Adorno at Womad: South Asian crossovers and the limits of hybridity-talk

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> The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism.[1]

In his essay, 'The culture industry reconsidered', Theodore Adorno writes, 'To take the culture industry as seriously as its unquestioned role demands, means to take it seriously critically, and not to cower in the face of its monopolistic character.'[2] Thus, while noting that 'culture now impresses the same stamp on everything',[3] Adorno also recognised that the standardisation of mass products had even to 'standardise the claim of each one [product] to be irreplaceably unique'.[4] These were, however, 'fictitiously individual nuances',[5] examples of the rule of the 'iron grip of rigidity despite the ostentatious appearance of dynamism'.[6] Today the multiplication of differences has become repetitive to the point that diversity and difference as commodities seem to offer only more and more of the same. In this article I consider this claim in the light of the rise to popularity of 'World Music', in order to evaluate the current vogue in culture commentary for hybridity.

Paul Gilroy writes that the 'hybridity which is formally intrinsic to hip-hop has not been able to prevent that style from being used as an especially potent sign and symbol of racial authenticity'.[7] In 'so-called World Music', he suggests, 'authenticity enhances the appeal of selected cultural commodities and has become an important element in the mechanism of the mode of racialisation necessary to making non-European and non-American musics acceptable items in an expanded pop market'.[8] There seems, at first glance, to be a possible convergence here between the critiques of Adorno and Gilroy. The commodification of black music today proceeds by way of a racialisation that has long been a part of the marketing of black musics such as Jazz, Disco and Rap to white, Euro-American audiences. Gilroy adds that this has also served as a means of presenting identities for self-confirmation and internalisation to black communities themselves. If pointing to the artifice of this is 'not enough', as Gilroy suggests, then neither is just dispensing with 'authenticity' debates in order to unblock 'critical theorising' of much consequence either. The point is to take this another step further with the critique of cultural production. But this

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commodification in cultural production is also something in which we are complicit. For me this complicity begins with attendance as a spectator consuming cultural 'difference' at Womad.

Womad

Womad Music Festivals, at Reading, Morecombe, Adelaide and elsewhere, are huge events no longer confined to llama wool jumper, bicycle-camping, tea-head greenie hippies and weekend travellers on weekends without a rave, but now successfully drawing in a cross-section of people not immediately or easily consigned to niche marketing categories. Even with the grab-bag categories it is difficult to specify the World Music audience today—beyond the generalities of middle class (it's expensive to get in), youngish (predominantly below forty) and Western. (Unlike most specific music genres, say Rock or Bhangra, there is no obvious disproportionate cultural or racial audience mix *vis-à-vis* proportional representation in, for example, the UK. Indeed the audiences of Womad are significantly diverse.) After more than ten years, the product recognition of Womad and the category of World Music may not have achieved music industry dominance, but it has captured a significant, and growing, slice of the industry. Bands and musicians from all corners of the world are brought to Europe—on occasion, Australia, Japan—to perform for appreciative audiences. Womad is interesting as a site for the playing out of capitalist cultural production at both ideological and economic registers. The commercialisation of music and the evacuation of politics at such events deserve comment and go hand in hand (in a pastoral, folksy, face-to-face sense) with an aversion to the technological (or a pastoralising of it) and an absolutist and authentic singularism (not always nationalist) which needs to be unpacked.

World Music has come to be considered by the music industry—its commercial production and promotional arms—as a potentially profitable, and so exciting, expansive and popular way forward in contemporary music. There has been little critical work produced on any aspect of this development at a time when what is required is a multi-perspective examination of the World Music phenomenon, ranging from a critique of the concepts and terminologies deployed, through the employment practices, marketing of 'ethnic identities', commercialisation, and so on, to the attempts at explicit politicisation of Womad audiences by disparate political groupings.

A multi-perspective approach to Womad would enable a focus upon World Music as a kind of commercial aural travel consumption, where the festival with its collections of 'representative' musicians, assembled from 'remote' corners of the world, are a (very) late twentieth century version of the Great Exhibitions of the nineteenth century. Womad gatherings have for the past decade offered musical 'multiculture' sampled according to the ethnic marketing categories that pass for intercultural relations today. The theoretical importance of an investigation of this would be in the conjuncture of local studies in a global context, addressing the potential for cultural creativity and political activist work within an international media economy.

Although there is space within the Womad ensemble for more 'traditional'

forms of South Asian music such as Bhangra or Qawwali, in the UK today it is post-Bhangra performers who are in the ascendant within the Asian popular music scene. Thus, Womad is a venue for several different, but complementary forms of Asian-influenced musical production, ranging from folk Bhangra to urban Punk Jungle sounds, yet before the audience and in the eyes of popular commentators and critics all these forms can too easily fall into a traditionalism mitigated only by an eclectic global sampling. A comment from Man-tu, one of the Nepali-mask-wearing members of the 'trip-hop' band, Transglobal Underground, illustrates: 'World music for me is anything from "Headbutt" [a band that uses bass players, fire extinguishers and shopping trolleys] to Dimi Mint Abba. The term has been misused to refer to anything liked by old hippies in sandals, but to me, it's a street level vibe.' Natasha Atlas, the front person for Transglobal Underground, wanted to distance World Music from terms like 'traditional' which were 'corny' and 'an imitation of something that belongs in the past'. Yet much of the Womad festival attraction relies exactly upon this 'traditionalism' (or primitivism), placed alongside more explicitly 'contemporary' crossover acts like Transglobal Underground, to sell its global package.[9] Womad's more explicitly crossover acts often come from the UK, but there is an unacknowledged hierarchy factored into the preferred Womad mix—not too much old style, not too much crossover: what some would call easy listening.

It is through Womad or similar festivals that Asian musics in Britain gain 'mainstream' exposure. Without these events it is likely that the only 'known' Asian performers would be Apache Indian and Sonya Aurora Madan from the indie band Echobelly. Womad brings acts to Britain that would otherwise not be seen, and in this sense it serves a progressive and explorative, innovative role unlike any other organisation in the UK. It achieves this, according to Natasha Atlas, because 'the world is getting smaller'. Hence Atlas wants the music of Transglobal Underground to 'cross over to as many cultures as possible'. Cross-*over*. One of the first impressions of the festival at Reading I had was that audiences today are largely uncritical of World Music. In the face of what must be a largely incomprehensible exchange, however much Qawwals or Bhangra or whatever can be described as being able to cross over, it is stretching the notion of the universal language of music and rhythm a little to think that there are no lacunae here.

Surely there is something more to it than intercultural harmony and surely there are contradictions that might evoke consideration of the politics of difference? How is it that white British performers can wear Nepalese masks on stage, abstracted from their social cultural context, without critical comment? Such a global sampling has come to be accepted as 'normal', as a part of the benefit of global communications, as a consequence of a 'smaller world', and as something that mass audiences can comfortably appreciate on a sunny weekend (at a reasonable price, where festivals are sponsored by beer corporations). This marked absence of any audience anxiety (at least compared to the anxiety for authenticity of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists) is particularly perplexing at a time of increased awareness of the politics of music in Britain since the introduction of the 1994 Criminal Justice Act and its legislative banning of

'rave' music festivals at which 'music characterised by a succession of repetitive beats' is played.[10]

The Womad festival in Reading offers the commercialisation of everything; stalls set up in a circle around the perimeter of the festival site sell a smorgasbord of multicultural fast foods (rapid ethnicities of the gullet), political persuasions—from aid for Indian wells to petitions for Tibet (no organised left parties), campaigns to defend the cassowary from poachers, to John Pilger speaking tours about Indonesian aggression in East Timor—and Womad merchandise (the Womad CD, the Womad book, magazine, T-shirt, cap), as well as sundry other merchandisers—often hardly distinguishable from the stalls and displays for various political causes—selling everything from oriental rugs to brass coffee pots, jewellery, candles, incense, anarcho and techno small-label recordings, and even a weird drumming puppet rhino 'drumming up' support to save soon-to-be-extinct species.

