Opportunities for Ethnography in the Sociology of Music

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Available online 2 July 2004

Abstract

Since the 1920s the sociological study of music has greatly benefited from the contributions made by researchers who use ethnographic methods in their work, and in this article I review some of this noteworthy scholarship. I argue that the last 10 years have seen a flourishing of ethnography on the relationships between music and, respectively, gender, place, and globalization. I conclude by identifying three topics that could benefit from further ethnographic study: the use of popular music in the marketing of urban areas; the production process within the culture industries; and the consumption of music in real time and space.

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1. Introduction

Ethnography literally refers to the art of writing about people. Within the social sciences it has come to refer to a broad set of practices through which scholars attempt to observe and interpret the cultural beliefs and practices of social groups by engaging them in some kind of interpersonal encounter. Traditionally, sociological ethnography has referred specifically to the task of the participant observer who “gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organization he studies” (Becker, 1958: 652). However, in recent years the term has been appropriated by researchers who employ a broader range of qualitative methodologies, such as open-ended interviewing and biographical narrative collection. In this article I examine how these methodological tools have been employed in the sociological study of music, from the early ethnographic work of the Chicago school to more recent explorations of music-making in the contemporary city.

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doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2004.05.002
2. The ethnographic tradition in sociology

A founder of the Chicago school of urban sociology during the early decades of the 20th century, Robert E. Park introduced ethnographic fieldwork into the department’s curriculum (Abbott, 1999; Anderson, 2001). Park himself was a former journalist, and under his guidance both graduate students and faculty alike researched and wrote ethnographic accounts of the otherwise hidden lives of Chicago’s immigrant families, homeless men, working-class gangs, and juvenile delinquents.

Among these monographs, three in particular give an account of how popular music scenes operate within a larger cultural ecology of urban nightlife. In *Vice in Chicago*, Walter C. Reckless (1933) provides a detailed cartography of the city’s Prohibition-era jazz venues, public dance halls, and vaudeville houses. In his analysis of the black-and-tan cabarets located in Chicago’s segregated black neighborhoods, Reckless (1933: 102–103) uses ethnographic data to emphasize how consumers attach symbolic importance to the neighborhood context in which they experience live blues and jazz music: “To a slumming white patronage the Black Belt location of cabarets offered atmosphere and the colored man’s music and patronage added thrill.”

Like much of the Chicago school research on urban life, a moralistic social agenda informs *Vice in Chicago*. Similarly, Paul G. Cressey (1932) critically explores the underworld represented by the taxi-dance hall, a type of club popular during the 1920s where men could purchase three-minute dances with attractive female companions at ten cents per song. Cressey relies on close participant observation and in-depth interview data with dancers as well as their male patrons, the latter typically Asian immigrants who relied on these dance halls and their live music as entry points into the social world of American life. Another prominent Chicago researcher, Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, fills *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929) with anecdotes about the importance of music for the diverse residential communities of the city’s Near North Side. In a chapter on the fashions of high-society, status-seekers measure their social worth in “invitations to certain box parties at the opera,” exclusive balls and benefit concerts held for charity (Zorbaugh, 1929: 50–51). His account of the unmarried residents who inhabit the area’s furnished rooming-house district includes a sad tale of an aspiring young pianist who flees Kansas for a chance to perform professionally in Chicago. (After a year, her music lessons grow more and more expensive until her teacher finally convinces her of the hopelessness of her ambition.) And in his research on Towertown, the city’s bohemian entertainment zone, Zorbaugh (1929: 102) discovers the jazz musicians and “singing waiters” employed within its highly commercialized world of nightclubs and “Paris revues.”

