

# **FROM FOLK REVIVAL TO WORLD MUSIC: SOCIAL SCIENCE, CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND THE CANTOMETRICS PROJECT**

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## **Abstract**

Founded in the 1960s by the American ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, cantometrics represented an early, quantitative attempt to provide cartographic expression of the spatial underpinnings of what later would be termed world music. This paper critically reflects on the aims, methodology and assumptions made in cantometric mapping of culture areas based on folk song style and culture, relating its findings throughout to the broader intellectual climate of the time. The opening sections provide contextual background about the theorising of folk music in relation to culture areas and about Lomax's work up to the late-1950s. The third section analyses the nature, characteristics and flaws of cantometric inquiry, with the ensuing part offering commentary on the parallels between cantometrics and cognate areas of geographical inquiry. The conclusion reflects on the significance and implications of Lomax's theory for the comparative study of world music within the context of social scientific studies of culture areas.

## **Key Words:**

Alan Lomax, cantometrics, world music, folk music, culture areas

## INTRODUCTION

The history of ‘world music’ can be told in two, very different ways. Defined *strictu sensu*, its origins can be precisely traced to a meeting held at the Empress of India public house in North London on 29 June 1987. The meeting, which was attended by representatives of the music industry and other ‘interested parties’, chose the term ‘World Music’ over contenders such as ‘Tropical Music’, ‘World Beat’ and ‘Hot Music’ as a convenient marketing label for a rapidly expanding range of folk and fusion styles (Taylor 1997; Connell and Gibson 2003:144-9; Froots 2011). Yet as a broad genre, ‘world music’ *sensu lato* can claim far older antecedents. Philip Bohlman (2002), for example, traces its beginnings back to eighteenth century theories of folk culture and thereafter to a diverse assortment of musical practices that extend from phonograph collections of so-called ‘exotic’ and ‘oriental’ music to the sonic extravaganzas of the Eurovision Song Contests and the development of ethnomusicology as an academic discipline.

Understandably, any prehistory of world music has its roll call of movers and shakers (Nidel 2004; Bohlman 2012), but few have contributed more than Alan Lomax (1915-2002). As a collector, field researcher and ethnomusicologist, he strongly influenced American folk and blues music in the 1940s and was subsequently prominent in promoting the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s. As a gifted writer, he offered accessible accounts of the history and development of folk music, illuminated by the acuity of an insider’s view. As a broadcaster, concert organiser, performer and political activist, he acted as an advocate and populariser, bringing a wide variety of roots music styles together in single events, venues and programmes. Finally, Lomax

had an enduring academic interest in creating taxonomies of world music, most notably through the cantometrics project that he developed in collaboration with the musicologist Victor Grauer, the sociologist Conrad Arensberg and others in the 1960s.

In this paper, we focus on cantometrics as an approach that effectively sought to define and categorise world music through mapping folksong styles and culture. At the outset, it must be stressed that this work largely bypassed the attention of geographers at the time despite, first, having sympathetic resonances with the quantitative-theoretical and behavioural approaches that then characterised human geography and, secondly, sharing North American cultural geographers' interests in the cultural hearths, cores, peripheries, cultural diffusion and migrant identities associated with music (e.g. see Carney 1990, 1998, 2003). Nevertheless, its development still bears scrutiny by geographers in terms of its innovatory approaches to the quantitative study of culture and the mapping of culture areas and for its potential in offering insight into the intellectual climate of a period of paradigmatic change in the social sciences.

The paper contains five main sections. The two opening parts supply contextual background about the theorising of folk music in relation to culture areas and about Lomax's work up to the mid-1950s. The third section analyses the nature, characteristics and flaws of cantometric inquiry, with the ensuing part commenting on the parallels between cantometrics and cognate areas of geographical inquiry. The conclusion briefly reflects on the significance and implications of Lomax's theory for the comparative study of world music.

