

## I. Popular music in the West

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### 1. Definitions.

A common approach to defining popular music is to link popularity with scale of activity. Usually this is measured in terms of consumption, for example by counting sales of sheet music or recordings. While it seems reasonable to expect music thought of as ‘popular music’ to have a large audience, there are well-known methodological difficulties standing in the way of credible measurement, and – perhaps more seriously – this approach cannot take account of qualitative as against quantitative factors: for instance, repeat hearings are not counted, depth of response does not feature, socially diverse audiences are treated as one aggregated market and there is no differentiation between musical styles. Thus sales figures, however useful, measure sales rather than popularity.

Another common approach is to link popularity with means of dissemination, and particularly with the development and role of mass media. It is true that the history of popular music is intimately connected with the technologies of mass distribution (print, recording, radio, film, etc.); yet a piece that could be described as ‘popular music’ does not cease to be so when it is performed live in public, or even strummed in the amateur’s home, and conversely it is clear that all sorts of music, from folk to avant garde, are subject to mass mediation.

A third approach is to link popularity with social group – either a mass audience or a particular class (most often, though not always, the working class). In the first case, the theory is usually ‘top-down’, portraying the group as undifferentiated dupes of commercial manipulation; this tends to accompany pessimistic scenarios of cultural decline. In the second case, the theory is ‘bottom-up’, representing the group as the creative source of authentic (as opposed to ersatz) popular music; this tends to accompany populist scenarios of leftist opposition. The distinction is between production for the people and production by the people. This catches a real tension in the concept of popular music, not to mention the fact that so often it is defined by negation, that is, in terms of what it is not (e.g. popular music is not folk music, art music, commercial music, and so on). Always positioned as subordinate in the musical field as a whole, popular music seems condemned to be an ‘other’. But musical categories commonly cross social boundaries (e.g. jazz could be described as ‘popular music’, as could arias by Puccini when sung by Pavarotti, or the music of Jimi Hendrix when played by Nigel Kennedy, or Elton John’s *Candle in the Wind*, sung after works by Verdi and John Tavener at the funeral service of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997). Even if ‘the masses’ or particular classes can be given precise sociological definitions, which is doubtful, the structure of the musical field cannot be mapped straight on to the social structure, and musical categories do not walk on to the historical stage in socially or musically pure forms.

These three approaches identify important tendencies. Yet all are too partial, too static, too prone to essentialism. For most popular music scholars, it is better to accept the fluidity that seems indelibly to mark our understandings of the ‘popular’. From this perspective popular music has no permanent musical characteristics or social connections; rather, the term refers to a socio-musical space always in some sense subaltern, but with contents that are contested and subject to historical mutation. Stuart Hall, drawing on the theories of Antonio Gramsci, insists that it is impossible to understand the popular in any given moment except by placing it in a broader cultural context (the other categories it is working alongside and against) and that it possesses no essential content or social affiliations; rather, ‘it is the ground on which the transformations are worked’ (Hall, 1981, p.228). Frith (1996), emphasizing that the

discursive formation of the popular is itself marked by internal distinctions and hierarchies, adds that the criteria for these are often drawn from neighbouring musical categories (notions of aesthetic value from art discourses, for example).

It follows from this argument that understandings of popular music have changed with time. Indeed, while all but the simplest societies probably have some sort of hierarchy of musical categories (as pre-modern Europe certainly did), the resonances now attached to the term came to the fore during the late 18th century (with the beginnings of late-modern society), and sedimented themselves into general awareness during the 19th. During this period a gradual but ultimately dramatic reshaping of the socio-cultural topography brought into being, in symbiotic interrelationship, hugely increased audiences for music; publicly accessible apparatuses for musical education, criticism, and propagation; an emergent canonic repertory of ‘classics’; and (as an apparent mirror image of this) a sense of low-class, ‘trivial’ genres as being problematic. On the one hand, this constructed what is now commonly known as classical music as, in a sense, the first modern popular music, laying the foundations for what would subsequently be its installation as the core of middlebrow taste; on the other, it imposed a new, explicitly moralistic pressure on ‘low’ music. Research by DiMaggio (1982), Levine (1988), Broyles (1992) and others has revealed many of the ways in which, in the USA, an earlier, easy, populist mixing of tastes was replaced, through the influence of the institutions of ‘good music’, by a sense of hierarchy, linked to social class. In Britain Haweis arranged the whole field into a moral-aesthetic ladder, with German symphonic music at the top and street entertainers at the foot (with ballads just above them) (*Music and Morals*, 1871). In the early 20th century the split intensified, the modernists defiantly esoteric, the emergent Tin Pan Alley defiantly commercial; the macabre dance of the Modernism–mass culture couple can now be seen as ideologically self-sustaining. On a broader front, the drive by the new mass media, especially radio, to identify and supply a fully national market brought all the musical categories into the same socio-technological space and also, as a result, revealed their differences: the BBC, for example, ‘undertook the standardisation, classification and placing in rank order of the *whole field of music*’ (Scannell, 1981, p.259). By the 1920s the now familiar highbrow–middlebrow–lowbrow model was fully in place. This ‘sandwich’ structure (a bifurcation with variable middle-of-the-road or light music fillings) remains fundamentally intact, even if by the late 20th century the boundaries blurred easily, crossovers abounded, new sub-terms (pop, rock, beat, etc.) appeared, and the content of particular categories became increasingly unpredictable. The ‘globalization’ of the cultural economy may engineer a further shift – perhaps, as all music is further commodified and deracinated, towards an erosion of category distinctions. However, so long as cultural capital remains an important tool of social positioning within capitalist society, the principles seem unlikely to change significantly.

The history of popular music, then, can be described in terms of a sequence (somewhat variably dated in different societies) of three spatial metaphors. First there is an ‘each to his own’ model, with different musical categories located in different social spaces, though in some circumstances mixing unselfconsciously. Then these spaces start to be connected to a ladder, which may be climbed through techniques of social mobility and moral self-improvement. Finally, this ranking is consolidated into a unitary ‘virtual space’. What is striking is how late, relatively, this final stage – the one we tend to take for granted – occurred. It was established fully only in the first half of the 20th century; in Britain, the restructuring of BBC programming into highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow channels after World War II marked its complete acceptance. In most European countries, it coincided with the first large-scale incursion of American styles, in the shape of the new products of Tin Pan Alley (in Britain this process had begun somewhat earlier); indeed, in the USA itself it is these products that often are associated most closely with the term ‘popular music’, the

characteristic post-1955 styles being covered by ‘rock’ or ‘rock and roll’. Significantly, during the same early 20th-century period, translations or equivalents of the English-language ‘popular music’ appeared, taking over wholly or in part from previous terminologies. In German, for instance, *Populärmusik* gradually replaced the older *Trivialmusik* and *Unterhaltungsmusik*. By the 1960s, throughout Europe and North America, interrelated terminologies focussed on equivalents of ‘popular’ and ‘pop’ music reflected the consolidation of a socio-musical field that was increasingly internationally unified.

## 2. Mass media and the cultural economy of popular music.

### (i) The main historical shifts.

The most significant feature of the emergent popular music industry of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was the extent of its focus on the commodity form of sheet music. During the 19th century music publishers’ catalogues and output grew enormously, and the products – many of them in ‘popular’ genres – were disseminated increasingly widely. Demand rocketed as an expanding, ambitious middle class (joined in due course by more affluent sectors of the working classes) bought pianos, which were falling in price and increasingly targeted at a range of social groups, and entertained themselves in the home. A variety of educational institutions and strategies promoted musical literacy. Song sheets, instrumental pieces and arrangements, cheap editions, music supplements in magazines, albums, and part-works poured from the presses. New transport networks created national markets and speeded up supply, carrying the latest pieces quickly around Europe and much of America. At the same time, the provision of and access to public performances also increased. In pleasure gardens and dance halls, popular theatres and concert rooms, ordinary people – no doubt for the first time, in many cases – could enjoy music commercially provided by professionals. The first ‘star’ performers promoted publishers’ products, for example through the British ‘royalty ballad’ system; one of the earliest, Jenny Lind, toured the USA in 1850–51 to great acclaim, a beneficiary of the pioneering publicity techniques of P.T. Barnum. Amateur choirs and bands mushroomed. Copyright legislation was in place or came into being in most countries, though enforcement was difficult and piracy abounded. Yet publishers profited from most of these activities, and thus, with the emergence of incipiently symbiotic music businesses, centred on the sale of compositional products and their performance to large markets, themselves marked by a variable balance between ‘listening’ and ‘participation’, consumption of musical pleasures and mastery of musical knowledge, and linked to the spread of ‘leisure’ as both a concept and a reality, a new kind of musical economy came into being.

In the 1880s and 90s American music publishing became centred in New York, in an area of the city later called ‘Tin Pan Alley’ (see **PRINTING AND PUBLISHING OF MUSIC, §II, 4**). These publishers developed a new method of production: aiming to construct a national market, they surveyed potential taste, contracted composers, established successful compositional formulae and assiduously promoted songs through ‘plugging’ techniques. As Charles K. Harris, one of the most successful Tin Pan Alley composers, wrote (1926, pp.39–40): ‘A new song must be sung, played, hummed, and drummed into the ears of the public, not in one city alone, but in every city, town and village, before it ever becomes popular’. Within a decade or two the American model was copied in European countries. Copyright protection and royalty collection were tightened, especially in relation to performing rights (in the USA the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), and in Britain the Performing Rights Society (PRS) were both formed in 1914: see **COPYRIGHT §V, 14(I); III, 16(I)**).

Automatic player pianos (which, at the peak of their popularity, before succumbing to competition from radio and records, accounted for 56% of American piano production;

Theberge, 1997, p.27) spread home music-making even more widely. The expansion and streamlining of sheet music production (American sales were around 30 million annually by 1910; Sanjek, 1988, iii, p.32) were linked to growing demand from vaudeville and variety theatres, to the popularization of dancing across all social classes (especially after World War I) and to the emergence of the gramophone record as a new medium of musical dissemination (see **RECORDED SOUND, §I**). After the success during the 1890s of publicly operated coin-in-the-slot machines, record players for home use took over from around the beginning of the 20th century, and the growth of production – much of it centred on ‘popular’ genres – was extraordinary. By 1920 there were almost 80 record companies in Britain, and almost 200 in the USA. American production reached about 27 million records in 1914, and peaked at 128 million in 1926, before the Depression devastated it (ibid., 27; Chanan, 1995, pp.54, 65–6). From the start radio transmitted music, from both recordings and live performances (see **RADIO**). In the USA radio broadcasting was organized commercially (the first station, KDKA, opened in Pittsburgh in 1920), while in Europe public monopolies were the norm (the BBC was formed in 1922). By 1927 there was a radio in about a quarter of American homes; the number increased by about 10% on average each year during the 1930s, and by 1950 virtually every household possessed at least one radio (Sanjek, 1988, iii, p.87; Ennis, 1992, pp.101, 132). Electrical recording (introduced by record companies in 1925) transformed sound quality and increased the appeal of the new media. The first sound film (*The Jazz Singer*) was released in 1927, and thereafter many films (and not only musicals) incorporated popular songs (see **FILM MUSIC, §2–3** and **FILM MUSICAL**). By the mid-1930s 60 million cinema tickets were sold each week in the USA.

### **Home music-making, c1830: engraving by Victor Bernstrom after Arthur Burdett Frost, late 19th century**

Mansell / Time Pix / Katz

These inter-war developments reconstructed the economy of popular music. Radio and film were now at its centre, supported by records and music publishing, and the market was re-imagined in terms of anonymous consumers populating a space that spanned classes, regions and even nations. The same star performers appeared on film, radio and recording. Turnover of songs accelerated, as did media permeation of almost all corners of society. Record sales and radio plays became more important to revenues than sheet music, and the first ‘charts’ appeared, in trade magazines; so too did the first radio chart show, ‘Your Hit Parade’, in 1935. The interdependence of the various sectors is clear (even if their interests did not entirely coincide), and took institutional form: for instance, in Hollywood, Warners took over Tin Pan Alley publishers Witmark in 1928, and later, in Britain, EMI bought into leading music publishers Chappell. Similarly, in 1927 the Columbia record company set up CBS, and in 1929 RCA bought the record company Victor. The trend towards oligopoly drove the mergers that created EMI in 1932; by the outbreak of the war EMI and Decca between them controlled all record production in Britain, and in the USA the entire record industry was in the hands of three giant companies, RCA Victor, American Record-Brunswick, and Decca. The entertainment conglomerate, with transsector and transnational interests, had arrived. Intrinsic tensions within this symbiosis led to several conflicts in the 1940s, for example, between ASCAP and the American radio corporations, and between the American Federation of Musicians and the record companies. This led to new opportunities for publishers and composers from outside the mainstream (especially in the fields of country music and rhythm and blues), and, along with a reduction in production costs following the introduction of recording tape and cheap vinyl, also facilitated the emergence of a new wave of small, independent record companies, often aimed at new markets. At the same time, the general hegemony of the big corporations continued, increasingly on a global stage; by the 1970s, this

dominance was in the hands of five huge transnational organizations, three American-owned (WEA, RCA, CBS) and two European-owned (EMI, Polygram), who between them probably covered about two-thirds of the world market, slightly less (on average) in North America and European countries. Within a general picture of startling and continuous growth (British sales increased from 60 million units in 1955 to more than 200 million in 1977; the value of American sales increased from just over \$100 million in 1945 to \$3.5 billion in 1977; Harker, 1980, pp.223–6), the vicissitudes of the relationship between the large companies ('majors') and the smaller independent ones ('indies') became an important feature.

