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Towards a Cultural Sociology of Popular Music

An immediate problem facing anyone committed to the task of mapping out a conceptual territory for cultural sociology in the field of popular music studies is where to begin. Part of the issue here relates to popular music studies' status as a field of academic study already overlain with a rich diversity of disciplinary approaches. Moreover, within the array of concepts and theories applied in the study of popular music, questions pertaining to the relationship between music and culture and of popular music itself as a cultural form have conventionally been addressed by cultural studies theorists rather than sociologists. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this rule (see, for example, Martin, 1995, DeNora, 2000, Bennett, 2000). That said, it is also fair to say that the application of sociological perspectives in popular music research has been a rather more diffuse process. Similarly, if a number of sociologists of popular music have been using what could be termed 'cultural' approaches in their work for a number of years, the results of such work have never cohered into a recognised conceptual approach to the study of popular music. Rather, such 'proto' cultural sociologists of popular music have tended to work in isolation from each other. The establishing of dedicated centres for popular music research during the last twenty years has not lessened this problem. Although such centres are commendably multi-disciplinary in their approach, representation among sociologists remains relatively low.¹

At the same time, however, the potential fields of work in which cultural sociologists of popular music could now involve themselves have expanded immeasurably. Popular music's ever-growing status as a multi-media, global industry – and the new technologies that have facilitated this - has pushed it increasingly into

the everyday cultural soundscape. Likewise, such advances in the production of popular music and its delivery to audiences has prompted the creation of strategies and spaces of resistance on the part of popular music creators and consumers who regard themselves as ‘operating under the radar’ of the commercial music field. At the same time, the increasingly multi-generational audiences for post-war genres, such as rock, punk, rap, and even dance music, is prompting interesting questions about the shifting significance of popular music as a cultural form. Some of these themes and issues have certainly been addressed in academic work on popular music, though rather less by sociologists than theorists and researchers working out of other academic disciplines. While the foundations for a potentially vibrant cultural sociology of popular music exist, considerable groundwork is required in order for such an approach to be properly formulated and realised as a means of exposing and explicating the increasingly complex interplay between popular music and everyday cultural practice. The purpose of this article is to begin addressing this task through offering a series of critical observations on the sociology of popular music and the possible constructive interventions that a more focused cultural sociological approach could contribute.

Popular music and the academy

As noted above questions of culture as these have surfaced and been addressed in popular music research owe much to the legacy of cultural studies. Indeed, by the time popular music studies became established as a mode of academic enquiry,² the signature debates concerning popular music as a cultural field had already been set in motion by cultural studies through its analytical engagement with critical and mass

communications theory (Bennett, 2007). During the early 1970s the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), from which the discipline of cultural studies emerged, produced a series of studies that critiqued the work of critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1969) and Habermas (1987) and mass communication theorists inspired by their work, for example MacDonald (1953). Rejecting the pessimistic claims of these writers concerning mass culture as a bourgeois instrument for ideological domination of the masses, the CCCS endeavoured to recast popular mass culture as a potentially subversive resource when placed in the hands of working class audiences (see Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Harris, 1992).

This critical agenda was directly inherited by popular music studies. Although the range of disciplinary interests that now converge under the banner of popular music studies has expanded considerably over the last twenty years³, and although there has also been a steady expansion in the themes investigated by popular music scholars, popular music studies continues to focus its emphasis upon five broad issues: text, genre, production, performance and reception. In each case, the points of tension arising from popular music's seemingly contradictory position as both a key cultural industry of late capitalism and a medium for engaging with discourses of inequality, social unrest and disempowerment are regular points for discussion and debate (see, for example, Street, 1986; Garofalo, 1992). In such instances, the analytical tools inherited from cultural studies are regularly brought into play. Social life is read essentially in terms of determinism and repression, while popular music is interpreted as a possible means through which the oppressed and disempowered can resist the everyday circumstances in which they find themselves (see, for example, Grossberg, 1992). Although 'culture' is invariably presented as a keyword in such

revisionist and interventionist writing, the interplay between popular music and culture continues to be explained away in a largely abstract fashion. Culture is considered as a constraint, something imposed from above which manifests itself most readily through issues such as teenage boredom, racial tension and sexual exploitation. The cultural response of those individuals on the receiving end of such constrictive bonds is also read in an essentially determinist fashion. Broad structural categories such as class, gender and race are portrayed and considered to be the, largely subconscious, motivation for reactionary tendencies among popular music audiences.

