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Culture

Section of the American Sociological Association

Volume 9, No. 1 (Fall 1994)



**Bringing Culture Back In:
Current Trends in German Sociology**
Hans-Peter Müller, Humboldt University

**Re-Orchestrating the
Sociology of Music**
Karen Cerulo, Rutgers University

At the end of the 20th century, sociology in Germany seems to have arrived at where it once took off: a focus on culture. In the wake of the fin-de-siècle, the founding fathers of German sociology molded this discipline as a cultural science (*Kulturwissenschaft*). The studies resulting from this paradigm are classics by now: Georg Simmel's "Philosophy of Money" (1900), Max Weber's "Protestant Ethic" (1904), Werner Sombart's "Luxury and Capitalism" (1913) and Alfred Weber's triad of "societal process, civilizational process and cultural movement" (1912). Despite capitalism, class struggle, and the social question, German sociology received a cultural grounding from the outset. The basic idea uniting the different approaches of the founders of sociology was the sense and meaning of modern culture and history on the one hand, and the impact of social change on individual ways of life on the other.

The cultural meaning of history for sociality and individuality is, I think, equally the major driving force behind the enormous interest culture, sociology of culture, and cultural science currently attract in Germany. One may very well speculate on the reasons for this interest particularly today. It surely is a fin-de-siècle syndrome since all certainties have vanished at the eve of the 21st century. What looked

(continued on page 2)

"Music," wrote George Elliot, "passes by me as a messenger that is not for me." Ten years ago, in my first article on music, I noted this quote as particularly applicable to our discipline's treatment of music. At the time, the sociology of music represented one of the few sociological subfields to so frequently "pass by" the very substance of its inquiry. Unfortunately, ten years later the story remains the same. Current reviews of the literature still fail to reap much work devoted to the cultural object from which the sociology of music takes its name.

Speaking of this void is in no way meant to detract from the valuable work that currently comprises the sociology of music literature. Through such research, we have learned much about organizational structure, regional composition, social change, and the ways in which these forces can influence the diffusion, reception, and evaluation of certain forms of music (see Blau 1988, 1989; Denisoff 1975; DeNora 1991; Hennion 1989; Martorella 1982; Peterson 1978, 1990a, 1990b; Peterson and Simkus 1992; or Small 1987). Other works have taught us much about the socialization and behaviors of musicians (see Becker 1963; Cameron 1985; Faulkner 1971, 1973, 1983; or Nash 1955). We have become better acquainted with musician networks (see Abbott and

(continued on page 5)

Postcard from L.A.

Michèle Lamont, Princeton University & Section Chair

We all had a fine time. The sky was pure blue; we drove to Venice Beach, saw a museum or two, and had superb Tex-Mex. We talked and talked with friends and colleagues, catching up on life and work. There were many ideas and lively sessions. Inter alia, Elizabeth Long organized a galvanizing open discussion of the challenges offered by cultural studies to sociology. A panel on theory and culture stirred strong emotions when Jeff Alexander fiercely defended his work against the criticism of younger talented theorists (Mische and Emirbayer; Lee; Olick; Battani, Hall, and Powers). Having drawn no less than fifty-eight submissions, Karen Cerulo's panel on identity, which included a wonderful piece by Barry Schwartz on Lincoln and race, played to a full house even

though it was scheduled at the bitter end of the meetings. Earlier in the day, a session on culture across disciplinary perspectives generated spirited exchanges between our own Michael Schudson, who questioned the usefulness of cultural studies to sociology, and Andrew Ross, one of the leading representatives of cultural studies in the humanities. For the first time, the Culture Section had an author-meets-the-critics panel (around David Halle's *Inside Culture*) and cosponsored sessions with other sections; these formats will be used again next year. The culture program made more room for new assistant professors and advanced graduate students, this group constituting the vast majority of our membership. The

(continued on page 11)

