



**Doctoral
School of
Sociology**

Thesis Summary

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Poor Neighbours

The Structure of the Hungarian Jazz Scene

Ph.D. dissertation

Dissertation Supervisor:

Miklós Hadas DsC

university professor

Budapest, 2018

Institute of Sociology and Social Policy

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1. Background of the Research and Justification of the Thematic Concept

1.1. Research Background

The aim of my dissertation based on an individual research project started in 2014 is to provide an innovative contribution to cultural sociology by analysing the symbolic and economic stratification of the Hungarian jazz scene. Alongside the emergence of jazz studies in Hungary – with the exception of works by Malecz e.g. (1981) – my work is the first systematic investigation about jazz musicians conceived as ‘creative workers’ (Umney and Kretsos, 2013) and their socially conditioned struggles for prestige in the cultural and musical field. Bourdieu’s field theory is applied throughout the analysis.

A colleague of mine, *Ádám Ser* has joined the research until 2016 Spring (Havas and Ser, 2017). The qualitative research (interview analysis, ethnography etc.) on which this dissertation is based on is entirely my own work.

Since the foundation of the Institute of Jazz Studies in 1952, jazz has been studied from a variety of disciplines that studies different aspects (ethnic, racial, historical, textual, aesthetic, social, economic etc.) of this cultural and social practice. In Hungary, until the early 2010's there have not been sophisticated social scientific discourse over the social and cultural meaning of jazz (see Ziperovszky and Havas, 2017; Havas and Ser, 2017).

1.2. Justification of the Thematic Concept

The sociological construction of the topic is determined by the epistemological standpoint that jazz is not (only) a musical, but cultural and social practice par excellence that bears the specific characteristics of modernity.

Johnson, in his study titled 'Jazz Diasporas' distinguishes between formal (text-based) approaches, and 'culturalist' approaches that consider the cultural and social characteristics of jazz as the centre of analysis and interest (Johnson, 20002: 34).

In Hungary too, the (sociological) study of jazz holds the perspective of grasping broader cultural distinctions and social dynamisms by analysing the aesthetic and social practices of jazz musicians who are part of the creative industry. Despite its cultural significance and the fact that jazz is an unquestionable part of the Hungarian national culture jazz was not systematically investigated in Hungary.

1.3. Research Questions

My dissertation investigates the symbolic and economic distinctions in the field of jazz based on Bourdieu's theory of artistic fields (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996). Research questions are formulated in order to provide a valid account on the legitimacy struggles within the field of jazz and the social and ethnic determinants of these status struggles and (musical) identity constructions.

Based on a qualitative, 'quasi-ethnographic' research design the following research questions were posed:

- The system of distinctions in the mainstream/free jazz dichotomy: how this distinction is constructed in the interviews and based on what kind of (musical) references?
- What is the relation between the positions occupied in the field and economic strategies of jazz musicians?

I also study the role of musical socialization in the creation of ‘musical habitus’ of gypsy jazz musicians leaning on Rimmer’s study (Rimmer, 2012). My hypothesis were the following regarding the aesthetic practices of gypsy musicians and their status in the jazz field:

- For gypsy musicians jazz is a terrain where due to their specific historically conditioned musical socialization and their dispositions they do not only establish a competitive relationship with other (non-gypsy) musicians but become themselves the elite group of this cultural field.
- To what extent ‘gypsy’ ethnicity is a ‘capital’ in the field of jazz?

2. Data and Methods Used

2.1. The Conceptualization of Jazz Musicians

Sociological studies on jazz – e.g. Becker (1951), Lopes (2002) – regardless of their different conceptual frameworks (e.g. art worlds, fields, or creative industries) tend to agree on the centrality of conflicts and rivalry in the jazz world (Banks, 2012: 80), albeit Bourdieu-oriented approaches more so than Beckerian ones. Depending on the researcher’s orientation and the level of cultural legitimacy expressed by jazz – from prestigious concert halls through smoky jazz clubs to background music in restaurants – different concepts are in use to describe people playing jazz. As they find Becker’s (1951) early concept of ‘dance musician’ and ‘jazz musician’ problematic (the former overemphasizing the commercial aspects, the latter the luxury of playing only jazz, i.e. autonomy), Becker and Faulkner (2009) prefer the term ‘ordinary musicians’ which adequately captures the diversity of working situations. While acknowledging the benefits of this concept, throughout the research I prefer the term ‘jazz

musician' because the musicians strongly identify as such, even when playing popular songs at commercial gigs.

2.2. Characteristics of the Quasi-Ethnographic Research

Drawing on the grounded theory method (Glaser, 1992), the research questions stem both from an empirical connection to the scene (semi-structured interviews, observations, informal discussions) and the continuous reevaluation of 'ready-made' theoretical concepts, for instance about field dynamics.¹

Through acquaintances and personal referrals I conducted 27 interviews averaging an hour and a half, of which 2 were conducted in mini-focus groups (2-3 persons), the shortest being 30 minutes, the longest lasting 3 hours, with predominantly male musicians of distinct ethnic groups, generations and different levels of prestige (understood as a relational construct). The

¹ This account is based on my paper (Havas, 2018) submitted for Cultural Sociology Journal in January 2018.

youngest respondent was 21 and the oldest 60 years old, while most were between the ages of 25 and 45 and all played an instrument. Although the research started in 2014, most interviews were conducted by spring 2017. The resulting ~40 hour recording was transcribed and manually coded. Female musicians' viewpoints (mostly present as vocalists), i.e. the role of gender in cultural consecration (Venrooij and Schmutz, 2010) was not studied in depth, but this 'instrument-centric', masculine pool is treated reflexively, given that a vocalist's status appears strongly related to the acquisition of an instrument.

