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GLOBAL POPULAR MUSIC, CULTURAL IMPERIALISM AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Recent academic writing on music has had a great deal to say about the status of local cultures (see Frith 1989; Robinson *et al.* 1991; Garofalo 1992; Bennett *et al.* 1993). Much of this work has reacted against the way local musics were dealt with in some cultural imperialism writing. For many on the left in the 1960s and 1970s, the domination of global music production by a group of multinational corporations based in Britain and the United States, issuing records largely made by acts from those countries, provided yet another instance of American cultural hegemony, reinforced by the vestiges of an older empire.

But since that time, in critical social science as a whole, the cultural imperialism (CI) thesis has taken quite a beating. There have been a number of body blows against this once-canonical approach — canonical at least on the left. I'll begin by briefly outlining some of the main lines of attack.

1. It has been accused of paying insufficient attention to reception, and the possibilities for audiences of negotiating the meanings of a text. This was the main thrust of an important early critique of the thesis by Fejes (1981); and, as more and more attention was paid to audiences in communication and cultural studies in the 1980s, this idea gained ground.

2. Critics have attacked the reliance of many versions of CI on Marxian notions of false consciousness (Tomlinson 1991 — and see my remarks later in this paper on the "exporting" of models of consumerism).

3. The CI thesis was often thought to rely on a crude mass culture conception of the effects of popular entertainment, casting America as the evil Other. Against this, it has been argued that American cultural imports could be a source of notions of rebellion and resistance in cultures where various forms of authoritarianism hold sway (eg, Reeves 1993, 207).

4. The model is said to be outdated, in that the notion of imperialism, in its cultural form, or in its political and economic manifestations, relies on an analysis of the relationships between nation-states, whereas we live in an increasingly globalised world (Smith 1990).[1] A weaker and perhaps more convincing version of this criticism is that the thesis relies in some of its versions on a concept of national cultural autonomy which is highly problematic (Schlesinger 1987) and even at times reactionary (Mattelart 1984).

5.   It often relied on a view that sees the products of local cultures as inherently superior to internationally-distributed cultural forms, often on the dubious grounds that these forms spontaneously and authentically express these local cultures.

I don't have the space here to deal fully with these important issues, nor to outline the complex ways in which these criticisms are inter-related. My focus will be mainly on the position of these criticisms in discussions of popular music, and on some problems in approaches which are replacing CI methods as the principal critical perspectives available for understanding international music production and consumption. In particular, I want to look at three areas of analysis where the musical version of the thesis has come under attack:

A.   Criticisms that the "purism" of the CI approach fails to see the value of musical hybridity.

B.   Issues of production, especially the view that shifts in the structure of the international music industry mean that we can no longer talk of CI. Here I focus on two issues: the predicted end of the dominance of Anglo-American repertoire on the international market; and the rise of transnational corporations, not rooted in any one nation-state, and supposedly not representing any one type of culture.

C.   The view that the products of the international industry are open to appropriation and re-combination by local audiences.

My approach to these issues will be conceptual, rather than empirical. My argument is that although they may provide a basis for a considerably more subtle view of what happens at the "local" level than in some cultural imperialism writing, I believe there are important absences and problems in such revisionist approaches.[2]

A. Hybridity, syncretism and transculturation

The most common way in which the language of CI has been rejected in debates about popular music has been to point out the aesthetic value of hybridity and syncretism in music.[3] Complaints about the negative influence of Anglo-American forms (European harmonic systems, African-American rhythms, rock instrumentation) on local, indigenous musics were legion, but the orthodoxy in studies of popular music over the last fifteen years has been to stress the fruitfulness of musical cross-fertilisation. A typical example is Collins' informative account of West African music (1992). Pointing out that African-American influence has both helped and hindered colonial and Anglo-American domination, he stresses the positive musical results in the area:

> Paradoxically, in copying these black American artists, Africans are being turned towards their own resources, which in recent years, has led to the creative explosion of numerous African "pop" styles (1992, 189)

Similarly, Hatch's paper on Indonesian popular music (1989) points to "the richness and variety of musical experiences" in Java, encouraged rather than destroyed by the arrival of Western phenomena such as the cassette recorder, American hard rock and John Denver.

What is clear from such ethnographic accounts of generic diversity is that it is difficult to sustain a CI thesis as applied to music by relying on the concept of *homogenisation*. There is simply too much evidence of continued diversity. Roger Wallis and Kirster Malm have provided vital reminders of the role of national policy and activism in maintaining such diversity (Wallis and Malm 1984; Malm and Wallis 1992).[4] Their first book *Big Sounds From Small Peoples* (1984) is often cited as a study of cultural imperialism, but their argument is more complex than has sometimes been recognised. CI is listed as only one of four ideal types of cultural interaction, each of which represents a stage in patterns of musical change (1984, 297-311). In their version, it is a fusion of a previous stage, "cultural domination," whereby the culture of a powerful group is foisted on another, with an additional factor, the transfer of money and/or resources from dominated to dominating culture group. This new stage is strongly associated with the development of the mass media over the twentieth century, and the interpenetration of forms of music making with those media.

