

## *Chapter 2*

### *The decline of musical absolutism?*

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## ***The story so far***

In Chapter 1 we presented ethical and educational motives behind the aim of the project reported in this book — to help develop a musicology of the mass media. In our attempts to explain why no such musicology has been established, we described some of the obstacles which conventional musicology, institutionalised in the mid-nineteenth century and symbolised by the confused concept of ‘absolute music’, has thrown in the path of realising projects of the type presented here. We questioned the dubious notion that the *practice* of affect somehow disappeared in European instrumental works along with its abandonment as theory during the latter half of the eighteenth century. We also explained some of the classical canon’s membership rules, especially, in its early days, its outright rejection of music associated with the fourth estate, and, later on, its inclusion of certain types of instrumental jazz but exclusion of film music. Last but not least, we argued that the Great Epistemological Divide between objectivism and subjectivism so pervades the way most of us have learnt to structure our thinking under capitalism that it will be no easy task to come up with convincing musicological alternatives which take into account the *interdependence* of human subjectivity *and* the material world. However, we ended the chapter on a hopeful note, stating that many before us have challenged the intellectual and ideological confusion caused by the institutional hegemony of musical absolutism.

This chapter presents a brief account of those twentieth-century challenges from perspectives relevant to the main aim of this book. We shall discuss the challenges in two main sections. The second of these deals with popular music studies, while the first summarises the most relevant traits of three broad twentieth-century approaches to the understanding of music, approaches which inform popular music studies in general and this study in particular. By the end of this chapter we should have completed our presentation of the basic epistemological background to the kinds of approach and method we use in the main part of this book.<sup>1</sup>

## ***The first three phases***

In the light of the discussion in Chapter 1 about the staying power of ‘absolute music’, the title of this chapter (“The decline of musical absolutism?”) may seem like wishful thinking. However, there are, as we shall see, grounds for identifying three main phases in the development of alternatives to the aesthetics and ideology associated with the institutionalisation of music studies in the late nineteenth century. These phases do not consist of particular dates, nor of sudden discoveries, nor of discrete events: they should rather be seen as fusions of general historical tendencies in Western culture, society, politics, media technology, as well as in musical style and practices. Such important changes have of course influenced ways of thinking about music. In the interests of brevity we shall call the first three phases ETHNO, SOCIO and SEMIO (see table 1).

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1. The epistemological traditions referred to are, unless otherwise stated, those of European thought since the Enlightenment. We state this caveat in recognition of the fact that other epistemological traditions do exist!

**Table 1 The first three phases**

Phase	Start	Musical mass media	Musical lingua franca
ethno	c 1900	notation, acoustic recording	Central European classical and popular
socio	c 1930	radio, film, electro-acoustic	European and US: classical and popular
semio	c 1970	vinyl, transistors, TV, video, digital audio	Anglo-US rock/pop and film music

Table 1 should *not* be interpreted literally and the three phases do *not* constitute historically or conceptually watertight categories.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the dates shown in the table represent no more than approximations of the historical time at which each phase assumes a perceptibly potent form in Western thought, and the column ‘Musical lingua franca’ gives no more than a very general indication of the sort of musical styles circulating internationally in the mass media of the time. Nevertheless, three general points of interest are discernible in table 1: [1] radical changes in music and the music media took place in the twentieth century; [2] those changes relate to concurrent developments in the political economy (e.g. proletarianisation, monopolisation, globalisation); [3] those changes, with their political and economic concomitants, seem to concur chronologically with changing approaches to the *understanding* of music. Since this is a musicological book, it is the third point that concerns us most.

It will already be clear that the labels given to each of the three phases can all be used as qualifiers of music studies: ethnomusicology, the sociology of music and the semiotics of music. These three qualifiers imply that studying music entails relating it to other parts of human activity: ETHNO to peoples and their culture, SOCIO to the society in which the music being studied exists, and SEMIO to the meanings, expressed in both musical *and* other terms, of the music under discussion, the latter implying that musical structures relate to types of human activity and social organisation other than just ‘other music’. Each challenge to the hegemony of musical absolutism will be presented in brief, not as an exhaustive historical account but as a way of highlighting what we see as the most important contributions made at each phase of the ‘de-absolutisation’ process to the development of popular music studies in general, and to a musicology of the mass media in particular.

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2. For example, Mattheson’s *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister*, though published in 1739, is very much SEMIO, while ETHNO and SOCIO approaches are obviously still essential for musicology in the twenty-first century. You could also, if you wanted, argue that some of Plato’s *Republic* (c. 400 BCE) is sociological and that some of Giraldus Cambrensis’ *Topographia Hibernica* (1188) is ethnomusicological. However, the stated purpose of this section is to account for alternatives to an institutionalised view established many centuries later, not to present an exhaustive history of the sociology or anthropology of music. You could also raise the more relevant objection that what might in broad terms be called a ‘semiotic’ view of music never really disappeared, even during the heyday of ‘absolute music’.

## ***Phase 1 – ETHNO***

We have already cited Dahlhaus' observation (1988:56) that German Romantic metaphysics of instrumental music 'reigned virtually unchallenged throughout the nineteenth century, even in the decades of *fin-de-siècle* modernism'. The first major challenge comes from what is generally called either ethnomusicology or the anthropology of music.<sup>3</sup>

As shown in table 1, the ETHNO phase gains momentum around 1900. This date approximates such events as the invention (in 1877) and subsequent spread of sound recording in the 1890s, Stumpf's trip to Siam in 1900, Hornbostel's first expedition in 1905, the publication of Sachs' and Hornbostel's organology in 1914, recordings from 1889 of Native American music in the USA, and, starting in 1904, of Transylvanian and Hungarian music by Kodály and Bartók (Skog 1977: 617-618). Although notation was still the main musical storage medium in the early twentieth century, acoustic recording enabled collectors of non-European music to store what they sought to document *as it sounded*, or at least as faithfully as the equipment permitted, rather than as the researchers heard it or were able to transcribe it on the spot. Thanks to the new recording technology, high standards of reliability of musical documentation were set: collectors could no longer return from field trips with just transcriptions of the music they intended to study. Through repeated listening to a recording of an identical sequence of musical events, they could more easily grasp the details of unfamiliar ways of structuring pitch, timbre and rhythm, taking particular care to transcribe all relevant parameters of expression, not just those suited to storage in the European system of notation.<sup>4</sup>

This early development in ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music is of importance to those who study music in the modern media because focus on musical texts shifts from notation to recording. Sound recording became the primary medium for musical storage and acted as the basis for transcription, whose function was merely to represent the original sound events on paper. In other words, the roles of notation and recording were more or less reversed. In European art music, the composer produced notation which acted as the primary medium on which live performance and any subsequent recording were based, whereas the notation of music in other traditions relied on sound recording of a primary live performance for its existence as a text used for purposes of study, not (re)performance. Later, after the advent of coil mikes and electrical recording in the 1920s, field recordings by collectors like Peer, Hammond and Lomax were to have an even greater impact: previously non-notated music traditions like hillbilly and the blues could now be stored, reproduced and distributed in quantities that were soon to outstrip the commercial success of the sheet music industry. With the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* (1967), of course, media primacy is in the recording, live performance becoming at best an attempt to re-enact the recording on stage, often an outright impossibility, while notation is pushed out into the media periphery.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Merriam (1964) suggests that 'anthropology of music' is a more adequate term than 'ethnomusicology', 'comparative musicology', 'folk music research', etc. We should not forget that musical hermeneutics (Kretzschmar 1911, 1913, 1919 and as discussed by Kneif 1975) were also active in the early years of this century.

4. See, for example, Hornbostel's and O Abraham's work on this subject from 1909.

By shooting straight to the 1960s we may have jumped the gun at the start of this account, but it is important to note from the outset that it was, perhaps ironically, ethnomusicologists who pioneered such radical change in the musical mass media. Still, before going any further, we should state the apparently obvious: that scholars of ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music tended (and still tend) ‘to deal with music *outside* Western civilisation and, to a smaller extent with European folk music’ (Nettl 1964: 1-3).

[Ethnomusicologists] ‘have worked, on the one hand, as the special kind of musicologist who investigates exotic music and, on the other hand, as the special kind of anthropologist who investigates music rather than other aspects of human culture, again outside Western civilisation’ (*ibid.*).<sup>6</sup>

In other words, interest among European and North American scholars for music outside the classical canon went in two main directions, both of which share a common denominator of exoticism, of a ‘somewhere else’ in terms of another time or place. To what extent such interest derived from the cultural escape mechanisms of romanticism is not the issue here.<sup>7</sup> We are merely registering *that* there was ETHNO interest in a nationalist ‘folk’ sphere and, from a Euro-North-American viewpoint, in a ‘foreign’ sphere. Of course, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century interest in the ‘folk music’ of one’s own or of neighbouring peoples was in Europe related to the identity of nation states whose rural popular music sounded quite dif-

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5. The media primacy of recording in pop music can probably be traced back to the work of Phil Spector in the early 1960s; see Richard Williams (1975), Tobler & Grundy (1982). See Green (2001) for role of notation in learning of postwar Anglo-American popular music.
  6. Under the heading ‘the scope of Ethnomusicology’, Nettl (1964: 5-7) suggests the discipline deals mainly with music from three types of culture: ‘preliterate’ society, Asian and North African ‘high cultures’, and oral (‘folk’) traditions within ‘high cultures’. Whereas Nettl does not so much as refer, even obliquely, to mass-media music, Jaap Kunst (1959:1) states that ethnomusicology ‘investigates all tribal and folk music and every kind of musical acculturation’, continuing: ‘Western art- and popular (entertainment-) music do not belong to its field’. Such restrictive views of which musics constitute legitimate terrains for ethnomusicological safaris may have been challenged by such scholars as Hood (1957:2), Chase (1958:7) and Merriam (1964:5-7), and the study of popular music may, as Skog (1977:617) points out, be considered *comme il faut* in some circles, but this latter, culturally anthropological, view still does not seem to have made much impression on ethnomusicology as a whole. It would, for example, have been impossible to legitimise important work on *mesomúsica*, such as that carried out by Vega (1944) or Ayesterán (1965), without a cultural-anthropological view of the subject. Ethnomusicology is still mainly conformist in its choice of subject material (2002), though less so than in 1990. These observations are based on a perusal of articles contained in *The Yearbook for Traditional Music or Ethnomusicology* and from ‘field work’ entries in the annual membership directories of the ESEM and ICTM. See also Tagg (1990b) and footnote 148 p.83.
  7. Knepler, in his *Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1961) characterises romanticism as criticising capitalism from idealist positions situated as far away as possible from the perceived historical and/or geographical location of that (European or North American) capitalism. The idealised ‘other places’ Knepler mentions are ‘im Mittelalter, in Orient oder sonstwie entfernten Zeiten und Ländern; im Reich der Geister, Feen und Engel; im Schlaf, im Traum und selbst in der Krankheit; schliesslich auch auf jenem Gebiet, das den Bürgern noch exotischer und entfernter zu werden drohte als die fernsten Länder: in der Kunst des Volkes’. In other words, anywhere in time or place will do, the further the better, the most exotic refuge being the ‘art of the people’. Although such traits of romanticism may be escapist, those ‘elsewheres’ may have provided, historically speaking, the only accessible point from which it seemed possible to criticise, as well as escape from, the hated reality of capitalism and its perversion of rationalism. The folk / national variation on this theme of exoticism has been severely dealt with by Harker (1985).

ferent to the international lingua franca of Central Europe, for example in Russia, Scandinavia, Hungary, the Balkans, Spain and, to some extent, Britain — Europe's *Randgebiet* ('fringe', 'margin'), if you view things in a Germanocentric perspective.<sup>8</sup>

The second direction of 'ethnic' music studies was towards non-European cultures and can be partly seen as a result of the increased contact with other parts of the world that colonialism brought about for Europeans.<sup>9</sup> Although this sort of anthropology of music, rooted in the slightly earlier discipline of 'comparative musicology' (*Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*), might have often been evolutionist or diffusionist (with all the ethnocentricity that such theories can entail), it paved the way for later, less Eurocentric, types of study.<sup>10</sup> Whatever its origins, motives or ideology, the serious study of musics outside those of (then) contemporary European society must be considered, at least in the Euro-North-American context, as a necessity for the subsequent development of popular music scholarship and as a prerequisite for a musicology of the mass media. We back this claim with three simple arguments.

First: by virtue of actually studying and recording other musics, early twentieth-century scholars, researchers, collectors and musicians made those 'other musics' available for us middle-class Westerners to hear, study and appreciate. Through subsequent work by scholars and collectors, more music from more cultures has become available to us on phonogram, this broadening our potential to find *aesthetic values in a greater variety of musics* and reducing the viability of maintaining a single dominant aesthetic canon for music.

Second: due to obvious differences in structure between Central Europe's musical lingua franca and these 'other musics', we middle-class Westerners could never take the meanings and functions of 'their' music for granted in the same way as we *thought* we could with our own. We needed explanations as to why 'their' music sounded so different from ours. *Their' music remained incomprehensible to us unless it was related to paramusical phenomena*, that is, unless it was linked to social or cultural activity and organisation other than what we would call 'musical', for example to religion, work, the economy, patterns of behaviour and subjectivity etc. If applying notions of the 'absolute' to familiar music in familiar surroundings is, as we have argued (p. 12 ff.), a contradiction in terms, applying such notions to unfamiliar music in unfamiliar contexts would be even sillier. So, forced to put the sounds of unfamiliar music into the specific social context of 'foreign' culture in order to make any sense of them at all, we had to compare the sounds of our own music with those of people living in other cultures, and the context of their music with our own cultural tradition. Perhaps we would need to ask how 'our' music worked

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8. See Ling (1981) and Tagg (1989:293). Those 'folk' cultures provided a particularly poignant type of 'otherness' for the alienated subjectivity of the European bourgeoisie, an imaginary Paradise Lost, a forgotten stranger within ourselves, so to speak (see Kristeva 1991).

9. See, for example, Jaap Kunst's special interest for Indonesia (*Nederlandsche Oost-Indië* as it was then) or the vast amount of music and musical artefacts from 'French' Africa in the archives of *Le musée de l'homme* in Paris or in the OCORA catalogue.

10. e.g. Blacking (1976), Chernoff (1979), Feld (1982), Hood (1990), Nketia (1974). An 'evolutionist' view is one in which music is conceived as developing from 'primitive' to 'higher' cultural forms. A 'diffusionist' view entails explaining similarities between music cultures in different regions by studying the spread of influences (I Skog in *Sohlmans Musiklexikon*, 3:742; 1975).

in ‘their’ context if ‘their’ music was incomprehensible to us without understanding it in ‘their’ context; and if we had to ask those sorts of question, maybe we would need to start thinking more seriously about how ‘our’ music worked in ‘our’ own context. Whatever the case, understanding anything of the unfamiliar music that ethnomusicologists recorded meant thinking comparatively. It meant reflecting on the givens of our own music, culture and society in order to understand ‘theirs’; it entailed thinking in terms of *cultural relativity*. Under such circumstances, musical absolutism was out of the question.

Third: as already suggested, attempts at transcribing other musics actualised the limitations of our own system of notation and thereby the limitations of music encodable within that system. This process provided insights into the *relative importance of different parameters of musical expression in different music cultures* and paved the way for a musicology of non-notated musics. A multitude of different aesthetic norms for music became conceivable and musical ethnocentricity, including Eurocentric notions of musical ‘superiority’, ‘eternal values’ and ‘absolute music’ could be questioned. This sense of the *relativity of aesthetic norms* for music was of central importance in the latter formulation of aesthetic values for all forms of music outside the European classical canon. Moreover, the pioneering use of sound recording by ethnomusicologists in the early twentieth century contributed to the popularity of non-notated musics which later formed the core of pop and rock styles that serviced the international music business for many decades. In this way, the ETHNO phase actually helped shape the history of the musical mass media for which we still need to find a musicology.

## Phase 2 – SOCIO

Although we set the date of the SOCIO phase to around 1930 (see p.35), plenty of words about music and society were written long before then. Plato’s notion that some instruments and tonal systems are more suited to one social class than another, Kepler’s hierarchy of church, court, merchant and peasant musics, even Dante’s descriptions of music for heaven, purgatory and hell, all make connections between different musics and different social groups.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the earliest text devoted explicitly to the *sociology* of music, Max Weber’s *Die rationellen und soziologischen Grundlagen der Musik*, did not appear until 1921. That date coincides with the invention of the moving coil microphone and precedes both the first major radio broadcasting boom and Western Electric’s patent on electro-magnetic recording by three years.<sup>12</sup> It is the popular spread of such technology, in combination with con-

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11. Ling (1985: 2), referring to Plato (c. 400 BCE, ed. 1952), Kepler (1611, via D P Walker, 1978) and to Dante (c. 1300, ed. 1984). According to *Le petit Robert* (1970), the word *sociology* was coined around 1830. Even then, the word was used only infrequently for many years, one famous example being Émile Durkheim’s *Règles de la méthode sociologique* from 1895 (Silberman, 1963: 45).
  12. BBC’s radio license sales rose to two million in 1924. Other important dates are: [i] 1925: first commercial electro-mechanical recordings and standardisation of r.p.m. to 78; [ii] 1926: formation of NBC by RCA, transfer of the BBC into state control, first ‘talking’ film; [iii] 1927: 100 million record sales in the USA; [iv] 1928: capacitor microphones; [v] 1930: standardisation of record diameter to 10 inches; [vi] 1931: Berlin showing of social-realist movie *Kuhle Wampe* (including the *Solidaritätslied* with music by Eisler and lyrics by Brecht); [vii] 1931: 70% of BBC airtime consists of music (see | [www.tagg.org/teaching/yearsall.html#1920](http://www.tagg.org/teaching/yearsall.html#1920) |).

cern about the injustices of the capitalist system, that make the connections between economic *and* cultural (not least musical) differences of class and political standpoint an obvious and urgent matter for discussion. This is, in other words, the point in European and North American history when the means of production and productive forces are far enough advanced for mass movements to radically threaten the capitalist system (e.g. Soviet Union, General Strike), and for recent technology to have developed into mass-media form (radio, talking film and electromagnetic recording being of greatest importance for music).<sup>13</sup>

Realisation of the conjuncture just described and concern about the future of individuals within this new mass society seem to be the main reasons behind the development, not least in the socio-political turmoil of Germany between the two world wars, of a sociology of music concerned not only with the bourgeois classics but also with the everyday musical practices of the popular majority; hence, for example, the establishment of the Berlin journal *Musik und Gesellschaft* in 1930, subtitled 'Working Papers for the Social Care and Politics of Music'.<sup>14</sup> This periodical contained articles on subjects like 'Music and Youth', or about music in the workplace, asking questions like 'Is music used to humanise an impersonal, mechanical environment or is it a tool for increasing production and for numbing the political will of the working class?'<sup>15</sup> One of those who wrote for *Musik und Gesellschaft* in pre-*Machtübernahme* Germany, ethnomusicologist Ernst Emsheimer, fled the Nazis and, after a decade in the Soviet Union, ended up in Sweden, where his concern for questions of music and social justice were highly influential on Jan Ling who, in his turn, became a pioneering figure in the development of popular music studies.<sup>16</sup>

It is also in the early 1930s that other German intellectuals take up the general theme of mass culture from a more theoretical, more philosophical perspective. The most influential of these thinkers to write specifically about music and the mass media was Adorno.<sup>17</sup> His work has probably caused more confusion and occupied

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13. Consider also such events as the Russian Revolution (1917), the inter-war 'great leap forward' for mechanisation, mass production and Taylorism, the Wall Street Crash (1929) and the ensuing depression, the polarisation of popular socialist and fascist movements. Consider also the liberal national economic policies of Keynesianism (e.g. Roosevelt's New Deal) and the 'social responsibility' entailed in mopping up mess made by the 'free' market. Everything was in place (massification, collectivisation, monopolisation) for thinking 'society', even in relation to music.

14. 'Mass observation' studies conducted by intellectuals like Q D Leavis (UK) in the 1930s illustrate that scholarly interest in the cultural habits of the popular majority was at that time not confined to Germany. Thanks to Bruce Johnson (Sydney) for this observation (phone call 2002-08-09).

15. The complete 1930-31 run of *Musik und Gesellschaft* is reprinted in one volume (Kolland, 1978). It contains articles like Heinrich Bessler's 'Der Zugang zur Musik aus der Alltglichkeit' (=Access to Everyday Music), Paul Hindemith's 'Förderung an den Laien' (=Challenge to Amateurs), Hendrik de Man's 'Die Wirkung des Rhythmus im Vollzug industrialisierter Werkarbeit' (=The Effects of Rhythm in the Fulfillment of Industrialised Factory Work), Gertrud Zech's 'Musikalischer Rhythmus bei der Fabrikarbeit' (=Musical Rhythms in Factory Work), Helga Weigel's 'Musikalischer Rhythmus als Mittel der Leistungssteigerung bei der Schreibmaschinenarbeit' (=Musical Rhythm as a Means of Increasing the Productivity of Typists), Rudolf Sonner's 'Der Typus der großstädtischen Musik Verbrauchers' (=The Typical Urban Music Consumer). Unfortunately, in the struggle between democrats and reactionaries, 'the content of *Musik und Gesellschaft* came increasingly into contradiction with the conservative course of the publishers [Kallmeyer-Verlag] who suppressed the adverts over which the editors had no control' (Kolland 1978: xi).

16. For more details about the connection between *Musik und Gesellschaft* and popular music studies via Ernst Emsheimer and Jan Ling, see Tagg (1998a).

more shelf space than that of anyone in the history of musical scholarship. We will therefore keep his part in this story to a minimum, and focus only on issues of relevance to this book.

Adorno's writings on music outside the European art music canon are, to put it mildly, problematic. He seems blissfully ignorant of much of the music he passes judgement on.<sup>18</sup> He calls virtually anything he dislikes — and that seems to be anything with a regular beat — 'jazz', and seems unable to distinguish between such diverse phenomena as crooners, small improvising jazz combos and big band compositions. After all, *Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens* (Adorno 1938) appeared after Ellington had recorded *Creole Love Call* (1928), *Mood Indigo* (1931), *Solitude* (1934), *Sophisticated Lady* (1935) and *Caravan* (1937). Then, in 1941, when Adorno's *On Popular Music (Über den Jazz)* appeared, Count Basie had been in circulation for some time and Ellington had managed to score several new big band arrangements. When Adorno published his *Einleitung in der Musiksoziologie* in 1962, Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* had been out for three years, Charlie Parker was already dead, and recordings of the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band had circulated extensively in both Europe and the USA. In short, although Adorno could hardly be expected to appreciate the innovations of pop and rock music from the late fifties and early sixties, it is odd that he was so out of touch with the contemporary jazz canon that must have been embraced at the time by many of his younger intellectual colleagues.<sup>19</sup>

Beaud (1980: 80) explains Adorno's popular-music blind spot, or deaf ear, as follows.

'His texts' [on popular music] 'date from his American period when he was on the lookout for fascism everywhere. Anything resembling rhythm he equated with military music. This was the visceral reaction of the exiled, aristocratic Jew during the Hitler period. The only time Adorno introduces elements of crude supermarket psychology is when he deals with light music and jazz... Worst of all' ... [are] ... 'his listening categories which are complete junk'.<sup>20</sup>

Now, visceral aversion to music's corporeality and an idealist celebration of its cerebral aspects are hardly ideal qualifications for anyone intending to develop a musicology of the mass media. Even so, although Adorno himself may have been

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17. The other figures of relevance to the development of popular music studies were Benjamin, Horkheimer and Marcuse. They were all members of the Institute of Social Research which worked out of Paris after the Nazi *Machtübernahme* in 1933. In 1940 the Institute had to emigrate again, this time to New York.

