

OUTSIDERS, OUTCASTS, AND OUTLAWS: POSTMODERNISM AND ROCK  
MUSIC AS COUNTERCULTURAL FORCES IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE  
GROUND BENEATH HER FEET*

by

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## ABSTRACT

Salman Rushdie's 1999 novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is ostensibly a rock 'n' roll novel, largely set in the 1960s, that traces the commercial rise of Indian rock star protagonists Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama. As their fame and wealth rise to global status and their stage show comes to entail a logistical complexity of military proportions, it becomes increasingly difficult to discern the couple's earlier countercultural ideals within their new established culture status.

I argue that despite the change from countercultural to establishment-based values in the novel's protagonists, Rushdie does make a case in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* for the possibility of countercultural efficacy against the commodifying culture of global capitalism (which I refer to as the "Frame"). His recipe for combating the exclusive hierarchies produced by the Frame is a combination of the non-totalizing politics of postmodernism and the subversive potential of uncommodified rock music.

I pay close attention to establishing the historical templates--John Lennon of the Beatles and Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys--of the novel's protagonists in an effort to understand the sort of countercultural alternative Rushdie is proposing. I likewise focus on the novel's depiction of the Beach Boys' *Smile* album, which as a still commercially unreleased record, reinforces Rushdie's imperative in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* for an uncommodifying counterculture and works in tandem with his portrayals of the artistic plights of several minor characters in the novel as well.

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## Introduction

"The only people who see the whole picture [. . .] are the ones who step out of the frame." (Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*)

"[I]nvention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable." (Jean-François Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition")

"I need to recover parts of a world that may still exist, disguised as parts of Beach Boys songs. Inside those songs, I know, can be found whatever is left of whole days and weekends and seasons otherwise beyond retrieval. The trick is to locate the seams in the music that will permit an unraveling of what was woven into it. We hide so much in that way, as if to protect something precious (and maybe slightly threatening) from outside forces that would root it out and destroy it." (Geoffrey O'Brien, *Sonata for Jukebox*)

"[T]he fated commodification of the counter-culture demonstrates the assimilative power of that 'official' culture and its concealed dominance over even the most evidently adversarial cultural practices." (Brent Whelan, "'Further': Reflections on Counter-Culture and the Postmodern")

Of articles written on Salman Rushdie's 1999 novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, most focus either on the novel's treatment of the Orpheus myth or on its themes of migration and globalization; only two deal exclusively with the musical elements within the novel. Christopher Rollason identifies many (but not all) of the Sixties rock music references in the novel (which I will refer to from here onward as *Ground*) and criticizes Rushdie for being insensitive to the insidious forces of Westernization in the world and for not including representative Indian musical figures in his story. Largely following Rollason's lead, Silvia Albertazzi globally examines musical aspects of narrative writing and accordingly conjectures about Rushdie's interest in rock music.

Rollason quotes Rushdie speaking to *Le Monde* in 1999: "This book is not a novel about rock'n'roll, but an attempt to respond to the evolution of world culture in the

last half-century" (122). The evolution that Rushdie refers to here is the worldwide expansion of the commercially-driven, absolutist tentacles of established, capitalist culture (which I shall from this point, adopting Rushdie's term, refer to as the Frame,), which of course has manifested itself as much politically and economically as culturally.<sup>1</sup> Said expansion has occurred in the name of globalization, frequently a politically correct term for imperialism or even colonization, or as Mariam Pirbhai more pointedly argues, "With the American dollar at the heart of globalization's neoimperial agenda, homogenization and Americanization become synonymous terms" (61). Although Rushdie's novel examines only its late twentieth-century manifestation, the Frame has arguably existed in various forms since the origins of capitalism in the early modern period, through the Industrial Revolution of the early-mid nineteenth-century, to the age of consumerism and advertising begun in the late nineteenth-century and veritably heightening ever since.

In terms of philosophy, the Frame's outlook is essentially modernist. Ensuring its self-preservation, the Frame eschews any historicist perspective in exchange for insistence on totalizing, universal truths, prioritizing the value of property rights, ultra-individualism, and originality.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that in my definition of the term "Frame," as it exists in the external world or in *Ground's* depiction, I am not suggesting some mysterious, conspiratorial body along the lines of SPECTRE, to borrow from Ian Fleming's infamously fictional nemesis of James Bond. I am also aware the term holds different meanings for different fields of study. However, in holding to the context of Rushdie's novel, I posit the definition of an open and systematically encompassing international capitalism that guides established culture today. The term "frame" is also used on occasion in the novel--including in my opening epigraph--by *Ground's* narrator, Rai, who is a photographer and as narrator literally "frames" the story for the reader.

Additionally, Rushdie's claim that *Ground*'s thematic basis is not rock music but cultural evolution is also historically accurate. At least in the first decade of its existence, rock was the central mouthpiece for the resistance movements in opposition to the Frame, but was not the movement itself. Nevertheless, rock's importance to the counterculture of the Sixties era should not be underestimated. The establishment certainly saw rock as a threat in its ability to motivate and direct the energies of millions of youth and, unable to kill off the new music genre, began to appropriate it for its own conservative uses by at least the mid-Sixties. Unfortunately, this trend has only continued to the present day, when many bands' breakthrough-moment is now seen not in artistic but commercial terms, when their songs are selected to provide soundtracks for commercial advertisements selling products from clothing to cars.

I believe Rushdie set a sizeable portion of *Ground* in the Sixties era because that time period arguably represents the last instance of significant resistance to the Frame. As John Lennon said, "The thing the Sixties did was show us the possibility and the responsibility that we all had. It wasn't the answer, it just gave us a glimpse of the possibility" (Leaf, *U.S.*). Ian MacDonald adds further perspective:

The Sixties seem like a golden age to us because, relative to now [he wrote this in 2005], they were. At their heart, the countercultural revolt against acquisitive selfishness--and, in particular, the hippies' unfashionable perception that we can change the world only by changing ourselves--looks in retrospect like a last gasp of the Western soul. Now radically disunited, we live dominated by and addicted to gadgets, our *raison d'etre* and sense of community unfixably broken. (37)

Although I do not necessarily share MacDonald's sense of hopelessness for cultural recovery, his assessment is otherwise sound. And to be sure, MacDonald is elsewhere unabashedly optimistic about the achievements of the era. He notes, for instance, that "huge sections of society effectively disfranchised before the Sixties had, as a direct result of the decade's widespread change in attitudes, found their voices and--at last--a share of social justice" (4). The events of the Sixties, and specifically, the successes of the countercultural resistance of course took place due to the particular historical conditions of the era. Although in many ways a unique time period, the Sixties can be a cultural model, and we can work to duplicate and perhaps even improve upon its successes. Rushdie's novel portrays an effective countercultural opposition to the globally totalizing effects of the Frame by combining the potent unity of resistance and revolutionary music of the Sixties counterculture with the non-essentialist, non-totalizing worldview of 1980s-and-beyond postmodernism.

My thesis begins by analyzing the culture v. counterculture backdrop of the Sixties era as seen in *Ground*. I then analyze Rushdie's transplanted, postmodernist literary aesthetic and political worldview in the novel and its effects on the cultural-countercultural standoff. My operative definition of "postmodernism" is Lyotard's "incredulity toward metanarratives" (36), in opposition to those "decision makers" (read Frame) who "allocate our lives for the growth of power" (37). Thirdly, I examine the "outcast" masses left behind in the Frame's globalization process. I then examine *Ground's* portrayals of its outcasts and rock music as the voice of the counterculture.

To follow, in chapter five I explore the historical origins of *Ground's* co-protagonists, rock stars Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara, and posit that they represent the



combined figures of Sixties musical and countercultural leaders John Lennon of the Beatles and Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys. This symbolism is present certainly in aesthetic if not conspicuously political terms. Particular attention is given to the Wilson portion of my claim, partly as a plausible model for Rushdie's protagonists. Very few critics have made this connection at all--with none having developed it--and as I demonstrate, identifying Rushdie's selections for historical countercultural models furthers our understanding of the type of countercultural opposition he posits in *Ground*.

In my conclusion, I postulate the nature of the world that *Ground* depicts and suggests may be within our reach, should we be able to resist the all-encompassing commercial imperative and its accompanying politics of totality that more often lead to competition and division than cooperation and unity.

The epigraphs that I include at the beginning of my thesis may almost be read as snap-shots of the solutions to the enclosure of the established Frame via an effective counterculture. As noted, Rushdie's term "Frame" is fundamental to my reading of his novel. In the second epigraph, Jean-François Lyotard sees the (perhaps paradoxical) countercultural and political potential inherent in postmodernism and so effectively employed in Rushdie's novel. In the third, Geoffrey O'Brien looks back to the Sixties era, and like so many others, credits the music of the period to be voice of the larger social and political movements it represented. Those movements faced very real opposition; so did the music that provided the cadence to their enactment.

Even if said music and movements were ultimately overwhelmed by the sheer dominance and military force of the established culture, those "outside forces that would root it out and destroy it," then my first opening epithet, from *Ground* itself (43), may

hold the key that Rushdie offers: we have to get back to a place of collective resistance, while simultaneously directing our worldview outside the totality of the Frame (or any frame, be it dominant or resistant), in order to see the world through our own lenses and be free to express ourselves and live in a manner that is equitable, just, and dignified. *Ground* offers a bleak narrative description of the alternative--a citizenry willing to live under the domination of the absolute Frame of the established culture, no questions asked--and demonstrates how the novel's protagonists (singers/lovers Vina Aspara and Ormus Cama) at least initially reject the totalizing "controlled conditions" of said dominant culture (95).<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, to "step out of the frame" in *Ground's* context does not imply a metaphysical transcendence of human perception or the binary of knowledge (a prospect which postmodernism deems impossible and which modernism, on the other hand, implicitly invokes). Rather, it simply references the global capitalist system that

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<sup>2</sup> *Ground* states, "What's a 'culture'? Look it up. 'A group of micro-organisms grown in a nutrient substance under controlled conditions.' A squirm of germs on a glass slide is all, a laboratory experiment calling itself a society. Most of us wrigglers make do with life on that slide; we even agree to feel proud of that 'culture.' Like slaves voting for slavery or brains for lobotomy, we kneel down before the god of all moronic micro-organisms and pray to be homogenized or killed or engineered; we promise to obey. But if Vina and Ormus were bacteria too, they were a pair of bugs who wouldn't take life lying down. One way of understanding their story is to think of it as an account of the creation of two bespoke identities, tailored for the wearers by themselves. The rest of us get our personae off the peg, our religion, language, prejudices, demeanour, the works; but Vina and Ormus insisted on what one might call auto-couture.

And music, popular music, was the key that unlocked the door for them, the door to magic lands."

In this excerpt, Rushdie provides a preview into the underlying modernist tendencies in both Ormus and Vina that will soon guide them out of the subversiveness of the countercultural underground into the capitalism of the establishment. Their insistence on "auto-couture" for their "personae" contradicts with postmodernism's disavowal of the historically unencumbered, autonomous self.

currently "frames" the world economy and established culture and states that those who wish to subvert the endless cycle of cultural commodification need resist commodifying their own cultural production. In my conclusion, I suggest two characters in the novel (Luis Heinrich and Ardaviraf Cama) who, to varying degrees of success, do just that.

Of course, beyond the first epigraph's "step[ping] out of the frame" economic component of resistance to the increasing commodification of culture (also represented by the fourth and final epigraph from Brent Whelan), it even more fundamentally implies resistance to accepting competition as the *modus operandi* of our very existence. As Peter Davis' 1975 Oscar-winning documentary on the Vietnam War, *Hearts and Minds*, explains, "we must address . . . the question of how we, initially a nation of revolutionary freedom fighters, [have] evolved into one of compulsive winners, from battlefields to football fields, literalizing its civilian urge to 'kill the competition.'" In this sense, Rushdie's novel reminds us of what we have lost since the Sixties (and subsequently what we must regain), and portrays how a resistant, uncommodified counterculture, guided by a postmodernist worldview set to the beat of a revolutionary rock music, must constantly reinvent itself to operate outside the ever-expanding Frame of the commercial, established culture to avoid assimilation and effect change.

