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# Pop Music, Pop Culture

Chris Rojek

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# Introduction: Why 'Pop', Not 'Popular'?

This is a book about pop music and pop culture. In recent years, some authors, especially traditional musicologists, have objected to the use of 'pop' as a synonym for 'popular'. The reasons for this are complex. For Simon Frith (2001) the question essentially turns upon two matters.

Firstly, while the terms 'pop' and 'popular' both refer to well-favoured or widely liked practices and commodities, the former is held to bear derogatory connotations. On this reckoning, 'pop' is an inherently dismissive term signifying disposability and inferiority. This is part of an older cultural studies tradition which maintains that elite culture is impervious to, or contemptuous of, the practices of the folk in traditional society and the masses in industrial society.

Secondly, with respect to well-favoured music, pop is held to designate a specific, territorialized genre: that is, music defined by the Tin Pan Alley tradition of the three-minute song formula structured around narrative typifications, basic chord structures, harnessed to powerful commercial interests.<sup>1</sup> To identify the people's music with pop is judged to be too limiting. Other widely liked genres, such as rock, progressive, heavy metal, country, indie, reggae, hip hop, rap, electronica, and so on, are organized differently. In particular, they are regarded as having purer aspirations to articulate the customs, practices and values of the people. This is very different from the blind worship of Mammon in which pop is held to indulge. As a result, traditional musicologists generally prefer the term 'popular music' as an umbrella term to cover the people's music as a whole.

The division between pop and what might be called 'the people's music' has influenced a generation of traditional musicologists and permeates the analysis of popular music. It holds that composition, production and marketing in pop are commercially driven. By implication, the musical texts that make up the people's music are held to be more authentic. Categorically speaking, they are less tainted by commerce and truly reflect the people's concerns, practices, traditions and aspirations.

The present book seeks to break with this convention. It does so for three reasons. In the first place, in terms of a simple head count, pop reaches a lot of people. By definition, pop is a well-liked genre. The analysis of the people's music must necessarily address it and consider the reasons why it is well liked, how it is composed, produced, represented and distributed, and why judgements of low taste do not hinder its mass appeal. In a word it is important to understand accurately why pop is popular. To separate pop from the rest of the people's music because it is attached to strong commercial objectives is, I believe, arbitrary. It is the widely favoured nature of pop, as against other 'popular' genres, that is the issue. In sum, pop is more well liked than many examples of so-called 'authentic'

popular forms, like blues, folk, country, heavy metal, rock, rap and techno. Must we fall back on tired old arguments that yoke the people's likes, of which a few progressive academics disapprove, with 'false consciousness'? Surely it is right to propose that nowadays we are dealing with a more literate pop audience than was the case when Adorno (2009) was writing in the 1940s and 1950s? People like pop despite being alive to its associations with commercialism, manipulation and low taste. The question is, why?

Secondly, to suggest that pop exemplifies commercial values whereas folk, blues, country, rock and other genres of the people's music are immune does not carry water. Popular music texts are not independent of commercialized communication highways. The pop of Abba and Westlife reaches mass audiences by the same gateways as Bob Dylan and 2Pac. 'Unbreakable' by Westlife (2006) and 2Pac's 'To Live and Die in L.A.' (2007) are popularized by essentially the same commercialized information highways. These highways may not have the same commercial effect on the texts, but that they exert an effect is not in doubt. An approach to the people's music that omits to balance the aesthetics and politics of songs with the mechanisms of popular communication is naïve and unacceptable. Pop music uses the same mechanism as other branches of the people's music to influence mass opinion.

Thirdly, to imply that pop can be separated from the people's music is to mistake today's leaky boundaries between genres, idioms, association and practice in music and much else besides. The production, exchange and consumption of the people's music have undergone tectonic movements over the last twenty years. As a result, huge fissures and major schisms have emerged in boundaries. This has changed traditional ideas of musical hierarchies, corporate power, authorship and the docility of the audience. These movements have made music ubiquitous and instantaneous. The abbreviation 'pop' appears to be better suited as a descriptor than 'popular' because it is more direct and informal. For me, this accurately parallels the profound social and technological changes that are making the production and exchange of music more direct, and the settings in which music is consumed more informal. Before spelling out these arguments at greater length, it is necessary to go into more detail about what traditional musicologists and the majority of sociologists mean by 'pop'.

