

3. *Epistemic inertia*

If the stopping distance of an oil tanker is measured in miles and its turning radius in kilometres, the inertia and manoeuvrability of a cultural legacy loaded with social, economic, technological and ideological cargo or ballast will need to be calculated in centuries rather than in decades or generations.⁵⁷ This chapter attempts to identify the contents of one such metaphorical oil tanker with a view to charting a less hazardous epistemological course through troubled waters for which the vessel was not originally designed. In crude terms (no 'crude oil' pun intended), the oil tanker in question is a certain set of European notions about music, the troubled waters are those of the post-Edison era and the epistemological hazards can be understood as a series of anomalies relating to the presence of that vessel in those unfamiliar waters.

The basic anomaly

On page 12 we asked: 'if music is... as important as [we] suggest, why does it... end up near the bottom of the academic heap?' We have not properly answered that question and need to do so because it begs other questions about music's ability to carry or not to carry meaning.

The contradiction between music's low academic status and its importance in everyday life can only be explained in one of two general ways: either music is not as important as we have made out or its importance *is* underestimated and its basic character misunderstood. Assuming the second alternative to be more plausible, this chapter attempts to demystify a few widely held articles of faith about music. In so doing the misconceptions need to be identified and explained. It will also be necessary to consider connections between ideology and musical institutions, as well as between notions of music and knowledge. There is a double reason for insisting on these points: compared to the visual and verbal arts, music in Western academe lives in a sort of conceptual and

57. For details about oil tanker manoeuvrability, ask your preferred search engine to find online occurrences of |"oil tanker" "turning radius" "stopping distance"|. Depending on various factors, stopping distances seem to range between about 5 and 16 km (3-10 miles), turning radius between 2 and 5 km.

institutional isolation from the epistemological mainstream. This relative *isolation in academe* stands also in stark contrast to music's much greater *integration into media production and perception* processes. Every time you put on a DVD, play a video game, watch a music video or are subjected to a TV commercial, music is an integral part of what has been produced and whatever it is you experience on hearing and seeing that multi-media production. Assuming that music makes a significant contribution to that 'whatever it is you experience', why, you might well wonder, in our tradition of knowledge, do we seem to lack the conceptual tools that could help us deal with basic questions of musical meaning? That question must be answered if we are to come up with any viable alternative at all; otherwise, we risk perpetuating the historical legacy of assumptions at the root of the problem to be solved.

We have already refuted the notion of music as a 'universal language' (p.17, ff.) and suggested that music's humble status in the pecking order of sign systems in a largely logocentric and scopocentric tradition of education and research may be due to its essentially *alogogenic*⁵⁸ character. As should be clear from the previous paragraph, there is, unfortunately, more to the problem than that.

Articles of faith

One major problem about understanding how music works (or does not work) as a sign system is that many of those who have sought to explain such matters have done so for reasons that are seldom transparent. Another problem is that the sources we rely on for ideas about music are, for obvious reasons, mainly scribal and that verbal literacy was until quite recently the preserve of an élite. Such sources have a long, powerful and important historical legacy. They are also often normative, propounding, from particular standpoints in specific socio-historical situations, notions of musical right and wrong, good and bad, true and false, beautiful and ugly, elegant and vulgar, learned and ignorant, etc. Of course, the fact that literacy was until recently the preserve of privileged minorities in no way implies that societies with little

58. Alogogenic = not conducive to expression in words.

or no division of labour have no musical norms, or that oral cultures have no notions of how their music should sound. It simply means that, in our largely scribal tradition of institutionalised and academically codified knowledge, we have had to rely heavily on documents whose power agendas are rarely made explicit.

Historical excursion

One recurrent trait in documents about music from ancient 'high' cultures (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Chinese, Greek, Arabic civilisations, etc.), is its link to official religious doctrine or to apparently indisputable physical phenomena.⁵⁹ In ancient Mesopotamia (3,000-600 BP), for example, music theory was connected to astrology and mathematics. The idea was that if you knew the motions of the stars, if you believed in their sway over human destiny, then you understood the harmony of the universe. You could theoretically be at one with the universe by making music which abided by the rules of its harmony. Music of the court and of official religion conformed to such rules; that of other classes and peoples did not. It was through such metaphysical links that an oppressive political system could be identified with a system of musical organisation which coincided with the immutable system of the universe. Like the deification of the worldly system's kings, metaphysical connections between the ruling classes, their music and the heavenly spheres created the illusion that their unjust political system was as great, as divine, as eternal, as unquestionable and as unchangeable as the universe.⁶⁰

59. See Tagg (2002) at www.tagg.org/xpdfs/origins3.pdf (*passim*); see also Ling (1983: 14-69), Crossley-Holland (1959:13-135).

60. One Mesopotamian (Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Chaldaean) notion was that the primary divisions of a stretched string, expressed as the mathematical ratios 1:1 (unison), 2:1 (octave), 3:2 (fifth) and 4:3 (fourth) (see note 61), not only define octaves and tetrachords, but also relate to the four seasons. There is also reason to believe that Pythagoras (sixth century BP), after extensive studies in both Egypt and Mesopotamia, brought back knowledge of harmonics and scales to Greece, where he and his disciples developed their own theories of the harmony of the spheres, including the notion of ethos (modal character and affect) that was later, via Arabic treatises, to influence music theory in medieval Europe. See also Ling (1983:11-13); Crossley-Holland (1959:13-15).

Written records from ancient China are even more explicit. The tonal system of imperial music, based on observations about the relation of rising fifths to the perfect ratio 3:2, was put into a cosmic perspective. According to documents from around 450 BP, '[s]ince 3 is the numeral of Heaven and 2 that of the Earth, sounds in the ratio 3:2 harmonise as Heaven and Earth.'⁶¹ The importance of official music in ancient China and its connection with irrefutable truths is also demonstrated by the establishment of a Music Bureau (*Yuefu* 樂府) under the Imperial Office of Weights and Measures (141-87 BP). The Bureau's brief was to standardise pitch, supervise music and build up musical archives.⁶² More importantly, for over 2000 years of Chinese imperial history (221 BP - 1911), one set of musical practices was identified by ruling-class ideologues as the 'right music'. *Ya-yue* (雅樂 'elegant music'), as it was called, refers both to court music of that long period and, more particularly, to court music associated with Confucian philosophy.⁶³

The music of imperial Chinese courts, especially *ya-yue* ('elegant music'), was, as we have suggested, related to the cosmic values of the numerals 2 and 3 which, in their turn, were related to notions of heaven and earth, male and female, *Yang* (陽) and *Yin* (陰), etc. *Ya-yue* was certainly regulated by strict rules of performance, not only in terms of detailed stage positions for instrumentalists and dancers, but also with regard to tonal norms. Intricate division and subdivision of genres in terms of both musical style and audience type illustrate further aspects of complex codification, as do the number of ancient texts setting out the history, aesthetics and metaphysics of imperial music-making. These sources also imply that knowledge of such intricacies was important for those producing and consuming the 'elegant' music, whose his-

61. Documents: the *Yueji* (樂記 'Memorial of Music') and *Liji* (禮記 'Record of Rites' (see also note 60), cited by Crossley-Holland (1959:42-46). A series of rising fifths and falling fourths produces all notes of a twelve-note chromatic scale, for example, from c up to g, from g down to d, d-a and a-e, e-b and b-f#, f#-c# and c#-g#/ab, ab-eb and eb-bb, bb-f and f back to c (see note 60). Most Chinese music is pentatonic and uses only five pitches (e.g., step-wise, c d e g a or, as fifths/fourths, c g d a e).

62. Malm (1977:152), Crossley-Holland (1959:48).

63. Pian (1995:250-251).

tory could be traced back to what was, even then, the distant past of an ancient dynasty.⁶⁴ Moreover, imperial Chinese music could be reproduced quite consistently from one performance or generation to another, not only because of the many treatises codifying its aesthetics and practice, but also because certain types of notation were used. Although such notation, either as ideograms indicating pitch or as tablature for string instruments, was probably used less prescriptively than the sheet music followed by classical musicians in the West, it at least helped ensure that singers and musicians could make the music they composed or performed conform adequately to prescribed patterns.

Similar hierarchies of music are found in written sources from other 'high' cultures. For example, to qualify as art music (i.e. as belonging to the 'Great Tradition'), Indian performing art, be it from the North or South, must, as Powers (1995:72) points out, satisfy two main criteria.

Firstly it must establish a claim to be governed by authoritative theoretical doctrine; secondly, its practitioners must be able to authenticate a disciplined oral tradition of performance extending back over several generations.

