

My contribution to the debate ‘Are we all ethnomusicologists now?’

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The following is a text from which I read an abridged version at the debate at City University on ‘Are we all ethnomusicologists now?’, which took place on June 1st, with panelists Amanda Bayley, Tore Lind, Laudan Nooshin, Michael Spitzer and myself. This entailed a series of statements and then a debate following on from Nicholas Cook’s article ‘We Are All (Ethno)musicologists Now’, in *The New (Ethno)musicologies*, ed. Henry Stobart (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), pp. 48-70.

The text and powerpoint slides used by Nooshin for this event **can be viewed here**. This statement contains the outlines of arguments I will be pursuing in more detail, with full references, in a forthcoming article. The filmed debate will be made available online soon, and furthermore some accounts and responses to it will also be going online at the **Music at City blog**. [EDIT: These are now online **here**. Furthermore, **Michael Spitzer’s statement can be viewed here**]

I have also posted a long section from the earlier ‘outsider’ critique of ethnomusicology by J.P.E. Harper-Scott, **which is given with commentary (and a related passage from Aijaz Ahmad) here**.

Are We All Ethnomusicologists Now?

Position Statement by Ian Pace, for debate at City University, June 1st, 2016.

The Term ‘Ethnomusicology’

The very term ‘ethnomusicology’ has obvious implications through the use of the prefix ‘ethno’, which Nooshin and others have suggested is itself problematic. Despite the non-geographically-specific origins of the Greek term, nonetheless the long history of ‘ethnomusicology’ having dealt with musical cultures outside of the Western art tradition, whether folk and vernacular traditions in the West, or musical cultures (including ‘high cultures’) from the non-Western world in particular, together with the contemporary resonances of ‘ethno’ or ‘ethnic’, all suggest something post-colonial, anti-imperialist, on the side of the wider masses, and so on. Who of an even vaguely left-of-centre political persuasion would want to be seen opposing such a

thing? But this is different when the object of study for this sub-discipline is Western art music, and it is on this body, or even canon, of work in English that I intend to concentrate today. In general, I believe it is always a cause for concern when any type of scholarship is judged more for its politics than its scholarly rigour, whatever those politics might be, and ethnomusicology of whatever type should not be immune from critique for purely political reasons.

My own positions – introduction

The very last thing I would want to do is in any sense deny the value of studying music from outside the Western art music tradition; on the contrary, I believe it is essential. In the context of my own work on Michael Finnissy I have drawn extensively on ethnomusicological and folkloristic work, including John Blacking on Venda African music, Alexis Chottin on Moroccan and Berber music, Habib Touma more widely on Arabic music, Diego Carpitella and others on Sardinian folk music, Samuel Baud-Bovey on Cretan folk music, Michael Hauser on Traditional Greenlandic music, any number of writers on African-American spirituals, and much else, not to mention related issues of orientalism and exoticism in music. These latter concerns have involved engagement not only with the tradition of Edward Said and later post-colonial theorists, but also alternative perspectives and critiques provided by the likes of Albert Hourani, Maxime Rodinson, Aijaz Ahmad and others.

I do not think however that we should have to be over-apologetic about a certain Eurocentrism in music study in Europe. Nor for the fact of being drawn to various types of music from very different social contexts primarily as a result of attraction to the sounds they make. Nor would I wish in any sense to deny the vital importance of studying the social and political context of music and music-making. Ten years or so ago, I would get into furious arguments with some conservative musicians and others who were adamant that it was wrong to ‘bring politics into music’, and all my teaching and research into music history and other subjects involves a good deal of wider consideration of history, society, ideology, economics, the workings of musical institutions, and so on.

Yet nowadays I am deeply concerned, not about the incorporation of a plurality of approaches to music, but at the potential for subsumation of musicology into other disciplines, to such an extent that it loses any distinct identity of its own.

