Film music, anti-depressants and anguish management

by Philip Tagg,
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Introduction

Amitriptyline, Celexa, Clomipramine, Dothiepin, Doxepin, Effexor, Fluoxetine, Flupenthixol, Imipramine, Lexapro, Lofepramine, Mianserin, Paxil, Prozac, Serzone, Trazodone and Zoloft are all anti-depressants. According to the Prozac Survivors Support Group in California, over 36 million people in the USA have been prescribed that particular anti-depressant, while Eli Lilly, the corporation producing it, grossed between 2 billion and 2.8 billion US dollars each year between 1998 and 2001.[1] What, you may well ask, do these pharmaceutical business statistics have to do with film music?

One connection between anti-depressants and music is obvious: both have to do with feelings, or, more precisely, with expressing and communicating feelings in specific cultural terms under specific cultural and political circumstances. The basic hypothesis here is that the analysis of recent change in musical structures demonstrably associated — by means of lyrics, film narrative, social environment, etc. — with sadness, depression, desperation, anguish, frustration and so on can inform our understanding of radical changes in patterns of subjectivity in society at large.

Given the current paucity of research into the issues just mentioned, I can do no more here than focus on one small set of musical structures associated with no more than one aspect of all the kinds of emotion just mentioned. Therefore, the first part of this article will establish the existence of that one small set of musical structures as a prerequisite for identifying their relative presence or absence in recent years. The final section attempts to explain how those changes in musical structuration

1. http://www.pssg.org/about.htm [2004-05-22]

relate to the political issue of "anguish management" as a means of socially controlling certain aspects of popular subjectivity. We will, however, need to start by stating, very briefly, some basic points of theory and method underpinning those later parts of this presentation.

Theoretical position

Since the advent of TV and home video, more people living in the media-saturated culture to which I belong hear more music in conjunction with moving pictures than in any other way. The fact that computer games, with their more or less constant music, now generate greater global sales than those of the music industry reinforces this tendency. Yet music analysis, as it is still generally taught, pays little heed to such facts. Indeed, it is no longer just works from the Euro-classical canon that music academics dissect as if their sonic structures had no meaning beyond their syntactic relation to each other: even pop songs are now given the Schenkerian crossword-puzzle treatment. If music analysis is to be of any use to the majority of people living in the same culture as I do, it must clearly deal with music *as if it meant something beyond itself*. As I have repeatedly argued in numerous texts and courses, musematic analysis can help us carry out this semiotic task.

Musematic analysis allows for the identification of musical signifiers and signifieds on the basis of two types of demonstrable consistency: [1] interobjective or intertextual, in the sense that the same or similar musical structure (designated at this stage of research in constructional terms)[2] are used in different works by different musicians belonging to the same basic music culture; [2] the same or similar paramusical phenomena are linked by different individuals, belonging to the same basic music culture, to the same or similar musical structures.

What follows is therefore based on intertextual and intersubjective procedures set out in *Ten Little Title Tunes* (Tagg & Clarida 2003: 94-152), a study which addresses structural, theoretical and ideological issues of musical semiosis . 'Ideological' refers here not only to overtly political categories (e.g. gender, normality, ethnicity, military) but also to other general semantic fields which, when examined historically in terms of patterns of subjectivity, appear no less ideological (e.g. heroism, urgency, speed, fashion, family, violence, love). This paper

2. For descriptions and definitions of the four basic types of musical knowledge, see Tagg and Clarida (2003: 9-11).

presents a brief discussion of one such covertly ideological semantic field which, for want of a better label, we shall call *anguish*. In fact, respondents (mainly Swedish, some Latin-American) providing the empirical data identifying this type of musicogenic semantic field never mentioned anguish. Their connotations were expressed in such terms as *difficulties, problems, trouble; against the will of…, despite…, external obstacles; destiny, fate; pain, suffering; sad, tragic; lonely, abandoned; melancholy, longing, languishing; parting, separating* etc. Such connotations occurred in response (and in varying degrees) to only four of the ten title tunes played to respondents.

