5. 'Meaning' and 'communication'

Sorting out notions of music is what this book has mainly been about so far and the last chapter ended with the promise to 'treat music as if it actually meant something'. So, now it's time to review concepts of *meaning* and *communication*.

Concepts of meaning

Meaning, sign, semiotics

Meaning, in the sense of one thing conveying, indicating or referring to something else, is a recurrent concept in this book. *Signification*, treated here as a virtual synonym to *meaning*, contains the morpheme *sign*. *Sign*, in its turn, simply means a thing indicating or representing something other than itself: it is in this general sense that US philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce ended up by using the word.[1] *Sign* also turns up in expressions like *sign system* and *sign type*.

Sign system denotes a large set of conventions of meaning, like this kind of written English, like impressionist painting, or like music for silent films. *Sign type* designates the particular way in which a sign relates to what it signifies, for example, if it physically resembles what it means (*icon*, see p. 107) or if the relation is largely *arbitrary* or *conventional* (see p. 109). *Sign* is also a translation of the Ancient Greek words *sēma* (σήμα) and *semeîon* (σημεῖον) at the root of words like *semiotics, semiology, semiosis* and *semantics*.

Semiotics, deriving from Peirce's *semeiotic*, means the systematic study of sign systems. *Semiology*, a term coined by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, is generally used to mean the same thing as *semiotics*.[2] There are some important differences, a few of which will be discussed shortly, between Peircean and Saussurean terminology. Saussure's most widely used concepts are probably the *signifier* (*signifiant* ≈ *sign*) and the *signified* (*signifié* = what the sign stands for or represents).

1.   Peirce eventually replaced *representamen*, a term he had used earlier, with *sign*.
2.   In fact, Saussure defined *semiology* as the 'science which studies the life of signs within the framework of social life' (*Le petit Robert*: Paris 1970).

Semiosis

Semiosis means the active *process* by which meaning is produced and understood. It includes the totality of, and the connections between, three elements that Peirce called *sign*, *object* and *interpretant*. As already suggested, it is simplest to think of the *sign* as a thing, with a physical existence of its own, that represents or stands for something other than itself. Let's put some meat on this theoretical bone.

Let's say that the *sign* is a photo you took of your aunt's dog. The photo clearly *isn't* your aunt's dog —it's a photo of it—, even though you might point to the photo and say 'that's my aunt's dog'. In fact, the photo represents your aunt's dog because that's what you saw when you took the photo. It's your visual perception of the dog at that moment which constitutes the *object* (in Peirce's terms) represented by the photo as its *sign*. When you look at the photo and see MY AUNT'S DOG, your visual perception cannot logically correspond 100% with what you saw when you took the photo (its *object*). This perception and interpretation of the sign, rather than your perception of the dog when you took the photo, is called its *interpretant*. You might regard this distinction between *object* and *interpretant* as esoteric conceptual nit-picking and shout 'big deal! ' because it´s downright obvious that the photo *looks* like your aunt's dog! Yes, indeed, but that very obviousness is the problem —and the big deal— because differences between object and interpretant, as well as between interpretants, are what cause meanings to be renegotiated, to change and to adapt to new needs, functions and situations. Let's go back to your aunt's dog and put some more meat on the poor animal's conceptual bone.

Many years after taking the snapshot, you open your family album and look at that same old photo of your aunt's dog. Note first that it has now become 'that same *old* photo'. Time has passed, you are different, and circumstances have changed but the photo remains the same. Maybe your beloved aunt has died in the meantime, or maybe you subsequently learnt things about her that put her in a bad light. Or perhaps you yourself now have a devoted dog, or perhaps you were badly bitten recently by one like your aunt's. Any of these factors could easily af-

fect the interpretant[s] you form when looking at the same photo at that later date. True, the prosaic MY AUNT'S DOG aspect of the interpretant will still work after all those years, but it will likely give rise to an array of different *final interpretants*, ranging from wistful longing for bygone days, when you were a child and you played with your kind aunt's dog, to WHAT A MANGY MONGREL! or WHAT A MEAN OLD WOMAN! And just wait until you show your MY AUNT'S DOG photo to friends and family! When you do, they will, in their turn, form other final interpretants of the photo. The content of those interpretants will depend on things like how well your family or friends knew your aunt and her dog, on whether or not they like dogs, whether or not they like you, and on a whole host of other factors. Whatever the case may be, this MY AUNT'S (shaggy) DOG story illustrates the necessity of distinguishing between *object* and *interpretant*, as well as between interpretants, in relation to the *sign*. These distinctions are essential when it comes to understanding how musical signs work, how the same sounds can mean different things to different people at different times and so on.

A complementary way of understanding semiosis is, as just inferred, to look at it in terms of a message and its communication. There are three main aspects to this process, too: [1] the thing or idea to be encoded (similar to Peirce's *object*), [2] the concrete form of that code —the *sign*— and [3] the decoded version or interpretation of that code (similar to Peirce's *interpretant*). Seen in this light of intention and interpretation, the 'ideal' semiosis would theoretically produce total unity between the sign as semiotically intended and as interpreted. The word *chair* would, for example, represent a fully identical notion of CHAIR in the minds of both speaker/writer (as an *object*) and listener/reader (as an *interpretant*), while the photo of your aunt's dog would be perceived, by anyone at any time, in exactly the same way as you saw the dog when you took the photo. Since exact correspondence between intended and interpreted message is impossible (and we shall shortly discover how, even in the case of *chair*), *semiosis* is also sometimes used to refer to processes by which meanings of existing signs are modified and re-negotiated, as with your interpretants that changed over time in relation to the same MY AUNT'S DOG photo.

To put a musical slant on these observations about shifts of meaning, just think of the distinctive wining sound of the pedal steel guitar in Country & Western music (C&W). This sound may have derived something from dobro and slide guitar techniques in the US south, but its most obvious sonic forerunner is the Hawaiian guitar, highly popular in the USA in the late 1920s and early 1930s, before electrically amplified musical instruments were commonplace. To cut a long story short, from originally connoting things like HAWAII and SUNSHINE, those steel guitar *glissandi* (swooping, sliding sounds) were gradually incorporated into the C&W mainstream and ended up as mere style indicators of Country music without the Hawaiian connotations.[3] The advantage of looking at semiosis in such ways is that, by including intention as well as interpretation, the semiotic process is more open to understanding in terms of social and cultural interaction.

Semantics

Semantics, a term coined by French linguist Michel Bréal, is defined by my dictionary as 'the study of the relationships between signs… and what they represent'.[4] Semantics is just one aspect of semiotics (or semiology) and the word is often used in contradistinction to (a) *syntax*, meaning formal relationships of one sign to another without necessarily considering their meaning, and (b) *pragmatics*, meaning the use of a sign system in concrete situations, especially in terms of cultural, ideological, economic and social activity. Now, as we noted earlier, to prevent semantics, the main focus of this book, from becoming a 'perverse discipline' (Eco, 1990:259), it must be related to pragmatics. This imperative has at least two important implications.

Eco's imperative firstly implies that a synchronic semantics (examining signs at one given point in time in one given culture) is not enough on its own: it needs a diachronic perspective that involves studying meaning as part of a dynamic sign system subject to change. The FROM HA-

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3.   See also under 'Style indicator' and 'Genre synecdoche', p.000,ff.
4.   Definition from *The New Collins English Dictionary* (London, 1982).
      Bréal's *sémantique* originally (1897) meant studying change of meaning in language, i.e. a sort of expanded etymology or diachronic study of semiosis.

WAII TO COUNTRY MAINSTREAM process, described above, illustrates a diachronic line of semantic reasoning that can also be called *etymophonic*. I apologise for introducing yet another term, but *etymophony* is a useful concept and quite easy to explain, as follows. If *etymology* studies the 'historically verifiable sources of the formation of a word and the development of its meanings', *etymophony* simply means studying the origins of a (musical) structure and the development of its meanings and functions over time. Etymophony is, in short, an important part of diachronic semantics in music.

The second implication of Eco's imperative is both synchronic and diachronic. It entails relating semantics ('relationships between signs and what they represent') to factors in the socio-cultural field in which the musical meanings under examination are generated and used. These meanings obviously both inform and are informed by value systems, identities, economic interests, ideologies and a whole host of other factors that constitute the socio-cultural biosphere without which music and its meanings, as just one semiotic sub-system among many others, cannot logically exist. We shall shortly return to this essential aspect of musical semantics under 'Codal interference' (p. 128, ff.).

