

Timothy D. Taylor

University of California, Los Angeles
Departments of Ethnomusicology and Musicology
Box 951657
Los Angeles, CA 90095
USA

tel.: (310) 825-8413
fax: (310) 206-4738
email: tdtaylor@ucla.edu

OLD AND NEW (ETHNO)MUSICOLOGIES¹

First, I need to offer a disclaimer: that my perspective on the state of the disciplines is a necessarily Americo-centric one. For this I can make no apology, since my education and career have been in the U.S. This results in a somewhat skewed perspective, I freely admit, but having kept up with intellectual trends in Europe, and, to a lesser extent, Asia and Latin America, I believe that there are commonalities in the trajectories of musicology and ethnomusicology that I hope that the following addresses.

One of the things that immediately struck me about this symposium is the topic itself. How is it that we are talking about ethnomusicology and popular music studies as separate to begin with? How is it that these fields (or subfields) emerged as distinct? And: what are these that the borders of these fields are, or may be, blurring?

To address these questions I will briefly discuss the rise of ethnomusicology as a distinct field from musicology, which, in the U.S., occurred in the mid-1950s with the founding of the Society for Ethnomusicology. This split gave ethnomusicology, and ethnomusicologists, more autonomy to practice the unique methods of the field, but, like all such splits, meant that ethnomusicology as a field diminished its influence on its parent discipline. In the last few decades, musicology in the United States has becoming increasingly known as “historical musicology,” and became even more resolutely about canonical works than it had been before,

and less and less historical (in the sense that it places works in historical contexts), less and less concerned with the rest of the world, the majority of the world's musics and peoples.

This is not to say that there were “good old days” when musicologists and ethnomusicologists existed harmoniously, but there does seem to have been a greater sense of pluralism than there is now. The sense of intellectual adventure that prompted the first editor of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* in 1948 to include an article by anthropologist Richard Waterman entitled “‘Hot’ Rhythm in Negro Music” now seems to be long gone (Waterman 1948).² The disciplinary impulse that promoted Manfred Bukofzer to include a chapter entitled “Sociology in the Baroque” in his mammoth history of Baroque music is long gone (Bukofzer 1947). “Historical” musicology might be about music in the past, but it is not music in history, that is, music as it existed in a time and place that shaped composers and their works. I will return to this point in a moment.

The next important disciplinary milestone was the rise of jazz studies in the 1970s, the first potential ideological attack on historical musicology as a field. Most studies of jazz, however, as many have noted, has been until fairly recently quite formalistic, not particularly interested in questions of race, urbanism, social class, or, more broadly, culture in the anthropological/ethnomusicological sense of the term. In other words, most jazz studies until recently have adopted the methodologies and orientations of historical musicology, which, strategically or not, was a way of legitimizing its subject. Jazz musicians make beautiful forms that transcend the time and place in which they were written. Race, class—the social situation of the musician generally—have no bearing on the study of this canon of masterpieces. In other words, jazz studies has historically been quite (historical) musicological in orientation, not ethnomusicological.

The 1980s saw the rise of cultural studies in Europe and the U.S., followed by what in the U.S. became known as the “New Musicology,” a musicology that sought to understand music not as a series of holy texts written by composer/gods, but as situated in culture broadly speaking. At its inception, the new musicology announced that it would be more open to other disciplines and other disciplinary approaches than the old, and be more receptive to questions of otherness, whether gendered, racialized, or ethnicized. One of the first publications in English to mark this shift was *Music and Society*, a volume co-edited by Susan McClary and Richard Leppert (Leppert and McClary 1987). The opening essay by sociologist Janet Wolff laid down the gauntlet: musicologically cherished notions such as the autonomy of the artwork were revealed to be ideologies situated in a particular cultural and historical moment, not transhistorical truths that are never to be questioned.

