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Why 'Ideology' is Still Relevant for Critical Thinking in Music Education

Lucy Green

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Why 'Ideology' is Still Relevant for Critical Thinking in Music Education

Lucy Green

We must guard against throwing out the baby with the bath water. In the wake of postmodernist disdain for 'monolithic' theory-building, and rising awareness of the complexity, fluidity and multifariousness of social groups and the relations cutting across them, the concept of ideology became unfashionable at the end of the twentieth century. It was somewhat dismissed as a crude and inflexible way of explaining only a one-dimensional power-relation between social classes, incapable of accounting for the variety of relationships, perspectives and social groupings that mark the contemporary world. In this article I examine the concept of ideology with specific reference to music, and attempt to show some ways in which the concept continues to be relevant to our understanding of the construction of musical value. I suggest how ideologies of musical value are perpetuated through the education system, and how this perpetuation is also tied up with the reproduction of social groups, not merely despite but partly as a result of the recent incorporation of a variety of musical styles into the curriculum.¹



The term 'ideology' has been inextricably linked, on one hand, with questions about truth and falsity, and on the other, with questions about power and subservience. For example, it is often assumed that ideology involves a type of falsehood that is cynically perpetrated by a powerful group of people to serve their own ends. This falsehood is then seen to be 'imposed' upon relatively powerless people who are somehow lead into believing it, despite the fact that it may not directly benefit them, or may even go against their interests. These people, in holding on to ideological beliefs even when it is against their own interests, are then seen to be suffering from 'false consciousness.' In order to

provide a brief illustration of such an understanding of ideology, I will invoke the notion that ‘individual freedom is a basic human right’. This notion could be understood as a deceit or a falsity, which is put about by wealthy, powerful people to justify themselves in exercising a considerable amount of choice about aspects of their lives such as where they live, where they send their children to school, which doctor they see, and so on. The deceit would be imposed upon less wealthy and powerful groups of people, who unsuspectingly believe in and support it, even though they themselves have much less choice about such aspects of their own lives. These people would then be seen to be suffering from ‘false consciousness’.

However, such a view of ideology is very crude. There is no reason to presuppose that wealthy, powerful people are fundamentally deceitful, or that poor, powerless people are stupid enough to believe anything they are told even when it contradicts their own experiences. Rather than ideology being a falsehood cynically constructed by a powerful group of people and imposed upon an unsuspecting subservient group, ideology grows out of social relations in ways that can be equally convincing and can appear equally beneficial to members of various social groups. This does not mean that there is no such thing as false consciousness; but it does mean that false consciousness is a highly complex notion.

Using the same example as before in order to illustrate these points: the concept of ‘individual freedom’ is not a straightforward falsehood and does not simply ignore the obvious fact that poor, powerless people have less choice than wealthy, powerful people. On the contrary, the concept by no means denies this fact, and furthermore it suggests that if individuals lack freedom, then there is something wrong. There are three central characteristics of ideology that I would now like to introduce in relation to this. I will attempt to describe each one as briefly and clearly as possible, then relate it to the example of ‘individual freedom’, in order to show how this concept operates ideologically.

Firstly, ideology has a tendency towards reification. It is helpful to understand this word in a similar way to the more familiar term, 'deification'. To 'deify' means to attribute an object or a person with god-like properties. Similarly, for our purposes here, to 'reify' means to attribute an abstract concept with thing-like properties. This attribution involves suggesting that the abstract concept exists, like a thing in the world, and that it is unchangeable, universal, eternal, natural or absolute. The ideology of 'individual freedom' involves reification, to the extent that individual freedom appears to be an unchangeable, universal, eternal, natural or absolute human right. Therefore, any social relations which pertain to the possession of individual freedom, must themselves be equally natural and inevitable.

Secondly, ideology has a tendency towards legitimation. This means that it tends to appear morally justifiable. For example, the main point of the ideology of 'individual freedom' is that people's rights should be protected, and this seems in all reasonableness, to be in everyone's interests, regardless of their social group. Therefore, any social relations which embrace the notion of individual freedom, appear legitimate.

Thirdly, ideology helps to perpetuate social relations. This occurs through the processes of reification and legitimation. These processes tend to make social relations seem natural and legitimate 'as they already are'. Therefore, even though any member of a society can be equally subject to ideology, nevertheless, ideology tends to work to the advantage of those groups of people who are better off 'as they already are'. For example, with reference to the ideology of 'individual freedom': in practice, some people do enjoy a greater degree of freedom than others; but the ideology of 'individual freedom' reifies and legitimates this fact. In this way, it helps to stem social unrest and to keep the peace, thus aiding in the perpetuation of the situation.