18. It is, for example, worth comparing the chapters on art music in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (Adorno 1976) with the single chapter on 'Light Music' (Adorno 1990). This chapter is disturbingly uninformed. It contains no reference to any particular popular music style and cites no examples of how, in concrete musical terms, the nostalgia, pseudo-individualisation and alienation are actually produced. Other problems with Adorno's 'On Popular Music' can be summarised as follows. [1] His hierarchy of listening modes is authoritarian, replacing the compulsion to listen emotionally or corporeally with the compulsion to listen analytically (see Stockfelt 1988). [2] Adorno seems relatively unaware of the contradiction between the proclaimed value of high art music and its appropriation by the ruling classes between 1830 and his death. [3] As Gracyk (1996: 156) observes, Adorno produces a long run of theoretical and ideological edicts, none of which are given any level of empirical concretion. For a convincing settling of social and political, rather than musicological, accounts with Adorno in popular music studies, see Harker (1995).

19. To verify these statements, see Adorno (1976, 1990) and listen to Duke Ellington (1932, 1988, 1992), Miles Davis (1959), Charlie Parker (1945-1947) and Dizzy Gillespie (1946-1949). Parker was revered and Davis's *Kind of Blue* owned by many intellectuals of the Kerouac generation.

conceptual light years from a viable musicology of the mass media he did help pave the way for others to do so, exerting considerable *indirect* influence on the course of popular music studies. First, thanks to his standing within the European musical establishment as a writer on and composer of art music, he introduced music academics to a vocabulary of social philosophy which, despite its considerable shortcomings,<sup>18</sup> made it just that little bit more difficult for music scholars to bury their heads in wonted formalist sand. Second, and more importantly, Adorno's indirect influence on studies of the musical mass media lies in his role as Herbert Marcuse's mentor. Marcuse, in his turn, popularised the social-critical philosophy of the Frankfurt School among radical US students in the sixties.

'It is generally accepted that Marcuse exerted considerable influence on the formulation of the' [US youth] 'counter-culture's political agenda and utopia. His books and essays sold in numbers never previously or subsequently matched by any philosopher'... (Michelsen, 1993: 63)

Michelsen (*ibid.*) also notes how important figures of US counter-culture in the late sixties, such as Black Panther leader Angela Davis, Yippie party chairperson Abbie Hoffman and founding *Rolling Stone* columnist Jon Landau, were all students of Marcuse at Brandeis University.<sup>21</sup> Even Carl Belz (1969), one of the first historians of rock, taught at Brandeis at the same time as Marcuse who, according to Landau (1972: 185 ff.), left an indelible mark on the whole university.

It is in this indirect way that Adorno can be seen as having contributed to the establishment of influential types of postwar English-language discourse on popular music. In journalistic or academic guise, this discourse, which was also influenced by traditions of (English-language) literary criticism, seems typically to concern itself with a certain set of social and cultural issues — notably those of youth, sub-culture, the music business, fashion and lyrics — and with alternative aesthetic canons of authenticity in popular music.<sup>22</sup> Speaking in general terms, this social-critical tradition of writing represented by Adorno is characterised by a lack of attention to structural and semiotic aspects of popular music and by an apparent aversion to empirical sociology.

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20. Beaud is referring here to Adorno (1976:1-20,29,41; 1941:32-48; 1978: 288). For a critique of Adorno's listener typology, see Middleton (1990:57 ff.). A colleague of mine once remarked in the late seventies: 'I can't imagine Adorno singing in the bath, let alone doing the waltz'. This speculation was in line with David Raksin's memory of Adorno as 'a bitter man – and very serious' (conversation with PT at Sonneck Society Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, April 1995). Recurrent Adornian pejoratives like *Reiz* (stimulation), [*Wirklichkeits-Flucht* (escape [from reality]), *Ablenkung* (distraction), *Bekräftigung* (affirmation) and *Nivellierung* (standardisation / homogenisation)], applied to the effects of mass-media music, express no sense of hope for or solidarity with the working-class in the struggle against capitalism; nor do they make any dialectical allowance for ways in which various aspects of mass culture can be used *in* that same struggle. Stockfelt's dissertation *Musik som lyssnandets konst* (1988) presents a more constructive model, suggesting that different modes of listening are appropriate to different functions of music and that real listening ability lies in the repertoire of different listening modes an individual can draw on. To simplify Stockfelt's main point, using it solely as sonic background masking unwanted noise, or getting up to dance to something that makes you want to move your feet, are just as valid listening skills as being able to follow the course of a Bach fugue in sound and notation. For a full discussion of Adorno's notions of authenticity in connection with rock music, see Michelsen (1993).

21. Frith, one of the most productive English-language writers on popular music, started his professional career as a columnist for *Rolling Stone* in the late sixties.

22. For a full historical and ideological account of Anglo-US rock criticism, see Michelsen *et al.* (2000).

It may seem strange that a European art music composer should have had a hand in the development of discourse on music that involves little or no discussion of musical *structure*; but it is less strange if you consider the avoidance of musical concretion in the study of music as just another variation on the general theme of *empiriphobia*<sup>23</sup> afflicting certain types of sociocultural theorising. That Adorno objected to *sociological* empiricism, on the other hand, is understandable from a historical viewpoint, as we shall shortly see. The main point here, though, is to account for those types of sociology which can help us construct a musicology of the mass media. Having mentioned the indirect contributions of such figures as Emsheimer and Adorno, we will now briefly discuss more empirical types of sociology relevant to the development of a musicology of the mass media.<sup>24</sup>

Adorno and Marcuse were not the only members of the Frankfurt School to flee across the Atlantic in the late thirties: so did Horkheimer and Lazarsfeld. While Adorno and Horkheimer, sometimes on their Hegelian high horses, pursued their social-critical approach with renewed vigour against the unabashedly commercial popular music and media business in the USA, Lazarsfeld was to become the ‘nice-guy’ immigrant who embraced the ‘American Way’, its media structures and intellectual systems. In fact, Lazarsfeld was instrumental in developing an empirical *sociologie à l’américaine* that was later sold back to Europe.<sup>25</sup> His work, which initially stemmed from a deep concern about Hitler’s and Stalin’s use of the mass media for propaganda purposes in the 1930s, had ironically, by the 1950s, become ‘the intellectual fountainhead of “motivation research” — the prime tool of Madison Avenue advertisers’ (Denisoff & Peterson 1972:4-5).<sup>26</sup> This branch of sociological research had in other words a devastating impact on music in the mass media: target groups and their life-styles could be efficiently identified on the basis of musical taste, and format radio became part of the consumerist ideology that bulldozed its ‘American Way’ through the rubble of postwar Europe.

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23. Neologism, from *ἐμπειρία* and *φόβος*, which ought to mean fear of experience; by *empiriphobia*, however, we just mean fear of empiricism. Of course, the avoidance of structural concretion in the study of music has other causes, too (see p.9 ff., 78 ff.).

24. For further comments on Adorno, see Harker (1995) and Middleton (1990: 34-63). With the fall of the Berlin wall, corporate capitalism definitively established its reign of greed. Consumerism, with its instant rather than delayed gratification, can be seen as combining with a LIBERATION OF THE ID (p.66ff.) which, in tandem with the ‘sexual revolution’ of the sixties, once again actualises Adorno’s notions of *Reiz* (stimulation), *Ablenkung* (distraction), etc.

25. ‘[C]hez Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse et Fromm, tu trouves une sorte de haine fondamentale viscérale de l’exilé de tout ce modèle culturel découvert d’un seul coup aux États-Unis, parce qu’il ne faut pas oublier que nous ... en Europe, nous l’avons vécue plus récemment, l’invasion d’une culture de masse en termes audiovisuels et musicaux, tandis que ces gens-là l’ont découverte en 1938, 1939... aux *États-Unis*. Enfin, pour eux il y avait deux modèles: c’était ou le modèle de refus de l’exilé, ou alors le contre-modèle qui était Lazarsfeld. Lui, au contraire, s’est lancé dans le système; enfin il a accepté le système et il a joué le bon immigré qui ne critique pas mais qui au contraire utilise toutes les ressources du système ... [Il y a] une recherche ... qui montre aussi le destin de ces deux courants: d’Adorno et Horkheimer revenant en Allemagne après la guerre et finalement se rassimilant très mal, et de Lazarsfeld, lui débarquant avec le plan Marshall ... et revendant la sociologie à l’américaine en Europe’ (Beaud, interviewed by Tagg (1980:81).

26. Denisoff & Peterson are citing Bauer and Greyser (1968). This is just a small part of the increasingly cynical abuse of the social sciences, especially psychology, for purposes of financial gain and ideological control. The TV series *The Century of the Self*, written and directed by Adam Curtis (BBC2, March-April 2002), reveals this larger process in considerable detail.

The empirical, statistical, market-research type of music sociology that evolved in the wake of Lazarsfeld's and his colleagues' work at Columbia University in the forties was, however, not only of use to avaricious advertising agencies in the USA. Although repeatedly exploited for producing the sort of manipulative media demographics deplored by Karshner (1971) and Rothenbuhler (1987), empirical sociology could also be used to highlight important aspects of cultural and educational policy from a different political standpoint altogether.<sup>27</sup> Given the right circumstances, it could even help pave the way for the development of a musicology of the mass media, as the following example from Sweden shows.

In 1964, the Swedish Concert Agency Commission (*Konsertbyråutredningen*) commissioned research into the nation's musical habits. Among the ensuing report's findings was the fact that old-time dance music (*gammaldans*) and contemporary pop music (*popmusik*) were the country's most popular styles (Nylöf 1967). These musics were reported to be much more popular with Swedes than was European classical music, thousands of times more popular than was contemporary avant-garde art music. The results were hardly startling, but they were then used for variety of interesting purposes.<sup>28</sup>

The initial purpose of the survey was to help establish policy for the new National Concert Agency (*Rikskonsserter*) as regards types of music to disseminate through concerts and recordings. One foregone conclusion of this state-commissioned research was that European classical music needed to be brought to the Swedish populace.<sup>29</sup> However, Nylöf's research had other, more important consequences: it directly influenced radical change in national policy on music education. Jan Ling, Head of Göteborg University's Musicology Department during the 1970s and 1980s, explains part of the matter as follows.

'Nylöf ... was just an empirical sociologist, but his research put the cat amongst the pigeons on the educational front because of growing support for the notion that processes of learning, especially in the cultural field, are far better motivated — and therefore more efficient — if they take as their starting point the actual experiences of pupils and students. This would obviously mean including popular music in state education.'<sup>30</sup>

In the same year as Nylöf's report was published (1967), Ling set up an Institute of Musicology at the University of Göteborg. The Institute cultivated a sociological profile and quickly produced three interesting studies of musical habits in two middle-sized towns.<sup>31</sup> Critical social theories and empirical-statistical surveys of music rubbed shoulders in these reports, as well as at seminars and conferences, some of

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27. An empirical approach is problematic if it assumes the existence of value-free socio-cultural facts, if it takes a set of values for granted and fails to explain which criteria lie behind the selection of certain facts or methods and the omission of others. This does not imply that sociological data collected *à l'américaine* only serve to confirm a social or intellectual status quo because they can also be used to criticise or change a hegemonic consensus (Tagg 1998a). Our position is that empirical studies are best if properly contextualised in terms of underlying values and historical processes, just as critical theory improves dramatically if subjected to empirical substantiation.

28. Nylöf's survey covered a sample of 2800 persons selected from the whole country in 1964-65 when Motown™ artists and The Beatles and were at the height of their international popularity. Ten years later, Nylöf showed that Anglo-American rock-based music had definitely overtaken old-time dance music (*gammaldans*) as the most popular set of genres in Sweden (Karlsson 1982).

29. Conversation with Jan Ling, 940905. See also Karlsson (1980, 1982) and Tagg (1998a).

30. Conversation with Jan Ling, 940905.

31. Ling & Erdmann (1970); Erdmann (1971); Frostensson *et al.* (1972).

which were attended by Nylöf.<sup>32</sup> Another far-reaching effect of Nylöf's research in the cultural climate of Sweden in the 1960s was the way its findings were used as arguments for reforming the country's music education. The Ministry of Education's 1969 National Curriculum for Music In Secondary Education (*Läroplanen för Grundskolan*, or *Lgr69* for short), included such sociological observations as:

'Young people's music readily becomes an integral part of their existence, an expression of their attitude to life.'

'In this decade there is the case of pop music which must be considered as part of a larger pop culture in which young people are deeply involved.'

'Many pupils who start an instrument in their teens soon reach good results, which must be ascribed to the high degree of motivation they feel for making this type of music.' (*Lgr69*:19)

The National Curriculum then stated the following among its guidelines.

'Music teaching must ... take into consideration the specific characteristics of young people's music and use these as a starting point.'

'Different types of music in the charts should be listened to and discussed. The personal style of popular artists should be studied.'

'It can also be worthwhile studying how musical popularity relates to social environment both in our own country and abroad... Here, the connection between musical life and the general social and cultural development in different nations is of particular interest' (*Lgr69*: 19-22).<sup>33</sup>

This Swedish school curriculum was clearly informed by both a critical-theoretical and an empirical sociology of music, and there is no doubt that Nylöf's survey provided essential fuel for arguments in favour of this new educational policy for music. Such policy also had repercussions in tertiary education, more specifically on the vocational training of music teachers to implement the new curriculum for Swedish state secondary schools. Since we have previously written part of that chapter in the history of popular music studies (Tagg 1998), we will only mention matters here which relate directly to the way in which the sociology of music influenced the development of a musicology of the mass media.<sup>34</sup>

Graduates from the new music teacher training college, set up in 1971 at the University of Göteborg,<sup>35</sup> would have to work in accordance with the guidelines of the 1969 National Curriculum. They would therefore need not only to be conversant in

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32. For an example of the (then) contemporary Scandinavian critical-theoretical current, see Nielsen (1978). Alf Björnberg, Ola Stockfelt and I concur in our impression of events in the early seventies at the Institute of Musicology in Göteborg. See also Gravesen (1977) and Karlsson (1982).

33. The radicalism of these recommendations is in fact far wider than the quotation suggests. Studying the effects of colonisation on African musics and Africa's contribution to the development of music in our part of the world was also included, as well as appreciation of the 'rhythmic vitality, intensity and varied timbral qualities' of the 'means of musical expression that usually capture the imagination of young people'. The use of programmatic (synaesthetic) thought is recommended 'as a means of enhancing the listening experience' and the role of the 'modern means of communication' is emphasised as a point to study.

34. We are not suggesting that Nylöf's empirical sociology was 'value free' (see footnote 27 p.44). On the contrary, the progressive uses it was put to were due partly to the political climate of the time in Sweden and, more importantly to the tradition of positive political activism which Ling had to some extent inherited from his mentor, Ernst Emsheimer who, in his turn, had originally fled German fascism by moving to the Soviet Union, not to the West, as Adorno, Horkheimer and Lazarsfeld did several years later. For more on this connection between German inter-war radicalism and the development of popular music studies, see Tagg (1998a).

popular as well as classical styles but also to know about music's social functions, a topic which was much easier to teach with useful facts and figures from empirical sociology and from music business statistics. However, when it came to combining KNOWLEDGE *IN* with KNOWLEDGE *ABOUT* music (see p.9 ff.), empirical sociology had little to offer. Although by no means as woolly as critical-theoretical sociology in its genre nomenclature (what *does* Adorno mean by 'avant-garde', 'jazz' and 'kitsch' for example?), it was just as inadequate when it came to identifying any *musical* criteria for the use of one genre name and not another. It was as if the *sound* of music was not an issue. Moreover, every music lecturer knows that history classes are as unattractive as they are incomprehensible to students if you cover everything except the music as something to be heard and felt, while music theory and analysis teaching is as useless as it is dry and uninspiring when presented in no more than formalist terms. In short, given the Emsheimer and Ling legacy (p.40) and a relatively radical cultural and political climate, as in the Swedish episode just described, empirical sociology *can* help create the conditions for a democratically informed music policy and education. Those conditions can in their turn allow for more searching questions to be asked. Such questions, often asked by students at the Göteborg college in the 1970s, were: 'OK, Tagg, so we spend so much money to listen so many hours of such and such a type of music. Why? How does it all affect us? How does it actually work?'

Although the SOCIO phase, with its both critical-theoretical and empirical constituents, could not help us answer much of the 'why', and only very little of the 'how', it did, in a sense, make the question historically possible. Its importance can be summarised as follows.

- Critical-theoretical sociology made it more difficult for musicologists to avoid addressing issues of aesthetic value in relative terms. Thanks to, or in spite of Adorno, musical absolutism came under attack from inside the European art music establishment.
- Both the critical-theoretical and empirical sociology of music helped put music on the agenda, albeit marginally, of social scientists interested in matters of culture and ideology.
- Empirical sociomusicology, with its quantifiable data about musical taste and habits, could be used to challenge the *raison d'être* of formalist and structuralist approaches in traditional musicology by documenting the crushing predominance of popular music practices in the daily lives of the majority of citizens in the industrialised world, practices virtually never previously considered in any systematic fashion by scholars adhering to the European classical canon.

In short, if the ETHNO phase meant it was impossible to treat music as a *Ding an sich*, and unthinkable to apply the same set of aesthetic values to all musics, then the SOCIO phase should have driven those points home beyond a shadow of doubt. Nevertheless, the SOCIO phase provided, with few exceptions, no answers to the vital questions it allowed us to ask, and perhaps the students who wanted to know 'how all that music affects us' were really asking the million-dollar question of semiotics: why and how does who communicate what to whom and with what effect?

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35. SÄMUS was founded under the leadership of Jan Ling. In 1976 it became part of the Göteborg College of Music (*Musikhögskolan*). I was member of staff between 1971 and 1985.

## Phase 3 – SEMIO

It should be clear from the last few paragraphs that semiotics<sup>36</sup> has at least the *potential* to bridge the gap between conventional muso formalism (MUSIC AS MUSIC — the TEXT) and conventional social or cultural theory (EVERYTHING ABOUT MUSIC EXCEPT THE MUSIC — the CONTEXT). Indeed, the semiotics of music, in the broadest sense of the term, is surely concerned with relations between, on the one hand, the sounds we call musical, including their manner of internal organisation, and, on the other, the functions, uses, effects, values and ‘meanings’ of those sounds.

Defined in such broad terms, the semiotics of music is as old as the hills. We could drag in Plato again, this time to illustrate a long history of thought about musical signification.<sup>37</sup> We could also mention the richly codified synaesthetic connotations of the great music traditions of the Indian subcontinent (Martínez 1997), or semiotic aspects of Islamic music theory (Leoni 1998). However, the most relevant precursors to contemporary notions of signification in Western music scholarship are found in post-Renaissance theories of rhetorical figures and affect.<sup>38</sup> As stated earlier, Baroque theories of affect were, in the late eighteenth century bourgeois spirit of individual emancipation and *Sturm und Drang* instrumental music, often regarded as prescriptive, restrictive and outmoded.<sup>39</sup> As Buelow (1980: 802) observes:

‘While some of the terminology as well as the basic ideas about [musical] rhetoric remained part of compositional technique until well into the 19th century, the understanding of rhetorical expression was almost entirely forgotten. It was only early in [the 20th] century that music historians, beginning with Kretzschmar, Goldschmidt and Schering, rediscovered the importance of rhetoric as the basis of aesthetic and theoretical concepts in earlier music. An entire discipline that had once been the common property of every educated man has had to be rediscovered and reconstructed’...

Buelow’s remarks are certainly valid as far as officially sanctioned institutions of music education and research in Europe are concerned during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He points to what seems to be an institutionalised rejection of referentiality in a particular tradition of making and of thinking about a particular body of music. This period of official rejection coincides with other historical parentheses in institutionalised views of the world in Western thought, some of which have already been mentioned.<sup>40</sup> Most of these conceptual ruptures and changes have taken place during the consolidation of the capitalist system over

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36. In this book we use the word *semiotics* (Peirce), rather than *semantics* (Bréal) or *semiology* (Sausure), to denote the study of signs/symbols and their meaning.

37. In *The Republic*, Book III, §1(d), Plato, posing in the first person as Socrates, uses his muso friend Glaucon as conversational fall-guy to ditch certain modes as unsuitable for guardians of the body politic (ἡ πόλις) (Plato 1955:138-139).

38. For authoritative accounts of ‘affect’, *Affekt*, etc., see Buelow (1980), Eppstein (1975a,b) and, especially, Bartel (1997). One of the more colourful statements of affect theorising comes from Johannes Kepler who, in his *Harmonices mundi* (1619), calls the major third ‘manly’ in comparison to the minor third which he describes as ‘a hen sinking to the ground ready to be mounted by a cock’ (Walker 1978:67, cited by Ling 1983:559).

39. ‘Although the writers of the later 18th century constantly reaffirmed the continuing validity of the affections as the primary aesthetic force governing musical styles and expression, their definitions of them showed subtle changes... The affections lost their objective quality as rationalised emotional states that act as unifying forces in every work. After 1750 they frequently became identified instead with subjective, personal emotions originating within the composer’ (Buelow 1980:802).

the last two hundred years. All of them bear the hallmark of the Great Epistemological Divide (see Chapter 1). As we stated, these polarities played an important part in forming those aspects of bourgeois subjectivity which allowed ‘rational’ practices in business or the ‘natural’ sciences to be conceptually severed from emotion, corporeality, sensuality and other ‘irrational’ aspects of ‘human nature’.

Absolutist music aesthetics has, as we argued, provided tenacious resistance to approaches which aim at integrating subjective and objective aspects of human experience and understanding. Conventional musicology’s unwillingness to address questions of musical signification can be seen as symptomatic of that resistance which, according to the approximations of Table 1 (p.35), appears to have delayed the arrival of semiotics into music studies by forty years in relation to sociology and by seventy compared to anthropology. Since the problems of music semiotics are bound up with the historical and ideological peculiarities of institutionalised music studies in Europe over the past century-and-a-half, we will need to backtrack a little in order to identify some of those peculiarities as a necessary step towards presenting a viable theoretical framework for the research into musical signification which occupies the majority of this volume.

By 1900 absolutist aesthetics seem to dominate the high-art musical institutions of Europe. For example, although Mahler wrote programme notes for his first three symphonies, and although his composition teaching did not prevent protégés Korngold and Steiner from writing programmatically for film after film,<sup>41</sup> he is nevertheless reported to have raised his glass at a meeting with Munich illuminati (20<sup>th</sup> October, 1900) and to have exclaimed *Pereat jedes Programm!* before downing his drink.<sup>42</sup> Scholars have interpreted this outburst as a way for Mahler to enhance his high-art credibility among a cultural élite which embraced a Hanslickian canon, according to which, in simple terms, Brahms symphonies were fine, Wagner operas dubious and Liszt tone poems intolerable.<sup>43</sup> Whatever Mahler’s motives, the DEATH

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40. Three examples of roughly concurrent historical parentheses are: [i] those parts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries during which the ‘irrational’ was treated irrationally, i.e. until the establishment of psychology as a discipline (see p.21; see Dahlhaus 1988:56); [ii] the period starting with rationalism’s irrational abuse of natural (and human) resources during the expansion of capitalism and ending with the rational insight that destroying the planet destroys human life (including capitalism), i.e. from a notion of the world as a limitlessly exploitable resource until the dawning of ecological awareness in the late twentieth century; [iii] the period starting with a clear division of musical labour between composer and performer (early 19th century) and ending with an at least partial reintegration of these tasks (late 20th century).