According to their typography, the most recent pattern of musical/cultural change is *transculturation*, a process by which music from the international music industry interacts with virtually all other music cultures and sub-cultures in the world (Wallis and Malm 1984, 301). Their description of this interaction is initially couched in a way that sounds like other writers' accounts of CI itself:

> Transnational music culture is the result of a combination of features from several kinds of music. This combination is the result of a socio-economic process whereby the lowest musical common denominator for the biggest possible market is identified by building on the changes caused by the three previously describe patterns of change [i.e., exchange, domination and imperialism] (1984, 300).

But then the emergence of national styles of pop and rock music is presented as a heterogenising resistance to this uniform (and potentially homogenising) transnational culture. "In its early stages," they say, "transculturation has had positive effects on cultural activity" (1984, 311).[5]

In the light of the rise of studies of musical syncretism and hybridity, debates about CI in the 1980s and early 90s have been about the "imperialism" of

western audiences, musicians and small businesses involved in the production, consumption and distribution of "World Music" or "World Beat" as much as about the activity of the multinationals. These are concerns that we might more accurately class with critiques of Eurocentric modes of thought in post-colonial criticism rather than the (more often) economic modes of analysis involved in the CI thesis. They reflect too a shift in critical social science as a whole towards a concern with the construction of identity and subjectivity.

The aesthetic behind musical borrowings and appropriations of musics of the "Third World," whether by British and American musicians like Peter Gabriel and Paul Simon, or by middle class consumers for their record collections, has been criticised on a number of grounds: principally, its reliance on "folk" notions of authenticity (Goodwin and Gore 1990) and its "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo 1989) for unsullied ethnic musics. I would add another criticism, often made within the largely white, bohemian scene of alternative rock culture (Straw 1991): the perceived inability of such fans to see value in the oppositional and marginal musics of western cultures. Although such criticisms can sometimes be more about the acquisition of cultural capital than about political critique, serious points have emerged from these debates.[6] It may be that "World Music" fans, in making what they often see as gestures of internationalist solidarity, are merely dabbling in non-Western musics. Are they, in Suzanne Moore's phrase, (though used in the context of gender) "getting a bit of the 'Other'"? (Moore 1992)

Although the liberal multiculturalism of some World Beat/ World Music discourse is fair game, and although it must be clear by now that it does not represent an opening up of the world market to non-western musics in any significant way, criticisms of the phenomenon have often failed to register the other side of a contradictory process. Steve Feld (1992) has described his involvement in the recording and dissemination of the music of the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, and his writing about the issues raised represents another angle on hybridity and syncretism: a defence of the use of sophisticated "western" recording methods for the music of "traditional" societies. Feld makes clear that such recording was carried out in consultation and dialogue with Kaluli people, a process he calls "dialogic editing." Nevertheless, he strives to recognise the contradictions involved:

As he points out, however, such acknowledgment involves the "necessity of engagement" with these problematics, rather than on the one hand, the withdrawal of activism and interest in other musical cultures; or, on the other, a refusal to see that the circulation of hybrid musics might well be involved with processes of exploitation and domination.

To maintain this critical process, it is necessary, as Feld implies elsewhere (1994) to take account of the macro-economic structures which intersect with (but do not determine) cultural and musical approaches. If shifts in cultural studies, popular music studies and ethnomusicology in the 1980s and early 1990s have drawn attention to what happens at the local in a considerably more sophisticated way than in some of the earlier literature, this may have been at the expense of losing the bigger picture.[7] I'll deal with the potential contribution of the CI literature to this macro focus in the next section. In the meantime, it must indeed be recognised that followers of the CI approach failed adequately to address the aesthetic and political value of hybrid musical cultures, on either a global, national or local level; and that they paid insufficient attention to the role of culture in the formation of collective identity.

I believe, however, that the CI thesis might be more resistant to other, rather different, aspects of revisionist criticism; and in showing this, I want to deal with its potential contribution to a "macro" level focus which would complement the stress on the local in some of the empirical studies of music I have mentioned.

B. Issues of production: Simon Frith on Anglo-American Music

To do this, I want to discuss a concise and insightful outline of a "postimperial" approach to music by Simon Frith (1991). Frith begins by questioning whether Anglo-American domination of the global music business, undisputable for the last thirty years, will continue for much longer. A convincing part of Frith's argument is that the days of British pre-eminence in repertoire (the "Anglo" part of the combination) are numbered. Britain's important roles as a talent pool and as a test market for the world's youth are diminishing with the rise of the "yuppie demographic and the corporate tie-in." Pan-European pop institutions such as fan magazines, and commercial music radio and television mean that British bands increasingly rely on the closer European market, rather than on the American market, which is declining in economic significance anyway.