3. Results of the Dissertation

3.1. System of Distinctions in the Mainstream/Free Jazz Dichotomy

The opposition between musical and ideological attributes refers to those abstract, aesthetic aspects of jazz – often codified in textbooks and institutionalized in conservatories – which are not innocent technical features, but fulfill 'ideological' functions of

legitimacy. Acquiring the aesthetics and style of canonized figures therefore functions as capital that conditions the schemes of mutual perception and appreciation within the field.

Therefore, in the course of constructing musical habitus the modes of use differ, while the categories are identical, which can be bewildering if the categories themselves are not understood relationally. The historically conditioned plurality that derives from the ambiguous embeddedness of the field within the hierarchy of legitimacies is the reason for the relatively stable field-relations: there are no ‘winners’ (avant-gardes that have become consecrated and thus mainstream) so far who legitimize their positions against the ‘fossils of another age’, throwing them out or back to history – as happened with Dixieland referred to as ‘museum jazz’, or the ‘painters who supplied the galleries of the Right Bank in fin-de-siècle Paris’ with works emulating the avant-garde of a previous age (Bennett, 2005: 150). Instead, the field is structured by two oppositional logics of hierarchization that have coexisted since the 1970s. This specific logic

of hierarchization is referred to as ‘simultaneous hierarchy’ throughout the dissertation. Both ‘camps’ play in consecrated concert halls to stable (i.e. relatively small) audiences (depending on the event), and if on any weekday someone wishes to listen to an established musician from either the ‘free’ or the ‘mainstream’ camp, (s)he will not find major differences in audience size.

3.2. Aesthetic and Ethnic Constructions of the Contemporary Hungarian Jazz: ‘Gypsy Jazz’ and Musical Habitus

The last empirical chapter of the dissertation analysed those gypsy jazz musicians’ relationship to music who were born in traditionally musician families based on the study of musical socialization and the discursive constructions of aesthetic questions. The role of musical socialization was studied by using Rimmer’s concept of musical habitus in order to understand the functioning of socially conditioned dispositions in the field. The intense adherence to the mainstream doxa,

i.e. the emphasis on jazz's high art status, can be understood as the symbolic expression of the upward status mobility of gypsy musicians (the 'quasi-blacks' of Hungary): 'aesthetic dogmatism' provides legitimacy in the social field. In Hungary too, therefore, aesthetic differences in jazz are *'tied to the struggles over the constitution of social status hierarchy'* (Lopes, 2000: 183).

The most distinctive characteristic of the mainstream 'hard core' – often but not exclusively associated with gypsies – is the imposition of high entry costs to their circles as a symbolic expression of their often fanatically advocated 'professional' musical habitus. For them, the acquisition of the 'blessed trinity' of mainstream aesthetics is indispensable for recognizing others as legitimate jazz musicians. It is therefore recurrent to refer to mainstream jazz features as *laws*, which explains the creation of institutionalized boundaries between the camps. If one observes the compositions of bands, non-gypsies are also present in predominantly gypsy bands, which supports the idea that the entry costs and boundary-making are not solely

based on ethnicity, but on musical dispositions that strongly favor mainstream aesthetics, whose strongest advocates tend to be gypsies. Turning ethnicity into an aesthetic category (the ‘compliment’ of ‘*good gypsy*’ means playing mainstream jazz at a professional level) is an important characteristic of Hungarian mainstream jazz. Most free jazz musicians, however, stand opposed to this understanding of tradition.

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5. Publications

Journal Articles

Havas, Ádám (2018): The Logic of Distinctions in the Hungarian Jazz Field: A Case Study of Hungarian Jazz. *Cultural Sociology*. (revise and resubmit)

Havas Ádám (2018): A kortárs jazz esztétikai és etnikai konstrukciói: „cigány jazz” és zenei habitus. *Szociológiai Szemle* (forthcoming)

Havas Ádám (2017): A szabadság dogmatizmusa és a dogmatizmus szabadsága: különbségtételek rendszere a mainstream-free jazz dichotómiában. *Replika* (101–102): 169–196.

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Conference Papers

Havas Ádám and Ser Ádám (2016): „*Szegény rokonok*” – *A budapesti jazz színtér konstrukciója*. In: XII. PEME PhD Konferencia. Koncz István és Szova Ilona (szerk.). Budapest: PEME. 111–123.

Other Publications

Articles in Preparation

Havas Ádám (2018): Aesthetic and Ethnic Constructions of the Hungarian Jazz Diaspora: ‘Gypsy Jazz’ and Musical Habitus. *Poetics*