Tonal determinants

Although slow tempo and, in three of the four tunes, minor key were among the structural common denominators of the music eliciting the sort of response just enumerated, they were not the main tonal[3] determinants of the 'anguish' connotations just listed. Three other tonal elements were more operative in distinguishing 'anguish' from other other semantic fields —*funeral, dirge, depression,* for example— which, in mainstream Western culture, also rely on slow tempo and minor mode. The three tonal elements recurring in the four tunes heard by respondents as connoting 'anguish', but absent in the six other tunes giving rise to no such connotations, were: (1) the 'minor add 9' sonority (abbreviated m^{add9}); (2) the half-diminished chord, i.e. 'minor seven flat five' (m7♭5) and its inversion as 'minor six' (m6, i.e. a minor triad with added major sixth); (3) a 'tortuous tune', i.e. a melody characterised by disjunct profile and/or emphasised melodic dissonance.[4]

Minor add nine

The minor-add-nine chord has a long history in the West. It is, for example, a common device for madrigalistic woe, underscoring words like 'wherewith I mourn and melt' (Byrd's *Wounded I Am*) and 'Ay me! I sit and cry' (Morley's *Fire! Fire!*) (all c. 1600). It also turns up in J S Bach's harmonisations of such penitent or agony-related chorales as *Christ lag in Todesbanden* or *Ach, wie nichtig! Ach, wie flüchtig!* and Schubert uses it in the accompaniment to Gretchen's bitter complaining (ex. 1).

3. *Tonal* is used in this text as an adjective qualifying parameters of musical expression definable in terms of pitched tone(s) as opposed to those definable in terms of timbre, duration, rhythm, metre, tempo, period, dynamics, etc.
4. For more detailed discussion of the minor add nine and the half diminished chords, see Tagg and Clarida (2003: 180-203, 453-466, 566-573).

The m^{add9} chord is no stranger to film scores. For example, it is heard during most of Morricone's cue for the scene in *The Mission* (1985) in which Carlotta tells a devastated Rodrigo (played by Robert De Niro) that she loves not him but his brother. It also plays a prominent part in three of the four tunes connoting 'anguish' to several hundred respondents, for example in response to Rota's theme for Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (ex. 2). It is also a favourite of Morricone's in situations where poignant sadness, tragedy, separation or bitter fate are on the narrative menu, as in the 'Ophelia' cues from *Hamlet* (1990), in the theme underscoring the death of young Cockeye in *Once upon a Time in America* (1984), in the cues 'Abduction' and 'Death of Oahn' for *Casualties of War* (1989), in the title theme from *Lolita* (1997), or in 'Nostalgia of the Father' from *Marco Polo* (1982, ex. 3), to name but a few.

Ex. 1. Schubert: *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (1828)

Ex. 2. Rota: *Romeo & Juliet* (1968): (a) initial 5-♭3-2 motif; (b) piano accompaniment madd9.

Ex. 3. Morricone (1982): 'Nostalgia of the Father' from *Marco Polo*,

The same chord type also turns up in connection with lyrics of fateful sadness in postwar popular song. For example, the Bovary-like 'Madame' of Alain Bashung's *Madame rêve* (1991) dreams longingly and hopelessly of *un silence si long* and of *un amour qui la flingue* to the accompaniment of the same minor-key semitone dynamic between major second and minor third. In *Western Eyes* (1997), Portishead's Beth Gibbons whines 'I'm breaking at the seams just like you' with the minor-add-nine's semitone between degrees 2 and ♭3 (9↔♭10) pulsating in the background. The same m^{add9} semitone device is treated more melodically than harmonically both in Radiohead's *Life in a Glasshouse* (2001) — 'again I'm in trouble with an old friend' — and in Elvis Costello's *For Other Eyes* (1993) — 'I don't know what I should do'; 'It's over and done'. Among the most striking pop-rock examples of the m^{add9} semitone crunch's semantic field are Aerosmith's *Janie's Got A Gun* (1989, ex. 4) at 'Run, run away-ay-ay' (from the pain of sexual abuse) and the piano track heard for at least 25% of Lionel Richie's *Hello* (1985) whose vocal persona sadly regrets never 'getting the girl' (ex. 5).

Ex. 4. (a) Aerosmith: *Janie's Got A Gun* (1989); (b) Lionel Richie: *Hello* (1985)

As stated earlier, m^{add9} featured prominently in three of the four title tunes respondents connected with 'anguish', including Rota's *Romeo and Juliet* theme (ex. 2). Even though the other two, the title music for *A Streetcar named Desire* (1951, ex. 5a, 22a) and Deep Purple's *Owed to 'g'* (1975, ex. 5b, 22b), produced a response profile of crime and its detection in rough urban settings which differed markedly from *Romeo and Juliet*'s with all its tragic love set in a rural past, all three tunes shared both m^{add9} and a significant response rate for *adversity, difficulty, problems, trouble; away from, departure; lonely, abandoned.*

Half-diminished

The two urban tunes just mentioned featured *both* m^{add9} *and* the second of the three tonal traits linked with 'anguish' responses —the half-diminished chord or its inversion as 'minor add six' (m6, ex. 5).

