Towards a Critical Understanding of Music, Emotion and Self-Identity

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Biographical note

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Abstract

This article explores how we might understand the relationships between music, emotion and self-identity. My goal is primarily theory-building but I also draw upon some empirical work. I begin by claiming that there is a dominant conception of music, emotion and personal identity in sociologically-informed analysis of music, and I show this by examining work by three leading analysts. This dominant conception sees music primarily as a positive resource for active self-making. My argument is that this conception rests on a problematic notion of the self and also on an overly optimistic understanding of music, which implicitly sees music as somehow independent of negative social and historical processes. I then draw on other theorists to attempt to construct a) a more adequately critical conception of personal identity in modern societies; and b) a more balanced appraisal of music-society relations. In particular, I suggest two ways in which relations between self, music and society may not always be quite so positive or as healthy as the dominant conception suggests. The first is that music, with its strong links to the emotions and to values of personal authenticity, may well have become bound up with the incorporation of emotional self-realisation, authenticity and creativity into capitalism, and with intensified consumption habits, processes that some writers plausibly claim may be having damaging effects on the psychological health of human individuals. These possibilities are explored via analysis of an interview with a man who has a particularly strong attachment to musical consumption. The second is that such emotional self-realisation is linked to status competition, in particular over the degree to which individuals are 'emotionally sensitive' and over involvement in hedonistic collective activity. Again I examine interview material to explore these possibilities. In the conclusion, I draw out some implications of the piece for the study of musical consumption, and for cultural consumption in general. I also briefly distinguish my perspective from two other critical perspectives that a hasty reading might confuse with my own, those influenced by Adorno and Foucault.

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Music provides a particularly interesting example of modern relations between consumption and self-identity. Many people report that music plays a very important role in their lives. This role does not appear to have diminished with industrialisation, commodification, and the mass consumption of music; if anything it has grown. The

continuing and perhaps growing importance of music in everyday life may be based on two contrasting but co-existing dimensions of musical experience in modern societies. The first is that music often feels intensely and emotionally linked to the private self. As one leading music sociologist has put it, music is a set of cultural practices that have come to be intricately bound up with the realm of the personal and the subjective (Martin, 1995: 2). The second is that music is often the basis of collective, public experiences, whether in live performance, or simply by virtue of the fact that thousands and sometimes millions of people can come to own the same recordings. These features are not necessarily contradictory; in fact, they may support and reinforce each other. Our excitement or sadness can be intensified through the sense that such emotions in response to a particular piece of music are shared, or even *potentially* shared. This feeling can be especially strong at a live performance, but it is just as possible when experiencing music individually, when we might, however semi-consciously and fleetingly, imagine others - a particular person, or untold thousands - being able to share that response. (This is one of the pleasures of pop music, and also perhaps a reason why many people are suspicious of it.)

Music, then, represents a remarkable meeting point of the private and public realms, providing encounters of self-identity (this is who I am, this is who I'm not) with collective identity (this is who we are, this is who we're not). Of course all cultural products have this potential – films, television programmes, even shoes and cars. Yet music's often-noted link to the emotions arguably makes it an especially powerful site for such encounters. Whether music really is more strongly connected to the emotions than other cultural forms, the fact that it is widely assumed to be so is itself significant. For we now live in societies where the private self has never been, in sociologist Eva Illouz's words, 'so publicly performed and [so] harnessed to the values of the economic and public spheres' (Illouz, 2007: 4). It is no longer possible to sustain the idea that the private sphere offers some kind of opposition to, or protection from, a world of public power, with the former understood as 'warm' and intimate, and the latter as a 'cold', rational, administrative domain. Of course many people cope with the demands of their working lives by telling themselves that their private realm offers a 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch, 1977). But in reality those realms we think of as 'personal' – our inner selves, and our relationships with families, lovers and close friends - are hugely affected by the world beyond them. This may be more so now than ever, as powerful commercial and state institutions in advanced industrial countries increasingly require autonomy, creativity and emotional roundedness in their employees and citizens – an issue I investigate below. This means that music, with its real or projected connections with the emotions and with self-realisation, may itself be increasingly politicised.

This article therefore explores how we might understand the relationships between music, emotion, selfhood and public identity. My goal is primarily theory-building but I also draw upon some empirical work.[1] I begin by claiming that there is *a dominant*

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[1] The empirical material used in this article is drawn from fieldwork interviews carried out with a range of English and Welsh people about their musical practices, tastes and values in 2002-4. 42 semi-structured interviews were conducted by a team of seven interviewers - myself, Stephanie Adams, Lorna Ashcroft, Surinder Guru, Jackie Malone, Dave Morris and Ian Robinson – funded by The Open University's National Everyday Cultures Programme. Recruitment aimed at a balance of social classes, roughly equal mix of men and women, and a reasonable spread of age groups, from those in their 20s to those in their 70s. Five interviews were with 'non-white' subjects. My thanks to Tony

