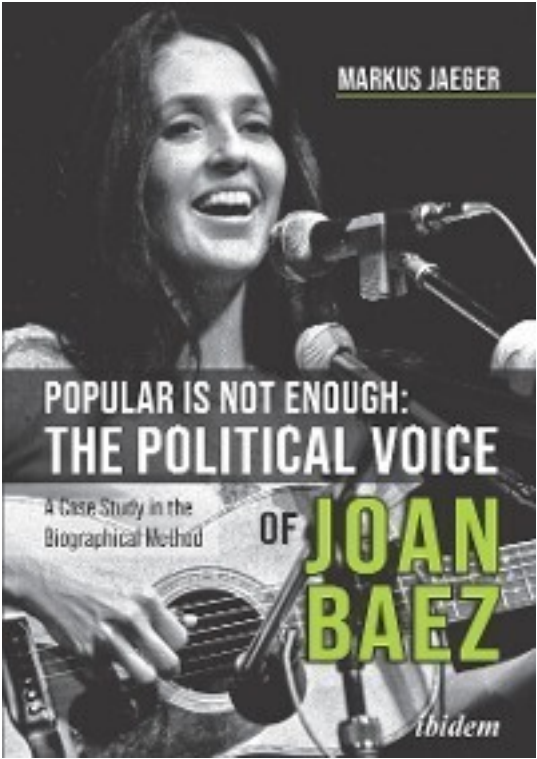




MARKUS JAEGER

POPULAR IS NOT ENOUGH:
THE POLITICAL VOICE

A Case Study in the
Biographical Method

OF

JOAN
BAEZ

ibidem

Markus Jaeger

Popular Is Not Enough: The Political Voice Of Joan Baez

Аннотация

Markus Jaeger explores the coalescence of Joan Baez's work as a singer and songwriter with her endeavors as a political activist throughout the last sixty years. He illustrates an American popular singer's significance as a political activist—for her audiences and for her opponents as well as for those victims of politically organized violence who have profited from her work. Mingling popular culture with political activism can be a helpful means to achieve non-violent societal progress: Joan Baez's work offers an excellent example for this hypothesis. Revised and updated edition, with an additional chapter on Joan Baez's artistic and political endeavours in the 2010s.

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Dedicated to the sister to my soul since 1987,
Susanne Rundl, without whose friendship
I would be an entirely different person.

And to Janice Schiestl, my former teacher
and now dear friend, without whose support
this book would not have been possible.

I think one of the saddest and stupidest things in our world is the segregation and discrimination of different races [...] (Joan Baez, 1955).

There's a consensus out that it's OK to kill when your government decides who to kill. If you kill inside the country you get in trouble. If you kill outside the country, right time, right season, latest enemy, you get a medal [...] (Joan Baez, 1968).

[...] people play this very loud music so they won't have to confront the quietness. They don't want to think about death. A lot of my songs, especially the songs I first played, were about death [...] (Joan Baez, 1976).

The prevailing ethos is: No negative thoughts, and everything is beautiful. You just jog, eat enough of the right yogurt, and everything is going to be all right [...] (Joan Baez, 1987).

It was simply a case of saying I would quietly disappear from

mainstream music or fight my way back in, as a result, I have made a commitment to my own career [...] (Joan Baez, 1990).

I did have a flight booked and a hotel booked and the final agreement, yes. Maybe four days before the concert, then I was told that I was not approved [...] (Joan Baez, 2007).

That's my little song/ about a man gone wrong./ He's nasty from his head to his feet./ When the dirt on this man / finally hits the fan,/ and no one gives a damn about his tweets,/ he'll be finally and forever obsolete [...] (Joan Baez, 2017).

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Introduction

When artistic expression engages with political activism, unavoidably arising doubts tend to result in forthright lack of differentiation. The choice of artistic genre, political attitude, ideological background and specific political demands of those who are involved in offering their audiences a mixture of art and activism repeatedly leads to heated debates about the authenticity of politically active artists. This case study aims to find an answer to the question of whether a generalization about such credibility can be considered as intellectually satisfying or not. Its line of argumentation points out that lavishing care and attention on passionately upheld convictions like the alleged impracticality of popular music in relation to activist work might perhaps be not enough to adequately analyze the connection of artistic expression with political activism.

The current study explores the coalescence of Joan Baez's work as a singer and songwriter with her endeavors as a political activist throughout the last sixty years. It aspires to illustrate an American popular singer's significance as a political activist—for her audiences, for her opponents, as well as for those victims of politically organized violence who have profited from her work. Baez has never clearly separated her artistic work from her efforts as a political activist and in this sense has continually falsified Theodor W. Adorno's rigid pessimistic view on the

political potential of popular music. Her attainments during the most successful decade of her career—the 1960s—have been co-influential for a whole generation’s political conscience. Baez later resorted to this fame when she used her reputation to publicly speak, act and sing out against war and other kinds of organized violence from either the right or the left side of the political spectrum. More than once, she has been able to save numerous lives in the course of her activities (see, for example, Chapter 6.4).

The journalistic material on Joan Baez throughout more than half a century would fill libraries; the growth of published serious scholarly material about Baez, however, is still in its infancy. Countless scientific sources on topics like the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, political prisoners in Latin America and all the numerous other dimensions of her work positively refer to Baez and repeatedly point out the significance of her work. They are, nevertheless, not dealing with the topic of Joan Baez on a general level. One very well written and highly recommendable exception is German musicologist Jens Rosteck’s book *Joan Baez. Porträt einer Unbeugsamen* (in German, Osburg Verlag, 2017). The most comprehensive bibliographical source of information to start any form of research on Baez, however, is Charles Fuss’ highly recommendable informative bio-bibliography of 1996 (see also Fuss, 1996).

The number of sources specifically dealing with Baez’s work,

on the other hand, is limited: Mexican scholar Avital Bloch, for instance, has added comprehensive essay contributions about the different points of view from which Baez's work can best be analyzed in the wide field of Peace Studies. In the book *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960's*, her essay "Joan Baez: A Singer and Activist" analyzes the complex ways her rise to fame answered difficulties resulting from the cultural and political generation gap between the 1950s and the 1960s (see also Bloch, 2005). Her contribution "Peace Activism and Paradox of Gender Values: Joan Baez and Vietnam" to the anthology *American Studies and Peace*, which was published after the 25th conference organized by the Austrian Association of American Studies in Salzburg in 1999, is an essay about Baez's image as a woman and the multifaceted significance of a changing perception of femininity for Baez's development as a peace activist (see also Bloch, 2001).

These versatile American Cultural Studies attempts to grasp the relevance of Baez's work find a comprehensive scholarly addition in the field of pedagogy, where Fletcher Ranney Dubois published his study *A Troubadour as Teacher: The Concert as Classroom?*, which analyzes Baez's role as a teacher of activism to her young audiences in music halls (see also Dubois, 1985). The study *Joan Baez and the Issue of Vietnam: Art and Activism versus Conventionality* (Jäger, 2003) exemplifies the significance of art and activism in the development of resistance against war with an analysis of Baez's activities in regard to the

atrocities in South East Asia during the Vietnam War. The ten chapters of this current study attempt to take the logical next step: analyzing Baez's most incisive artistic and political activities throughout her career. This analysis depicts the multi-layered accomplishments of Baez as a popular singer and investigates their relevance for her efforts as an influential political activist.