## Chapter One: Established Culture v. Counterculture

Multiple events caused tensions to increase throughout the Sixties in the U.S., including the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, Jr., the escalating war in Vietnam, and the Civil Rights Movement. The more demands made for equality and freedom by the counterculture, the more the established culture clamped down and solidified its control. MacDonald notes that John Lennon very much

. . . anticipated the shift from 1967, the year of peace and love, to 1968, the 'year of the barricades'. In fact, so aware was he of the growing confrontation between the counterculture and the establishment that he wrote his polemical 'Revolution' months before les événements of May '68 whilst in the rarefied air of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Himalayan retreat at Rishikesh. (17)<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, Lennon's barometer for cultural change was accurate, as tensions between the counterculture and establishment would only intensify as the Sixties came to a close. For a historical backdrop of the period, I turn to Theodore Roszak's seminal book on the subject, *The Making of a Counterculture*. Roszak describes the "Sixties" in the U.S. as "The Age of Affluence" and actually dates the period (for purposes of historical resemblance and continuity) as the thirty-some years between 1942 (the U.S.' emergence from the Great Depression) and 1972 (the final rise of the technology-based, military industrial complex). Roszak identifies the origin of the established Frame that the Sixties

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<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, this was an excursion that also included Beach Boys' vocalist Mike Love, who assisted Beatle Paul McCartney in writing the Cold War hit, "Back in the U.S.S.R." while there in India, and thereby demonstrating the close proximity of the two bands whose leaders Russhdie models for *Ground's* protagonists.

counterculture would resist and which corporate globalism would work to spread (xi-xii). Rushdie's characterization of the established culture is significantly more scathing than Roszak's, although he is also careful not to leave the blame entirely with those in power nor to exempt himself.

Rushdie's narrator's harsh criticism of the lemmings willing to abide by the establishment without questioning it (*Ground* 95) calls to mind the Beatles' 1967 single, "Strawberry Fields," and its lines, "Living is easy with eyes closed, misunderstanding all you see." Like Rushdie, Roszak fondly recalls the healthy skepticism of the Sixties, noting that "For a period of some twenty years the world's most prosperous industrial society became an arena of raucous and challenging moral inquiry the likes of which we may never see again--at least not if those whose wealth, power, and authority are at stake have anything to say about it" (xii). His description of the inquirers--"those whose wealth, power, and authority are at stake"--is a pinpoint definition of Rushdie's Frame, and Roszak's portrayal of the inquiring counterculture is equally engaging. Roszak notes that the American counterculture in the Sixties was a combination of many different groups, and for that reason, harder to quantify than the established culture (xxvi).

With the Sixties offering the last truly potent counterculture, no wonder Rushdie chose to contextualize much of *Ground* in that era. Linda Hutcheon also reminds us that "The 1960s were the time of ideological formation for many of the postmodernist thinkers and artists of the 1980s and it is now that we can see the results of that formation" (8), a point that is important to remember in that *Ground's* postmodernism (as I discuss in more detail in the next chapter) also works as a deterrent to the commercial globalization of the Frame. As the novel describes its Sixties setting, the counterculture

of the period quickly became a formidable opposing force that demanded the Frame to take notice: "There is the war and the protest against the war. A generation is learning how to march, how to riot, it is inventing the chants that turn groups of kids into armies that have the power to frighten the state. What do we want when do we want it. One two three four, two four six eight. Ho ho ho" (293). Though Rushdie's Sixties setting for much of *Ground* is thereby appropriate, his literary representation of the culture v. counterculture battle, however, is anything but predictable.

The plot of *Ground* premises a forthcoming collision of two worlds/realities, which physically manifests itself in the geologic form of earthquakes. My assertion is the clashing tectonic plates represent established culture and counterculture, with the idealism of the latter usually falling under the economic/military might of the governmental manifestation of the former. It is "geology as metaphor," as described in *Ground* (203), and as Pirbhai notes, "In this uncertain global age, Rushdie paints an unstable, shifting Earth that explodes from the tensions and contentions of its poles as well as from the ideological conflicts surging within its inhabitants" (56).<sup>4</sup> The collision

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<sup>4</sup> Rushdie's geologic metaphor, while unique in its cultural/counterculture application here in *Ground*, comes from a long literary and intellectual tradition. As Klaus Stierstorfer indicates, "People's apprehensiveness about the reliability of the ground they literally or symbolically stand or live on is, first of all, a time-honoured topos which can be traced far back to antiquity" (213). He offers numerous instances from the Judeo-Christian tradition (213), in Immanuel Kant's scientific treatises after the 1755 earthquake of Lisbon (214), and in the work of Victorian authors Hopkins, Arnold, and Tennyson (215).

More contemporary examples of the geologic metaphor from both literature and popular culture that also draw from the same rock music theme as *Ground* (rock 'n roll itself suggesting movement, resistance, and instability) are Don DeLillo's 1973 novel, *Great Jones Street*, and 80s/90s Minneapolis psychedelic-pop band Trip Shakespeare's 1990 song, "The Crane" (featuring lyrics by Matt Wilson).

In DeLillo's novel, earthquakes are humanly-initiated and contrived as "an act of sacrificial love" to the earth (78). Wilson's lyrics, on the other hand, employ the same

of tectonic plates in the novel is a literal manifestation of the clash between established culture and counterculture.

Anshuman A. Mondal effectively characterizes the tectonic metaphor at work in *Ground* and the dubious, if multiplicitous role that globalization plays therein:

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* the unstable earth, which results in ever more frequent earthquakes, signifies the seismic shift represented by globalisation and its paradoxical effects. The metaphor of constantly shifting tectonic plates colliding and readjusting, swallowing up and throwing up, represents the contemporary conjunction of contradictory social, political and economic forces--a multiplicity of forces that can result in both binarism and polarisation but also hybridisation, solidarity and new sites of identity. (171)

Pirbhai concurs with this assessment of globalization and its role in *Ground* (54) and contends that the double-edged sword of globalization is essentially the challenge of, on one hand, remaining open and engaged with the global world at large without, on the other hand, sacrificing long-held cultural identities.<sup>5</sup> I agree, and remind that it is the

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geologic metaphor and anti-establishment perspective of *Ground* (although not specifically in the context of an earthquake), as the poetic voice flees the "dogs of the bankers" over the canyon's edge in an effort to make the establishment go to the trouble of retrieving his wrecked carcass if they are to force him to his death. The lyric of "The Crane," "I feel that the world should come with me as I rise through the cracks in the earth," does indeed have a sort of Rushdien feel to it that would not be out of place in *Ground*.

<sup>5</sup> Pirbhai states, "The novel illustrates what could be called the paradox of globalization: while as an ongoing process globalization signals a literal and symbolic opening up of the world to the heterogeneous cultures and identities that comprise it, globalization also brings with it hegemonic, economic and cultural practices against which national and cultural entities must form their own sites of resistance."

globalization of the polarizing variety that is largely on display in *Ground*. Sometimes referred to as the "Americanization" of cultures, the international dominance of the Frame through control of business, media, and advertising interests, not to mention military might, is a formidable obstacle for the counterculture to overcome. Frequently in instances where countercultural resistance efforts combat the Frame, the latter is shown in the novel to quickly reassert its authority (*Ground* 553)

With globalization leading the way, accordingly, for the cultural forces of the Frame, what does Rushdie offer as counteractions? As Rollason indicates,

The critics [ . . . ] recognise that Rushdie's narrative and stylistic strategies--the use of mythology, the East-to-West sweep of the tale, the multi-layered allusiveness--represent an attempt, successful or otherwise, to create a fiction that will adequately reflect that process of globalisation and offer the reader certain possible responses to it. (149)

My thesis focuses upon one of those countering responses suggested by *Ground*, an effective and substantive counterculture with rock music as its central voice. Another of my foci is illustrated by Rollason's reference to "the multi-layered allusiveness" of the novel: the tell-tale quality of simulacra that is, among multiple other characteristics, representative of postmodernism.



Chapter Two: Postmodernism as (Countercultural) Antidote to (Established Culture)  
Globalism

Hutcheon has made clear that a postmodern aesthetic not only does not imply the absence of politics, but rather can be a subversive political catalyst itself. As she indicates, postmodernism's focus on a "decentered perspective, the 'marginal' and what I will be calling the 'ex-centric'" (12) brings the outcast "other" discarded by the Frame, to a more level field of operations. Rushdie's particular use of a postmodernist approach in *Ground* further serves as both a liberating function and a subsequent call to action for the counterculture:

What if the whole deal--orientation, knowing where you are, and so on--  
what if it's all a scam? What if all of it--home, kinship, the whole  
enchilada--is just the biggest, most truly global, and centuries-oldest piece  
of brainwashing? Suppose that it's only when you dare to let go that your  
real life begins? When you're whirling free of the mother ship, when you  
cut your ropes, slip your chain, step off the map, go absent without leave,  
scram, vamoose, whatever: suppose that it's then, and only then, that  
you're actually free to act! (177)

In the above scenario, the decenteredness of the individual without regard to origin or orientation signifies a postmodern perspective not only counter to the globalism of the Frame, but necessary for political action. In other words, if you cannot concede the binary entrapment of the essentialist, modernist, Frame of global capitalism, then you can

hardly hope to achieve external political efficacy in combatting it. A postmodernist perspective allows this transformation to occur.

As I have stated, Rushdie's centering on the Sixties counterculture is logical in that it represents the last truly effective resistance effort in recent U.S. history. In his analysis of author Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, as seen in Tom Wolfe's book, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), Brent Whelan also shows how the Sixties counterculture was important in demonstrating art's potential role in political resistance (85).<sup>6</sup> Coming of age in the Sixties, Rushdie clearly understands the era's artistic vitality and potent political activism, and he makes them a central part of his setting and countercultural force against the Frame in *Ground*. Still, why does he eschew the 60s own countercultural Marxist politics to fight the Frame in the novel, opting instead to ahistorically extract and "transplant" a philosophical worldview (postmodernism) from some two decades later?

Simply put, neither era (the Sixties nor the decades to immediately follow) wholly contains the elements necessary for successfully opposing the Frame (a perhaps obvious observation, considering that the tentacles of the Frame have clearly only expanded over the past forty years), hence Rushdie's employment of literary license in selectively combining the best parts of each. As for the crucial element of an effective

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<sup>6</sup> Whelan demonstrates that "For a time in the mid-1960s, I believe, the counter-culture, with Kesey in its vanguard, did manage to question the proper place of art and aesthetic experiment and did establish, first for dozens and then thousands of adherents, a different relation between that art and social realities. The ecstatic possibility of a hip, communitarian revolt against consumerism, administered culture, and instrumental social ties, while imperfectly realized, nonetheless helped, and helps, make visible the nature of the dominant but often unspoken rules that were broken. In this I would agree with Lyotard: such breaches, however small and momentary, are healthful, enlightening, an important stage of resistance to the official culture."

countercultural sensibility of active resistance, Lawrence Grossberg refers to "the existence of a politicized community of youth in the sixties and its absence in the eighties" (182). On this point, the Sixties clearly win out.

On the other hand, the anti-totalizing worldview of postmodernism, an approach neither matured nor widely understood until the early 1980s, displaces the New Left, neo-Marxist politics of the Sixties counterculture in the novel precisely because it is non-totalizing. As Philip Auslander indicates, "From the perspective of the 1980s, the totalizing radicalisms of the 1960s seemed to have lost their purchase . . ." (22). The intervening two decades of cultural evolution, alongside the more full development of postmodernist theory by the 1980s, shown that any meaningful socio-political change won by the counterculture would not occur from an uncompromising, totalizing politics, whether liberal or conservative.

The politics of the Sixties were largely totalizing both on the Right (see David Farber and Beth Bailey 163) and Left (see Richard Rorty's *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*), whereas Rushdie's postmodernist politics and literary technique in *Ground* privilege no singular political doctrine. Although it is certainly true that, per the anti-Frame disposition of *Ground*, Rushdie privileges the political Left in the novel, he does not do so when that Left becomes totalizing, as seen with his criticism of psychedelic boutique owner Antoinette Corinth, who is described as "a demagogue: self-righteous, a True Believer" (286). To be sure, postmodernism, still a relatively new phenomenon in the Sixties, was then an especially hard pill to swallow for most political true believers on both sides of the conservative/liberal spectrum. Auslander describes the conundrum that in many theoretical circles is still debated today:

The awkward relationship between the desire for political activism and the acknowledgement that we cannot transcend the terms of our cultural and epistemological context manifest in discussions of postmodern political art can also be seen in poststructuralist discourse on politics in general, a discourse that apparently can support political action only at highly localized, micropolitical levels. (22)

To be clear, the modernist metaphysics of "transcend[ing] the terms of our cultural and epistemological context" is not the same as materially stepping outside of the frame of the international capitalist economy, a move I am proposing that *Ground* both depicts and suggests. In the artistic world, the move is achieved by not commodifying one's work, which is exactly what several minor characters in the novel (Ardaviraf Cama and Luis Heinrich) do. This is exactly the sort of under-the-radar, often anonymous "micropolitical" activism which Auslander references.

The political efficacy of postmodernism as pertains to oppositional politics and the literary universe of *Ground* was a far from commonly-accepted assumption in the Sixties era, much less the underlying philosophical position guiding the countercultural movement(s). In this sense, Rushdie's employment of postmodernism in the novel (both in form and content) is indeed largely an ahistorical, literary transplant. But for Marianne DeKoven, as for Hutcheon, the Sixties era sew the seeds for an emerging postmodernism which would only mature and be realized in later years. As such, she refers to "the end of modernity's totalizing, grandly synthesizing utopianism, which achieved its culmination and final flowering in the radical and countercultural movements of the sixties" (xvi).

