

Text and Context as Corequisites in the Popular Analysis of Music

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1. Introduction

When asked to provide a contribution for an anthology or for a conference, I am usually expected to say something about popular music analysis. This occasion is no exception and I am pleased to oblige. However, over the last ten years, I have come to realise that the sort of *popular music analysis* I have been trying to develop for teaching purposes may in fact have more value in contributing to the development of a *popular analysis of music*. Therefore, although what follows is may be largely based on observations made in the course of teaching popular music theory, history and analysis, it will also, I hope, be of interest to those teaching or researching *any* sort of music.

One of the premises for this paper is the almost tautological fact that musical text and context can only exist symbiotically. If so, then any serious music analysis must relate one to the other. The problem is that music analysis, as it is conventionally taught, does not. The first half of this paper will therefore briefly examine central problems of text and context in music analysis. In the second half I will argue that certain contextual aspects can make an important contribution to improving methods of music analysis.

First, however, I think it is important to put the whole question of music analysis into its *own* context.

1.2. The popular analysis of music: an educational necessity

If we believe, in accordance with the UN Declaration of Human Rights, that all people should be able to form their own opinion on any subject of individual or collective interest,¹ then as many people as possible should be offered easy access to as much information as possible about how ideas are mediated, not only on the printed page but also in the audiovisual media. It is simply no longer possible to foster the critical spirit essential to independent thought by relying solely on numeracy and verbal literacy. Words and numbers may be the symbolic systems privileged in public education, but it is the audiovisual media rather than the written word that carry the most persuasive messages influencing which political candidates are elected and which governments are toppled, not to mention which commodities are sold, lifestyles led, fashions followed, myths maintained, and ideologies embraced. For most of its programming time, television, the most pervasive of audiovisual media, favours non-verbal aspects of sight and sound, the latter incorporating no mean

1. We are referring here to articles 18 and 19 of the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) | www.unhchr.ch/udhr/ | (02-03-23).

amounts of music. These circumstances underline the importance of developing and popularising studies of non-verbal communication in the mass-media. Music analysis has an obvious role to play in this larger context. The only problem is we have yet to reach the point where music analysis can adequately meet the ethical and educational demands that music's central role in the audiovisual media make upon it. The reasons for that inadequacy are historical and far too complex to deal with in this paper, but they all share one trait in common — the dissociation of musical text and context. In order to lay some conceptual foundations for the development of a music analysis which might meet the ethical and educational challenge just mentioned, it will, however, be necessary to briefly discuss at least one of the obstacles which that dissociation has thrown in our path.

1.3. Institutional obstacles

The most obvious obstacle to the development of a popular analysis of music is the way in which the dissociation of musical text and context is *institutionalised*. To clarify the problem we need to posit the central contradiction of music studies: that between MUSIC AS KNOWLEDGE and KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MUSIC (see table 1). The way in which differences between these 'knowledges' are conceptualised and institutionalised in our culture provide, of course, just one example the Great Epistemological Divide in Western thought.²

Table 1 Types of musical knowledge

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

By MUSIC AS KNOWLEDGE I mean knowledge *in* rather than about music. This intrinsic

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2. It is all part of the general dualism in bourgeois society between objectivism and subjectivism, which also dissociates conscious from the self-conscious, public from private, personal from social, natural science from human nature, business from pleasure, work from leisure, morals from money, rational from emotional, etc. This dualism relates to, but is not the same as, the Cartesian split between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. In fact the divide probably dates back at least as far as to Ancient Greece. A continuous tradition is definitely traceable from the medieval split between *ratio* and *sensus*, found in the writings of Boëthius and St. Augustine, and in distinctions between *musicus* and *cantor*, *musica mundana/humana* and *musica instrumentalis* (Bartel 1997: 11ff).

sically musical and culturally specific type of knowledge is non-verbal and can be divided as follows: (1a) CONSTRUCTIONAL COMPETENCE, by which I mean the ability to compose, arrange, perform or otherwise *make* music; (1b) RECEPTIONAL COMPETENCE, meaning the ability to *respond* to music in a culturally competent manner. Receptonal competence relies on the ability to recall and recognise different musical sounds, as well as their culturally specific connotations and social functions.³

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MUSIC, on the other hand, is by definition metamusical and always entails verbal denotation. However, *like* MUSIC AS KNOWLEDGE, KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MUSIC is culturally specific and can be divided into two subcategories. Table 1's MUSICAL METADISOURSE (2a) houses conventional music analysis, 'music theory' and any other activity which entails the ability to identify and name elements and patterns of musical structure. CONTEXTUAL METADISOURSE, on the other hand (2b), involves explaining how musical practices relate to the culture and society that produces them and which they affect. This fourth aspect of musical knowledge, the second aspect of KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MUSIC, covers everything from biomusicology to acoustics, from business studies to psychology, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. With the exception of biomusicology and acoustics, contextual metadiscourse has dominated institutionalised popular music studies.⁴

The institutional underpinning of division between these four types of musical knowledge is strong. In UK tertiary education, for example, constructional competence is generally taught in special colleges, conservatories, performing art schools, etc., and musical metadiscourse in departments of music or musicology as well as in conservatories or colleges. Contextual metadiscourse, on the other hand, is generally associated with social science disciplines and is much less prominent in conventional musicology departments or performing arts colleges, even though the latter often include basic music history and business studies on the curriculum.