Against this backdrop of cultural determinism, popular music is often quite literally read off by popular music theorists as a mirror of reality – for example, punk is assumed to be the soundtrack of an angry, dispossessed, white working class youth (Hebdige, 1979), while rap is represented as the voice of an equally angry and dispossessed, inner-city African American youth (Rose, 1994). From such a position, musical texts and the narratives they allegedly bespeak have come to be regarded by many popular music academics as a singularly rich source for the construction of analytical discourses concerning the relationship between music and culture. Other voices that may have entered into this debate, typically those of social actors involved in the production, creation and appropriation of popular music texts are summarily excluded from consideration. This oversight has often been held up as a point of criticism. For example, in his highly instructive critique of Hebdige's study of punk, Clarke suggests that Hebdige's Barthian-influenced semiotic analysis of the punk style, together with the metropolitan centredness of his approach, offers little insight into the perceptions held by young punk rockers themselves or punk's broader socio-cultural resonance as a national youth culture. Thus argues Clarke: '... Hebdige

concerns himself only with the innovative punks, the “original” and “genuine” punks concentrated in the London area ... Hebdige’s analysis of punk beings with a heat wave in Oxford Street and ends in a Kings Road boutique’ (1990: 86).

Willis’s *Profane Culture*, published in 1978, constitutes a significant departure from the work of Hebdige and other cultural studies writers though its inclusion of those other voices – that is, youth itself – in the text. *Profane Culture* combines a traditional sociological ethnographic approach with a sophisticated theoretical reading of the relationship between class, culture and musical taste using the conceptual framework of homology. The ethnographic sections of Willis’s study centre around the contrasting musical tastes of two class-defined youth cultural groups, the ‘bikers’ and the ‘hippies’. The transcripts included in the text illustrate a preference among the bikers for musically straightforward 1950s rock and roll songs, while the hippies’ musical preference is shown to be for the more musically complex, album orientated progressive rock groups of the early 1970s. According to Willis, the contrasting musical tastes of the bikers and hippies directly relates to their differing class backgrounds. For the bikers, the simplicity of rock and roll ‘clearly resonates and develops the particular interests and qualities of [their] life-style [possessing] an integrity of form and atmosphere as well as an immediate, informal confidence (1978: 71). By contrast, the more educated, middle class hippies demand music that challenges the listener and offers a more diverse listening experience. In combination with the use of psychedelic drugs, the complex rhythms and exotic soundscapes characteristic of progressive rock music became a way of achieving altered states of perception and awareness: subverting conventional notions of time: ‘Electronic techniques ... such as echo, feedback, stereo [and] loudness itself ... [gave] the

impression of space and lateral extension', a sensation that was significantly enhanced when the music was listened to under the influence of drugs (ibid: 167).

Willis then proceeds to explain the professed musical preferences of the bikers and hippies in terms of a homological fit between class background and taste. According to Willis, homology, represents 'the continuous play between the group and a particular item which produces specific styles, meanings, contents and forms of consciousness' (ibid: 191). Arguably, however, Willis's attempt to meld ethnography and homology in this way exposes a fundamental flaw in his work. In effect, Willis is using music primarily as a means of uncovering the social processes that he perceives as underpinning the formation of musical taste – the former then being used to explain away the latter. For Willis, what appear on the surface as spontaneous responses to music, are, in fact pre-determined by the structural experience of class. Far from being reflexive and creative agents, choosing music because of the way in which its rhythm, tempo, melody, sound, lyrical content, production, packaging, and so on, appeals to them as individuals, the bikers and hippies are depicted by Willis's study as acting unconsciously and in accordance with structurally embedded antecedents which basically 'tell' them 'how' to react to particular aural and visual stimuli.

