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It's all about The Soul:

Discourses of authenticity in old-time American folk music

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Abstract

This essay explores notions of authenticity among musicians who play “old-time”, a North American folk genre traditionally played by string-bands at squaredances. The repertoire is based on early twentieth-century field recordings and commercial releases from the American rural South. These recordings are considered to be the oldest and purest sources of “authentic” old-time music. I analyse notions of authenticity as a form of discourse, examining the constructed and partial nature of accepted “truths” about the genre and their role in the subjectivity of old-time musicians in Denmark, Sweden and online.

Keywords: Social anthropology, old time, oldtime, old-time, American folk music, authenticity

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1. Introduction

Aim

The aim of this essay is to analyse discourses of authenticity among old-time musicians in Denmark, Sweden and online.

Research question

Old-time music is usually associated with stringband music played to accompany squaredance by the white British settlers of the Appalachian mountain region. It is played on acoustic instruments, most commonly with a fiddle on lead melody, accompanied by a banjo, guitar and string bass. The style has experienced a growth in interest in recent times, featuring heavily in the soundtracks of popular films such as Oh Brother Where Art Thou and Cold Mountain.

I began playing the banjo in 2011 and got involved in the old-time "scene" shortly after, attending jams and squaredances in Copenhagen and reading about techniques and history in online forums.

I immediately noticed that conflicts and negotiations over musical authenticity were central to discussion.

"Traditionalist" musicians considered themselves bearers, protectors and scholars of vulnerable musical traditions that had emerged in their purist form from isolated communities deep within the Appalachian mountains. They considered early twentieth-century field recordings ("source recordings") as the ultimate documents of stylistic purity, and were disdainful of musicians who did not use them to learn songs. According to traditionalists, it was simply not good enough to learn "second-hand" - from modern interpretations or from jams at festivals. This lazy musicianship corrupted traditions and hybridised styles. The resulting music was not authentic and could not be taken seriously – it had misunderstood the "soul" of old-time music itself and was a threat to the survival of "authentic" styles and techniques.

Not everyone agreed with the traditionalists. Other musicians argued that old-time had always been a growing and evolving tradition. It had never been "pure" and could not be frozen in time by dogmatically copying the "source recordings", which were a mere snapshot of a particular historical period. Musicians must also be allowed to learn repertoire from other sources and incorporate their own techniques, styles and influences into their playing, as they always had done.

In order to analyse the ongoing struggle over authenticity and the parameters of permissable musicianship, I focussed on the following questions:

What is authenticity?

Is there such a thing as authentic folk music?

Are historical source recordings reliable documents of authenticity?

What makes the notion of authenticity in folk music so powerful, and who does it serve?

Earlier research

The majority of scholarly literature I was able to obtain on old-time music explores the social history, styles and techniques related to the genre. Social science research on the old-time "scene" is not particularly common. While I was not able to find any other studies specifically by social anthropologists, several musicians and ethnomusicologists have published research on the genre. Musician-scholar Emily Troll has explored attitudes to practice and learning, noting that while some musicians strive for structure, measurable progress and perfection, others see learning as a form of self-therapy that promotes awareness, personal growth and artistry rather than self-discipline (2010:5). Ethnomusicologists Andrew Woolf (1990), Dorothea Hast (1993) and musician-scholar Amy Wooley (2003) explore the affective power of old-time music and corresponding states of ritualistic trance, deep listening and flow (in Henderson Wood 2015:62). Hast sees music and dance as a communal exercise of "self mastery" (Turner 1982, in Hast 1993:22) which transcends social and structural limitations. Woolf also sees

communal music performance as an "attempt to act harmoniously and creatively" (1990:87, 59-60) with an ethos of "openness" (1990:48). In contrast, Wooley observes that musicians gathering at festivals tend to be territorially protective of small, exclusive, group jams (2003:315).

The meaning of community is frequently addressed in ethnomusicological studies. Jeff Bealle observes a contradance community bound by a deliberate "void of structure and authority" (2005:350). Jeff Todd Titon describes the old-time "scene" as a music revival movement (2015), examining cultural resilience, adaptive management and the strategies used by ethnomusicologists and musicians to preserve old-time culture and tradition. David Henderson Wood analyses social divisions in the old-time scene, and the distinctions that musicians make between Appalachian-born "insider" musicians and the "outsiders" who come to the old-time scene with no previous connections to Appalachian culture.

Theory

Bourdieu's analysis of the embodiment of social reproduction in bodily know-how and competence (1977) would have made an obvious choice for this study. Musicianship is intrinsically physical. Competence is achieved through repetetive training, imprinting a stylistic and technical "habitus" upon the musical body in a deep and reflexive way. The stylistic devices - slides, intonations and rhythms, for example - that make up the old-time musical "habitus" also have a significance beyond the purely aesthetic. They are the audible manifestation of social structures, directly referring to an imagined pre-war Appalachian culture. The most "authentic" musicians have incorporated these socio-musical structures on a deep, instinctive level; they have a perceivable old-time "style", which reveals itself in performance without apparent conscious effort.

Bourdieu's study of taste as a marker of class distinction (1979) also would have been a good choice. The majority of those who responded to my questionnaire were highly-educated and from middle-class backgrounds. They were drawn to old-time's "gritty", "raw", working-class associations yet considered the music be an antidote to "trashy"

popular music. Bourdieusian analysis would certainly have yielded some interesting insights on this ambivalent stance towards issues of class and good taste.

I chose not to focus on Bourdieu in this particular study since Bourdieusian studies of music and musical culture are common (de Boise 2016, Prior 2011 and Atkinson 2011, to name just a few). I was also interested in analysing beyond the surface of the old-time habitus; I wanted to explore the cultural and social processes behind notions of old-time "authenticity", and perhaps even glimpse historical alternatives that had been arbitrarily excluded from this canon of "truths". These issues – how and why we know - have been explored in great detail by philosopher Michel Foucault, and his theoretical approach has replaced perhaps more obvious choices in this particular study.

