The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock

This Companion maps the world of pop and rock, pinpointing the most significant moments in its history and presenting the key issues involved in understanding popular culture's most vital art form. Expert writers chart the changing patterns in the production and consumption of popular music, tracking the emergence of a vast industry with a turnover of billions and following the rise of global stars from Elvis to Public Enemy, Nirvana to the Spice Girls. They trace the way new technologies – from the amplifier to the Internet – have changed the sounds and practices of pop and they analyse the way maverick entrepreneurs have given way to multimedia corporations. In particular they focus on the controversial issues concerning race and ethnicity, politics, gender and globalisation. But at the heart of this Companion is the music itself – rock, pop, black music, dance music, world music – its impact, its power and its pleasures.

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POP AND ROCK

EDITED BY

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Will Straw and
John Street

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Introduction and chronology of pop and rock

The chronology of pop and rock which appears at the end of this introduction (see pages xi–xvii) might, at first glance, seem to detail the banal and the trivial, to mark out mundane moments in a period which saw two world wars, the assassination of presidents and civil rights leaders, coups and famines, the dropping of the atomic bomb and the discovery of the structure of DNA. In such a history, what place is there even for a few sad deaths (Brian Jones, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Ian Curtis and Kurt Cobain), let alone Gerry and the Pacemakers' 'How Do You Do It?' or Hanson's 'MMMBop'? And yet, of course, those deaths and those songs do matter. They are part of an industry that in 1999 had a worldwide turnover of $38 billion. The United States industry alone was worth $15 billion. Across the globe some 3.8 billion CDs, cassettes and minidiscs were sold. But these figures do not just describe a major industry, a source of revenue and of trade links, they also describe a source of meaning and pleasure. The songs and sounds being manufactured and bought have become part of the memories of people who use them to mark the passage of time; they have become the object of censors who fear for their effects and of propagandists who want to exploit those effects; they have helped to constitute national and ethnic and sexual identities; and they have been used to raise money and awareness of poverty and starvation, of oppression and environmental degradation. This book is about how this has happened (and about the arguments about how it happened). It traces the history of the musical forms that compose pop and rock; it looks at the industries, technologies and performers that gave them their particular character. It explores the ways in which musical pleasure was organised and enjoyed, and looks at the ways these pleasures linked to identities and locations across the world. And most importantly, this book documents the arguments and disputes that animate discussion of popular music: about the power of the industry that produces it, about the figures who have shaped it, about how and when it gives pleasure.

There was a time when pop and rock had no literature of its own, or what it had was neglected and patronised. These days the shelves are well stocked – with biographies and autobiographies, not just of rock stars, but even of rock journalists too. There is also a burgeoning academic market, serving the increasing number of university courses on popular music. And most recently, there have been the rock and pop guides, the most extensive collection of which are the *Rough Guides* – to world music, to

dance and techno, to rock and classical. From the people who gave you the *Rough Guide to Spain* and *Mexico* come books that point out the best sites for flamenco and salsa, for ambient house and garage. These guides exist as authoritative maps for the novice traveller, giving crucial tips on bargains and must-sees. This book is not a guide; it is a companion.

A companion is different. Where guides lead, companions accompany; where guides dictate, companions argue and share. This companion does not pretend to offer definitive accounts of the musical forms which it covers, rather it is presenting novel and provocative interpretations of those histories. It recognises that there is no settled history, no definitive canon. The contributors, all experts in their various fields, were briefed to survey their area and to review the ideas and arguments that mark the territory. They were not, however, asked to write dry, formal, cautious histories and surveys. They were asked to provoke, to raise questions about conventional wisdom and settled myths. Each chapter is meant to stimulate discussion, to feed back into the everyday arguments and responses which pop and rock themselves elicit.

The book is broken into three major sections. The first provides the context. Pop and rock were not the simple result of a youthful creative flowering. They were the result of shifts in demography, patterns of cultural production and developments in technology. The first three chapters, therefore, trace the emergence of the recording industry and the practices associated with it.

The words 'pop' and 'rock' do not refer to well-established traditions with clearly demarcated boundaries. From the beginning, there were strands and genres, each with their own histories and conditions of production. The second part of the book reflects upon some of those divergent forms. In particular, chapters are devoted to pop and rock, to rap and dance. These are, of course, not discrete forms, and each incorporates elements of the other. What is important, though, is to note the different ways in which musical forms are created and enjoyed, the way their histories coincide and diverge.

The final section reflects the issues and arguments that mark current concern about popular music – the political, academic and theoretical (and there is no neat distinction to be drawn here either) debates that run through understandings of popular music. It begins with a topic that links all those in the book: the way we make sense of music, whether we understand it musicologically or sociologically, as sounds or social experience. Overlaying this fundamental question, and the way it is answered through the institutionalisation of academic knowledge, are the ways in which society's forms and interests are inscribed in music. This includes music's intimate connection with sexual and ethnic identity, with racism and

sexism, and with state and oppositional politics, and with the effects of globalisation.

Interleaved with these chapters are a series of profiles of pop stars. As with the rest of the companion, these do not pretend to be entries in a pop encyclopaedia. They too give a perspective on the figures who have contributed most to pop and rock. Those profiled are not necessarily the artists who have sold most records or survived longest, nor necessarily those who appear in those numerous lists of the one hundred greatest or whatever. They have been selected because of the stories they tell about the history and character of pop and rock. So Jimi Hendrix's career, for example, represents the links with jazz, just as Elvis Presley's represents those with country music. They have been chosen for their centrality, too, within musical genres – James Brown and funk, Abba and Eurodisco, Public Enemy and rap, Derrick May and techno; and for the part they played in introducing new ideas and practices: David Bowie and art, Bob Dylan and bohemia, Madonna and video. Again, they may not have been the first or the most commercially successful, but they form key figures in popular music's serpentine history.

The sections of this companion do not divide neatly between the historical and factual and the polemical and the argumentative, between those chapters that provide data and those that take sides. They all do both. Drawing on recent research into the past and present of popular music, they offer novel perspectives on an apparently familiar landscape. Throughout the companion particular themes appear and reappear: the way in which ideas of 'race' and the practice of racism are part of the music industry's organisation and the musical forms; the way changing technologies alter what is made and heard; and how the 'globalisation' of popular music's political economy is a core component of how it is experienced and used.

Accompanying and linked to these themes is also a sense of the music's power to move and to shock, to cause delight and despair. This companion aims both to reflect on these features of pop and rock, and to deepen our understanding of them: to help explain why the seemingly trite moments in the brief chronology that follows matter so much.

A brief chronology of pop and rock

1877 Thomas Edison demonstrates the first phonograph

1889 Louis Glass of Pacific Phonograph Company creates the first version of the juke box

1896 Emile Berliner patents the flat recording disc

1909 US Copyright Act is amended to establish the basis for royalty payments for recorded music, and not just live performance

1914 American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) is formed to enable songwriters to claim the income due under the amended Copyright Act

1920 The first news-and-music US radio station, Westinghouse's KDKA, begins broadcasting

1926 BBC is created as a public corporation; its Music Department is set up the following year

1939 Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) is formed as a competitor to ASCAP and to represent the blues and country music ignored by its rival

1947 Wynonie 'Blues' Harris records, according to some commentators, the first rock song 'Good Rockin' Tonight'; Roy Brown releases another version in 1948

1952 The deejay Alan Freed names his radio show 'Moondog's Rock'n'Roll Party'

1953 Bill Haley and the Comets' 'Crazy Man Crazy' is the first rock'n'roll record to make the *Billboard* charts

1954 Elvis Presley releases 'That's All Right Mama' in US; UK release is not until 1956

1955 Little Richard records 'Tutti Frutti'
Bill Haley and the Comets perform 'Rock Around the Clock' in the film *The Blackboard Jungle*

1956 Elvis Presley's 'Heartbreak Hotel' is No. 1 for eight weeks in US; reaches No. 2 in UK
Lonnie Donegan releases 'Rock Island Line' (No. 8 in UK; No. 6 in US)
Tommy Steele's 'Singing the Blues' is No. 1 in UK

1957 *American Bandstand* is broadcast nationally, reaching an audience of 20 million and providing a launchpad for many fifties teen idols

1958 Elvis Presley is drafted into the US Army

1959 Buddy Holly, Richie Valens and the Big Bopper are killed in an air crash
Cliff Richard and the Shadows are No. 1 with 'Living Doll'
Juke Box Jury begins on BBC TV: celebrities vote on whether a single will be a 'hit' or a 'miss'

1960 Congressional investigation into payola begins; it reveals 'pay for play' arrangements between record companies and broadcasters

1962 The Beatles release 'Love Me Do', and later their first LP, *Please Please Me*
Cliff Richard and the Shadows are No. 1 with 'Summer Holiday'

The Rolling Stones begin a Sunday night residency at the Crawdaddy Club, Richmond
Bob Dylan releases his first album, *Bob Dylan*
Gerry and the Pacemakers' 'How Do You Do It?' is No. 1
The Beatles give their last performance at the Cavern Club in Liverpool
First press reports of 'Beatlemania' are published

1963 The Beatles release *With the Beatles*, and appear on *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* and at the *Royal Variety Show*
Ready Steady Go! begins broadcasting on Independent Television (ITV)

1964 The Beatles appear on the *Ed Sullivan Show*; their 'Love Me Do' and 'She Loves You' are No. 1 in the US; John Lennon publishes *In His Own Write*, a collection of his drawings and stories; the Beatles' first film, *A Hard Day's Night*, opens; The Beatles play New York's Shea Stadium (attendance: 55,600, a world record); they receive the MBE from the Queen
The Rolling Stones also appear on the *Ed Sullivan Show*
The pirate stations Radio London and Radio Caroline begin broadcasting
Country singer Jim Reeves dies in a plane crash; soon afterwards eight of his records are in the UK Top 20
The first edition of *Top of the Pops* is broadcast; it is still shown weekly
Robert Moog markets his synthesiser

1965 Otis Redding's *Otis Blue* album is released
Dylan is booed at the Newport Folk Festival and elsewhere for 'going electric'; he gets the same treatment when he tours the UK the following year

1966 The Cavern closes
UK singles rise 7*d* to 7*s* 3*d*
John Lennon says the Beatles are now more famous than Jesus
Pink Floyd take part in 'Spontaneous Underground' at the Marquee Club in London
The Beatles play their last ever tour concert at Candlestick Park, San Francisco
The Jimi Hendrix Experience play their first UK gig and release 'Hey Joe'

1967 'Giant Freakout All Night Rave' (featuring the Who, the Move and Pink Floyd) at the Roundhouse
'Giant Freakout' at Winterland, San Francisco (featuring Jefferson Airplane, Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service)

The Monkees first shown on UK TV, a year after the group and the programme debut in the US
The Rolling Stones appear on *Saturday Night at the London Palladium*; Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are sent to prison on drug offences (they are released on appeal)
The Who tour the US for the first time
Elvis Presley marries Priscilla Ann Beaulieu in Las Vegas
The Beatles release *Sgt Pepper Lonely Hearts Club Band*; 'A Day in the Life' is banned by the BBC
Brian Epstein, the Beatles' manager, dies
Monterey International Pop Festival (starring, among others, the Mamas and Papas, Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Ravi Shankar, Otis Redding, and Jimi Hendrix) is attended by 30,000 fans
Rolling Stone magazine is launched
Cream release *Disraeli Gears*
BBC's Radio 1 begins broadcasting, replacing the now illegal pirate stations
Otis Redding dies in a plane crash
The Beatles' television film *Magical Mystery Tour* is broadcast

1968 The Beatles visit India to learn about meditation
First free Hyde Park Festival (featuring Pink Floyd and Jethro Tull)

1969 Led Zeppelin release their first album *Led Zeppelin*
Paul McCartney marries Linda Eastman; John Lennon marries Yoko Ono and returns his MBE to Buckingham Palace
The Who release their 'rock opera' *Tommy*
Blind Faith, the first 'supergroup' (Eric Clapton, Ginger Baker, Stevie Winwood, Ric Grech), play Hyde Park
Judy Garland dies
The Rolling Stones perform in Hyde Park, following Brian Jones' death
The Woodstock Festival attracts 400,000 fans
The Hell's Angels attack and kill a member of the audience at the Altamont free festival, organised by the Rolling Stones

1970 Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin die
The Beatles disband
Soul Train appears on US television; it is influential in reporting new dances, images and fashions to black America (the syndication rights are bought by CBS TV in 1973)

1971 The *Old Grey Whistle Test* starts on BBC2; bands perform live in a bare television studio

The Canadian government implements 'Canadian Content' regulations, which require that radio station playlists contained specified minimum amounts of Canadian music. The Junos, Canada's answer to the Grammy Awards, are named after Pierre Juneau, the civil servant responsible for these regulations

1973 Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* enters US charts. It stays there (in the 'Top Pop Catalog' charts) for well over 1,000 weeks

1975 Bruce Springsteen releases *Born to Run*

1976 Sex Pistols release 'Anarchy in the UK'; after swearing on television, the band are dropped by their record company EMI and banned from many UK venues

1977 Elvis Presley dies, aged 42

Kraftwerk release *Trans Europe Express*, a record that influences hip hop and dance culture

1979 Eleven fans die at Who concert in Cincinnati, Ohio

1980 John Lennon is shot dead in New York

1981 MTV is launched

Abba's last No. 1: 'Super Trooper'

The Specials' 'Ghost Town' is No. 1; during the summer, there are a number of urban riots

1982 Michael Jackson's *Thriller* is released (it goes on to sell 45 million copies)

1983 The first CDs go on sale

The arrival of video is acknowledged with the first American Video Awards

The Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) becomes available; it enables synthesisers to be connected to each other, and signals new technical possibilities for music making

Culture Club are No. 1 with 'Karma Chameleon'

1984 Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Relax' is No. 1 and banned by the BBC

George Michael's first solo single 'Careless Whisper' (No. 1)

Band Aid release 'Do They Know It's Christmas?'

