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MUSIC THAT MOVES: POPULAR MUSIC, DISTRIBUTION AND NETWORK TECHNOLOGIES

Abstract

This essay examines the consequences of technology for how music reaches people and for how people reach music. It is argued that new media technologies, particularly the Internet, create new territorializations of space and of affect. The spatial distribution of music wrought by new technologies provides an opportunity for cultural studies to bring distribution to the centre of the study of media. By so doing we can better understand cultural processes as not only industrial ones but ones of geography, audience and fan, and thereby de-centre production and consumption as the sites of cultural critique.

Keywords

popular music; distribution; Internet; technology; copyright

MUCH WRITING in popular music, academic and journalistic, fixes on the notion that geographic location of a particular group or sound is a good thing, for, at the very least, achieving a kind of specificity, an anchor, within which to understand a particular socio-historical moment. When movement is invoked, it is largely used to denote a dispersion and diffusion of values, a loss of aura and authenticity, as in the move from 'down home' to 'uptown', from country to city, that Jensen (1998) described.

If it were not for those movements, popular music would hardly exist in the

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forms in which we know it. Particularly during the first quarter of the twentieth century, prior to the widespread adoption and affordability of the phonograph and radio, music and musicians relied on transportation networks to reach audiences, and vice versa. Later the causes of such movement, that which might set 'wheels in motion', became more wide-ranging. A good example of a key moment that caused music making to disperse geographically is the 1940s challenge to ASCAP that resulted in New York City (and Tin Pan Alley) losing its dominance as a centre of popular music composition and production (Butler, 1994).

There are many causes of music's movement. One continues to find examples of musicians searching for locales in sympathy with their music, as was the case with the influx of rock musicians into Seattle in the early 1990s, or their migration to Athens, Georgia, in the 1980s, or even in the fluid movements of various rave scenes. It is likely that the ability to easily share both music and talk about music online is resulting in formation of new virtual locales for like-minded musicians and fans. Napster, Gnutella and other Internet software allows for both chat and file sharing, enabling the movement of music and discourse about music. Importantly, such uses of the Internet are resulting in new territorializations. If, as Grossberg (1997: 113) noted, 'rock is a differentiating machine (that) continually separates Us . . . from Them', then important new lines of demarcation are being drawn by Internet technology.

The whole of that which is being demarcated is usually termed 'virtual space', 'cyberspace' or some variation thereof. However, even though technologies of Internet-working create 'virtual spaces', we should not be blind to the fact that it is *real people* who occupy space – virtual or otherwise. Network technologies are ones of distribution. In relation to music, particularly, they are not simply ones of musical production and consumption. Moreover, network technologies are of increasing importance in regulating the tension between alienation and progress, at least because of the discourse about them, but usually in terms of their insertion into everyday practice. In particular, technologies associated with the distribution of music over the Internet are also technologies of *geography* and, in turn, of *audiences*. These technologies have consequences for how people get to music, and for how music gets to people (which should in and of itself argue that special attention be paid them in popular music scholarship).

The methods of fixing sound to a physical medium that were developed in the late nineteenth century made it possible to record music. Typically, this has been understood to mean that recording technology both froze the moments in time during which the sound of music was generated *and* captured the space within which the sound occurred. However, it is important to not lose sight of the fact that recording technology also enabled the *transportation* of sound and thus its distribution beyond the distance inceptive sounds waves travelled.

Playing back a recording only in the place of its original making would have constituted a revolution in kind, but not in scale, when it comes to the first

crossing of popular music and communication technology. Subsequent developments in electrical technology (telegraphy, telephony and wireless) made possible transportation of sound without recording. Ironically, the 'fixing' of music onto a physical medium for recording led to its eventual mobility for commercial purposes.

Music technology has been the means by which music has moved, literally and figuratively, but it continues to be overlooked in most analyses of popular music. Little work (apart from the purely technical) provides theory and analysis of the movement of sound via technology. In recent popular music scholarship, production and consumption have garnered attention (Negus, 1992; Burnett 1996; Théberge, 1997), but the distribution of music, the intermediate step between technological production and popular consumption, continues to be ignored.

