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Introduction

Music is an important thread in the fabric of the social world. It is a form of social interaction; one amongst many forms which concatenate, interpenetrating and overlapping in the ongoing process which generates, reproduces and transforms our societies in their various local, national and global manifestations. That, at least, is the central claim of this book. It sounds simple. However, unpacking it and filling in its details gives rise to questions and complexities which it will take the whole book to tackle.

The book covers a wide range of themes, from meaning, taste and identity, through social division, cohesion and the dynamics of economic and political life, to the various social worlds ('music worlds' as I call them) which form around different clusters of musical interactivity. Underlying all of this, however, is a relational conception of both social life and music. There are several competing versions of 'relational sociology' in the literature (Depelteau and Powell 2013), with the perspectives of Born (e.g. 2010a) and Bourdieu (1984, 1993) proving particularly influential within music sociology (Bennett et al. 2009; Born 2005, 2010b; Prior 2008, 2011, 2013; Rimmer 2010, 2012; Savage 2006). The discussion in this book converges with these different relational perspectives at points and departs from and disagrees with them at others (see also Bottero and Crossley 2011; Crossley 2011, 2013a). However, my conception of relationality is different and has been developed – partly in relation to music, but also in more general theoretical discussions – across a series of books and papers (Crossley 2011, 2013a, 2015a, 2015c, 2016). This intellectual trajectory, which the present book continues, elaborating further the distinctive relational approach to music sociology sketched therein, requires brief elaboration.

Several years ago I wrote a book about the origins of punk and post-punk in the UK (Crossley 2015a). In this book, taking Becker (1974, 1982) as my point of departure, I developed a concept of 'music worlds' to capture, amongst other things, the network of participants involved (i.e. musicians,

audience members and the assortment of managers, promoters, engineers etc. whom Becker collectively terms 'support personnel') and their various interactions and relations. The idea that early punks formed a network was central to this study and I used the techniques of formal social network analysis (SNA) to analyse this network (on SNA see Borgatti et al. 2013; Scott 2000; Wasserman and Faust 1994).[1]

The ideas originating in this work were subsequently developed across a number of papers. Working both alone and with others, I further elaborated the 'music worlds' concept and used SNA to analyse: Sheffield's folk-singing world; the UK's trans-local underground heavy metal world; UK music festivals and the artists who perform at them; and Turkish, university-based music festivals and their artists (Bottero and Crossley 2011; Crossley and Bottero 2014, 2015; Crossley and Emms 2016; Crossley et al. 2015; Crossley and Ozturk 2019; Emms and Crossley 2018; Hield and Crossley 2015).

Networks are central to relational sociology; but not only networks. It is my intention in this book, in addition to further elaborating upon the importance of networks, to bring a wider range of relational concepts to bear upon music and also bring a wider range of music's facets into relational perspective. I will make a start here by briefly sketching the foundational arguments of my relational perspective (see also Crossley 2011, 2013a, 2015c, 2016).

My point of departure is a critique of those approaches to sociology which either reduce society to an aggregate of individuals or reify and hypostatise it as an individual in its own right with goals and the means to achieve them (Crossley 2011, 2013a, 2015c). Rational choice theory is an example of the former approach. Functionalism and teleological forms of Marxism exemplify the latter. In contrast to these approaches I propose that the building blocks of society are: (1) *social interaction*; (2) the more enduring *social relations* which form within interaction and subsequently shape it; and (3) *networks* of interaction and relations, which both shape and are shaped by them. And I propose that these building blocks are irreducible – *sui generis* as Durkheim (1979) would say. 'Society', on whatever scale we may wish to focus (e.g. local, national or global), is a network on this account; a huge and immensely complex network of interactions and relations operating on different scales and in different ways.

Actors and their agency are important in relational sociology, not only in their human but also their corporate forms; that is, in the form of organisations – such as economic firms, governments, trade unions and pressure groups – which own and control resources and make and implement decisions in ways which are irreducible to the individual human actors who staff them (see Hindess 1988). Actors are not discrete atoms, however, and they do not pre-exist social life. They are formed in and by social interaction.

