sound tracks
popular music, identity and place

John Connell and Chris Gibson
Sound Tracks is the first comprehensive book on the new geography of popular music, examining the complex links between places, music and cultural identities. It provides an interdisciplinary perspective on local, national and global scenes, from the ‘Mersey’ and ‘Icelandic’ sounds to ‘world music’, and explores the diverse meanings of music in a range of regional contexts.

Sound Tracks traces the ways in which music has informed complex globalisations, the role of companies and technology in diffusion, innovation and commercialism and the wider significance of cultural industries. It links migration and mobility to new musical practices, whether in ‘developing’ countries or metropolitan centres, and traces the recent rise of ‘music tourism’. It examines issues of authenticity and credibility, and the quest for roots within different musical genres, from buskers to brass bands, and from rap to rai. Sound Tracks emphasises music’s contributions to the contradictions, illusions and celebrations of contemporary life. It situates music and the music industry within spatial theories of globalisation and local change: fixity and fluidity entangled.

In a world of intensified globalisation, links between space, music and identity are increasingly tenuous, yet places give credibility to music, not least in the ‘country’, and music is commonly linked to place, through claims to tradition, ‘authenticity’ and originality, and as a marketing device. This book develops new perspectives on these relationships and how they are situated within cultural and geographical thought.

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Popular music, identity and place
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SOUND TRACKS

Popular music, identity and place

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This book is dedicated to some of those who died during its long gestation period and in varying ways helped to make it what it is:

Rob Buck (of 10,000 Maniacs)
Steve Connolly (of the Messengers)
John Denver
John Lee Hooker
David McComb (of the Triffids)
Curtis Mayfield
Rob Pilatus (of Milli Vanilli)
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And, to our fathers,

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who would never have believed that popular music (‘you call that music?’)
and scholarship might ever be combined, and

Ian Gibson
for knowing that music has no boundaries of age or class, and
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PREFACE

In some respects this book emerged from an article in an Australian newspaper, the *Sun Herald*, which covered the arrival of a Canadian band Junkhouse (who were never to be heard of again in Australia) and stated:

In the Canadian steel town of Hamilton there are limited choices for teenage boys in their final years at high school – unemployment, a life in the steel mills or a career as a rock 'n' roller, bluesman or jazz performer….They knew that if they were going to work in Hamilton the music had to be rootsy. ‘That sort of music has always been what the town is about’…[the lead singer] said. ‘A blue collar town, and most of the people from Hamilton who decide to play wind up with a pretty direct human type of music. When you’re learning how to play music…you have to be able to relate to your audience, to communicate. We learn to communicate in the simplest terms in my home town, because it is an industrial town.’

(28 August 1994)

In the popular music world similar statements enshrining environmental determinism are legion. Indeed, a week or so later, the same newspaper, in an article about a rock group from the small Victorian country town of Ballarat, stated simply ‘rock bands don’t come from Ballarat’; out there presumably was country and western land. Here were two fundamental themes: that music is somehow linked to place – the idea of a ‘Hamilton sound’ – and that music is also about mobility, diffusing sounds to the world while enabling the social mobility of musicians (in the same way that jazz, boxing and basketball were supposed to provide a route out of the ghetto for African Americans). In that single short paragraph there were basic geographical suppositions about place, identity and movement. By contrast, Steve Kilbey, lead singer of Australian group the Church, once claimed that ‘music is magic. It’s got nothing to do with geography. It’s got nothing to do with industry or standard; it’s magic’ (quoted in Howlett 1990: ix)
33). In this book we seek to show that he is both wrong about geography and right about the magic.

When David Harvey concluded the Preface to his distinguished *Explanation in Geography* (1969) with an acknowledgement to, among others, 'Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Dionne Warwick, the Beatles and Shostakovich’ it suggested a whiff of scandal: low culture intruding into the high culture of intellectual enterprise. Surely he could not be serious? Intellectuals were expected to subscribe to classical music. Many such cultural prejudices were nothing more than undisguised elitism, about the spirit and context of performance, yet music is not without merit or meaning because it is popular, as will become evident here.

Perhaps significantly, as the first draft of the book took shape, Sydney was the Olympic City and at every venue popular music accompanied athletic endeavour. No sport was too ascetic for rock music, and escape was impossible as the music was sponsored by the International Olympic Committee. Taxi Ride sang ‘Get Set’ and Bruce Springsteen did ‘Born to Run’ at the athletics, Midnight Oil’s ‘King of the Mountain’ accompanied the mountain biking, and Vanessa Amorosi’s ‘Heroes Live Forever’ and Yothu Yindi’s ‘Calling Every Nation’ were everywhere. National anthems capped all these efforts. In New Zealand National Party leader and former Prime Minister, Jenny Shipley, was still recovering from a decision by organisers of a National Party conference to play the Troggs’ ‘Wild Thing’ as her entrance song. On the other side of the world, American presidential candidates were using popular music on the campaign trail: George W. Bush with Hispanic music to woo the ‘migrant’ vote and Al Gore preferring Sting’s ‘Brand New Day’.

A year later, as the book went to press, over a hundred popular songs had been banned from the air in New York, with lyrics too close to the reality of terrorist destruction. There was little doubt that popular music had to be taken seriously.