The legacy of these Chicago school investigations lies in (1) their use of the case study as a legitimate form of sociological inquiry; (2) an attention to participant observation and other types of ethnographic fieldwork; and (3) an emphasis on the interactional fields in which urban culture is produced, marketed and consumed. These examples would continue to influence ethnographic work in the sociology of music over the course of the twentieth century.
3. Producing music

While the contributions of the Chicago school add to our knowledge of how music cultures operate in the urban milieu, it is clear that the study of music was always tangential to a more general examination of social organization and human ecology in the context of the American city. In contrast, the next wave of ethnography in music focused specifically on the world of musicians in the settings in which they lived and labored. The earliest of this research was conducted not by sociologists, but by folklorists and ethnomusicologists interested in capturing the indigenous musical cultures of the rural South. Through a variety of techniques, including extensive participant observation, interviewing, and recording songs and oral narratives, fieldworkers such as Alan Lomax (1993), Paul Oliver (1965), and David Evans (1982) created vivid and illustrative portrayals of the Mississippi Delta and its folk blues culture. This ethnographic work emphasized how blues musicians in that context drew on the reality of their surroundings, particularly chronic poverty and institutionalized racism, to infuse their songs with both ironic reflection and emotional intensity. In a similar vein, Charles Keil (1966) studied Chicago blues and soul singers, and Samuel Charters (1981) researched West African tribal performers (or griots) thought to be the originators of what would come to be the American blues tradition.

While productive, the ethnomusicological approach to blues research suffered from a number of related weaknesses: its presentation was generally impressionistic, rather than systematic; its intellectual goals were descriptive and explanatory, but not theoretical; and its orientation was romantic instead of critical. As a result, classic ethnomusicology evaded an analysis of how more contemporary professional, economic and institutional forces structure the production of popular music. Sociology, on the other hand, was much better equipped to compensate for these gaps, and from the mid-1950s onward ethnographers explored the commercial contexts in which musicians produce their craft not only as inspired artists, but as employed professionals as well (Becker, 1982). These ethnographic studies developed out of three related paradigms made popular within sociology at this time: the influence of Everett C. Hughes and his work on occupations; the rise of symbolic interactionism; and the strengths of labeling theory and the social construction of deviant behavior. In Outsiders (1963), Howard S. Becker (a student of Hughes) examines how jazz musicians negotiate between the demands of their audiences and their own artistic aspirations and establish career identities within an unstable job market. According to Becker (1963: 114–119), jazz musicians labored in a low-status profession regarded as “unconventional,” “bohemian” and downwardly mobile by the reigning middle-class norms of the 1950s and 1960s, and this impacted how they conducted themselves in their domestic relationships as well as their professional lives. Becker demonstrates how close participant observation can yield both systematic empirical data and theoretical insight.

Becker’s analysis of jazz players as an occupational group propelled future work on the professional lives of other types of musicians. Robert R. Faulkner (1971, 1973) explores the higher-brow world of classically trained orchestral musicians, particularly those who transition from live concert performance to studio recording for film and television. Like Becker, Faulkner’s chief emphasis concerns how musicians organize and emotionally experience their careers as workers laboring in an inherently unpredictable field. The
economics of musical work require that participants manage their ambitions and definitions of success accordingly, taking into account the challenges of finding employment as well as the benefits and costs of “going commercial.”

In contrast to Faulkner, H. Stith Bennett (1980) researches the world of local rock musicians; however, like his predecessors, he addresses a wide range of their occupational strategies, including instrument acquisition, gig procurement, set programming, and techniques of performance. A student of Becker’s, Bennett also performs as a musician and relies on his contact with fellow players as his primary source of data about not only professional practices, but the set of meanings that musicians attribute to those practices. Like Becker and Faulkner, Bennett draws on ethnographic methods in order to better understand how musicians develop subjectivities within a set of material constraints, commercial demands and professional expectations.

4. Subcultures and style

Until the mid-1970s, ethnography in the sociology of music focused almost entirely on production. Why? In part, musicians made fitting case studies for research on occupations and on the social construction of deviance, two fields that exponentially grew in popularity among sociologists during the 1960s (Abbott, 2001). But this focus was also due to an abandonment of ethnographic work on music consumption. The rise of the Frankfurt school’s critique of mass culture, particularly Adorno’s work on jazz and the “regression” of listening, contributed to growing attacks on the commodification of popular music by American public intellectuals during the 1940s and 1950s (Macdonald, 1953; Hayakawa, 1955; Adorno, 1989, 1997; also see Rosenberg and White, 1957). By portraying consumers of popular music as alienated, neurotic and childlike simpletons rather than discriminating human agents, this critique ultimately rendered such consumers unworthy of close ethnographic attention.

