



## Review / Reseña / Resenha

Ismaiel-Wendt, Johannes. 2011. *tracks 'n' treks: Populäre Musik und Postkoloniale Analyse*. Münster: UNRAST-Verlag, 272 pages.

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“There are no more masters and mastering in the tracks 'n' treks mode”.

The last sentence of Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt's published PhD thesis, *tracks 'n' treks. Populäre Musik und Postkoloniale Analyse*, is also the most important one. It symbolically reflects his method of using DJ language as an alternative terminology in opposition to the institutionalized (post)colonial musicological language with the aim to establish a new cultural concept –TRX studies.

“Postcolonialism” includes here the contrary and at the same time overlapping discourses of decolonisation in a sense of independent movements and recolonisation/neo-colonialism as a subtle form of colonisation in which colonists always use new variations of appropriate resources (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2005).

Stuart Hall's “rest of the world” is considered a concept of deterritorialisation in globalisation by slavery, work, and war migrations applied to a narrative mode. On the one hand, interactions of deconstructions and constructions are included, trying to avoid a localisation of colonialism, but on the other hand, the author dated the beginning of colonialism with the “discovery of America”. Anyway, Hall's idea of deterritorialisation is transmitted to music due to a discrepancy between music generated by movement and a topographic specification.

The publication is divided into three major parts. It starts with “postcolonial ear training”. The second part contains the analysis of eight different tracks. These two parts are followed by the third one titled: “reason for movement/motivation” (Beweg-Grund). Attached are a tracks'n'treks equalizer (index which connects key concepts), a bibliography, a discography, the lyrics of the eight analysed tracks and a glossary to musicological terms.

The initial two chapters focus on the mutual influence of postcolonial discourse and popular music. On channel/chapter one, postcolonial theories are discussed by means of their icons like Homi K. Bhaba, Stuart Hall, Edward Said or Gayatri Spivak. The aim is to de-centralize paradigms of unities and uniformities deconstructing the images of ethnical groups, nations and/or cultures.

On channel/chapter two, there are the eight tracks (8TRX) as a compilation of popular music. In a written track mode the hook line is repeated at least four times in order to really catch



the reader's attention when saying that contemporary (pop) musical compositions and studio techniques need to be rethought as digital and analogue audio tracks and as layers of dynamic cultural conceptions. "Trek" is understood as the exhausting journey as well as the dynamic and central paradigms of experience in postcolonialism-like slavery, diaspora and migration. The hook line is expanded by a backspin which reflects the intention of Ismaiel-Wendt's work in another redundant way: "trying to make fluctuation audible/trying to make fluctuation audible".

In addition to the introductory thoughts, a crossfader transfers "postcolonial ear training" to the 8TRX channel and back, defining some basic axioms. Therefore, popular music is "welthaltig" (containing the world) because cultural geographies are fixed. On the other hand metaphors of mixing spread rampantly from it like never before. Popular music is "weltgewaltig" (omniscient) when stimulating postcolonial thinking by creating unknown worlds by means of movement, which even generates knowledge.

On both channels/chapters effects can be found. So it is the popular music itself which stimulates postcolonial theories because in its aesthetic lines of movement cultural junctions can be experienced which have been preceded by the known overdetermined world views defined by cultural texts.

The effect on channel/chapter 2 is the reason for a collage setup technique by means of globalisation and an increasing cultural mix in popular music defined by the author as "cut and mix" aesthetics.

But to construct the "postcolonial ear training", first of all a critical deconstruction is necessary as in every typical postcolonial discourse. Ismaiel-Wendt's imagined enemy is the "ethno(music)logic". He criticizes Erich Moritz von Hornbostel for having created an "issue of topophilia" with his "world map of music". The author argues that bringing sounds and geographic locations into a unit (e.g.: African music) means to generate racial and ideological "short-circuits" as they can be found even in recent "ethnomusicological" works. Therefore, Ismaiel-Wendt quotes the German systematic musicologist Helmut Rösing (2003) and his disconcerting ideas of "black music" when referring to "jazz", which finally confirms Ismaiel-Wendt's generalisation of an "ethno(music)logic".