After World War II television began to take over some of radio's role, and, partly in response, radio (first in the USA, then elsewhere) cultivated new functions, notably specialized music channels (including 'chart radio'), whose presenters were increasingly prominent disc jockeys (DJs). The transistor increased radio's portability and ubiquity. The economic 'long boom' (1945–73) resulted in widespread increased leisure and spending power, disproportionately so among the young of the postwar 'baby boom' generation, at whom much of the expanded record production and its radio, television, and film mediations were aimed. Musical production was now centred on the recording studio. Multi-track recording (from the late 1950s) and the development of more sophisticated equipment in the 1960s placed producers and engineers at the centre of the process, and the requirements and potential of this process increasingly affected the sounds and textures of the music. A plethora of charts on radio and television and in magazines focussed attention on record sales. The role of specialist composers was reduced as producers and performers increasingly wrote their own material, with the requirements of recording in mind. Increasingly, too, a performance was judged by its ability to reproduce the sound of the recorded version through which it was first known. As the sounds of recorded pop music permeated the soundscape, especially in cities, a further step towards the complete commodification of leisure was taken, and a new sort of virtual aural space – created through highly technical mixing together of varied sounds and musical products into inescapable media flows – started to come into being.

From the 1970s the tendency towards conglomeration and globalization intensified. The musical products of the majors continued to be dominated by American (and to a lesser extent British) performers, but although these companies were responsible for 90% of American record sales in the 1990s (Burnett, 1995, p.18), only Warner remained American-owned, the others being based in Japan (CBS-Sony, MCA) and Europe (EMI, BMG, Polygram). In 1994 total world sales of recorded music were valued at about \$33 billion (*ibid.*, 3), of which the majors took the lion's share; yet for them, both capital and markets were transnational. Moreover, all the majors were part of much larger media-entertainment conglomerates, and increasingly sought synergy between their activities (tie-ins between recording, radio, television – including terrestrial and satellite music-video channels – publishing, merchandising, and advertising for other leisure products), if possible unified around a 'mega-star' performer and creating what has been called a 'total star text'. In the 1990s 'entertainment' accounted for a huge proportion of economic activity in developed societies, and its products were pushed into almost every social and geographical corner. And because music could be re-used so easily in different media contexts, recordings became not just commodities but 'bundles of rights'; back catalogue items were reissued in new formats (on cassette or compact disc or in 'greatest hits' compilations), and well-known recordings were used in television commercials, in movie soundtracks and for 'background music' in places such as supermarkets and airport lounges (*see* **ADVERTISING, MUSIC IN, TELEVISION** and **ENVIRONMENTAL MUSIC**).

At the same time, the introduction of digital equipment (mixing desks, synthesizers, samplers, sequencers) not only offered new sound worlds and new ways of creating music, accessible to people with little conventional musical training, but also drastically reduced production costs.



As a result, ‘do-it-yourself’ home recording studios, tiny independent labels, and small (often illegal) community radio stations formed the opposite extreme of the music economy. **SAMPLING** technology and the ease with which records could be remixed (see **REMIX**) raised questions about the very identity of a composition and about its ownership. Similarly, the audio cassette made home taping easy, and cheap production technology prompted a huge increase in pirate compact disc and tape copies of commercial recordings. The potential threats to the existing structure of the music industry and to the hegemony of big capital and the potential for democratization of music-making were clear. Yet most ‘indies’ depended on the majors for manufacture and distribution, or, if successful, were bought by them or contracted as independent suppliers; alternatively, their innovations were copied and ruthlessly exploited on a bigger economic stage. The basic picture in the 1990s was of large and small, global and local, in uneasy but mutually advantageous co-existence. Thus the homogenized global pop style and the ‘underground’ dance club, the international multi-million seller and the niche market (catering for specific age groups, ethnic or regional tastes, or youth subcultures), seem to behave like different aspects of a single system.

These developments seem to represent a new stage in the aural compression of time and space. A constant search for novelty rubbed up against back-catalogue nostalgia; individualized consumption through the personal stereo threw into relief the global exploitation of markets and musical materials in ‘world music’. Unprecedented amounts of exchange value streamed out of musical labours; yet the ease with which fans, performers, and entrepreneurs could, using new technology, exchange roles offered at least the possibility of a new relationship between listening and participation.

#### **(ii) Issues.**

Even if the main contours of the history of the mass media and popular music are reasonably clear, much of the detail of the developments, and their implications and effects, is less so, and has been the subject of lively debate among scholars, performers, and listeners. Several arguments draw on the central idea of ‘technological determinism’ – that particular cultural practices owe their character to the nature of the technology they use. Marshall McLuhan’s proposition (*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Toronto, 1962; *Understanding Media*, New York, 1964) that different media, especially the broad categories delineated by oral, written, and electronic modes of transmission, have intrinsic properties that condition diverse forms of consciousness and culture has been developed by John Shepherd and others in an attempt to explain distinct approaches to musical structure and process. To many, such views seem to allow too little room for other factors, including political struggle and human agency. Yet it is plausible to suggest, for example, that the ‘rational’ structures of many 19th-century popular-song genres and their explorations of major–minor tonal harmony are at least connected to their notated form; that this helps to differentiate them from orally transmitted folksongs (which are often monophonic, modal, and more iterative in structure); and that the recording process facilitates the recontextualization of some techniques typical of oral cultures (particularly performed nuance – tiny pitch and rhythm inflections that cannot be notated – hence the success of such genres as black American blues), and at the same time introduces new approaches to sound, texture, and form (e.g. montage, or repetition through computer-sequenced ‘loops’). The historical model, rural (folk memory) – urban (sheet music) – cosmopolitan/global (electronic pop), makes some sense described in these terms, even if it is often too crudely drawn. In an argument more sociologically sensitive than that of McLuhan, Walter Benjamin, writing about film in the 1930s (‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, 1936, repr. in *Illuminationen*, Frankfurt, 1961; Eng. trans., New York, 1968, pp.216–53), suggested that mechanical reproduction had drastically changed the status of the work of art, by destroying the ‘aura’ of the unique, authentic object, creating new processes of ‘distracted’

reception and thus empowering the viewer. At the same time, technically and collectively highly organized production demystified creativity, and turned passive consumers into critics. Applications of this analysis to music have become common. It is certainly clear that owners of a record, who can listen to it when, where, in whatever mental state, and as often as they want, stand in a different relationship to the music from that of traditional concert-goers. Some, following Adorno, point out the ease with which new forms of 'aura' can be created – through the fetishizing of the musical commodity or the glamorizing of stars – and argue that, in actual musical practice, passive listening is still the norm. Similarly, while digital technology has the potential to democratize production and 'de-throne' the stars, it can also be used to create new stars, such as producers and DJs (*see DJ (II)*) as well as performers. Nevertheless, Benjamin's inspiration continues to be evident in the stream of work that began in the 1970s on music subcultures, and in subsequent research on the 'active fan'.

Adorno believed that mass production is an adjunct of what he took to be the main ideological function of the 'culture industries' (including the music industry) in late capitalism, namely tying standardized products to equally standardized consumer (listener) responses; this maximizes profits (homogenized pieces can reach huge markets) and keeps people in their place. Many writers (for instance, Jacques Attali, in his concept of 'repetition') have advanced similar arguments. Given the financial rewards record companies gain from a large international 'hit', their desire to use the full array of mass media and marketing techniques to achieve the maximum possible market control is understandable. Nevertheless, research makes it clear that the market is not fully controllable (most record releases lose money); that music industry operations inhabit a field of conflicts among the various sectors, many of which mirror conflicts among musicians and fans; that new agents, new styles, and new tastes can never be outlawed – indeed, the logic of the economy requires them; and that, in any case, musical values cannot be regarded as mere epiphenomena of economic exchanges: interpretation and use cannot be fully policed. In this context the most influential model for the popular music economy draws a relationship between the balance of industry concentration and diversity on the one hand and the degree of musical standardization or innovation on the other; the history is viewed in terms of cycles: periods of oligopoly and conservatism are broken up by new energies coming from independent sources, which are in turn incorporated and made safe by the major players. Some qualifications are necessary: late 20th-century technology loosened somewhat the connection between industry structure and musical innovation; there are numerous examples of innovation in the outputs of major companies; and the model does not necessarily apply in the 1920s and 30s before the tendency to oligopoly really developed. Nevertheless, given that musical production here takes place in the context of the imperatives of a capitalist industry, the basic perspective of the model seems persuasive, suggesting that the history might be pictured as a spiral in which each stage strives to achieve an equilibrium that is nevertheless inevitably unstable.

Implicit in all these arguments are diverse views of what modern society is and what part mass-mediated music plays in it. It is a commonplace that each expansion in the scope of music markets, each increase in the speed of turnover, tends to intensify a process whereby metropolitan norms replace or absorb older, indigenous and peripheral styles and traditions. The trend is to rationalize and democratize by flattening out difference. Thus the promotional discourses around many 19th-century genres focussed on talk of fashion, the 'latest' composition, the 'talk of London' (or New York, or Paris, etc.), performed 'with great success by ...'. In the early 20th century J.B. Priestley described the appearance of ragtime as 'drumming us into another kind of life in which anything might happen' (Baxendale, 1995, p.138). Throughout Europe, American influences were associated, then and again after World War II, with modernization and the loss of old worlds. In the late 20th century the technophilic futurism of club-dance styles seemed to threaten pop traditions and to signal the

birth of a new transurban ‘jungle’. But cultural geographers point out that while such processes may destroy and restructure communities, they can also create the possibility of new ones (real or imagined), for instance people coming together round a newly discovered music style accessible to them only electronically. At the same time, as the size of the geographical unit within which activity is organized expands, so in a paradoxical way norms associated with intermediate levels (the nation-state, for example) may weaken, allowing local ‘scenes’ to flourish; increasing compression of time and space makes plentiful musical materials available. In any case, the industry is adept at inventing traditions or adapting them for sale to consumers alienated from their own. The British case – from early 19th-century stereotypes of Irish and Scottish music, through English folk revival ‘peasants’ and a music-hall ‘golden age’, to lovable rock and rolling cockney teddy boys and assorted adherents of (black American or Afro-Caribbean) ‘black roots’ – is a good example. Modernity has an insatiable appetite for irrational tradition, and most European traditional musics, most American ethnic styles, not to mention world musics from further afield, have been drawn into the net. The best overall model, then, may be some sort of network of levels of activity, continuously evolving in shape and dynamics, such as the matrix of (global) ‘superculture’, (local) ‘subculture’, and (cross-cutting) ‘interculture’ proposed by Slobin (1993).

### 3. An outline history.

#### (i) Before Tin Pan Alley.

As suggested above, it seems safe to assume that in all socially stratified cultures there is some sort of hierarchy of musical categories. While there may be a few remote regions where this seems barely to have obtained until relatively recently (the Scottish Highlands, Serbia, parts of the American frontier before the late 19th century, for example), in most of Europe and the New World distinctions between ‘popular’ and ‘élite’ types of music have a lengthy history. However, before about 1800 there is little sense of this being considered a problem. When the medieval theorist Johannes de Grocheio (*De musica*, c1300) wrote that the motet was not suitable for ordinary people ‘since they do not grasp its subtlety or delight in hearing it ... [it] should be performed for the learned’, he seems simply to be stating an obvious fact. It was the growth of social mobility, the increasing effects of capitalist social relations and the appearance of commercialized leisure activities that led to anxiety about the culture of the people. This process can be dated to the 17th and 18th centuries: J.G. Herder’s statement, late in the 18th century (cited in Burke, 1978, p.22), distinguishing an acceptable vernacular from the horrors of the contemporary *vulgus* – ‘The people [*Volk*] are not the mob of the streets, who never sing or compose but shriek and mutilate’ – may be taken as conveniently encapsulating the beginnings of the modern ‘problem’ of popular music.