The Canon of Ethnomusicology of Western Art Music

On the hand-out you will find a bibliography I have compiled of relevant texts. I do not claim this to be comprehensive, but do believe it gives a fair range of what I would characterise as canonical works in this tradition. To keep the list within manageable limits, I have omitted studies of the performance and reception of Western art music outside of the Western world, such as the interesting work of Rachel Beckles Willson, Ben Etherington, Geoff Baker or Suzanne Wint, or various work dealing with the role of Asian musicians and music in Western traditions, such as that of Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau, Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, and Mari Yoshihara. There are three texts on the bibliography which time has not

permitted to read: Livingston, which I haven't been able yet to obtain (but am working on it), Chaikin and the full dissertation by Usner; so I will not refer to these.

I would separate out from my critique the excellent book by Michael Chanan which is really of a quite different nature to most of the others. This is really a social and economic history of music, in a long tradition of the work of Combarieu, Weber, Bloch, Mellers, Blaukopf, Raynor, Durant, and others, including some working in the former Soviet Bloc. Also I feel the work of Peter Jeffrey, to which I will return, is on another level of depth and expertise compared to most of the others, though not without some significant problems.

Sub-disciplines and issues of territory

As many have commented, defining ethnomusicology as a sub-discipline can prove elusive. But we still have scholars who self-identify as ethnomusicologists, and others who do not. Now there are very few ethnomusicology degrees in the UK, and as such ethnomusicologists have to find work on degree programmes simply identified as 'music'. And while many popular music or music technology degrees are allowed to have dedicated degrees in which specialists in those fields can choose the whole core curriculum, those courses centered upon Western music, history, analysis, etc., are most frequently the ones who need to incorporate the ethnomusicologists. This can cause a good deal of tension, as found in various faculties.

In much of the literature I am considering (and also in the so-called 'new musicology'), the writers spend a lot of time maligning Western art music, and so-called 'traditional musicology', often without detailed knowledge of either field – straw man characterisations are frequent, as for example in the work of Henry Kingsbury, Bruno Nettl, Stephen Cottrell or Pirkko Moisala. At the same time, I have seen no other sub-discipline so jealously defensive and keen to assert its own superiority, nor which spends so much time talking about itself in a somewhat cliqueish manner, endlessly telling its own story and creating its own canons of hallowed figures, as for example with Shelamay's recounting of the figures behind the great 'milestones' of ethnomusicology: Alan Merriam, Alan Lomax, Timothy Rice, Mark Slobin, and equally revered non-musical sources such as the work of Clifford Geertz and Arjun Appadurai. Almost every writer in the canon I have drawn up cites most of the others before them, not least the work of Kingsbury, Philip Bohlman, Ruth Finnegan and Nettl, thus locating themselves within a newly constructed 'great tradition'. Internal critique is very rare.

It often appears as if the simple fact of having employed what is identified as an ethnomusicological approach to the study of Western art music is enough to win any such writer a seat at the top table, and this overrides any more sober critical investigation of their work. This is the attitude I find in Kay Kaufman Shelemay, Jonathan Stock, Cottrell, Tina K. Ramnarine, Moisala, Laudan Nooshin and some others. As such, in a relatively self-regulating world – through the processes of peer review, external examination and so on – what I believe to be very serious flaws in a good deal of this work, in terms of relatively standard scholarly criteria, are frequently overlooked. This is an approach which says as much about territorial motivations than any concern for fair and rigorous assessment of scholarship, and I find it very unhealthy.

Now I want to give you two quotes from John Blacking and Henry Kingsbury.

It is not enough to identify a characteristic musical style in its own terms and view it in relation to its society (to paraphrase a definition of one of the aims of ethnomusicology by Mantle Hood, who has done more for the subject than almost any other living ethnomusicologist). We must recognize that no musical style has “its own terms”: its terms are the terms of its society and culture, and of the bodies of the human beings who listen to it, and create and perform it.

John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1973), p. 25)

The standard rhetoric for this is that music be studied “on its own terms,” a phrase which generally means that certain abstract concepts (“melody,” “harmony,” “rhythm”) are to be analysed in terms of other similarly abstract terms (“structure,” “form,” “development”). The prevailing idea is that music is not to be understood in terms of its sociocultural context, but rather in terms of its internal organization and cohesion.

Henry Kingsbury, *Music, Talent, & Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 16.