This is a critical oversight, particularly given the Internet's use as a distribution medium. However, even prior to the Internet's wide spread, distribution played a key role in music and in other media forms. Burnett, for instance, noted the centrality of distribution in the context of international consolidation in the music industry:

> A major motivating factor in consolidation and concentration of the music industry is distribution. Into the 1970s, the record industry relied in large measure on a series of independent record distributors that acted as intermediaries between the record manufacturers and retailers. In the 1980s, the independent distribution system began to break down as more and more minor and independent labels such as Arista, Motown and A&M left independent distribution and agreed to be distributed by one of the major distributors.
>
> Simultaneous has been a movement . . . to . . . develop new talent and feed the enormous worldwide distribution networks . . . (and the) trends have been towards either the purchase of minor and independent labels by conglomerates, or the funding and distribution of start-up companies.
>
> (Burnett, 1996: 61)

A similar trend was evident during the 1980s in both the USA and the UK. Independent distributors (Dutch East Indies, Important, Rough Trade, to name a few) specializing in carrying titles from independent record companies, either folded or joined together, leading to consolidation among distributors (ADA, Rykodisc, the Cartel, for instance). Additional, and quite visible, evidence of these changes is found in the availability of specialty titles in 'mass merchandise' retail stores like Best Buy, Barnes & Noble and Borders. Such stores are more likely to work with larger distributors than with smaller ones that had once primarily only served specialty record stores.

This essay addresses Garnham's urging that 'we need to concentrate our interventions not on production but on distribution in the widest sense' (1990: 167). Garnham's encouragement to examine and critique distribution is not explicitly focused on communication technologies nor is it focused on popular music. Still, a central point Garnham makes is that

> It is easy to overlook and misunderstand the nature of distribution because to ordinary members of the public, as well as to many specialist writers on film (who should know better), film is mainly associated either with the experience of watching films in a cinema (or increasingly on TV) or with all that the word Hollywood represents in popular mythology . . . while distribution appears to be a mundane and mechanical function of linkage.
> (Garnham, 1990: 183)

Substitute 'music' for 'film', 'hearing' for 'watching', and so on, and find that the nature of distribution in popular music is also overlooked and misunderstood. The same reasons apply to the understanding of the role of distribution in popular music. Music appears to be 'out there' in relation to the audience just as film appears on a screen. Music's delivery is nearly ubiquitous; it is heard in elevators, malls, homes, automobiles, offices, with use of various devices (computers, radios, stereo systems, etc.). Whether it is recorded or live, music, like sound (or air itself), seems to be all around us, but it rarely reaches us entirely accidentally. Even at those moments when we serendipitously hear a piece of music, it is likely that serendipity is linked only to *our* experience of it, and that its performance and placement, through distribution in a medium, was otherwise deliberate.

Music and the Internet

The Internet's rise to prominence as a medium for music necessarily focuses attention on distribution and provides a fertile arena within which matters of cultural practice can, and should, be addressed. To date only Hayward (1995) in a general overview of the Internet's potential impact on the music industry notes the Internet's potential role in relation to distribution. However, at the time Hayward was writing (1994–1995), the Internet's development as a commercial entity had just begun, and online music retailers were only beginning to claim domain names. The ensuing debates over distribution in relation to intellectual property issues and the control of music and sound distributed over networks had not surfaced, and high-speed broadband Internet access for many was yet to be realized.

My strategy in this essay is to bring to the fore the role distribution plays in the mediation of popular music. The goal is to examine the configurations and

re-configurations brought about by network technologies to lay out a framework for understanding the implications of new forms of distribution, so that scholars can intervene and critique the cultural and commercial processes mediating popular music in relation to Internet technology.

Configurations: aspects of control

Negus noted that:

> Ultimately, the recording industry cannot 'control' or 'determine' what is going to be commercially successful. All entertainment corporations can do is struggle to monopolize access to recording facilities, promotional outlets, manufacturing arrangements and distribution systems, and be in a position to appropriate the profits.
>
> (1992: 152)

Until the 1970s, the recording industry had regularly monopolized access to recording studios. But developments in sound recording technology broke the monopoly, effectively allowing musicians (contingent on contractual terms with record companies) to make choices for themselves regarding the cost and location of production. In some cases (perhaps most notably that of Prince), advances provided to pay for recording were invested into the building of artist-owned recording studios.

The most critical monopoly held by the music industry was the means of distribution. In the USA particularly, where geography demands of the music industry a highly developed and very motile distribution infrastructure, control was with those who owned and operated the infrastructure of distribution (see Frith, 1981: 138–46; and the discussion of distribution in Eliot, 1989). In the UK, one can find instances of record labels owning retail outlets (some of which, like Virgin, have opened stores in the USA). However, in the USA no major record label owned, directly or indirectly through its holdings, a retail outlet selling music. Critical to the shift from regional music in the USA to a national music industry was the configuration of distribution operations within record companies. The music industry in the USA concentrated on developing the means of moving music from the point of manufacture (which in most cases it *did* control) to the point of sale (which in most case it did *not* control). The development of national music media occurred first in print media (*Rolling Stone*, etc.) and later on television (*American Bandstand*, *MTV*). Record companies did not control *media* distribution of music, but instead worked to co-opt the media vehicles that introduced music to the consumer, hence 'payola'.

