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The O'Rourke Factor: Authorship, Authority, and Creative Collaboration in the Music of Wilco

Sheena Hyndman

In a documentary interview with Jeff Tweedy and Jim O'Rourke, O'Rourke announced rather jovially that everyone says he ruins records, and the evidence of that could be found in Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*.[1] As this footage comes from a documentary specifically about Wilco and the making of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, it may seem odd that Jeff Tweedy is the only member of the band present in this interview, especially when considering that this discussion centers on the "failure" of a project that involves four other people who were active participants in the music making, and yet, are nowhere to be found in this particular interview. In this article, I will explore the importance of Jim O'Rourke's role as the mixer in the making of Wilco's fourth studio

[1] This interview is found on disc 2 of *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart*, dir. Sam Jones, 92 mins., Plexifilm, 2003. Though this interview appears as extra footage and was not a part of the actual documentary, I feel that O'Rourke's statement provides an appropriate starting point for discussing creative responsibility and its repercussions in terms of political economy in the music industry. Additionally, while the topic of this paper deals with the authorship of a record, I feel that it was the effects of political economy in relation to *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* that spawned this discussion of creative responsibility in the first place, as it is likely that O'Rourke would not have made his statement had Reprise Records accepted the album as it was. For more information about Wilco's relationship with Reprise Records, see Greg Kot, *Wilco: Learning How to Die* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2004), 154-235.

release, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* (2002). Examining issues of authorship, authority, and collaboration, this article will look at examples of O'Rourke's contribution as the mixer and how his specialized technological skill and prior experience as a performing musician and composer was an essential part of the creative music making process.

Formed in 1994, alternative (alt) country group Wilco was born from the ashes of Uncle Tupelo, one of North America's leading alt-country groups in the early 1990s. After parting ways with long-time partner Jay Farrar, singer/songwriter Jeff Tweedy gathered Uncle Tupelo's remaining members, bassist John Stirratt, drummer Ken Coomer, and multi-instrumentalist Max Johnston, and Wilco began recording their debut album *A.M.* in 1995[2]. *A.M.* was both a critical and commercial failure, but subsequent Wilco releases were better received by critics. After several personnel changes, collaborations and side projects, Tweedy began working with composer and multi-instrumentalist Jim O'Rourke and drummer Glenn Kotche, and together they formed the group Loose Fur. The Loose Fur project, along with the early experimental techniques used on their 1999 release *Summerteeth*, greatly impacted the making of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* in the following year; the different experimental techniques from Loose Fur and *Summerteeth* were applied to and extended on this new work, the band invited Kotche to become their full-time drummer, and O'Rourke was brought in to mix

[2] For a more complete timeline, please refer to the appendix. Also, all biographical information, unless otherwise mentioned, comes from Greg Kot's *Wilco: Learning How to Die* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2004).

the album.

Considered by some critics to be "the daVinci of experimental music,"[3] Jim O'Rourke has had an extensive and prolific career as a composer, performer, and producer. Following the completion of a degree in composition from DePaul University, O'Rourke worked with many notable groups and musicians and has participated in the making of over 200 albums.[4] Despite this, he is probably best known in the contemporary music world for his work with Sonic Youth that began when he was brought in to mix and perform on *NYC Ghosts & Flowers*, released in 2000. Soon after, O'Rourke was invited by Tweedy to collaborate on a project that would later become Loose Fur, which ultimately led to his being asked to mix the final tapes for *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*.

Following the recording of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, Reprise Records, a subsidiary of Time-Warner-AOL, rejected the album, stating that major changes needed to happen before it could be released. Wilco, however, was satisfied with their work and were unwilling to make any alterations. After failing to come to an agreement, Reprise let Wilco out of their contract with their finished album, and the band promptly streamed the entire album onto the internet from their website. This move garnered the band much attention from the media that, in turn, spawned a bidding war between more than thirty record companies who wanted a chance to release *Yankee*

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[3] Dugid, Brian, "Jim O'Rourke Interview," (1995) http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/orourke.html, accessed March 29, 2005.