conception of music, emotion and personal identity in sociologically-informed analysis of music, and I show this by examining work by three leading analysts. This dominant conception sees music primarily as *a positive resource for active self-making*. My argument is that this conception rests on a problematic notion of the self and also on an overly optimistic understanding of music, which implicitly sees music as somehow independent of negative social and historical processes. I then draw on other theorists to attempt to construct a) a more adequately critical conception of personal identity in modern societies; and b) a more balanced appraisal of music-society relations. In particular, I suggest two ways in which relations between self, music and society may not always be quite so positive or as healthy as the dominant conception suggests. The first is that music, with its strong links to the emotions and to values of personal authenticity, may well have become bound up with the incorporation of emotional self-realisation, authenticity and creativity into capitalism, and with intensified consumption habits, processes that some writers plausibly claim may be having damaging effects on the psychological health of man individuals. These possibilities are explored via analysis of an interview with a man who has a particularly strong attachment to musical consumption. The second is that such emotional self-realisation is linked to status competition, in particular over the degree to which individuals are 'emotionally sensitive' and over involvement in hedonistic collective activity. Again I examine interview material to explore these possibilities. In the conclusion, I draw out some implications of the piece for the study of musical consumption, and for cultural consumption in general. I also briefly distinguish my perspective from two other critical perspectives that a hasty reading might confuse with my own, those influenced by Adorno and Foucault.

The dominant conception: music as a positive resource for self-identity

In recent studies of musical consumption, a particular view of the relationship between music, emotion and self-identity has come to prevail. I want to show this by discussing three important contributions by sociologically-informed commentators. I begin with anthropologist Ruth Finnegan's survey of a range of ethnomusicological research (Finnegan, 2003). Finnegan argues that more attention needs to be paid to emotion in music. But she is clear that the emphasis should not be on 'trying to penetrate and pin down hidden internal states' but rather 'on the manner, variably practiced and conceptualized in different contexts, in which people are personally involved in their musical engagements' (p. 188). Finnegan emphasises the sheer range of emotions at work in musical performance and practice:

> It is not so much self-conscious internalized 'feelings' – though in some cultural settings that is indeed one element – as the contextualized manner of people's musical engagements: joyfully, fearfully, attentively, reflectively, proudly; in a spirit of exaltation or energy or irritation; in sorrowful, celebratory or nostalgic mood; with boredom (that too!), with dance, with tranquillity. (188)

Finnegan then summarises her view of how music itself figures in people's emotional lives.

> Whether in deeply intense fashion or more light-touch action, music provides a human resource through which people can enact their

> lives with inextricably entwined feeling, thought and imagination.
> (ibid)

Music, then, is seen as a *resource*, and one at the disposal of humans conceived in a particular way: creative, active, imbued with agency, diverse, and performative (in the interactionist sense, rather than in the way in which the post-structuralist writer Judith Butler uses the term).

A second account of music and identity relevant to my concerns in this article is by Simon Frith, in his book *Performing Rites* (Frith, 1996). The overall aim of that book is to provide a sociologically-informed aesthetics of popular music. The book climaxes with an eloquent account of the power of popular music, which is a summation of this aesthetics. Underlying this account is the idea that music has a particular and special ability to offer a route towards self-creation through fantasy. Music

> seems to make possible a new kind of self-recognition, to free us
> from everyday routines, from the social expectations with which we
> are encumbered… Music constructs our sense of identity through
> the experiences it offers of the body, time, and sociability,
> experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative
> cultural narratives. (Frith, 1996: 275)[2]

This is linked to a very constructionist conception of the self, which seems to be derived from symbolic interactionism, mediated here through the emphasis in cultural studies on the centrality of symbolic forms in modern social processes: 'Identity comes from the outside, not the inside; it is something we put or try on, not something we reveal or discover.' (ibid.) I shall return to this conception of the self in due course, but the main point I wish to make here is that here, as in Finnegan's account, there is a strong sense of music as a resource that allows people to enrich their lives.

The third contribution is that of Tia DeNora. In two insightful, readable and stimulating books, *Music in Everyday Life* (DeNora, 2000) and *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (DeNora, 2003), DeNora has made an extremely important contribution to the sociology of music. As explained above, it is her account of music, emotion and the self that I am particularly concerned with, and so her chapters on 'Music as a technology of self' (DeNora, 2000: 46-74) and 'How does music "channel" emotions?' (DeNora, 2003: 83-117) are most relevant here. Self-identity is understood as a production of the continuing activity of individuals, rather as a fixed inner essence, as in older conceptions of personality. The title of the first of these chapters recalls Foucault's use of the term 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 2000) but in fact DeNora's approach to subjectivity is very un-Foucauldian and owes more to interactionism, pragmatism, and Anthony Giddens's conception of modern self-identity as based upon reflexivity (DeNora, 2000: 46; Giddens, 1991). Drawing on interviews and ethnography, DeNora aims to show music

> in action as a device for ordering the self as an agent, and as an object
> known and accountable to oneself and others… Music is a material
> that actors use to elaborate, to fill out and fill in, to themselves and to
> others, modes of aesthetic agency and, with it, subjective stances and
> identities (DeNora, 2000: 73-4).

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[2] I wonder if there are pointers towards a more complex view in Frith's words. After all, this is presented as one kind of self-recognition, and the 'seems' here hints at an awareness of the limits of such imaginative self-making.