The first chapter demonstrates the necessity to step over boundaries when setting the course for the subsequent analysis. It illustrates the theoretical background for my examination of the marriage between popular music and political activism and explains the five main features of my research. First of all, it outlines reasons for the requirement to be open-minded to scientific interdisciplinarity, because rigid limitations to one scientific branch narrowly support the search for truth, but often articulate nothing but mere argumentative inflexibility. Particularly a complex topic like the relationship between the artistic and political dimensions in the professional activities of Joan Baez necessitates the closing of ranks between several scientific branches. As a scholar of American Cultural Studies and Political Science, I look for help in the expertise of my colleagues in the fields of History, Musicology, Philosophy and Sociology with humility. The second sub-chapter points out the relevance of social movements for a politically active artist like Baez. She has repeatedly supported the most various kinds of social movements—providing publicity for them through her famous name and actively supporting them in

their specific demands. Afterwards, a closer examination of the biographical method (or life history) explains its advantages for a chronological discussion about Baez's most significant endeavors as an artist and activist. The fourth step is to undermine the disparaging interpretation of popular culture as nothing but entertainment for duped masses—especially in the face of the many-sided work of Joan Baez. The last sub-chapter then presents a theoretician, who would certainly not have been a great fan of this study's heroine. It offers a closer investigation of Theodor W. Adorno's philosophical stance on the relationship between art and society in general and between popular culture and political activism in particular, giving reasons why Joan Baez can be regarded as an exception to his bluntly pessimistic view and as a falsification of his totalitarian generalizations. Sociologist Bühl correctly points out that Adorno would have been more authentic as a theoretician if he had concentrated much more intensely on an analysis of popular music—which Adorno brusquely dismissed as nothing but an inferior derivative of serious music (see also Bühl 128). The last argument of my first chapter is intended to support this hypothesis, leading into an analysis of Baez's work, which in the end contradicts Adorno's pessimism about society.

After building up these theoretical columns of my research, the second chapter offers first basic information about the biographical background of Joan Baez, emphasizing the importance of several occasions and developments during her

childhood and youth for her later artistic and political future. One of the main instances in this regard was the fact that her parents turned to Quakerism when Baez was a little girl. The passionate and literal interpretation of Christian non-violence within this religious denomination is the topic of chapter 2.1, as this kind of understanding about non-violence tremendously influenced Baez for many years to come. Another aspect during her childhood, which turned out to become a significant factor for her later professional life, was an intense feeling of isolation, which—compared to other teenagers—was aggravated through her dark skin (an inheritance from her Mexican father), turning her into a victim of discrimination on an ethnical level. Her most successful way to overcome such minority complexes was to share her talent as a singer and ukulele player with her fellow pupils. Apart from these general religious and psychological facets of her early childhood and youth, Baez also underwent concrete immediate experiences, which turned out to become significant driving forces for her later political view of the world. In 1951, when she was ten years old, Baez accompanied her whole family to Iraq, where her father took over a one-year job to help building up a Physics Department at the University of Baghdad. Baez repeatedly referred to witnessing the poverty of the Iraqi nation as the birth for her social conscience. Only a few years later, back in the United States, she met one of her most influential heroes in regard to political activism and social conscience for the first time—Dr. Martin Luther King,

Jr., with whom she later was about to work together on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement. Another incisive personality, who entered Baez's life on this relatively early stage, was Jewish scholar Ira Sandperl—he was to become her friend, mentor, and co-activist for decades to come. A brief sub-chapter about this friendship with an obvious political background concludes the second chapter about significant influences during Joan Baez's early childhood and youth.

The third chapter presents a summarizing examination of the philosophical impetus behind Baez's political view of the world. It outlines the tenor of Henry David Thoreau's transcendentalist posture on a citizen's duty to cling to acts of political disobedience when it comes to what is referred to as injustice in society. Thoreau points out the relevance of organized non-violent activities in order to be politically active. This approach was an authentic encouragement for Baez's entire career as an activist. Thoreau's stance on disobedience also formed a philosophical basis for the leader of the Indian Liberty Movement, Mohandas K. Gandhi, and enormously encouraged the leader of the later Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Both of these influences were often referred to as inspirational by Baez—this is the reason why a closer observation of Thoreau's arguments is a fruitful means of supporting an analysis of Baez's synthesis of her artistic work with her political activism. The subsequent seven chapters then chronologically present this analysis, step by step focusing on

each decade of Joan Baez's musical and political career.

This considerable chronology starts with chapter four about the 1950s, when Baez, still a teenager, committed the first public act of disobedience and took her first steps as a local folk musician in the Coffee House scene in Boston during the end of the decade. It offers a short synopsis of culture and politics of the United States during the 1950s and describes the radical Cold War paranoia which was the background of Baez's tender beginnings as an activist. It refreshes basic information about the Folk Music Revival during the end of the decade, which turned into the most relevant musical root for Joan Baez as a singer.

Chapter five about the most triumphant decade in the career of Baez starts with a summarizing outline of the most significant developments within American culture and politics during the 1960s, when more than ever since World War II, current moral, social, ethnical and political demarcations in a fragmented society were experienced with growing doubts by a majority of American citizens. The second sub-chapter continues the observation of Baez's friendship with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and explains the contribution of her fame as a singer of national and international renown to the success of numerous demonstrations on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement—the famous March on Washington in August 1963 being just one example. Afterwards, a discussion of Baez's commitment to the so-called Free Speech Movement highlights the fact that this movement started with just a few courageous students and

teachers on American campuses and soon turned out to become the basis for the later massive anti-Vietnam War Movement. Baez also became a sincere spokeswoman for the anti-war protest activities, which were aimed to loudly articulate dissent against the American intervention in South East Asia and turned into a significant factor for ending the increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam.

Chapter six about the 1970s suggests a sharp cultural—and later also political—comeback of conservatism in the United States, particularly during the years after the military defeat in Vietnam. In such a tightening climate, no one wanted to talk about war or anti-war activities anymore and a politically active singer like Joan Baez increasingly had to face difficulties in getting the attention of the same audiences as during the successful first decade of her career. Nonetheless, Baez continued working with her very own combination of being a popular singer and a political activist at the same time. The next three sub-chapters explain how she adapted her activities to other political realities and started to focus on political developments in numerous countries abroad. A human rights organization like Amnesty International profited immensely from Baez and her fame during the 1970s, when she—as only one example—supported the process of freeing political prisoners in Latin America. Baez articulated another significant dimension of her social conscience when she publicly supported the first activities of the Gay Liberation Movement—outing herself as having had

bisexual experiences and releasing several self-penned songs which explicitly dealt with the topic of homosexuality long before it became en vogue to be out and proud about it. The end of the decade found Baez returning to the topic of Vietnam, when she ignored the national suppression of the traumatic experiences in Vietnam and—against all odds—publicly protested against organized violence in South East Asia only four years after the end of the Vietnam War.

Chapter seven outlines Joan Baez's most important musical as well as political endeavors during the apolitical times of the 1980s. Her musical career started to tumble over the prevailing ethos of the decade that commercial success was the one and only thing that counted for an artist. A politically active singer, who was increasingly seen as a remnant of times long gone by, had to face difficulties to keep up with a career in a climate which primarily propagated national economic and political narcissism. The first argumentative step of this chapter is again a synopsis about the then current cultural and political state of affairs in the United States, which offered nothing but this kind of collective bow in front of nothing else than profit. Baez, however, did not give in to these professional difficulties and continued with what she had done before. The second sub-chapter explains the overtly political background of her musical tour in Latin America in 1981. A few years later, Baez visited Poland—once more as a singer with much more to offer than the 1980s' ethos of the big commercial hit. The third sub-chapter has a closer look at this

1985 trip by Baez to Poland and her meeting with the leader of the politically very successful workers' movement Solidarnosc and later President of the country, Lech Walesa. The last incisive effort of Baez during this rather difficult decade of her career was a highly political performance in Czechoslovakia in 1989, several months before the Velvet Revolution, a successful non-violent political development, which President Vaclav Havel later explicitly connected to the Joan Baez concert earlier that year. This undertaking concludes the analysis of Baez's artistic and political activities during the 1980s and most outstandingly marks the reason why the combination of popular music and political activism includes much more than Adorno's pessimism.