The impact of Willis's work on the popular music academy has not been dissimilar to those adhering to a more formal cultural studies approach. Willis' concept of homology has been variously adopted and adapted by popular music theorists as a means of explaining away the status of music, largely as an expression of class relations. An obvious example here is a study of heavy metal by Australian cultural studies theorist Marcus Breen. Breen (1991) portrays heavy metal as a personification of patriarchal and misogynistic traits running through those working class communities from which heavy metal bands and audiences emerge. The 'male'

bonding and camaraderie that permeates heavy metal concerts is also regarded by Breen as a means through which working class audiences symbolically negotiate their low social status and feelings of repression and disempowerment. Again, at the heart of Breen's interpretation of heavy metal is an acceptance of culture as a pre-determined vessel. For Breen, the cultural environment of working class heavy metal fans indelibly stamps them with an identity and series of life expectations which are subconsciously imbibed and pursued. Culture then becomes a cage which contains social actors, shaping their perceptions and uses of cultural resources in pre-proscribed ways.

In North America, where cultural studies has traditionally had a weaker foothold than the UK and Australia, the influence of the CCCS is nevertheless evident in the work of a number of popular music academics. A clear case in point here is the work of Grossberg (1992) which transposes CCCS discourses of resistance and empowerment on to the everyday teenagers of American suburbia. Weinstien continues this trend in a study of heavy metal that revisits a number of key CCCS conceptual frameworks in its interpretation of metal as a working class 'subculture' based around male camaraderie and misogyny. Thus observes Weinstien:

As an expression of a distinctive segment of youth, the metal subculture valorizes the demographics of its membership. Masculinity, blue-collar sentiments, youthfulness, and, to a lesser extent, 'whiteness', are values shared and upheld by the metal audience. Moreover, many of the other features of the heavy metal subculture are strongly related to or implicated in these demographically derived values (2000: 102).

At the same time, however, it is fair to point out that North American popular music scholarship has also offered a series of new directions in the interpretation and understanding of popular music as a cultural form and practice. Straw's (1991) compelling essay on music scenes provides a highly sophisticated analysis of music's interplay with taste and identity through introducing the concept of trans-localism and, with it, the notion that geographically dispersed clusters of musicians, promoters, studio producers, audiences and others comprising music scenes may actively 'think' themselves into collective musical practices through a perception of music's ability to transcend local boundaries. In offering scene as a conceptual framework, Straw's work begins to contest the more obviously determinist theorisation of musical participation integral to CCCS subcultural theory. Similarly, Cavicchi's (1998) *Tramps Like Us*, applies an ethnographic approach in attempting to understand how fans of US rock singer songwriter Bruce Springsteen contribute to the construction of their idol's star-text through their interpretation of his songs, image and live performance as reflecting and engaging with aspects of their own everyday lives.

Picking up the pieces: Popular music and sociology

Despite the dominance of cultural studies perspectives in popular music research, a pivotal text in the foundation of popular music studies as an area of academic concern was written by a sociologist. Simon Frith's (1978) *The Sociology of Rock* is an ambitious attempt to apply traditional sociological perspectives on consumer capitalism, class, race, and gender to an understanding of popular music across three broad spectrums – industry, performance, and audiences. As the earlier sections of this paper bear out, although Frith's work was to prove highly influential and created

