POPULAR MUSIC AND MUSIC AESTHETICS

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The Issues

In 1987, the British sociologist Simon Frith published an essay entitled 'Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music' (FRITH, 1987). In this essay, Frith observes that 'underlying all the other distinctions critics draw between "serious" and "popular" music is an assumption about the source of musical value. Serious music matters because it transcends social forces; popular music is aesthetically worthless because it is determined by them.' Frith expands on the character of this distinction by pointing out that 'if we venture to suggest that the value of, say, Beethoven's music can be explained by the social conditions determining its production and subsequent consumption we are dismissed as philistines – aesthetic theories of classical music remain determinedly non-sociological. Popular music, by contrast, is taken to be good only for sociological theory.' Frith concludes: 'my particular concern is to suggest that the sociological approach to popular music does not rule out an aesthetic theory but, on the contrary, makes one possible.' (1987, p. 133).

Frith goes on to argue that, as the social forces relevant to classical music's production and consumption remain accessible, capable of being uncovered beneath the discourse of transcendent values, so it is clear that what fans value in popular music transcends the production, consumption and social functions of the music. 'Turn to the explanations of the fans and musicians [regarding value] and a familiar argument appears,' says Frith. 'Everyone in the pop world is aware of the social forces that determine "normal" pop music – a good record, song or sound is precisely one that transcends those forces.' (1987, p. 135-36).

According to Frith, the value of popular music lies not in what it reveals about communities of producers and consumers, but in how it serves to construct such communities and the individuals who inhabit them. Popular music and popular culture serve to position individuals, to place them socially and, in the process, to contribute to the formation and maintenance of individual identities (see also FRITH, 1996, p. 269-78). Processes of transcendence in popular music are in this manner just as social as the forces that constitute the music's production, consumption and functions: in pop, says Frith, 'transcendence marks not music's freedom from social forces, but its patterning by them.' (1987, p. 144).

The distinction implicit in Frith's arguments concerning transcendence is not, therefore, between a transcendence that is by definition extrinsic to social forces (and, as a consequence, capable of being evidenced only in relation to classical music, since classical music is likewise conceived in its essence to be a-social) and a popular music that is assumed to be social in *its* essence, and thus incapable of supporting transcendence. It is between different types of social activity, one type focused externally, the other internally. According to Jan Mukarovsky, the value of an object lies in its ability to achieve a desired goal: 'by function we understand an active relation between an object and the goal for which this object is used . . . the value then is the utility of this object for such a goal.' (1977, xxii). Richard Middleton comments that 'for the non-aesthetic functions, the goal lies outside the object, but for the aesthetic function it is the object itself.' Music may thus be the goal of processes of production and consumption or serve the goal of a social function. In this sense, music is involved with social processes that are to an appreciable degree external to it. However, music – which occurs as the relation between the sounds of music and individuals who recognize those sounds as musical (SHEPHERD and WICKE, 1997, p. 175) – may also be involved with social processes that are in essence intrinsic to it: they constitute the music at the same time as being constituted by the music. This is what gives rise to transcendent, aesthetic experience. As Middleton puts it: 'the aesthetic may be defined as the hypothetically pure manifestation of our love-affair with what is really, physically to hand (or eye or ear . . .), in our existence as social, structuring, symbol-making creatures.' (1990, p. 257).

Aesthetic moments are as a consequence constituted socially through a self-referring circuitry of the individual and material reality (in the case of music, its sounds) that, *at the instant of aesthetic experience*, makes no reference outside itself. Middleton observes that the Czech semiotician Roman Jakobson 'sees this "introversive signification" or "auto-reflection" as characteristic of the aesthetic function of all semiotic processes, but argues that it is especially privileged in music.' (1990, p. 221). Frith appears to agree with this assessment when he argues that popular music has a special role to play within the broader context of popular culture. 'Music is especially important to [the] process of [social] placement,' he says, 'because of something specific to musical experience, namely, its direct emotional intensity.' Because of its particular, abstract qualities, he continues, 'music is an individualizing form. We absorb songs into our lives and rhythms into our own bodies; they have a looseness of reference that makes them immediately accessible. Pop songs are open to appropriation for personal use in a way that other popular cultural forms . . . are not – the latter are tied into meanings we may reject.' (1987, p. 139). As Frith concludes, 'the intensity

of [the] relationship between taste and self-definition seems peculiar to popular music – it is "possessable" in ways that other cultural forms . . . are not.' (1987, p. 144).

