Sound Commitments

Avant-garde Music and the Sixties

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"Demolish Serious Culture!"

Henry Flynt and Workers World Party

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On the evening of April 29, 1964, a group calling themselves "Action Against Cultural Imperialism" mounted a picket line in front of Town Hall on West 43rd Street in New York (see figure 2.1). Inside the hall was a "gala concert" sponsored by the West German government, with music by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Hans Werner Henze, Paul Hindemith, and others. The performers included Stockhausen himself, pianist David Tudor, and percussionist Max Neuhaus.[1] On the sidewalk in front of the hall were the demonstrators: philosopher and composer Henry Flynt; the artists Ben Vautier, Ay-O, and Takako Saito; Fluxus impresario George Maciunas; and the violinist and filmmaker Tony Conrad. (Amiri Baraka observed from across the street.[2]) They bore signs reading "Fight Racist Laws of Music!" and "Fight the Rich Man's Snob Art," and, according to *Die Welt*, made quite a racket by chanting "Death to all fascist musical ideas!"[3] The group's leaflet attacked the composer as a "lackey for the West German bosses," and claimed that his "repeated decrees about the lowness of plebian music and the racial inferiority of non-European music, are an integral, essential part of his art and its 'appreciation.' "[4]

On September 8, the group staged another demonstration outside Judson Hall on West 57th Street.[5] In Vautier's place was the poet and activist Marc Schleifer, later known as Abdallah Schleifer. The occasion was a performance of Stockhausen's *Originale*, a wild theater piece directed by Allan Kaprow, which featured such avant-garde and Fluxus luminaries as Allen Ginsberg, Charlotte Moorman, Dick Higgins,

Figure 2.1 Action Against Cultural Imperialism demonstration at Town Hall in New York City, April 29, 1964. Left to right: Henry Flynt, Ben Vautier, George Maciunas, Ay-O, and Takako Saito. Photo by Peter Moore © Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, New York, NY.

Nam June Paik, James Tenney, Alvin Lucier, Max Neuhaus, and Jackson Mac Low.[6] The circus like atmosphere inside the hall carried over to the demonstration going on outside, with some performers reportedly trying to join the picket.[7] Even though the language on the group's leaflet seems quite clear—"Stockhausen—Patrician 'Theorist' of White Supremacy: Go To Hell!"—many commentators thought the demonstration was a staged part of the performance. In his *New York Times* review of the concert, for example, Harold Schonberg reported, "Some said they were part of the show. Others said no, including the picketers, but nobody believed them....[T]hey looked like the participants in 'Originale,' they acted like the participants in 'Originale,' and they were dressed like the participants in 'Originale.'"[8] Jill Johnston, dance critic for the *Village Voice* and also a participant in the performance, wrote, "I don't know why the Fluxus people were picketing the concert..., but it might have been interesting if the director had invited the picket line to participate as 'guests.'"[9] In 2004 Flynt, who organized the demonstrations with Maciunas, recalled, "[T]he issue became...very confused.... I mean, people did not understand even the point that I was making. I would have to say they were disasters, actually. They were disasters."[10]

The confusion about the origin and meaning of these demonstrations has not subsided, because the story is often told from the perspective of Maciunas and Fluxus, the loosely organized performance art movement of the mid-1960s. In that version of the story, Flynt is cast

as Maciunas's sidekick, the outside influence who pulled him to the left and set off the internal feuds of Fluxus.[11] Although he enjoyed a close friendship with Maciunas, and his writings appeared in some Fluxus and proto-Fluxus publications, Flynt's association with Fluxus was one of convenience and necessity; desperately seeking a forum for his ideas, Flynt took any publication opportunities he could find. Nonetheless, Stockhausen biographer Michael Kurtz attributes the *Originale* protest to Maciunas alone and makes no mention of Flynt.[12] The art historians Michel Oren and Hannah Higgins also frame these protests within the boundaries of Fluxus history, arguing, respectively, that Flynt and Maciunas's political program was a major factor holding the Fluxus movement together, and that it reflected a major rift within the movement.[13] Yet Flynt's demonstrations were about more than mere squabbles among members of the European and Euro-American avant-garde, and any critical account of his work that cannot widen the scope of its inquiry beyond the experimental art world is woefully incomplete.

In this chapter I hope to correct some of these misunderstandings and to introduce into an account of Flynt's developing attitude toward the avant-garde a set of references that rarely make it into conversations about American experimentalism and performance in the 1960s. This requires a trip outside of the somewhat parochial narratives of experimentalism into histories of the Left, the civil rights movement, and popular music styles. Drawing on new interviews with Flynt, I will concentrate in particular on his experiences in the sectarian Left between 1962 and 1967. By 1964 Flynt was a committed member of the Marxist-Leninist Workers World Party (WWP), and that organization was a major force leading him to the complicated position articulated in the 1964 demonstration. Flynt's engagement with certain tendencies in downtown experimentalism, his commitment to non-European musics, and his involvement in Workers World were interrelated moments in a more general movement away from European and Euro-American high culture, culminating in his abandonment of the downtown avant-garde in favor of a roots music-based populism. The year 1964 was key in this transition, and the following account treats the anti-Stockhausen demonstrations as a significant moment in Flynt's developing interest in joining African American popular music with Marxism-Leninism, a move that eventually led to his 1966 political rock recordings. Flynt produced these recordings to demonstrate how a communist cultural policy ought to sound, and did not regard them as "avant-garde," per se. Nonetheless, his theoretical treatments of African American vernacular music reveal a continuing interest in such avant-garde predilections as formal innovation, newness, engagement with new sonic technologies, and sonic complexity. Connecting these qualities to the black liberation movement and the wider fight against imperialism, Flynt sought to reframe these concerns of the avant-garde within the context of group identity and collective struggles for self-determination.[14]

"No More Art!"