I was once told that if I did not judge ethnomusicology, or some other types of research, on their own terms, I should not be assessing them at all. But I believe that what’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. I do not identify as an ethnomusicologist, but I have read a reasonable amount of such literature. Some would say though that I am unqualified to have a view, but by the same token, many ethnomusicologists would be disqualified from speaking about other musical disciplinary areas or fields of practice about which they do not hesitate to pronounce – not least, for example, Born and others on modernist music, about which there is little evidence of any detailed engagement or familiarity.

This is one reason why I want to concentrate my own critique on a limited sub-section of ethnomusicology, rather than claiming to be able to make sweeping statements about a whole discipline, something I doubt many, including many ethnomusicologists, could really do, unless able to read a huge number of languages and derive expertise in practically all the musics of the world.

Music in social and cultural context – dialectical approaches

The study of music in a wider social context is actually nothing like as new as sometimes suggested; even Nicholas Cook concedes this when mentioning musicological traditions from outside of the English-speaking world. But this can take various forms. I want to consider the following statement from Bruno Nettl, which appears in his book *Heartland Excursions*:

A major theme of ethnomusicological discourse is that fundamental values of a culture are expressed in its music. (p. 32)

The word ‘society’ could also be substituted for ‘culture’ if one wishes to give this statement a more sociological rather than anthropological feel. I do find this statement, at least if applied in a general manner, to be reductive and limiting. In its most fundamentalist manifestation – and I do recognise that this is not true of all ethnomusicological work – it resembles what was once called a ‘vulgar’ form of Marxism, by which all elements of a societal superstructure are nothing more than a by-product of the economic base. Engels in particular in some important late letters

rejected this view and argued Marx also did (and there is significant evidence for this in his writings), maintaining that the relationship was more dialectical, and that the superstructure could reflect back upon and affect the base. Acceptance of this dialectical formation underlies a good deal of continental Western Marxism in the 20th century, and I would argue strongly for a similar model for the relationship between music or any other specific cultural form and the wider social and cultural context in which it occurs. I do not believe that there are many contexts which one can use to account for every detail of the music emerging from therein (I will concede there are a few), and so this makes for degrees of 'relative autonomy'. In some societies, not least advanced industrial ones, is there not an important place for some dissident culture, which wishes to confront that society? In contrast to this, the reductive view I describe ultimately leads to the politics of Zhdanov, and I would characterise hostility towards consideration of aspects of musical autonomy in such a fashion.

Nettl also writes about how the ethnomusicologist should try to avoid doing anything to affect the culture being studied. Over and above the question of whether this is indeed possible, even just through writing and publishing about it, I wonder why this should always be paramount? As Marx famously said, philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it; the same might be said of some anthropologists and ethnomusicologists. But many of these latter are not, say, education reformers with positive proposals for meaningful change, but those embroiled at the heart of academic systems and seeking academic capital through the allegiances and ideologies of their work. I find this somewhat futile and symptomatic of an academic world whose social engagement is little more than skin deep.

Walter Benjamin argued that there no record of culture which is not also a record of barbarism; even if this is hyperbolic, there are plenty of cases for which this is true. Instead of fetishizing cultures simply by being able to be labelled as such, I believe we might do better to look for those aspects of cultures which are worth valuing in contemporary contexts.

Much of the ethnomusicological work I have been looking at does not simply consider the relationship between sounds and contexts, but brackets out sounding music out entirely. Without detailed consideration of the specifics of musical material, it is impossible to gauge the possibility of a dialectical relationship between sounds and context, and I believe this is one reason why many writers do not do so.

What remains is what I call 'musicology without ears'. This requires little in terms of traditional musical skills (in whatever tradition), and I believe the more this achieves a dominant or hegemonic place within contemporary musical education, the more it contributes to what I have referred to elsewhere the deskilling of a profession (meaning the loss of many skills specific to that discipline). Musicology can become little more than a more elementary sub-section of sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, but rarely with the breadth or depth of methodological awareness to be found in some of those other disciplines (though I have wider doubts about cultural studies/industries in general). This can facilitate the ominous possibility of musical departments being closed or simply incorporated into others. With this in mind, I would suggest that musically deskilled ethnomusicology might itself be better housed within these other disciplines already.

