The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s

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Presumably it is difference that kills otherness.
Baudrillard 1990:131

World music is popularly believed to be a “roots” phenomenon, an expression of national and ethnic identities and multicultural diversity. Yet, as the analysis of recent examples reveals, world music could also be more properly considered as a typical product of consumer society. The term “world music” itself had emerged in the mid-1980s, initially as little more than a handy term for musics as vastly heterogeneous as lambada, Paul Simon’s Graceland, and Mory Kante’s Yéké Yéké. By 1988, however, “worldbeat”—as world music is more commonly known in the U.S.—was described by Newsweek magazine as the fastest growing sector of the international pop market.1 Although, in the mid-1990s, this expansive trend has somewhat abated, elements of world music have now crossed over into a vast range of other musics, such as avant-garde jazz, John Zorn’s work comes to mind here, some recent New Age albums like Andreas Vollenweider’s Book of Roses and Hector Zazou’s Les nouvelles polyphonies corses or even dancefloor and hip hop. This broadening of the phenomenon, it seems to me, directs attention to a number of issues which have been insufficiently explored in earlier discussions of world music.

My argument proceeds from the hypothesis that world music is more than a new style, more than a new category for racks in the record stores. World music is a new aesthetic form of the global imagination, an emergent way of capturing the present historical moment and the total reconfiguration of space and cultural identity characterizing societies around the globe. Here my argument differs substantially from other, more familiar readings of the phenomenon that leave considerable space for the interpretation of different kinds of world music as an assertion of a politics of difference—of nation, community, and, most notably, race—and of the local, as resilient articulations of opposition against Western hegemony: it maintains that synthesis is the central category of this global aesthetics in the making. Although representing no particular global cultural or political entity as such, world music offers the panoramic specter of a global ecumene, of a totality long deemed lost by contemporary critical thought. Beneath the truly exponential proliferation of signs and all the celebration of difference, world music, within its very constitution and aesthetic canon, seems to articulate the inchoate feeling expressed by the 1990 AT&T commercial: “we are all connected.”

But this is also a new type of synthesis for which the earlier notion of an organic totality seems hopelessly inadequate. Rather, as Fredric Jameson has suggested, we are dealing with a kind of transversality born from the random play of unrelated differences. Much of this new aesthetics has already been put in place in certain forms of postmodern public culture such as video art. Here as in popular music more specifically, such as in alternative rock, as Will Straw argues in one of the most penetrating analyses to date of the music industry in the global era, this synthesis does not represent an attempt at “collective redirection” through which musical communities are brought into new alliances. Rather, cross-fertilization and hybridization in alternative rock produce what he calls “idiosyncratic passages.” Or, as Jean Baudrillard, the mastermind of simulation writes, this “hell of the identical,” amidst the orgy of differences, has all the qualities of a melodrama, of a psychodrama. In the psychodrama of the test and the interface, Baudrillard maintains, we simulate and dramatize, in an acrobatic act, the absence of the Other. In the interaction that results from this artificial dramaturgy, the subject becomes the Other of nobody. Fashioned in this manner, the interactive, transversal subject is not the product of some new form of exchange, but of the wholesale disappearance of the social and of difference as such.

2. See, for instance, Goodwin and Gore 1990; Guilbault 1993; Waterman 1990.
More specifically, my analysis here takes issue with two propositions frequently made in current debates about world music. First, I see homogenization and differentiation not as mutually exclusive features of musical globalization that can be lamented, denounced, or demanded as needed, but as integral constituents of musical aesthetics under late capitalism. Synchronicity, the contradictory experience of the universal marketplace alongside proliferating neotraditional codes and new ethnic schisms, is the key signature of the postmodern era. Or, to use a more familiar image from the realm of commodity aesthetics: homogeneity and diversity are two symptoms of what one is tempted to call the Benetton syndrome—the more people around the globe who purchase the exact same garment, the more the commercial celebrates difference.

From this view it follows that a quality which defines a system cannot at the same time function as an antithesis to that same system. The position must be questioned, then, that a subsystem or a series of differentiated subsystems such as the Third World, regional and local cultures present some form of challenge to the wider system of global capitalism, that diversity by definition subverts homogeneity. In other words, I dispute the notion that certain forms of world music are to be seen as an antidote to the venom of Western consumer culture and cultural imperialism, and that, as Iain Chambers claims, the world’s musics “offer a space for musical and cultural differences to emerge in such a manner that any obvious identification with the hegemonic order, or assumed monolithic market logic, is weakened.”