You will probably notice that I left out one of the four musical 'knowledges' from the previous paragraph. I had to omit RECEPTIONAL COMPETENCE because that widespread form of mainly vernacular musical competence is itself also neglected in almost all institutions of higher education: very rarely does it seem that the ability to

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3. Since neither constructional nor receptonal competence rely on any verbal denotation, they are both more commonly referred to as skills or competences rather than as knowledge. This does not mean that knowledge *has* to be verbally mediated, merely that our logocentric tradition of knowledge does not tend to think of *music* as knowledge. If mathematical knowledge does not need to be verbal to be knowledge, and if 'carnal knowledge' is knowledge rather than 'carnal skill', there is no reason to qualify constructional and receptonal competence in music as skill rather than as knowledge. For further explanation of the 'constructional' and 'receptonal', see Tagg (2001c:2,ff.).
 4. As songwriter, composer, guitarist, music journalist and IASPM founder member Franco Fabbri put it in 1995, referring to the general intellectual direction taken by the association internationally and by the journal *Popular Music*, 'music and musicians seem to have become some kind of troublesome appendage to popular music studies. Where is music and where are the musicians? Can't researchers learn something from them?' These rhetorical questions came in an e-mail to PT (95-06-23) as response to my question 'what do you think is currently wrong with IASPM internationally?' Another telling example of music's marginalisation in the world of cultural studies is the fact that the last assistant to be taken on by Birmingham University's legendary Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), and the first to be discarded, was an interdisciplinarily competent musicologist. Dick Bradley joined the CCCS in the late seventies but was forced to leave in the early eighties when the Thatcher government, through its education minister, Sir Keith Joseph, launched an attack on anything resembling sociology, and forced any institution studying society to make radical cuts.

distinguish instantaneously between, say, a Hollywood and an Italian Western, or between horror and mystery, or between when to wave your cigarette lighter and when to stage dive at a gig is taken seriously in education. The virtual absence of receptional competence from school and university curricula has been an obstacle to the development of music analysis because, with no institutional status comparable to that of the three other types of musical knowledge, it has developed no established forms of training or conceptualisation. Consequently, there is no consensus of method or terminology which scholars of popular music analysis can draw on when attempting to name, explain and discuss important aspects of musical communication.

However, there is *no* lack of institutionalisation or established terminology when it comes to the other three types of musical knowledge. Instead, the problems are caused *by* institutionalisation or, to be more precise, by the phenomenon of historical inertia inherent in that type of institutionalisation. Of course, the most obvious symptom of musical text dissociated from context is the notion of ‘absolute music’.⁵ The metaphysic of ‘absolute music’ has haunted the corridors of musical academe ever since, even spilling over into popular music studies and into ‘learned’ discussions about film music. (As one Italian music professor put it when casting doubt on Morricone’s value as a composer: *ma, maestro, c’è comunque la musica di cinema e la musica musica*.)⁶

1.4. Structural nomenclature and competence

For music analysis to work we must be able to denote structural elements in the musical text. According to the ‘knowledges’ shown in table 1, we are referring here to musical metadiscourse (knowledge 2a), i.e. the ability to identify and name elements and patterns of musical structure. Now, there are radical differences between the analytical metalanguage of music in the Western world and that of other symbolic systems; these differences concern, more specifically, peculiarities in the derivation patterns of terms denoting structural elements in music when compared with the denotative practices applied in linguistics and the visual arts.

To clarify this contradiction it is unfortunately necessary to introduce a conceptual pair of neologisms: ‘constructional’ and ‘receptional’, each adjective representing opposite extremes on a theoretical bipolar scale of structural nomenclature.⁷ *Constructional* qualifies a term which denotes a structural element from the viewpoint of its construction in that such a term derives primarily from the techniques and/or materials used to produce that element (e.g. *con sordino*, *glissando*, major minor-seven chord, analogue string pad, phasing, pentatonicism). *Receptional*, on the other hand, qualifies terms denoting structural elements primarily from the viewpoint of received effect or connotation (e.g. ‘*allegro*’, ‘*legato*’, ‘*spy chord*’, ‘*Scotch snap*’,

5. This concept may have had some historical value in a context of liberation from the ancien régime connotations of Baroque Affect Theory, but, when institutionalised in the post-revolutionary context of the bourgeois state, with its establishment of conservatories, musicology departments and the European classical canon, led to expulsion of improvisation from music education, and to the falsification and denial of communicative qualities which had been an intrinsic part of the tradition. It led in other words to the removal of the music it purported to preserve from the social context that kept it alive in a state of dynamic change.

