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GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN



Hk Royal Academy of
Fine Arts, Design,
Music and Dance

Ethnomusicology-at-Home and Grounded Theory

Evert Bisschop Boele
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My history

From the music of Moroccan migrant group
Weshm in the Netherlands...



... and the expression of Frisian identity in the music of
Irolt...



... via multicultural music education in the Netherlands...

... to 'musickers' (Small 1989) in the Dutch province of
Groningen AD 2011

'From the exotic to the neighbours'

Musickers in Groningen AD 2011

The other side of the professional musician – the audience.

Not in entrepreneurial/marketing terms ('target groups')...

... but the audience as a meeting of individuals with their own musical 'idio-culture' at a – for them – meaningful musical occasion. (cf. Cavicchi 2009)

Ethnomusicology-at-home?

Ethnomusicology: the interpretive study of music as a social practice – a plausible interpretation of musical life.

Ethnomusicology-at-home: ??

Certainly one of the more at-homier variants of ethnomusicology is the one where a Dutch-raised and Dutch-trained ethnomusicologist wants to research the practice of musicking of a wide and indiscriminate variety of his fellow-citizens.

Ethnomusicology – anthropology – “the” method: fieldwork

“Anthropology distinguishes itself from the other social sciences through the great emphasis placed on ethnographic fieldwork as the most important source of new knowledge about society and culture.” (Eriksen 2001: 24)

“There are two main attitudes that really distinguish ethnomusicologists in what they actually do from other musical scholarship. One is the centrality of fieldwork.” (Nettl 2005: 9)

Participant observation as main method (but not the only one - interviews, document-/artefact-study).

The essence of fieldwork

“Ethnography exploits the capacity that any social actor possesses for learning new cultures, and the objectivity to which that process gives rise.” (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 9)

The journey from “outsider” to “insider” leads to knowledge.

“As has long been recognized by ethnographers, he or she is the research instrument par excellence.” (id. 17)

Ethnomusicology at home

What happens methodologically when a researcher researches (in) his own culture? “Endo-anthropology” (Van Ginkel 1998)

What happens when there actually is no journey from outsider to insider, because the researcher is an insider from the start? May this lead to ‘homeblindness’ (Eriksen2001: 30), and if so: how do we deal with that?

Three answers to the problem of 'the estrangement of your own culture' (Hirschauer & Amann 1997)

1. Just cope with the problem.

Fieldwork works everywhere (cf. Van Ginkel 1998) – a competent ethnomusicologist knows his way around the problem.

2. There is no problem.

Because ethnography is deeply personal, ethnomusicology–at-home is a personal narrative anyway (cf. e.g. Kisliuk in Barz & Cooley 1997)

3. Address the problem.

Ethnomusicology is a deeply reflexive discipline nevertheless searching for some sort of objectively justifiable, plausible account of the social world we live in (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 18).

The question - again

How do you gain knowledge as an ethnomusicologist on the social practices of

- the Early Music–world in the US? (Shelemay 2001)
- an American conservatoire? (Kingsbury 1988; Nettl 1995)
- practitioners of aerobics? (DeNora 2000)
- Milton Keynes’ “hidden musicians”? (Finnegan 1989)
- a Welsh opera company? (Atkinson 2006)
- ‘musickers’ in Groningen?

Ethnomusicology-at-home – the turn from anthropology to qualitative sociology

Ethnomusicology-at-home: ??

Certainly one of the more at-homier variants of ethnomusicology is the one where a Dutch-raised and Dutch-trained ethnomusicologist wants to research the practice of musicking of a wide and indiscriminate variety of his fellow-citizens...

... but it also is an example of a qualitative social research project focusing on music

Qualitative sociology

The interpretive study of (western) society.