Perhaps it is because of the prevalence of this rhetorical stance against cultural imperialism that recent attempts to grasp the dynamics of the new global musics have tended to privilege the politics of global mass culture, the economic strategies of the multinational media, or the role of music in national politics. Although these and similar issues are crucial to any serious analysis of the new global cultural dispensation, in the tentative analysis of world music that follows I do not pursue such a line of reasoning. Deviating from ruling practice in popular music studies, my argument is relatively unconcerned with the classical parameters of cultural analysis. For instance, the industry, consumption, class, hegemony, resistance and other such obligatory categories play a secondary role here. I agree with Straw that the crucial site of the politics of popular music is neither

7. For a succinct critique of old-time anthropological notions of cultures as a priori coherent wholes, see Moore 1989:38.
in the “transgressive or oppositional quality of musical practices and their consumption, nor uniformly within the modes of operation of the international music industries.”

Rather, what seems to be required today is a more thoroughgoing examination of global culture which is not limited to analyses of postcolonial economics and power dynamics. I imagine a reflection on the aesthetics of these transcultural sounds as a global phenomenon, a reflection that rather than looking at the global sales strategies of Sony and BMG and their impact on the national and cultural identity of countries like Kenya and Sweden, would examine the production of social differences through the “building of audiences around particular coalitions of musical form.” For this reason, I propose that an aesthetic theory of world music shift the focus more toward problems of the construction of historicity or the changes in mimetic representation in the electronic media. What follows are the outlines of such an aesthetic theory of contemporary world music.

Implicit in this attempt to sketch out the new global musical aesthetics is a certain element of cultural self-critique. If, as I argue, world music represents an attempt by the West to remold its image by localizing and diversifying itself through an association with otherness, a serious analysis of global musics can only be written from a subject position in the West. Thus, this form of cultural critique is sensitive to the fact that “asymmetry rules,” and that among many Third World critics of Western hegemony, the present situation is frequently seen not so much as the completion of modernity, but rather as a lack of modernity in the first place. At the same time, my main concern in this essay is activated by an analysis of the ways through which ideologies of difference are produced in the West. An aesthetic theory of world music as cultural critique therefore cannot heroize otherness. And, by the same token, it cannot engage in, say, the sort of influential anthropological project that attempts to bring “the insights

10. For example, Rutten 1991. For an exemplary study of audio cassette technology in North India, see Manuel 1993.
gained on the periphery back to the center to raise havoc with our settled ways of thinking and conceptualization.”

To propose a theory of something as disordered and segmented as the world’s musics may seem surprising in view of the fact that the role of theory itself in synthesizing complex, fragmented realities has been called into question. At the same time, the current distaste for totalizing modes of discourse is not due solely to the sheer magnitude of the geographic spaces covered and the multiplicity of the phenomena within them. As a recent attempt by ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin to map the “micromusics of the West” demonstrates, such multiple and partial narratives reflect deeper conceptual, methodological difficulties. In dealing with the numerous local musics of Europe and the United States, Slobin claims that no “simple analytical system will capture the pathos and the power of music in today’s shifting world.” Hence, the dramatis personae in his account are the familiar characters of postmodern dramaturgy: the villains are associated with the system, blueprint, or model and, predictably, the heroes with multiple viewpoints, disjuncture, and multivalence. But despite all the distrust of such methodological procedures as a “particular conceptual grid,” Slobin’s ambitious essay does yield a set of notions, after all, like subculture, interculture and superculture, that seek to integrate the multiple, amorphous realms of micromusics into a wider model. Ultimately, however, this attempt to systematize something so resolutely unsystematic as the new micromusics, is doomed to reproduce only the paranoid effect caused by a system unleashed of its own logic.