6. I failed to note the identity of that professor. The comment was made at a seminar on film music, arranged by Sergio Miceli, and held in 1990 at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena.

‘cavernous reverb’).⁸

In the analysis of visual art it seems that is just as common for the identification of structural elements to derive from notions of iconic representation or of cultural symbolism as from concepts of production materials and technique. For example, structural descriptors like ‘gouache’ or ‘broad strokes’ clearly derive from aspects of production technique and are therefore constructional, while the iconic representation of a dog in a figurative work of art would be called ‘dog’ — a receptional term — rather than be given the technical description of how the figure representing that dog was produced. Moreover, ‘the dog’ in, say, Van Eyck’s famous Arnolfini marriage portrait,⁹ could also be considered a structural element on symbolic rather than iconic grounds if it were established that ‘dog’ was consistently interpreted in a similar way by a given population of viewers in a given social and historical context: e.g. the dog as recurrent symbol of fidelity — a receptional term again, this time in a different semiotic mode. Of course, a structural descriptor like ‘central perspective’ is constructional and receptional at the same time in that it denotes both a technique for representing three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface as well as the way in which that surface is perceived as three-dimensional by the viewer.

In linguistics there also seems to be a mixture of constructional and receptional descriptors of structure. For example, the phonetic term ‘voiced palato-alveolar fricative’ is constructional in that it specifies the sound /ʒ/ (Gimson 1967:33) by denoting how it is produced or constructed, not how it is generally perceived or understood. On the other hand, terms like ‘finished’ and ‘unfinished’, used to qualify pitch contour in speech, are receptional rather than constructional. Moreover, such central concepts of linguistics as ‘phoneme’ and ‘morpheme’ work both constructionally and receptionally in that they designate structures according to their ability to carry meaning from the viewpoint of both speaker and listener. /ʒ/, for example, understood as a phoneme, rather than as a ‘voiced palato-alveolar fricative’, denotes the structural element that allows both speaker and listener to distinguish in British English between ^hlɛʒə (leisure) and ^hlɛsə (lesser) or ^hlɛtə (letter).

From the perspective just presented it is no exaggeration to say that, compared to

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7. This footnote does no more than summarise a lengthy and laborious process of philological elimination. Never happy about adding to the terminological Tower of Babel, I tried to find existing words to cover the concepts discussed in what follows. ‘Structural’ v. ‘phenomenological’ seemed unsatisfactory because structures (‘the structural’) can be defined from the viewpoint of their perceived meaning (‘receptional’) as much as from how they are constructed (techniques and constituent materials — ‘constructional’). Moreover, structures denoted from the viewpoint of their construction are as phenomenological to the musician as they are phenomenological to the listener. Similarly, ‘transmissive’ or ‘emissive’ would, if the words existed, suggest qualities of transmission and emission processes rather than qualify a mode of denoting structures, while their counterpart — ‘receptive’ — already means something totally unrelated to the issue, as, indeed does ‘productive’. Furthermore, using ‘productional’ rather than ‘constructional’ might imply that music’s users were not just as important producers of music’s meaning as those constructing its sonic materials: hence ‘constructional’ v. ‘receptional’.
 8. In fact the last two descriptors, ‘spy chord’ and ‘cavernous reverb’, mix both receptional (‘spy’, ‘cavernous’) and constructional (‘chord’, ‘reverb’) modes of denotation.
 9. *The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami*; 1434; Oil on wood, 81.8 x 59.7 cm; National Gallery, London. ‘The companion dog is seen as a symbol of faithfulness and love’, writes Nicolas Pioch [www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/eyck/arnolfini/] in 1996 and most other online commentators. For an exception, see [www.open2.net/renaissance/prog1/script/scriptp4.htm].

the study of visual arts and of spoken language, conventional music analysis in Western Europe exhibits a clear predilection for constructional terminology, sometimes even to the extent of excluding receptional categories from its vocabulary altogether.¹⁰ Such exclusion also relates to notions of symbolic competence.

