

Music, Knowledge and the Sociology of Sound

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Abstract

The sociology of music has often concentrated less on analysing and understanding the specificity and meanings of musical material culture as both an object and a process and more about ransacking music for insights into wider social relations like class, race and gender. The social constitution of music and the musical constitution of the social deserve a more sustained attempt at explicating relations and musical forms. This paper looks at the literature on what is specifically sociological about music and why music is important for sociology but also begins to problematize the relationship between social science and material culture by moving beyond popular music studies and the study of music more generally to examine the sociology of sound and sound art. We argue that this raises difficulties for the whole concept of the social as part of a human science and that new sound studies have to have a more nuanced and critical understanding of sociological epistemologies and the objects and processes they seek to explicate at the same time as understanding the material formation of music. Questions of knowledge and meaning are embedded in music and the paper concludes by thinking about knowledge and the materiality of music as knowledge.

Keywords: *Sound, Sociology, Materiality, Human, Science, Music, Art, Research, Objects*

Music, knowledge and the sociology of sound

- 1.1 The sociology of music has often concentrated less on analysing and understanding the specificity of musical material culture as both an object and a process and has been more about the ransacking of music for insights into wider social relations like class, race and gender. The social constitution of music and the musical constitution of the social deserve a more sustained attempt at explicating relations and musical forms. This paper looks at the literature on what is specifically sociological about music and why music is important for sociology but also begins to problematize the relationship between social science and material culture by moving beyond popular music studies and the study of music more generally to examine the sociology of sound and sound art. We argue that this raises difficulties for the whole concept of the social as part of a human science and that new sound studies have to have a more nuanced and critical understanding of sociological epistemologies and the objects and processes they seek to explicate.
- 1.2 Sociological studies of music have broadly addressed three areas – all of them valid exercises in their own right. Firstly, the study of the social context of music and the social determinations that are brought to bear upon it. Secondly, the study of what that music says about the social world which produced it or in which that music is performed as discourse. Thirdly, the study of what might be called the 'social powers' of music – the impact that musical production and performance has upon society. The study of music is clearly entwined with the study of society and with the reflexive study of social science itself. The study of music is also embedded in music analysis, musicology, and philosophy of music each with their own methodologies, histories and programmes. In this article we want to examine some themes from the sociology of music but also move to questions that are raised by a more specific sociology of sound and sound art. In doing this we want to think of music and sound as objects of knowledge that we can describe and 'think with'. This means that we are interested in thinking about a series of questions. Firstly, how can we identify an object of or a process for study in terms of the artefacts and practices that constitute musical or sound production? In terms of this the specificity of the sound artefact is important that the sociologist might examine and what it might say about soundworlds

and social worlds or whether it is 'radically' untranslatable? Secondly, what can we learn from practices around listening and mediations related to music that are not directly taking the notated score, song, or sound as its specific object? Thirdly, can we reassert the role of sound and music within classical sociology, its realist projects of description, and demarcate it away from the aesthetic projects of music analysis? Finally, what can we say about the relation of music and sound to social domination and power and how could we begin to develop an understanding of those processes? We do not provide any kind of comprehensive answer to these questions. Our programme lies in developing them as problems that the sociology of sound and music should address.

Thinking about the sociology of music

2.1 Sound studies and the sociology of sound have been part of the reassertion of hearing against visualisation in the social sciences and have raised new questions about identity and meaning and their relationship to sound, sound art, and music. As Jonathan Sterne (2012) has noted in his recent survey of the field:

Sound studies is a name for the interdisciplinary ferment in the human sciences that takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival. By analyzing both sonic practices and the discourses and institutions that describe them, it re-describes what sound does in the human world, and what humans do in the sonic world (2012:2).

2.2 Evaluating an academic field is difficult enough but sociology, since its emergence, has struggled with exactly what kinds of objects it is examining and how far phenomena can be described as social phenomena or socially produced or determined in some way without the recourse, in terms of art and music, to aesthetic essentialism and formalism. For Sterne the study of sound has to be defined by the combination of object and approach, by the multi-disciplinarity of its study, by its reflexivity, its historicity and its mode of critique (2012:4-5). Yet the question of the exact relationship to be described between musical form or sound to the social formation around it is bedevilled by a dual problem of how we relate the social to the sound and the kinds of relations that have to be described to say something worthwhile about their relationship.

2.3 The social study of music, its social context and its social impact is a developing project within sociology and musicology (Shelemay 2011; Spracklen 2012; Stock 2004; Weston 2012; Yarwood and Charlton 2009). Studies have included music and space (Cohen 1995 and 2012b; Tironi 2012) and soundworlds and tradition (Cohen 2012a; Curtis 2010; De Witt 2011; Dorsey 2005; Edwards 2012; Hudson 2012; McGrath and Brennan 2012) and even the relations between music and legal history (Jenkins 2010). The comprehensive review of the sociology of music literature by William Roy and Timothy Dowd raises a series of questions about the social nature of music - 'What is music, sociologically speaking? How do individuals and groups use music? How is the collective production of music made possible? How does music relate to broader social distinctions, especially class, race, and gender' (2010:183)? This question of the intimate reconcilability between social stratification and classification and musical preference is well-expressed in the famous quotation from Pierre Bourdieu - 'Nothing more clearly affirms one's 'class,' nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music' (1984:18). For Roy and Dowd the reassertion of a central theme is explicit in both their review and their wider work. For them what is relevant to sociology are the social relations brought to bear upon music and the social relations that music itself shapes and very clearly not the 'sonic qualities' of the music itself as a material artefact (2010:184).

