Music and Urban Geography

Reviewed by Laith Ulaby - University of California, Los Angeles

While many agree on the importance of interdisciplinary projects, it is rare to see one as wide ranging and ambitious as Adam Krims' latest book, *Music and Urban Geography* (2007). In this work, Krims fuses elements of ethnomusicology, musicology, urban geography and a host of other disciplines to explore how music is mediated in the urban environment. Krims' central question is: what is unique about urban music making and how might we develop a coherent methodology for its study? As the author details, we are experiencing a great global migration to cities, and by the year 2030 an estimated sixty percent of the world will live in urban environments. Crafting a scholarly approach to music and urbanism will only become more of a necessity as the world continues this transformation. If we accept the proposal that urban spaces shape our everyday social and economic behavior, it seems only logical that our musical behavior might also be affected by the unique dynamics of urban space. Krims tackles this complex problem through a variety of disciplinary and methodological outlooks.

The introduction, the longest chapter of the book, does a remarkable job of outlining the ways in which music is embedded in urban social fabric. Krims begins with an ethnography of the central commercial district in Amsterdam, using it to illustrate the complex role music plays within urban space. In the second half of the introduction, Krims lays the foundation for his subsequent arguments by outlining the relevance of post-Fordism and urban geography to music scholarship. In this section, the author draws on his own research to address the problem of how the recent global population shifts to cities can be seen “as instances for explaining changes in musical culture, and looking toward how the two processes may find a connection in a larger unity, including contributions from music back to urban form” (xix). Lastly, Krims engages with the legacies of Marx and Adorno in an attempt to refigure how their theories have been applied, and misapplied, in cultural musicology.

Chapter One undertakes a systematic discussion of how urban spaces have been represented in music. Krims examines the links between musical representations and urban social structures by developing a concept he calls the “urban ethos”: “It is the scope of that range of urban representations and their possible modalities, in any given time span, that I call the *urban ethos*. The urban ethos is thus not a particular representation but rather a distribution of possibilities, always having discernable limits as well as common practice” (7). The examples he draws upon to illustrate this idea are wide ranging, and include Petula Clark, Burt Bacharach, 50 Cent, and Dr. Dre. Krims uses these artists' musical representations of urban space to develop the concept of the *urban ethos* along two main axes: diachronic (those that occur over time) and synchronic (those that occur through internal shifts of range and limits).

Chapter Two offers a discussion of popular music theory and a case study of Willemstad, Curacao, focusing on the popular dance genre *tumba*. Through this parallel discussion, Krims attempts to re-frame the dichotomy of the negative “space” and the positive “place” that is often invoked in cultural theory. He argues that in many contemporary cities the supposedly resistant features of place and locality have been subsumed into the greater framework of space—and that place and space should therefore be seen as a dialectic. Rather than lionize place as a “somehow healthy, politically progressive viewpoint, one might, from a new perspective appreciate it as both resistance *and* compliance…” (60).

In Chapter Three, Krims dives into an analysis of disco and its role in *Boogie Nights*, a film thatdraws heavily on music to represent Southern California in the late-1970s and early-1980s. Although Krims discusses how music can demarcate time and place (dovetailing with his ideas in chapter one and two respectively), the relevance of the film to music and urban geography is not entirely clear. Krims' discussion of disco is well executed and explores the specific urban socio-economic and racial dynamics that were infused into the sound and aesthetics of disco. He also highlights other musical genres, coming out of the same environment, which were seen as a reaction to disco. He specifically looks at punk rock as an example that illustrates the fact that the urban environment is not deterministic of any one particular type of music. While Krims is clearly well versed in film studies, many of the technical terms are likely beyond the common experience of most musicologists and/or urban geographers.

Chapter Four concentrates on the legacy of Theodor Adorno and the Marxist themes in his work. In this ambitious chapter, Krims maps out the place of Adorno in popular music studies, or as he rightly puts it, the different “Adornos” who populate a great deal of contemporary music scholarship. Krims feels that many of the competing narratives of Adorno do not appropriately historicize his theories regarding the relationship of economy and culture.

The author then broadens the discussion to look generally at the use of Marx and Adorno in current popular music and cultural studies. In the next section of the chapter Krims returns to the binary of “knowledge” rap and “reality” rap, developed in his previous book *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity (2000).* Through this classification system he outlines shifting aesthetics, styles, and musical poetics within rap music, demonstrating how the genre defies the rigid interpretations posed by those working within the framework of Adorno's ideas.

In the final chapter, Krims outlines his new approach to the study of urban music, which refocuses musicology on modes of production (in the Marxist sense). In his view, the emphasis in popular music scholarship on using the methods of cultural studies means that it often misses the material circumstances (e.g. modalities of listening, means of production, record sales) of music in urban settings. This latter approach, in combination with the structural and interpretive approaches outlined in previous chapters, allows Krims to map social, cultural and organizational structures as they relate to music.

Krims tries valiantly to give adequate context and background, but the difficulties of condensing a substantive and accessible discussion of urbanism, post-Fordism, Adorno, and Marx into 160 pages are unavoidable. To his credit, Krims outlines the book in his introduction, and tells the reader which chapters might be appropriate for different audiences. His theoretical discussions, however, require more than a passing familiarity with the aforementioned scholars and schools of thought. With that said, for those hoping to formulate a post-cultural studies approach to the study of music and urbanism, this may be one of the best starting points so far. This book offers valuable insight for anyone grappling with the legacies of Adorno, Marx and a host of other contemporary scholars of music. Any ethnomusicologist examining music in an urban environment will find this a challenging and inspiring work.

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