Semiotics and semiology

When denoting the study of sign systems, speakers of French and Spanish seem to prefer *sémiologie/semiologia*, while anglophones, Italians and others tend to use *semiotics/semiotica*. This confusion may eventually be resolved in a similar fashion to the VHS versus Betamax battle over videocassette formats in the 1980s but it is impossible to predict which concept, if indeed either, will oust the other. In the meantime, *semiotics* rather than *semiology* will be used here for two reasons. [1] A book written in English ought logically to use English-language terms. [2] Two of Peirce's numerous trichotomies (*sign - object - interpretant* and *icon - index - 'symbol'*) substantially inform the conceptual basis of what follows. Even so, in order to save space, Saussure's binary notion of *signifier* and *signified*, where *signifier* is roughly equivalent to Peirce's *sign* and *signified* means what the sign stands for (i.e. both *object* and *interpretant*), will sometimes be used as shorthand, not as a replacement, for Peirce's trichotomy *sign - object - interpretant*. Another termi-

nological problem is that Peirce uses *symbol* to denote what Saussure calls *sign* and vice versa. To avoid this confusion when discussing semiosis, I shall try to avoid *symbol* and stick to *sign* in the Peircean sense used so far. That means PEIRCE'S *SYMBOL* / SAUSSURE'S *SIGN* needs another label. *Arbitrary sign* is what I use to cover the concept (p.109).

Two Peircean trichotomies

First, second, third[5]

Peirce closely examined and classified all types of signification. Radically simplifying his overall meta-system, we can say that the relationship between a sound and the human perception of that sound —as that sound alone without mediation— would constitute his notion of *firstness*: it is phenomenologically just one thing, so to speak, even though the sound and its perception are physically separate entities. It's just like the oneness of your aunt's dog as such and your perception of it when you took the famous photo.

Secondness is easier to grasp semiotically because (surprise!) it has *two* poles. The musical sound as *sign* (one pole) includes, relates to and represents its firstness (the other pole), just as the celebrated dog shot relates to your perception of the dog when you took the photo. For example, soft, slow, smoothly swaying music, as in a lullaby, is not the same thing as soft, slow, smooth, swaying as such: it represents that movement in sound. There is a *sign* (the sound) and an *object* (the idea of movement perceived and to be represented in sound).

It should hardly come as a shock to learn that *thirdness* contains *three* elements: [1] *sign* (the sound of the lullaby); [2] *object* (explained under secondness) and [3] *interpretant[s]* (interpretations of the lullaby, including recognising it *as* a lullaby rather than a war song. *Final interpretants* might be: nostalgic feelings of comfort, images of an adoring parent singing a much loved infant to sleep, the smell of baby powder, evening light shining through a chink in the bedroom curtains, etc.

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5.   'Merely to say that Peirce was extremely fond of… of triadic relations, would fail miserably to do justice to the overwhelming obtrusiveness in his philosophy of the number three.' (Peirce entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 2006; |plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce/| 2007-12-05).

Icon, index, symbol

Peirce's next three trichotomies are like a ninefold Kyrie in that first-ness, secondness and thirdness each give rise to their own three categories of sign. Since I shall concentrate on musical semantics, oneness will be largely taken as read. Secondness and thirdness, however, are of direct relevance to the topic. Nevertheless, to avoid death by conceptual drowning in Peirce's taxonomic sea of 9, then 27 (then 81?) categories, each with its own abstruse label, and so as to open up our musical semantics to sociocultural considerations through pragmatics, thirdness will be discussed in more accessible terms and use of Peirce's sign types will be restricted to those of secondness because they seem best suited to musical semantics. Peirce's trichotomy of secondness distinguishes between *icon*, *index* (plural: *indices*) and *arbitrary sign* (what Peirce called *symbol* and Saussure called *sign*).

Icon

Icons are signs bearing physical resemblance to what they stand for. Iconic resemblance can be striking, as in photographs, or (traditional) paintings, but maps and certain types of diagram are also iconic because there is at least some structural resemblance, though less patent, between the signs and what those signs stand for. Even the representation of rising and falling pitch, of legato slurs (smooth) and staccato dots (choppy) in musical notation can to some extent be qualified as iconic. However, the *visual* representation of *sonic* events can only be considered a resemblance if conventions of synaesthetic homology are in operation allowing us to equate certain signs encoded in one mode of perception (e.g. visually, as staccato dots on the page) with certain objects/interpretants existing in another (e.g. sonically, as intermittent, choppy, pointillistic, aurally pixelated, etc.). Since, as explained earlier (pp.34-40), synaesthesis is intrinsic to music, we will have to refine the notion of icons in music to cater for conventions of synaesthetic homology (see 'Anaphones', p.000, ff.). Here, though, we need to get to the most obvious aspect of musical iconicity, i.e. to sounds as signs physically resembling the sounds they stand for.

If a photo like MY AUNT'S DOG is an icon of the object it is supposed to represent, then a musical recording ought logically to be considered an icon the music as it sounded when recorded. However reasonable that assumption may be for live recordings, there are good reasons for considering icons differently as a musical sign type. One reason is that the sound of a recording does not even reach the oneness stage of semiosis until the sounds are actually perceived by someone, even less reach the semantic stages of secondness and thirdness where sonic signs can relate to objects and interpretants. It is at these stages that musical icons called *sonic anaphones* (see p. 000, ff.) come into play, such as a low-pitched drum roll sounding like the rumble of distant thunder, or an overdriven electric guitar sounding like a Harley Davidson, or two notes on the piano imitating the call of a cuckoo, etc. None of these SOUNDS LIKE examples function solely as icons because distant thunder can mean danger, while a Harley might connote a pack of Hell's Angels and cuckoo notes on the piano might make you think of a spring morning or of your primary school music teacher.

Index

Distant thunder meaning danger, smoke meaning fire, dark clouds meaning rain: these are all examples of semiosis using a causal *index* as sign. Indices are signs connected either by causality, or by spatial, temporal or cultural proximity, to what they stand for. This sign type is particularly important in music semiotics to the extent that *all* musical sign types can be considered as at least partially indexical.[6] Some types of indexical sign are very common in musical semiosis, in particular a type of metonymy[7] called the *synecdoche* [sɪnˈɛkdɔkɪ]. In language, synecdoches are part-for-whole expressions like *the crown* meaning the monarch and royal power *in toto*, not just a bejewelled piece of metal headgear; or like *fifty head of cattle* meaning not just the animals' heads but fifty complete bovine beings. Synecdoches work similarly in music,

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6. For convincing arguments on the intrinsic indexicality of all musical signs, see Karbušicky 1986. See also 'Anaphone' (p. 00) and 'Genre synecdoche' (p. 00).
7. Another type of metonymy uses phenomena connected in time or space to refer to each other, as in the case of *Champagne* signifying a certain type of wine because it is produced in a region of that name.

for example, the overdriven guitar connoting, via the SOUNDS LIKE A HARLEY icon, an entire pack of Hell's Angels and not just the bike, or the cuckoo notes on the piano connoting the entirety of a spring morning rather than just the cuckoo that happened to be part of the soundscape at the time. Another example would be seeing old Paris in your mind's eye on hearing specific figurations in waltz time played on a French accordion (*accordéon musette*). That semiosis is typically synecdochal because only one tiny set of all the musical sounds circulating in Paris before World War II have come to connote the totality of that time, that place, its culture, its people, their habits and activities, all probably in black and white, too, rather than in colour.

