Special Issue

Blurred Boundaries: Music, Community and Identity

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The *Irish Journal of Anthropology* is the organ of the Anthropological Association of Ireland. As such, it aims to promote the discipline of anthropology on the island of Ireland, north and south. It seeks to provide coverage of Irish-related matters and of issues in general anthropology and to be of interest to anthropologists inside and outside academia, as well as to colleagues in a range of other disciplines, such as Archaeology, Cultural Studies, Development Studies, Ethnology and Folk Studies, Gaeilge, Irish Studies, and Sociology.

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Authors – biographical notes

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Rina Schiller is an ethnomusicologist (PhD 2005 QUB) who has carried out comparative research about traditional Irish music at a number of European locations, focusing specifically on East/West differences. Her MA research about different Irish musical traditions has led to a book publication, The Lambeg and the Bodhrán: Drums of Ireland (2001, QUB: Institute of Irish Studies). She is also an experienced traditional musician, and she participates in public performances of various other musical genres. She is currently an Honorary Research Fellow with QUB.

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Introduction

Jaime Rollins-McColgan

As a PhD student researching a topic that requires the straddling of a variety of subjects, I am often asked whether I hail from a primarily anthropological background or an ethnomusicalological one. The answer, to put it simply, is both. Both disciplines are remarkably similar in many ways and so it may seem that to insist on a distinction is perhaps pedantic, or at least a matter of semantics, especially to those who rarely have the opportunity to cross over. Still, for many of us, the boundary has been traversed countless times, even to the point at which the line is indistinguishable. My research on republican parading bands has led me to consider a myriad of methods, concepts and themes from various disciplines, and because of this I consider the questions I ask – as well as the frame of mind with which the answers are received – to be that much the richer.

The articles in this special edition issue were presented at the Anthropological Association of Ireland’s annual conference at Queen’s University Belfast in May 2009. The focus of the conference was the exploration between memory, identity and belonging in an interconnected world, with a special section of ethnomusicology panels concentrating on the relationship between music, community and identity.

Though the concepts of community and identity are often debated – both in their own right and as a combined force – the literature on community and identity (or even communal identity) with respect to music is somewhat more selective. However, that is not to say that the subject is neglected. John Blacking wrote that the ‘function of music is to enhance in some way the quality of individual experience and human relationships; its structures are reflections of patterns of human relations, and the value of a piece of music is inseparable from its value as an expression of human experience’ (Blacking 1995: 31). The link between music, community and identity is implied, but no less real. And as the following articles reveal, the ways in which community and identity are expressed through music and musical performance are as diverse as the participants themselves. The question then becomes: given the range of human expression and experience, how do we then begin to classify, describe or even analyse such difference? Especially when, as Mattern (1998) has pointed out, music can sometimes be the medium through which such differences and negotiations are debated and articulated?

It is almost taken for granted these days that music is in a distinctive position to offer a multitude of uses, possibilities and meanings. Its portability enables it to travel to the far reaches of the globe, while modality allows for the listener to interpret the rhythms and melodies for him or herself. Coupled with lyrics or text, music has the benefit of subtly – or unmistakably – communicating its messages in an easily accessible format that often passes for mere entertainment. It can be argued equally that music is made and played for the benefit and enjoyment of certain communities, or that conversely communities make the music that best represents them as a whole, in a political context or otherwise. I believe both to be true, sometimes simultaneously. Of course, the term ‘community’ can be a contested concept. Mayo has noted that the name community, while a ‘warmly persuasive word’, is a slippery term that generally focuses on two aspects: the sharing of a common territory and the sharing of a common interest (2000: 39). In this volume, the construction of community is observed in a variety of ways, and whether a community is linked by its cultural traditions or political opinions, as in the following papers by Raymond Casperly and Jaime Rollins-McColgan, or whether they are defined by their musical tastes and performances, as in the papers by Rina Schiller, David Murphy and Ivan Deasy, the ‘imagined communities’ brought together by sound and musical expression are still apparent.

In Casperly’s paper, we are taken into the world of Loyalist flute bands, and he illustrates for us the intricate network of social and cultural connections that are built upon the experiences of coming together to play music and participate in parades. Similarly, in my own research on Republican flute bands, I have discovered that, while they are comparable to their Loyalist equivalent in terms of social networking and cultural maintenance, the purpose and the aims of a Republican flute band are remarkably disparate. In his studies on music and Afghan identity and culture, Slobin has argued that music ‘may be one of those features of social interrelationship that reflect underlying patterns of ethnic boundary maintenance’ (1976: 1), and this could be argued for the case of Northern Ireland’s rich tradition in flute band parading. While Loyalist flute bands in Rathcoole view joining a band as a social prospect and an opportunity to learn about music-making, Republican band members use music and parading as a means of demonstrating political belief and solidarity. Several scholars have suggested that Northern Ireland’s Protestant and Catholic communities are better understood as ethnic groups, and this can be readily seen (and heard) in the music they create, the traditions they uphold and the reasons for which they parade.
Another example of music reaching beyond simply its artistic merits is found in Schiller's article, where she examines the concepts of tradition and nostalgia in the context of Irish traditional music sessions held abroad, specifically in Berlin. She points out that, though the sessions are often made up of musicians from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, there are common themes that run through the Irish traditional music genre. The commonality among the most prominent of these themes – homesickness or a longing for home – serves as a binding agent for the community of session musicians and creates a sense of place, both for those who wish to remember home and those who possess touristic interest. Schiller notes: 'In this way it becomes possible to create different images of place simultaneously by performing this musical genre within local communities, as it also serves to unify the community against cultural misrepresentations in the local media.' By recreating the image of a place (or one's homeland, in this case) in song and evoking the emotions and meanings felt individually and collectively, the sharing of this experience creates a mutual connection. This connection reinforces the group's collective memory of the place and maintains the community's sense of 'us' and a shared belonging, to one another and to their homeland.

Music often occupies a space of its own in everyday life, a space that many scholars – and musicians – have attempted to analyze and explain, to diagnose and categorize. Christopher Small asserts that it is not enough to ask what a piece of music means; we must 'ask the wider and more interesting question: What does it mean when this performance (of this work) takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants?' (Small 1998: 10). For Tia De Nora, music is 'implicated in every dimension of social agency' (2000: 17), and she too advocates careful examination of the interactions between composer and listener, and between performer and participant. These links are forged through common – some might say communal – experience, a powerful component in building the bonds of community. De Nora also points out what most musers on musical meaning have come to realize: 'At the level of the listening experience...music seems imbued with affect while, at the level of analysis, it seems perpetually capable of eluding attempts to specify just what kind of meaning music holds and just how it will affect its hearers' (De Nora 2000: 21). It is this question that Steve Coleman considers in his article on 'mobilized sound'. His investigation of the human relationship with music is explored through the concept of chronotypes to describe the representation of not only personhood and time, but the effect of musical interaction as an experience of audible time. The themes illuminated by Coleman here are not so different from those touched on elsewhere; the notion of memory enveloped and released in song, the threads of communal history strung together through music. Irish-language songs – or seán-nós – offer a fascinating glimpse of multiple worlds co-existing in the present, and Coleman's study teases out these worlds with analytical dexterity. Coleman's article proffers an insight into how the chronotypical relationship between personhood, time, music and image work together to form and inform human experience and expression, and ultimately how traditions are used to negotiate future relations – within a single community or between two or more communities.

A significant part of what brings a community together and maintains its ties is the effect of shared experience and the creation of its ideals. In Deasy's examination of social stigma and the construction of subcultures through punk rock, he employs an example of one of punk's revered icons: GG Allin. Even for a genre that was conceived around the notion of rebellion and nonconformity, Allin's performances pushed the boundaries of artistic expression. Allin's extreme tendencies towards violence, disturbance and sensationalism were the basis for his cult following, and the experiences he created within his public performances fulfilled a desire for those seeking something definitively alternative to mainstream popular music. Deasy quotes Willis to help clarify: 'by listening to music together and using it as a background to their lives, by expressing affiliation to a particular taste group, popular music becomes one of the principal means by which young people define themselves' (Willis 1990: 69). Allin's philosophy on life was expressed through his music, through his lyrics, and through his lifestyle. And for his fans, as Deasy concludes, social stigma and Allin's unfailing faith to himself and his music are requisite in providing the elements of attraction.

Similarly, David Murphy's fieldwork in Serbia focused on the theme of collective 'effervescence' in the black metal scene. Through the bands' use of what Murphy terms 'deviant stereotypes' and their manipulation of the media, the bands 'enhance [their] status whilst simultaneously creating and managing a particular aspect of identity and prestige deployed in antipathy to a prevailing stigma'. Murphy's own involvement in the black metal scene allows him a first-hand perspective on what might otherwise be judged as subversive, but when viewed from an insider's vantage point, these elements become expressive and experimental. Murphy's frank accounts of performances offer us a glimpse into the black metal community as he experienced it. He challenges the notion that art should be 'comfortable' and instead agrees with Sontag's view that 'real art has the capacity to make us nervous' (Sontag 1990: 8).

In Cormac Sheehan's paper, while not strictly about musical anthropology, he draws our attention to a subject that is not often reflected on. Sheehan reflects on Rice's (2003) statement that 'a deaf ear has been turned to the acoustic properties of environments', and believes that 'in the case of tinnitus, the lack of interest from anthropology has been deafening'. However,
Sheehan admits that tinnitus ‘presents a difficult theoretical model to comprehend; it is a sound or layers of sound without external acoustic stimuli, in effect it is a sound but not a sound’. Steven Feld has coined the phrase ‘acoustemology’ to ‘argue the potential of acoustic knowledge’; by doing so he has encouraged awareness of the effects of an environment’s sounds to better understand the way people hear the world (Feld 1996: 96–7). While Feld’s research is focused on sound as an element of our sensory input that should not – indeed, cannot – be ignored, he reasons that to try to exclude the impact of our sensory input from the way we understand human perception would be to leave out an important facet of our human characteristics. In this vein, Sheehan’s study into how sound is perceived has brought up some interesting questions, and his research fills a niche in acoustic anthropology.

Mattern writes: ‘Community represents a theoretical and practical means through which disparate individuals come to recognize and act upon common concerns and interests, negotiate differences, and assert themselves in public arenas’ (Mattern 1998: 5). For now, what we are focused upon here is the expression of this negotiation and assertion through the medium of music. Perhaps musical expression simply provides a portal through which to view fundamental elements of community and identity, but instead I choose to believe music to be a powerful force in the expression of our humanness, and ‘musicking’ strengthens those links that we forge in the making of our communities, of our identities. And if our identity is a constantly shifting representation of who we are, then music is an ideal means of expressing that identity because it too is never static. Slobin has noted that ‘music’s social and cultural role is always that of a shape-changer, if not trickster’ (Slobin 1976: 4). And music’s ability to possess whichever qualities the listener desires is what allows it its malleability. Mattern writes: ‘If music embodies common memories and meanings, then it is tied to public and objective social circumstances … This public, common quality gives music its communicative capacity, which, in turn, may support the development of community by enabling the sharing of experience’ (Mattern 1998: 17).

The boundaries that define who we are, and the cultural connections that we perform both in our music and in everyday life, are heard as subtle – or not so subtle – manifestations of our identity. As many have already noted, the ways in which we express ourselves – both communally and individually – are not becoming increasingly blurred or mute, but rather the opposite: more meticulous and a bit louder. Deafening, in fact.

References


(Endnotes)

1 See Anderson 1991 [1983].
The Fyfe and My Family: Flute Bands in Rathcoole Estate

Raymond Patrick Casserly

Flute bands in Northern Ireland have long been associated with many negative stereotypes. From supposed links to paramilitary organisations to overt statements of discrimination emanating from some tunes or banners, the widely-held public opinion on flute bands contends that they are negative, aggressive, politically-based relics from a previously paramilitary-dominated era of social divide. With all the political progress in mind we are forced to ask why these bands continue to maintain their high membership levels. This paper investigates how Protestant flute bands in Rathcoole attract and maintain new memberships by providing a social network to musicians.

The flute band tradition in Northern Ireland is one that inspires awe, respect and admiration from some quarters in Northern Ireland’s society. But there is also fear, embarrassment and ridicule from other quarters in Northern Ireland depending on the life experiences of the observer. According to Jarman, the parades within which these flute bands participate ‘and the associated visual displays have been a vibrant feature of political life in the North of Ireland for two hundred years. These displays have always flowered most powerfully at times of crises: is it any wonder they have continued to flourish over the past twenty-five years?’ (Jarman 1997: 79). Jarman’s assertion that the parades and their visual displays flourished during times of struggle and strife is supported by evidence from the many flute bands that were formed during some of the most troubling times of the conflict. For example, the Cloughfern Young Conquerors Flute Band was formed in 1973, the Shankill Protestant Boys Flute Band in 1980, the Regimental Flute Band of the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1969 and the Pride of the Hill Flute Band in 1985.

Bryan (2000), Kelly (1996) and Witherow (2006) argue that the importance of these musical performances is also based on the provision to the Protestant community of an opportunity to recall their own unique experiences as a community. However, with all the trauma and trouble that tends to surround a minority of certain parades in Northern Ireland annually, we are forced to ask how these parades and the bands that support them have managed to survive and prosper throughout the recent changing circumstances in Northern Ireland’s social and political environment. To answer these questions this paper will present an analysis of flute bands in the Rathcoole estate.

The Rathcoole estate, which is north of Belfast in Newtownabbey, has long been associated with some of the most negative features and prejudices emanating from the conflict between the two communities in Northern Ireland. What Rathcoole has also become known for amongst the Protestant band tradition is the provision of numerous Loyalist flute bands for the annual marching season. Although we cannot presume that every person from Rathcoole supports and participates in the Loyalist flute bands, this paper explores what these music groups can provide to their significantly large membership in terms of social networking and musical development. I hope to establish and develop a better understanding of why these groups continue to persevere and grow in light of an extremely poor media and public image for the past fifteen years.

The Field: Rathcoole Estate

Rathcoole estate was built in stages in the 1950s and 1960s to house many of those displaced by the demolition of inner-city housing in Belfast. The long-term development of Rathcoole estate was poorly maintained and the estate eventually sprawled ‘in an apparently unplanned confusion of architectural style between the sea and the higher ground’ (Jenkins 1982: 3). The estate later accommodated an unforeseen accumulated population of fourteen thousand people. Towards the end of the 1960s the conflict across Northern Ireland reinforced a sectarian divide between the communities. A prominent feature of the late 1960s and early 1970s was the massive movement of people into enclaves. Initially a large section of Rathcoole Estate, referred to as the ‘top end’ (Jenkins 1982: 3), provided accommodation for both Catholic and Protestant families who were moved to the estate from centrally-located areas in Belfast.

However, as intimidation and violence increased with more activity from the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the other developing Loyalist militias, Rathcoole, especially the top end, witnessed the mass exodus of its Catholic population who were then replaced by Protestants forced out from other high-tension and interface areas in Belfast. It was during this time of civil unrest that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was born in 1973 as a means of attempting to control the flow of families from any one part of Northern Ireland to another. With an apparent display of negligence and indifference to the civil unrest in Rathcoole by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, resource-starved authorities could do little but stand by and re-allocate housing on the basis of squatters becoming accepted as sitting tenants (Jenkins 1982).

Around this time of social disarray many young disaffected Protestant males became associated...
with prominent Loyalist flute bands in the estate. The most prominent flute band was and continues to be the Sons of Kai Flute Band, a group that formed in the early seventies. Since the seventies the Sons of Kai Flute Band also existed under other guises, such as The East Antrim Volunteers Flute Band, since the original Sons of Kai Flute Band was banned from participating in Orange Order parades in the 1970s for breaching protocol by failing to meet an Orange Order lodge in time for a parade. The group continued under a variety of different names until 2006 when the group reformed under the original name, The Sons of Kai Flute Band, Rathcoole.

Regarding the origins of the name of the group there are numerous debates at both the political level of Northern Ireland society and the local level, particularly during parade season, as to the meaning and significance of the group’s name. On one side of this debate a popular interpretation claims the name Kai is the acronym K.A.I meaning Kill All Irish. To some this appears as being all too similar to other anti-nationalist graffiti slogans and acronyms found in Belfast such as K.A.T. (Kill All Taigs). However, this association is contested by the current members of the group, who state that another more benign explanation is accepted by both locals and the members of the band as the sincere origins of the group’s name. In a recent interview a participant, named as Dave for anonymity, explained what he believes is the genuine background and meaning of the group’s name.

Ray: …Where does the Kai get its name from?
Dave: I tell you Ray I know what people think because I seen all the stories about it in the papers when Rooney called his son Kai.
Ray: He scored the winning goal for Rangers in one of the finals in the 60s and with the boys being Rangers crazy and all, you know?
Dave: He scored the winning goal for Rangers in one of the finals in the 60s and with the boys being Rangers crazy and all, you know?

The debate about the origins of the band’s name is that individual members such as Dave believe that overt statements such as Kill All Irish are not part of their ideology when it comes to participating in flute bands in Rathcoole Estate.

Although The Sons of Kai is the flute band most people will immediately associate with the estate, there are other flute bands placed near the area which attract a large membership from the Rathcoole estate. These are the Monkstown Young Citizen Volunteers; the Cloughfern Young Conquerors; Pride of the Hill, and the Hounds of Ulster. Other bands such as the Regimental Flute Band of the Ulster Volunteer Force, based in East Belfast, and the Shankill Protestant Boys, based in West Belfast, have historically filled some of their ranks with musicians from Rathcoole, as those who moved to Rathcoole in the 1970s attempted to ‘maintain strong ties with the areas they left behind’ by joining these bands (Jenkins 1982: 3).

The Bands: Youth Support and Cultural Education

Although Jenkins argues that the young people he worked with as a community youth-worker in Rathcoole in the 1970s had little or no pride in their locality, many of the young persons I have encountered through bands in Rathcoole estate claim with pride how they are from the ‘Coole’. Rathcoole is also claimed as ‘the third largest estate in Europe’ by Roy, a nineteen-year-old who has been a member of numerous bands in the area (29/01/2009). The different bands from the greater Rathcoole area provide the flautists, flag bearers and percussionists with options as to what type of flute band they wish to be a part of (i.e., whether they choose to participate in a Blood and Thunder flute band or a Melody/Militaristic flute band). Some of the participants mentioned in this paper, such as Roy, are in a number of different groups at any one time, while other participants move from band to band depending on their favour.

The research participants all claimed that bands are providing a service for young people in the area. Either through education in their own traditions or the provision of extra-curricular activities, the argument is made that bands are a valuable resource for young working-class children from the area. As one participant claimed, ‘A young person is taught their culture through the bands. When you’re young you don’t understand why but when you grow up through the bands you do’ (‘Tom’ 03/04/2009). This respondent, Tom, has been involved with flute bands for over eight years. Having grown up watching the July Twelfth celebrations with his father, Tom admired the spectacle of all the bands and decided that he wanted to join.

George, another participant in the research, advocated the social responsibility of the bands in Rathcoole and other working-class Protestant areas to the youth of the area. According to George, the bands provide a service to the local community by keeping
young people off the streets, occupied and away from drugs, joyriding and other illegal activities. The bands also give the youth a source of pride, as they become members of one of the central features of the parading tradition in their local area. As part of this membership, George argued, they develop self-respect and discipline through the requirements to maintain their uniform in good order, thus the concept of responsibility is bestowed upon them. However, in contrast to George’s argument, there are questions surrounding the level of underage drinking that occurs at the parades. As a result of this excessive level of binge-drinking by some youths, onlookers often question the value of the bands to young people when it comes to deferring anti-social or illegal behaviour.

The Bands: Musical Knowledge
Robert, another local bandsman who has been involved with various flute bands for over seventeen years supported many of Tom’s assessments. He found that involvement with bands was something I always wanted to do and I always wanted to know music and this was a way of doing it’ (‘Robert’ 10/04/2009). For Robert, ‘the different style of music’ and his increased knowledge of music are the major reasons behind his membership of a flute band in Rathcoole. For example, he claimed that ‘as far as music goes I got a better understanding of it. Not a whole lot into music but, um, but a broad range of, you know, how it works from the conductor down’ (‘Robert’ 10/04/2009). Robert’s reluctance to recognize his acquired knowledge as ‘musical knowledge’ comes from a widespread distinction between musicians and flute band members within the flute band tradition of Northern Ireland. Typically, a flautist or percussionist is only considered a musician by Loyalist band members if s/he can read Western musical notation, a task which Robert is yet to accomplish. Tom also argued that he has benefitted musically from his membership of a band, by stating, ‘until I joined a band I wasn’t musical at all and I used to hate it on the recorder at school and all. But now I’m developing new skills’ (‘Tom’ 03/04/2009). Like many other young boys joining bands, his first musical experience with the bands started with the percussion line, playing handheld instruments such as triangle and cymbals, and later the snare drum. Tom also remains reluctant to consider himself a musician due to his inability to read Western musical notation or any form of musical notation.

