation to the status of singing poet par excellence; the ultimate example of a process

⁴ We can find similar song-genres in most countries of the Western world in this period. The different terms used to describe these singer-songwriters in different countries are of interest: 'chansonniers' (Quebec), 'singer-songwriters' (Anglo-Saxon world), 'cantautori' (Italy), 'liedermacher' (Germany), 'tragoudopoioi' (songmakers, songsmiths) (Greece).

⁵ I use the term to refer both to a concept of a songwriters singing songs which are considered poetic, and to composers who use already published poems for their songs, thus 'singing' the work of poets.

resulting in what was hailed a ‘popularization of poetry’ (‘la poésie à la portée de toutes les bourses’ (Charpentreau 1960: 14)), will also be at the centre of my discussion (Part 1, Chapter 2).

I shall then move on to consider the emergence of ‘a new popular music’ in Greece after 1945. Through a review of the cultural politics of the popular composers Manos Hadjidakis (Part 2, Chapter 2) and Mikis Theodorakis (Part 2, Chapter 3), I assess the decisive role literature played in shaping a distinct popular culture ideology in Greece, and follow its transposition to the field of popular music; I also ponder the extreme importance and canonical space given in Greece to Mikis Theodorakis’s project of turning acclaimed poems into songs, a strategy that soon had its own generic name (*Melopoietene Poiese* [Musicalized Poetry]). Finally, I turn to Dionysis Savvopoulos, a Greek singer-songwriter much influenced by Georges Brassens and Bob Dylan who, as I shall show, both absorbed and undermined the model of the singing poet through a renegotiation of 60s countercultural politics (Part 3).

An obvious question here is why I am not limiting myself to the seemingly more recognizable concept of the ‘singer-songwriter’ as opposed to that of ‘singing poets’. The former term describes artists who wrote their songs (music and lyrics) and performed them themselves. Indeed, singer-songwriters have been identified as a distinct genre over the last few decades, now meriting an entry in the latest edition of the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. But as the entry makes very clear, this definition is far from unproblematic:

Singer-songwriters *have been described* variously as *folk poets, auteurs, poet-composers and even bards*, indicating the supreme importance of the words, with both the sung lines and their instrumental accompaniment providing support. Although many singer-songwriters have published poems as *literature* [...] the genre is both an aural and oral one with its roots in *ancient oral traditions*. The songs have the *legitimacy* of a poet reading his or her own verse, to which is added the *authority* of a musician singing an own composition. The direct connection between performer and audience can produce a cultural commonality or *authenticity* which has made some songs extraordinarily representative of their time [...] [Even though singer-songwriters have been using very different styles] what gives them coherence is the creative connection between music, text and listener, and which is mediated by a single singer (Potter 2001: 424; 427, emphasis added).

The *Grove*'s references to the singer-songwriter's 'roots in ancient oral traditions' and the use of such words as 'legitimacy', 'authority' and 'authenticity', betray, I believe, the mechanics of the larger formation of which singer-songwriters were part - that is, a persistent use of literary models to establish legitimacy and authority for a part of popular music.

It is difficult to argue in the modern world that there can be a part of 'oral culture' unmediated by writing, what Walter Ong calls 'primary orality' (denoting 'an oral culture untouched by writing' Ong 1982: 6; 31 and *passim*), even if we accept the term 'secondary orality' that many critics have preferred in response (the situation where orality and writing interact). In 20th-century music, the dominant presence of the record, sound technologies and the promotion techniques of the recording industry make it almost impossible to speak of 'an oral genre of popular music' especially if we restrict our analysis to the western world.⁶ On the contrary, the references to orality in the period this thesis covers were, as we will see, very much caught up in a web of written texts (criticism, music industry promotion, book series) and were exploited and further elaborated by the extremely textual-centred and bureaucratic record industry. What these references referred to was a form of *originary orality*, a view that suggested that primary oral genres of the past were at the very foundation of 'good' modern popular music. This is the main reason why I prefer the term singing poets, and include in my study not only singer-songwriters in the strict sense, but also popular music composers who worked with literary texts and poets who wrote song lyrics. I am not concerned with assessing and/or reclaiming the singing poets' secondary orality, but with showing how the reference to an originary orality (that is to the imagery of troubadours, oral minstrels or wandering storytellers) provides, like the reference to 'writing', 'poetry', and 'authorship', textually-grounded legitimacy and authority - to some artists, to a genre, or to a whole field that is renarrated as the system of popular music.

The literary viewpoint

⁶ Simon Frith has gone as far as to argue that 'twentieth-century popular music means the twentieth-century popular record; not the record of something (a song? a singer? A performance?) which exists independently of the music industry, but a form of communication which determines what song, singers and performances are and can be' (Frith 1988: 12).

As the use of the word 'writer', 'author' and 'poetry' to define some of the genres that display the features of the singing poet shows, the comparison between literature and popular music after the 40s was largely aimed at exploiting the prestige and the role of the author in the modern, textual world, and has little to do with either oral cultures or with a deeper questioning of how literature works.

In more ways than one, the tendency towards a conceptualization of the popular song through a persistent reference to literature and writing, especially as it emerged in France, can be compared to a similar critical vocabulary which at around the same time attracted the cinematographers of the Nouvelle Vague, mainly in the *Cahiers du cinéma*. The cinematic auteur was seen as a *metteur-en-scène*, his *oeuvre* as the sum of his films, his style compared to a writing style and his camera to a pen (Caméra-Stylo, Astruc 1948). This critical tendency functioned, like its counterpart in song criticism, as 'a basis for distinction and evaluation [and] emphasized the cinema's claim to parity of treatment with other arts' (Reader 1979: 131-132). But *auteur theory* introduced ways to see the cinematic work as a whole, emphasizing its distinctiveness and providing new models for assessing films; it was also used to dismantle an earlier critical focus exclusively on scripts, providing an escape from 'text-only' criticism. In contrast, the critical discourses associated with the singing poets signalled a retreat to an appreciation of the songs' lyrics first and foremost, thus reducing the song exclusively to its verbal text. They also introduced a semi-mythological idealization of a unity of music with poetry which was not analyzed but only reiterated as a critical fixation.

The critical appreciation of the singing poets mainly employed a view of literature as a stable field and of the author as the most prestigious artist in the cultural system. However, today we are in a position to accept that the content of literariness is relational, discursively defined and institutionally supported. I share the view that literature is indeed a category shaped by specific historical and institutional evolutions, legitimized by a multi-dimensional structure of power and appreciated and taxonomized through an interrelated cultural enterprise, that of literary criticism (see Bathrick 1992; Eagleton 1996; Culler 1997). Our idea of what constitutes literature's prestige in the modern world is interwoven with a prevailing concept of authorship. But as Foucault argued in 'What is an Author?', we should actually speak not about 'the author', as a

stable profession and/or a person of transcendental vocation, but think instead of the 'author function', the particular connotations that authorship has been associated with at different times (Foucault [1969] 1988). The point not often made about Foucault's much cited article is that apart from a demystification of the author, his argument also aims at a demystification of literature. Literature, Foucault implies, is this particular institution associated with the author function and evolving around it. If we accept the author as a fluid category, then we should as a corollary admit literature's relational characteristics too.

My argument in relation to the popular song is that, especially in the two countries and the period I have chosen as my primary focus, an 'author-role' was borrowed from literature in order to legitimize popular songs. Thus the notion of the singing poet came about to represent an authorial song that could function as high-popular, the highest point in a system of popular music. The radical review of our thinking about literature that has occurred in recent decades as a result of structuralism, post-structuralism and cultural studies, provides the space for a similar review of the concepts underlying the critical appreciation of the popular song as a literary form.

We now see genre in a completely different light, accepting it as being in a constant state of flux, a set of laws 'dead at the very moment it is uttered' (Derrida 1992), that is, a set of rules and principles that is there, if only to be undermined and transgressed (Todorov 1978; Beebee 1994). We are also more willing today to understand genre as a set of performative statements constantly shaping a territory, an endless game of 'in', 'out' and of rearranging of borders (Freadman 1988; 1991). The notion of the literary canon has also come under attack; far from an unchanged 'great tradition', we tend to talk about an agonistic space (Bloom 1994), and focus more on the ways canons are arranged as systems that reflect relations of power, how they are discursively ordered and deeply embedded in an endless web of textual assertions of value (Scholes 1992; Gorak 1991; Von Halberg 1984; Herrnstein Smith 1984). Taking such re-writings of literary critical concepts into account, we can confront the traditionalist appreciation of the singing poets and reveal its predispositions and limitations. Through a review of how the high-popular was constructed and subsequently undermined by certain artists, we can also improve our insight into the

ways literary canons and generic systems operate, and how we as readers, listeners and critics react to them. Last but not least, the period under discussion provides a valuable insight into an early stage of the interaction between popular arts and literature which culminated in the late 60s (as I explain in Part 3, Chapter 1, with a review of the cultural politics of the 60s).

The cultural studies and literary theory framework which I adopt is bound to start from reading(s). But in order for one not to repeat the mistake of using a literary critical project in order to speak about popular songs, one has to accept a different form of reading, an open reading of the multiple, palimpsestic texts that converge in the production of a popular song. This is a view that has gained momentum in recent studies of popular music: Richard Middleton, in the introduction to a collection of articles tellingly titled *Reading Pop*, argues that our idea of the text has to be open and discursive, cultural and fluid:

Well, what exactly *is* the text here? Aren't the channels of dissemination, the institutions and social settings, the collective behavioural practices of musicians and fans, the associated visual styles, the surrounding media discourses, aren't these all parts of a *multiple text* - an interactive network of semantic and evaluative operations? This is fair comment: pop's mode of existence (dizzying chains of replication and intertextual relations; ubiquitous dissemination; production processes and reception contexts characterized by multi-media messages) does indeed render ideas of the bounded, originary text and of its single *auteur* outmoded (2000:8).

My main focus in this thesis will be on how songs, through their *multiple text*, produce meaning, and how I, as critic, listener and reader, am supposed to interact with this multiplicity. Starting from various texts (predominantly the text of the lyrics, but also details of performance, recording features and presentation aspects, interviews and criticism about the songs), I try to read the tension between divergent semiotic webs (connecting popular music and literature, for example, or art ideology and culture industry and so on) when they come to define a popular song. But my question also goes back to reception: popular songs produce meaning while also altering our understanding of (their place in) the cultural milieu. This is what Paul Zumthor means when he claims that 'It is no longer a past that influences me and informs me when I sing; it is I who gives form to the past' (Zumthor 1990: 203).

Zumthor takes this view to support his decision to analyze the work of the same artists I categorize as singing poets in terms of his notion of ‘oral poetry’. But, as he makes clear, the postwar singing poets *are seen* as modern oral minstrels and poets *at the moment of listening*. As the songs perform their inverted parentage, we the listeners decide to ‘read’ orality in(to) them. Thus both ‘poetry’ and ‘oral’ become in Zumthor’s view resignified as modalities of the modern song’s place in the world.

What remains, when the abstract categories (stemming from writing) are thus emptied out, is the statement of a fleeting agreement, of a momentary reconciliation between an expectation and what suddenly responds to it: this brief encounter. Jacques Brel stated one day to Clouzet [the editor of a book on him] that song is not an “art”. Developing this assertion into a series of paradoxes, he had meant to accentuate the “artisanal” aspect, but managed only to show just to what extent he was a prisoner of the literary conceptualization of poetry... yet no one will deny, I think, that Brel was a great poet, but *we* feel it to be so, in his *song*. The term “song” refers back to a mode of aesthetic existence that is not of the same kind as that which we currently call “poetry”; *we* refer back to our (historically and spatially determined) culture (ibid: 100).

I do not share Zumthor’s apparent opinion that if the songs pose as oral poetry or whatever else, and if we decide to accept this, then this is what counts as oral poetry. What he sees as the modern popular song’s renegotiated secondary orality, I prefer to see as its different *writerly modality*, the fact that it engages in complex modes of writing and reading which can be *acted out* at the moment of listening, performing etc. However, what I find extremely interesting is Zumthor’s insistence on addressing the popular song’s difference: ‘*we feel it to be so, in his song*’. An important aspect of the popular song that is normally left out of consideration is, I would argue, its peculiar, performative placing in our world, the fact that we construct our appreciation of it around ‘*le plaisir de l’écoute, cette rencontre qui fait que tel individu aime telle chanson*’ (Calvet 1981: 18); the fact that we develop, in Barthes’s words, ‘sans loi [et] au-delà du sujet toute la valeur qui est cachée derrière “j’aime” ou “je n’aime pas”’ (Barthes 1972: 62).

‘*I like and I don’t like*’, ‘*this song has played a role in my life*’, ‘*this song reminds me of*’: these are reactions that may not seem helpful for an analytic approach of popular songs; but, what if, as the *Feuilles Mortes* songs seemed to suggest, therein

lies, in the final analysis, the real distinctiveness of the popular song? Should we then add, as a supplement and compensation to the unavoidable incompleteness of our readings of the endless semiotic webs that make a song, a glimpse of the popular song's place in our life?

Seriousness vs. frivolity

In 1965 Edgar Morin, announcing avant la lettre the need for a 'multilayered reading' of popular songs, argued that 'on ne connaît pas la chanson', precisely because the popular song's multi-dimensionality had never been tackled effectively. Introducing the special issue on 'Chansons et disques' of the journal *Communications*, Morin emphasized the 'caractère multidimensionnel qu'aurait toute investigation dans le domaine de la chanson'. What he argued next is of extreme interest: a serious study of the popular song had not yet been undertaken, Morin said, possibly because '[l]'étude des phénomènes jugés frivoles est jugée frivole', and, as he put it, the song is the domain 'dans la culture de masse le plus insignifiant, le plus frivole...' (Morin 1965: 1).

Two decades later Louis-Jean Calvet, an academic who has persistently attempted to tackle the popular song's multidimensionality (Calvet 1988; Calvet 1995) tried, in his very influential *Chanson et société* (1981), to redress the balance. He insisted that 'reconnaître son importance à la chanson, ce n'est pas seulement dire cette importance, c'est étudier la chanson comme un phénomène important, et se donner les moyens d'en parler de façon sérieuse'. The issue still is, he maintained, whether the discussion about songs can be of any importance, whether the song can be dealt with in a 'serious' manner:

Comment parler de la chanson: là réside tout le problème. Sans vouloir le moins du monde limiter le plaisir de l'écoute, cette rencontre qui fait que tel individu aime telle chanson, il nous faut nécessairement tenter d'analyser la chanson d'un point de vue théorique, construire les bases d'un discours critique responsable' (1981: 18, emphasis added).

There is an implied opposition (strengthened by the rhetorical structure of the phrase) between 'plaisir de l'écoute' and 'critique responsable' in this quotation. In other words, the lack of a responsible critical analysis deprives songs of their seriousness, while a

potential theorization would run the risk of undermining the simple ‘pleasure’ they can offer. We have here the implicit guilt of the critic who fears he may spoil the *jouissance* of simple listening - as if invited somewhere where he should not be. Calvet’s work thus adopts the same pattern as the *Communications* special issue: seriousness (of criticism) is placed against the inherent ‘frivolity’ of an art form.

This is, I believe, the biggest problem with any analytic approach to popular songs: even when we tackle more than one of the song’s dimensions, be it music, social content, performance and performance space, recording and so on, we are faced with a deep impulse to pin-down and circumscribe a stable text in order to make our object of study ‘serious’. This, however, gives a bitter feeling to the critic of songs, since as a result the object of study seems to lose its most defining characteristic: its place in life, its dispersibility, its *feuille-morte-ness*.

This feeling has often led critics who did not want to succumb to the ‘stable/serious text’ model to retreat into a provocative personal style, pointing out that the popular song’s most effective characteristic is not whether it is serious and respectable, but comes from its power to reside in the everyday, the uncategorizable, the upsetting and the unsettling. Boris Vian’s book *En avant la zizique*, a satirical pseudo-poetics of the popular song that pre-empted all the ‘serious’ critical attempts of the 60s, is one such personal statement.

Vian’s *En avant la zizique* (1958), or, as its subtitle specifies ‘Le livre d’Or et le Code d’Honneur de la Chanson’, is written as a *moquerie* of a classical musical piece, with chapters headed by characteristic neologisms *a la italiana* meant to remind the reader of mottos from a musical score: the one on ‘Les Éditeurs’ starts in *Tempo di Piratissimo*, the first chapter of definitions is aptly given a *Tempo di Laroussino*, the chapter on critics and criticism is taken in a *Tempo di Bellissima Coneria* etc.

The Popular Song emerges from Vian’s writing as itself a parasitic art. Nothing happens correctly; everything is governed by flawed principles and served by deeply ignorant disciples: artists seem more like businessmen and the field resembles a battleground full of hilarious incidents. But this is a parasite with the undeniable power to subvert. Vian keeps pointing to what he believes distinguishes the popular song from other art forms: the fact that it rewrites everyday life from within. The whole text of *En*

avant la zizique is a pastiche of pseudo-scientific narratives (complete with theorems, rules, Pataphysician mathematics and analytic premises); at moments, an uncanny logic prevails and the song is treated as an art form with an oddly subversive power. Of these moments, one stands out in particular: speaking of the 'chain of production' of a song, Vian describes

une chaîne qui va de l'idée surgie, un beau jour, dans un cerveau d'auteur en ébullition, à la bouche édentée d'une vieille dame fredonnante, en l'an 2025, un mambo entendu un soir d'août 58, soir funeste de ce premier bal où elle rencontra le polytechnicien boutonneux qui allait lui faire onze enfants, tous futurs généraux (1966: 61).

The grotesqueness of the image notwithstanding, the mambo here serves, like the *Feuilles Mortes* before it, as a symbol of the associative power of the popular song. The story of the old woman who remembers the scene of her seduction by humming the mambo she once danced at a ball, is trapped in an odd temporal dimension. The mambo cuts through her life and shapes it: it is heard not once, but repetitively, as simultaneously the space of a memory, a fantasy and an everyday habit and habitation. The scene reminds one of the way Fredric Jameson, in a different context, described such life-long attachment to popular songs:

The passionate attachment one can form to this or that pop single, the rich personal investment of all kinds of private associations and existential symbolism which is the feature of such attachment, are fully as much a function of our own familiarity as of the work itself: the pop single, by means of repetition, insensibly becomes part of the existential fabric of our own lives, so that what we listen to is ourselves, our own previous auditions (Jameson [1979] 1992: 20).

As Greil Marcus has claimed (in a statement that could well be referring to Vian's old mambo lady), 'people don't use songs according to anyone's intent. In the truest moments, songs, like microbes - without intent, without brains - use people' (quoted in Frith 1996: 158).

The last three quotations speak of the power of the popular song to play a role in our lives and in that they resemble a recent tendency in critical discourse to treat popular music as the 'soundtrack of our lives', as an element constructing 'the technology of the

self' (Frith 2001; DeNora 1999; DeNora 2000). The quotations also focus on personal and individual associations with popular songs and provide a favourable allusion to the popular song's belonging in a 'little tradition', a cultural space meant to stay outside high institutionalized art. A similar allusion, however dissonant and subdominant it seemed at the time, was constant during the period I am examining. Thus Brassens and Brel, at the height of their acclaim as poets, started talking about the 'chanson' as 'art mineur' (a formulation later ironized with gusto by Gainsbourg: 'chanson... un art mineur... pour les mineures') (see Part 1, Chapter 3). Manos Hadjidakis, during the emergence of a high-popular establishment in Greek music of the same period, insisted on presenting his view of popular music as *the place of dreams* (see Part 2, Chapter 2). And, finally, Dionysis Savvopoulos, would try deliberately to mix 'yéyé' and high-popular aesthetics in an effort to reassess the form and potentials of the popular song (as I explain in Part 3, Chapters 2 and 3).

This bridging of the *seriousness vs. frivolity* dichotomy is, in the final analysis, the space where the most appealing aspect of the singing poets emerges. As we saw in the *Feuilles Mortes* songs, while authorship and an allusion to poetry could shape a reference to the popular song (and provide a value-system for it), it is the constant emergence of the song's least dignified characteristics, its everyday life associations, its role in the 'existential fabric' of our life, its disposability and iterativity, that provoke our creative response to it and safeguard its uniqueness.

Reading Pop

In the most well-known critique of popular music this century, Theodor Adorno analyzed what he pejoratively termed 'light music' as a mere product of the music industry, itself a segment of a larger culture industry that manipulates the individual's tastes, standardizes the cultural product, segregates and commodifies it in order to reach the most extended markets possible and to maximize profits. The music industry, Adorno maintains, produces parcelled, repetitive, fetishized musical works which are ardently consumed by a passive audience. 'The liquidation of the individual is the real signature of the new musical situation' (Adorno 1991: 31). This critique ought certainly to be taken into account in an analysis of popular music of the 20th-century (Middleton

2001a), but it has also given impetus to cultural critics who want to argue against Adorno's heavy legacy.⁷ They have tried to show how they themselves *react creatively* to popular music, thus asserting the individual's space within it and the power that listeners exert over their own listening. This in turn has led to insights about the way identities unfold and contestatory spaces are released through 'light music'.⁸

The theoretical premise for such a 'return of the listener' in popular music criticism has been provided by Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (Benjamin [1936] 1992). Benjamin - writing on art, photography and cinema - argues that mechanical reproduction destroyed the 'aura' of a work of art, thus radically altering its status as a unique, authentic object. Creativity has thus been demystified and the viewer is turned into an active re-producer of the work, a constant critic who participates in the production of the work's effect.

Theorists have capitalized on these remarks and tend today to retreat 'from 'modernist' frameworks in pop music analysis in favour of emphases on the microsituation, malleability of interpretation, the irreducibility of difference' (Middleton 2000). In this sense, they attempt what I see as a final bridging of the 'serious' and the 'frivolous' that dominated earlier discussions: they try to bring the fan out in the critic, the everyday *feuille morte* in the poet.

This is an aspect that I also try to foreground in my analysis. While the channels that gave rise to the notion of the singing poets seem much indebted to a modernist project of 'highing low art', I try to also discern the songs' 'other side'; I see this as an assessment of the songs' own distinctiveness as popular art, as well as a result of my own relation to them. It is as popular songs that I first heard the work I will be analyzing in the following chapters, and whenever I quote from them or describe the discourses around them, their music and my previous auditions (my self listening) are what I have heard whispered behind the text. This is one of the reasons why in Part 3, I push my

⁷ Frans Birrer concluded his review of definitions given to popular music with such a call: 'Better than to search for definitions would be to start from those parts of musical experience that are commonly denoted as 'popular', and then to show that they are not as one-dimensional as many believe them to be' (Birrer 1985:104).

⁸ In the most curious explanation of the anti-Adorno tradition in cultural criticism, Bernard Gendron has argued that theorists of a younger generation accept the potentially radical and emancipatory potentials of popular music because of their *individual experience* as participants in 'the radical movements of the

reading strategies more towards deconstruction and psychoanalysis, in an effort to deal with the popular song not as a stable text with literary references, but as the potential other, the place not *of a confirmation* but *for a dislocation* of my own analytic premises.

In a comment that I fully endorse, Richard Middleton explains that ‘reading pop’ is a strategy which ‘acknowledges (if only implicitly) the positivity of difference, the formative power of dialogue with what is absent, with the Other, in such a way that it provides both the means to problematize the boundaries of the ‘popular’ (external and internal), and to delineate their historical specificity’ (2000: 13).

In the following pages I deal with songs which have had *real* meanings (so their first audiences claimed), which have played an uncontested role in people’s lives and have had a crucial impact on a whole field of popular music. But I also try to capture some of their moments of impurity and contingency, to worry the knots where I find that meaning is *at issue*. I deal with an historically specific formulation of popular music but also look at how its boundaries come into question. To put it simply, this thesis goes in search of the conditions that made certain songs hailed for what they were saying (their poeticity), while also trying to turn to the songs themselves to see how they superseded those words. This means that, at times, even though my first concern is to find a frame for the *poet*, I do not forget that the essence of his/her *singing* may be that ‘*quand on est à court d’idées, on fait/ la la la la la la la*’.

sixties, which turned to rock’n’roll as their primary means of cultural expression’ (Gendron 1986: 10; see also Paddison 1996).

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Part 1: Poetry and the songs

The genre of Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes and its impact on French Popular Music in the 1950s and 1960s

1. Poetry and the system of French song

Whenever a well-known singer has died in France during the last few decades, there has usually been one thing on which all the obituaries have agreed: the use of the word 'poetry' to define his/her art and the word 'poet' to characterize him/her.

'Trenet le poète a disparu', mourned the first page headline of the conservative *Le Figaro*, on the eve of Charles Trenet's death on 20 February 2001. The feeling was similar in the national coverage of Jacques Brel's death in 1978: 'Un poète qui nous étripait, comme pour mieux découvrir le secret d'un coeur déformé', wrote Alan Bosquet in *Le Monde* (reprinted in Monestier 1979: 13). As for the death of Georges Brassens in 1981, this was dealt with as the passing of a national poet: 'Quand il est mort le poète...' read the title of *Le Figaro* (31 November 1981), and almost the same words were used in the *Parisien Libéré* of the same date; 'Brassens: La mort d'un poète' announced *Le Matin* (31 November 1981). In a similar vein, the President of the Republic, François Mitterrand, announced: 'L'un des vrais poètes de ce temps vient de nous quitter. Georges Brassens avait su porter haut l'alliance de la poésie et de la musique, et son oeuvre est déjà inscrite dans le patrimoine culturel français' (reprinted in Monestier and Barlatier 1982: 11). This consensus occurred, as Louis-Jean Calvet notices, 'comme si on ne pouvait, en France, rendre hommage à un chanteur qu'en le considérant comme un poète' (Calvet 1991: 12).

The unsuspecting reader is awed by the sheer number and recurrence of the words "poet" and "poetry" in this context; they crop up in ways which combine extreme elevation of a genre apparently considered of low origin (these singer-songwriters were *as good as* poets), a canonical positioning (they *are* our modern poets) and a generic description (these singers we call poets) all at the same time.

As I will show, this is neither coincidental nor the conspiracy of a few exaggerating journalists and politicians. On the contrary, specific notions of 'poetry' and the 'poetic' have been used as basic instruments for the construction of a firm genealogy of French singers-songwriters over the last 50 years, and for a classification of the upper echelons of French popular music. This tendency originated in a cultural production which culminated in the 50s, to be specified, capitalized on and canonized in

publications, re-releases and discussions in the 60s. In the following pages I will be looking at how this discourse was produced, promoted and established.

The mirror of poetry

Stuart Hall has argued that we cannot understand what 'the popular' stands for in any given historical moment except by placing it in its broader cultural context: that is, in relation to those categories with which it is in opposition, in parallel or in accordance. Hall maintains that as a concept popular culture does not possess any essential, fixed content of its own, and is not the unmediated expression of a distinct social class (neither the authentic voice of the people, nor the space of manipulation by the dominant classes). We have to conceive of the popular rather as a huge battlefield which integrates points of resistance and moments of supersession, complex dialectics of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation. Hence popular culture is in a state of constant transformation, its elements moving incessantly between resistance and appropriation, its forms moving up and down the ladder of a high-low taxonomy; in the end popular culture is defined as the 'ground on which the transformations are worked' (Hall 1981: 228).

Following this argument, popular music critics now agree that we cannot speak of one unchanging popular music, but should refer instead to 'popular musics', taking into account the specific context of each historical moment (see Middleton 1992 and 2001, Frith 1996). What interests me here is that in this continuum of constant transformation, *the field* of popular music is arranged through an overarching performative gesture which transforms it into a system, that is 'a closed net-of-relations, in which the members [the genres and the styles] receive their values through their respective oppositions'.⁹ Through inclusions, exclusions and the shifting of borders, the dominant genres of popular music act by re-presenting themselves at the centre of a circle which is arranged so that their characteristics serve as canonical values. These dominant genres, and the discourses by and about them, both create a genealogy of popular music (older forms of popular music presented as precursors) and promote a sense of 'what popular music is' and 'should be'. Through this mechanism, popular

⁹ I am here using the definition of a cultural system given by Itamar Even-Zohar. See esp. 1979: 291.

music is conceptualized at a given historical moment and in a given geographical space not as continuous and fluid, but as a concrete system with set value criteria.

In French popular music, the 50s and 60s brought about such a performative re-organization and re-presentation of French Popular Music. The emergence of a popular song genre, later named the genre of the *Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes* (abbreviated as ACI)¹⁰, acted as the catalyst for this process. The external characteristics that defined the genre were the singers' tendency to present songs written by themselves, and the economical use of orchestration, which was often limited to a single instrument. The internal characteristics were as follows: a stylistic consistence and intertextual build-up which created the impression of a single person's 'oeuvre'; abundant allusions to an idealized image of oral poetry; and song lyrics that could lay claim to 'poetic value'. With the gradual creation of a 'singing national myth' in the 'troubadouric' persona of Georges Brassens, and with the extension of the discussion about the 'poetic value' of the basic movers in this genre, the ACI, particularly in the 60s, became not only a very distinct and 'prestigious' popular music genre, but a pattern for the very concept of "good" French popular music.

It is no accident that the most widely acknowledged and cited history of the modern French song, by Lucien Rioux, started life as *Vingt ans de chansons en France* (Rioux 1966) and then evolved into *50 ans de la chanson française* (Rioux 1992). The initial twenty years in question were, as one might expect, the period of the emergence of the ACI as a genre. Even in the final edition of this book, which is much more representative and inclusive, covering a larger time span than before, the chapter devoted to Brassens and his peers is aptly subtitled 'L'époque des géants'. The ACI, or, as a book called them in 1970, 'ces chanteurs que l'on dit poètes' (Hermelin 1970), were gradually presented as having 'high representatives' (Brassens, Ferré), 'forefathers' (Charles Trenet), ancestors (chanson réaliste and its stars, early -Yvette

¹⁰ I will use this rather unwieldy term throughout my study, since it has prevailed in the bibliography from the 60s onwards (see Calvet 1995a, Rioux 1992). Often, other terms are used, such as 'chanteurs-poètes'. The term *chansonnier*, which may still be used by some and was certainly employed by artists, especially in the 60s, is deeply confusing, since it first denotes a distinct song style of the 19th and early 20th century (culminating in Montmartre with Aristide Bruant) characteristic by its use of satire and bawdy humour. In this sense it has also entered the language as a verb ('chansonner qqn: se moquer de qqn par des chansons satiriques' Robert). As a tradition it may have influenced the emergence of the

Gilbert- or late- Piaf), minor or sui generis representatives (Anne Sylvestre, Bobby Lapointe, Barbara, and certainly Gainsbourg), and sons and daughters (Maxime le Forestier, Renaud). Even today, some see in musical genres that do not have much to do with them (such as the rap-influenced music of MC Solaar), their belated imitators (Carapon 1999). The genre of the Auteur-Compositeur-Interprète (ACI), Louis-Jean Calvet concludes, has been seen for the second half of the 20th century as ‘la rolls royce du chanteur français, le haut de gamme, le top niveau’ (Calvet 1995a: 58).

The ACI’s phenomenal acclaim is only one aspect of the crucial conviction of music criticism in France after 1945 that the French popular song has an uncontested literary value. This argument mutates into a viewpoint and becomes the dominant mode of judging -and, even, conceptualizing- the French ‘chanson’. Looking more carefully, the persistent literary appreciation of the modern French popular song seems to be the amalgam of two complementary critical strategies: the first is to see the French chanson (as exemplified by the ACI) as the direct descendant of a literary evolution, the second to discern in those artists first emerging in the 50s (and, retrospectively, in some of their predecessors), the return of oral minstrels, a successful mutation of oral poetry (of the troubadours, of ancient storytellers and so on) into modernity.¹¹

The combination of these two arguments is clearly shown in the perception of the French chanson outside France. One early example is an article by Alasdair Clayre in the *TLS* in 1968: he notes how the French singer-songwriters remind one that silently read poetry is a comparatively new practice, and that oral poetry, poetry performed or sung was once the rule. But the *TLS* reader should rest assured that, notwithstanding the ancient roots of their orality, these singers can also be as good as published poets: in short, they can write. Clayre goes on to present Brel and Brassens as ‘indispensable’ for the creation of a European popular song tradition:

Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes, but to use it to name the latter genre would be misleading. Still, however, the term *chansonnier* even today prevails over ACI in Quebec (see Hermelin 1970).

¹¹ These two complementary critical strategies culminated in two influential academic books, both published in the early 80s: Lucienne Cantaloube Ferrieu’s exhaustive monograph *Chanson et Poésie des Années 30 aux Années 60: Trenet, Brassens, Ferré... ou les “Enfants Naturels” du Surréalisme*, and Paul Zumthor’s well known *Introduction à la poésie orale*.

for the standards they set, for the scope of their constructions, and above all for having grounded their song-writing in the tradition of European verse, so that whatever else they do, they can write. Then there is the chance that sometimes they will write poetry (Clayre 1968: 104).

For Colin Evans, another British academic writing in 1981, 'the French chanson is a popular form and is about fundamentals' (Evans 1981: 11). In this context, 'fundamentals' means not so much a version of the popular as 'the authentic voice of the people', but as the 'authentic' voice of poetry. It is implied that the origins of poetry lie in oral poetry, an argument which I prefer to term the thesis of *originary orality*. At a time when the death of the author is proclaimed, Colin Evans reminds his readers, one should applaud 'a form of poetry' which 'remains inseparable from an author, a creator, a performer - a monument to a lost unity' (ibid). This framework still pertains in studies about the French song in England. In his recently published *Chanson: The French Singer-Songwriter from Aristide Bruant to the Present Day*, Peter Hawkins points out that 'Chanson is a tradition which goes back to the Middle Ages, and probably beyond [...] although it has undergone many transformations since then'; he adds that, undoubtedly, chanson has retained close links with its "more prestigious literary cousin", that is, poetry' (Hawkins 2000: 3).

Whither the poetic? The popular politics of the Resistance

One is tempted to accept, along with the critics cited above, that the poetic value of the chanson stems directly from a long French poetic tradition. In addition to this, the importance assigned to authors and literary figures in modern France should be mentioned. Literature in France still plays a central role 'in the ongoing process of the establishment of national identity' (Worton 1995: 192), and conversely, one could argue, all that is considered important ends up being conceived as a form of literature (the repeated special programs of the prestigious *Apostrophes* on chanson in the 70s and 80s would corroborate this point). It is also true that the generation of Brassens and Ferré were not the first musicians to be venerated as poets: there are accounts of Béranger admired as 'a poet' in the early 19th century, or of Bruant in the early 20th. But never before the 1950s was the mirror image of high literature used so consistently and extensively as a criterion to define and promote chanson.

However, even if we adopt an argument about the extent to which the French literary tradition is popular, we cannot ignore a series of other synchronic factors that seem to have influenced the apparent intellectualization of the French song after the 40s and provoked its critical reception based on literary criteria.

We should first look at the impact of the French communist party's decision dating from the 1920s to promote a protest poetry which was often sung (a move echoing what anarchic groups did in the 19th century). This played a role in the wide distribution of formally recognizable poetry and in the wider promotion of a tendency to 'get poetry out into the streets'. Some of the revolutionary 'sung poems' had their glory years in the Popular Front, a well-known example being the song 'Au devant de la vie' by Jeanne Perret, which used a film score by Shostakovich (Zumthor 1983: 219; Brécy 1978: 7-14; 257-267).

We could see the attempt made by left-wing writers to write simpler poems aimed at reaching a wider audience as a development of this strategy. Some of these poets gradually started employing not only the familiar forms of song lyrics in their poems, but also writing lyrics for songs themselves. Jacques Prévert's work springs to mind: his famous *Paroles* emulate the simplicity of the popular song; in fact, many of the poems in *Paroles* would indeed become song lyrics in the post-war years using the music of emigré musician Joseph Kosma. Louis Aragon is another such example: most of his 'song-like' poems were turned into famous popular songs in the 50s and 60s by Léo Ferré and Jean Ferrat.¹²

After the Liberation, the poetic ideals of the Resistance were fused with the sounds of the cities, the expressive and explosive musical styles of the late 30s and the Occupation (the jazzy tunes of the zazou-years and the Music-Hall song numbers celebrating a vagabond life and escapist romances). Thus popular music of the cities came to replace the revolutionary marches as the best accompaniment to popular poetry. The marriage of the two sides of the popular (the sound of the cities and the concept of popular literature promoted by the Resistance) that followed, was presented as an expression (albeit being at the same time a redefinition) of what 'the people really

¹² The song-lyric experiments of such high calibre authors as Queneau, Mac Orlan, Sartre and Cocteau should also be mentioned (see Cantaloube-Ferrieu 1981).

wanted'. Many critics argue that this was the crucial moment for a decisive effacement of the 'red line' separating high literature and popular culture.¹³

But the 'grande utopie d'une République sociale', promoted by the Popular Front, evolved into an even wider cultural agenda with a canonistic set of criteria. Jean Claude Klein notes that in the 40s, all the parties who had had a role in the Resistance wanted to promote the ideal of a democratic culture, a high-standard culture for everyone: there were artists and songs immediately invoked and promoted as 'authentic' (Trenet, Oswald, the newcomer Montand), while others (Tino Rossi, Line Renauld) were judged as frivolous, anodyne, alienating (Klein 1995, esp: 67-70).

In other words, while nominally the line separating the 'two cultures' was quite spectacularly effaced, another line was created instead, between authentic and inauthentic popular songs, between those ideologically accepted or not; a distinction that would soon mutate into 'good' and 'bad', 'high' and 'low' popular song. This then would be the ideological space the Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes, very conveniently, inhabited: the place of a good popular song, the space of the high-popular.

The growing new division within popular music could subsequently be manipulated by the music industry, which was emerging at that time as an important player in the field. At the beginning of the 50s, the disc (which from 1953 was produced in France using the microgrooved - 'microsillon' - technique) and the radio became the main channels for a popular song's promotion and consumption. The existence of an inherent taxonomy in popular music would be used by the industry for better marketing results. The outcome was, as outlined above, the heavily promoted image of 'l'âge d'or de la chanson',

qui sera, plus tard, érigé en modèle, en forme universelle de l'espèce chanson, parvenue à son plein épanouissement, puis produite à l'étranger sous le label "France" (Klein 1995: 69).

The intellectuals, the Rive Gauche and the new songwriting

¹³ Paul Zumthor is the most influential: 'Au cours des années qui survivrent 1945 et le traumatisme nazi, une convergence se produisit entre cette tradition populaire et une poésie "littéraire" issue de la Résistance: la ligne rouge sembla s'effacer, qu'avaient laborieusement tracée et maintenue des siècles de culture élitiste entre poème et chanson' (Zumthor 1983: 274).

Another key cultural event after the Liberation was the re-emergence of the Rive Gauche as a subcultural symbol. Intellectuals and youths who frequented the area created a climate that has since been much mythologised.¹⁴ Under the major influence of Jean-Paul Sartre and the role played by such charismatic artists/authors as Boris Vian, also thanks to bad press from the conservative newspapers, the Rive Gauche cellar clubs were filled every night with people singing, dancing and ‘exchanging ideas’.¹⁵ Musically, the biggest influence remained jazz, as it had been before the Occupation, but the atmosphere was now decisively intellectual. Boris Vian, the writer one could listen to playing trumpet with his jazz band in the new club *Taboo*, also wrote a ‘guide’, *Manuel de Saint Germain des Prés* (1950), in which this part of Paris reached almost transcendental dimensions; the book presented itself as a utopian map of a utopian space. Musical styles, pseudo-existentialist collages, cartoons of the famous “Germanoprätins” (including Cocteau, Prévert, Merleau-Ponty and, of course, Sartre), were assembled side by side with an excessive mapping of the quartier, information about streets, historical sites, and, of course, details about the ‘caves’, the underground clubs. In all respects, this was Saint Germain des Prés presented as a lively subculture made up of progressive intellectuals.

The existentialist and ‘engagedly intellectual’ subcultural character of Rive Gauche lay behind the legacy of the ACI as *the* anti-commercial and potentially subversive song genre. The Rive Gauche ‘revolution’ created the intellectual milieu for a more personalized and, in an existentialist sense, more ‘responsible’ form of songwriting. It provided the catalyst for a transformation of the song of ‘je’ (represented in songs sung by well known singers where the ‘I’ of the song was seen merely as the role taken by the singer) to the song of ‘moi’ (where a fully integrated sense of ‘singing personality’ was at stake and was easily conflated with the singing persona- the persona

¹⁴ At the beginning of the 1950s, one of the famous Cafés of the Rive Gauche, the *Café de Flore*, was advertised in magazines as “le rendez-vous des existentialistes” and the other, the *Deux Magots* as “Rendez-vous de l’élite intellectuelle” (see Campbell 1994: 95).

¹⁵ As Claude Roy recorded in his memoirs “We wanted to change the world during the daytime, and exchange ideas at night” (as cited in Lottman 1982: 239).

adopted by the singer).¹⁶ One should add that this is precisely the intellectual milieu in which the origins for the conceptualization of the film-director as auteur could be found.

But the Rive Gauche also brought the small underground clubs and cabarets back into fashion. Space in them was limited and the stage for the musician, if it existed at all, was severely restricted. Thus, the new generation of singer-songwriters who first appeared in these places had to use basic orchestrations: most of them accompanied themselves on guitar (Felix Leclerc or the young Brel), piano (Barbara, Ferré, Bécaud), and rarely made use of an additional bass (Brassens). When in the winter of 1951-52 a series of this generation of singers who also wrote their own songs caught the public eye as a definable group, they started appearing in small clubs as well as in big music-halls (see Klein 1991). The year marks the Parisian debut of Georges Brassens, but also of Raymond Devos, the Quebecois Félix Leclerc, Henri Salvador, Philippe Clay; even though they were all soon invited to appear in big music-halls, they kept their characteristic 'small scale' orchestrations. At the time, the Parisian night was still dominated by the 'big stars' of the music-hall (Piaf, Trenet). The apparent distinction between the over-performed and over-orchestrated style of the latter and the minimal constructions of the former thus reinforced the ACI's spartan orchestrations and simple melodic lines, *as a style*.

Some critics propose that in pursuit of this style, music was left rudimentary and the artist tried to compensate with more difficult, complex texts for lyrics (Calvet 1991: 130). I accept this argument as complementing the - more internal and ideological - reasons proposed earlier. Another hypothesis could also be added: the audience in the late 40s may have grown tired of the hyperboles of the music-hall, the overwrought sentimentality of the chanson réaliste and the exuberant diligence of jazz. We cannot take it for granted that a singer-songwriter who finds himself/herself in the limiting situation of performing in a cabaret, can write 'poetic songs' 'channelling his/her talent' from spectacular music to spectacularly worked verses instead. However, we have to acknowledge that in the small cellars of the Rive Gauche and the cabarets of

¹⁶ Wolfgang Asholt, who supports this argument, makes clear that for him the genre of the ACI also means political engagement. 'D'abord parce que ces ACI refusent de regarder leurs productions comme une marchandise et s'opposent donc à l'industrie culturelle qui se développe autour d'eux. Ensuite, étant

Montmartre (still in existence in the 50s), only some of the debutants stood a good chance: those whose music did not lose much if performed with only a guitar accompaniment and whose verses were closer to the standards of written poetry (and, one might add, more ‘existentialistes’) than the average popular hit of the time. Of these, the ones who had written their songs themselves could also be better marketed by an industry then rapidly gaining pace. Louis-Jean Calvet provides the ideal epilogue:

C'est ainsi qu' une certaine image de la chanson française commence à circuler, que nous pourrions ramener symboliquement à cette égalité: chanson française = guitare + poésie. On l'appelle "chanson poétique", "chanson littéraire" et surtout "chanson rive gauche"... Et si, derrière cette étiquette, on peut mettre plusieurs dizaines de noms, c'est Brassens qui va très vite en devenir le port-drapeau, lui qui à l'étranger va être comme le produit vedette d'un nouveau style. (Calvet 1991: 130)

It is to this image of Brassens as the very embodiment of the ‘nouveau style’ that I will now turn.

2. Georges Brassens: The troubadour as a nation.

National imagery and the modern troubadour

There is little dispute today about the status of Georges Brassens, not only concerning his place in the history of the French song, but also his standing as a quintessentially French, national treasure and cultural icon.

‘On l’avait... transformé en institution. Auteur-Compositeur-Interprète sétois, il personnifiait la chanson française. La bonne, bien écrite, soutenue par une pensée solide, un vif goût des mots rares et des images fortes’, writes Lucien Rioux in his *Georges Brassens: Le poète philosophe* (Rioux 1988: 8). These are elements which serve to construct the ‘Brassens-persona’: the singer par excellence, the modern troubadour, the mild anarchist and the consistent pacifist, the poet studied in schools and universities, the typical Frenchman, the quintessential embodiment of Frenchness, the authentic singing voice of the French people. In short, ‘Brassens fait partie de la conscience collective et de l’âme du Français moyen’ (Vassal 1996: 90); for modern France ‘ça ne s’appelle pas une vedette, c’est un miroir’.¹⁷

Sara Poole, in the beginning of her recent study of Brassens’s work - included in a series of critical guides on canonical literary texts- finds him as iconic as the Eiffel Tower: ‘Eiffel’s *dame de fer* has come to symbolize the French flair for daring, stylish innovation. And Georges Brassens has come to symbolize - the French’. She also notes that ‘the notion of his incarnating Frenchness, personifying à la Marianne an intangible French quintessence [...] is a home-grown appreciation, surfacing for the first time in the late 50s’ (Poole 2000: 9).

We are focusing on the construction of a myth, the ‘*mythe Brassens*’, propagated by a thick nexus of texts, multimedia references and the constant presence of his image in newspapers, books and discs with a prominent place in every music-shop in France. The prime material for the construction of this myth is to be found in the songs, most of which have become classics. Brassens is, after all, the singer with the pipe and the moustache, singing ‘l’amour, la mort et le temps qui passe’, using rudimentary musical settings; the popular anti-hero of ‘La mauvaise réputation’; the loyal friend of ‘Les

¹⁷ *Libération* 22 October 1991.

copains d'abord'; the mild anarchist of 'Le pluriel', the anticleric, the pacifist, the antimilitarist, the reconciliatory figure ('Tonton Nestor') and the sceptic ('La Tondue'). He is consistently described as 'a folk troubadour [...] reflecting the human condition and railing against the stupidities of society [...] a contemporary François Villon'.¹⁸ Critics acknowledge him as a unique songsmith who laid bare the elements of his song poetics and who, in the tradition of the ancient lyric poets, has provided us with a description of his characteristic persona in a metrically perfect and thus unalterable alexandrine: 'Serein, contemplatif, ténébreux, bucolique' (from the song 'Les trompettes de la Renommée').

Reading popular accounts of Brassens's work, one realizes that his myth is not only about the person and the persona on display in the songs. It is also the myth of the whole genre of the Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes and of 'la poésie populaire': 'Le grand poète descendu dans l'arène de la chanson',¹⁹ 'plutôt un philosophe',²⁰ 'Georges Brassens a le génie de s'inspirer de la meilleure tradition des chansons françaises, celle qui existe depuis le Moyen Age. Il retrouve un peu l'inspiration de Villon, le poète mauvais garçon. Brassens s'adresse à un public intelligent; ses chansons sont souvent difficiles, mais elles plaisent aussi aux gens les plus simples par leur anticonformisme, leur verve populaire'.²¹ This is an artist who has been singled out not only to represent, but also to consolidate and formulate a whole genre along with a range of discussions on what a popular poetry could mean. He is also one whose popularity never waned, who was elevated as the French popular singing poet par excellence, and who, as such, represents the 'highest standard' of popular song in France of the second half of the 20th century, a golden 'unchanging' measure to map a changing field:

Chaque génération amenait une nouvelle fournée des fidèles. On avait aimé Trenet et Brassens, on aimait Brassens et Bécaud, Brassens et Johnny, Brassens et les Beatles, Brassens et Higelin. Questionnés aujourd'hui, nombre de jeunes interprètes avouent ou clament leur admiration pour Brassens et l'influence qu'il a exercée sur eux (Rioux 1988: 15).

In what follows I will show the extent to which this 'mythe Brassens' was first constructed by elements present in the songs themselves. I will then move on to a brief

¹⁸ Naomi Barry, 'Brassens, the Troubadour', *International Herald Tribune* 12 December 1972.

¹⁹ *L'Humanité* 19 January 1967.

²⁰ *France Soir* 21 October 1964.

survey of articles and books that shaped the public conception of Brassens as a ‘popular poetry’ hero and used the ideal of the ‘modern troubadour’ with which he was identified to relaunch a discussion on popular song and to consolidate the genre of the Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes. My further question will be how this discourse of praise and mythologization was in turn renegotiated by Brassens’s songs.

Brassens’s success came almost immediately after his first appearance on the stage of Patachou’s Montmartre cabaret in the early 50s. If Charles Trenet was the face of the chanson at that time, Brassens could easily have been conceived as the anti-Trenet par excellence. There was a dramatic contradiction between the all-laughing, all-dancing and musically overblown, youthful Trenet, and this figure of a mature man standing stock still, singing monotonous narrative songs with his southern méridional accent, ‘guitare aux mains’. The very first newspaper mention of him in this context, speaks of a nervous singer with a guitar, an ‘accent sétois’ and songs ‘d’inspiration folklorique’ (quoted in Hawkins 2000:124). He was viewed as a much needed departure from the zazou years (still personified in the late 50s by Trenet), with a minimal musical performance in direct contrast with the over-orchestrated, jazzy musical environment of the Rive Gauche. This was a singer-songwriter ideal for the new, small boîtes, with his focus on lyrics and no need for the support of an orchestra. No wonder he was picked up by the producer and manager Jacques Canetti, a man famous for his perceptiveness in discovering new talents and promoting new trends.

Chanson folklorique / chanson populaire

From very early on, Brassens was identified as the singer who would promote the song into a high literary art form and make poetry popular²²; in the meantime, even the early assessments of his style mention the troubadours and the trouvères as an obvious reference²³. Where did this immediate response come from? Partly from the fact that in

²¹ Geneviève Rêve, ‘Le poète du temps jadis retrouvé’, *La Tribune de Genève* 29 July 1965.

²² The poet René Fallet recalls in an article in *Nouvelles Littéraires* (5 December 1963) the initial impression Brassens had made, ten years before, on a certain circle of intellectuals: ‘Pour eux, Brassens poète, c’était un pléonasmе. Il n’était que cela... Le succès de Brassens n’est autre que la revanche des pauvres tirages actuels des ouvrages de poésie et des plaquettes “à compte d’auteur”’.

²³ Summing up ten years of criticism and popular mythologising, a 1963 article in *Combat* (17 September 1963) entitled: ‘À Bobino: Rentrée du trouvère Georges Brassens’, states matter of factly: ‘Brassens est Sétois et c’est le mot troubadour qui vient tout d’abord sous la plume, à son propos.’

his early songs, Brassens used tropes and themes well known from an oral folk tradition that was again rediscovered in the immediate postwar period. 'Traditional songs [were] sung in every school in France, every "colonie des vacances", youth hostel or scout camp' (Evans 1977: 675). 1944 had seen the publication of the widely read and much quoted *Livre des chansons* by Henri Davenson (pseudonym of Henri-Irénée Marrou), one in a long line of popular anthologies that had started appearing from the early 19th century with considerable success. These anthologies widened an ideological distinction that today we could identify as that between *folk* vs. *popular* culture - even though the word 'folk' is not used in French as extensively as in English, and the French collectors of songs and tales from the rural areas in the 19th century still preferred the word 'populaire'.

The word 'folklore' came into the French language from the English relatively late (1887 is the date given by the *Robert*), but the concept of a rural popular art that would be analyzed as 'authentic and ancestral' in direct opposition to what was seen as the lowly culture of the cities, had appeared very early in the 19th century (see Klein 1995).²⁴ Raymond Williams's description of how the concept of the *folksong* came into being in 19th century Europe holds exact for the ideology behind the various *livres des chansons* that shaped the French public's idea about 'the treasure of the song tradition':

Folksong came to be influentially specialized to the pre-industrial, pre-urban, pre-literate world, though popular songs, including new industrial work songs, were still being actively produced. Folk, in this period, had the effect of backdating all elements of popular culture, and was often offered as a contrast with modern popular forms, either of a radical and working-class or of a commercial kind (Williams 1988: 137)

In modern France, old folk songs were very influentially introduced as part of a national tradition that had to be learned, appreciated and reiterated, especially in difficult times. Henri Davenson, who prepared his collection 'quand la France, déchirée par la défaite et occupée par l'ennemi, était menacée par le découragement, le désespoir - la trahison'

Cependant il compose en langue d'oïl... de Paris et le ton de sa poésie est celui d'un trouvère. [...] Georges Brassens [...] est le numéro un de la chanson française [...] La monotonie volontaire des lignes musicales donne de la densité au texte. Le timbre est émouvant et la diction parfaite'.

