

dialectic, within experience, of the social subject and the genuinely other object is the phenomenologists central concern.

I shall develop these ideas in more detail. One of the difficulties of interdisciplinary work, however, is accounting for related but distinct strands of intellectual history. With basic concepts like textual empiricism, the contextuality of meaning, and enriched text in place, we shall be able to move quickly through the related developments in ethnomusicology and popular music studies.

Ethnomusicology, Popular Music Studies, and the Issue of Context

Transcription issues and the concern with form

From Bela Bartok's formal analysis of Hungarian folk song ([1924] 1981), to Helen Roberts's ([1936] 1970) areal classifications of Native American musics, to the collectivist and salvage work of Francis La Flesche ([1914] 1970,1928,1930,1939), Fletcher and La Flesche ([1911] 1972), and Francis Densmore (1939,1972), a wide range of scholars in the first half of the twentieth century were concerned with questions of musical structure and problems of transcription. The main methodological challenge for this generation was that standard Western music notation is often unable to capture the sonic details of non-Western musics. In response, special markings and symbols were created to adjust for the limitations of the five lines and the staff. Opening up new possibilities for descriptive accuracy, the works of Bartok and Roberts set the standard for ethnomusicological transcription. From the founding of the Society for Ethnomusicology in 1957 until the mid-1970s, however, scholars began to problematize this approach.⁴ First, writers such as Charles Seeger (1958), Mantle Hood (1963), and Bruno Nettl (1964) argued that transcription was necessarily a selective process and that the transcriber's cultural background invariably influenced that selection. Soon after, others observed that the basic visual features of even modified Western notation projected Western European assumptions about music onto any sonic form it was used to transcribe. Bar lines and time signatures, for example, imply an underlying pulse grouped into units with a hierarchy of strong and weak beats; note shape, staff position, and multistave scores construct pitch, rhythm, and timbre as independent sonic elements. Scholars such as James Koetting (1970) and James Reid (1977) worked on new notation systems that could reflect non-Western ideas about musical sound. Against the evolutionists' textual empiricism, this work suggested that ethnomusicology's study object should be the "native perspective" on the music.

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Approaching the problem from a different angle, other writers enlisted mechanical transcribers to overcome the selectivity of the scholar's ear (Seeger 1957; List 1974; Reid 1977). Perhaps the most suggestive idea of the period came in an undercited article by Nazir Jairazbhoy in *Ethnomusicology* (1977)- Criticizing the idea that a mechanical transcriber can produce purely objective transcriptions, Jairazbhoy pointed out that human neurology and the body's bulk itself attenuate musical sound in a way that is not represented by the mechanical transcriber's output. While mechanical transcribers can be designed to account for such filtering, Jairazbhoy's comments are significant because they suggest concrete and unavoidable links between musical sound and the experiencing subject. Jairazbhoy notwithstanding, the growth of structuralism in ethnomusicology siphoned away interest from transcription issues. A form of textual empiricism, structuralism treated transcriptions as unproblematic raw data. Searching for the deep structures believed to be implicit in the surface text, the work of John Blacking's structuralist period (for example, 1970,1972) and Robin Cooper (1977) neither questioned the status of the transcription nor related their analyses to the research participant's experiences.

Though transcription issues received diminishing attention, intriguing questions of study object still remain. Is the music a physical object, existing independent of any person (composer, musician, listener) and capable of being fully described by an objective transcriber? Is the music the research participant's intention? Is the music the performance? If the music is an independent object, how can we account for features of the sound that are constructed by the listening subject, such as the underlying sense of pulse? If the music is a research participant's intention, how can a transcription reflect the fact that intentions are influenced by the act of performance itself, that intentions vary over time, and that

intentions range from the minutest sensual detail to the broadest of structural features? If the music is the performance, what is the relationship of the music to the transcriber's or performer's experience? One way beyond these apparently irreconcilable perspectives (music as fact, music as idea, music as act) is to see that even the most fundamental, seemingly objective aspects of the music imply the existence of a listening subject. Without a spatiotemporally specific subject engaged with sound waves, there is no now, no before and no after, no loud or soft, no accent (just changes in amplitude), and no underlying pulse. It takes a subject—always an agent and always social—to hear a period of sound as linked together in a phrase, to hear a phrase as present or past, to stand close to or far from a sound source, to constitute a pulse. And if these basic, "objective" aspects of the sound imply a listening subject, the affective and more complex formal dimensions do this all the more. Before the designation of

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any musical feature as an objective sonic fact or a subjective mental construct is our prereflective engagement with the world, our immediate experience of music. If we think of our study object as experiences actively and socially constituted by perceptual subjects, then spectrograms, interview data on musical intentions, and ethnographic descriptions of performance can be understood as different moments in the project of transcription.

