

# Quilting Points and Ethnomusicology

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In my **last post** following the ethnomusicology debate at City University, I gave links to **two responses to the event**, and also to the **position statement by Laudan Nooshin** [ADDENDUM: see also **the position statement by Michael Spitzer**). I will post a more detailed reply to this latter soon, believing it to be disingenuous in various ways and in others to confirm a lot of what I was arguing. But here I just wanted to post a longer section from one text cited briefly by Nooshin, J.P.E. Harper-Scott's *The Quilting Points of Musical Modernism: Revolution, Reaction, and William Walton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Here I should not hide the fact that Paul Harper-Scott is a friend and someone with whom I have had many discussions about these types of issues, as I have with many other musicologists and others. A good deal of Harper-Scott's work entails revisionist views of composers and aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, from a perspective broadly sympathetic to a modernist aesthetic and firmly opposed to the values of late capitalism, from which context he can re-assess figures such as Elgar and Walton, never merely in an over-generalised fashion, but backed up by analytical detail. *Quilting Points* is a remarkable book with an ambitious scope; I certainly do have some reservations, not least the employment of aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis (a discipline for which I have little time), and some other theorists about whom I have serious doubts, but it is endlessly stimulating and also extremely clearly written, with incisive points springing out from almost every page. Harper-Scott, as a real expert on the music on which he writes, can move from musical detail to social and political context extraordinarily convincingly without relying merely on vague allusions, in a manner which I think many of those whose work I have criticised in my earlier piece would do well to study.

This book is one of the very few which includes a critique of ethnomusicology from an 'outsider's' position (i.e. one who does not identify as an ethnomusicologist), and I value it especially for that reason. For too long ethnomusicology has sought to present itself as a self-regulating enterprise (often, in my experience, in a jealously defensive fashion), and the lack of proper external scrutiny and critique has in my view enabled some very poor work to sail through PhD examination, peer review, and so on, when ratified by those with an obvious vested interest in so doing. This passage in Harper-Scott's book is part of a wider critique of various recent Anglophone musicological trends (not least the 'new musicology' and the work of Richard Taruskin), many of which he links to a xenophobic Anglo-American variety of late capitalism. I want to quote in full the section 'Ethnomusicology and pop musicology as class enemies'. This I found very impressive, not least because of my own long-term disdain for Western intellectuals' romanticising and idealising of massively unequal and reactionary social and cultural practices just because they happen to be in the third world (a legacy of Maoism, an ideology which enforces a conformity to romantic

ideals in murderous fashion), an issue touched upon in the **commentary by Ben Smith** on the debate, and which lies at the heart of a remarkable book I have recently been reading, Leigh Phillips' *Austerity Ecology and the Collapse-Porn Addicts: A Defence of Growth, Progress, Industry and Stuff* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014).

I was also deeply drawn to Harper-Scott's description of his own class background and readiness to entertain the possibility that a good deal of the liberal grandstanding to be found amongst ethnomusicologists, popular music scholars and new musicologists primarily relates to a conscience-soothing exercise for sons and daughters of privilege feeling a bit guilty for that very reason (just as the Indian Marxist writer Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out how the narrative bequeathed by Edward Said suits the interests of the sons and daughters of the ruling classes in formerly colonised nations, for they definitely need a narrative which takes class out of the equation – see the bottom of this post for the passage in question). I come from a background not so different to Harper-Scott (indeed today our parents live less than a mile from each other in Hartlepool, though are not personally acquainted). I grew up in West Park, Hartlepool, to a reasonably comfortable family, though the circumstances in which my parents themselves grew up were very different – my father was born into deep poverty in 1931, and during the Depression he and his family would be moving house every three months or so in a desperate trek for work; his father found some construction on a huge cooling tower together with a friend during this time and through inappropriate safety regulations watched his friend plunge to his death. Both parents left school at 16; I was the first in this strand of the family to go to university (both my younger sister and I went to Oxford), which naturally was a source of great pride. I learned about music and much else in large measure through the resources available at my local library, before going to music school at age 10. My background is far from typical for a musician (even less typical today than it was in some of the post-war era in the UK), and I have had to fight for it in the face of snobbery and privilege. As such, I feel nothing other than total and utter contempt for the patronising nonsense presented by academics, including some sociologists and ethnomusicologists, who would have denied either Harper-Scott or me the chances we had, by trying to make musical education more 'relevant' and 'inclusive'. One of my greatest joys is when I am able to introduce students of all types of background to many types of music, literature, visual arts, complex ideas, and so on, which they would have been unlikely to encounter otherwise (and will be unlikely to in many university departments if some have their way), and to hear their own individual responses (often very different from my own), and help them gain tools for developing and framing these ideas – and also push them to read and listen widely! – such as facilitates critical perspectives which are based upon detail and real knowledge rather than generalities and stereotypes. In short I want them to have the opportunities I had; this is one of my main reasons for wanting to teach in a university, and I would like to think I achieve this reasonably well. One reason for embarking on a critique of some varieties of ethnomusicology (as well as being shocked by what passed for scholarship in many cases) is the identification of a group of scholars essentially working to deny students much of what I have described, instead using them and curricula as vehicles to flatter those very ethnomusicologists, under the auspices of spurious rhetoric of diversity and relevance, or turning wider deficiencies in British education into virtues. These are worrying trends which can be found in many places.