The Limits of Ethnography Alone

Now I have another quote on slide from a 2014 article by anthropologist Tim Ingold, ‘That’s enough about ethnography’, which I would just like to give as background to what I am about to say.

“Ethnographic” has become the most overused term in the discipline of anthropology. It is hard to say exactly when the term broke loose from its moorings, or what the reasons were for its subsequent proliferation. These reasons are undoubtedly complex and could be the subject for a separate historical study. My concern in this article, however, is prospective, not retrospective. For I believe that this overuse is doing great harm to anthropology, that it is holding it back while other fields of study are surging forward, and that it is actually preventing our discipline from having the kind of impact in the world that it deserves and that the world so desperately needs. And because the cause is desperate, I shall not refrain from polemic. The tenor of what follows is partisan, and deliberately so. I am sick and tired of equivocation, of scholarly obscurantism, and of the conceit that turns the project of anthropology into the study of its own ways of working. A discipline confined to the theatre of its own operations has nowhere to go. In its spiraling descent into irrelevance, it has no-one and nothing to blame other than itself.

My aim is not to eliminate ethnography, or to expunge it from our anthropological consciousness. Nor is it to underrate its significance, and the complex demands it places on those who practice it. Rather, I am concerned to narrow ethnography down so that to those who ask us, in good faith, what it means, we can respond with precision and conviction. Only by doing so, I contend, can we protect it from the inflation that is otherwise threatening to devalue its currency to the extent of rendering the entire enterprise worthless. For it is not only within anthropology that ethnography is on the loose. I am sure I speak for the majority of anthropological colleagues in deploring the abuse of the term that has become commonplace in social sciences beyond our shores. How many research proposals have we read, coming from such fields as sociology, social policy, social psychology and education, in which the applicant explains that he or she will conduct “ethnographic interviews” with a sample of randomly selected informants, the data from which will then be processed by means of a recommended software package in order to yield “results”?

Such a procedure, in which ethnographic appears to be a modish substitute for qualitative, offends every principle of proper, rigorous anthropological inquiry— including long-term and open-ended commitment, generous attentiveness, relational depth, and sensitivity to context—and we are right to protest against it. And, we are equally entitled to protest when those who assess our own proposals demand of us, in the name of ethnography, the same slavish adherence to the protocols of positivist methodology, by requiring us to specify—for example—how many people we intend to talk to, for how long, and how they will be selected. Against such benchmarks, anthropological research is bound to be devalued.

I do not deny the value of ethnographic approaches, but I do have severe doubts about their exclusive or simply primary use, especially when this entails an ideological opposition to combination with other methods. It can be as if it is more important to maintain a territorial ‘purity’ than draw upon the widest range of possible strategies to help with producing the result.

In the work of Kingsbury, Nettl and Cottrell, one encounters very crude historical and analytical approaches. For example, Kingsbury’s consideration of the pedal marking in the second movement of Beethoven’s C minor Piano Concerto takes no account of the type of instrument involved, which can profoundly affect the sounding result, and seems to imagine that it is impossible to execute opposing dynamics in two hands on the piano. Furthermore, his comments on Marcus Goldmann’s thoughts on Chopin editions shows little awareness of the real complications entailed, as Chopin published most of his works simultaneously in slightly different versions in three countries (and which differ in the specific case cited here). I believe he is dead-set upon setting up a

clear dichotomy between fidelity to a text and some nebulous notion what is 'expressive', the latter defined with minimal thought to the historically problematic nature of such a category.

In the case of Shelemay's article on the Boston early music movement, to my mind one of the weakest articles I have read, here are some of the findings (there are numerous others of a similar nature):

Early music practitioners, speaking from their own experiences, referred often to the scholarly literature and critical editions, which they know intimately and on which they draw in preparing detailed notes for concert programs and published recordings.

Thus the early music movement, while drawing on music of the historical past, is powerfully informed by the creative impulses of its practitioners and the aesthetics of the present.