41. Korngold’s art-music compositions had been praised by Mahler in Vienna. Steiner, also Viennese, was actually a pupil of Mahler. See Korngold and Steiner in LMR.

42. ‘May every [musical] programme perish!’ or ‘Down with all programme music!’ This incident occurred following a performance of Mahler’s second symphony at the *Hugo-Wolf-Verein* (from Ludwig Schieder-Mayr’s *Gustav Mahler - Eine Biografie* (Leipzig, n.d., p.13-14), quoted in Floros (1987a). Thanks to M Michelsen and J G Williamson for help with these Mahler references.

43. In 1857, Hanslick (1963:56-7) wrote that Liszt’s symphonic poems ‘do not flow from the pure fountain of music; they are artificially distilled. Musical creation does not come freely and originally with Liszt; it is contrived... to offer Liszt’s symphonies as musical artistic creations, as masterpieces, or as the starting point of a rejuvenation of music, is only possible if we first abandon once and for all every previous conception of purely instrumental music and every remembrance of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn.’ In an 1858 article about *Lohengrin*, Hanslick (1963:61-2) characterises Wagner as ‘neither a great musician nor a great poet’, but as a ‘decorative genius’. For more on Mahler and programmatic composition, see Floros (1985, 1987).

TO PROGRAMME MUSIC! incident exemplifies a wider tendency whereby composers who wrote more for theatre, ballet, salon or church than for the concert hall (*Kapellmeister* rather than *Künstler* or *Komponisten*) were relegated, often in their own minds, to lower divisions of the art music composer league tables.

The pressure on conservatory-trained composers to conform to the dominant aesthetic of ‘absolute music’ throughout the twentieth century cannot be underestimated. One of Korngold’s great disappointments was never to have been recognised as a composer of ‘music for music’s sake’, while Rózsa went to great lengths to ensure his treasured ‘composition for non-utilitarian purposes’ was kept separate from his film work.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Morricone has expressed disappointment at the scant recognition he receives for his concert music compared to his fame on the film front, however widely acclaimed he may be as a *musical* pioneer and innovator in particular *because* of his work for the cinema.<sup>45</sup> The point is: if the institutional dominance of absolutist aesthetics exerted such influence on such widely acclaimed figures as Mahler, Korngold and Rózsa, and if that influence persists into the 21st century, as it seems to have done in Morricone’s case, then such a view of music is likely to have exerted just as much, if not greater, influence on lesser figures teaching or researching in conservatories and departments of music(ology). Indeed, an interest in matters of musical signification can still provoke suspicion, even hostility, if you work in a music institution with high-art aspirations.<sup>46</sup>

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44. In his autobiography, *Double Life*, Rózsa (1982:9) writes: ‘My “public” career as composer for films ran alongside my “private” development as composer for myself, or at least for non-utilitarian purposes: two parallel lines’... [In] ‘the interests of both my concern has always been to prevent them meeting’. The Korngold details can be simply checked on Korngold’s biographical profile at |www.geocities.com:0080/~bs-magazine/korngold/i\_korbio.html| (000730).
45. Morricone told me (PT, Rome, 961101) that he was uncomfortable with the notion of his film music as the site of *musical* innovation, even though his pioneering work *for the cinema* has not only captured the imagination of a mass audience but also earned him the international respect of many avant-garde musicians (e.g. Zorn, 1986). At a 1991 film music symposium in Siena, two local musicology professors rebuked Morricone for writing film music rather than, as they put it, ‘musica – musica’. Franco Fabbri and I have tended to agree that Morricone’s works for the concert hall exhibit greater synaesthetic richness than can be found in the work of many of his contemporaries. Our view has been that his critics perhaps fail to see that synaesthetic richness does not preclude other compositional skills; or perhaps they are so conditioned into thinking in absolutist terms that they reject anything musical that might be construed as connected to something ‘other than itself’ except, of course, unless that something is the social status that goes with belief in MUSIC AS MUSIC. Sergio Miceli (Florence), Morricone’s friend and biographer, also reported having heard the composer express the same kind of disappointment as mentioned above (conversation with PT, Cagliari, 1999-12-07). One line in Morricone’s reasoning, recorded by Miceli in 1979, seems to be that, when writing for the cinema, he feels he has to adopt a double standard, not knowing if what he does is his own choice or the only practical solution. For example, in answer to a question about Hans-Werner Henze’s view of the cinema as the composer’s passport to an unimaginably large audience, Morricone thinks ‘it might work well for Henze because he writes for film just as he would otherwise. But’, he continues, ‘I don’t work like that, because I know by now what actually works in film... If he keeps on “being just Henze” in the cinema too they’ll be right not to ask him very often... because they won’t make any money, just as they didn’t make money from films where I wrote music according to my own ideals and no-one else’s’ (Miceli 1982:330, transl. PT).
46. It was certainly true when I studied music at Cambridge University in the 1960s. At that time it was clear that Deryck Cooke’s *The Language of Music* (1959) and Wilfrid Mellers’ parts of *Man and his Music* (1962), the only books I knew of then which treated music as if it meant anything, were held in some contempt by my tutors. There are still remnants of such absolutism in many prestigious departments of music and musicology.

Initially it seemed that semiotics might help liberate music studies from their formalist prison as the ETHNO and SOCIO approaches had done before. In fact, it seemed that SEMIO approaches could have even greater potential because they deal with ‘relations between, on the one hand, the sounds we call musical... and, on the other, the functions or connotations of those sounds’. That greater potential is also shown in Table 2 which simplifies the typical topic areas to be covered by conventional musicological, ETHNO and SOCIO approaches (rows 1-3) and (row 4) SEMIO approaches, if applied to their full potential. With that potential realised, the SEMIO should differ from both the ETHNO and SOCIO approaches, as well as from conventional musicology, in three ways.

**Table 2 Typical topics for 4 general approaches to studying music**

Objects of study →	Our own culture				‘foreign’, ‘ethnic’, exotic, ‘other’ cultures	
	art music		other music			
↓ General approach ↓	music	society	music	society	music	society
conventional European musicology	●	•	•		•	
ethno	•	•	•	•	●	●
socio/cult.stud.		•		●		•
semio	●	●	●	●	●	●

● = very likely to be studied    • = less likely, though possible, object of study    • = unlikely as object of study

1. Unlike conventional musicology and sociology, but like anthropology, semiotics examines relationships between the sounds of music and the social context in and for which they are produced.
2. Unlike ETHNO approaches, which are typically used to study music in unfamiliar cultures, and unlike conventional musicology which ‘has filled our curricula with the study of one fraction of the music of one fraction of the world’s cultures’ (Monelle 1992:22), semiotic approaches can, like those of sociology, be applied to any kind of music used by anyone anywhere at any time.
3. Unlike SOCIO approaches, but like ethnomusicology and conventional musicology, semiotics closely examines music as a sounding object.

In short, of all three challenges to musical absolutism mentioned so far, semiotics is in theory the most radical. Not only should it, like SOCIO and ETHNO approaches, entail studying the social and cultural conditions of musical practices (pragmatics); it should also, like ETHNO, insist on studying links between music as sound and the social context and functions of that sound (semantics). Moreover, since semiotics deals, at least theoretically, with signification rather than with ‘absolute’ value aesthetics, a SEMIO approach to music need give no pride of place to any particular type of music. More importantly, it should assume that musical texts under examination will, if put into socio-historical context, be found to carry more than the mere sounds which are its medium. The musical text must exist not only as structure and syntax but also as intentions, reactions and functions in a sociocultural context

(pragmatics). In order to understand how semio approaches can contribute to a musicology of the mass media, we will need to assess the extent to which music semiotics has realised the potential we have just described.

Monelle (1992:27-28) observes that there is no single semiotic theory of music but rather, as Nattiez (1975:19) argues, a range of ‘possible semiological projects’. Unfortunately, there is no room to discuss those projects here and we refer readers elsewhere for further information,<sup>47</sup> confining this account to observations of relevance to the approaches used in the main part of this book. It is, however, important to note that approaches to the study of music which, in Western Europe, are explicitly qualified as SEMIO (‘semiotic’, ‘semiological’, etc.) start to appear around 1960 and that several of them initially draw quite heavily on linguistic theory of the time (e.g. Nettl 1958, Bright 1963).<sup>48</sup> These early studies were subsequently criticised by musicologists of semiotic persuasion<sup>49</sup> who drew attention to the problems involved in transferring concepts associated with chiefly denotative aspects of verbal language to the explanation of musical signification, with its connotative and gestural types of discourse. However, such laudable caution about the dangers of grafting linguistic concepts of meaning on to music seems to have resulted in a reversion to a largely congeneric view of music.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the vast majority of articles collected in volumes of music-semiotic scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s show, with few exceptions, an overwhelming concern with theories of music’s internal, congeneric structuration (syntax). This literature shows much less interest in music’s interrelation with other modes of expression and pays scant attention to music’s paratextual connections (semantics). Evidence linking musician intentions or listener responses to musical structure (pragmatics) is conspicuous by its virtual absence. We base this generalisation on perusal of 88 articles published in three specialist volumes: we estimate that 15 of 20 (75%) articles in a special music issue of *Semiotica* (vol.66-1/3, 1987) can be categorised as primarily concerned with overriding theoretical systems rather than with direct evidence for the validity of those systems, or with syntax rather than with either semantics or pragmatics. The proportions are identical (75% or 24 of 32) for *Musical Semiotics in Growth* (Tarasti, 1996), more encouraging (56% or 20 of 36 papers) for the proceedings of the 5th International Congress on Musical Signification (Stefani *et al.* 1998). Only in the last of these three volumes were agents in the musical communication process taken into serious consideration. Even then, only three of the volume’s 36 papers (8%) discussed pragmatics, all three concentrating on musicians, none on music’s final arbiters of signification — its users. As we explain next, this general tendency in semio-musicological scholarship has little direct relevance to the project presented in this book.

Eco (1990:256 ff.), drawing on Peirce (1948) and Morris (1938), emphasises the necessity of integrating syntax, semantics and pragmatics in the study of significa-

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47. For example, Karbušický (1986); Tarasti (1987, 1990); Monelle (1992) and Marconi (2001).

48. It should be noted that Robert Francès (1958) did not tread the path of linguistic structuralism.

49. For example Imberty (1976b), Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1977), Keiler (1978) and Stoianova (1978).

50. Monelle (1992:28-29) provides a useful summary of the problem of metatheorising in music semiotics of the 1970s.

tion. Now, we understand syntax as aspects of signification bearing on the temporal relationship of signifying elements (signs) within a given mode of communication, semantics as the relation between such signs and what they stand for, and pragmatics as cultural and social aspects relating to the production and interpretation of meaning. If our understanding of those three terms has any validity, then the type of music semiotics we described in the previous paragraph is largely concerned with syntax, much less with semantics and almost never with pragmatics.<sup>51</sup> If that is true, as seems to be the case, the music semiotics documented in international conferences and publications must be in a sorry state, because, as Eco (1990:266) explains, not even the most abstract and theoretical rhetoricians, sophists and philosophers concerned themselves solely with the abstract relations between expression and content: they also considered the intended meaning and interpretations or effects of actual statements.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Eco sees pragmatics at the centre of any study of signification:

‘To say that pragmatics is one dimension of semiotic study does not mean depriving it [the semiotic study] of an object. Rather, it means that the pragmatic approach concerns the totality of the semiosis... Syntax and semantics, when found in splendid isolation become... “perverse” disciplines.’ (Eco 1990:259)<sup>53</sup>

If Eco’s critique and our description of semiotic music studies presented in scholarly volumes from the 1980s and 1990s have any validity, then much of that writing has to be understood as part of a perverse discipline, because it deals overwhelmingly with syntax, much less with semantics, and rarely, if ever, with pragmatics.

One possible reason for the avoidance of semantics and pragmatics in so many music-semiotic texts may be the fact that the type of linguistics from which theoretical models were initially derived accorded semiotic primacy to the written word, to denotation and to the ‘arbitrary’ or ‘conventional’ sign. Such primacy was understandably considered incompatible with the general nature of musical discourse. However, denotative primacy has been radically challenged over the last few decades by many linguists. Some of them argue that prosody and the social rules of speech (including also timbre, diction, volume, facial expression and gesture) are as intrinsic to language as words, and that they should not be regarded as superfluous paralinguistic accoutrements.<sup>54</sup> Other linguists refute denotation’s primacy over connotation, and all underline the importance of studying linguistics as social practice (pragmatics).<sup>55</sup> One reason for these developments in linguistics is the insight

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51. The pragmatics of musical signification can be understood to cover such phenomena as, on the one hand, the sociocultural position and signifying intentions of those ‘transmitting’, making or producing music, and, on the other hand, the sociocultural position, interpretations, reactions, functions, uses, etc. made by those hearing the same music.

52. ‘La retorica greca e latina, così come l’intera linguistica dei sofisti, possono essere [considerate] come forme di un pragmatica del discorso. Ma anche nelle più astratte definizioni classiche di significazione ci sono elementi pragmatici — tutte le definizioni del segno tengono conto non solo del rapporto fra espressione e contenuto, ma anche di quello fra l’espressione e la reazione mentale dell’interprete’. Eco (*loc. cit.*) exemplifies this observation with reference to Wittgenstein, Peirce, Morris, Meade and Habermas, St Augustine, Roger Bacon, Occam, Abelard and Locke.

53. That passage from Eco goes in fact even further: ‘[d]ire che la pragmatica è una dimensione della semiotica non significa privarla di un oggetto. Significa invece che l’approccio pragmatico ha a che vedere con la totalità della semiosi, la quale, per essere compresa pienamente, dev’essere avvicinata anche da un punto di vista pragmatico. La sintattica e la semantica, quando si trovano in splendido isolamento diventano... discipline “perverse”.’

that conventional signs cannot logically originate as such, because convention, definable as ‘customary practice’,<sup>56</sup> derives from an original set of functions to which the custom is historically linked at its genesis, not arbitrarily or conventionally (the custom has yet to be established!), but in categories of perceived causality, proximity or homology. In other words, a conventional or arbitrary sign ultimately relies on the prior existence of iconic or indexical semiosis to establish the conventions underpinning its very status *as* conventional or arbitrary.<sup>57</sup> Music semiotics has, in general, it seems, either been slow to assimilate such developments in linguistics, or chosen to disregard them. How can such reluctance be explained if incompatibility with linguistic theory is much less of an issue now than it was forty years ago?

The congeneric formalism and the neglect of semantics and pragmatics which characterise the work of many musicologists rallying under the SEMIO banner is difficult to explain in any other terms than those dominating our account so far — the established hegemony of musical absolutism in seats of musical learning in the West. While ethnomusicologists had to relate musical structure to social practice if they wanted to make any sense of ‘foreign’ sounds, and while the sociology of music dealt mostly with society and less, if at all, with music as sound (even if that is a social phenomenon too), most music semioticians were attached to institutions of musical learning in which the absolutist view still ruled the roost. Their tendency to draw almost exclusively on European art music for their supply of study objects provides ample circumstantial evidence for this explanation,<sup>58</sup> not because music in that repertoire relates to nothing outside itself (on the contrary, see p. 19 ff.), but because the notion of ‘absolute’ music has been applied with particular vigour to music in that tradition. Without exaggerating too grossly, it could be said that the tradition of music semiotics we are referring to is not only perverse in the sense put forward by Eco, but also based on a flawed (absolutist) notion of a limited musical repertoire developed during a limited period of one continent’s history by a minority of the population in a limited number of communication situations.

The main problems with the majority of writing about musical semiotics over the last few decades can be summarised in six simple points.

1. It is hampered by its association with an ‘absolute’ aesthetics of music.
2. Its objects of study are usually drawn from the limited repertoire of the European art-music canon.
3. It frequently avoids, and sometimes even deprecates, any type of empirical concretion.<sup>59</sup>

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54. See, for example, Atkinson (1984) on body language and gestures of orating politicians, Hirsch (1989) on turn-taking in conversations, Bolinger (1989) on intonation and grammar. Musicologists Fonagy & Magdics (1972) also address links between linguistic intonation and melodic contour.

55. See Lakoff & Johnson (1979) on metaphor, Lakoff (1990) on the cultural and experiential basis of linguistic categories, etc. See also Harris (1981), Halliday (1985), Cruise (1988) and Kress (1993).

56. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford, 1995).

57. Eco (1990:6) calls the imagined solidity of denotative signification through arbitrary signs ‘rigid designation... [L]anguage always says something more than its inaccessible literal meaning’...

58. That evidence is easily obtained by perusing major works of music semiotics (e.g. Monelle (1992), Nattiez (1975), Tarasti (1978)), not to mention the 88 learned articles (p.51).

59. See footnote 23, p.43; see also Ruwet’s extraordinary attack on Nattiez (Ruwet 1975, reported by Monelle, 1992:29) because he ‘failed to realise that theory has no basis in experiment’ [*sic*].

4. It exhibits an overwhelming predilection for either syntax or general theorising, much less interest for semantics and virtually none for pragmatics.
5. It concentrates almost exclusively on works whose compositional techniques must be considered as marginal, i.e. as the exception to rather than as the rule of current musical practices, codes and uses.
6. It resorts to notation as the main form of storage on which to base analysis.<sup>60</sup>

The general neglect of popular music as a field of serious study by musicologists and semioticians is of course a matter of cultural politics which we discussed in Chapter 1, but it is also a matter of importance to the development of both musicology and semiotics. As we have argued elsewhere (e.g. Tagg 2000a: 83-119), popular music cannot be analysed using only the traditional tools of musicology developed in relation to European art music<sup>61</sup> because the former, unlike the latter, is:

1. conceived for mass distribution to large and often socioculturally heterogeneous groups of listeners;
2. stored and distributed in mainly non-written form;
3. only possible in an industrial monetary economy, where it usually becomes (part of) a commodity;
4. subject, under capitalism, to the laws of 'free' enterprise according to which it should help sell as much as possible of the commodity (e.g. film, TV programme, game, sound recording) to as many as possible.

According to this last point, popular music should elicit some 'attraction at first listening' if the music is to stand a chance of making a sell or, in the case of music and the moving image, of catching audience attention more efficiently than competing product.<sup>62</sup> It also means that music produced under such conditions will tend to require the use of readily recognisable codes as a basis for the production of (new or old) combinations of musical message. Failure to study this vast corpus of familiar and globally available music means failing to study what the music around us *usually* mediates *as a rule*. We argue that it makes more sense to start by trying to understand what is mediated in mainstream musical genres (in our culture that would mean middle-of-the-road pop, music for film, TV, advertising, computer games, etc.) before positing general theories of signification based on discussion of subcultural, counter-cultural or other 'alternative' musical codes such as (in our culture again) those of avant-garde techno, speed metal, bebop, folk rock, Beethoven's late quartets or any other repertoire contradicting or complementing rather than belonging to the dominant mainstream of musical practices. Using exceptions to establish rules may be standard practice for scholars projecting an image of high-art or high-cred cool but it is hardly a viable intellectual strategy.<sup>63</sup>

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60. For example, in his earlier work, Nattiez (1976: 50, 198) seems to treat the score as music's equivalent of Peirce's representamen, the (musical) note as its phoneme.

61. Music for the audiovisual media, whatever its stylistic influences, is considered here as belonging to the 'popular' section of an axiomatic triangle consisting of 'art', 'folk' and 'popular' music. For definition of these terms, see Tagg (1979: 20-32 or 2000a: 29-45). See also p. 57ff.

62. For a general description of these mechanisms under capitalism, see Desai (1974).

63. You might as well claim that general semiotic principles of modern English can be established by analysing ebonics (was 'jive talk'), Scouse, Cockney, or the work of e e cummings or John Donne.

The neglect of popular music as an area for semiotic analysis causes other basic problems of method. We have already touched on tendencies of notational centrism which treat the score as reification of the ‘channel’, ‘work’ or ‘text’ when in fact the notes represent little more than an incomplete shorthand of intended musical events communicated within the emitting stage of the communication process between composer/arranger and performer.<sup>64</sup> Such confusion is less likely in the study of popular music because notation has for some time been superseded as the primary mode of storage and dissemination to the extent that popular music ‘texts’ are usually either commodified in the form of sound recording carried on film, tape or disc, or stored digitally for access over the internet. Due to the importance of non-notatable parameters in popular music and to the nature of its storage and distribution as recorded sound, notation can rarely function as a satisfactory graphic representation of the musical texts circulating in the mass media.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, it is probable that the professional habitat of music semioticians in institutions of conventional music studies which still focus on the European art-music canon tends to encourage a return to the old absolutist aesthetics as the line of least intellectual resistance. Conventional musicology’s pre-occupation with ‘form’ and long-term thematic narrative (extensional structures and syntax) seems often to preclude discussion of the meaningful elements of sound with which the various themes and sections are constructed and without which, as we argued in Chapter 1 (p. 19), no ‘form’, no sense of narrative, can logically exist. The spectre of ABSOLUTE MUSIC can even cast its shadow over empirically substantiated studies in which listener responses are restricted to adjectives of general affect and from which nouns denoting concrete phenomena are excluded, even though combinations of such concrete connotations often constitute quite musicogenic semantic fields.<sup>66</sup> Besides, as we shall see in the main part of this book, nouns are the most common part of speech used by respondents in our free induction test situations. In short, even when semioticians of music address issues of pragmatics, the temptation still remains to direct respondents towards thinking in abstract terms of general affect or

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64. Notation as reification of the ‘channel’ between ‘emitter’ and ‘receiver’ (Eco 1976: 33) seems unsatisfactory even for music predating the era of sound recording. Equating the score with the ‘composition’ or with a sort of Platonic ‘ideal performance’ may be part of the problem behind Nattiez’s notion of *le niveau neutre* (Nattiez 1976: 54–55, 239–396).

65. For more about notation’s replacement by sound recording as the main means of musical storage and distribution, see the ETHNO section in this chapter (p. 36ff.). For discussion of the WORK concept in popular music, see Horn (2000), Middleton (2000c) and Tagg (2000c). Before the spread of recorded sound in the twentieth century, especially before the break-through of vinyl in the 1950s, the dissemination of popular music relied heavily on its ability to be performed and reperformed through the medium of notation. During the last fifty years, however, the role of notation has become quite specialised. It currently fulfils four main functions: [i] as a score, with parts, to tell conductors and musicians in bands and orchestras what to play or sing, for example during productions for the stage, film, TV, etc.; [ii] as an individual part telling session musicians what to sing or play; [iii] as transcriptions, either for analysis (as in this book), or for instrumental teaching and learning (as in *Guitar Player* magazine); [iv] as a published piano reduction, usually simplified and sometimes inaccurate, to allow musicians to reconstruct, rearrange and reperform music with which they are already familiar in the form of a recording or live performance. The last of these four functions corresponds most closely with that on which the hegemony of music publishing was based in the pre-vinyl era. It is, however, the only example of published notation still in regular use for popular music.