One factor which Harper-Scott identifies very precisely is the limitations of the empirical mentality of those people who patronise the lower classes (this is one reason why a truly progressive left is in short supply in the empiricist Anglophone world): they can only imagine what has been, can be experienced, not what might be, and thus to what various members of social groups might aspire. In short, they treat the lower classes as another variety of noble savages, just as (as documented in David Cannadine's *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2001)) there is a long history in British society of portraying the poor using similar concepts and categories as used to dehumanise colonial subjects of non-Caucasian ethnicities.

Harper-Scott also touches on another point, in which context he cites Slavoj Žižek, specifically how self-styled Western multiculturalists are happy to tolerate an idealised 'Other', and ignore an actual 'Other' which might not correspond to many of their preconceptions. As a sceptic about multiculturalism myself (influenced by **the thinking of Kenan Malik on this subject**), I consider this to be a symptom of an ideology – certainly common amongst plenty of ethnomusicologists and anthropologists – which fetishes culture (especially local cultures) and is blind to the very universal workings of global capitalism and its effects upon peoples and cultures. As Terry Eagleton put it in his pungent critique of Gayatri Spivak (**Terry Eagleton, 'In the Gaudy Supermarket, London Review of Books 21/10 (May 13, 1999), pp. 3-6**):

Much post-colonial writing behaves as though the relations between the North and South of the globe were primarily a 'cultural' affair, thus allowing literary types to muscle in on rather more weighty matters than insect imagery in the later James. Spivak, by contrast, has a proper scorn for such 'culturalism', even if she shares a good many of its assumptions. She does not make the mistake of imagining that an essay on the figure of the woman in *A Passage to India* is inherently more threatening to the transnational corporations than an inquiry into Thackeray's use of the semi-colon. The relations between North and South are not primarily about discourse, language or identity but about armaments, commodities, exploitation, migrant labour, debt and drugs; and this study boldly addresses the economic realities which too many post-colonial critics culturalise away.

A 'culturalist' view, on the other hand, can lead to some of the most crazy conclusions, such as **Germaine Greer's defence of female genital mutilation**, or Julia Kristeva's of Chinese foot-binding, presented as some beguiling alternative model of feminine physical demeanour (in *Des Chinoises* (Paris: Editions des femmes, 1974), available in English as *About Chinese Women*, translated Anita Barrows (London: Marion Boyars, 1977)).

Anyhow, here is 'Ethnomusicology and pop musicology as class enemies'. Below this is a passage from the conclusion from which the quote by Nooshin comes ('According to ethnomusicology, the cultures of the non-western world should take intellectual precedence, and those of us who spend our time focusing on Western [classical] music should feel ashamed of ourselves (there is quite an irony in the fact that ethnomusicology, in the UK at least, increasingly attempts to colonize the Western-music syllabuses of our universities'). Nooshin may not 'recognise the ethnomusicology described here and would be interested to know what it is based on'; I am sure Harper-Scott could provide plenty of examples, as could I (including some of Nooshin's own work). As regards syllabuses, I wonder how the faculty at the School of Oriental and African Studies would feel if they were made to have a few Western art music historians/analysts on their faculties, who could then insist that the

ethnomusicology core curricula must in part be fashioned around their activities and specific interests and expertise? But it is important to see this in the wider context of the critique presented in the book.

I would like to encourage others not simply to adhere to my view on this text, but submit their own thoughts and responses to this and the wider issues, whatever those may be, though keeping such responses focused on the specifics in question and refraining from personal attacks.

#### **4.12 Ethnomusicology and pop musicology as class enemies**

‘Henry Stobart’s study of music and potato farming in the Bolivian Andes can be taken as representative of this risk as it manifests itself in ethnomusicology.<sup>74</sup> It is certainly not representative of ethnomusicology as a whole, though there are plenty of other ethnomusicologists like Stobart. Nor is the foil I shall use later (some work by Martin Stokes) the only example of an alternative ethnomusicological approach. The exact proportion of these kinds of studies in ethnomusicology is not germane to the theoretical use I am putting this material, which is to demonstrate the possibility for the obscure subject to emerge in this subdiscipline. My arguments may be met by one of three arguments academics habitually wheel out when their field is under attack: the ‘non-articulation’ argument, the ‘one rogue reporter’ argument, and the ‘you can’t read’ argument. The non-articulation argument says that ‘the individual or group you direct your criticisms at is of course profoundly aware of the issues you raise, even if they do not articulate them’. I am at a loss to see why we are to believe that someone has an articulable understanding of anything, if they do not evidence it, particularly when (a) it harms them not to articulate it and (b) there is no bar to them articulating it. The only possible reason for remaining silent in such circumstances is that they must be consciously deciding, perhaps for reasons of intellectual masochism, to bare themselves to attack – in which case they will enjoy what I have to say. The ‘one rogue reporter’ argument (made famous by News International in defending charges of phone hacking at its newspapers; it was plausible until further evidence revealed the alleged abuses to be more or less systemic) says ‘yes, of course, the target you have chosen here is guilty as charged, and if what you say were generally true across the subdiscipline then of course I would agree with you – but this individual is alone in doing this, and as a whole the subdiscipline is sound’. The answer to this is first that Stobart is certainly not alone, and second that even if he were, the existence of even ‘one rogue reporter’ would be sufficient evidence of the possibility of the obscure subject presenting itself within ethnomusicology in terms of the formal theory I am elaborating in this chapter. The third argument, ‘you can’t read’, which implies that the critic fails to understand the subtlety or intellectual context of a position in such a way as to undermine their criticism, is the last resort, and requires rather a lot of support if the mud is to stick. But it is at least the basis of a meaningful discussion, since it requires the rearticulation of the criticized position that explains why the criticism is wrong. I would welcome that.