This book then seeks to redress the rather neglected place of geography in any analysis of popular music, by tracing the links between music, place and identity at different scales, from inner-city ‘scenes’ to the music of nations. It examines the influence of culture, economics, politics and technology on the changing structure and geographies of music at local and global levels. Initially we trace the role of music from an expression of local culture in indigenous societies, through dispersals and expansions towards a still incomplete globalised industry, where ‘local’ sounds remain vibrant. Migration and ethnic diversity have contributed to hybrid, diasporic sounds, at the same time as new technologies of production and distribution have moved ‘local’ sounds, whether rock, ‘world music’ or trance techno, to global audiences. Innovative recording and distribution systems and legal challenges have unsettled old certainties. The local has not however disappeared and has even become formalised in the depiction of particular scenes, as in Seattle, Detroit and Liverpool. Such local spaces are very different across genres, from the invented tradition of some folk music to rapid cycles of fashion in club
cultures. Music tourism has emerged from affluence and nostalgia, to emphasise contemporary and continuous reconstructions of space through music. We have sought to provide a distinctive and critical spatial perspective, which embraces globalisation, local acquiescence and resistance, drawing on diverse musical texts and practices to develop a geography of popular music.

We must declare our interest and biases, and thank some popular muses, for one author the Incredible String Band, Leonardo’s Bride and 10,000 Maniacs, and for the other the Church, New Order and, of course, Barry White. For both of us, Spinal Tap added a necessary extra dimension. We would also like to thank Chloé Flutter for her assistance with Chapter 9, Wendy Shaw for advice, Krste Trajanovski for technical assistance and Linly Goh and Jessica Carroll who led the way. In Berlin we must thank Jutta Albert; in Montreal, Will Straw; in the UK, the Price household, Frank and Kath Robinson, Gonnie Rietveld, Kurt Iveson and Arun Saldanha; in Sydney Janet Witmer, Ali Wright, Kate Lloyd, Anthony Hutchings and Andrew McGregor kept us sane. We must also thank Ann Michael, the last in a line of Routledge editors who somehow kept faith with us, and Emma Hardman for her proofreading. Above all, we would like to thank Robert Aldrich, who carefully read every chapter and reminded us that popular music was a global phenomenon, and David Bell, David Keeling and Tracey Skelton who provided detailed comments on the first draft.

John Connell, Chris Gibson
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This book explores the many ways in which popular music is spatial – linked to particular geographical sites, bound up in our everyday perceptions of place, and a part of movements of people, products and cultures across space. It seeks to develop an innovative perspective on the relationship between music and mobility, the way in which music is linked to cultural, ethnic and geographical elements of identity, and how all this, in turn, is bound up with new, increasingly global, technological, cultural and economic shifts.

The cover image for this book suggests one starting point for exploring these themes: a South American panpipe band in Times Square, New York, in 2001, providing a seemingly authentic Andean musical experience in a different hemisphere. The band, playing panpipe ballads over pre-recorded keyboards, was accompanied by a colleague selling home-made CDs of the group. In one sense, it is an unsurprising image: South American panpipe busking groups became common in cities around the world in the 1980s, especially after the international success of Inti Illimani and the rise of New Age music. Indigenous knowledge of musical traditions provided quick resources for migrants keen to earn an income, as with, in other contexts, Cantonese violinists, Caribbean steel drummers and flamenco guitarists. Yet the image reflects much more than just an incidental part of a city streetscape. It is a busy scene in a unique city, created and constantly transformed by migration. It suggests links between music, tradition and authenticity, reinvented in the public spaces of the city; it demonstrates how technological changes (notably the digitisation of music) have informed local music production, generated new home recording cultures and small-scale entrepreneurialism. Music is caught up in multiple layers of networks that come together in that one street scene. In contrast to the low-key musical economies of the foreground, the background confirms the corporate domination of music: the Virgin megastore, and the global headquarters of BMG, one of the world’s largest entertainment companies (in Times Square, perhaps the archetypal global entertainment space). Passing cars boom with a wealth of sound – R&B, techno, rock
classics and current hits; MTV’s American television studios, behind the photographer, advertise exclusive interviews with Janet Jackson; souvenir stalls replay stage and show classics out into the street. Music fills the scene and affronts – or soothes – the senses.

While Times Square may be atypical, music surrounds us, in shopping malls, cinemas, lounge rooms; as a soundtrack to fashion, TV channels and video games. Yet, despite the presence of music in most people’s lives, this area of popular culture has been largely neglected as a ‘serious’ academic pursuit. This is perhaps due to music’s relative invisibility, and the apparent lack of tangible ethnographic material to be analysed and explained in ways that other material aspects of culture have been studied. As Smith has argued, it is as if a claim for ‘the non-social, implicitly metaphysical qualities of music has almost succeeded, making music perhaps the last of the arts to be looked at from a critical cultural perspective’ (1994: 235). Here, we trace the various links between music, place and spatial identity, and introduce a plethora of examples – from artists and their output to global distribution, from local ‘scenes’ to national music traditions – which map out diverse geographies of music. From its origins as sound experienced only in ‘live’ circumstances to sound waves captured in a computer chip – music in its varying forms has become almost inescapable. Similarly, popular music transcends geographical scales, from live performances in corner pubs to global tours; equally, we can shut ourselves off from the outside world in the private space of a Walkman, while governments create anthems and cultural policies aimed at representing a sense of nation. This book brings an explicitly geographical approach to popular music – thinking of music in terms of place and movement, of proud heritages and dynamic, fluid soundscapes.