[4] Ibid.; Greg Kot, *Wilco: Learning How to Die* (New York, NY: Breadway Books, 2004), 171.

Hotel Foxtrot on their label. In the end, Wilco signed with Nonesuch, also a subsidiary of Time-Warner-AOL, reportedly because Tweedy liked the idea of working with a company who could get the public interested in music by "a bunch of old Cubans."[5]

Yankee Hotel Foxtrot, finally released in April of 2002, is considered by many to be Wilco's finest and most innovative work to date. In their ground-breaking use of studio recording technology, Wilco effectively changed the face of alt-country music; though much of Tweedy's songwriting still connects to traditional aspects of country music, Wilco's use of voice generators, tape loops, and especially complicated mixes makes *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* an exceptionally original work.

In considering Jim O'Rourke's statement that "[he] ruins records, and [*Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* is] the evidence,"[6] an important question comes to mind: what does the mixer have to do with the success or failure of a pop music album? There are, of course, several ways to answer this question, but for now I will discuss technologies and the aesthetics of sound.

The expansion of sonic technologies through the second half of the twentieth century has produced virtually limitless possibilities in the creation of music, and nowhere has this phenomenon been more exploited than in the modern recording studio.

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[5] This comment was made by Tweedy in reference to the popularity of the Buena Vista Social Club in North America. Jonathan Valania, "Heroes and Villains," *Magnet* (June/July 2002) www.geocities.com/nutnhunnee/0602magnet.html , March 29, 2005.

[6] *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart: A Film about Wilco*, dir. Sam Jones, 92 mins. Plexifilm, 2003. DVD.

Engineering a recorded or live performance, once limited to checking volume levels for symphony orchestras and rock and roll bands, has become a creative endeavor with the field of possibility limited only by the imagination of the person behind the technology.[7] In the manufacturing of popular music, the idea of creating a sound becomes an important marker of identity for engineers, perhaps because the definition of the term sound seems to have become largely limited to describing relationships with the changing technologies of musical production; while, for example, musicians can alter a guitar sound with any number of playing techniques, an engineer's special identifying feature is rooted on the creation of a value based proper perspective for said musician's guitar sound.[8] Phil Spector's "Wall of Sound", characterized by dense mixes of overlapping electric and acoustic instrumental parts often playing in unison, is perhaps one of the most famous examples of a unique and readily identifiable production style.

With the advent of sound recording, musicians have been able to distance themselves from the act of performance in favor of what H. Stith Bennett calls "impossible music", that is, music that could not be conceived of or performed live in the same way it is formed in the studio.[9] This was certainly the case with Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, whose conception

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[7] Paul Theberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology* (London and Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 187.
[7] Ibid., 192-193.
[9] H. Stith Bennett quoted in Paul Theberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology* (London and Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 216.

depended on the impossible simultaneous combinations of noise tracks with musical instruments. However, it's also important to realize that a finished product, whether it is a live performance or a recorded one, depends on the highly specialized skill and aesthetic sensibilities of sound engineers, particularly the mixer.[10] Further, an album mixed by the songwriters or even by another engineer would have a very different sound that, in turn, could impact an audience's reception of the record. In this sense, studio technology becomes social technology insofar as it involves more than just the musician in

[10]In his 1974 study on the social organization of recording engineers, Edward Kealy suggests that, because musicians are becoming more aware of the opportunities afforded to them by newfound intimate knowledge of the recording studio, mixers are losing control over sound recording. However, as Steve Jones argues, "few musicians are capable of mixing their own recordings and operating the equipment in a control room." This supports the necessity for specialized knowledge, and by extension, separate roles performed by both musicians and non-musicians. See Edward Kealy as quoted Steve Jones, *Rock Formation: Music, Technology, and Mass Communication* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 171. Further, Simon Frith provides an interesting example in which the performer was powerless to control their sound, which was imposed on both them and the audience by the mixer's value judgments of what constitutes a good sound. The justification that was used in this situation was that audience pleasure relies on the objectivity of people who are considered sound experts. See Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 24-25. Also, see Susan Schmidt-Horning, "Engineering the Performance: Record Engineers, Tacit Knowledge, and the Art of Controlling Sound," *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 34, No. 5 (2004): 703-31. Here, Schmidt-Horning examines how factors like skill, formal education, and changing technologies contribute to sound engineering as a form of tacit knowledge.

