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Happy Families? Convergence, Antagonism and Disciplinary Identities or 'We're all God knows what now' (Cook 2016)

City University London Debate, 1st June 2016

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- **PPT 1** I should start by saying that it feels very appropriate to be hosting this debate at City, given that Henry Stobart's 2008 edited volume in which Nick Cook's famous words first appeared in print is dedicated to the memory of Gerry Farrell, my predecessor here, who died in April 2003 and who some of you will remember, I'm sure. And Gerry also spoke at the November 2001 conference from which the book grew.
- So, first things first. Let's go back to that 2001 conference **PPT 2-1** at which Nick presented the original version of what would become the 2008 book chapter. It's true that his paper was entitled: 'We are all ethnomusicologists now' – referencing Nathan Glazer's book *We are All Multiculturalists Now* – but in fact his final conclusion was not that at all, but that 'We are all **musicologists** now'. I was there and remember well the explosive response from the audience - of mainly ethnomusicologists; and my subsequent report on the conference (also re-published in the 2008 book) suggested reasons for it. When I asked Nick recently about the paper and his subsequent revisions, he said:

PPT 2-2 ... it ended by saying, well, if we are all ethnomusicologists now, there is no difference between musicology and ethnomusicology, so why don't we just say we are all musicologists now. However, when I came to write it up for Henry's book I cut that: I decided it was open to interpretation as musicological hegemony and blunted rather than sharpened the main argument. I changed the title to 'We are all (ethno)musicologists now' at a late stage of book production, reflecting the brackets in the book's title.

- I begin with this anecdote, partly to set the historical record straight - I'm fascinated by the politics of forgetting and by scholarly myth-making: what gets erased or rewritten, and what stays in the collective memory. And because it highlights questions of power and self-other binaries that have long underpinned the relationship between 'musicology' as normatively understood and its 'Other': 'ethnomusicology'. And I

should just say that my discussion relates to the situation in the UK; of course, disciplinary relationships play out quite differently in other parts of the world.

- So: **PPT 3-1** Cook raises the question of musicological hegemony and this seems a good place to start a discussion of disciplinary identities, for without it and the self-other relationships that follow, this debate would be redundant. But when a narrow slice of music studies comes to occupy the disciplinary centre and claims the unmarked term - at the same time privileging a very culture-specific understanding of what music is – those excluded might justifiably invoke the idea of an ‘occupied’ musicology **PPT 3-2**. After all, when in 1885 Guido Adler set out his model for the scholarly study of music - with its two main branches of Historical and Empirical Musicology - the latter included something also titled: ‘Musicology’ but then in brackets (Examination and Comparison for Ethnographic Purposes)’, which of course became comparative musicology and later ethnomusicology. **PPT 4-1/2**
- But there’s a conundrum: if I seek to reclaim the unmarked term (‘musicology’) in the name of a more holistic field studying music in its broadest sense – by which I mean not just a fetishist focus on music as sound or on other areas only relatively recently embraced by occupied musicology such as performance or meaning - but music in all its diversity and beauty: as physical movement, as behavior, as ideas - something that people think and talk about and that plays a central role in and shapes their lives. If, like Cook, I declare that we are all musicologists, then I appear to deny a whole history of alterity by which ethnomusicology has long been defined. Being on the margins has attuned us to certain things and shaped the kinds of questions we ask, and arguably made us more receptive to ideas from a range of disciplines. Such a position also risks marginalising those who feel allegiances to other disciplines such as history, anthropology or area studies – but then as I will argue in a moment, we don’t just need to be one thing.
- So the first problem is that we can’t *have* this conversation without using the inherited categories, with their complex histories and baggage. If we were to start over, ‘musicology’ might describe a more integrated field embracing any approach that enriches our understanding of music; and within *that* musicology-as-is would be focused on one particular music culture (an ‘ethno-musicology’ perhaps?).

