

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

THE MUSICAL OBJECT  
IN CONSUMER CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

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Where music has been produced as a commodity, as is much popular music, its status sometimes appears to be reflected in its material. Its standardized forms and rationalized content are comparable to those features of mass-produced commodities. This was the basis for Adorno's infamous critique. In fact, the popular music of the 1930s that was the subject of Adorno's critique was not actually mass-produced at all, but handcrafted. Adorno's criticism would seem far more pertinent to the highly repetitive music of contemporary dance culture. But however standardized even this music might sound, I argue that the organization of its material cannot be ascribed to the facts of its production. Rather, than modes of production affecting musical material in a direct way, it is my thesis that commodity production informs an aesthetic paradigm. It is this paradigm that is subsequently realized in the standardized forms of popular music.

Issues of how we relate to musical material, and how it relates to us, have troubled scholars for centuries. Television commercials are a useful resource to consider such questions, as they are usually contrived to communicate something quite blatant to the viewer – typically the desirability of a product or its producer. Since 1983, British Airways has consistently used the “Flower Duet” from Delibes' opera *Lakmé* in its advertisements. I argue that the music itself has no meaning in the semantic sense, but that (following Cook, 1994) the music facilitates the emergence of meanings given elsewhere in the multimedia form. Nevertheless, a piece of music can signify as a result of its association with a product or brand. This is particularly interesting in the case of the “Flower Duet”: despite being subject to severe distortions in British Airways' commercials, the musical sign remains intact.

The standardization of some popular music also poses problems for musical aesthetics in terms of its value. Repetitive forms are typically dismissed. Given that the majority of people enjoy the experience of ‘low’ forms of musical expression, it is not surprising that aesthetic theory is often regarded as irrelevant. I attempt to rectify this situation by proposing a formalist approach to aesthetics that does not privilege the objects of particular cultural institutions, but regards all objects presented to the senses on equal footing – even highly repetitive dance music. Importantly for music scholarship, I argue that the isolation of the musical object that this approach requires is not an outmoded concept (I am not exhuming the concept of autonomous music) but is a perceptual reality, practised regularly by listeners.

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## INTRODUCTION

Music is seemingly everywhere in post-industrial society. It is piped into offices, factories, shops and other public spaces. It also features in many leisure activities – at the cinema, disco, restaurant, fun fair and sports events. These are all examples of music in the public domain. While this demonstrates the ubiquity of aural phenomena in the media age, the use of music that is paradigmatic of post-industrial consumerism is carried out privately. Whether it is beamed into our living spaces via radios, televisions or personal computers, or realized from recordings, domestic entertainment often has a musical component. We typically choose recordings from our private collections to accompany activities as diverse as dinner parties and routine household chores. And the same is true outside the house: the in-car entertainment system or personal stereo provides music to relieve the boredom of travel. But we do not use music simply as an accompaniment to other activities. Importantly for this thesis, we sometimes choose to listen to music for no other reason than to listen to it: to venture into its sound world and lose ourselves there for a while.

The private use of music is paradigmatic of post-industrial capitalism because the music that makes up our personal collections, and that we choose for any of these activities, reflects our perceptions of ourselves and our relation to society in much the same way as the other goods we consume – the clothes we wear, our household furnishings, and the cars we drive, for example. In

saying this, some might accuse me of depicting contemporary society as a consumerist utopia, ignoring the social problems and deprivation that still exist in advanced economies. However, a substantial proportion of the population in the first world (and even parts of the third) enjoys something of this utopia. In such an economic climate, the harsh realities of basic subsistence give way to issues of consumption – the ‘problem’ of how best to spend one’s disposable income, and one’s leisure time.

Musical commodities, such as compact discs, vie for consumers’ attention alongside a plethora of other luxury goods; the opportunity to spend one’s time indulging a love of aural phenomena competes with an ever-increasing number of leisure activities. Interestingly, music is also frequently used to market those other goods and activities, whether in the literal sense of ‘bringing them to the marketplace’ – as it is used in shops, malls, restaurants, and so forth – or in television and radio commercials. Although music used as a marketing tool might not appear to be a commodity in the same way as a bought compact disc (the economic exchange involved is far more complex, and may not even involve the listener directly) it is, nevertheless, a commodified musical experience. It is also available for apprehension in the same way as the more obviously commodified recording, even though it may not be designed with this intention. A classic example of this phenomenon is the music video, initially conceived as a marketing vehicle but ultimately consumed (and reconceived) as a commodity in its own right.

The concept of listening as a leisure activity can make musical consumption sound very passive. Indeed, a lot of music in consumer culture reflects this mode of listening, being designed specifically to not require active engagement. Rather, it is intended to provide an aural backdrop in front of which the real action can take place, whether that be buying and selling, or eating and chatting. Whether or not one chooses to class the subconscious absorption of music as consumption is a matter of semantics. I like to think of musical consumption being characterized by an altogether more active attention to the musical material. But this kind of attentive listening is not at all incongruent with leisure. I have already described the way in which we sometimes listen as an end in itself. Typically, this sort of listening involves an engagement with the musical material, and an apprehension of at least some of its internal logic, in much the same way that we become engrossed in a novel, a drama, or a game. Music as a social activity often requires something of this engagement, whether the physical environment and social conventions that frame the musical material are those of the gala concert or the nightclub. And other social activities, such as *Karaoke* and mixing, explicitly involve participants in creating music. These activities blur the distinction between consumption and production, and redefine the relationship between the subject and the musical object (Yano, 1996). DJs, and composers who are heavily reliant on samples, create aural complexes or *montages* from previously created musical commodities. The resulting cultural field is characterized by a vibrant intertextuality, which is mirrored in popular musical production in



general. The same intertextuality is also evident in television commercials – another mass cultural form, and one in which music is often a foreground feature.

Academic interest in consumerism reflects the number of disciplines which deal with contemporary culture (the social and political sciences are the most obvious examples – as in Bowlby, 1993; Campbell 1987, 1996; Ewen, 1976, 1988, 1990; Ewen and Ewen, 1978; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Slater, 1993) or whose object of study is a constituent of it (such as musicology). A number of academic discussions of music specifically reflect its position in contemporary cultural discourse: attention has been paid to music as an environmental element in shopping malls (Sterne, 1997) in advertising campaigns (Blair, 1990; G. Cook, 1992; N. Cook, 1994; Gorn, 1982; Gorn *et al.*, 1991; Hecker, 1984; Huron, 1989; Park and Young, 1986; Pitt and Abratt, 1988; Smith and Curnow, 1966; Stewart, Farmer, and Stannard, 1990; Stout and Rust, 1986; Stout and Leckenby, 1988; Springer, 1992) and in business strategies (Denisoff and Plasketes, 1990; Ross, 1996). Music is also discussed in analyses of the texts of consumer culture (Geis, 1982; Goodwin, 1993; Myers, 1986) or their place in the wider socio-cultural context (Frith, 1981, 1988, 1996; Shepherd 1982; Shepherd *et al.*, 1977; Shepherd and Wicke, 1997, Shumway, 1992).

Scholars working outside musicology have typically been unwilling or unequipped to focus on the musical material itself. Theodor Adorno, a trained composer as well as a critical theorist, is a notable exception – although the

extent and critical edge of his analytical engagement with musical texts has been questioned (see, for example, Paddison 1993: 171). Even within the discipline, however, musicologists have often chosen to deal with the music of mass culture from a socio-cultural or historical angle (for example Stilwell, 1995; Wicke, 1982) rather than from a conventional music theoretical position. Despite some notable discussions of popular musical texts (for example, Hawkins, 1992; Middleton, 1990; Tagg, 1979) the impression sometimes given is that while musicology and theory are capable of dealing with the music of previous epochs, they have little to contribute to the understanding of the music of our own culture. Indeed, Middleton (1990) argues that a synthesis of musicology and sociology is required if we are to understand popular music. There is some foundation to the belief that popular music cannot be explained by conventional music theory. As musicologists or theorists we are fortunate that our object of study can be broken down into syntactic elements. Thus we are able to salvage something of the experience (pitch classes, and their temporal positions). Nevertheless, much of what we classify as musical information is informed by the musical culture in which we work; accordingly, much of what constitutes a significant part of the musical experience for many listeners slips through this conventional representational net.

There are some musical traditions for which this is particularly problematic. Timbre, rhythmic displacement, 'feel', *portamenti*, micro-tunings, and so on, are very much foregrounded in much contemporary popular music compared to the more abstract melodic and harmonic content privileged in

scriptist analysis. This music is usually composed in an aural manner: bands ‘jam’ out ideas; samples are incorporated regardless of key or time signature; composers use synthesizers and engage with specific sounds from the very beginning of the creative process. The music is often the accumulation of numerous compositional processes at a sequencer and mixing desk, continually auditioned and progressively refined until a definitive aural object is produced. In this kind of musical culture it is impossible to distinguish between the composition of a piece of music and its performance (where these kinds of details would be conventionally added). To study such music in transcription is often quite inappropriate as it distances us from the primary object of study. Indeed, the surrogate object it substitutes is often so impoverished as to be hardly recognizable – this is the case with much popular music.

The problem this creates for the analysis of popular music is obvious, for conventional academic approaches to music often appear to take this surrogate object as the object of study. From this perspective, the music often seems to be a notational system with an appended sound world rather than an aural phenomenon. Furthermore, the notational object is explored and charted with the aid of additional scripted objects so that the scripts sometimes seem to take on a life of their own, apparently unrelated to the aural object on which they are intended to shed light. At the same time, though, it is difficult to study music in any detail without recourse to some graphic representation, and conventional notation has proved hard to equal in terms of comprehensibility. And while the conventional approach clearly has some fundamental problems,

it does at least give us *something* to grasp in our analysis. By contrast, the non-musicological approaches to popular music that prevail in sociology and cultural studies are unsatisfactory to the extent that their analytical tools have no real purchase on the intramusical aspects of the experience. One might think that this would provide musicologists with ample justification for their methodology, a point made by Covach (1999) and Moore (1993), but this is not always the case. And ironically, the main challenge to the validity of music theoretical approaches has come not from outside musicology, but from within – from so-called ‘New’ musicologists, who have argued for a more ‘enlightened’ consideration of music in view of postmodern positions regarding knowledge and objectivity. In particular, ‘New’ musicology took post-Marxist thought in cultural studies as its model.

#### ‘FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS’: FROM MARX TO McCLARY

Marx’s analysis of the capitalist system of production and the structure of the commodities produced within it (trans. 1918) has been profoundly influential. This influence is particularly clear in cultural studies, an academic tradition on which the present study must inevitably draw. In the discussion of localized socio-cultural issues, this methodology has provided an effective critical position. Nevertheless, the universalizing tendency of the theory is difficult to escape.

Marx proposed a meta-historical theory in which history is seen as a process moving from slavery to utopian communism, with feudalism and capitalism being stages on the way. This hypothesis has largely been

discounted. Nevertheless, the tendency to see history in this way is apparent in many accounts of media and music which similarly describe the development from administered to democratic production (Attali, trans. 1985; Benjamin, trans. 1973; Cutler, 1984; McLuhan, 1964; Shepherd, 1982). Apart from the wider historiographic project, Marx's point was fundamentally that the social and economic institutions were artificial constructs that impeded the natural progression of society; in other words, that they were ideological. Any belief that the system or its components were other than this could thus be described as 'false consciousness' – literally, that the subject was conscious of neither man's 'true' condition, nor the artificiality of the current situation. In the most reductionist application of the theory, the socio-cultural field is structured as a binary opposition between the concerns of capital (the economic agenda and the false-consciousness of the bourgeois incorporated into it) and the concerns of mankind (our true nature). This makes it difficult to critique: anything positive recognized in capitalist society can simply be dismissed as false-consciousness. Thus, young people apparently enjoying the products of the entertainment industry are remarked upon for their incorporation within the system (Adorno, ed. 1990; trans, 1991). Similarly, the formal characteristics of those products are remarked upon for the way in which they exemplify the system and entrap their subjects (Adorno, ed.1990; Leavis, 1930).

False consciousness is not limited to the perceptions of those within the capitalist system, of course. The same argument can be advanced against our perception of anything. How do we arbitrate between true and false, or

appearance and reality? Such an approach is closely related to philosophical scepticism: like scepticism, it questions the reality of the fundamentals of our world, in this case socio-political structures. This is a compelling philosophical stance, which forces us to question the most basic elements of our reality. In the most extreme applications (solipsism and radical scepticism) aspects of our own reality, and the reality of the world in which we move, can be shown to be merely unreliable hypotheses, constructed rather than experienced.

Exposing the constructedness of things, and attempting to deconstruct them, has invigorated cultural studies. The success of the resulting 'critical theory' has encouraged similar approaches to other disciplines – including musicology. Critical theory makes us aware of our frames of reference, our institutions and our assumptions. In exposing the constructedness of theoretical frameworks, it also enjoys the privilege of suggesting alternative analytical insights that prevail when a new theoretical framework is substituted. McClary (1991) provides a musicological example when she puts forward an analysis of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony based on a gender typology constructed from Bizet's *Carmen*. If one holds that no single analytical approach to a text can be privileged, then analyzing it in terms of gender is perfectly valid – and is far more accessible for non-musicologists than a Schenker graph, it must be admitted. However, the alternative epistemological positions taken by postmodern scholars must not be assumed to be deconstructive. McClary (1993) is not simply playing an intellectual game in

analyzing texts on the basis of gender. Her project is to expose the patriarchal “narrative agendas” in cultural discourse.

Earlier I compared an aspect of Marxism to philosophical scepticism. The comparison holds true inasmuch as both highlight the constructedness of the fundamental elements of our experience. But there is an essential difference between the two. Where scepticism is the tentative confrontation of a subject with the unknown or unknowable world within which he or she acts, the Marxist account is meta-subjective, positioning itself outside the sphere on which it passes judgment, and prescribing that which in our culture is true, and that which is false. The assumption that such a meta-subjective stance is tenable at all actually epitomizes false consciousness, revealing the ideological nature of the whole enterprise. Even the most sophisticated expressions of the theory, which are self-consciously anti-positivistic (for example, Adorno and Horkheimer, trans. 1979; Marcuse, 1991), are prone to the same problem. So, too, is contemporary critical theory. And it is a debilitating problem for disciplines involved in analysis as well as theory. How should one proceed when the validity of the tools one uses, the academic community or tradition in which one works, and even the objects one chooses to analyze are called into question? This is the main problem with ‘New’ musicology as practical musicology: it has argued itself out of a direct dealing with musical material on the grounds that to do so would require the construction of an autonomous musical object which it holds to be theoretically untenable (Leppert and McClary, 1987: xiii).

## MUSIC AS MARKETING TOOL

While musicology has clear problems with constituting music as an object of study, other disciplines have a far more blasé attitude to such matters. The use of music in marketing campaigns, typically in television commercials, is commonplace. Accordingly, the contribution of music to such campaigns is a subject for marketing theory. The reason for music's use in this commercial context is one of the perennial themes of musical aesthetics: music is felt to be referential in an emotional if not a semantic sense (Beardsley, 1958; Davies, 1994; Langer, 1951; Meyer 1956, Scruton, 1989; 1993; Pratt, 1931). The attraction to the advertising industry of such a form of communication is obvious. Marketing theorists believe that we consume largely on the basis of emotions rather than reacting to products in a purely rational way (see for example Isen, 1984: 534-537). This is reflected by advertising strategies, which since the 1970s have moved away from heavily verbal, rational appeals in favour of 'lifestyle' commercials. Typically these commercials encode psychographic categories (leadership, independence, compulsiveness, conformity, and gregariousness) for the purposes of targeting certain types of consumer.<sup>1</sup> Lifestyle commercials de-emphasize verbal informational content in favour of images, often in rapid succession and timed to music – the 'vignette' approach – which are designed to “sell feelings and emotion rather than products directly” (Jhally, ed. 1988: 20). So our purchase decisions are

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<sup>1</sup> Dunn and Barban (1986: 301-303) define psychographics as “measures of personality characteristics” which reflect “the unique way a person sees himself or herself in relation to job, leisure activities, and buying habits.”



governed by human qualities that we project on to products, or we imagine will be realized through a product.

The motivation for such a strategy is made clear in a behavioural analysis by Michael Geis (1982: 56): “Humans are inferencing creatures, trained to maximize their inferencing capacities rather than to minimize them.” As a result, “untutored speakers must be said to be quite vulnerable to compelling, even invalid, inferences of advertising copy.” It is for this reason that bodies such as the Advertising Standards Agency were established to police the claims made in advertisements. As Cook (1994: 35) points out, music can be used to make similar inferences in commercials with impunity. The example he gives is a commercial for Prudential financial services in which the resolution of an extended cadential process in the music coincides with the on-screen presentation of the Prudential logo. The implication is that Prudential financial products will completely (re)solve all the viewer’s financial problems – an assertion that would raise eyebrows if stated verbally.

Advertising and marketing theorists have paid some attention to harnessing music’s potential. Typically, however, their attempts to quantify music’s effects are very simplistic. For example, Stout and Rust (1986) compare responses to two versions of the same commercial, one with music, and the other without. They do not refer to the music they used for their experiment by name, genre or instrumentation. Indeed, the general tone of their conclusions lead one to believe that any music would fulfill the same function. The assumption is that music creates affect, and following Batra and Ray

(1983) affective stimuli may be subject to a greater degree of processing than non-affective stimuli, so may be more memorable. Whether a more memorable advertisement is actually more effective is a matter of contention among marketing theorists. Indeed, while words like 'effective' are qualitative in their commonsense usage, the advertising theorists clearly believe that effectiveness, affect, purchase intentions, and so on, can all be measured quantitatively in experiments. In the case of effectiveness, it is argued that an effective advertisement is one that elicits a favourable response from its subjects, so one simply has to measure their responses. Another strain of advertising theory focuses on the possibility of conditioning an association between a product and a piece of music (Blair, 1990; Gorn, 1982, 1991; Pitt and Abratt, 1988) in the hope that a favourable response to a piece of music can be 'attached' to a product. It is precisely such a conditioned response that enables the "Flower Duet" to refer to British Airways. Nevertheless, beyond such explanations, the methodological gulf between the two disciplines means that marketing theory has little to offer musicological investigation.

## MUSIC AS AESTHETIC OBJECT

I have described the different ways in which musicology and marketing theory objectify music. There is, however, a fundamental sense in which music constitutes an object, and it is this sense in which I use the term 'musical object' in this thesis. However else music is used, and whatever else it might constitute, it is always an aesthetic object.

Conventional aesthetics, in the Kantian tradition, is burdened with some hefty prejudices. Rather than being simply the esoteric and rather whimsical pastime that some consider art appreciation to be, the issues of aesthetics are those which trouble philosophy in general: questions regarding our existence, knowledge, systems of beliefs, values and so forth. And the importance of these matters weighs heavily. Conservative aesthetics is not concerned with simple pleasures, but profound truths. Art is reified as truth immanent in material, engagement with which can transform the subject. In the Romantic era, the responsibility of discharging this duty was seen as the preserve of the genius, and something of this notion survives in popular culture to this day.

Critics of post-industrial society are reluctant to recognize the democratization of aesthetic experience that has occurred, or the significance of the emergence of the mass culture that popular music and advertising represent. Paradoxically, this is not only true of conservative aesthetics, but also of the Marxist approach that requires a critical stance to the capitalist system and all it entails. In the latter case, the object of attack is the bourgeois society created by the capitalist mode of production, and which enabled the creation of a mass culture industry. For aestheticians like Adorno who worked within the Marxist tradition, the two ideological imperatives become intertwined in a monolithic theory of aesthetics (trans. 1984): if art is concerned with truth, then it must critique the capitalist system; if a cultural object is not created in opposition to the capitalist superstructure, or worse

still, if it is produced within it, then it could not be art but could only exemplify or appeal to the false consciousness of the bourgeoisie.

In using the word 'aesthetic' I do not wish to invoke these historical or ideological concepts. On the contrary, I use the word in the strict etymological sense, referring to the perception of stimuli at the most fundamental level of human engagement – as raw sense-data. Musical aesthetics, as I understand it, is principally concerned with the way in which we perceive pieces of music, the way they are constituted as aural objects, with particular formal properties and attributes, and the way certain configurations achieve particular effects. The issues of musical aesthetics, then, are not matters for cultural theorists, psychologists, or philosophers, but for musicologists. That is not to devalue the contributions of other disciplines to our understanding, but to underline the fact that the primary objects of study, and the primary sources, are those objects that result from the perception of musical stimuli.

## SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS

It should be clear from my previous remarks that this thesis is intended as a contribution to musicology. As such it takes music itself – that is, aesthetically interesting sounds, and listeners' responses to them – as its object of study, rather than focusing on the socio-cultural or commercial context. Nevertheless, the music I discuss is considered in relation to its context, in particular, its relationship to the capitalist system in which it is produced, its contribution to commercial operations, and its appeal to listeners. The thesis comprises three chapters, each of which can be taken as a self-contained essay

on an issue for musicology or musical aesthetics in contemporary culture. Each of these chapters contributes to, and develops, a single argument: music and social meaning, I argue, are never directly related. Rather, their relationship is mediated by irreducible aesthetic values. Music does not have the propensity to refer semantically, although it can facilitate the emergence of meaning, and this is how it works in multimedia forms such as television commercials. In so doing it imposes its own, purely musical, characteristics. An inclusive aesthetics can be developed on this basis, by defining the aesthetic not as an attitude, as in the Kantian tradition, but as a response to these formal properties. In this way we can avoid reducing music to social meaning, and re-establish it as an object in its own right.

Chapter One takes Adorno's infamous critique of popular music as its starting point. According to Adorno (trans. 1990) standardization in popular music was directly comparable to the standardization of mass production. In fact, the popular music of the 1930s that was the subject of Adorno's critique was not actually mass-produced at all, but handcrafted. Contemporary dance music, on the other hand, is created using many procedures that would appear to come directly from the factory floor. This appears at first sight to be an example of precisely the sort of migration of capitalistic modes of production into the realm of cultural production that Adorno was warning against. However, the simple, linear relationship between music and society propounded by Shepherd (1982) and Cutler (1984) does not exist. There is clearly some relationship between the musical objects of dance culture and

manufactured goods. I argue this is the result of a migration of attributes from the technologically determined qualities of manufactured goods into an aesthetic paradigm, which is subsequently realized in dance music. Such processes, I argue, operate at the level of what is termed ‘hegemony’ in socio-political commentaries – what Barthes (trans. 1993) refers to as ‘myth’. At this level, Adorno’s critique of popular music comes close to hitting the nail on the head.

Questions regarding what pieces of music can mean to listeners, and why, have fascinated scholars for centuries. Television commercials provide a useful resource to consider such questions, as they are usually contrived to communicate something quite specific to the viewer – typically the desirability of a product or its producer. In Chapter Two, I consider a series of commercials for British Airways, which use various arrangements of the “Flower Duet” from Delibes’ opera *Lakmé*. It is commonplace for businesses to use aesthetic elements to establish brand identity (thus, we come to associate a particular company with a particular typeface, logo, or slogan) and British Airways’ use of the “Flower Duet” fits in with this model. The high-profile nature of its advertising campaigns means that, for many people, the “Flower Duet” is synonymous with the airline. In this way, the “Flower Duet” has been cast as a sign in the marketplace.

This is interesting for several reasons. The “Flower Duet” presumably has qualities that in some way make it appropriate to signify British Airways, so this provides a suitable opportunity to test the theories of the way in which music

refers, and to attempt to establish what those qualities are. That the “Flower Duet”, as used by British Airways, signifies at all is worthy of attention: in the commercials in which it used, the music is subject to a variety of transformations or deformations, some of them quite fundamental. And yet the essential attributes, which identify this piece and enable it to be recognized as a sign, survive intact. It is my thesis that the identity of the “Flower Duet” can be reduced to an essential set of attributes, whose relationship can at best be described as topological. As long as the arrangement or deformation preserves these attributes, the musical identity and its signification are preserved. The musical material itself, I argue, does not have any properties that intrinsically refer to British Airways. Rather, following Cook (1994) it is argued that the music provides a context within which such meanings can be accommodated. In multimedia forms, such as television commercials, modes of communication with semantic potential (verbal and visual) provide the meaning.

This conception of music as an ideologically neutral, asemantic, sonorous material, while making explicit the values that it does not possess, does not account for the value it has for its listeners. I have already said that pieces of music are aesthetic objects, and have described the way that aesthetics is generally concerned with not just any perceptual objects, but specifically with beautiful objects. Pop songs would not generally be taken to be aesthetic objects in the Kantian sense, no matter that listeners generally derive pleasure from them. I touch upon this issue in my discussion of the commodity status

of popular music in Chapter One, in the way that Adorno compared popular music with 'serious' music. For Adorno, the fact that commodified objects were pleasurable was evidence of 'false consciousness', so his aesthetic theory was not required to account for them. If we admit that musical material is ideologically neutral, then we must provide an aesthetic theory that can account for the pleasure they bring. It is a simple matter to judge the objects of one cultural tradition by those of another, and to 'prove' their inferiority (as does Meyer, 1967: 419). It is more of a challenge, and altogether more rewarding, to provide a formulation of aesthetics that does not privilege the objects of particular cultural institutions, but regards all objects presented to the senses on equal footing. In Chapter Three I attempt to do precisely this by reinstating the concept of aesthetics as a fundamental, immediate response to sensory stimuli, which precedes ideological or consciously intellectual involvement. It follows that the sensory stimuli we find appealing should have certain formal characteristics. Aestheticians have been aware of the general nature of these formal characteristics for centuries – it is what Hutcheson (1725) referred to as 'uniformity amidst variety'. Importantly for the discipline, despite objections about the unsustainability of the concept of autonomy, I argue that music can constitute a perceptually bracketed object. It is the role of musicology to shed light on the properties of such objects.

As well as explaining the pleasure we get from perceiving objects on their own, from their internal relations, the currently unfashionable approach of formalist aesthetics can also explain the pleasure we get from the way different



objects relate to one another in the cultural field. Intertextuality is clearly evident in the texts of the culture industry, whether popular music, advertising, or television programmes, and Philip Tagg (1979) has drawn attention to the same phenomenon throughout previous epochs. It is my thesis that this is a sign of a culture that is alive, rather than dead (as commentators such as Debord, 1994 have claimed of the present era) and that it is evidence of the same phenomenon that accounts for formal relations within aesthetic objects, but operating macroscopically, as a cultural process.

## CHAPTER 1

### COMMODITY CAPITALISM, ITS MATERIAL FORMS, AND THEIR IMPACT ON MUSIC

In his 1941 essay, “On Popular Music”, Adorno railed against the degree of standardization prevalent in commercial music. “Standardization,” he wrote, “extends from the most general features to the most specific ones. Best known is the rule that the chorus consists of thirty-two bars and that the range is limited to one octave and one note” (Adorno, ed. 1990: 301). And it was not just the predictable formal template, or the enforcement of a practical melodic range that he objected to. The musical material that was constrained by them was also standardized:

Most important of all, the harmonic cornerstones of each hit – the beginning and end of each part – must beat out the standard scheme. This scheme emphasizes the most primitive harmonic facts no matter what has harmonically intervened (p. 301).

Adorno’s repudiation was not simply based on what he saw as the worthlessness of individual songs. The same concerns over standardization pertained to the relationship of those songs to any number of other songs

within the popular music field, all of which were apparently constrained by the same rules:

The general types of hits are also standardized: not only the dance types, the rigidity of whose pattern is understood, but also the “characters” such as mother songs, home songs, nonsense or “novelty” songs, pseudo-nursery rhymes, laments for a lost girl (p. 301)

Adorno’s focus on standardization served two purposes: first, it allowed him to compare popular music with what he called “good serious music” (p. 304) with predictable results; second, it provided the foundation on which to theorize the relationship of the listener with the objects of popular culture, and the society that produces them.

Within the constraints of the standardized forms and types, Adorno argued, there exist ‘pseudo-individualized’ details. These details – which he summarized as blue chords, dirty notes, and breaks – hide their standardization “behind a veneer of individual ‘effects’” (p.302). They are ‘effects’ because they are merely substitutes for the overtly standardized elements. Their relationship with the whole is not that of a musical detail in a self-sufficient, organic work of art. Rather, the relationship between the detail and a musical schema is as standardized as the templates for mass-produced commodities. In the case of apparently complex harmonies, Adorno argued that the chord does not function in the same way as it does in a good piece of serious music, but simply stands in for the basic harmony that could just as easily be in its place. The listener hears the deviation in relation to the established scheme, and while

experiencing the superficial effect, is unconsciously held to the standardized form behind it. Rather than details relating internally to a unique musical whole, then, as they do in a “serious” piece, the details of a popular song are related to a blueprint which, beyond from the song’s exemplification, is irrelevant to the musical discourse.

The comparisons with “serious” music, and the invocation of concepts such as the organic nature of art, make it plain that Adorno is content to judge popular music by an historical aesthetic yardstick, to which it fails to measure up. The problem that popular music poses for aesthetic theory is a subject worthy of further attention, and is examined in detail in Chapter Three.

But Adorno’s argument does not end with the aesthetic poverty of popular music. The standardization that he saw in hit songs of the 1930s was not a feature unique to that cultural field. On the contrary, standardization typified the wider culture of industrial capitalism and its primary mode of production: mass production. This led him to conclude that popular music was the same as any other mass-produced commodity, and that its standardized forms were the hallmarks of capitalist production. Furthermore, the cultural currency of such commodities meant that it was not just a case of them exemplifying a mode of production, and the social organization it entailed. Rather, they were instruments of the ideological process itself, and thus implicated in its perpetuation. Whether listeners belong to what Adorno classifies as ‘rhythmically obedient’ or ‘emotional’ types, popular music is above all a means by which they achieve some “psychical adjustment to the

mechanisms of . . . life” (pp. 311-12). This is achieved either by a process of “masochistic adjustment to authoritarian collectivism” for rhythmically obedient types (p. 312) or a cathartic reconciliation to their social dependence for “emotional” types (p. 314).

Adorno’s essay is widely seen as a major flaw in an otherwise astute analysis of twentieth century culture. It was written about a musical genre with which he was not only relatively unfamiliar, but for which he held a clear distaste. Neither of these factors has enamoured Adorno to the scholars of the succeeding decades who have grown up with industrial capitalism and are fans of its products, and of popular music in particular. As it is largely the result of such scholars that popular music has become accepted as an object of academic study, Adorno’s critique has largely been marginalized in academic circles. But whatever one’s feelings about the obvious bias of the piece, it must be admitted that Adorno’s analysis does highlight several important factors about the formal properties of popular music, and their relationship to the culture in which they were produced. And rather than dodging the issues, we must be prepared to address them if we are to fully understand popular music and its place in contemporary culture.

Adorno’s primary point is quite simple: popular music is standardized through and through. This standardization exemplifies capitalist production, a system that also circulates such music. It is this point that we will consider in the present chapter. (Adorno’s subsequent argument regarding the aesthetic value of this music will be examined in Chapter Three). The wider point, which

is elucidated elsewhere, that products of an industrially organized culture are not only exemplars of capitalist ideology, but also agents which endorse, naturalize, and thus perpetuate the capitalist system (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979; Adorno, trans. 1981; Adorno, ed. 1991) is considered as a subsidiary discussion in this chapter.

#### FROM STANDARDIZATION TO COMMODITY AESTHETICS

Shuker (1994) dismisses the work of the Frankfurt School out of hand. More often, scholars are content to explain away the more extreme elements of Adorno's argument allowing them to salvage what they consider to be the more reasonable elements. The general tendency has been to question the applicability of Adorno's critique beyond its historical context (Gendron, 1986; Longhurst, 1995; Middleton, 1990; Paddison, 1989, 1996).