The subject of popular music in medieval and early modern Europe is one of the weakest parts of its historiography. This is partly because the sources are scanty and often unreliable; partly because of insufficient research; and partly because the work that has been done often exists as an ‘aside’ in music-historical literature that is focussed elsewhere, or in the literature of highly specialized disciplines, notably folklore studies (see **FOLK MUSIC**). Redfield’s model of ‘great tradition’ and ‘little tradition’, the former accessible only to the educated élite, the latter to both the élite and the rest, but with two-way traffic in content and style, still holds good as a starting-point (see Burke, 1978, pp.23–64); but the task of placing data about the popular traditions within a picture of the development of the musical field as a whole is in its infancy (but see Maróthy, 1966; Ling, 1997). In some ways the interpretative difficulties intensify when more commercially orientated activities, often aimed at an embryonic middle class, increased during the 17th and 18th centuries. Broadside ballads (see **BALLAD, §1, 7**) and the tunes to which they were sung had already been socially mobile for some time, but in the second half of the 17th century printed collections of songs and dance-tunes were



published (in England, for example, John Playford's *The English Dancing Master*, 1651, *Apollo's Banquet*, 1669, and *A Choice Collection of 180 Loyal Songs*, 1685, and D'Urfey's *Wit and Mirth, or Pills to Purge Melancholy*, 1699), followed by individual songs, perhaps drawn from the theatre or, increasingly, specially composed for the growing domestic market. By the 18th century, simple instrumental pieces were being aimed at the domestic market too, and the first collections of 'folk' music (mostly 'Scotch') appeared. Popular tunes, previously used by, for example, Elizabethan composers of virginal and consort music, were used in 18th-century English ballad opera, German Singspiel and French *opéra comique*. Town bands, such as the English waits, were joined by more commercially organized groups performing in taverns and, later, in pleasure gardens and concert rooms. The new urban tunes percolated out into the countryside, for instance through the travels of itinerant fiddlers, pipers, and singers, while many dances, from the saraband and country dance to the early 19th-century waltz, made the opposite social journey.

The essential background to the history of popular music in the 19th century is its industrialization. As this process gradually brought most of society within its orbit, the effect in some ways was to narrow the stream of musical practice: the range of activities was broad but, leaving aside older rural repertoires, the stylistic range became less so. Much of what we think of now as art music was widely available through cheap editions, through transcriptions and arrangements (which often simplified difficult works), through the spectacular virtuoso recitals pioneered by Paganini and Liszt, and through 'popular concerts'. A similar repertoire was central to the activity of the mass amateur choral movements that developed in most European countries (stimulated in part by the invention of sol-fa notation systems); and art music (especially opera) also featured strongly in the repertoire of the equally popular wind bands, such as the British brass bands which first appeared around the middle of the century and quickly coalesced into a unique working-class movement (see **BAND (I), §IV, 3**). Many of these activities were part of consciously pursued attempts to tie the lower classes into the norms (aesthetic and behavioural) of bourgeois society.

At the same time, it is often difficult to draw a clear dividing-line between these activities and more 'down-market' spheres. Weber (1975) shows that many early 19th-century concerts in London, Paris, and Vienna cultivated a rather vulgar appeal to the *nouveaux-riches*. Similarly, in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s in these cities (and later in others) a new breed of composer-conductor, with a flamboyant, 'marketable' personality, appeared: Louis Jullien in London, Philippe Musard in Paris, the two Johann Strausses in Vienna. Their promenade and outdoor concerts included not just dances (the Strausses, of course, owed their fame initially to the waltz) but also pieces for listening, and these performances (which themselves emerged from earlier pleasure-garden traditions) laid the ground for the 'popular concerts' that developed in the second half of the century. Large-scale dance halls were another new phenomenon, and dances (as well as marches) were also popular with wind and military bands. The flood of music written for domestic performance also shades stylistically from art norms into what has tendentiously been called *Trivialmusik*; the distance between Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* and the salon pieces of, for example, Gustav Lange and Sydney Smith, or between the simpler lieder of Schubert and the songs of Adolf Jensen and F.W. Abt, is not large. Much the same point can be made about French *mélodies* and British drawing-room ballads: prevailing norms are simplified for a mass market. The relationship between the core operatic repertoire – from which many overtures and arias in any case found their way into orchestral and band concerts, dance and domestic arrangements, and even barrel organ transcriptions – and new lineages of light opera and operetta (from Ferdinand Hérold and Offenbach to Gilbert and Sullivan and Lehár) is not dissimilar.

Even in the British **MUSIC HALL** (and equivalents elsewhere, such as the French *café chantant*; see **CAFÉ-CONCERT**) 'serious' music was sometimes included, especially

extracts from operas and ballets. But the sources of these new institutions, which emerged during the mid-19th century, were socially and musically more diverse. Early audiences seem to have been predominantly working- and lower-middle-class, and the songs derived from existing folk, street, and urban comic-song repertoires. By the 1860s distinct song styles had been established, and the first star performers, such as ‘swell’ George Leybourne, had made their mark. Towards the end of the century, however, increased investment, a tendency to split the drinking from the entertainment, and a broadening of the audience turned the halls into something more like variety theatres; there is still an observable difference in type of appeal and musical character between them and contemporary musical comedy

(see **MUSICAL**), **CABARET**, and Parisian vaudeville-operetta, but it is not a chasm. Further still down the socio-musical ladder lie resilient traditions of street, industrial, and political song, which, as folklorists have shown, drew on and developed older tunes and styles, often using them in new contexts such as industrial disputes. Here is the place where striking musical difference (for example, in the form of modal tunes) may still be found.

The history of 19th-century popular music in the USA is similar in some ways to that in Europe, and different in others. The ideological gulf between ‘popular’ and ‘élite’ developed more hesitantly and patchily. There were exceptionally strong and active folk traditions among both rural white communities (notably in the South) and black slaves and ex-slaves; these assumed great importance in the early 20th century, since their modes of performance were far better suited to transmission by recordings than by notation. However, commercial music publishing in the USA drew at first on European (especially British) sources, initially broadside ballads and the 17th- and 18th-century collections of Playford and others, then the ballad opera and pleasure-garden and domestic song repertoires. Irish songs (especially those published by Thomas Moore) and Italian opera were also popular. Many European musicians, such as the English singer and composer Henry Russell, visited the USA. Singing schools and other educational initiatives led to increased musical literacy (see **PSALMODY (II)**, **§II** and **SHAPE-NOTE HYMNODY**), and to the growth of domestic markets for vocal and instrumental music similar to those in Europe. At the same time, ‘singing families’ such as the Hutchinsons generated distinctive song repertoires, as did the Civil War; and, much more significantly, the minstrel show – emerging as an identifiable genre in the 1830s, and soon an enormous success in Britain as well as throughout the USA – evolved in ways that were unique not only in relation to its negotiation of racial issues but also to its musical fusion of Anglo-Celtic, Italian, and (to some degree and in diluted forms) black American elements (see **MINSTRELSY**, **AMERICAN**). The fusion is heard at its most influential in the songs, for both minstrel show and domestic parlour, of Stephen Foster.

Foster is notable for his ability to identify successful song formulae and exploit them. This tendency is seen even more clearly in the output of subsequent song composers, including H.P. Danks, Henry Tucker, Septimus Winner, Will S. Hays, and David Braham, as well as in the production of drawing-room ballads in Britain from the 1870s by Arthur Sullivan, Frederic Cowen, James Molloy, and others. Mass production techniques emerged at exactly the same time in the music hall: Felix McGlennon, who was self-taught, claimed to have written 4000 songs, Joseph Tabrar 17,000 (sometimes 30 in a day). McGlennon said that he would ‘sacrifice everything ... to catchiness ... . If a rowdy song takes the ear of the public, and rowdy songs set in, why, I must needs write them. [The] music hall songs of all time run in clear grooves’ (Bennett, 1986, pp.9–10). The stage for Tin Pan Alley was set.

### **(ii) From Tin Pan Alley to rock and roll.**

Tin Pan Alley may have established itself in response to the growing demand for songs from the vaudeville theatres (which had replaced the minstrel show, just as variety replaced music hall in Europe, and which had their organizational centre in New York); but it quickly

developed a commercial momentum of its own (see **TIN PAN ALLEY**). Many of the songs of the 1890s and early 1900s – by Paul Dresser, Charles K. Harris, George M. Cohan, Harry von Tilzer, and others – are not radically different stylistically from their immediate predecessors; but the vibrant, punchy demotic manner of Irving Berlin's first hits (from 1909, and especially *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, 1911) may be taken to represent both a new phase and the multi-ethnic ferment in turn-of-the-century New York out of which the new music emerged. With the advent of records (George Gershwin's first big success, *Swanee*, 1919, sold over two million copies), then radio and films, the Tin Pan Alley composers between the wars were the hub of American popular music. The up-tempo, dance-orientated, novelty focus which was a feature of the period from 1900 to the early 1920s tended to shift subsequently to more introspective and sentimental moods, particularly in the 1930s as the Depression took hold, and compositional technique became somewhat 'denser' (involving more complex harmonies, phrase patterns, motivic relationships, etc.). Nevertheless, a handful of celebrated composers – Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, and Harold Arlen, in addition to Berlin and Gershwin – dominated the entire period, even though notable songs were also written by many others, including Harry Warren, Vincent Youmans, Duke Ellington, and Frank Loesser.

The connections between popular song and the theatre remained close. At the turn of the century, operetta and musical comedy composers such as Victor Herbert used a more sophisticated musical style than their Tin Pan Alley contemporaries, but, as American musical theatre left European models behind, the **REVUE** and the musical became important contexts for 'breaking' new songs. Many of the composers mentioned above wrote for musical shows, and their songs thus had a double life (indeed more than that, if arrangements for dance bands and performances by 'silent' cinema musicians are taken into consideration). In due course, a similar relationship developed between such composers and the Hollywood film industry. While songs for stage shows and musical films were often clearly intended for a subsequent independent, commercial life, there was also a counterbalancing tendency towards more dramatically coherent musicals, Kern's *Showboat* (1927) and *Oklahoma!* (1943) by Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II being the most celebrated examples. In any case, the best songs of this Tin Pan Alley–Broadway–Hollywood nexus have justifiably been considered as among the creative peaks of 20th-century popular music.

The new media disseminated a broad range of genres: novelties, old-fashioned vaudeville songs, religious music, and a variety of traditional or 'ethnic' repertoires (e.g. Polish, Jewish, Irish) adapting to 20th-century urban existence in the USA. Of these ethnic musics, two were to be of wider historical importance: **COUNTRY MUSIC**, at the time known as **HILLBILLY MUSIC**, and black American music, put out on 'race' records. Each of these tended to have its own listing or label within record company catalogues, and eventually its own dedicated sales charts (hillbilly soon acquired its own radio programmes on certain Southern stations, too); and each was marketed primarily to its 'home' audience. However, from an early point in the century black American music was becoming more widely known and influential; indeed, this process can be traced back to the 1890s (if not, in a certain sense, to minstrelsy).

The **COON SONG** and **CAKEWALK**, deriving both their musical style and their portrayal of black stereotypes from minstrelsy, were among the most popular song types of the 1890s and early 1900s. They were followed by the astonishing commercial success of **RAGTIME**, which lasted until World War I, then **JAZZ** (the first records appearing in 1917) and, at roughly the same time, the first commercially disseminated **BLUES** (the earliest sheet music, by W.C. Handy among others, appeared in 1912, and the earliest recordings, by Mamie Smith, in 1920). Jazz bands enjoyed considerable popularity during the 1920s 'jazz age', and in the mid-1930s the big band jazz style known as swing (see **SWING (II)**) achieved a

national (and international) prominence that lasted until World War II. Many historians and critics have tried to draw clear boundaries around these terms, and to privilege certain strands, often associating these with the ‘authentic’ styles of black musicians, which they have wanted to distinguish from white ‘dilutions’. It is easy to agree that the piano rags of Scott Joplin, the blues of Bessie Smith, Charley Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Leroy Carr, and Robert Johnson, the small group jazz of King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Jelly Roll Morton, and the big bands of Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie were distinctive and usually superior to the music in similar styles, or styles derived from these, produced by white musicians. Moreover, much of this white music certainly offers a ‘smoother’, ‘sweeter’ alternative, in the quest for mainstream appeal. Nevertheless, the practices of black and white musicians were thoroughly intermingled. None of these categories was tightly defined at the time. ‘Ragtime’ encompassed not only the classic piano pieces but also songs and band music; and any music could be ‘ragged’. Its origins lie in syncopated guitar, banjo, and string band styles played by both black and white rural musicians, and in the march tradition represented most famously by J.P. Sousa. ‘Blues’ settled definitively into the structure we now associate with it only in the late 1920s (perhaps as a result of the influence of records); before that, the term seems to have applied more to an emotional character and to certain technical features, which might appear in a range of vocal and instrumental genres, including Tin Pan Alley songs; it could also denote a type of dance. ‘Jazz’ was used to describe novelty groups such as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the ‘symphonic jazz’ of white bandleader Paul Whiteman, ‘sweet’ big bands like the Casa Loma Orchestra, and indeed any mildly syncopated dance music or ‘hot’ singing styles. Blues singers often included other types of song in their repertoires and played rags; and white country musicians sang blues, and, in the 1930s, were influenced by jazz (in Western swing), dance-blues and **BOOGIE-WOOGIE** (in **HONKY-TONK MUSIC**). Early jazz musicians had their own repertory, but soon added Tin Pan Alley songs to it. Blacks working in the margins of the mainstream music business – ‘society’ dance-band leader James Reese Europe, songwriters such as Perry Bradford, Clarence Williams, Eubie Blake, and Noble Sissle, jazzmen such as Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller – drew on a range of available genres, a tendency given a particular point in the lineage of black musical shows, from Will Marion Cook’s *In Dahomey* (1902–3) through Sissle and Blake’s *Shuffle Along* (1921) to the various *Blackbirds* revues of the late 1920s and early 30s. Finally, melodic shapes, rhythmic patterns, and blues-derived harmonies infiltrated much of mainstream popular song, most clearly in the ‘jazz age’, but – if often in subtle ways – permanently. Arguments that this represented no more than a veneer (e.g. Hamm, 1979, pp.358, 385), while appropriate in some cases, would seem to mistake hybridity for superficiality, and to underestimate its long-term historical significance. A somewhat parallel case – the ‘Latin’ influences on mainstream Euro-American popular music generated by successive fashions for **TANGO**, **RUMBA**, and **MAMBO** – is perhaps more susceptible to Hamm’s critique; but even here superficial exoticism is only a partial explanation for what, more carefully considered, may be a symptom of deep-rooted cultural ambivalence. This is not to deny the need for distinctions, between white and black audiences and the musical styles that they typically favoured, nor that black musicians were other than heavily constrained in the activities open to them. Cultural and social relationships were no less complex than the psychology of the white reception of black music (welcomed as ‘modern’ and at the same time tantalizingly ‘primitive’; attacked for its ‘barbarity’ and ‘immorality’). Economic exploitation of black musicians was commonplace. Thus the biggest beneficiaries of the craze for swing music – based on musical innovations developed by blacks – were white bandleaders such as Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and Glenn Miller. Similarly, a succession of dance fashions, from ragtime dances such as the bunny hug through the foxtrot and charleston to jitterbugging, all originating in black American practices, was ‘cleaned up’