## CULTURE AREAS AND THEORIES OF ‘THE FOLK’

Commentators have considered folk music to be intimately related to the localities in which it is practised (Nettl 1983), but in the present context the conceptual framework that exerted greatest historic influence was derived from the anthropological theory of *Kulturkreislehre* or ‘cultural circles’ (Bohlman 1988:55; Kluckhohn 1936). Imbued with the pervasive fascination with cultural history that characterised Germany or, strictly speaking, German-speaking lands, since interest in the idea of the Volk predated unification in 1871, *Kulturkreislehre* theorists in the nineteenth century sought to reconstruct cultural history in cases where written records were absent by postulating a spatialised conception of cultural development over time (Andriolo 1979:133-4), Folk music, which occupied a prominent place in the analysis, was thereby seen as grounded in the specificities of place.

The key source for such ideas was Johann Gottfried von Herder’s two-volume folk song collection *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1778, 1779; later 1880). Herder’s work contains an important duality. It is commonly considered to provide the foundations for the collection of folk music in the service of nation-building (e.g. Skultans 1998; Francmanis 2002). Yet it is also seen as pointing the way to the first examples of world, rather than simply nationalistic, music (Bohlman 2002:40). This apparent contradiction can be understood by disentangling Herder’s ideas about ‘the folk’ (Bohlman 1988, 2002). When using that expression, Herder meant something akin to the term ‘ordinary people’; an Enlightenment ideal of universal humanity and a conception that transcended national or other boundaries. Music as a universal attribute of the human condition provided a means of bringing together ‘enlightened

human beings' (Bohlman 1988:38). Yet, there was 'ambivalence' in Herder's work, which helps explain 'how he manages to appear both liberal and proto-fascist' (Young 1995:42). The way that Herder grounded human value in the specificity of language, for instance, makes it easy to interpret the idea of 'folk' in a more exclusionary and hierarchical manner. Certainly, many writers, musicians, politicians who read his work emphasised notions of locality, nation, and homogeneity of race and culture, and extracted anti-Enlightenment ideas about relativism, difference and the superiority of German culture (Bluestein 1972:11). Nevertheless, Bohlman (1988:38) argues that universality and nationalism were not antithetic for Herder but aspects of an essentially democratic vision forged in a German political context reflecting the active unification of individual states and principalities. He therefore suggests that Herder was arguing for individual regions, or cultures, to each have a specific and valued 'voice' within an ecumenical sense of national or, indeed, global cultural difference.

Since the mid-1980s, scholars (e.g. Pickering and Green 1987a; Bohlman 1988; Clayton 2003:64-67; Aubert 2007) have pointed to the failure of theories such as *Kulturkreislehre* as reductive even when explaining the development of folk music in all but the most isolated of societies. They challenge the idea of place-based folk music grounded in oral tradition and community participation at both theoretical and empirical levels. Here, one can point to important debates within the humanities and social sciences concerning both the 'invention of tradition' and the politics of classificatory systems. If conventional theories of folk music production rely on bounded notions of community and static and/or monumentalising conceptions of place, then there are clearly conceptual problems to be addressed when accounting for the cultural practices of modernising, urban and industrial populations for whom

large-scale migration, industrialisation and commercial popular culture are part of everyday life. In such circumstances, the development of world music and the related proliferation of roots-based fusion styles confront the very senses of authenticity, purity and stability which make such styles seem so exotic and appealing to many audiences.

With these points in mind, Pickering and Green (1987b) developed the concept of ‘vernacular culture’ to account for the heterogeneity of everyday folk culture practices (also Richards 1992; Revill 2005). More recent theorists have drawn on the concept of hybridity, derived from post-colonial theory (Bhabba 1994), to shift attention away from theoretical and idealised constructs of cultural purity and instead embrace instead the messy and eclectic nature of lived experience (Gilroy 1993; Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000; Radano and Bohlman 2000; Biddle and Knights 2007). Here, spaces are characterised by flow and connection, with boundaries shaping culture and identity through contestation and transgression rather than exclusivity and stasis. At the same time, heterogeneous cultural practices may be interpreted as sometimes conscious and sometimes strategic sets of borrowings and adaptations rather than as evidence for cultural degeneration (Revill 2005).

Cantometrics, when seen against this background, occupy an ambiguous position. Its typical approach—isolating and classifying characteristics and then producing a typology of similarities and differences—harks back to culture area theories that conceived folk music as being produced within bounded places and static communities. At the same time, its attention listening and music’s performative

characteristics looked forward to more fluid, improvisatory conceptions of cultural production.