In Stobart’s study, non-Western music is not only declared to be interesting, to a sympathetic and accustomed Western ear, but – and here a simplistic liberal move that is widespread but not wholly permeating in these disciplines shines through – also to evince an essential authenticity in its production and consumption that is lost, to our great discredit and disadvantage, in the West (this by way of a pseudo-critique of capitalism).<sup>75</sup> The tacit contention is that we would all do rather better (morally, not intellectually) as musicologists if we turn away from our Eurocentric focus on Beethoven and so on. The fractured body of modernist works is therefore denied as a focus for study (¬c) and the emancipatory truth claim of modernism is denied (¬ε) and replaced by a new ‘emancipation’ for the West’s neglected Other (in this case, the potato farmers of Bolivia).

Stobart’s essay follows an exemplary democratic-materialist logic. First, six lines into the essay, he reminds us that ‘music is not the universal language that many [implicitly bad] people have often claimed it to be’, paralleling the logic that ‘there are only bodies and languages’, nothing universal in musical experience, but only a multiplicity of musical languages and persons who (re)create and experience it: this is true so far as it goes, but banal. Second, in the very next sentence, he declares with beautiful capitalist ingenuousness: ‘this does not prevent us deriving great pleasure and inspiration from the music of other cultures’.<sup>76</sup> This statement has a double edge. On the one hand we are to

submit to the superego injunction to enjoy this music: and if it sounds unlovely to an unaccustomed Western ear, Stobart proves his *aretē* (and his moral worth) by his capacity to love it.<sup>77</sup> But on the other hand, the intellectual and material poverty of the farmers whose music this is should *inspire* us. This is the democratic-materialist manifestation of the (ironically!) disavowed Rousseauian ‘noble savage’. The authenticity of the Bolivian farmers casts our privileged Western consumerism into shameful relief. The paradoxical solution, of course, is for us to buy into the Bolivian culture, by visiting, buying CDs of the music, and so on.

The tale Stobart tells of these farmers’ use of music in the different seasons of the potato-growing year is unquestionably interesting. ‘The *pinkillu* flutes and *kitarra* of the growing season are said to call the clouds and rain up from the valleys and to help the crops to grow. In turn the dry season *wauqu* and *siku* panpipes blow the clouds away causing clear skies and frosts.’<sup>78</sup> The farmers believe it to be vital that they play the right tunes, because both their diet and their livelihood depend utterly on the success of the potato harvest.<sup>79</sup> Stobart is careful, early in the essay, to report that the connexion between certain instruments and tunes only has a direct climatic effect *according to the beliefs of the locals*, but it is essential to the ideological trajectory of the essay that by the end, all the qualifications are removed, and the music *does, in all actuality* cause the the right weather conditions to produce the successful potato harvest. <sup>80</sup> Here is the kernel of the ‘inspiration’ we are to draw from the Bolivians: their closeness to their natural world has been lost to us, and it is through their musical practices that we see it. We may not return to the subsistence farming they endure (though we may dabble in a 1970s, *Good Life*-style small-holding lifestyle, cultivate an allotment, or have grubby-looking organic vegetables delivered from local farmers in weekly boxes), but through their music we can approach their perception of the world, and see that ours is neither the only one (which is banally true) nor one that we could hope to universalize (which is wrong, as I shall argue, and is in fact a quintessential manifestation of the obscure subject).

I do not for a moment question the need for the West to rethink its relation to nature, and the positive component of the Bolivian experience here has a basic appeal (though the need to prevent environmental devastation is scarcely a realization that requires the reports from Bolivia to bring it to Western attention). But a nastier failing is also present here: the consequences of a refusal to speak from a universal moral position.<sup>81</sup> One of the dances the farmers perform while they think they are aiding the growth of the potatoes involves the circling and ‘trapping’ of the male flute players by a group of women. Stobart interprets the symbolism: ‘it would seem that the dancers represent the soil or mother earth which protects, but also imprisons and ultimately destroys the parent seed potato when it has given birth to the next generation’.<sup>82</sup> Considering this comment in the light of Stobart’s final words reveals a rich subtext. For my hosts the potato is no mundane staple, but is an enchanting and magical being whose life is seen in many ways to parallel and enable their own. Potatoes must be loved and cared for, just like human children. This sentiment is expressed through music, song, poetry and dance which, in turn, are some of the ultimate expressions of human feeling. For the people of this highland hamlet, at least, it would seem that the potato must count among the most important organizing principles of musical performance. Or rather, might it be more accurate to say that music is one of the primary expressions of the potato?<sup>83</sup>