As part of the rise of the new musicology, popular music studies entered music departments in the early 1990s. There has been a veritable explosion of popular music courses in many music departments in the U.S. The first time I taught such a course, in the fall of 1994, roughly half of the syllabus contained nonmusical/nonmusiological texts. Now, it would be possible to teach the course many times without repeating a book or article.

The new musicology and popular music studies represented the biggest challenge yet to historical musicology and as such are salutary developments in many respects. Yet from the perspective of an ethnomusicologist/anthropologist, the rise of the new musicology and popular music studies have not always fulfilled their early promise. While musicologists who were attempting to move beyond the stilted, even stultifying set of approaches and methods that had dominated the field for decades, cultural studies seemed to be the answer: it was hot, it was

trendy, there were people in other departments one could talk to. In the meantime, however, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists were largely ignored.

I would like to spend some time on the drawbacks of the new musicology as I see them, for they help address the question of the disciplinary separation of ethnomusicology and popular music studies. The new musicology, like its disciplinary godparent, cultural studies, tends to marginalize Culture and History (which I take to be the same thing, the former in the present and the latter in the past). Instead, the new musicology foregrounds cultural forms and cultural (though rarely social) theories. In the 1980s, when so much of academia was being reorganized along the lines of theories promoted by feminists, people of color, Marxists, and others, musicology had to choose which way to go: to follow literary studies and continue the textological orientation of older musicologies; or to make alliances with people in departments and schools of music who have a culture concept: ethnomusicologists (see McClary 1991:26).

But this latter option was, by and large, the road not taken. And so, most of the “new musicology” today follows a particular pattern. The author identifies a particular musical work or works, and then links that music to a particular abstract concept that is already highly theorized, or will soon be by the author. The cultural/historical underpinnings that gave rise to that music in the first place are made to be optional, which means, therefore, the larger cultural/historical question is as well: Why is this music the way it is? But in the new musicology, it seems that the rise of Theory has come at the expense of History, in cultural studies in general, and in the new musicology in particular (see Taylor 1990). Thus, the new musicology can exist quite happily alongside older ones—all have a textual orientation, a focus on works rather than people, history, culture.

Additionally, what seems to have happened in this era of multiculturalism is that most music departments, few of whose members are conversant with cultural theory, have nonetheless seemed to have grasped one of the tenets of multiculturalism about the relativization of knowledge. There is no “truth” anymore, there are truths. Instead of simply assuming that canonical works are supposed to be at the center of the life of the university, the attitude now seems to have become one of defending the canon, justifying its study by recognizing that it is only one of a number of bodies of works now receiving scholarly and pedagogical attention. In this way, historical musicology, old musicology, has been able to carry on with business as usual without mending its ways, much less questioning or thinking them.

For example, at a university where I taught for many years, there is a required class called “Masterpieces of Western Music.” This is part of a required program at that university that emphasizes “great books.” Each undergraduate is required to take this one-semester class, in addition to other classes on literature, the visual arts, and philosophy. Students in this class receive on the first day a one-page document with a general syllabus (three weeks on musical elements, two weeks on medieval and renaissance music, etc.) that begins with a paragraph on the course philosophy. This paragraph describes the overall orientation of the course as taking a “masterpieces approach.” Of course, this is the only way that most historical musicologists know how to study music, but the fact that they now recognize it as an “approach” shows how their view of the field has become relativized. But only a tiny bit, a certainly not to the extent that this approach would ever be questioned, much less challenged or jettisoned altogether.

I have been rehearsing this critique of historical musicology in order to show that much of its assumptions are alive and well in the new musicology and in popular music studies as well.

It is true that the new musicology is more theorized than historical musicology, which until quite recently eschewed theory altogether.

