



THE POPULAR AND THE SACRED IN MUSIC

Antti-Ville Kärjä



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Music, as the form of art whose name derives from ancient myths, is often thought of as pure symbolic expression and associated with transcendence. Music is also a universal phenomenon and thus a profound marker of humanity. These features make music a sphere of activity where sacred and popular qualities intersect and amalgamate. In an era characterised by postsecular and postcolonial processes of religious change, re-enchantment and alternative spiritualities, the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music have become increasingly multifarious. In the book, the cultural dynamics at stake are approached by stressing the extended and multiple dimensions of the sacred and the popular, hence challenging conventional, taken-for-granted and rigid conceptualisations of both popular music and sacred music. At issue are the cultural politics of labelling music as either popular or sacred, and the disciplinary and theoretical implications of such labelling. Instead of focussing on specific genres of popular music or types of religious music, consideration centres on interrogating musical situations where a distinction between the popular and the sacred is misleading, futile and even impossible. The topic is discussed in relation to a diversity of belief systems and different repertoires of music, including classical, folk and jazz, by considering such themes as origin myths, autonomy, ingenuity and stardom, authenticity, moral ambiguity, subcultural sensibilities and political ideologies.

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First published 2022
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-032-02503-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-02504-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-18364-8 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003183648

Typeset in Times New Roman
by codeMantra

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements and a note on ortography</i>	xi
1 Introduction	1
2 Origins and effects	30
3 Ingenuity and authenticity	58
4 Religion and moral ambiguities	84
5 Subcultures and generations	112
6 Politics and resistance	136
7 Conclusion	156
<i>References</i>	167
<i>Index</i>	187



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Preface

For almost as long as I can remember, I have been both highly suspicious and tremendously fascinated by all things religious – which in my case translates all but exclusively as Christianity in the guise of Evangelic-Lutheran Protestantism. It may have started with the naïve realisation of a child airborne for the first time in his life that there was nothing, or no-one, rather, above the clouds, and it has continued over the years as stupendous astonishment when faced with the double standards in the lives of (pseudo-)religious people and as a deep interest in and enchantment by various mythological narratives, whether in the form of scriptures held sacred by some, fantasy novels or science fiction on the silver screen. Once, someone wondered if not believing in anything induces anxiety in the end for me, to which I responded that the myths provided by J. R. R. Tolkien and *Star Wars* fill that void in my life abundantly – and this was well before *A Song of Ice and Fire* or *Game of Thrones*.

To some extent, I regret I have never been a fan of opera, merely because I cannot fathom the beauty in the screaming of sopranos any more than in Neil Young's whining. Only because of professional reasons I tolerate both. The same goes for avant-garde jazz and extreme metal, by and large. Indeed, my personal appreciation of melodic inventiveness, executed with only modest distortion if at all, may be considered counter-intuitive when faced with the mythological and transgressive properties and potentialities of the above examples (among many others); yet, while what follows is undeniably a personal journey, my current musical preferences have not always been thus, and it is the inevitability of change – musical and otherwise – that I have found central for intuition and new ideas to emerge. In some respects, as an elderly acquaintance of mine put it, we all remain twenty years old mentally, but as my ears get hairier, I also realise my interest in the latest stylistic developments in music has diminished, with the recognition that the styles I once revered as the pinnacles of musical creativity and innovation are rather blimpish now (and, admittedly, I do have a Buffalo Springfield album in my personal collection, mostly because roughly thirty years ago I thought one is supposed to). All this does not mean there are other people

who still revere the creative acts in question – or continuously rediscover their merits, as my children do.

Behind the academic interest into the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music there is, admittedly, something of an epiphany. For the early part of 2011, I was living in Auckland, Aotearoa, New Zealand, and one sunny late summer morning (in April) I decided to jog to the top of one of the extinct volcanoes, namely Maungawhau (also known as Mount Eden). After getting to the top and some breath amidst breathtaking scenery, I noticed a hearse leaving the site, followed by a procession of cars. At the same time, a busload of tourists were enjoying the vista over the city. While there is not much new in reminding of the fact that many religious or otherwise sacred sites are often also tourist attractions, the situation becomes more complicated because of Indigenous cosmologies involved. Maungawhau is not just an extinct volcano; in the Indigenous Maori mythology its crater is the homestead of Mataaho, the god of the secrets hidden in the earth. This raises additional questions about cultural and by implication religious difference, assimilation, appropriation and domination. Around the crater rim track, in fact, there are numerous signs warning against entering the crater, on both physical and spiritual grounds: “Do not enter crater. This fragile and sacred area is easily damaged”, or, in the Maori language, *tiakina tenei Maunga tapu*, that is, “save this sacred Mountain.” Yet the lure of the pit is apparently irresistible, as some had climbed down to form their initials with the rocks that lie there.

What the early morning visit to the crater clearly represented was a concrete and real situation where different belief systems and attitudes to life (and death) intersected in ways I had not considered before. The most important revelation for me concerned the inextricability of the notions of the sacred and the popular in certain situations; in the case of Maungawhau, the former manifests itself in explicit religious practices and the latter in the form of tourism industry. Yet equally important for me was to realise that these two aspects are both based on experiences of transcendence, whether stemming from issues of life and death or from the awe of facing monumental proportions, and the possible physical effort needed to reach the location in question. Even though there was no music audible to my ears at that moment, it reoriented my thinking profoundly, also in relation to all things musical.

Curiously enough, the mixture of personal recollections and theoretical ruminations I initially designed to facilitate a fairly straightforward conceptual juxtaposition and discussion turned, in the end, into an astonishment of the disciplinary rigidity at play. While the original energising boost of frustration was based on what I perceived as academic laziness around the notion of popular music, the eventual fillip came in the form of exasperation over both methodological and musical conservatism of ethnomusicology in particular. To me, the culprit in both cases is nevertheless the same: the Anglo-American scholar(ship). While the resources are more limited in

the sparsely populated and linguistically distinctive areas of North Eastern Europe, the resulting insecurity may induce eccentric combinations of expertise that go way beyond the conventional self-congratulatory emphasis on interdisciplinarity in the field. These combinations may be sacrilegious to the academic imperialists, yet I am inclined to posit that such an impious orientation is rather useful in scrutinising the peculiarities of music and the belief systems surrounding it. What is more, my personal clashes with the conventional (ethno)musicological dogmas have only served to strengthen the conviction about the dependence of scholarly enquiry on incessant questioning, and hence about the never-ending necessity of asking, what is it that is called music, whether demarcated with epithets such as popular and sacred or not, and how do the shifting definitions and demarcations contribute to understanding what it is to be a human being.



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Acknowledgements and a note on ortography

The book is an expansion on ideas expressed in a series of presentations at various conferences, including *Crossroads of Cultural Studies* in Paris (2012) and Tampere (2014), *Studying Music* in Edinburgh (2014), *Pop-Life* in Northampton (2014), *Music Networks Seminar* in Budapest (2014), *Popular Music and the Sacred* in London (2015), *Rituals and Cultural Performance* in Dunedin (2016), *Communicating Religion* in Leuven (2017), *Losing My Religion: Music, Spirituality and Religion* in Santander (2017), *Music and Politics* in Bursa (2018) and *Crosstown Traffic* in Huddersfield (2018). In the treatment, I develop further the discussion expressed in the following publications: “Epiphanies of a commercial age” in *Holy Crap!* (co-edited with Kimi Kärki, IIPC 2016); “The Intersection of the Popular and the Sacred in Youth Cultures” in *Young 25:1* (co-written with Anders Sjöborg, 2017); “Intersections of Politics and the Sacred in Music” in *Etnomüzikoloji Dergisi* 1:2 (2018); and “Beatified Beats, Ritualised Rhymes” in *Exploring the Spiritual in Popular Music* (eds. Georgina Gregory and Mike Dines, Bloomsbury 2021). In addition, in Chapter 2 in particular I draw from my Master’s Thesis in the Study of Religions titled “Mythologisation of Music” (University of Helsinki, Faculty of Theology, 2019). I thank all who were responsible in organising the events and editing the publications, as well as the collegial friend whose name is Legion since they are many. The underlying research has been funded by the Academy of Finland in 2009–2012 and 2014–2018 (projects nr 127772, 129066, 265668, 282844, 304206). The original artwork on the opening page of each chapter is by Varpu Leinonen.

In the twenty-first century phase of political correctness and populist Orwellianism one can never be entirely sure of appropriate terminology or how it will be misappropriated and reinterpreted. In my own writing, I have adhered to the current academic vocabulary while reproducing citations with original wordings, regardless of their occasional derogative insinuations. Regarding genre labels, I have spelled out compounds such as “rock and roll,” “rhythm and blues” and “country and western,” thus following authoritative reference sources (e.g., Rye 2001; Vallee 2013). Alongside religious denominations, I have capitalised the cardinal points when they imply political and ideological rather than geographical directions. Here, I do

maintain that to be cognisant of the directions and the movement they imply is crucial, as while going either West or East is to go around, to go either North or South is to find oneself ultimately in uninhabitable conditions. Lunar and interplanetary directions are of no relevance here, despite the obvious eschatological scientism involved.

1 Introduction

“Gee-whiz, Auntie Harriet, what is so important about Chopin?” asked Dick Grayson, the young ward of multimillionaire Bruce Wayne, as he was getting frustrated over his piano lessons. “All music is important, Dick,” responded Mr Wayne from his couch, and explained: “It’s the universal language. One of our best hopes for the eventual realisation of the brotherhood of man” (*Batman* 1966a).

Whether or not one agrees with Mr Wayne’s statement, it foregrounds several common assumptions about music. First, there is an egalitarian recognition of the importance of all kinds of music, implying not only that music can be found in myriad forms but also that it carries significance regardless of its formal qualities. This is reinforced further with the second postulation that concerns the universality of non-verbal sounds and particularly their usefulness in cross-cultural communication, as a form of language. Third, the emphasis on hope conveys assumptions about the potential and role of music as a conduit, if not an autonomous agent even, for social change. Fourth, this change is conceived as a positive one, leading to convivial co-existence of humankind. Finally, there are implications about the gendered qualities of music; is it merely a coincidence that it is a male composer’s work that incites contemplation over achieving “the *brotherhood of man*”?



2 Introduction

As at issue is a work of fiction for television, some might dismiss these remarks as inconsequential; yet I beg to disagree with such dismissals, particularly on the basis of the (historical) popularity and authority of the medium in question. Regardless of the accuracy or veracity of Mr Wayne's assertion, the fact remains that *Batman* has reached an enormous audience during its half-a-century-long existence, boosted by the contemporary cult status of the series itself. To be sure, this brings to the fore various ways of interpreting and relating to it; thus, it is entirely possible to treat the passage as funny or ridiculous as Batman's much-appraised utility belt, or the characters portrayed in the series in general. Yet, to use the title given to the passage on YouTube (2015), "Batman and Robin's Cultural Policy Debate" may be considered also as part of "a powerful social commentary that wholeheartedly supports the Great Society initiatives of President Lyndon Johnson," exhibiting "a very liberal line on public spending, the value of human life, penal reform, and racial integration" (Gould 2011).

Thus, it may not be surprising at all to encounter a statement celebrating the equality and importance of all music, as all this coincides, broadly speaking, with the emergence of ethnomusicology in the USA as an academic discipline based on anthropological ideals of cultural sensitivity and relativism. This notwithstanding, to consider Chopin, or any other decomposing composer canonised within the Euro-American classical tradition for that matter, as equal to, say, the "Batusi" dance invented for the series (*Batman* 1966b), would have been courageous in the academic circles of those days, and it would be so also today. Despite the emphasis on cultural contextualisation and the relativity of musical value within ethnomusicology, the discipline was for long preoccupied with more "authentic" musical traditions such as European and North American folk and Indigenous musics, as well as the musics of the so-called old high cultures of Asia.

The association of Chopin with the immense wealth of Mr Wayne and his manor – as opposed to the speakeasies, greasy spoons and other delinquent lairs with their seductive sounds, frequented by the crime-fighting caped crusaders – is not by any means insignificant either, as it conforms to the principles of cultural and particularly musical distinction based on social class divisions. Considered this way, both immaterial and material value is ascribed to music; Chopin is *worthy* of being taught by Aunt Harriet in the great halls of Wayne Manor, while Batusi takes its practitioners over spontaneously, if not uncontrollably, in places of low moral fibre and nefarious affluence. Distinctions over musical value spill over to the criteria and definitions of music to begin with, and thus Mr Wayne's embrace of "all music" raises suspicions about the boundaries of the aesthetic practice in question. This has also theological implications, since, for instance, in certain religious contexts these boundaries may be literally a matter of life and death, as in the case of atrocities committed against musicians by Taliban extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Other theologically intriguing aspects in Mr Wayne's postulation are the insistence on the universality of music and

the way in which this is combined with an eschatological “hope” that there will be an “eventual” social and societal equilibrium in the world.

With this musing over of some twenty seconds from a rather eccentric television series, it is my intention to point to the multiple ways of conceptualising music within a variety of ideological domains, whether mainly cultural, economic, political or religious in quality. Furthermore, I use the *Batman* example to emphasise the tendency to rely on taken-for-granted assumptions about music being somehow transcendent, as both universally comprehensible and with powers of its own. Indeed, alongside – and crucially because of – its alleged ability to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, it is often conceived as an autonomous force that is capable of changing the future (usually for the best) and affecting human behaviour and attitudes. The fallacies inherent in universalist and autonomist schools of thought have been noted by ethnomusicologists and popular music scholars from early on (e.g., Merriam 1964: 10, 274; Blacking 1973: 68–72; Middleton 1990: 172–176), and in significant ways they manifest themselves in the paradox between the universality of musical practices that renders “music” popular by definition, and the vehement moral objections often caused by the self-evident effects of “popular music.” Put differently, the phenomena signalled by the Eurocentric label “music” are constitutive of humanity as a whole, and because of their fundamental qualities subject to equally profound moral concerns. From this, it follows that music is, always already, both popular and sacred; it is appreciated in one form or another by virtually everybody, and one’s “own” music defended and protected, with the occasional result that the appreciation and protection transmogrifies into prohibitive and destructive negations of certain types of music.

This is in fact the line of reasoning behind Taliban extremists’ violence against music and musicians; in its converse form, it has been influential also in the construction of Lutheran Christian musical practices, for instance – and in the later canonisation of Johann Sebastian Bach and his output. Yet it is imperative to recognise that the assumed transcendental or sacred qualities of music, as it were, need not be religious or spiritual. To the extent to which the notion of transcendence is set “vertically” against immanence by referring to “other-worldly” phenomena in the heights or the depths (see Schwartz 2004: x–xi) and, as its etymology suggests, climbing (Lat. *scendere*) over or beyond (Lat. *trans*) the boundaries between this and that other world, it may be conceived as pertaining to purely mundane shifts in the human conditions – as in the case of any socialist utopia. In investigations about music in totalitarian societies one quickly encounters references to state-sanctioned types of ideologically orthodox music and to the revolutionary potential of allegedly dissident and decadent sounds of jazz, blues and rock in particular (e.g., Ryback 1990; Rauhut 2017). Philosophers may be interested in re-conceiving transcendence as “the ground of humility,” yet its “unsavory reputation” extends to the present moment as crimes continue to be “committed in the name of transcendent principles – principles

4 *Introduction*

held beyond question, beyond critique” (Schwartz 2004: vii). Political leaders may (and will) come and go but as long as the systems that sustain them do not transform – for instance, by abandoning the idolatry of the Nation and Commerce in favour of supporting real-life diversity and equity – it does not matter how many trumps one has to put in; the boundaries remain unsurpassed. As sociologist of religion Gordon Lynch (2014: 147) puts it, “[o]ne of the greatest threats to our ability to live peaceably in pluralist, Western societies is precisely the simplistic narratives that are constructed around moral and cultural conflicts.”

Rescripting the sacred, popping the popular

Different understandings of music and its potential sacred or transcendental qualities accrue a pronounced importance in contemporary times of global migration and religious or spiritual plurality. These two phenomena are in fact inextricably intertwined; while the former yields the latter, the latter – or the lack of it, rather – often contributes to the former. In any case, it is possible to address these global processes through two “posts,” by focusing on the interrelations between postcolonial and postsecular processes. The consequences and “legacy” of European colonialism and imperialism have affected cultural expression profoundly, including conceptualisations and practices of music, and the same can be said of the resurgence and broadening of religious and spiritual forms of life, especially in allegedly secular Western states and countries. For some, this has signalled also “rescripting the sacred” (Santana and Erickson 2016) through an increased confluence of religious or spiritual belief systems and forms of popular culture, occasionally including certain types of music. The ascendancy of studies focussing on the contemporary variety of religiosity and spirituality is indeed notable, particularly from within sociology and anthropology of religion, and often discussed in terms of new religious movements, the postsecular age and re-enchantment. Indeed, it is demonstrable that in the twenty-first century, the study of religious elites has been complemented with investigations into religiosity in everyday contexts and commercial mass media (see Lynch 2005: 22). For instance, in relation to religion and “mediated reality” – spearheaded by social media and reality television – it has been maintained that not only do religious themes such as martyrdom and redemption function in normalising late capitalist ideology, but that the emphasis on ethical issues and fundamental values in the reality media becomes a key component in structuring the daily rituals of lived religion (Einstein et al. 2018: xviii–xx). Relatedly, in theorisation about postsecular societies emphasis is laid on a “new reflexive and inquisitive attitude” or even an obsession towards religiosity, induced by processes of globalisation, European integration and increasing religious pluralism related to (im)migration (Casanova 2012: 42–44). Moreover, instead of treating the sacred as a religious domain exclusively, critical discussion of its multiple forms, fluidity and complex

moral commitments has emerged; Lynch (2014: 131, 133), for instance, calls for “careful analysis of the moral architecture that we inherit in particular social and cultural contexts” and of how various “inviolable symbols and objects play a fundamental role in defining the moral meaning and boundaries of society” (see also Lynch 2012).

A common underlying understanding in the attempts to “rescript the sacred” has been to treat popular culture primarily as a secular, non-religious sphere of activity and to conceive the sacred predominantly in terms of (Western) religiosity. Such assumptions inform also relevant music-related research; for example, in a recent collection on “the relations of religion to popular music,” editor Andreas Häger (2018a: 1, 3; emphasis added) considers the contemporary connections between the fields as “examples of how *religion is changing*” and equates popular music implicitly with secularisation, without any cogitation about how the ideas of what counts as popular music may transform in the process as well. This indicates a distinctively ahistorical, or a presentist, approach to popular music, whereby relevant shifts in the interrelations between religion and popular music in the years, decades and centuries before the 1950s are axiomatically ignored (Johnson 2018: 15; see also Morgan 2007: 29). An intriguing juxtaposition in this respect can be made with the fourth-century distinction between sensuous, “luxurious” music (*musica luxuriantis*) and “wise” music (*musica sapientis*), as well as with “the level of influence popular music likely had on the sophisticated ‘art music’ emerging from cathedral-universities during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries” (Hijleh 2019: 50, 90).

While there surely is a lot to be learned from recent investigations into the interrelation between religion and popular culture, one may suspect equal flashes of inspiration to be drawn from “popping the popular” or reconceptualising popular culture through religion, and by implication, the category of the sacred. Yet this seldom happens; indicative of the situation is Bruce David Forbes’s (2017: 11) fairly influential separation of four fields of examination when dealing with the different relationships between religion and popular culture: religion in popular culture, popular culture in religion, popular culture as religion and religion and popular culture in dialogue. The first of these covers situations where there are “explicit representations, allegorical parallels, and implicit theological themes” in a variety of “popular cultural forms,” while the second field “refers to the appropriation of aspects of popular culture by religious groups and institutions” (Forbes 2017: 15). The third option, in turn, “involves the argument that popular culture serves as religion or functions like religion for many people,” particularly in the formation of devoted fan communities; and finally, the spheres are in dialogue when at issue are shared ethical concerns or cultural values that extend beyond individual religious doctrines or commercial products (Forbes 2017: 16–17). But what about *religion as popular culture*?

Admittedly, Forbes (2017: 23–24, n15) addresses the exclusion of such a field of examination, albeit merely in an endnote. Inasmuch as its inverse

6 Introduction

formulation pertains to the functions of religion, the quandary here is if religion can “function fully as popular culture,” leading immediately to speculations over the ultimate function of popular culture. To this Forbes (2017: 5) provides only an indirect solution when subscribing to the idea that popular culture “draws our attention to the widespread, common, frequently commercial, and often entertaining aspects of our cultural context.” Nevertheless, if popular culture exists to serve commerce and to entertain first and foremost, the question remains whether there is anything particular that would distinguish it from other forms of commerce and entertainment in a capitalist world order with its niche audiences. In relation to this, Forbes (2017: 23) does note the importance of historical shifts and contexts by suggesting that to consider religion as popular culture might be applicable in situations “where a single religion is central to a culture as a whole, prior to the complications of secularization and religious diversity.” Here, a gambler might be tempted to pick out any odd cultural historian or a scholar of religion interested in the premodern times and wager on immediate counter-arguments that stress not only the variety of everyday religious practices but also the difficulties of demarcating “a culture as a whole.”

The implicit association between “whole” and “popular” culture leads to further contradictions in Forbes’s (2017: 2–5) treatment, especially with respect to the conventional distinctions between popular, folk and high culture, and regardless of all emphases on porous boundaries and imprecise conceptualisations involved. In other words, if it is the late modern religious diversity that renders the idea of religion as popular culture moot, why bother with separating spheres of culture from each other in the first place? In addition, there is uncertainty over whether “spectrums of popularity” are to be discussed on quantitative or qualitative terms: “why is it that certain popular cultural forms flourish in some subgroups and not in others?” (Forbes 2017: 5). A straightforward answer to this question is: because quantitative popularity (or flourishing) is relative, depending on the qualitative criteria at issue (or the kinds of forms and subgroups).

A different response to Forbes’s (2017) unbalanced treatment is to stress the inextricability of the spheres from each other. From such a stance, any preposition becomes futile in the end, because *religion is popular culture* and vice versa. One of the few meaningful ways to separate them is to rely on institutional factors – in which case it would be more prudent to talk and write about the Church and the Media, for example, than about religion and popular culture. Moreover, there is a meta-analytical level to be recognised, which in fact means introducing another institution in the set-up, namely the Academia; a key question now concerns the terms chosen and their underlying conceptualisations – and their usage. It is quite revealing that Lynch (2005, 2007, 2012, 2014), one of the key authorities in the study of religion and popular culture in the early noughties, carefully avoids using the term “popular culture” in his more recent publications. No doubt this results from his earlier concerns about “the implicit effect” the use of the term may have

in “reinforcing the ideologically-loaded binary of high/low culture” and other “barriers and unhelpful assumptions” that obfuscate the specificity of “a particular range of cultural practices” that becomes manifest in a given instance of religion and popular culture and vice versa (Lynch 2007: 162–163).

Concepts are critical for those in the Academia, and academic analysts are expected to be critical towards the concepts. Luckily for the analysts, people have the freedom to use terms and concepts as they please, hence ensuring there is no dearth of implicit assumptions when either religion or popular culture is mentioned. Thus alongside the institutional usages of the terms, an expedient avenue of investigation is constituted by the everyday discourses, that is, how people *actually* use the terms, under what circumstances, for what possible and probable purposes and with what kind of effects. Following the influential ideas of Michel Foucault (1972), this strand of discourse analysis goes beyond considerations of “how actions are given meaning and how identities are produced in language use” (Hjelm 2011: 134) in its emphasis on material conditions and consequences. This is akin to the practice-centred approach to religion propagated by David Morgan (2007: 26–27; original emphasis): “We need models ... that will help us describe the varieties of circulation of culture, ... to describe what people *do* in addition to what they *say* they believe” by enfolding “material reality into the ritual or routine or daily habit that puts it to work in the world-constructing and maintaining behavior.” Pushing this line of enquiry further towards circumstances and effects, one may ask not if but *how* a given instance of material reality, whether in the form of an iceberg, a viral infection or something else, relates to ideas about religion, popular culture and their amalgamations.

A central part of this approach is to acknowledge that original intentions may be quite insignificant as times, locations and people change. A church may be converted into a nightclub, and a detail in a Renaissance painting taken as a reference to the boy bands of the late twentieth century (see Figure 1.1), potentially leading to a scrutiny of historical shifts in sanctifying gender relations in musicianship. Morgan (2007: 27), himself a scholar of visual culture, points to this by stressing the importance of studying “how people use images to put their worlds together and to keep the working in the face of all the challenges that beset them,” by tracing “the narrative life of an image from the mental schema, imagination, traditions, and commerce of making them to their purchase and display to the response they receive from one generation or context to the next.” To be aware of the context of production and possible dogmatic intentions is certainly an additional asset and facilitates a more nuanced examination, yet ultimately it is merely a circumstantial factor amongst others, contributing to the variety of responses as to *why* it is possible – and even (un)desirable – to interpret a given image in a certain way. Sometimes this may lead to so-called alternative facts and, regardless of the power-hungry lunacy involved, to an inadvertent affirmation of Foucault’s (1980) ideas of the inextricability of discourse, power and knowledge.



Figure 1.1 A heavenly boy band of the 1510s or a detail from the *Altarpiece of Madre de Deus* by Jorge Afonso (1515) in the collections of Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon, Portugal (photograph by the author).

Echoing the principles of Foucauldian analysis of “conditions of possibility” (Keller 2018: 69) further, Morgan (2007: 27) advocates “production, distribution, and reception as the proper matrix of analysis” when dealing with religion and popular culture, or in a broader sense, practices of assigning fundamental values to works of art in consumerist societies. For him, this entails moving the discussion on from creativity, styles and formal features of objects to their deployment both privately and institutionally. Regarding institutions, Morgan (2007: 24–27) notes the centrality of museums and temples, but dwells in more detail on the disciplinary constraints, or “guilds”, of scholarly investigation, as well as on the problems and lures of interdisciplinarity. On the one hand, he maintains, those who study “popular religious culture” interdisciplinarily “face the constant stumbling block of being outsiders” and subject to “professional censure”; on the other, he calls for genuine dialogue and collaboration between well-trained specialists “who are willing to engage in meaningful conversation with colleagues on the other side of any of several disciplinary boundaries in order to frame research in a way that suits investigation to what is being investigated rather than the reverse” and to “learn to speak from the depth of [one’s] discipline to the depths of another” (Morgan 2007: 25–26).

As the insinuation of academic parochialism suggests, also scholarly work exhibits quirks and predilections of its own, despite all good intentions. Well-meaning proponents of collaborative interdisciplinarity may

thus also fall prey to the (institutional) need or (personal) desire to justify one's research area through circular ennoblement. Morgan (2007: 21, 26; emphasis added) for one, despite his initial incitement to "ask if 'popular culture' really means anything as critical nomenclature anymore," succumbs to praising interdisciplinary study as "especially suited to the investigation of religion and popular culture because it is better able to respond to the fluidity and transience of popular culture, which is driven by markets, consumption, daily ritual, and *all manner of human exchange*." A distinct and directly pertinent consequence of academic (and vocational) disciplinary compartmentalisation to my topic is the separation if not outright mythologisation (Doniger 2011; see Chapter 2) of music as a sphere of activity whose scholarly examination rests allegedly on certain technical symbols and vocabularies, as well as on musicianship. This is particularly so in the fields of music theory, musicology and ethnomusicology, but indicative of the same is the juxtaposition between "popular musicology" and "popular music studies," the former being a subfield of the latter in its devotion to analysing the formal and structural details of the sounds of popular music, as a response to both external and internal dismissal. In other words, the aesthetics of popular music were long belittled within musicology and ethnomusicology as either vulgar or decadent, respectively, while within the mainstream of popular music studies they were neglected as secondary to sociological concerns about audiences, consumption and industry (see Moore 2003: 4–5).

The disciplinary divisions and trenches that surround music, both generally and in terms of genres, are evident also in volumes designed to re-script the sacred in the context of popular culture. There are two sides to this, one ontological and the other methodological. Regarding the former, one may note a tendency that alongside chapters focussing on diverse types and forms of audiovisual media (e.g., film, television, video games, porn, advertising) as the appropriate objects of study, there may be one dealing with "popular music" (e.g., Clark and Clanton 2012; Santana and Erickson 2016). On the methodological side, in turn, even in related volumes demarcated to music only, detailed analysis of sounds is often a rare treat, whether or not framed musicologically (e.g., Partridge and Moberg 2017; Häger 2018b; Gregory and Dines 2021). It is in fact entirely possible to encounter analyses of, say, contemporary Christian music (CCM), where the boundaries of the genre are made "clearer" by referring to Biblical or otherwise Christian lyrics as the sole criterion, while only alluding to the centrality of rock-inflected genres in the process (Wilder and Rehwaldt 2012: 160). And why would it be more relevant to carve out the idiosyncrasies of different genres of audiovisual media than those of music – especially if and when there is very little attention paid to the connections between or, rather, inextricability of auditive and visual stimuli? To overcome the institutionalised disciplinary enclosures, some assistance may be provided by the idea of media ecology, referring to "the study of how dominant forms of

communication in a media environment affect the ways people relate to the world,” including the role and functions of music in the networks, communicative norms and cultural logics at issue (Wagner 2015: 27). From this, it is a short intellectual leap to the Foucauldian points of departure where language and other forms of symbolic exchange are inextricable from societal circumstances, power relations and material conditions, whether theorised in terms of discursive formations, dispositives or disciplines (Foucault 1972, 1977; Keller 2018: 70–73).

Haughty hymnody and other classic classifications of music

To foreground the multifaceted and interrelational qualities of any type of music as well as the frailness of presentist and modernist socio-cultural compartmentalisation, one may take heed of popular music scholar Simon Frith’s (2001: 106–107) suggestion to (re)consider Christian hymns as a type of popular music on the basis of their participatory, emotional and mass cultural features, not forgetting their role in “the process of cultural imperialism, spreading Western musical forms East and South” either. Relatedly, on the basis of Gerald Hobbs’s (2006) general remarks about the historical variety of Christian music, one might question further the tendency to associate the emergence of “popular culture” with the nineteenth-century industrialisation. It is nevertheless crucial to be mindful of the levels of abstraction here, as well as the historical dynamics between conceptual and social spheres; as John Storey (2003: 15–16) remarks, the concept of popular culture was first introduced or “invented with the ‘discovery’ of the folk in the late eighteenth century,” and in the subsequent century and a half, “the study of folklore produced not only a concept of popular culture as folk culture, it also helped to establish the tradition of seeing ordinary people as masses, consuming mass culture,” in no small part as “a response to middle-class fears engendered by industrialization, urbanization, and the development of an urban-industrial working class.” Yet the conceptual emergence or invention of “popular culture” in this sense does not preclude considerations of earlier developments in terms of similar socio-cultural dynamics. Thus, while musicologist Richard Middleton (1990: 12–15), for instance, identifies three “moments” of radical change in Western music since the late eighteenth century that have contributed to the contemporary conceptualisation of popular music – namely the “bourgeois revolution,” the emergence of mass culture and global “pop culture” – he emphasises the presence of a variety of historical layers in any given musical phenomenon. He is also keenly aware of the limitations of his “geographical and historical scope,” noting nonetheless that “whether it makes sense to talk about ‘popular music’ in pre-industrial societies or not, many of the resonances presently attaching to the term only appear when these societies undergo the impact of ‘modernization’ (in all its local variants)” (Middleton 1990: vi).

Following Hobbs (2006: 74–75), a central historical point of reference in this respect is the interlinkage between the emphasis on (linguistic) accessibility within Protestantism, particularly in its Lutheran manifestation, and the radical shifts in mass communication caused by developments in the printing press in the form of movable typeface accredited to Gutenberg. In addition to the emergence of Lutheran “complementary hymnody” drawing, partially at least, from folk traditions and designed to “accompany the liturgy and strengthen the people’s participation,” Hobbs (2006: 69–70) stresses the importance of “subversive” hymnody that takes its impetus from persecution and oppressive conditions, with the slavery-related “black spiritual tradition of America” as a prime example. Furthermore, in between these somewhat polar positions of complementary and subversive hymnody, there is a third type of “essentially lay music” that Hobbs (2006: 70–71) labels “supplementary hymnody.” Alongside the Wesleyan Methodist and to some extent anti-industrialist evangelical hymnody, this is the broad category for the Salvation Army songs in the late nineteenth century targeted at the urban rabble:

Considered an outrageously vulgar musical expression by much of the Christian world, their fresh, plain lyrics and noisy, enthusiastic melodies provided the spiritual tonic needed by many on the streets of the great cities. One could say the same of the hymns of various sectarian groups, such as the Pentecostals of the early twentieth century. Initially understanding their songs to be supplementing the spiritual fare being served in so-called mainstream Protestant churches, in the long run, these groups formed a new religious tradition, their songs ceased to be marginal, and their song became their public liturgy.

(Hobbs 2006: 71)

In his remarks about the twenty-first-century trends and the future of Christian music, Hobbs (2006: 84–85) does not mention such “popular” genres as CCM or white (or Christian) metal for example, but instead notes the profound changes within Roman Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council (from 1962 to 1965), as significant measures have been taken “to break down the clergy-lay polarisation in liturgy in favour of popular participation.” In addition, he refers – with certain suspicion – to “the disappearance of the established translation of scripture” that “may suit the spirit of postmodern individualism”, as well as to the increasingly limited place of musical training, “for centuries a characteristic of a good education,” in schools, possibly leading to “a resurgence of professionalization at the expense of an enfeebled people’s song” (Hobbs 2006: 85). Regarding the possible and probable reconceptualisations of the popular, he intriguingly – albeit clearly lugubriously – associates this educational crisis with “fundamental shifts concerning the place of music in popular culture,” alongside “a general devaluation of the musical idiom” in North

America that allegedly has resulted from the ubiquity and pervasiveness of “elevator music” and “easy listening” in commercial and other public places (Hobbs 2006: 85).

The moralising innuendo notwithstanding, also this cursory potpourri of Christian musical practices attests that there is a variety of ambiguities and implications at stake when operationalising “the popular.” As the evidence suggests, it can be used to refer to a distinction between a professional elite and the “enfeebled” ones, to separate a sphere of commerce and consumerism from other areas of human interaction (such as, say, religion) or to indicate an eroding impact of individualism on the importance of traditions at a particular stage of modernity. What Hobbs’s (2006: 85) throwaway reference to “popular culture” evinces further, precisely because of its parenthetical quality, is the questionable tendency to use the notion as a self-evident classificatory label. A well-known – or popular, maybe – remark amongst cultural scholars regarding this is attributed to Raymond Williams (1983: 87, 236–238) who not only considers culture to be one of “the most complicated words in the English language,” but also emphasises the cumulative historical shifts with respect to the implications and purposes of labelling something as popular. Intriguingly enough, neither “religion” nor “sacred” features amongst Williams’s (1983) *Keywords* of culture and society, and thus one can only speculate about the added layers during the most recent decades. One may also note that there are no entries prefixed with “post” either; in a “revised vocabulary” by multiple contributors some twenty years later, both “postcolonialism” and “postmodernism” are included, yet religion emerging only in fleeting albeit numerous references to its importance as a social institution (Bennett et al. 2005).

My aim is not to speculate but, like Williams (1983: 22–23), to emphasise interconnections within linguistic and conceptual “clusters” that engender “an extended and intricate vocabulary, within which both the variable words and their varied and variable interrelations are in practice active.” My keywords then are, in alphabetical order, “music,” “popular” and “sacred” and my goal is to investigate the conceptual clusters they activate. In other words, the aim is to address the role and position of music in the contemporary global postcolonial and postsecular condition by focusing on the conceptual entanglements between the attempts of rescript the sacred and pop the popular. From another theoretical stance, at issue is an experiment in Foucauldian “interpretive analytics” that involves “a procedure of splitting up apparently coherent unities, looking for complex constellations and empirical relations between heterogeneous elements” (Keller 2018: 69–70).

Admittedly, the primary allegedly coherent unity or cluster under scrutiny is “popular music,” not least because of a long-time frustration over its taken-for-granted and imprecise use in scholarship. In this respect, the objective is to question the conceptual basis of popular music through the category of the sacred, as well as to scrutinise the implications of given instances of “musical rescripting” for understandings of both the popular and the

sacred. Again, I find it less interesting to ponder if a musical phenomenon represents popular, religious or sacred music or not, than to consider *how* it does so and what kind of preconditions and consequences this implies. Therefore, all manifestations of and claims about popular (or religious) music are to be taken as real and actual, regardless of their truth value or institutional support, but equally, if not more, valuable for unearthing the “conditions of possibility” is to consider the conceptual shifts required *when* any random piece of music is claimed popular, sacred or preferably both. To paraphrase Lynch (2014: 142), the guiding question concerns *the implications of the presence or absence of specific sacred and popular forms* in a given concrete musical situation, with the intention to avoid abstract and normative speculations about what should (not) be defined as sacred or popular. For the sake of clarity, “concrete musical situations” include all activities where music is being performed, constructed or conceptualised, regardless of prefixes or underlying ideologies, whether experienced live or as mediated, audibly or in a literary format, through “easy guitar” editions or yellow press, by reading biographies or academic dissertations. This complements Christopher Small’s (1998: 9) discussion on the verb “to music”, or “musicking”, by shifting the attention from musical works to various ways of performing and making the performances possible and meaningful, including “the hefty men who shift the piano ... or the cleaners who clean up after everyone else has gone.” In short, “to pay attention in any way to a musical performance” constitutes musicking (Small 1998: 9). Thus, to *make* music needs to be understood in relation to both acoustic and conceptual qualities and activities that are required for music to exist, not as an abstract let alone autonomous entity but a variety of fundamentally material practices that can literally make eardrums bleed and bodies shake, rattle and roll (see also Titon 2009: 4).

To preclude additional misunderstandings, it is paramount to realise that my treatment does *not* focus on religious popular music, or popular music and religion, but – to reiterate – on the ways in which different apprehensions of the popular and the sacred become operationalised and politicised in musical situations. If another excursion into the upper levels of the Batcave is allowed, at issue is not only the investment of *all* music – including the most blasphemous and distorted forms of *popular* music – as universally important (i.e., sacred, at least potentially), but also how Chopin and other decomposing composers hold a peculiar position as “popular” figures within a hallowed musical tradition. As a consequence, those expecting an account of “the most significant” artists, genres or musical events associated with religion, spirituality or the sacred will be gravely disappointed. To their consolation, relevant volumes abound, some of the most recent of which include re-enchanted treatments, for instance, about Nick Cave, Bob Dylan, Judas Priest, Ozzy Osbourne, Katy Perry and Prince, as well as of country, electronic dance music, gospel, punk and rock on the level of genre (e.g., Häger 2018b; Gregory and Dines 2021). Undeniably then, various forms of

popular music in the conventional sense do provide a useful point of departure, as do different types of religious music. Yet as the case of Mr Chopin in the Batcave demonstrates, there are more dimensions to the intersections of the popular and the sacred than the conventional musical categories imply. One may begin with the concept of music itself: to the extent to which at issue indeed is a universal phenomenon, what are the implications of a term deriving from Greek mythology for addressing the phenomenon's qualities, values and significance? It has been pointed out on numerous occasions that while the practices associated with the Eurocentric notion of music surface globally, the notion itself may not make sense in local, vernacular settings, and has historically functioned as a powerful tool in distinguishing Western "civilisation" apart from "primitive" noise. According to music historian Gary Tomlinson (2007: 285–287), for instance, especially the instrumental music of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries "lodged itself at the heart of a discourse that pried Europe and its histories apart from non-European lives and cultures."

While frustrating, the institutionalised and everyday "loose" usages of the label "popular music" (Frith 2004a: 3) are absolutely crucial for my analysis. Without the opaque qualities and juxtapositions with other labels, especially in education, cultural policy and the media, there would be little or no contribution to be made to debates about the cultural politics of popular music. My most immediate concern in this respect pertains to how the absence of conceptual deliberation may lead not only to historical presentism and other prejudiced demarcations, but also to disciplinary self-definition and protectionism in the petty academic circles. For instance, with respect to ethnomusicology, especially in its dominant Anglocentric variation, there are no methodological reasons to disregard the forms of music that, in quantitative terms, are the most popular within a given community or society. Yet the field is dominated by investigations into folk, traditional and "world musics," as well as the "Eastern" classical traditions, and mainly so because of historical and institutional reasons – but not without a substantial ideological baggage based on conceptions of authenticity and an assumed need to "salvage" musical traditions that are perceived to be under a threat for one reason or another. For instance, in "a contemporary reader" much emphasis is laid on various applied practices that involve close collaboration with ethnic and other cultural minorities, without including headwords "bass guitar," "drum set," "electric guitar" or "popular music" in the index; "music industry" is mentioned in passing (Post 2018).

Within popular music studies, in turn, the subject matter tends to be conceived loosely indeed, mainly on the basis of certain aesthetic qualities and modes of production and dissemination. While analyses based on the conventional conceptualisations of popular music may be useful in pointing to crucial cultural, social and political dynamics of music, the implications and consequences of the common sense definitions remain often undiscussed. A case in point is provided by Owen Coggins (2018: 11) who,

in his study of drone metal, situates the (sub)genre into “contemporary popular music culture,” while at the same time he emphasises how at issue is “a somewhat obscure music genre, situated on the fringes of underground heavy metal music culture and experimental sound.” Intriguingly then, this “relatively new yet significantly extreme and still fragmented and marginal form of popular music,” as Coggins (2018: 173) puts it, raises a number of questions concerning its popular qualities: in the absence of an explicit definition, one can only ponder whether its obscure, underground, experimental, fragmented and marginal features constitute it as an *unpopular* type of music. Obviously, it is the aesthetic and stylistic continuum or even tradition of (heavy) metal music that serves as a justification for the unquestioned connection; yet this immediately leads to asking, what *kind of popular* music is (heavy) metal?

Another related example is constituted by Christopher Partridge’s (2014: 5) excavation into the dynamics of the sacred and the profane in popular music, as he is rather inclusive in his adoption of the generic label by positing that the very existence of popular music, “from folk to jazz to dubstep, has always constituted a threat to the sacred center.” It is certainly possible to conceive these three genres as types of popular music, yet to do so entails addressing their individual criteria of popularity, particularly in relation to technological, aesthetic and commercial dimensions. What is more, there is evidence of circularity at stake, as the notion of the sacred (or profane as its constitutive other) provides the basis for such an indiscriminate definition of popular music – which then is subjected to an analysis of the relations between the sacred and the profane. The category of jazz creates recurrent conceptual quandaries in Partridge’s (2014: 22) treatment, especially as a self-evident subgenre of popular music, even if he implicitly refers to it in its early forms, with “contemporary electronica” at the other end of the timeline. This does not preclude him from criticising others, notably Theodor Adorno, for using the label inaccurately, or from including the works of “the prolific avant-garde jazz musician” John Zorn in the discussion, either because of the artist’s Naked City project that is simultaneously “free jazz, grindcore, broadly industrial” and influenced by discussions of violence and the sacred, or due to Zorn’s general approach to “the creation of music as a sacred process” and his infatuation with the occult (Partridge 2014: 33, 85, 119, 152).

These caveats notwithstanding, the point is not whether Partridge is right or wrong with his nonchalant and circular classifications, even if they are likely to cause a substantial amount of confusion; instead, it is more pertinent to consider the implications of such presumably purpose-oriented usage of terminology and the agendas – or politics – behind it. As Middleton (1990: 7; original emphasis) puts it, popular music as well as other classificatory labels need to be considered as active tendencies “within the context of the *whole musical field*” which “is always *in movement*.” Moreover, especially because the notion of popular culture is notoriously context-specific and

multidimensional, to operationalise it meaningfully in an analysis requires a definition or at least deliberation. To celebrate the “re-scriptures” that are based on loose or intentional definitions of the popular uncritically is to disregard the possibilities a more nuanced and multidimensional approach would yield.

The same applies by and large to the insouciant understanding and usage of the sacred as a synonym for the religious. While it may very well be that the notion of the sacred constitutes “the defining essential of religion” (Pals 2006: 13), to equate the two risks neglecting different levels of abstraction on the one hand, and the variety of metaphysical and moral commitments associated with the current postsecular era of re-enchantment and alternative spirituality on the other. Intriguingly, biblical scholar Terry Ray Clark (2012: 6–8) suggests that the notions of popular culture, sacred and mundane alike are all conceptually empty and therefore ultimately relational and situational categories and labels. Even if he does equate popular culture primarily with mass marketing and the sacred with the religious, he stresses the artificiality and outright fallacy of separating the two realms, both historically and in the current situation. While he does not refer explicitly to musical phenomena, a popular music scholar might find something agreeable in his assertion that the inextricability of religion and popular culture “becomes clear when one recognizes that distinct cultures and subcultures regularly define the sacred in their own unique ways” (Clark 2012: 8). This is in alignment also with Lynch’s (2014: 135–136) critique of normative philosophical approaches that rely on “free-floating definitions, detached from any serious social analysis” in their attempt “to satisfy an abstract philosophical puzzle of what (if anything) can properly be considered sacred,” instead of addressing specific moments and instances of social life.

The multiple forms of the sacred popular

The body of relevant scholarship is indeed rapidly growing, though arguably predominantly within conventional disciplinary boundaries. An agent provocateur might note that just as popular music scholars have realised the existence of religious musics, scholars of religion have found popular music useful in their attempts to fulfil the multi-, inter-, cross- and trans-disciplinary demands set from above. Lynn Schofield Clark (2007: 19) notes somewhat sarcastically: “conventional wisdom held that those in religious studies [and] theology should attain expertise in something suitably ancient and respectable, only to ‘dabble’ in popular culture studies after tenure had been safely secured.” Church music, for its part, has been assigned a separate disciplinary slot in the Western academia, shunned by musicologists because of its explicit extramusical “programmatic” conditions and inaccessible to the majority of theologians due to its ideals of musicianship. Yet as any cultural historian of European music would undoubtedly testify, this

separation is more a matter of (late) modern institutional compartmentalisation and governmentality than of actual socio-cultural practices (see Beck 2006: 7–10; Laack 2015: 221–227).

The cross- and transdisciplinary doctrines notwithstanding, the scholarly connections between popular music and religion have been fairly rare and really a phenomenon of the 2010s – not to mention studies attempting to interrelate popular music with the notion of the sacred. The exception confirming the rule is Rupert Till's (2010) investigation into “pop cults” and consequently into what he calls “the sacred popular,” or the replacement of religious functions in Western societies by forms of spirituality that draw from popular culture, especially from popular music (Till 2010: 169–172; see also Sylvan 2002). Otherwise, key anthologies and reference works of popular music rarely discuss religion explicitly or even list it in the indices; indeed, it is startling how in fairly influential textbooks it appears that religion is of minimal significance when “understanding” or “studying popular music culture,” only to be dealt with in relation to “moral panics” (Shuker 2008: 225–238) to the increasing sales figures of the marketing category “religious music” (Wall 2013: 275). Likewise, in a recent 650-page handbook of popular music with thirty-five chapters, religious issues are mentioned only in passing; first, in relation to “pious punks” as they combine hardcore aesthetic with Christianity and to some extent also Islam (Haenfler 2015: 285–286), and later when discussing the inclusion, or appropriation, of chanting the Qur’ān in a sound collage by “pop avant-gardists” David Byrne and Brian Eno (McLeod 2015: 601–602).

Indeed, as pointed out by Frith (2004a: 3–4) in his introduction to the four-volume collection of “critical concepts” in popular music studies, the notion of “popular music” is paradoxical in analytical terms as “any kind of music can feed into it and yet it remains categorically distinct,” for instance, from “everyday functional music – religious music, military music, children’s song.” While finding this agreeable, one may nonetheless note that in the four volumes, there is no explicit discussion on the possible “critical” contribution issues of religiosity, spirituality or the sacred might offer to popular music studies; neither does Frith’s (2004a: 5) list of scholarly disciplines represented in the collection include the study of religion (unless one considers it a subfield of sociology or cultural studies). The closest one gets to topics frequently associated with the religious and the sacred is via an insistence on the centrality of debate over authenticity in the field, as well as through references to the myths about the origins, revolutionary qualities and also closure, or the recurrent proclamations of death, of rock music (Frith 2004a: 4, 2004b: 3–4). In the articles in the collection, death is in fact explicitly discussed in one of them, yet not so much in its own right but as a literally universal phenomenon in debunking ideas – or myths – about music as a universal language; here, the ideological and political implications of the most sacred aspects of human existence nevertheless become obvious, inasmuch as “the notion of music as a universal language is not only a

misconception but also an ideological statement,” urging one to “consider *which* and *whose* music is labelled ‘universal’” (Tagg 2004: 345, 366).