Born in 1940 to middle-class parents in Greensboro, North Carolina, Flynt majored in mathematics at Harvard in the late 1950s. He was also a classically trained violinist and composer, whose close friend and classmate Tony Conrad (later a well-known violinist and filmmaker) introduced him to the latest music and ideas of the European and American avant-garde, particularly those of Californian composer La Monte Young, who moved to New York in late 1960. After withdrawing from the university in the spring of 1960, Flynt devoted himself to private philosophical and musical pursuits, frequently visiting New York until he relocated there permanently in 1963. In February 1961, Young had introduced Flynt to the New York avant-garde at his well-known concert series held in Yoko Ono's loft. Young's word pieces of 1960 inspired Flynt to theorize an aesthetic practice that could dematerialize the conventions and ordainments of traditional high culture; moving "beyond art" was certainly in the air, and Flynt was eager to contribute to the project. An important step in this regard was his "Essay: Concept Art" (1961), in which he wrote, "'Concept art' is first of all an art of which the material is 'concepts,' as the material of for ex[ample] music is sound. Since 'concepts' are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language."[15] Concept Art held the possibility for Flynt of being an entirely new, unprecedented activity that could ultimately supersede "art" itself. Always a reactive thinker, his aesthetic projects at this time were specific responses to the concerns of John Cage and Young; as he later put it, "I thought I was explaining to them what their own professed goals meant. That was my purpose."[16] That his works and ideas were met with indifference and (at times) ridicule led Flynt to suspect that other experimentalists were not truly committed to discovering new aesthetic practices for which there was no mold. His loss of confidence in the avant-garde became more exaggerated in 1962 and 1963, when he developed an explicit anti-art position, grounded both in Concept Art and in a new theory of aesthetic experience that he first called "acognitive culture," then "Veramusement," before finally settling on the term "Brend."[17] The new theory dismissed institutionalized activities of serious culture (composition, painting, theater) on the grounds that they exist only because of social expectations and pretensions. Brend describes a purely inward-directed aesthetic experience, undertaken only because it is liked by an individual, and guaranteed to be "new" because it does not rely on someone else's artistic production. He later wrote, "[M]y anti-art theory was a philosophical argument that if taste is subjective, then nobody is more able than me to create an experience to my taste....I was serious enough about this to have destroyed my early artworks in 1962; and thereafter I did not produce

art."[18] In early 1963, Flynt led anti-art demonstrations at the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center, and delivered lectures on the subject in the spring and summer. Photographs taken at the time reveal a variety of strident, agitprop slogans: "Demolish Serious Culture!" "Destroy Art!" "No More Art!" "Demolish Concert Halls!" and "Demolish Lincoln Center!"[19]

Young, who had been an accomplished jazz saxophonist in the 1950s, was also instrumental in Flynt's growing love of jazz. As Flynt later recalled, "Young's episode as a jazz pianist-composer was little celebrated, but it provided me with a permanent inspiration."[20] Both admired the recordings of John Coltrane, but unlike Young, Flynt also thought highly of Ornette Coleman (most of Flynt's music between 1961 and 1965, in fact, was an attempt to translate Coleman's style to piano, violin, and other instruments). Flynt was also interested in other U.S. vernacular musics, and hearing country blues for the first time had a huge impact: "I heard that, and it *completely* turned me *all* the way around. Totally. From that moment on...I've been...a conscious, dedicated enemy of...the European vision."[21] When Flynt and Young recorded a series of improvised duets in January 1962 (Flynt on violin, song flute, and saxophone; Young on piano), Flynt directed him to alter his usual swinging triplet subdivision to a faster duple subdivision characteristic of early rock 'n' roll players like Little Richard.[22] This signified a shift from Young's predilection for jazz to Flynt's interest in other more commercial styles, a transition in musical vocabulary that itself symbolized emerging social and cultural differences between the two. Young was not a populist, and was not responsive to Flynt's desire to take their act into the clubs. In a 1968 interview, Young stated, "The reason I discontinued my work in jazz was to progress into more serious composition."[23] Such a statement would have been unthinkable to Flynt, who was already beginning to view both jazz and vernacular musics as being far *more* "serious" than "serious composition."[24] The ideological gulf between Young and Flynt would never close, and with the exception of one encounter in 1969 or 1970, the 1962 sessions would be the final time they played together. Flynt went on to develop a personal style on the violin and guitar, combining Young's pedal-point harmony and static repetition, Coleman's free playing, and the riffs and licks of U.S. vernacular music traditions.[25] Flynt's first recorded example of this idiosyncratic style, "Acoustic Hillbilly Jive" (1963), features abstract noise explorations, Young-influenced riff repetitions, and the hillbilly sound that would gain his lasting interest.[26]

Concurrent with Flynt's education in jazz and black popular music and his involvement in downtown experimentalism was his growing commitment to the far left. The poet and anarchist Jackson Mac Low had given Flynt's name to the Marxist-Leninist WWP sometime in

early 1962, and soon Flynt began receiving and reading their newspaper, *Workers World*.[27] A secretive and hierarchical organization, the WWP split off from the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party (SWP) some years after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956—WWP supported the invasion, while the SWP viewed the incident as an unsuccessful workers' rebellion against Stalinist control. The WWP's internal organization and leadership style could be described as Stalinist—there was an exclusive central committee and party members were expected to accept the committee's direction without discussion. The party favored action over critical discourse and theory. Having organized one of the earliest demonstrations against the Vietnam War, WWP displayed the kind of commitment to anti-imperialism and Third World Marxism that is usually associated with the second half of the 1960s.[28] Worker's World should not, however, be considered a part of the New Left movement. Though it was constituted only a few years before the Port Huron Statement (1962) and the founding of Students for a Democratic Society, WWP was much more dogmatic than the students, antiwar protesters, Free Speech advocates, and militant civil rights activists in the New Left. The party's leadership, particularly founders Sam Marcy and Vincent Copeland, emerged from the industrial labor base in Buffalo, New York, even though its membership was no longer drawn from this sector of the working class.