Arbitrary sign

An *arbitrary sign* (Peirce's *symbol*) is connected only by convention to what it represents. Examples of arbitrary signs in the English language are *table, because, grass, semiotics, but, think, grateful, pullover* and most other words and phrases. This sign type is called conventional or arbitrary because it is supposed that nothing but convention prevents a word like *theology* from denoting a can-opener, whereas it is highly unlikely that an indexical sign like *Champagne* (the wine) will ever mean POLISH VODKA or LAWN-MOWER, and impossible that smoke from a fire will mean the fire has gone out or that you have run out of sugar. In other words, a sign can be called *arbitrary* when its semiosis exhibits no discernible elements of structural similarity (icons), or of proximity or causality (indices), between sign and object/interpretant.[8]

Arbitrary signs are rare in music, except for things like instrumental versions of national anthems or instrumental passages from Eurovision Song Contest tunes. In these cases there is rarely any musical signifier, iconic or indexical, of national identity, the main point of the music being to sound like a national anthem or like a Eurovision Song Contest entry. It is only paramusical evidence —the language in which the mel-

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8.   Arbitrary: not absolute; founded on (personal/collective) whim, convention, habit etc. Arbitrary signs cannot *originate* as such because without other initial types of semiotic relationship (e.g. icons or indices) it would be impossible to develop the conventions on which arbitrary signs rely for their subsequent denotative qualities.

odies are sung, or, in the case of a national anthem, which flags are flown behind the Olympic medallists' podium— that give uninitiated listeners a clue as to which nation the anthem or the Eurovision song represents. In other instances where musical signs are apparently stylised to the point of convention, some vestige of non-arbitrary semiosis, iconic or indexical, always remains. For instance, four French horns, in unison, playing broad, strong, consonant melodies in the upper middle register of the instrument still sound heroic, even in space (as in *Star Wars*), despite the fact that the etymophony of that sound is shrouded in the historical mists of rural eighteenth-century Europe, when horns were used in hunting or to clear the road for stagecoaches.[9] That specific indexical link in history with quick, strong, energetic male activity may be lost on modern listeners but it has passed into stylised convention. Other aspects of the original semiosis remain, because those 'heroic' horn melodies move swiftly in broad, strong, sweeping and energetic gestures and because FAST, BROAD, STRONG and ENERGETIC are what heroes are still supposed to be.

Denotation and connotation

Denotation and *connotation* designate two different aspects of semiosis. By *denotation* is meant the lexical type of meaning associated with dictionary definitions and with arbitrary signs. The word *table*, for instance, *denotes* 'a flat horizontal slab or board supported by one or more legs'; it doesn't connote it. Similarly, *theology* doesn't connote the idea of studying religious beliefs: it *denotes* that idea. However, in the statement *smoke means fire*, neither the phenomenon SMOKE nor the word *smoke* denotes fire: it is the perception of smoke that *connotes* the presence of fire through causal indexicality. Despite the fact that SMOKE MEANS FIRE exemplifies a much more tangible type of semiosis than does *theology*'s link with the idea of studying religions, denotation is still often considered to be a less vague type of semiosis than connotation. Eco (1990:6) challenges this assumption, branding the imagined solidity of denotative signification through arbitrary signs 'rigid designation', adding that language 'always says something more than its in-

9.   Mail coaches were the fastest vehicles on the planet, delivering the mail *post-haste*.

accessible literal meaning'. If Eco's observation is true for language, it is even more relevant to music which, as we just saw, rarely uses arbitrary signs. Since music is, on the other hand, highly connotative, it is worth examining the concept of indexical connotation in greater detail, applying Eco's ideas to the semiosis involved in the statement 'smoke means fire'.

I've shortened the saying *where there's smoke there's fire* to *smoke means fire*. In so doing, I substituted an observation of simultaneity with one of causality. I can do that because, unless we're talking about stage smoke (liquid CO_2), fire *causes* smoke. Now fit your smoke alarm as instructed (good) and go to sleep with a burning cigarette (bad). Your smoke alarm should wake you up. Its piercing alarm sound is triggered by smoke caused by fire. You hear the sharp beeps and you know the alarm sound (the *sign*) means FIRE (*interpretant*) and other alarming things, like GET OUT OF BED, RUSH OUT OF THE HOUSE and DON'T DIE (*final interpretants*). The alarm sound doesn't denote FIRE like the word *fire*, nor does it directly mean FIRE indexically like the smoke you see that is caused by fire you *don't* necessarily see. The connection between the smoke alarm sound and fire is one of *connotation*: the alarm *connotes* a particular sort of fire and everything you know goes with it, because the relationship between the alarm sound as signifier and the fire as signified, with all its connotations, *presupposes previously established levels of signification*. These distinctions do not constitute conceptual nit-picking: they are an essential step in understanding how connotation, such an important aspect of musical semantics, actually works.

The 'previous levels' just mentioned are all indexical and causal, namely the relationships [1] between the alarm sound and smoke (smoke triggers the alarm), [2] between smoke and fire (fire causes smoke), [3] between fire and danger (babies have to learn that fire hurts). With these previous levels of signification you are able to connote the specific threats of multiple burns, asphyxiation and possible death with the sound of a smoke alarm. In Eco's terms (1976:55), 'connotation arises when a signification is conveyed by a previous signification, which gives rise to a superelevation of codes'. The form of this 'connotative semiotics' is shown in table 5-1.

Table 5-1: Smoke alarm: connotation as
superelevation of previous signification[*]

Signifier			Signified
Signifier		Signified	Danger! Get out!
Signifier	Signified		
alarm noise	smoke	fire	

> [*] The original Eco model uses Hjelmslev's terms *expression – content*, not the Saussurean pair *signifier – signified* which is used here for reasons of brevity in comparison with Peirce's *sign - object/interpretant*.

According to Eco (1976:55), 'there is a connotative semiotics when there is a semiotics whose expression plane is another semiotics'. So, in the smoke alarm example, the signified of the three former significations combined —[1] THE ALARM SOUND IS TRIGGERED BY SMOKE, [2] WHERE THERE'S SMOKE THERE'S FIRE and [3] FIRE IS DANGEROUS — becomes the signifier of a fourth signified: DON'T DIE! GET OUT! Thus the smoke signifies FIRE indexically, but the sound of the smoke alarm *connotes* both DANGER and EVACUATION associated with fire thanks to the previous semiotic relationships. Eco continues his critique of denotative hegemony in linguistics as follows.

> 'The difference between denotation and connotation is not... the difference between "univocal" and "vague" signification, or between "referential" and "emotional" communication, and so on. What constitutes a connotation as such is the connotative code which establishes it; the characteristic of a connotative code is the fact that the further signification conventionally relies on a primary one.'

This critique of received wisdom about denotation and connotation segues into the next and equally problematic point —the widely held assumption that music is intrinsically polysemic.

Polysemy and connotative precision

Polysemic —from Greek *poly* (πολύ = many) and *séma* (σήμα = sign)— means signifying many things at the same time, i.e. that the same sign is linked to many different objects and/or interpretants. Now, there is no doubt that music is polysemic from a logocentric viewpoint and I often produce the lexically incongruent concepts AUSTRIA AND SHAMPOO

to illustrate the point. Austria is a middle-sized Central European nation famous for its capital city, Vienna, for mountains, Strauss Waltzes, downhill skiing, Mozart and a host of other things that have nothing to do with viscose liquid that comes in small plastic bottles and that you apply to your scalp when washing your hair. Despite these radical and patent differences between the two phenomena, I claim that AUSTRIA and SHAMPOO belong to the same, well-defined semantic field. That sounds like utter nonsense, so here's my explanation. 🎥◀ 00

A one-minute extract from a romantic film theme (*The Dream of Olwen* by Charles Williams) was played without visual accompaniment to 607 listeners. Respondents were asked to jot down notes for a suitable film scenario or anything else that came into their mind when hearing the piece. The most common responses were LOVE, ROMANCE and either A COUPLE or A SINGLE WOMAN STROLLING THROUGH THE GRASS OF A SUMMER MEADOW. Other common responses were WAVING CORN, ROLLING HILLS, the long FLOWING HAIR and DRESS of the woman they saw, the SWELL of the SEA in a SUMMER BREEZE, BILLOWING SAILS, a FLOWING RIVER, OLDEN TIMES, etc. Many respondents imagined scenarios in either ENGLAND, FRANCE or AUSTRIA. Now, the AUSTRIA envisaged by respondents was *not* the Dolomites in bad weather, nor skiing at Kitzbühel, nor eating *Sachertorte* in a *Konditorei*, nor the airport or oil refinery at Schwechat. No, it was the Austria of *The Sound of Music*, in particular a WOMAN in a LONG DRESS STROLLING THROUGH GREEN MEADOWS. This cluster of responses describes the scene, shown as Figure 5-2, in which Julie Andrews bursts into the film's title song ('The hills are alive with the sound of music'). Now, that scene features a fine open-landscape panorama quite different to the confines of a shower cabin where shampoo is applied to the scalp. The question is obvious: how can shampoo be related to strolling in the green grass of an open meadow?