It should not be thought that I am hostile to or mocking of attempts to raise awareness about the plight of various mammals designated as aphrodisiacs, meat or game in less liberal cosmologies, nor that the campaign to expose Indonesian military atrocities, as funded, supplied and alibied by Western governments, is without urgency. The problem is that some point of connection and organisation seems missing in this context. Indeed inappropriate 'appropriations' and half-understood orientations seem more the norm despite the best of intentions. No one seemed too embarrassed at the irregular dancing of the waif-like hippie woman spiralling trance-circle-ly in sexy rapture in front of the devotional Islamic Qawwals of Hussain and Party: at the same time no one seemed to want to join in despite her exhortations to the crowd to 'get up and dance'. The importance of this performance for Hussain and Party, however, is a possible recording contract with Womad's Real World label, and an appreciative audience of Western buyers (a segment of the market not to be ignored). The Bauls of Bengal attracted a similarly curious and appreciative audience—a most cynical understanding of the audience–performance relation here would assess performances only on the criterion of whether or not the crowd can tap their feet and sway to a rhythm. I am particularly interested, and anxious, about the appropriations, and questions of appropriate behaviour, in such a scene where authenticity operates through incomprehension and fracture of context.

Real World record company marketing of essential exoticas is the staple commercial angle of Womad. Working for Real World can be no easy task for the A&R reps and design wallahs, because of quite inconsistent and differing demarcations of the authentic and the complications arising from having multiple 'national' musical traditions. Here the Bauls of Bengal occupy a genre that sits uneasily alongside Qawwali and UK Asian Rap and no clear-cut resolution into traditional and modern is plausible (not even the 'traditional' classical Indian forms are so neatly traditional in this context). Womad seems to maintain a form of nationalist cultural essentialism that must remain blind to the inconsistencies of its own designations. At this time, crossover articulates as 'World Music', which in white hands often also loses its political edge. Yet Gilroy also suggests that in the late 1970s, it was the reggae of Bob Marley which provided a crossover music able to articulate a critique of colonialism and repression, and

which gave young audiences in England a chance to 'make sense of their lives in post-imperial Britain'.[11]

Gilroy suggests that the possibility for some UK Post-Punk and Ska bands to take up this crossover work was short-lived but perhaps this needs more careful consideration. The influence of (small) initiatives, such as Public Image Ltd, continues to percolate throughout the scene in the 1990s in diverse forms such as Techno, Dub, Jungle and Trip-Hop. Understandably, in the context of a book written during the first half of the 1980s, Gilroy seems bitter at the loss of up-front crossover, which gave way, after Marley's death, to 'a new wave of post-punk white reggae musicians'. He directs his barbs elegantly at a target symbolically appropriate for all that came with the election of a Conservative government in Britain, 'The Police':

> The best known of these [white reggae bands] inverted the preconceptions of Rasta by calling themselves The Police and armed with 'Aryan' good looks and dedication to 'Regatta de Blanc' served, within pop culture at least, to detach reggae from its historic association with the Africans of the Caribbean and their British descendants.[12]

Whether or not The Police can be held responsible for this disarticulation (William Burroughs was once at an awards ceremony where he was introduced to members of the band; later he quietly advised friends that if they were 'holding any drugs they ought to stash it quick' because he'd 'just found out that those guys over there were cops'), there was a period in which white musical hegemony again asserted itself through appropriation of non-European rhythms. The long tradition of appropriation reaches back to before even the early Beatles and Rolling Stones began playing that devil Negro music unashamed. Nevertheless, whatever the antics of Jagger, Richards and co., there is reason to think that the protest politics of Reggae and Punk were not lost for ever in the bland of The Police, and indeed return with Hip Hop, House and Techno in another cycle in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Whether or not this is encouraged or corralled on the Womad stage is another matter altogether.

In asking questions about how certain forms of music come to be designated and promoted as 'World Music' it is necessary to provide a critique of a number of institutional levels at work conjointly: (a) the commercial manufacture of the genre 'World Music' and commercial considerations within the mainstream music industry; (b) the parochialism and biases of the 'mainstream' music industry and its public; (c) the influence of certain individual entrepreneurs, Western or not, with a foot in the door of the music industry; (d) notions of tradition and authenticity, as maintained by the media, and often deployed by 'World' artists themselves; (e) the wider context of international politics, market forces and imperial relations; (f) exoticism, New-Age-ism, the tree-fetish lifestyle-hippiedom and feral/folk market opportunism that provides cottage-capitalist support for the 'Womad' sector; (g) cyclical media ethnic feeding frenzy, lack of interesting Rock 'n' Roll, we'll-try-anything-once experimentalism, commodification of everything, etc.; (h) technological development, in the music industry and in communications and transportation, facilitating the per-

formance of those from faraway locations, their recordings distributed world-wide, their images beamed globally via satellite television.

The political task of a reading of Womad at Reading might include attempts to ascertain levels of educational and organisational impact, against commercial gain and consumption of target audience. The possibility of identifying what could be called 'cottage capitalism' throughout the Womad ensemble is real—punters browse past tent stores and campaign tables as they would past display windows in shopping malls. Music from the corners of the world is provided as unique entertainment in the same way that food or clothes work like wallpaper, in endless aural, visual or tasty simulacra. What sort of coherence might be found in the different politics on the display tables remains unclear: some sign a petition or buy a badge to wear upon their lapel. Many more buy funny hats—and express an 'alternative' appearance and a well-cultivated grunge fashion (several varieties thereof). Honest and intense activist commitment also coincides with such lifestyle shopping. It could seem that the struggle of musicians and artists from the South to be heard amidst this din offers a metaphor for the cacophony of all world struggles drowned out in the on-the-spot reporting of CNN World News—on screen, but not heard.

A CNN report on Womad in 1994 stressed little of the grassroots politics and made much of the most 'exotic' of the musicians—Hassain Qawwals were shown in detail, with the requisite CNN correspondent speaking over the top of their image. The reporter celebrated Womad as an example of human harmony and togetherness, and the tone was one of tribute to the organisers and the people who attended. The one non-musical aspect of the event mentioned was an aid collection for hospitalised children in Bosnia. Such liberal music politics and Womad's breadth, from CNN Bosnia relief to cassowary campaigns, have been noted before: 'It is more than a coincidence that the development of charity rock, with its primary focus on Africa [Band Aid, Live Aid, etc.], paralleled the emergence of "world beat", a marketing category dominated by African and African-influenced sounds.'[13]

What this restricted and edited marketing of 'oppositional' cultures does is to bring contradictory impulses into the happy relationship of a capitalism that can sell—and usually neutralise—everything under the sign of value. Everything can be equated to everything else (the beat of authenticity stimulates the rhythm of charity). The efforts of intellectuals to facilitate the entry of marginal discourses, like black musics, into the commercial and public sphere are fraught with exactly this contradiction—one that is shared with both the impulse to charity and the sponsorship of the state, and of CNN itself. Despite all good intentions, the consequences are often inevitably incorporation and cooption because there has been no disruption of the overarching system. Another aspect of this double-play is taken up later in this article, where I argue that Gilroy overstates the role of performance in his analysis of black cultural forms.[14] While his enunciative stress is quite sound aganst textual narratives, it seems less useful to let this displace attention to mediatised forms of articulation and the role of the technological.

The problem of the privilege of live peformance is complicated, since it is often acknowledged that tele-technological flows (of which CNN is part) are

essential to Womad's commerical success. Artists do, of course, want to sell their products. A complicated choice is marked out for any evaluation of World Music by—to take one possible formulation of the parameters of this debate among many—Wallis and Malm, who (excerpted in the collection *On Record*) note first of all that

> Music industry technology has found its way, in a very short time, into every corner of the earth. Both software and hardware can be found in even the remotest village in every country, irrespective of social or economic system. No other technology has penetrated society so quickly—what is more the rate of penetration appears to be accelerating … [so that we also now see that a] transnational form of nationless culture develops. Through a process of integration and concentration … At the same time, the amount of music in our environment has increased to such a level that, even if a saturation point has not been reached, it is getting harder to experience silence![15]

They also hold out optimistically against the transnationalisation of culture, because

> This scenario, however bleak it might appear at superficial glance, is not entirely negative. The sound cassette [for example] has given thousands of people the opportunity to hear more music. To a certain extent users can decide what music they want to hear … cassettes can even be used for recording the sound of the small peoples themselves. The very accessibility of music industry technology has brought about another common pattern of change, particularly noticeable in smaller cultures. It has provided the prerequisite for a counterreaction against the transnationalization of music—even if no local music cultures have been totally unaffected by international music products.[16]

Despite some uneasiness about the propriety of metaphors of 'accelerated rates of penetration' and the rather ridiculous ethnographic recovery project phrasing about 'recording the sound of the small peoples themselves', the two poles here set out opposed uses of music technology, both as a force for the homogenisation of culture and as an opportunity for resistance and creativity. (Evaluations of the project of a group like Arrested Development, or the still more complicated country music of Aboriginal musicians like the Warumpi Band, might complicate this assessment.) The difference here is between the integration and concentration of the music industry to the point of saturation ('any music may now be heard any time anywhere'[17]), and the counterreactive possibilities of the cassette, user choice, and local music cultural resistance to transnationalisation.

