

ELEMENTS OF SOCIOLOGY OF MUSIC IN TODAY'S HISTORICAL MUSICOLOGY AND MUSIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract: In this article I try to show the incorporation of the elements of sociology of music by such disciplines as historical musicology and music analysis. For that explain how sociology of music is understood, and how it is connected to critical theory, criticism or aesthetic autonomy. I cite some of the musicologists that wrote about doing analysis in context and broadening the research of musicology (e.g. Jim Samson, Joseph Kerman). I also present examples of the inclusion of sociology of music into historical musicology and music analysis – the approach of Richard Taruskin in and Suzanne Cusick. The aim was to clarify some of the recent changes in writing about music, that seem to be closer today to cultural studies than classical musicology.

Key words: sociology of music, sociomusicology, historical musicology, critical theory, Theodor Adorno, Richard Taruskin, Suzanne Cusick

1 Sociomusicology

Historical musicology and music analysis recently became open to incorporating elements of sociology of music. Understanding of the importance of analyzing music in context was not unfamiliar to musicology in general – the obvious example is ethnomusicology, which focuses on music culture(s) and which asks about the relationship between the society and the music it produces. So called “new musicology” aimed at broadening the frames of classical musicology, was the next step. It’s approach to music was cultural, analytical and critical. From it such subdisciplines as feminist musicology and sociology of music emerged. But historical musicology and analysis only lately became ready to include elements of sociology of music (as well as of feminist musicology) into its narratives. It is especially visible in the new version of general music history by Richard Taruskin¹ or Suzanne Cusick’s book on Francesca Caccini.² In this article I would like to summarize the discussion about analyzing music in context and critical analysis, and shortly show that many aspects of sociology of music are present in recent works musicologists (Richard Taruskin’s and Suzanne Cusick’s books will serve as examples).

Sociology of music is also called sociomusicology. As Charles Keil put it, sociomusicology is a „paleologism [...] for wording how musicking, socializing, and a certain kind of utopian aspiring or imagining all fit together. The most basic sociomusicological idea is that interacting sound constitute the abstraction ‘music’ in the same way that interacting people constitute the abstraction ‘society’; we can learn a lot by the close comparison [...] of interacting sounds and interacting people in specific times, places and contexts that we can’t learn by transcribing music, transcribing interviews, and interpreting these texts in terms of each other”.³ Norman Stanfield’s writes shortly about the history of sociomusicology, and how we can trace some of its characteristics back to Max Weber. In his *The Rational and Social Foundation of Music* that „linked the Western exploration of harmony with the European development of rationalisation, Weber theorized that it was the invention of Western notation, and not music per se, that set Europe on its singular path. This line of thought was pursued by the Canadians Harold Innis and his successor, Marshall McLuhan”.⁴

More recent definition describes sociomusicology as the work of scholars that is often „similar to ethnomusicology in terms of its exploration of the sociocultural context of music”.⁵ However „sociomusicology maintains less of an emphasis on ethnic and

national identity, and is not limited to ethnographic methods. Rather, sociomusicologists use a wide range of research methods and take a strong interest in observable behavior and musical interactions within the constraints of social structure. Sociomusicologists are more likely than ethnomusicologists to make use of surveys and economic data, for example, and tend to focus on musical practices in contemporary industrialized societies”.⁶ Classical musicology, and it’s way of emphasizing historiographic and analytical rather than sociological approaches to research, is the reason why sociomusicology was regarded as a small subdiscipline for a long time. But the increasing popularity of ethnomusicology and new musicology (as well as the emergence of interdisciplinary field of cultural studies), created a situation in which sociomusicology is not only a fully established field itself, but is also widely used by other subdisciplines, such as historical musicology or music analysis.⁷

To sum up, by definition, sociomusicology refers to “both an academic subfield of sociology that is concerned with music, as well as a subfield of musicology that focuses on social aspects of musical behavior and the role of music in society. It is the study of music as a social phenomenon or the study of the social aspects of music”.⁸ In Ivo Supićić’s opinion, „the social functions of music evolve, diversify, and are transformed, reflecting different aspects according to the global societies from which they emerge. The social functions and references of music derive from its social conditionings allowing music to act as an important factor that contributes towards cultural change. Music influences and reflects many parts of society such as politics, religion, current events, and popular culture”.⁹ So sociology of music (sociomusicology) is a discipline that focuses on the relations between music and people who create, perform and „use” it.¹⁰ It lays between sociology and musicology, and the aspects it deals with are (after Theodor Adorno): musical institutions, musical jobs and their role in the society, the way music functions in the society, social functions of music, changes of the musical preferences.¹¹