But one must ask: which theory? One of the biggest problems, it seems to me, is a continuing reliance on the Frankfurt School, and Theodor Adorno in particular (see Fulcher 2001). A recent academic article database search of musicology journals resulted in the following: 749 hits on “Adorno”; 158 for Michel Foucault; 111 for Clifford Geertz; 98 for Pierre Bourdieu; 91 for Walter Benjamin; 43 for Jürgen Habermas; 30 for Jean Baudrillard; 16 for Anthony Giddens. Clearly, the ghost of Adorno looms large over musicology.

Yet there are a number of problems with Adorno from the perspective of ethnomusicology and anthropology, as well as history. First, his work is philosophical, not social scientific. His concerns are those of a philosopher interested in universals, not those of a social scientist concerned with how real people make their way in their real worlds. For Adorno, there is good music and bad music, good ways of listening and bad ways of listening, and so forth. Second, Adorno is not only uninterested in ethnographic research—he is against it, believing that ethnographic research (or even the proto-focus group research practiced by Paul Lazarsfeld and others in New York when Adorno was associated with the Radio Research Project—see Jay [1973] 1996) was pointless for the average person would simply articulate what the cultural industry had programmed her to believe. Third, his use of rhetorical assertions rather than argumentation reduces a good deal of his writing to the level of opinion, not sustained argument. And, finally, to tie up with what I have already argued, Adorno is by and large ahistorical, except with respect to the Second Viennese School, but this is an incidental effect of Adorno having been associated with that particular group of composers and musicians.

Let me spend some time here with the problem of the absence of History (uppercased, à la Eagleton 1996:30). I should first note that not all new musicologists or popular music studies scholars ignore history; there is some very good work, by Mark Katz (2004), Kier Keightly (1996; 2004), and others. Yet absence of History in historical musicology and the new musicology is dominant and unmistakable, stemming from one of the foundational concepts of what I will call the classical music ideology, the idea of transcendence. Since artworks are thought to speak directly to their listeners or viewers, whatever History that produced them is thought to be irrelevant.

The classical music ideology, with its notion of transcendence, means that most scholars of music tend not to cultivate a concept of History as, say, a historian does. History is not perceived as a real, palpable, dynamic force that shapes peoples' lives, shapes the way things are. History, instead, is usually construed a collection of facts that may or may not be relevant in hearing a piece of music. In other words, where in ethnomusicology and anthropology one speaks of the "culture concept," it is just as possible to talk about a "History concept" in the historical fields. I take these two to be pretty much the same thing, the one in the past and the other in the present.

All this is assuming that music in history is the object of study, which is infrequently the case with popular music studies, which tends to be quite presentist. There are far fewer studies of music in the past than in the present, and those studies of past popular musics tend not to historicize as I have been arguing here. For example, many major popular musicians of the last century have hardly been subjected to scholarly treatment, such as Rudy Vallée, the crooner who was the first mass media popular music superstar (see at least McCracken 1999).

Another problem with the Frankfurt School, and cultural studies more generally, is that it is critic-centered. It seems that if, as Roland Barthes wrote, the death of the author could only result in the birth of the reader (which in practice really turned out to mean the critic), it seems that the ascendance of the critic/theorist could only come with the death (or decentering) of the ordinary reader, the subject (Barthes 1977:148). This seems to have resulted in a kind of solipsism or narcissism. The death of the author brings the birth of the critic. Much of the new musicology is not about the “work” (as in older musicologies) but what the critic makes of it. Discussions of musical works as de-historicized, or transhistorical “masterpieces” written through the depersonalized, omniscient musicologist has diminished in the hands of new musicologists, only to be replaced by equally ahistorical studies of works through the eyes of the musicologist.

I am not here advocating a return to a study of works, but, rather, that we need a more social science approach that takes into account real people: not just the traditional focus on musicians, but also producers, consumers, critics, etc. I will develop this point more in a moment.