It is easy to itemize the components of this ideological message:

- subsistence farming is not a burden, a stressful hand-to-mouth existence, but a genuine spiritual wonder that rich Westerners might in some ways envy;
- potatoes are like children, and (implicitly) children are one of the greatest things on earth, and the procreation of them is or should be the generic pursuit of all humankind;
- women, whose role is clarified symbolically in the Bolivian dance, are meant to cultivate and destroy: they should as surely be rearing children as the earth produces the potatoes.

This message of the musical and farming practices of these Bolivians is clearly both anti-feminist and pro-natalist in its focus on the reproductive duty of women. And yet, in line with the democratic-materialist refusal to acknowledge a universal moral position, this is never once questioned in Stobart’s essay. I would not accuse him of sympathy with this position, but his intellectual commitment here prevents him from raising an objection (this is the mystery of the ‘non-articulation’ argument). Not even a disarming remark that this focus on women as mere wombs and (even worse) deadly ensnarers and destroyers surfaces in the text, and since by the end of the essay we could be forgiven for thinking that the author believes, with his hosts, that the right tunes bring the right weather, Stobart forces himself into the invidious position of failing to address the unpalatable parts of the ideology of

the Bolivian farmers. Are we supposed to tolerate this misogyny merely because it is an expression of an Other who we – nasty imperialist Europeans – are morally forbidden to criticize? This is of course only a single essay, and in other cases, where the misogyny is even more extreme, we might encounter criticism of the Other – but far from demonstrating the consistency of the scholar's multiculturalist position, that of course reveals its Eurocentric basis. Such a critical form of liberal democratic materialism

tolerates the Other in so far as it is not the *real* Other, but the aseptic Other of premodern ecological wisdom, fascinating rites, and so on – the moment one is dealing with the *real* Other (say, of clitoridectomy, of women compelled to wear the veil, of torturing enemies to death . . . ), with the way the Other regulates the specificity of its *jouissance*, tolerance stops. Significantly, the same multiculturalists who oppose Eurocentrism also, as a rule, oppose the death penalty, dismissing it as a remainder of primitive barbaric customs of vengeance – here, their hidden true Eurocentrism becomes visible.<sup>84</sup>

Stobart's silence on the misogyny of the Bolivians is the flip-side of this refusal to tolerate more obnoxious prejudices.<sup>85</sup> But his message in the study of the potato farmers is also profoundly, and I am sure unintentionally, neoliberal in an economic sense, which concerns me even more. Where Stobart romanticizes his hosts' relation to their 'enchanted and magical' potatoes, the materialist-dialectical response is to ask fundamental questions:

- Must we tolerate a global economic order in which it is possible that people can live in this subsistence manner?
- Can nothing be done to improve the education of these people, to give them proper scientific understanding of agriculture, so that they can take proper steps to ensure the success of the potato crop on which *their entire life depends* instead of just playing music and hoping for the best?

In the face of such an ethnographic study, the materialist-dialectical response could never be: well, these people live in this manner, and who am I to judge? The proper response from the Left has to be to universalize from its position of economic and material advantage, to look at the appalling material conditions of these people and, rather than to cherish and preserve (draw 'inspiration' from) this way of life, to strive towards the creation of a new world in which it is simply not possible for human beings to live in such precarious economic and dietary conditions. Instead of valorizing forms of life such as this, the response of ethnomusicologists who undertake fieldwork in these situations should be to encourage the rest of the West to make the systemic political changes that are required to lift these people out of their situation, to emancipate rather than to romanticize.

The error in not taking this step is redoubled by the way such relatively rich liberal Westerners use their enthusiasm for these appalling ways of life – which is tantamount to complicity in economic violence against their various Others – as a stick with which to beat their Leftist counterparts on moral grounds. Those Leftists who would like to see the end of these ways of life are of course damned for being Eurocentric imperialist monsters. The cause of this purblindness, I suggest, may be the class experience of the scholars in question. It appears to some members of the congenial middle classes that what the less fortunate majority in their own country or the rest of the world requires is respect and tolerance, rather than a means of escape. To suggest that the poor may wish to escape their poverty is, on this view, to demean them, when the reality is of course that the way to love the poor best is to stop them being poor – in theoretical terms, to break the connexion between their economic situation and their subjective existence. It is precisely this connexion that democratic-materialist musicology sets up by confusing *the situation of people* with *the people in the situation*.