(Davenson 1977: I), also introduced it with a typical declaration about the ideological importance of the ‘chanson folklorique’ which he alternately calls ‘chanson populaire’:

Je ne suis pas folkloriste, mais seulement un lettré français; je m'intéresse au folklore, à ses recherches et surtout à leurs résultats. [La chanson populaire...] fait partie de *ma* culture et représente une valeur *pour moi*. [...] C'est comme homme cultivé que je cherche à connaître la chanson folklorique: Français, et comme tel occidental à idées claires, je professe naïvement qu'une connaissance plus distincte ne saurait faire de tort à l'amour et je cherche de mieux connaître la chanson populaire pour avoir des raisons de mieux l'aimer. (Davenson 1944: 12)

The intellectual appreciation (*un homme lettré*) and the insistence on the importance of the folk songs as a key part of the living culture (*fait partie de ma culture et représente une valeur*) is characteristic. It is also indicative of the extent to which older song traditions were present in post-war France.

It is thus conceivable that when Brassens sang his song ‘Les Sabots d'Hélène’ for the first time (1954), the audience would easily have picked up the ‘sabots’ reference from the refrain of the folk song ‘En passant par la Lorraine’: ‘En passant par la Lorraine avec mes sabots/ Rencontrai trois capitaines, avec mes sabots/ Ils m'ont appelée vilaine, avec mes sabots’ (collected in Davenson [1944] 1977: 330-332). Brassens's is a simple love tale, based on the folk narrative: here also three captains meet a sabot-wearing Hélène, whom they fail to conquer; the fourth ‘qui n' [est] pas capitaine’, our humble singer, does manage it. Folk music, folk tale, and an easy reference to the greatest storyteller of all time, Homer, all reassemble to support a Brassens persona under construction. Along with the sound of authenticity that the references to the old song would carry, we also have a subtle reference to the image of the ‘wandering troubadours’; the songwriter seems to be introducing himself as the offspring of a very ancient and never absent trade.

‘Les Sabots d'Hélène’ is one of the few Brassens songs released on 78 RPM discs; the new technique of the ‘microsillon’ (microgrooved vinylite) of the 45 RPM had not yet been popularised in France, and for the first two years of his career, Brassens saw his songs released on both formats. In the 78 RPM release, ‘Les Sabots d'Hélène’

²⁴ I will be using the word ‘folk’ in its modern English use if this is what the authors of the French quotations mean with their use of ‘chanson populaire’.

was paired with the now proverbial 'Chanson pour l'Auvergnat', a combination that I would suggest was very significant. With a slow and gentle tune,²⁵ this second song is devoted to a man from Auvergne, a stranger who helped the singer in a difficult situation. 'Toi l'Auvergnat qui, sans façon,/ M'as donné quatre bouts de bois/ Quand dans ma vie, il faisait froid'.²⁶ The Auvergnat is a version of the Good Samaritan (and this certainly accounts for the song's extreme success among religious groups in France, *pace* Brassens's well known anticlericalism) and by naming the song after his place of origin, the singer reinforces the parable resonances of his tale. The Auvergnat may also be an ordinary Frenchman who risked his life by striving to help a resistant fighter hiding during the Occupation - 'Toi, l'Étranger qui sans façon/ D'un air malheureux m'as souri/ Lorsque les gendarmes m'ont pris'. These lines, we should bear in mind, were sung in the 50s, when another national fixation, that of the French Resistance and of a population that supported it uncompromisingly, was in its heyday in the country. What may not be spotted initially is the theme of an 'oral poet' self-narrative. The singer who wishes his humble benefactor well is also presented as wandering around, cold and hungry, not having a place to stay, being laughed at and harassed by 'les croquantes et les croquants, tous les gens bien intentionnés' before being, in the end, arrested by the police. This fits well, I would argue, with a popular imagery of the 'troubadour errant, la guitare au côté et la toque emplumée', or the juggler despised by the small community he visits, 'honni des gens de bien, et d'abord des gens d'Eglise' (Davenson 1960: 3; 5).

On top of everything else, Brassens also includes a biographical element here, a piece of information that the public would learn soon after the song's release.

'L'Auvergnat' was indeed written for Marcel Planche and his wife Jeanne Planche (née Le Bonniec - she would later be immortalised in the songs 'La cane de Jeanne' and 'Chez Jeanne') who provided Brassens with shelter in their house in Paris when he ran away in 1944 from his Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) after working in the labour camp of Basdorf, near Berlin, for more than a year. It is this version of personal history-

²⁵ One cannot fail to notice that even at this period, the unwritten rules of the music market were already at work: the disc comprises a song with an upbeat tempo ('Les Sabots d'Hélène') and a slower one ('L'Auvergnat'). This would be an identifiable strategy in later times, when a fast and a slow piece would be the perfect pairing on a single release, and can be seen even today, when, in the single release of a ballad, there are also dance versions to complement it.

turned-persona(l)-mythology that interests me here - and it is in this light that I argue that the two songs in the 1954 78 RPM Polydor release complement each other. As a whole, the two songs indicate a sophisticated revisiting of a generic mythology (the storytellers, the troubadours and the folk song) and support the formulation of a persona by using the topos of the 'singing minstrel' in a personal modern narrative.²⁷

Blurring the boundaries of folk

One of the most often repeated observations on Brassens is that the tradition of the pastoral-idyll, (the love affair with the beautiful shepherdess), an easily identifiable and well-known genre from the folk-song ideal library, is revisited in songs like 'Brave Margot', 'La Chasse aux Papillons', or 'Dans l'eau de la claire fontaine' (again, who could miss in the latter, the reference to the well known 'À la claire fontaine'?). Many of his other songs also take place in a typical (or, rather, typified) village, and in many of them a story reminiscent of a folk ballad unfolds. But sexual innuendos and humorous backgrounds (like the 'gars du village' who keep an eye on Brave Margot just to see her feeding her cat: 'tous les gars, tous les gars du village/ Étaient là, la la la la' ...), ironic turns of phrase and a diffuse sense of playfulness, all establish an important difference: as much as these songs resemble ideal folk song material, they also have a style that brings a garrulous Parisian chansonnier like Bruant to mind. The use of bawdy humour (gauloiserie), jokes characteristic of an 'épater le bourgeois' strategy, irony, the 'conneries', obscenities and so on, are here to recall a 'low popular' (as opposed to 'authentic folk') song genealogy: the long tradition of drinking songs, the 'mazarinades', obscene songs sung against the 17th century politician of the same name; the satires of the Caveaux in the mid-19th century onwards, and the ironic verses of the turn of the century *milieu montmartrois* and the *caf'conc'* (of which Bruant was a famous representative).

²⁶ All Brassens's lyrics are cited from *Georges Brassens: Poèmes et Chansons*. All other songs by ACI are taken from the relevant Seghers Poésie et Chansons volume (see bibliography).

²⁷ Compare this with Peter Hawkins' analysis of Brassens's use of 'bawdy humour', which he correctly identifies with the long popular tradition typified by the chansonniers. According to Hawkins (2000), Brassens's originality lies in the fact that all this gauloiserie is infused in songs with more personal narratives. This is a similar strategy to the one I am arguing for: the 'wandering troubadour' identity mingling with personal narratives in songs like the 'Chanson pour l'Auvergnat'.

In most of Brassens's songs of his first period (until, that is, the end of the 50s), obvious folksong elements (canonized as 'oral poetry') constantly mingle with identifiable popular song characteristics to create a vivid style.

'Le Gorille' is Brassens's signature tune of this period, and another good example of this tendency. Brassens here uses the characteristically typified small society environment, and a folk storytelling pace, to narrate the well-known tale of the gorilla who escapes from his cage, scatters people in all directions (including the women who previously admired his male organ) and then sodomizes the judge who, on that same day, had sentenced an innocent man to death. Before the song's anti-capital-punishment moral is revealed, we have gone through a colourful and hilarious depiction of a society which is threatened by a topsy-turvy event with Rabelaisian resonances.²⁸ In addition, the song's ending betrays a technique, astutely identified by Peter Hawkins, as 'typical of the cabaret song which debunks figures of authority with crude sexual innuendo' (Hawkins 2000: 127).

In the 60s, the decade, as we will see, of Brassens's definitive induction into the high literary canon, whenever Brassens revisited his old tactic of implicating an easily identifiable intertext from a folk song, he did so in a progressively more sophisticated way, always undercutting it with references to popular songwriting. His large audience had by then become 'educated' by him, and were full of expectations for elaborate intertextual games from such a 'maître de la chanson'. In order to grasp Brassens's reception in France, one can conjecture that a good part of his audience recognized the different registers in which Brassens's textual games are rooted - that is to say, his constant irony did not fall on deaf ears. And almost all his listeners could grasp the fact that Brassens, as Colin Evans puts it, 'is definitely not writing "repro" folk-songs. His songs *imply* folk-songs but don't attempt to *be* folk-songs' (Evans 1977: 675).

Most indicative from this period is the song 'La route aux quatre chansons' (1964) where Brassens makes explicit reference to four well-known folk-songs: 'Sur la route de Dijon', 'Sur le pont d'Avignon', 'Dans les prisons de Nantes' and 'Auprès de ma blonde'. As Colin Evans notes, 'the reference in this song is musical as well as

²⁸ An even more Rabelais-meets-Aristophanes mayhem is the centre of another famous song, 'Hécatombe'.

verbal as the second guitar discreetly quotes a few bars of each of the four [folk] songs' (Evans 1979: 675). The musical and verbal direct quotations are also there to serve a narrative device. The singer, apart from being at the crossroads of the four folk songs of the title, is also presented as being at the crossroads of two different eras, 'le temps de jadis' and the gloomy present. In each stanza, he revisits the location of each of the four famous folk songs. He takes the road to Dijon in order to see the famous Marjolaine crying 'près de la fontaine', but unlike the 'Marjolaine de la chanson [qui] avait de plus nobles façons', the one he finds is a prostitute asking 'Tu viens chéri?'. Accordingly, he goes to 'le pont d'Avignon/ pour voir un peu les belles dames/ et les beaux messieurs tous en rond/ qui dansaient'; instead he finds that the music has changed and, in the time of rock'n'roll and chemically supported subcultures, "les bell's dam's" shout at him "Étranger, sauve-toi d'ici". Next stop is Nantes where the 'fille du geôlier', instead of helping the inmate, laughs at his conviction and imminent hanging. Last but not least, 'voulant mener à bonne fin/ ma folle course vagabonde', he returns home to sleep 'auprès de ma blonde'. Unlike in the folk song, this blonde proves to be unfaithful: 'Il y avait du monde/ Dormant près de ma blonde'. Now alone, he has only one consolation: 'Me sont restées les quatr'chansons'. Playfully, one can add the obvious, that the songs, including Brassens's own patchwork, have now become five.

A reading often proposed here is that the old folk songs are recalled as innocent, distant childhood memories, which are then compared favourably to the isolation of modern society (see Evans 1979: 676). Interesting as it might be, this reading ignores all the generic implications; it ignores the constant effect of the mingling of folk-song themes with popular song modalities. In the four parts of the song, the folk themes are always transformed into recognizable themes of the chansonnier (Bruant) and the chanson réaliste (Guilbert-Piaf) traditions: low-life and prostitution, yobbishness, society's cruelty expressed with capital punishment, unfaithfulness. But they are also themes Brassens has himself revisited before - albeit by often using his strategy of the folk song mask: 'Stances à un cambrioleur', 'Le Gorille', 'Corne d'Aurochs'. Even the fifth, the phantom song, has itself a prototype in the Brassens canon: Brassens had previously sung a story in which an unfaithful woman leaves him alone with (his cats and) his songs: that song is (in a very *caf'conc'* manner) entitled 'Putain de toi' (1953).

Hence, 'La route aux quatr'chansons' is itself a recapitulation of Brassens's basic strategy: painting with chansonnier colours, on the palette of the folk song. In so doing it is also characterized by a profound irony. Brassens knows that he is sometimes reproached for his didactic tone, for his recherché vocabulary and intertexts and for his tendency to escape to an idealized imagery from the Middle Ages instead of dealing with the problems of his contemporaries (see Rioux 1966). 'La route aux quatr'chansons' raises an ironic eyebrow at criticism of this sort, while still reproducing the same strategy, as is made clear in another song from this period, 'Le moyenâgeux' (1966):

Le seul reproche, au demeurant,
Qu'aient pu mériter mes parents,
C'est d'avoir pas joué plus tôt
Le jeu de la bête à deux dos,
Je suis né, même pas bâtard,
Avec cinq siècles de retard.
Pardonnez-moi, Prince, si je
Suis foutrement moyenâgeux.

Brassens's songs exploit the divide between what is considered 'authentic folk' and what appears to be a popular tradition. While subverting this divide, they place themselves within it, drawing their energy from the very fact that it exists. A view that presented the songs of the revolutionary Goguettes and the style of the canf'conc' as the folk styles of their epoch, or one that demystified the naturalness of the 'oral poetics' of the folk song, even though it would not be far from what Brassens himself eventually provokes, would minimize the effect of his songs.

The juggler of words- the writer of sounds

We could engage in a similar analysis of the other famous characteristic of Brassens's artistry: his use of rare words, archaisms and direct intertexts from high literary texts. Consistent with the strategy outlined above, he almost always mingles his recherché phrases with a vocabulary of the streets. This is, again, a way of constructing another Brassens hybrid at work: he is a poet, son of poets and master of difficult words, who plays with these words like a juggler, and mixes them with the underground vocabulary of a chansonnier. In an interview with Danielle Heymann in *Express* (12 September

1966) he said: 'Dans le domaine des paroles, je sais d'où je viens. Je ne suis pas un très grand poète, pas non plus un très petit. Je suis un poète moyen... Moi, j'aime *jongler avec les mots*'. The defamiliarization effect produced by this juggling with words is unquestionable - it is also an integral part of the 'mythe Brassens' and a main argument for his poetic status. But there is a paradox: the productive and unfamiliar use of language could account for a poet's merits, but the Brassens effect is magnified precisely through the fact that he is not a poet. It is the medium of song that transforms the 'poète moyen' into the 'très grand Auteur-Compositeur-Interprète'. Once more, Brassens reinforces a high-low divide, while also superseding it. This is how Peter Hawkins puts it:

This element of surprise, even irony, at the use of high-flown rhetoric in a low-prestige, popular form such as chanson is one of the effects with which Brassens makes great play. It is clearly not a result of the orality of the chanson genre... It is rather a question of bathos, the use of high-flown language in a low-life context, reinforced by the rudimentary gruffness of Brassens's musical style, and his marked méridional accent. The formal discourse of authority, of the political and legal establishment is thus subverted by its integration into chanson; but at another level this effect depends on a tacit reaffirmation of the differences of register on which it depends. (Hawkins 2000: 128-129).

In some of the songs already quoted, one notices a parallel strategy that stands out: music is often used to support, or simply to constitute a narrative device. In 'Brave Margot', the verse describing the reaction of the 'gars du village' in seeing Margot ('étaient là, la la la la la') is treated with an unexpected rhythmical change, a syncopated melody which stands out as the most marked part of the song. By being so distinguishable from the rest of the song's rhythm, this verse is reinforced as the most subversive element in the whole story. In this 'innocent' tale of a young shepherdess feeding her cat, the 'not-so-innocent' muttering of the voyeurs is singled out by a musical/rhythmical motif which also acts as the dissonant moment within an 'innocent' folk-like melody.

Another such example is 'Le Gorille' and its chorus, taken up by the dramatic cry 'Gare au gorille' which becomes something more than a catchy tune. What is mainly the narration of an event (as we have seen, with a moral in the end) introduces in its centre an *imitation* of the event: the cry that could have been heard during this grotesque scene. But it is not so much a cry of agony, as one of jolly onlookers (it could have been the tune for a cry in a football match), a twist that reinforces the ironic distancing, the

grotesqueness of the whole song. Another chorus similarly arranged is the cry 'o-e-o-e' in 'Hécatombe', which resembles the refrain in children's songs.

These and many other cases of 'music as a narrative device' show how scrupulously Brassens sculpted his songs. Moreover, I would argue that the 'narrative' use of musical strategies unsettles the image of the 'oral poet'. It introduces music as more of a writing device than an 'unmediated', 'natural' expression of a simple tune. On the other hand, the persona of the oral minstrel is still persistently cultivated: the audience knows that this is a constructed characteristic, and also knows that orality cannot be produced unmediated in modern culture, yet still rejoices in the fact that the artist's persona is close to the idealized image of unmediated orality. The effect thus depends on Brassens's reinforcement of every element that would support it.

The use of the guitar as his main accompaniment is a significant point. In his biographical essay, Louis-Jean Calvet makes the surprising revelation that Brassens used to compose his songs not on the guitar, as most people believed, but on a piano, or an electric organ²⁹. Through a brilliant analysis of Brassens's first songs, Calvet makes a further startling observation: Brassens's songs might have been written at the piano, but they were very skilfully constructed so as to support the idea that they were written on and for the guitar and, moreover, by someone who was not a very adept guitar player. In songs like 'Une jolie fleur', the melody is based on the simplest guitar chords possible. Other songs like 'Le Fossoyeur' alternate between two or three chords, all of them very easily recognised as basic on the guitar. This observation is significant because it prompts us to see Brassens's guitar not as the basic accompaniment of an oral poet, as was extensively mythologised, but as a fundamental and deliberately chosen accessory of the persona under construction. Brassens opted for the guitar as his songwriting symbol, just as Le Forestier and the young Brel did; his guitar was analogous to Ferré's, Bécaud's and Barbara's piano³⁰.

²⁹ In fact, this comes as less of a surprise if one examines photographs from press cuttings and biographies of Brassens. In many of them he can be seen working at home, writing the lyrics at a desk with a pencil, with a cat at his side, and experimenting with the notes on a simple synthesizer.

³⁰ One should note that for Ferré and Bécaud the piano has an additional significance: it underlines their beginnings as accompanists and composers before they emerged as successful ACI in their own right. Barbara on the other hand used her piano as an elaborate metaphor of femininity (opposed to the masculine guitar), a function supported by her persona as both 'femme au noir' and 'femme au piano' (both titles of songs and shows featuring her).

Brassens's guitar is not simply present in the artist's promotional photographs in order to support the direct allusions to a troubadouric/oral poetic background, it is also constructed as such at the centre of the songs themselves. It provides an ascetic accompaniment which, in effect, highlights the voice and the way the lyrics are uttered. Listening to Brassens articulating his difficult and unfamiliarly paired words with only a gentle contrapuntal musical addition on the guitar makes one think of Barthes' 'grain of the voice'. Brassens's voice is, likewise, one that 'writes' the space of the words he sings. My point here is that this is as much an artistic merit as it is staged and intentional: Brassens's voice might display an undeniable grain, but the singer self-consciously forces us to pursue a 'Grain of the Voice' aesthetic appreciation avant la lettre. As it happens, this feeling gets illustrated in the criticism of the time, as Jean Evariste writes in *Réforme* (20 December 1969):

Nous trouvons Brassens à cette place commune, sur ce lieu commun qu'est notre langage. À l'heure de la communication impossible, Brassens restitue au langage tout son rôle d'expression, et c'est ce qui lui permet, avec une musique monocorde et des thèmes ultra-classiques -le vin, l'amour, la mort-, de nous entraîner dans une complicité irrésistible.

The singing poet singing poets

One thing that the audience learned early on about this new and impressive songwriter was his love of poetry. Indeed, according to all biographies and the constant references in interviews and articles on him, Brassens was an avid reader, especially of poetry (see Calvet 1991; Chaprentreau 1960: 35-56).³¹ His 'devotion to poetry' was also promoted by Brassens himself: among the first songs he published were some using well known poems as lyrics. This later became a pattern: he seldom failed to introduce a poem transformed into song in his LPs. The canon of this 'transformed poetry' could range from poems formally resembling a folk song such as Paul Fort's 'Le petit cheval', 'La Marine' and 'Comme hier', to more complex texts such as Lamartine's ode 'Pensées des morts', as well as unexpected material such as Villon's 'La ballade des dames du temps de jadis'.

Brassens's poems-turned-to-songs are little experiments whose primary aim was not to flex the songwriter's musical muscles nor to imply that the poems can be

³¹ Before his first appearance on stage, Brassens had published two books, both considered mediocre.

circulated widely thanks to music -even though both these arguments were presented at the time. They constitute, instead, an elaborate performance of the Auteur-Compositeur-Interprète-as-reader-of-poetry, constructing the image of an artist who can be in the company of poets from the high canon, while promoting his ideal library.

Two of Brassens's most famous songs based on poems are 'La Prière', using a poem by Paul Fort, and 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux', based on a poem written in the early 40s by Aragon. One detail is important: both songs have the same music. When asked, Brassens explained that this happened simply because the poems employed the same rhythmic pattern.³² This represents once again the celebration of the singer-as-reader: the alert reader (picking up on metrical patterns), the critical reader (in the poem by Aragon, the last stanza is not sung, since Brassens thought of it as 'not well expressed'), and the reader who defies the rules of popular music: 'Au mépris des règles admises dans la chanson, il va donc, fait unique, reprendre le même air une seconde fois!... C'est la popularisation de la poésie' (Charpentreau 1960: 180).

Truth is that, as 'règles de la chanson' go, singing the same tune with two different lyrics was not unheard of. On the contrary, from the 16th century onwards, new lyrics were written based on well known tunes (airs) which were noted at the top of the printed ballad sheet with a simple mention ("à l'air de..."); this even evolved into a distinct style, named 'pont-neuf'. It was on the Parisian bridge of that name that itinerant singers tried to promote and sell broadsheets with these new lyrics sung to the old tunes (Duneton 1998a: 405-411). With 'La Prière' and 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux', Brassens alludes, I believe, to this tradition and playfully transforms Aragon and Fort, in a backward projection, to pont-neuf lyricists, as if they had written their poems 'à l'air de Georges Brassens'.³³

Brassens used canonical poems and thus shared their status and literary prestige. He self-consciously followed a symbolist ideal, a kind of 'de la musique avant toute chose' in action, but also introduced a playfulness into this gesture. His setting of Verlaine's 'La Colombine' is a clear example: he used one verse from the poem to

³² 'Parce que c'est le même mètre, la même versification' (Brassens quoted in Charpentreau 1960: 88)

³³ The intertextual games Brassens plays when turning a poem into a song seem inexhaustible. Another example is his version of 'Gastibelza' by Victor Hugo, a poem first turned into a song in 1837 by a

produce his main melodic motif. The song starts with a do-mi-sol-mi-fa [C-E-G-E-F] melodic sequence, in a mimicry of Verlaine's verses: 'Do, mi, sol, mi, fa/ tout ce monde va/ rit, chante'. Then, when the voice reaches the actual verse, which is now transformed into a chorus, the melodic line is transposed a third higher (a typical songwriting device for refrains -see Calvet 1981). Thus, Brassens ends up singing the verse 'do-mi-sol-mi-fa' on these notes: mi-sol-si-sol-la [E-G-B-G-A]. The song playfully stays one step away from being faithful to the poet's notation. This, most of all, is a reader's playfulness: on a poem which is about masks, puppets, and children's games, the song masks the 'musical' verse with a similar (but not identical) music.

'La poésie quotidienne de la chanson'

The way Brassens proposed his musical rendition of poems channelled an argument that would prove decisive in attempts to canonize the song genre of the Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes. The successful experiment of bringing poems to a wider audience would be paraded as exhibit number one for the inclusion of the chanson in a new poetry canon. Jacques Charpentreau, the author of *Georges Brassens et la poésie quotidienne de la chanson* (1960), the first monograph to argue so extensively for Brassens's 'literary merit', counts as many as fifty poems that by that time had become popular songs, significant examples including Trenet's 'Verlaine', and 'Les Saltimbanques' by Apollinaire, sung by Montand to music by Bessière. But Brassens's attempts stand out, the critic maintains, because they are the most popular and have achieved the most successful pairing of music and verses. 'Il nous restitue ainsi la fraîcheur et le charme de poèmes que nous avons oubliés; certains mêmes semblaient attendre la venue du musicien' (35). If, through the medium of the chanson, poetry can reach a wider audience - 'la poésie à la portée de toutes les bourses' - then, the argument goes, the means used for the production and distribution of the chanson, the discs, radio, clubs, are simply different forms of 'poetry pages': 'si la chanson et le poème sont deux genres différents, ils sont de même nature. Qu'elle soit enfermée dans les *pages d'un livre* ou les *sillons d'un disque*, qu'elle passe par le *micro* d'un music-hall ou le *juke-*

composer of the Caveaux, Hippolyte Monpou. That song was immediately a "succès fou", so much so that its music was later used again by Charles Colmance for his 'Pantalon' (Duneton 1998b: 760).

box d'un bistrot, la poésie s'impose' (14, emphasis added). The important point here is that this phrase no longer refers to poems transformed into songs: the argument has been extended to include all of Brassens's songs -and all similar songs by the ACI.

An interview with Brassens is added as an appendix to the book. As one might expect, Charpentreau's first question to the artist is also a statement: 'Il semble que vous ayez retrouvé la vraie tradition de la poésie chantée. Qu'en pensez-vous?'. The answer follows along the same lines:

Oui, sans doute, mais je ne rends pas tellement compte de ce que je fais. J'ai beaucoup lu les poètes. J'ai d'abord écrit des poèmes sérieux, tragiques, quand je croyais avoir du génie. Et puis, j'ai fait des chansons. [...] La chanson, c'est pour tout le monde. [...] Les gens acceptent ce que je fais parce que je n'ai pas l'air d'un littéraire. Bien sûr que j'en suis un' (Charpentreau 1960: 85-86).

Jacques Charpentreau came back to the question of poems turned into songs with a long article published in 1965 and an argument with similar ramifications: if poems can be transformed into songs, then good songs can also be considered as poems. He was also one of the most outspoken supporters of a further extension of the argument: if good modern French songs are poems, and old folk songs are also considered rich in poetic value, then both old and new songs show a stock of artistic production that can be seen as quintessentially French, a central building block of French identity through the centuries. 'La France possède le plus riche répertoire de chansons de tous les pays du monde... il faut admettre que les Français ont produit, du Moyen Age à nos jours, une prodigieuse quantité de chansons' (Charpentreau 1971: 5). This comes from the introduction to the collection *Le livre d'or de la chanson française* (1971) in which old folk songs, famous parts from French operas and operettas, melodies, children songs, court songs and troubadour songs, are printed side by side with songs by Brassens, Ferré, Brel, Bécaud, Béart and Douai. The motto of the book is, of course, the much quoted proverbial phrase from Beaumarchais: 'en France tout finit par des chansons'.

Charpentreau's book on *Brassens et la poésie quotidienne* would soon be upstaged by the special number of the 'Seghers - Poètes d'aujourd'hui' series (1963) and then a collection of articles on Brassens written by the author and poet René Fallet (1965), all employing similar arguments.

Praise for a national poet

The traditionalist literary appreciation of Georges Brassens as poet would culminate on 8 June 1967 when he was awarded the Grand Prix de Poésie de l'Académie Française. From the mid 60s, newspapers were reporting personal appeals from a number of Académiciens for Brassens to stand as a candidate for the Academy, which he never did. Every time such a rumour was reported, the 'Immortels' in question were said to be praising Brassens's 'inventiveness with language', hardly an original observation.

Consequently, in 1967 Brassens became the predictable laureate of the largely conservative Academy³⁴. The 'texte d'allocution', signed by René Clair, repeats the two (by then very well known) topoi we have seen above: Brassens is a belated oral minstrel as well as a poet equal to the greatest in the French language:

C'est par des chansons que commence toute histoire de la poésie. Aussi, en récompensant un de ceux que jadis on appelait ménestrels, n'avons-nous pas le sentiment de céder au caprice d'une mode, mais au contraire de renouer une tradition qui remonte aux premiers âges de notre langue. [...] M.Brassens [...] ne dépare pas la lignée dont il serait en droit de se recommander. Corbière et Laforgue ne sont pas éloignés de ses complaints, ni Villon de ses testaments.³⁵

The award provoked a few ironic responses from the press (most notably an article signed by Alain Bosquet and published in *Combat* of 10 June 1967 under the vitriolic title 'Brassens, pourquoi pas Fernandel?') but also triggered a long series of congratulatory columns. Most critics repeated that this was an honour long overdue; and even if some seemed uneasy about their terms³⁶ - in the end, shouldn't the Chanson be judged as a genre in its own right? - all seemed to assent to a statement like René Fallet's: 'Georges Brassens a plus fait de la poésie que biens des grands poètes'.³⁷

The award represents the culmination of the discourse 'Brassens=poète'. From that point onwards, the idea that Brassens was a direct descendant of the Troubadours,

³⁴ One of the members of the Academy, Jean Rostand, declared to the Press: 'Vraiment, je suis content. Rien ne pouvait me faire plus plaisir... Georges, c'est mon idole' (from the report on the award by Arlette Chabrol published in *Paris-Jour* 9 June 1967).

³⁵ From the version of the 'Texte de l'allocution' read by the Académicien René Clair in the official award ceremony, as published in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* of 28 December 1967.

³⁶ 'Il y avait sans aucun doute un nouveau prix à créer pour éviter, aujourd'hui et dans l'avenir, toute confusion' opines René Lacôte in *Lettres Françaises* (15 June 1967). But he swiftly adds: 'Si la chanson n'est pas la poésie elle demeure liée à la poésie comme l'est, souvent, le théâtre'.

³⁷ 'La bonne réputation', in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* 15 June 1967.

or that the merits of his songs made him worthy of a central place in French literary canon, became commodified. It was no longer a radical statement for a newspaper to publish a sketch of Brassens, complete with guitar, accompanied by François Villon on his left and Rabelais on his right (as in the sketch published in *L'Express* on 13 October 1969), or to put his photograph facing a Middle Ages singer with a lute on the cover of the *Dictionnaire de la chanson française*.³⁸ The 'mythe Brassens' was undergoing its mutation into a commodity 'etiquette'.

The 'mythe Brassens' and its opposite

I have thus far tried to show how interconnected the public perception of the artist and his artistry, the 'mythe Brassens', was with the songs themselves. The songs informed the public persona and vice versa. But, as I have noted at various moments, Brassens's play with such concepts as 'popular poetry', 'oral poetry', 'high literature', 'folk song' and 'chanson poétique', is more complex: even though Brassens depends on the audience's knowledge of the different registers within which he operates in order to produce his elaborate strategies, he is simultaneously dependent on the audience's willingness to suspend this knowledge and to accept his call at face value. This is the reason why Brassens's popular reception in France through the decades of the 50s and 60s, as I have outlined it above, can be seen as having a deeply ideological side: it presupposed a deliberate choice of what to see, what to narrativize and what to ignore. Brassens's songs provide all the elements permitting one to see his 'characteristics' (the troubadour, the pacifist, the philosopher, the oral poet, the popular poet who supersedes the high-low divide) as extremely constructed, not natural. This constructedness is at once obvious and extremely appealing. As happens with the listener who suspends disbelief in favour of his/her pleasure, the critics and the public in the late 50s preferred to see, from the two versions of Brassens on display, the mythical one. Apart from the use of the Brassens persona in order to name, represent and consolidate a whole genre of singer-songwriters, what was more pressingly at stake was the creation of a high-

³⁸ Vernillat and Charpentreau 1968. The entry for Brassens asserts: 'L'oeuvre et le personnage de Brassens dominent toute la chanson contemporaine'. It then argues: 'Cette riche complexité est celle d'un poète, comme ses thèmes: la nature, l'amour, la mort, la divinité... En réduisant le théâtre du monde à de petites scènes de trois minutes, il a rendu la poésie quotidienne' (43)

popular cultural sphere, which could also take a nationalistic turn and become a building block for the France of 'La Grande Culture'. One cannot help agreeing with Paul Yonnet when he points out that Brassens's cultural legitimization by 'les appareils officiels traditionnels du livre' happened suspiciously fast and decisively. For Yonnet, this is a textbook example of the persistence of the norms of 'la Grande Culture', an expression of enforced unity, an effect of the imposed 'idéologie française de la Grande Culture' (Yonnet 1985: 197-8).

In the 50s the critics who jumped onto this bandwagon realized that the chanson, as practised by figures like Brassens, presented an ideal opportunity for the construction of a discourse both taxonomic of popular culture (creating a solid distinction between high and low popular song, the seeds of which were sown in the 40s) and contributing to the formation of a distinctive image of Frenchness. Colin Evans was noting in 1977 that 'the Brassens myth offers French people a favoured, traditional image of themselves while not making any great demands on them to bridge the gap between image and reality... [it] doesn't exist to question but to console and reaffirm' (Evans 1977: 676). Later commentators pointed out that Brassens's pacifism, antimilitarism and nonconformist individualism could actually be seen as less engaged than was initially thought; it was instead, one critic argues, a very elaborate 'conservatism clothed in the colors of individualism' which could even be seen as characteristic of de Gaulle's France (Pinet 1985: 283 and *passim*).

In addition, Brassens's calculated incorporation of a literary style and the subsequent reception of his work as 'high poetry' provided the means for a systematic redemption of potential subversive elements in his work: the unification of the massively-produced popular with a reiterated version of high poetry is itself a utopically 'reconciled' view of society that fits very beautifully with the requirements of the culture industry, as Rüdiger Stellberg is at pains to prove in his Adornian critique of Brassens's oeuvre (Stellberg 1979).

The argument, as we can see, has undergone a complete reversal: Brassens's literariness, initially paraded as proof of his independence from the culture industry, can now be criticised if not as a construct of this industry, at least as an element serving its purpose. Similarly, Lucien Rioux implies that the constant reference to an imaginary

past in Brassens's songs ends up proposing an escape to a fake 'exotic' utopia different in content to that promoted by 'low pop' hits, but very similar in function (Rioux 1988: 24).

All these views are, no doubt, astute and to a certain extent illuminating. My objection is that, first, they tend to take the 'mythe Brassens' at face value and, second, they imply identity as a stable, given entity. On the contrary modern identities are constantly rearranged, never completed, but fragmented, fractured and in a permanent state of becoming, 'multiply constructed across different, often interesting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' (Hall 1996: 4). As I have shown, the 'mythe Brassens' is only one way to listen to the songs which, instead, provide the means for a multiple, more fluid, controversial and subversive reaction. They also combine different antagonistic elements.

In other words, while the construction of the myth, as well as the whole discussion about the ACI's literariness, does show identity formation strategies and ideological presuppositions active in the French society of the time, it does not exhaust them. On the contrary, Brassens's hybrid construct, the space where the *moyenâgeux* meets the *chansonnier*, and folk purity is contrasted with popular subversion, foreground these knots in cultural history in which a sense of popular culture asserts itself as a meeting point of conflicting discourses, a mediated event in constant change, a space of fluidity.

Songs beyond the poetic

The 'mythe Brassens' and the 'literary canonization' strategies may indeed furnish a view of his songs as solid representations of ideal Frenchness and of ideally unmediated poetry. Identity propositions stemming from them could be similarly cemented, with French Culture seen as an exclusively 'Grande Culture' and Frenchness as 'bonhomie' and 'galanterie'. But while these may have taken their unquestioned place in the pantheon of existing ideologemes in French cultural history, as the numerous newspaper cuttings clearly show, a more plural and, indeed, more fluid Brassens always returns to reassert a different legacy.

Even though exhaustingly canonized and commodified as myth and symbol, Brassens still generates unexpected responses (see Berruer 1981:125-6). To take but one example, we could mention a 1989 collection of comics inspired by Brassens's songs and signed by the best artists currently working in France. Instead of being awed by any form of 'national poet' complex, the artists assimilated the Brassens intertext to their own individual styles and opted for a view of the songs in everyday life contexts, or for subversive and ironic uses of some of their verses.

We have learnt from Barthes the tendency of all myths to be recuperated 'by the right', to have their semiotic content negated in favour of a monophonic, static and conservative symbolic content. In the case of the 'mythe Brassens', one is able to see this itinerary unfolding: from discursive space to dominating symbol. But on the other hand, there is something in the space Brassens opens, something I would like heuristically to call a popular music space proper, that resists recuperation and provides new perceptions, receptions and reconstructions.

If, instead of the myth, one glances over the 'use' of Brassens' work within popular culture and the everyday life, the picture one gets today is different. If one reviews the different ways his songs are being reinterpreted in France and around the world, the ways his persona is being reworked in the public performance of new artists, and new 'tributes' to him, then one experiences an interesting plurality at work. In a way, the postmythical waves of the reception of Brassens's songs have established something as internal to the songs as their mythical side: their oppositional space.

No matter how much the 'mythe Brassens' is recuperated as a traditionalist 'myth of origin' for critics who prefer to theorize on a version of the high-popular chanson, his songs still retain a place in the popular culture milieu: they are constantly being heard, played and replayed and it is in this space that plurality is reasserted. In Part 3, I will analyze the oppositional politics of Dionysis Savvopoulos, a Greek singer-songwriter once introduced as 'the Greek Brassens'. Following the ends to which Savvopoulos pushes Brassens's songwriting paradigm, we can see that the cultural space the Brassens persona is supposed to be celebrating, what I have termed as the high-popular and the singing poet, also incorporates the necessary elements to mobilize it from within.

At the moment though, I will stay with my discussion of the singing poets discourse as it evolved in France, moving on to a review of the most persistent presentation of the Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes as poets: the inclusion of their work in the *Seghers- Poètes d' aujourd'hui* series. Apart from its obvious importance as a detailed example of the ways the literary appreciation of a song style was turned into a model and a critical apparatus, I also find this overview interesting for the itinerary it covers. It first moves on to establish a 'monophonic' discourse on the singing poets based on a consensus about their literary merit, before gradually expanding, acknowledging difference and diversity, and in the end asserting a polyphony of popular cultural space. In my review of the *Seghers-Chansons d' aujourd'hui* series, I will show how the premise 'songwriters=poets', on which the singing poet model was initially based, gradually evolved to also incorporate its opposite, a discussion on 'chanson comme art mineur'.

3. The songwriters as 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui': The canon politics of a literary series.

Chanson and the literary canon

The complacent view that the French chanson is different (and to a certain extent, better) than other popular song traditions because its best representatives are considered poets, is a double-edged legacy still debated in France today. Consider, for instance, the ambivalence of a comment made by the popular composer Jean Jacques Goldmann in a recent interview: 'Only in France do you get academic songs [which]... *could be published in a collection of "Today's poets" - the texts without the music*' (cited in Huq 1999: 134, my emphasis). As Goldmann specifies, this is both good and bad: good for the chanson's prestige, but bad for its evolution as a popular form.

The quotation hints at the role played by an acclaimed book collection, the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' series published by Les Éditions Seghers, in which many Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes were first introduced during the 60s. In a textbook case of canon construction, the inclusion of the work of singer-songwriters in the Seghers-Poètes d'aujourd'hui series had a double effect: it reinforced a view of the French song as 'academic', 'poetic' and accepted in the literary canon, but also secured the place of a specific song genre at the centre of the system of French popular music.

The 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' series, a collection of critical poet-profiles accompanied by a selection of their poems, which was inaugurated by the poet and publisher Pierre Seghers, played a considerable role in popularizing poetry in the postwar years in France. In the words of one critic, 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' was 'le plus fécond de tous les efforts qu'on ait fait de la poésie depuis la guerre' (René Lacôte, *Lettres Françaises* 28 March 1963). The aim was to make poetry accessible to a wider audience, something which it achieved to a surprising extent. The books in the series became famous for their small format, the characteristic photograph of the poet on the cover, the informative biographical-critical introductions (normally taking up one third of the whole book) and their middle-of-the road editorial decisions (nearly all forms of poetry were represented, from all periods of French, and later of world, literature). As an editorial project, 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' shared the same view of the poésie populaire

that we have seen stemming from the Resistance and taken up by mainly left-wing or left-leaning authors as a poetic aim (most notably Aragon, whose main publisher was Seghers, as well as Prévert). It is, as I have noted, this same literary ideology that led many literary figures to experiment with writing lyrics for songs during and after the war - Seghers himself wrote some songs, the better known of them in collaboration with Ferré.

In December 1962, when the publisher included a songwriter in his series for the first time, *Léo Ferré*, edited and introduced by Charles Estienne, there had already been ninety-one volumes of 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui'. The publication came at a time when barely a review of Brassens or Ferré concerts failed to mention the words "poésie populaire", "poète", "troubadour" at some stage in the text. But, as is understandable, the introduction of these artists in a series with such a canon-forming power was of immense importance and made headlines.

Both the introductions and the reviews of the books in newspapers and literary magazines made clear that what was at stake was the crystallisation of the genre of the ACI (if not of all chanson) as a genuine genre of poetry. As Louis-Jean Calvet notes 'la chanson est enfin prise au sérieux, les auteurs-compositeurs-interprètes considérés comme des poètes' (Calvet 1991: 180). With the Seghers editions, the argument about the 'poetic quality' of the ACI secured a wide readership, a wide coverage from all the media, and, in very material terms, had the immediate effect of putting the photographs of the most famous of them in the same book format and under the same title where previously names such as Aragon, Verlaine and Rimbaud had been.

Reading the Seghers books: Ferré

As I have shown in the case of Brassens, the presentation of the ACI as poets was to a considerable extent cultivated by the artists themselves. It is no coincidence that the first ACI to be awarded a Seghers book was Ferré and not Brassens. The Monegasque former accompanist of the Rive Gauche clubs was the one who had manipulated his image as a 'new kind of poet' in the most extrovert way possible.

Ferré's own itinerary on the music scene is indicative. He first wrote songs to be interpreted by other singers, most notably Juliette Gréco. When he appeared on stage, it

was to present an avant-garde persona meant to question lyricism and perceptions of the poetic from within; from the beginning he was an 'auteur en scène'. Although his most famous early songs were semi-anodyne existentialist blurbs, his breakthrough as an ACI was made possible by songs which questioned the function of popular culture, the idea of the singer as idol, and, at the same time, promoted a conception of the song as the ideal carrier of new literary sensibilities.

The art critic Charles Estienne, who was commissioned to edit and write the introduction for the *Ferré-Poète d'aujourd'hui* book, could not help adopting Ferré's own rhetorics. Hence the long essay opening the volume focused mainly on one issue: the ways of perceiving and dealing with chanson as high poetry. Ferré had already presented a semi-directed one-man show in 1961 whose central aim was to develop the popular conception of the singer-songwriter as a poet equal among poets. Heavily influenced by existentialist attitudes to popular culture - he used black colours for both setting and clothes, candles for lights, in a manner reminiscent of the stage presence of Juliette Gréco, the diva of the Sartrean Rive Gauche - the show's main narrative thread was the idea of poetry and the poetic. It is understandable why Estienne began Ferré's initiation in the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' catalogue with a review of this very show. After the detailed review of the concert, the editor concluded with a phrase in which the words 'poète' and 'mise en scène', fruitfully and without any sense of irony, coincide: 'On a tenté plus haut de reconstituer la marche réelle d'une pensée *de poète* [Ferré], sa direction et sa tension, à travers son expression la plus matérielle, *à travers sa mise en scène*' (Estienne 1962: 9, my emphasis). The artist had successfully dictated, through his own performance, the way his inclusion in the canon of Poetry would be argued.

According to newspaper reviews, Ferré began his 1961 shows with 'La poésie fout l' camp Villon', a song written a year before:

Tu te balances compagnon
Comme une tringle dans le vent
Et le maroufle que l'on pend
Se fout pas mal de tes chansons
Tu peux toujours t'emmitoufler
Pour la saison chez Gallimard

Tu sais qu'avec ou sans guitar'
On finit toujours sur les quais

La poésie fout l'camp Villon!
Y'a qu'du néant sous du néon
Mais tes chansons même en argot
Ont quelques siècles sur le dos

Si je parle d'une ballade
À faire avec mon vieux hibou
On me demandera jusqu'où
Je pense aller en promenade
On ne sait pas dans mon quartier
Qu'une ballade en vers français
Ça se fait sur deux sous d papier
Et sans forcément promener

La poésie fout l'camp Villon!
Y'a qu'des bêtas sous du béton
Mais tes chansons même en argot
Ont quelques siècles sur le dos

With this song, placed as an artistic manifesto at the beginning of the recital, it becomes clear how the artist conceived of himself as the inheritor of a very long tradition (*quelques siècles sur les dos*), a genealogy starting with Villon and evolving with vagabonds, popular performers, street singers (*on finit toujours sur les quais*). The song shows Ferré's anxiety to crystallize the genre he moves within, to provide an ideal genealogy in which he is presented as the latest member, and to conceive of this genre both oppositionally to high culture (the diffuse irony levelled against the '*ballade en vers français/ [qui] se fait sur deux sous d papier*') and in high culture's own terms (since the song is also a textbook case of anxiety of influence, an attempt to repudiate literary forefathers). Ferré's own song presents itself as both the 'other' of high literary culture, and as the new form that will take over the old 'written' genres: it is, moreover, the medium that will encompass, 'devour', popularize and share legitimacy with the high poetry of the past and the present.

After opening with 'La Poésie fout l'camp Villon', Ferré went on in the recitals in the *Théâtre du Vieux Colombier* to propose a long series of new songs he had already written but not yet recorded, based on poems by Aragon, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud. This was a deeply embattled and purposive gesture: to put poetry in the club environment was one of its aims; the other was to defy show-business laws with avant-garde estrangement. If the rule of thumb for performing artists was to meet the audience's expectations by singing well-known and previously released songs ('les succès'), Ferré started with all his new material, work-in-progress and poetically-overloaded, challenging all 'popular' expectations (but also, to some extent, gratifying the well-known modernist expectations from an individual auteur).

In an article entitled 'Pourquoi je fais un récital', written for the newspaper *Combat* on the eve of his *Vieux-Colombier* première, Ferré went on to explain: 'Je fais un récital pour que de grands poètes comme Aragon aient leur place dans la mécanique contemporaine du juke-box, de la radio, de la télévision'. This is a version of the singer as bearer and propagator of the poetic message and the poetic text. A singer engaged in a highly artistic mission - yet still dressed in the clothes of easy going populist need. His recital is 'non pas un tour de chant poétique mais un tour de chant avec de la poésie... Je fais un récital parce qu'un chanteur, ça chante, n'importe quoi, même de la poésie' (cited in Belleret 1996: 312-313). As Estienne understands it in his introduction to the Seghers volume, such a carrier of the poetic message, an artist who so spectacularly shares the work of 'les poètes morts', is worthy of being called a 'poète d'aujourd'hui':

Ce que l'on sentait très fortement à la sortie [du récital dans le Vieux Colombier], distance prise, c'était [...] l'éternelle complicité avec soi-même de la poésie, et les devoirs que cela implique; dont le premier est sans aucun doute la complicité de tout poète d'aujourd'hui, connu ou non, - et idéalement, de tout homme vivant et pensant - avec les poètes morts. (Estienne 1962: 16)

To be sure, the concerts in the *Vieux Colombier* were, for Ferré, the culmination of an artistic strategy spelled out in detail earlier, in songs like 'Les Quat'Cent'Coups' (1959) which was already one of Ferré's signature tunes by 1961:

Unir en chœur tous les poètes
Tous ceux qui parl'nt avec des mots

Leur commander des chansonnettes
 Qu'on déduira de leurs impôts
 Mettre un bicorné à la romance
 Et la mener à l'Institut
 Avec des orgu's et "que ça danse..."
 La poésie est dans la rue

In the playful tone of this song (again a form of artistic manifesto), Ferré also provides a gloss on his practice of setting poems by well-known and established literary figures to music and makes his aims clearer: he wants to transform poetry into a popular medium, to transform popular song into 'the poetry of the streets' and to overturn the institutions propagating the high-low divide (the bicorné being the symbol of the Académie Française) with a carnivalesque upending of the world. But this is already a complicated and overstated effort to launch a Rabelaisian social critique, or even a proto-postmodern fusion of high and low. In fact, it is best read as an overdetermined, purposeful and avant-garde influenced desecration of canonical conceptions of art.

It is also certainly a move against commoditisation - an in-your-face modernism 'On lancera la poésie, avec les mains [...]: des cris jetés comme des paquets parleurs à la face de la commodité et du confort plastifié... Nous écrivons la psychologie de la révolte avec les techniques d'oiseau' (Estienne 1962: 197-199). These phrases come from another artistic statement by Ferré, attached in an appendix to the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' book, in the form of a prose poem entitled 'Le Style'.

Ferré's project was an avant-gardish and avowedly modernist project of 'revolutionizing' an art form, the chanson, and injecting into it the defamiliarization and the fragmented and subversive sense of the world one expects from high modernist poetry. For Ferré however, this was a highly personal affair: even though as an artist he was very much a product of a whole climate (which, arguably, he drew on to an extreme), he hardly thought in terms of a song-genre at all. He only used the song to propose a 'new poet' persona. This may be the reason why Ferré in fact did achieve the acceptance as a poetic figure for which he campaigned, even though his status never reached the level of popular-myth to which Brassens attained. Furthermore, when the discussion about the 'poetry of the streets' became generalised later in the 60s, it was

Brassens, as we have seen, who became its trademark and not Ferré; that is, the icon of the 'ideal singing poet' and not the personification of the 'ideal poet -incidentally singing'.

... and then Brassens

Only months after the *Ferré-Poète d'aujourd'hui*, a *Brassens* volume appeared with an introduction by Brassens's school teacher and 'initiator in poetry', Alphonse Bonnafé. Bonnafé no longer needed the lengthy argumentation Ferré's editor had undertaken. First, since this was the second 'chanson' book in the series, it meant that the point did not need to be made again so forcefully. Second, Brassens had already used much subtler tropes than Ferré in promoting the persona and the artistry of a popular poet for almost a decade. Finally, Brassens was already widely accepted as a 'modern troubadour', his status approaching mythical proportions. Bonnafé began the introduction with precisely this point, enumerating the different opinions about Brassens's poetic status; it made no difference, he observed, whether people saw in him the oral minstrel or the innovative poet:

[t]out le monde a raison, comme toujours; mais ces opinions opposées n'ont d'intérêt que de contribuer à la naissance d'un mythe Brassens. Voilà longtemps (depuis Hugo ou Rimbaud) qu'un poète n'avait pas pris les proportions d'un mythe. Il serait plaisant que celui-ci y parvienne. Il a le physique et les manières qu'il faut: sa carrure de catcheur, ses grosses moustaches, sa façon de se ruer sur la scène sans saluer, sans sourire, et de se camper, le pied sur une chaise, avec l'air de dire au public "À nous deux", voilà qui promet de l'extraordinaire. Et son répertoire tient largement la promesse. Le voilà sacré monstre, gorille, ours, Cyclope, *ad libitum* (9).

Bonnafé (unlike Estienne) did not feel the need to prove anything. For him the argument was simpler: '[Brassens] a fait une révolution dans l'art; pour les poètes, c'est ce qu'il aura fait de plus précieux: il a fait rentrer la poésie dans les chemins du vrai lyrisme, du lyrisme proprement dit, celui des poètes de l'antiquité et du moyen âge, qui ne se concevait pas sans le chant et sans la musique' (14). Surprisingly, the new technologies of sound reproduction and mass culture are presented not in a negative, Adornian light, but as the very medium which made the return to 'vrai lyrisme' possible:

Ce lyrisme (pris dans l'exacte acception du terme) a heureusement trouvé à notre époque le serviteur qu'il faut, le véhicule passe-partout, toujours disponible, le disque. Ceci, le disque, tuera cela, le poème donné à lire ou à entendre sans musique. Le présent recueil est un événement, non seulement

parce qu'il donne à entendre les chansons de Brassens, mais parce qu'il donne à concevoir tout ce que peut la poésie lyrique, le premier des arts, le plus populaire, le plus nécessaire (15).

Bonnafé's introduction crystallizes the already widely accepted concept of 'Brassens=poète' that has become fundamental for the *mythe Brassens*: the songwriter is presented as first the propagator of a new era for the *chanson française*, producing 'a necessary popular poetry' of the highest value, and second a poet worthy of a central place in a new French canon (in Ferré's case the sequence was, arguably, reversed). It did not, then, come as a surprise when the Brassens's volume achieved, in a few short weeks, the highest sales of the whole series: the *mythe Brassens* was a more than effective marketing device.

LPs on the bookselves

Some weeks after the publication of Seghers volume ninety-nine, when a promotional party was held by Philips, Brassens's music company, to celebrate his tenth anniversary as a recording artist, the newspapers noted that 30,000 copies of the book had already been sold. The journalists made the connection: the book was selling like a new Brassens album.³⁹ No wonder, then, that the music industry chief executives boasted about this fact as if it was their own product: 'Brassens- the popular poet par excellence' was, it seems, the promotion strategy that the music industry had already adopted. In the feature about the event signed by Charles-Armand Klein in the *Libération* of 12 November 1963 (entitled: 'Un mondain nommé Brassens'), M.Meyerstein, director of Philips, is reported to have said in his celebratory speech:

Georges Brassens est devenu la vedette incontestée du disque et souligne son apport dans le courant poétique actuel [...] 30.000 exemplaires de son recueil de poèmes publié chez Seghers, dans la collection 'Poètes d' aujourd'hui', ont déjà été vendus. Mis en vente depuis quelques semaines, c'est là le chiffre record de cette collection. On s'attend à un écoulement de 100.000 exemplaires.