Make no mistake, there are problems with the term. Frith (2001: 94) himself describes the descriptor 'pop' as 'slippery'. In an effort to resolve the issue, he submits that pop music ought to be regarded as a type of music harnessed to commercial rather than artistic imperatives which is designed to attain maximum public access (2001: 94-6).

To consolidate the argument, Frith offers four identifying characteristics of pop music:

(1) *General appeal.* Pop aims to generate a general cultural response. It is not tied to communal or subcultural experience. Instead it seeks to appeal to everyone. As examples, Frith lists Euro-pop (Abba /Boney M), with its 'family music' pitch, and the assembly line of hits produced by the Stock, Aitken and Waterman songwriting and production team in the 1980s. A more contemporary example would be the music format showcased by Simon Fuller's *Idol* and Simon Cowell's *Got Talent*

franchises: that is, songs and middlebrow performers who, in the majority of cases, aim for the lowest common denominator of emotions.

(2) *Light entertainment.* Historically, pop grew out of a light entertainment/easy listening tradition. Generally, it holds no brief to challenge audiences socially or to inspire political activism. Unlike folk, blues and country traditions, which often include expressions of resistance and opposition, pop is conservative. This imposes tight restrictions upon narrative content, musical composition and the packaging of performers. The best pop songs carry a powerful emotional payload, but they are ultimately decorative aural wallpaper for urban-industrial life.

(3) *Commercial imperatives.* The main purpose of pop music is to generate revenue. It is a business rather than an art form. As such, it places ultimate value on professional songwriters, slick production values and overwhelming star-images. Pop tries to mould public reception. It does not constitute the free articulation of the people. Rather, it is an imposed form of well-liked music, designed by business, in order to shift units.

(4) *Personal identification.* Pop is an industrial type of music aimed to appeal to the masses. However, the medium of expression is typically organized around achieving instant empathy with personalities rather than the public. Pop works with clichés, stereotypes and melodrama to connect with individual listeners. When the singer sings of a boy with a cheating heart or a girl left crying at the altar, the composition, production and performance are organized to 'speak' directly to you. This raises a separate set of questions about the nature of the individual desire that pop seeks to supply. These questions generally culminate in the conclusion that pop is ideological since it is unable, or has no wish, to generate general criticisms or social and psychological alternatives.

Upon this basis most musicologists and sociologists conclude that pop must be treated as a differentiated genre. It is part of the people's music, but its content and mode of production must be kept separate from other genres that have emerged from the people and are favoured by them.

In contrast, the present study runs against the grain. New technologies, revised systems of mass communication and grassroots resistance have combined to transform the postwar business model of the people's music. Sampling, sequencing, social network sharing and unauthorized downloading have become general forms of practice. Miniaturization has produced high-quality playback systems that are slimmer and lighter than a cigarette packet. The old conventions linking training and practice with musical proficiency, and consumption with paying, no longer obtain. For the under-30 demographic, the normal ways of producing and consuming music are microchip-based.

These transformations are not modish. It is important not to confuse a revolutionary aesthetic genre, such as glam, punk or rap, with a radical technological and cultural transformation in the production, exchange and consumption of pop music. Aesthetic genres influence only a segment of the market, albeit often an appreciable one; and they also date as new genres

challenge and replace them. In contrast, a revolutionary cultural transformation in production, exchange and consumption constitutes a tectonic shift which may last for many decades and, in some cases, for centuries. It changes the way in which music is composed, distributed and experienced. I maintain that we are in the midst of such a shift today.