a monumental surge of interest in popular music, sociologists continued to play a relatively minor role in the study of popular music⁴. Nevertheless, Frith together with a number of other sociologists have over the last twenty years produced a body of work which at many levels offers a series of critical insights into how a cultural sociology of popular music can be established. These sociologists, despite working in isolation from each other, often share a theoretical and empirical language that moves beyond the more pragmatic concerns of cultural studies and related fields. Rather than assuming a top down stance in which musical meanings are deemed to radiate directly from the experience of class, gender, race and other acknowledged forms of structural inequality, a number of sociologists of popular music have proffered the notion that musical meaning and significance, whilst not divorced from such considerations, is at the same time the product of a rather more complex interface between sound, text and agency in which questions of meaning and value as these are inscribed in music may be beyond the grasp of any analytical approach that relies purely upon theoretical abstraction. This point is effectively and succinctly made by Frith who observes:

There is no doubt that sociologists have tended to explain away pop music. In my own academic work I have examined how rock is produced and consumed, and have tried to place it ideologically, but there is no way that a reading of my books (or those of other sociologists) could be used to explain why some pop songs are good and others bad . . . how is it that people (myself included) can say, quite confidently, that some popular music is better than others? (1987: 133-4, 144).

For Frith then, while top-down analyses of musical texts, the political economy of the music industry, or the ‘authenticity’ of particular popular music artists over others may begin the task of unravelling how popular music ‘works’ at a cultural level, equally important in this respect is an engagement with the aesthetic practices and value judgements of music fans themselves.

Such critical engagement with the origins and function of musical meaning is also evident in the work of other music sociologists. For example, in his seminal work *La Passion Musicale*, French sociologist Antoine Hennion (1993) argues that rather than focusing purely on musical texts as a ‘mirror’ of social and cultural meaning, a position that has been undoubtedly adopted in much cultural studies scholarship over years, the act of musical interpretation as a mundane, everyday practice should actually be key to sociological enquiry. The construction of musical meaning, argues Hennion, is an inter-textual and highly subjective process in which the audience is inextricably positioned as a reflexive and creative agency. The emotive energy that audiences invest in musical texts is key to the latter’s function as conveyors of meaning in the everyday social world.

A broadly similar view is espoused by Peter Martin (1997) in his Becker-influenced study *Sounds and Society*. Masterfully engaging with the social determinism of founding sociologists such as Marx and Durkheim, whose interpretations of class and class conflict in capitalist society provided a crucial underpinning for both critical theory and cultural studies, Martin applies a social constructionist view of musical meaning, contesting the widely held notion that music reflects in any straightforward way the social circumstances under which it was produced. Again, in Martin’s work questions of inter-textuality and subjectivity as key

proponents in the creation and social reproduction of musical meanings are central to the interpretation of music's meaning and significance.

In a compelling attempt to pose such questions of musical meaning in an ethnographic context, Tia De Nora's *Music and Everyday Life* sets out a series of vignettes in which individuals offer in-depth and highly personal accounts of the interface between music and everyday experience. As De Nora observes, what her work illustrates is the way in which: 'Music [act as] a device or resource to which people turn in order to regulate themselves as aesthetic agents, as feeling, thinking and acting beings in their day-to-day lives' (2000: 62). More precisely, De Nora illustrates that while particular aspects of music, as governed by genre, tone, lyrics and so on, may provide particular templates through which individuals are able to explore and / or express emotions, musical meaning and significance is ultimately also a product of highly individualised investment in and subsequent interpretation of particular texts.

Peterson's (1997) *The Creation of Country Music* adds a further dimension to this debate through its consideration of how issues of intertextuality – between musicians, songs and audiences – are integral to the social construction of meaning around genre, in this case country music. As Peterson demonstrates, the interplay between the everyday experiences of artists, audiences and songs feed back into the way in which genres are produced and represented, such that the meanings that genres embody ultimately cannot be detached from the forms of emotional investment inscribed in them through the collective act of performance and consumption.