Marvin Gaye dies, shot by his father

1985 Live Aid raises £50 million

Wham! are the first Western group to play in China

Bruce Springsteen releases *Born in the USA* (which sells 15 million copies in US)

Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) gives evidence to Senate committee on the explicit sexual and violent content of records

Record companies introduce 'Parental Advisory' labelling on records as a way of appeasing PMRC complaints

1986 Paul Simon releases his *Graceland* album; a row erupts over whether it breaches cultural sanctions imposed on apartheid South Africa
Madonna's *True Blue* enters the UK album chart at No. 1, the first US artist to do this
Bob Geldof receives honorary Knighthood for his work for Live Aid

1987 MTV is launched in Europe; MTV globally now reaches 79 countries and 281.7 million households
M/A/R/R/S have a No. 1 with 'Pump Up the Volume', marking the rise of music made with deejay skills and sampler technology
Rhythim is Rhythim (Derrick May) releases 'Strings of Life', a key moment in the emergence of Detroit Techno

1988 Kylie Minogue has No. 1 with 'I Should Be So Lucky'
While still serving a life sentence in South Africa, Nelson Mandela is honoured with a seventieth birthday concert at Wembley; the performers include Whitney Houston and Peter Gabriel
CDs now outsell vinyl records
Dance culture's 'Summer of Love' begins in UK

1989 Public Enemy release *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*

1991 Bryan Adams' 'Everything I do (I do it for you)' is No. 1 for sixteen weeks in UK, and is No. 1 in seventeen other countries
Nirvana's 'Smells like Teen Spirit' is the most played video on MTV Europe

1992 Garth Brooks' *Ropin' the Wind* is the first Country album to top the US pop charts
CDs now outsell cassettes

1993 Snoop Doggy Dogg's *Dogstyle* is the first debut album to enter *Billboard* charts at No. 1

1994 Kurt Cobain commits suicide
M People release *Bizarre Fruit*; it becomes (and remains) the biggest selling dance album
Julio Iglesias' *Julio* is released and sells 200 million copies worldwide
British government introduces Criminal Justice and Public Order Act which is intended to curb illegal raves (and music that uses 'repetitive beats')

1996 Shania Twain releases *The Woman in Me*, which becomes the biggest selling country album by a female artist (11 million copies in US)
Spice Girls' 'Wannabe' is No. 1 in twenty-two countries

1997 MP3 is introduced: it is a computer digital file format that enables audio files to be reduced greatly in size; it allows music to be transmitted over the Internet
Oasis's album *Be Here Now* sells 345,000 on day of release
Prodigy's *Fat of the Land* is No. 1 in twenty countries
Garth Brooks has twelve songs in *Billboard* Country Top 75

1998 Madonna wins a record six MTV Music Video awards
B*Witched become first female group to have their debut single enter the UK chart at No. 1 ('C'est la vie')
Elton John's elegy for Princess Diana, 'Candle in the Wind', sells 1.5 million copies in its first week; US advance orders are 7.8 million

1999 Napster software is introduced; it greatly increases access to music on the internet
US charts dominated by rap metal acts: Limp Bizkit, Rage Against the Machine, and by Santana

2000 Napster is sued by Metallica for breach of copyright
Record companies establish copyright deals with Internet music providers

2001 Hear'Say, a group assembled through a UK televised documentary series (*Popstars*), become the first band to top the UK album and singles charts simultaneously with their debut releases

PART I

Context

1 'Plugged in': technology and popular music

PAUL THÉBERGE

Any discussion of the role of technology in popular music should begin with a simple premise: without electronic technology, popular music in the twenty-first century is unthinkable. As a point of departure, however, such a premise demands that one develop an understanding of music technology as more than a random collection of instruments, recording and playback devices. Technology is also an environment in which we experience and think about music; it is a set of practices in which we engage in making and listening to musical sounds; and it is an element in the discourses that we use in sharing and evaluating our experiences, defining, in the process, what music is and can be. In this sense, the ensemble of electronic devices that are used to make, distribute and experience contemporary music are not simply a technical 'means' through which we experience music. Technology has become a 'mode' of music production and consumption: that is, technology has become a precondition for music-making, an important element in the definition of musical sound and style, and a catalyst for musical change (Blacking 1977). However, technology does not simply determine music-making. Pop artists and consumers have often used technology in ways unintended by those who manufacture it. In this way, pop practices constantly redefine music technologies through unexpected or alternative uses.

This chapter presents an overview of several parallel yet interconnected evolutions in music technology: the development and continued importance of electro-magnetic technologies; the evolution of studio recording technologies and techniques; the rise of new musical instrument technologies; and the evolution of consumer audio devices and formats, including recent innovations in digital formats for music distribution on the Internet. The brief survey of musical instruments, reproduction devices and technical formats presented here will be treated as an inquiry into musical concepts, techniques, and social and aesthetic values as much as a history of technology *per se*. In this regard, it is essential to recognise, firstly, that conflicts in musical aesthetics and values have accompanied virtually every development in music technology and, secondly, that the possibilities offered by new musical technologies are never exploited equally, or even accepted, in every sphere of music-making. Indeed, different uses of technology reflect different aesthetic and cultural priorities (Rose 1994).

The specific uses, abuses, or the explicit rejection of various technologies are thus instrumental in defining a particular 'sound' – a pop aesthetic – and contribute to a sense of 'distinction' between popular music genres.

Fundamental technologies

By the second half of the twentieth century, the technologies of sound recording and reproduction, and the industries associated with them, were already firmly established and had become a central component in all of Western musical culture and, increasingly, throughout the world. But the vast array of technical devices that came into use in popular music after the Second World War, and the intensity of the economic and aesthetic debates which often surrounded their introduction, tended to mask the continued importance of a number of other, ancillary technologies developed during the early years of the twentieth century. Specifically, the microphone, electrical amplification and loudspeakers must be considered as absolutely fundamental to contemporary popular music. Their character is underscored, ironically, by the degree to which they have become 'naturalised' and their effects rendered invisible to us. Even in the digital age, however, these technologies remain the beginning and end points of virtually every act of musical production and reproduction, thus giving the lie to the very idea that pop music can be 'unplugged'. The aesthetics of 'high-fidelity' have reinforced the idea that microphones, amplifiers and speakers are *reproductive* technologies, that they are, by design, transparent in their operation. However, such an ideology only serves to efface the impact that these technologies continue to have on our experience of popular music, even in the twenty-first century.

Curiously, these fundamental technologies were developed initially neither within nor for the record industry. Microphones, for example, were first developed by the telephone and broadcast industries and only later adopted for use in music recording and in film production. During the early 1920s, the record industry hesitated in adopting electrical methods of recording in favour of protecting the large investments already made in the production and stockpiling of acoustical recordings. The microphone, in conjunction with electrical amplification, soon proved to be more powerful in its ability to render the subtleties of both the human voice and instrumental sounds than acoustical methods and the industry was forced to convert to electrical technologies in order to compete with the new medium of radio.

The impact of the microphone on musical style was both subtle and profound: for example, the string bass could be heard clearly, for the first

time, in jazz recordings and the instrument quickly replaced the tuba which had often been used in earlier recorded jazz. More importantly, a new, intimate style of singing, known as 'crooning', evolved in response to the introduction of the microphone in popular music practice and spurred immediate controversy. As Simon Frith (1986) has pointed out, crooners were regarded by early critics as effeminate and their singing style as both technically and, by extension, emotionally 'dishonest'.

Despite such criticisms, what had become clear for the early crooners was that it was now necessary not only to sing but to develop a technique suited to the microphone. No performer of the period appears to have realised this more than Bing Crosby, who exploited the intimacy offered by the microphone to great effect: his more 'masculine', 'husky' sounding baritone voice not only differed from the style of singing adopted by many of the other early crooners but its low register was also particularly enhanced by the microphone through the physical phenomenon known as the 'proximity effect'.

In this sense, while pop performers sing to an audience, real or imagined, they always sing first and foremost *to* the microphone. In return, the microphone reveals, in intimate detail, every nuance of the performer's vocal style. But it does not do so in a transparent fashion: every microphone has its own characteristics and colours the sound in subtle yet unmistakable ways. Pop performers have become exceptionally sensitive to the manner in which the microphone can flatter the voice and even musicians who publicly denounce the excesses of modern instrument and recording technologies can be found, in interviews, waxing rhapsodically about the ability of a certain microphone to lend 'warmth' to a vocal performance.

As listeners, our experience of the 'grain' (Barthes 1990) of the voice in popular music (not to mention our notions of how an acoustic guitar or other traditional instrument 'should' sound) has been subtly influenced by the intercession of the microphone. The sensuous pleasures that we derive from listening to the sounds produced by pop performers – from the ironic, conversational tones of Brad Roberts (Crash Test Dummies), to the over-the-top ballad styles of Céline Dion or Whitney Houston, to the tortured screams of Axl Rose – are essentially erotic in character (Frith 1981). These pleasures are made all the more powerful by the extraordinary sense of 'presence' (an aesthetic, metaphorical and quasi-technical term used by recording engineers) afforded by the microphone.

In contemporary live performance and recording the microphone is never a singular technology, it is always plural. Indeed, the evolution of multi-microphone techniques have been central to the development of popular music since the advent of rock'n'roll during the 1950s. Prior to

this time, it was unusual to find more than a handful of microphones used in live performance contexts or in recording studios. But innovative engineers and producers, in search of a new 'sound' for the emerging music, began to experiment with microphones and their placement: at Atlantic records, for example, 'Tommy [Dowd] did revolutionary things with how he would mike the bass and drums. Nobody used to mike drums in those days [the 1950s] . . . later on he started using multiple miking. We learned all the advantages of remixing and sweetening' (producer Jerry Wexler, quoted in Fox 1986: 146). In this way, engineers gradually took over much of the responsibility for achieving musical balances within the overall sound of first the recording, and later, live performance. Experiments in multi-microphone technique, which involve the selective placement and isolation of instrumental sounds, were among the first steps taken towards the creation of the modern multitrack studio and continue to be an essential factor in the production of the transparent sound and instrumental separation characteristic of most popular music today (Schlemm 1982).

Microphones (and related electro-magnetic technologies such as guitar pickups and the stylus of a turntable), however, would be useless without the ability to amplify electrically the signals they produce. The development of the 'Audion Tube' by Lee DeForest, in 1904, laid the basis for amplification, radio broadcasting, and other electric technologies of the early twentieth century. Since the 1950s, however, amplification has become more than a technical necessity, it has become a crucial element in the evolution of the sound of popular music, particularly rock music. From the outset, rock'n'roll established itself as loud, raucous music by virtue of its emphasis on the sound of amplified electric guitars and, in the decades that followed, rock became synonymous with both volume and distortion. When an amplifier is pushed beyond its normal capacities the electronic components become overdriven, resulting in a brighter sound, rich in harmonic content unrelated to the original sound source. Rob Walser (1993) has argued that the sound of amplified guitar distortion has become a key aural sign of heavy metal and hard rock genres and an important signifier of power and emotional intensity in the music.

Even when tube amplifiers are not overdriven, however, they have a distinct sound, valued by many musicians and engineers, that is difficult to reproduce through other means. In this regard, there is perhaps no more curious an example of the fact that the production of popular music is essentially an aesthetic project, not simply a technical one, than the survival of tube technology. Decades after the introduction of solid state transistors and, more recently, digital circuitry, the vacuum tube remains a viable technology. Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, equipment manufacturers have done a brisk business in the production of

tube-based microphone preamps, guitar amplifiers, compressors and other signal processors. Similarly, as computers became increasingly important in music production, programmers attempted to simulate, in software form, the particular distortion characteristics, buzz and 'warmth' of tube technology in order to cash in on the 'retro' aesthetic prevalent in various genres of pop music.

It is in combination with loudspeakers, however, that amplification makes its most significant contribution to popular music culture. Since its introduction during the 1950s, amplification through transistor circuitry has lent itself to both the economies of power and miniaturisation, thus making it possible to meet the acoustic demands of public venues such as dance clubs and sports stadiums, on the one hand, and the more intimate spaces of automobiles, portable transistor radios and Sony Walkmans, on the other. 'Power' is again in this instance both a description of a physical phenomenon and a cultural value: for it is only through the application of electrical amplification to loudspeakers (or headphones) that we are able to invest both our public and private spaces with a musical intensity unprecedented in cultural history. It could be argued that no other technology affects our subjective experience of popular music more than the amplified loudspeaker: the loudness of rock or the booming bass of hip-hop are sounds that can only be produced and experienced through technological means. Studio engineers recognise the importance of loudspeakers in music consumption and routinely employ two or three different speaker systems in an attempt to approximate the effects of different listening conditions on a given mix.

Loudspeakers were first introduced in radio and public address systems during the 1920s but their most significant development occurred during the early days of sound cinema. Some of the most respected names in the audio industry, such as J. B. Lansing, began their careers developing speaker systems for film theatres during the 1930s and only later oriented their efforts towards meeting the demands of the recording studio, stage performance, and home listening. It was during the 1960s, however, that popular music began to make special demands on speaker technology. As pop bands, such as the Beatles, the Who, and others, turned increasingly to sports stadiums as performance venues, their primitive guitar amplifiers and PA systems proved inadequate. Manufacturers responded to these new demands by creating ever more powerful sound systems and, in the process, created the technical infrastructure of modern live performance. More importantly, amplifiers and loudspeakers became part of a complex social technology: they facilitated the coming together of ever-larger crowds for popular music, thus supporting both the needs of fans and those of the expanding music industry.

As noted above, however, loudness in rock music was only partly dictated by necessity, it was also a fundamental component in an evolving rock aesthetic. And, as in the case of amplifier distortion, rock musicians soon learned that loudspeakers, as the functional source of musical sound, could be employed for musical ends. When a microphone or guitar pickup is placed in close proximity to a highly amplified loudspeaker the phenomenon known as 'feedback' occurs. Rock guitarists, such as Jimi Hendrix, learned to play *to* their amplifier speakers, coaxing novel sounds from them, and making them a true extension of their musical instruments.

Outside guitar-based rock, the loudspeaker must also be considered as central to the experience of a range of pop music genres from reggae to the whole gamut of genres associated with modern dance music. From the early reggae 'sound system' – or mobile discotheque – to the dance club, to the rave party, a premium has been placed on the ability of amplifiers and loudspeakers to produce an artificially loud, or 'heavy' bass sound. Subsonic speaker systems create tones that are felt as much as they are heard, thus supporting the movement of dancers as much as the rhythm of the music itself. Furthermore, the exaggerated emphasis on bass frequencies found in various genres of African–American music, such as hip-hop and rap, has come to be perceived by fans and pop commentators alike as a marker of not only musical genre but cultural identity as well (Rose 1994).

Certainly, microphones, amplifiers and loudspeakers have been important to virtually all recorded music: classical, folk, jazz, or popular. But it is only in popular music and in rock that these technologies can be regarded as truly essential to the processes of both musical expression and experience.

Sound recording

Magnetic recording, in one form or another, has also been a central element in the development of production practices in popular music since the 1950s. While the first magnetic recorder was developed as early as 1898 and wire and steel-band magnetic recorders found limited use in radio broadcasting during the 1930s, it was not until the Second World War that German engineers were able to perfect tape-based recording. In 1948, working from German prototypes, the first commercially successful tape machines were introduced in the United States and were soon put to general use in radio, film and record production. The overall improvement in sound fidelity, duration of recording time and, above all, the ability to edit and splice together different 'takes' of a performance, contributed to a

quality and flexibility previously impossible with conventional disk recording methods. Singer Bing Crosby was again one of the first performers to exploit these possibilities: from the late 1940s onward, he insisted that his radio programmes be pre-recorded (first on disk and, later, on tape), thus ensuring 'perfect' performances. The ease and relative low cost of production were also significant factors in the rise of independent, entrepreneurial production (especially in the emerging genres of rhythm and blues and rock'n'roll) during the 1950s and contributed to an overall reorganisation of the recording industry.

From the outset, entrepreneurial producers and engineers experimented with the technical possibilities of tape technology in order to create new sounds. For example, echo, originally produced by the physical gap that exists between the record and playback heads on a tape recorder, was employed as a novelty effect in pop recording from the early 1950s onward (it can be heard prominently, for example, in some of the early rock'n'roll recordings, such as Elvis Presley's version of 'Hound Dog') and later became a standard part of pop recording practice. Similarly, during the late 1960s, an experimental technique known as 'flanging', which can be described as a kind of 'whooshing' effect created by phase cancellations that occur when the speed of two tape recorders is manipulated relative to one another, became a distinctive part of the sound of many psychedelic rock recordings. Audio manufacturers quickly responded by creating electronic devices that could reproduce the effect of such experimental techniques but with greater control and precision; these effects remain part of the standard repertory found in digital effects processors and software today. Thus, in what has become characteristic of the commercial context in which many pop practices originate, what begins as experimentation is soon packaged and sold back to pop practitioners in commodity form.

Beyond such novelties, however, there is perhaps no more salient example of the intimate relationship between popular music and technology than the development of the multitrack tape recorder. Indeed, while the technology of multitrack tape recording was developed in response to the needs of popular music, the evolution of pop and rock from the 1960s onward was, at the same time, predicated on the very existence of the technology and the practices associated with it. Multitrack recording is not simply a technical process of sound production and reproduction; it is also a *compositional* process and is thus central to the creation of popular music at the most fundamental level (Eno 1983).

