Popular music analysis and musicology: bridging the gap

RICHARD MIDDLETON

Since their beginnings, popular music studies have conducted an implicit (sometimes explicit) dialogue with musicology. To be sure, the musicological side of this conversation has more often than not been marked by insult, incomprehension or silence; and popular music scholars for their part have tended to concentrate on musicology's deficiencies. But musicology is changing (more about this later); at the same time, recent work on popular music suggests a new confidence, manifesting itself in part in a willingness to engage with and adapt mainstream methods.[1] I believe each needs the other.

Within the sphere of analysis, the main problem felt to attach to mainstream methods has been the tendency to formalism. In contrast, popular music analysis has insisted (rightly, I think) on the priority of *meaning*. Much of the best work has been semiotic or interpretative (Laing, Tagg, Bradby, Grossberg) or has pursued theories of social and cultural homology (Hebdige, Shepherd). However imposing this body of work, though, there is a suspicion that sometimes insufficient attention has been paid to the sounds themselves – to the intra-musical structures of what I call the 'primary' level of signification (Middleton 1990, p. 220). Somehow, we need to find ways of bringing the patterns created in the sounds themselves back into the foreground, without as a consequence retreating into an inappropriate formalism. And if we can do this, we may well find that we are contributing to an advance in *general* musical analysis. (I will come back to the important question of how music labelled 'popular' and musics labelled in other ways are positioned within the general analytical enterprise.)

Theory

My proposal is directed towards a search for a theory of gesture. This I understand as possessing affective and cognitive as well as kinetic aspects – by which I mean simply that how we feel and how we understand musical sounds is organised through processual shapes which seem to be analogous to physical gestures (see Coker 1972). Such a broadened notion of gesture does not deny that in some sense a theory of gesture would be also a theory of rhythm; but a satisfactory theory of rhythm is one of the things musicology does not possess, and if it did, it would necessarily encompass far more musical parameters than just the obviously rhythmic. For a basis, therefore, we need to look outside musicology, to anthropology and cultural theory – for example, to Lévi-Strauss's theory of 'correspondences' between musical and somatic structures, to Blacking's idea that musical processes

are linked to somatic states and rhythms, to Barthes' proposal that they trace the operation of 'figures of the body' or 'somathemes'.[2]

One musicologist who has explored similar territory is the Hungarian, János Maróthy, in an important study on 'the musical infinite' (n.d.). Maróthy defines rhythm as 'a repetition of any element, whereby heterogeneity can be made coherent'; its periodicities 'reveal the identity hidden in difference' (ibid. pp. 19, 52). In this broad sense, rhythm, for Maróthy, is the basic principle of all reality, traversing not only physiological processes and sense modes (the structure of light and sound waves, for example) but the entire spectrum of matter/energy, from the processes of micro-physics to those of cosmic inter-relationships. Bio-communication, including music, occupies one part of this spectrum, and for humans, argues Maróthy, 'rhythmic sension' snatches us out of particularity, 'switching the individual into the circuit of universality' (ibid. p. 32).

Drawing on all these perspectives, I would propose that musical 'gesture' should refer here to the 'performance' – that is, the 'furnishing' of the communicative field with self-validating 'performatives' – of somatic processes through structurally analogous musical processes. The analytic objective is to develop methods of identifying and categorising the structures concerned.

There is an obvious danger in this kind of approach of falling into an essentialist assumption that music is a pre-cultural feature of species behaviour. My own feeling is that musical gestures – deep structures or principles which give unity to a music culture – are underlaid with still deeper generating 'gestures': kinetic patterns, cognitive maps, affective movements. But these are probably specific to a culture too: people seem to learn to emote, to order experience, even to move their bodies, through locally acquired conventions. Modern genetic theory insists that the question of whether 'nature' or 'nurture' has priority is in principle not susceptible of resolution; this is because it is impossible to find, or to conceive of finding, even the smallest, the most embryonic bit of human nature which is not already nurtured. Human nature is always already encultured (see Jones 1991). But this need not rule out the proposition that culturally specific gestures are rooted in human biology – and hence, widening out, in the greater bio- (and metabio-) sphere. Sustenance from what is concretely given, mediation by the variables of the cultural environment: these are the complementary sides of a properly materialist theory. Thus the gestures we are concerned with always take musical (rather than some other) form; while never autonomous (always pregnant with 'correspondences'), they maintain a systemic integrity: 'musical space is nothing but an imaginary and ideal spot for the evolution of human gestures' (Maróthy n.d., p. 106).