To some extent, the concerns reflected in the above body of work also surface in what could be termed the second wave of cultural studies research, initiated by theorists such as Fiske (1989a; 1989b). Drawing on the ideas of Michel de Certeau (1984), Fiske argues that the products of the cultural and media industries fashion

partly finished meanings that can only be completed once these products enter the public sphere and acquire specific everyday resonances. Problematically, however, while avoiding the more spectacular claims of earlier cultural studies theorists concerning the potentially subversive qualities of popular culture products in the hands of consumers, in his insistence on fixing the practice of consumption around issues of class – for example, working class audiences for game shows and soap operas – Fiske’s work ultimately suffers from the same limitations as can be identified with CCCS-style analyses of popular culture products. In reading consumerism ‘as the expression of “struggle and resistance against the corporate hegemony”, Fiske paints an overly romantic impression of the subversive potential associated with the act of consumption’ (Bennett, 2005: 57 Chaney, 1994: 215).

Popular music sociology and the cultural turn

A critical point of tension between cultural studies and cultural sociology relates to the positioning of class and other structural constraints in relation to issues of culture. In both cultural studies and cultural sociology, culture is regarded as a motor-force in the everyday world. However, a key distinction between cultural studies and cultural sociology turns on the conceptualisation of culture in relation to how it is seen to function in this respect. There is no denying that structural constraints play a considerable role in shaping a person’s everyday life experience. The question, however, is how far we can assume that the individual is unavoidably a ‘product’ of their class, gender, race, and so on, or how far they have the capacity to negotiate such structural conditions and circumstances – to find an identity and construct a lifestyle that transcends the parameters of such structural experience? In a conventional

cultural Marxist analysis of culture, which forms the bedrock for the majority of cultural studies research, this question is rarely engaged with as class, gender, race and so on are presented as 'givens'. Agency, in as much as this is ascribed to individual actors begins and ends within the confines of structure; in this sense, 'culture' is little more than a pre-determined script playing itself out through the bodies of individuals locked within a series of rigidly demarcated social relations.

In the field of sociology, a major effect of the cultural turn has been to bring such assumptions about the nature and function of culture in late modern society sharply into question. Thus, as Chaney observes, a key problem with structurally informed approaches to the study of contemporary culture

... is that they try to close off the processes of the production of meaning. Such theories cannot allow the free play of irony and reflexivity in cultural discourse ... Putting it at its simplest, such theories assume that social entities such as class exist, one might say in the real world, and then they are talked about, represented and experienced as cultural matters. It follows that the dynamic relations of the former can be used to explain the character of the latter (1994: 48-9).

For Chaney, by contrast, rather than being in any way trapped by the fact of class, individuals in late modern society have the capacity to exercise reflexivity and critical detachment in relation to their social identity and its day to day management. Indeed, there is in Chaney's above observation a clear implication that class itself is now a far less monolithic and essentialist category than is often portrayed in social theory – and this has much to do with the dominant referents drawn upon by individuals in late

modernity. Thus, according to Chaney, in the context of late modernity previous forms of cultural authority – those grounded in class, community and tradition – have been replaced by new forms of authority in the form of the media and cultural industries whose products and resources have become part of the bedrock of everyday life. As Chaney argues:

... if we have been forced into more personal choices about what to believe, there is likely to be a greater demand for new sorts of expertise and guidance. And thus a paradoxical intensification of the social process of reflexivity is a proliferation of expertise and authority in fragmented culture. The reason why a more intense reflexivity is associated with greater uniformity becomes clearer if it is appreciated that the processes of heightened reflexive consciousness are articulated through textually mediated discourses more generally (2002: 24).

Chaney's observations are highly pertinent to the discussion of the everyday meaning and significance of popular music in that they begin to challenge conventional ideas about popular music as simply a reflection of a pre-determined social reality and also help us to see around the rather narrow definition of musical taste as this has been theorised in relation to class. Applying Chaney's ideas, we can begin to appreciate how musical taste, rather than simply being a product, and ultimately a personification, of structurally determined social circumstances is rather a reflexively derived form of expression – one of the available means through which individuals are able to actively construct their identity, lifestyle and even sense of place in late modernity.

