

Who May Speak? From a Politics of Popular Music to a Popular Politics of Music¹

Richard Middleton

The Mercury Music Award, a British music industry prize designed as an equivalent to prestigious literary prizes like the Booker, went in 1994 to the dance-pop band M-people. Trade magazine *Music Week*, while going along with the general acclaim which greeted this verdict, was unhappy about the presence on the judging panel of “egghead academics and journalists who think too much for their own good” (*Music Week*, 6 August 1994). (Presumably the *Music Week* editor who wrote this sees himself as a journalist who doesn’t think too much.) The Chair of the panel was Simon Frith, a leading popular music scholar. Around the same time, a piece appeared in the Newsletter of the United Kingdom branch of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music by sociologist Keith Negus—himself author of books on the music industry—attacking articles on rave music by two other well-known pop academics, Angela McRobbie and Philip Tagg (see Negus 1994, McRobbie 1993, Tagg 1994). Negus criticized their use of “apocalyptic gener-

¹ Versions of this paper were read not only at the “Border Crossings” conference but also at the Fourth Annual Conference of the Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology, University of Tampere, and at a Critical Musicology conference at University College Salford, both in April 1995. Thanks to participants for their comments. Much of the present version also appears in the Proceedings of the Tampere conference, published by the University’s Department of Folk Tradition with IASPM-Norden.

alization based on distant observations of and conversations with dancing offspring." In other words, they were appropriating something they didn't understand: "something is happening and you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?" (Negus 1994, 4).

In both cases, what is at issue is whose music this is, or more specifically, who may speak about it. Of course, this question is a long-standing one. Not only has it shadowed discussions of twentieth-century popular music styles from their beginnings, but it can be traced back even earlier. Perhaps popular cultures and subaltern practices have always been subject to incorporation by mainstream culture—often through reinterpretation—and perhaps this has always produced resentment and resistance. But with pop music this tension takes on a special intensity. Frequently the music is felt to present itself explicitly as an "other," a dirty alternative to the clean world of school, career, family, and responsibility—as an anti-intellectual celebration of forbidden zones and visceral pleasures. Indeed, to some intellectuals this is precisely its attraction. At the same time, many popular music academics, despite being inescapably positioned by education and role within the elite social bloc, feel that this *is* their music. They love it—but more than that, they feel it is part of their life-pattern, their world-view; in many cases, they were fans before they were scholars. For Negus it is a problem that scholars "mix up our musical euphoria and academic rhetoric from time to time" (*ibid.*). But, as Gillian Skirrow has suggested, "In investigating popular culture the only way not to feel like a snooping health visitor, sniffing out whether someone's environment is fit to live in, is to examine some aspect or form of it which evokes passionate feelings in oneself" (Skirrow 1986, 115). My own coinage of the term "scholar-fan" derives from the same impulse (Middleton

1993, 180). The intent is not to appropriate but simply to participate: to allow the music's gestures to energize the scholar-participant, producing a phenomenology of subjective response guided by the "implicit theory" of the vernacular practice. What is at stake here, then, is the politics of the Low-Other (as it has been called).² My general argument will be threefold: firstly, that it is not only legitimate but essential for the intellectual to study popular music; secondly that this requires a position "on the far side" of vernacular knowledge; thirdly, that the ramifications of such a process for musical studies as a whole are profound. Another way of putting this would be to suggest that intellectuals need to study popular music not so much for *its* sake (for most of its history it has managed pretty well without such attention) but for their own.

In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White dissect the role of the Low-Other in the collective psychology of the modern West, tracing the movements of its relationship with bourgeois High culture from the sixteenth century to the twentieth. At issue, they argue, was "the formation of the cultural Imaginary of the middle class in post-Renaissance Europe," involving "an internal distancing from the popular which was complex and often contradictory in its effects" (1986, 193). The whole project of Western modernity is inscribed within the sign of this pathology, marked by the mutual impress of denial and desire. Inside and outside produced each other; the bourgeois Subject was actually formed through the construction of High/Low demarcations in a range of discursive do-

² The Low-Other can be thought of as that cultural subject which is positioned by elite social forces as the alteritous partner of High cultural practices. See Middleton 2000.

mains, which were in turn mapped on to a range of social groups, and vice versa. As this suggests, the main strategies were either *appropriation*—introjection, repression, negation, and transformation of the Low—or *projection*—externalizing the Low and depicting it in the form of cultural stereotypes; both can readily be found in the history of musical practice and of musical scholarship. It is clear, for example, that the category of popular music, as we know it, came into being, around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in conjunction with the concept of musical classics, with its canon of superior works; the two were mutually determinative, what was excluded justifying the boundary which protected what was included. William Weber's study (1992) of the eighteenth-century British roots of the canon leaves no doubt that the construction of historical repertoires of "good music" in Britain was a response, largely among conservative social groups, to fears of the corruption and vulgarization of taste which, it was thought, were accompanying the growing commercialization of leisure. However, the Low was not only distanced, it was also annexed; significantly, the beginnings of the appropriation of "folk airs" for the bourgeois drawing room, leading to exploitation of this material by composers such as Haydn and Beethoven, dates from the same period. From here to the contradictory responses to jazz, rock, and rap is a lengthy and convoluted journey, but an unbroken one.