The ethnomusicology of form and meaning: From evolutionism to functionalism

Alongside the concern with form, the discipline has always been interested in the problem of music and emotion and the relationship between musical activity and larger social contexts. Until the 1950s, these issues were largely taken up by the evolutionists. Scholars like John Comfort Fillmore (1888, 1895, 1899), Helen Roberts ([1926] 1967), Jaap Kunst ([1950] 1974), and Mieczysław Kolinski (1961, 1965) all proffered variations on the idea that non-Western musics are both simple in structure and unchanged since prehistoric times. Interpreting the music of "primitive" peoples as a direct reflection of emotion, ethnomusicological evolutionism rests on the belief in a universal system that links musical form and emotional content. Setting aside evolutionism's obvious and objectionable racism, such a position is problematic because it assumes the existence of an underlying system and locates any new data within it, rather than treating this system as a hypothesis and collecting data to test its validity.

The seeds of a new approach to these issues can be found in the descriptive passages of Helen Roberts's work and in the ethnographies of Edwin Burrows (1936a, 1936b, 1945). Juxtaposing musical transcriptions with evocative accounts of performance events, these writers suggested that music's affective content is tied to its situated context and cultural milieu. Occupying a similar place in ethnomusicology's history as the "Ethnography of Speaking" does in folklore, Alan Merriam's *Anthropology of Music* (1964) made the implications of these text-context sandwiches explicit. The *Anthropology* is based on the notion that music is the product of social activity and argues that the affective power of musical form is culturally specific. Problematizing the assumption that music only exists to evoke affective and aesthetic responses, Merriam charged ethnomusicologists with the task of discovering the variety of uses to which music is put in world cultures. In so doing, Merriam and his functionalists' contemporaries (McAllester 1954; Nettl 1964; Ames 1973; Johnston 1973; Irvine and Sapir 1976) repudiated the notion of a universal system of musical meaning and exorcised the spirit of evolutionism from academic ethnomusicology.

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While functionalist research represented a major advance for the discipline, its level of focus presented two difficulties. The functionalists all agreed that cultural context gave musical structure its affective power, but most of these scholars took that affective power for granted and concentrated their attention on how that power plays itself out in society. Of course no single work can examine all aspects of musical phenomena, but the consistent functionalist focus on "macrolevel" problems drew interest away from the question of how musical form evokes affective experiences. As a result, functionalist ethnomusicology never developed a detailed theory of music and emotion to replace the one from evolutionism that

it dismantled. A second difficulty was one to which all forms of functionalism are prone: the problem of agency. While Merriam's Anthropology took social activity as the basis of musical phenomena, the focus on typical behaviors and large-scale patterns tended to reduce situated practices to a mere expression of larger social forces. Thomas Johnston's analysis of Tsonga beer drink music (1973) is a case in point. Here, the diversity of situated practices in musical performances is reduced to routinized behaviors and society's need for solidarity is seen as the music's source. Within and beyond ethnomusicology, functionalist work tends either toward a synchronic antihumanism that ignores agency and social change or toward after-the-fact attempts to reconcile individuals' uses with society's functions.⁵ Here, structuralism and functionalism are parallel. Structuralism strays into metaphysics by treating experience and action as epiphenomena of a neurological system that is, by definition, inaccessible to the subject; functionalism strays into metaphysics by treating experience and action as epiphenomena of social forces that are also, by definition, beyond the actor's control.

