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Music and the Sociologial Gaze

By Peter J. Martin

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Introduction[1]

'The history of musicology and music theory in our generation', write Cook and Everist, 'is one of loss of confidence: we no longer know what we know' (1999 p. V). The reasons for this widely-acknowledged crisis of confidence need not be rehearsed, but clearly arise from a series of challenges to the established discipline – from, for example, the critical and feminist theories of the 'new' musicologists, from various claims about the proper relation of musicology to ethnomusicology, from the emergence of popular music studies, and so on. The present paper is concerned with one aspect of these challenges and the response to them, an aspect which could be succinctly, if rather inadequately, characterised as a 'turn to the social' in the study of music. Some authors have brought new life to a tradition of analysis which has come to be identified with Adorno, arguing that music inevitably bears the imprint of the societal conditions in which it was created. For John Shepherd,

> … because *people* create music, they reproduce in the basic structure of their music the basic structure of their own thought processes. If it is accepted that people's thought processes are socially mediated, then it could be said that the basic structures of different styles of music are likewise socially mediated and so socially significant. (1987 p. 57)

For Shepherd, therefore, it is not accidental that the conventions and procedures of functional tonality have achieved virtually hegemonic status in Western societies, since in them is encoded a representation of the dominant ideology of industrial capitalism (Shepherd 1991 p. 122). Similarly, for Susan McClary, specific '… gender/power relationships [are] already inscribed in many of the presumably value-free procedures of Western music' (1991 p. 19). For these authors, musical analysis must go beyond the notes themselves to elicit the fundamentally social meanings which they convey.

Others have agreed with the proposal that musical works must be understood in terms of the social contexts from which they have emerged, but rather than seeking social meanings 'within' the musical texts, have sought to explore issues concerning the social circumstances of their production, performance, and reception. An insis-

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tence on the fundamental importance of context, for example, permeates Olle Edström's discussion of the approach developed by the 'Gothenburg School', specifically as a result of its members' reading of Adorno: '… we gradually gained a deeper insight', he writes, 'into the pointlessness of instituting theoretical discourses on music without a solid ethnomusicological knowledge of the everyday usage, function and meaning of music' (1997 p. 19; see also Tagg 1998 p. 228).

For present purposes, my initial concern is simply to suggest that, whether the focus is on music as a 'social text' (Shepherd 1991), or on the societal contexts of its production and reception, the proposed analytical reorientation necessarily leads musicologists to engage with issues which are also of fundamental concern to sociologists, and have been so for many years. This much may be taken – perhaps optimistically – to be uncontentious. What I would argue, rather more polemically, is that in general this 'turn to the social' in musicological studies has not led to a sustained engagement with the themes and traditions represented within the established discourse of sociology. In saying this I do not intend either to reify or to ascribe a spurious unity to 'sociology' – which, like musicology, has its warring factions, its doctrinal disputes, and a constant tendency towards fragmentation. But what I do wish to suggest is that there are various ways in which sociological insights can illuminate all kinds of musical practices in their various contexts, that sociologists may therefore have a legitimate interest in such practices, but that their concerns – arising from a rather different disciplinary discourse – may be rather different, and indeed divergent, from those of musicologists, whether 'old' or 'new'.

Another way of putting this would simply be to assert than music, like any other phenomenon, may be approached from various different perspectives, of which the sociological is one. Yet whereas studies of music by historians, philosophers, psychologists, and to a lesser extent economists, using their distinctive skills and insights, have apparently been quite acceptable to musicologists, the interface with sociology appears problematic, certainly when viewed from a sociological point of view. Part of the difficulty may well be that most sociologists lack the technical and theoretical knowledge required to undertake musicological analysis; but the same point could be made about historians, philosophers, and the rest. In fact, it could be argued that a similar lack of awareness – this time of the discourse of sociology – has hindered musicologists in their efforts to pursue the 'turn to the social'. It seems appropriate, therefore, to suggest some of the ways in which the agenda of the sociology of music may differ from that of musicology, but yet make a distinctive contribution to the understanding of musical practices in their cultural contexts.

Problems at the Interface

That the relations between musicologists and sociologists of music remain problematic is evident in the responses of some of the former to works of the latter. Indeed, for sociologists such responses usefully demonstrate the extent to which their efforts may be subject to misunderstanding and misapprehension. By way of illustration it may be useful to focus on two related issues, both of which have been raised by musicologists in relation to some of my own work, but (I am encouraged to note) have also been seen as troublesome elements in other sociological studies.