Frith, however, goes on to make a very different claim: that, as he puts it, Dutch, South African, Filipino and Hawaiian rap acts have "as much chance to make it globally as the rappers from the Bronx or LA," as long as they sing in English (268-69). New technological and institutional conditions of music-making, such as the shift from an emphasis on live performance to recording as the main breakthrough method, mean that a new equality of access is now attainable (267).[8] Frith's assumption is that everyone has equal access to the digital technology which makes it as possible to produce the universalised sound" the "global acoustic," in the Philippines as in LA. But economic inequalities have often meant that access to new electric technologies have

tended to be highly uneven in the past. Wallis and Malm's investigation (1984) is exemplary in its attention to this aspect of musical production, and it will be interesting to see empirical evidence about access to digital technologies in developing countries over the next few years. Frith is likely to be right in one particular respect: that where access to digital technologies is available, (principally in the metropolitan core areas, the Manilas and Johannesbergs) an increasingly globalised set of sounds will achieve the highest levels of success. If this is a further example of Wallis and Malm's "transculturation," then what is needed is a continuing assessment of the state of musical institutions producing other musics to exist alongside this global music.

Even if it were the case that such methods meant a global democratisation of production, distribution is, as Frith recognises, still in the hands of the majors. The corporations

> ...control an information network, so that whatever sells in one country can be mass-marketed in another (267).

But the international mass-marketing of product that "breaks" in a particular territory is only one possible result of control of distribution and financing. Others include decisions not to distribute product in certain countries which sells in others. This is especially so if this music product is sung in a language which isn't English, but sometimes if the sound isn't "right" for the British and American staff who make the decisions. Paul Rutten (1991) points to the continuing difficulties for non-American acts in "making it" outside their own territories in a valuable article (from the same conference as Frith's paper) on how difficult it is for acts from marginal markets to get distributed with any effectiveness on a global scale.

Keith Negus too has recently argued that the "dominance of Britain and the United States" in terms of repertoire is likely to continue for some time (1993: 300). Negus makes a careful distinction between the rapid development of Europe as a key, integrated market; and the rather slower and more uneven development of the different countries of Europe as repertoire sources. He detects two principal reasons for this tardy development in the attitudes of record industry personnel: a continued insistence on the aesthetic superiority of American and British acts; and ingrained habit, in that staff are unused to working with acts from other sources. This is manifested, says Negus, in a "resulting mutual torpor" (304) whereby British staff agree to accept recordings from another country in return for the release of records by lesser known British-signed acts, but then put no effort into promotion. Rutten (1991) describes this process from the perspective of Dutch A&R staff: if, say, music by a Dutch artist sounds different from what is fashionable in the UK/US markets,

Anglo-American staff will say it isn't suitable; if it sounds the same, they'll say that there are already plenty of British and American acts producing such music.[9]

Although they disagree on the extent to which Anglo-American dominance exists, or on whether it is likely to continue, Frith and Negus agree that the CI thesis is not a valid way to explain and analyse the current distribution of power in the international industry. Frith stresses the fact that the majors are no longer owned by companies based in the US, but in Europe and Japan. He argues that we can no longer

> ...define the international music market in nationalistic terms, with some countries (the USA, the UK) imposing their culture on others. This does not describe the cultural consequences of the new multinationals: whose culture do Sony-CBS and BMG-RCA represent? (1991, 267)

Similarly, in defining the new multinationals as essentially the distributors of locally produced goods, but with the risk borne at the local level, Frith argues that

> ...the majors don't share some supranational identity, something to be *imposed* culturally around the globe....The cultural imperialism model of nation versus nation must be replaced with a postimperial model of an infinite number of local experiences of (and responses to) something globally shared....(267-68: original emphasis)

Negus too lays emphasis on the spread of ownership and financing; this means, he says, that culture and territory can no longer be identified (311). But, as Negus stresses rather more than Frith, the fact that ownership is being dispersed into a triad of East Asia, Western Europe and North America doesn't mean that talk of cultural domination is out-dated. To be sure, it would be wrong to talk about MNCs directly representing national cultures, and was probably unwise even when most MNCs were American. This direct link of MNCs with national cultures has been widely criticised in writing on the CI thesis, and it is a just criticism. It clearly exaggerates the coherence of (at least) two very different forms of power, state and corporate-commercial.[10]

But, in spite of these problems, at this point I want to raise two principal aspects of the CI literature that may be worth preserving in new approaches, and that I feel are largely absent from collections like those of Garofalo (1992) and Ramet (1994). One significant contribution of writing under the CI banner was the argument that cultural norms, values and institutional patterns of a particular type were being foisted on to other societies (Schiller 1976; Mohammadi 1990). These included: entrenched inequality of wealth, increasing concentration of power, and the weakening of civil institutions. If

some other versions of the thesis tied the idea of CI too closely to the idea of nationalism and national autonomy (eg, Hamelink 1983; Nordenstreng and Schiller 1979), others have laid emphasis on this wider criticism. Criticisms of the CI thesis which (correctly) criticise its focus on the problematic concept of national autonomy leave this broader critique of capitalism untouched.

