

Popular Music Studies versus the 'Other'

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Music and Life-world. Otherness and Transgression in the Culture of the 20th Century.
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Introduction

The recurrence of terms like *otherness* and *difference* in academic literature has irritated me for some time now. Although I have told myself not to react so negatively, I have to admit that hearing the term *otherness* still reminds me of how I felt when words like *postmodernism* were in vogue. My impression, unsubstantiated until relatively recent reading (Callinicos 1989), was that *postmodernism* had been adopted as a defeatist intellectual strategy by the kind of colleague who seems more set on wearing trendy conceptual garb on the catwalk of cultural studies (including musicology) than in shedding light on the mediation of ideologies in the modern mass media. *Otherness* seemed to be another of those 'in' concepts — or was it? I was therefore very grateful to hear about this conference: the occasion would, I hoped, force me into thinking more closely about the *other* and allow me to either abandon my prejudices or to formulate a reasoned critique. I have decided to try for the latter, basing the critique on experience, starting in the mid sixties, as teacher, researcher or practitioner in the area of music and the mass media. The problematic relationship between these areas of work and *otherness* will become clear in what follows.

Defining other

Let me make clear from the outset that I do not think there is anything wrong with dualisms of alterity as such. To take such a view would be singularly foolish because everyday usage of the word *other* has equivalents in many languages.¹ *Other* (or one of its equivalents) is usually

opposable to a *one*, as in 'on the one hand'... 'on the other hand'. But *other* is sometimes used to mean *second* or *different*, this complicating matters considerably.² For example, the English language is one of many to include concepts whose etymology combines elements of *other*, *different* and *foreign* into one, the most striking examples being words like *alien*, *alienate* and *alienation*, all originating from Latin's *alius* (meaning *other*) and from its derivative adjective *alienus*, meaning 'belonging to another, foreign, unrelated, estranged, unfriendly, unsuitable'.³ There is no room here to analyse shifts in meaning between *other* and *different*, between *different* and *foreign*, between *foreign* and *strange*, and between *strange* and *unfriendly* or *unsuitable*, but it should be clear that there are stages at which the simple binary concepts of one and other become evaluative. When dealing with the academic concept of *otherness*, be it with a big or small 'O', we seem to be dealing with all these different aspects of *other*.

Eight dualisms of alterity

As a first step in sorting out my problems with scholarly concepts of alterity, I decided to list all notions of the *other* that seemed to me to be common academic currency. With the help of trusted colleagues⁴ I came up with the following list:

1. It may have equivalents in all languages as far as I know. I have only considered English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, Magyar, Russian, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, German, Dutch and Icelandic.
2. For example, Swedish adjective *andra* kan mean 'other' (*andra människor* = 'other people'), (2) 'second' (*andra plats* = second place), (3) 'different' (*det är andra bullar*, *det* = that's a different kettle of fish).
3. Translations and definitions are taken from *Cassell's Latin-English English-Latin Dictionary* (London 1968). Note also that in Ancient Greek *ἄλλος* meant other and *ἄλλοιος* different or strange (*Greek - English Lexicon*, ed. Liddell & Scott, London 1871).
4. I am grateful to Richard Middleton (Newcastle), Dave Harker (Manchester) and Margit Kronberg (Göteborg) for help and criticism while writing this paper. I am particularly indebted to Sara Cohen (Liverpool) and Pete Wade (Manchester) for supplying me with highly relevant references to anthropological literature.

1. the popular *other*;
2. the lower class *other*;
3. the black *other*;
4. the 'third world *other*';
5. the female *other*;
6. the national or ethnic *other*;
7. oppressed parts of subjectivity as the *other*;⁵
8. 'somewhere else' as the *other* (place).⁶

These eight *others* constitute a motley bunch of dualisms, some of which are reversible, others not. Some dualisms allow for the identification of a *one* to oppose against the *other*: other *others* do not. For example, each of the first five *others* — the popular, the lower class, the black, the 'third world', the female — presupposes the existence of an implicit *one* — the elite, the upper class, the white, the 'first world' and the male — without which none of the *others* can be logically identified as *other*. Once the *one* has been made explicit, each of these five dualisms of alterity can, at least theoretically, be reversed so that the *one* becomes the popular, the lower class, the black, the 'third world' or the female, and so that each of these can identify the elite, the upper class, the white, the first world or the male respectively as its own *other*. However, in the strange reality of fashionable academic discourse on culture, these last five concepts (elite, upper class, white, 'first world', male) are more likely to appear as implicit *ones*, less likely to figure as explicit *others*. This is a disturbing observation implying that if we use such dualisms of alterity in our own writing we will be obliged to take an elite, upper class, white, 'first world' male's world view for granted, even when attacking it. There are, as we shall see, ethical and ideological as well as intellectual problems with the uncritical acceptance of hegemonic categories of alterity.

5. This particular category may be a paraphrase of Lacan. Unfortunately, I have not yet found time to check this lead.
6. There are of course other common representations of the *other*, e.g. as the devil or the evil one. At this point in the text I only list those types of *other* that seem to me to have surfaced most frequently in recent European and North American studies of culture.