Again, as with Finnegan and Frith, there is a strong sense of music as a resource to be used. This is applied explicitly to emotions: 'music is a resource for modulating and structuring the parameters of aesthetic agency – feeling, motivation, desire, comportment, action style, energy' (53). This should not be understood as the expression by music of 'some internal emotional state'; rather, 'music is part of the reflexive constitution of that state' (57). DeNora calls this kind of reflexive activity 'emotion work' (DeNora, 2003: 96; DeNora, 2000: 53). And as with Finnegan (including the latter's classic study of *The Hidden Musicians* – Finnegan, 1989) and Frith, the attitude is overwhelmingly positive. Time and again, for DeNora, music is found to be enriching experience, adding to agency, enhancing dimensions of people's everyday lives. It can be used for attaining and maintaining states of feeling, for aiding concentration, and more generally for retrieving memories and therefore 'remembering/constructing who one is' (DeNora, 2000: 63). This is demonstrated using a set of interviews and ethnographic observations with subjects who appear to be overwhelmingly white, middle-class, educated women.

It is perhaps worth briefly relating this dominant tendency in the study of musical consumption and experience[3] to other research that may be more familiar to readers of this journal. Reviewing twenty years of articles in *The Journal of Consumer Research*, Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson (2005) identify a number of features of what they call consumer culture theory (CCT), 'a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings' (868). There are overlaps between the dominant conception outlined above and key features of this CCT tradition. As Arnould and Thompson put it, 'CCT research has emphasized the productive aspect of consumption. [It] explores how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals…. From this perspective, the marketplace provides consumers with an expansive and heterogeneous palette of resources from which to construct individual and collective identities' (871). Here too, then, the emphasis is on the active and reflexive agency of consumers – though there is more stress than in the dominant conception of music consumption and self-identity, discussed above, on the market origins of the cultural products that provide consumers with their resources (Frith's work is a major exception to this – see Frith, 1981).[4] In media sociology too, this emphasis on the active nature of consumption has been strongly manifest. In some respects, for example, DeNora's approach recalls the uses and gratifications tradition in communications research, with its emphasis on how audiences 'use' media products to fulfil certain personal needs (for example Herta Herzog, 1941, on the way women gain 'emotional release' from daytime radio serials). In other respects it has much in common with the 'uncritical cultural populism' (McGuigan, 1992) of audience research in Anglophone media and cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s, when a focus on 'active audiences' was the basis of what one writer has called a 'consumptionist orthodoxy' within those academic fields (Born, 1993).

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[3] For further critical discussion of cognate studies of musical consumption, including those derived from theories of neotribalism, see Hesmondhalgh (2005).

[4] Arnould and Thompson (2005: 871-2) briefly note the presence of a more critical strand of CCT work, which sees identities as aligned in some cases 'with the structural imperatives of a consumer-driven global economy'.

Beyond the dominant model: problems of self-realisation in modern societies

I now want to question the positive conception of music, and some assumptions about the self, underlying the accounts of music, emotion and self-identity discussed above. I am not doubting that people mobilise music in the various positive ways outlined by these writers. As I explore elsewhere (Hesmondhalgh, 2007) there are many positive, emancipatory aspects to people's relations to music in modern societies. Yet the dominant conception (music as a positive resource for self-identity) seems to me to downplay various ways in which music may become implicated in some less pleasant and even disturbing features of modern life. The dominant conception rightly emphasises the social nature of music and of self-identity, but if music is as imbricated with social processes as the dominant conception suggests, then it is hard to see how people's engagements with music can be so consistently positive in their effects, when we live in societies that are marked by inequality, exploitation and suffering. While it is true that people have been miserable and mistreated in all human societies, it is also the case that, as numerous sociologists have taught us, including Georg Simmel and C. Wright Mills, private lives, personal biographies and mental states should not be detached from history. Can music really be so autonomous that it floats free of social forces? And, turning to self-identity, might not people's projects of self-creation (to use DeNora's term) or self-recognition (to use Frith's), *and therefore their uses of music as part of these projects*, have some more difficult and troubling dimensions than emerges in the dominant conception?

There is a psychological dimension to this that I cannot develop in this article but which I want to signal here. The dominant conception underestimates the psychic difficulties that individuals face in constructing a coherent and healthy self-identity. It is true to say that humans can act on their environment and upon their selves, but they surely do so in ways that are limited not only by social and historical factors (such as poverty, deprivation, lack of education or training) but also by their own personal biographies. One need not be a full-on Freudian to recognise that damaging experiences in early life can place severe constraints on what it is possible to do in later life – including the way we interact with music, and how we might use it to shape our selves.

In this article, however, it is the way in which emotions and self-identity become bound up in problematic aspects of modern societies that I want to explore, and then apply to music. A seminal contribution was by Arlie Hochschild (1983), who analysed workers' experiences of service employment. These jobs appeared comfortable and rewarding, but for Hochschild involved new and distinctive forms of control and alienation, whereby workers were being required to internalise at the deepest level the emotional responses required *to look as though they love their jobs*. Her most striking example was the way that flight attendants are trained to smile by airlines that promote their service on the basis that 'our smiles are not painted on'. One implication of Hochschild's study was that the emotional self-management made possible by new forms of self-identity in capitalist modernity can be appropriated in dubious ways by powerful interests. If this is true, then this suggests that the use of music to achieve emotional self-management – analysed by DeNora and others - may not always be healthy either.[5]

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[5] DeNora refers explicitly to Hochschild's studies (DeNora, 2003: 96; DeNora, 2000: 53), including her concept of 'emotional work', yet she does not register Hochschild's critical orientation, or her contrastive concept of 'emotional labour'.