Well, the SHAMPOO respondents mentioned was no more *shampoo* as such than the AUSTRIA they saw was lexically *Austria*. Respondents were in fact alluding to a Timotei shampoo advert featuring a young Nordic woman, with long, flowing blonde hair and a long, flowing, old-style white cotton dress, moving in slow-motion through the long grass of a summer meadow and watched longingly by a young man in

the background (Fig 5-3a). It is an image derivative of the famous meadow love scene in *Elvira Madigan* (Fig. 5-3b).

Fig. 5-2. AUSTRIA: *Julie Andrews bursts into song in* The Sound of Music
  © 20th Century Fox, 1958, 1965, 1993

Fig. 5-3. (left) SHAMPOO: *Timotei advert (Sweden, c. 1980)*
  (right) **Elvira Madigan** *(Widerberg, 1967):*

Obvious similarities between these pictures (Fig. 5-2 and 5-3) suggest that respondents, some of whom said AUSTRIA and others SHAMPOO, were not in the least bit confused about what sort of scenario, movements, gestures, activities, emotions or moods they got from hearing the music, even though there is no connection between dictionary definitions of *Austria* and *shampoo*. It is therefore only from a lexically *logocentric* viewpoint, that AUSTRIA and SHAMPOO, not to mention HILLS, HAIR, CORNFIELDS, SAILING SHIPS, DRESSES and MANOR HOUSES, all common responses to the same music, can be considered contradictory, incongruous or polysemic.

Observations similar to those just made about AUSTRIA AND SHAMPOO apply just as well to very different sets of musical sounds, for instance those associated with city streets by night, with concrete, rain, crime, delinquency, flickering lights and urban loneliness. This latter set of sounds and those of the AUSTRIA AND SHAMPOO piece cover mutually distinguishable fields of connotation. Obviously, the fact that each of the two sets of associations contains *lexically* disparate concepts does *not* mean the two fields of connotation are *musically* contradictory within themselves. On the contrary, play the music connoting each of those moods to anyone belonging to the culture in and for which the music was produced, and listeners will be in no doubt after a split second about which is which.

Misconceptions of music as polysemic arise partly because academe demands that we present ideas about music, not in music, not even in terms of moving picture or of dance, but in words. These notions of music's supposed polysemy can be questioned in at least two other ways: [1] by considering different symbolic representations of the same physical reality; [2] by turning the tables on denotative language and by branding *it* as polysemic instead.

Figure 5-4 (p.116) shows three different black-and-white representations of the same geographical location —the area around Castletown, near the southern tip of the Isle of Man (UK). Image 5-4A, from an Ordnance Survey map, features roads, railways, built-up areas and place names. The curve of the bay in image A recurs, seen from a slightly different angle, in the tilted Google Earth image B. Image B gives only two place names and its low resolution obscures most road trajectories, even though the image's original colour version gives a good clue as to variations in surface terrain. Image C, a geological cross-section from northwest to southeast through the same area, bears no apparent resemblance to either A or B.

These three images of the same location focus attention on differences in the nature and function of the visual sign system operative in each case. Images A and B can't be polysemic just because the area's geological details aren't included, any more than image C can be called vague

because it doesn't show buildings, roads or the varying colours of the surface terrain. The point is that a physical location can be visually represented in an almost infinite number of ways, each symbolising different aspects of the same reality from different perspectives, using different rules of stylisation and abstraction, as well as different techniques for encoding different types of information for different purposes. If it is accepted that the same location can be visually symbolised in such different ways for such different purposes, how come music, whose basic nature and functions differ so radically from those of language or from graphic forms of representation, is expected to live up to linguistic or visual rather than musical criteria of semiotic precision?

Fig. 5-4. Castletown: same geography, different visual representations
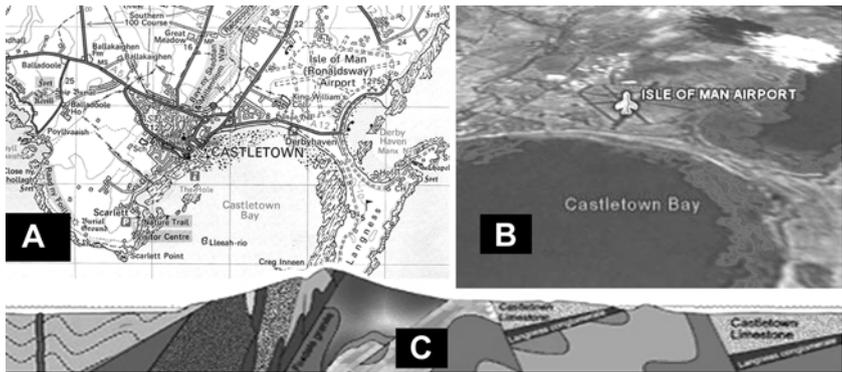
Since different individuals within the same culture tend repeatedly to respond to the same music in similar ways, music cannot reasonably be considered polysemic. To underline the problem with logocentric thinking about musical meaning, you only need to apply musicocentric arguments to language and ask, for example, what the *sound* of the spoken word *table* ['tɛɪbəl] really means. True, like *mesa, Tisch, τραπέζι, pöytä, стол* and other words denoting 'a flat horizontal slab or board supported by one or more legs', *table* is pretty monosemic, but it is, as 'tɛɪbəl, musically indistinguishable from rhyming words like *able, Babel, bagel, cable, cradle, Dave'll* [do it], *fable, gable, label, ladle, Mabel, navel* or *stable*, each spoken with the same voice, intonation, timbre, inflexion, accentuation and speed of delivery. However, whereas no sane musi-

cologist would dream of calling language polysemic just because all but the most onomatopoeic of words are musically ambiguous, many people still think of music as polysemic, just because musical categories of signification do not coincide with verbal ones. This logocentric fallacy, part of the epistemic inertia discussed in Chapter 3, can also be refuted with the help of two final examples relating to a very simple, tangible, concrete and ostensibly denotative noun: *chair*.

[1] What does *chair* mean? You can sit *on* one type in the kitchen, *in* another in front of the TV; you can *take* the chair at a meeting, *occupy* another sort at a university and be *sent* to a final one in a Texas prison. *Chair* has to do for the lot of them and only the noun's context or the addition of qualifiers like *kitchen, easy, research* or *electric*, will clarify which *chair* is relevant. Words, in other words, even nouns denoting concrete objects, can be context sensitive and polysemic.

[2] The spoken word *chair* [tʃɛːə] is as musically polysemic as humming the guitar riff of *Satisfaction* is verbally polysemic. Neither utterance carries clear meaning if judged according to the norms of semiosis applicable to the other sign system. A verbal statement is made *less* polysemic by prosody, i.e. by the 'musical' elements of speech —intonation, timbre, rhythm, etc.— just as musical discourse gains in precision if linked to words, actions, pictures, etc.

In short, precision of musical meaning can never be the same as precision of verbal meaning. Music and language are not interchangeable sign systems: if they were, they would not exist separately. It is for this virtually tautologous reason that connotations given in response to the AUSTRIA AND SHAMPOO and URBAN ALIENATION pieces of music mentioned earlier must be understood as belonging to *musicogenic, not logogenic, categories* of meaning: connotations elicited by music are verbally accurate in relation not to verbal but to *musical* discourse. Music is an *alogogenic* sign system whose semantic precision relies largely on connotation and on indexical signs. Mendelssohn put it this way:

> 'The thoughts which are expressed to me by a piece of music which I love are not too indefinite to be put into words, but on the contrary too definite.'[10]

Concepts of communication

So far this chapter has presented some background concepts essential to an understanding of musical *meaning*. Now, no semiosis can take place without *communication*, be it intimate and unplugged or broadcast by satellite. Even singing alone in the shower is impossible without having first learnt patterns of melodic construction that can pass for song in the culture[s] you are familiar with. In short, all communication relies on some aspect of social organisation. Indeed, as we saw in the discussion of MUSIC AS A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE (p.19, ff.), musical competences, poïetic or aesthesic, are to an overriding extent culturally specific. Even the simple word-painting tricks described at the end of Chapter 4 (SUNBEAMS SCORCHING, CHILLY DEWDROPS, etc.) had to be *learnt*, as did the AUSTRIA AND SHAMPOO and URBAN LONELINESS connotations provided by respondents hearing separate musical extracts without verbal or visual accompaniment.