The popular music scholar is located inescapably within this history, as potential *pater familias*, colonist, secret slummer; the dangers of romantic populism or interpretive exploitation, perhaps colored these days with the crude "wannabe" politics of identity-consumerism, are real ones. Yet as bourgeois intellectuals, we ourselves are internally split. If we can come to terms with the Low within, this helps release the Low without to speak for

itself, freeing its internal differences from the straitjacket of stereotyping. As Houston Baker puts it, an assertion of self by the Other is “never simply a coming into being, but always, also, a release from a BEING POSSESSED” (Baker 1987, 56). Of course, the issues here are familiar to us from ethnography, where, especially in recent years, the relationship between “informant” and “observer” has been the subject of intensive reconsideration. In the new, reflexive ethnography, the relationship is figured as a dialogue, the different stories being complementary if always incomplete. But, given popular music’s position of internal colonialism within the Western musical field, there is something quite specific here. If pop scholars are “indigenous ethnographers,” the ethnomusicologists of Western music, they are themselves traversed by the colonial split. They are both observer and informant; release of the Other will also be a self-release. This dual release is a liberation of difference, a refusal of false simplicity.³ Thus, in response to demands that popular music be kept pure, outside the net of intellectual discourse, we can say, along with James Clifford, that we do not “see the world as populated by endangered authenticities—pure products always going crazy;” rather we acknowledge a multiplicity of differentiated but interconnected worlds requiring “space for specific paths through modernity” (Clifford 1988, 5). To do this we will have to fracture inherited psychological and cultural structures. Baker, discussing the emancipation of the Black-Other (whom he depicts as “Caliban”) argues that “any conceivable global modernism...must be articulated through Caliban’s expressive traditions—traditions that sing a joyful song on the far side of an acknowledgment of the fic-

³ For an argument coming from a different angle but making a similar point, see Goodwin 1998.

tional character of 'self' and 'other'" (Baker 1987, 61). The process hinges upon what Baker calls "deformation of mastery," and because such deformation works to free the Low-Other to accept internal differences, it also frees the master-discourse to acknowledge its own differences to itself, rather than projecting them outwards or assimilating them into false identity.

Methodologically, this position carries specific difficulties, as I have hinted, but it also creates special advantages. Standing in a two-sided margin, the popular music scholar can face both ways. Black Studies, which has built on W.E.B. Dubois's notion of the African-American's "double consciousness," offers a model. Henry Louis Gates (1988), along with Houston Baker (1984), has located a "vernacular theory" in the practices of African-American music and oral literature themselves, a theory which they term "Signifyin(g)." The missing "(g)" indicates the contrast with conventional "signification"; the former, focused on the paradigmatic plane, operates through dialogic variations of a "changing same," while the latter, focused on the syntagmatic plane, constructs linear chains of representations. Applying such a "double-voiced" perspective to the music of the Low-Other frees it from analytical presuppositions associated with appropriative and projective strategies alike.⁴ What emerges is no pure essence but rather a spectrum of possibilities drawing on a range of materials and trajectories, with determinate meaning endlessly deferred. Indeed, Baker's and Gates's preferred image is not that

⁴ For applications of the theory of signifyin(g) to music, see Brackett 1995 (Chapter 4) and Tomlinson 1991. Of course, to the extent that the influence of African-American music on pop demonstrates a Black-Low filiation, not only can the Baker-Gates strategy act as a model for popular music scholars, but their specific vernacular theory itself can also be applied to this music.

of the margin but of the crossroads or railroad crossing. Some scholars, such as Paul Gilroy (1993), have responded to the ideological emancipation of the Black-Other by explicitly locating black people within the historical "black Atlantic," as crucial and active agents in the construction of Western modernity as a whole. This in turn re-writes the wider historical script, revealing lacunae, internal contradictions, and hidden agendas within the master-discourse of the post-Enlightenment West.