Ex. 5. Tonal accompaniment to (a) North: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951); (b) Deep Purple: *Owed to 'g'* (1975).

For musicians and musicologists let it be known here, in parenthesis, that I am treating minor-[add]-6 (m6) and minor-seven-flat-five (m7♭5) paradigmatically as mutually invertible variants of the same half-diminished sonority (ex. 6.).

Ex. 6. Mutual invertibility of Dm6 and Bm7♭5

Ex. 7. Wagner's *Tristan* chord as m7♭5 or m6

Like m^{add9}, the half-diminished chord has a long history in Western art music. For example, John '*sempre dolens*' Dowland uses it in such anguished circumstances as the *Lachrymae* Pavane (*Flow, My Tears*, ex. 8) and at 'consumed with deepest sins' in *From Silent Night* (1612), as does Campian to underscore the breaking of vows in *Oft Have I Sighed* (1617). The chord also features prominently, as both a Cm6 and an Em7♭5, in the famous suicide aria from Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas* (ex. 9). The verbal accompaniment to these and other English instances of m7♭5/m6 is quite tragic: living or dying forlorn, broken friendship, disclosing shame, etc.

Ex. 8. Dowland: *Lachrymae* (c.1610)

Ex. 9. Purcell: aria 'When I am laid in earth' (*Dido & Aeneas*, 1690)

Just for the musicological record, I should of course clarify that there is nothing anguished in the Baroque tradition about a half-diminished chord in the middle of an run of sevenths anticlockwise round a virtual circle-of-fifths. However, we are not dealing with the chord in such syntactic functions but with its occurrence in highlighted positions, where it has considerable semantic value, for example: [1] as second chord after an initial tonic; [2] in precadential contexts, often in crisis-chord position about seventy-five percent of the way through a romantic melody; [3] as modulatory (key-changing) pivot chord.

Restricting the Baroque part of this story to the works of J.S. Bach, the half-diminished 'second chord' turns up repeatedly in the first Kyrie of the B minor mass ('Lord, have mercy', ex. 10-11), as well as in the opening chorus to both the St. Matthew and the St. John passions.

Ex. 10. J.S. Bach (1737): B Minor Mass (opening) →

Ex. 11. J.S. Bach (1737): first Kyrie fugue theme from the B Minor Mass ↓

It also occurs in the same position or precadentially in at least 36 settings of chorales with the following sorts of text: *Herrn, ich habe mißgehandelt; Wo soll ich fliegen hin?; Ach! Was soll ich Sünder machen; Ach wie nichtig, ach wie flüchtig!; O Traurigkeit; Jesu Leiden, Pein und Tod; Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt; Christ lag in Todesbanden; Herr, straf mich nicht in deinem Zorn; O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden; Meines Lebens letzte Zeit*. Add to this barrage of second-chord and precadential woe the vii^7-s or iv^6_5-s accompanying 'his disciples forsook him and fled', 'the price of blood' and Peter's denial 'I do not know the man' (all from the *Matthew Passion*) and we are back to an anguished semantic field unambiguous enough to survive in instrumental works of the rococo and classical periods. Indeed, if we accept Rosen's description of sonata form as 'a dramatic performance' (1976: 155), it will come as no surprise that Mozart's 40th symphony (K550), with Cm6 as its prominent second chord, was characterised by early 19th-century commentators as 'impassioned grief', ranging from 'the saddest' to the 'most exalted' (Stockfelt, 1988: 21-22).

Turning to the pivot aspect of our diminished-fifth tetrad, it is worth noting that C.P.E. Bach (1974: 38) considered 'no chord… more convenient'… than the diminished seventh, 'as a means of reaching the most distant keys more quickly and with agreeable suddenness'. We would hold that the half-diminished chord is pretty useful too, especially for modulating to related keys.

Mozart often uses the half-diminished chord as pivot, for example in a impassioned chromatic progression in the development section of the slow movement from his E♭ Sinfonia concertante for violin and viola (ex. 12).

Ex. 12. Mozart (1779): Sinfonia concertante (K364), 2nd mvt., bars 27-28.

Schubert puts second-chord half-diminished semiosis to good use in his nerve-racking *Erlkönig* chase music, in the tragically listless *Einsamkeit* and, most markedly, to accompany the travelling stranger on snowy roads in an inhospitable world where mad dogs howl outside their masters' homes (ex. 13).