What does it mean to propose that, over the last twenty years, the people's music has undergone a tectonic change in production, exchange and consumption which makes general responses more immediate and fragmented? Sampling, sequencing, the internet and the emergence of various countercultures to capitalism have dislodged old concepts of authorship, accumulation and power. The main consequences that follow from this are fourfold:

(1) *Spatial distribution.* The laptop and mobile phone have replaced the bedroom Dansette and the Grundig transistor radio as the main focus for individuals to listen to the people's music. In the days of mods and rockers, soul, grunge and electronic, the club, the coffee bar, the high street record store and the ever-changing rave venue were the primary spatial settings for the collective consumption of recorded music. Over the last twenty years these primary locations have been seriously eroded. The high street record store is arguably the biggest casualty. It has all but disappeared, to be replaced by legitimate file distribution sites like iTunes, multiple unauthorized servers for peer-to-peer (P2P) exchange, subscription models of streaming and free internet blogging and exchange sites, such as MySpace, YouTube, Spotify and Last.fm. The exchange of recorded music is now instant and weightless. Because of this, the focus of consumption and exchange is today often mobile, through hand-held devices like laptops, mobile phones and iPads, or the sound playback system in automobiles.

(2) *Subcultural formation.* Fixed spatial settings were propitious for the development of communal responses to music that ultimately strengthened subcultural formation. Music subcultures still exist – think of goth, metal, country, trance, punk and emo traditions and practices. But the internet encourages more diffuse and contradictory forms of reception. The weightless and mobile character of exchange and consumption militates against subcultural formation because it removes the principle of visible collective experience, the urgency of collective organization and the necessity of collective practice. This results in much weaker notions of collective consciousness. This does not mean that network society is unable to make connections between people and build recognition of collective interests and initiatives (Castells 1996, 1997). Rather, it means that the way in which collective recognition and action now operate is less transparent than in the days when the people's music was centrally consumed in fixed spatial settings. For example, internet exchange makes it unlikely that regional subcultures, like the Mersey and Manchester scenes of, respectively, the 1960s and late 1980s, or the Compton rap scene in Southern Los Angeles of the 1990s, will emerge with the same force and influence in the future. Scenes depend upon physical locations. The effect of the internet is to disembod listening and the production of music from primary spatial locations like the neighbourhood or the city and spread them out electronically.

(3) *Authorship and co-operative labour.* The postwar music business model identified authorship with the composition and performance of popular music. This elevated composers and performers as stars or potential stars and positioned listeners as passive consumers. Sequencing, sampling and the internet have radically challenged this hierarchical model of production, exchange and consumption. They have recast the rules of composition and performance by reducing the need for technical training to make music. All that is necessary to do this now is basic keyboard skills. Admittedly, this imposes limits upon the virtuosity and range of what is produced. Even so, it represents a fundamental transformation from the days when learning an instrument and music composition were prerequisites. In addition, sampling and sequencing enable producers of music to engage with old traditions of pop music as well as contemporaneous forms. Samples of mod classics and soul standards can be easily spliced into new rhythms to produce multi-layered sounds. In effect, the only limits on appropriating recorded music from the past or the present are copyright restrictions.

Not only this, but sampling, sequencing and the internet increase the power of ordinary consumers to engage creatively with recorded music. There is no seal around it. New digital technologies allow consumers to hack into recorded sounds, amend arrangements, transform rhythms, strip out (or insert) layers of sound and change lyrics. The old business model that positioned music fans as passive consumers is now redundant. The situation today is closer to a system of co-operative labour in which the recordings of stars are not simply played and listened to but also reassembled.

(4) *The power of the record corporation.* Widening access to illegal downloading and ineffective systems of policing have combined to produce a haemorrhage in the revenues accruing to record corporations. Traditional A&R (Artist and Repertoire) scouting functions have been outpaced by exchange on MySpace, YouTube and Twitter. Artists themselves do not necessarily regret this weakening of corporation ties. The idea of the omnipotent corporation and the heinous recording deal has long had immense resonance in the industry. In 1977, The Eagles released 'Hotel California'. Superficially, the song dealt with a noirish storyline of abduction in California. In reality the song was an attack on the Los Angeles record industry and the tyrannical moguls and business executives who sought to imprison artists in punitive record deals. Performers like The Clash, David Bowie, Prince, George Michael and The Rolling Stones are all well-known victims. However, new technologies are increasing the artist's independence from record contracts.

Record corporations are being squeezed in a pincer movement. Revenues are being decimated by unauthorized downloading and streaming, which creates a hole in profits and research and development income. At the same time, digital technologies and the commercial opportunities of the internet are liberating artists from studio control. Beyoncé's producers may still work in highly sophisticated studios, but the laptop has become an indispensable device for composition. In the long run it will weaken the capacity of record corporations to make demands on future royalties as the price paid for leasing studio space and personnel for recording, pressing records and retail distribution.