The important concept here is doctrine (*ḥ̄stra*), more specifically *saṅgīta-ḥ̄stra* (musical doctrine). For Indian music to qualify as doctrinally correct, it must adhere to at least one canonical point: melodic construction should be governed by one of the tradition's *ragas*.⁶⁵ This rule is so important that the proper term for correct musical practices, *ḥ̄striya-saṅgit* ('doctrinal music'), is less frequently used than *ṝgdar-saṅgit* (music based on a raga). Indians also often use the English word 'classical' when distinguishing raga traditions from popular music practices. *The Oxford Concise English Dictionary* (1995) defines 'classical', qualifying the arts, as:

64. Master Lu's Annals (239 BP) cited by Crossley-Holland (1959: 45-46).

65. *Raga* can be understood as a melodic matrix for improvisation, with rules for ascending and descending patterns using a specific tonal vocabulary. The specificity of a raga is also determined by the relative importance of particular notes in that vocabulary, by appropriate motifs or phrases, as well as by paramusical links to season, time of day and moods, etc.

serious or conventional; following traditional principles and intended to be of permanent rather than ephemeral value... representing an exemplary standard; having a long-established worth.

Calling *ḥastriya-sangit* or *rīḡdar-sangit* 'classical music' is in other words quite appropriate because not only do buzzwords of higher and lasting value occur in the connotative spheres of both terms: *ḥastriya-sangit* and 'classical music' also both allude to notions of tradition, doctrine, convention and learning. Besides, *ḥastriya-sangit's* qualification as scientific or knowledgeable rhymes well with European-language equivalents of 'classical music' like *musique savante*, *musica colta*, *música culta*, *música erudita*, *E-Musik*, *serious music* and *art music*.⁶⁶ Unlike most types of 'popular' and 'folk' music, the musical practices qualified by such epithets as 'classical' are all associated with doctrinal texts codifying the philosophy, aesthetics, performance, interpretation, understanding and structural basis of the music in question.

To cut a long story short, the division of music in Western culture into categories of 'art' or 'classical' and 'folk' or 'popular' has numerous parallels and forerunners. It is even possible that elements of Mesopotamian theory passed via Greek and Arabic scholars into the metamusical mindset of medieval clerics and their trichotomy of musics.⁶⁷ This trichotomy consisted of *musica mundana* (the music of the heavens, of the spheres of the universe), *musica humana* (music providing equilibrium of soul and body and instilled by liturgical song) and *musica instrumentalis* (the singing and the playing of instruments that were at the service of the devil as well as of God). As Ling (1983:97) explains:

[I]n the world of heavenly light sounds the harmonious and well-tuned music of eternity whose opposite is the unbearable noise and dissonant, discordant music of hell. Both heaven and hell exist on earth: the music

66. *Musique savante* (French) literally means 'knowledgeable music' or music for people in the know. *Musica colta* (Italian) and *música culta* (Spanish) literally mean 'cultured', 'refined', i.e. music for educated and cultivated people. *Música erudita* (Portuguese) means of course 'erudite' or 'learned' music. *E-Musik* (German) is short for *ernste Musik*, meaning 'serious' music, i.e. for people who take their music seriously; it is generally opposed to *U-Musik*, short for *Unterhaltungsmusik*, meaning 'entertainment music'.

67. See footnote 60, p.43.

of heaven is reflected in liturgical chant — it is organised, well-measured and based on science and reason. All other music is of the devil, being chaotic, ill-measured and uneducated.

Since *musica mundana* was a Platonic ideal of music (the music of the spheres, of heaven, of God's perfect creation, etc.), the real world contained only two sorts of music according to the aesthetic and religious precepts of the church fathers: (1) *musica humana* as the uplifting liturgical song of Mother Church and of God's representatives on earth and (2) *musica instrumentalis* as all other music, whether it be of the devil or of God. This basic dualism of musics changes character quite radically as part of the lengthy and complex process by which the ideologies of feudal and ecclesiastical élites are superseded by those of an ascendant bourgeoisie. It is important to understand these bourgeois music values because they have been at the basis of much discourse about music in Western institutions of education and research for the best part of two centuries. These values of the musically Good, Beautiful and True still hold sway in many of our musical institutions and still exert a strong influence on what sort of meanings, if any, those of us who see ourselves as educated think that music can carry.

'*Music is music*'

The notion of ABSOLUTE MUSIC and of its superiority is probably the most striking feature of institutional music aesthetics in the Western world. Hegel, for example, makes the following distinction between the musical values of the initiated and those of the average punter.

[W]hat the layman (*Laie*) likes in music is the comprehensible expression of emotions and ideas, something substantial, its content, for which reason he prefers accompanimental music (*Begleitmusik*); the connoisseur (*Kenner*), on the other hand, who has access to the inner musical relation of tones and instruments, likes instrumental music for its artistic use of harmonies and of melodic intricacy as well as for its changing forms; he can be quite fulfilled by the music on its own.⁶⁸

The most famous ABSOLUTE MUSIC aphorism was formulated in 1854 by Austrian music critic Eduard Hanslick who, in his treatise *On Musical Beauty*, wrote: '*Music's complete content and total subject matter is nothing other than tonal forms in movement.*'⁶⁹ Since then, similar views of music

have ruled the roost in Western art music circles to such an extent that some composers whose 'tonal forms in movement' clearly relate to 'other subject matter' have denied any such relation. Stravinsky, for example, once quipped that his music expressed nothing but itself, insisting that visually suggestive works of his — *Petrushka*, *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*, for example— were 'pure' music.⁷⁰ It may be true that Stravinsky, a bit like David Bowie, frequently recast his public persona but the very fact that he saw fit, even just once, to do so from the standpoint of musical absolutism suggests that it must have been opportune to subscribe to such views in order to recast his image in influential circles. This is certainly what Gustav Mahler felt compelled to do: having written programme notes to his first three symphonies, he is reported to have raised his glass at a meeting with Munich illuminati in 1900 and to have exclaimed 'death to all programme music'.⁷¹

The pressure on composers to conform to the notion of ABSOLUTE MUSIC throughout the twentieth century cannot be underestimated. For example, famous film composers like Korngold and Rózsa lived double lives: they felt compelled to separate their 'music for music's sake' from their work for the movies.⁷² Similarly, until quite recently Morricone expressed disappointment at the scant recognition he received for his concert music, however widely acclaimed he may have been as a musi-

68. Hegel: *Ästhetik* (1955, compiled from lecture notes c. 1815), cited in Zoltai (1970:260). By *Begleitmusik* (*begleiten* = accompany) is meant music accompanying or combination with words, stage action, dance, paramusical narrative, etc. 'Sanctuary of the Higher Arts' (*Asyle der höheren Künste*) is a similar epithet coined by Adolf Bernhard Marx who, on Mendelssohn's recommendation, was appointed Director of Music at the University of Berlin in 1830.

69. 'Tönend bewegte Formen sind einzig und allein Inhalt und Gegenstand der Musik', from Hanslick's *Vom musikalisch Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, Leipzig (1854).

70. See Stravinsky & Craft (1959).

71. *Pereat jedes Programm!* were Mahler's actual words. The incident occurred after a performance of Mahler's second symphony at the *Hugo-Wolf-Verein*.

72. Wolfgang Erich Korngold, Viennese composer and pupil of Mahler, wrote music for films like *Captain Blood* (1935) and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938). Miklos Rózsa, Hungarian pupil of Honegger, wrote music for *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Lost Weekend* and *Spellbound* (1945), *Quo Vadis?* (1951) and *Ben Hur* (1959). Rózsa's autobiography (1982) is actually entitled *Double Life*.

cal pioneer *because of his work for the cinema*.⁷³ The point is: if the institutional dominance of absolutist aesthetics can affect the lives of widely acclaimed figures like Mahler, Korngold, Rózsa and Morricone, then such a view of music will have exerted just as much influence on lesser figures in conservatories and departments of music(ology).

When Francès (1958) conducted his pioneering research into the perception of music, he received several indignant responses from his music student informants in which they expressed strong absolutist views, for example:

No, no and no again. Music is music, I cannot conceive of it as a source of emotional or literary ramblings.⁷⁴

I still (2007) occasionally meet individuals who take unmistakable offence at the mere suggestion that music can relate to anything except itself. Musical absolutism, it seems, still exerts a strong influence on what many consider music to be capable or incapable of communicating. Obviously, in order to understand the effects of such influence, a prerequisite for presenting viable methods of music analysis, we will need first to logically refute the notion of ABSOLUTE MUSIC and then to explain the reasons for its tenacity.