## **THE POLITICS OF THE MELTING POT**

There is no doubting Alan Lomax's pivotal position in the history of folk music collection or, indeed, in the development of popular music during the mid-twentieth century (Szwed 2010). Born in Austin (Texas) in 1915, he was strongly influenced by working with his father John A. Lomax in developing the Archive of Folksong for the Library of Congress. Between 1933 and 1942, the Lomaxes undertook extensive trips, especially in Appalachia and the Deep South to assemble oral history interviews with blues, folk and gospel singers as well as making field recordings of their music. Alan Lomax undertook further collecting tours in the Deep South and in Appalachia during the period 1959-65 (Collins 2004), but added extensively to his range from the 1940s onwards, with trips to Italy and Spain, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the USSR, Romania, Morocco, the Bahamas, Haiti and the Eastern Caribbean. These trips eventually yielded an inventory now made available on upwards of 100 CDs (see [http://www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/ce\\_alanlomax\\_discography.php](http://www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/ce_alanlomax_discography.php)). In recognition of these efforts and other aspects of his work, Lomax was awarded the National Medal of the Arts by the United States Congress in 1986, and a Grammy by the Recording Academy in 2002 for his life-long contributions to music.

Though Lomax did not train as a professional musicologist, his activities as a folk collector and his later work on cantometrics were heavily influenced by his university education. He held a BA in Philosophy from the University of Texas at

Austin (1936) and he undertook graduate study in Anthropology at Columbia University. While there, he attended and was inspired by the lectures of Curt Sachs, New York University's German-born professor of music (Cohen 2003:98; Szwed 2010:140-2). Sachs, along with the Austrian-born ethnomusicologist Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, had pioneered the creation of recorded archives embracing world musical traditions in the early twentieth century and developed wide-ranging theories of the history and diffusion of world musical styles. Lomax's radio broadcasts between 1946 and 1949, made for the Mutual Broadcasting System, typically showed the eclectic influence of Sachs and Von Hornbostel. One programme entitled 'Dancing Around the World', for example, juxtaposed recordings of Chicago blues, Appalachian and Cajun fiddling, Afro-Cuban music, West-African drumming, Django Reinhardt's 'Djangology', dances from Ireland, Finland, Israel, Armenia, a Russian chorus, a Balinese xylophone orchestra, klezmer wedding music and a Dixieland revival recording featuring Sidney Bechet and Wild Bill Davison. Lomax's commentary included observations about instrumental and vocal styles, calling attention to the Middle Eastern influences apparent in a klezmer clarinet solo and the precise diction of the Finnish bandleader (Cohen 2003:98-99; Szwed 2010:233-4).

In many respects, the USA provided fertile ground for building the notion of world music. Waves of immigration, particularly from Europe and Africa, provided the raw material of a complex patchwork of folk music styles drawing from diverse cultural practices and traditions. Not only did folk music researchers believe it possible to find clear evidence of a multiplicity of migrant national folk music styles within North America, they also regarded the distinctive forms of music associated, say, with the Deep South, Appalachia or the Mid-West as active and creative fusions

that incorporates music from countries of migrant origin into something uniquely new and American. In this way, it was believed that African-American Gospel music from the Deep South fused African practices of call-and-response with Protestant traditions of ‘lining-out’—the alternate repeating of lines of hymn texts common in western Scotland (Dargen 2006). Similarly, the music of the ‘Polka belt’ of the upper Midwest reflected musical styles brought to the USA by successive waves of European immigrant farmers. Based substantially around German and Scandinavian stylistic practices, the music also shows influences of Irish, Scottish and English music (Leary 2006).