On the face of it, there does appear to be some justification in dismissing Adorno's argument on the basis of its historical limitations. After all, he was writing in the era when songs from the "Tin Pan Alley" publishing houses dominated the sphere of popular music, and the 32-bar ballad prevailed. Songwriting within this system adhered to peculiarly rigid norms. Within a decade of Adorno's essay the situation within popular music had changed beyond recognition: rhythm and blues informed rock 'n' roll, which opened out into a vast array of popular music styles. So, the argument typically goes, even though music might have been standardized up until the early 1950s, it has not been since then. But, things are not so simple. For one thing, rather than emancipating pop music from standard formulae, the blues brought a new

level of standardization. As Middleton (1990: 48) points out, its twelve bar harmonic scheme was far more rigid than any that existed previously.

Furthermore, blues musicians often adopted the riff-based technique made famous by the swing bands of the 1930s, a mode of construction characterized by the repetition of short standardized chunks.<sup>2</sup> This technique is still prevalent in popular music today. Indeed, it has reached new levels in the digital age of samplers, non-linear recording facilities and sequencers.

A perhaps more far-reaching argument against Adorno is that standardization in any field cannot simply be presumed to be detrimental. After all, Max Weber (1930) postulated that rationalization, leading ultimately to capitalism, was the product of a Protestant and basically Puritanical ethic.<sup>3</sup> Industrialization simply exploits a particular characteristic of human organization; it did not create or impose it. Standards pervade all human activities, and this is most evident when they are conducted communally. Music is a case in point: when two or more people get together to make music, no matter how informally, there must be some common basis for what they do, or the result would be chaotic. Again, standards are essential for social exchange, whether economic (the gold standard) or linguistic (a common tongue). In the

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<sup>2</sup> Middleton (1990: 278-281) discusses the history of riff technique. As we will see later, however, the basis of this technique is rather more fundamental than Middleton implies: 'chunking' small units together has always been a basic generative technique in non-literate musical cultures.

<sup>3</sup> Weber argued that Protestant ideals sanctified work, as well as the conscientious accumulation of wealth. This resulted in the legitimization, rather than the condemnation, of new economic practices.

same way, standardized musical parameters enable us to exchange musical ideas, in short, to commune in music. Thus the existence of a standard notation and tuning of western music was a primary factor in the establishment of a music industry, centered as it was on domestic realizations from printed media. Similarly, the MIDI standard has made possible a burgeoning electronic music industry and united a vast community of amateur and professional musicians.<sup>4</sup>

But it was not this low-level standardization with which Adorno was taking issue (indeed, he seems to have been oblivious, or at least ambivalent, to its existence and necessity within cultures). Rather, it is repetition at higher levels that concerned him; that is to say, the standardization of musical grammar. It is important to realize that the standardization he describes was not in any direct sense the consequence of industrial production processes; at the time he was writing, there was no industrial machinery with which to create musical material. (Such technological tools have only been developed since the

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<sup>4</sup> Prior to MIDI, control-voltage (CV) technology was used to interface electronic instruments with sequencers. There being no agreed system, each manufacturer used their own particular pitch:voltage ratio. As a result, there was only limited cross-platform compatibility, and a fragmented market for musical equipment. The major manufacturers recognized the need for a standard and pooled their ideas, agreeing on the MIDI protocol in 1982.



1970s.)<sup>5</sup> Indeed, he emphasizes the ‘backwardness’ of musical production, which is still at the ‘handicraft level’ (Adorno, ed.1990: 308). Nevertheless, Adorno’s fears are closely related to similar worries in the field of design, where mass production was directly involved, and pre-empted a rash of similarly pessimistic views about the effect of mechanization on art.

As early as 1835 the architect C. R. Cockerell suggested to a parliamentary Select Committee that attempts “to supersede the work of the mind and hand by mechanical process for the sake of economy will always have the effect of degrading and ultimately ruining art.”<sup>6</sup> This opinion, cemented into ‘truth’ by John Ruskin, Richard Redgrave and William Morris, was still current well into the twentieth century when Nikolaus Pevsner (1960: 42-43) pronounced that in terms of art, the machine had been disastrous. In design, what was seen as so devastating was the uniformity of all the elements resulting from a production process that had ousted, and ultimately killed off, the craftsman. Machines, it was argued, had separated the appearance of an object from the task of forming it; the human involvement with the material, and, crucially, the trace of that involvement had been deleted. Indeed, Stuart Ewen makes the point that the real productional advance made possible by the machine was the

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<sup>5</sup> I am distinguishing the machinery required to create musical material from that required to make music. A tightened skin, or string represents a technology with which music can be made. I am specifically talking about technological tools that enable musical phrases to be generated, larger musical structures to be realized, or large chunks of digital audio data to be manipulated.

<sup>6</sup> Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures, Minutes of Evidence, Parliamentary Papers, 1836, vol. IX, ¶ 1431 (quoted in Forty, 1986: 42).

ability to mass produce the mere signs and symbols of crafted goods. It offered the impression of “luxury and abundance, privilege and franchise” but “only as surface image” (Ewen, 1990: 45).

The kind of production that is being described here is not simply ‘industrial’ in the broad sense of the word. Industrialization refers to the organization of methods of production, regardless of what is produced. But the industrial manufacture of iron and steel, for example, clearly lies outside Ewen’s purview, so it is not industrialization itself that is the issue. Rather, Ewen’s point relates specifically to the mass production of consumer goods – typically, luxury consumer goods. And, as I shall argue, it is the concept of the consumer that is central to the association Adorno assumes between standardization and value judgement.

The concept of the consumer is worth clarifying at this point. ‘Consumption’ refers to those processes through which economic resources are used up. In other words, it is the opposite of production. Logically, consumption is a worrying phenomenon: scarce resources (which are literally what constitutes an ‘economy’) should, after all, be preserved. It was this negative meaning that the word ‘consumption’ originally held, and practices based on the same value of non-consumption still hold in less-developed communities today. ‘Consumerism’, by contrast, refers to a pattern of consumption that is not concerned with responsible resource-usage and the satisfaction of basic needs. Rather, it involves consuming goods to satisfy emotional wants, such as the desire to have the latest goods, or the desire to be

seen to own the most expensive products – behaviour described as ‘conspicuous consumption’ (McCracken, 1986). Advertising promotes this kind of consumption with its messages of “Look what you can have or be” (Bowlby, 1991: 102). This failure of production to satisfy needs, while at the same time fuelling further desires, is a particular characteristic of consumerism – one which accounts for the amount of waste in Western industrialized countries, and the relentless demand for ever more novel production.

So, the mode of production involved in the sphere of designed goods (and also, I shall argue, in the case of music) is specifically the mass production of goods for a consumerist market. And this type of production has some particular features. Ewen’s description of goods which offer the impression of luxury and privilege, quoted above, is sure to conjure up images in the minds of most inhabitants of the Western world: veneers rather than real wood; gold plating (or worse, metallic finished plastic) in place of the genuine article. Imbuing a good with the semblance of a superior product is nothing new, as Friedrich Engels’s description of working-class living conditions in mid-nineteenth century England makes clear.<sup>7</sup> The phenomenon of mass consumption is characterized by cost structures and output that traditional production methods could not achieve. Demand exists for cheap imitations

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<sup>7</sup> Quoting from the *Liverpool Mercury*, Engels writes: “ ‘Chicory and other cheap stuff is mixed with ground coffee. . . . Cocoa is often adulterated with fine brown earth, treated with fat to render it more easily mistakable for real cocoa. . . . Pepper is mixed with pounded nutshells.’ . . . The lion’s share of the evil results of these frauds falls to the workers. The rich are less deceived because they can pay the high prices of the large shops which have a reputation to lose.” (Engels, 1969: 102-3).

precisely because they look like the more expensive genuine article, but at a fraction of the price. The so-called 'consumer culture' is linked, therefore, to two particular types of production: the production of novelty, and the production of semblance. Both of these are accounted for by the term 'commodity aesthetics' coined by Wolfgang Haug (trans. 1986; trans. 1987).

Commodity production also demands the minimal investment of time at the design stage. To reduce time spent on the drawing board, commodities are not usually designed from scratch. Rather, existing designs are usually modified in line with changing tastes, or a rival product. This has the same economic effect as modification of content – production costs are minimized and profits maximized – but it also has a telling effect on the field of commodity production at large.

As designs are endlessly modified and presented as new designs, a degree of standardization prevails across the field of production. In car production, for example, looking from one year's models to the next, it is obvious where a line has been turned, or a plane curved to keep the surface in line with the prevailing aesthetic. (These are largely superficial changes: engines, gearboxes and so forth often remain unaffected). However, the sequence is edge-related, as a result of which it may be quite difficult to see the relationship between two models widely separated in time. Like each of the utterances in a game of Chinese whispers, the relationship between internal adjacent expressions can be apprehended, even if the original and final variant are quite dissimilar.

These minor cumulative variations are themselves subsumed into a lexicon of features that can be incorporated into future designs. Often these are linked to a particular period of time – mini skirts and the sixties, flared trousers and the seventies – and in turn these elements come to signify those periods. This occurs to such a degree that, as Ewen (1990:50) points out, the historical process itself becomes no more than a catalogue of styles in a fashion system that is the correlate of the museum culture. However, the media and information revolutions have ensured that this catalogue is endowed with a currency that a mere historical curio would not merit. As a result, this design lexicon constitutes a stylistic vocabulary that can be used in the knowledge that it will be widely understood. Thus designers and consumers alike can compose with styles – and the same is true of musical composition, as Nicholas Cook points out: “Traditionally, musicians compose with notes, rhythms, and perhaps timbres”. In postmodern culture, however, “composing with styles . . . is one of the basic musical techniques” (Cook, 1994: 35).

In commodity production in general, therefore, standardization occurs both *intratextually* (within products made up of standardized components) and *intertextually* (between texts within the wider field of production).<sup>8</sup> Both of these occurrences can be seen to reflect the desire to optimize valorization,

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<sup>8</sup> My terms intratextual and intertextual correspond exactly with what some scholars (Gendron, 1986, for example) have termed microscopic and macroscopic. The latter, however, give the impression that the difference is one of scale, when it is the position relative to the text – internal or external – that is fundamental.

being a function of an internal and external economy of formal terms. As we shall see later, however, there is rather more to it than that.

This notion of commodity aesthetics has obvious connections with the argument against popular music advanced by Adorno. Just as Adorno claimed of popular music, commodities are characterized by aesthetic 'effects'; similarly, these effects relate not to the object itself, but to an external schema; again, they are superficial promises of a uniqueness and quality that is illusory. Furthermore, as Adorno claimed for popular music, Haug makes the point that the goods themselves are instruments used to perpetuate commodity capitalism, and are therefore ideological:

So long as the economically determined function of commodity aesthetics exists, and continues to be driven by the profit motive, it will retain its ambiguous tendency: by serving people in order to ensure their service, it brings an unending stream of desires into the open. . . . it can bring only an illusory satisfaction, which does not feed but causes hunger (Haug, trans. 1986: 56).

Such parallels between popular music, as seen by Adorno, and Haug's interpretation of material culture are limited by the fact that the popular songs of the 1930s were not actually mass-produced in the same way that commodities were, although their promotion and distribution was industrially organized (Adorno, ed. 1990: 306). However, as a result of advances in technology, and the establishment of more clearly industrial modes of production in music, some popular music today appears to exemplify

commodity aesthetics in a far more obvious sense. We might, then, expect Adorno's critique to apply with all the more force to such music, a possibility explored in the following section.

## STANDARDIZATION IN TODAY'S POP MUSIC

'Sequencing' is a process by which musical segments can be pre-programmed and subsequently performed automatically. Sequencing technology emerged in the 1960s with analogue devices using control-voltage technology. Early sequencers could store a limited number of events that could be cycled in performance to create specific effects. Typically, they would be used to perform musical sequences beyond the physical capabilities of a human performer, such as rapid arpeggiations. A further musical limitation of these devices was their fixed step duration: sequences were made up of notes of equal length. The introduction of MIDI in the early 1980s, and the advances in microprocessor technology, resulted in more sophisticated digital implementations – often software applications for home computers. MIDI allowed note-on and note-off events that could be used to control the duration of notes. Furthermore, other aspects of musical performance – note velocity, pitch bends, sustain pedal events, volume and other controller data – were also described by the MIDI protocol, enabling many aspects of a performance to be transmitted and received by MIDI devices, and to be recorded by MIDI sequencers.

Such MIDI sequencing set ups quickly became *de rigeur* for commercial recording studios, and quickly became a crucial technology in the production

process. The reasons are clear to see. Prior to MIDI, recording a song had involved doing a certain amount of preparatory work to provide a framework of the song's form. This typically involved recording a rough 'guide' track on a single track of the multi-track tape; for a fixed tempo pop track, a metronome (or 'click' track) might also be recorded. These guides would then be used as the template against which the polished musical performances could be added layer by layer. This mode of working facilitated the recording of complex musical arrangements, but did little to aid the initial composition. By the time the guide track was recorded, the form of the piece was established. It was difficult to reorganize musical material subsequently without substantial re-recording, or physically cutting and splicing the multi-track tape – something that was not undertaken lightly.<sup>9</sup>

The introduction of MIDI sequencers revolutionized the way that songs were composed and recorded. As all the events of MIDI performance could be recorded (typically from a keyboard) as a data-stream, a song could be composed and recorded in the same process. The recording of a synthesized part resulted in a list of MIDI events, which meant that it was a straightforward matter for sequencer designers to provide functions for manipulating and reordering these events. Thus, entire arrangements could be restructured at a

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<sup>9</sup> Musical ideas could still be developed in the process of multi-track recording although these were generally the details of the individual parts rather than the form of the whole. Some experimental bands used the multi-track more consciously as a compositional aid. The Enid, for example, used the recording studio as a compositional aid to form the symphonic rock pieces of their early albums, composing the lengthy development sections of large-scale sonata forms 'on the fly'.



moment's notice, whole sections could be transposed, and individual pitches, durations and velocities corrected. Furthermore, the MIDI events could subsequently be transmitted to any MIDI device, meaning that once the data was recorded, different instruments or sound patches could be auditioned. Chunks of data could also be copied and pasted within the piece, allowing passages of intramusical material to be mass-produced. In a typical song structure, for example, the data for the verses and choruses would only need to be entered once, and simply copied as many times as the song required. Only when the arrangement was finalized did the sequencer need to be synchronized to the multi-track recorder for the recording of such audio signals as could not be represented by MIDI data – particularly the vocals.

Sampling was the other major advance in music technology in the 1980s. Sampling allowed an audio signal to be recorded as a digital signal. As with MIDI sequencing, digital audio data allowed for easy manipulation. In the early to mid 1980s, technological limitations meant that only samples of a limited duration could be recorded. This meant that they were typically used for capturing short musical sections that could be triggered (individual drum hits, vocal or instrumental riffs) or looped (drum loops). With the development of higher capacity Random Access Memory (RAM) in the late 1980s, professional samplers were capable of recording tens of seconds of music. This enabled them to be used as digital recording devices. A common use for such samplers in studios was to duplicate a complex backing vocal arrangement by sampling the mixed tracks, and then 'flying in' the sample at subsequent points in the

arrangement where the same backing vocals were to be featured. In both sequencing and sampling, then, the same economic facts obtained: the marginal cost involved producing repeated identical musical units had been removed. Thus, the mass production of musical segments was realized.

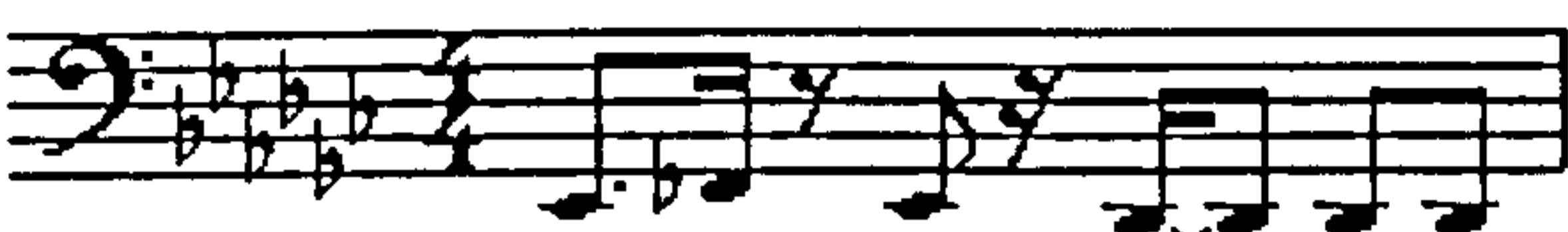
The development of sequencing and sampling, then, could be interpreted as a vital step in the industrialization of music. Of course, music was already an established industry at this point, but the industrial machinery was concerned with the replication and dissemination of the musical artifact, rather than units within the musical material itself; only now was capital machinery available for the purposes of creating music. Unsurprisingly, this machinery was quickly utilized to produce dance-floor hits for big-name artists; Madonna's 1985 hit "Into The Groove" is a good example. Apart from Madonna's vocal performance, all the musical material is synthesized or sampled. The accompaniment consists of a small number of musical units that meld to form an infectious dance-floor groove, and which are repeated to provide an extended musical form (see Appendix A). As in a conventional pop song, it is the vocals and an instrumental solo (in this case, a piano solo) that are clearly the foreground elements. These can be distinguished from the groove by both the length of the musical units themselves – the groove is made up entirely of


two and four bar units – and by the fact that they result from ‘live’ performances.<sup>10</sup>

While it was possible to produce a conventional pop song using the new industrial equipment, to do so was not playing to the strengths of the equipment. The new studio tools could be used to produce music which foregrounded the novel effects of digital duplication. Sampling, in particular, spawned a rash of novelty records as the ‘live’ input was reduced to a catch phrase, which was itself subject to repetition throughout the track. Paul Hardcastle’s “19” is a famous example. Other arguably less worthy examples include “House Nation” by Housemaster Boyz and the Rude Boyz of House, which is constructed almost entirely from just three basic samples (including the obligatory ‘stutter’ effect of rhythmic re-triggering of a word) in addition to equally repetitive looped drum patterns (Fig. 1.1, overleaf).

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<sup>10</sup> The piano solo actually sounds as though it has been played into a sequencer and quantized; the point remains, however, that it would have been played in real-time and was therefore the result of a ‘live’ performance. In any case, the through-composed nature of the 16 bar solo, and its uniqueness as an event in the song, distinguish it clearly from the material of the accompanying instruments.

Bassline 

Synthesizer 


Vocal Sample   
 How how h- how h- how h- how how how

Fig. 1.1: Housemaster Boyz and the Rude Boyz of House, “House Nation”

By the 1990s, the ubiquity and increasing power of digital audio technologies made it possible to create increasingly complex arrangements out of small samples. Dance genres in the nineties were typified by the use of sampled break beats and drum loops, as well as melodic riffs – often taken from earlier recordings by other artists. 2 Unlimited’s “No Limit” (1992) and “Exterminate” (1992) by Snap (see Appendices B and C) are good examples, although all the material is original: they are highly repetitive, being composed of a small number of one or two bar chunks which not only saturate the texture, but actually structure the music. If we listen to the tracks we recognize the strict time-quantization and digital sound processing which indicate a mode of production with a clear allegiance to industrial methods: inputs are rationalized in terms of the number of components required, and also in the

way they are utilized; they are positioned horizontally (in time) and vertically (within the audio spectrum) with the accuracy of precision engineering. These would seem to be clear examples of industrial production methods, in which the digitization of musical material could be seen to have reduced the song to a series of standardized components. Some commentators have seen technology as *defining* the musical genre to which the dance tracks discussed earlier belong: the composer Paul Schütze, for example, has suggested that ‘techno’ is as much a product of the software designers as it is of musicians.<sup>11</sup> There is certainly an element of truth in this claim. It is difficult to imagine recordings such as Snap’s “Exterminate”, or Coldcut’s “More Beats and Pieces” (1997) using linear, analogue equipment.

#### BEYOND ‘MODES OF PRODUCTION’

But is it really fair to assume that the repetition characteristic of much recent pop music, and at its most extreme in dance music, is the aesthetic result of (rather than merely being realized through) a particular mode of production? If we broaden the scope of our inquiry, any number of tracks in the blues-inspired rock vein (Led Zeppelin or the Rolling Stones, for instance) show the same kind of repeated 2-bar riffs. Minimalist ‘art’ music, too, is characterized by dense repetitions. Further afield, from Japanese Ainu Songs through Nepalese *Gaines* music to the music of the nomadic Baka of Cameroon, much traditional folk music is equally repetitious.

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Paul Tingen, “Paul Schütze: The Parallax View,” *Sound On Sound*, April 1996, p. 100.

There are some much more obvious, and more universal, reasons why the music we create should feature repetition. In the creation of music our psychological make-up ‘forces our hand’. We parse information into higher-level *Gestalts*, each of which can then be considered as a single object in order to optimize our information processing capacities. ‘Chunking’ several identical units together to form a piece is a cognitively efficient way of encoding a large temporal span of music, quite apart from any ritualistic or aesthetic aspects of such repetition. Of course, in oral cultures – whether pop sub-cultures or preliterate societies – such practical considerations are central to musical expression, and will be evident in the objects of that expression. One could even go as far as to say that it is the scriptist Western classical tradition that privileges large-scale structural concepts which is the aberration in the world’s music. Indeed, just as we can recognize the role of digital technologies in fashioning the musical artifacts of dance music, we must also recognize the role of writing and notation technologies in making possible much Western ‘art’ music.<sup>12</sup>

So, just because pop music is repetitive it must not be assumed that this is a feature of its industrial or capitalist status. One does not have to look very far to corroborate this statement: rebellion against ‘the system’ is a recurring theme in pop music, often in the most repetitive musical structures. It would be ironic if the use of repetitive structures reflected the artists’ incorporation within the system. The Clash’s “White Riot” and “London’s Burning” (both 1977) are

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of this see Wishart (1977).

overtly rebellious songs that nevertheless conform to standardized structures. Another example is Bruce Springsteen's "Born In The U.S.A" (1984).

Springsteen's image is centered on notions of authenticity of expression, in the 'folk' tradition. He is portrayed and perceived as a working-class hero staging a musical rebellion against the repetitive life of manual labour to which his peers were condemned in small-town America. Yet "Born In The U.S.A." has the same riff repeated endlessly throughout the song:

*Keyboard Riff*



Fig. 1.2: Bruce Springsteen, "Born in the U.S.A."

Obviously the repetition in this music occurs at a different level from the articulation of meanings, or the song would jar with his image. This point is stressed by Shepherd (1982: 165) who warns, "redundancy and non-redundancy have to be understood and judged in terms of culture-specific musical criteria". And yet, there are plenty of examples where scholars have argued precisely this kind of direct relationship between social structures and musical material, Shepherd included.

The relation of pop music to pre-literate or other oral forms of music making is discussed in the literature (Cutler, 1984; Shepherd, 1982). But without considering the practical reasons for this correlation, such scholars

have invariably concentrated their efforts on advancing theories of simplistic homological relationships. Cutler (1984) for example, concludes that pop recording is evidence of a move to socialist society from the bourgeois formulations of the classical tradition, in line with the Marxist teleological model. Shepherd (1982) similarly makes direct connections between the hierarchical structures of art music and capitalist societies, suggesting that “functional music articulates the ideology of industrial capitalism”. This occurs through a musical enactment of the “struggle against the forces of the world” in which “the attainment of the key note is the final attainment of power and control” (p.163). Similarly, distorted guitars in punk music are said to correlate with the distortion of perspectives within capitalist society (p. 171).

The justification for this kind of approach is given in the book *Music and Cultural Theory*, written with Peter Wicke (Shepherd and Wicke, 1997). In it, they argue that music is “as fundamental as language to the formation and persistence of human societies.” It is, they go on, “an asemantic yet material structure whose role it is to impart the principles of symbolic structuring to society, language and other forms of human expression” (p. 3). It is not unreasonable to assume that some form of sound making predates human language. After all, oral linguistic expression is a subset of oral expression in general. One might also venture that sounds of different pitches or rhythms might even have been explored, and conclude that music predates language,



although this claim would rather depend on one's definition of music.<sup>13</sup> It is presumptuous, however, to suggest that music should enjoy and maintain a privileged role as *the fundamental* symbolic language throughout human history – a claim that smacks of crude inter-disciplinary score-settling rather than objective cultural or anthropological investigation.<sup>14</sup>

But while direct links between modes of production and musical material can generally be dismissed, there is nevertheless evidence of a relationship of some sort between musical commodities and other commodities. And here Adorno seems to have come rather close to hitting the nail on the head.

In his analysis of Adorno's critique, and its application to the music of the doo-wop genre, Gendron (1986) makes it clear that the stylistic traits that characterize the music of the Cadillacs are common, to some degree, to all of their output. It is also clear that the Cadillacs are one of a number of groups who worked within the doo-wop genre. Doo-wop is, therefore, a sub-cultural musical practice characterized by certain musical features. Furthermore, many of these features are not unique to the doo-wop genre: as Gendron makes clear, elements of doo-wop can be found in 'surf music', punk and rockabilly (p.23). Within the wider musical field, repetition occurs, therefore,

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<sup>13</sup> Karl Dallas (1975: 96-97) suggests that speech has its origins in the chorused grunting of the shanty that was used to coordinate efforts of labour. Dallas cites the nineteenth-century sociologist Bücher (in his *Arbeit und Rhythmus*) as the source of this idea.

<sup>14</sup> Shepherd and Wicke make explicit their motives: "we urge a renewed, invigorating and *important* role for musicology within the arts, the humanities and the social sciences" (p. 6, their italics).

between songs by the Cadillacs, between the Cadillacs' music and that of other doo-wop groups, and between songs within the doo-wop genre and those of other genres.

This kind of repetition is typical of commodity production in general where demand is continually re-stimulated by the introduction of superficially new products (which Haug terms 'aesthetic innovation') and where obsolescence is built into goods through the use of inferior components (Haug, trans. 1986: 39-44). It could be argued that the repetitive nature of pop music, which could be seen as limiting its long-term appeal, is a form of in-built obsolescence guaranteeing a short shelf life. At the same time, new subtly different musical experiences advertise themselves on the radio and television, vying for consumption. So the Rolling Stones' "Jumping Jack Flash" (1968) replaces "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" (1965) by a process of aesthetic innovation, with subtly different components (different guitar riff, vocal hook and so on) substituted for the old.

But this feature is not unique to the pop music industry. The classical music market is subject to the same process. It has been suggested that Vivaldi wrote the same concerto four hundred and fifty times.<sup>15</sup> The basis for this observation lies in the intertextual repetition and minor variation of melodic motifs and harmonic formulae throughout his output. Classical music is usually

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Gammond (1985: 47) writes: "Vivaldi, according to one unfriendly critic, spent his life writing the same concerto five hundred times. This was a malicious exaggeration – he only wrote four hundred and fifty (and he often took the trouble to change the solo instrument)."

subject quite explicitly to this kind of repetition in its presentation in consumer culture: the emphasis on interpretation, and the associated star-status of conductors and performers, artificially stimulates further demand for the same pieces. Thus the racks of Beethoven symphonies, each differentiated by packaging and the vital interpretation, is comparable to the market for washing powder or cosmetics. The importance of such aesthetic innovation to an atrophied canon has been recognized in academic musicology, and is reflected in the new emphasis on the analysis of performance, and recordings.

Adorno rightly recognized the formal similarities between musical and non-musical commodities. However, he clearly failed to appreciate the implications. And it highlights a particular limitation to his thinking. Writing before the advent of reception theory, Adorno clearly held that the value of a text lies in the text itself. This belief was the foundation for his deliberately 'difficult' writing style. Full of exaggerations, over-extended analogies and contradictions, his prose "constantly seems to negate and consume itself in search of its 'object'" (Paddison, 1993: 18) in order to be self-consciously anti-positivistic. The notion that a text itself was not responsible for its interpretation, or that value could arise from the apprehension of relationships between texts does not seem to have been considered. Intertextual repetitions can add a new level of meanings to an otherwise unremarkable object, and as Gendron points out, it is precisely this intertextuality that is so potent for fans of a particular musical genre. The field of doo-wop production reorganizes and reconfigures formal types. Just as in a generative grammar, where a finite set of

linguistic terms can produce an infinite number of meaningful utterances, in music, too, a small number of generic characteristics can give rise to a vast number of musically meaningful arrangements. In both cases, deriving meaning from particular expressions is dependent on familiarity with the standards and conventions observed in the formulation of those expressions.

Many songwriters use established forms, such as the twelve-bar blues, as the basis of songs. This is not because they are incapable of inventing a more original chord progression. Rather, they are deliberately situating their act of creation in relation to a pre-existing archetype. Songs as diverse as George Michael's "Faith" (1987) and The Smiths' "How Soon Is Now" (1985) for example, use the Bo Diddley rhythm, while artists as diverse as Prince, ZZ Top, Huey Lewis and the News and Robert Palmer have an undisguised penchant for blues-based progressions.

There are various reasons why one might use a pre-existing form as the basis for a new composition. It might be a deliberate compositional strategy, akin to composing out all of the possibilities in a theme in a more extended composition. Alternatively, it might be what Guy Cook (1992) describes as cultural 'code-play' – by which he means precisely the intertextual play of recognizable formal terms I have described. Whatever the motivation behind the practice, the end result is much the same: these songs must be understood in terms of an archetype from which they derive at least some of their meaning. Acknowledging the existence of intertextual repetition, therefore, does not deny the possibility of innovation. Indeed, subversion of cultural

codes *requires* that some kind of code is operational between texts. One cannot help wondering whether, if Adorno had lived to hear Frank Zappa's "Doreen" (1981) or countless other 1950s parodies, he would have been aware of the satire, or simply considered it to be as standardized as the Cadillacs – assuming he had been familiar with their music.

Whether sincere or ironic, musicians are often aware of the musical codes they employ: rock bands often employ particular archetypes, not just as reference but also in reverence. Peter Gabriel, for example, has described "Sledge Hammer" (1986) as a self-conscious contribution to the Stax/Motown soul tradition. This is even more acutely true with the blues, originating as it did in oppression. In the same way, when an artist such as George Michael uses a particularly well-known rhythmic archetype, we may reasonably assume that he has made a conscious decision to do so, and that he is deliberately alluding to that archetype and maybe to some context with which it is associated. Therefore "Faith", with its 'Bo Diddley' rhythm, has some connection with an established tradition of pop songs that have used this rhythm, including The Who's "Magic Bus" (1968) David Bowie's "Panic In Detroit" (1973) and Bow Wow Wow's "I Want Candy" (1982). Such connections are real enough both for listeners and for the composer. Experienced listeners will recognize the relationship between "Faith" and other songs using the same rhythm, if only subconsciously. Similarly, a composer might employ such a device consciously to situate him or herself within a

tradition, or unthinkingly as an element that fits it in with the musical material at hand.

## INDUSTRIAL AESTHETICS

As I have already said, while direct links between modes of production and musical material can generally be dismissed, there is nevertheless, evidence of a relationship of some sort, as made clear by the intertextual links between musical and other commodities. When Adorno rightly described the process of music as a ‘handicraft’, and made the point that industrialization only occurred in the distribution and promotion of musical goods, he went on to make a telling observation. The creation of popular music, he wrote, “is not industrial but rather pretends industrialization, in order to look more up to date” (Adorno, ed. 1990: 306). Adorno did not pursue this almost throwaway remark, but it is a suggestive idea. He was implying is that the signs of industrial production might be deliberately appropriated for symbolic or aesthetic reasons. If a causal relationship does not exist between modes of production and musical material, then perhaps there exists a connection at this level.