The following eighth chapter analyses artistic and political challenges for Baez during the 1990s, when she had to face the necessity to re-arrange her professional priorities. Several younger producers and new and fresh songwriting talents supported her successful attempts to hold on to a musical career, including the release of studio and live-music albums and a Grammy nomination as well as numerous promotion tours through the United States and Europe and many other regions around the globe. The general growing political dissatisfaction in the United States, as outlined in the first sub-chapter, among other dimensions, was driven by a generation conflict which labeled young people with the not very flattering X—standing for a lack of orientation. Such youth and their changing musical taste created an artistic surrounding in which it was a

mentionable success for an artist like Baez (whose music often was wrongfully labeled as still purely folk) to professionally survive. The political dimension of her work forced Baez to more selective engagements, but she did not stop lending her voice to political issues. The second sub-chapter exemplifies this professional integrity in her earlier activities with an analysis of her trip to Bosnia in the middle of the Balkan War. It accentuates her experiences as well as her passionate attempts to draw international attention to the horrors of the war in former Yugoslavia.

The ninth chapter welcomes Baez in the New Millennium. It triggers off the analysis of her activities in the first decade of the 21st century with another summation about the most important driving forces within the culture and politics in the United States and examines the question in what ways these developments are relevant for Baez's professional life. Secondly, a discussion about her return to the anti-war movement explains in what ways the massive international protest activities against the war in Iraq differ from the organized protest movement against the Vietnam War during the 1960s and the 1970s. It gives, however, reasons why those two different historic dimensions are still comparable. The last sub-chapter observes the necessity to point out that democracy and censorship do not fit together and discusses Baez's experiences in this regard in 2007.

The tenth chapter finishes the analyses of Baez's political significance and non-violent authenticity with a closer look at her

activities in the 2010s. It summarizes her most relevant accolades during the final decade of her career during one of the most troubled political phases in the United States. Her song “Nasty Man” on the 45th President of her home country eloquently sums up the reason why her work is the lifelong prove for the fact that being popular is not enough.

1. Stepping Over Boundaries: Materials, Methodology and Theory Introduction

The aim of this first chapter is to sketch the theoretical background for my line of argumentation. Additionally, a description of the main method outlines the reasons why the biographical method (or life history) is the most profitable approach to the work of Joan Baez. In this manner, sources and materials used to verify the main thesis are explained. On the following pages, five sub-chapters examine these columns of my research in more detail.

The first step is to plea for open-mindedness regarding the interdisciplinary approach that I take with my analysis, because it can be very unsatisfying to limit research possibilities to one scientific branch only. Secondly, an excursion adds an explanation about the cross-border element of social movements, in view of the fact that they offer Baez's main professional platform, where she melts the borderline between her artistic and her political work. The third sub-chapter offers a summarizing investigation of the biographical method, discussing necessary conditions and advantages of the life history, which is the main methodological approach to my analysis of Baez's combination of art and activism. The fourth step is a closer look at the

challenging relationship between popular culture and politics. It explains the reason why I refer to Baez as a popular singer and how far this classification can be a helpful means for a discussion about her political endeavors. As a last step, the incorporation of Baez's work with Theodor W. Adorno's aesthetic theory juxtaposes the activeness of Baez's efforts to the passiveness of Adorno's theory as well as his slack use of musical categories—falsifying his resigned approach to the authenticity of politically active artists (particularly in the field of popular culture). The most valuable way of building these columns of my analysis is to consider more than one scientific discipline for my research.

1.1 Against Wrongful Restrictions: On the Advantages of Interdisciplinarity

Picking out singer and activist Joan Baez as the central theme for a dissertation reveals a manifold number of risks and poses numerous questions. Satisfying answers to these questions can not be found by sticking entirely to one particular discipline only—meaning: to one specific body of knowledge, which is being delimited from other scientific disciplines. Moran analyses an important aspect of this kind of systematic delimitation: “[...] in fact, the very notion of the term [discipline] as a recognized mode of learning implies the establishment of hierarchy and the operation of power [...]” (Moran 2). This is the reason why interdisciplinarity can be regarded as an attempt to overcome structures of limited power; limited to a small number of selected scientists of one single discipline as well as limited in its potential of achieving knowledge. In other words: the often underestimated “[...] teamwork [...]” (Rodgers, Booth and Eveline 2003) of different scientific disciplines is a helpful means of producing knowledge, because knowledge is achieved via the verification of hypotheses—regardless on which hierarchical level of a scientific discipline’s power within the academia.

The stability of putting knowledge into structured schemes—enabling us to go back to organized information more easily

—shall by no means be generally put into question. Barker, all the same, correctly emphasizes the fact that “[...] many cultural studies practitioners have felt ill at ease with the forging of institutional disciplinary boundaries for the field [...]” (Barker *Making Sense* 6). The most incisive boundary that I attempt to overcome is the often far too strict line between the humanities and the social sciences. McClung Lee refers to the process of melting this particular boundary as “Humanist Sociology”, explaining reasons why it can be fruitful to approach research from a humanist’s as well as a social scientist’s point of view: “[...] interdisciplinary contacts, including ones with stimulating artists, are useful to build resistance against closure tendencies, against overlooking alternative views of reality [...]” (McClung Lee x). Consequentially, the unbending attention to one scientific discipline only includes the danger of overlooking alternative ways to the verification of hypotheses.

Ignoring possible elitist attitudes, which—in a generalizing manner—dismiss such a form of interdisciplinarity as scientific “[...] vulgarization [...]” (McClung Lee 151), my intellectual focus follows what McClung Lee describes as “[...] searching for reality in its historical and cross-cultural contexts and [...] what appears most relevant [...] to our society [...]” (McClung Lee xi). This definition can well be applied to the work of Joan Baez. Social movements offer the most interesting platform and potential for a successful expression of this continual attempt to non-violently fight against (what is considered to be) social

injustice.

1.2 Reconstituting Culture: On the Significance of Social Movements

Social movements offer a concrete manifestation of the melting borderline between culture and politics. Apart from being driven by instantly recognizable political issues, Chester and Welsh summarize their essence in the following definition: for them, social movements are networks, which “[...] have employed confrontational, imaginative, and highly symbolic repertoires of collective action based upon the ethos of ‘direct action for direct democracy’ [...]” (Chester and Welsh, 97). Chapters 4 until 10 of this study present a chronological analysis of the way Baez has supported a variety of social movements throughout her career. Their significance for social change can not be underestimated, as they form appropriate forces for the development of culture; or—in the words of Eyerman and Jamison—they are “[...] central moments in the reconstitution of culture [...]” (Eyerman and Jamison 6). While social movements are driven by particular political intentions—their efforts can shape significant breaks in the cultural development of society.