Of course this aspect of the CI thesis may be vulnerable on other counts. Tomlinson (1991, chapter 4) makes powerful criticisms of the argument that CI is a harbinger or concomitant of consumer capitalism. He sees this emphasis on the role of cultural products (eg, records) in promoting ideologies such as consumerism and free market economics as a sliding towards a theory of economic domination, away from the cultural. The idea is that such marxist-influenced theories never actually confront the moment of the cultural because of this "economism."

Tomlinson also argues against the idea that western or metropolitan writers can speak for the non-western poor about what is right and wrong for them. Is it possible to argue that western goods (including records) help prepare non-western users for a consumerist lifestyle, and that this consumerist lifestyle carries dangers other than those Tomlinson describes as the ambiguities of modernity? Tomlinson is only prepared to accept the advertising of such goods as pharmaceuticals and baby products in developing countries as representative of a cultural (rather than economic) process of exploitation. He argues that the models of consumerism which CI is supposed to inculcate in the peoples of developing countries are interpreted as unhealthy only from the standpoint of metropolitan intellectuals who have experienced benefits from such models. All such talk, according to Tomlinson, is implicitly reliant on discredited Marxian notions of "false consciousness."

Tomlinson's reflexivity about "who speaks" is welcome and necessary. But a rejection of false-consciousness approaches shouldn't disable criticism. The agenda of international communication studies still needs to investigate the idea that the images of fame, glamour, hedonism and escapism associated with western media products have, as one leading Latin American reviser of the CI approach puts it, qualities of "seduction" as well as resistance (Martin-Berbero 1993). Although the kind of political mobilisation around rock music discussed in Garofalo (1992) is important and encouraging, we also need to look at some of the problems associated with the exports of such musical-ideological models: the potential to encourage apathy and passivity in the face of global commercial activity, for instance. These are issues which are difficult to treat empirically. A lack of political activity (and possible causes for such a lack) is inevitably harder to observe and interpret than the kind of gatherings treated in Garofalo's collection.

The second point I want to make about the globalisation critique of CI is that the functionalism of certain variants (eg Schiller, 1976) does not discredit the entire approach. While it is true that MNCs can not be directly associated with a particular national culture, it is nevertheless valid to argue that they might be part of a process by which certain national cultural forms become predominant. There is no need to attribute conscious planning or conspiracy to such companies in order to see this. Thus the MNCs operate subject to certain economic imperatives and aesthetic histories (of the kind well described by Negus and Rutten) *with the result that* Anglo-American music is still the main type of music distributed and promoted internationally. Even if we cannot talk in functionalist terms of a conscious imposition of one culture on another, the *logic* of the global market as it is means that access to distribution and committed publicity and promotion still seems to be extremely unequal, and this inequality is geographical, and nationally differentiated.

It is sometimes argued that spread of ownership might mean greater access to the world market for the cultural products that are recognisably characteristic of countries like Germany, Japan and Brazil. This is not an argument that either Frith or Negus make, because it would contradict their stress on the lack of fit between culture and territory in the "globalised" world. Nevertheless, there are signs that recognisably national, or at least regional, forms are emerging from these countries, the classic example being Brazilian "telenovelas" (Reeves 1993). German popular music is likely to increase its importance on the European and world markets over the next few years. The chairman of the UK division of BMG has denied that the reason for the surge of German acts on his label was a result of Bertelsmann's base in Germany, or even the size of the German national market; rather, he said, it reflected the distinctive, but syncretic and multicultural diversity of German society, or "GI Culture," as he put it.[11] While these are interesting developments, even if cultural and economic shifts mean that "recognisably" Brazilian and German television programs and music are going to be more present on the world stage, that hardly means that national cultural inequality no longer exists; merely that we are seeing the historical emergence of different forms and patterns of inequality. Indeed, there is a certain amount of absurdity in arguments that the emergence of German and Japanese cultural products represents the end of cultural inequality. These societies have hardly been the principal victims of global capitalism over the last fifty years.

Frith's argument, though, contains the idea that increased access to the global market for non-Anglo-American acts is already in place. I feel we need more empirical evidence to be sure that the presence of groups like Roxette, Milli Vanilli and Sinead O'Connor on the world stage at the beginning of the 1990s represented a stronger trend towards the presence of continental European acts

than the presence of their compatriots Abba, Boney M and Mary Hopkins in the '60s and '70s. It's not enough to look at the presence of 2 Unlimited, Haddaway and Ace of Base in the singles charts: we need evidence of sustained, significant album sales by a large number of acts. In continental Europe at least, what does seem to be the case is that continental European acts are at present achieving unprecedented singles success (Laing 1994).