   These two ends of music technology, and the concomitant imbrication of such technologies with socio-economic and political questions about the technological expansion of the international market and/or the possibilities for autonomy within or against this, have also exercised many writers, critics and the practitioners themselves. There is still today much to be said for a critique of technologically rampant capitalist expansion. Although nostalgia sits less easily among wary critics, the music-as-alternative narrative is alive and well. Laments for a pre-industrial music manifests in many ways, not least of all in the rhetoric of Womad, even at the very moment when it is the technological extension of market economies that is the ground of possibility upon which it is staged. Widespread familiarity with 'Indian' music, from Ravi Shanker at Woodstock to

Nusrat Fatah Ali Khan on Real World, would not be possible without this extension. The technologies of capitalist music export Hindi film songs to communities in Britain, Canada, the US, Australia, Fiji, Mauritius, Malaysia and so on and so on—it is almost a cliché to mention this.

Popular culture

The parameters of a discussion of World Music can be recast in terms derived from the much maligned Adorno if we take up his comments on popular culture. What is important in Adorno's discussion of the culture industry is his interrogation of the relations between mass culture and capitalist imperatives for profit; he notes that with mass production in the culture industry 'cultural entities are no longer *also* commodities, they are commodities through and through' (my emphasis). This comment, in an essay written to 'reconsider' the culture industry argument, maintains an uncompromising and unpopular position that exposes novelty and difference as illusion and commodity fetish.[18] There is a homology between a focus upon the skeleton of sameness behind commodity differences and the critique of 'hybridity' which, along with a questioning of the authority to comment of the critic, is offered below.

Scott McQuire argues that Adorno (and Horkheimer) have been used in much recent media theory as 'convenient whipping posts':

> A quick reference to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* today suffices not only to dismiss it, but also to counterpoint the 'advances' of contemporary theory with its (enlightened) concern with popular culture and audience ethnography.[19]

Singled out for attention is the work of Mark Poster, who refers to Adorno's 'revulsion' for popular culture'.[20] The litany against Adorno has it that he is motivated by a 'disgust for the common',[21] sees no worth in the products of mass media, and sees them as homogenising rather than as potentially democratic (I am paraphrasing here). This is to give 'short shrift' to Adorno, as McQuire notes:

> Even in such a pessimistic text as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer are less monolithic in their analysis than Poster suggests. While frequently scathing towards popular culture, they nevertheless grant the culture industry a positive role as the dialectical corrective of 'serious art'. What stalls the dialectic is neither the mass nature nor the technological mediation of the culture industry, but its *gentrification* … One might well dispute their analysis, but this should not mean simply ignoring their attempt to *relate* these different domains, instead of declaring an absolute preference for one over the other.[22]

Poster fails to understand, McQuire argues, the full significance of his own citation of Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of 'the twin scourges of the twentieth century': the culture industry and fascism[23]—or in McQuire's gloss, of 'Hollywood and Hitler'—not that Hollywood was fascist, but rather that it is a mistake to think that fascism was 'simply an exception to the political culture and the political rationality of modernity'.[24] Such a discussion plays out across the all too easy acceptance of a strict opposition and incompatibility between democracy and fascism, and leads to serious errors 'when relating social and political transformations to transformations in technologies of representation and

communication'.[25] The standard reference here is to Hitler's saying that the National Socialists would never have conquered Germany in 1933 without the loudspeaker. Interestingly, Adorno and Horkheimer note that it was by disseminating certain buzzwords like, say, 'blitzkrieg' that the power of this loudspeaker was brought to people's attention on both sides: they add, 'The blind and rapidly spreading repetition of words with special designations links advertising with the totalitarian watchword.'[26] The point here is that debate about technological change and the music industry's homogenising effects are not simply consequences of cassette availability, of hardware and software, but parameters that need to be placed in political context.

There are reasons to be less sympathetic where Adorno gets denunciative of Jazz as a 'cult of the machine' which 'necessarily implies a renunciation of one's own human feelings and at the same time a fetishism of the machine such that its instrumental character becomes obscured thereby'.[27] But what is denounced here is not the machine *per se*, but the subjugation of human feeling to instrumental ends. There are, conceivably, other possible instrumental uses for these machines, but it is the domination of the commodity system of the culture industry that is prominent here. Adorno is not denouncing machines or culture, but rather, capitalist production—Poster conflates these.

This conflation is not only a fault of apolitical postmodernists. Reception of Adorno is skewed on all sides, and seems to exact a damning punishment for the presumption of calling entertainment and commodity desire to account—even those arbiters of critical theory fashion who should have been comrades appear keen to dissuade close attention to the specificity of his critique. Jurgen Habermas warns that Adorno and Horkheimer were too Nietzschean,[28] translators such as Ashton elide Adorno's Marxism and references to communist co-thinkers from the English version of his *Negative Dialectic* (reading 'exchange system' as 'barter' and turning Adorno's rival Karl Korsch into something of a non-person), and even Frederik Jameson, in his study of Adorno called *Late Marxism*, wants to reconstruct him as an avatar for postmodern times.[29]

By contrast, Robert Young points out that Adorno's understanding of the relation of high art to popular culture is more complicated. Both, as Adorno writes, coexist in a dialectic, both

> bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change … both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up. It would be romantic to sacrifice one to the other.[30]

It may also be a kind of idealism to think that the adding together of these two, plus the removal of the stigmata of capitalism, would bring 'freedom', but as with Lukács' notion of free creativity, it allows an opening for evaluations of cultural production in terms of a movement away from the reification and alienation of human production under capitalism, towards liberation. What cultural life would be like after the abolition of the market cannot be specified in advance, but unlike most discussion of culture, which operates an impossible relativism, here is a perspective that gives at least some criteria for making judgements of the avowed 'cultural politics' and egalitarian popular intent that lie behind the idea of Womad as global musical celebration.

So it is possible to ask in a new way (in old Adorno's way) what is the political achievement of a Womad cultural politics that sees people like Nusrat Fatah Ali Khan and Bally Sagoo collaborating on 'crossover' production for the Asian and Western market to a degree of success that attracts the attention of music industry majors like Sony?[31] Much of this is attributable to the visibility of these artists provided by the commercial arm of Womad. Is this a part of a dialectical creation of a space for something 'liberatory' that may escape the dominance of commodity fetish forms? There are those who would valorise the success of Bally Sagoo as the creation of an Asian presence or 'space' within mainstream public culture. Here Sagoo's music itself takes on a fetish character—it offers an abstract or spectacular negation of mainstream music and its racially marked exclusions, but it does so through the capital market itself.

While it is still possible to imagine the oppositional use of certain commodities—and the illegal festivals of the anti-Criminal-Justice-Act campaign offer an example—the practical and material negation of the social relations of capitalism requires more than this. Sagoo's 'Asian space' is a space wholly within the commodity system and is not in any way a dysfunction or disruption of that system. Such dysfunctions there may be, and the promotion of Asian underground Junglist and 'original nutter' UK Apache may be an example of a performer less easily accommodated within the music industry machine, but this too is insufficient challenge. The potential for any oppositional politics seems wholly curtailed under the auspices of Columbia, even though the contract signed with Sagoo included clauses that, according to the artist, guaranteed against any compromise on 'Asian' content. This ghettoisation of purity and authenticity serves only to corral the 'ethnically' marked performer yet again. The *double entendre*, wherein space claimed for cultural expression becomes a constricted and restrained space within a wider system, is the recurrent theme of cooption.