1. The Myth of Value-Freedom

The first issue arises out of the quite fundamental contention that (despite all Adorno's arguments) it is not the business of the sociologist of music to make aesthetic judgements concerning music or its performers. To many musicologists and others with a background in the humanities, this position has on occasion been interpreted as a quite unworthy abdication of serious responsibilities, as a futile effort to achieve 'value freedom', or even (as has been said of some work of mine) a presumption of 'Olympian detachment' (Middleton 1996 p. 656). In fact, the position entails none of these things: what is perhaps insufficiently appreciated is that the agenda – far from being 'value-free' – is set according to a different, but specific and identifiable, set of assumptions and values. Indeed the principle of 'sociological indifference' is itself one of these values. It should also be emphasised that this is not a further example of superficial post-modern relativism: to those familiar with the sociological literature, it is a methodological precept elaborated by Max Weber more than eighty years ago in distinguishing between sociology as a science concerned with 'the interpretive understanding of social action' – that is, by formulating explanations of action based on 'subjective meaning' – from other 'dogmatic disciplines … such as jurisprudence, logic, ethics, and aesthetics, which seek to ascertain the "true" and "valid" meanings associated with the objects of their investigation' (1978 p. 4). The aim of the sociological exercise, to put it more concretely, is thus not to decide on the 'justness' of a law, or the 'rightness' of a principle, or the 'real meaning' of a piece of music, but to understand the beliefs held and meanings taken by real people in actual situations, in order that their actions my be explained, and the course of events understood. To this end, it is essential that the sociologist attempts to remain indifferent to the claims and counter-claims made by the protagonists who are the subjects of the research: to take sides or to intervene would be to compromise the investigation itself – we would not, for example, expect a racist bigot to produce a credible study of inter-ethnic relations.

   Sociologists' perspectives on these matters, then, are no more 'detached' than those of musicological analysts – but the object of their studies, and their methodol-

ogy, may be very different. In this context it is instructive to recall the remarks of Howard Becker more than a decade ago on the relations between ethnomusicology and sociology, in which he points out that contemporary sociologists of art are no longer primarily concerned with the (often speculative) grand narratives relating 'art' and 'society' produced by European theorists of Adorno's generation, but focus on the 'collective activity' through which things like music-making get done: 'Sociologists working in this mode', says Becker, 'aren't much interested in "decoding" art works, in finding the works' secret meanings as reflections of society. They prefer to see those works as the result of what a lot of people have done jointly' (1989 pp. 281f). It is worth emphasising this point, for as Becker himself suggests, the notion of investigating 'what a lot of people have done jointly' is 'deceptively simple' (*ibid*). It's too simple in one sense, because as every sociologist knows, and a moment's reflection will confirm, the scientific analysis of the collaborative interactions which are the essence of human social life is an immensely difficult and complex undertaking. Earlier I referred to the 'technical and theoretical knowledge' which is rightly regarded as essential if a person is to operate as a professional musicologist. At this point, it is worth noting that there is also an extensive domain of 'technical and theoretical knowledge' which has been developed by sociologists concerned with the analysis, in various ways, of the routine accomplishment of orderly patterns of social organisation. Without some awareness of that domain, it may be hard to grasp what the sociologists' purposes are, and I strongly suspect that this is the source of some of the misapprehension of sociological work by some musicologists. I will consider below a few of the ways in which this sociological concern with the technical (and normally taken-for-granted) aspects of social organisation may illuminate aspects of musical activity.

2. Social Constructionism

A second issue concerns the implications of the contention that the meaning of cultural objects is not inherent in them, or somehow existent independently of social life, but is constituted in and through the interactional processes of real people in real situations. What is entailed, of course, and what some authors have considered a radically new idea, is that 'pieces' of music do not have a single or unambiguous meaning which it is the business of the analyst to decipher. Rather, meanings are created, sustained, and challenged in processes of collaborative interaction; indeed, from this perspective, cultural objects may be said to be *constituted* through such processes. Far from being a novel suggestion, however, the theme of the 'social construction of reality' has been (or should have been) familiar to every undergraduate student of sociology since Berger and Luckmann's book of that title was published in 1966. Moreover, the book itself draws its main inspiration from the work of Alfred