Returning briefly to the word-painting tricks described at the end of Chapter 4, I assumed, as an organist trained in a particular tradition, that the timbral variations I had learnt would communicate to the congregation the basics of the intended kinetic, tactile, emotional and culturally connotative effects I had in mind: SUNBEAMS SCORCHING as sonically sparkling, sharp, bright, high-pitched and edgy; CHILLY DEWDROPS as more rounded, cooler, slightly airy but precise and delicate, and so on (see p.98, ff.). However, it would have been rash to conclude that every member of the congregation registered exactly the same effects in exactly the same way (if, indeed, they registered anything at all of what I was doing), because social, physiological, neurological and psychological factors, including the momentary state of mind of each individual, would inevitably produce variations of response between members of the same basic musical community. More importantly, it would not be so much rash as absurd to expect members of a very dif-

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10. Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47), quoted by Cooke (1959: 6). Dave Thomas, experimental rock musician, went even further: 'If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a sound is worth a thousand pictures' (*EAR* Magazine, 13/10: 27 (February 1989)).

ferent musical culture, with very different conventions of structuring and understanding timbre, to register the intended musical effects in the same way as the congregation of the school chapel where I played organ.

Here we enter the tricky territory of communication theory and (semiotic) pragmatics in which musical semantics (the relation between musical signs and what they stand for) needs viewing within the framework of the relevant socio-cultural field. A short, explanatory disclaimer is called for here because this section of the chapter will not necessarily conform to the course content of B.A. programmes in communication studies. That said, what comes next *is* influenced partly by the Peircean tripartite semiotic models already presented, as well as by Eco's (1976:32-47) reasoning about 'signification and communication' and by a more music-specific model presented by Bengtsson (1972).[11] Even so, I should, in the interests of transparency, make three academically unconventional admissions: [1] that the main source of ideas presented in this section consists of observations and reflections made over almost sixty years of experience using, as transmitter or receiver, different kinds of music for different purposes, under different economic, social, physical and cultural circumstances; [2] that such experience has more often determined the theoretical models I adopt (perceptual learning) than vice versa (conceptual learning); [3] that thirty years of trying to run courses in the history or analysis of music 'as if it meant something' has forced me to abandon some intriguing but educationally less practicable conceptual universes, such as 18 of Peirce's 27 sign types, not to mention all the specialised poïetic descriptors of musical structure. Instead I have prioritised concepts that gel more easily with students' perceptions of music and its meanings, even though those perceptions are sometimes, as Chapters 1-4 suggest, in need of problematisation. With that academic *mea culpa* off my chest, I feel less ashamed about presenting a basic communication model.

11.   For a more in-depth discussion of these sources, see Tagg (2000a: 67-74).

Basic communication model

Figure 5-5 (p.121) is intended to visualise basic elements of musical communication within a socio-cultural framework. The twisted arrows at the top and bottom of the diagram indicate that the model should be read as vertically circular, so that the *store of signs* and the *sociocultural norms* are seen as part of the same constellation of culturally specific values and activities, part of the same socio-cultural field. More precisely, the *store of signs* is really just *one* of the *socio-cultural norms* shown at the bottom of the model because it contains all the social conventions of what constitutes music in the relevant culture, as well as all the socially negotiated norms about which elements of music have which connotations and are suited to which purposes, etc. I apologise for this problem of graphic representation but we need to distinguish between two types of 'non-communication' (*incompetence* and *interference*) and I was unable to graphically encode, all in one single diagram, that important distinction while at the same time visualising the *store of signs* as a subset of *sociocultural norms*.

In fact, the diagram should really be spherical and (at least) three-dimensional, because it is also *horizontally* circular, as suggested by the various arrows at the left and right edges. These arrows show that the uses to which we put the music we hear and the meanings we attribute to it, whether or not those uses and meanings are intended by those who made the music, influence the symbolic and behavioural conventions (the *store of signs* and the *socio-cultural norms*) which, in their turn, form the cultural starting point without which music's 'transmitters' cannot meaningfully produce work as composers, arrangers, musicians, singers, recording engineers, producers, DJs, etc.

Since Figure 1 is spherical, you could theoretically trace any musical communication process starting at any point in the diagram. For example, many scholars have, without considering musical semantics, instructively examined interactions relating to music in the socio-cultural field, such as those between commercial and aesthetic value, between patterns of ethnic, religious, sexual or social identity and their representation in the media, etc. In such cases, the communication model

would almost certainly, like the geographical representations in Figure 5-4 (p.116), look very different. Be that as it may, since the main focus of this book is semantic, it is logical to put the process of musical 'message' at the centre of the model (the TRANSMITTER-CHANNEL-RECEIVER line). That process runs as follows: the intended message, informed by specifics of transmitter subjectivity in objective relation to the socio-cultural field, passes from idea or intention, via its concretion in sonic form ('channel') to 'receivers' who respond to what they hear. Let's zoom in on that central semantic line in the communication process.

Fig. 5-5. *Musical communication model in a socio-cultural framework*
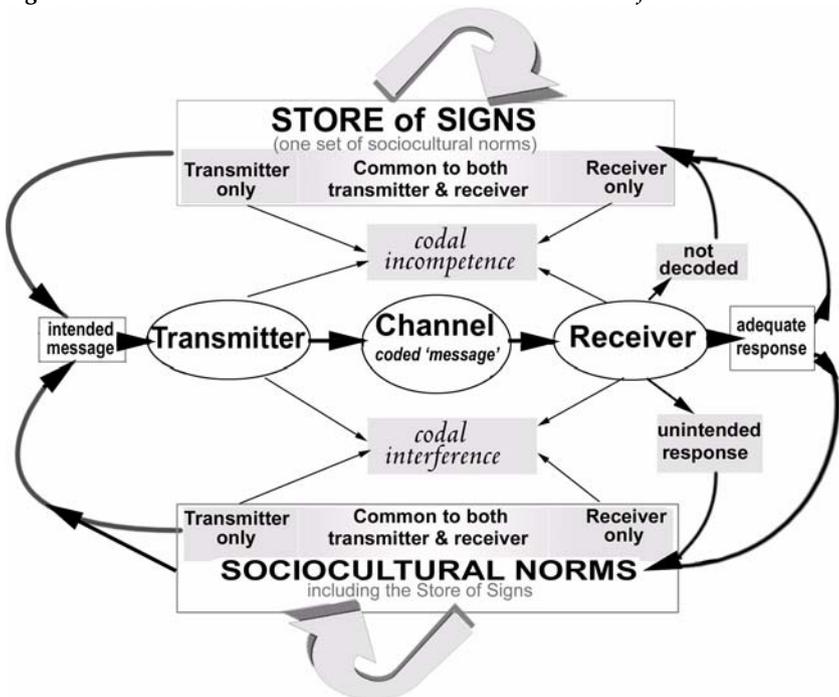
By *transmitter* is meant any individual or group of individuals producing music —composer, arranger, musician, vocalist (including you singing in the shower), recording engineer, DJ, etc. By *channel* or *coded message* is meant the music as it sounds (an array of *signs*), while *receivers* are those hearing or using the music, be they simultaneously the music's transmitters or not. The *intended message*, similar to Pierces's *ob-*

ject, is what transmitters hope to express —the right sounds at the right time in the right order creating the right 'feel', so to speak. Since transmitters very rarely use words to conceptualise their intended messages —they do that in music!—, I have provided some verbal approximations hinting at a range of 'feels' that a musician working in the Western media might have to consider producing (see Figure 5-6).