66. For exemplification and more detailed argumentation of this point, see Tagg (1987:285). The same problem was discussed in considerable detail 29 years earlier by Francès (1958:278ff).

of form, time, closure and tension (Hanslick's *tönend bewegte Formen* again) rather than towards studying semantic detail in terms of tangible connotations like those provided in such great numbers by respondents participating in the reception tests reported in this book — LOVE, GRASSY MEADOWS, SUMMER, SADNESS, SEA, DESPAIR, MILITARY PARADES, LONELINESS, COWBOYS, HORSES, PRAIRIES, WALKING, RIDING, DRIVING, CHASING, SAILING, DETECTIVES, CARS, SMOKY DIVES, JUVENILE DELINQUENTS, VIOLENCE, STREET LAMPS, FASHION, etc.<sup>67</sup>

This account of the SEMIO phase has now taken us twice round the same epistemological block to end up more or less where we started (on p. 47), stuck in the mud of musical absolutism. We have, in short, been describing a music semiotics which is semiotic by name rather than by nature. To put it bluntly, if the semiotics of music, as it seems largely to have been applied in academe, were a commercial venture, it might well qualify for indictment under the Trades Description Act.<sup>68</sup>

There are, however, exceptions to the general trend we have been discussing. A few of these exceptions are explicitly SEMIO, while others are semiotic by nature if not by name. They have all informed, to varying degrees and in different ways, the type of study presented in this volume and have all seriously challenged, sometimes in the face of considerable opposition, the institutionalised conventions of ABSOLUTE MUSIC. There is no room to do more than merely mention some of those 'exceptions' relevant to the main part of this study. Readers are instead referred to Marconi's *Musica, espressione, emozione* (2001) for a useful and extensive coverage of semiotic writing about music.<sup>69</sup>

It will become clear that the main semiotic focus of this book is more semantic and pragmatic than syntactic<sup>70</sup> in that it examines links between musical signs and what they stand for while attempting to relate such signification to matters social, cultural and ideological. Useful studies covering, in different proportions, the semantic and pragmatic aspects of musical signification have mercifully preceded the publication of this book. Those studies include, for instance (in alphabetical order): Assafiev (1976), Bernstein (1976), Björnberg (1984), Blacking (1976), Boilès (1976), Brackett (1995), Cooke (1959), Davies (1994), Delalande (1993), Feld (1982), Francès (1958/1972), Imberty (1986), Huckvale (1990), Jiránek (1998), Karbušický (1986), Van Leeuwen (1999), Ling (1978), Kivy (1989), Marconi (2001), Martínez (1997), Maróthy (1974, 1987), Mellers (1962, 1973), Middleton (1983, 1990), Nattiez (2000), Rösing (1977, 1978, 1983), Stefani (1976, 1982), Stilwell (1997), Tarasti (1978) and Walser (1993).<sup>71</sup>

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67. Of course, we do not hold that the music 'means' the same thing as the words reported by our respondents. For a discussion of the way in which such connotations — what Middleton (1990:232ff) called 'secondary signification' — combine to form musicogenic patterns, see 'Matters arising' at the end of our analysis of *The Dream of Olwen* (Tune 1).

68. For example, Cook's *A Guide to Music Analysis* (1987) devotes only 28 of its 376 pages (7.5%) to semiotic music analysis. Since less than half of those 28 pages consist of music examples, only 3.7% of the book discusses how musical structures relate to anything apart from themselves.

69. Marconi's book, which accounts for relevant literature in English, Italian, French and German, has yet to be translated. It is highly recommended for anyone who reads Italian.

70. This does not mean to say that aspects of musical syntax are absent in this study. See, for example, the discussion of episodic time in our analysis of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

It is perhaps significant that only a quarter of the authors just mentioned are known primarily as SEMIO scholars of music: all the others come from an ETHNO or SOCIO background, or from journalism, musicology or education. It is in fact the cross-disciplinary character of the studies just referred to, the fact that they attempt to relate the sounds of music to other forms of human expression, that makes them relevant to the project reported in this book. Interdisciplinarity is also central to the fourth phase in the decline of musical absolutism: popular music studies.

## ***Phase 4 – Popular music studies***

### ***Background***

The popular-music-studies challenge to aesthetic absolutism is of particular importance to the main aim of this book. It is also a particularly complex matter, fraught with contradictions that need explanation. To be more precise, we have to devote more space to this phase than to the previous three for the following three reasons. [1] Since the ten title tunes which are the main focus of our analysis are qualifiable as popular, it is logical that special attention be paid to traditions of studying music also qualified as popular. [2] Since popular music studies is a relative newcomer on the academic scene, and since its history of ideas is less well-documented than that of the ETHNO, SOCIO or SEMIO phases, it is necessary to bring those ideas into the scribal daylight in order to determine how they can contribute to the aims of the project presented in this book. [3] Unlike ETHNO, SOCIO and SEMIO approaches, popular music studies has, generally speaking, developed more as a subject area of interest to scholars in the social sciences rather than as the result of attempts to reform musicology. Since the interdisciplinarity of popular music studies differs historically from that of the previous phases, it needs its own set of explanations. In order to cover these issues satisfactorily and to evaluate the role that popular music studies can play in helping to create a musicology of the mass media, we will first need to define what we mean by popular music and popular music studies. After that we will discuss its institutionalisation, paying particular attention to the problems of rockology and to the influence of cultural studies.

### ***Definitions***

We have previously characterised popular music as music not readily qualifiable as art music or folk music (Tagg 2000a:29-45). This highly generalised notion rhymes quite well with the concept of *mesomúsica* (Vega 1966), but it is also a negative characterisation resting on the wild assumption that we know what art music and folk music are. For reasons of space and clarity we cannot problematise any of those terms here except to say that popular music studies has, like women's studies, had to identify itself in contrast to a what was, or still are, areas of study deemed appropriate, by convention rather than reason, for inclusion in officially recognised institutions of learning. If the problem of women's marginalisation in conventional studies of history and culture was to be solved, then that excluded body of knowledge and experience needed first to be identified as a distinct phenomenon. The ab-

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71. Other interesting developments can be found in *Critical Musicology* | [www.leeds.ac.uk/music/Info/CMJ/cmj.html](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/music/Info/CMJ/cmj.html) | .

sence had to be made visible, to be given a face and a name in order to become a presence. That presence with its name, WOMEN'S STUDIES, meant in turn that the studies from which women's knowledge and experience were excluded could be identified for what they were (MEN'S STUDIES?), the long-term aim being presumably to develop studies for which no gender specification would be necessary. It is clearly absurd, perhaps also another matter for trial under the Trades Description Act, to exclude the lives of 51% of humanity from 'studies' if such restrictive practice is not part of the labelling. If so, it would be even more undemocratic to exclude, this time from 'music studies' and on the equally flimsy grounds of taste, music made and used by a popular majority well in excess of 51%. The problem was, or still is, how to identify and name that vast body of institutionally marginalised musical practices: is it *mesomúsica*, 'mass-media music', *U-Musik* or 'popular music'? Anglophone scholars have, for better or for worse, opted for the latter, but what they mean by the term depends, in addition to other factors discussed later, on whatever in their own experience has proved to be excluded from officially recognised institutions of musical learning. That experience differs considerably from one nation to another, even from one institution or individual to another.<sup>72</sup> In other words, popular music scholars may not always agree about which music qualifies as popular but they do agree that the music of the popular majority was excluded until recently, that it ought to be included, and that it needs a label — hence the qualifier POPULAR.

Our account of the 'three phases' (pp.34-57) shows that popular music scholars were not first in having to identify themselves in relation to a MUSIC STUDIES which apparently require no comparable qualification. Like POPULAR qualifying MUSIC STUDIES, the ETHNO, SOCIO and SEMIO labels also had to be affixed to MUSICOLOGY in order to mark different types of absence in what are still referred to by apparently all-encompassing subject signifiers like MUSIC or MUSICOLOGY whose actual signifieds are conventionally restrictive. It's a bit like the white minority in apartheid South Africa needing to carry no pass cards while the coloured majority had to produce proof of identity at the drop of a hat. However, *unlike* the ETHNO, SOCIO and SEMIO qualifiers of music studies, the POPULAR of POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES does not refer primarily to a set of approaches but to a body of social and musical practices. Therefore, studying popular music is, in theory at least, not only an interdisciplinary issue involving any approach capable of furthering our understanding of that body of practices, but also an interprofessional matter,<sup>73</sup> because it involves learning how to make and use music, not just learning *about* it. Indeed, the primary aim of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) is still 'to provide an international, interdisciplinary and interprofessional organization for promoting the study of popular music'.<sup>74</sup> Clearly, the association's aim is to put

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72. It is impossible to choose here between past and present tense. It all depends on experience. Since I have been active in popular music studies in higher education since 1971, I find the past tense more appropriate. Others, however, including much younger colleagues, have to deal with institutions from which popular music is still excluded. For example, one such colleague, when interviewed in June 2002 for a job at a prestigious university music department, was asked: 'do they really have a whole Institute of Popular Music at Liverpool University? What on earth do they teach there? Gigology?' [Giggles]. At such music departments, where popular music has yet to become part of the curriculum, the present tense is unfortunately more appropriate.

73. See the four types of musical knowledge presented in Chapter 1 (p.9ff.).

74. IASPM statutes, §2.1. — [www.iaspm.net/iaspm/statutes.html](http://www.iaspm.net/iaspm/statutes.html) [020519].

knowledge *in* music on an equal footing with knowledge *about* it, the idea being that one type informs the other and that no overall understanding of the phenomenon can be gained without reasonably equal input from both.

IASPM proceedings and popular music studies in general have, however, for reasons of institutional conservatism discussed elsewhere,<sup>75</sup> focussed almost exclusively on metamusical knowledge, i.e. on knowledge *about* rather than *in* music. In fact academic interest in popular music is even more lopsided than that because, as we shall see, metacontextual discourse<sup>76</sup> has come to dominate this field of study, for while it is true that textual and contextual metadiscourse coexist in popular music studies, they rarely seem to do so in cooperation. The subject is dogged by an ongoing conflict between, on the one hand, those able to make music and to name elements of musical structure —the •MUSOS— and, on the other, those who specialise in social or anthropological aspects surrounding the music —the •CULT STUDS. This conflict stems from the institutional division of musical knowledge (p.9ff.) and from the primacy of words, not music, in education. The continued institutional division of musical knowledge is, as we mentioned earlier, just one symptom of the Great Epistemological Divide and it is still unclear whether popular music studies will bridge it or leave it gaping. There are tendencies in both directions and we will need to know the particular nature of the Divide in its popular music studies guise if we want to help bridge it, as, indeed, is the purpose of this book.

### ***Rockology and the Great Divide***

#### *The institutionalisation of rock*

While conventional music studies, as we argued in Chapter 1, mainly concentrated on MUSIC AS MUSIC and saw its uses and functions as peripheral to THE TEXT, the majority of English-speaking popular-music scholars have, if anything, tended to do the opposite, concentrating on metacontextual discourse, i.e. on EVERYTHING EXCEPT THE MUSIC. Put another way, conventional music studies deals a lot with the music as sonic text and only a little, if at all, with music as social practice and context; popular music studies, on the other hand, tends to deal much less with THE MUSIC and a lot with its social, cultural, economic and political ramifications. This difference between the two traditions of studying music relates to the simple fact that their institutional habitats are also different: while musicians and musicologists (musos) dominate classical music studies, they are a minority in popular music studies which is dominated by scholars from the humanities and social sciences (cult studs). A third and even more obvious difference between conventional and popular music studies is that the former uses European art music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as its core repertoire while the latter gravitates towards rock and pop music from the latter half of the twentieth century. Still, however striking these three differences may appear, they can be understood just as well as three *common* traits shared by both conventional and popular music studies:

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75. See, for example, Tagg (1985, 1995, 2000d, 2001a).

76. According to our definitions in Chapter 1, *metatextual discourse* houses conventional music analysis, ‘music theory’, or any other activity which entails the ability to denote elements of musical structure; *metacontextual discourse* involves explaining how musical practices relate to the culture and society that produces them and which they affect (see p.9ff.),

1. both seem to favour a restricted repertoire as particularly appropriate;
2. both seem to prioritise one set of approaches over another;
3. both are dominated by scholars from one main disciplinary background.

Consequently, neither type of studies has managed to integrate in any consistent fashion theories about music with its practice, nor to explain links between the intricacies of musical sounds and the intricacies of their causes, effects and uses. But the similarities embedded in the differences do not stop there.

Table 3 sets out the differences and similarities in the institutionalisation of classical and popular music studies. In addition to the three common traits, just listed, of a musical and intellectual canon in each camp, we should also mention:

4. the establishment of a musical heritage with conservation imperatives;
5. a clear link to notions of individual freedom and subjectivity;
6. a strong relationship with political power at both national and global levels;
7. official appropriation and sanctioning of the music in question by state power and its inclusion in state-sponsored events;
8. the granting of privileges to and bestowal of honours on those the state deems to have made substantial contributions to the success and hegemonic desirability of the music in question.

**Table 3 Historical comparison between the institutionalisation of classical and popular music as fields of study**

	classical music studies	popular music studies
main initial period	1830s-1860s	1970s-
main institutions created	conservatories, departments of music and musicology	performing arts colleges, social science and media courses
musical 'heritage'	mainly instrumental 'classical'	first jazz, then pop/rock
conservation tendencies	Old music preserved and played more often; new music less so.	1960s: almost no re-issues in charts; 1999: 60% of sales back catalogue
musical lingua franca	Central European, mainly Germanic	Anglo-American
global hegemony	European colonialism	US imperialism
liberties and attitude to pleasure	liberation of the ego, emotionality, postponed gratification	liberation of the id, corporeality, consumerism, immediate gratification
hegemonic class movement	rising capitalist merchant class against feudal aristocracy and abandoned fourth estate	nouveau riche against old 'cultured' capitalism and new lumpen-proletariat
buzzwords of excellence	high, sublime, superior, great, art, masterpiece, genius	cool, fun, wild, striking, kick-arse, moving, entertainment, hip, etc.
examples of state appropriation and sanctioning	Händel (mass appeal) becomes Handel, musical representative of UK state power	Queen's jubilee: Brian May, Eric Clapton, Brian Wilson; Abba songs on symphony orchestra repertoire
UK honours bestowed	<i>Sir</i> : Charles Stanford, Hubert Parry, Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Arthur Bliss, William Walton, Michael Tippett	<i>Sir</i> : Cliff Richard, George Martin, Paul McCartney, Bob Geldof, Elton John, Mick Jagger. <i>OBE</i> : Van Morrison, Richard Starkey, George Harrison

As Table 3 shows, the educational institutionalisation of each body of music takes place a generation or so after the apogee of the original musical development subjected to subsequent canonisation. For example, the city of Berlin saw its first high-ranking (classical) music academic a generation after Beethoven composed his fifth symphony and its first professor of popular music a generation after the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* album.<sup>77</sup> But the table and the list of points preceding it raise other issues in need of elaboration if we want to understand the problems of popular music studies with a view to evaluating its contribution to the development of a musicology of the mass media. These issues — the rock canon, ideologies of the body, relations of social class, etc. — are all interconnected.<sup>78</sup>

We already mentioned ossification tendencies in the process by which classical music became 'classical', citing the fact that the proportion of dead to living composers on the French concert-hall repertoire doubled between 1780 and 1870 (see pp. 18–19). It is less well-known that a similar pattern exists in the sale of pop music recordings over the last few decades: whereas album charts from the sixties and early seventies include very few re-issues, back catalogue today accounts for the *majority* of pop sales.<sup>79</sup> Such processes of repertoire consolidation and conservation after an initial period of radical change are, as the following passage illustrates, accompanied by processes of the music's appropriation by state power.

During the reign of George III (1760–1820), many works by Handel (1685–1759) were used by the monarchy, several decades after their initial popularity, as emotional fuel to boost bourgeois British nationalism.<sup>80</sup> Much more recently, in fact just a few days after originally writing these words in late May 2002, pop and rock songs from the 1960s and 1970s were used for similar purposes at Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee celebrations.<sup>81</sup> After Brian May's rendition of *God Save The Queen* (Queen 1975) from the ramparts of Buckingham Palace, the TV audience was treated to a show in the palace gardens. A succession of ageing rock stars trooped on stage to perform a string of rock and pop numbers from the late sixties and early

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77. Adolf Bernhard Marx was appointed Musical Director of the city's university's in 1830 and Peter Wicke was appointed professor at the Humboldt University's Centre for Popular Music Research (*Forschungszentrum populäre Musik*) in the early 1990s. This coincidence does *not* mean that either Wicke or A B Marx should be seen as avid institutionalisers. On the contrary, both brought important new ideas into established institutions. They are not the problem; the system represented by the established institutions, however, *is*.

78. For an enlightening account of these issues, see Frith (1996 *passim*). Chapter 5 in Strachan (2002) also contains useful passages describing important characteristics of the rock canon. 'The critical consensus... central [to the]... rock canon can be most easily measured through charts which collate the views of rock critics and fans pertaining to the 'greatest' or 'most influential' records/artist of the rock era... Of the total of 3375 entries recorded... 60% related to just fifty artists. With the exception of Bob Marley, all of the acts included in this core fifty were from North America or the UK and Ireland. Only nine were Afro-American or Caribbean and just three were women... Of the top ten artists who appeared most frequently, all but one (Bruce Springsteen) started their recording careers in the 1960s.' Thanks to Rob Strachan for permission to quote from his dissertation.

79. See listings in, for example, Joel Whitburn's *Top LPs 1945–1972* (1973b). According to Karen Collins, who from 1997 to 1999 ran the music section of Future Shop (Canada's second largest record retailers) in Kitchener (Ontario), it was company policy to aim for 60% sales of back catalogue: 'That's where all the margin is' was the message circulated to staff in a corporate e-mail.

80. Thanks to Jan Ling for this observation (by phone, 020603). Händel lost his *Umlaut* ('Handel') when he acquired British citizenship. He died one year before George III came to the throne.

81. BBC1, 2 June, 2002 (*\*Party at the Palace*). The current UK monarch was crowned in 1952.

seventies. Among the highlights were Eric Clapton with *Layla* (Derek and the Dominoes 1970), Brian Wilson with *God Only Knows* and *Good Vibrations* (Beach Boys 1966a, b), Ray Davies with *Lola* (Kinks 1970) and Sir Paul McCartney with *Blackbird* (Beatles 1968). Among other established rock/pop celebrities to appear were Ozzy Osbourne, Stevie Winwood and Sir Cliff Richard. It was an evening of rock and pop ‘classics’, i.e. of *classical popular music* which complemented the *popular classical music* featured in the previous evening’s Jubilee celebration concert. The classical popular concert rounded off a day filled with other officially sanctioned manifestations of popular culture, including the multi-ethnic Notting Hill Carnival and a contingent of Hell’s Angels driving their choppers past the royal box at the Victoria Memorial, much like a May Day army parade saluting Stalin atop the Lenin Mausoleum in Moscow’s Red Square. Less than a week later, news broke that Mick Jagger was to be knighted.<sup>82</sup>

We mention these details to underline the extent to which, at least in the UK,<sup>83</sup> certain types of popular music have been appropriated by the establishment to boost popular support for a political system that clearly fails the popular majority in terms of public health, education and transport, not to mention its record on those articles of the UN Charter of Human Rights which concern unemployment, poverty and political asylum.<sup>84</sup> Popular culture, including music, can in other words be exploited as a useful tool for drumming up popular national support for a system pursuing unpopular policies, whether it be press-ganging the poor into fighting colonial wars on behalf of Georgian or Victorian entrepreneurs, or recruiting young African-Americans to fight the Vietnamese, or just encouraging acquiescence in the face of increasing social inequality. To put the last point in more concrete terms, Brits who sang along to *Good Vibrations* at the monarchist feel-good gig will, we suppose the PR reasoning goes, be more likely to accept the burden the royal household puts on the UK tax payer, more likely to turn a blind eye to the fact that the total share of UK national income received by the poorest 10% of the population has fallen to 2.9% under the Blair regime while the richest 10% still pocket 27%.<sup>85</sup> Of course, state appropriation of popular music is only one tiny weapon in the ideological arsenal of political oppression, but, like World Cup soccer, it can help whip up a spirit of national pride which masks shameful social realities.<sup>86</sup> It can hardly be accidental that an increasingly unpopular government and monarchy opted for a PR strategy celebrating themselves to the tunes of Beatles and Beach Boys rather than to the accompaniment of jazz, jungle, rap, industrial, or avant-garde art music. Nor can it

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82. ‘Earlier this year, [Jagger] claimed Prince Charles was shocked he had not even received an MBE while Paul McCartney, Elton John, Cliff Richard and Bob Geldof had... [Jagger] was put forward for the honour by Tony Blair... [who] covered the Stones’ *Honky Tonk Woman* and *Brown Sugar* with his group the Ugly Rumours as a student at Oxford’ ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/entertainment/music/newsid\\_2033000/2033869.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/entertainment/music/newsid_2033000/2033869.stm) | 020609). BBC1 TV News ran an interview with Jagger on the day of his knighthood (2200 hrs., 020615). Recent footage of the old rock star was supplied with a voice-over stating that ‘the bad boy of rock’ had been knighted that day in the Queen’s Birthday Honours. Commenting on what the voice-over had set up as an anomaly (THE QUEEN, ROYALTY, KNIGHTHOOD, ETC. = DIGNITY versus BAD-BOY MALE ROCK STAR AND WOMANISER = THE OPPOSITE), Jagger explained: ‘This sort of thing isn’t like what it was in the old days’.

83. According to Prof. Jan Ling (Göteborg, phone conversation, 020603), Swedish symphony orchestras now include Abba songs in their repertoire. Koji Kondo’s music for video games like *Super Mario* and *Zelda* has also been recorded by symphony orchestras (see *\*Game Music Concert*).

84. UN Charter of Human Rights (1948), art. 14, §§1, 23 and 25 | [www.unhcr.ch/udhr/](http://www.unhcr.ch/udhr/) (020602).

be fortuitous that only one UK art-music composer, Peter Maxwell Davis, has been knighted since Michael Tippett, whereas the system has, starting in the dark days of Thatcher, presented Brits with Sir Cliff Richard, Sir Paul McCartney, Sir Elton John, Sir Robert Geldof, Sir George Martin and Sir Michael Jagger, plus several pop-rock OBEs to boot.<sup>87</sup>

Now, what do these political considerations have to do with popular music studies and with developing a musicology of the mass media? The answer lies partly in the role that popular music studies has played in actually *facilitating* the kind of cultural hijacking just described. We will now try to explain that role.

Arguing for the establishment of popular music studies within the academy has been no straightforward matter. Initially, we justified its inclusion not only on obvious democratic grounds (pp. 57-58), but also in terms of a relative value aesthetic which holds that popular music, like the music of non-European cultures (pp. 38-39), is neither superior nor inferior to European classical music: it is just different. The distinctions drawn between intensional and extensional structuration (Chester 1970) or between the relative importance of different parameters of expression in popular and classical musics (Tagg 1979)<sup>88</sup> will serve as examples of that democratic aesthetic. Chester's ideas have been particularly influential in popular music studies in that he was one of the first to identify distinctions between long-term and immediate types of structural complexity in music as relevant to the aesthetics of rock/pop. The long-term type of musical-structural complexity typical of classical sonata form's harmonic and thematic narrative he called *extensional*, while *intensional* qualified the sort of complexity of timbre, articulation and rhythm encapsulated in the 'now-sound' of a rock/pop recording or performance. To put it simply, you need to wait and hear how things develop in a sonata-form movement to appreciate its value, whereas the aesthetic value of a rock or pop track resides in the immediate complexity of its timbres, rhythms and riffs. Here it is important to remember that Chester's influential article was not about the aesthetics of popular

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85. Roy Hattersley (veteran Labour Member of Parliament) in *The Guardian* (010616). It is also worth remembering that: [1] 0.08% of the UK population (<500 individuals) are paid over £1m a year while over one third of UK wage-earners, not to mention the unemployed, fall below the European Decency Threshold of £15,000 a year; [2] being unemployed reduces male life expectancy after 25 by 2.4 years compared to employed males, female life expectancy after 25 by 4.3 years, compared to employed females (*British Medical Journal* 309 (1994): 1470-1474); [3] since 1980 the amount of income tax paid by the richest 20% in the UK has fallen from 37% to 35% while, over the same period, the proportion paid by the UK's poorest 20% rose from 31% to 38%; [4] raising the rate of income tax for those on more than £110,000 (\$150,000 US) to a mere 50% would bring in an extra £3 billion a year; [5] raising UK taxes to the average European Union level would bring in an extra £40 billion (*Socialist Worker*, 001202, citing a Fabian Society study). For details about popular music in fascist Germany, see Wicke (1985).