Strong focus on methodology:

- reflections on the role of theory ('abduction', 'bracketing'; grounded theory, ethnomethodology)
- reflections on data collection (e.g. observation vs interviews, theoretical sampling; conversation analysis)
- reflections on data-analysis (e.g. coding, intersubjective analysis; objective hermeneutics)

'Techniques of distantiation'

Ethnomusicology-at-home, qualitative sociology – and RILM

One of “seven themes toward disciplinary renewal.” (Stock 2008) (cf Nettl 2005 (1983))

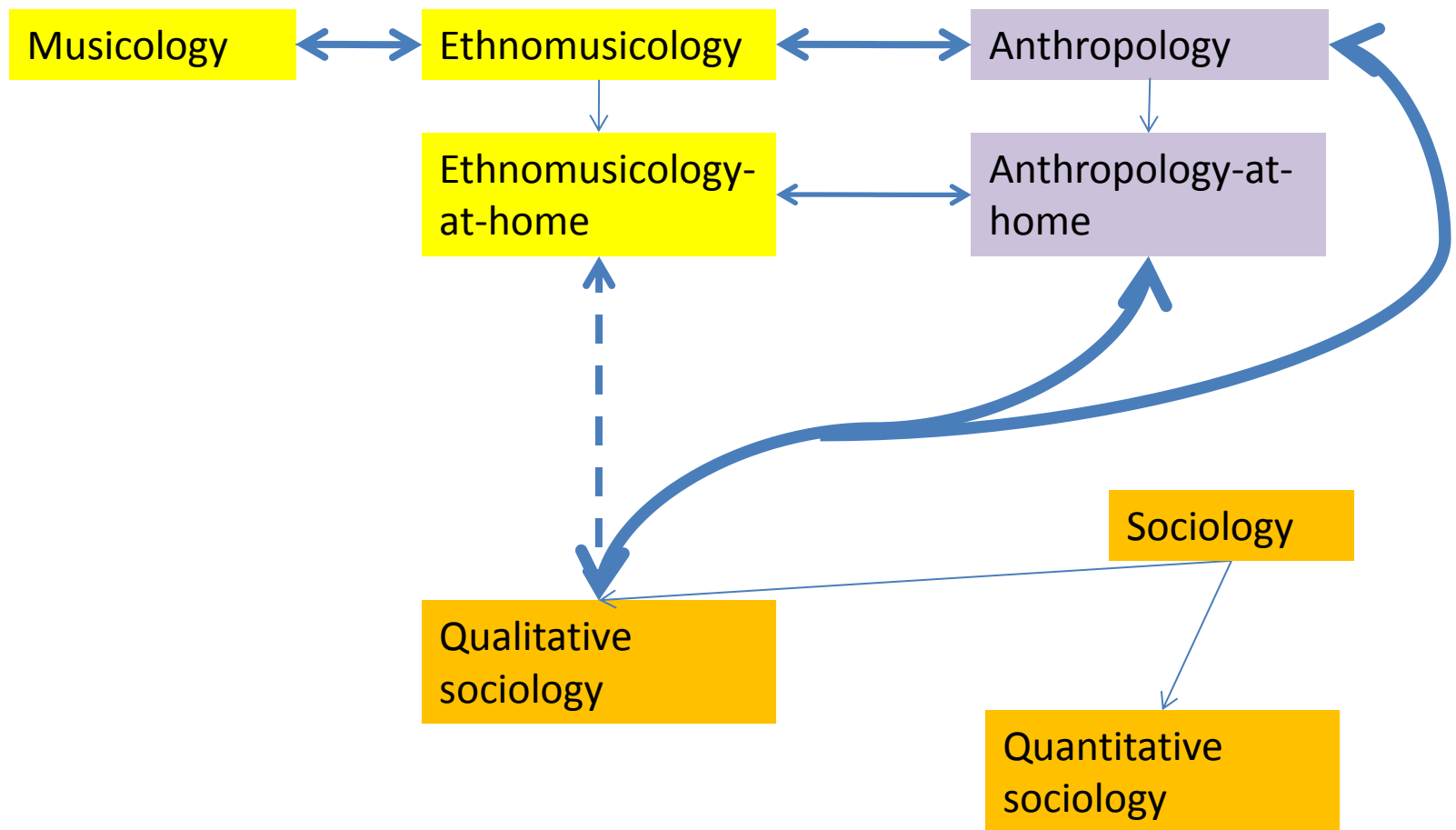
RILM hits (July 2011):

- ethnomusicology at home: 2
- ethnomusicology/grounded theory: 2
- grounded theory: 70 (music education; music therapy; music psychology - performance studies)

Ethnomusicology-at-Home and Grounded Theory

Research Group Lifelong Learning in Music & the Arts

The return to sociology



Intermediary conclusion

Many ethnomusicologists work at home...