At times more in line with the perspective of Britto-García than DeKoven and Hutcheon, Gerhard Hoffmann sees postmodernism already at the forefront of the Sixties' "rebellion against the fifties and late modernism" (193) and likewise describes the breakdown of the totalizing yet insufficient New Left politics of the Sixties' counterculture:

The protest movements engender the liberation of underprivileged groups, natives, minorities, marginals, women, a process that produced or foregrounded a series of quite new political, social and cultural categories like race, gender, marginality, feminism, the 'Other,' 'colonize,' politically correct, etc., classifications that could no longer be subordinated to the traditional Marxist category of class. (193)

Even more directly connecting postmodernism with the Sixties counterculture than Britto-García, Hoffman states, "What fuels the transformation of both the political and the cultural scene in the sixties, the rebellion against the bourgeois, morally austere, tranquillized fifties, their social decorum and conceptual schemes, are energy, intensity and free form. All three characterize also postmodernism and the postmodern arts" (197). Nevertheless, he also acknowledges the Sixties' unrest with "what was conceived to be the playful spirit of postmodernism, its so-called 'anything-goes' attitude" (194), and notes that postmodernism, unlike the Sixties counterculture, wasn't realized via historically brief socio-political movements, but rather through a longer-term evolution striving toward "changing consciousness," "promoting radical artistic innovation," and employing the elements of irony, montage, and collage (197). It is important to note that Hoffmann includes in this list, by quoting Rushdie himself, the equal importance to

postmodernism of "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs" (198).

Regardless of whether the postmodernist component of the opposition to the Frame is ultimately an ahistorical, transplanting move by Rushdie in *Ground*, it is an effective component in the novel and might also prove a useful model in the external world for a contemporary counterculture.

Indeed, since the 1980s, there have been increasingly effective blends of Leftist, Sixties counterculture influences with postmodernist sensibilities and politics, with Eugene Holland remarking upon our current ability to now "see Marxism as both benefiting from and contributing to a novel, nonlinear version of historical materialism" (196). As seen in Rushdie's *Ground*, postmodernism's disruption of non-egalitarian hierarchies easily crosses paths of combined interest with Marxism, yet without resorting to its own totalizing, essentialist platform.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of form, *Ground's* fragmentary structure, non-linear internal history, shifting narrative point of view, and use of simulacra qualify the novel as postmodernist. To be sure, for the pop culture aficionado, Rushdie's countless (and predominantly music-related) cultural references in the novel are great fun. Simultaneously, they are also seemingly never-ending and at times cumbersome, with the original reference points

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<sup>7</sup> A close analogue and personification of *Ground's* politics in the external world today may perhaps be someone like contemporary pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, who, like the combination worldview presented in the novel, combines a Marxist-based ethic for egalitarianism (albeit an older model than that of the New Left in the Sixties) with the more contemporary, non-totalizing perspective of postmodernism. Like Rushdie, he merges the best approaches of several historical eras to most effectively counteract the ever-expanding tentacles of the globalist Frame. To conclude this chapter, I now include a detailed account, in both form and content, of *Ground's* postmodernist characteristics.

frequently long out of sight. As Jean Baudrillard states, in those instances, "the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum--not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (634). In *Ground's* terms, "The universe proceeds by mirror images, and each set of imitations and replicas is less than that which it copies" (334).

Several examples in *Ground* of simulacra are also music-related, suggesting an inherent postmodern element to music itself. Consider the following commentary on the Beatles where the list of parallel comparatives continues indefinitely with the original referent far back in the rearview mirror: ". . . the Beatles, for goodness' sake, the Beatles are white English trash trying to sing like American *girls*. Crystals Ronettes Shirelles Chantels Chiffons Vandellas Marvelettes . . ." (251). The novel also describes the musical multi-track recording approach commonly known as "bouncing down tracks" (300), a technique perfected by Ormus Cama and historically pioneered by Les Paul in the 1950s and Brian Wilson in the 60s, among others. As stated in *Ground*, "Bouncing down is what you do when you need to keep tracks free" (300), though with sub-standard equipment or when applied to excess, it can also be a flawed technique leading to a sound-degrading, simulacrum-like quality known as "generational loss," where again, the bounced tracks are "less than that which [they] cop[y]" (300). Clearly, this music recording technique of "bouncing down" is a metaphor in *Ground* for simulacra and for the novel's postmodernist outlook in general:

Our lives disconnect and reconnect, we move on, and later we may again touch one another, again bounce away. This is the felt shape of a human

life, neither simply linear nor wholly disjunctive nor endlessly bifurcating, but rather this bouncy-castle sequence of bumpings-into and tumbings-apart. (543)

The use of simulacra, in sum, is only one of many formal postmodernist aspects of Rushdie's novel, alongside the multiple examples of content-based postmodernism in *Ground* as well.

Before citing a final key example of *Ground's* postmodernist content, a bit of explanation is warranted in connection to the first of this thesis' opening epigraphs that may otherwise suggest a very modernist and not at all postmodernist disposition. To "step out of the frame" does not imply a metaphysical ability to access higher knowledge beyond the binary of human experience; it simply means, on a very practical level, resisting and eluding the oppressive influence of the dominant culture. As Rushdie directly explains in *Ground*, "This doesn't have to be supernature, it doesn't have to be god. It could be just--don't ask me--physics, okay? It could be some physics beyond our present capacity to comprehend. It could just be I found a way of stepping outside the picture" (350). In *Ground*, a postmodern worldview is a precursor to taking that step and achieving political efficacy against the Frame.

One of the strongest indictments against the Frame's modernist and totalizing view in the novel concerns illegitimately wealthy businessman Piloo Doodhwala, nemesis of Ormus and Vina. Doodhwala exploits the modernist impetuosity of the West's "arch-disciples of linearity, of the myth of progress [who] want, from the Orient, only its fabled unchangingness, its myth of eternity" (*Ground* 266). Furthermore, *Ground* shows how the modernism v. postmodernism face-off is often an urban v. rural competition,



with, paradoxically, the urban side (as the more Westernized and commercialized) representing modernism.

Piloo dupes the public, as well as the state, into believing he is owner of a vast herd of goats in the Indian countryside which supply his goats milk mega-business. His subversion succeeds because he exploits the naïveté of the urban-centered, modernist worldview that sees the rural as unchanging and so never bothers to check:

City dwellers were constantly told that village India was the 'real' India, a space of timelessness and gods, of moral certainties and natural laws, of the eternal fixities of caste and faith, gender and class, landowner and sharecropper and bonded labourer and serf. Such statements were made as if the real were solid, immutable, tangible. (*Ground* 238)

The country peasants take advantage of the cities' gullible, modernist outlook and happily play the postmodernist role of shepherds of non-existent goat herds. For them it is a non-abstract question of economic livelihood and quality of life, and for Doodhwala, "It was a mega-hustle which freed his people from the daily hustles that drove them into early graves" (*Ground* 237). Assigning the subversive role in this conflict to the postmodern position of the peasants is a clear endorsement of the radical and countercultural political potency of postmodernism. To go a step further and demonstrate the efficacy of this approach in subverting the Frame for a villain figure like Doodhwala is to beg the question of its encouraging chances for success in honest hands.

A postmodernist perspective, though, is indeed often a tough sell for counterculturalists interested in political efficacy against the dominant culture, as Rushdie explains: "In spite of all the evidence that life is discontinuous, a valley of rifts,

and that random chance plays a great part in our fates, we go on believing in the continuity of things, in causation and meaning. But we live on a broken mirror, and fresh cracks appear in its surface every day" (*Ground* 30-31). Facing a dominant culture with seemingly infinite resources at its disposal, however, the counterculture's embrace of a postmodern worldview can be just unorthodox enough to be effectively subversive, as *Ground* demonstrates. And, this embrace is not a sign of weakness but rather the most logical course of action to assume.

As (predominant) narrator Rai states in the novel, "I took refuge in the reasonable man's partial-knowledge defense: to admit we do not understand a phenomenon is not to admit the presence of the miraculous but merely, reasonably, to accept the limitations of human knowledge" (503-4). Besides confirming Rai's non-metaphysical intent when he makes speaks earlier about "seeing the whole picture" and "stepping out of the frame," this demonstration of the narrator's philosophical outlook replaces the often frightening notion of the postmodern void with a calming reason. *Ground's* postmodernist elements, thus set at the forefront of its author's literary approaches in the novel, provide a formidable modus operandi for dealing with the Frame.

As a post-colonial writer, Rushdie is most often oppositional to the established culture. In *Ground*, his use of postmodernist and, additionally, magical realist forms and content (explored in chapter five) serves as additional antagonism to the globalist Frame. As Ruth Helyer indicates, these three literary approaches work quite happily together: "Magic realism is aligned with postmodern and post-colonial writing as it questions what is 'real', in particular 'pasts' and 'histories' and the way in which these are experienced" (248). By way of the above three modes, the landscape of *Ground* becomes shifting,

unstable ground with meanings in transit--effectively a moving target that for the Frame is nearly impossible to pin down and suppress.

### Chapter Three: Outcasts of Globalization and the "Frame"

The first effort by characters in the novel to soften the collision of worlds (cultural and countercultural) and bring people together is by ancient history scholars Darius Cama (father of Ormus Cama, rock star and co-protagonist of *Ground*) and William Methwold (resurrected from Rushdie's 1980 novel, *Midnight's Children*). The elder Cama and Methwold attempt to bridge the mythologies of East and West, basing their conclusions on the tripartite theory of real-life French comparative philologist and mythologist Georges Dumézil (1898-1986), who claimed the defining features of civilization to be religious sovereignty, physical force, and fertility, and argued for a common origin between Aryan and Indian ancient mythologies. For Darius, however, Dumézil's theory quickly proves insufficient.

Darius becomes critical of the exclusivity of Dumézil's theory, arguing for the need for a fourth function that accounts for "outsiderness"--that is-- people who are outcast from society by the Frame in one form or another and left as an unwanted, collective "Other." Darius' actually self-centered reasons for desiring this fourth function are likely due to the outcasts in his own family (albeit their outcast status is largely due to his own hand) and his own marginalized status, due to his secretly fraudulent credentials as a lawyer. Arguably due to his personal proximity to "outsiderness," Darius feels a threatening vulnerability to the restricting hierarchies implicit in Dumézil's theory that Methwold does not. For Darius, to "step outside the frame" is clearly a move made by excluded outsiders of said hierarchies to escape their discriminating influence.

Darius aptly recognizes the unique, hard-earned clarity of perspective of the left-behind outcast, asking, "But what about *outsideness*? What about all that which is beyond the pale, above the fray, beneath notice? What about outcastes, lepers, pariahs, exiles, enemies, spooks, paradoxes?" (42-43). Further added to the list are

the existential outsider, the separated man, the banished divorcé, the expelled schoolboy, the cashiered officer, the legal alien, the uprooted wanderer, the out-of-step marcher, the rebel, the transgressor, the outlaw, the anathematized thinker, the crucified revolutionary, the lost soul. (202)

Representing empire and the established culture of the Frame in *Ground*, Methwold has no interest in any fourth function, preferring instead to keep outsiders effectively disenfranchised. His response to Darius' call for a fourth function for outsiders is as follows:

If there are people like that . . . aren't they, well, *rarae aves*? Few and far between? Does one really need a fourth concept to explain them? Aren't they, well, like waste paper, and all the stuff one puts in the bin? Aren't they simply surplus to requirements? Not wanted on the voyage? Don't we just cross them off the list? Cut them? Blackball them out of the club?

(*Ground* 43)

Methwold's cynicism and elitism here divulge not only his allegiance to the Frame, but the Frame's reliance upon maintaining rigid cultural and socio-political borders that protect the "haves" from the "have-nots." Such borders are part of the Frame's modernist ethos that achieves stability through its own constructed, hegemonic hierarchies that are designed to keep the outsiders of the postmodern counterculture at bay when they do not

conform, effectively exiling them to what Ormus comes to refer to as "the outsideness of what we're inside" (350). As Rushdie states in *Ground*,

. . . those who value stability, who fear transience, uncertainty, change, have erected a powerful system of stigmas and taboos against rootlessness, that disruptive, anti-social force, so that we mostly conform, we pretend to be motivated by loyalties and solidarities we do not really feel, we hide our secret identities beneath the false skins of those identities which bear the belongers' seal of approval. (73)

Nevertheless, Methwold underestimates the counterculture's ability to resist and counteract imposed boundaries within the cultural domain--specifically via rock music and the de-centering force of postmodernist and magical realist literature.

The "surplus" supplementary outsider described by Methwold has significantly more power within a postmodernist arena where class and political divisions are already less rigid and the possibility for transcending established boundaries is, correspondingly, substantially greater. As shown in *Ground*, the destabilizing force of Rushdie's postmodernist and magical realist literary technique proves an effective counterpoint to the homogenizing effects of the Frame's globalization strategy. Homi K. Bhabha explains the subtle process of outwitting the Frame where, accordingly, language itself is the quietly subverting force in this scenario that resists the assimilative tactics of the Frame for any who would threaten to transcend its established hierarchies (306).