It is almost twenty years since Frith made this important and prophetic foray into the realm of popular music and aesthetics – important and prophetic because, in conceiving of a popular music aesthetic that was socially constituted yet respected music's specific qualities, Frith was pointing to intellectual territory within which important developments in the study of music as a whole could occur. For what Frith was pointing to was not just an aesthetic of popular music, but an aesthetic for music as a whole, one that countered the prevalent tendency for 'aesthetic theories of classical music [to be] determinedly non-sociological.' As Frith points out, if transcendence in popular music 'marks not music's freedom from social forces but its patterning by them,' then, 'in the end the same is true of serious music, too.' (1987, p. 144).

Developing an aesthetic of music along the lines indicated by Frith involves two exercises. One is to better understand what Frith has referred to as music's particular qualities, its 'abstractness,' the abstractness that is responsible for the 'direct emotional intensity' of the musical experience. This exercise, it is often assumed, requires the kind of musical knowledge possessed by musicologists. The other is to understand how this 'abstractness,' this 'direct emotional intensity,' can be subject to 'patterning' by social forces, forces, it could be assumed, that might be distinctly non-abstract in character. Developing these two forms of understanding raises issues that are related since, in the minds of some musicologists – musicologists who could be assumed to possess the knowledge necessary to flesh out the intellectual territory to which Frith points – the prospect of music's abstractness being patterned by extrinsic forces that are presumed to be non-abstract raises the specter of music's particular qualities being compromised. On the one hand, then, the way in which music communicates and evokes in people the kind of experiences that it does appears to be quite distinctive, unlike that of any other form of human communication and expression. On the other, stressing music's connections to other forms of activity appears to be a risk to music's particular character and the kinds of experiences to which it gives rise. The purpose of this paper is to explore these issues and to show – beyond establishing that a 'sociological approach . . . does not rule out an aesthetic theory but . . . makes one possible' – that a sociological approach is, indeed, fundamental to the field of music aesthetics.

The Sanctity of Musical Experience

The degree to which music communicates and evokes in people experiences that are quite distinctive is certainly open to debate. However, it seems reasonable to assert that the feature of music that makes it recognizable and accepted as music is the use of sound in a purely structural, and non-denotative and non-referential manner. This is the feature to which Frith is referring when he invokes the notion of 'abstractness.' While much music, and particularly popular music, contains words in the form of lyrics or libretti that invoke the external world of objects, people, ideas and concepts, therefore, it is the defining, non-linguistic use of sound in music – structural, non-denotative and non-referential – that distinguishes music from language. By contrast, the use of sound in language *is* based upon reference outside it to objects, people, ideas and concepts, and it is this that characterizes language as language in the minds of people and that distinguishes it from music. Add to this that many other forms of human communication and expression seem to be based on a denotative and referential capacity – as in forms of visual representation – and the feeling that music is something apart from other forms of human communication and expression becomes understandable.

The line that distinguishes music from other forms of human communication and expression cannot, of course, be quite so easily drawn. Abstract art is non-denotative and non-referential in its appeal and can – in a certain sense – be thought of as purely structural. Further, there are forms of literature that, while using words, very seriously weaken or eradicate an appeal to the denotative and referential and play, through words, on the more musical aspects of sound as sound. In this context, it is worth recalling the nineteenth-century French poet Paul Verlaine's credo of 'la musique avant toute chose' (in poetry, 'music before everything'). If music is truly distinctive, then, this distinctiveness lies in a combination of the sonic, the non-denotative and the non-referential where words, if used, are declaimed in a manner that far transcends their normal articulation in language and that serves an intrinsically musical logic.

It is because the non-denotative and the non-referential do not seem to figure in other forms of human communication and expression, or figure in a less fundamental way than they do in music, that music's distinctive character has been quite jealously guarded by musicologists and music aestheticians. To admit that music has some connection to other forms of experience – forms of experience, it is tacitly assumed, in which the non-denotative and non-referential are not fundamental or do not figure – is, for them, to risk draining music of its constitutive and defining characteristics – in short, of its 'essence.'