In the pages of *Workers World*, Flynt read articles about anticolonial struggles in Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, Cuba, and the Caribbean. He also would have learned about a particular Marxist interpretation of the civil rights struggle. In 1928, over the protestations of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), the Moscow-based Comintern (also known as the Third International) officially recognized the "black belt" counties in the American South as an oppressed nation, and thus cast the civil rights movement as one of nationalist liberation.[29] Though the Communist leadership withdrew the "nation-within-a-nation" thesis in 1958, it remained a crucial principle for black radicalism outside the CPUSA in the 1960s, when it received new support and theoretical force from Mao Tse-tung.[30] It was also of critical importance to the majority-white membership of Workers World, who framed the global class struggle in terms of imperialism and the fight against capitalist European-U.S. colonial expansion. As a 1965 *Workers World* headline declared, "In Selma, Bronxville, and Vietnam: The Enemy Is the Same!"[31] The WWP claimed to "support the right of the Black nation to choose whatever form of relationship to the United States will best advance their struggle for liberation from oppression: that is, the right to integrate, separate, federate, or any other political path."[32] Before the slogan "Black Power" emerged in the summer of 1966, sectarian groups like Workers World consistently supported militant black radicalism; indeed, WWP's split from the SWP had been connected to their advocacy

for Robert F. Williams, president in the late 1950s of the Monroe, North Carolina, branch of the NAACP.[33] Williams advocated armed defense of African Americans in the face of terror attacks from the Ku Klux Klan, and gained notoriety in 1959 when, after a Monroe jury acquitted a white man of assault and attempted rape of an African American woman, he declared, "This demonstration today shows that the Negro in the South cannot expect justice in the courts.... He must meet violence with violence, lynching with lynching."[34] When Williams became a national story, the SWP set up a front organization to raise funds and provide legal assistance.[35] Although the details of internal disagreements in the party may never be known, it appears that a faction that would later become WWP was the most vocal on this imperative. As WWP leaders wrote in 1959, "It is our tendency that has taken the initiative to build a revolutionary group *in the South*. And we are the first tendency to have *done it*.... The Negro movement of the South... is most probably the torch which will light the whole powder barrel of the American working class."[36]

In the spring of 1963, a few months after the publication of Williams's autobiographical *Negroes with Guns* (which Flynt avidly read),[37] Flynt visited his parents in Greensboro, and observed a civil rights demonstration.[38] He sent a letter about the experience to *Workers World*, a letter they subsequently printed as an article.[39] Witnessing this event profoundly affected him; he wrote, "It was one of the great experiences of my life." The young correspondent had asked some protesters their opinion of Williams's advocacy of self-defense; he reported that "[t]hey didn't seem to think it was necessary.... But as one youth said cagily—'Not yet, anyway.'"[40]

It was his commitment to Workers World that brought Flynt to New York permanently in May 1963, when he began taking part in such party activities as demonstrations, marches, and meetings, including a trip to Washington, D.C., for the March on Washington in August 1963. The leaflet for the April 1964 Stockhausen demonstration reveals that Flynt had assimilated the language and concepts of orthodox Marxism. "[Stockhausen's] patronage comes mainly from the government-owned Cologne Radio," he wrote. "Like all court music, Stockhausen's Music is of course a decoration for the West German bosses."[41] While Flynt's rhetoric is clearly informed by the terms of class struggle, he also makes a more subtle point about the modality of Stockhausen's musical-theoretical domination. The leaflet begins by referring to a lecture that Stockhausen had given at Harvard in 1958, a talk attended by Flynt and Conrad. Although Flynt was only beginning to be interested in jazz at the time of the lecture, by 1964 he had, retrospectively, become enraged by what he remembered as the composer's patronizing remarks on jazz: "Stockhausen contemptuously dismissed 'jazz' as 'primitive... barbaric... beat and a few single chords...,' and in effect said it was garbage."[42] In Flynt's eyes, Stockhausen did not even consider jazz to

be music, or at least music of any significance. Through his lectures and the journal *Die Reihe*, Flynt argued, Stockhausen articulated a vision of music that only includes his own in dialogue with that of other avant-garde European composers. The music of the rest of the world does not even exist—or, in the words of *Die Reihe* contributor Wolf-Eberhard Von Lewinski, it "can be summed up by adding a question-mark after 'music.'"[43] By calling attention to the gaps and silences in Stockhausen's musical discourse, Flynt was attempting to reinsert subaltern musical traditions into the discussion, and thus to place Stockhausen and his colleagues into the context of a global hierarchy of cultures.

This motivation became more pronounced in the extraordinary September 1964 leaflet, "Picket Stockhausen Concert!"—one of the most audacious documents on politics and the avant-garde to come out of the 1960s. Here, the emphasis is on imperialism, and specifically the way that art music has supported European claims to global supremacy by "develop[ing] the most elaborate body of 'Laws of Music' ever known: Common-Practice Harmony, 12-Tone, and all the rest, not to mention Concert etiquette." Flynt points to Alfred Einstein's statements on jazz ("the most abominable treason") as just one example of a powerful apparatus that produces the grounds upon which musical value is assessed. Stockhausen is singled out as a target of Flynt's critique because, unlike his fellow "rich U.S. cretins Leonard Bernstein and Benny Goodman," the German composer is "a fountainhead of *'ideas' to shore up the doctrine of white plutocratic European Art's supremacy*, enunciated in his theoretical organ *The Series* [*Die Reihe*] and elsewhere." In 1962 or 1963, Flynt might have attacked this music because it made false claims to originality, or because it was pretentious. Now, however, he viewed the social pretensions of high culture as playing a crucial role in European global domination.[44]