For a public figure like Joan Baez, artistic work alone is not enough to lead a satisfying professional life. She uses her fame as a singer and songwriter of national and international renown to support initiatives which successfully co-create a political climate in which the constant attempt to revive organized non-violence

turns into a (repeatedly successful) means of overcoming organized violence. One of the most important conditions for such a course of action is the implementation of social movements, which represent the main professional platform for an artist and activist like Baez. Eyerman and Jamison constructively define the importance of social movements, already connecting it to the field of popular culture: “[...] through their impact on popular culture, mores, and tastes, social movements lead to a reconstruction of processes of social interaction and collective identity formation [...]” (Eyerman and Jamison 10). This study directs its main attention to the various ways a politically active singer like Baez can influence these processes. Two questions summarize the challenge of this research aim: How shall the humanities—which include the analysis of popular culture—deal with specific political positions? How shall the social sciences—which include the analysis of specific political positions—deal with artifacts of popular culture? Eyerman and Jamison mark the reason why these two questions include a cultural and political dimension at the same time and depict the role which social movements play in the melting process of these two dimensions:

[...] by combining culture and politics, social movements serve to reconstitute both, providing a broader political and historical context for expression, and offering, in turn, the resources of culture—traditions, music, artistic expression—to the action repertoires of political struggle [...] (Eyerman and

Jamison 7).

The process of using cultural resources (while being politically active) has to be examined carefully on the edge of potential ideological abuse. Artistic influence on social movements undeniably has to face the possibility of instrumental use: this danger, nonetheless, is no reason to stop any further debate about the combination of popular music and political activism, because “[...] to the extent that social movements are able to transcend these instrumental (and commercial) usages, music as exemplary action becomes possible.” (Eyerman and Jamison 24). Organized political activity and artistic expression (in our case: the work of a popular singer) can be intertwined, transcending possible ideological or party-political abuse.

Reproaching this coalescence within social movements with commercial interests and lack of political credibility does not dismiss all of its potential. Eyerman and Jamison seriously doubt whether, for example, music theorist Theodor W. Adorno is right with his assumption that people (who are those people?) merely listened to the radio and not to the music on the radio (see also Eyerman and Jamison 137). The aim of this study is to verify the truth behind this doubt (chapter 1.4 has a particularly close look at Adorno’s approach to popular culture and the authenticity of politically active artists). On the one hand, songs can be able to enhance the political struggle of social movements, which, on the other hand, “[...] provide a cohesiveness, a kind of social glue, that reconfigures the relations between culture and

politics [...]” (Eyerman and Jamison 78). Throughout her whole career, Baez has offered her own work to the work of social movements and has thereby non-violently added relevant “[...] social glue [...]” (Ibid.) to their passionate political efforts. The main methodological approach to analyze this contribution is the biographical method.

1.3 Life Is the Method: On the Sisterhood of Biography and Society

The primary driving force to discuss one single artist regarding the main thesis of this study is to understand “[...] that the subject’s life story reflects a set of meaningful experiences which, when told, create an emotional bond between the teller and the listener [...]” (Denzin 198). In our case, what reflects these experiences is not only told but also sung and/or expressed in political activities as well. The emotional bond is created between Baez as a singer and her listeners and/or between Baez as a political activist and those, who politically agree with her positions. The most fruitful methodological approach to analyze these reflections and their consequential emotional bonds is the biographical method (or life history).

The argumentative essence of the biographical method is the view that a closer analysis of a single person’s life can offer a depiction of “[...] the intersection between the lives of people and the history of their society [...]” (Bogdan and Taylor 7). In his liner notes to Baez’s 2005 live-Album *Bowery Songs*¹, which can be interpreted as a musical reply to the Presidential election of 2004 (see also Levy liner notes 2006), Levy summarizes this aspect in regard to Baez by attaching significance to “[...] crucial moments during her long and storied career - which is to say [...] crucial moments in America's history over the past four

decades and then some [...]” (Ibid.). This linkage between Baez’s professional activities and the background of the cultural and political development in the United States is analyzed in this present study. In order to successfully apply the biographical method to this kind of research, analytical means “[...] range from letters to autobiographies, from newspaper accounts to court records [...]” (Denzin 183). This definition eloquently summarizes the methodological devices used in my study. Denzin offers another possibility of defining the biographical method:

The life history, life story, biographical method presents the experiences and definitions held by one person, one group, or one organization as this person, group, or organization interprets those experiences. Life history materials include any record or document [...] that throws light on the subjective behavior of individuals or groups [...] (Ibid.).

An important advantage of the life history to be of interpretive help in this regard is that it “[...] closely approximates the fit between theory, method, and interpretation [...]” (Ibid.). It can give insights to the complexity of social realities, for which theories no longer are enough (see also Fuchs-Heinritz 7). In addition to that, the biographical method demands an interdisciplinary approach (see also Völter, Dansien, Lutz and Rosenthal 8); a cognition which goes hand in hand with what I point out in chapter 1.1 and with the research of Bohnsack and Marotzki, who are convinced that an interdisciplinary character

displays one of the primary conditions for qualitative methods (see also Bohnsack and Marotzki 7). Although these different faces of the life history also create the risk of subjectivity, as the selection of events—when discussing the life of an individual—does not follow certain empirical rules, it does not necessarily mean that a scientific debate is a priori impossible. As DuBois explains by introducing the term ‘lifelines’ and pointing out possible empirical support in an analysis, which is based on the biographical method:

[...] Any one person has, theoretically, a multitude if not infinitude of lifelines. [...] The various lifelines are drawn at various times and in various circumstances by persons and organisations with very varied and sometimes opposing interests [...]. The lines however are not arbitrary. There are safeguards for veracity. There are statements which can be proven false (e.g. so and so was not at such and such a place at such and such a time) [...] (DuBois 21).

The reference to such ‘lifelines’ already hints at what Baez claims in the preface to her own autobiography, where she states that writing “And a voice to sing with” (New York: Summit Books, 1987) meant tracing the “[...] threads of my personal, political, spiritual, and musical lives—how they came together and how they fell apart, depending on the times and the circumstances [...]” (Baez Voice 13). This statement sums up the background of this study: it is not intended to give a subjective overall description of Baez’s life or be some sort of unauthorized

biography; its aim is rather to discuss several of her ‘lifelines’—in order to explain the motivation for analyzing the significance of her work as an activist and the question which role her artistic work has played for her political efforts. In order to do so, all materials and sources are relevant for the debate, as Denzin also concludes:

A central assumption of the life history is that human conduct is to be studied and understood from the perspective of the persons involved. All materials that reflect upon this perspective should be employed [...] (Denzin 183).

The following sub-chapter discusses the question of how far the various manifestations of Baez’s political perspective are influenced by her work as a popular singer. Popular culture theory does not offer a clear-cut possibility to define the cultural and intellectual significance of popular culture. Pop-musicologist Fuhr correctly suggests accepting the fact that particularly popular music is not to be grasped with explanation models, which attribute a problem to a single cause (see also Fuhr, 131). Fuhr is another expert, who agrees on my assumption in chapter 1.1 on the advantages of interdisciplinarity. He is convinced that a scientific analysis of popular music can only be fruitful as an interdisciplinary project (see Ibid.). A scientific debate about popular culture—and popular music in particular—is more a scientific conflict. Anyone who attempts to work on popular music should be “[...] living out the tension [...]” (Middleton in Ibid.) between the cultivated side of academic training and the

popular side of his subject matter. Taking this suggestion into account, it is necessary and worth a try to find an answer to the question why a singer like Joan Baez can be defined as a popular singer and why it is her deep-felt conviction that being popular is not enough.

1.4 Popular Is Not Enough: On Popular Culture and Politics

Popular singers, who are repeatedly involved in political initiatives, constantly have to face the accusation of lacking political authenticity—of being interested in nothing but promotional work for successfully selling their records. In order to falsify this accusation, one has to get a clearer picture of the political impetus driving the artist's work. The analysis of Baez's political momentum is done on a phenomenological basis. Bogdan and Taylor define the research aim of a phenomenologist:

The phenomenologist is concerned with understanding human behavior from the actor's own frame of reference [...] the phenomenologist examines how the world is experienced [...] (Bogdan and Taylor 2).