When we looked at the digital production of pop songs in the previous section, we noted the tight control over pitch and timing that digital technology made possible. But in recordings made in the 1980s, this control is often matched by similar properties in domains where no technological revolution had occurred. So, although it was only the timing and pitch of musical events that was subject to increased control through digital technology (at least in the

1980s) the sound of records such as “Into The Groove” was also defined by a tight control over all aspects of the musical object.

‘Tightness’ in the pop jargon usually refers to a minimal rhythmic deviation between musicians. The term is normally applied to the members of the rhythm section. Sequencing facilitated the ultimate in tight performance, each drum beat and bass note triggered synchronously, and arriving exactly on the beat. This aesthetic of control also seemed to imbue other production values: equalization came to be applied in such a way as to restrict each instrument to a particular frequency band. Streaming by frequency band has always been a basic principle of orchestration, but equalization extended the possibilities of this practice. With MIDI the channelization of the signal path was extended beyond the 24, 32 or 48 tape tracks with numerous virtual tracks of synthesizer, sampler or drum machine parts fed down free mixer channels on mix-down. As a result, tones were regimented in their positioning both horizontally through time, and vertically through the audio spectrum. Musical parts that were sequenced as MIDI data could also be processed to standardize the duration and velocity of notes. This ‘control aesthetic’ can also be seen in the clinically ‘dry’ signals recorded to tape in order that digital reverberation can be introduced in a tightly controlled manner to simulate the desired acoustic environment.

It is important to stress that this control was not a product of digital technology. Even in entirely analogue recording environments it was possible to synchronize the output of the rhythm section to create a ‘tight’ sound. By

gating the output of a bass guitar with a noise gate, the opening of which is triggered by the bass drum, for example, even if the bass guitarist is playing ahead of the beat, the resulting sound would feature simultaneous bass guitar and bass drum notes. Similarly, it was possible to compress the amplitude range of a signal to control the differences in loudness within a track.

What this seems to exemplify is the migration of attributes directly congruent upon technological innovation to other dimensions of the mix, in the service of a fundamentally aesthetic conception. It also appears to exemplify the migration of attributes to the sound world from objects outside. Whether or not this is actually true of “Into The Groove” is hard to tell. But there are examples where this migration of attributes is quite transparent.

The synthesizer group Kraftwerk adopted an aesthetic language that was clearly influenced by technology. Their music featured structural repetition and rigid quantization, courtesy of sequencers, as well synthesized timbres. Their celebration of technology was made quite overt in their ‘live’ performances which employed robots on stage, drawing on the theme of mechanization. British ‘synth pop’ groups in the 1980s, such as Depeche Mode, made clear their debt to their German predecessors, while augmenting the sound-palette with overtly industrial sounds (in “Master And Servant” (1993) for example). Similarly, robotic movement formed the basis of a popular style of dancing. Manchester’s Factory Records provides perhaps the clearest example of the celebration of industrial aesthetics in its appropriation of the signs of mass production for design purposes. One stylistic device used in packaging the



company's products elevated the catalogue numbers of their records (FAC-1, FAC-2, and so forth) to a central part of the product design (in large bold letters in the middle of an album sleeve, for example) so foregrounding their status as industrial products (Frith and Horne, 1987: 136-7).

Even for many amateur bands, the pleasure of making music does not seem exclusively concerned with the sensory, libidinal, or social pleasure the act of making music affords. Rather, a degree of gratification seems to arise from enacting the same ritual of production that their heroes enact on the commercial stage. Their 'heroes' are not simply the musicians they particularly identify with or like, but a wider set of revered archetypes, which is just as likely to include Calvin Klein or Budweiser as Bruce Springsteen. In other words, the music they consume fits into a broader pattern of lifestyle consumption: their favoured artists are the particular brands they choose to consume, just like any other products.

The domains of pop music and business have become intertwined to an enormous degree. Major record companies are multinational concerns with associated corporate images, and pop music is used extensively in adverts (where its use is often translated into a hit record).<sup>16</sup> Its performers even appear in commercials endorsing products. And much of this is mediated

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<sup>16</sup> The most obvious example is the series of Levi 501 commercials in the 1980s that resulted in the re-release of songs such as Marvin Gaye's "I Heard It Through The Grapevine" and Sam Cooke's "Wonderful World" which the adverts featured. The cover of the re-released "Wonderful World" even featured a shot from the commercial showing a man shrink-fitting his 501s in the bath.

through the magical television, or via the otherworldly glossy magazines. There is, as it were, an ongoing corporate drama in which the human and inorganic objects of consumerism are the stars, and which is transmitted by a media industry that, confusingly, also constitutes a character in the drama. The limits of this constructed world are deliberately blurred: these brands are backed by real people making tangible products. In the case of musical artifacts, the equipment that bands endorse in magazines, and appear with in their videos, can be bought, and the sound of the product closely emulated. Amateur musicians can go one step further into this world by engaging directly with the imposing multinational business by submitting the ubiquitous demo tape. The hope is, of course, that they will be admitted to the world of the drama: that they can enter the business and make *real* musical products for their living. Just as in the wider consumer culture, the business is inextricably tied to the trade of fantasy (Campbell, 1987), although the products and the players are very real.

The desire to create a finished, saleable musical product has often surmounted the severest poverty of musical technical skill. Some novice guitarists will not seek to augment their repertoire of chords or practice their scales, but will prefer to fashion complete songs out of the three or four chords they do know, and the riffs they can play. Bands will often invent a name and image – a brand identity in other words – before producing any music. Even the punk movement, for all its anti-establishmentarian posturing, and despite its marked effect on the music industry, was obliged to operate

within essentially the same system, even if only to subvert it. Punk bands in general made an attribute of their musical incompetence – which was sonically anarchic – to turn out often perfectly conventional (though superficially subversive) products. In the hands of Malcolm McLaren, the complicity of the punk movement with capitalism was more evident still: the ‘Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle’ was nothing more than a shameless commercial scam – “capitalism and anarchy far from being distant relatives were actually pillow-talk partners,” as Al Clark of Virgin Records later commented.<sup>17</sup>

But while the music industry has encouraged the commodification of the musical product, and has espoused industrial modes of manufacture and mediation, these are only tolerated within strict limits. Total industrialization conflicts with the notions of authenticity still harboured at the heart of the business, as pop duo Milli Vanilli found to their cost.

After the 1990 Gramophone Awards in which they were presented the Grammy for Best New Act, Milli Vanilli admitted they had not sung a note on any of their records. The industry moguls accordingly stripped them of their award (Goodwin, 1993: 32). Milli Vanilli products represented the ultimate detachment of surface from the content of a product, and the ultimate division of labour – they were merely the attractive packaging, people with correspondingly attractive voices having provided the vocals – an extreme case

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Frith and Horne, (1987: 136.) By this, it is not suggested that the Punk movement did not have an enormous impact on the organization and aesthetics of popular music, but that punk bands were operating (however subversively) within the existing capitalist structures of the record industry.

of the collective approach to music-making discussed in the literature (Hennion, 1990; Wicke, 1982). The musical product was not diminished in any way by their revelation: it still sounded good and had an attractive visual component. Indeed, the effect of the finished product would almost certainly have been diminished if they had sung on the records, or if the real singers had appeared in the videos. But the worlds of music and industry, which in the real world of the marketplace cohabit so snugly, were incompatible in the reconstructed pre-capitalist world of the 'Grammies'.

#### POPULAR CULTURE AS IDEOLOGY

The migration of attributes between the different domains of material production that we noted in the previous section was something that Adorno had clear concerns about. His notion that the standardization in popular music was related in some way to the standardization that occurred elsewhere in consumer capitalism has been proved correct in at least some cases. However, he made a wider claim in "On Popular Music". As well as migration within the aesthetic realm (the realm of objects available to our senses) Adorno argued that attributes of material production reflect, and transmit, ideological content. In other words, that the standardization in the sound of a popular song can communicate ideas to its listeners. Specifically, the claim made is that ideas relating to economic and socio-political structures can be communicated, and that in doing so, popular music situates its listeners within such systems (Adorno, ed. 1990: 309-14).

In order to better understand Adorno's argument, it is necessary to put it in its historical context. The notion that industrialization was the harbinger of dangerous social change and thus a power to be resisted, which is apparent in Adorno's dismissal of standardized music, has achieved currency in many forms. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, for example, the Luddites pursued the objective of disrupting the process of capitalization by destroying the industrial machinery that had been introduced to rationalize textile production. Far from being motivated by some puritanical zeal (as is often implied) the Luddites seem to have recognized at a fundamental level the way in which the capitalist system was transforming social relations. The machinery that they destroyed was perceived to be the apparatus not simply for producing goods, and thus wealth, but also for enslaving people (Martín-Barbero, trans. 1994: 94). In a sense, then, it was the larger and invisible ideological machine which was rumbling into action that the Luddites were attempting to destroy.

For the Luddites, the central concern was the practical quality of life for workers. For others, however, the concern was with more abstract cultural values. Alexis de Tocqueville (1946) for example, blamed industrialization for having imposed sameness and repetition on what he saw as an ignorant social majority. This repetition, imposed on all aspects of their material reality, allowed differentiation only in what de Tocqueville saw as the most trivial ways – popular culture and fashion. The sheer volume of 'petty' culture, and the weight of the new mass society, in de Tocqueville's view, posed a real threat to the continued existence of the elite and their 'true' culture. Similar views about

cultural decline can be found in Ortega y Gasset (trans. 1923) and T.S. Eliot (1948).

Other socio-historical commentators have also recognized the impact of industrialization. F. R. Leavis (1930: 6) for example, recognized the machine in a more general sense (the car, for instance) as having ruptured the fabric of society. For Leavis, however, the real danger was that standardization, which was not necessarily a bad thing, would extend to the realm of ideas: “increases in efficiency are not worrying in themselves” but only if they come to bear on other, non-material, production (p. 7). This is essentially the same idea that found expression eleven years later in Adorno’s essay. It also prevails in much Marxist thinking. Herbert Marcuse (1968: 223-4) for example, writes:

Not only the application of technology but technology itself is domination (of nature and men) – methodical, scientific, calculated, calculating control. Specific purposes and interests of domination are not foisted upon technology ‘subsequently’ and from the outside; they enter the very construction of the technological apparatus. Technology is always a historical-social *project*: in it is projected what a society and its ruling interests intend to do with men and things.

Ultimately, the totalizing impulse of rationalization would lead to what Marcuse (1991) describes as ‘one-dimensionality’: the eradication of critical dialectical (or ‘negative’) thinking and the unchallenged perpetuation of existing values, modes of thought and behaviour. Marcuse’s position here is very similar to that of Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (trans. 1979).

The idea that subjects within society are unable to escape the influence of some dominant ideology has an affinity with the concept of hegemony as it was originally proposed by Antonio Gramsci. This theory, developed while he was incarcerated in a fascist prison, was Gramsci's attempt to explain why the exploited and oppressed masses within capitalist societies did not revolt. As Raymond Williams (1980: 37) has pointed out, Gramsci's concept has become so over-used in Marxist theory as to be almost meaningless.<sup>18</sup> True hegemony does not refer to a simple situation of domination of one class over another, as it is sometimes used in vulgar Marxist diatribes. Rather, it is a situation infinitely more subtle:

hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural, like the weak sense of ideology, but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which, as Gramsci puts it, even constitutes the substance and limit of common sense for most people under its sway, that it corresponds to the reality of social experience very much more clearly than any notions derived from the formula of base and superstructure (Williams, 1980: 37).

It is this notion of socio-cultural *saturation* which is vital here – the idea that one's behavioural and conceptual practices might not be independently constructed but 'given'. As Joseph Fermia (1981: 24) points out, as a form of

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph V. Fermia (1981: 23) makes the same point: "whenever certain Marxist analysts come across a situation involving (what they deem to be) the ideological predominance of a particular group or class, the term 'hegemony' is immediately adopted – as if the notion of 'ideological predominance' were itself free of ambiguity."

domination, hegemony is almost invisible, being as it is “the predominance obtained by *consent* rather than force of one class or group over another”.

Of course, industrialization itself was not obtained without some resistance, as the preceding discussion has made clear. However, while the constitution of a mass market for consumer goods has been subject to academic critique, the majority of individuals have largely accepted it – even if they had to be educated to consume.<sup>19</sup> In this way, individuals were incorporated within the system of commodity capitalism as consumers. As a result, in the ‘One Dimensional’ society, “the ‘rationalization’ of the conditions of life is synonymous with the institutionalization of a form of domination whose political power becomes unrecognizable” (Habermas, trans. 1971: 82).

But while it is hard to refute the insinuation of ideologies into our ways of thinking, and to recognize the shift in cultural practices that industrial capitalism brought to bear, the theories of the transfer of such ideas discussed here do not support Adorno’s claims that transfer could occur between material form and an idea. Hegemony describes the manner in which political influence is exerted by one class over another. If a material object is itself to be an instrument of ideology, as Adorno argued, then this level of transfer must also be possible outside the political arena, and via aesthetic objects.

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<sup>19</sup> Boston magnate Edward Filene stated in 1919, “Mass production demands the education of the masses; the masses must learn to behave like human beings in a mass production world. They must achieve, not mere literacy, but culture.” Quoted in Stuart Ewen (1976: 54-55).



The link between material objects and ideas is made by semiotics – the science of signs and their meanings. It was the way that ideologies are transmuted into significant form that provided the motivation for Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*. In the preface he tells us, "I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view is hidden there" (Barthes, trans. 1993: 11). He goes on (in "Myth Today") to spell out more clearly what he means by 'myth': it is a semiological system which "has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. . . . this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology" (p. 142). In other words it is a process of normalization.

Barthes writes specifically about French culture, taking its artifacts as the objects of his study. Nevertheless, the universality of his analysis is easily recognizable. "The whole of France", he tells us (and we can read it as "the developed world")

is steeped in this anonymous ideology: our press, our films, our theatre, our pulp literature, our rituals, our Justice . . . the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear, everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world. These 'normalized' forms attract little attention. . . . They enjoy an intermediate position: being neither directly political nor directly ideological. . . . they gravitate towards the enormous mass of the undifferentiated, of the insignificant, in short, of nature (p. 140).

The imagery of 'steeping' which Barthes uses here clearly resonates with the 'saturation' in Raymond Williams's description of hegemony: what Barthes describes as 'mythology' then – an all-pervasive, naturalized ideology – corresponds to that which we have seen described as 'hegemony'. Rather than operating in an overtly political manner, myth operates through the apolitical, the everyday – and the aesthetic. The infrastructure of advanced industrial societies provides a medium through which such mythologies can operate. In the 'one-dimensional society' "the 'rationalization' of the conditions of life is synonymous with the institutionalization of a form of domination whose political power becomes unrecognizable" (Habermas, trans. 1971: 82).

As Barthes demonstrates, popular cultural products make clear the degree to which the bourgeois ideology has been naturalized. This can be seen particularly clearly in the case of consumerism. Enlightened individuals pride themselves on 'seeing through' advertising campaigns, understanding the mechanics of the process of communication, and deciding not to buy the product being promoted. Yet, at the same time, such people may uncritically accept the practices of deliberate deception and profiteering so prevalent within capitalism, and the status of advertising texts as a form of entertainment. As Marcuse points out, *real* economic freedom "would mean freedom *from* the economy – from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living," which is mistaken for 'free' entry into the labour market (Marcuse, 1991: 4). In the same way, real consumer sovereignty would entail not simply

the choice of whether or not to consume a certain product, but whether to accept the system of commodity capitalism. On that issue we have little choice. Indeed, Marcuse's main point is not simply that even freethinking individuals cannot opt out of the system, but that the system actively suffocates the alternatives.

I am not suggesting that in consumer culture there exists a crude situation of political hegemony, with one part of society (producers, capitalists) dominating another (consumers). Rather, I am suggesting that the capitalist system itself, as a socio-economic paradigm which extends total control over whole economies, and which has insinuated itself into the West's world view, informs our desires, expectations, and cultural norms, and which in so doing perpetuates its own mythology. The practice of advertising, for example, does not just promote individual products that we may rarely buy, but also promotes consumerism itself, and thus capitalism, as a valid (if not the only) means of social 'organization'. And, it seems, we buy *that* idea every time.

In contemporary culture, for example, there is nothing extraordinary in music videos (which originated as adverts for products, and still retain something of this function) occupying entire television channels (see Goodwin, 1993). Similarly, it is commonplace for these commercial texts to be incorporated within what are perceived to be non-commercial forms. Music videos are shown on any number of youth and music programmes, and entire television series are devoted to re-running old commercials. Even in the cinema product placement can occur to such a degree that the naïve viewer

might be forgiven for thinking they are watching an extended advertisement. Many scenes in *Mission Impossible* and *Independence Day* (both 1996) for example, appear to have been written specifically to showcase Apple PowerBook computers.

Often the music in films seems to have been ‘placed’ in exactly the same way – the Prince tracks in *Batman* (1989) for instance. In other instances, the situation is more ‘synergistic’, involving cross-promotion: music-based films such as *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) *Purple Rain* (1984) and *Dirty Dancing* (1987) promote the music (which is available on albums) while the music (which is often released several months in advance in the form of singles) promotes the films (see Denisoff and Plasketes, 1990). In the case of films such as Warner Brothers’ *Batman & Robin* (1997) the soundtrack album does not just include music that accompanies the film, but also music “inspired by the motion picture” (as it proclaims on the album cover) – by artists contractually obligated to Warner Brothers (as was Prince, whose music was ‘placed’ in the first *Batman* film).

## CONCLUSION

Industrial processes and capital machinery are used to fashion audio creations, and this has had an undeniable effect on musical objects. Since the 1980s, technological apparatus has developed which makes possible production methods closely akin to mass production. Nevertheless, while it is true that formal details comparable to those of mass-produced commodities are clearly in evidence in some pop music, standardization is an essential part of musical

culture and not evidence of industrialization or mass production. In particular, many of the features of pop music that appear to be the product of industrialization are more likely the product of an oral musical culture. Explicitly, intratextual standardization is apparent in pre-industrial folk music. Intertextual standardization is also seen in non-commercial music, and is a feature of musical communities, as well as of industrial production. For this reason it is too simplistic to assume that any relationship is constant, proportional, or analogical in the way that John Shepherd and others have proposed.

At the same time, it is also true that the products of industrial processes, and the processes themselves, have been appropriated as symbols in popular musical culture. In this way, the formal language of mass produced objects has become an aesthetic paradigm. This in itself is perfectly natural, as Walter Benjamin explains:

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense is organised, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well (Benjamin, trans 1973: 224).

But while the forms of commodity capitalism can be consciously appropriated as a symbolic language, other processes operate at a subconscious level, in something of the way that Adorno claimed. Where hegemony refers to the obtaining of political influence indiscernibly, Barthes argues that a similar

process operates apolitically through cultural objects – a process he describes as mythological. The post-industrial society is clearly implicated in the dissemination of musical artifacts, whether as discrete consumables, or embedded in vehicles such as films or music television. The reliance on capitalist processes and institutions to provide musical entertainment gives the consumer, or would-be producer, little option but to accept the system of commodity capitalism in which to enjoy these objects, or to produce them. But if the capitalist system exacts some kind of hegemonic domination, it is not really over us as individuals; we could, with some effort, choose not to consume the products of the culture industry by ‘unplugging’ ourselves from the network and making our own entertainment. Rather, it is our socio-economic structures and our cultural institutions – operating with the silent consensus of the mass society – which are steeped in the values of commodity capitalism.

## CHAPTER 2

### MUSIC AND MEANING IN THE BRITISH AIRWAYS COMMERCIALS

Since 1983 “Dome Épais”, better known as the “Flower Duet”, from Delibes’ opera *Lakmé*, has been British Airways’ theme tune. It has featured consistently in the company’s TV commercials of this period and is used in their operations, both in the air and on the ground. The importance placed on this music can be seen quite clearly in the way it is used to promote the airline. In June 1997, when BA revealed a radically revised corporate identity, the “Flower Duet” survived with only a handful of visual signifiers.<sup>20</sup> Its central position in BA’s corporate identity can also be seen in the company’s commercials, in which it is always a foreground element.

Many of British Airways’ adverts offer spectacular televisual experiences in their own right, as we shall see later. However, although such advertisements might constitute aesthetic objects and cultural products, this is not their

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<sup>20</sup> Most controversially, the red, white and blue tail-plane was replaced by colourful abstract designs, unique to each individual plane, and reflecting global influences. This flagrant disregard for one of the central tenets of corporate design, coupled no doubt with the deposition of the union jack, prompted Baroness Thatcher to shroud one newly unveiled tail-plane design with her handkerchief.

primary purpose. British Airways is a commercial airline, not an entertainment company, and its adverts are primarily promotional texts. It is not too presumptuous to assume, therefore, that these texts are quite consciously significant. When advertisements are conceived, attention is paid to every detail in order that the composition achieves the desired effect, or conveys the desired meaning. At the same time, an established company such as British Airways is likely to have an established – and thus relatively static – corporate ethos. As a result, it is likely that the messages they hope to convey in their advertisements are relatively consistent too. The use of the same music to advertise British Airways may simply be a symptom of the advertising industry’s reluctance to change a successful formula. On the other hand, it may be indicative of something more profound: it offers the tantalising suggestion that the musical material itself contributes something to this signification, and that the reason it is used consistently is that the meaning it conveys is a meaning that British Airways are keen to be associated with. It is this notion that I will explore in this chapter. In order to provide a theoretical context for this study, I will begin by briefly considering some relevant issues concerning musical meaning. I will then move on to consider the way in which music is commonly used in TV commercials, before examining British Airways “Flower Duet” commercials in detail.

## MUSIC AND MEANING

When we talk of ‘deriving something’ from listening to music, or more simply ‘getting something’ out of it, it is clear that we are implying that the



music has some meaning to us. The nature of this meaningfulness is something that has troubled philosophers and aestheticians for centuries. Meaning is normally taken to be the expression of a specific concept by means of a highly specific communicational system. Language is obviously the most highly developed human example of such a system. If we invoke a Platonic notion, words are man's way of transforming 'essences' from the realm of pure meaning into concrete terms. As the term 'pure meaning' makes clear, however, from this perspective, meaning is not the exclusive province of language: language does not possess meaning (it is an arbitrary system) but only expresses it. Nevertheless, the ties between language and meaning are difficult to sever. Music, too, seems to express something – it is characterized as the expressive art *par excellence*. But whether it really expresses anything, and whether the thing it 'expresses' can be called 'meaning', are matters of controversy.

According to Monroe Beardsley (1958: 378) the problem stems from our tendency to look for meanings in man-made objects. As rational agents, we presume that the object under examination has been produced for a reason, and if that cannot be found in some practical utility, it must reside elsewhere:

[An] auditory design presents itself with every sign of being a human artifact, something thought out intelligently and ordered by a being like ourselves. . . . And when we attend to it, and strain to penetrate its inmost nature, it is as if we were listening for a 'message' or trying to catch the voice of its maker.

But if we strain to hear the ‘voice’ of a composer in a piece of music, what do we actually hear? Often people speak metaphorically of a young composer ‘finding his or her musical voice,’ but no-one imagines that this voice has any correspondence with their bodily voice: the phrase refers to their arriving at a consistent musical style with which they can be identified. So while it may tell us something about their music in musical terms, it can tell us little else: it does not tell us anything ‘meaningful’ in the usual sense of the word.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, this idea of music being quasi-linguistic has been prevalent in musical scholarship.

Since the late 1960s, linguistics (by way of structuralism and semiotics) has been one of the dominant modes of thinking in cultural studies (Lechte, 1994). And the notion that music is a language has led beyond the general discussion, which offered genuine insights into how music functions, to rigid and often unhelpful isomorphisms between the two fields. Particular branches of linguistic endeavour can be seen to cast their shadows on music theory. The discovery of irreducible phonetic units as the basis for language, for example, prompted investigations into the existence of similar atomic units in music. Benjamin Boretz (1970), for instance, found them in *qualia* of pitch and temporal ordering. Likewise, Chomsky’s notion of generative grammars – a

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<sup>21</sup> Other writers have considered music to be rather more than the mere voice of its maker. Simon Jenkins, ‘Midsummer Melodies’ *The Times* (London), 28 June 1997, p. 22, writes of Alfred Brendel’s performances of Beethoven and Schubert that “he led us, torch in hand, through the dark recesses of each composer’s soul”. Later in the same article he tells us that the musician also enjoys access to the listener’s soul.

finite set of rules that can generate an infinite number of well-formed linguistic constructs – led to the divination of similar musical grammars (Lerdahl and Jackendoff, 1983; Sundberg and Lindblom, 1976). In each case, the primary motivating factor was that music, like language, has syntax, a formal structure. But, in addition to its syntactic features, language is characterized by its semantic basis: the property that facilitates the expression of precise meanings. It is hardly surprising that, for some scholars, a theory of musical semantics has represented something of a musicological Holy Grail. Unifying their diverse methodologies is the principle that just as verbal meaning is attributable to units of meaning, musical discourse can be similarly divided up and its meanings deduced.

The clearest example of a quasi-linguistic theory of music's emotional meaning is Deryck Cooke's *Language of Music* (1959). Cooke argues that conveying this rarefied form of meaning has been the unconscious project of composers for the past five centuries. He even goes so far as to identify certain intervals in melodies that correspond to the expression of certain emotions. Cooke argues that in tonal music, particular emotions are evoked by specific musical motifs by virtue of the relationship between the various scale degrees of the motif to the tonic, which have different 'tensions'. For example, a melody in a minor key which starts on the dominant and then rises a minor sixth to the submediant before falling by step to the tonic, "conveys the feeling of a passionate outburst of painful emotion, which does not protest further, but falls back into acceptance" (p. xi).

More recently, and developing from semiotic theories, Philip Tagg (1979) has similarly looked for specific 'musematic'<sup>22</sup> reference in order to establish a method for analyzing affect in popular music. His analysis of the *Kojak* theme exemplifies his method. Identifying and isolating a museme, and comparing it with similar elements in other pieces (a process he calls 'interobjective comparison') Tagg goes on to hypothesize its 'meaning'. This hypothesis is then tested by substituting elements within the museme to show how the meaning is dependent on that particular configuration of elements. The overall meaning of a piece (or passage) of music is a product of synchronic and diachronic aggregates of such musemes.

Cooke's recognition that music is a process of patterns of tension and resolution is not contested; nor is his description of a hierarchy dependent on the relationship between scale degrees and the tonic. But his main thesis, that these musical units point to some signified, is contentious. Language can be seen to refer to specific things in a way that music does not. Its formal structure, at the level of both the sentence and the word, provides a systematic framework for the articulation of meaning. This structural framework simply does not exist to the same degree in music, as can be seen by the lack of specificity which characterizes the meanings that both Cooke and Tagg ascribe

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<sup>22</sup> What Tagg calls a 'museme' is equivalent to the morpheme in language. Just as morphemes are reliant on phonemes, so musemes depend on fundamental units of musical expression. Whether or not one considers such a unit to have semantic potential, it can nevertheless be used to refer to a short chunk of music with psychological reality to the listener. It is in this general sense that I use the term in subsequent chapters.

to musical passages. Cooke's account of the meaning of the motif mentioned above makes it clear that he is talking not about specific quasi-linguistic meaning with exclusive signifier-signified relationships, but about 'meaning' in the most generalized sense. 'Resignation to pain', 'hopeless grief' or even 'ambition denied' would all be plausible labels for the same motif: the music evokes a general class of feelings rather than anything more definite. Likewise, in Tagg's description of the *Kojak* theme it is the generalized human qualities like heroism that are most convincing. Readings of "constant bustling activity, agitated and insistent" make more sense when taken as descriptions of autonomously musical activity rather than expressing "the atmosphere of a large American city" (p. 230).

Semantic reference in language functions by virtue of the division of the linguistic sign into two parts: the signifier (word or sound pattern) and signified (concept) (Saussure, trans. 1983). In language, the signifier is generally said to be 'transparent'. In other words (and invoking a slightly different metaphor) it 'collapses' as a function of the signified; words give way to meanings. Thus, when we are told something we usually remember the gist of what was said – the meaning – rather than the precise syntax of the expression (Fillenbaum, 1973). Poetry and creative writing are the exceptions in that the signifier does not collapse completely. In these artistic products the organization on the syntactic level is apprehended and appreciated in tandem with the meaning of the signifieds – a feature which Michael Apter (1984: 419) describes as "signifier/signified synergy".

In reality the 'transparency' of the signifier even in everyday language is not literal: accomplished speakers choose to employ words not just on the grounds of specificity of meaning, but also for affective reasons. When we perceive words to be 'appropriate' or 'fitting' we are referring to their surface features alone, or to what we apprehend as some correlation between these features and the concept signified. Onomatopoeiae are the obvious examples. In the same way, repeated use of the same word, in speech or writing, often 'clouds' the otherwise transparent surface, focusing attention on the syntactic structure, usually to the detriment of the expression. A competent language user will vary linguistic terms to prevent this. Of course, the choice to employ an unusual but appropriate word in place of the mundane, or to vary one's language, is a creative decision – and Apter's synergy still applies, although it may only do so momentarily, as the speaker's attention once again refocuses on the broader meaning he or she is conveying.

In the verbal arts, especially poetry, it is the deliberate opacity, rather than transparency of the surface, that is admired. So it is the language of Shakespeare, not his storylines (which were often clearly derivative, of course) that we delight in. A poet would not be impressed if asked to just summarize what the poem said, rather than giving a full recital. Indeed, performance-poets sometimes tell their audience what a poem means in addition to reading it – an act that, if expression of meaning were a poem's sole function, would render the recitation redundant. Not all creative writing features such clear structural synergy, however. Some nonsense poetry, for example, being composed largely

of made-up words, does not have the semantic foundation on which it depends. There are no obvious signifieds relating to the given signifiers, so the equilibrium is tipped in favour of the latter. Thus it is the surface play of syntactic features – metre, rhythm, rhyme-schemes and so forth – which is primarily apprehended.

But there is rather more to it than that. Part of the effect of nonsense verse lies in the veiled meanings arising through the confusion of juxtaposed phonetic structures. In other words, the nonsense syllables that result bear some vague relation to similar meaningful words, and their groupings relate to the morphology of meaningful sentences. So, while a nonsense poem may not refer to some specific thing, it may allude in some fragmentary way to a vast nexus of semantic possibilities, each of which contributes (however fleetingly) to its effect, and to some kind of ‘meaning’. Thus, although not occurring in such a clear-cut way, signifier/signified synergy is still present to some degree. This ‘poetic’ situation would seem to correspond exactly to that which occurs in music: surface elements cannot ‘collapse’ in favour of some signified meaning, because the necessary semantic correspondence is lacking. Indeed, T. S. Eliot (ed. 1975) describes (sensible) poetry in much the same way, contrasting its ‘music’ (the surface interplay of its signifiers) with its meaning. If anything, music is more like nonsense poetry: it can conjure up some semantic correspondences, but any signification that does occur is non-specific and

rather unpredictable – a state of affairs that is rather desirable from the point of view of composers.<sup>23</sup>

Because the musical sign does not collapse in favour of some extramusical concept, Raymond Monelle (1979) has described it as more ‘religious’ than linguistic symbolism. By this he means that the symbol participates in the reality of its meaning, rather than standing conventionally for its meaning, as do linguistic symbols (words). So, just as in nonsense poetry, it is the syntactic surface of the music that is the primary matter of the experience. In music this is sometimes described as the ‘sheer musical process’. This includes pitches and timbres, rhythmic and harmonic groupings, and higher level chunks of combinations of all of these. And just as in poetry where it is purely sonological relations which effect rhymes, for instance, well-formed musical discourse is conditional on purely musical relations. Thus we hear one phrase ‘answered’ by a ‘rhyming’ phrase, and even formal units complementing each other in an analogous manner. An ‘answering’ phrase does not imply that the preceding phrase literally posed a question, just that it left the musical discourse open, or incomplete, the second phrase being required to effect closure.