On reading Slobin’s piece, the vague feeling persists that somehow the new global culture is all an overwhelming muddle as it sometimes haunts you in your dreams, that the superculture inextricably affects the subculture and vice versa, that musicians constantly “code-switch between the subculture and the interculture which in turn determines the interaction between subcultures, and so forth in an endless swirl. It is quite conceivable that this might remain the only conceivable definition of culture at the present (global) stage and that, as Slobin says, “There is little difference between ‘hegemony’ and ‘culture’.” Hegemony would then

18. Ibid., 1.
19. Ibid., 14.
be just another way of saying that there is no reality outside a universe awash with signs, regardless of how differentiated and fluid the system may otherwise be.

As Jameson has pointed out, the fear of totalizing concepts that is expressed in this and similar pictures of an incomprehensible labyrinth, overseen by unnamed masters and populated by innumerable subgroups, is itself a function of globalization. But where there is nothing outside the all-encompassing system, he adds, the notion of a system must lose its raison d'être. This then only comes again by way of a “return of the repressed” in the nightmares of 1984 and the sci-fi novels about some global conspiracy. Of course, as Slobin is critically aware, the way out of the maze cannot lie in the romantic hope for some kind of Other out there that will eventually, by the virtue of its mere existence, save us from the self-enclosure of the total grey-out. Rather the question how to account for both global generality and local specificity might have to be recast by trying to think this global-local relationship in more dialectical terms as mutually constitutive features of the very micromusics that Slobin finds so hard to pin down, to anchor more firmly the “micromusical home” in a space that is both more local and more global than Slobin’s tripartite model. The point is to find the name of the new global chaos, as it were, to engage in more than “well-intended gestures in the direction of multicultural diversity,” as Straw calls it. Renewed attention is required to the “distinctive logics of change” (my emphasis), to somehow save the notion of music in today’s shifting world as a systemic and historically produced realm of cultural production.

A possible conceptual center for this systemic notion of a global cultural totality is provided by Jameson’s notion of difference. Following Jameson, who is one of those critics who has pursued most vigorously the idea of “mapping a totality” and on whose thoughts about the systemic nature of cultural production in late capitalism much of my argument is based, the production of difference is inherent in the logic of capitalism itself. The ability of the system to reproduce itself in endless variations and interconnected subsystems rests on a deeply “anti-social,” atomizing logic. Paradoxically, the systemic reproduction of capitalist society through social difference does not implode the system from within, in the sense of the structural contradictions producing the collapse of the whole without the intervention of some outside force or acting subject. Differentiation simply in-

22. Ibid.
23. See also Straw 1991:374–75.
creases, on a grander scale, the heteronymy and chaos that are the historical attribute and originality of this society. The omnipresence of commodity production is the roof, as it were, under which differentiation and homogenization now comfortably reside as members of the same family.

The production of difference through ceaseless internal replications of a closed system is also at the heart of Niklas Luhmann's thinking. Capitalist development, according to Luhmann's almost claustrophobic notion of social process, is to be seen as "growth by internal disjunction" that differentiates realms of human practice by merely replicating the difference between a system and its environment.\textsuperscript{24} Each subsystem therefore becomes a copy of the whole system in the special form of the difference between the subsystem and its environment. A complex system such as the global economy (or world music) thus gains integration not only on the basis of common values, norms, or power relations, but simply by providing an ordered environment to its subsystems.\textsuperscript{25}

It may seem disquieting to invoke a theory that is so patently devoid of any reference to human agency and that, consequently, leaves little space for the popular arts to articulate some kind of creativity and authentic truth. But Luhmann's notion of system seems useful for the analysis of global aesthetic production, not only because it is, as Luhmann says somewhere, a "figure for thinking forbidding complexity." We are in fact dealing with the most ramified, all-encompassing environment ever in the history of artistic production, independent of the continued creativity of individual artists. In this environment, the relationship between different musical subsystems may simply be conceptualized as "circuits" through which styles and the relationships between them are "reproduced within a variety of local circumstances."\textsuperscript{26} While the loops of these circuits may open up new spaces for creativity, the globalization of artistic production also creates new possibilities for romanticizing authenticity and mythologizing local talent.