2.4 More, Roy and Dowd separate out two ways of understanding music and social relations – seeing music as an object on the one hand and seeing music as an activity or process on the other (2010:184). For them 'Music is often treated as an object – a thing that has a moment of creation, a stability of characteristics across time and place, and potential for use and effects', it can be abstracted from its time and place, extraterritorialized and de-materialized. It is an institutionalized system of notation and tonalities (2010:184-185). They argue that this concept of music as an object, a commodified object at that, holds lessons for social construction - 'This self-conscious examination of how music is treated as an object has lessons for social construction more generally. Because the achievement of music's object-ness is relatively culturally and historically specific, it can be studied as a model for the process of reification, whereby human creations are mistakenly treated as simply resulting from nature' (2010:186). The reified object, the musical object, stands as something natural, achieved, and without history something which can only be overcome by moving beyond seeing music as an object.

2.5 Rather than seeing an object with fixed qualities Roy and Dowd argue that if we see music as an activity, as doing, as something in movement or as part of a process we see it as 'something always becoming that never achieves full object status, something unbounded and open, something that is a verb (musicking) rather than a noun' (2010:186). Hence the material and historical specificity of the musical formation is

understood as something constructed and achieved by the processes of time and development and the intersubjectivity of human meaning and interaction. This sees music as absolutely embedded in social life and social meaning as part of being-in-the-world (2010:187). Rather than observing and understanding the notations, texts, and forms it allows us to see music as a collective process of invention and enactment (2010:189, 191).

- 2.6** Music then becomes a template through which we can observe the social relations of class, race, gender, sexuality and so on – the refraction of them through music and the impact of music upon the social relations themselves – what could be more sociological (2010:194 and see Hudson 2012 and 2013 for a wider discussion of music, art and social relations)?
- 2.7** In an important recent article Lee Marshall has provided a corrective to this denigration of the 'sonic qualities' inherent in the material artefact by providing at once a more sociological account, if that were possible, than Roy and Dowd, allied to a heightened understanding of the artefactuality of music itself. Marshall argues that work on music has not been sociological enough and that studies specifically of popular music have been ghettoized within sociology because not enough evidence of wider sociological concern is invested in its study. The essential interdisciplinarity of music studies with musicology specifically has led to a collapse of sociological intradisciplinary work at the same time as he argues that sociology *should* deal with 'sonic qualities' or what he calls the 'internal aesthetics and specificity of music' (Marshall 2011:154). Further, understanding those aesthetics is hampered by not enough sociology rather than too little (2011:155). To rectify this Marshall proposes an analytical account of musical forms that does not collapse into idealism, taking account of aesthetic specificity, and hence a materialist analysis of formations - 'There seems to be little in the sociology of popular music that deals with the specifically musical aspects of its subject. Not music as an object to be bought, held, collected, traded, shared, but music as music, as organized sound,' (2011:157). For Marshall then, the increase of dialogue with other forms of sociology is essential and he dismisses ideas that analysing music is not the role of sociology. He notes 'That the meaning of music is arbitrary, indeterminate, socially constructed and historically specific does not make it any less real' (2011:165). The music itself has a materiality that can be explored by sociologists. Its spatial and temporal dimensions can be analysed with insights from other aspects of sociology. As Marshall argues about Antoine Hennion's idea of music as mediation and musical formation – specific scores and texts, sound instruments, repertoires, are important – and important not to dismiss them as Roy and Dowd do as musical 'objects' (2010:166). Microsociological studies of text and processes of practice and meaning are both important. As Hennion has noted - descriptions of micro-practice and how people make stuff and listen to stuff are remarkably rich for observation (Hennion 2001:6).
- 2.8** For Marshall, a new sociology of music, can effectively do a number of things. It can bring the listeners perspective to bear on musical analysis – a focus on sound rather than notes as in musicology (2011:168). It would begin to develop new ways of writing about music not entrenched in the categories of musicology (2011:168). It would generate new qualitative work on musical experience and a vocabulary for expressing it – 'If listeners have the knowledge to make sense of music and generate musical meaning, but lack the capacity to verbalize both their knowledge and their experience, then new tools to help their verbalization need to be developed' (2011:168). In other ways rather than the musicology of how people make music, it would be a sociology of listening and response.
- 2.9** But as Nick Prior has argued in his study of Bourdieu and musico-social relations a new understanding of the complexity of music and its mediations and 'the construction of a new sociology of music is not without its perils' (2011:121). One solution to thinking about how to move beyond seeing music as a social product, and the music as socially producing is to examine both at once in the study of music-as-discourse where music hold within it discourses from society that can be described and that have ideological impacts in the social world. Importing linguistic semiotic analysis into the study of music Theo van Leeuwen sees music and meaning as core parts of social life, a social which delimits and constrains the meanings inherent in musical form (van Leeuwen 1998:26). More than this, music itself is an ideological notation of the social world;
- Music can be seen as an abstract representation of social organization, as the geometry of social structure. . . Music not only "represents" social relations and "signifies" ideologically crucial dichotomies, it also and simultaneously enacts and rejoices in them (1998:38).
- 2.10** The powerful dialectics of text and context can be described by the methodological strategies of the social semiotics of music, a methodology which is rigorous and complex and analyses music as it would the semiotics of any other part of the social world (1998:52). But it has been true as Van Leeuwen notes that the analysis of music as discourse with critical discourse studies has been exceptional and there have been few attempts at this largely because the analytics of music has been seen as too complex and too specialised. This is