Elsewhere in this Issue . . . Books of Note, Page 9 • Call for Papers, Back cover • News and Information: Of the Section, Page 12; Beyond the Section, Page 13 • Business Meeting Minutes, Page 14 • Section Leaders and Committees, Page 15 • About the Newsletter, Page 14

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Cerulo on Musical Sociology

(continued from page 1)

Hrycak 1990; or Stebbins 1976; 1979), and have gained a better understanding of music's audiences (see Berger 1947; DiMaggio, Useem, and Brown 1978; Kamin 1974; Robinson 1977; or Schuessler 1948).¹ Yet, amidst this massive literature, with all its undeniable virtues, works devoted directly to music are scarce.² Few have probed the variations in musical structure and content, the social forces and processes linked to those variations, the meanings derived from different musical structures, and the ways in which music can influence social behavior. Indeed, if we exclude "classics" by theorists such as Adorno, Honigsheim, Simmel, or Weber,³ we are left with only a handful of sociologists who have tackled the study of music head on: e.g., Jones's (1963) work on the blues, Bergesen's (1976) work on musical "codes," Harris and Sandresky's attempts to classify musical meaning (1985a; 1985b; 1990), Dowd's (1992) work on popular hit records, and my own work, first on war music and later on national anthems (Cerulo 1984; 1988; 1989a; 1989b; 1993; forthcoming).

In many ways, sociology's reluctance to tackle music "head on" is unique within the social sciences. Those in related disciplines regularly and comfortably travel where sociologists seem fearful to tread. Such efforts have generated exciting research discoveries, and they have usurped many of the research agendas that seem more appropriate to the sociological eye. Consider, for example, the prolific work of psychologist Dean K. Simonton. Through computer analysis of melody note configurations, Simonton (1984; 1986; 1987; 1989; 1994) has been able to establish the relative originality of melodies and rhythms in classical works. More importantly, he has linked variations in originality to social factors such as the audience popularity of a composition, or the critical evaluation of a composition's aesthetic merit. Further, he has isolated the artistic forms, biographical scenarios, and social forums most likely to elicit originality from a composer. Other psychologists have addressed music's role in stimulating, changing, or aiding certain emotional and behavioral responses (see Alpert and Alpert 1990; Benes et al. 1990; Kellaris and Rice 1993; Palmer 1992; Roe 1992; Sloboda 1992; Wells 1990; Yalch 1991). Such works have

(continued on page 6)

uncovered interesting response patterns, including the dampening effects of slow tempos and links between dissonance and irritability. But this line of research has also yielded findings of central sociological interest, including the intricate ways in which members of various social categories (i.e., class, gender, race) enjoy, interpret, and remember musical symbols. Further, such work is illuminating the ways in which different social groups use music to manage sadness, depression, happiness, etc.

Ethnomusicologists and anthropologists also have benefited from their willingness to deal directly with musical objects. In so doing, they too have generated findings well suited to the sociological domain. Allan Lomax,⁴ for example, has successfully located music structure in the characteristics of the groups from which it emerges. His work reveals the ways in which a group's division of labor, or the power arrangements between the sexes, can influence the forms and styles of a group's musical expression—i.e., monophonic versus homophonic or polyphonic song styles. In a similar vein, anthropologists have examined the traditional music of specific groups or tribes, charting a group's particular song style and performance mode, and noting the effects of history, class, and gender composition, migration, acculturation, and assimilation on these musical characteristics (see Erlmann 1990; Henry 1988; Keeling 1985, 1989, 1992; Marosevic 1992). Such works provide special insight into the social conditions under which a group maintains a unique strategy of expression versus those conditions that stimulate the merging of various expressive styles.

Communication researchers, too, have enthusiastically pursued the study of music, exploring issues such as music's rhetorical properties, the role of technology in changing definitions of music, and music's effects on consumerism (Bruner 1990; Frederickson 1989; Jones and Schumacher 1992; McGuire 1991; Stout et al. 1990; Tankel 1990). Among semioticians, efforts have ensued to map a "language" of music (Bierswisch 1983; Dunbar-Hall 1991; Dunsby and Whittall 1988; Jackendoff and Lerdahl 1981; Nattiez 1967). Such scholars have helped us to better understand the systems by which groups and cultures combine identical signs (i.e., the notes of the diatonic scales) to create different musical styles.