Fig. 5-6. Ethnocentric selection of connotative spheres ('feels'/'moods') *

rock 'n' roll kick-ass	ethereal sublimity	erotic tango
rural loneliness	urban loneliness	muso jazz cleverness
street-philosophising PI	gospel ecstatic	brave new machine world
yuppie yoghurt lifestyle	cheerful children	sex, aerobics style
headbanging thrash	romantic sensuality	bitter-sweet innocence
noble suffering	slavery, drudgery	wide-screen Western
Italian Western	medieval meditation	hippy meditation
psychedelia	evil East Asians	nice East Asians
savage Indians	noble Native Americans	slapstick comedy
pomp and circumstance	sixties sound	acid house body immersion
cybernetic dystopia	death by frostbite	twinkling happy Christmas
football singalong	music hall pub song	Methodist hymn
pastoral idyll	the throbbing tropics	inexorable violence
horror	mystery	grace and sophistication
Dracula's drooling organ	depravity and decadence	scorching sun, blistering heat
wide and open	smoky dive	Arabic sound
West African drums	distant bagpipe	Barry Manilow ballad
Abba Aphex sound	laid-back rock ballad	seventies disco
1930s German cabaret	Aboriginals	inconsolably unjust tragedy
pagan ritual	religious wonder	Celtic mists
lullaby	the march of death	existential *Angst*

*   This selection is labelled 'ethnocentric' because 'West African drums', 'East Asians', etc. are specified by ethnic qualifiers, while 'feels' applicable to many music cultures (e.g. 'violence', 'innocence') are assumed to be formulated in a Western musical idiom. This ethnocentricity is regrettably necessary because musical connotative semiotics is to such a large extent culturally specific. Besides, many of the 'feels' listed here correspond to mood categories found in library music collections produced in the West for use in the Western media (see p. 000, ff.).

Even though musicians within the European and North American cultural sphere might never use any of the words in Figure 5-6 to describe any musical idea, the professionals among them would still be able to

come up with sounds corresponding to most of the 'feels' in the list. Similarly, codally competent listeners from the same cultural background would be able to distinguish that music according to categories similar to those in Figure 5-6, a list that could go on for ever or include a totally different selection of mood categories. The point here is just to give some examples, in the form of pallid verbal approximations in this very verbal medium, of what an *intended musical message* might be, whether such intentions are verbalised or, as is usual, just musically conceived. Of course, an intended musical message (or *object*), however inspired, doesn't drop magically out of the blue. As the arrows on the left edge of Figure 5-5 indicate, they are informed by conventions existing in the sociocultural field, including its store of symbols, which in their turn are informed by previous acts of semiosis involving transmitters, receivers and the sociocultural field.

Thanks to Figure 5-6, there is now a little meat on the bone of *in*tention, which we'll follow from transmitter to receiver. Does the music actually *sound* as intended? If so, does it physically reach receivers? If it does, what happens when they hear it? Is the message interpreted or used as intended or in a different way? We'll start with the latter, taking as examples the first 'feel' in Figure 5-6.

A typically 'adequate response' would probably come into play if, in the case of intended KICK-ASS, rock concert-goers reacted by gesticulating enthusiastically, perhaps also joining in by yelling out the hook line of the chorus. Stage diving would be good at a speed metal gig and brandishing a cigarette lighter appropriate for a rock ballad. Such activity would, however, not constitute 'adequate response' at a string quartet recital: listening in silence and without visible expression, not clapping between movements but giving the musicians a round of applause after the performance would be more appropriate. If people sit in expressionless silence during the intended KICK-ASS ROCK or if they bop around loudly to the EXISTENTIAL *Angst* or ETHEREAL SUBLIMITY of a late Beethoven quartet, or if they hear something intended as delicate and tender in terms of sentimental tack, or something intended as interesting in terms of horror, then there has been a breakdown in musical communication.[12] In these cases, musicians have to ask themselves

what went wrong. It's not much use for composers to moan 'they just don't understand my work', because that implies, arrogantly and erroneously, that a breakdown in musical communication is solely due to malfunction at the reception end of the process.

Of course, with live performance there can be difficulties with the actual venue. Are its acoustics problematic? Is there disturbing background noise? Can't careful miking, mixing, equalising or speaker placement help? Did the violins have to work too hard to make their notes last in a dead acoustic space? If such problems aren't solved, some of the intended message (*object*) won't even make it into the 'channel' (the *signs*, the sounds that you, as transmitter, want to be heard), let alone reach the receivers (your audience) so that they can form their interpretants. However, —and more likely— maybe your performance or recording sounds fine to you but the message still doesn't seem to get across. Is it the wrong audience for your music or, more pertinently, did you make the wrong music for them? Perhaps they laugh when they should cry, or gape apathetically instead of shouting and jumping? Such problems of musical communication are attributable to what I call *codal incompetence* and *codal interference*.

Now, *incompetence* and *interference* both sound quite negative. Let me assure you that they are not intended in any pejorative sense. The two terms are merely intended as shorthand for two different aspects of breakdown in a synchronic musical communication situation. Neither the 'incompetence' nor the 'interference' imply any stupidity or malice on the part of the transmitter or receiver. Each concept simply highlights a particular set of mechanisms causing the varying degrees of difference that inevitably arise between, in semiotic terms, object and interpretant or, in terms of intentional communication, between intended and interpreted message. Codal incompetence and codal interference are in fact essential to the renegotiation of music's possible meanings and to its survival as a sign system capable of adapting to dif-

12. My favourite example of 'interesting' heard as 'horror' comes from an Italian music teacher whose twelve-year-old pupils, on hearing Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, pretended to brandish large knives and to stab imaginary victims.

ferent functions for different individuals in different populations at different times and in different places.

Codal incompetence

For musical communication to work, transmitter and receiver need access to the same basic store of signs, by which I mean a common vocabulary of musical sounds and norms. If the two parties don't share a common store of signs, codal incompetence will arise, at either the transmitting or receiving end of the message, or at both ends.

Imagine, as a Westerner, listening to a CD track of a field recording of traditional music from East Africa and thinking it sounds quite festive. Then imagine reading the CD inlay and discovering that the song isn't supposed to be festive at all, at least if the notes written by a reputed ethnomusicologist are to be trusted. She describes the singing as 'strident' and explains that it largely consists of stylised imitations of hyena calls. Whoops! Codal incompetence is at work here, firstly because you heard no hyenas in the music whereas, reportedly, those making or dancing to the music did at the time of the recording. Secondly, like me, you probably don't even know what a hyena sounds like, let alone what cultural conventions determine which aspects of hyena calls are stylised in which way into which types of song. Furthermore, you don't know how hyenas are regarded in the music's original cultural context. STRIDENT would be an appropriate attitude for the villagers to adopt in music if, as you learn from the introduction to the CD inlay notes, hyenas often attack the cattle at the basis of the community's livelihood and that collective courage, energy, organisation and determination are needed to effectively combat ravaging packs of hyenas. Mistaking STRIDENT for FESTIVE may be less inaccurate than hearing the song as mournful or gentle but codal incompetence on your part as listener is in clear evidence because you didn't hear the music in the same way as would a member of the community producing and using those sounds. None of this means that your FESTIVE AND NO HYENAS response is 'wrong'. Codal incompetence at the receiving end simply means that yours was an 'inadequate response' only in terms of the music's origi-

nal cultural setting, functions and intentions. Besides, codal incompetence is in no way a trait exclusive to musical reception, as the next example shows.

I was once asked to come up with some ideas for a signature tune for a series of local TV programmes in Liverpool. I understood the basic programme concept to include a fair amount of populist nostalgia for the 'good old days' when 'ordinary people' were supposed to have enjoyed themselves in 'simple honest ways'. Having lived in Sweden for many years, I automatically connoted a certain cheery accordion style with a certain type of old-time, proletarian FUN-AND-GAMES DANCE MUSIC (*gammaldans*). So, my first thoughts were to mix a bit of that style into a signature tune to promote some 'populist nostalgia for the "good old days" when "ordinary people" were supposed to have enjoyed themselves in "simple honest ways"'. That was of course a bad idea because Merseyside listeners, unfamiliar with that Swedish style of music and totally unaware of its Swedish connotations, would not have known what to make of it. It would have amounted to *codal incompetence* on my part as musical transmitter in a Liverpudlian context. Perhaps my local theme tune would be less codally incompetent if I tried to emulate the sound of the older popular artists from the region, maybe a Searchers pastiche to take viewers back to the city in the sixties. The problem with that idea was that it too would also fall on deaf ears because younger Liverpudlians might not even recognise a Searchers sound, let alone be familiar with its connotations. In this latter case, however, there would also have been elements of codal incompetence from the receiving end, since the young audience would be unable to interpret musical signs that would be quite meaningful to older Liverpudlians. Needless to say, these theme tune ideas never saw the light of day, not so much because of my codal incompetence as because the TV project, thankfully, never passed the stage of loose chat in a pub.