86. Just a few days after the Jubilee concert, England beat Argentina 1-0. The front page of UK newspapers were covered in jingoistic headlines and the cross of St George (the English, not British, flag). English nationalism is at an all-time high, it seems, at the time of writing these words (020608), even if the state of the nation's railways and health care is at an all-time low and despite all the facts listed in footnote 85. England were subsequently beaten by Brazil in the quarter finals, the jingoism has subsided, and New Labour have partly renationalised the rail network.

87. OBE = Order of the British Empire, higher than MBE (Member of the British Empire) but lower than knighthood ('Sir' or 'Dame') in the league table of UK royal honours.

88. Tagg (1979: 22, 30-32, 39 or 2000a: 31, 42-45, 56). For discussion of problems in rock/pop criticism with dichotomies of body/mind, postponed/immediate, etc., see Frith (1996: 23-144).

music in general: it did not pretend to discuss brass-band music, bossa-nova, Bollywood musicals, Cantopop, evergreens, polkas, reels, hymns, games music or film and TV themes. It was about *rock*, and it is rock and pop music, mostly of Anglo-North-American origin, that constitutes the central core of repertoire around which popular music studies has revolved since the late sixties.<sup>89</sup>

Now, rock music holds a special place in the hearts of many baby-boomers, especially in Europe and North America. Accounts of the music's emancipatory powers are legion and need no reiteration here. In general, though, canonic rock historiography tends to identify *Rock Around The Clock* (Haley 1955) and Presley's early RCA recordings (1956) as pivotal to the start of the rock era. Rock and pop historians also underline what, from a white, male, middle-class North American or European standpoint, was perceived as a new-found freedom of social and corporeal expression in the music.<sup>90</sup> It is a freedom that rock ideology holds up in contrast against the staid decency of poetically crafted romantic evergreens for adults — the difference between *Love Is A Many Splendored Thing* (Four Aces 1954) and *Hound Dog* (Presley 1956), so to speak. It can also be understood in terms of a break between, on the one hand, stifling middle-class normality, with its hypocrisy and sexual repression, and, on the other, impassioned, youthful, life-affirming, fun-loving sensuality.<sup>91</sup> But public discourse on rock and pop goes well beyond such general statements of difference and emancipation.

After explaining the socio-political background to the basic *raison d'être* of rock culture we just described, Michelsen *et al.* (2000) chart the course of rock criticism from journalism into the academy, registering recurrent themes in the develop-

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89. My bibliographical database contains details of 329 entries in the Cambridge University journal *Popular Music* (volumes 1-20/2). 105 of those are reviews, reports, etc. A rough count of the remaining 224 articles revealed the following: 128 (57%) deal with European, North American or Australasian rock, pop, country, blues, etc., 60 (27%) with postwar urban musics from other parts of the world, 36 (16%) with other issues (e.g. pre-World-War-II music, general theory, general issues, such as technology or copyright, applicable to no specific repertoire). When entering article details into the database I characterise each text with <=10 standardised keywords. 'Musicology' figured as keyword for 40 articles (18%), 'Music Examples' for 30 (13%), 'Music Analysis' for 13 (6%). *Popular Music* aims to be both international and interdisciplinary. In English-language popular music journalism the proportion of Anglo-North-American rock and pop to other forms of music is therefore much higher and the amount of writing which refers to musical structures virtually non-existent. For detailed analysis and comparison of classical and pop music reviews in terms of issues addressed and values expressed, see Koironen (1992). Even IASPM suffers from Anglo-American rock ethnocentricity despite its explicitly interdisciplinary and international aims. As one Brazilian colleague told me at IASPM's conference in Turku, Finland (2001). 'I've been warned that they're nice people but all they talk about is rock' (see Tagg 2001a).

90. See, for example, Belz (1969), Cohn (1970), Gillett (1971). Of particular relevance to this passage is the article 'Why 1955? Explaining the advent of rock music' (Peterson 1990).

91. This dichotomy was the main dynamic of Gary Ross's influential film *Pleasantville* (1998). Whether subsequent cultural studies theories about rock as resistance are valid or not is another question altogether because the rock rebellion can also be interpreted as an expression of resignation, of acknowledging impotence by donning the mask of impudence. As Mattelart & Neveu (1996: §34) suggest, '[L]es analyses de l'équipe de Birmingham n'ont... pas toujours échappé aux périls du populisme et du misérabilisme. Il conviendrait... de se demander si les dérives «populistes» identifiées à la fin des années quatre vingt n'ont pas quelques antécédents dans une distribution généreuse de la qualité de «résistance» à une ensemble de pratiques et traits culturels populaires qui peuvent aussi s'interpréter comme une acceptation résignée de la domination, un aveu d'impuissance derrière la dérision ou l'insolence'.

ment of the rockologist canon.<sup>92</sup> For instance, the authors draw attention to Nic Cohn's insistence on style and subculture, an approach which later influenced the work of the Birmingham school,<sup>93</sup> to Lester Bangs' and Dave Marsh's concern with radicalism, to Robert Christgau's enthusiasm for the spirited underdog, to Jon Landau's notion of 'body music that entertains and provokes', and so on, right through to the claim that the goal of pop music is not subversion but oblivion (Reynolds 1987).<sup>94</sup> Michelsen and his co-authors present a detailed history of US and British rock/pop criticism since the sixties as a complex and partially contradictory set of ideas, but one overall trend is clearly discernible from their account: idealist notions of radicalist, subversive, subcultural underdogs engaged in 'body music that entertains and provokes' were ousted in the eighties and nineties by the even more idealist notion of a music whose highest aesthetic ideal is supposed to be bodily immersion and mental oblivion.<sup>95</sup>

'Immersion' and 'oblivion' should ring warning bells for readers remembering Wackenroder (1792) 'fully surrendering to the welling torrent of feelings' in music (p.15). We shall return shortly to that connection, but first we need to complete this section about the role of rockology in bolstering the power of the ruling classes.

Rockology, by which we mean the academic arm of the body of literature discussed by Michelsen *et al.* (2000, see above), has largely propounded an aesthetic of the intensional and immediate rather than extensional, of 'sound' rather than 'form', of body rather than mind or feelings, of instant rather than postponed gratification, etc.<sup>96</sup> RATHER THAN is important here because, in its early stages, Anglo-US rock-aesthetic discourse identified new qualities of experience which did more than just celebrate the body: *it celebrated the body as an emancipatory act in relation to an old order which did not*. Early rock aesthetics posited in other words a struggle between old and new values, songs like *Love Is A Many Splendoured Thing* standing for the old order, and recordings like Presley's *Hound Dog* symbolising the new.<sup>97</sup>

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92. 'Rockologists Go Home!', it says on the front cover of *Popular Music: da Kojak al Rave* (ed. L Marconi and R Agostini, Bologna 1994). I first used 'rockology' in 1993 to denote rock's intellectual canon, characterised by my generation's monopolisation of youth culture authenticity and by its idealisation of body (see Tagg, 1994a).

93. For a short account of 'The Birmingham School' (The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham), see Schulman (1993). For well-documented, informative and insightful accounts of the history and ideology of British cultural studies more generally, see Matelart & Neveu (1996), Steele (1997) and Mulhern (2000). See also 'Music: a troublesome appendage to Cultural studies' (p.78ff.) in this book.

94. '[T]he generations growing up after World War II experienced a growing discrepancy between what they sensed and what they were told, between, for instance, an enormously expanding horizon of consumption and an upbringing emphasising moderation' (Michelsen *et al.* 2000: 56). Michelsen *et al.* also explain developments in terms of Ziehe's notion of cultural release (*op. cit.* p.57) and deal in some detail with Cohn, Bangs, Marsh, Christgau, Landau and Reynolds (*op. cit.* pp. 121-122, 174-175 and 261-263).

95. 'We just wanted to sort out and characterise the discourse of rock criticism. We had no particular agenda, but, yes, I think you're right about the general line of development, and I think that's how it came out in our book, too' (Morten Michelsen, phone conversation with PT, 020609).

96. There are, of course, many notable exceptions to this trend, for example Frith (1983, 1996) and Laing (1969, 1985). At this point we are discussing general tendencies, not the exceptions.

97. *Hound Dog* (Presley 1956), *Love Is A Many Splendoured Thing* (Four Aces 1954), *My Generation* (The Who 1965): see LMR for recording details.

Since the old order still ruled the roost, those symbolising the new through rock music were understandably seen as underdogs representing the rest of us who wanted less formality, more fun, less rules, more freedom, perhaps also more justice and a better quality of life. In short, notions of rebellion, opposition, alternatives and *a future* could gel with a celebration of the body because the latter, expressed in rock music, was part of a larger struggle in a specific historical and political context.

‘[A]s long as the musical ideals were emancipatory in relation to an outmoded system of thought they could lend support to the development of revolutionary forms of music and society. But what happened when those musical ideals became the rule and their advocates the rulers?’

We asked that question in our account of the process by which European classical music became ‘classical’ (p.18) but it applies just as much to our discussion of rockology because, by the mid seventies, pop and rock music had become big business.

*Pomo-rockology, consumerism and the ‘liberation of the id’*

By the end of the seventies, rock was financially part of the hegemonic new order even if it was still often marketed with an image of oppositionality. By the early 1980s, when turnover of new recorded product was at its peak, teenagers in *Hound Dog’s* heyday were pushing fifty, the teenagers of *My Generation* forty.<sup>97</sup> Most of those ex-youngsters had jobs and many had become part of the new establishment. Remnants of the old order’s cultural norms may have still existed, not least in seats of conventional musical learning, but they had lost much of their cultural power base to the new rock-friendly regime of kicks and consumerism. Despite the defiant cries of punk and reggae in the late seventies and despite a powerful reconnection of rock to a culture of alienation and dissent in the nineties,<sup>98</sup> the SUBVERSIVE UNDERDOG ingredient of rock’s IMMEDIATE BODY aesthetic had, by the mid eighties, little connection with any simultaneous or recent socio-cultural struggle. All that was left on that front was marketable nostalgia for music with social significance in bygone days. Rock was severed from the social dynamic of its genesis and could be repeated, repackaged, rerun and reissued (conveniently, now, on the new CD format). Like jazz and classical music before it, rock, with its aesthetic ingredient of youthful energy and oppositionality, was now conservable, canonisable and remarketable.<sup>99</sup> Rock celebrities could stage come-backs and even be knighted. With a couple of decades’ quarantine from contamination with anything politically subversive, the old music could be safely appropriated by the establishment, even for populist manifestations of such old-order power bases as the British monarchy (p.61). More importantly, though, it has, since the eighties, been possible to package rock for institutionalised education so that it can fit neatly into a regular curriculum and be assessed, examined, evaluated, audited and timetabled as courses in pop history, electric guitar, music business, recording skills, the sociology of pop and rock, and so on, all recyclable for student after student, year after year, complete with ‘assessment criteria’, ‘attainment targets’, ‘quality assurance’ or whatever other benchmarking buzzwords managerialist bureaucrats dream up to denote the suffocation of intellectual creativity.<sup>100</sup> There is little doubt that, like classical conservatories

98. E.g. Nirvana (1991), Pearl Jam (1991), Radiohead (1995), Rage Against the Machine (1992), Tool (1996), plus a whole host of Nu Metal and other ‘alternative’ rock bands in North America.

99. For critique of the cultural studies viewpoint of rock/pop as resistance, see *ftnt.* 91 p.64.

and jazz colleges before them, rock and pop schools, or their equivalent, are here to stay. So, too, is the academic side of the matter — popular music studies. The only trouble on this front was that the old rock aesthetic was in crisis at the very time when popular music studies entered its first stage of institutionalisation.<sup>101</sup>

With the fun-loving ROCK BODY dissociated from the social struggle which nourished it in its infancy, rock aesthetics could go in one of two directions. It could either resurrect the old rock ideal of SUBVERSIVE UNDERDOG WITH IMMEDIATE BODY by identifying new sites of social contestation connected with other types of urban popular music (e.g. rap, grunge, jungle, extreme metal, industrial), or else it could dump the SUBVERSIVE UNDERDOG altogether. While writers like David Toop (1984, 1985) and Jon Savage (1991, 1995) veered more in the first direction, Simon Reynolds, a latter-day rockologist to have exerted considerable influence on the cult-stud contingent of popular music scholars,<sup>102</sup> tended to opt for the second. Combining verbal dexterity with postmodernising sleight of scribal hand, Reynolds forged a new sort of musical absolutism which claimed the moral high ground of subversive cool by celebrating an *entirely suprasocial body* in opposition to the oppositionality of the old rock aesthetic. Michelsen *et al.* (2000:262), discussing ‘The Heart of Noise’ (Reynolds 1987), report his stance as follows.

‘It reads like an aesthetic manifesto where his anti-humanist stance is outlined. [According to Reynolds] [s]ome groups use noise but do not realise its possibilities in full because their noise is a reaction to something specific (a reality effect or an anti-pop gesture). Herein he detects the loathed notion of pop as subversion. Instead, “forget *subversion*. The point is *self-subversion*, overthrowing the power structure in your own head. The enemy is the mind’s tendency to systematise, to sew up experience. [...] The goal [is] in OBLIVION” (Reynolds’ own italics and capitals).

This statement, the authors go on to point out, does not represent *any* old avant-garde stance. It is certainly not situationalist because it rejects subversion, but it is old because, as we hinted earlier, it has a lot in common with the absolutist avant-

100. For an account of the Kafkaesque mayhem of neo-managerialist educational bureaucracy, see ‘Audititis: the Contagion’ | [www.tagg.org/rants/audititis/audititis.html](http://www.tagg.org/rants/audititis/audititis.html) | . For ‘early warnings’ of the effects of institutionalisation and careerism in popular music studies, see Tagg (1982a, 1982c, 1983, 1985). For more on the problems in the institutionalisation of popular music studies, see Tagg (1994a, 1996, 1998a, 2000d).

101. 1981 is a significant year for the institutionalisation of popular music studies. It saw the foundation of IASPM (The International Association for the Study of Popular Music) and the first issue of *Popular Music*, published by Cambridge University Press.

102. Rockology flourished in the 1980s and 1990s, as critics like Savage, Reynolds and Toop graduated from fanzines to specialist magazines to authoring entire books. This development runs parallel with the establishment of *Popular Music*, with the foundation and growth of IASPM (fnnt. 101), and with the spread of popular music courses in secondary and tertiary education. The strong influence of Reynolds, with his zeal for ‘non-signifying elements,... the grain of the voice, the materiality of the sound, the biological effect of the rhythm’, etc. (Reynolds 1990:10, cited by Michelsen *et al.* 2000:259-260) is most probably due to the author’s demagogic skills and veneer of erudition. ‘Grain of the voice’ is of course Barthes (1977), Barthes is a French literary theorist, and French cultural theory was not so much *à la mode* as *comme il faut* during the heyday of •pomo-rockology, with its roots in journalism, literary criticism, political science, critical sociology, etc. As Michelsen *et al.* (2000:263) observe: ‘Reynolds must be characterised as a critic in the literature criticism tradition in a broad sense... [His] discussions clearly aspire to be part of high (academic) culture, and they certainly contribute to make rock music look more like an autonomous field. Academics have taken him to their heart, quoting him at length and reviewing his books in academic journals’. *Blissed Out* (Reynolds 1990), for instance, received a positive review in *Popular Music*, 10/2 (1991).

garde of our metaphysical friends from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century (p.15ff). We might as well be listening to Rameau's nephew again:

'Passions must be powerful, the musician's feelings... full-blown — no mind control... no clever... ideas!' (Diderot 1762:119);

or hearing Wackenroder's imperatives about the right way of listening to music by 'fully surrendering [the] spirit to the welling torrent of sensations and disregarding every disturbing thought and all irrelevant impressions of [the] senses' (Wackenroder 1792, cited by Dahlhaus 1988:95);

or reading Hegel's old distinction between

'the layman [who likes music for its] comprehensible expression of emotions and ideas, something substantial, its content, [and on the other hand] the connoisseur... who can be quite fulfilled by the music on its own' (Hegel, cited by Zoltai 1970:260).

Now, some might argue that these comparisons are invalid because Reynolds and his •pomo-rockologist colleagues contest the classical canon's notions of THE WORK and AUTONOMY in relation to pop and rock.<sup>103</sup> We hold that argument to be disingenuous for the following reasons.

We have already shown (pp.9-29) that, since neither individual emotions nor the music thought to be expressing them can be properly understood without their social and political context, there can be no absolute autonomy of musical text. At the same time, contesting the classical canon's notion of absolute music and its notion of the autonomous work does not mean that a musical text can have no *relative* autonomy.<sup>104</sup> When the RELATIVE AUTONOMY baby is thrown out with the formalist bath water, epistemic mayhem ensues. For instance, pomo-rockologists in text denial might hold that *When A Man Loves A Woman* (Sledge 1966) was not the same in 1987 after its use in a commercial for Levis 501 jeans, even if the music used in the advert, not to mention the song's re-issue following the popularity of the commercial, were both demonstrably identical with one and the same original recording. The pomo case against these irrefutable facts would most likely start quite convincingly along the following lines: since the record-buying and TV-viewing public are the ultimate arbiters of pop's values, and since the context of the jeans commercial was different to that of the same recording's original release in 1966, different connotations and different values were perceived in relation to the song. Moreover (and it is here that the argument falls into non-sequitur), if the same music did not *feel* the same to those using it in the new context, it could not *be* the same as before because audiences are the arbiters of musical meaning. According to this line of reasoning, music is defined as the response it receives and/or as the symbolic values attributed to it, not as the sonic text which elicits that response or to which those meanings are attributed. The fact that commercial exploitation of the original Per-

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103. 'The question is how to refer to what, within a given musical culture or subculture, is generally perceived as a musical continuum of determinate duration and of sufficient internal structural cohesion to be understood as sonically identifiable in itself from whatever precedes or follows it, as well as from other similarly integral sets of sequences of musical sound' (Tagg 2000c:153). The obvious answer is WORK... Unfortunately, the high-art connotations of THE WORK sit awkwardly in discourse about popular music — NUMBER, TRACK, TITLE, CUE, SCORE, TUNE, SONG, ALBUM, SET, SESSION, GIG etc. sound much more suitable. However, there is no substantial reason why 'work' should not be appropriated by popular music scholars in a sense devoid of high-art connotations.

104. See, for example, the three quotes on page 70.

cy Sledge recording's connotations was dependent, twenty years later, on the TV audience's ability to recognise the music as 'that song' with its own connotations for each listener in an earlier context rather than another song with other connotations from another time and place does not seem to enter into the argument; nor does the fact that Atlantic (Sledge's record label) cashed in on the same song's renewed popularity, under new circumstances and with new connotations, by issuing a simple re-release, i.e. without having to re-record a single track, without having to produce anything resembling a new musical text.<sup>105</sup>

By marginalising or disregarding the musical text (or 'work'),<sup>106</sup> pomo-rockologists conflated specific sets of culturally organised sound with the activities and reactions they believed to occur in connection with those particular sounds under a particular set of circumstances. If no musical text (or 'work') exists there can be no relatively autonomous set of musical sounds which can exist in other contexts where those same sounds might be invested with different meanings or values, give rise to different reactions, have different functions, etc., as in the case of *When A Man Loves A Woman*. All that remains in other words is just one idealised and absolute context. ABSOLUTE CONTEXT is of course just as much an aberration as ABSOLUTE MUSIC (TEXT), not only because a context must by definition contain a text to exist as such (just as no text can exist without a context), but also because no context can have a specific character if no other contexts exist with which to compare it (just as no text can exhibit specific traits if there are no other texts from which it can differ).<sup>107</sup> Put in simple semiotic terms, whereas the old musical absolutism had potential signifiers but no signifieds, the new absolutism had only potential signifieds but no signifiers. Whichever way you look at it, semiosis is out of the question. Such a standpoint is clearly of no use to the project undertaken in this book, but it must be a godsend to anyone with a canonic axe to grind because, with semantics and pragmatics out of the picture, the coast is clear for propagating an authoritarian view of music. By mystifying text and disregarding context, romantic music metaphysics could rank ways of responding to music on a scale of arbitrary

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105. True, you might say that GAY is *not the same word* now as it was in 1902 because its meaning has shifted so radically. However, although figurative conflation of signifier and signified may be common in everyday speech, it is a different matter if you want to explain the processes by which English-speaking sexual minorities appropriated mainstream vocabulary to signify their own identity in positive terms. You would be hard pushed to do so convincingly if you could not distinguish between the *word* GAY and its various meanings in different contexts!

106. See ftnt. 103 or Glossary for definition of musical WORK. Pomo-rockologist text denial can also be seen as another symptom of empiriphobia, because intersubjective agreement among musicians and/or listeners as to what constitutes similarity and difference between sets of musical sound constitutes objectively verifiable or falsifiable evidence for the existence of one or more musical texts (see footnotes 103 and 107).

107. Of course, it is possible to object here that WORK and TEXT are notions culturally specific to Europe, in particular to art music, the arguments being [i] that the text is usually identified with the score (notation) and [ii] that the boundaries between music and other forms of expression are either different or more fluid in other cultures. We maintain the validity of MUSICAL TEXT as a generally applicable notion provided it can be demonstrated that similar (types of) sound events which we would call musical can be repeated (with social consensus regulating the degree of variation determining similarity or difference) with similar participants and produce similar effects, or be used in similar ways in similar contexts under similar cultural conditions; or that the same sort of musical sounds can be repeated under different conditions and be identified by members of the culture as the same sounds despite a change of context (as in the Percy Sledge example).

aesthetic excellence compatible with bourgeois notions of subjectivity. By mystifying context and disregarding text, pomo-rockology did the same for today's consumerist ideology.<sup>108</sup> The only difference is that classical absolutism's idealised text tended to dissociate emotional subjectivity from society, while pomo-rockologist absolutism's idealised context tended to celebrate the existence of a suprasocial *body*, an idealist stance we shall refer to as •BODYISM.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, if, as Zoltai (1970:193ff.) suggested with reference to the rise of instrumental music in late eighteenth-century Europe, it is possible to see the metaphysical interpretations of the (then) new instrumental music as celebrating an idealised liberation of the bourgeois ego, it would be far from unreasonable to see the rockologist aesthetic as celebrating an idealised *liberation of the bourgeois id*.

Now, as we have seen, both forms of absolutism initially derive from site of real social contestation. Music symbolising the liberation of the ego was connected to revolutionary notions of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, while music symbolising the liberation of the id was part of postwar opposition to what was perceived as soulless normality, hypocrisy and sexual repression.<sup>110</sup> However, once each *ancien régime* had been confronted and its opponents had replaced it with a new order, old allies in the struggle were abandoned<sup>111</sup> and the cultural face of the old struggle was preserved as if its values still held currency under radically altered political circumstances. This does not mean there was anything 'wrong' with music's role in either process of social change. No, the problems started when aspects of subjective emancipation were dissociated from the sociocultural context that provoked the struggle for that emancipation in the first place.