These and similar fusions had long interested collectors, who habitually interpreted them in light of their favoured narratives. A generation earlier, for example, the English folk music collector Cecil Sharp interpreted the heterogeneity of Appalachian music through the lens of looking for traces or ‘survivals’ of past cultures (Gold and Revill 2006). Lomax certainly recognised the heterogeneity of Appalachian music as one of its fundamental characteristics and, with Sharp in mind, noted that:

‘Collectors have gathered scores of ballads dating back to the late Middle Ages from mountain singers. These ancient ballads served to link the pioneers with their British homeland and to keep alive ancient patterns of emotion and poetry which beautified their lives. The country singers, however, did not regard them as historical documents, but as dramas which exemplified traits of character, both for good and for evil, that they perceived in themselves and their neighbours... Folk singers seldom make distinctions between old and new

ballads, or indeed between lyric songs, comic pieces and the ballads so cherished by scholars.’ (Lomax 1997)

Rather than trying to strip folk songs back to their ‘European roots’, Lomax seemed more interested in the extent to which folk music represented the new experiences of people living in America. In 1941, Lomax had argued that:

‘The American singer has been concerned with themes close to his everyday experience, with the emotions of ordinary men and women who were fighting for freedom and for a living in a violent new world. His songs have been strongly rooted in his life and have functioned there as enzymes to assist in the digestion of hardship, solitude, violence, hunger, and honest comradeship of democracy.’ (Lomax *et al* 1949:xiii)

Subsequently, he maintained that Appalachian folk music was the first *British* folk music since it was the first tradition to blend English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh traditions. Intriguingly, he claimed that Appalachia had democratised British music by purging its aristocratic and medieval tone to create a new purer, hybrid form. Lomax viewed this mixing as positive evidence for the democratic qualities of the American ‘melting pot’ at work. In 1960, he stated:

‘American folk songs are, above all else, American. They are a mixture of English, Scottish, Irish, French and African influence stirred together in a way that could happen only in this magnificently heterogeneous country.’ (see Calkins 1960:205)

For Lomax, Appalachian folk music's heterogeneity was a starting point for a project that was centrally concerned with developing a highly politicised conception of the American nation. His own politics bore the imprint of the Roosevelt era, even though he classed people with strong left-wing sympathies, such as Pete Seeger and Ewan McColl, as amongst his closest associates. As such, Lomax saw folk music as both a conduit by which the people might speak to the centre and as a means by which the USA might discover its democratic identity. In 1981, Lomax recalled that:

‘the Roosevelt period was not only one of political development, when for the first time America became conscious of its social responsibilities to the whole population. It was also a time when a rising interest in American culture flowered and bore fruit... The developing concern about what our own American culture was actually like, about who we were as people peaked at this time. And the search for American folk roots was a part of this.... The Roosevelts and the bright, young, intellectuals of the New Deal and Congress under Roosevelt's baton put their arms around the whole of American culture - minorities, ethnics, blacks, poor whites, Indians, coal miners, unemployed.... And it was partially on the power of that discovery that we could fight World War II. That self-discovery poured energy right into the bloodstream of the people and helped us lick the fascists.’ (Cohen 2003:93)

Yet despite his sense of patriotism and duty, Lomax was investigated as a ‘communist sympathizer’ on various occasions from 1942 onwards, arousing particularly hostile scrutiny when placed in charge of campaign music for Henry A.

Wallace's 1948 Progressive Party's Presidential candidacy. Subsequently, Lomax was listed in the publication *Red Channels* as a possible Communist sympathizer and was blacklisted from working in US entertainment industries (Gioia 2006; Szwed 2010: 189-91). His decision to spend much of the 1950s in London was undoubtedly influenced by wishing to be beyond the reach of the anti-Communist witch-hunts of that era.

Whatever the reason, it proved an immensely prolific period for Lomax. He acquainted the British public with the diversity of American folk music styles, while at the same time collecting British and European folk music. From the latter, he compiled the 18-part *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*—an anthology issued on newly-invented LP records that drew upon a network of folk musicians and folklorists in Britain and continental Europe, particularly Italy and Spain. Rather than simply constituting exercises in preservation, the accumulated materials gave Lomax *as collector* a sense of the dynamism, complexity and transformation of specific traditions within a broad spatial and temporal framework and, *as performer and populariser*, the potential for new emerging styles, forms and fusions that might capture the popular imagination. This was illustrated on his return to the USA in 1959 by the concert 'Folksong 59' that he produced in New York's Carnegie Hall. In addition to gospel, blues, bluegrass and folk revival music, the concert also featured a Black rock 'n roll group 'The Cadillacs'. This occasion marked the first time rock 'n roll and bluegrass were performed on the stage of Carnegie Hall (Cohen 2003:140). Lomax was unapologetic in the face of protests from purists, arguing that Americans should set aside prejudices and embrace this music as their own (also Szwed 2010:310-12). Although there are many moments in

the 1950s and 1960s claimed by historians of popular music as being pivotal, there was symbolic significance in encouraging Americans to accept the emerging genre of rock 'n roll as an American tradition—as much part of the musical ‘melting-pot’ as the blues, gospel, cajun or bluegrass.