'Absolute' and 'non-absolute'

Calling music 'absolute' literally means that the music thus qualified is neither mixed up with, nor dependent on, nor conditioned by, nor otherwise related to anything else. One problem with this absolute definition of 'absolute' is that not even the most adamant musical absolutist would claim such 'absolute' music as a late Beethoven quartet to be

73. Ennio Morricone, composed the music for such films as *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* and *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), *1900* (1976), *The Mission* (1986) and *The Untouchables* (1987). In November 1996, while working on *Lolita* (released 1997), Morricone told me that he was uncomfortable with the notion of his film music as the site of *musical* innovation, even though his pioneering work *for the cinema* has not only captured the imagination of a mass audience but also earned him the respect of avant-garde musicians like John Zorn. Sergio Miceli, Morricone's friend and biographer, told me in December 1999 that he had heard the composer express the same opinion.

74. Francès (1958:288-9) 'Non, non et non. La musique est musique, je ne conçois pas qu'elle puisse être source de divagations sentimentales ou littéraires'.

100% independent of the musical tradition to which it belongs. Since the quartet cannot *de facto* have existed in total isolation from the musical traditions to which its composer and audiences belonged, any notion of ABSOLUTE MUSIC must be dependent on at least the existence of other ABSOLUTE MUSIC for its own identity. 'Absolute' would in this case be relative, allowing for the music in question to be absolute only in the sense of unrelated to anything else *except* other ('absolute') music. Now, apart from the fact that the other ABSOLUTE MUSIC would relate to more ABSOLUTE MUSIC, either in a loop (circular argument) or, at some final point in an otherwise endless chain of 'absolute' references, to something other than ABSOLUTE MUSIC, the slight qualification, just proposed, of 'absolute' as partly relative is problematic for two more substantial reasons.

The first reason is that ABSOLUTE MUSIC relies on the existence of NON-ABSOLUTE MUSIC for its distinction *as* 'absolute'. Since NON-ABSOLUTE MUSIC must, at least by inference, be related to other music and to phenomena that are not intrinsically musical, ABSOLUTE MUSIC must also, even if indirectly, be related to other phenomena than music, thanks to its *sine qua non* relation to NON-ABSOLUTE MUSIC, and to that music's relation to things other than itself. Moreover, since those who distinguish one type of music from others by the qualifier 'absolute' in no way make up the entire population, they are just one of many sociocultural groups identifiable by their specific musical values and opinions.⁷⁵ This means that the term ABSOLUTE MUSIC is linked willy-nilly to the sociocultural position, tastes, attitudes and behaviour of those that use it. It thereby identifies not only ABSOLUTE MUSIC in relation to other music but also its devotees in relation to users of other music. Due to such inevitable sociocultural connotation, ABSOLUTE MUSIC is a contradiction in terms.⁷⁶

The second reason for refuting the notion of ABSOLUTE MUSIC is its implication that the music thus qualified transcends not only social connotations and uses but also neurological and cultural patterns of

75. Without this fact of sociology, the US format radio system would fall apart. See Denisoff & Peterson (ed) 1972:4-5 or any number of *The Broadcasting Yearbook of America* or Karshner (1972) for more on musical taste and 'demographics'.

76. See Silbermann (1963:179-199) on the social behaviour of classical concert-goers.

synaesthesia.⁷⁷ If that sort of transcendence existed it would mean that demonstrable patterns of juxtaposition between music and pictures, between music and words, or between music and bodily movement (as in dance, film, opera, *Lieder*, pop songs, adverts, videos, computer games etc.) could never influence the production or perception of ABSOLUTE MUSIC and vice versa. Moreover, if ABSOLUTE MUSIC were indeed absolute, it would need no elements of biologically or culturally acquired synaesthesia to exist, with the consequence that NON-ABSOLUTE MUSIC (opera overtures, TV themes, ballet suites, dance tunes, etc.) would be pointless in a 'music only' situation (at a concert, on the radio, on your iPod) where their visual, dramatic or choreographic accompaniment is absent. Conversely, it would mean that ABSOLUTE MUSIC played in connection with anything but itself or other ABSOLUTE MUSIC would also be useless because its 'autonomy' would preclude any synaesthetic perception. This would in turn imply that the Taviani brothers were deluded when they used snippets from the slow movement of Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto in A* (K622) as underscore to key scenes in *Padre Padrone*; it would also mean that Kubrick misunderstood the values of European art music in *2001* and *The Shining*, or that Widerberg, not to mention his cinema audience, were musically incompetent when responding to the *Elvira Madigan* effect.⁷⁸ In other terms, ABSOLUTE MUSIC contradicts music's inherent properties as a site of cross-domain representation (pp.33-39).

In short, if music called ABSOLUTE ever has had any social connotations, if it has ever been written or performed in given historical contexts by certain musicians, if it has ever been heard in particular social contexts

77. See "Cross-domain representation and synaesthesia" on page 33, ff.

78. In *2001* (1968) Kubrick uses Johann Strauss's *Blue Danube* waltz (1867), the start of Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1895) and György Ligeti's *Atmosphères* (1961). In *The Shining* (1980) he uses the third movement of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1936). In *Elvira Madigan* (1967), Widerberg uses the second movement of Mozart's 21st Piano Concerto in C, K467 (1785), for the hazy, slow-motion summer-meadow love scene that became a popular template for romance in TV adverts (e.g. Timothei Shampoo: see 'Piano arpeggios, plant life and Madigan meadows' in Tagg & Clarida (2003:241-6)).

or used in particular ways by a particular audience, if it has ever been related to any drama, words or dance, then it cannot be absolute. ABSOLUTE MUSIC can therefore only exist as an illogical concept or as an *article of faith*. If so, how can it have been so influential and why is it so resilient? A first clue to this enigma is provided by the next three quotes.

'Passions must be powerful; the musician's feelings must be full-blown – no mind control, no witty remarks, no clever little ideas!'⁷⁹

This sort of statement could have been made by a dedicated jazz musician. In fact the words date from 1762 and are uttered by the rebellious main character in the play *Rameau's Nephew* by Denis Diderot.

Similar values were expressed in 1792 by German romanticist Wilhelm Wackenroder who describes the optimal music listening mode.

'[I]t consists in alert observations of the notes and their progression, in fully surrendering my spirit to the welling torrent of sensations and disregarding every disturbing thought and all irrelevant impressions of my senses.'⁸⁰

In 1799, Wackenroder's collaborator Ludwig Tieck writes:

'[O]nce music is freed from having to depict "finite", distinct emotions, it becomes the expression of "infinite yearning", and this indefinite quality is superior to the exactness of vocal music, rather than inferior, as was believed during the Enlightenment.'⁸¹

Powerful passion, fully surrendering the spirit, infinite yearning etc. on the one hand and, on the other, mind control, disturbing thought, irrelevant impressions, distinct emotions and so on: the value dichotomy is clear in the three views of music just cited. Other important common denominators are that they all, like the Hegel passage that started this section, come from the same period in European history and that they are all qualifiable as Romantic.

79. Free translation from 'La querelle des bouffons' in Diderot's *Le neveu de Rameau* (1762:119, lines 298-299, 304-305).

80. Cited by Dahlhaus (1988:95).

81. Ludwig Tieck *Phantasien über die Kunst* (1799), cited by Dahlhaus (1988:18).

'Absolute' subjectivity

The rise of instrumental music in eighteenth-century Europe can be understood in the context of the Enlightenment, rationalism and the bourgeois revolution. The emancipatory values of these developments and the subjective experience of that emancipation found collective expression not only in emotive slogans like *liberté, égalité, fraternité* but also in a music that was itself thought of as liberated. Instead of having to make music under the constraints of feudal patronage and of the Baroque theories of *affect* associated with the *ancien régime*,⁸² music could now, it was believed, be purely instrumental, free to express emotions without the encumbrance of words or stage action.⁸³

Of importance to this historical background is the fact that Romantic views of music were conflated with notions of 'personality' and 'free will' central to bourgeois subjectivity, both of which were treated as conceptual opposites to the external world of material objectivity. Individuality, emotionality, feelings and subjectivity came to be imagined as opposite poles to the social, rational, factual and objective. Music played a central role in this history of ideas according to which the subject's alienation from objective social processes was not so much reflected as reinforced, even celebrated. Since the humanist liberation of the ego from feudalist metaphysical dogma went hand in hand with the bourgeois revolution against the absolutism of the ecclesiastical and monarchist hierarchy, it is hardly surprising to find contemporary notions of music unwilling to tie down musical expression by means of verbal denotation or any other type of reference to anything outside itself. After all, as long as the musical ideals were emancipatory in relation to an outmoded system of thought they could lend support to the development of revolutionary forms of music and society. But what happened when those musical ideals became the rule and their advocates the rulers?