Before discussing Baez's political frame of reference and the question of how she experiences the world, basic biographical pieces of information are essential. How did the affiliation of artistic and political components turn Baez into a mover? What motivated Baez to meld her artistic with her political activities? As Bogdan and Taylor also point out: "[...] all personal documents are valuable [...] once the researcher has taken the motivation into account [...]" (Ibid.). Baez is analyzed as a popular singer with a political motivation. The reason for

labeling her as a popular singer can be seen in the following explanation of Strinati:

[...] popular music can be seen to be marked by a trend towards the overt and explicit mixing of styles and genres of music in very direct and self-conscious ways. This has ranged from the straightforward remixing of already recorded songs from the same or different eras on the same record to the quoting and ‘tasting’ of distinct musics, sounds and instruments in order to create new sub- and pan-cultural identities [...] (Strinati 233).

These key characteristics can certainly be correlated to the musical work of Joan Baez. Starting as a folk singer in the midst of the Folk Music Revival at the end of the 1950s, she led the anti-Vietnam War movement as a singer of protest songs during the 1960s, spread the human rights cause of Amnesty International via her international fame as a singer during the 1970s and 1980s and achieved the status of a musical icon during the 1990s, still releasing new musical records and extensively touring the world in the 2000s and 2010s. All these careerstations were marked by exactly this kind of “[...] explicit mixing of styles and genres of music in very direct and self-conscious ways [...]” (Ibid.). This kind of artistic characterization is argued in more detail throughout the whole study. Only one important aspect shall be noted here: popular culture has always been the matter of deep-seated scientific conflicts. Strauss, as only one example, bluntly dismisses popular culture by elaborating on the following simplification: “[...] popular culture was created to

entertain the masses while the elite ruled [...]" (in: Weaver 8). Eagleton, on the other hand, elevates the fact that such a dismissal is not necessarily the most sophisticated way of looking at the topic:

If one thinks of the range of artistic works, both 'high' and popular [...] it is remarkable what common witness they bear on the question of what moral ends are to be promoted [...] (Eagleton 105).

This argument leads to the hypothesis that popular music can be capable of asserting more than entertainment to its consumers. Artifacts of popular culture are able to be more than just popular in the elitist dictionary sense of being "[...] aimed at ordinary people and not at experts or intellectuals [...]" (in: Sinclair 1277). This definition implies that no one who listens to popular music can be an expert or intellectual of whatever kind. Such a simplification does not fit into the research motivation of all scientific disciplines: objectivity. Berger convincingly objects to this knowledge-limiting attitude the intellectual interests of scholars, who study popular culture. These multi-layered interests prove to be

[...] the role that popular culture plays in society—[...] the way popular culture socializes young people, the psychological impact of popular culture on individuals, the depiction of women and members of other groups (ethnic, racial, socioeconomic) in popular culture texts [...] (Berger 161).

Ignoring these dimensions by simply attacking the intellectual

incapability of listeners of popular music is not enough for a satisfying debate. Weaver goes a step further and articulates his conviction that “[...] now, popular culture has a much more dramatic influence on how culture is defined [...]” (Weaver 2). The political efforts of Joan Baez during the last 50 years—as analyzed in this study—undermine this significance. Gamman and Marshment chime in on this issue—more sophisticatedly than Weaver—and expect the critical reader to be careful with possible definitions of popular culture:

It is not enough to dismiss popular cultures as merely serving the complementary systems of capitalism and patriarchy, peddling ‘false consciousness’ to the duped masses. It can also be seen as a site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed (Gamman and Marshment in Strinati 216).

This is the point where Baez’s position as a political activist comes in. My argument is: the most significant momentum of Baez’s work as a creator of popular culture artifacts is her politics. This does not mean that she only recorded textually straightforward political songs; it puts her most famous and most important songs (and performances of the same) into a specific cultural context which transforms her artistic work into the continuing tenor of a unified political message. This hypothesis flagrantly contradicts with the position of American Studies scholar Lipsitz, who is convinced that

[...] artifacts of popular culture have no fixed meanings: it is

impossible to say whether any one combination of sounds or set of images or grouping of words innately expresses one unified political position [...] (Lipsitz *Time Passages* 13).

In order to falsify Lipsitz's thesis, this study discusses the musical work of Joan Baez from her political point of view. The analyses of various political initiatives which Baez has supported as an activist throughout her career and the role of her work as a popular singer for this kind of activism exposes a doubtless fact: Artifacts of popular culture certainly can express a unified political message. Popular music can be political. Robin Denselow is convinced that the political potential of popular music is not at its end, as many political elites might probably wish, because

Pop musicians have learned that they have the ability to use their music as well as their position for commenting on political developments, [...] collecting large sums of money, and mirroring the course of history [...] as it has been done by troubadours of folk-music movements all around the world² (see Denselow 382, transl. by Jaeger).

Joan Baez was (and still is) a representative of these folk music movements and continues to support political issues which were and still are dear to her. This kind of relationship between music and politics is old and full of complex obstacles; narrowing the topic down to songs against violent authorities, for example, still offers us a history of many hundred years (see also Stern 1978). An outstanding 20th century theorist evoking

troublesome discussions about the relationship between society and art, who comes to word in the following sub-chapter, is musicologist and philosopher Theodor W. Adorno. In his 1970 posthumously published study *Aesthetic Theory* (Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), many critical facets can be referred to the work of Baez. She is juxtaposed to Adorno's critical argumentation against politically engaged art (and artists) as a popular singer who wrote and recorded and performed songs with either political content and/or within political contexts. The following pages shed a critical light on the question of whether Baez would have been a successful pupil at the Frankfurt School.

1.5 A Critical View of a Critical Theorist: How a Bad Frankfurt Pupil Can Still Be Politically Active

Although Theodor W. Adorno can certainly be called an outstanding intellectual of the 20th century, he was “[...] a troubling figure [...]” (Paddison 2), who evoked ambivalent reactions in the fields of philosophy, sociology and musical theory. Beside his often underestimated work as a composer and his lifelong passion for social research, he is most famous for his elaborations as a philosopher. Paddison concludes in characterizing Adorno’s intricate theoretical work with yet another hint at the significance of interdisciplinary work (as pointed out in chapter 1.1): “[...] the interdisciplinary character of Adorno’s work is all-pervading, even in those texts which, on one level, seem straightforwardly ‘musical’ [...]” (Paddison 16). One essence which can be attached to most of his interdisciplinary work is an incisive commentary on politics. His membership at the famous Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, which was founded in 1923, was just one example of this kind of political focus. Paddison describes the aim of the Frankfurt Institute and points out the political tenor in Adorno’s lifelong work:

The Institute, which was initially independent of the

university, operated as a kind of community of scholars, taking an interdisciplinary approach to current social issues of importance. The fundamental of their shared concerns was the rise of Fascism in Europe and of authoritarianism in general [...] (Paddison 7).

These straightforwardly political concerns were delivered by Adorno in passionate analyses of “[...] musical models in both the classical and the popular or light music traditions [...]” (Witkin 2). Mechanisms (form and/or content) in the creation of artifacts (classical or popular) for him are comparable to mechanisms in society. This is one reason why an interpretation of Baez’s political dimension of her work as a popular singer under the influence of Adorno’s theory can be a fruitful intellectual attempt although Adorno most probably would have accused Baez of trying to be manipulative. Witkin summarizes Adorno’s reason for disseminating his attitude on popular culture’s attempt to stultify its consumers:

His rejection of music ranging from Stravinsky to Louis Armstrong was not based upon the fact of their popular appeal nor their power to stimulate emotion [...]; it was, rather, based upon his belief that such music was ‘manipulative’, that it colluded in the weakening and undermining of the subjects it appealed to, that its claim to spontaneity or genuine expression was untrue [...] (Witkin 2-3).