Schütz (Berger & Luckmann 1991 p. 27), whose *Phenomenology of the Social World* (1972) first appeared in Germany in 1932. In the present context, it is worth noting that the German title of book was *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* ('the meaningful construction of the social world') which in many ways conveys a better sense of its main theme. In turn, of course, Schütz drew heavily on Husserl's phenomenology, and in particular the notion of *Lebenswelt* – the 'lifeworld' which is fundamental to human experience, and in which the unique subjectivities of individuals come together to generate a shared sense of taken-for-granted reality. Another influence on Berger and Luckmann was the work of G.H. Mead and the sociological tradition of symbolic interactionism (Berger & Luckmann 1991 p. 29) which, drawing on elements of American pragmatism rather than European phenomenology, investigated patterns of social organisation as the dynamic outcome of what Becker (1974) terms 'collective action'. From this perspective too, the aim of analysis is not to establish whether peoples' assumptions, beliefs and ideas are objectively correct, morally right or aesthetically good, but to determine the ways in which such beliefs – whatever they may be – influence the processes of collaborative interaction which are basic to any human organisation. Indeed, the words of the early Chicago sociologist W.I. Thomas have long been adopted as a slogan for this approach as a whole: 'If men define situations as real', declared Thomas, 'then they are real in their consequences'. In another classic statement, Herbert Blumer concisely outlined the implications of Mead's thought for sociologists, emphasising, *inter alia*, that not only do meanings not inhere in objects, but that all objects '… are social products in that they are formed and transformed by the defining process that takes place in social interaction' (1969 p. 69).

A short consideration of the idea of the 'social construction of reality' thus confirms that the term and its implications should be far from new to anyone familiar with the sociological literature, but more importantly suggests, once again, that its utility for the sociologist arises in the context of a specific area of research interest, that is, the remarkable phenomenon of the achievement of normatively organised social order. Seen from this perspective, many all-too-familiar criticisms appear to miss the point. Social constructionism does not, for example, give license to an unconstrained relativism, since firstly, as I have said, it is itself rooted in a particular academic discourse, and secondly it is concerned, not to ajudicate between competing claims about facts, values or meanings, but to take the whole process of claims-making – and the ensuing conflicts, debates, negotiations, and their outcomes – as its *topic*. Moreover, as this implies, it is not the case that a constructionist view (or interactionism more generally) neglects phenomena of power and conflict; on the contrary, attempts to achieve, defend, or challenge positions of advantage are precisely what motivate individuals and groups in the social arena: the 'social structure', with its huge inequalities of wealth, power, and symbolic resources, is no more – and no less – than the outcome at any moment of this perpetual struggle for advantage.

So it is also a great mistake to write of social reality as being 'only' or 'merely' a social construction – anyone who has the least acquaintance with Berger and Luckmann's book will be aware of the amount of attention they pay to the 'objective facticity' of social institutions (1991 p. 30). Moreover, unless we are prepared to accept the claims of such approaches as instinct theory, genetic determination, or operant conditioning, there would appear to be no other way in which human social life could be organised, so it would seem reasonable to view this as a field of some scientific interest.

Just as, therefore, there are now 'old' and 'new' musicologies, so we may distinguish between old and new sociological approaches: the former concerned with 'structural' phenomena and 'macro' social processes which, as in the grand schemes of Marx, Durkheim and Parsons, are held to operate independently of real people, the latter starting from the fundamental reality of individuals in collaborative interaction, and examining the ways in which the social order is built up from that. And just as in musicology, the old and the new remain in uneasy coexistence. However, I think it is reasonable to detect in recent years a general drift away from 'structural' approaches (on the grounds that they reify collective phenomena, and entail deterministic explanations of human behaviour). Certainly most theoretical sociologists have left behind them the conceptual baggage of structural and post-structural approaches, seeking to develop an understanding of social life in terms of 'practical action' in interactional contexts: it is in such contexts, as Giddens puts it, that 'meaning is produced and sustained through the use of methodological devices' (1987 p. 214f). Significantly, too, the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who explicitly saw his task as an 'effort to escape from structuralist objectivism without relapsing into subjectivism' (Bourdieu 1990 p. 61) has attracted criticism precisely because he has not succeeded in detaching his analyses from 'structuralist' presuppositions, and thus fails to capture '… the emergent processes inherent in the production and reproduction of the structure of daily life reasoning, language use, and practical action' (Cicourel 1993 p. 112). In general, then, and with varying emphases, much recent sociology has focused on the ways in which the 'objective facticity' of the intersubjective world is produced, reproduced, and changed through organised practices which, however routine and regularly occurring, must nonetheless be *enacted* by real people in real situations.