for respectable white consumption, notably through the publications and educational projects of the dancers Vernon and Irene Castle (*see* **DANCE**, §7).

In a period marked by a growing cult of musical ‘personality’ it was white composers, singers, and bandleaders who by and large enjoyed the greatest commercial success (not entirely, however: Ethel Waters, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Lena Horne, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong all achieved considerable popularity). In particular, star singers such as Al Jolson, Rudy Vallee, Ethel Merman, Ruth Etting, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and Dinah Shore, with the benefit of new singing styles such as **CROONING** and more intensive publicity techniques, were associated with songs more than their composers were; record companies vied with each other to achieve this tie-up through multiple covers of new songs. Characteristics of voice and nuances of performance became at least as important as the notes on the page. At the same time, bandleaders, from Whiteman to Miller, could also become celebrities; songs, it was discovered, could be danced to (and tailored rhythmically for dancing), while conversely most dance bands had a vocal soloist. Social dancing was a major pastime, and could be pursued at home as well, to records or the radio. Most of the stars also benefited from film appearances. Increasingly, musical practice became multi-functional, musical success constructed through a concatenation of aural, visual, and behavioural images. In Europe, late 19th-century traditions of musical theatre, variety, dance music, and domestic song survived into the next century for some time, but the vigour of the new American styles, transplanted to a context marked often by political and cultural self-doubt, led quickly to their popularity, forcing older practices to give way or adapt. Many American musicians visited Europe – Sousa, Cook, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Whiteman, and Armstrong – and the black singer Josephine Baker settled in Paris. Ragtime revues (e.g. *Hullo Ragtime*, 1912) brought both the music and the new dances. Most major New York musical shows went to London. Dance bands on the American model sprang up across Europe (along with small nuclei of jazz aficionados); dancing – in dance halls, hotels, and restaurants and at home to broadcasts – was cultivated by all social classes; bandleaders such as Jack Hylton and Ray Noble were as well known as singers following the American style, such as Al Bowlly and Vera Lynn. American films, including musicals, placed their stars before the gaze of Europeans. Native songwriters (in Britain, Horatio Nicholls, alias Lawrence Wright, Tolchard Evans, Will Grosz, Ray Noble, Jack Strachey) copied the American form and style. Differences survived, however. Local theatre composers such as Ivor Novello, Noël Coward, and Kurt Weill hybridized indigenous and transatlantic lineages; some singers resisted American models: Gracie Fields and George Formby, for example. In French *chanson* and *variété*, German *Schlager*, Italian *canzone*, and some British songs in the music-hall tradition, native gestures and structures of feeling survived, intertwined with new rhythms. In more peripheral regions, old-established genres and practices changed less, and everywhere, it should be remembered, there was a less obvious network of vernacular musical activities, under-researched as yet. In Britain, for example, these included middlebrow ‘light classical’ and ‘palm-court’ music, played in upper-class hotels and spas, accordion and banjo bands, old-fashioned ballads, and ‘romantic’ operetta, alongside still older traditions of brass band, pub sing-song, and choir singing.

However, World War II and its aftermath, which brought US troops to Europe, with their records and radio stations, and established the USA as the leading political and economic world power, laid the ground for a new phase in the rise of American popular music to global dominance.

### **(iii) Rock and roll and after.**

**ROCK AND ROLL** entered American public consciousness in 1955 (with the success of Bill Haley’s *Rock around the Clock*, first released in 1954, when it was included in the



film *Blackboard Jungle*), and threw up its first big star, Elvis Presley, in 1956 (with *Heartbreak Hotel* and *Hound Dog*). Its popularity, and the controversy that accompanied it (falling into a pattern set by the reception of ragtime and jazz), quickly spread through Europe, including (via illicit routes) communist eastern Europe. Musically, however, it was not new. It was derived from the driving, small-group rhythm and blues that had been developed by black ‘jump’ and city blues bands and vocal groups during the 1940s and early 50s, with an admixture of influences from the blues-influenced country music performed in the same period by such singers as Hank Williams. What was new, though, was that this music was ‘crossing over’, being heard and taken up by mainstream white (mostly young) audiences, and that it contrasted in style with the big band accompanied ballad singing that still dominated popular music immediately after the war. Several interacting factors were involved in this shift. In the USA huge numbers of Southern whites and blacks moved to northern cities during the war. Their musical tastes began to be catered for in larger-scale, more obvious ways, especially through a rash of new independent record companies and radio stations. New technology (described above) facilitated new modes of musical practice and dissemination. A postwar surge in births (the ‘baby boom’) coincided with the start of the economic ‘long boom’, leading to substantially increased disposable income and leisure time, disproportionately so by the mid-1950s for young people. A gradual shift in moral atmosphere revealed growing social tensions and made possible more public expression of cultural and generational differences.

All subsequent types of what became a new popular music mainstream, ‘pop’ or ‘rock’ music, can be traced back to rock and roll. Its historical significance is therefore obvious, but it is also manifold. It established black American traditions as central to popular music throughout America and Europe. It enthroned youth as the principal market for the music industry, and as the decisive arbiter of taste. It shifted the cultural politics of popular music: it was from this point on, for example, much more clearly about physical pleasures – indeed, sexuality – and about ideals and choices of life style. It was exceptionally well suited to dissemination in recorded form (conversely, sheet music could not capture its textures, rhythmic dynamics, and vocal inflections), and, as musicians realized this (Buddy Holly being, arguably, the earliest), it became the first popular music to be designed for recording.

The intricate history of pop music after rock and roll (intricate in terms of its chronology and its geographical variants) is recounted in detail elsewhere (*see* **POP**). The emphasis in this article is on laying out the pattern of major shifts that articulate this history and relating them to the longer-term popular music narrative. Three such shifts are apparent. The first relates to the emergence of **ROCK** as a self-standing stream distinct from its antecedents; this dates from the mid-1960s. The second is associated with the brief flowering of **PUNK ROCK** in the late 1970s, which was a symptom of a broader process of fragmentation in the popular music field. The third revolves around the appearance in the late 1980s of a new wave of highly technically mediated, club-based dance music styles, which seemed to some to threaten much of the basis on which the previous popular music apparatus operated (*see* **DANCE MUSIC**). It is important to note, however, that through these successive shifts existing styles rarely disappeared; on the contrary, the history shows a cumulative process and an expanding style-reservoir. Moreover, many pre-rock-and-roll styles also continued, in the margins, to be joined by a host of adaptations, hybrids, and revivals associated with ethnic and indigenous traditions particular to many distinct regions of both Europe (from Irish show bands to Russian rock) and North America (from Louisiana swamp rock to Jewish *klezmer*). Indeed, there is an argument that, as media saturation brought all corners of these societies into the same electronically mediated space, the very concept of cultural centres and margins became doubtful, making the historiography of popular music a politically charged enterprise.

The assimilation of rock and roll by the music industry and mainstream taste in the late 1950s and early 60s (in the form of blander adaptations) was rudely upset by a constellation of new developments: from Britain, **BEAT MUSIC**, led by the Beatles, and a native derivative of rhythm and blues associated most influentially with the Rolling Stones; from the American West Coast, new hybrids of folk, blues, and rock and roll, leaving Californian ‘surf music’ behind and developing into **PSYCHEDELIC ROCK**; from New York (mainly), modernizing **FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL** and **FOLK-ROCK** styles led by Bob Dylan, and the incipient **ART ROCK** of Velvet Underground. In a context of rapid economic growth, an expanding college population, youthful protest (especially over the Vietnam War) and widespread changes in social values, all amounting (it has been suggested) to a crisis of legitimacy for existing political regimes, the music took on a rebellious edge and serious aesthetic aims. Rapidly changing studio technology, the growth of FM radio, and the emergence of LPs (sometimes in the form of ‘concept albums’) as a rival to singles shifted the basis of production and enormously expanded the available musical means. By the later 1960s ‘rock’ was established in general discourse – with several variants, including (in addition to those mentioned above) **PROGRESSIVE ROCK**, **HARD ROCK**, and **COUNTRY ROCK** – and was separating (in terms of audience, production, and aesthetic) from more chart-orientated ‘pop’. Alongside these developments, distinctive black American styles, notably **MOTOWN** and **SOUL MUSIC**, sometimes interplayed with rock currents (through such performers as Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin, for example) but by and large stayed relatively separate, in market and musical practice.

In 1976–7 the Sex Pistols, the Clash, and others pioneered British punk rock. Some of its sources lay in earlier pop (for example, the Who and David Bowie in Britain, American garage bands and art-rock punks from New York such as Patti Smith and the New York Dolls), but by tying a stripped down musical revisionism to a pseudo-situationist philosophy and deliberately outrageous behaviour, British punk caught the mood of economic recession and social unrest among working-class youth and exposed the gargantuanism of progressive rock as pretentious. Perhaps most significantly, it offered an approach that was both aesthetically and organizationally democratic: anyone could make music, it was suggested; a huge number of new, often tiny, independent record companies, distributors, and shops sprang up, in opposition to the established music business; and new production technology made very cheap recording possible. By laying bare the seams in their own music, behaviour, and visual style, punk musicians and fans made the point that rock, for all its aesthetic claims, was really a branch of entertainment, with its own modes of artifice. Their insistence on organizational control galvanized the further fragmentation of popular music, laying the ground for the emergence of **INDIE MUSIC** (the US equivalents were ‘alternative’ or ‘college rock’), electro-pop (using synthesizers, drum-machines, etc.), **GRUNGE** (a punk–heavy metal hybrid originating in Seattle), and world music, each with its own audience and (often) organizational network. These joined chart pop, **HEAVY METAL**, the **SINGER-SONGWRITER**, and various black genres (**DISCO**, soul, **FUNK**, **REGGAE**), as well as older styles and hybrids (rock ballads, rock musicals, etc.), to make what was by this time an exceptionally broad pop field. The effects took institutional forms, bringing a diversity of performance contexts (clubs and discos, as well as concerts and festivals), of radio channels and programme formats, and of music magazines; similarly an intensification of merchandising and of star promotion occurred, but alongside an increasing acceptance of the legitimacy of serious pop journalism and critical writing. The international influence of punk, and of its effects, was enormous.

For some, these effects threatened ‘the end of rock’ (at least as an ideology), but arguably a more tangible threat was the rise in popularity of club dance music. With roots in disco (dance music designed for records to be played in discotheques, at the peak of its popularity in the

1970s), in funk, in dub (remixed reggae records; *see* **DUB (II)**) and in **HIP HOP** and **RAP** (originally New York street musics using intermixed rhythm tracks, drum machines, manually ‘scratched’ records, and ‘rapped’ vocals), the new dance music was clearly based in black music traditions. Starting in the mid-1980s with Chicago **HOUSE** and Detroit **TECHNO**, and moving through British **RAVE**, a host of continually hybridizing styles had developed by the 1990s, in centres in North America, Britain, and many parts of continental Europe. Dance had its own institutional networks (clubs, illegal raves, record companies, magazines, radio stations), its own production system (centred on producers, mixers, and DJs, making music through techniques of sampling, sound synthesis, computer programming, and live mixing, with few or even no performing musicians directly involved), its own approach to musical form and texture and its own social ambience, associated with lengthy (often all-night) dance sessions and recreational drugs. While crossover into the mainstream market became commonplace in the later 1990s (usually involving the incorporation of more conventional elements – instrumentalists, vocals, pop forms), dance music posed a clear challenge to the previous popular music paradigm.