Hybridity talk

In this context it is instructive to look towards what contemporary commentators might make of it all. 'Hybridity', 'diaspora' and 'postcoloniality' are now fashionable and even marketable terms. The authors who deploy them as key concepts have become the institutionalised social theory equivalent of household names (and like household names they are marketed and have a brand recognition that is an advertiser's dream). In many ways they have broken new ground and forced reconfigurations and reappraisals that have enlivened and irrevocably transformed academic debate. Yet at the same time the transformations introduced seem also to have left the system intact. The point of taking a critical stance towards the deployment of these terms is not to insist upon true historical antecedents or debates about strict reference that would, for example, trace the term 'diaspora' back to Jewish, Armenian, Greek, Indian, Chinese, African or even Black Atlantic units. The point is to question how these terms gain contemporary currency in the universities, academies, disciplines, history, publishing, political and social forums where things seem to carry on as if by remote control. Although we see a championing of experimentation, creative collage,

and multiple identities, it could be argued that the new contexts remain conventional: the same routines rehearsed, and well-known tunes replayed—which is to say that the radical critiques signified by these celebrated names soon turn oxymoronically into 'new conventions' of scholarship and our valorisation of these critiques sometimes comes to nullify critical thinking itself. The same old record.

Or, perhaps more confusing yet, the celebration of hybrid cultural activity promotes a seemingly rampant and chaotic mode of creativity. This in itself would be no problem if it did not also allow an abdication. In the context of a valorisation of mix, creole, mulatto and mongrel emergence (these are not *quite* the same things), it sometimes happens that a lesser place is accorded to intentional and targeted forms of politicised cultural production, ignoring both resistance to specific structural and institutional constraints and the almost inevitable hegemonic incorporation of random creativity through diffusion and dispersal of difference and its marketability. In this context the *political* work of a band like Fun^Da^Mental (who are regulars at Womad events) or their label-mates Asian Dub Foundation, can be obscured by a focus on the hybrid nature of their productions. Yet, hybridity talk in favour of wild creativity and transnational, interracial, intercultural, hybrid mix could become interesting when conjoined to a political programme of the kind that Asian Dub Foundation produce (this is discussed below).

For pseudo-progressive, conservative (multiculturalist) forces, the convenience of this moment is clearly the fun and creativity, even radical cool, of fusion forms. What most often seems to be taken from the critical discourse of hybridity and diaspora are those aspects that repackage and reinscribe difference, juxtaposed exotica (hybrid as exotically mixed) and otherness as marketable categories. This is the appeal of someone like Apache Indian. Interestingly, then, hegemony, despite its homogenising cultural reach, now accommodates (circumscribed and carefully marketed) cultural differences. Difference within the system is the condition and stimulus of the market—and this necessarily comes with an illusion of equality, of many differences, and—in the bastardised versions of chaos politics which result, the image is of 'crossed' cultural forms merely competing for a fair share. Among things that are forgotten here is that it is often embourgeoised groups that can avail themselves even of the space to articulate a demand to go to market. In this respect, hybridity talk might also be suspected of a collusion with state policy-making in that one of the things it can sometimes be is a call for access—a recognition that certain otherwise marginal, overlooked or previously excluded activities are now creative cultural practices of merit enough to also attract a small share of Arts Council funding, state subsidy, commercial acclaim and critical attention. It is Bally Sagoo who suggests that the day that a Hindi language song gets to number one in the mainstream charts will be the day Asian music arrives.[32]

Hybridity talk, creole and so on seem to imply a bogus notion of the prior and the pure—pre-hybrid cultures. This is a consequence that is inadequately solved by the insistence that all cultures are hybrid, since this is well and good in theory but is not the case in the face of absolutist and essentialist groupings and ideologies. Common parlance assigns hybrid cultural production to the—usually

FIGURE 1
Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Photographer Sue Belk, courtesy Real World.

ethnic—margin, thus implying a wishful vision of future integration into a supposedly homogeneous West. For too many, South Asia remains a site of mystery, aroma, colour and exotica, even when it appears in the midst of Britain. In highlighting such themes, hybridity talk obscures the aporias of official multicultural policies, and through inaction, in effect, alibis the overpolicing of inner-urban Britain, excessive and racist immigration control and the maintenance of white privilege in education, the workplace and the public sphere.

Stuart Hall identifies what he calls 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject', recognising that a politics of representation has opened up an important, and ongoing, debate. If I read his argument correctly, his most crucial point, and the source of my troubles with it, declares, 'What is at issue here is the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category "black"; that is, the recognition that "black" is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category.'[33] It seems to me that this point is as important as it is banal. Was this really something that was not recognised by all except the most trenchant dogmatic participants in political struggle? In any case, what now needs to be debated is whether or not this recognition of the *constructed*-ness of the category 'black' and its political importance is any less constructed than any other categories, and if so, what it means to become less 'innocent' and 'essentialist'. What sort of politics flow from this?—as Hall also asks.

The recognition of diversity that Homi Bhabha has denounced as the relativis-

tic tolerance of exoticising multiculturalism is not that far away here[34]—it could certainly slide into play in the hands of some commentators who can see a gain in such usages of anti-essentialism. Further, the slippage from a critique of an innocent homogenising politics (how innocent actually is this politics—tempered as it was, or is, in a common experience of racism?) to a further essentialising refraction is a real possibility. Sanjay Sharma argues that political identification with the category 'black' need not mean that being different, or Asian, or Afro-Caribbean, or woman, working class or whatever is incompatible with such a black politics.[35] Nor need the politics of 'black' dissolve on recognition that not all black people are the same. It is, as Hall notes, still no easier to 'build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible'. Yet the slippage that would make this task more difficult would be one that extrapolated negatively from premature declarations of 'the end of the essential black subject',[36] taken to mean the end of any black subject position in politics. This latter need not dissolve so fast.

Hall notes that 'some sectors of the mobile (and mobile-phoned) black youth' have taken advantage of Thatcherism and the Enterprise Culture of 1990s Britain, while 'a particular variant of black cultural politics' which had to do with campaigning, representations and media 'has had its cutting edge blunted in the 1990s'. This rightward shift, which goes along with the general trend of much cultural 'politics' in Western nations, corresponds to the one aspect of multiculturalism that Hall would applaud: 'the racial and ethnic pluralisation of British culture and social life'. This process is 'going on, unevenly, everywhere' and through television and other media the 'unwelcome message of cultural hybridisation' is being brought into 'the domestic sanctuaries of British living rooms'. The same process can also be seen going on in youth culture, where 'black street styles are the cutting edge of the generational style wars'.[37]

Hall says that 'black popular culture of the 1990s is more internally differen-tiated, by locality, neighbourhood, generation, ethnic background, cultural tra-dition, political outlook, class gradation, gender and sexuality than [older] models allow. It is far less "collectivist" in spirit', and there can be no doubt that popular culture can be characterised in this way. But when he refers to those many people who 'are still trying to capture its [the dark side of black popular culture] contradictory diversity within older cultural models, honed mainly in the 1970s',[38] the suggestion that the black politics of the 1970s is superseded does not escape his declaration that he is not trying to periodise. Diversity is now recognised, and older models were inadequate. But surely this does not necess-arily mean abandonment of any 'collectivist' spirit, since one can retain this and still be differentiated, by locality, neighbourhood, generation, ethnic background, cultural tradition, class gradation, gender and sexuality—as if it were ever any different in the 1970s. To imply that the 1970s were a time marked by only a collectivist black anti-racism would seem to underplay the political and cultural currents that enabled these differentiations to come to notice in the first place.