The emphasis, therefore, was, until the 1980s, on understanding profit and loss in traditional business terms, namely in terms of sales. The business model

on which the music industry based its operation was founded on moving products ('units' in music industry parlance) to consumers. During the 1980s, a time of vertical integration throughout the entertainment industry, exploitation of rights became a common means of improving record companies' bottom lines. It also provided a means by which record companies could bypass the traditional process of gaining media exposure via radio, TV and film. Rather than merely hoping for exposure, bribing those who control it outright (and everything in between), it became possible, indeed easy, to 'place' music within and across vertically linked media organizations' products. Cross-media cross-promotion of music, along with production of soundtracks, reissues and compilations, increased in frequency, as did development of global rights and collections mechanisms. The increase brought with it new concerns not just about copyright but also about trade exclusions, national treatment of cultural products and numerous other matters addressed by free trade agreements (Jones, 1996: 348).

It is important to remember that legislation has long sought to counter the centripetal tendencies of new distribution technologies and copyright (to be examined in the next section) is not the only issue at stake in debates about new media. During the aforementioned period of vertical integration in the entertainment industry, one finds refinements in the discussion of industrial process in the literature of popular music studies. Given most attention still is the tension between major labels – who have well-developed systems of production, distribution and promotion – and independent labels – who have had to struggle with all facets of the industrial process. The narrative hews closely to the now classic 'commercialism versus authenticity' debate found in much writing (academic and otherwise) about popular music and popular cultural forms generally. However, it is important to remember that no matter the tone of the debate, the economic facts of the matter do point to the power of capital to master cultural development. Frith (1981), for example, noted the difference in Britain between major label distribution and independent distributors, and finds that:

> The 1970s reassertion of distribution control by the American majors was a response to the rock boom . . . but its effect was disastrous for record companies that couldn't afford their own distribution – the independent distributors suddenly lost custom, capital, and effectiveness.
>
> (Frith, 1981: 140)

Cusic similarly sets off the major label distribution system and the 'alternative system (of) independent distribution companies' (1996: 61). Hull's (1998) treatment of distribution in the music business is the most refined, noting a variety of categories of distributor. Hull observed that:

> The distribution system within the recording industry has evolved through several phases. Initially each label was in charge of its own distribution. As

> the number of releases and labels increased so did the need for a middle person who could handle several labels and deal directly with retailers. That caused the birth of independent distributors. By the end of the 1960s the major labels felt the need to compete more effectively and bolstered their own distribution systems.
>
> (Hull, 1998: 165–6)

He then goes on to note that major labels discovered the profitability of distribution and began, ultimately, both to build up national and international distribution operations and to open their own retail outlets as well. The results have not been all bad: some independent record companies, for instance, have been able to work within the industry's new system of distribution and the accessibility of music that had once been available only in specialty stores increased.

The monopolies record companies held in regard to manufacturing arrangements and distribution systems were the next to come under attack in the late 1980s, due to digital encoding and distribution of music. Compact disc piracy and digital audio recording were the focus of the RIAA's efforts to control production and distribution. By the early 1990s, the music industry took note of the Internet's potential for popular music consumption, but, ironically, it was music retailers that noticed it. The first inkling that the Internet would come to play a key role in the music industry was *not* related to digital audio but rather to the Internet's global reach and the development of the World Wide Web. Online retail outfits like CDNow quickly became a record buyer's Mecca, offering a multitude of titles (including hard-to-find ones) usually at a discount to offline retail prices, entirely bypassing traditional music business distribution channels by shipping direct to the consumer. Retail chains (Best Buy, Tower, Virgin, etc.) were the first to decry the potential loss of sales in their 'brick and mortar' stores. However, short of curtailing sales to online retailers and hurting its own bottom line, the recording industry has had little recourse other than to pursue its own online sales strategies.

Configuration of control: copyright

The tension network technologies mediate is most superficially apparent in legal skirmishes during an unsettled era for copyright law. These technologies, on the one hand, are 'liberating', insofar as they permit greater geographical 'reach' and thus greater marketing opportunities. As Hayward notes, this makes them of particular interest to 'artists who have a creative, financial or political aversion to dealing with the music industry' (1995: 33). It also applies, however, to the music industry, and maybe more directly than to artists. The potentialities of the technology *vis-à-vis* reach and marketing may be utilized to a greater extent by record companies with capital.