This has in the past led to the argument that the meaning of music lies exclusively within its sonic structures. This argument is tautological: music is its own meaning. Leonard B. Meyer took issue with it in his groundbreaking book, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, in criticizing the position of those he characterized as 'absolutists':

> The absolutists have contended that the meaning of music lies specifically, and some would assert exclusively, in the musical processes themselves. For them, musical meaning is non-designative. But in what sense these processes are meaningful . . . they have been unable to state with either clarity or precision . . . This failure has led some critics to assert that musical meaning is a thing apart, different is some unexplained way from all other kinds of meaning. This is an evasion of the real issue. (MEYER, 1956, p. 33).

The problem with this 'absolutist' position is that of confusing a symbol that has no referent in the world of objects, people, ideas and concepts with one that is a closed system. Music is not a closed system, however; it is capable of invoking the world outside it without referring to objects, people, ideas and concepts. It is this distinction that facilitated the influential theories of Meyer and Suzanne Langer on the issue of musical meaning. Meyer located musical significance in 'psychological constants' (1973, p. 14), while Langer located this significance in 'psychological laws of "rightness".' (LANGER, 1942, p. 240). Put simply, music was taken to appeal *autonomously* and directly to the *autonomous awareness* of the individual. This appeal was assumed to be purely structural in character. That is, since all music was taken to originate in the minds of people, and since all human minds were assumed to possess similar psychological characteristics, it was concluded that there existed a certain conformity of structure between all music and all minds. This position is consistent in one sense with that later developed by Shepherd and Wicke, namely, that music cannot be reduced to the condition of its sounds (see SHEPHERD and WICKE, 1997, p. 169-182), a tendency that has been prevalent in the discipline of musicology. For Shepherd and Wicke, music is constituted through a dialectic and socially mediated interaction between the sounds of music and individuals that recognize these sounds as musical.

By contrast, the theories of Meyer and Langer constitute a prime example that, as Frith puts it, 'aesthetic theories of classical music remain determinedly non-sociological,' a position decidedly at variance with the work of Shepherd and Wicke. The music that Meyer and Langer discuss is almost without exception classical music. Because this music was taken to appeal autonomously, directly, and in a purely structural manner to the autonomous awareness of the individual, it was once more felt that this quite distinctive form of human

experience should be kept safe from intruding external and socially situated elements that might drain it of its supposedly abstract and universal 'essence.' One such element was explication through language, whose basic appeal was to the world of objects, people, ideas and concepts. The other was the idea that music was in some meaningful way related to this very same external world. This sense of keeping the musical experience safe from contamination through explicit examination became apparent early in the development of musicology following World War II, and is evidenced in the writings of leading musicologists of the time. In 1962, Arthur Mendel observed that 'music-historians are interested in musical works . . . as objects of delight.' (MENDEL, 1962, p. 4). He concluded, however, that although the 'direct relation of the music-historian to the work is necessary, it is certainly not sufficient for explanation.' It must remain, he said, 'unanalyzable.' (16). In other words, although a love and appreciation of the direct and powerful experiences that music can evoke should be the starting point for scholarly work on music, they should not themselves constitute the object of study for musicologists. Claude Palisca was of the same opinion in arguing that music aesthetics was not a legitimate area of inquiry for scholars of music. 'We cannot forget,' he argued, 'that musical aesthetics is not musical scholarship; it is musical experience and musical theory converging upon a philosophical problem. Aesthetics does not rest upon documentary or similar evidence, but on philosophical and psychological principles tested by experience.' (PALISCA, 1963, p. 110).