While Foucault is usually associated with grand historical investigations into the production of truth in the modern human sciences, his theories resonated deeply with my observations at old-time jams. In line with Foucauldian discourse theory, I observed that power and prestige were assigned to musicians who could make the greatest claims to authenticity, the parameters of which were strictly controlled and protected by traditionalists. These "truths" became common-sense; reassuringly stable and objective, they could be relied on as compasses to guide correct performance and technique.

Discourses of authenticity served a multitude of identity projects and were rarely questioned. No single source or authority could be held to account for how authentic old-time music was defined, and the contingent nature of authenticity was rarely acknowledged. Historical recordings were cited as authentic documents, yet little critical reflection was given to the circumstances in which they were produced or the cultural models on which they were based. However, once I began to examine these "truths" in line with Foucault's theories, the solid assumptions and incontestable premises on which they were based began to unravel. Stable notions of authenticity and tradition revealed themselves as partial, transient and context-bound, embodying a multitude of contradictions, gaps and oppositions. Their arbitrary construction revealed them as historically-located fictions with the power to silence and oppress.

The physical and verbal nature of musical jams was relatively straightforward to analyse, since body language, clothing, setting, verbal exchanges and so on are all common objects of the anthropological gaze. The music itself, however – particularly the improvised music played at jams - was much more ephemeral. Sociolinguistics provided a pragmatic theoretical framework for analysis, since for me (as a musician), music is a language. Like language, music is a tool with which to express musical ideas and emotions. You use your instrument to communicate sadness, joy, frustration – tell jokes, get angry. You can "speak" to the whole group or direct what you are "saying" at the person next to you, responding with melodies, rhythms and harmonies. You can command attention, make suggestions, influence pace and drive the musical "discussion" or play a more supportive role in the background, all within the span of a few seconds. You can overhear conversations that other musicians are having and join in.

Participation in an old-time musical "discussion" requires specific knowledge of a set of musical "codes" that function in a similar way to linguistic codes. Groups who share a set of linguistic codes can be viewed as "speech communities" (Gumperz 2009:66). Participation requires skill in encoding and decoding speech codes correctly, which in turn depends on an individual's social networks, and the frequency, longevity and intensity of their contact with the group (2009:72). Similarly, old-time musicians must achieve reasonable levels of musical skill in order to communicate with their community. Over time musicians will increase fluency in identifying and manipulating musical codes.

Linguist Basil Bernstein describes how speech "acts" may employ two different kinds of code; "elaborated code", which is open, fluid and expresses individual identities, and "restricted code", which displays rigid syntax, simple grammar and predictable sentences. Restricted code is impersonal, ritualistic and limited to rigidly organised sets of possibilities (1971:125-126). This model corresponds with Durkheim's model of organic and mechanical "solidarity". Like elaborate code, organic solidarity is characterised by differentiation, ambiguity and changing relations between a diversity of creative individuals (in Rapport 2014:63). Like restricted code, "mechanical solidarity" is rigid,

characterised by "loyalty, passivity and dependency in a social group" and "inclusive homogeneous relations" (ibid.).

Old-time musicians at jams employ restricted code, limiting musical expression to a narrow set of techniques, styles and songs in order to conform to notions of authenticity and tradition. Although many consider the "scene" to be open, accessible and egalitarian (see Woolf 1990, Bealle 2005), the use of restricted code indicates hierarchical and authoritarian group relations.

Methodology

My observations spanned Sweden, Denmark and the USA, a mixture of "real-life" and virtual connections. Defining the ethnographic "field" for the purposes of this study thus presented some methodological challenges. When anthropology established itself as an academic discipline in the early twentieth century, it was associated with the holistic study of primitive, exotic or marginalised peoples located within bounded units such as villages, tribes, ghettoes or isolated communities (Davies 1999:32-33). Modern anthropology now recognises a profound stretching of social life across time and space, with localities simultaneously constituted by temporally and geographically distant influences (Gidden 1990, in Inda & Rosaldo 2002:8). My contact with old-time musicians reflected this. The majority of my observations took place in Denmark, where I am a member of the Dansk Amerikansk Folkemusik Forening (Danish American Folk Music Association, or DAFF). This organisation currently has around fifty members from Scandinavia, Holland, France, Germany, America and England, most of whom attend an annual jam weekend at a youth hostel in the countryside near Copenhagen. Different constellations of DAFF members perform old-time string band music for audiences or at squaredances, and there is at least one acclaimed old-time banjo maker based in Denmark (Johannes Bonefaas). Between ten and fifteen musicians attend a regular monthly jam at a bar in Copenhagen, with a core contingent of five or six musicians who attend almost every event. The jam is advertised on social media and open to the public, so new

musicians sometimes show up with no previous connection to the group or experience of old-time at all. The Danish old-time "scene" exists as a satellite to activity in America, stretching my "field" yet further. Musicians often learn new repertoire via virtual or real-life contact with the USA, in the form of recorded music and videos, online contacts or visits. Others may reject modern sources altogether, learning exclusively from historical recordings and stretching my "field" temporally as well as geographically.
To deal with this fragmentation I employed George E. Marcus' "tracking strategies". This approach rejects traditional, bounded fields in favour of new paths of connection and association, allowing everyday practices to be expressed on a differently-configured spatial canvas (1995:98). Chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions are revealed, allowing us to follow the connections between geographically or temporally disparate people, things, metaphors, plots, stories, allegories, lives, biographies or conflicts (1995:106-110). I tracked the notion of authenticity across temporal and geographical boundaries, tracing a path through comments made at jams, in private discussions, on online forums and via an online questionnaire sent to 55 DAFF members in Denmark and 250 members of a Facebook group I started in 2013 (Old-time Musicians of Sweden)[1]. I received thirty-seven responses (14.8% of those polled), so my findings do not represent the whole group. I collected information on age, gender, ethnicity and educational background, first contact with old-time, current involvement, favourite recordings and greatest influences. I also included open-ended questions on the mental associations they made with the genre, what attracted them about old-time, aspects they liked and disliked, what it meant to them personally, and whether authenticity was important to them.