Baez’s artistic and political efforts differ from Adorno’s theoretical work and his “[...] vast speculative pessimism

[...]” (Said in Witkin 10) not only in regard to this accusation of lacking legitimate artistic allowance. The most perceptive differences between the theoretician/philosopher and the activist/singer can be exposed, because they worked in different times. The last decade in the life of Theodor W. Adorno—the 1960s—was the first decade in the career of Joan Baez. An undeniably similar aversion to any form of authoritarianism and an interest in the question of how problems of society could be defined and possibly be solved (plus the relationship of this form of interest to artistic expression), however, can be traced in the work of both Baez as well as Adorno, who most lengthily discusses the relationship between art and society in his study *Aesthetic Theory*, posthumously published by his widow.

The following pages summarize the most significant similarities and differences between the work of Baez and the aesthetic theory of Adorno. A brief philosophical outline of the relationship between society and art in Adorno’s theory heads a short synopsis of the concept he and his colleague Max Horkheimer coined for what they describe as the Culture Industry and culminates in an explanation of Adorno’s critical attitude towards politically engaged art. As a next step, critics of Adorno come to word, in order to disapprove of the passiveness of his elaborations. Despite Adorno’s skepticism about popular culture and politically engaged art, a closer analysis of the passive nature of his theoretical explanations serves to prove the significance of an activist like Joan Baez, who uses her

artistic work in order to support political initiatives—without necessarily turning this kind of activism into an ideological instrument keeping authoritarian mechanisms in society alive; an accusation in the writings of Adorno which he puts on every politically engaged artist in a generalizing manner (see also Sauerland 3). Although he critically exposes doubtful dimensions of the principle of *l'art pour l'art* (art which is created for art's sake only), he is not willing to accept the affiliation of artistic expression and political contexts.

1.5.1 Music for More Than Music's Sake: On the Credibility of Politically Engaged Artists

In his essay on art and criticism in Adorno's aesthetics, Geuss concludes that for Adorno, any form of art which attempts to convince people that "[...] this world or life in it was worthwhile would not just be doing something unhelpful, but would be misguided in the most fundamental way possible" (Geuss 300). This pessimistic view of artistic reality cannot be enough to explain all dimensions of the relationship between art and society. The artistic work of Joan Baez indicates a great level of compliance to my more optimistic argument. Bodenschatz, for example, refers to Baez by explaining that "[...] she [Baez] thinks that music cannot be seen from a l'art-pour-l'art standpoint only [...]" (Bodenschatz 11). Baez, in this sense, personifies a politicization of Adorno's complex analysis:

The idea of beauty advocated by l'art pour l'art [...] did indeed exclude [...] all content [Inhalt] as disruptive that did not, before undergoing the law of form and thus precisely anti-artistically, submit to a dogmatic canon of beauty [...]. This idea of beauty is limited because it sets itself up as directly antithetical to a society rejected as ugly [...] (Adorno 237).

Joan Baez's work does not indicate such a flagrant

contradiction to society. She artistically addresses (what she refers to as) problems in society and underlines her point of view via offering her efforts to the work of various social movements. Such a mixture of political and artistic activities is not possible with an antithetical stand on social problems. The combination of art and activism—as it can be seen in Baez’s work—is not promising without taking part in society, without being politically active. In his book about his own version of an aesthetic theory, Adorno describes this problematic relationship between political attempts to change society and any form of art and comes to the conclusion that this relationship is a dangerous dependence, which for him—particularly in the face of modernity—turned into a vicious circle. This kind of vicious circle generally puts art in a doubtful position, where Adorno is even no longer sure if it still has got the right to exist (see also Adorno 1). Adorno expert Sauerland summarizes his definition of this complex connection between art and society:

On the one hand, all problems [...] melt into art, on the other hand, works of art can still criticize the poor state of society without having to get involved with it [...]3 (see Sauerland 1, transl. by Jaeger).

For Adorno, artists who criticize society in their artistic work can not be trusted, because they do not need to get involved in the solution of social problems. As a consequence, ‘true’ artists—in Adorno’s diction—can only reach artistic credibility when their art becomes autonomous, that is, separated from

social mechanisms (see also Adorno 335). Aesthetically radical autonomous forms of art for him bear the only possible potential to produce authentic pieces of art (see also Geuss 300 pp.). New Music of the 20th century for him expresses the most radical and therefore most convincing criticism of modern culture and society (see also Said 41). The essence of such radical artistic means necessarily has to be a vehement artistic turning away from traditional forms and styles. Milner and Browitt formulate Adorno's conviction:

Authentic art [...] involves a necessary confrontation with already established traditional styles; 'inferior' work is merely the practice of imitation [...] (Milner and Browitt 72).

For Adorno—due to what he and his colleague Max Horkheimer referred to as 'Culture Industry' (see also chapter 1.5.2.1)—modern capitalist markets (which are necessary to sell music records) and political authenticity of artistic expression can not be combined (see also Adorno 306). Particularly during the first years of her career, Baez had to face this dilemma, when she suffered from a serious “[...] confusion about being rich and famous [...]” (Baez Voice 128), which was deeply rooted in this question of political credibility, as her work as a popular singer demands from her to record and to sell music albums. This is exactly the problem which Adorno articulates in his critique of the Culture Industry. Only many years after the beginning of her career was Baez able to find a certain kind of calmness and independence from this continuing expectancy of a popular artist

to function as nothing but the producer of a means of trade. In her 1977 self-penned song “Time rag”, she sings that

[...] I really should tell that deep in my heart, I don't give a damn where I stand on the charts not as long as the sun sinks into the West and that's going to be a pretty serious test of time [...]⁴.

Adorno would heartily disagree on Baez's credibility regarding this statement. Artifacts of popular culture—like songs written and/or sung and/or performed by a singer like Joan Baez—for him are artistically interchangeable and therefore not practical for criticism towards society. For Adorno, “[...] popular music is mechanical in the sense that a given detail can be shifted from one song to another without any real effect on the structure as a whole [...].” (Storey 106). Adorno is convinced that in popular culture, listeners of songs have to ruminate on (see also Adorno 285) what the Culture Industry enforces upon them, because

[...] the listener can supply the ‘framework’ automatically, since it is mere musical automatism itself. [...] Every detail is substitutable; it serves its function only as a cog in a machine [...] (Smith Reinventing 44-45).

Adorno is convinced that any audience—while consuming popular songs—becomes “[...] socialized to passively accept simple formulas and so becomes susceptible to authoritarian messages [...].” (Ibid. 46). This argument a priori implies that every listener to popular music is not able to defend oneself against systematic stultification, not to mention his total

negation of popular culture's potential to be of political relevance (apart from the transformation of politically engaged artists into ideological instruments). Adorno does not even consider the possibility that songs can be capable of the contrary, of supporting the conviction of the audience to stand up against authoritarianism. He is not willing to take into account the slightest chance that artifacts of popular culture could possibly be able to offer a pool of protest against social misfortune (see also Jourfixe 2006).

Adorno passionately disagrees with such an assumption—particularly in regard to popular songs—because for him, songs are generally something that he would not consider to be of artistic value at all. In Adorno's opinion, songs as artifacts of popular culture promote passive listening and merely serve to adjust the audience to society's status quo (see also Storey 106-107). Böning accentuates Adorno's disparaging attitude in this respect and exposes the criticism he evoked with his unsuccessful academic attempt to silence politically critical singers:

In his criticism of musicians Theodor W. Adorno wrote in 1956: 'Nowhere is it written that singing was necessary'. Walter Moßmann and Peter Schleuning—one a singer of political songs, the other one a musicologist - later spoke of an 'adornite silence' and 'ideology-critical refusal to sing'⁵ (see Böning 2004, transl. by Jaeger).