The difficulty here is broadly social theoretic and not narrowly ethnomusicological. As Anthony Giddens has argued (1979,1984,1993), the problem emerges from the false idea that society is a thing in and of itself, an entity independent of the people that constitute it. Giddens's solution is the notion that society is the ongoing intentional and unintentional outcome of individuals' intentional action in the flow of history. Within ethnomusicology, we can use the notion of practice to gain insights into both the problem of music and affect and the relationship between musical activity and large-scale social context. On the "microlevel," musical structure and affective content are constituted in the practice of perception. As a kind of practice, this musical perception is both deeply informed by the practitioner's situated and broader social contexts and actively achieved by the subject. On the "macrolevel," the historical emergence of relatively stable forms of the social life of music (performance events, musical cultures, and

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subcultures) are indeed informed by functionalism's "larger social contexts." Social "context," however, is not an anonymous force separate from individual human conduct; rather, it is made up of the intentional and unintentional consequences of past practices. Similarly, the typical performance events and musical cultures that functionalism describes are themselves constituted by the diverse practices of social actors. This doubly constitutive nature of practice in musical cultures is a theme I shall return to throughout this book.

Form and meaning since the 1980s: Ethnomusicology

The 1980s and 1990s have seen a wide variety of intellectual approaches to the issues of affect and context. Probably the best-known musical ethnography of this period is *Sound and Sentiment* (1982), Steven Feld's study of music among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea. Brilliant in his synthesis of Levi-Strauss's structuralism and Geertz's interpretive anthropology, Feld expends copious and fruitful field time in understanding the Kaluli perspective on music. Arguing that the various domains of cultural knowledge are structurally homologous, Feld suggests that Kaluli ornithology and mythology serve as a metaphor that connects musical form and its affective content. Feld's study object can be interpreted as "the native perspective" and his text an attempt to unearth the mechanisms that produce that perspective. The notion of "native perspective" is fundamental for most recent humanistic research in ethnomusicology; by examining this concept we can illuminate the achievements and challenges of the contemporary discipline.

The idea of "perspective" implies a specific spatiotemporal point, a subject located there and a world grasped from that vantage; the word "native" locates the subject in a society and suggests that culture informs perspective. In the best tradition of Merriam and the 1960s transcription theorists, the idea of native perspective highlights the profoundly social nature of experience. But social context is only one-half of a complex dialectic that informs culture; the other half is agency, and the notion of native perspective often obscures historical change, differences within social groups, and the active component of human conduct. *Sound and Sentiment* powerfully evokes the everyday life of Kaluli villages, but in the text's most reifying moments, "the native" ceases to be a social individual, actively constituting his or her perspective. Here, the "native" is a reined norm, an ageless and genderless Kaluli,

structuralism's ideal speaker/hearer whose perspective is produced by an underlying and inaccessible system, itself formed by functionalism's larger social forces. Here, native perspective is not the partially

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shared elements of diverse Kaluli experiences, but an autonomous set of metaphors that relate abstract systems of myth, ornithology, and music.

In analyzing the interplay between different domains of knowledge, Feld achieves powerful insights, but it is unclear how his model operates in concrete situations. Do all Kaluli know the master myth and the system of ornithology? If not, how does the music's affective power operate for them? Do all Kaluli experience the music in question as embodying the same affective contents? Can Kaluli grasp the music in different ways and experience different emotional contents? The very notion of structure would seem to prevent this. What of differences across age, gender, or other affiliation? Though Feld amasses his transcriptions through participant observation, he analyzes those transcriptions as a purely formal system, without regard for their emergence and use in situated practice or their various meanings in the participants' experiences. Such an analytic treatment disconnects the transcription from its grounding in daily social life and operates as a kind of textual empiricism. Lived meanings can hang together in tightly coordinated sets of relationships, and these relationships may be partially shared among diverse social actors. But when we take underlying structures as our study object, we disengage meaning from the social practices that constitute it.

In the period since *Sound and Sentiment*, ethnographers from a variety of intellectual traditions have helped to orient music scholarship around the concepts of social activity and lived experiences. Judith Vander's *Song-prints: The Musical Experiences of Five Shoshone Women* (1988) is one of the most sensitive ethnographies, musical or otherwise, written in recent years. Ruth Stone's *Let The Inside Be Sweet* (1982) and *Dried Millet Breaking* (1988) are landmarks of phenomenological ethnography. By taking entire events, rather than decontextualized texts, as her study object, Stone made a major step toward returning musical sound to its foundation in situated practice. Her approach to interaction and time perception is foundational to this study.