Rock and roll is often seen as marking a radical shift in popular music practice, from literate styles clearly related in their musical techniques to broadly accepted norms of 19th-century European and Euro-American musics, to more corporeally exciting styles made for records and derived mainly from black American norms with strong orally transmitted elements. While there is a good deal of truth in this view, it is possible that it both underplays the strength of black American influence before rock and roll (see Van der Merwe, 1989, esp. p.286; ‘with the publication of the first blues the materials of the 20th-century popular composer were complete. Since then popular music ... has striven to maintain a sense of breathless novelty. But it has come up with nothing that, fundamentally, cannot be traced back to 1900 or earlier’) and overplays its triumph since (Tin Pan Alley musical forms and long-established ballad singing styles survived, for instance, and one of the best-selling albums worldwide since the 1960s is the sentimental Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *The Sound of Music*). Post-rock-and-roll pop might better be seen as the striking culmination of a lengthy process, going back at least to minstrelsy, whereby mainstream white society has come to terms with an internal cultural ‘other’. But by this argument, a stronger claim to musical revolution might be made for late 20th-century dance music, which, in its most extreme forms, abandons the presentation of sung feeling, the portrayal of expressive character, in a way that rock music, any more than Tin Pan Alley songs and 19th-century ballads, does not. It is clear, however, that the moments associated with the constellations of rock and roll on the one hand and Tin Pan Alley, ragtime, and early jazz on the other do represent important historical shifts. They also map rather well onto contemporaneous and similarly important shifts in the technology and economy of musical production (which in turn are no doubt related to broader adjustments, routinely noted by historians, in the organization of Western capitalism). Whether or not technological digitization and economic globalization imply an analogous status for the post-punk period, and especially for dance music, is a question perhaps best left for further historical assessment.

#### **4. Genre, form, style.**

##### **(i) Genre.**

In a broad-brush analysis, popular music may be regarded as a single generic system. Its distinctive practices emerge from related sets of conventions organizing form, style, function, audience, meaning, and appropriate discourse. It is at this level that popular music as such tends to be defined: for example, as normally comprising short pieces, accessible to large audiences, in familiar (rather than experimental) styles, and requiring no great quantity of theoretical knowledge for its appreciation (or, often, for its production). Within this system,

most popular music falls into one of three main functional categories: dance, entertainment, or background, although there are also subsidiary categories, notably those to do with functions of drama (e.g. music theatre; film or television soundtrack). The three main categories often overlap (as, for example, with dance-songs treated as background music from a pub jukebox). This generic simplicity may be connected to the need of a commercial cultural system to maximize organizational stability, market size, and stylistic flexibility. Its secular and vernacular qualities mark it as a product of modern, post-Enlightenment society, in which direct social functions tend to weaken and artistic practice strives towards a certain autonomy. Contrary to common assumptions about the nature of entertainment (the German term *U-Musik* has even stronger pejorative overtones), this function does not preclude intensive listening, a point supported by the aesthetic stance of many 19th-century listeners to domestic ballads or brass band performances of operatic arias or of many 20th-century listeners to jazz or rock singer-songwriters; indeed, certain strands in popular music have constantly implied claims to the status of art, from Scott Joplin's view of ragtime as a serious American music, to John Lennon's claim that rock and roll has 'something in it which is true, like all true art' (Wenner, 1971, pp.100–01). At the same time, older, quasi-ritualistic categories have survived to some extent, in residual or adaptive forms: hymns and carols, used in secular contexts; civic songs (e.g. national anthems); marches associated with particular military organizations; war, propaganda and political songs (from those of the British Chartists and the American Civil War to the Nazi 'Horst Wessel Song' and the Internationale); and songs and chants used by football crowds.

The big generic categories of the popular music mainstream break down into a large number of smaller ones. The pioneering Tin Pan Alley composer Charles K. Harris listed the following (Harris, 1906, p.13): a. – The Home, or Mother Song. b. – The Descriptive, or Sensational Story Ballad. c. – The Popular Waltz Song ... d. – The Coon Song ... e. – The March Song ... f. – The Comic Song... g. – The Production Song (for interpolation in big Musical Productions ... h. – The Popular Love Ballad. j. – High Class Ballads. k. – Sacred Songs. Similarly, categories in rock and pop songs include ballads (of a variety of types), up-tempo dance-songs, confessional songs (associated with singer-songwriters), character songs (dramatic or narrative presentations of a character), songs of social or political comment, songs about themselves (i.e. about pop music, 'rock 'n' rolling', dancing, etc.), novelty songs, and song cycles (on concept albums). 19th-century social dance may be subdivided according to differences of tempo, rhythmic gestures, typical social contexts, and typical semantic associations; the same is true of late 20th-century dance music, which is particularly prone to generic splitting and hybridization. The proliferation of subgenres is probably the corollary of the large-scale systemic simplicity, the one providing a necessary stability, the other a desirable level of flux and novelty.

Elements of commonality are important at several levels. Romantic and sexual relationships provide easily the most frequent types of subject matter; indeed, this generic feature might in one way be regarded as subsuming many of the subgenres. Similarly, self-expression, taking a variety of guises, is fundamental to popular song throughout its history, marking its secular trend. The effects of commodity-form status (on dissemination, content, performance) are so general that they are only revealed when put in question, as in folk clubs or in the free rock concerts of the late 1960s. One of these effects is a tendency to multi-functionality: for example, songs appearing in the theatre, in recorded form, for dancing, on television commercials, and on film soundtracks. (As classical music became more thoroughly commodified in the late 20th century it was affected by this tendency as well; by this criterion it turned into a type of popular music.) However, such recycling of material (e.g. tunes migrating from one context to another) has a much older ancestry in vernacular musical practice. Throughout the history, there is on the level of musical style and technique a sense

of a generic centre, surrounded by, and from time to time refreshed by and interacting with, marginal genres (such as folk music, blues, reggae, world music, etc.). Some genres have seen significant change. Thus the popular ballad, starting in the 19th century as a narrative genre with roots in the folk ballad, came, in the Tin Pan Alley–Broadway song system, to combine narrative with (and often subordinate it to) the characteristics of a reflective romantic song; by the time of the development of the rock ballad the genre can be defined simply as a slowish pop song, with subjectively orientated and often romantic themes and a personal mode of address. At the same time, certain aspects of some genres seem to change very little. From the early British music-hall song *Bacon and Greens* to popular successes such as *Yes, we have no bananas* (1923) and *Barbie Girl* (1997, referring to a popular brand of doll), many of the features of the comic novelty song are remarkably stable.

### **(ii) Form.**

One way of writing the history of popular music forms would be in terms of an interrelationship between iterative and additive modes on the one hand and the principle of sectionality on the other. The folk music forebears tended to privilege the first, through stanzaic song forms and repeating dance-tunes; and to a greater or lesser degree popular music in the 20th century returned to similar techniques, derived for the most part from black American influences. In between, sectionally orientated structures increased in importance, perhaps because of the closeness of much 19th-century popular music to contemporary art music norms. An additional factor to be borne in mind in the case of songs is the role of **LYRICS**. Through the demands imposed by setting existing words, or through mutual interaction, or sometimes through the effects of producing both together, the patterns of verbal form (rhyme scheme, line length, stanza structure, etc.) and those of musical form are always interrelated.

Most 19th-century popular songs use a strophic form. The roots of such forms go back not only to folksong but also to theatre and pleasure-garden song, broadside ballad and *Gassenhauer*, romance and lied. Commonly (though not universally) each stanza ends with a short refrain. The phrase structure is generally made up of regular two-, four-, and eight-bar units, phrases are often repeated, either immediately or after a contrasting phrase, and there is an important role for open–closed (antecedent–consequent) relationships between adjacent phrase-endings, produced melodically or harmonically, or both. Sir Henry Bishop's *Home, Sweet Home* (1823) exemplifies all these tendencies, illustrating the way in which the additive strophic principle is infiltrated by elements of a developing sectionalism. Perhaps under the influence of contemporary art song, some composers went further in this direction, especially in drawing-room ballads, into through-composed, modified strophic, or other sectional forms. From the middle of the century refrains of American songs were often intended to be sung by a group (hence use of the term 'chorus') and, similarly, British music-hall songs often have a chorus in which the audience can sing along. Eight- or 16-bar sections were by now the most common, for both verse and chorus, and in both repertoires a variety of phrase-structure patterns can be found, for example *AABA* and (the music-hall favourite) *ABAC*. The folding of repetition into lyrical shape through sequence and the rhyming effect produced by permutations of symmetry and contrast between phrases and by open–closed relationships between cadences create a sense of balance, of quasi-narrative movement balanced by degrees of closure, which is typical of this period.

The sectional principle was even more prominent in the instrumental dance music of the 19th century (including marches, which could be used for dancing the quickstep or galop). From quadrille, waltz, galop, and polka to two-step and cakewalk, practice oscillates and permutes between two types of pattern, each based on sections of (normally) eight or 16 bars: the string



or set pattern (a sequence of different themes) and the minuet-and-trio or *ABA* pattern (the trio generally being in a contrasting key, often the subdominant). Both tendencies were taken over into instrumental ragtime. Most piano rags use a two-part form, the first section having a ternary arrangement of sections (or ‘strains’), the second introducing new strains and perhaps recapitulating an earlier one, but in any case being in a contrasting key, usually the subdominant (and often closing there – a peculiarity of ragtime). Common patterns are *ABA/CD*, *ABA/CA* and *ABA/CDC*, many of the strains being repeated.

In the later 19th century song choruses tended to expand and, increasingly, to become the focus of the form. This tendency continued in Tin Pan Alley song, and at the same time the verse section shrank in both size and number. By the 1920s one verse (in any case often omitted in performance) was the norm, and the chorus was generally 32 bars long, the whole approximating to a recitative-and-aria structure. Various chorus patterns were used but by far the most common is the ternary variant *AABA*, known as ‘standard ballad form’, with the bridge (the *B* section) providing contrast melodically, harmonically and sometimes in key. Such an expansive, well-organized structure can function as a self-standing entity (hence descriptions of the mature Tin Pan Alley–Broadway song as the lied of popular music), and would seem to mark the triumph of the sectional over the additive principle. However, on a micro-structural level many songs take over from ragtime and blues techniques of building form through repetition of short figures; from Joe Howard’s coon song *Hello! ma baby* (1899) through Lewis F. Muir’s *Waiting for the Robert E. Lee* (1912), Walter Donaldson’s *Yes, sir, that’s my baby* (1925) and George Gershwin’s *I got rhythm* (1930) to Joe Garland’s *In the mood* (1939), this technique points, at least incipiently, away from sectionalism, towards open-ended iteration.

12-bar blues form, which emerged during the same period, strings together a variable number of verses (often, confusingly, called choruses), each one marked internally by a good deal of phrase and smaller-scale repetition, call-and-response between voice and accompanying instrument(s) and the use of riffs (see **RIFF**). Early jazz musicians not only improvised on the 12-bar harmonic sequence (I–I–I–I–IV–IV–I–I–V–V[IV]–I–I[V]) but applied the same approach to the choruses of Tin Pan Alley songs. From this point ‘chorus form’ refers to pieces built on iteration (potentially open-ended and usually with variation) of a structural unit. This constitutes a principal resource for all black American genres, and also influenced the additive strophic forms typical of country music; from both traditions it entered mainstream pop music from rock and roll onwards.

Post-rock-and-roll, pop song used 12-bar blues, together with variant and equivalent chorus-form chord sequences, and drew on folk revival for simple additive strophic patterns; but it also retained elements of the standard Tin Pan Alley form, both the overall pattern itself (especially in ballads) and the verse–chorus–bridge sectional principle (more widely). By the later 1960s these lineages were thoroughly combined, and generalization is possible only to the extent of observing first that songs are usually constructed from a sequence of sections of variable length, which, depending on their function and interrelationships, may be termed ‘verses’, ‘choruses’, or ‘bridges’; and second that at the same time processual links are often created across sectional divisions through the use of riffs, interrelated musical figures, harmonically open chord progressions, or foregrounded rhythmic continuities. The impulse to avoid closure often results in fades at the end of recordings or performances. Riffs may be melodic (as in the guitar riff of the Rolling Stones’ *Satisfaction*, 1965), but more commonly comprise a short chord sequence, a pervasive technique from the I–IV–v–IV of Richard Berry’s ubiquitous *Louie Louie* (1957) onwards, even in clearly sectional forms. The contrasting temporalities of short harmonic cycle and larger sections can intertwine in powerful ways: in REM’s *Losing my religion* (1991) lyrics and musical content indicate an unorthodox sequence of verses, choruses, and short bridges, but virtually all the music pivots

around a two-chord riff (A minor–E minor), which, however, grows varied harmonic ‘limbs’ in the different sections of the song.