In his important, if somewhat neglected, study of the social dimensions of musical taste, Lewis offers an interpretation of the relationship between musical taste, identity and lifestyle that in many ways supports the views of Chaney. According to Lewis:

... the relationship between [musical preferences and social class] is not the clean and neat one that some, perhaps naively, have assumed it to be – especially in our modern, mass-mediated technological society. In such a society, under conditions of relatively high social mobility, greater discretionary income, easy credit, efficient distribution of goods, high diffusion rate of cultural products, conspicuous consumption, and a greater amount of leisure time, the link between social and cultural structures becomes a question, not a given. Rather than assume it to be simply correlative, it is perhaps better to view it as contingent, problematic, variable, and – to a higher degree than we might imagine – subjectively determined (1992: 141).

Lewis applies the concept of taste cultures, originally developed by Herbert Gans (1967), in attempting to explain the process whereby individuals acquire tastes in music and cohere into social groups on the basis of shared tastes. Lewis identifies three main dimensions underpinning the formation of taste cultures – *demographics*, *aesthetics*, and *politics*. *Demographics*, notes Lewis, covers factors such as age, gender, race, and also locality. According to Lewis, each of these factors can dramatically cut across class in providing a basis for attachment to a particular style of music. *Aesthetics*, suggests Lewis describes how personal outlook, which may arise from growing up in a particular place, reading a particular kind of literature, and so

on, can act on the individual to suggest that a specific genre of music is more aesthetically fulfilling, because of its resonance with other acquired sensibilities, than other genres. Finally, *politics* connotes a perceived association on the part of the individual between a music's relationship to the dominant power structure. Thus, as Lewis explains, whereas a genre such as country may be perceived as broadly supportive of the dominant power structure, punk and rap can be seen as assuming an oppositional stance. Thus, in adopting a preference for a particular kind of music, individuals both articulate their own political values and assert themselves in opposition to other musical taste groups.

Lewis's study is important in that, though breaking with the cultural studies tradition of looking for underlying structures that inform collective taste in music, it regards individuals as more agentic and reflexive in choosing a particular kind of music and incorporating this into their lifestyle aesthetic. Moreover, given that certain pre-determined and external factors play their part in the acquisition of taste, for example, gender, race and locality, the latter do not, in Lewis's view, press down like dead weights on the individual. Rather, they serve as points of reference, acting on the individual to different levels and in different ways – producing a plurality of responses to musical genres rather than a monolithic response.

Lewis's study serves as a highly useful mapping schema for our understanding of the relationship between music, taste and identity in late modernity. Missing from Lewis's work, however, is any real sense of the *actual* ways in which musical life is acted out on an everyday level, and the highly nuanced forms which this undoubtedly takes. We know from Lewis's analysis that an individual may be drawn to a particular genre of music due to the way in which this music chimes with the aesthetic and or / political sensibilities of the individual. We also know that gender, race and locality

may also play some part in acquisition and articulation of such sensibilities. Beyond this, however, the actual detail of how music acts as a vehicle in the construction and expression of lifestyles becomes quite sketchy. For example, we learn from Lewis's work that both hip hop and punk attract individuals due to their reactionary stance and invitation to participate in an oppositional culture. However, the nature and extent of this participation among individuals and what they themselves bring to the construction of hip hop and punk cultural milieus are never considered. This is a problem for any study – sociological or otherwise – claiming to illuminate the social meaning of popular music. Broad, non-specific examples, such as hip hop fans claiming urban space through spraying graffiti designs on walls, or punks punching out three chord songs in protest at the virtuosity of the progressive rock musician, capture little of the real emotional investment in such statements or the variety of other activities that individuals engage in as part of hip hop and punk scenes.