Reflexivity

Recent postmodern shifts in anthropological thought have rejected the meta-narrative (or "privileged explanation") of early anthropologists. However, if we accept that the anthropologist influences the outcome of their observations, how can they undertake impartial, unbiased research? Bhaskar's "critical realism" can provide a solution to this,

1 Questionnaire available at http://goo.gl/forms/WRPwfMzaFo

navigating a path between positivism ("the social" only exists in observable human behaviour) and interpretivism ("the social" exists purely in the minds of social actors) (Davies 1999:19). Bhaskar explains that human agents are neither the passive products of social structures nor entirely their creators - they exist in a reflexive feedback relationship to both (in Davies 1999:19, 25). "The social" is like a magnetic field - not directly observable, but existing independently of human concepts all the same (ibid.). Ethnographers can thus give equal weight and credibility to the phenomenological reality of actors' interpretations *and* the observable effects of social structures, making "the social" a possible object of knowledge (ibid.).

Reflexivity is important for all forms of research, since all researchers are connected to or part of their research to some degree (Davies 1999:4, 35). Anthropologists researching "at home" must examine critically their relationships with their own societies and refrain from assuming that belonging is either uncontested or problematic (ibid.). These issues were particularly pertinent for me since I have been personally involved with old-time music in Denmark, Sweden and online for five years. My place in my "field" during the course of my research was a complex mixture of "at home" and "outsider". American discussion forums were a familiar environment, since language and cultural references were easy to decode and employ. My "real-life" observations in Sweden and Denmark were more complex. Contact with Swedish old-time players usually occurred in private. I speak fluent Swedish but was at times painfully aware that it was not my mother tongue, and although I was among friends I still felt myself to be a cultural "outsider". Old-time jams at bars and public events in Denmark were culturally more familiar (speaking as a pub-loving English person). I could follow simple conversations in Danish but used English to respond. This sometimes lead to misunderstandings and restricted the range of expression available to those I was speaking to. I was often the only woman present at jams comprised of men my age and older, and an inexperienced banjo player at the bottom of an internal hierarchy of knowledge, skills and status. My engagement with the group had all the hallmarks of "studying up", and other musicians offered explanations, instruction and correction without prompting.

My personal involvement in old-time clearly exposes my research to bias. My engagement with the old-time scene has influenced all phases of my research, from initial selection of topic to final reporting. I socialise, jam and perform with other old-time musicians and have a vested interest in maintaining my ties with them beyond the scope of this project. I felt uncomfortable quoting directly from observations made directly in my role as banjo nerd at social events, since in most cases no consent had been given; my anthropological intentions were not at that point clear to me or my informants. Only quotes given in anonymous questionnaire responses and internet forums are included in this report. These views were willingly given with the knowledge that they could enter the public domain. Detailed analysis of specific individuals or group interactions that could be identified by those involved is not included.

Essay structure

I begin with a brief description of old-time music, how it is played and who plays it, the scene as a music revivalist movement and the cultural models on which it is based. I then explore how early folklorists defined authenticity and how models of tradition and cultural transmission have changed, questioning historical source recordings as "authentic" documents. I then apply sociolinguistic and Foucauldian analysis to my field observations, exploring how musical style and technique functions as a form of restricted code. I examine techniques of surveillance, hierarchical power relations and other forms of social control woven into the subjectivity of the old-time musician, exploring the musical body as a site of social struggles and an instrument of "authentic" discourse.

2. What is old-time?

Old-time has strong links to rural American social dance (Bealle 2005:3) and is usually associated with white British settlers of the Appalachian mountain region who played stringband music to accompany squaredance. Anecdotal evidence suggests that around 15,000 musicians are involved in the genre (Titon 2015:189). It is an affinity scene based on common interest, composed of loosely interconnected groups of musicians who swap songs and socialise together (ibid.). It is a participatory music style centred around

spontaneous, informal jams and square dances rather than stage performances[2]. Jams take place in bars, cafes, public spaces, festivals and private homes. They are generally relaxed and welcoming, with a strict underlying etiquette and repertoire that enables musicians to play music together with little discussion or uncertainty, even if they have never met before.

The old-time “scene” is a revivalist movement (Titon 2015: 189), in line with the following definition:

1. Revival informants and/or original sources.
2. An individual or small group of "core revivalists".
3. A group of followers which form the basis of a revivalist community.
4. Revivalist activities (organizations, festivals, competitions), and non-profit / commercial enterprises catering to the revivalist market.
5. A revivalist ideology and discourse (Livingstone 1999: 69).

The old-time events I observed in Denmark displayed all of these hallmarks. Musicians frequently discussed authentic technique, chord selection, song choice, playing style, melody and instrument set-up. Central to these claims to authenticity were “source recordings”, the early twentieth-century recordings made by folklorists and record companies. Danish old-time activities were organised by a core group of “core revivalists” who had been active for many years. Events were popular, with an annual jam weekend that was attended by over fifty musicians from across Europe. Musicians were frequently employed by contradance clubs to play at squaredances.