Another problem with the eight *others* listed above is, as has already been mentioned, that the sort of reversibility just applied to alterity dualisms one through five does not work in the same way on number six (national or ethnic *others*) and does not work at all on dualisms seven or eight (oppressed parts of subjectivity and the 'somewhere else'). With the national or ethnic *other* (no. 6), the differences constituting *otherness* are relative to the national or ethnic habitat of the person identifying the foreign nation or culture. Such identification of *otherness* can then go in either direction and may be either negative and derogatory or neutral and positive.⁷ With dualism number seven, on the other hand, there is no reversibility because the oppressed parts of one's subjectivity are, if oppressed, hardly in a position to do much conscious identification of any *others*. Similarly, *other* number eight — a real or imaginary *other* of place and/or time — cannot be reversed to identify here and now (this place and time) as an 'elsewhere' because places have no consciousness. Moreover, even if people living in a real other place or at a real other time (as with the national or ethnic *others* of dualism no. 6) may be able to indicate us here and now as the *other*, an imaginary elsewhere — a paradise, a Shangri-La, a heaven or hell — can only be supplied with imaginary people as *ones* to do any identification of any *others*.

Another strange aspect of the eight concepts listed above is that only one of them suggests that there might be problems with notions of alterity. I am referring here to *otherness* category number seven, to the '*other* as oppressed parts of subjectivity', the word 'oppression' making it clear that the process by which we identify the *other* may not only be fraught with difficulties but also possess ethical and political dimensions. This question of oppression and *otherness* ties in closely with the classical Marxist notion of aliena-

7. For example, since I am a foreigner in Australia, Scotland, etc. I might be identified either negatively as 'Pom', 'Sassenach', etc., or neutrally as an Englishman: in either case I am from another culture from those two viewpoints. On the other hand, some English people may refer negatively to people from 'other' places and cultures as 'Jocks', 'Krauts', 'Yanks', 'Paddies', etc. or neutrally as Scots, Germans, US-Americans, Irish, etc.

tion and we shall have occasion to return to this aspect of alterity. At this stage and in this context, however, it is important to note that many of the other dualisms of *otherness* listed above have recently come in for heavy criticism on the same grounds of uncritical acceptance of hegemonic discourse as we have already mentioned. For example, Strathearn (1987) has refuted the mechanistic reversal of the *other* in some feminist discourse of the eighties, while Kuper (1988), Torgovnick (1990) and Trouillot (1991) have provided convincing critiques of notions of the 'primitive' as *other*. Similarly, Goldberg (1993) and Jackson (1995) have argued authoritatively against racist notions of 'authenticity' and 'genuineness' in the 'third world' as supposedly positive *others*, while, closer to the home topic of this paper, Michelsen (1993) has challenged the construction of 'alternative' canons of authenticity in the rock and pop sphere.

Despite the incongruity of most of the concepts mentioned so far, despite recent critiques and despite classical theories of alienation, notions of the *other* have been quite tenacious in popular music studies. Such notions have in the past provoked me to write an open letter (Tagg 1989) in which I criticised the inverted racism of the white liberal pop music scholar's idealisation and falsification of music history relating to both Europeans and Africans in North America. Similarly, as co-founder of The International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM), I have also felt obliged to warn against the long-term separation of popular music studies from studying other kinds of music (Tagg 1985). In both these cases I felt that idealistic and ethically dubious notions of *otherness* needed to be criticised.

It is with this background and in this critical context that I will now draw attention to the problems of conceptualising popular music practices in terms of *otherness*. I will spend the rest of my time on three concrete instances in which uncritically accepted notions of the *other* are not so much problematic as destructive towards the teaching and research of music in the modern media.⁸

Three dubious others

The three *others* I will briefly cover here in relation to popular music studies are: (1) the racist *other* in the context of US pop music history; (2) the metaphysical highbrow *other* of hegemonic discourse about European art music; (3) the lowbrow *other* of popular music. These three *others* are of course all closely interlinked.

The racist other⁹

The history of music in the USA is central to our understanding of music in the modern mass media and the acculturation of musics of West African and of European origin is a key issue in our understanding of that history. One basic problem in this context has been that much white liberal discourse on the music of African North Americans has emphasised 'difference' and *otherness* to the extent that almost any musical practice not conceived of as belonging to a parodically narrow European conservatory aesthetic has been assumed to have non-European (usually African) origins.

For example, tones performed as pitches outside those fixed in equal tone temperament have usually been characterised as 'blue notes' — and 'therefore' black — as, indeed, have melismatic runs in anhemitonic pentatonic modes, regardless of whether such structural traits originated in the British Isles as much as (or more than) in West Africa. Another curious assumption has been that metronome sense is an intrinsically African trait, even though the music most frequently placed in the opposite corner — euroclassical music during the rise of colonialism — was, as Klingfors (1991: 346-350) convincingly documents, very keen on metronome sense. Consider, for example, the following statements.