However, pronouncing the judgment that music means no more than superficial patterns of sound obviously does not square with our subjective experiences as musical listeners. While listening to music we can be moved to extremes of emotion manifestly more powerful than those we feel while

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<sup>23</sup> In a letter to Alma Mahler (17 October, 1910), Schoenberg admitted ‘I don’t want to be understood; I want to express myself – but I hope that I will be misunderstood. It would be terrible to me if I were transparent to people’. Quoted in Cook (1998: 271).



apprehending, for example, the play of colours in a kaleidoscope. So, just as in nonsense poetry where the surface hints at veiled meanings through phonetic similarities with real (that is meaningful) words, the musical surface seems to hint at something beyond itself. Now, it is obvious that music, not being composed of phonemes, is precluded from allusion to verbal constructs. The only alternative is that the powerful meanings that are felt to be carried by music are non-verbal.

Although music does not have the signifier-signified relationship on which meaning in the linguistic sense depends, it is nevertheless felt to have meaning. That is to say, its effects are interpreted as meanings because it somehow appears to meet the formal requirements of a meaningful expression. But in acknowledging the role of interpretation, we have moved beyond the question of whether or not music actually does carry meanings to the issue of whether or not it is felt to do so. And whether it is felt to be meaningful is entirely independent of whether or not it is actually semantic. Feeling music to be meaningful is the province of feeling rather than meaning.

The correspondence between music and feeling has never really been contested. Even Hanslick, who dismissed its emotional properties as extraneous to aesthetic value, nevertheless recognized that music had affective potential. For Hanslick, however, it was the sheer musical process that was of aesthetic importance.

The Beautiful, strictly speaking, aims at nothing, since it is nothing but a form which, though available for many purposes according to its nature has, as such, no aim beyond

itself. If the contemplation of something beautiful arouses pleasurable feelings, this effect is distinct from the beautiful as such (Hanslick, trans. 1974: 18).

He implores us that “the mere fact that this particular art [music] is so closely bound up with our feelings, by no means justifies the assumption that its aesthetic principles depend on this union” (p. 19). Indeed, he is utterly damning of listeners who apprehend the musical object in this way: “Their attitude towards music is not an observant but *pathological* one. . . . their mind is constantly on the rack of suspense and expectancy” (p. 124). Later he suggests that

Music loosens the feet or heart just as wine loosens the tongue. But such victories only testify to the weakness of the vanquished. To be the slave of unreasoning, undirected, and purposeless feelings, ignited by a power which is out of all relation to our will and intellect, is not worthy of the human mind (p. 129).

Hanslick’s standpoint is rather extreme, and his tone overly prescriptive by the standards of today’s scholarship. Nevertheless, the apprehension of the play of formal elements is a perfectly legitimate way of listening to music, assuming that one is able to simply divorce one’s emotional responses from one’s intellectual consideration, or that one would wish to. Of course, in focusing on the formal elements of aesthetic experience Hanslick sidesteps what is perhaps the thorniest issue of musical aesthetics. For many people the

value of music lies precisely in its perceived emotional content, so the question of how an auditory trace can support this interpretation is fundamental.

The basis for emotional perceptions of music was recognized as far back as 1931 by Carroll Pratt, according to whom the auditory characters of music “intrinsically contain certain properties which, because of their close resemblance to certain characteristics in the subjective realm, are frequently confused with emotions proper”. He stresses, however, that these “auditory characters are not emotions at all. They merely *sound* the way moods *feel*” (Pratt, 1931: 191).

This line of reasoning has remained largely unchallenged, being reiterated and refined by successive generations of musical thinkers and aestheticians. Susanne Langer (1951: 227-8) for example, suggests that rather than the existence of fixed signifier-signified relationships,

there are certain aspects of the so-called “inner-life” – physical or mental – which have formal properties similar to those of music – patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, of agreement and disagreement, preparation, fulfilment, excitation, sudden change etc.<sup>24</sup>

These ideas were developed by Leonard Meyer (1956) who provides a psychologically enlightened description of the manner in which ‘embodied meanings’ (those internal to the piece) are generated by this dynamic tensional flux:

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<sup>24</sup> This is Langer’s most strongly voiced opinion, but as has been pointed out, her thinking in this area is full of contradictions. For a full discussion see Åhlberg (1994).

Musical experiences of suspense are very similar to those experienced in real life. Both in life and in music the emotions arising have essentially the same stimulus situation: the situation of ignorance, the awareness of the individual's impotence and inability to act where the future course of events are unknown. Because these musical events are so very similar to those existing in the drama and in life itself, they are often felt to be particularly powerful and effective (Meyer, 1956: 28).

What is suggested, then, is that rather than possessing emotional properties, music somehow exemplifies those properties (Goodman, 1969: 46-95). According to Goodman, symbols that exemplify differ from denotative symbols in one fundamental way: they possess as a quality the thing to which they refer. More recently, Stephen Davies has clarified this point: there are such things as 'public' emotions which do not express emotions inherent in an object. The drooping boughs of a weeping willow or the jowls of a St. Bernard, for instance, may look sad, but their appearances are not indicative of felt emotions (Davies, 1994: 31). In the same way, a musical structure may sound emotional, but cannot *be* so. We perceive it as emotional expression because the music has some resemblance to the structure of our emotions.

Making explicit his debt to Meyer's work, Monroe Beardsley similarly locates the expressive meaning of music in what he calls 'modes of continuation' which are general features of all experience. These modes are characterized by such factors as expectancy, hesitation and delayed resolution, so that the tonal system offers analogies for the way in which people experience emotions and these analogies allow a partial mapping of the

relations within this system on to our emotions. Therefore, to quote Roger Scruton (1993: 202) the processes of music are “truly musical, and yet at the same time [are] explorations of character and invitations to sympathy.”

Beardsley is wont to remind us, however, that although the ‘meanings’ we find in music may be very powerful,

these descriptions, in the end, are best taken as attempts at a compendious description of the prevalent or dominant human regional qualities of the work. They do not entail, nor do they presuppose, that the work can be, or contain, a proposition (Beardsley, 1958: 378).

Music, then, does not signify in a linguistic sense, but in the sense that its effect upon the listener gives an impression of meaningfulness (in the broad sense of the word) as its contours mirror those of life itself.

Looking for fixed signifier-signified relationships, in the way that Cooke (1959) and Tagg (1979) have done, is certainly out of step with one influential theoretical approach, and one that is particularly attractive in the case of music. Rather than accepting that meanings are enshrined in expressions (be they linguistic, musical, or whatever) ‘reception’ or ‘reader-response’ theories espouse the notion that construction of meaning arises in the interpretation of an expression. In other words, while the expression provides the material to interpret, and may favour certain readings, its meaning derives from the subject’s negotiation with that material. Meanings, then, are simply not available to be imposed by producers.

This idea that meanings are negotiated by the subject is central to much work in post-Adornian cultural studies. With specific reference to language, for example, Bakhtin (trans. 1981) proposes the idea of ‘heteroglossia’ in which all communication takes place. While any process of communication must conform in some way to a fixed system (the proto-language), Bakhtin argues that the features of that system are subservient to the context of the utterance. As Michael Holquist summarizes in the introduction to his translation of *The Dialogic Imagination*, these can “refract, add to, or in some cases, even subtract from the . . . meaning the utterance may be said to have when it is conceived only as a systematic manifestation” (p. xix). Bakhtin argues that focusing on the formal constraints of language is to misrepresent the plurality of meanings that can be derived from a single expression. Nicholas Cook (1994: 39) is quite clearly drawing on such theories when he describes music as “a bundle of generic attributes in search of an object. . . . a structured semantic space, a privileged site for the negotiation of meaning”. Cook’s formulation of reception theory is significant for musical aesthetics in that it also accommodates the prevailing idea that music is heard in terms of human qualities. Later in this chapter I shall go on to consider the music of the “Flower Duet” in relation to this conception of musical meaningfulness.

## MUSIC IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Advertising represents a kind of textual devolution. Design elements created to promote products were originally attached to those products themselves, as packaging. In the advertisement, ‘aesthetic persuaders’ have

become independent of packaging. In the words of Wolfgang Haug (trans. 1987: 115) this represents an emancipation from the product of the “colourful commodity spirit” which “flies all over the world.” The benefits of removing the promotional text from the product are clear enough for manufactured goods. The promotion can be published in a variety of formats, through different media, to reach a wider audience than would otherwise be possible. Television is just one of those media. For service-providers who do not have a tangible product, advertising provides a virtual product body on which aesthetic persuaders can be located. British Airways are a clear example of this: although BA does have tangible vehicles (pun intended) that can be designed and packaged, the visibility of these to the general public cannot be guaranteed. After all, only a small proportion of the population live beneath flight-paths, and those that do are unlikely to be wholly sympathetic. Television commercials, therefore, provide a means of reaching a broader public.

On a superficial level, at least, the role of music within TV commercials can be explained adequately enough. As Dunbar (1990: 200) tells us, it provides a background to verbal and dramatic events and can comment on those events; it is used to establish and enhance moods and set the scene within a particular geographic location or period of time; it can also provide a brand signature and deliver a sales pitch.<sup>25</sup> These do not seem unduly problematic: a brand

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<sup>25</sup> Huron (1989) also provides a list of functions that music in advertising fulfils, and holds them up as a model that can be applied to judge the communicative success of any musical work. Hecker (1984) provides a similar list of the values that music can impart, and describes technical (and non-technical) musical characteristics to realize these values.

signature is no more than a musical mnemonic, delivering a sales pitch can be achieved by setting words to the music, and the other functions listed are broadly comparable to the way music is used in films and television programmes. From a formal point of view, however, an obvious distinction can be made between commercials that feature images cut to a pre-existing piece of music, and those in which music underscores a verbal or visual narrative in the conventional Hollywood manner. This distinction is central to the way in which music relates to the general communicative framework of the advert.

Where music is the originary component, it has the propensity to be treated as the foreground element. The extent to which it is foregrounded in a particular advertisement depends on several factors. The music, which can be in any style, can be presented diegetically, with the musical performance presented simultaneously in the aural and visual domains. This obviously increases the attention on the music. On the other hand, even when the music is the continuous, originary component, its potential to figure as a foreground element can be diminished by the presence of a voice-over. In this category, the meanings are often related verbally via the lyrics, which might be pertinent to the product (“You’d Better Shape Up” from *Grease* (1978) in a 1996 commercial for St. Ivel Shape yogurt, for example) or which may carry the desired connotations (M People’s “Search For The Hero” in Peugeot’s 1995 commercial for its 406 saloon). Sometimes the lyrics are altered to refer directly to the product while the style or genre of the music adds its own signification.



For example, a 1995 commercial for Kingsmill bread featured lyrics about the quality of their loaves to the tune of “Big Spender”.

Song lyrics are obviously just one of many forms of verbal communication available. Voice-overs and on-screen text are far more common. Occasionally, two or more of these verbal modes coincide, usually to reinforce a message (a spoken phrase is shown on-screen). Very occasionally this coincidence provides an opportunity for playing on words. In a 1996 advertisement for Clover butter, for example, the song “Love Is All Around” accompanies close-ups of the ‘love’ in the word Clover on the container. Another strategy sometimes employed in commercials is for the meaning to be verbal but unstated. For example, an advert might use a well-known song with lyrics pertinent to the object of promotion, but in an instrumental arrangement. Viewers are left to fill in the verbal meaning from his or her cultural knowledge.

Other adverts in this category seem to use music for purely musical reasons. It is unlikely, for instance, that many viewers, or potential Orange customers, would recognise the music used to advertise their mobile telephones as being from Philip Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach*. We must assume, therefore, that features inherent in the music itself, or generic features, somehow correlate with the meaning that is being constructed in other domains (it sounds modern, and hi-tech, and it relates kinaesthetically to the visual imagery). In some cases the music refers on more than one level: Renault used the overture from Verdi’s *La forza del Destino* in a commercial featuring a

monastery – a central location in the opera. On one level the music could be seen to bear a kinaesthetic relation to a well-tuned engine, or speeding car; on another level, the connoisseur is rewarded (and may feel flattered) if he or she spots the allusion to the plot of the opera. Cadbury's appropriation of a theme from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, sung to the words "Everyone's a fruit and nut case," is another example.

This relationship between music and image is characterized by existing audio-visual genres, and explicit reference to these genres is often made in commercials: the St. Ivel Shape commercial mentioned previously, which featured a parody (vocally and visually) of the film musical *Grease*, is an example of this. Likewise, the Peugeot 406 commercial clearly borrows its mode of presentation from music video, while actively referencing the film *Schindler's List* (1995): like the film, this commercial is in black and white except for the red of small child's dress. Unlike the film, however, in which the discarded dress signifies the fate of the little girl (in spite of Schindler's heroism), the child in the commercial is plucked from the path of a juggernaut in an heroic act. This is, of course, a thinly veiled attempt to engender associations of heroism with the Peugeot saloon, further reinforcing the connotations of "Search For The Hero". Such intertextual references are typical of music video. In this case the sub-text could be taken to be rather offensive in its implication that the mere purchase of a car can surmount Schindler's altruism.

Rather than using music as the originary component, however, many adverts are more like miniature films in their construction: a narrative is composed first, and then, if music is added, it is used to underscore the visual or verbal narrative. In this situation, the music obviously has less potential to be a foreground element. Once again there are no stylistic limits. Just as in films, excerpts from pop tracks, electronic textures or more traditional film music rub shoulders – sometimes all in the same commercial. This can occur diachronically, whereby the music proceeds through different styles, or synchronically, in which case different stylistic elements occur simultaneously. Alternatively, both diachronic and synchronic axes may be characterized by a plurality of genres. As the music is not the primary structuring element, commercials in this class have an auditory feature available to them which, by necessity, is not available to the adverts structured around music: silence. As the visual narrative forms a continuous thread, music has the potential to ‘drop out’ – in much the same way as it would do in a television drama, for example.

In structural terms, then, the use of music in adverts conforms to its general use in audio-visual forms, with either the music or the visual narrative taking precedence. Even where the relationship changes in the course of the advert (for example, where the music moves from being the background element to the foreground element, as in the British Airways ‘Concorde’ commercial which I analyze on page 98) the same thing occurs in film musicals and even standard films. But can we really assume that any television commercial is just a very short, but otherwise standard, cinematic form, an

essential component of which just happens to be a product? The rather obvious 'product placement' that occurs in some films and television programmes may lend credibility to this reading, as we see that products *can* feature in conventional cinema, but this is surely wrong-headed. Commercials are very different from other televisual forms. After all, broadcasters *buy* programmes to fill their schedule but *sell* advertising space, mainly to finance the programmes; programmes are scheduled, commercials are not; viewers use commercial breaks to make cups of tea, or to 'channel-hop'. Indeed, these differences override the fact that television programmes, films and adverts share common structural features to such a massive degree that the observation of this fact is rather banal.

Of course, theories of the way music, sound and vision combine in the cinema can shed some light on individual commercials. As Guy Cook makes clear, television commercials often employ structures analogous to conventional narrative with clear goal-directed motion in all modes (visual, musical and verbal) each component of which flows into a single point of closure.<sup>26</sup> In narrative terms the sale represents the ultimate close. Within the diegetic world of the advert, the storyline itself will also be constructed to

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<sup>26</sup> Cook (1992: 47-48) describes how each of the modes (visual images, music, language) flow independently until the final third of the advertisement when "these tributaries . . . flow together into a single message. This suggests that advertisers, whatever the strength of their faith in pictures, feel it safer to hedge their bets at the end." In addition, gestures of closure preponderate in all modes: the musical 'narrative' typically climaxes, crescendos or simply resolves, and this is true of the verbal and visual components. Bowlby (1993: 103-105) also discusses narratives of selling.

achieve a similar envelope, but the short duration and monothematic nature of advertisements mean that the 'rhythm' of an advert cannot derive from the standard narrative-structuring devices but relies on the cadential progress towards a goal.<sup>27</sup> Tonal music is characterized by an analogous process: the opening of a psychological gap and its ultimate closure. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that music plays a significant role in the cadential structure of commercials. Indeed, as is clear from Nicholas Cook's (1994) work in this field, the contribution of music to advertising messages in such contexts is so pivotal that a musicological understanding is essential if we are to apprehend the total communicative effect.

#### BRITISH AIRWAYS' "FLOWER DUET" COMMERCIALS

British Airways' adverts in general are typical in their use of music: in the early 1990s, for example, the Club World brand was promoted with the Drifters' hit "Up On The Roof", the lyrics of which clearly related to the airline business. Similarly, World Offers (a season of cut-price long-haul flights) used music from different continents, juxtaposed with the silence of Britain's empty streets (the implication being that the everyone has left Britain for sunnier climes, courtesy of a discounted BA ticket). But while certain of British Airways' individual brands are promoted using other music, the "Flower Duet" (see Fig. 2.1 on page 96) is undoubtedly the British Airways' theme. Most

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<sup>27</sup> It is the 'dovetailing'/overlapping and 'nesting' (imbrication) of narrative terms that makes possible large-scale structures (Barthes, 1977: 103-4). In commercials, the short time duration and singular message being communicated preclude this kind of structure.

noticeably, it is reserved for those adverts that do not focus on any particular product, or target specific demographic groups, but promote British Airways the company – what BA term their ‘Masterbrand’, a concept to which I shall return later. In these commercials the music is clearly not just a background affair but is often quite deliberately foregrounded. Rather than merely accompanying a communicative strategy, then, the music seems to be very much a part of the message, and this would appear to be corroborated by the presence of the music beyond the televisual text.

Music in the culture of the late twentieth century is routinely piped into real-world situations: it often accompanies us in our public lives whether we are shopping, eating out, or working. In all of these situations the music does not form part of an authored mixed-media experience centered on a narrative structure. Rather, it contributes to the mixed-media experience of the real world as opposed to the diegetic worlds of commercials: a world in which we are free agents ‘making the story up as we go along,’ as it were. If environmental music ever ‘fits’ our actions in the way that it might in a classical Hollywood score, then this is usually purely coincidental. In view of the vastly different demands of these respective contexts, therefore, we must assume that music plays a different role in each. This would appear to be borne out by the fact that most businesses use music exclusive to a particular context. Supermarket chains, for example, often use foreground music in their commercials, but will use background music in their stores.

The musical score for "The Flower Duet" is presented in eight staves, each with a melodic line and guitar chord diagrams. Roman numerals indicate the harmonic structure. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 6/8.

- Staff 1:** Melodic line with three measures. Chord diagrams are shown below. Roman numerals: I, I, I.
- Staff 2:** Melodic line with five measures. A first ending bracket covers the first two measures, and a second ending bracket covers the last two measures. Roman numerals: VI, III, VI, I, V.
- Staff 3:** Melodic line with four measures. Roman numerals: I, V.
- Staff 4:** Melodic line with four measures. Roman numerals: V, IV.
- Staff 5:** Melodic line with four measures. Roman numerals: IVm, I.
- Staff 6:** Melodic line with five measures. Roman numeral: V<sup>9</sup>.
- Staff 7:** Melodic line with five measures. Roman numerals: I, IV, I, IV, I.

Fig. 2.1: The "Flower Duet" (melodic lines).

The way in which many airlines use the same music in both their real world operations and in their commercials, which British Airways pioneered with the “Flower Duet”, is something of a commercial anomaly. Nevertheless, it provides an interesting case study. It also affords some purchase on the issue of what music contributes to the various contexts in which it is used.

The “Flower Duet” commercials do not conform to any one particular taxonomic class. In some adverts the music is employed in almost its original form (only the final cadence is altered) while in others it is a hybrid of rock/pop or world music instrumentation with the classical theme (1989 and 1995 ‘Masterbrand’ and 1992 ‘Masterbrand’ commercials, respectively). There are consistent features, however, in that the music is foregrounded – either by its presence as the originary component to which everything else is synchronized, or else through the use of some device that emphasizes the music. The three ‘Masterbrand’ commercials, being almost music videos, are the clearest examples of the visuals having been cut to the music. Of the commercials in which the visuals are not simply cut to the music, the 1986 ‘Concorde’ advert (which seems to have been used to present the piece to the public as the British Airways theme) features the most obvious foregrounding device.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The “Flower Duet” had already been used in a low-key campaign in 1983-84, the ‘Product Improvement’ commercial. This could have been a low-key public opinion test, or it may have been realized only afterwards that the “Flower Duet” had the potential for wider significance. In any case, the presentation of the music in the ‘Concorde Competition’ commercial leaves little room for doubting Saatchi and Saatchi’s intentions.



Year	Promotion	Music	Time
1983/4	Product Improvement	Orchestra and voices (original)	6/8
1986	Concorde Competition	Orchestra and voices (original)	6/8
1989	Clearing Your Path	Orchestra and voices (original)	6/8
1989	Masterbrand	Pop version (Malcolm McLaren)	4/4
1992	Masterbrand	Ethnic/pop version - rhythmically altered	3/4
1993	Gatwick	Viennese waltz pastiche (reharmonized)	3/4
1993	Dream Ticket	Solo voice with orchestral accompaniment	6/8
1994	Club Europe	Waltz (pizzicato string textures)	3/4
1995	Masterbrand	Pop/rock version	6/8

Fig. 2.2: British Airways commercials featuring the “Flower Duet”, 1983-95

The ‘Concorde’ commercial advertised a competition in which the first prize was the private use of Concorde for a day. In the advert we see the last-minute preparations being made for the prizewinners’ send-off. So, as the voice-over informs us of the finer details of the promotion, we see a red carpet being rolled out, banners unfurled, and drapes carefully ironed for the big event. At the same time, we hear the sounds of an orchestra tuning up, and see musicians donning white bow ties. But while there might appear to be no particular synchronization between the audio and visual components, the combination is not entirely haphazard: the glide down a banner by one of the uniformed work party is ‘mickey-moused’ by a glissando from a warming-up flautist. As the sounds of tuning-up fade away, the voice-over adds the final

festive touch to the future proceedings: “. . . we’ll even get a band to see you off”. At this point the camera tracks back to show the orchestra assembled on the tarmac; the conductor raises his baton, and the musicians perform the “Flower Duet”. The irony here is self evident: the ensemble is not the *band* that one would expect, and the music, being rather restrained and lacking in razzamatazz, is not an obvious contender for such an event. The inappropriateness of the music points to another level of meaning behind, or rather, above, that of the superficial content.

The Concorde competition, being the subject of the voice-over, is the most obvious object of promotion. But this does not quite make sense: we are only just being told about the competition, and yet the clear implication is that we are viewing the preparations for the winner’s send-off. The virtual worlds of commercials are, of course, exempt from the causal logic of the real world; the confusion arises because the products embedded in these elaborate fictions are very real, as can be substantiated in the high street. But even after making allowance for this, the musical references of this commercial seem out of kilter with the superficial communicative strategy. The obvious conclusion is that, rather than being a classical multimedia text, with the music underscoring the verbal and visual narratives, in this commercial the music functions as an independent agent. Being clearly at odds with the primary message (that of the voice-over) we must assume that the music forms a secondary, separate, level of communication. This multi-level structure would seem to be supported by a close reading.

From the very start of the advert we are shown signs of preparation in both visual and aural domains: as I have described, we see the putting up of the decorations and hear the musicians preparing for a performance. On the whole these sounds are not diegetic – only briefly do we see a violinist tuning-up. This preparatory process is still unresolved by the time the voice-over has given all the details of the competition; only when the band is mentioned, seemingly as an afterthought, does the goal of this process become clear. At this point we are presented with the ultimate unity between the visual and musical as the two domains converge to a single diegetic musical performance.

The irony that we noted in relation to the inappropriateness of the music for such an event serves to disrupt the frame of reference of the commercial. Just as a grammatical error or malapropism focuses our attention on the productional aspects of language rather than on what is being said, this musical ‘blunder’ shifts our focus within the communicational matrix of the text. From the beginning of the advert the only really coherent element is verbal – the voice-over. Since humans have a well-documented preference for coherent expression, this is what we focus on. In this context, the musical intrusion thrusts the “Flower Duet” into the spotlight. This is the first coherent music we have heard, and the notion that it is this we should be focusing on is reinforced by its diegetic presentation. To be sure, the voice-over does return after a few bars with a final humorous remark, serving to close the verbal narrative and restore the conventional inter-media balance. In this way the verbal narrative frames the message of the musical narrative. Why this should

be so, and what this secondary narrative might be conveying, is left for the viewer to work out.

The cleverly contrived presentation that the advertisers adopted in the 'Concorde Competition' commercial is ample evidence of the importance they placed on the "Flower Duet". Likewise, the way it is consistently foregrounded in all of the adverts makes it clear that this music is felt to 'say something' about British Airways. We must assume that a quality was recognized in the "Flower Duet" that could be associated with British Airways, and which somehow embodied the company ethos in musical form. This music then functions as an agent of meaning alongside typography, graphic design and so on, all of which contribute to BA's corporate identity. In effect, it functions as a musical logo.

The most obvious meanings that pieces of music impart to TV commercials are generally not simply musical meanings: some arise from the words or titles of songs; others derive from extra-musical factors or at least rely on cultural knowledge. The "Flower Duet" sounds operatic, and that alone will have certain connotations. All pieces of music are culturally embedded objects, and each viewer of a commercial is involved in that cultural web to some extent. It is, to this extent, problematic to talk of purely musical meanings. Nevertheless, different pieces of music evoke markedly different responses and there is more to this than textual or generic references or other connotations. Any number of pieces of music, for instance, sound operatic and give rise to the same generic connotations, but that is not to say that they are equivalent in

their communicational effect. It goes without saying another operatic duet – that from Bizet’s *Les Pêcheurs des Perles*, for instance – would evoke a very different corporate image. They are, after all, two quite distinct pieces of music, and no one contests the specificity of the sound events. The challenge is to explain the way in which those events translate into meanings.

## INTERPRETING THE MUSIC

From a musicological point of view the “Flower Duet” appears to be an eminently reasonable choice of music for an airline. In Delibes’ opera, composed in 1883, Lakmé, the daughter of a Brahmin priest, and her maid-servant Mallika take a boat out on a river while her father visits a nearby town. In order to obtain protection for him on his trip, she plucks a blue lotus flower, sacred to Ganesa, a Hindu God. As they float on the water Lakmé and her servant sing the duet “Dome Épais”. The associations with travel and the safety of loved ones are, of course, highly appropriate. In addition to these contextual associations, other, purely musical aspects might seem predisposed to connotations of flight and travel.

If we were to engage in a hermeneutic description of this passage we might interpret the opening bars of the music, a repeated four bar chunk which never quite escapes its tonic harmony, as a tentative reaching for the skies, doomed to return to the earth. This ‘meaning’ could be seen in both the melody in which the upward scale at the end of the first and second bars never reaches the fifth degree, which it promises, and in the harmony, which fails to escape the gravitational pull of the tonic. Eventually, in bar 4, it actually does

get off the ground, but only as far as the unstable mediant from which it can only fall back to earth. After another attempt, the music finally surges up into the powerful dominant harmonies of bar 9-12. Once airborne, it soars into a weightless melodic display as the supporting harmonies slip away to the subdominant (bars 13-14). As we ascend we get a nostalgia-tinged view of the subdominant harmonies, which from this altitude, of course, appear quite minor (bars 15-16) before we begin our gentle descent back home. Even the overall shape of the melody describes an arch-shaped trajectory, gradually rising to 'cruising altitude' before once more descending, albeit with a little turbulence on the way. The trouble is, this music accompanies a boating scene in the opera, so if anyone really hears *flight* in this music, it surely has more to do with the fanciful variety than the real.

To look for such obvious musical meanings is, of course, misguided: beyond the rhythmic identification with the *barcarole* it is unlikely that Delibes was overly concerned with the literal musical representation of travel of any kind. Rather, it is likely that he was composing patterns of tension and relaxation, of implication, frustration, and resolution – a rich complex of attributes which served his purposes of insightful characterization and dramatization, but which are adaptable to a range of other expressive objects. In any case, the musical elements we have described are by no means unique to the "Flower Duet" but are common to a vast body of 'classical' music: the ternary form which this piece (broadly speaking) exemplifies, is characterized by a move from tonic to dominant and back again in the various sections.

Similarly, one does not have to look far to find arch-shaped melodies. So what is it about this particular piece of music that gives it the potential to ‘mean’ British Airways? Could not any piece of music effect the same signification?

On the basis of the preceding discussion, it must follow that the music in the British Airways commercials provides a suitable musical space to be populated with the connotations of the visual domain. That must be the goal of the advertising agency with regard to the musical content. And how can they know *a priori* that a particular piece of music is suitable? As Hroar Klempe has described, if the advert is to use a newly composed piece of music, the company, agency and composer will often have an intuited idea about what will or will not fit. These intuitive feelings, however, are notoriously difficult to verbalise (Klempe, 1992: 387). Part of the problem is that while verbal and visual literacy are common in the advertising profession, music literacy is rather more rare (Dunbar, 1990: 201).

A company or advertising agency can ensure a good ‘fit’ by pre-testing an advert before it is publicly broadcast. This could prove to be expensive: it is only after the costly and time consuming business of writing and recording the music, and adding it to the visuals, that the results can be judged to be successful or not in market research experiments. This process might need to be carried out several times before a good match is found, and this may be unsatisfactory from a commercial point of view as an advertisement that perfectly captures the mood of the moment can quickly pass its sell-by date. One way to avoid this situation is to use a pre-existing piece that affords

impromptu screen testing without the productional problems. This route would also seem to offer another advantage.

Delibes could not sit down and write a piece of music that meant ‘a daughter in a boat with her servant, thinking of her father’s safety on a journey’. In any case, he did not need to – all of those factors have been depicted and discussed in the action (the plucking of the blue lotus flower) and dialogue of the opera. The music would simply be attempting to duplicate the content of these other domains – domains infinitely more suitable for concrete representation.<sup>29</sup> What he had to do was to create a musical context in which the meanings inherent could resonate comfortably. So the music should not *mean* travel or safety, but should provide a suitable context for the emergence of such meanings. And on the strength of the finished opera, we must come to the conclusion that Delibes has succeeded in this regard. If this were not the case the audience would sit shaking their heads in disbelief, or leave the opera muttering their incredulity at the inappropriate music of the boating scene. That this manifestly does not happen must be taken as ample evidence that this music is an appropriate site for the negotiation of these particular meanings.

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<sup>29</sup> Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, p. 233, makes a similar point when she writes, “*Music articulates forms which language cannot set forth. The classifications which language makes automatically preclude many relations, and many of those resting-points of thought which we call ‘terms’.* It is just because music has *not* the same terminology and patterns, that it lends itself to the revelation of non-scientific concepts. To render ‘the most ordinary feelings, such as love, loyalty or anger, unambiguously and distinctly,’ would be merely to duplicate what verbal appellations do well enough.” (The emphasis is Langer’s. She is quoting from Paul Moos, *Die Philosophie der Musik* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1922), p. 297).