The tendency to promote a socially decontextualised body as aesthetic ideal of the pomo-rockologist canon can be gathered from a wealth of literature which, for reasons of space and clarity of narrative, cannot be accounted for here. We will therefore confine ourselves to citing three passages illustrating the bodyist tendency.

[1] ... '[T]he power of pop lies not in its meaning but in its noise,... the non-signifying, extra-linguistic elements that defy "content analysis": the grain of the voice, the materiality of the sound, the biological effect of the rhythm, the fascination of the star's body' (Reynolds 1990:10).<sup>112</sup>

[2] 'Rock and roll is corporeal and "invasive" ... [W]ithout the mediation of meaning, the sheer volume and repetitive rhythms of rock and roll produce a real material pleasure for its fans (at many live concerts, the vibration actually might be compared to the use of a vibrator, often focused on the genital organs)'... (Grossberg 1990:113).

[3] 'Music excites the body to automatic movement, an exhilaration that defeats boredom and inspires insight... Music gives the body control over itself, granting personal freedom and revealing sexual potential.' (Lull 1992:29-30).

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108. Links between pomo-rockology and consumerism are discussed on p. 74ff.

109. The neologism BODYISM is Dave Laing's (phone conversation with PT, 020701). See Glossary.

110. That sentiment was overtly expressed in *Stinknormal* by the (then East) German band Scheselong (1986). Whether or not the perception is accurate is another matter (see ftnt. 91 p.64).

111. In the bourgeois revolution those allies were the fourth estate (see p.22). The consumerist rock revolution's abandoned allies can be seen as those parts of the working class who now make up the new lumpenproletariat, i.e. the unemployed, single parents on benefit, immigrant workers etc.

112. As cited by Michelsen *et al.* (2000:259-260). See also footnote 94 p.65.

The lack of textual and contextual specificity in such bodyist statements leads to difficulties which relate to a postmodernist preoccupation with OTHERNESS, by which is apparently meant whatever is not felt to be US or OURS (whoever WE are supposed to be).<sup>113</sup> In addition to a generalised body in apparently constant need of emancipation,<sup>114</sup> that OTHER takes on a number of guises, three of the most common candidates for rockologist projection of an idealised OTHER being women, African Americans or members of the working class. The subtext of such projection is that WE are all white middle-class males living in Western Europe or North America and that those OTHERS are somehow more ‘bodily’ than WE are. Since we (the authors, in lower-case this time, even though we are white, male, middle-class and from nations bordering on the North Atlantic) have previously argued that the use of those sites of projection so easily leads to discourse qualifiable, usually in inverted form, as sexist, racist or elitist, we will discuss them no further here.<sup>115</sup>

A more general and common symptom of the pomo-rockologist bodyism illustrated above is the reduction of the rock body to sites of sexuality and little else.<sup>115</sup> As Tamlyn (1998:22) argues in his discussion of the second quotation on page 70:

[The] comparison of rock’s repetitive rhythms to the movements of a vibrator is problematic. Perhaps Grossberg is attempting an analogy between repetitive rock rhythms and those that may characterise certain phases of the sexual act. If so, similar “vibrator” associations ought to occur in connection with any other “sheer volume and repetitive rhythms”. Presuming that such volume and rhythm features loud, regularly articulated beats in the form of strong bass thuds, sharp crashes and other percussive sounds, the “vibrator” effect should logically arise when walking next to the bass drums and cymbals in a marching band or when standing at the assembly line in a packaging factory, or when listening to the final scene of Berlioz’ *The Damnation of Faust*. Since it is unlikely that... rockologists would associate marches, factories or Berlioz with sex, there is an obvious interpretative incongruity here that raises an important problem. Grossberg assumes that his readers... have experienced... what a vibrator feels like. More importantly, he tacitly assumes a high degree of intersubjective consistency among his readers as regards their response to music.<sup>116</sup>

The vibrator analogy Tamlyn mentions here may not be as important as the problem of missing intersubjective evidence but it does highlight a recurrent article of pomo-rockologist doctrine: that energetic movement of torso and hips is an exclusively sexual matter, and that rock/pop’s IMMEDIATE BODY must therefore also be

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113. For discussion of problems with postmodernist notions of alterity in popular music studies, see *Mass Media Music Studies versus ‘The Other’* (Tagg 1996). For more general critiques of postmodernist posturing, see *Against Postmodernism* (Callinicos 1989) and *Intellectual Impostures* (Sokal & Bricmont 1998). For salutary bouts of poking fun at pomos, the Postmodernist Generator website is also worth a visit at |[www.cs.monash.edu.au/links/postmodern.html](http://www.cs.monash.edu.au/links/postmodern.html) |

114. It is more likely a matter of the compulsive desire symptomatic of an inability to distinguish between SELF and OBJECT (see reference to Melanie Klein’s theory of Object Relations, p.76).

115. ‘Rock’s eroticism is thrusting, grinding — it is not the whole body, but phallic. Hence it takes from black music the insistent beat’... (Dyer 1990:414; cited by Tamlyn, *loc. cit.*). ‘Lawhead posits the notion that “rock has a strong, compelling beat” and therefore “it is very dangerous since it owes its beginnings to African demon worship and may itself be demon inspired” (Lawhead 1987:50)’ (Tamlyn 1998:23). For critique of this kind of inverted racism in rockology, see Tagg (1989) and Frith (1996:123-144). The Frith chapter presents many compelling arguments and quotes, including well-reasoned insights from Chernoff (1979), Borneman (1946) and others. For critique of reductionist idealisation of ‘Woman’ and ‘Body’, including evidence from Kristeva’s later work (1990:33-34), see Tagg (1998c).

116. For further refutation of such notions, see the Guirard quote on page 77.

about sex and nothing else. True, dancing and body display linked to mating rituals are central features on certain occasions when loud rock/pop music is played, but they are by no means essential when the same music, played at a comparable volume, is heard in a stadium, in an indie club, on your in-car stereo, or on your own home sound system. Nevertheless, the exclusively sexual aspect of BODY is so common in pom-rockology that scholars otherwise critical of reductionism will sometimes adopt its mode of discourse. For example, in the course of constructing a theory of MUSIC and SOCIETY in relation to BODY, Shepherd and Wicke (1998:95-96) characterise the instrumental introduction to *Satisfaction* (Rolling Stones 1965) as follows.

‘The motor rhythms... are themselves taken to constitute socially and culturally the form of sexuality in question through their very articulation. They are taken at the time of their articulation to occasion in individual subjects... the structure of feeling this form of sexuality in a manner specific to themselves.’

Although the authors include some intersubjective relativity in this passage (‘specific to themselves’), the only interpretation of the music’s motor rhythms they provide is SEXUALITY. This particular reading of the *Satisfaction* riff might be explained by one short phrase in the song’s lyrics (‘trying to make some girl’) but it is contradicted by the preponderance of all the other ways in which the song’s vocal persona ‘can’t get no satisfaction’ —the radio man with his ‘useless information supposed to fire my imagination about how white my shirts could be’, but who ‘can’t be a man ‘cause he doesn’t smoke the same cigarettes as me’, etc. All these other *non-sexual* reasons for dissatisfaction occur twice in the song, the single sexual reference just once.<sup>117</sup> Sexual interpretation of the song’s motor rhythms is questionable also because it is a reading of particular significance for particular people of a certain age in certain places at certain times in history (white, middle-class males who experienced the concurrence of rock and the ‘sexual revolution’ in Northern Europe and North America), not necessarily to anyone else.<sup>118</sup> In this sense the sexual reading is indexical and ought to be located at a ‘secondary’ rather than ‘primary’ level of signification (Middleton 1990:220-232), the latter being more compatible with such descriptors as INSISTENT or TO AND FRO than with SEX. TO AND FRO, INSISTENT and OSCILLATORY, REPEATED and FORCEFUL, etc. may well, as Tamlyn (1998:22) puts it, ‘characterise certain phases of the sexual act’, but to equate such movement of the human body with sex is to assume that the importance humans in general attach to metronomic aspects of copulation is greater than that of all the following activities combined: climbing, crawling, digging, dragging, defecating, exercising, giving birth, hauling, hay-making, heaving, hewing, horse-riding, jumping, mowing, pulling, pushing, playing sports, rising to our feet and sitting down, reaping, rowing,

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117. In early 1998 I asked about a dozen people born between 1944 and 1955 what they remembered being the object of dissatisfaction in the lyrics of *Satisfaction*. All mentioned one or more of the following: USELESS INFORMATION, HOW WHITE MY SHIRTS COULD BE, CAN’T BE A MAN ‘CAUSE HE DOESN’T SMOKE THE SAME CIGARETTES AS ME, FLYING ROUND THE WORLD. Only one person mentioned TRYING TO MAKE SOME GIRL.

118. i.e. white, male, middle-class, Euro-North-American baby-boomers. It is of course significant that the rise of rock in the 1960s and its commercial hegemony in the 1970s coincide with the ‘sexual revolution’ and with increased availability of contraceptive pills. We are in other words dealing with a very short period of relative economic welfare in the West before the full onslaught of monetarist neo-liberalism and before the spread of AIDS.

wrestling, sawing, cycling, shovelling, skipping, scrubbing, sweeping, swimming, swinging, vacuum cleaning, etc.<sup>119</sup> The tendency to reduce energetic movement of the lower body to its sexual aspects may be understandable coming from middle-class, male, white, Western baby-boomers lumbered with a legacy of sexual repression because we have been socialised into identifying forceful movement in the lower body most frequently with sex or, rather, with mass-disseminated images of sex. Nevertheless, if this culturally specific restriction of lower body movement in relation to sound is, as we suggest, only part of the story in the particular case of the *Satisfaction* riff in a particular historical context, then it is difficult to see how it can constructively inform the type of musicology we aim to help develop through discussion of the responses and analyses we present in the main part of this book in relation to a much broader range of musical styles.<sup>120</sup>

From this discussion it would appear that pomo-rockology's idealised, socially decontextualised body in an idealised 'absolute context' is no better than conventional musicology's idealised, socially decontextualised emotions expressed in an idealised 'absolute text'. Bodyism may in fact be even worse, at least if viewed from the standpoint of semiotics in Eco's terms (p.51ff.), because while conventional musicology, including the music semiotics represented by the 88 learned articles discussed earlier (p.51), relies at least on syntax with a little bit of semantics thrown in now and again, pomo-rockology speculates about pop/rock aesthetics, viewing semantics with suspicion and discarding both syntax *and* pragmatics. In fact, if, as we suggest is the case in extreme pomo-rockology, there is no musical text, then there can be neither pragmatics, nor syntax, nor even semantics because, so to speak, the music IS THE BODY (or vice versa) in no specific social context; or rather (which amounts to the same thing), music IS the body in one implicit, idealised, absolute and 'seamless' context. If that is the case, we are not so much dealing with a latter-day variant of

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119. Sitting on my office chair in front of the computer, I have just pushed my buttocks down into the seat and thrust myself forward to slide closer to the monitor in order to read the small text of this footnote more easily. There was nothing erotic about that. Now I will use my hips and buttocks to move my chair in the opposite direction. Nothing sexual there either. Perhaps I should move to and fro repeatedly. Still no erotic experience. Now I'll put on *Satisfaction* quite loud and try again. Ah! More energy and fun this time, but still nothing sexual to report.

Putting a more serious slant on the problem, Alessandra Gallone, teacher of modern dance, told me: 'Confusion of lower body movement with sex is a real problem in dance teaching. Many people giggle with embarrassment at what we do. Helping them to use their whole body to express *anything* they want, not just sexuality, can be a heavy task' (Milan 980104). Perhaps this is why some of us still ethnocentrically assume the essential use of the lower body in many forms of African dance to be primarily sexual. For a settling of accounts with inverted racism in relation to music of African and European origin, see Tagg (1989: 285-298).

120. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that [pomo-]rockology is to no mean extent sex-fixated. Sexuality and gender are of course important topics in popular music studies, but the quantity of texts devoted to those topics in pomo-rockology is out of proportion when compared to the amount of words published in the fields of anthropology, business, musical practice, musicology, politics, sociology, technology, etc. This state of affairs is even registered by the Postmodernism Generator, a website set up by linguists at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia) and which generates random essays based on stereotypical postmodernist discourse (apparently quite easy to emulate and predict — see | [www.cs.monash.edu.au/links/postmodern.html](http://www.cs.monash.edu.au/links/postmodern.html) |). Besides, the music we discuss in the main part of this book covers a much broader range of popular musical styles than just rock and pop, whether the communicative values of such musics are conceptually reduced to sexual aspects of corporeality or not. Moreover, in an impassioned attack on pomo-rockology, Nehring (1997) argues that bodyism disregards the musical mediation of *emotion*. He identifies *anger* as a particularly important aspect of social contestation in rock/pop (e.g. Nirvana 1991).

Hanslick's absolutist claim that music is 'nothing other than tonal forms in movement'<sup>121</sup> (MUSIC IS MUSIC), but with something even more metaphysical: the IS of pomo-rockologist aesthetics conflates music with the body instead of denoting particular types of relationship between the two, while the body, devoid of social context, remains a culturally unknown entity.<sup>122</sup> We are, it seems, dealing with the same sort of magic IS as in 'Coca Cola *is* it', an advertising slogan included here not so much for rhetorical effect as to draw attention to a link between consumerism and the kind of pop/rock aesthetic we have just been describing. That link is particularly clear in view of the fact that the socially decontextualised body reduced to its sexual constituents is not just a feature of pomo-rockology: it is also something that recurs with monotonous regularity in advertising which, in its turn, attacks us with monotonous regularity every day of our lives.

Now, following links between pomo-rockology and consumerism would lead our discussion into a minefield of issues to do with subjectivity and the political economy, the risk being that we would never return to the matter in hand. Unfortunately, however, the overall aim of this book (to help develop a musicology of the mass media) demands that we understand at least something of the nature and purpose of the most influential notions of music that have been in recent circulation. If, as we argued in Chapter 1, it was necessary to put the old absolutist notion of contextless musical texts into a historical context in order to explain the need for alternative views (the four phases of this chapter), then we ought to do the same for the new kind of musical absolutism we have just been discussing. Although we have already tried to summarise general trends in the canonisation of rock and pop, we have done no more than allude to fundamental issues linking such trends, including the patterns of subjectivity they embody, with the political economy in which those trends and patterns develop. We need in other words to relate pomo-rockology to the ethical issues raised at the start of this book (p. 4ff.). The trouble is, as we just said, that discussing links between pomo-rockology and consumerism means delving into complex relationships between subjectivity and the political economy. Another problem is that we do not have the benefit of much historical hindsight. Therefore, the short excursion that follows should be seen as no more than an attempt to interpret a few salient features of intricate ongoing processes, and to suggest explanations of relevance to the ethical and educational aspects of our project.

As shown in Table 3 (p. 60), there can be little doubt that the main musical lingua franca of the new absolutist canon is Anglo-American and that the concurrent site of geopolitical dominance is in the USA. Nor can there be any doubt that popular music scholars write about rock/pop-related issues more than about any other single set of topics,<sup>123</sup> nor that native speakers of English dominate the proceedings of IASPM, despite the inclusion of internationalism among the association's primary aims.<sup>124</sup> It is also clear that the canonisation of rock 'classics' and the gradual

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121. 'Tönend bewegte Formen sind einzig und allein Inhalt und Gegenstand der Musik' (see p. 18).

122. Of course, the reduction of a musical-cultural phenomenon to one overriding set of many possible sets of traits attributable to that phenomenon (as in the *Satisfaction* case) is only possible if the pragmatic aspects of semiotics are excluded from the equation. That musical syntax (music's structures, their description, etc.) is excluded goes without saying because there is 'NO TEXT'.

123. See ftnt. 89 p.64.

124. See |www.iaspm.net|. See also Tagg (1985, 2001a) and ftnt. 78 (p.61).

dumping of rockology's SUBVERSIVE UNDERDOG in favour of decontextualised bodyism runs parallel with the GREED IS GOOD and DOG EAT DOG culture of the Thatcher and Reagan years when core social values like justice, welfare and equality were marginalised by a fixation on superficial aspects of individual appearance —on the body instead of the human being occupying it— and on outward signs of material well-being. The question is whether the link between rockology's concern with the corporeal and dominant patterns of subjectivity under finance capitalism is causal or just a fluke of historical parallels. Some explanation may be in order here.

Today it almost seems that appearance has replaced substance in the mass-media cultures of the industrialised West: image and packaging have become the focus of our attention, so to speak, rather than what the image represents or what the package contains. The ultimate expression of this unsettling reification of symbols and surfaces is in the world of finance where investment brokers sell their manipulation of figures symbolising money (which represents exchange value, which symbolises use-value etc.) as if the digital manipulation of those abstract figures were a concrete 'product', while actual products and real labour do not enter into the equation, even though they are the material source of the exchange value whose further abstraction as numbers is what the investment brokers end up manipulating.<sup>125</sup> A similar reification of the abstract and abstraction of the concrete is often heard in contemporary political spin, for instance when politicians say that new legislation 'sends a message' rather than improves matters on the ground, or that the government must *be seen to be doing* something rather than actually *doing* it. Attention is in other words focussed on the superficial qualities of human interaction or, rather, on transaction and 'the sell'. Indeed, PR hype and marketing have become so pervasive in daily life that we are all reduced to 'customers' (read CONSUMERS) as if every interhuman action were a matter of monetary quantification. Passengers on trains and tenants in accommodation no longer exist, and it is only a matter of time before both patients and students are also incorporated into the Holy Market's swelling throng of 'customers' (consumers). So, how does pomo-rockology relate to this topsy-turvy world of finance capitalism, its reification of abstract quantity and its apparent disregard for real values, material or otherwise?

The simple answer is that by conflating signifier with signified, medium with message, message with response, response with text and text with context, pomo-rockology has, like the finance capitalism under which it grew and flourished, created an inscrutable black box whose contents are closely protected from deconstruction or examination. They are conceptually imprisoned, inaccessible, invisible, passed over in silence, nameless. All you get to see is the box, the packaging. This reification of an abstraction which obscures the material and social dynamics of music seems to mirror larger contemporary processes of reification too faithfully for it to be interpreted as a historical fluke, especially in view of other coincidences between, for instance, the celebration of rock intensionality and consumerism's de-

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125. While editing this text (2002-06-26), news broke that Worldcom Inc. (including Xerox), had cooked its books to the tune of \$2bn (US) over the past five years. While re-editing this text (2002-08-10), Channel 4 News (UK) reported that Worldcom executives had in fact diverted another \$4bn, enough to double the average income of all Africans for five years. This corporate manipulation of figures to influence stock market speculation in favour of company shareholders and their real buying power comes shortly after similar events at ENRON and The Allied Irish Bank.

pendence on immediate gratification, or between the abandonment of rock's SUBVERSIVE UNDERDOG and the dismantling of the welfare state.<sup>126</sup> Viewed from this perspective, it seems that pomo-rockology has contributed in a small but significant way to creating the impression of an inscrutable monolith of power in which the political economy, its ideology, culture and patterns of subjectivity are fused into a seamless 'postmodern' whole: for if one type of subjective experience of a musical text in a particular context is confused with the music as text, and if that experience is conflated with the specific cultural context in which it occurs, then there can be no negotiation of meaning between text and context. With the effective denial of such negotiation, individual and collective experiences of music are bound to be conceptualised as inscrutable and monolithic. It is in this way that canonic CORPOREAL OBLIVION can be understood as a consumerist variation on the old absolutist theme of music as UTTER SUBMERSION, INFINITE YEARNING or ETERNAL ESSENCE.<sup>127</sup> Just as our reduction to customers bars us from any type of social engagement outside that of consuming goods and services, the bodyist reduction of music to a site of all-embracing and oblivious individual corporeality deprives us of music with any other potential. But that is not all.

Pomo-rockology's conflation of music, body and sex can also be seen as an expression of the psychotic symbiosis explained by Klein (1975) in terms of the *object relations* which humans need to develop in order to distinguish between the self and others. Failure to develop such relations through socially acquired experiences like guilt and reparation leads to a false sense of self-awareness in which the self is conflated with everyone and everything around him/her.<sup>128</sup> Such conceptualisation is in other words quite normal for two-year-olds but a sign of psycho-social disorder in adults. Now, regressive abandon to pre-verbal or even quasi-amniotic states (immersion, submission, surrendering to feelings, giving into bodily pleasure, oblivion, eternal essence, total immediacy, prolonged present time, etc.) is no problem in itself. On the contrary, it is necessary to human survival because without it no-one would ever fall in love and life would be unbearably dull. No, the problems start when the abandonment becomes compulsive. Regressive abandon is particularly destructive when the compulsion is fuelled by social pressure to conform, for example when you diet yourself into an eating disorder so as to look 'right' rather than to keep healthy, or when you drink yourself into alcoholism because you feel unable to act as the life and soul of the party in any other way. With pop/rock 'fun' the problem is similar because the *right* to party and the *compulsion* to party are different matters, as are the right to experience great passion (in love, music, art or in any other way) and the compulsion to do so.<sup>129</sup> Since, as we have argued (p.69), absolutist music aesthetics, old and new, are, once they are established, intrinsically authoritarian in that they rank ways of responding to music on arbitrary scales of excellence, they increase the pressure on us to conform so that our right to share common aesthetic values can easily degenerate into the compulsion to do so.

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126. For more 'coincidences' and 'flukes', see Table 3 p.60.

127. These three expressions are taken from Wackenroder (1792; see p.15), Tieck (1799; see p.15) and De Lamennais (1840; see ftnt. 35 p.18).

128. Thanks to Margit Kronberg (Göteborg) for drawing this psychological aspect of subject/object conflation to our attention.

One final issue of rockologist compulsion needs to be addressed before moving on to other matters. It concerns the conviction that true experiences of music ‘defy content analysis’ and ‘the mind’s tendency to systematise music’s meaning and signifying elements’.<sup>130</sup> Such overwhelming experiences of music are not uncommon and it is surely part of a music critic’s job to try and mediate something of their power. Indeed, if well written, personal testimonies about music’s powerful effects will make for much more inspiring reading than this sentence. However, it is misleading to present such accounts as generally applicable truths, no matter how complete, utter, immediate, invasive or overwhelming the experience with music may have been. Guirard (2001) explains the problem as follows.

‘As Robert Francès demonstrated over forty years ago (Francès 1958), musical emotion is not caused by some mysteriously spontaneous effect of sound on our body or soul: indeed, our ability to feel musical pleasure derives from a series of cognitive processes, both implicit and unreflected, whose function is to decode what our culture allows us to share in by giving it a form [in music]. Although the unconscious character of such competence may present the illusion of transcendence and immediacy, such experiences result from the cumulative build-up of links between, on the one hand, our previous experience and our expressive needs, and, on the other, the mythemes, functions and texts which constitute our cultural heritage.’<sup>131</sup>

In other words, the transcendence, immediacy, corporeal oblivion, etc. that certain music creates for certain people in certain contexts may *feel* real enough, but trying to verbalise such experience explains nothing of *how* or *why* the illusion works. Moreover, by omitting essential aspects of intersubjectivity, as well as issues of text and context (including Guirard’s ‘mythemes, functions’ and ‘cultural heritage’), individual testimonies about strong personal experiences of particular music under particular circumstances assume the false guise of cross-cultural, almost biological, generality. From there it is only a small step to promoting those strong personal experiences and their concomitant music to the status of universally applicable aesthetic benchmarks.