As I noted first in Chapter 1, I speak from a radically different experiential position from virtually any academic I know. I used intellect and a set of cultural interests as a means of escape from the doom of living out my life in one of the greatest centres of unemployment and poverty in the country, the colliery-dominated east coast of County Durham, and from the myriad limitations inbred in a family whose education never (before me) progressed beyond the age of 16. I can therefore personally corroborate one of Žižek's more pertinent observations about the tension between (a) the liberal bourgeoisie's essentializing conjoining of the poor with their culture and (b) the equal and opposite *non-identification* of the poor with the material limitations of their existence. Here the critique should be broadened back out from ethnomusicology to include also pop musicology, thus focusing attention on the principal organs of the obscure subject that attempts to occult the truth claims of modernism in music. For just as ethnomusicology can have the unintended effect of commending

the cultural practices of economically subject external Others, the pop musicologist (or, in other disciplines, the scholar of mass-market literature, art, and so on) can make a virtue of the cultural practices of the lower social orders, to valorize their educational and economic position and make an inextricable link between it and the people who occupy it. The assumption is that since the majority of people think and behave in certain ways, they must want to do so, and the duty of the privileged elite is therefore to learn to love what the masses love, to hide their privileged cultural forms away. What happens in both these cases is that the scholar fails to perceive the fact that the Other is split in itself – that members of another culture, far from simply identifying with their customs, can acquire a distance towards them and revolt against them – in such cases, reference to the ‘Western’ notion of universal human rights can well serve as the catalyst which sets in motion an authentic protest against the constraints of one’s own culture.<sup>86</sup>

Proof, if it were needed, was again seen in the Arab Spring of 2011, where far from identifying with their otherized position (‘Arabs seem naturally disposed towards dictatorships or Islamic fundamentalism; we can’t expect them to want our Western democratic values’), the people of Egypt and elsewhere rose up against their governments in pursuit of precisely the democratic freedoms and human rights that their luckier brothers and sisters in the West enjoy. Here was the universal human striving for emancipation, for political freedom, emerging autochthonously from the Other. The suffering of the Bolivian farmers, or of children educated in failing comprehensive schools during the miners’ strike in County Durham, may be worlds away from the immediately life-threatening reality of an attempted revolution, but that does not deprecate them as matters of concern.

Of course ethnomusicology is not blind to this danger of occultation. Resisting this line of thought from within both ethnomusicology and pop musicology are Martin Stokes’s studies of Turkish arabesk, popular music from the 1970s onwards whose critique of official nationalist ideology turns specifically on questions of identity. In arabesk we find another faithful response to the emancipatory truth claims of modernism. Its singers are mostly ‘migrants from a remote and barbarised Turkish “orient”, the Arab speaking and Kurdish regions of south east Anatolia, who occupy the urban spaces between squatter town and metropolitan centres’; they are also often tranvestites and transsexuals.<sup>87</sup> Far from presenting a uniform and transcendent national Body (C), these internal cultural, economic, and sexual Others more properly epitomize the ‘image of an urban lumpen proletariat dislocated and alienated through labour migration’.<sup>88</sup> The quality of the dissenting voices in this music might be more subdued than those of protestors on Tahrir Square – the music ‘calls on listeners to pour another glass of raki, light another cigarette, and curse fate and the world’<sup>89</sup> – but it is clearly recognizable. This dissenting quality led to its condemnation by the Turkish state as ‘foreign’ music, its filigree melodic decorations too pan-Arab, the influence of Egyptian film music (Egyptian films were banned in 1948) too strong and obvious, its ‘orientalist sophistication in the use of sitars and rhythmic techniques learned from Indian *tabla* playing’ and its melodic dependence on Middle Eastern modal theory (*makam*) both profoundly corrupting, the latter as a remnant of the culturally dangerous pan-Islamic civilization that was an external limit for the young Turkish state.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps more treacherous still in political terms, ‘arabesk has pointed to migration and class issues as lying at the heart of Turkey’s social and economic problems’.<sup>91</sup>

Arabesk singers neither collapse their identities into one imposed by the official ideology (and understood by Westerners to be constitutive of their character as Other) nor, on the other hand, seem to proclaim a wholly universal conception of common humanity that would eradicate the particular nature of their status as internal Other. In short, arabesk neither over-particularizes nor over-universalizes, which is what demonstrates its potential as a resurrection of the universal emancipatory truth of modernism in the particular world of 1970s–90s Turkish experience. This move, essential to maintain the focus on the (disavowed) rift in all human societies, is possible only when scholars refuse to too closely identify people with a particular cultural identity; the alternative is to give the mythical impression of unity which is essential to the ‘all in this together’ ideology of the economic slash-and-burn policies dreamt up by the ruling elite in response to the international capitalist crisis of 2008 onwards.