also shaped by a refusal of many musicologists to address the question of music and discourse and the meanings and representations that could be shown to have some force within it (Van Leeuwen 1998:320). But he argues that we should not abandon the rigorous semiotic analysis of musical discourse and its meanings - 'Clearly, the principal musical systems – melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and so on – are not just abstract, formal systems. They realize social meanings and express values and identities and ideologies' (1998:320). It is clear that meaning is invested in music and that music itself often sets itself the task of representing the world. Whether we can call that a sociology of music and whether this is possible in the way that social science might define itself is another matter.□

2.11 Lee Blackstone's insights are interesting in terms of rethinking the sociology of music. He asks a series of questions about how listening is socially constituted and the role of social theory in critiquing and understanding that listening – including the inability of sociology to understand the ethereal and fleeting notion of music as something perhaps heavenly. The idea of listening as a 'contested battleground' and an uncovering of histories of sound provide a corrective to the ransacking of music for social relationships and ideas about social classification (2011:5). This idea of the radical untranslatability and invisibility of music to the social and human sciences has been forcefully put forward by commentators such as George Steiner. It is worth quoting him at length;

'The meeting, the collision between awareness and signifying form, between perception and the aesthetic, is among the most powerful. It can transmute us. This is overwhelmingly true of music, though the nature and *modus operandi* by music is little understood. The German word *Stimmung*, meaning 'mood' and 'state of being', also encapsulates 'voice' and 'tuning'. We are 'tuned' by the music that possesses us...The concatenations of strictly private-personal antennae, past experience or training, more or less avowed expectations, social-cultural conventions with some momentary inclination (*Stimmung*) or accidental circumstance, elude us. But the 'experience-act' and its effects on us are unmistakable.' (1997:24).

2.12 Steiner argues that we have an incapacity to answer the question – what is music about (1997:64)? The 'ubiquitous force' of music has its source in its estrangement from human beings and has its 'prologue in the organic and animal worlds' (1997:75). It has origins neither base nor ethereal but in nature and the human response to nature. To think of music sociologically is anathema - 'It functions outside truth and falsehood, good and evil. It possesses men and women but is not possessed by them. Its 'ligaments' with empirical, intelligible reality largely elude us' (2011:75). In some ways this is reminiscent of music as a separate world, distinct from ours, and the world of sociology and rationality – what Josh Kun has called audiotopia's – music as a better world that we can take back with us into the real world (2005:2-3) but resistant to analytical tools imported from the social sciences.

2.13 But Steiner does also point to the 'experience-act' of music and its effect on us and our social formations. His analytics of music is shaped in profound ways by Theodor Adorno and it is in the response to Adorno's work that a clearly sociological engagement with music emerges. Tia DeNora, within the multiple projects with which she has been involved, has attempted a clearly sociological project which has reasserted the 'social powers of music' (DeNora 2000:151) and its impact as music-in-action. This turns away from the penetration of the musical form in order to extract 'data' about its production and the society which formed it in order to look at the consequences of music upon society. In this sense this is for her a 'Music sociology' rather than a 'sociology of music' and one in which identities, 'knowledge forms' and acts are shaped by cultural objects, agencies and processes (2011:xii-xiii). Music in action (2011:xv) is then intimately related to ethics, politics and society making imperative an 'action-oriented, grounded music sociology' engaged in micro-level analysis and 'specifiable musical practices' (2003:xii). Shaped originally by a reading of Adorno and particularly *The Philosophy of Modern Music* (2007), DeNora works through a 'music sociology' that engages with issues of social order and domination, reasserting music's role as a mode of action rather than reflection (2003:2). Musical interrogations then work on the territory of understanding the social role of music and the practices around it and in this way is very different from the idea of 'ransacking' cultural forms for sociological data, the latter being a project in which the central questions around music come to be 'excised' (2003:2-3). The animating force of music is, for DeNora privileged over the inanimate product to be explained and discursively analysed and like Adorno she considered music as power rather than something that could be explained by remnants of structural properties that can be found within it (2003:3). As DeNora says - 'Adorno used music to think with' (2003:3).

2.14 Even though Adorno relegated the study of actual, material musical practice to others (2003:22) it is in the study of material practice that we can delineate the social consequences of musical form. For DeNora, in terms of situated musical practices 'music can neither speak 'for itself' nor can other things (including other human speakers or texts) speak entirely for it' (2003:28). This, in itself, is a weaker, more pragmatic form of

'radical untranslatability in that the meaning lies neither fully inherent in the object and nor does it lie with interpretations to make its mystery clear. DeNora's focus on the pragmatic methodologies surrounding music and its specific, actual productions stress 'use' rather than interpretation (2003:44-45) - 'Within this dynamic conception of music's social character, focus shifts from what music depicts, or what it can be 'read' as saying 'about' society, to what it makes possible. And to speak of 'what music makes possible' is to speak of what music 'affords',' (2003:46). The importance of affordance (2003:154) and the intelligibility of cultural forms and practices we address below. But what is clear is that the shift to the empirics of practice and its descriptions is move away from the description of the metrics of the composition and notation itself and what it means.