In this statement, the circulation of a book is described by a record -and not a publishing- executive and in terms normally used for music circulation. One quickly

³⁹ The book would keep pace with typical album sales for several years to come. In 1966, for instance, Danielle Heymann (*L'Express* 12 September 1966) noted that 200,000 copies of the book had already been sold. This is exactly the circulation Philips was reportedly expecting for every new LP by Brassens. 'Chaque fois qu'un de ses 33 tours paraît, 200,000 exemplaires s'arrachent chez les disquaires: il a chez Philips une presse qui lui est réservée.'

realizes the interconnection between the Seghers first editions, the French music industry's new products and the public's changing perceptions of the chanson.

The celebration party for Brassens's decade as a recording artist also coincided with and celebrated the Seghers edition prompting all journalists to ask Brassens whether he first writes 'the poem of a song or the music'. In addition - and in characteristic music industry promotional technique - the career milestone was also celebrated with the release of all Brassens's songs in a new format: a 'coffret' of six discs of '33 tours 30 cm'.⁴⁰ Until some months earlier, the public could find all Brassens's songs on ten separate discs of 33 tours 25cm (which, in turn, also assembled the first 78 tours releases, and the numerous 45 tours of the previous decade). With the new medium of 33 tours 30cm and a little help from Brassens's inclusion in the Seghers' canon, Philips seized the opportunity to provide a more comprehensive format for all Brassens's work and to promote it as 'Brassens intégrale', that is, an essential 'buy' for the collector and the sensitive listener, the collected works of a singing poet. In a significant move, Bonnafé's introduction to the Seghers volume was also reprinted in the 'coffret Brassens'.

After the release of the six-record album, a critic summed up the general impression of the time when he announced 'Brassens now has his Pléiade edition'. It is in quotations like these that one realizes how interconnected the Brassens myth, the expanding critical interest in Brassens, the Seghers edition and the technical novelty of a 'coffret LP' were at the time:

L'intérêt, le respect même qu'on montre envers Georges Brassens signifient qu'on ne traite plus, aujourd'hui, la chanson à la légère. Sujet de thèse il y a trois mois, inscrit au nombre des 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' par Pierre Seghers, *Brassens a maintenant son édition 'Pléiade'* et c'est la première fois sans doute qu'un tel phénomène se produit dans le domaine des variétés. En effet *10 ans de Brassens* qui vient de paraître (Phillips-P 6 L 0053) groupe toutes les chansons enregistrées par l'auteur depuis 1953 en un album de six disques (Michel Perez, 'Brassens, depuis dix ans...', *Combat* 11 December 1963).

The easy comparison between a disc and a book, implied above, was obviously a byproduct of the auteur image promoted for artists like Brassens. It was also crucially

⁴⁰ I keep the French technical terms in this section because they appear in the references. As the reader easily infers *tours* stands for *revolutions per minute* and *t* for *RPM* (or r.p.m.) the acronym that I will prefer in following chapters. The 33 tours 30 cm records of the 60s are known in England as 33 1/3 RPM 12 inch records (the 25 cm being the 10 inch records).

supported by the relatively new technical innovation known as the LP which in its earliest format (the 25cm wide disc) was popularized a year after Brassens's first appearance on stage, and in its revamped 30 cm format coincided, as we saw, with Brassens's general admission into 'the poet's company'⁴¹. The Long Playing Vinyl record, the LP, fabricated with the new technique of microsillon (microgrooved vinylite) was also responsible for the other popular disc form of the late 50s, the 45 tours.

What Alphonse Bonnafé implied in the quotation cited earlier that 'le véhicule passe-partout, le disque' is the ideal carrier of a new form of lyricism would not, I argue, have been made possible if the disc format had remained the old 78 tours (in use in France until around 1953). Moreover, Bonnafé (and after him journalists like Perez) felt at ease with an implied comparison between the disc and the book, because what they had in mind was the more 'intellectual' format of discs, as the LP 33t was promoted. From the mid-50s, all the popular stars were being promoted with hits on the 45t discs rather than with LPs; it was, then, easy for critics and intellectuals to recognize the LP (and even more so, the later invention of the wider -thus with longer playing time- 30 cm LP) as a format ideal for their own version of high-popular music.

In order to comprehend this more fully, we need to make a little detour into the history of the recording industry. In the 50s a new invention changed the music industry for ever: the microgrooved vinylite. First invented and promoted in USA in the late 1940s (in 1948 Columbia began to press the first vinyl discs), it was then licensed to all the other companies around the world; the new technique made possible the production of the first LPs which were to replace the older 78 tours. As often happened in the music industry of the time, the new invention was presented as a victory for the demanding listener, especially the collector of classical music. In response to this, RCA-Victor produced the first 45 tours, similarly based on the microgrooved technique, much smaller discs able to carry only a limited number of songs (see Ord-Hume et al. 2001 esp.: 8-9). For many critics this is the birth of 'easy-listening' popular music as a

⁴¹ It is interesting that when the celebration for Brassens's decennary took place, in December 1963, his career was actually 11 years old (if one counts his first appearance in 1952 in *Les Trois Baudets*, or his first 78 tours discs - *Le gorille/ Le mauvais sujet repent*, Polydor 560398 and *La mauvaise réputation/ Le petit cheval*, Polydor 560432, both published in 1952). Ten years was the time that elapsed from the moment the first LP 25cm. with Brassens songs appeared in 1953. Thus, the decennary was to celebrate, more than merely the singer, the discographic phenomenon called LP.

definable category. 'Serious' music was the LP's province, whereas the 45s would from then on represent the 'hit industry'. To be sure, this should not be understood as a straightforward evolution: a long series of other notable events in 50s popular music exerted a combined effect. We should not forget that this was the dawn of the era of rock'n'roll, of the popularity of the Top 40, of the increasing influence of radio stations, and more importantly, of radio stations which relied on the repeated airing of the same hit songs (see Miller 1999: 53-57).

In 1956, the Barclay company published the first 'Microsillon-45 tours' in France: it was Dalida's 'Bambino', which was then heavily promoted by new radio programmes like the 'Musicorama' live show in Europe 1 (see Klein 1991:115). The singer Dalida was indeed the perfect 'agent' to launch the new material: a new singer, strange, foreign and exotic, singing a similarly exotic and upbeat song. It would sell 175,000 copies in a year and mark the dawn of a new era (ibid: 116). In the meantime, radio's influence gradually became greater: between 1945 and 1957, 10.1 million radios were sold in France. By the mid-50s, the radio had superseded the juke-box as the main channel for the promotion of a song - but not yet of all songs, nor of all singers. In parallel with the commercial success of singers like Dalida (or her invented adversary, the Spanish Gloria Lasso), this was also, as we have seen, the decade when numerous ACI emerged, with both commercial and critical success. With the advent of microsillon, ACI like Brassens would see their songs previously released in 78 tours formats rereleased as LPs (for Brassens this happened in 1953, just one year after his first songs appeared in a 78 format). Even judging from this event, we can see that the idea of a song that 'lasts longer' than a hit was being built.

As their reputation and fame grew, the work of the ACI was also increasingly present in the promotional channels of hit-popular music. Brassens's songs were also released in a number of 45t formats. Indeed, some of them became hits in the very basic sense of the term: 'Le Gorille' and 'La Prière' were constant points of reference and always present on hit radio programmes. It is clear, however, that the representative material for all the ACIs was the 33 tours record. It was very rare to find a newspaper report on a single new song by an ACI after 1955: the focus was always their new LP, their new cycle of songs - as opposed to stars like Dalida, whose promotional focus was

always the new hit, released on a 45t record.⁴² What is important here is that in the mid-50s the schism between high and low popular music was registered very markedly in the domain of discography, and given a new set of generic credentials by the new microgrooved vinylite technology.

The ACI used many techniques to consolidate their cultural impact and generic distinctiveness - the creation of a persona, the support of this persona with a constant reference to an instrument, the reference to written poetry and so on. My argument here runs alongside these: they also used the growing public feeling that the new disc formats emerging in the 50s (LP 25cm) and refined in the 60s (LP 30cm) represented a 'higher form' of popular culture. Léo Ferré, for instance, very promptly manipulated these new techniques in order to promote efficiently his transformation from accompanist and composer to Auteur-Compositeur-Interprète in his own right. He always tried to fill his records with as much material as they could contain (his releases on 45t, for instance, contain from two to five different songs), but also at a very early stage explored the idea of a thematic LP, a release, that is, with obvious unifying subject matter (like the classic *Léo Ferré chante les chansons d'Aragon* released in LP 25cm). When the first 33t 30cm. became available, he again pushed them to their limits, releasing a recorded version of one of his recitals, *Le Récital à l'Alhambra* - we have already seen how important the recitals were for the articulation of his artistic persona. In the case of Ferré more than in any other ACI, one cannot think of his later projects, like the thematic - "collected poems"- discs on Aragon, Verlaine, Rimbaud, without the availability of the LP 30cm microsilicon technology.

Through the medium of the LP, the work of the ACI could both reach a very wide audience and yet stay uncontaminated by the frivolous 'succès' material filling the airwaves. This is the idea behind one of Ferré's most provocative songs, 'Monsieur Barclay':

⁴² These two phrases may seem contradictory: how can the ACI also have success with single songs and still be discussed only in terms of their 33t production? Reading newspapers of the time, one sees that while referring to Brassens, for instance, journalists would write 'the creator of *Le Gorille*', or 'his famous *Testament*', but they would still do this by persistently referring either to the latest live concert, or to the new 33t disc. Indeed, this is also one reason why we have so little information about most of the ACI's 45t production; it has been generally perceived as a marginal affair. A significant example is Calvet's detailed discography of Brassens, where the author simply announces 'nous n'avons pas tenu compte des 45-tours'.

Monsieur Barclay/ M'a demandé/ "Léo Ferré/ J'veux un succès/ Afin que j'puiss'/ Promotionner.../
 À Europe 1/ Et chez Fontaine/ Et chez Lourier/ Et chez Dufrêne..." / Et moi pas con/ J'ai répondu/
 Voilà patron/ C'que j'ai pondu:/ Yes, yes, boum bye/ Tira me la gambe/ Tira me la gamba/ Yes, yes,
 boum bye/ Tira me la gambe/ sul tramvaye.../ J'suis pas salaud/ Et pour la peine/ J'vendrai/ Rimbaud
 avec Verlaine' (quoted in Belleret 1996: 383-4).

The song, addressed to the famous Eddie Barclay - who, incidentally but not accidentally, was the man who introduced the first microsillons in France and the manager of Dalida - is normally cited as proof of the tension in Ferré's relations with the music industry and his contempt for its rules. But the song is also a sign of the tension between the 'popular hits' released in 45t which bumbled along with anodyne lyrics (*Yes, yes, boum bye/ Tira me la gambe*), and the LPs, seen as the more prestigious, 'intellectual' material, the only one able to 'sell poetry' (*J'vendrai/ Rimbaud avec Verlaine*). Ferré's 'Monsieur Barclay' is not so much about contempt for the strategies of an industry (it even endorses the industry's main role: selling as many discs as possible) as it is about refusing to be categorized along with the frivolous 'succès' material of the 45 tours. In short, it is not an anti-commercial cry, but rather a demand for generic purity.⁴³

Criticism and the 'new canon' of Singing Poets

The move to include the two most acknowledged ACI in the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' series did not, as one might anticipate, remain unnoticed by the press of the time. 'La chanson contemporaine entre dans sa phase de respectabilité' announced Michel Perez in the newspaper *Combat* (11 September 1963). These two Seghers books were, for Perez, a tour de force statement. 'Prétendre que la poésie n'existe plus guère aujourd'hui que par la chanson n'est donc plus tout à fait une boutade'.

The Seghers books had not only bestowed symbolic capital on the work of the two most recognised ACI, they had also given their songs a solid, printed textual body,

⁴³ The reading I propose does not, in any case, preclude all the other obvious ones: Ferré certainly reinforces his image of the marginal anarchist, mocks the popular establishment by naming the successful radio-show hosts, unmasks the industry's ways of orchestrating the making of a hit, and, quite spectacularly, satirizes the yéyé hits, predominant at the time. But one should stress the generic emphasis here. Ferré's music is not the 'one hit wonder' kind associated with the yéyés. It is the other side of the coin, the one able to outsell the others by producing (under the same label) LPs with songs based on poems by Verlaine and Rimbaud.

ready to be taken up and debated - as something simultaneously in and out of the norms of poetry - in the most prestigious poetry criticism columns. René Lacôte, the poetry critic of *Lettres Françaises*, approved of the first book on Ferré, noting that it certainly 'va servir, en effet, à remettre en question les idées que l'on se fait sur la poésie' (*Lettres Françaises* 17 January 1963). For the critic, the fact that Ferré was a poet was something already acknowledged by the public and intellectuals alike. The problem was to provide a strong argument that would persuade even the conservative reader who believed in the 'purity of genres' to accept Ferré's -and, the critic notes, a handful of other singer-songwriters'- 'canonisation poétique'. The article is replete with terms ('poésie sérieuse', 'classer', 'cadre', 'qualifiant de troubadours', 'frapper aux portes les mieux fermées', 'lignée') indicating that a reformulation of the canon was at stake. Introducing Ferré among the poets is not a rupture with the idea of the poetic canon, Lacôte implies, but a prolongation of already existing criteria, a test that would make the canon stronger:

Mais le fait de classer Ferré ainsi est une première conclusion: si la poésie française est bien ce qui vient de nous être démontré, soyons logiques: ce type qui chantait dans les bastringues et qui n'en finit plus de faire fortune sans en être intoxiqué, ce poète est dans la bonne lignée.

For the critic, the introduction of the Seghers book played an important role: it clearly showed the poetic evolution of which Ferré's work was a part, and argued for Ferré's close link to the poetic idea(l)s of such modernists as René Char. Since the argument was made so persuasively, Lacôte argued, Ferré's lyrics could begin to exert their influence on contemporary French poetry. The bottom line, the critic reminds us, is that 'la poésie gagnera à prendre Léo Ferré au sérieux' (ibid).

Less than nine months after the Léo Ferré publication, when the Brassens volume appeared, the debate had not subsided. 'Les remous provoqués par la publication d' un Léo Ferré dans la collection des Poètes d'aujourd'hui ne sont pas encore apaisés, et voici déjà un Georges Brassens' writes the same René Lacôte in his 'chronique de poésie' column in the *Lettres Françaises* (19-25 September 1963).

J' espère même que Pierre Seghers ne s'en tiendra pas là dans l'entreprise de désintoxication par laquelle il continue à bien servir la poésie et qu' après un *Jacques Brel*, désormais indispensable et attendu, il développera son offensive sous de nouvelles formes qui surprendront encore.

As we shall see below, Jacques Brel was, indeed, the third ACI to be included in the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui', and the offensive on the 'hierarchy of genres' was later expanded by the inclusion of other 'surprising forms' of the song genre. Lacôte's was a well-known poetry-criticism column, and his conclusion on the value of the work of Brassens-on-the-page for contemporary written poetry is important in this context: 'en ramenant la chanson française égarée sur sa véritable voie, par des moyens personnels extrêmement originaux, Brassens contribue à ramener à la raison la poésie écrite, contrainte de se souvenir aussi de ce que ses propres origines ne sont en rien différentes'.⁴⁴

After Brassens's inclusion in the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' series, the discussion of the equation 'Brassens=poète' was so magnified that Brassens felt the need to defend the music of his songs. He said in an interview with René Quinson in *Combat* that his lyrics had, indeed, grown to become more important than music in his songs. However, 'si vous supprimez ma petite musique toute simple, mes chansons perdent, je crois, beaucoup de leur intérêt' (*Combat* 20 October 1964).

Brassens's assertion of his music as an integral part of his songs' structure introduces a discourse that would run counter to the 'chanson as poetry' discourse mapped so far: we could call it 'chanson as distinct genre', or 'chanson as chanson'. It was no coincidence that Brassens's defence of '[s]a petite musique toute simple' as an integral and not secondary part of the songs came at exactly the moment when a third 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' edition appeared: the one with Jacques Brel on its cover.

Brel in Seghers: Poésie et chansons

Even though Brassens was one of the first artists who helped the young Jacques Brel to begin a singing career in Paris, there is a fundamental difference between Brel and both Brassens and Ferré. In the case of the latter, the idea that a chanson is and should be a 'popular poetry' was instrumental in their songs and the images of themselves and their

⁴⁴ There is a resonant link between this view and a later debate on French poetry: how could French poetry supersede the dichotomy between 'difficult' and 'easy' diction, how can poetic language be perceived not as a 'foreign', 'difficult', but as 'ordinary language in its most intense form' (Worton 1995: 209).

artistry they promoted. The discussion of developments like the Seghers editions was as much a product of a general consensus as one already voiced in their own songs.

Arguably, however, in Brel the trajectory was different. The newspaper reports of his first Parisian appearances were much more cautious in their characterization of his artistry - they did not quite as frequently invoke words such as 'poet' and 'troubadour' for him, as had been the case for Brassens and Ferré.

When the critics detected a 'poetic effect' in Brel's songs, they often did not acknowledge it in the lyrics, but were more inclined to discern it in other aspects, notably his performance and his singing passion. Poetry, again, may have been the point of reference, but what we had now was, as Pierre Kyria put it in *Combat*, poetry as force, the poetic both in its protean and savage form. 'Une force. Une force de poésie qui hurle, frappe, se déchaîne avant de se briser, soudain, en quelque chose qui ressemblait à une plainte si une grande pudeur n'était pas là en garde-fou. Une force vive de poète à l'état sauvage' ('À l'Olympia: Jacques Brel: poète à l'état sauvage', *Combat* 17 October 1964).

Henri Quiquere was even clearer in the *Libération* (17 October 1964) on the eve of the publication of Brel 'Poète d'aujourd'hui'; Brel's performance, he explains, is so mesmerizing that one simply cannot accept those who criticize the singer and question the legitimacy of his songs being part of the 'poète d'aujourd'hui' series. Poetry is, simply, the transcendental effect:

Jacques Brel, *en plus de ses chansons de poète d'aujourd'hui*, possède à présent merveilleusement le métier de la scène, sa seule présence fascine et l'on est beaucoup trop attentif à ce qu'il chante pour rejoindre les médisants professionnels, ses confrères, qui prétendent qu'il détonne trop souvent et a tendance à en rajouter (emphasis added).

The reason I place emphasis on the 'en plus' of the above phrase is to illustrate that in Brel's case, the 'poète d'aujourd'hui' title is a generic given; the song genre reinforces the idea of poeticity in a performative way. Brel's songs may or may not be poetic in the strict sense, but as a supplement (en plus), they possess the performative power which makes the audience unable to question anything. With Brel's performance, the scrutiny normally expected from poetry readers is disapproved: poetry has become a general atmosphere.

Thus, for the first time, the value of the Seghers-‘Poète d’aujourd’hui’ volume was transformed: poetry was not to be found in these pages, but only as a remainder, a distant memory of a performance; the poetic effect was destined to lie, in Brel’s case, as a supplement, always somewhere else. This is a change reflected in many ways in Jean Clouzet’s introduction to *Jacques Brel: Poète d’aujourd’hui*. It starts by acknowledging Brel’s reluctance to accept ‘ce brevet de poésie’ that a Seghers edition would bring along. Thus, the critic semi-jokingly admits, it may be that for Brel the title of the series should be changed to ‘Climats poétiques d’aujourd’hui’. This reluctance about labelling is reflected for the first time on the cover of the book: along with the prestigious ‘Poètes d’aujourd’hui’ series title, a small surtitle is added on the upper left corner of the book which reads: ‘Poésie et chansons’.⁴⁵

The tacit admission that what is ‘poetic’ is the song in its entirety and that the text represented in the collection is only a part of it, also affects the way the text of the lyrics is printed on page. In the most notable example, ‘Ne me quitte pas’ is printed with the end of its stanza repeating the title verse three times, the way it is repeated in performance. The same happens in ‘Les Flamandes’; where the end of each stanza also gives a transcription of the sung text, unusual in a printed poem, but meant to evoke graphically the most characteristic part of the song:

Les Flamandes
 Les Flamandes
 Les Fla
 Les Fla
 Les Flamandes⁴⁶

This change of focus, from the poetic verse ‘avant toute chose’ to a concept of a poetic ambience in the song can also be traced in Brel’s singing and songwriting career.

Let us compare an early black and white photograph of Brel, taken from the Alhambra theatre in 1957, with one of his most famous photographs from the 60s: in the former (reprinted in Vassal 1988: 12), we see Brel sitting in front of the microphone,

⁴⁵ Brel commented on this in a televised interview, marshalling the argument for chanson’s autonomy (“Discorama”, 14 juin): ‘Si j’ai fini par donner mon accord [pour la publication], c’est sous condition qu’on dise bien que je ne me tiens pas pour un poète. Dans la poésie, le mot est souverain, alors que, dans la chanson, l’on est toujours tributaire d’une note de musique. Les vrais poètes ne sont pas faits pour être chantés’ (cited in Lorcey and Monserrat: 30).

guitar in his hands. He may be more photogenic, youthful and attractive to the camera than Brassens, but the allegiance is there. Brel starts off as a player in exactly the same generic territory stabilized by Brassens: he is a singing poet, he has come from his native town to Paris 'to sell his stories' (in a way very comparable to how Brassens's career started, Brel first visited Gréco and presented her with one of his songs, 'Le diable', which she then included in her repertoire). He writes songs which persistently revolve around a limited number of topics (with their tune arranged around a limited number of chords), creating an aura of the self-referring auteur for himself. Ultimately, he holds a guitar, the use of which may be musically limited to a handful of chords, but which symbolically puts him in line with the other ACI, supporting the 'singing poet effect'. It is significant that in this first period, Brel always wrote both the music and lyrics of his songs.

Moving to the next photograph (reprinted in Vassal 1988: 9), we have a glimpse of the 'stage-monster' that made Brel famous around the world. The guitar has gone, hands-legs-head move freely and manically. And now the microphone has become the focus of attention. It stands there as if it were his main instrument and, even more surprisingly, the symbol aligning the performer to a songwriting genealogy and a singing tradition. Brel by now has stopped writing music on his own, and frequently collaborates with his orchestrators for his songs' tunes. His tour de force presence on stage has become proverbial and he tries to implicate it in the structure of his songs, where narrative tension and musical nerve frequently build up to an explosive crescendo at the end ('Au suivant', 'La valse à mille temps').

There is a romantic reading of this transformation, the one adopted by most histories of the French song: it sees in it the successful evolution of an artist towards his own personal tropes of expression. Some of the more perceptive critics also note that what Brel actually succeeded in doing was to combine a tradition of great interpreters with that of the singing poets (see Hawkins 2000: 138-139). I would propose that what is at stake here is more complex: Brel indeed alludes to the tradition of the stage singer, still present in the 60s, when Edith Piaf could still be seen on stage and early recordings

⁴⁶ A similar strategy is followed in the transcription of a number of songs, including 'La valse à mille temps' and 'Je ne sais pas'.

by legendary singers such as Gilbert and Mistinguett were rereleased. However, Brel's performance allusions do not distance him from the singing poet model identified with Brassens: on the contrary, they reshape the model, while adopting it.

In the late 50s Brel joined the genre already represented by Brassens and Ferré and followed their example; like them, he wrote texts with literary aspirations, adopted a persona, constructed a past through his singing presence. He also used an inverted parentage, focusing on a poetic tradition and presenting himself as its heir. If Brassens's adopted parentage was a hybrid of ideal troubadour and garrulous chansonnier and Ferré's were the *poètes maudits*, Brel turns decisively to the recent popular past and recycles the style and pathos of popular sentimental singers.

It is in this context that we have to understand both the focal presence of the microphone and the insistence on gestures. They stress a constant game with references that underline Brel's self-positioning as a recording artist *post* the *chanson réaliste*. Brel's frantic gestures did not 'resemble' the overdramatic gestures of Piaf and earlier chanteuses réalistes. Brel was not a continuation of the tradition of the chanteur réaliste: he *quoted* this tradition, using it as material in his own strategies of representation (be they textual in the stricter sense of the term - the text of the lyrics - or broader - performance). Instead of emulating the *chanson réaliste* tradition, he had successfully narrativized it. In the same way, the microphone as a symbol played more the role of a quotation than of an instrument of expression for him. It can be seen rather as referring to famous posters and photographs like the one of Piaf in front of a microphone, with her huge shadow projected on the right behind her (reprinted in Klein 1991: 96). Ultimately creating a distinct and overarching Brelian style, these strategies also encourage the listener to accept Brel as an 'auteur' of songs: but, crucially, now the object of writing, the 'text', has ceased being the song's lyrics. For the first time what is foregrounded so dramatically as 'text' is the song as a whole, singing, staging and gesturing included.

I have so far shown how Brel, while sharing generic allegiances with the genre of the ACI, as shaped in the work of Brel and Ferré, also developed a very different style. As a consequence, the analytic tools that we have seen employed so far by the critics and the

Seghers editors for Brassens and Ferré could not have served in Brel's case had they remained unchanged. Suddenly, a strict poetry argument was not enough if the singing poet model was to expand into a working version of high-popular. Hence, there is a discursive shift to reinstate the popular song's distinctiveness as a genre (we saw Brassens's eagerness to remind everyone that there is music behind his verses) along with its multiplicity. In these terms, Brel's inclusion was indispensable for both the canon and the genre under codification. With Brel joining Brassens and Ferré - and thus forming a recognizable 'high triad' of ACI - the high-popular was consolidated⁴⁷.

Chanson... un art mineur

This was, tellingly, the moment when the discussion of the song as an 'art mineur' began. The reason behind it seems clear-cut: if the price to pay in order to be included in the 'art majeur' of high poetry was to lose the distinctiveness of the song as art (and, in the meantime, leading critics to find the song a lesser form of poetry), then it was preferable to see it positively as an 'art mineur'.

Predictably, Brel was central in the formation of this argument (which can be seen as constituting the counterdiscourse of the 'chanson as poetry' one). Brel seemed anxious about getting asphyxiated by the category of the poet - this may have been because he knew that judged by traditional literary criteria his songs could have been easily dismissed as lesser poetry compared to Brassens's exquisite constructions and Ferré's confrontational avant-gardism. In an interview immediately after the publication of his volume in the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui', Brel was asked whether he could write poems as well as songs. He denied it emphatically. The following argument, anxiously parading clichéd generic distinctions between song and poetry, is indicative:

Absolument pas! Le poème et la chanson sont deux choses très différentes. Le poème est fait pour être lu et relu. Un poème n'a pas besoin d'avoir une musique, il se suffit tout seul. La chanson, elle, est faite pour être chantée; elle doit être claire et facilement compréhensible à la première audition. Moi, je ne peux pas écrire de poèmes, je ne sais pas trouver la sonorité poétique, j'ai besoin d'une

⁴⁷ In a 1964 interview with *Paris-Jour* Brel explains: 'le public fait de plus en plus de différence entre la musique à danser et la véritable chanson. Il distingue mieux entre Dalida et Nougaro, Mariano et Ferré, Guétary et Gainsbourg. C'est lui, le public, qui obligera les gens du disque et du music-hall à changer les appellations. Ainsi moi, je me considère comme un "chansonnier" tout comme Brassens, Ferré ou Gainsbourg ('Jacques Brel "Je suis célèbre... mais pas riche"' [interview conducted by Alain Spiraux], *Paris-Jour* 15 October 1964).

note de musique pour faire sonner les mots ('Je ne marche pas au pas avoue Jacques Brel', *Combat* 28 November 1964).

The discussion of the song as an art mineur found one of its best airings in a widely publicised debate between Brassens and Brel on radio. According to the newspapers, this was the first time the two ACI had appeared together, in a programme in 'Europe 1' presented by Jean Serge. The transcript that follows (taken from the newspaper *Combat*) is indicative of how the idea of the song as distinct art mineur was painstakingly pursued and presented:

G.B. Nous sommes des poètes mineurs, mais dans le domaine de la poésie, peut-être y-a-t-il moins d'erreurs, je parle de la poésie pure. Les choses s'arrangent avec l'avenir. Les poètes sont souvent méconnus de leur vivant.

J.B. Nous sommes des artisans, pas des poètes. Nous sommes ce qu'on peut exactement appeler des petits maîtres. (*Combat* 11 November 1965, 'Jacques Brel rencontre Georges Brassens sur les ondes d'Europe No 1').

Once Brel was 'a number' in the Seghers catalogue, the discussion on 'l'art mineur' started running parallel to the overstated argument for chanson as the new poetry, and the inclusion of singer-songwriters as 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' was given a caveat with the small subheading 'Poésie et chansons'. Now the way was open for the inclusion of other singing stars who were not primarily known for their 'poetic' qualities, in the revamped company of the singing poets.

Aznavour, Trenet, Gainsbourg... the other poetry

The *Charles Aznavour* volume appeared in 1964, still with a number in the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' list (121) but also with the heading 'Poésie et chansons' figuring very prominently. It was clear by then that the main aim of the Seghers series was to present the lead players in a song-scene and not necessarily to focus on the strictly poetic value of their lyrics: poetry was already conceived more broadly, as the necessary quality of a good song - from a strict comment on the lyrics, it had become a general impulse characterizing the high-popular.

Consequently, Yves Salgues, the editor of the Aznavour volume, contributed an introduction which avoided sounding like a literary essay and instead adopted devices from popular journalism. There was a lengthy description of the artist's work in the

studio, a long report on Aznavour's charm as it worked on women and journalistic praise for the transcendental effects of '*the* voice'. Also included were a much longer biographical essay and a detailed interview with the artist himself. The direct implication is similar to that made in the edition on Brel: poetry is diffused in every single detail of this artist's performance, not only in the songwriting. Aznavour's voice is poetic, his -minimal- height is poetic, the way he stands behind the microphone, the way he enters the studio, the way he talks to fans, all these constitute the space where his poeticity is unfolded. Poetry may have stayed as the defining characteristic of a genre of 'good song' that Aznavour is felt to be part of, but the poetic has changed considerably as a concept from the Seghers introductions by Estienne or Bonnafé reviewed earlier.

It could not be otherwise, since Aznavour fits in even less with the prototype established earlier for Brassens and Ferré: he does not write the music of his songs -and not all of his lyrics-, nor does he embody any particular 'high literary' ideology; on top of everything else, he has been a successful 'crooner', a type of singer extremely popular with female audiences and iconically satirized in Brel's 'Chanson de Jacky'.

Charles Trenet only appeared as number six in the 'Poésie et Chansons' Seghers sub-series (while still retaining an initial numbering in the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' series).⁴⁸ This may seem odd at first since Trenet is often presented as the initiator of the modern singing poet tradition, the first Auteur-Compositeur-Interprète in the genealogy; however, this is mainly a retrospective projection. The Seghers series made this point clearly: it was only after it had become an all inclusive forum for the high-popular that Trenet's music-hall past could find a place in the - revamped and retitled - canon of 'Poésie et Chansons'.

This is the reason why Michel Perez, the music journalist who edited the volume, did not put enormous emphasis in his introduction on Trenet's literary production proper: his novels, his autobiographical writings, even his poems. On the contrary, his focus was on the chanson as a distinct genre, with its own laws and

⁴⁸ Between Aznavour and Trenet, Félix Leclerc was presented (number five in 'Poètes et chansons' and 124 in the general 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' series): he represented the Quebec Chanson tradition and his recitals in Paris had been very successful, and were received with the notable 'singing poet' reviews. He is, *mutatis mutandis*, the Brassens of Quebec, and thus his inclusion in the series was long overdue.

aesthetics, according to which Trenet was claimed as a poetic figure. This introduction resembles Clouzet's for Brel, but is even more polemical: Perez in fact launches an attack on the overuse of the 'poetic tendency' in songwriting. Thus, for the editor, the songwriter represents a period before the current asphyxiating intellectualization of the *chanson*:

Un texte de Trenet est presque toujours pur de toute intention littéraire et ses idées ne sont pas philosophiques ni morales: ce sont des idées de chanson. La chanson, rien que la chanson, rien d'autre ne semble l'occuper (1964: 10).

Trenet's are 'des chansons pures et simples... sans surprises', whereas most of the authors representative of the '*chanson intellectuelle*' 'exprime des idées qui agacent, qu'on les comprenne ou non'. As for their lyrics 'on ne peut pas les retenir, on n'ose pas les déformer' (ibid). Implied in this last phrase is the discourse of *chanson* as art mineur, which has now evolved its own poetics: unlike an intellectual song, a proper popular song, Perez explains, is important in that it can be sung and resung (it even lets its lyrics be 'deformed' while sung); it can be followed, admired and, in the end, even studied without having to be projected on the matrix of literature. The echo of Trenet singing his '*L'âme des poètes*' some 20 years earlier is more than clear.

In a later edition of the Seghers *Charles Trenet*, the 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' vignette has disappeared. But the book opens with a facsimile of a handwritten dedication written on the title page of *Le Cornet à dé* by Max Jacob. It reads: 'à Charles Trenet... qui a donné la vie à sa poésie par sa voix et sa voix à la vie de sa poésie... avec la vraie amitié de Max Jacob [signature]'. This belated addition may have been ordered to compensate for the 'art mineur' style of Perez's introduction, but it is also a reminder of the fact that Trenet had been a favourite of a group of intellectuals and poets of the prewar years. In my view, this phrase also shows how, in the 30s and the 40s, the role of the word 'poésie' to characterize the work of a songwriter and performer may have been used as a high praise, but did not have the resonances it took on in the 50s and 60s. In the newspapers of the 30s, it is also sometimes used to denote a good lyricist ('on le connaissait comme compositeur-poète, non comme interprète') or, as in other contexts used even today, an artist very good at his art: 'Un poète nous y fut révélé: Charles Trenet [...] nous apporte [...] une fraîcheur encore inéprouvable au music-hall

et, en dix-minutes de synthèse, la jeunesse d'aujourd'hui' (both cited in Calvet 1991: 23).

In 1969, when Serge Gainsbourg's volume appeared, there was a further change in the series title: the vignette 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' was changed to 'Chansons d'aujourd'hui' (doubled up with the subtitle 'Poésie et chansons') reportedly after pressure from the artist himself. Lucien Rioux, who edited this volume, did not leave any room to doubt why this was done: Gainsbourg, always playful, adversarial, inconsistent and uneasy with his work, provocateur, cynic and inimitable witness of his times, represents, Rioux maintains, the idea of a song which should not be judged according to the rules of high culture, but instead according to the rules it itself imposes.

The 'poetic' song, in the idealist terms used at the beginning of the decade, was not a proof of high artistry anymore, and, as Rioux argued, had declined to a sign of failure in the hands of untalented imitators; the new focus was now a popular song poetics. In Rioux's version of Gainsbourg, the songwriter represented the Other Song, neither contaminated by the climate of a song 'flou' and 'pseudo-poétique', nor asphyxiated by the trends of the hit songs. The subversive force Gainsbourg was bringing into sometimes unexpected territory, like that of a Eurovision song or a duet with Brigitte Bardot, was recalled in a very favourable light. And constant reference to post-May 68 France implied the biggest criticism levelled against the 'poetic song': that it had not risen to the occasion of the popular revolt, even though reputedly liberal, nor had it foreseen or depicted it afterwards. On the contrary Gainsbourg, in Rioux's terms, could still be seen as reflecting the May spirit - even before May 68.

In the end, the criterion that established Gainsbourg artistic importance for Rioux was, simply, that he was one of those songwriters 'qui se créent leur propre langage':

Ceux-là peuvent choisir leurs mots dans le passé ou le présent, cela n'a aucune importance; ce qui compte, c'est l'emploi qu'ils en font. Ils bâtissent un monde, utilisent les mots comme un peintre emploierait ses couleurs, pour créer une atmosphère... Parfois, ils racontent une histoire, les mots ne sont là que comme des matériaux au service de cette histoire. D'autre fois, l'histoire s'estompe, disparaît: chacun des mots devient en lui-même un objet esthétique et l'assemblage ne vise plus qu'à produire une harmonie de sons, voire à produire un ensemble attrayant sur le plan visuel (1969: 52).

In this paragraph we can still discern the analytic tools modified to fit the case of each ACI who had been introduced in the series. From the new, 'Chansons d'aujourd'hui' point of view as laid out by Rioux, what was at stake was 'purely and simply' good song writing. No matter whether it used a mixture of old and new, high and low vocabularies, as in the case of Brassens, or whether it could result in a poetic atmosphere based on words (Ferré) or the whole performance-effect (Brel), whether it could narrate a story (Leclerc, Barbara) or use words for their material effect (Brel, Trenet), the popular song had, in the end, to impose itself as a distinct and self-contained art form.

By the end of the 60s Lucien Rioux became the director of the, newly independent 'Poésie et chansons' Seghers series and oversaw its expansion towards the past; books on Béranger and Bruant were included, the latter introduced very eloquently by the singer Mouloudji and the former by Serge Dillaz. The new volumes - without any mention of the initial 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui' surtitle -, opted for a much looser definition of the singing poet; in 1972, a volume on Gilbert Bécaud appeared. His name and photograph were on the cover and an introduction to the composer-singer was included, but the lyrics collected in the main body of the book were not his: they were written by the three lyricists and poets who most frequently collaborated with him, Louis Amade, Pierre Delanoé and Maurice Vidalin. But, the introduction argued, all three had worked with Bécaud's performance in mind and were thus part of the poetic atmosphere he created on stage: 'à travers le talent des trois auteurs qui sont ses habituels compagnons de travail, c'est un univers bien à lui qui transparaît au détour de chaque vers' (Izard 1972: 5). Not only the concept of 'poetry', but also that of 'author' had undergone a significant reversal. In a similar vein, a *Juliette Gréco* (1975) number would eventually appear, and, of course, Gréco never wrote either the music or the words she sang. Again, what mattered for the editors was the persona as a source of poetic ambience.

In the mid-70s the set-up of the covers would change, and big photographs with light colours would be employed to revamp the 'Poésie et chansons' series as well as remind its readers that this was, after all, popular culture. In a further analogous mutation, most of the books would be republished in the 80s under the heading 'Le club des stars'. With these last transformations of the Seghers books on the chanson, one realizes that this publishing story ended up representing not only a genre (the ACI) and

its poetics, but a transitional period: what began as an argument for the inclusion of popular songs in the canon of high poetry, then evolved into a framing of the space of the high-popular, before opening its main structural element ('the poetic') to the multiple vocabularies of popular culture.

The logics of a plural space

We have so far traced the emergence and consolidation of the genre of the ACI, and seen how the consensus that made it central to the 'âge d'or de la chanson française' was formulated. We have also reviewed the factors that led up to the emergence of the genre and worked towards its reception as a phenomenon. As I have argued, the ACI became the central measure of value and coherence for the whole system of popular music in France, a system that received its symbolic label through the 'mythe Brassens'. In addition, I have shown how the elevation of Georges Brassens to the status of national icon and the univocal praise of his songs *as poetry* ended up restraining them, working against their own plurality - a multidimensionality I have attempted to foreground through my own readings of some of them.

By reviewing the story of the Seghers books, we moved towards a more general conclusion: as the evidence from the Seghers introductions and other publication material shows, the attempt to consolidate the ACI's oeuvre under the label of high poetry did not conform to the one-dimensional criteria it itself imposed. We have seen how the initial discussion was based on particular practices and song politics: the performances of Ferré, Brassens's popular idealism and his limited but successful use of poems to create popular songs, and so on. As I have argued, even at this early stage other factors and agencies, such as the promotional bodies of the music industry, were also alert to the possible use of this 'force for literary canonization' for their own ends.

Once it was decided that the Seghers series should become more representative and include more and younger artists in the canon that was under construction, it had to alter and finally discard its original title and interpretative strategies. Initially used as a token of prestige and a shaping force, poetry had then to be conceived in a much broader sense, and a new counterdiscourse (the one on 'chanson art mineur') arose to counterbalance the popular song system. Thus, what had begun as the prescriptive

discourse of what popular music *should* be (an ‘oral poetry’ genre), ended up a more inclusive space where the popular could unfold and renarrate itself. That space was recognizable by its plurality of styles and strategies, the inherent build-up of oppositions, and the agonistic relation between a discourse of ‘high literature’ and another on ‘minor art’, all elaborated as characteristics of popular culture, now conceived as the very ‘ground on which the transformations are worked’ (Hall 1981: 228).

Epilogue: Reading the singing poets against the grain

It is indicative that when the editors of the progressive musical journal *musique en jeu* commissioned a special issue on popular music in 1971, not one of the articles dealt with French popular music, or even mentioned the French chanson (Hirsch 1971). This was undoubtedly symptomatic of a new discourse on popular music that had emerged very strongly in France after May 68, and saw the French chanson as a dated intellectual exercise out of touch with real life issues. More importantly, the French chanson was seen as lacking the characteristics that made American rock seem the most progressive genre of popular music.

Suddenly, previously highly praised French songwriters were no longer being discussed by theorists. If critics had gone in search of the poetic a decade earlier in order to legitimize a song genre and to metonymically map a whole field of popular music, in the 70s a different critical framework was built to assess rock and pop musicians for their musical inventiveness, their rebelliousness, or the use of the performing body. Needless to say, in this new framework, older genres such as the ACI were retrospectively formalized as belonging to ‘a dated culture of the mind’, and hence seen as retrograde.

In the early 60s, new rock’n’roll styles had been negatively criticized in France as frivolous, commercialized, valueless and merely imitative of Anglo-American models. They were in large part judged according to a system of evaluation dominated by the ACI genre and the literary conceptualizations built around it. However, towards the end of that decade a new systemic approach emerged which was no longer centred on the concept of the singing poet. Contrary to the ACI, which now appeared very

conservative and academic, 'la musique pop' from England and especially North America sounded oppositional, groundbreaking and contestatory. Even in a text about classical music becoming something we listen to passively instead of playing and performing actively, such as Barthes's 'Musica Practica' (1970), we find a positive reference to rock, celebrating its implication of the body in the aesthetic experience: 'pour trouver en Occident de la musique pratique, il faut aller chercher du côté d'un *autre* public, d'un *autre* répertoire, d'un *autre* instrument (les jeunes, la chanson, la guitare)' (1982 [1970]: 231).

Now another model based on youth rebelliousness, 'anti-utopia' and anticonformism was at the heart of a new conceptualization of popular music. Thus, in 1975, three well-known academics signing a book on *La révolution sans modèle*, proclaimed 'la musique pop' as the ultimate example for a revolutionary 'culture sans modèle'. Olivier Révault d'Alonnes argued, not without a considerable degree of idealization, that 'dans cette même 'musique pop' qui n'a pas d'harmoniques, il n'y a pas non plus de chef, de partition, d'obligation. Il y a *le plaisir*, c'est tout. Finalement, quand on conteste les harmoniques, on *conteste* aussi *la hiérarchie* et le pouvoir. Cela me paraît évident et décisif' (Châtelet, Lapouge, and Revault d'Alonnes 1975: 67).

The concept of 'youth explosion', of pleasure interwoven with contestation, also governed Henri Lefebvre's distinction between two central characteristics in music, the 'logogénique' and the 'pathogénique', which he explained in an article published in *musique en jeu* in 1971:

Le pathogénique [...] a une puissance "cathartique", apaisante jusque dans l'appel à la transe et à la violence. Il a son domaine en deçà et au-delà du discours, du monde des signes et de celui du Sujet; il évoque l'irruption d'un espace dionysiaque, l'inverse et l'adversaire d'un espace intelligible et spécialisé: l'irruption du désir. Quant au logogénique, il se rapproche du sujet (le chanteur, la voix) en même temps que des signifiants et du rapport "signifiant-signifié", de l'espace ludique préparé et raisonnable. A la limite, celui qui chante c'est le Logos qui se fait enchanteur (1971: 59).

If the reference to the logogénique reminds one of the ways the chanson of the singing poets had been analyzed, the pathogénique by contrast refers to late and post-60s rock music - as Lefebvre would make clear with a reference to Woodstock (1971: 61). Of course, one should note that he theorizes pop from the perspective of the outsider, thereby replicating the tendency to idealization of the literary critics who had focused

on chanson a decade before. For Lefebvre, the space opened up by the pathogénique is the space of desire and of the imaginary (61), 'le contre-espace, le contre-regard, la contradiction vécue, le rebondissement de la révolte, l'ultime recours' (60).

Roland Barthes would push this argument further in an article also first published in *musique en jeu*, his much quoted 'Le grain de la voix'. Although it starts with examples from classical music, Barthes's essay is emphatically concerned with aesthetics across the musical spectrum. He starts from a distinction which echoes Lefebvre's pathogénique/ logogénique and establishes the difference between géno-chant and phéno-chant (also reworking Kristeva's distinction between géno-texte and phéno-texte). The phéno-chant is what we ordinarily speak about and give cultural value to, the semiologically structured vestige of the song, while the géno-chant is the space from which signification stems. 'Le géno-chant, c'est le volume de la voix chantante *et* disante, l'espace où les significations germent "du dedans de la langue et dans sa matérialité même"' (1972: 59).

The génochant is the privileged place of what Barthes calls 'le grain de la voix':

Le "grain", c'est le corps dans la voix qui chante, dans la main qui écrit, dans le membre qui exécute. Si je perçois le "grain" d'une musique et si j'attribue à ce "grain" une valeur théorique (c'est l'assomption du texte dans l'oeuvre), je ne puis que me refaire une nouvelle table d'évaluation, individuelle sans doute, puisque je suis décidé à écouter mon rapport au corps de celui ou de celle qui chante ou qui joue et que ce rapport est érotique, mais nullement "subjective" [...] Cette évaluation se fera sans loi: elle déjouera la loi de la culture mais aussi celle de l'anticulture; elle développera au-delà du sujet toute la valeur qui est cachée derrière "j'aime" ou "je n'aime pas" (1972: 62).

The grain, the bodily presence of a voice and our desire for this body, is what makes the song speak, or more precisely, what makes it *write*, in the Barthesian sense of *écriture*: 'Le "grain" de la voix n'est pas -ou n'est pas seulement- son timbre; la signifiante qu'il ouvre ne peut précisément mieux se définir que par la friction même de la musique et d'autre chose, qui est la langue (et pas du tout le message). Il faut que le chant parle, ou mieux encore, *écrive*, car ce qui est produit au niveau du géno-chant est finalement de l'*écriture*' (60-61, emphasis added).

Barthes's grain adds to the voice what was seen as its opposite, writing, and to the text, what was seen as excluded from it, the body; his thinking on music thus opens up a previously unavailable dimension. Through the bodily presence of both performer

and listener and the interaction between them, the musical work regains its status as an event, without crossing out its textual presence - instead foregrounding it in all its multiplicity. Barthes's erotics of literature, theorized in *Le plaisir du texte* but also resonating through texts like 'Le grain de la voix', have opened up a new understanding of reading and writing as inseparable actions in formulating our cultural experience, working with and through the body.

Such a postructuralist approach to text, reading and writing, could help fuel a rereading of the singing poet model through a radical reconfiguration of both the terms 'singing' and 'poet'. This, crucially, did not occur in the 70s, when critical focus wandered from the singing poets. But in a contemporary perspective, it has great potential to foreground the different and very interesting aspects of the afterlife of the work of songwriters such as Brel, Brassens, Ferré and Gainsbourg. If these artists initially triggered and exploited a comparison with the literary text that eventually reduced their songs to monophonic texts, they also created, performed and recorded them as popular music, opening them up through their bodies and towards the bodies of their listeners, over different periods and within different song systems. To take this into account would mean remapping these texts as texts of pleasure (and, to follow Barthes's suggestion, to linger on their moments of *jouissance*) in order to revise both the initial conceptual limitations of their literariness, and to explore their ultimate aesthetic function, their grain.

If this discussion is to be undertaken, it will have to interrogate cultural and national identity fixtures such as the ones I have discussed in my conclusions on Brassens. It is precisely the symbolic and mythological elements attached to the discussion about the 'poeticity' of the French chanson which often make it very difficult to read against the grain (in search of a Barthesian grain). Undoubtedly, before measuring the work of the ACI in a post-60s reading framework, one has first to deconstruct such stagnant mythologies, in which the singing poet, still often assigned the primary role of rigid symbol, is the element in need of closest critical attention.

In Part 2, we encounter a similar situation in which the genre of the *Art-Popular*, and the project of *Sung Poetry*, both seen as constituents of the high-popular in 60s Greece, eventually attained mythical dimensions in the country's cultural life and to this

day are invested with immense symbolic weight. As with my approach to the French ACI, I will also try to locate in this context to what extent literary and other cultural ideologies tried to freeze an image of popular music as a national institution in 60s and 70s Greece. However, as I will indicate in Part 3 through a review of the work of Dionysis Savvopoulos, the most probing response to stable representations and interpellations can be found within popular music *as it renarrates itself*, the only way open to us to look back to the songs and listen to them *as songs*. In relation to Savvopoulos - who simultaneously reworked the Greek and the French singing poet models from a late 60s, rock music perspective - in the final part of the thesis I take the further step which is to my mind essential. Through an analysis of his reading of the work of his predecessors and through my readings of a part of his work, I will conclude by looking at the singing poet model from the viewpoint of the grain of the voice, from the site of jouissance (see Part 3; Chapter 3); in short, from a post-60s liminal position of subjectivity that aspires to go beyond the old dichotomies of the *chanson littéraire* and to acknowledge that, in Lefebvre's words, 'celui qui chante c'est le Logos qui se fait enchanteur'.

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Part 2: Greece of the Two Composers
Popular Music as a National Institution (1948-1963)

The purpose of this part is to analyze how Greek popular music was redefined and reshaped after the Second World War under the force of concepts that betray many similarities with the ones we saw operating in France at the same time. Even though the *singing poet* model did not materialize from the beginning in the same format as in France, there was a strikingly similar infusion of literary ideals in Greece to define what popular music should be and what its territory should look like. In the place of Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes, in Greece we are faced with *the popular songwriter as auteur*, a discourse that was exemplified in the case of Manos Hadjidakis and Mikis Theodorakis.

As extremely influential popular composers who started working after the 40s, Manos Hadjidakis and Mikis Theodorakis recuperated older musical forms, proposed their own views on folk and popular culture and, in the end, their own cultural politics of music. What has been described by critics as ‘Greece of the two composers’ was an official representation, reorganization and self-conceptualization of the whole field of popular music in the country, and was inextricably linked with discourses of nationality, national identity and high (modernist) culture. The two composers collaborated extensively with an array of poets who started writing lyrics for songs, but also set well-known poems from the Greek canon to music. In the case of Theodorakis in particular, this strategy led to the formation of a well-defined genre, which was given the name *Melopoimene Poiese* (Poetry Turned to Song, literally Musicalized Poetry). This genre had significant political overtones and became a point of reference for the whole system of popular music under construction.

It is important to recognize that both Hadjidakis and Theodorakis used an older popular genre, *rebetiko*, in order to construct their own canonistic proclamation on popular music and to distinguish it from folk music. As I will explain, rebetiko provided a platform from which to conceptualize popular music as distinguished from folk. This conceptualization found its beginnings in the framework operating across Europe at the time, using “popular” to refer to cultural forms which depend on mass production and consumption, which are essentially urban and industrial, and the term “folk” to refer to cultural forms which are predominantly rural and oral in their creation and transmission’ (Shiach 1989: 102; see also Bennett 1980). But in Greece after the 40s, not only was

the distinction between folk and popular at stake, but also a positive conceptualization of the popular, beyond (or through) its associations with mass production, urban and industrial life, towards a larger topos with overtones of national identity. Literary models and ideological predeterminations, as well as the ideas of the Greek modernist intellectual circles, mediated at this stage to influence a system of popular music ready to establish its own version of the *high-popular*.

To be sure, Hadjidakis's and Theodorakis's formulations of the high-popular have crucial differences, especially in their relationship to rebetiko. I argue that Hadjidakis saw rebetiko through the lens of a fragmentary modernism, whereas Theodorakis preferred to use it to proclaim 'a true popular force', an unmediated 'expression of the masses', seen as such through the writings of Antonio Gramsci.

A new generation of Greek songwriters would eventually re-read rebetiko in the late 60s, celebrating it as a subcultural style and using it as the basis for their own countercultural politics. I will deal with this aspect in Part 3, where I review the work of Dionysis Savvopoulos. It is crucial to note that even though Savvopoulos was the one artist to cultivate the persona of a singer-songwriter to the full, drawing on the examples of Georges Brassens and Bob Dylan, he also crucially positioned his work within the terms of the high-popular as set out in the work of Hadjidakis and Theodorakis, accepting their system of popular music but also effectively undermining it from within.