This applies to all music. But looking round our present musical culture, popular songs seem to provide a good place for experimental attempts at analysis to start – simply because, as common-sense interpretation tells us, 'movement' is usually so important here. More clearly than in, say, classical symphony or chamber music, this music is unquestionably rooted in the structures, inner processes and operational patterns of the secular human body. Even with pieces not intended for dancing, listeners usually find themselves *moving*, really or in imagination. And certainly rhythm is a key – but, as I have already implied, not solely in the strict sense of the term. There are vital roles too for the rhythms governing phraseology; chord and textural change; patterns of accent and intensity, of vocal 'breathing', vibrato and sustain; not to mention the micro-rhythms

responsible for the inner life of sounds themselves, and the quasi-'spatial' rhythms organising the hierarchies of relative pitch strength and tonal tension, both in melodic contour and in harmonic sequences. Maróthy (n.d.) has eloquently described the permeation of the whole spectrum of musical parameters (and beyond) by rhythmic principles. The physical spectrum of periodicity zones (lungs – heart – feet – fingers – speech organs – vocal chords – ear drum – ultra-sound perception – electro-chemical neural circuits – eye (light waves)) is mapped (or partly so) by the musical spectrum covered by the frequency zones of rhythm (in the strict sense) and pitch, which together cover the distance from pulsations occupying several seconds each, up to a frequency of approximately 20,000 pulsations per second. This gives a theoretical basis to the idea that 'gesture' occupies a spectrum, with relationships to obvious corporeal movements at one end and neural pulsations at the other. Not only beat and metre, then, but also the micro-physics of intonation, sound-articulation and timbral adjustment: both are parts of the rhythmic ensemble. Moreover, the bottom end of the spectrum can be extended, as the longer periodicities of affective and cognitive movements come into play; the manoeuvres, traverses, outpourings and reflexes associated with corporeal activities, we might say, are transferred to a mental and emotional setting, where their scale can be expanded, to generate the patterns of phrase-relationships, pitch-contours, harmonic rhythms and so on. All the components and periodicities overlap, combine, complement and at times contradict each other in a complex gestural totality. And just as physical bodies (including parts of our own) can resonate with frequencies in the pitch zone, so they can with the lower frequencies found in the rhythm zone. 'The producer of sound can make us dance to his tune by forcing his activity upon us' (Maróthy n.d., p. 98), and when we 'find ourselves moving' in this way, there is no more call for moral criticism of the supposedly 'mechanical' quality of the response than when a loudspeaker 'feeds back' a particular pitch. Boosting the volume can force zonal crossover, as when very loud performance makes us 'feel' a pitch rather than hearing it in the normal way; our skin resonates with it, as with a rhythm.

The textural location of this complex gestural totality is what Allan Moore has called the 'sound-box' (Moore 1993); it is within the four-dimensional space-time of this imaginary cuboid that the gestural intersections take place. Modern recording technique has hugely increased the variety of possible configurations, and the sense of specific physical place that can be created has enormous potential effects on the power and types of gestural resonance which listeners feel. In European music history, the nearest analogy is perhaps performances in church, theatre and courtly chamber before the rise of the massed symphony orchestra, with its uni-directional relationship to the audience, changed our way of listening. But electronically mediated mixing can greatly magnify the 'staging' possibilities found in pre-classical ritual, drama and dance. In modern popular songs, the listener seems to be related to the sound-box not only – often, perhaps, not mainly – through a perspective, derived from a single, objective point of view, but through a feeling of being inserted into the mix, a process which produces gestural identification and resonance. The first offers blended textural space for assimilation, or mastery, by the detached listener-subject; in the second, it is the subject, a gestural subject, who is assimilated into the textural space, as a participating actor.

Method

The detachment to which traditional analysis often pretends becomes difficult if the experience of somatic movement is the guide to analytic decisions. One research method would be hypothetico-deductive, generating models – 'action-models' – of song-types, whose characteristics could then be tested for their applicability in particular cases: aspects of real songs would be more or less matched to the models by means of 'participant listening'. One would have to work out quasi-objective sets of 'rules' governing gestural force, direction and shape in, for example, melodic contours. Pitch direction and distance, interval quality, and tonal rhythm and function are all factors – though they interact, and may well not reinforce each other. Similar factors apply to harmonic sequences, though the presence of polyphony now (different voices, perhaps moving different distances in different directions) complicates matters. But in applying such models to particular instances, subjective decisions concerning 'pertinence' cannot be avoided; which gestures are in play, or are predominant, at any given moment? (On pertinence, see Middleton 1990, pp. 173ff.) We could, and should, test the validity of the decisions by comparing them with those made by other participants in the music. And indeed, it may be easier to develop a language for such inter-subjective comparison when it is gestural as well as, or more than, verbal. Dancers know if they are feeling the music the same way – though that simple starting-point would need considerable refinement. On this level, the analyst is no more privileged than any other participant because he or she is totally reliant on 'implicit theory': the unconscious schemas guiding one's phenomenology of subjective response. But an advantage of the method being sketched here is that in principle the analyst can double as 'informant' from within the culture – laying out the gestures through participation – and as 'critical outsider', cross-checking the information against schemas drawing on a wider body of musical data. The role of the 'scholar-fan' becomes vital.