Instructive in relation to the above point are a series of what could be termed post-cultural turn studies in the sociology of popular music. Although not abandoning the notion of musical life as a collective and often politicised practice, these studies nevertheless endeavour to illustrate the highly nuanced, localised and subjective ways in which music and cultural practice align in everyday contexts. For example, in her highly important work on popular music festival culture, Cummings (2006) illustrates how contemporary youth audiences, while ostensibly a part of particular music 'scenes', display a diverse range of ideological positions in relation to the commodification of the festival scene by organisers and their sponsors. Moreover, as Cummings observes, such ideological positions have in turn been picked up on by organisers and sponsors who have in turn endeavoured to construct festival spaces in ways that align with the particular sensibilities – anti-capitalist, environmentalist, and

so on – exhibited by festival crowds. Similarly, in his research on goth music and style, Hodkinson (2002; 2004) demonstrates how the creation of this music scene – actually a conglomeration of small local scenes that connect via trans-local and virtual links – is very much the product of highly reflexive, creative practice among individual goths in continual effort to carve out a space for themselves and their music. Finally, his work on local hip hop scenes (Bennett, 1999a; 1999b; 2000) notes how young hip hop fans read very different meanings into the significance of hip hop and its role in their lives due to their differing experiences of the ‘local’. The everyday meaning of hip hop then, as opposed to the more uniform meanings created in top down analyses of the genre, is seen to be the culmination of a range of highly subjective - and in many cases conflicting - values placed in musical texts and their attendant cultural artefacts by young hip hop fans. Such values may reflect issues of class, gender and ethnicity, but these in turn are overlain by a another range of issues – access to and use of local urban spaces, production and listening resources, peer-related debates concerning notions of authenticity and integrity, and so on. The cultural world of hip hop then, is one that is inextricably bound up with a world of conflict, ambition and desire that cannot be readily explained through any analytical template that attempts to reduce cultural questions to a series of ideal types. The cultural agency of hip hop and indeed other musico-stylistic forms is constantly being made and remade by social agents acting in real-time situations in response to circumstances and contingencies arising from the flow and process of everyday life as this is experienced in micro situations.

Conclusion

This paper has endeavoured to provide a series of signposts for the development of a cultural sociology of popular music. Beginning with an overview of the development and trajectory of popular music studies it was noted how the field – and particular discussions of culture in relation to popular music – have traditionally been dominated by themes and perspectives drawn from cultural studies. The following section of the paper began to consider the contributions of sociologists to the study of popular music and how, in many cases, the findings of this work constitute a form of ‘proto’ cultural sociology. In the wake of the cultural turn, it was then observed, discussions of culture and cultural process have become more central to sociological debate. The new analytical territories introduced into sociology through the cultural turn, it has been shown, have opened up important new areas of concern relating to issues such as reflexivity, subjectivity and cultural fragmentation. Such debates, it has been argued are key to a cultural sociology of popular music in that they provide the basis for an understanding of cultural production and participation in relation to music not merely as a top down process, but rather as a dynamic interactive process in which the everyday reception, appropriation and aestheticisation of popular music texts, artefacts and associated resources are integral the production of musical meaning and significance.

Notes

1. There are a number of music research groups with significant sociological input, notably that established by Tia DeNora at the University of Exeter, UK. However, the focus of this group tends to be on classical rather than popular music.

2. A critical turning point in this respect was the establishment of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM). Founded in 1981, IASPM is now a global association with a number of different local branches serving members in many regions of the world. Over almost three decades, IASPM, and with it popular music studies, has continued to grow in popularity

3. At IASPM and other popular music conferences, it is not uncommon to see a highly eclectic mix of disciplinary interests covering, for example, musicology, ethnomusicology, cultural and media studies, sociology, psychology, anthropology, folklore, history, economics, political science, education studies, language studies, criminology and law.

4. In North America, where sociology maintained a more traditional stance for a longer period than in the UK and Europe, *The Sociology of Rock* was re-published in 1983 with the alternative title of *Sound Affects*.

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