Multitrack recording techniques were first used in mainstream pop of the 1950s when a third track was added to the stereo pair of tracks found on professional recorders. The extra track was used as a means of isolating and enhancing the vocal sound of pop singers, such as Frank Sinatra and

Nat King Cole, in relation to the backing orchestra. Such applications can be regarded as a simple technical expedient in the service of commercial ends. Overdubbing was put to a much more extensive and creative use, however, in the multiple guitar and voice recordings of Les Paul and Mary Ford during the 1950s (Les Paul is also credited with having created the design for the first 8-track tape recorder; see Sievert 1978). The fusion in timbre created by a single vocalist performing multiple harmony parts, a technique pushed to its limits by artists such as Joni Mitchell during the late 1960s and early 1970s, can only be achieved through overdubbing. By the time that four-track recorders became available during the early 1960s, producers such as Phil Spector were using the technology as an integral component in an overall strategy for the creation of a new pop sound. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, track capacity expanded rapidly from 4-, to 8-, to 16- and 24-track recording, offering greater possibilities for the control and layering of sounds; performers such as Stevie Wonder made use of these enhanced capabilities and released recordings in which they played and sang all the musical parts.

The multitrack tape recorder is one of the principal technical devices within an overall technical environment – the multitrack studio – that needs to be understood as a 'technology' in larger terms. The studio is an environment made up of a specifically designed set of acoustic spaces within which one finds a wide range of technical devices: microphones, tape recorders, mixing console, signal processors, monitors, headphones and, more recently, digital samplers, synthesisers and computers. Furthermore, the multitrack studio comprises a flexible, though well-defined organisation of musical labour and a rational division of specific technical practices: the use of multiple microphones, overdubbing and other techniques to maximise separation, signal processing, and mixing (Théberge 1989). Mixing has become such a complex and specialised task that different engineers (and different studios) are often employed at this stage of the recording process. The work of creative engineers and producers, from the disco producers of the 1970s (such as Freddie Perren and Giorgio Moroder) to the dance remixers of the1980s and 1990s (such as Shep Pettibone), has highlighted the capacity of the studio to act as a tool in reworking pre-existing material in order to meet the needs of different consumer contexts. Such practices also clearly fit within the economic imperatives of the record industry as they allow for the profit potential of every song to be exploited to its fullest (Tankel 1990). Not surprisingly, prominent remix engineers, based on their ability to deliver marketable hits, have been signed to long-term contracts with major labels.

Taken together, the ensemble of technical spaces, devices and practices

that constitutes the process of multitrack recording has become the primary mode of production in popular music. It has resulted in both a particular 'sound' – dynamically compressed and spatially separated (Schlemm 1982) – that is characteristic of most contemporary recording, and a new approach to the creative process. Whereas, in the early 1960s, a band would not ordinarily enter a studio without having a selection of material rehearsed and ready to record, less than a decade later it was normal for bands to compose in the studio, spending weeks and months experimenting with the various creative possibilities inherent in the multitrack process. In this regard, 'overdubbing', an essentially additive process in which the various instrumental sounds are layered in temporal succession and then later combined (or stripped away) at the time of mixdown, is a central technique of the studio when used as a compositional tool (Eno 1983). As a compositional tool, the multitrack studio has perhaps been most fully exploited in various genres of dance music, where the contributions of musicians have become little more than raw material which is manipulated, transformed and re-composed in the studio itself.

Initially, the prerogative of 'composing' with the new medium was not given equally to all who participated in the multitrack enterprise: it was the producer, more than anyone else, whose judgement prevailed within the studio environment (on the role of the producer, see Hennion 1989). And, indeed, it is the status of the producer that is valorised in modern copyright law: as far as mechanical rights to the recording are concerned, it is the producer (or the record company) who holds all rights of reproduction. Increasingly, however, popular musicians insisted on having greater control over the multitrack recording process and, ultimately, the sound of their music. Edward R. Kealy (1979) has described in detail the changing patterns of collaboration that came about in the recording of rock music during the period between 1965 and 1975. According to Kealy, an 'art mode' of production evolved during this period where the recording artists themselves were responsible for aesthetic decision-making in the studio. In this, pop musicians have come to rely heavily on the technical expertise and growing artistic contributions of recording engineers with whom they have developed creative relationships. Such relationships often allow musicians to experiment with the technology in unorthodox ways: for example, Tricia Rose (1994) has described how rap musicians and producers (not unlike rock guitarists of the sixties) often work 'in the red', pushing the capacity of tape recorders in order to create a more distorted sound.

From the 1970s onward, many successful artists invested tens of thousands of dollars in constructing their own studios, where they could experiment freely without the pressures of paying for commercial studio

time at hourly rates. As an understanding of the basic technologies, routines and practices of studio recording has gradually become an essential part of every musician's store of knowledge and skill – as essential as knowing how to tune a guitar – semi-professional and amateur musicians also began setting up their own studios using low-cost equipment specifically designed by manufacturers for the 'home studio' market. In an effort to simplify the design of multitrack equipment for amateur recordists, manufacturers such as Tascam created the consumer-oriented 'Portastudio', which integrated tape recorder and mixer functions in a single device. Aspiring young musicians now regularly produce demo tapes even before they have learned to play before an audience; as Steve Jones (1992) has pointed out, 'paying your dues' in the music business is no longer simply a matter of playing night after night in bars, it also means working in (and making payments on) your home studio. The sound quality of home equipment has improved to the point where it can often rival that found in commercial studios: by the mid-1990s, digital multitrack recorders, in both tape and hard disk/computer software formats, had become available at modest prices.

This continuous 'democratisation' of the audio marketplace is significant in that it allows for a level of do-it-yourself recording activity (and an associated aesthetic) that is unusual in contemporary cultural production. Punk musicians of the 1970s and 'alternative' bands of the 1980s developed an aggressive, 'lo-fi' approach to the recording medium that both rejected the dominant practices and aesthetics of the record industry and played a role in defining these genres, in ideological terms, as more 'authentic' than other forms of mainstream pop and rock . This type of low-cost, independent production that co-exists with more commercial recording practices is characteristic of the music industry and is significantly different from the type of 'independent' production that takes place in other cultural sectors, such as the film and television industries.

At a very different level, the significance of multitrack recording has also become evident as the next generation of technology – digital technology – has entered into studio practice. MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) is a hardware/software protocol, introduced into the synthesiser market in 1983, that allows digital synthesisers, samplers, drum machines and computers to be networked together. Sequencers, software programs that allow MIDI data to be recorded, have adopted the multitrack tape recorder as a metaphor for the user interface even though MIDI does not carry sound data, only data related to performance gestures. In this way, software manufacturers have built upon, and thus reproduced, an already existing base of technical knowledge and practice

(Théberge 1997). Similarly, as high-fidelity, digital audio recording has become viable on home computers, the entire multitrack studio has become the object of software simulation: including simulations of multitrack tape recorder functions, mixing consoles and signal processors.

This technical reproduction is not without its social consequences. The technologies of rock and pop music production have long been a male-dominated terrain, and this has been as true for the most basic of rock technologies, the electric guitar, as it is for the wider range of electronic technologies associated with stage and studio (see Bayton 1990). Recent studies conducted by the music instrument industry have suggested that even among women with computer and music instrument skills, the use of music software is extremely limited. In reproducing the multitrack studio in software form, programmers implicitly assume that users *already* have the knowledge required for its use, thus reproducing, perhaps, the social inequalities associated with access to the earlier technology as well.

Musical instruments

Musical instruments are often the centre of controversy in pop and rock because their use is so intimately tied with musicians' notions of personal expression, on the one hand, and audience concerns for the 'authenticity' of music, on the other. Even Bob Dylan's adoption of the electric guitar in folk music of the 1960s was looked upon with derision by his fans. Historically however, rock music has been inextricably associated with the electric guitar in terms of its sound, performance gestures (fans often mimic, on 'air guitar', the exaggerated gestures of rock performers) and iconography. Because of the way in which specific sounds (and images) are linked to musical genres and the way in which nostalgia works in both pop and rock music, guitars of a certain type or vintage – the Gibson Les Paul or the Fender Stratocaster and Telecaster models, for example – have attained a special status among guitarists. The Stratocaster in particular, first introduced in 1954, has been copied by many manufacturers and its distinctive form has become, through commercial advertising and other avenues, one of the musical icons most commonly associated with rock.

But perhaps most important for rock and popular music are the wide variations in sound that can be produced by the electric guitar. In addition to the distortion and feedback techniques described above, the sound of the electric guitar has become increasingly integrated with electronic technologies: from the 'wah-wah' pedals of the 1960s to the elaborate, multiple digital effects employed in the 1990s, our notions of what the guitar is, and can be, have been transformed. It could be argued that the guitar is no

longer simply 'electric' – that is, an instrument that has been amplified – but that its sound has become truly 'electronic' in nature.

Similarly, our experience of even the most 'primitive' of musical instrument technologies – the drums – has been altered by the processes of sound recording and electronic manipulation. The multitrack recording process allows for the sound of the drums and cymbals to be spatially separated in the stereo mix, thus creating an artificially enhanced, spatialisation of the rhythmic structure of the music itself (Théberge 1989). The sound of the voice and other instruments and, ultimately, the listener are placed *within* this spatial/rhythmic field. Furthermore, the drums are usually subjected to high levels of dynamic compression and other signal processing which serve to increase the overall impact of the sound of the beat in the final mix. Phil Collins' trademark snare sound – a sound that dominated many pop recordings of the 1980s – was created through a combination of microphone placement and signal processing: including compression, artificial reverberation and noise gating. Despite the controversy created by the introduction of drum machines during the late 1970s and instruments such as the Simmons Electronic Drums during the early eighties, the difference between the sound of processed acoustic drums and their sampled and electronic counterparts can be quite negligible.

Filling the same role as the guitar in rock music, the drum machine has become perhaps one of the most important instruments in the production of a wide variety of pop and dance music genres. The drum machine has its origins in the rhythm accompaniment boxes associated with home organs of the 1950s and 1960s, thus demonstrating that musical innovations do not always flow from the top down (that is from professional to consumer markets); but rather, significant innovations can originate in almost any market sector. These humble origins extend to even some of the manufacturers of drum machines: Ikutaro Kakehashi, founder of Japan's Roland Corporation, which is today one of the major suppliers of electronic musical instruments in the world, began his career in the music instrument industry designing home organs and rhythm boxes.

Both the sounds and the characteristic ways in which rhythm patterns are constructed on drum machines have been important elements in defining pop aesthetics. The Roland TR-808 drum machine (introduced in 1980), for example, became the instrument of choice among many hip-hop, rap and house music producers. Both the ability to detune the bass drum, creating a sound akin to a low-frequency hum, and the necessity of building rhythm patterns in a precise grid-like framework, have been cited as influences on the musical style of these genres. The instrument has achieved its own 'vintage' status: it continues to fetch a high price on the used instrument market, its sounds have often been sampled by producers

of dance music, and it has even been reincarnated in the form of a computer software program (Steinberg's 'ReBirth', released in 1997).

Most audiences, however, have never seen a TR-808, and if there is any instrument that has achieved both the musical and the iconic status of the guitar in dance music, it is the phonograph turntable. Using innovative techniques such as mixing and 'scratching', dance club deejays transformed the turntable, a quintessentially reproductive device, into a *productive* one, a musical instrument of the first order. Similarly, one might consider the art of the deejay as founded, initially, upon a type of consumer knowledge – a knowledge of musical style based in judgement and connoisseurship – which is then combined with a particular set of musical skills: the ability to sequence and mix together a series of songs and rhythmic breaks (Straw 1993). Along with the turntable, the form of the vinyl record was also transformed: the twelve-inch single had been developed specifically for dance use as early as the 1970s and, later, specialised distribution networks evolved to serve the needs of professional deejays (often catering to their penchant for secrecy by distributing the records in unmarked, 'white label' editions). Not unlike the preference among rock guitarists for tube amplification, many deejays continued to champion the turntable and vinyl records over CD technology well into the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The evolution of deejay aesthetics and practices – beginning with the Jamaican-inspired work of deejay Kool Herc in the early 1970s and its influence on the New York hip-hop scene and the later development of house music in Detroit and Chicago – created the conditions in which other, more advanced technologies, such as the digital sampler, could be introduced into dance music production. Arguing against crude technological determinist notions of how technology influences musical style, Ross Harley (1993) has suggested that it was the dance floor context, and the deejay practices associated with it, that led to the adoption of digital sampling technology and the particular manner in which it was put to use in house music of the 1980s.

The digital sampler is a hybrid device – a device for recording sound *and* a musical instrument – that was designed to reproduce the sounds of conventional musical instruments, thereby making studio production more economical by eliminating the need for backing musicians. The Mellotron, an analogue keyboard instrument that used tape loops, was introduced during the 1960s for similar purposes; the sound of its taped string ensembles were popularised by bands such as the Moody Blues and King Crimson during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and used on individual cuts by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and many others. In many commercial recordings, the digital sampler is used specifically for the mundane

purposes for which is was designed: as an inexpensive replacement for grand piano, drum sounds, string and brass ensembles and, more recently, the sounds of traditional instruments from around the world.

However, in the hands of house music producers and remix engineers, the sampler was used to cut sound fragments and loop together rhythmic grooves from a wide variety of sources: especially commercial recordings of soul, funk and heavy metal music but, also, from an increasingly diverse range of sources including film and television sound tracks. By using samplers to extend the possibilities of isolating break beats and mixing together passages from various recordings, sampling artists created a crisis within the music industry with regards to copyright infringement during the 1980s (Frith 1993). While the perceived threat to copyright law was relatively short-lived – the industry essentially bringing would-be samplers into line primarily through intimidation and the threat of litigation – the influence of this chaotic moment in the history of pop should not be underestimated. By the 1990s, sampling had become a tolerated, if not fully accepted, part of musical practice: for example, in 1993, the acid jazz group US 3 was given extensive sampling access to the back catalogue of Blue Note recordings in order to create their particular mix of jazz and rap styles.

The rise of sampling technology must be considered within the overall development and use of keyboard synthesisers within popular music. Prior to the 1960s, the use of electronically synthesised sound had been largely the province of avant-garde and, to a lesser extent, film music composers. While modular analogue synthesisers were already being used in commercial studios by the late 1960s, it was the introduction of the Minimoog, in 1970, that shifted the emphasis of synthesiser design towards the needs of live performance, thus paving the way for the wider acceptance of synthesiser technology within popular music. Despite the reaction to synthesisers mounted by the musicians' unions (who regarded them as a threat to the livelihood of conventional studio musicians) and opponents of disco music during the late 1970s, the sound of analogue synthesisers became central to a wide range of pop and rock styles throughout the decade: from the funky, soul/rhythm and blues style of Stevie Wonder, to the driving, progressive rock sound of Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and the ironic, electro-pop styles of Kraftwerk and Devo, to name only a few.

A number of significant developments occurred during the early 1980s that changed the nature of the modern synthesiser. Manufacturers began to make use of digital circuitry in order to make synthesiser technology more stable, economic, and easier to use. They pursued an aggressive economic and technological strategy that saw the lowering of the cost of syn-

thesisers and samplers, the expansion of synthesiser capabilities, and an ever-increasing capacity to store and reproduce pre-fabricated sound programs. The development of this latter capacity coincided with a subtle shift in the way in which musicians were regarded by manufacturers: no longer thought of as programmers of original sounds, musicians were increasingly viewed as consumers of prefabricated sounds and a small cottage industry developed to meet the supposed 'needs' of this new market. By the 1990s, synthesiser users had become largely dependent upon pre-fabricated synthesiser programs and prerecorded, CD libraries of digitally sampled sounds, thus placing them in a new relationship to instrument and software manufacturers (Théberge 1997).

With the introduction of MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) in 1983, the ability to use multiple synthesisers, drum machines and samplers in conjunction with one another and with personal computers was greatly enhanced, thus stabilising the synthesiser marketplace and offering greater creative possibilities to musicians. More important, it allowed electronically generated music to become part of a complete production *system*, modelled (as mentioned above) on the multitrack studio, and to become more fully integrated with conventional sound recording than ever before. While electronic pop music was still regarded by many, particularly the rock press, as 'cold' and 'inhuman', the sound of digital synthesisers began to appear in a surprising number of genres: for example, the eighties folk-derived style of Suzanne Vega's music was defined by a combination of acoustic guitar and synthesisers – a combination that would have been unheard of a decade earlier.