As suggested above, one could predict that freeing up the Low-Other to speak for itself will have similarly radical effects on the discourse of High music culture, including that of musicology. Indeed some musicologists have begun to recognize that what is at issue here is precisely the authority of their discipline to define the field.⁵ "To the extent," writes Philip Bohlman, "that musicologists concerned largely with the traditions of Western art music were content with a single canon...they were, in effect, using the process of disciplining to cover up the racism, colonialism, and sexism [and also, we might add, the class prejudice] that underlie [it]..." (1992, 198). "Freedom from these forces," adds Don Randel, "will require the unmasking of the supporting oppositions—the removal of their polarities, their deconstruction" (1992, 20). Such observations recall the historical complexity inscribed in the question: who may speak about popular music? One might ask: can intellectuals speak about the popular? This is an old question, as we saw earlier. One might also ask: can intellectuals—or indeed

⁵ Many musicologists still cling to their positions of power, however. For example, Jean-Jacques Nattiez accepts that he is "conversing" with his "informants" in the "foreign" music culture; but he insists that the analyst possesses irreducible "facts." The idea that "analysis must be made by the people" is "epistemologically absurd" and "politically demagogic" (Nattiez 1990, 189).

anyone—speak with any authority about anything? This is a relatively new, postmodern question, part of the deconstruction of the “grand narratives”: the foundations of rationality, judgment, and subjectivity. But of course the two questions are connected, since the first owes its present intensity to the forces set moving in that very moment, from the 1960s on, in which the revolt of the whole range of Others, via feminism, postcolonialism, cultural studies, and so on, laid siege to the entire edifice of the modern paradigm and established the outlines of a new historical phase.

It is worth looking more closely at the history of which that moment forms a part. John Shepherd (1994) has explored some of the factors involved: the partial fracturing of seemingly monolithic social and economic forms, and the advent of welfarist consumer capitalism, which led both to rock ‘n’ roll and the Beatles, and to cultural studies and the beginnings of popular music studies. The *danse macabre* of the modernism/mass culture couple, typical of the earlier part of the century, was, if not swept from the stage, at least re-choreographed. To these factors, we can add the emergence of the modern discipline of ethnomusicology. As Philip Bohlman (1992) has pointed out, this discipline is distinguished now by a tendency to replace the earlier paradigms of comparative musicology, in which the Western canon was always the touchstone for comparison, with a new valorization of incommensurable difference. Lying behind this change, undoubtedly, was the world-wide post-war movement towards de-colonization, with its concomitants in the intellectual sphere of *négritude*, Black Power, and other post-colonial cultural theories. Also at the same time, the first strands in classical music of what would later be termed postmodernism appear, in the music of Cage and

his followers and the early minimalists. In both, a new fluidity across the High/Low boundary is characteristic.

In the 1980s and 90s all these tendencies were further strengthened. As one might expect, developments in musical practice and in concepts of musical scholarship go together. So the crisis of the canon today, and the recurrent questioning of musical categories, runs parallel with the crisis of authority and method in the disciplines of musicology and ethnomusicology.

Similar connections appear if we trace the earlier history of the High-Low relationship. This is a history which has not yet been written in any detail—and needs to be, if we are to grasp fully the nature of present changes. Thus the moment at which the very concept of High culture music and its canon were emerging, along with a new sort of distancing of respectable people from popular music—namely, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—also saw the beginnings of historical musicology and of the anthropology of music. At the same time, classical composers were developing the techniques to enable their music to represent more graphically both the Self and a whole range of Others, either portraying them through stereotypic idioms or appropriating the raw materials on which such idioms drew into integrated wholes. Musical Romanticism provides the clearest examples both of the development of techniques for the exploration of self-identity and for the portrayal of “foreign” others. Already in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* we find a striking model of how composers could now put women, non-whites, and the vulgar musically in their respective places, locating them in relation to the beneficent discourse of Enlightened Man.⁶ The development of a world history, with such a Man at its

⁶ I explore this area in more detail in Middleton 2000.

center, required that these Others be both musically and discursively disciplined.

The pressures this discipline imposed in the nineteenth century—the paranoias over sexuality and race, the stigmatizing of the mob, the unwashed, the slum—are well known (and well illustrated by *Stallybrass and White*). One strategy was to essentialize differences of gender, race, or class that had previously been regarded as functional or sociological, thus implying that they were grounded in Nature. The academy, through the disciplines of physical anthropology, philosophy, psychology, and medicine, played a full part in this. Contradictions abounded. For example, though “good” music could be fenced off from the vulgar by allocating it to the realm of Spirit and Imagination, and by developing a “male” model of musicology (“rational” and high-minded) for its analysis and documentation, nevertheless traditional notions of music as feminine, sensual, vulgar, and morally dangerous would keep creeping back into discourse. One solution to this was to relegate such characterizations to the category of popular music: as Andreas Huyssen and others have shown, mass culture, musical and otherwise, has persistently been figured as “feminine”—passive, sensual, repetitive, and instinctive (Huyssen 1986, Modleski 1986). In a book like the best-selling *Music and Morals*, by the Victorian clergyman H. R. Haweis, the entire field of music, together with the author’s hierarchy of value-judgments, is structured by the intersecting registers of class, gender, and race, with sentimental ballad-singing women and comic “niggers” joining bawling street musicians at the bottom of the heap.