Initially, the record corporations dealt with the threat of unauthorized

downloading by litigation. The law was applied against both unauthorized servers and consumers. On the part of illegal servers this produced a lively, prolonged exchange of counter-litigation in which peer-to-peer downloading was defended with reference to the 1st and 14th amendments of the US Constitution, which guarantee the freedom to express information, ideas and opinions, independent of government restrictions. The record corporations have enjoyed some success in attacking servers. The pioneering unauthorized P2P exchange site Napster was a prominent scalp in 2001. However, litigation has not succeeded in eliminating unauthorized servers, since providers simply change sites when they are threatened with court actions.

With respect to the unauthorized consumption of recorded material protected by copyright law, the conventional wisdom now is that litigation is counter-productive because policing is ineffective. Litigation merely creates victims and makes record corporations look like tinpot tyrants. The bad publicity that arises is held to outweigh commercial gains and ethical victories are widely discounted as pyrrhic.

### Cultural De-differentiation

The tectonic changes in the production, exchange and consumption of recorded popular music are best described and understood as a massive movement in *cultural de-differentiation*. This term refers to the collapse of boundaries and the breakdown of genres. Nothing, any longer, is hermetically sealed. Technology, mass communication and creative ambition have combined to borrow elements from one genre tradition and blend them with others.

All of the main players in the music business, from artists through to record corporations, media hubs and audiences, have been caught up in a process of de-familiarization: that is, a social and cultural process that has positioned individuals differently in relation to recorded sound and performance. Instant, weightless access and the emergence of the microchip as a standard compositional and performance device have changed the rules of the game. The present condition is a state of flux in which the new conventions and reciprocities have not settled down into customs or traditions. The production, exchange and consumption of pop are in deep transition, which makes writing about and studying the subject both exciting and demanding.

The most popular type of people's music now is rap (Rentfrow et al. 2007, 2009). Aesthetically speaking, rap both is a symptom of cultural de-differentiation and shows the way for future developments. Consider Puff Daddy's multiple-platinum single 'I'll Be Missing You' (1997). A tribute to the slain fellow Bad Boy Records artist The Notorious B.I.G., the song famously samples sections from 'Every Breath You Take' (1983) by The Police and the melody from the American spiritual 'I'll Fly Away' (1929). It is a genre piece that relies on multi-lane surfing and splicing from other music genres. It doesn't recognize boundaries or limits. It is music that purports to speak for the oppressed, but it is microscopically calculated for the purpose of economic accumulation. It plays with identities and impressions, and its public appeal rests upon overturning assumptions and forcing people out of their comfort zones.

In the midst of the tectonic changes that follow from cultural de-differentiation,

one can hardly escape the conclusion that the opposition to using the descriptor 'pop', with respect to the people's music, has more to do with defending academic boundaries than engaging with cultural realities. The position taken here is that there can be no closed shop in the interpretation or making of music. The production of the people's music deliberately and unintentionally mixes references from blues, country, progressive, punk, post-punk and other genres. By the term 'unintentionally' I wish to convey the sheer saturation of music in ordinary culture. This makes it impossible to avoid boundary meltdown and genre busting simply as a result of ordinary listening. Instead of solid, differentiated boundaries between genres, technology, resistance and innovation now mean that the people's music is created between permeable boundaries. The centre of particular genres may be purist. But the periphery is where the action is in creating contemporary music that makes waves with the public. The definitive feature of the periphery is the mixing of styles, arrangements and traditions.

Coming to the questions of exchange and consumption, the internet makes music commodities instant and weightless. There is no financial cost in ripping music from unauthorized sites and the risk of criminal punishment is routinely assessed by consumers to be negligible. The increasing popularity of streaming, downloading tracks from albums rather than the whole album, making playlists or triggering random, shuffled playlists has changed the meaning of consumer ownership. It is no longer a question of building vinyl and CD libraries. Today the accent in exchange and consumption is on low or financially neutral access and weightless transaction. Access to files is often on a temporary, leased basis. The 'here today, gone tomorrow' character of music collections on iPods, laptops and other portable electronic devices suggests an immediate, transitory, disposable relationship to ownership for which the descriptor 'pop' is better suited.