My main interest here though is on the historical dimensions of the appropriation of goals of self-realisation and autonomy by powerful interests. The German social theorist Axel Honneth has argued that increasingly, in the twentieth century, 'members of Western societies were compelled, urged or encouraged, for the sake of their own future, to place their very selves at the centre of their own life-planning and practice' (Honneth, 2003: 469). As a result, individual self-realisation becomes linked to 'institutionalized expectations' and 'transmuted into a support of the system's legitimacy' (p.467). Honneth does not sufficiently specify what this might mean in his suggestive article, but a more thorough sociological account, compatible with Honneth's, is provided by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in their tour-de-force *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005). Boltanski and Chiapello differentiate two principal ways in which capitalist societies have been criticised – social critique and artistic critique. Social critique emphasises poverty, inequality, the opportunism and egoism of private interests, and the destruction of social bonds brought about by capitalism. Artistic critique, with its roots in bohemianism and romanticism, instead stresses capitalism as a source of disenchantment and inauthenticity, and the limits it places on freedom, autonomy and creativity (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 35-8). Boltanski and Chiapello trace how, faced with a crisis of legitimacy and motivation in the late 1960s, under pressure from both the social and artistic critiques (coming together in the events of 1968 in France and across much of the world) capitalist institutions responded by validating the artistic critique, especially critical demands for autonomy in working life. Measures aimed at providing security for workers were replaced by measures aimed at relaxing hierarchical control and allowing people to fulfil their individual potential (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 190). The result is a society based on a 'connexionist' model where the self is an individual enterprise, and where transitory relationships and commitments are considered more legitimate than stable ones – because rapidly changing one's connections can supposedly lead to personal growth and greater self-realisation. In this connexionist society, individuals are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own self, even though that self is borne down upon by all kinds of social pressures. Honneth, Boltanski and Chiapello all write about the potentially damaging effects of that pressure on individuals. However consciously sceptical individuals may be, 'the ideal of self-realization is experienced … subliminally … as posing demands upon the manner in which one's subjectivity is to be formed', as Honneth puts it (Honneth, 2003: 467). The result, Honneth claims, drawing on a variety of sources, is a rise in the levels of depression in society – though depression is not necessarily to be understood in clinical terms here. It may involve a combination of 'symptoms of inner emptiness, of feeling oneself to be superfluous' with 'hectic and enervating activities' (p.478). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 420-424), meanwhile, place greater stress on anxiety and anomie, citing statistics on rising numbers of suicide.

These writers, then, show how the autonomous self-realisation implicitly celebrated by the dominant conception, has come to be linked to power. All this has a direct relevance to cultural consumption – and indeed to musical consumption. For Honneth, a key basis of 'organised self-realisation' was that individuals in the twentieth century increasingly felt compelled 'to seek an intensification of one's own feeling of being alive in the consumption of cultural products'. This derives from a protestant undercurrent in which an 'uncommon state of emotional excitement was taken to be a sign of God's goodness and grace' (Honneth, 2003: 478). This co-existed with the protestant work ethic – and did not necessarily contradict it. For Honneth, drawing on the historian Colin Campbell, this undercurrent eventually becomes the basis for 'a massive investment in intensity-enhancing consumer goods' (ibid.). Daniel Bell's thesis that modern individualistic hedonism contradicts the functional demands of capitalism, leading to crisis, has not

been borne out. Rather, for Honneth, it has only strengthened capitalism. The presence of shorter and more fragile bonds between people (powerfully analysed by Sennett, 1998, among others), and the tendency for leisure to be seen as a key means of self-definition, do not radically conflict with the needs of the capitalist economy. Indeed, according to Honneth, these facets of modern societies have become a productive force in their own right, in that they fuel cultural consumption. Similarly, for Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 437), in the new connexionist society that has arisen in the wake of capitalism's appropriation of the artistic critique, 'People's aspirations to mobility, to multiply their activities, to greater opportunities for being and doing, emerge as a virtually boundless reservoir of ideas for conceiving new products and services to bring to the market'. Innovation is strongly connected to this need for liberation, including transport and automation, but it now includes devices which allow people to be active while mobile. For Boltanski and Chiapello, intriguingly given our present concerns, music is the archetypal form of such contradictory freedoms.[6]

However, there is another way in which music is connected to these developments, which neither Honneth's article nor *The New Spirit of Capitalism* comment upon. This is music's own active role in fuelling capitalism's incorporation of autonomy; in Boltanski and Chiapello's terms, its centrality to the artistic critique. The most prominent musical genres of the last century – jazz, rock, soul and hip hop – have all been strongly tied up with romantic notions of personal autonomy. Rock in particular accompanied the kind of historical changes tracked by Boltanski and Chiapello, producing a culture that was centred on values of rebellious creativity, but which, in retrospect, was assimilated very quickly to values of commercialism. The mainstream rock music of the 1980s and 1990s, with its often unchallenging celebrations of mobility and unfettered individuality, can be seen to conform closely to Boltanski and Chiapello's connexionist world.[7] When dozens of nostalgic rock documentaries look back to the glory years of rock rebellion, they provide a comfortable picture of bohemianism for older viewers now immersed in a very different kind of autonomy.