For the deconstruction and liberalisation of such "ethno(music)logic", the author chooses "recent" ethnological "attempts" like Geertz's thick description of 1973. So the answer to music/track is in the music/track itself. All subjectivity of hearing and analysing is immune to misunderstandings because music is always social. More explanations cannot be found.

Subjectivity is the basis of the first method of TRX studies called audioscapes/audiotreks, followed by a short introduction of the artist and the "securing treks", a method by Eggebrecht (2004) to describe the flowing and dispersing of sounds. It needs to be mentioned that all analyses and subjective perception by the author should be added to the act of hearing the track itself, just to be clear about what Ismaiel-Wendt is writing and what kind of performative worlds (Fischer-Lichte 2004) he generates through the audible sounds.

Every subjective perception of any of the eight tracks is interpreted from three different perspectives (audiospace/securing treks/performative spaces) and finally echoed under the topic "world interpretations, world appropriations, and realities". Here the preceding ideas, feelings,

perceptions and imaginations of the author are amalgamated into a next or another level of interpretation leading to the third part –“*Beweg-Gründe*” (reason for movements/motivation).

The first track Ismaiel-Wendt analyses in his TRX study style is the track “Hajti Fi Gurini” recorded/mixed and/or remixed by DJ Cheb I Sabbah. The author feels that “women and men drummers are playing like a hundred years ago”, only the E-Bass reminds him that it was recorded in 2005. The voices of the women recorded by Cheb I Sabbah are not symbols of freedom through liberation of the voices as what the DJ aims to, but bringing Cheb I Sabbah closer to the “ethnologic”. Ismaiel-Wendt argues that due to the use of original field recordings, the voices cannot act anymore. So the recordings are archiving and preserving the voices, implying that they can never be liberated or liberate themselves.

The second track by Asian Dub Foundation (ADF) is “Burning Fence”. Here the author describes his perception of the audiospaces while hearing the track several times. He introduces the reader to his sound metaphor writing that a protest march is rolling over the street using the full road width up to the end and into the open. The band draws a unique picture in their related music video.

In the chapter of “securing treks” he explains the “Dhol” and its geographical extension. The drum produces next to string samples and guitar, a “dramaturgy of movement”, which can be heard as the sound picture of the protest march. At the same time the track transmits a clear misunderstanding when the band mocks pseudo-revolutionary movements, which can be seen as a metonym to the discourse of power when deconstructivism takes place in postcolonial discourses.

The kind of “diaspora” set to music by Natascha Atlas is a performative “diaspora”, which transmits the gender specific sound perception carried out by the closeness and intelligibility of the male voice and the distance and unintelligibility of the female voice, embedded in a deformed sonic atmosphere experienced through a prolonged bass line and wobbling chords. Ismaiel-Wendt hears a creation of a female and sensual orient contradicting the dynamics of the track in general, which finally ends up in compensation for the games of orientalism and/or oriental kitsch as indicated by the album cover.

Keziah Jones’ “Kpafuca” stands in the tradition of the “Afrosurrealist narrative” like Prince, George Clinton, Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis or Fela Kuti generating over-realistic worlds and an alternative world history. Jones reflects in his album named “Black Orpheus” that “being an African” is constructed. His answer is “afroanarchism”. Reality and fantasy are parts of a “fuzzy logic” represented by the “doesn't matter discourse”, whether Keziah sings and plays the guitar alone or is accompanied by the whole orchestra, enlarging the frequency framework.

The focus on German identity can be heard in the track of Jan Delay’s “*Kartoffeln*” (potatoes) and Quio’s “*Bratwurst*” (grilled sausage). Delay reveals the very special interaction between interiority and physicality (Descola 2011) by moving between the two poles of “reading *Bild Zeitung*” and Reggae grooves. The process of materializing the interiority can be heard by the nasal sounding voice when Jan Delay is not using his throat but his nose to invent himself over and over again. Ismaiel-Wendt sees this polarization and appropriation using a mimetic performance or “performance performance” as a strategy to infiltrate the imagined patterns of

representations without the serious dimension of an overwhelming hegemony in which mimicry has a function of self-defence.

