

Writing Pop/Pop Writing

David Hatch and Stephen Millard, *From Blues to Rock: An Analytical History of Pop Music* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987). 217 + x pp. £25.00.

Two words from the book's subtitle could be taken to represent a methodological dilemma which, to some extent, inhabits all studies of popular cultural forms: "analytic" and "pop." When the discourses of the academy with their own histories of "seriousness," "critique" and "analysis" turn their attention to popular fields whose "native" discourses tend to be equally (but in a different sense) "serious," fragmented and essentialistic, a difference comes into play. The problem of writing is: to write as a fan, as an analyst or some amalgam of the two? When a distinguished university press puts out a book on pop music, it's precisely this difference that is most keenly felt – a difference which both requires and enables certain writing practices. In this paper, we want to touch on how Hatch and Millard handle those writing practices and, at the same time, look more widely at some possible consequences for popular cultural studies in general.

The book attempts to take pop music "seriously" in contrast to, as they note, Gillett's view that it won't "hold up to that much analysis," or Goldmann's writing-off: "it's a baby food industry."¹ While the aficionado can occupy the grounds of pop as pleasure and enjoyment, deliberately eschewing analytic attention, the sociological, musicological or historical analyst is expected to overlay the fan's genuine enjoyment with taxonomy, classification or archival work – to name only a few ways of writing. Analytic interest always comes, then, as a supplement to pleasure – in order not to write off a central component of pop objects, namely their status as pleasurable forms. There is a broad and fuzzy territory which opens up here between indulging in one's pleasures at the expense of critical analysis and killing off that pleasure for more sterile academic pursuits.

Hatch and Millard, then, like many pop analysts who are unable to, for example, find syntheses between the two modes, tend to alternate between them. On the one hand there is a direct use of pop's own discourse (which we can call the "object discourse"), and on the other a subordination of it to one type of musicology or another (the "analytic discourse"). On the one hand, a rock journalism and history aimed "within" the field of the popular, addressed to the fan, on the other, a highly detailed analysis of genres addressed to an entirely different audience. For example, Chapter 4, "Across the great divide," is an intelligent rock history which reviews a historical period (1959-63) and

turns the information so gathered back into the analytic mode. With and against this more piecemeal approach, there is a theory of three-stage development based around the category of the "song family" which has its clearest representation in the elaborate musicological analysis of the book's appendices.

As this brief summary shows, although the book alternates the two modes, the object discourse is, as an apparently deliberate strategy, absorbed into the argument of the analytic discourse. But for all this the former, as a highly narrative and informational mode, is never and never can be completely repressed. It continues to surface in various ways as a discourse in its own right. But this (sometimes easy, sometimes hard won) juxtaposition of modes is as far as the book goes towards critical self-reflection on the general theoretical problem of writing pop versus pop writing. Inevitably, any analytic treatment of or intervention into popular cultural objects becomes part of and so transforms them, in and as the writing.

This raises the question of the institutional space of writing. For example, would it be the other way around, would the analytic discourse have had to be more clearly absorbed by or into the object discourse if the book had been published not by Manchester University Press but under the aegis of rock journalism, say as a one-off from the *NME*? As it is, however, the boot is more clearly on the other foot and this asks that attention be paid particularly to the already mentioned question of how the object discourse (pop music) continues to surface in the book. Let us return to this.

The question is continually begged: why are the particular artists and songs discussed regarded as constitutive of pop history? For example, on page 37, why compare Little Richard and Bobby Bland in particular? Why this choice? As Hatch and Millward rightly tell us, they have a common background in gospel but, as the book also says, so do many other black and Southern white singers. Beyond gospel, that is once the two become secular artists, there is no apparent reason for the comparison – at least not in strictly historico-musicological terms. The comparison ignores specific backgrounds, the circuits played, types of bands and instrumentation, audiences, etc. The achievement of fame is attributed to the texture of Little Richard's voice. This is a possibility that is put forward notwithstanding the fact that in the early 1950s the two singers were already working in two different fields, Little Richard in rock and roll, Bobby Bland in rhythm and blues. Although, as the authors point out, Bobby Bland did "cut a number of uptempo, rocking numbers in the early fifties," these songs remained within rhythm and blues, a genre that did not achieve crossover, i.e., white audiences or record sales, for nearly another decade. It is hard to accept that this is a completely analytic comparison then. It's much more the sort of preoccupation