By the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the increasingly professionalized disciplines of musicology and comparative musicology were tightening their grip on their subject-matter under a governing posi-

tivist paradigm. At the same time, virulent fears accompanying the emergent mass society set off new criticisms of the cultural Low. In the United States, as Lawrence Levine (1988) has shown, it is only at this point that an earlier degree of flexibility over the High-Popular boundary is finally squashed, giving way to a triumphant elitism. In Britain too, against an intellectual context of Nietzschean anxiety about the threat of the totalitarian crowd, "mass culture" and "art for art's sake" emerged together, bred by "competitive commerce" from the "fatal division of men into the cultivated and degraded classes," as William Morris put it (1962, 139). All types of music were dragged from previously separate locations by the new mass media and assembled in the same social space, where they both defined and were forced to respond to each other. Thus, the Victorian social metaphor of the ladder, which, given the requisite effort and self-discipline, it was possible to climb, was replaced with the idea of a definitive bifurcation into Highbrow and Lowbrow. Tensions within the work of modernist composers were intense; products of the Enlightenment-Romantic heritage, repositories of elite critique, vehicles of negation of crass commercialism, such music necessarily set itself apart from the "people"—as Adorno among others trenchantly argues—yet the fascination of Debussy, Bartók, and Stravinsky with the "folk," the street, and the "primitive" is easily apparent.⁷

For all the vicissitudes of the next few decades, it was fundamentally this structure of feeling and practice, set in place at the beginning of the century, which was then the subject of fracturing forces in the 1960s. What is at stake is set forth by Paul Ricoeur: "When we ac-

⁷ For an explanation of modernism from this point of view, see Born 1995, Chapter 2.

knowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with the destruction of our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just *others*, that we ourselves are an 'other' among others" (1965, 278). But, given that these relations are structured not in pure difference but in inequality, power imbalance is always a factor; there is always a structure of dominance, and some "others" may function as countercultures—specifically, as "countercultures of modernity," to use Paul Gilroy's phrase. My argument would be that it is impossible to grasp Western music culture across the whole period of modernity without disentangling the High/Low relationship, as it has configured both musical practices and human subjectivities—in particular, without operating the countercultural perspective, "reading up from down." And we may find that, to quote George Lipsitz, "a sideshow can sometimes be the main event" (1990, 20).

As suggested earlier, not the least effect of such a reconfiguration will be felt in the sphere of intellectual practice. To think through this change requires that we develop and re-cast the classic Gramscian theory of the intellectual, whose role Gramsci described as "the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone" (1971, 9). As the "knowledge-base" in our "information societies" ceaselessly expands, and the mass-mediated circulation of "vernacular philosophy"—"common sense," as Gramsci calls it—speeds and intensifies, and as the tentacles of commodity culture penetrate even the most elite spheres of musical practice, Edward Said's (1994) romantically-colored picture of the intellectual as exiled, autonomous, and proudly marginal looks increasingly anachronistic. The waters of desacralization lap around the last redoubts from which music intellectuals might claim a position for attacking

mainstream culture from outside. Nowadays, such autonomy has been irredeemably recuperated to “tradition,” and any new movement of critique—any reimagining of the role of Gramsci’s “organic intellectual”—is likely to be pursued through dialogic rearticulation of position, from within. As intellectual jobs become more specialized and professionalized, so, ironically, intellectual functions become more diffused. Already in 1936, Walter Benjamin could see ordinary filmgoers as “experts.” Now, in the conditions of late capitalist society, we can see that the corollary of the crisis of the intellectual is the intellectualization of a general crisis. Life is “textualized,” social differences are “culturalized,” and the “double consciousness” of Said’s marginalized exile is becoming a generalized quality in a society of margins. Among discursive practices which follow is the feature identified by Gregory Ulmer (1983) as the very principle of deconstructive “post-criticism”: intertextual montage, a criticism by citation. We find this at the center not only of contemporary pop production practice (in the sampler-governed recording studio) but also pop vernacular discourse. “It’s like X—with a touch of Y—only different—the groove comes from Z—but the singing...”—this is criticism as overdubbing.

Such intercourse between academy and street is a symptom, not a panacea. For the pop academic, the Adornian warning—of fetishized listening, standardized products, false resolutions of grinding contradictions—throws a permanent shadow; collapsing diverse levels and moments would betray the vernacular itself. Yet, to think about Adorno in this context is to realize the deep irony that runs through his theory. He certainly was not wrong to identify tendencies in the operations of what he termed the “culture industries” whose ambition it is to push musical structures and forms of listening into stan-

dardized channels. And he was well aware that the historical processes responsible for these tendencies—namely the Dialectic of Enlightenment, as he called it, with its triumph of instrumental reason—actually created the category of the “popular,” by exclusion from the field of “art.” This explains his oft-repeated image of musical culture under capitalism as two sides of a torn whole, to which, however, they could never add up. But Adorno never fully acknowledged that this split ran through himself as well, creating the typical structures of denial and desire, appropriation and projection; the resulting ambivalences pervade his theory and his language.