music making; audience receptivity is always a point of consideration, and the development of new technologies, such as the development of mixing board sliders,[11] helps to generate new roles and creative outputs for engineers.[12]

As this demonstrates, the mixer is an indispensable creative partner in music making, and therefore has a role that partly determines an album's route to failure or success. However, this also raises the issue of the extent to which the mixer should be considered a creator, or author, as a result of their collaboration with musicians. Further, how much credit should be granted to the mixer for aiding in the creation of a final product?

In spite of recent efforts to broaden perceptions of authorship to include collaboration, for many people the function of the author is still one of individualized action. From a purely philosophical point of view, M. Thomas Inge's observation of collaboration stands as such:

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[11] Before the creation of vertical sliders, the mixing board employed large and cumbersome knobs that were difficult to use. Record engineer Tom Dowd's innovative idea to replace mixing board knobs with vertical sliders not only made the act of mixing exponentially easier, but from a visual point of view, it also served to make the mixing board appear more like a musical instrument. In addition, Dowd was responsible for making eight-track recording common practice in recording studios. Inspired by Les Paul's home studio, the eight-track recorder allowed the mixing of an album to take place after all the parts were recorded, which was never possible with single track technology. For more information, see *Tom Dowd and the Language of Music*, dir. Mark Mooreman, 90 mins, Palm Pictures, 2003. DVD.

[12] Paul Theberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology* (London and Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 217.

> It is commonplace now to *understand* that all texts produced by authors are not the products of individual creators. Rather, they are the result of any number of discourses that take place among the writer, the political and social environments in which writing occurs, the aesthetic and economic pressures that encourage the process, the psychological and emotional state of the writer, and the reader who is expected to receive or consume the end product when it reaches print. Even if it is not intended for an audience or the publishing marketplace, a piece of writing cannot escape the numerous influences that produce it. All discourse is socially constructed.[13]

While Inge makes allowances for the different types of relationships that may influence a work, he completely bypasses the most immediate and basic part of collaboration; the primary interaction between more than one person with the intent to create something, whether is it a novel, a finance report, or in the case of this paper, a popular music album. All of the factors outlined by Inge still exist, but remain secondary influences in relation to a pre-existing primary relationship between two or more people who work directly together.

In their essay based on collaborations with each other, Kathleen Blake Yancey and Michael Spooner attempt to clarify what collaboration as a concept actually means. Most of the sources they consult agree that "all writing is inherently collaborative" and that the definition of collaboration

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[13]Emphasis added. M. Thomas Inge, "Theories and Methodologies: Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship." *PMLA*, Vol. 116, No. 3 (2001): 623.

is "far from self evident."[14] According to John B. Smith, one of their sources,

> Collaboration carries with it the expectation of a singular purpose and a seamless integration of the parts, as if the conceptual object were produced by a single good mind… The reader is unable to tell from the internal clues which chapters or sections were written by which authors.[15]

Further, Smith views cooperative work to be

> …Less stringent in its demands for intellectual integration. It requires that the individuals that comprise a group… carry out their individual tasks in accord with some larger plan. However, in a cooperative structure, the different individuals… are not required to know what goes on in other parts of the project, so long as they carry out their own assigned tasks satisfactorily.[16]

While this distinction between collaboration and cooperation may be required when considering works of literature and academic essays, it is possible for music making to be at once collaborative and cooperative. In the making of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, for example, the members of both the band and the production team cooperate by performing certain actions on individual equipment, but they do so with

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[14] Kathleen Blake Yancey and Michael Spooner, "A Single Good Mind: Collaboration, Cooperation, and the Writing Self." *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1998): 46.
[15] John B. Smith quoted in Kathleen Blake Yancey and Michael Spooner, "A Single Good Mind: Collaboration, Cooperation, and the Writing Self." *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1998): 50.
[16] Ibid.