8. At this point in the discourse it may be worth adding: (1) that I am used to teaching students in both music and communication studies; (2) that not many of these students will actually find employment nationally that is commensurate with their education; (3) that their spare time has been (and will probably continue to be) led to the soundtrack of various types of music disseminated via the electronic media.
9. Since I have dealt with this issue at length in an earlier publication (Tagg 1989), this account has been kept as short as possible.

'People with no sense of regular pulse have no honour'. 'Regular time is the soul of music' (Beer 1719: 166, ff.).¹⁰

'Accompanists who can't keep to a regular beat are vulgar and amateurish' (Mozart 1756: 266).¹⁰

'A good music teacher always keep his pupils on various types of dance music so they become rooted in the automatic aspect of the beat' (Kirnberger 1771).¹⁰

'He was a very accurate conductor and in matters of tempo... extremely reliable' (J.S. Bach obituary, 1754. Bach-Dokumente III, 1972: 666).¹⁰

The testimony of J S Bach's pupil Kirnberger, of Bach's obituary, of Leopold Mozart's and of a whole host of others about the central importance of keeping to the beat is apparently of little interest to self-styled keepers of the classical seal. In fact, such historical testimony is more likely to be of considerable embarrassment to them. 'Great music', their argument probably goes, 'cannot have been created by people who think that dance and beat are so important because those are the sorts of thing the rowdy masses enjoy in music. Bach and Mozart can't be wrong because they're Bach and Mozart, but we should keep quiet about their views on dance and the beat, in case our version of their music, with its aura of transcending both society and physicality, loses credibility. Metronome sense, improvisation, etc. must therefore be seen as belonging to *others* and not to *us* (the implicit *ones*).

Another way of falsifying music history is to treat 'black' *otherness* as a desirable kind of *difference* in its function of transgressing oppressive 'white' cultural patterns. The only trouble here is that this ostensibly positive projection relies on the dubious equation of the nineteenth-century conservatory canon with 'white', 'European'

10. Citations from Klingfors (1991:347, 355) are free translations of: (1) 'Wer nicht tactfest ist / ist auch selten Ehrenfest' ... 'so kann auch kein practicus, als ein musicus bestehen / der die mensur nicht vor die Seele der music lässet'; (2) 'De som inte har något begrepp om god smak håller inte tempot när de ackompanjerar (*niemals bey der Gleichheit des Tactes bleiben*); (3) 'Gute Tonlehrer haben ihre Schüler allezeit hauptsächlich zu Tanzstücken vershiedener Art angehalten, damit sie sich in dem Mechanischen des Takts festsetzen und ordentlich denken lernen ... Dies was zugleich die beste übung im Vortrag'; (4) 'Im Dirigieren war er sehr accurat; und im Zeitmaaße, welches er gemeinglich sehr lebhaft nahm, überaus sicher'.

and 'us'. According to this view, 'white' musical practices are equivalent to what the second-rate teacher in a third-rate conservatory regards as aesthetically acceptable and 'black' is almost everything that does not fit into that scheme of things. The iniquity of this notion of 'black' *otherness* is not only that it is based on demonstrable falsehoods of music history (e.g. the metronome sense) but that it is insulting to both black and white. The dichotomy imposes categories upon us which by extension imply that people of African origin in the USA are the sole transgressors of an oppressive canon and that we Europeans can only oppose that canon if we view ourselves in some way as 'black'. Such a notion of *otherness* leads to racist essentialisation of practices of musical structuration and to our projection of corporeal values in music on to people with dark skin and of rational organisation in music on to people with pale skin. This double insult, deriving from an uncritical and overzealous concern with *otherness*, projects a similar sort of animal status on to African North Americans as was conferred on them by the slave trade, while inflicting us with the equally inaccurate and insidious self-image of disembodied upholders of material progress, rational organisation and civilisation. It results in our inability to accept Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* as a 'serious' work, in our disappointment and confusion when Jimi Hendrix chose not to bump and grind with his guitar, in our interpretation of Milt Jackson's vibraphone licks or of Charlie Pride's ballad singing as not 'truly black', etc.

The other part of the insult is our own ignorance (real or feigned) about European music: about classical composers as improvisers, about popular singing 'between the cracks', about the relatively late introduction of monometric periodicity, about melismatic and ecstatic singing in the British Isles, about metronome sense, etc. In short, anything about the music of our own peoples on our own continent that might resemble anything which we have been taught to stereotypically identify as coming from Africa and anything about the music of West Africa that might resemble what our music is supposed to be like (e.g. complexity of organisation and

structure)¹¹ is denied and the frequently false caricatures of difference exaggerated. Suitable slogans for this inverted racist version of the *other* would be 'vive la fausse différence' and 'mort à la vraie similarité!'