In many respects, the academic world has shifted in ways that make it possible to take music seriously. The move away from sometimes rigid theories of society and economy, towards studies of social diversity and heterogeneity, has illuminated the complexities of how members of communities create and sustain meanings and identities for themselves. Consequently geographers have given greater attention to the ways in which our understandings of space and place are mediated by popular cultural forms such as television, print media, film and music, hence some geographers have called for more intense examinations of musical texts in studies of society, polity and culture (Gill 1993; Smith 1994; Leyshon et al. 1995, 1998; Kong 1995a; Nash and Carney 1996; Carney 1998; Romagnan 2000). This has marked a conceptual shift within cultural geography, from its historical concern with producing ‘objective’ studies of cultural landscapes, to interpretations (or ‘readings’) of human-made spaces as a form of ‘text’ – discursively constructed arenas that are shaped by wider social relations and representative of divisions and tensions in society. As Leyshon et al. have argued, ‘space and place are…not simply…sites where or about which music happens to
be made, or over which music has diffused, but rather different spatialities are...formative of the sounding and resounding of music’ (1995: 424–5). The centrality of music to youth sub-cultures (particularly since the 1950s), the links between music and social movements in the 1960s (such as soul music and the American civil rights movement), the role of music in mediating stories of place (from urban decay in punk to the rural utopias of country music), the widespread array of venues and sites in which music is now encountered (from concert halls to airport lounges) and the more globally integrated nature of music distribution are just some examples that have amplified the necessity for critical analysis.

Popular music has appeared in some university settings, gradually filtering through the curricula of music, sociology, media and communications departments, yet has been accompanied by considerable scepticism. In some circles, this scepticism stems from notions of popular culture as fanciful or irrelevant at ‘serious’ universities; at times popular music is subject to more extreme attacks, written off as a legitimate area of study by those with conservative views of music, who see it as inconsequential. While literature, film and art have been graced by an abundance of work from a cultural geographical perspective, popular culture, and particularly popular music, has remained enigmatic territory. Kong has traced the lack of popular music studies in geography to a tradition of cultural elitism – researchers privileging those ‘serious’ and enduring cultural artefacts over popular cultural forms, which have ‘been regarded with disdain as “mere entertainment”, trivial and ephemeral’ (1995a: 184). This is part of the wider priority attached to vision (Smith 1994; Ingham et al. 1994), reflected in both the empirical underpinnings of ‘science’, and in post-modernism’s origins in architecture and art. The omission of music from mainstream geographical inquiry can also be attributed both to the belief that it is not ‘geographical’ and to the complexity of its expression, engaging sight and sound simultaneously. As long as the written word remains the dominant academic medium, visually experienced cultural forms are likely to remain the most widely studied texts (Smith 1994), ensuring music’s relative neglect.

What is ‘popular’ music? Is it simply that which sells the most? Is ‘classical’ music distinct from ‘popular’ music (see Box 1.1)? Music also implies much more than just texts (whether lyrics or musical scores). Musical practices include whole constellations of social uses and meanings, with complex rituals and rules, hierarchies and systems of credibility that can be interpreted at many levels. Music can represent a highly participatory art form or a passive consumption experience, from karaoke or busking on streetcorners to hearing easy-listening ‘muzak’ in shopping aisles, or dancing in a club – hence geographies of music are inextricable from the various contexts of performance, listening and interaction in space. As a sometimes-living exhibition and art form, as fluid, invisible sound, popular music refuses to provide a uniform or static text to manipulate or deconstruct.
Any attempt to distinguish popular music reveals basic disagreements: criteria to differentiate ‘classical’, ‘folk’ and ‘popular’ music are artificial and at best localised. All music that is heard and enjoyed can be interpreted as ‘popular’ in some sense. Whether talking about ‘traditional’ music styles that remain important in the social practices of indigenous communities or migrant groups, the mass-produced output of major record labels, or the categorisation of music in record shops, music involves the broadcast of sound by individual performers or groups beyond the performance context (stage, radio station, recording studio), to audiences in a variety of places that understand and recognise the noises as ‘music’. This marks a spatial trajectory away from highly localised and contained origins, to absorption into the musical styles and consumption patterns of a wider community (to varying degrees). Yet boundaries of meaning are consistently erected between what is deemed ‘popular’ or otherwise. Adorno regarded popular music as a mass-produced, commodified and standardised product, involving minimal creativity. Consequently ‘serious’ music, ‘art’ music and ‘experimental’ music were portrayed as structurally distinct from ‘popular’ music (see Adorno and Horkheimer 1977), yet, considered in their own social and historical contexts (however narrow they were), these too were popular. In many societies, these divisions had no meaning. In Italy and elsewhere, opera was genuinely ‘popular’ across social classes, yet in many contemporary contexts it has been associated with refinement, and an educated ‘cultured’ elite. The notion that some musics are of ‘objectively’ higher status or quality remains common. (As an example, in 1996 court action was brought against Italian group FCB concerning their dance remix of Carl Orff’s *O Fortuna* (entitled ‘Excalibur’), in which the companies who owned the rights over the original piece claimed the techno remix ‘debased’ the original. FCB won the case.) Similar perspectives exist over what constitutes folk music or world music. Others have consulted more quantitative, seemingly democratic techniques to define genres – ‘popular’ music is simply that of the masses, that which sells the most copies, or draws the largest crowds. Manuel (1988) argued that popular music could be distinguished from other types of music, since it was largely disseminated by the mass media, and this substantially influenced its form. Then there is presumably some sales number (or level of media exposure) below which music of all sorts is ‘unpopular’ or merely the domain of cult enthusiasts. Yet highly influential releases by artists are sometimes distributed within very narrow parameters (such as dance tracks, popular in clubs but
Ironically, the allure of popular music as a site of research inquiry is intensified because it is so tangled up in the activities of everyday life. Ward has even argued, ‘music-making is, more than anything else you can think of quickly, the cement of society’ (1992: 120). While this might be exaggerating the social role of music
somewhat, many everyday understandings about places (whether particular sites such as concert or festival venues, regions with music traditions, or national institutions) are mediated through engagements with popular music. Everyday associations with places may come to be defined by musical expressions, on a number of levels. Just as Hollywood has become a mythological site through its proximity to the global film industry, so too Nashville, Seattle or Memphis in the United States, Liverpool and Manchester in England or Tamworth in Australia have come to be known as key sites of musical production, dissemination or festivals for particular audiences. Myths of place are often reinforced in music itself; examples cut across genres and eras: the many music texts dedicated to the cities of New York or Los Angeles (from Frank Sinatra and Billy Joel to Public Enemy and 2Pac); the numerous country and western artists, such as Willie Nelson, who are nostalgic about home and the land; or the often heavily geographical discourses of hip hop or reggae. Analyses of popular music therefore demand diversity, considering the cultural forms, ideologies, identities and practices in place that provide the individual a ‘plausible social context and believable personal world’ (Eyles 1989: 103), both in material trends and matters of popular discourse.