No scholar of music would argue that the musical experience should not be the starting point for musical scholarship. Indeed, David Gramit has more recently observed that 'the musical experience' attracts 'statements of allegiance that cut across the boundaries of otherwise conflicting musicological camps.' (GRAMIT, 2000, p. 38). However, the overwhelming trend within musicology since the writings of Mendel and Palisca has been to keep the musical experience off limits as an object of inquiry. This trend was the subject of some perceptive remarks by the feminist musicologist Susan McClary towards the end of the twentieth century. McClary confesses, 'I was drawn to music because it is the most compelling cultural form I know.' She entered musicology because she 'believed that it would be dedicated (at least in part) to explaining how music manages to create such effects.' Musicology granted her access 'to an astonishing cultural legacy: musical repertoires from all of history and the entire globe, repertoires of extraordinary beauty, power, and formal sophistication.' Yet McClary soon discovered:

> Musicology fastidiously declares issues of musical signification to be off-
> limits to those engaged in legitimate scholarship. It has seized disciplinary

control over the study of music and has prohibited the asking of even the most fundamental questions concerning meaning. Something terribly important is being hidden away by the profession, and I have always wanted to know why. (McCLARY, 1991, p. 4).

Musical Experience as Social Experience

An answer to this question becomes apparent in considering the character of a musicology different to that encountered by McClary. This alternative form of musicology occupies the kind of intellectual territory to which Frith's 1987 essay points. Gramit argues that this kind of musicology, a critical musicology, 'neither denies the relevance of intense involvement with music nor presumes it as a foundational experience.' Precisely because this experience is real, continues Gramit, 'it is . . . socially constructed, an object of inquiry rather than a postulate.' As a consequence, says Gramit, a critical musicology 'begins with an acknowledgment that . . . every encounter with music is historical through and through.' Both the experience and the music on which it is based are *social constructs* and there cannot, as a consequence, be any relationship with music that is 'pure' or unmediated by social processes. Therefore, every encounter with music is

> contingent on culturally constructed concepts, values, and expectations that are bound up not only with an individual's society, but also with an individual's place *within* society, as determined by economic structures, gender roles, class values, and host of other categories, of which we are aware to a greater or lesser degree. In this sense, regardless of the repertoire under consideration, there is no direct, unmediated contact with a musical object, for neither listening subject nor heard object are so purely and unproblematically constituted. A critical musicology thus both recognizes the intense experience we call aesthetic and explores its historical contingency, a double perspective of involvement and detachment... (2000, p. 34-35).

In a well-known exchange between musicologists Gary Tomlinson and Lawrence Kramer, Tomlinson proposes that, in line with this double perspective of involvement and detachment,

> we might begin to interrogate our love for the music we study. This is not to say that we should try to stop loving it . . . It is instead to urge that we dredge up our usual impassioned musical involvements from the hidden realm of untouchable premise that they tend to inhabit, and that we make them a dynamic force – to be reckoned with, challenged, rejected, indulged in, whatever – within our study. (1993, p. 24).

This, for Kramer, becomes a dangerous undertaking. For Kramer, a concern with contingency necessarily involves a distancing from the immediacy of an engagement with

music. What would happen, Kramer asks, 'if we gave up listening with the kind of deep engagement, the heightened perception and sense of identification, that both grounds and impels criticism?' He answers, 'the materiality of the music, the dynamic sensuous fullness that arguably offers a major site of resistance to ideological pressures, would be put at risk.' (1993, p. 27). Kramer is here rendering as mutually exclusive the musical experience and the elements conceived as being external to music that situate music and its apprehension as events that are culturally and socially constituted. The latter is seen as an ideological threat to the former. In Kramer's view, 'Tomlinson in effect asks for . . . the dispersal into context of what we usually grasp as the immediacy of music.' (1993, p. 27). The 'essence' of music, its autonomy and 'purity,' is put at risk.

It is this perceived risk of the dispersal of music's 'essence' into a context of ideology that explains, as McClary puts it, why 'something terribly important is being hidden away by the profession' of musicology. However, this risk is only perceived – not real. Firstly, the tacit assumption that the non-denotative and non-referential are not fundamental to or do not figure importantly in forms of human expression and communication other than music is just that, a tacit assumption that bears critical examination. If critical examination shows that other forms of human expression and communication are to an important degree non-denotative and non-referential, then the risk to music in relating to them reduces, if not evaporates. Secondly, if music is capable of invoking the world outside it without referring to objects, people, ideas, and concepts then, on the face of it, there seems no reason why this capability should be restricted to the autonomous awareness of the individual, an awareness, that is, presumed to be independent of the social and cultural forces that to a significant degree constitute it. Is it the case, in other words, that social and cultural realities are not importantly structural in character? Finally, is it really the case that social and cultural mediation of necessity reduces the immediacy of the musical experience? Cannot the concrete directness of the musical experience be constituted socially *in* its intrinsic characteristics?