Gayatri Spivak says that a critique of hybridity is relevant at the present moment because that which hybridity talk was useful for (for example, fighting the cultural absolutisms of racism in the First World) now tends to inhibit other, also necessary struggles demarcated differently. She suggests that as hybridity

implies at its logical extension the hybridity of everything, this means also that contradictions and struggles that were in a certain way prior to those raised around the term still require urgent attention—imperialism, capitalism, exploitation, oppression. She argues that a negative word from socio-biology, hollowed out and reclaimed, is politically useful as a position from which to question the racism of the culturally dominant. But it is 'troublesome since it assumes there would be something that was not hybrid, or if you were to say that hybridity is everywhere, irreducible, then all of the old problems apply'.[39]

Hybridity talk is certainly useful in bringing to attention the ways in which cultural constructions can maintain exclusions. But why talk hybridity now rather than a more explicitly radical language? Another way to state this more bluntly is to ask why some 'postcolonial' discursive efforts seem to do very well at avoiding any discussion of Marxism, or indeed can even be considered an elaborate displacement, a way of keeping Marx out of the academy at a time when a materialist method has been never more relevant. The ways in which hybridity displaces other languages and other ways of seeing and organising deserve attention. Young's work suggests that something could be said for taking the meanings of hybridity away from the previous century's 'miscegenation' discourses, but this political project seems too often to have given way to an analysis of textual construction. As with Hall, a pro-hybridity stance does not seem to me to offer any guarantees of a revolutionary project, since the place for the articulation of hybridity is also a space that already seems all too easily articulated with the market. Hybridity and difference sell; the market remains intact.

My charge against hybridity is thus that it is a rhetorical cul-de-sac which trivialises black political activity (organisational achievements, history, etc.) in the UK over the past 25 years, diverting attention from the urgency of anti-racist politics in favour of middle-class conservative success stories in the Thatcher-with-a-*bindi*-spot mould. What this means is that rather than continue to fight for solidarity among anti-racists and anti-imperialists, building upon the histories of those struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, the fashion for hybridity theory takes centre stage. Theorising hybridity becomes, in some cases, an excuse for ignoring sharp organisational questions, enabling a passive and comfortable—if linguistically sophisticated—intellectual quietism.

Despite this, some might have thought that a plausible approach would have attempted to make sense of phenomena like World Music, Womad and the new Asian dance musics via an operationalisation of the term 'hybridity' and hybrid cultural production. To ask if hybridity is helpful in elaborating explanations of World or South Asian musics at the same time would offer a chance to make an evaluation of this recently rehabilitated theoretical construct. However, hybridity is inadequate to a description, let alone an explanation, of these musics, and indeed alibis bad examples in a rerun of cultural relativist unities.

Abandoning the operation of hybridity, it would be a more practical political choice to begin with the terms that practitioners, and their audiences, deploy themselves in explanation of what they are doing. Of course, there are obvious problems with this—for example the way audiences, and critics, tend to internalise the commentaries provided by practitioners and offered in the music

press by A&R reps and artists. Abandoning the theoretical construct of hybridity or diaspora or whatever would never guarantee that the analyst is also without baggage or dependencies. The point here is to commit to this political choice. Thus, beginning with the circumstances and struggle of the people involved at least circumvents any notion that an adequate politics can emerge from having the correct 'theory', as some seem to believe.

Technology and hybridity

As with the infrastructural facilitation of World Music festivalism like Womad, one of the lines of argument running through the works of Gilroy, Hall and Bhabha attributes significance to the role of technology in the production of hybrid, postcolonial, diasporic consciousness. One way to get more specific about these matters would be to examine critically the recent work of the writer who is, perhaps, the most prominent purveyor of hybridity talk, Paul Gilroy. Gilroy notes that 'the musical components of Hip-hop are a hybrid form nurtured by the social relations of the South Bronx where Jamaican sound system culture was transplanted during the 1970s', and placed in this local setting in 'conjunction with specific technological innovations'. Through this it was able to 'flaunt and glory in its own malleability' successfully enough to become 'transnational in character'. At the same time it came to be 'interpreted as an expression of some authentic African-American essence' sprung 'intact from the entrails of the blues'. Questioning the assertive nationalism that seems to close down diasporic cultural forms leads Gilroy to see 'embarrassing' similarities in the practice of an essentialist black elite whose racial politics shares something with the 'pseudo-precise, culturalist equations' of the racist right.[40] The employment of Hip Hop as symbol of racial authenticity fits a long tradition that uses music in such a register—that black people have rhythm is a stereotype found at both ends of the political score.

For Gilroy, an investigation of the 'cultural absolutism' and essentialism that attends controversies over the origins of Hip Hop has to proceed through examination of the ways exclusivist notions of race, ethnicity and culture operate. What he appears to give less prominence to in his evaluation of Hip Hop and black cultural histories, but which underlies much of the *Black Atlantic* argument, is a promise to reveal the transnational and technological coordinates within which these histories and identities are now played out. At the end of the book it is the idea of 'global circulation through the most sophisticated means that technological postmodernity can furnish' which exercises his thoughts. More work would be required here, as the promise of the technological remains unfulfilled: hybrids, translations and transnationals do not all circulate in an equivalence or at the same speeds. While Gilroy might well note that 'transnational entertainment corporations unwittingly supply a vehicle for circulating these [radical black, heterogeneous, regenerative, etc.] ideas in the form of black popular music',[41] it is also the case that the specific technological processes are left somewhat apart from the more literary and folksy interests and concerns of the book. An excellent formulation summarises work which is yet to be done:

> These means of distribution are capable of dissolving distance and creating new and unpredictable forms of identification and cultural affinity between groups that dwell far apart. The transformation of cultural space and the subordination of distance are only two factors that contribute to a parallel change in the significance of appeals to tradition, time and history.[42]

These two factors—culture and distance—are crucially important, although Gilroy carries a strong nostalgia for the face-to-face relations of the local community and the dance-hall scene (his continued valorisation of call and response restricted to this context rather than followed into technological mediations would count as evidence). It is not clear why he claims that the 'emergent culture of the black image offers no comparable experience of performance with which to focus the pivotal ethical relationship between performer and crowd, participant and community'.[43] This means that journals like *Black Film Bulletin*, and even Gilroy's own books, as well as numerous documentary, discursive and other mobile mediating forms, are rendered invisible or transparent as constituent parts of identity formation (although they are all possibly more suited to 'ethical' relations than loud, smoke-filled music clubs and such, however fun).

Sidestepping the more mediatised varieties of cultural production that also form a community, Gilroy presents the performer dissolving into the crowd as his favoured example. It is the antiphonal, the communicative, the storyteller role of the musician and active listening that is characteristic and ubiquitous in the cultures of the African diaspora and which, he suggests, may make up the minimal coordinates of what should perhaps be reserved for the term 'tradition', in that these are what makes diaspora conversations possible. He says the idea for much of the book *Black Atlantic* was conceived while 'watching and taking pleasure in the way that African-American and Caribbean singers would win over London crowds and dissolve the distance and difference that diaspora makes'.[44] It might be important to remember that these are not exclusively African pleasures—the translating dissolution of distance certainly has its Asian counterparts: Hussain Qawwals at Womad or at the Bradford Mela.[45]

When Gilroy does get around to mentioning Asian musicians, it is in terms that can be read as somewhat begrudging of Asian creativity and participation, though these cannot be ignored:

> In reinventing their own ethnicity, some of Britain's Asian settlers have also borrowed the sound system culture of the Caribbean and the soul and hip hop styles of black America, as well as techniques like mixing, scratching, and sampling as part of their invention of a new mode of cultural production and with an identity to match. The popularity of Apache Indian and Bally Sagoo's attempts to fuse Punjabi music and language with reggae music and raggamuffin style raised debates about the authenticity of these hybrid cultural forms to an unprecedented pitch.[46]

These words do carry a specific tone: reinvention, borrowed, invention, attempts, debates, authenticity, unprecedented … they are hedging words which would probably not be deployed to explain the same processes accompanying Junglist innovations in the UK, so why single out Asian cultural production in this way if not to dismiss it?

Yet Gilroy's politics are usually fine. He wants to 'invert the relationship between margin and centre' in a 'reconstructive intellectual labour' that examines black cultural history in a way that has 'a great bearing on ideas of what the West was and is today'.[47] Where such a project gets bogged down for me is in its aversion to any extended investigation of the new global tele-technological cultural conduits within a context of capitalism in crisis which recognises 'culture' over and over as hegemony and product. Cultural difference crossed with the new marketing configurations of another round of technological innovation only furthers the reconversion cycle of capitalist production in ways that could be more clearly spelled out. Gilroy continues to identify areas that would begin this critical work but he never delivers on the technology side.