associated with rival fans. And so the object discourse emerges with a kind of residue: it is unable to be completely adequated by its analytic counterpart. This, it must be said, is by no means a negative criticism of this particular book – as we shall see, on the contrary. Instead, it's a general problem which all such studies run into. Analysis cannot completely adequate its object, particularly in this field. But that still leaves the question of the *status* of the residue. If this is not merely grist to the analytical mill, then what?

If, as here, popular cultural theorists are to attempt such an adequation or appropriation of popular texts, then the "level" at which that operation works is a further problem. Without lapsing into the usual distinction between the "micro" and the "macro," there is still a problem of the extent to which, in such analysis, it's important to bring into play "demographic" material, particularly where the topic is the continuity and development of pop music in two countries. Hatch and Millward's preference is for a strongly song-based analysis over and above the demographic. It tends not to stress the transmission of music through the States by radio broadcast and record sales, the transmission across the Atlantic via seaports (Liverpool in the 1950s) and from within Europe (American Forces Network wavelength broadcasts from Nuremburg). Certainly, radio broadcasts are mentioned (44-49), but there is no extensive analysis of these types of connection apart from the suggestion (45) that black radio ownership be a further subject of research.

A definite tension arises between what the book says and what it achieves. We are told that "it is important for researchers analysing any music to be familiar with an adequately representative sample of the available materials" (136). Let us state immediately: Hatch and Millward demonstrate both familiarity with and knowledge of the music they discuss. Their familiarity, however, is the cause of the tension in the book. There are two related problems in the above quotation around the concepts of "familiarity" and "adequately representative sample." Familiarity determines, to some extent, what constitutes an adequately representative sample. Yet for an adequately representative sample to declare itself as such, familiarity must pass through certain knowledges, certain operations. A familiarity with "an adequately representative sample of the available materials" cannot be naive or untutored. Familiarity, as we know after Derrida, is the poison that cures. As it introduces us to our material, it also begs the question: why this material? Quite rightly, Hatch and Millward interrogate received knowledge of "the material." This they do in Chapter 5, "What is black music?" As they point out, "The concept of black music has become something of a shibboleth, to the extent that to even question its pre-eminence amounts to heresy" (116). They show how complex the problem of racial status can be when different states had different regulations about what factors

constituted a black person. They also discuss how black and white musical traditions have always intersected in these regions.² But this still leaves the question: why this material? Like the problem of object discourse and analytic discourse, the problem here again is one of adequation. A familiarity that has been developed into academic knowledge still retains the traces of the fan who existed before the knowledges were gained, before the operations were learned. Familiarity connotes pleasure as well as knowledge and the pleasure of the fan, in this book, refuses to be repressed by the merely analytic knowledge of its authors.