An important argument in support of these ideas has been supplied by Mark Johnson in his book, *The Body in the Mind*. Johnson shows that the basis of language – that which is fundamental to what language communicates as opposed to how it communicates (denotatively and referentially) is importantly non-denotative and non-referential. He says:

> I am perfectly happy with talk of the conceptual/propositional content of an utterance, *but only insofar as we are aware that this propositional content is possible only by virtue of a complex web of nonpropositional schematic structures that emerge from our bodily experience*. Once meaning is understood in this broader, enriched manner, it will become evident that the

structure of rationality is much richer than any set of abstract logical patterns completely independent of the patterns of our physical interactions in and with our environment. (JOHNSON, 1987, p. 5).

Johnson's arguments can be put in context by noting that people have a location in the material environment as a consequence of bodily placement, and can only ultimately operate on this environment through their bodies. To the extent that people have a sense of their location in the environment, and a sense of the significance of this location in relation to the material world (including other people), they thus have it through their bodies. It can as a consequence be argued that senses of the world and of individual identity and significance in the world *must* be rooted in the body. The process of grasping the character of the connections between embodiment on the one hand and experience, feeling, rationality, and imagination on the other rests on what Johnson terms a 'geography of human experience.' Such a geography, says Johnson, 'seeks to identify the chief contours (structures) and connections that our experience and understanding exhibit. It . . . explores the emergence of comprehensible form and organization in our experiences and the means we have of making sense of it' (1987, xxxvii). '*Any adequate account of meaning and rationality,*' concludes Johnson, '*must give a central place to embodied and imaginative structures of understanding by which we grasp our world.*' (1987, xiii).

Through imagination, continues Johnson, we constitute the 'structures that organize our mental representations' within the constraints proffered by the external world as well as the materiality of our bodies. These structures, argues Johnson, are 'embodied schemata.' As such they '*are not propositional.*' Neither are they '*rich, concrete images of mental pictures*' (1987, p. 23, all italics original). They are 'structures that organize our mental representations at a level more general and abstract than that at which we form particular mental images.' (1987, p. 23-24). Johnson is talking about language as invoking a fundamentally non-denotative and non-referential world in what it communicates; as always invoking the logic of grounded, social situations as internalized within the individual and, through the material connectedness of bodies and their physical environments, of invoking experiences that – although socially mediated in their very constitution – are direct and concrete in character.

Johnson could equally as well be talking about the world invoked by the sound fundamental to music. Sound brings the world into people from all directions, simultaneously and dynamically. While it is frequently possible to locate the source of a sound, it is a fundamental experiential characteristic of sound that it lifts off the surface of its material source to occupy and give life to the space not only between the source and the listener, but

also around the listener. It is experienced as a phenomenon that encompasses and touches the listener in a cocoon-like fashion. Sound reminds people that there is a world of depth which is external to them, which surrounds them, and which touches them simultaneously from all directions. Sound is, in addition, the only major medium of communication that can vibrate perceptibly *within* the body. The sound of the human voice could not be amplified and projected were it not for chambers or resonators of air inside the body (the lungs, the sinus passages, the mouth) that vibrate in sympathy with the human voice. Equally, the sound of the human voice could not be amplified were it not for the objects of the external world, objects whose configurations, textures and movements mold and shape the sound of the voice as it comes into people from all directions simultaneously. Consequently, the human experience of sound involves, in addition to the sympathetic vibrations of the eardrums, the sympathetic vibration of the resonators of the body. Sound, shaped and resonating with the properties of the internal and external configurations, textures and movements of the objects of the external world, can thus be felt in addition to being heard. Sound enters the body and is in the body. Not only does sound reveal the internal properties of inanimate material sources and the order of their relationships to the material world around them; it reveals also the inner, physiological life of individuals in terms of the way the internal configurations, textures and movements of their bodies affect the quality of sound production. Sound is ideally suited to revealing and connecting the internal and external worlds. It provides an ideal metaphor for embodied schemata and the dynamics that lead to the formation of schemata. As Frith puts it in the context of popular music, 'we absorb songs into our lives and rhythms into our own bodies . . . the intensity of [the] relationship between taste and self-definition seems peculiar to popular music – it is "possessable" in ways that other cultural forms . . . are not.'