However, network technologies permit less commercial control, insofar as they permit (for now, at least) digitized music to freely circulate without restriction or compensation, to the chagrin of copyright enthusiasts. The rapid changes in computing and Internetworking that – within a scant few years after online music retailers began doing business – brought mp3 files, broadband Internet access and copious amounts of Random Access Memory (RAM) and hard drive space have changed the connections between record labels, musicians and consumers. Developments in digital audio and of the Internet have meant that placement of musical commodity into the hands of the consumer or the media is at least for the time being no longer exclusively under the control of, or even in the realm of, the music industry, whether retail or wholesale. As Haring (2000) noted in *Beyond the Charts*:

> While the copyrighted recordings under (record labels') control were at risk to digital distribution via the Internet, (label) executives also realized that large-scale piracy had bedeviled the industry since at least the 1960s. The potentially greater threat was the possibility that musicians would bypass the established distribution systems and deal directly with the marketplace.
>
> The recording industry was taken by surprise. They had envisioned a quieter, gentler transition away from physical goods, one that would be as tightly controlled and manipulated as the transition from vinyl albums to compact discs in the 1980s.
>
> (Haring, 2000: 5–6)

In the face of rapid change that may well threaten the lifeblood of the recording industry, the only weapon determined by the recording industry to be of any consequence in the struggle against the break-up of its monopolies of distribution is that of intellectual property rights. The ways in which intellectual property rights confer control in popular music has been well studied. Frith (1993) gave two reasons for 'growing professional (and academic) interest in copyright law' in the 1980s and 1990s:

> First, new technologies for the storage and retrieval of knowledge, sounds and images have posed complex problems for legal definitions of their authorship and use; second, the (related) globalisation of culture has given multi-national leisure corporations pressing reasons to 'harmonise' copyright regulations across national boundaries. . . . In the specific case of the music industry this has meant a kind of analytic redefinition: what was treated in the 1960s and 1970s as manufacture, an industry primarily selling commodities to consumers, came to be treated in the 1980s as a service, 'exploiting' musical properties as baskets of rights.
>
> (Frith, 1993: ix)

The Internet forced the music industry to struggle with yet another analytic redefinition: when neither national boundaries nor copyrights are effective as a locus of regulation for the movement of music, by what means, *at what point in space and time*, can payment be extracted for either goods or services? Historically the locus of exchange has been the transaction at the cash register, the point of movement of commodity to consumer in exchange for money. An increasingly important point of exchange has been the transaction among (and sometimes within) entertainment conglomerates that only indirectly engage the consumer (as is the case with sales of rights to a song for a film and its attendant soundtrack). Music licensing and performance royalties have played a more prominent role in the bottom line, as has exploitation of merchandizing and other non-musical rights (Jones, 1993b). All loci of exchange in these cases invoke the infrastructure of the entertainment industry, the apparatuses that deliberately place cultural products via transportation and mediation in the specific spaces and times of a shifting cultural formation.

But the focus on copyright law and rights ownership has caused an inattention to one of the more mundane issues wrought by digital distribution. The near-instantaneity of most digital distribution disrupts the aforementioned loci of exchange:

> The speed of digital network distribution has consequences for enforcement as well. When physical copies must be produced and distributed, the process is spread over time and can be interrupted. When information is disseminated by computer networks, it travels to sites around the world in moments. Temporary restraining orders are of little use in forestalling deeds done in minutes.
>
> (National Research Council, 2000: 39)

Processes employed in the past by the music industry to exert control over the flow of music (and, in the case of immigration laws, of musicians themselves (Jones, 1996)) are rendered useless when the medium of distribution undergoes a paradigmatic change from analogue to entirely digital, from physical good to digital code. The legal controls the music industry could exert relied on an infrastructure of transportation that provided gate-keeping opportunities. Customs checkpoints, warehouses, retail outlets and even radio stations were subject to legal authority due to their situated-ness in space (they could be found, discovered) and in time (they would stay put in space sufficiently long to be found). The lesson of movement has not escaped pirate radio operators who would frequently change locations and frequencies to avoid arrest.

It is likely that in the future the locus of control of online music will reside in the Internet's infrastructure, in the routers, or perhaps the Internet protocol itself. Such points are the ones most clearly available for gate-keeping, and are the ones at which movement is controlled. They form the only locus at which

one might monitor and act upon exchange at Internet speed and at great volume. They also, however, create serious issues of loss of privacy and surveillance. It is noteworthy that those loci of exchange are prone to greatest corporate control after industrial consolidations like that of America Online and Time-Warner.

The focus on copyright has also overshadowed the wider implications of digital distribution. The disruption of the loci of exchange also disrupts a connection between the social and financial. High-speed distribution makes it impossible, for all practical purposes, for humans to negotiate an exchange, unless the exchange is forced to a slower rate by artificially interrupting the process. What is therefore being re-negotiated due to digital distribution is social exchange. Downloading music using mp3 software like Napster, Gnutella, and so on, is on the one hand a human–machine interaction that obliterates traditional place- and point-of-purchase interaction. However, on the other hand, such software incorporates opportunities for messaging and chat that allow reconfiguration to new forms of connection between consumers (and purveyors) of music.