As for Darius and Methwold, despite their status within the dominant culture, their own scholarly efforts to culturally bridge the mythologies of East and West are, for the Frame, unacceptable and unpermissible transcendencies. As *Ground* reveals, the

Frame distrusts anyone--scholars as much as rockers--who threatens to break down the established hierarchy. Darius and Methwold's own culture-bridging efforts are thwarted when the strong arm of the media presents newspaper headlines deeming Dumézil, the author of their project's tripartite foundation, to have Nazi ties. Although their work in demonstrating a common origin between ancient Aryan and Indian mythologies (initially inspired by Dumézil's scholarship) has altogether ignored contemporary politics, they are aware of the damage sustained by these reports in the realm of public perception (which would only discredit their claims), and they abandon the project.<sup>8</sup>

Pointing again to the period of the Sixties, Paul Berman recalls a climate of openness and embrace for those left behind by the Frame, whether in the United States or abroad:

. . . young people embarked on a reverse passion for the 'other'--not a hatred for people who are different but a love for them, in eager acknowledgement of their very difference. Faraway solidarity became their religion. They said, in effect: I struggle on behalf of others, therefore I am. They conceived an idea of identity through action. (33)

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<sup>8</sup> Despite Darius and Methwold's complete independence from Dumézil's politics in the novel, there does seem to be some credence in the external world to his purported fascist sympathies, albeit not of the Nazi variety. Bruce Lincoln notes that Dumézil's tripartite theory arose in the years 1938-42, "when fascism in various forms was an urgent concern for any Frenchman" (124), and cites "the resemblance of this system to Mussolini's 'corporate society' and the 'integral nationalism' of Charles Maurras" (125). Furthermore, Dumézil is known to have published pseudonymously in the right-wing newspapers *Candide* and *Le Jour* during the years 1933-35 in praise of Mussolini's Italy (Lincoln 128). Regardless of Dumézil's politics, Darius and Methwold's lost project represents another example in *Ground* of discouraged efforts to break down rigid identities and hierarchies that could open doors to upward mobility for those outcast by the Frame.

The Sixties era gave agency to the outcast "other," inspired the liberating origins of postmodernism, and created the last truly effective countercultural movement the world has seen. What was the voice of that resistance effort, both historically and as seen in *Ground?* Rock music.



## Chapter Four: Beyond Borders: Rock Music as the Voice of Outsiders and the Counterculture

Hermann Hesse writes in *Magister Ludi (The Glass Bead Game)*, "The music of a restive age is excited and fierce, and its government is perverted" (20). Accordingly, if the 1960s represent the last truly "restive age" with a significant countercultural movement in the U.S., they definitely represent the last time rock music led such a movement. This is why Albertazzi's criticisms of *Ground* and Rushdie, claiming that "he pays no attention to the development of rock music over the last few decades" (95), ring hollow. As Farber and Bailey indicate, "Youths in the Sixties--at a time when society was wracked by conflict over civil rights and, increasingly, the Vietnam War--used rock music as a proud emblem of their rebellion against the more staid and conservative aspects of the society they were poised to inherit" (59). Obviously there have been rock bands in the past four decades that have continued that liberating, subversive ethos from the Sixties era, but due to increasing commercialization and the expansion of the globalist tentacles of the Frame since that period, they are the exception to the rule.

Rock was certainly not alone among the arts in providing a subversive voice for the counterculture movement of the Sixties, although it arguably wielded the most potential for reaching vast audiences and motivating them to act. Rushdie himself poses the question in *Ground* of why we place such emphasis on the power of music in general, asking,

Why do we care about singers? Wherein lies the power of songs? Maybe it derives from the sheer strangeness of there being singing in the world.

The note, the scale, the chord; melodies, harmonies, arrangements; symphonies, ragas, Chinese operas, jazz, the blues: that such things should exist, that we should have discovered the magical intervals and distances that yield the poor cluster of notes, all within the span of a human hand, from which we can build our cathedrals of sound, is as alchemical a mystery as mathematics, or wine, or love. Maybe the birds taught us. Maybe not. Maybe we are just creatures in search of exultation. We don't have much of it. Our lives are not what we deserve; they are, let us agree, in many painful ways deficient. Song turns them into something else. Song shows us a world that is worthy of our yearning, it shows us our selves as they might be, if we were worthy of the world. (19-20)

The question of the mysterious efficacy of music ("the power of songs") to potentially induce kinetic effect (that is, to move people to action) is arguably unique to that art form (or in those mediums that incorporate music). Perhaps it is the physical vibrations produced by music that enable it to frequently elicit likewise physical responses from people, unlike the more purely cognitive interaction induced by non-musical art forms.

To be sure, Rushdie is quick to note that even in the Sixties era itself, few rock bands were capable of inspiring voices of counterculture (*Ground* 156-57). And even though the inspirational value of music to affect people has long been acknowledged, can music actually function as a catalyst for socio-political change?

First of all, the communicative potential of rock music is culture-spanning and touches millions. "I think of rock as a sort of international language," Rushdie has said

(McGrath 8). As he elaborated at the publication of *Ground* as to why rock music is at the forefront of a novel about the countercultural potential to overcome the Frame,

[T]hat was one of the valuable things about rock and roll. It meant that there was a language of cultural reference that I could use which people all around the world would easily get, just in the same way that people once might have got a range of classical or mythological reference. Rock is the mythology of our time. (Kadzis 222-23)

Moreover, the potential for creating socio-political solidarity via rock music is formidable. Rock scholar Greil Marcus has shown that rock music "cuts across lines of class and race" (214). The very unpretentious nature of the medium bespeaks solidarity, as Thomas Pynchon represents in his 1965 novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*: "When those kids sing about 'She loves you,' yeah well, you know, she does, she's any number of people, all over the world, back through time, different colors, sizes, ages, shapes, distances from death, but she loves. And 'you' is everybody. And herself" (117). As rock constructed inclusive unions of solidarity, it simultaneously deconstructed rigid borders based on exclusive identity and protecting the "haves" from the "have-nots."

As *Ground's* protagonists Vina and Ormus write in song, the Frame of the established culture has organized society into exclusionary hierarchies that are strictly enforced: "At the frontier of the skin mad dogs patrol. At the frontier of the skin. Where they kill to keep you in. Where you must not slip your skin. Or change your role. You can't pass out I can't pass in. You must end as you begin. Or lose your soul. At the frontier of the skin armed guards patrol" (55). These lyrics use the metaphor of the limits

of the body to depict the rigidity of the socio-political and economic hierarchies assembled by the Frame that are seemingly impossible to subvert.

Nevertheless, Rushdie also confirms in the novel, ". . . all frontiers would crumble before the sorcery of the tune" (55). His language here is playful, yet need not imply a mystical component to what music can politically achieve.

Rock music, however, defies the exclusionary hierarchies and borders of the Frame (ala postmodernism) by changing the requirements for group membership in its own union of solidarity to affinity and not identity. As Don DeLillo writes of music's power to defuse the identity imperative (and subsequently, subvert the Frame) in *Great Jones Street*, "I get taken beyond every reference that indicates who I am or how I behave. Just so out of it. Music is dangerous in so many ways. It's the most dangerous thing in the world" (46). Nevertheless, there are still those who question Rushdie's emphasis on rock music to lead the subversive way.

Rollason (142-43), echoed closely by Albertazzi (96), heavily criticizes Rushdie's use of a "non-Indian" musical genre to convey counterculture liberation stemming from the East and questions whether rock music isn't a force for globalization rather than against it. But Rushdie already anticipated the issue in *Ground*:

In India it is often said that the music I'm talking about is precisely one of those viruses with which the almighty West has infected the East, one of the great weapons of cultural imperialism, against which all right-minded persons must fight and fight again. Why then offer up paeans to culture traitors like Ormus Cama, who betrayed his roots and spent his pathetic lifetime pouring the trash of America into our children's ears? Why raise

low culture so high, and glorify what is base? Why defend impurity, that vice, as if it were a virtue? (95)

Rushdie's initial response to this perspective is to simply dismiss it as "the noisome slithers of the enslaved micro-organisms, twisting and hissing as they protect the inviolability of their sacred homeland, the glass laboratory slide" (95).<sup>9</sup> He goes on in *Ground* to offer a less incendiary explanation of how and why rock music is a legitimately subversive, countercultural force--even beyond the borders of the U.S. The key reason offered is that in *Ground's* universe, rock does not originate in the West, but rather in Ormus' head in the East (95-96).

In effect, Rollason need not worry about the lack of non-Indian music in *Ground*, nor about the erroneous conception of rock as a form of globalist, cultural imperialism; Rushdie has already circumvented those issues in the novel by having rock originate from the East as part of his postmodernist destabilization program against the Frame.

Furthermore, the Gayomart component to the story negates the overall East v. West debate either way. By having Ormus' songs originate in his head from the voice of his dead twin Gayomart, the true, ultimate origin of rock music in the novel is, technically, neither East nor West, but "the other side," as in life after death. Rushdie's allusion to the dead twin of Elvis Presley creates this source to alleviate the East/West criticism that he (correctly) anticipates coming. Nevertheless, the music is said to be

. . . driven by the democratic conviction, retained by Ormus from the days when Gayomart sang the future into his ears, that the music is his as well,

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<sup>9</sup> Matt Wilson's lyrics to "Descender!" (Planetmaker Records, 1998), a musical adaptation of Jules Verne's *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, depict similar frustration with those who wage war in the name of cultural "purity": "From each nation there's a redneck cracker with a reason to be fighting for the mother place."

born not just in the U.S.A. but in his own heart, long ago and far away.  
 Just as England can no longer lay exclusive claim to the English language,  
 so America is no longer the sole owner of rock 'n' roll. (378).

Rollason simply mistook *Ground's* agenda and proposed a better replacement for rock: world music.

The magical realist Gayomart component of *Ground*, which Shaul Bassi terms a "parodic take on authenticity" (111), can,

. . . destabilise and disable all the discourses on origins and originality that are often vitiated by supremacist implications. To defend an authentic Asian music, or an authentic world music, Rollason subscribes to a cultural model where one's origins become an irredeemable destiny. What is authentic, asks Rushdie? Do we really know where culture comes from, he responds? (111)

Pirbhai seconds this notion, indicating that "World music merely promotes a myth, the image of a harmonious and healthy diversity, while the world itself continues to live within its Manichean, local spheres in which cultural complexity is reduced to its lowest common denominator" (60-61). The "preservation of authenticity," thus, is not equal to "postcolonial hybridity" (Bassi 110).

Additionally, on the level of music production and manufacturing, it seems particularly absurd to insist upon the "authentic" substitution of world music for rock in *Ground*, when all the world's album-producing mechanisms in question (be they for Western or world music genres) are engaged in the manufacture and reproduction of music. "[T]he very category of World music was a commercial coinage agreed upon in

1987 by the major independent record companies," notes Bassi (110), while in his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin affirms that overcoming one's insistence on authenticity can actually lead to a more democratic and enlightening experience of the work for all (20). Authenticity becomes updated and redefined in *Ground*.

In Rushdie's view rock music was the music of his generation. Echoing the sentiments of Geoffrey O'Brien from the first, opening epigraph of this thesis, Rushdie too describes recovering lost memories from his past that are encapsulated in the music:

I wanted to write about rock and roll partly because it's the music of my life. When I was young, it was young, We've more or less grown up and grown old together. It feels as if rock music is the soundtrack of my life. As if I could associate all kinds of moments in my life with songs, and songs would evoke memories that otherwise might have been lost.

(Kadzi 223)

The author further explains, "I grew up in India listening to early rock, and then when I came to England in '61, the music explosion was almost immediate. I was a huge fan of the Beatles and Beach Boys and also the New York underground of the Velvets and Captain Beefheart" (Galloway 7). Rushdie is adamant: rock music is everyone's to own.

In an interview with *Rolling Stone* senior writer David Fricke at the publication of *Ground*, Rushdie stated, "The extraordinary thing about rock and roll in India in the Fifties was that this music didn't seem foreign. It happened everywhere to young people in the same way at the same time. In the novel, I have this conceit of Ormus saying he's getting the music first . . . to suggest the strength by which we felt it was our music" (2-

3). Rushdie's sensibility as such corresponds to Arjun Appadurai's "five-part theory of globalization" (as quoted in Pirbhai), indicating that "most often, the homogenization argument subspecies into either an argument about Americanization , or an argument about 'commoditization' . . . What these two arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenized" (63). Ormus is, of course, the site of that indigenization in *Ground*.

Ormus and Vina's claims to rock music mirror Rushdie's own life, and what the displacement of rock's origins achieves in *Ground* is to 1) destabilize the Frame and 2) show that affinity for the rock genre and its potency as the voice of the counterculture is indeed world-wide. "Talking to Vaclav Havel, Rushdie discovered how the music of the Velvet Underground was a great inspiration for the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia: pop music has its mysterious ways of offering freedom" (Bassi 113-14). Rock has indeed been as much the voice of the counterculture in many other parts of the world--India, Japan, Brazil, and Sweden notably among them--as it has in the U.S. and U.K.