Adorno writes about the impulsive, natural, sensual character of pre-modern popular music, and he is prepared to defend its quality of “orgiastic intoxication” (1976, 21), especially because it provided raw material which could be sublimated, brought into consciousness, by “cultivated” composers. While “nature” in Adorno is always the historical construct “second nature,” nevertheless a yearning sense of an ideal of “primitive immediacy” seems to slip inadvertently into his writing. When in the nineteenth century this pre-capitalist “people” is destroyed, swallowed up into an all-consuming mass culture, then that almost mythic sense of popular music disappears, too. “Folklore” is now entirely a bourgeois construction. Only small remnants of the old instinctual traditions remain, for instance in “traces of orgiastic memories in Offenbach’s can-can” (ibid., 25). Now they are fetishized, and an image of the “natural” is presented as “culinary delights which seek to be consumed immediately for their own sake” (1978a, 274). Thus popular music, according to Adorno’s model, now has a *petit bourgeois* location, pasting traces of mimicked spontaneity on to a decadent, *gesunken* version of contemporary classical music—the “obsolete or depraved material of art music” (1978b, 160), the “dregs

(1978b, 160), the “dregs of musical history” (1976, 29). What has happened is that, in a move from projection to appropriation, popular music for Adorno has passed straight from the sphere of “nature” to that of commodity, without passing through “culture” properly speaking at all.

Yet Adorno’s language, dripping with highly-charged adjectives, betrays the tensions and even, perhaps, the forbidden desires which his theory denies. He regards “jazz” as not specifically African-American at all; its difference is pseudo-difference plastered on to the “depraved stock of late Romanticism” (1976, 24). Even so, he cannot resist describing its bass drum as representing the “dance-like primal feelings of colonial peoples” (1978b, 163). The jitterbuggers’ dancing “is stylized like the ecstasies savages go into in beating the war drums;” and if their bodies cannot entirely maintain the stylization, it is as if “the weak flesh punishes the lies of the willing spirit; the gestural ecstasy of the infantile listener misfires in the face of the ecstatic gesture” (1978a, 292). Susan McClary (1991, 65) has pointed out the lip-smacking relish with which Adorno explicitly makes a link between Low, racial and gendered Others when he asserts that “The aim of jazz is the mechanical reproduction of a regressive moment, a castration symbolism. ‘Give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated,’ the eunuch-like sound of the jazz band both mocks and proclaims, ‘and you will be rewarded, accepted into a fraternity which shares the mystery of impotence with you, a mystery revealed at the moment of the initiation rite’” (Adorno 1981, 129).

Similar ambivalence sounds through Adorno’s analyses of nineteenth-century *kitsch* (as he calls it). Gounod’s *Ave Maria*, for example, is described as a sacred *Schlager*, fusing penitence and lust; he compares this

to a description he has come across of the formula of English music hall: "put three half-naked girls on a revolving stage. Then play the organ." "Overcome with remorse," he writes, this Mary Magdalene wants to "reveal all. Thus saccharined religion becomes the bourgeois cloak for a tolerated pornography...The soul delivers itself into the hands of the Almighty with uplifted skirt...The dress that bears her aloft reveals her thigh...the upward sweep is so overwhelming...the climax comes...[O]nce the...[sinners] have experienced their moment of bliss, it is irrelevant to ask where they have been transported to..." (Adorno 1992, 37-8).

This language displays such a charge that it is hard to imagine that Adorno has not felt the appeal of these forbidden fruits. The "folk," the "primitive," the possibility of truly instinctually intoxicating popular music, are dead, says Adorno; but these losses can only be lamented by one who has invented the categories in the first place. Characteristically, the roots of the Adornian project in Enlightenment reason carry with them a Rousseauian fascination, tinged with guilt, with what supposedly has been lost or corrupted, but which in reality has never really been allowed to speak for itself.

The complexities, obvious and hidden, of Adorno's position provide a salutary confirmation to the student of pop that to acknowledge one's own imprisonment by the dialogue of Self and Others is a necessary first step. At the same time, Adorno's insistence that the "popular" may not always be everything it is presented to be is a necessary corrective to any over-eager celebrations of street credibility.

The strategy I am proposing makes no initial pre-suppositions about the specific ideological relations within which the popular might be situated at any given moment. It simply refuses to start from the view from

above. In fact, there is widespread recognition in the vernacular discourses themselves that the Low is no less ideologically fractured than the High, as we see from debates around the pop/rock couple, about the relationship of artistry and commerce, and so on—and in the common picturing of the popular as a site of struggle (in rap or rave, for example). This fracturing is compounded by power imbalances; thus mainstream white pop often finds itself located, not only as Other to a High Self, but also as Self to a Black-Other or a World Music-Other. Emancipation, here as much as in the dialogics of academic and vernacular, is always provisional, endlessly deferred along the chain of splitting positionalities, for “Cultural *poesis*—and politics—is the constant reconstitution of selves and others through specific exclusions, conventions and discursive practices” (Clifford 1986, 24).