In short, rather than a crude concept of ideology as a set of imposed falsehoods inducing a straightforwardly 'false' consciousness, it is more helpful to understand ideology as a set of common-sense assumptions which contribute towards making our social relations seem natural and justifiable: ideology helps to explain our world to us, it

grows out of human experience and is shared, in various ways and with various consequences, by large numbers of people from different social groups making up a society. But at the same time, through the processes of reification and legitimation, ideology helps to perpetuate social relations ‘as they already are’. Therefore, ideology usually operates to the advantage of the most powerful and better-off groups within the society.

I have suggested that ideology helps to explain our world, that it is shared and that it stems social unrest. But this does not imply that ideology is a unified belief system: on the contrary, there is not in reality ‘one ideology’, but there are several ideologies. Furthermore the concept of ideology does not imply that every ideological position is always explanatory, that every member of a society agrees about every ideological position all of the time, that ideologies always correspond harmoniously with each other, or that social unrest never occurs. For example, the ideology of ‘individual freedom’ suggesting that everyone should be able to choose their personal health care, conflicts with the ideology of ‘equality’, which requires everyone to have the same health care as each other. Yet both the concept of ‘individual freedom’ and that of ‘equality’ are powerful contemporary ideological positions. One person might adopt one of these positions some of the time, the other at other times, or both at the same time; similarly, certain social groups might change their allegiances or hold potentially contradictory positions. It is part and parcel with the fact that ideologies can come into conflict with each other, and can have more or less explanatory force, that social change occurs, as different individuals and different groups of people claim allegiance to different positions at different historical periods.

One of the greatest bones of contention in discussions of ideology concerns the notion of economic determinism. This notion suggests that the economic structure of a society is so fundamental and important that it profoundly influences everything else, including peoples’ ideas, values and assumptions, or in other words, including ideology. This is called ‘determinism’ because it suggests that people are not ‘free’ to think or to



act in any way that they choose, but that their thoughts and actions are laid down for them, or ‘determined’ by economic factors. However most writers on ideology clearly acknowledge that people are not completely determined by their economic situation, and that people do retain a degree of freedom to think for themselves.² Otherwise, there could not be a variety of ideological positions, and there could never be any social change, or social challenges such as strikes, civil rights protests, peace movements, feminism, and many other movements. The crucial point about ideology in such cases is that when people make challenges they cannot be entirely ‘free’ of ideology; rather, they are bound to be operating from new ideological positions. These new ideological positions will have some relationship, both to previous ideological positions, and to changing economic or other large-scale social conditions.

In short, the picture I am attempting to draw here suggests that ideology represents sets of ideas, values or assumptions which large numbers of people in a given society believe in at any one time, and which aid in the perpetuation of existing social relations. These ideas, values and assumptions are not ‘innocent’, straightforward truths, nor are they deceitful, cynical falsehoods, but they grow out of social relations in such a way as to appear helpful and explanatory to people from various perspectives. This appearance derives in part from the dual tendencies of ideology towards reification and legitimation. Through these tendencies, ideologies either directly or indirectly influence the ways people live, how they behave and how they relate to each other; and it is through such influence that ideologies help to perpetuate social relations.

One of the greatest problems in writing about, thinking about, or discussing the concept of ideology is precisely that the writer is always inside ideology himself or herself. We cannot for a moment step outside of ideology altogether and consider it as if from an ideologically-free or ‘objective’ position. This problem is one that I will address later in the article. For now, it is necessary only to observe the permanent and inescapable presence of this difficulty in any discussion of ideology, including of course, the present one.

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Ideology and music

Next I will try to show how this concept of ideology, as a set of ideas, values and assumptions that tend to reify and legitimate social relations, can be related to music. Then I will illustrate how musical ideology can serve to perpetuate existing social relations, with specific reference to education.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, various ideological positions on musical value grew up. These positions suggested in general, that the highest possible value arises when music can be said to possess certain properties, of which I will select four as examples here: ‘universality’, such as the music’s ability to express ‘the human condition’; ‘eternality’, meaning that the music has a value which will never die; ‘complexity’, for example in harmony, counterpoint, form, or executive demands on performance; and ‘originality’, that is, that the music breaks with convention to establish new stylistic norms which would influence future generations.