Following this estimation, Adorno—deliberately or without

intention—promotes a process of ‘silencing’ himself. Adorno expresses this point of view in a generalizing manner, which could easily be described as authoritarian itself. The decisive nature of his rigid elaborations throws a critical light on his own work, which, as already mentioned above, is said to have only one target: authoritarianism. Adorno is a representative for the idea “[...] that music is a ‘force’ in social life, a building material of consciousness and social structure [...]" (DeNora 2). Nevertheless, politically engaged artists (a popular singer in our case) for him—consciously or unconsciously—always turn into proponents of mere ideology; for him, the artistic work of popular artists always helps to harden structures of power in society (see also Sauerland 14):

[...] by speaking the truth, truth itself becomes an ideology in the sense of false consciousness. It helps [...] to consolidate the network of lies with which society is spun [...]6 (Sauerland 3, transl. by Jaeger).

Only once in his aesthetic theory does he point out the possibility that artists might at least be driven by good intentions, but in his fundamental attitude they are never able to succeed (see also Adorno 344). In this sense, politically engaged artists necessarily have to turn themselves into instruments of ideology—without exception. The following sub-chapter aims to depict weaknesses of Adorno’s theory, in order to emphasize the significance of the combination of art and activism when it comes to successful and convincing criticism towards society.

While Adorno limits his convictions about the relationship between art and society to his radical aesthetic theory, Baez transforms her own beliefs into active work—as a singer on her records and on the stage, but also as an activist within the various political efforts of different social movements.

1.5.2 Words Do Not Change Society: Theory Versus Practice

1.5.2.1 On Fictitious Freedom

Adorno (and his colleague Max Horkheimer) coined the term ‘Culture Industry’ in 1947, while still in US-exile at the University of Columbia, New York, where they spent more than ten years. Ironically, the freedom and openness which the members of the Frankfurt School found in American society on their flight from authoritarian repression in Europe, “[...] were the instruments, so their argument went, of its domination and repression.” (Berger 45). In their opinion, the Culture Industry’s freedom (as experienced in American mass culture) was only a fictitious freedom. Summarily, their argument went: the most important condition for the Culture Industry’s fictitious freedom was the fact that apparently free people were not about to organize their dissent against society’s numerous injustices. People who were convinced that they were free were not to become potential protesters against political misfortunes. Campbell and Kean explain the conceptual relevance of the Culture Industry in regard to possible social dissent—for them, Adorno and Horkheimer

[...] saw mass culture as a product of state monopoly capitalism seeking to mould the minds of working people by

encouraging false needs whilst diminishing alternative ways of thinking that might have offered some opposition [...] (Campbell and Kean 283).

This kind of brain-washing nature of the Culture Industry is only one tenor of Adorno's and Horkheimer's concept, which attempts to examine a general lack of opposition in society. This interpretation once more articulates Adorno's theory that artifacts, as soon as they are consumed by more than a small number of intellectuals, are nothing but mere attempts to stultify people. Impressions of an intensified process of industrialization in the United States of America during World War II and its aftermath can be interpreted as another relevant actuator of their critical concept, which

[...] pinpoints the interconnections between economy and culture and how cultural texts and artifacts are produced in an industrial process. Cultural products, it was argued, were made in the same way as other items of consumption from soap to cigarettes [...] (Smith Reinventing 44).

Particularly within the realm of a scientific debate about popular culture and its political significance, Adorno repeatedly emphasizes that listeners to popular music were nothing but mere consumers, stultified and not at all able to think in terms of political opposition (see also Kellner Critical Theory 73). The main platform for artifacts of popular culture are the mass media, which—in Adorno's diction—“[...] had, in effect, prevented history from working out the way it should have, in Marxist

terms, by subverting the masses [...]” (Berger 43). The Culture Industry has extended organizational methods of monopoly and state capitalism into the arts (see also Paddison 202) and popular culture stands at the top of this development. This fundamental point of view only seemingly does not allow critics to voice at least some of their doubts about Adorno’s theoretical elaborations. Fortunately, not every scholar is as easily convinced by the radical concept of the Culture Industry in all terms (see also Docker 40-50). Docker, for example, exemplifies his doubts about Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s approach regarding the way people are dealing with their relationships to each other in the United States of America:

Not only do Adorno and Horkheimer know what true art must always involve, but they also know that the culture industry denies ‘truth’, for example, the ‘true kind of relationships’ human beings should have, but can’t, in democratic America [...] (Docker 40).

This exemplary quote no longer offers a satisfactory conclusion when it comes to simple questions: How could they possibly know? How did they analyze the relationships of all American citizens? Is it possible to boil a discussion down on a simple statement: every single relationship of every single American has been a lie! Such—lightly ironic—questions are supposed to depict an element of criticism towards Adorno, which clouds the Frankfurt School’s aim to overcome totalitarian mechanisms in society. Docker supports my argument when he senses a certain elitist premise, which Adorno and Horkheimer

assume, while descanting on the doubtful state of culture:

[...] in a monologic way, readers are positioned by the Culture Industry essay as passive, as having automatically to accept as received truths their totalising judgements [...] (Ibid. 41).

The accusation of such a form of passiveness, which seems to be expected by the reader of Adorno's texts, can be juxtaposed to the passive process of consuming artifacts of popular culture, a passiveness which for Adorno, on the other hand, is such an incisive reason for his passionate cultural criticism. Criticizing and at the same time expecting passive acceptance puts a big question mark on Adorno's own credibility. Apart from the above-mentioned general passive position, which is forced upon Adorno's readers, the subsequent pages briefly point out other important aspects which question Adorno's aesthetic theory. Adorno, for example, does not take matters of categories all too seriously. This kind of looseness in treating musical categories is particularly interesting in regard to the musical background of Joan Baez.

1.5.2.2 On the Credibility of Hazy Categories

Adorno's aesthetic theory challenges even the most sophisticated experts among his readers because of its combination of a dense philosophical discourse and a chaotic composure of technical musical terms (see also Rampley 150). A closer analysis of this kind of intellectual challenge, which he forces upon his readers, however, exposes Adorno's hazy treatment of special terms for musical categories. Adorno points out his skepticism towards categories in general by locating the danger of simplification in the way aesthetic genres are defined according to the common characteristics they share with each other:

The universal aesthetic genre concepts, which ever and again established themselves as norms, were always marked by a didactic reflection that sought to dispose over the quality, which was mediated by particularization, by measuring them according to common characteristics even though these common characteristics were not necessarily what was essential to the works (Adorno 201).

This argument can not a priori be negated. The claim of always appropriate clear-cut artistic categories might include the risk of limiting the analysis to an unsatisfying surface. Nevertheless, the total ignorance of categories in a debate

about music (and its relationship to society) contains the risk of argumentative incredibility. One example in his theoretical work, which eloquently depicts this kind of risk, is the way Adorno deals with the term 'folk'. Paddison points out this critical aspect regarding Adorno's doubtful way of distinguishing between musical categories:

Related to the increasingly 'sociological' writings are those on aspects of folks music, 'popular music' and jazz. There are, of course, very different categories of music involved here—categories which Adorno sometimes distinguished between, but often did not [...] (Paddison 26).