Ex. 13. Schubert: 'Gute Nacht' (*Winterreise*, 1827)

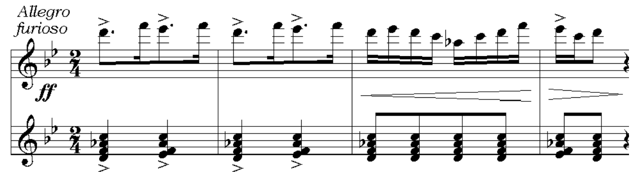
Wagner's famous Tristan chord is both potential pivot *and* prominent second-chord if the anacrustic cello arpeggio is heard as an initial D minor tonic (see ex. 7). While it is possible, using a couple of intermediate chords, to complete a perfect cadence in any key from *Tristan*'s initial Fm7♭5, its immediate continuation into another two accentuated half-diminished 'second-chords' (the last one repeated to boot) with no intervening modulation is evidence that the sonority had, at least for Wagner in 1859, a semantic charge of its own. Indeed, it was a dramatic device that he used again, for example when presenting Alberich's curse of the ring to the tune of a rising F♯m7♭5 arpeggio (ex. 14).

Ex. 14. Wagner: Alberich's curse from *Siegfried* (1874; cited in Donnington, 1976: 314)

The same sort of non-modulatory, quasi-autonomous harmonic device is used at break-neck tempo by Grieg to start the 'Abduction of the Bride' section of the *Per Gynt* suite (ex. 15). The anguished Dm7♭5s of that Grieg extract may well have helped establish half-diminished pathos as an element of musical code in the modern mass media because

those four bars constitute the *only* 'Horror' entry in one of the silent film era's most widely used anthologies (Rapée, 1924: 173; ex. 15).

Ex. 15. Grieg: 'Abduction of the Bride' from *Per Gynt* (1891)



Half-diminished chords are two a penny in European romanticism where they seem to work less technically as links to other keys, more like signs that a modulation *could* occur, with all the uncertainty of direction that such ambiguity might entail in terms of heightened drama and rhetoric. In the final reprise of Liszt's *Liebenstraum* (1847), for example, every other chord is half-diminished in a chain of chromatic slides. It is worth noting that the harmonic language and orchestration of Liszt's tone poems resurface in many of Max Steiner's film scores, not least in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), the half-diminished chord appearing in the languishing first bridge section of the film's overture , as well as in the cue 'Scarlett walks among the dead'.

Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov show a particular penchant for the precadential half-diminished chord. The way they use the device in crisis-chord position, i.e. at a point about 75% of the way through a particular period or section (Tagg & Clarida, 2003: 211-4), is common and familiar (ex. 16). It is also important, for two reasons, in the development of widely understood notions of pathos in mass-mediated music.

Ex. 16. Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto B♭ minor, Op. 23 – m7♭5 at crisis point.

D♭ G♭6 4 A♭
D♭ A♭ 8 D♭ 9 10 G♭6 11 Cm7♭5 F 13 B♭ E♭
bar 12 (of 16)

Firstly, the Tchaikovsky theme cited above has been used and abused too many times as the sonic representation of 'deep feelings' on radio, TV and film to mention here, while Rachmaninov's second piano concerto in C minor fulfilled so convincing a 'passionate-but-hopeless-love' function in *Brief Encounter* (1945) that its connotations could be parodied a decade later in the Marilyn Monroe box-office success *The Seven Year Itch* (1955). The popularity of ivory-bashing popular classics like these gave rise to a series of piano-concertante clones that were used in

films, many of which were produced in the UK during World War II, and which film critics Halliwell & Purser (1986) review in terms like ‘harrowing’, ‘gripping’, ‘tearjerker’, ‘romance suffused with tragedy’, etc. Addinsell’s Warsaw Concerto (ex. 17) was one such clone, composed for *Dangerous Moonlight* (1941), an ‘immensely popular wartime romance’… in which ‘a Polish pianist escapes from the Nazis and loses his memory after flying in the Battle of Britain’ (*op. cit.*).