The ability to understand both the written and spoken word (receptional skills) is generally held to be as important as speaking and writing (constructional skills). In music and the visual arts, however, receptional competence is not held in equal esteem. For example, teenagers able to make sense of quite sophisticated intertextual visual references in music videos are not usually dubbed artistic, nor credited with the visual literacy they clearly own. Similarly, the widespread and empirically verifiable ability to distinguish between, say, two different types of detective story after hearing no more than two seconds of instrumental music does not apparently allow us to qualify the majority of our population as musical. Indeed, 'artistic' usually seems to qualify solely constructional skills in the visual arts sphere and 'musicality' seems to apply only to those who perform as vocalists, or who play an instrument, or can decipher musical notation. It is as though the musical competence of the non-muso¹¹ majority of the population did not count. This is clearly undemocratic and of little use to the development of a popular analysis of music.

1.5 Summarising the problems so far

Before proposing one way in which the problem of music's institutionalised dissociation of text and context can be addressed in analysis teaching, I will summarise the points made so far.

1. Students are encouraged to analyse verbal and visual messages critically but music as text is usually dissociated from its context and is rarely taught as if it communicated anything at all.
2. Terms denoting the structural elements of language and the visual arts are both constructional and receptional while those denoting the structural elements of music are overwhelmingly constructional; such terminological difference exacerbates music's institutionalised dissociation of text from context.
3. Constructional and receptional competence are generally accorded equal value in relation to language, but when it comes to music and the visual arts it appears that 'competence' only applies to constructional skills.
4. Constructional competence in music and knowledge of musical metadiscourse are housed in institutions of learning for musical experts while contextual metadiscourse is seen as the reserve of other disciplines; receptional competence is virtually excluded from the sphere of public education.

What a mess! In what follows I am assuming that we think it needs tidying up. I also assume we agree that music is a symbolic system and that its communicative power is just as dependent on receptional competence among the non-muso majority as it is on the constructional competence of the muso minority. Therefore, if we

10. It is important to note that the denotation of structural elements in the Northern Indian raga tradition is much more receptional than in Western Europe (see Martínez 1996).

11. *Muso*: slightly derogatory slang term denoting a musician, more specifically someone preoccupied with making or talking music and relatively uninterested in anything else. In this paper 'muso' is not used derogatorily. It is merely a conveniently short term to denote someone with either formal training in music, or who makes music on a professional or semi-professional basis, or who sees him/herself as a musicologist rather than as a sociologist or cultural studies scholar. 'Non-musos' are those who do not share the traits just described.

think that all people should be given the right to understand how music affects their ideas, attitudes and behaviour, and if we follow the basic educational guideline that learning processes are most effective when rooted in the experience of our pupils or students, then we shall need to include and use their widespread receptional competence in our music teaching.

2. Music analysis for non-musos

2.1. Sources of 'popular' descriptors

I would like to start the second half of this paper by suggesting that we can find a rich vocabulary of structural descriptors in everyday uses of popular music. Some of these descriptors may be constructional but, compared to the terminology of conventional music analysis, I think we will find that a larger proportion will be either receptional or a mixture of the two denotative types. The types of musical use and manner of registering the popular vocabulary I am referring to can be exemplified as follows.

1. Colloquial dialogue about musical structure can be collected in either ethnographically or by: [a] conducting reception tests; or [b] registering students' IOCMs and PMFCs in analysis classes.¹²
2. Descriptors of electronically produced timbres can be gathered by studying such phenomena as: [a] the preset nomenclature of sounds recurring in similar sonic guise on different synthesisers; [b] the labels given to particular sounds on sampling CDs and in musical sample banks on line.
3. Descriptors of sound-treatment parameters (reverb, delay, phasing, distortion, etc.) can be collected and collated by studying template nomenclature on effects equipment.
4. Connotative descriptions abound in library music¹³ catalogues. By studying regular patterns of correlation between such written connotations and structural elements recurring in different library music tracks labelled in a similar way it would be possible to both enlarge and refine the analyst's range of receptional descriptors.

12. IOCM = interobjective comparison material; PMFC = paramusical field of connotation. For explanation of these terms, see online glossary at [www.theblackbook.net/acad/tagg/articles/ptgloss.html]. 'La ragione principale per la quale usiamo il confronto interoggettivo sta nel carattere intrinsecamente *a-logogenico* del discorso musicale. L'eterno dilemma del musicologo è quello della necessità di usare parole per un'arte non-verbale, non-denotativa. Questa evidente difficoltà può essere tramutata in un vantaggio se in questa fase dell'analisi scartiamo le parole come meta-linguaggio per la musica e le sostituiamo con altra musica. Questo significa usare in modo rovesciato una frase coniata da Sonnevì nel 1975 in una sua poesia: 'la musica non può essere spiegata – non può essere contraddetta a meno che non usi musica completamente nuova'. Quindi, usare il confronto interoggettivo significa descrivere musica per mezzo di altra musica, significa confrontare l'Oggetto di Analisi con altra musica che sia in stile pertinente e che abbia funzioni simili. Vediamo ora come avviene un confronto interoggettivo. Se chiamiamo intersoggettivo quell'approccio analitico che stabilisce una concordanza nelle risposte a uno stesso Oggetto di Analisi fatto ascoltare a un certo numero di differenti soggetti, allora un approccio interoggettivo dovrebbe essere quello che può stabilire una concordanza, per quanto riguarda gli eventi sonori, tra due o più pezzi di musica.' (P. Tagg, *Analizzare la popular music: teoria, metodo e pratica*, in *Popular Music. Da Kojak al Rave*, a cura di Robeto Agostani e Luca Marconi, Ed. Clueb, Bologna, 1994, pag. 56).

