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Frith, S. (1981) ***Sound effects : youth, leisure, and the politics of rock'n'roll*****.**

Constable, London.

vii, 294 p. **ISBN 0094649405**

'Sound effects' was the book that first ignited my interest in the study of the cultural economy. At the time I was writing my PhD in economic geography; however, I had been involved in music production for friends and working in radio for a few years previously. Perhaps recognising my limitations as a potential musician I became interested in all the things that shaped music. Trained more to discern the economics of things, and frustrated with the limitations, I was drawn to sociology. I was fortunate enough to pick up this book in Compendium bookshop in Camden. I mention this as, on reflection, one had to travel to bookshops to browse; bookshops that offered a diverse and idiosyncratic range of books were few and far between (especially in Exeter where I was studying). It sits on my bookshelf in a garish green cover and typewriter typeface characteristic of Constable Communication and Society Series, fittingly, the adopted style of the fanzine of the late 1970s. Although, I am sure that this was not an intended reference as the others in this series bear this inimitable design feature as well.

Frith is an academic and a rock critic, a fan and a critical analyst. What Simon Frith does in this book, an idea that has animated my work since, is to examine production and consumption, the text and the context. At once escaping the trap of the Frankfurt School in an elitist mass culture, arguing that rock music was also culture; also, taking rock music and its consumers seriously, not through detailed analyses of the lyrics, or ethnomusicology, but through the tensions of freedom and control, formality and informality, producers, consumers, audiences, teenagers (and all of their sub-cultures), actors all, and not dupes.

What this book suggested to me was that serious study of the cultural economy was valid, and one that could be valid in academe too. Moreover, a field of study that might not respect what appeared to be rigid boundaries of traditional disciplines. Moreover, that there was a material culture and political economy to music, as well as the 'youth, leisure and politics of rock'n'roll' signalled in the subtitle to the book. In a sense the book, and its message, was a sleeper for me. Having written a PhD thesis on local economic development and then begun to teach in a town planning department, it did not seem relevant. However, the more radical economic planning that I was interested in gave rise to the GLC Industrial Strategy (1985), a key chapter of which was the cultural industries; also to the practical efforts of Sheffield City Council. It was at this time that I decided that I wanted to shift my focus from planning and rural development to the cultural economy. It was then that I took down Simon's book and read it again along with another book in the same Constable series, Big Sounds from Small Peoples, by Wallis and Malm (1984) concerning the internationalisation of music, and in particular world music. Together these, for me, encapsulated, and underpinned my initial thoughts about the cultural economy. Moreover, they were suggestive of the possibility of cutting across the dualisms of culture and economy, local and global, formal and informal, meaning and making, and production and consumption.

Today, looking back on the book I think that it has worn well, in material form the typography and design marks it for its age; as does some of the argumentation between the covers as one might expect. But, at core, the insight is as fresh as ever, and as timely as ever in terms of the view right across the process of cultural production and consumption. Although I read it later, Howard Becker's (1984) Art Worlds carried the same message for me, but at the time rock won out over jazz! In another way, Peterson's (1976) collection might have had an impact on me. But, it didn't spark my interest in the same way, perhaps as I wasn't very widely read in the field (and again didn't come across Peterson's work until much later, after I had started to use the term cultural production system, and thus needed to satisfy myself that I had not just re-invented the wheel).

Moreover, I have always been more comfortable with the British sociology and cultural studies traditions (especially that emerging from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham) than the American cultural sociological approach. Thankfully, there is now a growing bookshelf of texts and commentary that are beginning to flesh out, debate and develop, what Frith and others first hinted at, this time right across the entire cultural sector. Hopefully, it is from these empirically rooted understandings of the dynamics of the cultural and creative industries (as they are now styled) that it will be possible to consider policy-making. Moreover, it should help us to confront the differences and similarities between cultural policy and that of the cultural and creative industries, and the temporal, spatial and national specificities of policy-making.

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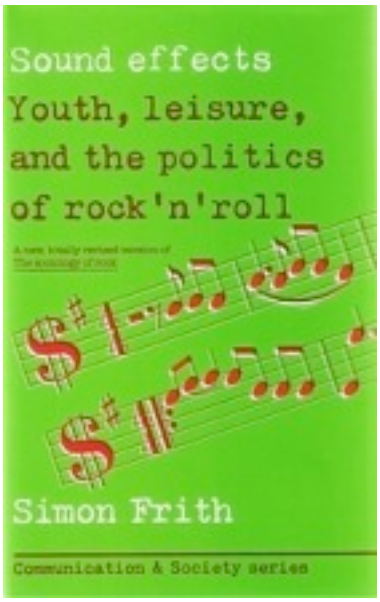

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