Music as culture and commodity

In order to understand music’s spatial dimension, we explore a series of dialectical relationships that define how music operates in places and across geographical distances. One such dialectic stems from a tension between music as a commodified product of an industry with high levels of corporate interest, and simultaneously as an arena of cultural meaning. The initial stages of the production process for music (whether a work ends up as a recording or a performance) involve small-scale creativity – bands and songwriters creating music in garages, recording studios or local pubs, illuminating ‘the ways in which music is used and the important role that it plays in everyday life and in society generally’ (Cohen 1994: 127). Beyond its importance as a cultural pursuit, music is captured, transformed and broadcast in a range of ways, involving complicated trajectories of production, distribution and consumption. These reveal tensions about how sounds circulate as both economic and cultural value. Sheet music captured melodies, words and arrangements, allowed rapid dissemination of songs and also established publishing companies as pivotal players in the emerging music industry. Later, recording technologies were established by music companies as attempts to capture clearer sounds and sell more copies of albums, yet in many contexts they also allowed more complex and more numerous grassroots musical cultures, and new informal networks of small-scale production (Chapter 3). However, academic study of music has largely evaded complex connections between cultural and commercial trends, assuming either that music, as an imme-
diately cultural expression, ‘belongs’ in cultural studies or cultural geography, or
that questions of culture and identity are frivolous diversions, compared to the
‘real’ tasks of examining music’s function as a nucleus of economic growth or a
possible means of job creation (Sadler 1997: 1919). There are many potential
reasons for this. Aspects of popular culture such as film, music and television lend
themselves to cultural analyses; much of the rich mythology surrounding these
activities is related to their distinctive consumption and interpretation by audi-
ences in cultural milieux. These include sub-cultural settings, where
heterogeneous visual markers confront researchers most quickly (for example the
safety pin and mohawk fashions of punk, or the pan-African imagery of reggae);
geographical settings (the festival, the cinema, the theme park); depictions of
cultural encounters in television serials and films (such as *Hi-Fidelity* or *Brassed
Off*); and in academic arenas themselves, where certain styles, movements, artists
or cultural products are afforded authenticity in intellectual circles. Academic
celebrations (and alternatively, deconstructions) of musical texts can return to old
debates, variously affirming key expressions, such as ‘art’, against the tainted stuff
of ‘commerce’. Notions of academic credibility, attached to selected musical
styles, artists or pieces, without self-reflexive critique, stimulate acts of snobbery
associated with everyday music consumption (the more ‘credible’ inner-city
clubs, more ‘genuinely alternative’ bands, a more ‘refined’ classical music).
Academics actively add critical currency to cultural products, as do music critics,
retailers, recruiting agents and sub-cultural elites. As Breen has put it, ‘we have
been too eager to be culturalists – promoters of our musical obsessions – rather
than analysts and critics’ (1995: 490), writing and reflecting on music’s affective
qualities as consumers with particular tastes, ideological predilections and
preferred readings of musical texts. Such distinctions cannot be sustained: all
music, of ‘high’ or ‘low’ culture, is commercial in some way, while all cultural
materials, even those of mass consumption, provide openings and alternatives for
audiences.