Musicians in all of the ensembles with which we worked testified to the centrality of creative activity in their conceptualization and performance of musical repertory.

Many of our associates provided considerable detail about their instruments, conveying not just extraordinary technical knowledge, but the instrument's history and social significance with great elegance.

For example, violinist Daniel Stepner noted the creative role of members of the Boston Museum Trio, consisting of himself, gambist Laura Jeppesen, and keyboardist John Gibbons, in such basic and little discussed processes as selecting and formulating their own repertory:

There's lots of music that's appropriate for us to play together, but very little, relatively little music that was written specifically for these instruments. (Daniel Stepner, 22 October 1996)

That musicians discuss performance practices in detail is no surprise, but the manner in which they were able to articulate details of musical practice as well as values behind them was one of the richest outcomes of the ethnographic process. For instance, while testimony about musical instruments is perhaps more easily rendered because of the easy availability of the instruments themselves, we found that singers also provided nuanced discussions of vocal production as well speculated on the difficult philosophical issues surrounding the voice and textual articulation.

I would have to say that this is all extremely basic (as is, say, the work of Frederick Seddon and Michelle Biasutti), certainly in comparison to a wide range of scholarly historical work on these areas; engagement with this work would have enhanced this study very considerably.

Finnegan admits reasonably that she does not feel qualified to engage with the music she encounters, but ultimately I feel her survey is quite limited as a result, and in many ways serves more as a list of data rather than critical analysis. Catherine M. Cameron tries to define 'experimental music' but with no evidence of familiarity either of later traditions to which this term has been applied, the history of the term, or perhaps most significantly of music created in Europe at the same time as that she studies. As such, I do not believe she is really in a position to argue for American 'experimental music' as a distinct field from European traditions, in the manner she does, though this is also true of others who have written on the subject, which is the subject of another paper!

In particular, in the majority of the work in my bibliography, there is little or no engagement with sound – this is true of the work of Marcia Herndon, Finnegan, Georgina Born, Vicky L. Brennan, Shelemay, Cottrell, Stephanie E. Pitts, Seddon and Biasutti, Eric Usner and Hettie Malcolmson. Instead the writers use comments from others about music, mostly of a very vague and general nature, without much consideration of what self-fashioning might be involved; Cottrell even cites

xenophobic comments from musicians about making the Hitler salute at a conductor who rehearsed in German, without further comment. If there were no attempts to draw conclusions about the sounding music, that might not be so bad – as with Finnegan, say – but some do. But even with more modest aims, I feel such work to be flawed – it is almost like assessing a performance or piece simply by asking the performer or composer their view of it, and reproducing that as one's own view – indeed Moisala does precisely that.

When I taught at Dartington College, I sometimes found students would undertake a project simply by asking a handful of questions of their friends, then using their answers as data for a supposedly scholarly and statistically representative survey. I feel some ethnography essentially does this on a slightly bigger scale, not least because of a lack of critical and analytical perspective on the data sourced and its limitations.

There is an understandable post-colonial reticence on the part of many Western ethnomusicologists and anthropologists for engaging in critical views of non-Western societies and cultures they encounter. When this attitude is carried over into the study of Western art music, however, and text is padded out with long ethnographically sourced quotations (often from those who are not necessarily very verbally articulate) presented without much commentary, critique or analysis, one is left with a type of writing which resembles nothing so much as casual journalism or even a publicist's material, as in the work of Brennan, Cottrell, Moisala and Ramnarine.

In many classic ethnographies (for example Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society*, or Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour*), the collation and presentation of ethnographically sourced data, especially quotations, is a starting point for the study, leading to detailed critical analysis. Some of the work on Western art music essentially omits the second stage, or renders it rather trivial. I would not claim that description is a neutral activity, and can be undertaken with great care and skill, but in many cases here it amounts to little more than reportage, perhaps 'filed' in a handful of unremarkable categories. In a similar manner Finnegan's long book does read rather like a government inspector's report. Other work, such as that of Pitts, resembles feedback surveys conducted by marketing departments for musical institutions. Other work like that of Moisala can read like a hagiographic publicity piece, not so different from a much earlier type of 'life and works', but with much less analytical detail on the works.