Once again, the general lack of interest towards the religious or the sacred within popular music studies is indicative of the trend to treat popular culture, and popular music in particular, as separate from and in many cases even antithetical to religious ideologies. However, it may very well be that sound in general and music in particular have been undervalued in the study of religions for conventional epistemological and methodological reasons. In other words, music and sound are not considered as (serious) carriers of knowledge as opposed to words and images, and it is widely assumed that to “understand” music in particular requires specific skills and education, even if virtually everyone listens to and enjoys it, and especially even if in all religions certain kinds of sounds are revered more than others. Consequently, it is only recently that “an auditory or acoustic turn” has taken shape in the study of religion (Hackett 2011: 447–448; see also Tagg 2012: 118–120).

An indication of the recent re-enchanting, postsecular or alternatively spiritual developments in popular music is the change in the content of a textbook devoted to *Understanding Society Through Popular Music* (Kotarba and Vannini 2009). In the first edition, of religions only Christianity is mentioned and only in passing, but in the second edition there is an entire chapter dedicated to religion (Kotarba et al. 2013). Some have emphasised in addition the historical shifts, for instance, by noting how “existential questions, ideology and religion have been negotiated and expressed” in popular music since the 1960s’ hippie movement at the latest and juxtaposing this with the more recent developments associated with global migration and the resulting changes in ethno-religious relations (Bossius et al. 2011: 1–2). A distinct approach to the conundrums of popular music and alternative spiritualities is constituted furthermore by theorising paganism (Weston and Bennett 2013), and some are even willing to posit that, regardless the approach chosen, what is crucial in the end is to analyse “the confluence of two of the principal dynamic forces shaping contemporary human life, popular music and the sacred” (Partridge 2014: 3). To some extent, this resonates with Till’s (2010) approach based on the notion of cult, emphasising, for example, sex, psychedelia, death, stardom and locations. He estimates thus:

Pop cults have provided for many a bridge across, or escape from, the crisis of ... having no rituals or trusted religious traditions to guide them into the transcendence and through the paradoxes of twenty-first-century life. ... [P]opular culture is reaching out to mend and replace the broken and lost rituals of community that have been allowed to fall into disrepair ... The religion of pop cults is a vital ritual technology for connection.

(Till 2010: 175–179)

Again, the obvious risk is to celebrate the confluence of the dynamic forces at issue, often with an emphasis on the sacred and with questionably loose ideas of popular music. While such usage admittedly compels one to

reconsider the epithet popular, there often is not much help offered. A case in point is how in the introduction of a landmark handbook in the study of religion and popular music, editors Marcus Moberg and Christopher Partridge (2017: 1) do not discuss the definitions of either religion or popular music in their attempt “to equip the student who is new to the area with enough knowledge to benefit from the more detailed discussions that follow.” Enough of course is enough.

Regarding the multidimensionality of the denominator popular, an influential point of departure is provided by Storey (2015: 5), as he sketches out six definitions of popular culture which all demonstrate different outcomes of “theoretical labour within particular historical and social contexts.” The definitions he proposes are based on understanding the epithet popular as: (1) “widely favoured,” or quantitative; (2) “inferior,” or aesthetic, likened also to conventional ideas about easyness, uniformity and simplicity; (3) “mass,” or sociological, indicating a stress on large-scale commercial production and consumption and implying a presence of working-class sensibilities; (4) originating from “the people,” or a folk dimension associated with vernacular expression and ideas about ethno-cultural or national authentic traditions; (5) a form of resistance, or a political dimension, referring to counter- or subcultural aspects in particular; and (6) “postmodern,” or the inextricability of “high” and “low” forms of expression (Storey 2015: 5–12; see also Storey 2003).

This kind of taxonomy enables a more subtle investigation into the multiple forms of the sacred than a fixed monolithic definition of popular culture. Furthermore, it facilitates the exploration of additional links between the popular and the sacred, for instance, by postulating that there might be also a religious dimension of popular culture. After all, religions involve a lot of people, and are certainly not devoid of aesthetic, sociological or political significance. On a theoretical and methodological level, one could continue the scrutiny by focusing on the dynamics between theology and secular scholarship, and between evidence and authority, for example. In relation to this, Storey’s (2015: 2–5) words are once more useful, as he stresses the centrality of ideological components in any definition of popular culture. In other words, no matter how the popular is conceived, there are value judgments, conceptualisations of reality and issues of power involved. The same applies to any religious system in the world.

Moreover, a crucial aspect of Storey’s (2015: 12) listing is that all the six definitions with their individual emphases nevertheless share an underlying conceptualisation of popular culture as an outcome of industrialisation and urbanisation. Thus, to engage in an analysis that involves any dimension of the popular is to participate in the critique of global modernity, unless one adopts a definition of the popular that evades Storey’s (2015) classification. Additionally and equally importantly, the epithet always sets a certain sphere of activity apart from other spheres, and thus there is a constant need to acknowledge the “absent other” involved as well as the theoretical and political inflections it carries into the discussion (Storey 2015: 1; see also Middleton

1990: 6). Against this backdrop, one can only marvel at the scarcity of attention paid to the connections of the popular to the long-established ideas of the profane as the constitutive other of the sacred and to the “numinous” as the “wholly other” experiential quality of all things religious (see Eliade 1959; Otto 1990; Durkheim 1995), especially in relation to the aesthetic dimension, or the popular as a profane antithesis of high culture. It is central to note in addition that in Storey’s (2015) account, there is no consideration about the possibility of a religious or, maybe more to the point, an epistemological dimension of popular culture that might be evident in a reliance on shibboleths and beliefs rather than scientific findings and theories. While it is possible that this dimension is implicit in the idea of popular culture as folk culture, “a culture of the people for the people” (Storey 2015: 9), the issue becomes more pressing when one considers the quantitative dimension involved, meaning the undeniable fact that religions are popular, or widely favoured, movements by definition. According to haphazard online statistics, Christianity and Islam have roughly two billion followers each, while the two top-selling musical artists, the Beatles and Elvis Presley, sit at 600 million sold recordings each. The numbers are hardly comparable, but maybe the Beatles are not more popular than Jesus after all.

Alongside the problems of conceptualising the popular, the tendency to equate the sacred forthrightly with the religious warrants similar attention and reflection. Indeed, the attempts to rescript the sacred are less about the sacred than new forms of religious scripture or how Biblical and other influential religious texts and narratives are being rewritten, reinterpreted and even challenged in the public sphere (e.g., Santana and Erickson 2016: 22–23). This tendency is evident also in music scholarship. A case in point is provided by ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman (2013: xxiv), who in his examination of the interrelations between “sacred music” and European modernity suggests that in the twenty-first-century “New Europe,” its sacred music is “no longer insistently Christian,” yet evades defining the sacred explicitly and instead conceives it as a primarily religious category through references to Jewish and Muslim worship and music. While scholars of religion are quick to stress that there are no straightforward criteria for defining religion and that the term serves as “a somewhat abstract umbrella term that easily bypasses the normative meaning of personal commitment implied in alternative terms such as faith, belief or confession” (Schilderman 2015: 4), the notion of the sacred is readily associated with religion. This is at least implicit also in anthropologist James Bielo’s (2015: 20) assertion that to examine “religion outside religions we must ask where else we find the elements and processes that are central to making and doing religion: separating what is sacred from what is profane, creating ritual structures, defining taboos, seeking purification, and so forth.” There is a seed for a non-religious way of comprehending the sacred in the exhortation, yet it begs the question why such an examination should be thought of as a quest for religion, and to what extent this, in turn, results from the differentiation

within secularisation or how “modernity successfully and permanently tattooed religion as something distinct from other social domains (e.g., politics, law, medicine, science)” (Bielo 2015: 21–22). With respect to this development since the late Enlightenment, there are strong grounds for claims that the application of abstractions such as religion “to grass-roots beliefs and practices is an effort of colonial interpretation at best and one that easily serves typically western interests” (Schilderman 2015: 7).

Even if religions do constitute a key arena of the sacred, the attempts to re-script the sacred indicate it need not be reserved for religious contexts only. Here, even the so-called classical sociology of religion and especially the early considerations of the sacred may have quite a lot to offer, particularly when considering the sacred as something that requires usually significant social investments, both in terms of human and other material resources (e.g., Eliade 1959; Durkheim 1995). For instance, while in the case of tourism to sacred sites the personal physical effort required is sometimes minimal, dependent on the accessibility of the site and availability of parking slots, the visit cannot take place without expenditure of some kind of resources, starting from the monetary assets available for travelling. Indeed, the ubiquitous commercialism and consumerism associated with tourism, not only with respect to travelling itself but also to various merchandise often made available at the sites, links the phenomenon to definitions of the popular.

This serves as a useful reminder of, first of all and on a general level, that despite the tendency to equate popular culture with the marketplace, in a world system based on global capitalism it is hardly meaningful to distinguish between spheres of culture on the basis of economic imperatives alone (see Middleton 1990: 4). Second, and with respect to the notion of the sacred more specifically, one should not overlook the importance of institutional religions as financial systems; once it was thought to be possible to secure one’s place in the Christian heaven by investing in indulgences and also contemporary religious authorities may regulate, for instance, loan interests. And of course, the monumental locations associated with religious transcendence have often required hefty amounts of both physical and financial resources – the title of the most expensive temple ever built goes to the Buddhist Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar (Burma) that is covered with golden plates and diamonds worth more than EUR 2 billion.

Following this line of enquiry further, it is entirely possible to ask what are the sacred dimensions and forms of politics, law, medicine and science. This entails recognising the broader implications of the sacred, also and particularly with respect to how social identities become formed and constructed. Following anthropologist of religion Veikko Anttonen (2000: 204), this broader understanding of the sacred means considering it as something that “comes into being as a category in any value-laden situation to mark the inviolability of the boundaries of an entity in times of crises or in periods of transformations taking place in temporal or spatial categories of the society.” An essential component in the cultural logic of conceptualising and

creating such boundaries is the human body, as it constitutes a fundamental material interface separating the inside from the outside and establishing psychological, territorial and economic relations (Anttonen 2000: 201–203). In a similar vein, Lynch (2012: 5–7, 29) offers a wider definition of the sacred as a “cultural structure” that hinges on “what people collectively experience as absolute, non-contingent realities which present normative claims over the meaning and conduct of social life” (also Lynch 2014: 32). Certainly, institutional or otherwise organised religious movements constitute an obvious area of enquiry here, as do more personal types of transcendental experiences; at issue are nevertheless the more general dynamics of the “set-apart sacred” that are evident in many civil spheres: “From war, to politics, to advertising, much energy goes into the creation, co-opting, capturing, and/or desecration of sacred things” (Evans 2003: 42). One may indeed consider the implications of the “extension of sacred forms”, as Lynch (2012: 18) puts it, for instance, in relation to national identity, child welfare and ideals of democracy. In the end, he maintains that “it is the sacred that generates the idea of human society as a meaningful, moral collective” (Lynch 2012: 128). This suggests that the sacred may become manifest in the context of various ideological domains, whether these are primarily religious, political, national(istic), economic or subcultural in nature (see Bielo 2015: 21–22). A word of caution may be in order here; in case someone wonders if something like the “artistic sacred” should be added to the list, the explanation for the absence of art is its subordination to the subcultural and economic domains in particular. I suspect some may consider this provocative. I do not, and the grounds for this will become clear in due course.

To amalgamate the dual multiplicity of the popular and the sacred yields a tabular grid of possible intersections on a general level (Figure 1.2). In the analysis, the grid may then be used in considerations of how various actual musical phenomena facilitate and construct conditions where the distinction, let alone opposition, between the popular and the sacred becomes questionable and futile even. This is in fact evident already in the multiple dimensions at issue, as on both sides there are references to political and sub- or countercultural qualities. To alleviate confusing overlaps, I have renamed the political as “partisan” on the popular side and the political (or ideological) dimension of the sacred as “factional”; this is so, also because there are always political and ideological dimensions involved when dealing with socio-cultural activity, inasmuch as politics has to do with legitimation of social power relations and ideology with more or less systematic cluster of ideas and value judgments (see Storey 2015: 2–4).

The cultural study of music and the sacred

The inevitable multidimensionality and conceptual fluidity of both the popular and the sacred necessitates an analytical approach that foregrounds the socio-cultural context of the phenomenon under investigation. Even the most

		THE SACRED AS				
		RELIGIOUS	FACTIONAL	NATIONAL(ISTIC)	ECONOMIC	SUBCULTURAL
THE POPULAR AS	QUANTITATIVE					
	AESTHETIC					
	SOCIOLOGICAL					
	FOLK					
	PARTISAN					
	POSTMODERN					

Figure 1.2 A grid of intersections of the popular and the sacred.

abstract philosophic rumination over what may or may not be truly popular or sacred in (true) music emerges in distinct and actual circumstances. Thus, the socio-cultural context has been conceived as broadly as possible, as inseparable from historical, social and political conditions. There is nothing new in this, and these points of departure are accepted in anthropology and sociology of religion as well as in (ethno)musicology, popular music studies and cultural studies alike. That is not a problem; the problem is that people in these fields of academic enquiry rarely communicate across disciplinary fault lines. As a result, scholars of religion innovate their models of “culture as circulation” (Morgan 2007: 26) as if they were utterly ignorant of earlier theorisation about “circuits of culture” within cultural studies (du Gay et al. 1997: 3), not to mention cultural materialism with Marxist undertones (e.g., Williams 1980). Maybe they are, and maybe because of certain ideological prejudice; it appears furthermore that the experts of religion or those of culture are seldom, if at all, aware of the similar circular reinvention of the wheel in music studies, whether labelled “music-culture” (Titon 2009: 3) or “a musical ecosystem” (Schippers 2016: 12–13). These, in turn, share a great deal with earlier ideas about music in and crucially *as culture* (Merriam 1964: 6, 1977: 204) or as “soundly organized humanity” (Blacking 1973: 89), as well as with more philosophic elaborations about dispositives, or apparatuses, as totalities of rules, physical environment, practices and words (Foucault 1977, 1980; Power 2011: 42), and their resonance in the “radical contextualism” of cultural studies that fastens on “a structured assemblage of practices – a cultural formation, a discursive regime – which already includes both discursive and nondiscursive practices” (Grossberg

2010: 25). In fact, with broad enough a mind, one can detect similar logic in the century-old words of Émile Durkheim (1995: 34) about (cultural) beliefs that lead to consecrating certain (material) objects and appropriate (social) ways of behaving or rites.

Broadly speaking (and writing), all these disciplinary trajectories share a commitment to social constructionism, in the sense that reality is conceived both conceptually and physically as an outcome of social relationships – which then are in reciprocal fashion conditioned and to some extent determined by the material reality. In other words, what the models and theorisations have in common is that ultimately, the cultural, the social and the material planes of existence are inseparable from each other; thoughts, beliefs, aesthetics and ideologies become manifested and reconceptualised in a diversity of activities, practices and social organisations that depend as much on material resources as does the human brain. The triangular interrelations at stake are succinctly summarised by ethnomusicologist Alan P. Merriam (1964: 32–35) as an entity comprising of a cultural level of concepts, a social level of behaviour and a material level of sounds. Different materials vibrate differently, and to evaluate certain audible vibrations as more beautiful as others risks not only overexploiting the materials but also discriminating against those who do not agree with the evaluation. And, as vehemently argued by ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1973: 4) already many years ago, this becomes deeply problematic in industrial societies and its institutions designed to maintain sharp divisions of labour that in the musical realm pertain especially to the separation of the allegedly musical ones from those who supposedly are not. Musicologist Philip Tagg (2012: 118) refers to the same by jibing how:

the widespread and empirically verifiable ability to distinguish between, say, two different types of detective story after hearing no more than two seconds of TV music does not apparently allow us to qualify the majority of the population as musical.

In general methodological terms, I take my lead from ethnomusicology and the models of music as culture and musical ecosystems developed there-within (e.g., Merriam 1964; Titon 2009; Schippers 2016). This is, by and large, equivalent of theorising (popular) music genres as an aggregate of conventions of sound, performance, commerce and values; in the words of Frith (1996: 94), music becomes meaningful in “the integration of sound and behavior in performance ... already ensnared in a web of genre expectation.” This similarity alludes once more to disciplinary disconnections and gives grounds for an important caveat to be added; as methodology, ethnomusicology involves the basic ontological and epistemological premisses that enable the study of music as culture (or as an ecosystem). As a discipline, in contrast, ethnomusicology is – or at least has been – dominated by unsubstantiated emphasis on various types of folk, traditional and vernacular

music as opposed to classical, jazz and popular ones. In addition, due to historical and institutional reasons, it has been prevalent within the discipline to rely on first-hand ethnographic fieldwork as the main manner of producing research material, and thus the field has been conceived often as “anthropology of music” (e.g., Merriam 1964). The resulting implicit equation of “ethno” with either certain repertoires (and by extension people) or ethnographic methods is deleterious for two reasons, as either politically Eurocentric or technically derivative. In recent decades, however, it has become more common to define the field “broadly as the study of ‘people making music’, ... encompass[ing] the study of all music, including Western art music and popular music [and] characterised by its breadth in theory and method, its interdisciplinary nature and its global perspective” (EF 2021; see also Titon 2009: 4).

The formulation “people making music” is treacherous inasmuch as it alludes to the division between the musical ones and those who merely consume the sounds and whatever surrounds them. Yet when taken literally, it does not necessitate a focus on musicians but more generally on how in various situations and contexts music is being made, not just acoustically but conceptually, not just by performing but also by listening and evaluating, whether amongst friends or rival academics. As ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon (2009: 4) puts it, people make music in two ways: “They make or produce the sounds they call music, and they also make music into a cultural domain, forming the ideas and activities they consider music.” This idea of making music bears evident connections to Small’s (1998) notion of musicking or “to music,” even if there are no explicit considerations about the similarities on either side. Small’s (1998: 11) insistence on “the one great human activity that is called musicking” is nonetheless basically another way of conceptualising music as “soundly organized humanity,” as a manifestation of and reaction to “the basic human problem of learning to be human” and “to social forces, and particularly to the consequences of the division of labor in society” (Blacking 1973: 104).

It is again instructive to note the disciplinary divides. Small’s (1998) ideas emanate primarily from within musicology, that is, the study of Western art music, and evince a fairly rudimentary understanding of both ethnomusicology and popular music studies. Ethnomusicologist Titon (2009), in turn, emphasises performances and activities just as Small (1998) does but as if they took place on a different planet. It is certainly possible to argue that through a “performative turn” in musicology, it has become “ethnomusicologised,” in the sense that cultural dynamics have replaced creators’ intentions and structures of musical works as the locus of music’s meanings and meaningful musicology; as musicologist Nicholas Cook (2008: 65) remarks, at issue is a transformative problematisation of the conditions of scholarly interpretation, by adopting cultural diversity and interaction as “a state of mind, an attribute that is always there ... whether we are talking about Beethoven, the Beatles, or Balinese music.” I have to admit it is tempting to

cock a snook at musicology because of its intellectual elitism, poverty and retardation, yet it may be more constructive to welcome its representatives amongst cultural scholars and consider their possible complements as well as challenges that only help sustain a more inclusive field of music studies (cf. Cook 2008: 66; Nooshin 2008: 74).

Whatever the disciplinary label used, and whether writing about Chopin, the Crickets or Chinese music, the point in emphasising ethnomusicological points of departure is to foreground their decisive role in what has in more recent decades become termed as the cultural study of music. In his influential if not classic account of the study of popular music, Middleton (1990: v, 146–147) asserts that he “tried to write a *cultural study of music*, that is, a study which focuses on music but refuses to isolate it,” and juxtaposes this with the ethnographic and homological imperatives of ethnomusicology; a decade later, he lumped together ethnomusicology, cultural sociology, cultural studies, popular music studies and “critical musicology” as concurrent markers of “a historical node in thinking about music that demands attention” in an edited volume named *The Cultural Study of Music* (Middleton 2003: 2). Admittedly, the problems with the prefix “ethno” are manifold, ranging from its racist and othering undertones to implications of folkish repertoire and ethnographic methods, but once one is willing to go back to the etymological memory lane and equate it with *all* people, its contribution to the examination of soundly organised humanity becomes ever so apparent.

The methodological triumph of ethnomusicology is one thing and disciplinary tactics another. This is evident when considering the treatment of religious topics or the sacred in ethnomusicological literature. For instance, in academic journals named after the discipline, only a handful of articles with “religion,” “religious” or “theology” in their titles has been published. The number of articles doubles when searching for titles with the word “sacred.” Relatedly, in the second edition of *The Cultural Study of Music*, one of the newly commissioned chapters deals with religion or the “profound relation between the sonic and the sacred” as “an essential aspect of musical practice, thought, and discourse and an enduring theme in music scholarship” (Engelhardt 2012: 299). Another indication of the recent shifts of re-enchantment is provided by Alison Arnold and Jonathan Kramer (2016), who have divided their treatment of music as a global phenomenon into four “units”: foundations, identity, social life, and “music and the sacred.” It is yet noteworthy that while basics for an investigation into the interrelations between music and religiosity can be found in the ethnomusicological music-culture models, the issue tends to be discussed briefly in terms of Indigenous cosmologies or belief systems that for their part belong to the level of concepts or ideas in the models (e.g., Merriam 1964: 64–65; Titon 2009: 18–19). Thus the theme may not be as enduring as some hope, yet the stress on belief systems rather than religion intimates a connection to the broader conceptualisation of the sacred, to be applied in the analysis of

other ideational aspects of music-culture: aesthetics, contexts and history. This entails investigating how ideas about “proper” and “beautiful” music, about appropriate occasions, surroundings and memories, and about the grounds for preservation, state interventions and revivalist movements are all linked to the sacred (cf. Titon 2009: 21–24). Another way of demonstrating the connections between music and the sacred as well as the effects of disciplinary compartmentalisation is put forth by ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl (2005: 190–191) as he introduces an “ethnomusicologist from Mars” who, he surmises, would most probably approach Western music education as a religious system.

Such an approach would not be entirely alien to anthropologists or sociologists of religion. These strands of scholarship do in fact share a great deal methodologically with the cultural study of music. Anthropology of religion aligns with mainstream ethnomusicology in its emphasis on “doing ethnography with religious communities” (Bielo 2015: xi), whilst not forgetting issues of mediation, social impact, authority and globalisation. Yet it may be argued that what distinguishes anthropology of religion from other disciplines of religious studies is precisely the “ethnographic imperative” with its focus on “religion as practiced, embodied and lived”, as well as its underlying “disciplinary commitments to cultural relativism, holistic analysis, comparative thinking, and abduction (i.e., persistently oscillating between empirical data and general theory)” (Bielo 2015: xii–xiv). Replace religion with music, and you get one common, if not the dominant, definition of ethnomusicology.

While within anthropology of religion there is a pronounced interest in how religion is *done* in various communities, in sociology of religion one of the central questions concerns what religion *does* in social groups and society, often approached through statistical analysis (Carnesecca 2016: 226, 237). Yet quantitatively measuring religious frequencies, attitudes and intensities may lead to “a generally impoverished view of the workings and understandings of religious dynamics” (Martí 2014: 506). Thus, alongside the foundational focus of the discipline on abstract social structures, it may very well be fruitful to consider, for instance, also “the way physical structures shape social interactions in religious settings” or how “religious buildings are a powerful example of the ‘social forces’ which shape and constrain the formation of groups and the identity of the members belonging to them” (Brenneman and Miller 2016: 83). Some sociologists of religion have even dared to examine music, if only fleetingly; in the eight decades of the journal *Sociology of Religion* (*Sociological Analysis* until 1992), there have been two research articles with the word “music” in their title, one dealing with symbolism in rock music (Martin 1979) and the other with the social and religious significance of the Greek Orthodox rock band Free Monks, a.k.a. Elefteroi (Molokotos-Liederman 2004). In the former, ethnomusicological premisses about the inseparability of cultural, social and material levels echo in the postulation that “[s]ymbol systems constantly interact with

features of the *social* world such as the distribution of power and *resources*” (Martin 1979: 94; emphasis added). The latter article is theoretically more modest, yet also foregrounding the ambiguous dynamics and interdependencies between aesthetics, values, economy and social relations. Both may remain fairly detached from detailed musical analysis, but the same can happen to the odd ethnomusicologist or scholar of popular music. The point is that neither of the two sociologists isolates music in their treatment, let alone excludes it.

Whether one self-identifies as an ethnomusicologist or sociologist of religion or not, the incitement to include and embrace music as sound, as matter, in the analysis of the intersections of the popular and the sacred, is constitutive for my basic argument. To reiterate, music is always already both popular and sacred, but crucially so because of its material propensities that evade both verbal and visual meaning-making. When compared to language, music provides more flexible yet no less arbitrary means for communal identification and thus also for commercial exploitation. In addition, in a world where the criteria of knowledge depend on numerical, verbal and visual information, sounds of music (and noise) facilitate moving closer to alternative epistemologies or, more to the point, multimodal and multisensory epistemology that acknowledges the limits of human sensory capabilities. This means foregrounding human corporeality again as the ultimate source for the boundaries of the sacred, albeit slightly differently from theories where emphasis is laid on the inside and the outside of the human body (e.g., Anttonen 2000). At issue now is the bodily interface itself, its receptors and resonating membranes, and a resulting question is whether that which remains beyond their reach and reactivity is to be considered supernatural (cf. Durkheim 1995: 82) or rather an indication of the superbly limited natural conditions of human existence and intellect.

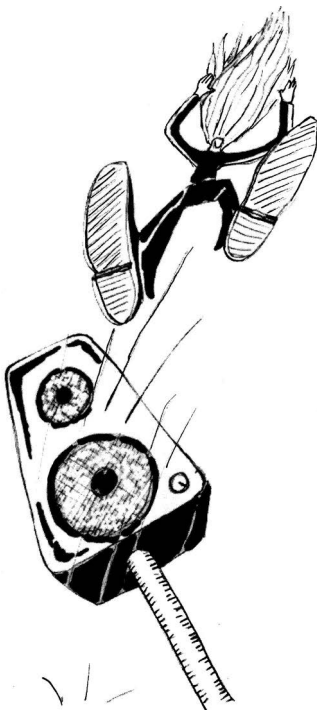
A collateral argument of mine is that to redefine or reconceptualise the popular through the sacred is not merely useful but necessary, in order to increase understanding of the popular as a pivotal cultural and social mechanism that oozes fundamental collective values. This of course applies not only to music, but given the fact that the musical realm is conditioned and constrained by powerful institutions yields it a particularly propitious area of enquiry in this respect. To advance the arguments by investigating the entrance points into the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music more closely, and admittedly with a more philosophical than functionalist orientation, the chapters that follow concentrate first of all on mythologisation of music in relation to debates and speculations about the origins of music and its effects as an allegedly autonomous entity (Chapter 2), as well as to the pervasiveness of ideas concerning musical ingenuity, stardom and authenticity (Chapter 3). Next, the treatment centres on issues pertaining to institutionalised religions, with specific attention paid on the industrial, economic and technological aspects involved, as well as on the moral ambiguity of the sacred in the context of sexual abuse and its recognition

(or lack thereof) in music historiography (Chapter 4). From the more formal institutional settings, then, the discussion proceeds towards looser and less organised – or subcultural – forms of musical activity and their links to issues of religiosity and spirituality, with a particular emphasis laid on generational dynamics (Chapter 5). Finally, the deliberation advances from the subcultural power relations to more general political aspects of the dynamics of the popular and the sacred in music, foregrounding issues of censorship, ethnicity and ecology in particular (Chapter 6), to be followed by concluding remarks (Chapter 7).

As will become obvious, there is no systematic corpus to be dissected, but rather a fortuitous collection of examples that in their actuality help demonstrating the intersections under scrutiny. Again, at issue is not if but *how* they reveal the various dimensions of the popular and the sacred and under what circumstances. In this respect, my approach verges on articulation and assemblage as developed within cultural studies, as a method for “the reconstruction of relations and contexts” or “to fabricate the real” by connecting the conceptual and the empirical through “assembl[ing] data from wherever [one] can find it” without delusions about completeness or statistical representativeness (Grossberg 2010: 52–55). Of course, the conceptual grid of the popular and the sacred can be applied to any given allegedly coherent set of material, be it produced through ethnographic means, from archival or mediated sources or in a laboratory. None of these exists in isolation.

2 Origins and effects

I have always been more fascinated by *The Silmarillion* (Tolkien 1977) than *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1968), probably because the former provides a deeper explanation of the cosmology mostly implicit in the latter. My nationality matters very little in this; I read *The Silmarillion* roughly a decade before the *Kalevala*, the national epic of Finland, from which Tolkien drew influences and entire storylines. Not only was the Finnish language important for him as a model for Quenya, one of the Elvish languages he invented, but also medieval legends, narrated anew in the *Kalevala* by philologist Elias



Lönnrot (1888), found their way into Arda, the fictional world contrived by Tolkien. Particularly influential for him was the tragedy of Kullervo (*The Kalevala*, Runes XXXI–XXXVI; Lönnrot 1888), as it forms the basis of one of the lengthiest individual tales he wrote. Interestingly, the tragedy is intimately associated with the discussion about “the birth of the Finnish musical language,” culminating in the symphonic poem *Kullervo* composed by Jean Sibelius in 1892. In the website devoted to the composer, the work is characterised as “at the same time a masterpiece and a baggy monster of a work, bursting at the seams[,] the King Kong of orchestral composition[,] brazenly megalomaniac” (Sibelius.fi 2021). In contrast, according to the “Music Portal” of the online *Tolkien Gateway* (2017) there are no musical works dedicated to Túrin Turambar, Tolkien’s equivalent of Kullervo; elsewhere in the depths of internet, one can nevertheless find a related album by an Italian “epic black metal” group, as well as a Polish “experimental black metal” group named after the fictional character in question (EM 2021).

Yet my favourite passage in *The Silmarillion* is Ainulindalë (Quenya for “the Music of the Ainur,” the Holy Ones), where Eru Ilúvatar, the All-father, declares to the Holy Ones “a mighty theme, unfolding to them things greater and more wonderful than he had yet revealed; and the glory of its beginning and the splendour of its end amazed the Ainur, so that they bowed before Ilúvatar and were silent” (Tolkien 1977: 15). This theme is what the Holy Ones then shaped into a Great Music, which, in turn, became the mould for the creation of the world, in a dialogue of bloom and gloom:

Then the voices of the Ainur, like unto harps and lutes, and pipes and trumpets, and viols and organs, and like unto countless choirs singing with words, began to fashion the theme ... and a sound arose of endless interchanging melodies woven in harmony that passed beyond hearing into the depths and into the heights ... and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void. ... [A] new theme began amid the storm, like and yet unlike to the former theme, and it gathered power and had new beauty. ... [A] third theme grew amid the confusion, and it was unlike the others. For it seemed at first soft and sweet, a mere rippling of gentle sounds in delicate melodies; but it could not be quenched, and it grew, and it took to itself power and profundity. And it seemed at last that there were two musics progressing at one time ... and they were utterly at variance. One was deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came. The other had now achieved a unity of its own; but it was loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated; and it had little harmony, but rather a clamorous unison as of many trumpets braying upon a few notes. And it essayed to drown the other music by the violence of its voice, but it seemed that its most triumphant notes were taken by the other and woven into its own solemn pattern.

In the midst of this strife, ... in one chord, deeper than the Abyss,
higher than the Firmament, ... the Music ceased.

(Tolkien 1977: 15–17)

Since encountering this passage, I have been tempted to create a symphonic poem of my own that would somehow meet the criteria set by the prose; at the same time, I have been painfully conscious of my amateurish capabilities as a symphonic composer, and also of the immanent disappointment with the outcome. It is the model for perfect music and any attempt to realise it is doomed to fail. Not everybody agrees, apparently, as while there are no orchestral symphonic poems by the name to be found, there are a few folk- or new-age-oriented “Ainulindalës” available, as well as an eponymous French artist specialised in “Tolkien based folk music” (Bandcamp 2019). While I can appreciate the effort, I continue to be disappointed.

One could maintain my disappointment results from the discrepancy between the myth and the reality. Occasionally, I have used the literary passage in my teaching as an example of the importance of cultural conventions for cognition, asking my audiences – without revealing the source – to describe or categorise the music in more technical terms. By far the most common response has been opera, supported by frequent associations with Western classical music in general. Sometimes the “strife” between the “deep and wide and beautiful” and the “endlessly repeated” themes has been likened to the distinction between classical and popular music. I do not think jazz has been mentioned once.

One does not have, of course, to familiarise oneself with Tolkien’s fantasy world to encounter the connection between myth and music. It might help, though: even if the “Classical Music” section of the *Tolkien Gateway* (2012) is very limited in scope and deals mainly with composers and musicians associated with Tolkien’s writings or the films made on the basis of them, there are links to *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Die Walküre* by Richard Wagner. Alongside the Nordic mythologies that lurk behind Tolkien’s and Wagner’s voluminous outputs, there is the blatantly obvious link to the Mediterranean antiquity through the etymology of the word “music,” which serves to remind that “in Western culture, music is the only art or craft that is actually named after a divinity or divinities: the Greek Muses” (Beck 2006: 10; see Figure 2.1). Deriving from the same mythological sources are the figures of Apollo, Orpheus and Prometheus, who have in the modern era inspired not only composers and tunesmiths but also a variety of scholars interpreting their musical representations. In addition to the representational quandaries and debates, there is a “neo-mythologist” hermeneutic paradigm of its own that builds on a structuralist and semiotic methodology, although with an apparent risk of amalgamating essentialist interpretations with canonisation, for instance, by “acknowledging the fact that the degree of involvement with mythic imagery and archetypes ranges significantly from



Figure 2.1 “Apollo and the Nine Muses” from ca. 1580 (and a claviorgan in the front), in the collections of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photograph by the author).

composer to composer” (Adamenko 2007: 262). Thus, such historical and philosophical studies of myths, specifically in Western art music, risk *mythologising* music in themselves, particularly in the form of propagating musical autonomy and ingenuity.

Demythologising music

Despite my infatuation with Tolkienesque myths and their (possible) musical incarnations, my academic interest leans more towards how music as a cultural practice and expression has indeed become mythologised in different ways, and how the diverse acts of mythologisation imply intersections of the popular and the sacred in the contemporary global postcolonial and postsecular condition. In emphasising mythologisation, I draw on Wendy Doniger's (2011: 16, 61–62) ideas concerning the ways in which a given phenomenon – in this case music – is connected and invested with ideas and stories that ultimately cannot be substantiated as they characteristically deal with “religious” questions, in the sense that there are no empirical answers available, and thus the ideas necessitate believing while there may be overwhelming evidence against them or at least a great deal of controversy. Typically, at issue are ontological testimonies about fundamental origins, essence, purpose and destiny of the phenomenon, as well as its relationship to supernatural powers. Moreover, mythologisation is a political act, in that at issue is not so much what the myths of music *are* exactly but what they *do* or, more to the point, what *is done with them*; what are the underlying agendas and socio-cultural power relations they are implicated in (see Doniger 2011: 15, 92)?

I should emphasise here that my examination strives towards pointing out the ubiquity of mythologisation of music, even in the case of most scientific of analyses and treatises. Thus, the aim is to unearth the particularities of these acts of mythologisation and mystification, instead of speculating and bickering about the fundamental truth or explanation concerning music's origins, essence or purpose. While there is an abundance of evidence suggesting that the ever-present “trap” of mythologisation of music results from an epistemological incapability or refusal to recognise music as a form of knowledge production, despite its referential, imitative, intertextual and affective properties (see, e.g., Elliot 1991; Tagg 2012: 83–132), I will leave this debate aside and instead depart on the basis of the undeniable fact that music is constantly surrounded by competing myths and explanations, whether religious, journalistic or academic in kind. This qualitative multifariousness alone in fact confirms that there are different premisses, agendas and intentions involved in the mythologisation of music.

Thus, I aim at unearthing and questioning the variety of mythologisation that surrounds and even determines music, its categorisation into “popular” and “sacred” types among others, and its relations and structures of power. Questions concerning myths and music are by no means novel, yet my investigation should not be conflated with those where mythologisation of music is understood as an aesthetic device that rests on essentialist assumptions of “permanent effect of the myth on the present-day man and continuous revival of mythological structures and symbols in art” (e.g., Kozel 2019: 178). Instead, my approach is akin to explorations of mythologisation in

musical biographies, where the hagiographic construction of canonical figures is discussed in relation to national politics and social distinction by embracing “the full spectrum of conflicting versions of a given story for the insights they yield into the cultural values held dear at given times and places” (Wiley 2019: 215). Indeed, musical myths constitute in this sense entries towards the sacred in the society or community in question, especially as the underlying belief systems they imply become so dear that they suffer no violations, or lead to protectionist exclusion and even physical violence. This is where politics of mythologisation enmesh with the moral ambiguity of the sacred, ideologies of the popular and ethnomusicological music-culture models (see Titon 2009: 14–30; Doniger 2011: 30; Lynch 2012: 47–49; Storey 2015: 2–5).

On the basis of existing ethnomusicological research in particular, for analytical purposes it is possible to divide the ways to mythologise music into four general categories that evince the unsolvable paradoxes, or “the mixture of the cosmic and the banal” at issue (Doniger 2011: 20). First, following Nettl (2005: 260–261), it may be argued that one of the biggest questions concerns the *origins* of music, detectable not just in the ubiquity of cosmological explanations in various epics and Indigenous mythologies, but crucially also in the recent hardcore neuroscientific approaches to music. Second, there is the question of music’s *autonomy*, based on widespread assumptions about music as a transcendent or supernatural power of its own, with certain universal traits and inexorable effects. The third set of questions pertain to the existing cross-cultural evidence about assigning exceptional musical propensities to certain individuals, whether labelled as *stars* or *geniuses* or something completely different; and finally, assumptions and debates over *authenticity* constitute a major area of mythologisation of music, particularly in relation to presumptions about pureness and excellence (see Nettl 2005: 29, 37–43, 372–373).

Such ethnomusicological cogitation finds support from the field of philosophy of music, albeit with a clear dominance of Western art music in the treatments. In his introduction to the field, R. A. Sharpe (2004: 6, 27), for instance, notes that questions about distinguishing music from noise, the fundamental quality and meaning(lessness) of music, and whether music is a language (of emotions) or an autonomous phenomenon have been recurrent in the debates. While these bear a connection primarily to issues of origins and autonomy, there is a link to conundrums of individuality and authenticity in the discussion over music as (a work of) art, especially in relation to the requirements set for its creators and aesthetic traditions (see Sharpe 2004: 34–35, 42–43). Stephen Davies (2005), in turn, has divided his investigation into four general themes: ontology, performance, expression and appreciation. Questions about origins remain outside his scope, but emotions and authenticity pierce through the topics, and even if he does not use the word “genius,” it is hardly a coincidence that the works of Bach, Beethoven,

Cage, Mozart, Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky feature repeatedly in his treatment. When referring to “musical Platonism,” however, he provides links to debates about origins and individuality: according to some Platonists, Davies (2005: 31–32) maintains, musical discoveries “become possible only when an individual with particular talents finds herself within a particular cultural or musico-historical setting,” while others “argue that the work is created, because it comes into existence when the eternal pattern or form is selected, indicated, or prescribed by the composer.”

It is yet notable that in the music-related attempts to rescript the sacred, there is very little attention paid to questions of mythologisation. Intriguingly enough, a couple of relevant accounts stem from within jazz studies. Neil Leonard (1987) examines jazz in general as myth and religion by applying a number of religious concepts to jazz, based on the premise that jazz (and maybe all types of music) stimulates (quasi-)religious feelings and thus constitutes a form of “religiously linked behavior” that relies significantly on “faith in the supernatural upheld by rituals and myths” (Leonard 1987: ix–x). What is particularly noteworthy in his treatment, in relation to dynamics of the popular and the sacred, is that he stresses the way in which the mythological and the religious touch on “activities ordinarily considered secular.” There are some apparent differences, however, especially in terms of his usage of the notion of myth, as he defines it rather simply as “tales of origins and heroes” (Leonard 1987: ix). Alongside discussing the prevalence and importance of these tales, he also approaches jazz through the notions of the church and the ideas of orthodoxy such institutionalisation entails; sects, as in the division between “true believers” along the boundaries between early jazz, bebop and free jazz; “prophets” Armstrong, Ellington, Davis, Coltrane and Parker; gnosis or the “truth” about jazz in general and in its sectarian contexts; rituals in the form of performance, language and use of narcotics; and followers, that is, critics, historians, aficionados, hipsters, beats and dancers. What is more, he is clearly conscious of the politics of interpretation, in the sense that he does not claim that jazz is a religion, but rather examines how the religious conceptual framework might be of aid in understanding the historical and cultural position of jazz. Admittedly, there are occasional anachronistic elevations of “real jazz,” and in the end he invests jazz with outright powers of salvation against the fragmentation and alienation caused by processes of secularisation and urbanisation, particularly for African Americans.

Tony Whyton (2010: 134), in turn, emphasises in his scrutiny of jazz icons “the use of myth in constructed historical narratives” for various purposes, not least to provide models for behaviour, explanations about relationships, and links that bind communities together. “Mythologies endure,” he writes, “because they resonate with us today; they provide a cultural function, outlining codes and conventions by which we live our lives” (Whyton 2010: 134). Moreover, he points to ideological, political and economic dimensions involved by noting that presently, to make the jazz mythologies explicit and

to challenge the causal, linear narratives “would undermine the power, status and profit of the myth-makers themselves and so the presentation of a relatively uncontested tradition remains of paramount importance” (Whyton 2010: 135).

The connection to relations of power is pivotal with respect to analysing mythologisation in Doniger’s (2011: 103–104) sense, whereby myths are primarily “pre political,” accommodating a variety of political agendas depending on the time, the place and the type of narration. “A myth is like a gun for hire, a mercenary soldier: it can be made to fight for anyone” (Doniger 2011: 86). Also Michael Tager (1986: 626–627) stresses the capability of myth to evoke action and its integral links to social movements. To him, “the clearest manifestation of action motivated by myth” is violence in its almost spiritual “pure” form, removed from rational and calculated political persuasion and based instead on such “short-circuited reasoned discourse with disastrous effects” as the nation and race (Tager 1986: 630–631). He further juxtaposes this with the “more aesthetic” Barthesian sensibility of myths where the emphasis is on multiple (consumer-cultural) sources and fragments that somewhat paradoxically have the “capacity to convert historically determined outcomes into natural phenomena,” to abolish complexities and replace them with “the simplicity of essences.” While myths thus may prevent rather than stimulate action, they are equally political to the extent they participate in purifying the histories and motives of the dominant class (see Tager 1986: 631–632).

It may be that the debates and assertions about the powers and mysteries of music stem crucially from an epistemological hierarchy where numbers, images and words are at the top as the fundamentals of scientific knowledge, and the knowledge produced by musical means may not even be acknowledged as a form of knowledge. Whether this is so or not or if there is a possibility to understand music “fully” is a topic for another dissection altogether; the empirical fact remains that there are myriad different claims and explanations concerning the ontology and effects of music, and it is this very diversity that forms the point of departure for my investigation. To the extent to which music is either “humanly organized sound” or “soundly organized humanity” or both (Blacking 1973), to mystify and mythologise music is a way to organise sounds and humanity alike. The same applies to any attempt to demystify and demythologise music. For an ethnomusicologist or a cultural scholar of music, the eschatological (albeit hopeless) quest to understand music “fully” is far less interesting than the mundane manifestations of the ways to understand music *differently*, including those of the philosophers immersed in the quests in question.

By demythologising I refer to an analytical procedure that aims at unravelling the presuppositions that form the basis of any given myth or rather, act of mythologisation. Demythologising in this sense constitutes a form of Foucauldian genealogical analysis, where each singular instance of mythologisation is examined in terms of its conditions of existence and, centrally,

the “power-knowledge relations” that construct a given phenomenon – in my case, music – an object of knowledge with distinct material elements, techniques and effects (Foucault 1977: 27–28, 1978: 11). As my aim is to analyse the intersections of the popular and the sacred evident in the instances of mythologisation of music, the genealogical stance entails by necessity, considering the implications of the historical multidimensionality of the two concepts in question. In other words, when encountering an example of music being mythologised, one is compelled to ask *how* this act of mythologisation is linked to the notions of the popular and the sacred, in which form and for what possible and probable purposes and effects.

Epics, evolution and plural ontologies of music

In the *Kalevala*, the national epic of Finland, it is narrated how Väinämöinen, the “ancient minstrel” and “wonderful enchanter,” fashioned “a harp of wondrous beauty” from the jaws of a pike of monstrous measurements:

Whence the harp’s enchanting arches?

From the jaw-bones of the monster.

Whence the necessary harp-pins?

From the pike-teeth firmly fastened.

Whence the sweetly singing harp-strings?

From the tail of Lempo’s [Devil’s] stallion.

(The Kalevala, Rune XL; Lönnrot 1888)

The passage accounts for the birth of instrumental music, but earlier in the epic, it is noted how from the very beginning of his existence, Väinämöinen “passed his years in full contentment” by “singing ever wondrous legends, songs of ancient wit and wisdom, ... singing in the dusk of evening, singing till the dawn of morning” (*The Kalevala*, Rune III; Lönnrot 1888). In other words, one may infer from this that insofar as Väinämöinen was the first human being to exist, singing as a form of expression and communication is as old as the human species itself.

Curiously enough, this mythological suggestion about music’s origins finds its counterpart in recent scientific treatises on the issue. In general terms, in this emergent field of “biomusicology” or “evolutionary musicology,” a basic distinction is made between adaptationist and non-adaptationist theories, where the former refers to Darwinian explanations with an emphasis on either individual or social ways to fit in for survival, and the latter includes hypotheses that stress cognitive processes that are not affected by the socio-physical environment (e.g., Brabec de Mori 2017: 116–117; Honing 2018: 9). In his attempt to “describe what we currently know (or think we know) about the origin and neuroscientific basis of music,” Alan Harvey (2017: 204–205) builds on the evolutionist paradigm and maintains in the end that “music of whatever origin or quality is neither an art nor a science;

it is a core and fundamental element of what it is to be human.” This assertion finds support in the broader ranks of biomusicology with its reliance on the starting points of cognitive science and evolutionist biology, even if the emphasis shifts from music to musicality. This notwithstanding, even the hardest neuroscientific measurements conducted in order to identify musical phenotypes or “the basic neurocognitive mechanisms that constitute musicality” (Honing 2018: 16) are, in the end, faced with the unavoidably speculative nature of ancient history, as well as of the evolution of cognition in general.

Despite all this, Harvey (2017: 205) argues more specifically – or *believes*, actually and explicitly – that to recognise through modern neuroscientific brain research, the importance of the capability of music to sustain an altruistic and prosocial “harmony of souls” is absolutely crucial in order to “reveal – as the ancients knew – that music has clear relationships with medicine and with mental health.” Indeed, for him, music serves as a fundamental evolutionary remedy against “an increased sense of isolation and futility” that pesters Western societies, and thus there is an urgent need to convince decision-makers, educators and medical professionals that “music remains essential for our psychological health and the social well-being of our society” and “should be accepted as a conventional and efficacious therapy” (Harvey 2017: 206–207). Despite the recognition of “many different types of music,” the connection to the popular remains implicit in Harvey’s (2017: 1) treatment, observable mainly in references to the intimate link between music and dance, as well as to the role of music as “a core component of ceremony and ritual” and other group events (Harvey 2017: 4–5). Relatedly, he remarks how this “power of music to influence the so-called masses” has not been lost on political, military or religious leaders, especially within totalitarian regimes. “Even today,” he laments, “music (and dance) is actively suppressed by certain religious groups and/or political organizations in various parts of the world,” which for him constitutes “surely a sign of weakness, a symptom of an insecure ideology, depriving the populace of perhaps their most vital social binding agency, music” (Harvey 2017: 5). This statement might be read as a simplistic critique towards music in Muslim communities and societies in particular, but more crucially by investing music with therapeutical and social powers of its own Harvey (2017) not only sacralises but effectively mythologises music. It is particularly noteworthy that this is done by linking the “theology” of music as an absolute reality with the “daily reality” of the brain, vindicated by normative hard science (cf. Doniger 2011: 30).