The metaphysical other

A similar fixation on difference rather than dialectic concern with both difference and similarity characterises another problematic *other* in the context of popular music studies. This, the second of this paper's three *others*, prevents us from seeing our own European music history of socialised corporeality and emotionality in any other terms than denial and transcendence.¹² I am referring here to the metaphysical qualities attributed to certain types of instrumental music produced in mainly Germanic Europe during the period from around 1730 until about 1960 and to the canonisation (by conservatories and musicology departments) of that music as 'classical' (Ling 1984, 1986; Stockfelt 1988: 68-92). I am also referring to Hegel's hierarchy of musical experts and punters (*Kenner* and *Laie*),¹³ to A B Marx's notion of music as 'Sanctuary of the Higher Arts' (*Asyle der höheren Künste*),¹⁴ to Tieck's argument that 'music'... 'freed from having to depict "finite", distinct emotions'... 'becomes the expression of "infinite yearning"',¹⁵ and to Wacken-

11. It is hardly surprising that complexity of rhythmical organisation, as documented, for example, by Nketia (1974) or Chernoff (1979) in relation to various types of West African music, does not figure as a factor of any importance in traditional European musicology's criteria of aesthetic excellence.
12. *Transcendence* is used here in Emerson's sense of [imagined as] 'existing apart from, not subject to the limitations of the material universe', while *transcend* is taken to mean 'surpassing the range or grasp of human reason'. These definitions are similar, though not identical, to Schelling's notion of *transcendent* ('explaining matter and objective things as products of subjectivity') but different to other philosophical usage, e.g. 'not realisable in experience' but 'pre-supposed in and necessary to experience' (Kant) and 'higher than or not included in any of Aristotle's ten categories of scholastic philosophy'. Unless otherwise stated, *socialise*, *socialisation* etc. are used in this paper in the Habermasian sense of the process by which the activities and ideas of individuals are patterned according to their objective historical relation to the society in which they live, not in Marx's sense of *Vergesellschaft-en*, -ung.

roder's idea that music represents the 'utter submission of the spirit in the surging torrent of feelings'.¹⁶ My favourite metaphysical notion of 'classical' instrumental music comes from Hughes Félicité de Lamennais, who wrote:

[music]... 'lifts man above earthly things and imports him to a perpetual upward motion.... Music's goal is infinite beauty. Consequently it tends to represent the ideal model, the eternal essence of things, rather than things as they are. For, as Rousseau so correctly observed, "Outside the individual being existing on his own, there is nothing beautiful apart from that which is not."¹⁷

There is no time here to trace the history of the bourgeois notion of the individual and its related propensity for such romantic meanderings into the realms of the sublime. It is nevertheless worth restating the obvious fact that the bourgeois mythologisation and idealisation of certain types of instrumental music relates very closely to the rise of rationalism and individualism, to the bourgeois revolution and to the abandonment of the Fourth Estate. Part of the strange role cut out for official views of music during the

13. 'What the layman (*Laie*) likes in music is the comprehensible expression of emotions and ideas, something substantial, its contents, 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'. (Author's translation of Zoltai 1970: 260, original source Hegel *Ästhetik*, Berlin 1955. 'Der *Laie* liebt in der Musik vornehmlich den verständlichen Ausdruck von Empfindungen und Vorstellungen, das Stoffartige, der Inhalt, und wendet sich daher vorzugsweise der begleitenden Musik zu; der *Kenner* dagegen, dem die inneren musikalischen Verhältnisse der Töne und Instrumente zugänglich sind, liebt die Instrumentalmusik in ihrem kunstgemäßen Gebrauch der Harmonien und melodischen Verschlingungen und wechsellenden Formen; er wird durch die Musik selbst ganz ausgefüllt.') Please note that Hegel included vocal music under *Begleitmusik*.
14. For more on the 'sanctuary of the higher arts', see, as discussed by Stockfelt (1988), A B Marx *Ludwig van Beethoven. Leben und Schaffen*, Verlag Otto Janke, Berlin 1901.
15. Ludwig Tieck *Phantasien über die Kunst* (1799), cited in Dahlhaus (1989: 18). Tieck continues: ... 'and this indefinite quality is superior to the exactness of vocal music, rather than inferior, as was believed during the Enlightenment'.
16. Cited in Dahlhaus (1989: 16). No primary source given.

subsequent hegemony of capitalism has in other words been connected to a system of bourgeois socialisation and character building. According to this system, demonstrably 'finite' and 'earthly' aspects of human experience categorisable in terms of emotionality and sensuality, including music, are shunted off to 'other worlds'. While popular and proletarian forms of music were relegated as *gesunkenes Kulturgut* to the lowest divisions of *Trivialmusik*, *U-Musik*¹⁸ and light or lowbrow entertainment (until recently, all too low to touch with an academic barge pole), the instrumental music traditions of the new elite, inherited from the previous ruling class, were beamed up into the realms of the artistically 'sublime' about which Hegel, Tieck, Wackenroder and De Lamennais waxed so poetical. As a utopian fantasy, an artistic Shangri-La, this latter *other* belongs to what was listed earlier as alterity dualism no. 8. Now, the otherworldly world imagined by the romantic metaphysicists of bourgeois music shares many traits in common with notions of paradise found in other cultures. One these traits — the ultimate good — is described by Swedish philosopher Per-Olof Olofsson (1987) in terms of a nonexistent referent for the primal fantasy of regaining the lost state of total dependence and irresponsibility experienced, with varying degrees of comfort, by every foetus inside the womb of any mother in any culture.¹⁹