Where that move is lacking in studies of popular and non-Western music, we therefore witness the declaration of a transcendent body, C, a body of uniformly ‘national’ or at least communal music whose practitioners uniformly compose that body (a body which is both complete and different from us, and cannot be admitted to the general, universal, fractured body, c). The Turkish state broadcasting organization, TRT, proposes just such a ‘transcendence through the characterisation of regional difference in terms of a centralised style of musical performance emphasising the role of

the *bağlama* (a longnecked lute) orchestra, “correct” Turkish pronunciation and vocal techniques associated with the microphone and recording studio rather than unamplified singing’, and so on.<sup>92</sup> This appeal to transcendence is just one form of the democratic-materialist insistence that no universalist position may be taken in the face of a legion of (equally transcendent) Others, and consequently that the only morally responsible intellectual possibility is to produce endlessly expanding banal lists of difference: peoples, pop bands, potatoes. And under the democratic-materialist heading for the body C we naturally also, aesthetically rather than (obviously) politically, find the insistence, in the art market, that art’s function is essentially to shock – but not in a truly shocking way, only in a way that will demonstrate the moral superiority of the middle-class consumers of it. In the proclamation of this transcendent body the democratic materialists attempt to drown out any Leftists who might say that Emin’s art is trash, or that the poor of the West or the rest of the world can find an escape route by expanding their minds beyond the narrow cultural experiences they have been exposed to. An internal Other myself, I have nevertheless more than once (by a member of the class that historically subjugated my own within my own country) been accused of ‘imperialism’ for having such a heretical thought in the democratic-materialist world. Once more we can use a Badiouian matheme to summarize the formal structure of this occultation, one which, at its (sadly common) worst, is shrouded in a holier-than-thou sententiousness that threatens to chase politically valuable study of the Western canon – and its focus on the centuries-long unfolding of the project of emancipatory modernity – into oblivion.

C [democratic materialism]⇒(¬ε [no antagonism]⇒¬c [no non-mass art])  


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π [modernist art as ideology critique]  
(4.6)

Could there be anything more distasteful than the comfortable bourgeois who wears the clothes and listens to the music of the poor, while living in perfect material security in Highgate, sending his or her children to a high performing local state school whose catchment area prevents the poor from attending, and pointing an accusing finger at new members of their class, escapees from poverty, who want to open up rather than restrict access to the emancipatory potential of humankind’s greatest intellectual and artistic products? For the last and longest rhetorical question of the chapter I reserve my most thunderous and angry *no*.

A truly Leftist, even communist, musicology extends the emancipatory potential of modernism – in its faithful and reactive forms – to all, not just to the congenial middle classes who have benefited from it and now, under the conditions of postmodern late capitalism, wish to discountenance it for the sake of adopting unreflective multicultural attitudes that are calculated to demonstrate their superior difference from the lower classes. Yet as we have seen, even their obscure subjective response is motivated, albeit negatively, by the eternal communist present that the third sequence of communism will resurrect for a new day. What remains is to discern some of the signs of this resurrection, which can be seized on even in reactionary music – to reveal the political potential of musical works that have traditionally been seen to be regressive.’

(pp. 186-196)

[74] Henry Stobart, ‘Flourishing Horns and Enchanted Tubers: Music and Potatoes in Highland Bolivia’, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 3 (1994): 35–48, doi:10.1080/09681229408567224.

[75] Pop musicology falls foul of the presumption of authenticity too: for a critique see Elizabeth Eva Leach, ‘Vicars of “Wannabe”’: Authenticity and the Spice Girls’, *Popular Music* 20, no. 2 (2001): 134–67, doi:10.1017/S0261143001001386. The particular form that this error takes in studies of the Western canon is of course in its focus on the authority of the composer. The difference here is, however, that that authenticity is not then taken to extend across the entire range of performers, listeners, and writers who engage with the music. The classic critique of this is Richard Taruskin, ‘The Poietic Fallacy’, *Musical Times* 145, no. 1886 (2004): 7–34, doi:10.2307/4149092.

[76] Stobart, ‘Flourishing Horns and Enchanted Tubers’, 35.



[77] Here for a moment his aesthetic superiority overlaps with that of the dyed-in-the-wool modernist who is in the rare minority of superbeings capable of enjoying serialism.

[78] Stobart, 'Flourishing Horns and Enchanted Tubers', 37.

[79] *Ibid.*, 36.

[80] Cf. the quotations given above with the summary of the research in *ibid.*, 45 and 46.

[81] The irony that liberal thinking of this sort *does* speak from a universal and Eurocentric moral position in its insistence on universal human rights and the empowerment of the meek is of course seldom if ever acknowledged.

[82] Stobart, 'Flourishing Horns and Enchanted Tubers', 43; cf. the return to this symbolism, now expressed as a 'uterine embrace', in the summary at *ibid.*, 47.

[83] Stobart, 'Flourishing Horns and Enchanted Tubers', 47.

[84] Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 262–3.

[85] Žižek says of this that 'the tolerant multiculturalist liberal sometimes tolerates even the most brutal violations of human rights, or is at least reluctant to condemn them, afraid of being accused of imposing one's own values on to the Other' (*ibid.*, 263).

[86] Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 263–4.

[87] Martin Stokes, 'Islam, the Turkish State and Arabesk', *Popular Music* 11, no. 2 (1992): 213, doi:10.1017/S026114300000502X.

[88] Martin Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey*, *Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1992), 108.

[89] *Ibid.*, 1.

[90] Stokes, 'Islam, the Turkish State and Arabesk', 215.

[91] *Ibid.*, 217.