## **A FLAWED METHODOLOGY**

Lomax's writings reveal that he envisaged working towards a global theory of the folk by the mid-1950s. The regional music of Spain and Italy collected during the period 1952-55, in particular, made him wary about the use of folk culture by totalitarian regimes and reinforced his sense that that social science should find ways to allow all musical cultures to flourish equally. He therefore proposed a new science of musical ethnography based on the study of the musical styles or habits that should embrace the total situation in which human beings produce music. Its purpose was not only to achieve a new understanding of the nature of folk music, but also to show that ethnomusicology can contribute to understanding the relationships between cultural and social patterning. Lomax (1959:928) proposed that: ‘the new science of musical ethnography be based on the study of the musical styles or musical habits of mankind. I prefer the term “style” to “habit”, because the former gives the sense of a dynamic current in culture, while the latter puts the accent on non-creative, mechanical activity.’ He continued by arguing that the ‘study of musical style should embrace the total human situation which produces the music’ (*ibid*:929), which included:

‘(1) The number of people habitually involved in a musical act, and the way in which they cooperate.

- (2) The relation between the music makers and the audience.
- (3) the physical behaviour of the music makers - their bodily stance, gestures, facial expressions, muscular tensions, especially those of the throat.
- (4) The vocal timbres and pitch favoured by the culture, and their relationship to the factors under 3.
- (5) The social function of the music and the occasion of its production.
- (6) Its psychological and emotional content as expressed in the song texts and the culture's interpretation of this traditional poetry.
- (7) How songs are learned and transmitted.'

In contrast to other research on music such as Alan Merriam (1964) and other mid-century American ethnomusicologist, Lomax argued that it was only when the behavioural patterns covered by these seven points were taken into account that formal elements (such as scales, interval systems and rhythmic patterns), could be properly understood as the act as symbols that stand for the whole. He concluded (*ibid*):

'A musical style is learned as a whole and responded to as a whole.... the very magic of music lies in the fact that its formal elements can conjure up the total musical experience. An Andalucian gypsy finds it difficult to sing well in his flamenco style unless he is in a bar with wine on the table, money promised, women to clap and dance the rhythms, and fans to shout encouragement. Yet a melody hummed at work in an olive grove conjures up this experience to his imagination.'

Cantometrics took formal shape between 1963 and 1976 and drew on the assistance of numerous collaborators, most notably the anthropologist Conrad Arensburg and the composer and musicologist Victor Grauer. Arensburg, in particular, was co-director and a formative influence on the project through his belief in a holistic anthropological science that looked for unifying models to structure cultural data. He believed that anthropology, as a natural science, could build a science of observed behaviour based on the empirical study of human interaction—a form of interaction theory termed ‘human ethology’ (Arensburg 1972:6). Cantometrics, Arensburg claimed, exemplified this way of doing anthropology, resulting in the successful discovery of pan-human, worldwide cultural correlations and highly specific cultural variations in social relationships, and measuring both musical and non-musical cultural data in behavioural terms (*ibid*:7; Arensburg and Kimball 1981).

Cantometrics was also shaped by the available funding, which came initially from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), an agency of the US Federal Government. Perhaps not surprisingly, the NIMH’s interest in Lomax’s work centred more on social relations than musicology. His application to NIMH for a four-year grant under the name ‘Folk Song as a Psycho-Social Indicator’ proposed to extend phonotactics beyond its original Indo-European data set, develop content analyses of song texts, and begin a pilot study of dance style. However, what especially interested the NIMH was Lomax’s theory that a stronger sense of self, rooted in a more authentic cultural identity, could alleviate juvenile delinquency in minority populations and ethnic groups (Cohen 2003:239; Szwed 2010:347).