## Chapter Five: The Historical Origins of Ormus and Vina

Nearly all the articles written about Rushdie's *Ground*, whether explicitly engaged with the novel's musical aspects or not, to some degree address the historical referents for protagonists Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama. These efforts shed informative light on the novel and provide valuable historical context for its reading, and need not contradict postmodernism's incredulity toward the prospect of recovering the historical real. As Hutcheon explains, postmodernism's "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its re-thinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (5).<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, awareness of Rushdie's selections from the numerous available historical referents in Sixties rock, and specifically, of which aspects of those selected figures he chose to foreground, gives us invaluable insight into the type of countercultural stance against the Frame he is proposing in *Ground*. Most of the scholarship to date on this issue (led by Rollason) points to Elvis Presley and John Lennon as the joint blueprint for Ormus, while for Vina, Janis Joplin and modern-day pop star Madonna are the popular choices for representation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hutcheon's definition of postmodernist literature as "historiographic metafiction," is, incidentally, an accurate description of *Ground*'s theoretical framework--a postmodernist structure which disqualifies neither historical examination nor retrieval.

<sup>11</sup> Additionally, within any tracking of Vina's historical referent(s), it should be mentioned that cases could also be made (but have not been) for her origins stemming partially from the figures of both Cher and Tina Turner. Both pop stars, like Vina, are of non-Anglo ethnicities, and both fronted their groups alongside a male counterpart (Sonny Bono and Ike Turner, respectively). Likewise, each singer was a key part of the Phil Spector/Wrecking Crew recording scene in early-mid '60s Los Angeles, of which Rushdie is known to be an avid fan. Cher's #1 1965 single with Bono, "I Got You, Babe," is referenced in *Ground* (183) as is her 1973 solo album, *Half Breed* (116), while

However, Rollason, again emphasizing the ethnic imperative in criticizing the novel, suggests the overly simplistic possibility of Queen vocalist Freddie Mercury as Ormus' historical model. Mercury (born Farrokh Bulsara) was, like Ormus, a Parsee Indian born to a family of at least moderate wealth and transplanted to England to begin his musical rise to superstardom (Blake 79). The connection is more fleeting beyond these basic similarities, although there is a compelling detail in Mercury and Queen's biography that actually leads the trail back to the person I believe is a significant model for Ormus: Brian Wilson.

Wilson is antecedent to Mercury and, therefore, if one is looking for first sources, Wilson becomes a logical contender. Before they were Queen, the band was known from 1968 until 1970 (when Mercury came aboard) as Smile (the title of the Beach Boys' unfinished album of 1966-67). Although the band was primarily a progressive rock/blues hybrid, they embraced the same high-range vocal harmonies as the Beach Boys, which Blake contends was highly influential for Mercury (84). They developed their own version of the Phil Spector "Wall of Sound" recording approach (again, similar to the Beach Boys) that Queen would be known for in the decades to come. Furthermore, the group's lips/teeth smile artwork, designed in 1968 by bassist/vocalist Tim Staffell and identified by Blake as bearing an "uncanny resemblance" to the Rolling Stones' later lips/tongue band logo (84), is even more striking in its nearly identical resemblance of Frank Holmes' artwork for the Beach Boys' *Smile* album from only two years prior. In

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Ike and Tina Turner's classic 1966 album, *River Deep, Mountain High*, is referenced twice in the novel (428, 539), jointly for Vina and for her replacement, Mira Celano, on the second occasion.

sum, there are multiple points leading the Freddie Mercury case for Ormus' historical antecedent in *Ground* ultimately back to the mid-60s, *Smile*-era Wilson.

To be sure, Lennon and Wilson (in addition to Presley) merit the most attention in discussing the historical referents in the novel for Vina and Ormus, and both historical figures also fit nicely into Rushdie's postmodernist apparatus. Citing the overall "utopian impulse of sixties rock" as "a music of liberation and transcendence," DeKoven specifically references both the Beatles and Beach Boys (particularly in the groups' abilities in the Sixties to continually metamorphose and adapt to the times, as opposed to complacently adhering to a static, singular vision) as being "at the heart of the emergence of postmodern popular culture" (119). Furthermore, both Lennon and Wilson were leading players in the Sixties counterculture movement, albeit in vastly different capacities and with subsequently disparate levels of contemporary acknowledgement--the former on the front page and the latter behind the scenes. At the opposite cultural pole, both musicians, like Ormus and Vina, can likewise be said to have more in common with commercial, mainstream culture than radical counterculture in the later stages of their careers.

#### A. Ormus and Vina as John Lennon (and Yoko Ono)

Vina and Lennon share associations with persons and groups of the political Left in the U.S. Vina, not Ormus, is " . . . grilled about her political associations with Yippies, Panthers, assorted unionists and leftists . . ." and subjected to drug raids and IRS audits (*Ground* 395), much like the ex-Beatle. In 1971 New York, Lennon was a close associate of the Yippies, particularly leaders Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman (Harris 69) and gave

his support to a variety of Leftist causes. These included the Michigan concert benefit demanding White Panther John Sinclair's freedom from a ten-year prison sentence for possessing two marijuana cigarettes (Harris 72) and the protest of Angela Davis' firing from UCLA for her Communist Party membership and Black Panther associations (Stubbs 46). Lennon's well-documented counterculture status goes back to at least 1966 with the Beatles initial "butcher" cover (depicting the Beatles in butchers' aprons with dismembered dolls and pieces of meat) for what would become the *Yesterday and Today* album. The cover was a poignant protest of the Vietnam War and was quickly rescinded by Capitol/EMI Records. Philip Norman reports that, "As to which Beatle had proposed the bloody joints and limbless dolls, there was never any serious doubt. The banned cover, a bitterly resentful John Lennon said, was 'as relevant as Vietnam.' His tone, people noticed, was neither cheeky nor funny" (331). Vina's Lennonesque subversiveness does not end here.

Reverberating much like Lennon's 1967 pronouncement that the Beatles were "bigger than Jesus Christ," in *Ground*, Vina persuades Ormus to write their names in the sand of the Nevada desert (using a four-wheel drive vehicle) so that they can be seen from the moon. It is a gesture she accompanies with the pronouncement that ". . . they wrote their names over an area bigger than any church. You can't see no churches from the moon" (394-5), which causes an uproar among religious groups.

Vina and Ormus then appear naked and enchained on the cover of *Rolling Stone* (403-4), just as Lennon and Ono appeared naked on the 1968 *Two Virgins* album. The fictional couple run full-page ads in the world press (a tactic the novel suggests is Vina's idea) pronouncing their love for one another and that "Music is the bridge between our

worlds. Music liberates and unifies" (422-23), similar to Lennon and Ono's December, 1969 media ads (in billboard and print), stating, "War Is Over If You Want It--A Christmas Message From John and Yoko" (Harris 69). As Sven Birkerts says of Rushdie's fictional rock star couple, "Theirs is a kind of John-and-Yoko stardom" (3). *Ground* clearly posits Vina and Ormus as also a socio-political force to be reckoned with, much like Lennon and Ono from the late Sixties into 1980.

Ormus too bears striking resemblance to Lennon on a number of levels. The *Ground* protagonist has a curious affinity for bread that begins the moment he arrives in the U.K. and continues throughout his residency in the West (289). Lennon called his domestic existence during the mid-Seventies the "bread-baking years" (Stubbs 56), a time when, away from the madness he had endured as a Beatle when constantly under the media microscope, he focused more on the simple things in life.

In a more obvious similarity, Ormus is threatened with deportation by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (395), identical to Lennon's case in 1972 (Stubbs 48). The basis for the threat in each instance is a phony drug charge from years prior, and for both Ormus in the novel and Lennon in the external world, the case would ultimately be dropped.

Finally, the most direct, undoubted representation of Lennon via Ormus is the *Ground* character's residency in the massive Rhodopé Building on New York's Upper West Side (383), which is a clear portrayal of Lennon and Ono's address at the Dakota Building. Like Lennon's shooting death outside the Dakota on December 8, 1980, Ormus suffers the same fate outside the Rhodopé (570).

## B. Ormus as Brian Wilson

The Beach Boys' leader Brian Wilson is the other primary historical referent from which *Ground's* protagonist is drawn. Like Lennon, Wilson exemplifies the sort of outsidership that is a major theme in the novel. In response to the compelling juxtaposition of Wilson and Lennon in the "outsider" capacity David Leaf indicates,

That's a question I've never been asked. And it's a good one. I think it's fair to say that when you listen to their music, it's clear that both John and Brian wrote from a place of pain. From early on in their songwriting careers, they were writing about alienation or abandonment or a feeling of aloneness. However, it found its expression in different ways. For Brian, it was 'In My Room'; an early example of John's might be 'Help.'

(Telephone interview)

There are only four instances in the novel (far fewer than for Lennon and the Beatles) where Wilson or the Beach Boys are mentioned by name or work, and only two writers (Matt Galloway, 9; and David Leaf, "When You Wish" 2) directly connect Wilson to *Ground*. Yet, myriad allusions throughout the novel unmistakably demonstrate Ormus' origins in Wilson.

First off, Ormus is described as possessing prodigious musical talent from the very beginning, from making "perfect-pitch gurgles" to playing air guitar in the crib with his tiny fingers (46). Likewise, Wilson displayed very early indications of extraordinary musical talent, reportedly humming the entirety of the "Marine Corps Hymn" at eleven and one-half months and singing nursery rhymes in perfect pitch by age three (Lambert 2). A few years later he took six weeks of lessons on the accordion before switching full-

time to piano, and Audree Wilson (Brian's mother) remembered the teacher commenting, "I don't think he's reading. He hears it just once and plays the whole thing perfectly" (Lambert 2).

We quickly discover in *Ground* that Ormus and brother Cyrus endure emotional abuse from father Darius from an early age. Darius' ill-treatment of his sons, "both of whom he took to berating regularly on the subject of the decay of Parsi youth" (45), heightens at a rate equal to the father's increasing dissatisfaction with his own lot in life. The Wilson parallel here is of course father Murry Wilson's well-documented physical and emotional abuse of his three sons, future Beach Boys Brian, Dennis, and Carl. The elder Wilson's bitterness and envy only heightened as his sons' musical careers began to skyrocket, while his own musical endeavors drew scant interest.

Possibly tied to the physical abuse from his father, depending upon which sources one believes, Brian Wilson has been predominantly deaf in his right ear since childhood. It is a condition that was greatly aggravated by the amplification onstage for the Beach Boys' live performances and was eventually a contributing factor to Wilson largely removing himself from the band's touring schedule altogether in late 1964.

Ormus too is shown to suffer from damaged hearing (*Ground* 383) and resorts to having a glass enclosure constructed for himself for onstage use at live performances (*Ground* 424). Although his "glass box" (424) is for the explicit purpose of protecting his hearing, it also has the effect of isolating Ormus from the audience as well as the rest of the band.

From the earliest stages of the Beach Boys, Brian Wilson figuratively (and later, literally) constructed such enclosures for his own emotional and psychological protection

from the ensuing pressures in his life. The 1963 Beach Boys ballad "In My Room" describes the sanctuary of the Wilson brothers bedroom, where they would quietly harmonize at night until Murry would yell out, threatening more beatings. Later in his own mid-Sixties Bel Air (Los Angeles) home, Brian had a large, custom-made Arabian tent erected in his living room, along with a large sandbox in which he placed his grand piano. Each of these enclosures, while in part an expression of humor and childhood innocence, also reflected the mentality of an insecure individual seeking protection and a place to hide, the same motives driving Ormus in his "glass box" performances in the post-Vina VTO period described above.

As Ormus enters the mid-Sixties era and the beginnings of psychedelia, like Wilson, his internal battles increase dramatically:

His horror, his sense of foreboding, of wrongness and impending doom-- cracks in the world, abysses, the four horsemen, all the anachronistic apparatus of millenarian eschatology--is increased by the knowledge of his own involuntary gift of visions, the holes in the real that manifest themselves to show him another reality, which he resists, though it beckons him to enter; for entry would feel--he knows this--very like insanity. Can it be this visionary madness, the thing he most fears within himself, that's most in tune with his new world? (*Ground* 288)

The above reads very much like the psychology behind Wilson's (1966) *Pet Sounds* album track "I Just Wasn't Made For These Times," composed with lyricist Tony Asher, with a visionary component that extends to the (1967) *Smile* album track "Surf's Up," composed with lyricist Van Dyke Parks. In David Leaf's (2005) *Smile* documentary,



*Beautiful Dreamer*, songwriter Jimmy Webb speaks of the clairvoyance of "Surf's Up" as backdrop to the visual imagery of such Sixties polarizing events as the deaths and funeral processions of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and President Richard Nixon's acceptance speech:

It almost seems to me that 'Surf's Up' is like a premonition of what was going to happen to our generation and what was going to happen to our music--that some great tragedy that we could absolutely not imagine was about to befall our world. There's some really very disturbing, clairvoyant images in 'Surf's Up' that seem to say, 'Watch out--this is not going to last.'