The question of origins of music has been addressed also by ethnomusicologists and their predecessors, and admittedly Harvey (2017) does recognise this, albeit occasionally and thus implicitly as less credible than the neuroscientific explanations. The evident disciplinary and epistemological tensions have been noted as well, for instance, by ethnomusicologist Bernd Brabec de Mori (2017) in his excavation into the origins of song, as

he juxtaposes the neuroscientific or biomusicological approaches with ethnomusicological ones, while also assigning credibility to Indigenous belief systems and ancient myths – and to Tolkien’s (1977) *Ainulindalë* and other modern-era fiction and fairy tales – as explanations of music’s origins. Thus, as one may expect, through a synthesis of Indigenous epistemologies with modern scientific and scholarly theories, Brabec de Mori (2017: 115) comes to the concluding proposal that ritual and religious practices “emerged together with humans’ musical faculty.”

This may be luring as evidence in favour of the inextricability of the popular and the sacred in music in the most fundamental sense, as a proof of how any dealings with music are dealings with the ultimate core of all humanity. Yet as Brabec de Mori (2017: 125) himself willingly admits, all theories about the origins of music are “necessarily speculative” and “tell us less about what happened in human prehistory (we will never know) and more about the circumstances of formulation.” Thus, the core question may not in fact concern origins at all, but *music*; as remarked by Nettl (2017: 49), the Western holistic notion of music obfuscate the possibility that “a number of often-distinct sound phenomena that we now call music had different, separate origins.” Like-mindedly, as part of “reconstructing music’s co-evolutionary trajectory,” Anton Killin (2018: 2) cautions against teleological thinking, whereby more than 250,000 years old “proto-musical” traits are assumed to evolve straightforwardly into music in the dominant modern sense. This points further towards what Brabec de Mori (2017: 119) calls “enchanted listening” as a way to respect “ontological pluralism,” in the sense that it is the obtained mode of listening that “precedes the act of hearing” and “determines the ontological properties of what is heard,” be this “music” of transcendent origins or not.

The debate is by no means novel in ethnomusicology. Blacking (1973: 55), for instance, expresses his suspicions towards evolutionary approaches to music history, whether at issue are the overall origins of music or “the development of musical styles as things in themselves” by noting that they are “useless chiefly because they can never be proved.” While I tend to agree with him, I do think there is something to be learned from the ubiquity and multiplicity of the explanations in question, whether they present themselves in the form of epics, fairy tales, educated scholarly speculations or hardcore science. In all of them, but especially in the latter two, at issue are the politics of origins, or *why bother* with such activity that borders on mythologisation inasmuch as it whirls around questions that “have no empirical answers, and there is much disagreement about the nonempirical answers that have been advanced” (Doniger 2011: 62)? More specifically, what kinds of power relations are being legitimated with such research-based production of knowledge? Is it a mere chance that the upsurge of biomusicological obsession on origins coincides with the alleged digital revolution of the late 1990s after a slumber of several decades (see Nettl 2017: 48)? Or could it be that alongside the existential awe about origins that frames

many religions and cosmologies, at issue are the material and mundane concerns to justify disciplinary relevance, for instance, through scientific validation of the ultimate and universal values of music? These values can then just as easily be put to work in pleas for the use of music in mental therapy (Harvey 2017), as in postcolonial pragmatism when reconciling the differences between Indigenous and scholarly ontologies and epistemologies (Brabec de Mori 2017). In this sense, the mythologisation of music's sacred origins is a popular phenomenon indeed, and not only quantitatively but also epistemologically, in the sense that especially in the case of epics and fiction, "popular" knowledge formation is favoured over scientific argumentation. Yet occasionally, or maybe more often than not, the final outcomes are quite similar in nature. To music is to be human (cf. Blacking 1973; Small 1998).

Importantly, as noted by Brabec de Mori (2017) and Nettle (2017), amongst others, questions about the origins of music depend crucially on the ontologies involved. In other words, at issue is the definition of music and its Eurocentric etymology. The discussion over Islamic *mūsīqā* provides useful inspirations in this respect (see, e.g., al Faruqi 1985; Shiloah 1995; Otterbeck 2008), but one might also note that in the *Kalevala*, there is no "music" but only various forms of singing and playing. In his take on the ontologies of music, Bohlman (1999: 26) maintains that "[c]ircumscribing the ontology of music in the singular not only sells encyclopedias ...; it provides a basis for imperial power and intellectual control." In contrast to the one true ontology of music – and by implication, to the idea of singular origins – he examines the possibility of plural metaphysical conditions and ontologies of music, discussing the conceptualisations of music as an object and a process, its "embeddedness" in human societies and cultural practices (Bohlman 1999: 18–19), as well as its "adumbration," which he defines as follows:

Adumbration comes into play as a metaphysical condition especially when a culture's (often a religion's) ontology of music needs to negate the presence of music, or at least a certain kind of music, as when Islamic thought claims that recitation of the Koran is not music. Adumbration functions frequently as a border-crossing mechanism, allowing one to conceptualize the music of the other through shadows evident in one's own.

(Bohlman 1999: 19)

In other words, through Western adumbration or "veiling," the Islamic vocalisations and sounds become conceptualised as "music"; conversely, Islamic "hardliners" might adumbrate Gregorian chant as *non-mūsīqā* on the basis of its religious content and reliance on human voice alone, just as they tolerate occupational and military songs for their usefulness in increasing productivity and motivation (Otterbeck 2008: 224). Similarly, regarding cultural contexts where the separation of music from dance makes little sense,

the metaphysics of adumbration come to the rescue for a Western observer enculturated and socialised into believing in the distinction.

Regarding the plural ontologies in more detail, Bohlman (1999: 22–33) discusses the multiple options available for conceiving music on the basis of its assumed fundamental relation or dependence, for instance, on mathematical order, nature, language, aesthetic traditions, divine entities, technology and the human body. With respect to the divine ontologies more specifically, he notes how musical performance often provides a connection between the sacred and the everyday. Through human bodies in particular, sacred religious qualities become materialised in the form of voices, instrumental sounds and various rituals that cannot be separated from the everyday, the mundane – or the popular, if you wish. Also, he states, music serves reciprocally a key activity that modulates “the voice of quotidian practice into sacred practice” (Bohlman 1999: 27).

For Bohlman (1999), the sacred is exclusively a religious category. His remarks do nonetheless offer some further ideas in relation to multiple sacred forms, proposed by Lynch (2012). One pertains to the ontological category of “our music,” which, according to Bohlman (1999: 21), accrues its ultimate expression in the idea of national music, which, in turn, “has grounded aesthetic theory and justified racism alike.” Another idea stemming from Bohlman’s (1999: 24) ontological musings in relation to multiple sacreds emerges from his remark that “[w]hen music is too far removed from nature in most societies, a sort of ontological fear sets in, a fear that one is no longer really experiencing music.” As opposed to the ubiquitous claims and stories about the sudden and precise birth of a given musical style or genre, the ontological fears in question may be related to the equally recurrent concerns over the “death” of music. For popular music scholars, these are familiar worries, given the pervasiveness of the distinction between high and low types of cultural activity, whereby “popular” becomes an antithesis for “real” music. Quite often, these sorrows are framed by prejudices against technology, and they can be detected also within the allegedly inferior “popular” realms where the preoccupation of the industry to maintain its economic well-being may lead to actual “technophobia” (Garofalo 2015: 103). For instance, while electric amplification may represent an abomination to proponents of “real” acoustic instruments used in classical and folk music, a “robot DJ” was deemed “the ultimate dooms-day machine” in the Finnish Musicians’ Union’s magazine as recently as in 2003. The reasons for this are rather obvious, considering the advocacy behind the magazine: “In music workshops also other novelties are being developed in order to eliminate human labour or out of sheer techno-religion” (Nieminen 2003: 14).

Apocalyptic anxieties such as this, alongside the convictions about virtually immaculate births of various types of music, bear a connection to Christian doctrines, and thus provide evidence of the pervasive and profound impact and effect these tenets have in the Western world as fundamental ideological frameworks, regardless of one’s explicit religious conviction or

the lack of it. In other words, the belief and insistence on singular origins of music is not necessarily very different from the idea of a singular religious saviour, and thus may very well tell more in the end, or the beginning, or whenever of the scholars than of music itself, however conceived.

Musical demons and the sacred capital

Another recurrent apocalyptic trope is the idea of music as demonic in origins. Examples can be drawn from a variety of socio-religio-political contexts. “Hardline” Islamic theologians, for instance, might condemn music as “an evil distraction created by Satan” (Otterbeck 2008: 223), just as conservative Christian leaders – mainly in the USA – have been eager to demonise certain types of music as originating from the underworld. As Ian Peddie (2017: 34–37) demonstrates, the prime culprits in these discussions have been the blues, rock and roll and heavy metal, all of which serve also as evidence of the inextricability of theological argumentation from societal concerns that for their part stem from racialised, generational and ideological tensions. Even if explorations of “the putative satanic corruption of youth by a manipulative and sinister music industry,” infiltrated by communists and civil rights proponents, among others, suggest primarily a “presence of a paranoid group of conspiracists” (Peddie 2017: 35–36), a crucial outcome of such continuing processes is that religion and its moral authority becomes measured repeatedly against those forms of music that are usually labelled popular.

Consequently, for Peddie (2017: 35, 37), popular music carries a promise of religio-socio-political transgression and democratisation against the hierarchies of religion and authoritative regimes, through “continually repudiating and rejecting that which is perceived to be oppressive and illegitimate.” Yet there is a degree of circularity involved in the sense that, following Partridge (2014: 63–114), the transgressive qualities of popular music are taken for granted; after this mythologising act of its own, in fact, Peddie (2017: 38) goes on to suggest that, on the basis of gospel and “Jesus music” of the 1960s, “the deep divisions between the sacred and the profane, between religion and popular music, may never have been as profound as we have been led to believe.” He also mentions soul, hip hop and trance as examples belonging to “a history of religious popular music,” and in relation to this engages in a deeper discussion over reggae, emphasising the genre’s inseparability from issues of racism, injustice, poverty, social inequality, general suspicion towards party politics and, importantly, redemptive religious alternatives in the form of Rastafarianism (Peddie 2017: 38–39).

Despite the risks of purpose-oriented circularity in the use of the popular here, Peddie’s (2017) discussion serves as a reminder that often, if not always, to demonise music is to demonise people. Thus this particular form of mythologising music foregrounds the sociological and aesthetic dimensions of the popular, while linking them especially to the religious and factional

spheres of the sacred. In many respects, this echoes the social distinction associated with the industrial revolution and the emergence of modern social classes, notably in the juxtaposition between the (higher) bourgeoisie and the (lower) working class. A key reference here is the work of cultural critic Theodor Adorno (e.g., 1990), and specifically those parts of it which focus on types of music listeners and the qualities of music capable of communicating the essence of society. While many have emphasised the significance of his work as an impetus for later paradigms where music is taken seriously as a socio-cultural phenomenon, the musical and by extension social hierarchies are clear for him: the top is occupied by modernist art music appreciated by the upper-class expert listener who is also preferably a professional musician, and at the bottom there are the “standardised” and “pseudo-individualised” mass products of “popular music” consumed inattentively by the working-class dupes of culture industry for whom the music functions only as a social adhesive and a false promise of emancipation from the yoke of capitalism (see, e.g., Middleton 1990: 34–63; Hesmondhalgh 2013: 35–36). Yet as Robert Witkin (2003: 98–99) points out, one should be wary of confusing standardisation as “an entire theory of popular culture itself” with conventional classificatory labels. In other words, basically all types of music can become “popular” through standardisation; in which case, the actual problem concerns the criteria of the formulaic features in question as well as “musical evolution” as their counterpart (Middleton 1990: 55).

Another classic point of departure with respect to the dynamics between the high and the low is the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), particularly the notions of habitus and cultural and symbolic capital. Habitus refers to class-based “systems of dispositions,” or the way in which social order and norms become naturalised, internalised and attached to real individuals in their corporeality, particularly through physical disciplines such as sports and military service – but one could include also musical education in the list. Cultural capital, in turn, translates as education and access to sanctioned information, while symbolic capital manifests itself particularly in “a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into political positions” (Bourdieu 1984: 291). There is considerable stability in all these aspects of socio-cultural distinction, but also room for modifications as circumstance change, whether through egalitarian societal policies or more abruptly with the aid of accumulation of economic wealth (see also Urban 2003: 358–360).

One can also talk and write about “sacred capital” which, according to Hugh Urban (2003: 362), stems from Bourdieu’s (1987) ideas about religion as “the ultimate form of mystification that transforms this-worldly political and economic interest into allegedly other-worldly ideals.” Hence, the social field of religion is occupied by interests and struggles over symbolic and material resources or over “the authority to administer the goods of salvation and to exercise power over the laity” (Urban 2003: 362). Furthermore, the sacred capital reliant on this authority resides mainly within the official

religious institutions, or the church. These institutions and their priests and other sacred capitalists, as it were, are also key agents in imposing a religious habitus on their subjects and thus perpetuating the social structure. According to this line of thought, the primary role of the church on the social level is “to legitimise, reinforce, and reproduce a given social hierarchy and political formation: the church gives a divine sanction and legitimacy to the existing socio-economic system” (Urban 2003: 363).

To connect social distinctions and questions of sacred capital to mythologisation and other debates surrounding the origins of music, then requires certain inferences where the “low” or mass cultural dimension of the popular as well as the religious and factional aspects of the sacred are of particular use. Those willing to follow Adorno’s (1990: 310–312) ideas may postulate that the fullest or true meaning of music and its potential of social critique is decipherable only in the “serious” forms of Western art music, while “popular music” offers merely pleasurable distraction and functions as a social cement – even if this kind of postulations are a result of an inverted misreading where the label determines the function and not the other way around (see Witkin 2003: 98). Moreover, the quest for the true meaning of music may be associated with a certain “thrill to the cryptographic sublime” and an elitist fascination for “technomysticist” encoding that merely waits for its enlightened decipherer (Abbate 2004: 525, 527). The extent to which the musical hermeneutics of this type reveal anything about the origins of music is debatable, yet they imply a tendency to sanction “serious” forms of musical expression with sacred capital, and thus suggest a connection between supernatural authority and the ultimate meaning of music. Such sanctioning might not take place in the public very often anymore, yet the ways in which popular music has been demonised in recent decades suggest that the inclination is alive and well and manifests itself mainly through negation. In the eyes and ears and minds of official religious authorities and by extension the overall societal establishment, the more “popular” music is – particularly aesthetically, sociologically and partisanly – the less sacred capital it possesses. In subcultural communities, the situation might of course be reversed.

Regarding ontologies of music, issues of various forms of capital accrue additional significance when considered in the framework of copyrights and intellectual property in general. At the core of the matter is economic capital; yet depending on the socio-historical context the ways in which the economic value of intellectual property connects to cultural, symbolic and sacred capital may very well vary. In societal conditions dominated by authoritarian ideologies, possibilities to abuse the system often become apparent; it has been pointed out, for example, how Richard Strauss fought throughout his career for “music rights geared towards people like himself: successful composers of serious music with a long shelf life,” to the extent of instrumentalising the Nazi Reichsmusikkammer for the purpose (albeit briefly and apparently with no party membership), thus “reminding

us of the institutional roots of copyrights in feudal structures and censorship” (Kretschmer 2000: 212). More recently, somewhat similar concerns over copyright bias have been expressed officially by the European Parliament in relation to new licensing models and how these might favour “the Anglo-American repertoire” that dominates the sales charts, leading “to an overcentralisation of market power and repertoires at the EU level, as well as undesired competition to the detriment of less commercially successful[,] local and specialised repertoires, artists, and thus cultural diversity” (EP 2009: 26, 37).

While there are significant ideological differences between the eugenics-inflected emphasis on “serious” Austro-German art music and the multiculturalist music policies of the EU when it comes to managing intellectual property rights, both signal the interwovenness of aesthetic, economic and political interests with questions of ultimate social values and hence the sacred. What is more, and particularly relevant regarding ontologies of music, is the fact that music copyrights and other forms of intellectual property rights depend crucially on the notion of a musical work. According to popular music scholar Jason Toynbee (2004: 125), the centrality of the work resulted from attempts “to make clear-cut property out of intangible art” and the realisation that to describe a work concretely and specifically, especially in a written or graphic shape, is far more straightforward than to define the basic principles of creativity for legal purposes. He mentions further that this process was the result of several coinciding causes in the early nineteenth century, including the idea of total composition as opposed to improvisation, the development of printed music notation, the growth of sheet music market for middle-class home pianists and the fact that in its fixed form, the work became an object to be utilised in rational legal processes. Moreover, the legal(istic) reduction of music to its basic elements, primarily melody and words, “ensured a regime of enforced originality” and enabled a rather strict division of labour in the music industry (Toynbee 2004: 125).

For a fierce proponent of performing musicians’ rights such as Toynbee (2004: 126–127), a fundamental problem with the adopted system based on the notation conventions of European classical art music is that it does not recognise the creativity and mode of production of “phonographic orality,” meaning the widespread practice within popular music to create new music through imitation and improvisation. “At a general level,” he writes, “the biggest problem is a deep confusion about the attribution and ownership of creativity, a confusion which has got worse since the advent of digital sampling” (Toynbee 2004: 127). In other words, at the core of assessing the originality – and consequently, the ontology – of a piece of music required by the copyright system is a question whether a combination, an imitation or an adaptation constitutes a work of its own or merely an act of copyright infringement. To a significant degree, at issue is “rampant capitalism everywhere” (Toynbee 2004: 136) that serves the interests of major rights owners such as publishing companies which for their part are usually subsidiaries of

gigantic media conglomerates, and the exploitation of the existing intellectual property through rereleases which has demonstrably resulted in abatement of resources spent to nurture emergent music-makers. To remedy the situation, Toynbee (2004: 135) suggests that “an African diasporic model of culture, where versioning is the norm, might be more appropriate than the European ideal of original creation.”

Thus, there is also a postcolonial dimension to comprehending musical ontologies, particularly when approached in terms of copyright legislation. A cynic might note that this is only understandable, considering that the whole notion of music is fundamentally Eurocentric, and therefore exhibits certain limited – while unquestionably influential – ideas and *beliefs* about meaningful units of cultural expression and about creativity in general. As music philosopher Lydia Goehr (1992a) has incontestably argued, the notion of the musical work is a product of certain socio-historical circumstances and has been applied to a number of phenomena only retroactively, and therefore its ontological supremacy can also be challenged from within the expressive paradigms built around it.

Recently, these challenges have been put forth, for instance, by Paolo de Assis (2018a: 11) through a stress on performance as not a *representation* of an “original” work but as a way to problematise the notion of the work entirely. He further foregrounds the empirical consequences, especially in performances, of ontological judgements and conceptualisations of what counts as a musical work, as the definitions at stake instill “profound constraints on what is considered as ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable,’ as ‘possible’ and ‘impossible,’ what is allowed and what is forbidden, thus providing the musical market with precise instruments of survey and control” (de Assis 2018a: 17). Drawing from Deleuzian “differential ontology” of possibilities, forces and intensities, he criticises the Platonist, nominalist and fictionalist strands of music philosophy for “reintroducing a transcendental entity into the picture” and for a preoccupation with “the conditions of *identity* of musical works,” and argues for an understanding whereby works (or *works* in Deleuzian orthography) appear as personalised multiplicities, “as highly complex, historically constructed assemblages ... leading to processes of differential repetition,” where all performances are “different” in their own right, not comparable to any transcendental abstraction of an original (de Assis 2018b: 22, 41; original emphasis). To achieve such an understanding, de Assis (2018b: 41) claims, researchers have to free themselves from the straitjacket of conventional analytical scholarship that “remains hopelessly imprisoned in the past” and strive towards artistic research that “creatively and productively designs new futures for past musical objects and things.” It may not come as a surprise that he self-identifies explicitly with the latter field (see also de Assis 2018a: 17).

On the basis of pagan epics, fantasy fiction, neuroscience and ethnomusicology alike, it is obvious that questions about music’s origins and essence perplex and haunt people incessantly, and while the modes of argumentation

vary, all participants tend to agree that there has been music as long as there have been human beings, and thus music, indeed, is “soundly organized humanity” (Blacking 1973: 89). An exception here is the fantasy world created by Tolkien (1977: 18, 20), where the Great Music of the Creation is “but the growth and flowering of thought in the Timeless Halls” of divinity and precedes the rise of both Elves and Men, “the Firstborn and the Followers,” by time immeasurable. Although this form of mythologisation invests music with an existence and essence of its own, it follows the general maxim postulated by the Swedish composer and music scholar Gunnar Valkare (2016: 49) that there has never existed such a creature as *homo amusicus*.

To this end, debates over the origin of music are ultimately debates over the origin of human beings and, importantly, the role of modern scientific enquiry in the debates. As the first half of the twentieth century violently demonstrated, science has played a central part in attempts to separate “real” humans from the “lesser” ones, and by extension “real” music from “lower” cultural forms or noise even. Also in the early years of ethnomusicology and under a heavy influence from the paradigm of comparative musicology, it was not uncommon to find assertions based on assumptions about the racial foundation of musical expression; albeit Jaap Kunst (1974: 1–2), the person generally held responsible for introducing the term “ethno-musicology” (*sic*), deems the label “primitive music” a Western misunderstanding, he subscribes to ideas about a “psychophysiological” linkage between a certain type of music and its “organic” community:

The position, after all, is that each race, each population group has its own manner of musical expression, and this special manner strikes a different race or people, on first acquaintance, as strange. This manner of expression, characteristic of a race or people, is not only bound to its specific psychic structure, but is also physiologically conditioned.

(Kunst 1974: 2)

As a result, the contentions over the origins and ontology of music are easily politicised, whether discussed in terms of adaptationist or nonadaptationist neuroscientific approaches, Indigenous, plural or “differential” ontologies, postcolonial pragmatism or racialised demonisation, social distinctions and transgressions, or copyrights and copyleft. These discussions, in turn, as a form of mythologising music, are prone to foreground the aesthetic, folk and, to some extent, postmodern dimensions of the popular, while on the side of the sacred the connections are virtually all-embracing, especially if one considers Indigenous ontologies as an instantiation of the subcultural sacred. This may be self-evident to a degree on the basis of the definition of the sacred as involving the fundamentals of existence, and hence closely associated with mulling over ontology.

Valkare’s (2016: 250) solution to the quandary of “where does music come from” – as the title of his book in Swedish goes – is simple enough: it is a

“transitive communication mechanism” integral to the human species. His postulation echoes both the ethno- and biomusicological arguments, yet does not succumb to either adaptationist Darwinian reductionism or non-adaptationist dismissals of music as something that is biologically useless. This is another way of noting that ultimately, “music does not come from anywhere” (Valkare 2016: 227).

The relative autonomy of musical duels and seduction

Closely linked to questions of origins and ontologies is the issue of music’s agency and inherent “power,” which frequents in mythological tales. In the *Kalevala*, again, singing is not only an inextricable part of human existence but also a material practice associated with supernatural powers. The third rune of the epic centres on the challenge posed by “Lapland’s young and reckless minstrel” Joukahainen to Väinämöinen, resulting eventually in the latter’s “wrathful waxed” and “fiercely frowning” singing that trembles rocks and ledges, tears mountain cliffs to pieces, tumbles the seas and sinks Joukahainen “into deeps of quick-sand” (*The Kalevala*, Rune III; Lönnrot 1888). Certainly, much of the tale serves to stress the skills and knowledge of Väinämöinen, yet it is imperative to note that the “weapons” used in the duel are songs – not six-guns, not magic wands, not lightsabres, not verbal spells, but sung poetry (of sorts, at least). The power of songs and singing is vividly present also in the mythic tales about Muses and Sirens in the Greek mythology, or about the equivalent (often female) littoral characters in other allegedly pagan tales of mythic proportions, such as Irish Banshees, Russian Alkonosts, Galician Mouras Encatadas, Brazilian Iaras, Germanic Loreley, and Slavic Rusalki (sing. Rusalka), not to mention the variety of mermaids – and mermen – in folklore virtually worldwide.

The mythological power of music is by no means restricted to singing, as evidenced, among others, by Orpheus and his lyre, the Pied Piper of Hameln and composer Adrian Leverkühn who made a deal with the devil in exchange for musical ingenuity in Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* (1947). On a less fictional level, stories about musical mastery of satanic origin surround violinist Niccolò Paganini and blues guitarist Robert Johnson. The gendered emphasis on mastery is no accident, as the legends in question tend to celebrate masculine capabilities; yet there are rumours in circulation about Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, Whitney Houston and Katy Perry being amongst “the Illuminati, a satanic cabal of powerful people that runs the world” (Bryant 2017). It may also be noted that the historiography of European art and popular music includes numerous examples of how certain musical features and practices have been deemed diabolical, extending to mixtures of Christianity and racism in the twentieth-century claims about the subhuman and inherently evil quality of various African-American musical styles and genres. Within Christianity, there are still some sects within which it is maintained that, for example, Lucifer was originally “the worship leader for

all the angelic creatures in heaven” and that “[a]fter he fell he retained his talent but lost his position.” Hence, he continues to seduce people by using music which “may sound heavenly but the words (and sometimes the beat) will always give it [a]way” (LUR 2019). It is hardly a coincidence here that singing and the rhythm section are often mentioned as key characteristics of popular music.

Music is connected to divine powers frequently also within the mainstream strands of major institutional religions. In the Judeo-Christian scriptures, one of the most well-known musical situations is that when Joshua’s army brings down the walls of Jericho with “seven trumpets of ram’s horns” (Josh. 6:4), recaptured in the song *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho* that has been recorded by Paul Robeson (1925), Mahalia Jackson (1958) and Elvis Presley (1960), among others. From the Hindu epic *Mahābhārata*, in turn, one can learn of Gandharvas and Apsaras, celestial male musicians and female dancers, respectively, who can act as messengers between the gods and humans. In the much-theorised field of Indian classical music, Gandharva Sangita in fact translates as “celestial music” and can be considered “a gift from the gods” and “not simply one of India’s ancient musical forms” but the sacrosanct “form-supreme” (Beck 2012: 87–88). Moreover, the (de-)moralising effects of music have been discussed in length by ancient philosophers, critics of mass culture and Islamic authorities alike.

Myths, fiction and religions aside, claims or assumptions about “the mysterious power of music to move the heart, along with many less lofty purposes,” can be found also in scholarly writing (Arnold and Kramer 2016: 2). These claims may exist primarily because of promotional purposes as lures based on popular myths, yet they are a clear indication of the pervasiveness of the ideology of – and belief in – musical autonomy that is a central part of the legacy of the nineteenth-century romanticism. Within the “project” of aesthetic autonomy, as musicologist Jim Samson (1999: 51) calls it, emphasis was laid on the formal qualities of “absolute” instrumental music as the sole source of its meaning and criteria for positivistic scientific evaluation, detached from any cultural, historical, political or social circumstances, even if it, at the same time, relied on the ideas of musical geniuses (particularly in the form of a male composer), structural contemplative listening and “other-worldly” transcendent aesthetic qualities (see also Kramer 2002: 4; Bowie 2009: 86–87; Ellis 2009: 48–50; Tagg 2012: 98–101). For music sociologist Simon Frith (1996: 256–258), the “final logic of the music-as-music position,” with its insistence on contemplation (instead of listening or playing), leads to a conceptualisation of the musical work as something that exists only in its potential and, importantly, to moralising the musical experience, in the sense that it becomes “a study not of how people ... listen to music but of how they ought to.” In such situations, one might be tempted to argue that at issue is not a study at all, but rather a parareligious tract. Not only does the denominator “absolute” insinuate sacred qualities as defined by Lynch (2012, 2014), but as a contradiction in terms it responds to Doniger’s

(2011) ideas about myths and can “only exist as an illogical concept or as an *article of faith*” (Tagg 2012: 93; original emphasis).

In relation to questions of music’s autonomy and by extension transcendence, Goehr (1994: 102) distinguishes between “two different solutions to the problem of autonomy” that have been offered over the years: “crude” and “critical.” According to her, the former is based on the axiom that “a given musical work is either autonomous or it is political, but it cannot be both”; the latter, in turn, rests on a suggestion that only an autonomous work is truly political. At the root of crude conceptions of musical autonomy is, Goehr (1994: 103) maintains, an understanding that “originates in, and resonates with, what turns out to be one of humanity’s deepest religious and philosophical impulses – to transcend the ordinary world of human imperfection.” She further reminds of the intimate connection between romanticism and religion, or the former “as a secular surrogate to Christianity and as an extension of the transcendent life of philosophical contemplation” (Goehr 1994: 103). The critical solution, in turn, and to reiterate, stems from a conviction that the most effective political role of music is achieved only by denying its political involvements and by emphasising its transcendent qualities. Furthermore, at issue for Goehr (1994: 107–108) is the interplay of “freedom from” social developments with “freedom to” produce abstract expressions that have “transcendent political force in the ordinary world,” finally amounting to “freedom within” social forces.

The link between romanticism and Christianity, or the idea of autonomous art as an earthly substitute for religion in general, is brought forth forcefully also by Virinder S. Kalra (2015: 25), who – from an explicitly post-colonial stance – stresses the importance of the idea of autonomous or absolute music, “resting outside of history and bequeathed to humanity as a gift from Europe (Germany),” in linking the Orient and “the formation of the religious.” What he means by this is that colonial relations manifested themselves also in music and spirituality through their respective doctrines and philosophies that rest on “an epistemological terrain in which the West is defined against the Oriental.” In other words, just as European absolute, autonomous music was at the top of musical hierarchy, European conceptualisations of religion were instrumental not only as theological-political ranking mechanisms but in apprehending Oriental cultural forms *as religion* (Kalra 2015: 26–27). As a consequence, religion, music and classicisation emerge out of colonial modernity as interwoven amalgamation based centrally on ideas of (European) classical music as transcendental, equivalent to beliefs in the eternal forms of sacred texts. In a nutshell, Kalra (2015: 44, 47) argues that while in Europe, God was supplanted by autonomous classical music, in colonial India, reforming of local traditions into “classical” music depended on “the arrival of God.” For him, this represents in addition a shift from an earlier heterolingual and *heteroreligious* domain to “the post-colonial demand for a singular religious identity” that manifests itself not only in the “colonial repetition” that ascribes monolithic religious identity

even to the precolonial era (Kalra 2015: 62–63), but also in the contemporary formation of Hindu and Sikh musical identity in postcolonial Punjab. According to him, “what unifies the traditionalists and reformists ... is their opposition to popular religious practice” and exclusion of “the ‘low caste’ performers who are most adept at performing for any of the religious traditions or for those who have none at all” (Kalra 2015: 60).

The strength of the ideology of autonomous music (and art in general) should not be underestimated. While the anthropological and sociological leanings in ethnomusicology and popular music studies have contributed to recognising the inextricability of aesthetic, political and social realms, in also these fields of music scholarship post-structuralist ideas of “relative autonomy” have been fostered. This is so despite yet another insoluble paradox, or a “failure to fit a round peg into a square hole [that] generates potentially infinite ways of not fitting a round peg into a square hole,” indicative of the presence of mythologisation (Doniger 2011: 98). Less metaphorically, at issue is “an inherent contradiction in the idea that absolute music, which is supposed to inhabit a realm untroubled by the material world, should be dependent on a historically located aesthetic,” while still clinging to “the belief that music possesses its own procedures” (Williams 2001: 16; see also Tagg 2012: 91–94). Remnants of this contradictory belief can be found even in recent ethnomusicological textbooks: “Whether by nature or nurture, most of us have an appreciation for music, but why this is so is a great mystery” (Arnold and Kramer 2016: 2).

Frith (1996: 252) calls this “the sociological paradox” of musical experience, in that the importance of music is socially produced as something extraordinary, as if music’s meanings were autonomous, “in the music,” deriving their value from the “inner and private soul” of music (see also Goehr 1992b: 191). These claims have been very typical when discussing Western art music, but Frith (1996: 252, 337 n10) appropriately points out that also aficionados of popular music “have an aesthetic mode of listening” that is based on beliefs about musical autonomy and ultimately on an understanding of music’s aesthetic value “in the framework of a historically specific interpretive musical culture.” Goehr (1994: 106) connects the claims about music’s relative autonomy further to the critical approach or solution to the dilemma of music and politics. According to her, this entails an understanding of the fundamental political potential of music as a respond “to its conditions of production by resisting them.” This resistance, in turn, is founded on the assumptions about the representational and conceptual emptiness of music, about music as “the art of pure sound and pure motion, and thereby of pure emotion and pure thought”, as “the art whose content is least likely to be confused with ideological ‘causes’” (Goehr 1994: 106). At the same time, however, music becomes invested with the political potentials of transcendent abstraction. It is particularly noteworthy here in relation to the paradoxes of mythologisation as intersections of the popular and the sacred that Goehr (1994: 107) emphasises the purpose of the proponents

of music's critical or relative autonomy "to show how precisely in its abstraction, music succeeds in being truly political, and, also, how precisely in its transcendence music succeeds in being truly ordinary."

It may indeed be that at the core of the paradox of (relative) autonomy of music, there are, as both Frith (1996) and Goehr (1994) suggest, rather straightforward issues of historical situatedness that pertain to the ontologies and epistemologies of music. In other words, how have the understandings of what music fundamentally is and how to make sense of it changed over time (and place)? For instance, when conceived either as sound or graphic notation, "music" evades verbal meaning-making; yet this does not render it unintelligible or meaningless in given interpretive communities, whether metalheads or musicologists. To this end, Middleton's (1990: 7) explanation of relative autonomy of music as the relation of "the musical field ... to structures of power" that is not (pre)determined by the latter evades the immediate problems of essentialism. Following Gramscian principles of articulation, he maintains that the relations in question "are the product of negotiation, imposition, resistance, transformation, and so on," as a result of which existing cultural elements are combined into new patterns with new connotations and underlying ties to specific – but not direct, eternal or exclusive – "economically determined factors such as class position" (Middleton 1990: 8). Yet the question remains, why to cling on the concept of autonomy, instead of understanding "the pleasures of art ... as rooted in certain psycho-biological constants; not permanent, metahistorical categories but relatively stable ones, certainly more stable than sociocultural configurations" (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 135). It may be in addition that due to the logo- and scopocentrism at the top of "the epistemological hit parade" (Tagg 1998) of modernity, music tends to be mystified as something incommunicable (see also Tagg 2012: 84). While it is undeniable that verbal or graphic descriptions of music are not the same as acoustic sounds, there is a political level to be recognised when music is mythologised in one way or another (cf. Doniger 2011: 15); as cultural historian of music Lawrence Kramer (2002: 5) puts it:

I am always suspicious of claims to ineffability, because people who invoke the unspeakable may use it to justify unspeakable things. The mystery of music will always be cherished by music lovers, but it is best cherished when it is demystified, understood as a contingent effect, not as a first principle.

Also Frith (1996: 254–255) is suspicious towards romanticist ideas about music's ability to invoke "ineffable feelings" and its sublime or autonomous essence. With respect to interrogating the intersections between the popular and the sacred in music, however, the issue is not so much whether such ideas are fundamentally flawed or not, but rather that they demonstrate considerable cultural resilience and thus contribute constantly to the alleged mystery of music.

The ineffable charm of sublime sounds

The questions concerning music's autonomous or sublime ineffability surface not just in everyday discussions and the writings of music critics, but also in more philosophical approaches to music and its possible effects. A notable case in point is provided by the tract *Music and the Ineffable* by philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (2003: 25–6, 51) where he, on the one hand, forcefully criticises all metaphysical conceptualisations of autonomous music, yet on the other hand, introduces the notion of Charm (Fr. *charme*) as a shorthand for the fundamentally ambiguous lure of music, “an unknowable something whose indeterminate expression is music.” And this is where the ineffable emerges as the crux of “the musical mystery”; as opposed to the untellable, represented by death in its “despairing nonbeing,” the ineffable “cannot be explained because there are infinite and interminable things to be said of it: such is the mystery of God, whose depths cannot be sounded, the inexhaustible mystery of love, both Eros and Caritas, the poetic mystery par excellence” (Jankélévitch 2003: 72). While Charm in principle defines all music, the treatise betrays an anti-German fascination for the “inspired violence” in the works of neoclassicist composers Igor Stravinsky, Béla Bartók, Sergei Prokofiev and Darius Milhaud (Jankélévitch 2003: 41), thus leading to a peculiar mix of quasi-religious enchantment, gendered (or all-male) ingenuity, echoes of anti-Nazi nationalist politics and an emphasis on the irrevocable materiality of music. Yet quite like for Small (1998), for Jankélévitch (2003: 26) music exists only in the moment of performance, in “sounds in reality,” and the fact that much of its qualities remain beyond words does not render it meaningless.

As is evident on the basis of the discussion induced by Jankélévitch's (2003) pamphlet, there are several ways to connect Charm to the notion of the sacred, whether through its engagement with forms of “absolute knowledge through intuition” (Lochhead 2012: 231) or by stressing the efforts to represent “noumenal absolutes,” even if they are “necessarily failed” ones (Gallope 2012: 239). Some are, in fact, willing to deem Charm an article of faith, a theological postulation that leads not only to bracketing out questions about the cultural and social implications of music, but “to fill the vacant space now exempted from external critique” with “any foundational doctrine that one chooses” (Hepokoski 2012: 225). Regarding the popular, in contrast, Jankélévitch (2003: 41) himself offers very little, especially as the potential universality of Charm is ultimately reduced into a property of French and Russo-Slavic neoclassicism that “crucifies form” with its disdain “for the well-turned phrase, for melodic grace or academic elegance” – assuming some of these qualities are associated with popular music aesthetics. Yet the insistence on real musical performances instead of ideal musical works links the discussion to mundane materialities, and has informed Carolyn Abbate (2004), the translator of the tract, as she juxtaposes the “drastic” indeterminacies of performances with the assumed supra-audible legible or “gnostic” significations of the musical work. The latter are

for her instances of “clandestine mysticism” that dominates conventional musicological hermeneutics and grants music “certain grandiose powers” and “revelatory force,” especially when the interpretation draws from psychoanalytical transcendentalism. Within the “Freudian romanticism” that emerges, she maintains, music is conceived as a primary medium for the unconscious, and invested with the ultimate authority to monumentalise and give aura to ideas and “truths” about cultural values and political circumstances that are otherwise inaccessible – for instance, when yearning for “secret histories” of rock music, discoverable only through musical sound. As a result, through associations with the unconscious, music verges on “occulted truth” (Abbate 2004: 517–520).

A different stance towards the possible ineffability of music is provided by cultural scholar Paul Gilroy (1993) in his analysis of the role of music in the constitutive processes of the Black Atlantic. Yet for him, it is not exactly the ineffability of music that is at issue but how music provides one of “the ways in which the closeness to the ineffable terrors of slavery was kept alive – carefully cultivated – in ritualised, social forms” (Gilroy 1993: 73). At the core of his treatment is not just any kind of music but that what he calls “black music,” meaning the genres and styles associated with the descendants of slaves taken captive in western and central parts of Africa and then shipped across the Atlantic to the “new world” and beyond; indeed, “the Afro-Caribbean and black American” idioms such as jazz, rhythm and blues, reggae, soul and rap interest him as acoustic and kinetic remnants of the transatlantic slave trade and as “unashamedly hybrid,” dislocated and racialised cultural forms of “black Britain,” too – and by implication, everywhere in the Western world. With respect to the mythologising tendencies, Gilroy (1993: 100–101) is careful enough to warn against the “usually mystical ‘Africentrism’ which ... perceives no problem in the internal differentiation of black cultures,” maintaining instead that it is the “syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone” that provides forceful grounds “for resisting the idea that an untouched, pristine Africanity resides inside these forms, working a powerful magic of alterity in order to trigger repeatedly the perception of absolute identity.” Nevertheless, the “black diaspora styles” in question are, to him, marked “indelibly as the products of slavery” by the premium placed on the processual qualities of performance through “their radically unfinished forms” (Gilroy 1993: 105). In addition, the diverse styles of black music are interconnected through “the slave sublime,” by which Gilroy (1993: 37, 131) points to the ultimate elusiveness of the slave experience and to “the centrality of terror in stimulating black creativity and cultural production.”

There are further inspiration to be drawn from Gilroy’s (1993) influential account for dissecting modes and types of mythologisation of music. At issue is, in a nutshell, the appropriation of the slave sublime for the purposes of rock-centred historiography of popular music. In the historical narratives of

this variety, the “fascination and veneration of black musical forms ... is so strong that it is possible to identify a major part of the origins of the majority of mainstream popular musics in black forms” (Wall 2013: 33). In other words, to acknowledge the effects of transatlantic slavery on contemporary racism may lead to interpretations of the musical past where – crucially because of the unattainability and incomprehensibility of the slave experience – styles of so-called black music are invested with ideas of equally inaccessible essences that confirm their position as the ultimate and “true” testimonies of cultural creativity. For Gilroy (1993: 91, 99), “slave music” is the “privileged signifier of black authenticity,” which, for its part, has been central not only “in the mass marketing of successive black folk-cultural forms to white audiences” but also “in the mechanism of the mode of racialisation necessary to making non-European and non-American musics acceptable in an expanded pop market.” Thus, the slave sublime and the mythologisation surrounding it have a bearing on virtually all forms of so-called world music.

To be sure, the commercial implications of mythologising music by autonomising it should not be underestimated. To invest music with an ultimate essence, whether in the form of “technomystical” societal critique or by emphasising its noumenal ineffability, is to endow it with an authority that guarantees its consumers’ sapience and judiciousness. In capitalist societal settings, the investments based on the ideas about music’s powers and its exceptionalism – “the idea that music occupies a more important place in our culture than other forms of expression or cultural production” – are not lost on advertisers, as emphasised acerbically by ethnomusicologist Timothy Taylor (2012: 1–2). Certainly, important shifts have taken place. For example, in the 1930s “invariably happy and catchy” radio jingles carried an upbeat promise of a better consumerist future in the post-Depression USA; by the postmodern 1980s and 1990s, these “quintessential sounds of capitalism” could no longer compete with allegedly “ideologically purer and more authentic” rock and pop songs (Taylor 2012: 73–74, 144). In the interim years, a particularly influential style of music emerged in the jingle industry to convey the positive affect necessary: the so-called Madison Avenue Choir style. In Taylor’s (2012: 140) rundown of the main ingredients of this “pinnacle of advertising music,” there are more than one aspect implying the presence – or at least the worth – of (religious) transcendence:

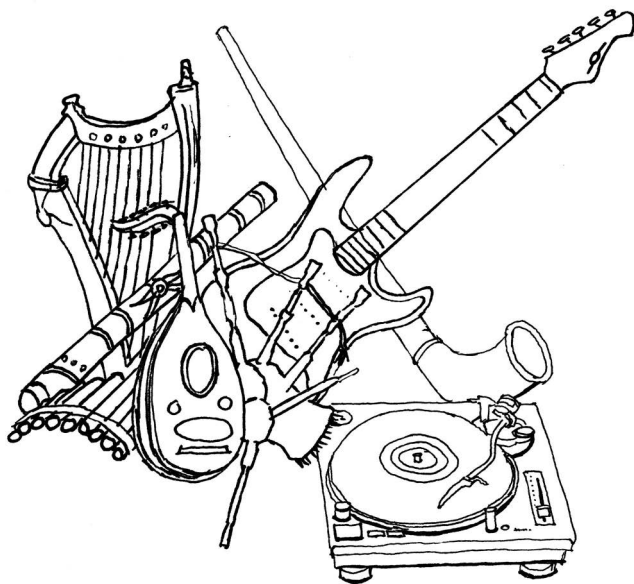
1950s and 1960s big-band-style music with a chorus, or sometimes a vocalist backed by a chorus. For this sound, advertising composers employed a vocal ensemble to make a chorus of approbation for the advertised product in a kind of secularized gospel music style A Burger King jingle ... from 1981, for example, employs a soloist and chorus format and ends with a plagal cadence, the same as in a hymn on the word *amen* The “informational” content of this commercial is left to a male soloist, as though he were the religious leader imparting timeless truths, while the chorus chimes in with more emotional, even ecstatic, music.

The idea of music exhibiting peculiar powers of its own and inevitable effects is indeed a popular one, in the sheer quantitative sense. Outside the tales of the supernatural and other forms of fiction, it is equally common to find indications of the *belief* in the autonomy of music. In their love (*filo*) for wisdom (*sofia*), various philosophers, particularly those infatuated by romanticist and structuralist modes of thought, have confused affection and ideology with critical investigation, and consequently merely perpetuated the myth of music as a self-sufficient entity. While the impetus for their sophisticated interpretations may have been a benevolent awe at a loss of words, the very same potential of ineffability and indeterminacy has been demonstrably put to use in the exploitative forms that relate to colonialism, racism and consumerism. Taylor (2012: 1) quotes the “legendary adman” Earnest Elmo Calkins’s words about a “consumption engineer”: “It is not his job to sell what the factory makes, but to teach the factory to make what the consumer will buy.” Paraphrasing this, one might wonder if the job of evangelists, novelists, philosophers and other mythologisers – or “engineers” – of music is not to contemplate on what “the music” makes, but to teach how to make music.

Regarding the overall connections of the idea of musical autonomy to the multidimensionality of the popular and the sacred, forceful links emerge towards the aesthetic dimension of the popular and the religious capacities of the sacred. In other words, it is the type of music that matters, and often there is at least a quasi-religious doctrine determining how. The aesthetic realm is also connected to the national and factional sacred, as evinced by anti-German and racialised ineffabilities. From this, in turn, associations arise towards the folk and partisan dimensions of the popular. The consumerist context of late modernity for its part creates linkages extending from the popular as postmodern mass culture to the economic core of the sacred. Finally, in addition, one can refer to the “drastic” debates surrounding Jankélévitch as indications of subcultural sensibilities of the sacred at work, regardless of whether one takes the “charmed” or the “technomysticist” side.

3 Ingenuity and authenticity

According to an academic rumour in Finland, one cannot be taken seriously as a music scholar in the country unless one engages in the life and works of Johan Christian Julius (a.k.a. Jean) Sibelius, the alleged national composer of the country and whose birthday (8 December) is an official flag-flying day and celebrated as the Day of Finnish Music. His revered – or sacred – popularity on a national level can be also somewhat intimidating, as the socio-cultural, artistic and academic weight of the composer’s monumental figure leads easily into a situation where the “critical” editions of his oeuvre are set against the critical approaches to his manoeuvres. In some respects, the outcome is the same nonetheless, as much can be forgiven on the basis of ingenuity, whether at issue is stylistic immaturity or marital infidelity. Whatever the case, it took me some twenty years in the profession of



music scholarship to tackle his compositions even briefly and framed with a broader interest in the historiographical treatment of his use of orientalist tropes and techniques – and with an uneasy personal recognition that I actually like the music in question. While I am inclined to blame my cultural conditioning for this rather than the alleged ingenuity of the composer, the fact remains that regardless of the volatility of Sibelius’s reputation, in his figure central beliefs about originality on both personal and national level are incarnated. This bears a direct link to the notion of authenticity inasmuch as at issue is individual artistic uniqueness on the one hand and collectively meaningful sincerity on the other.

Yet the sphere of music is dominated by ideas that stress the individuality and specialisation of musicians over forms of communal creation and expression. By and large, this may be attributable to the gradual increased division of labour throughout modernity to the extent that the whole notion of “a musician” can be taken as an indication of such processes, implicated profoundly in the ideological separation of “musical” individuals from those who allegedly are not. As Blacking (1973: 4) provocatively asks:

Does cultural development represent a real advance in human sensitivity and technical ability, or is it chiefly a diversion for elites and a weapon of class exploitation? Must the majority be made ‘unmusical’ so that a few may become more ‘musical’?

While projects have been executed where the “unmusical” ones have been trained to become competent performers (by Western standards), institutions of music education and performance are still fundamentally based on the idea – or *belief* – that some individuals are musically more talented than others and that only a handful is *worthy* of investing time, energy and monetary resources in, in order to achieve the highest level of skill and expression. In the capitalist world order, these capabilities translate also into fame and a foundation for economic prosperity (see Blacking 1973: 34; Tagg 2012: 118–120). Moreover, what is understood by musicality may vary across the globe, and thus also the principles of inclusion and exclusion (Westerlund et al. 2020); one only needs to compare the racist stereotypes of people with “the rhythm in the blood” to the symphony orchestra line-ups in the global North. In fact, the racist undercurrents can be more subtle yet no less stereotypical; in a study with US undergraduate music majors as evaluators of conductor performance on the basis of two pre-recorded excerpts, the results indicate that “white conductors were rated higher than black conductors when conducting the western art music excerpt, and the black conductors were rated higher than white conductors when conducting the spiritual excerpt” (Vanweelden and McGee 2007: 11–12). The four participating conductors were all male, as might be suspected.