Old-time played an important role in the formulation and maintenance of a class-based identity (Livingstone 1999:66). Many informants associated old-time with “working man’s music” (“you almost can hear how much shit they have under their nails and how tired they all are from the hard work and tough times”), and one complained that “the

2 A typical old-time jam: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqPkBagKWVg. Retreived 11 January 2017.

Appalachian population is often held in contempt by the broad American mid- and upper-class, who fail to see that these hills hold a cultural and musical treasure”.
Pre-war recordings were considered the “purest” source of authentic sounds, techniques and melodies available. Volunteer-run website Slippery-hill.com, which gives free access to thousands of digital audio source recordings ("virtually the entire old-time repertoire"[3]), was frequently cited. Material is collected from out-of-print LPs and cassettes, musicians, printed notation and early twentieth-century Library of Congress field recordings. *The Millener-Koken Collection of Fiddle Tunes* was also frequently mentioned. This 800-page book contains over 1400 transcriptions of source recordings; merely possessing it lent credibility to ones' status as a serious musician among those that I observed. Transcriptions originate from old commercial recordings, archives, live performances and private field recordings. Multiple versions of the same tune often appear; the classic song “Cluck Old Hen” is transcribed played by eight different fiddlers, in four different keys and two tunings, for example. All transcriptions are indexed with a source recording.
These resources were seen to give musicians the opportunity “to learn the actual notes played by the source fiddlers”[4]. Many of these musicians have now passed away, but transcriptions and recordings crossed boundaries of time and space, giving learners “direct contact” with bearers of tradition. They preserved the “intricacies, turns of phrase, idiosyncrasies and archaic beauty” of pure traditions that otherwise risked becoming “simplified, glossed over and homogenised”[5]. “Second-hand” sources – YouTube videos or modern commercial recordings - were seen as poor interpretations:

> YouTube abounds in videos of “new-timers” playing old-time music - some outstanding and some missing the point completely. This is not always a question of technical proficiency. Lots of very skilled and

3. Warren, Larry. (N.d.). *Slippery Hill (Larry Warren) has posted MP3s of the entire Milliner/Koken collection,* https://oldtimeparty.wordpress.com/2011/08/22/slippery-hill-larry-warren-has-posted-mp3s-of-the-entire-millinerkoken-collection/ Retrieved 1st April 2016.
4. Dirlam, Hilary. The Milliner-Koken Collection of American Fiddle Tunes – Review. *Old-time Herald.* June 1, 2011
5. Ibid.

> celebrated professed "old-time" musicians simply missed the train when it comes to understanding the soul of this music.

"Authentic" old-time styles were seen as "pure", static and historically isolated:

> Old-time music stands against homogenization [...] The tradition has not been lost. It may be resisting change but it has not been displaced, it is not a modern music [...] A lot stayed in isolated puddles with their own separate currents resisting homogenization and standardization. [6]

Several informants argued that musicians should stick rigidly to the versions of melodies found in source recordings ("I think it of vital importance to stay as close to the originals as possible [...] It has do to with the soul of the music."). They claimed that authentic old-time traditions were vulnerable and needed protection:

> There are so many styles within old-time and each one has a right to survive. Stay true to OLD originals, the oldest and first recordings of songs and tunes.

> It's really important that as many musicians as possible keep this music style alive to secure its survival.

Traditionalist "old-timers" expressed contempt towards those that strayed too far from convention or were "ignorant" of tradition ("I'm slightly fed up of playing with 'beginners' or people who don't appreciate/understand the 'soul' of old-time music"). One even refused to play with novice musicians at all:

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6. Feldman, Allen. (N.d.) *Why Bluegrass and Old Time Are Not The Same. (From three email posts to Banjo-L by Allen Feldman).* http://dwightdiller.com/links/why-bluegrass-and-old-time-are-not-the-same/ Retrieved 18th March 2016.

> There are so many youngsters today that claim that they play old-time. In my mind they do not. They don't have any knowledge at all about tunes or where they come from. They are so ignorant it upsets me. I do not want to play with them.

"Festival style" was seen as the ultimate embodiment of "lazy" attitudes to tradition. This old-time style was associated with modern string bands and large jams at festivals. It was described as "hybridised", and stood diametrically opposed to the defined regional traditions thought to have existed in bygone days. Homogenised and over-simplified, it polished the raw edges associated with authentic regional styles and was a threat to them:

> Festival style seems to have kind of become the default style of old-time and as a result, it has overshadowed and eliminated a lot of the different regional styles.
>
> In one of Dwight Diller's DVDs he pleads with his audience to "not turn these tunes into festival tunes", to not "round the corners off"[7]

Other musicians complained about these rigid approaches to history and tradition:

> *Jag tycker inte om vad vi på 60-talet kallade "musikpoliser"* [I don't like what we called in the 60s "music police"]
>
> *Jag tycker inte om när utövare är bakåtsträvande och anser att de gamla inspelningarna är det enda rätta sättet att spela. När folk inte vill se att all folkmusik förändras över tid.* [I don't like it when players are reactionary and consider the old recordings the only correct way to play. When people refuse to see that all folk music changes over time]

They saw source recordings as a foundation on which to build own creativity and identity:

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7. http://www.banjohangout.org/archive/171016 Retrieved 1st April 2016

> *Man ska försöka låta som sig själv filtrerad genom så mycket old-time musik man bara kan hinna med att lyssna på[...] För att ha något att komma med måste man fördjupa sig i genren så att man får en intuitiv förståelse för det man gör.* [You should try to sound like yourself filtered through as much old-time music as you can possibly find time to listen to [...] In order to have something worth saying you have to immerse yourself in the genre so you get an intuitive understanding of what you're doing]

> You have to learn from the old masters to become a good old time mountain musician. But then again, beware not to become a copy. Be your self.

They argued that authenticity was a false concept, characterising folk music as a living being or force which must be allowed to grow. Rigid adherence to traditions defied the "point" of folk music, restricting the creativity, improvisation and spontaneity on which folk styles are based:

> *Musiken har genom tid alltid förändrats av andra influenser och den ska ha rätt att göra det!* [The music has always been changed by other influences and it should have the right to do so!]

> *Man måste få vara kreativ och leka med musiken - om du inte känner dig levande i processen så är musiken inte heller levande och vad är då meningen med att spela musik?*
> [You have to be allowed to be creative and play with the music – if you don't feel alive in the process then the music isn't alive either and what's point of playing music then?]