This does not mean his work is not the most suggestive we have in the field, especially where he points to current debates about the relationship between politics and aesthetics or about science and domination, noting that 'few of these debates operate at the interface of science and aesthetics which is the required starting point of contemporary black cultural expression and the digital technology of its social dissemination and reproduction'.[48] But while I agree that this is an important point, keeping in mind Adorno's critique of the danger entailed in technological enhancement of the commodity system, I do not understand, then, how or why Gilroy immediately needs to differentiate himself from postmodernist textuality by means of what he calls an 'esoteric' interest in 'fleetingly experienced' black musical forms—most often signalled in his references again to 'antiphony (call and response)'.[49] The textuality he avoids iscertainly well worth avoiding, but then I think it is through this esoterica that the
project of comprehending tele-technological politics and the science/aesthetics nexus is also jettisoned. The question remains:

> How are we to think critically about artistic products and aesthetic codes which, though they may be traceable back to one distinct location, have been changed either by the passage of time or by their displacement, relocation, or dissemination through networks of communication and cultural exchange?[50]

Surely, it is defeatist to think that technological mediation poses a threat to those longstanding, nurturing alternative black public spheres; and in a context where both the ghettoisation of black cultural production and its extension into all areas of popular culture via the music industry seem stronger than ever, this nostalgia appears to misconstrue what is going on. What is important is to analyse and evaluate the flows of displacement, dissemination, communication, and the hierarchies and exclusions maintained within the political coordinates of diasporic engagement with digital capitalism.

It could be suggested that an insistence on cultural particularities like the 'democratic moment enshrined in the practice of antiphony',[51] the 'oral character of the cultural settings in which diaspora musics have developed', 'traditions of performance',[52] and the dance-hall scene entails an anti-absolutism that produces new essences only by default and reaction. Gilroy takes pains to point out that he does not want to present the pre-modern as the anti-modern, nor to 'recover

hermetically sealed and culturally absolute racial traditions'. He is for the 'legitimate value of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture' which 'keep the unstable, profane categories of black political culture open',[53] in preference to a reifying cultural or ethnic absolutism that must be rejected. He wants to evaluate not so much the 'formal attributes of these syncretic expressive cultures', but rather the problem of how critical '(anti)aesthetic judgements on them can be made' and 'the place of ethnicity and authenticity within these judgements'.[54] Authenticity, however, seems already marked out on a dance-hall floor that has stronger roots in Africa and Jamaica than in the experiences of black politics in the UK. In this context, his comments on antiphony as a shrine to 'new, non-dominating social relationships'[55] tend towards a celebration of Africo-centric particularity and ignores other cultural possibilities.

Gilroy's reluctance to work with a notion of 'black' that includes Asian politics in Britain raises difficulties. Examining what he identifies as a 'retreat from a politically constructed notion of racial solidarity' in the context of the tele-technological reach of certain intellectual vanguards might indeed produce a different picture. The alleged 'retreat' asserts a 'compensatory recovery of narrowly ethnic culture and identity'[56] and is most clearly visible for Gilroy in the break-up of the unity of the 'commonality' of racial subordination in the UK.[57] For Gilroy this legacy has dissolved as constituent elements of the previously singularly configured peoples of African, Caribbean and Asian descent 'rejected' the 'unifying notion of an open blackness' in favour of 'more particularistic conceptions of cultural difference'.[58] In another work he places this dissolution under the signs of hybridity and Bhangra when he notes that 'there are now important signs that … processes of cultural and linguistic syncretism are beginning to take in "Asian" culture too'. Setting up a hierarchy and history of hybridities he prioritises Caribbean and African-American hybridity as 'no longer the exclusive raw material for cultural experimentation and synthesis', and to this prior, and by implication, original and authentic mixing he announces the emergence of Bhangra, which fuses 'traditional Punjabi and Bengali music with Hip-hop, Soul and House'. This description of Bhangra could be contested (it having emerged well before anyone started talking about House, concurrently with Hip Hop, and in a complicated relationship with Soul) but it is in the capacity of these new styles to 'circulate a new sense of what it means to be British' that Gilroy finds 'these latest hybrid forms will contribute … and take their place'.[59]

In 'a system of global communication constituted by flows',[60] the list of tele-technological coordinates in this hybrid, diasporic, globalised and postcolonial world seems often to stand in the place of analysis—but what does repetition of this mantra add? Much gee-whiz apocalyptic tone, but little more than lists. This is not more evident than in, for example, James Clifford's surveying of 'diaspora' that recites, on almost every page: the importance of 'a discourse that is travelling or hybridising in new global conditions'. This hybridisation travels across 'transnational connections'; telephone circuits; 'technologies of transport, communication, and labour migration; 'Airplanes, telephones, tape cassettes, camcorders'; 'business circuits and travel trajectories'; and then, with Clifford

specifically reading Gilroy—'Gilroy is preoccupied with ships, phonograph records, sound systems, and all technologies that cross'—it goes on, and so on right up to the very last line of the article, where 'global technologies' have still not been unpacked beyond this listing.[61]

The question to be asked is whether or not we are in a position to describe and evaluate, not just list, some of these global technological processes? The telematic mantra—of information flow, new media, travelling culture and the internet—is construed as a metonymic list that synecdochically signals both progress and change. Theorists of telematics repeatedly tell us that an intensification, abstraction and speeding up of capitalism, financial flows, media and so on are the defining characteristics of the current period. Is there really this intensification? A speeding up? How, in the very late twentieth century, might the relative and abstract speeds of capitalism be evaluated? (Can there be an intensification of abstraction?) There is much work to be done to evaluate the ways tele-technological flows have, or have not, reconfigured capitalist production, cultural or otherwise. Is capitalism hybrid now? My suspicion is that a more useful line of research would examine rather an intensification of the rate of exploitation under capitalism now reaching what Marx called the stage of the real subsumption, or what Adorno called the 'collectivisation of the world'.[62] Would it not be better to attempt to understand this speeding capitalism not simply, and mystically, as a quickening, but as a change in the relations of production appropriate to a given stage of technological development of the forces of production and the logistics of exchange?

Musical alliances

Does hybridity suggest a political programme? Why is it that the term has achieved such visibility if not its very tameness? Is crossover a marketing niche?

ASIAN DUB FOUNDATION
FIGURE 2
Asian Dub Foundation. Courtesy ADF.

Does participation in Womad, or on MTV, entail a sell-out, a betrayal of community and roots, a dalliance with destruction? Aren't cultural producers both sometimes far more politically conservative and market oriented than hybridity talk would admit? And aren't some cultural activists far more politically focused, and perhaps even more theoretically astute? What would a radical hybridity look like?

This final section presents a discussion of the early work of the London Junglist Punk outfit Asian Dub Foundation (ADF) as an example suggesting a way beyond the limits of hybridity talk as the code for understandings of 'ethnic' popular culture performances. The question to ask here might be something like: does the work of ADF act only as a claim for or defence of a 'cultural' space—in the sense that Gilroy discusses, following Castells, seeing social movements as fragile resistances to domination, not political programmes? Or is there something in their work which builds alliances across the lines marked out by the critiques of essentialism and absolutism and which goes beyond hybrid, diasporic, 'World Music' politics towards a more 'stable' (Gilroy's term) transnational anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and, therefore, anti-racist politics? I think so. The task is to untangle this politics not only from hybridity talk, but also to explicate this politics in the context of global tele-technological flows.

Questions about the 'hybrid' conditions of production and dissemination/discussion of Asian musics need to interrogate the media and the forums in which the 'message' of Asian music such as that of Bally Sagoo, Apache Indian and ADF is received: video, television, international satellite, technologies of communication, and the ways in which scholarly interest in these technologies rarely moves beyond safe questions about representation. The globalised commercialisation of ethnicity at Womad is an important issue. Is it *post*colonial? The album, video, music recordings, performances and workshops of ADF escape any easy recuperation into 'World Music', hybrid or fusion 'cultural' work, or syncretic post-olonial aesthetics by way of a 'transgressive' assertion of political difference.