1. Before the Two Composers

The Two Composers and the moment of intervention

Modern Greek popular music tends sometimes to be seen, in the words of one critic, as ‘a tale of two composers’ (Papandreou 1993). Manos Hadjidakis and Mikis Theodorakis, this ‘informal duo which changed the flow of the Greek song once and for all’ in the words of another critic (Angelikopoulos 1998: 81), were two very influential artists with elaborate views on the art of songwriting and the wider place of popular music. Their extreme visibility, which culminated in the early 60s, put popular music at the centre of the Greek cultural map and gave rise to what we could term ‘the popular songwriter as commodity and national symbol’. Critics have gone as far as to argue that the two composers actually represent ‘the two visions of Greece’:

One, a progressive though amorphous populism with socialist roots, representing a nationalist and sometimes strident “Greece-first” philosophy; the other, a conservative statism with authoritarian overtones, advocating a “let’s-not-rock-the-Western-boat” philosophy, [these two visions of Greece] are as different as the composers themselves. Mikis is a tall impressive man; Manos is short and overweight, with sad puppy-dog eyes and jowly cheeks, and is today no longer afraid to hide his homosexuality. The image that Theodorakis himself continues to promote is invariably that of the artiste engagé or the political leader [...] In contrast, pictures of Manos show a man in the comfortable company of poets, playwrights, and friends, garbed in baggy pants, loafers and a khaki shirt which expands over his portly stomach (Papandreou 1993: 114-5).

Key figures in the bestowal of prestige and cultural kudos on a particular form of popular song, Hadjidakis and Theodorakis achieved a status analogous to that of Georges Brassens in France, even though they seldom performed their songs themselves and wrote only a small percentage of their song lyrics. They both constructed extremely resonant authorial (and sometimes authoritative) presences and gained the prestige traditionally reserved for writers in Greek society. ‘The two pillars of art-popular song’, as Theodorakis and Hadjidakis became known, were, I will argue, at the centre of the most influential systematization of popular music in 20th century Greece, constructing an ideology of the high-popular that remained intact for decades.

Two chronological moments stand out in the construction of the high-popular in Greece and the system of popular music around it. Significantly, they both have Hadjidakis and Theodorakis at their centre and a common element: *rebetiko*, the older popular genre which became pivotal in the composers' reconfigured versions of the high-popular.

- 1) **1949.** This was the year in which Hadjidakis gave a celebrated lecture on rebetiko, the 'urban popular music', at the *Theatro Tehnes* in Athens. The first public intellectual praise for a genre of popular music associated with the urban underworld, this lecture has since been 'canonized' as a turning point in public perceptions of rebetiko and the basic instrument with which the genre was most associated, the bouzouki.
- 2) **1960.** This was the year in which 'the face of the Greek Song was changed overnight' (Angelikopoulos 1998: 81), with the release of Theodorakis's song-cycle *Epitaphios*, based on a poem by Yannis Ritsos. The release triggered a public discussion which actively legitimized rebetiko especially in the consciousness of the Greek Left, and gave rise to the art-popular (*entehno laiko*) genre, the most specific formulation of high-popular in Greek music. On the other hand, the film *Never On Sunday* was produced in the same year and presented at the Cannes Film Festival. The film - promoted with a legendary bouzouki party in Cannes - set in motion the international career of the Hadjidakis's 'Children of Piraeus' (later to receive an Oscar for Best Song), which further established bouzouki as the official musical representative of modern Greece (see Notaras 1991: 45-50).

As is evident, both these 'formative moments' in the emerging popular music system are based on a renegotiation of the legacy of *rebetiko* (plural: *rebetika*). My argument will show that the apparent use of rebetiko to create a style of high-popular music was directly influenced by the climate of literary modernism that created the dominant cultural discourse in postwar Greece. It is therefore imperative to begin with a review of the two apparently different spheres of popular music and literary modernism as they stood in postwar Greece. What follows is a brief account of the evolution of

rebetiko and a review of how a modernist cultural ideology shaped the ideas about folklore and the popular dominant in the postwar years.

Rebetika and popular styles

Recent scholarship has clarified many aspects of the history and the generic particularities of rebetiko but the genre's origin and its name are still a point of heated debate.⁴⁹ Adopting a middle-of-the-road definition, the first scholar to have devoted a monograph to the genre, Gail Holst-Warhaft, writes for the latest edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*:

The *rebetika* are Greek songs associated with an urban low-life milieu frequented by *rebetes*, or *manges*, streetwise characters of shady repute, many of whom smoked hashish. The genre occupies a similar place in Greek culture to that of the tango in Argentina or to flamenco in Spain [...]
Influenced by the the popular music of the late Ottoman empire the rebetika are considered to have reached their characteristic form after a massive influx of refugees following the exchange of populations at the end of the Turkish-Greek war of 1919-1922 [...] Most rebetika songs were composed in one of three dance rhythms: the *zeibekiko*, a solo male dance (2+2+2+3); the *hasapiko*, or 'butcher dance', in 2/4 or 4/4; and the *tsifteteli*, or 'belly dance', in 2/4 or 4/4 (Holst 2001: 906-907).

The necessary generalizations of the paragraph notwithstanding, this is a measured account of rebetiko; it foregrounds all the main characteristics that have sustained the impression of a single genre originating in Asia Minor, in big ports of the Greek mainland and some islands (notably Syra, the home-island of Markos Vamvakaris).

Acknowledging the various formations of the genre throughout its evolution, we can add that rebetiko's origins may be conjecturally placed somewhere in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is accepted today that two quite distinct rebetiko traditions existed before 1922: the mainland Greek and the Eastern/Asia Minor

⁴⁹ Trying to circumvent the problem, Stathis Gauntlett, an influential rebetiko scholar, has proposed an 'interim definition' for the genre, which accepts that many generic names were given to similar song traditions associated with the low-class urban life in the first half of this century in Greece and the Greek-speaking world and possibly earlier: heuristically, we accept the term Rebetiko for them (Gauntlett 1985; 2001).

tradition: they were distinct as styles, performed with different instruments and possibly addressed different audiences.⁵⁰

Rebetiko started life in the cafés of the Greek ports and cities of Minor Asia and mainland Greece, and especially in those called *Cafés Aman*. The *Cafés Aman*, whose name was taken from the word *aman* (alas!) frequently heard in the songs of the Eastern tradition, were possibly established as an alternative to the *Cafés Chantant* and *Cafés Concert* (caf'conc') which had been imported from Italy and France. In 1885, Demetrios Vikelas was able to distinguish between the two café styles in 1885: 'Café-aman, comme on dit pour le distinguer du café-chantant' (1885: 247). The musical style of the Cafés Aman was described as 'à la tourka' -meaning soloists performing in the Eastern maqam mode (as opposed to the minor-major scale system) and singers singing with high-pitched voices; 'à la tourka' was opposed to a performance style known as 'à la franca' (Conway 1981).

Rebetiko's links with urban places of organized entertainment, where musicians were paid to perform, and the existence of a very old recording tradition for some of its songs, have led many commentators to argue that the genre signals the beginning of Greek popular music, as distinct from the country's folk song tradition. Greek folk songs, or as most of them have been collectively termed, *demotika tragoudia/ demotic songs*, were collected in the 19th and 20th centuries, first by foreign travellers, then by Greek folklorists, becoming linked, from the first edition by Fauriel, with the cause of Greek nationalism (Beaton 1980: 7). This also meant that they were canonized as the most representative examples of Greek Culture, a 'pure' expression of rural collectivity and orality still extant in Greek villages.⁵¹ Evidently, genres like rebetiko could in turn be seen as products of another world, the consequences of an industrial society and a system of paid entertainment.

However, as Despoina Mazarake has shown, rebetiko was not the only music sung in the old Cafés Aman - older demotic songs were also performed, and the formal resemblance of the two traditions, especially in their extensive use of a modal rather

⁵⁰ It has been argued that the mainland tradition was underground as opposed to the cosmopolitan and crossover Eastern tradition flourishing in the major urban centres of Asia Minor (Papaioannou 1995).

than a tonal system, must have worked in favour of such integration (Mazarake 1984: 49).⁵² Furthermore, the argument of ‘paid entertainment’ cannot be a decisive distinction, since even wandering musicians who performed with travelling bands in rural festivals, playing mainly demotic songs, expected to be paid for their services, at least from the 19th century onwards. Finally, rebetiko was never the only ‘non-demotic music’ around; along with the Café Aman tradition, another tradition sprang from the series of Cafés Chantant and their descendants. The music style referred to as ‘à la franca’ in the 19th century, was later labelled ‘light song’ (elafo tragoudi) in the 20th. Light Song could be seen as having originated not only from the initial Cafés Chantant, but also from the very existence of the oppositional pair, *Café Chantant* vs. *Café Aman*, that is the division between Western and Eastern influences expressed in distinct performance places. On this basis, the term ‘light music’ (elafra mousike) was frequently used in Greece during the 20th century to refer not only to non-classical music, but also to non-rebetiko styles, or, in other contexts, to a musical realm separate from ‘popular music’ (*laike mousike*).

With the influx of refugees after the end of the Greco-Turkish war in 1922, the two rebetika traditions (the Peiraeen and the Smyrna traditions) were united, with the resulting version soon assimilated and promoted by the emerging local music industry. The bouzouki, a type of long-necked lute similar to the Turkish *bozuk*, with three double courses of metal strings tuned *e-b-é*, became the main instrument associated with the genre; the traditional oriental tradition instruments outi, santouri, kanonaki and violin were largely abandoned by the classic rebetiko quartet of the 30s, which comprised bouzouki, baglama (a smaller instrument of the bouzouki family) and guitar. But the Eastern tradition left its mark elsewhere, for example with the eastern-style singing of some of the later performers, the association of the genre with ‘hashish smoking and the pleasures of sharing the nargile’, as well as with the narrativization, in both form

⁵¹ Roderick Beaton observed in 1980 that the demotic tradition had ‘been better preserved than comparable traditions in western Europe, and is still sung in the village setting where one may fairly assume it used also to be composed’ (Beaton, 1980: 12).

⁵² Researchers have pointed out the influence of the Turkish maqam system on the music of Greek folk songs (Beaton, 1980a: 9). The influence of the same Turkish system of modes (as opposed to the Western minor and major scales) on Rebetiko is well documented (see below).

(manedes, minore) and content (songs like 'Zaira' or 'Boufetzis') of Asia Minor as being the semi-mythological origin of rebetiko.

After 1922, rebetiko's growing popularity as a genre beyond the underground confines of the petty-criminal world of the big Greek ports of Piraeus, Volos and Thessaloniki, resulted in a formalization of the genre's underworld credentials, which were then used as elements of stylistic identification and typified performance. The metonymic association of bouzouki with the whole genre can be explained in the same way. It is unclear at what stage the *mangas* type, this 'streetwise character of shady repute' stopped referring to actual subcultural performances and became a typified persona, expected to be found (along with typical clothes and habits, his 'problems' with women, drugs and the law) as the hero and often the singer/first person narrator of rebetika. In any case, the persistent reference to an underworld always in direct conflict with authority has led to the argument that rebetiko, of the classic period (1920s-1940s) at least, was a subversive and liberational art form of the oppressed subproletariat (Damianakos 2001; Revault d'Alonnes 1973). A similar view was adopted by the Greek countercultural youth of the late 60s, which reread rebetiko as a subcultural style (on this, see Part 3: Chapter 2, of this thesis).

As critics agree, in Greek popular music the concept of 'ownership', by which we mean the association of a song with a particular composer or a singer, was only belatedly introduced and coincided, in the 20th century, with the increasing prominence of phonograph records which began to standardize performances (Cowan 2000: 1021; Dragoumis 1975). But this has to be seen as a multidimensional process: along with 'ownership' and 'authorship' come commodified genres, 'artists-stars', commercialization and reification. It is certain that by the 1940s rebetiko had left the boundaries of the underworld, become a form of cross-over entertainment, and gradually started losing any working-class implications. In a song by Markos Vamvakaris dating from this period, we see how, with bouzouki a metonymical symbol for the genre, rebetiko celebrated its acceptance in the mainstream. Interestingly, its despised status as a lowly genre is reintroduced as a typified generic marker:

Bouzouki, life's delight,
you used to delight the *manges*

and the rich, my bouzouki,
 did you down.
 Now they've spread out carpets for you
 and in their salons placed you higher
 even than the violin, my bouzouki,
 by two whole rungs.
 You've risen in the lift
 to apartment blocks
 and played, and enfant gâté ladies, my bouzouki,
 found you to their taste.
 Now you're going to rise still higher,
 you'll get as far as Mars
 and even Apollo the god, my bouzouki,
 will find he likes you really.⁵³

The self-consciously humorous and involuntarily grotesque implication at the end of this song, that the Dionysian nature of the popular genre would soon be tamed and appropriated by the Apollonian 'high art' canon was not, as we shall see, far from the truth.

The influential figure of Vassilis Tsitsanis played a key role in this process: Tsitsanis, who wrote his first songs in the late 30s, is often hailed as the 'modernizer' of rebetiko. He coped with new censorship restrictions (imposed by the dictatorship of 1936-1940), as well as overseeing the growing popularity of the genre and creating songs which dissociated it from its underworld identification. His themes became more varied, and most crucially, the musical structure of his songs grew closer to the western notation systems of major and minor scale, than to the previously used system of modes (maqam/tropoi). As the genre was reformulated by Tsitsanis, it gained the potential to be sung by people no matter what their origins in class or locale were; its music, performance and lyrics, also became more open to external influences (Michael 1996). With many musicians now using western notation, the genre could incorporate western popular melodies, rhythms, thematic ideas and trends; dissociated from a strict underground identification, it could open up its performance codes. Finally, it could evolve to exist antagonistically and symbiotically with other popular music forms.

This stage is also exemplified by the figure of Manolis Hiotis, a flamboyant bouzouki-soloist and songwriter often hailed as the inventor (or popularizer) of the four-chord bouzouki (the four chords tuned in *d-g-b-é*, just like the classical guitar). With

this instrument, it was even easier to ‘accommodate’ Western influences and ostracize the older modal tradition performed only on the three chord bouzouki. Hiotis introduced ‘exotic’ elements like latin rhythms and escapist themes into his songwriting. The result was often called Arhontorebetiko (“posh” rebetiko), an ironic term coined especially for the type of song performed in trendy tavernas and popular films. Hiotis’s version of rebetiko became a standard interlude in the popular Greek films of the 1950s and 1960s (Hiotis was later joined by Giorgos Zabetas in the role of the ‘musical guest’ for most of the popular films of the period). The same artist was significantly employed as the main soloist in Theodorakis’s first recordings in 1960.

The evolution of the genre in the three decades after the Second World War has been seen as a prime example of culture industry recuperation. The French sociologist Olivier Revault d’Allonnes, in a chapter devoted to rebetiko, observes in his *La création artistique et les promesses de la liberté* that:

le rébétiko a été l’objet, dès la fin de la guerre civile au plus tard (1948), d’une aliénation complète et d’une intégration dans les circuits commerciaux... Ce qu’on vend maintenant en Grèce, ce que l’on joue pour les touristes, à la radio ou dans les restaurants, c’est une chanson occidentalisée, voire américanisée, dont la célèbre rengaine des ‘Enfants du Pirée’ (1961) [sic] est - à tous points de vue - le “chef-d’oeuvre” (1973: 145).⁵⁴

The amorphous and formulaic music style that Revault d’ Allonnes witnesses was a central element in the 60s image of Greece as the bouzouki and wine loving, sun and sea bathed place of carefree summer holidays. State-supported as part of an emerging tourist industry, this image(ry) was given a further push by two global musical hits by Hadjidakis and Theodorakis. Hadjidakis wrote the song ‘Children of Piraeus’

⁵³ As translated in Beaton 1980: 197, original in Keil 1978: 130-1; Petropoulos dates the song from 1946, Beaton from some years earlier.

⁵⁴ To his merit, Hadjidakis, the composer of the Children of Piraeus ‘hit’, would agree with the above comment. In a very similar vein he pointed out in the early 60s that ‘the success did arouse the salesmen, the music halls, the second rate musicians, the progressively developing tourist industry and the easily capricious ‘Greek temperament’ of our international celebrities; and then *Never On Sunday* the movie came, which delivered the final blow to what had once been our popular (laiko) song’. Years later he self-consciously (rather than self-incriminatingly) added that ‘Rebetiko has no longer existed since around 1950... It ceased being from the moment we touched it with our hands - like the frescoes in Fellini’s catacombs, which disappeared once they were touched by the wind from the upper world’ (Hadjidakis 1979: 280).

(the theme song from *Never On Sunday* that won him the 1961 Oscar for Best Song) which commodified the rhythm of hasapiko and tied it in inextricably with a (colonial) cultural ideology of the 'unspoilt', 'rebellious' and 'innocently amoral' Greek underworld.⁵⁵ Theodorakis was responsible for the music of *Zorba the Greek* which similarly popularized 'syrtaki', a mainly invented, hybrid dance and rhythm, based on zeibekiko and hasaposerviko with abundant dance and bouzouki solos. Both composers later denounced their 'global cinematic hits' (biographies of Theodorakis contain hardly any details about *Zorba*, and Hadjidakis repeatedly dismissed his 'Children of Piraeus' Oscar), however, the effect their global success had cannot be overlooked. It was the cultural politics advocated by Theodorakis and Hadjidakis which had legitimized rebetiko, but which also had given a shape and a 'representational baggage' (and in material terms, an existence in the global market) to its various commodified offspring, given the collective term *bouzoukia music*. Contrary as this was to both composers' intentions, it was also directly linked to their interventions.

With this overview of rebetiko's evolution, I have tried to focus on the elements that would later characterize rebetiko's use in the formation of a popular music system. I underline here that what I have just described is *not* a system of Greek popular music. A precise discursive formation with a taxonomy and associations of value was only presented through Hadjidakis and Theodorakis's versions of popular music and their attempts at once to 'legalize' rebetiko in the consciousness of intellectuals and to aestheticize and purify it. It is the two composers' complete articulation of an ideology of the high-popular that made it possible for them to 'denounce' their own global hits of the 60s and certain styles of bouzouki music of the same period, while still producing popular hits themselves: their music was immediately authenticated by their undisputed auteur personae. As I have noted, their intervention is inextricably linked with a cultural ideology which originated in the ideas of literary modernists and shaped the ideas about folklore and popular still dominant after the 1940s.

⁵⁵ Consider this typical review-comment: 'Made in Greece, by an expatriate American, *Never on Sunday* is a kind of fairy-tale, a wistful fantasy of amorality without viciousness, in which 'civilized values' retire defeated before the energy and enthusiasm of an older tradition.' (*Monthly Film Bulletin* 324 January 1961).

The popular and the folklore

Both Hadjidakis's and Theodorakis's appreciation of rebetiko must be seen in the context of the 'popular politics' of Greek modernism (mainly associated with the 'generation of the 30s'), and in the larger context of the legacy of demoticism in Greece. Demoticism, the movement for the use of commonly spoken forms of language in literature, education and as the official language of the State, became a bandwagon in Greece for ideological and social forces of modernization from 1880 onwards. The 'return to the roots' movements that were largely associated with demoticism and which were manifest in the 'discovery' of the folk songs, the collection of the folk tales, the use of folk-tale stories for dramas and vaudeville theatre and of folk tunes as key material for classical music compositions, all shared an agenda with the emerging modernization of the Greek state and nation building process - still at stake and ongoing, as the irredentist ideologies of *Megali Idea* show. As Gregory Jusdanis summarizes it, 'the demoticist project for common language and shared ideology was all-encompassing, manifesting itself in the codification of the vernacular, the canonization of its literary tradition, and the invention of folklore' (1991: 72). Central to the nation-building process, folklorism in Greece and elsewhere in Europe, was a manifestation of the 'nationistic system of thought [...] which in its turn was a result of the romantic notion of the retrieval of origins and the organic paradigm of the nineteenth century which succeeded the mechanistic and rationalistic paradigm of the Enlightenment' (Tziovas 1986: 253).

The 30s literary generation, including poets such as Seferis, Elytis and Gatsos, largely followed the legacy of the demoticists. They too started from the issue of language and worked on a nationistic organic paradigm, but in a significant modal change,

the socio-political project of the demoticists - to create a repertoire of shared opinions, attitudes, and symbols - became aestheticized in the 1930s. The national traumas and disappointments consequent to modernization, as well as the ideological contradictions inherent in it, propelled Greek culture into an aesthetics of autonomy. The Generation of the 1930s resolved these problems by projecting them into the utopian space of art (Jusdanis 1991: 78).

Hence, as Dimitris Tziovas has influentially shown, Greekness reemerged in the aesthetic criticism of the generation of the 30s as the ultimate means for reconciliatory *and* utopian rebuilding of nationhood (Tziovas 1989: 31-38).

Coinciding with their adoption of literary high modernism, this generation's appreciation of Greek art became the basis for their more general concept of Greekness. Instead of restricting themselves to a view of the folk tradition as the true expression of a nation ('the archives of a nationality', 'the imprints of the soul of a nation', 'the living voice of the nationalities', Tziovas 1986: 248, quoting Herder), the modernists were equally drawn to a view of popular culture ('*laïke tehne*') as an amalgam of continuous and discontinuous traditions, genealogies that had to be discovered, whose authenticity could be appreciated and aesthetic value emulated. In short, this was the view of a tradition as being *rebuilt in the present*, an amalgam 'of the timeless and the temporal together' as Eliot saw it in his 'Tradition and Individual Talent' (1920). The Greek modernists' preference for the adjective 'laikos' (popular) instead of 'demotikos', 'demodes' and 'paradosiakos', and in direct contrast with 'laografikos' (words which had previously been used interchangeably to a certain extent), shows their aim to nominate/re-create tradition as something alive in the present but coming from any part of the past ('Parthenon and a Byzantine church'), as something not exclusively characteristic of collective authorship, (Erotokritos, Makryjannis) and also as something which could incorporate traditions, myths and symbols at a meta-traditional level (Theofilos). In cultural materialist terms, this generation's aim was to renegotiate the specific hegemonic set of meanings that the term 'folk culture' had gained with the demoticists; 'popular culture' was a means to this end.⁵⁶

The move from 'folklore' to 'the popular' signals a difference from older demoticist ideology (-ies) that could also be attributed to a change in the geopolitical situation of Greece. Demoticism was a complex intellectual movement aiming to lay the foundations for a Greek identity in a nation defined by its irredentist aspirations. In the 30s, and more crucially, after the Second World War, modernists had to deal with a state which for the first time had defined boundaries, a homogenous population and

⁵⁶ For a survey of the construction of a similar hegemonic conception of popular song in England during the first folk revival, see Shiach, 1989: 101-131.

more Greeks living inside instead of outside its borders. The extrovert ideals of demoticists had thus to be renegotiated in the light of an introvert contest of identity. Newly emerged economic structures (industrialization, the expansion of urban centres, the depopulation of rural areas) also had an impact on this change of tactics. After the Liberation and until the end of the 40s, the bloody Civil War also magnified the state of crisis, and the repercussions of 'killing one's brothers' made the demand for an aestheticized politics of identity all the more pressing - at least for those intellectuals who did not identify themselves directly with the communists and the leftist cause.

The move from the invention of folklore to the appreciation of the popular is, to a certain extent, signalled by Seferis in his comment on the 'popular painter' Theofilos: 'his creation is an important event in Greek painting. I do not mean an event that instructs by means of folklore [...] but an event that teaches painting per se [...] The grace given to us by Theofilos [...] is not folklore' (Seferis 1966: 5-6, translation modified). What was appreciated, however, was the popular as form, and this is not to be mistaken for a wholehearted appreciation of popular art and its function. Thus, these intellectuals were moved by popular art produced by 'Greek people' but they could not legitimize the pleasure real people gained from the use of popular forms within popular arts as they were performed and experienced. Rather, they advocated a remodelling of the artistic experience on another sphere, that of modernist art, where the popular form would re-generate pleasure - this time aesthetically sanitized and ideologically valorized pleasure. Tradition did not have to be lived through but reproduced, popular paintings had to be brought into the museum, songs assembled in meticulous editions, music appreciated as an abstraction of collective experience.⁵⁷ Aestheticizing the popular was seen as the means to a transcendental, almost mystical end. In a trajectory reminiscent of Ezra Pound's poetics, this would go beyond 'western rationality'. Elytis put it as follows:

I and my generation - and here I include Seferis - have attempted to find the true face of Greece [...] something] necessary because until then the true face of Greece was presented as Europeans saw

⁵⁷ In the article quoted above, Seferis describes both Theofilos's paintings and the exhibition (for which the article was written) as important events. In the mind of the critic, the creation of Theofilos's paintings and the canonising exhibition of his work are, indeed, interchangeable and comparable *events*.

Greece [...] In order to achieve this task we had to destroy the tradition of rationalism which lay heavy on the Western World' (quoted in Keeley 1992: 181).

Contemporary readers cannot miss the irony that it was precisely the tradition of European modernist thinking which first provided the conceptual ground for such an undoing of 'the tradition of rationalism'.

2. Manos Hadjidakis and the re-production of Rebetiko

The system of songs at the time of Hadjidakis's lecture

In the 40s, it was very usual for rebetiko artists to include older demotic songs and older rebetika songs in their performances along with songs they themselves had penned. Some of them had also added their own versions of well-known European popular songs to their repertoire. In the meantime, other popular genres, such as ballroom dances, music-hall revues and vaudeville theatre, copied some of rebetiko's characteristics, introducing, for example, bouzouki in their orchestrations.

By the time Hadjidakis delivered his famous lecture on rebetiko, the generic system of Greek popular music was not clearly defined, with such categories as the demotic/folkloric, the popular, the light, and the rebetiko song merging easily into one another. Research has adequately described this 'fluidity of generic boundaries' especially evident in the postwar years (Kapetanakes-Voliotes 1999; Gauntlett 2001; Petropoulos 1979). Such generic fluidity was also reproduced on record labels (see in Petropoulos 1979: 385, a photograph of labels of the company Balkan) and in catalogues of recording collections. *The Hand-List of Greek Commercial Gramophone Records in the BBC Gramophone Library (up to and including December, 1950)*⁵⁸ points to similar conclusions. A brief survey of its pages reveals the 'non-classical' musical field to be divided into largely overlapping categories, mainly dictated by inconsequential music industry labellings. Songs that we today consider as rebetika are listed in the categories: 'Folk Dances and Dance-Songs' (where 'Rebetikos' is listed as a folk dance along with Syrtos and Tsamikos); 'Music From Asia Minor', 'Popular Songs'. In all these, rebetika are grouped together with demotic songs collected by folklorists and popular songs heavily derivative of Western popular genres. Such generic confusion led to an oxymoron: even though rebetiko was becoming one of the main styles of music 'that people listened to', it was not represented as a genre in any systemic view of popular music. This is what Hadjidakis meant when he later reminisced that 'at that time [1948] rebetiko was simultaneously existent and invisible'

⁵⁸ It is a slim volume of 130 pages, typed, including an index, apparently to be used by the Greek section of the World Service. The catalogue is also photocopied and deposited in the British Library (HUS 789.289 001 66).

(Hadjidakis 1979). After his 1949 lecture, invisibility ceased to be an issue. On the contrary, an intellectualized version of rebetiko provided the basis for the formulation of a high-popular and for the articulation of a concrete system of Greek popular music.

The lecture

Hadjidakis's lecture on rebetika in January 1949 was reported widely in the Press. The journal *Ellenike Demiourgia*, which also published most of a transcript of this lecture,⁵⁹ noticed in the introduction that:

M.Hadjidakis's gesture to support rebetika, zeibekika and hasapika songs and dances so decisively and his persistent effort to empower them with as much support as he could gather from the personal emotion triggered by his love for this 'popular music of the city', are not only natural, but also interesting. At the end of the day [sto kato kato] these songs occupy and move the emotional world of a part of our people, the most genuine and pristine [partheno], so to speak, no matter how uncultivated, in the same way as another part of the people would be moved by a passionate tango (Hadjidakis [1949] 1977: 151-2).

Even though positively judged by Hadjidakis and identified as a distinct genre of 'the urban popular song', rebetiko was, in the eyes of other commentators, neither as homogenous nor as valuable and 'pristinely popular' as Hadjidakis wanted to present it. According to Papademetriou, one of the severe critics of this lecture, rebetiko might 'carry with it a handful of popular music elements but, due to what it expresses, is meant for fall and decay'; it is a dangerous supplement, 'it poisons the people and especially the youth' ([1949] 1977: 145-146). Finally, generic indeterminacy allows rebetiko to 'diffuse its venom' in a territory larger than its own: 'we are used to call rebetiko every song which falls outside the circle of the light song, tango, fox trot and so on; however, we should long have distinguished the real rebetiko from the other 'rebetiko-type' songs and the real popular songs... this way, by separating the immoral real rebetiko, we would easily beat it out and deracinate it' (ibid). In this view, coming from the pages of the influential left-wing journal *Eleuthera Grammata*, rebetiko is seen

⁵⁹ This is the only information we have about the content of the lecture, since Hadjidakis did not publish it or keep a manuscript. He did, however, include the article from *Ellenike Demiourgia* in his collection *O Kathreptes kai to Mahairi*.

not as the central 'urban popular music' genre, as Hadjidakis had it, but as a parasite of popular music, a degrading and degraded artistic form that should be eliminated.

In order to preempt such negative views, Hadjidakis had assured his audience that 'rebetiko succeeds in combining the word, the music and the movement in an admirable whole... a tripartite expressive synthesis that sometimes reaches the heights of ancient tragedy' (1977: 153). The songs belonging to this genre guaranteed 'something *more* than what we need to pass our evening entertainment hours' (152). It was maintained that the aesthetic quality advocated could result in an expression of the inner self: '[Rebetika] will always be there to explore us and to make us realize our deeper self' (155). As I have shown, the cultural/national identity that this 'deeper self' implied, and the fact that it could be triggered by the 'urban popular songs', are signs of the most identifiable aesthetic strategy of Greek literary modernism: aestheticizing popular art as living tradition.

Rebetiko as popular painting

We should review Hadjidakis's vision of rebetika in precisely the context of Greek literary modernism. Hadjidakis positions rebetiko and its forms (especially its two main dances/ rhythmic patterns, *zeibekiko* and *hasapiko*) as 'the clearest modern Greek rhythms' which are influenced by both demotic songs and Byzantine ecclesiastical hymns. In a very self-conscious move, he distinguishes rebetiko from demotic songs by calling the former 'the urban popular song' (*laiko tragoudi poles*). In this he can be seen as capitalizing on the distinction between 'folklore' and popular tradition implied in the modernist discourse. Hadjidakis's lecture on rebetiko follows both Seferis's and Elytis's 'readings' of the popular form in their appreciation of the painter Theofilos.

In his lecture entitled 'Theofilos', Seferis had praised the authenticity and 'truthfulness' that Theofilos's unskilled artistry conveys:

Maybe *he is not a virtuoso*; maybe in this sphere *his ignorance of technique* is great [but...]

Theofilos gave us a new eye. He cleansed our seeing [...] *The truth - the whole truth* that Theophilos gives us is his own world that is wholly alive, a pictorial world *without tricks and subterfuges*.

(Seferis [1947] 1966: 5-6 and 11, emphasis added)

In a comparable way, Hadjidakis praises the authenticity of rebetiko musicians and their unskilled yet highly accomplished aesthetics: 'our popular song, which is *not made by people of the fugue and the counterpoint*... is there to sing *truth and truth only*' (1977: 153, emphasis added). He also praises 'the virgin soul of our people ... the packed liveliness and simultaneous beauty' which stand up against the difficult postwar period; this is a phrase which resonates with Seferis's assertion in the Theofilos lecture about the 'very cultivated collective soul - the soul of our people' (1966: 7). It also resonates with Elytis's own assertions, first made around the same time, about Theofilos's paradigmatic 'ethical personality' which is 'in a pristine condition (prosopikoteta ethike se parthena katastase)' and his way of life, 'solely based on the goodness of his soul' (Elytis 1982: 197). Reading Hadjidakis's celebrated lecture in the context of both Seferis's and Elytis's 'Theofilos' texts, one senses the deep modernist foundations of Hadjidakis's 'discovery' of rebetika. In these terms, the use of the words 'Popular Paintings' in the title of Hadjidakis's most famous subsequent transcriptions of rebetika for piano, the *Six Popular Paintings*, is not at all coincidental.

The Six Popular Paintings

Hadjidakis's assertion that the music of rebetiko is worthy of serious intellectual attention had a double effect. Rebetika songs became for the first time an intellectual concern, gaining attention and the prestige of an 'authentic popular tradition'. They were also proposed as a potential source of material for learned middle-class composers like Hadjidakis to draw upon: a 'living tradition' topos of authentic material ready to be aesthetically re-produced as *modern* work of art. Indeed, in the year after his lecture, Hadjidakis presented a suite for piano based on melodic material from six rebetika songs. The suite *Six Popular Paintings* (often translated - mistakenly - as *Six Popular Images*) was a transcription of the tune of six rebetika songs by Tsitsanis, Kaldaras and Mitsakis, with some small additional embellishments which show the debts of the composer to classical piano literature (especially Chopin), rather than transforming the original material.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The most interesting and noticeable 'interference' in the structure of these songs is a couple of dissonant chords added to the transcription of 'Synnefiasmene Kyriake'.

The *Six Popular Paintings* were soon used for a ballet under the same title, choreographed by Rallou Manou and performed by her group Elleniko Horodrama with costumes by Yannis Moralis. Elleniko Horodrama was a dance group equally driven by the same modernist ideals of ‘refining’ while defining popular culture - and through it, Greekness. In the words of its founder, choreographer Rallou Manou, the aim of the group was ‘to give, as Greek artists, a Greek performance, a distinctive mode and style, [to convey] this something which seals our artistic expression as Greek (pou vasei te sfragida tes Elladas ste demiourgia mas)’ (1961: 16). The discourse of the generation of the 30s is a clear influence here, obvious if one compares this quotation to the earlier one by Elytis.

The reworking of elements drawn from Greek folk or contemporary popular art and the production of aestheticized modern, artistically inventive and stylistically defamiliarizing and distinctive but never shocking work, was the common thread through the work of many artists called to join forces with Horodrama.⁶¹ Sofia Spanoude, a middle-aged and very influential cultural critic of the newspaper *Ta Nea*, summed up the artistic ideology of the group in a review of 1951:

[The work of Elleniko Horodrama] is healthy and triumphant, and emerges from the most visited pathways in order to map new trajectories, new beginnings and new highlights, and creates a genuine Greek tradition, distilled through a refined aesthetics, guaranteed by the higher education of its founders (reprinted in Manou 1961: 88)

As is obvious, the view of a distilled and refined tradition, and the guarantee offered by the ‘higher education’ of the distillers, is as close as one can get to a description of the artistic ideology behind the use of ‘tradition’ as redefined by the modernist aesthetics of the 30s Generation. ‘Genuinely’ Greek because ‘highly’ artistic, this ‘new tradition’ was not supposed to be other than a high-art tradition, whose relation to the Greek people would be imagined rather than actually existing: popular in a utopian rather than in any actual sense.

⁶¹ The influence of Isadora Duncan’s dance theory on Horodrama is evident but still unresearched. The identifiably modernist work of Martha Graham and other American dancers of the 30s are also very close. On Duncan, Graham and modernism see Franko 1995.

The lively discussion at the first meeting of Helleniko Horodrama's advisory board (1950) is recalled by Hadjidakis:

First, Rallou Manou stands in the middle and shouts: "I want you all, I want many collaborators, lots of dance, music, ideas". Tsarouchis [the famous painter] breaks in, a byzantine icon in his hands, and stresses each of his words: "Petroushka should learn how to dance zeibekiko, and no wonder, we should persuade Romeo and Juliet to start dying from now on with a hasapiko dance." Chatzikyriakos-Gikas [another influential painter] was staring at us and after a pregnant pause, went on to talk about a unity of music, dance, colour and word, all together interpreting/expressing (ermeneuoun) the most real form of Greek life (ten pio pragmatike morfe tes ellenikes zoes).' (quoted in Manou 1966: 19)

Pound's ideas on synaesthesia and Eliot's on tradition lie behind these statements. Here also the aim is to re-write the popular as an amalgam of previous traditions presented through modern art, to re-unite and re-speak tradition. Consistent with this ideal, in the performance of the *Six Popular Paintings* as a ballet, the dancers' costumes aimed at an idealistic vision of the urban working class closer to older rural cultural codes.⁶² The choreography deliberately conflated zeibekiko dances with typical moves from folk dances.⁶³ The original rebetiko composers of the tunes were not mentioned - giving the impression that this was an example of anonymous composition; Hadjidakis was presented as the composer of the work, even though, strictly speaking, he was just an arranger of the tunes for piano.

Hadjidakis's fragmentary aesthetics

Hadjidakis has often glossed over his 'discovery' of rebetiko by proposing an analogy with the literary poetics of the generation of the 30s. He once commented, for instance, that 'the quest for *an other* music was a deeper need for these times, when Ghika, Tsarouchis and Moralis were already active in painting, Pikionis in architecture, Seferis,

⁶² Women wore triangular wigs, men thick black rectangle wigs; they also had to wear clothes of different colours (see Manou 1966: 58-65)

⁶³ In the sketches from the performance, *Synnefiasmene Kyriake* seems to be performed by a series of men, even though the zeibekiko is a slow, 'improvised' and individual dance, almost always performed by a man alone. The same happens in 'Kourasteka na s' apokteso', another zeibekiko, where female and male dancers performed in couples, in moves that bring to mind those of the Ballos folk dance (see Manou 1966: 58-65).

Elytis, Gatsos and Ritsos in poetry. This was a time [...] which obliged us to search and find a truer face for our national identity' (Hadjidakis 1979). Although this phrase supplements what I have described above as the almost genetic relation of Hadjidakis's poetics with the paradigm of the generation of the 30s, I would argue that his work went a step further.

Hadjidakis's adoption of rebetiko may have been another part of the attempt to articulate a new artistic style while revising tradition and meditating on national identity. However, his quest was not for the timeless, the aesthetically authentic and the unspoilt. He did not desire 'a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality... a process of depersonalization' as Eliot has described the progress of the modernist artist (Eliot 1928: 52-53). Rebetiko was not adopted in order to produce another major narrative of Greekness, but instead wove a memory localised both in time and space: the memory of an experience of a subcultural underworld and the evocation of hard times both at the national and personal levels. In the end, this proved to be the reminiscence not of a collective identity but of a sense of being unable to establish a concrete and stable identity performance in either the realm of the real or that of fantasy:

Rebetiko existed *only* at a time when it was still functioning illegally in inaccessible and far away areas somewhere in the margins of the city. It still existed in the immediate postwar years when it started being the functional expression of passions and experiences of a nameless mass, still betrayed and dizzy from destruction, that felt the need for an erotic contact, *and couldn't do it*, that had an inkling to escape from reality, *and couldn't do it*. (Hadjidakis 1979, emphasis in the text).

This is the memory of oneself as a stranger (both in class and sexual orientation) who 'went into small tavernas, incredibly hidden and unapproachable, into mystical, ritualistic places, with that daring carelessness of youth [...] A stranger, small, young and impotent, I believed at once that the song I was listening to was my own, undoubtedly one of my own' (Hadjidakis [1961] 1998).

The last comments come from the liner notes of a further two albums in which Hadjidakis, later in his artistic life, proposed orchestral arrangements of well-known rebetika (this time with a clear acknowledgment of their composers). The titles of these albums are revealing: *Lilacs from the Dead Earth* and *The cruellest month of April 44*.

As is obvious, they are both based on verses from *The Waste Land*, by T. S. Eliot, and they come precisely from Seferis's translation of the poem.⁶⁴ The titles indicate the modernist foundation of Hadjidakis's aesthetics; they also, however, subvert it. Rebetika may be 'fragments I have shored against my ruins' as in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but here Eliot's poem is also treated as another fragment. Rebetika become part of the same mapping of memories as the reading of a poem - Eliot's *The Waste Land* and its historic Greek translation: they are all connected to a recollection of war and the Occupation years. Hadjidakis places himself as an artist coming *after* modernism, remembering modernism as he remembers the sound of rebetika. The implications are crucial: it is the performance placed decisively after-modernism that announces a break from high modernism's call for a unity of a higher order. If Eliot's poem assembled fragments in order to create a new unity and re-utter the cacophony of its disparate voices into the polyphony of a poetic order, Hadjidakis's poetics reiterate fragments with a focus not on the power of poetry to reassemble and rewrite, but on the reiteration itself: on memory and its fragmentary nature.

Reviewing Hadjidakis's work of the 50s, one realizes that it is not only rebetika that became his topos of inspiration. In his songs, he displayed a much more complex and multiple array of musical traditions and sounds. He often borrowed, sometimes explicitly, from demotic tunes, rebetika, other popular genres of the 30s and 40s, various European traditions including the French popular song and from classical music. This constant borrowing of musical motifs, rhythms or simply styles evolves into what Andreas Andreopoulos very astutely describes as a 'phenomenology of memory'. Rather than tributes or intertextual (intermusical) games, Hadjidakis's allusions function as musical memories, or better, 'create the effect of a memory now recalled as well as the reflective opening of the mind that comes with personal introspection' (Andreopoulos 2001: 258). Reiterated texts and reiterative memory thus have a performative power in that they constitute a performance of self as well as a mapping of the performing self: crucially, they also map the cultural space within which they are uttered, both as a topos and a modality. In other words popular music is at once described through its association with all the borrowed styles (topos) and defined as a form constantly

⁶⁴ Seferis's translation of *The Waste Land and Other Poems* appeared in 1936.

reiterating styles, traditions and memories, and still retaining its fragmentary nature (modality).

Here, Hadjidakis marks the transition between a discourse that defines popular culture as prime material for high art to one that inhabits popular culture and defines it from within, performing its inherent fluidity, its lack of definitions and artistic certainties, as well as its otherness. Moreover, rather than describing and/or proposing this transition, Hadjidakis becomes it. While describing and reperforming the popular, his work *becomes* popular. A brief example suffices: in the 1955 soundtrack for the film *Stella*, Hadjidakis's music self-consciously reworks rebetiko themes. The songs from the film became immense hits overnight and rebetiko musicians like Marika Ninou, in a typical strategy of the industry of the time, promptly rerecorded them. The mirroring of the popular had itself become prime material for the popular to take up.

Hadjidakis and Gatsos or the place of dreams.

In this trajectory, Hadjidakis's work and artistic persona became inextricably linked with that of the poet-critic Nikos Gatsos. A close friend of Elytis and an assistant editor to Katsimbalis on the *Anglo-Hellenic Review*, Gatsos was one of the most influential poets of the 30s generation. Deeply knowledgeable about the new poetic trends in European literatures, he became known as 'the poet of one poem', since he published only one major poem in his lifetime.⁶⁵ *Amorgos*, a modernist mantra much influenced by *The Waste Land* in both poetics and rhetorics, 'struck his generation like a thunderbolt' (Gatsos 1998: 12); the fame and influence of the poem never waned in the postwar years. Gatsos embodied the utmost expression of the aesthetic ideology of the Generation of the 30s. In the words of Peter Levi, 'he was undoubtedly [...] a great master of poetry in many languages, but it was into Greek traditions, folklore and poetry of the oral tradition, that he dug to find his roots. He was as fresh as a waterfall. He used to say that if he were a dictator he would make a law to prevent the Greeks learning foreign languages' (Levi in Gatsos 1998: 12).

⁶⁵ Peter Levi comments in his introduction to the English translation: '*Amorgos* is both a dated poem and I think a great one; but it is almost all that he ever wrote [...] he added very little to his *Amorgos*, which is just one poem... although now a few bits and pieces have been added to his oeuvre, it is essentially just *Amorgos* (in Gatsos 1998: 12-13).

After *Amorgos*, Gatsos never published another poetry collection but instead presented an inexhaustible number of lyrics for popular songs by Hadjidakis, and later by many other composers as well. One possible reason for this 'conversion' was the immediate financial gains he, an ardent gambler, could expect from the royalties of successful 'popular hits'. He became one of the most celebrated popular lyricists, paving the way for other poets to test their talents in writing song lyrics (from Elytis to Anagnostakes), for song lyricists to consider themselves as poets, and for critics to pay 'serious attention' to the art of songwriting. Even more crucially, his lyrics became a reference point for a long series of critical gestures of legitimization, according to which the popular song itself was worthy of serious intellectual attention. As an established poet working through song, Gatsos provoked responses similar to those with which Jacques Prévert's work was met with in France.

In his collection of articles *En Leuko*, Elytis has argued for both Gatsos's song-lyrics and the standing of the popular song. According to the poet, the popular song is a serious and powerful art form, albeit "humble" and of a "different scale":

Even in the lyrics, written to earn a living (but also because he found his humble art much more preferable than the high art destined to gather dust on the shelves), his talents are infused, often nearly unscathed, albeit on a different scale [oi aretes tou pername, tis perissoteres fores, shedon atofies, meion te diaforetike klimaka] (Elytis, 1992: 299).

In a similar vein, critics have long argued that Gatsos's lyrics 'stemmed from *Amorgos*' (Lignades 1983; Angelikopoulos 1998). I believe this view owes more to the critics' predispositions and standardized view of 'high poetry' as a potential source for 'low song lyrics' than to the actual relation of Gatsos's poetry to his work for songs. However, it underlines the fact that Gatsos's song lyrics give the impression of belonging to a non-existent whole, a never finished universe of poetic symbols akin to Benjamin's - never to be fully reconstructed - vessel in the 'Task of the Translator' ([1923] 1992). Their main cohesive factor is their distinctive style, and their fragmentary nature seems to constitute an ironic mirroring of high cultural coherence. In this respect, Gatsos's persistence in 'serving his humble art', instead of the eclecticism and self-importance of modernist poetry, could be seen as supplementing Hadjidakis's

aestheticization of the fragmentary, the working class, the popular and the mass produced.

The difference between the high-modernist poetics of the early *Amorgos* and the 'popular culture' practice of Hadjidakis/Gatsos's songs in later years, and especially during the 60s, is not merely remarkable, it becomes almost iconic. Nowhere is it more evident and eloquent than in the comparison between a fragment of *Amorgos* and in its reappropriation in an 'artistic identity' narrative by Hadjidakis in the 60s.

The middle part of *Amorgos*, written in nearly unpunctuated prose, ends with these lines:

My friends perhaps the memory of forefathers may be a deeper consolation and a more honourable company than a handful of rose-scented water and the intoxication of beauty nothing other than the sleeping rose of Eurotas. Goodnight then I see crowds of falling stars rocking your dreams but I am holding in my fingers the music for a better day. Travellers from the Indies have more to tell you than Byzantine chroniclers (Gatsos 1998: 47-49).

In it, the quest for forefathers and their eternal topos becomes a transcendental chora of Greekness, placed oppositionally (*a more honourable company*) to the mundane instant gratifications of everyday pleasures (one also thinks: of popular, low culture). In the part of the poem from which the above extract comes, a hybrid of Hindu mythology and a metaphysics of Hellenism is drawn on to map an intermediate chora of poetry, of the poet and of art in general, a Platonic chora which is both atemporal and extremely localized, a space activated by a mythical (sleeping rose of Eurotas) and metaphysical (travellers from the Indies/ music) revisiting of the past (memory of forefathers).

Twenty or so years later, Hadjidakis alluded to this fragment, turning its basic idea upside down. In the epilogue to his musical *Odos Oneiron* (*Street of Dreams*-1961), Hadjidakis's voice is heard against the background of a barrel-organ saying:

Now, here's the end of the music for the Street of Dreams.
Now, here's the end of the dreams you yourselves
have lent me this one evening, unawares.
By now it's very late and all my friends are asleep.
But being so incurably faithful to this street, I'll stay awake

until tomorrow morning in order to collect the new dreams
 you'll bear [give birth to]. I will keep them safe and give
 them back to you some other time again in music.
 Goodnight.
 (as reprinted in the liner notes of Hadjidakis 1999)

The resemblance of the two pieces is striking, especially the phrase 'Goodnight then I see... stars rocking your dreams... but I am holding... the music for a better day' from *Amorgos*, which in *Odos Oneiron* resurfaces as 'I'll stay awake until tomorrow... to collect the new dreams you'll bear... and give them back to you some other time again in music. Goodnight.' The most significant point, however, is not the resemblance, but the transformation from one to the other. In *Amorgos*, music stands as a transcendental symbol of poetry and art. The poet holds its subliminal expression, which is contrasted with the lowly, mundane falling stars/rocking dreams. Music is the poet's key to an ideal, mythical world. In *Odos Oneiron* music is no longer a transcendental category, but the medium for the expression of the present dream(ing) at a later time: it does not - as it did in *Amorgos* - belong to a higher level, but is the medium for the repetition of dreams - the iteration of the mundane. It is incomplete, no longer the centre of the poetic utterance but merely its support. Music and dreams seem here to become a symbol of everyday songs, a never-to-be-completed vessel for depositing popular dreams.

The comparison between *Amorgos* the modernist poem and *Odos Oneiron* the popular musical, in many ways illuminates a wider perspective. In *Amorgos*, we have the poetic voice creating - in high modernist form - an imaginary space between the world of ideas and reality, between idealized, eternal Greekness and war stricken Greece. The setting is self-consciously pastoral, and the metaphors and symbols come from a rural context. In *Odos Oneiron*, we also have the artist as central figure (alternating between Hadjidakis's "comments" overheard from loudspeakers and the character of the photographer/magician, famously played by Dimitris Horn) but the setting is decisively urban. The focus is not the Arcadian landscape of *Amorgos*, but a city street 'small, trivial, sad, tyrannical, but also infinitely amiable [...] full of earth, full of children, full of mothers, full of hopes and full of silence'. The artistic aim at the core of the work is not anymore to transcend and transpose in an atemporal 'ever', but

to rework the dreams in an all-temporal 'now'. We are at the epicentre of a transformation: from the modernist dream *of* the popular, to the dream *as* popular culture.

Interestingly, even though Hadjidakis's music, iconoclastic, hybrid, uneven and *sui generis*, met in the 60s with unprecedented success, it never reclaimed the field of popular music as its own. It seems here that the fragmentation it put forward as a characteristic of the popular art form per se was at the same time a subversion of the modernist norm and taxonomy, but also a revaluation of the modernist ideal of a separate aesthetic sphere. In other words, the eclecticism of Hadjidakis's fragmentary aesthetics was very close to, and soon became another version of, modernist elitism.

It seems an oxymoron that even though Hadjidakis's music shaped the generic space of popular music in Greece at the start of the 60s, with such hits as 'Children of Piraeus' and 'Garifallo st' afti', his music persistently avoided presenting itself as a 'national' music. Instead, it preferred to propose itself as an ironic reflection of both high and commercial culture. On the one hand, Hadjidakis's break with high modernism can be seen in the disengagement of popular culture/tradition from the concept of a stable and idealistic national identity it provoked. One detects instead a conceptual move towards inconclusive and fluid personal identities expressed through a self-contained popular culture. On the other hand, Hadjidakis's work, anxious to separate itself from the bulk of popular music production of the time, was creating a new form of idealism.

The emerging void a) between Hadjidakis's 'refined' popular aesthetics and the music the people actually heard, and b) between the popular as fragmentary dream and the popular as representing a national whole, is exactly the space occupied by Mikis Theodorakis. He returned from Paris in 1960 to renew a vision of popular music tied to modernism and to produce a re-nationalization of popular music aesthetics through the formation of a new genre which was coined as *art-popular* and went hand in hand with a project of setting poetry to music.

3. Mikis Theodorakis and the invention of Laiko

In 1960, an article entitled 'Music manifesto: A Draft Plan for the Reorganization of Greek Music' appeared in the short-lived but influential journal *Kritike*, edited by the poet Manolis Anagnostakis and published in Thessaloniki (reprinted in Giannaris 294-297). It caused a stir in artistic circles and provoked long and heated discussions. It was signed by the composers Theodorakis, Argyris Kounadis, Iannis Xenakis, Yannis A. Papaioannou, Dimitris Chorafas and the ethnomusicologist Phivos Anogiannakis,⁶⁶ who called for a reorganization of music education in Greece, the establishment of independent symphonic orchestras, opera and dance schools in the big cities, the modernization of the Athens Festival and so on.

