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**Motti REGEV, *Pop-Rock Music: Aesthetic
Cosmopolitanism in Late Modernity***

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Motti Regev, *Pop-Rock Music: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in Late Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013.



Pop-rock music is an important book because it solves the long-standing problem of how to make sense of the global influence of Anglo-American rock. Popular music studies has generally been unwilling to accept cultural imperialism as an adequate model. While this may in part be due to its practitioners' belief in the music's oppositional role, it is more importantly a reflection of the fact that the music is precisely influential. Unlike the film industry, where American movies have dominated the box office in many markets around the world, rock'n'roll in its various forms has been taken up by musicians and made their own. The result

involves a global music context in which there are both widespread similarities and significant local variations. How do we account for this theoretically?

Motti Regev offers a persuasive alternative to cultural imperialism in the concept of "aesthetic cosmopolitanism." He acknowledges that *cosmopolitanism* has previously meant an "openness toward 'other' cultures [...] [as] a matter of individual inclination," but in late modernity it has become "a structural facet of national and ethnic cultures in general, or, at the very least, of major sectors within them. It is not a whim of curiosity, but an institutionalized constraint" (8). As should be clear from this quotation, Regev is not celebrating cultural hybridity but trying to theorize its conditions of possibility. The key notion here is what the author identifies as "the quest for status, participation, and parity in modern world culture" (10). What has happened is that markers of status (recognition and parity are elements of this) have increasingly become international rather than national or local. Consider the worldwide spread of shops selling luxury brands that are desired mainly because they are status symbols. As Regev shows, music's connection to status is more complicated because it involves not just conspicuous consumption but also creative expression. While status is always a matter of recognition, aesthetic cosmopolitanism would seem to be the result of artistic production by cultures previously unrecognized internationally. It is a product of "actors who aspire to participate as equals in what they perceive to be the cultural

frontiers of modernity" (11). Thus musicians, critics and listeners all find themselves within two fields of cultural production, one international and one national. This sophisticated treatment of status and its relation to aesthetics is unusual and much needed. One wishes that Regev had developed these ideas at greater length.

Regev offers copious instances of the effects of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in music ranging over numerous nations and their markets. While he quite rightly distinguishes the Western experience of "world music" from the broader phenomenon with which he is concerned, the existence of "world music" remains dependent upon it and is strong evidence in support of Regev's conception. In order to make his argument, Regev needs to point to specific musical elements or styles that are widely shared, including studio production, electric instruments and distinctive vocal techniques. Most readers will readily assent that these elements are derived from Anglo-American rock music and that they are indeed now to be found virtually everywhere.

Yet when Regev claims that these shared elements can be meaningfully used to define a heretofore-unrecognized super genre, "pop-rock music," I for one am not persuaded. While Regev's strength is applying a range of social theory to the problem of global popular music, his weakness seems to be the music itself. This is true not only in the sense that his treatment of music in formal terms is consistently cursory and superficial—perhaps understandable given the required range of reference—but also in the sense that he doesn't attend to the particular histories of different musics, either

in the England and U.S. on the one hand, or in the various other nations who have been influenced by Anglo-American music. In fact, he repeatedly dismisses popular music history as "mythologized," while seeming to accept a face value the national traditions and history that preceded aesthetic cosmopolitanism. As Hobsbawm and Ranger's collection (1983) detailed, mythologized history and invented tradition are co-extensive with the nation State itself.

Regev explains the neologism "pop-rock" by asserting the need not only to include a wide diversity of styles and musicians, from the Velvet Underground to the Archies, and Sonic Youth to Beyoncé, but also to exclude other styles traditionally included as popular music such as Broadway show tunes or Barbra Streisand. In English, the popular name for the hodgepodge of music Regev includes is "rock," and "pop" is used to name music that tends toward the character and attitude of popular music before rock's advent. In this sense, "rock" and "pop" are poles that define American popular music of the last half of the twentieth century. It is true that music critics and scholars have often tried to refine this usage, by, for example, periodizing "rock'n'roll" as the music of the 1950s and "rock" as the music of the 1960s and early 1970s. Regev seems to be trying to respond to an expected critique from this perspective, including the word "pop" in his new name so that he can't be accused of elevating bastardized or diluted forms to legitimate status. But it's not clear to me why he need get involved in this debate at all. His larger point about aesthetic cosmopolitanism does not depend on the existence of a single super genre, but merely on the widespread adoption of different musical ele-

Pop-Rock Music: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in Late Modernity

ments, performance styles, or production techniques derived from Anglo-American records. Moreover, by reducing all of the global music he discusses to a single category, he erases its many local and national differences and the particular cultural meanings it has in different times and places.

For example, the effect of treating Anglo-American music since the 1950s as "pop-rock" is to deny its cultural significance in its original space. This is in part, I think, an explicit element of Regev's agenda, as he wants to qualify the association of rock with oppositional politics. He acknowledges the connection in certain instances, but not generally, and especially not in the U.S. of the 1950s or 1960s. Part of the problem here is that the term "oppositional" is both vague and overly specific. It

can mean on the one hand almost any variance with cultural norms, while on the other hand it means tending toward the revolution. Rock music was almost never oppositional in that second sense, but it did contribute significantly to the redefining of social norms in the U.S. Whether it has this role other places can only be assessed on a case by case basis, a task clearly beyond the scope of Regev's book. Nevertheless, *Pop-Rock Music* is a book well worth serious engagement.

David SHUMWAY

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Matthieu Saladin, *Esthétique de l'improvisation libre. Expérimentation musicale et politique*, Dijon, Les Presses du Réel, 2014.

L'ouvrage de Matthieu Saladin est une contribution importante au champ aujourd'hui très dynamique des études sur l'improvisation (voir Lewis & Piekut, 2015). À travers trois collectifs ayant occupé une place essentielle dans le développement des musiques improvisées au tournant des années 1970 – l'AMM, le Spontaneous Music Ensemble (SME) et le Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV) – l'auteur entreprend d'analyser l'esthétique sous-jacente à la pratique alors émergente de l'improvisation dite « libre », mouvement qui occupe une place importante dans le champ des pratiques musicales contemporaines; il vient ainsi éclairer une forme d'improvisation