Such critical perspectives on consumption and self-identity are missing from the dominant conception which sees music as a positive resource for self-making. Admittedly, however, these are large-scale sociological-historical claims. A great challenge is to apply them to the individual lives of people, without doing violence to the specificity of those lives, or to the undoubted truth that people do have some freedom to shape their own cultural practices. While the fundamental aim of this article is primarily to question the *theoretical* assumptions regarding emotion and self-identity underlying studies of musical consumption, in the next section I reflect on these issues using empirical case studies, in the manner of DeNora's micro-sociological analyses, but examined from a perspective influenced by the critical and historical accounts outlined above.

Case study 1: A collector

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[6] The ambivalent qualities of consumer uses of mobile music devices are well captured by Michael Bull (2005), in ways that have implications for the dominant conception. For Bull, users employ i-pods and so on to reclaim urban space, but they do so by privatising it.

[7] The best accounts of this aspect of rock culture are by Simon Frith (1981) and Keir Keightley (2001).

As we have seen, both Honneth and Boltanski/Chiapello point to ways in which the quest for personal meaning and self-realisation in capitalist modernity helps to fuel consumption, and also to how 'organised self-realisation' (partly through consumption, but also through the development of more formally autonomous types of labour) seems to be resulting in greater society-wide levels of anxiety and depression. It is interesting in this context to consider those people who seem to place a particularly strong emphasis on self-realisation through musical consumption, if only as a limit case, while recognising their atypicality.

One of our interviewees, Paul, for example, a 40 year old hairdresser, was interviewed in a room lined with hundreds of CDs and records. His main loves were rock, R&B, soul and reggae, but his collection included other material too. What united them was music that was in some way 'challenging' (the Rolling Stones, Neil Young and Prince were his favourites). He had contempt for music that was 'empty', with 'no real feeling'. At the salon where he worked, Paul was well-known for being a musical aficionado, and his conversations with customers often centred on music. However, Paul's collecting was a source of real tension in his relationship with his wife. In Paul's presence, his wife Helen told the interviewer that she found his record collecting and his playing of loud music obtrusive and irritating. She expressed anger concerning the sheer amount of money Paul spent on music and music equipment. And in the salon where he worked, Paul could be very dominant in asserting his views about what kind of music should be played. Paul's relationship to music seemed a defiant statement about his independence – both within the family and within society. He acknowledged that his desire to buy music constantly, to accrue amounts of music that he could not possibly play more than once or twice, was irrational, but he revelled in that irrationality.

Paul's love of music, then, provided an important part of his identity. Whether his pleasure in music might be understood via DeNora's concept of reflexive 'emotional work' (see DeNora, 2000: 53-8) however, is another matter. Or at least there were uncomfortable aspects to his relationship with music, of a kind which barely seem to appear in the dominant conception of music and self-identity. Active and positive self-making may have been involved here, but there were some other, more ambivalent aspects also involved.

It might be objected that Paul's 'problems' here have nothing to do with music, that music was simply a vehicle through which he and his wife found a reason to express their ambivalence towards each other. If music had not been there, one might say, they would have found other ways to quarrel with each other. But this is to see music as passive, as dead matter with no consequence, rather as active material that has an effect upon the world, when combined with human agency. It is surely more interesting to ask: what is it that made music the basis of this disagreement? Why music and *not* something else? And here it is important I think that Paul was drawn to rebellious, individualistic music and expressed disdain for music he considered conformist. Somehow the notion of music as (at its best) intensely and genuinely expressive comes to stand for Paul as a defence against what he portrays as the emptiness of much of the rest of the world. This attitude, it seems, may indeed help him in certain situations in his life (after all, music undoubtedly has positive uses and I am not denying that), but it is also likely to lead to some psychological trouble too – of a kind that the dominant conception does not recognise. In Paul's case, the quest for personal authenticity through music becomes so important that it almost seems to fill his house, in spite of the objections of his partner. Yet this

authenticity is somehow transferred on to the collection, and music can sometimes seem elusive compared with the solidity of these ordered and alphabeticised commodities.

It is also useful in this context to consider the gendered nature of record collecting – and arguably collecting more broadly. It is not fair to try to interpret Paul's motivations on the basis of a short interview, but it seems reasonable to think that at the very least the obsessive pursuit of completeness and order exhibited by collectors such as Paul might also be an example of disavowal, in that huge amounts of time and effort and emotion are devoted to categorisation and knowledge, rather than to music as a source of 'emotional work' (in DeNora's sense). In fact, almost inevitably, most of the records and CDs in Paul's vast collection went unplayed, and he admitted to having difficulty in discussing his emotional engagement with music. There are strongly gendered dimensions to such disavowal; boys in modern societies can be strongly discouraged from open displays of emotion. But, combined with dynamics of social power that are somewhat underplayed in the dominant conception, this can lead to exclusions. As Will Straw (1997: 15) has incisively discussed, the 'nerdish homosociality' of record collectors, while relatively harmless compared with more blatant displays of masculinist power in popular music cultures, is as fundamental to the unequal gender politics of pop as any phallic guitar strutting.