Sales themselves, however, are not enough as a method of analysis: we need to take account of the less easily quantifiable issue of *cultural significance*. Which acts are at the centre of pop myth and debate? The broadest canons of popular musical history have little room for continental European acts, other than as key influences on Anglo-American trends (e.g., Kraftwerk and Can). Two years ago, Laing concluded a survey of national and transnational trends in European popular music by speculating that the next U2 might come from Wroclaw or Bratislava (1992, 139). But which continental European acts today are likely to gain the Sunday feature/ Q front cover status of U2 — or even of Meat Loaf? In the history of European acts on the global scene, only Abba even approach being at the centre of pop myth, and even their significance since the 1970s has been primarily based on discussion of kitsch.

These problems are, needless to say, magnified for "Third World" musicians. Only Bob Marley has achieved full musical-mythical status in the age of Rock. We may be entering a new age, where the values and discourses of rock no longer have such a grip on musical production and consumption, but, as yet, no contemporary Third World performer — with the possible, though unlikely, exception of Shabba Ranks — looks like gaining the kind of interest and debate that surrounds the movements of the Inner Circle of mega-stars (Jackson, Madonna, Prince) or even the Second Circle of Nirvana, U2, INXS and the like.

What is needed then in examining the distribution of global musical resources is not only a careful, long-term consideration of patterns of sales, but also of access to sets of musical-mythical discourses. In the next section, I want to consider some of the possible ways of thinking about the consequences for audiences of such unequal cultural patterns.

C. Audiences and aesthetics

Dave Laing (1986) has provided an important examination of the CI thesis as applied to the international recording industry. One strand of his argument (338) uses Peter Wicke's account of the reception of Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" in East Germany to argue that an active audience response can mean that, rather than encouraging a submission to "alien values" (with all the reactionary connotations of that term), international music can foster a creative

challenge to a parental national culture. This is typical of a key strand of critiques of CI, the argument that it failed to pay sufficient attention to conditions of reception. The canonical example is Katz and Liebes' work on *Dallas* (1985), which aimed to show that people in different countries draw very different meanings from the program. Such arguments clearly have important implications for how we might talk about the effects of the products of the "core" on the "periphery," however we might define each category.[12] If those on the periphery of world power are at liberty to draw their own meanings from the products of the core, then how can we talk with any certainty about what happens as a result of their consumption of such products?

Without denying that non-western audiences can make positive and progressive political usage from western cultural goods, I want to argue here for the retention of some critical lines of thought connected with the CI thesis. A valuable article by Ali Mohammadi (1990) on the role of television in spreading western ideologies of consumerism will help. Mohammadi gives an account of the adoption by the Shah of Iran in the 1960s and 1970s of the western, Eurocentric development model. The Shah hoped to set up a Western-style broadcasting system, with many imports from American television in order to develop Western-type institutions in his country. Mohammadi argues that, in comparing their own situation with that of Americans, Iranians came to see the limitations of their own state (276-78). In other words, exposure to western television products and institutional forms actually encouraged resistance to an authoritarian ruling class.[13] This account clearly takes on board the "reception critique" of the CI thesis. But Mohammadi adds a dimension that is often missing from discussions of reception: the vital importance of local political and ideological conditions. He makes it clear that it was political organisation (including the development of small alternative media networks by opposition groups) plus vital cultural factors (such as the fear that traditional cultural ties were breaking down) that meant that western television programs were read in this way. In other circumstances, western television has no doubt been read primarily but by no means universally as an affirmation of potentially destructive western values.

I am using Mohammadi's study to make two arguments: firstly, that it would be a mistake to equate the recognition in cultural and communication studies that readers are able to negotiate the meanings of texts with a very different idea, that cultural products have little effect on their audience. Secondly, that the effects of such exposure depend in turn on the particular circumstances in which negotiation takes place. This is highly dependent on wider social factors, and not just the variables of class, race, gender and age, but also the degree to which people are prepared and motivated to read texts by wider political forces and activism. Sometimes people will be prepared to accept messages, and at

other times not, and sometimes those messages might well pass them by. But such issues depend very much on political motivation and organisation. In situations where there is large-scale depoliticisation, apathy and conservatism (I would speculatively suggest Eastern Europe as a present example) the effects of "core" products might not nearly be so progressive.