> The name "old-time" sort of implies "dead", or "static". However, I think the genre should be very much alive and subject to interpretation. That is the nature of

> music, and this is OK with me, as it doesn't really destroy the genre. Old-time morphed gradually into bluegrass, which then morphed into newgrass, and who knows what next. However, as each genre develops, it takes nothing away from the original music form.

Manipulating authenticity

Authenticity covers a range of meanings from genuineness and originality to accuracy and truthfulness (Trilling 1972; Handler 1986, 2001; Lindholm 2008, in Theodossopoulos 2013:339). It embodies the expectation that identities and cultural practices will faithfully represent a deeper, bounded and self-contained "truth" (2013:340). However, the superficial/authentic binary cannot be taken for granted; it is a "culturally specific Western ontology. For some cultures, 'real', 'honest', or 'sincere' identities are revealed on the surface, while mischievous ones are hidden below" (2013:342).

The notion of authenticity is thus riddled with traps (2013:348). Its diffuse nature provides actors with the freedom to escape from strict definitions and an opportunity to create and define their own meanings (2013:341). It is often connected with the exotic; it resides in the inner Self who struggles to transcend social hierarchies or relations, and is embodied in the exotic, native Other who is free to realise the true self uncorrupted by modernity (ibid.).

Traditionalist models of "authentic" old-time reflect this occupation with the exotic and can be traced back to the identity projects of Enlightenment urban elites. They associated themselves with reason and planning, standing in contrast to "ignorant ", "natural" and culturally "pure" peasants in rural areas (Filene 2000:9-11). Folklorists at the time claimed that folk songs were anachronistic "survivals" from an earlier, primitive period, striving to discover "purest" and oldest forms. This detective work was a careful process of selection and exclusion, and many of the connections they made now appear arbitrary and racist.

The first blacks had arrived in Virginia two hundred years before the earliest folklorists and scholars of Appalachian folk music were born (Epstein 1977:7). Professional black

fiddlers were documented at white get-togethers and dances as early as 1694 (1977:21, 80), and by the nineteenth century, black banjo and fiddle pairings (the central unit of old-time music) were common. Enslaved fiddlers and banjoists were employed as full-time musicians, and had their earnings remained in their own hands they would have been considered professional musicians (1977:149). Professional black string bands are documented as early as 1832 (1977:156).

In spite of this considerable legacy, renowned Appalachian folklorist Francis J. Child (1825-1896) limited his studies of "authentic" Appalachian music to British ballads. Although the first collection of African American folk music, *Slave Songs of the USA*, had already been published in 1860 - when the systematic collection of British ballads in the Appalachians had barely begun (1977:301) - Child saw fit to ignore pre-colonial influences and contributions from people of colour, collecting data exclusively from historical texts. He claimed that there was little point in making contact with contemporary rural communities since their music had been polluted by commercial ballads and printed music (Filene 2000:13). His narrow and racist approach set the frame of reference for decades of subsequent folklorists in Appalachia (ibid.).

Child's successor, Cecil Sharp, began collecting folk music in the Appalachian mountains in 1916 (2000:20). Many mountaineers were already playing fiddle tunes, pop songs and hymns by this time (2000:26). African American song was widely popular (ibid.) since the Appalachians were home to a large and growing African American population (64,251 in 1910, and 108,872 in 1930 (Reich 2014:9)). However, Sharp also chose to ignore African American musical traditions and influences in the region, focussing solely on British ballads. He insisted on the mountaineers' cultural isolation and ignored "corrupted" modernised regions. True Appalachian folk were the white rural peasants who displayed a "Britishness" extinct in Britain itself for over a century (Filene 2000: 23-27). Their "authenticity" was evident in their use of the barter system, adherence to strict religion, and a wholesome, simple lifestyle, which was somehow immune to the pressures of making a living (ibid.). These associations remain powerfully prevalent among old-time musicians today. As one informant explained:

> When listening to old-time music, pictures from the past appear in my head. I "see" (imagine) old-time musicians playing in farmhouses in the Appalachian mountains in the late 1800s.

Anthropologists of the 1930s rejected the evolutionary models of culture on which the work of the earliest folklorists was based. Franz Boas pointed out that linear models of cultural progress based on simplistic binaries (primitive/civilised, nature/culture) were nothing more than arbitrary judgements reflecting the colonial interests, class divides and power relations of the era. Folk music was not more primitive, pure or raw; it was simply different.

Characterisations of "authentic" Appalachian culture are often based on stereotypes that do not stand up to academic scrutiny. As Montgomery points out (2000), Appalachian "isolation" is rarely defined. It may be physical (far from large population centres), sociological (lacking contact with other communities), economic (self-sufficient in terms of goods, services and ideas), psychological (inward-facing or hostile to change), cultural (displaying distinctive practices and beliefs), or technological (with limited access to newspapers, radio, TV or internet, for example) (2000:4). However, living in a region that is geographically distant from towns does not automatically produce other types of isolation, and what was remoteness for the folklorist was not necessarily perceived as such by the musicians they documented (2000:5). Isolation is also not a homogenising force; individuals in a community have differing levels of outside contact (ibid.). Mountain communities rarely lacked regular economic networks; they were often an extension of the valley below. From the very first colonial settlements, the Appalachians have been a region of cultural contact and socio-economic enterprise (ibid.)

The notion of an unselfconscious, unmediated and wholly uncommercial Appalachian musical culture is also fundamentally flawed. Musicians might have learned a particular style from a family member or local musician, but many were equally able to take inspiration from phonograph records, radio, travelling performers, migrant workers, or

other musicians they met when travelling to neighbouring areas. These outside influences are often downplayed or obscured in discourse surrounding authentic old-time heritage.

Source recordings as unbiased documents

The source recordings are a combination of field recordings made by folklorists and commercial recordings made by record companies. In both cases, the recordings reflected the cultural and ideological agenda of those that made them. Claims that they are unbiased, unmediated and uncommercial are overstated.