At the same time that these developments were taking place in the field of pop production, large music and consumer electronics corporations, such as Yamaha and Casio, were introducing portable electronic keyboards into the consumer marketplace. While regarded by many as mere toys, the impact of these instruments on the musical tastes of an entire generation of musical consumers should not be underestimated. Furthermore, as digital sampling methods became more commonplace, the market for home organs and upright pianos has gradually been displaced by electronic keyboards and digital pianos. In this way, not only has popular music become increasingly electronic in nature, but so too has much of amateur music culture in the West.

Consumer audio

As the above comments suggest, the relationship between the professional and semi-professional worlds of popular music-making and the world of

consumer electronics is extremely intimate and complex. Indeed, the economics of technological innovation are such that even the professional world of music production has become dependent, in part, upon the success of home computers and the consumer audio industry to ensure the availability of affordable digital components. At the same time, the record industry has become increasingly hostile towards audio manufacturers (which, in many cases, are only partly independent of the record industry) and, more recently, the computer industry because they supply consumers with the tools with which they can violate copyright in recorded music, thus challenging the record industry's power to control patterns of distribution and consumption.

Quite apart from issues of copyright, however, consumer technologies and audio formats must be understood as being intricately interwoven with the structures of music marketing and distribution. In this regard, historical conflicts between the record and audio industries have often been accompanied by larger, structural changes within the music industry and changes in the character of music consumption. For example, shortly after Columbia Records launched the 12-inch, 33⅓-rpm, long-playing record in 1948, RCA countered with its own 7-inch, 45-rpm format, with the hope of ensuring consumer loyalty by making its own technology incompatible with the LP. A number of reasons contributed to the premature end of the so-called 'Battle of the Speeds' that ensued, not least among them the fact that small, independent manufacturers of high-fidelity equipment decided to develop turntables that could play not only both of the new formats but the older, 78-rpm records as well, thus undercutting the record companies' strategy of exclusivity. Eventually, the 45-rpm format would have been doomed to failure had RCA not aggressively promoted it as the new standard for popular music singles. The 45-rpm record quickly became the preferred format among young consumers of the 1950s and helped to establish the youth market as a powerful force within the popular music industry (the LP did not become a mainstay of youth consumption until the late 1960s).

A different set of conflicts greeted the arrival of Compact Discs during the 1980s. Launched in 1983 after a lengthy collaboration between Japanese (Sony) and European (Philips) electronics manufacturers, CD technology was still not guaranteed success in the marketplace unless the majority of record companies agreed to make music available in the new format, which they were reluctant to do at first. It was only after audio manufacturers dropped the price of CD players to a fraction of their initial retail value that consumer demand for the new technology began to grow. The loss of profits suffered by the audio industry is often cited as one of the reasons for the acquisition of Columbia Records by Sony: the introduction

of future innovations in hardware, it was hoped, would not be hampered by the unavailability of music 'software'. Once the CD format was adopted, the record industry soon halted production of LPs on most new releases and began to capitalise on CDs through reissues of their enormous back catalogues of popular (and other) music. In this way, the loyalty of fans and the nostalgia for pop music of the past can be seen to have strategic value for the record industry. The LP has, nevertheless, survived in a kind of half-life in deejay practice and, curiously, among both hi-fi and lo-fi (alternative music) enthusiasts, as well as in various developing nations where consumers have been less inclined to invest in CD technology.

Perhaps the most significant conflict between the record and audio industries and, indeed, the public in the second half of the twentieth century can be found in the controversies surrounding popular uses of cassette tape. Whether made in the form of attacks on 'home taping' (in the industrialised world) or on 'piracy' (just about everywhere else), the record industry has conducted a long campaign against the unauthorised taping of its copyrighted music. Given the difficulties of gaining direct compensation for such uses, the industry has, in recent decades, managed to persuade many Western governments to impose levies on the sale of cassette recorders and blank tapes. This industry-dominated public discourse concerning the supposed abuses of cassette technology has tended to mask the broader social and cultural significance of the medium; economically too, industry lobbying has largely obscured the fact that pre-recorded cassettes outsold both LPs and CDs throughout the 1980s and were thus one of the pillars of the record industry during this period.

As the first recordable audio medium to have gained widespread acceptance among consumers in nearly a century (since the demise of the early Edison wax cylinder; reel-to-reel tape technology never having taken hold outside of the high-end, audiophile market), cassette tape recording offered a form of potential empowerment to users that was unprecedented. Popular musicians and consumers alike used the cassette as an alternative medium of distribution for forms of music that would not otherwise gain the support of the record or radio industries (see Pareles 1987). Cassette technology spread rapidly in the form of devices designed for use in the home, in automobiles, and in portable applications. Given its durability, ease of use, and the huge base of installed hardware, cassettes have been able to fend off other competing technologies and will likely remain a viable format for consumer audio well into the first decade of the twenty-first century (its possible replacement by Digital Audio Tape was effectively blocked by record industry lobbying during the 1980s and other digital audio formats emerging in the 1990s, such as Sony's MiniDisc, met

with limited acceptance by the public; digital file formats, such as MP3, are still confined primarily to computer enthusiasts).

Equally important, the low cost and portability of cassette technology contributed to its diffusion throughout the non-industrialised world during the 1970s where its impact on local music cultures has been as profound as it is widespread (Wallis and Malm 1984). Often contradictory in its effects, the cassette has enabled local popular music cultures to thrive, offering greater diversity of content than is available through industry or state-controlled media, while at the same time, it has contributed to the spread of Western pop music. Nevertheless, many commentators agree that the cassette has been a democratising agent in the popular music of the non-industrialised world and has effectively led to the restructuring of the music industry in many countries (see, for example, Regev 1986 and Manuel 1993). Digital technology notwithstanding, the cassette continues to be, on a global scale, one of the most significant audio technologies of our time.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, many of the debates concerning piracy and home taping that had appeared decades earlier, with the advent of the cassette, have been revived and given a new sense of urgency within the world of online culture – the world of computers and network communications. While a relatively small number of musicians, independent record labels and fans had, at least since the late 1980s, made use of specialised computer networks for sharing and distributing music and information, their efforts were hampered by the sheer size of digital audio files and the relatively slow speed of data transfer. By the late 1990s, the appearance of various file compression techniques and increases in the overall speed of computer networking allowed the digital distribution of music (both legally and illegally obtained) to become a mass phenomenon. The speed with which music can be copied and distributed among, potentially at least, millions of users on an international scale, has become a pressing concern for the record industry.

In particular, the sudden rise in popularity of the MP3 file format – short for Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG) 1, Layer 3, a digital file format that reduces audio files to a fraction of their normal size while retaining reasonable audio quality – during the 1990s, is a case study in the complex relationships between audio formats, entrepreneurial capital and consumer interests, on the one hand, and the marketing and distribution structures of the record industry, on the other. From the outset, MP3 was recognised, by individual fans and audio pirates alike, as a viable format for sharing and distributing music over the Internet. While the record industry was able, beginning around 1996, to prosecute some of the larger sites offering pirated music, dealing with individual consumers proved to

be more difficult. The problems associated with policing individual behaviour on the Net became even greater with the appearance, in 1999, of a software program known as 'Napster'. Based on a decentralised, distributed model that allows users to access sound files located on the computers of thousands of other individuals, Napster immediately became popular among students on college campuses in the United States and elsewhere. While many fans (and even some musicians) regard the sharing of copyrighted songs over the Internet as being relatively harmless – a form of social interaction that may ultimately act in such a way as to promote and increase record sales – the record industry regards it as a form of theft and quickly brought legal proceedings against Napster.

The popularity of the MP3 file format also gave rise to a number of web sites dedicated to offering alternative forms of music distribution and consumer services. For example, MP3.com was founded in 1997 as a site for the distribution of independently produced music. Funded essentially by advertising revenues and, more significantly, large sums of venture capital, MP3.com expanded quickly and, by the year 2000, represented over 50,000 independent artists. In an attempt to diversify its operations, MP3.com also began to offer new music services, one of which allowed subscribers to access thousands of copyrighted music files from a centralised data bank. Once again, the record industry brought suit against MP3.com on the grounds that the creation of such a data base was in violation of copyright laws.

While the outcome of both these legal proceedings is, as of this writing, yet to be determined, it is important to recognise that what is at stake in the various controversies surrounding the MP3 file format is not simply the issue of copyright *per se*. The case of Napster needs to be understood as a clash between radically different value systems – between a particular notion of what constitutes a legitimate form of social interaction between fans, on the one hand, and the commercial needs of the industry, on the other. For its part, MP3.com represents a new type of business model based on the possibilities offered by digital technology and computer networks (see National Research Council 2000). In taking legal action against MP3.com, the record industry is, in part, using copyright law to prevent entrepreneurial competitors from gaining an upper hand in what is, in essence, a new marketplace. In the meantime, the industry is attempting to adapt its own marketing and distribution structures to meet the demands of online commerce.

Aside from the technical formats that support sound reproduction – vinyl, cassettes, CDs and MP3 – and the possibilities they offer to consumers and industry alike, the various forms of consumer 'hardware' associated with sound reproduction have also played an increasingly

important role in the experience of popular music since the middle of the twentieth century. Above all, the audio industry's penchant for miniaturisation contributed to the reshaping of pop music sensibilities and the social conditions of listening. During the 1950s, the portable transistor radio was an essential component in the sense of freedom and mobility associated with post-war youth culture. Similarly, the 'ghetto blaster', or 'boom box', of the 1970s and 1980s, while significantly larger than the transistor radio, helped fuel hip-hop street culture. Its territorialising power – its ability to lay sonic claim to the street – has been immortalised in Spike Lee's film, *Do the Right Thing*, where the key dramatic moment is precipitated by a confrontation over the blaster's sonic boom and the clash of cultures that it symbolises.

For the more discreet, the Sony 'Walkman' proposed a new kind of balance in the experience of aural and visual environments in the urban landscape during the 1980s (Hosokawa 1984). More than any other technology, the Walkman seemed to epitomise the sense of mobile, privatised musical experience that had been the promise of sound reproduction technology for a century. With a design philosophy and a marketing campaign that was global in scope and targeted at the youth market, the Sony Walkman rose to popularity during the 1980s and early 1990s, influencing the listening habits of an entire generation (see du Gay et al. 1997). In this context, it is perhaps no accident that when the manufacturers of computer peripherals, such as Diamond Multimedia, and others, introduced audio devices dedicated to the playback of MP3 files during the late 1990s, they concentrated their initial efforts on the creation of Walkman-like portable players. Recognising the potential for the portable players to legitimise MP3 as a mainstream consumer format, thus extending its reach beyond the confines of computer-based communications, the Record Industry Association of America launched a legal battle against Diamond Multimedia – a battle that ultimately failed.

While miniaturisation and mobility has been a significant factor in the design of audio technologies, contributing to a wide range of aesthetic and social practices, so too has the development of an increasingly sophisticated set of technologies designed for domestic music consumption. The rise of the modern audio component system – the 'hi-fi' – took place during the post-war period and, together with television, displaced the role of the parlour piano and radio as the central entertainment technologies of the home. As the primary means of listening to music in the home, the hi-fi needs to be understood in terms of its accommodation within, and its contributions towards the construction of domestic relationships: indeed, the incorporation of the hi-fi system into family life can be regarded as a case study in middle-class culture and gender relations of the

1950s (see Keightley 1996). The discourses surrounding the hi-fi experience emphasised hi-fi reproduction as a means of immersing oneself in music; at the same time, the hi-fi was discursively constructed, in opposition to television, as essentially a male domain.

The aesthetics associated with hi-fidelity reproduction have also contributed to the construction of the perceived opposition (or, as I would argue, a complementarity) between domestic and public forms of entertainment. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, as popular music became increasingly used in film soundtracks, the superior audio quality of domestic hi-fi was cited as one of the forces necessitating increased investments in the improvement of audio in both cinema production and exhibition (similar forces were also at play in the live concert presentation of music, resulting in improvements in PA systems). Coming full circle in the 1990s, the introduction of domestic versions of the Dolby Surround Sound system has given rise to the notion of the 'home theatre' and given a new resonance to the aesthetic (and social) ideal of 'immersion' in the experience of hi-fi reproduction.

While phonograph listening was often regarded by critics of the early twentieth century as a form of 'passive' consumption, it should be clear from the examples cited above that this is no longer the case (if, indeed, it ever was). As a final example, one might also consider the rise of *Karaoke*, a practice originating in Japan but increasingly popular in the West during the late 1980s and early 1990s as well, where consumers were invited not to simply sing along with their favourite songs, but actually to take on the role of lead vocalist performing with pre-recorded arrangements of popular hits. Ethnomusicologist Charles Keil (1984: 94) has suggested that we need to consider this novel form of 'mediated-and-live' performance as a kind of 'humanising or, better still, personalisation of mechanical processes'. Keil's analysis could apply equally well to a number of other technologies cited above and highlights, I think, the importance of understanding consumer audio technology as a significant enabling factor, operating at a number of levels, in a wide range of essentially participatory, social and musical practices.

Conclusion

Technology has been central to the production, distribution and consumption of popular music for over half a century; indeed, it has become a precondition for popular music culture at its broadest and most fundamental levels. The debates that have accompanied the introduction of new technology in popular music have often depended on a rigid set of dichotomies:

for example, the distinction between 'live' and 'recorded' music. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this essay, such distinctions are often misleading: the live performance of popular music is as dependent upon the technologies of audio production and reproduction (not to mention lighting, video and other technologies) as any studio recording (see Goodwin 1992).

As a precondition for popular music-making, technology must be understood as both an enabling and a constraining factor that acts in complex and contradictory ways in music production, distribution and consumption, blurring, in many cases, the distinctions between these otherwise discreet stages in the circulation of music. While it is in the interests of the record industry to use technology in ways that will enhance, rationalise or control the circulation of music, musicians (in the case of sampling) and consumers (with cassettes and MP3 files) have also used technology to disrupt the operations of the industry, if only temporarily. As outlined briefly above, the Internet is, at the turn of the twentieth century, the ground upon which this play between competing interests is currently being acted out. On the one hand, the Internet is regarded as a potentially lucrative forum for direct marketing strategies, sales and licensing for both the traditional record industry and a new generation of entrepreneurs while, on the other, it has given rise to new consumer formats (such as MP3, among others) and emerged as an alternative distribution network for all forms of independently produced music as well as a potential site of new musical experiences and social interactions among consumers. In the end, the outcome of the exploitation and containment of these various possibilities will depend on the ways in which this technology can be used to mediate the ever-shifting set of power relations that exists between the industry and popular music practices.

Further reading

A comprehensive history of audio technology and its role in the evolution of the sound recording industries can be found in Pekka Gronow and Ilpo Saunio's *An International History of the Recording Industry* (Christopher Moseley, trans., London: Cassell, 1998); less detailed but taking a more polemical stance with regards to the musical and cultural significance of sound recording, including the importance of technologies from the microphone to digital sampling, is Michael Chanan's *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and its Effects on Music* (London: Verso, 1995). William Moylan's *The Art of Recording: The Creative Resources of Music Production and Audio* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992) offers a

good overview of the technical and aesthetic practices associated with studio recording.

A stimulating account of the shifting musical and cultural meanings associated with the electric guitar – one of the most significant of all musical instrument technologies of the jazz and pop/rock eras – can be found in *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience*, by Steve Waksman (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1999). The influence of digital technologies on musical instrument design and musicians' practices, as well as an account of the industries that create and promote these technologies, is the subject of my own book, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music / Consuming Technology* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997). An insightful case study of the uses of technology in the production of rap music can be found in 'Soul sonic forces: technology, orality, and black cultural practice in rap music', by Tricia Rose (in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

A number of important studies documenting the diffusion of cassette technology, especially as it relates to non-Western cultures, have been published. Among the first, and the most broadly based, is Roger Wallis and Krister Malm's study of the music industry in some twelve countries around the world, entitled: *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1984). Focused on the dramatic changes in popular music wrought by the advent of cassettes in India is *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*, by Peter Manuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Taking a slightly different tack, in *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage, 1997), Paul du Gay and his colleagues offer a wide-ranging account of the design and global marketing of the Sony Walkman and its impact on consumption practices.