Assuming, at least for a couple of minutes, that Primal Fantasy is (for biological reasons) something experienced by every human

17. Hughes Félicité Robert de Lamennais *Ésquisse d'une philosophie* (1840), part II, book 8, chapters 1, 2 and Book 9, chapter 1, cited in Le Huray (1988: 351-355). The Rousseau quote is not translated by Le Huray, and understandably so, for its meaning is quite obscure: 'Hors le seul être existant par lui même, il n'y a rien de beau que ce qui n'est pas'.
18. *Gesunkenes Kulturgut* = cultural sediment that has seeped down from above — the crumbs from the master's table or the results of an imagined cultural 'trickle-down effect'. Some German musicologists swear that there are no negative values in the term *U-Musik* (ostensibly an abbreviation of *Unterhaltungsmusik* = 'entertainment music') despite the existence of clear 'unter=under=lower' parallels like *U-Bahn*, *U-Boot*, and *U-Mensch* (not to mention *Unterleib*, *Unterwelt*, *Unterstufe*, *Unterhose*, *Unterbewusstsein*).

being, it would be equally obvious to assume that different societies, with different economic systems and cultural traditions, will construct patterns of socialisation dealing with Primal Fantasy in ways that suit the particular social and political system of individuals growing up as part of that system. Thus, there is considerable cultural variation in the musical representation of transition from an everyday material or intellectual mode of interface with the world outside the individual to one where less usually practised modalities take over. Musical structuration of listening modes can vary from repetitive drumming or chanting (e.g. trances induced by a Saami or Inuit shaman, Haitian voodoo ceremony, two hours of kick drum track at 124-160 bpm plus 110 dB, etc.), through relaxed euphoria and easy listening (e.g. dedicated rave-goer in chill-out space or allowing your favourite music to make you cry or to give you goose pimples), to total meditative involvement or to the concentrated, reflexive listening advocated by Adorno in response to music in the European bourgeois art music tradition. The strange thing about the European classical/romantic socialisation of Primal Fantasy through music is not that it favours the last two of these listening types but (a) that it does so at the expense of other listening modes,²⁰ and (b) that it continues to dominate the institutionalised teaching and research of music aesthetics. In other

19. From Olofsson's text it is possible to interpret Primal Fantasy as imagination of ideal states of total bliss — the ultimately Good and Beautiful, heaven, paradise, nirvana, Eden etc. It is not unreasonable to view this ability to imagine such states as an existential, anthropologically universal human experience based on our life in the womb. I am not suggesting that the foetal state is ideal, especially not for babies whose time in the womb depended on a mother who was ill or depressed or alcoholic or abusing other drugs. It is, however, irrefutable that every foetus is totally dependent and totally without responsibility and that this state of total independence and irresponsibility can never be regained. However, we are not concerned here with anthropological reasons for the cultural construction of different types of paradise in different societies but with socially specific expressions of the phenomenon.
20. See Stockfelt (1988) for a well problematised and nuanced account of musical listening competence according to the individual's *range* of listening modalities, not according to a restriction of listening modalities according to ethnocentric and hierarchical criteria.

words, Adorno's hit parade of listening modes and Hegel's notion of musical experts versus punters are still very much alive in institutions of music and musicology throughout the world. To put the matter in eighties-style sales-speak, we are all expected to strive for a ride in the 'executive' listening class and to shun the supposedly cheap thrills of 'economy' class music consumption. Of course, this alterity is reversible and allows for the idealisation of the 'economy class' as the equally dubious *one* of anti-art street cred, rock/pop authenticity, etc.

With the European bourgeois art music's disembodied and meta-physical location of musical transcendence, it is of course possible to construct equally metaphysical theories of musical absolutism and to state that music expresses nothing. This particular form of idealism allows 'executive class' music to be related to 'eternity', to 'timeless' values, such associative magic rendering it apparently superior to music which lays no claim to such suprasociality. Perhaps this is why the high priests of art music aesthetics sometimes become indignant when their music is discussed as though its structures were socially meaningful or related in some way to political, economic and ideological activity. The power of this meta-physical idealism should not be underestimated. It is still somewhere on the agenda, implicitly or explicitly, of most departments of music(ology) I have had to deal with. However, this epistemological disaster of the 'sublime' and 'better' world to which we can escape with our 'good' music²¹ could not exist without the prior existence of uncritical and irrational notions of *otherness* in the form of that *other* world, that lost paradise, that utopia. The problem here is not that we create images of happiness or of a better future or that we express Primal Fantasy in other positive ways but that the utopia associated with the conservative aesthetics of

21. This was a recurrent theme in parlour song (cf. Claribel's *I Cannot Sing The Old Songs*). It is also the punch line (repeated at the end) in Schubert/Schober's *An die Musik*: 'Du holde Kunst, in wieviel grauen Stunden, | Wo mich des Lebens wilder Kreis umstrickt, | Has du mein Herz zu warmer Lieb entzunden, | Hast mich in eine beßre Welt entrückt!! In eine beßre Welt entrückt!'