Nevertheless, even though deconstruction of Self-Other relationships is in principle endless, when one (anyone) comes to speak about music, that moment is *situated*. A certain intersection of discursive trajectories takes place, and there is some sort of claim for authority, however conditional. Frith (1992) is incisive on the academic use of pop as a site for intellectual fantasizing, produced by “an anxiety-driven search by radical intellectuals and rootless academics for a model of consumption—...for the organic intellectual of the high street who can *stand in for them*.” But he also notes the influence of academic theories on the vernacular discourses: “if fans are ‘popular’ (or organic) intellectuals, then they may well have the same anxieties about being fans (and take comfort from the same myths) as the rest of us” (180, 182). As this dialogue spirals on, back and forth, the important issue is less that of specific guilt-trips, and more the increasingly generalized cultural condition—focusing

on anxieties around identity, authenticity, and difference—that sustains it.

Rather than advocate the valorization of difference for its own sake, I am more persuaded by the perspectivalism espoused by, for example, Susan Bordo.⁸ In her study of contemporary constructions of the female body, Bordo (1993) sets up postmodernism's refusal of subjective authority as actually a mirror-image of its supposed antagonist, modernity's "terroristic" Reason; against the projected "view from nowhere" of Western rationalism stands the (equally disembodied) postmodern fantasy of a "view from everywhere." But we *are* embodied; thus "one is always *somewhere*, and limited..." (229)—limited by the contingencies of biology, history, and culture. It is this situatedness which creates certain qualified but systemic commonalities, so that it becomes reasonable to make generalizations about the conditions of women, subordinate ethnic groups, and the Low. Indeed, it is precisely the task of the intellectual (academic or vernacular) once having submitted to the hazard of self-deconstruction, at a second moment, to make connections—whether connections of surface (local to local) or of depth (local to broader or even global).⁹ In a world presenting itself as one of fragments, such connectivism is the best understanding now of Gramsci's "critical elaboration." It should be sharply distinguished from strategies of totalization. In Gary Tomlinson's words, "Vernacularism...attempts...to theorize the space between *itself and others*—to keep sight, so to speak, of the other modes of thought around it by keeping them above its horizon" (1991, 231-2; Tomlinson's emphasis). As I have

⁸ Of course, there is a lineage to this kind of position, going back to Nietzsche, but Bordo's version is particularly appropriate to my argument here.

⁹ On making connections of these kinds, see Marcus 1986.

suggested elsewhere, we need “to ‘walk round’ the entire topography, holding this map in the mind so that there is ultimately a committed point of view which is nevertheless aware of a structure of mutually critical perspectives analogous to the structure of the musical practice itself” (Middleton 1990, 125).

It is clear from this, I hope, that the strategy proposed here is a dialogical one, in the specific sense which Bakhtin made available to us. As the dialogue of High and Low is deconstructed, freeing the High Cultural Self from the prison of transcendental significance, the historical expropriation of the music claimed by this Self from “the people” (in a loosely defined sense) is laid bare. Elitist aesthetics and the “musical appreciation racket,” to use Virgil Thomson’s phrase, formed the twin mechanisms through which this theft, by canonizers and musicologists, was perpetrated; the vernacularization of classical music exploding through global music culture in the 1990s, and contemporaneous interest in strategies of “popular listening,” mark the signs of its possible overturning.¹⁰ As the dialogue of High and Low is reconfigured, so the internal differences of both High and Low are freed up, and a dialogical mode of analysis also comes more clearly into view. Popular music has commonly tended towards inter-textuality, style eclecticism, and multivocal textures and structures, tendencies amplified by practices in the modern recording studio. But this is only a dramatic demonstration of what, for Bakhtin, is a universal; for him, signs are always inter-textual, always and unavoidably referring to other signs and previous discourses, and hence subjectivity is created in dialogue

¹⁰ For discussions of “popular listening,” see Cook 1990 and Stefani 1987. Examples of “popular listening” are to hear sonata form as a structure of themes, not one of keys, and to focus listening on what Stefani calls “singable music.”

with other subjects and discourses. Thus "the self must be thought of as a project"; it is "an act of grace, a gift of the other" (Clark and Holquist 1984, 72, 68). Musical systems can be thought of in terms of the sediment of this historical dialogue, though of course this sediment is being stirred all the time by the currents of cultural renewal. Within the history of modern Europe, Bakhtin sees the dialogue of High and Low as possessing a particular importance, so much so that all the more localized dialogical processes are always inflected by this large relationship. And even seemingly monologic utterances are dialogic; not only are they formed in a way that implies the relationship of author and listener, but at the same time their style and meaning also operate in implicit dialogue with those other styles and meanings current in the cultural field which are absent.