1.1 Critical theory, analysis in context

Adorno, sociologist and musician, believed that “critical theory” (that he was one of the founders of), a subdiscipline of sociology that was created in the 1930s, could also be applied to music.¹² Nicholas Cook reminds us, that the purpose of critical theory is “to expose the workings of ideology in everyday life, revealing ‘uncritically’ accepted beliefs and so returning to individuals the power to decide for themselves what they will believe”.¹³ Origins of critical theory lay in Marxism, but it became a culture critique that effected also musicology.¹⁴ Adorno’s work contributed to the emergence of the “critical” viewpoint (that Joseph Kerman calls for, as I explain further in this article).¹⁵ Critical theory is, as Cook puts it, “in essence of the theory of power, and it sees power largely in terms of the institutions through which it is channeled”.¹⁶ That’s why institutions are crucial in “naturalizing power structures”, so that we think that unequal distribution of power across the world is natural.¹⁷ The discussion in musicology about canon formation is connected with that process of naturalization. The new question was asked: what is “the role of musical institutions in

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ <http://societyandmusic.wordpress.com/2012/02/18/what-is-sociomusicology/>.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ *An Introduction To Music Studies*, ed. J.P.E. Harper-Scott, J. Samson, Cambridge

2009, p. 43.

¹¹ T. Adorno, *O fetyszyzmie w muzyce i o regresji słuchania*, [in:] T. Adorno, *Sztuka i sztuki*, Warszawa 1990, p. 100-130.

¹² N. Cook, *Music. A Very Short Introduction*, New York 2000, p. 102.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 103.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹ R. Taruskin, *Oxford History Of Western Music*, 5 volumes, New York 2010.

² S. Cusick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court. Music and the Circulation of Power*, Chicago 2009.

³ Ch. Keil, *Call and Response, Applied Sociomusicology and Performative Studies*, „Ethnomusicology”, vol. 42 no. 2, Spring/Summer 1998.

⁴ N. Stanfield, *Sociomusicology*, <http://blogs.ubc.ca/normanstanfield/music-matters/>.

⁵ <http://dictionary.sensagent.com/sociomusicology/en-en/>.

constructing, maintaining and naturalizing this canon?"¹⁸ Also the 'critical' orientation became an important aspect of gender studies (so at the same time of feminist/gender musicology) as well as historical musicology and music analysis. Jim Samson talks about critical theory in terms of explaining the 'project' of aesthetic autonomy. As he explains in his article *Analysis in Context*, in the book *Rethinking Music*¹⁹, "the more art disengaged itself from the social world (and thus gained – as Adorno saw it – critical acumen), the more easily it could be manipulated by that world, and the less effectively it could adopt a disinterested critical stance".²⁰ And that, he says after Peter Bürger, marked a failure of aesthetic autonomy. And he also calls for including social aspects into the music analysis, seeing it as the alternative available for analysts today: "a redefinition of the province of music theory will be a prerequisite for any further advance in the professional discipline of analysis. Such a redefinition would step beyond the identification of musical materials, confronting the social nature of those materials and exploring the mechanisms involved in their realization and perception".²¹ So formal analysis that does not go beyond the material itself is no longer enough. The context for the score is needed as much as it is for its creator.

Now let's explain what Joseph Kerman means when he calls for criticism in musicology. As he writes in his famous *Contemplating Music. Challenges to Musicology*²², criticism is "the study of the meaning and value of art works".²³ In Kerman's opinion, it is history, and not music theory or ethnomusicology, that is the most solid basis for criticism.²⁴ His conception of history is also more comprehensive than that of some conventional musicologists.²⁵ And that brings it closer to the kind of history (historical musicology) I am talking about in this article – the one that also includes elements of the sociology of music. Obviously the meaning and value of art works that Kerman writes about, can only be such to people. So analyzing the social aspects is crucial in following the 'critical' approach. As Derek Scott points out, social factors affect our response to music.²⁶ And that in a variety of ways. For example changing social factors can "affect our response to works which may have previously provoked quite different reactions: *Così fan tutte* is not the same after the cultural impact of modern feminism, and *Peter Grimes* has become problematic due to present concern about child abuse; we are no longer ready to accept Grimes as a tortured idealist".²⁷

Jim Samson talks not only about aesthetic autonomy in the abovementioned article, but also, as its title suggests, about analysis in context. In his opinion, music is so specific, and "its meaning so embedded in its essence" that researchers are forced "to borrow from other systems of thought in order to attempt any kind of description at all".²⁸ Only examining music in context allows to reach deeper into its meaning, and using other disciplines' terminology or theories allows to talk and write about music, as well as understand it. This is why using some of the sociology approaches to music serves as a way of understanding how music functions in society and culture. Samson even proves his point by talking about the history of this phenomena (of the fact that musicology needs other disciplines to capture music). He reminds us about ancient times and Greeks, who used mathematics to describe music.²⁹ Then about Renaissance-Baroque period, when two different categorization of music were favoured – one linking music to verbal language, and one linking it to *ars oratoria* (in the eighteenth century).³⁰ Also visual and spatial arts were used as models for analyzing

music (e.g. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries).³¹ And let's not forget about biographical, social, and literary tropes that, we might say, dominated nineteenth-century criticism.³² The attempts to 'ground' music³³ embraces social cause, but also, as Samson emphasizes, they extend to so called 'social trace' ("the imprint of the social world on the musical materials themselves"³⁴), and to the social production of meanings ("the subject-matter of a reception history"³⁵). As Samson further explains, analysis engaged by this larger enterprise usually addresses the second of these levels (social trace), but it may do so by using several strategies:³⁶