Recognition of the commercial dimensions of music has informed a limited
number of studies examining music as a cultural economy (Caves 2001; Brown,
et al. 2000). Music has been bound up in local development strategies, alongside
other ‘new media’, entertainment and ‘content’ industries (such as film, multimedia,
publishing). Music is an industry (or more accurately, a series of
economic clusters and networks), like any other, geared towards commodity
production, and can be situated within frameworks more familiar to economics.
Various studies have examined the patterns of employment in music, locational
factors underpinning the music industry, agglomerations of cultural industries
(including music) in particular cities and the regulatory and institutional settings
within which music development is promoted. Yet such approaches sometimes
lack the resonance, emotive importance, politics and cultural meaning bound up
in music, although business concerns heavily influence who hears what music. A focus on particular firms, or clusters of businesses, has tended to disassociate the ‘economic’ from the ‘social’; ‘it is almost as if the form stood outside of society; interactions with a whole range of public and private bodies and individuals are lost’ (Pratt 1994: 1–2). Moreover, music often allows for capitalist and non-capitalist economic activities to take place, linked as it is to big business, but also to an informal sector: a ‘black economy’ with its own unpredictable multipliers, and networks of economic exchange. Examining an ‘economy of culture’ also requires recognition of the need for ethnographies of the cultural economy; music is channelled through gatekeepers, individuals in a range of settings who manage and promote certain flows of music. Such gatekeepers may exist in sub-cultures, in record and publishing companies, at radio stations and record stores, while state policy makers have attempted to more forcibly influence international flows, to varying degrees of success. Particular sets of gatekeepers have become a ‘critical infrastructure’ governing the cultural economy (Zukin 1991; see also Mitchell 2000: 83), involving workers in cultural industries (such as music, book and film critics, designers, television producers) who flesh out ideas of ‘culture’, and create, consume and reroute music through particular channels.

Popular music remains an industry permeated by gendered norms and expectations at all levels; some of the most unequal labour relations can be found there. (In some countries male employment in the music industry outnumbers that of women by 5 to 1.) In part due to the persistence of male domination of gatekeeping positions, gender assumptions, biases and exploitation permeate other aspects of the production and social consumption of music (a point returned to at various points in this book). Some authors (e.g. Pratt 2000; Leyshon 2001) have acknowledged the socially constructed linkages between individuals, institutions and agencies within cultural economies — networks of influence, trade and knowledge transfer that are always being generated, negotiated, renewed (or severed). Such approaches attempt to rework the ‘cultural’ into economic analyses, emphasising the embeddedness of economic activities in social relations, production spaces and consumption districts, and in discrete cultural milieux. The economics of music cannot be divorced from the networks of people who make and promote it — music is an inherently risky and often vulnerable industry, hence the importance of cultural knowledge and contacts for generating a ‘buzz’ surrounding an artist or release. Thus, Straw located the Canadian music industry ‘within and between a wide range of institutional and social spaces’, distinguishing it from other cultural industries such as film and television that had narrower professional boundaries within which most production took place. Yet music activities ‘unfold within artistic communities which resist definition, constituted as they are in the overlap between the education system, sites of entrepreneurial activity (such as bars or recording studios) and the more elusive
spaces of urban bohemia’ (Straw 1993: 52). Musical cultures are commodified, but music never leaves the sphere of the ‘cultural’ or ‘social’ even when it is being manufactured, bought or sold.

Complex interactions between economy and culture exist across all geographical scales. Local musical cultures are bound up in questions of economy (how much musicians are getting paid for gigs, the companies involved in producing and selling musical instruments, the commercialisation of local sounds, the changing economy of music retailing); meanwhile economic aspects of musical activities are always socially and culturally embedded, relying on aesthetic judgements, and particular networks of actors that are not always obviously economic. Music conjures up representations of place, identity and culture, but the ‘economic’ is evident in how companies create images of products, brand names and concepts, and in reactions to the economics of music in musical texts themselves (hence the Sex Pistols’ aversion to EMI). The interconnection of the cultural and the economic in music will become apparent throughout the book: early chapters explore the role of technology and capital investment in the growth of globally integrated markets for popular music. Subsequently connections are mapped between, on the one hand, musical infrastructures and production networks in certain places, and, on the other, the mythologies of musical heritage that help shape popular impressions of those same places. Music endows social status, it moves with migration, attracts tourists, fosters a sense of belonging, generates jobs, all of which are reflected in perceptions of the cultural and economic role of music.

Music as fixity and fluidity

If music is simultaneously a commodity and cultural expression, it is also quite uniquely both the most fluid of cultural forms (quite literally, as sound waves moving through air) and a vibrant expression of cultures and traditions, at times held onto vehemently in the face of change. This tension, between music as itinerant and fleeting, and music as something static, fixed and immobile, underpins much of the discussion in this book. Both ‘fixity’ and ‘fluidity’ operate as umbrella terms that reflect a range of spatial practices, tendencies, decisions and physical objects (see Table 1.1). ‘Fluidity’ or ‘spatial mobility’ indicates flows of music, people, capital, commodities and money across space. This emerges in a number of ways in music. Music is, at its most basic, sound transmitted from the microlevel (in a bedroom, pub, car, between headphones) to the macroscale (through various means, including the global media). Music is also an artefact moving with people, whether as indigenous knowledge, oral traditions or recordings. Mobility also maps out musical economies, in the desire of entertainment companies to capture dispersed markets and seek new sources of
Music in all eras is characterised by particular sets of networks, technologies and institutions that map out cultural connections at different geographical scales.