The final two sections of the document bundle together Flynt's experiences in the avant-garde and the radical left with his passion for black popular music.[45] With himself obviously in mind, Flynt writes, "There are other intellectuals who are restless with the domination of white plutocratic European Art. Maybe they happen to like Bo Diddley or the Everly Brothers. At any rate, they are restless with the Art maintained by the imperialist governments." Even these intellectuals, he continues, are held in bondage by the arbitrary myths supporting the supremacy of European art, "surrounded by the stifling cultural mentality of the social-climbing snobs." Flynt's directions on how to break these bonds of snob culture make direct reference to his anti-art crusades of the previous year or two: "The first cultural task of radical intellectuals, especially whites, today, is...not to produce more Art (there is too much already)." Finally, naming his enemy along the intersection of race, nation, and class that was common in the rhetoric of the WWP, he proclaimed, "The first cultural task is publicly to expose and fight the domination of white, European-U.S. ruling-class art!"

Although the 1964 demonstrations have been somewhat clouded by the partial and incomplete understanding of critics and historians, they make complete sense in light of the three primary aspects of Flynt's work in the early 1960s. His avant-garde aesthetics—Brend and Concept Art—contributed to the 1964 protests as much as to the anti-art projects of 1962. If the avant-garde was truly interested in new aesthetic modalities—as Young declared in his "Lecture 1960," "I am not interested in good; I am interested in new"[46]—Flynt argued that they should "throw away the crutch of the label 'Art,' and...crystallize unprecedented, richly elaborated activities around unprecedented purposes."[47] Though Stockhausen's *Originale* appeared to be a transgressive work of avant-garde music theater, it nonetheless relied on old conventions to achieve this aura of transgression. Moreover, Flynt reasoned, Brend had rendered traditional aesthetic experience obsolete, so if Cage and his associates in the downtown experimental scene were serious about dissolving the boundary between art and life, then works like *Originale* were to be dismissed as reactionary, not supported and celebrated. Along with this dialectical relationship to the avant-garde, Flynt's musical allegiances were shifting to black popular traditions, which he had begun to see as an alternative to the solipsistic aesthetics of Brend. The fact that these non-European musics were ignored by Stockhausen in his writings on music was in turn given added significance for Flynt by the anti-racist, anti-imperialist ideology of Workers World Party. These impulses combined to motivate Flynt's public intervention against European music—each was interconnected with the others. As he told a radio interviewer in 2004:

> Here I'm deciding that the best musicians in the U.S., perhaps doing some of the all-time best records are...on the bottom rung of the status ladder. What conclusion do you draw from that?...One had to become socially involved, I thought....You had the civil rights movement, the Cuban revolution, the Vietnam War, you had...an African political awakening, the so-called "year of freedom," 1960, in which many colonies gained their formal independence. At that time, all of this was the same thing to me.[48]

Indeed, in the same manner that WWP was making global connections in its class analysis ("In Selma, Bronxville, and Vietnam: The Enemy Is the Same!"), Flynt was combining insights and conclusions from each of these separate discourses, using Brend, Concept Art, and the race/class analysis of the left to critique the avant-garde. His skill as a polemicist would be honed in the years following the 1964 demonstrations; but his growing appreciation for the revolutionary nature of black vernacular musics meant that the target of his critique began to shift—toward the cultural Eurocentrism of the left itself.

"Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture"

Flynt spent the next few years as a party worker—attending meetings and demonstrations and occasionally speaking for them in forums on the race and colonial question. He also wrote for *Workers World* from 1964 to 1966, and even edited the newspaper for a few weeks in 1965.[49] His numerous articles, written under the pseudonym "Henry Stone," fall into three general categories: reporting on civil rights demonstrations and crimes throughout the United States; breathless accounts of decolonization and nationalization in Africa (Zanzibar, the Congo, Southwest Africa); and longer background pieces on imperialist aggression in Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia. In July 1966, he interviewed three black civil rights leaders (Ivanhoe Donaldson, Jim Haughton, and Mae Mallory) on the subject of Black Power and what it meant to them.[50] In one of his last stories for the paper, he reviewed a benefit concert for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at the Village Gate, where Stokely Carmichael shared the stage with groups led by Marion Brown, Jackie McLean, and Archie Shepp. "The juxtaposition of Carmichael's high political awareness with a score of the black community's musicians was a logical, timely, and refreshing development," he wrote.[51] The review was the first time music—or any of the arts—was mentioned in *Workers World*.

The support that Workers World gave to the civil rights movement and to black radicalism in general should be understood in the context of a long history of white involvement with African American freedom struggles. The relationship between the two was often tense, and by the 1960s many black radicals were deeply suspicious of having their cause co-opted and superseded by the imperatives of white Marxism. Harold Cruse, for example, questioned the collaboration between the Trotskyists and the civil rights movement when he wrote, "This 'alliance' is meant to build the Marxist party, *not* the Negro movement, in order to rescue the Marxists from their own crisis."[52] Williams was also outspoken on this subject. Living with his family in Cuba after fleeing a trumped-up kidnapping charge in 1961, he eventually overstayed his welcome by repeatedly criticizing the Communist Party of Cuba for its implicit defense of racial hierarchy.[53] But unlike most white radicals who endeavored to direct African American freedom struggles from afar, Flynt tried to extend the movement by launching a postcolonial critique of his own immediate circle, the composers and artists of the white avant-garde. As he wrote in the September leaflet, "Whatever path of development the non-European, non-white peoples choose for their cultures, we will fight to break out of the stifling bondage of white, plutocratic European Art's domination." He was more specific in a 1964 *Village Voice* interview, explaining that he thought black jazz

musicians and writers should be encouraged to go their own way, while their white counterparts "should devote themselves solely to the propagation of Afro-American art forms in white intellectual circles."[54]