82. The Theory of Affects (a.k.a. *Affektenlehre*, Doctrine of the Affectations, etc.) is associated with the Baroque era and was particularly developed in Germany. Its basic gist is that composers and performers can, by using particular melodic, harmonic and rhythmic devices, provoke particular emotional responses in their audience. For an extensive catalogue of Baroque affects, see Bartel (1997).

83. This part of the account is based largely on Zoltai (1970:193 ff.).

Perhaps the most significant change is that the radical instrumental music of late eighteenth-century Central Europe, initially dubbed 'Romantic', acquires the label 'classical'.⁸⁴ This rebranding was established by the mid nineteenth century, along with the music's institutionalisation in philharmonic societies, concert halls, conservatories, etc.

Another striking symptom of the same process was the adoption of recurrent buzzwords to signal aesthetic excellence: ART, MASTERPIECE, GENIUS, FREE, NATURAL, COMPLETE, UTTER, INSPIRED, INFINITE, ETERNAL, SUBLIME, etc.⁸⁵ Raised to the status of classical, the once emancipatory qualities of the music were mystified and its Great Composers mummified into those little white alabaster busts that classical buffs used to keep on top of well-polished pianos. Although the dynamic independence that the canonised instrumental music once possessed had been dynamic and independent *in relation to* older forms of music that were considered fettered by certain types of extra-musical bonding, it was, as 'classical' music, stripped of that historicity. In its new state of sanctity it was conserved in conservatories that by 1900 had successfully eradicated anything that might upset the canon, including the improvisation techniques that had once been part of the tradition whose champions the same conservatories professed to be.⁸⁶ This institutionalisation process left the seemingly suprasocial ABSOLUTE MUSIC deep frozen as sacrosanct notation: a century-and-a-half of performers were subsequently conservatory trained to perpetuate it. At the same time, concerts included less and less new music: for example, the proportion of living to dead composers' music on the concert repertoire in France fell from 3:1 in the 1780s to 1:3 in the 1870s.⁸⁷

84. 'Classical' was not Tieck's, Wackenroder's or ETA Hoffmann's label. For Hoffmann (1776-1822), Haydn and Mozart were the first *Romantic* composers (Rosen 1976:19). For more details about how classical became 'classical', see Ling (1984, 1989: both *passim*); see also Stockfelt (1988:61-91).

85. Apart from the Wackenroder, Tieck and Hegel citations (page 52), please note [1] A B Marx's view of the sonata as 'form of free development' (Rosen 1990:83); [2] Hegel's notion of music as 'complete withdrawal into subjectivity', cited in Zoltai (1970:243) from Hegel (1955:806).

86. Improvisation was one of the most important skills of the European art music tradition: Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, Franck and many others were renowned not only as composers but also as *improvisers*.

Freedom of expression without verbal or theatrical constraint had been the revolutionary drive of the new instrumental music that was later canonised as 'classical'. Once canonised, it needed theories that would identify and codify those special qualities. And if the new music's emancipatory driving power had been its unfettered emotional expression then that would be an obvious trait to conserve in conservatories and to expound upon in serious writings on music. One problem was that the new instrumental music had derived its perceived freedom of expression, its own internal musical rhetoric and drama, *not from being devoid of words or dramatic action but from the fact that similar music had been repeatedly associated with particular words or stage action*. In simple terms, when music went instrumental and crossed the street from the opera house or theatre into the concert hall, it carried with it those links to words and dramatic situations.⁸⁸

Still, even though the classical symphony could never have acquired its sense of dramatic narrative without a legacy of affects from the Baroque era, many experts still regard the European instrumental classics as ABSOLUTE MUSIC. As Dahlhaus (1988:56) explains:

Early German romanticism dates back to the 1790s with Wackenroder's and Tieck's metaphysic of instrumental music — a metaphysic that laid the foundations of nineteenth-century music aesthetics and ... reigned virtually unchallenged even in the decades of fin-de-siècle modernism.

That metaphysic lived on through much of the twentieth century. Even Adorno's hit list of listening types⁸⁹ is clearly Hegelian and music is still sometimes taught as if it were at its best when divorced from words and the visual arts.⁹⁰ Polarising the issue for purposes of clarity,

87. Ling (1989:173) citing Weber (1977).

88. Rosen's historical account (1976:155) of the classical Viennese symphony stresses this point. ... '[T]he application of dramatic technique and structure to "absolute music" ... was the natural outcome of an age which saw the development of the symphonic concert as a public event. The symphony was forced to become a dramatic performance, and it accordingly developed not only something like a plot, with a climax and a dénouement, but also a unity of tone, character and action it had only partially reached before.'

89. See Adorno (1941:32-48; 1976:1-20), Middleton (1990:57-60).

90. This process is described in detail by Zoltai (1970:177-261).

it could be said that keepers of the ABSOLUTE MUSIC seal either condemned music, if deemed bad, to the aesthetic purgatory of entertainment or primitive ritual; if deemed good, they raised it to the lofty realms of Art. It is no exaggeration to say that a large proportion of musicological scholarship since A B Marx has been devoted to propagating an arsenal of terms and methods describing the complexities of European instrumental music in the classical tradition at the expense of other musics. Among those 'inferior others' we find not only the music of peoples colonised or enslaved by the European capitalist classes ('primitive ritual'), but also the 'light music' (*Trivialmusik*) of the nineteenth-century European proletariat oppressed by the same ruling classes ('entertainment'). That deprecation of low-brow by high-brow is callous, to say the least, because the French Revolution of 1789 and the *Code Napoléon* of 1804 would never have materialised without the support and sacrifice of the popular majority. Despite that support, the bourgeois revolution reneged on the promise of liberty and equality for all as it betrayed the fourth estate (workers, peasants, etc.). You do not have to be a professor of political history to work out that deprivation directly affects people's relationship to music, as the following simple points demonstrate.

- The less money you have, the less you can afford concert tickets, instruments, rehearsal and performance space, musical tuition, etc.
- The less money you have, the more crowded your living conditions will be, the less room you will have for musical instruments, and the more likely you will disturb your neighbours when you make music or be disturbed by them when they make music.
- The less leisure time you have, the less likely you are able to try out other musics than those readily accessible to you and the less likely you are to opt for music requiring patient listening or years of training to perform yourself.
- The noisier your work and leisure environments, the less use you have for music inaudible in those environments, or for music demanding that you listen or perform in a concentrated fashion without disturbance or interruption.

Bearing these points in mind, Wackenroder's 'right way' of relating to music (see p.52) would be out of the question under the dreadful con-

ditions that most people had to endure in industrial cities across nineteenth-century Europe. Nor were the old musical ways of the countryside much of an alternative. Apart from the fact that music connected with the cycle of the seasons was not suited to life in an industrial town, most members of the new working class were refugees from semi-feudal repression in the countryside who had little reason to idealise their rural past in musical or any other terms. Instead, the old folk music was replaced by street ballads, low church hymns, music hall tunes, popular airs from opera and operetta, dance tunes, marches and so on. It was this musical fare that nineteenth-century music authorities branded as light, trivial, trite, crude, shallow, low-brow, commercial, ephemeral entertainment in contrast to the deep, serious, classical, high-brow, transcendental Art of lasting value which they prized. True, some charitable burghers registered that something was wrong and sought to provide opportunities for the masses to raise their musical standards, but that realisation of high and low in itself indicates that class differences were very much a musical as well as a political and economic matter. So the first probable reason for the longevity of European art music's absolutist aesthetics is that it worked for a long time as a reliable *marker of class membership*: even today, adverts for financial services are much more common on classical format radio than on pop or country stations. However, the CLASSICAL MUSIC = HIGH CLASS equation did not just work as a sociocultural indicator.

Members of the new ruling classes faced a series of moral dilemmas, the most striking of which is probably that between the monetary profit imperative of the capitalist system and the charitable imperatives of Christianity. 'Sell all that thou hast and give unto the poor' rhymed badly with paying your employees as little as possible to produce as much as possible or with sending children to work down the mine. As a businessman in a 'free' market with 'free' competition, it might ease your conscience if you could draw clear dividing lines between your business and your religion, between work and leisure, public and private, personal and social, morals and money, etc. Any conceptual system that could rubber-stamp such polarities would offer welcome relief and help you sleep at night. Seen in this light, even the most *outré* state-

ments of Romantic music metaphysics⁹¹ have to be taken seriously because the institutionalised concept of ABSOLUTE MUSIC provided a kind of get-out clause: if listening to music in the 'right way' was a matter of the emotions, of the MUSIC ITSELF and nothing else, then good business ought to be a matter of making money, BUSINESS ITSELF and nothing else. Or, to put it another way, feeling compassion or any other 'irrelevant' emotion while making money would be as inappropriate as thinking about money when listening to instrumental music in the 'right' way (see p.52). To put it in a nutshell, MUSIC IS MUSIC (ABSOLUTE MUSIC) can only exist in the same way as ORDERS ARE ORDERS OR BUSINESS IS BUSINESS. All three statements are of course tautological nonsense, otherwise there would be no music industry, no War Crimes Tribunal and no anti-capitalist movement; but that is not the point because the effects of the practices characterised by such conceptual absolutism and by the ideological purposes it serves are painfully real. The conceptual dissociation of money from morality, military orders from ethics, and the world outside music from music, all illustrate the way in which capitalist ideology can isolate and alienate our subjectivity from involvement in social, economic and political processes.