This analysis points out that Adorno's treatment of different musical categories indicates a great level of vagueness. My argument is: such a blurred usage of terms can be interpreted as a weakness of his theory, more than once forcing the reader to ask: which category does he mean? His all too loose and relaxed treatment of the musical category of 'folk music' exemplifies this kind of doubtfulness, which his theory has to be treated with, particularly when it comes to the work of a folk singer like Joan Baez:

'Folk music' as a category increasingly tends in the later writings to blur into a general concept of 'popular music' which is itself very hazy, and Adorno sometimes seems to make little distinction between popular songs (Schlager), jazz, and 'light music' (leichte Musik) [...] (Ibid.).

The fourth chapter of this present study outlines the relevance

of folk music, the famous Folk Music Revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s and the artistic role of Joan Baez in this musical movement. It contradicts Adorno's philosophy, who wrongfully predicted in 1932 that there was no 'folk' left anyway (Ibid. 26-27). Baez and other artists during the beginning years of her career up until today falsify Adorno's predictions about the doubtful existence of folk music. All in all, Baez's efforts differ from Adorno's theoretical point of view not only in regard to the falsification of his negation of folk music or the authenticity in the political impetus of popular artists, who are trying to mould the boundaries between art and politics: The most relevant dimension of my doubts about Adorno's theory is the fact that any kind of theory about society and the question of how to change it for the better necessarily has to stay limited to the passive boundaries of words. This juxtaposition emphasizes the significance which a politically active singer like Joan Baez personifies in the combination of her artistic with her political accomplishments. Adorno harshly (and often rightfully) criticizes problems of society and, all the same, is not willing to do more than write complex philosophical explanations about it.

1.5.2.3 On the Passiveness of Theories

The most incisive juxtaposing element in the comparison of Adorno's philosophical work with Baez's work as a singer and activist is that a theoretician always has to stay passive when it comes to criticism towards society. Adorno and his colleagues at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research more than once emphasize the exclusiveness of the work of thought, ignoring the fact that good intentions to change society stay mere intentions as long as they are limited to theory only. Particularly during the last years of his life (which were also the first decade of Baez's career), Adorno had had to face this kind of dilemma when he came under serious attack from the New Left for refusing to take part in political activities (see also Paddison 11) during the socially troubled times of the 1960s. He and other outstanding figures of the Frankfurt School were considerably confused about this new interpretation of their Critical Theory. Paddison summarizes this kind of confusion and outlines the reaction of Adorno and other devotees of Critical Theory to this political attack:

They had never considered Critical Theory to be a model for political action and were dismayed at the possibility of their ideas providing an excuse for the use of violence to bring about political change (Ibid.).

This kind of defense implies a wrongful and biased position,

as it presupposes political activism to always result in violence, dismissing even the option of non-violent resistance—the only kind of revolution Joan Baez has always supported. Adorno is convinced that the only form of active resistance is organized violence. A closer analysis of Baez’s work during the last 60 years, as done in the following chapters, refutes this conviction. A collection of essays about Adorno’s work, which was published soon after his death in 1969, deals with this kind of divergence between activity and passivity. Adorno is quoted from one of his early essays on this topic:

Thinking actionists answer: among other things, it is important to change the state of separation of theory and practice. In order to get rid of the rule of the practical people and the practical ideal, practice is required. This, however, turns into a ban on thinking [...]. One clings to actions for the impossibility of action⁷ (see Adorno in Schweppenhäuser 10, transl. by Jaeger).

Without giving reasons for his accusation that anyone who is active necessarily articulates the mechanisms of authoritarian governance, Adorno claims a radical impossibility of being politically active and separates theory from practice in a totalitarian manner, because, as he puts it, “[...] according to its sheer form, praxis tends toward that which, in terms of its own logic, it should abolish [...].” (Adorno 241). This leads to an obvious question: how shall society, which involves the kind of ugliness that also Adorno criticizes, be changed, if no one

takes action at all? Another dimension, which can only be hinted at, but should not be neglected either, is the question: to what extent could the modern democratic parliamentary right to vote be considered to be a form of political action? Applying Adorno's point of view on the primacy of thought over action to the modern democratic parliamentary system would mean to dismiss (or even abolish) one of the most incisive political activities: the right to vote.

The work of thought doubtlessly marks the first condition to influence society—still, can this be enough? Theodor W. Adorno is convinced that we ourselves cling to action just for the sake of action's impossibility. My reason to reproach Adorno for this pessimistic conviction is that this total negation of the necessity to be active, in order to influence society, offers no alternative to the countless misfortunes in society (injustices, which he, all the same, does not stop criticizing). His obviously depressing conclusion is that all actions were senseless and in this simplifying manner opens an artistic and political debate about the question: if this was true, then why do we need (not only his) theory at all?

The life and work of Baez contradicts Adorno's passive theoretical assumptions. Two steps are necessary to set the course for a successful analysis of this contradiction: first, a biographical summary of Baez's childhood and her experiences as an adolescent depicts the most relevant roots of her political and artistic background. The early years of Baez's life have

influenced her impetus as a forthcoming artist as well as her work as a political activist; this is the reason why a synopsis of this significant period is helpful for any further debate. The following sub-chapter about Baez's childhood offers this kind of synopsis.

In addition to that, a definition and closer analysis of political disobedience and organized non-violence—the most incisive conditions for her work—finishes the theoretical background of my study. Henry David Thoreau and his famous “Essay on Civil Disobedience” can be interpreted as one of the most influential sources of inspiration for Baez; this is the reason why a discussion about this outstanding figure in the cultural history of the United States of America reflects relevant reasons for Baez not to fall into the trap of resignation; an approach which Adorno's philosophy obviously is based upon. In chapters 4 to 10 of this study, a chronology of when and how Baez took action—with a focus on her position as a singer of national and international renown—then refutes Adorno's pessimism and verifies my main thesis.

1 Joan Baez, *Bowery Songs*, Proper Records, 2006.

2 „Popmusiker haben erfahren, daß es in ihrer Macht liegt, sowohl ihre Musik als auch ihre Position zu nutzen, um Kommentare abzugeben, [...] große Geldbeträge zu sammeln und den Gang der Geschichte widerzuspiegeln [...] so wie es die früheren Troubadoure der Folkmusik-Bewegungen auf der ganzen Welt getan haben [...]“ (Denselow 382).

3 „Einerseits gehen alle Probleme [...] in die Kunst ein,

andererseits sind es die Kunstwerke, die noch Kritik am schlechten Zustand der Gesellschaft üben können, ohne sich auf ihn selbst einlassen zu müssen [...]“ (Sauerland 1).

4 Joan Baez, “Time Rag,” Blowin’ Away, Portrait Records, 1977.

5 „In seiner Kritik des Musikers schrieb Theodor W. Adorno 1956: ‘Nirgends steht geschrieben, daß Singen not sei’. Walter Moßmann und Peter Schleuning – Sänger politischer Lieder der eine, Musikwissenschaftler der andere – sprachen später von einer ‘adornitischen Schweigezeit’ und von ‘ideologiekritischer Gesangsverweigerung’“ (Böning 2004).

6 „[...] indem sie die Wahrheit direkt ausspreche, werde sie selber zur Ideologie im Sinne von falschem Bewußtsein. Sie helfe [...] die Maschen des Lügennetzes, mit dem die Gesellschaft übersponnen ist, verdichten [...]“ (Sauerland 3).

7 „Von denkenden Aktionisten wird geantwortet: zu verändern gelte es, neben anderem, eben den Zustand der Trennung von Theorie und Praxis. Gerade um der Herrschaft der praktischen Leute und des praktischen Ideals ledig zu werden, bedürfe es der Praxis. Nur wird daraus fix ein Denkverbot [...]. Man klammert sich an Aktionen um der Unmöglichkeit der Aktion willen“ (Adorno in Schweppenhäuser 10).

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