This is obvious in relation to corporate actors, whose decisions and actions, whilst irreducible to those of the human actors who compose them, are nevertheless dependent upon them. Human actors too are the product of interaction, however. Infants interact with their adult carers from the moment of conception and must do so given their biological dependency. However, their capacity for interaction and agency is initially very limited and only develops by way of nurturing and learning within interaction. The infant becomes a social actor by engaging with others and thereby acquiring: a sense of self and identity; practical skills and embodied know-how; moral sensibilities; the capacity for rational deliberation; and both language and the capacity for reflective thought that it engenders. Biological organisms become social actors through social interaction, and interaction is therefore irreducible to 'the actor'.

Indeed, the human organism itself, as a product of evolution, was shaped by the demands of social interaction and relations. Collective living considerably enhanced the survival and reproduction chances of our primate ancestors, generating a selection pressure for traits conducive to it. Certain of our hardwired biological attributes were selected for in the evolutionary process because they better equipped us for social interaction and the formation of enduring social relations (Wilson 2012).

In addition, actors never exist apart from networks of interaction and relations ('the individual' is an abstraction) and their thoughts, perceptions, interpretations, decisions and actions are shaped by these interactions and relations. Social interaction forms an irreducible system: A responds to B, who responds to A in a circular dynamic which can only be understood as a whole. As Merleau-Ponty argues in relation to conversation, interaction gives rise to *sui generis* dynamics. It is not decomposable into the individual contributions of its participants:

> my thought and his are woven into a single fabric … called forth by the state of the discussion … inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator … the objection which my interlocutor raises … draws from me thoughts which I had no idea I possessed …. making me think … It is only retrospectively … that I am able to reintegrate it and make of it an episode in my private history. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 354)

These arguments call for a situated conception of the actor; situated, that is, within networks, social relations and interactions which both shape the actor and draw her into action. However, they do not dispense with actors as functionalist and structuralist arguments do. Actors are never entirely independent and autonomous from a relational perspective but, qua interdependent agents, they remain a driving force of society. Agency and its creative, inventive potential are central (on this point I agree strongly with Born (2005, 2010b)).

A situated conception of agency has the advantage, moreover, of facilitating, indeed demanding, a focus upon social structure. This is not the place to discuss structure in detail. Briefly, however, it has three interpenetrating aspects as I conceptualise it (see also Crossley 2011).

First, social structure is network structure. Social actors, human and corporate, are connected. That is what makes them 'social'. And their connections concatenate to form structures whose properties generate opportunities and constraints for them, at different levels, simultaneously steering the social processes which arise within them.

Second, participants in social interaction orient to conventions, forged within earlier interactions, which structure both them and the wider relations and networks to which they belong. 'Conventions', as I conceive of them, do much of the structuring work that Bourdieu (1992) assigns to 'habitus' and our orientation to them is often habitual. Used in conjunction with 'habit', however, 'convention' better captures this structuring work. For example, it allows for those cases, such as that of the neophyte who has yet to form a habit, where interaction is structured through self-conscious observance (of convention). More importantly, it better captures the relational nature of social structure. Habits (or habitus), even when collective, are localised in individuals. Conventions, by contrast, following Lewis's (1969) definition of them as solutions to 'coordination problems', involve intersubjective agreement.[2] They form *between* actors. Where habits steer individual behaviours, conventions structure interaction and relations. They allow actors to coordinate their actions and emerge from efforts to achieve such coordination.

Finally, social life is structured by the distribution of a variety of resources, including statuses (such as gender and race), across the network of actors comprising a society. Different resources can be evenly or unevenly distributed, for example, in each case lending society a shape or structure.

These structures, which combine in the context of the interaction they presuppose, are always evolving. A conception of social life rooted in social interaction is necessarily dynamic and processual. Interaction unfolds through time and so too, therefore, do the structures shaped by and shaping it. Network structures, for example, evolve as a result of interaction. New relations are forged and existing relations might either change or break. Even those which remain the same only do so by virtue of interactions which reproduce them. Structure-in-process is still structure, however, and it is fundamental to relational sociology.