As propounded in *Folk Song Style and Culture* (Lomax 1968), cantometrics essentially involved a complex and quantitatively sophisticated form of cultural and behavioural analysis. In brief outline, researchers analysed at least 10 songs for each of a sample of 233 different cultures and did so on the basis of coding sheets (see Figure 1), which covered musical and melodic structure, lyrical content, social context and participation, gesture and performance. In Lomax's (1967:220) words:

'A rating sheet was designed by Victor Grauer and myself so that a trained observer might consistently record his judgement about many levels of the song performance. Consensus tests on this rating system indicate that agreement between judges on most parameters is 80 percent or better and that naïve judgement may be trained to achieve this level of consensus on at least half the system in a matter of a few days.'

The sheets provided rating scales for each element, with between 3 and 13 points available on any given scale, depending on the perceived evaluation needs of the particular element (13 was then the limit that IBM coding cards could handle). Each song was coded separately, having a specific profile. These could be aggregated into data sets which told about the style of the folk music of particular areas and could be used in all manner of ways: for example, to yield information about particular elements of song, to produce world maps of say choral or solo singing, or simply to demarcate culture regions.

\*\*\*FIGURE 1 about here\*\*\*

The researchers also collected data about subsistence type and social structure for each of the 233 cultures, which were cross-tabulated with the cantometric data. These were analysed and, using regions based on George P. Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas* (Murdock 1967), were used to generate 56 broad areas on the basis of musical 'style', a characteristic that Lomax and his colleagues defined as that 'part of music that expressed the social or collective identity of its performers and listeners'. Through aggregation, the 56 culture areas were arranged into nine large, homogeneous, though interrelated, style regions (see Table 1). On this basis, it was possible to generate sets of topological maps to give visual expression to the basic principles of cantometrics. Figure 2, for example, shows the 56 culture areas of the world on one map, with the focus on North America. What this map purports to show is that the stylistic connections for American folk music are primarily within the bounds of the broader culture region, apart from significant links with Eastern Brazil and the Mato Grosso. Placing maps that focus on other culture regions alongside would give an immediate impression of homogeneity and difference.

\*\*\*TABLE 1 and FIGURE 2 about here\*\*\*

Cantometrics attracted heavy criticism and had little impact on the methodologies used by other ethnomusicologists. Lomax's quest for universal, demonstrable correlations fitted uneasily alongside an increasingly fashionable intensive ethnographic approach developed from the work of Franz Boas. However, the most damning criticisms were directed against the quality of the science. Panteleoni (1972:243-4) accused Lomax of 'bias in approach and sloppiness in method'. *Inter alia*, he cited the following problems: the exclusion of data from China

without discussion; omission of features that failed to yield the desired results; exclusive use of North American adjudicators; imprecise analytic categories and rating scales; implicit assumptions of European cultural superiority; small samples of songs from any given culture and the lack of a rationale for choice; and the preponderance of field recordings of male musicians by male researchers. Downey (1970) raised concerns that the *method* of coding influenced the *outcomes* of coding in the process, thereby posing a series of questions about reliability, bias and experimental control. Various commentators have pointed to ambivalence in Lomax's work about whether musical correlations derive from historical diffusionism or from parallel stages of development. From the first viewpoint, cultural similarities are spread through the influences of war, migration or expansion. From the second, parallels derive from what in cantometric parlance might be termed societies that occupy corresponding evolutionary 'levels' or experience similar systems of subsistence. This contradiction is evident in Lomax's own statement that:

'First, the geography of song styles traces the main paths of human migration and maps the known historical distributions of culture. Second, some traits of song performance show a powerful relationship to features of social structure that regulate interactions in all cultures.' (Cohen 2003:244)

Ultimately the question of geography, which one might imagine would lie at the very centre of a project aiming to map culture areas, proved to be the least well theorised and most problematic of all aspects of the study. Victor Grauer noted:

‘What really became a problem was that Alan was so focused on getting the correlations with the Murdock data to come out “just right” that other very important, meaningful and less problematic aspects of the project were neglected. (*ibid.*)

Nevertheless, Lomax continued to champion the validity of cantometrics as he developed his final project, the Campaign for Cultural Equity, and attempted to find funding for a computer-based GIS system called the ‘Global Jukebox’ (Filene 2000:176; Szwed 2010:384-5). Here Lomax adopted the language of environmentalism to counter what he perceived as ‘pollution of the symbolic environment’ and ‘cultural greyout’ resulting from the domination of modern media by international big business (Cohen 2003:324-5).