Codal incompetence can also occur at more basic levels of musical structuration. For example, just listen to Bulgarian women singing traditional harvest songs [◀00]. To unfamiliar Western ears, their pen-

chant for singing two different notes a semitone apart at the same time can sound harsh and discordant, at best exciting or exotic. Given the collaborative and celebratory aspect of these songs, the harshness we might hear in repeated or held semitone dissonances, as in horror film music, is clearly at odds with the function of the music we are listening to. After all, it isn't as if the Bulgarian singers in Figure 5-7A look any more horrified than the party-goers in Figure 5-7B.

Fig. 5-7. A: Women singing harvest songs in rural Bulgaria
(LP Musik från Bulgarien, 1969)
B: Canadian office Christmas party (2006, anon. from internet) .

It would of course be codally incompetent, from the receiving end, to apply the semiotic conventions of Western horror film music to Bulgarian women singing traditional harvest songs. It would also be codally incompetent, from the transmitting end, to use the semitone dissonances of traditional Bulgarian harvest songs to celebrate the Christmas break at an office party in Milan or Milwaukee (Figure 5-7B), that is unless a disproportionate number of ethnomusicologists or 'world music' fans are among the party-goers, in which case Bulgarian semitones might work well as group identity marker of sociocultural difference. With these 'ethno' fans and their radical recontextualisation of the Bulgarian women's vocal techniques, we are not so much dealing incompetence as with codal *interference*.

Codal interference

Codal *incompetence* arises, as we just saw, when transmitter and receiver do not share the same store of musical signs, when the same musical sound[s], as *sign*, stand for different things at the transmitting and receiving ends of the communication process. *Codal interference,* on the other hand, arises when transmitter and receiver *do* share the same basic vocabulary of musical signs but *differ* in terms of *sociocultural norms*. *Codal interference* means that the intended sounds get across and are basically understood but that 'adequate response' is obstructed by other factors, such as receivers' general like or dislike of the music and of what they think it represents, or by the music's recontextualisation in visual, verbal or social terms.

Returning, for purposes of illustration, to KICK-ASS ROCK from the 1980s, those that primarily hated the sounds of heavy metal and attacked the music's lyrics and lifestyle did *not* necessarily fail to understand the music's message as you or I did with the East African hyenas. Metal haters were codally competent enough to register that the music is loud and powerful, that its singers and soloists yell and scream, that it is supposed to make its listeners shout, extend arms in huge V-signs and so on. They were also aware that this sort of activity is best experienced at venues where lots of people are doing it all together at the same time. Indeed, heavy metal protagonists (soloists) have to be loudmouthed and loud-gestured because the instrumental backing they set themselves to be heard above, just like the society they and their audience live in, would otherwise drown them and they would disappear inaudibly and invisibly into an amorphous mass of sound and society.

Metal haters, just like its fans, know that nice guys and good girls, with a well-mannered, reserved and demure behavioural strategy for social success, are out of the question in metal aesthetics that demand vulgarity, lavish amounts of ego projection and high volume to make the music work. Codal interference will arise if you have invested lots of energy into cultivating a nice-guy or good-girl identity and little or none into nourishing the self-celebratory parts of your self. You will find the latter anathema, not so much because the music seems to spit on the nice guys and good girls as because you have worked hard at re-

pressing the vulgar loudmouth and garish slob inside you that threatens your efforts to please those in authority as a means to gaining social power and approval. You understand the music only too well but your sociocultural norms and motivations are antagonistically opposed to the expression of cathartic disgust, desperation or self-celebration that the music might give you too.

Codal interference can work in the opposite direction if you think of metal fans incapable of deriving any enjoyment from hearing a classical string quartet. The delicacy and small but effective means of expression associated with thise type of music can easily become a taboo area of affective and gestural activity for those who experienced alienation and failure at school, perhaps those whose peer group enthusiasm and social restlessness got them thrown out of class, those who hated having to learn the recorder, or who resented the successful upper middle class pupils and teachers who seemed to love classical music so much. It is no wonder if those who already feel oppressed cannot embrace music that involves, among other expressive features, qualities like delicacy, control and containment. Just like the good guys and nice girls who can't stand heavy metal, oppressed metal fans who hate classical string quartets also miss out on essential aspects of music's semiotic richness.

If social and psychological fear or resentment of certain music and what it is heard as representing interfere with the communication of intended musical messages, deep identification with a certain music can do the same in reverse. In 1972, for example, the Strawbs, a politically conservative English band, recorded a tune called *Union Man* in which they parodied a trade union member in the lyrics and a proletarian pub or music-hall singalong 'feel' in the music: they intended to ridicule political views, people and music they did not like. Unfortunately for the Strawbs, but fortunately for socialists in the UK, the British left loved *Union Man* and adopted it as their own anthem on picket lines. Codal interference arose in this instance because of diametrically opposed political views and divergence of cultural identity between transmitter and receiver. It is also clear that codal interference is in this instance related to codal incompetence because The Strawbs had radically misunderstood the British record-buying public's store of signs.

Sometimes the words of a song can interfere with your reception of the musical message. For example, if you had sung the well-known Welsh hymn tune *Cwm Rhondda* with its original words 'Guide me, O thou great Jehovah!' for twenty years in the local Methodist chapel and then, for the first time, heard lager louts sing it with lewd lyrics as you walked past the pub one night, it is doubtful whether you would ever sing or feel the tune in the same way ever again. Similarly, visual narrative can also interfere with musical messages, as so often happens with the use in TV ads of music you know from before. You only need think of the start of Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* in ads for fabric softeners and office machinery [☙00], or of Dvořák's *New World Symphony* for sliced bread, or of black US bluesman Muddy Waters' *Hoochy Coochy Man* for jeans worn by young white US males.[13]

Codal interference works in two ways with these TV ads. First, if you knew the music before seeing the ad, the connotations and context of your previous hearing[s] of the music will be challenged, interfered with, just as the lewd lager-lout words interfered with your previously established understanding of the Methodist hymn tune. Given your prior knowledge of the music, it is quite possible that the commercial message may not have the intended effect of interesting you in the product advertised because it interferes with your existing 'sociocultural norms'. In cases like this, advertisers let their zeal to sell get in the way of their ability to interest you in the product, while your prior knowledge of the music interferes with an 'adequate response' to their intended sales pitch. Second, if, on the other hand, you *didn't* know the music before seeing the advert and then heard the music at a concert or on the radio, you would probably think of the advert you saw earlier. In this case, the music's paramusical accompaniment (visual, verbal) in the ad won't necessarily interfere with your perception of the music be-

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13. The ads are: (1) *Copiatrici Gevafax* on RAI (Italy, 1983) and Silan fabric softener (Dutch TV, 1980s); (2) *Hovis* bread on ITV (UK), late 1980s; (3) *Levi 501* jeans, MTV Europe, c. 1990. Stanley Kubrik started the audiovisual popularisation of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, using it three times in *2001* (1968) to underscore aspects of overwhelming importance relating to the universe and human existence. The relevant passage in *Also sprach Zarathustra's* original programme (1898) is also pretty grandiose. Please see video 00 for further details.

cause you never heard it before without visuals or voiceover. It will, however, certainly conflict with types of semiosis relevant to hearing the same music without such accompaniment, or in a different paramusical context, because you just can't get the previously established connotations of the ad out of your head. Codal interference is certainly intentional in the advertising examples just given, the whole idea being that consumers associate the music, previously intended for, and used under, other circumstances, with the product being marketed: it's a form of connotative hijacking.[14]

Sometimes these intentional codal interferences, including the connotative hijacking, serve their purpose, as with the adverts just mentioned and as in the case of the Sousa march which became the *Monty Python* theme tune (Chapter 00). Sometimes intended interference doesn't work, as with the Strawbs' *Union Man* (p.129), and sometimes it only half works, as in the next and final example, drawn once again from personal experience.

In 1981, Swedish Radio asked me to provide theme music for a programme series for and about immigrants. The programme's title, *Jag vill leva, jag vill dö i Norden*,[15] is the last line of the Swedish national anthem and provided a useful starting point. Since Sweden is the host nation into whose established majority culture immigrants must assimilate, I started with a full-blown, grandiose, official-sounding version of the national anthem's last line. Of course, my budget couldn't pay for a symphony orchestra or a decent brass band, so I settled for recording the line myself on full organ in a local church. In fact, that was a better solution because end-of-year school ceremonies in Sweden are often held in churches and are quite a nationalistic affair. OK, the OFFICIAL NATIONAL CEREMONY organ sound took care of the powerful host-nation side of the story but the series was not supposed to be a nationalist PR stunt, so I also needed to reflect something of the conflicts and problems of immigrant life. Incidentally, when describing my intentions here, I am retrospectively verbalising mainly *musical* concepts and

14. See, for example, the CD *25 Commercial Classics* (1994).
15. Literally translated 'I want to live, I want to die in the North', i.e. in the Nordic country, i.e. in Sweden.