PMFC = Paramusical Field of Connotation (campo di connotazione paramusicale: [1] Qualunque tipo di paratesto collegato all'Oggetto di Analisi (AO/Analysis Object); [2] connotazione immaginata o esperienza richiamata in riferimento all'AO; [3] reazione e abitudine che si dimostra essere collegata all'AO.

13. Library Music: *musica di sonorizzazione*.

In none of the four categories just listed is it necessary for the user to be at all fluent in the constructional description of structural elements: no-one need know what diminished sevenths or augmented fourths are, and no-one need understand or recognise what is meant by a circle-of-fifths progression or the mixolydian mode. After all, category one's students might just as well be from Communication Studies as from the Music Department, while the users implied in categories two and three might just as well be computer nerds who have hooked up a synth or be working as recording engineers with no formal musical training. Similarly, library music descriptions are formulated, usually by a non-muso member of the record company staff, for stressed-out media producers, also usually non-musos, who need to find the right music as fast as possible.¹⁴

Unfortunately, there is no time here to discuss more than one of these four sources of structural descriptors. Indeed we shall now put categories two through four into the ever-overflowing in-tray marked 'future research' and present a very short account of how category one alone can help solve some of the popular music analyst's problems.

2.2. Music analysis for non-musos

For the last seven years I have run a six-week postgraduate course called 'The Semiotic Analysis of Popular Music' at the University of Liverpool.¹⁵ On average, just over half the students are non-musos in the sense that they are not notationally literate, nor do have they the first clue as to what a diminished seventh or the mixolydian mode might be. Nor do I see it as a priority to teach them what such terms mean.¹⁶

During the first third of the course I present and exemplify the sort of approach to analysing popular music that I have set out in several publications (Tagg 1982, 1987, 1995, 1999). I try to illustrate the conceptual and methodological tools they will need for their own analysis work.

The middle third of the course is occupied by feedback sessions at which each student.

... 'plays his/her chosen music to the seminar and notes feedback from the participants. The main point of these sessions is to obtain information about the piece's perceived qualities (associations, reactions, descriptions, evaluations, etc.). Feedback from seminar participants, in the form of structural or connotative observations, should be taken into account by the [student] in his/her subsequent analysis work.'¹⁷

The final third of the course is devoted to analysis presentations by each student and to eliciting further comments from participants that may help each presenter

14. See interviews with library music producers in 1980, online at [www.theblackbook.net/acad/tagg/articles/intvws80v1.pdf], pp. 8, 24.

15. Citations on the next few pages are taken from online course materials: [www.theblackbook.net/acad/tagg/teaching/analys/semioma.html] and associated (hyperlinked) pages. Please note that courses are called 'modules' in UK university jargon and that a programme is called a 'degree course'.

16. The aims of this six-week course include: 'To further the systematic understanding of relationships between structural aspects of music (text) and its psychological, social, cultural and ideological qualities (context). 'To encourage the abilities of lateral and connotative thought.' 'To relate skills in lateral and connotative thinking to more rationalist modes of discourse.'

17. See | www.theblackbook.net/acad/tagg/teaching/analys/semioma.html | and related hypertexts.

improve his/her written analysis. In order to demonstrate what sort of mental processes the students are subjected to in this course, it is worth quoting extensively from the assignment instructions.¹⁸

‘Metamusical vocabulary. One of the ... difficulties in talking or writing about music is knowing which words to use when referring to its various sounds in such a way that whoever you are addressing will know what you mean...

...‘[M]usicians have developed a whole range of terms denoting particularities of musical sound. Unfortunately, there are two problems with this store of words: one is that there are as many sets of vocabulary referring to musical structure in the world as there are different musical styles, the other that a lot of musicians talk about music is incomprehensible to the majority of people in the culture they cohabit.’