2.15 This pragmatic understanding of musical practice is echoed by Antoine Hennion and his own complementary understanding of music in action. By examining music lovers as 'active practitioners of that love' as listeners and performers (2001:1) Hennion has been able to evade the problems associated with a sociology of music which exploits the musical form for social determination. Listening becomes central for Hennion rather than the social determination and constitution of the object. Hennion's pragmatism locates something particularly important for evading typical sociological concerns and vulgarities – the specific materiality of music and its□ mediations. In listening and practice we can then 'do' a sociology of events and processes, examining social relations generated by instruments, notations, and virtuosity (2001:2).

2.16 In his analysis of affordance and virtuosity Hennion argues that the skills and the practice of music – the means, techniques, affordances of instruments 'suggests a part of the truth that exists in mechanics' (2012:127). The actual mechanics that make virtuosity possible and the abstraction from mechanics and notated scores that make virtuosity special and applauded raise key questions about the meaning of a musical form and process as knowledge or 'the experience-act' of music (Steiner 1997:24). Yet raising this question simply resituates the object into listening rather than a focus on the material object itself – the textual, oral form, or into the mediations expressed around that form. The 'experience-act' and the form are indivisible as are the social relations surrounding the object itself. As Jerome Hansen has said of Hennion in his introduction to a newly translated piece, the latter's reformulation of the sociology of sound evades both the internalist readings of musical forms and 'burying their material specificities under the weight of social determinants' (Hennion 2008b:175). The question of mediation and the object of study are central for Hennion but also disclose some clues about how we should approach musical activity and form;

Music holds a paradoxical, unstable position with regard to the question of mediation: its objects are dynamic, elusive, always in need of interpretation. This should prevent the study of musical productions from limiting itself to those material traces that, unlike in the visual arts, never amount to the work itself. That being said, the history of music has long involved the mobilisation of material intermediaries so that it too could aspire to the status of an autonomous reality, becoming a little more object and a little less mediation, and producing closed works and authors akin to literature, whilst also attracting a solvent public: all this thanks mainly to music's transformation into written form. The history of music is not that of an art of sound counterbalancing the evolution of the visual arts, but more accurately, the story of a continuing effort on the part of musicians to make their art more visual and stable (2008b:178).

2.17 Recording and the preservation of 'dead' sounds can be contrasted for Hennion with the specificity of□ performance which 'makes use of these traces, objects and media to bring music back to life' in a process of dissolution and fixation (2008b:179). The performance itself makes something out of the traces of the dead, invisible object (2008b:1979). Not only this but there is a dissolution between the physical presence or absence of objects and the mobilisation of them in performance (2008b:179) with a multiplicity of devices that can also reproduce an event (2008b:181).

2.18 The examination of musical practice and reception in terms of what it does and what it does to the 'lover of music' does move beyond the dualism set by disciplinarity of 'all-in-the-work' or 'all-in-the-social'(2008a:36) by 'understanding as part of the same movement both the presence of the world and the presence in the world, the object known and the act of knowing' (2008a:36) which leads us away from 'the sterile oscillation between the meaning contained in the works and the meaning projected arbitrarily onto them' (2008a:36). The co-production between lovers in practice and lovers in listening, the joint formation of the object and experience, the feedbacks and loops of music in immediate production and the production of the sound of 'dead worlds' initiates a new sociology of music. This new sociology of sound and music does not circle around it whilst evading the object itself neither is it 'a mere pretext for games whose determinations are ultimately social' (2008a:39). It redefines□ the actuality and materiality of what we are looking at and hones our vision and aurality as sociologists. For Hennion the resonances of the sound, of the music, of the performance and its reception, its co-formation, renders sterile the idea of internal or external meaning – the work is what it is, its occurrences and effects

(2008a:40). Looseley, in his analysis of Hennion's work has argued that for Hennion music is not an 'inert' object but a 'live' project (Looseley 2006:346).

- 2.19 Do we, in a move away from understanding the specific musical form, then surrender to the idea of 'radical untranslatability' or can we recompose the sociology of music itself and reformulate its relationship to music as an object and a process? We may be able to begin to reformulate some of these problems by examining the question of sound and sound art and its challenges for sociology and the 'human' sciences.