Irrespective, then, of the specific readings one might bring to Luhmann, the point is that a system that constitutively produces difference remains a system all the same. Difference, in this interpretation, is no longer an antithesis to the system, it is drawn back inside the system. The eccentricity of the system is the symptom of an inner metastasis rather than of its impending death. At the very least, this interpretive option should enable us to transcend the heteronymy and

\textsuperscript{24} Luhmann 1982:231.
\textsuperscript{25} Luhmann 1975:59.
\textsuperscript{26} Straw 1991:378–79.
tautology implicit in the ideology of difference. A more systemic notion of global cultural production might prevent us from essentializing music as a “source of difference” per se, and enable us to rehearse an aesthetic theory that goes beyond a random collection of autonomous ethnoaesthetics.

It is this tension between a total system and the various local cultural practices that opens up a space for ethnography. Thus, musical ethnographies will increasingly have to examine the choices performers worldwide make in moving about the spaces between the system and its multiple environments. Rather than casting these moves in binary terms such as choices between the West and the Rest, between participation and refusal, the politics of global musical production creates numerous, highly changeable “border zone relations” that allow performers to constantly evaluate their position within the system.28

+++ Before I now turn to some of the constitutive features of the new global musical aesthetics, I briefly return to the term “world music” itself. Invented by an industry deeply shaken about its own expansion by the uncertainties of the 1970s, and the pre-MTV music market, the term displays a peculiar, self-congratulatory pathos: a mesmerizing formula for a new business venture, a kind of shorthand figure for a new—albeit fragmented—global economic reality with alluring commercial prospects. Like in some of the actual world music record labels such as Globestyle, Earthworks, Realworld, within the term “world music” reside fantasies that were once stored in the treasure-house of poetic language.29 Thus, the first point to be made about an aesthetic theory of world music is that the well-nigh complete commodification of musical performance—the ubiquity of the market—now seems an indisputable fact.

Nevertheless, some crucial distinctions remain. The first concerns the obvious fact that autonomous, uncommodified forms of musical practice still thrive in some places, and, in the heart of Western consumer societies, quite unabatedly so.30 As we shall see, the very coexistence of these different forms of musical production and consumption is one of the strongest social bases for the myth of world music.

The second differentiation that needs to be considered refers to the market—or, more precisely, particular forms of markets—as the images and, at the same time, the contexts of world music. In an original move, Philip Bohlman has used the Middle Eastern bazaar as a metaphor for the role of folk music in the modern world. The culture of the bazaar, he writes, is a reminder that music has always faced modernization. What Bohlman’s image seems to be referring to is of course mercantile capitalism, an earlier phase of the capitalist mode of production. And thus, the image of the bazaar appears somewhat inapt as a representational shorthand of the modern world-system and its sounds. For unlike the merchandise traded in Bohlman’s imaginary bazaar, contemporary world music does not emanate from some locally circumscribed peasant community or artisan’s workshop. The music of the South African choral group Ladysmith Black Mambazo and of Senegalese pop star Youssou N’Dour passed into the commodity stage and secured for itself a firm position on full-grown national markets long before the new global musical culture was even dimly perceived; in other words, it was already fully modernized before it came to the global bazaar. If, then, some metaphorical expression is needed to describe the space in which world music is situated, it would perhaps more adequately have to be the ubiquitous nowhere of the international financial markets and the Internet.

World music, then, is not the new music of the “non-western world,” let alone of the disenfranchised Third World “lumpen proletariat.” Rather, world music seems to be the aesthetic figure corresponding most closely to what Baudrillard has called the “fractal stage of value,” a historical moment in which value is no longer dependent on the natural use of the world, nor on a logic of commodity exchange or a structural web of signs. Value, in the viral stage, develops from pure contiguity, from the cancerous proliferation of values without any reference point at all. In this stage, the forces and processes of cultural production are dispersed and cut loose from any particular time and place, even if local tradition and authenticity are what the products of the global entertainment industry are ostensibly about. World music, in this reading, appears to be the soundscape of a universe which, underneath all the rhetoric of roots has forgotten its own genesis.

This interpretation in turn suggests another differentiation. Even if some of the older concepts such as syncretism, Westernization, or modernization, used
for denoting the sudden intrusion of modernity into precapitalist societies, have
lost their analytical value, and even though the distinctions that have been made
between them, in the light of my own theoretical premise, may now appear as
rather fastidious,\textsuperscript{35} we might want to retain at least some of the intention of this
terminology. The point of these terms seemed to be not so much to differentiate
between different types of music and their cultural contexts per se, but to account
for different patterns of change in response to Western influence, to periodize
music history in an emergent global order, and to grasp the peculiar historical
space between tradition and modernity, or between the compact disc, MTV,
Graceland, and everything that preceded them.