‘Similar problems of incomprehensibility unfortunately apply to significant amounts of musicological discourse, especially in the typically European regions of pitch specification, i.e. in connection with harmony, counterpoint, [etc.]... However, expressions qualifying volume, timbre, space, speed, attack, melodic contour etc. can be used by anyone with a command of their mother tongue, as indeed can several more specialist yet fully understandable terms like ... polyrhythmic, polyphonic, monophonic,... legato, staccato,... drone, ... pentatonic, anacrusis, distortion, phasing, ‘panning’, etc., etc.’...

...‘[M]any instrumental sounds and vocal types can be easily and correctly identified by anyone with reasonable hearing and a modicum of experience in listening to music in the relevant style. Nevertheless, many of the musical sounds to which you will need to refer cannot be satisfactorily denoted, even if armed with this small arsenal of terms just mentioned. This remaining difficulty can be successfully circumnavigated in two ways that need to be employed in conjunction with each other: (i) *receptional denotation*; (ii) *unequivocal chronometric placement* in a recorded series of sound events.’

‘By *receptional denotation*’ is meant verbal identification of certain perceived qualities connoting the sound to be identified. Such an expression may be based on interobjective comparison — for example, ‘the Bach arpeggio’, ‘the gamelan final gong sound’, ‘the *Hey Jude* chord sequence’ — or on the analysis object’s own paramusical fields of association, i.e. on connotations to the particular sound provided by your respondents, including yourself — for example ‘steamy’, ‘croaking’, ‘witch-like’, ‘bubbles’, ‘sunrise’.

‘However, although this type of exercise allows you to refer concisely to particular sounds in your analysis piece, such reference will not be unequivocal because other sounds resembling, say, Bach arpeggios, gamelan gongs, the *Hey Jude* chord sequence, or sounds possibly qualifiable as ‘steamy’, ‘croaking’, ‘witch-like’, ‘bubbles’, ‘sunrise’ etc. will almost certainly exist in many other pieces, probably in a slightly different sonic guise to that occurring in your piece. For this reason, unequivocal chronometric placement is essential.’

‘By *unequivocal chronometric placement in a recorded series of sound events* is meant the start and end points of the sound you wish to identify in relation to the start of the complete piece. ... [Since] music usually consists of several different sounds... occurring at the same time... you have to qualify the sound you wish to identify in relation to other concurrent sounds (e.g. ‘the kick drum figure at 1:33’ or ‘at the word ‘love’ in the third ‘I love you’ of verse 2’)... ‘

18. For complete assignment instructions, see | www.theblackbook.net/acad/tagg/teaching/analysis/semiomaass.html | .

'*Graphic score*.... The graphic presentation should include the following parallel lines: (i) time grid; (ii) formal grid; (iii) paramusical events (if applicable); (iv) grid of musematic occurrence. This graphic score should ideally be proportionally chronometric so that equal durations occupy equal amounts of horizontal space.'

'A *time grid* consists of a horizontal line along which you mark the timing of significant musical events throughout the piece (e.g. 0:44 = 44 seconds into the piece, 3:01 = 3 minutes and 1 second into the piece).'

'The *formal grid* indicates where, in relation to the time grid, the various sections of the piece start and end, e.g. 'intro', 'verse 1', 'chorus 2', etc.'

'The *paramusical grid* contains such events as lyrics, description (or drawings) of visuals.'

'*Grid of musematic occurrence*. This grid should contain as many parallel horizontal lines as you identify separately meaningful strands of sound in your piece. The start and end point of each museme should be clearly visible from your presentation.'

All the tasks and processes just mentioned are supposed to focus attention on the constituent meaningful elements of the music under discussion. However, they also function as a series of confidence-building exercises. Firstly, by constructing chronometric grids for their analysis piece — a straightforward task if playback equipment sporting a real-time counter is used (CD, MD, DAT, DVD, etc.) —, students with little or no prior experience of music analysis can discretise and irrefutably indicate the objective existence of particular sounds. Secondly, the degree of intersubjective agreement in feedback sessions, both about the 'general feel' of the piece and with regard to the connotations of particular sounds, usually turns out to be greater than students expect.¹⁹ Bolstered with confidence in their ability to unequivocally denote a sound within a recording and to describe it in accordance with intersubjective agreement, students are more willing to name such a sound receptionally, less embarrassed about not being able to do so constructionally. Descriptors like 'the long eighties synth chord that starts the track' can then be given a short name (e.g. 'eighties synth chord') and students can start writing their analyses.