The attribution and valorisation of such properties can be seen as central to ideological constructions about music, not because they are ‘false’ or inaccurate reflections of musical value, but because they involve reification and legitimation. Regarding reification, for example, the idea that a piece of music is universal or eternal, involves the suggestion that the music must have an unchangeable, inevitable and natural appeal to all human beings regardless of who they are, where or when they live. The music’s value is thus reified, or understood as a ‘thing’ existing independently of the social world. Regarding legitimation, such notions involve a legitimation of the viewpoints of those people who make the claims in the first place. For example, if a piece of music is claimed to be valuable for being ‘universal’ or ‘eternal’, then this implies that the music’s value must be independent of any interests of the people who value it. Indeed the music must be so good, that it would always be good, for any people in any social situation at any historical period. This in turn, means that the people who value it do so, not because they can gain anything from doing so, or not because they are in a special position from which to value it; but on the contrary, because they are concerned beyond

their own interests, with the music's value for all people. Therefore, their views are legitimate.

From some perspectives through the twentieth century and stretching before and beyond, people have argued, or have assumed, that Western classical music, very broadly defined, is the only really valuable style of music and that it alone possesses such properties as universality, eternity, complexity and originality. Towards the end of the twentieth century voices argued, contrastingly, that popular, jazz or 'world musics' are also valuable. But rather than necessarily contradicting the evaluative claims of the classical supporters, this argument can readily be drawn in, so as to rest on very similar claims – such as the assertion that these other musics have universal appeal or lasting value, or that they can be very complex or highly original. Whichever way round the argument goes, whether in support of classical, popular, or any other kind of music, it remains ideological insofar as, and to the extent that it involves reification and legitimation.

Another concept that has played a prominent role in discussions of musical value is that of 'autonomy'. I will briefly examine this concept in relation to one of the most provocative writers on ideologies about music: T. W. Adorno.³ In general, when people use the word 'autonomy' in relation to music, they mean that the music is highly valuable, and that it has developed in ways that are logically connected to the forms and processes of the musical style as it existed at the time the music was composed, without any regard for contingencies such as making money or being popular. For Adorno this aspect of the notion of autonomy holds. But his concept of autonomy does not necessarily tally with the way the concept is often used by other writers, for he added another aspect: that the truly valuable, autonomous piece of music does have a close relationship to the society from which it comes, because it in some way replicates and reveals the forms and processes of that society through parallels in the ways that the musical forms and processes are organised.

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The concept of musical autonomy as a source of musical value has ideological resonances which are similar to those of the concepts of universality, eternity, complexity or originality discussed above. But in some ways, it has implications which can be rather different. As I have already indicated, the valorisation of autonomy is particularly and explicitly opposed to social contingencies and social functions of music such as money, fame, fashion or enjoyment: autonomous music is supposed to be good precisely because it disregards or even flies in the face of such social factors. Popular music and many other non-classical musics, contrastingly, are usually overtly and even proudly dependent upon such social factors for their production and in their mode of consumption. Adorno held very strong views about popular music and jazz, which he regarded as fundamentally inferior and even damaging types of music.⁴ For him, these musics were neither universal, eternal, complex or original; they also lacked autonomy. For all these reasons, they encouraged people to regress to an earlier, infantile, stage of development. This was because, instead of autonomously and progressively working through musical logic independently of commercial concerns, they repeated the same, tired old patterns over and over again in order to sell themselves to a listenership that craved familiarity. At the same time, so as to appear varied, they added superficial differences to these old patterns, deceiving people into thinking that these differences were new and fresh. Thus people were being ‘fed’ a limited, repetitive diet through the mass media, whilst imagining they were receiving something varied. For Adorno, as well as for others of his contemporaries such as Marcuse, a ‘diet’ of this nature helped to perpetuate social relations, because it induced a ‘mass consciousness’ (a type of ‘false consciousness’), which prevented people from thinking independently and challenging the social organisation.⁵ To put this another way, the musical diet was actually a part of ideology.

There have of course been vociferous criticisms of Adorno from many people who do not think that popular music and jazz are necessarily so damaged by ties to the

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commercial market, so simple or so unoriginal; who do not see them as such a harmful and repetitive drudge; and who do not consider that their listeners have regressed to a state of infancy. Whilst a number of different views prevail, in general it is fair to suggest that most writers agree that Adorno's understanding of the musics was flawed.⁶ One of the major contentions is that he measured the musics' value by comparing them with classical music: but what if classical music is really so different as to require completely different ways to evaluate it?