The evidence of historical and material forces notwithstanding, the “implied spider” behind “the webs, the myths that human authors weave” remains elusive enough to incite people to explain the shared human experiences at stake in obvious paradoxes (Doniger 2011: 67, 69). Thus, the lure of mythologisation inherent in the ideas about ingenuity and authenticity, for instance, pertains to its “chameleon quality” that “encourages a wide range of beliefs” as contrasted with “the more monolithic and dogmatic aspects of religion” that would only narrow the range (Doniger 2011: 103). This gives grounds to juxtapose the “myths” of ingenuity and authenticity with the “dogmas” of repertoire- and genre-based musical “religions”; regardless of the genre or repertoire and the claims of its exceptional qualities, a diversity of geniuses and “real deals” surface without an exception. Writing about jazz, Leonard (1987: 135) summarises the function of the myths of the music as providers of “sources of identification and meaning,” of “coherence and significance” that fits followers, movements and whole peoples “into a cosmic context that explain[s] and justify[s] their existence and their music.”

In the Western cultural sphere, the heightened importance of musical individualism is apparent in the form of three characters in particular: stars, virtuosos and geniuses. While these may converge at times, they carry distinct implications that relate to charisma, skilfulness and creativity, respectively. Moreover, all these “popular” figures are associated with certain transcendental, supernatural or mythological qualities. Stars are, in the modern astronomical sense, luminous celestial objects and as such unattainable, extremely hot aggregates of nuclear reactions; similarly, the “real” person behind the star persona is usually as unreachable as are galactic constellations. The twinkling night sky has also been a source of religious inspiration, whether at issue is the Star of Bethlehem, of David, of Islam or of any “pagan” belief about the stars as the transformed souls of notable individuals. A specific type of star with explicit gendered qualities is that of a diva, encountered on opera and disco stages alike, who etymologically is “a goddess.” Virtuosos are equally gendered creatures, as the word stems from Latin *vir*, “a man,” and its abstraction *virtus*, “manliness,” with allusions of moral excellence and in Christianity heavenly power. Geniuses as well are spiritual beings, literally denoting – again – the male spirit of a family in classical Latin, and in the pre-Christian Roman times, tutelary gods or guardian spirits of people and places (OED Online 2021).

Stars, divas, virtuosos and geniuses are also interconnected through the notion of idolisation. Etymologically, one enters now the realm of excessive adoration, veneration and worship of an (false) image or an object representing deities, one that “usurps the place of God in human affection” (OED Online 2021). While there are no reasons to doubt the ubiquity of idolisation in its various forms globally, the phenomenon has become particularly popular or well known in the context of music through the *Idols* television series, launched in the UK in 2001 as *Pop Idol* and subsequently broadcast in national and multinational versions virtually worldwide, supported by

the unauthorised copycat production within certain non-Western political regimes (Tay 2011: 324–325). Whether the prevalence of the standardised show has inflated the term “idol” or not, it reflects the way in which contemporary music business, particularly in its “popular” sector, is built on the exploitation of singular artists by constructing them as objects worthy of large-scale adoration.

The global popularity of the *Idols* franchise provides additional possibilities for questioning the mythologised dimensions of stardom, particularly when treated rather literally as a form of idolatry, or attaching oneself to a person or a thing, to a false deity, in an immoderate fashion (OED Online 2021). Even in the less religious operational environment of global music industry, the unreliable promises of instant stardom made by *Idols* and other similar musical talent shows stand in opposition to earlier ideas of stardom based on a more long-term production, sales, promotion and an emphasis on the part of record labels to develop stable careers for artists through fan support. According to music industry researcher Charles Fairchild (2015: 467), this old type of career development has in the twenty-first century become “the subservient but necessary corollary of the exploitation of the many new environments in which we can experience music.” With respect to stardom, significant changes have nevertheless taken place during this shift from an object-oriented industry to intellectual property management, particularly in the case of music-based reality television that is based on cheap and disposable labour or “contracted servitude” of contestants who, “like their songs and performances, are more or less interchangeable, unless one of them manages to produce a hit” (Fairchild 2015: 461, 466).

Indeed, as Fairchild (2015: 443–444) points out, the changes in the industry appear less radical when one considers that since the 1980s, “roughly the same small percentage of artists still managed to take the lion’s share of music sales.” The whole business around charismatic stars destined to fame and fortune, then proves to be a matter of beliefs and wishful thinking more than anything else, surrounded by mystification and, indeed, mythologisation of given individuals’ charisma, in the sense of being capable of inspiring devotion or enthusiasm. As a consequence, it is the idea of stardom instead of given individuals that is exploited to the full, and the “actual” charisma can be recognised only afterwards; it is stardom that guarantees charisma, not the other way around. One should not forget here that also the word “charisma” has distinct theological relevance, as a grace or talent of divine bestowal (OED Online 2021).

Necrophonic superstars and decomposing composers

The connections of charisma to the supernatural are further consolidated by the fact that death is quite often a boost to the popularity of a celebrity – or a “deleb,” as a dead celebrity is colloquially called. Musicians feature prominently in the charts of “top-earning dead celebrities”; according to

the “Halloween-spooky list of the 13 highest-paid dead celebrities” (Greenburg 2017) in the business magazine *Forbes*, in 2017, amongst the thirteen there were seven musicians, with Michael Jackson topping the chart with an income of USD 75 million. The other six were Elvis Presley (#4), Bob Marley (#5), Tom Petty (#6), Prince (#7), John Lennon (#9) and David Bowie (#11).

With respect to the productive and profitable qualities of the dead, drama scholars Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut (2010: 14) suggest punningly that “[w]hat is ‘late’ about late capitalism” are the new “intermundane” relations and arrangements between “bio- and necroworlds.” They further note the centrality of music in this kind of “necro-marketing” where dead artists are performing with living ones, the earliest examples of which date back to the early 1980s at the latest. Importantly, however, they point out that sound-recording technologies have since their very inception been associated with death, especially in the sense of preserving artists’ voices and by extension bodies for the posthumous use in performing certain social functions (Stanyek and Piekut 2010: 15–16).

One might also note that in the audiovisual realm, notable dead artists do not rest in peace but every now and then perform with living ones; Elvis Presley, for example, has sung duets with his daughter Lisa Marie on a music video (*Daddy Don’t Cry*, 1997) and with Celine Dion on televised talent shows (*If I Can Dream*, 2007), not to mention numerous “virtual tours” where he is seen on a screen, accompanied by live musicians. The duet with Dion is often mentioned as one of the first “musical holograms,” alongside the ones made of Tupac Shakur (a.k.a. 2Pac), Michael Jackson, Ronnie James Dio and Roy Orbison. In 2018, “Roy Orbigram” performed on the world’s first major “holographic tour” in the UK, prompting one cultural critic to dub the event a “discombobulating hi-tech show” where “awe and amusement [mix] nostalgic pleasure and incredulous unease” (McCormick 2018). In addition to “delebs,” (once) disbanded groups such as ABBA have been reported considering the possibilities hologram “avatars” provide for letting the (dis)band “to live on as people remembered them and as they could see them still on video[: y]oung, fresh-faced, perfectly in sync with the bright and melodic pop songs they crafted” (Sullivan 2018).

According to popular music scholar Ken McLeod (2016: 501), the holographic performances challenge conventional ideas about physical transcendence and may constitute a basis for a certain kind of technological spirituality. In a manner not dissimilar to Lynch’s (2012) notion of the sacred, he relies on reconceptualisations of spirituality as a variety of transformative meaningful or blissful experiences that are not necessarily associated with organised religions. On the basis of this, he maintains that holograms function as spiritual entities in the following complementary ways:

Not only do they often involve a literal transformation of a real (or even fictionalized) person into a seemingly three-dimensional form, but they also perform a secondary transformation on audiences themselves,

who are often imbued with a “feeling” of a spiritual co-presence of the non-present performer. Furthermore, in their ability to fundamentally shape or transform our reality through technology, holograms play with various quasi-spiritual notions as they question the boundaries between the material and the virtual, the human and the post-human, the living and the dead, the temporal and the eternal.

(McLeod 2016: 502)

A prime example of such “quasi-religious ephemeral ‘second coming[s]’” for McLeod (2016: 504) is the holographic resurrection of 2Pac in 2012 where the rapper’s performance relied not only on recycled concert footage but also on original dialogue created through digital editing. On the basis of McLeod’s (2016) dissection of the event, the popular and the sacred intertwine in multiple ways. As a genre, rap alone foregrounds basically all six aspects of the popular as identified by Storey (2015: 5–12) through its global reach, accessible aesthetics and production techniques, racial and sexual politics, emphasis on authenticity, subcultural sensibilities (whether literally “gansta” or not) and celebration of cultural hybridity. Dimensions of the sacred, in turn, emerge on the generic level in the ways in which rap challenges conventional – and in many respects hallowed – forms of musicianship, fosters particularly strong beliefs concerning authenticity and is associated with violence, misogyny and to some extent cultural appropriation. The violent death of 2Pac in 1996 adds a specific flavour to all this, amplified further by the similar fate of his fellow rapper and foe The Notorious B.I.G. (born Christopher George Latore Wallace) just six months later; in the words of McLeod (2016: 503), 2Pac in particular has since his death evolved into “a sort of ethereal, digitally preserved, Jedi-god in the rap realm, where his pre-recorded virtual vocal ‘presence’ is used to lend weight to innumerable posthumous releases.” The holographic performance of 2012 included also songs “rife with religious imagery,” both acoustically and verbally, and became “a global media sensation” yielding substantial commercial benefits for Shakur’s rights owners and estate, as well as for the digital technology companies involved, raising ethical questions in relation to capitalising on the dead (McLeod 2016: 504).

Holographic resurrections of dead superstars have induced questions about the ontologies or “hauntologies” involved. For Stanyek and Piekut (2010: 18), a key issue is the possibility to (re)consider deadness as a form of agency that is based on effectivity and “not merely an individual’s capacity to respond to changing conditions.” This entails also rethinking agency in relation to temporal orientations, for instance, by scrutinising how “dis-tended pasts that swell up with delays, pre-echoes, calls, and incitements ... spill over into multiple presents and futures,” and by recognising the “un-predictably durative” nature of effects that become particularly pronounced when dealing with recordings: “being recorded means being enrolled in futures (and pasts) that one cannot wholly predict nor control” (Stanyek and

Piekut 2010: 18). For them, this is a crucial aspect of “the intermundane” or “the co-constitution of bio- and necroworlds that interpenetrate in specific ways,” including various forms of co-labouring between the living and the dead, as well as the institutionalised management techniques of such collaboration (Stanyek and Piekut 2010: 26).

Framing agency as effectivity is not without its problems, whether considered in purely conceptual terms or in relation to the capacity of a dead entity to respond to fluid circumstances. To begin with, the responses in question are highly dependent on technological factors and solutions, which might be automated to a degree yet always have human beings with diverse competencies and interests turning the potentiometers, gliding the faders and plugging the cords in. They surely condition and have effects on the human actions, but to invest them with agency borders on mythologisation not only because of technological reasons, but also on the basis of legal, economic, familial, affiliative and corporate “topologies” of the intermundane. Indeed, it may be argued that in “intermundane collaborations,” familial claims and politics of access become paramount “because of the forceful place blood ties have within marketing structures dominated by celebrity,” regardless of “the corporate arrangements that harness these ties” (Stanyek and Piekut 2010: 33). To emphasise that artists become “partially incapacitated” by their death and continue to “act” in the possible legal struggles over their estates is nevertheless provocative, even if the main intention is to point out “that the effectivity of singing ghosts in the techno-sonic realms of the intermundane is at least partially determined by rapidly changing laws governing the transference of wealth and property” (Stanyek and Piekut 2010: 34). The issue becomes more problematic when considered in relation to ethics, particularly in the form of exploiting the dead; Stanyek and Piekut (2010: 34) may be reasonable in their caution against straightforward condemnations of intermundane projects, but their quest for an ethics of non-human effects carries the risk of displacing responsibility, and the ultimate paradox is that they indeed “risk reinstating a human exceptionalism along the ethical axis that [they] have worked so hard to neutralize along the agentic.” Holographic resurrections and earlier “posthumous duets” nonetheless provide ample evidence in favour of their final claim that in the post-World War II decades of late capitalism, “deadness has emerged as a decisive patterning of intermundanity based upon ever-replenishable value, ever-resurrectable labor, ever-reversible production processes” (Stanyek and Piekut 2010: 35).

Regardless of the types of values, labour and production processes at issue, the irrevocable mundane materiality of music-makers of any gender and occupation becomes apparent at the moment of their demise. In recent years, people have mourned over a number of musical megastars who have ceased to twinkle as their atomic fuel has run out apparently without chemical or any other type of extraneous catalysts; while there might be some uncertainty over Prince’s dying at the age of fifty-seven in 2016, David Bowie’s

death because of cancer in the same year and Aretha Franklin's passing in 2018 came hardly as surprise to anyone as their illnesses were reported in the tabloids well in advance. Alongside a diversity of tribute concerts for the superstars in question, solace is often provided with the phrase "their music will live forever," as demonstratable by a superficial internet search. By late July 2019, of the three above-mentioned, Prince was by far the most remembered and revered, as the phrase yielded 140,000 hits when combined with his name, while 44,700 for Bowie and only 3,050 for Franklin. For the sake of comparison, one may note that for the canonised and long decomposed figures of Michael Jackson, John Lennon and Elvis Presley, the respective figures were 136,000, 26,100 and 8,800 – and 15,700 for Mozart.

The demise of Lennon foregrounds in addition a different type of death, as he was shot by a "disturbed" fan. A fate not dissimilar from Lennon's has met, among others, Victor Jara in the hands of the handymen of Augusto Pinochet, for exhibiting popularity – mainly sociologically but also aesthetically and quantitatively – within a political system where, for the establishment, it represented *un*popularity to the extreme. In more recent years, *raï* artists such as Cheb Khaled have been assassinated, not to mention the more or less accidental hoedowns between numerous rappers striving for "street cred" authenticity. To be sure, to accredit the quest for authenticity as the primary reason for acts of ultimate violence may be somewhat hyperbolic; yet the fact remains that more often than not to become murdered is a guarantee of fame and authenticity. The line of reasoning here is that as someone had to resort to homicidal violence, the artist in question represents values and sentiments most sincere and fundamental, alluding to the notion of the sacred. The same applies to suicides (Jones 2005a: 13). Also in cases where the motive for the fatal crime stems from domestic disputes, as with soul singer Marvin Gaye, for instance, the untimely violent death frequently functions as an assurance of unfulfilled talent and a status of an immortal superstar. This can of course happen without acts of external violence, as demonstrated by the posthumous fame of reggae incarnate Bob Marley, who died of cancer.

In addition, accidents do happen. In the historiography of popular music, a date of mythic proportions is 3 February 1959, also known as "the day the music died." The event yielding the exclamation is the aeroplane crash in Iowa in the USA that resulted in the death of rock and roll musicians Buddy Holly, Richie Valens and Jiles Perry "The Big Bopper" Richardson. While some may have taken it as "the hand of God striking out against rock 'n' roll," a more mundane contributing factor is that had the industry been more supportive at the time, "they might not have found themselves in the hinterland in winter, traveling from town to town in broken buses and rickety aircraft" (Altschuler 2003: 171). Correspondingly, after the numerous musical departures in 2016 (see Figure 3.1), in several journalistic forums the question was posed whether this was to become "the year the music died" – even if it is highly probable that similar years are likely to occur as rock and

pop musicians pass away increasingly because of natural causes and not only due to rebellious lifestyles (Jones 2005b: 273). In addition, there obviously are situations when a given artist's music does not live forever. Again, at issue is a rhetoric device, yet decisively one that assigns music with agency of its own, either as living or dying, therefore autonomising it.



Figure 3.1 A detail of the timeline on the wall of Virus Theatre in Helsinki, Finland (photograph by the author).

In 1959, the music died not only at a specific time but also at a particular location. Likewise, in the case of musicians' demise, either their deathbeds or other significant sites have become sanctuaries and destinations of pilgrimage. And there is of course money to be made out of this: alongside Beatles tourism in the UK, there is Delta Blues tourism in the USA, implicating the phenomenon in so-called dark tourism that rests on "the attraction of death and disaster" (Lennon and Foley 2000). With respect to blues tourism in particular, Mark Duffett (2015: 249–250) maintains that through possible romanticising aspects and the ambivalence of "witnessing social injustice and voyeuristically consuming it," ethical questions concerning this type of pilgrimage and ritualistic conduct become foregrounded.

Musical prodigies, ingenuity and intermediation

While the exceptionality of music stars, dead or alive, is largely a product of music industry and its risk management, there are of course differences in personal proclivity towards music. The epitome of these differences is the figure of a musical prodigy, personified frequently by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, with allusions to "the love of God" as the source of his talent on the basis of his middle name. Yet he is by no means the only musical whizz-kid, as online lists contain more than one hundred names, including, for instance, Björk, Glenn Gould and Michael Jackson, who all made their debut before their sixth birthday (e.g., Wikipedia 2021). The most recent child music prodigies mentioned in these lists include pianist-violinist-composer Alma Deutscher and vocalist Sreya Jayadeep, both born in 2005. What is nevertheless worth noticing in these catalogues and tables is the centrality of "classical" traditions, either in their Western or Indian (Carnatic) manifestations. In fact, while there are half a dozen East Asian pianists mentioned, in the combined list of composers and conductors the dominance of Europe and the USA is exclusive. Also, when considering "non-classical genres," there is a prevalence of Western categories and geographical locations, even in the case of the two artists mentioned as representatives of "folk and world music," namely Arite Ketime (from Greece) and Adán Sánchez (from the USA).

To the extent to which these lists represent a "popular" comprehension of a musical prodigy, the implication is straightforward enough: at issue is once again a category that serves primarily the purposes of the music industry and the educational system deeply connected to it. In a piece of press coverage about "Little Mozart" Alma Deutscher, it is pointed out that a musical prodigy in particular is "a group enterprise" that "hinges on parental involvement." In the article, risks of burdensome future, family feuds and aggressive publicity are also mentioned, with an etymological twist in a quote from her mother: "It means a marvel but also a monster" (cf. Latin *prodigium*). The institutional importance of precociously talented children becomes apparent in the feature through references to also other forms of involvement than merely parental ones; the initial affluence of the family

is clear from the outset, yet the preconditions for the father to work home and the mother to give up her work are not disclosed in detail nor discussed in relation to the emergence of “a team of advisers: PR manager, financier, agent.” What is more, it was “a family friend” of certain public appeal, namely actor Stephen Fry, “who catapulted Alma to fame” with his tweets after seeing her play on video (Williams 2017; see also OED Online 2021).

With respect to the paradoxes of mythologisation (Doniger 2011), it is nevertheless central to note how in the article, despite the disillusioned treatment of the topic, the claim is made that “Alma was born into music” (Williams 2017). On the one hand, there is an element of fatalism in the utterance, with allusions of the autonomy of music. On the other hand, socio-historical circumstances become foregrounded in the remarks that follow about one of her grandparents being a pianist and another an organist and about her parents as amateurs. Yet also these external factors, as it were, are presented as intermingled with elements of musical heritage, as if music with its autonomous power has chosen to infiltrate even into the family’s genetic ancestry. Never mind the two remaining grandparents.

One cannot disregard gender issues either. As Mr Mozart as the archetype of a musical wonder child implies, historically it has been more commonplace to assign the wondrous qualities to male specimens. Yet according to online encyclopaedias, the type of musicianship also plays a part in this, as vocalist prodigies tend to be female, while those inclined towards keyboards, composing or conducting are predominantly male. The same applies, by and large, to the “non-classical” whizz-kids, and particularly to blues and jazz; all the seven blues prodigies mentioned are male, and regarding jazz, amongst the 23 names there are only two females, Terri Lyne Carrington and Mary Lou Williams. Moreover, the gender politics of the issue become apparent in the use of “Mozart” as a general epithet, also for young ladies. This might provide grounds for various queer and transgender-related readings, but to regender Mozart in this way serves also the ideological premisses behind the notion of autonomous music, as it is the divine gift of musical talent alone that necessitates the application of the epithet. Yet it is hardly a coincidence that the prodigy charts do not include any female contemporaries of Mozart – the earliest female wonder child mentioned is Lili Boulanger, born in 1893 (see Wikipedia 2021).

More serious-minded music historians, in turn, have debated whether Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre deserves the honour, as a “marvel” of a harpsichordist and a composer in the eighteenth-century France. According to Mary Cyr (2008: 79–80), for instance, Jacquet de La Guerre’s gender was “an important factor contributing to her success” and inseparable from the marvelling assessments. Still, even academics tend to be lured into the webs of musical autonomy; after discussing early accounts about the composer’s prodigal and gendered qualities, Cyr (2008: 82) turns “to the music itself” in order to “give a sense of what was truly unique about her approach to composition.” Somewhat unsurprisingly, given that Cyr has edited volumes

for the collected works series of the composer, she comes to the conclusion that Jacquet de La Guerre managed to surpass the gendered limitations of the time, and thus with:

further study of her music and with the preparation of a new scholarly edition of her collected works, we will be able to understand more fully the unique and individual features that set her music apart from that of her contemporaries.

(Cyr 2008: 87)

Alongside favouring musical uniqueness and hence autonomy instead of historical socio-cultural conditions, the unabashed publishing proposition serves as another reminder of the inextricability of the notion of musical prodigies from institutional and industrial interests in the twenty-first century.

Mr Mozart is not only the quintessential musical prodigy, but also a crucial constituent of what Nettle (2005: 37, 175) deems “the fundamental myth of Western art music culture in the twentieth century” that is based on the perceived – and perpetuated – contrast between Mozart and Beethoven, between divine “inspiration” and human “perspiration,” as the two fundamental types of musical geniuses. Nettle (2005: 37–38) further stresses the difference between “M and B” as objects of historical enquiry and the ethnomusicological quest to analyse “what roles M and B play in our culture,” as “cultural heroes because they reflect important societal values.” As he notes in a sarcastic tone, the myth of Amadeus, “the man loved by God,” outweighs unequivocally any historical evidence suggesting “that he was really a workaholic who devoted himself to solving difficult musical problems, had enormous knowledge and a stupendous memory, and basically worked himself to death” (Nettle 2005: 37).

One may certainly hope that such a future does not lie ahead for present-day musical geniuses of the M variety, one of whom is Ethan Bortnick, celebrated for his “musical equivalent of photographic memory” and as the youngest musician ever to have a concert tour under his own name, as well as his dedication to combine “musical pursuits with his charity work,” with more than USD 50 million raised for various non-profit causes worldwide (EB 2015). In the press, his talents have been described as including “technical gifts and instant recall” but also the ability to charm audiences, surrounded by quasi-Christian bedazzlement about where he might be incarnated from (Gundersen 2010). The remarks about gifts, charm and reincarnation may be taken as common rhetorical tropes, yet they allude to an underlying layer of mythologisation where the psychosomatic aptitude of an individual becomes connected to – and “explained” by – transcendental qualities and forces. This kind of emphasis on inspiration rather than perspiration is evident also in the press coverage through foregrounding how all the songs Bortnick plays from memory are easy for him and how he never

gets nervous, but instead “tackles music with fervour and focus” (Gundersen 2010). Similar implications of music as a force field of its own are evident in the title of his concert show on public service television, *The Power of Music*, attesting also to an affinity towards autonomising music as something with “a higher purpose” (WTTW 2013). In other words, the individual in question becomes merely a conduit for the other-worldly might and intention of music itself.

Bortnick is by no means the only musician characterised in these terms or who is a self-confessed intermediary for the transcendent. One of the most renowned individuals in question is Igor Stravinsky, who not only surpassed other twentieth-century composers in his ability “to make the leap from a rarefied intellectual world to the status of pop hero, an icon” (Joseph 2001: 4), but has also been discussed extensively on the basis of his unabashed formalism and alleged anti-humanism that manifests itself, for instance, in his explicitly Schopenhauerian belief that “music is an independent and self-contained universe in which the human mind has created the material and reduced them to order” (quoted in Joseph 2001: 28). Stravinsky’s opinions and claims have received a great deal of scholarly criticism, the fiercest of which is based on the apparent contradiction and outright self-denial evident in his adherence to ideas about the autonomy of music and his disavowal of the personal or expressiveness in music, as well as on a questionable “insistence on music as a world cut off from everyday forces, including, evidently, those of morality” (see van den Toorn and McGinness 2012: 282, 286).

While the latter stance might constitute an incomparably “sinister reading of the composer’s formalist beliefs” (van den Toorn and McGinness 2012: 286), it does raise the issue concerning an individual’s ethics and responsibilities. Put bluntly, when composers or musicians declare themselves, or are declared by their admirers, as mere media or vessels for the “music itself,” the implication is that should there be anything ethically controversial or questionable in their work and output, they are ultimately innocent. Again, the ubiquitous phrase “I am just a vessel for the music” may be taken as a rhetoric device that translates as “I cannot verbalise my musical actions exactly,” yet this risks underestimating its constitutive cultural ramifications, particularly when it comes to mythologising music as autonomous and “ingenuity” or “talent” as otherworldly in origin, even messianic. There is furthermore a gendered aspect to the issue, and – while this is not unique to music alone, not by a far cry – it may be argued, particularly with respect to composers of Western art music that as either intermediaries for the transcendent or godlike geniuses, they become mythologised as *heroic* demigods or Chosen Ones whose work and works separate them from “mundane materiality,” centrally through an exclusion of women. Indeed, as pointed out by Christine Battersby (1989: 14), the genius “is always a ‘Hero’, and never a heroine[, nor] are his social duties consistent with those of fulfilling mundane domestic or reproductive tasks, nor of living a life of enforced,

upper-class ease.” It is furthermore debatable if introducing “Heroines” into the canon can solve the issue ultimately, not at least without challenging the criteria of excellence that operate in the Western musical canon formation (Randel 1992: 17; Citron 1993: 225).

Transcendent musical vessel-ness is by no means confined within the realm of male composers of Western art music. In addition to Stravinsky, “soul songstress” Joanna Teters, amongst others, “encapsulates an ingenuity seldom discoverable in today’s musical landscape” (McHale 2018), as does indie art rocker Florence Welsh and her “otherworldly, ethereal image [of] some sort of goddess or nymph ... straight from classical myth or art” (Osborne 2018), and the Norwegian pop singer-songwriter Aurora and her “language of pure emotion that she conceived herself” (McDermott 2018). Clearly, then, individuals matter in music, whether as objects of idolisation, sources of posthumous livelihood, perspiring prodigies of national or generic creativity or mere mundane music-makers who may or may not provide the base for fandom and other forms of musical sociability. The emotional attachment to a musician or an orchestra comprising of distinct personalities may be likened to the Durkheimian idea of collective effervescence, especially in large-scale singalong live events; it may just as easily lead to “fan tribalism” with potentially dangerous consequences not dissimilar from the ones associated with religious fundamentalism and extremism (see Marsh 2017: 237, 240; also Durkheim 1995: 213). The sociable benefits and risks notwithstanding, in capitalist societal systems forms of musical individuality are virtually by definition harnessed for profit-making that is based on managing labour, consumption and rights alike. Till (2010: 52) notes that “as long as the fans’ devotion can be maintained, products can be continually created, marketed, sold and consumed,” and therefore “the maintenance of an obsessive devotion to the popular icon by the fan [is] a key relationship within popular music.” Some might be tempted to replace “icon” with “God,” “fan” with “believer” and “popular music” with “religion.”

An additional crucial layer of mythologisation of musical individuality is indeed related to risks, failures and their precarious management. Going back to the televised talent shows, Fairchild (2015: 450) maintains how “the ‘winner-take-all’ market in music in which ‘nobody knows the reasons for success’ remains heavily laden with serious risk and almost shocking levels of failure.” To compensate the debacles, to mythologise the random winners with charisma and other metaphysical qualities is a cost-efficient solution par excellence, as it demands very little material resources. This leads to reiterating the obvious: in the early twenty-first-century stage of globalisation, the risks and failures are primarily of the economic kind. In relation to this, it may certainly be argued that “the economy is the sacred ground of postmodern western culture, and that consumption is the dominant focus of mediation, ritual and myth in contemporary western society” (Till 2010: 67).

To encapsulate the intersections of the popular and the sacred as they pertain to mythologisation of music through an emphasis on individuality,

on the side of the popular particular weight is laid on the capitalist mass cultural mode of production as well as on the “postmodern” replacement of religious forms of monolatrist collectivity with sacralised media constructions and other consumerist types of star-struck identification, regardless of the musical repertoire. While the status of the superstar or icon is ultimately available for the chosen few only, there is the quantitative dimension of the popular present in both production and consumption, as new artists tend to be marketed as stars or idols from the very beginning and there unquestionably are hoards of fans or aficionados supporting a given widely favoured musical celebrity or genius, whether alive or dead. Inextricably intertwined with these dimensions of the popular is the economic sacred, which serves also as a reminder of the general economic facets of institutional religions, especially historically but not forgetting contemporary forms of managing material resources either. Furthermore, specifically in situations where the musical individuals in question epitomise entire genres or local traditions, whether invented ones or not, the subcultural and national features of the sacred emerge, respectively.

Musical authenticities and the metaphysics of corporeal categorisations

It is common to encounter claims where an individual’s musical stardom or ingenuity is associated with or even explained by authenticity, whether in the guise of credibility, innocence, originality, obduracy, communality or anything else that serves the purpose. A context of primary importance for discussing authenticity in the societal conditions of global postcoloniality is the national, not least due to its status as the prevalent ideological framework for the world as a whole. It might be argued in fact that the national is a prime example of the intersection of the popular and the sacred, to the extent it becomes banal in all possible senses of the word (see Billig 1995). It is by definition a populous category, and quite often supported with populist agendas. These same agendas construe it as self-evident, absolute, normative, and immutable, regardless of the fact that the borders of a given nation-state can be altered virtually overnight. The national holds also a crucial position with respect to defining authenticity, as it connects a given form of expression to ideas of communality that is based on inheritance and ownership.

Yet in the context of music, the question of authenticity accrues some more specific qualities. Yes, inheritance is there, in the sense that certain types of music are more readily than others considered as the continuation of a national tradition. Here, national equates with ethnic, as both refer etymologically to a community that shares certain traits, whether physical, linguistic, habitual or religious in quality. The inheritance does not have to be exclusively national or ethnic, but it can pertain to stylistic and generic aspects of music – which, for their part, can often be nationalised, ethnicised

and racialised. For instance, what would be the criteria for the authentic inheritance of reggae, in terms of Jamaican-ness, black-ness and Rastafarianism? Moreover, it may be argued there are also subcultural modes of authenticity at stake.

What all this points to is the multidimensional nature of authenticity in the context of music, and to complicate things further, one may ask how the different dimensions of authenticity might relate to the different aspects of the popular and the sacred. When approached from within music studies, some key periods and topics emerge, pointing to the historical and political situatedness of the debates. In general, though, what is agreed upon is the idea that authenticity is, in the words of philosopher Charles Taylor (1992: 25), “a child of the Romantic period,” in relation to the rise of modern individualism both in the society in general and in the sphere of arts in particular. Taylor (1992: 2–3, 16) remarks on the “disenchantment” of the world as a result of discrediting earlier “supposedly sacred orders” and on authenticity as a moral ideal that rests on ideas of “what a better or higher mode of life would be, where ‘better’ and ‘higher’ ... offer a standard of what we ought to desire.” In a similar fashion, Lynch (2012: 18, 47) discusses the sacred as a moral project – but maybe signalling more recent tendencies of *re-enchantment*, emphasises the ambiguity of the outcomes of this project. In his words, “sacred commitments can be the source of much harm,” especially in the “sacred visions of nation, race, or revolution” and in violence as “a ritual expression of sacred commitments” (Lynch 2012: 48, 116).

Interestingly, this kind of moral ambiguity is present also in Taylor’s (1992) account on the ethics of authenticity, especially in relation to claims over originality. This carries some crucial implications for artistic activity, or as Taylor (1992: 61) himself puts it, there is “a close analogy, even a connection, between self-discovery and artistic creation.” Furthermore, he juxtaposes self-discovery and self-definition with morality by noting how “the very idea of originality, and the associated notion that the enemy of authenticity can be social conformity, forces on us the idea that authenticity will have to struggle against *some* externally imposed rules” (Taylor 1992: 63).

Yet authenticity manifests itself in music in other forms than just individual originality. A prime example where it is the communal rather than individual that is invested with fundamental sacred values is constituted by folk music, preferably as something distinct from processes of urban industrialism (cf. Storey 2003: 4–10, 2015: 9). Here, it is possible to discuss certain “intergeneric” dynamics, referring to the ways in which given genres are othered as inauthentic and profane by proponents of genres that are somehow oppositional to them. Partridge (2014: 136) proposes that this is frequently the case with popular music, especially when opposed to the taken-for-granted “sacrality of folk music.” To put it bluntly, he maintains, “just as there is a very clear sense of the sacred attached to folk music, so there is also a very clear sense of the profane attached to that which threatens it – commercial popular music.” This, nevertheless, begs a closer

examination on the epithet “popular.” One might even argue that there is an element of sacralisation of popular music at work in Partridge’s (2014: 6) writing, as one of his foundational points of departure is that “popular music is fundamentally transgressive.” There is nevertheless a fair amount of evidence that shifts in relation to authenticity have taken place; musicologist Allan F. Moore (2002: 213–214), for one, notes that:

[w]hereas in the late 1960s, authenticity was the preserve of a politicised, selfless counter-culture, in the late 1980s there was no such counter-culture, and thus ‘authenticity’ became allied to constructions of ‘innocence’, and an unreserved embrace of the ‘pop’ to which it was so antithetical twenty years earlier.

Currently, one major arena where authenticity is being battled is rap music, in its insistence on “keepin’ it real.” Curiously enough, also here, internal differences – or what popular music scholar Murray Forman (2013) has called “generational dissonances” – have emerged, referring centrally to the older rappers’ accusations about the younger’s lack of historical knowledge of the genre. In this way, then, assuming their “street cred” is not challenged, an intrageneric tension emerges between historical authenticity and, say, subcultural authenticity.

To state this is largely analogous to the debates concerning so-called early music in the 1980s may be blasphemous to some, yet I do think to disregard the similarities would serve only the interests of purists in both fields. In the authenticity controversies surrounding early music, the tension between historical and subcultural attitudes comes forth primarily in the disputes whether or not the performance practices of old should be reconstructed as carefully as possible. A leading figure in these debates, Richard Taruskin (1982: 341–342) has suggested that at issue is a discrepancy between romanticist historicism and post-World War I modernist performance aesthetics that may in the end “amoun[t] to little more than time-travel nostalgia.” Cultural historian of music Katherine Ellis (2005: xv) insinuates acerbically towards the same by relating the tendencies involved to “theme-park muzak” and “prostituting sacred music as ‘local/historical colour’ in a highly commercialized atmosphere.”

Even if, as Taruskin (1982: 346) continues, the “historical reconstructionist performances ... are quintessentially modern performances, modernist performances in fact, the product of an esthetic wholly of our own era,” they are implicated in the construction of the sacred authenticities that hinge either on communal traditions or individual intentions. But what if early music was to be considered a form of *popular* music? To some extent, the notion of tradition provides the connection, especially when – again – thought of in terms of the folk dimension of the popular. To recall the other dimensions offered by Storey (2015: 5–12), for some early music might verge on a form of resistance or the “postmodern”; Taruskin’s (1982) ideas would support the

former more than the latter. But is early music a “widely favoured,” “mass” or “inferior” form of culture? In France in the late nineteenth century, baroque choral music may have provided some ways to popularise “classic” music (Ellis 2005: 223), but a century and a half later, not many would find the implications of commodification agreeable, I suppose, at least not musicologists like Taruskin. Yet at the very end of his “little essay,” he insinuates that a wider favour might not be entirely undesirable; he does this with reference to the “little discreet composing” historical musicologists do “to make a fragmentary piece performable,” and closes with the wish “if we could only sell them...” (Taruskin 1982: 349).

The immediate question that emerges has to do with the commercial value of authenticity and the ways in which it is linked to the popular and the sacred alike. On the one hand, the commercial appeal and mass success of music has repeatedly been taken as a prime indicator of its inauthenticity, as opposed to the communal values of the popular as a guarantee of its authenticity. On the other hand, a star or genius can function as an indicator of authentic originality that for its part constitutes the basis for identification and idolatry, usually in large quantities, both demographically and financially. Frith (1987: 137) remarked long ago that the myth of authenticity, particularly in the context of rock music, is essentially a commercial ideology.

This may be foregrounded further with an example that touches upon the authenticity debates surrounding early music. If scholarly work is not convincing enough, there is always *Forbes*. An article from 2006 opens with the question: “[w]hat’s 300 years old, made of wood and easily outperforms most mutual funds?” And the answer is: “[a] Stradivarius violin. Or an antique guitar or mandolin, for that matter” (Roney 2006). Indeed, not only are the instruments of old valuable in the market as collector’s items and investments, but also various items that once belonged to a well-known artist. One of John Lennon’s coats was auctioned for USD 30,000 in 2014 – but then again, “an exact re-creation” of his brown suede jacket featured on the cover of *Rubber Soul*, including “a few minor manufacturing errors,” is available online for 359 dollars (plus shipping; BS 2021). In situations like these, the sacredness of an object becomes measured in monetary terms that crucially rely upon proof of authenticity, while the object’s popularity rests on a more charged juxtaposition of the item as a well-known and a desirable thing as opposed to its singularity and the sometimes extraordinary wealth needed to obtain it.

This type of objectified authenticity is thus a class issue. This nevertheless does not mean that those located at the lower strata of society would be denied of such authenticity; when the singular objects are beyond one’s financial means, the monetary value of the hallowed object is easy to replace by more qualitative esteem where one’s personal experience becomes decisive. The identity politics of authenticity are moreover not restricted to socio-economic differences, but are intersectional through and through. Here, gender and age accrue a pronounced significance, as

there is a tendency to dismiss girls' and young women's cultural practices as inauthentic, while the obsession of middle-aged men to find a copy of all existing releases of a given rock album is usually treated as a sign of connoisseurship (see Straw 1997). A pertinent question in this respect concerns the age at which a person's claims about musical authenticity, in one form or another, begin to matter – and when they cease to do so. Also performances of authenticity change inevitably as the performers age; the way in which the Rolling Stones, for instance, exhibit authentic rock rebelliousness was quite different in 1964 from what it is now, more than half a century later, as the leading members of the group are way beyond the public sector retirement age.

Ageing bodies are degenerating bodies, and as the once so nimble fingers gradually stiffen and slow down, displays of authenticity cannot be based on technical prowess anymore (assuming they once were). A curious incident in this respect took place in Finland in October 2013 with Chuck Berry, one of the pioneers of rock and roll, at the centre of attention; at the age of eighty-seven, he performed in the two concerts organised in the country as a frontispiece rather than a guitar virtuoso, yet this did not prevent leading music journalists from deeming the gigs fiascos, neither certain members of the audience from claiming their money back after the first concert. This may be primarily an indication of misplaced expectations, as many of the Teddies I saw and talked to at the second show appeared to be genuinely happy to witness one of their icons alive, with no delusions of grandeur about his guitar skills. In the end, still, it was the fiasco argument that won, in that entrance fees were remunerated on the basis of inferior quality of the show. As a consequence, a precedent was set by introducing a disclaimer in tickets, discharging retailers from liability as regards aesthetic quality. Regarding mythologisation of and its insoluble contradictions (Doniger 2011), the implication is that even the oldest musicians, regardless of their physical limitations, should be able to reproduce a performance that corresponds the criteria of authenticity unquestionably. There is also an element of musical autonomy at stake, in the sense that as if music associated with authenticity – “original” rock and roll in the case of Berry – had the power to sustain musicians' technical abilities.

Gender and ageing foreground corporeality in general, and to broaden the scope of intersectional identity formation, related considerations pertain to sexuality and racialisation as well as to (dis)abilities that are not associated with ageing. Regarding sexuality, one may ponder whether it is a mere coincidence that genres associated with non-heteronormative sexuality, such as disco in the late 1970s, have suffered from fierce criticism on the basis of their alleged inauthenticity. Popular music historian Reebee Garofalo (1997: 304–305) points to the juxtaposition between disco and punk in the latter half of the 1970s, stating that while the two genres were similar in their motivation and effect “to intensify the feeling of the moment in an otherwise uncertain world,” the former was decried by most critics as escapist

and the latter approved antithetically because of its perceived political content. Continues Garofalo (1997: 305):

Herein lies the source of distortion in the way in which the histories of punk and disco have been recounted. It was punk's political possibilities, real or imagined, that captured the attention of rock critics who had cut their teeth on the political movements of the 1960s. Never has so much been written by so many about so little. ... Although disco was seldom intentionally political, in the long run it may have scored a larger political victory than punk[, as it] brought people together across racial lines not to mention lines of class and sexual preference. ... In such a context, anti-disco slogans like "Death to Disco" and "Disco Sucks" have to be regarded more as racial (and sexual) epithets than as statements of musical preference and the systematic avoidance of disco by the rock critical establishment can only be construed as racist[.]

In the sphere of popular music in the conventional sense, racialisation is deeply connected to authenticity, especially when discussing "black" or "ethnic" music. To reiterate Gilroy's (1993: 99) poignant remarks, the insistence on "black authenticity" has functioned effectively in the commodification and marketing of especially African-American and African-Caribbean musics. But there is more at stake in this discussion than exploitative commercial relations that capitalise on the history of slavery and stereotypes about (sub-Saharan) Africa as the provenance of rhythm; in racist societal and cultural situations the identity and historicity of the ethnic other is continuously undermined and denied even, and in this kind of conditions "the aura of authentic ethnicity" may provide certain stability and comfort. It may also lead to cultural protectionism and a problematic stress on ideas about cultural origins, with the result of identifying and favouring "original, folk, or local expressions of black culture" as authentic at the expense of "subsequent hemispheric or global manifestations of the same cultural forms" (Gilroy 1993: 86, 96). Building to a considerable degree on these ideas, David F. Garcia (2017: 12–13) suggests that "the logic of black music's and dance's African origins" is "one of modernity's most natural and all-encompassing technologies in the ordering of people, place, and time."

A further consequence of this is a "polar opposition between progress and dilution," whereby new forms of cultural expression with their aesthetic hybridisation and technological innovations are not recognised as "culture worthy of the name," even by the members of the racialised community in question – here, Gilroy (1993: 96–97) refers to the dispute between the jazz trumpeters Wynton Marsalis and Miles Davis in 1986, with the former arguing "that jazz provides an essential repository for wider black cultural values while Davis insisted upon prioritising the restless creative energies that could keep the corrosive processes of reification and commodification at bay." Whether either one was right or wrong – though Gilroy (1993: 97)

appears to support Davis's stance – is less important than the conflict itself as an indication of the effects of racism, not only in relation to the denials of black cultural integrity and reproductivity but also to “the hierarchy of creativity generated by the pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies blacks with the body and whites with the mind.”

Similar mythologising metaphysics lurk behind the category of Latin music. Writing specifically (and rather opinionatedly) about salsa, Marco Katz (2005: 36) notes how studies focusing on it are suffused with questions of identity, “with varying constructions of who should be allowed in, how to define the music, and where its roots are planted.” These questions are additionally connected to issues of education, institutions, marketing, media, technology and politics. Yet ethnicity carries particular weight, and there is a tendency to “make an ethnic case that justifies one's own participation” in salsa, for instance, by mobilising and amalgamating various non-white identifications and affiliations for the purpose (Katz 2005: 37). Regarding authenticity explicitly, Katz (2005: 38) refers to “the debates and dissensions inevitably brought to the surface by discussions of origins” and their intimate connection to the tension between ideas about music as a universal language and as an ethnically particular type of expression. He maintains that when music is considered as a multicultural factor, arguments in favour of ethnic inclusivity proliferate; when, in contrast, “musical styles are divvied up and assigned to select communities, the musicians – although not the critics, producers, and presenters – are only granted importance when they are members of the group considered authentic.” Intriguingly, Katz (2005: 43) also mentions the possibility to account for – even promote – incompetent musicianship with claims of authenticity. One might posit that in the case of Chuck Berry's 2013 visit to Finland, this possibility was not exploited to the full (if at all).

Techno-orientalism and other (dis)embodied fashions of musical authenticity

Mythologising music by “ethnicising” it may operate on various levels, and debates over a certain (sub)genre's blackness or Latin-ness may become increasingly nuanced in national and regional contexts. On a global scale, there are also widespread essentialist assumptions of Arab and Asian music that often perpetuate earlier exoticist practices in a “neo-orientalist” manner (see, e.g., Kalra 2015; Roy 2017). Regarding styles and musicians associated with East Asian countries more specifically, these discussions have been complemented by references to “techno-orientalism,” often with explicit connection to gender issues. This pertains to both “popular” and “classical” realms; within the former, musical styles and musicians are coupled with high production values and audiovisual media, while in the latter there is a tendency to evaluate musicians as technically consummate but artistically impassive and therefore inauthentic (see, e.g., Yoshihara 2007;

Yano and Hosokawa 2008; Choi and Maliangay 2014). Arguably, on the popular side it is masculinity that is being challenged and redefined, while in classical music at stake is the commensurability of femininity with technology. This notwithstanding, on both sides, core questions concern the appropriate ways to address the postcolonial dynamics and dilemmas at stake. Regarding Korean K-pop, for instance, a tension between claims about *reproducing* Western styles and *reprocessing* them has been noted, evident also in the dynamics between transnational fandom and local modes of production (Choi and Maliangay 2014: 3–4). With respect to the role of Asians and Asian Americans in classical music, in turn, it has been argued that their considerable quantities in Western symphony orchestras foreground postcolonial cultural dynamics as they are seldom considered as “transparent conveyors of Western traditions” because of their visible ethnicity; yet despite racialisation as cultural others, they are “widely recognized as excelling in the musical form to which they are presumed to be outsiders,” thus inducing re-evaluations of authenticity (Yoshihara 2007: 191).

Corresponding to Doniger’s (2011: 98) ideas about mythologisation as “wrestl[ing] with insoluble paradoxes,” to re-evaluate authenticity may lead to inherently contradictory reasoning where, on the one hand, geographically or culturally bound understandings of musical authenticity are decried as “not only provincial but also racist” on the basis of universalist ideals of the free will of a true musician, while on the other hand, cultural ownership of Western idioms is claimed on educational grounds in particular, without recognising the variety of institutional interventions in governing music or “the vastly different access” to music education, depending on one’s region and social class (Yoshihara 2007: 200–201). At issue are furthermore “ethno-cultural psychodynamics of cultural creativity” and forms of “cognitive colonialism/racism” that have constructed the global North as productive, artistic and original, while the South has been disdained as consumptive, aping and derivative (Choi and Maliangkay 2014: 13).

While the business models around symphonic orchestras and J- or K-pop may differ ever so slightly from each other, in both spheres questions of musical authenticity become part and parcel of the legal and economic structures of producing, distributing and consuming music. In this kind of framework, essentialist racial markers and stereotypes, despite their offensiveness, may be useful in creating market niches (Yoshihara 2007: 222). This may be a pragmatic approach, yet an unabashedly naïve one; in relation to K-pop, it has been suggested that a specific type of “soft racism” may emerge out of the “fascination with the cultural craftsmanship of an under-sized, undistinguished nation in Asia in producing something comparable in quality to the ones that have been deemed singular to Euro-American nations,” which outside Asian ethnicities may further border on “a vicarious satisfaction aided by the sentiment of minority solidarity” or on “an amazement/admiration at the gifted exotic Other” that “helps assuage pain over the programmed inequity in the global creative industry” while meeting the

“need to be in sync with the emerging hot culture in an alleged era of Asia” (Choi and Maliangkay 2014: 13–14).