- By making a notion of a 'double-root' for the musical work (social and stylistic),³⁷ usually "through homologies of compositional and contextual constructions" – the essence of sociological poetics
- By forming one or several strands of a "'thick' web of metaphors, metonyms or allegories"³⁸ (the work becomes encircled by layers of possible meaning)
- By making (through semiotic theory) possible "series of stepping-stones linking 'neutral' musical materials to formal, generic and narrative codes, and ultimately - by way of these codes – to the world beyond music"

To sum up, Samson says that analysis may confront, be absorbed by, or absorb context. "The emphasis lies rather on inclusion, the 'bringing together' of disparate perspectives and separated categories [...]"³⁹ And that is what Richard Taruskin and Suzanne Cusick do. They include elements of sociology of music into both their historical and analytical parts of research, but for the need of this article I will briefly focus on Taruskin's historical part, and Cusick's analytical part.

1.2 Examples

Richard Taruskin, in his *Oxford History of Western Music* focuses not on events in the history of music, but on people that caused those events. That means that he rejects the common way of writing about music history (we might call it a "classical" way), that does not take into account agents standing behind the historical facts. In his opinion statements and actions should always be included, because these are "the essential facts of human history".⁴⁰ Taruskin's emphasis on the "human aspect" in his narratives, as I had the chance to explain more broadly in one of my articles is backed by nothing else but his interest in sociology.⁴¹ Particularly, in Howard Becker's book "Art Worlds" on sociology of art. This clearly shows where are the origins of the existence of sociology of music in his histories. And he remains true to talking about the history of music in a broad context of societies and cultures throughout all of the five volumes of his book.

Prin Cusick devoted her book to the life and works of a seventeenth-century Italian composer, Francesca Caccini. Cusick decided to analyze Francesca's music from the feminist perspective, so she looked for gender aspects in Caccini's works (let these fragments be the example: when she writes about Francesca's collection *Il Primo Libro*, she defines it as a "course of study that winks simultaneously at problems of vocality and

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ J. Samson, *Analysis in Context*, [in:] *Rethinking Music*, ed. N. Cook, M. Everist, New York 2001, pp. 35-54.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 51.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 53.

²² J. Kerman, *Contemplating Music. Challenges to Musicology*, Harvard 1985.

²³ Ibidem, p. 16.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 19.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ *Music, Culture and Society. A Reader*, ed. D. B. Scott, New York 2002, p. 13.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ J. Samson, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 48.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 49.

³² Ibidem, p. 50.

³³ See e.g. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, Cambridge 1987". After: Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 50.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ "The notion of a 'double root', social and stylistic, was developed for art history especially by Heinrich Wölfflin; see his *Principles of Art History*, New York 1950". After: Ibidem.

³⁸ "See in particular Gary Tomlinson, *The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology*, „19th-Century Music", 7 (1984), pp. 350-62. Also Clifford Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* [in:] *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York 1973, pp. 3-30". After: Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 51.

⁴⁰ Taruskin, op. cit.,

⁴¹ K. Kizińska, *Richard Taruskin's Historical/New musicology and the Topic of 'Women in Music'*, *International Handbook of Academic Research and Teaching. Proceedings of Intellectbase International Consortium*, Volume 25, Winter 2012 – Las Vegas, NV, USA.

problems of womanhood”,⁴² in which the composer shows “paradoxes of gender and problems of musical technique as interrelated dilemmas to be simultaneously resolved”⁴³ Such an approach, characteristic for feminist musicology, is also connected with the aims of the sociology of music. There is an inclusion of social aspects (such as the experience of the artists as a member of the specific society) into the analysis of music (see again Jim Samson’s explanation of this process above). Of course the most important fact for Cusick, is that Caccini was a woman in a particular musical culture of the Medici Court in Florence. From explaining in details Francesca’s struggles and success in this social environment, she goes to analyzing her music. And the music is seen as something mirroring the biography.

These short examples were to end the article of a more theoretical character. I tried to show the incorporation of the elements of sociology of music by such disciplines as historical musicology and music analysis. For that I first explained in detail how sociology of music (or sociomusicology) is understood, and how it is connected to critical theory, criticism or aesthetic autonomy. I also cited some of the musicologists that wrote about doing analysis in context and broadening the research of musicology. The aim was to clarify some of the recent changes in writing about music, that seem to be closer today to cultural studies than classical musicology.

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⁴² S. Cusick, op. cit., p. 114.

⁴³ Ibidem.