In the 1990s, scholars such as Christopher Waterman (1990), Peter Manuel (1993), Jocelyne Guilbault (1993), Veit Erlmann (1996), and Barry Shank (1994) synthesized social history and participant-observation field-work to gain new insights into musical meanings. Exploring what folklorists would call the "genre problem" (the question of how individual works of expressive culture are organized into genres and the epistemological status of generic categories), Zouk, Guilbault's study of popular music in the West Indies, serves as a case in point. Content with neither a formal analysis devoid of people nor a social history devoid of musical detail, Zouk explores how musicians and music producers developed particular musical genres in creative response to particular social contexts. Highlighting the

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diversity of Caribbean perspectives and allowing ample space for local voices, Guilbault depicts the subjects of her study as agents, social individuals actively making meaning in their world.

The work of Paul F. Berliner (1994), Ingrid Monson (1996), and Stephen M. Friedson (1996) contribute related insights. Berliner's epic *Thinking In Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, painstakingly traces out the process by which jazz musicians acquire and develop their improvisatory skills. Here, the focus on learning illuminates aspects of agency overlooked by other approaches and powerfully evokes the participants' diverse experiences. Treating the musical structures of jazz performance as the outcome of social interaction, Monson's *Saying Something* provides a detailed ethnography of performance that fails to disengage music sound from musical activity. Where Guilbault employs polyvocal writing techniques to highlight the multifaceted nature of musical meaning, Monson draws on W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness (the idea that African Americans always partake in both African American and European American culture) to shed light on similar social processes. Berliner's and Monson's perspectives on jazz has been foundational for this study. Friedson's ethnography of music in Tumbuka healing rituals, *Dancing Prophets* (1996), uses Martin Heidegger's vision of the mutually constitutive relationship between the subject and the

world to suggest the transformative potential of musical activity. While Freidson's use of Heidegger is quite different from my approach to phenomenology and Monson's notion of interaction is distinct from my idea of practice, their research provides a path related to the one I wish to chart here. From social history to the development of musical skills, to the unfolding of performance event— in all of these studies the theme of emergence highlights different dimensions of agency and illuminates the relationship between musical form and meaning. I hope to forward this approach by focusing attention on the constitutive act where most meanings are established: perception. By treating perception as social practice, I show how such seemingly individual and microlevel acts are informed by and go to build up historical currents and the relatively stable forms of social life.

Form and meaning since the igyos: Popular culture studies

Based on foundational works like Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* (1979) and Simon Frith's *Sound Effects* (1981), the British popular music studies of the last twenty years have provided another set of approaches to the problems of music research. Frith's work debunks romantic ideas about rock's

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resistance to the music industry and sheds light on issues of race, class, and gender in Britain and the United States. Hebdige uses the semiotics of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva to reveal the complex ways that signs can convey meanings in popular music subcultures. Both authors interpret the musics and fashions of youth subcultures and use those interpretations to develop theories about the relationship between music and society. Once again, problems of research method shed light on fundamental issues of study object. One difficulty here is that these authors provide little information about the process by which they collected their data and made their interpretations. In Hebdige's work, it is never clear if the meaning ascribed to a given item of expressive culture (the mod's tie, the punk's Mohawk) is based on mass-media reports, informal interviews, or the scholar's own interpretive work. Hebdige has clearly spent time in popular music scenes, but his failure to describe his research methods makes the status of his readings unclear. While he provides ample citations for his sources in semiotics, he never grounds his readings of style in feedback interviews or specific examples of participant observation. While Frith supports some of his interpretations with quotes from critics, media interviews with performers, or biographies, many of his readings—of "black music" as "immediate and democratic" (16-17) or of "country music" as dominated by feelings of "shame" (25)—are given with no support at all and seem to be only the scholar's view of the music. If past ethnomusicology had reduced the variety of local music meanings to a typified norm, the method of much of the 1980s British popular music studies seem to suggest that a sufficiently sophisticated scholarly reading of subcultural style is all that is needed to unearth local meanings—or even that participant perspectives are unimportant.

This last point is crucial. If our work is to explain the role of music in society, then our interpretations of music must be an attempt to understand the meaning of the music for the people who participate in it. If an interpretation of a genre of music or subculture is present for the scholar and no other social actor, I cannot see how it can be consequential for the larger society. As a result, the interpretation of music, fashion, and style must be understood as an attempt to share the experiences of the music's participants. As I shall argue in Chapter 11, this is not to suggest that musical participants cannot misinterpret their own musical experiences, that every scholarly reading must be verified by the research participant in feedback interviews, or that cultural outsiders cannot provide unique insights into the musical lives of others. This is to say, as Sara Cohen emphasizes (1993), that if we wish to understand how music operates in society, our interpretations must illuminate the ways in which musical meanings play out in the