Record company scouts began making trips to the South to make commercial recordings of local musicians in the 1920s. As Filene explains, they recognised that a diffuse notion of "tradition" was key to their popularity. They chose performers on their ability to respond to coaching and sell records. Old "style" was more important than traditional repertoire or performance. Musicians were expected to deliver an old "sound" and perform both traditional and original songs (2000: 35-37).

African American and white musicians were often recorded on the same trip, in the same city, playing the same or similar repertoire. However, musicians were segregated by record companies and given separate numbering systems, adverts and markets. The term "old-time" first appeared in record company marketing material in the 1920s and was used to distinguish white "hillbilly music" from African American "race records", cementing racial bias into the genre.

Folklorists also began making ethnographic field recordings in the 1920s, with the goal of capturing and immortalising "dying" rural traditions. As Filene explains, their methodology arose from the same flawed assumptions as early folklorists Child and Sharp. They sought out cotton plantations, cowboy ranches, lumber camps and prisons; "self-contained homogeneous communities cut off from the corrupting influences of popular culture" (2000:50). Mainstream communities were avoided since they had lost contact with their primitive "roots" (Ibid.). Several of the musicians I observed claimed that since folkloric field recordings were not commercial they were more authentic. However, field recordings also fulfilled commercial aims. As Filene explains, ethnomusicology and anthropology were still in their infancy in the early twentieth

century (2000:40). Folk song collectors had to work hard to create careers, attract funding and gain respect for their disciplines. They combined a self-conscious effort to define and widen definitions of American folk song heritage beyond ballads with the determination to reach a popular audiences (ibid.). Many funded their research through sales of songbooks aimed at popular audiences, influencing the focus and results of their research considerably (ibid.)

Early twentieth-century folklorists created a "cult of authenticity" (Filene 2000:47-50). They travelled the country, defining a set of criteria for determining how an "authentic" folk singer looked and sounded, and promoting a set of assumptions about the importance of *being* authentic (ibid.). The Lomax' methodological approach was, by today's standards, "part talent search, part sociological survey, and part safari" (ibid.). They were eager to promote their vision of America's musical past and sought out songs and musicians to earn them income and represent their ideas. They coached performances and freely edited songs to suit their own tastes, as Bess Lomax Hawes describes:

> Most folk music lovers of the 1930s and 1940s believed that it was "the song" - an intact package of words and a particular tune - that really mattered, so that the primary job was to try to find the "good ones" that could encircle the globe and make plain our own history and bring us all together and make us brave and wise. And so we happily chased songs around the countryside, and when we caught one, those of us who were comparative musicologists worked to get it down on paper accurately, preparing research articles for scholarly journals and technical transcriptions of entire performances. Others worked to share our song findings with the general public, preparing easier-to-read versions of the tunes and fixing them up so that they might be remembered by all manner of other people. And those were all good things to do in that complex and transitory period. All of us have grown in wisdom and humanity because we heard and learned our great songs (1995:182).

As Mitchell explains (2007), many field recordists were funded by the government, who had their own nationalist identity aims. In the aftermath of the Great Depression they placed a new focus on regional pride, “ordinary Americans” and their culture. The Federal Writers' Project (FWP) published guides to each state containing detailed information about folk culture, geography and history. The American South was a particular focus since it had suffered so badly during the Depression. The FWP recast this region as “the home of America's suffering but noble ‘folk’”, who had succeeded in holding on to their simple values and customs (2007:49) . These images continue to be powerfully associated with old-time music.

During the 1950s folk music revival well-known folk musicians toured the USA recording and recruiting older folk musicians to play at festivals and college campuses, inspiring a new generation of younger musicians (roughly half of my questionnaire respondents had first heard old-time during this time). Ethnomusicologist John Bealle (2005) has questioned some of the the underlying assumptions of the 1950s folk music revival and the vision of authenticity that they promoted. Performers such as the New Lost City Ramblers articulated an imagined past based on pre-war recordings (2005:65). However, old-time did not “die out” during the war years; it remained an important element of rural music tradition in most areas of the U.S. throughout the 1940s. These living traditions were ignored since they were less “authentic”. Cementing old-time in the pre-war period gave it more prestigious anti-modernist credentials.

The power of the documentary recording

What makes source recordings so powerful and persuasive as documents of authenticity? None of my informants questioned their production process or their status as unbiased and objective. As Aull Davies points out, it is all too easy to make generalisations from ethnographic documentary recordings as if they are timeless, ahistorical descriptions (2012:80). Although the encounter between ethnographer and musician is historically located and circumstantial, the recording suspends the performance in an unchanging and timeless state. The multitude of variations which could have expressed themselves in the

encounter – different songs, techniques, musicians, volumes, melodies – are relegated to insignificance.

Modern recordings gave folklorists an air of unbiased authority and scientific endeavour. Before the event of recording technology they had relied on transcription to capture songs, exposing the data to considerable bias. Armed with recording equipment, the modern folklorist could appear to vanish from this equation, no more than a mere facilitator between musician and machine. Filene explains that this "neutrality" was central to the working ethos of folklorists and the institutions who funded them. Folklorist John Lomax was urged by the head of the Library of Congress music division to avoid taking any trained musicians with him on field trips; it was important that musicians be "rendered in their own element, unrestrained, uninfluenced and undirected by anyone who had his own notions of how the songs should be rendered" (Lomax 1934, in Filene, 2000:56).

Source recordings were seen by many folklorists as the only hope of preserving "dying" traditions. They endeavoured to record as much as possible from the oldest and "purest" sources before it was "too late" (ibid.). This mode of "salvage ethnography" was central to the establishment of anthropology as an academic discipline, and its continued relationship to the museums and archives who provided funding (Aull Davies 1999:157). Folklorists strove to create an ethnographic present prior to the documentary encounter itself. Like Franz Boas, who worked with elderly Native Americans to reconstruct memories of pre-colonial society and culture (Aull Davies, 2012:194), folklorists sought out the oldest musicians and captured the songs and memories of their youth. In doing so, they paradoxically located recordings in a fabricated time long before the ethnographic encounter itself, prior even to the processes of modernisation - without which the encounter would never have occurred (Aull Davies 2012:194, in reference to Boas).