The Bands: Networking
As a result of involvement with bands Robert highlighted that ‘quite a few’ of his friends are members of the flute bands he participates in. Tom gave a more exact estimation by claiming that around twenty-five percent of his friends are members of flute bands. For both of these participants the flute bands also provide their members with business or employment possibilities, as Tom claims ‘you know yourself it’s happening here where younger lads have gotten jobs and apprenticeships throughout the bands. The band is the first place you go to for that kind of stuff’ (‘Tom’ 03/04/2009). Robert also argued that he has benefitted from the bands via the provision of work to his small business: ‘the band has given me a few jobs and stuff. Like, you can meet somebody like a builder and that, or I can get work cleaning up and stuff’.

As outlined in the statements given above the social networking provided by the bands is a valuable resource to its membership. But there are notable restrictions in place. For example, Tom argued that your membership in any one particular band can influence who you socialize with at events where there are other Loyalist flute bands performing. ‘If it is indoor’, says Tom, ‘then each band would sit in their own wee area and they would get up and talk to each other but more often they stick to their own’ (‘Tom’ 03/04/2009). These restrictions become even more apparent when flute bands are aligned to any one particular paramilitary organization, be it the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence Association or other Loyalist paramilitary organizations. During the height of the feud, the division between the warring factions was palpable and echoed throughout the community in Rathcoole. Either by choice or by providence, members of the community who were in certain flute bands found themselves immersed in or at least affected by the feud with tensions rising to the point that combat in the streets during parades became a far-too-common and unwanted sight. One notorious example of this extremely tense divide occurred between the differing factions of the Ulster Volunteer Force-aligned Shankill Protestant Boys Flute Band and the Ulster Defence Association-aligned Cloughfern Young Conquerors Flute Band in Derry/Londonderry city. During the parade the two groups broke into a massive mêlée where many of the bandsmen in both groups were injured.

As the infamous feud between the factions began to fizzle out with the closing down of Johnny ‘Mad Dog’ Adair’s control over the Shankill Road-based ‘C Company’, a number of efforts were set in place through the bands to help ease tensions in the community. As a part of these reconciliation efforts symbolic performances were organized between the differing flute bands across North and West Belfast. George described to me how these gestures of reconciliation took place. ‘See we would invite them down to play for us and when they did we would make sure everybody clapped and stuff. A couple of weeks later we would head up there and they’d be good to us too’ (‘George’ 25/09/2008).

Despite the progress that was achieved through these symbolic displays of musical solidarity Tom argued that the distinctions between the paramilitary-aligned bands are still present with a small number of band members in Rathcoole preferring to maintain the rivalry between the factions. Tom also believes
that this particular problem with the bands and their associations may be confined to Rathcoole perhaps where the bands aren’t as involved like in County Down and such’ (‘Tom’ 03/04/2009) the membership of the bands may not face the same degree of problems from paramilitary association. Contrary to Tom’s opinion, one is inclined to see this perceived divide between the bands as less significant in the day-to-day operations, practices and performances of the bands. Evidence to support this is found by analysing the social circles that members of the bands engage with. During my research experiences in Rathcoole I encountered numerous examples of senior bandsmen who are members of bands associated with one faction and yet hold close friendships with people from bands associated with another faction.

We may presume that the question of a band’s paramilitary alignment relates back to the Nationalist/Unionist, Republican/Loyalist conflict when many of the bands originally formed. However, when a new flute band is formed in Rathcoole estate the question of paramilitary alignment or association can also become apparent for a small number of the participants. For example, four years ago a new group was formed, The Hounds of Ulster. Originally named as the Colonel Sauderson Corps of Drums this group based its practices in an infamous venue in Rathcoole, a venue often linked with the Ulster Defence Association during the height of the conflict. Initially, this new flute band was founded by members from another Ulster Defence Association-aligned flute band and other non-aligned flute bands with the aim of experimenting with new types of tunes and drumming styles for flute bands. This new flute band tried to achieve these aims by hiring outside musical expertise for the task. Paul, one of the original music tutors, had advised the group to change the practice venue to a more accessible one in order to make the new band appear more welcoming to incoming members. These concerns were also later echoed by Dave in a recent interview:

See, when they started I wasn’t with them. But I knew of them. I knew they were practising down at the clubhouse. And that’s a UDA clubhouse … where they were practising would have caused difficulty for some. I think that’s why they changed their venue … (‘Dave’ 17/02/2010)

Paul, who holds extensive experience as a music tutor for flute bands in Northern Ireland, also recommended to the group a review of the band’s first logo as it was regarded as reminiscent of a paramilitary insignia. After much discussion amongst the group and consultation with a prominent Unionist politician the band changed its name, logo and practice venue to a more accessible location in order to proactively open its membership to all people. This move was to prove hugely successful, as the group started to take in membership from all backgrounds from the immediate community and from outside.

This evidence suggests that the association with paramilitaries appears to be becoming an embarrassment amongst some of the membership of the flute bands, as many view their musical experiences as a-political. This view however, should not be confused with a loss of pride in their background, an abandonment of the principles of Unionism, or a retrospective disagreement with the efforts of Loyalist paramilitaries during the height of the conflict. Nor should it be viewed as a desertion of the preservation of a Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist identity. It is more likely explained as an attempt by the band members to make the appreciation of this music culture as non-controversial and a-political as possible. For example, Tom explains how:

Politics only comes in when a parade or something is being challenged. And then if people are going out for a parade or a competition in the Shankill, or in East Belfast, or somewhere that’s ninety-nine or ninety-five per cent Protestant every Saturday night, in April or May, then politics doesn’t come into it. June/July time when the WhiteRock comes into it and you can’t walk down, then culture and politics comes into it. (‘Tom’ 03/04/2009)

**Changing Directions**

Some of those involved with the bands appear content to maintain their tradition as it currently stands. As long as they can participate with their band and play music on parade, especially for popular marches like the annual Mini Twelfth/Somme Commemoration in East Belfast, they see no reason to make dramatic alterations to how bands perform, what they perform and how they are organized. However, there is another rising group of musicians within the Rathcoole estate and wider flute band tradition. The recent addition to the flute band scene in Rathcoole estate comes in the form of the earlier-mentioned non-marching flute band that seeks to allow its members to explore their musical experiences on a number of atypical platforms. The Hounds of Ulster are an ambitious group of people who are eager to change the common negative views regarding flute bands in Rathcoole and the wider Protestant working class community. Through their own efforts they are ‘the site of a new struggle to impose legitimate principles of group construction’ (Bryan 2000: 16).

Those who operate in The Hounds of Ulster with the aim of changing the public perception of flute bands refer constantly to a certain and necessary degree of caution, for fear of criticism. However, in reality many bold steps have been taken and continue to be taken, such as flute bands like the Hounds of Ulster travelling to Ennis, County Clare, to perform...
at the international traditional Irish music festival, An Fleadh Nua in May 2008 and again in May 2009. Few participants in this research have found this action to be in significant conflict with the flute band tradition in Rathcoole. Nor did these participants find objection to The Hounds of Ulster performing for the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, in Clontarf in September 2009. Instead many participants explained how they perceive such actions as ambassadorial in its composure. As Bryan notes: ‘The continuities of form that undoubtedly exist through time cannot be assumed to reflect unchanging social relationships. Rather, they reflect the ability of ritual and its symbolic patterns to be used and re-used within a variety of changing power relationships’ (Bryan 2000: 181).

Thus a flute band predominantly composed of Protestant males from Rathcoole estate travelling to Ennis to perform in front of a largely Irish audience did not drastically affect the band members’ understanding of these ‘continuities of form’ that have helped shape their music tradition. Instead, the previously presumed unchanging negative attitudes towards such efforts were subsumed by an overwhelming effort by the group, and their audience, to find a common ground through the a-political appreciation of music.

In conclusion, bands in Rathcoole estate provide opportunities to their memberships. Through the provision of after-school activities, cultural education and the development of musical understanding, bands are regarded by members as beneficial to the personal development of youths in the area. Bands are also deemed as central for certain members in providing them with a social network. Through the bands’ practices and performances members can interact with one another and in certain cases pass on knowledge of employment prospects. However, there is concern amongst some members that paramilitary alignment can affect relations with members from other bands. Lastly, innovative Rathcoole bands such as the Hounds of Ulster provide members with an opportunity to perform their music on new platforms and in front of new audiences in an attempt to break down the negative stereotype commonly held against the Protestant flute band tradition in Northern Ireland.

References


(Endnotes)
1 The reference is to Wayne Rooney, the Manchester United star footballer
2 The term Blood and Thunder refers to the blood on the hands of the bass drummer, and the thunder refers to the sound the drum creates. This type of band has its own distinctive style of drumming.
3 A Melody/Militaristic band is one that plays in the style of a British regimental marching band.
4 The Whiterock Parade is an annual parade that is a source of great tension between the communities in Belfast.
Music as a Form of Political Sport

J. Rollins-McColgan

The atmosphere was a strange mix of celebration and muted solemnity as the drum roll cut through the noise of the crowds that lined the Falls Road. The band, called to attention by the lead drummer, began to march. Other bands, waiting on side streets, fell in line amongst the other parade participants, including ex-prisoner groups, posters of the signatories of the Irish Proclamation, people dressed as republicans from specific periods in history, and relatives of those who were killed in the Troubles. Many of the latter carried photos and memorial wreaths in green, white and orange. It was this element of the parade – commemoration – that brought gravity to the occasion: with the celebration of historical feats came the remembrance of the inevitable tragedies suffered along the way. The songs played by the bands echoed the visual display: James Connolly, Joe McDonnell, and Boys of the Old Brigade dominated the repertoire. No one sang out loud, but through the crowd one could see several people mouthing the lyrics. The Irish anthem, Amhrán na bhFiann, was reserved for the conclusion of the speech – given by Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams – and the closing of the event at Milltown Cemetery, where two helicopters hovered in the sky.  

In the above description of the Belfast Falls Road Easter parade, a few key elements stand out that are unique to republican parading: the unusual mix of celebration and remembrance, the music played by participating parading bands, the variety of parade participants, and the culmination of the event – a political speech followed by the Irish national anthem – set in a graveyard. While these elements are standard at most republican parades, there remains little academic analysis of the processes involved in republican parading and its music. The annual Easter parades in Belfast began in 1926 and, over the years, they have come to signify several elements of nationalist and republican culture in Northern Ireland. They provide a medium for remembrance, an occasion to pay tribute to republican heroes of the past, and an opportunity for participants to express themselves as nationalists – and republicans – in their own territory, especially through music. Though there are many complex issues to consider, in this paper I will focus on one particular facet of the Easter republican parades, that of the practice of political activism – or, as some might call it, political resistance – through music-making. I have taken as the basis of my research for this paper the study of what Fischlin describes: ‘Sound as dissident practice, commentary, critique. Sound as rebellion, resistance, and revolution. Sound as the base element in the alchemy that enables human expression. Sound as possibility, potential, power. Sound as the contradiction of silence. Musicking as the contradiction of silencing, of being silenced’ (Fischlin 2003: 10). I focus particularly on music as a means of not only bringing people together, but as an expressive force of those people’s beliefs, opinions, and goals.

Seamus Dunn points out: ‘In Ireland, in particular, because the state itself is contested, and because the actions of nationalists are often treated as inherently transgressive, such events [commemoration parades] have both a symbolic emotional significance and an emotional transformative impact on the public imagination’ (2000: 130). Though Dunn is referring to the Bloody Sunday commemorations in Derry, his statement is true for all nationalist commemorations. Emotion is often inherent in musical practice, though it may be difficult to mark, but the range of the rebel music genre conveys a spectrum of emotion: from hate to anger to respect to love of one’s country. The songs speak of loyalty, of courage, of dedication and of hero-martyrs. It is the conviction with which this emotion is communicated that offers strength and meaning to all republican parades, but particularly to the Easter commemorations, and it is this, I argue, that bestows music with a motivating force within republican parading and politicking.

The majority of rebel songs played today were composed during and after the height of the Troubles, when the IRA was once more gathering strength, as direct law and internment were introduced at the end of the O’Neill era. Bardon writes: in ‘less than two years Northern Ireland moved from a promising period of cooperation to violence so intense that in news coverage across the world it vied with reports of the Vietnam War’ (Bardon 1992: 623). Out of this turbulent period, the people found a voice for their frustrations, fear and anger through song. In the 1960s, the Easter parades became more militant in nature and they set a pattern for Easter commemorations to follow (Jarman and Bryan 2000: 107). With Northern Ireland’s civil rights movement emerging in 1968, parading became about the right to be seen, heard, and the right to march. Jarman and Bryan write that ‘parades have often served as a surrogate for low level warfare and, with the arrival of the ceasefire in 1994, the issue of parades became a prominent and highly visible means of displaying and mobilising behind traditional political demands in an alternative site of conflict. In 1995 the Troubles continued, to the sound of the beating drum and marching feet’ (1996: 32). In this respect, republican rebel music uses specific rhetorical devices to persuade and stimulate the listener; they are techniques used with the intention of maximizing the impact these songs have on their audience. In this paper, however, I
will only briefly explain these techniques here.\(^5\)

From a political perspective, rebel music can be used as a motivational catalyst to rally community support. The songs carry messages that reflect certain political opinions and objectives, such as views on decommissioning or a united Ireland. The song ‘Go On Home’\(^6\) is an example of the strong resentment against the British presence in the North:

> We’re not British, we’re not Saxon, we’re not English
> We’re Irish and proud we are to be
> So [stuff] your Union Jack, we want our country back
> We want to see old Ireland free once more

The lyrics reinforce the singer’s (and the audience’s) national identity while speaking for the collective by use of the pronoun ‘we’. It emphasizes the view that their country has been stolen away from them, then unequivocally asserts a common desire: ‘we want to see old Ireland free once more’. In ‘A Nation Once Again’,\(^8\) the singer dreams of freedom, after reading of the ‘ancient freemen’ of Greece and Rome:

> And then I prayed I yet might see
> Our fetters rent in twain
> And Ireland, long a province, be
> A nation once again!

The song alludes to the country’s lack of nationhood as an incomplete province and projects the image of the country in shackles. The song’s composer, Thomas Davis, was a great believer in music as a political force and wrote that ‘music is the first faculty of the Irish … The use of this faculty and this power, publicly and constantly, to keep up their spirits, refine their tastes, warm their courage, increase their union, and renew their zeal, is the duty of every patriot’ (quoted in Zimmerman 1966: 75). Though written in 1843, well before partition, it remains a popular song played by both rebel bands, ballad groups and parading bands.

Ballads honouring the ‘martyred hero’ are also very popular, as they offer the comfort of remembrance, especially to the families of volunteers. McCann defines a hero in this context as someone ‘whose death has been a direct consequence of his participation in the Irish national struggle … [and] the ratio of songs to heroes is greater than one to one.’ (McCann 1985: 204). Zimmerman has also written of the hero-martyr, and noted that this type of hero is given a martyr’s qualities; their ‘only avowed “crime” is patriotism’ (Zimmerman 1966: 66). Hunger strikers fall into this category for republicans, as do other IRA volunteers and sympathizers. The songs venerate the volunteers as ‘true’ or ‘brave sons of Ireland’? The lyrics gloss over any potential negative qualities and emphasize those characteristics which are seen as courageous or heroic, as in the song ‘Sean South of Garryowen’. It tells the story of Sean South and Fergal O’Hanlon who, in 1956, planted a bomb near the Brookeborough RUC\(^10\) Barracks. The bomb failed to detonate, the men were fired upon, and died of their wounds:

> And as they marched along the streets up to the barrack doors
> They scorned the danger they might face, their death that lay in store
> They were fighting for Ireland’s cause to claim their very own
> And the foremost of that gallant band was South, from Garryowen

Despite being about a failed mission, it is a popular song that is widely played. Perhaps the popularity comes from the jaunty, fast-paced melody and well-fitting rhymes, or perhaps it is popular *because* the men failed and died – apparently fearlessly – in the process.

Another type of song relates the tragedies and injustices suffered during the Troubles. These songs remind republicans what their struggle and hardship has been for and teaches younger generations – from a republican point of view – about the history of struggle and oppression. Many of these songs were composed about victims and tragic events of the Troubles. These songs may also be about a person who was killed as a result of the Troubles, but who was not necessarily involved directly, such as in the song ‘Aidan McAnespie’:

> It was on a Sunday evening, the sun shone in the sky
> As he made his way to the Gaelic ground, never thinking he was going to die
> But as he crossed the checkpoint the sound of gunfire came
> The news spread through the border town, “Aidan McAnespie was slain”
> Oh why did you do it? Have you not the guts to say?
> You say it was an accident, or even a ricochet
> But like Loughgall and Gibraltar, your lies are well renowned
> For you murdered Aidan McAnespie on his way to the Gaelic ground

The composer clearly believes the gunshot was not an accident, and likens the incident to the disasters of the Loughgall attack and the Gibraltar killings\(^11\) before concluding that the claim of an accidental gunshot is a lie. The singer requests an answer, and suggests the truth is hiding behind cowardice. The facts surrounding Aidan McAnespie’s death have always been cloudy. The soldier who fired the gun claimed it was an accidental misfire, and the initial charge of manslaughter was dropped. The family have never been certain, believing a coincidence improbable. In 2009, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Shaun Woodward, released a statement of regret to the McAnespie family, twenty-
one year after his death. Though the statement has been welcomed, the mystery of the accidental fatal ricochet remains.

Though the bands play the music without its accompanying lyrics, moving lips can quite clearly be seen amongst the crowd at commemoration parades, and band repertoires spring primarily from a supply of rebel songs that grows yearly, all with associated lyrics. And though a tune made into a marching melody with drums and flutes may trigger feelings of excitement and enthusiasm in certain cultural circles, in this case, at least in part, it is the added knowledge of the story and memories behind the music that infuses it with the passion it does. In a community that shares a history that has been distilled through generations of unrest and division, the music informs listeners that history is still very much alive and kicking and offers a shared experience that reinforces imagined community. As Eyerman and Jamison (1998: 173) have put it: ‘Music can embody the sense of community, a type of experience and identity pointing beyond the walls of the self, which has become the central locus of modern experience and commitment. Such community may well be “imagined,” but since it affects identity, it is no less real for that’. Viewed from both angles, music supports the community by reaffirming identity, history, and memory; likewise, the community sustains the music by infusing it with emotion and using it to communicate a broader opinion on politics, their struggles, tragedy, and culture. This has been a trend in certain musical circles in Ireland for more than two centuries. In 1843, the newspaper The Nation wrote: ‘We furnish political songs to stimulate flagging zeal, or create it where it does not exist’ (quoted in Zimmerman 1966: 75). Rebel music can also, of course, be used in negative ways; for example, to antagonize, to mark boundary and difference, and to divide. However, even when used for these reasons, the effect is still the same: the feeling of belonging is enhanced, if only for the simple reason of defining who does not belong.

Regardless of the expected or unexpected outcomes of the employment of rebel music or its desired consequences, the fact still remains that it is a powerful means of strengthening the feeling of community among republicans. Anderson, in musing on the effect of music in binding an imagined community, wrote that ‘[s]inging provides occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realisation of the imagined community … Nothing connects us all but imagined sound’ (Anderson 1991: 145). I might add that it is not simply imagined sound that connects us, but an imagined ideal that is portrayed through sound that gives it its attraction and desirability. When used in conjunction with a political movement, music becomes a powerful method of unifying and motivating people – especially young people – to action. There is much to be said of how the occasion of performance adds to the experience of musicking, both as a participant and an audience member, but here I am focusing mainly on the lyrical content of the songs.