Such problems, we repeat, are not peculiar to this text. They arise from the mixing of genres that popular cultural studies have, by and large, carried with them. The abiding interest of Hatch and Millward's book is that it attempts a unique solution to this question of methodological anchoring counter to the demographic impulse, namely via an unashamedly detailed and textual musicological analysis. It attempts to anchor a general popular history in terms of the migration of highly specific musical and lyrical forms which the authors call "song families." The term has resonances with Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblances."³ To cut the story short: what Wittgenstein argued was that for something to fall under a particular concept, e.g., for a particular object to fall under the concept "tree," does not mean that it must contain some *essential and distinguishing characteristic (Merkmal)* of all trees. Instead, the concept is theorised as a family. Some members share particular clusters of features, other members share others. These features overlap like the fibres of a rope – but there is no single fibre running through the centre. In this way, Wittgenstein was able to account for the unity or strength our everyday concepts have for us but without resorting to essentialism. In a similar way, Hatch and Millward are able to identify sub-genres of pop music through a stage-based analysis of song-family migrations. Song features shift and change, not allowing us to draw up exact and precise "recipes" or technical specifications from blues, jazz, folk, rock'n'roll, etc. Yet we know that the location of essences can be precisely the terms of the debate for fans. Such and such, we often hear, is not blues because it's not in a 12-bar structure. Such and such is not folk because it's played on electric instruments. And so on. The arguments are all too familiar and tedious – and, moreover, they are exactly the sort of residue carried over from the object discourse into many an analysis. The solution that Hatch and Millward have found, much as it does not address the general problem of the two modes of discourse, offers hope with this particular aspect of the distinction.

Are there other possible strategies for dealing with aspects of this modal duality – strategies for more firmly footing studies of popular culture, for abstaining from dogma and essentialism while going beyond

the journalistic mode where one can just say anything one likes? And are there strategies for signalling one's own complicit intervention in a popular cultural form without rendering the writing operation duplicitous?

Before we consider these problems in an abstract manner, it is probably useful to look at two books that work with similar problems. Charles White's *The Life and Times of Little Richard: The Quasar of Rock* and Gerri Hirshey's *Nowhere to Run: The Story of Soul Music* are both clearly meant for a popular audience.⁴ They both fit the category which we introduced earlier, that is, they are both the institutional opposites of Hatch and Millward's book. And so we must ask the question of White and Hirshey which we have previously asked of Hatch and Millward: Is the analytic discourse more clearly absorbed by or into the object discourse given that the books have been published under the aegis of rock journalism? The answer, as we may expect, is yes. But it is the way in which the analytic discourse has been absorbed into the object discourse that is of interest.

In both books there is an attempt by the authors to efface their authorial role. Most prominently, in the case of White, there is an attempt to present himself as editor as opposed to author. With Hirshey it is an insistence on presenting the "voices" of the subjects: "The people who had sung the music so well are its most eloquent historians" (xiv). For both, the problem of the analytic and the object discourses is a methodological problem to be addressed by rebalancing the roles of author and subject of investigation. Both rely heavily on the anecdotal, giving prominence to the interviewee in order to create a personal narrative, rather than a factual history.

Restrictions of genre notwithstanding, there is instruction to be gained from these books. Both authors declare their reasons for writing their books. For White, Little Richard is "an uncontrollable genius whose influence on Western culture is incalculable" (12) and for this reason alone deserves book-length attention. Hirshey announces that after seeing James Brown on *The Ed Sullivan Show* she "deep-sixed the Beatle magazines and worked out in the basement, longing to be a famous Flame. I grew up, but I can't say I've outgrown the infatuation" (xi). It is these two declarations – one to do with the singer, the other with the author – that give us a clue to the strategies for popular cultural studies which we mentioned earlier, strategies which can signal one's own complicit intervention in a popular cultural form without rendering the writing operation duplicitous.

Two strategies: the object of attention bespeaks interest, the writing subject bespeaks interest. To a certain extent, these two strategies, and how they shall be expanded, are predicated on an observation made by Dick Hebdige in the conclusion to his *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.⁵

Hebdige observes that:

we should be foolish to think that by tackling a subject so manifestly popular as youth style, we have resolved any of the contradictions which underlie contemporary cultural studies . . . we should hardly be surprised to find our 'sympathetic' readings of a subordinate culture are regarded by the members of a subculture with just as much indifference and contempt as the hostile labels imposed by the courts and the press. In this respect to get the point is, in a way, to miss the point. (139)

The fact that the object of study is popular does not signify the popularity of the study. Hebdige realises that his book cannot intersect with "the people" as long as he writes for the academy, or as long as the academy is constructed as not part of "the people." At this moment, the writing process is duplicitous. Hebdige is writing as (at that time) a research assistant at the Polytechnic of Wolverhampton and a participant in those popular cultural forms that he describes. Yet his writing cannot be unified in its production. In order to write he must deny one discourse and in order to participate he must deny the other. This is the problem of the fan, and it is a problem that must be taken seriously if we are to examine the vices and virtues of familiarity which we have identified in Hatch and Millward's book.