[92] *Ibid.* This is treated at length in Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate*. At the same time as they objected, the Turkish state broadcasters of course paradoxically promoted arabesk singers when it suited the capitalist ideology of the state: 'The lifestyles of the stars, often described in promotional material as the Kings, Queens, Princes and Princesses of arabesk, suggest possibilities of social mobility which are quite unrealistic for most of the population, and obfuscate the processes of class stratification which are continuing to emerge in modern Turkey' (*ibid.*, 221).

From 'Afterword: what to do?'

'The ideological frame of modern musicology, democratic materialism, is seldom brought into the clearing. The revolution of the 'new musicology' has bequeathed a proliferating collection of subdisciplines, all of which inevitably vie for position, most of them picking the easy target of 'elitist', 'Eurocentric', faithful modernism. I share many of my colleagues' suspicion of the masculinism of some of this music's champions but am concerned by the political risk posed by attacks on it – and through it, in scholarship on pop music, film music, and particularly ethnomusicology, an attack on Western art music as a whole. Even among musicologists who still work on Western art music there is a tendency to equate canonicity of the major composers of the first two communist sequences (Beethoven, Wagner, the faithful modernists, et al.) with political configurations in the twentieth century's second communist sequence – essentially, 'totalitarianism' understood in the broadest terms.

All attacks on this tradition share the banality of the democratic-materialist mantra: there are only bodies and languages, there is no truth. According to ethnomusicology, the cultures of the non-Western world should take intellectual precedence, and those of us who spend our time focusing on Western music should feel ashamed of ourselves (there is quite an irony in the fact that

ethnomusicology, in the UK at least, increasingly attempts to colonize the Western-music syllabuses of our universities); according to pop or film-music scholarship, the ‘democratic’ (read: successfully marketized) forms of music should be examined as a way of valorizing the economically underprivileged (the problem here, as I explained in Chapter 4, is the facile judgement that such listeners have an essential bond with this music, which cannot be broken, and from which they can certainly never dissent); while according to scholars of the Western ‘periphery’, including Britain, Scandinavia, and Russia, there is a danger – sometimes baldly stated as a Nazi danger – of Germanophilia in perpetuating the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century musical canon, and so on. The banality inheres in the conclusion of the mantra: there is no truth. Of course I defend the interests of scholars, musicians, and listeners in all of these traditions, and no ethically responsible musicology could ever sideline or – which is what many people seem to fear – hope to obliterate them: it goes without saying, and therefore need not be said, that the different bodies and languages of the world require fair treatment. But failing to give that fair treatment is precisely the danger that faithful and reactive modernism protects us from, and which these intellectual approaches I have just enumerated – in the form of the obscure subject – are at a particular risk of falling into.<sup>1</sup> I have absolutely no desire to reduce the quantity of research published in any of these fields, but as they come increasingly to dominate the discipline it is vital that a strong and politically radical response comes from scholars of modernism. I strongly suggest that modernism continues to offer the best scholarly locus for an emancipatory musicology to develop, though I am delighted when, as in Stokes’s work (cited in Chapter 4), I see it elsewhere.

The neoliberal global economic system may be in its last phase. Its ideology has forced its tentacles into the heart of the universities, the home of those minds – students and their teachers – that are capable of formulating a principled and effective resistance. Academic departments are closing in the UK at an alarming rate and academic research is being pushed into ever more narrowly conceived furrows of ideologically approved ‘impact’. Academics understandably flick jaundiced eyes at the craven managers who increasingly run universities as businesses, exploiting intellectual property for profit’s sake and imposing a neoliberal quilting point in which students show up as consumers and degrees as commodities that can be sold for better jobs. But it is not only the managers who are colluding with the democratic materialist ideology that threatens the preservation of the commons – the ideology is vibrant in much of the universities’ scholarship too.’

(pp. 251-252)

From Aijaz Ahmad, ‘*Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said*’, in *In Theory: Nations, Classes, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992).

For in one range of formulations, Said’s denunciations of the whole of Western civilization is as extreme and uncompromising as Foucault’s denunciations of the Western episteme or Derrida’s denunciations of the transhistorical Logos; nothing, nothing at all, exists outside epistemic Power, logocentric Thought, Orientalist Discourse- no classes, no gender, not even history; no site of resistance, no accumulated projects of human liberation, since all is Repetition with Difference, all is corruption – specifically Western corruption – and Orientalism always remains the same, only more so with the linear accumulations of time. The Manichaeic edge of these visions – Derridean, Foucauldian, Saidian – is quite worthy of Nietzsche himself.

But this vision, in the case of *Orientalism*, gains further authority from the way it panders to the most sentimental, the most extreme forms of Third-Worldist nationalism. The book says nothing, of course, about any fault of our own, but anything we ourselves could remember – the bloodbath we conducted at the time of Partition, let us say – simply pales in comparison with this other Power which has victimized us and inferiorized us for two thousand five hundred years or more. So uncompromising is this book in its Third-Worldist passion that Marxism itself, which has historically given such sustenance to so many of the anti-imperialist movements of our time, can be dismissed, breezily, as a child of Orientalism and an accomplice of British colonialism. How comforting such visions of one’s own primal and permanent innocence are one can well imagine, because given what actually goes on in our countries, we do need a great deal of comforting.