It was becoming apparent, however, that Flynt's enemy was not only European serious culture but also the cultural Eurocentrism of the left. In WWP, cultural matters did not rank as a priority for the party, evidenced by the complete lack of coverage in *Workers World*, while the official organ of Soviet communism in the U.S., *Soviet Life*, only reported on festivals of heroic folk art and the occasional performance of a great Russian symphony. Flynt insisted that the Left's love of Woodie Guthrie-style folk music had to be brought up to date:

> I just found it absolutely shocking, because Workers World had deliberately latched on to the black issue .... Here they were, pounding on that in their newspaper, and yet the fact that there was an entire form of music which was created in the United States by these people that they were advocating for just completely bypassed them .... I found that just outrageous. I kept nagging them. I said, "You cannot go on like this, with Beethoven and Pete Seeger .... [T]he cultural revolution is right under your nose, right here at Atlantic Records. That's the culture of revolution."[55]

In fact, following the 1964 demonstrations, the head of Workers World advised Flynt that he shouldn't introduce a new theory through the flimsy medium of a leaflet. His project lacked political clarity, and if he wanted to make a complex theoretical statement, he would have to do so in a longer document. This resulted in Flynt's pamphlet *Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture*. The publication was designed by Maciunas and made a striking impression: the bold text treatment sprawled out over five wide columns of body copy, and the whole thing was folded four times and banded to a one-inch-thick slab of styrofoam, included to illustrate Maciunas's ambitious idea for mass-produced housing. It was published by World View, the imprint of Workers World, whom Flynt had persuaded to lend their logo to the project; but otherwise, Workers World offered no support.

Flynt's most developed statement on culture and politics during the 1960s, *Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture* shows evidence of his wholesale estrangement from the Left on the cultural question even while his suggestions for cultural policy were steeped in communist rhetoric and the Stalinist cult of efficiency. Explaining his motivation, the author writes, "*For clarity, somewhere, sometime, the best possibility* in culture for the present period has to be defined."[56] Flynt provides three conditions that must be met by a properly revolutionary culture: first, it must increase the productivity of labor; second, it must promote the equality of all workers and reduce the stratification of labor by nationality or other categories of false consciousness; and third, it must bring workers to grips with reality, and must "be done

with escapism in culture." Flynt then investigates these three conditions in a range of cultural practices: the "applied arts" (industrial design), music (together with dancing and poetry), film, theater, visual arts, and fiction.

The section on music, by far the longest in the pamphlet, presents Flynt's case for the radical nature of popular musics. Although he lists styles from Jamaica, Africa, Brazil, India, and Cuba, his focus is on African American popular music, which he refers to in the language of the times as "street-Negro music." Flynt does not conceive of this as a narrow category, however, for it "includes every authentic popular music in the world today, except the European or Anglo-American, which is simply washed up."[57] Important for Flynt was that this music could not be reconciled with European bourgeois art. In an apparent swipe at folk heritage festivals and the like, he writes, "*Further, it must be absolutely clear that street-Negro music is not 'folk art.'*" Because the implicit judgment of "folk art" was that it was something antiquated, humble, and pathetic, Flynt was motivated to argue that the music of Buddy Guy, Bo Diddley, John D. Laudermilk, and the Trashmen was clearly none of these things, and thus not "folk." Crucial to Flynt's argument about the modernity of black popular music was the technological basis for its many innovations. Not only does the music use "advanced instruments" like the many types of electric guitars and electric organs, but it also engages with such cutting-edge electronic recording techniques as reverberation and over-dubbing, and relies on radio stations for distribution. For Flynt, all of these technological investments positioned "street-Negro music" in the vanguard of musical evolution.

Flynt's advocacy for "street-Negro music" was based not only on aesthetic and technological grounds but also on its subversion of the racial hierarchy that European music—both elite and popular—supported. Economic stratification had fractured the global workforce, Flynt explained, and a white labor aristocracy was now situated "at the top of the world proletariat." This upper layer of the proletariat "seeks to consolidate its privileges, and uses methods pioneered by the aristocracies of earlier eras," including the use of art to differentiate and consolidate the upper class. For this reason, European popular music now performed a reactionary role, in that it was understood to be higher and purer than low, "racial" "street-Negro music." In order to eliminate the stratification of labor and resist the formation of a labor aristocracy (his second condition for a revolutionary culture), Flynt demanded that all "folk music" and "folk ballet" be replaced by "street-Negro music." Because they were understood by Flynt to be projects of legitimization and purification, these folk genres betray just as much deference to "the mysteries of snob culture" as do forms like opera, Western art music, the "legitimate Theatre," bourgeois modern art, and poetry, and thus are equally responsible for the persistence of white supremacy.

Flynt then turns his attention to the internal dynamics of communist cultural policy. "Now there is no nonsense about bringing this music-dancing to the masses, because they created it," he writes. "The almost insuperable problem is to bring street-Negro music to the Communists." The problem, he maintains, is that Communists retain significant sympathies for European court musics. To address this unacceptable situation, Flynt offered several suggestions: Communists should begin listening to R & B and rock 'n' roll radio programs; they should replace their classical record collections; they should only play "street-Negro music" at parties, which ideally would take the form of dances. Only after the Communists have integrated "street-Negro music" into their lives will it be time to address their frequent complaint that this music is decadent and manipulated by the bourgeoisie. In particular, the hedonism of most of the song texts in these genres would have to be corrected: "Somebody will have to encourage an open call to rebellion in the lyrics."