Indeed, Popular Music Studies by musicologists, including new musicologists, also still tends to be about “composers” and “works.” For example, a recent issue of a popular music studies newsletter includes an announcement of a new journal and says that there are plans to include articles on Bob Dylan and the Last Poets, Gil Scott Heron and Patti Smith, Jack Kerouac and Tom Wolfe, poppy Z Brite and Genesis P-Orridge, Jim Morrison and Jewel, Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie, U2 and REM, Allen Ginsberg and Henry Rollins, Adrian Henri, John Cooper Clarke and Benjamin Zephaniah, William Gibson and Sam Shepard, Nick Hornby and Steve Earle, Douglas Coupland and Irvine Welsh, Nik Cohn and Greil Marcus, Nick Kent and

the Nu Yoricians, “to name only a few.” More intellectual issues come up in later paragraphs but this is what they lead with when they say what the new e-journal is going to be about.

With some important exceptions (such as the work of Sara Cohen, an anthropologist), popular music studies hasn’t taken up ethnography, more social science approaches to the study of music generally (for a discussion of the lack of ethnographic perspectives, see Ortner 1995). By ethnography I don’t simply mean fieldwork—going somewhere—but adopting an attitude, a perspective. Why are these people doing what they are doing? Why is their music the way it is? Or—Why is this text the way it is? What were people thinking about, talking about, doing, in a particular moment, and how do all these things leave traces in texts? A favorite passage from Michel Foucault’s work puts this approach succinctly: “How is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?” (Foucault 1972:27). That is, what are the historical, cultural (and other) reasons that resulted in a particular statement, defined broadly as any text? I’m talking also about new modes of ethnography: ethnographic reading, ethnographic listening.³

Despite the differences between popular music studies and ethnomusicology, the insularity of historical musicology and the conservatism of music departments has meant that popular music studies has become more affiliated with ethnomusicology as a (sub)discipline. Both fields are marginal in music departments and frequently their practitioners find themselves fighting the same battles together. This is an affiliation of the marginalized; the two subfields have influenced each other minimally; popular music studies is pretty much new musicology/cultural studies.

Now, this critique of the new musicology and popular music studies from the perspective of ethnomusicology does not mean that ethnomusicology isn’t without its flaws. First and foremost, ethnomusicology has been slow to become more theoretical, like popular music studies

(or anthropology). An “area studies” mentality still dominates. Ethnomusicologists are expected to travel to a serious Elsewhere, learn the language, the music, and write meticulous, descriptive books and articles about this people and their music. This model is being challenged by a number of recent studies but it does still appear to be the norm.

And until recently, most ethnomusicologists are not trained to study complex societies with hierarchical social systems, mass media, consumerism, etc. This has been changing as a result of the increased interest by ethnomusicologists in popular musics, and in conducting ethnographic research closer to home.

At any rate, when one examines the relationship between ethnomusicology and popular music studies, one finds a gap: ethnomusicologists have a concept of culture, but not always the theoretical/methodological tools to study complex cultures; non-ethnomusicological popular music studies scholars tend to lack a culture/history concept and be musician- and text-centered.

What is to be done? I would advocate doing away with the subfields and reconstituting them as a new field: Music Studies. In the field of music studies, culture and history would come back in. Workers in this field would forge intellectual alliances with likeminded colleagues in our departments, and out of our departments. That has been one of the salutary effects of the rise of cultural studies, by the way, and I do not want to minimize it. With respect to the absence of history in historical musicology, we can forge alliances across departmental and disciplinary lines.

In this way we can help put History, and Culture, in historical musicology, and bridge the gap between musicology and ethnomusicology, as well as popular music studies. There are an increasing number of anthropological and ethnomusicological studies that are historical. And even within English studies, there is some textual work being done today that is attentive to

culture and history. The major figure is probably Stephen Greenblatt, widely regarded as the founder of a new approach in, yes, literary studies called the New Historicism. Greenblatt frequently acknowledges his debt to Clifford Geertz.⁴ The new historicism is an approach that not only seeks to situate literary works in cultural/historical contexts, but also attempts to uncover meanings in works that were contemporary at the time.