Status competition through music

I turn now to another problematic aspect of music-self-society relations downplayed by the dominant model of music consumption, where music is seen as a positive resource for forging self-identity. This is the way that the use of music for self-realisation, self-management or self-recognition can be subject to aspects of competitive individualism that tend to be prevalent throughout modern societies. The work of Pierre Bourdieu is relevant here. Where writers from various disciplines and traditions (including 'consumer culture theory' and media studies of 'active audiences' – see above) see an abundance of creative agency in contemporary cultural consumption, Bourdieu's *Distinction* is well known for stressing its darker, competitive aspects. In fact, Bourdieu singles out music from all other forms of culture in terms of its power to act as a marker of class differentiation.[8] And this is bound up, for Bourdieu, with a number of factors: the way in which music is particularly associated with 'interiority'; an emphasis on the value of 'listening' in modern societies – including in psychoanalysis (which Bourdieu distrusted); and the socially imputed purity of music, its tendency to slip towards negation of the world.

There have been responses to Bourdieu from sociologists of music (Frith 1996, Hennion 2003; see also Hesmondhalgh, 2006, on Bourdieu's assumptions about popular culture as manifest in his studies of cultural production). In my view, in terms of the concerns of this article, Bourdieu is too cynical about the role of aesthetic experience, and this may in part derive from his excessively sociological analysis, which is also curiously lacking in any consideration of the emotions when it comes to cultural consumption. Nevertheless, Bourdieu helps us to see that cultural consumption can not be so easily separated from

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[8] 'Nothing more clearly affirms one's "class", nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music' (Bourdieu, 1984: 19). The contrast with the dominant conception of music consumption is worth noting, along with its opposition to wider views, including leading musicologist Nicholas Cook who asserts that 'music is an essentially democratic art' (1990: 2).

the competitive individualism of modern societies as writers such as Finnegan, DeNora and Frith imply.

In his article, 'On status competition and emotion management' (1991), the Dutch historical sociologist Cas Wouters offers a perspective on modern competitive individualism that in my view is more useful for considering music consumption in relation to emotion and self-identity than Bourdieu's work. Wouters traces how in some respects it has become increasingly difficult for powerful groups to show superiority through traditional means such as 'birth', displays of wealth and physical violence. Instead displays of efforts to experiment with new lifestyles and tastes become increasingly important in the everyday lives of many people in advanced industrial societies, *and so too does an awareness and knowledge of emotions*. In some circles and some situations, we might say, being a sensitive emotional individual is a key marker of superiority. Such superiority needs at its best (its most superior) to come naturally – and this means, for Wouters, that much of the work involved is done in secret in order to conceal from others the effort needed to articulate oneself as an authentic individual. Wouters does not say in this article how the dynamics he observes may take different forms in different social spaces – for example, amongst different social classes. Nevertheless, I think that there is something suggestive here for the study of music. Music can be part of status battles to show one's open-ness to a variety of lifestyle pleasures and one's superior emotional range. After all, as we saw at the beginning of this article, music has come to be linked, perhaps more than any other cultural form, with the emotional dimensions of our selves.

Competitive individualism is also a relevant frame for examining how people talk about music's capacity to intensify sociality, celebrated in much of the literature (Filmer, 2003). Whether in the dance club, at a funeral, or on a radio show inviting its audience to look back nostalgically on past times, music offers the emotional intensity craved by modern consumerism (recalling Honneth's account, above). This can be about sadness, catharsis, and self-awareness; but it can also be about fun, pleasure and sociality. In a hedonistic society of the kind hypothesised by Honneth, then, music may actually be attached even more strongly than other socio-cultural forms to a certain *duty to have pleasure*.[9] By this, I refer to the way modern individuals compete over who is having the most fun, who is gaining most from life. To use modern language, anyone who is not living it large is a loser.

I suggest, then, that there are two ways in which music might be the basis of status battles in modern society: in terms of the emotional sensitivity of its consumers, and in terms of its basis for hedonistic pleasures. To investigate these issues, I now turn again to interview material.

Case study 2: competition over sensitivity and pleasure

We asked our interviewees to play us records that brought back strong memories through music, and to discuss them. John, a 27-year-old teacher living in Cumbria, played us a club version of a track by Garlic called 'Not Over Yet' (remixed by Paul Oakenfold).

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[9] Bourdieu discusses 'pleasure as a duty' in discussing the emerging cultural habits of 'the new petite bourgeoisie' (1984: 367). Also relevant here is Featherstone's notion of 'calculating hedonism' (1991).

> When I first heard it, it was played in a club in Liverpool, right at the end of the night. It's actually called 'It's Not Over Yet' and the music sort of went out and everybody thought it was time to go home, and then this came on […] and I just thought great, it's not over yet.

Here music serves, for reasons that DeNora (2000: 66-8) discusses eloquently in *Music as Everyday Life*, as a repository for memory. It is because music, like clothing or smells, is part of 'the material and aesthetic environment' in which it is experienced that the past comes alive when certain music is heard. DeNora, as ever, uses vibrantly positive language to describe this. The creation of musical 'moments' are 'due in part to the alchemy of respondents' perceived or sensed "rightness" or resonance between the situation, the social relationship, the setting, the music, and themselves as emerging aesthetic agents' (67).