the goal of creating a seamless finished product to be released under the umbrella of the name Wilco. It is not required that the bass player know how to engineer the recording, nor does the engineer need to know how to play the piano, but each member works together in order to make themselves appear as both a cohesive ensemble and as invisible individual contributors to their audience.[17]

In terms of songwriting, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* is regarded by the members of Wilco as being the group's most collaborative effort to date, with each band member contributing ideas about what direction the songs should take.[18] Despite this, Jeff Tweedy's name is the one that appears in the songwriting credits. Like so many other groups in popular music

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[17] Blake Yancey and Spooner further discuss the problematic nature of Smith's treatment of "collective intelligence" and how it divides the concepts of collaboration and cooperation. It is important to note that both authors (for lack of a better term) agree that Smith is perhaps too prescriptive and may be deterministic in his definition of these terms, as he assumes that in a cooperative endeavor members will organize themselves hierarchically. Blake Yancey and Spooner later offer a compromise that takes into account Smith's more linear perspective, but is much more fluid and circular. Using this paper's case study as an example, it is easy to see that the issue of cooperation versus collaboration is not as cut-and-dry: though the goal of the people involved is to create a product that falls into Smith's guidelines for a collaborative work, there is clearly a hierarchy in Wilco. Therefore, Wilco is but one of many examples that is more appropriately discussed in cyclical terms. See Katherine Blake Yancey and Michael Spooner, "A Single Good Mind: Collaboration, Cooperation, and the Writing Self." *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1998): 51-59.

[18] *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart: A Film About Wilco*, dir. Sam Jones, 92 min., Plexifilm, 2003. DVD; Greg Kot, *Wilco: Learning How to Die* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2004).

history, Tweedy is the embodiment of what has been referred to as "an idea-led-word-producer", or the front man who is responsible for producing inspiring lyrics that will ultimately influence the audience's vision of the band as "a happy democracy working together."[19] Though aspects of songwriting are discussed and deliberated by the band, creative authority is ceded to Tweedy, who ultimately holds the position of head creator within the hierarchy of Wilco.

While I am not disputing Tweedy's authority over the creation of individual songs I would question his authority over *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* as a finished product. As Robert Self said, "objects of art require a maker";[20] but does that mean the idea of a maker must be limited to one person? In any music making ensemble, no one person, instrument or sound is more important than any other, and any absences of personnel or sounds would surely affect the finished product. Additionally, though Tweedy's songs are considered by some to be works of genius, it is obvious in looking at previous Wilco albums that his songwriting was not enough to generate commercial

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[19] Griffiths' discussion here is about Radiohead, a popular music group with a similar power structure to that of Wilco. Thom Yorke is responsible for song and lyric writing, song arrangement, artwork, and any other aspect that promotes an image for the group. Griffiths asserts that this creates tension between Yorke and the other members of the band, and that it would be just as easy for any other member of the band to make similar contributions as word-producers. Griffiths' general argument has some merit and can easily be applied to other examples of power structure in popular music. See Dai Griffiths, *OK Computer* (London: Continuum, 2004), 81-87.

[20] Robert Self, "Robert Altman and the Theory of Authorship," *Cinema Journal* 25:1 (1985), 3.

success for the band. Finally, as mentioned earlier, there were a number of different people besides the members of Wilco involved in the making of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, which was the biggest commercial and critical success for the band since their inception.

In view of this, I propose that the authorship of an album like Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* should be viewed, not as the realization of a figurehead's single vision, but as Michel Foucault suggests, as "a series of specific and complex operations."[21] As in the creation of anything, the manufacture of an album is based on a symbiotic relationship between performers and producers, and, however small the role, each individual action helps to determine the outcome of the final product. Through a brief comparative analysis of musical examples from Wilco and other sources, I will further explore the question of collaborative authorship and authority in popular music through the examination of a non-musician's role in the making of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*.

Before discussing *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, I would like to provide a frame of reference by looking at two examples from different albums. The first comes from Wilco's 1999 studio release called *Summerteeth*, mixed by Jim Scott. The second example is an excerpt from Sonic Youth's *NYC Ghosts & Flowers*, which was mixed by Jim O'Rourke.[22]

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[21] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader,* trans. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 113.