lives of a society's actors, and that ethnographic research is one of the most powerful tools we have for exploring this domain. While it is not always practical, or even possible, to do participant observation and feedback on some topics, I believe that we must conceptualize

our study object as lived experience and interpretation as a partial sharing of meaning. To do otherwise is to jeopardize the data upon which any broader conclusions are built. A related difficulty in the British popular music studies of the 1980s was the lack of work on musical sound. Here, the few writers that did look at music exemplified many of the problems of study object and method I have suggested above. For example, Richard Middleton (1985), Sean Cubitt (1984), and Barbara Bradby and Brian Torode (1984) interpreted particular songs and genres and sought to reveal the social meanings implied by their musical form. Treating musical meanings as both inherent in the sonic structure and unproblematically accessible to the interpreting scholar, this work ignored the fact that different audiences may interpret musical sound in different ways, that a single listener may garner a variety of meanings from a piece, and that situated context can have a profound impact on the ways in which listeners "read" songs. When Bradby and Torode, for example, interpret the lyrics of Buddy Holly's "Peggy Sue" and discover patriarchal ideas in the text, one can imagine their interpretation as a description of the sexist meanings the song subtly reinforces in the experiences of its listeners. Understood in this way, such interpretations are relevant to the beliefs and practices that constitute patriarchy in the world. But when these writers notate the rhythms of the guitar solo, capriciously ascribe lyrics to those rhythms, and then analyze the text they created, one is forced to question, not only the specious musical score but their entire interpretive project as well. A critical analysis only makes sense if interpretations describe the experiences of the people who make and listen to the music. How can meanings that are not present in participants' experience influence their conduct or inform the larger society? Middleton's analysis of the juxtaposition of styles in John Lennon's "Imagine" is highly sophisticated and rich in insight. Reading the text, however, one still wonders how different audiences interpret the song and how these stylistic references play out in situated practices of meaning making. In the 1990s, musical sound began to receive greater attention in the research of rock scholars (Whiteley 1990,1992; Josephson 1992; Moore 1993; Ford 1995; Hawkins 1996). One of the richest of these works, Allan F. Moore's *Rock: The Primary Text* (1993), presents a history of rock styles and shows how the traditional concerns of British cultural studies (authenticity, the historical development of music subcultures) can be forwarded by attending to the music. In the theoretical section of his work, Moore

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argues that the listener's perception of the song should form the basis of musical analysis and suggests that fans might apply different strategies to the act of listening. In the musical analysis, however, Moore focuses solely on the score, provides little discussion of listening strategies, and uses neither observation data nor feedback interviews to ensure that his sonic interpretations connect with the listener's perceptions. Like Middleton, Moore provides many insightful readings, but the lack of field data and the failure to account for situated context suggest the problems I have explored above.⁶ Based on rich interview data, Rob Bowman's fine style analysis of the songs of the Stax record label (Bowman 1995) helps to connect the musicology of rock with ethnomusicological approaches. With the broadening of the field of data has come a related expansion of interpretive approaches, and a number of recent scholars have sought to overcome the assumption that popular music is a solely regressive force in modern societies (Lipsitz 1990,1994a, 1994b; Walser 1993; Garofalo 1987, 1992, 1997; Manuel 1993; Shank 1994). Peter Manuel's painstakingly researched study of the impact of cassettes on popular music in India, *Cassette Culture* (1993), refutes both Luddite condemnations and facile celebrations of mass-media technology. Manuel illustrates the complex range of consequences that cassettes have had and shows that it is not technology per se, but the way that technology is used that determines its effect on society. In all of this work, careful historical or ethnographic research replaces older speculations about mass media and enriches our understanding about the relationship between expressive culture and society. Though the present study compares four music scenes, heavy metal is at its center, and recent work in this area has provided key directions for my research. Robert Walser's pathbreaking *Running with the Devil* (1993) combines ethnography and social history with a rigorous musical analysis. Placing the development of the genre within the context of Western deindustrialization, Walser connects subcultural styles with larger economic forces. Most important, his powerful interpretations of particular songs make the artistry of metal comprehensible to outsiders and show how the analysis of music can bring insights into

issues of class and gender. Relating musical meanings, metalhead beliefs about virtuosity, and broader American ideologies of race and gender, Walser's work yields powerful insights into the role of metal in the lives of its participants. Related ideas emerge in Deena Weinstein's *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (1991). Though Weinstein spends little time on the musical sound, her sensitive ethnographic work and comprehensive attention to audiences, performers, and music industry mediators produces rich understandings into this music. Further, Weinstein's wide knowledge of the genre allows her to

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reveal participant perspectives on the music and debunk many of the myths that surround metal. Like H. Stith Bennett's research on the everyday lives of rock musicians, Weinstein's rigorous fieldwork evokes the diverse experiences of metalheads. The focus on musical practices in Bennett's *On Becoming a Rock Musician* (1980) make his classic research another source of inspiration and insight.