What I wish to suggest, therefore, is that the application of this particular sociological 'gaze' to the field of musical practices generates a rather different kind of discourse to that of musicology. As Becker suggested, the sociologist will not be concerned to decode or decipher the meaning of musical 'texts', however defined, either from a syntactic or a semantic point of view. Nor, as argued above, is it any business of the sociologist to take sides in the inevitable and perpetual debates about their meaning or value. What will be of interest, however, are the many and varied ways in which such cultural objects are constituted and defined, the uses that are

made of them, and the consequences of these activities, for it is through this sort of investigation that we may arrive at an understanding of the social organisation of the musical 'worlds' (Becker 1982) in which all production, performance and reception take place.

One of the important contributions of Leonard B. Meyer was the recognition that aesthetic experience not only depends fundamentally on the kind of expecta- tions that the listener brings to the music, but that such expectations themselves are derived from particular kinds of cultural learning and experience. Individuals' responses and reactions, which are experienced as right and 'natural', are nonetheless shaped by prior processes of social learning (Meyer 1970 p. 43). This is not quite as 'paradoxical' as Meyer suggests, if we accept the point above that inculcation into the everyday intersubjective world *is* in fact the 'natural' way in which human beings acquire the capacity to have any kind of experience, and so to engage in organised social life. But for present purposes the essential point is simply to emphasise the implications of the idea that the ways in which we hear music are profoundly influ- enced by our cultural experience, which varies both between and within societies: as Edström has put it '… the significance and meaning of music is created, like every- thing else, in its social environment' (1997 p. 16). What this has been taken to mean, quite properly, is that the production, performance, and reception of music are 'socially mediated', to use Shepherd's term, but in specific ways, so that – for example – styles of music are said to be capable of 'implicitly coding an explicit world-sense' (Shepherd 1991 p. 85), which is then assumed to be characteristic of specific social groups. As I have suggested, there are some fundamental theoretical problems with this sort of analysis, and I have discussed these elsewhere (Martin 1995 p. 160ff). At present what I wish to suggest, as an extension of the points made above, and Becker's (1989) distinction between the 'old' and the 'new' sociologies of art, is that the things which are taken to constitute the 'social environment' – such things as 'societies', 'social classes', musical 'styles', and so on – are not structured entities 'out there', so to speak, whose relationships can be unambiguously defined by the analyst. Rather, they are to be conceived as phenomena whose reality is con- structed – and whose existence is normally taken for granted – through collaborative social interaction in specific situations. We need only reflect on the enormous range of actual sounds and musical styles which have been referred to as 'jazz', for example, to realise the extent to which the meaning of the term – that is, what it signifies at any particular moment – is context-dependent.

It should be said straight away, in order to anticipate a frequent set of misunder- standings, that this sort of perspective does not commit us to philosophical idealism, to subjectivism or solipsism, or to a denial of the massive inequalities of wealth and power in societies. This theme cannot be pursued here, but is developed by Berger and Luckmann in their discussion of objectification and the consequent 'coercive power' of institutions (1991:78); Blumer, too, asserts that any denial '… of the exist-

ence of structure in human society … would be ridiculous' (1969 p. 75). What I do wish to consider briefly, though, is the emerging importance of the social situation for the study of music as social practice. Again, Edström rightly includes the 'situation' in his diagram of the mutual interrelations of the factors involved in reception (the others being the 'individual', the 'music', and the 'performance'. But the implication of the present argument is that we must go beyond a simple conception of the 'situation' as, for example, 'when and where music is performed' (Edström, 1997 p. 64), to consider the social situation much more fundamentally as the focal point where all other factors – not least, the unique subjectivity of each individual – are brought together to constitute what phenomenologists have called a 'vivid present' through the interactional 'work' (DeNora, 1986) of participants. As Erving Goffman pointed out, the importance of the social situation is often neglected, perhaps because of its very ordinariness. Each of us, as a human being operating in specific cultural contexts, constantly experiences the world not as 'social structures', or 'institutions', and so on, but in terms of the exigencies and constraints of a succession of social situations and encounters. All of what we call 'experience' is mediated in some way or other by these situations, from earliest infancy right through life; they, not 'social facts', are '… a reality *sui generis*, as He used to say' (Goffman 1964 p. 136; the He in question is, presumably, Durkheim). Moreover, the dynamics of social life – from momentous political projects to tiny conversational details – do not consist in the operation of disembodied social processes, but must be *enacted* by culturally competent individuals. Again, Goffman made the point effectively. In contrast to the vast attention given to the study of 'language', there is an infinitely smaller number of studies of its actual use in the world: but, asks Goffman, '… where but in social situations does speaking go on?' (*ibid)*. In the present context, the implication is that *from a sociological perspective* it is through the analysis of actual situations (rather than musical 'works') that we will come to understand something of what Edström terms '… the everyday usage, function, and meaning of music' (1997 p. 19).