Reformulating the sociology of sound

- 3.1 Before formulating ideas about sound as an artefact, in field recordings for example, it is worth thinking about sound as a cultural artefact, as something which is about art. In the same way in which music has been ransacked for social relations or we have asked of music to demonstrate its impact on society so we can look at art as product of and producer of social relations. Alan Licht, in his comprehensive survey of the nature and history of sound art argues that 'Sound art is a term that has been used with increasing frequency since the late 1990s but with precious little in the way of an accompanying, agreed-upon definition' (Licht 2007:9). Looking at three different ways of looking at sound art by Annea Lockwood, Max Neuhaus and Christian Marclay (2007:10) he begins to develop some initial ways of defining or delimiting what sound art might entail. Noting that the term itself goes back to William Hellermann's Sound Art Foundation of 1982 which created experimental new music in spaces he stresses the difficulties of thinking through the complex ways that curators and practitioners have thought about sound. For Lockwood, perhaps the most recognised contemporary sound artist and known widely for her work on understanding the sound archive of the Hudson river in sound maps, sound art is about electroacoustic resources presented in space – curatorial or geographical space but 'perhaps the term was pragmatically conjured up for/by museum curators to account for sound's acceptance into their world' (Licht 2007:10).
- 3.2 For Neuhaus sound art is about organised sound, though much called sound art has little often to do with either sound or art and for Marclay it is undefinable – making the contours of a sociology of sound or sound art problematic as we shall see. More problematic for a science of society is the question of the human or inhuman nature of sound. As Licht notes 'Sound art rarely attempts to create a portrait or capture the soul of a human being, or express something about the interaction of human beings – its main concern is sound as a phenomenon of nature and/or technology' (Licht 2007:14) making the very nature of sound as art questionable.
- 3.3 Attempting to define the field Licht argues that a number of features of sound art can at least be noted – that sound organised in space rather than time is important, that as an artwork it has to have a sound-producing function (such as sound sculpture), and that it is a product of the artist's own aesthetic intention (2007:16-17). We shall see below that this concept of sound as art creates a set of problems and limitations for practitioners, artists and specifically recorders but it also might overreach in both its humanisation and its aestheticisation of sound. The relationship of art to sound in naturally occurring environments is instructive for an initial thinking about these definitions.
- 3.4 A classic piece of sound art in Licht's definition is Meadow Piano by Leif Brush (1972) where structures within a piano in a field used sensors which responded to weather activities and microphones which recorded insect activities. Artists and commentators like R. Murray Schafer have talked about the 'seismographic delicacies' of minute, significant sound in rural spaces' (Licht 2007:78) whilst La Monte Young has talked of the musical resonances of natural and human spaces – canyons, trees, the whistle of tea kettles and trains (Licht 2007:79). Yet there is something different about the sounds of the meadow piano and the sounds that La Monte Young is talking of – the first is artistically organised sound in space, the second is perceived to be a naturally occurring sound unmediated by its recorder (whereas we know that there are all kinds of mediations in field recordings). John Cage himself has indicated the revolution in tape recording which breaks away from human cultures and mechanical instrumentation (even of the piano in the meadow) in order to fully hear the complexity and structure of what we might call sound-in-the-world but these non-human forms are themselves embedded within the methods of recording, the choice of location, and the significance of different types of sound to recorder and audience.
- 3.5 Licht himself goes some way in expressing the disjunction between humanly and naturally produced sounds

'Music speaks to the listener as a human being, with all of the complexity that entails, but sound art, unless it's employing speech, speaks to the listener as a living denizen of the planet, reacting to sound and environment as any

animal would (with all the complexity that entails). This sounds dehumanizing, but this appeal to a primal common denominator may, in fact, show human gesture at its most benevolent and least aggrandizing. By taking sound not as a distraction or currency but as something elemental, it can point to the kind of cosmic consciousness that so much art aspires to.' (2007:218).

3.6 As Bennett Hogg has recently noted, these practitioners 'participate in what I see as a broader set of cultural practices in which the imperial power of "the human" over the rest of the world is shifting in favour of what we might call a more ecosystemic engagement' (2013:2) creating an art that participates in nature but does not represent it leading to critiques of humanism and the active intervention or domination of artists over nature.

3.7 The question of inhuman or natural sound becomes more present in the work of Carl Michael von Hausswolf. In 1997, inspired by Electronic Voice Phenomenon (EVP) experiments (the sounds of the dead within white noise and radio waves as one part of this) launched a series of works under the title Operations of Spirit Communication. Using both vision, sound and spatial locations it used analogue and digital technologies to display the possibility of the ghosts of the dead speaking through spaces like radio and electricity grids. Whether the artist intervenes in nature, human nature or supernatural sound is profoundly important for culture and society. As Hogg argues

'We are implicit in our own sound worlds; we generate sound as well as perceiving it, and we therefore hear ourselves in the world in a way that we generally do not see ourselves. This hearing-of-ourselves is one way in which we concretise our involvement with and participation in our world. The silent, non-participative, uni-directional attention of concert performance and its derivatives, is in fact quite untypical of how we normally perceive and behave towards sound.' (2013:5).

3.8 Schafer in his studies of the Vancouver soundscape (1994) and in his philosophical programme to understand the nature of sound and sound in nature has examined the nature of the soundscape of the world (1994:3). He argues for the encouragement, preservation and multiplication of certain forms of sound and for the elimination of others (1994:4). A sociological focus on Schafer is important because of the macrocosmic nature of his understanding of sound. For Schafer the world itself is an 'indeterminate composition' or a 'macrocosmic musical composition' (1994:5). The time and space 'containers' of sound (compositions, concerts, rehearsals) also allow the introduction of the worldly sound beyond them external to composition – pointed to by Cage's 4'33" which is 'one protracted caesura' in the container allowing only sounds to be heard from beyond the composition itself. Each sound is a marker of the world in the same way as a landmark (1994:10). Notating or mapping those sounds in texts, visually or in performative display is only one category of sound, a set of categories that Schafer tries to make exhaustive in his own attempt to map the soundworld (1994:139-144). The listening subject can then sonographically map that world with their own 'sonological competence' (1994:274). The 'corps sonore' or corporeal, listening body, as Nancy would have it (2007) has to attend to the nature of the sounds coming to them.