Ex. 17. Addinsell: *Warsaw Concerto* (1941), bars 1-2

Example 17’s anacrustically catapulted Cm7♭5 is far from the only m7♭5/m6 in the piece and the *Warsaw Concerto* is not the sole representative of a genre in which half-diminished chords recur so often as to act as one of its style indicators. That repertoire also includes, for instance, Rota’s music for *The Glass Mountain* (1949), Rózsa’s *Spellbound* Concerto (1940) and Brodzsky’s score for *RAF, The Way to the Stars* (1945, ex. 18). All these films fit the melodramatic pathos bill alluded to earlier and all appear on the album *Big Concerto Movie Love Themes* (1972). Brodzsky’s main theme, like Mendelssohn’s Wedding March (1843), cuts straight to the half-diminished chase on its first downbeat and stays there for six beats at ♩=56 (ex. 18).

Ex. 18. Brodzsky: *RAF, The Way to the Stars* (1945), main theme (piano only)

Secondly, half-diminished tetrads occur precadentially as melodramatic crisis chords in many a prewar popular tune, and in the usual sort of position, for example at bar 26 (of 32) in Tierney’s *Alice Blue Gown* (1920), Rodgers’ *Manhattan* (1925) and Rapée’s *Charmaine* (1925), or at bar 14 (of 17) in Breil’s ‘Love Strain’ (ex. 19), etc.

Crisis chords in this position do not need to be half-diminished but they have to contain four or more different pitches, at least one of which must be key-extrinsic (e.g. E7+, Fm6, F♯dim, A♭7 *or* F♯m♭5 in bar 14 of ex. 19). The whole point is to insert a touch of melodrama offsetting

the subsequent V–I cadence's 'happy ending'. The fact that half-diminished chords often fulfil such a function confirms their status as signifiers of drama and pathos in highly familiar types of popular music.

Ex. 19. Breil: 'The Love Strain is Heard' from *Birth of a Nation* (1915), bars 9-17.

One category of half-diminished tetrads has yet to be discussed: the 'jazz' minor six (m6) chord, as quoted in example 6. Superficially the chord seems to be little else than a colouristic alteration of a standard minor triad; after all, major sixths can be added to minor triads other than the tonic, as, for example in Ellington's *Koko* (1940) or in Billie Holliday's recording of *Gloomy Sunday* (1941), or in Gershwin's 'Summertime' and 'It Ain't Necessarily So' (*Porgy & Bess*, 1935). If so, Debussy's 'autonomous' Fm7♭5s underscoring the heroine's tears in *Pelléas et Mélisande* (ex. 20) ought also to be qualified as colouristic, but that is hardly likely since the composer's choice of harmony is clearly related to the expression mark *plaintif* he has written in the score.

Ex. 20. Debussy: Mélisande crying (*Pelléas et Mélisande*, 1902), cited by Cooke (1959: 66)

Although technically correct from a syntactical viewpoint, the notion of harmonic 'autonomy' just presented misses the semiotic point on at least two counts.

First, the sonority contains the same array of pitches as those half-diminished chords which are, as argued earlier, often treated with relative syntactic autonomy in film music and popular song. It is highly improbable that musicians exposed to such widely disseminated music as Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto, or Rapée's *Charmaine*, or Steiner's score for *Gone with the Wind* would be oblivious to the obvious connotative charge of its half-diminished chords.

Second, the jazz minor six chord was, in the hegemonic WASP (= White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) mentality of inter-war years in the USA, often associated with music performed by particular people (African-American) in particular places (e.g. smoky dives). It was also linked either with lyrics dealing with death and crime (e.g. *St. James Infirmary*) or with other aspects of a 'threatening' subculture (e.g. Ellington's 'jungle' style). Due to these connections, the chord came to function as genre synecdoche (Tagg & Clarida, 2003: 99-103) for a semantic field including such phenomena as seedy US urban locations, African-American subculture, night, danger and crime. It is therefore no coincidence that Gershwin used plenty of minor triads with added major sixths for *Porgy & Bess* scenes located in an African-American slum, no wonder that *Harlem Nocturne* was the title chosen by Earle Hagen for his C minor piece 'for E♭ saxophone and concert band' (ex. 21).

Ex. 21. Hagen: *Harlem Nocturne* (1940)

In short, the jazz minor-six chord embodies a dual semiosis in which the synecdochal particularities of its inter-war usage in the USA combine with the general melodramatic pathos value of the classical and popular classical half-diminished chord to reinforce rather than contradict one another.[5]

Of course, the semiotic interaction between classical and popular tonal idioms in dealing with anguish does not stop with the half-diminished chord.