This problem may be set aside for a moment while we consider the first of our strategies; where the object of attention bespeaks interest. For Tony Bennett, the problem is not so much where his own popular participatory discourses intersect with his academic discourse. Instead he is concerned with an attempt to locate, theorise and examine what constitutes "the popular." As he points out, in "Popular Culture: Theoretical and Pedagogic Strategies," there are two criteria which have been considered useful in locating "the popular" in popular culture and neither of them is sufficient nor necessarily useful.⁶ They are what can be identified by the "quantitative indices of popularity [such] as box-office receipts, book and record sales and so on" (35), and that which is residual "once the sphere of high culture has been defined" (36). These are the indices of quantity and quality. The latter exists in a shifting relationship with the dominant ideology. It is the former that is of concern here.

The magnitude of a popular cultural form is not alone sufficient to provide a base for the theoretical study of popular culture. As Bennett points out:

Proceed this way and popular culture is, simultaneously, everything and nothing; the limitless possibilities for extending its meaning effectively cripples the term 'popular' in depriving it of the ability to operate any productive distinctions of an analytical kind. (36)

Yet this does not disqualify magnitude as an effective provocation of interest in any popular cultural form or object. Indeed it is hard to imagine the possibility of Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* without the size of the Bond phenomenon even though it is not the size of the phenomenon that is directly under examination.⁷ What provoked the interest in Bond, according to the Bennett and Woollacott, was its own peculiarity as a cultural phenomenon. This is a different kind of qualitative index from that which we found in the residual category above. Whether it is quantitative or qualitative factors, or any combination of the two, that provoke the interest in a popular cultural object, it becomes obvious, in this type of operation at least, that it is the object that bespeaks the interest in the study.

If we can return to Hebdige at this point we can see a second strategy for popular cultural studies. We left Hebdige in a Barthesian moment lamenting the distance between his work and the practices that it described. If we look at more recent articles, we can see that he is continuing in the Barthesian tradition. Just as the later Barthes essays were as much about Roland Barthes as they were about photography or anything else, so some more recent articles by Hebdige are just as much about Dick Hebdige as they are about masculinity or the sublime.⁸ What then is the strategy behind this movement?

The limitations of *Subculture* are outlined above. The difference between *Subculture* and the writings which follow can be seen in the importance which Hebdige places in the recognition of himself as a writing subject. In an interview with John Stratton, he says:

Mod is still my Imaginary . . . my structure of feeling was formed in Mod . . . I have been attacked for being sexist in my work but I speak from a position in my work. I speak from a male position. I am a gendered, classed, subject and I speak from that position. I prefer to do that.⁹

Where *Subculture* lamented not being able to reach "the people," the later writings have no-one to reach but Hebdige himself. This is not a criticism. This approach to popular cultural studies, through an examination of the self, allows for an intersection of cultural practices and social/textual history because the familiarity with the self must pass through certain social knowledges whether this is selfconsciously acknowledged or not. In the quotation above, we find Hebdige constructing himself through Lacan and Williams and hinting at the debate over male feminism. This second strategy, then, is one where the writing subject bespeaks the interest in the study.

The point of both these strategies is self-reflexivity. With Bennett and Woollacott, as with White's book on Little Richard, the effect of the popular cultural object on the social formation is recognised as the

motivation for the study. With Hebdige, as with Hirshey's book on soul music, the effect of the popular cultural practice on the individual formation of the writing subject is recognised as the motivation for the study.