That "somebody," it turned out, would be Flynt himself. By late 1965, he was not only theorizing and writing about the relationship between Marxist anti-imperialism and black popular music, he was also beginning to put his ideas into practice. After learning the rudiments of guitar playing from Lou Reed, Flynt began writing explicitly political rock 'n' roll songs, cobbling together a pickup band, the Insurrections, which consisted of sculptor Walter De Maria on drums, Art Murphy (who would later appear on Steve Reich's classic *Four Organs* album)[58] on keyboards, and jazz bassist Paul Breslin. Flynt played guitar and sang. The band recorded about ten songs in three sessions during the first half of 1966, a collection of material that Flynt hoped would show Workers World exactly how the movement's music should sound. For Flynt, this necessitated his reinvention as a Gramscian organic intellectual—that is, an intellectual who recognizes his position in the social hierarchy, and uses it to help communities gain revolutionary consciousness. In his 1980 essay "The Meaning of My Avant-garde Hillbilly and Blues Music" (revised in 2002), he writes:

> For me, innovation does not consist in composing European and academic music with inserted "folk" references. It consists in appropriating academic or technical devices and subordinating them to my purposes as a "folk creature." An outstanding prototype of this approach was Bo Diddley's use of the electric devices of pop music to project the Afro-American sound.[59]

Noting that "these repertoires are the voice of the unsubjugated autochthon," Flynt admired the iconoclasm and inherent rebelliousness of U.S. popular musics. His avant-gardist allegiance to progressivism persisted, however, and Flynt aimed to extend these traditions, as Coleman and Coltrane had extended the language of jazz. "Of course the musical languages of the autochthonous communities need to be

renewed—to absorb new techniques and to respond to changing social conditions—and they also need to be refracted through an iconoclastic sensibility, an ennobling taste."[60] In his own music, Flynt's "new techniques" included the opening up of blues and country to extended melodic improvisation, the elimination of chord progressions, the incorporation of extreme glissando and ornamentation, and the complex, swinging beat characteristic of African American music—all of which make this music *more* complex than "serious composition."[61]

The songs were not exactly radio friendly; Flynt was no Chuck Berry. Nonetheless, the combination of Flynt's splintered guitar style and De Maria's rollicking approach to the beat created an unusual sound, perhaps more at home in histories of garage, punk, or no-wave than in R & B and electric blues. The influence of Young can be detected in the extended static harmonies of many of the tracks, and Flynt's lyrics made up in clarity what they lacked in poetry. In "Uncle Sam Do," he sings,

> Nobody talk peace like Uncle Sam do
> Nobody talk peace like Uncle Sam do
> Uncle Sam talk peace, and drop napalm on you.
>
> Nobody hate Africa like Uncle Sam do
> Nobody hate Africa like Uncle Sam do
> He send d' C.I.A. to make uh rightist coup.
>
> Uncle Sam stores his H-bomb in your town
> Uncle Sam stores his H-bomb in your town
> If it chance to go off, you'll never be found.
>
> Set uh fire under Uncle Sam's feet
> Set uh fire under Uncle Sam's feet
> Burn baby burn till he feel uh heat.

In other songs, Flynt celebrates the riots in Watts, criticizes the draft board's targeting of the poor, and fantasizes about the capture and cooking of a European missionary in Africa. He was initially inspired by Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues," which was released in the spring of 1965 and contained elliptical references to the counterculture and police surveillance, but Flynt's lyrics were obviously much more explicit and to the point.

Flynt was not entirely alone in calling for R & B and other black popular styles to be used in spreading revolutionary messages to the workers, but no one had offered such a developed justification. Roland Snellings (later Mohammed Askia Toure) wrote in October 1965 of "Rhythm & Blues as a Weapon," but his impressionistic celebration of the music as a political force presented nothing like the doctrinal rigor of Flynt's formulation.[62] Although it was common for soul musicians in the late 1960s to play benefits, donate to civil rights organizations, and speak out for the cause, historian Brian Ward notes that in the music of the early and middle 1960s there was little more than "sympathy and synchronicity" with the movement. Amiri Baraka observed that such songs from the first half of the decade as "Keep on Pushin'" and "Dancing in the Street," "provided a core legitimate social feeling, though mainly metaphorical and allegorical for Black people."[63] As Ward concludes in his magisterial study of race consciousness in black popular music, "[T]he claims that Rhythm and Blues provided some sort of explicitly running commentary on the Movement, with the men and women of soul emerging as notable participants, even leaders, tacticians and philosophers of the black struggle, have usually depended more on partisan assertion than hard evidence."[64] (The single notable exception is Nina Simone, who wrote the seething "Mississippi Goddamn" in 1963. Her refined cabaret style, however, was a far cry from the electric sound that had so captivated Flynt.) Indeed, it appears that Flynt's attempted integration of radical messages with the latest popular styles had no precedent. Although Flynt cannot be considered a "real part" of 1960s black popular music (*I Don't Wanna*, an album of the Insurrections material, wasn't released until 2004, and Flynt's music is unlikely to have been enjoyed by most R & B audiences at the time), it wasn't for lack of trying—he sent demo recordings of his duets with Young to Atlantic in 1962, and pitched the Insurrections material to Folkways and ESP-Disk in 1966.[65]

In 1967, Flynt left Workers World. He had grown dissatisfied with the party's unwavering support for the Soviet Union, and his friend Ben Morea, leader of the anarchist group Black Mask, influenced him to question the organization's rigid hierarchy and its stifling of open debate. His misgivings were reinforced by a lecture he heard Herbert Marcuse deliver in 1967, in which the Frankfurt school philosopher offered an immanent critique of Soviet policy. In the end, Flynt no longer wanted to be a foot soldier in such a party, and gradually dissociated himself from the group. Yet the ideology of Workers World had clearly been important in the development of his anti-art critique in general, and of his attacks on Stockhausen in particular. Flynt's involvement in anti-imperialist activism encouraged him away from the abstraction of the downtown avant-garde in favor of vernacular styles; he thought of his 1966 rock recordings as an entirely new project. Nonetheless, the Insurrections material shows the continuing influence of Young's pedal-point harmony and Coleman's adventurous approach to improvisation, and these influences would remain active in Flynt's music for years to come.