Perhaps on the strength of this critique of popular culture, research on music consumption tended to employ varied approaches such as content analysis and survey methods but rarely ethnography (i.e. Clarke, 1956; Horton, 1957; Johnstone and Katz, 1957). David Riesman (1950) provided an exception to this rule by conducting lengthy open-ended interviews with his students and a sample of younger teenagers. He found that American youth could be divided into two groups. The majority followed conventional adolescent tastes while a minority of active listeners exhibited their distaste for commercial music and celebrity performers. These latter consumers developed their musical preferences within the context of peer groups who expressed a disdain for conformity to the cultural mainstream.

Two decades later, observations like Riesman’s would become the basis for an entire wave of ethnographic research on the consumption of music. Drawing on a amalgam of British social history, neo-Marxist theory and French post-structuralism, fieldworkers associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham produced accounts of how youth subcultures actively incorporate music into their overall lifestyles (Hall and Jefferson, 1975; McRobbie and Garber, 1975; Willis, 1978; Hebdige, 1979). In colorful studies of punks, skinheads, bikers, hippies, Rastafarians
and other bohemian groups, researchers explored how young people rely on the creative potential of music to develop symbolic and aesthetic practices in concert with other elements of style, including fashion, body adornment, dance, drug use and slang. Reacting to the mass culture critique, these scholars argued that the consumption of music represented a class-conscious form of rebelliousness, or “resistance through rituals” (Hall and Jefferson, 1975). By appropriating commodified forms of music for their own stylistic and expressive ends, music consumers could refashion themselves as producers as well.

While path-breaking in its own right, some of the research of the Birmingham school unfortunately emphasized the development of theory without empirical verification from ethnographic data, sometimes at the cost of substituting armchair sociology for the rigors of fieldwork. In contrast, more recent studies of subcultures and style employ intensive participant observation to reveal how young consumers use music to shape a set of collective identities and experiences in everyday life. In her late-1980s ethnography Teenage Wasteland, Donna Gaines (1991) hangs out in convenience store parking lots with working-class hard rock fans from suburban New Jersey, and details the enthusiasm with which they worship the songs and totemic symbols of their favorite bands—Led Zeppelin, Metallica, Bon Jovi, Suicidal Tendencies, the Grateful Dead. Through the consumption of heavy metal and glam rock, kids labeled as so-called “burnouts” invest their socially marginalized lives with meaning and affirmations of self.

Whereas previous accounts of youth subcultures explained how the consumption of music could also help foster in-group solidarity and integration, during the 1990s ethnographers began emphasizing how music tastes and rituals of consumption could lead to increased internal differentiation within subcultures. In her ethnographic study of British dance clubs, Sarah Thornton (1996) found that established acid house and techno music fans vie for subcultural status by mocking their less experienced counterparts within the scene. Clubbers criticize these novice thrill-seekers for exhibiting what they consider an amateurish lack of sophistication and style, and refer to the mainstream clubs that cater to them as “drunken cattle markets” where “tacky men drinking pints of best bitter pull girls in white high heels” (Thornton, 1996: 99). Similarly, Ben Malbon (1999) explores how London dance clubs employees invoke the criteria of “coolness” to restrict entry into their establishments, thereby replicating the racist and sexist social norms of exclusion found in more mainstream cultural settings.