It does not follow that the general attitude to pop is dismissive. In his notes on the concept of the popular, Raymond Williams (1976: 199) observed that the mid-twentieth-century abbreviation of the popular song and popular art to 'pop' bestowed 'a lively informality' in 'many familiar and pleasing contexts'. It is this quality of lively informality, which encompasses genre busting and captures the creativity and innovation of co-operative labour and cultural de-differentiation as a whole, that I wish to convey by applying the descriptor 'pop' to the people's music and culture.

True, Williams goes on to comment that the use of the term is historically associated with the 'trivial'. As I noted at the outset, the use of the term 'pop' is not without problems. However, it is important to recognize that the association between pop and triviality is not privileged. In the mid-twentieth century, pop art emerged and produced a culturally transforming engagement with commodity culture and consumerism which incurred the displeasure of some traditional art historians. However, the work of Andy Warhol, Richard Hamilton, Roy Lichtenstein, Derek Boshier and others is hardly regarded today as trivial.

Similarly, to use the term 'pop' to refer to songs like Nirvana's 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' (1991), 2Pac's 'So Many Tears' (1995) and Eminem's 'Love The Way You Lie' (2010) does not trivialize them. On the contrary, in doing so, the associations that I seek to privilege are ubiquity, speed, flexibility of setting, direct emotional transfer and instant access. To my mind, the abbreviation 'pop' conveys this with more force than 'popular'.

There is another reason for going with 'pop' as the most suitable descriptor to apply to the people's music and culture. The general ways in which people communicate are becoming faster and more streamlined. Think of communication via mobile phones. It privileges verbs, adjectives and nouns. Many words are rendered phonetically: 'u' for 'you'; 'r' for 'are'; 'wd' for 'would'. The emphasis is upon direct, uncluttered communication. This is reinforced by web and mobile phone technology, which makes instantaneous contact possible at all times, and in all places.

In interesting research on the increasing turn towards abbreviation in communication, Todd Gitlin (2002: 98–9) compared the top ten best-selling novels from the first week of October in 1936, 1956, 1976, 1996 and 2001. He took four sentences from each book drawn from randomly chosen pages: 1, 50, 100 and 150 (or 120 in the case of books that were shorter than 150 pages). He counted the words used in each sentence and also the punctuation marks. His findings are striking. Between 1936 and 2001, sentence length declined by 43%, and the number of punctuation marks by 32%.

Gitlin is appropriately cautious about the methodology behind these findings. He notes that his sample is small and that the sentences randomly chosen may be unusual or an aberration. However, his conclusion is confidently expressed: 'best-seller sentences have gotten briefer, simpler and closer to screenplays' (2002: 1000). He puts this down to the 'torrent' of images and sounds that, through the media, are saturating everyday life. He uses terms like 'speed addiction', 'relentless sensation' and 'nonstop stimulus' to describe the character of general culture. This draws on older accounts of the distinctive qualities of modern culture. Especially significant here are the writings of the sociologist Georg Simmel (1971, 1978), who noted the ubiquity of 'haste and hurry' in urban-industrial life and speculated on the destabilizing effects on personality and culture; and Walter Benjamin (2002) on the 'explosive' effects of new electronic technologies of cultural transmission on identity, practice and association.<sup>2</sup>

What seems to be true of best-sellers is also true of successful pop songs. They have become shorter, more streamlined and more like screenplays. At the time of writing, the most popular songs in the charts of the day, like Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance' (2009), Jay Sean's 'Down' (featuring Lil Wayne) (2009) and Talo Cruz's 'Break Your Heart' (2009) conform to Gitlin's rules of abbreviated, direct, instant meaning. The technology encourages cutting, pasting, surfing and clipping. This is reflected in the practice of the people's culture and the production, exchange and consumption of the people's music. As such, I maintain that, despite the risk of running the gauntlet against established musicologists and sociologists of popular music, 'the lively informality' and easy access to music in 'many familiar and pleasing places' make the descriptor 'pop' a preferred prefix to describe the people's culture and the people's music.