I am suggesting, then, that there is a methodological distinction between world
music as I have provisionally defined it here and all those other musics that are
often and rather inadequately classed as world music like Zimbabwean chimur-
enga, Pakistani bhangra, or Nigerian fuji. Musics such as these, in my view,
are all constructed around the shock and dislocation an individual from a local,
non-Western tradition might experience who suddenly finds his or her life-world
more or less violently juxtaposed with the world of industrial capitalism.\textsuperscript{36} What
separates such musics as chimurenga, bhangra, and fuji from a fully developed
postmodern music production on a global scale is not their allegedly prior position
on some putative teleological scale, but the way in which history itself is inscribed
in them, how they synchronize the experience of individual lived time with the
myriad collective histories and voices elsewhere in the region, nation, and the
world at large. In other words, different phases in the evolution of world music—
itself not an ahistorical phenomenon—are to be distinguished by the degree to
which the meanings of the past, the tradition, overlap with the overwhelming
present or, by the extent to which certain social relations and cultural practices
are unhinged from concrete spatial conditions and recombined in ever-changing,
“disembedded” time-space relationships.\textsuperscript{37}

In all phases of globalization prior to late capitalism there prevailed a sense
of only a partial overlap of the past and the present, of a difference between the
values and practices of the past and those of the present. Thus fuji, an eclectic
mix of images drawn from Islam, Nigerian urban subculture, Western consumer

\textsuperscript{35} Nettl 1985.

\textsuperscript{36} Of course, the distinctions I am making between different forms of commodity relations and
more or less “parallel” types of world music are not to be understood as periods or stages in the
sense of fixed points on some kind of linear trajectory of universal music history.

culture, and "deep" Yoruba tradition, is more than a seemingly random cluster of symbols. Christopher Waterman, in a preliminary account of fuji, is reluctant to read fuji as a symptom of the postmodern waning of historicity. Rather, he contends, fuji is, in its own context, a privileged locus for the production of historical consciousness and for attempts to metaphorically map the global networks upon which the uncertain future of fuji musicians and their listeners vitally depends. By contrast, the new global culture has not swept away the variety of "traditional" practices and aesthetics (which continue to thrive in places), but the need for periodization itself. The past has been completely supplanted with the logic of the present, the modernization process is complete and Nature is gone for good. The allocation of meaning to whatever relics of the past have survived has become a mere matter of taste.

+++ The current appeal of commercially produced images of "world" stands in a strangely inverse relationship to the unpopularity of totalizing concepts in current theoretical discourse. Nostalgia for the totality in popular artistic production appears to derive precisely from the fact that in an age without synthesis, as Robert Musil once called modernity, these images answer an old-fashioned, residual desire for unity and coherence. The historical genesis and the ideological pervasiveness in the West of such inverted Utopias must now be specified. In other words, I am concerned here with the new global culture as an essentially "imagined world," as Arjun Appadurai calls it, as a perspectival construct that is inflected by the historical, social, and cultural situatedness of different sorts of actors.

One of the most intense ideological expressions of such totalizing mythologies are the major public rituals of world music such as the Womad (World of Music and Dance) festivals. As such, Womad festivals are useful lessons in the ideology of universal commodity production. For while the concerts celebrate the diversity of artistic expression in the world's cultures, this celebration of difference conceals as it rests on a more fundamental "sameness." As Durkheim long ago argued, the growing complexity and geographical scale of societies have led to a point at which the only thing the members of a society have in common, becomes their humanity. At the same time, the growing functional differentiation of societies

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on a global scale not only results, in Weber's famous expression, in a polytheism of values, but also leads to a weakening of common boundaries. Consequently, in a world in which habitus, the authority of custom and lived experience, have been subjected to rationalization, an integrated society that encompasses the myriad functions and roles, can only be imagined as a global ecumene.\footnote{Luhmann 1975:60.}

Following Peter Sloterdijk, it is such “lies of belonging” that are at the basis of politics in the kingdoms, empires, and nations of all ages and description.\footnote{Sloterdijk 1993:34–41.} In them, politics as the art of the possible consists in making the unlikely appear as the inevitable: the political world is conceived of as everything that is the case within the greatest possible circle. There arise in such worlds not only veritable state-athletes, but also the secession of man from man: the intimate strangeness of master and servant. People come closer to one another by becoming strangers to each other: exclusive inclusivity.