Republican bands in Northern Ireland are predominantly born of the community at the grassroots level. Their membership is often based within a particular locality, which the band then represents at commemorative occasions. Often the band is named for a local IRA volunteer or republican martyr, its members learn and play the songs written about that volunteer or about local events or stories. Young people, upon seeing the band march at commemorations or local parades, are encouraged to join, often through older family and friends who are already band members. They view joining a band as a social outlet coupled with a chance to participate in the cause of the republican movement. However, one member pointed out that although ‘politics [may not] have been the main reason for joining … once in the band it creates opportunities to politicalize and develop young people’s interest in the republican struggle’ (S., in interview, 09/08). Bands remain a popular entry point for younger members of the republican community to become involved in politics, as most bands have a membership of at least half under the age of twenty-five. And being part of a band, as one bandleader put it, ‘gets them into politics, gives [youth] a focus, a positive focus’ (B., in interview, 09/07). Many band members have, in recent years, gone on to join Sinn Féin or its youth wing, Ógra Sinn Féin. Being a part of the political movement and being a part of a republican band is so synonymous that band practices are sometimes cancelled in favour of attending a politician’s talk or a local public meeting. According to a member of Sinn Féin, ‘[t]he bands bring colour, discipline and music to commemorations. A flute band can be a very important platform for young republicans or not so young [to] express their republicanism in a talented, disciplined and open manner. The bands at times can be the first interaction in which young people are exposed to republicanism and from this interaction they can develop into becoming political activists and broaden and deepen their involvement in republicanism and the struggle’ (S., in interview, 09/08).

Republican commemorations in Northern Ireland perform several functions. They provide a forum for remembrance of deceased relatives and friends, a display of communal support (both for the political community and the local community), an opportunity for the telling or retelling of history and, most importantly, they connect the past with the present to keep alive the collective memory of historical events. In light of the republican movement, commemorations are used to contextualize past objectives with current political actions and ambitions. This not only lends them legitimacy but maintains the illusion of continuity and authenticity. Commemorations also offer an opportunity to bring people together to hear the speeches of politicians or other important members of the movement. It is a chance to reiterate the goals of the party and its achievements to date while
reminding the people of how far they, as republicans, have come politically. The bands’ role in these events is manifold: they serve to impart colour, noise, and an air of formality to the occasion. Their presence not only loudly tells the neighbours that a commemoration is taking place, but everything about them – from the flags they carry to the uniforms they wear to the songs they play – is intended to bestow a sense of pride in the culture of republicanism. Though commemorations can perhaps only loosely be referred to as a ritual event, Beezley, Martin and French explain how and why ritual events such as commemorations work so effectively:

Ritual relates the individual to the collective by joining the emotional to the ideological. From an elite perspective, then, ritual works by fusing the positive emotions of symbols and events with social and moral demands on the subject. In other words, social norms and values acquire greater force by being invested with emotion while basic emotions are ennobled through association with social values (Beezley, Martin and French, 1994: xv–xvi).

As these commemorations are generally based on tragic events involving the deaths of friends and family in the name of patriotic pride, the emotions already inherent at commemorations become fodder for motivated action. While there is not enough space in this paper to further explore the relationship between ritual, community and emotion, I believe it is important to point out that emotion and the power of ritual performance adds greatly to the experience of community, imagined or otherwise. Though there is no entity or receptacle that stores communal feeling, as Milton (2005) has pointed out, emotions can be contagious and what we feel and express as individuals can – and often does – affect the moods of others. And when emotion is channelled via the expressive medium of music and packaged in a ritual performance, the possibility of turning political opinion into activism becomes a very real probability. So, while scholars of music and emotion make an important point about how emotions we feel for a particular piece can be experienced through the associations made with that music, in this case, it is the lyrics that reveal certain underlying emotions behind the music. The songs tell stories – of tragedy, of strife and hardship, of sadness, loss, anger, resentment and determination – that represent the history described by the republican community.

There is a multitude of persuasive methods at the disposal of politicians and political activists, but while political speeches may be moving, and while photographs or video clips may be impressive, they remain contained in text or in image unless memorized or copied. Music is a portable form of memory, and like most forms of memory, it can be manipulated and adapted easily, which makes it ideal to use in conjunction with a political agenda. Through the medium of music, musicians can voice political opinions or ideals that may be used directly or indirectly by activists agitating for political reform. Lipsitz writes that ‘[i]n Africa … musicians have been able to participate in politics through nationalism – through music that calls for anti-colonial liberation, that rebukes corrupt authorities, or that serves as a focus for reformers and revolutionaries in their countries’ (Lipsitz 1994: 138). By bringing music to the streets – and also often to sites of historical significance – republican bands are in a position to remind those around them – through song, through the symbols they bear and the flags they carry, even the language they use – what republicanism stands for and what remains important to the goals of the movement. Through music, bands educate and reinforce messages stemming from a specific cultural past, which in turn is utilized as a foundation for political platforms to persuade and influence public opinion and rally support for the republican movement.

The concept of using music as a means to a political end is by no means a new one, nor does it pertain to Western society alone. However, it is one that is often overlooked in its potential, perhaps because it is a medium usually confined to the realm of entertainment. Music can be used for so much more, as I have shown here. Brown suggests that perhaps we are witnessing the diminishing role of political parties as socialising agents and informational pipelines which guide both the formation of attitudes as well as the influence of political behaviour for members of mass society (Brown 2008: 3). And as we settle into the age of the iPod and downloadable media, music will continue to be used to articulate and communicate that which cannot be effectively said by any other means. Lipsitz writes: ‘… because popular music functions as a node in a network of international capital, it sometimes offers subordinate populations opportunities to escape the limits of their own societies, to find new audiences and allies by appealing to an international market and embarrassing local authorities by exposing them to international censure and ridicule’ (Lipsitz 1994: 138). It is in this way that the bands are communicating their political ideals, by remembering through musical history a past that has every relevance to the present. One bandleader put it to me this way, when I asked him if he found commemorative events and their songs too despairing:

They may be sad, but they’re also probably motivating for some people, because I mean a lot of them are about heroics, the gallantry of people I suppose who really stepped up to the mark and … given their lives. There’s probably no greater sacrifice than someone giving their life for their country. When you view that sort of aspect you have to look at it and say well … are they just sad songs? I know at times when we’d be marching and we’d be playing
a wee tune, [and] the words would be going through your head as you’re playing it. And … you can feel yourself going, ah, here, this is what they’ve done and we’re still here (B., in interview, 09/07).

The function of republican bands is not to perform to a particular musical standard, nor is it to engage in healthy competition or even to offer an opportunity to learn an instrument. While all these factors may be to some extent true, the principal role that the bands fulfil is that of a cultural mnemonic, one that is used in the politics of the republican movement to gain support and legitimacy, and it carries with it explicit messages about the past that will ultimately carry into the future.

References

Notes
1 James Connolly participated as a leader in the 1916 Uprising. Joe McDonnell was the fifth person to die on hunger strike in Long Kesh prison in 1981, and Boys of the Old Brigade is set at Easter time as a father recalls to his son his time spent in the IRA.
2 This description was taken from my field notes from April 2009.
3 ‘Hero-martyrs’ is the term coined by McCann (1985) to describe those individuals venerated in republican ballads.
4 The O’Neill era occurred from 1963 to 1972. When Terence O’Neill – the first Northern Ireland prime minister to make his main goal reconciliation (Bardon 1992: 622) – attempted to reform the province, he quickly lost support as he failed to satisfy either side.
5 For more on the techniques of persuasion used in rebel music, see Rollins 2006.
6 Compiled by Tommy Skelly.
7 The original lyrics read: ‘So fuck your Union Jack’.
8 Compiled by Thomas Osbourne Davis.
9 ‘The Ballad of Pearse Jordan’; ‘James Connolly’.
10 Royal Ulster Constabulary.
In May 1987, eight IRA men planted a digger loaded with a bomb near the RUC barracks in Loughgall, Co. Armagh. They were fired upon by the SAS and all eight, plus a civilian caught in the crossfire, were killed. In Gibraltar in March 1988, three unarmed IRA volunteers were shot on a public street by undercover SAS soldiers, who claimed the three were planting a bomb.


In a survey I conducted in 2009 of sixty-six band members, thirty-three recorded their age as twenty-five or younger.

See also Bell (1992) and Turner (1969) for theories on ritual and community; Whitehouse (2005) for ideas on ritual and emotion; Bryan, Fraser and Dunn (1995) and Bryan (2000) for the concept of ritual in the context of Orange parades in Northern Ireland.

Creating culture-specific meanings of Irish music: The musicians have lived in Berlin since the 1970s. The Spree is the main river running through Berlin. Inside the CD cover is an explanation of the double meaning of the expression 'On the Spree', for the benefit of German audiences.
Monstertunes for Sally’s Garden: Transforming images of place through musical performance

Rina Schiller

Introduction

The genre of ‘traditional Irish music’ is possibly unique in that its present-day performances integrate a number of quite paradoxical aspects. For a start, in their nowadays community use they are very much a contemporary phenomenon, but they largely use genuinely traditional repertoire, predominantly from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Further, they integrate stylistically quite varied musical material from different periods, but they are nevertheless widely – and also internationally – regarded as ‘one genre’. In addition, this music can be claimed in Ireland as a ‘national genre’, but its performances are nevertheless serving at widely different international locations as a means for crossing national boundaries and constructing local musical communities. These images of community are carried by ambiguous notions of boundaries, and in performance events at different international locations the music is just as well used for constructing boundaries as for crossing boundaries. This paper will take a look at how these seemingly paradoxical aims are achieved.

At some not too clearly definable time in the second half of the last century traditional Irish music moved into the community context of the pub session performance. Its popularization at this time has often been ascribed to the musical activities of Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Chualann, although a valid point can be made that the popularisation of the music was carried by the many community musicians who, by their taking up of session performances, made this popularization of the music possible.

No doubt the new style of performance practice of playing together in larger groups of compatible instruments will have made the music aesthetically more attractive to larger sections of the population, but it would be foolish to overlook the at least equally important social aspect of the new performance practice addressing some very vital needs of community building in twentieth-century western societies with their dominant focus on technology, which often are perceived by individuals as lacking human interactions and feelings of community. Getting together to play some music – even with the freedom of minute improvisations – provides all participants with a powerful tool to celebrate community. It does this in a way that allows for culturally flexible meanings and for accommodating ambiguities that resemble the multi-layered meanings transmitted in rituals.

I will provide some ethnographic examples to illustrate these points I have just raised, but a brief introduction of my methodology and motivation seems a good idea at this point. My PhD research was carried out at the beginning of this century about Irish music in Berlin – in the east and west of the city, on both sides of the former East/West border – and for this research I could draw advantageously on my multicultural personal background and on connections with the long-term resident Irish musicians in Berlin. This could have made an interesting study in itself, but the additional advantage I brought to the project was that I was thoroughly familiar with the comparative performance contexts and community events taking place at home in Ireland from my many years of participating in community session performances. This cultural double-consciousness made it possible for me to look at community activities and image constructions from different vantage points. This in turn brought out some interesting perspectives on present-day performances of Irish music, about which I have since then carried out some additional observations at other European locations on both sides of the former East/West division.

Musical and Extra-Musical Expectations of Performance and Session Etiquette

One way of finding out what makes this type of music so conducive to travel to many different countries of this world since the latter half of the twentieth century is to look at what associated concepts of performance behaviour travel with the music and transfer to different cultural contexts, which one remain culture-specific. Playing styles, repertoires and instrumentation regarded as suitable for playing this genre; seem to travel easily with this music to the most diverse cultural contexts, and in many places the local musicians go through a considerable effort to obtain training, in the form of music lessons from resident Irish musicians, Irish music summer schools and workshops. In some places, particularly in Scandinavian countries, this effort even extends to learning to sing traditional Irish songs with a specific regional Irish accent. In general, it can be said, however, that musicological genre rules have been observed to have travelled easily to different cultural contexts.

As far as expectations of appropriate session behaviour are concerned, the comparison between European performance contexts and the Irish home context is slightly more complicated. More obvious aspects – like choosing a circular arrangement as the most accommodating formation for hearing each other in performance – also appear to be travelling widely with the music, and this seems to indicate that this
type of music addresses needs for community musical communications that are widely appreciated in many different cultures.

There are, however, socio-cultural concepts that sometimes travel with the music, but indeed sometimes do not, and this makes them suited for investigations of creations of culture-specific meanings. Whether such concepts travel seems to depend on whether their meaning can transfer to the new cultural context or not. An example of the latter would be the arbitrary ascription within Irish home contexts to see the guitar as ‘not a traditional instrument’ (implying that it is ‘foreign’). Such arbitrary ascriptions of political meanings to musical instruments are of course context dependent, but Martin Stokes (1994: 9–10) has vividly described how belief in such ideologies can politicize music-making in Northern Ireland and lead to considerable violence in defending them. However, such extra-musical meanings do not make sense at European locations, because Irish musicians can be seen to use the guitar for this genre, and therefore they tend not to transfer with the music.

Another extra-musical ascription relates to what is conceptualized within different contexts as ‘traditional’, ‘Irish’, or ‘non-Irish’. In Ireland, sessions are usually expected to consist mostly of ‘Irish traditional material’. However, the concept is somewhat flexible. Traditional eastern European tunes that were introduced by the well-known – but in this respect somewhat unusual – Irish musician Andy Irvine into his recordings of Irish repertoire, may be accepted as ‘Irish’ in a session event because of these cultural associations (as has happened indeed in the past with tunes from various European locations), but an unfamiliar tune of non-Irish origin may be rejected by the same session musicians as ‘not traditional’, although it is in fact only ‘non-Irish’ and lacking these perceived cultural associations. One such exchange took place, for instance, at a local session in Belfast, where a visiting musician played a traditional Swedish tune, and some punters in the audience complained that this was not part of ‘traditional music’. They did not know this tune, therefore it was not ‘traditional’.

So one could say that it is not the ‘traditionality’ per se of the repertoire that primarily matters, but its relations to cultural associations and interpretations – in other words, what Fintan Vallesy (2008) has termed ‘Traditional’ Irish music, spelled with a capital ‘T’. In this respect the musical ‘genre’ fits exactly what Malcolm Chapman (1992, 1994) has described in relation to the construction of ‘the Celtic’: the contents can change over time, but the categories remain the same.

Given these cultural connotations of what is considered ‘traditional’, I decided to take a closer look at how these concepts transfer to different cultural contexts. In Germany, where I carried out my PhD research, traditional Irish music is marketed as a separate music category, not to be included in music shops in the bin of ‘world music’, and it has its own audience. This aspect has also been observed by Desi Wilkinson (1999: 283), who uses it for a comparison between conceptualizations about Irish music in Brittany and in Germany. It is a fair point, for audiences play certainly an important part in the construction of extra-musical concepts. One of the consequences of this conceptualization about musical ‘categories’ is that the repertoires played during my research at local community sessions in Germany closely resembled the selections of equivalent performances in Ireland, with some minor local variations.

At other European locations, however, the situation was quite different. At Prague, for instance, where I carried out some comparative research on Irish music in 2007, and in St. Petersburg, from where a friend sent me some ethnographic recordings in 2006 for this analysis, community musicians freely mix traditional repertoires from various countries – including their own. A look at the respective marketing strategies for Irish music provides an explanation: within these cultural contexts traditional Irish music is marketed as a component of the wider category of ‘world music’.

There was, of course, a very real possibility that within these contexts there existed a different understanding of what is ‘traditional’, for instance in relation to historical musical developments in different countries. However, at least in Prague some contemporary folk-style songwriter material was included in the performances, and this points to the conclusion that musical categories in different cultural contexts are just constructed differently, not in agreement with – or in opposition to – what may be termed ‘traditional’ material in its literal sense.

**Song Repertoires and Images of Place in Community Music-Making**

Since instrumental Irish music caters for a multiplicity of individually and culturally different interpretations, I have also paid some attention to the song material performed at community events in Berlin, and in particular to singer-songwriter material reflecting on their own images of place. Details of these are discussed in Schiller 2004: 208–220, and their analysis brought out some interesting discoveries. To obtain a comparative angle on the musical construction of images of ‘home’, I compared singer/songwriter reflections in Berlin from long-term resident Irish musicians and American musicians. The surprising results were that the American musicians had written a variety of songs expressing their feelings and experiences in their new adopted home, and judging from their musical expressions they seemed to feel totally at ease integrating ‘past roots’ (musical style) with perceptions of their new home (song texts).

Rather different was the situation as regards musical reflections from the Irish community in
Berlin. Any songs reflecting images of ‘home’ in their repertoire were concerned with the topic of leaving Ireland and how to return some day. The topic of ‘home’ seems indeed to occupy a special place in Irish music that cannot be explained by socio-economical reasons. William Williams, who has studied images of the Irish in American popular song lyrics during the period of 1800 to 1920, found the Irish in their songs more longing for ‘home’ than, for instance, German immigrants (Williams 1996: 102), and the topic of emigration to be almost totally lacking in songs of Scottish immigrants (ibid.: 79).

At this point it seems a good idea to separate these different constructions of images of reality: those expressed by people in conversations and those expressed in music, because for the latter cultural conventions will have an important influence. It was indeed the case that from verbal communications during fieldwork it emerged that many Berlin-resident Irish – and in particular those who have lived there since the 1970s – feel equally at home in both cultures. This indicates that the romanticized image of home places in Ireland is specifically constructed and perpetuated in Irish song material – to construct a virtual reality of home – and in this sense it can be said to be a specific trait of Irish musical culture. Or, as Northern Irish musician and broadcaster Tommy Sands has humorously summed up this sentiment: ‘the difference between an Australian and an Irish boomerang is that the latter sings about coming home’.

Now such creative musical daydreaming would be harmless enough if it were just providing potential German tourists with pleasant images of Ireland as the eternal ‘insula magica’ where everything is possible. However, such images are located dangerously close vicinity to national stereotyping, and this makes them prone to being exploited by the media, in particular by the tabloids looking for exotic and exciting topics.

An example of the exploitation of these images for blunt national stereotyping is an article that appeared in the local tabloids in Berlin – accompanied by a photograph of well-disciplined local session musicians – that described the Irish musicians in Berlin as ‘playing wild Irish music in local pubs to drown their homesickness in excessive alcoholic drink’, which was unanimously rejected and strongly criticized by the local Irish music community.

This community, by the way, consists of musicians from many different countries, who play this type of music at community sessions and in folk groups with the Berlin resident musicians from native Irish backgrounds. Within these contexts in particular the instrumental dance tunes of this genre can easily create ‘community’ and integrate participants irrespective of their national origin. For instance, during my fieldwork in Berlin there were weekly Irish music community sessions with participants from Ireland, Germany, England, Scotland, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Russia, and America. Many of these international musicians take regular music tuition with the Berlin resident musicians from Ireland to improve their stylistic skills as regards playing this musical genre. Frequently their interests also take them to Ireland during their holidays to participate in music summer schools, and in this sense it could also be said that these community music sessions create ‘a taste of Ireland abroad’. In this way it becomes possible to create different images of place simultaneously by performing this musical genre within local communities, as it also serves to unify the community against cultural misrepresentations in the local media.

However, there is another possibility of how extra-musical concepts may travel to different cultural contexts and in the process change their meanings. This may happen if the meaning of a cultural concept is not easily accessible in its new contexts, and in that case meanings may develop their own flights of fancy. If, for instance, one is not aware of the meaning of the word ‘sally’ as indicating willow trees (Old English: saelh, Irish: saileach), one might think that for his famous song ‘Down by the Sally Gardens’, W.B. Yeats had chosen a funny and particularly quaint English expression that could be bettered by rendering it into modern English as ‘Sally’s Garden’. As a result of such associations a group of German musicians playing Irish music in Berlin have come to call themselves ‘Sally’s Garden’. In this way a girl’s name now has come to symbolize to their local audiences something ‘Irish’. It is certainly another form of creating extra-musical meanings.

Yet more influenced by processes of Chinese whispers was the term ‘Monstertunes’, which appeared as a heading on a list of Irish tune repertoire passed around in the community, and its meaning was explained to me as a colloquial term for ‘tunes played in sets’ that one of the Berlin resident musicians had brought from his home place in Cork. I had never heard this term before, and decided to inquire with the Cork musician himself. The results turned out surprising indeed. The Cork musician himself was equally surprised by this creation of meaning within the local community. He explained to me that his girlfriend had typed out this list of his tunes for circulation among the Berlin community of musicians, and that the term ‘Monstertunes’ related to a personal pet name of his that related to his biscuit-eating habits and the TV children’s programme Sesame Street.

Conclusions

The genre that is nowadays known as ‘traditional Irish music’ appears to have been adopted within many – and widely different – cultural contexts as suitable for community music-making because it addresses some essential needs of twentieth- and twenty-first-century societies for constructing images of ‘community’ with meaningful inter-human relations. The associated meanings, particularly those of the instrumental part
of the repertoire, are sufficiently flexible for being used either to invoke images of 'community', or to construct group boundaries against a perceived 'other', as desired within specific situations.