In a short video documentary, Smita Malde has shown how ADF emerged from a music technology community workshop in East London. ADF describe their music as neither ethnic, exotic or eclectic (the only E they use is electric—'Jericho') but, rather, a vehicle for commentary. They are closely involved with anti-racist and self-defence campaigning, especially in East London, and draw on a long tradition of Bengali musical production reaching back to the famous Joi Bangla, Joi, Joi Karma formations of the late 1980s and early 1990s (manifest in diverse projects such as music for computer games and anti-Desert-Storm/Gulf-War agitations). ADF's inner urban 'dub' consciousness and community activism come together in brilliant tunes and sharp lyric lines all coded around an agitation politics informed by experience and understanding of the multiple oppressions of racism, colonialism and capitalism. They comment on the South Asian presence in Britain, 'We're only here 'cos you were there. Here in England, A global village. Consequences of your global pillage' ('Debris', *Facts and Fictions*, 1995).

But ADF is not only about 'conscious lyrics' ('Tu meri', *Facts and Fictions*), nor only 'Strong culture', another track title; their work extends to a political

programme that asserts the need for new unities and alliances. ADF is visibly and intentionally 'Asian' in identification *and* is involved in black political groupings (in ways that might be considered 'out of date' by those who want to write obituaries for black politics). While a focus on hybridity might stop at noting that their first significant 'hit release', 'Rebel warrior', contains multiple references to, variously, Hindi, Islam, community and the West, the message extends beyond mere multiplicity. The video for the track, filmed in London, featured schoolyard and campaign scenes that underline an upfront political intent: they point out that confrontation with racist groups cannot be shirked, and requires forces combined to fight. The track is inspired, and celebrates in its chorus, the words of Nizrul Islam's 'Bidrohi', but moves from the Ami Bidrohi of the individual faced with oppression, fighting oppression ('I am the Rebel Warrior'), to combined resistance and a message for all members of the community ('A radical fusion ... Unity'):

> Repetitive Beats
> beating against your skull
> I'll be striking you down
> to the sound of the war drum
> The doum!
> The doum of the dohl
> taking its toll
> ...
> I am the Rebel Warrior
> I have risen alone
> With my head held high
> I will only rest
> When the cries of the oppressed
> No longer reach the sky
> When the sound of the sword of the oppressor
> No longer rings in battle
> Hear my warcry!
>
> A radical Fusion
> Strange alliance
> The siren and the flute in unison
> 'Cos that's part of my mission
> To break down division
> Mental compartments
> Psychological prisons
>
> I'll be sowing the seeds of community
> Accommodating every colour
> every need
> So listen to my message
> And heed my warning
> Ami Bidrohi! Ami Bidrohi!
> Yes the unity of the Hindu and the Muslim
> Will end your tyranny
> Ami Bidrohi!
> ('Rebel warrior', *Facts and Fictions*, Nation Records, 1995)

In this fusion, strange alliance, unity—this combination of the flute and the siren—there is something that would be misrecognised and diminished if called hybrid. Hybridity itself stops short of political action, and ADF are well aware of the dangers of such condensations imposed by academic and mainstream categorisations. Yet they recognise the importance of inserting this message into the media flows of MTV, Star TV, pop shows and talk back. Albeit with a cynicism towards the commercial interests of the industry (and its capacity to cannibalise talent), they want to redraw an Asian public culture along explicitly political lines, and in the interests of promoting alliances across differences. This suspicion of the media does not mean cowering before its institutional power, nor merely accepting a proffered space. A similar suspicion of other institution-ally authorised makeovers of 'Asian culture' inspires an assertive cultural politics. In another track from *Facts and Fictions*, their most catchy line references just this liberal 'mental prison' that conventional ethnomusicologies, anthro-gazing and social surveillance disciplines operate. In presenting the 'patrons of culture' with 'ethnic' material, they then go further with militant active demands, and they warn the liberals:

> An Asian background
> That's what's reflected
> But this militant vibe
> Ain't what you expected
> With your liberal minds
> You patronise our culture
> Scanning the surface like vultures
> With your tourist mentality
> We're still the natives
> You're multicultural
> But we're anti-racist.
>
> We ain't ethnic, exotic or eclectic ...
> ('Jericho', *Facts and Fictions*, Nation Records, 1995)

Any suggestion that academic work and the constructs it employs are part and parcel of a wider context which includes exploitation, oppression, racism and cultural chauvinism will not be considered new. Multiple differences are catered for (or are reduced to catering at the food stalls of the Womad festival). The danger here is that hybridity and diversity become merely calls for access to the market. Diaspora and transnationalism facilitate circulation and regulation of a global, yet still hierarchical, economy.

Yet within any subsumption of culture into capitalism, the production of escape clauses, nooks and crannies of dissimulation, diversions and dysfunctions offer momentary respites which we should hope to extend, elaborate, valorise—even though so much of this is inevitably absorbed and folded within the factorium (which indeed needs resistances as a kind of motor force). There is in this observation something that goes further than the tainted creativities of hybrid culture studies. Unfixed identities are political; subversion is temporary, alliances are fluid. By new lines of alliance we might refer to those demarcations usually accepted and approved but which might be usefully transgressed—the

lines that divide music and politics, the white left and Asian political groups (ADF do this), the lines between Bhangra and post-Bhangra, or between Bhangra and Hip Hop, between diaspora and local politics, between technology and tradition, between hybridity and the same. All these are the context in which the politics of 'Rebel warrior' and 'Jericho' is part of a resistant social formation generating alliances that remake and renew the possibilities for left political practice today and (perhaps) grounding differences and knowledges in a political struggle that fosters those lines of escape, new assemblages, wrex mikes, so that these crossed spaces of hybridity and diaspora are open to a politicisation that could blow the complacency of social theory away.

To the extent that Bhangra, Jungle, Womad, Rave, and even House and Techno in clubs, and very, very, maybe the radical aspects of Rock 'n' Roll, are moments of collective subjectivity resistant or unavailable to commercialisation (and there is nearly always an element, to differing degrees, in each of these forms), then these practices can be valorised as counter-hegemonic. Subsequently these moments suffer the concurrence of entrepreneurialism, industrialisation, bandwagonism, collaboration, opportunism. And the reassertion of hegemonic order is hardly impeded by the almost complete failure on the part of critics and scholars to provide the sort of partisan analysis and vigilance against recuperation to commercialised impoverishment (more or less aided by media filtering and promotion, repressive force, industry priorities and narrow horizons). This is what Adorno called the 'admonitions to be happy voiced in concert by the scientifically epicurean sanatorium-director and the highly-strung propaganda chiefs of the entertainment industry'.[63]

In the end it is worth trying to return to Adorno as a way to reconnect capital, hybridity, culture and resistance. Such a return might provide the basis for understanding the cultural politics of Hip Hop and the New Asian dance music in the context of the tele-technological formations that Gilroy identifies as important but cannot describe. The key here would be to look at the ways the technological facilitates commodification of culture, and look also to those who may be capable of offering an oppositional politics to this. A critique of standardisation, as Adorno presented it fifty years ago, would need to take into account differential production processes and short product runs, just-in-time delivery systems, and niche marketing strategies so that the standardisation of everything that Adorno feared could now be recast in terms of difference and specialisation. Adorno suggests that 'the cult of the new' is 'a rebellion against the fact that there is no longer anything new',[64] since everything is geared towards commodity production.