Not only the choice of which gestures are in operation will vary; so too will the *level* at which the textural map is read. Each level, from the inner vibrations of sounds, and the shortest of rhythmic values, through to phrases, verses and choruses, corresponds to a different span of gesture, and hence to a different somatic location: foot, pelvis, nodding head, breathe in/breathe out, excitement growing/then released, proposition/reiteration, etc. And the nerves are pulsating, the muscles vibrating, the feet moving, *within* the longer spans of action: the more slowly gyrating pelvis, the patterns of inhalation and exhalation, the charge and discharge of emotion, and so on. There is, then, a hierarchical 'tree' relating the spectrum of structural levels in the music with the spectrum of somatic equivalents. Some ethnomusicologists have remarked on the 'polycentric' nature of much African music, with dance-movement of various body areas being associated with different components in the rhythmic texture (see for example Kubik *et al.* 1989, p. 148). We can surely extend this to much popular music – especially that influenced by Afro-American styles – and, more speculatively, to cover affective and cognitive moves as well as kinetic ones.

A basic starting-point to the gestural modelling of song-types is the notion of rhythmic 'groove'. Different configurations of note placing, articulation and accent from the various components of the percussion kit, at specific tempi, play a large part in defining styles. But very quickly this takes on more extended textural

aspects; the gestural shape varies according to type of bassline and placing and articulation of notes from other instruments: guitars, keyboards, horns. These interactions produce a gestural centre or 'given', around which many popular songs orientate themselves, and listeners are intimately familiar with the different 'grooves' associated with, say, rock ballad, reggae, funk and so on. These 'groove tracks' can best be modelled in visual or kinetic forms as the analyst's body responds to (resonates with) the sound-gestures. Around this centre operate varied types of phrase-relationship, of melodic intonation and of chord-sequence (not to mention the micro-gestures associated with many individual sounds). On the level of phrase-relationships, we can distinguish between units that are open or closed; antiphonal, complementary or iterative; musematic (that is, two or three-note, self-contained segments) or discursive (longer structures, more analogous to verbal phrases). Examples of common types of melodic intonation are descending, arch-shape, shouted or chanted, circling and what I call 'narrative' (this is the kind that seems to be telling a story – pulling us through a 'what will happen next?' note-string). Characteristic chord-sequences include chord-alternations and three- or four-chord riffs (of many types), circle of fifth sequences and twelve-bar blues patterns. In all these cases, it is the exploration of tonal space that is important, along with the effects of movement, relative distance and tension that this prod-uces. (For more detailed discussion of all these types, see Middleton 1990, chapter 6.)

If musical gestures lie semiotically beyond the linguistic domain (as Lévi-Strauss, Blacking and Barthes in their different ways all imply), the search for a verbal analogue of their meaning is a forlorn one (even if unavoidable). Two-dimensional graphics (while also not problem-free) are often helpful. It is not difficult to represent a chord-alternation – because switches of tonal tension are involved; and a strong backbeat can be marked visually in an obvious way. It is harder to depict something like a twelve-bar blues chord-sequence – even though any sympathetic listener will feel the gesture involved: to do, somehow, with a particular intersection of structurings of time on the one hand, tonal space on the other. But so often one feels the need for more dimensions. There may be a future for moving real-time three-dimensional images. Many ethnomusicologists now film as well as record performance; certainly in much African music, for instance, body movement can help reveal musical structure. Perhaps this example should be pursued, and expanded, in popular song analysis, using freely created 3-D images as well as film of performance, dance and other participative activity.

This is not possible here. In discussing a couple of examples, I will just try to bring out what strike me as the basic gestural features, using two-dimensional diagrams and a few words.[3] First, Madonna's 'Where's the Party?' I am confining myself to the verse and chorus (that is, omitting the bridge) (see Figure 1). Here we would certainly have to represent:

(1) the 'groove'. In typical disco fashion, this is founded on a heavy regular beat – that is, on the feet. But predominantly strong-beat bass is complemented by back-beat snare drum (sways of body?), strung on a sixteen-to-the-bar cymbal chatter (felt as a sort of muscular vibration?). And notice how the bass joins in this semiquaver figuration in the choruses, adding to the feeling of spasmic excitement. In the verses, the ongoing rhythmic groove is articulated by the guitar-keyboard riff (one to each phrase – see Ex. 1), its accentual 'hit-point' marking an (upper-
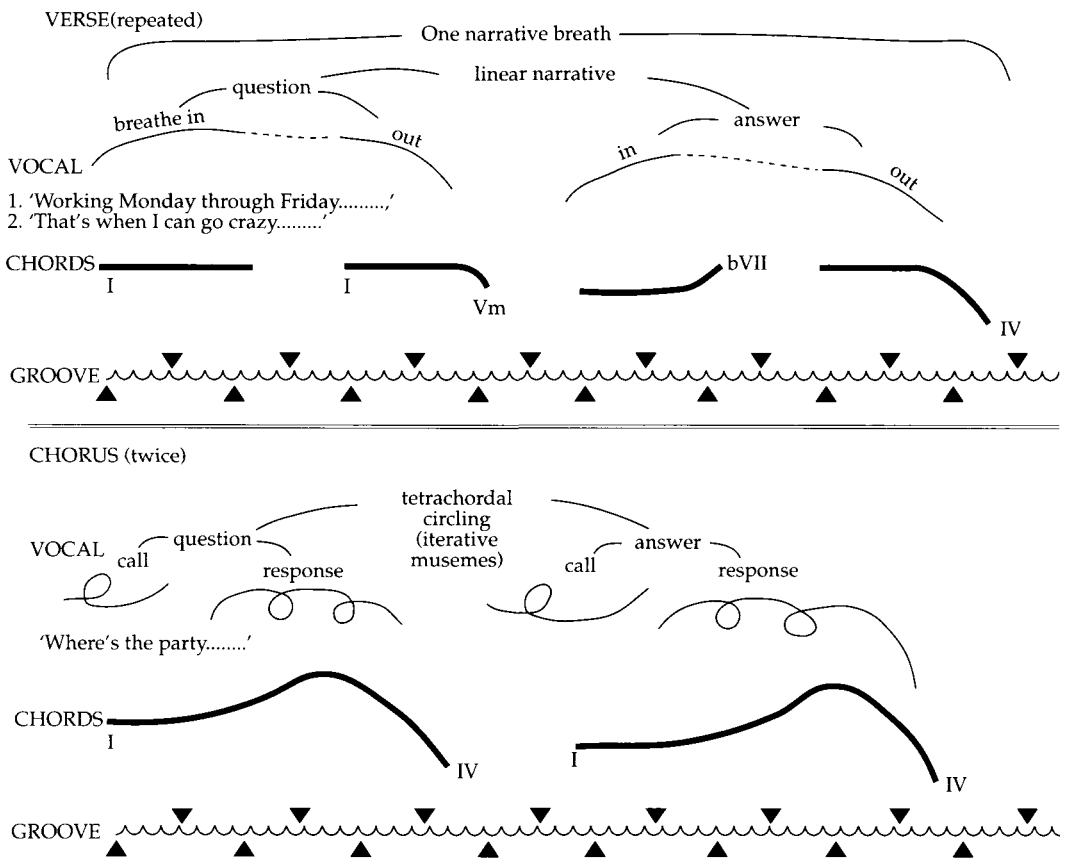
Figure 1. Madonna: 'Where's the Party'

body jerk?) punctuation. The riff – basically on-beat – is offered by the bass in more syncopated variants (Ex. 2), and Madonna's vocal (double-tracked – which muddies the on-beat clarity) sometimes pulls away from the strict metrical divisions. These are examples of what Maróthy calls 'noise': the tendency in all rhythmic phenomena towards systemic unity (abstract mathematical order) is subverted by the attractions of 'difference' (the disorder of concrete reality); and the effect of this is to widen the field of gestural reference.

(2) the shapes of the repeating chord-sequences used in both verse and chorus. Both are really filled-out I-IV moves, and the subdominant trajectory produces a relaxation (because we are moving flatwards on the circle of fifths), so overall the harmonic gesture is one of comfort. However, this is tempered by a slight ambiguity over which pitch is the tonic. The internal structure of the sequence differs between verse and chorus, modifying the tensional shape. The move to Vm in the verse 'ought' to increase tension but it does not seem to, perhaps because the dominant chord is minor, perhaps because of harmonic rhythm and phrase-structure: coming at the end of the two-bar phrase, it takes on a quasi-cadential resolving quality. The harmonic sequence (one falling fourth answered by another, I-Vm

Example 1

Example 2

Bass variant
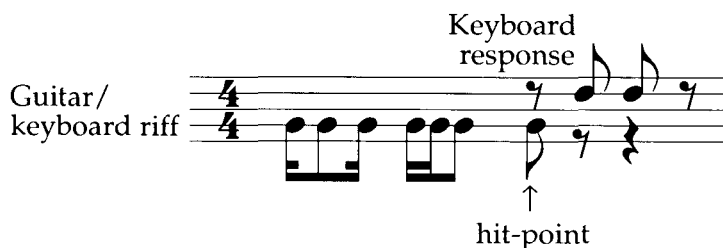
by bVII-IV) supports the question-answer formulation of the vocal. In the chorus, by contrast, squashing the I-IV move up from 4 bars to 2 increases the energy level, and the repetition is relentlessly iterative. The move, upwards through IIm and Vm, increases the tension, which then drops back with the fall to the subdominant.

(3) the various combinations of question/answer, call/response, inhale/exhale found in the vocal phraseology which is laid over the chord sequences. Notice here the contrast between the basically 'narrative' shapes in the verse – the internal 'rhyming' simulates a conversational account – and the compact, tetrachordal 'circling' shapes, organised into repeating call-and-response patterns, in the chorus. This contrast, between linear narrative and dance-ritual, is a common one.