'Tortuous tunes'

Harlem Nocturne (ex. 21) contains all three of the 'anguish' traits discussed in this text: [1] m^{add9}, complete with semitone crunch between 2 and ♭3; [2] a half-diminished chord (as m6); [3] a melody characterised by disjunct profile and/or emphasised melodic dissonance — a 'tortuous tune'. All three traits also feature prominently in two of the four tunes eliciting the 'anguish' connotations that enabled us to posit the general semantic field in the first place. The harmonic traits, cited in example 5, accompany the melodic lines shown here as ex. 22.

Ex. 22. Initial melodic phrases from (a) North: Title music for *A Streetcar named Desire* (1951); (b) Deep Purple: *Owed to 'g'* (1975).

(a) ♩=58 vlns. F♯m6 add9

(b) ♩=60 Em6add9 overdriven ld.gtr. *vibratissimo* *molto vibr.*

In addition to all the adversity, crime, danger and seedy locations envisaged by respondents hearing these tunes, 'detective' was another common connotation, i.e. the individual, usually a white male, supposed to bring some semblance of order and justice into his inimical surroundings. The only trouble is, at least in a stereotypical *film noir* plot, that the detective's own life is such a mess: apart from the consolatory whisky bottle in the desk drawer of his ramshackle office, he is usually out of pocket, beaten up by hoodlums, thwarted by 'jobsworth' police officials, and often unhappily but passionately involved with the *femme fatale* implicated in the web of deceit he has to unravel, only to end up alone in stake-outs, alone tailing suspects, alone philosophising about the evils of this world. The 'anguish' of such a P.I.'s theme tune is therefore just as much 'his' as the listener's, not least because the relationship between the visual narrative's foreground figure (the P.I.) and his environment can also be identified in the melody-accompaniment dualism between melodic figure and 'backing' parts. Since we

5. In the version of this article presented to the IASPM Latin America conference (Rio de Janeiro, June 2004; see |http://tagg.org/articles/iasprio.html|) I played a montage of half-diminished chords, compiled from numerous sources, in order to convince sceptics of the rather dry verbal arguments presented here. See |http://tagg.org/articles/iasprio.html#m7b5list| for contents of that montage. That version of this article also includes several audio clips (mp3 format) of some of the music referred to here.

have discussed these and other aspects of detective music semiosis at length elsewhere (e.g. Tagg, 1998) we will do no more here than cite two of the most familiar English-language TV detective themes (ex. 23) and add that *Harlem Nocturne* (ex. 21) was revamped as theme for the CBS TV detective series *Mike Hammer* (1983).

Ex. 23. (a) F Steiner: *Perry Mason* (1957); (b) Riddle: *The Untouchables* (1959)

Of course, 'tortuous tunes' in the minor key, with their altered fifths, sharp sevenths, 'dissonant' ninths, etc. are by no means exclusive to TV detectives. Marconi (2001: 66-110) cites enough musical outbursts of anxiety, complaint, desperation etc. to substantiate a long history of similar semiosis in the European classical tradition, including examples from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Verdi's *Il trovatore* and *Aïda*, and Bach's *Matthew Passion*. In musical-rhetorical terms of the Baroque period, we are dealing with phenomena that might well have been given such labels as *pathopeia*, *saltus duriusculus*, etc. (Bartel, 1997: 357-62; 381-2), i.e. the sort of tortuous line to which Bach sets Peter's remorseful tears after denying Christ in both the *Matthew* and *John Passion* ('und weinete bitterlich'), or the anxious penitence of the Kyrie eleison fugues in the B Minor Mass, including their half-diminished and Neapolitan chords, or the F♯ minor aria *Ach, Herr! Was ist ein Menschenkind?* with its minor-sixth and diminished-seventh leaps concurring with the Lord suffering such great pain to bring about the redemption of the wayward 'child of Man'.

Ex. 24. J.S. Bach: *Ach Herr! Was ist ein Menschenkind?* Cantata 110 (1725)

Although it may seem sacrilegious to lump divine suffering for the redemption of humanity together with the urban *Angst* of private detectives, it is clear that their musical and paramusical commonalities are quite substantial.

Musemes and ideology

So far we have presented evidence of consistent correspondence, within the broad context of Western musical traditions over the last few centuries, between certain tonal structures and certain paramusical phenomena. Since we focused on the particularities of musical structures connected with the general semantic field we labelled 'anguish', the discussion might be termed musematic in the same sense that the deconstruction of (verbal) language into its meaningful constituent parts could be qualified as phonematic.