Like other polyphonic music, the constituent voices of pop textures—lead and bass, call and response, riff and variant, and so on—can be heard as forming a dialogue, each speaking from a different position. Each voice may contain specific style-elements, with specific associations, summoning up a specific history or cultural locale. The stylistic eclecticism of many songs creates a situation in which styles signify in relation to each other, in a field of meaning which is "structured in difference." One mode of analysis is to envisage the styles as speaking and interacting with each other on a variety of discursive planes—class, gender, ethnicity, and so on—so that we can picture them as being positioned, for any given discursive plane, along axes of meaning: "individual-collective," "black-white," "romance-sex," etc. By drawing out these axes on the various planes, we can put together a series of discursive maps of the style-terrain that is operative in a particular song.

In work on the Eurythmics (Middleton 1995), I have analyzed the multiple "voices" of style, genre, and texture in this manner. For example, the gender plane is particularly important for this band. The conflict within Western culture between the notion that music is somehow "feminine," and the simultaneous tendency to exploit art's location in the (Lacanian) symbolic order so as to align it with structures of patriarchal authority, leads to a gendered distribution of styles and genres, some being regarded as more "masculine," others as more "feminine." The ballad, drawing on the code of "romance," is clearly located (stereotypically) in the "feminine" sphere and can be placed at one pole of the axis; at the opposite pole stands the clearly "masculine" sphere of blues, a music that (again stereotypically) celebrates "sex" rather than "romance." This sort of stylistic dialogics is exploited continually in the Eurythmics' songs. At the same time, given singer Annie Lennox's classical training and the elements of pseudo-operatic vocalism she employs, the High-Low plane is a factor of considerable importance, too.

This mode of analysis need not be confined to popular music. Similar approaches to the supposedly smooth syntheses of the classical repertory have begun to appear, notably from Susan McClary (1991), Carolyn Abbate (1993), and Lawrence Kramer (1990, 1993). So far this mostly concerns the suppressions, evasions, and partly hidden voices of gender. But there is no reason to suppose that the Low is not also trembling to give voice—and not as raw material refined out of recognition but, to quote Abbate, as "other sources... [which] ...split the sonorous fabric into multiple originating speakers, whose bodies exist behind what is heard" (1993, 235). What would it mean to hear *The Magic Flute* as focused around Papageno and Papagena? Or to read Mahler's

Ninth through its “backward” (vulgar) elements, rather than hear those elements, as Anthony Newcomb (1992) does, as a means to create a “forward-moving” teleology? To hear Beethoven’s Seventh not in terms of a heroic composer drawing on dance elements in order to invent new “characteristic” styles, but in terms of a dancing Low, who is composing Beethoven? We need to uncover the cultural dialogue structuring, but disguised in, the particular moment, and then, as Kramer puts it, “to read as inscribed within the immediacy-effects of music itself the kind of mediating structures usually positioned outside music under the rubric of context” (1992, 10). Kramer’s own analysis of a Mozart Divertimento does this admirably, reading the textures as a staging of the “civilizing” effort needed for an artistic distancing from the palpable body of the Low—except that the story is still told from within the dominant problematic, using the terms of the post-Enlightenment intellectual. My question for Kramer would be: what would it mean to hear this music from the vantage-point not of the drawing-room but of the street?

A final thought: in one sense, the deconstruction of the musical Subject in a way reconstitutes on new ground the old idea that what music represents lies somehow in the interior of the subject. But if subjectivity is socially constructed, there is continuity between “inside” and “outside,” not a Cartesian split. It is that split which gave rise in the first place to “representation,” situated as this is, with clear historical specificity—as Heidegger, Foucault, Rorty, and others have taught us—at the heart of the epistemological obsession of Western modernity. According to Heidegger, “the fact that the world becomes a picture at all is what distinguishes the modern age...The word ‘picture’ now means the structured image that is the crea-

ture of man's producing which represents and sets before. In such producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is" (1977, 149-50). The apparent split within Western musical semantics between internalism and externalism is precisely to do with the fractures that inevitably accompany such philosophical imperialism. To challenge this structure does not imply a regression to Romantic cults of immediacy (themselves a product of the structure). Even if all music, all culture, is always and everywhere a mediated process, and always, unavoidably, drenched in meanings, it does not follow that it is necessarily representational in this modern sense. Lifting at least partially from the shoulders of the Low the mechanisms of portrayal, stereotypic expression, and all the giant apparatus of representation, we may find that popular strands in the music culture have operated, in part, according to a different paradigm: perhaps a "gesturology," which may be most appropriately considered within a cultural ecology of performativity, according to the rubrics of somatic processing, or "music-acts."¹¹ Philip Bohlman (1993) has predicted that we may discover something similar in our encounters with non-Western musics. We might push the argument even further. To the extent that the Low has been willy-nilly a co-producer of the High-Western repertory, deconstructing this dialogue may uncover in this repertory too, intimately mixed with the structures of musical representation, something that looks suspiciously like a would-be politics of musical practice.