(4) the micro-gestures' of individual sounds. A few examples from Madonna's lead vocal: the tremulous vibrato on 'fun' (nervous anticipation?); the rasp on *'party'* (anticipation sensually fulfilled?); the slide up to pitch on *'Friday'* and the structurally equivalent *'crazy'* – these coincide with the 'hit-point' of the accompanying riff (see Ex. 1), forming the tensional climax of the gesture, and assisting the conversational structuring of the vocal narrative (each phrase answered by the keyboard response: 'oh yeah'; 'uh uh').[4]

(5) the texture. The fact that the frequent dissonances between the vocal and the chords are not heard as such demonstrates the extent to which the texture here is gesturally layered. Although there is not much horizontal spread within the 'sound-box', the mix has quite a bit of depth, with bass and snare drum heavily foregrounded, vocals behind (and above) them, and harmony further back again. The predominantly sharp timbres, with lots of high frequencies transmitting high energy levels, contribute to the clarity.

Even in this apparently simple song, then, the variety of gestural spans (from semiquaver up to four-bar unit) and the complexity of the combinations, demand a genuinely polycentric somatic response from the participant listener.

Of course, Madonna's record is a dance-song and, it might be argued, you

would expect lots of kinetic energy here. Let us look now at a ballad – Bryan Adams' '(Everything I Do) I Do It for You' (see Figure 2).

Perhaps the most striking feature here is the pervasive arch-shaped vocal intonations, typical of the ballad genre – and indeed of the entire bourgeois song tradition, from at least the Renaissance period. Gesturally, this intonation suggests a bodily and psychological reaching out, an assertion of energy and control, but
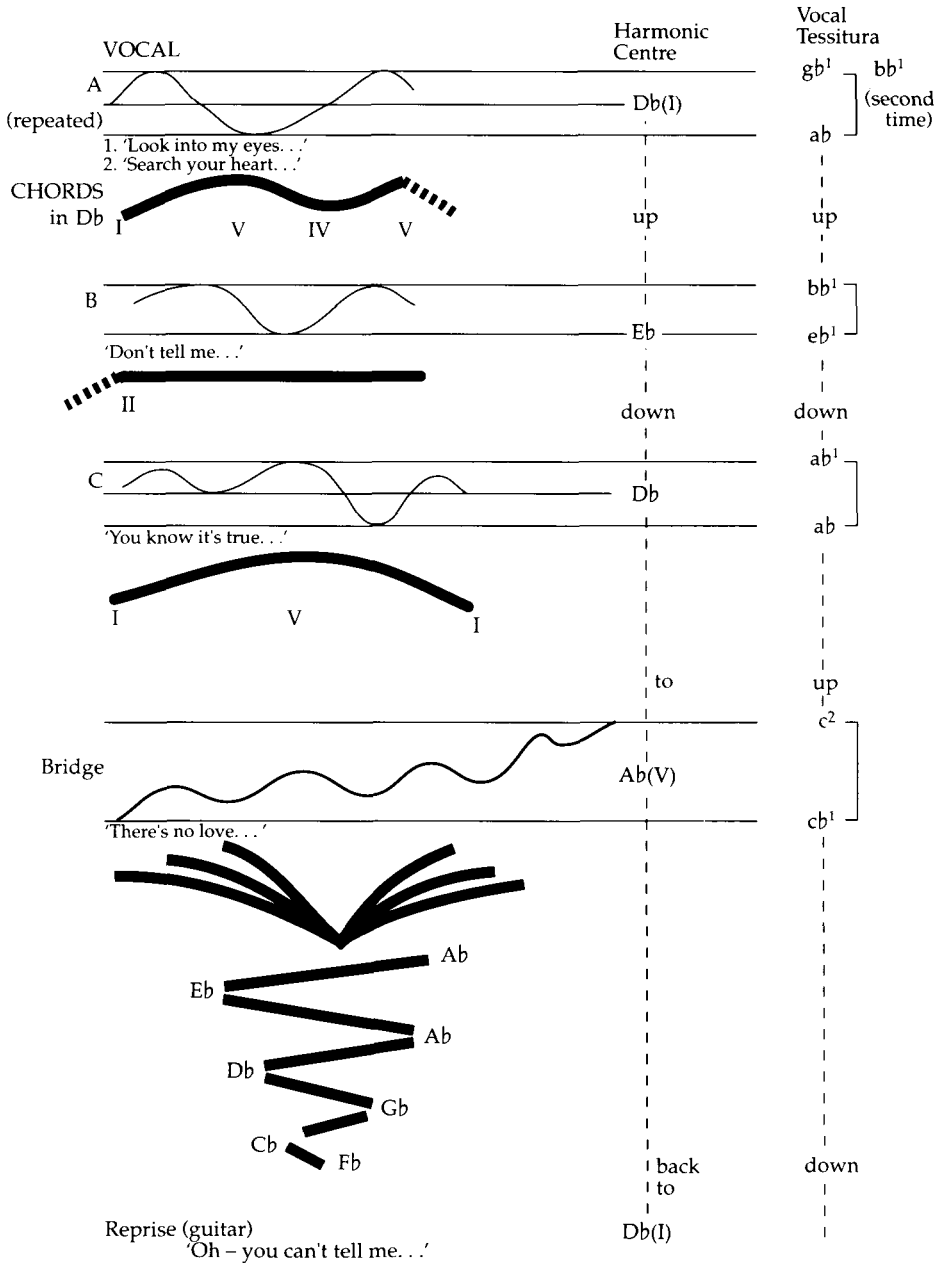