For the directors of television commercials, and other multimedia productions, the beauty of using historical music from an older multimedia form like opera is that its suitability as a musical context (for the majority of people) is proven. In this way, the success of an opera like *Lakmé* over the years can be appropriated retrospectively as a long-term screen-testing programme. This music, and music from countless other operas, films and television programmes, is therefore a tried and tested musical context which can simply be requisitioned.

Some musical contexts are more appropriate than others for accommodating particular meanings. None, however, can be presumed to be exclusive: Boyé, a contemporary of Gluck, commented that the music of “*Che farò senza Euridice!*”, in which Orfeo laments his loss of Euridice, would better serve exactly the opposite meaning. And yet Gluck’s aria moved entire audiences of *Orfeo ed Euridice* to tears.<sup>30</sup>

## FROM BRAND TO ‘MASTERBRAND’: BRITISH AIRWAYS’ CORPORATE IMAGE

The analysis thus far has been predicated on the notion that the object of the promotion campaign is a flight, the singular, local manifestation of BA’s business. In fact, British Airways’ commercials are characterized by the near complete absence of any direct references to flight. In any case, as Fig. 2.2 (on

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<sup>30</sup> Hanslick (trans. 1974: 48-49). For an examination of Hanslick’s formalist aesthetics with specific regard to his reporting of this incident, see the chapter, “Something I’ve always wanted to know about Hanslick,” in Kivy (1993).

page 98) shows, the 'Flower Duet' in various guises has been a near constant feature of British Airways' advertising for over a decade, and has contributed to a variety of advertising texts. So, although the musical processes of the "Flower Duet" can be understood to function in the quasi-narrative manner previously discussed, it is unlikely that they do so exclusively. Rather, as I have suggested, the function of this music extends beyond the local narrative of any individual commercial, constituting a 'meta-narrative' that tells us something about British Airways as a company.

British Airways has a range of product brands, each offering a different level of service, and aimed at a particular market sector. Club World, for example, is aimed at long-haul business travellers, offering them Fast Track (a quick check-in service) and special Club World passenger lounges; in flight, passengers are offered flexible catering, comfortable seats with footrests and eight channels of video entertainment. Super Shuttle caters for domestic business travellers, offering a telephone check-in service, Hertz chauffeur driven service, discounted parking at Heathrow and in-flight meals at any time of day. It is integral to this marketing strategy that the airline promotes each of these brands independently; the 'Club Europe' commercial promotes yet another of BA's product brands.

These brands can be fairly inconspicuous to the average person, and from a commercial point of view this is nothing to cause alarm: most of these are aimed squarely at the frequent business traveler. What must not be inconspicuous in the wider marketplace, however, is British Airways' corporate

identity. To this end, BA marketing policy focuses on what it calls its 'Masterbrand'. This is not a particular product line, but embraces all of British Airways' individual brands. This 'Masterbrand', in short, is British Airways *the company* – or rather, the representation of the company through a unified corporate image. As the word 'image' implies, this is largely a matter of impressions ('semblances', in Haug's critique) and the world of commodity aesthetics is just as relevant here as it is in the packaging of goods: every element is carefully designed and consistently implemented. Thus BA gilds its aircraft, its personnel and its airport terminals in its distinctive livery; the same typeface delivers the corporate aesthetic from aeroplane bodies, tickets and advertisements.

The unifying potential for aesthetic elements of the environment has been recognized for centuries. In the Roman Empire it was standard practice for civic buildings to be built in the Roman, rather than regional, style; this was seen to impress the supremacy of Roman law on its subjects. Likewise, in fighting corps, religious sects, or sub-cultural groups, corporate identity has long been achieved through aesthetic means – usually in clothing. It was only natural that the same principle came to be applied to industrial concerns.

One of the textbook examples of corporate design is that of London Transport. Originally, transport in the capital was provided by 165 different companies running competing bus, tram, and underground services. As this was perceived to be contrary to public interest, in 1933 these were integrated to form the unitary London Transport, which was granted monopoly status. In

order to unify these diverse operations, elements of design were used to forge a corporate identity. This was not entirely new – it was already standard for companies to use their own particular colours, typefaces, and so on. What was radical about London Transport was the rigour with which these principles were applied: from the architecture of station buildings down to the furniture on platforms, the molded interiors of buses down to the smallest light fitting, everything utilized the same stylistic language. And not only did the new modernist design give the impression of a coherent organization, it also said something about the ethos of that organization to the people who passed through the system: it was efficient, clean, progressive, a model of purity and simplicity. In a word, it was modern.<sup>31</sup>

British Airways, along with all the major high street businesses, can be seen to have followed this example to the letter. Uniforms, tickets, luggage labels, aircraft livery, cabin fittings – even condiment sachets – are crafted by designers who strive to subsume every last detail into a unified experience. Music did not form part of London Transport's design brief, not because it was not a component of the transport industry, but because of the era in which the marketing strategies were devised. Where London Transport's advertising used printed media, British Airways' strategy is centered on the television commercial, of which music is a standard component. The centrality of televisual presentation to the construction of brand identity means that, in a very real sense, music can be a component of virtually any industry. So, just as

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<sup>31</sup> See Forty (1995: 223-238) for a discussion of this.

the distinctive typefaces that London Transport used on their paper advertisements were design elements that could be used on station furniture, timetables and route maps, the “Flower Duet” is available to be used within British Airways’ service. Thus, it wafts through airport shuttles and departure lounges, and is piped through the cabin at the most significant points in the journey – take-off and landing. Indeed, we may have been rather too hasty in dismissing the music as a non-essential feature. The presence of music, whose affective potential is not doubted, at these moments of greatest in-flight stress and on-ground inconvenience is surely not coincidental. Even if the soprano (female, motherly) voices do not actually soothe ragged nerves, the musical logo serves as a timely reminder that you are in the secure hands of “the world’s favourite airline.”<sup>32</sup>

In spite of these very practical ramifications, brand identity is, to a large extent, an aesthetic construct. Of course, consumers’ perceptions of a company are usually informed by some knowledge of the marketplace, and the company’s actual products or services are obviously inextricably tied up with this; no amount of packaging and promotion will maintain demand for a poor product. But these aesthetic elements are independent of any products or

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<sup>32</sup> Athanasius Kirchner, *Musurgia Universalis sive Ars Magna Consoni et Dissoni* (Rome, 1650) VII, p. 545, indicates that the contrary was thought to be true: “Phlegmatic persons [i.e. those having a stolid or unemotional disposition] lean towards women’s voices because their high-pitched voice has a benevolent effect on phlegmatic humour” (quoted in Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization*, pp. 436-7). Kirchner seems to be implying that the female voice arouses excitement, rather than exercising the calming effect that one would associate with the maternal voice.

services. Their role is to enhance product perceptions. For the majority of goods the body of the product provides the obvious locus for persuasive devices, be they aesthetic, semantic or connotative. For service-providers like BA, however, the virtual product body of the advert is the primary vehicle for aesthetic signification. It need not be exclusive, however, as is demonstrated by the transferal of the “Flower Duet” from the virtual product body to the actual service provision. And this traffic is not one way: the inescapable noise of the actual service – the ‘whoosh’ of the aircrafts’ engines – is conversely relocated in the virtual product body as a sonic logo at the end of each commercial. The fact that it is presented simultaneously with the British Airways typographic logo and a long-associated visual image of the bounded globe supports this claim.

#### THE NATURE OF THE MUSICAL SIGN

Incorporating the brief noise of an aeroplane into the corporate image is much easier to understand than the use of a piece of music. The aircraft noise has indexical associations with the service provided. The use of a piece of music, on the other hand, is purely arbitrary. In the first instance, this concept does not seem problematic in itself: many signs are similarly arbitrary, the majority of verbal constructs included. But we have already seen that music does not function in the same way as language. In addition, a cursory look at the commercials reveals a further and more fundamental obstacle: that of musical identity.



If the “Flower Duet” were presented in identical ways in each commercial of the series it would be reasonable to conclude that this particular arrangement of musical features was able to signify. Even if different instruments were used, or the music transposed, the sign would be recognizable. But in this series, musical parameters vary widely from one commercial to the next. So, if the musical processes of the “Flower Duet” do somehow function as a signifier of corporate identity throughout these musical transformations, it must logically follow that it is the features that remain constant through these transformations that enable the music to function in this way.

The most obvious differences between the music of different adverts are in instrumentation and production. Some adverts feature classical orchestration, others use pop arrangements; some feature vocal parts, others are purely instrumental. More significantly, the commercials feature differences in meter. Most are either 6/8 or 3/4, but the 1989 Masterbrand advert is ‘distorted’ to fit a 4/4 pop groove (Fig. 2.3, overleaf). Meter is central to our perception and comprehension of a piece. It is the framework against which events are heard and perceptually grouped. As a result, changes in meter impinge directly on the temporal and rhythmic organization of the music, having a profound effect on the resulting piece.

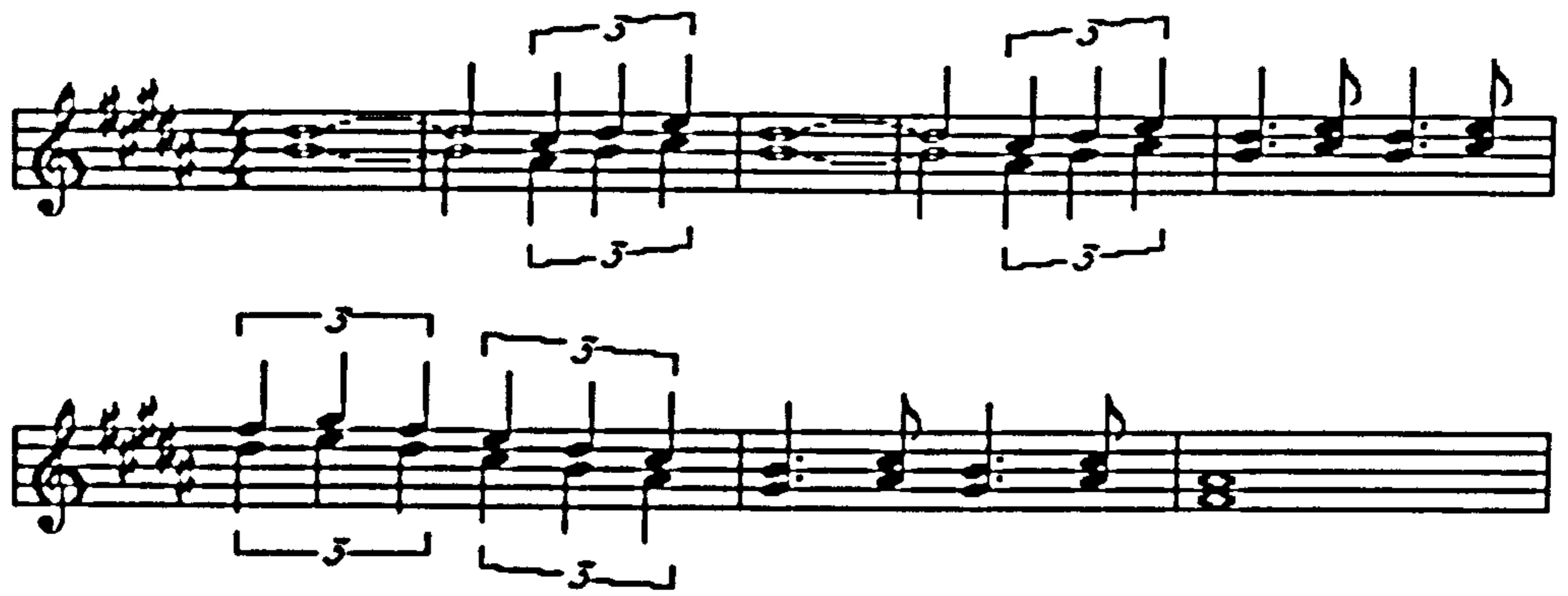


Fig. 2.3: Metrical distortion in the 1989 'Masterbrand' commercial

In fact, the only real constants throughout all the variants are the individual pitches – but even these are not preserved literally, nor in their entirety. The 'hard working' second soprano line (that of the servant, Mallika, who rows the boat in the opera) is frequently omitted in favour of the leisurely upper voice – quite appropriate for associations with effortless travel. And if dynamism is required it is injected via the engine of the pop machine – the drum 'groove' – that precludes the need for manpower, and Mallika too, presumably.

More radical still, the ordering of events is not constant. In the earlier cited 'Concorde Competition' advertisement the music (which is purported to be a concert performance) begins at bar 11 and ends halfway through bar 16. In several other adverts similar restructuring occurs: the 'Dream Ticket' commercial, for example, opens with the final cadence (bar 22) followed by bars 1-4 before jumping to the subdominant harmony of bars 13-14, from where it cadences on the tonic. Even when the original ordering of events is



preserved, as in the 1995 'Masterbrand' commercials, whole sections of the 90 second commercial are simply cut to create shorter 30 or 60 second versions. How are we to understand this? If the "Flower Duet" signifies something, then is this not disrupted by the 'deconstruction' of the piece? To put the question more bluntly, how much damage can a musical identity sustain?

Throughout all the musical variants of these advertisements, however, no matter how the music is altered or edited, two features are always present. These correspond to bars 1-2 and 13-14 of Delibes' music – the opening motive and the sublime melodic ascent over the move to the subdominant. In particular, the second of these would seem to be the focus of the musical affect. These harmonic regions underpin the narrative process in almost every commercial. Typically, the subdominant region (bar 13 of the original music) most often occurs at the key structural point in the communicative strategy. Whether the 'punch-line' is verbal or visual, or a combination of both, it is almost exclusively delivered at this point in the music. In the 'Concorde Competition' commercial, for example, the move to the subdominant (bar 13) coincides with a light touch: "The great Concorde challenge . . . can it *really* be true?" the voice-over asks rhetorically. The aircraft 'nods' its nose in affirmation, and the voice-over dryly concludes, "apparently." And this pattern is repeated in the majority of cases.

In the 1992 'Masterbrand' advertisement, it is the sales pitch, "It's the way we make you *feel* that makes people fly with British Airways" that is delivered at the same point in the music. In the same way, the 1983/4 'Product

Improvement' commercial delivers its ecological, emotive and humorous message underscored by this harmonic progression. When the roof of the aircraft cabin is removed to install the new larger seats, a small bird flies in and is trapped as the roof is replaced. As the roof is lifted and the bird set free, the voice-over reminds us that British Airways is "the airline that cares about everyone who flies". Another affective strategy that coincides with this progression is the shift from distant aerial views to close-ups of people smiling and embracing, and children playing in the 1989 and 1995 'Masterbrand' commercials.

It was noted previously that the 'Concorde Competition' commercial served to introduce the "Flower Duet" as British Airways' theme and it is noteworthy that the presentation of the music in this advertisement highlights the features that have been recognized as salient. The music starts in the dominant with the music of bar 11, in preparation for the transition to the subdominant in bar 13. To emphasize this point, the first two bars are purely orchestral, the strings playing what were originally the vocal parts. At bar 13 the voices take over. Similar musical strategies are used to highlight the importance of bar 13 in other commercials. The 'Product Improvement' advertisement features the same arrangement as the 'Concorde Competition' with bars 11 and 12 serving as an orchestral introduction with the voices entering at bar 13. The 'Dream Ticket' commercial opens with a single soprano line, at bar 13 the instrumentation is augmented, and the lower vocal part added. In the 1993 'Gatwick' advertisement, the music is reharmonized and

arranged as a pastiche of a Viennese waltz. At the music of bar 13 the pastiche reaches its peak with a glissando figure, cymbal crash, the augmentation of the ensemble with brass, and chromatic alterations typical of the genre.

In other advertisements, the move to the subdominant does not itself coincide with the climax of communicative effect. Rather, this progression signals the start of a definite cadential motion; and this is not exclusive to the music. Guy Cook sums up this common practice:

A typical pattern in TV ads is for each mode and sub-mode to wend its own way for the first two-thirds of the time, creating its own meanings; then in the final seconds, these tributaries suddenly flow together into a single message. This suggests that advertisers, whatever the strength of their faith in pictures, feel it safer to hedge their bets at the end.<sup>33</sup>

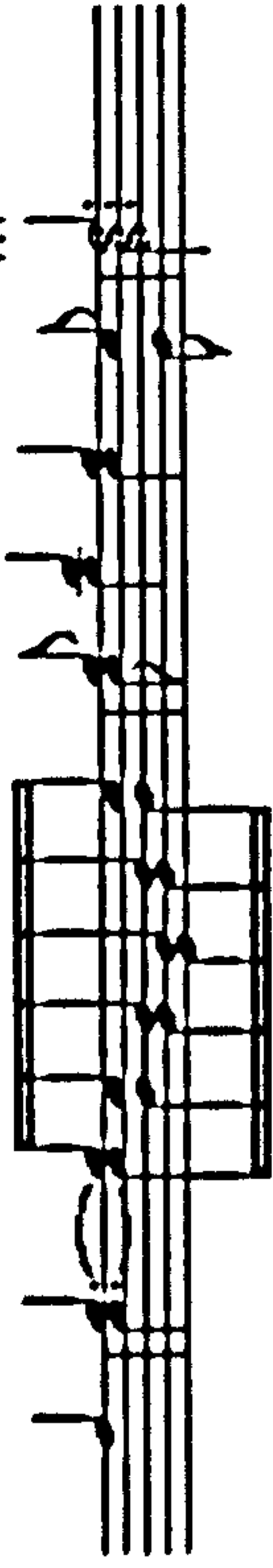
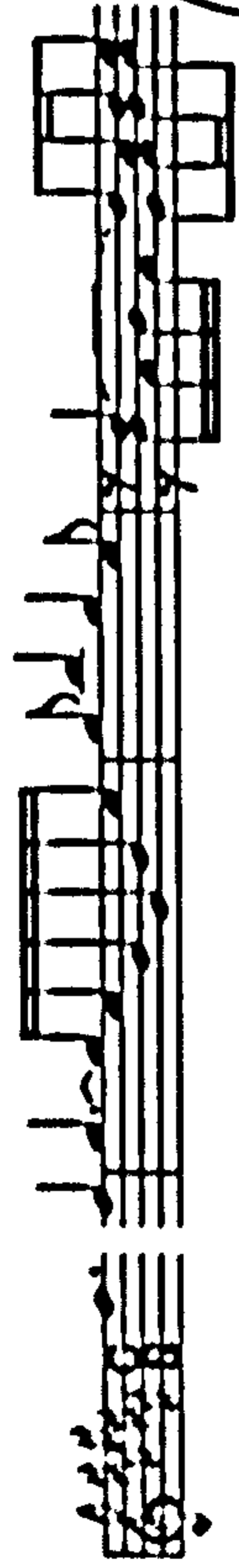
In the British Airways adverts, the process occurs over a rather longer time span than a few seconds: the 1989 'Masterbrand' commercial delivers its message, "Every year . . . the world's favourite airline . . . brings 24 million people . . . together" over 22 seconds of the 60 second total—all timed precisely to the music. Interestingly, this confluence commences with the subdominant minor, two bars after the focal point of the other advertisements.<sup>34</sup> The coming together of the various modes can be seen most clearly, however, in the 'Dream Ticket' advert (see Fig. 2.4, overleaf).

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<sup>33</sup> Guy Cook (1992: 48) cited earlier on p. 93n. The modes he refers to are pictures, music and language. Each of these has various sub-modes, for example speech and writing in the case of language.

<sup>34</sup> There is, however, a change from aerial views to close-ups corresponding with the subdominant major, in common with the other 'Masterbrand' commercials.

Music



Voice-over

Where do you go in your dreams?

Wherever you go in your dreams you can now go in reality ...

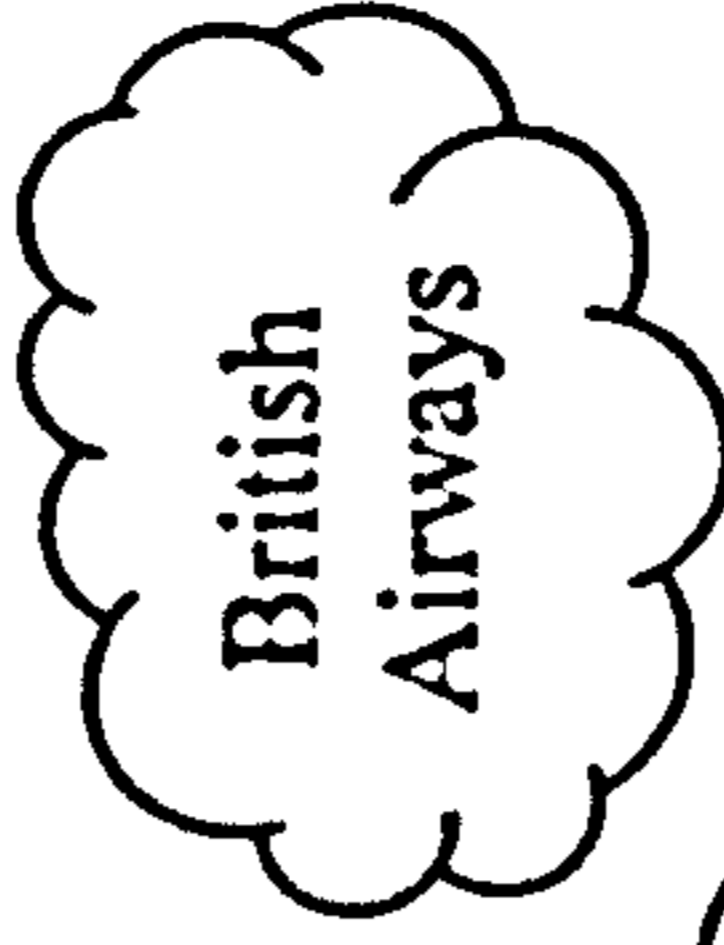
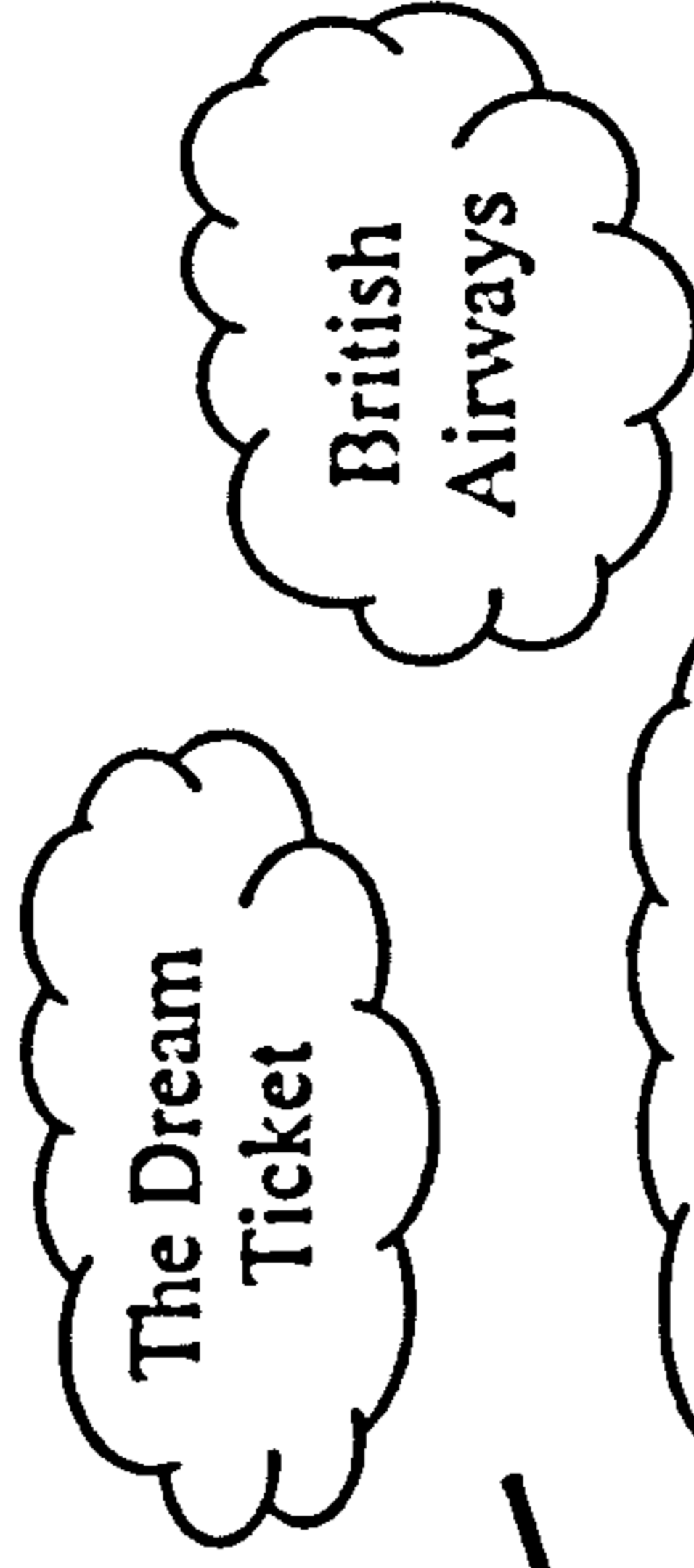
... with the 'Dream Ticket' offer from British Airways.

Before your next business flight, phone 0500 747 400 for details\*

Visuals

Close-up of a man asleep in bed.

We see what he is apparently dreaming - that he is strolling through a tropical paradise.



The camera tracks back from the man's face and up into the sky, revealing that the bed in which he is sleeping, is on an island in a small archipelago in a turquoise sea.

The islands transform into clouds in a clear blue sky. Text appears in the clouds, as though in thought bubbles.

Time (Secs)

0

30



Fig. 2.4: The convergence of audio-visual modes in the 'Dream Ticket' commercial.

There is more to it than these features underpinning the narrative. As I noted earlier, these are the only constant features throughout all the “Flower Duet” commercials. It logically follows, therefore, that if the British Airways “Flower Duet” is a recognizable musical sign – which all the evidence suggests it is – then its identity is bound up with these features. Indeed, we could go as far as saying that it is the relationship between the tonic and subdominant harmonies (which are prolonged in a very straightforward manner in these passages) that is key.



Fig. 2.5: The essential features of the “Flower Duet” sign

So while the musical progression may well underscore a narrative message, the music is not functioning solely in this way. Rather, the music seems to be functioning in a time-independent way. That is to say, the musical identity, and the corresponding brand association, seems to arise from an essentialized relationship between a few key musical elements: the tonic, dominant and subdominant major and minor harmonies, inextricably linked with certain

melodic motives, as shown in Fig. 2.5. These elements combine as a sub-textual iconic schema. Signification is not dependent on the order, or the totality of these events; indeed, the generation of a musical ‘image’ that is somehow complete is not precluded by the absence of certain harmonic events. Thus, we must conclude that the musical sign is not any one performance or arrangement of the “Flower Duet” but a set of musical attributes that are common to all versions. The relationship between any one version and another, and the relationship between them and the sub-textual musical sign, therefore, can more accurately be described as topological.<sup>35</sup> Of course, this situation does not occur as a result of the music itself but is dependent on the music having been heard previously. It is the previous experience of the musical sign in its totality that enables the image to be replicated and signification to be effected.<sup>36</sup>

## READING THE SIGN

While I have made several analytical observations pertaining to the locus of meaning in British Airways’ use of the “Flower Duet”, I have, thus far,

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<sup>35</sup> Topology is a branch of geometry describing the properties of a figure that are unaffected by continuous distortion, such as stretching or knotting. Typically, these properties will be features such as nodes or intersections.

<sup>36</sup> This is analogous to a holographic image, which is generated in its entirety even if part of the photographic plate is missing or damaged as each part contains the data for the whole interference pattern on the plate. This feature has proved attractive for theorists in many disciplines: Karl H. Pribram, *Languages of the Brain* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971), for example, suggests that memories are stored in similar interference patterns in the brain.

stopped short of discussing what this music might actually signify. What has been stressed is the phenomenon whereby meanings do not arise from the notes themselves, but can be structured by a piece of music. In multimedia forms, words or visual images will often supply the intended meanings, and so it is in these commercials. Thus, the coincidence of the verbal and visual images described above with the salient musical moments gives a fair indication of the meanings that BA is trying to communicate. And these meanings are, of course, rather typical of commercials.

British Airways, we are told, *cares* about the way you feel. Indeed, BA cares so much that they will endeavour to enhance the way you feel when you fly with them. The fact that people choose to use the airline is then cited as evidence of their success in this regard: thus the voice-over of the 1992 'Masterbrand' commercial tells us, "It's the way we make you *feel* that makes people fly with British Airways". Indeed, we are led to believe that they go to the trouble of bringing people all over the world together, not to make money, but because they care so much about us – we see people embracing loved-ones while BA staff look on in clear satisfaction at what they have made possible. For those people who *do* use their service it is rather humbling: they go to all this trouble to make them happy, and yet they stand at the door of the plane and *thank* them for flying with them.

Of course, these meanings do not arise from within the musical language but are suggested in the verbal and visual imagery. The music merely provides an appropriate context for these meanings to resonate. But as a culturally

embedded product, music can also carry certain connotations – meanings that are not generated in the music itself, but which arise from extra-musical cultural knowledge. The “Flower Duet” thus carries with it additional socio-cultural meanings. Classical music, and perhaps opera in particular, has connotations of sophistication. France, too (signified by the singing in French in the music of many of the commercials) is associated with elegance and the finer things in life: cuisine, wine, fashion, perfume, and romance. At the same time, the contemporary production of some versions of the music (notably Malcolm McLaren’s 1989 “Aria On Air”) could be taken as signifying a healthily progressive outlook. Similarly, the ethnic touches of the 1992 ‘Masterbrand’ advertisement have connotations not just of a multinational business in a global market, but one that understands and encompasses all races and cultures.

While it is not easy to find specific meanings in the musical language, it is more sensible to suggest some possible meanings with regard to timbre. Timbre has a clear significant potential: after all, a sound can signify an object (an object will make a particular sound when it is struck, for example); one thing can sound like another, and sounds can have very specific associations. This is particularly true of the female voice – the most consistent timbre in BA’s “Flower Duet” arrangements.

In psychoanalysis and film theory the female voice is associated with the earliest experiences of the mother; usually characterized by security, warmth, provision and the dependency of the infant subject. These associations are



non-verbal, as the infant has not yet acquired language. In any case, it is the male Other who is associated with verbal reason (Silverman, 1988: 72-100). Much of the time a child experiences the mother's voice in speech. Singing is usually reserved for a specific and very intimate mode of mother-baby communication: the lullaby. So, if the female voice has connotations of security, warmth, peacefulness, and so forth, these will be heightened in the experience of the female singing voice. These, of course, are precisely the kind of associations that an airline is likely to want to engender. They want to make us feel secure, warm, and provided for, dependent on them. And so it is in-flight: our food and drink is provided to a schedule largely outside our control, we are told when to sit down, when to extinguish cigarettes, fasten our seatbelts, when to buy duty-free goods and so on. In short, we are *mothered*. Interestingly, a 1999 print advertisement for British Airways has more explicitly denoted this association, showing the passenger as a baby cradled in an aeroplane seat.