The sound collage of Quio's "*Bratwurst*" shows German identity in a grotesque liquidation. He concludes that the broken beats and breaks, the collapsing bass sounds and the difficulties of speech and pronunciation create doubts in reference to stability and safety. All this serves the anti-flow which leads the track and its destruction and discontinuity to a composition unit – "a formed non-form" as Ismaiel-Wendt mentions here.

The track "Aksak" by Chronomad, also known as "Schlamminger", seems to be a perfect example against topophilia. The artist is using sounds which refer to the musical experience of the listeners without connecting these sounds to local places. The cancellation of a geographic localization de-ethnicizes and de-essentializes spaces out of time. Even if sound references (John Lee Hooker) are used, the sound is alienated to play with similarities. Authentic recordings are not conserved as in Cheb I Sabbah's track. The "Aksak" track is the closest one to Ismaiel-Wendt's concept of culture by transformation.

The last track named "Trauma" is recorded by Pinch. The continuity of the concept is: "Unhomeliness" referring to the idea of Homi. K. Bhabha who explains it as a productive strategy expressing postcolonial experience. The "Trauma" track needs to be understood as a more dangerous experience to create that drastic history of underwater dancehall and post-apocalyptic space in the deepest depth. The track remains incomprehensible as fiction. Ismaiel-Wendt decides to let Elsaesser (2007: 206) speak for him by quoting the last sentence of his second part: "Trauma is a term of referentiality impossible to locate in a fixed place. Nonetheless, its time-space-place-referentialities are postulated/positioned".

The third and final part is "reasons for movement/motivation", which summarises all the analysis of the eight tracks (8TRX) in a political theory project, developing ideas of a science paradigm and cultural concept.

The author starts with an analysis of Bass sounds as a postcolonial theoretical concept of culture comprehended as a resistant practice. In "topoi and motive" the eight tracks are compared, on the bases of their "world interpretations, world appropriations, and realities" to work out a first catalogue of dynamic, confusing, playful, shifted and destructive strategies of transculturation.

Ismaiel-Wendt suggests transmitting his TRX-study method from the science field to transform it into a transculturation or decolonisation project to liberate female and male musicians from the burden of topophilia and to hear music autonomously. He concludes with a concept of sonic delinking by refusing to play imposed roles in the cultural musical. Composers and listeners should produce and hear with topophobic disobedience in order to sketch a utopia of sonic atmosphere, to change or to synthesise repertoire through remixes, to disturb, to destroy and to (de-)compose new thinking which is not followed by the center-periphery-logic. Listening equals listening against topophilia.

There is a chapter about genre and gender inserted. It is stressed here that TRX-studies do show much sensibility in avoiding and fighting against fixed paradigms of order and discrimination in categories of popular music.

The written publication of Ismaiel-Wendt is like a track which can be read over and over again always finding other topics, themes and/or samples, thus creating other/new forms of realities. The absence of master(s) has more advantages than disadvantages as postcolonial ear training is more than necessary today. Therefore, his 8TRX-study method serves as a construction and as a new concept in comparison to the traditional musicological sign system, which the author is still not able to leave behind but is trying his best with extra excursus to “*Begriffsmonster*” (“term monsters”, which are heavily charged notions like “black” or “blackness”).

The generalisation of ethnomusicological practice into a field as racism and ideology is based on a strange simplification and missing information. I wonder why the comparative musicologist von Hornbostel is used when even evolutionism and the German *Kulturkreislehre* (“theory of cultural circles”) in music was practiced by agents like Curt Sachs or Marius Schneider.

Ignoring this little criticism, the book contains a scientific discourse worth considering since it declares diversity and subjectivity a new basic axiom beyond institutions and institutionalized “masters and mastering”.

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Matthias Lewy holds a PhD in comparative musicology and anthropology from the Free University of Berlin and a post-graduate Diploma in Cultural Management from the Academy of Music Hanns Eisler Berlin. His research focus is on world music, sound and ritual, as well as in music and language. At the moment he is working on concepts of auditory anthropology. He is a

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