Another study that has important connections with my work is Ruth Finnegan's excellent book *The Hidden Musicians* (1989), an ethnography of amateur music making in the English town of Milton Keynes. Applying approaches from folklore's performance school, Finnegan takes music making practices as her focus, and she uses her rich and detailed fieldwork to challenge many of the strictly theoretical criticisms of popular music leveled by mass culture scholars. Comparing a wide variety of musical scenes in the town, Finnegan shows how the organization of performance events, the acquisition of music skills, and the act of composition vary across musical cultures. Finnegan does not explore musical sound, and she repeatedly juxtaposes her own emphasis on musical practice with the music scholar's analysis of scores and recordings; one goal of this book is to reconcile these apparently opposed perspectives by showing how issues of musical structure can be understood in terms of the practices of musical perception and musical action.

Perhaps Finnegan's most important contribution is her attempt to replace older conceptions of the social base of music (such as "musical community") with her notion of the "pathway"—an organized pattern of music making conduct actively brought about by performers and listeners. Though Finnegan does not rely on practice theory, her concept of the pathway is compatible with my own vision of situated practice constituting music scenes; interpreting Finnegan in the language of Giddens, one could say that her powerful idea of the "pathway" accounts for both the structure of local scenes and the agency of their participants. While Finnegan sees her pathways as forms of social organization, she tends to focus on the personal and local dimensions of music making. For example, problematizing simplistic equations of popular music styles and the social background of their participants (i.e., rock as youth rebellion), her work places less emphasis on the role of power relations in local music making. Responding to materialist perspectives on culture, she argues that what is most important about music is its ability to provide a vehicle for creative activity, profound ritual experiences, and transcendent feelings of social connectedness in the performance event. Using concepts from Anthony Giddens, I hope to put more emphasis on the relationship between local music making and so-called larger social forces, without slipping into the determinism and re-

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ductionism that Finnegan so rightly critiques. Exploring the complex dialectics of situated practice and social context, I show how issues of race and class in American society inform, but do not determine, the music making practices in my field site.

Phenomenology and Practice Theory

The discussion so far has explored a variety of new ideas about the study of expressive culture. The rest of the chapter uses notions from Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Anthony Giddens to weave these ideas together and suggest a program of music research based on the concepts of practice and experience.

Foundational ideas from phenomenology: Experience and world, self and other

The concept of experience is central to phenomenology, but in everyday conversation and academic usage the term has a wide range of meanings. To clear the ground for our discussion of phenomenology we must first see what the word does not mean to phenomenologists.⁷ First, experience is not some mysterious substance that stands in opposition to the real, objective world of things; experience encompasses both the objective and the subjective. Neither, as the empiricists would have it, is experience only sense-impression; to reduce experience to sensation is to weigh down our understanding of perception with unfounded assumptions. In my usage, experience is not some abstract entity possessed by a group (some ideal object like "The American Experience"); although experience is always socially constituted and potentially can be shared across individuals and groups, experience is always someone's experience and sharing is always partial. Finally, experience is not the opposite of book knowledge; while there is a genuine distinction to be made between perception and reflection, both are part of experience. As a first approximation, experience can be understood as the contents of consciousness: the ideas thought, the emotions felt, the sounds heard, the fragrances smelled, the flavors tasted, textures touched, and colors seen. By definition, therefore, experience is all we can ever know because it encompasses both the knowledge and the thing known. Here we have reached a truism and need to make our way more carefully. Husserl's idea of the *epoche* ([1913] 1931, [1931] 1960) will provide the path.