I reiterate my view that music can have these positive dimensions. But a more balanced sociology of music needs to recognise that music will also be tied to problematic aspects of the self, perhaps especially in societies like ours. There is a methodological issue here in examining interview material. People's memories are unreliable – they may recall happy times through music that were in fact riddled with ambivalence. They may even unconsciously present themselves as having lives (past or present) that are more rounded and dynamic than they really are. Such tricks of memory can be helpful: in bad times, a certain memory – invoked by music or not – may give people hope that the future might be good again, as the past once was. But it may also romanticise or sentimentalise relationships that were in fact deeply difficult and painful. And music is perhaps especially prone to such romanticisation or sentimentalisation, because of the special way in which it evokes that intensity of feeling and of collective hedonism that we are encouraged to feel is a mark of being a successful person in capitalist modernity (see above).

In fact, it transpired that this was the last time that this young man went clubbing with his friends. John was by the time of the interview living in rural Cumbria. John indicated elsewhere in his interview that this was not an easy place for him to be, and there was a poignancy to this choice of record: why choose a record explicitly associated with collective fun with friends in the city, when living in this rather isolated environment? We should not rule out the possibility that his choice of this particular musical memory is both an example of how music can positively provide some comfort in recollections made from a different position in one's life, but that it also might be a way in which an interviewee presents herself or himself as having a more rounded and satisfying life than is actually the case. Perhaps John chose a clubbing record to say 'I am someone who has friends, who knows how to have fun in the big city'. This is not music's 'fault' and there is nothing 'wrong' with John doing this – but it means that to see music as a positive resource in self-making may not tell the whole story. Or, to put it another way, there are more ways to read John's responses than via the lens of music as a positive resource for self-identity.

Let me now analyse further interview material, in terms of competitive individualism over 'emotional sensitivity'. Here I want to outline some different ways in which middle-class people are able to present themselves to interviewers as rounded, musically sensitive individuals. I want to take just three different examples: James, a retired university lecturer; Ian, a social worker; and Lauren, a church minister. In all three cases, I discuss how these people have successfully incorporated a critique of snobbery or exclusion into their accounts, in order to present themselves as open-minded and sensitive people. (And

this is one of the things that makes Wouters a more appropriate lens through which to view this material than Bourdieu).

First, James, a retired university lecturer in metallurgy, who talked about a favourite Mozart piece (K563): 'it's called a divertimento which suggests something light but it's actually a most profound piece of chamber music, fully the equal of any of his string quartets and of course they are as lovely as anything in the world'. There are echoes here of some of Bourdieu's respondents in *Distinction* (for example, the case study of the 'truly classical' university teacher: see Bourdieu, 1984: 288-90). But James was doing more than just displaying his cultural capital – he was also making an implicit set of claims about his emotional sensitivity to music, and the way it fitted into his relations with others. In talking about music he does not like, James was extremely careful to qualify his comments. ('I mean it's always it's all right for you, it's easy for you to talk, you've had a silver spoon in your mouth all your life'). He also differentiated himself from a 'cold', technical or intellectual approach to loving music, embodied in the figure of a piano teacher he knew from church (and this anecdote was followed immediately by 'I like her very much as a person'):

> I think she probably thinks I'm a frivolous old devil but she teaches a lot of the youngsters and […] every now and then she puts on little concerts of her protégés in church after the Sunday service with proceeds to a charity or something like that. And I remember going up to her once after a concert which I had been very impressed by and amongst other things I said - meaning it entirely as a compliment to her - 'Well, […] you have achieved something because your pupils obviously enjoy making music'. She looked at me and she almost spat and said 'music isn't about enjoyment it's about understanding'.

What better way of illustrating one's own capacity for enjoyment, for pleasure, than by invoking the figure of someone who is devoted entirely to an insensitive notion of musical understanding?

Second, Ian, a business studies lecturer from London. Ian was one of a number of respondents who emphasised how his tastes had expanded over time, and who was therefore able to put together a personal narrative based on a growing aesthetic consciousness. Ian emphasised his growing omnivorousness ('I've always been interested in literature and music I would say, I've always been interested in most things really, and I suppose what you would call current affairs and what's going on in the world and that kind of thing'). The thread through his expanding musical tastes, beginning with rock ('it was actually more in my mid to late teens that I got into music, you know like we used to listen to John Peel late at night and heard stuff like Captain Beefheart and Kevin Coyne and the Soft Machine'), and expanding into contemporary music, was the idea of 'weird' sounds. Ian set this against the 'blandness' of 'boring' music, across a wide range of musical genres, from soft rock ('when I was in Mozambique, there was a guy who was particularly into *Hotel California* by the Eagles, which I absolutely hated and despised') to traditional rock and roll ('I just found it utterly boring, utterly tedious' – as opposed to the 'magic' of blues artists like Robert Johnson) to Mozart ('there was a bit of Mozart on the radio and I was saying how fucking boring it sounded, and how tedious Mozart was'). But Ian displayed his musical – and emotional - open-ness by showing that he was able to find value in unlikely places, indicating a growing sensitivity that comes with age:

> Ian: […] his ex-partner was really into the Pet Shop Boys and we had this argument about the Pet Shop Boys, he was telling me how they actually have really good well-put-together pop songs - which actually I can hear. You

know stuff I would have really hated in the past, I've had my ears opened to, bits of George Michael you know.