Interestingly, the new historicism has scarcely had an impact in historical musicology, though perhaps Richard Taruskin, who doesn't tend to state an allegiance to any particular approach or body of theory, might qualify, as would Susan McClary in some of her work.⁵

We should also, along with anthropologists, do what we can to take back the culture concept, and educate our colleagues in and out of our departments about what culture is and how it can be studied, how it can be productively included in studies of music. Cultural studies didn't need to reinvent the wheel. We can engage with and thoughtfully critique cultural studies and new musicological work that doesn't talk about culture, or tries to talk about it in limited ways.

And, finally, I think it's crucial that we know the theories that cultural studies scholars and some new musicologists are using. We have to be able to speak their language if we are going to convince them of anything worthwhile. Simply crying "foul" when culture/history is elided or given short shrift isn't enough: we must be able to meet these scholars on their own ground and show them why the view from there isn't quite as panoramic as they think.

In this era of the relativization of knowledge, am I saying that including considerations of culture and history is simply another approach that should be considered for adoption? No—I am saying that it is better than other approaches. It is better because it connects works and musical practices to real people, real times, real places. If we are to have a truly new (ethno)musicology,

one that cares not just about texts but the texts' connections to the people who make and listen to them, it is essential to move beyond the text and into the realm of the cultural.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Giovanni Giurati for inviting me to present some of these ideas at the seminar, as well as for the input and comradeship of the other presenters: Franco Fabbri, Serena Facci, Laura Leante, and Philip Tagg.

² I would like to thank Christopher Waterman for reminding me of this article and the intellectual moment it represents.

³ An important exception is Sara Cohen (1993, 1991).

⁴ Much of Greenblatt's work makes his debt to Geertz explicit. For a recent homage, see Greenblatt 1999.

⁵ See, for just a few examples, Taruskin 1997, McClary 1987, McClary 2000, and some of the essays in McClary 1991.

REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland. 1977. "The Death of the Author." In *Image – Music – Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Noonday.
- Bukofzer, Manfred. 1947. *Music in the Baroque Era, from Monteverdi to Bach*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Cohen, Sara. 1993. "Ethnography and Popular Music Studies." *Popular Music* 12 (May): 123-38.
- . 1991. *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1996. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon.
- Fulcher, Jane. 2001. "Symbolic Domination and Contestation in French Music: Shifting the Paradigm from Adorno to Bourdieu." Paper given at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, 16 November.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1993. "Art as a Cultural System." In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. 1999. "The Touch of the Real." In *The Fate of "Culture": Geertz and beyond*, edited by Sherry B. Ortner. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jay, Martin. [1973] 1996. *The Dialectical Imagination: a History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Katz, Mark. 2004. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Keightley, Kier. 1996. "'Turn it Down!' She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948-59." *Popular Music* 15 (May): 149-177.
- . 2004. "Long Play: Adult-oriented Popular Music and the Temporal Logics of the Post-war Sound Recording Industry in the USA." *Media, Culture & Society* 26 (May): 375-91.
- Leppert, Richard, and Susan McClary, eds. 1987. *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McClary, Susan. 1987. "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year." In *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, edited by Richard Leppert and Susan McClary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- . 1991. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2000. *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McCracken, Allison. 1999. “‘God’s Gift to Us Girls’: Crooning, Gender, and the Re-Creation of American Popular Song, 1928-1933.” *American Music* 17 (winter): 365-95.
- Ortner, Sherry B. 1995. “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37 (January): 173-93.
- Taruskin, Richard. 1997. *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, William R. 1990. “On the Dangers of Theory without History.” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 37: 29-31.
- Waterman, Richard A. 1948. “‘Hot’ Rhythm in Negro Music.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 1: 24-37.
- Wolff, Janet. 1987. “The Ideology of Autonomous Art.” In *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*. Edited by Richard Leppert and Susan McClary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.