The manifesto represented a break with artistic tradition, had a strong generational character⁶⁷ and its arch-enemy was very clearly singled out: the mainly Athenian *National School* (Ethnike Schole) of composers, that had just celebrated 50 years of intellectual and musical prominence. This older generation's aim had been to 'restore' folk musical elements within a classical music framework primarily influenced by the German classical tradition. According to Manolis Kalomoiris, their intellectual leader, the aim of the National School was 'the rebuilding of a palace in which to enthrone the national soul' (Leotsakos 2001: 350). As many commentators have pointed out, and as Theodorakis was keen on stressing in the 60s, this could be seen as an internally flawed artistic programme: Greece did not have an indigenous classical music tradition and the attempted fusion of classical writing with folk material was generally perceived as an imposed cultural mode trying to manipulate a native one. Additionally, the composers of the 'National School' had often attempted to integrate folk melodic material in a shallow way - whereas, say, Bartok or Stravinsky had integrated rhythmical and formal structures of folk music and not simply the tunes. Theodorakis has described how ineffective and "barren" he felt the impact of the National School to be when he

⁶⁶ Hadjidakis did not sign the manifesto and this caused intense speculation in the Greek Press. However, it seems that his reasons for not signing came from his aversion to organized politics and his opposition to the fact that Theodorakis had drafted and manipulated the manifesto (see Hadjidakis's interview with *Tachydromos* of 26 November 1960, reprinted in Theodorakis 1986: 144-145).

started composing. It is indicative that in an article preceding the 'Manifesto' in the same journal, Theodorakis had proclaimed 1960 as the 'Year 0' for Greek Music. The proclaimed 'year 0' would eventually stand neither for the classical music education nor the concert hall culture of Athens. Instead, 1960 would become 'the year that changed popular music'.

In her biographical monograph, *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music*, Gail Holst makes much of the period the composer spent in Paris in the 50s. A promising classical composition postgraduate student - in the late 50s his ballet *Antigone* had a well-received run in Covent Garden, repeated in 1960 - Theodorakis soon realized that he had to create a personal style and position himself in relation to the main musical movements of the time⁶⁷. In the Paris of the late 50s, the musical avant-garde and the search for post-serialism (which later culminated in Boulez's experiments in the Ircam and the work of Theodorakis's colleague and friend Iannis Xenakis) dominated the sphere of contemporary composition. For a composer who knew that his strength was to write uninhibited, free-flowing melodic lines and who was also courting the idea of 'popularizing high art', this climate of 'anti-melodic' musical experimentation would soon become suffocating.

Instead of Schoenberg, Messiaen (whose *Conservatoire de Paris* classes Theodorakis attended) and Boulez, the early Stravinsky and Bartok were picked up as a source of inspiration. This is how Holst puts it:

He was not only a confirmed nationalist, but a Marxist who wished to communicate his music to a wide audience. He was faced with the choice of abandoning his natural gifts as a composer and struggling to do what Xenakis was better suited to [the mathematical challenge of total serialism], or pursuing a style of composition which had been rejected by the mainstream of European music. Half a century later than the great innovators of modern music, Theodorakis was confronting the same

⁶⁷ In a letter to *Tachydromos*, Theodorakis writes in 1960: 'From the beginning I thought that since this initiative came from our generation, we ourselves should also provide the first example of fraternity' (ibid: 146)

⁶⁸ Theodorakis himself has narrativized - with a slightly apocalyptic overtone - this sudden conversion to simpler forms (Theodorakis 1982: 19 and Koutoulas 1998: 47-50). He would explain, for instance, how the example of *Antigone*'s part 'Epitaphios' partly showed him the way to 'turn back to the sources/roots but from another viewpoint' (Koutoulas 1998: 48).

basic problems which the avant garde might claim to have solved but which he saw as essentially unresolved (1980: 30-31).

What Holst presents as a choice prompted by personal aesthetics, political ideology and artistic vision, Theodorakis himself was eager to theorize as a complicated and theoretically evolved musical program. He declared himself 'unable to strictly follow any of the aesthetic trends prevailing in the West [within which] my Greek sensibility [e ellenike euaisthesia mou] feels more than restricted: it feels betrayed' (Theodorakis 1986: 124-5). Taking the most striking example, he claimed that even though Iannis Xenakis 'is recently being promoted' and admired 'for the mathematical elements of his compositions which in turn, stripped of the human touch, are offered as the triumph of the abstract', this music cannot be considered 'Greek music'. He took issue with the modernist critics' circle in Greece who tried to promote this music also as an example of Greekness; it is instead, he maintains, 'Greekless [anellenike] music which often amounts to also being genuinely anti-Greek [anthellenike]' (ibid: 126). In this early interview with the magazine *Tachydromos*, Theodorakis criticises both the modernist argument in contemporary music, which for him is unacceptably non-engaged, overtechnical and anti-aesthetic, in short inhuman, and a social realist trend of 'orchestrated folklore' which he finds oversimplified, shallow and untheorized [epanapaumene theoretika]. Instead of debating with extra-musical arguments, it is high time, Theodorakis concludes, 'that modern Greek composers brought their interest and the debate over the problem of Greekness *into* their work' (127).

Theodorakis's own version of Greekness was not far off. Surprisingly however, it did not come from the concert halls of symphonic music, but in the most recognisable form of popular song medium: a release of eight popular songs. In the winter of 1960, Theodorakis presented what was to be hailed as the first instalment of his 'new Greek music' strategy: *Epitaphios*, a cycle of eight songs based on the poem of the same title by Yannis Ritsos. The poem's content (the lament of a mother over her dead son, slain during a union demonstration in Salonica in 1936), and the fact that it was set to recognizably popular tunes, were defamiliarizing devices capable of guaranteeing initial public attention.

The work was first presented by Hadjidakis in his own orchestration and with Nana Mouskouri as the lead singer. Theodorakis went on to record his own version of *Epitaphios*, using his own orchestration, only weeks later. The main difference between this and Hadjidakis's version was that now bouzouki figured prominently in the orchestration, and the songs were sung by Grigoris Bithikotsis, a man with a rebetiko-styled voice, a taverna singer from the working class neighbourhood of Kokkinia. Much has been made of this double release: the difference between the two versions elicited a discussion with ideological implications in which Theodorakis's version (and consequently, Theodorakis's future music) was presented as more authentically popular than Hadjidakis's 'light' version. However, we should note that the most probable reason the two versions were released in the first place can be traced to music industry politics. Hadjidakis was at the time a far more established 'popular' composer, with commercial success and influence in the music industry. Theodorakis, naturally, sent the work to him first, in order to orchestrate and release it under his auspices. Company politics gave the second twist: Columbia, a firm antagonistic to Fidelity, to which Hadjidakis was contracted, decided to produce their own version of the new work. This was almost customary in Greek commercial recordings of the 40s-60s, with companies rushing to release their own versions of hit songs sometimes only days after an initial release. In the case of *Epitaphios*, however, this commercial strategy had wider connotations.

The two releases stood side by side in all Athenian record stores in the winter of 1960 and thus multiplied the attention Theodorakis's artistic gesture was meant to have had in the first place. As Jacques Coubard puts it in his *Mikis Théodorakis: La Grèce entre le rêve et le cauchemar*, Theodorakis's version 'engendre bientôt une polémique homérique qui prend des proportions nationales. Musiciens, écrivains, poètes, journalistes, comédiens, hommes politiques s'affrontent. La Grèce se divise en deux partis, les "Hadjidakikos" et les "Théodorakikos"' (1969: 145). The division of the public's preference was identified by Hadjidakis as an ideological one with class resonances: 'the popular audience, the left-wingers, preferred Theodorakis's own version, the others, the bourgeois, the version with Mouskouri. The former because they saw it as an epic, the latter because they saw it as an emotional cry. Both versions

complete, with their seriousness, the poem'. He also adds that a mix of gender and ideology politics was at play: 'The Left-wingers [...] preferred whatever was conducted by Theodorakis and found my version of *Epitaphios* sentimental but not "manly". As if sensibility is a characteristic of womanliness (Hadjidakis 1989: 219). However, the discussion soon focused much more explicitly on the nature and aims of popular music. Apart from articles and letters to the editors of the major Athenian newspapers, special sessions and discussion panels were organised by Unions and Student Organizations during which, after heated debates, popular votes were organized to decide which version was better. In these public discussions, Bithikotsis's 'rough singing' and the use of bouzouki, both evocative of the world of rebetiko, made Theodorakis's version an undisputed favourite. In this context, Hadjidakis's version was considered 'westernized' and 'appeased' - if not 'feminine'; Theodorakis's was seen as 'explosive', 'liberating', 'true to the people's psyche'. The impact of the debate (and the audience's reaction to it) was such that the previous critical unease about rebetiko soon changed into an enthusiastic appreciation of this 'truly popular form'.

Theodorakis himself rushed to support his version's expressionistic use of rebetiko stylistic elements. However, instead of insisting on the characteristics of each version as differences of musical performance, he presented his version as closer to the 'original essence' of the work. Insisting that he had 'adopted' and worked on rebetiko forms, Theodorakis's *Epitaphios* rhetoric could remind one of what Hadjidakis had attempted a decade earlier with *Six Popular Paintings* and subsequently with soundtracks like that of *Stella*. Crucially, however, what Hadjidakis had seen as a support for his fragmentary vision of the popular, Theodorakis perceived as a 'true popular force', an unmediated 'expression of the masses'.

I have already examined how Hadjidakis conceived his quest for Greekness through rebetiko as a form of impotence, a constantly deferrable loss and lack ('*felt the need... and couldn't do it*'). We can contrast this with the way Theodorakis viewed his own appropriation of rebetiko as the celebratory retrieval of a lost supplement:

The 9/8 rhythm which characterizes the zeibekiko was born from the iambic pentameter (fifteen syllable) but when I wrote the music I was not aware of that. So how did I turn towards the zeibekiko? For years I racked my brains to find the correct meter. When I began writing songs

number seven and eight (of eight) I scored the melodies to a unifying beat of 2/8, yet I knew something was missing. It is simple and let me explain it: every melodic phrase, based on each of Ritsos's couplets, took 4 metres of 2/8 each. In other words 2/8+2/8+2/8+2/8, yet the final beat on the last 2/8 was short, quick and without fullness. So I added a fifth metre of 2/8 to enlarge the ending. But now the ending seemed larger than it should have been. It was redundant. And suddenly I saw the solution, the truth lay somewhere between the 2 and 4, in other words, 3. The *true* rhythm had to be 2/8+2/8+2/8+3/8. That's to say, a zeibekiko! My melody, influenced by our popular music, brought with it, organically, the rhythm of popular song. This is the *truth*.' (Theodorakis 1986: 194; incorporating parts translated in Holst 1980: 193).

For all its technical details, Theodorakis's argument for the 9/8 rhythm cannot hide its metaphysical claims. The implication is that Ritsos's original intertextual allusion to the demotic laments with the use of the fifteen-syllable verse is only fulfilled with the use of such a 'contemporary working class folk art' as rebetiko. This strategy reminds one of the 30s poets' view of the popular as ontologically containing and pushing forward the 'qualities' ascribed to folk. We could, then, say that if the modernists opted for a popularization of folklore, Theodorakis's discursive formulation was aiming at a complete folklorization of the popular. All the qualities inscribed by the first demoticists' vision of folk culture (orality, continuity, historical consciousness and national identity) could now, Theodorakis implied, be mapped onto a unified vision of the popular psyche as male, industrial and working class.

In this, Theodorakis completely outstripped Hadjidakis's evolution, outlined in the previous chapter, that is, the move from a folkloric discourse to the conception of popular music as a self-contained topos. It also gave back the missing link between a form of national identity and an acceptable formulation of popular culture.

The Left and the Popular

One of the reasons the '*Epitaphios* Debate' gathered such momentum in 1960-1 was Theodorakis's overt association with the Left and his prominence as a communist artist and thinker. Theodorakis's acceptance, in practice, of a rebetiko-style put in question the Greek Left's inconsistent position in relation to the genre and to popular music.

Even during the Civil War, the Communist Party had debated this issue (as letters in *Rizospastis* and *Avgi*, reprinted in Holst 1977, show). However, the official

party line condemned rebetiko as an expression of lumpenproletariat degradation. There are reports that communist guerrillas used to raid tavernas in order to stop the 'downgrading influence' of rebetiko on the popular masses (see Gauntlett 2001). In his well-accomplished study of rebetiko in the concentration and deportation camps where members of the Communist party were held, Panages Panagiotopoulos (1996) shows how and why rebetiko was condemned and officially forbidden to the members of the party. Panagiotopoulos astutely points out that the Communist Party had a pressing need to distinguish both ideologically and representationally, within the detention territory, between its members, the 'political detainees' and the criminals, the 'poenal detainees'. Rebetiko, having been associated with a lawless underworld, had to be repudiated in order to provide, as the lumpen 'other', an element for oppositional identification for the 'pure' proletariat of the communists. Meanwhile, the official state radio included rebetika in its (full of anti-communist propaganda) airplay during the Civil War due to enormous demand by the soldiers of the National Army. Interestingly, what the Communist Party hardliners offered as a counterbalance was 'the authentic music of the people', the avatar of the early demoticists and nationalists: demotic songs. However, the Party never officially condemned rebetiko, thus leaving the debate within the Left open. Sporadically, influential thinkers from the Left also expressed their appreciation for the genre, only to be met with fierce criticism by anti-rebetiko left commentators.

When the discussion on rebetiko was taken up again in the 60s due to the *Epitaphios* debate, a new element seemed to change everything: here was a recording by a composer with unquestionable links to the Communist Party, which had already become extremely popular while setting itself performatively at the core of the debate over the value of rebetiko and its iconic instrument, bouzouki. *Epitaphios* not only triggered, but in a sense created, the conclusion of the debate over what the modern Greek Popular song was and what the place of rebetiko was within it. Furthermore, this was a conclusion met with national acceptance and endorsed by Left and Right alike.

Some months after the release of the two *Epitaphios* recordings, the newspaper *Avgi* published a lengthy survey, asking 12 writers, musicians, ethnographers and musicologists, to respond to the editorial questionnaire over the use of instruments like bouzouki in the setting of poetry (which, as we have seen, was the main difference

between the two versions), and to debate this work's place in relation to Greek popular music. Predictably, the discussion was immediately transposed from the narrow case of *Epitaphios* to the larger debate about the whole field of Popular Music. Most of the intellectuals of different political allegiances who answered *Avgi's* questionnaire seemed enthusiastic about Theodorakis's work; more tellingly, they made clear that they considered *Epitaphios* only "the first step" in an ongoing artistic programme that would evolve to "change the face of Greek popular music". The poet Tassos Livadites called it a movement 'of immense importance for the sanitation of our country's musical life'.

The loudest opposition to these arguments came from two conservative left-wing commentators, the journalist and critic Vassilis Arkadinis and the composer Alekos Xenos. Xenos, replying to *Avgi's* questionnaire, repeats the old left-wing argumentation against rebetiko ('a degenerate popular form') and in favour of the demotic song ('the authentic popular form'). A proponent of 'difficult and serious' forms of symphonic music and an ardent critic of 'all rotten musical constructs, like rock & roll, tsa-tsa, rebetiko [which are] corrosive for the audience's psychology', Xenos provides an interesting counterargument to Theodorakis's ideological construct (in Theodorakis 1986: 219). He attacks the claim that rebetiko has close links with byzantine and demotic music, and reminds his readers that rebetiko had been used by right-wing governments and the National Army radio station in order to manipulate, along with the music industry, 'the audience's preferences' (216). Most astutely, he points out that what was at the time seen as 'bouzoukia music' was not an 'authentic form' of rebetiko, a popular song form close to the myth of origin Theodorakis was exploiting, but a genre directly manipulated by the entertainment industry's needs - since, now, the record companies were joined by the cinema industry and theatre production companies in the exploitation of *bouzouki music*. Xenos presents 'bouzouki' and the 'rebetiko-derived' forms of music as a mainstream trend that has made 'light music' composers eager to share its success. In a considerably ironic move, Xenos speaks about 'light music composers [synthetes elafras mousikes]' who introduce themselves as saviours of popular music - a depiction that stops short of naming Theodorakis, but certainly alludes to him. The irony is that, as we shall see shortly, Theodorakis, even though a self-professed 'saviour' of popular music, never considered himself as a 'light music'

composer. On the contrary, as I will argue later, he persistently excluded 'light music' from his discussions of respected popular music forms.

Unlike Xenos's outright condemnation, Arkadinos takes a middle-of-the road approach that shows his anxiety not to miss the 'popular front' potential of such a work. The critic believes that Hadjidakis's version is closer to the 'spirit of the musical work'. He assures his readers that he has seen the musical score and argues that Hadjidakis's version with Mouskouri 'has the simple, unadorned, primary conception of the musical idea which exhales the plainness of a popular song'. On the contrary, Theodorakis's version with Bithikotsis is the one that has moved from the original by adding something foreign, supplementary:

the consciously *recherché* bouzoukorebetiko style not only differentiates and betrays the original musical idea, but also - and this is the worst - *destroys* the message, the power, the greatness, the appeal of such a monumental poetical work as Ritsos's *Epitaphios* (in Theodorakis 1986: 190, emphasis added).

For him, the true spirit of the popular and the value of the work lie in the musical score: 'Studying the score of these songs one can say that they bear the mark of a genuinely popular art and bring something new to the relationship between Greek music and poetry' (191). Arkadinos shares with Xenos an internalized disgust for bouzouki and the singing style of rebetiko and laiko singers. He makes this clear by condemning the 'vulgar' interpretation of Theodorakis's bouzouki orchestration and the 'heavy, semi-hoarse, cavey' voice of his singer Bithikotsis. He advances the view that this was the product of an added calculation and a 'conscious popularization' that cannot do justice to the poetic text or to the 'soul of the people'. This is in direct contrast with Theodorakis's argument at the time, which was that bouzouki and a rebetiko style were at the origin of his work, and not simply a performance style.

While Theodorakis had created a popular music event that was to be judged in terms of performance, appeal and, even, commercial strategies and results, the old Left remained grounded in a traditional discourse of ideological purity, intentional strategies and highly articulated social realism. In musical terms this is spectacularly manifested

with Arkadinos's argument about *Epitaphios*'s score as opposed to *Epitaphios*'s performance.

We could say that in its striving for ideological purity, the old Left was adopting discursive strategies that were identified with classical music scholarship, as opposed to the emerging performance-oriented ethnomusicological discourse, that was soon to appear in its Greek incarnation fully in support of Theodorakis. The real discrepancy here is between two different visions of what constitutes the popular, both expressed within the Left at the time and characterized by antithetical pairs: text vs. performance, the people's psyche vs. commercial art, folk instruments vs. bouzouki, folk music vs. rebetiko. This reflects a deeper schism within the Left, in relation to what constitutes *the people* and who belongs to the classes that the Communists should address. More than an argument between political factions of the Left, this schism was a manifestation of deeper changes in Greek society and the cultural sphere.

After the end of the civil war, the urban population increased rapidly and rural areas were deserted by their inhabitants who migrated in vast numbers to the big cities. The expansion of the cities went hand in hand with the emergence of new cultural hybrids, largely defined -again- with the adjective 'laiko' (popular): they essentially combined rural and urban traditions, and were mediated by a popular culture matrix (mass production, urban centralization and commercial promotion and so on). In this fusion of characteristics, the rural elements were purged of their topical distinctiveness and urban styles gained a legitimacy as the cultural norm for 'all the people'. The popular song, the *laiko tragoudi* of this time, could be viewed, along with popular cinema,⁶⁹ as the utmost expression of this cultural fusion: 'it addressed a society that was at the time leaving behind it the old divisions and entering the funnel of a mobility unseen before -that is, of a society which was striving for big equalizing common denominators' (Kondylis 1991: 42). Crucially, Theodorakis intervened at this particular

⁶⁹ Giorgos Arampatzis argues that the popular cinema of the 60s interpellated the urban working classes through various strategies that culminated in a mapping of Us (instinctive, friendly, honest, serious, low class, staunchy male) vs Them (stiff, sly, effeminate, aristocrats). In this oppositional pair, the People were identified with bouzoukia, whereas the Others with 'western popular music'. (Arampatzis 1991: 50) Astutely, Arampatzis concludes that Laiko Tragoudi (bouzoukia) was the most powerful interpellating marker for 'the people'. To such an extent that Popular Cinema, did not merely contain popular songs: it *was* them: 'The content of popular films is laika tragoudia (bouzoukia)'. (36)

moment, his work providing ideological credentials for such a 'popular expansion'. As Jane Cowan puts it

Theodorakis seems to have addressed himself to *a new sort of Greek* who appears in great numbers in the post-war period: the rural migrant to the Greek cities, who has roots in a regional culture but who comes to live and work in a regionally-mixed yet primarily working-class and petit-bourgeois urban milieu. Evident in [his] strategy is both an attempt to create a "national" music, appealing to a wide spectrum of Greek society, and a music which dignifies and celebrates the folk and popular elements at its core' (Cowan 1993: 5, emphasis added).

This *new sort of Greek* was, I argue, not yet addressed properly by the political establishment, and especially by the official Communist Party line. The time for such an address was urgent, since in the beginning of the 60s the Left became, after fifteen or so years of exclusion and expulsion, once again a prominent player in the Greek social arena. With the communist party banned outright, the party representing the left, *EDA* (Left Democratic Unity), even though influenced by the politics of the Communist Party in exile, was open to associations that could be seen as defining a larger 'Democratic Front'; composed of different political associations and groups, it was seen as the union of the non-Right, progressive elements of the population: this was a platform fit to welcome 'the new sort of Greek', the mosaic of the new urban population. In this context, the 'people's demand' and the 'representation of the masses' became much more important than the strict following of the even stricter communist party lines. Theodorakis's music came to express the existence of a popular stratosphere that did not have strict class or party delineations. This, perhaps, is one of the most central reasons for its immediate endorsement by an audience whose existence was vital to Theodorakis's his artistic strategy in the first place. The 'popularization' of the Left aesthetics, expressed as a victory of performance over strict "text" - ideological, literary or other- resulted in a politicized view of art that was very close to a formulation first proposed by the Italian sociologist Antonio Gramsci: the 'national-popular'.

Gramsci's National-Popular and its influence on Theodorakis's Art-Popular

Theodorakis conceived of his work as a medium whose primary aim would be to instruct the Greek people. His 'artistic credo' is characterized by a rhetoric of progress: as good educational material, Theodorakis's music was meant to pull the masses upwards and make them 'understand' and 'receive' his most complex work, after they had assimilated his simpler pieces (see Theodorakis 1972, esp: 36-53, and Theodorakis 1997, *passim*). He seemed to have answered the Gramscian call for intellectuals and artists who would 'elaborate a modern 'humanism' able to reach right to the simplest and most uneducated classes... [a move] necessary from the national point of view'. He seemed to present himself as one of the 'educators and elaborators of the intellect and the moral awareness of the people-nation' who, according to Gramsci, would provide a national-popular culture (Gramsci 1985: 211).

Gramsci formulated the concept of the national-popular as a middle stage, an interlude that could come after fascism's fall and before the imposition of pure socialism: realizing that the dictatorship of the proletariat could not be imposed in Italy as an unmediated transition from fascism, he called for an alliance of peasants and other intermediate social strata with the proletariat, thus proposing a cultural and political topos, a larger democratic alliance, within and through which the communist party would eventually impose, hegemonically, its own ideology. Even though Gramsci acknowledged that 'the people themselves are not a homogeneous cultural collectivity but present numerous and variously combined cultural stratifications', he also saw the national-popular as a means for the proletariat and the Communist Party to make its allies conscious of their *shared interest* and, at the same time, as the expression of this shared interest in the form of a *collective will* and a continuous cultural field. In a way, it is the view of the cultural field as a whole, in which the Party and the proletariat had to intervene, that also could offer the people, in their multiclass mobility, a concrete historical presence and representation:

For all the capitalist countries a fundamental problem is posed - the problem of the transition from the united front tactic, understood in a general sense, to a specific tactic which confronts the concrete problems of national life and operates on the basis of the popular forces as they are historically determined (Gramsci 1978:410).

As David Forgacs points out in his article 'National-Popular: Genealogy of a concept', 'it was in response to the conjuncture of ascendant fascism in Italy and the ebb-tide of revolution in the West that Gramsci began to elaborate the concept of the national-popular. The period was between 1924 and 1926' (1993: 180).⁷⁰ It is important to remember that this formulation comes from Gramsci's call for a broad front against fascism: in the Greece of the 60s, a broader alliance against an emerging fascism (eventually culminating in a full blown dictatorship in 1967) was also imperative. Gramsci criticises Italian intellectuals for their failure to meet the needs and demands of the people, to understand and trust them. Inherent in Gramsci's critique is also the view that the existent stratification of the cultural field into high and low is also a product of existing social formations and broadly based on the politics, aesthetics and rhetorics of high intellectuals 'without organic links with the broad popular masses' (Forgacs 1993: 187). This means that for a national-popular culture to appear, there must be i) a rehabilitation of high culture within the culture of the people, a kind of regeneration that would permit high artists to redefine their organic links with their people, and ii) a complete refutation of the low, popular culture sphere as (and because it is) constructed by the reactionary political and cultural alliances, believed to be inherently hostile to the people.

Theodorakis's conception of the composer-as-national-leader emerged from a very comparable vision. He famously spoke about his need 'for *unmediated*, direct contact between the artist and all the people' (Theodorakis 1986: 172) and he thought of himself as someone who 'did not do anything but write down the tunes that all of you [the Greek people] have heard in your minds, without being aware of it. [My music] is a *genuinely popular music*, where the mediation of the composer can be compared to the hand of the unnamed monk while he writes down the voice of the Holy Spirit'. (ibid: 172-173, my emphasis) Again, this seems to share and implement directly Gramsci's criticism against the Italian intellectuals of the 30s:

⁷⁰ David Forgacs, on whose important article I base much of my argument, reminds us of the main foundational aspects of the national-popular concept. 'It was elaborated in response to fascism... It was dependent on the relative numerical weakness of the Italian proletariat. It involved the formation of a collective will through the building of a mass party, where a number of social classes and class-fractions are successfully hegemonized by the party and the proletariat. It was conceived of as a transitional stage

The intellectuals do not come from the people, even if by accident some of them have origins among the people. They do not feel tied to them (rhetoric apart), they do not know and sense their needs, aspirations and feelings. In relation to the people, they are something detached, without foundation, a caste and not an articulation with organic functions of the people themselves.' (Gramsci 1985: 209)

Contrary to other intellectual leaders who, the implication went, were neglecting the needs and the voice of the people, Theodorakis seemed to want to embody the Gramscian ideal of the national-popular; moreover, it was probably this ideal conception that also gave him the space to present himself as a leader -intellectual, artistic, and political- since the concept of the national-popular was formed in order to permit precisely those platforms through which an aesthetic and cultural concept (the popular) could become a foundational aspect for both a national identity and a leftwing liberational front.

Theodorakis further promoted his own national-popular discourse by persistently setting canonical poetic works to his music during the 60s: the project was presented as an effort to bring poetry back 'to the roots', 'to the people', 'to the masses' and it was referred to with the term *Melopoimene Poiese* (Poetry set to music). In a text written in jail during the first years of the dictatorship (just as Gramsci's diaries were written when he was incarcerated by the fascists), the composer suggests that his setting of poetry in popular music was meant to provide a way out of the 'cultural deadlock experienced in Greece for the last twenty years [1950-70]' (Theodorakis 1983: 22). Even though people, he explains, had a need to express their ('historically loaded') experiences, they could not do it in an integrated way: on the one hand the intellectuals were producing work that 'either could not reach the masses or could not meet their expectations' (ibid). On the other hand, people opted to express themselves with a form of popular song, which, however, was uneven, that is it 'was as deep and powerful in its musical part as it was shallow and stupid in its verses. My first attempt tended to resolve this contradiction. Of all the Greek Arts poetry was the most evolved. It followed that the

leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat, to socialist democracy (soviets) as opposed to bourgeois democracy (parliament)' (1993: 183).

simplest thing to do was to unite these two extreme conquests of the modern Greek spirit' (ibid). Again, we are here at the core of Gramsci's perception of the national-popular. The project of Melopoiemene Poiese comes to counterbalance an implied antinomy very similar to the one Gramsci perceived in the work of Italian bourgeois intellectuals who did not meet the expectations and the needs of the people.

Melopoiemene Poiese can then be seen as a cultural project meant to remedy what Gramsci termed the failure of 'the lay forces in their historical task as educators and elaborators of the intellect and the moral awareness of the people-nation' (Gramsci 1985: 211).

Since *Epitaphios* was a well established poem that was proving to work with popular music, and Theodorakis's next attempts were met with similar approval (the song cycles *Archipelagos* and *Politeia*, with titles more suitable for poetry collections than popular albums), poetry became, along with bouzouki (or supplementary to it) a distinct component in the bandwagon of the national-popular culture under construction. A long series of left-wing poets of the post-war generations rushed to collaborate with Theodorakis. But the composer, even more influentially, also used the iconic work of the bourgeois generation of the 30s, in a recuperative strategy of 'returning high poetry to the people, bringing poetry to the masses' that could also be seen as a decisive effort to force the cut-off bourgeois poets to communicate with the people. Especially with Seferis's and Elytis's work repackaged as popular songs, there was also an implied aim to render the eclectic Greek High Modernism, at last, accessible to the Masses. As an editorial in *Epitheorese Tehnes* assured its readers in 1966, Theodorakis's 'manly popular tunes' were able to 'transfuse the high meaning of a great poetry' (*Epith. Tehnes* v.139-140).⁷¹

The project of using poets' work for the lyrics of his songs soon became a definable subgenre and exerted an unprecedented influence on songwriters and producers for the most part of the 60s and 70s.⁷² Poetry set to music soon became a symbol of

⁷¹ A move to 'recuperate', use and share the achievements of the poetic generation of the 30s, could be seen as more general in the Left (at least in its non-Stalinist and anti-Zhdanovist fraction) from the late 50s. Crucial in this is the publication of *Axion Esti* in *Epitheorese Tehnes*, even before its official full publication as a book. See Kagiales 2002.

⁷² Later in the 60s and certainly in the 70s, *Melopoiemene Poiese* also evolved, as a concept, to encompass all the rest of Theodorakis's work, so that in the definitive editions of the lyrics of his songs

Theodorakis's importance, of his canonical position in the musical and intellectual field and of the 'educational potentials' of his music.

A New Popular Song

Significantly, after *Epitaphios*, rebetiko as a genre, bouzouki as an instrument and zeibekiko as a dance, gained a legitimacy that swept past all resistance. Tassos Vournas, in a lengthy article in *Epitheorese Tehnes* in 1961, attempted to put a definitive case for Rebetiko and bouzouki -especially the purified bouzouki music of Theodorakis: 'One thing is certain: the vulgar and lowly element is step by step discarded since responsible civilizers (ekpolitistes) started influencing the genre' (Holst 1977: 183). In Theodorakis's and Hadjidakis's songs, the critic points out, 'we can hear today our tradition alive and expressed through the sound of bouzouki' while the work of 'gifted poets enriches the songs' poetic content, shapes with lyricism the problems of this country and the longings of a whole people speaking directly to our souls. Rebetiko, starting where it started from, is being transformed today into the lyrical expression of a proud people, an embattled, democratic and pacifist people. Could we neglect it?' (ibid).

Prompted by this article, the ethnomusicologist Fivos Annogeianakis went on to provide a detailed genealogy of the Greek Popular Song -thus supplementing Vournas's account of rebetiko - in the next issue of *Epitheorese Tehnes*. Rebetiko, he argued, was a direct descendant of the demotic Greek songs, the popular song of the East and the byzantine liturgical music. In the process, it had also assimilated elements from 'popular songs in demotic forms' and the *kantada* (canzona) tradition (his genealogical map reprinted in Holst 1977:191). Annogeianakis also introduced a critical distinction: he proclaimed the distinction between popular and folk music, at the time an ethnomusicological issue (see 'Definition of Folk Music', voted in the Seventh Conference of the International Folk Music Council, held in Sao Paolo in 1954). But instead of the criteria set by the International Folk Music Council to define folk music, such as oral transmission, continuity between present and past, variation and selection, he proclaims:

the composer opted for the title *Melopoimene Poiese* as the general term to characterize his whole production of popular songs (see Theodorakis 1997).

The term *folk song* (French *chanson folklorique*, German *Volkslied*) denotes the old songs of a people, whereas the terms *popular song* (French *chanson populaire*, German *Volkstümliches Lied*) the more recent ones (the words old and more recent are relative and follow, as it is obvious, the particular historical social and geographic conditions of each country). In the Greek language the corresponding [antistoixoi] terms are *demotiko tragoudi* and *laiko tragoudi* respectively (in Holst 1977: 184-185).

Crucially, Annogeianakis's distinction allows, again, for a Gramscian version of the popular to slide into the ethnomusicological distinction between popular and folk music. It was indeed Gramsci who thought that a version of popular folklore would comprise all songs which 'the people adopt because they conform to their way of thinking and feeling', no matter how they were composed (oral/written composition), or whether they have been composed by the people, for the people or by learned composers (Gramsci 1985: 195). In the claim that the distinction between folk and popular is primarily that between old and new songs, Annogeianakis's concept of popular music circumscribed all the definitions based on poetics, proposed until then by ethnomusicologists, and argued for a continuum between folk and popular music, according to which popular music is the folk of the present, and they both fall under the category 'of the people'. The people here are thought of in the Gramscian sense of the 'popular forces as they are historically determined' (Gramsci: 1978:410). And the ideological space proposed is for a 'popular' music not really produced *by* the people, but ultimately produced *for* them: by Theodorakis.

The disappearance of Elafo

Discussions like the ones in *Avgi* and *Epitheorese Tehnes*, as well as the countless panels on *Epitaphios* and 'laiko tragoudi' of 1960-1, resulted in an inimitable intellectual and artistic climate that Hadjidakis's work of the 50s had not succeeded in triggering. As a result, both a system of popular culture and a genealogy for it were imposed, as we saw in such articles as the ones written by Annogeianakis and Vournas. In the process something was lost: the only officially visible 'popular music' until then, called 'Light Song', ('Elafo tragoudi') for the only reason that it was conceived as the

other of the 'heavy' classical music. Itself not a homogenous genre, 'elafro' was represented in a taxonomy of middle-class entertainment, where it had occupied for decades the place of 'the other' not only of classical music, but also of rebetiko forms and of demotic songs (see Dragoumis 1975: 17). Directly influenced by European popular traditions and by certain forms of classical music, like operetta, the 'light song' constituted a genre by the 60s insofar as it used western instruments, its artists were called to translate and cover for the Greek market popular hits of the west and that they did not present themselves as rebetiko or bouzouki interpreters.

For Theodorakis, this was precisely the music that had to be excluded from any first rate popular genealogy. In a very popular lecture given after a performance in the Metropolitan Theatre, he went on to turn this into a coherent argument.

Light song in our country has been synonymous with a cheap mimesis of the European and American song. Same melodic line, same rhythms, same tonality. The only difference is the Greek lyrics, but, they are words without any content and they are uttered with such articulation that one gets the impression that this is a foreign language. This completes the overall impression that what we are talking about is a foreign song. (Theodorakis 1986: 240-241)

Rebetiko/laiko, on the contrary, is proposed as the real Greek Song, authentic expression of the Greek People (both capitalized in Theodorakis's text), characterized by 'its melodic line, its rhythmic patterns and its harmonies. There is also the ethos and the character of the poetic text, the genuine modern Greek mode of performance and the art of its accompaniments, which is inextricably woven with bouzouki' (ibid: 241). A model of national identity based on pride and national superiority thus cannot be distinguished from a system of artistic topicism and 'authentic popular art' ideology:

Imagine then how proud we should be for our people who, when alone and willing to sing correctly in order to burst out and find salvation, pick up true works of art -at the very moment when most of the civilized nations haven't got in their repertoire but these music-dance constructs which are as odourless as nitrogen and as tasteless as hay (ibid: 241-242).

As I have argued, Theodorakis's promotion of the laiko song as authentically, genuinely and exclusively Greek is directly linked to a national-popular, in the Gramscian sense of

the word, version of Greekness. But it is also a powerful tool in his attempt to construct an inherent taxonomy of modern Greek popular music. The light song, the implication goes, is a lesser song since it is not Greek, or Greek rooted. The taxonomy also relies heavily on a supplementary strategy: the authentically Greek popular song is of a higher value since it can also be compared with classical music. 'The genuine and fulfilled [olokleromeno] Greek song is equal in importance and power reserve to the most famous German Lieder, the most important Italian arias, the deepest melodies of the Russian school.' (ibid) The two sides of the argument (nationally unique and up to the classical standards) which are put to work towards the classification and canonization of the popular song culminate in the following paragraph:

the misjudged popular (laikoi) interpreters have proved with our concerts in 'Kentrikon' and in Piraeus that they are artists of a high standing, that they possess all the secrets of music to perfection, both in terms of art and technique, that they can stand on stage and be up to the standards of classic singers and even better, and that they are, finally, genuine Greeks with deep roots in the lively tradition of the nation (ibid: 239).

Theodorakis's and all the pro-rebetiko critics' arguments had such an impact that they succeeded in imposing a new canon and taxonomy of popular music within months. As early as July 1961 the 'light song' composer Hairopoulos was complaining with three consecutive letters to the right wing newspaper *Apogevmatini* not only of the prominence gained by Theodorakis, his music and artistic credo and the prevalence rebetiko was suddenly allotted on the popular music scene, but also about the complete exclusion of the light song from Greek culture's representation to the 'outside world' (always a pressing topic in Greek cultural politics). Hairopoulos criticized the fact that international stars like 'Elia Kazan, Sophia Loren and Charles Aznavour' were accompanied to bouzoukia tavernas 'as soon as they set foot in Greece' and he protested because the tapes offered as a representative gift to Jackie Kennedy during her visit in Greece did not include 'light' composers like himself or Attik, even though 'USA's first lady had asked for a florilege of *all* the musical genres that are currently being sung in Greece' (Hairopoulos [1961] 1986: 251).

By erasing the Light Song from the field of popular music, Annogeianakis and Theodorakis, along with whoever gave *that* tape to Mrs Kennedy, quite forcefully completed the representational packaging of 'Greek popular music'. From being the pariah of official representation, Rebetiko/ Laiko had now suddenly become the only 'true' representative of Greek Popular Music and (via the rhetoric of the national-popular) of Greekness. This implicit argument could in turn support the rhetoric about the popular art as an unmediated expression of the people, as opposed to the recuperated one, derivative from the West and manipulated by the industry, 'light music'.

The birth of Art-Popular: Entehno Laiko

What was subsequently brought along was a new genre, a hybrid of 'popular' and 'art music', that could serve as the materialization of the national-popular ideology on offer into a concrete musical concept. It was given a name that was, significantly, also a hybrid: *Entehno Laiko*/ Art-Popular, a genre conceived to describe Theodorakis's songs and denote the highest level, the 'haut niveau' of popular music.

It was a way of making art music, starting from popular forms and using a popular medium. Not surprisingly, the concept of 'higing' from the roots is not absent from Theodorakis's rhetorics. In a 1966 article entitled 'The Art-Popular Song', he writes about this 'fully fledged war which resulted in the creation of a new genre' (Theodorakis 1982: 17). The Song as form, he explains, is the root of 'the tree of Art', but is also represented in the other parts of the tree. 'And the human being, while ascending along with the evolution of Art, meets it in the branches, in the leaves and in the fruit (which is more specifically in music, the Symphonic music' (ibid). In this elaborate metaphor, we find the same blend of national identity discourse with an effort to position one genre of popular song as higher than others, by iterating the criteria of classical music. The song is presented as the foundation of cultural life, but like the tree which is meant to grow and produce fruit, cultural life is also a purposive project: the aim is 'more specifically in music' classical symphonic music. However, modern classical Western music, as Theodorakis explains in the same article, had produced fruit that had severed or completely lost the connection to the roots. Unsurprisingly, the form

that can keep the ripeness and ‘highness’ of the fruit and in the meantime reestablish the link to the roots, is the Art-Popular Song.

The concept of a learned composer who also writes popular songs that Theodorakis carefully promoted through his example and the implied comparison with classical composers of the western canon had a tremendous role in creating an internal taxonomy of popular music that soon transcended political divisions and found sometimes unexpected support from conservative classical music critics.⁷³ However, what it was even more influential in creating was the ‘politicization’ of the field of the popular song: by defining a topos of the national-popular, and adorning it with a decisively Gramscian, Adornian and Brechtian⁷⁴ rhetorics, Theodorakis also created for himself the status of intellectual/ political leader, thus re-defining his work as the ultimate expression of political art. In a very decisive move, not only was his music considered as the prototype of “serious” popular (=national-popular=art-popular) music, it became the prototype for politically engaged music as well. From that point on, the equation that appeared to define the Greek 60s further, was born: the good (and valuable) popular music was seen to be only the politically engaged music. And the composer was subsequently elevated to the most recognizable political symbol. Sometimes his music did not only represent but also became a social movement: to take but one example, when Grigoris Lambrakis, an MP and president of the Greek branch of Bertrand Russell’s Peace Movement was assassinated, the political/youth movement that promptly sprang up named after him, *Lambrakis Youth*, was not only supported by Theodorakis, but crucially used his concerts around the country as political meetings. It was not long before Theodorakis himself became the *Lambrakis Youth* leader.

Theodorakis’s political engagement and the direct and indirect censorship on his music during the 60s, made all his work (‘even his love songs’) read through as subversive (Holst 1980: 129; Van Dyck 1998: 15; Cowan 1993: 4-5). But, in essence, it

⁷³ Lily Spencer-Drakou in *Athenaika* 7 July 1961, compares Theodorakis with ‘the great Schubert and other classical composers [who] did not consider it humiliating to write entertaining music *as well*’ (in Koutoulas 1996: 319)

⁷⁴ Theodorakis is at pains to remind the readers of his theoretical texts that his project to create a musical tragedy based on ‘contemporary mythology and the modern popular song’ are examples of a new genre ‘first used by Brecht in his *Threepenny Opera*’ (Giannaris 1983: 48). And in a similar mode, Fivos Annogeianakis, writing for the journal *Epitheorese Tehnes* in 1965 went on to compare Theodorakis’s project with the works of Brecht-Weill.

was the Gramscian overtones of Theodorakis's rhetorics that made all popular culture described in his project, potentially political. To be sure, persecution of his music by right-wing governments or fascist paramilitaries, was widely reported, and contributed to the political reinvestment of its symbolic status before the dictatorship. After April 1967, when the military junta passed a decree banning all Theodorakis's music from public broadcast and punishing any Greek who even possessed his records, then, certainly, not only his music, but even his face, his words, his anecdotal whereabouts, became political par excellence. We should not forget though that the reason for junta's explicit decree was not simply hatred for such a famous communist artist: the real issue was that the dictators imposed a regime whose cultural politics of populist fascism had - as in Mussolini's Italy - an aim oppositional but a strategy similar to the national-popular: hegemonic control of a wide range of social strata through decisive mediation of popular art-forms. In these terms, the anecdotal information contained in *Journals of Resistance*, that the colonels initially asked for Theodorakis's collaboration, does not seem so implausible.⁷⁵ This is, as it happened, what occurred with a series of other artists who were happy to go along with the Junta's populist politics as eagerly as they had been to assist Theodorakis's national-popular in a previous phase. Bithikotsis, the popular singer who had gained national fame from *Epitaphios*, did not stop singing, even though all of the composer's songs were banned; on the contrary, he even became the favourite of the junta's officials. And Marinela, one of the 'popular singers of highest standing' praised by Theodorakis in his lecture in Metropolitan, became the star of the nationalist/fascist parades held in Panathinaikon Stadion by the junta's cultural ministry. The dictators promoted every form of 'low entertainment' as a component of their own nationalistic motto: 'Greece of Orthodox Greeks' - and the *laiko tragoudi* Theodorakis had seen as the platform for a national-popular art obliged, by now becoming more commercialized and populist than ever.

Abroad, Theodorakis, first incarcerated by the colonels, and later very famously flown to France after mediation by Servan-Schreiber, himself became a symbol for the

⁷⁵ According to Theodorakis, Colonel Ladas, the notorious Secretary General of the Ministry of Public Order, suggested this in a meeting during the first days of the composer's incarceration. The junta official is reported as saying: 'You're not like the other [communists]. You're different in our eyes.'

fight for liberation along with his music. As an article in the *TLS* put it, he was equally famous abroad 'for his bouzouki music, his intermittent involvement in Communist causes, and his absurd persecution by the military dictatorship' (Woodhouse 1973). For the West, Theodorakis became the popular musician engagé par excellence, attracting an unprecedented interest that ran from mythologization to commodification. Journalists from the *BBC* and *The Times* smuggled cassettes of him singing, which were then rebroadcast to Greece; high standing European politicians and the Swedish parliament were signing petitions in his support; Roger Garaudy and François Mitterrand wrote the prefaces to his books; in Northern Europe his work was hailed as a poetry classic; and on the eve of his release, the *London Magazine* ran a comic-strip, dramatizing the story of his incarceration. The blurb on the cover of the book *Les fiancés de Pénélope*, published in France in 1975, is indicative of the mode of appreciation:

Mikis Théodorakis c'est des milliers des fans d'un bout à l'autre de l'Europe. C'est Bob Dylan, Joan Baez et les Beatles à la fois. C'est la culture grecque dans sa forme la plus achevée, la culture dans la vie, la culture populaire. Barde des temps modernes, héraut d'une révolution culturelle inouïe, il dit depuis vingt ans les souffrances et les joies de son pays.

Theodorakis's music and his politics have made many more commentators see him as the embodiment of the liberational spirit of the 60s. His political/cultural affiliations have prompted commentators to compare his music and ideas with the Folk Revival and the Civil Rights movements (Lades 2001; Giannaris 1981). Indeed, the move to consider popular forms of songwriting as fulfilling the same role as folk songs in pre-industrial communities, echoes similar ideological statements from the British song revival (especially the formulations of A.L.Lloyd, see Shiach 1989: 114-116). And such political movements as the *Lambrakis Youth* could bear reasonable comparison with Civil Rights movements at the time highly active in USA.

However, unlike the Folk Revival which we normally view as directly connected to the Civil Rights Movement in America, Theodorakis's Art-Popular did not aim at

What's more, we all like your music.' (Theodorakis 1972 b: 157, the whole Theodorakis-Ladas conversation: 154-159)

'unearthing' old material and resinging old songs. Instead, it focused on contemporary artistic production that would purify the popular diction. In the American folk revival composers of new songs were soon to take centre stage and their repertory was quickly mingled with the older folk repertory. But the focus of attention was primarily the older material, at least until Bob Dylan's arrival. Unlike that, Art-Popular focused on the work of a handful of composers, Theodorakis and his imitators, all of whom may have shared a 'folkish' view of popular music, but wrote exclusively new music. Theodorakis, unlike the folk revival main's figures, had the very interesting aim not only to alter the Greek musical map overnight, but also to cover the whole of this map with completely new music: his music.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Theodorakis's work reinserted a nationistic element into the conception of popular music along with a new compartmentalization; having capitalized on the popularity of rebetiko genres, Theodorakis's Art-Popular was soon presented as the only authentically Greek song genre, while all the popular trends flourishing in the West were seen with suspicion. Following Theodorakis's condemnation of the 'Light Song' and his national-popular rhetorics, western popular music styles, including jazz and rock'n'roll, were largely condemned as non-Greek, easily manipulated by the record industry; thus one of the main characteristics of the 60s in the west, youth culture, was being sacrificed for a 'Greece first' cultural ideology.

In place of a conclusion: The 60s of the two composers

In the previous pages I have shown how Hadjidakis's and Theodorakis's work became central in the popular music system of Greek culture; I have also argued that it was through the work of these two composers that the field of Greek popular music was reorganized and finally represented. What also becomes evident from a consideration of their work and cultural politics is the powerful performance of authorial personae they both offer, the first to be achieved by popular musicians in modern Greek culture. As I

⁷⁶ The impact Theodorakis's project and rhetoric had (apart from the strictly musical influence) on the popular music market in Greece goes sometimes unnoticed by its very 'naturalization'. To take one example, the decline of singles the market in the 70s and the subsequent elevation of the album as the main cultural monad of popular music, as opposed to the song, the hit and the single, were a direct result of the generalization of the 'Song cycle' politics that Theodorakis introduced and countless imitators followed after the restoration of Democracy. Unlike Anglo-American pop, Greek popular music failed to produce a Charts list and a considerable singles market until well into the 90s.

have outlined, discourses of Classical Music and Literature were instrumental in this self-production of the composer as an author/artist:

- 1) *Classical Music*. Both Theodorakis and Hadjidakis were first received as classical music composers by the Greek intelligentsia; we saw how Theodorakis's onslaught on the popular culture system started with a manifesto which was seemingly about art music and classical music education. Furthermore, we saw how Theodorakis's rhetorics constantly borrowed from classical music value distinctions to support his project for the birth of the Art-Popular movement.
- 2) *Literature*. Poetry and literature were their main interlocutor in the attempted formation of a distinct cultural and national identity politics; but also more palpably, this same poetic discourse, was either distorting/evolving it, as is the case of Hadjidakis (see Hadjidakis's allusions to the poetry of Gatsos, or his use of Gatsos's lyrics), or setting it to music as in the case of Theodorakis.
- 3) *Folklore /Popular*. I reviewed how Hadjidakis's first formulations on 'urban popular music' were based on a rewriting of the concept of tradition by the generation of the 30s. We have also seen Theodorakis reclaiming a folkloric view of the popular.

Even though Theodorakis and Hadjidakis dominated the musical field of the Greek 60s, they both introduced a dualism that could be seen as intrinsically opposed to the spirit of the 60s: for Hadjidakis popular culture could function as an aestheticized sphere separate from its actual use - popular music was ultimately not experienced through the body, but rather originated from a mind reminiscing on its (past) body. Theodorakis introduced in his rhetorics another version of the mind/body divide: his proclaimed Art-Popular, was an attempt to 'intellectualize the popular' (Beaton 1981), to produce art music value from popular expression, at a time when classical music scholars contended that 'the brain is associated with art music while 'brainless' with pop' (cited in Frith 1995: 362). If we accept, as Simon Frith does, that statements such as this were another manifestation of the mind/body dualism, we also have to admit that Theodorakis's politics, for all their 'power to the people' rhetoric, insisted on a transposition of the body to the mind, of the popular to the intellectual, of the artistic to the political and of pop to classical music.

We can see here that, for all its popularity and political use, Theodorakis/Hadjidakis's 60s, also became an imposed system that, although creating a sense of 'self-contained popular culture' (Hadjidakis) and political engagement (Theodorakis), both global characteristics of the 60s, also lacked other important aspects of what has been described as 'the spirit' of the decade. The mind/body divide, the high/low and the Greek/non-Greek distinctions that were reinserted into the domain of popular culture were effectively blocking places of contestation that arose in other countries: a focus on the body and identity politics, an inherent and purposeful transcendence of the high/low divide, and a certain cultural globalisation that was mostly expressed in the world influence of Anglo-Saxon pop/rock movements. In the end, the two composers' version of 'localised 60s' was not, for many, as multiple, fluid and liberational as its Western counterpart. Costas Taktsis, the celebrated novelist and translator, has commented very evocatively on the difference between the Greek and the international 60s:

In the West, to the sound of the music of the Beatles, and under the influence of psychedelic drugs that were at the time sold without restrictions, various liberational movements had erupted: youth movements, feminist, homosexual, black movements; the flower generation was also about to appear, rock would turn into pop, and I had experienced all that, partly participating - albeit in my own way - partly as a mere observer.

What did I find upon my return to Greece? The same provincial hell, parochial ideas, and unsolved contradictions that I had left behind some years earlier. Young workmen and students were on the streets demonstrating to the sound of Theodorakis's hymns, to the slogans '114', 'bread-education-liberation'; in the tavernas the first generation of the 'kamakia' [predatory Greeks courting tourists] were dancing the syrtaki self-absorbed, unself-conscious with the tourists looking on. They called this 'a spring', they called this a 'renaissance' (1989: 371).

The ways a younger generation - still in the shadow of its predecessors - chose to revisit the unresolved contradictions described above, will be discussed in the Part 3, where I will survey the work of Dionysis Savvopoulos.

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Part 3: The 60s, the singer-songwriter and his way to a-void
Dionysis Savvopoulos and the new challenges of popular music (1963-1975)

1. 'The spirit of the '60s' and the dissonant politics of mimicry

Fearing that I'd become my enemy
 In the instant that I preach
 My existence led by confusion boats
 Mutiny from stern to bow
 Bob Dylan, 'My Back Pages'

I take a walk to the station
 And I change my theories
 It is high time I dispensed
 With these Back Pages
 Dionysis Savvopoulos, 'Oi piso mou selides' (My Back Pages)

I have so far shown the important extent to which Greek popular music was given a substance, 'named', 'shaped' and 'mapped' by the efforts (and the performative power of the work) of Manos Hadjidakis and Mikis Theodorakis. The work of the 'two composers' may have challenged the existing cultural system, but it was itself eventually transformed into a part of the canon, generating new exclusions, rewritings and relocations of cultural capital. In this way, their popular culture politics eventually created uncharted territories. As Costas Taktis implied in the quotation with which I closed the last chapter, there was a huge discrepancy between that 'purposeful' image of popular culture put forward by Mikis Theodorakis and the youth counterculture that was already booming in other parts of the world. Hadjidakis and Theodorakis outlined a field of high-popular that effectively nominated a large part of what was already popular with audiences as low and artless. Quite unexpectedly, however, this organization of popular space (high, 'artistic' popular vs. lowly commercial pop) decisively left out 'the spirit of the 60s', the youth and countercultural popular politics we associate with the decade, the pop and rock genres which are often seen as 'the central cultural form of the 60s' (Sayres et al. 1984: 327). The mutation of this exclusion into new expression is evident

in the work of those artists who tried to reverse this balance and readdress the 'missing 60s' in Greece.