Extra-musical concepts depend for their meaning on the embedding wider socio-cultural context. Some concepts – such as session etiquette – seem to serve different cultural contexts well, and therefore to transfer well, while some other meanings are rather culture-specific. If any of these latter transfer at all, they may well acquire the most fantastic and unanticipated meanings within different cultural contexts. But then, who is to say that there are no advantages in playing ‘Monstertunes’ in Berlin for ‘Sally’s Garden’. Meanings are constructed socially by human beings, and if they serve to enhance local community music-making interactions then they are just as well suited to their purpose as any meanings of this musical genre constructed within the Irish home context of music-making.

References


Other References


Discography


Mobilized sound: Memory, inscription and vision in Irish traditional music

Steve Coleman

This paper suggests a few ways in which sound is multiply embedded in histories, localities and figurations of identity. I compare the linguistic and performative contextualization of musical sound to the semiotic effects which ensue when sound and image are juxtaposed. In each case, multiple contexts are brought together, creating sensory chronotopes in which performers and listeners find themselves within complex ‘time-spaces’.

Chronotopes

‘Time, place and persons’ (Agha 2007) are brought together in specific concrete ways during the course of cultural history. Bakhtin borrowed the term chronotope (‘time-space’) from physics in order to describe what he called ‘the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature (Bakhtin 1981: 84). In narrative, time and space come together such that ‘time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible’ (ibid.: 250).

Bakhtin showed that the narrated worlds of literature take particular forms that are transformed in the course of literary history. Chronotopes ‘define genre and generic distinctions’; and project stereotypic images of man: ‘The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic’ (ibid.: 85). Thus, in the words of Asif Agha, a chronotope is ‘a semiotic representation of time and place peopled by certain social types’:

Every chronotopic representation has two essential aspects. It links representations of time to those of locale and personhood. And it is experienced within a participation framework: The act of producing or construing a chronotopic representation itself has a chronotopic organization (of time, place and personhood) which may be transformed by that act. (Agha 2007: 321)

Literary chronotopes provide ‘frames of reference for subsequent – often ideologically saturated – forms of life’. This is also true of ‘any form of entextualized representation’ (ibid.: 323). Since every representation, even thought, requires concrete expression, Bakhtin claimed that all signs are chronotopic to some extent:

… in order to enter our experience (which is social experience) they must take on the form of a sign that is audible and visible for us (a hieroglyph, a mathematical formula, a verbal or linguistic expression, a sketch, etc.). Without such temporal-spatial expression, even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently, every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope. (Bakhtin 1981: 258)

Representations are chronotopic because they always juxtapose the world they describe and the world which describes them – the narrated and the narrating worlds exist in particular relationships which are historically and generically specific. What is more, representations circulate through social space, over time, so that the relationships between representations are themselves chronotopic as well. We can see this in the concepts of tradition, in which claims are made about the relationships between representations (that they in some way belong within an encompassing space-time), and modernity, in which different sorts of claims are made about representations (that they in some way belong within different space-times).

Agha points out that, as they circulate in the discursive life of a society, chronotopes become models of and for personhood:

… representations of time … cannot be isolated from representations of locale and personhood (and hence from aspects of personhood, such as models of subjectivity and social relations). And their interpersonal relevance derives from the participation frameworks in which they are experienced, and through which they are maintained or transformed. (Agha 2007: 324)

I would like to turn now to the chronotopic aspects of music – the ways that, in music, time becomes, in effect, audible. One way to approach this problem is to consider the relationship between sound and image, comparing that found in cinema with the very different sound-image relationship found in traditional singing.

Complex things happen when sound and image combine in cinema. Music becomes the interpretant of the visual; as Eisler and Adorno (2005) argued, music can represent (and thus intervene in) the process of representation itself. These relationships become even more complicated when song is involved, especially Irish-language song or the airs associated with it.
Sound and Image
Can we visually represent musical representation? Alternatively, should film music merely represent, or as Adorno and Eisler argued, can it represent (and thus intervene in) the process of representation itself? Another way of asking these question is: How can we musically represent memory? How can we visually represent musical memory?

Arguably all sensory perception is synaesthetic, in that the senses combine and mutually influence one another; cultural ideologies like our own which tend to separate and value vision over sound nonetheless have been forced to recognize this. As William Beeman observes, in early ‘silent’ cinema the very silence of the motion picture itself was perhaps the most distracting element of all. In an aural world, silent pictures unaccompanied by any sound whatsoever had an eerie quality to them – especially when the scenes depicted action and violence. Thus music was first introduced as a solution to these problems. (Beeman 1973: 8)

Film music had its humble origins in this need for synaesthetic experience. Even newsreels were accompanied by live and often improvising musicians with a repertoire of stock motifs. But modern film music, especially in popular films, plays a trick on the viewer: originating in a secondary and subservient role (crowd control), music has become the interpretant of the visual, creating continuity, suggesting emotional stances, encoding the hidden inner lives of both cinematic characters and audience.

Western denigrations of the aural are based on a Platonic distinction between diegesis (the action of a film’s narrative; on-screen activity) and mimesis (imitation, representation by means of something similar). Plato may have preferred the mimetic, but for us it’s the narrative element that rules, and thus in film, the moving image was given primary responsibility for this task. For Christian Metz, diegesis seems to be distinct from the aural dimension per se, being

the narration itself, but also the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative, and … the characters, the landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, in so far as they are considered in their denoted aspect. (Metz 1974: 97)

Sound poses analytical problems for film theorists, who try to maintain the distinction between diegesis and mimesis via conceptions of narrative frames as more or less impermeable. Thus, for Percheron, the image is the fundamental vehicle for diegesis, and predominates over sound; sound is either ‘off’ or ‘on’ in a film, depending on its relationship to image:

Sound ‘on’ is emitted from within the frame; sound ‘off’ is emitted from outside the frame … This split depends on the image, and consequently testifies to the image’s primacy. It is the position of the sound source in its relation to the image which determines whether sound is ‘on’ or ‘off’. (Percheron 1980: 16)

The combination of sound and image creates very complex relationships, which are nonetheless perceived, for the most part as a simple unity. But as Chion (1994) and Buck-Morss (1994) observe, cinema has taught us to hear as well as see differently, giving us the ability to effectively ‘perceive’ perception itself. Much of film theory seems to involve the fact that modern film is a multi-channel phenomenon (sound and image), but runs into difficulties if it tries to distinguish between the ‘story’ a film tells (identified with the image), and the act of telling itself (identified with sound). Following Bakhtin, on the other hand, we can suggest that any sign whatsoever is chronotopic – i.e., represents a relation between the ‘off’ and the ‘on’. Combining sound and image produces a new and complex sign – a chronotope.

The linguist, Roman Jakobson, observed that any ordinary verb does the same thing, dividing utterance into an event of speaking and a narrated event.

In order to classify the verbal categories two basic distinctions are to be observed:
1) speech itself (S) and its topic, the narrated matter (T);
2) the event itself (E) and any of its participants (P) whether ‘performer’ or ‘undergoer’.

Consequently four items are to be distinguished: a narrated event (E⁰), a speech event (E¹), a participant of the narrated event (P⁰), and a participant of the speech event (P¹), whether addresser or addressee. (Jakobson 1971: 133)

In fact, when we speak, things get much more complicated, in the case of quotation, compound tenses and the like.

But in the case of sound, we trick ourselves – taking advantage of our faith that the immediate has power over the mediated, for us sound represents and interprets the visual, but this gives it the power to insinuate itself as the visual’s secret soul.
Music is non-dimensional (Zuckerkandl 1973) and sometimes we grant it the power to be achronic, or pan-temporal, as well. We can see this in performers’ attempts to describe their own art, to represent musical meaning.

But how does music mean – especially forms like Irish traditional music, which are rooted in the local, in what Ernst Bloch termed ‘the non-synchronous’? For Bloch, ‘not all people live in the same Now ... Rather, they carry earlier things with them, things which are intricately involved’ (Bloch 1932: 22). In what Ó Laoire (quoting Foley 1991) terms ‘traditional referentiality’, musical forms like songs, tunes, dances become linked to specific times, places, persons throughout the course of their performance history in a particular place, and carry with them multiple, contingent associations, invoking … a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself, that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual performance or text. (Foley 1991: 7, quoted in Ó Laoire 2002: 236)

Sometimes participants think of this aspect of music in terms of ‘secrets’ – multiple, non-explicit references and associations that are quite difficult to explain to the outsider. Irish-language lyric songs in particular are often linked to multiple narrative contexts, as in the medieval and Jacobite topos whereby, in a love song,
a female character may embody Sovereignty, speaking as, or speaking to ‘Ireland’ or its messianic redemptors. The emotional depth and energy of the Aisling genre derives from this element of contingency – the presence of more than one ‘story’, a diagesis embodied in a lyric and non-narrative surface. This multiplicity runs through the song tradition, where e.g. a chanson de jeune fille may be locally used to commemorate a sibling lost through emigration and calamity (Ó Laoire 2002).

Singers of Irish-language songs (the so-called ‘sean-nós’ tradition) sometimes take pains to point out that songs have ‘údar’ – bases, causes, occasions, authors, purposes – in other words, that they are manifestations of events. This is quite a different view of song than the typical English-language understanding of songs as being fundamentally narratives. The singer Joe Heaney (Seosamh Ó hÉinniú) from Carna, Co. Galway, maintained that songs have stories – but what he meant by this was, not that songs are narratives, but that songs relate to past events (their údar), and that knowledge of these events has to be separately transmitted, narrated, or simply guessed at, in order to understand the song (Coleman 1997). This might be due to the fact that Irish-language songs don’t really ‘tell’ stories; they are more like dialogues from plays – they represent the voices of characters but don’t spend much time describing what those characters are doing. Singers and audiences have to find their way back in time to an originating event; this event is usually either an encounter or the poet’s solitary reflection upon some such encounter.

Because of this, singers and audiences may have a uniquely strong sense of being projected into the scene that songs represent, in what some people feel is an act of visualization:

... you’re playing the act, you’re working exactly what [he] was doing, you’re going through the same thing that he was going through, before the song was ever made … And that’s exactly the picture you must follow when you’re singing an old song. Especially if it’s a sad one … you’ve got to have the picture before you. And always have that picture and then you’ll do the song properly then.

... they’re turning back the clock, to when this time was – and each song tells a story. (Heaney 1978)

In this case does the song represent this ‘picture’, or does the ‘picture’ interpret the song? It seems that in singing, the ‘picture’ functions a bit like the way that sound functions in cinema – as the (less determinate) sign that signifies the emotional burden of the (more determinate) sign.

Another reason to pay so much attention to the ‘údar’ of a song is that as they circulate socially, songs take on multiple ‘údar’:
One family in particular made use of this atmosphere to remember and publicly acknowledge their grief for the tragedy of a lost brother, who died suddenly in America shortly after leaving Tory in 1915 … He was Pádraig Dixon and his brothers and his sister Gráinne especially, always asked for a particular song … A Phaidí a Ghrá má d'imigh tú, [which] mentions a character named Paidí who has gone away and whom the poet, a girl, wishes to come back home safely. A classic Chanson de Jeune Fille, it is interesting that it was used as a representation of fraternal love in this case. According to Séamus Ó Dubhgháin, this song was requested by his mother in the wake house on the night he was being waked in Tory, although, as I have said, there was no corpse present. (Ó Laoire 1999)

Notice that performance history acts like a set of additional ‘údair’ – various memorable occasions when a song was performed, and for whom, and why:

Similar things happen with instrumental music, dance steps, and so on, where music and dance takes on multiple contexts through their performance histories. This level of meaning is intensely local, if not personal, and tends not to get talked about to outsiders. Like sean-nós songs, traditional performance forms have ‘secret’ stories attached to them:

Music happens inside of you. It moves the things that are there from place to place. It can make them fly. It can bring you the past. It can bring you things that you do not know. It can bring you into the moment that is happening. It can bring you a cure. (O’Grady and Pyke 1997)

Given that traditional forms have localized meanings, how do they translate to the national and international spheres?
In nationalist readings of tradition, songs like *Róisín Dubh* embody a chronotope involving the loss and recovery of an originary voice, which we hear as that of the nation itself. This risks a tremendous reduction in musical and emotional meaning as layers of contingency, of Ireland’s painful, non-linear history, are stripped away: the harp new strung shall be heard as that of the nation itself.

George Morrison and Seán Ó Riada’s 1960 film *Mise Éire* (I am Ireland) wove fragmentary archival footage of events surrounding the Easter Rising of 1916 into a national narrative, reclaiming Irish history to create a new national memory and re-legitimize the state. It succeeded in this task largely due to the unifying force of Ó Riada’s musical score, itself woven from fragments of Irish-language song melodies. But the effectiveness of Ó Riada’s score derives also from the semiotic nature of traditional music itself, where performances weave together fragments of ‘other times and places’ – the persons and occasions of a piece’s performance history as well as the multiple ‘stories’ alluded to therein. This ‘chronotopic’ dimension of traditional music, its simultaneous existence in different times, makes it an irresistible object for nationalists and antiquarians, but also a powerful device for deconstructing their modernist narratives.

Seán Ó Riada spent much of his life working to elevate local musical traditions, in dialogue with the power and prestige of ‘high’ cultural forms, to the national and international sphere. Ó Riada made his greatest impact in his orchestral score to *Mise Éire*, a film which embodied the nationalist allegory in its very title. An admirer of Eisenstein, Morrison collaged together fragmentary newsreel footage to recreate the story of the 1916 Dublin insurrection and the birth of the Irish state.

Ó Riada composed a score to accompany the silent footage, in effect returning film music to its early roots, but with a difference – Morrison and Ó Riada’s film turned Irish history into a symphony, orchestrating time itself as the statement, development, conflict and resolution of a symphonic theme – Hardiman’s arrangement of Róisín Dubh. Ó Riada’s score was so powerful that it all but overwhelmed the complexities of the film, creating an emotional response which perhaps eclipsed the intellectual engagement demanded by its creator. Thus for Harvey O’Brien,

I would argue that this is not so, at least on a discursive or intellectual level, since the film’s narration begins with a discussion of the political power of images and their manipulation for the sake of ideology. The viewer is constantly invited to decode, question, and challenge the visual evidence provided. *Saoríost* (Freedom?), the sequel to *Mise Éire* – another collaboration with Ó Riada – questioned the very nature of the revolution itself and challenged the legitimacy of the Irish state. For its listeners, Ó Riada’s score for *Mise Éire* perhaps achieved, on a sonic level, a redemption and recovery of Irish musical history, making palpable the beauty and expressiveness of ‘traditional’ themes in a modern orchestral setting, and using modern techniques and tonalities to interrogate and deconstruct these themes.

The first Irish-language feature film, *Mise Éire* is textured by its alternation between the lyric and the diegetic. Historical background is explained through discursive narration, while the viewer hears elements of the orchestral themes and sees actual historical footage and stills. At dramatic moments the narration switches into verse, and then both narration and musical score go silent, increasing the tension even more as the ‘silence’ we are thrown into is filled with the sounds – crowd noise, street sounds – which have been dubbed over the entire film, and which suddenly occupy the foreground. It is as if we are momentarily thrown into the actual events themselves through the magical verisimilitude of sound. Then the musical score resumes, giving a new emotional shape to the images we see, consolidating them as story. These three sonic layers – noise, narration and music – work together very effectively to create an overwhelming sense of the reality and teleology of Irish history.

Morrison and Ó Riada’s orchestration of Irish history contrasts sharply with Larla O’Lionaird’s score for Nichola Bruce’s (1999) film version of Timothy O’Grady and Steven Pyke’s book *I Could Read the Sky* (1997), which dramatizes the disintegration of the Irish narrative in the economic stagnation of the intervening decades, through a depiction of an emigrant labourer in London and his fragmentary memories of home. *I Could Read the Sky* began as a series of black
and white photographs taken in Ireland and England between 1987 and 1996 by Steven Pyke. Novelist Timothy O’Grady was invited to contribute text, and as the project developed, he interviewed several Irish migrant labourers in England. O’Grady assembled an oral history of emigration which he then fictionalized as the story of one old man, dying in a London flat, and his memories of life, work, emigration and home. For O’Grady, ‘the subject of I Could Read the Sky is the activity of memory in the mind of a man’. O’Grady was fascinated by the willful anonymity of the labourers he interviewed and sought to dramatize the fact that ‘the story of migrant labour … is … the central demographic story of our time’. (O’Grady 2006: 261)

Crucial to the effect of I Could Read the Sky is the disjunction between Pyke’s photographs, which function as fragments of unknown narratives, and O’Grady’s text, a collage of fragmentary memories. Produced independently of the photographs and later assembled by Nichola Bruce (O’Grady and Pike 1997), the resulting montage carries a strong allegorical feeling which means in the same manner as traditional music and song. This feeling is enhanced by the protagonist’s role as a traditional musician, and his memories of performance and descriptions of the power of song and instrumental music. O’Grady and Pyke’s book is thus a visual-textual representation of how traditional music represents.

The forms and discursive patterns of Irish expressive culture work to structure the experience, emotional habits and memories of its participants (Coleman 1997, 2004). O’Grady’s art consists in his allowing the narrative to be saturated by its oral sources on a structural level, letting it take on the semiotic forms of Irish performance tradition. Combined with these forms is an acute and ironic sense of economic contingency and emotional loss.

The complex semiotic history of I Could Read the Sky adds to its chronotopic depth. The highly processed text is redolent of context – the contexts of the photographs, of O’Grady’s conversations with emigrants, of scenes depicted or alluded to in the fictional narrative, and of the historical and social life of the songs and tunes mentioned. This interweaving of contexts is an imbrication of pain into memory, and the book combines this with a series of intense reflections on the labour process – ultimately seeing memory itself as a work of labour.

Nichola Bruce’s film version of I Could Read the Sky deepens the semiotic density yet again, adding layers of digital image processing, and a soundtrack which combines ‘live’ sounds and Ó Lionáird’s musical score, itself heavily processed and layered.

In the case of the film, however, the audio and digital effects represent not just memory as the active construction of the world but also the damage inflicted by the world, the damage which is defied though the act of remembering. Bruce’s film formalizes these qualities through montage, fade-outs, and aural and visual digital static.

In effect, I Could Read the Sky takes Morrison’s and Ó Riada’s re-assembled national history and disassembles it again, reflecting the experience of the generations of mass emigration, as those left out of ‘Ireland’s unfinished revolution’ discover themselves to exist in a very different ‘time-space’ to that of the triumphant nation. As we enter a new and potentially dark period of Irish history, we may need to draw upon the resources, not only of the ‘tradition’ as it has come down to us – which as I have presented it here, is primarily a resource for the mediation of private and public negotiations of pain and discontinuity, but also of the new forms of artistic practice which seek to deploy these forms effectively in the contemporary public sphere.

References
J. Robins.


In this paper, I will discuss social stigma as an important aspect in the emergence of punk rock as a cultural phenomenon. In order to illustrate this, the main focus throughout the paper will be on the career of GG Allin, an American punk rock musician who dedicated himself to living his life according to certain dictates of the punk model; the aim is to observe how social stigma figured in the lifestyle decisions he made throughout his short, turbulent existence. When someone identifies as a ‘punk’, it instantly brings to mind a set of beliefs and ideals which are synonymous with punk in the popular consciousness: resistance to authority, indulgence in copious amounts of drugs and alcohol, contempt for society at large, a close-knit, intensely exclusive community and, sometimes, an acutely aware political consciousness. Allin made it his mission in life to freely indulge himself in what could be considered the ‘negative’ aspects of the punk identity and live them to their logical, or illogical, conclusions.