[22] In order to fully comprehend what is being demonstrated, it is necessary to listen to all examples with earphones. If none are available, the listener should position themselves in front of a set of stereo speakers in such a way that any difference in sound between the left and right speakers will be noticeable.

Upon listening to the examples, perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the example from *Summerteeth* is the very dense sound; in its entirety, the song "Shot in the Arm" uses more than 18 different musical instruments and sound layers at one time. The layers are mixed very much in the foreground, sitting at the centre of the left-right stereo spectrum, which serves not only to eliminate the possibility of dynamic contrast throughout the song, but also to make it tremendously difficult to hear detail in certain layers without extremely close listening. The only noticeable play between the left and right speakers happens at the start and the finish of the song, and only because there is a dramatic absence of other sounds. It is possible that there is interplay between left and right during the body of "Shot in the Arm," but due to the dense mix it is difficult to be certain.

Sonic Youth's "Nevermind (what was it anyway)" from *NYC Ghosts & Flowers*, however, paints a very different picture. First, though a number of different sound layers are utilized, they are used sparingly in order to distinguish themselves and create detail that is audible without having to listen closely. The song is given texture through the use of obvious and distinctive foregrounds, middlegrounds, and backgrounds, with some sound layers fitting within these categories and others traveling up and down in between. Additionally, there is significant interplay between the left and right speaker, with certain layers traveling across the sound spectrum, or with two similar sounds occurring in each speaker, but at different tempi, in different keys, and so on. All of these mixing techniques employed by O'Rourke serve to create a unique sonic experience with texture and

detail.

Considering the details outlined above, I will now look at two different examples of the same song by Wilco. The first example is taken from film maker Sam Jones' documentary footage of Wilco recording the song "Poor Places" in their Chicago loft. The next example comes directly from the album *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* and is the final version of "Poor Places," mixed by Jim O'Rourke.

As with the first two examples, the version that is not mixed by O'Rourke is very dense sounding. Figure 1 shows the different sound layers used in both versions of the song's introduction, and there are obviously a greater number of musical layers (such as the low-register piano) and extra-musical layers (such as the layer called atmosphere) used in Wilco's original conceptualization of "Poor Places." It is worth noting that there are a greater proportion of non-musical, synthesized sounds used in O'Rourke's mix of the introduction, which is texturally sparser than the version from the documentary. Additionally, the wide array of sounds found in the version from the documentary are used at later moments in O'Rourke's mix of the song; while these two versions may sound radically different, it is important to know that O'Rourke did work with the material that was presented to him.

Jones 2003 (pre-O'Rourke)	Wilco 2002 (mixed by O'Rourke)
"Engine" → "beep"	"Beep"
"Atmosphere"	"Atmosphere"
"Static"	"Click"
Claves	Drone
Shakers	Voice
Low register piano (B flat)	
Electric organ	
Voice	

Figure 1 Sound layers from introductions of two versions of "Poor Places"[23]

The next two figures plot the different sound layers on a left to right stereo spectrum and show approximately where different sounds are placed in the mix.[24] Immediately apparent is the complete lack of

[23] The extra-musical layers listed above refer to sounds not made by conventional musical instruments. While some layers are more obvious (for example, "beep," "click," and "engine"), others, such as "atmosphere" and "static" are more difficult to describe definitively. However, I have included these layers because they are obviously a part of the sonic landscape of the song. The layer "static" refers to the hissing noises, similar to what one would hear on a radio. "Atmosphere" is meant to denote what is commonly described as white noise; that is, the sounds that typically occur in everyday surroundings and are not always noticed by listeners.