The increasingly paranoid Ormus hears voices (*Ground* 349), again connecting to Wilson, who to this day hears threatening voices in his head. Ormus ultimately secludes himself in his massive Manhattan residence to battle his demons the only way he knows how--alone with his music--and it is at this juncture in the novel that we receive one of our most direct references to this mid-Sixties period in Wilson's life with the following Beach Boys' 1966 *Pet Sounds* album allusion: "Against this backcloth of noble silence he will set his pet sounds.

He, too, is screaming inside. His agony will emerge as music" (387).

"Pet sounds" directly alludes to Brian Wilson.

Moreover, *Ground* declares "Ormus Cama is a genius" (301); that judgment occurs directly after an extended, technically in-depth description of Ormus' sonic wizardry and instinctual, unorthodox approach in the recording studio (300-301). This description closely mirrors the historical sequence of events pertaining to Wilson, particularly during the 1966-67 "Good Vibrations" and *Smile* recording sessions for the

Beach Boys. The band's publicist, former Beatles employee (in the same capacity) Derek Taylor, instigated an entire media campaign at the time suggesting the genius of Wilson, and Leaf's documentary of the lost album is filled with testimonies of people such as Jimmy Webb and Three Dog Night's Danny Hutton who attest to Wilson's revolutionary and unrivaled mastery in the recording studio during the mid-Sixties period.

Most compelling, Rushdie himself makes the direct connection in *Ground*, stating, ". . . Ormus had that, the wisdom of the recluse, of the Delphic oracle, of . . . Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys" (421). Matt Galloway likewise states that "[I]n the end, it's the bright lights and white lines that turn Ormus Cama into a Brian Wilson-like shell of a man, shaking in his sprawling apartment" (9). So why would Rushdie point to Wilson? How could Brian Wilson function as a substantial part of the historical basis for Ormus' character in a novel about subversive, countercultural resistance to the Frame, considering the striped-shirt/clean-cut image of the Beach Boys throughout the first half of the Sixties?

Given Rushdie's acumen as concerns Sixties rock music (evidenced by extensive referencing of rock arcana of the period) we expect him to have chosen his protagonists' historical referents with the utmost accuracy and care. I argue Rushdie has been both accurate and careful.

Despite the popular perception (much of which is true of at least the post-1977 group) of the Beach Boys' role as ambassadors of established culture and not counterculture, Rushdie's patterning of Ormus from their leader, Brian Wilson, is not misguided. Though clean-cut by today's standards, the Beach Boys were among the first

generation of rock 'n' roll bands at a time when the entire genre was thought to foment unrest, and they can be shown to be just such an influence. In Robert McCammon's 1991 novel *Boy's Life*, protagonist Corey Mackenson is at a loss for words to describe the Beach Boys' sound (specifically their 1965 #1 hit, "I Get Around") that stirs his emotions and empowers his youthfulness:

What would describe it? What word in the English language would speak of youth and hope and freedom and desire, of sweet wanderlust and burning blood? What word describes the brotherhood of buddies and the feeling that as long as the music plays, you are part of that tough, rambling breed who will inherit the earth? (182-3)

The Beach Boys' music is a threat to the Southern-conservative, Freedom Baptist church in that novel, where the Reverend Blessett demands, "This Satan's squallin' has got to cease" (185)! In 2011, that subversive image of the band is one with which most people would be unfamiliar.

Art Garfunkel said of Brian Wilson at the 2007 Kennedy Center Honors, he is "rock and roll's gentlest revolutionary." There is more than one way to be countercultural, and unlike Lennon (who, by the way, also led an ostensibly very clean-cut group until the mid-Sixties), Wilson's method in the Sixties was largely out of the spotlight, behind the scenes, and off the front page. From the hindsight perspective of today, we too often associate the mid-late Sixties counterculture, as it pertains to California, exclusively with the radical peace movements in San Francisco, but of course Los Angeles (and especially the Laurel Canyon district) during the same period (the context in which the Beach Boys operated at arguably their creative and revolutionary

zenith) experienced its own share of revolt. Domenic Priore explains, for example, the countercultural undertone of the Sunset Strip riots in late 1966:

The us-against-them aspect of the Sunset Strip riots that began on November 12th, 1966 becomes even clearer when juxtaposed with the election of right-wing extremist Ronald Reagan as Governor of California three days earlier. This is an indicator not only of a struggle over Hollywood's widespread cultural influence, but of the beginnings of a larger, physical resistance to conservative inertia, as reflected, too, in the Berkeley campus riots of 1965 and '69. (244)

Wilson and the Beach Boys were affected by these circumstances as seen in their creative output as well as their personal lives. In 1967, Beach Boy Carl Wilson refused his draft notice to the Vietnam War, claiming "conscientious objector" status and beginning a four-year court battle which would ultimately result in his permission to perform civic duties in lieu of military service. In addition, the Beach Boys performed at numerous benefit concerts, most notably the 1971 Mayday Anti-Vietnam War Rally in Washington D.C. (White 13), which L.A. Kauffman describes as "The largest and most audacious civil disobedience action in American history" (1), and which is still on record as the site of the nation's largest mass arrest.

Beyond his liberated, eccentric lifestyle at the time, Brian Wilson's countercultural resistance efforts were primarily directed against the media/entertainment arm of the establishment. As Leaf notes, he was operating in company that was by definition countercultural.<sup>12</sup> Beach Boys historians Priore (Email) and Stephen J.

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<sup>12</sup> Leaf states, " Brian instinctively picked Van Dyke Parks as his *Smile* collaborator

McParland likewise confirm the accuracy of a countercultural depiction of Wilson in this mid-late 60s era. Therein, Wilson would wage his battles against the economic tunnel vision of the conventional, restrictive forces of the music establishment, not least among them behemoth record company, Capitol/EMI. Given Rushdie's familiarity with both public and behind-the-scenes news and gossip of the 60s, Wilson makes perfect sense as the source for Ormus.

C. Artistry v. Industry: the Beach Boys (and Beatles) on Capitol and VTO on Colchis

Ormus and Vina's band, VTO, and their historical precedents in Wilson's Beach Boys and Lennon's Beatles confront parallel antagonizing relationships with their profit-driven record labels, Colchis and Capitol/EMI, respectively.

The Beach Boys' relationship with Capitol Records was in many ways contentious from the very beginning, when the company demanded a ludicrously prolific--three albums and five singles--release schedule per year from the band (Sharp 32) that eventually contributed to Wilson's nervous breakdown at the end of 1964. The

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because he knew he needed someone who was not afraid to be different. Van Dyke was articulate, educated and knew literature and music, but he also had a genuine counterculture sensibility. It seems that after just one or two conversations, Brian instinctively decided that Van Dyke had the ability to write with him on a project that truly had no commercial antecedents. It was definitely designed to appeal to the then-nascent, soon-to-be flowering underground movement. Brian's motivating notion that if you smiled, everything would be better, that laughter wasn't just the best medicine but revealed a deeper truth, was central to the project. This couldn't have been further from surfing, cars, California or even teenage angst. Remember, they began work in earnest in the early fall of 1966. The Monkees had just premiered on American TV. So, take that idea of *Smile*, [and] combine it with Brian and Van Dyke together who creatively were counter to the prevailing culture. And with David Anderle as point person, an artist himself who believed in pushing boundaries, Brian had a manager who was most definitely hip and part of the counterculture." (Telephone interview)

relationship far from improved during the mid-Sixties *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* periods (1966-67), with those "art" albums signaling a definitive departure from the band's previously proven (and economically lucrative) formula of surf and hot rod music.

The new direction would prove problematic not only externally with Capitol, but also internally with the non-Wilson brother contingent of the Beach Boys, who distrusted the implicit link between the new rock avant-garde and the counterculture and sought to distance themselves from any perceived anti-establishment position that might jeopardize their commercial well-being. Vocalist Mike Love would tell *Hit Parader* in 1970, for example, "Large cities have a bigger leftist, anarchistic group and it's become popular in the music business to equate underground music with revolutionaries and the overthrowing of the establishment" (Green 18). Although admirably maintaining a philosophy of non-violence regarding the possibility of political revolution, Love's stance opposes defiance of the established culture at all, stating, "It is probably wrong to think that way" (Green 18). Long-time Beach Boys touring musician Carli Muñoz verifies that "The Wilsons were more concerned about the creative aspect of it all" (Hinsche).

However, it was during that mid-Sixties period in Beach Boys history when Brian Wilson would boldly lead the group into its most aesthetically sublime and countercultural direction. Leaf again:

All you have to do is listen to the lyrics in *Pet Sounds* songs like 'I Just Wasn't Made for These Times' and 'That's Not Me' and you instantly knew that Brian was determined to express the sense of alienation he felt. That, to me at least, was one hallmark of the counterculture. Brian's songs on side two of 1965's *Today!* album and almost all of *Pet Sounds* are songs

about searching for meaning, about not fitting in. But it's a different kind of 'not fitting in' than a drop-out from the rat race or an anti-war activist. It's more internal, but I think it comes from the same sensibility. The avant-garde nature of the way Brian's music progressed was so 'out there,' what he was doing was so unlike what anyone else was doing, that I think it could properly be defined as counterculture. (Telephone interview)

"Out there" art albums or not, Capitol's modus operandi of prioritizing the commercial imperative over an artistic one would come to a head during Wilson's magnum opus, *Smile*, when the artist refused to be rushed to completion (by record label or select bandmates), electing even to abandon the project altogether rather than release it prior to his satisfaction or at the cost of splitting up his family.

Evidence of Capitol's single-minded economic determinism during the *Smile* period are heard in this advertisement from a Capitol Records promo lp released in December, 1966, before recording for the album was even complete: "*Smile* is the name of the new Beach Boys album which will be released in January, 1967, and with the happy album cover, the really happy sounds inside, and the happy in-store display piece, you can't miss. We're sure to sell a million units--in January" (Prior to *Smile*). Still, Wilson would not be bullied.

Not only did the Beach Boys' *Smile* of course not appear in January (or at any time since, with the record now "usurped" by Brian Wilson's solo version of the album in 2004), but under Wilson and Anderle's direction, the group boldly sued (and ultimately beat) Capitol Records for hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid back royalties. The Beatles likewise consistently pressed Capitol/EMI on auditing discrepancies and unpaid

royalties, even after John Lennon's death in 1980, but eventually resolved matters internally (Tillinghast 92).

Anderle was now head of the band's own record label, Brother Records, designed to reprioritize aesthetics over economics and provide an outlet for Wilson and the group's experimental projects without regard for their mainstream viability. As Leaf indicates, "There was no concern, on Anderle's or Brian's part, as to whether these ideas were commercial" (*California Myth* 97). Formed a full year before the Beatles' Apple Records, whose modus operandi Paul McCartney likened to "a sort of Western communism" (Connolly), Brother Records marked the first time in rock history that a group initiated its own record label, which in the case of both groups, would be the administrative arm for a multitude of projects, including music, film, etc.

Like the Beach Boys, the Beatles had witnessed that Capitol's first allegiance was to its corporate shareholders, "even though it might conflict with artists' desires or intent" (Tillinghast 60). Accordingly, the underlying ethos of both Brother and Apple was a reprioritizing of art before commerce, perhaps best exemplified by John Lennon's famous comment that the Beatles "wanted to set up a system whereby people who just want to make a film about anything don't have to go on their knees in somebody's office-- probably yours" (Roessner 151). Though a common practice today, in 1966, a rock banding operating under its own label was an astonishing motion for independence and a pioneering (countercultural) "step outside the frame" that sent shudders through the corporatized music industry.

In *Ground*, Ormus and Vina and their band VTO very similarly confront an array of problems with their record label, Colchis Records, run by executive Yul Singh. The



mercilessly capitalist, corrupt, and dictatorial Singh (read "You'll sing") appears to be a partial composite of historical music producers: Phil Spector of Philles Records (as well as doing numerous productions for Atlantic Records and others), George Martin of EMI-Capitol Records, and Ahmet Ertegun of Atlantic Records.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, the most evidence in *Ground* for the origins of Singh in the external world is for Spector. The signature attribute of Singh is his ruthless, extremist behavior and temper, which coincides perfectly with Spector (recently convicted for murder and sentenced to 19 years in prison). Known for his frequent violent outbursts and for routinely carrying weapons, prior to his imprisonment, Spector was typically

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<sup>13</sup> There is the least amount of evidence pointing to Ertegun and Martin.

In connection to Martin, Singh is shown in *Ground* to be an associate of the Beatles, who were on EMI-Capitol records at the time, but he is likewise portrayed in connection with Aretha Franklin (Columbia Records) and Ray Charles (ABC Records), who were not (185). Nevertheless, Singh is shown to have a personal relationship with Paul McCartney and an insider's knowledge of unreleased Beatles music (187).