A number of things follow from this. One is that, as Edström has also argued, this time in relation to Nicholas Cook's distinction between the 'ways of hearing' characteristic of musicologists and non-specialists (Edström 1997 p. 58; Cook 1990), studies of the reception, as opposed to the production or performance, of music assume a much greater significance. If it is accepted that the meaning of music is not to be found within the 'text', so to speak, the analytical focus moves to concentrate on the meanings which may be generated in the context of particular encounters, for it is these – and not the stipulations of some theoretician (or some composer!) – which will inform the subsequent conduct of the individuals concerned. (As Wittgenstein put it: 'You cannot prescribe to a symbol what it *may* be used to express. All that it CAN express, it MAY express). Again, though, I would wish to go further, and suggest that the term 'reception' is inadequate to convey what is involved here. For one thing, the notion of 'reception' is too passive, having the connotation of 'receiving' a

'message' which has been 'transmitted', as with radio and TV signals. What must be emphasised is the active and engaged process through which people 'make sense' of their cultural environment. There is something of this in the discussions of popular music which criticise mass-society theorists for their assumption of a homogeneous aggregate of docile consumers, and emphasise instead the active 'appropriation' of music and the ways in which consumer goods may be '… taken over, transformed, reinterpreted, inserted into new contexts [and] combined to form a new *style* (Middleton 1990 p. 157). But the implications of the view I am exploring go beyond this in the sense that, as Blumer suggested, all cultural objects are themselves *constituted* in the constant process of collaborative interaction. Mundane as it may seem, it is through *talk* that we create, sustain – and change – the taken-for-granted world of common-sense reality – learning, using and arguing about concepts such as 'the symphony', 'bebop', 'the orchestra', 'delta blues', and so on. This does not, of course, mean that we have the freedom to define situations however we wish, precisely because of the 'facticity' of institutions and cultural constraints. To paraphrase Marx, people make sense, but they do not make it as they please. Indeed, and I will return to this point, there is a 'political' dimension to all this: such concepts and the meanings associated with them are constantly open to renegotiation, as when we argue against others' interpretations and advocate our own, or – often more significantly – as organised intererest groups attempt to impose authoritative 'ways of hearing'.

These and other considerations arise from the apparently straightforward, but still problematic, suggestion that the sociologist of music may be primarily concerned with the uses to which music is put, as much as the qualities or characteristics of music itself. Even phrasing the matter in this way can cause difficulties: many listeners, most musicologists, and – almost by definition – all 'music-lovers' find it difficult or inappropriate to consider music in such prosaic, ulititarian, terms. Yet, quite apart from the process of 'demystification' which is likely to result from any properly sociological analysis, it is surely incontestable that music is 'used' for various purposes in a whole range of social settings and occasions: to yield a profit or earn a wage, to sell commodities, to create a desired 'atmosphere', to project an image of one's self, to work, exercise, or make love to, form part of a ritual, and so on. The list could be extended, but already what is evident is that, particularly in the electronic age, music's effectiveness in these sorts of circumstances does not necessarily depend on the 'performance' of a 'work', a dedicated setting, an 'audience', or indeed attentive 'listening'. And while all such events can be of interest to the sociologist, the musicologist may, or may not, share this concern. That is to say, in each of these settings music plays a part, perhaps an important part, in the constitution of normatively organised social situations. Yet precisely because they are normatively organised and normally experienced as unproblematic, the organisational features through which this sense of order is created are simply taken for granted. As I have suggested, however, orderly collaborative interaction does not just happen – it

involves, in Schütz's terms, the mutual orientation of the participants so as to secure a sense of intersubjective correspondence within an unproblematic 'world', and, further, the *enactment* of appropriate talk, gestures, actions, and so on in order to accomplish the event. These, I have argued, are matters of great technical interest to the sociologist who is concerned to understand the achievement of social order. But they may not be matters of much technical interest to the musicologist.