In a similarly structured 'new' transformation in the sphere of culture, hybridity circulates via tele-technological means (MTV etc.) carrying the markers of aesthetics and authenticity to forums like Womad, while leaving politics and political differences in the local inner urban (subcontracting?) enclaves. The ways Womad sanitises difference into so many varied examples of a World Music culture that is everywhere the same fits the scenario Adorno described in the 1950s, where he linked explicitly work practices, and work free-time, to the characteristics of commodity culture. Adorno recognises that the culture industry has 'become total—itself a phenomenon of the eversame, from which it promises

temporarily to divert people', but this diversion needs to be seen in the context of 'a system where full employment itself has become the ideal' so that 'free time is nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour'.[65] Art, for example, becomes only 'one moment of material production',[66] so is abolished along with conflict, though Adorno suggests that a 'secret omnipresence' of resistance can still be found in the 'romantic deception' of imagining culture outside production. The secret task revealed here would then be to fight for a unity of differences which refuses the show window limits of cultural authenticity in such hybrid spaces as Womad, since these limits are incompatible with expression of political differences except insofar as these limits are transgressed, and to fight for the expression, and organisational extension, of unity within difference in opposition to capital, *even* in the forums of Womad and telematically transmitted culture.

This current from Adorno might correspond to those thoughts on the constitution of ADF (and other Asian Hip Hop bands like Fun^Da^Mental and Hustlers HC) as new assemblages, formations, alliances—or in a neatly musical metaphor—a new 'composition' of forces refusing commodification and working towards a project of social transformation adequate to the contest with capitalism at this time. The task that remains is to look at how the tele-technological resources used by contemporary activists work; to look to the ways these uses constitute a resistance/refusal in the Adorno sense (rather than simply conceding the 'unwitting' technological facillitation of cultural–political transmission—Gilroy); and to pursue the activist politics of these denizens of 'transl-Asia',[67] not in order to find happy happy world hybrid forms, but to work for that project of redistributive justice advocated by Old Beardo (Marx) … (Of course this is just the soundtrack, which is insufficient in itself. Let's dance.)

The duty of the dialectician, as set out here, implies some organisational questions—how an organisational project alongside Adorno would give this critique some kind of grounding—otherwise this is just another free-floating intellectual tarot game ready to be reabsorbed—like our concepts of hybridity, postcolonial and diaspora—back into the culture industry, productive circuits of capitalist culture (studies), Womad stalls, and so on …

In 1967 Adorno wrote that, 'Modern bourgeois cultural criticism … finds a source of comfort in the divorce between "high" and "popular" culture, art and entertainment, knowledge and non-committal *Weltanschauung.*' This view of the world seems very happy to identify differences and celebrate multiplicities, but does little in the way of organising political alliances across these differences. It is all well and good to theorise the diaspora, the postcolony and the hybrid; but where this is never interrupted by the necessity of political work, it remains a vote for the *status quo*. Adorno would name this as the worst of horrors, even in the hands of the best 'dialecticians' (tenured Marxists). To focus on hybridity, and culture, and aesthetic questions, while ignoring (or as an excuse for ignoring) the contextualising conditions in which these phenomena exist (commodity system, political relations, telematics) is to limit rather than extend our project: 'A dialectical theory which is uninterested in culture as a mere epiphenomenon, aids pseudo-culture to run rampant and collaborates in the reproduction of the evil.'[68]

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1983, p 34.

[2] Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, London, Routledge, 1991, p 88. See also Theodor Adorno, 'On popular music', in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, Simon Frith & Andrew Goodwin (eds), London, Routledge, 1990, pp 301–314.

[3] Theodore Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London, Verso, 1979 (1944), p 120.

[4] Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p 68.

[5] Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p 35.

[6] Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p 62.

[7] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London, Routledge, 1993, p 107.

[8] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p 99.

[9] David Hesmondhalgh notes a bevy of terms: radical global pop, Global Techno, Ethnic Techno, Ethno-trance, Tribal Dance, World House and World Dance Fusion, his preferred choice, to describe Transglobal Underground. David Hesmondhalgh, 'Nation Records', presentation at IAPSM, Glasgow conference, 1995.

[10] For an extended discussion of the Criminal Justice Act and the campaign against it, including the participation of various music personalities in activism during 1994 and 1995, see John Hutnyk 'Repetitive beatings or criminal justice?' in *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music*, Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk & Ashwani Sharma (eds), London, Zed Books, 1996.

[11] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, London, Routledge, 1987, p 171.

[12] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black*, p 171.

[13] L Garafalo, 'Culture versus commerce: the marketing of black popular music', *Public Culture*, 7(1),1994, p 286.

[14] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p 75.

[15] Roger Wallis & Krister Malm, 'Patterns of change' in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, Simon Frith & Andrew Goodwin (eds), London, Routledge, 1990 (1984), p 161.

[16] Wallis & Malm, 'Patterns of change', p 161.

[17] Simon Frith, personal communication.

[18] Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, pp 86–87.

[19] Scott McQuire, 'The go-for-broke game of history: the camera, the community and the scene of politics', *Arena Journal*, 4, 1995, p 203.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Mark Poster, 'A second media age?' *Arena Journal*, 3, 1994, p 63.

[22] McQuire, 'Go for broke', p 204.

[23] Poster, 'Second media age', p 57.

[24] McQuire, 'Go for broke', p 205.

[25] McQuire, 'Go for broke', p 205.

[26] Adorno & Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p 165.

[27] Theodor Adorno, 'On popular music', p 313.

[28] Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge Polity Press, 1987, p 120.

[29] Fredrik Jameson, *Late Marxism, Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*, London, Verso, 1990.

30 The quotation is from Adorno's letter to Benjamin, cited in Robert J C Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London, Routledge, 1995, p 30. The letter is published in Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Block, Berlholt Brecht and Georg Lucács *Aesthetics and Politics*, verso, London, 1977, p. 123.

31 Sony's subsidiary Columbia Records offered Sagoo a £1.2 million deal in 1994 only to end the contract in 1996 citing 'musical differences'—though industry rumour suggested that Sony were unhappy that South Asian youth in Britain continued to purchase the cheaper bootleg copies of Sagoo's album rather than pay the full high-street price. Oh dear. See Kalra & Hutnyk, this issue.

32 Shirin Housee & Mucktar Dar, 'Re-mixing identities: off the turntable', in *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music,* Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma.

33 Stuart Hall, *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London, Routledge, 1996, p 443. See also Stuart Hall, 'New ethnicities', *Black Film, British Cinema*, ICA Documents 7, London, ICA, 1989; Stuart Hall, 'Black and white television', in *Remote Control: Dilemmas of Black Intervention in British Film and TV*, June Givanni (ed), British Film Institute, 1995, pp 13–28.

34 Homi Bhabha, 'The commitment to theory', *New Formations*, 5, 1988, pp 5–23.

35 Sanjay Sharma, 'Noisy Asians, or Asian noise?', in *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music*, L Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma.

36 Hall, 'New ethnicities'.

37 Hall, 'Black and white television', pp 16–18.

38 Ibid, p 16.

39 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, speaking about the film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* at a seminar at Keele University, 1995. See her *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, New York, Routledge, 1993.

40 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp 33–34.

41 Ibid, p 194.

42 Ibid, p 195.

43 Ibid, p 203.

44 Ibid, pp 199–201.

45 The importance of South Asian modes of call and response, Boliyaan, Giddha and other forms, is discussed in Raminder Kaur & Virinder Kalra, 'New paths for South Asian identity and musical creativity', in, *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music*, Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma.

46 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p 82.

47 Ibid, p 45.

48 Ibid, p 77.

49 Ibid, p 78.

50 Ibid, p 80.

51 Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, London, Serpents Tail, p 138.

52 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p 75.

53 Ibid, p 223.

54 Ibid, p 75.

55 Gilroy, *Small Acts*, p 138.

56 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p 86.

57 For a contrary narrative see Sanjay Sharma & Shirin Housee, '"Too black, too strong": anti-racism and the making of political identities in Britain', in *Storming the Millenium: The Politics of Change*, Tim Jordan & Adam Lent (eds), London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1998.

58 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p 86.

59 Gilroy, *Small Acts*, pp 61–62.

60 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p 80.

61 James Clifford, 'Diasporas', in *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 1994, pp 305, 306, 309, 311, 316, 328. For a more detailed reading of Clifford's work see John Hutnyk 'Clifford's ethnographica', in *Critique of Anthropology*, 18(4), 1998.

62 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, London, Verso, 1974 (1951), p 139.

63 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p 38.

64 Ibid, p 235.

65 Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, pp 168–169.

66 Ibid, p 67.

67 Kaur & Kalra, 'New paths'.

68 Adorno, *Prisms*, pp 27–28.