For Malbon’s chatty informants, the achievement of “belonging” depends on their ability to negotiate among the various front and back stages of the club. Also with an ethnographic eye toward differentiation and spatial practices within music scenes, Wendy Fonarow (1997) draws on field observations and interviews to provide a mapping of the three spatial regions of British indie rock clubs inhabited by consumers during live shows. The youngest and most enthusiastic fans jump and shout at the front of the stage and in the mosh pit; older fans congregate on the floor behind the pit, where they can enjoy the performance without distraction; and industry personnel and other music professionals linger in the back regions near the bar, coolly consuming the whole scene with bemused detachment. Fonarow demonstrates how the participants of music performances differentiate themselves by engaging in varied strategies of consumption. At the same time, as these consumers get older they alter their affiliation with the band and their place within the
club so that they eventually “move back through space until they are aged out of the venue all together” (Fonarow, 1997: 369).

5. The consumption of music and the self

While these accounts of music subcultures and scenes focus on collective processes and in-group interaction, other recent ethnographic research within the sociology of music emphasizes how consumers employ music to create more personal and individualized experiences for themselves. In Common Culture Paul Willis (1990) emphasizes the meanings and practices that young people attach to popular music. According to Willis’s informants, music serves as a resource for generating meaning through the selective interpretation of memorable lyrics and styles of performance. He argues that through activities such as home recording and creating a “personal soundscape” inside one’s head with the help of Walkman earphones, listening to music presents opportunities for developing a political consciousness, gaining spiritual nourishment, and making sense of pivotal milestones and life experiences (Willis, 1990: 64).

The work of Tia DeNora (1999, 2000) offers a sophisticated framework for thinking about how individuals consume music. She argues that music operates as a “technology of the self,” a resource for managing one’s everyday life. Through open-ended interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in sites such as aerobics classes and fashionable clothing shops, DeNora scrutinizes how consumers use music to orchestrate their daily routines from waking up to working out. In bedrooms and offices, music serves a variety of personal functions: it supplies mental preparation for the workday, encourages concentration during important tasks, alleviates stress, and acts as a device of organizing one’s memory of key moments with romantic partners, family members or other intimates. In ethnographic forays into the world of music therapy and physical fitness, DeNora (2000) emphasizes the elemental relationship existing between music and the body. In aerobics, music operates not as background, but as foreground, as a tool employed to explicitly define the rhythm, pacing and progression of the workout, from warm-up to cool-down. Similarly, Rob Drew (2001) relies on fieldwork conducted in thirty karaoke bars to examine how individuals use their bodies to publicly express themselves musically. Through elaborate performances that attempt to imitate, embellish or parody the recordings of well-known entertainers, amateur crooners experience music in an earthly manner through their intensely drawn facial expressions, exaggerated dance styles and strained vocals.

Drew draws on his own experience as a participant observer to enrich his account, and in doing so he subjects himself to his own analysis. This may not be surprising, given that the last two decades have given rise to the postmodern critique of ethnography emanating from within the worlds of anthropology, gender studies and critical theory. This critique challenges traditional ethnography on several grounds, including (but not limited to): its unfair characterization of politically subjugated groups, including women and racial minorities; the false claim to objectivity made by fieldworkers; the inherent power discrepancies between researchers and subjects; and the resistance of ethnographers to reflect upon these issues and candidly introduce them into their written accounts from the
field (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Clifford, 1988; Rosaldo, 1989; Abu-Lughod, 1993; Behar and Gordon, 1995; Marcus, 1998).

This attention to reflexivity in ethnography has prompted a number of studies by researchers who examine their own experiences as music listeners and/or performers. In *Race Music*, Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr. (2003) produces what he refers to as an “ethnographic memoir” by drawing on his own first-hand recollections as an African-American child growing up in Chicago, and his experiences as a professional jazz pianist and gospel performer. In addition, he draws on interviews with his immediate and extended family members who provide oral histories of their migration to Chicago from the Deep South and remembrances of life in the city’s segregated black neighborhoods. Ramsey elegantly weaves together these materials to describe the relationship between music and memory as it thrives in the spaces of black urban culture, including its house parties, jazz clubs, churches, and roller-skating rinks.