European art music is institutionalised as though it had a real material existence. In fact the social decontextualisation of the music is a prerequisite for its idealisation, mystification and presentation as something unattainable and eternal. Such reification of certain musical practices into quasi-eternal and purportedly suprasocial *objets d'art* ('timeless masterworks') produced by alienated demi-gods ('all great masters suffer') is in its turn a prerequisite for the official falsification, institutionalisation and adoption of that music as part of an oppressive ideology, as a type of transcendental *other* world 'superior' to the *other* ('lower') transcendental qualities of popular entertainment.²²

The problems with this particular *other* are in other words numerous. Its inaccessibility is not only related to the material nonexistence of the desired state but also to the fact that Primal Fantasy, along with other socialisable expressions of preconscious and subconscious cognition, have been banished to what might be called the oppressed parts of European bourgeois subjectivity (*otherness* category 8). The time it took for rationalism to get around to being rational about what it perceived as irrational provides living proof of the tenacity of alienated parts of bourgeois subjectivity.²³ In this way, imagination, lateral thinking, connotation, musical cognition, patterns of sensuality, etc. were mystified and marginalised with appalling ease and complacency²⁴ to the extent that many musi-

22. It's all a bit like belief in the religion of market economy and 'free' enterprise which, as Chomsky (1996) points out, is advantageous to an increasingly minute proportion of humanity and which makes neither ethical nor economic sense.
23. Dahlhaus (1989:56) explains the matter as follows. '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, as passed down by Schopenhauer from Tieck and by Wagner from Schopenhauer, reigned virtually unchallenged even in the decades of fin-de-siècle modernism.' It also took rationalism a long time to get round to thinking about its own irrationality vis-a-vis the material world, the non-dialectic idealisation of objectivity being complementary to irrationality towards subjectivity. Problems of ecological survival have exacerbated the epistemological debacle of idealised objectivity.

cians still feel obliged to behave as *others* (as typical musicians) in the first instance and as human beings or full members of society in second place. None of this alterity has been of much use to music studies of any sort (not to mention to musicians), not because musical cognition is the same as, say, verbal cognition — it is obviously not — but because music is evaluated according to the logocentric hierarchy of learning as an alien *other*, as symbolic system at a lower level than words and numbers. For this reason, music has generally been placed towards the bottom of the academic heap at schools and universities in our part of the world. Despite music's obvious and frequently documented importance in terms of money and time in social reality, it is demonstrably not worth the same as maths, physics or English in the dominant ideology of knowledge. This perfunctory attitude towards music as a school or university subject estranges those levels of cognition which are best catered for by music and removes them from the intellectual territory we associate with understanding. Music is consistently and logocentrically regarded as polysemic, as vague and emotional, as something too mysterious, too magic, too difficult, too different, or even too insignificant to be understood, analysed and related in a systematic fashion to other parts of our subjectivity or to the social or material world in which we and that music both have our material and ideological being. 'Classical' musicology, with its structural formalism, has never seriously sought to question notions of absolute music and has therefore exacerbated the alienation of important aspects of our subjectivity by banishing them to a mentally inaccessible never-never land. This metaphysical kind of *other* is thoroughly anti-intellectual. It is also totally counterproductive when it comes to the task of understanding the mediation of ideologies through nonverbal sound in the modern media.

24. Jung (1964: 92) put the matter as follows. 'We still complacently assume that consciousness is sense and the unconscious is nonsense.'

The lowbrow other

The final type of *other* to deal with is directly related to the previous one. Over the last quarter-century I have had to deal recurrently with its unabashed inanity. Such inanity is perhaps best illustrated by the way in which IASPM's first conference was covered by two UK periodicals.

'In announcing the first International Conference on Popular Music Research, held at Amsterdam in June 1981, *The Times* Diary printed the headline "Going Dutch - The Donnish Disciples of Pop" (*The Times* 16 June 1981). Judging from the generous use of inverted commas, 'sics' and 'would-you-believe-it' turns of phrase, The Times diarist was... 'baffled by the idea of people getting together for some serious discussions about a phenomenon which the average Westerner's brain probably spends around twenty-five per cent of its lifetime registering, monitoring and decoding.' (Tagg 1982: 37)

The same conference was covered by the *New Musical Express* (20 June 1981, p. 63) in the following terms.

'Meanwhile, over in Amsterdam this weekend, high foreheads from the four corners of the earth (Sid and Doris Bonkers) will meet for the first International Conference on Popular Music at the University of Amsterdam. In between the cheese and wine parties, serious young men and women with goatee beards and glasses will discuss such vitally important issues as "God, Morality and Meaning in the Recent Songs of Bob Dylan".²⁵ Should be a barrel of laughs'...