Figure 2. Bryan Adams: '(Everything I Do) I Do It for You'

always in the knowledge that this will be followed by a gathering in, a return to the safety of the Self's own little world. All the phrases in the main section of the song follow this pattern, though the first (A) starts with a descent, not an ascent, an initial drawing in or invitation to the listener: and this is emphasised in the first appearance of A by a tonic pedal under the chords shown in the diagram, establishing at the outset a bedrock quality of 'home'. The arch principle operates hierarchically. In the third phrase (B) (A having been repeated) both the harmonic centre of the melody and its overall tessitura rise, compared with A, falling again in the fourth phrase. Then in the bridge, the rising sequence carries the voice up to its highest point in the song. From there it descends again through the reprise of the main AABC section – though the relaxation effect of this is delayed and intensified, first, by the interruption provided by the guitar solo (this substitutes for the A phrases), second, by variants in the vocal line which introduce some higher pitches than the first time round, and third, by a lengthening of C (it is actually elided with a varied version of A). Over the span of the whole song, then, there is a (slightly undulating) large-scale arch. (For completeness, I should add that the initial chorus (AABC) comes twice, and in the second the tessitura is lifted slightly by melodic variants (see Figure 2); at the same time, textural thickening and rhythmic enlivening – the percussion kit enters here – increase the energy level and so also contribute to pushing this section somewhat up the overall arch structure.)

This large-scale arch form is underpinned by the harmony. In A and C the chords move away from the tonic – so that they can return there subsequently. This kind of out-and-back circling round the primary triads has roots in hymns but also in a myriad of popular genres, going back, for example, to the *passamezzo* formulae of the sixteenth century. In B the harmony is pushed up to II – a minor triad, lying a good way from I both in terms of distance on the harmonic series and of pitch-consonance relationships – screwing up the tension (the nerves tense). In the bridge, the chords move through a circle of descending fourths – or, as it actually sounds, a circle of rising fifths. Gesturally, the effect of this is interesting. The rise in pitch and the sharpward move increase tension, but the lack of leading notes, and the feeling of a succession of plagal (IV-I) cadences, seems to soften this, producing a more receptive, lump-in-the-throat kind of tension. I feel this as a gradual opening-of-the-arms invitation and appeal. And the repetition inherent in the sequential technique – this is the most iterative part of the song – generalises this: one feels the whole audience joining in this gesture, as against the I-You individualism constructed before and after this.

The subdominant chord and the IV-I progression play a big part in this song. Though only a suggestion in the first part, this importance picks up from the bridge onwards. The guitar solo substitutes a repeated IV-I oscillation for the harmonies of A, and in the full-length version of the song this pattern recurs in an extra quasi-improvised section following the final cadence. The gestural equivalent of the plagal progression seems to me to be something like a 'benediction', the arms opening and descending to reassure, absolve, bless; this is not just because of the 'Amen' associations, but arises from the centrality of the tonic pitch in both chords – there is a relatively low level of tensional difference – and from the fact that usually so many constituent notes of IV resolve downwards to I (VI to V, IV to III). Over the whole song, the role of the plagal effect is to modify the otherwise strong I-V-I tendency which Schenkerians[5] could easily find in the *Ursatz* (see the 'harmonic centre' column on Fig. 2; Schenkerians could easily locate a 3–2-1 *Urlinie*

as well – but this is not surprising in a genre with deep roots in European bourgeois tradition). A hint of Gospel ecstasy tempers ballad desire and aspiration. The most explicit focus for this desire is Bryan Adams' voice. Husky, limited in high frequencies (i.e. lacking energy and confidence, requiring assistance), rich in dissonant 'noise', this places us in the (imagined) world of concrete reality; disturbing ordered structure, its disordered quality, its incompleteness, demands listener participation, invites embrace. It is right in the centre of the mix, above the bass and drum-kit. Piano and synthesiser are slightly to the left, guitars slightly to the right, but there is not much spread – they are all blended in towards the centre – and there is even less depth: instead there's rather a 'wall-of-sound' effect, but the use of heavy reverb means that this comes out at the listener, enveloping her, rather than inviting her in (as in the Madonna record).