This brief outline of relational sociology bears directly upon the arguments in this book. As already indicated, I will argue that music is a form of social interaction; one of the many which collectively constitute our societies. Indeed, I will be suggesting that musical interaction is *multivalent*; that is to say, in doing music we often, simultaneously and by the very same actions, do much else besides. For example, musical interactions

are also often economic interactions, political interactions, bonding rituals etc. In addition, participants in musical interaction are *multiply embedded*. In taking up the role of musician or audience member they do not thereby cease to be, for example, a mother, tax payer, citizen and neighbour, and their performance of their musical roles will both influence and be influenced by these other roles. As a consequence of multivalence and embedding, musical interactions are always inextricably interwoven with other interactions and dynamics comprising society's network, affecting and being affected by them.

In addition, I will be arguing: (1) that we become musical actors by way of participation in musical interaction, acquiring therein the embodied know-how necessary to play whatever roles (e.g. performer, listener and/ or support) we take up (see also Crossley 2015b); (2) that musical interaction typically involves a network of participants, who (3) orient to conventions; (4) and that music or 'musicking' – to borrow Small's (1998) term – involves a mobilisation of various resources which are owned and controlled by specific actors within that network. Musicking both has, and forms part of, a wider social structure.

In an ideal world I would have explored these ideas by reference to a wide variety of musical forms drawn from a diverse range of cultures and historical periods, picking up on the postcolonial stream in contemporary music studies. Such breadth would have come at a cost, however. Musical forms likely to be unfamiliar to a majority of readers require lengthy explanation, thereby eating into word limits (at the expense of analytic content) and rendering potentially concise discussion cumbersome – all without much hope of giving a vivid impression of them. And if the aim is breadth and diversity, then many such examples are necessary. In addition, following my abovementioned claims regarding multivalence and embedding, it would not suffice to offer a description of musical forms in abstraction from the webs of wider interaction in which they are embedded. A discussion of music's economic aspect, such as I offer in Chapter 3, requires familiarity with the economic forms in which musicking is embedded, for example; and any discussion of music and politics, such as I offer in Chapter 9, necessarily hinges upon the particularities of political interaction in a given society. Taking musical diversity seriously, if done properly, is a huge undertaking and anything short of this risks superficiality and tokenism. For these reasons I have largely restricted my focus to contemporary Western music, with a further bias towards popular music. I have opted for depth over breadth. I can only hope that I will have the opportunity to revisit these ideas in relation to other musics in the future, or indeed that others will do so.

The plan for the book is as follows.

In Chapter 2, I make the argument that music is a form of social interaction, spelling out what this entails and dealing with a number of

objections. The importance of both performing and listening is emphasised, I consider the technologically mediated nature of much musical interaction and I discuss the importance of resources. In addition, I stress the manner in which musicking is structured by the orientation of its participants to conventions. Finally, I elaborate upon 'multivalence' and 'embeddedness'.

In Chapter 3 I continue the discussion of multivalence and resources by exploring music as economic interaction. The capitalist context within which much musicking occurs, globally, is a key focus of the chapter, as is 'the industry', and I critically review several well-known perspectives on these matters – including Adorno's critique of 'the culture industry'.

Chapter 3 ends with a discussion of 'the mainstream' and some of the music worlds which lie outside of it. This paves the way for Chapter 4, where the distinction between mainstream and alternative music worlds is further elaborated. My point of departure for conceptualising 'music worlds', as noted above, was Becker's concept of 'art worlds'. I could have started with a number of other concepts and writers but Becker is the best in my view, and in Chapter 4 I make the case for this, comparing 'music world' with the concepts of 'sub-culture', as posited by Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS); 'neo-tribe', as introduced by Maffesoli; Bourdieu's concept of 'fields'; and the more widely used concept of 'scenes'. A great deal of fascinating and important research has been conducted under the banner of 'sub-cultures', 'fields', 'neo-tribes' and 'scenes' and I have no desire to dismiss this work. However, we need some sort of unifying concept under which to bring the various insights they have generated, and it is my argument in Chapter 4 that 'world' is the best vehicle for doing this.