All subcultures begin as challenges to hegemony. As soon as they are made comprehensible to those outside of them, they are essentially shorn of their subversive power. They are made comprehensible mainly through the media. Once the media has situated the resistance offered by a subculture ‘within the dominant framework of meanings’ (Hebdige 1979: 94), it can be redefined and mass-produced by dominant groups. In the conclusion to the introductory chapter of Resistance Through Rituals, the manner in which subcultural, or ‘deviant events’, come to be understood by those outside of them is schematized. Firstly, the deviant or subcultural event and its participants are appropriated and defined by ‘control culture’, then filtered through the media. These ideas presented by the media are then taken up again by the control culture as representative of the ‘public voice’ to support its agenda, which is then reproduced once again by the media. Thus, the media and ‘control culture’ conception of what a subculture is becomes locked in a self-perpetuating cycle ((Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1991: 75–76). In the case of punk, this began extremely quickly, and by late 1977 punk was, as the saying goes, ‘dead’ (Clark 2003: 223). It would never again reach the same heights of danger and possibility as it did in 1976 and 1977. Yet punk continued to lure and fascinate throughout the late 1970s, 1980s and up to the present day, when it continues to be commodified, and has come full circle in the form of John Lydon and Iggy Pop appearing in TV advertisements for butter and car insurance, respectively. Rupa Huq refers to this phenomenon as the ‘institutionalisation of pop’ (Huq 2005: 5), whereby the ‘bad boys’ of rock and roll are assimilated into the establishment, as in the above examples, and notably Mick Jagger’s knighthood in 2003. Nonetheless it has still been possible to observe, in the words of Jon Savage, the ‘continued vigour … of the punk DNA, not as music or culture or one group, but as a global symbol for youth disaffection, rebellion, sheer trouble’ (Savage 2005: xvii). Johan Fornäs elaborates on this point in Youth Culture and Late Modernity when he states: ‘Rock is a mass-produced commodity, however it would be naïve to believe that being a commodity value eradicates rock’s value as an expression of the common needs of a large number of people all over the world or compromises its radical criticism of ruling forms of rationality and socialisation’ (Fornäs 1995: 214).

GG Allin was, in his own words, ‘an untamed animal’, ‘the rock ’n’ roll underground’s highest power’, and ‘God, Jesus Christ and Satan’ (Sosnicki 1993: #6). For him, rock and roll meant first and
foremost, a lifestyle. The music was secondary to a life filled to excess with drugs, alcohol, violence, and sex. Jesus Christ Allin was born in a small town in New Hampshire in 1956. His family lived in a log cabin with no running water or electricity. Allin's father claimed to have been visited by Christ and told to name his son after him, as he was destined for great things. Allin's father, Merle Allin Sr., was a fanatically religious man, who forbade any talking in the Allin home after the sun went down. Allin would later eloquently describe him as 'a real fucked up guy' (Mofo 1989). In a 1993 interview, Allin recalled a childhood wherein 'my very first memories … were beatings, burning, being held at gunpoint, kidnapped. Merle, Sr. had dug graves in the cellar where he had been planning an Allin family suicide' (Sosnicki 1993: #6). When Allin began school at the age of 12, his mother changed his name to Kevin, in an attempt to give his life some semblance of normality. Allin's experience in school was not a pleasant one. He felt utterly alienated from most of his classmates, and revelled in provoking their contempt. In a 1989 interview he recalls that during his school days 'the kids in my high school hated me … I never fit in in high school … I had a lot of problems and, ya know, parental problems with myself and I was just kinda out by myself … I went to a high school that had all geeks and farmers. I wore polkadot stretch pants, women's blouses and high heels, pocketbooks, my hair was down to there and I had round glasses' (Mofo 1989). 'I had to fight a lot', he states in another interview, 'because when I blew up I was so out of control, it would take five or ten kids to hold me down' (Sosnicki 1993: #6). When he was 18, Allin married Sandra Farrow, a model. The disparate nature of the pair's personalities eventually led to divorce. Allin would later recall that 'just like everyone else, she grew up and she realized that she did not want to spend the rest of her life with me … She could not deal with it … she hated what I did. I would come home covered in blood and shit and would call her to bail me out of jail … I just wasn't ready' (Mofo 1989).

An important point of genesis for many subcultures is of course, social stigma. Those whose behaviour or personalities don't correlate to hegemonic ideas of what it is to be normal need an outlet to express their identities. As Paul Willis notes in Common Culture, 'by listening to music together and using it as a background to their lives, by expressing affiliation to a particular taste group, popular music becomes one of the principal means by which young people define themselves' (Willis 1990: 69). Many of those who fit this description in London and New York in the late 1970s turned to punk. According to Lawrence Grossberg, 'identities are always relational and incomplete, in process. Any identity depends upon its difference from, its negation of, some other term' (Grossberg 1996: 89). What the emergent identity of punk situated itself in opposition to was the stale state of popular music in the 1970s and increasingly conservative governments in the UK and US. In the introduction to his volume, England's Dreaming, Jon Savage, the foremost chronicler of the punk phenomenon, provides a rich description of the enormous power of punk as a shelter for the disaffected: 'during the years following 1975 … for anyone in the UK … who felt cast out because of class, sexuality, perception, gender, even choice, who felt useless, unworthy, ashamed, the Sex Pistols were an attraction/repulsion machine of … ‘infernal’ power that offered the chance of action, even surrender – to something larger than you – and thus possible transcendence. In becoming a nightmare, you could find your dreams' (Savage 2005: xiv). In Erving Goffman's definition of stigma, he highlights three categories of social stigma: ‘abominations of the body’, ‘tribal stigma of race, nation and religion’, and most saliently for our purposes; ‘blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behaviour’ (Goffman 1990: 14). If Allin could somehow have been convinced to take part in the Sacrament of Penance at any point in his adult life, the above list would probably resemble quite accurately what he would have told the priest.

Allin was fully aware that he was not a ‘normal’ person in the eyes of those around him. In an interview from 1990, he states 'I’ve gotta go to psychotherapy. They say I have an anti-social personality disorder; they say I can’t get along with people, you know. I’m not supposed to act this way. It’s not normal human behavior, they say’ (Snider 1990: #9 (V.14). Like many of his contemporaries, he used the medium of punk rock to express the stigmatized aspects of his identity. Though Allin had been playing in bands since 1976, his first release proper was Bored to Death and Beat, Beat, Beat, backed with One Man Army on Orange records in 1979. Initially, Allin identified with the punk ideal: snottiness, misanthropy, and personal gratification. Thus, his music and lyrics were quite similar to those of his idols and peers, such as the Stooges, New York Dolls, and the Dead Boys. Allin's foremost influence, however, was Hank Williams. More than any punk, heavy metal or rock 'n' roll band, Williams represented, in Allin's eyes, someone whose life was inextricable from their music, and vice versa, someone who was raw and honest, and someone, most importantly, who was fiercely individualistic. Williams's tendency towards alcohol and drug abuse also appealed greatly to Allin. As Allin's own drug and alcohol dependencies worsened, and the landscape of American punk rock began to shift towards the faster and meaner style of hardcore, so too did his music and lyrics began to evolve. From around the release of the Eat My Fuc LP in 1983, the shift from occasionally offensive, snotty lyrics backed with fairly unremarkable upbeat punk rock, to hate-filled, violent rants accompanied by less
and less accomplished musicianship and recording quality is noticeable.

During a close examination of two of Allin's songs, one from his 1980 debut LP *Always Was, Is, and Always Shall Be* and one from six years later, the degeneration of musicality and lyricism over the course of Allin's career becomes quite clear. 'Don't Talk to Me', from 1980 is a punchy, quite catchy tune in the vein of first wave punk, along the lines of *Rocket to Russia*-era Ramones, the Damned or the Dead Boys. The lyrics, while rather nasty, are no more offensive than the Ramones' 'Loudmouth' or the Dead Boys' 'Caught With the Meat in Your Mouth'. Allin sounds fresh, enthusiastic and almost melodic at times, singing lines such as 'we're sick and tired of listening to your moronic shit/Why don't you just shut your mouth, stop acting like a twit!', and the immortal 'When you yak yak yak yak yak yak yak yak yak! I'd like to tie your hands and feet and put you in a sack'! The song hinges on a call and response chorus of 'Don't talk to me! [Don't talk!] Don't talk to me!', which harkens back to rock 'n' roll or even Motown, albeit in a slightly skewed manner. The song 'Bad Habits' was recorded in 1986 and first appeared on a compilation entitled *Dirty Love Songs* the next year. It is typical of Allin's later output. The majority of the song consists of two chords played out of tune while Allin howls like a wild animal. The music is very low in the (badly executed) mix, with Allin's vocal at the forefront, accompanied by ludicrously off-key female backing vocals and an astonishingly bad guitar solo. Over the course of the song's unnecessarily long four minutes, he intones charming lines such as 'I fuck all the whores/Black and white/I molest little girls/Who are ten and tight', and 'It's my bloody suicide/I'm not afraid to die/I abuse my body, cut my skin/Til it bleeds with a knife'. Dave Laing's observation, in his essay 'Listening to Punk', that, in punk rock singing, 'the implicit logic would seem to be that by excluding the musicality of singing, the possible contamination of the lyric message by the aesthetic pleasures offered by melody, harmony, pitch and so on, is avoided' (Laing 1977: 407) rings very true in the case of Allin's music. The 'lyric message' is primarily one of hatred and violence. It was around this time that Allin began to be very contemptuous towards his peers, and to see himself as beginning to fulfill his messianic destiny by becoming 'the rock 'n' roll underground's highest power' (Sosnicki 1993: #6).

Dick Hedidge argues that the 'alienation' and 'emptiness' that sociologists diagnosed in punks were actually aspects of a self-conscious parodic identity on their part, and that they, in fact, formed a tightly-bounded group identity. Allin, however, firmly embodied the concept of the punk as a bitter, alienated loner. Though Allin was married at one stage, and had relationships and acquaintances, he was clearly interested primarily in himself, and the treatment of his inner discontent through the catharsis offered by performance. 'The music, stage and rituals are the balance that keep me from going out on a fucking killing spree' (Sosnicki 1993: #6), he once stated, emphasizing the importance of the performance as a release of powerful, negative, emotions.

Allin's performances were certainly the primary reason for his infamy. It was a rare occurrence for his gigs not to be shut down by the police shortly after beginning. Just as Elvis shocked audiences in the 1950s by shaking his hips on stage, GG Allin shocked audiences in the 1980s by consuming his own waste and mutilating himself on stage. Within the space of 30 years, the boundaries of what was acceptable for a performer to do on stage had shifted radically. Allin's performances, I would like to propose, constituted a kind of 'deep play', an idea first posited by Jeremy Bentham and later made famous by Clifford Geertz, meaning a game or activity in which it is irrational for the participants to take part at all, owing to the high stakes involved. Sara Cohen draws attention to the 'carefully rehearsed and co-ordinated' nature of the onstage behaviour of most bands or musicians, and points out how the majority of them strive 'to be themselves more expressive and dramatic in their movement in order to convey ideas, sentiment and emotion' (Cohen 1991: 81). Allin certainly endeavoured to do the latter, though whether it was indeed 'rehearsed' or not is difficult to discern. There came a point in most of Allin's performances where he would charge, naked and bloodied, into the audience, swinging his arms wildly, trying to cause as much damage as possible. The audience usually responded by running *en masse* to the other side of the room, Scooby Doo-style, with a few brave individuals standing their ground and trying to fight back. In a 1993 issue of *Maximumrocknroll*, an attendee at a GG Allin gig gives a richly descriptive account of his experience: 'One punk in front of me … stood his ground and was swaying, almost dancing, when GG approached; GG then decked him with a vicious right. He also hit a girl in the face, then hit her again, and was finally hit back by a guy standing next to her. Later, a blonde girl who approached GG on one side of the stage, and seemed to kiss him, in return had her hair grabbed and face bashed against his'. At one point', he continues, 'after going to the bathroom, I was making my way back towards the dance floor area when a huge wall of people's backs surged toward me. For a second I didn't know what was going on; then I smelled it. The smell of GG's shit made the stink bombs from earlier in the evening smell like a lost lover's brand of perfume. When GG ate some of his shit, two hefty bouncers scampered out of the club and vomited on the sidewalk' (Rob 1993: #123). In Geertz's conclusion to his essay on deep play, in relation to Balinese cockfighting, he states: 'every people … loves its own form of violence … Balinese go to cockpitfights to find out what a man, usually composed, aloof, almost obsessively self-absorbed … feels like when, attacked, tormented, challenged, insulted, and driven in result to extremes of fury, he
has totally triumphed or been brought totally low’ (Geertz 1973: 449–450). The same can be said of those who attended Allin’s performances. Invoking Bertold Brecht, Dave Laing argues, in ‘Listening to Punk’, that, within punk rock, the mode of ‘non-identification’ can be found at work (Laing 1997: 417). This occurs when the performance is ‘deliberately designed to foil empathy’ between the audience and performer, thus preventing any identification with the performer which might defuse the power of the performance. This reading can be applied to Allin’s performances, wherein any hope of identification with him, on the part of the audience, is prevented by the extremely unpleasant nature of the performance. ‘What I do separates the non-conformists from the phonies who are there just to witness a freak show’ (Sosnicki 1993: #6), claimed Allin, but one has the feeling that, for the overwhelming majority of those who attended his gigs, the music was secondary to seeing a man tormented, destroying himself onstage. The phenomenon of violence at punk and heavy metal shows has been well documented. Harris M. Berger notes that this violence can take several forms: ‘aggression released through catharsis; aggression created in events for its own end; aggression as an aesthetic form to be explored’ (Berger 1999: 73). The punk gig in general represents an opportunity to flirt with danger. The tension between ‘fun’ and physical injury at the core of the gig is perhaps its most attractive quality for many attendees.

In his own personal philosophy, Allin’s beliefs were somewhat close to those of Marquis De Sade and Jean Genet. He claimed to be an anarchist, and sought a world in which ‘there can be no interference at all from authority, and where we come together for confrontation, self-mutilation, war, open sex, nudity and violence’ (Sosnicki 1993: #6). Though Allin never identified openly with De Sade, they shared quite similar attitudes towards life. Extreme self-obsession, a single-minded hedonistic drive, and a taste for giving and receiving pain characterized both men. Between 1989 and 1991, Allin spent approximately 16 months in prison for the assault, in decidedly Sadean fashion, of a female acquaintance. He had burned her with cigarettes, tortured her with a knife, and drank her blood. In a 1989 interview, Allin elaborates on his sexual preferences. He states that he likes ‘lots of piss and shit … really young guys’ and ‘masturbation’ (Mofo 1989). Like Genet, he had an extremely turbulent upbringing, and was persistently in trouble with the police. Genet’s tendencies towards theft, vagrancy, anti-authoritarianism, and ‘perverse’ sexuality, resonate strongly with Allin’s own behaviour and beliefs. Through their respective media, both sought to elevate crime into art. Allin considered it a personal triumph when he was charged with disorderly conduct in 1991, and dubbed a ‘toilet rocker’ by the local press after having been arrested in 1989 in Milwaukee for defecating on stage and throwing his waste at the audience (The Milwaukee Sentinel, 23 August, 1991). As he saw it, if someone wants to defecate onstage, eat the results, and charge people for the privilege of watching it, they should be allowed to do it, under the First Amendment. The fact that he was charged, he felt, highlighted glaring contradictions in both the legal and popular conceptions of what does and does not constitute art. Allin was also strongly convinced that the conception of his work as not justifiably artistic influenced the outcome of his trial for assault in Ann Arbor in 1989 for a crime completely unrelated to his work.

‘We construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents’, states Goffman (1990: 15), and indeed, it would seem the easy solution to blame Allin’s unusual and difficult upbringing for his behaviour in later life, but he rejects this idea. ‘I do not to this day’, he states, ‘blame anybody for who I am. If anything, I want to thank them for creating a powerful individual in me at the very start of life’ (Sosnicki 1993: #6), clearly reflecting Goffman’s idea that ‘the stigmatized individual … may also see the trials he has suffered as a blessing in disguise, especially because of what it is felt that suffering can teach one about life and people’ (Goffman 1990: 21–22). If we consider Allin’s account of his school days, Goffman’s point seems quite appropriate — that ‘public school entrance is often reported as the occasion of stigma learning, the experience sometimes coming very precipitously on the first day of school, with taunts, teasing, ostracism, and fights’ (Goffman 1990: 46). According to Goffman; ‘instead of cowering, the stigmatized individual may attempt to approach mixed contacts with hostile bravado’ (Goffman 1990: 29), an accurate description of Allin’s behaviour towards those he wanted to shock and outrage with his music. ‘Also’, states Goffman, ‘it seems possible for an individual to fail to live up to what we effectively demand of him, and yet be relatively untouched by this failure; insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he feels that he is a full-fledged normal human being, and that we are the ones who are not quite human’ (Goffman 1990: 17). This point in particular resonates with Allin’s outlook. Allin considered those who were not willing to take him seriously, ‘the target for my moods and aggressions’. ‘I am the painter, they are the canvas and blood is the paint’, he goes on. ‘When I look out at them as a whole crowd, I only see the enemy … I don’t know them and I don’t want to. I want to rape, beat and annihilate them’ (Sosnicki 1993: #6). Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s discussion of ‘traumatising’ and ‘integrated’ types of shock effects in relation to Baudelaire, Dave Laing differentiates between the local and structural shock effects of music. The local effect is when ‘just one aspect of a musical piece is composed of shock material’ (Laing 1997: 416), and the destabilizing effect of the song is neutralized by the familiarity of the listener with the other, more conventional, aspects of the composition of
the song. The structural effect occurs when the listener is traumatized by the onslaught of several aspects of the composition which are unfamiliar to them and prove disorienting. In Allin’s music, the consistently offensive lyrics, barely-competent musicianship, and unhinged vocal delivery are just three of the numerous points of discomfort for most listeners. The live performance of his songs adds another dimension of destabilization. Thus, the effect of Allin’s music on the listener can be encapsulated quite appropriately in one word: traumatizing.

In conclusion, I have examined social stigma as a significant facet of the drive towards the creation of subcultures, and particularly, punk rock. To achieve this, I have used the example of GG Allin, an archetypal punk figure, as a case study. It seems clear from the information given earlier that Allin was a man whose personality had a great many stigmatized elements to it. I have argued that these elements were the primary motivating factors in the various decisions he made in his life, foremost among them, the choice to live as a virtually homeless, drug-addicted alcoholic, and to dedicate himself wholeheartedly to the cause of disgusting and outraging people, but also, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, to the cause of raising awareness on certain issues which require a brave individual to address. These include: the need to question authority, the DIY aesthetic, or the possibility of achieving relative success in the music industry without making concessions to big business, and the need for greater understanding in legal perceptions of what constitutes art. At the heart of punk, according to Jon Savage, was ‘a furious disgust with consumption’ (Savage 2005: xv), and indeed Allin lived his life in a profoundly anti-consumerist manner, living alternately in cockroach-infested one-room apartments, on Greyhound buses, and on friend’s couches, owning only enough clothes to fit a paper bag. Boundary-testing artistic works, such as those of GG Allin, I would argue, are crucial as part of the resistance to the imposition of ideological homogenization (Mursić 2000: 314) by those in positions of power.

References

Discography
The Gift and Collective Effervescence: Bloodletting and Blood Drinking at a Black Metal Festival

David Murphy

Introduction
This article examines background, style and the shifting meanings of a sub-genre of heavy metal known as black metal (BM hereafter). Due to certain characteristics such as BM’s emphasis on blood, soil and mythology as aesthetic/artistic themes, coupled with a high degree of sensationalism, BM has spread globally over the past decade to sixteen years.

The themes I shall explore include methods of accumulating sub-cultural capital through a proximity to forms of violence such as church arson and murder. The shifts in meaning that occur as the scene spread from Norway into Serbia will also be explored through a discussion of collective effervescence manifested in live performances. The theories that I shall refer to range from Sontag’s criticism of Freudian interpretations of ‘real’ art, to a brief acknowledgement of classic anthropological texts and themes by Mauss and Durkheim. The final section of this essay includes a ‘thick’ ethnographic account of a festival I attended, at which the music and spectacle of symbolic violence and bloodshed created the conditions of possibility that engendered the experience of collective effervescence and mass-ecstasis (from the Latin ‘ecstasis’ – to stand outside oneself).

The ‘first wave’ of a style of music known as black metal emerged during the early 1980s when English and Danish heavy metal bands such as Venom and Merciful. Fate began using overtly Satanic imagery and lyrics in their music, artwork and performances. The proto-BM bands of the initial wave were amongst the first to wholly embrace Satanism from an artistic and spiritual point of view. For many of these bands, Satan was not an entity to be feared for cheating you out of your soul, as in the traditional Faustian Satanic pact. Instead a wave of bands, artists and film-makers, such as The Rolling Stones, Kenneth Anger and others, adopted an aesthetic version of Satan as patron/muse in a part shock tactic, part philosophical manner (Baddeley: 2006).