## **GEOGRAPHY, CANTOMETRICS AND WORLD MUSIC**

Though, as noted above, cantometrics developed entirely separately from the influence of human geographical research, criticisms of the project resonate with the powerful critiques directed at the quantitative and behavioural approaches within geography. It is sobering to learn that varieties of culture area theory often characterised within histories of geography as theoretically and methodologically conservative were being developed during the 1960s at the cutting edge of quantitative social science. In addition, while cantometrics substantially predates human geography’s engagement with behaviouralism, parallels in criticisms are striking. These include: accusations of focusing on methodology to the exclusion of critical reflection on underlying assumptions regarding society, culture and behaviour;

propagation of bourgeois values; and the adoption of atomistic models of human behaviour and deterministic models of social organisation in order to explain complex geographical processes, circulations and relations (see Gold 2009). In a sense, the maps themselves constitute eloquent critiques of cantometrics. The division of the world into equally sized blocks, each representing one of Murdoch's 'culture regions' and closely parcelled together to form a schematic and abstracted representation of the earth's surface, suggests a deliberate break with qualitative accounts of culture. Yet the Murdoch map of culture regions was a more representational and 'realistic' projection of the globe than that which resulted when the musical data was mapped on to it. For cantometrics, geography is objectified both as *a priori* knowledge and scientific abstraction.

Having said this, cantometrics and its subsequent developments were far from mere academic exercises in dispassionate and rationalistic scientific inquiry, since both were informed by strong, egalitarian and left-leaning politics. It is not surprising that a conception of world music should emerge in the United States in the context of a liberal democratic conception of American identity and a background of anti-fascism built, however optimistically, around a notion of the 'melting pot' and a plurality of cultures. There are parallels here with Herder's eighteenth century efforts to build cosmopolitan politics which defended the rights of small German states against the power of Prussia.

There are also contrasts between the folk collecting strategies of Lomax and previous collectors. Whereas Cecil Sharp searched for survivals in culture in order to locate and define historically-isolated outliers of English culture, Lomax, like Bartók

in his later period, [\[or Grainger\]](#) was well aware of the heterogeneous nature of folk music. For Lomax this did not threaten the integrity of American national identity but provided a primary building block for a democracy built on the idea of the melting pot. He went further than this, of course, and developed his idea of the melting pot beyond the USA into a global cartography of cultural hearths, diffusions, crossovers and hybrids. In doing so, Lomax retained the basic outlook and values of New Deal politics, continuing to see his role as, on the one hand, showcasing and providing a voice for the disenfranchised and, on the other, facilitating cultural bridges between apparently disparate and divided peoples through recognising the ‘essential unity’ of humanity. In this sense, cantometrics and other aspects of Lomax’s work drew more generally on the Enlightenment ideals evident in Herder’s original theorisation of folk culture.

Thus, for Lomax, the delimitation of specific cultures became the building block for a profound ecumenism. In a curious sense the foundational atomism of interaction theory, based on the idea that particularity and cultural meaning derive from the aggregation and collection of interactions into increasingly complex structures at progressively greater spatial scales, provides an appropriate theoretical ground. This is because interaction theory, at least as formulated by Arensburg, begins with events as abstraction and then traces the aggregation of these into socially meaningful organisational structures and networks. In the process, culture emerges from abstraction at higher levels of interaction.