Refocusing on MUSIC IS MUSIC, we need to mention one final reason for the staying power of musical absolutism. We are referring here to the way in which members of the haute-bourgeoisie, already at on top of society's monetary pyramid, could easily, by claiming the artistic high ground of musical taste transcending mundane material reality, convince themselves that they were superior to the masses in more than merely monetary terms: they cultivated what established experts agreed was good taste in music, they adopted the 'right way' of listening to the 'right' music; lesser mortals did not. By locating their musical experience outside the material world, the privileged classes were not

91. i.e. Wackenroder's 'utter submersion', Tieck's (and Schopenhauer's and Wagner's) 'infinite yearning', Lamennais' 'above earthly things', 'infinite beauty', 'ideal model', 'eternal essence rather than things as they are', Rousseau's 'il n'y a rien de beau que ce qui n'est pas', Hegel's 'retreat into inner freedom... from content' (matter), 'submission to self' and 'renunciation of narrow-mindedness'.

only able to feel superior: they could also divert attention from the fact that it was they who exerted the real power, they who enjoyed the real material privileges, actually *in* the material world.⁹²

In this historical context, the Romantic metaphysics of music and its notion of ABSOLUTE MUSIC, both of which became cornerstones in the capitalist state's musical establishment, can be seen as essential supplies in the conceptual survival kit of bourgeois subjectivity. It is for such reasons hardly surprising if academic institutions in a society still governed by the same basic mechanisms of capital accumulation⁹³ have until recently propagated conceptual systems validating dissociation of the subjective, individual, intuitive, emotional and corporeal from the objective, collective, material, rational and intellectual. It is also historically logical that this same dissociation should affect our understanding of music and dance, the most clearly affective and corporeal of symbolic systems, with particular severity.

Musical knowledges

The staying power of ABSOLUTE MUSIC, with its supposedly transcendental qualities, is both reflected in and reinforced by the institutional organisation of musical knowledge. This symbiosis of institutional and value-aesthetic categories is fuelled by the intrinsically alogogenic and largely non-denotative nature of music. The problem can be understood in terms of five anomalies, one of which we have already mentioned several times: music's lowly status in institutions of education and research versus its obvious importance in everyday reality.

The second anomaly follows directly from the first. While, for example, critical reading and the ability to see below the surface of advertising and other forms of propaganda are rightly regarded as essential to independent thought, and although such skills are widely taught in literary or cultural studies, equivalent skills relevant to understanding *musical* messages are not. This book is supposed to be a contribution to filling that gap.

92. See Baudrillard's critique (1970:60-61) of consumer society.

93. See K Marx: *Grundrisse* (1973: 221-223).

Structural denotors

The third anomaly is really another aspect of the second. It highlights disparity between the analytical metalanguage of music in the Western world and that of other symbolic systems; more specifically, it deals with peculiarities in the derivation patterns of terms denoting structural elements in music (structural denotors) when compared to equivalent denotative practices applied in linguistics or the visual arts. This third anomaly requires some clarification.

It is possible at this stage, using a simplified version of terms explained in the Chapter 00, to equate the notion of a 'musical structure' or 'structural element' with Peirce's *representamen*, i.e. that part of a musical sign which represents whatever is encoded by a composer, performer, studio engineer, etc. (the sign's *object*) and which results in whatever is decoded by a listener (the sign's *interpretant*). For example, the final chord of the James Bond theme (Em^{A9}), played on a Fender Stratocaster treated with slight tremolo and some reverb, is a structural element (*representamen*) encoding whatever its composer, arranger, guitarist and recording engineer intended (*object*) and decoded as listener response (*interpretant*) verbalisable in approximate terms like an excitement/action cue associated with crime, spies, danger, intrigue, etc.⁹⁴ The musical structure (*representamen*) is described here from a *poïetic* standpoint: 'Em^{A9}' ('E minor major nine') indicates how the chord is constructed, 'Fender Stratocaster' the instrument on which that chord is played and so on. The description is not *esthetic* because it is not presented in terms of its interpretant: it is not identified as a 'danger cue', 'twangy spy sound', 'crime chord', etc.⁹⁵

94. This chord (E minor major nine) contains the notes e2 b3 g3 d#4 f#4. The Fender Stratocaster is an electric guitar

95. *Poïetic* and *esthetic* are terms coined by J-J Nattiez (1974). I have, for reasons of etymological transparency, previously used the adjectives *constructional* and *receptional* to designate the same thing as *poïetic* and *esthetic* respectively. Though etymologically more esoteric, Nattiez's adjectives have two advantages: [1] they are shorter; [2] they are widely used in semiotic circles. *Poïetic* derives from Greek ποιεῖν (=to make, produce), *esthetic* from αἴσθησις (=perception).

In what comes next, therefore, *poiëtic* will qualify terms which denote a structural element of music from the viewpoint of its construction in that such a term derives primarily from the techniques and/or materials used to produce that element (e.g. *con sordino*, *glissando*, *major minor-nine chord*, *analogue string pad*, *phasing*, *anhemitonic pentatonicism*). *Esthetic*, on the other hand, will qualify terms denoting structural elements primarily from the viewpoint of perception (e.g. *allegro*, *legato*, *spy chord*, *Scotch snap*, *cavernous reverb*).⁹⁶

In the analysis of visual art, it seems, at least from a layperson's point of view, that it is just as common for the identification of structural elements to derive from notions of iconic representation or of cultural symbolism as from concepts of production materials and technique. For example, structural descriptors like *gouache* or *broad strokes* clearly derive from aspects of production technique and are therefore *poiëtic*, while the iconic representation of a dog in a figurative work of art would be called *dog*, an *esthetic* term, rather than be labelled with details of how the visual representamen of that dog was produced. Moreover, the dog in, say, Van Eyck's famous Arnolfini marriage portrait⁹⁷ could also be considered a representamen on symbolic as well as iconic grounds if it were established that *dog* was consistently interpreted in a similar way by a given population of viewers in a given social and historical context: the dog might be understood as recurrent symbol of fidelity, in which *faithful dog* would work as an *esthetic* descriptor on both indexical and iconic grounds. On the other hand, a structural descriptor like *central perspective* is both *poiëtic* and *esthetic* in that it denotes both a technique for representing three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface as well as the way in which that surface is perceived as three-dimensional by the viewer.

In linguistics there also seems to be a healthy mixture of *poiëtic* and *esthetic* descriptors of structure. For example, the phonetic term *voiced palato-alveolar fricative* is *poiëtic* in that it specifies the sound /ʒ/ by de-

96. In fact the last two descriptors, 'spy chord' and 'cavernous reverb', mix both *esthetic* ('spy', 'cavernous') and *poiëtic* ('chord', 'reverb') modes of denotation.

97. *The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami*; 1434; oil on wood, 81.8 x 59.7 cm; National Gallery, London.

noting how it is produced or constructed, not how it is normally perceived or understood:⁹⁸ it is an *etic* (as in 'phonetic') rather than *emic* (as in 'phonemic') term. On the other hand, terms like 'finished' and 'unfinished', used to qualify pitch contour in speech, are esthetic rather than poietic. Moreover, such central concepts of linguistics as 'phoneme' and 'morpheme' work both poietically and esthetically in that they designate structures according to their ability to carry meaning from the viewpoint of both speaker and listener. /ʒ/, for example, understood as a phoneme ('emic' again), rather than as a *voiced palato-alveolar fricative* ('etic'), denotes the structural element that allows both speaker and listener to distinguish in British English between ^hlɛʒə (leisure) and ^hlɛsə (lesser) or ^hlɛtə (letter).