This brief review of the literature suggests an important contrast. While other disciplines have willingly included music within the scope of their intellectual discourse, sociology has, comparatively speaking, given up its claim to this arena of inquiry. Some might be tempted to allow this pattern to continue. Since other disciplines have taken up this research gauntlet, must sociology enter the fray? I cannot help but think that such a stance is misguided; a full understanding of music, its structure, its social role, and its behavioral effects will only be enhanced by the sociologist's unique perspective.

Knowing the ease with which other disciplines approach music, one cannot help but question sociology's reluctant stance. What accounts for our hesitation in this regard? At one level, sociology's heavy reliance on positivism may help to explain our silence on music. From the positivistic perspective, music represents a slippery entity, a data source too difficult to apprehend. Indeed, many have argued that no

method providing the intersubjective reliability and objectivity required for systematic research can adequately capture the true essence of music. Positivism, however, represents only a part of sociology's problems with music. For while positivism promotes the notion that music *cannot* be objectively analyzed, interpretive sociologists (well represented within the sociology of art and culture) frequently promote the notion that music *should* not be objectively analyzed.⁵ Despite the fact that objective measures of music structure have been enthusiastically pursued by music theorists themselves (Allen Forte, Leonard Meyer, Heinrich Schenker, or Joseph Youngblood), the interpretive tradition continues to define such attempts as naive empiricism and potential debasements of music.

This philosophical tug of war has spawned obvious consequences for the field. It has created a literature that speaks around music rather than about it. And in many cases, it has delayed our meeting with music by making debates on aesthetic value and meaning a prerequisite to research. Consider the issues that routinely occupy the attentions of the field: What constitutes the true musical signifier—the note, the phrase, the composition? Do musical signifiers have inherent meaning or are they arbitrary in origin? What should be our unit of analysis—the musical score or the performance? Is the quality of music subjectively or objectively determined? Are elite/popular music distinctions valid? Such issues are, no doubt, interesting. Yet, debating these questions with our full energies threatens to preclude research progress. For the arbitrariness of a musical signifier should not dissuade our pursuit of the meanings it portrays. The study of both written and performed music can be pursued with the same vigor linguists invoke in their concurrent study of both language and talk. And regardless of questions of value, both "serious" and "popular" music are social facts worthy of our attention.

It seems time to exit this philosophical labyrinth and develop an organized research agenda, one committed to the goal of bringing music back in. In my mind, such an agenda contains several clear steps. First, we must re-orient our approach to music, divorcing ourselves from the position that music is either too sacred, too special, or too enigmatic for systematic analysis. In the current social environment, music constitutes an omnipresent and powerful cultural tool. Music forms the backdrop to a variety of social events and settings, from exercise classes and therapy sessions to religious ceremonies and government rituals. We hear music, indeed we have come to expect it, when we are at the supermarket, at the ball park, in the car, in an elevator, when placed on telephone "hold" by our insurance companies or catalogue warehouses, and even when "logging on" with our newest computer software. Music has proven capable of both rallying and calming us; it can "rock and roll" us, or join us in prayer and somber reflection. Music functions as a signature for celebrities, broadcast news shows, corporations, and nations; it frequently becomes the leitmotif of protest movements or significant social events. We use music to mark important moments in our lives, as we recall our college's "fight" song, the tune to which we danced at our wedding, or our favorite childhood lullaby. Music—of all types and qualities—virtually surrounds us. It is a widespread social phenomenon worthy of our most focused attentions.