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129. One of the clearest cases of compulsive romanticism is provided by Flaubert who describes the main character of his novel *Madame Bovary* (1856) in the following terms. ‘Elle n’aimait la mer qu’à cause de ses tempêtes, et la verdure seulement lorsqu’elle était clairesemée parmi les ruines. Il fallait qu’elle pût retirer des choses une sorte de profit personnel; et elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui ne contribuait pas à la consommation immédiate de son coeur, étant de tempérament plus sentimental qu’artiste, cherchant des émotions et non des paysages... [sa lecture] Ce n’étaient qu’amours, amants, amantes, dames persécutées s’évanouissant dans des pavillons solitaires, postillons qu’on tue à tous les relais, chevaux qu’on crève à toutes les pages, forêts sombres, troubles de coeur, serments, sanglots, larmes et baisers, nacelles au clair de lune, rossignol dans les bosquets, messieurs braves comme des lions, doux comme des agneaux, vertueux comme on ne l’est pas, toujours bien mis, et qui pleurent comme des urnes’ (cited in Lagarde et Michard, 1971).

130. Reynolds (1987, 1990); for complete citations and page references, see pp. 67 and 70.

131. ‘Comme l’a démontré Robert Francès il y a plus de quarante ans (Francès 1958), l’émotion musicale ne tient pas à quelque mystérieux effet spontané du son sur notre corps ou sur notre âme: notre capacité à ressentir un plaisir musical dépend bien d’une série de processus cognitifs implicites et irréfléchis qui travaillent à décoder ce que notre culture a rendu partageable en le mettant en forme. Bien que le caractère non conscient de ces compétences puisse donner l’illusion, transcendante, d’une immédiateté, cette émotion est le fruit d’une longue mise en correspondance de notre expérience et de nos intentions expressives avec les mythèmes (Bachelard), les usages et les œuvres composant notre patrimoine culturel (mise en correspondance produisant et résultant à la fois des compétences cognitives précitées).’

One of several ways out of this culturally absolutist impasse is through an understanding of how music is *made* because, however tautologous it may sound, musical experiences are best mediated through music, not through words. At least, that is what we tend to think as musicians. It is in that capacity that we make or ‘construct’ music using the ‘functions and texts’ of our ‘cultural heritage’ to the best of our abilities. To put it another way, deconstructing existing music (‘texts’ in our ‘cultural heritage’) is a prerequisite for putting it together again, usually in a different form (to COMPOSE literally means to PUT TOGETHER). Deconstructing to construct anew is an essential part of the musician’s job, as anyone who has ever used sampling or had to write or perform *IN THE STYLE OF...* knows only too well. Even though this dual process of deconstruction and [re]composition takes place at intrinsically musical levels of cognition (knowledge *in* music), even though it may seem implicit, unreflected or unconscious in verbal terms, it in no way follows that the actual application of that dual process is ever magically natural or biologically universal. Such a view of music (that it is all implicit, unreflected, unconscious BODY, SUBMERSION, SURRENDER, OBLIVION, etc. or just MUSIC) not only ‘complacently assumes that consciousness is sense and the unconscious is nonsense’:<sup>132</sup> it also ethnocentrically and logocentrically implies that culturally mediated processes of musical learning are an aberration. Furthermore, by ignoring processes of *musical* deconstruction and [re]composition, pomo-rockology’s view of music not only fails to grasp the notion of a musical text; it also misses the importance of the musician’s physical tools of the trade (instruments, recording technology, etc.), as well as the role of the musician’s empirically verifiable learning processes (formal or informal),<sup>133</sup> in producing the sounds that contributed to bringing about the experiences which informed that view of music in the first place. As a final point we should briefly mention that the ability or inability to grasp intrinsically musical processes of deconstruction and [re]composition may be an important factor determining how willing or unwilling the popular music scholar will be to deconstruct and explain musical experience from an end-user standpoint.

From the discussion so far it should be clear that culturalist rockology’s lack of attention to matters of musical cognition is not going to be of much use in pursuing the main aim of this book. The question concerning us next is therefore why music, as we musicians understand the term, has been marginalised in popular music studies and what steps have been taken to integrate knowledge *in* it with knowledge *about* it and with knowledge about what surrounds it.

### ***Music: a troublesome appendage to Cultural studies***

As with the SEMIO phase, our account of popular music studies has, at least so far, painted none too rosy a picture. Given its ETHNO and SOCIO precursors, and given the multitude of different genres which ought to sort under the umbrella term POPULAR MUSIC, popular music studies still holds great potential as an area of enquiry which, by the very nature of its subject matter, demands interdisciplinarity, interprofessionalism and the rejection of absolutist aesthetics. It is from this perspective of a potentially limitless range of genres, approaches and values that the predominance

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132. The third quotation on the title page of Chapter 1 (Jung 1964:92).

133. For an account of learning processes in pop and rock music, see Green (2001).

of discourse about (mainly Anglo-North-American) rock/pop and the establishment of a new type of absolutist aesthetics in relation to that music must be regarded as serious setbacks.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the influential pomo-rockology camp in popular music studies has, partly through sexual-corporeal reductionism, tended to mystify relationships between music and its uses, its perceived values, connotations and socially constructed meanings. The inability or unwillingness to clarify that relationship comes across strongest in a tendency to marginalise the musical text, sometimes to even deny its existence, let alone its importance (if not centrality), in the study of popular music. As Franco Fabbri put it in 1995, referring to the general intellectual direction taken by IASPM and by the journal *Popular Music*:

‘Music and musicians seem to have become some kind of troublesome appendage to popular music studies’.<sup>135</sup>

Fabbri hits the nail on the head with this remark: it is plain daft to take the music out of popular music studies. The problem is that we have yet to come up with a strategy of how to put the music back in. That how demands in its turn that we consider *why* music became such a ‘troublesome appendage’ to popular music studies.

One reason is obvious: we still live under the same basic political system as was established when classical music became ‘classical’. It would be strange if patterns of subjectivity developed in the interests of the system’s ruling classes (p. 24ff.) were to radically change before the entire system is consigned to history’s trash can. Therefore, while significant adjustments were made to bourgeois subjectivity during the twentieth century, the rock canon and pomo-rockologist bodyism being two interrelated examples of its reform or modernisation, the basic imperatives of hegemonic conservation, institutionalisation and absolutist aesthetics still remain, as we have seen, even though the idealised focus of celebration moved from the ego (emotions) to the id (body). Similarly, while cult studs and their textless contexts dominate popular music studies, the dispersal of musical knowledge into separate professions, disciplines and institutions with different aims, terminologies, career paths and traditions of learning, also still prevails. This disciplinary Tower of Babel presents a serious obstacle to anyone wanting to make intellectual sense of some-

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134. This may be a fifth case for indictment under the Trades Descriptions Act. The previous cases were: [1] music semiotics: semiotic by name but not by nature; [2] studies called STUDIES but which did not include women; [3] music studies called MUSIC STUDIES but which did not include popular music; [4] popular music studies which exclude most popular music. Now we are talking about [5] popular music studies without music. For Anglocentrism of rock canon, see ftnt. 78 (p.61).

135. ‘Where is music and where are the musicians? Can researchers learn something from them, or are musicians some kind of unnecessary appendix of popular music studies?’. This rhetorical question in response to the question ‘what do you think is currently wrong with IASPM internationally?’, came from Franco Fabbri, founder member of IASPM, guitarist (rock and classical), composer, computer network company manager, ex-record company organiser, active in cultural policy-making, chairperson of IASPM Italy and music journalist (email to PT 950623). It was shortly before IASPM’s 8th International Conference (Glasgow 1995) that I also received similar comments from Chris Cutler, Reebee Garofalo, Charles Hamm and Gerard Kempers, other intellectually competent musicians or musically competent intellectuals who were once actively involved in IASPM internationally but who became disenchanted with what they then saw as an epistemologically restrictive hierarchy of ideas, discourses and approaches. Since 1995 the situation has improved somewhat. Another example of music’s marginalisation in the world of institutionalised cultural studies is the fact that the last assistant to be hired and first to be fired by Birmingham University’s legendary •CCCS was a musicologist (see ftnt. 141 p.81).

thing which, from the end-user's viewpoint, comes across as just one thing — music in the audiovisual media — but which cannot be explained without using a wide range of approaches. It would in this sense be naive to expect such institutional mainstays of popular music studies as IASPM or *Popular Music* to have had much success with their interprofessional and/or interdisciplinary agenda. The institutional divides are clearly still in place, the only difference for the company of popular music studies and its cultural capital being that cult studs and their contexts, not musos and their texts, are the majority shareholders.

It must be admitted that the marginalisation of music in popular music studies is frustrating to those of us who started out as musicians, because whatever expertise we may have comes initially from knowledge *in* music — composing, performing, recording, producing, etc. — rather than from talking or writing about it as a social, anthropological or cultural phenomenon. As musicians working in the society and culture we belong to, we spend a lot of time trying to make sound *s* rather than sound *t*, *u* or *v*, believing that sound *s* heard in situation *w* will produce effect *x* rather than effect *y* or *z*. Sometimes we fail to connect because we either misjudge the situation, or fail to produce the sound we were aiming at, but most of the time we do manage to communicate successfully. It is from this perspective of hard-won knowledge and involvement *in* music that the feelings of muso academics run high when we see what we think of as MUSIC being sidelined, disregarded, misunderstood or mythologised by other popular music scholars.

However, although our frustration may be understandable, it can easily plunge us deeper into the Great Divide with its systems of institutionalisation, intellectual canons, career structures, etc. It is at such moments of frustration that we need to step back and ask how we can reasonably expect our non-muso colleagues to deal satisfactorily with musical texts. Where would they acquire the skills to do so, if not from the likes of ourselves? Where were muso academics when Marcus, Marsh, Landau, Christgau, Bangs and Frith started their rock journalism in the late sixties, or when Paul Oliver's book on blues lyrics appeared almost ten years earlier (Oliver 1960)? And where were all the musicologists who might have responded to the idea, expressed by Dave Laing (1969:194-6), that the study of popular music needed a semiotic dimension?<sup>136</sup> The questions are rhetorical. Popular music studies had to come from wherever most of those who tried to write seriously about popular music actually were at the time, and that was not in university departments of music or musicology but in journalism, sociology, communication studies, education, etc. These areas of activity and inquiry in the UK both informed and were informed by a new university subject: *cultural studies*.

According to Mattelart & Neveu (1996), Steele (1997) and Mulhern (2000), cultural studies, a UK university subject established in the mid sixties, derives from various traditions whose institutional homes were at the time outside academe.<sup>137</sup> Those traditions share two general traits in common which are of relevance to the subsequent course taken by popular music studies. The first deals directly with music's virtual exclusion from cultural studies, the second with what we shall call the DEMOCRATIC AGENDA, an important characteristic in popular music studies too.

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136. I was certainly not 'there' for any of them in those days. It was 1971 before I started teaching popular music and 1976 before I seriously started researching questions of popular music analysis.

Almost all cultural studies pioneers examined the verbal or visual media, i.e. the symbolic systems privileged in public education<sup>138</sup> and those which were technologically reproducible for teaching purposes at the time: ‘literally, the sort of thing you could photocopy’, as Simon Frith put it.<sup>139</sup> Their concern with music, as musicians understand the word, was, to say the least, marginal. There was little point in photocopying musical notation, not only because most cultural studies authors and their readership could not decipher it, but also because notation was in any case a medium of storage and dissemination of minor relevance to the popular genres whose sounds they might have been interested in considering.<sup>140</sup> The fact that the last to be hired and first to be fired as staff member at Birmingham’s CCCS was a musicologist is also symptomatic of MUSIC AND MUSICIANS AS A TROUBLESOME APPENDAGE.<sup>141</sup> This failure to take on the *sounds* of music as a form of cultural production requiring particular skills (constructional competence and metatextual, rather than metacontextual, knowledge)<sup>142</sup> is understandable at a time when the old form of musical absolutism held sway in virtually all departments and colleges of music. Besides, cultural studies already had its epistemological hands full assimilating intellectual influences from far and wide. Immersion in a whole mode of knowledge and experience that is neither verbal nor visual would have made matters much more troublesome than they already were.<sup>143</sup>

These reasons for music’s absence in cultural studies were clearly stated by Graham Murdock in an interview from 1980, when he worked at the University of Leicester’s Centre for Mass Communication Research.<sup>144</sup>

‘We’d only use music in as far as it was an example of something else... If there were studies of music illustrating particular processes, then we’d use those... Our students... would be aware... of the famous debate between Adorno, Lazarsfeld and Riesmann.’

Asked ‘how do you tackle the problem of reading a musical text as opposed to reading television?’, Murdock replied:

‘We don’t really get into that... [because] we can’t teach what doesn’t exist. Since the course can’t be any more than an introduction to the existing corpus of literature, and there is so little on this aspect of music, we have to have a sort of proportional representation system on the basis of what literature is actually available. Compared to stuff on

137. I could not have written the next few pages without Mattelart & Neveu (1996), nor without the help of Gaye Poole, Simon Frith, Richard Middleton, Bruce Johnson (phone conversations 020617-18), Dave Laing or Peter Wicke (by phone 020701). These colleagues generously provided me with their time and wisdom, pointing me in the right direction when it comes to understanding the historical and political background to cultural studies. I also asked them all: ‘why do you think cultural studies has been so reluctant to engage with music as text?’ Unfortunately, there is no room here to relay the considerable detail and insight of their answers. I just hope I have not misinterpreted their testimony in what follows.

138. Thanks to Bruce Johnson for sending the chapter ‘Jazz as cultural practice’ in which he expands on the problem of visual primacy (scopocentrism) in our tradition of knowledge (Johnson 2002).

139. Phone conversation with PT, 2002-06-17.

140. For more on problems of notation and popular music, see pp.55-55.

141. The musicologist was Dick Bradley. See ftnts. 93 (p.65), 135 (p.79), 146; Bradley (1992) and Tagg (1980:61-66). TROUBLESOME APPENDAGE is Franco Fabbri’s characterisation (ftnt. 135 p.79). CCCS = Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, UK (see Glossary).

142. For explanation of terms, see Chapter 1 under ‘Types of musical knowledge’ (p.9).

143. See Mattelart & Neveu (1996) for issues of interdisciplinary eclecticism at the CCCS.

144. Interview conducted in Leicester, 1980-03-05 (Tagg 1980:56-61).

television, there's very little on music. That's why music is not prominent on the course, plus the fact that nobody here is specially interested in the sociology of music.'

Murdock was right in 1980 since when the study of relationships between music and the mass media has rarely taken music's specificity as a symbolic system into account. Nor has a rapprochement between cult studs and musos been encouraged by the fact that some musicologists have over the past two decades subjected pop songs to bouts of Schenkerian and other types of formalist analysis.<sup>145</sup> At the same time, cultural studies scholars, especially those researching subcultures, were keenly aware of music's importance in creating identities, but they could not tackle questions of musical meaning, even if they had wanted to, because there was no musicological literature available which presented matters of music semiotics in an accessible way.<sup>146</sup>

However, musicology is not the only party with shortcomings in the interdisciplinary marriage that is popular music studies. Cultural studies too has its fair share of disciplinary ballast. Asked why he thought cultural studies had engaged so little with music as text, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, Dave Laing replied:<sup>147</sup>

'For those of us [in sociology or cultural studies] who had any interest in the music — and there weren't many of us — I think it's true to say that there wasn't much out there by musicologists, except for loners like Wilfrid [Mellers]... But there's more to it than that... I think Adorno got in the way. He had high-art and left-wing cred that suited the way things were going [in the late sixties, early seventies]... in sociology, cultural studies and so on. [H]is 'On Popular Music' served to reinforce a set of prejudices about the popular-classical split, you know, the popular as mind-numbing and the classical as mind-expanding... We knew that pop music... had different values (intensional versus

145. See, for instance, Everett (1986, 1992, 1999) and Covach (1997). For discussion of problems with Schenkerian analysis and pop music, see Gallardo (n.d.) and Middleton (1990: 192-201). We are not suggesting here that Schenkerian analysis is *always* irrelevant to popular music, merely that its use in the study of, for example, pop songs, title themes or film underscore is problematic for two main reasons: [i] Schenkerian precepts of tonal direction, both melodic and harmonic, are more often than not inapplicable to the musical idiom under analysis; [ii] Schenkerian analysis is only concerned with certain aspects of musical *syntax*, not with semantic or pragmatic aspects of musical semiotics (see p. 51 ff.).

146. For example, Hebdige (1978) and Willis (1974, 1978a). 'Who's your supervisor?', I asked Dick Bradley in 1980. 'Paul Willis', replied Bradley, adding: 'He... gave up trying to do anything about the social meaning of pop music and moved to... general stuff about growing up, the change from kid's world to adult world, etc.' (e.g. Willis 1997; see Tagg 1980: 64). In the early nineties, Willis held a seminar at Liverpool University's Institute of Popular Music. On that occasion I asked him why he had not continued with his studies of music's social meanings. He said it was partly due to a shift in his research interests, partly to the fact that 'there wasn't anything out there that I knew about at the time which I thought I could use'.

The most embarrassing example I recall of our inability as musicologists to provide cultural studies with viable models for understanding musical signification comes from the late eighties when the department in which I was working (Musicology, University of Göteborg) was approached by mass communication studies colleagues. Having discovered that 70% of all TV viewing hours included music, and realising that mass-mediated messages needed also to be analysed from a musical angle, those colleagues requested our help. (This was a few years after the establishment of cable TV in the Göteborg area. The figures derive from Lennart Weibull, professor of Media Studies, Department of Political Science, University of Göteborg. The TV programming included music as either underscore, jingles, title themes, etc. or was actual music programming, 'live' or as videos.) Even then, more than twenty years after the establishment of cultural studies in the UK and almost as long after Laing's appeal for a semiotics of popular music (Laing 1969: 194-6), we musicologists were still unable to come up with the goods.

147. Phone conversation with PT, 020701.

extensional and so on) and musicology seemed mostly to be about notes on the page. Popular music wasn't [notes on the page], we thought, even if we had to admit later that people like Gershwin wrote everything down... Besides, [popular music] was so much about style and clothes and a way of life,... not just about the music and definitely not about notes. So,... I don't think it even occurred to us to ask anyone in the Music Department... [and] I don't think any of us were really aware of ethnomusicology either.'

This unawareness of ethnomusicology may be regrettable, given the potential it offered popular music studies (pp.36-39), especially after work by such scholars as Blacking (1976), Feld (1982) and Keil *et al.* (1993) became available, but it is also understandable, since legitimate areas of ethnomusicological inquiry rarely included 'Western... popular (entertainment) music'.<sup>148</sup> Laing's point about Adorno 'getting in the way' of engaging with the musical text, on the other hand, suggests a different set of problems which Peter Wicke also alluded to in answering the same question about the reluctance of cultural studies scholars to deal with music as text.

'First I think it's because they were scared. They just didn't know how to describe sound in a precise way and didn't want to appear handicapped... Then I think there was a pseudo-politicisation when they tried to explain music in social terms when really it was all completely middle-class... Going into the music means confronting other experiences, not just your own... They would have had to theorise their social position in relation to others, but they often just mystified their own cultural experience instead.'<sup>149</sup>

So, what links Adorno 'getting in the way' with the failure of cultural studies scholars to address the musically mediated experiences of others than themselves? How come they failed to theorise their own social position?

Although it is clear that the reluctance of most musicologists to confront issues of music's meanings in a manner accessible to colleagues outside our discipline has been a serious stumbling block to the incorporation of musical texts into the study of contemporary culture, cultural studies has suffered from its own brand of epistemic inertia. The fact that we musos have to use discourse like this to make the obvious point that music studies ought to include *music* while, on the other hand, few cultural studies scholars make the effort to discuss music in terms of the sounds we produce and hear, suggests a serious lack of reciprocity. To put it simply, while we musos must be familiar with Bourdieu and 'embeddedness' in order to communicate with cult-stud colleagues, very few of the latter make the effort to talk to us musos in terms of presets or pentatonicism. For some culturalist scholars of popular music it almost seems as if metacontextual discourse were enough on its own to explain music in contemporary culture. Such an assumption is of course endemic in our educational system, compounded by the hegemony of verbal discourse and by the largely unchallenged notion that music belongs to the world of art or entertainment, not to the realm of 'real' knowledge. This apparently unreflected acceptance, at least in *practice*, of academic logocentricity and scopocentricity is also accompanied by a tendency to 'over-theorise' and 'under-substantiate'. Such empiriphobia

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148. 'Western popular (entertainment) music' is the expression used by Kunst (1959:1). See fnnt. 6 (p.37) for more about ethnomusicology's sanctioned areas of academic safari. My first memory of a more widespread ethnomusicological interest for popular music was a conference on the theme 'doorstep ethnomusicology', organised at Cambridge in the late eighties. The fact that DOORSTEP had to be used to qualify ETHNOMUSICOLOGY suggests that the subject material in question was different from the subdiscipline's conventional areas of inquiry.

149. Phone conversation with PT, 2002-07-01.

may be one aspect of Adorno's shadow hovering over cultural studies approaches to studying popular music, but there are others.

Apart from disregarding musical-structural levels of concretion when writing about popular music, Adorno was never one to provide any other type of empirical evidence for the ideas he propounded about the evils of mass-disseminated music. Members of the working class may have been the agents of revolutionary change in theory but they were little more than passive victims of mass-cultural manipulation in Adorno's brand of criticism which provides no documentation of how those 'victims' actually use music, let alone the opportunity for the 'victims' to speak for themselves. In this way, Adorno's text about popular music has to be seen as a position statement of cultural faith, unsullied by the messy contradiction of APPROPRIATION AND SUBVERSION VERSUS MANIPULATION AND ACQUIESCENCE, a contradiction that would no doubt have come to light if the author had engaged with the music as text and with its actual uses by real people. How, you might well ask, can scholars of contemporary popular culture, including music, lend any credence to such empirically unsubstantiated statements of belief?

There are at least two possible answers to this last question: [1] when cultural studies started, Adorno was thought to be 'all there was' on the question of music and the mass media; [2] Adorno's criticism of mass culture aligned with other agendas for the cultural emancipation of 'the masses' in the early twentieth century. Statements from Murdock (p. 81) and Laing (p. 82) will have to suffice as substantiation for the first answer, but the second answer needs at least a short explanation.

The pioneers of cultural studies, which was to exert such strong influence on the study of popular music, came not from the UK's largely elitist universities but from a tradition of public service in adult education and vocational training whose basic philosophy was egalitarian.<sup>150</sup> To put it simply, if material wealth should be fairly distributed then so should access to culture and education. Now, some believed that the cultural part of this democratic agenda could be put into practice by offering the aesthetic values of the privileged classes to the populace at large. The problem with this charitable agenda, followed by many humanist educators in the earlier part of the twentieth century, lay in the assumption that high art, be it classical or avant-garde, was emancipatory and that popular culture was not. This assumption was flawed because, as we have seen (pp. 18, 23, 26), the appropriation and ossification of high art (including 'classical' music) by the new ruling classes in Europe after the bourgeois revolution served to consolidate more than to challenge the class system that still operated in 1960s Britain. Recycling art associated with bourgeois emancipation from feudalism to students more interested in their own emancipation from the system which had appropriated that same art than in its historical relevance two hundred years earlier was not the most efficient strategy for cultural education. Put another way, although the bourgeois appropriation and ossification process in no way implies that the humanist and emancipatory values of works by a Mozart or a Dickens are forever lost, those same values are at risk if the expression of familiarity with canonic culture can be used as a passport to higher social status, as hegemonic 'cultural capital', as proof of having 'made it' (see p. 23).