It is these features of sound that have made possible the concept of the medium as developed in the work of Wicke (1989 and 1990) and, subsequently, Shepherd and Wicke (1997, p. 95-124). As applied to music, the concept of the medium refers to the sounds of music themselves, and has two distinguishing characteristics. First, it conceptualizes the use of sounds in music as being of a purely structural character consistent with music's evocation of a world that is fundamentally non-denotative. This world is powerfully material and corporeal in character. Second, while the medium conceptualizes sounds in music as being structured *and* structuring (structured by people, and structuring in providing the sonic grounds for the construction of meanings), sounds do not determine meanings. They only make them possible through a mediating role. The medium is merely the *sounds* of music. Music arises as the *process* of interaction between the sounds of music and individual people.

The connection between sounds and people is a concrete, tangible and direct one that remains to a degree negotiable. The kinds of meanings that people invest in the sounds of music are grounded in forms of structured and structuring awareness – embodied schemata structured by the sounds of music and structuring the sounds of music. For this reason, the meanings people invest in the sounds of music must have a certain character that renders them amenable or suitable for such investment. The character of the musical experience is thus constrained and to a degree explained by the fact that only certain kinds of meanings are 'musical' meanings (this because of the specifically corporeal and structural character of the connection between people and the sounds of music), and by the fact that only a certain range of meanings can be invested successfully with any particular medium. Frith seems to be pointing in this direction when he observes that 'musical experiences always contain social meaning . . . we are not free to read anything we want into a song.' (1987, p. 139).

The concept of the medium does, however, provide a useful corrective to Frith's stress on music's role in *constructing* cultural and individual identities. For, while it is certainly the case that music does not simply reflect cultural and individual identities as socially constituted, it is also the case that individuals do not come to music in a state of grace. They bring with them identities and senses of realities that are, in a sense, pre-formed, although certainly open to mediation through the sounds of music. Frith seems to move closer to this position in his later work when he says that 'the critical issue . . . is . . . experience and collusion: the "aesthetic" describes a kind of self-consciousness, a coming together of the sensual, the emotional, and the social *as* performance.' (1996, p. 272). The concept of 'alliance' is useful here. 'In responding to a song, to a sound,' says Frith, 'we are drawn . . . into affective and emotional alliances.' (1996, p. 173). The character of sound and the concept of the medium in this way reinforce Middleton's observation that 'the aesthetic may be defined as the hypothetically pure manifestation of our love-affair with what is really, physically to hand (or eye or ear . . .), in our existence as social, structuring, symbol-making creatures.'

The affective world to which Johnson refers is not, then, peculiar to language alone. Embodied schemata underlie all human expression and communication. Music is distinctive in its capacity to invoke this world in a direct, concrete, and immediate fashion, with no intrinsic need to be mediated by the denotative and the referential (although, of course, mediated socially and culturally in its very constitution). Music is not, therefore, a pristine cultural form that needs to be protected from the penetrating glare of all other ideological forms. Music is central and fundamental to the mediation of the affective world, a world that,

in turn − and as Johnson so persuasively argues − is fundamental to all forms of human awareness, expression, and communication. Frith hints at this when he observes that 'other cultural forms − painting, literature, design − can articulate an show off shared values and pride, but only music can make you *feel* them.' (1987, p. 140).

Music as Social Power

However, these are theoretical arguments. What do they mean in practical terms? At this point, it is necessary to recall Frith's important argument that the value of music lies not in what it reveals about social life, but in how it constitutes it (although, as we have seen, mediated by pre-existing social conditions). Illustrations of how music serves to constitute social life are provided in Tia DeNora's book on *Music in Everyday Life*. *Music in Everyday Life* (DeNORA, 2000) is about the power of music. It explores the proposition that music is capable of creating and influencing moods, emotions, and the ability to concentrate, and is capable also of establishing a basis for individual and collective action. It explores the proposition that music acts powerfully on the body, not just as an external presence, but as a constitutive agent that serves to form and activate the body in particular ways in particular situations. By joining these two major strands of exploration, the book proposes that music, by acting as a resource and progenitor of individual agency, operates as a force for social ordering at the level of collectivities as well as that of individual behaviour.