At the time (1981), I found *The Times* and the *NME* to be the most unlikely of bedfellows. After all, I thought, the *NME*, viewed from the contemporary cultural high ground of *The Times* culture pages, would surely come across as a clearly lowbrow *other*, as the UK organ for loudmouths and anarchic rock fans and as the nation's prime scribal representation of a blatantly commercial music culture. I also assumed that the *NME*'s high priests of fun would reciprocally be likely to view *The Times*'s high priests of the classical as an obvious highbrow *other*. However, this well-worn reversible dualism of alterity clearly served not so much to encourage difference as to censure it because both poles of the dualism showed a

25. No such talk was ever on the conference programme. Actually it is the title of Wilfrid Mellers's article in *Popular Music* 1 (1981: 143-157).

striking convergence of opinion: they both agreed it was silly to treat popular music as an area for serious study. This shared sense of incongruity implies one of four things: (1) that popular music is deemed so worthless that it cannot be taken seriously; (2) that music academics are so hopeless that the prospect of them trying to deal with anything as important as popular music is as absurd as they are; (3) that popular music is fun and that studying it seriously will somehow take the fun out of it; (4) that academic studies are serious and therefore incapable of dealing with the fun that popular music represents.

The first argument — that popular is not worth taking seriously — would probably have come from the highbrow direction and is patently ignorant. Not only does it pour scorn on all those musicians working in the media who spend years refining their skills, hours practising, recording and mixing in order to make sounds *a*, *b* and *c* rather than *x*, *y* and *z* in the order $p \rightarrow q$ rather than $s \rightarrow t$. It also seems to disregard the fact that popular music is serious enough a business for a veritable army of journalists, including those employed by the *NME* and *The Times*, to derive an income from writing about it.

The second argument — that traditional scholarship is incapable of dealing with such a complex cultural phenomenon as popular music — is less specious, as should be clear from our critique of the metaphysical *other* (see the metaphysical and lowbrow *others*, above). Nevertheless, to view the academic world as full of immutable ivory tower stereotypes is highly ahistorical. Quoting my 1981 account again (Tagg 1982: 39), it is worth observing that:

'To those of us who during the fifties and sixties played both Scarlatti and soul, did palaeography and Palestrina crosswords as well as working in steelworks, and who walked across quads on our way to the pop club, the serious study of popular music is not a matter of intellectuals turning hip or of mods and rockers going academic. It is a question of (a) getting together two equally important parts of experience, the intellectual and emotional, inside our own heads and (b) being able as music teachers to face pupils whose musical outlook has been crippled by those who present "serious music" as if it could never be "fun" and "fun music" as though it could never have any serious implications'.

Since those days many musically interested intellectuals and intellectually interested musicians, most of whom have grown up in a much more music-saturated media world than that of my youth, have applied themselves to the serious study of popular music. Thus, whereas it may have been no more than simple exploitation of populist prejudice in 1981 to treat serious scholars of music in the mass media as 'whackademics',²⁶ it would be stupid to treat us like that today. This does not mean there are no charlatans in popular music studies: it just means there are more popular music scholars, good or bad, and that it is becoming increasingly difficult to marginalise the subject. It should also be added that any demarginalisation of popular music studies that may have occurred over the last generation has done so in spite of, not thanks to, the reversible lowbrow-highbrow dichotomy of alterity.

There are three main ways in which lowbrow-highbrow alterity has directly and negatively affected the spread of popular music studies. These effects should be seen in the context of the marketisation of university courses and of the increasing popularity of course options in popular music and mass communication studies. Universities and comparable institutions of learning that wish to cash in on student interest in popular music have therefore had to establish attractive courses and to find teachers to run them. The notions of a highbrow *one* versus a lowbrow *other* and vice versa in this context have meant: (1) that most popular music courses, practical or theoretical, are kept separate from the study of European art music, such separation perpetuating demonstrable falsehoods of music history (Tagg 1985, 1989; Tagg and Clarida 2003); (2) that teachers for the new course options attracting increased student registration have been recruited by persons with expertise solely in the highbrow *one* and with no expertise in the lowbrow *other*, with

26. Expression used by the type of UK journalist who looks for stories of 'whacko' (= mad) academics that can be ridiculed for wasting public money on studying stupid things. A reactionary implicit consensus of popular anti-intellectual prejudice among the newspaper readership determines what the journalist can play on and, consequently, which people and actions are to be considered mad, stupid and a waste of space.

the result that some of the new courses may be run by people of questionable competence; (3) that, due to the identification by persons lacking in popular music expertise of our area of studies as a 'fun' and lowbrow *other*, there has been a tendency to underestimate the complexity and multiplicity of popular music practices, with the result that many of the new courses are underfunded in terms of physical and human resources.²⁷

The last two arguments, mentioned previously, against the serious study of popular music both imply a dichotomy of alterity between 'fun' and 'serious'. This dichotomy rhymes well with other generally accepted categories of experience established in our culture. I am referring here to the atomisation, compartmentalisation and polarisation of the body and mind, of emotion and intellect, of private and public, of individual and collective, of implicit and explicit, etc. This 'never-the-twain-shall-meet' syndrome is totally untenable in popular music studies because few things are more insulting to the intelligence of any young person attending university in the UK today than to hear that large parts of your subjectivity and important aspects of your cognition — in this instance those connected with dancing and music — are not to be taken seriously because they are fun or because the hegemonic view of knowledge in the academic institution you attend is that your fun is trivial. Put in simple terms, music has become so ubiquitous and so central to everyday living that its marginalisation to the state of an *other* is patently ridiculous.