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150. For full accounts of the origins and history of cultural studies, see Mattelart & Neveu (1996), Mulhern (2000) and Steele (1997).

The historical paradox just described is one of the problems behind what in cultural studies terms might be called a Leavisite agenda.<sup>151</sup> Adorno's *On Popular Music* could in that sense also be qualified as Leavisite because high art is seen as the liberating counterbalance to a dumbing-down of the masses under the cultural machinery of fascism and commercialism. Such an agenda, however noble its intentions, is nevertheless ahistorical, elitist, and class-centric because it assumes the only valid set of artistic values to be that associated with the emancipation of one's own class under specific historical circumstances. It was certainly an agenda that needed radical adjustment if (groups of) individuals buried beneath terms like 'working class' were to empower themselves for emancipation in terms of their own experience in the mass-media age.

To cut a long story short, it is reasonable to state that, in the earlier stages of its existence, cultural studies sought to put the culture of the popular majority under the academic spotlight by documenting its everyday practices and by focusing discussion of its functions on matters of survival, subversion, resistance and opposition.<sup>152</sup> Of course, the importance of rock and pop music among young people in postwar Britain was not something that could be ignored by scholars following the democratic agenda of the Birmingham centre, and a number of texts appeared which examined cultural identities formed around various types of pop or rock music and which were conceptualised in terms of youth *subcultures*.<sup>153</sup> However, whereas studies of verbally or visually mediated popular culture could draw on a relatively recent body of relevant Marxist literature, for example on Hoggart (1957) for the written word or on Raymond Williams (1974) for television, the only available authority figure with Marxist credentials on the music front seemed to be Adorno who, unlike Hoggart or Williams, failed to provide textual, sociological or ethnographic substantiation for his theorising.<sup>154</sup> As we have already seen, some scholars abandoned their interest in music partly because they could find no musicological equivalent to Hoggart or Williams,<sup>155</sup> while others embraced Adorno, particularly those who found his notions of authenticity could be easily adapted to fit a rockologist aesthetic (see Michelsen 1993). As we argued in our critique of pomorockology, the establishment of the bodyist canon was in part contingent on a failure to deconstruct a core element in the mediation of meaning — music as text.

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151. Leavisite *adj.* following in the footsteps of F R Leavis, founding figure of a basically humanist, non-empirical, elitist and auteur-centric tradition of English literary criticism. It is perhaps paradoxical that his wife, Queenie Leavis, is known for her work in the 1930s on 'mass observation' which documented popular reading habits in considerable ethnographic detail.

152. We are referring here to such work as Hoggart (1957), Raymond Williams (1965, 1974), Thompson (1978), Hall & Jefferson (1975) and Willis (1977, 1978b).

153. For example Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), Paul Willis (1974) on biker-boy culture, and, most influentially, Dick Hebdige's work on subculture (1979).

154. Adorno was of course far from being the only Marxist musicologist whose work was available in the 1960s. However, work by scholars like Assafiev (1976) had yet to be translated into English. Moreover, important work by Marxist musicologists like Knepler (1961), Ling (1983, 1989), Maróthy (1974, 1987) and Stockfelt (1988) remain untranslated to this day. Another problem for non-musos is that these other scholars, unlike Adorno, include the discussion of musical texts in their work. These problems of Anglocentrism and of other filter mechanisms behind the non-translation of Marxist musicology into English cannot be discussed here.

155. See footnote 146 p.82. See also Graham Murdock's comments on page 81.

Since Adorno theorised about popular music without confronting music as text (let alone the actual practices of real people), and since he was, by default,<sup>156</sup> the only musicological authority with Marxist credentials known to English-speaking cultural-studies scholars, he contributed to the legitimisation of approaches to music which shun its concretion as text and which consequently prevent the deconstruction and examination of social meanings and values mediated through the text. Once the text imperative is abandoned, it is, as we saw (pp. 75-76), much easier to construct an absolutist aesthetic which obscures its own class character.<sup>157</sup> It is in this way that Laing's comment about Adorno 'getting in the way' is linked to Wicke's idea about the contribution of cultural studies to a mystification of middle-class cultural experience.<sup>158</sup> Viewed in conjunction with the larger problems of institutionalisation, of consumerism, of a virtually unfettered 'free' market, the minor matter of popular music studies under the influence of Adorno and cultural studies takes on another dimension.

As we noted earlier, rock music was part of the new hegemonic order by 1981, the year in which IASPM was founded and the first issue of *Popular Music* came out of Cambridge University Press. Rock had in general been cut off from the social dynamic of its genesis and was now conservable, recyclable and remarketable. The old SUBVERSIVE UNDERDOG variant of the rock aesthetic was wearing a bit thin as teenagers of *My Generation* (Who, 1965) were pushing forty, many of them now part of the new fun-loving, pop-friendly establishment and some, including this author as well as first-generation cultural studies scholars, employed to teach previously unestablished subjects in established universities. It was also clear by the early eighties that cultural studies was unable to deal with music as text and that musicology was hardly in a position to help. With its institutional establishment, cultural studies also faced the problem of its own success in attracting acolytes like moths to a flame. Unlike the baby-boomer generation, the new recruits had no first-hand experience of the 'Great Leap Forward' from Leroy Anderson's *Blue Tango* (1951) to Elvis's version of *Hound Dog* (1956), nor of what that leap meant in terms of change in patterns of subjectivity. Raised with a TV in the home and with access to 24-hour pop radio channels, the newcomers met an intellectual environment which differed quite radically from what confronted baby-boomers when they went to university twenty years earlier. The new scholars were also about to meet a very different political climate to that of the 1960s as the Thatcher and Reagan regimes unleashed a particularly virulent strain of capitalism on a largely unsuspecting population. British working-class values of community and resistance suffered a severe setback with the defeat of the miners' strike and left-wing intellectuals were in a quandary about how to react as their own security was threatened by government crusades against 'sociology' and by the imposition of monetarist management models on universities. Under these circumstances it was obvious that theories of popular culture developed less than a generation earlier might need some rethinking.

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156. See footnote 154.

157. In the old, text-centred variant of musical absolutism the tables are turned because the 'suprasocial' can only be constructed if the *context* imperative is abandoned. The common denominator for these two variants of aesthetic absolutism is the obscuring of links *between* text and context.

158. Dave Laing's statement is on page 82, Peter Wicke's on page 83.

Describing changes that took place in cultural studies during the 1980s, Mattelart and Neveu (1996) draw attention to several problematic trends, two of which affect the development of popular music studies. The first of these is a shift in emphasis on popular agency away from active participation in sites of opposition to the celebration of mass-culture consumers as agents in the construction of meaning. Of course, information about ‘receivers’ and ‘users’ is vital to the understanding the dynamic of any cultural exchange and it was essential to challenge the auteur-centric determinism of earlier theories of mass culture. However, as Mattelart and Neveu (1996 §70) explain, obsession with the notion of the audience’s freedom to determine the meaning of mass-mediated messages leads to blindness about the relation of ‘receivers’ to the social and economic order which imposes restrictions on the range of readings actually open to negotiation.<sup>159</sup> There is in other words a tendency not only to conflate text with context (pp.75-76) but also to isolate the act of mass-media message reception from its larger social context, such idealisation of ‘alternative readings’ constituting little more than an academic variation on the old INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM OF CHOICE theme chanted by zealots of the ‘free’ market.<sup>160</sup> This change of focus coincides with the replacement of a partially Keynesian economic policy by neo-liberalist monetarism. It also coincides, as readers will recall (p. 74 ff.), with pomo-rockology’s abandonment of the SUBVERSIVE UNDERDOG in favour the DE-CONTEXTUALISED BODY.

The other problem with the 1980s ‘generation change’ in cultural studies is the trend towards over-theorisation. Mattelart and Neveu (1996 §69) do not mince words on this issue.

‘Faced with a world whose complexity is no more than a convenient slogan, Cultural Studies took up the challenge by introducing an abusive inflation of meta-discourses rather than by investigating a theory of that complexity.’<sup>161</sup>

The main reason for this trend, the authors argue, is the institutionalisation of cultural studies, more particularly the subject’s apparent inability to manage its own success inside an establishment to which it was at least partially opposed and, perhaps most significantly, its loss of its social foothold outside academe (*ibid.* §62). One symptom of this institutional malaise was that one of the subject’s most influential theoretical models, that of subcultural opposition, became something of a paradox once it was itself part of a successful enterprise: it was a sort of minor ac-

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159. ‘À force de s’obnubiler sur les « lectures négociées » et la liberté individuelle de déterminer le sens des messages, on en oublie totalement dans quelle société vit le récepteur, quelle marge de manœuvre dans l’autonomie individuelle et la contrainte, l’ordre social et productif laisse effectivement aux usagers’ (*ibid.* §§70, 76). The school’s ‘rediscovery’ of structuralism and empirical reception studies does not work, argue the authors, ‘lorsqu’il refuse de distinguer entre la consommation quasi-obligée du loisir télévisuel par des agents dominés et le choix d’un programme, lorsque l’attention à l’autonomie des récepteurs glisse vers une apologie naïve où la capacité des téléspectateurs à recoder ou braconner le flux télévisuel rend caduque toute interrogation sur les contenus, ou l’appréciation des programmes, lorsque le renouvellement des études de réception traite des « codes culturels » sans chercher à en expliciter la genèse et le *modus operandi*.’

160. See for example ‘Cross-cultural readings of *Dallas*’ (Liebes & Katz, 1993).

161. The passage continues: ‘It should be remembered that the label “theory” is only warranted by conceptual constructions which help solve problems and which renew our ability to understand objects...The conceptual sophistry [of Cultural Studies in the 1980s] conceals modes of thinking which are drenched in conformity and which are unable to tackle the new power relations that arise with the generalisation of technical and productive systems.’

ademic parallel to the more blatant anomaly of continuing to celebrate the SUBVERSIVE UNDERDOG when rock was already part of the big-business establishment.<sup>162</sup> The question is: if cultural studies was severed from the social dynamic of its genesis in adult education and vocational training, if it confronted a crisis of theoretical modelling under changed circumstances, and if it had to accommodate an expanding range of topics and approaches covered by an increasing number of scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds who identified different aspects of its theory as potential ways of understanding different aspects of contemporary mass culture, then what on earth *was* cultural studies? How could it identify itself and how could its followers identify with *it*? It does not seem that cultural studies as an academic institution developed any explicit strategy for solving the problem but rather that its acolytes, perhaps through fear of losing a valued sense of intellectual community, felt obliged to find levels of discourse that could, at least theoretically, be seen to unite a quite disparate range of ideas under the same umbrella. Thus, for example, texts published in the late eighties and early nineties by popular music scholars of the cultural-studies persuasion tended to include disproportionate amounts of metatheory. All too often those texts read more like a mantra of intellectually canonic terms and personalities to which fellow acolytes could relate, less like honest attempts to demystify the complexity of music's meanings and uses in society.<sup>163</sup> It would, in short, be far from misleading to suggest that the original democratic educational agenda of cultural studies — to help empower the popular majority to understand, criticise and change their own conditions — was to a significant extent sidelined by forces of institutional consolidation in the late eighties.

Given the domination of popular music studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s by the cultural studies tradition, it would be strange if the two problematic tendencies just mentioned were not discernible in popular music studies, too. Indeed, we have

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162. This problem is central to any study of popular culture but cannot be discussed in detail here. However, it is clear that the issue involves underlying problems of political theory. To quote Mattelart & Neveu again (1996 §35): 'Although Cultural Studies, particularly in Hoggart's case, was able to devote unprecedented attention to non-hegemonic cultures [*cultures dominées*], to treat them with respect and without connivance [*complaisance*], analyses from the Birmingham school have not always escaped the twin dangers of populism and "underdogism" [*miserabilisme*]. It would be worth asking if "populist" divarications identified at the end of the eighties may not have precedents in the generous use of the label "resistance" to cover a range of cultural traits and practices which might just as well be understood as the resigned acceptance of domination, as the admission of impotence behind the mask of derision or insolence.'

163. 'Even the most benevolent readers will find a plethora of articles which will slip out of their hands because they are no more than the most soporific of Marxological exegeses or just woolly theorising' [*théoricisme pâteux*] (*ibid.* §37). Between about 1987 and 1996 the journal *Popular Music* contained more than its fair share of this strange type of discourse.

It is also worth noting the critical comments of Mattelart & Neveu on the importation of 'la *French Theory*' (*sic*) into cultural studies. 'Another Marxist to play a strategic role in the mid seventies was Althusser, an Althusser whose curious escorts were Lacan and Levi-Strauss, together forming a trinity whose coherence seemed more aleatory when viewed from Paris' (*ibid.* §32). 'The attention paid to structuralism, together with the increasing space Cultural Studies devoted to the media and their messages, explains the considerable importance accorded to the importation of what became known as French Theory [*ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler la French Theory*], to the extent that [E P] Thompson felt obliged to speak out thunderously [*fulminer*] against what he called "the electrification of the Paris-London line". Barthes, the first to benefit from this interest, was soon joined by several other authors participating in the "semiotic adventure" around the journal *Communications*, or rather *Tel Quel*: Metz, Kristeva' (§33).

just noted the trend towards over-theorising and we have previously criticised pomo-rockology's bodyist celebration of individual consumers in textless pseudo-contexts. We have also repeatedly lamented the marginalisation of music and musicians in both cultural studies and popular music studies. It may therefore seem surprising that, given all the obstacles to progress in popular music studies (institutionalisation, disciplinary division, epistemic inertia, careerism, the shadow of Adorno, over-theorising, the loss of socio-political foothold, musical absolutism old and new, etc.), a considerable amount of useful cross-disciplinary innovation has nevertheless taken place within popular music studies. There is no room to mention more than a few examples of such work, but the following (in alphabetical order) should be enough to give a rough idea of the type of work we mean: Brackett (1995) on pop music analysis, Cloonan & Johnson (2000) on popular music as a tool of oppression, Collins (2002) on industrial music, Fabbri (1982, 2000) on genre, Frith (1996) on pop music from most conceivable angles, Green (2001) on how popular musicians learn, Järviuoma (1994) on the effects and meanings of sounds and soundscapes, Lacasse (2000) on the semiotics of vocal staging, Laing (1985) on punk, van Leeuwen (1999) on speech, music and sound, Middleton (1990) on studying popular music, Michelsen *et al.* (2000) on English-language rock criticism, Stilwell (1997) on the music for *Die Hard*, Tamlyn (1998) on drum patterns in early rock, Toynbee (2000) on music making and institutions, Walser (1993) on heavy metal, Wicke (1998) on the cultural history of pop, etc. Moreover, there is no doubt that debate about ways of putting MUSIC back into popular music studies has increased over the last few years and that younger colleagues (e.g. Collins, Lacasse, Stilwell, Tamlyn) play an important part in that process of reintegration.

## Conclusion and bridge

The simplest way to summarise this chapter about the possible decline of musical absolutism is perhaps in terms of AGAINST ALL ODDS. Those main ODDS AGAINST can be listed as a series of eight EVEN IF clauses à la Kipling.<sup>164</sup> Those eight conditional clauses are completed by one final main clause containing NEVERTHELESS, as follows.

1. *Even if* musical absolutism may still survive in many conservative seats of musical learning;
2. *even if* many ethnomusicologists habitually apply their ETHNO methods to any other *ethnos* but our own;
3. *even if* 'music semiotics' may be a misnomer for much of what has paraded under that banner;
4. *even if* pomo-rockology may have invented a new brand of aesthetic absolutism;
5. *even if* cultural studies may have wandered down blind alleys of postmodernising metatheory;
6. *even if* the ghost of Adorno still haunts the corridors of cultural academe;
7. *even if* music is still largely excluded from communication studies depart-

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164. See Rudyard Kipling's famous poem 'If', which came to epitomise the British STIFF UPPER LIP mentality (see Section 'Stiff upper lip sighs' in our analysis of Tune 1). To read the actual poem and for some background information about it, visit the Internet Modern History Sourcebook at [www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kipling-if.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kipling-if.html) |.

ments and marginalised in film studies;

8. *even if* popular music studies faces all the risks that its institutionalisation brings about etc., etc.;

there can *nevertheless* be little doubt about the big picture for the following principal reasons.

1. Ethnomusicologists have established that it is necessary to think of music in culturally relativist terms. They have also provided important tools to help us understand how musical sounds relate to the culture in which they are produced.
2. Many anthropologists and sociologists have documented the musical habits and values of different populations, underlining the necessity of cultural relativism and raising important questions about the uses and values of music.
3. Despite a general tendency to regress into formalism, some semioticians of music have started to deal with semantic and pragmatic, as well as syntactic, elements of music.
4. Despite all its problems, popular music studies has to date produced an encouraging array of interdisciplinary work which seeks in various ways to deal with the relationship of music to its meanings, uses and perceived values. In short, musical absolutism may still exist in guises old or new, but its position has been weakened during the past fifty years.

In today's media-saturated society it would of course be even sillier to pretend that music can be treated as if it related to nothing but itself. With the rapid development of audiovisual digital technology, with a remarkable growth in the number of internet users, and with a worldwide decline in CD sales, it is also becoming increasingly difficult, in material as well as theoretical terms, to dissociate the AUTONOMY aspect of music's RELATIVE AUTONOMY from its RELATIVITY vis-à-vis other symbolic systems. Given these recent changes in mass-media habits and technology, the task of developing a musicology of the mass media is particularly urgent, not least in view of the fact that, as we have seen, many epistemic obstacles still remain before the democratic agenda we set out for a musicology of the mass media (p.7) can be implemented to any significant extent.

The most serious epistemic obstacle is of course the fact that the language musos use to refer to the sounds of music is gobbledegook to most people. McClary & Walser (1990:289-280) illustrate the problem as follows.

'[T]he sad fact is that what created a particular effect in a piece of music — an effect so powerful that it can make an arena full of nonmusicians jump to their feet and scream with ecstasy — can be the result of an E-natural [e♮] rather than E-flat [e♭]. The sociologist who has jumped up with excitement... turns to the adjacent musicologist and asks: "How did that happen?" The musicologist... replies: "You were expecting an E-flat and he sang an E-natural"... [T]he sociologist explodes because she knows perfectly well that she was not expecting an E-flat [e♭], that... she would not know an E-flat [e♭] from a hole in the wall'...

'Without the possibility of live sound demonstration,... musicologists seem to have two principal alternatives. They either write in an impressionistic manner that may capture something of the way the music feels... or they try to explain precisely how the effect was achieved... [It's] a choice between poetic or technical mystification.'

This conflict between, on the one hand, the musicologist's culturally acquired competence in metatextual discourse that allows him/her to come up with the correct constructional descriptors for the musical structures giving rise to the audience reaction (the  $e\sharp$  and the  $e\flat$ ) and, on the other, the receptional competence of the sociologist knowing when to jump and scream ecstatically — also the result of cultural learning — illustrates the main problem we address in this book. If our intention is to help establish the foundations of a semiotic musicology of use to those studying non-verbal communication in the mass media as part of a democratic educational agenda (see p. 7), then we will need to give this question high priority.

The ideal solution would be to work out a set of receptional (phenomenological) descriptors of musical structure that everyone could understand. Unfortunately, that solution is unrealistic for two obvious reasons. [1] Reception and interpretation of musical structures vary notoriously from one culture to culture, even inside the same piece of music depending on its syntax, so the same musical structure can be labelled 'longing' in one context but signify closure in another.<sup>165</sup> [2] As long as musicians (and music programmers) are needed by their fellow humans to create new music, they will need to refer to the sounds they make in construction-friendly terms. For example, when describing what to play (or what is being played), it is much more convenient, more accurate, more efficient and quicker to say 'minor add nine' than something like 'you know, the chord that can sound sad and bitter-sweet if you play it smoothly, slowly and quietly, like at the start of the main theme from the 1966 film version of *Romeo & Juliet*, but which can have an edgy or even threatening feel if you play it repeatedly, loud and in a fast tempo, like in the chase music from Bertolucci's *1900*'.<sup>166</sup>

However, the obvious need for constructional descriptors does not mean that they have to dominate metatextual discourse to the extent that they have done hitherto in our tradition of knowledge. Besides, our educational agenda (p. 7) demands at least that we work towards a popularisation of metatextual discourse by increasing the availability of receptional descriptors. One huge problem facing this project is of course that very few ready-made receptional descriptors exist and that new ones have to be constructed, mainly from scratch. Now, although the main part of this book puts forward a few new receptional descriptors, that is not its primary aim. We have rather sought to lay the methodological foundations for such a construction process so that a more generally accessible type of musicology can be developed on solid ground. The analyses in this book are still a long way from that musicology because, although it would have been tempting to present some immediately user-friendly descriptors on the basis of no more than our own hunches about which musical structures communicated what, we thought it wiser to base any conclusions we might come to on a combination of detailed structural analysis and extensive empirical data gathered from the reception tests we conducted.

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165. See discussion of the tritone hook in Abba's *Fernando* (Tagg, 2000b: 50-59), especially the section 'Confusion or conclusion' (*ibid.* 64-65).

166. \*Rota (1966), see Tune 4 in this book; 'Apertura della caccia' (Morricone 1976a).

The central point of the analyses we present concerns the different ways in which responses from the reception tests relate to the musical structures of the pieces eliciting those responses. It is the nexus of such relations that houses the potential for developing a vocabulary of receptional descriptors. To make such connections between listener responses and musical structures we have had to use constructional descriptors to denote those structures because we know of no existing receptional equivalents. This is the fundamental and ironic reason why this book, which advocates a popularisation of metatextual discourse, contains a fair amount of what, from a non-muso viewpoint, may seem like gobbledygook. We sincerely regret this 'technical mystification' but it will be necessary to refer to musical structures in constructional terms until receptional equivalents can be established, which, in its turn, can only occur when a receptional descriptor can be unequivocally related to a structure, which must logically be designated in existing terms, which means more constructional 'gobbledygook' until etc., etc. It is a vicious circle which in one sense reflects the inevitable truism that music would not need to exist if its particular manner of symbolising human experience were interchangeable with that of other symbolic systems.

However, since music demonstrably interacts in practice with other forms of expression, and since it clearly relates, mainly by means of homology, connotation, cross-reference and cultural convention, to phenomena outside itself, the circle can hardly be regarded as impenetrable. Therefore, while it would be pointless to try translating music into words, pictures or into any other form of human expression, it would, as we have repeatedly argued, be equally absurd to pretend that music was inscrutable, locked away in an absolutist black box. Of course, receptional descriptors cannot and should not replace the relative reliability and precision of constructional terms, but there is no reason to suggest that their development cannot help break the vicious absolutist circle, no reason to believe that the receptional competence of non-musos has nothing to do with how music is constructed, and no reason at all to assume that the connections between music as structure and reception are in any way random, or that they are inherently inscrutable or unsystematisable.<sup>167</sup> There is moreover absolutely no good ethical reason for denying non-musos the right to a vocabulary which may help them talk or write about music more convincingly on the basis of their own receptional competence. Whether such a project will have any success remains to be seen. Whatever the outcome, if the vicious circle of absolutism, old or new, is not broken more often than has been the case up to now, we may never develop a popular musicology of the mass media, let alone contribute to the dissolution of the disciplinary and epistemological boundaries that have so negatively affected the position of music in our institutions of education and research.

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167. Readers may recall one of the initial quotes to Chapter 1: 'We still complacently assume that consciousness is sense and that the unconscious is nonsense' (Jung 1964:92).