Much of what has been written about MP3 files and the Internet in the popular press (and throughout the Internet itself) has been largely naive, partisan, or sensational in character. A recent study that examines the underlying industrial and structural issues raised by the new technologies was conducted by the National Research Council in the United States and published under the title: *The Digital Dilemma: Intellectual Property in the Information Age* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000).

PART II

Texts, genres, styles

4 Pop music

SIMON FRITH

The biggest selling pop single of all time is the version of 'Candle in the Wind' Elton John recorded as a tribute to Princess Diana, and his Westminster Abbey performance of the song, during Diana's funeral service in September 1997, can be considered as the ultimate British pop moment. It was controversial. Pop music is still regarded as a vernacular form unsuitable for a religious occasion, a vulgar form unfit for royalty; and Elton John was not an obvious representative of the state (though he was soon to be knighted, joining Sir Cliff Richard, Sir Paul McCartney, and Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber in the official pop pantheon). He was chosen to sing because he was an intimate of Diana and, in this respect, simply represented her social circle. But it was precisely because she was an Elton John fan that Princess Diana could be described as 'the people's princess': John was an appropriate singer at her service not just as a personal friend but also as the emotional voice of a generation.

In the 1970s Elton John and his lyricist, Bernie Taupin, perfected the musical form that came to dominate Anglo-American pop music in the last decades of the century: the rock ballad. They took the sentimental song (as commercialised in the late nineteenth century), keeping its easy melodic lines, its use of rising pitch to unleash emotion, its lyrical sense of expansive self-pity, but giving it a new rock-based dynamism (in terms of rhythm and amplification). In particular, Elton John's vocal approach was taken from soul music: he sings with a hesitancy, an introversion, an intimacy which contrasts markedly with the full, extrovert, confident vocal tone of the Victorian ballad singer. And this relates to what was most striking about his Westminster Abbey song: the crowd in Hyde Park, watching the service on television relay screens, clearly saw it as a performance. They applauded, and the applause resonated in the Abbey itself. When Earl Spencer spoke, his speech was also heard as a performance, and the applause rippled around the Abbey audience too.

Now of course everyone at Diana's service was performing one way or another, but Elton John's was a specifically pop performance. He was applauded less for being sincere than for performing sincerity: applause was necessary to confirm the skill – the effect – of the performance. Someone just being sincere – crying, say – is not applauded because this

involves neither skill nor calculation; it is not an act designed for an evaluative response. Elton John's performance, by contrast, was precisely a display of what we might call emoting skill. What the audience applauded was not John's actual feeling of grief (his business alone) but his ability to provide a performance of grief in which we, as listeners, could take part. 'Candle in the Wind' was, after all, first written for Marilyn Monroe, and it became popular because its feelings were so easily transferred; it was a song through which every lost love could be remembered. It was Diana's song not because she was now its object but because she had so liked it too.

Here are clues as to the ways in which pop performers can be distinguished from rock musicians, on the one hand, and from classical musicians, on the other. Elton John is a pop not a rock star because his authenticity – the authenticity of his expressed emotions – is not an issue. 'Candle in the Wind' is not a song of self-exposure; it was not written to mark off John's difference, his unique artistic sensibility. It was, rather, a pop song, designed for public use. At the same time its pleasures are neither abstract nor in any musical sense transcendent. It is a song infused with Elton John's personality and, for its emotional effect, infused too with a kind of collective sigh. Compare John Tavener's contribution to the funeral service. This also struck an emotional chord with the public (and duly turned up in Classic FM listeners' list of favourite works); but it was clearly a spiritual piece, lifting listeners out of the mundane. It was not applauded.

Definitions

Pop music is a slippery concept, perhaps because it is so familiar, so easily used. Pop can be differentiated from classical or art music, on the one side, from folk music, on the other, but may otherwise include every sort of style. It is music accessible to a general public (rather than aimed at elites or dependent on any kind of knowledge or listening skill). It is music produced commercially, for profit, as a matter of enterprise not art. Defined in these terms, 'pop music' includes all contemporary popular forms – rock, country, reggae, rap, and so on. But there are problems with such an inclusive definition as has become apparent when states have attempted to define pop in law. When in 1990 British legislators (concerned to regulate the content of music radio) defined 'pop music' as 'all kinds of music characterised by a strong rhythmic element and a reliance on electronic amplification for their performance', this led to strong objections from the music industry that such a musical definition failed to grasp the sociologi-

cal difference between pop ('instant singles-based music aimed at teenagers') and rock ('album-based music for adults').

Here pop becomes not an inclusive category but a residual one: it is what's left when all the other forms of popular music are stripped away, and it is not only rock ideologues who want to distance their music from pop, for them a term of contempt. Country music performers have objected similarly to 'pop stars' like Olivia Newton-John getting country music awards, and these days rap fans dismiss cross-over stars like Will Smith as just 'pop acts'. From this perspective pop is defined as much by what it isn't as by what it is.

Markets

Pop does not have a specific or subcultural, communal market/culture. It is designed to appeal to everyone. Pop doesn't come from any particular place or mark off any particular taste. The partial exception to this rule is teenpop which does appeal to a specific market segment (young girls) but it is misleading to conclude from this that pop is a female form or has primarily female appeal. Much of pop could be called family music. Europop, for example, has been the sound of the summer holiday since Los Bravos's million selling 'Black is Black' in 1966. Los Bravos were a Spanish group with a German lead singer and a British producer. Their success was a model for both cross-European collaboration and commercial opportunism. The skill of the Europop producer (and this is a producer-led form) is to adapt the latest fashionable sounds to Euroglot lyrics which can be followed by everyone with a high-school foreign language, and to a chorus line which can be collectively sung in every continental disco and holiday resort. Thus Boney M, a foursome from the Caribbean (via Britain and Holland), brought together by German producer Frank Farian, sold fifty million records in 1975–8, while the Swedish group Abba, had eighteen consecutive European top ten hits following their 1974 victory in the Eurovision Song Contest. Both groups appealed (particularly through television) to listeners older and younger than the dedicated holiday disco dancers, combining child friendly chorus lines with slick choreography and a tacky erotic glamour that gave Abba, in particular, a camp appeal that was a major influence on late 1970s gay music culture. The most successful British pop production team of the 1980s, Stock, Aitken, Waterman, were clearly influenced by this pop genre, and by the promotion processes that supported it. A group like Steps, which found fame at the turn of the century under Waterman's guidance, managed to combine an up-to-date sense of the Europop sound with British seaside hoofer values which would have been familiar to musical entertainers at the end of the nineteenth century.

Ideology

Pop is not driven by any significant ambition except profit and commercial reward. Its history is a history of serial or standardised production and, in musical terms, it is essentially conservative. Pop is about giving people what they already know they want rather than pushing up against technological constraints or aesthetic conventions. The new in pop thus tends to be the novelty (an instrumental hit like the Tornados' 'Telstar', an 'exotic' number like Althia and Donna's 'Uptown Top Ranking'), and pop is marked by the continuity of its musical values. Common pop terms – easy listening, light entertainment – and the familiar image of fireside crooners like Bing Crosby and Val Doonican suggest that pop is meant to be unobtrusive: if rock involves a kind of in-your-face presence, pop aims to soothe. The contrast can be heard in, say, James Last's orchestral versions of Sex Pistols songs!

Production

Pop is music provided from on high (by record companies, radio programmers and concert promoters) rather than being made from below. Pop is not a do-it-yourself music but is professionally produced and packaged. Hence the pop importance of song writers and record producers, on the one hand, and singing stars, on the other. The singer–songwriter is not a common pop figure (though Barry Manilow has shown what can be done with this role). Rather, the key people are commercial songwriters from Stephen Foster and Irving Berlin to Carole King and Dianne Warren, entrepreneurial producers like Berry Gordy and Mickie Most, and versatile performers like Jessie Matthews and the Spice Girls.

Aesthetics

Pop is not an art but a craft. It is not about realising individual visions or making us see the world in new ways but about providing popular tunes and cliches in which to express commonplace feelings – love, loss, jealousy. But to work pop must do this in sufficiently individualised ways to appeal to us as individual listeners. And the secret here lies in the pop singers' ability to appeal to us directly, to lay their personality on a song such that we can make it our song too. This is the paradox of pop that Noel Coward described as the 'potency' of cheap music. We can and do despise pop music in general as bland commercial pap while being moved by it in particular as a source of sounds that chime unexpectedly but deeply in our lives.

History

From a rock perspective pop is seen as a kind of unchanging 'old' music, to be contrasted with 'progressive' rock or dance music. This is partly an

effect of the way generations work culturally (though the identification of rock with youth does have the odd effect that thirty-year-old tracks can still be used by advertisers and style consultants to provide a youthful ambience) but it also reflects the underlying nostalgia of pop music culture: pop songs are designed both to sound familiar and, often enough, to make one regret that times and people change. But pop itself is implicated in such change: there can be few people over twenty-five who don't agree that they don't write songs like that anymore.

One reason they don't is technological. Pop was the product of a sheet music and then a record industry; it has been shaped by its use in the cinema, on radio, by television. (The most revolutionary moment in pop's technological history was undoubtedly the development of the electrical microphone, which I discuss further below.) Another is sociological. As a mass market music, pop reflects the changing nature of its audience and, in particular, is a kind of musical measure of migration, demographic change and the breakdown of geographical sound barriers. If American pop thus became dominant globally in the twentieth century, pop in the United States was itself the music of Jewish migrants from eastern Europe and the descendants of slaves from Africa. Pop music may come from no particular place, but it absorbs musical sounds from everywhere. And there is a further point to make here. In their very determination to mark themselves off from pop, fans of focused music genres like rock and country are admitting that the lines of demarcation are blurred. It has often been remarked that anything can be rocked; anything can also be popped. The history of pop is marked by the traces of all sorts of musical form – ragtime and blues, jazz and hillbilly, reggae and disco, rock and soul. Even classical music has been popped, as it were, whether in the marketing of opera singers as stars, from Enrico Caruso through Mario Lanza to Luciano Pavarotti, or in the pilfering of classical scores for good tunes – the Boston Pops Orchestra was formed (as an offshoot of the Boston Symphony Orchestra) early in the twentieth century. The success of Classic FM suggests that in Britain, at least, classical music can provide the basic programming for pop radio.

Pop has a history, then, with key moments of change. Perhaps the most important, as I have already noted, followed the marketing of the electrical microphone in the 1930s. Technically the microphone was a way of amplifying the voice, and its immediate use was to enable singers to make themselves heard above the noise of a jazz band or swing orchestra. The amplification of the voice ran parallel to the amplification of the guitar, wind and brass instruments that transformed rural blues into urban rhythm and blues and Western Swing into honky tonk (out of which came rock'n'roll). But in pop terms the microphone's importance was not that it enabled people to sing loudly but that it let them be soft. The electric

mike's immediate impact was in the radio and recording studio rather than on stage. The mike meant new vocal techniques (crooning, torch singing) and new kinds of singer whose skill was microphone technique rather than diaphragm control.

What the best of these singers (notably Frank Sinatra and Billie Holiday) quickly realised was that they could sing with a new expressive intimacy. A tone and pitch that were previously only heard in private conversation could now be reproduced publicly, and, of course, central to such intimate conversations are declarations of love and intimations of desire. Listeners could now pretend that they knew the singer, that the singer understood or, at least, articulated their own feelings. This brought a new kind of emotionalism and eroticism into pop, an eroticism most obvious in the emergence of Frank Sinatra's young female fans (who prefigured teen crushes to come), and thus a new kind of stardom: the pop singer as idol.

By the end of the 1930s pop meant vocal rather than instrumental records, and the singer (rather than band leader) dominated the stage (soon displacing the big band altogether). This process was an effect too of radio and cinema, both of which played a central role in the making of the new sort of singing personality, and by the end of the 1940s its consequences for the music industry had become far reaching. Pop songs were increasingly written to display a singer's personality rather than a composer's skill; they now had to work emotionally through the singer's expressivity (rather than the mood being determined by the score) – it was Sinatra's feelings that were heard in the songs he sang rather than their writers'. The new kind of vocal pop star thus needed simpler, more directly emotional songs than those provided by jazz or theatre-based composers, and singers (and their record companies) began to draw on the folk, country and rhythm and blues repertoires. Witty lyrics and sophisticated melodic lines were replaced by melodramatic narratives and unabashed sentimentality. The rise of television reinforced the importance of pop singers as family entertainers (Dean Martin became the biggest television draw in the United States) but brought a new kind of self-consciousness and irony into pop performance (personified most flamboyantly by Liberace).

In many ways the television version of pop that was established in the United States and (with some different national characteristics) in the United Kingdom in the mid-1950s provided a blueprint of pop performance and stardom with which we are still familiar. But two complicating factors should be noted. First, the 1950s also saw the emergence of a teenage market and a teenage taste and if one aspect of this (youth marking itself off from adult entertainment) was rock'n'roll, another

(youth music as a new strand of showbiz) was teen pop. Teen pop idols were manufactured (Pat Boone, Fabian) or evolved from rock'n'rollers to all-round entertainers (Cliff Richard, Tommy Steele; in the end, Elvis Presley). Adult pop conventions were adapted for the teenage market. Television was important: American teen idols appeared on *American Bandstand*, British teen idols on *6–5 Special* and *Oh Boy!* On these shows rock'n'roll songs alternated with ballads, and the most successful young performers were pretty but knowable, like the ideal boy next door. When Billy Fury, say, came on to sing 'Halfway to Paradise' he was in essence just a young and more vulnerable version of David Whitfield. Trouser shapes and hair styles change, but there are obvious musical and ideological continuities between Ricky Nelson and David Cassidy, George Michael and Robbie Williams, Pat Boone and Roland Keating, and there have always been model female teen pop singers too, from Connie Francis and Helen Shapiro to Tiffany and Britney Spears.

In commercial terms, then, the 1950s manufacture and marketing of teen pop stars was not a very different process than the manufacture and marketing of pop stars generally, and by the 1960s the pop market was predominantly the teenage market anyway. But there was significant difference in the detail. The writers and producers of teen pop, for example, tended to be young themselves, with a better grasp of teenage vernacular, a better feel for teenage emotions, a better ear for what was hip than the established Tin Pan Alley hacks. The Brill Building became the Tin Pan Alley port of call for young songwriters pitching teen pop songs, and its associated producers were much more at ease with the new technology of tape recording than the established record company studio teams. The record producer changed from being a skilled arranger like Mitch Miller, getting everything in its right place before the session started, to being an inspired sound engineer like Phil Spector, treating the musical tracks as just raw material. Most importantly of all, though, this new generation of pop song writers and producers blended African–American musical conventions into the mix in new ways. In the 1950s black singers had found a television pop niche, whether as a genius entertainer like Louis Armstrong or in the mellow, sophisticated and sexy stylings of Nat 'King' Cole and Johnny Mathis. But what interested the new class of Jewish writers and producers like Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller and Phil Spector was not the jazz that had influenced their parents, the generation of the Gershwins, but the music they'd heard directly from their African–American neighbours when growing up: rhythm and blues, doo wop, the sound of vocal groups.

The move from pop singer to pop group (which had its ultimate commercial triumph with the Beatles) partly reflected the increasing use of

multi-voices for telling teenage stories: teen emotions were seen to be an aspect of everyday conversation that adult emotions are not, and so Phil Spector and Shadow Morton made their 'little operas for kids' with the Crystals and Ronettes and Shangri-Las. But in the longer run the more important point is that multitrack recording found its aesthetic equivalent in the way in which doo-wop broke up the standard pop song into vocal parts, giving it a new rhythmic and timbrel complexity, and in the call/response structure of gospel music. While there was a white pop tradition of group singing (Barbershop groups, for example), its use of close harmony was only really developed by the Beach Boys. For pop in general the group sound came to mean a seductive lead voice (on the gospel derived model of Sam Cooke and Ben E. King) with a chorus of supporters, the sound perfected in the 1960s (and soon dominating the pop sales charts) by the Motown label and acts like Martha and the Vandellas, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, the Supremes, Temptations and Four Tops.