A number of scholars have grappled with this question by studying popular music, jazz and 'world' musics from alternative musicological perspectives, and in so doing, have observed that traditional musicology is not necessarily suitable for studying them. I would like to indicate how this unsuitability has been diagnosed with specific relation to the popular field, in relation to three areas identified by Middleton (see Note 6), most of which could equally be applied to other 'world' musics and much jazz. Firstly, musicology has developed a rich vocabulary and many sophisticated approaches for understanding musical qualities, such as harmony and form, which are particularly pertinent in Western classical music. But it lacks the same wealth of understanding in relation to qualities such as rhythm, timbre, texture, pitch inflection, rhythmic inflection, recorded sound-production or modality, which are more significant in popular and other musics. Secondly, musicology has tended to view the notated score as the prime object of study; and many of the parameters on which it has focused, such as harmony and form, coincide with aspects that are relatively easy to notate. Here again, popular and other musics require a different approach, because they are in many cases aurally transmitted, so that the performance or the recording, as distinct from any notation, must be taken as the prime object of study. Thirdly, in the last couple of centuries, musicology has led to a canon of 'masterworks', which have come to be considered the greatest examples of musical value. These masterworks have certain characteristics in common. For example, they are all notated, they have all been published in printed form, they are thought innovative in relation to the era in which they were composed, and they have all been

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composed by an individual, Western male. Once again, these characteristics do not necessarily pertain to a great deal of popular musics. But if this is not realised, musicologists will assume that these musics are lacking in value.

Similar problems as those located with reference to musicology above, can also be located with reference to Adorno's views. He did not adopt a traditional musicological approach, but a speculative, quasi-sociological or quasi-philosophical one. However, his approach was fundamentally influenced by traditional musicological assumptions and by the norms and expectations associated with classical music, making it unsuitable as an avenue for understanding other musics. Furthermore, Adorno never conducted any serious analysis of any popular music or jazz, and probably never heard a great deal of contemporary jazz in particular.

It is helpful to remember that the traditional methods of studying classical music may not be altogether suitable for that music either. Clearly, all music, whether popular, classical, or any other sort, has rhythmic, timbral, textural and inflexive characteristics of one kind or another; any kind of music can be made available as a sound-recording and is therefore produced, or mixed; all music takes place in time and usually involves some sort of live performance at some juncture, whether or not it is ever notated; a great deal of music, including classical music, involves some improvisation; and all music is produced by people, whether male or female and whether individually or collectively. The fact that musicology has developed in ways that tend to ignore these aspects with relationship to classical music, does not mean that classical music is completely devoid of these aspects. What it does mean, is that studying classical music has contributed to the appearance that classical music is only based on harmony, melody and other notable parameters; that it is always fixed in notated form; that it is always progressively innovatory and complex, individually composed by men, and so on. The relevant point about this appearance with reference to ideology, is that even though it may not represent an entirely accurate reflection of classical music, it does not harm the reputation of classical music: in fact it

contributes to the reputation of classical music as highly valuable. It is therefore part and parcel with the ideological evaluation of classical music's superiority.

One further point worth noting, is that just as it is possible to argue that popular, jazz or 'world' musics, like classical music, can be universal, eternal, complex or original, so too is it possible to argue that certain of these musics can be autonomous. This sometimes involves distinguishing sub-categories within these broader categories, because in order to argue for the autonomy of some music, it is always necessary to distinguish it from some other music which is seen to lack autonomy. As an illustration of this process: there have been many points in the history of Western popular music when a rock band, say, or a rap artist or MC, has been situated as 'alternative', 'underground' and against the commercial mainstream. In such cases, the music produced by the band or artist would be considered to have some autonomy, although their followers would be unlikely to use that word. The same band or artist has then 'sold out', or in other words, succumbed to commercial concerns or the search for mass fame and popularity, entailing a change in the kind of music they produce and a concomitant loss of autonomy. Sometimes, the music of some bands or individual musicians which, to all intents and purposes is in the broadly 'popular' field, maintains relative degrees of autonomy for longer periods. But it is more difficult for such music to maintain autonomy than it is for classical music. This is partly because of the relative lack of government subsidies, university lectureships, fellowships and other support mechanisms available in the popular field: ironically, the apparent autonomy of classical music has actually relied heavily on this sort of financial support. It is also partly because of the general ideological expectations and the existing social relations that surround the production and consumption of popular music.

As I suggested earlier, the argument that music can be universal, eternal, complex or original, is ideological, even if it is put forward in support of popular, jazz or other 'world' musics and opposed to the superior value placed on classical music. So too with claims that certain popular, jazz or 'world' musics can be autonomous. It is not the style

of the music itself, or even its economic position, but the content of the claims being made for its superiority, that make the position ideological.