- But we are where we are.
- I've often wondered about other disciplines where an appropriated centre ground leads to such Othering. I can't think of one. Do we have 'history' and 'ethno-history'?
- So, if we're not all musicologists, then perhaps we can all be ethnomusicologists. I would say the more the merrier - but first presumably we need to agree on what an ethnomusicologist is. And that, of course, is not easy, as evidenced by decades of debate. Is an ethnomusicologist defined by what they study? Or how they study it? By their approach or state of mind? Or because they do ethnography? But then not all ethnomusicologists do. I, however, do do ethnography and for this debate thought it would be useful to put the central questions to some real people, mainly but not only ethnomusicologists. Here's one response that reflects some of the complexities:

PPT 5 We patently are not all ethnomusicologists now, because still none of us know exactly what that is. If it means doing anthropological-style fieldwork, then very few of our WAM colleagues do that kind of work, not even when they work on contemporary music. So no. If it means thinking about music in/as culture/al context, then WAM history colleagues have been doing that for a long time anyway, especially the new cultural historians inspired by Clifford Geertz etc., and let's be frank: that's not really what (has ever) distinguishes(d) ethnomusicology. So no. If it means recognising all the non-Western sounds and activities that ethnomusicologists study as legitimately 'music' and worthy of study in music departments, then still no; there's still a lot of snobbery around.

- Disciplinary identities are strange things - and being an ethnomusicologist is about far more than what we study and how; it's about lineages and disciplinary canons, about spiritual homes, affiliations and friendships built over years:

PPT 6 'I'm an ethnomusicologist not because I study the non-west, or culture or something. I'm an ethnomusicologist because I studied with Ruth Davis and Henry Stobart. I submit grants to do research that involves ethnography and think I should know the local language. I go to BFE and SEM, and I hang out with Rachel Harris, Caroline Bithell, Laudan Nooshin, and co. I read *Ethnomusicology Forum* and I have *Shadows in the Field*, Jennifer Post's book and an old edition of Nettl on my bookshelf alongside a ton of anthropology theory.'

- **PPT 7-1** As someone for whom contesting disciplinary boundaries has been something of a mission, I genuinely welcomed Cook's reminder in 2001 of just how much had changed since the late 80s. **PPT 7-2** As Cook notes, with such convergence of interests it does become increasingly difficult to distinguish between 'musicologist' and 'ethnomusicologist' in their scholarly work, and things are probably even more fluid now, judging from recent conferences where it has sometimes been impossible – and unimportant - to spot the difference. And I had a similar experience editing a journal issue on the 'Ethnomusicology of Western Art Music'.

- At the same time, I find the idea that we might 'all be anything' faintly alarming. We all have multiple identities – disciplinary and other – we're not just one thing – and we highlight different aspects of these identities according to time and place. As one participant explained:

PPT 7-3 I call myself different things (ethnomusicologist, musicologist, music scholar) depending on the context (conference, teaching, country, fieldwork) and my audience, since these terms have very different meaning (or little meaning) to different people. Personally the label is not so important to me. My research and teaching has been shaped by my ethnomusicological training. But my research, in terms of methodologies and the literature I draw on, is motivated more by the specific research questions I am pursuing and less by (sub)disciplines they may be associated with.

- It also seems to me that this reification of the musicology-ethnomusicology binary potentially excludes others in the music studies constellation: where in this discussion does one place music psychology, popular music studies, music education or music informatics, for instance. I'm also mindful of the recent emergence or re-emergence of various 'brands' of musicology: empirical, relational, radical, cultural, and so on, and wonder how these fit into the debate.
- **PPT 8-1** So how much has changed in the last 15 years? We weren't all ethnomusicologists then and we certainly aren't now, but clearly a growing number of self-identifying musicologists have been drawn to some of the issues, approaches and methodologies largely associated with ethnomusicology, most obviously ethnography.

Indeed, Cook's provocation might more accurately have been 'we are all ethnographers now'; or at least aspiring ethnographers. Some ethnomusicologists have expressed concern over what they see as 'ethnography lite'. As one put it: **PPT 8-2** 'I don't see many musicologists producing fine-combed ethnographies, or even doing extended, in-depth fieldwork'. Personally, this concerns me less than what the trend heralds of a new attention to multiple voices and perspectives which ethnography in part makes possible.