Like earlier collectors, Lomax has been heavily criticised by recent theorists for the rigidity and dogmatism of his underlying philosophies and classificatory

systems. As with other folksong collectors of his day, Lomax believed that vibrant and lively folk cultures would reinvigorate their respective national cultures and counteract the dominance of what were believed to be degenerate and decaying commercial cultures—a point reminiscent of the heterogeneous creative and regenerative potential of folk music discussed earlier. However, with this in mind, it is important to return to the question of how folk collectors negotiated the relationships between purity and heterogeneity when defining the spaces of culture, region and nation or, as with cantometrics, global spaces of local distinctiveness. It seems evident that Lomax, like Sharp and Bartók (Gold and Revill 2006), remained locked into a search for points of certainty and security to anchor his otherwise fluid sense of the folk [and this is where, I think, Grainger diverged, since he sought no such stability, but rather celebrated the mobile nature of such repertoires]. As such, that process of anchorage was achieved in three distinct ways.

First, Lomax believed that when and wherever folk musicians found music related to their own 'tradition' it would remind them of their own personal and community folk history and thus "at home". Hence, he felt that folk traditions were inherently conservative because to change was to challenge longstanding senses of self and community. Such thinking mirrors notions of cultural hearths familiar from North American cultural geography and was an idea shared by Sharp in his search for 'survivals in culture' or Bartók in his concern for finding a creative centre for folk culture. Yet while trying to ground music's mobile, fleeting and transient qualities firmly in ideas of place, his approach also differed considerably in a number of respects. Most important were his emphasis on the performative qualities of folk

music, on its fundamental heterogeneity and on the cultural equality of world music traditions – ideas which have only recently taken a hold in ethnomusicology.

Secondly, the long-term collaboration of Arensburg and others at Columbia underscored a view that cantometrics should engage centrally with current social science debates. Lomax has been castigated for the apparently pompous pseudo-scientific language of cantometrics and the western, masculinist assumptions which critics detect as underlying its methodology and findings. Yet it is reasonable to assume that Lomax genuinely believed that what he was doing was fair and objective. This apparent dissonance is familiar in the world of folk collecting where many collectors have tamed the disturbing heterogeneity of music by resorting to an authenticity founded in the judgement of the collector (arranger, composer) as a sympathetic but dispassionate expert. In the context of the American New Deal liberalism championed by Lomax and Arensburg, the dispassionate expert was undeniably a key figure in the forging of an equitable democracy.

Thirdly, points of certainty were found by reference to a value system that defined 'beauty'. Lomax (1967), for instance, argued that the purpose of cultural analysis is to examine the ways in which value judgements (the good) materialise in culture (in what is considered beautiful) as part of the environmental and social adaptation of human societies. In this formulation, the study of aesthetics (or study of the beautiful) is our means of accessing the truth of the lived realities of societies in their specificity. Here Lomax reworks an idea from survivals theory with the sophistication of modern anthropology and some reference to his undergraduate years studying philosophy. It suggested that folk music is beautiful because it is true to a

people's history and experience, given that this experience is distilled through generations of adaptive decision-making (see Boyes 1993).

## **CONCLUSION**

Given Alan Lomax's sensitivity to other cultures, one might justifiably enquire why someone who was in many respects so enlightened in his approach to world folk musics could champion the rigid and partial classificatory system associated with cantometrics. Yet it is arguable that all attempts to create world music require the diversity of musical forms, practices and cultures to be subject to some form of conceptual homogenisation or overarching theory. Certainly the major criticisms of the recent world music phenomenon focus on this issue, highlighting concerns over issues such as the commodification, packaging and parcelling together of music created for a multiplicity of social, religious and ceremonial situations into a catalogue of bland style choices cut off from their social, religious and political contexts and meanings.

Cantometrics was undoubtedly open to some of these accusations. Though Lomax argued strongly for the cultural specificity of regional, local and national musical styles, his exposure to applied anthropology and transactional analysis enabled him to find a means of moving beyond the apparent limits of locally-generated meanings and bridge cultures by finding cross-cultural unity in interactional processes at higher levels of organisational complexity than that of musical events themselves. If for Lomax music presented universal truths, they were truths of structure rather than content. Perhaps this begins to help us understand the apparent

contradiction evident in the cantometrics project between the integrity of local styles and the fetishisation of abstraction and correlation.

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## Figure Captions

Figure 1. Modal profile for North America, based on 374 songs. The profile is drawn on the most frequent coding points.

Source: (Lomax, 1968:86)

Figure 2. Homogeneity mapping for North America

Source: (Lomax, 1968:85)