To close, I want to look at two areas of debate which are still relevant to a consideration of musical power, even if we accept, as we must, that audiences can actively appropriate, and negotiate with, musical texts. The first is the issue of singing in English. Frith (1991, 268) argues that the very ubiquity of American culture and the range of global appropriations of Anglo-American music, entails that to sing in English no longer means to sing in English, it "just means to be a pop star." He talks of the movement in Sweden to sing songs in Swedish as "punk nationalism," a phase superseded when

> people began to realise that in today's world what matters is not just that all music from all sources should sound approximately the same, but that such sameness should also make a difference.(268)

Frith here is provocatively suggesting a new stage in the production of popular music, one where local music-making becomes aimed at international success. He offers intriguing remarks about the aesthetic dimensions of an emerging split between "global" music and Anglo-American rock. Sinead O'Connor represents a move towards a global music with smaller aims, "centred on the body and the dance-floor," while her compatriots U2 are described as "Anglo-American" in their aspirations to a global political signficance (1991, 268-69). So O'Connor's music is global in its very shunning of a unifying rhetoric, its embrace of the local in the sense of small, personal; U2 are seen as affirming their (Irish) Anglo-American-ness precisely in their pursuit of grand-scale signif-icance — their global hopes confirm them as the products of a particular local setting.

Clearly, whatever his feelings about the particular acts in question, Frith prefers the former as an ideology of cultural production. Anglo-American rock is presented as reliant on a pompous rhetoric of unity. The personal, sensuous concerns of O'Connor, or the Pet Shop Boys, are less inflated, more subtle, he implies. He suggests too that the "old-fashioned" view that music should spread from local cult to international success (cf. Frith 1988a) is a version of the myths of authenticity that he has comprehensively criticised throughout his work. The "global perspective," on the contrary, recognises the commercial and technolog-ically mediated nature of popular music and, to a large extent, embraces it.[14]

I am sympathetic to Frith's attempts to deflate the heavy-handedness of Anglo-American rock, currently marked in many of its mainstream and alternative

forms by a debilitating nostalgia. It is clear that many of the most interesting recent developments in western music are in contemporary dance music genres. The lack of pretentiousness in good pop music, that ability to surprise you with a sudden, seemingly unintended connection of personal feeling to a wider body of people, is indeed to be valued.

But the politics of language remain submerged in Frith's account. Response to lyrics is dependent on the generic conventions at play in the particular type of music being listened to: for some genre audiences, close attention to and analysis of lyrics is vital; elsewhere, it's not important. Frith (1988b) has made powerful arguments in the past against the outright rejection of the latter approach, and in favour of the generic contextualisation of lyrics. Laing (1992) has usefully outlined a rough categorisation of the importance of language compared to vocal and musical sound in a range of genres, emphasising the different implications for different genres of the increasing integration of the European market. But you don't have to be a folk fan to believe that a great deal (though by no means all) of the pleasure of music derives from the inter-action of the human voice with the meaning of the words sung. Lyrics still count in a big way in Frith's category of "global music." I once witnessed a woman in a British pub sing along to all the words to Sinead O'Connor's "Nothing Compares 2U": it was apparently a plea for her ex-boyfriend to come back to her. No doubt it is perfectly possible for non-English speaking audiences to enjoy, appreciate and make their own uses of a record like that, but we shouldn't remain blind to the possibilities for identification opened and closed by particular language uses. Evidence that continental European audiences are turning away from global music sung in English to local musics sung in local languages may well indicate, at least in part, a desire for the pleasures of understanding.

The second area of debate I want to touch on here relates to the most striking feature of the sector of musical production adopted on a global scale: its reliance on a star system. The stars of globally successful music have, since the 1950s, nearly all come from Britain and North America. It may well be the case that, in the future, this will no longer be so. But this is a prediction, not a description. As for now, the star system provides the possibility for Anglo-American audiences of seeing local pleasures adopted on a wider, even global, scale. Again, I want to return to anecdote to illustrate my point. I once bumped into three French students who were wandering around the part of Manchester where I used to live, and who were looking for the setting of a Smiths song ("Rusholme Ruffians" from *Meat is Murder* (1987)). I couldn't help gaining a guilty pleasure from the incident: from the fact that someone would come all that way to try and find out more about experiences that I felt were peculiarly of the north of England, and therefore, given my own confused identifications

with the region, in some ways mine. Conversely, as for many music fans, my first visit to the United States was a veritable pilgrimage of song titles and references. Although some Brits and Americans visit centres of African music, we seem to be a long way from a situation where British fans would visit France, or Austria, or Mongolia, in a spirit of *fandom*.

The international distribution of industrial power, then, to some extent, structures the exclusions and inclusions that operate in the consumption of popular music. In at least some of its manifestations, the current (though perhaps increasingly vulnerable) cultural studies orthodoxy of "active audiences" threatens to obscure this process. I am suggesting that *the intensity of identification allowed by popular music* might be one way in which we might assess the way the balance of power in the international recording industries operates for consumers, excluding some from certain pleasures and possibilities, and including others. But I also want to stress the political dangers of such identification.[15] There are pleasures of recognition in hearing and seeing peculiarly local ways of experiencing sexuality, violence, adolescence, class and ethnicity; but these pleasures of course can be linked to nationalist, xenophobic exclusions of "them" in affirming the unity of "us." For many adolescent working-class boys in Britain in the early 1980s, the music of the Jam was a vital, exciting affirmation of dissatisfactions: their songs captured the fear of casual violence; the mundanity and frustration of small-town life (a feeling often associated with suburbia, but not confined to it); the desperate need for close friendships. But on the other hand, without our knowing it, this music united us as boys, and excluded girls. Young women would clear the floor as the lads rushed on to the dance floor to stamp around half joyfully, half angrily to "Going Underground."