Those entail one type of approach; another is very agenda-driven, and most phenomena are described in extremely loaded language. This is true of the work of Christopher Small, Kingsbury, Nettle, Born, Malcolmson. It is hard to imagine work with such a strong axe to grind being viewed so favourably if applied to a group of South Pacific Islanders, as Björn Heile has pointed out in the context of Born.

Ethnography also relies upon the investment of a good deal of faith on the part of the reader that the author has represented their source material in a fair manner, not distorting, misattributing, quoting radically out of context, fabricating, or blatantly ignoring substantial amounts of data which might not suit an argument. Where documentary sources are available, these can at least be checked by another where there is reason for doubt. I have to say that in some of these cases, seeing how

information which can indeed be checked is treated in such a cavalier manner, I am not always sure I feel prepared to invest this faith, and might be sceptical about some of the writers' other work as a consequence.

Oral Tradition, Jeffrey and Lind

I have had chance just to skim Tore Lind's book *The Past is always Present: The Revival of the Byzantine Musical Tradition at Mount Athos*, which is fascinating, and clearly very far from being narrowly territorial or ideological – it combines fieldwork with other forms of evidence, paleographic, historical, etc. And I am aware that there is a wide range of other scholarship identified in one way or another as ethnomusicological for which this is the case; and for that matter other scholarship where very little other sources are available than those provided by fieldwork. But this is patently not the case with Western art music.

Lind writes about the concepts of 'real' and 'reinvented' pasts, with relation to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's work on the 'invention of tradition'. If I cannot buy into the characterisation of modern social theory cited from Arjun Appadurai which argues that such theory posits a 'single modern moment' – I find that too crude a characterisation on Appadurai's part – I do believe there can and should be some type of middle way. This is where I think ideologies self-identifying as postmodern have been far from enlightening when presenting stark alternatives between the idea of history as some utterly objective body of facts on one hand, or completely unknowable on the other. I know of no serious historian who would argue the former position, but few other than the likes of Keith Jenkins or Patrick Joyce would deny there are some things which can be construed as facts with a fair degree of certainty. And there have been and will be many who would prefer that some of these are removed or at least marginalised from the historical record. Not just nationalistic politicians, but also many others associated with some institution or set of cultural practices in whose positive reputation they have much vested. Many in the Catholic Church might not like the long history of the abuse of children by priests, and their protection by the higher church authorities, to feature prominently in histories of that church, but I believe these are absolutely a part of that culture. For 'traditions' to be 'invented' does not require that *nothing* about these traditions has some palpable historical basis, but can simply mean that the particular selections are too narrow, idealised, and so on, and often used simply to legitimate present practices even where there exists historical evidence to the contrary. And for that reason I find Lind's suggestion of allowing 'various culture members to determine what they themselves believe to be authentic' problematic – I would ask *which* culture members are granted such authority, and why should one necessarily privilege their view over that of others, including those who might have less obvious vested interests, and may be more subject to proper scholarly critique? When practitioners lay claim to historical foundations for their practice, as so many do, then it appears entirely legitimate to me to investigate critically the basis upon which those claims are made. This is not, of course, to say that there would necessarily be anything less worthy *per se* of a contemporary tradition which has no basis for such claims and does not make them.

Lind himself makes a critique of Peter Jeffrey's work which concurs with that to which I was arriving – he says 'It is a fantasy to imagine that some contemporary

(“primitive”) practices exist untouched by time, making themselves available for chronological comparison, and, equally, to suppose that medieval chant has existed in a static form throughout history’ (p. 30). This indicates a wider problem with the use of ethnographic approaches alone to establish historical information, in cases where there are no living witnesses to the historical time in question, and especially where a long period of time has elapsed, as obviously with medieval chant. But even where living witnesses do exist, even then oral testimony can be problematic, not least because of the fallibility of human memory, as has been studied in detail by scholars working with survivors of genocide or other atrocities.