Sociological Studies of Music

It has been suggested above that it is not part of the sociologist's task to make normative judgements about the aesthetic value of music, in large part because – if this is not too perverse a way of putting it – it is the normative organisation of social life that is a central topic for sociological investigation. One studies the war, so to speak, and its contending armies, their resources, their generals and their tactics, their feuding factions and so on, in order to understand its outcome, rather than join the partisans on one or other side. This position is not therefore 'value-free' but derives from the discourse of scientific sociology, which from the outset has been influenced by a concern with the 'problem of social order' (Hughes, Martin and Sharrock 1995: 1–2). It remains to suggest, albeit briefly, some of the ways in which sociological studies can contribute to our understanding of music 'in its socio-economic context' (Edström 1997 p. 62).

1. It follows from what has been said above that the sociology of music will in principle be concerned with all 'kinds' of music, which means in practice that *popular music* will be a topic of particular interest, since it is both 'used' (in the utilitarian sense mentioned above) in a wide range of social settings, and 'listened' to (in the more musicological sense of knowledgeable and active engagement). Clearly this is another source of divergence between sociological and musicological concerns, with the latter concerned primarily with Western 'art-music' – though some musicologists, including members of the 'Gothenburg School', have come to realise the limitations of this preoccupation (Tagg 1998). Of course, there is no such entity as 'popular music', but the enduring use of the concept is suggestive of the power relations that obtain in this particular discourse – it is a 'catch-all' term for an array of heterogeneous styles and traditions which have not been classified authoritatively as 'serious' or 'art' music, a means of demarcating an important symbolic boundary. Thus the concept itself may serve as an example of the way a taken-for-granted cultural object ('popular music') may be constituted in the context of a struggle to assert and defend cultural legitimacy.

Moreover, both the distinction between 'serious' and 'popular' music, and prevailing definitions of particular types or styles, are themselves to be seen as 'socially con-

structed'. They are, that is, not simply ways of registering evident differences (though they may do this) but are ways in which a conceptual 'map' of the cultural environment has evolved out of the claims and counter-claims of interested parties. Of particular interest in this context are studies which have examined the processes through which the notion of music as 'high culture' was institutionalised in the nineteenth century, and the cultural consequences of the resulting opposition between 'serious' and 'popular' music in the twentieth (e.g. Levine 1988, DiMaggio 1986, Bourdieu 1984). Similarly, efforts to identify the essential qualities of a style often revolve around debates concerning 'authenticity' – as in the cases of, for example, 1950s rock 'n' roll, traditional jazz, or 'early music' – and lead to the definition of 'ideal-typical' stylistic paradigms which are then available to be used as criteria for the evaluation of particular performances. Simon Frith has discussed the ways in which musical, marketing, ideological and performance criteria, rather than simply 'the text itself' are all involved in the designation of popular music genres, noting that this is a constantly dynamic process (Frith 1996 p. 93f). More recently, Keith Negus has examined the ways in which record company staff seek to impose stylistic definitions and create genre distinctions within the volatile field of music production on the basis of cultural preconceptions and the selective gathering of information about the presumed market for their products; his conclusion, however, is that '… while market research gives people within the corporation a sense of certainty and security, in the process it does not so much understand the world of musical culture and consumption but invents one' (Negus 1999 p. 60).

2. Just as 'types' of music as cultural objects may be 'socially constructed' so their meaning and value are the subject of perpetual debate, negotiation and conflict. It is in this context that it is useful speak of the *politics of meaning,* as an (admittedly inadequate) way of referring to the perpetual barrage of claims and counter-claims that constitutes the discourse at any given moment. Once more, Edström provides us with a good example when he speaks of the way in which Lawrence Kramer's analyses are based on specific '*claims* about the way the inner meaning of music is constructed' (1997 p. 57, emphasis added). There is thus not simply a technical, but a rhetorical aspect to Kramer's discussion – he is inviting us to 'Hear it this way!', and by implication not another way, and trying to persuade us of the rightness of his version of things. A great deal of talk, and writing, about music operates like this, providing us with possible 'ways of hearing' the sounds, suggesting what it is 'about', and arguing for (or against) its aesthetic value.