These pop sounds were fed into rock by British beat groups and then dismissed as 'commercial' by the newly emergent rock fans, and in the last decades of the twentieth century musical influences worked the other way, less pop developments affecting rock, than rock sounds affecting pop. Two trends in particular should be noted: the rise of the power ballad, and the prominence of the soul diva.

Although rock was a musical form that defined itself against pop, the ballad remained central to its appeal. And if jazz performers had used ballads' melodic familiarity as the basis of improvisation – transforming a standard pop song into something quite different – rock musicians (following the Beatles' lead with 'Yesterday') wrote their own ballads but used them in familiar pop ways to bind their audiences into an emotional community. The original rock'n'rollers like Elvis Presley drew on established ballad traditions, whether Italian ('It's Now Or Never') or American (country rock balladeers like Roy Orbison, Charlie Rich and Willie Nelson gave Tin Pan Alley sentiment a new edge of melancholy). But the rock ballad as such derived from soul music and, in particular, from Ray Charles, whose gospel reading of a country song, 'I Can't Stop Loving You', became its inspiration. Charles' emotional sincerity was marked by a distinct vocal roughness and if his tempo was slow it was also insistent. He had a direct influence on such singers as Eric Burdon (of the Animals), Tom Jones and Joe Cocker who, in turn, established the conventions of the ballad as a rock form, as a vehicle for male vocal virtuosity (emotive singing at high pitch and high volume) and chorus line exhilaration. Foreigner's 'I Want To Know What Love Is' (with choral support from the New Jersey Mass Choir) and Aerosmith's 'I Don't Want To Miss A Thing'

(with Steven Tyler's vocals so over-the-top as to be parodic) are the classic power ballads, songs of feeling bottled up and bursting out; musical, emotional and sexual release somehow all equated.

This was balladry in a rock context, but such an amplified approach to wanting-songs soon affected pop singing conventions too, as marked initially, as I have already mentioned, by the 1970s emergence of Elton John and then by the success of Michael Bolton in the United States and Mick Hucknall and Simply Red in Britain. The best selling pop singer of the late 1990s, Céline Dion, started out as a child singing French Canadian folk songs and won the Eurovision Contest for Switzerland, but she became a superstar with a singing style that was clearly drawn from power balladry (even working with Meatloaf's producer, Jim Steinman, on one album), and this brings me to the pop importance of the soul diva. In many ways the history of female pop singing follows along the same lines as the history of male pop singing. In the 1960s the sophisticated night club approach of Dionne Warwick (mostly singing the notably adult songs of Burt Bacharach and Hal David) was overlaid by the gospel soul baring of Aretha Franklin and the more adolescent pop seductiveness of Diana Ross in the development of a new kind of vocal virtuosity (and fame) for Gladys Knight, Tina Turner and then Whitney Houston. But in other respects the role of the female pop singer has been different from that of the male pop star. Just as a matter of a wider gender ideology, women singers are heard to have a pathos or vulnerability that men lack – they can make us feel sorrier for them. And then, by this same token, they are also taken to be more skilled at the nuances of emotional expression, more powerful at emotional warfare, more confident at holding up their emotions for our exploration as it were. It is not surprising that Judy Garland, Shirley Bassey, and Dusty Springfield, for example, have had a certain camp appeal, a gay following precisely interested in the performance of emotional excess, nor that there's an element of kitsch in the sexual appeal of the biggest women pop stars – Dion, Houston, Maria Carey and, of course, Madonna.

Even more importantly, though, the very emotional impact of this singing style, its sense of raw feeling bravely dressed, has enabled its sound to be removed from its context: such strong feeling doesn't need an occasion, it can just be added into the mix. From the moment Giorgio Moroder realised that Donna Summer had the ideal voice to put over his machine music, the poppier end of the dance floor in Europe and North America has been dominated by the sound of (mostly anonymous) soul divas, by a kind of collective gospel choir of women wanting love, losing love, celebrating love, bemoaning love, boasting of love found, contemptuous of love lost. It's as if only such voices can guarantee the humanity of the electronic world.

The sentimental song

Paul McCartney once summed pop up as 'silly love songs', and the earliest content analysis of the American hit parade, carried out by J. G. Peatman (1942–3) in the 1940s duly found that 'all successful pop songs are about romantic love'. Indeed, Peatman claimed that he only needed three descriptive categories to characterise American pop: the happy-in-love song, the frustrated-in-love song, and the novelty song with sex interest. In historical terms, though, the popular song hasn't always been about love, and I think it makes better sense to define pop as the sentimental song and then suggest that in the twentieth century (in the West, at least) sentiment came to be applied almost exclusively to affairs of the heart.

This wasn't the case when the pop industry was first shaped in the nineteenth century. The first great commercial songwriter of the sheet music era, Stephen Foster, wrote his best-loved songs for minstrel shows. Plantation numbers like 'The Old Folks at Home' were sentimental about family, rural life and the past rather than about particular girls or boys, and the song catalogues and manuals for would-be pop composers in the 1900s suggest a range of possible lyrical topics. The pop repertoire was divided into ballad and novelty songs, and the former included not just love songs but also country or rustic songs, Irish songs, songs about Mother.

The obvious question here is what happened to pop in the first half of the twentieth century: why was it reduced to love songs? I'll come back to this. First, I just want to note that although the 1900s classification of song types is quaint it is not incomprehensible. I know what is meant by an Irish song ('Danny Boy', 'When Irish Eyes Are Smiling') and a rustic song (country songwriters like Dolly Parton were coming up with variations of 'My Old Kentucky Home' well into the 1980s). And even Mother songs or, rather, Absent Mother songs are not completely unfamiliar (in the musical *Annie*, for example), while Clive Dunn's 'Grandad' was a British hit as late as 1970. My point here, then, is that while Peatman's findings might accurately reflect the hit parade, by the 1940s the hit parade didn't accurately reflect pop. Certainly by the end of the 1950s, when singles sales charts were primarily a measure of teenage taste, 'chart pop' had become a specific and relatively insignificant strand of the pop music to which most people listened – musicals, film soundtracks, oldies, supper club songs, television variety, jazz and country easy listening standards, and so on. It is, in short, misleading to equate pop with record sales.

One of the implications of Peatman's findings was that music that had once had resonance in a variety of social settings, for a variety of social reasons had become focused on the narcissistic feelings of one individual

for another. Such individualisation was obviously tied into a shift in pop music marketing: the move from a sheet music to a record industry was a move from collective to individual consumption. But again the interesting question here is not so much why people buy records but about the occasions for sentiment. Pop's history is obviously marked by moments of collective sentimentality. Twentieth-century wars, for example, were fought to the sound of songs of pathos: 'It's A Long Way To Tipperary' (an Irish song to boot!), 'We'll Meet Again'. Even the Animals' 'We've Gotta Get Out of This Place', an obvious favourite for American soldiers in Vietnam, is essentially sentimental (and a love song only in the vaguest way). Twentieth-century migration also involved the use of sentimental songs to remind people of their homelands and to idealise old ways. The Irish song thus continued to be significant throughout the century, meaning among other things that the Irish folk revival of the 1960s (and the pop success of Tommy Makem and the Clancy Brothers and the Dubliners) originated in the Irish bars of New York and that the Riverdance phenomenon started out as interval entertainment, a tourist package, for the Eurovision Song Contest. At a more mundane level, collective sentimentality remains a feature of sports spectating (whether the old Wembley tradition of 'Abide With Me' or the more recent use of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'You'll Never Walk Alone' on the terraces at Anfield) and drinking. The *karaoke* phenomenon has certainly given new sentimental life to old sentimental songs, turning 'I Will Survive' and 'My Way' into anthems of feminist, gay and heterosexual cultures.

What's important to note about all these examples is that pop here doesn't just mean buying records but also performing them, and performing them in a particular way. Sentimentality describes not just how we listen but also how we sing, *from the heart*, and however embarrassingly we somehow all seem to know how to do that. One way of putting my argument here is to suggest that it is not strong feelings that determine how we sing, but that how we sing gives us the experience of these sorts of feeling. It's the music not the situation that makes us cry, as Hollywood film scorers have long known. To put this another way, it is the sentimental song, sentimental singing, that has come to be the public sign of sincerity. From the earliest days of the music hall, comic turns would wrap up their act with a sentimental song: forget the cynicism and humiliations of music-hall humour they seemed to say, this is the real me, the real you. This became a feature of television comics too (Ken Dodd singing 'Tears', for example) and even a much more aggressive performer like Millie Jackson brings her show to an end by moving out of her contemptuous man-mocking rap into a sentimental soul ballad .

It is perhaps not surprising then that in the latter half of the twentieth

century the sentimental song became the sales focus of the musical, on the one hand, and the film soundtrack, on the other. Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1940s transformation of the musical into a vernacular narrative form (with *Oklahoma*, *Carousel* and *South Pacific*) also involved a new sort of show stopper, the ballad that could stand free of the story ('If I Loved You', 'Some Enchanted Evening'). Such ballads, marketed as pop songs (*West Side Story*'s 'Somewhere' being the classic example), became, in turn, a way of selling a show. This was the promotional strategy mastered by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Hit songs like 'I Don't Know How to Love Him' (*Jesus Christ Superstar*), 'Don't Cry For Me, Argentina' (*Evita*), and 'Memories' (*Cats*) drew people to his shows (rather that the show producing hits on the back of its success – as had been the case with *The Sound of Music* or *Oliver*). This is the reason, I think, that Webber works seem less like musicals than elaborately staged pop shows (one reason, perhaps, why *Cats* works best).

The big ballad has become equally important for film marketing in the last thirty years. Henry Mancini's 'Moon River', written for the opening credits of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, is usually taken to mark a new relationship between the film and music industries. It was not just that here a song was used to sell a film (rather than vice versa) but also that the song had an accidental relationship to the plot, as it were. It might have had an obvious musical affinity to the rest of Mancini's score, captured the film's ambience, but lyrically it was quite vague and the film would lose nothing if it were removed or replaced. This use of a pop song as simply a film commercial was exploited brilliantly by the James Bond films and by the 1980s stand alone songs were being used over the closing titles too. Here the purpose wasn't just promotional. Audiences were now being sent out of the cinema uplifted by power ballads which bore little musical or lyrical relationship to the rest of the film's score. This trend gave big-voiced singers like Joe Cocker and Jennifer Warnes new careers and culminated in the simultaneous cinema and pop triumph of *Titanic* the film, James Horner's *Titanic* score, and Céline Dion's 'My Heart Will Go On'. What was most interesting here was not how film and music sold each other, but how the very meaning of the film (as a romance rather than a disaster movie) was determined by its closing sentimental song.

Pop music and society

Pop music could be defined as the music we listen to without meaning to; the songs we know without knowing how we know them. These days we

equate pop with pop records. Much of the music we hear despite ourselves is 'canned'. Pop music thus reaches us over the radio, through passing car windows, as sound around a shopping centre. Pop songs lodge themselves maddingly in the mind after holidays, children's parties, visits to the dentist; 'La Paloma Blanca', 'Barbie Girl', anything by Abba or Andy Williams. But to use the term 'pop' to describe all the music that insinuates itself into our lives and commercial music is only part of the story. We all grow up into musical cultures, collections of songs and tunes and styles that become our taken-for-granted musical knowledge. And for at least one hundred and fifty years commercially produced music has been an inescapable part of this. But only part, and with various consequences.

As children, for example, we hear lullabies, learn nursery rhymes, join in family songs. Schools teach us folk songs, children's songs; in the playground we join in skipping and jumping songs, on school outings rude songs. Most of us remember these songs throughout our lives, pass them on to children and grandchildren, and the result is a remarkably rich and jumbled repertoire, from traditional tunes which can be traced back over hundreds of years to recent pop tunes whose immediate provenance is soon forgotten. In their classic studies of the lore and language of school children, the Opies (1985) traced the wondrous 1950s journey of 'The Ballad of Davy Crockett' from American television series across English speaking playgrounds around the world, picking up a myriad of local variations along the way. Any hit pop song, it seems (Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody', Spice Girls' 'Wannabe'), can be given the a cappella playground treatment.

What's involved here, though, is not just the makeover of new best sellers, the translation of pop into folk, as it were. 'Children's song' is itself a commercial category. Ever since there has been a music business there has been a children's music business, and such 'children's favourites' are resold to generation after generation. BBC radio may have long since dropped its *Children's Hour* and family record request programmes, but the songs these once featured are now performed on children's television programmes (and videos), by children's entertainers like the Singing Kettle. Children's records and cassettes are still a flourishing (if little discussed) sector of the pop industry. An historian could doubtless trace the various musical origins of 'Nellie the Elephant' and 'Going to the Zoo', 'Puff the Magic Dragon' and 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight', 'The Runaway Train' and 'How Much is that Doggie in the Window?' But these songs have become, in effect, timeless, as freshly enjoyed by four-year-olds today as they were by their parents, grandparents and even great grandparents.

This process of musical absorption doesn't stop with childhood, of

course, although that is when we hear the most extraordinary range of musical material, and in adult life I have often been struck by how many songs I seem to know without any idea of how I know them. Music hall songs ('My Old Man Said Follow The Van'); cabaret songs ('Mad Dogs and Englishmen'); Disney songs ('Whistle While You Work'); Gilbert and Sullivan songs ('Three Little Girls From School Are We'); film songs ('White Christmas'); songs which come from I know not where ('I Love To Go A-Wandering, A Knapsack On My Back'). What we know this way is obviously shaped by class and place and family and friends; by ethnicity and nation. Most people in Britain probably know the opening lines of 'Auld Lang Syne'; Scots people are likely to know the next lines too, and one feature of a multicultural society is an expansion of the common pop repertoire, as 'Pass the Dutchie', say, takes its place in the playground. Pop defined this way thus provides a kind of map of a changing society just as it maps our own lives, helping give emotional shape to our memories of childhood, friendship, love affairs, life changes. And pop becomes too a resource, a social storehouse from which musicians of all sorts draw and quote and sample.

Pop is not usually treated so positively, so I should stress the two assumptions I'm making here. First, that a song's origin is really only of academic interest. The commercial intent behind 'How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?' is as irrelevant to a young listener now as the political intent behind nursery rhymes like 'The Grand Old Duke of York' or 'Bobby Shafto's Gone To Sea', while Davy Crockett and Tom Dooley are no more or less folk heroes than John Henry or John Barleycorn. Attempts to draw a clear distinction between authentic and inauthentic popular songs, whether using musicological or sociological criteria, are pointless. It's not where pop songs come from that matters, but where they get to. 'Jingle Bells' and 'White Christmas' are every bit as authentic Christmas songs as 'I Saw Three Ships' or 'Silent Night' simply because they are now part of everyone's musical Christmas portfolio.

My second assumption is that pop describes songs that we can and sometimes do perform as well as listen to. Much of this singing is collective – we sing at school, in the pub, at football matches, during weddings and funerals, at the end of parties. But we sing individually too – to our children, with our best friends, above all to ourselves. Indeed, I would add to the definition of pop as accessible music that it is also singable and performable music; it doesn't need the skills that classical or jazz or even rock musicians must acquire. And this argument about participation leads me to a kind of music which is not usually thought of as pop but which has some claim to have determined what pop music means. I refer, of course, to church music: even in these relatively Godless times most of us have

sung hymns and carols at some stage of our lives, have come to associate church music with rituals of grief and celebration.