Chapter 4 ends with a discussion of a network of music festivals, drawn from an empirical project, which allows us to think about and begin to conceptualise relations between the mainstream and other music worlds in what I call the musical universe. This discussion spills over into Chapter 5 where, focusing upon a theme of much of my earlier work on music, I discuss the networked character of music worlds and the ways in which musicking is both enabled and constrained by the network in which its participants are embedded. Networks, as noted above, form an important part of social structure and Chapter 5 aims to unpack their key properties.

The networks discussed in Chapter 5 tend to be specialised and to involve individuals with very particular musical interests and a high level of musical commitment. I conclude the chapter, however, with a brief discussion of everyday networks (e.g. with friends, family, colleagues, neighbours, etc.), arguing that these networks play a key role in individuals' reception of music and the formation of their tastes. This paves the way for a discussion of taste and meaning which stretches over several chapters.

I commence this discussion in Chapter 6 with a discussion of semiotic meaning, which I elaborate through a discussion of the work of Peirce. Many musicologists and philosophers – most famously, in historical perspective, Hanslick (1986) – have questioned whether (instrumental) music can mean anything at all, at least in the 'external' sense of representing a state of affairs outside of itself. Peirce's semiotics suggest a number of very clear ways in which it can, whilst providing an equally compelling way of making sense of the 'internal meaning' hinted at by Hanslick and elaborated more usefully (albeit from a rather different philosophical perspective) by Meyer (1956). This is important because these meanings are integral to the uses to which people put music, the resonance they experience between music and their own identities and thus to taste.

Use and identity are discussed in Chapter 7. The value that music has for social actors is, in large part, 'use value' and taste, too, relates to use. We like music because and to the extent that we are able to use it in our everyday lives. It is my contention, however, that not all uses figure equally in our tastes. Taste, as Frith (1987, 1998) suggests, implicates our identity. For many of us, specifying our musical tastes is saying something significant about who we are. This is a key theme of Chapter 7.

Chapter 8 develops these ideas by returning to the networks within which these uses and our identities are embedded – and more specifically the 'social space', in Blau's (1974, 1977) sense, in which such networks are themselves embedded. 'Social space' captures the way in which interpersonal networks are shaped by differences in status and resources and the social divisions and conflicts they are liable to generate. Given the importance of networks to music, this allows us to begin to reflect upon the way in which particular styles of music sometimes become associated with social status (e.g. 'black music', 'youth music' and the purported association between class and musical taste) and, indeed, the ways in which music might reflect and reproduce, but also help to combat, social divides and conflicts.

Finally, picking up on many of the themes of earlier chapters, Chapter 9 explores music's political aspect. Music is potentially political in many different ways. I begin with a discussion of the relative merits of the avant-garde for some political thinkers, before introducing the idea that music can generate, or at least contribute, to the generation of a political public sphere. From there, I argue both that music can serve as a political resource and that politics can serve as a musical resource. Music and politics are separate domains from this point of view, but they impinge upon and sometimes prove useful to one another. Returning to the idea of music worlds, the final section of the chapter suggests that some constitute 'alternative spaces' wherein alternative norms, values and identities are cultivated which have a political value.

It will be apparent from this menu of themes and issues that music as a form (or set of forms) of interaction – situated amongst others and mutually constitutive, with them, of the networked structure which is our social world – is connected to many other social domains which, as I will argue throughout the book, it both affects and is affected by. Music is economic and political. It impacts upon personal identity and also social divides, etc. This is why music is such an important and fascinating topic for sociological investigation.

Notes

1 All network analyses, both in the earlier book and this one, were performed using UCInet software (Borgatti et al. 2002).
2 This is not to suggest that we actively and consciously consent to them, or ever have, but rather that they entail mutual (intersubjective) expectations. If a convention exists, then actors (tacitly) expect certain behaviours from one another and expect that the other has certain expectations of them.