... but ethnomusicology-at-home is still a small field.

Ethnomusicologists don't feel the need to set apart ethnomusicology-at-home from ethnomusicology in general – despite the methodological questions connected to ethnomusicology-at-home .

Ethnomusicology seems hardly oriented towards qualitative social research.

A missed opportunity for more methodological reflexivity concerning 'techniques of distantiating'?

Two examples of 'techniques of distantiation' 1: the interview

Ethnomusicology: the domination of participant observation in fieldwork, sided by interviews and document-/artefact study

Ethnomusicology-at-home:

“the nature of the city as a research site (and of professional work in the modern world) may mean that the resulting ethnographies are quite distinct in style and content. (...) Interviewing and relatively formal interactions may be necessary rather than day-to-day participant observation.” (Stock 2008: 200-201)

The interview in qualitative social research

Hotly debated – “interview society”

“Some critics, myself included, have argued for a certain degree of caution and rigor in discussing data derived from interviews. I do not believe that interviews can give us access to unmediated private experience. Indeed, it is far from clear what such private experience might amount to. Rather, I suggest that interviews with informants yield autobiographical narratives that can and should be understood as performed identities. (...) They are mediated and framed by culturally shared forms and genres” (Atkinson 2006: 162).

The interview in ethnomusicology-at-home

Example: the Early Music World in Boston

- methodology: `ethnographic enquiry' including interviews
- discussion of insider/outsider problem
- “interviews sometimes *slipped into* conversations or *even* into spirited debates as members of the research team became at once musicians, audience members, or occasionally critics.” (Shelemay 2001)
- vs conversations or spirited debates as the conscious outcome of planned interview techniques.

The interview in qualitative social research

Example: teenager reactions on Britney Spears

- when, where, why of interviews
- choice for focus groups instead of 1-to-1
- rapport in spite of age difference
- effect of (audio – not video) recording on the data generated
- general course of the sessions
- way of transcribing the interviews
- choice for only two of the sessions (Lowe 2003)

Distantiating effects

Two examples of 'techniques of distantiation' 2: sampling

Studying music as social practice in Western society –
where to begin? Who/what do I study?

- where am I going to observe?
- how do I pick my interviewees?
- which documents/artefacts do I study?

Sampling in ethnomusicology-at-home

Tied to `culture' – looking for the exemplary

- the Western conservatoire as exemplary for Western music culture (Nettl 1995)
- a specific bar as exemplary for working class country culture in Texas (Fox 2004)
- `what's named on the label is found in the jar'

Sampling in qualitative sociology

'Theoretical sampling':

- bracketing theories and concepts
- just starting – 1 interview
- analyzing - developing sensitizing concepts
- picking the next interviewees - looking for maximum variation - contrast
- further developing sensitizing concepts as you go
- ending with saturation
(or lack of time)

Distantiating effect

Why?

Disregard of qualitative sociology

- too much stress on the demarcation of ethnomusicology from its `others'?
- stress on `the fieldwork paradigm'/`culture' – `that's the way we do this'?
- stress on music as a work and on the musician (“knowing people making music” (Titon 1997)) vs. stress on daily life?

A step ahead?

There is enough methodological reflexivity in ethnomusicology on 'techniques of distantiating' to cater better for ethnomusicology-at-home.

Cf. a recent plea for anthropology to turn to qualitative sociology in order to make a "...methodological step ahead in field research by re-importing sociology in ethnology." (Meyer & Schareika 2009).

An option for ethnomusicology-at-home?