Conclusions

To summarise: I've tried to identify a number of problems with the international distribution of musical power that I think might still be usefully contained under the heading of cultural imperialism. A stress on the value of musical interaction and hybridity is clearly preferable to the latent cultural purism of some cultural imperialism thinking, reproduced today in some (though not all) discourses around "World Music" and "World Beat." Such interaction and cross-fertilisation has its own dangers, however: appropriation and cultural voyeurism lurk beneath the surface of some well-intentioned borrowings by Western musicians; and the loss of certain musical skills and practices in developing countries cannot be merely dismissed as a sign of inevitable "progress." In addition, the study of, for example, generic diversity at a national level, might serve to obscure long-term macro-economic and cultural processes.

The cultural imperialism model might still be useful in drawing our attention to important criticisms which need to be made of the capitalist production of culture as a whole: the role of musical commodities as part of wider patterns of change in leisure and entertainment; and the continued dominance of certain national forms of music. Musically, the logic of capitalist production has developed such that there are enormous problems of access to the world market for musicians, producers and companies who want to root their work in local experience or language, especially if these are experiences alien to the people who work for the major companies in London, New York and Los Angeles. Frith may be (provocatively) overstating the diminishing significance of the national music cultures celebrated by Wallis and Malm. Certainly, he seems to take a neutral stance towards this decline. This is not to say that such local references are the only pleasures that count in popular music, or even that they are necessarily more significant politically than those afforded by the more universalised references of Prince or U2. It is certainly not to suggest that musicians authentically express local experience through such national forms; rather, the fascination of such musics is precisely in the way that such experience is mediated and fantasised, often in complex relationships with other, more global cultural forms and meanings.

I have also argued that the cultural imperialism thesis in its broadest form, as a critique of the effects of the relationships between international economic and cultural processes, is not substantially affected by the fact there has been a spread of economic power in the music industries from an America and Britain to the "global triad" of Europe, North America and South East Asia, as long as there is no solid evidence that this spread of ownership (often hardware-driven) is substantially transforming what we might call the "hegemonic form" of music. I argued that in terms of the cultural significance of major acts, little evidence of major change is forthcoming: very few major world stars have yet emerged from outside the Anglophone world. *If* it is fair to argue that such global music derives from European pop appropriations of African-American forms (and this is a musicological issue I have no space to argue over here) then the condoning of a global adoption of this sound risks Eurocentrism in the classic sense: the assumption and/or acceptance that specifically European/ North American practices are universals.

The predominance of English as the language of pop, combined with the continued pre-eminence of Anglophone stars, some of whom still use specifically British/ Irish/ Australasian/ North American experience as the basis of their meanings, means that industrial practice still helps to structure the possibilities of reception. If the term "cultural imperialism" is too steeped in overtones of intention and imposition, or with associations of a past when American political and economic power coincided with cultural influence, let's be rid of it. But

we shouldn't lose sight of the problems that its proponents were originally trying to draw our attentions to: unequal access to the means of production, distribution, ownership, control and consumption.

Notes

1. Frith (1991) and Negus (1993) both use versions of this argument — see later

2. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the "European Routes" conference at the Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool, 21 March 1994. My thanks to Georgina Born for her comments during the long evolution of this paper.

3. Syncretism is a term from the study of religions for the reconciliation of different systems of belief. If the metaphor of *hybridity* fits nicely with the connotations of "cultivation" in the etymological history of the concept of culture, that of *syncretism* stresses the ideological systems behind musical forms.

4. .Many of the contributions to Bennett *et al.* (1993) have a similar stress: see, for example, those by Marcus Breen and Jody Berland.

5. In their most recent study (1992) Malm and Wallis incorporate critiques of the cultural imperialism thesis from the last ten years, but in dealing with the importance of national media policy in nourishing musical activity, maintain their cautiously optimistic tone from the earlier book.

6. Much vernacular discussion of World Music reduces debates about these issues to the question of the *intentions* of musicians (are they sincere? did they pay the musicians above Union rates?); or, on the other hand, the relative hipness of record-buyers. The important critiques of appropriation and dabbling in "otherness" are often smothered beneath these other layers.

7. There is a call for a fusion of macro and micro levels of analysis in Grenier and Gilbaut's survey (1990) of the differences and possible interactions between conceptions of the "Other" in anthropology and popular music studies.