Tim Fleming (1999) has argued persuasively that the contemporary sentimental song has its roots as firmly in the eighteenth-century sentimental hymns of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley as in the romantic secular songs which were the source of the first big sheet music sales. It was these hymns that gave popular song emotional tropes that we still recognise: a regret for lost innocence, a yearning for paradise as a rustic idyll, a definition of love as comfort in distress. Robbie Williams' 'Angel', to put this another way, is not so different from Isaac Watts', and the translation of gospel into soul shows how easy it is to love a man or woman musically in the same way that one loves God. It could also be said that the Church has been as significant as the music industry in the process of cultural imperialism, spreading Western musical forms East and South. I've always assumed that one reason for Jim Reeves' remarkable global popularity was because his singing style was familiar from years of American missionary work.

Whatever the reason for Jim Reeves' success, pop certainly doesn't work in the straightforward ways that the simpler accounts of commercialism suggest. Why did King Sunny Adé like Jim Reeves' songs so much? How did Smokie become a talisman for radical students in South Korea? Why do some songs become standards the moment they're first heard ('Yesterday', for example) while others not very different make no public mark at all? What's sure is that pop can't be sensibly analysed just in terms of musicology or aesthetics. Yes, we do respond to the song-in-itself but that song-in-itself is soon encrusted with uses and memories and references. Once a pop song is launched on the world, all sorts of things can happen to it. When Bobby Vinton was in the studio laying down 'Blue Velvet', one of his soppier tracks, could he have foreseen that the song would accompany one of the great homoerotic scenes in Hollywood cinema, in Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, or become forever menacing, following its use by David Lynch? When Elton John and Bernie Taupin first crafted 'Candle in the Wind' could they have imagined it becoming an official state mourning song?

And if unexpected things happen to songs, so songs have unexpected effects on us. My favourite Abba song, 'The Day Before You Came', describes the wonder of falling in love by flatly documenting how banal life was before love struck. It could equally be a song about the transforming power of music. And so the irony remains. If pop is precisely the music we would usually include in such banality, it is also pop – more than any other form of music – that changes if not our lives then certainly the ways in which we feel about them.

Further reading

Some of my arguments here are taken from my book *Performing Rites. On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) though that deals with popular music rather indiscriminately. The best academic studies are historical. For an overview see Peter Van Der Merwe, *Origins of the Popular Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Tim Fleming's doctoral thesis, cited above, is the best study I know of the origins and commercial and cultural impact of the sentimental song. For the United States see Nicholas Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley: American Popular Song 1866–1910* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990). For the United Kingdom see Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England 1840–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) and Derek B. Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois. Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1989). I don't know of any good pop histories covering the rest of the twentieth century though most of the biggest stars have useful biographies. From the perspective of academic research, pop seems to be that music that isn't much studied. Most books written in the last twenty years with pop in their titles are really about rock; the most suggestive studies of popular music are focused on genres like rap or country. When pop singers or composers are taken seriously it is usually in order to suggest that they transcend their commercial context, can be treated like classical composers or as jazz singers. With the exception of Henry Pleasants' fine *The Great American Popular Singers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974) the resulting studies are often interesting but not often about pop, and I've yet to see an academic article on, say, Perry Como, Andrew Lloyd Webber or Cher.

For music and everyday life on the ground, as it were, see Ruth Finnegan's richly suggestive ethnography of the musical worlds in Milton Keynes: *The Hidden Musicians. Music Making in an English Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and the engaging interviews about people's musical lives collected by Susan D. Crafts, Daniel Cavicchi and Charles Keil as *My Music* (Hanover and London, Wesleyan University Press, 1993). For illuminating if oblique approaches to pop see Mark W. Booth, *The Experience of Song* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) historically arranged essays on songs from madrigals to advertising jingles, and Michael Billig, *Rock'n'Roll Jews* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2000) ostensibly a history of Jews in rock'n'roll, in fact a moving meditation on popular music and cultural identity.

PART III

Debates

9 Pop, rock and interpretation

RICHARD MIDDLETON

Everyone with an interest in pop has opinions about it – about its meanings, value, effects and significance. But some opinions – those of critics and academics, for example – claim more attention than others, largely because they have access to the public ear; and, actually, surprisingly little is known about ordinary fans' interpretations. Does this matter? Articulate description of musical responses is always rare; but more is at stake here than the familiar 'mystery' of music.

The announcement of the 1994 Mercury Music Award, by a panel chaired by noted pop music scholar Simon Frith, led trade magazine *Music Week* (6 August 1994) to bemoan the involvement of 'egghead academics and journalists who think too much for their own good'. Thirteen years earlier, the first international conference of the recently formed International Association for the Study of Popular Music was greeted with mocking incredulity in a London *Times* feature (16 June 1981), as was the first issue of the Cambridge University Press journal *Popular Music*. There seemed, evidently, to be an obvious incongruity here – high-value educational capital invested in the study of worthless music, rationality applied to the obstinately irrational, articulate discourse to the wantonly dumb; and this incongruity runs deep through the academy's involvement with pop. There are often suspicions that pop is being used. Thus male leftists, with the radical political commitments of the '1968 generation', largely drive the shape of the early waves of scholarship, 'rockist', 'masculinist' and anti-establishment as it is. More recently, 'postmodernist' intellectuals find in 'knowing' post-punk pop a seemingly ready accomplice in their search for a politics of 'identity'. The 'populist' alternative – 'let the fans speak for themselves' – loses its simple appeal once its inversionary logic becomes apparent. For conflicts and intersections of involvement and reflection, pleasure and theory, 'people' and 'intelligentsia', create the very conditions of existence for all interpretations of vernacular music culture.

Mass culture critique and the search for authenticity

A persistent question, both in the academy and on the street, has been whether pop – product of a highly capitalist industry – can nevertheless

find ways of expressing real feelings; even if it is made by them, can it stand for us?

The music originates at a time when capitalist society was being significantly re-structured, and much of the earliest writing on pop bears the marks of its roots in 1960s re-configurations of cultural fields and educational institutions which resulted from this re-structuring. Despite the appeals to cultural and political change, however, there is at the same time a debt to older positions, notably those associated with the early twentieth-century critiques of mass culture. In Britain, the influence of the literary critic F. R. Leavis; in the United States, the work of the sociologists of mass society; in Europe, the critical Marxism of the Frankfurt School: all these distinct but complementary bodies of theory lie behind the search for a popular music, and an interpretation of it, that could be seen as escaping the baleful embrace of commercial exploitation.

In post-war Britain, Leavis's defence of 'minority culture' validated by 'truth to experience' and grounded in 'organic community' offered a powerful paradigm. Richard Hoggart drew upon it in order to argue the superiority of the 'traditional' music culture of the working men's club over the 'shiny barbarity' of rock'n'roll. But by the mid-sixties the marker of discrimination had begun to shift, so that 'serious' work, with a capacity for 'inner growth', was now seen by some commentators as possible within pop. Though approved sources – jazz, blues, folk – were still favoured over their adaptations in commercial pop, the way was opened to a politics of authenticity in rock studies, together with a search for musical expressions of community, centred on the new social category of 'youth' (see Hall and Whannel 1964; Hughes 1964).

American writers, while drawing on partly different traditions, arrived at similar positions. Greil Marcus (1977) searches for a music of 'risk' and 'freedom' where 'each individual attempt implies an ideal community'; his account of Elvis's notorious passage from heroic youth to flabby music industry plaything is organised around, not anything so crude as 'selling out' (the vulgar version of this position), but loss of faith. It is this perspective which energised the countercultural rock magazines – *Rolling Stone*, *Creem* – just as the assumptions of 'Left-Leavisism' seeped pervasively into the British pop music press (not to mention some of the early academic musicology of pop).

Against the background of an emergent New Left, the late 1960s myth of rock authenticity shifted its colouring from liberal towards marxisant; Marcuse crossed with the American Beats formed the matrix within which a 'college aesthetic' (in Britain, specifically an art-school aesthetic) developed, moulding musical practice, vernacular theory and academic discourse alike. In a parallel (and inter-linked) move, British cultural studies,

centred on Stuart Hall's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, was crossing semiotics and poststructuralism with the theory of hegemony associated with the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to create what became known as subcultural theory.

Despite subcultural theory's new conceptual trappings, the debt to older mass culture critique is clear enough: Leavis's 'folk', classic marxism's proletariat, Marcuse's bohemians and outcasts, are replaced by youth subcultures: teds, mods, rockers, hippies, punks, as subjects of revolution – or at least resistance. The theoretical advance is the use of Gramsci to develop an account of pop styles as neither simply 'imposed' nor simply self-generated but as a form of 'negotiation' over constantly shifting cultural terrain. This was coupled with an interpretation of musical consumption as an aspect of meaning-production: style-elements, mass-produced as they are in their origins, are 're-articulated' to the expressive needs and social contexts of the subculture. The approach stands or falls with the concept of homology (structural 'fit'). But few subcultural studies demonstrate the music's fit, rather than assuming it; those which attempt to often fall into analytical generalisation, vagueness or inaccuracy, a deficiency which is a symptom of the deeper-level problem that, in cultures marked by fluidity and multiple mediations, it is difficult to protect social ownership of cultural forms (see Willis 1978; Hebdige 1979). Punk was the watershed. As the internal contradictions of both music and cultural style burst it apart, so images of socio-musical homology lost credibility (Laing 1985).

In recent years, 'authenticity' as such has also struggled for intellectual credibility, contaminated as it is by romantic wish-fulfilment and political exploitation. Yet models built on a distinction between 'art' and 'trash' or 'mainstream' and 'underground' (and indeed 'pop' and 'rock') still figure strongly in popular discourse. But the authenticity here has lost focus; it marks distinctions but without clear reference to social subjectivity. Arguably, to rehabilitate the concept would require that more attention be paid to 'articulation', less to 'homology', so that the fluidity of subjectivity and social positioning can be acknowledged, and the music's role theorised within rather than beyond the circuits of commercial media processes.

Sarah Thornton's study of dance music 'club cultures' suggests that it is possible to do this. Against the Birmingham approach, she insists that subcultures are constructed through the media, not in spite of them, and are not separable from commercial logics. Retreating from analytical depth, she claims that 'authenticity is ultimately an effect of the discourses which surround popular music . . . [and hence] subcultures are best defined as social groups that have been labelled as such'. As vehicles of 'subcultural capital', they simply mark distinctions, assert hierarchy, claim exclusivity,

transferring differentiating mechanisms typical of bourgeois society into youth culture itself. This persuasive picture reveals, though, how thin the concept of authenticity has become. Moreover, something of an older circularity remains – 'As a deep-seated taste dependent on [social] background, music preference is therefore a reasonably reliable indicator of social affinity' – and both the broader determinants of 'social background' and the part played by musical sounds themselves remain relatively obscure (Thornton 1995: 66, 162, 112–13). Thornton's language – 'consumers', 'brands', 'labels', 'niche markets', and so on – suggests something of an alignment between dance music subcultures, and her own ethnographic methodology, on the one hand, and the wider ideology of new-right consumerism, on the other. She is well aware that 'difference' is potentially repressive as well as liberating; yet she seems to shrink from any attempt to connect the new cultural segmentation to broader social forces.

That subcultural theorists have often ignored, or under-estimated the power of such forces is now easy to see, and it also helps to explain the neglect of the most imposing of the mass culture theorists, T. W. Adorno (1990), usually dismissed as simply an elitist snob. True, Adorno's message, at its most sweeping, would reduce popular music studies to nothing more than affirmations of the music's status as commodity-fetish. He re-writes formula (a potentially productive ground for creativity) as standardisation of musical form. He over-reads monopoly, to a point which empirical studies of both industry and consumption show to be unjustified. And he aligns music history to a uni-linear Marxist–Hegelian project of human emancipation which reduces the species anthropology 'upwards' into the perspective of a declining (Middle-European, bourgeois) class. Yet who could deny that the tendential strategies of the entertainment conglomerates and their 'gatekeepers' often approximate to the Adornian nightmare? Any cultural theory of pop's meanings must work with fully open eyes within this horizon, but few have done so.

Grasping the musical text

What do listeners hear when they listen to pop? How do they construe the inter-relationships and meanings of the sounds? The discipline of musicology is the one that should be able to answer these questions. Yet its established methods have not always proved suitable for the task. One of the problems with Adorno is his musicology, which in its method is simply transferred from its classical home and applied (or misapplied) to a repertory with arguably different requirements. This is not uncommon in the early attempts at a musicology of pop – though not always in such

an unqualified form (see Mellers 1973). Indeed, a dominant theme in the work of the younger generations of pop musicologists who appeared from the 1970s on, and who were influenced by emergent cultural studies, is precisely the issue of analytical method: how is the pop text to be grasped? – a question sometimes reduced to an attack on the received musicological paradigm tout court (Tagg 1982; McClary and Walser 1990; Shepherd 1991).

Pop is different in many respects from classical music. So there is a need to hear harmony in new ways, to develop new models for rhythmic analysis, to pay attention to nuances of timbre and pitch inflection, to grasp textures and forms in ways that relate to generic and social function, to escape from what Tagg calls 'notational centricity' (that is, the tendency to focus on a score rather than the sounds). Just as important, though, is that at a second level, the methodological problems arise from deeper, conceptual contradictions within the musicological paradigm. To locate music's meaning in its objectively constituted sound-patterns, regardless of its cultural contexts, social and emotional effects, and the bodily movements which accompany and perhaps generate it, is part of a broader tendency within post-Enlightenment bourgeois aesthetics. The trans-historical 'autonomy' of the work; the demand for 'disinterested' listening; the separation of a 'spiritual' from a lower physical sphere of expression; the reification of the 'composition': all fit together to form an ontology which would seem quite to exclude the secular life-processes of the pop song. To listen that way (as traditional analytic method implies we should) expropriates practice for 'art'.

Simon Frith (1996) has argued that 'musicology produces popular music for people who want to compose or play it'; its text is constructed around the interests of production – rather than listening. For anyone who believes (as I do) that this need not be so – that the 'musicologist' should also masquerade as the 'critic', who in turn tries to impersonate the 'fan' – the challenge is to show that analysis can produce an account of responses grounded both in intuition and scientific knowledge.

But if analysts are also fans, they are fans of an atypical sort. The question, 'who, in an act of textual analysis, is the listener?', might prompt as one response an excursion into ethnomusicology, where the problem of how to relate 'etic' (outsider) and 'emic' (insider) perspectives is a familiar one. The issue is that of pertinence (of interpretive code, of analytic paradigm). Often, large-scale contrasts are drawn between Western classical music on the one hand, African–American and pop musics on the other. The former is said to focus on *syntax* ('embodied meaning', 'extensional development'), the latter on *process* ('engendered feeling', 'intensional development') (Keil 1966; Chester 1990). There is a good deal in this – but

care is required. Such either/or distinctions are usually suspect, and probably all musical styles mix both approaches in varied proportion. Moreover, the same piece can be heard in different ways: even if a song seems to the analyst (an 'outsider' trying to get 'inside') to fall into a particular category, this does not of itself tell us whether all listeners would agree; and thus we are still left wondering where exactly 'inside' is (or indeed whether it has a single location at all).

Most textual analysis of pop has looked not to ethnomusicology but to semiology – the 'science of signs' – for inspiration, fired by a belief that 'social meaning' is crucial here. Listeners, it would seem, find songs meaningful. The question is, how the music produces this effect. The work that has been done varies in focus and in degree of methodological eclecticism. Certain issues constantly reappear, however: which musical features are the most important; how the features and parts of a song divide up and inter-relate; what exactly is the musical 'text' (a song, a style, a performer's repertory) and how it relates to 'contexts' of various sorts; whether meanings are 'coded' into particular sound-features, or attributed to them more flexibly by listeners; how far the interpretive process is a product of our experience, how far it constructs experience. Philip Tagg's well-known method relies more than most on empirical testing. Tagg reads meaning by, first, substituting discrete elements (a pitch, a rhythm, etc.) in the music to find how this changes the effect, and second, by 'inter-objective comparison' with other pieces in the same or similar repertories; in both cases, a body of respondents is consulted. This works well for dramatically characterised styles, especially those connected with visual images (film music, television themes) – though it can be criticised for apparently pinning down meanings too precisely, with little allowance for effects of context and disputed interpretation. It works perhaps less well for the more predictable and repetitive processes of typical chart pop or dance records, when there are fewer clear 'sound-images' to pick out.