Music has been transformed through spatial mobility. Simultaneously, music has influenced the manner in which wider global economic and cultural change has occurred. Music has been a feature of campaigns to both open up global trade and protect the intellectual property of entertainment corporations, and a part of debates about global cultural change and the erosion of local differences. Corporate interests in modernisation and standardisation have always been aligned with spatial mobility – a keenness to overcome spatial distance and differences – and rhetorical constructions of a ‘borderless world’ (Ohmae 1990). As the operations of entertainment companies increased and became international, distribution networks expanded in reach: musical expressions from diverse geographical locations could be purchased, broadcast and heard in many locations. Music may well reflect the increasingly global reach of popular cultural technologies, but it does so only because of particular investment decisions in the entertainment industries, within parameters defined by the state, and because sub-cultures and audiences have accepted outside sounds. Moreover, some have suggested that popular music around the world has been caught up in a process of convergence where, economically, different forms of media such as film, Internet, print and sound are owned by the same few corporations and, culturally, texts are received via the same channels, leading to a ‘standardised’

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| Discursive processes        | Fluidity
---|---
| Cultural flows and stylistic influences | Territorial assertions
| Discourses of styles and symbols | Tradition/heritage/authenticity
| Trans-continental and cross-cultural alliances | Cultural ‘resistance’
| Hybridity | Appeal to ‘roots’
repertoire of sounds, styles and images of place, as more locations are incorpo-
rated into a global popular cultural ‘matrix’. Similarly, some argue that a process
of cultural imperialism has utterly changed global geographies of music: localised
music traditions are slowly being erased by sounds determined and distributed by
global corporate entities. Yet, not surprisingly, musical influences have become
increasingly hybrid, with numerous indigenous, local music traditions being fused
with those from production centres such as in the United Kingdom and the
United States, both questioning and transforming cultural identities: mobility and
new forms of internal diversity are not inconsistent.

Music in place
Concurrent with the emergence of global ‘mediascapes’ (Appadurai 1990),
processes of musical fragmentation and diversification have occurred within coun-
tries. As media corporations distribute popular sounds beyond their origins,
niches and more subtle markers of musical difference have sprung up in unex-
pected places, from amateur local scenes, community musics and sub-cultures to
new transcontinental sounds. Reactions to globalisation have differed – musicians
have sought out new sounds or returned to ‘roots’; sub-cultures have emerged
that, even if momentarily, evade the products and commercial logic of media
corporations while audiences – fans, critics, occasional listeners – receive and
interpret music in the diverse contexts of their own lives. Accordingly, many
geographies of music have tended to locate analyses in more detailed local circum-
stances, generating place-bound theories and regional ethnographies of music
scenes, audience cultures and experiences of place, ranging from work on buskers
Finnegan 1989), sub-cultures and ‘indie’ scenes in various world centres (Maxwell
1997a; Mitchell 1996; Goh 1996) and ‘traditional’ music in remote parts of Brazil
or Papua New Guinea (Seeger 1987; Feld 1982). At various scales, and in a vast
range of locations, music has been linked to place – whether in the subways of
New York, the rainforests of New Guinea or the clubs of Manchester – as cultural
geographers and others traced links between music styles, sub-cultures and place.

As early as the 1920s, music, and sound more generally, were considered part
of an early ‘landscape tradition’ within regional geography. Regional distinctions
could be drawn not only through those characteristics experienced visually (in
terms of physical landscapes and the built environment), but also through
encountering sounds, noise and tunes. Sounds were a central part of landscapes,
and thus were crucial to the maintenance of a sense of ‘balance’ within those land-
scapes, suggesting an aesthetic ‘order’ that linked certain sounds with particular
settings, constructing ‘harmonies of scenery’. Geographers such as Cornish
(1928, 1934) and Abercrombie (1933) attempted to align sounds with scenes of
appropriateness and inappropriateness; the honk of a car horn in a country lane, or the sound of a gramophone in the open air, were considered aesthetically dissonant and unwelcome: 'If this quietude of the senses be broken...the mind begins to pay attention to imperfections instead of dwelling upon an ideal, and we no longer live in Arcadia' (Cornish 1928: 277).

More substantive approaches underpinned later efforts; cartographies of production and diffusion of musical forms such as country and western, jazz and folk music attempted to 'capture' cultural processes in maps. Popular music, like other aspects of culture, could be represented spatially, explained and described in terms of the location and origins of musical scenes, styles and pieces; the movement or diffusion of musical genres and styles across space, or the networks of musical tours, patterns of trade of musical product, or the locations of supposed 'hearth's of musical cultures (e.g. Carney 1974, 1978). Music thus provided cartographies of cultural production, reception and consumption. This research, originating from North America during the 1970s and 1980s, dealt with the spatial location and distribution of specifically North American music styles (Carney 1978), the delineation of musical centres and the diffusion and communication of musical expressions further afield (Ford 1971; Horsley 1978). Since the advent of more sophisticated, global communications technology and more rapid networks of production and distribution, 'local' music is now transmitted and received far beyond regional and national boundaries. This fusion is particularly evident in 'world music', to the extent of it being part of promotional club flyers, but in a manner that mythologises the extent of global reach (Figure 1.1).

The recent trend for musicians to record their own music and distribute releases via Internet technology, and the practice of reproducing and disseminating pre-recorded music in various computer formats through email (also known to the music industry as a form of digital 'piracy'), suggest quite different networks and cartographies of music in the digital age (Chapter 11).

Variants of the cartographic tradition attempted to evaluate the cultural 'distinctiveness' of musical expressions at a variety of spatial scales. Aldskogius (1993) and Waterman (1998) explored music festivals in Sweden and Israel, assessing the presence or absence of particular regional music traditions, while Lomax and Erickson (1971) and Nash (1968) attempted to map world musical styles. Other research with this descriptive, 'regional' flavour has included articles on the images of place that are evoked through music lyrics (Henderson 1974; Lehr 1983), depictions of sacred and profane places in country music (Woods and Gritzner 1990), images of cities such as New York (Henderson 1974), descriptions of regional 'sounds' (Bell 1998; Curtis and Rose 1987; Gill 1993) and even an atlas of the life and performances of Elvis Presley (Gray and Osborne 1996). Such cartographic depictions of music styles and scenes provided valuable detail on particular styles of music, the ways in which these were disseminated and the
lines of migration undertaken by performers. Such cartographies of music hinted at the need for greater emphasis on ethnographies of music, and developing a musical ‘sense of place’ as a starting point for more developed analysis. Yet, ultimately, such studies were limited through their ‘failure to engage with the social and political contexts in which music is produced’ and the socially constructed nature of human understandings of place and space (Kong 1995b: 186). Cartographies – just like printed maps – need to be situated in networks of economic, social and political relationships.