8. It is sometimes difficult to tell whether Frith is predicting or describing this new state. He begins his article by saying that he's not convinced that Anglo-American·domination of popular music is "as extensive or secure as it seems," (263) suggesting a mixture of prognostication and description.

9. Although these sound very convincing scenarios, a problem with the accounts of Negus and Rutten is that there is no firm evidence that this is taking place. This is perhaps due to the reluctance of MNC staff to go on record to confirm this.

10. Writing on "globalisation" has been criticised by Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi (1992) for its neglect of the dimension of the nation-state. Negus implicitly recognises this in his discussion of national policy responses to musical inequalities (1993, 309).

11. Personal interview, 16 November 1993.

12 .Lash and Urry (1994) provide a strong case for retaining these problematic terms. Clearly, core and periphery cannot be equated with particular countries, given the massive inequalities within most nations. Nevertheless, it is still valid to talk of national differentiation.

13. Sadly, of course, from the various opposition groups, a reactionary Islamic fundamentalism emerged triumphant. The effects of "open readings" which invoke resistance certainly don't guarantee progressive change at the level of the state.

14. See also Frith (1987) for a discussion of the need for an aesthetics of popular music based around intensity of personal emotion — a discussion that addresses the issues of genre bracketed in this later article.

15. As Georgina Born points out, cautioning against an "excessive utopianism" in considerations of the politicising role of popular music:

> Music, with its pedagogic, ritual and emotive functions, has also been the medium par excellence for ideological conditioning and de-politicisation (1993, 270).
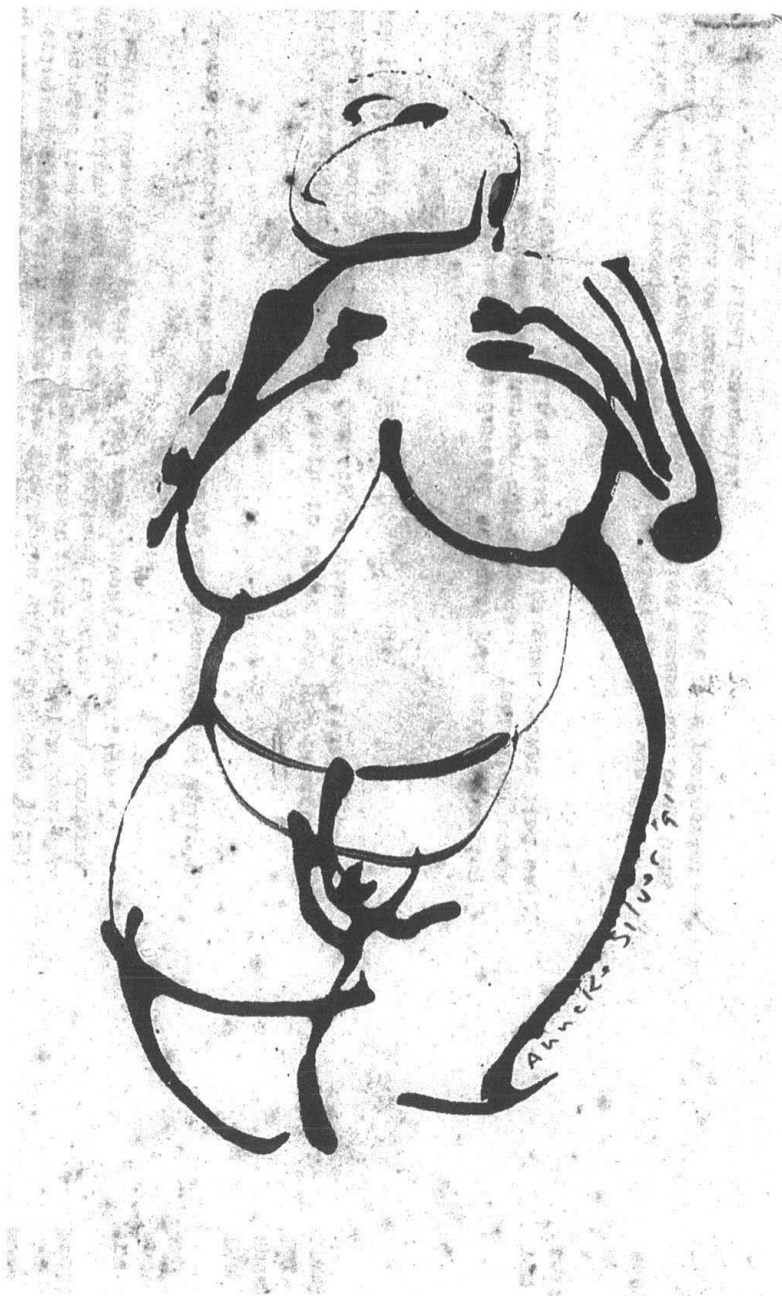
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