The Greek 60s as re-produced by Savvopoulos.

I will now turn to the work of singer-songwriter Dionysis Savvopoulos and his renegotiation of the ideas of culture, tradition and literature, nation, rebellion and the field of popular culture and popular music. I will read 'the spirit of the 60s' through Savvopoulos and focus especially on his paradigmatic use of the 'mechanisms' of popular culture, both external and internal, that is, both those operating at the level of culture industry practices and those influencing the established popular culture narrative.

Savvopoulos started his career by consciously adopting a style full of allusions to Georges Brassens, infusing it at later stages with a persistent adherence to the work of Bob Dylan. His dialogue with an emerging 'Greek rock' scene towards the end of the decade, the constant re-working of Dylan's iconic performance and his close contact with the emerging poetic avant-garde (which appeared under the constraint of the Greek dictatorship) made Savvopoulos an undisputedly central point of reference for the Greek 60s. Largely perceived even today as the 'bard of the generation of the 60s',⁷⁷ this songwriter absorbed the socio-political situation of the decade and transformed it into a quest for new popular forms. Instead of using literature's problematics and prestige in order to establish a popular music field, as was the practice of his predecessors, Savvopoulos moved on to construct his artistry as the vehicle to challenge literary and canonical cultural sensibilities. In these terms, his work can be viewed as paradigmatic. Karen Van Dyck provides a starting point:

Savvopoulos is useful in mapping out the cultural landscape of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not only does a contrast between him and Theodorakis provide an analogy for the difference between the

⁷⁷ The artist Hronis Botsoglou writes: 'To speak about Savvopoulos, is to speak about the adventure of our generation [...]. In Savvopoulos's work the adventure [of 'the generation of the 60s'] is so obvious. Possibly because he is the one who went further in this search, because more than any of us, he found pieces of our self' (Botsoglou 1975: 34). Similar comments abound; see Savvidis 1985; Politis 2000; Politis 2002; Karabelias 1985. Savvopoulos has commented on himself as the representative of a generation in one of his late songs, 'Tou 60 oi ekdromeis' (The excursionists of the 60s) from *To Kourema* (1988)

poetry of the younger generation and the older poets, but Savvopoulos himself was included in various anthologies as one of the poets of the generation of the 1970s, and his homeopathic use of the paralogical was a trademark of the poetry of many of his peers (Van Dyck 1998: 54).

Behind Van Dyck's 'contrast' between Savvopoulos and Theodorakis on either side of the gap between youth culture and an already established high-popular culture, as the struggle between older poets and a younger poetic generation and the tension between metaphor and metonymy, we find the set of terms which produce 'the periodization of the 60s' in Greece. Instead of seeing Savvopoulos as a poet, I will argue that his song artistry became the prototype for artistic/poetic strategies in and after the 60s. I will also try later to deconstruct Van Dyck's ideas on the homeopathic and the paralogical: instead of cultural *homeopathy*, I tend to see in Savvopoulos the dislocating effects of a strategic *mimicry* in the Bhabhaian sense, and in the place of the *paralogical*, I read an eruption of *jouissance* that radicalizes artistic subjectivity.

My most crucial rereading though will be characterized by the effort to push the Theodorakis-Savvopoulos 'contrast' to its theoretical excess. Why and how, I will ask, does Savvopoulos achieve such an iconic status? In what sense is he representative of the 60s generation? Finally, how can we unpack, through and with Savvopoulos, the conceptual baggage of the 60s as a larger construct?

The 60s in Process.

Let us first remind ourselves what we understand by the term '60s counterculture'.⁷⁸

Theodore Roszak gives a useful overview in *The Making of a Counter Culture*:

Never before had protest raised issues that went so philosophically deep, delving into the very meaning of reality, sanity, and human purpose. Out of that dissent grew the most ambitious agenda for the reappraisal of cultural values that any society has ever produced. Everything was called into question: family, work, education, success, child rearing, male-female relations, sexuality, urbanism, science, technology, progress. The meaning of wealth, the meaning of love, the meaning of life - all

⁷⁸ I prefer this spelling, accepted by the *OED*, to 'counter culture' and 'counter-culture', both also in use. The same applies to my preference for 'subculture' over 'sub-culture'.

became issues in need of examination. What is “culture”? Who decides what “excellence” is? Or “knowledge” or “reason”? (Roszak 1995: xxvi)

Evident questions arise: is the ‘60s’ a cultural ‘moment’ evolving simultaneously and in exactly similar ways in different countries? Are there different ways through which the ‘60s atmosphere’ is introduced as a revolutionary, subversive, liberational agenda, in different contexts, countries and cultures, then taken up as an argument in diverse political debates? Should we be using ‘the 60s’ as a theoretical concept, seeing it as a historical period with analytical resonance? And, if this is the case, what is the place of youth culture in this theorization?

Rewriting the popular image of the 60s from the perspective of the 80s, Fredric Jameson sees the decade as:

a moment when the enlargement of capitalism on a global scale simultaneously produced an immense freeing or unbinding of social energies, a prodigious release of untheorized new forces of black and “minority” or Third World movements everywhere, regionalisms, the development of new and militant bearers of “surplus consciousness” in the student and women’s movements, as well as in a host of struggles of other kinds [...] The 60s were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit; a universal abandonment of the referential gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of ever more devalued signifiers (Jameson 1984: 208).

One thing that Fredric Jameson’s seminal text ‘Periodizing the 60s’ has helped us to understand is that different spheres of human life came together in the 60s to produce a sense of an era *in the process of unfolding*. His version of the decade is a multi-layered reading of, among other things, ‘the adventures of the sign’, Marcuse’s cultural autonomy, international politics, the Vietnam War, the student uprisings and so on. In his ‘universalizing’ narrative, the difference between the *foco* guerrilla tactics of the first half of the decade and the ‘urban guerrilla movement’ of the second half is read in (and as) the context of the contrast between the Nouveau Roman and the experimental writing of Sollers. Jameson’s main point could be read as follows: literature, popular culture, international politics and economic developments, all these different spheres, are epiphenomena of a larger movement culminating in the emergence of late capitalism. ‘This sense of freedom and possibility -which is for the course of the 60s a

momentarily objective reality, as well as [...] a historical illusion - can perhaps best be explained in terms of the superstructural movements and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another' (208).

However, on re-reading Jameson I realize that the crucial argument lies elsewhere: all spheres may emanate from a single economic evolution, but what is important in this process is that the reading of a single layer, through its internal signs and periodizations, makes one aware of the whole period: the movement, that is, of the '60s' as a whole. In other words, one sphere 'reads' the other, the experience of each sphere makes (and *made*) one aware of the period as period. In this sense, the 60s *was* a chronotopy when history *changes tense*, and *becomes* a gesture of the *present*. At the heart of his article, Jameson reminds us of a short story by Borges: the Moebius Strip, in which the author imagines a map 'so rigorous and referential that it becomes coterminous with its object'. I would argue that every manifestation of human activity in the 60s came to resemble Borges's map, becoming not a representation of life, but life itself.

Supported by Jameson's theorization, I want to make the case for popular music clearer at this point. Popular music indeed plays a pivotal role in *shaping* the 60s and in representing youth culture as unified, dynamic and oppositional within this period. In these terms, popular music has to be treated as both an external and an internal cultural mark. It helps us reconstruct the 60s as an era but also conveys the feeling that it acted *internally*, that is, *during* this period, in creating a sense of the period itself.

To take an example: Jameson proposes as an internal periodization for the 60s 'a secondary break around 1967'. This break is, indeed, inscribed within popular music's 'history' in an almost figurative way: rock'n'roll *vs.* high 60s electric rock, folk *vs.* rock balladry, the Beatles of 'Love Me Do' *vs.* the Beatles of the *White Album*, Georges Brassens *vs.* Serge Gainsbourg, early 'folk' Dylan, *vs.* Dylan 'turned electric'. In short, popular music seems to follow a periodization pattern similar to that of the intellectual, political and economic debate in the 60s (as described by Jameson in his 'two parts of the 60s' theory). However, as a lived experience and a lived antagonism of styles, this internal periodization of popular music within the decade also becomes the canvas *for* the (experience of the) intellectual and political debate.

If there is one song which accurately conveys this feeling, it is Bob Dylan's 'My Back Pages' (1964), a song about two selves (an older and a newer) oppositionally placed but inextricably articulated:

Crimson flames tied through my ears
 Rolling high and mighty traps
 Pulsed with fire on flaming roads
 Using ideas as my maps
 We'll meet on edges soon, said I
 Proud 'neath heated brow

*Ah but I was so much older then
 I'm younger than that now*

Half racked prejudice leap forth
 Ripped out all hate I screamed
 Lies that life is black and white
 Spoke from a skull I dreamed
 Romantic facts of musketeers
 Foundationed deep somehow

*Ah but I was so much older then
 I'm younger than that now*
 [...]

The younger self questions political certainties and stable oppositional identities by denouncing the 'older self' of the folk singer/preacher. Strikingly, the song simultaneously shares and denounces the folk ideology and its liberational agenda. We should not forget that Dylan's changes of style and rhetorics during the decade were innumerable, occurring at an exhausting pace. 'My Back Pages', released in the heart of the 60s, thus became a figurative moment in a decade that contained an internal divide, a decade unfolding into two selves (an older and a newer self, both articulated almost simultaneously), a generation gap revisited as a historical project. As both older and newer selves moved to the present, history itself unfolded as a contestatory ground caught in the moment of the utterance, the whole decade folding back into the body of a

(hi)storyteller. 'Fearing that I'd become my enemy/ In the instant that I preach/ My existence led by confusion boats/ Mutiny from stern to bow'.

Stuart Hall has claimed that "new times" are both "out there", changing our conditions of life, and "in here", working on us. In part, it is *us* who are being "re-made" (1989: 120). As I understand it, the 60s can be summed up by putting the emphasis on the tense of Hall's words: to *be being* re-made. Hence, the *procession of the 60s* has to be seen as a synonym of *the subject in process*, a formulation Hall borrows from Kristeva (see Kristeva [1972] 1998). Hall argues that the main legacy of 'the cultural revolution of the 60s' was the profound change in the conceptualization of the subject:

We can no longer conceive of 'the individual' in terms of a whole, centred, stable and completed Ego or autonomous, rational 'self'. The 'self' is conceptualised as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit, something with a history, 'produced', in process. The 'subject' is differently placed or positioned by different discourses and practices (ibid).

This epochal radicalization of subjectivity more than anything else characterizes, I believe, the 60s as a whole. It is intercalated with the events of that period (producing them and being produced by them) and became the vehicle through which many of the debates of the 60s were articulated. My intention is to focus on the ways in which new subjectivities affected the field of popular music, but the centrality of this aspect for the period makes such a discussion inevitably slide into its 'constant context'.

Greek 'mi-mi-cries'.

A crucial break in the 60s happens, according to Fredric Jameson, in around 1967. Iconic events of that year: Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia, Bob Dylan had a 'mysterious' motorbike accident, Israel seized the West Bank after the Six-Day War, the Shanghai Commune was launched, the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was released and Timothy Leary's 'summer of love' unfolded in San Francisco; it was also in this year that the Greek military seized power. For Greece, the dictatorship imposed a very palpable internal break on the 60s (ironically coinciding with Jameson

theoretical periodization). As well as being a matter of internal politics, it was also seen as a direct effect of the 'global situation'. Moreover, I would argue, it was also the iconic surplus of a global context and the echoes of the western youth counterculture, that furnished the Greek youth with a vital form of opposition to the dictatorship. In a sublimely evocative text, Roger Miliex, the director of the French Institute in Greece, remembers that 'yesterday [30 November 1970], on their way out of a screening of the film *Woodstock*, which presents the pop festivals of the American youth, two thousand young Athenians demonstrated in the centre of the capital, shouting slogans against the police, before engaging in a confrontation with them' (Miliex 1987: 347).

The Greek youth were effectively dis-placing (or, metonymically placing) their opposition to the dictatorship by adopting the countercultural energy of *Woodstock*. These adolescents were also, however, uttering a surplus with their gesture by presenting their oppressive other (dictatorship) as part of a global oppressive Other (the authorities of late capitalism, American politics⁷⁹ and so on). They were thus *locating* their struggle in (the context of) the 60s and *dis-locating* the abusive topos of the Greek dictatorship. In an almost postcolonial manner, the location of their cultural power came as an effect of mimicry: the lines in the queues for cinema tickets were effectively turned inside-out, and re-produced as demonstrations.

In a similar context, Dionysis Savvopoulos 'going electric' was a central point of discussion in the Athenian press of 1969-1970. The main issue was not the new style as such, but the division between a former and a newer self. Asked in an interview to define 'his cultural point of view', Savvopoulos replied: 'My audience follows exhausted; before even waiting for them to adapt to what I'm saying, *I appear as an entirely different person* in the second part [of my concerts], and this happens against my will' (*Epikaira* 5 July 1970, reprinted in Savvopoulos 1984: 41). This is a direct

⁷⁹ Christopher Hitchens employs a recognizably 60s rhetorics when he describes the jewels 'in the crown of those successful Washington-inspired military coups and counter-revolutions that featured Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964, went on through Indonesia in 1965 and Greece in 1967, and extended as far as [Chile in 1973 and] Cyprus in 1974' (Hitchens, 2002: 3). In his poem entitled 'They receive instructions against Chile', Pablo Neruda is similarly evocative of a power lurking behind the scenes: 'But we have to see behind all these, there is something/ behind the traitors and the gnawing rats,/ an empire which sets the table,/ and serves up the nourishment and the bullets./ They want to repeat their great success in Greece./ Greek playboys at the banquet, and bullets/ for the people in the mountains' (ibid). The impression that the CIA was behind the dictatorship was commonly held by Greeks during and after the junta years.

reference to Bob Dylan and in particular to his 1965 world tour, in which, as the 'Royal Albert Hall Concert' live recording shows, the songwriter's performance was in two parts, the first acoustic, the second electric. However, through the bi-partite performing self Savvopoulos was putting forward, people in Greece read two different forms of songwriting: one directly political and urging collective participation, the other based on beatnik-style cryptographic narratives and announcing a newer form of 'personal/emotional' protest. They also saw it as representing two distinct phases in Savvopoulos's career, one influenced by indigenous composers and French songwriters and the other decisively oriented towards rock. The sudden change of the performing self within a single performance can also be seen as symbolically replaying the main sociopolitical rupture of the 60s in Greece, the 1967 imposition of the dictatorship.⁸⁰

With the benefit of hindsight, the songwriter who 'appears as an entirely different person in the second half', performed a 'self' multiple, fragmented and incomplete, a self, as Hall has described it, "'produced", in process'. In these terms, what started as the re-visiting of a prototype became a resignified map: it aspired to tell us *something more* than the musical conversion of the songwriter or his alliance with his generic forefathers in international rock. Rather it aimed at locating, in this surplus created by the mimicry of a foreign model (Dylan's conversion), a fully-fledged cultural critique. '*And this happens against my will*': what Savvopoulos produced with his conversion was not popular music *of* the 60s, but popular music that let itself *be spoken by* the 60s.

The difference between these 'new popular subjects' articulated through the matrix of the 60s and the popular author(itie)s of the previous generation is important. To remain in the context of Greece, if Theodorakis's popular music envisaged an original and originary moment of high art, predicated upon the transcendental importance of poetry made oral and 'offered' to the masses, the focus towards the end of the 60s turned to a popular moment which was self-consciously derivative and in confrontation with the audience and the performing self. Instead of embodying 'the people's authentic voice', the generation 'of the 60s' proposed a radical view of

⁸⁰ Recalling the audience's reaction to Savvopoulos 'appearing completely different' in 1969, the critic Giorgos Notaras argues: 'What had happened in the meantime [and resulted in this change of style]? [...] In our lives (and in Savvopoulos's) the sudden change was the junta.' (Notaras 1979: 82)

authenticity diffused into its other; it employed imitation revisited as mimicry,⁸¹ commercial reification doubled up as subversion. We can see how new pop strategies contested older 'high-popular' authorities by turning to our original contrast between Theodorakis and Savvopoulos.

Cultural (post)colonialism

While Mikis Theodorakis praised the authenticity and topicality of popular culture, Savvopoulos's poetics focused on the opposite, a well-organized, strategic mimicry. Theodorakis usually presented global capitalism, industrialization and 'mimeticism' as 'the site of evil' in popular culture. In an interview conducted in France in 1960, Theodorakis argued that the fact that Greece was spared the latest economic 'progress' of the West, guaranteed its safety from the culture industry's colonial grip. In other countries, Theodorakis warned, the culture industry had already imposed a 'cultural mimeticism' which in turn produced derivative and disposable pop:

Our people are deprived of the most advanced goods of industrial civilization; this is the privilege of the privileged people of Europe and North America. Hence [Greeks] console themselves by being what they always were: a people of poets, singers, dancers. Here in France, the French live like ghosts. What this people once was has now been transformed into 'Son et lumière' and a ticket for the tourists. They have surrendered, without mounting the least resistance, to the caprices of "civilization" (in other words, to the big capital's interests). Let me make one thing clear: they will dance to rock n' roll, they will sing à la Espagnola/Italiana or à la Greca, just because this is what they are ordered to do by those who milk them: the big record and film industries, etc. In Greece - thanks to our poverty!...- we have not reached this point yet. Our musical tradition still courses through our people's veins. [Greeks may be] bombarded by the lowest mass culture products, but their resilience [is great]. (Theodorakis 1986: 187)

Apparently, the perceived resilience was overestimated. Only some years into the decade, in an interview with the youth publication *E Genia Mas* of January 1966, the composer despaired that 'our popular composers have taken the path towards decline,

⁸¹ According to the *OED* mimicry is associated with an unsettling misrepresentation, an imitation with parodic effects. The first definition of the word is 'to ridicule by imitating or copying (a person, his speech, manner, gestures, etc.)'. A second use denotes 'servile, unintelligent, or otherwise ridiculous

some towards the West with cha cha, some others looking to the East, copying Turkish, Egyptian and Indian motifs. Life does not hit them anymore like a sword inflicting the wounds from which the genuine popular song springs' (Theodorakis 1982: 22).

Imitation 'of foreign models' is seen as a by-product of the capitalist economy.

Moreover, the cultural hybrid of indigenous styles and foreign influences is pronounced as both inauthentic (*the genuine song does not spring...*) and moribund (*life does not hit them...*). This kind of music is proscribed as artless, a fall from the grace of the truly popular/ genuinely artistic, a death under the 'machinations of promotion, gain and advertisement', produced by separation from real life and the roots of tradition.

Theodorakis's discourse, typical of the rhetoric of the high-popular, is most obviously limited by its underlying model: seen as a means of emancipation, popular music is thus considered an evolutionary project. It stakes its value on the eternal, the authentic, the original, the always oppositional and never recuperated. Popular music that focused on the potentials of the momentary, the historically localized, the ironically repeated, aesthetically changing and alternately recuperated/resignified (and, for that matter, mechanically produced and reproduced), is seen in this context as a dangerous failure.

Theodorakis maintains that 'the people' have to understand and act in full comprehension, with the music addressed to them promoting consciousness and ideological clarity: 'The masses still need to "understand" - not only aesthetically, sensually and in an abstract way - but rationally and precisely. In other words, they need a precise content and ideas they care about and fully understand, in order to be able to identify completely [with popular music]' (Theodorakis 1972: 43). Hidden behind this statement is Theodorakis's hostility towards those popular culture strategies in the 60s that defined a younger generation.

Savvopoulos's comments on his influences give us a glimpse of these new popular strategies, as well as underlining this dramatic contrast with Theodorakis and his artistic ideology. In the place of conscious understanding and difference, we are suddenly faced with partial interest in the signified, with fragmented understanding,

imitation'. I am here leaning on the associations of the word in a postcolonial context, where mimicry's misrepresentation and servility are turned into an effective oppositional strategy.

mimicry and irony. From a long series of similar extracts, I will here focus on a well-crafted interview published in the literary journal *Diavazo* which, in addition, very usefully maps the ‘internal periodization’ of the 60s described above:

-Where do you think your influences, both in terms of your poetic language and your music, lie?
 -From the radio. Light songs, Laika songs, pop songs, everything. Later, when we bought a record player, I also listened to foreign songs. I was mesmerized by the unknown language. What were all those ‘u’, ‘e’, ‘as’, ‘es’, ‘bee’? What was carried in the magical phrase ‘come prima di piú, di prima tameró’? or “only you”, or “sous le ciel de Paris” etc.? I was not interested in their translation at all, I was simply [*aplos*] mimicking [the words]. Later on, when I used to listen to more difficult stuff, like Brassens or Dylan, a friend might pass by, and he might describe [*perigrapsei*] what was going on [in the song]. This was all I needed. I would then sit alone, play the record and recall my friend’s narration; I would also add whatever I wanted, to magical effect. I have been greatly influenced by all these friends’ narrations *into* foreign songs. Thus, I never needed nor have I ever missed the exact translations of all those songs I loved: Brassens, Dylan, Brel, some blues, the Stones. (Savvopoulos 1978: 18)

This paragraph, as it stands, is a prime example of how expressive/excessive mimesis evolves into mimicry, and how this is presented as a productive way *to do* popular music. Instead of analysis, translation and understanding, the first reaction while listening to popular music is to mime, a move presented as directly analogous to that of listening and listening again, re-listening and re-playing the record. This process prompts language to expose its materiality, to become, in a very Barthesian fashion, a pure signifier, disconnected from its signified. Once mimesis is transformed into a blissful semiotic iteration, mimicry is already under way: ‘*I was not interested in the translation, I was simply mimicking*’. The key to transforming the mimetic impulse into mimicry is the diffusion of signification, the de-ideologization of the process hidden in the adverb *aplos*. I *simply* mimicked them: simply here stands for the everyday, the mundane, but also the excessive (because unrestrained), the supplementary (because unimportant). *Simply* becomes a mechanism through which stable meaning is dislocated, disqualified: ‘*I never missed the exact translations*’.

Simply, in this context, is this generation’s offering to the complex socio-political matrix of the 60s, as spelled out in the first part of the period. They *simply* mimed:

behind this de-signified repetition lies fun, pleasure (indeed bliss, *jouissance*). This is a version of the *swinging 60s* on their way to becoming the *high 60s*. A version of excess before it becomes resignified as direct oppositionality.

In a second phase, coinciding, we could say, with the move from the swinging to the high 60s, the dialogue with members of the same generation and group comes into play: '*Afterwards, when I was listening to more difficult stuff... a friend might come along and describe*'. The space opened up with this dialogic infusion of meaning is the space of writing. The songs are thought of as multidimensional texts containing structures of signification: instead of 'conveying the message' in full, the friends would dissect it and 'describe what was going on'. The verb used here is not, I think, coincidental (in Greek *perigrafo*, a composite of *grafo*: I write). Like Dylan's narrator, who realized his former self's preaching fallacy by textualizing that self (hence 'back pages'), the friends who de-scribed to Savvopoulos, performed a primary act of writing *into* the song. After that, the songwriter himself follows with another re-play of the record, a repetition that is now infused with new writing: 'I would then sit alone, play the record and recall my friend's narration; *I would also add whatever I wanted*'.

As Homi Bhabha reminds us, 'what emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry repeats rather than re-presents' (Bhabha 1994: 87-88). Bhabha's idea travels well, I believe, even when extracted from its context (postcolonialism, the government in India, imposed mimicry as a negation of Western ideals). Mimicry produces writing, repeats rather than represents, and thus introduces a new modal framework. Instead of the metaphorical axis of representation, mimicry brings along an endless series of repetitions: it inaugurates the metonymical moment which destabilizes the original, the authentic and the (r)evolutionary. Within this strategy the original loses its rights over the process. It becomes (in an Oedipal reversal) an unretrieved supplement, an unused and unmissed originary moment. '*I never needed nor have I ever missed the exact translations of all those songs I loved*'.

More notes on mimicry

The surplus of mimicry so evident in the adoption of popular music styles across cultures should also be addressed in a more general theoretical manner.

As is by now clear, I use the term as formulated by post-colonial theory, especially by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. In a powerful rewriting of both Lacan and Foucault, Bhabha understands mimicry as, first, the condition enforced upon the colonial subject by the colonizer: mimicry is 'a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other'. Colonial subjects may be forced to imitate the forms and values of the culture of the colonizer, but, crucially, the colonial power insists on producing the colonized Other as '*the same but not quite*'. In order for colonial discrimination to be safeguarded, colonization depends on the production of the Other as *almost* the same, someone who imitates the master's discourse but can never completely achieve its status. Thus, mimicry resurfaces as 'the sign of a double articulation' which 'poses an *immanent* threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers' (Bhabha 1994: 86). In Bhabha's reading, mimicry signals a constant threat for the colonizer by opening up the space in which authority is dismantled by difference. This is a space where hybrid forms of expression are favoured, fluid and differential strategies adopted in the uttering of subjectivity, and where repetition signals disrupting difference rather than sameness.

But how can we transpose mimicry so radically from a postcolonial context to a cultural overview of the 60s? Who is the colonizer and who the colonized in our discussion? I would argue that postcolonialism as an historical moment of reversed speaking and of rewriting is strategically crucial for such an overview. For Fredric Jameson (here following Ernest Mandel's views in *Late Capitalism*) late capitalism signals a period when the West transformed its relationship to the colonies into a neo-colonialism characterized by 'market penetration, [destruction of] the older village communities and a whole new wage-labor poor and lumpenproletariat' (Jameson 1984: 206). This moment is inextricably linked with 'the emergence of that *seemingly* very different thing in the First World, variously termed consumer society, post-industrial society, media society and the like' (207). But this is not as different as it seems: the neocolonialism emerging in the 'Third' World (a socio-economic situation that can be seen as constitutive of post-colonial societies) is not simply contemporaneous with

Western consumer society; it is its flipside. As Jameson asserts, 'late capitalism in general (and the 60s in particular) constitute a process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism - the last vestiges of noncommodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world - are now ultimately *penetrated* and *colonized* in their turn' (207, my emphasis). In this core structure of the 60s, late capitalism redoubles colonialism into neo-colonialism while the postcolonial moment is also turned 'inwards', against the 'First World', penetrating all its diverse spheres. Post-industrialism/ consumerism/ media society are different names for the West's auto-colonization, a diffuse postcoloniality that re-narrates the centre. The particularity of the Global Village is that it takes up all three potential roles: colonizer, colonial space (colonized) and postcolonial site. Oppression and opposition are articulated in the same chronotopy - there are no more enclaves of freedom and lapses in exploitation. The most effective contestation in late capitalism is uttered in a non-space. The revolutionary topos gets upstaged by a modality of response, a *sly civility* (see Bhabha 1994: 93-101).

My thesis argues that global(ized) capitalism produces its subjects as both compliant consumers and potential threats, sly impostors of compliance. How does this happen? Limiting our analysis to popular culture, we can see more clearly how global capitalism, almost in the manner of an old colonizing force, produces difference through excess. Driven by market forces, the aim of the culture industry is to manipulate production and magnify consumption, but this strategy also gives rise to a differential excess. The industrialization of popular music and the tendency to create bigger markets by pushing the young to overspend on their leisure produced the leisure excess that would be resignified in the 60s as *fun*. Fun became unsettling and upsetting because it was structurally (and not accidentally) excessive.

Following this reading, the schematic halves of the 60s, the swinging 60s and the high 60s of youth protest and rock counterculture, both seem linked through the notion of excess, first seen as uncontainable fun, then used as a conscious place of/for mimicry. The fact that fun becomes political in the high 60s has to be ascribed to a more confident use of mimicry, a self-conscious misuse of the society of the spectacle to an oppositional end. Thus the 60s encapsulate a move from the spectacularly excessive to the excess as spectacular resistance. To quote Bhabha once again:

mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. When the words of the master become the site of hybridity [...] then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain (Bhabha 1994: 121).

Thinking of the Greek adolescents who engaged in an act of civil disobedience after watching *Woodstock* (not by being at Woodstock) as producers of ‘spectacular resistances’ does not belittle their real, risky confrontation with power; rather, it opens up ways of thinking resistance in its multiplicity. ‘The words of the master’ in this case were obviously not proper colonial decrees, but the symbols of a double authority: of an undemocratic coercive government which had given the film the go-ahead (possibly because it was American), and of an industrialized cultural violence, against which *Woodstock* was a cry of resistance. In the same way that *Woodstock* ‘stood against’ the culture industry which was already about to turn it into a repeatable musical festival and a commercial film, the Athenian filmgoers/demonstrators found the space of opposition not outside the system of coercion, but within its very form.

Imitation as Form, Mimicry as Resistance

Savvopoulos has spoken at length about imitation, effectively putting his generic identification (‘the Greek Brassens’ and the ‘the Greek Bob Dylan’) into an ironic perspective. For him, rock music is the quintessential musical form based on imitation evolving into mimicry. In a very interesting quotation, an image of authenticity is turned upside down: rock music is first considered ‘the most authentic genre’, only to reappear at the end of the paragraph as the offspring of a mimetic strategy. This is, in a sense, what I have been calling mimicry - authenticity reversed:

[Rock music] is the most authentic [musical] genre. Do you know what rock is? ... I shall give you an example. You see a child that seems to have everything, but everything ... and nothing appeals to it. “What is the problem with this child?” teachers, parents and society wonder. If this child, on its way to expressing itself, *borrowes the means of another pain, historically and socially determined*, then what emerges is rock. The best American children after the 50s, *repressed by the formalism of school and social life in general, in order to express their pain*, what did they imitate? The music of a world

which knew what it was suffering from: the Negroes' world. *Then [in the 60s] something different stemmed from this mimesis, rock music.* (interview in *Eleutherotypia* 12 May 1980, reprinted in Savvopoulos 1981: 47, emphasis added).

According to this interpretation, rock music, the 'music that defined the [high] 60s' is based precisely on its self-conscious mis-repeating of history, its mimicry 'of this other pain'. Rock (emerging from rock'n'roll, itself developing from blues) is the copy of a copy, an historical dislocation. We should not overlook the songwriter's reference to the educational and institutional matrix from which 'the best children' sprang. The adolescents 'who did not know what they were suffering from' had to dress up 'in the pain of a real suffering'. In short, their revolt was based on mimicry because late-capitalist society ('school and social life') made them unaware of their social place and its demands. Their revolt was one of excess (not knowing what and why) and it was excessive.

This is important to my view of mimicry both as a way of resisting the cultural colonialism of late capitalism *and* as the ontological position impressed upon subjects *by* late capitalism. In colonial fashion, late capitalism imposes upon its subjects what Homi Bhabha has called a 'metonymy of presence'. In this view, 'formalism of school and social life in general' produces metonymies of presence, subjects re-produced as same and only able to become different through the repetition of sameness. Through these metonymies, strategically re-signified/rearticulated, new oppositionalities emerge. As Althusser has pointed out, the dominant ideology (diffused by the Ideological State Apparatuses) 'works primarily at the level of the unconscious; its function is to constitute us as historical subjects equipped for certain tasks in society' (in Eagleton 1991: 14). The radical moment of mimicry disturbs the ideological topography of the unconscious, unmasking dominant ideologies by self-consciously repeating them and making them iterable, in the process laying their workings bare. Mimicry always engages in a poetics of the surplus; it produces itself as an imitation, introducing the original as arranged, split, negotiated and in the end, not original at all.

We can now see the commonplaces with which Savvopoulos's career was met in a completely different light. He was variously seen as the anti-Theodorakis, the 'Balkan

beatnik', 'the most accomplished Greek rocker', the 'Greek Bob Dylan', the 'Greek Georges Brassens', 'the Greek troubadour of the 60s', the representative of the generation of the 60s and so on, terms which do not announce imitation, but point towards mimicry. As I now move on to examine Savvopoulos's poetics as typical of a new subjectivity that rearranges popular music, mimicry will be my guiding principle.

In his first period (albums *The Van/ The Fool's Garden*) mimicry creates confusion and internal subversion. It defies the field of high-popular/political music from within, and prepares the ground for a new cultural politics.

In the second period (1969-1975), mimicry emerges as a rereading of countercultural positionalities. The idea of the songwriter as a void, a hole in the meaning matrix that haunts the songs of this period is, I believe, also important for a review of the authorial structures within the popular field.

Savvopoulos will move on to propose a new version of artistic subjectivity based on fragmentary storytelling and 'lawless' enjoyment. I bring this study to a close with this image of the (hi)storyteller as the painfully fragmented, split, worn-out subject in process(ion) and jouissance.

Dionysis Savvopoulos, 'Our Old Friends'

Many things [in my songs] are reminiscent of Jacques Prévert, Christianopoulos, Theodorakis, Hadjidakis, Brassens and Romanos the Melodist. *My own personal speech is added, my meraki* (personal technique/commitment) so to speak. This is how, with thousands of influences, a new song is being made. It is warm, familiar, lively. It has a measure of happiness and a measure of sadness. Much faith and much hope. It is small enough to fit in a kiss, and big enough to fit in a revolution.⁸²

⁸² This note and the next two of this page are taken from the back cover of *Neo Kyma*, XLP 3206, Lyra 1965.

This was not the first time that revolution was becoming the catchphrase for the promotion of a new popular music style. As we saw earlier, Theodorakis had already promoted his style as a revolutionary one. What was new, however, was the pairing of revolution with the idea of youth,⁸³ which proved very successful as a commercial strategy. Neo Kyma as a generic term was soon a shorthand for ‘intellectual youth culture’, and later in the decade became the platform from which new styles, like rock and electric balladry, were ‘intellectualized’ and adopted, especially by students.

In Savvopoulos’s introductory paragraph, the new song(writer) is presented as a supplement: his ‘voice *is added*’, he says, to that of a French poet (Prévert), a Greek poet (Hristianopoulos), the two established Greek popular composers (Hadjidakis-Theodorakis), the French iconic singer-songwriter (Brassens), and a well-known Byzantine hymnographer of the 6th century (Romanos the Melodist). Seen closely, this is not an enumeration of forefathers, but a description of a contemporary field of cultural production, the evocation of a cultural strategy. We are presented with a cartography of the high-popular: the poet-singer in the mythological (Romanos) and contemporary (Brassens) forms, the field’s authorities (Hadjidakis-Theodorakis) and the poets who write in the vernacular (Prévert-Hristianopoulos).⁸⁴

Savvopoulos’s note also says something about the whole Neo Kyma genre. Indeed, through Neo Kyma, youth was produced by the culture industry as an addition (to the already staged ‘high-popular’) and through mimicry. The title of the genre, Neo Kyma, was itself a mistranslation and a commercially calculated move. We should here trace the story from its beginnings.

⁸³ In his study of Youth Organizations in Greece, Antonis Liakos points out that by the 60s a ‘consumerist youth-worshipping machinery’ was being set up in Greece (‘katanalotike neolatrike mehane’) (Liakos 1988: 65). As I argue, the Neo Kyma genre is only one part of this, capitalizing on its intellectual side. For the lower pop front, there was the Greek yéyé, the function of which is described later in this chapter.

⁸⁴ This ‘illustration of influences’ is also extended to the promotional material released at the time. In the two most famous photographs of the young Savvopoulos of 1965-1966 (the ones reprinted on page 6 and on the back cover of Savvopoulos 1982), he deliberately ‘stages himself’ in a mimicry of well-known promotional photographs of Georges Brassens on stage and Bob Dylan on a piano (from the back of *Highway 61 Revisited*) respectively. Later, this strategy of ‘unveiling influences’ would take a much more sophisticated form. In the notes of his *Collected Lyrics*, Savvopoulos mentions poems from which he has ‘borrowed’ verses, and friends from whom he has taken ideas. But he concludes: ‘I only note these people because the verses and the ideas that I mimicked from them [pou tous xesekosa] remind me so clearly of them; not that everything else you find in this book is “mine”: this is only what I have said to my editor’ (Savvopoulos 1983: 87).

Lyra and the inception of Neo Kyma.

Alekos Patsifas, the producer of the *Neo Kyma* LPs (collections titled *Neo Kyma 2, 3* etc., were promptly released after the success of the first one) and the genre of that name that was eventually introduced, set up his recording company, Lyra, in 1964. This was not his first venture into the recording industry; in 1960 he had set up another company, Fidelity, under whose label the first *Epitaphios* recording was released in 1960. Financial shortcomings had forced him to sell Fidelity to his competitors by the end of that year, and he was legally bound not to start a new company before 1964.⁸⁵ His recording plans aside, Patsifas was even better known in Athens for his co-ownership of the extremely prestigious Ikaros Publishing House which published Seferis, Elytis and most of the leading members of 'the Generation of the 30s'. Ikaros was an intellectual centre in its own right⁸⁶ with a bookstore and a record shop attached; the first recording project for Lyra aimed to complement the publisher's book catalogue. Indeed, the company's first record releases featured a series of well-known Ikaros poets reading their own work. It is worth bearing in mind that most of these poets had seen some of their work turned into songs by 1964, under Theodorakis's *Melopoimene Poiese* (Sung Poetry) project; thus, their 'spoken word' recordings must have sounded like 'the return of the poet's voice'. The first Lyra music releases also in a sense mirrored the preferred musical style of Ikaros's editors and their writers' circle. 'De-vulgarized' versions of Theodorakis, sung by Fotis Dimas, figure amongst Lyra's first numbers, were later paired with similar ones by Soula Birbili.⁸⁷ From anecdotal and autobiographical sources, we also know that the Ikaros circle was keen on French chanson, especially Georges Brassens.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ On Patsifas, Fidelity and Lyra, information taken from Maravelias 2001 and Falireas 1999.

⁸⁶ The prestige of Ikaros Editions, especially of poetry collections, is uncontested. After the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to George Seferis, the standardized poetic formats of the Ikaros Editions became something of a high-culture fetish. Such a view was also supported by the status of Ikaros as a literary/intellectual forum. On Ikaros and its high culture politics, sometimes read as an 'elitist posture', see Axelos 1984: 9. Information about the beginnings of Lyra is mainly drawn from Maravelias 2001.

⁸⁷ Covers of Theodorakis's 'hits', must have been the most secure commercial enterprise for a company at this time. Lyra soon added to its popular catalogues a series of Demotic Music and another of Bouzoukia Music with Giorgos Zabetas's group.

⁸⁸ Rinio Papanikola, who later became a well-known radio producer, recalled her first week as an intern in the Ikaros Book and Record stores in an article published in the magazine *Melodia*. She describes how as an admirer of Hadjidakis and Theodorakis she was persuaded by Patsifas to appreciate foreign pop,

Apart from the impact of Theodorakis's 'sung poetry', and the more subtle 'popular modernisms' of Hadjidakis's, a trend towards 'popular intellectualism' was evident in the Greece of the early 60s and had already left its mark on publishing production during this period. In 1961, Eleni Vlachou, the young heir of a press dynasty, founded Galaxias Editions in a successful attempt to popularize high literature that saw canonical titles of prose, poetry and criticism reprinted in small, cheap paperback editions. Ikaros also created its own 'popular' formats, the 'Ikaros's small series' which started with cheaper reprints of *The Collected Poems of Cavafy* (1963) and Seferis (1964) (see Politis 1998 and Politis 2002). Moreover, a number of new and energetic left-wing publishers, M.Despotidis of Themelio amongst them, attempted to popularize large scale history books and Marxist literature.⁸⁹ A tendency to appreciate new media and popular expression was also evident when, for instance, the most influential art and literary review of the Left, *Epitheorese Technes*, started publishing cinema, popular music and theatre reviews. Lyra's subsequent cultural politics have to be seen in the context of such a tendency towards the 'popularization of intellectualism'.

Neo Kyma (or 'La Nouvelle Vague de la chanson grecque' as the promotional leaflets presented it) emerged from Patsifas's insistence on creating a new high-popular genres for which the time was ripe. The project had the assistance of Yannis Spanos, a young pianist, accompanist and songwriter, who was at the time making his breakthrough on the French chanson scene by collaborating with Juliette Gréco and Pia Colombo.⁹⁰ Patsifas and Spanos first decided to name the genre they wanted to create, before assembling artists and songs. They opted for the term 'New Wave' since they had in mind a song genre that would emulate the poetics of the French Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes. If the main idea was to produce intellectual singer-songwriters and to promote their work as a form of personal, highly artistic 'writing', then with their adopted title they undoubtedly wanted to recall the concept of *cinéma d'auteur* that had sustained cinema's 'Nouvelle Vague' in France with Godard, Truffaut

especially the French chanson. Papanikola illustrates her piece with the covers available at the time in the Ikaros music section. One of them is a Brassens EP, another is the soundtrack of Godard's *Le Mépris* (Papanikola 2000)

⁸⁹ A very interesting biographical detail is that Savvopoulos worked in the most influential of these Marxist bookstores Themelio, as a bookseller (see Bliatkas 1999).

⁹⁰ For Spanos, see Mylonas 1985. On his French career see Vernillat and Charpentreau 1968: 231-232.

et al. We can certainly see the Greek Neo Kyma as an effort to produce a form of 'chanson d'auteur', exploiting the implications of artistic high quality, personal narrative and anticommercialism with which the term *Nouvelle Vague*/New Wave was already associated.

However, for all the 'French allure' songwriters like Savvopoulos would eventually give to the genre, most of its initial offerings had more to do with a neo-romantic escapist pop. The first Neo Kyma hit, a song with music by Spanos, lyrics by the broadcaster G.Papastefanou and sung by Kaite Homata ('Mia agape gia to kalokairi') relies on a much revisited sentimentalism: 'You shall be only a love for the summer,/ you will leave and you'll come back, just like the rain'. For all its promotional packaging as 'a musical revolution' and its effort to bank on the association of youth with change, Neo Kyma was effectively emerging as the retrieval of a lost innocence, a romantic retreat during a highly politicized and tendentious cultural and social atmosphere. This apparent contradiction is however explained in terms of the dynamics of a field: Neo Kyma also aimed to counterbalance (and commercially challenge) Theodorakis's domination of the high-popular field. Thus as a genre, Neo Kyma had to sound different than Theodorakis's Art Popular, but also to claim some of its prestige. The new genre's relation to the rest of youth popular music was based on an even more spectacular contradiction.

Neo Kyma, 'La Nouvelle Vague' and the Greek 'yeyedes'.

The Greek Neo Kyma could be seen as a mistranslation of what the 'cinéma d'auteur' stood for since it took 'intellectualism' as synonymous with romanticism. But it is useful to point out that a similar 'mistransportation' of the term *Nouvelle Vague* from its cinema context to popular music had already happened in France some years earlier. The term had been used very famously in the title of the 'chanson d'auteur's' direct opposite: the first recognisably 'yéyé' hit, a rock'n'roll song translated from English.

Richard Anthony, an ex-student of law and saxophonist in the Parisian Vieux Colombier, found fame with his 1958 French translation of the Coasters' 'Three Cool Cats'. His version was entitled 'Nouvelle Vague'. The atmosphere recalled in the song

is one of carefree youth with beautiful convertible cars (like the one which featured on the single's cover), young women singing Elvis Presley and endless rock'n'roll parties.

Une petite MG, trois compères
 Assis dans la bagnole sous un réverbère
 Une jambe ou deux par-dessus la portière
 La... Nouvelle Vague, Nouvelle Vague
 Trois mignonnes approchent, fort bien balancées
 Elles chantent une chanson d'Elvis Presley
 Voilà nos trois compères soudain éveillés
 Par cette... Nouvelle Vague, Nouvelle Vague...⁹¹

A long series of popular songs like this, which became hits in France in the 60s, were pejoratively called 'yéyé', and this term soon became generic. *Yéyé* was a linguistic pun, an imitation of the rhythmic verse endings in songs like the Beatles' 'She loves you, yeah yeah yeah', and a funny word meant to sound (as a generic term) inane and void. 'Yéyé' brought to mind all these fixed meaningless or anglicized words that translators of Anglo-Saxon hits into French had to employ in order to fit their translations to the given musical structure.

Like Richard Anthony's 'Nouvelle Vague', a similar 'carefree rock'n'roll' sound and sense of youth aimlessness were already leaving their marks on the Greek clubs, and in the first years of the 60s many adolescents had formed groups with a recognizably *yéyé* style. 1964 was the year in which Greek youth pop started being marketed more consistently and becoming more visible. On 1 April 1964, the first Greek youth pop magazine, *Monternoi Rythmoi* (Modern Rythms) printed its opening issue. Largely copying the French *Salut les copains* magazine, and the American *Teen Life* and *Teen World*, the first issue's cover featured Johnny Hallyday, the leading star of French rock'n'roll. Specialist radio programmes and columns in newspapers appeared in the

⁹¹ For more information on Richard Anthony and the beginning of the *yéyé* in France, see Barsamian and Jouffa 1984. In one of the artist's interviews included in this book, we find the idea that what was pejoratively called 'yéyé', was indeed a rupture of the established order. Order here has to be understood more as the established taxonomy of popular music as it stood in the late 50s, rather than as the social order in general. 'Et pourtant... cette nouvelle vague du rock'n'roll qui a déférlé sur la France, devenant un phénomène général, a gêné beaucoup de gens et on a utilisé bientôt le mot *yéyé* pejorativement. Le mot *yéyé* m'a un peu gêné. On avait beaucoup de gens contre nous. On rompait l'ordre établi' (32).

same year, many of them written by the journalist Nikos Mastorakes who also became the first manager of youth groups soon to achieve great success. In May 1964, the group Forminx⁹² gave a concert in the Society for Macedonian Studies in Thessaloniki, which was met, as reported in Greek newspapers, with ‘a wave of seismic enthusiasm verging on hysteria’ (Dematates 1998: 39). This was only the first concert of the Forminx in Thessaloniki and the group had not yet had their first record release (their first single appeared in early 1965). Forminx were formed in 1962 but had played in clubs and tourist resorts until their ‘discovery’ by the public two years later. More than a discovery, though, their sudden fame was a result of a movement in the record industry: in 1964 ‘youth pop’ was suddenly a recognizable genre, shaped by an industry which had just established the channels to promote it. In 1964, Forminx had professional management for the first time and were planning professional record releases; for the first time they had radio slots and music journalism to support their music. As the immense success of the group’s first concerts shows, once indigenous youth pop had devised the channels of production/consumption which allowed it to be seen as a musical genre closely tied to the international pop scene, the time was ripe for Greek youth to reach a level of hysteria similar to Beatlemania. Even if Greek youngsters did not know Forminx’s songs and had not yet seen them in concert, they did know about and had seen Beatlemania (from newspapers and cinema news reels) and were ready to reproduce it. Pejoratively also Greekicised as *yéyedes* or *teddyboides*, ‘the careless sound of youth’ had suddenly become visible.

1964, of course, was the same year Lyra started trading and Neo Kyma was devised. This means that both the intellectual side of youth music and the ‘non-intellectual’ version of youth pop almost simultaneously found a shape, a promotional strategy, and a concrete audience. Neo Kyma was thus both the Other of youth sound and its sibling, benefiting from similar tendencies in the market and a growing interest

⁹² Many pop groups had Anglicized names, often referring to classical Greece. The most famous were Olympians, Charms, The Greeks, Idols, The Sounds. Forminx is a latinized transliteration of an ancient word denoting a string instrument close to the contemporary guitar. The name has a playful irony, to be found in many of the Forminx’s songs, like ‘A Hard Night’s Day’, a playful inversion of the Beatles’s ‘A Hard Day’s Night’, based on Hadjidakis’s music. A founding member of Forminx, Vangelis Papathanassiou later teamed up with Demis Roussos and Loukas Sideras to form Aphrodite’s Child, the only Greek pop group with an international career in the late 60s, which also secured its members’ later solo careers - most notably in the case of Vangelis.

in youth culture that came together with the need to taxonomize youth culture, marking its highs and its lows, its 'mind' (Neo Kyma) and its 'body' (yéyédes).

Neo Kyma was primarily devised as the exact opposite of the Greek yéyé, an intellectual youth sound predicated upon the French *chanson intellectuelle*, yéyé's direct opposite. To see the full picture, we should also recall that Theodorakis and Hadjidakis at this time signified the 'haut niveau' of the Greek song, so for Neo Kyma to safeguard its position in the high-popular field, it was imperative that it should function as the youth supplement of Theodorakis's version of popular music. It was meant to share the prestige of Theodorakis's/Hadjidakis's music, but also to provide a contrast to their big orchestras, and especially to Theodorakis's bouzouki orchestrations which had flooded the Greek market in the early 60s. Neo Kyma's limited orchestrations, in particular Savvopoulos's strange and 'unmelodic' voice supported only by a guitar, were thus stylistically opposite to Theodorakis's project yet purported to be aesthetically supplementary: two versions of the high-popular.

However, here comes an exciting paradox: Lyra constructed its anti-yéyé genre in a way for which the yéyé releases were constantly criticized: using imitation and promotional overdetermination. In Spanos and his pianistic virtuosités, Patsifas saw a young Léo Ferré or a Gilbert Bécaud. In Savvopoulos, he tried to promote a young Brassens. The Barbara and Anne Sylvestre types of female singer-songwriters were provided by Kaite Homata and Arleta respectively. As we have seen, even the title of the new genre, Neo Kyma, was itself a copy (or, possibly, if the idea came from Richard Anthony's song, the misappropriation of a misappropriation). What was the difference between the yéyé pop groups and the artists of Neo Kyma, also 'orchestrated' with a commercial strategy in mind?

With Neo Kyma, Theodorakis's high-popular was at once shared and defied - it was etiolated. Neo Kyma was intellectual but also anti-bouzouki; it promoted the rebelliousness and youthfulness of its artists but was also musically anti-rock'n'roll. It was based on its artists' individual narratives and originality but was also a constructed, derivative, manipulated genre, celebrating its influences from a certain European musical scene (French *chanson*). Subliminally summarized by the double connotation of the term *Nouvelle Vague* (both relating to the *cinéma d'auteur*, and to the first yéyé hit),

the Greek Neo Kyma was a distinctive hybrid: high-popular ideology diffused into and through low pop marketing strategies.

Savvopoulos's early songs

The tensions that Neo Kyma as a genre seemed to generate are illustrated by Savvopoulos's first releases. To an important extent, they are also exploited by this songwriter to formulate what we could term a new cultural politics.

Savvopoulos's very first 45 RPM (extended play) record, released only months after the collective *New Wave* LP, started with a rewriting of one of Prévert's poems from *Paroles*. The song, titled 'Egerterio' (Reveille) or 'Elie Arhege' (Sun the Leader), as it became better known, is an uptempo ballad with characteristic leftist symbolism. Its central part is an almost word-for-word translation of Jacques Prévert's 'Le Temps Perdu' (Prévert 1947: 267). The songwriter follows Prévert's story about the factory worker who stops 'devant la porte de l'usine.../ le beau temps l' a tiré par la veste', and shouts to the sun: 'Dis donc camarade Soleil/ tu ne trouves pas/ que c'est plutôt con/ de donner une journée pareille/ à un patron?' (in the Greek version Savvopoulos sings: 'In front of the factory's gate the worker stops,/ the day is so beautiful, it waves at him and pulls his clothes'... Hey, my comrade how bad, a day with a sun like this,/ to be consumed by the boss'). However, Savvopoulos's version quite clumsily but characteristically, invests the story with a utopian vision of the sun creating a new polis, a new society. It ends with children dancing around a girl 'wearing a wreath in her hair' under 'the warm red sun'; the final vision is of 'the children growing up and falling in love with the girl/ then all will be ours, the sun, the sky and the fun'.

Following 'Egerterio', on the same side of this 45 RPM, we find a slow love ballad that dispenses with any political connotation in favour of the lyrical, the personal and the imaginary. 'A small sea waved you welcome/ then farewell;/ it is still waiting for you/ that small sea'. What links both songs is, first and foremost, their strong connection with poetic texts. Instead of Prévert, the prototype now is one of the legendary poets of Thessaloniki, Nikos-Alexes Aslanoglou (see Savvopoulos 1983: 87). Apart from the poetic intertexts, however, there is a subtler pattern established here, one that puts a politically connoted song face to face with its escapist and romantic

counterpart. The Reveille of the first song, a socialist utopia, is paired with a song about a long lost love.