This pop form mainstream is broadened out by two divergent tendencies. Some progressive rock groups explored more extended forms (especially on concept albums), sometimes partly through-composed, sometimes partly improvisatory. While subsidiary, the influence of this strand can be felt in the fluidities and irregularities characteristic of the work of some indie bands and of the more experimental singer-songwriters. At the other extreme, hip hop and dance-music producers in the 1980s and 90s, using sampling, computer-sequenced rhythm-loops, collage, and remixing techniques, developed a concept of form based on arbitrary cuts between a series of repetition-rich textures, each piece being potentially endless; articulation points seem to be largely local, and form is heard more like process.

Some scholars have connected the impulses towards form as process (iteration, variation) and form as organized structure (sectionalism) to non-Western (or specifically African and Afro-diasporic) and Western practices respectively. Thus Keil (*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1966) distinguished between a tendency towards ‘engendered feeling’ in the former and ‘embodied meaning’ in the latter, while Chester (1970) distinguished between ‘intensional’ and ‘extensional’ forms. A dichotomy is established between pre-planned composition on the one side and moment-by-moment nuance and inflection, based on received frameworks, on the other. As ideal types, these provide useful models; however they are both better regarded as principles, variably active in all music, on both of which popular music practice draws, in continually changing proportions, manifestations and interrelationships.

Adorno (1941) connected formal moulds and frameworks in popular music to the pressures exerted by commodification, and grouped them all under the pejorative label of ‘standardization’. From music-hall formula and Tin Pan Alley mass production to the ‘hit-factories’ of pop, it is clear that a tendency to structural predictability grows directly out of the imperatives of a capitalist industry. Yet the Adornian critique misses not only the productivity of formula (in stimulating variative invention) but also the range of formal designs and processes.

A further question is whether ‘the piece’ is the most appropriate unit for formal analysis. Two developments, one in cultural theory, the other in musical practice, have added extra charge to this question. Theories of intertextuality suggest that relationships between pieces or performances are of structural significance, and thus throw into relief the importance of covers, of recycling material, of ‘tune families’ that link songs together and of formulaic processes. Similarly, techniques of sampling and remixing raise queries about the boundaries normally placed around a singular musical event. The theory of ‘Signifyin(g)’ drawn by scholars from black American literary studies places the roots of Afro-diasporic formal thinking in the concept of a ‘changing same’, which generates intertextual relationships both historically and synchronically, through continual variation of formulae. The pervasiveness of repetition in popular music, at all structural levels, suggests that such a perspective may be at least as relevant here as European formal moulds and quasi-industrial standardization techniques.

### **(iii) Style.**

It is impossible to discuss in detail here even a few popular music styles, and the most that can be attempted is a sketch of some important trends. As with musical form, many aspects of 19th-century styles are linked to or contiguous with contemporaneous art-music techniques, while in the 20th century these were at least in part supplanted by, or mixed with, approaches drawn from black American (and to a lesser extent folk, country, Latin, and world) musics. This shift happened in conjunction with a different one, a move from norms moulded by the

demands of performance, often in intimate surroundings, to techniques designed for large-scale performance, often with the aid of amplification, or for recording, radio, or film, and at the same time shot through with the effects of enormous changes in the resources and processes of sound production. This was accompanied too by a gradual transition from a relative separation of song and dance genres to a situation in which their attributes are thoroughly intertwined.

Tune-and-accompaniment textures, simple diatonic harmonies (with a variable admixture of chromatic elaboration), melodies conditioned by harmonic progression and its rhythm (often arch-shaped, with frequent use of phrase repetition and sequence, though sometimes affected too by *volkstümlich* traits) – the ‘home-and-away’ melodic and tonal processes of ‘bourgeois song’ have been described often enough, and they provide the basic attributes of many 19th-century popular song styles (though obviously with differences of detail between styles lying closer to, say, lied, Italian aria or English theatre song). Our knowledge of performing style is thin for this era before records, but many celebrated singers (in Britain, John Braham, Sims Reeves, Antoinette Sterling, Charlotte Sainton-Dolby, and Adelina Patti, for instance) straddled the divide between art and popular music, and no doubt amateurs tried to imitate their pure tone, secure intonation and clear phrasing. Performance in the music halls and minstrel shows was much more theatrical, portraying character, inciting audience response and including speech-like effects and even patter. Street singers took such tendencies even further.

Similar melodic, harmonic, and textural characteristics are found in much of the instrumental music, too, such as salon pieces for piano, though here typical instrumental figuration might feature. Many such pieces are in a dance genre, and, while the dance music of the period also shares the same overall stylistic framework, in this repertory rhythm, often a background feature in the songs, is of course more sharply etched. In the second half of the century especially, typical dance rhythms often invaded vocal music as well – in minstrelsy, for example, or the waltz songs so popular towards the end of the century, or in music hall, where the contours of galop, polka, or waltz rhythms generate much of the sing-along impetus. So important is this influence in music hall (frequently both tempo and rhythmic character change for the chorus, introducing a more dance-like swing) that Bennett (1986) refers to the ‘gestic’ quality of the style – a memorable figure, pregnant with rhythmic character, embodies the song’s basic gesture (it is here, perhaps, that the device of the ‘hook’, so important in later popular song, was born). Throughout this 19th-century repertory textural principles differ little, whether the accompaniment is in the hands of piano, small orchestra of strings and wind, wind band or the small ad hoc groups of the music hall; but the banjos and guitars used in minstrelsy and the ‘traps’ (elementary drum kit) introduced in the later music hall and in vaudeville are pointers to the future.

With ragtime, blues, and early jazz, rhythmic features moved more into the foreground, notably ragtime’s half-beat syncopation and ‘secondary rag’ (three-note groups over a duple beat), the rhythmic flexibility of blues singing, the before-the-beat and after-the-beat phrasing against a strong regular beat (producing swing) that is typical of jazz, and sometimes the 3+3+2 metrical patterns characteristic of many Latin genres. Other important techniques in these styles include pentatonic and circling (rather than linear, goal-directed) melodic shapes; pitch inflection (including blue notes, i.e. variably tuned thirds, sevenths, and sometimes other scale degrees); small-scale repetition, including riffs; call-and-response; a more natural type of voice production, manifesting itself often in speech-like singing styles and ‘dirty’ tone – techniques that, when imitated by instrumentalists, result in ‘vocalized tone’; and a semi-improvisatory approach to performance.

Many of these techniques seeped, to variable extents and in variable ways, into the styles of Tin Pan Alley song, which in other respects continued to develop along lines already existing

in the 19th century. Harmonically, circle-of-fifth and (from blues) I–IV<sup>7</sup> progressions are typical additions to the basic diatonic framework, though by the inter-war period some chromatic chords (dominant extensions, added 6ths, augmented, and diminished chords) were also common, as were passing modulations (especially in bridge sections). Similarly, in the more sophisticated songs of Broadway shows a denser motivic texture developed, along with longer-breathed melodic lines. At the same time, dance-band performance norms were influential: for example, there are the beginnings of a distinct rhythm section stratum in the texture; and sometimes strong bass lines suggesting top–bottom thinking; elements of call-and-response, riff, off-beat accents, parallel voicing, and counter melodies owing more to jazz polyphony than to European textbook counterpoint infiltrate accompaniments. This applied across the range of performing groups, from small dance bands to large, string-dominated orchestras. Singing styles too were sometimes influenced by jazz (though bel canto norms remained important as well), and the novel intimacies, nuances and flexibility made possible by the microphone (in crooning, for instance) pointed towards the coming revolution in sound.

In rock and roll and subsequent pop styles, techniques derived from black American sources were developed further, notably shouted, ‘dirty’, dramatic, and jazz-influenced singing, top–bottom textures with foregrounded percussion stratum, widespread use of riffs as a textural as well as a structural device, and instrumental techniques organized around expressiveness and rhythmic bite. The standard performing group (guitars, drum kit, lead singer, perhaps with some group singing as well) emerged from the small-band lineages of rhythm and blues and country music, though additions (keyboards, brass, synthesizers) and larger groups were also used as the range of styles expanded. The ‘standard rock beat’ (kick drum on beats one and three, heavily accented backbeats on two and four, usually on snare drum, plus decorative cymbal patterns) was established, with a spectrum of variants in different genres (Moore, 1993, p.36). The harmonic language, while drawing on blues-type progressions and on Tin Pan Alley for circle-of-fifth and other diatonic progressions, is often modal, and favours short, repeating harmonic riffs; such sequences as I–♭VII–IV, I–vi and i–♭III–♭VII are common. Above all, perhaps, a new sound world was opened up by amplification (resulting, for example, in a range of electric guitar styles and in the deliberate use of feedback), by electronic effects (such as wah-wah and echo), by sound synthesis, and by multi-track recording, which made available techniques of layering, balancing, blending, and stereophonic spacing of voices that are impossible by any other means, thus radically changing conceptions of texture.

Texture and sound took on even greater importance in hip hop and subsequent pop dance styles. With the aid of digital technology, layers of sound, each one often created by looping rhythms, short figures or sampled noises, are assembled into montages. While the techniques were incipiently present in earlier black styles (disco, funk, dub), the tendency in much rave, techno, and drum and bass music virtually to abandon tune, to shrink periodicity to very short units and to constrict harmony to short, minimally directed (and often modal) sequences radically reconstructs the stylistic paradigm. A fast, metronomically regular beat supporting syncopated, short-note figures is standard, and a contrast between rapped lyrics and brief, soulful sung phrases is common. These dance music styles represent an extreme in the broad stylistic spectrum of popular music at the end of the 20th century; but their popularity, and even more their influence on more mainstream styles, points to a perhaps decisive historical significance.

#### **(iv) Popular music and the musical field.**

It is easy to see that in the first half of the 19th century there were close links between a good deal of popular music and contemporary art music, in terms of genre, form, and style; that in

the second half of the century these links weakened, as distinctively popular genres appeared; and that, with the beginnings of Modernism, this parting of the ways turned into a clear split, which subsequent developments in the 20th century tended to deepen (Hamm, 1979, in particular, argues this view persuasively). However, the story is not quite as straightforward as it might at first seem.

One common way of seeing the popular styles of the 19th-century bourgeoisie is as dilutions of the contemporary art music; but the whole field may also be viewed in terms of divergent tendencies within broadly accepted norms. The popular styles and the immense educational and critical efforts to popularize the classical styles then appear as sociologically interconnected; we can see ‘the rise of the musical masters as an early form of mass culture’ (Weber, 1977, p.6), and by the 20th century it is clear that their works ‘speak equally, or almost equally, to listeners in many countries because their native accents have been naturalised in an international musical idiom’ (Parakilas, 1984, p.10). At the same time, it should be remembered that the favoured musics of many 19th-century Europeans and Americans – folk and folk-related styles – lie outside this idiom: it is here that clearly articulated difference is to be located in this period. But the interplay between art and popular strands did not disappear in 1900. The popularization of classical music continued, from the work of the music appreciation movement to the commercial success of recorded compilations of classical ‘greatest hits’ in the 1980s and 90s. Basic 19th-century techniques and effects continue to inform the composition of cinema and television music and the repertory of light music. The ease with which classical pieces can be ‘ragged’, ‘jazzed up’, or given a rock beat is instructive. Mainstream popular music has often drawn on art music for material, from such Tin Pan Alley songs as *I’m always chasing rainbows* (1918, from Chopin) and *Avalon* (1920, from Puccini) to Procol Harum’s rock recording *A Whiter Shade of Pale* (1967, based on a J.S. Bach chord sequence) and Sweetbox’s 1998 hit *Everythings gonna be alright* (which makes use of Bach’s Air from Suite no.3 in D, or ‘Air on the G string’). Many progressive rock musicians have recorded arrangements of art music pieces or used art music techniques and textures, and some heavy metal guitarists consciously draw on Baroque virtuoso instrumental styles (see **CLASSIC ROCK**).