At the same time, the basis of increasing social differentiation and of the emergence of the individual as the lowest common denominator, as it were, of modern society is the near universality of commodity production. In the new global culture, it is things and increasingly also images—designed, produced, and marketed to represent an experience—that become the basic, universally valid units of culture. But if the global culture of commodities depends on the homogenization of cultural diversity to realize the value of any particular product, it cannot afford to blind itself entirely to this very diversity as its primary source of raw material, of new images. It is from this tension that emerges what Appadurai has called a certain “cannibalism,” a “politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thus to proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular.”\footnote{Appadurai 1990:308.}

If, then, the modern phantasmagorias of humankind, freedom of communication, world peace, and so on are to be understood as “auto-hypnoses” in the service of a politics as the art of the possible and as ones that result equally from the double process of global commodity production and rationalization, then the ecumenical idea exalted in world music festivals is not so much the expression of the enduring salience of monolithic, overarching worldviews such as Christianity or socialism, but the sign of universal commodity exchange. Similarly, Womad.
events are in reality the posthumous siblings of the world fairs of the machine age and, like them, "sites of pilgrimages to the commodity fetish."\textsuperscript{44}

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One of the most significant results of this cannibalism is the complete reconfiguration of local identity and the ideologies and aesthetic forms attached to it. On the one hand, a certain production fetishism emerges, a process whereby translocal production and its agents are masked in the idiom and spectacle of local worlds.\textsuperscript{45} Locality itself becomes a fetish which disguises the globally dispersed forces of production. Although increasingly larger populations around the globe live by these strips of manufactured local reality, the universality of these commodities does not mean that a transnational product accurately represents any of the particular experiences it claims to portray. The images produced by the world's multinational media networks remain imaginary landscapes, whose local authenticity is manufactured and whose universality derives from the sole fact that their appropriation depends upon purchase. On the other hand, the equalizing logic of commodity exchange also makes it possible for a particular form of local identity—the West—to conceal its own hegemony. It is thus, to use Stuart Hall's words, that the global becomes "a way in which the dominant particular localizes and naturalizes itself and associates with a variety of other minorities."\textsuperscript{46} Paul Simon with Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Peter Gabriel with Youssou N'Dour, Madonna with...

The local, then, is not the historical antecedent of modernity, but essentially a myth produced by the growing differentiation of society. Even though scholars concerned with musical practices around the world today are overwhelmingly sceptical of attempts at privileging the "geographically local as guarantee of the historical continuity of musical styles,"\textsuperscript{47} mythologies of the local strongly influence the work of ethnomusicologists on the popular musics of the Third World. Peter Manuel's useful survey, \textit{Popular Musics of the Non-Western World} comes to mind here, as does \textit{Music at the Margins: Popular Music and Global Cultural Diversity} edited by Deanna Campbell Robinson et al.\textsuperscript{48} These studies and others like them are essentially narratives about the survival of other, suppos-

\textsuperscript{44} Benjamin 1986:151. 
\textsuperscript{45} Appadurai 1990. 
\textsuperscript{46} Hall 1991:67. 
\textsuperscript{47} Straw 1991:369. 
\textsuperscript{48} Manuel 1988; Robinson et al. 1991.
edly more authentic, musical practices at the margins of the First World, a narrative that has of course had—under different guises—wide currency in numerous other debates about colonialism, Westernization, and resistance.