On the disc's second side, the same pattern is repeated: first comes a 'dark', almost expressionistic song (with possible political allusions) about 'these birds I know, the birds of sadness/misfortune' ('Ta poulia tes dystychias' The Birds of Sorrow). This in turn is offset by an upbeat love song that shouts: 'Don't talk about love anymore, love is everywhere, in our hearts, in our psyche, it eats our lips, it eats our mind' ('Men milas allo gi'agape') - it would become one of Savvopoulos's signature tunes over the years.

These first four songs are quite rudimentary in terms of their harmonic structure, orchestration and use of the tune to denote emotions. For example, they all use the major scale to express happiness and the minor to express a dark mood. However, the architecture of the first EP as a whole is more complex and well-wrought: each side has a dark and a light song, one slow and one upbeat song, a political and a love song. But the pairings are not always the same: thus, 'Egerterio' is full of light, has a political/social message and is set in a dance 5/8 rhythm and D major. 'Mia Thalassa Mikre' follows as the love song, slow, in a meditative 3/4 metre and in C minor. On side B, 'Ta poulia tes dystychias' is the direct opposite to 'Egerterio', an expressionistic evocation of 'the songs of sorrow' which come to 'steal the dreams of sleeping people'. In slow 4/4 rhythm and - as one might expect - set in D minor, the song shares a social interest with 'Egerterio' (the birds of sorrow, we are led to believe, anticipate the demise of a community) but in its darkness, is completely opposite in mood and setting. A D major (and a fast 9/8 rhythm), is used for the tune of 'Me Milas allo gi agape' which follows: this love song may be thematically analogous to 'Mia Thalassa Mikre', but stands as its opposite in terms of mood (rhythm and harmony); thus a well-structured chiasmus is completed:

LYRA (LE 2020)

Side A	Side B
Egerterio <i>fast, light, uptempo, political</i>	Ta poulia tes dystychias <i>slow, dark, political</i>
Mia thalassa Mikre <i>slow, dark, erotic</i>	Men milas allo gi agape <i>fast, light, erotic</i>

The reason I bring up this structure (which reminds one of a Greimasian semiotic square) is because it signals a tension and proposes the ways to absorb and overcome it. Within this model, the distinction between political/serious, and mindless/frivolous is maintained but also challenged. Savvopoulos's basic songwriting technique creates a sense of 'hand-made', amateurish sound to the extent that ideological discourses are defied by their mode of presentation. The social and the personal are presented in/as interchangeable moods. The artist, we should remember, had described his songwriting as 'warm, familiar, lively, [with] a measure of happiness and a measure of sadness. Much faith and much hope... small enough to fit in a kiss, and big enough to fit in a revolution'. By arranging all 'the measures' so neatly in his first EP, Savvopoulos, writing under 'all these influences', alerts us to a change. Suddenly, the very practice of popular music has ceased to be a moment of originary speech, an original art work made for the sake of the people. Instead, it is a relocation of moods *that are already there*, an appropriation and relocation of shaped patterns that bases its difference on mimicry. 'Each record ought to have an easier and faster song, to push it commercially', the songwriter admitted at the time (Kaliotes 1965: 530); would this not mean that a serious record ought to also have a political song, in order to be considered 'serious'? The way that not only the industry formats and strategies, but also the expectations of a high-popular field, are iterated in this EP, is what I find distinctive. They are all made to coincide and the result establishes a diffuse uncertainty that sounds refreshing rather than immature: how exactly could one categorize this work, so carefully categorizable and yet so different?

The same strategy becomes more pronounced in Savvopoulos's next release, where it can now be found splitting the same song. 'Synnefoula' (Little Cloud) is another lifelong signature tune which was first released on the artist's second EP in October 1965. The song's heroine, a girl called 'Little Cloud', could stand for a utopian symbol. As with Aristophanes's *Clouds*, the cloud could stand for the realm of social justice, the very space for the unleashing of utopian thoughts and the symbolic moment of youth, but also as the highly ironic rewriting of all of them:

I used to have a love, my little heart
 resembling a cloud- my little cloud
 like a cloud, it comes and goes
 loves me once and then forgets me

and one evening, my little heart
 I kicked my little cloud out
 I cannot stand her and her tricks
 she loves me once and then forgets me

April comes, my little heart
 then May, my little cloud
 without a song a tear and a kiss
 this Spring is just the one to miss

my little cloud, little cloud, to return I beg you now
 and hang around with whoever you want
 I can't stand my loneliness
 you love me once and then forget me.

A profound irony (aided by the upbeat melodic structure) runs through a song which at first sight is the recognizable plea of a deserted lover. One does not know where the grotesque ends and the emotional starts, where the symbolic gives way to the literal; similarly, it is difficult to conclude whether this is a political allegory, or a 'mindless' love song. Does the alias Synnefoula stand as a symbol - of youth revolt, of social liberation, drugs and rock'n'roll? - or is it an ironic imitation, a parody almost, of Theodorakis's working class love-tale 'Margarita Magiopoulos', one of the biggest hits in the year 'Synnefoula' was released?⁹³ Next to its possible intertext, the little story of Synnefoula is about a generation of sexual liberation, yéyé freedom and romantic wanderings with tears and songs. In addition, it is about the sense of urgency for

⁹³ 'Margarita Magiopoulos' is also a song about a beloved girl going away. Her departure is similarly interwoven with the metaphor of seasons and time passing. Theodorakis's song, with the lyrics of I. Kambanellis, is decidedly unironic, simply romantic: 'I had planted an orange-tree/ envied by the whole neighborhood./ Early in the morning I was watering it with kisses/ late in the afternoon it was stolen by the birds' (Theodorakis 1997: 117). In its turn, this song owes much to Brassens's very well

symbolic, cryptic messages being subverted by the very act of singing a frivolous song about a frivolous girl, bearing, nonetheless, a heavily-connoted alias. The tension between the political and the personal, the progressive and the utopian, locks the song in a blissful undecidability.

This undecidability would soon become a well-wrought ideological/political strategy, evident in a song published a year later under the title 'Vietnam yéyé'. The song appears to be a protest against American engagement in Vietnam. The most recognizable cause of youth protest in the 60s is presented through a provocative hybrid: the chorus repeats the word yéyé, and thus mixes 'the cause' with the symbol of 'fun':

In Vietnam they set fire to rice
set fire to rice
in Saigon you could not live,
the air was not enough for you to live
Now, hidden in the river, [under the water]
Fu Min Chi
you breathe with a straw

Chorus: Yé yéyéyéYé yéyéyéYé yéyéyéYé yéyéyéYé yéyéyé

To grasp the fine irony of this song, we should note that yéyé is effectively the linguistic symbol of mimicry: an imitative mumbling without a fixed meaning, used to cover the space of the words of an original foreign song. We saw how, used as a pejorative term, it became the interpellation of carefree European pop, the term critics gave to what they saw as a mechanism eager to transpose hits from one country to the other, with industrial pace. If 'yéyé' denotes a criticism of 'westernized' youth and its lack of political conscience, Savvopoulos uses it as the chorus of an overtly political song condemning American atrocities. 'Vietnam Yéyé' thus resignifies the pejorative term yéyé and is used to connote a different strategy of opposition.⁹⁴

known 'L'amandier': 'J'avais l' plus bel amandier/ du quartier[...] Mais vint l'automne, et la foudre,/ et la pluie et les autans/ Ont changé mon arbre en poudre/ Et mon amour en mêm' temps!').

⁹⁴ An analogous 'meta-yéyé' strategy could be detected in Serge Gainsbourg's 'Chez les yéyés' (1963). In this song Gainsbourg treated the yéyé as the topos of bodily movement, the unsettling, the upsetting, the irrational and the culturally subversive: 'Sous les tams-tams des yé-yé-yé-é/ j'frai du randam je me

The song addresses an ordinary Vietnamese person called Fu Min Chi; if there were not a war taking place, it says, he would have 'taken his girlfriend hand-in-hand, and gone for a walk in the woods'. But, is such a 'Make Love Not War' moral of the story to be taken at face value here or not? The answer is given, I argue, in the very confusion created by the ambivalent use of 'yéyé'. Yéyé, the word that takes up all the space of the chorus by not allowing any 'meaningful' words in, releases the song into its own mimicry. On the one hand, the pejorative, non-political 'yéyé', as a word and as a genre, is redeployed and mimicked to produce its opposite: a political and oppositional song about Vietnam. On the other hand, the 'hippy' moral of the story is also adopted with ironic reserve: the 'how beautiful life would be without war' moral seems oversimplistic when framed with the choruses of yéyéyé - carefree dance suddenly playing it serious.

The wordless, meaningless chorus of yéyéyéyé signals the moment and the site of mimicry and benefits from the confusion it generates; it becomes in the end the space for the writing of new oppositionalities: what is refreshing about this song is its instability. Like a magic-eye image, 'yéyé' makes the song double-sided and constantly moving. By adding yéyé to Vietnam, youth opposition becomes at once the space of politics and fun, mobilizing the former and recontextualizing the latter, but also undermining a view that such a move would be a definite solution: in the form of the song's double-sided irony, youth's insecurity becomes its own version of the 'political'.

A new genre and its politics

If Savvopoulos's proposed new politics were defamiliarizing, there was a very simple way to unpack this ideological dissonance. Savvopoulos was, as commentators have pointed out, producing new politics because he was adopting a new genre. In one of the very first texts endorsing the songwriter, published in December 1965 in the extremely influential journal of the progressive left, *Epitheorese Tehnes*, the critic Giannes Kaliores implies as much:

connais/ Oui à Sing -Sing je finirai... Mais rien n'aura raison de moi/ J'irai t'chercher ma Lolita/ Chez les yé-yé'. Savvopoulos follows along these lines, supplementing Gainsbourg's subverted sexual norm with his subversion of political orthodoxy.

He is a young man, around 21 years old, who, like those old ‘rhapsodists’, the wandering troubadours of the Middle Ages who expressed themselves through all the song’s elements, before the latter became compartmentalized... writes the lyrics and sings them himself, accompanying himself with his guitar... with a strange voice, hoarse, low, unique, however, in conveying their ‘distinctive’ sense. [His songs are] closely related to the efforts of similar singer-rhapsodists from other countries, like Bobby Dailan [sic, in Greek Μπομπ Ντάιλαν, instead of Ντύλαν), Georges Brassens [sic, in Greek Μπρασσέν instead of Μπρασσένς] and all this wave called Folk Role [sic, in Greek Φολκ Ρόουλ instead of Φολκ Ρηβάιβαλ =Folk Revival (?)] (Kaliories 1965: 529-30)⁹⁵

All in all, this early presentation in *Epitheorese Tehnes* is discursively influenced by the similar presentations of Auteurs-Compositeurs-Interprètes that so often appeared in French journals in the 60s. The critic insists that the songs are important in their entirety (music+lyrics+performance) while offering his readers some of the lyrics, which are made to stand as ‘the poetic representatives’ of the whole song.

Kaliories’s text in a striking way also echoes the first text praising Bob Dylan, the now legendary short review published by Robert Shelton in the *New York Times* of 29 September 1961. For Shelton, Dylan’s voice is ‘anything but pretty [but contributes] to a searing intensity [that] pervades his songs’. The songwriter (‘a bright new face in folk music’) is presented as ‘a cross between a choir boy and a beatnik’, also as both ‘comedian and tragedian’ with a ‘highly personalized approach toward folk song’ even though he ‘has been sopping up influences like a sponge. At times... his stylization threatens to topple over *as a mannered excess*’ (my italics).

Kaliories also praises Savvopoulos’s ‘personalized approach’, which additionally is presented as a way out of ‘old-fashioned’ political songs. The critic moves a step forward to consider Savvopoulos’s model of songwriting as a defamiliarizing project with implications on a much larger cultural scale than that of popular culture. For him, Savvopoulos’s songs, both generationally and generically new, emerge as a violent upstaging of the ‘ordinary’ world, becoming the ‘other’ of modern life aesthetics:

We could say that Savvopoulos’s songs enter abruptly, almost brutally, into our world, our orderly world, and try to de-taxonomize it. They come armed with meanings and edges, to throw at us some

⁹⁵ The implication for a theorization on mimicry aside, the mistransliterations in this quotation also show that Brassens’s, Dylan’s, and the folk revival’s significance in constituting a genre was known even

precious senses, some invaluable experiences, which we have humiliated or “arranged” [diaskeuasame], making fools of ourselves; [these songs] seem satirical and lyrical alike, they are like swords that spear our guilt for all those responsibilities we have passed on. (529)

This is, unmistakably, an older generation saluting a younger generation’s potentials (‘for the responsibilities we have passed on’). With Kaliories’s analysis, we realize that Savvopoulos’s challenge is conceptualized as the challenge of youth and of the new. It is seen as having come from ‘another world’, from the margins of the set cultural field, underlining the persuasion of the older generation that their own cultural discourse had already become institutional (dominant, reified and recuperated) and needed a new opening from the outside.

As the neo-Marxist critic Giorgos Karampelias has pointed out,

Dionysis Savvopoulos appeared in a context dominated... by the ideology of progress and economic development, the ideology that had focused on the surmounting of underdevelopment. Facing the cornerstones of Hadjidakis and Theodorakis, he seemed very little, very young, very marginal... However, he was already a magnificently new voice, expressing the then ‘marginal element’ of the period, that element which was secondary to the central aims of modernization and democratization, but which was already mobilizing the most progressive part of youth. (Karampelias 1985: 50)

Seeing again the songwriter’s work as an addition to ‘cornerstones’ of the popular scene, Karampelias also points to his novelty in terms of ‘a new politics’. Instead of clear-cut progressive politics and the modernist project of ‘development’, Savvopoulos’s marginal position announces a new viewpoint in waiting. It is interesting that the rhetorics of this argument do not deviate from the initial staged and commercialized image of youth - indeed, Karampelias’s analysis reminds one of the promotional blurb of the *Neo Kyma* LP we reviewed above. I would rather see this as a reverse conceptualization. The image of youth as revolutionary may have been recuperated and reproduced as a promotional device, but it also became the site for a political reconfiguration.

Savvopoulos’s later work would challenge more directly, as we shall see, both culture industry practices and the artistic authority of the high-popular. But for the

when the correct names (and possibly the music behind them) were not.

moment he was mapping out the territory: he both complied with the industry and presented himself as part of the high-popular, while emitting a dissonant sound that could open the space to rethink ideology.

Late in 1966, two years after his first EP release, Savvopoulos's first LP reached the Athenian shops. By that time, a much clearer artistic profile had emerged. The tendencies I have described so far were on their way to becoming a fully-fledged poetics.

Hopping on a Van

Under the title *To Fortigo (The Van)*, Savvopoulos's first complete LP came out in November 1966. By that time, the artist was known to Athenian audiences who had been able to buy two extended singles as well as attending a series of live concerts. In interviews with the national and regional press, he was frequently asked to 'define his position', since, as one journalist put it, 'you and your colleagues, the members of the younger generation of musicians, have to move within a pre-ordained space' (Fortigo: 68). As this comment implies, in order to prove that he was a 'serious' artist doing 'important' music, Savvopoulos still had to show himself as working within the tradition of Theodorakis and Hadjidakis.

The way Savvopoulos tried to cope with this demand was by insisting on the self-presentation strategies analyzed above. He provided an artistic performance 'loaded' with predecessors and influences but still able to perform its fluidity and rootlessness. His narratives supporting the first LP are more bohemian than political, more ironic than determined, more concerned with popular imagery than with 'authentic' popular roots. In terms of generic identification, they provide an alternative version of songwriting: instead of the composer who 'sings' poetry, we have now the singer-songwriter who alludes to a poetic tradition while maintaining that he sings 'simple songs', and combines foreign with indigenous popular influences.

In an interview only months before the release of *The Van*, Savvopoulos presents himself as an itinerant: 'I came from Thessaloniki hitchhiking on a van' he says, explaining the title of his LP. This is a first nod to the careful reader asked to recall the mythology of the wandering troubadour. The songwriter's journey from Thessaloniki to

Athens is then taken up in numerous interviews and presented as a travelogue and roman d'apprentissage. Humorously transformed into a mythical tale, 'Savvopoulos's first journey starts from northern Greece; on the way to the capital the songwriter meets 'the fat one and the tall one', a caricatured reference to the two composers, Hadjidakis and Theodorakis. He then bumps into a number of poets (Aslanoglou, Hristianopoulos, Anagnostakes, Pentzikes, all of them from Thessaloniki), before 'meeting' Brassens and Bob Dylan 'on the road'. Finally he reaches Athens, enters a café and shouts 'Long live eternal bohemia' (interviews reprinted in Savvopoulos 1982: 68-69).

For all the beat-influenced setting of this narrative, its first role is generic identification. The story of the van, a semi-biographical detail that would gather mythological repercussions for Savvopoulos throughout his career, is the story of a troubadour-style wandering that aims to produce a space *within* a given popular music framework. We should not forget that travel and artistic journey are also central points in Brassens's self-narratives. The most crucial reference here though is Dylan's elaborate narratives of his beginnings as an artist. Indeed, the setting of Dylan's early LPs, in particular the very first, titled *Bob Dylan*, has left its mark on the story behind Savvopoulos's *Van*. In the liner notes of *Bob Dylan* we read that 'Bob Dylan first came East in February, 1961 [...] His purpose: to visit the long-ailing Woody Guthrie, singer, ballad-maker and poet [...] In May 1961, Dylan started to hitch-hike West'. And in the 'Song to Woody Guthrie', Dylan starts his paean to the folk legend with the lines 'I'm out here a thousand miles from my home,/ Walkin' a road other men have gone down'. The repercussion in Savvopoulos's own liner notes for *The Van* is significant: 'On the highway just outside Thessaloniki, [the van] picks you up and after many troubles it lets you off in Athens before dawn [...] This road is a very old one and I do not know where it will lead me'.

Musically, Savvopoulos's early songs are more influenced by the European tradition than by the American, more so by Brassens than by Dylan. Savvopoulos sings with the sole accompaniment of his guitar bringing to mind Dylan's first releases, but this is only an external allusion. Whereas Dylan's guitar and harmonica orchestrations involved persistent musical references to the Blues and other American traditions, Savvopoulos's simple and very western harmonic structures bring him much closer to

the central European ballad tradition and the popular song traditions of the Mediterranean, as well as to the minimally orchestrated Rive Gauche songs.

As I noted earlier, however, Savvopoulos's challenge at this stage does not lie so much in the music itself, as in its presentation and overall setting. *The Van* stands as probably the first LP in Greek recording history that self-consciously reworks the technical publishing details of the release, employing them all, from the cover and liner notes, to the song order, according to a central concept. It is not simply the story of an artistic migration 'hopping on a van', rather it is a generic manifesto. Sustained by the overarching image of the title, the myth of the wandering storyteller occurs throughout the album and is presented in all its mutations (the jokerman, the juggler, the wandering clown). Significantly, though, it is not emulated at face value and uncritically: on the contrary, it is consistently presented as an adopted performance costume; the singer-songwriter model is explored more as a performative stance than as a mode of expression.

When the itinerant and the storyteller put on the mask of the clown and the joker, the whole process feels more like a generic reserve putting its contents on show. The generic display transcends time, subjectivities and myths, and is further pushed by Savvopoulos in the opening songs of the album into a staged extravaganza. This is a nine-minute piece itself textualized and 'set' in four scenes/chapters/songs with the overarching title 'The Itinerants':

In a moment the lights are turned on
and music brings us the magicians on stage
the clowns started the jokes once again
and the tightropewalker sweats on the rope.

The setting recalls a well recognizable theme from the Italian cinema (and especially Fellini's *La Strada*). Along come a wandering circus, a wandering prostitute Zozo (strongly echoing Aristide Bruant's famous 'Nini-Peau-d'chien'), a wandering monkey (a possible reference to Brassens's 'Gorille') and a wandering group of show catch-wrestlers who 'bend irons and eat nails'. The founding myth of the singer-songwriter genre (the wandering oral poet) is here measured against an ironic look at what

constitutes 'the popular'. Savvopoulos provocatively presents moments of entertainment provided by travelling players, paid for their services, and thus radically different from the idealist representations of folk entertainment provided by and for members of a close community. The itinerant entertainer, be it the storyteller, the circus dancer, or the prostitute, signals an early point in culture's commercial life, and to many, also points at the beginning of popular culture in the modern sense of the term.

By foregrounding these particular scenes, Savvopoulos makes clear that he is not interested in the popular as a quest for authenticity, but in the popular as mimicry, performance, paid entertainment and popular satisfaction. What is often presented as the fall from the paradise of folk entertainment, that is, the moment when entertainers became paid professionals, wandering from village to village, is presented here in a positive light:

"Four pennies for the grown ups
and two pennies for the soldiers",
they have come to town today
they bend iron bars, they eat nails.

It is important to note that each of the four characters in the songs is presented as one of a series of masks alternately put on by the songwriter. Savvopoulos becomes, simultaneously, the narrator and the actor in these songs, the narrating and the narrated I/eye. Zozo's story starts with the verse 'One evening in a village/ there comes Zozo from the town on a van/ a van passing by', which immediately recalls the general setting and the title of the album. In a similar vein, the circus's description ends with a metonymic, magical transfiguration: the songwriter's voice by the end has engulfed all the personas: it has become the circus:

When one day you will shed a tear
the moment when the magician triumphs on stage
while the clown mocks you
and the tambourine is frenzied and the violin cries

Then you will feel my soul

becoming a lantern in a feast every single night
 meeting the circus people on stage
 and bowing along with them for you the spectator.

The art of the storyteller immersed in popular narratives, thus mutates into a staged performance that shows its own constructedness. Moreover, the songwriter who recalls the performance of the itinerants but also *is* this performance, the itinerant who sings the story of the itinerants, the teller who becomes one with the tale, can be seen as additions to the ideological gesture we described before: the fusion of the personal with the political.

In the last song of *The Van*, titled 'Our Old Friends', the singer mourns 'the old friends, the old books, the old songs, which have gone for ever/ the long lost days which hurt us and are now toys in the hands of children'. What Savvopoulos verbalizes in this song, as with the whole *Fortigo* LP, is not the radical change of the world, a before and an after, but a changed point of view. As this song's clearest, almost slogan-styled, chorus states 'There comes the moment for you to decide with whom to go and whom to leave behind.' In a manner similar to Dylan's 'My Back Pages', the song and the album introduce a dilemma no longer about the left and the right, conservative vs. progressive politics, but instead take flight away from an old, clear-cut world of confrontation to a newer, diffuse moment of internalized dichotomies centred on repeating, remembering, playfully relocating and staging the embodied schism as a sign of new times.

What really matters is not to 'go with ones and leave some others', but to say that you are torn, that you need to decide, that you need to change.

As the Postscriptum in the liner notes of *Fortigo* says:

'I have grown numb during this in-betweenness. My old self has gone and my new self hasn't turned up yet. What you will hear herein are not exactly songs, they are, rather, a series of exercises of physical breath [askeseis physikes anapnoes]. Good bye!'

Conclusion

Savvopoulos's early challenge was centred on fusing the personal with the political, critics argue. For Giorgos Karampelias, the songwriter signals a new politics that 'does not accept the division between History (with a capital H) and personal history'

(Karampelias 1985: 15; see also Terzakes, 1990: 105). The implied contrast here is with the modernist project of Mikis Theodorakis's popular music, suggesting that the latter subjugated the personal to the political project. There is, however, a more subtle challenge laid down by Savvopoulos, one which undermines the discourses of individuality and originality, authority and stable subjectivity so far sustaining the emergence of the high-popular. It is this which makes many critics talk about a profound difference, a 'new beginning' in music signified by Savvopoulos. 'The Van was a unique success [...] it could be heard everywhere [...] it revealed a new multidimensional talent. It was a new force that erupted from a new beginning, one that was completely different to that of other songwriters of the time, the art-popular Markopoulos, Xarhakos, Leontes, Loizos etc.' (Notaras, 1979: 81). The difference between Savvopoulos and 'the other colleagues of his time, the art-popular musicians' lay in the way Savvopoulos contested both the authorities of the Greek high-popular canon as well as the ideological predispositions this canon incorporated. Unlike the numerous 'art-popular composers', all of them operating within Theodorakis's songwriting model, Savvopoulos mounted a challenge against the basic premises of that model.

Savvopoulos's early releases say on the cover: 'Songs by Dionysis Savvopoulos. He sings and plays the guitar himself'. They propose a youthful artist offering his voice without mediation, the new singing poet. As we have seen, this is only the external layer of a more complicated palimpsest internally distorted by mimicry. Indeed, as I have shown, Savvopoulos had to adopt the role, at once, of the young Theodorakis, of the Greek Bob Dylan, of the Greek Georges Brassens, and of the intellectual musician of the 60s. Mimicry occurs through adopting all these roles as well-ordered parts in a performance. A redirection of the arranged and the imposed emerges, a turning of the limitation into a weapon. Savvopoulos's originality is based on the fact that he is not original.

Even from the early stages reviewed in this chapter, this songwriter turns everything imposed on him outwards; he turns influence into a style and expectation into a mimicry of prototypes. He also subtly defies the internal taxonomy of youth culture in which he is supposed to participate, that of *yéyé* vs. *Neo Kyma*, with songs

such as ‘Vietnam yéyé’, where the initial positioning of Savvopoulos as the ‘accepted’ face of youth, the anti-yéyé intellectual songwriter, is crucially undermined. By clearly staging the discourses affecting his performance, he reveals them as discourses. He does not revolutionize the personal, or personalize the revolutionary, as many critics claim. He confuses the personal, he restages subjectivity, also restaging and reactivating the revolutionary, as will become clearer in what follows.

With the imposition of the Greek junta, all music by Theodorakis and everything resembling a political song was banned, thus further accelerating the radical rearrangement of the popular music field. An older generation found itself silenced while the younger generation of Neo Kyma was stuck in the same boîtes with youth pop/rock groups often sharing a similar aim to produce a cryptic, oppositional, subversive vocabulary. The previous tension between “high-art” popular music and “low-art” youth yéyé gave way to a new form of subterranean youth culture. It is to that period, covered by three Savvopoulos albums, *To Perivoli tou Trellou* (1969), *Ballos* (1971) and *Vromiko Psomi* (1972), that I now turn.

3. Subterranean Void Blues: Savvopoulos through jouissance

The song says that I take
responsibility
That I am the chief of this festivity
That's what the song says

Dionysis Savvopoulos, 'O Ballos'

The plain upside down: Subterraneity and the junta anti-politics

Writing in the aftermath of the Greek dictatorship of 1967-1974, Mikis Theodorakis commented on the differences between his songwriting and Savvopoulos's:

My song is a tree in the middle of the plain. But now that the plain has been turned upside down, the flowers have grown back to the ground and the roots sing "I have no material, I have no sound", my tree bows over dates and hearts sculpted by knives on its bark. And there my song listens to Savvopoulos's song... From the latter I have understood once and for all the charm of this generation that scares me. I once thought that it was born out of my generation; that we had the same chromosomes. The same angst, the same hopes. However, Savvopoulos's song, sailing through oceans, (hi)stories and blood, points at his generation's origins: a parthenogenesis. Its mother is our night's snow... If I could, I would kill my voice at once (Theodorakis 1976: 174).

As Theodorakis contemplates the discontinuity between his artistic project and that of a younger generation, we realize that something has changed. The youth that was previously seen (and produced) as an excess, is now thought of as born out of a parthenogenesis.

Even though the dictatorship is implied as the crucial catalyst here, the change seems larger in timespan and importance. Theodorakis glosses this further:

The houses with safe foundations that we used to build do not exist anymore. Everything has been buried since the plain was deeply torn. However, a virgin world, transparent, full of irrational sweetness and desperate optimism emerged from the ruins. And nobody managed to become one with its blood and its bitterness better than Savvopoulos. His song takes on a sacerdotal wholeness, it intertwines music and poetry, transcending them both in importance. It becomes the existence and the expression of mystical life. (173)

Significantly, Theodorakis opts for metaphors of hiding, turning upside down, going underground and expressing 'the mystical life'. The poetics of youth, this 'charm of the generation that frightens' are effectively presented as the subterranean moment par excellence, with Savvopoulos its most accomplished representative. Subterraneity in this context configures the modality through which youth culture as a counterculture carried out the most crucial form of cultural resistance against the junta in Greece. Indeed, not only did students mount their confrontation with the regime in the student uprising of 1973 (culminating in the November 1973 occupation of the Polytechnic School), but also their distinctive cultural politics were effectively undermining the dictator's totalitarianism from the very beginning.

The reasons this happened are twofold. On the one hand, preventive censorship was imposed on 21 April 1967 on any printed text and record release, radio and performance programme etc. This immediately made most established authors and artists of an older generation react by not publishing any new work as a form of tacit opposition; the Authors' Silence, as it became known, lasted more than three years and had a dramatic impact on the cultural field. A younger generation of writers, artists and students suddenly came to the fore and had to forge their own way of opposing the regime without withdrawing from cultural production.

On the other hand, the dictatorship immediately moved to impose its own nationalistic and populist cultural discourse, based on a form of folk-idolatry and kitsch popular extravaganzas. Evidently, mimicry, a mode already existing in the youth culture vocabulary, became the most effective countercurrent; in music, pop and rock, as well as highly innovative performances of folk and other older popular material, created the space to confront totalitarianism on the very grounds of its populist discourse.⁹⁶

Karen Van Dyck has analyzed with great sophistication how a younger generation of artists with new strategies suddenly found themselves at the centre of the cultural scene. As Van Dyck implies, the cultural shift that made the younger generation

⁹⁶ For all the nationistic and culturally conservative proclamations of the Junta, the military censors were not eager to impose bans on foreign cultural products, and it seems that they were not ready to contain youth culture as drastically as they persecuted, for instance, the well-known older communist authors and artists -banning even translations of classical texts undertaken by communist authors. Thus rock music, American and French cinema, theatre and avant-garde art became an oasis of cultural reinvigoration in a period when indigenous production ground to a halt.

capable of undertaking this task may have been precipitated by the dictatorship, but was also the outcome of an internal challenge. It also represented, I would add, the larger move of the 60s as a period in cultural history.

In a brilliant analysis of the first book that signalled the end of 'the Authors' Silence', the celebrated *18 Texts* (1970), Van Dyck explains that the junta's own cultural politics, however repulsive, kitsch and crudely nationistic, shared the same modal framework that characterized Greek cultural life in general: one based on stable meaning and language's ability to denote, on monologism and the commitment to '[telling the] truth', on the use of cultural artefacts to promote ideological positions and not to undermine them. As Van Dyck points out, postwar literature and culture in Greece were similarly shaped by metaphor, either in the form of the 30s Generation's symbolic system(s), or in the 'literal tropes and simple words' used by postwar writers of the Left, attempting to 'simply speak truth' - they were also employing metaphor, albeit at degree zero. Unexpectedly analogous, the dictatorship's propagandist cultural moves were monologic as well as 'committed', metaphoric in their crude use of symbols from a 'national past', from Thermopylae to the Greek resistance against German Occupation, but also 'literal' in the dictator's famous proclamations that he sought 'clarity and honesty'. They could thus not be confronted with a direct opposition *of the same modality*. An effective resistance had to opt for metonymic strategies, 'a mode that actually managed to sustain ambivalence... [a] more performative paradigm of language with its Lyotardian negotiation of alternative truths' (50).

Van Dyck finds this new approach exemplified in Savvopoulos's songs. She notes that, instead of the clear-cut oppositional politics promoted in Theodorakis's political songs,

Savvopoulos took a much less direct approach to undermining authoritarianism [...] Rather than attempting to right the wrong, [his songs] participate in the confusion. Instead of parodying the mixed messages of the times in order to dispel confusion, [they] suggest that, at least temporarily, one should absorb confusion into one's compositions. As in the alternative medical practice of homeopathy, the guiding principle is that that which is threatening can be used to strengthen the immune system. The very rhetorical figures [of the dictatorship] are used by Savvopoulos in the service of the paralogical. In his songs written between 1965 and 1975 he advocates a philosophy in

which nothing is essentially true or real and anything can be appropriated to someone else's ends (51).

Van Dyck lets it be understood that Savvopoulos's challenge is not confined strictly to the dictatorship period (she points to the period 1965-75), but is not interested in describing how his challenge fits the larger picture of the cultural field of the time. Nevertheless, her ideas of absorbing confusion, letting language's performativity unsettle ideological stability and using a homeopathic strategy to strengthen opposition are important starting points.

According to the *OED*, in the alternative medical practice of homeopathy small doses of drugs are administered, aimed at producing in a healthy person symptoms closely resembling those of the disease treated. Hence, we could read the Greek youth's cultural politics as an effort to restage the junta's populist fanfares in the fashion of homeopathy's basic motto: 'similia similibus curantur' (likes are cured by likes). However, this takes away the central cultural agenda of these moves and their larger context. The young artists may have marshalled their own popular culture politics as a response to the junta's popular manipulations, but the forms of cultural expression they favoured also played a central part in their quest for identity. Moreover, they wanted to turn noise into a topos for pleasure: they saw confusion as a way of unlocking stable meanings and dominant ideologies, that is, they saw it in itself, inhabiting it rather than temporarily absorbing it. Not targeting the dictatorship alone, they were bringing a characteristic 60s cultural agenda to its culmination.

A metaphor coined to describe this politics was that of a purifying ritual, which could, in a way, be read as based on homeopathy; it is indicative, however, that this cleansing procedure is presented as a mimicked religious mystery. In Savvopoulos's words: 'We perceive the objective world like a bitter bread which, from being dirty and unsuitable, can be transformed into something clean, pure and suitable for blood and body, through the act of eating [...] we could, then, communicate at the level of a festivity [giorte]' (*Hroniko* 1972: 215). This mimicked purification does not result in silence and order but in 'confusion', in carnivalesque mayhem. The songwriter eventually turned this view into the chorus of one of his most famous songs, 'Moro' (Baby):

Eat, eat, dirty bread
 It will be purified once it gets swallowed
 Every erotic creature then will appear
 to whoever surrenders to it.⁹⁷

Instead of their predecessors, who often presented themselves as the descendants of old traditions, this generation of artists had, I would argue, a more ironic, bodily and metonymic view of their position in the cultural (and thus in the social) system. Precisely at the point when the 'larger context' of a cultural system meets the personal quest for subjectivity and identity, a psychoanalytic matrix emerges. 'Rediscovering one's roots' while acting from the margins of society (and of subjectivity) became thus in that period psychoanalytically charged: the countercultural youth presented itself in the mirror of older cultural formations which were now resignified as liberational fantasies and interpellated as subcultures. The aim was to address the Big Other, the 'central authority' holding the symbolic system together, acting behind the scenes and oppressing the individual's life.⁹⁸ The dictatorship was addressed as one version of this Big Other, but along with it, forms of central authority that 'shape' the world, stable ideologies, were also undermined. The resulting tension leaves a graphic trace, I believe, in the 'voids', a peculiar characteristic of Savvopoulos's poetics of the time. Through a Lacanian reading of the void and the Real, I will show how Savvopoulos's re-articulates his place within popular culture.

Artists in process: re-playing rebetika and demotika.

There is a consensus that the Greek youth music scene 'turned rock' after 1967: rock music was a persistent element in the discussion of younger artists, and their main aim was to discover its subterranean, oppositional meaning. Extending this same strategy

⁹⁷ Later, I will linger on this view of mystic transfiguration and its countercultural connotations, and also contemplate the consequences of the use of the body, the inclusion of the reality of bodily presence and eating in what seems a purely symbolic gesture.

⁹⁸ A Lacanian analysis of how the Big Other is addressed follows in a later section. For the moment I use the term in its instant connotations of a hidden agency that, in Slavoj Žižek's formulation is "pulling the strings," running the show behind the scenes: divine Providence in Christian ideology, the Hegelian

backwards, one also detects a move to understand and revive the oppositionality of older popular genres; in particular, the politics of rebetiko came under review. The dictatorship had favoured a cheap and shamelessly populist 'Greek bouzouki' version of Laiko Tragoudi, so the return to a deeply informed appreciation of the 'original rebetiko' seemed refreshing and defiant. An argument that saw in Rebetika similarities with the blues (the oppositionality of which had been a persistent reference for the post-Dylan songwriting tradition) dates from the same period; Sakis Papadimitriou would even go on to publish a table comparing the blues and rebetika in each of their characteristics (Papadimitriou 1975). Elias Petropoulos's first ethnographic study and anthology of Rebetika songs was also published in 1967, regenerating interest in Rebetika's subcultural function. Petropoulos went on to organize a very successful fortnight of concerts and exhibitions in *The Athens' Hilton* in 1968, where photographs, handwritten and printed matter, as well as the live concerts of 'forgotten' representatives of the genre, attested to rebetiko's once subversive and marginal status.⁹⁹ Special 'Rebetiko Evenings' were also later organized in the *Kyttaro* club, one of the rock music venues of central Athens, where Savvopoulos also presented his most praised concert series (Petropoulos 1972; Alexandropoulou 1974). The situation reminds one of the American folk revival, and the work of such ethnomusicologists as Alan Lomax and Pete Seeger, whose 'authentic' recordings were used by countercultural youth in the 60s as the topos of oppositionality. In these terms, Petropoulos and Papadimitriou could be seen as the Savvopoulos's Lomax and Seeger.

Building on the same folk-revival topographies, the other central tendency in Greece under the colonels was to 'restore' the folk song's 'deep meaning'. From 1966, Neo Kyma artists had taken inspiration from folk tunes and demotic songs. After 1967 this strategy gained much more urgent validity, for the simple reason that the dictatorship itself had imposed its own version of 'folk tune' worship. Young artists

"cunning of Reason"... the "invisible hand of the market" in the commodity economy, the "objective logic of History" in Marxism-Leninism, the "Jewish conspiracy" in Nazism, etc.' (Žižek, 2001: 39)

⁹⁹ The events were organized under the title 'Rebetika Songs- Evidence (Tekmeria)' and lasted from 25 April to 10 May 1968. Elias Petropoulos is usually outspoken about its subversive aim: 'It was the first event that broke the silly "silence of the intellectuals", with which the equally silly intellectual leadership hoped to oust the dictatorship' (Petropoulos 1979: 628). More information on this exhibition in Petropoulos 1979: 628-633. The author was later incarcerated and his Rebetika anthology confiscated, since the censor finally realized its subversive potentials, almost two years after its original publication.

consequently tried to sing folk songs ‘in their own way’ in an effort to respond to this strategy. While the dictatorship used folk music to support a nationistic discourse and the hailing of Greek “leventia” (bravery/manliness) was promoted, especially through the dancing of Tsamiko folk dances in army camps (very often by the dictators themselves), young artists tried to propose the performance of demotic songs in small basement clubs as a form of identity quest and countercultural topos.

Nikos Houliaras, one of the first to have sung demotic songs from Epirus in his concerts, wrote on the cover of one of his albums:

I am not doing archival work - it is not within my interests. The folk song is alive and grows in each one of us. The reason the folk songs on my album have the form they have, is that this is who I am - I haven't made any changes. Willingly or not, I am somebody else from the person who first sang those songs.

I believe that what is important in the folk song's form is that it does not have any specific form. It appears to all those who love it and undertake its defense. It is “a song” after all, and a song is blood (Houliaras 1972).

Instead of just ‘performing’ demotika songs, most of this generation's artists put the stress on the process of creating a dialogue with the form, a process with clear existentialist overtones.¹⁰⁰ By the end of the 60s, groups and individual artists would include folk material in their programmes, performing it in unconventional ways; most of these artists today agree that Savvopoulos's performance synthesized this strategy, transcended it and then reintroduced it as an effective trend, especially with his two albums *Ballos* (1971) and *Vromiko Psomi* (1972).¹⁰¹ Mariza Koch and particularly her

¹⁰⁰ The case of Yannis Markopoulos and his records with Rizitika, the folk songs from Crete, should also be mentioned here. As Jane Cowan points out, ‘both through the songs he selected and through his collaboration with the much loved left-wing singer and lyra-player, Nikos Xylouris, Markopoulos signalled that these songs of struggling with Charos and of mountain goats cavorting on the mountain side were actually allusions to the political present... [this gesture] wrongfooted the censor, who may not have wished to be seen prohibiting such patriotic sentiments’ (Cowan 1993: 7). The reason I do not include Markopoulos in my analysis is that, even though often in contact with the countercultural strategies of the time, his poetics were also characterized by a persistent effort to emulate Theodorakis's example uncritically. He thus more often than not fell back on the undeconstructed model of authorship and popular culture that the latter represented.

¹⁰¹ There is a consensus that Savvopoulos was the one who turned a strategy such as Houliaras's into a more active reorientation ‘replaying’ old traditions based on the politics of rock (Houliaras 2002; Samiou 2002; Elleniades 2001; Trousas 1996; Terzakes 1990). It is also significant that many of the groups and artists singing rebetika and demotika as an oppositional gesture collaborated with the

LP *Arabas* (1971), one of the most innovative and influential albums of its time, is another example of this more complex and ambitious period: folk songs and rebetika are recorded in Koch's work, with electric orchestrations in which the percussion claims a dominant role. The singer's avant-garde performance, distinguished by frequent vocal amplifications, adds a profoundly alienating effect to these well-known songs. It is interesting that any differences between rebetiko and demotic songs (for instance the distinctions we saw debated in previous phases such as urban vs. rural, popular vs. folk) are obliterated. For the countercultural youth both rebetiko and demotiko were synthesized as *popular traditions* that could be resignified as liberational, made to act again and re-act.

Houliaras's phrase 'I am someone else from the person that first sang these songs' also brings us back to the question of subjectivity. Instead of stable subjects, with stable artistic and political ideologies, the members of this generation made the inherent fluidity of identity one of their strongest weapons. Unlike the stable subjectivities expressed in the work of older artists that could easily be banned, silenced and contained by the totalitarian regime, the younger generation's fluid, processual, artistic 'I' was uncontainable. In many respects, this was the time to capitalize on the profound split, the undecidability we have seen emerging from much earlier. Savvopoulos would thus reflect on his artistic 'change' after the advent of the dictatorship:

In *Fortigo* (1966) I had a law - something that was above, guiding me... From *Perivoli tou Trelou* (1969) onwards, I felt, like all my friends at the time, that there is no law - neither God's nor human - *because there is no self even*, or then again, if there is one, we are blind and cannot see it (*Hroniko* 1972: 215, my emphasis).

Without a law and a self, the processual subjectivity described (fragmented, fluid, lawless) signalled a decisive redefinition of youth culture's difference and oppositional tactics.

songwriter as support in his performances during the period 1969-1975. Some of them were the groups Bourboulia, Laistrygona, Anakara, Spyros & Leda, the singers Mariza Koch, Thanasses Gaifilias and Lakes Halkias. His shows also presented older artists performing demotika, like Domna Samiou and

Counterculture vs. Subculture

I have thus far made several references to the term 'counterculture': it has been most often employed to describe youth culture especially of the 60s and celebrated in books written about the period like Theodor Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture*. For Roszak, counterculture, a 'mystic revolution' that traces its beginnings from the beatniks, is the cultural expression through which 'the alienated young are giving shape to something that looks like the saving vision of our endangered civilization' (Roszak 1995: 1 and 124-5).

Even though counterculture has often been confused with subculture, there is also a long tradition of theorists who rely on a clear distinction between the two terms. For Dick Hebdige, a subculture consists of 'the expressive forms and rituals of those *subordinate* groups... who are alternatively dismissed, denounced and canonized; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons' (Hebdige 1988: 2, my emphasis). He and his colleagues from the Cultural Studies Group of the University of Birmingham saw subcultures as characteristic of working-class groups, 'clearly articulated, collective structures - often "near-" or "quasi-"gangs' (Hall 1976: 60). On the other hand, countercultural modes of the 60s, like the mods, the hippies and 'the alternative institutions of the Underground' were largely characterized as 'middle-class... diffuse, less group-centred, more individualized [...]; [they] precipitate, typically, not tight sub-cultures but a diffuse counterculture *milieu*' (ibid). With the benefit of hindsight, we now know, however, that a distinction based on class is very problematic, if at all valid. Most of the 'pure working class features' that theorists acknowledged in the subcultures they analyzed seem to have been performatively inscribed by the analysis rather than existing independent of it. From their analysis, however, another difference emerges: a subculture is in a constant dialectic with a dominant culture, a dialectic which includes recuperation and canonization, whereas a 'countercultural milieu', diffuse and 'artificial', is only palpable through its anti-dominant strategies (Hebdige 1988: 96; Beezer 1992: 110).

Tasos Halkias, rebetika, like the legendary Markos Vamvakaris, and the popular shadow puppet theatre of Karagiozes (Spatharis) (see Savvopoulos 2000).

We can posit a distinction between subcultures and countercultures on that level: a subculture very rarely *names* itself; more often, it *is named* either when it becomes recuperated by the cultural centre and thus needs to be packaged and reproduced as a new trend, or when it is studied and emulated by theorists, critics and devotees. On the other hand, a counterculture is characterized by its self-consciousness. Not only does it name itself, but it is often a counterculture that interpellates a subculture, by naming its predecessors. For every Dylan, there is a Lomax to 'unearth' country blues treasures, for every Savvopoulos, a Petropoulos to 'present' forgotten rebetiko masters. Very often, the use of an old tradition by a counterculture interpellates that tradition as subcultural (foregrounding its oppositional, anti-establishment characteristics), even though it may never have functioned as one before.

In these terms the *oppositional subculture* ends up being a theoretical originary moment (almost a myth of origin that never existed in its pure form). A counterculture stages itself as marginal with an aim to mock, to upset, to upstage and subvert. It conceives of itself as a theatre and shapes its reference as a scene.¹⁰² What was called 'Underground' in the 60s, can in these terms be seen as a self-consciously theatrical gesture: not a subcultural style but a countercultural citation of subterraneity.

Why is this distinction important? The answer lies, I believe, in the invented (and inverted) parentage that a counterculture proposes for itself, and the theatrical way it reconstructs it. We should remember here that the 'popular authorities' of the 50s and early 60s also talked about themselves as 'descendants' of older traditions. Folk and popular traditions were used to construct a high-popular canon. As I have suggested, a younger generation came to inhabit the supplement or excess of such a move. But the moment it positioned itself *counterculturally*, a radical shift in the mode of identification occurred. For the young artists of the Greek 60s, demotic songs and rebetika signalled not a prime, 'authentic' and representative material that could be used to construct a solid popular culture, but a subcultural mirror that existed *there before*, a

¹⁰² John Irving writes in 1970 that 'the subculture has become a concrete action system [...] and the persons [included are] more often self conscious *actors* [...] more persons are finding themselves judged by outsiders and *finding themselves marginal* [...] *Life is becoming more like a theater*.' (Irving 1997 [1970]: 67, 69) The link between acting, theatre and marginality makes a crucial point. Once a subcultural style is structured self-consciously (as it was in the post-60s youth cultures), its main asset is

hidden, confused and misused, indefinite and primordial plane against which they had to measure up. Suddenly the older traditions were seen as a subversive, subcultural topos, there to be revisited, usually in a hybrid, polyphonic way.¹⁰³

We have to see Savvopoulos's insistence that what is important is to give oneself over to a *process* of identification in this light: 'a musician's surrender (paradose) to his musical experience is a very personal matter' (*Vema* 2 November 1972, reprinted in Savvopoulos 1984: 117). Savvopoulos here plays with the Greek word *paradose* (tradition) and its linguistic root: instead of the active 'to give, to bequeath' (paradido), he associates it with the middle voice of the verb: to be given up, to surrender (paradidomai). Asked whether he felt any difference from the folklore musicians he had assembled as support for his concerts, he replied: 'We are all traditional (paradosiakoi). Because, what is tradition after all? Tradition is not what we have been given, nor what we will give to our successors. Tradition (paradose) is our own surrender (paradose) to what exists anyway' (1984 [1972]: 114).

By thinking that tradition is 'to be given to what exists anyway', Savvopoulos, at the time eager to show his psychoanalytic readings, refers directly to the Freudian *Wo es war soll ich werden* (where it/id was, I must become), in its particular rereading by Lacan. For Lacan, this phrase would mean 'I must come to be where foreign forces - the Other as language and the Other as desire - once dominated. I must subjectify that otherness' and more elaborately 'I must become I where "it" was or reigned; I must come to be, must assume its place, that place where "it" was... [must] assume responsibility for the unconscious' (Fink 1995: 68; 46). Let us take a step further: if tradition is always there already as the Other that interpellates us, then the moment that 'I' becomes tradition is only an illusion. 'I' can never become this whole Other, since 'I' would always have to be projected and measured up to it. The radical moment is not then when the 'I' becomes tradition, but when this illusion is deconstructed. In another quote of this period that seems at first sight controversial, we hear how this radicality is processed:

no longer what it is, but what it pretends to be, and the very fact that it pretends, acts and stages. This is why I propose the term counterculture for these self-staged, self-conscious and negotiated marginalities.

I do not like tradition especially, neither do I know it; you should dispel the impression that “Savvopoulos evolves folklore”. I only love some twenty demotic songs and a dozen of rebetika... Every time I decide *to glance at a book* with demotic or rebetika songs, or with byzantine or ancient hymns for that matter, I get bored and put it down (Savvopoulos 1984 [1971]: 85, emphasis added).

Hidden behind this statement is a distrust of the orality and perceived immediacy of folk and popular traditions. Instead of telling us that he ‘listens’ or ‘performs’ older songs, Savvopoulos stresses that he opens books and reads them; reads *through* them, one is tempted to add. If language (and alongside it, tradition) shapes the world and ‘was there’ before us, then in its textuality we can find the gaps in its consistency, we can question its power. *Reading through* also means working against language’s performativity, questioning its ideological function. Reading through in order to map the points at which the linguistic system is torn, the gaps through which we can glimpse what lies beyond, standing outside ideology ready to be called for its undoing. This is only a move *towards* - it falls short of establishing itself as a permanent situation. For Savvopoulos, this comes close to a definition of rock music: the tearing, the opening up that cannot provide stability. ‘These songs I am now writing are “rock”, if I am not mistaken. My attitude is rock. That is, impetuous and impotent. “Rock”, just like every art form that is still alive, is impetuous but cannot guarantee a proper and permanent way out’ (ibid). He would amplify this viewpoint in another interview the next year: ‘In order for one to realize what rock is, one has to feel rock. Which means one has to feel homeless, in search of a roof and of basic principles, and ready to knock them down and go away once they are almost found’ (Savvopoulos 1984 [1972]: 123). This description of the subject constantly *on the move*, is also stripping away the certainty that one can become one’s mirror image (that is, that rock can become blues, that Savvopoulos can write a rebetiko song). Iteration, constant movement and enjoyment: these are the elements on which Savvopoulos builds his mimicry of ‘rock’, and which I will now illustrate with a further presentation of some songs from this period.

¹⁰³ In a very characteristic article published early in 1972 in the fanzine *Mousike Genia*, Tasos Falireas uses the word Underground (untranslated) to describe ‘Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Vamvakaris [...], Robin Hood, Simos the existentialist, Soteria Bellou, Daskalakes, Theofilos’ (Falireas 1972).

Moving around a Fool's Garden

Savvopoulos's 'conversion to rock' in 1968-9 shook Athens. Mimicking a countercultural revolt was seen as an effective way to challenge the cultural deadlock the dictatorship had imposed. Savvopoulos's 1969 album, *To Perivoli tou Trellou* (Fool's Garden) is the mantra of his rock conversion, full of allusions to English pop, American counterculture and 'distorted' fragments of Greek literature. The album's cover, a hippy-styled, colourful pastiche, immediately recalls the covers of the Beatles's *Yellow Submarine* and *Sergeant Pepper* albums. *The Fool's Garden* is considered 'the first purely rock album in Greece' (Terzakes 1990; Karabelias 1985) not without good reason. As the album's first song self-consciously proposes:

Something is happening here, truly
 something mystical
 something rich and strange
 like a site of the sea-bed.
 Blossoming cherry-trees
 and a warm afternoon
 and colourful grass, oh yeah
 for me to fall asleep.

The song is a hymn to subterraneity, to the mystical, colourful, odd, dense and flowery imagery of hippies, psychedelia and Underground. The 'colourful grass', is a barely concealed reference to narcotics. In the meantime, the mystical 'something [which] is happening', (a possible reference to Dylan's 'Something is happening and you don't know what it is' from 'The Ballad of a Thin Man'), alludes to cryptographic oppositionalities in general. The youthful audience following Savvopoulos in his Plaka concerts of 1969, where he first performed this song, could invest both countercultural and strictly political, antifascist meaning in a song ultimately about being able to escape, to create parallel, subterranean worlds. Savvopoulos's 'secret garden' gestures very firmly towards what Jameson has termed 'the superstructural credit' offered by the 60s.