- Among those I spoke to there was a surprisingly wide range of views, often coloured by experiences in the institutions where individuals work. Some felt that whilst the musicology-ethnomusicology boundary has blurred since 2001: **PPT 8-3** 'I think there's actually very little engagement between the two; and scholars on both sides seem to have some rather stereotyped assumptions about the other'. Many felt that institutional structures and internal politics worked against change. Indeed, my research revealed some quite shocking stories of exclusion and prejudice, including the idea that ethnomusicologists don't *belong* in a Music Department: here, the politics of occupation and the privileging of one ontology of music over others are clear.
- In contrast, there were many who felt that things had changed considerably, with the divide less significant now and with greater dialogue, evidenced for instance in the number of conferences across sub-disciplinary areas. Ethnomusicology is definitely less marginal, seen in the number of Music Departments hiring ethnomusicologists compared even with 10 years ago, and with ethnomusicology more central to the curriculum, including issues-based courses taught jointly by musicologists and ethnomusicologists. And this is significant at the very least for: **PPT 9-1** 'a new generation of scholars [emerging] for whom this is not an identity issue; having studied a diversity of musics as undergraduates [unlike most of us who went through HE before the 1990s] it seems quite obvious and natural to draw on these different resources and methods.'
- Some respondents suggested new terrains of convergence, for example: **PPT 9-2** 'I think there are two new convergences, between: a) musicologists and ethnomusicologists who are interested in how music mediates culture; and b) the "new empiricists" (big data, music and science/cognition, new music analysis, etc)'. And several others mentioned sound studies as an emerging area of shared interest.

- One of the difficulties in discussing the relationship between musicology and ethnomusicology is that there are still few who can speak authoritatively about trends in both; and there is thus a danger that we end up with a flattening of complexity and caricature-like statements such as the following:

PPT 10 According to ethnomusicology, the cultures of the non-western world should take intellectual precedence, and those of us who spend our time focusing on Western [classical] music should feel ashamed of ourselves (there is quite an irony in the fact that ethnomusicology, in the UK at least, increasingly attempts to colonize the Western-music syllabuses of our universities). J.P.E. Harper-Scott (2012) *The Quilting Points of Musical Modernism: Revolution, Reaction, and William Walton*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 251.

- I don't recognise the ethnomusicology described here and would be interested to know what it is based on, given that many British ethnomusicologists, at least, come from a Western classical music background and are still involved as performers of it. And the idea of ethnomusicology colonizing Western-music syllabuses is simply not borne out by the evidence and the institutional mechanisms which until quite recently kept ethnomusicology out of the power centre. I suppose it's in the nature of occupied territories to feel threatened by the idea of sharing space and more concerned with building walls and policing boundaries. A more charitable interpretation was suggested by someone who said that in the current context of austerity, cuts and closing departments, everyone is fighting for their own patch. Maybe. And in any case, I don't believe this to be a particularly typical view. But it is out there, and in print. A rather different perspective was offered by someone who felt that the current climate made it all the more important to stick together:

PPT 11 'I think that reflexivity over sub-disciplinary boundaries or identities is worthwhile, but for it to spill over into animosity is a dangerous step in a climate in which serious thinking about music has little support outside academia ... It's easy to find ways in which other people's scholarship on music doesn't measure up in some way to our own standards; better would be to think more about how the best of musicology can enrich ethnomusicology and vice versa.'

- This seems a good way of thinking about the future and such healthy debates around the changing landscape of music studies will surely continue. Despite having its fingers in different disciplinary pies, British ethnomusicology is still most closely allied to

musicology, and the vast majority of scholars are based in Music Departments. Whether these sister disciplines continue to travel alongside each other or develop a more conjoined relationship, I believe that ethnomusicology has much to learn from musicology; and scholars such as Amanda Bayley, Rachel Beckles Willson, David Clarke and others who have been drawn to ethnomusicology in different ways should be welcomed for their enriching presence and the new ideas and approaches that they bring. They are evidence that scholarly identities should be liberating, not confining.