Surmounting bass and drums, Adams, so to speak, 'rides' the groove. This is of classic rock ballad type. It is vital to get the tempo right for this, so that the combination of strong on-beat, emphasised by bass fills around it, and moderate (hi-hat) back-beat produces the required sways and dips of the body (shoulders, hips, flexing of the knees?). Throughout, unschematised fragments from bass, guitars and piano of eight-to-the-bar and sixteen-to-the-bar 'fills' (with off-beat accent) offer possibilities of more complex, flexible movements – almost like individualised variants of a generalised eroticism. These fills, a rhythmic equivalent to the concreteness of the vocal timbre, are the other side of the more abstract, 'collectivising' effect of the basic beat (audience swaying together). Nevertheless, in general, this latter effect defines more than any other quality the specificity of the rock variant of the ballad genre's personalised gestures.

Gesture and connotation

Nothing in my argument so far should be taken as implying that, in the analysis of popular music – still less music as a whole – *only* the sphere of gesture matters. In both the pieces I have discussed, for example, connotations are important too. The girlish but provocatively knowing sound of Madonna's voice calls up all kinds of associations, certainly in the male mind, standing in a long-established intertextual tradition (represented, for instance, by Marilyn Monroe); and the genre itself, disco, gives rise to many connotations. Bryan Adams' voice-type, together with piano and (synthesised) string backing, immediately signals 'sentiment', 'romance', 'confession'; and the 'Amen' fourths suggest a hymnic sincerity. But often the fields of gesture and connotation (primary and secondary meaning, as I have called them elsewhere) are actually correlated, through the action of what some semiologists have termed a 'semantic gesture': a unifying, generating principle, traversing semiotic levels (somatic; referential) and tied to deep cultural functions (see Mukarovsky 1977; Middleton 1990, p. 224). For example, the bourgeois 'arch' relates on one level to a gestural agenda, as we have seen: the personal mastery of the body; the individualisation of emotion; the expansive-but-controlled, rationally-timed symmetries of the Self as 'little home'. But on another level it also relates to an expansive field of connotations: boundless ambition, directed at mastering external reality, making history and so on, but limited, ultimately, by the assumptions of 'empirical individualism' ('I know, and possess, that which I can see'); the result, through 'contracts' between individuals (individual phrases?) representing the 'greater home' of bourgeois culture. (On

'arch' structures and bourgeois culture, see Maróthy 1974.) Similarly, it might be possible to find the roots of both the nervous excitement modelled in the rhythms of 'Where's the Party?' and the suggestions of hedonism conjured up by Madonna's voice and by the connotations of disco culture in certain key developments in late capitalist consumerism, which begin to write the bourgeois individual out of the script in favour of *homo communalis desiderens*: 'we know, and want, that which we enjoy'.

Popular and Classical

I see no reason why the mode of analysis proposed here could not be applied to music other than popular songs.[6] The musicological time may be right. Joseph Kerman, in his important book on musicology (1985), constantly circles round the limitations of formalistic analytic methods, tying them to their historical roots: the development of musicology itself, of idealist aesthetics – with its notion of the 'autonomous' work – and of the 'canon' of 'classical' masterworks, which all began in the early nineteenth century. These developments gave rise to a preferred mode of listening, closely linked with formalistic analysis, and based on the proposition that understanding is directly proportional to the ability to grasp cognitively all the details of a work's underlying structure and their inter-relationships. Subotnik (1988) and Cook (1990), among others, have clarified the specific historical location of this 'structural listening'. It is applicable, they argue, purely to the 'common-practice canon' of Western art music, from Corelli to Mahler – and may be not entirely appropriate even there.

The deconstruction, within musicology itself, of 'structural listening', together with the ideology of structural autonomy which is linked with it, brings into sharp focus the historical and cultural limits within which they have validity. To the extent that structural analysis triumphed alongside the musical category of autonomous art with which it was historically connected, we can also say that to historicise structural analysis casts light on the split of the musical field into 'popular' and 'classical' sides. It has been commonplace – and is so still – to defend the distinction between the two by exposing popular music to examination by structural analysis and finding it wanting. This historical model has, since the early nineteenth century, tended to reserve 'mind' for art music, 'body' for popular; 'argument' and 'visceral pleasures' have been separated in line with a quasi-socio-logical distinction of categories. But if the relevance of structural analysis is now being revealed as distinctly partial, it is tempting to wonder if the last 200 years have been, in one sense, something of a diversion, the popular/classical split a side-effect of the gigantic, if glorious, failure of post-Enlightenment bourgeois thought. This would have implications not just for analytic methodology but for music historiography as well, for it raises the possibility that the differences setting apart twentieth-century popular songs from the lineages of European music are less than commonly thought.