Ideology and music education

I now wish to address the claim that through the processes of reification and legitimation, ideology helps to perpetuate social relations. As I mentioned earlier, a constant difficulty in writing about ideology, is that the writer must be operating from within some ideological position or other: we cannot entirely escape ideology. One way to respond to this difficulty, is to ground ideology-critique by making it specific to concrete objects or concrete situations. A great contribution of Adorno, and the reason why despite his many faults, he is still read and respected by a number of people, was that he grounded his ideology-critique of music, in actual concrete pieces of music, in musical styles or in the society in which the music was produced and/or consumed. Focussing largely on classical music, he tried to show how real pieces of music were, as I said earlier, an autonomous, or an ideological expression of some truths about society. But one of the criticisms of Adorno that I would like to highlight here, is that although he often grounded his critiques in his own, highly abstract notions of music and society, he never grounded them in ordinary people's notions about music or uses of music.⁷ He made a lot of assumptions about what people 'got out' of music, what they thought about it, what effects it had on them, and how they used it, without ever actually asking either listeners or musicians about their experiences or about what the music 'meant' to them, and without ever observing them using music. He himself was disdainful of any idea that it was worth asking people such questions or observing their behaviour, since, according to him, people were already so ideologically influenced that they did not know what they thought, and anything they did think or do would anyway be ideological. But, if looked at another way, we can see that in order to find out something about the content of ideology, it makes sense to ask people what they think or to observe what people do, before we leap to any assumptions.

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Here, I will give a brief example of a grounded discussion of musical ideology in the field of education, drawn from my earlier research in the UK, and focusing particularly upon the relationship between classical and popular music in the school system.⁸ This discussion is by no means intended to illustrate the only way of conducting ideology-critique in relation to music, nor does it pretend to cover all aspects of the subject. However, I hope that it will be useful in illustrating one concrete way in which the concept of ideology can be used in relation to music education.

The education systems of a society have a great deal to do with ideology. Most particularly, education helps to perpetuate ideologies that are already well established, it helps to assimilate (or 'de-fuse') ideological challenges, and it can help to produce new ideologies in line with changing economic and social conditions. In doing so, it imbues children with self-images, expectations and achievement-orientations that tend to correspond with their existing social situations. In this way, it helps to perpetuate social relations by guiding pupils into an acceptance of their situation and the concomitant taking-up of roles that are both adaptable to the current economic and social climate, and at the same time, do not significantly challenge their existing social positions. Education provides a clear, focussed site on which to ground discussion of ideologies about music.

By the early 1980s in England, music education in schools had been overwhelmingly concerned with classical music; but a large proportion of teachers over a period of only four or five years had started to incorporate quite a significant amount of popular music into their curricula, and this was followed in 1985 by the official recognition of popular music in the first ever National Curriculum for music in the country. However, rather than classical and popular music simply blending together in the classroom, there arose relationships of difference between them. Here I wish to consider two particular areas of difference, both of which can be understood in relation to the ideological construction of musical value.

One concerns the clear split that was discernible in the way that teachers valued classical and popular music respectively and how they expressed that value in relation to

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the curriculum. This did not manifest itself in simple terms; for example as already mentioned, it was by no means the case that the majority of teachers valued and used classical music to the exclusion of popular music, or that curriculum materials focussed on classical music alone. On the contrary, popular music was incorporated into the curricula of about two-thirds of the teachers, and there were a number of textbooks entirely dedicated to popular music. However, amongst the teachers who used and valued this music, and in the orientations of the textbooks, there was nonetheless a tendency to assume that the music's value rested fundamentally on the very same claims as those upon which the value of classical music rested. That is to say, many teachers stated that, for example, popular music had 'universal' appeal or lasting value; that much popular music was 'complex' or 'original'; or that there was a distinction between different kinds of popular music, some of which was implicitly assumed to be 'autonomous' (such as progressive rock), as distinct from other types which were described as 'commercial' (such as charts pop). The ideological tendencies towards reification and legitimation already discussed were thus just as prevalent as they were in the views of those people who supported classical music in opposition to popular music.

The other area concerns the ways in which classical and popular music were approached through teaching strategies. Generally, the teaching of classical music focussed on intra-musical, or what in *Music On Deaf Ears* I call 'inherent' technical aspects of the music, that is to say, the notes and how they are composed and performed; whilst the treatment of popular music involved concentrating largely on extra-musical or 'delineated' aspects such as the uses of the music, its associations with particular bands, clothes, leisure-time activities and so on. The focus of study on a particular aspect of music already contains implications about the music's value. As I have suggested, musical value has been seen to arise from properties such as universality, eternity, complexity, originality or autonomy. If teachers present music only, or largely in terms of its intra-musical or 'inherent' aspects, the suggestion is that its significance derives from factors that are not tied to any specific social situation and are therefore universal and

eternal, which involve complexity, and which make possible the development of originality and autonomy. Contrastingly, if teachers draw attention only or mainly to the social contexts or ‘delineations’ of the music, this suggests that the ‘music itself’ is of less importance, that the music is a servant of its social context and therefore, that it cannot be universal, eternally valid or autonomous. Also, since the ‘music itself’ is not apparently worth analysing, this suggests that it has no complexity, which in turn suggests the impossibility of any real originality. Overall, then, although popular music was taught, it was approached in ways that implicitly rendered it inferior to classical music.