In the 20th century, admittedly, the relationship between art and popular strands became more complex. Early Modernists sometimes used elements of ragtime and jazz (and of folk music too), but they treated them as raw material, to be transformed and distanced. From the other side, symphonic jazz (in a variety of guises – Whiteman, Gershwin, Ellington, the Modern Jazz Quartet) is also permeated with stylistic and structural tensions. It has been suggested that more complete and less selfconscious crossovers emerged under the influence of postmodernism (from the 1960s). It is certainly often difficult to assess, on the level of style (and sometimes that of audience too), whether, within the avant garde, such musicians as LaMonte Young, Philip Glass, Brian Eno, Laurie Anderson, Frank Zappa, ambient dance group the Orb, or drum ‘n’ bass musician Roni Size produce ‘popular’ or ‘art’ music. The story is so complex that generalization is extraordinarily difficult. Two points can perhaps be accepted: that attempts to discuss popular music in isolation, that is, without taking account of its variable relationships (positive and negative) with other musical categories, will inevitably be weakened in their analytic scope; and that these variable relationships are closely connected with shifts in social relationships and in associated broad cultural patterns. An example of the ground opened up by acceptance of the second point is provided by Paul Gilroy’s concept of the ‘black Atlantic’ (Gilroy, 1993) and W.T. Lhamon’s parallel history of blackface performance (Lhamon, 1998). If, as Gilroy argues, the presence of a slave and post-slave Afro-diasporic culture within late-modern bourgeois society is not marginal but significantly constitutive for that society, then the emergent role of black American music becomes important not just for popular music but for our understanding of the musical field in



this society considered as a whole. If Lhamon's provocative argument is accepted, namely that blackface, for all its racist caricatures, constitutes a core site for the negotiation of a cross-race Atlantic popular identity, with a history traceable from early 19th-century New York through the performance styles of such figures as Al Jolson and Elvis Presley to that of the 1990s rapper M.C. Hammer, then the ethnic mediations of social class become central to an understanding of modernity and its musical culture. Against the background of such post-colonial critiques, the periodic incursions into mainstream popular music from outside its apparent geographical base, from tango in the early years of the 20th century through Afro-Cuban influences during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s to reggae and world musics in the 1980s and 90s, suggests that the geo-cultural boundaries of 'the West' itself are as porous as its social identity is multi-faceted. The very concept of a mainstream might begin to come into question at this point, especially if, to the importance of the 'marginal' musics just mentioned, is added consideration of the historical significance of the other musical 'outsiders', for example Gypsy music (especially in 19th-century central Europe) and Jewish music (for instance, in the ethnic ferment out of which the formation of Tin Pan Alley and Broadway song styles emerged). It is not necessary to accept Constant Lambert's élitism or his unsavoury espousal of 'racial characteristics' in music to note the pertinence of his argument, in *Music Ho!* (1934), that, to many critics of musical change, 'the Jew is just as much an enemy of the British and Holy Roman Empires as the Negro' (3/1966, pp.177–8). Negotiations of difference and identity, representation and self-representation, relating to the full range of racial, ethnic, class, and cultural hierarchies, have been a constant factor in the way that popular music has been located within the musical field as a whole.

## 5. Social significance.

### (i) Politics.

Art music in the West is generally portrayed as apolitical, and the contrast with popular music in this sphere is striking. Bob Dylan's protest songs of the 1960s may stand as key examples of one sort of popular music politics. Song lyrics with overt political content have not been uncommon in subsequent pop music, though in mainstream 20th-century popular music before the 1960s they are quite rare. In the 19th century there were songs about wars, campaigning songs (supporting the abolition of slavery, for instance), and songs of social comment (on such issues as the evils of alcohol), though often their aim was to affirm rather than protest, as in British music-hall songs with enthusiastically imperialist themes. Pop music protest stands more in the tradition of strike ballads and other politically motivated workers' songs, which in turn can be related to folksongs containing political comment (a trait surviving in blues and country music, and passing into pop through the influence of such American neo-folk and folk-revival singers as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger).

There is also a history of political movements making use of songs for campaigning purposes, and, in a linked though distinct way, some pop musicians have tied their music to political campaigns, such as Rock Against Racism in the late 1970s and in the mid-1980s the Band Aid and Live Aid movement in aid of the relief of world poverty. Similarly, the rather inchoate political demands of the 1960s counterculture were often seen as carried above all by the rock music of the time. In these cases, however, lyric content is relatively unimportant to the political effects; and arguably the politics of most popular music have generally had more to do with its sounds, contexts, and uses than with its words.

Many popular music styles have been subjects of controversy. In the 19th century, theatres and pleasure gardens were often seen as morally suspect, and there were frequent attempts to clear music off the streets. New dances, starting with the waltz, had a habit (so it seemed to their critics) of infringing the canons of respectability. Music halls responded to efforts to control and censor them by becoming blander and less risqué. Ragtime, jazz, rock and roll,

and rap were each greeted by a chorus of condemnation which combined musical criticisms with a moral panic focussed on allegations of violence, sexual immorality, and uncivilized 'jungle rhythms'. It is often difficult to disentangle musical dislike (frequently couched in terms of a discourse of 'noise') and fear of social disorder. Thus rock music was resisted by communist state authorities both because it was felt to be musically aberrant, indeed, primitive, and because it was seen as a symptom of bourgeois capitalism; conversely, to dissidents and alienated youth it represented freedom on both levels. Even claims to no more than 'fun' can be regarded as threatening by defenders of social (especially work) discipline. For participants in popular music, it often represents 'community' at least as much as it does 'threat'. Pete Townshend of the pop group the Who wrote: 'When the music gets so good ... everybody for a second forgets completely who they are and where they are, and they don't care. They just know they are happy' (Frith, 1983, p.80). Such a politics of community takes particularly overt form at a few specific moments (at the Woodstock rock festival in 1969, for instance, or in all-night 'raves' in the dance clubs of the late 1980s and early 90s), but forms a continuous thread in the appeal of pop music, a thread that appears to be derived ideologically from the myth of a 'folk community' constructed by folk revivalists and folklorists (and before them by the Romantics). It may manifest itself in some earlier proto-folk situations too – for example, in the relationship of brass band music or music-hall song to particular 19th-century British working-class communities. It constantly intertwines, however, with popular music's role in what Raymond Williams (1961) called a 'long revolution': the gradual extension of democratic opportunities (in this case, access to music, both its production and consumption) to more and more sectors of society. The politics of this shift are those typical of mass society, and their effects are variously construed (as, for example, alienation or empowerment; cultural flattening or cultural pluralism), depending on the observer's political point of view.

What most observers might agree on is music's power to 'place' people in society. For Adorno, this pointed to the way that popular music in mass society acts (he thought) as 'social cement', confirming consumers as passive units performing (willingly) their allotted roles in an incipiently totalitarian capitalist system. Still less tendentious critiques may refer to, for example, the escapism in Tin Pan Alley song; and similarly the historian Gareth Stedman-Jones (1974) describes late 19th-century music-hall song as a 'culture of consolation', its small convivialities (its 'fun') compensating for the seeming impossibility of real social change. For most popular music scholars, however, the ideological effects of the music are far more variable than Adorno allows, and more subject to negotiation. At the opposite extreme, subcultural theorists such as Willis and Hebdige argue for the possibility of particular music styles to act as vehicles of resistance to dominant cultural and social values, through the meanings read into them by consumers. It is nevertheless impossible to describe the politics of production as anything other than vitally important, for they greatly affect what music consumers will hear. The imperatives of commodity form, of intellectual property law, and of growing corporate power explain the appeal of neo-Marxist portrayals of the music industry as a monster. Theories of 'cooption' describe how musical innovations are often stripped of any power to upset, as they are incorporated into mainstream styles; one major record company enthusiastically promoted the radical musics of the 1960s counterculture under the now notorious slogan 'The revolution is on CBS'. As, through the 19th and 20th centuries, the cultural industries became more and more significant both to the economy and to social behaviour, the role of the state became increasingly important as well. Under fascist and Stalinist dictatorships it was overtly oppressive and directive, but in liberal democracies the concerns of state agencies are mostly to do with encouraging orderly consumption and profitable production, along with social tranquillity. Legal regulation of performance, broadcasting and copyright, taxation and subsidy policies, censorship and educational

strategies form a network of official involvements. The systemic integrity of the whole production apparatus, especially by the later 20th century, can look impressive. Nevertheless, most popular music scholars would want to point also to the faults in this system (see §2(ii) above), to the impossibility of eradicating these and, above all perhaps, to the intense difficulties in controlling the meaning of music.

### **(ii) Social identities.**

Whatever the political context or ideological mechanisms, it is widely agreed that participation in popular music genres and styles is intimately connected with how people (listeners and producers) see themselves – that is, with their sense of social identity. A dramatic example is the way that the social category of youth has been configured since the 1950s, in large part through the images, values, and behavioural possibilities made available in pop music. But social identity is an amalgam, standing at the meeting-point of various axes, including not only generation but also social class, gender, nation, and ethnicity.

There is good empirical evidence to link many popular music genres with particular social classes, both working-class groups (street music, industrial song, brass bands, music hall, blues, and country music up to the 1960s, hard rock styles and heavy metal) and middle-class groups (parlour and salon music, operetta, and progressive and art rock styles). Such links tend to be obscured in the first half of the 20th century by discourses of mass culture, which assume an incipient universality of social positioning; and these discourses retain some importance subsequently, if only because, in societies with increasingly blurred class boundaries and in fluid mediascapes dominated by large organizations and with socially mobile audiences, theories of class ownership of and class expression through specific styles seem simplistic. Homology models, derived from anthropology, in which musical content and class position are mapped one to the other, raise difficult epistemological issues (they seem to require an analytical first cause), and, for most scholars, need to be written on a very coarse scale, to be modulated by theories of negotiation, or to focus on use and consumption rather than on musical form and content. The last two are the favoured strategies of subcultural theorists, such as those who have identified resonances between particular pop styles and the values of punk, mod, teddy boy, hippie, or other class-based subcultures. Even in the 19th century, when class-linked musical differences are relatively easy to spot, norms originating in bourgeois traditions gradually spread their influence through large swathes of popular music practice, so that a model based on the variable articulation of a core stock of techniques seems the most convincing one. Despite these qualifications, however, it remains important to place popular music in its class contexts. Whatever its exact definition, it is always in some sense culturally subaltern; from this point of view, all popular styles are ‘people’s music’ (in a broad sense), positioned against whatever is defined as *élite*. At the same time, social distinctions have affected access and responses to musical resources, resulting in a multitude of differences in taste, practice, usage, and interpretation, both within popular music and between it and other categories, but always in some sort of relationship with people’s sense of their place in the social hierarchy.

Such differences are always mediated by other factors, however, notably inscriptions of gender, nation, and ethnicity. Throughout its history, in both production and consumption, popular music has generally been gendered in quite clear ways. Domestic performance has been available to women, but public performance (increasingly the norm in the 20th century) has been overwhelmingly in the hands of men, a division that extends to all production roles in the music industry. On the whole, female musicians have been confined to singing, and to singing of particular sorts – in backing groups (women as support), of ballads (women as caring and naturally emotional), in erotically explicit personae (women as sex object). There have been exceptions to this pattern, however – female singers who have broken the rules, for

instance, some blues, country, and music-hall singers – and the 1970s saw the beginning of a more dramatic shift, with the number of female pop bands, songwriters, and stylistically uncompromising singers increasing significantly. Popular music styles themselves, and their consumption, seem to have been gendered in similar ways to production. ‘Softer’ styles are often thought of as being disproportionately intended for women, ‘harder’ ones for men, and subject matter (particularly in songs about love and romance) is generally organized, narratively and in its presentation, to appeal differentially to male and female listeners. Similarly, performance styles often seem designed to facilitate predictable patterns of identification and desire on the part of fans. Yet while lyric themes, performer images, and listener tastes cannot be isolated from the structure of gender relations in society at large, research (though it is as yet limited) suggests that the two spheres may not be entirely coextensive. It is possible, for instance, that for women an evening dancing or at the music hall may represent an escape from feminized domesticity; that a seemingly ‘romantic’ female vocal group such as the Shirelles or the Crystals may be interpreted as giving women advice about managing men; and that, conversely, men identifying with flamboyant, passionate male performers (such as Al Jolson, Elvis Presley, or Freddie Mercury) may view listening to their music as an opportunity to imagine ways of acting not normally available to them. Long vernacular traditions of ‘camp’ performance, including cross-dressing, provide the historical context for the emergence of explicitly gay or bisexual performance imagery in pop (with artists such as Little Richard, David Bowie, Madonna, and many more; *see* **GAY AND LESBIAN MUSIC**), suggesting that to some extent popular music may represent an arena where gender roles and relationships can be queried, if only (for most listeners) in the imagination.