Moreover, in the sociological gaze the making of such claims, and the variety of perspectives revealed by, for example, composers, members of audiences, critics of various persuasions, musicians, promoters, sponsors, and so on, appear not as positions to be argued with, but as data which, in the aggregate, can display the *realpolitik* of a particular art world. Whose claims will be accepted, and why? Who has the most effective symbolic resources, or the greatest material ones? What sort of contin-

gencies will affect the outcome? And so on. From the point of view of social organisation, these matters are important, since they determine the pattern of 'facticities' and consequent constraints which real individuals have to confront. Whose music is performed, and whose excluded? How are broadcasting schedules and playlists determined? Which band gets the recording contract? What sort of music is taught in schools? Sometimes these things 'just happen', but it would be naive (and sociologically incompetent) to ignore the activities of such 'big players' as major record companies and their marketing departments, or the hidden (and not so hidden) agenda of arts funding bodies. Sometimes there is an identifiable cultural movement: Stradling and Hughes' study of *The English Musical Renaissance* (forthcoming) is a fascinating account of the formation, and relative success, of a powerful coalition of interests which in the 1890s and subsequent decades aimed to replace 'German' with 'English' music in British conservatoires, concert halls, and radio programmes. Composers who were deemed to conform to the movement's programme were favoured; those who did not were marginalised. The implication is that little of this has to do with technical or artistic merit.

Other recent studies have examined sociocultural factors influencing the development of particular 'ways of hearing', and their consequences for the 'reception' of particular styles. Thus Tia DeNora has pointed to ways in which, in their efforts to maintain cultural distinction, Viennese aristocrats in the 1790s turned from a financial to an aesthetic strategy of social exclusion, in which Beethoven's new and unconventional music (and by extension his patrons) were associated with 'good taste', and in which there was 'a heightened emphasis on the appreciation of "greatness", from which derived the notion of master composers' (1995 p. 48). Ultimately, the process contributed not only to Beethoven's recognition as a 'master', but to the institutionalisation of a new discourse of art music – involving an ideology of 'serious' music and a reformulation of the concept of 'genius' – in which both his and others' works could be placed and evaluated (*ibid* p. 190). Before long, as James H Johnson shows in *Listening in Paris,* the elements of this discourse provided a context in which 'absolute' music could not only be rendered comprehensible but heard as 'the divine language of sentiment and imagination' (1995 p. 272). Whereas Beethoven's First Symphony was 'rejected virtually universally' after its Paris premiere in 1807 (*ibid* p. 258), by 1828 his music was greeted with 'rapturous' and sustained enthusiasm, and in the 1830s and 1840s Haydn's work was 're-evaluated' in terms of its 'abstract meanings' rather than judged, as in his lifetime, by its 'programmatic elements' (*ibid* p. 271).

Another example of a recent study which examines the effect of sociocultural factors on the ways in which music is heard is provided by Scott DeVeaux's *The Birth of Bebop* . DeVeaux rejects the two prevalent narratives of the development of modern jazz – one (particularly attractive to white critics) describing the more-or-less spontaneous evolution of the 'art', the other seeing the movement in terms of black musi-

cians' rejection of white society – on the grounds that both are retrospective constructions which decontextualise the music and its players. Instead, DeVeaux develops a nuanced interpretation of the evidence which emphasises the institutional and ideological constraints facing contemporary players. Thus the pioneering efforts of Coleman Hawkins during the early 1930s led him into an institutionally anomalous situation, where his 'rhapsodic' solo style fitted in with neither the dance bands nor the pop songs of the day (DeVeaux 1997 p. 85). Yet at the time, there were virtually no locations in which Hawkins could be heard as a 'concert' performer, nor any institutional framework to support a black freelance virtuoso soloist, and indeed only a very limited acceptance of the idea that jazz could be a 'serious' music for listening to. As DeVeaux shows in detail, it was only as these and other conditions which we now take for granted – such as the acceptance of small-group jazz and extended improvisations – were realised over the next decade that Hawkins, but more particularly the younger generation of 'bebop' players, could find acceptance as independent soloists. Following Becker's analysis of 'art worlds' (*ibid* p. 45), DeVeaux thus shows how the conventions and constraints – notably economic and racial – confronting black musicians exerted a powerful influence both on the way in which the music developed and on the kind of music which could be publicly performed. This perspective, emphasising the constraints and contingencies which affect real people in real situations, is also consistent with Richard Peterson's view of the 'production of culture' (e.g. Peterson 1990).