Once reminded of the centrality of our data, we must continue to seek an appropriate methodology with which to analyze music. In so doing, we must resist the temptation to approach such methods as a debasement of an art product's essence. Understanding the workings of grammar does not destroy our ability to discern the comparative quality of a Dr. Seuss nursery rhyme versus a Fitzgerald novel. Grasping the mechanics of color perception does not hinder us from recognizing the differences between our preschooler's latest finger painting and Monet's "Water Lilies." Thus, the methods for capturing music structure must be viewed as opportunities—tools that enhance our capacity for meaningful comparison and intersubjective discourse. Rather than fighting against the measurement of music, we must direct our attention to perfecting and enriching such techniques. For example, in designing my own measures of music structure, I have attended to characteristics such as note sequencing, range and method of musical motion, interval construction, sound range, dynamic variability, key construction and change, form complexity, meter changes, tempo, use of syncopation, etc. My selections represent the items most common to musicological analyses. But my criteria are by no means exhaustive. Future research demands that we explore additional indicators of music structure. Further, we must begin to tap additional qualities of music; measures of music's innovativeness, sensuousness, agreeableness, and motivational power remain to be developed. Within this measurement endeavor, however, the challenge of accessibility must remain in the foreground. Sociologists are not required to become trained physicians in order to specialize in medical sociology research, nor schooled lawyers in order to study the sociology of law. Thus, sociologists of music must avoid the needless exclusionism that can result from methodologies requiring extensive musicological training.

A third step of the research agenda I am proposing requires an aggressive expansion of work devoted to the direct study of music. While the current literature is limited, it nevertheless cites a number of relationships that deserve further attention. To date, social elements such as group heterogeneity (Bergesen 1979), performer characteristics, sole authorship and production, industry competition, high-tech instrumentation (Dowd 1992), and large scale social disruption (Cerulo 1984; 1989; forthcoming) have been linked to the production of embellished music structures. Similarly, the structural location from which music is produced appears associated with music structure: composers located in peripheral areas of a social system tend to produce the most embellished musical scores (Cerulo 1993; forthcoming). Patient empirical inquiry is required if we are to better understand these complex links between the social and cultural domains. And additional research energies are demanded for the complex questions still before us. What are the connections between music structure and reception—are some structures more popular than others? What links exist between music structure and audience action—are some structures more stimulating than others? And do the social processes and events that affect music structure influence the aesthetic and emotional qualities of music as well?

Finally, the time has come to test some of our suppositions regarding musical meaning. Note that objective criteria for the measurement of the musical object open new and exciting research doors in this arena. Using such indicators, it becomes possible to group musical pieces according to distinguishing characteristics of their structures: complexity, density, irregularity, etc. Once we are doing this, we can, for example, begin to chart receiver response to various musical structures, exploring what certain structures mean to those who hear them. In addition, we can probe the universality of structural meaning, separating structure's influence from factors such as a receiver's prior emotional condition, or the context in which the music is heard. The issue of meaning can also be explored by comparing verbal themes with the musical structures that support them, providing a sender's perspective on intended structural meaning.⁶

In essence, the agenda I am proposing strives to re-orchestrate the sociology of music. It promotes a field that directly addresses the subject of its inquiry. To be sure, this agenda is a demanding one, but our efforts promise a rich reward as we learn more about the ways in which the social and the cultural intersect. In light of what is at stake, it indeed seems high time for sociologists to "face the music."

NOTES

- ¹ This review of the literature is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.
- ² Some might argue that the production of culture perspective ultimately addresses musical content. I would suggest, however, that those working within this approach consider only the most general aspects of musical content (musical genre) and more frequently favor extra-musical content (a work's lyric theme, composer, recording artist, etc.) in their work.
- ³ For more on these writings, see especially the collections and commentaries prepared by Peter Etzkorn.
- ⁴ Lomax has devoted a lifetime to the study of folk music from around the globe. His 1968 work is perhaps the most notable of his corpus.
- ⁵ Jepperson and Swidler (1994) make a similar observation.
- ⁶ My own work in progress addresses this issue. I am currently categorizing a variety of popular and classical works according to their verbal themes. Guided by these themes, I am looking for similarities in the melodic structure of happiness, anger, sensuality, etc.

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(continued on page 8)

Cerulo on Musical Sociology (from page 7)

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