Alongside class, gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity there are other differences that make a difference in mythologising music through authenticity. In the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), Finland was represented by Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät (“Pertti Kurikka’s Nameday,” a.k.a. PKN), “a punk band known for its unbending attitude” and members who “just happen to be mentally disabled, or ‘retards’ as the vocalist Kari Aalto calls himself and his bandmates” (Nyt 2015). In addition to recurrent references to the band’s uncompromising disposition, in the press coverage one encounters frequently accolades for generic purity, unbridled energy and societal critique (e.g., Crouch 2015), all of which may be harnessed to the service of authenticity rather straightforwardly.

The phenomenal success of PKN provides undisputable evidence in favour of the empowering aspects of music for the disabled, and it may be argued that as a punk group, they have been perfectly *able* to produce credible output. As “a barrier-breaking smasher of prejudice” (Nyt 2015), the band may very well earn the extolment, but crucial ambiguities emerge when they are situated in the broader societal and cultural context of (dis)ability and minorities, not to mention the ESC stage. To begin with, at issue are the criteria of musicianship and the ethics of their evaluation; if ideas about ethnic authenticity can function as an excuse for “bad musicianship” (see Katz 2005: 43), to what extent would it be considered discriminatory to apply the same logic to forms of authenticity associated with mental disabilities? One can also ponder the significance of the musical genre here, as if punk rock would be somehow more suitable – and authentic! – for the musical expression of the disabled than, say, chamber music. This line of thought risks dismissing not only people with disabilities as worthy of only punk rock, but also punk rock as “music that anyone can play” – even Aalto’s “retards.” What is more, the case of PKN at the ESC adds to the complexity of exoticist and spectacular banal nationalism (see Billig 1995: 132–134), as exhibited in the competition where also minority (sexual) identities are celebrated. The fact remains that in the ESC, sovereign states (as represented by their public service broadcasting companies) compete against each other, and as a result the performances become, explicitly or inadvertently, related to questions about national identity. These questions gain in complexity when there are elements of minority cultural expression in the performances, particularly in relation to the dynamics of recognition and appropriation. Indeed, on the one hand the uncompromising authenticity of PKN has been linked to Finnish-ness, for instance, by claiming that “unconventionality has always made people stars in Finland” (Nyt 2015), with implied elevation of Finnish national identity as both tolerant and unpretentious; on the other hand, there is the immanent “Borealist” risk to exoticise the North (see Schram 2011) by treating the band as merely another group of quirky eccentrics from the northernmost fringes of Europe, as abominations not entirely different

from Lordi, the heavy metal monsters from Finland who won the contest in 2006. Yet again, instead of choosing sides, it may be more advantageous to examine the possible Borealist forces by considering “how cultural agency is performed and images reappropriated in what could be described as an obscure, ironic and crypto-colonial cultural context” (Kjartansdóttir and Schram 2013: 54).

Conceptualisations of musical authenticity are indeed multifarious and may derive their vitality from romanticist individualistic disenchantment, postsecular re-enchantment, premodern folk ideology, countercultural political movements, recreational consumerist innocence, street-credible turbulence, historically accurate imitation, exceptional singularity, various forms of identity politics and so on. What this makes clear is that links to mythologising music through authenticity are ubiquitous to the extent it is tempting to maintain that the notions of authenticity and the sacred are effectively inextricable. With respect to the multiple dimensions of the popular, the connections are similarly manifold, yet with an emphasis on the aesthetic, folk, partisan and postmodern manifestations.

The all-encompassing potential of musical authenticity as an aspect of the sacred may not come as a surprise once one remembers the more general points about authenticity as an indication of individualist re-enchantment and a fundamental moral ideal (Taylor 1992: 16; Lynch 2012). According to Taylor (2007: 473–475), especially since the World War II, the impact of consumerism on people’s self-understandings has given grounds to an “Age of Authenticity,” whereby the conditions of belief in the North Atlantic societies have been profoundly altered. This age is marked by the romanticist ethos and even a sense of duty to openly challenge established standards, particularly allegedly bourgeois ones, with the result of a rampant “simplified expressivism,” for instance, in advertisements encouraging people (or consumers, rather) to do their “own thing,” to be true to themselves (by buying the product). Taylor (2007: 485–486) further discusses the dominant consumerist “ideal of authentic self-fulfillment” in relation to a “neo-Durkheimian” approach towards “the imagined place of the sacred, in the widest sense,” where the individual and the right to choose are core points of moral reference as opposed to “paleo-Durkheimian” religious coercion. Pushed further by the new consumerist expressivist dispensation, maintains Taylor (2007: 487), the idea of the sacred – in its “post-Durkheimian” mode – expands beyond the conventional frameworks of church and state, and becomes uncoupled from political allegiances and ideals of order.

The Durkheimian dispensations Taylor (2007: 487–488) roughs out are nevertheless ideal types, and not intended as total descriptions but rather as indicators of historical shifts and the post-World War II prevalence of post-Durkheimian expressivism, whose availability alone is an important signal of how earlier ideas about a link between faith and civilisational order have become destabilised and conflictual, even if certain conservative coalitions and sects aim at re-establishing them. Also, while the new

understandings of spirituality and the sacred have pluralism built into them, there are still limits involved; hence, “they are in a sense political, and flow from the moral order of freedom and mutual benefit” (Taylor 2007: 489).

Taylor (2007: 474–475) does not discuss the old and new dispensations of spirituality in relation to music, apart from incidental remarks about records within the new consumer culture centred on youth with its “flood of new goods” and about music as one element of literally *fashionable* expressive youth culture, “giv[ing] expression to the personality, to the affinities of the chooser, within a wide space of fashion in which one’s choice could align one with thousands, even millions of others.” These remarks resonate to some extent with Jonathan S. Shannon’s (2003: 270) investigation into the global staging of world music where, he suggests, the epithet “sacred” frequently functions as a stylistic designator with a pronounced connection to authenticity: “sacred ... ‘styles’ of music trade in the currency of cultural authenticity and purity, and their promotion should be read as constructing a domain for consumption.” In addition to the marketing strategies that exploit “universalizing narratives of spiritual essence,” Shannon (2003: 275) continues, there is a widespread tendency to generalise all music as sacred, which for its part “must be understood not for its presumed truth value but in terms of how it allows for the commodification of diverse musical cultures as ‘sacred’ in order to serve the interests of the growing world music market.” In this debate, authenticity is intimately connected to essentialist ideas about locality and ethnicity; Shannon (2003: 275) concentrates in his treatment on Syrian sacred music, and concludes that its construction “on the world stage entails the simultaneous production of an idea of musical and spiritual authenticity at the site of the local and its packaging for export abroad as a style of world music.”

Similarly, Regina Bendix (1997: 3, 6–7), in her excavation into the formation of folklore studies in the USA and the legitimating role of conceptualisations of authenticity therein, points to the centrality of both consumerism and secularisation, either by creating “a market of identifiable authenticities” or by maintaining “the linkage to divinity” through “promises of transcendence,” however deceptive these may be. The similarities to the sacred get stronger, as Bendix (1997: 6) maintains that “authenticity in ever-changing guises” has become “the goal and cement of cultural knowledge – the origin and essence of being human.” She further notes that while her aim is to deconstruct authenticity as a discursive formation, there are more fundamental cultural and psychological processes at stake; the search for authenticity is not easily invalidated as it “arises out of a profound human longing, be it religious-spiritual or existential, and declaring the object of such longing nonexistent may violate the very core around which people build meaningful lives” (Bendix 1997: 17). The implication is, in the final analysis, that just as even the most remorseless non-believers have aspects of the sacred in their lives, to build one’s identity, either collectively or individually, on a conscious fallacy – inauthenticity – is both socially and mentally

unsustainable. Music, whether in its folk, early, countercultural, unique, commodified, “black,” Latin, Asian, monstrous or fashionably expressivist manifestation, carries the potential for both spiritual and existential longing that is integral for the conceptualisations of authenticity and the sacred alike. “Authenticity stems from conviction,” asseverates Taruskin (1982: 344), and continues: “Conviction in turn stems as much from belief as it does from knowledge.”

4 Religion and moral ambiguities

In August 2014, I was involved in organising a conference with the somewhat provocative title “Holy Crap,” signalling an aim at investigating the popular and sacred dimensions of youth cultures. As a pre-conference event of sorts, there was a Mass held by the Evangelical-Lutheran Parish of Helsinki in Temppeliaukio (“Temple Square”) Church, also known as the Rock Church, which according to municipal promotion is amongst the top fifteen attractions in the city (MH 2021). As the sobriquet suggests, a unique feature of the church is that it is built into solid rock, and instead of a spire it has a flat dome with a row of narrow windows, as well as an ice age crevice as an altarpiece. The church is also lauded for its acoustics, and hence a favoured place for musical concerts; in late 2018, the musical programme not related to the regular Lutheran services included the leading military orchestra in Finland, a gospel concert, two nationally renowned chamber music ensembles, a Christmas concert crossing over from middle-of-the-road entertainment music to operatic delivery and another Christmas concert with a jazz big band.



It appears thus that there are certain aesthetic criteria involved when designing the musical programme of the Rock Church. To be sure, there is a degree of generic diversity present, as indicated by the coexistence of gospel and mainstream pop alongside military and chamber music, yet it might be inferred from the supply that there is a tendency to favour fairly conventional ideals of musical beauty and quality. Yet on a closer inspection, one may note certain elements of transgression in one of the chamber music concerts, as the orchestra in question, *Avanti!*, had as its main number HK Gruber's *Frankenstein!!* (1977–1979), the “pandemonium for a chansonnier and an orchestra[,] a cornucopia of styles, stories and characters” (Avanti! 2018). Then again, the orchestra is known for its profile as an avant-garde group, albeit with certain inclinations towards crossovers between diverse styles and genres of music, and thus the inclusion of *Frankenstein!!* in the concert programme may not be as radical or transgressive as one might initially assume. Moreover, the fame of the orchestra as a highly trained artistic combo positions it into the realm of revered cultural expression, worthy of a venue of equal reverence such as the Rock Church. Indeed, the name notwithstanding, there apparently is very little rock music performed in the church, or not at all. Likewise, rap, reggae and other genres of allegedly more youthful and consequently of lesser artistic or national significance are missing from the list.

The pre-conference Mass, however, provided an example of other, supposedly more youthful, forms of musical transgression at work in an Evangelical-Lutheran Christian context. The Mass was a Metal Mass, a Lutheran service with conventional liturgy and including the communion, but musically arranged as (heavy) metal and, instead of a cantor at the organ, featuring a band with a lead singer and a group of backing vocalists. By 2014, this was not an innovation by any means, as the first Metal Mass was organised in 2006, and since then there have been over one hundred said Masses held in different parts of Finland (see MM 2020). Some of them have been tailored for an international audience as World Wide Metal Masses, with the liturgy in English but the hymns in Finnish. And yes indeed, while the music might at first sound a bit unfamiliar because of lengthy introductions with piercing distorted electric guitar blasts, it is hymnal through and through. While the celebrant at the 2014 Mass emphasised the nature of the occasion as a Lutheran service and not a metal music concert, he nevertheless acknowledged the lead guitarist's input for arranging the hymns.

The Metal Mass is not the only unconventional type of celebrating the Protestant communion, and one may nowadays participate in Lutheran Masses that are musically based on electronic dance music or punk rock. Yet one should remain aware of the importance of religious denominations when discussing the possibilities of musico-liturgical innovations. It may very well be argued that with respect to music, “the revolutionary idea of the Reformation was that you could sing to your God yourself in church, not just listen to a trained initiate do it for you in a secret, private language

which he understood and you didn't" (Gant 2017: 55). But could it be that in the five centuries since, the vernacular liturgies and hymns have become conventional and stagnated to the extent that new revolutionary ideas are needed? I am not a huge fan of either hymns or metal music, but the lead guitarist at the Metal Mass certainly came close to a trained initiate to me, performing in an idiom I am not too familiar with, more so than any average organ-grinding cantor could. Conversely, maybe it is the fugues and toccatas and the dragging delivery of hymns that constitute an alien mode of communication to many others, especially the youthful cohorts of society. Hence, the Metal Mass, among others.

With respect to the intersections of the popular and the sacred, the Metal Mass nevertheless provides a rather straightforward point of departure, as in it an aesthetic practice commonly considered as an instance of popular culture is combined with an explicitly religious doctrine and form of conduct. Yet as scholars of metal music, either in its heavy or extreme manifestation, are eager to point out, the genre is imbued with associations with ultimate power, even when there are no explicit references to religiosity. In his seminal study of "power, gender and madness in heavy metal music," Robert Walser (1993: 58–65), for instance, builds a great deal of his argumentation on the acoustic properties of the music as indications of an infatuation with sources of fundamental strength and force: distortion, loud volume, forceful vocal delivery, emphasis on both low and high frequencies, energetic rhythm and, rather tellingly, so-called power chords. He elaborates on the last of these musical parameters in a way that makes the intersections of the popular and the (religious) sacred quite obvious:

Power chords result from distortion of the chord voicings [of] an open fifth or fourth played on the lower strings. Power chords are manifestly more than these two notes, however, because they produce resultant tones. ... Such resultant tones are also produced by pipe organs, where high volumes and open voicings on very low notes are sometimes employed to similar effect: to display and enact overwhelming power—usually, in that context, for the greater glory of God.

(Walser 1993: 59)

In addition to the wall-trembling grumble of pipe organs, questions concerning the material conditions of any institutional religion become foregrounded in discussions about the religious denomination and the demographics of faith. Thus, a cynic might deem the musically unconventional Masses as a part of a marketing strategy that aims at responding to the declining numbers of parishioners, even if the "projects" in question are based on attempts "to approach young people on their own terms" (Moberg 2011: 43). But to organise a Mass with extra personnel and equipment is not without financial repercussions either. Expenses cannot be avoided, but sometimes there are also hefty remunerations involved; for instance, the

total revenue of the Pentecostal megachurch Hillsong exceeds AUD 100 million, of which the share of “music and resources” is thirteen per cent, amounting to approximately EUR 9 million (USD 10 million). In the 2017 annual report of Hillsong (2018: 64), it is noted that the worship music written by unnamed “Hillsong songwriters” has been translated into more than 100 languages and constitutes not only “a great resource for local churches around the world” but also “a financial resource for our church” in funding ministry outreach. It is noteworthy though that the income generated by “resources” diminished to a half in 2017 – which may be why the Senior Pastors begin the report by referring to “an ever-shifting social and economic climate” (Hillsong 2018: 5, 77–80).

To be sure, the “new” Protestant Masses and Pentecostal hillsongs are examples amongst many others pointing to the centrality of various forms of popular music in institutionalised religious contexts. An additional example of pivotal importance is African-American gospel whose religious base lies especially in Baptism and Methodism, while its past in musical terms is usually accounted for as inseparable from (rhythm and) blues and soul (see, e.g., Woog 2014). Also within denominations considered more conservative and even fundamentalist, there is an abundance of evidence about amalgamations of popular aesthetics and religious doctrines; in 2016, news about Catholic services incorporating heavy metal in Brazil were spreading (Watts and Sussman 2016), and the category of “halal pop” is becoming established within the studies of broader cultural and religious changes labelled “popular Islam” (e.g., Noor 2015; Farstad 2017).

Postcolonial dynamics of heteroreligious heresy

The notion of religion in its own right raises a number of issues regarding the appellations “popular” and “sacred,” complicating the associated multidimensional problematics further. Arguably, one of the most common threads in the writings of theologians and scholars of religion is that instead of providing their readers with a succinct definition of religion, they point to the multiplicity of defining criteria and tend to focus on the enactment of religion (e.g., Morgan 2007: 26–33). This is, admittedly, an approach based on social sciences, particularly in their anthropological and sociological manifestations with implicit emphasis laid on ethnographic methods, and with an equally implicit opposition to more philosophical or otherwise theoretical treatments. As a result, a circular methodology may emerge where “popular culture” is equated with both “everyday life” and “religious functions in contemporary society” (Lynch 2005: 164), without much consideration of the conceptual conundrums and implications involved.

Intriguingly, even in extensive landmark handbooks of religion and popular music working definitions may be ignored (e.g., Partridge and Moberg 2017). Thus regarding methodological choices, all one can do is to infer on the basis of individual contributions that crucial topics to be addressed

include the “persistent presence” of the Bible and other holy scriptures “in popular culture in all kinds of unlikely contexts” (Gilmour 2017: 67), theological approaches on and imagination induced by (secular) popular music, especially when performed or listened to “religiously” (Hopps 2017: 78), and the use of musical aesthetics “to achieve specific worship goals” (Wagner 2017: 90). Even if in addition to the “Big Five” institutionalised world religions – Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism – more local or alternative forms of religiosity and spirituality were introduced, one may begin to suspect that Christianity deserves the pole position not so much on quantitative grounds than quite simply because within it, the distinction between the religious and the popular is more meaningful than elsewhere. Instancing Jewish cantors performing for money and musicians playing at weddings, Jon Stratton (2017: 121) emphasises “the complex interweaving of the religious and the secular that has always been central to Jewish life,” and thus how both the cantor’s music and the wedding music “are both religious and profane, or, rather, that in this context the distinction is not meaningful.” Regarding the Islamic contexts, in turn, Swedish Islamologists Jonas Otterbeck and Göran Larsson (2017: 111) complicate the issue further by including in their conceptualisation of the popular, “first, music that is widely played, for example, in the streets and during festivals and popular feasts,” and second, “music produced as part of the rise of mass consumption and capitalism.” The first type of popular music would “obviously” include also “the so-called folk music,” while the latter “is popular in the sense that a large audience stretched out in time and space may consume it” as a commodity (Otterbeck and Larsson 2017: 111). More wood on the fire is put in considerations about the implicit or “rather concealed and ambiguous” nature of religious elements in Chinese pop (Ho 2017: 180), the possible “musical stylization” of religion into fashion in Japanese popular music (Milioto Matsue 2017: 169) and the position of traditional Buddhist monastic ritual music in “the global popular culture’s consumption of the spiritual sacred” for over half a century now (Cupchik 2017: 145).

On the basis of this, it is indeed pertinent to consider the extent to which the global consumerist interest in various geopolitically Eastern musical and religious practices constitutes, as Anjali Roy (2017: 131) puts it, “a neo-orientalist gesture that decontextualizes, deterritorializes and exoticizes non-Western cultural production for the pleasure of the Western consumer.” As a result, it may be argued, all things Eastern have become associated with elevated levels of spirituality as opposed to the mundane monetary materialism of the West, with the consequence of the modes of thought being adopted on both sides. Roy (2017: 132) continues her stringent critique by stating that while stereotyped imagery of India may have been tolerated by Hindu purists as cultural appropriation, “the decontextualization of religious symbols and concepts in the production of an oriental myth of the mystical East has been viewed as a blasphemous act.” She nevertheless maintains that such purist objections “display a deep amnesia to the

amalgamation of the sacred and the profane in Eastern music and fail to address the larger question of the Orientalization of non-Western musics” (Roy 2017: 132).

Along the same lines, Kalra (2015: 6–8) emphasises colonial modernity as the main cause behind the separation of the sacred from the secular. According to him, this has involved not only transcending religion by removing it from the political, but also elevating music through a “process of classicisation.” This process culminates on the ahistorical and Eurocentric notion of absolute music that borders on a religion in its own right and is based on the Orientalist epistemology whereby all that is not “Western” is lumped together to demonstrate “the universal uniqueness of Europe”, further leading to a strong association between the Orient and what is considered religious (Kalra 2015: 25–27). As a consequence, the European sacralisation of classical music finds its counterpart in the creation of “Clessicul” music through a colonial repetition and mimesis, not to mention the realignment and reframing of the religious in the aftermaths of the Enlightenment: corresponding to “the way in which Classical music relies on the expulsion of God in Europe” is “how Clessicul music is created through the arrival of God in colonial India” (Kalra 2015: 47).

The dominant idea of religious activities, whether within institutionalised religions or not, as somehow separate from other spheres of life may be further associated with “the postcolonial demand for a singular religious identity” (Kalra 2015: 63). In regions where languages and belief systems do not obey the artificial boundaries set by sovereign states, it is not just the linguistic heterogeneity but also heteroreligiosity that pose challenges and even threats to the established political order. One of such regions is Punjab that traverses the border between India and Pakistan, thus exhibiting also overlaps and tensions between a secular democracy and an Islamic republic. Kalra (2015) concentrates on the musical practices and categories of Sikh *kirtan* and Sufi *qawwali*, concluding that “music is one of the few remaining cultural domains in a subcontinent that is increasingly surpassing the tight boundaries established by colonial modernity, with violent policing of religion and suppression of heterodoxy, where the heteroreligious is still to be found” (Kalra 2015: 162).

To be sure, within the study of religions the connections between the idea of singular religiosity and the development of modern scientific thought in the late nineteenth century have been recognised and discussed in detail, for instance in terms of constructing (in)dependent variables for social and cultural research, particularly in the fields of ethnography, anthropology, sociology and psychology (Schilderman 2015: 2). A crucial lesson to be learned from Kalra’s (2015: 9, 170) critique towards postcolonial “epistemological tyranny” is nonetheless that the separation between the religious and the secular – and the political – is intricately connected to the “renegotiation and translation of Christianity” since the Enlightenment. A worthwhile reminder of this is also the origins of the word “secular”; deriving from Latin

saeculum, a “century” or “age,” in Christianity, it was adopted as a reference to “ordinary as against higher times” that for their part are demarcated religiously in one way or another, ultimately as the “secular age” between the comings of Christ (see Taylor 2007: 54–55). Sociologist of religion Jose Casanova (2009: 1063) sums “this particular historical process of secularization” as follows, linking it also to the global postcolonial condition:

“the secular” emerged first as a particular Western Christian theological category, a category that not only served to organize the particular social formation of Western Christendom, but structured thereafter the very dynamics of how to transform or free oneself from such a system. Eventually, ... “the secular” has become the dominant category that serves to structure and delimit, legally, philosophically, scientifically, and politically, the nature and the boundaries of “religion.” Moreover, this particular dynamic of secularization became globalized through the process of Western colonial expansion entering into dynamic tension with the many different ways in which other civilizations had drawn boundaries between “sacred” and “profane,” “transcendent” and “immanent,” “religious” and “secular.”

Thus, it may be inferred that just like the epithet “popular” is always framed with “implied otherness” (Storey 2015: 1), the “secular” immediately evokes the religious as its counterpart, whether understood more carefully in terms of public spaces, the separation of the State from the Church or a situation in which faith is but one option amongst others. While it has been commonplace to conceive the secular society on the basis of second understanding above, as “the falling off of religious belief and practice” (Taylor 2007: 2), the axiomatic conceptualisations of popular music rest significantly on the equation of the secular with public spaces, particularly when discussed in terms of mass production and consumption or “what we make from the commodities and commodified practices made available by the culture industries” (Storey 2015: 260). Certainly, the consumption of commodities may take place in secluded private spaces, yet the mode of production foregrounds public dissemination and marketing as widely as possible.

In addition, the religious is indeed a popular label, incorporated into multiple levels of education even in societies where the political system is allegedly removed from the spiritual realm. The search for an exhaustive definition of religion is likely to be as futile as the one for the ultimate criteria of popular music, as complementary and competing socio-historical, theological and philosophical definitions abound, accompanied by multi-disciplinary functionalist approaches and more recent “neuro-theological” empirical experiments (Schilderman 2015: 1–3). While the rampant post-secular re-enchantment may have increased the quantitative popularity of religious practices, there are also potentially significant epistemological implications, especially when considered in relation to the emergent debate

over so-called alternative facts. In this respect, concerns expressed over the disjuncture between academic research of religion and practiced beliefs in faith communities are warranted, as is the suggestion to carefully scrutinise the incentives and repercussions of academic relocations of theology within humanities and social sciences (Schilderman 2015: 4). Such suggestions may indicate certain elevation of theology above other disciplines of studying religions and could be rebutted straightforwardly as inattentive to non-theistic belief systems, yet they point to the centrality of “god-studies,” both historically and contemporarily, not to mention cross-culturally.

Indeed, the global popularity of religions should not be neglected. Also, regarding the dynamics of the popular and the sacred, the “theological consistency” in conceptualising them or rethinking their “universal human functions” (Schilderman 2015: 3) is of minor importance when measured against the simple fact that the notion of religion is constantly put to use in a variety of contexts and for diverse purposes. One of these contexts of course is music, and one possible purpose is to distinguish certain types of music from others, whether labelled “popular” or not. Methodologically, then, a crucial question concerns how to analyse the music-cultural role and location of religion; how do “religious” practices and modes of thought relate to the cultural, social and material resources of music, and what theoretical underpinnings are exploited in given situations?

Institutionalising the sacred, industrialising the popular

When discussing institutionalised religions, it is nevertheless appropriate to consider the extent to which the notion is in fact inherently tautological, signalling a presence of Eurocentric assumptions about religions as institutions to begin with. As Vicky Ho (2017: 175) in her introductory article on Chinese religions and popular music remarks, in the Chinese context religion is “a fuzzy category,” diffused throughout cultural practices and penetrating daily activities pervasively. She further maintains that instead of emphasising “institutional structures and systematic doctrines, and a distinct dichotomy between the sacred and the profane,” Chinese religions tend to be expressed as cosmic and ethical convictions, whether in the guise of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism or syncretic “popular religion” or their more or less interreligious “open-ended and hybrid” manifestations (Ho 2017: 175–177).

The notion of popular religion is intriguing, both as the counterpart of institutionalised religion and an implicit amalgamation of the popular and the sacred. In Ho’s (2017: 176) usage, it is synonymous with “folk religion,” yet without any closer discussion on the implications, let alone definitions of the epithets, for instance, and particularly with respect to the possible distinctions between the religion of lower classes or “the rabble,” common religious practices within the general populace and religion as a fundamental cultural process, “an activity or an arena of conflict” (Teiser 1995: 378–379).

The two latter expositions of popular religion may further be approached by emphasising their diffuse qualities above the institutional ones; the diffuse mode of religion refers to a situation where “beliefs, practices, and specialists are so intimately fused with nonreligious institutions that ‘religion’ cannot be identified as an entity *sui generis*,” whereas the institutional mode entails a presence and maintenance of “a consciously systematized theology, unique forms of worship, and independent body of religious personnel” (Teiser 1995: 379).

The notion of popular religion may be aligned in addition with “popular piety,” which has been addressed by no lesser institutional religious body than the Vatican’s Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, who in their 2002 *Directory of Popular Piety and Liturgy* define it as designating “those diverse cultic expressions of a private or community nature which ... are inspired predominantly not by the Sacred Liturgy but by forms deriving from a particular nation or people or from their culture” (DPPL 2002: 9). It should be noted however that in the directory, “popular religiosity” is defined separately as “a religious dimension to human life found among all peoples – not limited to Christians – that involves external ritual expression” (Francis 2014: 12). Whatever the terminology and definition adopted, at stake is a process of “dialogical inculturation” where the institutionalised doctrines are examined in relation to local forms of “religious imagination” and worship, acknowledging also the impact of migration and multiculturalism (Francis 2014: 14).

Regarding the conflictual tendencies of popular religion, additional ideas may be drawn from its association with Liberation Theology, informed centrally by Marxism and theorised and practiced in Latin America since the 1970s in particular and later also in Africa (e.g., Sands and Verhoef 2018). According to Michael R. Candelaria (1990), at issue are multiple levels of ambiguity, relating in the first instance to the various ways to comprehend the adjective “popular” but crucially also to the dynamics of alienation and liberation. These dynamics are especially manifest in the tension between the limited social efficacy of popular religion as “a conservative cohesive factor” and its revolutionary potential, or whether “it will be revitalized by revolutionary construction or it will stagnate by withdrawal from historical responsibility into the individualistic search for security and mere religious salvation” (Candelaria 1990: 7–8). With respect to the ambiguities of the “popular” kind, liberation theologians generally acknowledge the difficulties of definition, sometimes even renouncing the task and instead of any attempts at universal definitions, emphasising the study of concrete practices in determinate socio-historical conditions. What is more, in these discussions weight is also given to processes of acculturation and syncretism where, in the Latin American context, Indigenous and diasporic (African) belief systems and religious rites may intermingle idiosyncratically with strands of Catholicism and Protestantism. As a consequence, popular religion is characteristically marginal in economic and socio-political terms,

often degraded by the official religious establishment as deformed, deviant and decadent forms of religiosity (Candelaria 1990: 9–13).

Candelaria's (1990: 13) discussion on the problematics of popular religion is furthermore of assistance, as his "operating definition" shares a great deal with the music culture models; at issue for him is:

a system of values and ideals, and a complex of symbolic practices, discursive and non-discursive, enacted in ritual drama and materialized in visual images, all relating the human being to the sacred, originated and maintained by the poor and the oppressed.

Despite the evident disciplinary deafness, one may link this further to the-orisations of musical genres, especially with respect to conventions pertaining to value judgements, acoustic aesthetics and performance practices (cf. Frith 1996: 94). Interestingly, Candelaria (1990: 15) does use a musical example when demonstrating his conceptualisation of "popular culture," which for him is synonymous with "folkways" but with a distinct emphasis on the masses of lower social classes, thus containing "a nucleus of resistance against oppression" from the part of the ruling classes. The example in question is "La Bamba," which in the form of "Mexican folk ballad" represents popular culture, while when reproduced in the 1987 hit movie of the same name it becomes "an example of mass culture" (Candelaria 1990: 15). In the end, then, in spite of explicit warnings against strict definitions of popular religion on the basis of abundant ambiguity, the multidimensional conundrums of the popular emerge once again – only to be augmented with remarks concerning issues of translation and the importance of "nationalist and populist undercurrents," possibly even "the spectre of Nazism and fascism" they recall (Candelaria 1990: 16–19). Thus, one arrives at the multiple aspects and forms of the sacred and its moral ambiguity. It is indeed crucial to acknowledge the role of institutions, whether primarily religious or musical in quality, in maintaining hierarchical systems and procedures of material resource management, whether measured in financial currencies, surface areas and cubic capacities or full-time labour equivalents.

In dictionaries, one can encounter a basic distinction between the idea of an institution as "an organization founded for a religious, educational, professional, or social purpose" and as "an established law or practice" (OED Online 2021). This distinction is useful in further discussion about the sacred, as there is an explicit reference to the religious sphere, juxtaposed with an implicit stress on the non-religious forms of the sacred in the guise of legislation. There is also a difference at the level of abstraction to be recognised, as in the sense of religious organisations, for instance, institutions manifest themselves in very concrete forms, while as established laws and practices they are more akin to guides and models of activity. Indeed, there is an apparent risk of synonymising "institution" with "organisation," thus inflating both notions beyond meaningful analytical usage. To avoid

inflationary conceptual deployment, in the scientific circles of the systems theory, for instance, it has become commonplace to refer with “organisation” to “a particular form of social system which can be differentiated from other social systems like families, groups, networks, protest movements, or nation-states” (Kühl 2013: 6). Within these circles, the word “institution” might be even avoided to some extent in order to prevent confusion, yet there is ample discussion on institutional functions and levels of activity. Such functions relate predominantly on the so-called *façade* aspect of organisations, in that there is a heightened concern in them “with gaining legitimation within their environments,” for example, through creating positions that “conform with diversity ... even when it makes no sense at all from an efficiency standpoint” (Kühl 2013: 90). While all organisations include the *façade* aspect and hence institutional dimensions, there are clear differences between organisations depending on the level of centralisation and hierarchisation:

For example, a major corporation that is precisely programmed from start to finish and therefore reminiscent of a symphony orchestra can be distinguished from a somewhat more flexible and decentralized organization that might be compared to a jazz band, or a growth company that is constantly breaking the rules and in some respects reminds one of a rock group.

(Kühl 2013: 87)

To associate institutions and institutionalisation with mobilising external support “by presenting a polished image” (Kühl 2013: 87–88) is to stress the importance of “sets of social rules, state legislations, and criteria of social legitimacy” for organisations, not least for the purpose of determining the grounds of their functioning and measuring their success (Strati 2000: 111). The emphasis on rules and legitimacy provides additionally a link between institutionalisation and the sacred in a sense that extends beyond mere religious institutions, inasmuch as it involves assigning an organisational entity or activity with non-instrumental value; in the classic words of Philip Selznik (1957: 17; original emphasis), in the field of organisational sociology, “‘to institutionalize’ is to *infuse with value* beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand.”

The “popular” implications of institutionalisation may not be as evident, especially if one departs from the sociological class-based conceptualisation of the term with an emphasis on “low” mass-cultural qualities. It may nevertheless be argued that popular music in its own right is an institution of late modernity, exhibiting a certain value hierarchy where production techniques and commercial appeal reign over formal compositional aesthetics by and large. Such an argument is necessarily a simplistic one and neglects not only the conceptual multidimensionality, but also the variety of styles, production contexts and ideologies to be found within the taken-for-granted

usage of the label – or should I say *institutionalised* usage, as it has been apparent for decades now that alongside music academies, operas, philharmonic orchestras, museums and other “high cultural institutions,” there is an abundance of educational entities and memory organisations that centre on other musical repertoires than the allegedly “high” ones, evincing the institutionalisation and hence legitimacy of the repertoires in question, whether “popular,” “folk” or any other type. Moreover, regardless of the contrasted categories and value hierarchies, there are institutional circumstances and conditions to be reckoned with; the administrative and ideological peculiarities may be more overt when discussing the situation in conservative and even totalitarian religio-political realms, yet it is a worthwhile reminder that in Western secular democracies too, “musicians have to become adept at working the no less recalcitrant, and equally – if implicitly – ideological and politicized, institutional apparatuses of the major entertainment corporations” (Born 1993: 275).

The corporate context of production and dissemination serves as an additional thrust for a closer examination of the interlinkages between institutionalisation, the popular and the sacred. A key concept here is “the music industry,” one of the most recurrent topics within popular music studies. The tendency to equate the music industry with popular music is indeed a widespread one, signalling for its part an emphasis on the sociological dimension of “popular culture.” For instance, in his dissection of the international music industry, Robert Burnett (1996: 33) posits, albeit somewhat hesitantly, that “[p]erhaps the most fundamental aspect of popular culture as a concept is that it is the product of industrialization,” characterised in more detail by centralised production, privatised consumption, maximised turnover and, indeed, “secularity, despite the ritualized form of many popular events, from sport to popular music.” In more recent takes on the industry transformations associated with “the impact of digital technology on the musical economy,” there are in contrast indications of considering “popular music industry” as one sector of the larger economic whole (Leyshon 2014: 5, 84).

What has apparently remained the same is that “religious music” is not recognised in the academic study of music industries as a sector of its own, despite the multimillion sales figures involved, for instance, in gospel and contemporary Christian music (CCM) each. Similarly, within the more recent field of congregational music studies, issues of political economy and different forms of capital are only beginning to emerge (see Reagan 2015; Mall 2018). A central issue here pertains to the criteria of statistical classification; CCM in particular may be difficult to demarcate as a “catch-all term for popular music that features evangelical Christian lyrics,” including “variants of hard rock, dance-pop, adult contemporary, and hip-hop” (Lindenbaum 2013: 112). Indeed, as argued by William D. Romanowski (1992: 79) in his founding studies about CCM, when juxtaposed to conventional forms of popular music, including traditional gospel music, the “CCM industry ... was distinguished solely by its ‘spiritual’ dimension, displayed in

the lyrics without regard for musical style,” and that it stood out “in that it was marketed almost exclusively to a religious subculture, namely the burgeoning evangelical youth culture and not the longstanding traditional gospel audience.” According to Romanowski (1992: 79–80), the CCM industry emerged in the 1970s as “a quasi-parachute ministry” and was unprecedented in its scale of merging “religious music with the commercialization and industrialization of the popular entertainment industry,” resulting in complexities and outright problems in “intermingling of sacred and secular cultures [and] evangelical and capitalist sensibilities.”

Economic ethnomusicology, denominational differences and competing cosmologies

Another indication of the rigidity of disciplinary boundaries within scholarship is that only nearly three decades after Romanowski’s (1992) scrutiny, similar questions have emerged under the rubric of “economic ethnomusicology.” Anthropologist Jim Sykes (2018: 16–19), for instance, notes the prevalent separation of the economic from the artistic within (ethno)musicology and attributes it to processes of colonial modernity. His emphasis is on the notion of “musical gift,” as “the *act* of giving sound,” especially in “encounters *between* people who belong to different communities” (Sykes 2018: 16–17; original emphasis). This understanding of musical gift is further linked to historical colonial encounters informed by the “liberal imaginary of individual determination” that transformed “musical gifts as technologies of care into music as an expression of geographically determined communal identities,” also contrasting with traditional ideas about sounds as “public offerings to encourage deities to protect people” (Sykes 2018: 19).

The idea of giving and receiving gifts resonates with ethnomusicologist Anna Morcom’s (2020) discussion about action-based “exchange theory for the understanding of music” as opposed to assumptions of immanent value of music, which still prevail in Western practice and academia. By emphasising social relationships and (im)balances of power, she notes in relation to musical performances that “what is ‘given’ or ‘received’ is intangible and highly subjective, making it particularly unpredictable in its value, with potential for immense excess and thereby implications for obligations, attachments, or even devotion” (Morcom 2020: 2). She further contrasts the simultaneous consumption and production of live music with mediation and mass production (of “popular music”), yet without explicating why mediated givings and receivings could not be approached in terms of action-based exchange. This transpires all the more dubious and romanticised as she goes on by noting the centrality of acts, work and efforts in creating value “in any given time and place” and thus providing “scope to evade the restrictive frames of commercialization and commodification in opposition to ‘art’ that have plagued the study of music” (Morcom 2020: 3–4).

The romanticising insinuations notwithstanding, there is a connection to the sacred in her reliance on the concept of “inalienable possessions,” whereby the emphasis shifts from reciprocal exchange to inequalities, hierarchies and authority, “the creation of which relies on keeping as well as giving” (Morcom 2020: 5). This means recognising how certain possessions or “things,” whether material or intangible, become invested with “absolute value” that manifests itself not only in symbolic repositories of genealogies, histories and identities, but also in requirements of “cosmological authentication”; the action-based approach then leads to examining “how actions protect, preserve, and endow ... music with not just value but absolute, inalienable, or transcendent value” (Morcom 2020: 5). The echoes of Durkheim’s (1995) and Lynch’s (2012, 2014) ideas of the sacred reverberate loud and clear, considering the foundational role protective actions have in the rituals that demarcate that which is set apart from the regular social and societal activity.

Undeniably, once corporate media become involved in musical exchange, things get more complicated; yet instead of dismissing the institutional factors, it might be more prudent to consider their contribution not only to the obfuscation of the distinction between commercial and communal exchange, as it were, but also their role in the “particularly intensely patterned and codified actions” that are central for heightened aesthetic value, recognisability, memorability and durability that, in turn, are prerequisites for inalienable possession (Morcom 2020: 15–16). To downplay the importance of media in all this risks, in fact, mythologising action-based exchange beyond issues of transcendental authentication and energising effects, especially when taking technological change into account. With ever-innovated digital applications, one is likely to witness an increase in the forms of “intensive patterning” through which the capacity of performances to “retain a history” is guaranteed (Morcom 2020: 16–17), given also the prevalence and rise of (neo-)national(ist) sentiments worldwide. It may in fact be a tad surprising that Morcom (2020: 7) refers to such sentiments only briefly when pointing to the “idea of classical performing arts as national culture,” while in many respects it is the allegedly *national* value of music that is considered inalienable most often, manifested in works and repertoires whose “value is about how they are kept and guarded as well as given, passed on rather than sold or even given away” (Morcom 2020: 17).

A somewhat different approach of economic ethnomusicology is provided by Nina Öhman (2017: 11), who in her doctoral thesis “seeks to advance this developing field from the perspective of gender by demonstrating how gospel music provides a sphere for African-American women to perform a variety of creative functions as active participants in the capitalist economy.” Through addressing historical intersections of gender, racialisation and commerce as they become evident in the careers of Mahalia Jackson, Aretha Franklin and Karen Clark Sheard (of the Clark Sisters), or how “they have embraced the commercialization of gospel music ... to sell the sacred,”

Öhman (2017: 16) suggests that instead of accusing gospel of a diluted religious intent on the basis of its “increasing encounters with ‘the world,’” one should acknowledge that “gospel music performance has been a religious *and* commercial practice since its beginnings.”

The vicissitudes of African-American gospel thus serve as a welcome reminder of the inextricability of the sacred and the popular, especially in their religious and sociological variants, respectively. What is more, the role of the church as both “a central support base” and “a vital setting for building a career” should not be underestimated, as the church may function “as a training ground ... where gospel singers are groomed from the congregation to the choir, to groups, and to sing solo,” and an affiliation with a specific church may become a central component in their branding (Öhman 2017: 75, 79–80). At the same time, however, the musicians’ desire to “be commercialized on top of being anointed” (Jacky Clark Chisholm, quoted in Öhman 2017: 280) may result in suspicion towards and outright reprimands for excessive flamboyance, as perceived by religious traditionalists in authoritative positions.

Alongside gospel, the commercial value of religious music like CCM is unquestionable, recognised in the charts of *Billboard* magazine amongst other places. This foregrounds the quantitative dimension of the popular in addition to the aesthetic aspect – as CCM does *not* adhere to the styles of, say, free jazz or chamber music – but also the sociological dimension through references to “poor, rural, Republican-voting, and evangelical Christian media markets” as the basis of CCM fandom (Lindenbaum 2013: 112). Moreover, an indication of the quantitative popularity of religious music is its unstable position within the copyright system, attributable to a large degree to the frictions between religious and economic ideologies. Not much attention has been paid to the issue in the study of the music industries; in relation to the broader framework of copyrights, there are nevertheless incidental studies where differences and disagreements in interpreting the US “fair use” principles, for instance, have been brought forth, especially as they pertain to the juxtaposition between “the divinely religious purposes” of given texts and the profit they yield, also indirectly and in other than financial form (Kelderman 2002: 1115, 1139).

Inasmuch as popular music is conceived as the primary field of music industry and intellectual property rights management, the disputes over religious purposes as fair use by definition raise pivotal questions about the ontology of creativity and ownership. It may be suspected in fact that the frictions at stake emerge crucially from a difference concerning the fundamentals of creation. In the context of Christianity, the difference manifests itself in the juxtaposition between divinity as the ultimate site of all creation and natural persons as original authors of works of art. The latter stance is the one adopted, by and large, within Western capitalist democracies and inscribed in their Copyright Acts and other relevant laws and statutes. It should be borne in mind though that the copyright system – as its name

suggests – has been designed to serve primarily the financial interests of those doing the copying, that is, the publishing industry. Writing about the history and philosophy of copyright, Martin Kretschmer and Friedemann Kawohl (2004: 22) emphasise the convergence of an emergent sense of individualism, rapid mercantilist economic growth and the invention of printing press during the fifteenth century as the main factors behind the development of copyright as a legal issue. They further point to the centrality of religious censorship as a rationale behind the development of copyright protection (Kretschmer and Kawohl 2004: 23–24).

In subsequent years, the explicitly religious incentives became supplanted by theories about labour, property and authorship, leading to the dominance of economic, profit-maximising rationale where the concepts of creator and investor have arguably become convoluted (Kretschmer and Kawohl 2004: 33–34, 42–43). These arguments pertain distinctively to the alleged societal welfare purposes of the copyright system as a guarantee of the possibility to earn a living as an artist (of any persuasion). Extensive terms of protection beyond an author's lifetime may in fact be considered dubious in their disproportionate benefits for a select few and their offspring – whose creativity may lie solely in trumping up novel ways to exploit the legal system. Writing a couple of years before social media and streaming revenues, Kretschmer and Kawohl (2004: 44) present as their final *belief* that “the period of copyright expansion” is coming to its end within a generation as “copyright laws will be unrecognisable” and overwhelmed by a historical understanding that “supports arguments for a system in which short terms of exclusivity, encouraging fast exploitation, are followed by a remuneration right for the lifetime of the creator.” Much depends of course on the temporal limits of a generation, but it may be suspected on the basis of recent restructurings and reorientations within the music industry that a radical change is not likely to take place in the 2020s.

Certainly, whether deemed instrumentalist and derivative or not, there are musical practices that have been sanctioned within institutionalised religions. Here the cultural politics of transgression become paramount as a site of struggle over the ultimate boundaries of the sacred. Within certain denominations of Christianity, for instance, questions about revising the hymnbook surface every now and then. In 2018, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints launched an effort to update their *Hymns* and *Children's Songbook* in order “to unify the music used for worship by members around the world” with “existing, new, and updated music to meet the needs of members worldwide.” Regarding the future versions of the Mormon *Hymns*, then, this means removing “The Star-Spangled Banner” (no. 340), “God Save the King” (no. 341) and other national anthems from the English version, as well as patriotic songs like “Finlandia” from the Finnish one (no. 199). The Church nevertheless responds to a question about the inclusion of national anthems by noting that “sacred music of local interest may be made available to members by language through digital channels as appropriate

and doctrinally correct” (LDS 2021), thus indirectly acknowledging that there are also other sides to the sacred than the exclusively religious one.

Importantly, at stake are also transgressions that pertain to musical aesthetics; as the case of the Metal Mass demonstrates, Lutheran hymns, for instance, can be performed in heavy (or extreme) metal arrangements, and while some may find this doubly spiritually empowering, others deem it sacrilegious. The emergence of hymnal metal may be attributed to some degree to a perception of concomitant expressive and metaphysical forces: the Word and the (Distorted) Sound. This simplistic explanation is nevertheless hardly sufficient, and a more substantial analysis would require a more detailed consideration about the ways in which the aesthetic practice of heavy (or extreme) metal music is implicated in social and societal change, particularly with respect to youth alienation.

An intriguing counterpart for the Lutheran Metal Mass in relation to this is Muslim metal, raising questions not only about musico-religious transgression and change in general, but also about the role of music in the variegated Islamic societies and communities in particular. According to Mark LeVine (2008: 231), the importance of metal music, among other “extreme music scenes,” as a conduit for political participation in the Islamic public sphere should not be underestimated. To emphasise his point, he quotes Reda Zine, “a founder of the Moroccan heavy metal scene”: “We play heavy metal because our lives *are* heavy metal. Can you think of a better soundtrack to life in poor and oppressive societies like ours” (LeVine 2008: 231; original emphasis).

Writing about Jewish music in the USA, in turn, Joseph A. Levine (2006: 50–52) notes how in the aftermath of the Holocaust and later during the Vietnam War, synagogue cantors began to imitate rhythmic and melodic features of “peacenik” songs in their work, thus providing the classical Hebrew prayers with “the stress pattern of colloquial speech” through syncopation. There are also gender dynamics at play, as while the number of female cantors has laudably increased since the 1980s, they nevertheless face aesthetic challenges if and when attempting to reproduce the “high-flying vocal pyrotechnics” of the superstar tenors of the early twentieth century whose recordings have served as templates of the Orthodox style. Certain relief to the quandary has been available through “pop song influences,” as while they may have “diluted the ethnic flavour of synagogue prayer, almost eliminating the exotic modal intervals of sacred chant,” the overall aesthetic adherence to mainstream musical entertainment has paved the way for women in cantorial practice (Levine 2006: 52).

Also Stratton (2017: 129) points to the 1970s as a significant period for Jewish music, emphasising on the one hand the emergence of punk “as a precursive expression of the cultural trauma of the Holocaust as this trauma began to enter ... the cultural consciousness of the West.” On the other hand, the mid-to-late 1970s was the time of the klezmer revival, whereby the generic label entered popular usage and became one of the most well-known indicators of a musical practice, within which distinctions between religious

and secular or folk and popular are largely irrelevant. Since then, during what Jonathan Freedman (2008: 18) calls “the postklezmer moment,” klezmer, as “a resolutely impure cultural form” in its “relentless and even definitional hybridity and [its] ceaseless and even foundational revisionism,” provides possibilities for theorising not only religious difference but “the nature and properties of ethnic culture-making itself.” Such “klezmering” of national and ethnic identities involves not only abandoning conventional metanarratives but also creating possibilities for novel critical interventions, through ambiguous humour, for instance (Freedman 2008: 322, 325).