Meanwhile, Stacy Holman Jones (2002) uses her field research as an opportunity for self-analysis. She combines her observations and a brief interview with a cabaret performer with her own musings on torch singing and fantasies about Sarah Vaughan to produce an ethnographic meditation on music and desire. Jones (2002: 739) herself refers to the piece as “a fiction and an autoethnography, an analysis and an argument, an irony and a literal rendition, a scrapbook and a fan letter.” While these highly personal studies may lack the empirical reliability of more traditional field research, they emphasize the subjective and interpretive quality of ethnographic practice (see Geertz, 1973).

### 6. New directions in the sociology of music

During the 1990s a number of themes emerged in the ethnographic literature on music, each simultaneously responding and contributing to larger trends within qualitative sociological research. Below I will address three topics in particular: gender and the role of women in music; the reemergence of urban space and its relationship to cultural processes; and the impact of globalization on local music subcultures and their scenes.

#### 6.1. Gender

As demanded by an increased concern with gender differences in music-making, during the 1990s ethnographers turned to an examination of the position of women within worlds of music production and consumption. In particular, this work emphasizes three distinct social roles inhabited by women: active (as opposed to passive) cultural consumers; young girls and adolescents who maintain shared notions of femininity and sexuality; and marginalized workers organized into sex-segregated occupations. As discussed above, DeNora (1999, 2000) accounts for how women actively consume music in their domestic, work and leisure spaces as a means of negotiating the challenges of everyday life. Regarding the collective subcultural life often shared by female youths, Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo (1998) conduct focus groups with music fans associated with the pro-feminist riot-grrrl movement of the 1990s, and explore how young women draw on the symbolic elements of music in order to collectively forge gendered identities and
affirmative modes of self-expression (also see McRobbie and Garber, 1975; Ehrenreich et al., 1997; Koizumi, 2002; Lowe, 2004).

In addition, a number of ethnographic studies capture the precariousness of the roles that women play as musicians, rappers and other producers within contemporary music scenes. Drawing on discussions with female hip-hop artists, Tricia Rose (1994a) examines how their music reflects a strong feminist self-reliance, and in particular, a desire for financial and emotional independence from men (also see Gottlieb and Wald, 1994; Reynolds and Press, 1995; Schilt, 2004). Meanwhile, her interviews with female record company executives uncover the pervasiveness of sex segregation and gender inequality in more managerial and administrative sectors of the music industry (Rose, 1994b).

Mavis Bayton (1998) also explores how gender differentiation operates at both the artistic and managerial level within record companies. Through numerous interviews with female rock artists, Bayton identifies how women negotiate the constraining barriers that prevent them from joining bands and securing recording contracts in a male-dominated professional context. This institutionalized sexism is reinforced within spheres of production and distribution in which most of the influential gatekeeper roles are held by men. Bayton argues that the pervasiveness of these inequities doubly serve to marginalize women in music.

Similarly, Mary Ann Clawson (1999) interviews bass guitar players to understand why women find themselves segregated into those particular roles in male-oriented rock bands. She reveals how a number of factors combine to create this seemingly unusual outcome. Bass players are in high demand relative to other positions within rock bands, chiefly because it is a supporting role deemed unattractive by male musicians. The bass is a relatively easy instrument to learn quickly—a selling point for twenty-something women, who (unlike males) are rarely encouraged by family or peers to learn to play rock instruments at a younger age. But when explaining their own ubiquity in rock circles, Clawson found that many female bassists ignore these structurally determined factors, arguing instead that women are well suited for bass playing because the position requires that performers lend support to their fellow band members as well as possess an innate sense of rhythm: two qualities commonly attributed to womanhood. By internalizing these gender stereotypes, female bassists often help reproduce the very same prejudices that ultimately give rise to sex segregation in the music industry.