### Organization of the Book

The text of this book is organized into four parts. Part I situates the reader in the field of pop music study. It acknowledges the achievements of musicology. However, despite the enhanced receptivity of musicologists to work from sociology, cultural studies and media and communication studies, the book

argues for an approach that locates pop in the mode of production in which it is created, produced, distributed, consumed and received. Pop culture, rather than the biography of the artist, the history of the record corporation or the values of the media, is regarded to be the crucible for understanding pop music. The idea of a 'great artist' is not necessarily discounted. What is claimed is that what we mean by the term and how it emerges are indissoluble from the mode of production in which music is produced and distributed.

In this part of the book the relationship between pop and the tradition of cultural articulation is explored, with nuances of articulation around identity, resistance and regulation duly noted and elucidated. For example, the construction and meaning of pop songs are investigated in relation to harmony and convention; language, syntax and semantics; typification and transcription; culture and genre. This relationship between pop and culture, in turn, is related to problems of the cultural meaning of popularity and tectonic changes in the production, exchange and consumption of pop.

Part II surveys the main theoretical approaches to the study of pop music. This employs what is, in sociology, a well-established and useful device of dividing structuralist and agency approaches to the study of social and cultural life. This classificatory device is not without contradictions. Chief among them is the tendency to over-egg respective questions of determinism and autonomy. Nonetheless, given the wide array of theoretical contributions to the field, it was deemed necessary to impose some categorical discipline so as to avoid giving the impression that theoretical contributions to the study of pop amount to what might be called an amorphous riddle. Our enthusiasms for pop may seem to us to be wholly a personal matter. In fact, they are patterned. The theoretical approaches examined here give us tools that help to elucidate and understand how the social patterning and psychology of music operate.

The main examples of structuralism examined here are the work of Plato and Aristotle, Jacques Attali, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Theodor Adorno. Although there are many important differences between these writers, all suggest that music has general (or universal) characteristics of production and consumption. In the case of Plato and Aristotle, these characteristics are traced back to the human species' need for *katharsis* and *mimesis*; in Attali, they go back to the species' fear of catastrophe and the use of music to provide intimations of wider social-economic and political transformations; in the writings of Lévi-Strauss, the characteristics derive from the structural arrangement of cultures, which ultimately refers to the composition of the human mind; and in Adorno's work, the general or universal characteristics of production, exchange and consumption have to do with the capitalist system of world domination.

The chief representatives of the agency perspective to the analysis of pop music are subculturalism, relationism, transcendentalism and textualism. Agency approaches allow for more autonomy or, in extreme cases, total freedom for actors to interpret and act upon the world. The differences between the four traditions are explored with reference to the writings of Willis, Williams, Hebdige, Cohen, Weinstein, Steen and Condry (subculturalism); Bourdieu, Thornton and Negus (relationism); Eliade, Sylvan and Wilson (transcendentalism); and Barthes, Hebdige, Fung and Curtin, and Kaplan (textualism).

As will rapidly become apparent to the informed reader, the aim here is to draw on a much wider range of resources in the social sciences and cultural and communication studies than is normal in the analysis of pop music. It is necessary to cover some ground that may be familiar to informed readers. For how can a book that claims to offer a comprehensive account of the main theoretical approaches to pop avoid the writings of Adorno, Middleton, Willis or Hebdige? However, in referring to these writings I hope that I have done more than merely re-state the obvious or the well known. The sections on Attali, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade, Sylvan, Wilson and, to some extent, Bourdieu are novel, at least in relation to the study of pop music. The intention is very much to demonstrate the pertinence of these writings to revitalizing the investigation of how pop works and why it has colonized pop culture.

Part III of the book moves from mapping the field and surveying the main theoretical approaches, to an analysis of the mode of production in which pop is created, exchanged and consumed. It examines the historical framework of pop music in the postwar period. This framework is characterized as a mode of industrial planning and management. The challenges presented by cultural de-differentiation in the form of increasing access to recorded music and widening participation in composition and performance through sampling and sequencing are fully investigated.

The central social institutions in the mode of pop music production are music corporations, media, managers, stars and audiences. They operate as allocative mechanisms that produce and distribute scarce economic, cultural and social resources. They bear the hallmarks of more profound structural divisions of class, gender, race and status. Each of these institutions is discussed in detail and the interrelationships between them are explored.