It is especially during feedback sessions that potentially useful receptional descriptors turn up. For example, the names of two musemes in my analysis of Abba's *Fernando* (Tagg 2000b: 36-38, 41-42) derive at least partially from student input: [1] TIPTOE BASS — the *leggiero* arpeggiated figure that occupies just half of each bar in the verses; [2] the SUNRISE MOTIF — the UPWARDS-AND-OUTWARDS motif resembling the *immer breiter* figure at the start of Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Even simple chord sequences found in well-known pop songs are sometimes recognised by non-musos as SOUNDING LIKE *LA BAMBÀ* (or *Guantanamera*, or *Hang On Sloopy*, or *Twist and Shout* or *Wild Thing*) and named accordingly, while a recent film music class featured music containing structures referred to by non-muso students as

19. Of course, it is always necessary in feedback sessions to discuss connotations from a musicocentric, frequently gestural, starting point. For example, ostensibly disparate connotations, such as 'long hair', 'rolling hills' and 'the beach' have little in common in terms of physical size, texture, etc. Gesturally, however, the fall of long hair, the curves of rounded hills and the sweep of a sandy beach with small waves on the sea all share obvious common denominators. For more on the principles of 'gestural interconversion' and music, see the analysis of *The Dream of Olwen* in Tagg & Clarida (2002).

THE VIVALDI BIT (a perpetuum-mobile arpeggiated violin figure following several chords descending round the circle of fifths) and A SORT OF *CARMINA BURANA* SOUND' (unison male voices singing accentuated even crotchets quite loud in a middle-to-low register and accompanied by punctuations from brass and woodwind).²⁰ Students are, in other words, able to suggest quite relevant receptional descriptors, either on the basis of gesture, touch, movement, paramusical sound and connotation (e.g. SWEEPING, SPIKY, SILKY, ROUGH, DELICATE, CRAZY, TENSE, VERY EIGHTIES, QUITE DETECTIVE-ISH, i.e. as PMFCs) or in relation to music they already know (e.g. SOUNDS LIKE BACH, VERY PET SHOP BOYS, LIKE THE JAMES BOND THEME, A BIT INDUSTRIAL, i.e. as IOCM).

The most obvious difficulty with the sort of receptional descriptors just mentioned is that they can only be expected to mean anything substantial to those with aural access to, or memory of, the recording in which the structure so named occurs at the point stated by the student. Another problem is that vernacular receptional descriptors are much less likely than more centrally established types of vocabulary to be understood outside the relatively restricted cultural sphere in which they have acquired any degree of intersubjective sense. For example, while it is not uncommon in English to call a reverb 'wet' if its secondary signals create a constant and fairly loud 'wash' (long decay time), the same expression translated into Italian — *UN ECO UMIDO* or *UN ECO BAGNATO* — would be meaningless. Asked what the Italian for 'a really wet reverb' would be, Franco Fabbri once replied *UN ECO DELLA MADONNA* whose literal translation back into English — AN ECHO OF OUR LADY — would make little or no sense to English-speaking studio engineers.

Now, the cultural specificity of vernacular receptional descriptors does not need to be seen as a major obstacle to the development of analysis method. As suggested earlier, such descriptors can be collected and codified: it may even be possible to find patterns of cross-cultural similarity and to establish some common denominators. After all, if receptional descriptors like *LEGATO* and *ALLEGRO* are understood across linguistic and cultural boundaries in the sphere of European art music, there is no reason to assume that terms like *MEDIUM BOUNCE*, *BREAK BEAT* or *DETECTIVE CHORD* should not acquire the same cross-cultural status in the world of popular music.

There is nevertheless one barrier which non-musos rarely seem able to cross: that of denoting tonal structures, especially those of harmony, key, mode, etc. True, some harmonies seem to have reasonably clear connotative traits — the famous *DETECTIVE CHORD*, the *COWBOY HALF-CADENCE*²¹ — while, as stated above, other common ones can be referred to by the name of a well-known pop song in which they occur — the *LA BAMBBA PROGRESSION*, the *MY SWEET LORD CHORDS*, etc. However, these descriptors hardly scratch the surface of all the connotatively significant harmonies to be found in the music of our mass media. Consequently, non-muso stu-

20. The class took place on 20 November 2001. If I remember rightly, the 'Vivaldi bit' occurred in the underscore to *Great Expectations* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 1998), 'a sort of *Carmina Burana* sound' in a scene from *The Mummy* (dir. Stephen Sommers, 1999).