In 1980 Flynt wrote, "The utopia in human relationships to which my philosophy is directed is unattainable in the foreseeable future. Activities are worthy, then, whose contribution is to keep the dream alive. To ennoble the cultural media of a non-privileged, autochthonous community is a way of ennobling the community itself."[66] Flynt's avant-gardism

consisted of embracing the sound language of his home community—that is, roots music of the rural South—and then extending it through technological innovation and compositional invention. This is a rather different view of the artistic vanguard than is usual—we don't tend to think of Cage or Stockhausen as linked to the traditions of a local community. Flynt looked to black performers such as Bo Diddley, Jackie Wilson, and Memphis Slim for inspiration, modeling his own extensions of U.S. vernacular musics on these earlier artists who successfully updated their tradition with new sounds, new technologies, and new kinds of virtuosity. In this regard, Flynt was more in line with theorists of the Black Arts Movement than he was with those of the white experimental scene. For example, Baraka's important essay, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" attempted to chart a mutable African American essence as it appeared in both rhythm and blues and avant-garde jazz. The goal was to illuminate the role that free jazz played in the black liberation struggle, and thereby to connect this avant-garde form with more popular (and, perhaps, more "populist") genres. Like Baraka and other Black Arts writers, Flynt was concerned with repositioning the ideas of innovation, advancement, and technical "progress" into the context of group identity. As one of the very few 1960s experimentalists to tackle questions of race, imperialism, collective struggle, and the role of expressive culture in these discussions, Flynt's campaign to demolish serious culture was bewildering to many observers. Enlarging the frame through which we view this campaign not only dispels this bewilderment but also pushes conversations about experimentalism into productive circulation with other trends in 1960s culture.

Notes

1. See Raymond Ericson, "Showcase Offers Music of Germany," *The New York Times*, April 30, 1964, 29.

2. Henry Flynt, interview with the author, New York City, Dec. 8, 2004.

3. R. B., "'Stockhausen, Go Home!' Zeitgenössische deutsche Musik in New York," *Die Welt*, May 12, 1964, 11.

4. Henry Flynt, "Fight Musical Decoration of Fascism!" (New York: Action Against Cultural Imperialism, 1964), http://www.artnotart.com/fluxus/hflynt-fightmusicaldecor.html.

5. See Susan Goodman, "Anti-Art Pickets Pick on Stockhausen," *The Village Voice*, Sept. 10, 1964, 3, 8. A photo essay on the cover of the *Village Voice* from Sept. 17, 1964, also included an image of the protesters.

6. The performance is documented in Peter Moore's film *Stockhausen's* Originale: *Doubletakes* (New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 2004).

7. In a 1980 interview with Fred Stern, Charlotte Moorman recalls that she and Allen Ginsberg joined the picket. The interview can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiEJdOlgcDE.

8. Harold C. Schonberg, "Music: Stockhausen's 'Originale' Given at Judson," *The New York Times*, Sept. 9, 1964, 46.

9. Jill Johnston, "Inside 'Originale,'" *Village Voice*, Oct. 1, 1964, 6, 16.

10. Flynt, interview with the author, Dec. 8, 2004.

11. Michel Oren refers to Flynt as "Maciunas's sidekick"; see his "Anti-Art as the End of Cultural History," *Performing Arts Journal* 44 (1993): 1–30. In the second edition of *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (Belmont, Calif.: Thomson Schirmer, 2008), Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin include Flynt's leaflet for this demonstration, but misattribute it to Maciunas and the Fluxus movement (463–65).

12. Michael Kurtz, *Stockhausen: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 132.

13. Michel Oren, "Anti-Art as the End of Cultural History" and Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

14. For a fuller discussion of two significant subjects—Flynt's place in the avant-garde circle around La Monte Young, and his growing enthusiasm in these years for the blues, R & B, early rock 'n' roll, and world folk musics—see Henry Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard: Pre-Fluxus, During Fluxus, Late Fluxus," in *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus: 1990–1962*, ed. A. Bonio Oliva (Venice: Ex Granai della Repubblica Alle Zitelle, 1990), 99–128; Flynt, "La Monte Young in New York, 1960–62," in *Sound and Light: La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela*, ed. William Duckworth and Richard Fleming (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1996), 44–97; Branden W. Joseph, "Concept Art," in *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage*, 153–212 (New York: Zone Books, 2008); Benjamin Piekut, "Taking Henry Flynt Seriously," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 6–7, 14, http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam/NewsletS05/Piekut.htm.; and Piekut, "Testing, Testing . . . : Networks of Experimentalism, New York 1964" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008). See also Alan Licht, "The Raga n' Roll Years," *The Wire* (October 2004): 26–29; and Ian Nagoski, "That High, Dronesome Sound," *Signal to Noise* (Winter 2002): 50–53.

15. Henry Flynt, "Essay: Concept Art," in *AN ANTHOLOGY of Chance Operations . . .*, ed. La Monte Young (Bronx, N.Y.: L. Young & J. Mac Low, 1963), n.p.

16. Henry Flynt, interview with the author, New York City, Nov. 2, 2004.

17. Henry Flynt, "My New Concept of General Acognitive Culture," *décollage* 3 (1962): n.p. On Veramusement see "Against Participation: A Total Critique of Culture," at http://www.henryflynt.org. On Brend, see "Down with Art," in *Blueprint for a Higher Civilization* (Milan: Multhipla Edizioni, 1975), 63–66.

18. Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard," 121.