In addition to the debates within religious institutions about the supremacy of divine purposes over copyright-related financial remunerations, there are other cosmological models of creation and immaterial ownership available. For instance, in the Indigenous Northern Sámi vocalising practices known as *joik* (pronounced “yoik”), it is the subject of the song, traditionally a person or a natural phenomenon, who “owns” it and not the singer. One does not sing *to* or *for* someone or something, but one *joiks someone* or something (see Ramnarine 2009: 188, Hilder 2015: 5–7). On the basis of a distinct cosmological notion of ownership and occasional fierce debates over authenticity of *joik* as an auditory emblem of certain Indigenous identity, its connections to the sacred are evident. The connections become even more pronounced when considered in relation to the prevalent denomination of Christianity in the northernmost Europe, namely the Laestadian movement of Lutheranism, within which *joik* has been stigmatised as sinful and literally of devilish in origin (see Hilder 2015: 117, 194). Thus, many relatively well-known Sámi musicians were forbidden to *joik* in their childhood by their parents because of religious reasons. One of these musicians is Wimme Saari, “one of the world’s foremost joikers” and known also for his crossover collaboration with “electro-jazz experimentalists,” setting “the joiks into deep ambient textures and thudding techno-tribal workouts” (Blackstone 2017). In April 2019, Saari’s music hit the headlines of Finnish daily press for a moment as it was initially banned by a local minister of religion on the basis of the assumption that “the music is not in harmony with the message of the church”; a couple of days later, the minister revoked the ban, admitting that *joik* “as an art form was alien to us” (Lehmusvesi 2019). On the basis of the coverage, it remains uncertain whether or not the controversy resulted from the fact that Saari’s church concert was a part of an ethnofuturist art event.

Musical technologies of destruction

To write about movements might appear self-evident when discussing the implications of the religious sacred in the context of music or when discussing music in general; from a strictly physical stance, music (as sound) is vibrating air (or any medium) and requires certain energy input, often with the aid of mechanical or electric contraptions called musical instruments. Indeed, for a physicist, any instrument is essentially an energy transfer device, where the

initial human kinetic energy is transferred either directly or indirectly to the vibrating body which then makes the air around it pulsate. The basic principle remains the same regardless of the mechanical or otherwise technological sophistication of the device in question; a triangle is in this respect no different from, say, a grand piano. Yet as “precision machines,” the instruments are quite different, and it is more likely to find a two-hundred-page-long book on the physics of the piano (e.g., Giordano 2010) than one on the triangle – which indicates that technological precision carries certain cultural value and might thus be linked to the notion of the sacred. The fact that a number of physicists have engaged in a “quest for the secrets of Stradivari,” in turn, evokes the sacred rather unequivocally: “to understand and define the ‘soul’ of the great violins, like the best scientific and artistic inquiry, is an unending quest for truth, enlightenment and beauty” (Wali 2010: 131).

Yet at the same time, one can witness a tendency within institutionalised religions to treat technological change and development with suspicion. There are at least two sides to the issue, as on the one hand at stake is the challenge posed to religious doctrines and teachings through the intimate link between technology and science, and on the other hand, there are concerns over consumerist media technologies becoming more important than religion. Within cultural expression, there are various sensibilities towards technology. New gadgets may be greeted suspiciously within the industry whose main interest is in sustaining its market position, yet gradually these become exploited in the ways “to connect music, but not necessarily musicians, to as many listeners as possible and to turn a profit in so doing” (Garofalo 2015: 103). In addition to industrial equivocation, audiences opine differently, often along class and generational boundaries, though equally frequently on the basis of technological utopianism that may render the crackliest recorded sounds simply angelic (see Figure 4.1; Katz 2010: 51). Lynch (2005: 46–48), in turn, points to the ambivalences by noting how the Futurist movement in the early twentieth-century Italy “embraced machine technology as offering an opportunity for a new virile and empowered humanity – even to the extent of celebrating new technologies of armed conflict as a new level of human evolution,” while over the decades a prevalent theme in science-fiction cinema has been an “anxiety about humanity being harmed or controlled by machines.”

To this, one might add from within the realm of audiovisual entertainment industry the recurrent – or “popular” – portrayals of certain religious communities such as the Amish as technologically removed from the rest of the world in their avoidance of electricity and combustion engines. Within the film and television industry, representations focusing on isolated conservative groups “who live austere lives without indoor plumbing” or on the anticipated excesses associated with the *Rumspringa* period (Elder 2014: 6, 12) may be deemed favourable on the basis of a mixture of temporally distanced exoticism and socio-pornographic shock value; but as is so often the case, the reality is more multifarious than fiction. Thus, for instance, within the Amish communities, there are also “progress-minded groups who use land



Figure 4.1 Parahute Mermod Brevette apparatus for mechanical music with fixed pin barrel from the 1880s, in the collections of the Helsinki University Library and the National Sound Archive, Finland (photograph by the author).

lines or cell phones, operate sizable businesses, and interact freely with outsiders” (Elder 2014: 6). The diversity of practices notwithstanding, a foundational cultural marker of the Amish is arguably a resistance to socio-cultural change, evident also in their musical practices where emphasis is laid on what is “holy enough for Christians to sing”; as this remark implies, musical instruments are disallowed in general within the Amish districts, following Zwinglian interpretations about them as “nonbiblical trappings” introduced by the Wicked One (Elder 2014: 28–29).

There are curious similarities between these deliberations and those associated with certain forms of popular music (in the conventional sense). A pivotal example in this respect is the literally explosive hostility towards disco music from within the ranks of rock establishment in the late 1970s, culminating in a “Disco Demolition Night” at the Comiskey Park baseball stadium in Chicago on 12 July 1979, where disco records were actually blown up with “hordes of rock crazies ... tearing up turf and chanting ‘disco sucks’ at the top of their lungs” (Garofalo 1997: 348). The visceral anti-disco campaigns, spearheaded by proponents of hard rock and heavy metal, signal not only different attitudes towards – and understandings of – music technology but the amalgamation of aesthetic, economic and racial concerns, especially in the US context. Garofalo (1997: 5–6) summarises the shifts as follows:

Unlike earlier forms of popular music, rock ‘n’ roll incorporated the capabilities of advanced technology into the creative process itself. Far

from valuing the purity of the live performance, rock 'n' roll records consciously used the technical features of echo, editing, overdubbing, and multitracking to distort the reality of the performance. ... The emergence of rock 'n' roll, then, was characterized by a progressively more intimate relationship with the technologies used in its production and dissemination. This relationship continued as rock ventured toward art in the 1960s [when] rock groups spent untold hours in the studio experimenting with technological gimmickry ... Disco was further immersed in technological wizardry, becoming almost completely product of the studio. In live performance, the use of feedback and distortion ... has become institutionalized in heavy metal ... Rap has pushed the envelope still further, first by using dual turntables as musical instruments, and then by using samplers, sequencers, and programmable drum machines as essential tools of the trade. To the extent that these creative uses of technology have been accepted as artistically valid, they have pushed the very definition of popular music beyond a traditional European conception of music as a pattern of *notes* toward a conception of music as organized *sound*.

This succinct encapsulation of the technological shifts in popular music demonstrates that the attitudes towards technology are genre-specific. Thus the disagreements over the given type and form of "technological wizardry" are ultimately more fundamental in nature, relating to the wider historical, social and political circumstances and implications of the genre in question. If hymns executed with distorted guitars or ethnofuturist *joiks* create uncertainty amongst religious authorities, how come are the multi-tentacled wizards known as organists tolerated in churches and cathedrals, not to mention the myriad technological details included in the instruments they master? One is again reminded of Walser's (1993: 59) astute remark about the similarity of acoustic effects between a distorted electric guitar and pipe organs, especially as enactments and displays of overwhelming if not even transcendent power.

Going back to the "roots" of rock and roll, Garofalo (1997: 94) warns against a "quite fashionable" and even "self-righteous" emphasis on cross- or multicultural influences, often represented in the form of an pseudo-algebraic formula " $r\&b + c\&w = r\&r$." According to him, this formula has an element of truth to it in its insistence on rhythm and blues and country and western as the "primary styles that gave birth to rock 'n' roll," yet it undervalues not only the variety within the two founding styles but also neglects issues of gender and social class in favour of race and ethnicity (Garofalo 1997: 95). He nevertheless maintains in addition that "the African-American contribution" should not be underestimated through an inference that the relative value of the elements in the formula would be equal; instead, one should acknowledge the centrality of "variations on black forms" as the basis of early rock and roll, as well as the importance of "electrified" Chicago

blues and the jazz-gospel-pop fusions that “brought the traditions of the black church into the secular world of rock ‘n’ roll” (Garofalo 1997: 95–96).

The reasons for Muddy Waters to electrify blues may have been rather pragmatic, in the sense that the main motivation was “just to be heard above the din in the noisy honky-tonks and juke joints where he performed” (Garofalo 1997: 96), but it constituted an immediate aesthetic change. Garofalo does not dwell on the reception and evaluation of this change as opposed to the electrification (or electrocution, as some might argue) of folk music that took place at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival in the form of Bob Dylan with an electric guitar and an amplified band. For Pete Seeger and other folk purists, this was all but sacrilegious and Dylan was barracked off the stage; it may nevertheless be argued that the decision to go electric “cost him his authenticity but brought him a mass audience” (Garofalo 1997: 198).

Within a given genre, the interrelations between technology and cultural purity are further implicated in more distinct identity politics. As Frith (1996: 75–76, 94) succinctly puts it, there are conventions of sound, performing, packaging and embodied values (or ideology) at stake in every genre of music, and when the conventions are amalgamated into a single label – gospel, for instance – elemental value judgements are made with a variety of determining influences. In short, “the musical label acts as a condensed sociological and ideological argument,” with authenticity as a key value, whether deployed in social or formal terms, as being true to the community and markets or to the “musicological rules” at issue (Frith 1996: 86, 89; see also Fabbri 1982). Regarding racialisation, gender and sexuality, the anti-disco campaigns of the late 1970s provide ample evidence of how technologies of production and consumption became entangled with issues of racialised and gendered difference, and with anti-gay prejudice in particular. As Gillian Frank (2007) convincingly argues, the campaigns constitute effectively a reactionary response to the fundamental challenge posed by disco to the “authentic” mode of production and artistry of rock music at the time, signalling a crisis of heteronormative masculinity in the form of “discophobia.”

The moral concerns and outright panic associated with sexuality are familiar to popular music scholars, with the sociological dimension of the popular dominating through an emphasis on youth. In these discussions, there are usually references to conservative religious groupings (e.g., Frank 2007: 286), yet far less attention has been paid on the conceptual connections between such panics and the religious sacred. After all, it may be argued that sexuality constitutes “the primary ground on which human relationships are sanctioned as natural and good, or unnatural and wrong” through ideologies, taboos and rituals, and that as an immensely forceful factor in organising social relationships, sexuality is crucial for constructing religious meaning (Ellingson 2002: 2). Moreover, to consider how sexuality and thus corporeality are rendered meaningful is to foreground the material basis of religious beliefs. In some religions, a divine conception may be immaculate

but a conception nonetheless, while in other cosmologies deities may engage in diverse sexual acts with their fellow deities, human beings and other creatures alike.

Sexual encounters need be neither immaculate nor dirty, but they do tend to involve sweat and other bodily secretions. They also raise questions about physical integrity, autonomy and violence; and indeed, as institutions, organisations and movements conditioning the variety of material resources, religions invariably involve the potential of physical violence. This becomes manifested unequivocally in the continuous failures of sacerdotal chastity, as well as in situations where wars are campaigned in the name of the truest deity or denomination, whether with the support of official military forces or in a more clandestine manner. This kind of conflicts are by no means phenomena of the past, but instead only likely to increase as religious extremism, political populism and societal inequality continue to feed into each other. Music comes to the fore in these situations often in the form of Islamophobic insinuations and presumptions about music as categorically banned in Muslim communities and societies. Such misconceptions are complicated further by the difference between Eurocentric “music” and Islamic *mūsīqā* (al Faruqi 1985: 6), and while there admittedly are numerous reported incidents about extreme violence against music and musicians by the Taliban and the Islamic State in recent decades, it is entirely possible to engage in a scholarly examination of the “music culture” of such militant and fundamentalist groups as al-Qa’ida where the poetic and, by Western standards, musical genre of *anāshīd* is used to “enticing recruits, retaining members, and motivating members to action through emotionally charged music and messages that legitimize al-Qa’ida ideology” (Pieslak 2015: 18). At the same time, the authorities in Myanmar have tried to silence the Rohingya Muslims, both verbally and musically – and permanently. In the refugee camps in Bangladesh, the Rohingya have been “using traditional music to document atrocities and hold on to who they are,” yet with constant fear of being spied on and punished by the minions of the Myanmar government (Ingber 2019).

In the eastern parts of the EU, in turn, attention has been paid to the peculiar mixture of Islamophobia, post-socialist populism and Catholicism, and the “misguided means” in question “to raise the region from its current status within the EU as a semi-peripheral, semi-colonial appendage” (Kalmar 2018: 390–391); while there are not many news reports let alone academic analyses of the role of music in these developments, scrutinies into “patriotic rap” in the region have begun to emerge. Writing about the situation in Poland, Piotr Majewski (2018: 18) maintains that instead of considering patriotic rap as “a form of a grassroots, subversive cultural practice that empowers the disadvantaged social strata,” its emergence should be treated as “an element of a ‘legitimizing identity’ produced by the dominant social institutions to extend and rationalize their domination over other social actors” and the rappers as “pop-cultural ‘professional vendors of second-hand

ideas' ... such as nationalism, libertarianism, white racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Catholic fundamentalism" (see also Antoszek 2013).

Remembering the grotesque acts of musical violence

The extent to which this type of pop-cultural vending yields actual physical violence is uncertain, yet it is undeniable that in its close association with the overtly political "repolonising" attempts, Polish patriotic rap builds on an essentialist understanding of the nation "as an organic, biological, cultural, religious and historical community determined by bonds of blood" (Majewski 2018: 20). As events in Europe have demonstrated, the step from such understandings to annihilation can be short and swift. The amalgamation of nationalist, racial and religious ideologies and the potentiality of violence in Polish patriotic rap is furthermore a worthwhile reminder of the multiple forms and aspects of the sacred. In fact, in his theorisation of the sacred, Lynch (2014: 35) emphasises the importance of violence in unearthing and realising the unquestionable claims at stake. According to him, the sacred in a society is revealed precisely through "grotesque acts of violation," and it should not be confused with a simple hierarchy of values:

The sacred is not just that which we highly value; it is the meaning of fundamental realities around which our lives are organized. If we ask people what is sacred to them, they will tell us what they consciously value in their lives. If we want to see what is really sacred in their lives, we need to understand what they will kill or die for, what they believe can legitimize violence against other human beings, and what moves them with deep moral feelings of belonging or disgust.

(Lynch 2014: 35)

The crucial question has to do with the moments and instances when music constitutes violence. Some might suggest that for extremists of a select persuasion, a given type of music represents an act of violation to an extent of grotesqueness worthy of capital punishment, yet in a closer examination it is rarely, if ever, music as an expressive practice that is the sole or primary cause for actions taken. In any case, there is a great deal of ambiguity involved, as much depends on the interpretive positions and strategies adopted. The alleged Islamic ban on music provides a prime example, and the recurrent moral panics surrounding various types of popular music are similar indications of profound social and societal frictions that derive fundamentally from differences between generations, social class and cultural identity. One might also note how issues of ethnicity and racialisation play a significant part in these stampedes; virtually all genres of "black music" have been initially dismissed over the years within the Euro-American, "white" educated classes as morally corrupt on racial grounds. Currently, a prime arena for the dismissals is constituted by certain rap styles, as they have been

surrounded by implications about an innate connection between violence and blackness. Quite recently, related arguments have been presented by academics and judges alike about UK drill, for example, emphasising also the alleged effects of symbolic content over the increasing socio-economic disparity that affects racialised groups in particular. Interestingly enough, even when the broader set of circumstances and challenges is duly acknowledged, there is an apparent tendency to invest – or to mythologise – music with specific affective potency:

In many ways, the panic over drill is just the latest example of how music is singled out among the complex social factors that add up to crime in UK cities, just as grime was blamed last year for the use of the extra-strong cannabis strain skunk. ... Music remains a valuable means of self-expression, and, perhaps, financial reward, for black Londoners who are among the poorest ethnic groups in the city, with 35% classed as low-paid. ... Even so, [rappers] perhaps underestimate the emotive charge that music has, and its power to amplify, dramatise and spread what would otherwise be innocuous verbal sparring. Coupled with macho posturing, jealousy, and a lack of direction and opportunity in deprived cities, drill can – in its most wretched moments – be where violence is given a voice.

(Beaumont-Thomas 2018)

I am tempted to simplify this idea by noting that when alienation and desolation become coupled with *anything*, the chances for violence are on the increase. This is not to suggest that the aesthetic symbolic content does not matter, but rather that it is a crucial aspect of the music cultural formation at hand – drill, for instance – as through the specific materiality of the communicative practice known as music, it manifests and challenges the underlying power relations and belief systems in their totality. This is also where the genre theories become useful, particularly with respect to the possibility of transgression and outright profanation of the historically contingent conventions that have become to be taken as normative and absolute realities, or ultimately sacred in Lynch's (2012, 2014) sense. The lengths to which people are willing to go in order to defend (or demolish) genres of course varies, as does the nature of the sacred core allegedly under threat. Whether the grounds are primarily or explicitly religious, (anti-)subcultural or political, they can still all be exploited in justifying the mutilations and use of explosives in a given case.

There is nevertheless a need to distinguish music-related violence from musical violence or the use of music for violent purposes. In their dissection of music's "measured malice," Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan (2008: 3) have included separate sections on music accompanying violence, music in relation to incitement and arousal to violence and music *as* violence. Regarding the last of these, they emphasise the material conditions

in two significant respects: the physiology of hearing on the one hand and the acoustics of music on the other. “Music is not just an aesthetic or moral terrain” but sound, they maintain, “and when it inflicts violence it does so not only by virtue of what it means, but what it then is: noise” (Johnson and Cloonan 2008: 4). More specifically, when discussing music as violence, they point to the possibilities of using music as a sonic weapon to induce either biological or psychological forms of pain or both, through loud volumes and humiliating or insulting usages, for instance. This kind of usage rests again on “the distinctive phenomenology of sound within the sensorium,” as thus music “can become itself the direct agent of violence” (Johnson and Cloonan 2008: 148). With respect to concrete examples, Johnson and Cloonan (2008: 151–153) recount the ways in which music has been used as a form of psychological warfare by the US military in particular, in order to disorient and torture adversaries and captives through both sustained predisposing to high volume and utilisation of unfamiliar or assumedly unpleasant aesthetics. Regarding the latter mode of action, references to hard rock, heavy metal and rap music are recurrent in their discussion, and in the end they maintain that the aesthetic choices are by no means accidental, but indicate a somewhat deliberate use of “forms of popular music which have reputations for, and can be heard as being, aggressive [and which] may also be experienced as culturally aggressive by detainees unfamiliar with such sounds” (Johnson and Cloonan 2008: 153). Intriguingly, they refrain from connecting the examples and discussion explicitly to religious issues, even when the cases they refer to relate to the conflicts in the Balkans and between Israel and Palestinians, the so-called War on Terror and other incidents involving Muslim or Arab participants or factions.

The moral ambiguity of the religious sacred enters news headlines often, when at issue is the abuse of children by religious authorities, either sexually or otherwise physically. Yet the “moral necessities” at issue are historically contingent; in relation to this, Lynch (2014: 39–40) builds a great deal of his argumentation about the multiple forms of the sacred on the issue of child abuse, noting with reference to the systematic beating of children in the Irish Catholic residential school system in the 1940s, how that which “may be morally obvious to people at one point in time ... can become morally abhorrent in later times.” In these debates there is very little if anything at all about music, and one can only surmise whether ex-Pope Benedict XVI’s (2019) accusations towards the sexual revolution of the hippie era of the late 1960s as a fundamental factor behind the recent scandals within the Roman Catholic church, for instance, imply a linkage to psychedelic rock or other styles of countercultural music (see also DW 2019). The ethnomusicologist from Mars introduced by Nettle (2005: 190–191) might nonetheless note that similar acts of physical violence are not unknown at distinctively music-related religious institutions, namely music schools and conservatoires. Induced partially by the #MeToo campaign of the late 2010s, ethnomusicologists and other cultural scholars of music have begun to address

issues of abuse and violence in music, particularly in the contexts of music education and historiography.

Regarding the former, ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes (2018: 97) notes in his scrutiny of the assumptions about good music producing good citizens that there is a growing sense of the corrupt nature of Western art music institutions in particular. In addition to perpetuating social inequalities, the institutions may foster and shield direct physical violence, in a manner identical to that of the Roman Catholic Church:

The individualized and unsupervised teaching of piano, violin, voice and so forth allows teachers to get too close to students and, in some now very public and well documented cases, to abuse them sexually. The institutions cover up the scandal, the cover-ups themselves become as kind of secondary scandal.

(Stokes 2018: 97)

In these situations, the prestige of the institution clearly becomes more valued than the well-being of an individual, constituting a morally ambivalent sacred core at stake. At the same time, it often manifests a peculiar form of popularity, in the sense that while its eminence rests on exclusivity, the institutional fame itself is widely known, as are often the alumni. The Juilliard School of dance, drama and music, for instance, prizes itself as “a world leader in performing arts education” dedicated to preparing its students to “achieve their fullest potential as artists, leaders, and global citizens” (Juilliard 2021), and many undoubtedly are familiar with the name while only a few personally affiliated with the school. Indeed, another aspect of this type of popularity is the low acceptance percentage which, in turn, results from a relatively high number of applicants; in the case of the Juilliard School, roughly six per cent of 2,500 applicants are admitted annually. Amidst of the chosen few, there are such globally well-known artists – and citizens – as composer Steve Reich, cellist Yo-Yo Ma and actors Robin Williams and Kevin Spacey. Interestingly, on the school’s website, there are no references to Spacey, as if he, now in contempt for sexual harassment, never studied in the school.

The evident act of deliberate forgetfulness connects the issue with concerns expressed about bowdlerised historiography, especially in relation to acknowledging let alone prosecuting sexual harassment within the music industry. Here, following the lead set by Catherine Strong and Emma Rush (2018: 570), the (quasi-)religious sacred inherent in mythologising the musical genius converges with the economic sacred, inasmuch as “the systematic (ab)uses of power that can be deployed in an industry where protecting an investment – by preserving the reputation and freedom of an artist – could be considered more important than protecting women from predatory actions.” At issue is not just misogynist violence, as “similar questions can and should also be asked about racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other

types of criminal and immoral activity in the industry,” and in order to make a profound and enduring difference, “an interrogation of how and what we remember, and the development of an ethical framework for talking about damaging behaviours is needed” (Strong and Rush 2018: 570–571). The tendency to elevate rock musicians on the basis of their (hetero)sexual exploitations has reached mythical proportions, and in the realm of “pop,” convicted murderers and suspected paedophiles such as Phil Spector and Michael Jackson continue to be celebrated for their musical ingenuity (except in *The Simpsons*, in the case of the latter). Gary Glitter, in turn, somewhat paradoxically serves as an example of doubly suspicious conduct, as a combination of musical inauthenticity and sexual immorality, without an inkling of ingenuity that would save him from ruin. The double standards evident in the historiography of (popular) music signal on the one hand a crisis of legitimation, which has also spilled over to the academia:

popular music studies has faced an uphill battle over many decades to have its subject matter taken seriously, and as a result of the negative attitudes towards it has often focused more on the positive aspects of music and the recording industry.

(Strong and Rush 2018: 572)

On the other hand, at issue is the moral tension between acknowledging the profanities and the creativity; as Strong and Rush (2018: 577) put it, “there is a responsibility for those recording this history to ensure that these types of behaviours are not excused, minimized or left out of the record altogether,” just as they should be expected “to always include an acknowledgement of what artists have done, although this does not preclude a positive assessment of their work in other ways.”

The positive assessments of the work of the musicians in question do not apparently extend to the ability to create a fan base, as the notoriety of Gary Glitter and his fall from grace attest. One might ask what exactly is so different in his crimes from the ones (allegedly) committed by Jackson, and to what extent are the violations committed by the latter indeed justifiable by musical merits – or maybe more so by the widely disseminated (hi)stories about Jacko’s childhood under the overtly strict and exploitative parenting by Joe Jackson. One may also consider the importance of racialisation in this respect, as the King of Pop has undeniably provided an empowering model and precedent for many members of racialised minorities. The occasions and locations of Jacko impersonators I have encountered over the years are as innumerable as they are unexpected.

5 Subcultures and generations

At the beginning of my teenage years in the early 1980s, I entered a new school. When visiting for the first time one of my new classmates, his mother greeted me amicably with the words, “so, you’re the one who listens to classical music.” Admittedly, at that point my emergent musical taste was at least partially based on the compilations *Herbert von Karajan conducts the Philharmonia Orchestra* (1961) and *Mozart: Eine kleine Nachtmusik – Serenaden und Divertimenti* (1966) also featuring maestro Karajan. While the albums in question were there originally for the amusement of my mother, they soon found their way into the c-cassettes I carried with me, particularly when travelling with my “earmuff stereos” (as portable personal stereos were



called in Finland in those days). Some years ago, as my mother's turntable reached the end of its lifespan and she did not bother to replace it with a new one, the albums found their way equally rapidly onto my shelves and now belong to my vinyl album collection.

As it happens, whilst writing this I am listening to the first-mentioned, with its renditions of such classics as "The Skaters' Waltz" by Emil Waldteufel, "Radetzky March" by Johann Strauss I, "Tritsch-Tratsch Polka" and "Thunder and Lightning Polka" by Johann Strauss II, as well as the overtures from the operettas *Light Cavalry* and *Orpheus in the Underworld* by Franz von Suppé and Jacques Offenbach, respectively. Regarding the last of these, it is stated in the liner notes that "[n]o one is going to want [the] overture that does not include that delirious climax of the Can-Can, the best propaganda for Hell (or Paris) ever invented" (Mann 1961). The implications of Waldteufel's surname ("Forest Devil") are not mentioned.

Had my classmate's mother been aware of this kind of exposure and propaganda, she might have been less friendly when meeting me for the first time. In any case, my friend and I were "good pupils" amongst many others, and while they did not share my musical taste, we all were rather conservative in appearance – as opposed to the more suspicious "glue-haired" ones, who in those days were wearing either pins, studs and black marine boots or denim jackets with sleeves torn off and, more often than not, the face of Eddie, the "mascot" of the heavy metal band Iron Maiden, attached on the back. Depending on whether the hair was pointing up and sideways in bundles or hanging down way beyond one's scapulae, the group designators used without hesitation were, respectively, *punkkarit* ("punks") and *hevarit* ("heavy-[rock]ers" or "metalheads"). Some of my female classmates exhibited punk affinities, while the metalheads were exclusively male; there were some girls signalling fandom for Duran Duran, in particular with their clothing, but I cannot remember hearing a label used to separate them as a group, either neutrally or derogatively. Yet I do remember hearing dismissive slop in the form of "Duvan Duvan" occasionally, mainly by the metalheads. There was no shorthand for those who listened to classical music either, but I cannot recall being disdained or ridiculed for it – most probably because of my gender, as well as the gradual shift in my musical taste towards various strands of rock. Yet I might just as well admit, I never grew up to be either a punk, a metalhead or any other type of musical "subculturist."

Indeed, when talking or writing about musical subcultures, punk rock and heavy metal with their fan communities are amongst the most common examples, signalling a tendency to focus on "spectacular" styles with an emphasis on (possible) subversive resistance as opposed to earlier theorisations about shallow and submissive mass culture (Haenfler 2014: 8–9). With respect to heavy metal or, in more precise terms, the "new wave" of its British variant, spearheaded by Iron Maiden, it may be argued that the grotesque figure of the band's mascot Eddie the Head in its various incarnations on record sleeves and at concerts as a mummified Egyptian deity, a lobotomised

mental patient, a zombie and a cyborg indicates a presence of transgressive sensibilities that deal with non-human, non-natural or even supernatural forms of existence. Eddie the Mummy and Eddie the Zombie in particular foreground questions, myths and narratives about life after death, linking the discussion to issues conventionally considered as religious. Consequently, Eddie and by extension Iron Maiden have not remained outside controversy; for instance, on the cover of the band's third album, *The Number of the Beast*, Eddie is portrayed pulling the strings of the devil, and the overall Biblical theme induced conservative Christians, particularly in the USA, to label the band Satanists – based on intentional misinterpretation, some might say (see Brackett 2018: 288). Such controversies and inadvertent boosts to publicity are by no means unique to Iron Maiden, and related debates have in recent years emerged in association with countercultural anti-religiosity of black metal, resurgence of pagan musical practices and alternative spiritualities associated with electronic dance music, to name only some of the most prominent examples. In addition, the types and kinds of spirituality evident and emergent in these situations need not be radically alternative in the end; as a relatively new subgenre of (heavy) metal music, drone metal, for example, in its extreme distorted loudness and extensive repetitive – or meditative – slowness, arguably “pushes the limits of heavy metal’s sonic conventions, tests the endurance of listeners and invites descriptions which employ a vocabulary of religious experience, ritual and mysticism” (Coggins 2018: 2).

One might in fact suspect that when considered in relation to the broader implications of the sacred along the lines provided by Lynch (2012, 2014) in particular, any genre of music, whether “popular” or not, would manifest its own “sacred dynamics.” These may occasionally be explicitly linked to institutional religious doctrines – as in the case of (Christian) gospel and (Islamic) *anashid* – but emerge more often in fierce debates about origins, authenticity and appropriation. Questions about transgression are a central component in these disputes, in terms of both inauthenticity and innovation, and contribute further to discussions about the formation of subcultural identities. In one of the earliest attempts to “tak[e] seriously the idea that beat-driven popular music and its attendant youth subcultures can be understood as religious phenomena,” Robin Sylvan (2002: 8–9) maintains that at the core of the issue is the connection between the expressive forms and adolescence as a transitional period where aspects of liminality enmesh with various corporeal initiatic trials, rendering the musical youth subcultures in question “danced, embodied religions employing beat-driven music in communal, ritual contexts to produce ecstatic, quasi-possession states.” He exemplifies the variety of the “danced” qualities in question by discussing the religious dimensions of the Grateful Dead and their followers the “Deadheads,” as well as those to be found in electronic dance music, heavy metal and hip hop. Indeed, the centrality of genres in the subsequent related accounts is notable, suggesting an emphasis on the ideological conventions

involved (cf. Frith 1996: 94; Storey 2015: 2–5). Despite the inconstancy and volatility of the embodied value judgements within a given genre, this quite apparently is a fairly effortless way of addressing the interrelations between the religious sacred and popular culture. In addition to Sylvan's (2002) three explicit genres and psychedelic music epitomised by the Grateful Dead, similar attention has been given to pop and rock, punk and hardcore, reggae, folk, country, blues and jazz, goth, ambient, and music on the "religious screen" (e.g., Partridge and Moberg 2017).

The genre-based discussion points plausibly to the problems of a schematic separation between "popular" and "religious" music, yet raises additional questions concerning the Eurocentric legacy of the labelling and conceptual compartmentalisation in general. This becomes particularly pronounced in the absence of theoretical takes on genre classification, at least for two reasons. First, if the religious is a facet of ideological genre conventions while genres are a key mechanism to demarcate spheres of popular culture, how is it possible to maintain a meaningful distinction between religion and popular culture? Well, it is not. Second, there is the risk of conceiving the "non-Western" and particularly the "Oriental" manifestations of a given genre as inherently more spiritual and religious in nature, without considering the ideologies and politics of postcolonial modernity at stake (Kalra 2015: 26–27, 62–63). In relation to this, one might consider how studies about popular music and Islam, Hinduism and other types of "non-Western" religiosity or spirituality provide useful points of departure for a closer inspection of the importance of the (religious) sacred for theorising musical genres further. For instance, in their take on the "dominant Islamic views on music in general and popular music in particular," Otterbeck and Larsson (2017: 111) begin with the problems of defining what is "popular" in the Islamic context, moving then towards the quandaries over "music" as a particular category of sound whose definition is less dependent on the aesthetic properties than the theological interpretations over its function.

These caveats notwithstanding, the "loose" category of popular music (Frith 2004a: 3) may serve to some as an indication of similar forces at play. Moberg and Partridge (2017: 8), for instance, subscribe to the straightforward position that popular music, in its secular apparition, is typically transgressive, as it "articulates the profane in the contested spaces of the modern world" and as it has often been "composed at the liminal edges of hegemonic culture, on the rejected periphery, it has always, in varying degrees, constituted a threat to the sacred centre." Even if they appropriately note that not all types of popular music fulfil the criteria and that there is political significance in transgression, they emphasise the transgressive qualities of popular music as if it is the primary if not the only musical realm with such properties. "Within the liminal cultures of popular music," they maintain further, "the power of the hegemonic sacred is weakened, interrogated and challenged" and understanding the political implications involved "helps us to grasp its affective force and its appeal within the liminal

lifeworlds of youth culture” (Moberg and Partridge 2017: 8). Alongside the overall stress on the transgressive core of popular music, the musical category in question becomes conceptualised as a youthful one. This is by no means unique, and only relatively recently have questions related to ageing become recognised as pertinent in popular music studies. As Forman (2012: 245) puts it, “in much of the research among popular music scholars the emphasis is not on age *per se*, but on *youth* specifically, whether as a generation, as a market demographic, as an audience formation, or as an array of subcultures.”

Other central musical phenomena referred to in the style-based subcultural theorisation have included goth and, especially more recently, rap as the musical output of the cultural formation known as hip hop – to the extent it is possible to consider hip hop studies as a subfield of subcultural studies (Bennett and Waksman 2015: 3). The position of rap in these theoretical musings is particularly significant because of two reasons: on the one hand, especially in its “gangsta” manifestations, it has forcefully reintroduced youth delinquency and actual criminal activity in the debate instead of uncritical celebration of style; on the other hand, it has brought forth questions about the importance of racialisation when discussing subcultural formations. To be sure:

while rap has been framed negatively, as a contributor to an array of social problems, crime and delinquency in particular, it has also been celebrated and championed as an authentic expression of cultural resistance by underdogs against racial exploitation and disadvantage.

(Tanner et al. 2009: 694)

In addition, even if the delinquent and resistant qualities of the genre have been associated with post-1970s African-American sensibilities in segregated urban areas within US metropolises, its global reach since the late 1980s, at the latest, has been readily acknowledged, to the extent that to characterise rap as “a global youth subculture” does not come across as a contradiction in terms. Building on the notion, popular music scholar Tony Mitchell (2003: 41) for one maintains that unlike “the seemingly highly fluid, mobile, transient and fragmentary ‘postmodern’, border-shifting subcultures ...”, hip hop represents a far more dogmatically entrenched, stable subculture” that has spread virtually all around the world. Indeed, while the global community known as the Universal Zulu Nation is devoted to hip hop’s Do-It-Yourself ethics, ideals of universal authenticity particularly in the form of “street credibility” and alternative “public” pedagogical dimensions, Mitchell (2003: 42) pays specific attention to various localised or “indigenised” manifestations of rap and hip hop, and warns against mystifying the cultural formation “into a quasi-religious cult of self-dedication and identity submission.” Indeed, it may be worth one’s while to consider, in addition to the violent tragedies and subcultural resistance, “the dynamism

that underlies processes of localization” to the extent “we would do better to talk of global Hip Hops” – which, in turn, can be “highly critical of dominant themes in global Hip Hop, in particular, features of violence, consumerism, and misogyny” (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 30–31).

As a racialised genre, rap provides a fertile base for scrutinising how the popular and the sacred intersect. In addition to examining the ways in which the notion of race is implicated in constructing popularity, especially through audience demarcation, and sanctifying certain types of alleged authenticity, its conceptual intimacy with “uncivilised” modes of action such as violence and misogyny foregrounds moral ideals and is hence linked to the notion of the sacred as delineated by Lynch (2012, 2014). To a degree, the moniker Universal Zulu Nation, indicating accredited members of the global hip hop community, implies a fundamental presence of racial violence, inasmuch as it derives from a positive evaluation of the collective strength – and eventual defeat – of the unidentifiable “Zulu” in the 1964 film of the same name (UZN 2016). The film does not exhibit gendered violence or hatred explicitly – unless one considers the almost total exclusion of women in these terms – but Universal Zulu Nation has received related critique and condemnation in the mid-2010s due to the child molestation allegations against its founder, Africa Bambaataa (orig. Kevin Donovan), resulting also in internal disputes and restructurings within the organisation (see, e.g., Rys 2016).

Similar violent intimacies exist arguably in the realms of heavy metal and punk rock, by and large, though with respect to racialisation they evince more a tendency to not conceive whiteness as a racial category of cultural identification and labelling. Admittedly, in the historiography of punk it is significantly more likely to encounter female artists than in that of heavy metal or rap, yet it has been noted how in the hardcore “straight edge” communities, for instance, while challenging conventional ideas of masculinity through abstinence, there is a strong tendency to celebrate “a hypermasculine side based on glorifying ‘hardness’ and ‘control’” as well as on questioning female subculturists’ motivations and excluding them from participation, at least partially (Haenfler 2014: 75–76).

The popularity of youthful moral panics

Racial, sexual or gendered violence is of course by no means unique to sub-cultural formations, yet the topic surfaces frequently in the guise of moral panic from the part of conservative adult establishment. Here, the implications of the prefix “sub” become paramount, especially through its historical connections to criminal gangs and youth delinquency as well as via the later emphasis on “subordinate, subaltern and subterranean” qualities involved (Thornton 1997: 4); in other words, it points to questions about social, political and aesthetic hierarchies and values, insinuating there indeed are forms and types of cultural activity that are best kept away from public

or evaporated entirely. Indeed, some (might) say they are inherently and ultimately *evil*, not so much from underground but from the underworld itself. While the moral panics associated with subcultural genres of music are often manifested in such religious terms, they may emerge also in the form of more general concern or “worry” about societal norms and ethics as these become contested by new, often youthful, cultural practices. Equally often, the concerns and worries are framed as pertaining to the well-being and moral fibre of the young ones, to saving them from themselves, as the phrase goes. Thus, one is amidst the collective moral commitments and anxieties that are inseparable from the notion of the sacred (Lynch 2012: 128), in the context of the sanctity of age in particular.

Indeed, it may be argued that the centrality of subcultural theorisation in popular music studies and the prevalence of “spectacular specifics” within subcultural studies (Hodkinson 2012) constitute a major factor behind the straightforward association between popular music and the youth. Conversely, the notion of “youth music,” when implemented, translates, by and large, as a synonym for popular music, though often with an emphasis on contemporaneous rather than historical forms of musical expression. Consequently, the youth as a demographic category is invested with a substantial amount of agency with respect to the creation and emergence of new forms of expression on a collective level. In the historical narratives, it is the youth that forms the basis for the creation and appreciation of a given type of popular music, whether one is dealing with the rock and roll “baby-boomers” in the late 1950s, working-class “punks” in the late 1970s, segregated African-American “gangsta” rappers a decade later or any other major genre of music. There is no denying that several key individuals were in their late teens or early twenties as the musical and cultural shifts in question took place, yet at the same time numerous “old” people have contributed to the change. Regarding the “revolutionaries” of rock and roll, for instance, Bill Haley was thirty years of age as he was rocking around the clock and the North Atlantic world. In addition, while the majority of artists may have been in their twenties, in the managerial world it has always been more likely to encounter more “mature” agents of change – even if change itself has not been the primary incentive for their decisions and actions. A central figure involved in the story of Sex Pistols, the band’s manager Malcolm McLaren was thirty-one at the time of the release of their first album, quoted a year earlier in the music press saying that “rock is fundamentally a young people’s music ... [a]nd a lot of kids feel cheated. They feel that the music’s been taken away from them by that whole over 25 audience” (Kent 1976: 27). Another well-known story is that of record producer Sam Phillips, (in)famous for his desire in his early thirties to become a millionaire by finding “a white man with ‘the Negro sound and the Negro feel’” and after allegedly finding the person in the form of one Elvis Aron Presley, signing him off to another company for roughly one-thirtieth of a million (see, e.g., Starr and Waterman 2006: 63).

Presley's career serves as a reminder of how popular musical creativity tends to be celebrated as a youthful phenomenon, complying with an Aristotelian dramatic arch of sorts where the early years of roughness either signal originality and purity or lead to an apex of expressive maturity, followed inevitably by decades of decay. In the historiography of popular music, it is not uncommon to encounter an emphasis on "the freedom and rawness" of Presley's early recordings as:

the expression of a young white singer who is looking with optimism toward an essentially unbounded future, flush with new possibilities for stylistic synthesis that would help assure both intensely satisfying personal expression and an unprecedented degree of popular success.

(Starr and Waterman 2006: 65)

His later years, in turn, as a "B-movie star turned Las Vegas spectacle" (Bertrand 2007: 64) may pass unnoticed. Centrally, at issue here is the historiographical evaluative agency; whereas for some "Presley symbolized the twentieth-century version of the heroic pioneer blazing trails into an unknown frontier, an unlikely rebel who set the stage for a countercultural insurgency that later would shake the sixties," for others he "was less about innovation and more about continuation, namely the perpetual exploitation and misappropriation of black labor and artistry" or merely an unfashionable caricature, "an uncouth and untalented truck driver ... incapable of achieving historical significance" (Bertrand 2007: 63–64). None of these include the assessments by the Las Vegas audience, and thus the possible perceptions of his "casino creativity," as it were, remain unknown or at least unacknowledged. Had the same audience been asked, let alone given the possibility to narrate and publish its version of popular music history, also the immensely popular – in the quantitative sense – figure of Władziu Valentino Liberace might feature more centrally and not a mere point of reference for artists such as Elton John (see Garofalo 1997: 302).

The centrality of emergent and therefore, at least potentially, subcultural youthful creativity for conceptualisations of popular music becomes apparent in addition when considered in juxtaposition with the apparent creative powers of jazz and classical musicians. According to acclaimed jazz historian Ted Gioia (2011: 312), for example, at forty-four Miles Davis "legitimized a whole new area of exploration and experimentation for jazz musicians" with the "raw, unfiltered music" of *Bitches Brew* (1970), "the father of 1970s fusion." In the field of Western classical – or art – music, in turn, conductors in particular tend to mature until their demise; one of the unquestioned superstars of this sphere of music, the aforementioned Herbert von Karajan, died only within three months of his resignation at the age of eighty-one. A decade earlier, this "personality ... of extraordinary complexity" (Galo 2001: 387) took an active part in the development of the compact disc – or at least lent his fame and talent for the purpose. Additionally, the

extent to which his relationship with the Nazi regime and the post-war debates over the matter contributed to the complexity remains unsettled.

The intimacy between the youth and the popular is on the basis of these examples alone a matter of cultural contingency, signalling a particular type of valorisation of a certain age cohort in relation to distinct expressive practices. Nevertheless, to cherish youth leads often to ambiguous manifestations, as evinced by the recurrent moral panics, which, in turn, provide a route towards conceptualisations of the sacred. Furthermore, regarding the material plane of the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music, the notion of youth (or age or generational difference) is instructive due to differences in the level of abstraction. This is to say while there are various ways to define youth, it is, unlike the popular and the sacred, inextricably tied to a particular aspect of human existence and physiology even, namely ageing. In many parts of the world, there are legal age-based restrictions on marriage, operating motor vehicles and using alcohol. Yet in recent decades, such rigid definitions of youth have been supplemented by ones where emphasis is laid on attitudes, values and ways of life. As sociologists Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson (2013: 2) note, since the 1980s, “the straightforward equation of youth cultures with the young has become more difficult to sustain. Many of [the] groupings once unproblematically referred to as youth cultures are now increasingly multigenerational.”

Alongside internal generational issues, youth cultures become complicated when examined against the notions of the popular and the sacred. Regarding the former, there is a risk to treat all forms of youth culture as instances of popular culture – which would downplay not only the generational dynamics of popular culture but also the cultural variety of young people’s activity. Here, any cultural grouping of young people that is organised around or within conservative religious strands provides a case in point, not to mention students in institutions of higher music education where in the curriculum references to “popular music” are often marginal at best. Indeed, there are youngsters who grow up to dislike popular music in its conventional sense, and it is even more obvious that *all* youngsters grow up to dislike *certain* types of popular music. How this happens is still largely an uncharted area of research, hindered pivotally by a lack of ethnographic studies of “localised everyday interactions” and “a focus on symbolic as opposed to actual resistance [which] has meant that artefacts such as music have been bestowed with meanings exclusively applicable to youth *against* rather than *within* parental cultures” (Laughey 2006: 4).

Regarding the sacred aspects, in turn, the social category of the youth is crucial in notable ways. One of these pertains to the notion of the post-secular age, whereby it is maintained that while institutionalised religions attract less people nowadays, alternative forms of spirituality have emerged, and often it is young adults who are the most active agents within these new religious movements (NRMs) or “pop cults” (see, e.g., Sylvan 2002: 8–9; Till

2010: 173–174). Regarding religious shifts in general, Sylvia Collins-Mayo (2010: 1), in turn, notes that young people are the agents of change and therefore “[i]t is their engagement with religion, religious ideas and institutions that tell us how resilient beliefs and practices are, and how religions might adapt, transform and innovate in relation to wider social and cultural trends.” Furthermore, in all societies and communities, the youthful years constitute a transitional phase one way or another, a phase that is conditioned by diverse age-based regulations. The age limit for operating different motored vehicles and types of alcohol varies, and may be yet something else for those wishing to be sterilised without a medical reason.

Issues of procreation are indeed significant when discussing youth as a transitional social category and in relation to the sacred. Traditionally, there have been numerous rites of passage associated with the coming of age, and adolescence and questions about sexual maturation that surround it have frequently constituted a basis for moral concerns or outright panics on the part of the adult establishment. A case in point is the Parents (*sic*) Music Resource Center (PMRC) that was formed in 1985 in the USA by a group of politically influential women, leading to a Senate hearing and eventually to the introduction of the “Parental Advisory: Explicit Content” sticker to be attached on the cover of recordings that were deemed morally dubious. The PMRC even released a list of songs they found the most objectionable, known as the Filthy Fifteen; the grounds for this denunciation included sex, violence, alcohol and drugs – and occult. In 2015, the music magazine *Rolling Stone* revisited the debate on its thirtieth anniversary, with recurrent responses from the artists in question maintaining that the sticker served more as a sign of approval and an inadvertent tool for promotion than a warning. Regarding the one song in the list with the proposed “O” (for occult) rating, namely “Possessed” by Venom, the band’s frontman Cronos (a.k.a. Conrad Lant) reflected back by noting how the PMRC:

wasted their time ... and for me, well, that album wasn’t doing too well when it was first released, actually, but after their fantastic marketing scheme, it picked up and started selling very well, so thanks for that, PMRC. All they achieved was advertising hardcore underground music.
(quoted in Grow 2015)

Furthermore, the intervention of the PMRC foregrounds also the ways in which apparently solely moral concerns expressed by public interest groups (PIGs) may be linked to party politics and consequently to debates over media regulation, freedom of expression (or censorship) and, ultimately, to the financial profit-seeking of the entertainment industry. Arguably, the PIG in question “succeeded in melding entertainment with politics to such a degree that the Congressional hearings became must-see TV,” while failing in its actual objectives and unintentionally helping in creating markets for gansta rap in particular (Fontenot and Harriss 2010: 577–578).

Links between youth, the popular and the sacred do not end here. Alongside the general moral concerns over young people's cultural activities and products, the younger the humans in question, the stronger the protective and prohibitive attitude tends to be. In this sense, it is possible to note the existence of "sanctity of children" specifically, which rests on the idea that children are by definition morally pure creatures who should be protected from the evils of the world. Yet when discussing the interrelationships between children and (commercial) popular culture, it has been suggested that in recent years, the tension between "sacralised" children and "profane" markets has diminished, and in fact that because of the elision of toys and other forms of children's entertainment with "the enchanted landscape of childhood," the children's market becomes naturalised and sacralised. Put another way, currently "the 'dark secrets' from which children's innocence must be protected are not sexual, but industrial," whether the latter have to do with exploitation of labour or maximising copyright control (Langer 2004: 253, 264).