Of course, it is evident from differences in timbre, orchestration, rhythmic articulation, accentuation, etc. between most of the extracts cited, that analysis of music's tonal (harmonic and melodic) aspects is insufficient. Other, more obvious sonic characteristics of anguish have been absent from this discussion, for example, yelling, screaming, a grating or complaining tone of voice, and so on. We need only think of Kurt Cobain's spine-chilling vocal delivery in *Smells Like Teen Spirit* and *Lithium* to make the point, but even these recordings contain elements of tortuous melody (all those flat fifths and seconds) that are absent from less anguished anthems of alienation.

Despite these and other problems of method, it is possible, using the sort of approach sketched above, to demonstrate some important aspects of musical semiosis in our culture. Not only can such an approach contribute to the development of musicological method: by highlighting musicogenic categories of meaning it can also raise issues of ideology relating to the social patterning of subjectivity under changing political and economic circumstances.

For example, we have argued elsewhere (Tagg, 1994) that the decline of foreground melodic figure and the prominence of backing loops in some kinds of techno music not only represented a radical departure from the basic compositional strategy of Western music since Monteverdi —the melodic-accompaniment dualism—; we also argued that the abandonment of such a central element of musical structuration in our culture ('what Haydn and AC/DC have in common') corresponded with a rejection of 'the big ego' (of melodic presentation in opera, jazz and rock, for example) which, in its turn, related to a rejection of the perverted self of capitalists let loose under Reagan and Thatcher.

Similar questions need to be asked about recent changes in the musical representation of 'anguish'. If, for the increasing number of marginalised members of our society (including my ex-students who, despite their education, are unable to find satisfactory employment), there is little credibility left in bourgeois notions of the individual (e.g. the 'American Dream', the 'self-made man', the opera diva, the big rock star, the greedy capitalist), how can impassioned musical statements of the deep anguish such marginalisation surely causes be made or heard? Worse, where are this society's 'successful' role models from whom we 'lesser mortals' can take a lead in recognising the injustices of the system under which we all try to survive and in expressing appropriate remorse for all the pain and suffering it causes? Worse still, how can individuals express any kind of anguish if they fail to develop, through learning the social skills of guilt and reparation, the object relations that enable humans to distinguish between self and environment (Klein, 1975)? It is a learning process under constant threat from all the advertising which regularly exploits a psychotic symbiosis that is quite normal in two-year-olds but that is (or, at least, was until recently) considered a symptom of social disorder in adults.

These questions need to be addressed from a musicological viewpoint too, because it has been possible recently to discern a certain reluctance to give Hollywood movies, whose story lines veritably seethe with anguish, an underscore bearing any resemblance to the sort of impassioned grief that the on-screen characters clearly have to live through or to the indignation they must surely feel. *American Beauty* (Newman, 1999), *Monster's Ball* (Asche & Spencer, 2001) and *The Life of David Gale* (Parker, 2003) are three such films. Although their visual-verbal narrative is full of pain, injustice, dignity, bitterness, loneliness, etc. 'against all odds', their scores are generally conceived in a restrained, ambient vein, tinged by the occasional insertion of subdued accompanimental dissonances.

A four-minute passage, taken from near the start of *American Beauty*,[6] (2000) illustrates this tendency. The character played by Kevin Spacey has just lost his job due to "management restructuring" and is being driven home, in the family's useless SUV (Bradsher, 2002), by his ambitious estate-agent wife. There is bitter irony and tragedy in this extract, especially when father and daughter try in vain to communicate

6. Chapter 2 on the NTSC region 1 DVD (Newman, 1999), from 0:06:13 to 0:10:17.

with each other in the kitchen. It is clear that the latent charge of anguish and unhappiness in this extract is left latent by the music. After the ironic “elevator music” accompanying dinner in the perfectly appointed dining room,[7] a simple minor-key piano melody appropriately emphasises sad nostalgia for an illusorily innocent “Paradise Lost” rather than any desperation or anger at the system that has brainwashed them into believing that a crippling mortgage, a monstruous family vehicle, and relatively useless consumer fetishes in general, are essential to a good life.

Of course, the music in the *American Beauty* example paints a realistic picture of *latent* anguish, of *repressed* frustration and anger. However, it is not unreasonable to ask whether such musical (and political) restraint cannot also be interpreted as an emotional self-censorship mechanism echoing tendencies to repress reactions of anger and indignation against the societal causes of grief and pain. Is this a new sort of musical ‘anguish management’ strategy? The questions pile up, and there are more.