As was suggested earlier, the affective potential of this music may well be desirable in an in-transit context: played to soothe nerves at the most stressful moments of the flight and in inter-terminal shuttles. In television commercials, however, there is obviously no need to calm down viewers – unless the very thought of flying is traumatic. The presence of the female voice may, however, be significant in another regard. As we have seen, it is the male voice that is associated with verbal authority. It is not surprising that the voice-overs of these BA advertisements (and the vast majority of commercials) feature a male

voice-over. The male voice imparts the reasonable (but not logically argued, of course) “You know it makes sense to fly with British Airways” type of commentary. Any female voice(s) usually contribute in a non-verbal, essentially emotional manner. In these commercials the singing is either entirely non-verbal, or else in poorly articulated French.

While the connotations of security and provision are appropriate for an airline, the positioning of subjects as infants is more disturbing in a televisual context. An infant is, of course, not a rational consumer. Unequipped to respond to anything other than immediate physiological needs, any judgments are likely to be purely emotive. Since abandoning the factually laden rational appeals in the 1970s, advertising agencies have typically attempted to arouse precisely this type of response to products. Indeed, the psychological effect of the maternal voice may heighten this response. Denis Vasse has suggested that the female voice has associations with the natal rupturing of plenitude. This, it is claimed, leaves the subject with a psychological gap that he or she looks to imaginary objects to fill.<sup>37</sup> Vasse’s description chimes uncannily with theories of the generation of consumer desire in which the psychological gap exists as a function of production, in order to absorb the surplus production of advanced industrial economies (Baudrillard, ed. 1988; Campbell, 1987).

We should not be too hasty in assuming the reality of such abstract theoretical correlations. Nevertheless, the wider point still holds true. Whether

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<sup>37</sup> Denis Vasse, *L’Ombilic et la Voix: Deux Enfants en Analyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), pp. 13-14, quoted in translation in Silverman (1988: 86).

as part of the travel experience, or simply as a symbolic element in consumer culture, the music reiterates the familiar message. British Airways, it reaffirms, is dependable and will provide for us and for our prosperity, whether that be by way of global transportation, the provision of millions of jobs, the maintenance of share-prices, or the contribution to aesthetic discourse through their commercials. Indeed, the spirit of BA, which the “Flower Duet”, livery, typography and so on embody, is no longer the exclusive domain of the airport or aeroplane. It is part of the symbolic currency of every television viewer, radio listener and newspaper reader among us. This, then, is surely the nub of the whole issue of corporate design: these multinational giants are not merely commercial organizations, they are quasi-organic *corporate* entities that enfold us, socio-spatial bodies which nourish us and provide for our every material need. In the British Airways music, the maternal connotations are clear in the female voices, but beyond any specific timbral association the effect is in fact quite similar. It is something like the heartbeat of these surrogate mothers that resounds through the rhythmic regularity of industrial design.

During the fourteen years under consideration the “Flower Duet” has featured in films (*The Mission*) and other commercials (Ford used the music in a commercial for the Galaxy which parodied BA’s advertising). It has been recorded, not just by Malcolm McLaren, but also by the Greek star Yanni (also in 4/4, and thus connecting directly with the BA ‘pop’ version) as well as featuring in its original guise on any number of CDs of ‘music from the adverts’. Outside the period under consideration, the same syntagmatic chain

stretches back to nineteenth century France, and will no doubt continue into the future.

The aesthetic dimensions of corporations and products, then, do not simply run through consumer culture at the abstract level, but also through its subjects' lives. Advertisements are discussed in the way that other cultural forms are talked about, and they themselves form part of a complex intertextual discourse – what Guy Cook (1992: 226) describes as 'code play'. The series of "Flower Duet" commercials here is one example of the kind of syntagmatic chains with which our socio-cultural reality is shot through. These syntagmatic chains anchor us in our present day culture, and in examples such as the "Flower Duet", they also anchor our present in its historical context. This is quite at odds with much Marxist and postmodern theory which argues that in capitalist societies humankind is divorced from history and from lived experience, existing in a continual present, and experiencing only spectacle instead of a living culture (Debord, trans. 1994: 114). On the contrary, the "Flower Duet" and the British Airways commercials are clearly terms in a cultural process that is very much alive.

## CHAPTER 3

### RETHINKING THE AESTHETIC

The earlier discussion of commodification in the culture industry focused on the industrial aspects of repetition and standardization, whether these are used deliberately in the production of cultural artifacts, or else subconsciously impinging on cultural practices. As I argued in Chapter One, however, whatever the facts of its production, music can never be *just* a product or a commodity: it is always an aesthetic object. The basis for this observation is the fact that people clearly derive pleasure from popular music in a variety of situations, and that, broadly speaking, is what people call 'aesthetics'. Simon Frith has written a book about the 'aesthetic value' of pop in which he looks at the importance of such music and the critical judgements of it in cultural discourse. Our tastes, Frith argues, form the basis of friendships, social interactions, and so forth, not just because relationships revolve around talking about such things, but because they are fundamental to the cultural practices in which we engage, and, in short, our world-view (Frith, 1996: 4-5). It is, therefore, this centrality to our social being that bestows value on the aesthetic.

This account of 'aesthetic value' is indistinguishable from cultural value, or social value, so Frith is clearly using the term in a very broad sense. But if we really value these objects for the things they are in themselves, then a socio-cultural theory does not seem sufficient: it can examine the significance of

relating to objects in this way in social terms, but it cannot elicit the *prima facie* significance of our relation with those objects. Conventionally, aesthetics is concerned with this 'free appreciation' of objects, but its judgements are typically more profound than issues of 'liking' or 'disliking'. Many aestheticians would deny the objects of popular culture equal status to art on the basis that they offer entertainment and not the 'transmutation of the self' that is sometimes ascribed to art.<sup>38</sup> Can we really talk of 'aesthetics' in relation to popular music, or indeed to commodities in general?

As has been made clear, the notion that music is in some sense an aesthetic object is a matter of common sense. Aesthetics is concerned with our perception of objects through the senses (the Greek *aesthetikos* means literally 'perceptible by the senses'). What we consider to be musical experiences derive almost exclusively from sources extrinsic to us, which we internalise through

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<sup>38</sup> Roger Scruton is the most obvious example, as we shall see later. However, such accounts are by no means exclusive to aestheticians. Benjamin Boretz (1989: 41-42), for example, gives a particularly clear and comprehensive account of this notion: "Entertainment surrogates our time; relieves us of it for a spell; lives through it for us while it's on loan; does what it takes to keep it for just so long as that feels nonconsequential, . . . returns it refreshed but otherwise intact, unsullied by any lingering tarnish or blemish of content; cleansed but not altered. . . . High art surrogates our time exactly so; but also aspires to not only surrogate our time but also to transform it permanently and substantively. . . . Its intentions to us are serious (as is our use for it) and sinister: someone is invading our psychic space with the intention of appropriating our identity and remaking it at their will; or it is we ourselves who appropriate ourselves to it so as to have it do this to us: 'take us over', make us more thereby, give us by surrogation the authority of its own visionary grasp."

sensory perception. So music, by definition, must be an aesthetic object.<sup>39</sup> But the ideological baggage the term has accumulated makes this etymological usage of the word problematic. As conceived within the Kantian tradition, aesthetics is concerned with only a subset of the phenomenal world: the appreciation of 'beautiful' objects. Furthermore, it is not concerned with the normal, everyday cognition of these objects but a special kind of attention which must be cultivated, and which only beautiful objects can command: the 'disinterested' state. It seems unlikely that pop songs would conform to an eighteenth century paradigm of beauty, or that listeners engage with the music with the deference that people reserve for established art works. At the same time, there is no generally accepted aesthetic theory that offers an alternative.

The monumental status of Kant in the field is partly explained by the position the *Critique of Judgment* took in his philosophical system. The faculty of judgment, according to Kant, mediates between pure and practical reason. Furthermore, it is in aesthetic experience, Kant suggests, that we come to understand our relation to the world, and the limitations of our knowledge of that world. It is in design, whether natural, or man's pale imitations, that we sense a transcendental reality beyond the bounds of our experience. Aesthetics is, therefore, essential to ethics and metaphysics. This is not the place for an

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<sup>39</sup> Musical experiences can, of course, be wholly internal, arising from within the imagination. These internal 'performances' are not entirely unrelated to heard experiences: it is difficult to imagine how someone who had never heard a piece of music might create something 'musical' in the imagination.

examination of the philosophical elements of Kant's argument. Nevertheless, certain aspects of his methodology are not above contention.

Eighteenth-century theories of the mind maintained a clear distinction between sensation and thought. 'Sensation' referred to a lower, indistinct, cognitive faculty. 'Thought', on the other hand, was a cognitive power characterized by intellectual precision, and thus able to deal with distinct ideas. The raw sense-data that sensation and thought acted on were the same; the difference was in the way that sense-data was processed. Whereas Leibniz and his pupil Christian Wolff maintained that a sensation could only become distinct by turning it into a thought, Baumgarten and Meier (and ultimately Kant) maintained that sense perception could have a perfection of its own which is not conditional on its being intellectualized. Converting a sensation to a thought requires abstracting general principles from the unique sensory experience. On the other hand, giving sense perception the possibility of non-intellectual perfection involves emphasizing the 'material' quality of the experience. Aesthetics (a term coined by Baumgarten in his *Aesthetica*, published in 1750) is strictly concerned with these *a priori* judgments. It is this kind of attention, independent of intellectual consideration, which is described as 'disinterested'.

In Kant's theory, the experience of an object as beautiful arises from the same cognitive process that allows us to make practical or theoretical judgments. As it is non-intellectual, it must therefore precede, and be intrinsic to, such judgments: it is a fundamental response to the sense-data. This



conception of an attitude that defines aesthetic experience – often referred to as the ‘aesthetic attitude’ – has continued into this century in the aesthetic theories of G. E. Moore (1903), Edward Bullough (1912), and Clive Bell (1924). In musical listening, however, the concept of ‘disinterestedness’ is particularly problematic. While only musically literate listeners might be distracted by musicological ‘facts’ in the stimulus, there is a universal tendency to correlate the formal properties of the music with some aspect of what Susanne Langer (1951: 227-228) dubs our “inner-life”: we hear it as embodying human qualities. Indeed, Kant considered musical listening to be irrevocably tied to this type of experience: “Music” he writes in the *Critique of Judgment*, “has a certain lack of urbanity about it . . . it extends its influence . . . farther than people wish.” (§53, trans. 1987: 200). He also implies a comparison of music and oratory, which is less than flattering, considering that he views the latter to be “an insidious art . . . that knows how, in important matters, to move people like machines.” He goes on: “Rhetorical power and excellence of speech . . . belong to fine art; but oratory . . . the art of using people’s weaknesses for one’s own aims . . . is unworthy of any *respect* whatsoever” (198n).

Kant, then, did not admit the possibility of music being appreciated as an aesthetic object – hence Hanslick’s project to elevate music to that position, a project continued by Peter Kivy (1990; 1993). As I touched on in Chapter Two, Hanslick argued that to appreciate music as an aesthetic object the listener must ‘rise above’ the pathological response: “To be the slave of unreasoning, undirected, and purposeless feelings, ignited by a power which is

out of all relation to our will and intellect, is not worthy of the human mind” (trans. 1974: 129). The possibility of resisting music’s ‘human qualities’ in this way, and hearing it in the abstract, is made clear by Clive Bell (1924: 31-32):

at moments I do appreciate music as pure musical form, as sounds combined according to the laws of a mysterious necessity, as pure art with a tremendous significance of its own and no relation whatever to the significance of life. . . . How inferior is my normal state of mind at a concert. Tired or perplexed, I let slip my sense of form, my aesthetic emotion collapses, and I begin weaving into the harmonies, that I cannot grasp, the ideas of life. Incapable of feeling the austere emotions of art, I begin to read into the musical forms human emotions of terror and mystery, love and hate, and spend the minutes, pleasantly enough, in a world of turbid and inferior feeling.

Neither Hanslick nor Bell denies the possibility that music might be enjoyed in something other than an aesthetic experience. Bell, indeed, is all too aware of the charms of hearing music in terms of its human regional qualities:

I have tumbled from the superb peaks of aesthetic exaltation to the snug foothills of warm humanity. It is a jolly country. No one need be ashamed of enjoying himself there. Only no one who has ever been on the heights can help feeling a little crestfallen in the cozy valleys (p. 32).

There is no doubting which is felt to be the more remarkable of the two kinds of experience, however.

Of course, remarkableness is precisely what is argued for in this Kantian understanding of aesthetics. Rather than dwelling merely on the facts of our

own nature (revelling in what we might perceive to be its emotional or libidinal qualities, for instance) the value of the aesthetic, Kant suggests, lies in its intimation of something far greater than our own humble understanding, something that lies outside the realm of possible human experience. Aldous Huxley sums up this metaphysical dimension of aesthetic perception perfectly in his description of a passage from a Bach suite in his novel *Point Counter Point* (1954). The music, he tells us, is “a slow and lovely meditation on the beauty (in spite of squalor and stupidity) the profound goodness (in spite of all the evil) the oneness (in spite of such bewildering diversity) of the world.” But while the qualities he describes are very much of this world, expressed in human terms, for Huxley the music seems to hint at something supersensible:

It is a beauty, a goodness, a unity that no intellectual research can discover, that analysis dispels, but of whose reality the spirit is from time to time suddenly and overwhelmingly convinced. . . . Is it illusion or the revelation of the profoundest truth? Who knows? (p. 32)

Where Huxley hedges his bets, however (he admits the possibility that it is illusion) Kant is in no doubt as to the reality of the transcendental. Nevertheless, his general feeling is much the same: we are dealing with the unknowable. In the final proposition of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein avowed “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein, trans. 1961: 74). The aesthete working in the Kantian tradition would almost certainly demur: what we cannot speak about is the province of art.

While the transcendental reality at which aesthetic experience seems to hint must remain beyond our knowledge, there would appear to be another line of enquiry available. The aesthetic experience derives from our experience of objects, whether natural or man-made, and we can examine those objects. The general formal qualities that are intrinsic to our perceptions of beauty have been widely known for centuries. Hutcheson tells us that “the figures that excite in us the Ideas of Beauty, seem to be those in which there is *Uniformity amidst Variety*,”<sup>40</sup> and this notion has achieved popular currency. Gerard Manley Hopkins (ed. 1959: 47) for example, is clearly applying the same principle when he writes that:

the beauty of the oak and chestnut-fan . . . is a mixture of likeness and difference. . . . And if we did not feel the likeness we should not feel them so beautiful, or if we did not feel the difference we should not feel them so beautiful.

Turning to poetry, Hopkins observes that rhyme is an example of the same principle: “Is it not an agreement of sound – with a slight disagreement?” concluding, “rhyme is the epitome of our principle. All beauty may by a metaphor be called rhyme.”

Despite attempts to lend some degree of empirical orthodoxy to this rather vague notion of ‘unity in variety’, most attempts at scientific analysis have been risible. G. A. Birkhoff’s formula of  $M = O/C$  (where M is the

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<sup>40</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London: Will and John Smith, 1725), p. 15. Quoted in Urmson (1989: 28).

amount of pleasure,  $O$  the amount of order, and  $C$  the amount of complexity) for example, must be taken as a fuzzy approximation rather than as an absolute scientific formulation (Birkhoff, 1933).<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the apparent simplicity of the ‘unity in variety’ theory should not detract from its far-reaching implications. Peter Kivy takes it to mean, for example, that the perception of beauty is as fundamental as the perception of colour:

Rather as the micro-structure of matter causes the sensation of redness to be aroused in us without ever being consciously aware of the micro-structure, so the aesthetic microstructure . . . causes the pleasurable idea of beauty to be aroused in us, we know not how (1995: 353).

Indeed, he declares Hutcheson’s theory to be the most rigorous and audacious formalism on the basis that he has shown that aesthetic form and aesthetic content are one and the same (p. 356).

While attempting to express such a general and fundamental principle in algebraic terms is clearly misguided, it does not follow that science is powerless to clarify the phenomenon. This can be illustrated in terms of a particular example from the literature. Central to the theory of affect proposed by McLelland *et al* (1953: 42-44) is what they term the ‘discrepancy’ theorem. This theorem posits that stimuli received by an organism are compared with an “adaptation level”, a dynamic psychological state which corresponds to an habituated or predicted level of stimulation. Discrepancy with this adaptation

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<sup>41</sup> See also Rashevsky (1938). Osborne (1955: 226) also cites further mathematical investigations into aesthetics.

level (AL) results in the generation of affect. This can be represented graphically by what has come to be known as the 'Butterfly curve':<sup>42</sup>

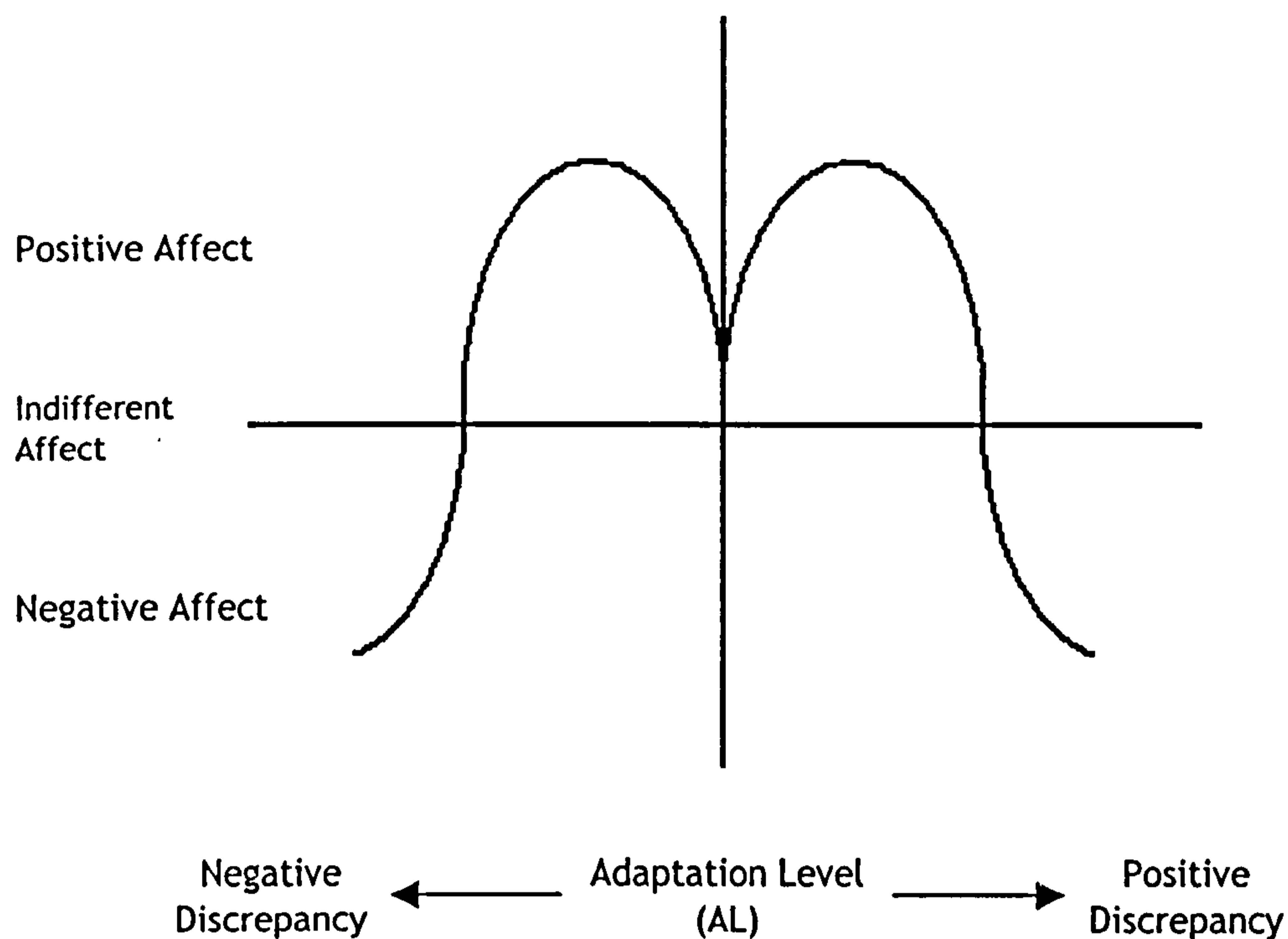


Fig. 3.1: The 'Butterfly Curve'

Discrepancy theory is corroborated by experimental evidence as well as by subjective experience. Desmond Morris (1962: 158-68) for example, has shown that thematic variation and optimum heterogeneity are key features in the picture-making of apes in captivity. From this he deduces that primates have a biological propensity to take pleasure in these features. The apes showed a marked tendency for finding a theme, and then developing it in a series of paintings, apparently taking pleasure in the similarities and differences, and

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<sup>42</sup>The 'Butterfly curve' and other theories of affect are discussed in Berlyne (1971: 91).

excitement in the very new. They also displayed sensitivity to compositional and motivic density, their pictures striking a balance between featuring too little or too much figuration. And Humphrey (1984) cites further evidence in support of discrepancy theory. Experiments have shown that when introduced to a particular stimulus – an abstract visual pattern, for instance – human and animal infants show a clear preference for new stimuli which differ from this archetype only slightly. Neither human nor animal subjects are attracted to completely unrelated stimuli.<sup>43</sup>

As Humphrey makes clear, however, experimental evidence is by no means our only source of ratification: the reality of discrepancy theory is felt in our own experiences, and this is particularly true of music. Variation is perhaps the fundamental compositional device in all Western music, classical and pop alike; quite apart from the strict employment of the technique, the pleasing effect of reharmonizing the final verse of a hymn, or embellishing a melody in performance is clearly felt by listeners. Discrepancy theory also informs our understanding of the kind of thematic transformations employed by Liszt, for example, as well as shedding light on why we feel the development section of a sonata form to be the affective centre of gravity, requiring the reestablishment of stability from the recapitulation. Indeed, Meyer's explanation of musical affect is essentially an application of the same theory: as he expresses it, "affect

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<sup>43</sup> Humphrey (1984: 130) cites J. Kagan, "Attention and psychological change in the young child," *Science*, 170 (1970): 826 and P. P. G. Bateson, "Internal influences on early learning in birds," in R. A. Hinde and J. Stevenson-Hinde, eds. *Constraints on Learning: Limitations and Predispositions* (London: Academic Press, 1973).

or emotion-felt is aroused when an expectation – a tendency to respond – activated by the musical stimulus situation, is temporarily inhibited or permanently blocked” (Meyer, 1956: 31). In other words, affect results from a discrepancy with the adaptation level.

Of course, the processes we are dealing with here are not exclusive to engagement with art objects. On the contrary, these are the ‘building blocks’ of consciousness, processes that are fundamental to psychology. And this is Humphrey’s central point: the way we engage with art objects, and our understanding of them, must be related to the way we perceive and cognize everything else in the world. After all, we attend to them with the same faculties. Our response to art, Humphrey argues, can be understood in terms of our natural response of finding order in stimuli, by a process of classification and comparison. As he puts it, the psychological basis of classification is “to help organize the sensory experience and to introduce an essential economy into the description of the world.” For a creature in the wild, this will “reduce the ‘thought load’ on the animal, expedite new learning, and allow rapid and efficient extrapolation from one set of circumstances to another” (Humphrey, 1984: 126-7). There is a clear imperative for an animal quickly to grasp the fundamentals of any environment in which it finds itself. For humans there are still many potential threats in the environment, but the need to organize stimuli into classifications goes beyond the need to survive: it is so integral to the way we deal with the world that we take a definite pleasure from it. In much the same way, Humphrey argues that our responses to art



objects are also biological: art objects act as ‘rogue stimuli’ giving rise to inappropriate responses in much the same way that a bundle of feathers with a red patch on the underside will elicit an attack from a male robin. So while ‘beauty is truth’ to the poet, “a biologist is bound to regard beauty – at least man-made beauty – as something closer to a lie. A lie admittedly of a peculiar kind, but of a kind to which men and animals are specially vulnerable” (p. 123).

This theory has much to recommend it. In particular, it would seem to shed some light on the importance that apparently non-functional objects play in our lives. As Huxley describes, they seem to embody the most profound truths. The delight in classification also explains the human propensity for such seemingly fruitless pursuits as stamp collecting and train-spotting (Humphrey, 1984: 143-5). Humphrey’s theory does not devalue the aesthetic experience: it does not explain the order that there is in nature, or why our faculties are so sensitized to it. All Humphrey is saying is that our liking for man-made beauty derives from the same propensity for recognizing the order of things.

If we take this argument to its logical conclusion, then as long as someone perceives there to be order in a stimulus, and takes a certain disinterested delight in it for its own sake, it can be taken to be an ‘aesthetic’ object. Indeed, Dabney Townsend (1992: 220) makes precisely this point. If the aesthetic is the transcendental aspect of all experience, Townsend argues, then anything can be an aesthetic object; it is just a matter of how one looks at things. But there is an important qualification to this claim: anything can be an aesthetic object *as long as it satisfies certain formal requirements*.

But while this 'open house' understanding of the pleasurable response to a stimulus might correspond to the etymological understanding of 'aesthetic', it most certainly does not correspond to the conventional identification of the aesthetic with the 'artistic'. Nevertheless, the truly democratic loci of pleasure, and their dislocation from the traditional arts, would seem to be borne out in reality. If it is a universal human characteristic to take pleasure from beautiful objects, natural or unnatural, then it is unlikely that the majority of the populace would forego the experience. In contemporary society, therefore, where only a small proportion of the population take an interest in the 'official' arts, we must assume the remainder are deriving their aesthetic pleasure from 'unofficial' sources: from fashion and the mass-culture of the cinema, television, computer games, and so forth. This is essentially Paul Willis's point in *Common Culture* (1990). Indeed, he goes further, suggesting that it is not just the products of the entertainment industry that provide this sort of pleasure but virtually any mass-produced commodities.<sup>44</sup> As Haug makes clear in his critique of commodity aesthetics, *all* commodities are invested with an aesthetic aspect, so it makes sense that they should meet the formal requirements of giving pleasure.

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<sup>44</sup> Willis does not, however, talk about aesthetics in the sense that I do in this chapter. He is concerned with the symbolic meanings of objects rather than the direct pleasure they afford, and he describes the way in which people use commodities to structure meanings rather than simply enjoy them as things in themselves.

## POP MUSIC AS AESTHETIC OBJECT

We have seen that ‘aesthetic’ pleasure can be seen not as the preserve of art, but as a direct response to certain kinds of stimuli, independent of both human cultural institutions or categorizations and intellectual attention. This is not to say that playing the games of cultural discourse is worthless, but just that game playing provides an entirely different kind of pleasure. It is quite clear that music of all kinds can be engaged with on this cultural level: whether cultural institutions have the cachet of the official arts or not, musical communities have their own rules and practices. In *Performing Rites*, Simon Frith demonstrates the cultural validity of these ‘games’, largely by virtue of the fact that he is a player; it is obvious from his writing that he has an intimate understanding and sympathy for the music and its cultural nexus. In a review of Frith’s book, Roger Scruton shows the result of not understanding the rules of the game, referring to the “incompetent voice-leading . . . the misunderstanding of chord relations, and the inability to develop a melodic line” in R.E.M’s *Losing My Religion*.<sup>45</sup> Scruton is making the mistake of judging one game by the rules of another – and crying “foul!” when he sees them ‘broken’.

It is quite clear, however, that the musical appreciation that Frith is talking about has much to do with these cultural aspects and less to do with the kind of sensory pleasure that we have been considering in this chapter. Of course,

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<sup>45</sup> Roger Scruton, “The profane put in front of the sacred,” [Review of *Performing Rites* by Simon Frith] *The Times* (London), 24 October 1996, p. 40.

the presence of this pleasurable kernel within the cultural object is implicit – it is the primary reason why people use music as a cultural resource. Contrary to Frith, however, I am suggesting that taking pleasure in an object is a very specific type of thing, quite independent of its position in all manner of cultural games or practices. In line with the arguments above, I do not conceive of this response being exclusive to any particular human institutions (the arts, for instance). Rather, I see it as a reaction to certain formal features that may be present in any stimulus. In the case of music, therefore, music of any style or genre has the potential to give the same kind of pleasure.

As a media theorist, Frith could be forgiven for taking pop to be indistinguishable from its cultural context. Indeed this view is prevalent in the literature. In *Conditions of Music* Alan Durant (another media theorist) suggests that because pop music is mediated by a variety of technical and cultural apparatus it does not have a single primary discourse or text (Durant, 1984: 9). It follows that popular music is a discursive phenomenon that takes in, and emerges from, a complex of signification in various media. Peter Wicke (1990: 138) even denies the importance of the music altogether, arguing that the “specific quality of the song hardly matters compared to the image of the stars, and their appearance on stage or through the media.” Now, no culturally-aware musicologist would deny the plurality of the experience: pop is as much to do with fashions, images, words and cultural politics as it is with music. ‘Pop’ as a cultural phenomenon, then, is not the domain of one particular class of text, or of one medium. But although this discursive cultural phenomenon

has come to be termed 'pop music', the music itself – that is, the series of sounds – must be taken to be a very particular (and, let us not forget, originary) component of the complex.

Pop music is experienced as a cultural phenomenon in many situations – it accompanies shopping, reading magazines, socializing, watching MTV with friends, and so on – but engagement with the music is not conditional on attending to any extra-musical material; one could just as well argue the reverse. Whereas cultural theorists might recognize the importance of the disco or nightclub as the site for all manner of symbolic activity – sexual and social, for example – it must also be recognized that it is the site of an involvement as autonomous and acultural as anything described by E.T.A. Hoffmann. Dancing in the context of a club can of course be social, but dancers often dance as individuals, and their engagement with the music is often total. People talk about being 'lost in music': their eyes are closed, and they are completely absorbed. Even their conscious bodily movements are 'of the music'.<sup>46</sup> This kind of engagement is concerned with music not so much as a cultural phenomenon (although this type of engagement is itself, of course, a cultural phenomenon) but as an *aural*, and specifically *musical* phenomenon. The closing of the eyes 'brackets' everything extraneous to the experience of the music. Similarly, the volume of the music masks other sounds and precludes conversation, thereby desocializing the experience. Nor is engaging with music in this manner restricted to the disco. We might hesitate to admit dancing

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<sup>46</sup> Ironically, Scruton (1993: 199) makes much the same point.

alone in our domestic environment, but many people's listening practices involve a similar bracketing of the experience. Music is something that many people prefer to listen to alone; listeners often favour sound levels that mask extraneous sounds, sometimes wearing headphones to achieve the result; and listeners often prefer to close their eyes, dim the lights, or simply stare into nothingness.

It would be quite wrong to suggest that all music, popular or otherwise, was experienced solely in this way. In the case of pop, the musical text must often jostle for attention with the paraphernalia of the teenage lifestyle: it will just as often be perceived as one element in a cultural complex – and like that of the art expert, this appreciation is intertextual. But it would be dangerous to assume that even the most culturally embroiled teenage fan has not glimpsed something of the essence of the text. Many of those who become fans of a particular band do so through hearing a song on the radio, missing the track's title and performer, not listening to its lyrics, but simply responding to the sound. And my central claim is that this concept-free appreciation of the object itself on its own terms, with everything extrinsic stripped away, is the epitome of aesthetic experience as defined by what might be termed post-Kantian theory. It is an *a priori* response to formal qualities, cutting through whatever production-oriented musicologics, heard emotional responses, or other cultural baggage that might otherwise cloud it. This kind of perceptual framing, or phenomenological reduction, is very much in the spirit of the isolation of the

object called for by G. E. Moore (1903) and elsewhere by Harold Osborne (1955; 1970).