6.2. Spaces and places

In addition to gender, the 1990s bore witness to the increased significance of space as a contextual variable in cultural and urban sociology. During the dominance of the Chicago school of sociology in the 1920s and 1930s, Park and his colleagues theorized and documented the influence of spatial structures and processes on the formation of urban subcultures within the larger cultural ecology of the city (see Abbott, 1999). In the 1990s and 2000s, urban ethnographers reintroduced the importance of spatial analysis in qualitative social research by describing how city dwellers interact within the context of urban spaces to build places, or worlds of meaning developed around concrete spatial forms, including streets, sidewalks, local establishments, community areas and ethnic enclaves.
Within the field of cultural sociology, recent ethnographic work emphasizes the spatial contexts in which music is both produced and consumed. Sara Cohen (1991) studies how unsigned rock groups in Liverpool survive on the margins of the music industry, and in her account she argues that the intense social solidarity existing among the city’s residents helps shape the organization of local bands. (For a similar ethnographic study of British rock musicians and local identities of place, see Finnegan (1989).) Likewise, Andy Bennett (2000) collects ethnographic data on a variety of emergent youth cultures, or “scenes”—including British white hip-hop, tribute bands, and the world of the pub—to examine how local ecologies lend shape to the boundaries and sensibilities that define music within a specific milieu. In studies of dance music, rap, and progressive rock, Bennett shifts from northeastern England to Germany to demonstrate how music scenes develop place-centered identities and stylistic particularities over time (also see Bennett and Peterson, 2004).

Finally, David Grazian (2003) draws on fieldwork conducted in Chicago blues clubs to examine how cultural producers and consumers rely on stereotypical images of authenticity in order to make sense of local music venues, the neighborhoods in which they are located, and even the city itself. By capitalizing on its largely manufactured reputation as the “Home of the Blues,” Chicago infuses its presentation of self with the razzle-dazzle suggested by the electrified blues of Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf and Buddy Guy. Like the work of the aforementioned authors, Grazian demonstrates how music can provide an interpretative lens through which audiences are able to experience spaces as places. See also Stokes (1994), Leyshon et al. (1998), Bennett (2000, 2001), Bennett and Peterson (2004).

6.3. The effects of globalization

Contemporary studies of globalization argue that international flows of immigrants and capital impact the cultural geography of local spaces and places (Appadurai, 1990; Sassen, 1991; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 2002). Since music appears to be particularly sensitive to these kinds of changes, recent ethnography emphasizes how global processes transform local musical cultures in both core and periphery nations within the world system.

Much of this work developed out of the ethnomusicology framework discussed above and demonstrates the hybrid quality of new styles of layered musical performance and practice in locales as varied as Istanbul, Kingston, Calcutta, and Papua New Guinea (Stokes, 1992; Stolzoff, 2000; Clayton, 2001; Crowdy, 2001). Sociologists address these concerns in their work as well. Sarah Champion (1997) and Simon Reynolds (1999) both explore the relationship between international and local cultures in their ethnographic investigations of the international rave scene. The first rave parties were cultural hybrids in which British youth danced all night to German techno and Chicago house music, and eventually spread to Ibiza, Goa, Tel Aviv, Cape Town, Tokyo and other global cultural capitals. By mingling with ravers at Even Furthur, an outdoor electronic music festival held annually in rural Wisconsin, Champion and Reynolds each consider how Midwestern audiences blend together the dance music of the global underground with death metal to produce an interbred “darkside” scene. The hybrid nature of this heavy metal-rave crossover reveals itself among dancers who head-bang to techno music peppered with Black Sabbath covers, mix Ecstasy with other dangerous drugs, and merge the rave-based symbolism of PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity, Respect) with the skull-and-bones aesthetics of
the occult. Other ethnographic explorations of the local production and reception of globally circulating music includes work on bhangra-pop fusion in Newcastle upon Tyne, 1970s American rock n’ roll in Manila and Bangkok, and the monopolistic practices of the Anglo-American recording industry responsible for the distribution of so-called “world” music (Iyer, 1989; Negus, 1992; Bennett, 2000, 2001).