The musicians would no doubt have been aware of the salvage goals of the visiting folklorists and – consciously or unconsciously - adjusted their performances accordingly. The resulting document ubecame a kaleidoscope of fabricated and re-imagined realities. Folklorists downplayed these concerns by appealing to functionalist models of culture whereby the transmission of tradition was an abstract and self-regulating process,

divorced from the specificities of particular events and observations. They claimed that once captured in a recording, traditions could be identified and extrapolated far beyond the limits of ethnographic encounter itself.

In the final part of the essay I will apply sociolinguistic and Foucauldian analysis to my field observations, exploring how musical style and technique function as a form of restricted code, limiting musical expression and enslaving musicians to rigid definitions of authenticity. I examine techniques of surveillance, hierarchical power relations and other forms of social control woven into the subjectivity of the old-time musician, exploring the musical body as a site of social struggles and an instrument of "authentic" discourse.

Restricted code at old-time jams

Bernstein explains that that restricted code is employed within speech communities in order to express and maintain the boundaries of the group. It pertains to "position-oriented" social environments, such as armies, prisons, religious institutions, long-established friendships and marriages. It is associated with explicitly authoritarian and reactionary social structures and is a form of social control expressing a hierarchical relationship (in Rapport 1999:63-64).

Although this seems to conflict with core old-time goals (an emphasis on communal playing, not sticking out, not competing or taking solos, openness to new members), the old-time jams I observed did display characteristics of hierarchical and position-oriented environments.

Musical "team work" was arranged into a constellation of specific relationships and roles. A fiddle or banjo player usually started the tune and played until others joined in. Guitars stuck to a pre-decided set of simple chords and the occasional bass-run - no jazz chords, melody or improvisation. The banjo and fiddle were tuned to a certain key, so musicians were not free to change key between songs. Each song was played in one key only; musicians were not free to transpose melodies as they saw fit. Solos were strictly prohibited, and all tunes were played in unison from start to finish. Musicians sometimes

played small variations in volume, technique, harmony and melody, but musical expression was largely restricted. The melody was prominent at all times; players that strayed too far from convention received surprised or amused looks. Musicians were expected to play in a way that did not draw overt attention. Those that disturbed the "flow" of the jam - by playing too loudly, badly or out of tune – often received a casual remark or an explanation about normal etiquette. Several informants had even cited these rule-breakers as the thing they disliked the most about old-time ("solo hogs and people that play to fast just because they can" or "people who don't realise their limitations and people who cannot follow chords even though they participate a lot!").

Old-time jams displayed many aspects of ritual behaviour, and several informants drew direct parallels to religious ritual ("it makes me feel like part of something bigger. Being an atheist this is my religion, church and congregation"). Melodies were repeated anywhere from five to twenty or thirty times, and for up to half an hour, becoming hypnotic and trance-like. Several respondents described jams as a liminal experience:

> It is almost like going in to another world for some time. When you play the same melody over and over again there are certain times when everything just fits together and the swing really is there. Those moments are of a certain kind that I have not experienced in any other situation

Continuing the religious theme, many saw musical practice as a way to pay homage to the "founders" of old-time:

Det ska gå att höra rötter i musiken var den har sitt ursprung! Ödmjukhet till musiken och dess utövare..[It should be possible to hear the roots in which the music originates! Humility to the music and its practitioners.]

In spite of the egalitarian, communal ethos, song selections tended to be made by a limited couple of individuals at the top of an unacknowledged social hierarchy – usually the most confident, proficient and knowledgeable about old-time (or those that

considered themselves to be). In line with Bernstein's theories, the power accorded to these individuals resided in their use of correct formal codes, both musically (in terms of correct technique and repertoire) but also in the discourse surrounding playing; professed knowledge about authentic old-time technique and history gave players at the top of the jam hierarchy the prestige and authority to maintain their positions.

Foucault

Foucault's focus on the body as a site for power relations is highly relevant to the study of musical performance. Foucault identified a number of ways in which people are objectified, classified and controlled. The first of these, dividing practices, separate individuals into socially-constructed categories of "normal" and "abnormal". These divisions justify the confinement, isolation and control of certain groups of people (Markula 2006:46).

Foucault referred to institutions such as mental asylums, jails and schools, but his model can equally be applied to old-time jams. "Serious" musicians who had mastered authentic traditions were contrasted with beginners, unskilled players and those too "lazy" to refine their hybridised skills. Repertoire, instruments, instrument set up and techniques were rigidly defined in order to defend old-time traditions from outside disturbance or corruption, restricting musicians' expressive capacity considerably. According to Foucault, such dividing practices produce and reflect oppressive power relations (doctor-patient or jailor-prisoner, for example). I observed these hierarchical relations as central to the old-time scene. Experienced musicians held sway over novices as teachers, mentors or self-appointed jam leaders. Less-respected or experienced players were not given the same space and freedom to control the proceedings of the jam.

Foucault argued that individuals experience tension as the subjects of conflicting discourses (Markula 2006: 52). I observed two conflicting discourses of authenticity among old-time musicians. Several described old-time as unpretentious, unmediated, spontaneous, natural or raw. However, "serious" musicians were also expected to have a scholarly understanding of the genre, closely studying source recordings, technical

details and regional traditions with all the dedication of a classical musician. Old-time musicians thus embodied an uncomfortable contradiction, striving for unmediated rawness via highly mediated and exacting means, thus making the authenticity that they strove for intrinsically unobtainable.

Foucault described how technologies of domination form a discursive web of normalising practices (Markula 2006:74). These forms of disciplinary power focus on the control and discipline of bodies, principally by means of surveillance. Discipline shapes and trains the body, increasing the mastery of the subject over her or his own body. It produces subjected, practised and "docile" bodies (Foucault 1991, in Markula 2006:66).