The treatment of classical and popular music in schools was thus both contradictory and ideological in the following two senses. Firstly, when teachers, curricula, syllabi or books theoretically supported the value of popular music, they tended to do so by appealing to the very same qualities of universality, eternality, complexity, originality or autonomy upon which the value of classical music rested. These qualities, as has already been argued, involve reification and legitimation. Secondly, when teachers, curricula, syllabi or books actually used popular music in the classroom, its treatment contradicted this evaluative claim, and instead made it appear to lack those very characteristics of universality, eternality, complexity, originality and autonomy purportedly possessed by classical music. The ultimate superiority of classical music was thus affirmed and legitimated. In short, the evaluation and the treatment of classical and popular music in schools, involved a reification of musical value as universal, eternal, complex, original and other similar categories; and a legitimation of classical music’s superiority by maintaining classical music as the only music really worthy of study.

Not only was musical value thus constructed as an ideological category, but also I suggested earlier that ideologies contribute to the material reproduction of social relations. This process can be clearly illustrated with reference to social class. As mentioned earlier, education helps to perpetuate existing social relations, and it does this partly through imbuing children with expectations and orientations towards taking up

similar roles as their parents. In the example I used at the beginning of this article, I indicated that the ideology of individual freedom is considered pertinent to the lives of people from many social groups, including those for whom this ideology does not directly correspond with or enhance their life-experiences. Similarly with the ideology that classical music is the most valuable type of music: this ideology has been accepted by the majority of teachers, curriculum planners, and examination authorities in many countries for many years, as being equally relevant for all children, even though it clearly does not correspond with the musical tastes, values and experiences of them all. For, even regardless of their parents' musical affiliations, many children from all social classes are quite clearly far more interested in various types of popular music than in classical music. Not only that, but some middle-class and many working-class children come from family backgrounds in which classical music is anyway not particularly highly valued. The ideology of classical music's superior value corresponds with the values of a minority of middle-class children, whereas it deviates from the musical tastes of some middle-class and many working-class children.

Not only that, but in order to achieve the highest possible educational success in most national school music exams in most countries, it is still helpful and in some cases, necessary to have access to specialist instrumental tuition, outside and in excess of the normal state-sponsored school curriculum. This tuition is available free of charge to some extent, but the system survives in many countries, partly thanks to the input of a large number teachers who are privately paid. Thus in general, for financial as well as cultural reasons, working-class children do not have as much access to instrumental tuition as middle-class children. Concomitantly, they do not have as much opportunity to select music courses, nor do they display as much interest in doing so, as middle-class children; and even when they do select courses, they tend to be disadvantaged. They therefore achieve less overall educational success in music than middle-class children.

Here, then, is one way in which ideologies about music serve to perpetuate existing social relations: in this case, relations between social classes concerning both the

possession of certain musical values, and the opportunity for music-educational success. Children from lower social classes are disadvantaged in relation to music education, not only in cultural but also financial terms, in so far as the implicit prerequisites of music education are both culturally and economically relatively removed from them. The continuing relevance of the concept of ideology to music education

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, during the late 1980s and the 1990s there was a gradual debunking of the concept of ideology in many circles, and its replacement with a Foucauldian concept of discourse.⁹ This was claimed to be a more flexible concept, which moved away from a 'monolithic' reliance on the distinction between social classes. That distinction was problematised by the recognition of complexities in the relationships between and across other major social groupings including those of gender, 'race', ethnicity, nationality and others. Although the concept of social class is in itself highly complicated, and although an individual may move from one class to another at different times, in general it is possible to situate individuals at any one point in time, into a social class category which can at least be distinguished from other social class categories in broadly economic terms related to the labour-market, and in relation to concomitant positions of power and subservience in the wider society. But when other concepts relating to other social groups, such as those of ethnicity, 'race', gender or nationality are added, categorisation becomes more tangled, and the economic relationships and degree of power and subservience between the various groups become even more complex. For example, there is no one social group of 'whites' who can be distinguished as standing in the same relationship as each other to one group of 'blacks'; or one social group called 'women' who can be thus distinguished from another social group of 'men'. On the contrary, some members of some ethnic groups might stand in a relationship of power to other members of other ethnic groups, but simultaneously in a relationship of subservience to others, either in the same group as themselves or in different groups. Likewise, women in some social groups might have considerable power over some men, either in the same social group or in different groups, whereas other