The book is rich in fieldwork and examples, including those drawn from aerobics classes and the retail sector. Three examples serve to illustrate the points DeNora is making. First, music can act as a force for personal integration. One woman interviewed by DeNora confided:

> I was feeling very stressed this morning because we're in the throes of moving house . . . so I actively decided to put on Schubert's *Impromptus* because they were my father's favourite . . . and I thought . . . about half an hour before I come up here [to her place of paid work], I'll just listen to them . . . I needed it . . . It was only ten minutes of so, you know. (2000, p. 16).

This woman's confidence provides a telling illustration of the manner in which classical music is frequently used in an everyday situation, of how transcendence in classical music 'marks not music's freedom from social forces but its patterning by them.' More dramatically, music can be a force in therapeutic situations for drawing out personality and identity. DeNora reports a situation involving Gary 'who is unable to see or speak in words.' Gary 'exhibits distress in the form of shrieks and screams when taken to (no doubt

frightening) public places such as shops, and sometimes he bites or scratches other people if they come too close.' Gary was referred by a local health authority for music therapy.' DeNora's observation at this point is telling. Music therapy she says, is 'often used as a "last resort" for clients when previous, more conventional, therapeutic strategies have been tried and failed.' (2000, p. 14-15):

> Gary is sitting in the music room with his carer, waiting for the music therapy session to begin. He is very still. His child's body is knotted up, his head bent over, his legs are crossed. As the music therapist begins to play, Gary shouts, and rocks backwards and forward in his chair. The therapist responds to whatever noises he makes, imitating them but also modulating them into softer, more 'musical' forms. The therapist then picks up a drum and bangs out a steady beat in sync with Gary's cries. She begins to sing, 'Gary is rocking,' after which Gary's rocking becomes so intense that his carer has to hold on to Gary's chair . . . The therapist then holds the drum closer to Gary and he takes her hand (the first time he had ever done so). He then uses her hand as a beater, and bangs the drum with it. Later, the therapist returns to the piano and plays a low-pitched, 'eastern'-sounding (pentatonic) melody. Gary is still rocking, but gently now. His noises are gentler too. At the end of the session he is smiling . . . (DeNORA, 2000, p. 15).

The social power of music can also be used in the service of commerce. As a brochure from a background music company claims:

> Creating a happy and relaxed environment through the imaginative use of music is a vital element in securing maximum turnover and ensuring that your business has optimal appeal. Used correctly, music can influence customer buying behaviour by creating or enhancing the image, mood and style you wish to achieve. (DeNORA, 2000, p. 18).

The manager of Euphoria, an independently owned store retailing trendy disco clothes and street wear to men predominantly in their twenties, commented that 'you don't want anything too "soulful" – certainly no classical, but not even jazz.' (DeNora 2000, 136-37). DeNora reports that the store sticks to drum-and-bass and club numbers.

Music's social power has perhaps been best summarized by John Blacking 30 years ago in his book *How Musical Is Man?* 'The rules of musical behaviour,' argues Blacking, 'are not arbitrary cultural conventions, and techniques of music are not like developments in technology.' Blacking continues: 'musical behaviour reflects varying degrees of consciousness of social forces, and the structures and functions of music are related to basic human drives and to the . . . need to maintain a balance between them.' (1973, 100). Much in *How Musical Is Man?* is drawn from Blacking's fieldwork with the Venda of South Africa. Blacking suggest that:

> The Venda make music when their stomach are full because, consciously or unconsciously, they sense the forces of separation inherent in the satisfaction of self-preservation, and they are driven to restore the balance with exceptionally cooperative and exploratory behaviour. Thus forces in culture and society would be expressed in humanly organized sound, because the chief function of music in society and culture is to promote soundly organized humanity by enhancing human consciousness. (1973, p. 101).

Once again, music is about the transcendence of everyday concerns, but in a manner that is socially constituted. The power of music can act as a force for thought as well as action. As Blacking concludes:

> If there are forms intrinsic to music and dance that are not modelled on language, we may look beyond the 'language' of dancing, for instance, to the dances of language and thought. As conscious movement is in our thinking, so thinking may come from movement, and especially shared, or conceptual, thought from communal movement. And just as the ultimate aim of dancing is to be able to move *without* thinking, to *be* danced, so the ultimate achievement in thinking is to be moved to think, to *be* thought . . . essentially it is a form of unconscious cerebration, a movement of the body. We are moved into thinking. Body and mind are one. (BLACKING, 1977, p. 22-23).