A small but active music scene in Bergen, Norway, instigated what is known as the second wave of BM. They began by expanding on elements of La Veyan Satanism (derived from Anton La Vey’s Church of Satan) in American and European heavy metal music, taking what was once an aesthetic stance and acting it out literally. Ideas inspired by mountainous landscapes, anti-Christian sentiment and a neo-romantic imagining of Scandinavian pre-Christian identity, concealed in a particularly potent form in Norway. This inspired a campaign of church arson and other aesthetically/ideologically motivated forms of violence known within the scene as ‘actions’. These were and are usually individual or loosely co-ordinated arson attacks on churches and graveyards that may not be directly instigated by bands but are rarely if ever condemned by them. These ‘actions’ provided the impetus that transformed a nascent local BM scene, initially a minor sub-genre of heavy metal, into an almost global underground phenomenon occupying a central place within a wider genre, commonly referred to in popular publications such as Terrorizer magazine and, in an academic context, as ‘extreme music’ (Kahn-Harris 2005, 2007). The success and spread of BM may be attributed in part to sensationalized media attention and the rebel prestige that followed certain ‘actions’ in Norway. Yet we must also take into account the fact that BM fulfils a perceived need for forms of rebellion, manifested socially through the performance of deviant stereotypes in youth music. According to Jones, writing about the BM scene in Manchester, ‘the “deviant” label was applied by social actors themselves and enhanced by stereotypical views advocated by the media and wider society’ (Jones 2003: ii). The use of deviant stereotyping is by no means confined to the BM scene or music in general. The use of the media’s own outrage is often strategically manipulated in order to enhance status whilst simultaneously creating and managing a particular aspect of identity and prestige deployed in antipathy to a prevailing stigma.

Upon re-reading Jones’s thesis (2003) after my initial fieldwork period exploring the Serbian BM scene, I began to think about the strategic deployment of deviant stereotypes on a wider scale. It is possible to think of the ‘deviant’ stereotype as a lens through which many Serbs articulate their relationship to the ‘West’. Many Serbs to whom I spoke articulated a complex relationship with the ‘West’ characterized by their reaction to unfavourable depictions of Serbia and negative stereotyping of the wider Balkan region. According to Volcic, many ordinary Serbs negate the stigma of these depictions by playing up to (sometimes displaying a sense of pride) the stereotypes of Serbia and the Balkans as a place of danger, instability, violence and internal conflict (Volcic 2005: 159). Within the Serbian BM scene this has afforded actors significant ‘sub-cultural’ capital amongst their European counterparts, given that the BM scene came to prominence due to its involvement in, and use of, real and symbolic violence.

Therefore, in the wider European BM scene there is an added sense of mystery and danger surrounding Serbian BM bands due to the fact that they come from one of the last European countries to
have experienced violent ethno-religious warfare. It is also a source of great pride for members of the Serbian BM band The Stone and their fans that they were one of few bands to regularly perform live concerts during the bombing of Beograd. On one of The Stone’s CDs (Some Wounds Bleed Forever; 2000) they include a sound sample recorded during a NATO bombing raid as a prelude to one of their songs.

In order to provide a context in which to understand the basis of sub-cultural capital accumulated through a proximity to real and imagined forms of violence, I shall describe some of the events that accompanied the development of the second and most influential wave of BM. There had previously been plenty of metal bands willing to sing about destruction, violence and murder but, until Norwegian BM came into being, few if any bands actually crossed the line and made their violent themes a reality. In what was partially a shock tactic, but also ideological, Christianity was depicted by some members of Norway’s BM scene as a corrupting influence, which destroyed the older Norse religion and made the people weak and subservient. The most potent manifestation of this ideology was the razing to the ground of the thousand-year-old Fantoft stave church, a national treasure and one of few examples of this particular type of church in existence.

Musically the sound structure of BM became more diverse as the nineties progressed, ranging from what was described by those within the scene as ‘primitive, raw or brutal BM’ (such as Mayhem and Darkthrone) to ‘epic, orchestral BM’ by bands such as Emperor and Dimmu Borgir. Black leather and band t-shirts (often banned) became the BM uniform; on stage, personal identity is subsumed by stage persona, and stage names such as Faust, Euronymous, Fenriz, and Dead were adopted by BM musicians. In addition to the ‘uniform’, heavily applied white and black make-up often referred to as corpse-paint is daubed onto the face and arms. Several bands are also using fake, and in some cases real, animal or human blood during performances and for promotional photographs.

Mayhem were one the first Norwegian BM bands to experience notoriety when their vocalist Per Yngve Ohlin, whose pseudonym was ‘Dead’, took his own life with a shotgun blast to the head. Dead’s suicide-note simply read ‘excuse all the blood’. Øystein Aarseth (pseudonym Euronymous), Mayhem’s guitarist and owner of record shop Helvette, was the first to find Dead’s body and before calling the police he is said to have taken photographs of the body. These photographs were later used as cover artwork for one of Mayhem’s records. Euronymous then took over as Mayhem’s vocalist but was later stabbed to death by temporary guitarist Varg Vikernes, of the one-man BM project, Burzum. Vikernes was convicted of Euronymous’s murder along with other crimes relating to church arson and was sentenced to twenty-one years in prison. While in prison, Vikernes continued to record music, and his ongoing incarceration seems to enhance his prestige and, in the eyes of many BM fans, lends his art an undeniable aura of authenticity.

Assessing the Value of Blood
Throughout my eleven months of fieldwork in Serbia I lived with musicians, frequented BM hangouts, bars, concerts, band rehearsals, and on two occasions went on tour with The Stone. Although BM music, artwork and ordinary social scenes are quite engrossing,
it is the live event that proves most amenable to anthropological scrutiny. When I first began to analyse the spectacle of the live event, I found it difficult to find a theoretical approach that would be useful for describing, contextualizing and analysing the values apparent in what I had witnessed. Most literature on the phenomenon of bloodletting and music scenes tended to relate to a psychological approach, whereas self-harm occurred in a private setting and tended to be analysed from a therapeutic viewpoint. Whilst there is no doubt that what I had witnessed is not divorced from the above criteria, I wish to provide an analysis that attempts to straddle both insider and ethnographer viewpoints and, in doing so, not load my analysis with a judgement on the psychological well-being of the individuals involved. Therefore, Susan Sontag's essay 'Against Interpretation' provided me with some insights that facilitated a more nuanced understanding of performance as reciprocal art (Sontag 1990). In many cases, the discussion of performance and works of art as texts, objects and symbols etc. has proved something of a navel-gazing hindrance when applied to musical scenes. It may be argued that these types of descriptions somehow sanitize the intensity of a successful live event. This is particularly so in the case of violent, visually and conceptually provocative events, during which there is for many a profound and engaging experience of something that could be referred to as the 'sacred'. Hence the use of the term 'ecstasy' to describe this experience, as it effectively describes the sense of being 'outside of oneself' that revellers sometimes associate with attending a concert, without necessarily implying religious connotations.

Within the BM scene a sense of occultism associated with the music is escalated into a more profound sphere of activity by rituals such as the application of 'corpse-paint' (face paint), special costumes, self-harm, blood drinking, and imbibing intoxicating substances (or negating them, in the case of musicians who remain sober). Through these rituals and during successful performances the musicians and fans transcend and are lifted out of the mundane, into the realm of the sacred, where the experience of collective effervescence and meaningful participation are rendered entirely present through the meeting of, and exceeding of, expectation and the creation of new 'scene' myths.

Whilst some observers outside of the BM scene would find the bloodletting and drinking problematic, I am reluctant to refer to these activities as 'self harm' in the psychological sense. Rather, I wish to depict the activities as an integral part of a ritual activity, and for which meaning is dependant upon context (performance) as opposed to outcome (scarring, trauma etc.).

In her discussion of film criticism, Sontag states that 'those who reach for a Freudian interpretation ... are only expressing their lack of response to what is there on the screen' (Sontag 1990: 10). I believe that this is also applicable to music and performance, particularly so with so called 'underground' music scenes.

Sontag argues that works of art should be experienced for what they actually are – art should frighten, confront, and demand sensual, physical, tangible reactions from people; she states that 'real art has the capacity to make us nervous' (Sontag 1990: 8). However, certain types of interpretation seek to sanitize, by 'taming art' and making it 'manageable, and comfortable'; Sontag advocates accepting the visual, physical and intellectual, for its immediacy and 'rigorous if narrow solutions to certain problems' (Sontag 1990: 9).

In relation to live events, their success rests in their ability to absolutely overwhelm the senses on both individual and collective levels, to induce ecstasy in the revellers, the production of a state-of-being that Durkheim and others have termed collective effervescence. This also relates to what Kahn-Harris describes as music's ability to transcend the 'mundane' through participation in 'spectacular' events, and live performances would certainly conform to the criteria of allowing a person to step outside of himself or herself (Kahn-Harris 2007).

In order to further analyse the interaction between performer and audience, Mauss's theories concerning the reciprocal nature and the magical hold exerted by the 'gift' may be of use in the context of the live performance analysis, where honour and prestige serve as a substitute for magic. The reason for this is that the experience/product being exchanged goes far beyond paying for a ticket and receiving goods and services. During a live event there is an exchange of commonality offered through the ritual of performance, contingent upon the degree of successful interaction and exchange between performer and audience. These exchanges are most apparent when a band manages to incite mass ecstasy in the form of a 'mosh pit'. A 'mosh pit' is when members of the (mostly male) audience, normally those in the throng directly in front of the stage, begin to violently slam their bodies into one another in a manner that is physically similar to mosh pits described by Tsitsos (2006), but with a slightly different ethos informing the experience.

Despite the violence and appearance of chaos in a mosh pit, it is not without conventions and practices that tend to be reproduced wherever a mosh pit occurs. For example, if someone falls to the ground they are generally picked up straight away. When a fight does break out, in the majority of cases the rest of the crowd will intervene and separate the opponents. As a result of belligerents knowing that the fight will be separated quickly, there is often a more excessive display of bravado than would have occurred in different circumstances such as outside a venue, or at a bar. The mosh pit provides opportunities for self-aggrandizement through violence, particularly amongst young men who have the energy to stay in the pit for the whole duration of a band's performance. In these
situations a person makes his presence conspicuous by pushing, punching and shoving others to the limits of acceptable behaviour, but also in time with music. Self-aggrandizement only succeeds and is tolerated where acts of ritualized bonding occur; certain protocols must be followed, and eye contact must be made before grappling with a stranger.

With reference to Dante, Sontag maintains that it may once have been revolutionary to ‘design works of art so that they might be experienced on several levels’, ‘now it is not so revolutionary’ (Sontag 1990:13). In accordance with Sontag’s argument, interpretation is another level, one that does not emanate from the artwork itself but is described as a ‘principle of redundancy which is the principal affliction of modern life’ (Sontag 1990:13). When a band performs a concert, its fans respond in emotional, instinctive and sensual ways. Sontag states that ‘real art has the capacity to make us nervous'; however, it would not be stretching her thesis too far to suggest that ‘real’ art also has the capacity to make people ecstatic. Therefore, when a band performs, there is a general tendency on the part of the fan to want the ‘art’ to be brilliant and overwhelming. This fuels anticipation, desire, and the utilization of cultural knowledge and capital, which to a greater or lesser degree determines the manner in which art is perceived and received within music scenes. This is where the concept of genre is of particular relevance, because, to some musicians and fans, it is important that their music should remain within the confines and dictates of the genre. With regard to BM and in particular, live performances – the behaviour and interaction between audience and performers – are quite different from typical rock and pop bands and audiences. Due to the misanthropic stance and aesthetic of BM, it would be inappropriate for bands to plead (to seek approval, affection etc.) with the audience and reach out and touch people in the manner typical of many rock bands. Instead, a strategic distance is maintained and interaction occurs in the form of menacing grimaces, and of bands and audiences raising the sign of the horns or an inverted cross with their fingers and arms (see following image).

**Genre leaking and the limits of expression**

Now that I have described some of the characteristics of a typical BM concert I shall describe a festival during which The Stone from Serbia and Shining from Norway performed and elicited the most profound reactions from the crowd throughout the three days of the festival. At Dunkelheit festival in Brno in the Czech Republic were many of The Stone’s fans who knew their lyrics by heart and who gave them a deeply appreciative welcome. The music of The Stone and their performances could be said to portray elements that rigidly conform to the dictates of Slavic BM. They wear make-up (‘corpse-paint’), and armbands studded with six-inch nails; they fire-breathe on stage and the music contains no indexical tinges from anything recognisably different from BM. While there are many bands that BM scene-members would describe as derivative and unoriginal for adhering so rigidly to genre stereotypes, for The Stone this is one of the strengths as they appear to eschew changing trends.
yet still manage to create a profoundly atmospheric sound and style. They play fast, powerful music and sing and chant lyrics based on a syncretic fusion of Slavic Pagan mythology and Satanism that lends itself to anthemic singing along by the crowd. Amusingly for the band this often happens outside Serbia and fans try to sing along to Serbian lyrics, which they clearly can't understand. On this occasion they also attracted a skinhead following who gave salutes and chanted ‘Slavonic Power’ and ‘Slava Smrtni’, a lyric from one of The Stone’s songs that translates as ‘glory to death’. In order to describe the power of The Stone’s performance I have included a description of their performance based upon field notes taken at the time (sections from field notes in italics):

_The singer Glad [an archaic Serbian word meaning ‘the hunger’] was exceptionally charismatic, inciting the crowd with outstretched arms adorned with spikes and announcing each song in a menacing growled voice. Standing at well over six foot tall, Glad tends to absolutely dominate the stage and this gig is no exception. His height, outstretched arms, natural arrogant swagger and all the leather and spikes really set him apart from all of the previous vocalists that day._

_Throughout their entire show there is a furious mosh pit in front of the stage, many men are topless, swinging punches, slamming into each other and occasionally lifting people above their heads to crowd surf. By the time The Stone finish, everyone up front is exhausted, ecstatic and drenched in alcohol and sweat. By way of finale, the band raises the sign of the horns to the crowd, shout ‘slava’ and walk off, a friend of the band then emerges and extinguishes the funeral candles that had been placed in front of the stage at the beginning of the show._

_There was no doubt in people’s minds that something transcendental and spectacular had taken place. During the performance people’s expressions were aggressive, glaring at the band, with lots of macho posuring resulting in real and symbolic violence. Yet when the band complete their show, people’s expressions are transformed, they walk out into the brightness of the venue’s bar grinning and exhausted, and chatter can be heard in several languages praising the spectacular nature of the performance._
The Stone’s music and performance could serve as a prime example of a stereotypical BM band who remain utterly within the confines of the genre without any hint of genre leaking or indexical tinge, as described by Bauman and Briggs (1992). As such The Stone are extremely proficient, recreating this atmosphere successfully at the majority of the concerts I have attended.

Another band that elicited a similarly profound response but through notably different means was Shining from Norway. Again, I shall draw upon field notes to convey a sense of what took place:

Although the music and spectacle was impressive at the beginning of the show, the crowd responded in quite a muted way. I believe that this was because the singer (Kvarforth from Shining) was so provocative, transgressive and utterly different to every other band that had played this festival. Many people were too stunned, amazed or shocked to respond in the manner they had to previous bands.

At one point the singer invited the people to clap at the end of a song, an extremely odd gesture within the context of this music scene but one that was reciprocated rapturously. This may have been because people were too shocked to show appreciation in the usual manner, as Shining’s music doesn’t always suit the kind of violent communitas of the mosh pit that other bands such as The Stone typically evoke.

Shining’s music tends to defy and stray beyond typical genre confines; many people were caught off guard and left almost speechless at the end of each song. Shining’s style borrows heavily from ambient jazz-inspired sound-scapes, it was also noticeably slower and quite metronomic, rising and falling to crescendos, as opposed to the furious paced sonic barrage that The Stone had offered up.

When the music was slow and creeping, Kvarforth the singer kept his back to the audience, swigging alternately from a bottle of Jack Daniel’s whiskey and a bottle containing animal blood. His arms, chest and torso were absolutely covered in a latticework of razor blade scars and when he emerged onstage he was bleeding from approximately 12 large cuts on his arms, ribcage, chest and stomach. He also used a large knife to add a few more cuts during the show.

Another aspect that made this performance so unique in the context of this festival was the fact that the blood drinking and shedding was performed in such a non-macho way. There was a feeling that this person was sharing with the crowd a painful and cathartic aspect of his personality through the medium of the live music. Kvarforth behaved in complete contrast to the...
excessively masculine, power-dominated performances of the other bands.

Shining exposed weakness, pain, and sexual ambiguity; Kvarforth blew kisses to the audience and sprayed mouthfuls of blood into the front rows. Some people there begged him to share this primal substance with them and he embraced a few male and female fans with his blood-soaked arms and kissed their faces.

Unusually for a BM concert (and the scene in general) there was a pronounced and deliberate sexual ambiguity to this performance; Kvarforth writhed erotically around the stage with his hand inside his leather trousers groping himself and rolling his eyeballs back in melancholic ecstasy. For the final song Kvarforth said that he found Czech girls to be extremely beautiful but wished that they would do something for him. Then he screamed ‘you must submit to self destruction’ and the band launched into a thundering rendition of one of their most famous songs (a song glorifying suicide and self harm which Kvarforth composed when he was fourteen years of age).

In conclusion, the two performances just described had been the ‘gift’, the exchange of mutuality, the creation of bonds between audience and performer, the one that establishes the elite, producing and enhancing a sense of prestige for both performer and participant through the transcendental spectacle that had taken place. The Stone and Shining had met and exceeded expectation. A symbiotic sense of collective effervescence had been offered and reciprocated. Bonds of commonality were forged and the scene, community or neo-tribe had successfully reproduced itself according to the expectation and requirements of the BM genre.

In the case of The Stone from Serbia, their music rigidly adhered to the confines and orthodoxies of the genre; therefore, they were under pressure to perform to the absolute limit of their abilities. The reason was that in this case novelty could not be relied upon to win over an audience, some of whom were unfamiliar with The Stone’s music. However, with Shining from Norway, most of their songs did not possess the same frantic tempo and heavy beat necessary to incite a violent mosh pit, which would normally be a typical feature of a successful BM performance. The visceral spectacle of Shining’s performance and bloodletting provided a novel spectacle and allowed the band to stray beyond genre confines and still manage to produce the experience of collective effervescence in what is typically an extremely conservative music scene.

At the beginning of this article I touched upon the issue of a music scene’s capacity to accumulate forms of ‘capital’ based on a real or imagined proximity to violence. One of the problems inherent in this understanding of violence as prestige, is the difficulty of sustaining these forms of prestige as a scene becomes more widespread and disseminates into ‘glocal’ contexts. In various contexts artists are often accused of ‘selling out’, as in the Punk scene post-1978, or of accepting censorship in order to gain mainstream attention, as in the case of formerly provocative acts that wish to promote their music using youth oriented music shows on TV. These critiques generally hinge upon criteria that mythologize a particular era in a musical genre at the expense of downplaying the continuity and evolution of the genre. Therefore an analysis of the immediate, visceral and sensual aspects of participation in live events helps to avoid a sense of ‘centrism’ in music, in the same way that a shedding of Freudian frames of reference for Sontag produces a more profound and engaging interaction with the artworks she describes (1990).

Through the inclusion of ‘raw’ field-notes and a downplaying of theory as frame of reference, this article privileges an analysis of performance, as opposed to the text of the music scene, thus taking away any attempt to arrive at a theory of value (Graeber 2001) in favour an emphasis on the free play of symbols (Huijinga 1955).

Therefore, I would playfully suggest that within anthropology’s appreciation of multiculturalism, tolerance and human diversity, the reader may spare a thought for those who dedicate themselves so tirelessly to the cause of extreme intolerance and misanthropic anti-humanism.
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What does it sound like?: Severity, Subjectivity, and Adaptation among Older Adults with Tinnitus living in Ireland

Cormac Sheehan

Abstract
Tinnitus, the perception of noise without the presence of external stimuli, is a common complaint, with about 10 % of the global adult population experiencing tinnitus. About one in a hundred people of that 10% are distressed by their tinnitus, experiencing anxiety and suffering. This paper sets out to explore the nature and characteristics of tinnitus, as represented in the extensive medical and psychological literature, as well as in ten interviews and observations with older adults living in Ireland. Issues of subjectivity are also explored, with a detailed reflection on the adaptations made to cope with tinnitus. This paper concludes that, if there is to be any developments in tinnitus research, the subjective experience of tinnitus must be considered.