Where, in North American or European popular music, can we find the forceful expression of indignation against injustice, of the anguish that goes with the alienation experienced by an increasingly large proportion of the population? Maybe some kinds of political rap music represent one sort of oppositional outlet, or is such rap little more than the embittered ranting of those who preach to the already converted? Where are the heirs of Nirvana’s Cobain? Will Radiohead’s Tom Yorke ever yell again (to an enharmonically twisted accompaniment, incidentally, as he did in 1994) the disgust of considering himself a “creep and a no-one”, or is self-invalidation the order of the day?

I have no answers to any of these questions, but one thing is clear: the invalidation of individuals who express pain and anguish has become endemic to the society I live in. It is in an invalidation that hits young people hardest[8] and which has disastrous consequences for both the individual concerned and for society, firstly in a literal sense because, as the US American Self-harm Information Clearing House reports:

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7. Peggy Lee singing ‘Bali-Haï’ from *South Pacific*.
8. For example, “a British study of nearly six thousand students shows that over their lifetime, thirteen percent of teenagers aged fifteen and sixteen had carried out an act of deliberate self-harm”.WebMD Medical News Reviewed By Brunilda Nazario, MD; by By Jennifer Warner on Thursday, November 21, 2002

> "One factor common to most people who self-injure, whether they were abused or not, is invalidation. They were taught at an early age that their interpretations of and feelings about the things around them were bad and wrong."[9]

Indeed, a political system whose commercial propaganda tells us we can buy individual happiness *now*, often by claiming that we will "win" or "save" in the process of parting with the little money we may have, is unlikely to cherish those who express discontent. Such people, especially the young, will naturally feel invalidated, believing it is their own fault if they do not succeed, if they have no job, and if they have not pushed their way past everyone else to the front of the line. With no legitimate outlet for the anguish this system causes them, their discontent and pain is invalidated and repressed so that self-inflicted pain becomes the only way out. As Miller (1994) and Favazza (1986, 1996) explain, self-harm has several functions:

> "It is an expression of emotional pain and provides relief. When intense feelings build, self-injurers are overwhelmed and unable to cope. By causing pain, [self-harmers] reduce the level of emotional and physiological arousal to a bearable one. Self-injurers also have enormous amounts of rage within. Afraid to express it outwardly, they injure themselves as a way of venting these feelings."

These are patently serious issues because an increasing number of young people in Europe and North America resort to self harm. Over one percent (1%) is the figure for officially reported cases in the UK, but the rate is much higher for people aged between eleven and twenty-six.[10] Of course, anti-depressants are usually administered to such officially reported cases of self-harm and it is here that we come full circle to document the real extent of collective emotional misery in Europe and North America. In the USA, for example, children aged six to eighteen received 735,000 prescriptions for Prozac and other anti-depressants in 1996, an increase of eighty percent (80%) since 1994.[11] The real horror is that the expression of anguish caused by the culture and society in which young people grow up, now seems to have very few

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9. http://www.selfinjury.org/docs/factsht.html
10. http://www.drinkdeeplyanddream.com/realvampire/SMS.html. Self-Injury No Longer Rare Among Teens: Cutting and Other Dangerous Acts Becoming New Cries for Help, By Jennifer Warner: WebMD Medical News Reviewed By Brunilda Nazario, MD on Thursday, November 21, 2002, referring to The British Medical Journal, 23 Nov. 2001.
11. http://www.pssg.org/huffington2.htm

legitimate forms of public expression and that the negotiation of such conflict consequently becomes impossible, to the extent that those who do express such anguish are clinically categorised as depressive and in need of physical treatment. Society has, so to speak, no need to apologise and no need to make amends if their behaviour can be altered by Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI, the clinical term for the most widely used type of anti-depressants).

Now, whether the tendency towards musical anguish management can be verified or not, it would have been difficult to ask any of these questions or draw any parallels with the proliferation of anti-depressants without examining the phenomenon in terms of musical signifiers and signifieds. That examination is facilitated by musematic analysis which focuses attention on musical-structural detail and on the relation of such detail to life 'outside' music. By paying attention to such detail it is possible for musicology to start mapping musically determined categories of thought which, in their turn, may contibute to a much broader understanding of how patterns of subjectivity are formed in this media-saturated society.

Understanding the expression or non-expression of anguish as a musical category may be an important step in developing strategies to deal with the alienation and disempowerment felt by so many members of our society. This article only scratches the surface of that issue. One thing is sure: if, as a musicologist, I fail to meet the challenge such uncompleted work implies, I will owe a huge apology to those who are most likely to be affected by my neglect.

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