Sites of re-configuration: the Internet, disintermediation and reintermediation

A key point to be gleaned from Hull's (1998) analysis of distribution in the music business is that the trend in the music industry has been toward the monopolistic *intermediation* of the musical product. The music industry, over time, has developed the means by which it mediates the movement of music as physical goods. Significantly, it has never been able to entirely incorporate for itself the mediation of music via mass communication and when it has tried to do so, the results have been scandalous (e.g. Payola).

New technologies of communication lead to *disintermediation* (essentially removal of routinized business practices involving middlepersons) and, in some cases, to a redefinition of the nature of a product, insofar as what had once been a physical item (a record, for instance) is now a digitized one (e.g. a downloadable file). Importantly, this is as true of musical products as of ones peripherally related to music (as well as other media), such as concert tickets, t-shirts, books, magazines, etc., being sold online. However, it is becoming truer of products that can be digitized and may exist only online (particularly in the case of web-based publications, but also sound files). One way to understand disintermediation is in terms of convenience:

> Photocopying an entire book is inconvenient and often more costly than buying the book, so not very many photocopies are made and distributed. Digital information has radically altered the economics involved, leading to upheavals not only in the relationships among authors, publishers,

> distributors, and others, but perhaps also in the disappearance of some roles and the emergence of others.
>
> (National Research Council, 2000: 38)

Thus, disintermediation is in some sense a reconfiguration of industrial processes involved with the manufacture and distribution of commodities that actualize the potential of intellectual property. In its most extreme form distintermediation would essentially result in de-industrialization, in individual control of all facets of the creative process.

Disintermediation is just one of many processes and practices that are a consequence of the intersection of new media with popular music, but it is the process that has the greatest consequence for industry in the first instance. As Hawkins *et al*. noted, 'a more likely scenario than outright and total disintermediation would be for various kinds of value to be transferred via alternative delivery mechanisms. This would be a process of 're-intermediation', in which the control of different elements in the value chain could move to different players' (1998: 10).

The likelihood of re-intermediation can be understood by noting that a complete de-industrialization of popular media would be extremely unlikely, for even at the level of individual production some form of process, however slightly industrial, will still operate. More likely therefore is re-industrialization and, hence, re-intermediation. Such a re-configuration of industrial processes is bound to have repercussions for all involved in the production, distribution and consumption of popular music. The most important effect is likely to be found in the shift in the locus of decision making regarding what music is made available to the public, what music can be heard, where that music is available, and its cost.

The music industry's power is most in jeopardy due to re-intermediation. The legal battles between the RIAA, Napster, mp3.com and other online music sites are evidence of the industry's effort to re-establish control of distribution, but to the extent that such suits have been settled the industry has seemed to have learnt a lesson. Distribution is out of control, but it is still possible to earn money for distribution. To put it another way, the industry (at least as it is represented by its trade groups like the RIAA) is in the process of using legal means with which to establish new loci of exchange for the movement of digital goods in which it owns rights. The earnings mechanisms shift from sales of physical goods to charges for downloading of digital code. The mechanisms are similar to ones used to license musical performance on radio, in jukeboxes, in concert. This is a logical shift, since, as in the case of performance, no physical goods are exchanged. However, it is not likely that such mechanisms will prove sufficient to copyright owners insofar as digital distribution, regardless of whether 'product' is exchanged or not, is an exchange of *recorded* music. Unlike in performance, of which (typically) no record remains, a download results in a

fixed copy of the 'performance'. Consequently, it is unlikely that licensing, in the long term, will provide sufficient incentive for the music industry to allow digital downloading. Instead, the music industry will likely seek to develop a subscription model of service (like that of cable television in the USA), by which consumers pay a monthly fee to hear, via digital streaming, music of their choosing. Alternately, a system of micropayment-for-play (enabled and enhanced by digital watermarking), by which every play of a digitally encoded song results in a small payment to the copyright holder, will be embraced.

The consequence of re-intermediation, both of licensing and of the development of subscription and pay-for-play models, is the creation of a new industry infrastructure. The music industry will likely consolidate its power by collaborating with Internet service providers (AOL, Yahoo!, etc.) and other media services that can make use of these models. As has always been the case, independent record labels and artists will have to fend for themselves – a daunting prospect given the capital needed for technology, bandwidth and promotion/marketing. Consumers, in turn, may have more variety than they do presently, should they choose to co-operate with said models, or means of hacking the models will be developed. However, it may be that consumers will have to rely on their own skills to find what music is available to them beyond that which is most heavily marketed by those with the means to promote to the public. In either case the music industry's ability to control a 'mainstream' of music and to 'make and break' new artists will, at least in the short term, be severely tested, as music moves across digital networks with, at best, licensing providing the only revenue source to copyright holders.