7. Opportunities for ethnography in the sociology of music

As demonstrated by past research, the promise of ethnographic methods presents a bounty of opportunities for the sociological study of music. Like music, ethnography is an interpretative practice; it requires participation and improvisation; its presentation invites a multiplicity of meanings as well as self-reflection. For these reasons, I conclude with three suggestions for new foci in ethnographic research in the sociology of music: the use of popular music in the marketing of urban areas; the production process within the culture industries; and the consumption of music in real time and space.

First, the contemporary literature on urban sociology proposes that elites often appropriate the local culture of their cities for political and entrepreneurial ends (Zukin, 1995; Suttles, 1984; Logan and Molotch, 1987; Lloyd and Clark, 2001; Lloyd, 2002). In Chicago and Memphis, civic boosters promote blues clubs within their cities as a means of increasing tourism and generating revenue for their local economies, just as Nashville, New Orleans, and Liverpool rely on their own roots-oriented music heritages for their financial vitality (Grazian, 2003). Ethnographic methods can help sociologists better understand these complex relationships existing between the political economy of urban areas and their music cultures. Specifically, by relying on three techniques—conducting participant observation at city-sponsored music festivals and other tourist attractions, engaging in open-ended interviews with civic leaders and the programmers of local cultural organizations, and collecting accounts of how musicians, residents, boosters and out-of-towners creatively employ images of “authenticity” to represent the city, ethnographers can add empirical weight to the more abstract paradigms indicative of much postmodern urban theory.

Second, ethnographic methods can enhance the historical and quantitative research currently conducted on the music industry itself. Over the past thirty years, the sociology of music has greatly benefited from the scholarly efforts made by those attempting to combine the fields of cultural production and organizational behavior. By treating the production of music as a commercial enterprise undertaken by large industrial conglomerates, sociologists have helped demystify the processes through which record labels and other media companies manufacture, market and distribute culture as a commodified form (Hirsch, 1972; Peterson and Berger, 1975; Peterson, 1978, 1997; Frith, 1978, 1981; Dowd and Blyler, 2002).

In recent years, ethnographic work has contributed to this project as well by increasing our knowledge of how corporate cultures impact particular music genres; identifying the diverse artistic and economic interests that drive the production of music videos; uncovering how hip-hop impresarios rely on ideological considerations to successfully promote rap music; discovering how music critics organize themselves within the context
of professional journalism; and exploring how the chaotic careers of session musicians are structured (Peterson and White, 1979; Negus, 1992, 1999; Regev, 1997; McLeod, 1999; Klein, 2003). In future endeavors, ethnography may prove to be particularly useful for developing our understanding of how support personnel experience occupational marginality and gender segregation within the music industry; how the employees of independent record companies create alternative identities and professional presentations of self; and how ideologies that shape the industrial production of music eventually filter down to the level of the local music subculture or scene.

Finally, ethnographic methods provide an especially handy tool for sociologists interested in examining how people consume music in real time within spatial contexts of social interaction. To their credit, sociologists of culture have relied on sophisticated techniques to examine the tastes and participation rates among music consumers, and have identified the relationship between music genre appreciation and social class, race, educational background, and occupational status (Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1990; Peterson, 1992; Bryson, 1996, 1997; Peterson and Kern, 1996). But even the most rigorous quantitative studies of consumption can fail to account for how individuals actually experience music in their moments of consumption, whether during public concerts, small cabaret shows, or candlelit dinners. Of course, certain questions regarding the consumption of music can only be reliably answered by making inferences based on large population samples, and in these cases ethnography may only be appropriate as a complement to ongoing statistical data analysis. However, the pleasure (and occasional displeasure) produced by music rarely registers at the level of mere approval, but is often experienced in an emotional and visceral manner as expressed through bodily gestures, spontaneous applause, and welled tears of longing (see Malbon, 1999; DeNora, 2000; Drew, 2001; Grazian, 2003). Whether through participant observation, open-ended interviewing, or oral narrative collection, live performance and experiences provide among the most appropriate opportunities for ethnography in the sociology of music.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge support from the Alice Paul Center for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Pennsylvania, which provided summer funding during the preparation of this manuscript.

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