Scenes of extreme aesthetics

Alongside an emphasis on young age, scholars and critics of subcultural studies have noted a predominance of white male protagonists in the accounts provided, accompanied often with a particular interest towards working-class sentiments (see, e.g., Laughey 2006: 24–25). It is not until the emergence of a "post-subcultural" theorisation in the twenty-first century that issues of ethnicity, gender and social class have been problematised more thoroughly within the field of research. A specifically important consequence of this discussion is the debate over the usefulness and validity of the notion of subculture to begin with. For some, the notion is constrained by rigid and often empirically unfounded assumptions about coherence and solidarity, useful only for its possible heuristic value; instead of such an emphasis on traditional permanent group identities, it would be more appropriate to address the phenomena at stake by focusing on cultural fluidity and the processes of selective "neo-tribal" identification characteristic to late modernity (Bennett 1999: 605–606). Additional related and competing central concepts include "scene" and "lifestyle," the former pointing to the spatial dynamics of music reception and localised sensibilities and articulations of taste with porous genre boundaries and also implicated in "trans-local" and "virtual" networks (Straw 1991; Peterson and Bennett 2004). Lifestyle, in turn, refers here to "the sensibilities employed by the individual in choosing certain commodities and patterns of consumption and in articulating these cultural resources as modes of personal expression" (Bennett 1999: 607).

The reformulations notwithstanding, the notion of subculture has not disappeared from the sociology of youth or popular music; instead, one might argue there has been a backlash of sorts as book-length examinations

of various music-related “subcultures” have surfaced steadily in the 2010s. Recent examples include a plethora of reassessments of metal, punk and trance, accompanied by investigations into less familiar areas such as “geek rock” (DiBlasi and Willis 2014), fascist groups (Shaffer 2017; Teitelbaum 2017) and record collectors or “vinyl freaks” (Corbett 2017). The last of these is instructive not only in its emphasis on activity instead of a musical genre but also due to the pronounced presence of jazz records as opposed to the self-evident genres and styles of popular music. Indeed, even if the shift from subcultures to scenes, neo-tribes and lifestyles is warranted, they all tend to be discussed without problematising the epithet “popular” in detail or at all. While the theorisation of music scenes undoubtedly provides productive ways to address practices and phenomena associated with popular music, it remains obscure whether the conceptual apparatus could be applied to “non-popular” musical spheres or how various “scenes” within folk music, jazz and classical music might contribute to the theorisation. Regarding the last of these, David Yearsley (2002) titillatingly writes about the spread of hand-crossing within “the European keyboard scene” in the first half of the eighteenth century, and despite the rather casual use of the term “scene,” his remarks about “an era of musical journeys” and the rapid circulation “of this curious conceit in a number of printed editions in northern Europe around 1730” (Yearsley 2002: 225) evince similarities to the jaunts and fanzines emblematic for translocal and virtual scenes of popular music, respectively.

With respect to the present-day “musical scenery,” there certainly is room for investigations of the local, translocal and virtual aspects and dimensions also in jazz and folk music; in case of the latter, one might scrutinise, for instance, how distinctions and negotiations between labels “folk music,” “traditional music” and “world music” relate to conceptualisations of music scenes on different scales and levels. A case in point is provided by the distinction between “traditional” and “contemporary” – or “modernised” or “new” – folk music, whose terminological and ideological quagmires relate not only to local educational facets nowadays but are further projected on the global notion – and markets – of world music. To be a credible folk musician, it appears one has to either be at least seventy years old or have a tertiary degree in folk (or traditional or global) music. It has also been noted how contemporary folk musicians may both self-identify and be marketed abroad as world music performers, but in the domestic market they are labelled “neo-folk” (e.g., Ramnarine 2003: 198; Hill 2005: 280).

In addition to the inadvertent and largely unchallenged connections created between scenes, popular music and youth, there is an apparent risk of terminological and conceptual confusion. Sociologist Ross Haenfler (2014), for instance, in his introduction to the “basics” of subcultures, often refers to subcultures, scenes and neo-tribes as if they were interchangeable and frequently with music genre labels. Conversely, he does distinguish scenes from subcultures explicitly by emphasising the localised and consumerist

qualities of scenes as well as their porous boundaries and fluid identities, and in the end, warns against pushing this line on argumentation too far at the expense of subcultural self-identification and political potentialities. Moreover, he maintains that regardless of the diversity within the field of research, there is a tendency to focus preponderantly on youth- and music-related microinteractions in urban contexts (Haenfler 2014: 11–15). A crucial point to be learned from his account nevertheless concerns the treatment and conceptualisation of “subculture” as “a way we describe and understand the ongoing processes of segments and moments of social life [and] a set of diverse meanings and practices that change over time,” as opposed to conceiving them as static “things” or clearly demarcated demographic groups, supported further by an acknowledgement of inevitable conceptual overlaps and an analytical willingness “to discuss the significant characteristics as continua and thereby discuss a grouping’s ‘subcultureness’” (Haenfler 2014: 15, 17).

Put another way, one might do better by pondering the variety of subcultural aspects in a given context of enquiry, thus avoiding the risks of essentialism and reification inherent in the noun “subculture” (and “culture” to begin with). At issue is the unavoidable analytical violence that follows from the conceptual, methodological and practical demarcations necessary for both pragmatic and disciplinary reasons, resulting in partial emphases on select details of an irrevocably multidimensional phenomenon. The implications of the grammatical choice between culture and cultural are quite familiar within ethnomusicology, as it has been discussed for more than half a century already in relation to disciplinary formulations such as “music as culture,” “the cultural study of music” and “cultural musicology.” Another indication of this is that in the leading academic journals of ethnomusicology, the notion of subculture features once in a blue moon and even more seldom are its definitional difficulties discussed in detail, not at least across the disciplinary divides.

A case in point is ethnomusicologist Andrew McGraw’s (2016: 129) take on “American gamelan subculture” that “traces its roots to Mantle Hood’s introduction of gamelan at UCLA’s Institute for Ethnomusicology in the mid-1950s” and has “flourished in the form of community groups, public school programs and college and university ensembles,” resulting in “a robust subculture of nearly 150 ensembles” today. In terms of theorising subculture in ethnomusicological context, he builds his argument on the different “frames of sociality” provided by a scalar continuum from subcultures to scenes to imagined communities, contrasting this with the notion of “atmosphere” that refers to the “strongly synchronic and pre-discursive” qualities involved; “While subculture, scene, and the imagined community are diachronically durable, atmosphere is felt all at once in the here and now and does not require the discursive representations of belonging these frames engender or demand” (McGraw 2016: 140–141). Intriguingly, McGraw’s (2016: 142) dissection on atmosphere insinuates towards the

sacred through an insistence on its “diffuse, pre-logocentric characteristics” which carry “the potential for immanent play prior to the comprehension of [social] categories, making it capable of instilling a generalized affect of utopia” that, in turn, is based on a momentary “felt relation” that “has no object other than the situation’s own intensity.” Given that McGraw (2016: 129) self-identifies as “a ‘native’ of the subculture,” one might be tempted to read his treatment as a type of personal credo where the “situation itself” transcends aesthetic conventions, social relations and the very physical activities at stake and necessary for the situation – and its atmosphere – to emerge. A more incredulous reader might wonder, in addition, the extent to which such an ahistorical notion of atmosphere, in its alleged “potential to interrupt established frameworks of the body, subject, and human” (McGraw 2016: 142), serves as a tool of legitimation in the postcolonial and post-humanist world.

Regardless of the doubt involved, the notion of atmosphere foregrounds not only issues of ontology and methodology, but crucially those pertaining also to epistemology, as in the very literal sense to recognise and perceive atmospheric changes is a matter of feeling. Atmospheric pressure, after all, can be measured (in pascals – and in 0 Pa, there are neither sounds nor human beings due to our mostly liquid physical nature). Likewise, the notion of scene evokes rather central epistemological preferences; etymologically, on the basis of classical Latin *scaena*, it refers to the “background against which a play is performed, natural scenery,” but intriguingly also to a “piece of melodramatic behaviour, piece of make-believe, pretence, spectacle worthy of the stage” with an Indo-European base as “shadow” (OED Online 2021). With respect to sensory reception and knowledge-making, scene thus tends to favour the visual realm, albeit including aspects that relate most prominently to the tactile, haptic and kinetic sensations.

And our eardrums as well as other organs endure sound frequencies and amplitudes only so far. This is to remind scholars of music and religion alike that music is an irrevocably material phenomenon: it is sound, which, in turn, in order to be perceived and processed cognitively, consists of molecular vibration of a medium, predominantly air. “Does a falling tree cause sound if one is not there to see it” is not a (pseudo-)philosophical question, but merely a reminder of the sensory capabilities of human beings and their limits, as well as of the prevalence of scopocentric epistemology in general. Moreover, the vibration in question depends on transferring energy, which in the case of music begins usually by a human being singing, playing an instrument or pushing a button or two on a playback interface. These elemental material qualities of music tend to pass often unnoticed though, overwhelmed as they are by concerns over more metaphysical issues such as aesthetic quality, authenticity and “atmosphere.” It is nonetheless crucial here to recognise the inextricability of aesthetics from the material world, as quite often changing or omitting just one instrument in a musical outline results in debates about (loss of) quality. There is no place for a drum kit

in a symphony orchestra and in a rock band one just must have an electric guitar. Occasionally, the “wrong” instrument may lead to omission of an orchestra, an artist or an entire genre from one’s personal musical library. My own struggle with opera, for instance, stems precisely from the material timbral qualities of sopranos in particular, because of the standardised technique necessary for the production of loud vocal projection; yet as I have problems mainly if not exclusively with sopranos, at issue are not just techniques but corporeal shapes and sizes too.

Lusty loudness and lauded locations

The “loud operatic voice” has its aficionados, proponents and institutions, even if for decades now there have not been any technical reasons for the vocal technique. While in many opera productions the singers have wireless microphones taped on their cheeks nowadays, the resilience of the singing style is yet another reminder of the interrelations between the material and the aesthetic, as the development of the style is ultimately inseparable from the growing size of both orchestras and audiences during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in Europe. More recently, similar developments have taken place with respect to the emergence of “big band” jazz (or swing) and the “electrification” of the blues. The lesson to be learned from the historical shifts is that while the loud volume of music may be a response to the material acoustic circumstances, it is always also an aesthetic choice that will yield responses of their own kind. In the late 1960s, a number of rock bands were allegedly competing who could create the loudest song, and during the 1970s heavy metal became known and celebrated as the loudest type of music available, only to be pushed further by various forms of “extreme metal” (see Walser 1993: 44–45; Kahn-Harris 2007: 45). In the twenty-first century, experimentations with extreme loudness have emerged within the subgenre known as drone metal, where one central objective is to produce musical experiences that literally resonate and more comprehensively in one’s body than just on the eardrums. In a study that promises to be groundbreaking not only as an introduction to the (sub)genre but also with respect to researching popular music and religion, Coggins (2018: 177) stresses the “importance of materiality in sound for drone metal practitioners,” especially as it facilitates a “transformation of bodily consciousness” that, in turn, “is matched by a mystical turn towards the materiality of the metal sign, in amplification, distortion, repetition, extension and meditative slowness.” Here, also violence becomes central, crucially through the ambiguity of loudness and “noise,” in a manner resembling René Girard’s (1977) ideas about sacrifice as the fundamental violent constituent of the sacred; in Coggins’s (2018: 165–166) words, the “relation between music and noise parallels the relation between chaos and society, and thus involves a figuration of violence,” both in the “chaotic” and “ritual” sense, as “the irruption of noise threatens to do violence to the social order in music, while

the social order in music exists as a result of a ritually violent shaping of noise.” Thus, in drone metal in particular – but certainly in abundance also elsewhere – violence and noise “occupy multiple places in a shifting logic joining society, ritual and the sacred” (Coggins 2018: 166).

Moreover, the ideas and practices surrounding drone metal foreground the ways in which the material and the aesthetic intertwine in the form of “sacred artefacts or emblems” of a given type of music. While electric guitars are central in the production of the sounds, they are rather an interface than objects of devotion in drone metal; more attention and reverence in this respect is directed towards sound amplifiers, as their detailed set-up and manoeuvring are primary in the production of desired volume and timbre (Coggins 2018: 50). The attentiveness to sound materialities is, in addition, a methodological choice of paramount importance, as the neglect towards musical sound and its effects within fan communities and other audiences that prevails in studies of popular music and religion risks “unreflexively reproduc[ing] an ideology present in much Christian contemporary music: that lyrical content and the intentions of the musicians are what matters in determining and defining religiosity in music” (Coggins 2018: 43). This is furthermore linked to a dual tendency in the field of study to consider, at least implicitly, Christian and non-Christian (or secular) metal as totally separate categories on the one hand and on the other, to understand religion “as a normative moral and political background against which metal musicians and fans struggle as they construct communities and identities,” which, in turn, limits “the potential for understanding how other metal fans might conceive of religion and spirituality in less polarized and more personally constructed ways” (Coggins 2018: 42–43). Thus that which superficially might appear as religious to a theologian or a sociologist of religion, may be more constructively thought of as a response to extreme physical stimuli in cultural conditions where the idea of religion provides one of the most dominant frames of reference and rhetorical tropes:

The traversal of alterity in drone metal experience is represented as a reenchanting, transcendental or otherwise sacred movement best understood through the repeated trope of pilgrimage. This movement between and across spiritually inflected elsewheres is enacted in speech and writing as well as in the informational content of communication. ... [Fans’ notion] “elsewhere here” expresses a response to listening in terms of a removal from a mundane world and a (new or remade) connection with a physical, corporeal reality considered to be more profound or real, again often communicated in terminology derived from religion. ... [T]he ritual resonance of drone metal is expressed as a profound experience, and it is exactly the opacity and mystery that is considered as fundamental to its power and that invites the language of mysticism and ritual.

(Coggins 2018: 176, 178)

The phrase “elsewhere here,” while grounded in physical realities, indicates, in addition, an emphasis on experiential qualities in a way that is somewhat different from the emphasis on scenes within (post-)subcultural theorisation. In relation to this, Coggins (2018: 175) notes how drone metal “differs from many other locally based scenes, in that it lacks particular places which serve as geographical, conceptual and mythical centres strongly associated with historical, musical and discursive developments,” and thus it “exists at the margins of wider extreme metal and experimental music scenes.” This may very well be so, yet as he uses the term “scene” rather casually without endeavouring into its theoretical debates, one might be induced to consider more closely the importance of the relatively short historical trajectory of the (sub)genre as well as the comparatively low mass of its critical appraisal. As the key expressive elements are such that it is doubtful if it will ever become popular in the quantitative sense, it will be quite intriguing to follow its future shifts and historiographical reception.

Drone metal’s “elsewhere here” may indeed be an aberration, especially when one considers the abundance of musical mythical centres available. Here, the notion of scene is again pivotal, as the “scenic musicking” (McGraw 2016: 141), whether as juxtaposed with subcultural, neo-tribal or nationally imagined occasions of music-making, risks valorising or even sanctifying certain localities above others. This is not to claim that particular locations associated with music and musicians are insignificant; quite the contrary – at the age of forty-eight, it was rather important to me, as a fan of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1974) since the early 1990s, to go to Hamilton in Aotearoa, New Zealand, once I learned the author of the show, Richard O’Brien, was to give a keynote address at the local popular music studies conference. The extent to which the encounter constituted a sacred event is admittedly debatable, as I seriously doubt that to miss it would have caused anything more than a grave disappointment in me. I did, nonetheless, get immortalised with his statute located in the city centre (Figure 5.1). This brings me back to issues of musical tourism – in the very literal sense – and the associated sanctification of certain locations. Wagnerites travel to Bayreuth, Jacksonites to Neverland, Presleytarians to Graceland. In many respects, the trips taken – again, in the physical rather than psychedelic sense – bear a certain resemblance to the pilgrimage carried out by religious believers. While there may not be a scripted doctrine, to “have been there” separates one from the more habitual believers.

The importance of certain hallowed musical locations, whether evoking a given artist’s life or death, has been noted by numerous scholars of music. For instance, Till (2010: 5), in his invocation of the “sacred popular” within popular music in particular as a “set of popular cults” that mix and confuse traditional ideas about the sacred and the profane, has devoted one chapter to “local cults.” By building on theorisation of both subcultures and scenes, he maintains that a distinctive local identity is a powerful factor in the construction of authenticity of an artist, as “to be from somewhere



Figure 5.1 The author at the statue of Riff Raff in Hamilton, Aotearoa, New Zealand. Personal archive.

identifiable, and ideally to be from a working-class background, adds to a popular audience a sense of rootedness, a perception of truth and believability, of honesty and of ‘keeping it real’” (Till 2010: 78). Another pivotal link to the sacred in these local cults of popular music is, according to Till (2010: 92), formed by a group of charismatic leaders or “sacred individuals,” who through their local identities and activities as musicians, managers and technicians “offer an access to the transcendental” with a heightened importance laid on a localised type of connectedness and consciousness, to the extent that the star performers “at the centre of local cults are divinised, or offer access to these experiences that focus on the spirituality of the relationships between people.”

Till’s (2010) musings over the sacred popular and “pop cults” may suffer from a certain amount of circularity when it comes to distinguishing between scenes, cults and the popular, yet he is by no means the only one to point out the often intimate connection between music-making and local identity construction. Indeed, in the field of popular music studies, several volumes have been issued that discuss the importance of local identity or the politics of location in general. One aspect of this is the prevalent interest in and theorisation of music scenes, which for its part points to one of the central problems when contemplating musical locations; in addition to the local,

translocal and virtual dimensions of music scenes (Peterson and Bennett 2004), the term “local” may emerge as a synonym for an operational environment that is demarcated mainly by municipal, metropolitan, regional or national boundaries. A crucial counterpoint for the local, regardless of its geographical scope, is the “global,” to the extent that the recent “abundance of studies seeking to connect musical practice to place and place-identification” may be considered as “a symptom of ... an *idealization* of place” at a particular moment of late capitalism, as Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights (2007: 2) suggest. They explicitly associate these forms of idealisation with a “nostalgia for the human in the face of a brutalizing anonymization of culture” or attempts “at a compensatory re-humanization (in the sense of an attempt to rediscover modalities of ‘human’ agency) of musical practice in the face of the anonymizing consequences of the intensified globalization of capital and capital flows,” which, in their extreme manifestations, result in “a romanticization of the local as inherently ‘subversive’, ‘oppositional’ and ‘authentic’, and an inverse figuration of the global as always already artificial and inauthentic” (Biddle and Knights 2007: 3). To challenge the idealised and romanticised notions of local music, they further emphasise the need to reconsider the “middle dimension” between the local and the global, particularly through examining “what might be termed *compensatory* nationalisms” in an era characterised in the public sphere by global migration, various forms of extremism as well as shifts in international (or global) economic and political relations (Biddle and Knights 2007: 10–11).

To be sure, such compensatory nationalisms may manifest themselves in the musics of diasporic migrant communities and xenophobic extremist groupings alike. This kind of juxtaposition might serve as an additional facet for examining the boundaries and definitive elements of scenes and subcultures, complemented and complicated further by their relationship to questions about cults, activism and socio-cultural minorities in general. With respect to migrant communities in particular, one might ask if they are not subcultural by definition and *par excellence*, inasmuch as the notion of subculture is taken to refer to a “relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices and objects, and a sense of marginalization from or resistance to a perceived ‘conventional’ society” (Haenfler 2014: 16). Certainly, the communities at issue may evince a relevant degree of subordination, subalternity and – at least metaphorically – subterranean activity, yet there are crucial distinctions to be made in terms of diffuse networks, resistance and marginalisation, especially when related to the formal hierarchies in civic groups and organisations, to integrationist agendas instead of intentional opposition and, importantly, to structural marginalisation primarily on the basis of ethno-religious prejudice (see Haenfler 2014: 16–17). This is, of course, not to say that within the communities, “proper” subcultural networks could not emerge. Relatedly, there are grounds to maintain that it is the extreme nationalist music scene that has come to represent the quintessential

subcultural formation in its more literal subterranean activity, foregrounding also the historical associations between subcultures and delinquency. To complicate issues further, in her study on white supremacist music, Nancy S. Love (2016: 32) notes how the musicians in question “often intentionally blur the boundaries between youth subculture, interest group, social movement, and political party.” A curious aspect in these scenes or subcultures is also how reggae and rap have constituted key musical idioms on which the musicians have relied, though in the process of politicising the expression, the “black” Caribbean and African-American influences have been denied and deleted from the narratives sanctioned by the cohorts themselves (Love 2016: 53; see also Shaffer 2017; Teitelbaum 2017).

Subcultural seniors

The relationship between subcultures and types of marginalisation accrues additional import when considered in relation to ageing. And now, I am referring to the evergreen cohorts of pensioners rather than the thirty-something “ageing subculturists” that one is likely to encounter in relevant edited volumes (e.g., Bennett and Hodkinson 2013). Admittedly, when reading the literature, I continuously expect to read about protagonists over fifty, but equally repeatedly run into what I perceive as more or less celebratory accounts of the (physical) youthful years. To be sure, my anxiety over the assumed ageing subculturists has grown out of the realisation that at fifty or so, I am too old to be or become a subculturist of any persuasion; more importantly, though, at issue is a suspicion about a lack of critical acuity especially with respect to the extent to which the triangular equation between the popular, youth and subcultures constitutes a self-perpetuating conceptual knot that, for its part, reproduces so-called decline narratives of age-based discrimination (see Forman 2012: 247).

My age and ageing notwithstanding, in the past decade or so there have been numerous incidents which have made me contemplate on the musical dynamics of the current era of gerontophobic consumer culture, as it were (see Gibson 2013: 82). The occasions in question have included such globally renowned performers as Sir Paul McCartney, Chuck Berry and Kiss, as well as more locally appreciated executions of chamber music, opera and tango. The performances by McCartney and Berry in the early 2010s foregrounded the physical differences between a seventy-year-old and an eighty-something, or between “those who *still can* [and] those who *can no longer* perform music,” respectively (see Brodsky 2011: 8; original emphasis); while Sir Paul executed a three-hour show without losing his voice, Mr Berry showed up and concentrated more on prancing around than playing and singing. This is not an assessment of aesthetic quality, and I do maintain that those who were expecting world-class guitar-playing from Berry need to educate themselves further not only in gerontology but also in recognising the difference between aesthetic and social significance. In the McCartney

concert the importance of art and collectivity may have been fairly equal, while the Berry event, I maintain, was first and foremost a social gathering. Similar dynamics were manifest also in the Kiss concert, with Paul Stanley struggling with his voice in front of three generations of painted faces in the gallery and stalls.

In the encounters with chamber music, opera and tango, in contrast, no doubt was cast over the technical proficiency of the performers or the audience appreciation. Yet it was the generational uniformity of the audience that startled me, as the overwhelming majority consisted of people in their sixties and seventies as far as I was able to judge, and most of them were women, or at least wearing the kind of outfits women in their sixties and seventies in the global North often wear. Regardless of the amount of drag queens in the audience or kings for that matter, I started to think about the possibility to conceive the occasion as a subcultural one. To be more precise, I began to wonder about the importance of age, gender and musical repertoire in all this, especially when linked to the cultural politics of physical locations through strong associations with national identity in particular. Without delving into excessive details, suffice it to note that the chamber music event took place in Kuhmo, a small and remote township branded as “a focal point” for Finnish national culture (DF 2019), and the engagements with opera and tango were part of a summer time festival in Ilmajoki, located amidst the agricultural “national landscapes” of Finland (VI 2021). Regarding the possibility of conceiving these phenomena as intersections of the popular and the sacred on the basis of subcultural formations, the key question concerns the aspects of the sacred that become – or need to be – operationalised. From the outset, the locations as geographical sites associated with mythologised national identity, the esteemed status of chamber music and opera within the Western music education and the ostensibly civilised elderly audience might suggest there is very little warranting this kind of a conceptualisation. Tango, for its part, has also been canonised into the national imaginary, even if its more vernacular variations now function as “a symbolic altar” for artists who aspire for a career as performers of Finnish popular songs, as they better “sacrifice” their talent by singing a tango or two at competitions before concentrating on more contemporary – and sociologically as well as quantitatively more popular – styles of entertainment music (Gronow 2004: 37). In addition, it may be argued that since the 1980s, the cultural and industrial significance of this type of popular “street tango” has been challenged by the emergence of “concert hall tango,” following the *tango nuevo* idiom and performed by highly educated musicians (e.g., Kotirinta 2010)

These caveats notwithstanding, should one ponder more closely the quantitative aspects at stake, namely geographical distances, sales figures and the size of the audience, one might conclude that much depends on the assumptions related to the prefix “sub.” To this end, it is possible to contemplate whether it would be more appropriate to rely, for instance, on the

notion of “idioculture,” as discussed by Gary Alan Fine (2012: 36) as “a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members refer and that they employ as the basis of further interaction.” At issue here is crucially the scale of activity, in a manner not entirely dissimilar from the debates concerning subcultures and scenes. In other words, subcultures are “networks of groups” whose intersections provide possibilities and occasions for local idiocultures to extend outwards, thus facilitating cultural borrowing on an individual level (Fine 2012: 143–144). In contrast to analyses of subcultures from a cultural studies stance with their alleged homogenising tendencies resulting from a neglect towards local groups, Fine (2012: 144) proposes a model of subculture that builds “on the shared meaning of a network of groups, expressed in action,” as this “permits an understanding of the relationship between the group and the larger community in which the group is embedded.”

One may note in addition that both idioculture and subculture tend to become encapsulated by “cultures of adolescence” in Fine’s (2012: 146) treatment, whereby a separate stress is laid also on building communication channels that are not reliant on traditional adult-dominated corporate media. Yet it remains obscure why this should be the case for young people alone, alongside a risk of youth-oriented technological determinism; if the notion of subculture is used to point to “a gloss of knowledge and behaviors that spread within interlocking groups, extending and then shaping the local ... through multiple group memberships, weak ties, structural roles, and media diffusion” (Fine 2012: 147), it is unclear whether the age of participants or the type of communication channels makes a fundamental difference. Rather, at issue are the different types and forms of knowledge, behaviour and media that are put to use and embodied in a given historical local setting.

The point of reflecting upon select events organised around chamber music, opera and “concert hall tango” is to assert that the historical profiles of the events do not provide an exhaustive explanation for the age-related demographics of the audiences. The question that emerges, then, pertains to the extent to which the ageing chamber music, opera and tango aficionados as a collective could and should be discussed in terms of subcultural and scene theories. When juxtaposed to Haenfler’s (2014: 16–17) “working definition” of subculture, for instance, there is little doubt that the people in question are “engaged in ongoing interaction” within *diffuse networks* where there is “relatively little (if any) *formal* leadership, bureaucratic organizational structure, membership lists, or rationally-planned, legitimated rules,” and that they exhibit *shared identity* through differentiation from others and feeling “some connection to a subcultural identity, other subculturists, or both” (Haenfler 2014: 16). Certainly, they might consider the label “subcultural” alien and maybe derogatory, yet this does not undermine the conceptual points of departure. Additionally, there obviously are *shared distinctive meanings* at stake, manifested in ideas, practices and objects alike

and the constant contestation of these – again in alignment with the ethnomusicological music-culture models (Merriam 1964: 32–35; Titon 2009: 18–30). Haenfler (2014: 17) does, however, emphasise how “these meanings are distinct from widely accepted norms and values,” on the basis of which one is compelled to interrogate further the implications of ageing in relation to what constitutes the widely accepted – or “popular” – normative value system in the society. Similarly, the degree to which ageing chamber music or tango subculturists, as it were, “tend to offer, either passively or actively, some sort of *resistance* to ‘mainstream,’ dominant, or hegemonic culture” (Haenfler 2014: 17; emphasis added), depends on the age-related boundaries of “normal society” and the mainstream. To investigate and demonstrate the complexities further, one may ponder how theorising subcultures relates, for instance, to the ideas about residual and emergent forms of culture, as alternatives or opposites for the dominant sphere (e.g., Williams 1980: 40–42). A central question in this respect is to what extent the emphasis on youth leads to an uncritical celebration of the “emergent culture-in-the-making,” epitomised often by “punk-as-unfolding-action-and-event” (see Hebdige 2012: 403), as if the residual features that relate to national sentiments and rural life especially did not unfold in various actions and events. Punk and tango may differ in terms of rhythmic accentuation and timbral qualities, and should one dare combine the styles, crossover success is all but certain, as in the case of the Argentinian El Cachivache Orkesta:

El Cachivache Orkesta is currently one of the most popular tango groups and is widely recognized on the world music circuit. Sometimes called “Tango Punk”, the group is characterized by its undeniably creative, original, and very “danceable” style.

Some call them “modern buffoons”, others describe the music as “communal flat groove”, and both are true. El Cachivache serves up its music in a vigorous manner with a good dose of humor, mixing up overdriven traditional tango music with a post punk look, which simultaneously frightens and attracts the tourists.

(El Cachivache 2021)

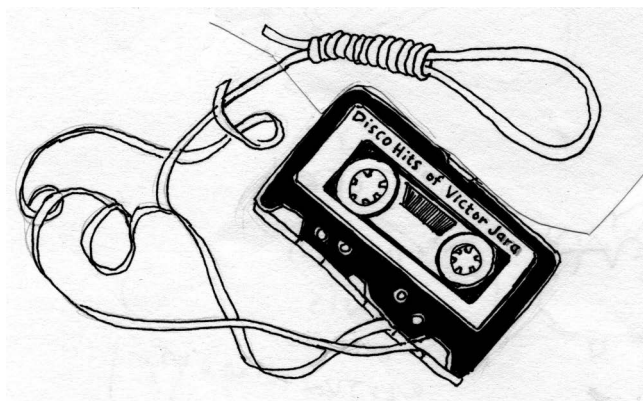
Of course, when elders get frightened the end result may not be very humorous at all. Relatedly, it may be noted finally that ageing forms an effective basis for structural marginalisation. Yet also here, the situation proves to be more complex as soon as one begins to (re)consider the importance of conventional cultural and national identification, particularly in relation to the geopolitical dynamics in a given situation. Chamber music, opera and tango materialise differently in the rural countryside, as opposed to the bigger cities where more emphasis may be put on multiculturalist policies. In these situations, Eurocentric or otherwise conventional repertoires may come to represent, at best, a nostalgic basis for “concert hall” arrangements by highly educated artists, or outmoded musical genres clinging onto reactionary and

even xenophobic constructions of national and cultural identity. In the absence of detailed investigations into the subcultures, scenes and idiocultures of the elderly and their musical practices, one may note furthermore that in the interest of contributing to the existing scholarship with the intersections of the popular and the sacred in mind, an appurtenant avenue of investigation leads towards juxtaposing the way in which moral panics surrounding youth subcultures imply sanctity of youth as a liminal phase of life with the implications of physical ageing and its equally liminal aspects associated with corporeal transformations, restrictions and leakages. The sanctity of old age of course manifests itself most clearly in the anticipation of the ultimate Can-Can, whether in the underworld or elsewhere, or nowhere.

6 Politics and resistance

When I was less than ten years old, in the late 1970s, after learning to play the melody of the national anthem of what was then the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, I proudly went to my grandfather and praised the melody of its beauty. He, a veteran of the two wars Finland fought against the Red Army between 1939 and 1944, did not share my enthusiasm nor my aesthetic evaluation. His response was, to the best of my recollection: “That’s a Russkies’ song. How can you say it’s beautiful after what they did to us?” Well, “they” have never done anything to *me*.

Anyway, as is well known, the composition replaced “The Internationale” as the official national anthem of the Soviet Union in 1944, and after the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet system it was readopted as the national anthem of the Russian Federation in 2000. The lyrics of the anthem have, unsurprisingly, reflected the state-related political circumstances at a given time, as in their initial form they include a line about Ioseb Besarionis dze Jugashvili’s – better known as Josif or Joseph Stalin – centrality as the source of socialist inspiration, but in the years of the so-called de-Stalinisation process after his death in 1953 the anthem did not have official lyrics at first, and not until 1977 were new words sanctioned, albeit without any references



to the inspiring character of Stalin whatsoever or to any other aspect of his “sunny” personality. The current lyrics, in turn, celebrate the “sacred state” of Russia, its glory, uniqueness and eternity; the opening line of the refrain has nevertheless remained intact over the years: “*Slavsia, Otechestvo nashe svobodnoe*” or “glory to our free fatherland” (see Daughtry 2003: 47–52).

But as in the case of my grandfather, at issue are not so much the lyrics as the profound association of the melody with national or, rather, geopolitical identity, given the nature of the Soviet Union as an aggregate of diverse ethnicities and nationalities, achieved significantly through invasions and forced migration. To my grandfather, the melody quite obviously was a painful reminder of the horrors of the war in general and what he felt was an unsolicited offensive on the part of the Soviet Union in particular. Within the Russian Federation at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in turn, the rehabilitation of the Soviet anthem was greeted by some as a positive decision, on the basis of the pride about the role of the Soviet Union in defeating Nazism and fascism in the so-called Great Patriotic War, while others “regarded the anthem as an unprecedented affront to the millions who suffered and died under Stalin and an ominous sign of a future return to the authoritarian policies of the Soviet era” (Daughtry 2003: 43). Given the resilience of the state leadership in Russia in the twenty-first century, the odds have been in favour of those betting on the ill omens.

The past European socialist regimes and the recent rise of equally authoritarian populist nationalism on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean foreground questions of freedom of expression and cultural diversity. These questions are furthermore linked to basic issues concerning human rights, and at least thus far, the constitutions of liberal democracies usually paraphrase the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1948, where it is stipulated that “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression[, including] freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (UN 1948). The everyday societal reality is quite often a different matter, and scholars of censorship, for instance, have underscored repeatedly that instead of debating whether there is censorship in a given society or not, it is more meaningful to address the forms of censorship in operation at any given moment. The grounds for censorial actions may range from religious and ideological to aesthetic and even commercial factors; according to Sue Curry Jansen (1988), for instance, over the centuries there has been a shift from church to state censorship and then towards something that may be labelled market censorship, meaning the increased importance of profit-oriented business relations and intellectual property rights (IPR) management as censorial tools, sometimes quite intentionally. Not all are willing to agree with the notion of market censorship, as it risks conflating official censorial intervention with commercial decision-making or “over-accentuating the similarities between professionalism and censorship” (Müller 2004: 9–10). This

notwithstanding, scholars tend to acknowledge that the interrelations between the legal system and the financial sector have significant implications for and impact on regulating freedom of expression. It is indeed arguable that in the USA in particular, the ambiguities and guiles at stake are very difficult to unearth, “given the cultural contradictions ... [i.e.] the incongruous mix of secular democratic values, high levels of religious participation and unbridled materialism” (Jansen 2010: 14). The notion of market censorship may be connected in addition to a broader field of “new censorship” that refers to various regulative, constitutive and structural aspects of legislation and professional practices which affect freedom of expression. The field of mass communication is one area whose practices are pivotal in this respect (Müller 2004: 5). In some situations, the notion of censorship may in fact operate as, whether intentionally or involuntarily, a lure that incites a strong reaction and an interest towards a given phenomenon, thus functioning as a mechanism for creating publicity and profitability (see Korpe et al. 2006: 247). Regardless of the type of political incentive behind a censorial action by a public authority, the action is likely to increase the appeal and thus popularity of the “forbidden fruit” in question, mainly in quantitative terms while not necessarily in the sense of well liked, as there may be also aspects of disgust involved.

Still, freedom of expression is not an absolute right, even in the most liberal of societies. While explicit references to blasphemy have been mostly erased from the criminal and penal codes of Western democracies, legal articles concerning child welfare, defamation, ethnic agitation and IPR in particular are amongst those that condition and restrict freedom of expression. Sometimes this is forgotten by artists and proponents of “alternative facts” alike, and indeed systematically by those who intentionally misinterpret the law as sanctioning hate speech on the grounds of freedom of expression.

While the ideals of democracy, justice and freedom of expression may constitute one central venue for the sacred in its general sense (Lynch 2012: 37), the notion of censorship is inevitably implicated in conceptualisations and debates about the fundamental values of a given society and community. The link to the sacred becomes particularly pronounced when at issue are acts and principles of censorship based on religious doctrines, but as censorship relies by definition on forms of prohibition, it is always already associated with the assumed threat of profanation that constitutes the decisive adversary of the sacred in the Durkheimian sense (see Durkheim 1995: 34–35). Alongside blasphemous forms of the profane, one can easily enough consider it also in relation to molesting, nationalism, racism, economic exploitation and cultural appropriation.

All censorial forms of the sacred and the profane have their musical manifestations, and quite often these are associated with the epithet “popular.” Racist hate speech has found its musical expression in the output of ultranationalist punk and metal bands, and curiously enough also in the idioms of rap and reggae (e.g., Love 2016; Shaffer 2017; Teitelbaum 2017). Regarding

molesting and sexual harassment, concerns have been voiced in order to acknowledge and react against such maladies when constructing celebrity biographies, whether for historiographical purposes or for contemporary promotion (Strong and Rush 2018). Questions about cultural appropriation have for their part increased tremendously in recent years, particularly in relation to the unauthorised commercial use and improper representations of Indigenous populations' cultural expression. Moreover, in societies dominated by religious fundamentalism, musical practices in general may be subject to severe persecution, and to tamper with religious symbols and topics musically causes usually some amount of objection on the part of the devout.

Just as there is a multiplicity of sacred forms and their popular apparitions, there is an equal need to recognise the shifting conditions and the multifaceted nature of the notion of politics. Curiously enough, the concept is not included in the keywords of culture and society (Williams 1983; Bennett et al. 2005), and one can only surmise if this signals general pervading qualities, inasmuch as it refers to social power relations and their legitimation (Beetham 2013), or how different interrelations between ruling and being ruled become manifest through what may be named conversation, command, commentary and co-operation (Alexander 2014: 299–300). In the everyday, two common threads in this discussion involve the sovereignty of a nation-state within international relations and the internal arm-wrestling within a nation-state by different political parties. Through the emergence of such activist slogans as “the personal is political” since the late 1960s, also less institutional forms of participation in societal decision-making and distribution of public resources have been included in the discussion. Yet as political scientist John Street (2012: 6) notes, to claim that everything, including all music, is political risks emptying the notion of politics of all meaning and confusing “those activities that can affect the exercise of public power [with] those that cannot,” even if the underlying idea is to point out that “in all aspects of our lives choices are being made and values being articulated.” For Street (2012: 7), a situation counts as political when it presents people with a choice they can act and deliberate publicly upon, and whose outcome has a social impact. On the basis of these general points, he approaches the relationship of music to politics by stressing the following:

It is only when musical pleasure (or musical displeasure) spills over into the public realm and into the exercise of power within it that it becomes political. It is where music inspires forms of collective thought and action that it becomes part of politics. It is where music forms a site of public deliberation ... that we talk of music as political.

(Street 2012: 8)

The insistence of public deliberation as the basis of politics might at first appear incommensurable with the emphasis on experiences of non-contingent

absolute realities as the bedrock of the sacred. Yet as Lynch (2012: 2) argues further, the sacred needs to be understood as profoundly social category: “human society is necessarily bound to collective notions of what is sacred that compel social action through powerful moral sentiments.” For him, the sacred constitutes in addition “a particular kind of communication” about the absolutes and moral demands in question (Lynch 2012: 11, 34), and hence it may be suspected that the difference between political deliberation and sacred communication depends ultimately on historically situated ideas about the aspects of social life that are axiomatic beyond deliberation.

Lynch (2012) does not discuss the political implications of his definition of the sacred in detail, if at all, but the implications are clear enough, for instance when he elaborates on the profane as “the evil that threatens to pollute and destroy the sacred order of societies,” therefore providing self-evidently legitimate grounds in the case of human beings for execution, torture, incarceration or denial of human rights (Lynch 2012: 27). This echoes Girard’s (1977: 31) ideas about the fundamental importance of violence as “the heart and secret soul of the sacred”; as national military and police forces all over the world attest, the legitimation of violence is a state business and hence political to its core – and, given the volatility of state boundaries, historically contingent beyond a doubt. Consequently:

if we allow ourselves to recognize that things we treat as obviously sacred (such as the care of children or patriotism) are peculiarly modern phenomena, the sense of universal and timeless moral weight attached to these sacred commitments can feel less secure.

(Lynch 2012: 13)

Commercial censorship, natural nations and exceptional ethnicities

While religion and the sacred do not feature as headwords in the index of Street’s (2012) book, one of his opening examples is linked to questions of sacred political – or factional – violence as it builds on “the silence imposed on the Afghan people” by the Taliban regime between 1996 and 2002, relating it to not entirely dissimilar bans on music by Quakers, Trappists and the Russian Orthodox Church in earlier centuries. Furthermore, what connects the Taliban and the Russian church is “a tradition that [sees] the alliance of state and religion operating to deny all kinds of public festivity” (Street 2012: 4). This kind of an alliance is indeed not uncommon but manifests itself in myriad historical and local forms. With respect to the Taliban, Street (2012: 4), notes how definitions of music entered the conundrum, especially in relation to religious chanting, and how in general “the Taliban’s strictures owed more to their politics than to any widely sanctioned reading of Islamic scripture.” By this he means that for the Taliban, the primary reason behind banning music had less to do with the sounds than their political

associations with the former Soviet oppressors and their use of music to maintain authority (Street 2012: 13).

Whatever the case, it is undeniable that in certain Islamic states and societies, to occupy oneself as a musician may be literally a matter of life and death, even if the fundamentalist interpretations of music are used for internal militant purposes rather than because of their assumed doctrinal content (see Pieslak 2015: 14–44). Yet what is of equal importance in this discussion is to be attentive to the ways in which the extremist interpretations are utilised in allegedly secular Western societies, in their policy-making and mass media, to demonise all Muslim communities as music haters and by extension, opponents of freedom of expression. Such Islamophobic sentiments disregard the empirical evidence about the variety of Muslim musical phenomena and build on two loci of the sacred simultaneously. On the one hand, they rely on the conservative and restrictive Islamic legal interpretations about music as something that “draws people from the remembrance of God [and] might even be considered the voice of the Devil” (Otterbeck and Larsson 2017: 113). On the other hand, the Western criteria and ideals of freedom of expression emerge as fundamental sacred values in themselves, without any consideration over the restrictions and regulations posed on this freedom on capitalist economic grounds in particular. This carries certain implications towards the denominator “popular”; for the industry, the aesthetic dimensions are fundamentally insignificant when measured against the quantitative and sociological ones, meaning that the ultimate values at stake find their material form in the sales figures of the mass-produced musical commodities as well as in the business decisions and transactions executed in the interest of protecting financial investments.

Islam of course is not the only institutionalised religion within which music is being restricted and regulated, if not censored even. “The urge to censor music for fear of its effects is as old as music itself,” notes Street (2012: 9), and whether one focuses on ancient philosophers, state governments or religious authorities, congruent worldwide attempts “to silence certain sounds and performers” are demonstrable. Following from this, it is less sensible to ask whether or not a given religious authority or institution exerts censorship on music than to ponder what are the acceptable forms of music censorship in a given socio-historical situation (see Korpe et al. 2006; Street 2012: 17–18). This points also to the Durkheimian multiplicity of the sacred, especially when approached by emphasising the restrictive and prohibitive mechanisms surrounding the sacred phenomena in order to prevent profane pollution (e.g., Durkheim 1995: 413). The perceived acts of censorship thus indicate the presence of the sacred in whichever form and regardless of the consensus over the matter. In other words, conceptualisations of the sacred and censorship both reveal a great deal about the fundamental social and societal values at stake.

The somewhat unreserved celebration of freedom of expression in liberal Western societies provides a case in point. The right to express oneself freely

in any medium, including also the right to receive information without the hindrance of a third party, is included in the constitutions of many countries and in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948, article 19). Yet on a closer examination, freedom of expression is not an absolute right but contingent on other constitutional rights; in the words of the declaration:

In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

(UN 1948, article 29, paragraph 2)

The majority of relevant limitations may be found in the penal or criminal codes of given states. These may include such potentially music-related phenomena as ethnic agitation, breach of sanctity of religion, criminal disturbance, distribution of depictions of violence and sexual obscenity, public obscenity, defamation, forgery, and copyright and intellectual property offences. Indeed, with the heightened importance of IPR within a capitalist, commercial system, some scholars of censorship have suggested that the Western democracies have moved from earlier forms of church and state censorship into so-called market censorship (Jansen 1988; Korpe et al. 2006: 260). Street (2012: 16), for his part, is somewhat suspicious towards this idea because of its breadth and impracticality, even if it were possible to conceive the capitalist music industry as “a censoring machine.”

Yet whether the notion of market censorship is sensible or not, it is impossible to deny the importance of the economic dimensions of both politics and the sacred. States are, by definition, political entities that govern and manage the variety of material resources within a given geographical territory, and quite often these resources have a monetary value, especially through taxation. Regarding the sacred in this respect, there are those who warn against serving Mammon, one of the seven princes of Hell, the god of material things and greed. This medieval biblical stance is echoed in some of the more recent rereadings of Durkheim’s (1995) ideas about the elementary forms of religious life; sociologist Kenneth Thompson (1998: 101), for instance, maintains that:

The “sacred” is that which is socially transcendent and gives a sense of fundamental identity based on likeness (kinship), constructed and sustained by difference or opposition over and against: (1) the alien Other (which may be another culture that threatens takeover or some other danger to the maintenance of its identity); (2) the mundane/profane i.e. the world of everyday routine, particularly economic activity and its rationality.

While the remark about the sacred as a fundamental aspect of identity construction finds support, for example, in Lynch's (2012, 2014) work, the suggestion that rational economic activity constitutes an opposing form of profanation deserves a closer scrutiny. Not only it appears to disregard the historical interconnectedness of religion, politics and economy, particularly within the Catholic Church or with respect to the Weberian postulations about the affinities between protestant ethics and capitalism, it risks ignoring the emergence of consumerist identities. Scholars of religion François Gauthier, Tuomas Martikainen and Linda Woodhead (2013: 4–5) posit that such a focus on the allegedly negative impacts of consumer culture on religion is haunted by either Marxist or nostalgic variants of cultural pessimism, or both. Less distrustful approaches, in turn, centre on questions about the changes stimulated by consumer capitalism within religious institutions, the impact of so-called prosperity religion on work ethics and social networks and the collaboration between religious organisations and public authorities for the common good, for instance, in terms of welfare provision (Gauthier et al. 2013: 6–8).

While Gauthier, Martikainen and Woodhead (2013: 8) do not pay any attention to music, in relation to prosperity religion they point especially to Pentecostalism with its promise of “salvation under the form of worldly as well as spiritual prosperity,” one aspect of which is of course the highly influential and economically salient Hillsong megachurch with its own music production company and transnational dissemination. According to popular music scholar Mark Evans (2006: 94), the “juggernaut that is Hillsong” owes much to the role of music in the attempts to achieve the mission of the Hillsong Church “to reach and influence the world by building a large bible based church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and impact every sphere of life.” Evans (2006: 96) further quotes Brian Houston, the co-founder and Global Senior Pastor of the church, whose vision in the early 1990s was “[a] Church so large in size that the cities and nations cannot ignore it.” Some twenty years later, the church in Houston’s vision was “a global church,” and there is a fair deal of evidence in favour of this (Hillsong 2021). Yet it remains an open question to what extent Hillsong has empowered people “to lead and impact every sphere of life,” to quote the church’s mission again. In the sensation-seeking tabloids, Hillsong has been associated with “allegations of homophobia, child abuse and financial greed” (Beal and Nauman 2017), and even on the basis of more credible scholarly sources there is an apparent tension between conservative values and social justice commitments within the community (see Hartje-Döll 2013).

Despite such global aspirations, the permanence and persistence of nations should not be ignored either. In many respects, it is the attribute “national” that provides the most potent examples of socio-cultural amalgamations of the popular, the sacred and the political. A nation is a populous entity by definition, and while the Latin etymology of the word refers to birth, especially in the sense of family relations and a common lineage

within a group of people, in the modern usage the national is frequently understood as a reference to “a political state” (OED Online 2021). Often there is a conflation between the national frame of reference and the ones based on conceptualisations of ethnicity and cultural traits. This is particularly evident in public debates over postcolonial multiculturalism, as the multiplicity of cultural dynamics involved is commonly conceived in the “narrow” sense that reifies culture and equates it with ethnic, linguistic and religious differences alone (Modood 2007: 2). Despite their naivety, the debates nevertheless provide a useful point of departure when considering the factional sacred-ness of music, as they foreground the amalgamation of political and ethno-religious aspects in cultural expression. To concretise, when hearing *adhān*, the Muslim call for prayer, on the streets of an average European metropole, one is immediately reminded of the presence of a religious community that in many parts of the Western world is a source of much anxiety, prejudice and even outright fear. In a similar fashion, the ubiquity of roots reggae provides the metropolitan inhabitants with an acoustic articulation of racial and sexual politics, Jamaican-ness and Rastafarian religiosity.