Furthermore, like much other work on popular culture in late capitalism, such studies suffer from a number of malaises which Meghan Morris has diagnosed as “banality,” an apologetic “yes, but” argument offering us, despite all class, race and sexual oppression, the “sanitized world of a deodorant commercial where there’s always a way to redemption.” Within the specific context of Third World popular practice and culture, substantial objections have also been raised against the all too facile identification of the politics of the local, of the cultural practices of the new social movements, and the Third World with radical opposition to the system as such. Whilst it is unquestionably correct to accept the essentialism frequently implied in the politics of difference as one of the many subject positions that inform radical pluralism, and even more so to recognize the power and artistic quality in some of the aesthetic expressions of this politics, some authors have rightfully questioned the tendency in post-colonial studies to accord to Third World discursive practices a privileged status in global antihegemonic politics. They see in such theoretical positions a certain nativism, a “fetishization of marginality,” and an essentialist identification of Third World cultural practices with Otherness per se. If, as Santiago Colás argues, late capitalism is first defined, as in Jameson, as the historical moment in which the Third World disappears through the saturation of the previously colonized, then the Third World cannot at the same time reemerge as that paradoxical Utopian space in which opposition to the logic of late capitalism is expressed.

Clearly, then, the mythologies of the global and the local, the “play of absences” that characterizes artistic production since the imperial age, call for critical intervention in a number of issues affecting global cultural production and aesthetics. The most pressing of these interventions seems to be a revision of the notion of authenticity, probably one of the more problematic terms in popular music studies.

53. See also Keil and Feld 1994:270–73.
There are two possible ways of undertaking such a process of revision. The first, more commonly adopted one is based on the assumption that an unmediated and undiluted otherness is essentially a Western fiction. The other approach, more fruitful for the purposes of my own argument, proceeds from an analysis of the profound changes that have taken place in the relationship between (digital) technology and representation, subjectivity and the constitution of society in late capitalism. According to the latter approach, the essence of art no longer lies beyond the work of art, in a meaning, but in the interaction to which it gives rise. A new relational aesthetic, a theory of sympathetic mediation and the interface has taken the place of an aesthetic founded on the idea that a work of art contained a set of meanings, some kind of truth that would become apparent through mimitic representation. Nowadays meaning is seen to exist in the intervals between a range of interconnected communication systems. To know a painting, a piece of music, then, is to be able to immerse oneself in its atmosphere. The category of appearance no longer applies to the difference between reality and the work of art, but to the interrelationship between an infinite chain of signs. Intentionality turns to intensity; the age of representation, as Paul Virilio would say, has given way to the age of presentation.54

If there remains nothing to represent, then, the search for some authentic experience or truthful meaning becomes a vain undertaking. In fact, as Simon Frith proposes, the misleading search for the truth in a piece of music should therefore be replaced by the question of how popular music sets up the idea of truth in the first place.55 Similarly, an aesthetic theory of music in the global age would thus not be concerned with the truthful representation of difference per se. Instead, such a theory would examine the ways in which world music constructs the experience of global communication and authenticity through symbolic means whose very difference depends so vitally on their sameness as transnational commodities.

If, then, it follows that world music does not really deliver the authentic Africa or, the original experience of the First World urban ghettos of the immigrants and minorities, it might be more fruitful to explore an interpretive option for a theory of global aesthetic production that bypasses, as it were, many of the dilemmas raised by received false dichotomies such as those between structure and agency, authenticity and inauthenticity. Following Jameson's programmatic analysis of postmodern art and culture of 1984, I propose the alternative notion

of pastiche—first developed systematically as an aesthetic category by Theodor Adorno—as the key principle of world music. I take pastiche and its central role in the postmodern global culture as an index of the rapid loss of referentiality and, thus, as broadly analogous to Baudrillard’s idea of a “culture of the simulacrum,” or Virilio’s “aesthetic of disappearance.”

In world music, this aesthetic of pastiche manifests itself at a variety of levels, two of which I shall discuss in more detail: the reconfiguration of time and space and its consequences for subjective identity; and, as a related phenomenon, the role of nostalgia. The reconfiguration of time and space, as I have said, is of course one of the main elements of modernity. In the new global culture, however, this feature of modernity is not simply expressed in aesthetically radicalized form, as Anthony Giddens might say, but coded in completely novel ways. A useful illustration for this reconfiguration is provided by Straw’s discussion of alternative rock and dance music. He argues that in alternative rock, different historical moments are made to coexist within a bounded cultural space through the inflection of older, residual styles. And thus, temporal movement is transformed into cartographic density. In dance music, by contrast, spatial diversity—the simultaneous existence of numerous local styles—is perpetually reworked as temporal sequence. Coexisting local styles are registered in terms of their place within rising or falling trajectories of popularity.