Given these perspectives, it is no exaggeration to say that, compared to the study of visual arts and of spoken language, conventional music analysis in Western Europe exhibits a clear predilection for poietic terminology, sometimes to the extent of excluding esthetic categories from its vocabulary altogether.⁹⁹

Skills, competences, knowledges

The fourth anomaly involves inconsistency in Western thinking with regard to the status of esthetic competence in language compared to other symbolic systems. Whereas the ability to understand both the written and spoken word (esthetic skills) is generally held to be as important as speaking and writing (poietic skills), esthetic competence is not held in equal esteem when it comes to music and the visual arts. For example, teenagers able to make sense of multiple intertextual visual references in music videos are not usually dubbed artistic, nor credited with the visual literacy they clearly own. Similarly, the widespread and empirically verifiable ability to distinguish between, say, two different types of detective story after hearing no more than two seconds of TV music does not apparently allow us to qualify the majority of our population as musical. Indeed, 'artistic' usually seems to qualify solely

98. See Gimson (1967:33).

99. N.B. Structural denotors in the Northern Indian raga tradition are much more esthetic than in Western Europe (see Martínez, 1996).

poietic skills in the visual arts sphere and ‘musicality’ seems to apply only to those who perform as vocalists, or who play an instrument, or can decipher musical notation. It is as though the musical competence of the non-muso majority of the population did not count. The fifth and final anomaly offers some clues as to a possible remedy.

This final anomaly is really a set of two times two dichotomies. Table 2 divides musical knowledge into two main categories: *music as knowledge* and *knowledge about music*. By the former is meant knowledge that relates directly to musical discourse and that is both intrinsically musical and culturally specific. This type of musical knowledge can be divided into two subcategories: *poietic competence*, i.e. the ability to compose, arrange or perform music, and *esthetic competence*, i.e. the ability to recall, recognise and distinguish between musical sounds, as well as between their culturally specific connotations and social functions. Neither poietic nor esthetic musical competence relies on any verbal denotation and are both more usually referred to as skills or competences rather than as knowledge.

Table 2: Types of musical knowledge

<i>Type</i>	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Seats of learning</i>
1. Music as knowledge (knowledge <i>in</i> music)		
1a. Poietic competence	creating, originating, producing, composing, arranging, performing, etc.	conservatories, colleges of music
1b. Esthetic competence	recalling, recognising, distinguishing musical sounds, as well as their culturally specific connotations and social functions	?
2. Metamusical knowledge (knowledge <i>about</i> music)		
2a. Competence in musical metadiscourse	‘music theory’, music analysis, identification and naming elements and patterns of musical structure	departments of music(ology), academies of music
2b. Competence in contextual metadiscourse	explaining how musical practices relate to culture and society, including approaches from semiotics, acoustics, business studies, psychology, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies.	social science departments, literature and media studies, ‘popular music studies’

The institutional underpinning of division between these four types of musical knowledge is strong. In tertiary education, for example, the first type (1a: poietic competence) is usually taught in special colleges, conservatories, performing art schools, etc., the third (2a: musical metadiscourse) in departments of music or musicology as well as in conservatories or colleges, and the fourth (2b: contextual metadiscourse) in practically any humanities or social science department, less so in music colleges and conventional music(ology) departments.

Esthetic competence (1b) is virtually impossible to place institutionally because the ability to distinguish, without recourse to words, between musical sounds, as well as between their culturally specific connotations and social functions is, with the exception of isolated occurrences in aural training and in some forms of 'musical appreciation', generally absent from institutions of learning: esthetic competence remains a largely vernacular and extracurricular affair. Indeed, there are no courses in when and when not to bring out your lighter at a pop or rock concert, nor in when and when not to stage dive, not even in when and when not to applaud during a jazz performance or at a classical concert. And what about the ability to distinguish musically between degrees of threat, between traits of personality, between social or historical settings, between states of mind, behavioural attitudes, types of love or of happiness, sadness, wonder, anger, pleasure, displeasure, etc.; or between types of movement, of space, of location, of scenario, of ethnicity and so on? This kind of musical competence is rarely acquired in the classroom: it is usually learnt in front of the TV or computer screen, or through interaction with peers and with other social groups.

The epistemic problem with music, as it has in general been academically categorised in the West, can be summarised in two main points.

Firstly, knowledge relevant to music's production and structural denotation have been largely separated from those related to its perception, uses and meanings. Established institutions of musical education and research have therefore tended to favour etic rather than emic and poietic rather than esthetic perspectives. Such imbalance, in symbiosis with a long history of class-specifically powerful and metaphysical no-

tions of 'good' music's absolute and transcendent qualities (pp.42-59), has led to frequent misconceptions about music as a symbolic system (e.g. pp.16-20, 48-49). This imbalance has also exacerbated ontological problems of music's alogogenicity and made the incorporation of musical knowledge(s) into a verbally and scribally dominated tradition of learning an even more difficult task.

Secondly, the virtual absence of esthetic learning (knowledge type 1b) in official education has meant that, compared to analytical metalanguage used with visual or verbal arts, very few viable esthetic denotors of structure exist in musical scholarship. This relative paucity of user-oriented terminology has, as we shall see in the next chapter, restricted musicology's ability to address the semantic and pragmatic aspects essential to the study of any type of semiosis. If that were not the case, this book would be totally superfluous.

In addition to these two overriding problems relevant to the development of a simple semiotic approach to music analysis (the real subject of this book), one final major issue of institutional legacy needs to be addressed: musical notation.

Notation: 'I left my music in the car'

Use and limitation

Notational literacy is very useful, even in the age of digital sound. Let's say you need to add extra backing vocals to a recording, that neither you nor the other musicians in your band are able to produce the sound you're looking for and that you contact some professional studio vocalists to resolve the problem. You could give those singers an MP3 file of the mix so far and indicate where in the track you want each of them to come in to sing roughly what at which sort of pitch using which kind of voice. This would be a time-consuming task involving your recording, for demonstration purposes only, something none of your band can sing anyhow; it would also involve either extra rehearsal with the vocalists or the risk of them arriving in the studio and failing to sing what you actually had in mind. It's clearly much more efficient to send the vocalists their parts written out in advance. It's quicker for them and it's both quicker and much less expensive for you because you won't waste studio time and money on unnecessary retakes.

This utilitarian aspect of notation is important for two reasons: [1] it highlights the absurdity of excluding notational skills from the training of musicians and it contradicts widely held notions about notation's irrelevance to the study of popular music; [2] it illustrates that the prime function of musical notation is to act as a set of particular *instructions about musical performance* rather than as a storage medium for musical sound. This last reason is of particular relevance to the discussion of musical meanings.

Many well-trained musicians can read a score and convert what's on the page into sounds inside their heads. This ability is no more magical than being able to imagine scenery when perusing a decent physical map or envisaging, when using a timetable to plan a rail journey, what it might be like at particular times of the day and year in particular places. However, although no sign system is totally irreversible, the ability to make sense of any such system presupposes great familiarity with its limitations, more specifically an intimate knowledge, usually non-verbalised, of what the system does *not* encode and of what needs to be supplied to interpret it usefully. For example, if the vocalists hired for your recording session are professionals and if the notation you sent them is adequate, they should be able to deduce from experience whatever else you want them to come up with in addition to the mere notes on the page. Just by looking at that notation, an experienced musician will understand what musical style it belongs to and, in the case of professional vocalists, will produce classical vibrato, gospel ornamentation, smooth crooning, rock yelling or whatever else you had taken for granted. In short, they will know to apply a whole range of expressive devices relevant to their craft and to the style in question, making decisions about timbre, diction, dialect, pronunciation, breathing, phrasing, vocal register and so on that are nowhere to be seen on the paper or in the email attachment you sent them.

Western musical notation is in other words a useful performance shorthand for certain types of music. It graphically encodes aspects of musical structure that are hard to memorise, especially sequences of pitch in terms of melodic line, chordal spacing and harmonic progression. It can also encode these tonal aspects in temporal terms of rhythmic profile

and periodic placement, but it does not convert the *articulation* of these elements. Moreover, aspects of timbre and acoustic setting hardly ever appear in notation and parameters of dynamics (volume), phrasing, and sound treatment are, if they appear at all on the page, limited to terse or imprecise written instructions like *f*, *cresc.*, *leg.*, *con sord.*, *sotto voce*, *laissez vibrer*, *medium rock feel*, *brisk*, etc.¹⁰⁰

Another important limitation of Western notation is that it was developed to visualise some of the tonal and temporal parameters particular to a specific musical tradition. Just as the Roman alphabet was not conceived to deal with foreign phonemes like /θ/, /ð/ (TH), /ʃ/ or /ʒ/(SH, ZH), Western music notation was not designed to accommodate African, Arab, Indian, Indonesian or even some European tonal practices.¹⁰¹ Moreover, since the establishment, in the early eighteenth century, of the ubiquitous bar line in Western music notation, it has been virtually impossible to graphically encode polymetric aspects of music from West Africa or parts of Latin America where the notion of a downbeat makes little or no sense. Even the frequent downbeat anticipations in basically monometric jazz, blues, gospel, funk and rock styles, so familiar to almost anyone living in the urbanised West, can only be clumsily represented on paper.¹⁰² In terse technical terms, the efficiency of our notation system is restricted to the graphic encoding of monometric music containing fixed pitches which conform to a division of the octave into twelve equal intervals.¹⁰³

Once aware of the restrictions just explained, it is of course possible to make good use of written music, not only as performance shorthand, as with your backing vocalists, but also, if you have that kind of training, as a viable way of putting important details of tonal and rhythmic parameters on to paper, provided of course that the music in question lends itself to such transcription. Indeed, the analysis of music and its meanings would be easier if scholars held such a pragmatic view. The

100. Parameters of musical expression are dealt with in Chapter 00, pp. 00-000.

101. See section 'Blue notes' in Tagg (1989) for just one example of European pitches incompatible with Western (art) music notation.