[24] The model for Figures 2a and 2b comes from earlier work where I attempted to plot the stereo soundscapes found in the music of Wilco. A more complete discussion and analysis of Wilco's "Poor Places" as mixed by Jim O'Rourke can be found in my paper "What's That Noise? Space, technology, and mixing in the music of Wilco" (Unpublished paper, York University, 2005). The left and right boxes indicate the left and right speakers, with the line in the middle representing center. The arrows that point towards or away from the center indicate either a wash of sound across the center and into the opposite speaker, or they indicate a diminishing away from their starting position on the spectrum

background sounds in Figure 2a, which represents the example taken from Sam Jones' documentary. It is important to note that the sounds appearing in the middle-ground are synthesized extra-musical noise, while the layers in the foreground are made by musical instruments. Interestingly, the low-register piano starts very much in the foreground and gradually fades into the middleground. The harmonic accompaniment of the electric organ, shown here in double parentheses, is so much in the foreground that at some points it is difficult to hear the singer. Additionally, while there is some wash across the spectrum in the layer called atmosphere, there is a fairly even mix between the left and right speakers, with no one side favoring any sound over the other.

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respectively. Where the same sound occurs in both speakers, the words that are capitalized indicate that the sound is slightly more prominent in that speaker. The letters appearing in parentheses on the same line as a sound layer indicates a pulsation in sound. Finally, the different fonts indicate the different dimensions of the sounds: background layers in italics, middle-ground layers are underlined, and foreground layers are in bold print.

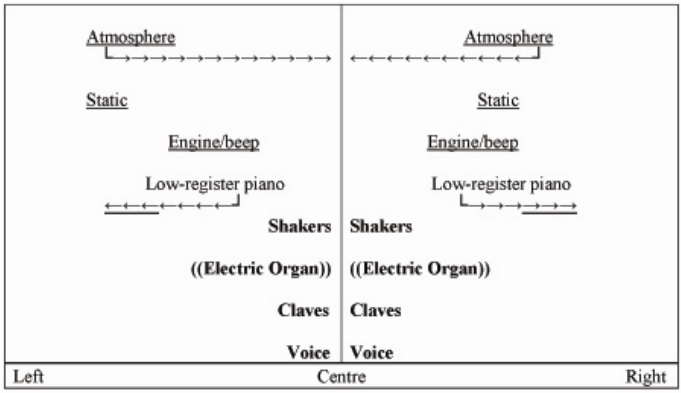

Figure 2a Stereo spectrum diagram of intro to "Poor Places" (Jones 2003)

Conversely, the introduction mixed by O'Rourke features the background quite prominently, and also uses only synthesized "noise" tracks, with Jeff Tweedy's voice being the only conventional instrument. This not only makes the whole thing significantly quieter than the other introduction, but also serves to draw attention to the texture created by the mix. The atmosphere washes are much more audible and pulsate at moments, bringing them in between the back and middle-grounds for split seconds. The left and right stereo mix is much more fluid, with some sounds favored in one side over the other. Atmosphere and beep are favored, for example, which indicates that they are of greater importance in the left speaker, while the drone is more significant in the right speaker.

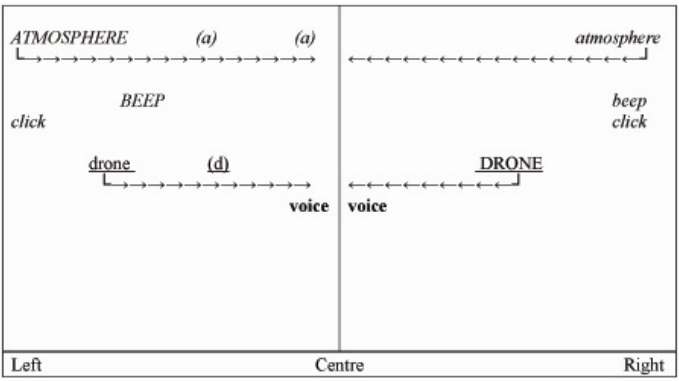

Figure 2b Stereo spectrum diagram of intro to "Poor Places" (Wilco 2002)

The concept of authorship has come under considerable scrutiny of late and the constant individualization of the author is problematic in many ways. In a world where the idea of the individual is ubiquitous while the actual individual may not be is an area of study that deserves more attention outside the realm of literary criticism. Many interesting examples of the issues addressed in this article can be found in other aspects of popular music besides the production of a record. For instance, Alvaro Barbosa's recent innovative research on collaborative musical composition through the use of computer network systems and communications technology provides another perspective on how technology affects and influences the authorship of music.[25] Another interesting example of how the notion of individual authorship affects the identity of a performer can be