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http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Green2_2.pdf

women in other social groups might be subservient to all men. Every individual is a member of some social class grouping or other, is gendered, has an ethnicity, and belongs to a 'race' or mix of 'races', as well as having other characteristics such as age, religion, nationality, sub-cultural allegiance and so on. All these characteristics do not fall neatly into social class categories, but cut across social class. Therefore, we cannot understand ethnicity, 'race', gender, or many other social divisions, by subsuming them into theories of social class.

The concept of discourse was adopted because it was thought more capable than that of ideology, of recognising that different groups of people, including those in power and those at the weakest or poorest end of the social spectrum, can all construct discourses which are more-or-less true or false taken from different perspectives at different times, and which can help to perpetuate social relations in different ways. However, there is no necessity to the application of the concept of ideology to social class only, for the concept is capable of being translated to other realms and used, not in contradistinction to, but conjunction with, that of discourse, as an umbrella concept containing multiplicity. In the case of music education, it can, for example, help us to understand how music education contributes to the perpetuation of not only social class but other large-scale social groups formed in the wider society, including those of gender, 'race', ethnicity, nationality and others; and how it contributes to the formation and perpetuation of specifically musical social groups, including reception groups such as sub-cultures and scenes, and production groups such as composers, guitarists, sound engineers and so on.

I will illustrate this claim briefly with reference to one social group, that of gender.¹⁰ The concepts 'masculinity' and 'femininity' might be thought of as discursive constructions within an overarching ideological framework. Overall, they involve the common-sense notions that femininity is marked by attributes such as passivity, emotionality, a willingness to care for others, contrariness, desirability, proximity to nature, subjugation to bodily functions, and the ability to reproduce craft-works;

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masculinity, contrastingly, is generally defined as active, rational, inventive, experimental, scientific, unified, as a catalyst to culture and an emblem of the controlling powers of mind, possessing the potential for genius required for the creation of art-works. Neither of these constructions implies that all women are 'feminine' or that all men are 'masculine'. On the contrary, it is possible and by no means abnormal for there to be 'feminine' men and 'masculine' women. However, ideology tends to label women with feminine qualities, and men with masculine qualities, as an evaluative act.

In the case of music, the attribution of 'feminine' characteristics has affected ways in which women singers, instrumentalists and composers, in almost all styles of music, have been perceived and evaluated throughout history. Not only women musicians themselves, but the music they have produced, especially in the case of women composers, has also been judged as if it were itself of feminine gender. It was therefore, considered lacking because it did not possess those attributes of masculinity listed above, which are necessary correlates of the legitimation of performance and productivity or the attribution of genius. So women have either been relegated, or have relegated themselves to particular, usually subservient musical roles throughout history; but the appearance has been given, that they have taken inferior musical roles because they lack musical ability. The constructions of femininity on which this process rests bear the two hallmarks of ideology on which I have been focussing in this article. Firstly, they involve the reification of characteristics – the apparently inevitable, universal musical incompetence of women – and secondly therefore, the legitimation of situations – the relative lack of musical opportunity available to women. Furthermore, this reification and legitimation serve in their turn, to perpetuate existing social relations concerning musical production between women and men, by reducing both the professional musical opportunities that are available to women, and the esteem in which women musicians and their music are held. Schools perpetuate this situation by rewarding girls and boys differentially in relation to their continuation of differentiated musical practices.

Closing remarks

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I have suggested a view of ideology as a set of common-sense assumptions which, although complex and manifold, tend to reify and legitimate, and thus to perpetuate existing social relations. With reference to music, it is necessary to understand ideology within the terms of the whole musical field, because specific categories of music are only manifest in contradistinction to others. Some of the main distinguishing forces in creating different categories of music involve ideological constructions of value. These constructions often contain the idea that valuable music is imbued with qualities such as universality, eternity, complexity, originality or autonomy. Whereas classical music readily lays claim to such qualities, popular, jazz and other 'world' musics do so less readily, and often only with qualification. But in all cases, the claims of value are ideological in so far as they involve reification and legitimation. In other words, regarding reification, they tend to give music the appearance of universality, eternity, inevitability, naturalness, and so on; and regarding legitimation, they tend to justify the pre-existing musical values of whichever social group employs them. This in turn contributes to the perpetuation of existing social relations by helping to regulate musical practices, expectations and opportunities. The education system plays a major part in that regulative process.