Of course, I am not suggesting that this kind of engagement is any more valid than immersion in the musical object in all of its cultural significance, only that this type of appreciation is possible, that pop music *can* be appreciated in this way. And what I am claiming here is by no means insignificant for musicology as a discipline, especially in the wake of the 'New' musicological critique of traditional approaches to musical texts. The experience of music as an object bracketed off from other sensory stimuli – as an autonomous object – is an experience of a purely musical rather than musico-cultural nature. Is this perceptually autonomous object not a perfectly valid object of musicological consideration? Of course, the position of these perceptual experiences within cultural contexts opens up many fascinating lines of enquiry. But as musicologists we should be in no doubt, we do have a primary text – at least, as far as anything can be said to be a primary text.

In order to justify understanding pop music as an aesthetic object in the inclusive sense I have advocated here, however, I still have to achieve a fuller demonstration: that it fulfills the formal requirement for aesthetic status to which I have referred. Not just anything has the appropriate formal structure, coherence, balance, and so forth – terms that attempt to articulate the formal characteristics of a pleasing object. And it is just those formal characteristics that are often seen to be absent from much pop music. In order to demonstrate the inclusiveness of the 'value-free aesthetics' which I am putting

forward, then, I shall take as my example an aspect of music which conventional aesthetics and music theory has traditionally shied away from, namely its repetitiveness. Repetition is a feature of almost all music, but is most pronounced in dance-music genres of the 1990s, such as ‘techno’, which I discussed in Chapter One.

A Romantic conception of art-works as organic wholes is clearly unable to sustain the aesthetic validity of repetitive music. Taking musical works of art to be organic entities, neo-Romantic theorists like Adorno (along with composers like Schoenberg) insisted that each part must have a unique relationship with the whole, each note included as a matter of necessity. The version of the theory that prevailed in musical aesthetics also required that every part was also unique. Any literally recurrent event could not enjoy this special relationship, and was thus, in Adorno’s terminology “pseudo-individualized”.<sup>47</sup> The notion that musical events did not need to be individual was apparently not entertained. Nor was the metaphorical basis for the organic model examined. In other arts, as in nature, of course, repetitive or iterative structures are widespread. Nevertheless, it was this peculiarly extreme version of the model that took hold in music, apparently colouring the attitudes of aestheticians and performers alike. It seems probable, for instance, that it has some connection with the practice of omitting formal repeats which first became fashionable this

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<sup>47</sup> See Adorno (1990: 307-309), for instance. As well as stressing the organic unity of the whole, Schoenberg (trans. 1975: 123) went further, claiming that composers conceived of a whole piece as a monothetic idea in a single instant of inspiration (*Einfall*). See Cross (1980) for a discussion of this.



century. Jonathan Dunsby (1987) and Peter Kivy (1993) have rehabilitated the formal repeat from the perspectives of musicology and aesthetics respectively. In both cases the argument is that the repeated material is a vital formal component of the musical or aesthetic object. Thus, what might be a literal repetition at surface level is not in terms of larger structure.

If the value of repeating a section of material for formal purposes is questioned by some, then music that is repetitive even within each formal unit must be beyond salvation. If the repetition is that which I will describe as structural (in other words, the music is built from such repetitions)<sup>48</sup> then one cannot simply omit those repeated elements without the whole piece 'falling apart'. In Schoenberg's view, this kind of repetition was evidence of a composer trying to fill a longer duration than his or her musical ideas could fill when presented singly (trans. 1995: 299). Repetitive music, then, is the incoherent babble of the musically illiterate, comparable to the linguistic incompetence of the schizophrenic.<sup>49</sup> Any such argument, however, belies a telling assumption about the nature of music.

Part of the suspicion with which repetition is regarded derives from the assumption that pieces of music 'communicate' something – even if the thing communicated is only a musical idea. From this perspective, repetition is as pointless as saying the same thing twice: no additional information is imparted

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<sup>48</sup> See Middleton (1990: 267-281) for a discussion of structural repetition in pop music.

<sup>49</sup> Lacan saw schizophrenia as essentially a language disorder in which the subject's confinement to the perceptual present precludes diachronic speech acts. See Jameson (1983: 118-120) for a discussion.

so the expression can be said to be redundant. If we take music to be communication, then literal, successive repetition makes as much sense as someone who repeats their every utterance. And yet there are plenty of examples in the classical repertoire where composers have come perilously close to doing just that – as in parts of the first movement of Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony (bars 16-25, and 151-175 for example).

But this notion of music communicating something is deserving of closer scrutiny. In some forms of communication, repetition is a standard rhetorical device. In political oration and religious preaching, for example, phrases are repeated to add emphasis and clarify important points. In poetry, phrases are sometimes repeated to effect closure or to articulate a formal structure. Beethoven's repetition in the 'Pastoral' Symphony does not seem to do any of these things, and does not seem to make sense of any sort. Often, however, there are good reasons to repeat music. And, just as in oratory, these have everything to do with making good sense.

In his pedagogic writings Schoenberg makes it plain that repetition is essential for the clear presentation of musical ideas. Viewing music as a logically ordered process, Schoenberg considered the listener's awareness of the logic of the musical argument of paramount importance. In order to achieve this, the terms of the argument and their relations should be made as clear as possible. As Nicholas Cook has pointed out, Schoenberg assumed that aesthetic understanding of music should involve the recreation of production-orientated structures. In other words, as a composer listening to, say, a Mahler

Symphony, Schoenberg would be interested in perceiving what Cook refers to as the “other side of the musical fabric” (1990: 122-160) – hearing the way in which the music was composed in a musicological or production-orientated sense, rather than as an object of auditory delight.

But if we discount the idea that the listener should be guided through a work ‘with their hand held’, so to speak, then is there any need for repetition? Some composers might object that the audience is the least of their concerns and repeating things merely to compensate for their inadequacies may be to the detriment of the pure musical form they are creating. Indeed, Schoenberg himself was clearly only happy to pursue his ideals of clarity so far:

were I prepared to be as discursive as one must be, in order to be widely comprehensible, my works would all last 10 or 12 times as long, and a piece which now lasts 10 minutes would play for two hours, while a whole day would not suffice to get through a longer one (Schoenberg, ed. 1975: 104).

Despite his self-proclaimed concern for the listener, then, Schoenberg does not seem particularly interested in making his music comprehensible to all and sundry. On the contrary, he writes on another occasion: “trained listeners have probably never been very numerous, but that does not prevent the artist from creating only for them” (p. 279). At other times he was positively scathing about composers pandering to the listening faculties of the ordinary person:

most deplorable is the acting of some artists who arrogantly wish to make believe that they descend from their heights in order to give some of their riches to the masses. This is

hypocrisy. . . . There is only “l’art pour l’art,” art for the sake of art alone (p. 124).

This latter view is probably more indicative of his general feeling on the matter: for Schoenberg general comprehensibility was the province of ‘popular’ music, the repetitions being for the benefit of the ‘unsophisticated’ listener. “The language in which musical ideas are expressed in tones,” he writes, “must be proportionate to the intellect which it addresses” (p. 399). So, while a certain amount of repetition is necessary to elucidate the musical ideas for even sophisticated listeners, the amount of repetition required to be understandable to the unsophisticated listener would make the work intolerable to anyone with more acutely honed faculties. Again, then, repetition is seen as an aspect of the presentation of the music rather than an intrinsic property of the music; once more the issue is sidestepped.

The ‘meaning’ we get from music in the communication model is the derivation of some new content from each successive event in a piece. In Schoenberg’s view it was the accumulation of these successive chunks that constituted the musical ‘idea’: the whole that the composer had conceived of in an instant of inspiration. This idea – bound up in Romantic notions of the genius – has also prevailed in more distinctly modern approaches to art. It is quite evident in one theory that found fashionable application in musicology and aesthetics during the 1950s and 60s, and which at first sight seems to subscribe to the communication model.

Information theory is concerned with probability systems. Taking a work of art to be such a system – a Markov chain, for example, in the case of music<sup>50</sup> – it is possible to describe its formal components in statistical terms. When Schoenberg describes retarding the development of his First Chamber Symphony, for example, in information-theoretical terms he is regulating the output of information, feeding it to his audience in small parcels.

Thinking of music or other art forms along these lines can be enlightening, and can have a certain analytical purchase. Indeed, the formal basis of pleasurable stimuli can be described in terms of information: similarity yields a pleasant amount of information where complete difference might result in information overload, and a negative response to the stimulus. ‘Information’ is a nicely general term, and this should be advantageous in our consideration of the pleasurable aspects of a variety of musical stimuli. Different sorts of music feature different kinds of information, so an approach based on such a neutral concept ought to level the playing field, as between different musical styles and traditions. In practice, however, information theory has never been applied in this impartial way, but has been used to determine the presence of specific (and value-informed) elements occurring in a signal in a quantitative sense.

The main problem with information theory as an analytical tool is deciding exactly what information to consider. Philip Tagg (1979) provides a

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<sup>50</sup> A Markov chain is a series of events in which antecedents can be used to determine the probability of consequent events.

nice illustration of the importance of the criteria used to ascribe value by comparing the judgments that devotees of rock and classical music might make to prove the superiority of their favoured music. A rock fan could ‘objectively’ prove that a piece of classical music was an inferior and less nuanced work than a blues track

if the analyst were to present irrefutable statistical data about intensity of attack, occurrence of syncopations and subtleties of ornamentation, number of dissonant accentuated notes in the melodic line, variation of timbre, etc. (all intramusical ‘statistics’) or by observing respondents’ reactions in terms of physical movement (p. 74).

Leonard Meyer’s ‘proof’ of the superiority of a theme by Bach over one by Geminiani illustrates the point. In Meyer’s judgment, Bach’s theme is the superior because of the way he ‘works against’ the probabilities inherent in the theme and plays on listeners’ expectations. For Meyer, a good composition involves the introduction of what he calls ‘designed uncertainties’ to compensate for the tendency toward increased certainty/stability through time that all systems exhibit (Meyer 1967: 419). A cursory look at Meyer’s writing makes it clear that what he classes as ‘information’ is harmonic and/or melodic elements. Of course, in reality a musical signal will be far richer in information than this: while on paper it may be limited to quanta of pitch and temporal position, in performance timbre, dynamics and inter-quantum pitch and timing values all constitute musical facts. Furthermore, as I shall discuss later, pop recordings feature sophisticated spatial effects.

The kind of discrepancies or ‘rhymes’ of pitch and rhythm that Meyer is concerned with feature extensively in classical music, but the application of information theory is not limited to the probabilistic focus on music as a Markov chain. As I have already suggested, variation is perhaps the fundamental compositional device, and this is an altogether different kind of discrepancy from those generated within functional harmony. The tonal system itself is a hierarchic system with its own in-built probability structure. Harmonic discrepancies are, therefore, not intramusical relationships but arise from the relationship between a syntagmatic occurrence and a paradigmatic structure (the tonal scheme). The probabilities of successive events in tonal music are not only dependent on preceding intramusical events but on the existence of this blueprint. Variation, on the other hand, is concerned with purely intramusical discrepancies. It is not surprising, therefore, to find consciously crafted relationships of this kind in non-tonal music. But the point is more general than this. A more honest application of information theory would take account of the effect of discrepancy in any part of the musical signal; individual tones, timbres, motives, musemes and so forth, all qualify as bits of information, and variation in any one will contribute to the music’s effect. Webern’s description of the *Variations for Orchestra* in a 1941 letter to Hildegard Jone, for example, clearly shows the importance of intramusical rhymes to the musical design:

Imagine this: 6 notes are given, in a *shape* determined by the sequence and the rhythm, and what follows . . . is nothing other than this shape over and over again!!! First this shape becomes the “theme” and then there follow 6 variations of

this theme. But the “theme” itself consists, as I said, of nothing but variations (metamorphoses of this first shape). Then as a *unit* it becomes the point of departure for fresh variations (ed. 1967: 44 [Letter dated May 26th, 1941]).<sup>51</sup>

The point I am coming to is that this kind of musematic ‘rhyming’ is not peculiar to the consciously crafted music of the Western art tradition. The same characteristic can be seen in even the least self-conscious music. “Kiss Me Quick”, a track recorded by Elvis Presley and the Jordanaires in 1961, provides a particularly clear example: the ‘sameness tempered by difference’ (as G.M. Hopkins put it) can be seen between various motives throughout the song:

Verse

The musical score for the verse of "Kiss Me Quick" is presented in five staves. The top staff is the Vocal line, with the lyrics "Kiss me quick etc." written below it. The second staff is for Backing Vocals, featuring a melodic line that includes the word "Ah" at the end. The third staff is for Balalaika, showing a melodic line with a long slur over the first two measures. The fourth staff is for Bass, with a rhythmic line. The fifth staff is for Percussion, showing a rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests.

<sup>51</sup> Webern (ed. 1967: 44 [Letter dated May 26th, 1941]). Webern had been struck by the aesthetic effect of this kind of formal device when he encountered the Parthenon frieze. In another letter dated May 3rd, 1933 he writes: “I stood there for an hour and a half. It’s an indescribable miracle. The conception! It is the exact counterpart of our method of composition: always the same thing appearing in a thousand forms. Overwhelming” (20).



### Refrain

Musical score for the Refrain of "Kiss Me Quick". The score is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of four staves: Vocals, Balance (Bal.), Bass, and Percussion (Perc.). The lyrics are "Kiss me quick be - cause I love you so." The vocal line features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The bass line provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and quarter notes. The percussion part shows a simple drum pattern with snare and bass drum hits.

### Bridge

Musical score for the Bridge of "Kiss Me Quick". The score is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of five staves: Vocals (Voc.), Backing Vocals (Backing Voc.), Guitar, Bass, and Percussion (Perc.). The vocal line features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The backing vocal line features a sustained note with a slur. The guitar line features a sustained note with a slur. The bass line provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and quarter notes. The percussion part shows a simple drum pattern with snare and bass drum hits.

Fig. 3.2: Elvis Presley, "Kiss Me Quick"

Figure 3.3 (overleaf) shows the distribution of figures related to the opening bass riff through the different sections of the song and throughout the

different instruments. (The riff can be seen in Fig. 3.2 in the first bar of the bass guitar part in the verse. Height above the floor of the graph represents the number of correlating elements, thus degree of rhyme, between each structural unit and the original riff.)

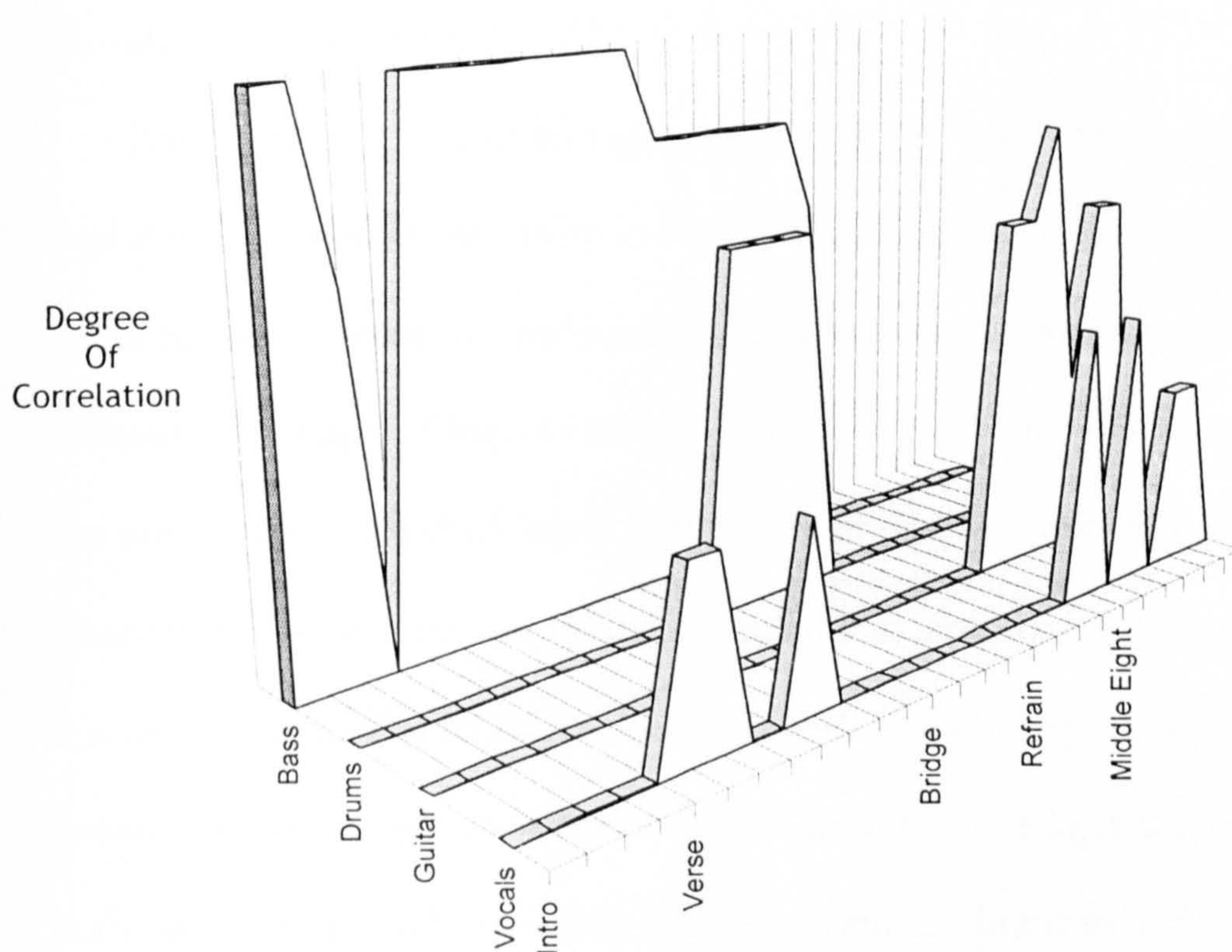


Fig. 3.3: Musematic 'rhymes' in Elvis Presley, "Kiss Me Quick"

The example given is just one motif in the texture. The pleasing effect of this piece cannot be put down to this single factor: similar discrepancies feature throughout the music (see the vocal lines, for instance, in Fig. 3.2) reinforcing or veiling each other. Furthermore, all of these rhymes are incorporated in a formal scheme with its own tonal and sectional rhymes. This formal rhyme scheme can be seen best in the 'bridge' section where the bass and drum parts

(which are elsewhere complementary) reinforce each other in a minor deviation from the original bass riff; closure is effected by the return to the primary pattern, a scheme that is itself reinforced by tonal relationships. It is likely that this structure was not consciously devised – it is not that exceptional – but rather, came about intuitively. And that is part of what makes it so effective: it sounds eminently natural.

But while the effect of vintage pop or rock like “Kiss Me Quick” can be explained in terms of the ‘unity in variety’ of its terms, more contemporary dance music still seems to confound the theory. Snap’s “Exterminate”, already discussed in Chapter One, is a case in point. Created using digital techniques, the music is composed of literal replication of short chunks which offer no internal rhyme or variation, and which are not subject to variation. This does not seem to conform to the ‘unity in variety’ model in any but the most pedantic sense: there is a variety of chunks, and there is a high degree of unity in the repetitions (each repetition is an exact replica). But if we judge this kind of music to be worthless based on the lack of variation within and between cells we are missing the point entirely. And this time the way forward comes from a somewhat unlikely source.

I have already touched upon Peter Kivy’s discussion of the repetitious nature of much instrumental music of the classical period (see page 146). Kivy’s main concern is to argue the value of this music not just in spite of, but because of, its repetitious nature. As has been made clear already, the music he discusses is repetitious in an altogether different way from that which concerns

us here. Nevertheless, the thrust of his argument is pertinent to this discussion. Essentially, he is arguing for the status of this body of music as a decorative art, conforming to what he terms the 'wallpaper' model. The comparison is not meant to denigrate music. Indeed, he insists that, "if absolute music is wallpaper for the ears, it is a many dimensional wallpaper that offers intrigues and complications far beyond its visual counterpart" (Kivy, 1993: 355).

The point that Kivy is making is quite simple: apart from any subsidiary elements that contribute to the musical experience, the pleasure we take in its patterns is an essential part of the experience. Just as in the patterns on wallpaper or the designs of Persian carpets (another example he gives) the repetitions are fundamental characteristics: without repetition there would be no pattern. This throws into relief the main problem with the information-theoretical approach as it has generally been applied to music. Where a repetition would be classed as redundant because it carries no new information, at the next level up in the design hierarchy, the repetitions themselves constitute another type of content. This 'shift' up the hierarchy is quite apparent when listening to minimalist music: the small-scale events seem to coalesce, and we find ourselves attending to higher-level patterns. Curiously enough, information theory as applied to other art forms does not look upon repetition in the same way. In architecture, for example, it would be absurd to conclude that after the first column in a colonnade the others were redundant: a colonnade is by definition a series of columns. The same is true of the music

Kivy is discussing. It “does not merely contain repetition as an important feature, but as a defining feature” (p. 359).

Kivy has an established philosophical interest in ‘absolute music’ – music with no verbal text or programme and with a generic title – and it is this to which his argument pertains. It would seem problematic to exhume this historical concept in relation to pop music; after all, pop songs have titles, and most have some kind of vocal component that is usually verbal. Nevertheless, there is a significant body of music, of which “Exterminate” is one example, in which words and titles are very much background elements, where the title seems little more than a label for the piece, and where any words are part of short vocal samples that are simply a part of the aural texture or pattern. Pieces such as this are primarily musical objects; they are primarily the resources of a dance culture in which subjects engage totally with, and consciously submit to, the aural phenomena.

Kivy might be surprised to be quoted in this context, but the fact remains: contemporary dance music, along with much minimalist music, is a prime example of a musical style defined by its repetitions. The repetitions of a Mozart string quartet, for example, are hardly comparable to the dense structural repetition of “Exterminate” and other music in this genre. Nevertheless, the same principle applies: it is not the individual repetitions we should look at, but the designs that arise out of them. It is not surprising, then, that while “Exterminate” is repetitious at the cellular level, looking at 8-bar aggregates gives more of a clue to the aesthetic appeal of this music. Fig. 3.4

shows the same structural units depicted in Appendix C, but showing higher-level units. Each unit is made up of eight bars. (For details of what the smaller structural blocks represent, refer to the Appendix).

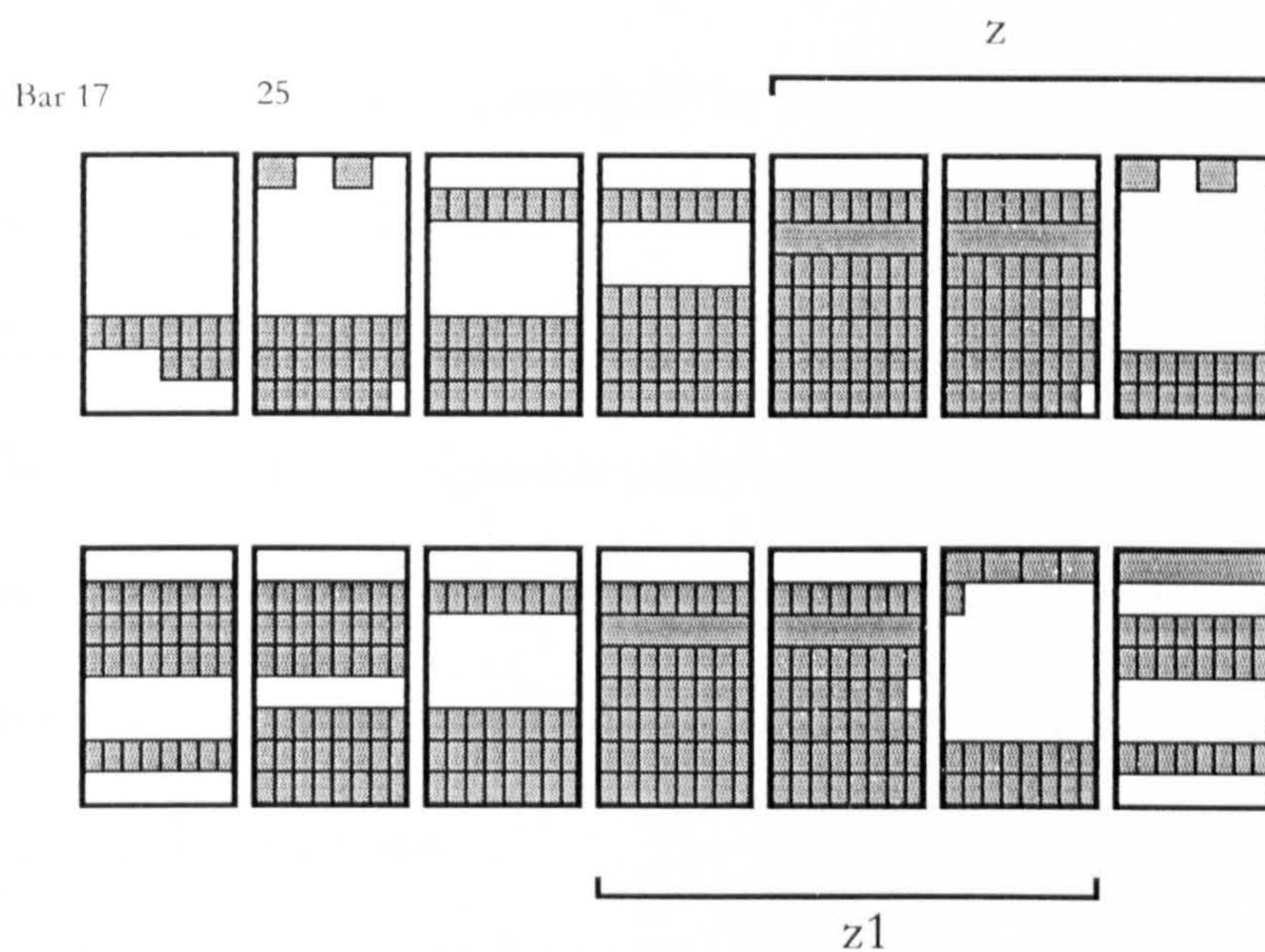


Fig. 3.4: Eight bar aggregates in Snap, “Exterminate”

Of the fourteen eight-bar units that make up the 112 bars total, only two are exact repeats. Furthermore, several ‘rhyming’ relationships are evident. The  $z - z1$  pairing is perhaps the most obvious on paper, and something of this is heard in performance, mainly as a result of the sustained shakuhachi melody which features throughout the first sixteen bars of both  $z$  and  $z1$ . In the listening experience, however, it is the minor variations between adjacent units that are most salient. Any adjacent units share at least one cellular component; often they have several in common. This, then, is a clear example of ‘sameness tempered with difference’: the sameness of the repeated motifs is tempered by

the difference in texture created by adding or taking away elements. The gradual building up of the texture through the first five of these eight bar chunks, for example, is typical of this genre and is essentially a formal process articulated by the discrepancies between adjacent classes.

Naturally for this genre, many of the multi-cellular configurations differ only in the smallest details: this level of information and flow-rate characterizes the 'techno' genre. One particular type of variation – the dropping out of the drums in the last bar of an eight-bar pattern (seen in units 2 and 6) – is a widely used device in this genre. It is comparable to the 'drum fill' in rock music, which is an analogous means of introducing discrepancies or variations into repeated eight-bar patterns.

As well as articulating high-level patterning, repetitions in music also give rise to a type of objectivity that does not exist in non-repetitive music. We have talked of the concept of 'aesthetic objects' without attempting a precise definition of those objects. For physical objects, the item's physical boundaries are clearly distinguished, and it is the form within these boundaries that is apprehended. Musical objects are much harder to define, if not to conceive of. Some of the problems were made clear as long ago as 1967 in a seminal paper on the subject by Patricia Carpenter. In her account of perceiving a Bach fugue as an object, Carpenter described what would seem to be two different kinds of objectivity, between which she admitted some confusion. On the one hand she conceived the whole fugue as an object, which exists outside time, and which can be grasped as a whole in much the same way as a visual object.

Elsewhere in the same paper she implied that the spatial objectivity is merely an illusion resulting from “the presentation of a single bit of musical matter from many different aspects, in many different lights, moved bodily from place to place” (Carpenter, 1967: 80). In the latter case it is just the fugal subject, rather than the fugue as a whole, that is the object. So when the theme is transposed, or otherwise altered, it is as though the same object is seen from another viewpoint. It seems altogether more likely that the subject could be perceived in its entirety as an object, rather than the whole fugue. Nevertheless, it is not clear how literally one should take any of this: Arnold Berleant (1968) criticized Carpenter’s paper at the time of its publication for translating concepts such as Bullough’s ‘psychical distance’ (Bullough, 1912-13) into spatial terms in too literal a manner.

But while this sort of objectivity can perhaps be dismissed as a fanciful conceit in the case of a Bach fugue, it can be taken much more literally in our present enquiry. After all, the repetitions in “Exterminate” and other digital compositions are *exact* replications of auditory objects. While the psychological reality of the discrepancies between terms further up the hierarchy is not doubted, it must be remembered that the time interval between these discrepancies is 14-15 seconds for the average dance track. If those variations were the only source of pleasure, listening to these pieces would be a frustrating experience. It could be argued that the intense repetition serves to reinforce the adaptation level prior to the new stimulus, thus highlighting the deviation when it is delivered. It is my contention that the repetition reinforces



the objectivity of these auditory components, and in this manner exercises a positive aesthetic effect of its own.

One of the most routine observations about music is its transitory nature. Music only exists in time, and certain of its attributes (a note's duration, for example) are only perceived retrospectively. If we wish to savour a musical event, or group of events, therefore, we must replay them, whether in the imagination, or out loud. It is not unusual for music fans to listen repeatedly to a newly purchased record, and this apparently obsessive behaviour can be easily explained – they wish to engage with the musical material on a prolonged basis in order to experience its pleasures to the full. Their only option is to repeat the music. Once again, although the signal presented is largely redundant, the act of repetition is not worthless. The stimulus may indeed lose some of its appeal after an extended period of such listening, but on the whole the repetitions must be seen to add value to the experience. Repeated listening offers something that would not be possible on a single hearing, namely, an intense familiarity with the sounding material. It is the successive hearings that enable the listener to attend selectively to particular elements in the sound complex, to apprehend details within and between these selected events. In short, repetition enables us to appreciate the finer details of the object.

It is this kind of relationship with repeated musical objects that is possible in dance music. And the effect is stronger than repeatedly playing the same record, for the intratextual repetitions of tracks like “Exterminate” are

generally shorter in duration than the specious present;<sup>52</sup> thus the scale of the events themselves makes them eminently knowable. At the same time, the repeated sound objects are often highly detailed, both rhythmically and timbrally. Contemporary culture has seen a rekindled interest in sound synthesis and manipulation, often with recourse to the filtering capabilities of analogue instruments of the 1960s and 70s, and increasingly using more powerful mathematical models to modify or generate sounds (often dynamically). Furthermore, the virtual acoustic spaces in which these sound objects are constituted in the auditory image create a depth of field around them, and invests them with a near-plasticity. Objects are not just placed in a stereo field; the field itself can be manipulated by various enhancement processes.