102. See Tagg (2000a:42-44).

103. See Chapter 00, p.000, ff. for explanation of these terms.

problem is that these down-to-earth truths still have to be explained to students and colleagues who hold the graphocentric belief that the score 'is' in some way the MUSICAL TEXT or the MUSIC ITSELF.¹⁰⁴

Now, given the hegemony of the written word in institutions of European knowledge, it would in one sense be odd if, before the advent of sound recording, music on the page, rather than just fleetingly in the air or as the momentary firing of neurons in the brain cells of members of a musical community, had not acquired a privileged status. After all, notation, despite its obvious shortcomings, was for centuries music's only tangible medium of storage and distribution. The weight of this legacy should not be underestimated because it ties in with important historical developments in law, economy, technology and ideology. There is no room here to disentangle that nexus but it is essential to grasp something of notation's radical influence on music and on ideas about music in Western culture.

Law, economy, technology and subjectivity

Well before the advent of music printing around 1500,¹⁰⁵ notation was already linked to the sort of subjectivity that later became central to bourgeois ideology. Of particular interest in this context is a passage in the entry on notation (*Notschrift*) from the 1956 edition of *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.¹⁰⁶ The article draws attention to the musical doodlings of an anonymous monk who should have been copying bits of plainchant but whose musical imagination seems to have been sparked off by a technology (notation) originally conceived for purposes of perpetuation rather than for recording innovative musical ideas such as 'what if I arrange the notes like this instead?' or 'what if I combine these two tunes?' or 'what if I write their rhythm like this?' Of course, the abbot overseeing the duplication of liturgical music on monastery parchment crossed out the galley-slave copyist's notes. Not only had the offending monk made a mess in a holy book; he had also, by commit-

104. Thanks to Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Montréal) for the term *graphocentric*.

105. Woodcut music printing dates from 1473 (Eslingen, Germany), moveable type music printing from around 1500 (Petrucci, Venice).

106. *MGG* is an authoritative German-language music encyclopaedia.

ting his own musical thoughts to paper, challenged ecclesiastical authority and the supposed transcendence of God's music in its worldly form (*musica mundana*). Preserving Mother Church's music for perpetuity was good; allowing the musical thoughts of all and sundry to be stored for posterity was not. A millennium or so later, the democratic potential of music technologies like digital sequencing, recording and editing, not to mention internet file sharing, is sometimes ignored or demonised by other authorities, elitist or commercial, whose interests, like those of the medieval abbot, lie in preserving hierarchical legacies of social, economic and cultural privilege.¹⁰⁷

At least two lessons can be learnt from this story of the wayward monk. One is that there is nothing conservative about musical notation as such, even though its long-standing symbiosis with conservatory training and its conceptual opposition to graphically uncodified aspects of musical production (improvisation, etc.) can lead those who rarely make compositional use of the medium to believe that 'notes on the page' constitute an intrinsically restrictive type of musical practice. Our anonymous monk's doodlings and our studio vocalists' notational literacy both suggest the opposite. It is also worth remembering that, unlike European classical music, other traditions of 'learned' music rely rarely, if at all, on any form of notation to ensure their doctrinally correct reproduction over time.¹⁰⁸

The second lesson is that the connection between notation and subjectivity has a very long history whose development runs parallel with the emergence of notions of the individual discussed earlier (pp.53-53, 57-59). Of particular importance is the process by which, in the wake of legislation about authorial ownership in literary works, creative musicians, no longer subjected to the anonymity of feudal patronage, were able to put their printed compositions on to the 'open market'. In late eighteenth-century London, for example, the market was a growing

107. Thanks to Jan Ling (Göteborg) for the MGG reference. In Benjamin's terms, any medium capable of encoding a symbolic event has the potential for *Produzierbarkeit* as well as for *Reproduzierbarkeit*.

108. See section on India, pp.45-46. For example, *Rig Veda* chants have been passed down *orally*, with great attention paid to detail, for the last 3000 years or so. For sources and more information, see Tagg (2002:23-25).

throng of bourgeois consumers wanting to cultivate musical habits befitting the status to which they aspired. As Barron (2006:123) remarks:

The capacity to earn a living by selling one's works in the market freed the artist of the burden of pleasing the patron; the only requirement now was to please the buying public.

Notation was a key factor in this development. As Lord Mansfield stated during a 1774 court action brought by Johann Christian Bach against a London music publishing house:

Music is a science: it can be written; and the mode of conveying the idea is by signs and marks [on the page].¹⁰⁹

Thanks to these marketable 'signs and marks', composers became the legal owners of the ideas the sheet music was seen to convey. Composers could be viewed as authors of not only a tangible commodity (sheet music) but also of financially quantifiable values derived from use of that commodity: they became identifiable central figures and principle public actors in the production and exchange of musical goods and services.

As the buying public diversified its tastes, many [composers] cultivated greater self-expression and individuality (it was a way of being noticed). Under the sway of patronage,... [the composer] was expected to be self-effacing... Craft counted more than uniqueness... The rise of a wider, more varied and anonymous [public] encouraged [composers] to carve out distinctive niches for themselves. They were freer to experiment, because less commonly working to peer expectation or commission — instead producing in anticipation of demand, even to satisfy their own sense of Creative Truth and personal authority.¹¹⁰

Rameau's nephew (p.52) would have been delighted at this turn of events, perhaps even more pleased by the magic attributed to the Artist by representatives of German Romanticism, at least if the following characterisation of their notion of 'the text' is anything to go by.

109. *Bach v Longman* (1774: 624), cited by Barron (2006:118). Composer J C Bach (1735-1782), was Johann Sebastian Bach's youngest son and is also known as 'The London Bach'.

110. Roy Porter: *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1990, London: Penguin; p.248), cited by Barron (2006:123). I have replaced 'artist' or 'writer' in the Porter quote with '[composer]' on each occasion.

The text, which results from an organic process comparable to Nature's creations and is invested with an aesthetic or originality, transcends the circumstantial materiality of the [score]... [I]t acquires an identity immediately referable to the subjectivity of its [composer].¹¹¹

Here we are back in the metaphysical musical world of Tieck, Wackenroder and Hegel, except that this time we're armed with notation as legally valid proof of the composer's subjectivity and of the 'authenticity' of his Text/Work/*Oeuvre*.

To summarise the account so far: musical notation in Europe around 1800 stands in the middle of a complex intersection between:

- the establishment of music as a marketable commodity;
- developments in the jurisprudence of intellectual property;
- the emergence of composers from the anonymity of feudal patronage and their appearance as public figures and principal actors in the exchange of musical goods and services;
- Romantic notions of genius and subjectivity.

Add to these four points the problem of MUSIC IS MUSIC (ABSOLUTE MUSIC) and its institutionalisation (pp.42-53), plus the fact that notation was the only viable form of musical storage and distribution for centuries in the West, and it should come as no surprise that many people in musical academe still adhere to the graphocentric belief that notation *is* THE MUSIC it encodes so incompletely. Indeed, this belief is so entrenched in musician circles that the word *music* still often denotes no more than 'signs and marks' on paper, as in statements like 'I left my music in the car'. The institutional magic of this equation should not be underestimated. For example, one research student told me his symphonic transcription of a Pink Floyd track was intended to 'give the music the status it deserves' and I was once accused of trying to legitimise 'trash' just because of transcriptions included in my analyses of the *Kojak* theme and Abba's *Fernando* (Tagg 2000a, b).

111. Roger Chartier: *The Order of Books* (1994, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp.36-37), cited by Barron (2006:123). Chartier is in fact characterising 'the literary ontology subsequently advanced by such architects of German Romanticism as Herder, Kant and Fichte'. Once again, I have changed 'book' to '[score]' and 'author' to '[composer]'.