Conclusion

What has been at stake in these discussions is something highlighted by popular music and its study, but something that is by no means exclusive to popular music: that a sociological approach is fundamental to the field of music aesthetics. Why has the study of popular music been so important to profiling this and related issues? There are two reasons. Firstly, most popular music is obviously and undeniably social in its significance. Secondly, a significant proportion of the popular music studied by popular music scholars has existed in the here-and-now of its analysis. It has been there to interrogate the academic discourses constructed around it.

This is important because, while first-hand experience of music as a performer may be important to understanding the role of music's sounds in instigating musical experience, musicological knowledge on the whole has not been. Contrary to common assumption, musicologists have not on the whole evidenced the knowledge necessary to put musical flesh on the bones of sociological theories such as those advanced by Frith. The temptation has been to assume that the musical experience is, in Mendel's words, 'unanalyzable,' something, in Kramer's thinking, to be kept free from the risk of exposure to 'ideological pressures.' While musicology has developed an impressive battery of analytical tools to apply to music,

therefore, these tools, in the words of Shepherd and Wicke, 'are based on descriptions of sounds as physical events occurring *in* time and space, and *are constituted as linguistic discourses*.' As a consequence, Shepherd and Wicke conclude that, 'as linguistic discourses, music theory and music analysis are quite different and distinct in the character of their *thinking* from the character of musical *experience* . . . they cannot "reach out" to musical experience in any convincing or useful manner.' (1997, p. 143). It is perhaps for this reason that Frith, in another context, has perceptively observed that 'much musicological analysis of popular music misses the point: its object of study, the discursive text it constructs, is not the text to which anyone listens.' (1990, p. 97). What this suggests, of course, is that much musicological analysis of other types of music also 'misses the point.'

The contemporaneously social character of much popular music has resulted in the issue of 'how music and society relate' being more inescapably and sharply focused in popular music studies than it has in musicology or ethnomusicology. The music examined has not been from other times and places. Not only has this made it difficult for the music to become the pawn of academic discourses. It has also meant that the pressure to examine musical affect as an experience mediated essentially through social processes has been intense. Link this to a desire to establish the question of value as being as legitimate in the field of popular music studies as it is in the criticism of classical music and the outcome has, in a sense, been inevitable.

In this way as in others, the development of popular music studies since the late 1970s has been important to major reorientations in music studies as a whole, reorientations attested to by the work of scholars such as Gramit and Tomlinson. This common approach to music aesthetics does not mean to say, however, that music can give rise to only one aesthetic, one kind of affective experience. As the work of Theodore Gracyck (1996 and 1997) and its discussion by Lee Brown (2000) illustrate, the quest for a distinctive aesthetic of rock music based on the manner of its technological creation and dissemination that would help to understand it as a genre is of value. Such work serves to underline the socially specific character of the aesthetic. However, the fact does remain that people experience music thought the material and embodied character of their existence, and it is this commonality that underwrites the socially specific character of the aesthetic. It is precisely for this reason that established and traditional forms of musicology have resisted an acknowledgment of the fundamental role of the material and embodied world in the creation and experience of music. As McClary has observed, 'our music theories and notational systems do everything possible to mask those dimensions of music that are related to physical experience and focus instead

on the orderly, the rational, the cerebral.' She continues, 'the fact that the majority of listeners engage with music for more immediate purposes is frowned upon by our institutions.' By contrast, McClary argues, in invoking both the classical and the popular, 'most people care about music because it resonates with experiences that otherwise go unarticulated, whether it is the flood of cathartic release that occurs at the climax of a Tchaikowsky symphony or the groove that causes one's body to dance.' (McCLARY, 1990, p. 14). What McClary is pointing to is not only a re-orientation of musicology, but a reconstitution of music as an object of study. That, however, is another story (see, for example, COOK and EVERIST, 1999, and SHEPHERD and WICKE, 2000).

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