Key Words: Tinnitus, Subjectivity, Severity, Adaptation, Habituation, Music, Radio, Television, Noise

Introduction
Tinnitus is the perception of sound in the ears or head in the absence of external stimuli. Most, if not all, people at one stage of their lives will experience ‘ear noises’, such as ringing, whistling, buzzing or a combination of sounds. These ear noises often turn out to be transitory, disappearing within a matter of minutes or days. For others, an estimated 10% of the global adult population, tinnitus becomes a persistent feature of everyday life. There have been numerous attempts to distinguish between transitory and persistent tinnitus, but there has been a lack of clear agreement to define differences. However, it has been suggested that tinnitus must be perceived for more than five minutes at a time at least once a week to be considered persistent. In general, common sense applies; what may be called ‘disco tinnitus’ or ‘club tinnitus’, after exposure to loud noises for example, is different to persistent tinnitus (Naughton: 2004). Epidemiologically, tinnitus can be broken down into three groups: 10% of the adult global population experience tinnitus persistently; of that 10% one in three seek medical advice; and one in ten (of the 10%) are greatly affected by tinnitus, experiencing annoyance, depression, anxiety, reduced ability to maintain employment, impact on leisure activities, and a general reduction of quality of life (Fagleson 2007, Siroise et al. 2006). With the lack of reliable epidemiological evidence it is difficult to ascertain the true figures of those experiencing tinnitus in Ireland. It is possible that Ireland may have a higher or lower incidence of tinnitus; however, applying the above global estimate to Ireland (that one in a hundred people are greatly affected by their tinnitus), an estimated 15,000–20,000 people in Ireland fall into this category. The epidemiology of tinnitus is further complicated by research findings suggesting that tinnitus is more common in older age and that women are more likely to report it than men, and that class, ethnicity, and occupation have been observed to impact of the prevalence rates of tinnitus (Davis and Rafaie 2000).

Tinnitus is often divided into two groups, objective (pulsatile) and subjective (non-pulsatile). Objective tinnitus is associated with heart beat and is likely to be the product of a blood-vessel irregularity of the arteries and veins of the head or neck area, which are adjacent to the ear on the surface of the head or just inside the head. Objective tinnitus can be heard by an examiner using a stethoscope or specialized equipment (Henry et al. 2005). Subjective tinnitus is far more common and less treatable than objective tinnitus, and cannot be heard by an examiner. Subjective tinnitus is caused by hearing loss, damage to the hair cells in the inner ear, age-related hearing loss, neck and back injuries, ear infections, common colds, flu, side effects of over 200 prescribed and non-prescribed medications, overuse of quinine, and as a result of surgery, to name but a few. Hazel (1995) argues that, although there are physiological differences between objective and subjective tinnitus, all tinnitus is subjective, as it is dependent of the sufferer’s own perception of the noises heard. The subjectivity of tinnitus is highlighted in the attempts of sufferers to articulate and describe noises perceived (see below). Andresson and Vretblad (2000) also note that tinnitus is concomitantly associated with every human auditory dysfunction, and some sufferers present with no obvious physiological condition that could be deemed a root cause. Furthermore, Baguley in a review of the mechanisms of tinnitus points out that ‘Hypotheses regarding mechanisms of tinnitus generation abound. Given the heterogeneity observed in the tinnitus population, it may be considered that no single theory, model or hypothesis will explain the presence of tinnitus in all those affected’ (2000: 195). Interestingly, recent tinnitus research has made associations between tinnitus and phantom limb pain, as Naughton explains: ‘While majority opinion seems to agree that some kind of damage to the mechanisms of the inner ear is the initial generator, the subsequent persistence of it as a sensation, and especially as a troubling sensation, is now believed to involve some kind of neural/cortical reprocessing of the impaired auditory signal’ (2004: 10). The dysfunction...
of the auditory system may be the ‘initial generator’; however, it is the neural reprocessing which continues the perceived sound. Kate Murphy in her New York Times (April 1, 2008) article describes this process metaphorically: ‘In the absence of normal auditory stimulation the brain is like a driver trying to tune in to a radio station that is out of range. It (the brain) turns up the volume trying to get a signal but only gets annoying static’. That annoying static may be a result of neural noise (the sound of nerves firing in the brain) and/or leftover sound memory. Comparing tinnitus to phantom limb syndrome goes some way to explaining that the inability to hear does not prevent an individual developing tinnitus, and in cases where a person’s tinnitus is so severe to have auditory nerves cut, tinnitus can and does remain. This is similar to reports of amputees sensing and feeling amputated limbs (Henry et al. 2005). Although tinnitus is for the most part perceived as a noise and therefore associated with the ear as the location of that noise, recent research and technological advancements in brain imaging have located the production-site of tinnitus within the brain (Johnsrude, Giraud and Frackowiak 2002). On this point Simpson and Davis point out that tinnitus ‘… could be likened to those found in phantom limb pain, where reorganisation of neural circuits leads not only to the generation of pain, but where it also changes the site of the processing of the sensory information received from remaining parts of the body’ (1999: 13). With no single theory or approach to solving the problem of tinnitus, and the endless mechanisms of tinnitus, and concomitantly associated dysfunctions of auditory system, it is no real surprise that clear treatment pathways and/or cures are not readily available, especially for non-pulsatile tinnitus (subjective tinnitus). It was the experience of most who took part in the present research and elsewhere (Naughton 2004) that sufferers were given little or no guidance from General Practitioners (if sought) and were told to ‘accept it, and move on’. For about one in ten who have tinnitus the act of acceptance and moving on is very difficult, and there is no way of predicting why a person will ‘accept’ tinnitus, and another be deeply disturbed and search endlessly for a cure and the quiet.

Severity

As noted, Hazel (1995), in disagreeing with the distinction between objective and subjective tinnitus and in professing that all tinnitus is subjective, opens an interesting and relevant debate on the issues of the severity of tinnitus, acuteness felt at the onset, and eventual habituation. If we agree with Hazel, then the issue of severity is also deeply subjective. What one person would describe as mildly bothersome, another might describe as torture (for a historical account of tinnitus as a type of torture, see Dan’s (2005) commentary on Titus’s Tinnitus). But what, if any, is the relationship between severity and how loud or what pitch the perceived noise is at? Regardless of the fact that we can objectively hear tinnitus, or subjectively listen to a person’s description of her/his perceived tinnitus, most of the literature points to a psychological framework for understanding degrees of severity and the habituation process, and may have little to do with the actual noises heard or physiological bases for tinnitus. In terms of causation, primary focus is on auditory dysfunction. When it comes to coping or not in some cases, it is primarily a matter for the individual; on this point Naughton argues as follows:

Central to the success of an individual’s ‘gradual habituation’ is the person’s ‘own attitude’. There is growing evidence to suggest that people who experience severe tinnitus may have predisposing characteristics, such as suffering from stress or heightened anxiety, and this may link the emergence of tinnitus to an emotional event. In a 2001 study, Granqvist et al. assessed the relationship between attachment theory and severity. The results provisionally suggest that people who have poor social supports, who are distrusting of social relationships (avoidance), and employ maladaptive coping strategies, are more likely to have severe tinnitus. Research also points to comparisons between tinnitus and chronic pain (Moller 2000). Chronic pain tends to be treated with psychological treatments, and acceptance of the chronic pain is necessary for the habituation process. As with chronic pain, tinnitus often goes undiagnosed and without a cure, and treatment is a psychological battle to accept, seek out support and change behaviors to lessen the severity. As Davis and Morgan point out: ‘People with tinnitus are often left un- or misdiagnosed, accused of malingering, and frustrated that most health care professionals do not understand or appreciate their condition’ (2008: 134). Like chronic pain, the need for acceptance is not just on the part of the sufferer, but clearly associated with reaction and understanding given by health-care professionals. The sharpest indication that tinnitus severity is dependent on individual attitude is the prominence of Tinnitus Retraining Therapy, which concentrates on the association between perception of sound (tinnitus) and negative emotion (anger, hate,
anxiety), as Herratiz et al. explain: ‘The goal is the habituation to a nonsignificative signal, that is, tinnitus, first, eliminating its reaction and, second, minimizing its perception’ (2007: 225). What this amounts to is ‘eliminating its reaction’ by extensive counseling, and ‘minimizing perception’ through the use of sound therapy, for example using music, television, hearing aids or more developed audio maskers.

It has been consistently argued that there has been a growing ocularcentric bias in approaches to ethnographic data collection, and the lower senses (Stoller 1997) have been neglected in ethnographic endeavours (Ree 1999). Rice (2003) has argued that ‘a deaf ear has been turned to the acoustic properties of environments’ and in the case of tinnitus, the lack of interest from anthropology has been deafening. However, the reordering of the lower senses to a more prominent and important position within anthropology offers a framework to understand the subjectivity of tinnitus. Tinnitus presents a difficult theoretical model to comprehend; it is a sound or layers of sound without external acoustic stimuli, in effect it is a sound but not a sound. It is real to those experiencing tinnitus, yet it is not part of the acoustic environment of others. It is a sound that needs to be tuned out, yet, with so many channels, which dial is to be turned?

Draper’s 2002 examination of men’s experiences of attending fetal ultrasounds presents a possible theoretical position for understanding tinnitus. Draper argues that until technological advancements in ultrasound, the experience of pregnancy was entirely that of the mother. Draper, drawing heavily on Duden, argues:

Duden’s (1993: 91) concept of hexis (the ‘habitual state in which a person finds herself’) provides a further relevant theoretical perspective here. In the present context, hexis can be described as the woman’s experience of pregnancy. Prior to the rise of medical technology woman’s pregnancy hexis was characterized by hapsis, that is knowledge accumulated about the world and her experience through perception and touch. A haptic hexis therefore was woman’s embodied experience of her pregnancy gained through touch, feeling and being and was available only to her (Draper 2002: 18).

Developing this point further, Rice (2008) presents the importance of sound and hearing in the understanding of the experience of disease and illness:

The sounds created by the body might also be understood to constitute part of the haptic hexis. A person is aware of his or her body sounds through notions of touch, feeling and being as much as through purely acoustic experience. To use an obvious example, a person running fast may be conscious of the sound of his or her heart beating. However, that person will also experience the heart, to use a cliché, pounding in his or her chest, or feel the sensation of blood pumping in his or her ears. In a similar way, a person may distinctly hear his or her stomach gurgling but at the same time will be aware of vibrations rippling through his or her gut. The body sounds, even when distinctly heard, remain intertwined in the haptic hexis … Medical students, of course, listen to their bodies in brief, if concentrated, spells. Their sudden awareness of their own heart sounds may be intense, but is not enduring. Auto-auscultation draws attention to a particular dimension of the body. It introduces a new sense of bodily possibility, but the students can choose when to listen and in the vast majority of cases find healthy heart sounds. Those patients who suffer the rather disturbing examples of auto-auscultation … however, find themselves engaged in much more dramatically ‘acoustic’ or ‘sonic’ ‘hexis’, a sonically-marked sense of the body-as-self. The patient’s auto-auscultatory experience is implicated in, and even formative of, their particular experience of illness and disease. (Rice: 2008)

Tinnitus nicely fits into this theoretical frame of the acoustic hexis, whereby those who have tinnitus hear various noises and are acutely aware of the internal nature of the noise, as being from within, rather than without. To understand tinnitus, the experience of the sufferer should not only be considered in terms of the distress caused or the annoyance experienced, but also the acoustic hexis, the sound itself, should tell us about the embodied experience of tinnitus, or as Rice writes the ‘body-as-self’. Therefore any theoretical frame concerning tinnitus should begin with the embodied experience of hearing noises, not the effects of such noises. Asking ‘what does it sounds like?’ is as close as the researcher may hope to get to the acoustic hexis. Part of the embodied experience, as expressed by the interviewees, is the effort not to listen to the noise perceived, to borrow from Schafer, who points out: ‘We have no earlids. We are condemned to listen. But this does not mean our ears are always open’ (2003: 25). To become what Schafer calls a bad listener is the key to successfully managing or someway placating the affects of tinnitus, a way of trying to somehow turn off the acoustic hexis. The interviewees were quick to point out that there was a constant awareness of the tinnitus, but they all strove to become bad listeners, we varying degrees of success and very much dependent on routine, patterns of activity and general well-being. When seeking out medical advice they were often met with less-than-convincing direction – ‘ignore it and accept it’ – become a bad listener? Tinnitus is a global phenomenon, with millions of people affected, yet all in this study were given the advice ‘ignore it and
Methods and Aims

This research is based on semi-structured interviews and observations with ten community-dwelling older adults, living in Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare, and Sligo. Each of the participants who took part in the research had earlier taken part in TRIL (Technology Research for Independent Living, visit www.trilcentre.org); all volunteered to take part in the research, which was conducted in 2008.

Each semi-structured interview took place in the participant's home, and in general lasted for over one hour. Although there are a number of developed and validated interviews and questionnaires to assess tinnitus, these were not used (see Naughton: 2004 for a review of questionnaires developed to assess tinnitus). They were not used for three reasons. First, I had detailed experience of working with older adults, and had noted that the presentation of questionnaires often resulted in less than satisfactory interviews—often interviewees would provide answers for the sake of giving an answer. Second, none of the developed questionnaires available for selection were specifically for older adults or older Irish adults, so I deemed it necessary to develop my own question set. Third, and perhaps most importantly, I wanted the question set to be open to change, and following the threads of research as they emerged, mainly through observations and open-ended questions. Prior to research an extensive literature review was conducted and from this a simple semi-structured interview was developed, to reflect themes that are present in the diverse tinnitus literature, which is dominated by medical and psychological reports (Anderson 2000, Davis and Rafaie 2000, Henry 2005). The semi-structured interview first examined the self-reported pitch, sound and severity of tinnitus. Second, the problems associated with tinnitus were assessed through questions about effects on sleep, changes in patterns, pain, implications for daily activities, annoyance, effects on social activity and engagement. Third, information was elicited on family history, occupation, accidents. Fourth, the participants were asked if they had sought any medical advice, whether they would consider medication and/or surgery, or whether they would purchase a technological solution to their tinnitus. Finally the participants were asked to explain how and why they believed they had developed tinnitus. Observational techniques were also used to develop the questions, depending on what was witnessed within the home of each participant. For example, it was observed when arriving at the participants’ homes whether radios and televisions were on. From these observations questions were asked about the use of radio (music in particular) and television as possible ways of ‘masking’ tinnitus, and this paper is based on their responses. Eight of the ten participants responded positively. The following excerpt from a transcript demonstrates the use of radio and music and the absence of awareness of the connection between their usage and tinnitus.

Cormac Sheehan
Would it possible, if the radio was turned off, I won’t be able to hear you clearly (raised voice).


Mike James’

No problem … I always have the radio on. I have one in every room in the house. When I am out gardening I have these old headphones on …

Cormac Sheehan

Do you listen to music or the talk radio?

Mike James

I get distracted if I am not listening to something.

Cormac Sheehan

Is that because of the tinnitus?

Mike James

I never thought of that before … I guess it does drown it out and I can work away. If I am reading I have to have the tele on to concentrate.

What was a simple observation became the basis for this paper. Originally, this research was to explore the relationship between social engagement/activity among older adults with tinnitus. This aim emerged from long-term ethnographic work with older adults who were identified as being either probable social isolates or those with busy social lives. While interviewing an older adult I was told the following:

I can’t stay in; I will go mad from the noise. It is ringing in my ears, when I am here; I have a television or radio on all the time. I go out so I can get away from the noise, I need to be out, and that is why I have a busy social life.

However, when I conducted the semi-structured interviews, this need to be out of the house and having a busy social life did not emerge as a finding. What did emerge was the constant and persistent use of radios and televisions by the participants in the research (Henry et al. 2008). The observations made in the participants’ homes emerged to be as valuable as the semi-structured interviews, and elicited content that is credible. There are limits to this research. The sample group of ten is small and must be considered unrepresentative of the Irish population. The ten participants are all over 60 years of age, and therefore comparative analysis with younger cohorts is not possible. However, in a recent excellent report called Quest for Quiet: People’s Experience of Tinnitus in Ireland, Ireland was identified as a ‘data desert when it comes to tinnitus’ (Naughton 2004: 21). The present research, limits aside, will hopefully go some way to add water to that ‘desert’. Moreover, the participants in this research were not part of support groups or members of the Irish Tinnitus Association (which is not the case in the aforementioned report), so their responses may be considered less biased by the knowledge provided within support groups and associations.

Subjectivity, Sound Perception and Adaptation

It is an unavoidable question, but when dealing with a subjective nature of tinnitus, the researcher must ask, ‘what does it sound like?’ The variability and complexity of responses showed that the question was simplistic, given the complications related to different patterns of pitch, loudness and bilateral or unilateral tinnitus (in one or both ears). Tinnitus, derived from the Latin tinnere to ‘ring’ and later in English ‘ringing in the ear’, does not reflect the variations expressed by the participants in this study and the difficulty of expressing the resulting noise, as the following excerpts illustrate:

‘It sounds like the sea or escaping air’

‘It sounds like alarms going off in the distance or voices’

‘It is like a bell, or an echo, it tinges sometimes’

‘It is a low-level sound, not acute, but I am conscious of it’

‘It is a dull sound; like your ears are blocked up … it is not that ringing noise’

‘It is a like a radio … like static … no not like static … it is a heavier sound … hisssSSSSS, and it gets louder towards the end’

‘It is a distant sound. Like if a train passed you by, and you get the resulting echo…”

The variety of perceived noise associated with tinnitus is not captured by ‘ringing in the ear’. Participants themselves have difficulty explaining what the noise is ‘like’. What I would perceive as being ‘like’ something again has infinite variables. These variables are further multiplied by the changing pattern of tinnitus, from the onset to daily patterns of tinnitus, becoming worse at night for most, or while sitting reading or in the case of Mike James while playing music:

Mike James

The echo one, that was the most upsetting … I was playing music and all I could hear was this echo that was very upsetting, as it was like if someone is singing out of tune with you, and it upsets the time. You hear them playing it again. It is like a resonance … This went on to for about two weeks, and I was thinking, what I am going to do with this bloody thing? And just like that, it was gone.

Cormac Sheehan

So it is gone completely?

Mike James

I get the whistle, or whatever you call it, in the other ear every now and again, and it does not last too long … sometimes it is hard to tell if the sound is coming from the outside or if it is internal in the ear … block off with your hand or finger and it is still there.

Cormac Sheehan

You said it is like a high C (hums a high C)

* Pseudonyms used throughout.
Mike James
No … no more like a middle C … It would start then it would stop and then it would start again … I wouldn’t get it that often … It keeps going and then it dies out (doooooooon fading at the end) I also get this low rumbling sound, like a drum beating. I have high blood pressure you see …

As shown in the case of Mike James, it is possible to have more than one type of noise, an echo, a whistle, and low rumbling sound. For the sake of illustration, not diagnosis, it is also more than probable that Mike James has both pulsatile and non-pulsatile tinnitus, given his history of hypertension and the description of the rumbling sound as a ‘drum beating’. Mike James, as mentioned earlier also employs different methods of dealing with tinnitus, as do the majority of participants; some press on the ear to release the pressure, others make sure the noise is external by checking that all appliances in the house are turned off, but the far most common adaptation to tinnitus is the use of radio and television to mask the perceived noises.

David Hurley is a 66-year-old man with a progressive disorder, which causes him to shake, inhibits his mobility and slurs his speech and, for him, tinnitus was a minor complaint, an annoyance, and one he felt he had control over, most of the time:

David Hurley
I listen to the radio all the time. Classical music mostly … I find that modern music makes me anxious and I do everything to stop myself becoming anxious, because of my condition. I listen all day long, it is on in every room in the house. I think it helps me think …

Cormac Sheehan
Is that because of the tinnitus?

David Hurley
I think so, I never thought of it like that … The most troubling time I have with the tinnitus is when I’m meditating … You see, the effects of the tablets start to wear off about an hour before I have to take the next lot. I go upstairs, and I have a dark room and listen to music to calm my body, but the tinnitus sometimes gets through and I can’t concentrate on the music … So, that is strange, I listen to music to block it out, but when I need to listen to music it does not work!!! (Laughs out loud)

In a separate interview with a retired medical professional, with a developed interest and appreciation for jazz, the issue of adaptation and daily patterns of tinnitus were discussed:

Robert Sheahan
… it is not a piercing sound … I am conscious of it … but if I am listening to something else it would tend to override it. It is not really an inconvenience; it can be a nuisance … I used to listen to jazz records at night, but I found conversation much easier. See, there is a beat in music (clicking his fingers), whereas there is no beat in conversation … so the beat tends to (slapping the back of his hands), with the exception of classical music. Whereas conversation does not have a beat, and it is the tonality of the sound from conversation that would block it out at night. I don’t think I thought about it consciously, I guess I subconsciously have over the years filled the place with radios and music.