The similarities in the temporalization of spatial diversity between dance music and world music are striking, and like in dance music, many of the styles more conventionally associated with the term “world music” come to demarcate community by forging affective links between dispersed places. At a deeper level of significance, however, the reconfigured time-space relationship in world music does away with time and place altogether. One of the correlates of this disappearance of historical consciousness is the overkill in stylistic turnover and its associated patterns of consumption. These patterns are modeled on zapping, the channel switching of the cable subscriber, characterized by Jameson as the “postmodern mode of totalizing.” These listening habits register different musical traditions as a string of asemantic actualities, as simultaneous fragments of a completely different type of cultural space than the one represented by the earlier notion of an organic totality.

This is a new kind of space in which the former acute sense of discontinuity in our experience of historical time, of the existence of different temporalities,

has all but evaporated. Although the breaks and discords are still there, they no
longer signify a rupture or *coupure*, but in a paradoxical turnaround a peculiar
kind of “euphoric,” as Jameson would say, relatedness. In world music the play
of differences is turned into a new kind of identity. We are dealing, as French
musicologist-philosopher Daniel Charles puts it, with an aesthetic of the singular
in the plural. It is not the situation of plurality as such, of different moments
of truths, that seems to preoccupy the Western world music consumer, but the
circulation of these plural forms among each other. Difference itself becomes
the signified. The fact that you register difference is proof that something is going
on, that there is a position on which the formation of a subjective identity is
possible.

Where historical consciousness is on the retreat, its place is taken by histori-
cism. And thus, in the most avant-gardist world music, something similar to the
“nostalgia for the present” Jameson diagnosed in contemporary film and literature,
asserts itself as the central aesthetic category. As a musical discourse, nostalgia
colonizes the past not by simply reviving and imitating the symbols of earlier
times. According to Jameson, pastiche is a “neutral” parody in which the sense
of some older, intact idiom as still being available has been completely lost. The
global musical pastiche is more an attempt at coating the sounds of the fully
commodified present with the patina of use value in some other time and place.
From Dino Saluzzi’s Andean journeys and Keiko Matsui’s electronic surfaces
garnished with Gregorian chant and bits of *shakuhachi* to Stephen Micus’s and
Andreas Vollenweider’s virtuoso sacking of the global fringe complete with *cheng*, Zulu choral music, and bassoon—much of world music has the pseudohis-
torical sound of pastness.

This past without history is of course not the same as the attempts in many
musics to reappropriate the past (even in “invented” form) as part of a new
historical consciousness. The desire, for instance, in Zimbabwean pop star
Thomas Mapfumo’s chimurenga music to recover the silenced voices of the past,
is clearly inspired by a certain sense of cultural identity and inscribes itself into
a movement that seeks to provide collective purpose by making this “original”
moment of identity politically effective. In this sense, musics such as chimurenga
are modernizing in the full sense of the term; they are themselves products and
agents of historical process. By contrast, Vollenweider’s *The Book of Roses*, and

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60. For the role of patina in commodity consumption, see also Appadurai 1993:22–26.
other recent projects such as Milton Nascimento’s *Txai* of 1990, are entirely located in a pseudopast. Organized as almost filmic journeys into a vanished world of Celtic castles, “medieval” Norwegian peasants and into the shrinking enclaves of Kayapho Indians and pink dolphins, they are the musical correlate of what Jameson has termed “spatial historiographies.”

These reflections on the conjuncture of globalization, aesthetics, and world music as part of a systemic process did not abandon difference and otherness as crucial categories of a theory of global cultural production. People around the world still state—and increasingly so with violent and destructive consequences—their differences. At the same time, the images and expressions of such difference, the tropes of locality, authenticity, and identity, increasingly originate from within a total hyperspace whose rules and codes may still be enigmatic at numerous levels and thus defy conventional modes of analysis. The issues raised by the world music of the 1990s or, at least those raised by some of its more self-consciously avant-gardist examples, challenge us to conceive of new ways of “mapping” this space.

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**Literature Cited**