3. A further set of issues which may lead to a specifically sociological interest in music concerns the ways in which it is often an important factor in the assertion or imputation of *identity*, both for individuals and social groups. For Pierre Bourdieu, '… nothing more clearly affirms one's "class", nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music' (1984 p. 18), and in Sarah Thornton's words: 'Tastes are fought over precisely because people define themselves and others through what they like and dislike. Taste in music, for youth in particular, is often seen as the key to one's distinct sense of self' (1995 p. 164). Thornton shows how recordings which symbolise 'underground' or oppositional values and identities are likely to lose their subcultural legitimacy as soon as they cross over into the mass market. Conversely, being banned from airplay on the BBC's Radio One was celebrated as '… expert testimony to the music's violation of national sensibilities and as circumstantial evidence of its transgression' (*ibid* p. 129). Many of the studies which have developed this theme, such as those concerned with the idea of 'resistance through rituals' or the display of disaffection from the dominant culture, have been widely influential, though Richard Middleton (1990 Chapter 5) has considered some of the problems raised by their assumption that there is a 'homology' between a group's fundamental values and the pattern of cultural symbols its members adopt. So in the present context it may be useful simply to note a tendency to move away from the idea that music *expresses* the values of social groups, towards the view that in significant respects it should be seen

as *producing* them (Frith 1996:270). Frith's argument is that in this respect there is no difference between 'popular' and 'art' music, that what we term aesthetic appreciation is in the end not a matter of decoding meanings but of 'ethical agreement' on 'a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it' (*ibid* p. 272) which inevitably involves being (or claiming to be) a certain kind of person who belongs to certain sort of group. 'Music', writes Frith, 'constructs our sense of identity through the experiences it offers of the body, time, and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives' (*ibid* p. 275).

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In considering these and other concerns of the sociologist, the musicologist may object that little or nothing has been said about the music, and that sociological interest appears to focus on contextual and circumstantial factors which, in principle, are distinct from the music itself. The objection is understandable, yet not sustainable, I submit, as a criticism of the sociology of music. What I have suggested is that there are a number of ways in which sociologists may wish to approach music as an organised social practice, and which do not necessarily depend on an analysis of the music itself. Indeed, the aim may well be to examine the process by which the 'same' music is invested with quite different meaning and significance in different social contexts, in which case technical analysis, or decontextualised claims about how 'it' has its 'effects', will have little to contribute. Moreover, as Edström remarks, it is an 'illusion' to imagine that there can be text without context (1997 p. 27): it is therefore also important to recognise the ways in which social factors may be decisive in influencing the production of the 'texts' themselves. So as a final example, I will quote from Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* (1994), a magnificent ethnography of the process through which aspiring players learn to become recognisably capable jazz performers. Berliner is here describing an incident which occurred while the pianist Barry Harris was conducting one of his renowned workshops for young players:

> At a fifth's student's performance … he shook his head and remarked 'No, you wouldn't do that in this music'. Stung by the rebuke, the student defended himself. 'But you said to follow the rule you gave us, and this phrase follows the rule'. 'Yes', Harris admitted, 'but you still wouldn't play a phrase like that'. 'But give me one good reason why you wouldn't', the student protested. 'The only reason I can give you', Harris replied, 'is that I have ben listening to this music for over forty years now, and my ears tell me that the phrase would be wrong to play. You just wouldn't do it in this tradition. Art is not science, my son'. The student left the workshop early that evening, not to return for months. (*ibid* p. 249)

The episode nicely captures some points which are relevant here. Firstly, there is the evident authority of Harris, the acknowledged master performer and the students' mentor. Secondly, the fact that his authority is brought to bear on the fine details of

the students' playing, and thirdly that it is not concerned simply with technical correctness but with matters of stylistic appropriateness which can only be decided on the basis of prolonged experience of the musical community and its expectations. It is clear that what is being communicated to these neophyte improvisers are detailed ways of shaping performance practices which are dictated not only by formal musical requirements, or the creative energies of individuals, but by the norms and values of an established 'interpretive community' (Fish 1980 p. 171). As in all interactions, the idiosyncracies and interests of individuals must somehow be reconciled with what Wittgenstein called a 'form of life'.

Conclusion

I have suggested that the perceived need to incorporate a 'social' dimension into musicological studies may not be met successfully by developing the idea that music somehow expresses or conveys 'social' messages of some kind, and that the sociological literature offers various alternative approaches, though these may not resonate particularly strongly with established musicological concerns. Musicological and sociological perspectives, then, are to be considered as emerging from, and grounded in, distinctly different academic discourses; as a consequence the way in which 'music' is constituted in each will be different. With a recognition of these differences, though, may come an awareness of complementary strengths, and to the extent that the work of the 'Gothenburg School' (Tagg 1998), is committed to ethnographic studies of the use and significance of music in real-life settings, it is certainly compatible with the sociological approach outlined above.

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