3.9 The question of artistically mediated sound, the capturing of different types of sound natures, the nature of the human and inhuman relationship to sound all signify something important for the practice of sociology and the sociology of sound as a human science. At the same time it also signifies something about the object or the material of a social science which reworks a realist account of music and sound and its materiality and practices.

Sociology, materiality and sound

4.1 The birth of social science and the science of the human in the 19th and 20th centuries was intimately related to three processes; the discovery of an object or objects of study, the disciplinary dispelling of rival epistemological competitors, and the combination of theory and the concrete or what might be called abstraction and reality. But in the social sciences there was no comparable attempt to think about sound and music. There were attempts to explicate the relationship of music to wider social relations in the work of thinkers such as Weber and Adorno but it was constantly frustrated and remains so by an inability to deal with the internal aesthetics of a musical product. Music since has been ransacked as 'data' to describe social relations or to see the refracted social relations in the commodity or product, or, as we have noted above to read off the product as a marker of social taste, distinction, and class. What Steiner has called the 'radical untranslatability' of music has, however, left the specific analysis of the musical formation to musicology. This however, does not address the question of listening and sound, only music and notation – observations of musical forms rather than the human nature of sound and what this means to subjectivity and our being-in-the-world.

4.2 The frustrations of a social science of music have been mirrored over the last three decades by the gradual war of attrition against science and truth in the heart of the very social science which has them as its

basis. The assault upon the object as a mode of study (the object is only the constitution/production/construction of a multiple series of narratives/stories/theories and has no real/truthful/independent existence beyond those narratives), the elimination in the same way of a relationship of the 'real' or the truth match between the theory and the concrete, and the collapse of disciplinary 'grand narratives' make a sociology of music even more problematic. The solipsistic eclipse of material upon which sociology can work not only threatens the kinds of classical narratives that attempted to understand social life and social formations abstractly, concretely and universally but also eclipse the micro-sociology of micro-objects and micro-processes because observation is irredeemably condemned to impose meaning and order upon its willing object having no existence until the sociologists appear with their narratives.

- 4.3** Recomposing our project as a sociology of sound rather than the sociology of music serves as instructive in thinking about this in a set of significant ways (Gallagher and Prior 2014; Rice 2013). Firstly, the capturing and recording of sound is mediated itself through a series of interactions between the recording itself, its recorder and so on. Now the location and the decision to record naturally occurring sound is a human process but the object, the sound itself, has a spatial and temporal location outside of the narrative that a theorist might want to impose upon it. This is totally different from, say, an orchestral performance as object, where meaning, history, intersubjectivity is already entwined within that performance even before the sociologist of music comes along and adds to this. It is also different from sound art which partakes of both processes – it adds the mediation of the aesthetic to the capture of natural sound and human sound – whether mechanical, conversational – or the voices of the 'dead', inhuman voices of profound relevance for sociological practice (Hudson 2000 and 2002). A focus on the mediated, natural object is significant for sociology if we are attempting to explicate the nature of an object, text or template. This means that the materiality of the object has an important bearing on the kinds of narratives spun from it because it has a real existence beyond the narrative itself.
- 4.4** The recording of the song of a thrush allows certain kinds of truth claims to be made about it and frustrates other narratives. There is meaning and society and intersubjectivity involved but this does not constitute or construct the object of knowledge itself. The collections and mediations of sound do not threaten the independence of materiality itself even when it is reworked into new assemblages of art and recording.
- 4.5** The second broad area of sound art and sound that is of significance for the nature of social science is the question of 'Object' and 'Activity' and in looking at this from the perspective of sound rather than music it raises interesting questions. Sound is unthinkable without the perception of it as both object and activity because of course they are inseparable – it is not formalistic to examine the microscopic specificity of a musical formation or sound unless you perceive that text as somehow static. The question of meaning, intersubjectivity, factuality of the artefact has to be seen in spatio-temporal terms and in a holistic manner – this means that any abandonment of the praxis of theory/concrete, universal/specific, macroscope/microscope is an abandonment of both a proper understanding of the material artefact and of the whole question of social science.
- 4.6** The third area which problematizes the question of sociology lies in the idea of sociology as a human science. This is not particularly problematic in sociological studies of popular music or even in social studies of science – where meaning and intersubjectivity and 'construction' of artefacts is a given. But in those reaches of sound art postulated by Shafer, Cage, La Monte Young and Hogg the elision between the human and the natural becomes perilous. If the intention of the sociology of sound art becomes a sociology of sound, often naturally occurring and human sound is seen as distraction, then it becomes an inhuman science. At the furthest reaches of this it is the recording of the inhuman voices of the dead – as in EVP. Now this would be a marginal question if not for the profound relationship between humans and material culture – understanding that material culture means understanding the reciprocal relationships between an inhuman artefact and human construction and meaning, whether that artefact is humanly made or a naturally occurring phenomenon. The question is also raised of the impact of the human on the natural phenomenon – hence the recent use of sound recordings of migratory birds to assess the human impact on landscape ecology and bird population – recorders who have been in origin, musicians and sound artists.
- 4.7** The fourth area lies in the nature of the internal aesthetics of an artefact or sound process. We cannot assess the internal aesthetics of naturally occurring sound because it is not in itself an 'aesthetically willed' human product. But this does not mean that we cannot appreciate it. Neither does the sound itself of migratory birds have the potential to refract social relations. But in listening to and understanding nature we are able to have a more nuanced and complex understanding of the profound relationship between the artefact, nature, and human intention. The microscopic unweaving of those objects, processes and intentions should be the 'object' of sociology. This cannot be a sociology of aesthetics because it is impossible to codify and classify essentially