It is this very problem of self-reflexivity that is most worrying in Hatch and Millward's book. It is not worrying because a lack of self-reflexivity signals a less than "aware" authorship. This is far from being the case. Hatch and Millward have shown considerable knowledge and developed formidable arguments in their book and have used a unique theoretical matrix to accomplish this. Why this lack of self-reflexivity is worrying is because the problems that we find in the book can be attributed to the limits that this self-reflexivity would bring. In the terms of our earlier argument, it is a matter of Hatch and Millward's addressing their own familiarity with the music they attempt to codify and describe, even in its continuity. It is a matter of realising that their familiarity with the music provides limits to their study just as much as the music does itself.

Matters are not cut-and-dried here, then. Hatch and Millward come across as residual fans despite dominant interests in musicology. Hirshey's autobiographical investments – quite different in their way from Hebdige's – are attenuated by her object interests in soul music.¹⁰ White contributes as much to music history as he does to fandom, even splitting his text typographically into "data" and "commentary," a taxonomic exactitude perhaps learned as part of his profession (he is a chiropodist). Hebdige's analyses are by no means a total self-indulgence. And Bennett and Woollacott are dependent upon Bond's magnitude. And so the paradox is finally this: while no popular cultural study can completely occupy an extreme position along the axes we have identified, neither have we yet seen any thorough attempt at a deconstruction or *Aufhebung* of these dualisms in the methodology of cultural studies.

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- 1 Albert Goodman interviewed in Binia Tymieniecka's film *Da do ron ron* (1983); Charlie Gillett, article in *The Sunday Times* (Nov. 1983); See David Hatch and Stephen Millward, *From Blues to Rock: An Analytical History of Pop Music* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987), 14. Further references to this book are included in the text.
- 2 For a more extended account of the same issue, see Barney Hoskins, *Say It One More Time for the Brokenhearted: The Country Side of Southern Soul* (London: Fontana, 1987) and, for a more poetic account, listen to Benny Latimore, *There's a redneck in the soul band* (1976 UK release: President PT 449).
- 3 See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953).

- 4 Charles White, *The Life and Times of Little Richard: The Quasar of Rock* (London, Pan, 1985); Gerri Hirshey, *Nowhere to Run: The Story of Soul Music* (London: Pan, 1985).
- 5 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).
- 6 Tony Bennett, "Popular Culture: Theoretical and Pedagogic Strategies," *Anglistica* 23. 2-3 (1980).
- 7 Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (London: Macmillan, 1987).
- 8 We refer here to "Some Fathers and their Sons," *Ten.* 8 17 (1985), and "The Impossible Object: Towards a Sociology of the Sublime," *New Formations* 1 (Spring 1987).
- 9 Dick Hebdige/Jon Stratton, *Art and Text* 8 (1982): 21, 25.
- 10 "I hog-tied the fan in me to the record rack and hauled myself to [Aretha Franklin's] hotel door in a hair shirt of sober music tech questions. But Aretha spared me the schizophrenia . . ." Hirshey, *Nowhere to Run*, xiii.

Lyrics can be written before or after writing a pop song, depending on the nature of the song. Writers should have a solid idea of what the song is about, and write lyrics that convey one message throughout the song. (e.g., if a song is about an apple, don't write about an orange). Try to cover one topic or one message throughout the song. Although the art of writing pop songs is a craft that can be nurtured and developed, many great songs are inspirations that have come to writers in their dreams. If you're catching a few zzz's and hear an amazing song in your head, consider it meant to be and commit it to (digital) tape as soon as you awake.

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Stack_item pop_stack
(stack *this) { assert (!empty_stack (this)); if(this->data == NULL){ Fprintf(stderr, "fail"); Exit(1);//Maybe malloc or realloc }. Return this->data[--(this->size)]; }.
Int main(void){ stack *s = Stack(); push_stack(s, "sin"); push_stack(s, "+"); push_stack(s, "cos");
while(!empty_stack(s)){ Puts(pop_stack(s)); } // Stack_(s);//call destructor return 0
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