[25] Alvaro Barbosa, "Displaces Soundscapes: A Survey of Network Systems for Music and Sonic Art Creation." *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 13 (2003): 53-9.

found in the work of Ani DiFranco. This nomadic folk-rocker is so aware of her "individualism" that she was prompted to start her own record company, Righteous Babe Records, simply because she decided that there was nothing a big label could offer her that she could not already provide for herself.[26] Though this type of do-it-yourself attitude should certainly be applauded, it is evident in the lengthy personnel lists provided in the jackets of her sixteen studio releases that there were things that she could not do on her own. If, for the sake of argument, we are to consider her music works of individual genius, are session musicians and engineers to be regarded merely as technologies at the disposal of DiFranco's creative whims?

What I have demonstrated in this article, with both my discussion and my analysis, is that through the direct and indirect involvements of several people, the issues of authorship and authority in popular music become subjects of contention and negotiation that deserve to be further scrutinized. Advances in technology, aesthetic judgments, and audience reception are but a few factors that have affected the way music is made both in and out of the recording studio, and thus, require a change in thinking about creative responsibility as an individualized action. Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* is only one example of an album where the mixer played a significant creative role, and by extension, O'Rourke's role as the mixer is one example of the many important non-musical jobs that contributed to the acclaim of the album. In beginning to explore such issues and how they relate

[26] Information on Ani DiFranco, see http://www.righteousbabe.com/ani/bio.asp.

and contribute to music making, this article has provided a starting point for further examination of authorship, authority, and creative collaboration in popular music.

Appendix: Timeline

Year	Event	Wilco Personnel
1994	-Uncle Tupelo disbands, Wilco is formed	-Jeff Tweedy, singer/songwriter -John Stirratt, bass -Ken Coomer, drums -Max Johnston, multi. Instruments
1995	-Wilco releases *A.M.* (Sire)	
1996	-Wilco releases *Being There* (Reprise Records) -Jay Bennett replaces Max Johnston	-Tweedy -Stirratt -Coomer -Johnston **-Bennett***
1998	-Wilco collaborates with Billy Bragg and Natalie Merchant to record *Mermaid Avenue* (Elektra)	
1999	-Wilco releases *Summerteeth* (Reprise)	
2000	-Jeff Tweedy collaborates with Jim O'Rourke and Glenn Kotche to form Loose Fur -Multi-instrumentalist Leroy Bach joins Wilco	-Tweedy -Bennett -Stirratt -Coomer **-Bach**
2001	-Glenn Kotche replaces Ken Coomer on drums -Wilco records *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* -Jim O'Rourke mixes *YHF* tapes -Reprise rejects *YHF* -Jay Bennett is fired from Wilco	-Tweedy -Bennett -Stirratt - Bach **-Kotche**
2002	-*Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* is released on Nonesuch Records	-Tweedy -Stirratt -Bach -Kotche

* Names in bold print indicate new personnel.

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Abstract

Over the last decade, Chicago based alternative (alt) country band Wilco's sound has undergone some drastic changes. From the decidedly folk-influenced early works, to their experimental middle period, to their present technologically complex stereo soundscapes, it would seem that Wilco has begun to progress beyond the category of alt-country into more musically innovative waters. Changes in personnel, both within the band and on the production team, as well as outsider influence from Wilco's long list of side projects, have helped to generate a new experimentalism that works in tandem with Wilco's alt-country roots to create a style of music that has yet to be categorized with any accuracy in the popular music lexicon.

One of the most important influences on Wilco's shifting sound is Sonic Youth's Jim O'Rourke, who mixed and produced Wilco's most recent studio recorded albums, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* (2002) and *A Ghost is Born* (2004). This article explores the importance of O'Rourke's role as the mixer in Wilco's fourth studio release, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. Examining issues of authorship, authority, and collaboration, this article shows examples of O'Rourke's contribution as the mixer and how his specialized technological skill and prior experience as a performing musician and composer was an essential part of the creative music making process.