21. The minor major-nine or minor major-seven chord, the final sonority in the James Bond Theme (1962) is usually heard as 'the detective chord' or 'the spy chord' (see analysis of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in Tagg & Clarida, 2002). For details of the 'cowboy half-cadence', see analysis of *The Virginian* in Tagg & Clarida (2002).

dents unable to structurally identify what it is in the harmonies that seems to make a semiotic difference have to ask the experts — the musos — and credit their constructional brothers and sisters in a footnote.²²

2.3. Vocal persona²³ — “*It’s in the voice*”

The final section of this paper focuses on one area of musical structuration to which non-musos seem to pay close attention: vocal timbre and inflection — ‘it’s in the voice’ is a recurrent comment. Unable to provide constructional descriptors of vocal production techniques (breathing, register, vibrato, tremolo, microphone usage, laryngeal tension, use of buccal cavities, diaphragm, etc.), students initially tend to shy away from describing what it is ‘in the voice’ they find so meaningful. One way out of this impasse is to ask students ‘what sort of person in what state of mind would use that kind of voice?’ When exhorted to speak the words of a particular vocal line emulating its approximate pitches, dynamics, timbre, duration, accentuation and rhythm, students are not slow to come up with words which pinpoint what might be called a *vocal persona*. The kinds of vocal persona heard in analysis classes tend to receive such vernacular epithets as: LITTLE GIRL, NICE BOY, COMPLETE BITCH, UTTER BASTARD, DESPERATE REBEL, MACHO GIT, SEXY WHISPER, FEMALE FRIEND, EVIL CHILD, WORRIED MAN, DEATH VOICE, VOICE OF SATAN, HOUND OF HELL, NERVOUS HICCUPING TEENAGER, ANGRY SCREAM, HARPIE SHRIEK, FRUSTRATED SQUAWK, BEDSIDE DISCO-MAN, FOOTBALL HOOLIGAN, ONE OF THE LADS, NUDGE-NUDGE/WINK-WINK, FRIEND AND CONFIDENTE, TIRED AND ABUSED, RESIGNED, DEPRESSED, DEMORALISED, CYNICAL, HYSTERICAL, OUT OF BREATH, STRESSED OUT, etc. The list seems virtually endless and intersubjective agreement in analysis classes about the connotative traits of the vocalist(s) and vocal line in question is usually very high.

Given the simultaneously wide variety and incontrovertible intersubjective validity of voice types envisaged by students, I would strongly advocate adopting the notion of vocal persona in the development of music analysis method. I would also suggest that it would be fruitful to study in depth the relation between vocal technique and vocal persona, as well as between vocal persona and the formation of subjectivity in our culture as a whole.

For example, I have for some time been concerned about the recent fixation on THE GIRLIE VOICE in commercial UK pop featuring female vocalists.²⁴ Do none of them want to sound like women? If not, why not? Do male listeners really want all these little girls with their girlie voices? Are they afraid of real women? Or do young women listeners want to be little girls rather than grow up? Or are they badgered into emulating female pubescence by the fashion and ‘beauty’ industries? What techniques do you have to use to sound ‘girlie’ if you have passed the age of twenty? Are any particular kinds of lyrics more common in songs sung by ‘girlie’ voices than by others? What is the relationship between stage act, clothing, artist image and the ‘girlie’ voice? How do these questions relate, if at all, to processes of growing up in today’s dog-eat-dog capitalism?

22. I try to persuade the students that asking questions and finding answers is a hallmark of good research and that ‘not knowing’ is a prerequisite for asking the right questions. Besides, such questions help to re-establish confidence among any musos who may be in the class.

23. Vocal persona: *personnaggio vocale*.

24. For example, Kylie Minogue, aged 35!

The serious nature of these questions was brought home to me with overwhelming clarity by a friend of my daughter's. In July last year she told me that she had, in the mid-to-late nineties, been offered a six-figure recording contract and been taken shopping by the record company's fashion consultant to buy skimpy little tops and other girlie garments to the tune of a four-figure sum. She then discovered that, of all the tracks she had recorded, the company intended to release only those few in which she had been instructed to use a girlie voice throughout. Suspicious about how she was to be marketed, she turned down the contract and went back to nursing.²⁵

Conclusion

This final GIRLIE-VOICE episode brings us back to the main topic of this conference because the denotation of musical structure, in this case vocal timbre, refers to central aspects of the musical text²⁶ by using structural descriptors derived from its reception, not from its formal construction. Such receptional descriptors are both metamusical (in that they denote aspects of musical structure) and paramusical (in that they use intersubjectively verifiable connotation as the basis for that structural denotation). Since paramusical connotation by definition involves a paratext and since a paratext, also by definition, is a subset of the context, the receptional descriptors we have discussed seem to provide an important link between text and context, between structure and function, between musical signifiers and signifieds. If that is so, it ought to be possible to develop methods of music analysis which are more able to meet the ethical and educational challenges mentioned at the start of this paper.

If text and context really do only exist symbiotically, then music analysis should reflect this fact of life. I hope the ideas presented here will contribute to the development of such analysis.

25. I am not at liberty to reveal the identity of this person. She has, however, agreed to put down her experiences of this episode in her life in writing. Her account is part of the research I hope to carry out in the near future.

26. Most popular music texts since the late 1960s are commodified as a sound recording, not in the form of musical notation.

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