¹¹ On "gestural analysis," see Middleton 1993.

References

- Abbate, Carolyn. 1993. "Opera; or the Envoicing of Women." In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Adorno, Theodor W. 1976. *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. Trans. E.B. Ashton. New York: Seabury Press.
- . 1978a. "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening." In *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt. Oxford: Blackwell.
- . 1978b. "On the Social Situation of Music." *Telos* 35: 128-64.
- . 1981. *Prisms*. London: Neville Spearman.
- Baker, Houston A., Jr. 1984. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1987. *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1992. *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. London and New York: Verso.
- Bohlman, Philip V. 1992. "Ethnomusicology's Challenge to the Canon: The Canon's Challenge to Ethnomusicology." In *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons*, ed. Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1993. "Musicology as a Political Act." *Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 4: 411-36.
- Bordo, Susan. 1993. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Born, Georgia. 1995. *Rationalising Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalisation of the Musical Avant-Garde*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Brackett, David. 1995. *Interpreting Popular Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, Katerina, and Michael Holquist. 1984. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, James. 1986. "Introduction: Partial Truths." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- . 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cook, Nicholas. 1990. *Music, Imagination and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frith, Simon. 1992. "The Cultural Study of Popular Music." In *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence G. Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler. New York and London: Routledge.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. 1988. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.
- Goodwin, Andrew. 1998. "Drumming and Memory: Scholarship, Technology, and Music-Making." In *Mapping the Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory*, ed. Thomas Swiss, John Sloop, and Andrew Herman. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. Ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowel Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Haweis, H. R. 1873. *Music and Morals*, 3rd ed. London: Harper & Brothers.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977. "The Age of the World Picture." In *The Question Concerning Technology*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Garland Publishers.
- Huyssen, Andreas. 1986. "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other." In *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Kramer, Lawrence. 1990. *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- . 1992. "The Musicology of the Future." *repercussions* 1, no. 1: 5-18.
- . 1995. *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Levine, Lawrence. 1988. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lipsitz, George. 1990. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marcus, George E. 1986. "Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- McClary, Susan. 1991. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McRobbie, Angela. 1993. "Shut Up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity." *Cultural Studies* 7, no. 3: 406-26.
- Middleton, Richard. 1990. *Studying Popular Music*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- . 1993. "Popular Music Analysis and Musicology: Bridging the Gap." *Popular Music* 12, no. 2: 177-90.
- . 1995. "Authorship, Gender and the Construction of Meaning in the Eurythmics' Hit Recordings." *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3: 465-85.
- . 2000. "Musical Belongings: Western Music and its Low-Other." In *Western Music and Its Others*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Modleski, Tania. 1986. "Femininity as Mas(s)querade: A Feminist Approach to Mass Culture." In *High Theory, Low Culture: Analyzing Popular Television and Film*, ed. Colin McCabe. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Morris, William. 1962. *Selected Writings and Designs*. Ed. Asa Briggs. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. 1990. *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Negus, Keith. 1994. "Raving for a Method." *International Association for the Study of Popular Music United Kingdom Newsletter* (October): 3-4.
- Newcomb, Anthony. "Narrative Archetypes and Mahler's Ninth Symphony." In *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven P. Scher. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Randel, Don Michael. 1992. "The Canons in the Musicological Tool Box." In *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons*, ed. Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1965. *History and Truth*. Trans. Charles A. Kelbley. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Said, Edward W. 1994. *Representations of the Intellectual*. London: Vintage.
- Shepherd, John. 1994. "Music, Culture and Interdisciplinarity: Reflections on Relationships." *Popular Music* 13, no. 2: 127-41.

- Skirrow, Gillian. 1986. "Helluvision." In *High Theory, Low Culture: Analyzing Popular Television and Film*, ed. Colin McCabe. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. 1986. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen.
- Stefani, Gino. "Melody: A Popular Perspective." *Popular Music* 6, no. 1: 21-35.
- Tagg, Philip. 1994. "From Refrain to Rave: The Decline of Figure and the Rise of Ground." *Popular Music* 13, no. 2: 209-22.
- Thomson, Virgil. 1939. *The State of Music*. New York: W. Morrow and Co.
- Tomlinson, Gary. 1991. "Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies." *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2: 229-64.
- Ulmer, Gregory. 1983. "The Object of Post-Criticism." In *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster. London: Pluto Press.
- Weber, William. 1992. *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual and Ideology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.