Lind does make the point that checking contemporary practice against historical evidence would not work in his study of Mount Athos, as the monks use the same historical evidence – though I presume he does not rule out the possibility, in this or other contexts, of discovering new historical evidence of which practitioners are unaware, and which might problematize such practice in terms of historical questions? Nonetheless, he says that ‘the ways that the monks interpret and relate to historical evidence become the central issue’ which seems eminently reasonable as an approach, and has some parallels with historically-informed performance of Western art music (bearing in mind that a large number of performers of such music, including those who would not self-identify as ‘historically informed’, appeal to some concept of a historical tradition to legitimate their practices).

Kingsbury, Nettl, Cottrell and Jonathan Shull all comment on the extent to which classical performers are often keen to present their pedagogical lineage – their teacher studied with X, who studied with Y, etc., etc., who studied with Beethoven, and so on. All except Shull view this unfavourably, and I would agree, seeing it as akin to a game of Chinese Whispers. Yet I do not see how then one can maintain that similar processes are so reliable with respect to oral traditions in other cultural environments, some of which have experienced major historical upheavals.

Jargon

Kingsbury notes how any study of modern American culture is lent an ‘anthropological aura’ by referring to ‘the tradition of studying “simple” or “primitive” societies’. He gives as an example J.M. Weatherford’s ethnography of US Congress, uses of terms like ‘shamans’, ‘bigmen’, ‘warlords’, etc.

Many of the phenomena for which ritualistic or other anthropological explanations are given in this body of work, as in the work of Small, Kingsbury, Hearndon and Nettl, can be explained in practical terms. For example, the fact of not having doors opening directly into a concert hall can simply be a way of avoiding extraneous noise generated by latecomers. Kingsbury insists that when students contrast administrative weaknesses of an institution with the strength of teachers, they ‘conceal the fact that these factors are elements of a single organizational structure’. Well, many of the staff on the second floor of the Juilliard School during my time simply couldn’t care less about practical student matters, sometimes acting as if we were trespassing upon their time and space. I can’t see how asking them to buck their ideas up would have undermined the artistry of the faculty members.

It can seem, in line with Ingold's critique, various writers including Kingsbury, Cottrell, Pitts, Malcolmson, and Shull are more concerned with forcing far-fetched analogies with other anthropological findings than the investigation of specifics relating to the matter under investigation. And this is part of a wider tendency to clothe the work in a good deal of jargon in ways I believe to be unnecessary.

Academics need to show in this day and age how they are supposedly connecting with a 'real' world, so often choose areas of study accordingly. But they also need to prove their writing is 'academic'; simple liberal use of jargon serves this purpose, and will impress some naïve people belonging to management, REF examiners, or research council board members, even where the underlying thought and research is banal and unremarkable. I have seen countless examples of this not just in this body of ethnomusicology, but also new musicology, popular music studies, music sociology, film and media music studies, acoustic ecology, and so on.

A wider question exists of this work serving as a *substitute* for other political engagement, such as through industrial action within higher education, but that is beyond the scope of this talk.

Wider Politics and Aesthetics

Whilst the likes of K.A. Gourlay, Chanan, to some extent Nettle, and for that matter Howard Becker, come from slighter older traditions in the social sciences still showing the influence of Marxism – albeit frequently of the empirical and Stalinist variety dominant in the English-speaking world – the work of many younger figures demonstrate clearly the influence of ideologies frequently identified as postmodern. I would associate these strongly with the growth of neo-liberalism during the Thatcher-Reagan years, and then continuing after the end of the Cold War. This is most explicit in the work of Born, who has elsewhere expressed a clear view of the superior virtues of culture supported through 'petty capitalism' than by institutions supported by the state (which I would categorise as democratically accountable institutions financed through taxation and public spending), referring back to her IRCAM study in such a context. This accords perfectly with David Cameron's ideal of the 'big society', and is music to the ears those who want to cut arts funding generated through taxation even further. One might conclude from Born's work that the remoteness of the possibility that a UK or US government might ever give financial backing to similar institution should presumably be welcomed?