Technologies of domination work upon the organisation of space, time and behaviour. Old-time jam "space" was organised for maximum surveillance. Musicians sat in an inward facing circle, reminiscent of the *panopticon*, an institutional building designed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. This building was designed to allow all inmates of an institution to be observed by a single watchman without knowing if they were being watched. All inmates were forced to act as though they are being watched at all times, effectively controlling their own behaviour. In an old-time jam circle each musician was observable (audible) but since everyone played in unison, and other musicians could listen to each other without giving any clues in their body language, they could not be sure if attention was focused on them at any one particular moment. Musicians at jams frequently described how they had spent entire songs worrying about their playing, aware of the perceived attention of their neighbour. They expressed acute embarrassment at their poor playing, only to find out that their neighbour was equally focused on her own mistakes and heard nothing.

Time was highly controlled at old-time jams. Songs were arranged in repeated segments and played at a certain speed, ideally for an extended period of five to ten minutes or more. Repertoire was selected from a specific historical period in time. At home, musicians often sectioned instrumental practice into graduated, repetitive and systematised exercises, using metronomes to keep time.

These exercises imposed control over the behaviour of the physical body. Repetitive training enabled the musician to adhere to conventions of musical skill and competence.

These exercises gave greater fluency and expression over time, but also bound musicians into an increasingly restrictive code. The subjected, practised and docile musician is better able to appease his or her peers by playing “correctly”. Musical practice shapes and modifies social meanings, enforces social control and produces advantages and disadvantages for particular individuals, making the musical body a “the site of social struggles" (Hargreaves 1986, in Markula 2006:68).

In line with Foucault’s theories, deviations from normative behaviour at jams were disciplined according to a scheme of punishments (1991, in Markula 2006:69). Playing the wrong chords, making obvious mistakes, playing too loudly or straying outside of etiquette received reprimands ranging from laughing, “surprised” looks and correction to silent hostility. These reactions – or punishments – encouraged subjects’ desire to be normal.

As Foucault explains, discipline through surveillance continues to act upon the subject even when they are alone. The individual turns the inspecting gaze inward, incorporating automatic and anonymous power through self-surveillance. In musical practice, self-surveillance takes several forms. Many musicians suffer from a practising guilt complex, feeling that they don’t practice enough, or effectively, and fail to live up to a perceived ideal (Troll 2010:12). Many use recording equipment to monitor their own progress, or play along to recorded music to simulate the gaze of other musicians.

Foucault cites the collection of personal knowledge as a disciplinary technology of surveillance. Hierarchical observation, the normalisation of judgement, and tests or examinations transform subjects into “objects of knowledge” (Heikkala 1993 in Markula 2006:68). A visible body is a knowable body that can be more efficiently controlled and shaped. Visible classification enables the subject to become conscious of the ways in which they deviate and their need for self-discipline (Markula 2006:96).

Old-time musicians did not sit examinations in their genre, but concerts functioned as tests of skill which were judged by other musicians and audiences. Musicians entered fetival competitions and were ranked on their skill by a panels of judges. Experienced musicians observed less-skilled musicians at jams and offered suggestions for curative techniques, usually without prompting.

All these examples reflect the normalisation of judgement, and a musical culture in which constructive feedback is expected to be received by less experienced musicians without offence. Musicians at jams made judgements about one another and freely gave complements on good performance. They ranked each other on skill and rewarded players higher in the hierarchy by giving them greater say in the proceedings of the jam. One informant explained that the performance anxiety felt when learning songs "on the fly" with new people was so acute that he avoided the situation altogether.

3. Conclusion

This essay has explored the conflicts, negotiations and power relations surrounding notions of "authentic" old-time music and musicianship. Old-time is a music revivalist movement based on the methodological and theoretical approaches of early anthropologists and folklorists, who claimed that cultures could be bounded, static and contain "pure" traditions. These ideas have been rejected by contemporary anthropologists on the grounds of their basis in highly questionable models of cultural isolation.

Isolationist cultural models in old-time employ stereotypes of Appalachian musicians and their supposedly primitive, "natural" and unsophisticated cultural expressions. They also reflect oppressive discourses of race, ignoring and segregating the considerable legacy of African American musicianship in the region.

Historical source recordings are presented as the ultimate source of legitimacy and authenticity in old-time music, evidence of a timeless reality that can be extrapolated far beyond the boundaries of the ethnographic encounter itself. However, they cannot be considered objective and unbiased documents of Appalachian culture but must be located within the commercial and careerist aims of those who made them and the power relations, assumptions and cultural models on which they are based. Source recordings are highly circumstantial documents that obscure an infinite number of other possibilities – different musicians, songs, moods, styles, locations and numerous other factors. The biases and arbitrary judgements underlying the selection of "authentic" musicians and the

songs they recorded were obscured by a cloak of scientific neutrality and detached observation. As musicians were drawn into folklorists' projects to "save" dying traditions, the recordings that they created became a kaleidoscope of memory and fantasy, past and present, wrapped up in convenient packages and presented as a source of meaning and identity for the American people, often in line with broader government aims and cultural trends.

Conflicts over the importance of authenticity among musicians reflected challenges to these static cultural models. Many of the musicians that I observed argued that folk music was a living entity that had always grown and must be allowed to continue to do so. They challenged claims to legitimacy and authenticity, asserting their own claim and contribution to the folk music tradition.

Sociolinguistic and Foucauldian analysis reveals the subtle ways in which discourses of authenticity are embodied in the interactions between musicians. Old-time conventions functioned as a form of restricted code limiting the expressive capabilities of the musician. Techniques of surveillance, hierarchical power relations and other forms of social control were embodied in the subjectivity of the musician. The musical body itself thus became an instrument, a site of social struggle and a tool in the workings of "authentic" discourse.

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