Studies of local ‘scenes’ in Europe and North America have shown how musical forms and practices ‘originate within, interact with, and are inevitably affected by, the physical, social, political and economic factors which surround them’ (Cohen 1991a: 342), resulting in the construction of diverse representations, or identities, for those regions (see also Kruse 1993; Cohen 1994, 1995, 1999). Music is

![Figure 1.1 Disoriental club flyer, Bradford](image-url)

**Figure 1.1** Disoriental club flyer, Bradford
bound up in places as 'articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings' (Massey 1994: 154), illustrated in a range of examples, from sub-cultural formations (in clubs, pubs or churches), to particular events. Such networks are layered and differentiated in various ways – new cultural alliances do not form on a 'blank slate'; rather they inherit the particular set of circumstances, traditions and social relations of older generations of cultural producers and consumers. The consumption of music opens up a mass of possibilities for enjoyment, pleasure, engagement or for developing wider cultural traditions. Yet, in emphasising ethnographic methods, Cohen recognised the limits to such approaches and the dilemmas of relativism:

"Ethnography in the anthropological sense has its limitations. It is small-scale and face-to-face, and this raises the problem of typicality – whether the small part studied can represent the whole – and the problem of incorporating detailed description which may seem banal or tedious."

(1993: 125; see also Chan 1998)

Associated with this is a tendency to become too enmeshed in the detail of the local at the expense of recognising how the local is constituted within wider flows, networks and actions.

A sense of place thus transects with activities operating on larger scales in many ways: local and regional 'sounds' are captured, marketed and transmitted through the worldwide distribution networks of music multinationals; musicians, sub-cultures and audiences in a multitude of localities receive and interpret music from other places, while local narratives of experience and identity can be sustained by dispersed populations across national boundaries (Mitchell 1996; Stokes 1994). Many sites, or wider geographical regions in which musical production and consumption occur, become linked with particular sounds, styles or musical approaches (such as the 'Motown' sound, New Orleans jazz). This is often due to concentrations of infrastructure for music production and for musical cultures in particular areas (for example, cities with an abundance of recording facilities, live venues or access to inexpensive technology), but may be equally attributable to a process of mythologising place in which unique, locally-experienced social, economic and political circumstances are somehow 'captured' within music.

**Music and the politics of space and identity**

Social conflicts, tensions and political debates sometimes become struggles to control a process of representation in various media. From tabloid reporting of 'gang violence' and 'ghetto life' to literary writing about 'exotic' cultures, from
travel brochure images of island paradises to protest songs, it has become evident
that visible and audible media are spheres in which narratives of place are gener-
ated and articulated. These may include associations between music and ethnicity,
nationalism, class and gender – creating ‘identities’ for individuals, social groups
and even for whole regions (Stokes 1994). National anthems, music traditions
such as the blues, funk and disco (and the ways these styles are mimicked and
absorbed in other places), and the work of artists as varied as Elvis Presley, kd
lang, Moby and the Afro-Cuban All Stars, all suggest different ways in which
spaces of expression are created, and how places (the inner city, the concert, the
community hall) are experienced. As with cultural sites and identities more
generally, musical spaces remain contested. Conflicts and contests are both
discursive (in the varying representations of identity), and concrete (in struggles
over public and private spaces).

The processes of identity formation in and through music occur in uneven
ways, mediated by relations of power: the racial, gendered and socio-economic
filters that can act to polarise sections of society, marginalise groups of people
from mainstream economic and political power, and silence oppositional or ‘alter-
native’ cultural voices. For example, all music, whether considered ‘independent’
or mass consumed and commercially oriented, is racialised in complex ways.
Moreover, the majority of music is in English, while musicians from other back-
grounds are not always afforded the airplay or opportunities to participate in
Anglophone markets. Despite such barriers, numerous non-Anglo-American
musical traditions – from salsa to rai – have continued to feed into the commercial
music industry. ‘Peripheral’ sounds can and do alter trends, inspiring musicians at
the ‘cores’ of English-speaking music production in Britain and the United States,
and voicing experiences of place that negotiate (and sometimes oppose) the global
processes commodifying musical heritage (Rose 1994; Lipsitz 1994). Musical
identities can challenge accepted social norms, configuring reactions to ‘main-
stream’ cultural practices, and asserting new styles. Popular music, alongside
other media such as art and literature, operates at many levels, providing a plat-
form for the expression of marginalised voices, while illuminating global alliances
and cultural flows. The performance and reception of popular music in particular
local circumstances may be ‘an effective form of resistance to the homogenising
forces of the culture industry, not necessarily by producing an alternative sound,
but by enabling people to experience music in distinctive localised ways’ (Smith
1994: 237). Popular music can then be seen as an integral part of the process by
which spaces are created for social interaction, entertainment and enjoyment,
including the plethora of sites designated exclusively for the production and expe-
rience of music, such as small live music venues, nightclubs and discos, record
bars and concert halls; and even spaces not normally associated with music, but
where the broadcast or infiltration of music serves various political or commercial
Intents. Music is one way through which ordinary acts of consumption and movement throughout daily life could constitute ‘tactics’ of subtle opposition (de Certeau 1984) that emerge from within the cultural spaces governed and controlled by others, occurring as they often do in the private spaces of home, in the corners of the night-time economy, beyond the panoptic gaze of the state.