Re-configuration of affect

Music, movement and cultural formation

Another important site of re-configuration is in the affective realm of popular music fans' engagement with music via mediation. The technology of music (for making, consuming, distributing) has a cultural significance. There is a continuing, and growing, elitism associated with live performances, in the aural construction of recordings, and in the social construction of over-determined narratives about and by musicians, fans and critics. Musicians and fans seek to express and communicate authenticity by way of sound, itself made explicit through the interwoven discourse surrounding technology that makes that expression possible (Negus, 1992; Jones, 1993a; Hayward, 1995; Théberge, 1997). There is an ongoing mediation between progress, alienation and comfort both in audience discourse (best exemplified by the comparisons fans make between old artists and new ones) and in industry discourse (best exemplified by the 'signing frenzy' that takes place immediately after a 'trend' is culturally agreed upon and the construction of 'sound-alike' performers).

But in an important way technology is also intimately tied to location. One can quite clearly see evidence of it in the claims to 'high fidelity' that invoke a claim to 'being there' thanks to improved recording technology (Jones, 1993a) In practice, recording captures not only time, as is most often argued, but also space, be it a 'live' or technologically enhanced or constructed space. However, this is a 'micro' example of technology's connection to location. The more important evidence of that connection, on a 'macro' level and thus a connection between technology and location in terms of geography and mobility, is manifested in assumptions about the relationship between musician, place and creativity.

Jensen's (1998) critical analysis of authenticity in US country music in the 1950s and 1960s is particularly noteworthy for the ways that it connects an understanding of authenticity as a cultural construct with an understanding of culture and geography. As she notes in regard to Patsy Cline's recording career:

> If the Nashville Sound seemed much like pop music, it was, nevertheless, still country because it was defined as being made in Nashville by sincere, natural musicians who loved country music and country fans and who just wanted to make good music to please friends and neighbors.
>
> (Jensen, 1998: 161–2)

Similarly, Kruse (1993), in her work on US college music scenes, has noted the centrality of place, of geography, to discourses of musical authenticity. And Cohen (1991) has well documented the connections Liverpool musicians have had to other musical forms by virtue of the city's 'role as a seaport (which) endowed it with an 'outward-looking' character. . . . (Its) wealth of music-making partly reflected an influx of foreign cultures and influences entering Liverpool through its port' (1991: 9, 12). Who we are is reflected in whom we are in contact with and in many cases (most cases) that contact is mediated.

New music communities

One of the consequences of music technology, particularly as it incorporates Internetworking technologies, is its effect on the ability to determine who 'friends and neighbours' (in Jensen's terms) are. As a journalist noted about a Usenet news group devoted to rhythm and blues music:

> In years past . . . conversations (about R&B) took place in what were once the shrines of the urban Black community, such as the Howard Theater in Washington, D.C., Chicago's Regal Theater and Harlem's Apollo Theater. Years later, those venues are all but extinct . . . the Internet has filled the void left by the demise of live R&B music venues.
>
> (Paul, 1996)

He goes on to compare the experience of having online discussions to that 'of meeting people and sharing the discussion in the aisles', a predictable turn in much writing about activities that had once been solely the domain of life offline. Kibby noted the central role of the Internet in providing 'a place in which new music communities can be formed' (2000: 100). In her discussion of a John Prine website, Kibby also noted that the Internet-based community,

> went a long way towards dispelling the alienation that followed the industrialisation of pop music; highlighting the consumption of music as an active, incorporative practice; and solidifying the often illusory bonds between performer and consumers. The (home page) became . . . a virtual place that facilitated the belief in a local music community.
>
> (Kibby, 2000: 100)

The Internet's insertion into industry and fan practices has meant that relations of audience/performer/space/geography/time are made problematic and have shifted in ways that have not yet been analysed. Berland (1998) noted such a shift in what she termed 'radio space', and wrote, 'the ongoing (re)shaping of listening habits is tied to our sense of location: where we are, where the music can take us, where we *belong*' (1998: 133, original emphasis).

Berland's essay provides a good starting point for analyses of network technologies, audience and geography, for it was in radio that the notion of a media 'network' was first developed (Barnouw, 1968). For greater focus on modern network technologies that give us glimpses of what one might term the 'transglobal local(s)' the Internet has wrought, one may turn to an essay by Fenster. In 1995, he wrote of 'the emergent spatial relations in the political economy of the international music industry and the local cultural practices of popular music' and the importance of 'local spaces, performances, and experiences . . . increasingly tied together by social networks, publications, trade groups, and regional and national institutions . . . (in) locally-dispersed formations' (1995: 83). His essay takes us a step toward moving from 'naïve correlations of shared space with shared culture' (Gay, 1995: 123) to an understanding of the importance of cultural diffusion, mobility and spatial and temporal registration and reproduction of the kind the Internet has wrought.