Finally, Lauren, an American woman in her forties, but who had lived in an English city for twenty five years, and who was working as an ordained minister at a local church. Lauren expressed her sadness and anger at the legacy of imperialism via music ('it saddens me no end when I hear Indian and African Victorian hymns, I think "where's their music, where's their culture?"') and, when asked to play us a piece of music that she had recently enjoyed, chose a track called 'Oh Robin', from an album called *Music for a Harmonious World*. This featured singers from England singing in collaboration with singers from South Africa. What Lauren valued was how the music 'allowed each other's genres to be there, the English people are singing English style music, the Africans singing African music and the way it moves together is just stunning.'. This is not just an aesthetic experience, Lauren is saying, it is also ethical, tied to concerns about imperialism and oppression.

Now all these interviewees are involved in using music to construct self-identity. All of them do so sincerely. All of them eschew snobbery by opposing symbols of high culture (the cold, technical piano player; Mozart, hailed as a genius, is in fact 'boring'; the Victorians who could not accept otherness). The problem is that, in our class-divided society, these people are actually engaged in a new form of status battle, which has replaced the 'sense of distinction' analysed by Bourdieu (1984). Important contributions to the sociology of consumption have drawn attention to some of these changing dynamics, including how omnivorousness has replaced snobbery as the goal of 'highbrow' taste.[10] Here I am trying to capture changing dynamics that are specific to music. My claim is that in-depth analysis of qualitative interviews can lead to very different conclusions about music, emotion and self-identity from those drawn by the dominant conception.

A further point is worth noting briefly. It is difficult to imagine working-class subjects being able to tell such convincing stories of self-realisation through music. Rather, our working-class interviewees tended to be flummoxed by attempts to articulate what they like in music. This means that relying on interviews with middle-class subjects in examining musical self-identity in music – as DeNora does - is likely to lead to an incomplete sociology of music.

Concluding comments

What are the implications of these arguments for the analysis of musical consumption? The main implication is that studies of musical consumption need to be much more cautious in the models of subjectivity they operate. In Tia DeNora's work, for example, there is a considerable and mostly welcome emphasis on the inter-relations of music, self and society. But her notion that individuals are capable of somehow producing their own subjectivity via music is problematic. It not only downplays the limits and constraints on that self-making that derive from psychological limitations, it also posits a model of social self-making that downplays or even ignores negative social processes. The positive way in which the dominant conception understands people's uses of music needs to be

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[10] A seminal example is Peterson and Kern (1996). However, see Warde, Martens and Olsen, (1999) for a helpful survey and critique of some of this American empirical work on the sociology of consumption.

complemented. Apparently positive notions of authenticity and autonomy have been incorporated into powerful ideologies – not fully, but at least partially.

There are implications too for the study of cultural consumption. Consumer culture theory, for example, as outlined by Arnould and Thompson (2005) shows some striking similarities with what I am here calling the dominant conception of music, emotion and self-identity. It emphasises the active reworking by consumers of meanings encoded in consumer products and the use by these consumers of cultural resources to 'produce' their own identities. Similarly, there is a huge amount of work in media studies which purports to show the same dynamics at work amongst media consumers. But if my criticisms of the dominant conception are correct, then this suggests that consumer culture theory and media sociology also need to be much more cautious in applying these ideas to contemporary consumption and self-identity.

I want to make it clear that my approach here is not an Adornian one. It may superficially seem to have something in common with Adorno's approach to music, in that it stresses the inter-relatedness of music and certain aspects of social power. And it is true that no-one has applied a historical understanding of subjectivity so relentlessly to musical culture as a whole than did Adorno. His writings on music have been criticised by many for being historicist, for being insufficiently attuned to the active role of individuals in constructing meaning and for his speculative drawing of inferences about society from the analysis of particular social phenomena or merely from artistic works. Bigger problems for me are his idealist requirement that art should aspire to impossible levels of autonomy and dialectic, his failure to recognise adequately the ambivalence and complexity in both 'high culture' and 'popular culture' and, linked to this, his seeming contempt for everyday cultural consumption in modern societies. A significant challenge for critical analysts, then, is to produce a historically-informed but *non-Adornian* account of music-related subjectivity. My aim here is to contribute to such a project, and not to revive Adornian criticism (see Born, 1993 for important reflections on these issues).

Neither is my approach here a Foucauldian one. Foucault developed a notion of subjectivity that has been hugely influential and which provides an alternative to the interactionist and pragmatist notion of the self that dominates much sociology, and which lies at the heart of the dominant conception of music, self and society criticised in this article. Foucault's notion of subjectivity places much more emphasis on power and constraint. It sees the self as constituted in power and discourse, and the job of the critical analyst is to reveal how the self came to be thought of in the ways that it generally is in modern societies. Foucauldians would generally share my suspicion of the notion of active self-making from cultural resources – but from a different standpoint. For Foucault's notion of the self (for example, Foucault, 2000) has little or no room for the discussion of emotions, of experience, or any notion of interiority. These are all elements which I think are important to an adequate sociological notion of music consumption in relation to self-identity (for a helpful survey of these issues, comparing different theoretical conceptions of self-identity, see Elliott, 2008).

Music, like other cultural forms, provides opportunities for people to make connections with each other, to enrich their inner lives, and even, in some cases, to enhance a sense of community. Some people are lucky enough to be able to exploit these opportunities to the full. But because of a number of socio-historical factors discussed in this article, and also for psychological reasons that I have not been able to explore fully here, music's

power to enable self-making is constrained, limited, and damaged. An adequate sociology of musical consumption needs to recognise this political complexity.

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