In support of Ertegun, there is slightly more correlation. Singh's physical description as impeccably dressed, wearing sunglasses, and "fortyish, small, dark, goateed" (*Ground* 186) adequately matches Ertegun, although the same could be said for Spector. Ertegun also popularized music by African-American artists (at the time referred to as "race music"--as was rock in general--and similarly referenced with Singh's Colchis achievements in *Ground* 185) with white audiences via his label, Atlantic Records (Cimino 21). Likewise, Ertegun began Atlantic with help from silent investor, Turkish dentist Dr. Vahdi Sabit, which is a comparable parallel to Singh's financial backer, New York optician Tommy J. Eckleburg (*Ground* 185), co-opted from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*.

Rushdie's inclusion of the *Gatsby* figure T. J. Eckleburg in *Ground* is instructive. In Fitzgerald's novel, Eckleburg appears in a gigantic eyewear billboard advertisement. In one scene, gas station owner George Wilson (it is a Wilson who is among the deceived in that novel too) looks up at the billboard and mutters, "God sees everything" (Fitzgerald 160). By aligning this symbol of omniscience with Singh, Rushdie adds to the latter's omnipotence as a music industry representative of the Frame, as well as furthers the theme of cultural commodification in *Ground*, since the religious symbolism afforded the Eckleburg billboard depiction in *Gatsby* is of course also an example of the commodification of religion. Incidentally, Rushdie incorporates two other *Gatsby* characters toward the end of *Ground*, after Vina's death, as "literary critics" Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway make an appearance to defend rock music's place in society (484).

accompanied in public by multiple bodyguards, an arrangement which mirrors Singh's constant accompaniment by Sikh bodyguards. Above all, Spector's simultaneously odd and domineering demeanor is the strongest link to Singh, who, like Spector, and in a broad sense, the Capitol/EMI record executives who handled the Beach Boys and the Beatles, demands exceptional control of his artists.

As such, Rushdie's title for Singh's record company, Colchis Records, is quite apt. Colchis is in reference to the mythological land where Prometheus, who tried to help humans by giving them fire, is chained to a mountain to have his liver eaten daily by eagles. Personified in *Ground* by the all-powerful Singh, Colchis represents the dominion of the powerful and vindictive.

Throughout *Ground*, Singh is depicted in the worst of terms regarding his business ethos and relationship with Ormus and Vina. In following Rushdie's *Gatsby* allusions, Singh is certainly the Meyer Wolfsheim (purportedly based on early twentieth-century New York Mafia boss Arnold Rothstein) of *Ground*, with a shady past and infamous reputation. He is shown as a "puppeteer" who strings the artists along (358) and is not at all averse to interfering in their personal lives if it means more artistic output and thus more money for him: "Lovebirds bill and coo and don't get much work done. A little trouble in paradise might well be worth stirring up" (359). Likewise, Singh is described as vampiric, as he "bears more than a passing resemblance to the actor Vincent Price, that smooth nocturnal prince of the fanged classes" (358), and alternately as Machiavelli, Rasputin (361), or one of *Ground's* homegrown villains, billionaire extortionist Pilo Doodhwala (308).

Early on, Vina thinks she and Ormus "should be setting fire to this nightmare palazzo instead of acting like Cool Yul's private harem" (*Ground* 368). She tells her lover and bandmate in Wilsonesque, "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times" terms, "If this is the twentieth century, baby, we should be making urgent plans to exit permanently into some other epoch" (368). As she is soon to find out, however, exiting the Colchis stable of artists is none too easy.

As VTO's astute manager, the Brian Epstein-based Mull Standish, informs Ormus and Vina, "[T]hey can dump you whenever they like but you can't walk away from them or change the deal" (*Ground* 398). Singh spells it out in no uncertain terms to Standish: "[Y]our artists are bound and gagged on my personal sacrificial altar, am I making myself clear. I own them, the devil didn't own Faust the way I have these babies, they're mine" (400). That is, until Standish's legal efforts and a bit of luck intervene.

When conventional legal maneuvering proves insufficient, Standish initially digs up unsightly, but not ultimately damaging information about Singh's background, exposing him as a right-wing extremist and employing the metaphor of paranoia from Thomas Pynchon's 1966 novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (which itself contains radical positions on the issues of cultural commodification and intellectual property) in his accusations:

Turns out you're interested in conspiracies, underground organizations, militias, the whole right-wing paranoid-America thing. Who knows why. You're here to bid for the memorabilia of some defunct immigrant cabal, used to go around writing DEATH on people's walls. Don't Ever Antagonize The Horn. They had a trumpet logo. Nice. (*Ground* 401)

Singh, of course, refuses to be bullied and employs his own brand of political rhetoric.

Invoking entertainment mogul and staunch political conservative Walt Disney, Singh retaliates: "Lemme tell you the laws of the universe. The law according to Disney: Nobody fucks with the mouse. Which in my version, with the louse: that's me . . . Don't antagonize the horn, you got that right, did you know I played clarinet. So here's the deal. The law of laws. Heads Yul wins, tails you'll lose" (*Ground 401*).

Contractually speaking, Singh is unfortunately correct. There is very little that Ormus and Vina as VTO can do to escape their deal with Colchis. It is not until Standish and Vina receive an anonymous package that the tide begins to turn in the artists' favor.

While on spiritual retreat in India, Standish and Vina are anonymously left a package at their Delhi hotel. The contents reveal

irrefutable documentary proof--in the form of facsimiles of signed documents, checks, etc., all duly notarized as true--that the celebrated Non-Resident Indian Mr. Yul Singh, the very same Yul Sing who has been taking such an interest in American underground cults and cells, Yul Singh the consummate rock 'n'roller, who has always presented himself to the whole world as the ultimate cosmopolitan, wholly secularized and Westernized, Boss Yul, Coolest of the Cool, YSL himself, has been for many years a secret zealot, a purchaser of guns and bombs, in short one of the financial mainstays of the terrorist fringe of the Sikh nationalist movement . . . (*Ground 407*)

With the above information, Standish and Vina have more than enough to bring Singh and Colchis to their knees and effect the release of VTO's contract, not to mention

enormous recompense and a re-written deal that is tops in the entertainment industry (407-8). Yul Singh and his wife commit suicide the next day (409).

Although VTO's victory over the exploitative Colchis is more dramatic than the legal battle with Capitol Records won by the Beach Boys or the internal settlement between the Beatles and EMI, it is nevertheless a representation of parallel accomplishment, modeled after Wilson and Lennon's groups, respectively, at a time when any victory for artists' rights in rock 'n' roll was rare.

D. *Quakershaker* (as *Smile*) and *Sgt. Pepper*

If Brian Wilson and John Lennon are indeed the historical precedents for Ormus and Vina, as I claim, then by extension, those artists' bands' seminal albums, *Smile* and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), respectively, are logical templates for VTO's centerpiece *Quakershaker* album.

In a review of literature, music, and film that has "traded on the legend" of *Smile* ("When You Wish" 1), Leaf states that "Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* brings to mind the myth [of *Smile*] clearly if indirectly" ("When You Wish" 2). One of the first indicators of such a parallel in *Ground* is when Rushdie describes one of Ormus's early love songs, the "anthemic 'Beneath Her Feet,'" as a "teenage prayer" (142), mirroring Wilson's ongoing 1966-67 description of the similarly spiritually-inclined *Smile* album as a "teenage symphony to God." On his website entitled *The Zen Interpretation of Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks' Smile*, Tobelman also indirectly reveals a *Ground* link to *Smile* when he states, "*Smile* is based upon Brian Wilson's spiritual experiences and the events surrounding those experiences. His religious awareness shifted from a Western understanding to an Eastern one, from understanding only part of the picture to understanding the bigger picture." Considered alongside *Ground*'s own claim (which I include as one of this thesis' epigraphs) that "The only people who see the whole picture [. . .] are the ones who step out of the frame" (43), it is not a stretch to suggest that both Wilson and Rushdie reach for a very similar degree of enlightenment and independence in these respective artistic works, not to mention Wilson's newly emerging awareness of Eastern philosophies and spiritualities that further aligns him with *Ground*'s cosmos.

Another connection between *Quakershaker* and *Smile* is the mythology of kinetic potency assigned to each work. In *Ground*, "Many correspondents send in near-illegible scrawls warning that VTO's quake songs may actually have been responsible for the current wave of seismic catastrophes and urging the band to keep away from that dangerous material" (546-47). Similarly in the external world, in a paranoid state precipitated by drug-intake and untreated depression in late 1966, Wilson halted and then cancelled the sessions for the *Smile* track "Fire," believing it to be the cause of a current rash of fires in the L.A. area, including one across the street from the Beach Boys' recording studio.

Of course, Rushdie is not the first literary author to address the *Smile* mythology. Of the three novels to depict a fictionalized, *Smile*-era Brian Wilson, (Paul Quarrington's 1989 *Whale Music*; Lewis Shiner's 1993 *Glimpses*; and *Ground*), two (*Whale Music* and *Ground*) employ a *Moby Dick*-based whale metaphor. Rushdie's representation in *Ground* of "otherness" or "outsiderness" as a "Whale," with Ormus as Ahab trying to understand and channel (if not harness) its power, is very similar to the metaphorical premise behind and throughout Quarrington's novel. As Rushdie states, "If the lost otherworld be likened to a Whale, then Ormus Cama had become its Ahab. He hunted it as a madman hunts his doom" (436-37). The outsider whale/obsessed hunter metaphor is an arguably apt description of the historical Brian Wilson during the 1966-67 *Smile* recording sessions, so it is no wonder the depiction has found its way into literary portrayals of the artist and album.

Indeed, when you accept the historical figure Brian Wilson as countercultural model for *Ground*'s Ormus Cama, it is only logical that musically, you focus on *Smile*,

Wilson's most revolutionary and countercultural work. Packaged around the October, 1966 #1 single "Good Vibrations," which Chidester and Priore call "Wilson's pièce de résistance" (218), Wilson confirms that "SMiLE [textual design by original authors] harks back to the promise of the counterculture and alternative consciousness, new ways of living together" (Trakin 314), traits which make it a prime referent for *Ground* to be based upon.

Likewise pointing to Ormus and Vina's fictional VTO album *Quakershaker* (*How the Earth Learned to Rock & Roll*) as their most radical and lauded work, it is in parallel with that record that Rushdie's modeling of the Beach Boys' *Smile*, featured in the novel as being at the pinnacle of the rock music world alongside the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album (*Ground* 232), is most apparent and illustrative in the context of *Ground's* overall countercultural and post-colonialist landscape. To be sure, *Quakershaker* as *Smile* is a construct in *Ground* that works well on a number of levels. Rushdie states in *Ground* of *Quakershaker's* content, "The songs are about the collapse of all walls, boundaries, restraints" (390). The same is not only thematically true for *Smile*, but with that album's pioneering modular or cubist production style, where the bridge or verse of one song might be the chorus of another, it is literally true.

In its simplest form, *Ground* is a postmodernist and post-colonialist novel that employs magical realist elements to fight the globalist, commercial Frame. As Rushdie has stated, "The book covers the half century that begins with the British empire and ends with the American empire" (Treisman 1). *Smile* and *Sgt. Pepper* employ parts of all these perspectives (alongside a heavy dose of psychedelia) to, yes, praise past greatnesses, but more importantly (especially in the case of *Smile*), to fight the notion of empire (read



Frame), just like *Ground*. Specifically, both albums draw upon their respective nation's nineteenth-century lyrical, musical, and visual imagery in an effort to acknowledge past injustices and glories while striving toward a more equitable, harmonious future.

In addition, with both *Smile* and *Sgt. Pepper* having been created with the Vietnam War raging in the background, in no uncertain terms, both carry a contemporary political resonance for their time. One of *Smile*'s centerpieces, "Surf's Up," is an astute critique of aristocracy with Van Dyke Park's line "columnated ruins domino" oft-interpreted as a critical reference to Eisenhower's "Domino Theory" concerning nations' susceptibility to communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Likewise, "McCartney viewed the title song [to *Sgt. Pepper*] and its eventual (if loose) concept as a mockery of contemporary England's antiquated Edwardian values and Western involvement in the Vietnam War" (Northcutt 137). Both albums, while thematically critical of national empires from the previous century, are very much in step with current political objections in the mid-late 1960s.

The same critical disposition toward the Western Frame's disruption and encompassing of poorer (and typically countercultural) parts of the world (namely, Southeast Asia) is seen in *Ground*'s earthquake metaphor, represented by the VTO *Quakershaker* album: "To many third-world observers it seems self-evident that earthquakes are the new hegemonic geopolitics, the tool by which the superpower quake-makers intend to shake and break the emergent economies of the South, the Southeast, the Rim" (554). At the same time, the novel demonstrates that "In the West the earthquakes have stopped and the construction teams have moved in. Banks and insurance companies are building their new palaces over the faults, as if to assert the

primacy of their authority, even over the misbehaving earth itself" (553). The usefulness of incorporating *Smile* and *Sgt. Pepper* into *Ground*'s landscape does not end here, however.