We are, though, a long way from sorting out the consequences of these new understandings of social and cultural formation for our many and varied uses of the term 'community'. As but one example of the contestation over concepts of community that new media of communication have wrought it is useful to recall that the notion of 'pseudo-community' (Beniger, 1987) has long dogged discussions of new media and their social impact. As I have pointed out in my own efforts to understand life online, 'it is difficult to imagine what new online communities may be like, and it is far easier to use our memories and myths as we construct them' (Jones, 1995: 32). Importantly, it is we who construct them, and

network technologies provide us with actual, in addition to our already utilized imagined, means to do so. But putting a name to the new social formations created online is more difficult than their creation in practice, though of course it is still difficult *offline* to identify and define instances of 'community.'

Evidence of some of the new music communities being formed does exist. For instance, network technologies create opportunities for musical collaboration between performers in different zones of time and space, as both Hayward (1995) and Théberge (1997) note, on a scale unmatched since the development of multi-tracking enabled the ready layering of sound and tape recording its transportation. Even more importantly, these technologies open discursive spaces for music fans, and for the construction of authenticity, which have hitherto been unavailable, particularly across distances that have largely separated cultures and fan communities. As Frith (1996) noted as regards his own experiences of listening to music:

> Memories dance with the music too. . . . This is what I mean, I think, by music both taking us out of ourselves and putting us in place, by music as both a fantasy of community and an enactment of it, by music dissolving difference even as it expresses it. The sounds on that Leamington dance floor, like the sounds now in this Berlin hotel room, are at the same time rootless, cut free from any originating time and place, and rooted, in the needs, movement, and imagination of the listener.
>
> (Frith, 1996b: 278)

A comment such as Frith's begs for further analysis, and yet little or none has been done. Instead, what analysis there is either examines the issues arising from the 'rootlessness' of music in regard to symbolic forms, in regard to copyright, or in regard to a discourse of authenticity that rests on notions of musical purity (e.g. one music 'pollutes' another more 'pure' one, or 'intrudes' on a culture's indigenous musics). But memory and identity are ineffably bound to us and to the music we hear.

Conclusion

What then are the right questions to ask about changes in the spatial distribution of music wrought by new technologies of music distribution? One place to begin is to revisit early ethnomusicological work such as that by Nettl (1964, 1983), in which the spatial contexts of music are noted in relation to culture and geography. Carney (1994) followed up on Nettl's ideas, embarking on a systematic study of the cultural geography of music. In an essay on the spatial distribution of music in Oklahoma, Carney noted that 'country music has reflected the changing life style of the state from brightening the solitary life of the homesteader to

providing solace for the displaced rural folk who migrated to the city' (Carney, 1994: 106). Jensen's (1998) work points to the role of music in relation to similar rural-to-urban diasporas.

As the spatial distribution of music changes, so too does its role as a meaningful element in people's lives (be they audience member, musician, or businessperson). Lipsitz (1994) put it well when he wrote:

> A poetics of place permeated popular music, shaping significantly its contexts of production, distribution, and reception. . . . Through music we learn about place and about displacement. Laments for lost places and narratives of exile and return often inform, inspire, and incite the production of popular music. Songs build engagement among audiences at least in part through references that tap memories and hopes about particular places. . . .
>
> Like other forms of contemporary mass communication, popular music simultaneously undermines and reinforces our sense of place. Music that originally emerged from concrete historical experiences in places with clearly identifiable geographic boundaries now circulates as an interchangeable commodity marketed to consumers all over the globe. . . .
>
> These transactions transform – but do not erase – attachments to place.
>
> (Lipsitz, 1994: 4)

It is important to remember that spatial distribution of music does not change in and of itself. It is the desires of those who seek to hear music and those who seek to have it heard that motivate it (in the fullest sense of the term). Lipsitz reminds us that, though it is easy to slip into a kind of technological determinism and believe that the Internet is now itself somehow responsible for the spatial distribution of music, it is Internet users (individuals, industry and institutions) that cause music to be distributed. Much as I wrote in regard to social relations online, that they exist 'side-by-side with social relationships already formed' (Jones, 1998: 29), music online exists side-by-side with music offline *and* side-by-side with cultural and industrial practices and processes offline.