In later work Tagg (1992) has placed more emphasis on larger-scale pointers to meaning: 'style indicators' (norms of the style in question) and 'genre synechdoches' (part-for-whole references to other styles), both of which bring clusters of associations with them. In a not dissimilar move, I myself, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogic meaning, have tried to construe musical textures and processes as dialogues of style-elements and their associations, through which a multiplicity of 'voices' speak (Middleton 1995). This is to situate meaning not 'in' the text but at the conjuncture of intersecting (and often contesting) discourses. Interestingly, two of the most accomplished recent interpretive studies, by Robert Walser (1993) and David Brackett (1995), work with methods that stress the importance of discursive contexts. But, as Walser argues, music

itself also functions as discourse – just as texts create contexts in addition to being defined by them. Similarly, as analysis starts to accept its proper place, telling one story among many that attach to the music, so music – musical practice – emerges more clearly as itself one branch of theory, implicitly commenting on its surroundings, musical and non-musical.

It is in this sense that dance music might be said to theorise the much-touted 'end of rock'. And in doing so, it may dramatise the possibility that, even though music is certainly everywhere wreathed in meanings, the idea of *musical representation* – the musical text designed to express some pre-existent reality – ties the semiotic perspective no less than the rock aesthetic to a specific form of meaning–production which may now be in decline. If dance textures do tend to evacuate the representational *mise-en-scène* formerly guaranteed above all in pop by expressive sung words, what seems to expand into this space is the gesturing body.

The pop body

Perhaps, though, this body was never really absent. The *physicality* of pop – 'the galvanising, primal joy of rock'n'roll itself' (Carson 1990: 448) – has been obsessively thematised since the very beginnings of the music. The sense that pop brings together, in specific ways, *feeling* and *movement* is often regarded as finding a focus in the performer, especially the star, whose person seems to embody the feelings the music expresses, and whose gestures both incite and stand for the corporeal responses of fans, through dance and in other ways. Paradoxically, however, there has been little serious study of star behaviour from this point of view, or of performance in general; and while the rush of work following the prominence of pop video brought the benefits of film theory to visual analysis, it often tends to miss links to the music (for example, to the 'gestures' structured into the movements of the sounds) and to older forms of (live) performance choreography.

Singing has an importance beyond 'expression' here, since in singing, after all, the body's pulsations are protruded on to a stream of breath. Arguably, though, the body's input extends throughout the music – and in a fashion, according to some, which bypasses the mediations of 'expression' altogether. To Peter Wicke – who rejects the apparatus of semiology and elevates 'sound' above form – it is a question of 'the *collective* presentation of emotions, postures and gestures'; 'the most important thing here are "structures full of movement" . . . [the music] is not a sign of something beyond itself but stands for something by itself, it is the mimic presentation of movements, patterns of movement, scenes of movement' (Wicke

1990: 19; my emphasis). Similarly, Walser (1993: 45) describes moments when 'the music is felt within as much as without, and the body is seemingly hailed directly'. But if, as John Shepherd (1993) argues, the movements of sound as such constitute a site of exchange between interior and exterior, where the material sociality of subjects and their bodies is negotiated, the problem becomes that of specifying what is distinctive about pop – and this in turn asks questions about how 'direct' the body's 'presentations' can be, if the mediatory codes inscribed in particular cultural instances are taken into account. This demands, surely, a theory of musical gesture grounded both in the spectrum of 'natural' rhythms which are all around and within us (including body-rhythms), and in the culturally mediated practices of specific musical traditions.

Such a theory – which translates the musicians' vernacular of 'groove' into a broader notion of rhythm permeating all aspects of musical texture – suggests a 'hidden' semiology, its meanings untranslatable but, precisely, *grasped*. This notion might remind us of Roland Barthes' 'figures of the body', or 'somathemes' – the body's gestures as they work in the music. Barthes' study of musical 'grain', though it says nothing about pop, quickly became canonic within pop studies, no doubt because it seems to offer a way of theorising intuitions of the music's gestural stratum. 'Grain' marks 'the body in the voice as it sings . . . the limb as it performs' (Barthes 1990: 188). It is the *surplus* in the interplay of signifiers, moving on the level of what Barthes calls *signifiance*, and opening to the listener the possibility of *jouissance* (the 'bliss' of self-loss – as opposed to the confirmation of identity associated with *plaisir* and effected by *signification* of culturally inscribed meanings). Pop listeners who have been 'lost in music' will know what Barthes is pointing towards.

Unfortunately, Barthes' influence on pop writing has by and large been at the level of generality: vague appeals to 'grain' (often reduced, mistakenly, to timbre); romanticising of 'bliss'. All too often, his limitations have transferred too: the social construction of the body and its signifying practices tend to be neglected, the variable interplay of *plaisir* and *jouissance* is reduced to an opposition, while 'bliss' seems to inhabit not so much the psychoanalytic sphere of the Imaginary as a strangely neutral pleasure-zone free of cultural marks. To challenge Barthes' elitist freedom to locate *signifiance* where he will (usually in modernist, avant-garde texts, while *signification* ('meaning') is left for the 'adjectival realism' of mass-culture products) requires the acknowledgement of an *encultured* body.

This means, above all, a *gendered* body. The analysis of gender codings in pop is an increasingly powerful stream. However, it is one thing to note the social conventions governing male and female roles in pop, another (more difficult) thing to find ways of discussing how modes of 'masculinity' and

'femininity' are constructed in the music itself. Can we connect specific musical styles or techniques to gendered values? Susan McClary (1991), diagnosing patriarchy in Western music as asserting itself through linear narrative and tonal closure (the Law of the Father, rationality triumphant), has explored the ways in which Madonna subverts it: through irony, rejection of linearity, refusal of cadence and 'phallic backbeat'. Robert Walser (1993) connects driving beat and high volume in heavy metal, together with the power guitars and controlled virtuosity, with machismo, but again finds some scope for modulation of this masculine image, especially in androgynous glam-metal. In *The Sex Revolts*, Simon Reynolds and Joy Press (1995) extend a similar reading to the whole of macho 'rebel rock', but they also construct an alternative, in the oceanic, pre-oedipal, 'wombadelic' bliss of ambient, dream-pop and psychedelia. For Richard Dyer (1990), the contrast with the 'thrusting' 'phallic' beat of rock is to be found in the more poly-rhythmic, whole-body (and hence liberating) eroticism which he finds in disco.

All these writers would, justifiably, refuse the label of essentialism. Yet an implicit binary divide ('dominant masculinity' in its relationship to something 'other') maps their readings to pre-conceived gender positions. Thus, for Dyer, 'even when performed by women, rock remains indelibly phallocentric'. Is such an approach capable of situating the full range of pop textures and structures, and their gender readings – from, say, 'girl groups' to rap? This question is a symptom of a wider problem which eases once gender codings are defined not by a binary 'cut' but as mutually constitutive, giving rise to discursive interplay, multiple gender histories and varied possibilities for musico-erotic pleasure. The idea of Mick Jagger as the embodiment of phallocentric macho desire, of androgynous camp, or of a pseudo-adolescent narcissism, all find equally plausible support from the Rolling Stones' music itself.

Genre, discourse, identity

For any discovery of meaning in music to take place requires first that 'conditions of audibility' are met – that is, that the events in question are classed as 'music', then, as a familiar sort of music, and finally, as a sort whose procedures and values are understood. This is akin to Franco Fabbri's (1982) definition of musical genre: 'a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules'. For Fabbri, such rules are formal and technical, as one would expect, but also semiotic, behavioural, social, ideological, economic and juridical. It is within this matrix – dense, powerful yet mutable – that understandings of

rock ballad, Britpop, trip-hop, etc. are generated, not to mention the overarching symbiotic tension of 'rock' and 'pop' itself. But these categories are never stable. Musicians, marketing labels and taste publics do not always map the boundaries in identical ways; and besides, 'a continuous definitional struggle is going on among the interpretive communities' (Fornas 1995). This means that rock is best pictured not as a single life-history, but as the multivalent subject of a permanent dialogue, now (and to some) appearing as a struggle between alternative genealogies, now (and to others) as a centre (male, white, rebellious, subcultural) defined through relationships to a range of Others. Always, though, we can say that 'through its generic organisation . . . music offers people . . . access to a social world, a part in some sort of social narrative' (Frith 1996) – or in other words, an identity.

The 'discursive turn' evident here – and in much recent work – has had several effects. Among them is a renewed privileging of the 'local' – specific musical scenes and the 'social narratives' embodied not only in their musical practices but also the ways in which they construct themselves and are described. This perspective may be seen both as a re-writing of long-standing interests in youth consumption practices, and as a reponse to postmodern narratives of fragmentation and globalisation. There is a danger that the moment of consumption is torn from the longer circuits of music circulation, bracketing both processes and effects of production, and larger patterns of dissemination. Will Straw's (1991) influential study of 'communities' and 'scenes', though it pays little attention to the musical dimensions of genre, does situate local musical spaces within cosmopolitan networks of taste. The old idea of self-authenticating musical subcultures gives way to 'scenes' marked by mobile 'alliances' of musical categories whose legitimacy is governed by the logics of specific discursive and institutional practices. The idea that 'particular social differences . . . are articulated within the building of audiences around particular coalitions of musical form' fits many of the patterns of contemporary musical flow – even if it also seems to evacuate any broader political interpretation of cultural power.

This shrinking of perspective is hard to avoid for local studies. Barry Shank's (1994) rich ethnography of the music scene of Austin, Texas focuses on how a succession of musical styles all cohere round what he sees as the master discursive figure of the local club scene, 'sincerity'. Similarly, Tricia Rose (1994) locates New York rap where traditions of 'black cultural expressivity' meet 'cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression'. In both cases, the wider musical world, including the 'mainstream' (within the location as well as beyond), is present in the story but as audience rather than actor. 'Belonging' is secured through selectivity, and

rather at the expense of the historical dialogues inscribed in the development of the musical styles. When, in the 1980s, Austin 'sells out' to a growing music industry presence, Shank, committed to 'sincerity', falls back on the banal explanation of 'commercial corruption'. Rose, taking on critics of rap's 'repetitions' and 'noise' with appeals to black difference, reduces two of pop's great tropes to ethnic exclusivity, rather than locating them within the larger dialogues of modern culture as a whole.

Admittedly, finding the right connecting mechanism between local and global is not easy. Lawrence Grossberg (1992) offers 'affective alliances'. These are articulations of 'cultural formations', such as the 'rock formation', to particular social contexts. The concept is close to Straw's; but Grossberg's swerve away from *meaning*, his insistence on *effects*, their 'positivities' and 'lines of force', empties the field of agency, and the music of specificity: 'there are . . . no musical limits on what can or cannot be rock'. But, arguably, musical identity is always *connected* to the definitions of genre and choices of historical narrative that people make. Music history can be construed as a *dialogue*, in which popular memory, grounded in real distinctions, plays its part. If, for most commentators, rock'n'roll coheres around such figures as Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Little Richard, things may look different to Los Angeles Chicanos, whose rock'n'roll hero, as George Lipsitz (1990) points out, was Richie Valens; yet Valens learned from African–American and country as well as Latin musics, and his hybrid style produced international best-sellers.

Thus, once within the pop field, all musics, however local in origin, come under the sway of a particular long-lived discursive formation. Simon Frith (1996) contrasts 'folk', 'art' and 'commercial' discourses, which are focused around ideas of 'authenticity', 'originality' and 'popularity', respectively. These operate across all musical categories in modern societies, forever trying to make musical distinctions. Frith's sociologism – musical effects are always placed by their discursive and social contexts – is qualified by his constructionism – music makes available possible identities, constructs audiences, rather than representing pre-existing social facts; yet the need, consequently, to account for music's specificity, leads him not only into some surprisingly conventional areas (bourgeois music aesthetics, for example) but also into textual exegesis of his own. This rather expert 'musicology' (illuminating interpretations of songs, singing styles, performance techniques, etc.) jars a little with the vernacularist thrust of the theory, resulting in a somewhat problematic connection between 'music' and 'discourse'. This connection is the nub. If music is always mediated by discourse and institutional placing, these in turn are mediated by distinct patterns of musico-productive practice. As Georgina Born (1993) makes clear, in her authoritative critique of 'consumptionism',

to grasp the 'cultural object' that is at issue here as 'a complex constellation of mediations' requires the full reinstatement into theory of aesthetic agency, institutional power and creative strategies.

Modernism/postmodernism

Pop values are caught within the over-arching discursive dialectic of High and Low, which runs the musical field as a whole. (For anyone who doubts that this is still the case, the 1996 'Handel House affair' is instructive. A proposal to establish a museum dedicated to Handel in the London house where he lived was followed by consternation in the classical music world when it was pointed out that Jimi Hendrix had lived in the same house; perhaps he should be commemorated with a plaque as well!) 'Art', 'folk' and 'commercial' discourses all refract and at the same time play into this dialectic, and all originate in that same late eighteenth-century moment when the formulations of cultural hierarchy characteristic of late-modern society began to emerge. But now, according to some, a blurring of the high/low boundary can be seen, symptom of a broader emergent post-modern formation, marked by acceptance of commodity form, valorisation of local, fragmented identities, celebration of ironic surface. Such blurring is certainly apparent on the aesthetic level: compare minimalism and rave, for example; or try to categorise Brian Eno, Orbital, Psychic TV or Glenn Branca – or Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé duetting on the 'operatic pop' of 'Barcelona'; it is also evident to some extent within aspects of production, partly in uses of electronic technology, partly as a result of more thorough commodification of classical music.

There is debate over the exact moment of the 'break' – the end of punk? the beginning of 'dance'? More important, as just remarked, on the sociological and discursive levels, the old hierarchy does still have force. Thus, despite certain stylistic and ideological links across boundaries (between various avant-gardes, for example), classical and pop musics by and large still circulate in different economies, have different uses, target different audiences. Perhaps there is a way to start to bridge the social/aesthetic disjunction, though. Born (1993) has explored the appeal of musical investments in 'culturally imagined community', both global (the pleasures of mass popularity) and local (the pleasures of 'alterity'). Frith's (1996) argument ends up in a not dissimilar place, with an eloquent description of music's power to offer 'alternative modes of social interaction', at once ideal and acted out. Jacques Attali (1985) has described music as a practice capable of pre-figuring changes in political economy. Less excitedly, Antoine Hennion (1990) insists that for pop theorists a sociology of music

is less useful than a 'musicology of society'. To the extent that music's socially constructive power is now accepted in cultural theory, the remnants of modernism in Born's vision may be no less important than the reformulation of a debate – between the 'musical' and the 'social' – that has been central to pop music study since its beginnings. It remains, then, to tackle the reconnection of the 'imaginary' and the 'real', if the political promise located from the start in pop, by fans and academics alike, is ever to be redeemed.

Further readings

On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word, ed. by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990) contains a representative selection of pieces in the mass culture critique and cultural studies traditions, including several subcultural theory classics. It also offers a range of more musicological studies, and anti-musicological essays by Hennion and Barthes. *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. by Richard Middleton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) brings together a collection of interpretative studies. *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, ed. by Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) contains several essays relevant to the subject of this chapter. Simon Frith's *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) is the most accomplished monograph on popular music aesthetics. Richard Middleton's *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990) develops many of the arguments outlined in this chapter at greater length. The best single-author interpretative books on pop are Robert Walser's *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), David Brackett's *Interpreting Popular Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Dave Laing's *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985). Jason Toynbee's *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions* (London: Arnold, 2000) is an important attempt to re-validate the significance of creative agency through a notion of 'social authorship'.

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