But it was-not within the so-called ‘Third World’ that the book first appeared. Its global authority is in fact inseparable from the authority of those in the dominant sectors of the metropolitan intelligentsia

who first bestowed upon it the status of a modern classic; while, perhaps paradoxically, its most passionate following in the metropolitan countries is within those sectors of the university intelligentsia which either originate in the ethnic minorities or affiliate themselves ideologically with the academic sections of those minorities. In Chapter 2 above, I discussed the connection between the emergence of the category 'Third World Literature' and the key changes that occurred in the patterns of immigration from the late 1960s onwards, with substantial numbers of Asian immigrants being based now among the petty-bourgeois and techno-managerial strata. Those who came as graduate students and then joined the faculties, especially in the Humanities and the Social Sciences, tended to come from upper classes in their home countries. In the process of relocating themselves in the metropolitan countries, they needed documents of their assertion, proof that they had always been oppressed. Books that connected oppression with class were not very useful, because *they* neither came from the working class nor were intending to join that class in their new country. Those who said that majority of the populations in Africa and Asia certainly suffered from colonialism, but that there were also those who benefited from it, were useless, because many of the new professionals who were part of this immigration themselves came from those other families, those other classes, which had been the beneficiaries; Said would pose this question of the beneficiaries of colonialism in very peculiar ways in his invocation of Ranajit Guha, as we shall soon see.

Among critiques that needed to be jettisoned, or at least greatly modified, were the Marxist ones, because Marxists had this habit of speaking about classes, even in Asia and Africa. What the upwardly mobile professionals in this new immigration needed were narratives of oppression that would get them preferential treatment, reserved jobs, higher salaries in the social position they already occupied: namely, as middle-class professionals, mostly male. For such purposes *Orientalism* was the perfect narrative. When, only slightly later, enough women found themselves in that same position, the category of the 'Third World female subaltern' was found highly serviceable. I might add that this latter category is probably not very usable inside India, but the kind of discourse *Orientalism* assembles certainly has its uses. Communalism, for example, can now be laid entirely at the doors of Orientalism and colonial construction; caste itself can be portrayed as a fabrication primarily of the Population Surveys and Census Reports- Ronald Inden literally does this, 32 and Professor Partha Chatterjee seems poised to do so .. 33 Colonialism is now held responsible not only for its own cruelties but, conveniently enough, for ours too. Meanwhile, within the metropolitan countries, the emphasis on immigration was continually to strengthen. I have written on one aspect of it in relation to Salman Rushdie, but it is worth mentioning that the same theme surfaces with very major emphases in Said's latest essays, with far-reaching consequences for his own earlier positions, as we shall see.

The perspectives inaugurated in *Orientalism* served, in the social self-consciousness and professional assertion of the middle-class immigrant and the 'ethnic' intellectual, roughly the same function as the theoretical category of 'Third World Literature', arising at roughly the same time, was also to serve. One in fact presumed the other, and between the two the circle was neatly closed. If *Orientalism* was devoted to demonstrating the bad faith and imperial oppression of all European knowledges, beyond time and history, 'Third World Literature' was to be the narrative of authenticity, the counter-canon of truth, good faith, liberation itself. Like the bad faith of European knowledge, the counter-canon of 'Third World Literature' had no boundaries – neither of space nor of time, of culture nor of class; a Senegalese novel, a Chinese short story, a song from medieval India, could all be read into the same archive: it was all 'Third World'. Marx was an 'Orientalist' because he was European, but a Tagore novel, patently canonical and hegemonizing inside the Indian cultural context, could be taught in the syllabi of 'Third World Literature' as a marginal, non-canonical text, counterposed against 'Europe'. The homogenizing sweep was evident in both cases, and if cultural nationalism was the overtly flaunted insignia, invocation of 'race' was barely below the surface – not just with respect to the United States, which would be logical, but with reference to human history as such. Thus, if 'Orientalism' was initially posited as something .of an original ontological flaw in the European psyche, Said was eventually to declare: 'in the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in the imperial or colonial or racial sense, race takes precedence over both class and gender I have always felt that the problem of emphasis and relative importance took precedence over the need to establish one's feminist credentials.'<sup>34</sup> That contemptuous phrase, 'establish one's feminist credentials', takes care of gender quite definitively, as imperialism itself is collapsed into a 'racial sense'. In a Nietzschean world, virtually anything is possible.

(pp. 195-197).

[32] See my 'Between Orientalism and Historicism: Anthropological Knowledge of India' *Studies in History* vol. 7, no. 1, (New Delhi 1991) for detailed comments on Ronald Inden's *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

[33] See Panha Chatterjee, 'Caste and Subaltern Consciousness', in Ranjic Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies*, vol. VI (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[34] 'Media, Margins and Modernity: Raymond Williams and Edward Said', Appendix to Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 196-7 The transcript of that public discussion- and, indeed, the whole book ends on that sentence about 'feminist credentials'