'feels' that constituted the *object* of the recording which became the *sign*. It was really only when codal interference affected the relationship between my *object* and the producer's *final interpretants* that I had to start rationalising, in verbal terms, what I had done musically.

I put the first aspect of IMMIGRANT PROBLEMS into music by replacing the grand final chord of the national anthem with a more disturbing sonority. I quickly faded that WORRY chord to a much lower volume that could be held throughout the rest of the signature to allow solo 'immigrant instruments' to play the same melodic phrase (the last line of the Swedish national anthem) at different points in different keys and at different pitches. The first 'out-of-key individual immigrant' to play the national anthem was a dirty-sounding electric guitar which I included for two reasons: [1] I was not the only rock-playing English-speaking immigrant in the country; [2] rock music was in 1981 itself fast becoming an integral part of the host nation's mainstream culture. After the rock guitar I added accordion (Swedish *and* immigrant again) in another different key and then mandolin as a generic 'ethnic folk lute' to represent Sweden's numerous Greek (*bouzouki*), Turkish (*saz*), Russian (*balalaika*) and Andean (*charango*) immigrants (instruments). The last 'out-of-key ethnic instrument' representation was soprano recorder, standing in for a South American *quena* or *pinkillo*. The final flute note was left loud, high, piercing, alone and long enough, with extra reverb, so that it be easily cross-faded into the speaker's introductory words.

Those twenty-odd seconds of theme music were not without humour but I also wanted them to sound a bit disconcerting. Why? Well, as an immigrant in a majority host culture, you try to fit in and to 'sing from the same hymn sheet' as the majority, but you often get the feeling that you'll always be somehow out of step, out of sync, out of tune and out of place because, like it or not, you think, feel, act, look or sound different to the host-nation majority. Since it was part of that experience that needed to be in those twenty seconds of music, I thought it would be effective to juxtapose musical soundbytes that didn't normally belong together in the same piece: I was in other words intentionally using codal interference (although that term didn't yet exist to denote that practice). Hence the official-sounding festive pomp of the organ *plus* the WORRY

chord, *plus* each individual and timbrally distinct instrument repre-
senting a different culture. All those elements were supposed to inter-
fere, like immigrants, with the first and most powerful statement on the
organ.◄ 00

The recording engineer and I made numerous mixes of the multitrack
recording. Apart from the full mix, there was one without the organ,
another without the distorted guitar, a third with neither organ nor gui-
tar, and so on. The only mix the producer liked was the one with just
the dubbed mandolin. She even made us dump the flute because it was
'too shrill'. Surprised at her reaction, I tried to explain why I had gone
to the trouble of recording a separate organ track outside the studio but
the organ and guitar were not acceptable, I understood, because they
didn't sound like immigrants. 'But I'm an immigrant, too, and Sweden
is the country we come to', I objected 'so Sweden has to be in there be-
cause you can't be an immigrant or feel like one if there's no host cul-
ture.' To cut a long story short, the only concession granted by the
producer was that, after much insistence from my side, the WORRY
chord could be held under the dubbed mandolin parts. It is that version
which was finally used as programme signature. I could content myself
with the fact that there was at least a slight musical hint that being an
immigrant might have its problems. ◄ 00

My interpretation of the producer's selection of just one element and
her rejection of all the others is not that she 'just didn't like it' or that it
was a matter of 'personal taste'. She seemed to me to be saying that
flutes can be cute or exotic, not shrill or piercing, in the same way that
host nations appreciate grateful and deferential immigrants who are
never angry, alienated or frustrated about their situation. She also
seemed to be saying that immigrants could not be from English-speak-
ing nations and not electric (so much for yours truly!). It was as if, in her
mind, we should all conform to a host-nation stereotype of immigrants
that assumes we all come from far-off and backward rural areas where
we all play pleasantly unfamiliar music on pleasantly unfamiliar
acoustic instruments. But worst of all was, in my opinion, that the sig-
nature theme could not include the constant presence and hegemony of
the host culture as a central issue affecting the lives of immigrants.

This little signature theme story illustrates codal interference on a grand scale. The producer knew as well as I did the values, attitudes and feelings encoded in the 'channel'. However, although we probably both had access to a very similar store of signs, our sociocultural norms and expectations were in definite conflict. She did not think my musical view of being an immigrant was suitable and, as an immigrant, I thought hers was both unrealistic and unsympathetic.

Of course, the producer had the final word and she is certainly entitled to her view. In fact, she may have thought of me as a codally incompetent transmitter in terms like 'he didn't come up with the goods'. Perhaps I was supposed to produce something happier and more catchy, something that would do no more than identify the programme and put potential listeners in a NO PROBLEMS frame of mind. However, since the only information I was given about the programme dealt with its content, I assumed that I was to focus on *that*. If, on the other hand, my job was to provide an innocuous musical identifier and to prevent listeners from switching channels, I should have been told so, or was I expected to read that between the lines?

Whatever the case may be, it is very possible that another communication problem caused the codal interference just described. That problem relates to the task of formulating an adequate brief, i.e. the instructions given to a musician or composer by someone who is usually not. Those difficulties are, in their turn, the reason for this book. The fact that muso discourse and non-muso discourse about music differ so radically, for all the reasons given in Chapters 2-4, calls for the development of models and of a terminology allowing musos and non-musos to better understand each other.

Summary

Chapters 1-4 were supposed to demystify notions of music and to explain why the epistemic divisions between music and other forms of knowledge are so entrenched in the West. In this chapter the focus was on basic concepts of meaning and communication. The main arguments can be summarised in the following seven points.

[1] Peirce's distinction between object and interpretant in relation to the sign allows for a dynamic view of musical semiosis. Even though it saves time in semantics if you use Saussure's *signifier - signified*, Peirce's triad *object - sign - interpretant* is more compatible with thinking about music in terms of symbolic *interaction* between humans. It is from this perspective that the *object* can be understood as conception or intended message at the transmitting end of a simple *transmitter - channel - receiver* communication model, and the *interpretant* as (surprise!) its interpretation at the receiving end.

[2] Since music works to such an overwhelming extent as a culturally specific sign system, its ability to carry meaning relies on the existence of a shared store of signs common to transmitters and receivers in the relevant cultural context. Although object (≈intended message) and interpretant (≈listener response) can never be identical, musical communication usually works, otherwise there would be no call for music on ceremonial occasions, nor in TV ads, computer games or anywhere else for that matter. However, there will be communication failure if the music uses unknown signs, or if interpretation of signs from the common store varies radically.

[3] Musical communication failures can occur for logistic reasons of acoustics, technology, etc., but their most common cause is codal incompetence or codal interference. *Codal incompetence* arises if transmitter and receiver do not share the same store of signs (including their meanings); it can occur at both the transmitting and receiving ends of the communication process. *Codal interference* arises when transmitter and receiver *do* share the same store of signs and their meanings but *do not* translate those same meanings into the same final interpretants. Differences in sociocultural norms are usually the cause of codal interference.

[4] Codal incompetence and codal interference (intentional or not) are prerequisites for shifts in musical meaning. Signs from one culturally specific store (or vocabulary) can be appropriated into another where they acquire a different meaning or function.

[5] Among Peirce's numerous trinities of sign types, one is of particular use to musical semantics: *icon - index - arbitrary sign*. Arbitrary signs (what Peirce calls *symbol*s) are rare in music, whereas icons are not uncommon and indices are virtually omnipresent.

[6] Connotation is not less concrete or less efficient than denotation and music is definitely not more polysemic than language. Music is a connotative, alogogenic sign system. Verbal descriptions of musical meaning must therefore be treated as very approximate verbal connotations of musically precise messages.

[7] Since connotation relies on the existence of previously established meaning[s], and since indices are signs connected either by causality, or by spatial, temporal or cultural proximity, to what they stand for, musical semiosis tends to be both connotative and indexical. That type of semiosis is what the next chapter is about.