27. For example, I was trained as a classical musician and musicologist. I have no formal training in social sciences or philosophy. And yet those inexperienced in the field of popular music studies often falsely assume that I am an expert in the sociology, anthropology, economics, technology, psychology, aesthetics and philosophy of music as well! Local media also seem to expect me to speak authoritatively about rave culture, film music, Merseybeat, *mariachi* and the Eurovision Song Contest, all at the drop of a hat! Conversely, I know several respected colleagues who have no formal musical training and who are nevertheless expected to run popular music courses at university level.

What to do with the other

In this paper I have given three short examples of how dualisms of alterity are not so much problematical in the study of music in the modern media as incompatible with that area of enquiry. First, I tried to summarise how the notion of a 'black other' essentialises matters of musical production in terms of race, of how it can lead to the falsification of music history, and how it clouds issues of oppression exerted not only by Europeans on enslaved Africans and their descendants but also by Europeans upon themselves. After that, I tried briefly to describe how the immaterial and supposedly suprasocial 'other world' constructed by Europe's romanticists of the musically 'sublime' illogically legitimises its own social and material institutionalisation, as well as that of the class associated with that music, to the extent that musical practices not belonging to that category — i.e. the majority of practices covered by popular music studies — are relegated to the status of an inferior *other*, along with the class associated with that music. Finally, I suggested that this lowbrow *other* is a totally untenable concept for popular music studies, not so much because it is the very substance of our field of enquiry as because it is so obviously an essential and ubiquitous part of everyday life.

At the start of this paper I mentioned differences in meanings of *other* and related words, suggesting that is difficult to unpick shifts of meaning as you pass from *other* to 'different' to 'strange' to 'unfriendly'. The problems start, in other words, when *otherness* is associated with something that is not, or ought not to be, considered different, strange, unfriendly or unsuitable, i.e. when simple binary concepts like me and you, us and them, here and there, now and another time, near and far, home and away, same and different, familiar and strange, are wrongly evaluated. These evaluative types of *other* (in terms of familiar and unfamiliar, friendly and unfriendly, wanted and unwanted, right and wrong, good and bad, etc.) are of a clearly ideological character: some phenomena (usually the *ones*) are identified as good, others (usually the *others*) as bad, or, if the alterity is reversible, the opposite evaluative system

will rule so that, in the world of popular music for example, musicians should refuse to speak coherently, and notated music should automatically be regarded as anathema.²⁸ Thanks to the seamless changes from simple binary opposition to ideological statement, concepts of *otherness* need treating with extreme caution. A critical spotlight is also essential when considering in whose interests particular *others* are identified and what effects those dualisms actually produce.

It is difficult to see how popular music studies are enhanced by talk of the *other* (or by any other fashionable academic discourse) unless we identify why who is telling us what we ought to be thinking of as *other*. Why, for example, should anyone want believe that music is either suprasocial sublimity or cultural anathema? In whose interests is it that we should all think of music as vague, polysemic and mysterious? And who told 85% of the population that they were unmusical just because they couldn't play an instrument or hold a part in a choir even though they could spot the musical difference between two different types of detective story in less than two seconds? And why were we supposed to believe that the music of West Africa was so different from that of the rural proletariat of the British Isles who settled in the Virginias? Why these false dichotomies, these false *others*? What is it we are not supposed to know?

It is clear to me as a Northern European with some experience of popular music studies that knowledge of our subjectivity has been hidden from us by the political system into which we were born. For example, we have little or no access to the music history of our own working peoples before the 1920s: we have no more than a very vague idea of how it sounded or how it moved people. Nor are we really supposed to understand those aspects of our subjectivity to which music is frequently related and which are shunted off into conceptual ghettos of *otherness*, positive or negative, like the sublime, the Dionysian, the corporeal, and so on. At the same

28. MTV's Beavis & Butthead once remarked that 'bad is cool'. It may have been in the same episode as their comment 'thinking sucks', but I am not sure.

time, advertisers and other propagandists all rely on the systematic workings of such levels of cognition in terms of shared socio-cultural subjectivity to prime us for their messages. The only *other* concept covering this expropriation of our subjectivity by those already set on making money at our expense is alienation : our own intellectual powerlessness over the important aspects of our subjectivity is in inverse proportion to the power of the dominant ideology over us via those shared patterns of subjectivity.

Meanwhile many of our students and some of us may become unemployed, without income. We will then join the vast reserve army of labour, living ingredients in 'the accumulation of misery' which is 'a necessary condition corresponding to the accumulation of wealth' under capitalism (Marx 1976: 799). Personally, I see no reason why any of us should tolerate, let alone propagate, the mystification, repression and alienation of subjectivity any more than we accept a society based on the exploitation and alienation of labour.

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