To understand the important role of the Internet and of distribution in popular music we must pay attention to the movement of people and the movement of goods *offline*. The Internet's impact on popular music was first noticed in relation to sales of CDs and records, not in relation to the digitization of music. Similarly, the Internet's impact on popular music fans is first being noticed in relation to the development of new discursive spaces in which existing discourses are reproduced, not in relation to entirely new fan practices.

As contributors to an anthology edited by Carney (1994) noted, simple observation of historical patterns in the spatial dispersion of people could provide

clues to the evolution of musical styles. Often enough movement, be it of individuals or social formations, literal or figurative, is not born of choice. It is therefore important that we also attend to diasporic movement originating for any variety of reasons, from famine and flood to crime and the law, from taste and climate to gentrification and market forces. What, for instance, might be the connections between suburbanization in the USA and developments in rock music from the 1960s onward, or the revitalization of Chicago's business and warehouse districts on house music? Lipsitz (1994) provides many examples of how one may go about attending to it, and of the importance of doing so:

> Whatever role (contemporary commercialized leisure) serve(s) in the profit-making calculations of the music industry, these expressions also serve as exemplars of post-colonial culture with direct relevance to the rise of new social movements emerging in response to the imperatives of global capital and its attendant austerity and oppression.
>
> (Lipsitz, 1994: 27)

To be able to intervene in assumptions about the cultural processes that intersect with these technologies it is necessary to remember that, as noted earlier in this essay, network technologies used for music distribution are technologies of geography and of audiences. They have consequences for how people get to music and for how music gets to people. It is important to mark the moments and movements of music not only because they tell us about geography, technology, production, distribution and consumption, but also because they help remind us that there is more to popular music than simply the industrial commodity form that moves from record company to retail outlet to consumer.

To control the distribution of music is as much an effort to control audience and place as it is to control technology. The movement of people, however, is not in the music industry's control, and so at the very least the industry needs to be immediately responsive to audience and place. Network technologies can permit it to be so, by separating the two. Rather than requiring, due to the limited 'reach' of communication media, segmentation of audiences by locale, network technologies allow for new aggregations of audience across space. Grossberg's observation that it is important to attend to 'The density of musical practices in daily life . . . all the musics made outside the vector of commodity production (for example, local bands and parties) . . . all the music consumed in contexts other than commodity purchases, concerts, radio, and music videos . . . all of the activities associated with musical life' (1997: 107) is particularly pertinent. The Internet and technologies of new media have, if nothing else, expanded the places and contexts of popular music.

But as Will Straw (1997) reminds us in his penetrating critique of the evolution of the record store, the choices expanded contexts bring may not always be a 'good thing' and movement itself may be disorienting:

> With so much that seems positive in these changes, we may overlook the new segregations of taste and audience which have resulted. . . . As record superstores beckon with their pluralist abundance, magazines, radio formats and the broader logics of social differentiation have circumscribed tastes and buying patterns within predictable clusters. What has been lost, arguably, are those (politically ambiguous) moments of crossover or convergence which regularly undermined music's usual tendency to reinforce social and racial insularity. Stumbling around the record superstore, 'lost, driven crazy,' the paths we follow are likely, nevertheless, to map the stubborn lines of social division.
>
> (Straw, 1997: 64–5)

One might easily replace the word 'paths' in the above with the word 'hyperlinks' and get a taste of the potential consequences for fandom, style and genre as popular music becomes more Internet-mediated and fans stumble around web sites.

Along with spatial re-configuration affective investments in music are re-contextualized. A person who might have once been a record collector is now a collector of mp3 files. The visual elements of popular music shift from album covers to videos to web pages. There is clearly a need for people to share music, whether they are musicians or fans (or both). The Internet and digital music have filled that need better than other technologies before them. As an example of the re-configurations of music practice digital technologies have wrought, one might consider that they have enabled mass customization of musical experience, a digital reconfiguration of songs, albums, music, a quick-and-easy word processing-like creation of 'mix' tapes, and an emphasis on the single song rather than the album, as well as on the aggregation of songs independent of artist, genre, etc. One can imagine Rob, the protagonist of Nick Hornby's (1992) *High Fidelity*, settled in front of personal computer, headphones on, endlessly shuffling mp3 files and playlists, uploading and downloading music, operating his specialty record store via a website.

The temptation is to believe that he would somehow be the worse off for it, that the social life of the record store, the face-to-face handing of those 'mix' tapes to girlfriends, the late-night in-person discussions about music, could never be supplanted by mediated encounters. But why must Rob's engagement in what one may call, borrowing from Loza (1993), 'rituals of marginality', be presumed to be solely the domain of any one, or a particular, medium of communication? His movement among those people also engaged in ritual, like the movement of music online, may now be less bound by geography or by medium, and more by desire.

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