The role of technology and mass communications in promoting cultural de-differentiation amounts to the biggest crisis faced by the industrial planning model in the pop music industry. To date, the dominant music corporation cartel has been incapable of responding adequately to the challenges of the digital revolution. Digital rights management (DRM) strategies have not countered the revenue loss produced by unauthorized downloading. Customer relationship management (CRM) strategies and so called '360 degree deals', which extend corporate control from the areas of traditional copyright privilege over sound recordings to new areas of concert tours, celebrity endorsement and mass merchandizing, have belatedly emerged. Their capacity to revitalize corporate revenues, and restore the main corporations to a position of dominance, is examined.

Part IV of the book is the Conclusion. Here the changing balance of power relationships between artists, corporations, managers, the media and audiences is addressed. Conventional wisdom in the field recognizes a polarized relationship between producers and consumers. Broadly, the producers were viewed as a sometimes contradictory, sometimes fractious, but always imperative, amalgamation between corporations, artists, managers and the media; and the consumers were viewed as the passive, disorganized audience. The combination of new technologies of production, consumption and exchange has destabilized this model. A hierarchical view of producers, on one side, and consumers, on

the other, is now untenable. Co-operative labour, in which fans use the internet, rather than the media, to communicate about performers, and interact creatively with authorized production and exchange music files for free is a more accurate term to capture what has been happening for the last twenty years. Naturally, this has elicited a reaction from authorized producers, who formerly took it for granted that they constitute the dominant force in the music business. The present situation amounts to a second enclosure movement: that is, a concerted effort by music corporations' pop managers, some performers and most of the media to appropriate the co-operative labour that has revolutionized the pop business and impose a blockade around free exchange. Peer-to-peer systems are being legally challenged, but the ideas and customs that they have developed are being gorged by a music industry that is hungry to return to the high-profit days of the 1980s and early 1990s.

### Sensuous Labour is Irreducible

*Pop Music, Pop Culture* is intended to be a first-stop guide to the key concepts, central theoretical approaches, primary historical issues and decisive dilemmas in both the field of pop music analysis and the mode of pop music production. It gives greater prominence to questions of technology and cultural de-differentiation than is evident in other books of this type. The reason for this is that these questions are altering the nature of pop music study because they are transforming the production, exchange and distribution of pop music. The changes are far-reaching and the use of the term *tectonic transformation* to describe them is, I believe, perfectly justifiable.

Naturally, a book of this type cannot hope to cover everything. The examples of songs and albums that I use to illustrate the wider arguments that I seek to pursue bear all of the limitations of personal biography and geographical location that unavoidably obtain in the practice of writing about music, culture and society, or indeed any other form of writing. However, I have tried to adopt a global perspective, by deliberately referring to Asian and some African examples of pop to counter the self-evident Euro-centric/North American bias. That being said, Europe and North America are still, by far, the dominant players in the field and in the mode of production. As such, their eminence in the text does not really require excuses. It is simply how things are in the world at the present time.

Because of the weight I give to technology and mass communications in bringing about what I call cultural de-differentiation, it might be tempting for some critics to label me as a technological determinist. So it is necessary to state plainly that my position is that human creativity is at the heart of technology, mass communication and, of course, the composition, performance and reception of pop. This creativity is the result of the rational, emotional, sensuous engagement of humans with the natural and social world. Sensuous labour is irreducible in understanding the technological changes in the industry and the socio-cultural reactions to them.

Although I am sympathetic with many aspects of the theoretical approach, the book is not written from a Marxist position. The discussion of the mode of production is, in fact, directly and tacitly critical of many aspects of the



Marxist tradition. However, it fully concurs with Marx's (1964: 113) foundational proposition that: 'Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity . . . in creating a world of objects, by his practical activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself as a conscious species being' (emphasis in the original). Like Marx, I hold that the products of this conscious activity have the power to become estranged from man's control and to stand above him, and dominate him, as an alien presence.<sup>3</sup> In the mode of pop music production some aspects of technology and music corporations may certainly be said to play this role. However, the rational, sensuous engagement with nature and society that brings about this adverse state of affairs is also the means through which alien domination can be exposed and elucidated. Creativity is at the centre of pop, as pop has become central to ordinary culture.

# Part I

## The Field