The relationship between ‘black music’ and ‘white music’ is another example of an apparently clear distinction that is in practice blurred. Historically, the extent of interplay and hybridization between styles, materials, and techniques associated with black Americans (and Afro-Caribbeans) on the one hand and Euro-Americans on the other renders attempts to define a separate ‘black music’ problematic (as well as potentially racist). Yet many black people would defend such attempts, and with good reason (to mark their presence and defend their identity, against great pressures), and so would many whites, for reasons often connected with the appeal of the exotic – the attractions of ‘black difference’ as an alternative to the blandness associated with mainstream music. The complications are intensified by the facts that white investments in this relationship have often led to stereotyping (from the grotesqueries of minstrelsy to the macho posturing of some white blues-rock); that black musicians and their genres have largely been kept separate by the music industry, and their difference maintained; and that, at the same time, they have been ruthlessly exploited, their innovations taken to fuel the mainstream’s need for novelty. In this context, ‘white music’ occupies a blank space: it represents the norm (that is, what is not defined as ‘black’). Yet it has never been a monolithic category. In the USA, for example, country music has represented ‘the South’ in opposition to the cosmopolitanism identified with the north, while Polish, Jewish, and other ethnic repertoires have maintained a symbiotic but uneasy relationship with the mainstream. In Europe, American styles have been on the one hand welcomed, as symptoms of modernization or vehicles of rebellion, but on the other hand resisted, on behalf of local identity and heritage, an attitude sometimes institutionalized through broadcasting quotas or the promotion of local production, as in the San Remo song festival in Italy. Regional differences, still strong in the 19th century but declining as national music markets were consolidated, re-emerged in the second half of the 20th century, often linked to indigenous folk traditions. In Britain, for example, expressions of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh difference, with their long histories, were joined by assertions of English provincial identity (the Liverpool of the Beatles; the London of the Kinks or Blur). Such strategies may

draw upon local material and styles, or, often, just on characteristic patterns of diction. Some British punk rock bands cultivated an aggressively anti-American, English diction. For musicians in continental European countries, whether to sing in English or not is itself an issue, as it is for French speakers in Quebec. In many countries such complications, both in tendencies of musical practice and in possible patterns of identity, are intensified by the presence of new or greatly expanding ethnic minorities since World War II: Hispanics and Asians in the USA, Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in Britain, North Africans in France. Whether considering class, gender, or ethnic identity, much writing on popular music has tended to look for direct links between music and 'real life'. But, as some of the examples given above suggest, there is reason to think that music acts less as a mirror reflecting pre-existing patterns of identity than as an arena for their negotiation, or even their construction, as more recent work drawing on discourse theory and post-structuralist perspectives would indicate. In this latter approach subjectivity is seen as fluid, provisional, and endlessly constructed in cultural practices, and from its application to popular music has come research into ways in which musical interests can support imaginary communities, transient subcultural taste distinctions, geographically virtual 'scenes' focussed on shared musical identifications, and searches for roots in styles originating far away, perhaps in one of the many manifestations of world music. This does not alter the fact that constructions of identity offered in music often confirm dominant positions already in existence rather than subverting them. Much depends on how listeners relate to their favoured performers, how they position themselves within lyrics (for example, which pronoun they take to represent them), which 'voice' (lead vocal, backing singers, guitar riff, etc.) they identify with, what connotations they attach to the particular style, and so on.

### **(iii) Aesthetics.**

Any attempt to raise even the possibility of an aesthetics of popular music must somehow bypass the scepticism of mass culture critics (e.g. Adorno: 'The autonomy of music is replaced by a mere socio-psychological function'; 1941, p.3) and of liberal musicologists (e.g. Dahlhaus: 'it is uncertain whether ... the surprisingly elusive qualities that determine a "hit" deserve to be called aesthetic at all'; 1989, p.312), not to mention the weight of a longer intellectual history extending back to the emergence of music aesthetics as a separate discipline in the 18th century. As Adorno's comment suggests, the underpinnings of this discipline lie in the doctrine of music's autonomy, and, while the insistence by popular music scholars on their music's social significance may seem unwittingly to support its reduction to a sociological datum, their more important achievement has been to show how popular music helps to reveal autonomy itself as a social construction. The sociological critique of aesthetics links all cultural practices, tastes, and judgments to social, institutional, and discursive conditions; thus the transcendent qualities attributed to autonomous music, and the disinterestedness allegedly required for its appreciation, are, by this argument, tied to specific interests of the Western bourgeoisie at a particular moment in its history. To be sure, the decidedly 'impure' production and consumption practices of popular music do not seem to suit it to the standard criteria of aesthetic worth (even though in its own way its emergence is linked to the wider spread of leisure time, which arguably also gave rise to the discourse of autonomy), but popular music scholars tend to work with theories of relative autonomy, which, while grounding taste in social conditions, insist that this rules out neither the integrity and irreducibility of that level of activity and meaning which is specifically musical nor the distinctive pleasures attaching to its appreciation.

In one of the most influential sociological critiques of aesthetics, Bourdieu (1984) made a clear distinction between the 'aesthetic disposition' (with its 'pure gaze') and the 'popular aesthetic' (which is 'realist', 'earthy', grounded in function), and linked these to taste



differences between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Most popular music scholars have preferred a model with categories that are more fluid in both their contents and their interplay. Frith (1996), for example, argues for three distinct discursive frames, each with its own values, institutions, and social practices (and all arising at about the same time, around 1800): that of 'art', organized around ideas of creative truth-to-self and educated knowledge; that of 'folk', centred on ideas of authenticity and community; and that of 'the popular', focussed on ideas of commercial success (i.e. popularity), entertainment, and fun. He suggests that none of these categories has any intrinsic musical content, so that 'popular music' (in fact, any music) can be, and is, placed in any category, or indeed in more than one. Of course, definitions of 'originality', 'authenticity', and 'entertainment' vary historically and socially; but this approach enables us to understand how a single piece – John Lennon's song *Imagine*, for example – can function variably, as a skilful and effective expressive statement ('art'), as a political *cri de coeur* around which a sense of community can be assembled ('folk'), or as a hit record, often transplanted to all sorts of routine situations including background music ('popular'). It also enables us to make sense of the ways in which performers and listeners talk about popular music in terms of musical skill, formal relationships, emotional truth, rhythmic power, original sounds, and so on, without needing to deny that the criteria will differ historically (compare a Victorian parlour ballad performance and a rock concert), without forgetting that the criteria will often be at odds with those common for classical music (e.g. noise, incessant repetition, and seemingly out-of-control vocalism are positive aesthetic qualities in much rock music), but also without wanting to erase the music's social and political significance.

This significance is vital. To think of a parlour ballad parody in a music hall, of Chuck Berry's rock and roll classic *Roll over Beethoven*, of the Sex Pistols' irreverent punk anthem *God Save the Queen*, or of the rap group Public Enemy's *Fight the Power* is to see that their political charge, in specific social conditions (including, arguably, the large audiences delivered by their commercial success), is part of their aesthetic achievement. Equally, however, their political significance is dependent on the appeal of their musical qualities. While these examples are extreme, the point can be generalized for all popular music. In the end, then, the most important argument made by theorists of popular music aesthetics may be that aesthetic experience is not necessarily extraordinary but can be found in musical practices intimately enmeshed in (and indeed contributing to) the patterns of ordinary people's everyday lives in modern societies.

#### 6. The study of popular music.

A good deal of 19th-century writing about popular music consisted of reportage, reminiscence, or polemic. Serious study started with the publications of antiquarians such as William Chappell and folk music collectors such as J.G. Herder, the brothers Grimm, and Cecil Sharp, though they were rarely interested in contemporary musics, their preferences being often driven in fact by a pessimistic certainty of cultural decline. There is useful journalistic comment on contemporary, commercially produced popular musics from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and a continuing stream of memoirs, biographies, and popular books on the emerging music business, but scholarly work on this repertory really began (aside from the beginnings of a literature on jazz) with the mass culture critics, of whom the most important was Adorno. More empirical sociological publications started to appear shortly after World War II (Riesman, 1950), and the influence of the British mass culture critic F.R. Leavis can be seen in the 1950s and 60s in the work of Hoggart (1957) and the young Stuart Hall (Hall and Whannel, 1964).

There was as yet no 'popular music studies'. The discipline emerged in large degree as the offspring of a meeting between the impact of rock music on young scholars beginning their careers in the 1960s and 70s and their reception of a wave of new cultural theories that were

beginning to transform the existing humanities and social science disciplines. From the start, though, the study of popular music was a broad (and at times uneasy) coalition. It drew on several fields: social studies (especially the sociology of youth, institutional sociology, and communication studies); radical strands in musicology (notably what has sometimes been called cultural or critical musicology, but also the pluralistic approach to American music represented by the work of such musicologists as Chase, Mellers, Hitchcock, and Hamm); cultural studies (in particular the movement originating in the Birmingham University Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies from the encounter of British culturalism – the tradition of Leavis, Hoggart, and Raymond Williams – with continental Marxist, structuralist, and post-structuralist theory, subsequently exported to North America, Australia, and elsewhere); ethnomusicology (e.g. Keil, 1966) and, to a greater extent, progressive folkloristics (e.g. the work of Oliver on blues and of Green, D.K. Wilgus, and Charles Malone on country music, in a tradition going back to American collectors of the early 20th century); and pop music journalism (especially in the USA, e.g. in the work of Greil Marcus). These varied strands did not so much coalesce as ferment (though at times they ignored each other, too). By the early 1980s the new discipline had a well-regarded academic journal (*Popular Music*, published by Cambridge University Press) and scholarly society (the International Association for the Study of Popular Music), both founded in 1981; research papers were presented at conferences and in journals associated with established disciplines; and the subject was starting to be taught in some universities. During the 1980s and 90s a substantial literature accrued and new generations of scholars emerged.

A variety of issues troubles the new discipline. Among the most important are the following:

(a) Research resources are generally scanty or inaccessible. Good library collections and archives (of printed literature, sheet music, and recordings) are rare. Much of the relevant material is ephemeral.

(b) The context within which popular music studies emerged has led to a strong research emphasis on Western pop and rock, the industry that produces it, and its youth audiences. This bias (sometimes criticized as ‘rockism’) has been at the expense of the study of other popular musical tastes in Western societies, of historical developments before rock and roll, and of popular musics elsewhere in the world.

(c) The most active, best populated, and most strongly supported research strands have, on the whole, been identified with predominantly social and cultural studies interests. At its most reductive, this appears as ‘sociologism’, and, while there have also been excellent interpretative work and first-class studies of the industry and audiences, this focus has somewhat overshadowed the study of musical practices, structures, and meanings.

(d) At the same time, the musicology of popular music has been troubled over methodology. It seems clear to most of the scholars concerned that, for a good deal of pop music and most genres of black American music, the technical differences between this music and mainstream Western art music (e.g. the emphasis on sound quality, the distinctive singing styles and treatment of timbre, the relative importance and complexity of rhythm, the significance of pitch inflection, the valorization of harmonic simplicity and structural repetition) raise questions about whether conventional analytical method, designed for study of the art-music repertory, is always appropriate. Even for some other genres, such as Tin Pan Alley song or music-hall song, where congruence with art music practice is greater, the importance of performance, and disparities between performance and text, mean that the question still arises. The lack of recorded evidence for the pre-1900 repertory compounds this problem. Analysts have thus tried to develop methods that can take account of timbre, complex rhythms, pitch and rhythm effects that are impossible to notate, and textural effects that are only possible on recordings. The issue of notation is itself difficult, with some arguing that it distorts much of

this music, turning subtle aural process into a reified approximation, and others supporting the use of notation (of various sorts, including transcription) for particular purposes.

This methodological debate can be pursued on deeper levels, for it seems to be rooted in the difficulties that most popular music scholars have with the formalism and immanentism that they take to permeate much of the mainstream musicological approach. Dealing with genres whose techniques, uses, and effects seem to be grounded in emotional and bodily activity and response, in culturally defined meanings and in the particulars of distinctive social conditions, these scholars have tended to reject not only the privileging of score-based formal analysis and disinterested contemplative listening but also the philosophical underpinnings of this in the doctrines of autonomy, genius, and 'the masterwork'. Partial resolution of this dispute may be visible in the move within mainstream musicology itself towards more interpretative and culturally contextualist approaches. Musicologists of popular music have also looked towards semiology (notably in the work of Philip Tagg and Dave Laing) and towards discourse theory (e.g. in the work of Robert Walser and David Brackett). One limitation of such perspectives may be their analytic focus on verbal connotations or discourse surrounding music or, in some cases, a tendency almost to equate music with words about it. The semiotic privileging of language over music was subjected to thorough critique by Shepherd and Wicke (1997), and, as they suggest, the other side of a resolution to the dispute may lie in the development of a method that, while maintaining the sense of music's cultural constructedness on which popular music studies has always insisted, is also able to reveal the specificity of musical processes. There are signs, on both sides, that such moves may be leading to a recognition that popular and art musics are not always so very different, or not in every way, or at least that they live in the same world.

A further issue debated in popular music studies – often prompted by attacks on the scholars by practitioners and critics, and sharpened by the impact of complex cultural theory – is the relationship between theory and practice. This was placed in even higher relief by the introduction in the 1980s of the teaching of popular music in some universities, conservatories, and schools. While it can act as a catalyst to the opening up of issues concerning educational aims and relative cultural values, popular music placed in such contexts raises questions about the desirability and implications of its own legitimation. On one level the questions concern whether to teach the music's production or its understanding, and the wisdom of teaching either aspect to young people who may well be closer to the music, as consumers or as practitioners, than their teachers. It is not obvious whose terms should be used, for example, or what should be the relationship between academic and vernacular theory. But on a broader level these questions are symptoms of problems that affect the study of popular music in general. The questions are not just tactical (how to attain the best understanding): given that the situation presents itself in terms of 'ordinary' culture under the gaze of 'experts', the people interpreted by the intellectuals, they must also be epistemological (how to define what is a 'true' understanding of this music) and even ethical (who is entitled to speak about this, and in what terms). The quandaries are akin to those surrounding the interplay of etic and emic modes of interpretation, much discussed by ethnomusicologists. For the encounter of musical science with the popular musics of its own hinterland, no less than for its dialogues with musics of other cultures, they are at the heart of the matter.

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