Aspects of ‘sub-cultural’ and ‘oppositional’ style frequently become valuable in themselves, in particular through musical genres, fashion styles and attitudes. There are always struggles and points of exchange between musical communities and the wider music and fashion industries, as musical space is defined as cutting edge, authentic or ‘underground’, in opposition to the commodified or ‘simulated’ products of the mainstream. Music can be a means of accruing ‘sub-cultural capital’ (Thornton 1995; McRobbie 1994), authenticated in cultural studies itself through examinations of the role of music in everyday life – ethnography thus cannot escape the contradiction that it authenticates as it describes. In turn, many theorists have retreated from celebrating such expressive musical identities, stressing qualities of heterogeneity, difference and hybridity.

A question of scale?

Many examples of musical identities are spatial, as they relate to physical sites and the movements of culture, commodities and people across territory. Yet music is also audible, and the public spaces where musical identities are constructed (and new evasions of control figured out) are both physical (as in the performance spaces of music) and virtual (as in the spaces of public broadcast). New hybrid identities are created by the spread of musical sounds (as with the global distribution of reggae or country and western), while musical sub-cultures and sites can be politicised and subject to scrutiny as part of struggles for local spaces.

Authors writing on the politics of popular culture have grappled with this complexity and how it relates to geographical scale. McLeay (1997) and Shuker (1998) both questioned the terms ‘global’ and ‘local’, through the tendency to reify certain actions as belonging to one scale or another, or to posit cultures, institutions and individuals exclusively within particular geographical limits. Thus, the ‘global’ and ‘local’, oversimplified concepts for what are complex and multi-scaled actions, are replaced by new terms such as ‘glocalisation’ that attempt to indicate the simultaneous ‘global’ and ‘local’ elements of economic processes and cultural identifications:

The hybrid term ‘glocalisation’ has emerged as a more useful concept, emphasising the complex and dynamic interrelationship of local music scenes and industries and the international marketplace.

(Shuker 1998: 132)
Mitchell (1996, 1999) has similarly appealed to the ‘glocal’ in a more sub-cultural approach, looking at ways in which global ‘templates’ have enabled local mobilisations of hip hop musical languages and diasporic identities (see also Bennett 2000). We intend to side-step such discussions rather than dismiss them, suggesting that the terms ‘fixity’ and ‘fluidity’ reflect more dynamic ways of describing and understanding processes that move across, while becoming embedded in, the materiality of localities and social relations. The ‘global’ and the ‘local’ happen simultaneously, not as a mere coincidence, but often as part of a formal contradiction – they are constructed in part because of endogenous actions, productions and expressions, but are also defined against what they are not. Consequently more active terms are needed than ‘global’ and ‘local’ or variants such as ‘glocalisation’, which reify the status of geometric space over the dynamic conditions under which space is actively constructed and consumed by companies, institutions of governance and by individuals (Lefebvre 1991). Dialectical explanations of inter-scalar relations have appeared from work in cultural geography and political economy, examining the complex dynamic of scale in global economic and cultural change. In many respects, a tension between movements of objects, people and money across space, while also seeking to establish permanence in place, has always characterised spatial dimensions of human activity: a dynamic of ‘globalisation/reterritorialisation’ (Brenner 1999: 436). There is a tension:

between preserving the values of past commitment made at a particular place and time, or devaluing them to open up fresh room for accumulation…between fixity and motion, between the rising power to overcome space and the immobile structures required for such a purpose.

( Harvey 1985: 150)

But, here, our use of a similar dialectic involves discussions across economic and cultural domains – fixity and fluidity operate at multiple levels, from the formal and institutional to the personal, embracing much more than just circuits of capital. Music illustrates that such dynamics are difficult to tease out in any ordered manner; music cannot be contained within a single explanatory theory – it is dynamic and unpredictable, involving movements of sound and people, expressing mobility in certain periods, stability in others.

The following chapters of this book explore multiple ways in which music can be understood as geographical, and the various debates that cut across this: Chapter 2 examines music and connections to place, establishing the logics of ‘authenticity’ that ground performers, styles and songs in geographical locations. Subsequently, Chapter 3 explores the converse, considering music as mobility and
change. Further chapters then expand on a number of themes relating to this dialectic, both discursive (in lyrics, ‘sounds’, in the politics of identity and world music) and also material (in the built spaces of music, in tourism and in the digital realm). Throughout these chapters various tensions are revealed that shape music as fixity and fluidity: between innovation and continuity, in nostalgia and return, between authentic and fake. Places, and their specific socio-historical, economic and political circumstances, shape musical expression; musical recordings act as catalysts for the construction of spatial identities that sometimes last (for example in the associations between the Beatles and Liverpool) or fade. Music traditions can alter places (whether through generating employment or through influxes of tourism), while music flows across space (from oral traditions to Internet distribution) in directions and along pathways that are sometimes directed, often random, but always mediated by (or constituted as reactions against) flows of capital, new technologies and styles. Music creates places and networks of cultural flow, but does not do so beyond the worlds of politics, commerce and social life.