untranslatable artefacts unless we are able to be universally multidisciplinary and combine micro-sociological discoveries with those in cognitive science, particle physics and so on. In doing this we do abandon the disciplinary regime of classical social science but at the same time lock into universalizing mechanisms to enhance the aspiration towards a totalizing human and natural science.

Method, knowledge and the artefact of sound

5.1 As we have seen, thinking about these problems of sound, meaning and knowledge have led sociologists and philosophers to a dead end – either to silence about musical form or evade it by talking about something else. Philosophers like Jean-Luc Nancy have evaded any analysis of the materiality of music, for example, by a focus on the very nature of differing modes of listening and their impact on the receiving listening subject (Nancy 2007).

5.2 This question of objects to be seen or heard raises really significant questions about how far they can be perceived as knowledge rather than data that the sociologist can use to support ideas about social determination. It is worth examining some ideas about the status of texts and how far these ideas can apply to sound, sound art and music in terms of the meaning that can be made sense of from them and narratives constructed. If we look at two comparable and contrasting texts from within the sociology of knowledge and methodology on the nature of texts and objects then we can begin to think about the nature of sound as knowledge;

What. . . are we to make of his reference to the analysis in Part Two as a 'logical sequence'? The intelligibility of this reference arises for me in a way of speaking which assumes that the logic of a text always remains to be explicated outside the text or that the meaning of data awaits explication. . . But what if analysis is always present in the text itself, always present in the recognition of 'data'? What if the text, as an act of production of sense, always displays the grounds of its intelligibility its 'logic'? (Silverman 1975:61).

When an object becomes observable, measurable and quantifiable, it has already become civilized; the disciplinary organization of civilization extends its subjection to the object in the very way that it makes it knowable. The docile object provides the material template that variously supports or frustrates the operations performed upon it. (Lynch 1985:43-44).

5.3 David Silverman, in his reading of the texts of Castaneda, points initially to the dialectic of outside and inside, of externality and essence, so reminiscent of debates within the sociology of music. But what if the text itself 'always displays the grounds of its intelligibility' – and so seemingly accepting a type of formalism: that the enigma of a documents lies in its internal logics rather than an intelligibility brought to bear on it from outside, from the social determination. Contrastingly, Lynch in his study of artefacts, initially seems to point to the deadness and docility of the text or object which is subjected to a knowing imposed upon it from outside – disciplinary, surveying, constituting. Yet, Lynch then points to something of real significance for thinking about music – that the material template itself, the logic of its very being actually imposes its own intelligibility upon the kinds of stories, narratives, constructions that are performed upon it. The template or object itself frustrates or makes possible the kinds of narratives that attempt imposition upon it. Hence rather than seeing the practice rather than the object or making the object the wider array of mediations or using the object to display social determination we see the ways in which intelligibility can be made clear through and from within the text by examining the operations performed upon it from outside – music and sound then become experimental moments in which the sociologist perhaps in co-production with the practitioners and lovers can dissolve the inside/outside dialectic by opening each moment of the practice to scrutiny.

5.4 The 'grounds of intelligibility' in an artefact raises a further question about what we have called the 'metrics' of a sound or piece of music and the 'empirics' of practice and production around the methods we might use to dissolve that distinction. Examining sound and its practices means extending the empirical reach of sociological research projects into music and sound as knowledge, into the social relations around musical practice in communities, into the social 'powers' and impact that music has on politics and civics and around the social definitions of sound and the ubiquity of noise. It also means the empirical extension of projects into understanding the relationship of music and sound to the very question of modernity that gave rise to sociology in the first place and hence the geographical socialities around slave songs and the plantations, sea shanties, the birth of Jazz and the use of tonality for despotic totalitarian projects (Ross 2007). It seems to us that understanding the epistemologies and ontologies of soundworlds means further developing the 'metrics/empirics' analysis with other disciplines, whilst retaining a sense of the core social project of understanding and developing social relations in the context of nature and global modernity. These epistemologies of sound have to be understood empirically. Jonathan Sterne has argued that;

Knowledge is a problem in sound studies in at least three ways. Knowledge is a problem of epistemology and method – how do sound students acquire, shape, build and disseminate knowledge about sound in their own practice? Knowledge is also a problem for the field in the sense that there are many competing knowledges of sound in the world, they have their own politics, historicity and cultural domain, and exert their effects on everything we study. (Sterne 2012:8).