Both albums also fit well into Rushdie's post-colonialist agenda in *Ground*. *Smile* is all about westward expansion, which is certainly the direction *Ground*'s plot moves in. Scott Stanton calls the album a "critique of America's mythic past," and Peter Reum details Wilson and Parks' stance on the record (13).<sup>14</sup> *Smile* laments the American past of indigenous genocide and the exploitations of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth-century. Like much of the counterculture in the mid-late 1960s, the Beach Boys embraced Native American spirituality, even making Cyrus E. Callin's life-sized bronze statue, *Appeal to the Great Spirit* (which depicts a Native American man on horseback, appealing upward to the sky with his arms outstretched) their logo for their newly-emerging, independent record label, Brother Records. "When Beach Boy Carl Wilson was asked in 1975 why the group used this as their logo, he said the Indian was chosen because Carl's grandfather believed that there was a spiritual Indian 'guide' who watched over Brian, Dennis, and Carl from the 'other side.' The choice of the logo was Brian's" (absoluteastronomy.com). While both *Smile* and *Ground* center on the premise of colliding worlds, (Carl) Wilson's explanation here is also parallel to the alternate reality component in *Ground*.

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<sup>14</sup> According to Reum, "They approached *Smile* as a project which would be a travelogue of American music as presented by the Bicycle Rider, a manifestation of the industrial revolution and the commercial birth of the U.S., and a metaphor for the movement of Manifest Destiny across the United States, and the conquest of America's Native People from Plymouth Rock to Hawaii, with the subsequent destruction the change did to their culture and their church, our natural environment."

Furthermore, the "Bicycle Rider" section of the *Smile* song "Heroes and Villains" to which Reum alludes above includes the very direct, post-colonialist line, "Bicycle rider, just see what you've done to the church of the American Indian."<sup>15</sup> *Smile* includes multiple other post-colonialist elements (thereby making the album a "simpático" selection by Rushdie for reference in *Ground*), including the "Who Ran the Iron Horse?" section of the song "Cabin-Essence," which critiques the practically slave-labor conditions of Chinese immigrants (often referred to as "coolies") during the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad in the mid-nineteenth-century.

The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* also contains many post-colonial elements that fit nicely into the outsider v. Frame theme in *Ground*. "Eleanor Rigby," for instance, certainly evokes the lot of the outcast or "displaced person," with the line, "All the lonely people, where do they all come from?" Much like the Beach Boys' *Smile*, the album portrays a nation both acknowledging its past glories, but also coming to terms with the brutality of its dying empire. As David Michaelis indicates,

The album's themes are anchored [. . .] in a period when England was looking back--part wistfully, part skeptically--to a world in which, more often than not, the 'English Army had just won the war,' although the 1967 narrator of 'A Day in the Life' can remember the Empire's glory only from seeing it in a movie. The 'twenty years ago today' that seems to invite the

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<sup>15</sup> Philip Lambert says of the poignancy of "Heroes and Villains," "It reminds us that "heroes" and "villains" are real entities, making real promises and threats, inspiring genuine affections and fears. Whether the opposing forces are characters from the American West, or figures in the Los Angeles music industry, or dynamics of an artist's internal psychology, or even members of an artist's own singing group, we're reminded that life and art are products of struggle, that nothing comes easy" (265).

audience of a brassband concert to recall an earlier, better time is actually pinpointing 1947 as the date from which the rest of the 'show' follows--a year when Great Britain, lately in command of one-quarter of the world's landmass, was coming to terms with its decline. (134)

To elaborate on Michaelis' lead here and in relation to Rushdie's India, 1947 was of course the year of India's bloody Partition following the withdrawal of the longstanding British colonial presence there, thereby aligning "the rest of the 'show'" depicted in the album with a violent transition to post-colonial rule in the external world.

The "twenty years ago today" 1947 reference in *Sgt. Pepper* is, incidentally, not the only connection to India (and by extension, to Rushdie and *Ground*) in the album. As Michaelis points out, "[T]here had been a real-life figure named Pepper: one of the many retired army officers of the British Raj in India who used their military ranks when playing for the local cricket team. Sergeant Pepper played for Uttar Pradesh" (134). Accordingly, the album is a very apt fit for its inclusion in *Ground*.

Ultimately, it makes perfect sense to model *Quakershaker* after *Smile* and contextualize it together in *Ground* with *Sgt. Pepper*. Both albums were created (although *Smile* was of course never released) at the acknowledged height of the 60s rock music era (1967), on the same American record label (Capitol), and *Ground*'s protagonist Ormus Cama, as I have demonstrated, is patterned largely after the key figures of both groups, who were themselves a mutual admiration society. Paul McCartney also participated in the recording of the *Smile* track "Vegetables," and Brian Wilson was initially slated to be one of the historical figure cut-outs on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper*. In the larger thematic context of *Ground*, the two albums also emanate from the two major

Western hegemony of the late twentieth-century (the U.S. and Britain, accordingly) thereby fulfilling the Western geographic focus on the music industry face of the Frame that is of high priority for the novel.

Additionally, both *Smile* and *Sgt. Pepper* contain ample post-colonialist elements that coincide with the anti-Frame theme of *Ground*, and they are themselves examples of the rock music that in 1960s England would be outcast (and literally, outlawed) to pirate radio status.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

The second half of *Ground* depicts rock music's relegation to literal outlaw status in England when it was largely banned by the BBC in the mid-60s and only heard via highly commercial, off-shore pirate radio broadcasts. Very quickly, however, the music industry began to recognize the enormous profit potential of rock and began to appropriate it into mainstream culture. As my opening epigraph from Brent Whelan states, the increasingly corporatized music industry would, essentially, commodify the very notion of countercultural rebellion, making it just another "lifestyle" consumer choice.<sup>16</sup> The Sixties counterculture, of course, did not go down without a fight, and there are minor characters in *Ground* (Ormus' brother Ardaviraf Cama and street musician Luis Heinrich) that represent a resistance to commodified culture.

Both historically and within the universe of the novel, however, it was not a battle the counterculture would win. Ormus and Vina are part of the music establishment well before *Ground's* end, and by the time they finally secure fair recompense from Singh's Colchis label, it reads as much like a simple transfer of funds between industry heavyweights as it does a victory for artists. Vina "managed the stocks and bonds, the real estate, the growing art collection, the bakeries, the Santa Barbara winery," while Ormus' Camaloaf bread franchise "was already an established brand" (*Ground* 433). After the settlement, "Few people thought of Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama as being

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<sup>16</sup> On this point, Fredric Jameson is absolutely right: in the postmodern (or "late capitalist," in his words) era, many countercultural forces that were once liberatory and revolutionary were co-opted by the Frame and commodified, not only negating their subversiveness but making them part of the capitalist system. Rock music was no exception to this phenomenon.

amongst the finest viticulturists in California, to say nothing of the biggest dairy farmers in the northeastern United States, but that's what they had become" (433).

Michael Gorra wrote at the 1999 release of *Ground*,

[W]hen worlds collide, when one universe blows through another, well, that is when the sky comes tumbling down and the ground beneath one's feet begins to shiver and shake. And although the novel's own world survives that collision, the implication is that our own may not. (25)

Whether or not *Ground's* world does survive the collision (I would argue that it does not in any lasting, meaningful way), Gorra is correct in observing that the novel Rushdie called a response to "the evolution of world culture in the last half-century" (Rollason 122) does suggest a gloomy picture for the external world's descent into unabated consumerism and advertising. Today Brian Wilson records for ultra-conservative Disney. The Beach Boys headlined a benefit this February commemorating the 100th birthday of far-Right Republican, former President Ronald Reagan. The Beatles are continuously packaged and repackaged, sold and resold, more than 40 years after they played their last note together. Music journalist Kent Wolgamott observes that "youth culture is now fully co-opted by corporations, which send scouts to the streets to identify the latest trends to turn them into cash" ("Woodstock"). For all of its magical realist components, Rushdie's novel is in this context just plain realistic. *Ground* keenly depicts the regression of rock music from subversive, countercultural force, to appropriated, corporatized cash-cow.

Still, even as Rushdie's fictional trajectory of cultural devolution in *Ground* accurately depicts the same post-60s, regressive phenomenon in the mid-late 20th century

external world, there still may be hope for a world in which all cultural and artistic production is not immediately commodified and artists are not simply just "content providers."

Albeit for at times dubious reasons, young people today frequently feel a sense of entitlement to free access to music, evidenced by the fact that "album sales are circling the drain. But music is, by many measures, more popular than ever" (Wolgamott "Grammys"). Wolgamott now even refers to this era in pop culture as a sort of free music age, or, "culture of free' that has become the operating principle of the web" ("Current").

Furthermore, the novel does not necessarily predict absolute and unavoidable cultural doomsday. There are multiple places in *Ground*, as I have described, where countercultural efforts are successful in combating the Frame through a non-totalizing, postmodernist politics set to the cadence of intrinsically-oppositional rock music. Likewise, it is significant that the now wealthy Ormus and Vina, both more mainstream culture than counterculture by novel's end, do not ultimately survive the culture v. counterculture tectonic clash. It is not naive or misguided to interpret this unlikely fall from power as a ray of hope for possible countercultural subversion of the Frame.

Additionally, it is important, if counter-intuitive, on this question of *Ground's* vision of cultural evolution to give due attention to the aforementioned minor characters in the novel such as Ormus' mute brother and street musician Ardaviraf Cama and Luis Heinrich (leader of street band the Mall). These are outsiders under the radar who operate uncommodified, freely and uncompromisingly on their own terms, outside the oxymoronic free market (or outside the Frame, if you will), and who are entirely overshadowed by the industry-embracing celebrity of the highly commodified stars.



They face a seemingly insurmountable task, as such, to achieve any sort of meaningful cultural (much less political) impact as opposed to the well-funded, industry-supported Ormus and Vina. In fact, Heinrich, who temporarily embraces the commercial prospect and recasts his group as Wallstreet, does not survive the ordeal, as he commits suicide when the band's "official" debut nears (*Ground* 532).

Ardaviraf Cama enjoys considerably more efficacy, however, as he begins to play his flute in the streets and attracts the following of legions of homeless and dispossessed with his charm and free songs: "The beautiful smile of Virus Cama had become infectious; it was spreading through the street urchin community at high speed and dramatically increasing their earning power" (*Ground* 138). Ardaviraf's strange melodies are described in the novel as "inappropriate music" (160), the same language famously used by Brian Wilson for three decades to decline comment on the abandoned *Smile* album.

Free art, as depicted principally through these minor characters in Rushdie's *Ground*, is one of the most threatening prospects to established, capitalist culture (the Frame), and therefore of great importance in the countercultural struggle to resist cultural commodification. It is on this point that the previously unestablished Brian Wilson/*Smile* connection to *Ground* is perhaps most vital; it is enormously significant that *Ground* is based on *Smile*, (an album with only an artistic agenda, to its own demise), literally the most uncommercial album in rock history, having been shelved by Brian Wilson in May, 1967 for its rejection by band and record label. In an industry that has since spiraled into unabashed commercialism, frequently at the expense of artistic priorities, *Smile* as an historical template for Ormus and Vina's *Quakershaker* album demonstrates Rushdie's

countercultural imperative in *Ground* of resistance to the culturally commodifying efforts of the Frame.

Through his novel, Rushdie has given us a blueprint to reach back to the Sixties, the last truly countercultural age. With a new, more equitable, and open-minded political outlook, we might then redirect our cultural efforts away from our current, destructive consumerist path. Tuli Kupferberg, co-founder of early-60s rock band the Fugs and purportedly "the world's oldest rock star" before his death in July, 2010, said, "Nobody who lived through the '50s thought the '60s could've existed. So there's always hope" (Simmons 34). Even today in 2011, former Boomtown Rat and Live Aid organizer Bob Geldof still vividly recalls the promise of change introduced by 60s rock artists, much like the multiple universe (Frame v. counterculture) blueprint re-delivered by Rushdie in *Ground*:

[T]hese voices came out of Radio Luxembourg--

DylanJaggerLennonTownshend--saying that there is another universe. It has yet to be invented but here are the tools and here's what it could look like. That was electrifying. (Eccleston 40)

To be sure, positing the ideal, no matter how seemingly unrealistic at the moment, is often the first step toward achieving real social change and not just switching out the current political players for new ones.

For Rushdie, changing the political window dressing is not the solution to achieving sustainable change in the world, and he does see hope for the future, as seen here in his remarks about what drew him to the Orpheus myth depicted in *Ground* in the first place: "[A]s important for me is the end of the story, when Orpheus is murdered--his

head is cut off and thrown into the river, and it goes on singing. That idea--that you can destroy the singer but not the song--was something I wanted to write about" (Treisman 2). What is ultimately at stake is the internal, philosophical outlook of the individual. As seen in *Ground*, the non-totalizing equity of postmodernism, set to the 33 1/3 rpm of rock music, facilitates that cultural change and breaks down divisive borders, thereby allowing everyone, outsider or not, to participate.

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