In general, in a lot of this work musical institutions are viewed very critically, but it is rare that industries – in many cases institutions funded by private capital rather than through taxation, as with much of the popular music industry – are subject to the same level of critique (as in Cottrell's essay on ethnomusicology and the music industries). This is quite emblematic of an ideological phenomenon which some radical thinkers, including critics of cultural studies such as Todd Gitlin, Robert McChesney, Keith Tester or Joseph Heath, or anti-capitalist thinkers like Naomi Klein, have identified: whereby a superficial politics of 'diversity' is not so much a moderate call for a modification of capitalist society, but actually a means of giving new life and purpose to high capitalism, not least through the destruction (rather than reform) of existing social democratic institutions.

Similar views can be found in the writings of Nicholas Cook, in whose wider work one can encounter harsh criticism of the ‘disdain for the marketplace and its discourses’ in various European writers. When a French musicologist, Anne Boissière, criticised his *Music: A Very Short Introduction* for nihilism, his response was to accuse her of being part of ‘the attack on capitalism and consumerism that developed throughout the German-speaking countries in the 19th century (where it was associated with the nostalgic values of an idealised rural past), and fed ultimately into the Nazi creed of ‘blood and soil’’. Dismissing social democratic European thinkers by contrived association with the Nazis is one of the least edifying aspects of our profession.

Timothy Rice writes in his *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction* (2014):

Ethnomusicologists do not begin their research with a judgment about what they imagine is “good music” or “music worthy of study” or “music that has withstood the test of time.” Instead, they assume that whenever and wherever humans make and listen to music with the keen devotion and attention that they do, then something important and worthy of study is going on. (p. 2)

Elsewhere one can often find ethnomusicological rejection of aesthetic value judgement – how do those coming from such a position really mark compositions or performances?

Cook rejects aesthetic valorisation directing study, arguing that musicologists should instead, like sociologists, ‘study social reality as they find it’, so that ‘The point is not that Madonna is good or bad but that she’s there’. But to bracket out or otherwise marginalise anything which is not ‘there’ (assuming ‘there’ means something which has gained some degree of prominence, for otherwise everything is ‘there’) renders invisible that cultural work whose producers have been unable to garner public visibility. Only a belief that the market will always provide the most fair selection could legitimise musicologists and others neglecting all else.

In place of explicit aesthetic judgement, in this work and much new musicology one encounters politically and morally loaded characterisations which I believe serve principally to attempt to close down debate. I find it sad when musicology has moved from a position of intense interest in music to one of morally self-righteous judgement, which as I have written about elsewhere, I believe derives in part from a desire to dominate one’s subject, a charge which can be laid at the door of aspects of some other disciplines, including anthropology and psychoanalysis, as well.

There are numerous moral grounds with which some will condemn the ethnomusicological work and ideologies of Bartók, or some of the work upon which Finnissy draws. But to me the value of that work is palpable because of the vital creative composition which would not have been possible in the same way without it. The same is true of some of the amazing music which has come out of IRCAM: amongst which I would include Boulez’s *Répons*, Berio’s *Chemins ex V*, Aperghis’s *Machinations*, Harvey’s *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco*, Risset’s *Inharmonique*, Saariaho’s *Verblendungen*, Manoury’s *Pluton*, Dillon’s *Introitus*, Murail’s *L’Esprit des dunes*, Nunes’s *Lichtung I & II*, Dusapin’s *To Be Sung*, or Czernowin’s *Hidden*. Ultimately I do believe that the importance of this type of compositional work (and its performance) exceeds that of any musicology, ethno- or otherwise.

Conclusion

I will end with a reapplication of Marcel Mauss to this field of ethnomusicology itself. Its participants offer up endorsements for the right theorists, the right canonised and revered ethnomusicologists, the right political outlook, generally that sort of 'consumerist multiculturalism' which accords well with modern neo-liberalism, to those who are in a position of power above them, and are rewarded for this through promotion and research grants in a process of exchange. Collegiate relationships within hierarchical academic structures are made possible through this process of reciprocity. This may be an unfair caricature, but no more so than many of the analyses in this body of work.

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY OF WESTERN ART MUSIC

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