The concept of ideology in relation to music can be helpful in understanding how and why certain musical values come to be accepted as common sense; how these values are reproduced through history; how they contain propensities for reification and legitimation; and moreover, how they perpetuate social relations. This perpetuation occurs partly because musical ideologies affect actual musical practices by reifying and legitimating the availability of different musical expectations and opportunities to people from different social groups.

I have also indicated that it is never possible for a writer to sit outside of ideology. My own viewpoint must therefore contain some ideological aspects, and it is in this area that it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle objective argument from evaluative assumption. The best I can do here is to highlight an apparent conundrum in my position.

By suggesting that musical value is an ideological category, I have made it appear that music can ‘really’ have no value in itself at all, but that its value is always derived from its social contexts. Whilst I do believe that this must be so, I am not content to follow this through in such a way as to suggest that all music is equally valuable or equally valueless. On the contrary, I believe that both the ways in which the musical materials – the notes and their ‘inherent’ interrelations – are put together and executed, and the social contexts or ‘delineations’ lying behind musical evaluations, do form important, relevant and genuine claims for musical value. What the concept of ideology continues to be able to do, is to make us aware of some of the distinctions between different types of evaluative claims, to help us understand how musical values affect musical practices, and most significantly, to indicate how our musical practices can act back to affect our musical values. What the concept of musical ideology cannot and should not do, is allow us to slip into a position of total relativism from which we are unable to even attempt to distinguish ‘good’ from ‘bad’ music. The task of making such distinctions, however, lies elsewhere.

Notes

¹ Parts of the central section of this article are based on a chapter of mine entitled ‘Ideology’, in Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss’s edited book, *Key Terms for Popular Music and Culture*, (New York and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1999, pp. 5-17). The concept of ideology in relation to music and music education is also worked through in my book *Music On Deaf Ears: Music, Ideology and Education*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), which has now been out of print for over ten years.

² See, for example, the references in Notes 3, 4, 5 and 6; and Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, (trans. H. Zohn, London: Cape Publications, 1973), or George Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, (trans. R. Livingstone). Merlin Press, 1971).

³ See, for example, his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, (trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Seabury Press, 1976) which has been out of print for many years despite several rumours of prospective re-printings. A useful collection of his sociological perspectives on music is found in *Prisms*, (trans. S. Weber and S. Weber; first published by Neville Spearman, 1967; third printing of 1981 edition in 1986; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press).

⁴ See, for example, ‘Perennial fashion – jazz’, in *Prisms* (op. cit), and ‘On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening’, in Arato, A., and Gebhardt, E. (eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978)

⁵ See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) or Marcuse’s *Negations*, (trans. J. J. Shapiro, London: Penguin, 1968); or Max Horkheimer, ‘Art and mass culture’, in A. Arato, A. and E. Gebhardt, (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

⁶ For example, Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990, pp. 103-7). Also see, for example, Allan Moore’s *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*, (2nd edition, London: Ashgate Press, 2001), and David Brackett’s *Interpreting Popular Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷ This point is argued in my *Music On Deaf Ears*, (op. cit.) pp. 9-10. There has recently been some fascinating work on ordinary listeners’ relationships with music, such as Tia DeNora’s *Music in Everyday Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Daniel Cavicchi’s *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁸ Lucy Green, *Music On Deaf Ears: Music, Ideology and Education* (op. cit.). For other discussions of the pop-classical split in English schools at the time see for example, Graham Vulliamy, ‘Music and the mass culture debate’ and ‘Music as a case study in the “new sociology of education”’ in John Shepherd, Paul Virden, Trevor Wishart and Graham Vulliamy, *Whose Music: A Sociology of Musical Language*, (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1977)

⁹ The seminal texts are perhaps Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction*, (trans. R. Hurley, London: Allen Lane, 1981), and his *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. Bristol: Tavistock Publications, 1972). Many of the critiques of the concept of ideology are associated with feminist studies and the study of ‘race’ and ethnicity.

¹⁰ This argument is made in more detail in my book *Music, Gender, Education*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
Biographical Information

Lucy Green is Reader of Music Education at the Institute of Education, London University, UK, where she lectures in music education and the aesthetics and sociology of music. She is the author of *Music on Deaf Ears: Musical Meaning, Ideology and Education* (1988), *Music, Gender, Education* (1997), and *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead For Music Education* (2001). She has written numerous articles and book chapters on music education and the sociology of music, and given keynote lectures in

many countries in Europe, the Americas and Asia. She sits on the editorial boards of various journals including Music Education Research and Popular Music.