Another important reason for the longevity of the equation MUSIC = SHEET MUSIC is of course that notation was, for about a century and a half (roughly 1800-1950), *the most lucrative mass medium for the musical home entertainment industry*. In most bourgeois parlours, the piano was as focal a piece of furniture as the TV in latter-day living rooms. Before the mass production of electro-magnetic recordings in the late 1920s, or even as late as the 1950s and the advent of vinyl records, sheet music, like CDs or online music files, was encoded 'content' in need of software and hardware to decode and reproduce. The parlour piano was only part of that hardware; the rest of the hardware and all the necessary software resided in the varying ability of sheet music consumers to decode notes on the page into fine-motoric activity on the piano keys (or on other instruments or by using the voice). The sheet music medium on which consumers relied in order to realise an aesthetic use value, hopefully commensurate with the commodity's exchange value (its monetary price), demanded that they contribute to the *production* of the sounds from which any aesthetic use value might be derived. In this way, consumer preoccupation with poietic aspects of musical communication was much greater than it became in the era of sound recording. Poietic consumer involvement in musical home entertainment was also greater than that required for deriving use value, aesthetic or otherwise, from a newspaper or novel, especially after the introduction of compulsory education and its insistence on *verbal* literacy for all citizens: notational literacy was never considered such a necessity, even in the heyday of sheet music publishing.

The fact that those who regularly use Western notation today are almost exclusively musicians, not the general listening public, reinforces the dichotomy between knowledges of music, especially that between vernacular esthetic competence (e.g. aural recognition of a particular chord in terms of crime and its detection) and the professional ability to denote musical structures in poietic terms (e.g. 'minor major nine'). What composers, arrangers or transcribers put on to the page is, as we've repeatedly stated, intended as something to be performed by trained musicians who, in order to make sense of the 'signs and marks', have to supply from their own experience as much of *what is not* as of

what is on the page. It goes without saying that it would today be economic suicide to produce sheet music en masse in the hope that Joe Public would derive any value from just reading it. Despite this patent shift in principal commodity form during the twentieth century from sheet music to sound recording, graphocentrism is still going strong, not only in the musical academy but also in legal practice. As late as November 2003, a California judge declined to award compensation to a jazz musician whose improvisation had been sampled on a Beastie Boys track: judgement was passed on the grounds that the improvisation was part of a work whose score the plaintiff had previously deposited for copyright purposes but that the improvisation in question had not been included in that copyrighted score.¹¹²

One final aspect of the dynamic between notation, subjectivity and the institutionalisation of musical knowledges deserves attention if any strategy for developing more democratically accessible types of discourse about music is to be at all viable. This dynamic has to do with the composer's star status in the Western classical tradition after 1800.

Back-tracking to the nineteenth-century bourgeois music market for the last time, composers became, as we have seen, the legal owners and recognised authors of ideas conveyed through the tangible commodity of sheet music. In this way they also became the most easily identifiable individuals involved in the production of music. For example, the biggest names on popular sheet music covers were, in the heyday of notation, those of the composer and lyricist, while the optional 'as performed by...' text, which only starts to appear in the inter-war years after the commercial breakthrough of electro-magnetic recording, was assigned a much smaller font. Of course, in the classical field, piano reductions and pocket scores virtually never include details of notable recordings of the work in question. Indeed, although nineteenth-century artists like Jenny Lind or Niccolò Paganini were unquestionably treated like pop stars in their day, they never acquired the lasting high-art status of composers enshrined as Great Masters in Western musical aca-

112. For more detail, see *Newton v Diamond* | <http://www.phillaw.com/html/beastie.html> |, accessed 2007-02-22.

deme's hall of fame. Romantic notions of the individual, of music as a refuge of the higher arts and of virtually watertight boundaries between subjective and objective contributed to this canonisation process. Among the continuing symptoms of this romanticised auteurcentrism we could mention conventional musicology's considerable zeal for discovering musical *Urtex*ts or for re-interpreting Beethoven manuscripts compared to its relative lack of interest in how such music was used and in what it meant to audiences either then or more recently. In short, the vast majority of musicological textbooks still deal with composers, their subjectivity, their intentions and their works, the latter overwhelmingly equated with the poietically focused medium of notation, much more rarely with the effects, uses and meanings of that music from the viewpoint of the infinitely greater number of individuals who make up the music's audiences.¹¹³

The consequences of notation's long-standing central position in music education are, in the perspectives just presented, quite daunting. Thankfully, several major twentieth-century developments have highlighted many aspects of the anomalies brought together in the discussion so far. These developments, discussed in the next chapter, have not only enabled a critique of conventional musicology: they also prefigure the sort of analysis method presented in Part Two of this book.

Summary of main points

[1] Music's relatively low status in the academic pecking order is due not only to its inherently alogogenic nature but also to its institutional isolation from the epistemological mainstream of European thought.

[2] The relative isolation of music from other aspects of knowledge in

113. One exception to the 'infinitely greater number' observation might be the minuscule fan base for certain types of 'contemporary' art music. This strange milieu is linked to another symptom of auteurcentrism. I refer here to the often bizarre teaching of composition in the academy where Romantic subjectivity seems to run riot, one of its saddest syndromes being the innovation angst affecting young composers who feel obliged to conform to the originality edicts of tiny totem groups — Darmstadt, anti-Darmstadt, post-Darmstadt, modernism, serialism, postserialism, postmodernism, stochasticism, minimalism, avant-garde sensualism, aleatorics, acousmatics, electro-acoustics, etc. *ad inf.*

our tradition of learning is not only due to the latter's logocentric and scopocentric bias but also to a powerful nexus of historical, social, economic, technological and ideological factors.

[3] Music's relative isolation in our tradition of knowledge is partly due to a long history of institutional mystification: notions of suprasocial transcendence have for thousands of years been a recurrent trait in learned writings about learned musics. The doctrinal ghost of one such notion of suprasociality — ABSOLUTE MUSIC ('MUSIC IS MUSIC')— still haunts the corridors of musical academe in the West.

[4] The strong link between ABSOLUTE MUSIC and Romanticist (bourgeois) notions of subjectivity reinforces a more general dissociation or alienation of individuals from social, economic and political processes. In so doing, the link between ABSOLUTE MUSIC and bourgeois notions of individuality also obscures the objective character of shared subjectivity among audiences, placing disproportionate emphasis on the individual composer or artist in the musical communication process.

[5] Overriding emphasis on the production of music, rather than on its uses and meanings, is so firmly entrenched in European institutions of learning that terms denoting elements of musical structure are almost always poietic, rarely esthetic. Consequently, those without formal musical training are largely unable to refer in a doctrinally correct fashion to such structural elements (*representamina*). This lack of officially recognised esthetic structural denotors makes the discussion of musical meaning by those without formal training a very difficult task.

[6] The longevity of notation as the *only* medium of musical storage and distribution before the advent of recorded sound, combined with its subsequent status as the *most lucrative* medium during the early part of the twentieth century, has compounded the difficulties mentioned above. Unlike the written word, notation, conceived and used almost exclusively for the *production* of musical sound rather than for its perception, exacerbates the poietic imbalance of musical learning in the West. At the same time, notation's long-standing status as commodity form, combined with its historical association with European notions of subjectivity, especially during the Romantic era and in the wake of leg-

isolation rubber-stamping the composer as an authentic originator and owner of marketable property, has further contributed to the poietic lopsidedness of thought about music in Western institutions. It has in the process also reinforced the metaphysical views of music and subjectivity mentioned in points 3 and 4.

The long and short of these six points and of the discussion they summarise is that it should come as no surprise if intelligent people, perfectly capable of embracing a socially informed semiotics of language or cinema (syntax, semantics *and* pragmatics), are generally unable to do the same with music: the heavy historical legacy of musical learning in the West has quite simply made that task virtually impossible. At the same time, although it is vital to understand the causes of this problem, it should also be obvious that it must be solved. Musical realities after nearly a century of mass-diffused sound clearly demand that the mental machinery of the historical legacy be overhauled.

Therefore, returning briefly (and in the interests of temporary closure) to the analogy that started this chapter, we are perhaps now slightly better placed to determine what cargo to salvage and what to discard along with the ballast of the oil tanker representing the historical legacy we have just discussed. Although we may be able to neither manoeuvre the massive vessel satisfactorily nor bring it to a complete standstill, we can at least decrease its inertia and more easily predict its behaviour. If all else fails, we can always abandon ship, salvaging some important cargo, and row our lifeboats towards another point on the shoreline. Hopefully the tanker can be safely moored before it causes more damage so that we can use as much fuel as possible salvaged from its hold to run less cumbersome vessels providing a more efficient shipping service in the public interest. Several epistemological lifeboats have already put out. They are the subject of the next chapter.