Before being superseded in the late eighteenth century, the dominant European music theory, explaining compositional technique and expressive effect alike, was that of mimesis. There is a certain congruence between aspects of this theory and aspects of a theory of gesture (though there are also differences). The system of musical 'figures' developed by Baroque theorists and composers, as a means of 'imitating' emotions, actions, character-types and so on, was sympto-

matic of a pervasive relationship between music and classical rhetoric, for the figures were modelled on oratorical figures of speech and structural devices, and in both cases the aim was the arousal and direction of the audience's passions.[7] While many of the musical figures were to do with word-painting or devices of musical logic (repetition, sequence, etc.), others were more obviously 'gestural': *exclamatio* and *interrogatio*, for example. Moreover, both Cartesian science and the older theory of humours emphasised the emotions' physiological roots. One theorist, Heinichen, drew on the rhetorical concept of *loci topici* – rationalised categories of topics which could give rise to concrete musical figures in the composer's mind – and these might perhaps be compared to deep somatic gestures. It is true that the theory of figures and the whole rhetorical tradition on which it was based are overwhelmingly weighted towards considerations of verbal syntax and meanings. But oratorical performance is intimately concerned with the moulding of verbal intonations in time and pitch-space, and here rational and affective meanings, and their musico-gestural delivery by the vocal body – with the assistance of the physiological body – are fused. Wilson Coker's book, *Music and Meaning* (1972), persuasively shows how in musical syntax the equivalents of logical devices or cognitive shapes have physiological links.

Mimetic theories gradually faded, as notions of music's structural autonomy came to the fore. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that they were ideologically written out – for I think it is perfectly possible to do a gestural analysis of many nineteenth-century pieces. Take Beethoven, high priest of the autonomists – the initial presentation of the first subject of the first movement of the fifth symphony ('da-da-da-dah'). How easy it would be to describe this passage in terms of the gestural references of its dramatically undulating pitch shapes, its variability of motion, from cascades of notes to lengthy pauses, its variety of harmonic rhythm and its use of accent. Agawu (1991) in his semiotic study of Classical music (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven) describes its principle of operation not in the formalist terms generally used but in terms of an interplay between two semiotic levels, one intra-musical (but organised as rhetorical structure), the other extra-musical (organised through conventionalised 'topics', each associated with familiar musical figures, manners and textures). This is not too far distant from my gesture/connotation pairing, and 'What emerges is a fluidly defined sense of movement, often most accessible through rhythm' (Agawu 1991, p. 130).

Even in the twentieth century, when at first sight formalism seems to reign supreme, we find a 'poor relation' situated in Central and Eastern Europe, which we may represent by the figures of Ernst Kurth – who based his analytic theory on the 'energies' manifested by tensional processes – and Boris Assaf'ev, whose 'intonational theory' saw music as a product of the dynamic inter-relationships of sounds, conceived as models of socio-historical relationships (Kurth 1991; Assaf'ev 1977). The work of both men can be felt to lie behind the work of Maróthy, mentioned earlier. In Western Europe, Cook (1990) at times comes close to a gestural theory; and several recent writings apply methods derived from rhetorical analysis (for example, Greene 1992).

The rehabilitation of a more kinetically-oriented mode of analysis does not mean, I must repeat, that other modes are always irrelevant. To return to the opening of Beethoven's fifth symphony for a moment: as well as functioning gesturally, this passage obviously carries a range of connotations (fate, heroism, and all that); and at the same time it stands at the beginning of a large-scale musical

argument, which will not be completed until the very end of the final movement, and which for its full assimilation certainly does demand the techniques of structural listening. What I would suggest is that these three areas – gesture, connotation, argument – operate in different repertories in diverse ratios and inter-relationships; and analysis needs to reflect that. Within musicology, gestural analysis is the poor relation. For historical and cultural reasons, popular songs offer ideal material for starting to put that neglect to rights.

Endnotes

1 Despite differences in approach, recent work by Van der Merwe (1989), Moore (1993), Brackett (1992), Hawkins (1992) and Walser (1992) exemplifies this point.

2 For more detailed discussion of the theories of Lévi-Strauss, Blacking and Barthes, and references, see Middleton 1990, chapters 6 and 7. Despite many differences, these theories all see meaning in music as *embodied* rather than *signified*.

3 It will be obvious that not only are the analyses here less full than would be desirable but also the methodology is less than fully adequate, in terms of what is proposed earlier. I can only claim limitations of space and time in mitigation.

4 Of course, lyrics almost always have other functions than the purely gestural – a point which is

neglected throughout this article. Furthermore, not only would their denotations and connotations have to be taken into account in a full analysis, their contribution to gestural process itself – through prosodic features and through sound-quality features such as consonant attack and vowel-modulation – is often more important than may be apparent here.

5 For Schenker's theory, which sees all good music as based on an underlying I-V-I harmonic progression, see Middleton 1990, pp. 192–5.

6 I have concentrated here on the Western musical field. The extent to which the argument applies elsewhere is a larger question which should certainly be pursued.

7 The *New Grove* article on 'rhetoric' is a good starting-place for this topic.

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