Husserl developed his work in reaction to an idealist philosophy that set up a sharp (and to some, commonsensical) contrast between experience and objective reality. According to that idealism, we are never in contact with the objective world of things; we have only experience, and this is

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completely distinct from objective reality. Wanting to give philosophy an absolutely stable grounding, Husserl argued that we must not begin with abstract arguments but must instead base our thinking on a rigorous description of that which is concretely given to consciousness. To make this radical return to the givens, we must place judgments about the objectivity or subjectivity of experience in an "epoche" (or set of brackets) and examine the things themselves. When we do this, we immediately stumble onto a thunderous discovery: nothing has changed; the objectivity of the world is retained in the pure experience that the epoche establishes. When I attend to the desk before me, for example, I not only see its brown color and its smooth texture; built into my experience of the desk is the sense that this object is independent of me, that it has sides that are hidden from me, that it is there for (sighted) others to see, for (sensate) others to touch. What Husserl concludes from phenomenological descriptions such as these is that the world—as persistent and independent as we know it to be—is there in and for experience. As a result, we are never to remove the epoche and find out what lurks behind experience, because the objective characteristics of the world are there given directly in experience.

Applying the epoche does not reduce the world to a mere idea. Objects in the world are not to be confused with ideas, because the two are grasped in different ways. Objects in the world are there to be experienced by any capable person who is physically present; thoughts are mine alone until I share them through some form of expression. Likewise, arguing that the world is there for experience is not to reduce perception to imagination. While we have a measure of control over the act of perception (think of the vases and the hourglass in the famed Rubin's Goblet drawing), the world in perception is not infinitely malleable. I cannot see the map of Connecticut in Rubin's Goblet and call my experience a percept. However, the objectivity and autonomy inherent in our experiences of the world should not blind us to the fact that those experiences are always had by a subject. Understood phenomenologically, the objective aspects of the world are better described as all of those aspects that are there for anyone to grasp. Husserl's phenomenology is a transcendental phenomenology in that it emphasizes that the world exists as something there to be constituted in experience; in that sense the world is constituted within experience. The existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1989) differs from Husserl's in many ways, but on this fundamental level the difference is merely one of emphasis: Merleau-Ponty agrees that the world is there for experience, but he emphasizes that the subject is there in that world, as much constituted by it as he or she constitutes it (see

Hammond, Howarth, and Keat 1991, 127-48).

This dialectic of the subject and the world is basic to all forms of phe-

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nomenology. Perceptual phenomena emerge as the outcome of the subject's active and meaningful engagement with the world, and both the object of experience (or noema) and the engagement (or noesis) that constitutes it are present in experience. Experience is not constituted in one unified process but in an array of noetic modes: perception, memory, imagination, and so on. In fact, it is because our modes of engagement are so varied that it is so easy to miss the foundational reciprocity between ourselves and the world. In Merleau-Ponty's words, "[Phenomenological] reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slacks the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice" (1989, xiii).

Both parts of this dialectic are profoundly social. First, the world is a public world there for others. We saw before that when I experience this desk, I am not only aware of the surface that faces me, I am also aware that it has a back and sides that I cannot view. That is, built into my experience of physical objects is an awareness that objects possess features that are beyond my immediate grasp but may become the focus of future experiences. Pointing toward a world beyond the immediate givens, present experience entails the existence of other subjects: my self in the past or future, and others. The world is, in Merleau-Ponty's terminology, an interworld—a world partially drawn into the subject's experience and partially shared between subjects. Second, the subject itself is social in origin. As Husserl observed (1960, 103-28), assimilating the concept of subject simultaneously establishes the concept of the self and other. In one's first reflexive experience, one discovers that the counterpart to oneself as an experiencing subject is oneself as a body in the world. Encountering another body, one does not merely constitute him or her as physical object; one experiences him or her as an other subject, because one knows that the counterpart of oneself-as-object is oneself-as-subject. Finally, the diverse acts by which the subject constitutes experience are radically social: informed by situated event and broader social contexts, actively deployed to achieve social ends, and potentially consequential for others and society as a whole.⁸

The dialectical, betwixt and between character of the social subject and the public world allow for a sharing of experience that is as real as it is incomplete. In everyday life, the fact of cross-cultural misunderstanding, as well as simple lying, attest to the difficulties of knowing another's experience. But while I can never possess the identical experiences of the other, experiences can be partially shared. As we have seen, perception is not capricious imagination; while it is true that the world never determines the experiences we constitute from it, the fact that we live in a common world allows a measure of partial sharing. Further, because the constitution of experience is a