There are parallels between Robert’s use of talk radio at night and David’s use of music while meditating. Both suggest that tinnitus becomes more perceived in the silence of night or in the calmness of meditation. The overwhelmingly common response is to adapt through the use of music and other sounds. It was found in this research that the need for this adaptation is associated with the natural rhythms of the body (for example, sleeping, relaxing or concentrating) and daily activities:

‘I listen to the radio going to sleep, then I put on the headphones when the missus is asleep, then I get up in the morning and turn on the radio so we can both enjoy it’

‘I have the tele on very loud all the time, and I have the radio on here everyday, especially at night’

‘I need something on in the background when I am reading’

‘I can’t sleep without some noise, a clock and a radio help, but sometimes I think I am hearing voices … that really drives me mad!’

‘I need noise in the house … if I’m reading or knitting … or when there is no one here’

Although the participants in this study have mild forms of tinnitus, as they stress that it is not deeply troubling, there are certain grounds to reflect on the patterns of tinnitus for each individual, and collectively. As the above examples show, tinnitus becomes more troubling and distracting while going to sleep, being asleep, reading and other ‘quiet’ activities, or when alone. It is clear that activity levels are associated with levels of severity or how a person is affected by the perceived noise. Moreover, the perceived sounds can be controlled by the use of sounds (television and radio etc). What is also evident is that adaptation has limits, as in the case of David, and in the following case of Mary Kay:
As discussed earlier, the severity of tinnitus is linked to anxiety. It is clear from Mary’s description that her personal situation as full-time carer for her ‘very sick and deaf’ husband is a causing her great distress, resulting in severe tinnitus, and almost daily falls. Adaptation as presented here is by no means a cure for tinnitus, and serves as a reminder that tinnitus has more in common with chronic illness, where acceptance, adaptation, and behaviour modification are central to successful habituation.

Conclusion

It is clear that tinnitus is a problem for over 15,000–20,000 people in Ireland, causing annoyance and affecting their daily activities. Moreover, there is larger population in Ireland who live with tinnitus, and experience degrees of annoyance, depending on daily activities, levels of environmental noise, general health, character, and sleep routine. What is also clear is that tinnitus is a deeply subjective experience, far more difficult to articulate than the simple description ‘ringing in the ear’; in this research the participants have found ways to describe tinnitus based on sound, as well as other sensations, such as feeling and physical awareness – haptic hexis. The participants turn on their radios and televisions, plug in their ear-phones while sleeping, reading, meditating, and while simply trying to find the mental ‘space’ to concentrate. Asking a person with tinnitus ‘what does it sound like?’ leads to a fascinating exploration of perceived noise and sound internal to the individual (or acoustic hexis). These noises, resulting from neural circuits firing or memory of sounds, are caused by a variety of auditory dysfunctions, which are then masked by the adaptive use of external noises. Adaptation has its limits, undermined by stress, and the changing characteristics of tinnitus. With the heterogeneity of the tinnitus population, epidemiological uncertainties, the subjectivity of tinnitus, and vast number of auditory dysfunctions associated with tinnitus, it looks very unlikely that the participants in this study will find a new drug, surgery (although all said they would not seek this option even if available) or technological solution to counteract tinnitus in the immediate future. The recent work establishing the location of tinnitus production in the brain seems to be the most probable transfer pathway of science into support for the people living with tinnitus throughout the globe. What is ultimately clear from this paper is that whatever trajectory tinnitus research takes, it will need the subjective experience at the heart of any research to make it applicable in a world full of sounds, be they internal or external.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Andrea Mitchell who carried out an excellent literature review of tinnitus research, without which I would not have been able to write this paper. I wish to thank my friends at the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, NUI Galway. I would also like to acknowledge the support of TRIL and IDA for this research. Finally, I would like to thank all the participants who took part in this research, especially Robert Sheahan, who has since passed away.

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This book provides a welcome counterpoint to other recent work on traditional music in Ireland (O’Shea 2008, Vallety 2008, Kaul 2009 and O’Flynn 2009), addressing the lack of attention to the musical traditions of Northern Ireland within recent Irish musicology. The book’s cover, a photograph of the Protestant musician James Perry, is indicative of some finer points of its focus: the music and musicians dealt with are often peripheral to the mainstream traditions of either community; the music focused on is not that which is used overtly as a means of symbolizing religious or political identity; and the musical traditions surveyed are primarily (though not exclusively) those which had (or have) a presence within the Protestant community. Of course the wonderful thing about Perry’s photograph – and what makes it such a suitable cover – is that there is no indication of his affiliations. He is photographed as simply a musician, and what Cooper emphasizes throughout the book is how traditional music resists constraint by boundary making, and has not been confined to a single community in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, Cooper has made a conscious decision to concentrate on more Protestant traditions – and thus musicians such as the McPeakes or Harry Bradley are not found within this volume. Cooper has good reason for this, as he rightly points out in the introduction for Protestant musicians like Perry, the fiddle traditions (Mac Aoidh 1994; (and Tyrone) ornamentation, droning. Within the section on the influence of this work are particularly evident here in the thorough discussion of metres, and elsewhere in the discussion of modality: these sections are more relevant perhaps to the specialist reader. The chapter’s thorough analysis, particularly of Orange songs, demonstrates the lack of homology between music, religion and politics; the importance of the heritage of Gaelic verse; and illustrates how narrative content, not musical or poetic, distinguishes any community associations these songs might have. His findings about Orange songs are original and striking (one third of the songs have Gaelic metric influences), and support the conclusion that the ‘musical chasm between” “Gael” and “Planter” … is as illusory as the racial chasm between “Celt” and “Saxon”’ (63).

Turning to instrumental music, Cooper admits to the difficulty of isolating stylistic features within Northern Ireland; however, concepts of regionalism are commonplace within traditional music (e.g. Smith and Ó Súilleabháin), and by way of comparison, reference is made to writing on Donegal (and Tyrone) fiddle traditions (Mac Aoidh 1994; Feldman and O’Doherty, 1979). Cooper echoes this work in examining the bagpipes’ role in influencing performance and style, and its relationship to several aspects of fiddle styles: modal characteristics, ornamentation, droning. Within the section on the fife, there is a colourful description of the aforementioned Perry (1906–85), which contributes to a compelling picture of the role of music in everyday life in pre-Troubles Northern Ireland. Like Vallety’s recent book (2008), what this demonstrates is that the musical boundaries of Northern Ireland are recently drawn – for Protestant musicians like Perry, fife and fiddling were incorporated into everyday life, were unremarkable, and there was no otherness attached to ‘traditional music’. Of particular interest here is the portrayal of a fascinating juxtaposition of traditional music and hymn-singing at a house party, which (as the book does consistently) challenges our preconceived notions of what constitutes ‘folk’ and ‘traditional music’ (78). A list of the fiddle tunes in Perry’s collection further reinforces this repertoire’s common currency – many of these tunes would be in the repertoire of any traditional musician of this period (82–3). Perhaps a broader discussion of the fiddle might have been more useful in this chapter, and unusually there is no reference in


The second chapter focuses on song, notably drawing connections between the form of the ballad and Presbyterian psalms (35). The musicological leanings of this work are particularly evident here in the thorough discussion of metres, and elsewhere in the discussion of modality: these sections are more relevant perhaps to the specialist reader. The chapter’s thorough analysis, particularly of Orange songs, demonstrates the lack of homology between music, religion and politics; the importance of the heritage of Gaelic verse; and illustrates how narrative content, not musical or poetic, distinguishes any community associations these songs might have. His findings about Orange songs are original and striking (one third of the songs have Gaelic metric influences), and support the conclusion that the ‘musical chasm between” “Gael” and “Planter” … is as illusory as the racial chasm between “Celt” and “Saxon”’ (63).

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the book to the County Antrim and Derry Fiddlers’ Association. The final section of the chapter looks at Ulster-Scots Performance Practices (an area which has received recent attention by Martin Dowling and Fintan Vallem). Again, the chapter serves to reinforce that style is not homogeneous, and that, ultimately, the traditional music of the region is not particularly ‘restricted to one or other side of the religious divide’ (100), even if sometimes repertoire may have political associations.

I found the material on collectors and collecting to be less effective, although in itself it functions as an informative overview of such work carried out in Northern Ireland. The opening of the chapter rehearses much material which is available elsewhere, however, and there seems to be no clear reason for the inclusion of so much material about George Petrie. There are also some oversights in the chapter: Cooper does not give any acknowledgment of Charlotte Milligan Fox’s role in rediscovering the Bunting MSS, nor, indeed, to her own collecting work. There is also no mention of the work of the antiquarian collector John Mulholland, whose work was published in Belfast in 1810.

The final chapter is a welcome addition to the considerable body of literature on Irish music in America. Some of the commentary dealing with identifying Scotch-Irish influences is somewhat speculative, and doesn’t lead to any definite conclusions. More useful is the discussion of Bluegrass music, where Cooper provocatively comments that ‘the cynic might suggest that … the music that has appeared to speak most strongly to the majority of rural Irish people over the past half century or so is actually country music’, whether sung by Irish, Scotch-Irish, or American singers (156). Cynical or not, it is probably true, and highlights a musical subculture in Ireland which has received little enough attention.

Finally, in framing the Ulster Scots movement as the virtual return of a diaspora (157), Cooper rightly notes that the most interesting ‘musical artefact’ which has emerged from the Ulster-Scots cultural movement is On Eagle’s Wing, a ‘kind of Ulster-Scots Riverdance’ which was produced in 2004 and 2008, but which failed to generate a similar response (158). The reasons for its failure are complex (see Dowling 2007), but here Cooper uses its lack of engagement with the breadth of traditional music of Northern Ireland as a means of re-articulating his thesis: that the heterogeneous musical traditions of the region span political, religious and ethnic divides. This is an idealistic conclusion, perhaps, but one which this book should help to achieve, in its drawing together of diverse material on these less well-known traditions.

References


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It is extraordinary that two excellent ethnographies of Irish traditional music-making in County Clare should appear within a year of each other. O’Shea and Kaul both focus on the appropriation of ‘national’ or ‘local’ traditions by outsiders (‘blow-ins’ in the Irish vernacular), from other parts of Ireland and other parts of the world.

Both authors set their studies in historical context, but those contexts are different in emphasis. O’Shea, whose theoretical focus is on the relationship between music and nationalism, provides a broad and insightful history of this relationship in Ireland from Elizabethan times onwards. Kaul, who is interested in the relationship between music and tourism, sets his study within a context more tightly focused in time and space, but no less illuminating, concentrating on the west-Clare village of Doolin, where ‘the old days’ means ‘before the 1960s’ (10).

Whilst participant-observation is the central methodology of both studies, the authors write from different standpoints. O’Shea, an accomplished player and teacher, makes effective use of her own experiences as a ‘blow-in’ playing in ‘sessions’, and her emotional reactions to those experiences, as raw material for ethnographic analysis. Kaul, who describes his own playing skills as ‘stumbling’, presents his musical experiences primarily from the viewpoint of a knowledgeable audience member, adopting a somewhat
more self-effacing writing style. Both authors succeed in providing evocative and nuanced ethnographic descriptions of the complex personal interactions and negotiations that make every session different for those who participate, and of capturing the varying viewpoints of individual musicians concerning these negotiations.

In examining how ‘blow-in’ musicians may achieve acceptance, both theorists focus on embodied and emotional experience. Kaul claims that ‘in the embodied performative moment of musical practice, one’s identity in the village as a local, a blow-in, or a musician-tourist, matters far less than one’s ability to contribute a voice to the conversation of a session’ (150). This observation resonates with O’Shea’s assertion that ‘as we played together … I understood through my body the meaning of dance music … I was at one with the music-making’ (137), but also with her claim that such feelings of one-ness result from a dialogic engagement with difference (138).

O’Shea and Kaul are both concerned with issues of belonging, acceptance and exclusion. There are considerable similarities, and yet significant differences in the pictures that emerge from the two works. Both researchers find that the ideology of the traditional music scene in Clare is centred on a small number of senior, highly-respected ‘local’ players (living or dead), such as PJ Joe Hayes, in Feakle or Micho Russell in Dingle. The vast majority of younger players, however, are incomers, either from other parts of Ireland, or from the wider world including, but not limited to, Irish diasporas.

Whilst Kaul notes that there are certainly tensions between ‘locals’ and ‘blow-ins’ in Doolin, he finds the traditional music scene largely immune to these tensions, noting ‘a very liberal willingness to accept newcomers (regardless of their origins) with a sincere interest in learning how to play the music’ (138). Kaul attributes this openness to the fact that traditional music in Doolin is not a ‘zero-sum game’: that ‘more musicians playing more music does no harm. Indeed, it adds to the cultural capital of the village’ (150).

O’Shea, whose fieldwork includes Doolin but focuses primarily on east-Clare, sometimes encounters similar openness, but she often finds it mediated by a variety of subtle, or not-so-subtle exclusionary discourses and practices, from the fiddler who was told ‘You play well, but you don’t sound Irish’ (93), to the visiting musicians who were routinely refused access to the ‘inner circle’ of chairs in a session (1247), to the piper who was told ‘You’re fucking awful! You should stop playing the pipes’ (101). At another level of exclusion, O’Shea notes how in Feakle, the more ‘open’ of two pub-sessions was derided by participants in the more exclusionary session as ‘inauthentic’ or ‘rubbish’ (129).

In examining power-relationships between individual musicians, O’Shea reveals that such exclusionary tactics may be used not only by ‘locals’, but sometimes by those whose own claims to belonging may be open to challenge.

The differences in the way Kaul and O’Shea interpret their experiences is apparent in their different responses to Ó Súilleabháin’s metaphor of Irish traditional music as a ‘river of sound’. For Kaul, this river ‘has allowed other … people and other musical influences to flow back to the sonic river itself to become part of … its very core’ (150). O’Shea, however, fears that ‘the music of others, as well as outsider-musicians, will remain foreign bodies to be dissolved in the river of sound’ (148).

A critique that could be levelled at both these works is that they largely overlook the dimension of class. The changes which they document in Irish traditional music do not consist just of the appropriation of local practices by outsiders, but of the appropriation of a rural working-class dance music and its transformation into an art-music for a transnational, cosmopolitan middle-class. Kaul makes little reference to class, and whilst O’Shea notes the historical influence of the middle-class in nationalist movements, she allows class to drop out of the analysis of her ethnographic material. Since the working-class seems to have largely abandoned ‘traditional music’ to incomers, the question arises of what has replaced this music in working-class lives? A few asides in both works suggest that it is probably the much derided, academically neglected, and yet hugely popular genre of ‘Country and Irish’: a music which is arguably as Irish, and as traditional, as the Irish traditional music studied by Kaul and O’Shea, but which continues to be played almost exclusively by the Irish, for the Irish.

O’Shea and Kaul have both produced high quality ethnographies and insightful theoretical reflections, which make significant contributions to the conversation around inclusion and exclusion in Irish traditional music. Perhaps it is now time to widen the conversation about what counts as ‘Irish’, and what counts as ‘traditional’, in order to avoid perpetrating our own academic exclusions.

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‘Indie’ music has been one of the most powerful subcultural expressions of the past three decades. Despite its local significance within the British rock music milieu, the ambiguity of its self-definition, and the complicated aesthetic notions that surround it, indie music managed to transform into a cosmopolitan phenomenon appealing to musicians and fans in every continent. Wendy Fonarow’s book presents a rooted
ethnographic account of indie culture in its birthplace, Britain, specifically focusing on audience behaviour and the phenomenology of spectatorship within the scene. As is made clear early in the introduction, Fonarow ‘[treats] musical performance as a ritual’ (2). This approach, employed consistently throughout the text, attempts to connect the subjectivities and aesthetics of audience participation with a set of religious ideologies (3) resulting in what she calls the ‘metaphysics of spectorial embodiments’ (7).

In the first chapter, Fonarow elaborates on the meaning of ‘indie’ as a music category. By contrasting it with its major cultural antagonists, namely ‘mainstream’ rock and dance music, she conceptualises indie as an aesthetic discourse of purism. Key components of this aesthetic refer to the ways of production and distribution (‘indie’ being short for ‘independent’), the disregard for over-elaborate compositional and playing techniques, and the disapproval of attitudes connected with ‘stardom’ with its effective augmentation of the divide between performers and audience. Consequently, indie music is characterized by its simplicity, austerity, technophobia, and an obsessive fetishization of the guitar. Indie aficionados exist in constant search for musical ‘truth’, a process supported by their faith in objective criteria for the evaluation of music. In Fonarow’s description, indie fans regard themselves as ‘music disciples whose acute sensitivity allows them to recognize any music of value’ (57). The above notions facilitate the parallel between indie ideology and Puritan Protestantism. In Fonarow’s examination, indie music with its quest for decentralisation of power, unmediated expression, and an obsessive fetishization of the guitar, becomes a terrain where music professionals struggle for recognition, prestige, and status affirmation. This struggle involves such ambiguous strategies as ‘blagging’ oneself into free event admission (131–137), and the adoption of a blasé, ‘unimpressed’ attitude, wonderfully examined here by the author in relation to the way entry passes are displayed on participants’ bodies (138–150).

Chapter four elaborates on the meaning of ‘spectorial positioning’ (162) in relation to a chronology of the indie fan’s involvement in the scene. In Fonarow’s view, the individual’s progressive move from the front to the back of the live venue represents a meta-narrative of transformation from a West-African bodily metaphysic (zone one) to the Protestant mental purification of aesthetics (zone two) which eventually leads to disengagement (zone three) and retirement. In chapter five, the author examines the ritualistic aspect of the indie gig in relation to the community’s valorization of ‘truth’ and ‘credibility’. In this respect, indie participation emerges as a liminal space between childhood and adulthood, between parental dependence and social responsibility. The indie youth culture is presented by Fonarow as a rite of passage which facilitates a necessary mental/ideological/metaphysical transformation through performance. In contrast with this teleological transformation, chapter six considers the ethics of the few practitioners who remain within the indie community (musicians, crew members etc.) and their ambiguous attitudes towards ‘trickster’ behaviour (228–241) and the ‘groupie’ category (212–216).

Fonarow remains consistent throughout the book in her endeavour to establish a conceptual link between the indie aesthetic ideologies of purism and ‘truth’ and the religious Reformation of Protestantism. The extent, however, to which this comparison succeeds in prescribing metaphysical concerns to the indie community needs to be assessed further. Although the analogy drawn serves as an extremely useful analytic approach, I remain unconvinced that the initial aim of ‘demonstrat[ing] how religious ideology shapes Western aesthetics and artistic practices’ (3) has been achieved. Very similar aesthetic debates of ‘high’ and ‘low’ music practices involving purist ideologies have been, after all, identified in locales such as Turkey (Stokes 1992) and Greece (Papankikoulaou 2002), where the ritual-concerned dispute of Protestantism versus Catholicism bears no relevance. Another not unrelated point of critique concerns Fonarow’s conceptualisation of the indie gig as ritual. While the author is very convincing in her account of the indie performance and participation as an occasion of ‘anti-structure’ (97), her discussion of Victor Turner’s ideas of liminality and ritual omit his crucial account of the ‘liminoid’ (Turner 1982). In Turner’s approach, ritual occurs in the liminal space/time of tribal societies insomuch as
it is obligatory. He explains that ‘[o]ption pervades the liminoid phenomenon, obligation the liminal’ (1982: 43). Consequently, in accordance with Turner’s analytical model, the indie gig should be seen as ‘a genre of leisure enjoyment, not an obligatory ritual, [as] play-separat-from-work, not play-and-work ludergy as a binary system of man’s “serious” communal endeavor’ (ibid). This fact is directly suggested from Fonarow’s assertion that indie music presents a milieu where ‘the world is upside down, making ugly boys beautiful, play more important than work’ (247). It is, in fact, the post-industrial society’s division between ‘work’ and ‘play’ that transforms, in Turner’s view, the ‘liminal’ to ‘liminoid’ and, consequently, ‘ritual’ to ‘leisure’.

Overall, Fonarow’s book offers an extremely perceptive and valuably polyphonic account of the indie music scene. Her successful balance between literary analysis of the music, lyrics and press and an emphasis on ethnography of participation and involvement makes her book an exceptional read for ethnomusicologists and popular music researchers interested in urban music phenomena.

References

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