- 5.5 To overcome some of the fractured relations between musical form and social formation we have to examine the questions we set ourselves at the beginning within a properly sociological, realist project of empirical description. Firstly, how can we identify an object of or a process for study in terms of the artefacts and practices that constitute musical or sound production? To actually 'do' sociology there has to be the attainment of a sociological research object in terms of materiality and artefactuality. But to consider sound or its experiences, music and its lovers, as a sociological object immediately sociologises the 'docile' object as if it were dead. Exploring the mediations, practices, and relations around the object and the ways in which performance resurrect dead sounds and forms is a way of exploring social relations without leaving in silence a text which is unintelligible but lays the ground for its own intelligibility to such an extent that it is unnecessary or impossible for sociology to describe it or 'civilize' it. Yet, the artefact itself does display its intelligibility without recourse to the social relations to an extent in that its template frustrates the social stories that can be invested in it. It seems to us that the exploration of those practices and those narratives about the sound form are both a description of discourse and a description of practices that are profoundly meaningful to the 'lovers and practitioners'. This leaves the aesthetic object challenged at a series of levels but leaves much to be said about it also beyond even the multidisciplinary of sound studies. In conclusion the identification of an object or process and its mediations is central to doing complex empirical work. But what is the specificity of the sound artefact that the sociologist might examine and what does it say about sound worlds and social worlds – in fact is music subject to understanding or is it 'radically' untranslatable? There is something to be said about the distinctiveness and the specificity of sound for social studies in terms of the privileges accorded to sound that are not to visuality. The displacement of visuality has to be related to a recognition of the import of sound as an artefact for social and historical research in its artefactuality. Sound as *document* and archives of material sound would not just be there to be ransacked for hints of social relations but be constitutive of forming any awareness of past worlds, social and private worlds, and the world of 'the dead'. From Electronic Voice Phenomena to the sounds of village bells, to dialect studies, blues records, and field recording of starlings in fens, sound has a central role in and of itself. It has a primacy which cannot be reduced to a documenting of something else but is a central aspect of social, sound worlds.
- 5.6 Secondly, what can we learn from practices around listening and mediations related to music that are not directly taking the notated score, song, or sound as its specific object? The shift away from thinking about sound and music as representation and understanding in itself means a shift between different modes of listening as Nancy has noted (2007). This shift reasserts the centrality of forms of listening that are dedicated to what sound does to us and the 'echo chambers' of the self rather than the search for meaning and understanding that lies elsewhere beyond or far away from the music. This raises significant questions about the nature of the human and its displacement but it also becomes problematic when so much music and sound sets itself the task of representation – significations of the sound of birds, or the winds, or wreckers on the coast – rather than the phenomena itself. The status of music and sound which actively wants us to partake of meanings extraterritorial to where we are sitting listening in the here and now, and far displaced in space and time, has been questioned by sound art over the past thirty years but even there, where we have sounds relocated from one space and time (a field, a fen, a factory) into another (an installation, a sound walk) it raises some questions about the phenomenology of that transition and the intent that an artist or a field recorder wishes to communicate. But as DeNora and Hennion have noted, the empirical description of practice and the mediations of music is as central to understanding the social world as any other social phenomena. 'Music sociology' has to be central to the practice of social science, largely because its 'social powers' are so ubiquitous.
- 5.7 Thirdly, can we reassert the role of sound and music within classical sociology, its realist projects of description, and demarcate it away from the aesthetic projects of music analysis? It seems necessary to think about the impact of sound and music not just on social life and as a central aspect of that social life but also to examine the impact of sound upon sociological practice itself. It also means the rediscovery of the centrality of music to classical sociology and to subsequent forms of social critique including critiques of factory noises, the relationship of music to mass existence and observation, the question of the country and the city, and the significance of sound to other ways of thinking about human life including literary studies. Related to this in part is the question of silence both generally in the human ordering of existence, and the social changes which bring questions of silence to the fore but also, more specifically the role of silence in scholarly and philosophical life and how far Cage's musical experimentation say something important about the presence or absence of silence in musical and human activity. Ethnographic and historical accounts of music and sound, recordings, and

contemporary observations of practice are central but the reassertion of sound into the classical sociological canon is a decisive question – one which Adorno tried to answer and one which we are trying to answer still – not least because of the resonances around human and non-human sounds and the impact of sound on social life.

5.8 Finally, what can we say about the relation of music and sound to social domination and power and how could we begin to develop an understanding of those processes? The ubiquity of sound raises questions that are either not sought, or evaded, in much of the social study of music but retain a power of governance over identities and social formations. The regulation and political control of sound and noise and the dismissal of unacceptable and disliked sounds as Schafer would have it (1994) are part of an emerging understanding on behalf of power that those who control sound, control and determine the social and hence the widening intrigue that music and sound have for commerce, governance, and the regulation of human life – both existentially and in fact. Speaking truth to power then becomes a project of speaking, singing, recording truth to power and retains for us the reserve of music and sound – its proliferation and its polymorphousness – and not least the centrality of sound to both despotic and liberatory projects. As recent auditory commentators within sociology have pointed out - only when the 'unwanted and deafening roar threatening the body politic of the subject' (Bull and Back 2003:1) is mapped and understood can we rethink the meaning and nature of our social experience, our relation to community, our relational experiences (to others and ourselves), and our relationships with power (Bull and Back 2003:4). Classical social science looked towards a realist description of social phenomena because it wanted to change the world it described. Sound and music, as a set of objects, processes, and practices, have to be re-inserted into our understanding of social worlds as sound worlds.

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