19. These events are described in Flynt, *Blueprint for a Higher Civilization*, 69–70.

20. Flynt, "La Monte Young in New York," 72.

21. Flynt, interview with the author, Nov. 2, 2004.

22. These tapes have not been published.

23. Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (New York: Dial, 1968), 187.

24. In a 1974 essay, he argued that "ethnic sound elements" are "far more complex than the elements of classical music," pointing to the developed use of continuous pitch change (glissando), non-arithmetic durations, and a raga-like approach to mode. See Flynt, "The Politics of 'Native' or Ethnic Music," *Zweitschrift* 2 (1976): 27–28.

25. Recordings are commercially available on the Locus Music, Recorded, and Ampersand labels.

26. Henry Flynt, "Acoustic Hillbilly Jive," on *Back Porch Hillbilly Blues, Vol. 1*, Locust Music (2002).

27. Flynt, interview with the author, Nov. 2, 2004.

28. On this subject, see Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

29. See Robin D. G. Kelley, "Reds, Whites, and Blues People," in *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture, ed.* Greg Tate (New York: Harlem Moon Broadway Books), 44–67; and Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

30. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002), 60–109.

31. "In Selma, Bronxville, and Vietnam: The Enemy Is the Same!" *Workers World*, March 11, 1965, 1.

32. Dierdre Griswold, "A Brief Resume of the Ideology of Workers World Party," reprinted in the House Committee on Internal Security, *The Workers World Party and Its Front Organizations*, 93rd Cong., 1974, 27.

33. On Williams, see Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (1962; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998); Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967; New York: New York Review Books, 2005); and Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

34. Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, 26.

35. See Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 111–15. On the SWP and their uneasy relationship with the black radical tradition, see Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 278–85. For an excellent assessment of the SWP's overtures to black radicals written in the early 1960s, see Harold Cruse, "Marxism and the Negro," *Liberator* (May 1964): 8–11 (part 1); (June 1964): 17–19 (part 2).

36. "Proletarian Left Wing of SWP Splits, and Calls for Return to Road of Lenin and Trotsky," *Workers World*, March 1959, 7.

37. *Negroes with Guns* was an edited collection of interviews between Williams and Marc Schleifer, who participated in Flynt's September 1964 demonstration.

38. Flynt, interview with the author, Dec. 8, 2004.

39. Henry Flynt [Charles Henry, pseud.], "I Saw the Birth of Freedom in Greensboro, N.C.," *Workers World*, May 25, 1963, 1–2.

40. Ibid., 2.

41. Henry Flynt, "Fight Musical Decoration of Fascism!"

42. Ibid.; ellipses in original. Though he was clearly paraphrasing from memory, Flynt was not too far off the mark. In the written version of Stockhausen's lecture, he refers to jazz as "melodic inventions within a given basic rhythmic and harmonic scheme," in the course of distinguishing it from more "serious" experiments in "directed chance" by Cage and others. See Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Electronic and Instrumental Music," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Dan Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 378.

43. Wolf-Eberhard Von Lewinski, "Young Composers," *Die Reihe* 4 ([1958] 1960): 1.

44. In his 1964 interview with Susan Goodman, Flynt mentioned that he was next turning his attention to sites of the social reproduction of Eurocentrism by planning demonstrations at Juilliard and Art High School to protest the fact that they only taught European music. See Goodman, "Anti-Art Pickets Pick on Stockhausen," 8.

45. He even sent a copy of the leaflet to Robert Williams in Cuba. See Henry Flynt, "George Maciunas and My Work with Him," *Flash Art* 84/85 (1985): 49.

46. La Monte Young, "Lecture 1960," *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965): 75.

47. Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard," 109.

48. Henry Flynt, interview by Kenneth Goldsmith, WFMU, East Orange, N.J., Feb. 26, 2004.

49. Flynt, interview with the author, Dec. 8, 2004.

50. Flynt [Henry Stone, pseud.], "Black Leaders on 'Black Power,'" *Workers World*, July 22, 1966.

51. [Henry Flynt], "Black Music at SNCC Benefit Linked to Liberation Struggle," *Workers World*, Jan. 20, 1967, 4.

52. See Harold Cruse, "Marxism and the Negro," *Liberator* (May 1964): 9. See also C. E. Wilson, "Black People and The New Left," *Liberator* (June 1965): 8–10.

53. See Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 292–96.

54. Goodman, "Anti-Art Pickets Pick on Stockhausen," 8.

55. Flynt, interview with the author, Nov. 2, 2004.

56. Henry Flynt, *Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture* (New York: World View, 1965), n.p.

57. Flynt's terminology is reminiscent of Herman Gray's recent reflections on "the road and the street, . . . places where musicians borrowed and mixed styles and experimented with new possibilities. In the process, they created music that was dynamic, dialogic, and fashioned out of the experiences and needs of everyday life." Herman Gray, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 49. My thanks to George Lewis for pointing out this similarity.

58. Steve Reich, *Four Organs; Phase Patterns* (Shandar SR 83 511).

59. Henry Flynt, "The Meaning of My Avant-garde Hillbilly and Blues Music" (1980; revised 2002), n.p., http://www.henryflynt.org/aesthetics/meaning_of_my_music.htm.

60. Ibid.

61. Flynt's essay was focused on his longer, instrumental compositions from the late 1960s through the early 1980s, but the Insurrections' songs belong in this lineage, for they were an early attempt to assimilate popular music traditions into Flynt's larger political and aesthetic program.

62. Roland Snellings, "Keep on Pushin': Rhythm & Blues as a Weapon," *Liberator* (October 1965): 6–9.

63. Amiri Baraka, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)," in *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967), 208, quoted in Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 204.

64. Ward, ibid., 290.

65. Flynt, interview with the author, New York City, April 1, 2005; Bernard Stollman, interview with the author, New York City, Dec. 5, 2006.

66. Flynt, "The Meaning of My Avant-garde Hillbilly and Blues Music."