Enhancement is still something of a ‘black art’ in the audio industry; most of the procedures commonly implemented in recording equipment were chanced upon, and the explanation left for a fledgling psychoacoustic theory to divine. As a result, while much is still not fully understood, some basic principles have been identified which can explain some of the clearly perceptible effects on the auditory image. In the real world, when a signal from a single source travels through the air, the low frequencies travel slightly slower than the higher frequencies, and arrive at the ear later. So when the sound is

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<sup>52</sup> Also referred to as the ‘perceptual present’, the specious present (a term originally coined by William James) is defined as “the time interval, a few seconds in length, in which we experience the flow of events as being simultaneously available to perceptual or cognitive analysis” (Michon, 1978: 90).

heard there is a phase difference within the signal. The effect is heightened for distant sounds, and lessened for very close sounds. If the sound is emanating from a single source such as a speaker, any phase difference arises in the space between the source and the ear (speaker designs often compensate for this by placing the 'woofer' further forward than the 'tweeter'). In this situation amplitude and harmonic content are the main tools for creating depth of field: closer sounds are usually louder and brighter (they are more high frequency harmonics present in the signal) than distant sounds. Enhancement techniques augment these techniques by introducing phase-shifts into the audio signal before it is transmitted. In this way, not only can the depth of field, and thus the lateral separation of sound objects be exaggerated, but by introducing a negative phase-difference to compensate for the transmission effect, an auditory image can be formed in front of the source. This technique is widely used in professional recording, which is why the results often sound more 'up front' than amateur efforts.

Processing of this kind is usually applied not in a 'blanket' fashion across the mix but selectively. Objects are treated individually in order to heighten the spatial illusion. The results are often remarkable: constituents within the auditory image are perceived to have more definition; the mix seems transparent with a consequent heightening of clarity and detail. In other words, while musical objects have previously been described metaphorically in terms of spatial relations, the products of modern music technology have an almost

tangible spatial component. The repetition itself also contributes to the definition of auditory objects. Leonard Meyer makes the point:

In the construction of successive hierarchic systems, there is a strong temptation to discover recurrent cycles and patterns of repetition. This is partly because events appear to be more clearly defined and separated from one another when such recurrence is present. The more exact the repetition of a pattern . . . the more certain we are about the limits of the events (Meyer, 1967: 94).

Any understanding of the pleasure that this kind of repetitive music brings must acknowledge the perceptual reality of these psycho-acoustic effects, and the sound objects that they define. After all, the auditory worlds created in high-tech pop are quite different from the sonic component of the real world. They are also very different from the sound worlds of most 'classical' music. It is not surprising that people enjoy this 'virtual reality for the ears'. It has much the same appeal as the fictive or diegetic worlds conventionally presented within the frame, beyond the proscenium, or on the screen.

#### TEXTUAL INTERCOURSE AS AESTHETIC PROCESS

Where information theory can, in the wrong hands, fail to account for the pleasures of listening at the intratextual level, it can be applied with predictably similar results at the intertextual level. Meyer's judgment that "a tonal process which moves in the expected and probable way without deviation may be said to be neutral with regard to meaning" (1957: 415) is essentially a rewording of Adorno's criticism of intertextual repetition in pop that I discussed in Chapter

One. After all, Adorno was basically suggesting that the employment of standardized harmonic schemes was 'meaningless'. These conceptions of musical aesthetics do not take into account the position of music as a cultural artifact. Both Adorno and Meyer exemplify the tendency for Modernist thinkers to require their objects of study to be innovative rather than iterative. The same aesthetic, ill-equipped to understand the simulacra of reproduction, or the paradigms of mass-production, failed to make sense of television: in a 1969 article Richard Carpenter bemoaned the "drab marriage of aesthetics and TV" (Carpenter, 1969: 259). Umberto Eco, writing a decade and a half later, is happy to acknowledge that the structure of mass-entertainment does afford its pleasure, citing the inexorable cadential progress of TV commercials as an example: "it is precisely on this foreseen and awaited reappearance that our modest but irrefutable pleasure is based" (Eco, 1985: 162). Even without academic validation, the enjoyment that people take from the repetitive forms that pervade the cultural field is self-evident.

For decades, viewers have avidly watched a succession of TV sleuths in programmes which are not only repetitive within a particular series, but which also conform to a generic archetype. Of course, the programmes themselves are not literally repetitive but iterative. If the same storyline occurred on successive weeks, viewers would quickly lose patience. At the same time, viewers would be frustrated if they did not see the same core characters in similar situations. When one watches *Inspector Morse*, for example, one has certain expectations: the personality clashes with his long-suffering sidekick

Sergeant Lewis; the excerpts of Mozart; lunchtime pints in Cotswold pubs; and glimpses of Oxford collegiate life. These elements are as pre-given as Barrington Pheloung's punning theme music, or the inevitable murder that Morse will have to investigate.

What a Morse devotee derives from watching each installment, then, is not just the textual pleasure that the casual, one-off viewer might enjoy, but an intertextual pleasure. It conforms to what has come to be called a "new aesthetics of seriality" in Italian academic debate<sup>53</sup> (although it is more indexical – and thus hierarchical – than the linearity that the term 'serial' implies). To describe this as 'aesthetic' is not overstating the case: the dialogue between sameness and difference, and repetition and innovation, that underlies textual aesthetic experience is evident here. But it is an aesthetic concerned with formal relationships not within objects, but between objects. In any one installment, it is both the particular configuration of symbols and the relationship between that and previous configurations that is part of the pleasure. That is not to say that the drama itself is not pleasurable if one has never heard of Morse and never sees another episode, but just that a viewer familiar with all of these aspects of the series will experience the episodes in a different way.

Much popular music is similarly serial: Andrew Goodwin (1993: 98-130) has described the way in which artists' identities form a 'metanarrative' or

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<sup>53</sup> Eco (1985: pp. 166 and 176n) cites a special issue of *Cinema & Cinema*, 35-36 (1983): 20-24 as the "manifesto" of this new aesthetic.

supertext that superposes any discrete token of their output. Goodwin is primarily discussing the visual constituents of star identity, articulated through music television (hence the emphasis on narrativity) but the same 'structure' is evident in all aspects of the popular musical product. Most obviously, artists tend to have a certain 'sound'; one expects certain compositional devices along with recognizable qualities in vocal and instrumental performances and production values. Once again, that is not to say that the text itself does not offer any pleasure as a discrete object, but just that hearing it in relation to the other instances in the series (other songs by the same band or artist, for example) offers a significantly different pleasure. We could also relate lyrical content, album covers, and so forth, to the same indexical supertext.

It is not only individual bands or artists that are subject to this intertextual aesthetic: we perceive rhyming connections between the music of Oasis and the Beatles, or Blur and the Kinks. Bernard Gendron's (1986) discussion of the 'doo-wop' genre, which I cited in Chapter One, makes it clear that these elements are important in constituting generic identity. But more than this, Gendron is in no doubt that it is the similarities between songs, and in particular between their lexical components, that is a source of pleasure. 'Doo-wop' collectors "scour through rummage sales . . . to add to their hundreds or thousands of *like-sounding* records" – in order to experience more of the same, but different (p. 29, my italics). This is broadly comparable to the fan of a particular band wanting to experience the whole set of rhyming terms of their output, and eagerly awaiting each new release: it is not simply the joy of

collecting, or the obsession with the stars, although that certainly enters into it for some fans.

Just as in textual aesthetics, the equilibrium of sameness tempered by difference within an oeuvre can be disturbed to the detriment of the subject's enjoyment. The Clash's 1980 album *Sandinista!*, in which the band moved from references to dub and reggae within a punk/rock context to a lengthy and self-indulgent exploration of explicitly dub and even disco textures, was too far removed from the band's punk roots for many of the band's original fans. Indeed, it was seen by many as the final act of a sell-out that had begun with the polished production of *Give 'Em Enough Rope* (1978) the follow-up to their eponymously titled debut album of 1977 which CBS considered unsuitable for release to an American market. Thus, what was largely a matter of aesthetics – the way the music sounds – was perceived to be an ideological issue. Bob Dylan was accused of much the same thing in 1966 when he utilized electric instruments for the first time. More clearly an aesthetic issue was the failure of Terence Trent d'Arby's second album *Neither Fish nor Flesh* (1989): it simply sounded too different from *Introducing The Hardline According To...* (1987).<sup>54</sup> For a commercially available product, a supertext is synonymous with brand identity, and the same problem exists: Richard Branson's ambitions in industries as diverse as travel, soft drinks and financial services have invited

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<sup>54</sup> Terence Trent d'Arby returned suitably chastened more than three years later with *Symphony or Damn* (1993) a concept album comprising two parts: 'Confrontation' and 'Reconciliation'. It could just as easily have been subtitled 'An artist's practical creative response to just criticism'.



criticisms, as yet unsubstantiated, of 'terminal heterogeneity' within the Virgin brand (originally a music brand, of course) from business analysts.

This discussion of intertextual qualities has clearly taken us beyond the realms of textual aesthetics. Indeed, a charge that could be levelled at the artworld – that it is often more concerned with intertextual connoisseurship than intratextual pleasure – would seem to obtain here too. This is exemplified by Eco's account of intertextuality, in which he champions the notion of the 'smart' model reader: someone who is sufficiently familiar with the cultural nexus of a text to appreciate its references.

Much of Eco's paper is concerned with overt intertextual reference – the quote. Thus he cites examples by Woody Allen and Steven Spielberg which are directorly in-jokes, but which are equally available to the community of expert movie-goers. This is, of course, a widely remarked-upon aspect of postmodern culture, and examples proliferate in all areas of cultural production. Music-videos and TV commercials provide a rich seam of allusion: the references to *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) in the videos for Madonna's "Material Girl" and Queen's "Radio Ga Ga" respectively, or to *Tom Jones* (1963) in a 1995 Nissan Micra advert, are all examples of this.

In the case of advertising, the use of such references, and the pleasure of their recognition, might have some commercial effect: it is feasible that a consumer gaining entry to this expert community might see the product as a badge of their inclusion. In the case of music video, however, it is not clear what proportion of the *Top of the Pops* audience would have recognized the

references to a culturally distinct movie canon. The postmodern penchant for quoting in an ironic manner, or rather for understanding quotation as being ironic thus runs into problems. This is similar to Fredric Jameson's notion of 'blank parody'; quotation in which there is no ironic or satirical impulse; "a neutral practice of . . . mimicry . . . without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to . . . what is being imitated" (Jameson, 1983: 114). But what is 'normal' in a Madonna video? What is 'normal' in a Hollywood musical? Indeed, what does 'normal' mean in terms of human cultural traditions that have evolved so far beyond natural practices?

For linguistic signs, the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, so the meaning of a term is not given by etymology or philology, but arises in discourse. Understanding of the word 'wicked' is not dependent on knowing its origins (it comes from the old English *wicce* meaning 'witch'). Furthermore, the relationship between word and meaning is dynamic not static. Hence 'wicked' has come to have a quite different meaning in its slang usage. It does not make sense to talk of the reference to *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* arising in quite the same way: if filmmaking is speech it is of the most stilted kind. Nevertheless, the meaning of this clip – as it is interpreted by viewers – does arise from its situation in cultural discourse. So, even if viewers are unaware of the precise reference, the clip is still meaningful: the spectacle is clearly constructed within the video (it is a play within a play), the characters are not dressed in contemporary styles, the opulence of the spectacle reflects the lyric, and so on. In other words, it has a generic significance. The same is

true of the “Radio Ga Ga” video, which has general connotations of totalitarian regimes, military dictatorship, ‘thought control’, and mass hysteria quite independent of the specific references to Lang’s vision of the future.

These speech acts, then, are strictly polysemic, not in the sense of the *double-entendre* (they do not say one thing while meaning another) nor the parable or allegory (no particular meaning is privileged) but in the true sense of the term. They function equally as ‘loaded’ or ‘blank’ references. Indeed, the best analogy is speech itself where the meaning of terms can be carried in the cut and thrust of cultural discourse rather than being the exclusive preserve of etymological knowledge.

Musical ideas and expressions circulate within communities, whether overtly as in the communities of sample-users, or in the field of influence that occurs naturally, and often subconsciously, around cultural objects. If these objects have ‘meanings’ to a particular speaker, they may have an altogether different set of associations for other producers (who may generate similar speech acts) and interpretants. In music there is no proto-language around which this heteroglossia is centered, but a potential for variable semiosis along with asemantic reception. In any case, the pleasure that results from this intertextual dialogue is quite independent of any such meanings it might evoke for speakers or interpretants. In other words, it is the abstract formal relations that are pleasurable at the intertextual level, in exactly the same way as occurs intratextually.

## CONCLUSION

The serial aesthetic that we have noted in the music of mass culture is not exclusive to non-functional cultural products such as movies or songs: ordinary commodities from cars to clothes are characterized by similar patterns of production, as was discussed in Chapter One. This characteristic structure is taken by Marxist analysts to be defined by the market. In other words, the structure of the field of production is thought to be defined by the mode of production. Haug (trans. 1986: 39) for example, explains the continual variation of forms in terms of stimulating demand by a process of ‘aesthetic innovation’ in which older styles are made obsolete. Haug is particularly concerned with the aesthetic component of commodities, but this kind of economic determinism prevails throughout the humanities.

Even after dismissing Adorno’s critique, it is commonplace for scholars to root their discussions of pop music in economics rather than aesthetics. Richard Middleton (1990: 38) for example, writes of a “cyclical pattern of continual conflict between conservative major companies and innovative ‘grassroots’ independents and entrepreneurs: breakthrough – assimilation – breakthrough – assimilation” as though the aesthetic impulse can be accounted for in this way. There is a certain amount of truth in the economic facts of his account, as Peter Ross (1996) makes clear in his analysis of the mainstreaming of punk in Britain from a market-based perspective. Nevertheless, the economic description does not tell the whole story. The repetitious nature of popular musical culture is not simply a characteristic of the market in which it

features, but a fundamental part of the experience. It is not simply that audiences “will support innovation that resonates with familiarity”, as one scholar has put it, and thus “allow artistic innovation within an industrial process” (Tankel, 1990: 39). They positively enjoy it.

Cultural production, including musical production, is carried out within socio-cultural discourse in general: a field structured around the poles of sameness and difference, conservatism and progressivism, as evidenced by socio-political impulses. It must be noted that this structure also conforms to the same discrepancy model that human psychology seems to favour – humans enjoy change, just as long as it is moderate. Too much change, or too fast a rate of change, brings uncertainty. In social or professional situations, this is almost always associated with stress – hence the advice for managers to ‘stretch’ but not ‘stress’ their employees.

Cultural production virtually by definition conforms to the ‘aesthetics of seriality’ that Eco describes. The kind of production remarked upon by theorists is simply the continuation and escalation of this process into the industrial and post-industrial age. Modes of production are very much secondary issues. The system in which commodities are produced is largely irrelevant: ‘aesthetic innovation’ is not a function of the system, but a feature of human production in general. It is not simply that this structure of the cultural field is supported by audiences in same the way that consumers might tolerate a change of ingredients in a popular product. On the contrary, the

dialogue between old and new is as much a formal requirement of a pleasurable context as unity in variety is a requirement of a pleasing text.

What is misrepresented in the Marxist analysis, then, is the position of the consumer. Rather than being mere objects for exploitation in the impulse for valorization, incorporated within the system of commodity capitalism through the aesthetic dimensions of commodities (Adorno, trans. 1990; Haug, trans. 1986, trans. 1987), consumers derive their own non-economic value from the same production cycle that creates wealth for producers. Of course, this is largely a consequence of precisely those aesthetic properties of commodities, but the pleasures afforded by these objects cannot be restricted to the economic exchange, or constrained by a production-based concept of their commodity status.

Paul Willis's (1990) account of the way in which subcultures use music is a pertinent example. The basis of Willis's argument is that 'necessary work' (labour) in the industrial world precludes the possibility of symbolic creativity that existed in pre-industrial society. Workers on a production line, for example, are not afforded the opportunities for self-expression or fulfillment of the craftsman. At the same time, the institutions of high art seem remote, and meaningless to the vast majority. As a result, people have no choice but to conduct their 'symbolic work' (which is actually no less necessary than 'necessary work') in other areas. For the masses, cultural commodities are the raw materials with which this symbolic work - the creation of meaning - is carried out. These objects do not require the self-conscious appropriation that

Hebdige (1979) describes as *bricolage*. On the contrary, buying and owning is enough. The individual's public identity is an aggregation of these symbols: the clothes we wear; the cars we drive; what we choose to eat and drink. The only site available for this negotiation of meaning through commodities is the marketplace. Willis concedes that the "selfish, blind, grabbing hand of the market" might not be the most appropriate way of achieving cultural emancipation (p. 26); as he points out, while the 'official arts' do not offer themselves readily for use, "commercial cultural commodities, conversely, offer no such impediments . . . . [They] are aimed at exchange and therefore at use" (p. 25).

More fundamentally still, it is possible to derive pleasure from commodities, or other paraphernalia of consumer culture, without any economic exchange taking place. When we see a new a product in a shop, we can appreciate its purely formal qualities without being drawn into economic consumption. Likewise, it is possible to take pleasure in television commercials quite independently of any interest in (or recollection of) the products being advertised. And once again, the enjoyment is not purely textual, but arises from our position in culture, and in a well-nigh 'carnavalesque' way (in Bakhtin's (1968) sense of the word): we feel the way the design elements of products relate to the stylistic vocabulary of the moment – the way a product's form relates to its predecessors and competitors or in which a design articulates or embodies the prevailing stylistic grammar. The enjoyment is that of lived experience in an environment populated with these objects. The same is true of

advertisements: we thrive on the relationships between the different productions – the cultural ‘code-play’ as Guy Cook (1992: 226-7) calls it – whether they form a clear series (like the British Airways adverts), make overt intertextual references, or just embody the unplanned interrelations that occur in a culture.

As we recognized in the discussion of the “Flower Duet”, Delibes’ music informs syntagmatic chains that interweave throughout the cultural field, crossing the boundaries between ‘serious’ and popular culture, and product and advertisement. The “Flower Duet” as used in a Ford Galaxy advert or the Yanni recording is not that of Delibes’ opera, but a “Flower Duet” in which its cultural heritage is a vital part of its meaning. Yanni’s recording in 4/4 is clearly related to the Malcolm McLaren version of the piece used in the 1989 BA commercial. Likewise, the Ford Galaxy commercials reference those of British Airways rather than Delibes’ opera. And this phenomenon is not restricted to British Airways, or even to the advertising industry. When DJ Paul Oakenfold used Barber’s *Adagio in Perfecto Fluoro* (1996), he did not just source any version of the music. On the contrary, he chose to use it in its post-*Platoon* (1986) guise, complete with the sounds of warfare that punctuate it in the film.

This, then, is the nub of the issue. These intertextual repetitions, reiterations, and connections are not merely symptomatic of an aspect of our culture: they define it. And while these particular manifestations of our need for semiotic currency are exclusive to our epoch, to our media, and to our specific cultural infrastructures, the underlying practices are not. If Philip



Tagg's project to map 'interobjective comparisons' throughout the history of music demonstrates anything, it is that the intertextuality that is rampant in the cultural production of industrial societies is not unique to postmodernity but is, like the aesthetic impulse in general, a fundamental human characteristic. Indeed, the idea that capitalist production has incorporated aesthetic elements purely in the service of valorization may be putting the cart before the horse: it seems altogether more reasonable to assume that the human need to engage with aesthetic objects has found expression in the dominant cultural activity of our age – industrial production. Advertising and industrial design provide creative individuals with the canvasses on which to work. When those individuals invest the objects of their profession with aesthetic attributes, their motivation is not to somehow ensnare unwitting subjects (who are people just like themselves) but to do what any other creative-producers do, and have done for centuries: delight themselves and others with their creations. Likewise, the features of industrially produced material also inform non-functional aesthetic production, as I have argued is the case in contemporary dance music. Such a migration of attributes does not compromise the objects created, but further serves to involve those objects in our culture: it enables them to speak to us in a formal language that we recognize, and that resonates with many other aspects of our existence – which in post-industrial society necessarily revolves around commodities.

Understanding the way in which musical objects fit into this cultural web is, of course, a valuable undertaking. It is important that we more fully

understand the ways in which we relate to objects of all sorts, as well as why, how and when we produce them. Our understanding of such issues can only benefit from greater interdisciplinary cooperation. This should not be limited to cultural studies: psychology, philosophy, anthropology and physics (to name but a few) all have vital roles to play. It is also important to avoid some of the mistakes of the past and resist the temptation to look for easy answers (such as homological, linear, or causal relationships) to what are extremely complex issues and phenomena.

But as well as working alongside other disciplines to establish music's position in this cultural web, it must be recognized that there are certain aspects of the musical experience which are squarely the preserve of musicological investigation: namely those musical features of the object that music theory evolved (and continues to evolve) to account for. Again, other disciplines can shed light on the way we perceive musical objects and the attraction that they hold for us (psychology and physiology, most obviously). And in turn, these findings may shed light on the socio-cultural or commercial roles of music. But an understanding of the primary musical material itself is the remit – and the responsibility – of musicology. As I have argued in this chapter, it is possible to bracket the musical object when listening, excluding ideological and conventional baggage, and to apprehend the sounding material from a position of neutrality. Current music analytical methods *do* filter the musical experience (which was the basis for the 'New' musicological critique), but vital parts of the musical material are filtered out along with extra-musical

factors, and the result is a skewing of repertoires that all too easily informs aesthetic valuation. The development and application of egalitarian analytical methods is a worthy goal. It seems to me that an honest application of information theory would make a sensible first step towards this goal.

Advances in computer technology made since this approach was applied to music in the 1950s and 1960s offer the possibility of providing a more comprehensive set of data for analysis, capturing the timbral information, rhythmic displacement, and micro-tunings in musical signals that conventional representations fail to account for. Adding such approaches to the palette of music analytical tools can only serve to re-invigorate music theory, and re-affirm its position with regard to the musical text.

# APPENDIX A: MADONNA, "INTO THE GROOVE"

## *Drums*

A Agogo pattern

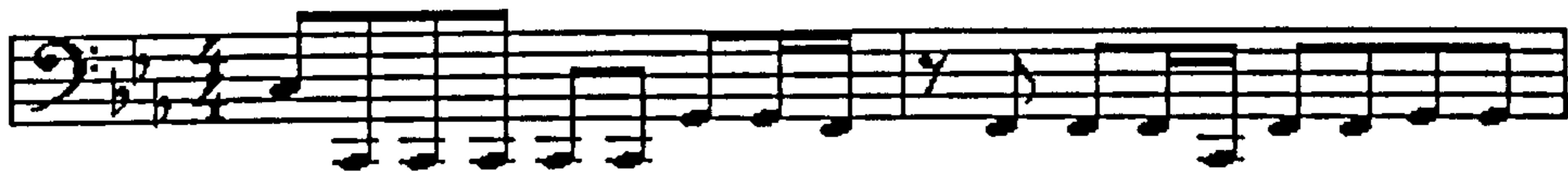
D Drum loop

## *Bass*

B1 Chorus



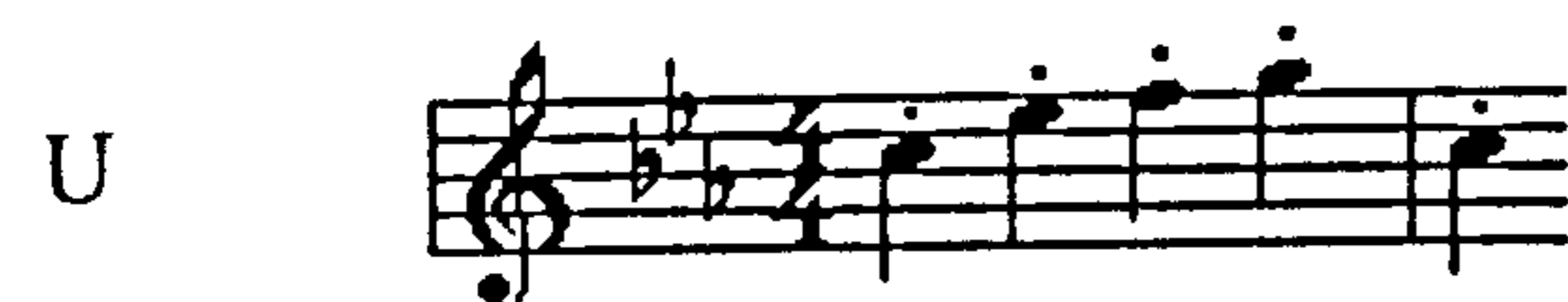
B2 Verse



B3 Middle Eight



## *Synthesizer*



Synth/fx

Synth

Bass

Drums

U U U U

SI SI SI SI SI SI SI S2 S2 S2 S2 S2 S2 S2 S2 SI SI SI

B1 B1 B2 B2 B2 B2 B1 B1

A A D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D

Bar 9 17 25 33

Piano

Synth/fx

Synth

Bass

Drums

Piano Solo

U U U

SI S2 S2 S2 S2 S2 S2 S2 S2 SI SI SI SI SI SI

(B1) B2 B2 B2 B2 B1 B1 B3 B3 B3 B3 B1

D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D

41 49 57 65 73

Piano

Synth/fx

Synth

Bass

Drums

(Piano Solo)

U U U U

SI SI S2 S2 S2 S2 SI SI SI SI SI SI SI SI


B1 B2 B2 B3 B3 B3 B3 B1 B1 B1 B1


D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D

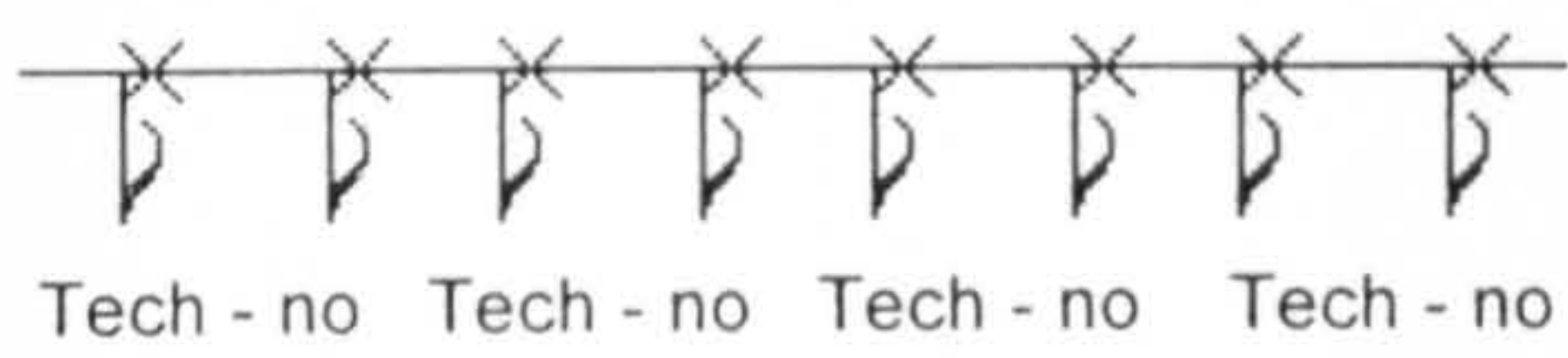
81 89 97 105

## APPENDIX B: 2 UNLIMITED, "NO LIMIT"

### Vocals

N 

O 

T 

### V Verse Melody

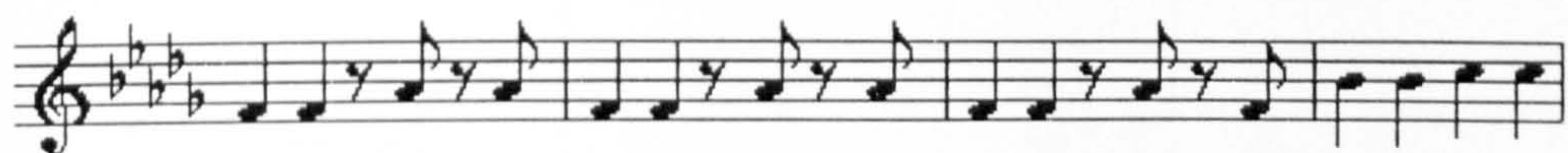


### Synthesizer

A Analogue bass



ST Synthesizer tune



C Chordal pad



### Drums

K Kick drum

DR Drum loop

Vocals

Synth

Analogue Bass

Drums

Bar: 1 5 9 13 17 21 25 29 33 37 41 45 49 53 57

Detailed description: This system of musical notation spans from bar 1 to 57. The Vocals part has notes 'NN R NN R V V'' starting at bar 37. The Synth part has notes 'ST ST' from bar 21 to 25 and 'C C' from bar 41 to 45. The Analogue Bass part has notes 'A A' from bar 1 to 5, 'A A' from bar 13 to 17, 'A A' from bar 29 to 33, and 'A A' from bar 53 to 57. The Drums part has a 'K' at bar 5, and 'DR' notes from bar 13 to 57, with a 'DR-' note at bar 53.

Vocals

Synth

Analogue Bass

Drums

Bar: 61 65 69 73 77 81 85 89 93 97 101 105 109 113

Detailed description: This system of musical notation spans from bar 61 to 113. The Vocals part has notes 'Ow T Ow T' from bar 61 to 65 and 'NN R NN R V V' V V'' from bar 85 to 109. The Synth part has notes 'ST ST' from bar 77 to 81 and 'C C C C' from bar 93 to 101. The Analogue Bass part has notes 'A A' from bar 69 to 73 and 'A A' from bar 109 to 113. The Drums part has 'DR' notes from bar 61 to 113, with 'DR-' notes at bars 81 and 85.

## APPENDIX C: SNAP, "EXTERMINATE"

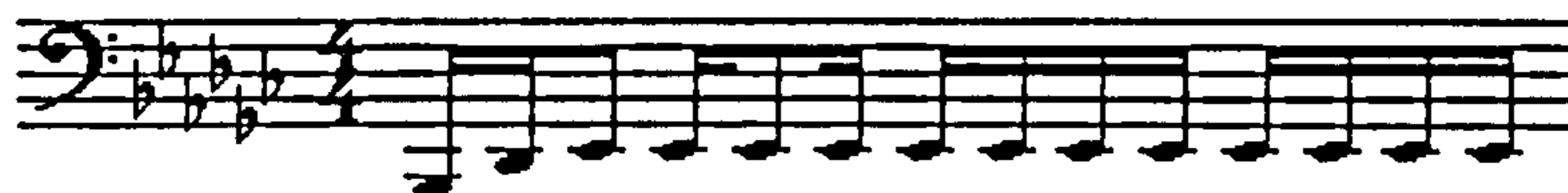
### *Vocals*

V Verse

Y "You'll be surprised at what you might find"

### *Synthesizer and Samples*

A 'Squelchy' analogue synth



B Bass



C *Staccato* synth figure

O Piano figure

P Percussive riff

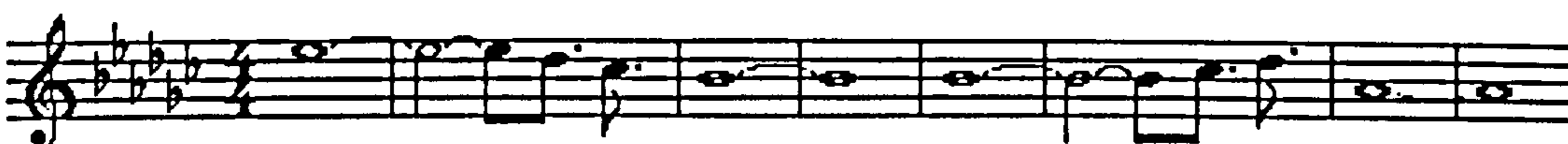


R Soft background pad

S Synth figure



Z Sustained Shakuhachi melody



### *Percussion*

H Tambourine

D Drum loop





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