Orchestration is central in conveying the subterranean 'mystique' of *The Fool's Garden*; it also completes (along with the cover and the hallucinatory allusiveness of

certain songs) the impression of a musical U-turn performed by the songwriter. Instead of the single guitar of *Fortigo*, we hear a long series of percussion instruments, brass orchestras, choruses, electric guitars and flutes. The 'colourful garden' of the title is performatively introduced in the music, the "turn to rock" musically dramatized in a much more ostentatious way than in, say, Dylan's similar "conversion" (*Blonde on Blonde*).¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the appearance on the back cover of some of the musicians who performed on the album, along with the mention that their group, Bourboulia, was responsible for parts of the orchestration, illustrates another point: that it is the work of a large group of performing musicians, a collective, oppositional work, a representative piece of a larger counterculture.¹⁰⁵

Often the inventive and rich orchestration seems to fill the sound band so much that words are rendered superfluous: music abundance thus becomes the place for hiding words, and this can be seen as an effective strategy to topple censorship. As Foucault has argued, 'there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses' (Foucault 1984: 27); the things that one does not say 'function alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies' (ibid). The non-said thus becomes a silenced supplement, and in the case of Savvopoulos's songs of this period, it often gets resignified through a musically excessive gesture: music speaks on behalf of the words that cannot be uttered.¹⁰⁶

This is exactly what happens in the song 'Thalassographia' ('Sea-paint'). A rhythmical piece impressively orchestrated, loud and imposing, where the singer only

¹⁰⁴ This also shows that Savvopoulos's initial 'guitar only' orchestrations did not have any strong and deep musical relation to Dylan: when the latter moved to more complicated orchestrations, his musical style remained untouched - still deeply influenced by blues and American folk; on the other hand, Savvopoulos's new orchestrations have a crucial impact on his whole musical style. Significantly, the famous Synnefoula is repeated with a new orchestration in *Perivoli*; with all its flutes, drums, timpani and ironic marching rhythm, it sounds like a completely different song.

¹⁰⁵ Savvopoulos's orchestrations of the Junta period were often presented as 'collective works in progress', and in one case, we have a recording to prove that: in the record *Zontanoi sto Kyttaro* musicians who collaborate with Savvopoulos, perform (without the songwriter) a 7 minute piece that would then become the basis of the song *Mavri Thalassa*.

¹⁰⁶ Savvopoulos's devices for overcoming censorship have been aptly described by, amongst others, Karen Van Dyck. But as Van Dyck's main example, the song 'Therio', which was recorded before and released after the dictatorship, makes clear, censorship played a creative role: more than the external censorship imposed by the junta, censorship also represents for Savvopoulos an integral part of the creative process, one that foregrounds dramatically the Rimbaldian 'Je est un autre'.

repeats 'Take us far away, bring us to the [places of the] other side/ blow, you wide sea, blow wind, blow wind'. The piece reworks the escapist idea of 'going away' which is central for certain genres of commercial pop. The phrase 'Thalassa Plateia' is also a direct reference to a song by Hadjidakis, a cinematic hit of the early 60s sung by the popular actress Aliki Vougiouklaki. 'Wide sea, I love you because you're like me'. On the other side of Hadjidakis's wide sea, that could be seen as a site of cultural recuperation and de-ideologized escapism, Savvopoulos's Sea, added in the topography of the *Fool's Garden*, becomes the site of staged oppositionality: its escapism is no longer the sign of recuperation, but a strategy for how not to be recuperated. Savvopoulos's 'place of the other side' maps the subterranean topography of oppositionality.

A similar oppositional use of escapism is explored further in the song 'Eida ten Anna kapote' (I saw Anna once) which is built on an exact metrical and thematic allusion to the early poems by the 'Greek national poet' Dionissios Solomos 'Xanthoula' (The little Blonde) and 'Agnoriste' (The Unrecognizable). Reversing Solomos's image of a woman going away in 'Xanthoula', the song recalls a female friend coming back abruptly, only to leave again.

I suddenly saw my childhood friend, Anna,
 I saw her standing and staring at me
 ...
 I now see her coming down, she's standing on the step
 before she disappears for ever in the roaring of the world

The literary intertext is distorted as if it were read through a hallucinatory mirror. Unlike Solomos, who saw 'Agnoriste's eyes as 'having... the colour of the sky', in Anna's eyes the songwriter discerns 'fragmented statues... forgotten cities, shipwrecks on the seabed'. The seabed stands, again, for subterraneity, and 'Anna' becomes a key passage to the other culture, the hidden topos of fluidity: 'the steps are fading away, nobody is there/ we will wander around alone,/ seas cities empty stations/ everything is changing down here at such a pace'. In the end, the song again gives way to music, with the songwriter surrendering his words to a repeated 'lalalalala'.

Voi(ce)d: tearing, hole and emptiness

If a persistent reference to youth counter-culture, drugs and rock is one pole of *The Fool's Garden*, the other is the strategy of re-playing tradition and older popular styles. One of the earlier examples is 'Dirlanda', a sailor's song from Kalymnos, recorded in *The Fool's Garden*. (Ironically, this was Savvopoulos's only international hit, later sung by Dalida in French). Other songs engage with older traditions in more complex mechanisms of signification. One refers to rebetiko: the older genre is evoked for its marginality and subcultural power, and this helps the songwriter (the 'imitator' of the voice of the rebetika), to fulfil his impulse to go away, to become a hole in the system of the world:

Like an old Rebetiko, my voice is fading away and disperses
 I don't count anymore in this world
 So I waved my goodbyes
 I went, and left a hole behind me

In a third song from the same album, the 'Ode ston Georgio Karaiskake' (Ode to Karaiskakis), a re-location of tradition maps a larger gesture: folk music is torn, opened up, reduced to a mere frame. The song starts and finishes with a pseudo-demotic melodic theme; we hear a five-tone tune first performed on the guitar, then the violin, subsequently joined by three different folk wind instruments: a wooden flute, a clarinet and a tsampouna, a Greek bag-pipe. This is a strong reference to demotic songs, and in particular those of Epirus written in five-tone scales. But the main part of the song turns, unexpectedly, into a slow rock ballad, without any demotic allusions. The introductory tune will only return at the end to close the song. Mirroring the musical strategy, the song's title also alludes to a demotic song with the mention of 'Karaiskakis', the legendary hero of the Greek uprising, a frequent hero of the Klephtika demotic songs. Like the folkish tune which is only heard at the song's musical extremes, Karaiskakis's name is mentioned only in the title. In the main body of the lyrics an unnamed hero is addressed instead; but, rather than a living hero, the song, in a further twist, is about the dead hero's image being diffused by antennae and screens:

The screen sinks
 the crowd moves
 images
 burst out at once
 Where are you going
 brave man
 beautiful like a myth
 you are swimming
 straight to death

and all the antennae
 of a battered earth
 loudspeakers and wireless everywhere
 they sing you sweet lullabies
 and you rise
 high among the kings
 of the skies.

The audience of the time was swift to understand Savvopoulos's allusion: the song, they said, was about Che Guevara, recently assassinated in the woods of Bolivia, with the discussion about the role played by new surveillance satellite technology in his capture still a burning issue (Falireas 1999). Some also heard it as a covert reference to Alekos Panagoules, one of the earliest and bravest heroes of the Greek resistance, whose arrest was extensively reported and filmed for cinema newsreels.¹⁰⁷

Superseding its possible connotations, however, the song is first and foremost a comment on the way a myth is constructed and on whether it can remain oppositional after its media(tiza)tion. In Barthesian fashion, the hero's image becomes resignified,

¹⁰⁷ For this interpretation one can point out the line 'you are swimming straight to death'. Panagoules, pretending to be a tourist, detonated a bomb next to the dictator's car. He was swiftly arrested and the photograph of him in his swimming trunks held by two policemen became one of the symbolic fixtures of the dictatorship era. For a literary response to this photograph see Cicellis, 1977. For a description of Panagoules's funeral which subliminally, uses tropes (screens, crowds 'moving like an octopus') very comparable to Savvopoulos's, see Fallaci 1979. Generally, 'Ode ston Karaiskake' can be contrasted to Theodorakis's 'Song for Petroulas', a hymn to a student killed during a demonstration in 1965, also written in the second person. Theodorakis had emphasized the *immediacy* and *spontaneity* of his song which 'was sung by the crowds during Petroulas's funeral' (see Theodorakis 1997: 143).

produced and reproduced as a second order semiological system (see Barthes [1957] 1993: 114-115). However, the process by which the myth is recuperated by the canon is itself turned outwards and made a spectacle through Savvopoulos's poetic techniques. If a myth is a sign emptied from the inside in order to be invested with new, manipulated signification (thus ending, in Barthes's words, a 'depoliticized speech'), then in Savvopoulos's song the myth is again emptied of its mythical signification, and in the same way, resignified for a second time. The folk song is torn and emptied, in order to open up a place in its kernel for a rock ballad; Karaiskakis's myth is kept as an empty shell in which the image of a new hero is infused. If this were not enough, the song is obsessed with mediation, with the modality and form of signification. An almost disturbing reference to antennae, loudspeakers, hymns and the wireless heightens the song's self-referentiality, pointing to the inherent doublesidedness of semiosis: the very agencies that tracked the hero down and led to his capture are also used to mythologize him.

As a self-consciously popular song, 'Ode ston Karaiskake' does not have claims to the 'unmediated orality' of a demotic song; it instead foregrounds its dependence on media(tiza)tion. Significantly, the singer does not share the certainty of the singer/subject of a demotic song: 'Who am I really and where am I going/ with thousands of pictures in my mind/ spotlights blind me and still I go/ and I kneel/ and I kiss your blood' shouts Savvopoulos in the chorus of the song. With this phrase, the centre of the song has suddenly become deserted, left unclaimed, a hole in the 'process' of mythic signification. The teller 'kneels and kisses' the hero's blood, but still remains an itinerant, a lost, unsure and insecure voice. '*With thousands of pictures in my mind*'. One is reminded here of Ginsberg's verses:

all the pictures we carry in our mind
 images of the Thirties,
 depression and class consciousness
 transfigured above politics
 filled with fire
 with the appearance of God. (Ginsberg 1961: 30)

Ginsberg's God is the site of a myth that exceeds structure and modality of politics, through a transfiguration. At this mystical and magical moment, politics return in a new form, 'filled with fire', to inhabit us as pictures transfigured, made new and strange, and, most importantly, changed from passive representations to active and re-acting catalysts. The transition is predicated neither on any form of forgetting the 'classical' social conflict, nor on an evolutionary model of 'learning through a previous example of conflict' (the Thirties); instead, what is being proposed is iteration and citation: a doubling up of events that already exist as photographs in the mind. Such a simulation of images introduces, not the metaphor one expects to find at the centre of the myth (something representing something else) but a chain of signifiers (photographs doubled up) in an endless metonymic chain. As a side-effect of metonymy, the centre of the poem is still left burning and in the process of transformation, pulverized and liquified.

Savvopoulos's use of the heroic myth is similar. We hear the voice of the songwriter at the centre of the song announcing its instability (*who am I and where am I going*), instead of the falsely secure consciousness provided by a metaphoric mythic process; this becomes the catalyst for the song's retrospective (re)signification along a metonymic chain. The subject/voice of the song articulates the void, the missing link in the centre of the signifying structure in a way that folk music allusions and the screens referred to in the lyrics (both 'images' of a myth) become the site of a crossed out, blocked, barred, non-whole, inconsistent Other that cannot provide stability and certainty.¹⁰⁸ Unexpectedly though, the authorial gap at the centre of the song reactivates the myth: instead of a stable, recuperable structure, the latter in the end has become an energy field, an electric moment. This is how the song ends: 'The crowd howls/ bells are ringing/ and your hymn/ is shaking the temple.'

We have a defining moment for the cultural politics under discussion here. Instead of simply using an old tradition for its perceived subcultural value and antiestablishment connotations as a metaphor for opposition, the songwriter transfigures

¹⁰⁸ I am here drawing on Žižek's Lacanian readings as they appear in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and *For They Know Not What They Do* (see in particular Žižek 1989: 74 and 1991: 200). In a detailed Lacanian analysis of this song, we could argue that both the folk mimicry of the introduction and the screens addressed in the lyrics, are forms of what Lacan symbolizes with the figure S (A barré), the signifier of the impossibility, of the crossed out Other. To follow the game in Lacanese, we could thus

the folk tune echo (and the mythic name: Karaiskakis). Instead of symbols, he makes them sound as if left-over from the operation of entering the Symbolic, a non-symbolized topos lying beyond, and thus an uncontainable/unrecuperable energy.

With electric voices: Zeibekiko's countercultural politics

A similar transfiguration of an older tradition commands the centre of another song, 'Zeibekiko'. The song is structured as a palimpsest: two stories, recorded one 'behind' the other, and two styles, rock and rebetiko, the latter posited as the mirror of the former.

Enter the songwriter and his generation: in the first verses, 'the friends' are introduced as itinerants, young people who live underground and escape to far away places. The 60s' countercultural youth, 'singing with electric voices', address their 'father Batis' in this song, a legendary figure of the rebetiko tradition active in the 30s-40s; they are in search of "his basic principles":

On aeroplanes and boats
and with old friends
we wander in the darkness
and yet you can't hear us

You can't hear our singing
with electric voices
in the underground arcades
until our orbits meet
your basic principles

My father Batis,
came from Smyrna in '22
and lived for 50 years
in a basement of secrets (a mystic basement)

In this world whoever loves

name Savvopoulos's self-positioning in this song as *voi(ce)d*: a *voice* alerting us to the presence of a *void* which in its turn is glimpsed through its 'covers' (screens/folk mimicry) becoming, in that way, *voiced*.

eats a bitter bread
 Said Batis one Sunday
 and their desires pursue
 underground routes

Mimicking a rebetiko, the song is orchestrated with bouzouki and built on the metre of the title, the 9/8 characteristic of most rebetika songs. The surface text describes the countercultural experience as a staging of an older subcultural style that leads, again, to an electric eruption in the last stanza.¹⁰⁹ 'Go on my soul, plug it in/ set your clothes on fire/ the music set on fire/ a blast of black spirit to become/ our awesome voice'.

After the whole first narrative has been sung through once, the songwriter's voice moves slowly to the right loudspeaker, leaving the left sound source 'empty'. It has a very powerful impact, magnified, I think, by the fascination listeners would have felt with the new aesthetic options offered by the relatively new technique of stereo recording.¹¹⁰

After some seconds with the left loudspeaker completely 'empty', and as from the right speaker we hear the same voice repeating the song we have just heard, in the left speaker a voice both same and other, sings 'between the lines', in counterpoint to the original melody. Savvopoulos's second voice sings a second narrative, this time a paean to a female deity:

Huge mother
 Voice of blood and sky
 You were holding me and we were going away...
 I will get lost
 In the world like a refugee
 You were holding me and we were going away.

¹⁰⁹ It helps to know that Batis, the legendary soloist of the Peiraeen rebetiko scene, was born in Methana and then emigrated to Peiraeus; he is presented in the song as coming from Smyrna after the city's fall to the Turkish army, a route followed by other rebetiko musicians. This inaccuracy is deliberately inserted in the song, as if to underline the fictiveness of every subculture, the fact that it lies mostly in the eye (and the distortions) of the (countercultural) beholder.

¹¹⁰ I am here referring to the 1972 recording of the song, included in the LP *Vromiko Psomi* (1972).

Supplementing (but also parasitical to) the previous narrative, this is a longing for a pre-patriarchal (that is, pre-symbolic) order of signification.¹¹¹ As a displacement of the symbolic order, the second voice destabilizes our sense of certainty. The song ends up rewriting the longing for 'the Other' of a subcultural style (*whoever loves... their desires pursue/ underground routes*) with the impulse to go away, to shift from place to place in a chain of signification (*I will get lost... in the world like a refugee... you were holding me and we were going away*). Like the myth of Karaiskakis emptied of its symbolic content in order to become an electric eruption, metonymy comes in 'Zeibekiko' to firmly define the politics of a counterculture. The presence of the 'father Batis' and his 'basic principles' is displaced by the maternal figure of the 'huge woman'. We have to listen again, and the second time we realize that what initially seemed like a stable identification with a rebellious father is in fact unlocked by the desire for fluidity and a metonymic sliding of the signifier: *You were holding me and we were going away*.

'Her body melting in my mouth': the oral politics of emptiness (Mavre Thalassa)

In another song, 'Mavre Thalassa' (Black Sea), tradition itself becomes the site of a void. The song's main tune is, significantly, based on the folk song 'Ta Lianorohortaroudia'.¹¹² The chorus, however, keeps on repeating: 'I do not have a sound, I do not have material'. More than the emptiness one feels when one comes as a belated son in a tradition, the song is about reading counterculturally through a tradition in order not to reinscribe it in the cultural system, but to destabilize it profoundly:

Let us say words savage, strange and whole
On her dead face shrouds and soil
Her tough voice melts like a huge body
in my own mouth.

¹¹¹ The device of singing a second song 'behind' a first, completely different song, was very successfully used by Simon & Garfunkel in 'Scarborough Fair'. The 'hymn to a female presence' motif is very strong in the late-60s Bob Dylan, with songs like 'Sad-Eyed Lady' and 'Visions of Johanna'. For an analysis of them in this perspective, see Bowden 1977.

¹¹² Domna Samiou claims that she was the first to sing this demotic tune to Savvopoulos who then 'turned it upside down and changed the words' (Samio 2002).

If 'tradition' is used for what is seen as its subcultural, liberational characteristics (*words savage, strange and whole*), it is also imposed as a dead body, as a present absence in the voice of the song (*her voice... melts like a huge body in my own mouth*). The bitterness one feels after a wake spent smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol (and possibly singing traditional songs in a club) is powerfully transfigured into an image of a body decomposing in the mouth. The mouth, a site of orality in both senses of the word (the echo chamber of the voice and the cavity of oral fixation), cannot identify itself on the firm ground of tradition. What could have been a nodal point to structure ideology (tradition as a metaphor for freedom), is instead turned into a site of progressing emptiness. As a destitute *nodal point* of meaning, the emptying Black Sea does not corroborate meaning but lets it slide again into metonymy. The mouth is a hole, the voice is a void.

The persistent, almost obsessive mention of a void that haunts a large number of Savvopoulos's songs needs to be addressed in greater detail. It usually takes the form of empty sites/myths ('*Greece, a blind hole in geography*' from 'Gennetheka sten Saloniki' (1979)), empty figures/voices ('*My voice fades away and disperses... I said my goodbyes, I went and left a hole behind me*' from 'San Rebetiko'), empty laws and empty utopias ('*the sky is an empty law*' from 'Moro'), empty poetics ('*song full of holes and verse full of patches*' from 'Kileler' (1969)), empty desire ('*Our love is full of holes and it cannot protect us*' from 'San ton Karagkioze' (1974)), empty writing ('*My rhythms have gone frenetic, but they can't hold the sound [...] I erase miles of written matter/ for you to find the page white*' ('Mystiko Topio' (1983))). Very often songs are also 'stopped', musically stripped to their underlying rhythm, the resulting emptiness lying thus at the centre of the innermost structure of the piece. To these we should add the very frequent device of singing 'meaningless words', indecipherable phonemes and sequences of word-sounds without meaning to disrupt the 'normality' of the lyrics:¹¹³

This song seems like a tune in a difficult key
With words that I could not, once again,

¹¹³ Vassilis Lambropoulos has thus commented on these 'meaningless' words: 'Nowhere else in the most recent Greek poetry can we find such an anguished vigilance, the lust to liberate the ineffable and the

Aoudouadaria aoudaria, I have tried again
[this song] is such a stranger.

These non-words give us an idea about the function of the void; they push us beyond the symbolic: they are the supplement of language, not yet signified, but pure phatic power, a near noise, 'a passing susurrations within the cosmic process... This is the language of prophecy moving towards a final emptiness' (Bowie 1991: 87).¹¹⁴ If language structures the world, language's supplements, sequences of non-signified phonemes, signal the presence of what Lacan called the Real, this part which does not expect anything from the word, but is 'there, identical to its existence, a noise in which everything can be heard, and ready to submerge in its outbursts what the 'reality principle' constructs within it under the name of external world' (Lacan 1966: 388; translated in Bowie 1991: 95).

The voids and the disruption of order built into the songs are no longer empty semiotic spaces inscribing the tension between a dominant culture and a youth counterculture. They lead to an eruption of the Other side, they touch what lies beyond symbolization.

Unlocking metonymy. A Lacanian perspective.

One is tempted to work with Lacan's theorization of the void and the Real here. For Lacan, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, the two registers around which human experience is organized, are made possible only because they are constructed around a central void, the gap of the Real. The Real, as a third register, is not what people understand as external reality; 'external reality' is for Lacan the already structured symbolic world. The Real lies beyond symbolization: it comprises what is left over after symbolization, and what is not projected in the imaginary during the process of identification. The Real is always present, however, and makes its presence felt through the inconsistencies of the other two registers, through the gaps and the outworld

terror of silence, as in the non-signified vocals that make up the [wordless] cries of [Savvopoulos's] songs' (Lambropoulos 1976: 319).

¹¹⁴ In this part I am influenced by Lacan's discussion of the Upanishad in 'The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis' (see Lacan 1966 esp.: 322). Malcolm Bowie's phrases quoted are from his discussion of this same passage (Bowie 1991: 86-87).

moments one experiences. As Slavoj Žižek explains, ‘in the normal state of affairs, the Real is a lack, a hole in the middle of the symbolic order (the central black spot in Rothko’s paintings), enjoyment which drives the proliferation of signifiers by its lack, functioning as a central ‘black hole’ around which the signifying network is interlaced’ (Žižek 1989a: 26).

We could thus see Savvopoulos’s persisting voids as a constant overspill or residue of the Real. By “showing” the black holes of signification, Savvopoulos undermines order without negating it altogether. He tries to effect ruptures in the seemingly seamless texture of ‘reality’, to let the floodgates of the Real open, even momentarily. This could be taken as a gesture against totalitarianism: disturbing the junta’s symbolic system with the shock of the Real as an effective weapon against its authority. But if the dictatorship was the big Other to be addressed during this period, Savvopoulos’s challenge is, as I have suggested before, a much larger and more prolonged one. Denouncing the whole process of the dictatorship as a big Other, he makes clear that his critique touches the big Other’s central gap in general, undermining the very aim of every ideological matrix to support discourse, metaphor and stable identifications.

We should not forget that Savvopoulos’s challenge first focused on a disturbance of the ‘political song’ expectations through a deliberate mingling of mindless enjoyment with political activism. After that, he moved to a persistent undermining of the singer-songwriter-poet model through his fragmented self presentations and the emptying/mockery of his storytelling authority. In the furthest step he takes, he moves to reconstruct the field within which he works by melting all the above challenges through a force of jouissance, a rupture of the symbolic order by the full embrace of/identification with what the later Lacan calls the *sinthome*. Before moving on to analyze the effect of this in the song ‘Ballos’, I will first explain this move in theoretical terms.

Fantasy, jouissance and the sinthome

One of the ways in which Lacan conceptualized the Real and the jouissance related to its experience was through an analysis of fantasy. Contrary to expectation, Lacan argues

that it is through a dreamlike fantasy that we can finally approach the hard kernel of the Real (Lacan 1976-7). I will try briefly to show how this happens, first borrowing an example from Žižek, then moving on to an analysis of Savvopoulos.

If for Freud, fantasy denotes ‘a scene which is presented to the imagination and which stages an unconscious desire’, Lacan stresses that the fantasy is both ‘that which enables the subject to sustain his desire, and “that by which the subject sustains *himself* at the level of his vanishing desire”’ (quoted in Evans 1996: 60). In a version of the world as an illusion, there persists a hard kernel of the Real, and it is its memory that we keep when we ‘wake up’, and find ourselves amidst the symbolic world.

Fantasy as a screen of desire can have a totalitarian aspect (in it, ‘the world’ becomes ruled by the subject, always present as a central character, Freud reminds us); this is what totalitarian regimes exploit: they are very often based on a collective fantasy (supremacy, world domination, mythical past, prosperity) which, however, they present as reality and ground in an oversymbolized matrix. Some cases of resistance to totalitarian regimes, then, can give us a crucial example: the residue of the Real is used by them to effect ruptures in the seemingly seamless texture of fantasy’s totalitarian cover; as moments of spectacular resistance, they permit a speculum of the Real.

Slavoj Žižek, explaining that particular moment where fantasy’s totalitarianism becomes the topos of oppositionality, uses a well known example from Terry Gilliam’s film *Brazil*: during the picture, a totalitarian regime is identified with a well-known mindless song, ‘Brazil’, which is heard everywhere. The implication is that ‘the mindlessly obtrusive rhythm of the song serves as a support for totalitarian enjoyment, condensing the fantasy-frame of the ‘insane’ totalitarian order that the film depicts’. But in the last scene, when the hero is being tortured and his resistance about to be broken, he stages his most effective opposition by whistling the tune of ‘Brazil’:

Thus, whilst functioning as a support of the totalitarian order, fantasy is at the same time that overspill or residue of the Real that enables us to ‘pull ourselves out’, to preserve a kind of distance from the socio-symbolic order. When we go crazy in our obsession with mindless *jouissance*, even totalitarian manipulation cannot reach us’ (Žižek 1999a: 16).

This is not simply homeopathy (redirecting the enjoyment factor against totalitarianism). The hero of *Brazil*, like the singer of Savvopoulos's songs and his audience, is 'pulled out' of totalitarian manipulation and its socio-symbolic order by locking himself into the excess of fantasy. He situates himself within jouissance, becoming, however momentarily, identified with the Real and reproduced through a gap, centrifuged, metonymized. The body, now a site of contestation at the time of torture, reacts by reproducing the totalitarian fantasy as its own jouissance. From Barthes to Lacan, jouissance (with the connotations of orgasm and ejaculation that the term 'enjoyment' lacks in English) is used to denote enjoyment that lies beyond pleasure, is uncontainable, painful and fundamentally transgressive (Evans 1996: 92).¹¹⁵ It is extremely interesting that in our example jouissance is located in a song coming from both inside and outside the body, both exhumed by it at the time of torture and located outside its boundaries, in the fantasy shaping the world. Thus the song becomes a link between the symbolic, the fantasy, and also their transgression through jouissance. This reminds one of a grapheme Lacan used when he reconceptualized the symptom from the perspective of jouissance. In his late seminars on Joyce, Lacan coined the term *sinthome*, a neologism that punningly alludes to an old spelling of the word symptom, also to sainthood, and to Saint Thomas (Lacan 1987). With *sinthome*, he tried to define a topos that holds together the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. The *sinthome* is also a way to think about jouissance -that is, if jouissance is an unsymbolizable sudden glimpse of the Real, then the *sinthome*, with its triple grounding, provides a glimpse of jouissance, makes us aware of its existence. As Žižek explains, 'symptom as *sinthome* is a certain signifying formation penetrated with enjoyment: it is a signifier as a bearer of jouis-sence, enjoyment-in-sense' (Žižek 1989: 75). In other words, while the symptom is a key to the organization of the symbolic world, the *sinthome* gives rise to an organization of jouissance, a parallel universe. A symbolic order *rewritten* by the Real and *penetrated* by jouissance.

¹¹⁵ Lacan goes on to propose his famous distinction between pleasure and jouissance. The pleasure principle works, he maintains, as a limit to enjoyment; according to it the subject has to 'enjoy as little as possible'. Transcending the pleasure principle brings the pain of jouissance. Jouissance has been often translated as enjoyment, but it has also been pointed out that the word could be kept in English as it is mentioned in the *OED*. This gives us the opportunity to retain both words suggesting a tripartite

What we must bear in mind here is the radical ontological status of symptom: symptom, conceived as *sinthome*, is literally our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject... [a] binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world (Žižek 1989: 75).

The reason I find this formulation exciting for radical thinking on songs and popular music is that it allows one to draw parallels with popular music's uses. We have to remember here that the popular song:

- a) functions as part of the texture of the - *symbolic* - everyday life;
- b) becomes a topos for *imaginary* projections (personal and national identity formation, the imaginary aspect of everyday life);
- c) with the connotations of dance and body participation, veers towards excess of/and enjoyment, a transcendental experience of the *real* lying beyond.

What is difficult is to conceptualize all these orders simultaneously. We have the song seen as a projection of literariness and/or national identity deposit, *or* as a mindless disposable hit for everyday life consumption, *or* as an electric eruption, a power (and topos) of bodily transcendence. How then, if at all, could one synthesize all three of these aspects, and how radical would the outcome be? An answer is proposed, I believe, in Savvopoulos's defiant masterpiece, the 17 minute long 'Ballos', with which I will draw my analysis to a close.

'Into the long song, I was built alive.': built in jouissance

Savvopoulos sheds light on his song 'Ballos' with a cross-reference from a later song: 'And then I was the rhythm/ drum-drummie-drum [daou-daoula-daouli]/ into the long song, I was built alive'.¹¹⁶ Like the hero of *Brazil*, the songwriter gets immersed in

structure: *pleasure* (repressed jouissance), *enjoyment* (organization of jouissance through the sinthome), and *jouissance* (uncontainable and ineffable eruption). (see Thurston 1996; Lacan 1991, esp. : 51)

¹¹⁶ This is a lyric from the song 'Moro' (Baby) which, in more ways than one, functions as Ballos's supplement. In this song, Savvopoulos refers to Ballos also as 'the song of the Other that I repeat'. The link between repetition, 'Ballos' and Otherness (in Greek Allos/ Other is phonetically included in Ballos) appears also in a much later song, 'E Monaxia tes Amerikes' (America's loneliness) from *Hronopoios* (The Timemaker) (1999), where the songwriter says: 'Where is the Other, my soul, for I need to replay Ballos'.

'Ballos', a long song painstakingly, almost tortuously, built.¹¹⁷ Circumventing many parts of what is a multi-faceted song, I will focus on its politics of 'engulfing jouissance' and the radical consequences of such a move.

'Ballos' (1971) is Savvopoulos's magnum opus in the sense that it exemplifies his oppositional poetics and articulates a radical critique of both the sociopolitical reality and the cultural field within whose boundaries this work is being produced. A song covering the whole first side of an LP of that title, 'Ballos' disrupts 'order' from the beginning: first, it defies the discographic 'rule' that a popular song's duration should not exceed 4-5 minutes.¹¹⁸ Even though the song takes its title from a folk dance, no precise musical references to Ballos folk dances are made, hence the title ends up a void description. The song is divided into four parts, the first and fourth set to similar tunes, the second a theatrical recitative, and the third an almost conventional ballad. Numerous instruments are used in the orchestration, mostly folk wind and percussion instruments, interacting with the classic rock sounds of electric guitar, electric bass (figuring prominently) and drums. 'Ballos' is meant to be a cartography of songwriting-in-progress. It borrows folk tunes and poetic allusions, avant-garde recording and performing techniques while even a couple of army marches find their echo in the tune. Playing with ideas of music and noise, rhythm and enjoyment, storytelling and community gatherings, it deals at first sight with the doing and the undoing of music as a social event. The opening setting is mythical: the singer-storyteller is introduced as an itinerant, 'alone and austere in the path/ with my bag empty and a baby on my back'. He hears that festivities are starting in a nearby village and goes there to assume a role in them.

At this point the music suddenly stops, or rather, its core is stripped off: we are left with only the rhythmic battering from a zourna, the traditional Greek timpani. Within this musical 'hole', the songwriter starts to deliver rhymed lines, his voice approaching the heartbeat of the song. This is what he says:

¹¹⁷ Evident here is a reference to the folk myth of the bridge of Arta, for the completion of which a young woman had to be built into the foundations.

¹¹⁸ Indeed, we learn that there was tension between songwriter and producer before Savvopoulos finally prevailed. (Falireas 1999)

I know this song
 and that narrow flash in the mirror
 I've seen it before
 I fancy a liberal and rich life
 and I greet you
 and I kiss you
 you little coloured creatures
 locked in the mirror

I know this noise
 from round arches
 and blocked wells
 from mystic woods
 prehistoric woods
 kept deep in the ice.
 It comes towards me
 and it engulfs me
 I bring my finger to my mouth
 shhh! shhh!

The mirror and the 'small creatures' here are sufficient links to the themes of Otherness and identification that underlie the song. If the first part staged an older tradition of folk festivals (resignified in countercultural style as a liberational subcultural moment), then its mirror brings not safety, stability and 'music', but their opposites. The mirror brings noise coming from a hole somewhere behind and deep, hidden and blocked. Blocked desire and barred subject are undermined by this noise: it is a dissonance coming from beyond the Symbolic, a sound coming beyond the festival. The songwriter, in a completely different tone of voice, then shouts:

WHAT'S HAPPENING?¹¹⁹

Has there been a landslide, has any rock fallen?

¹¹⁹ There is always something lost in translation: the original Greek phrase is TI TREHEI, which colloquially means 'what's up/ what's happening', literally however, it can mean 'what is it running', or 'what is it spilling'. I have tried to make these latent meanings resound in my analysis.

In Lacanian terms, this is the voice of a big Other asking the most intriguing, the most significant and charged question of otherness: What do you want (*Che Vuoi*)?¹²⁰ But who is this big Other?

The very implausibility, grotesqueness and irrationality of the phrase as it is uttered in this recitative part, leads me to think of it first as a direct imitation of the dictator Papadopoulos's well-known mannerisms and metaphors. In his speeches, the dictator often compared Greece to 'a patient' suffering from various illnesses or a place hit by a natural disaster; his 'God given' role, he maintained, was that of a doctor who would cure, or a mechanic who would 'fix' the leaks, the cuts and breaks. What follows in Savvopoulos's text supports this reference: we are faced with a satire of the dictatorship's cultural politics:

The crowds
are screaming in the stadium's shuttles
tambourines, drums, percussions [defia daoulia krotala]
are heard somewhere in the background
processions are mounting
and then the great goat
the protagonist
enters
with a saw
he is wearing a tin crown
and a pair of blinkers
he sprinkles with blood
the stone steps
thus making the site grow.

Evident here is a very clear reference to the dictatorship's 'cultural fairs' which took place in the Panathinaikon Stadium (full of white marble steps) in successive years after 1969. In these 'Festivals', to the sounds of laiko and demotic songs, hundreds of school children, dressed in ancient Greek mantles or 19th-century folk dresses, paraded and

¹²⁰ For an analysis of this part of Lacanian teaching, and its implications for ideology, see Žižek 1989: 87-129.

reconstructed 'famous moments from the Greek past', mostly battles from ancient Greek history or from the uprising against the Ottoman Empire.

Savvopoulos marshals against this distortive cultural/nationistic extravaganza his own satirical gesture. As a distortion of the distortion, a mimicked extravaganza, this central part of 'Ballos' could be seen as a mocking of the fantasy parade of totalitarianism. However, in a further subversive turn, it deliberately mingles the description of a fake propaganda 'event' (*crowds... are screaming... shuttles... protagonist... tin crown*) with words linked directly to festivities, ritualistic purification and 'authentic folk' carnivals (*defia daoulia krotala... sprinkles with blood... the great goat... making the site grow*).

We should not forget the image with which the song started, that of a rural festival. The easiest critique here would be to identify that one (and, consequently, the song we are hearing, Savvopoulos's song) as the pure, liberated and liberational, cultural artefact, and its mirroring, the junta's festival, as a degenerate imitation, a populist fake copy of folk culture and its rituals. But Savvopoulos's diction undermines such an 'evolutionary' model. Instead of describing the degenerate, fake and hollow symbolic structures of the dictatorship (as opposed to his own, 'authentic' symbol, the song itself), this section struggles to come to terms with an eruption of the Lacanian Real: what we are confronted with lies beyond the symbolic system.

The central re-play of the distorted populist extravaganza (distorted precisely because it is infused with the "pure" discourse of sacrifice), cannot anymore be seen as a satire against a precise symbolic system. It is placed instead as a wound, a rupture of the symbolic structure in general. As Žižek, reading Lacan, has pointed out, 'distortion and/or dissimulation is in itself revealing: what emerges via distortions of the accurate representation of reality is the real -that is, the trauma around which social reality is structured' (Žižek 1994: 26). This is crucial, especially since we are dealing with two distortions here: the distortion of the popular into populist by the authoritarian regime, and Savvopoulos's distortion of the populist into a more confusing, hybrid image. It seems to suggest that the populist extravaganza is not a degeneration of the popular (and to ground it in our example: the junta's festivities were not a degeneration of Theodorakis's Art-Popular), but is itself the rupture around which the popular was being built all along. In other words, there is no such thing as a 'purely popular' culture that

degenerates into mass deception, but popular culture as we know it is a structure precisely owing its own cohesiveness in the void lying at its centre: manipulated, populist, mass culture tries to cover this central gap, but because of its distorted modalities, it simultaneously provides a sudden glimpse of the void.

Savvopoulos does not suggest a return to a full, original, healthy state of affairs. He does not absorb confusion, but unearths from it what has been effaced and repressed all along, a dark continent occluded by the normalization and taxonomization of popular culture: redressing the balance, he sees popular culture as the symptom of a repressed desire. Like the hero of *Brazil*, then, Savvopoulos becomes this symptom and is immersed in it: with his voice regulated by a drum/heartbeat that lies both in and out of the symbolic (it is both a part of the 'long song', but also an unexpected fracture in its musical structure) the songwriter becomes his jouissance, he is built in(to) the hidden fantasy that had supported his artistry all along: '*Into the long song/ I was built alive*'. It is the body being tortured that exhumes 'Brazil' as satisfaction at the end of *Brazil*; similarly, it is the songwriter called to participate in the populist hybrid, to open his body in confusion, who produces the topos of his jouissance: he embraces what lies outside him (the mirroring of himself and of his art) and thus touches the grain of the Real.

In the last part of 'Ballos', after the recitative eruption, the song returns to its very first tune and Savvopoulos again becomes the songwriter who wears the mask of the storyteller about to join a festival, the performer who makes topography (and with it 'history') possible, the void troubadour:

In these Balkans in this century
 I met with my friends one winter's night
 ...
 and once they saw me they were wide-eyed
 because all this time they thought of me as dead
 ...
 and after they welcomed me, and after they were bored with me
 they understood my farce and negated me
 ...
 I distribute the bread I give you the flask

I look you in the eyes and sing you a song

and the song says that I take responsibility
that I am the leader of this festivity.

Thus the song ends with an auto-mimicry. As the wandering storyteller becomes the leader of the festival (*'I take responsibility/ I am the leader in this festivity'*), we realize that this happens to be only a citation: this is what 'the song says'. This mimicry of a ritual is important: instead of catharsis as an end the focus here is the process of glimpsing 'the other side', daring a touch of jouissance and then returning - to sing again, to repeat, to simulate one's jouissance in pleasure. The songwriter finally meeting his friends in his bodily (re)presence assumes the role created for him in a joyful song that mimics the Holy Communion. *I distribute the bread, give the flask and sing a song.* The carnival/festivity of the last verse is not a world undone: it is the world reseen, a mindtrap finally read through by enjoyment.

Conclusion: What's happening?

Let us return to the question: who was the big Other asking 'What's happening?/What's leaking (*Ti Trehei?*)', in this, the most disturbing moment in Savvopoulos's songwriting? It is important to remember that Savvopoulos and his artistic generation were interpellated by others and Others from the very beginning.. As I have shown, from the Left, there was the expectation of 'political song' as standardized by Theodorakis. On the part of 'high culture' and its expression in the music industry, a 'Greek version of chanson intellectuelle' was expected. From a global, swinging youth culture, there was an anticipation of dance and carefree enjoyment. Last but not least, a global, youth counter-cultural movement of the high 60s was putting rock in the picture. An additional interpellation came from the need to address the dictatorship oppositionally. In these terms, the voice who asks '*Ti Trehei*' in the central part of 'Ballos' is the voice of all these big Others, at the moment they interpellate, at the moment, that is, that they become these big Others, constructing whatever we come to understand by the figure 'Savvopoulos'.

An interpellation, however, is always predicated on an original moment that the interpellated subject can never reach. Hence the interpellated subject will always be a mimicked subject, always having *less* than the original and coming *after* the originary moment. The long process I have identified in Savvopoulos's poetics signals his aim to confront this interpellation directly and to readdress mimicry as a conscious strategy. I have described in sections 1 and 2 how mimicry leads to interpellation reproduced as performance, propelling a staged subjectivity instead of an originary authority. In this section I have traced a second step: through a reassessed view of countercultural politics, I have shown how an empty centre foregrounded by mimicry can be turned into the field of effective jouissance. In both stages, Savvopoulos's mimicry succeeds in turning the something *less* that any interpellation imposes into the something *more* that mimicry marshals against it.

Thus the big Other asking 'What's happening' in the centre of 'Ballos' is the songwriter himself, turning his interpellation into the reflection of his own agency being interpellated. The fact that enjoyment and limitless desire can find refuge in this extricated topos of "more", could be analyzed further in psychoanalytic vocabulary, but the limits of this study do not allow me to do so. I will only point out that through doubling, a mingling of identification with fantasy and of jouissance with the symbolic, Savvopoulos reassesses the field of the popular and suggests an opening up to enjoyment. The itinerary he has completed also becomes the itinerary of the listener who finds him/herself opened up to the Barthesian *grain de la voix*, to the 'body in the voice that sings'. As critic and director Hrestos Vakalopoulos put it, listening to Savvopoulos songs 'I deposit my arms and listen. I cannot write anymore, because somebody *really* sings; I cannot think of anything because somebody *is addressing me*' (1985: 23).

The order to which the subject seems to return at the end of 'Ballos', a symbolic world revisited and this time penetrated by jouissance, provides the space to think of popular culture as a form of reconstructed utopia. In his later career, Savvopoulos would go on to elaborate a view of utopianism that transcends politics (with works such as *Happy Day* and *The Acharneans*). 'Let us drop the political messages and join in the dance', he would memorably say in an interview (Savvopoulos 1979). A review of Savvopoulos's whole career would have to discuss these stages in great detail, as it

would also have to critique what was seen as a conservative U-turn in the late 80s (see 1989a;1989b). I believe however that in the period I have singled out, a model of popular music is pushed to its limits.

Could we conclude that Savvopoulos dismantles popular music's internal taxonomy or the role of the high-popular within it? On the contrary: his work is so interesting as a case study precisely because it is placed within the high-popular. Savvopoulos's poetics make us aware of the tension provoked by the very notion of a definable popular music 'led by' a high-popular field. With his songs, both parts of the term 'singing poet' are rendered problematic, resignified, and yet kept in suspension. Describing the songwriter's status over the past decades in Greece, the art critic Nikos Xydakes wrote that Savvopoulos 'sings and plays and speaks and incites and sets on fire; and unifies, pacifies [...] travels through passions and decades, is a figure of mistakes and sparks, instructs and undoes himself [...] national troubadour, old friend, father, guru and soul mate' (1995). Xydakes's inclusive but also uneasy list points again to the tension between the two words: singing/ poet. Both canonical and anti-canonical, both poet and entertainer, Savvopoulos introduces his '*what happened/what leaked*' quest into the tenuous void lying between our concepts of high and popular. As this gap is painstakingly reworked into a field of jouissance that reminds us of popular culture's long lost (or fantasmatic) otherness, it seems that the postwar ventures and adventures of the 'singing poet' have come full circle.

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Conclusion

In a review of Savvopoulos's 1979 record *The Spare Tyre*, published on the front page of the national newspaper *To Vima* (22 December 1979), D.N. Maronitis, a well-known professor of literature, commented on the songwriter's poetics:

The strangest thing in Savvopoulos's songs is that their present ends up being almost always torn, a void, in whose deep bottom there is only a mirror.

In this leaking sieve which is simultaneously a mirror, the shadows from the past fall, sometimes shyly claiming the future; this is the space in which they are distorted.

Evidently, the reception of the singing poets has come a long way. Later in this review, Maronitis would read Savvopoulos's songs through Barthes *Leçon*, published in Greek at around the same time in 1979. 'L'énonciation, elle, [...] assume de faire entendre un sujet à la fois insistant et irrepérable, inconnu et cependant reconnu selon une inquiétante familiarité: les mots ne sont plus conçus illusoirement comme des simples instruments, ils sont lancés comme des projections, des explosions, des vibrations, des machineries, des saveurs: l'écriture fait du savoir une fête' (Barthes 1978: 20).

Through a completely different understanding of such words as textuality, literature and writing, Maronitis was able to read Savvopoulos in 1979 without falling back on the old debates about whether this was literature or not, whether the songwriter was also a poet and of what kind. The writing that unifies knowledge and celebration, or mind and body, also merges the critic, the listener, the writer and the singer. This writing, not distinguished from a reading which deals with the endless nature of textuality, reinscribes the mirror at the centre of the songs, creating of it a fluid site, a leaking screen where life is projected, distorted and reclaimed all at once.

The mirror Maronitis discerned in Savvopoulos's songs recalls the phrase describing 'le mythe Brassens' in *Libération*: '*ça ne s'appelle pas une vedette, c'est un miroir*'. Indeed, the whole of this thesis - which started with the poètes-chanteurs seen as the exact reflection of Frenchness and finished with Savvopoulos in front of a Lacanian mirror - can be seen as an itinerary marked by the two different connotations that the phrase 'c'est un miroir' attracts in this context. First, in terms of seeing the mirror as a reflection, the songwriter and his/her songs are seen as the exact reflection of literary ideals, the unmediated expression of a people and their poetic

predeterminations; second, the songs work as a projection, the mirror distorting our different uses of it, our different points of view, our changing angles of perception. This is the reason for my fascination with the iconic status achieved by Brassens in France. As I explained in Part 2, we can discern in Brassens's case both versions of the mirror: on the one hand, the singer as the ultimate embodiment of 'la Grande Culture', the clearest reflection of a literary/poetic ideal, and on the other the singer as the maker of songs which defy categorizations, and create the space for listeners to project their own meanings, lyrics, musics and everyday worlds.

In a 1985 lecture on the popular song, Manos Hadjidakis discussed Brassens's work as a space reordered (and disordered) by subjectivity:

Could a song exist without words? At first sight no, this is not possible. However, Brassens says in his song 'Le parapluie':

Chemin faisant, que ce fut tendre
D'ouïr à deux le chant joli
Que l'eau du ciel faisait entendre
Sur le toit de mon parapluie!

In this 'chant joli' of the rain, you have to slot in *your own* words at the very moment of listening - whichever words you pick up, whichever fit in with your sentiments of the time. If you are sad, the rain's song is sad. If you are angry, the rain's song becomes angry, and if you feel optimistic, happy, the same happens to the rain. This is a song that lasts for as long as you listen, while you are giving it shape. Afterwards it is nothing more than a moment of rain.

The word stops being *the moment* after a song is made. The same goes for the sound, that is, for the rain itself. Who has the copyright on the result? Who will be paid royalties for the public performance of the rain? Since, as our world has it, there is no song, if there is no copyright holder? (Hadjidakis 1989: 116)

Hadjidakis here summarizes the main issues and trajectory travelled by the singing poets in France and Greece. Hadjidakis *is reading* Brassens and acknowledging his allegiance with the song model Brassens represents; he ends up with a description that undermines what we usually anticipate in relation to a singing poet. Instead of praise for the song's

words, concrete musical ideas and authorship, we are given a description of how words are effaced from the song at the moment of listening.

Hadjidakis even throws in a subtle irony against the popular song's authorship. We know that Brassens and Hadjidakis (as well as Trenet, Ferré, Brel, Theodorakis, Savvopoulos et al) have benefited from the increasing 'authorization' of popular music; the fact that nowadays 'everything has a copyright' is directly implicated in their auteur persona. On the other hand, their song is built on an impressive hybrid: it defies our conception of authorship at the very moment it asserts it. As the *Feuilles Mortes* songs I referred to in the Introduction made clear, the modern popular song gives value to *the poètes*, while accepting that their works may end up as moulding leaves on the sides of the road and their words transformed into a joyful '*lalalalalala*'.

This is a point to which I have returned time and again in this thesis: it can be found in the early criticism's debate between 'seriousness' and 'frivolity' (between Edgar Morin and Boris Vian); in the transformation of the phrase 'chanson poésie d'aujourd'hui' to that of 'chanson art mineur' in France; in the itinerary travelled by Manos Hadjidakis, articulating his popular song from a poetics of literary modernism to its conception as the fragmentary and eclectic site of dreams. Last but not least, it is evident in the ways the multiple and multifaceted mimics of Dionysis Savvopoulos and his generation defied the very (ideological and poetic) foundations of the high-popular, as consolidated in Greece by Theodorakis, while pushing the model of singer-songwriter first proposed by Georges Brassens to its excess.

I have been keen to stress that the the singing poet should not be seen as a figure obstructing our grasp of another, more 'real' popular lying somewhere else, hidden from view. Instead, as I have argued, I believe that the popular can be found precisely in such discursive formations: in the systems aimed at codifying popular culture but in fact undermining it from within, in the impositions of concepts like that of the high-popular which are eventually forced to mingle with their opposites.

In different sections of the thesis, I have analyzed Stuart Hall's argument that we ought to conceive of the popular not as an 'authentic' expression of a particular class or group of people, but rather as a battlefield which integrates points of opposition and moments of supersession, complex dialectics of resistance and acceptance, refusal and

capitulation. Thus, it is my firm belief that by reading through and beyond the particular frameworks and concepts that prevailed in the artistic productions called popular at a certain moment and place in history, we can highlight such a nexus of competing discourses, we can map the popular without retreating into any canonistic definition.

If the high-popular music styles in postwar France and Greece at first seemed to be an imposed, hegemonic category formulated under the influence of literature, they were eventually also reworked in contradictory terms. For instance, I have identified such moments in the changing formats of the Seghers 'Chansons d'aujourd'hui' editions, or Savvopoulos's fusions of the political and literary song's prerogatives with his 'yéyé' dissonance. The popular as 'the ground of transformations' emerges at this very moment of change, when a rigid conceptualization of the singing poet as a standard of value is superseded by its inherent contradictions.

This is how my central argument connects writing (the songwriter as author) with reading. Thus, I have observed the singing poets being read and *reading* - different styles, other art forms and the system of popular culture - before proposing my own re-readings of their work. I observed Brassens reading the folk and popular traditions as both distinct and interwoven; I also saw him as a reader of poetry. I saw Ferré reading les poètes and Brel reading the tradition of the chanson réaliste. I moved on to Hadjidakis reading rebetiko through the lens of the Greek literary modernists, and then to Theodorakis, again, reading rebetiko through the lens of the Gramscian overtones of his art-popular proclamations. Finally, I brought my study to a close observing Savvopoulos reading both the Brassens and the Theodorakis-Hadjidakis legacies, from a perspective of 60s counterculture and through a mimicry of rock music. In these terms, the Lacanian readings I performed on Savvopoulos's early 70s songs represent a risk I also took with a view to ascertaining the potentials of what I have claimed to be the songs' endless textuality, one that defines the world but also lets it evade and leak.

One of my main research aims was to break free from the two major narratives that have so far shaped the discussion of the period and the countries on which I focus. These are the Oral Poetry narrative and the Song-as-literature narrative (as I argued in Part 1-Chapter 1, they have functioned as distinct but also complementary narratives); in

the case of Theodorakis and Savvopoulos I also wanted to move beyond the political-song and the rock-music narratives respectively. Through the defined scope and focus of my research project I was able to show the predeterminations of these narratives, their foundations, their limitations and different uses in bestowing prestige and arranging cultural systems. However, laying their discursive limits bare by no means implies that these narratives have been irrelevant to the reception of popular music over the years in the countries of my focus. On the contrary, they are still indicative of ways in which *actual songs have been listened to by actual people*. In addition, as is the case with Brassens's and Theodorakis's music, one sometimes needs to suspend disbelief in relation to these major narratives in order to enjoy the songs (an example of this was provided by my analysis of Brassens's 'folk and oral narratives' in Part 1- Chapter 2). But the most significant claim of this thesis is that unless we map these narratives and critique them, we cannot really see the songs as songs; we cannot see how *real people* dealt with these narratives and found, in the songs' fringes, openings and tearings, a space for their own creative responses, a space in which to confront the sociopolitical situations shaping their lives (see my analysis of youth opposition to the Greek junta undertaken in Part 3-Chapter 1).

I do not argue that my conclusions on the role literature and concepts like the singing poets played in the period 1945-1975 in Greece and France hold for other periods or other parts of the world. Nor have I argued that the perceptions of popular music I have analyzed acted alone as the exclusive discursive forces in the period and the countries in question.

But I do believe that the singing poet narratives I presented were indeed the dominant ones. I would also maintain that my conclusions have a validity larger than my scope and can be used for an analysis of the system of popular music as it emerged in a great number of countries after the Second World War. My understanding of the role of high-popular music and of the concept of the singing poet can be expanded and used in an analysis of narratives that hold for different repertoires in different countries of the Western world. The easy assumptions and easily promoted genealogy for the genre of singer-songwriters in Anglophone pop could productively be confronted with my own

observations about very similar narratives. A further comparison with various distinctive traditions that I believe fall under the category of the singing poets in European and other countries after the Second World War, could both critique these traditions while enriching our understanding of the discourses related to the singing poets.

More than a definitive statement, this is, I believe, a strong heuristic device and a working hypothesis for future research.

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