In the narrowly multicultural debates, to apprehend ethnicity primarily in terms of visible and religious deviations from the norm is to invest it with a certain degree of minoritarian politics. In this sense, ethnicity is a designator of a minority group, otherness, and hence always both oppositional to and constitutive of the majority – whose own ethnic qualities remain largely invisible and, in the musical context in particular, inaudible. Yet by taking another etymological detour, one might note here how “ethnic,” on the basis of the use of the Greek *ethnos* (ἔθνος) and *ethnikos* (ἔθνικός) in Biblical translations some two millennia ago, has come to imply foreign, heathen or pagan properties (as opposed to the Judeo-Christian beliefs) instead of its more neutral basis as a denotation of a nation or a people (OED Online 2021). Similarly, the notion of ethnomusicology was introduced by Kunst (1950) as an indication of a field of study that deals with the metaphorically pagan types of music as opposed to the “righteous” European art and popular musics. Indeed, Kunst’s (1974: 1–2) postulation reveals the ideological circumstances and premisses of early ethnomusicology, which effectively was not much more than a neologism for the comparative musicology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These premisses were based on ideals of cultural sensitivity and relativism, yet treating cultural differences fundamentally racial in quality. According to Kunst (1974: 12), intervals, rhythm, formal structures and performance styles are all “characteristic of the manifestations of a race,” exemplified, for instance, by “the passionately ‘pinched’ vocal sound of the Japanese and Chinese actors; the nasalized melodics of Indonesian women; the pathos in the vocal rendering of the American Indians; the vital jollity as well as the sonorous seriousness of the Negro singing.” To encapsulate all this: “each bird is known by its song” (Kunst 1974: 2).

Since the 1950s, much has of course changed, particularly with respect to the speed and profundity of intercultural connections, rendering it more difficult to recognise a bird by its song. The political resilience and continuities should not be underestimated though; the ideological basis of early ethnomusicology was founded on an unwavering belief on the existence of certain unequivocally national characteristics of music, particularly regarding European musics (and regardless of the fact that by 1950, European national borders had been redrawn and palisaded anew several times). Quite often, the national qualities of music were conceived in terms of singular ethnicity, even if the “e-word” was reserved mainly for traits considered as foreign and especially non-European.

The tendency to nationalise certain genres and ethnicise others is a common trend also in the contemporary world of music. Often there are obvious connections to marketing and promotion, as national epithets can serve as shorthands that are based on general knowledge (or stereotypes) about a given region’s musical features – or, perhaps more crucially, on a reliance on the assumed difference between various national(ised) genres. This difference, especially in the guise of the uniqueness of one’s own national musics, is linked to the idea of the sacred and its associated assumptions about absolute and normative conditions of life (Lynch 2012: 29). In other words, it is not uncommon to encounter a variety of reasons and agendas, more often implicit than not, behind the construction and maintenance of allegedly national genres and pieces of music. It appears also that the actual musical details are most often less important than the mere need to deem a given musical style or genre national. In this respect, the nationalising tendencies in music attest to the pervasiveness of nationalism as an ideological formation, both in its explicit state-driven forms and the more subtle everyday and “banal” manifestations (see Billig 1995). Indeed, as a cultural, social and political unit, the nation is an ambivalent one, particularly in relation to issues of ethnic differences and cultural raci(al)ism (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 150–151). Furthermore, there is a need to remain alert to the institutional dimensions and interests involved, especially when it comes to education and commercial mass media, and their interrelations to the variety of musical practices at any given point of time. As popular music scholar David Hesmondhalgh (2013: 158–159) puts it, stories about genres such as jazz, blues and polka in the US and tango and son in Argentina and Cuba, respectively, becoming “absorbed as symbols of national unity-in-diversity” are common yet problematic at least in two ways:

First, they can distort our understanding of music in relation to nations by reproducing the state’s own excessive focus on key genres, rather than looking at the complexity of the musical field as a whole. Second, they can set up a simple dualism where an oppositional music form is absorbed and pacified by the homogenizing, hegemonic nation-state. [...T]he association of the original music with dominated ethnic groups

and class fractions is no guarantee of political oppositionality; and incorporation by nation-states can be a complex matter too.

(Hesmondhalgh 2013: 160)

Indeed, as Hesmondhalgh (2013: 164) emphasises, to take this complexity into account has the benefit of avoiding the misleading dismissal of all relations between national identity and music as regressive. Instead, by concentrating on instances where music, even amidst of explicit nation-building projects, provides hints or reminders of more complicated aspects of belonging, one may discern “the utopian kernel in the idea of popular culture, where ‘popular’ might mean something like ‘belonging to the people,’ rather than ‘commercialised homogenised mass’” (see also Storey 2015: 9). In Hesmondhalgh’s (2013: 164) estimation, this has happened especially when music has prompted “listeners and participants to appreciate ... how poverty and lack of freedom can tear apart the supposedly collective enterprises of nationhood, and yet also how social suffering and marginalization produce a set of experiences that might be denied to the more privileged.”

Emotions, Indigeneity and ecomusicology from the underbelly of neoliberalism

For Hesmondhalgh (2013: 164–165), the “utopian invocation of collectivity” that he detects in forms of popular music which derive from the creativity of deprived and marginalised segments of society is fundamentally a matter of making the world a better place, and the role and contribution of aesthetic experiences in this. In other words, he is interested in his “critical defence of music” in “music’s constrained contributions to human flourishing [and] enrichment of people’s individual lives” (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 6). What is more, and of particular relevance in terms of the notion of the sacred, is that in his “quest for ideal forms of communal existence” on the basis of “considerable evidence of rich music-related sociability,” one of his key “routes” is based on “Durkheimian sociology concerning a primal need in humans for intense experiences of collectivity” (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 8–9). This entails acknowledging the possibility that music and dance might meet these primal needs “in modern societies in ways that are ultimately beneficial,” and this is where Hesmondhalgh (2013: 118) also refers to the Durkheimian conceptualisation of the sacred as, “in essence, the intense social experience produced by collectivity.”

Yet this is as far as Hesmondhalgh (2013) goes with the notion of the sacred explicitly. He does make occasional references to religious contexts, but does not dwell on the details; instead, he presents some unsubstantiated – or at least overly generalised – comments, for instance, about “the marked decline of church attendance” and how this signals that “religious singing has become less a part of people’s lives” (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 105). Such remarks may of course be based on a rather conservative way of thinking

about the (Christian) church and religious singing, and when considered in relation to the proliferation of reformist Christian Masses with metal and electronic dance music arrangements, for example, as well as to the emergence of Pentecostal music business, the people Hesmondhalgh (2013: 105) refers to might also deserve a closer specification. This notwithstanding, it is worth reiterating that the reliance on the Durkheimian ideas of the sacred provides possibilities for examining the multiple forms and manifestations involved. Moreover, many scholars of religion will have no problems in connecting Hesmondhalgh's (2013) postulations about utopian dimensions, human flourishing and enrichment of lives to eschatological discussions of hope and redemption, even if he distances himself from "the redemptive hopes that post-Enlightenment thought invested in [...]esthetic experience" (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 171).

There is in addition an element of speculation or outright *belief* in the power of music in Hesmondhalgh's (2013) writing, for instance, when he emphasises "music's seemingly special link to emotions and feelings" which "makes it an especially powerful site for the bringing together of private and public experience" by investing it with a "capacity to enrich our lives via the feelings and emotions it engenders" (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 2, 11). Likewise, when he asserts that music and dance, "more than any other kinds of communication, seem linked to sociality and community," one would expect to encounter some evidence or at least a reference to relevant research in favour of the assertion. This is not to say he would be misguided in his insistence on addressing questions about music's relations to sociality, solidarity, community and communality and hence to democratic politics that are based on the idea of the common good as a pivotal ethical principle, especially when faced with the "victories of neo-liberal forms of thought and policy [that] have surely strengthened the forces of competitive individualism" (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 84–85). Nevertheless, to invest music and dance with somehow stronger links to sociality than is the case with other forms of art and communication risks mystifying and mythologising the former with transcendental, if not sacred, qualities. It is true that as non-verbal forms of communication, music and dance are useful, for instance, in collaborating with migrant groups, but so is also football, whose rules and forms of communication are in fact more universal than those of music and dance.

The limits of cross-cultural musical communication become clear in situations where debates and accusations over cultural appropriation arise. These debates can become particularly heated when at issue is musical expression that is associated with a certain Indigenous population. As a form of cultural categorisation, Indigeneity in fact has pronounced significance in relation to both politics and religiosity. On the one hand, it refers etymologically to a native population in a country or a region (OED Online 2021), as distinguished from the population as a whole; on the other, a crucial aspect of this distinction is the presence of local belief systems and cosmologies that differ from the major world religions, Christianity in

particular. What is more, the study of “indigenous religions” as opposed to world religions and new religious movements might be of aid in challenging the notion of religion to begin with. As Karen Ralls-MacLeod and Graham Harver (2000: 8–9) note, discussion about “appropriate means of studying indigenous religions is worthwhile not only because they are the majority of the world’s religions, but also precisely because they are diverse ways of being human and religious,” forcibly revealing that “people do religion in particular places in particular, embodied ways.” Indigenous religions also disclose a “considerably richer ... story of human creativity, agency, action and thought ... than a consideration of the dominant utopian (no-placed or dislocated) traditions of the world would suggest.” Linking these issues explicitly to music, Ralls-MacLeod and Harver (2000: 10) refer furthermore to the non-existence of “music” as an abstract entity, separate from other social and cultural spheres, in many Indigenous societies, as well as to ideas about the suitability of music as a communicative and expressive medium for religious experiences that often cannot be verbalised adequately.

The sacred politics of Indigenous music acquire even more weight when considered in the context of ownership and IPR. Regarding the interrelations between intellectual property and Indigenous knowledge in general, Peter Drahos and Susy Frankel (2012: 2–7) point out how these two realms have had largely separate trajectories, largely due to European colonialism. As a consequence, while gradually becoming recognised within anthropology and the study of legal systems, Indigenous or “folk” knowledge has been set against formalised scientific knowledge on the one hand and codified systems of law on the other. With respect to the notion of intellectual property and the laws and rights associated with it, one may consider how forms of expression based on Indigenous knowledge are often subject to “selective free riding” that aims at transforming them “into an innovation through some minimal intervention” (Drahos and Frankel 2012: 8). This is the case especially when cosmologically anchored ideas about ownership deviate from the Western intellectual property system:

an owner of the indigenous knowledge may not be found because, for example, IP systems do not recognise an ancestor as a legal person or because the knowledge is regarded as having entered the public domain. There is, however, considerable evidence that the willingness of indigenous peoples to share their knowledge is not, from their perspective, the equivalent of placing it in the public domain.

(Drahos and Frankel 2012: 9)

Confusions over the public domain – or outright attempts to exploit it in the “popular” realms of culture – become apparent, for instance, in musical situations where “indigenous” is taken as a synonym for “traditional,” in the sense of a piece of music lacking an identifiable author (cf. Johansson and Berge 2014). The Northern Sámi *joik* becomes again instructive because

of its subject- rather than author-centred basis of ownership. A particularly perturbing example of irreverence towards and a violation of Sámi cultural ownership is constituted by the non-consensual inclusion of *Normo Jovvna*, a *joik* to (and thus the property of) a deceased person, on the 1994 CD *Sacred Spirits – Chants and Dances from Native Americans*, affirming not only the pervasiveness of an orientalist logic according to which all forms of Indigenous culture are interchangeable, but also through its multimillion dollar sales figures the economic value of alternative spirituality based on Indigenous cosmologies. In the estimation of ethnomusicologist Thomas Hilder (2015: 153), the *Sacred Spirits* incident suggests a persistence of “the configurations of power relations set in motion by imperialism” in the guise of “new-age” market where Indigenous cultural traditions and spirituality have become exotic commodities and “experiences.” He summarises the situation as follows:

By symbolizing livelihoods, cosmologies, and traditions that somehow offer an escape from the excesses of capitalist modernity, indigenous cultures have today ironically themselves become a profitable industry in a global market. However, voices from within indigenous communities have questioned these processes owing to fears of the lack of control source communities have over their cultural heritage, concerns over commercialization of sacred aspects of indigenous cultures, and anger at the economic gain of others. Such sentiments have ignited a wave of fierce critique within political, legal, cultural, and academic arenas, which assert that indigenous cultural appropriations are a form of “neo-imperialism.” In these ways, indigenous cultural heritage has become politically charged field.

(Hilder 2015: 153)

With respect to the possibility of multiple sacred forms through a juxtaposition with heritage, commercialisation and economics, the sacred aspects of Indigenous cultures become implicitly conceptualised as mainly religious in quality. Remembering Ralls-MacLeod’s and Harvey’s (2000: 7–9) remarks on the quandaries of defining Indigenous religion, the stress on the sacred instead of the religious may be taken as an indication of acknowledging the ontological and epistemological differences between “utopian” world religions and place-bound, located Indigenous cosmologies. Elsewhere, Hilder (2015: 110–113) notes the interconnectedness of the sacred, place and environment in Sámi culture and music, yet again treats the sacred as something that is associated with spirituality, shamanism, mythology, rituals, cosmology and indeed “indigenous religion.” While the sacred remains in his treatment an undefined and largely a taken-for-granted appellation, he nevertheless points to the difficulties in separating the sacred from the secular in Sámi music, as well as to the possibility to draw on the sacred “in a novel and special way” (Hilder 2015: 2, 111), even if the latter assertion

proves to be little more than a symptom of the researcher's own fascination with the topic.

Be it as it may, the inextricability of Indigenous cosmology from a particular physical, geographical location serves as an inkling of an ecological aspect of the sacred. Underlying this suggestion is the realisation that if “to be indigenous is to celebrate belonging to a place” (Ralls-MacLeod and Harvey 2000: 6), environmentalist issues of sustainability constitute key factors in determining the absolute and normative qualities that are central for conceptualisations of the sacred in Lynch's (2012: 29) formulation. This is not to insinuate that world religions would consider their physical surroundings irrelevant; as it becomes blatantly manifest in the vicinity of any major cathedral, mosque, pagoda, synagogue or temple, there is a huge amount of both material and immaterial resources that have been spent on such edifices, as well as on the planning, building and maintenance of their elaborate musical contrivances in some cases. The crucial difference once again is that while the structures and sounds of world religions reach to heavenly heights, the Indigenous temples and shrines are often to be found in nature (and often exploited by the tourism industry).

A related but somewhat reversed question concerns the extent to which nature is to be found in Indigenous music, and how this might be linked to politics and to the sacred. Hilder (2015: 131–132), for one, marvels at the ways in which musical landscapes are “wonderfully brought to life” in contemporary Sámi music through *joik* in particular:

Joik performance, through evoking one's natural surroundings and communing with the spirits of nature, can establish an intimacy between people and their natural environment. ... These musical articulations of close relationship to nature can ... take on political resonances in light of disputes over land rights. Considering escalating concerns about ecological disasters, they can also be interpreted as articulating the politics of environmentalism.

Environmentalist interpretations of music have indeed become more common in scholarship in general. Some have concentrated on the discourses and representations of landscape in a general manner (Mitchell 2017), while others have framed their investigations more explicitly in terms of environmentalism and “ecomusicology” (Allen 2011; Schippers 2016; Dibben 2017). In both strands, there are grounds for establishing a connection to the sacred, either by emphasising the profaning tendencies in the possible musical exoticisation of Indigenous or otherwise “remote” locations, or by stressing the ecocritical concerns over the role of music in securing the sustainability of fundamental living conditions. It has been pointed out that in the broader field of ecocritical art and fiction, there is a prominent apocalyptic orientation towards an immanent and irrefutable crisis, endowing the products with “political relevance [and] sublime terror” (Rehding 2011: 410).

The ecocritical music scholars further accentuate that the environmental crisis at hand is not only a scientific or political shortcoming but crucially also “a failure of culture,” in the sense that it signals a breakdown of “holistic problem solving, interpersonal relations, ethics, imagination, and creativity” (Allen 2011: 414; see also Dibben 2017: 164). From a more detailed investigation into the ethical situations and arguments involved there is only a short step into the realms of politics and the sacred, inasmuch as all are linked to questions about the criteria and conditions of good life. Ecocritical studies of music bring an additional facet to this through a heightened awareness of the inherently activist qualities of all scholarship, and sometimes through explicit advocacy for, say, “sustainable forestry in the harvest of musical-instrument wood” (Allen 2011: 417). Instead of fiddling while the earth burns, to paraphrase Aaron S. Allen (2011: 417–418; original emphasis), “ecomusicological approaches have the possibility to offer new *social critiques* about the intersections of music, culture, and nature – and, in general, about the world around us.”

The ecomusicological concerns have a great deal in common with the study of musical paganism, especially if and when paganism is conceived as a form of ecological spirituality and a veneration of place (Weston 2013: 45). Once again, one is wise to remember the etymological root of “pagan” as arguably based on a reference originally to those who are “of the country, rustic,” gradually developing within the context of early urban Christianity towards “heathen” (OED Online 2021). Alongside the political implications of eco-sensibilities involved in musical paganism (Weston 2013: 47), it may be argued that there are also connections to countercultural sentiments, especially as a continuation of resistance towards technocratic ideologies (Bennett 2013: 23). This is pronouncedly so in the case of so-called industrial paganism where the explicit aim was, during its rise in the UK in the 1980s, to bring about cultural and political change through “occultural esoterrorism” based on explorations of taboos, forbidden knowledge and all things grotesque, “in an attempt to create a free-thinking occult culture in which individuals were the resources with which they might be able to carve out their own future” (Partridge 2013: 206). Thus:

Paganism, viewed through an “industrial” lens, becomes an approach to the world from below; it is a way of analysing society from its underbelly; an immersion in the dark side; the subversion of Christian hegemony, conservative politics and what nowadays might be described as neoliberalism.

(Partridge 2013: 193)

As a bottom-up form of social critique, industrial paganism with its occultural and esoterrorist inclinations fulfils many, if not all, of the conventional criteria for a subcultural phenomenon: to the eyes and ears of the conservative mainstream, it bespeaks of aesthetic, moral and social deviance, corruption and degeneration. While pathologising, labelling and stigmatising notions of

subculture have given way to context-sensitive, interactionist, constructivist and intersectional approaches, elements of deviation, resistance and marginalisation have remained as core aspects of how to define a subculture. Yet as Haenfler (2014: 15–16) notes, instead of trying to identify concrete criteria for isolating “blocks” of people as subcultures, it is more useful to treat sub-cultural characteristics as continua that are based on an understanding of culture as “ever-changing symbolic blueprints that guide and give meaning to people’s beliefs, values, behaviors, and material things.” On the basis of this, to reiterate Haenfler’s (2014: 16; original emphasis) working definition, a subculture is a “*relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalization from or resistance to a perceived ‘conventional’ society.*”

Issues of marginalisation and resistance are by definition implicated in social and societal power relations and hence politics, and with respect to the possible and probable intersections into the realms of the sacred, it is worth noting how Haenfler (2014: 17–20), for one, begins his elaboration on shared distinctive meanings by mentioning values, beliefs and rituals. Yet as his scrutiny proceeds, it becomes apparent that the conceptual fluidity of both politics and the sacred needs to be taken into account. Regarding politics, he distinguishes subcultures from social movements and countercultures on the basis of the “manifestly political” and oppositional character of the latter two. The sacred, in turn, emerges in its religious dimension when he likens new religious movements to subcultures due to similarities regarding norms, practices and marginalisation; yet he maintains that “NRMs are often somewhat more organized than subcultures, and ... their emphasis on the spiritual or supernatural make them distinctive enough to warrant their own concept” (Haenfler 2014: 21).

Hostile gospels of subcultural sorts

The legitimacy of the classificatory labels may well deserve further debate, but more pertinent is the extent to which the similarity between subcultures and new religious movements provides a basis for a closer scrutiny into the multiplicity of postsecular sacred forms and their political implications. Here, one might also note the existence of explicitly music-based religious subcultures, such as Evangelical punk and hip hop, even if, as sociologist Ibrahim Abraham (2017: 5) suggests, the political stances of subculturists in question remain largely implicit at best. It is nevertheless instructive to keep in mind that institutional churches may be described as “domesticated descendants of once radical movements,” which, in turn, is not entirely dissimilar from the tensions between subcultures and the mainstream in music. Also sociological studies of countercultures as religious phenomena and theorisations of subcultural identity based on religious strength and resilience may prove to be informative (Abraham 2017: 17, 29–30). In the case of Evangelical subcultures and their theorisation, though, there is an apparent

tension between a marginalising resistance towards secular mainstream and a negotiation that is necessary to make one's evangelising understood. This mixture of cultural refusal and offering a cultural alternative may be conceived as a form of resistance in its own right, but usually as removed from the class-based forms of subversion and opposition more typically found in secular subcultures; as Abraham (2017: 33–34) puts it, the political approach in question, “such that there is one, ... is less a policy platform than a subversive relational individualism evincing strong distrust of the normative social institutions and practices of secular modernity.”

The ways in which politics intertwine with the popular and the sacred in subcultural musics may be further examined in relation to Indigeneity, ethnicity and racialisation. Again, different renditions of the *joik Normo Jovvna* prove to be instructive, as it has been recorded also by Aigi, a Sámi metal band, thus giving grounds to contemplate over the amalgamations of subcultural transgression, Indigenous cosmology and transcultural cosmopolitanism, and how the transformations and reinterpretations “might provide a model for alternative ways of reappropriating cultural heritage and resisting cultural dispossession” (Hilder 2015: 155). The overall importance of styles of metal music, beginning from the early “heavy” ones and culminating on the plethora of more recent “extreme” types, as evidence in favour of the inextricability of religious and subcultural susceptibilities should not be forgotten either. Stories and critiques abound about the blasphemous, immoral, violent and vulgar qualities and contents of metal music, and as a consequence, the genre as a whole has been surrounded by recurrent moral panics that have often been centred on accusations of Satanism. As there has been in addition a demonstrable fascination within metal styles with apocalypse, mythology, legend, occultism, esoterism and paganism, some are willing to claim that it is “no exaggeration to say that heavy metal's association with religion – whether emerging from within the genre itself, from the criticism of its detractors, or both – has developed into a defining characteristic of the genre as a whole” (Moberg 2017: 223). And, as one might expect, there are also metal subgenres that take their impetus from the major world religions, to the extent that one encounters such apparently self-contradictory labels as Muslim black metal. Moreover, whether explicitly religious metal styles are guilty of an “evangelical strategy of cultural infiltration” (Moberg 2017: 227) or not, the role of metal music – alongside other types of music, notably rap (e.g., Mitchell 2015: 229) – in the revolutionary upheavals known as the Arab Spring has been recognised by scholars too. In the words of LeVine (2012: 795):

The Arab Spring did not produce its own heavy metal anthem, but metal is an important strand of the DNA of the Arab uprisings. ... The foreign origins and do it yourself ethos of the metal scenes, the marginalization from the mainstream of Arab societies, the need to sustain small-group solidarity, the focus on noncommodified, internet-based networks for

disseminating their art, and the inherently subversive messages of the genre (where themes of corruption, meaningless violence, and decay naturally called to mind the political realities of their societies)—all of these enabled metal scenes across the Arab world to function as incubators of political activism.

LeVine (2012: 795) reports also about the centrality of certain rappers in giving “voice to the despair and anger of a generation” in the early 2010s, and in the reorientation of the broader “sonisphere” towards revolt instead of fear and obedience. Rap and hip hop, as a cultural formation in general, have indeed received a great deal of attention in recent years as a prime site of subcultural politics; an indication of the peculiarity of rap and hip hop in this respect is that “hip hop studies” have emerged as a field of research and scholarship in their own right, with debatable status as a subcategory of subcultural studies (cf. Bennett and Waksman 2015: 3). For comparison’s sake, a quick search into the undiscriminated depths of the virtual world yields some 40,000 results for “hip hop studies,” while the numbers for “punk studies,” “metal music studies” and “reggae studies” are in the vicinity of 33,000, 16,000 and 13,000, respectively, and little shy of 60,000 for “chamber music studies,” whether one considers the latter a subcultural phenomenon or not.

Within the broader field of hip hop studies, there has also been an increasing interest towards religious aspects of rap music. There are at least two major incentives for this. On the one hand, as indicated by the Arab Spring events, among other things, there is a realisation that the expressive techniques and styles of rap have been adopted practically worldwide, and thus the genre exhibits also “non-Western” value systems and forms of spirituality. Of particular interest for many in this respect has been Muslim rap. On the other hand, it is precisely the racial societal and political system of the USA that has induced many to investigate the roles of and interrelations between hip hop and religion, and it may very well be argued that through the introduction of “race” into the equation, the politics of the sacred in music attain a dimension of a profound importance. The historical connections between Christianity, colonialism and racism aside, the everyday and structural forms of racism in the alleged land of the free and the home of the brave have been examined in relation to hip hop and its religious aspects. Thus, Daniel White Hodge (2017: 24–25), for instance, writes about “hip hop’s hostile gospel” that derives from:

the nefarious social and living conditions of the urban context ... that breed frustration and hostility within the Hip Hop community such that ... Hip Hop creates a hostile form of theology which not only engages these issues, but also demands a voice at the theological table while it brings its frustration and hostility paired with a “good news” to get out of the current situation. ... The good news is not based on Christian values and theologies, but in a much broader view of social

justice, social awareness, social consciousness, community mindedness, personal consciousness, and a journey to a God who can help and will provide shelter. Moreover, this gospel within the Hip Hop community is not always a sacred quest; the secular and profane are intertwined with weed, alcohol, sexuality, and “living a good life/being successful.”

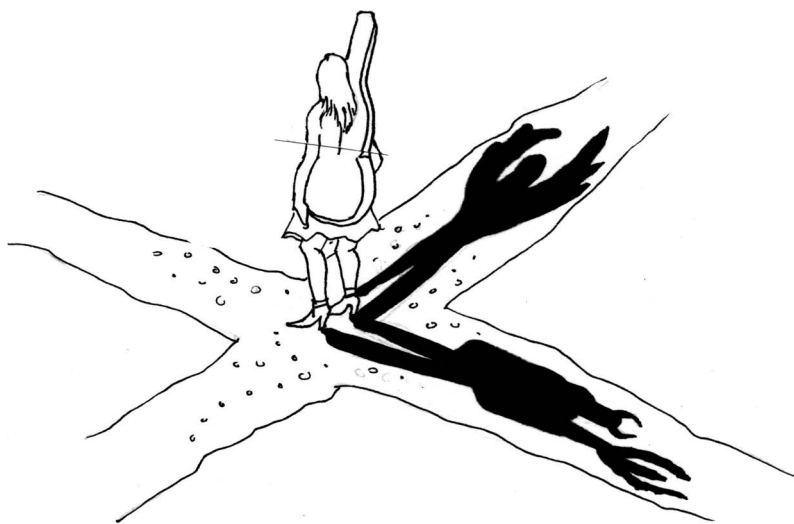
On the basis of this kind of cogitation, it is very difficult, if not outright impossible, to make a meaningful distinction between the political and the religious angles involved. Similarly, when the given circumstances are approached in terms of socio-spiritual urban geopolitics that rest on racial oppression and economic asymmetry, the separation of the political from the sacred makes little sense. In the words of sociologist Michael Eric Dyson (2015: 61), the “geopolitics of such urban misery begin to constitute a ground for urban theodicy” that accrues some of its most potent forms in rap music and hip hop culture in general as guidelines, explanations and evidence of overcoming societal destitution. Thus the commercial success of rappers may function for some as “a realized eschatology” (Dyson 2015: 62).

With these tensions and their sacred political or factional implications in mind, one may come to the conclusion that the sacred needs to be considered as an irrevocably political phenomenon and conceptualisation of social relations in its own right. Additionally, one might recognise a requirement to treat politics as a sphere of activity that is equally, inescapably connected to the sacred, inasmuch as at issue are the ways in which legitimization of social power relations are based on what “people collectively experience as absolute, non-contingent realities that exert unquestionable moral claims over the meaning and conduct of their lives” (Lynch 2012: 32). Interestingly enough, in the treatises on religion in hip hop one may encounter a definition of religion that comes close to this way of specifying the sacred. Anthony B. Pinn and Monica R. Miller (2015: 3), for their part, conceive religion not as a proxy for Christianity, Islam or any other world religion with their doctrines and institutions, but as “the manner in which the existential and metaphysical arrangements and rhetoric of meaning are developed, worked out, and (re)arranged.” For them, this is tantamount to understanding religion as “a conceptual and taxonomical ‘place holder’ of sorts, a way by means of which human parse out and explore the social world, the self, and human experience, framework of meaning, or strategic acts of identification.”

On the basis of such reconceptualisations, the conventional wisdom about the sacred as the ultimate explanation, the eventual goal and a transcendent entity beyond politics or mundane power struggles proves to be political to its core when faced with the empirical reality constituted by an abundance of sacred forms, as all public deliberation and action draws its final authority, justification and legitimization from these ultimate sources. And, as suggested by the diverse religious, ideological, legal, economic, national, ethnic, Indigenous, ecological and subcultural manifestations of the sacred, there certainly is more than one song to be written about all this.

7 Conclusion

As I met a senior colleague after a number of years and told him about my topic, he leered into my eyes for a meaningful moment and said: “That’s impossible. Impossible.” I fear my attempts to clarify my approach as conceptual rather than exemplary, let alone exhaustive, fell on deaf ears (and not because of his seniority), as my emphasis on the sacred as not a mere synonym for the religious quite apparently served only to increase his incredulity. While I was and remain confident that a critical juxtaposition of the popular and the sacred provides scholars of music – and culture and religion – with auspicious possibilities in their endeavours to further and challenge the prevailing understandings of humanity and their part in the world as a whole, I am nonetheless willing to admit that the topic has the tendency to overwhelm, especially due to the abundance of relevant events and incidents – as well as because of the obvious popularity of the sacred



in the academic marketplace, musically and otherwise. Thus, I have had to remind myself frequently of the point that, given the multidimensionality of both the popular and the sacred, the examples I have chosen foreground certain tendencies and by no means exclude other types of intersections; to this end, I would urge all readers with “obvious” missing examples in mind to consider carefully the degree to which the examples in fact do challenge or even contradict the principles I have introduced here. In a sense, therefore, the mythological, religious, subcultural and political intersections of the popular and the sacred in music discussed in the preceding pages serve their purpose best when taken as a point of departure for a debate and not as a comprehensive explanation.

Whether the point of departure offered is deemed impossible or worthy of further consideration, it is obvious that on a general level, the intersections of the popular and the sacred manifest themselves in music in multiple ways, and given the multidimensionality of both the popular and the sacred, this is quite understandable and to be expected even. Hence, the value of the examination resides in the interrelations and differences between the areas of enquiry. Again, as the treatment is conceptual in nature and lacks a systematic corpus, the inferences to be drawn are suggestive and tendentious (see Figure 7.1). With this caveat in mind, one can nonetheless posit that regarding myths and mythologisation of music, there is certain prevalence of the quantitative and folk dimensions of the popular and their intersections with the religious, national and subcultural sacred. With respect to the realm of institutionalised religions and their side effects, as it were, there is, in turn, a pronounced presence of an amalgamation of the quantitative and aesthetic popular with the religious and factional sacred. The subcultural dynamics at stake for their part, it might be argued, favour the subcultural sacred (of course) as it intersects with virtually all dimensions of the popular, with the quantitative one

		THE SACRED AS				
		RELIGIOUS	FACTIONAL	NATIONAL(ISTIC)	ECONOMIC	SUBCULTURAL
THE POPULAR AS	QUANTITATIVE	myths		myths		myths
	AESTHETIC	religions				
	FOLK	myths		myths		myths
	SOCIOLOGICAL		politics			sub-cultures
	PARTISAN		politics			
	POSTMODERN					

Figure 7.1 The grid of intersections of the popular and the sacred with suggested areas of predominance with respect to myths and mythologisation (see Chapters 2 and 3), religiosity (see Chapter 4), subcultures (see Chapter 5) and politics (see Chapter 6).

as a possible exception. Finally, considering politics, one might insist that all dimensions of the popular and sacred become relevant, even if there is certain predominance of the sociological and partisan qualities of the former and the factional, national and economic aspects of the latter.

Whether these suppositions hold true in more systematic research settings is for others to find out and ultimately quite tangential as far as I am concerned. More valuable to me is the possibility to examine a given empirical example – preferably but not necessarily a musical one – as an intersection of the popular and the sacred; equally valuable are those situations when the possibility to do so is denied. This is, in a significant sense, to emphasise the Foucauldian points of departure for the analysis and the insistence on conceiving discursive statements as irrevocably relational and ideological occurrences that in their singularity and uniqueness establish connections and regularities between symbolic content, physical objects and subject positions (see Foucault 1972: 107, 117). To be sure, one can learn a great deal from the regularities that govern a particular singular intersection of the popular and the sacred in music, yet one can equally justifiably ponder the possible broader clusters of regularities. Regarding mythologisation of music, for instance, one might consider the omnipresent *popularity* of *sacred* myths about music – whether in the form of Indigenous cosmologies, religious doctrines, Eurocentric romanticism or biomusicological speculations – as an indication, first of all, of the irrevocable and insurmountable difference between modes and media of communication. In this sense, music indeed is ineffable; yet to deem the fundamental difference, for instance, between musical sounds and written words as “charm” (see Jankélévitch 2003) is quite different from approaching the expressive practices and techniques in question in terms of multimodality, by stressing the multiple sensory mechanisms of every human being on the planet Earth – and of other animals, too. Both explanations can, of course, be used to claim that to be musical is to be human and vice versa.

The tendencies and problems associated with the ineffability of music indicate further that the issue is fundamentally epistemological in nature. In other words, a central question pertains to what counts as knowledge where music is concerned, and how is that knowledge obtainable and transferable. In socio-cultural circumstances where the “epistemological hit parade” (Tagg 1998) is dominated by numbers, words and images, it is hardly surprising that those musical parameters which cannot be unequivocally measured and represented graphically – such as timbre or “the sound” and “groove” – are considered less central in the production of knowledge. A rather mundane consequence of this is that these qualities become conceptualised as something beyond reason; it is not uncommon therefore that, by extension, music in general becomes mythologised or otherwise sanctified as something that resembles the notion of the sacred as delineated by Lynch (2012, 2014). However, an emphasis on various *musical* forms of knowledge production might have its benefits in the critique of prevailing

logocentrism and visual epistemology – but only with an awareness of the risk of autonomising music.

In relation to this, it is instructive to note how an increasing number of ethnomusicologists in particular have realigned their disciplinary allegiance from music to sound(scape) studies, sometimes distancing themselves from music altogether and concentrating on “vroom and moo” instead (see Järviluoma 1994). In these departures and other instances of sound studies, epistemological issues have often been foregrounded, for instance, in theorising “acoustemology” (Feld 2015) and “ecocentric” approaches (Allen 2019: 53) that are based on relational and reflexive formation of knowledge through all kinds of listening practices (Recharte 2019: 78). Relatedly, one can engage in “deep listening” where the aim is not to reveal absolute musical structures nor to increase personal awareness, but to reconsider the interrelations between people, the environment and power by concentrating on the overlapping layers of meaning in a given situation, and crucially not just by listening but multimodally, with an emphasis on the “democracy of the senses” (Bull and Back 2003: 3–4). Yet as recent times have evinced, alleged democracies may be led by crazy people, and given the institutional weight of music and art as fields of exceptionalist exclusion, the immanent risk is that by emphasising sound, music is left to the supposedly musical individuals known as musicians and thus mythologised further, with little chance to structural remoulding that might have more profound effects.

Indeed, a rather special visual effect is that the world will look different once one closes one’s eyes. Of course, not everyone has this scopocentric luxury, just as there are many who cannot sense musical and other acoustic vibration through their eardrums. This does not preclude them from dancing, especially if the beat is strong and amplification fierce. Even if one has no sensory impairments, in certain situations the epistemological dominance of the visual becomes challenged; one may, for instance, examine “the relationship between night and popular music ... as a complex system of sonic and visual representations, materialities and practices,” with a heightened sensitivity towards the management of the haptic and corporeal in an environment “where safety and security are set against the more ludic aspects of music at night” (Bottà and Stahl 2019: 6, 13). While this may imply certain wishful re-legitimation of the transgressive qualities and “communal power” of popular music against alleged threats of individualistic atomisation as well as instrumentalisation of the music “as a sonic balm for daily tedium,” the night as a sphere “where social regulation meets social ritual” and “a place of fear and danger around darkened space and places” (Bottà and Stahl 2019: 2–5) offers multiple entries into the dynamics of the popular and the sacred:

Music has served to mystify and amplify some of these aspects of the night, playing up its sacred mysteries but also providing sanctuary and security through collective experience that pay heed to its tenebrous

power, from tribal gatherings to vespers to raves. The shared motifs and mythologies between music and the night are now so deeply entwined that it is difficult to see them as anything less than partners striving towards a frontier that thrives on transgression, danger, risk, resistance, pleasure, eroticism, experimentation, conviviality and liminality[.]

(Bottá and Stahl 2019: 5)

The implicit question that remains unanswered is nevertheless: “what is the relevance of the popular here?” Is it constitutive of “the night” or vice versa and how is it maybe mythologised for its part when making such tacit assumptions? A detailed response to these questions will have to wait, but the prevalence of mythologising and sanctifying music, inadvertently or not, may also be considered an inkling of the fact that modal and sensory differences quite simply *matter* to people, regardless of the ideologies and belief systems underlying their actions and societal conditions. An inexorable consequence of this is that precisely because of the multiplicity of available ideologies and belief systems, the ways in which the said differences matter are for their part divergent and hence constitute the basis for power struggles. And as these struggles enter the public realm, sanctification of music becomes a matter of politics (see Street 2012). Consequently, as the sacred qualities of music become interweaved with deliberation and decision-making over material resources, they have also an economic component to them. As Timothy Taylor (2012: 1) puts it: “Music has power. Musicians know it, listeners know it. And so do advertisers.”

The idea of music as a fundamental human trait or “soundly organized humanity” (Blacking 1973: 89), nevertheless contradicts the ubiquitous *belief* in music’s innate powers and autonomy, as does the recurrent emphasis on ingenuity and other forms of exceptional musical individuality. It is certainly possible and maybe equally commonplace to think that it is the music which chooses an individual to become its vessel, regardless of the socio-cultural and historical circumstances and conditions. In many parts of the world, the idea of “musical families” is fostered, whereby immediate questions emerge concerning the familial, social and cultural structures conditioning the formation of such families, as opposed to speculations over the importance of genetic factors in inheriting “musical creativity” (see Oikkonen et al. 2016). On both sides, nevertheless, the creative powers reside somewhere else than in “music itself.”

As practices labelled “music” in the Western world are indeed global, the ways in which they manifest the intersections between the popular and the sacred also reflect and inspire actual socio-cultural change. Certainly, as evident in educational contexts in particular, the mythologisation of music’s origins, autonomy, individuality and authenticity may serve the interests and power relations of institutional status quo, which for its part is invariably connected to negotiations and struggles over material resources

and hence a matter of politics and economy. A pivotal aspect of this in the current era of creative labour is the way in which issues and beliefs about origins, individuality and authenticity in particular bring pressure to bear upon the copyright system and intellectual property rights in general. A crucial point of comparison here is constituted by different Indigenous cosmologies with conceptions of music's origins and hence also its ownership that is radically different from the one inscribed in the Western copyright acts.

In contrast to the elements of political and economic exploitation inherent in sanctification of music, the beliefs and doctrines involved, whether justified religiously, (sub)culturally or scientifically, may provide grounds for a sense of communality, identity construction and self-assurance, among other things. The celebration of the potentialities is undoubtedly warranted when dealing with the destructive prospects of societal alienation and extremism, yet at the same time, it should not be forgotten that the very same capacities, particularly when supported by myths of cultural purity and totalitarian leadership, can be – as manifestations of sacred commitments – “a source of much harm” (Lynch 2012: 48).

Ambiguities and repercussions of the harm done

To scrutinise the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music, or in any other field of cultural practice and its associated belief systems for that matter, will unquestionably meet with certain opposition on the part of the “believers” in question. As the points of my departure lie predominantly in the conceptual framework of ethnomusicology, it is likely that the various “subculturist” mythologisers of music and other members of communities of musical beliefs, as well as those subscribing to ontological philosophy or neuroscientific biology will come up with a number of objections and alternative explanations. The multiplicity of myths and other sanctifying (as well as sacrilegious) practices surrounding music and the similarities between them nevertheless constitute an empirical fact that is particularly suitable for an investigation where the focus is on historically situated socio-cultural dynamics, whether labelled ethnomusicology, critical musicology, the cultural study of music or anything else that meets the disciplinary needs at a given point of time and place.

With respect to the challenges associated with theoretical and methodological points of departure further, the disciplinary divide between the strands of music research and the study of religions comes across repeatedly as overwhelming. Sometimes the gaps in question lead to neologisms that translate as nothing more than questionable unfamiliarity with the “other side”; a case in point is Evans's (2006) notion of “theomusicology” which is effectively the type of ethnomusicological study that focuses on Christianity, thus foregrounding certain conceptualisations and “ideas about music” (cf. Merriam 1964; Titon 2009). Also the absence of explicitly

ethnomusicological discussion from impressive landmark collections such as *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music* (eds. Partridge and Moberg 2017) is conspicuous, especially as four contributors to the volume self-identify as ethnomusicologists. Symptomatically, in the article that opens the handbook by addressing “the basic principles of ethnographic research and their application in the study of popular music and religion,” the only other fields of academic research that count are popular music studies, youth cultural studies and, historically speaking and writing, anthropology (Bennett 2017: 13) – as if ethnomusicology, whether or not in the guise of anthropology of music, has nothing to offer whatsoever in the field of study in question. But, as one reads the article on, it becomes apparent that neither does anthropology of religion matter very much, as the emphasis is on summaries of mainly sociological studies on various subcultures or scenes of popular music (in the generic sense). The only explicit connections to the intellectual history and paradigms of the study of religions emerge in brief references to the work of “founding *sociologist*” Durkheim and to “virtual ethnography” conducted on “sites dedicated to new age forms of spirituality and beliefs” (Bennett 2017: 14, 21; emphasis added).

To this end, to introduce an approach that does not rely on unquestioned conceptualisations of either popular music or religion or the sacred has the benefit of transgressing rigid classificatory boundaries that for their part might lead to circular argumentation – and will most certainly lead to pointless bickering about the boundaries themselves, signalling invariably different ways to conceive musical authenticity. It should not be forgotten though that the term “music” is a classificatory label in its own right, separating certain sounds from “noise,” for instance, and in particular often if not always investing the sounds at hand with aesthetic and hence cultural value. The term is also thoroughly Eurocentric and thus a carrier of cultural beliefs and ideologies of fundamental nature. To recognise this in an analysis of the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music indubitably increases the complexity of the task, but this should be taken as a benefit and not as a detriment however laborious the execution; by giving prominence to conceptual multidimensionality and epistemological multimodality, the treatment participates in the discussion about re-enchantment and other postsecular cultural processes and expands it with a particular sensitivity towards disciplinary boundaries and overlaps.

Regardless of the dubious disciplinary politics in higher education, especially in humanities and social sciences, the “signs o’ the times” (as one mouldering musician might have put it) suggest there will be no dearth of relevant topics of research in the future. I write these words as all around the world people are anxiously anticipating a solution to the Covid-19 pandemic, and many colleagues have begun to investigate the effects of the crisis to the music industry, while others explore possible solutions to the predicaments of the live music sector in particular. There undoubtedly is a lot to be learned from the plight and hopefully some remedies emerge, not only for musicians,

promoters and other industry professionals, but also for audiences. The pandemic has proven that, once again, in an all-encompassing societal turmoil questions about the fundamental values and priorities come to the fore and invariably turn towards issues of sustenance, whether framed medically or economically. Importantly, this is a reminder of the centrality of the human body in all things sacred; in very concrete terms, who are the ones to be vaccinated first in order to maintain the system, to make sure there will be both performers and audiences, amongst others, in the future as well? Apparently, the Olympic athletes.

Remembering the principles of soundly organised humanity, one may ease one's mind, as the humans will music until their world burns. The anthropocene is not the end of the planet, but as its name suggests, the man – and maybe other human beings as well. And here is the rub: instead of maintaining the system, the real challenge is in transforming it. Just as earlier plagues and epidemics, Covid-19 is both symptomatic and revealing of the unsustainable political, economic and ecological structures that bedevil the globe. This is blatantly obvious in the neocolonial protection of vaccine patents for the benefit of the pharmaceutical industry, regardless of the public resources that have been invested in developing the drugs (e.g., Kashyap and Wurth 2020). The conditions cannot be changed with short-term state loans or digital innovations, but only through more equitable distribution of wealth and quite simply by reducing consumption in terms of both money and energy (see Devine 2019: 187). Live music in fact may be of aid in this, albeit one would have to consider the need for electric amplification more carefully, and consequently the ramifications towards conceptualising the popular.

Questions of wealth and consumption cannot be solved overnight or mechanistically, not least with tanks on the streets. Neither are the hazardous manoeuvres and consequences of the “epistemic oil tanker” that represents the historical legacy of autonomous absolute music (Tagg 2012: 83, 132) transmutable within presidential terms of office, regardless of the type of democracy. Indeed, regarding the years to come, it is rather certain that multiculturalism and other postcolonial processes will only increase the phenomena that can be analysed meaningfully through the conceptual dialectics of the popular and the sacred. As an aspect of this, it is already evident that the rise of (neo)nationalism, fascism and racism lead to destructive sanctification of “race” and ethnicity that spills over also to ethnomusicology, especially inasmuch as it is misconceived as an anthropology of “ethnic music.” The problems of the prefix should not be underestimated, yet there are grounds to be equally critical towards the other two components of the disciplinary label, not least the suffix “ology” (see Nooshin 2008). There are also other forces in operation in this world than those of the higher education, and they may be even more discouraging; in the industry, the label “ethno” is used occasionally and in some cases even habitually in the context of world music, also known as contemporary folk music.

Unsurprisingly, then, the ethnicising and racialising tendencies pervade the public sphere. I have witnessed situations where genres like rap have been degraded on racist grounds, and even in well-intentioned multiculturalist projects certain styles of music have been evaluated on the basis of a prejudiced juxtaposition between a performer's "own ethnic" expression and a "global hit" that "wasn't like it was hers" (see Kärjä 2016: 81). It is likewise expectable that as the religious landscape continues to change, new forms of "sacred popular" (or vice versa) music will emerge, whether these are linked to paganist re-enchantment or more traditional religious denominations. One cannot exclude the impacts of religious fundamentalism from the discussion either, or the aesthetic and subcultural forms of extremism that are manifested in the pervasiveness of the ideas about the autonomy and authenticity of music. In this respect, it would be tempting to say that music really is worthy of its name as the mythologised art of the Muses, as regardless of its ubiquity and universality as a cultural practice, there is a continuing tendency to sanctify or mystify it either technically or ideologically.

From a scholarly and methodological stance in particular, it is apparent that there is a need for further combinations of analytical approaches provided by religious studies and (popular) music studies. The grid of the popular and the sacred I have offered thus represents merely a point of departure into more nuanced investigations, and quite obviously is in its two-dimensionality insufficient to address, for example, temporal shifts in the intersections in question. But as can be learned from analytical geometry, more than three dimensions can easily be included in the co-ordinates; with respect to mundane materiality, for instance, to relate the grid to issues of technology and gender would undoubtedly yield additional understandings. Moreover, on a more general level, there are lessons to be learned – or to remind oneself of – which concern the urgency of remaining attuned to the multidimensionality and valency of any conceptual and classificatory markers used, whether in private, public or academic contexts. As any textbook on research methodology instructs, at the core of academic inquiry is the simple act of questioning, and thus scholars and scientists should be by definition wary of axiomatic terminology and lines of reasoning. Yet at the same time, research fields are dominated by paradigms and traditions that in the course of time, may accrue sacred, absolute, non-contingent, normative qualities of their own, and as a consequence researchers may forget the fundamental ontological and epistemological questioning that is needed. This, in turn, as in the attempts to rescript the sacred quite often, may lead to purpose-oriented arguments that in the final analysis reveal the most about their presenters than the phenomena under scrutiny.

It is understandable that the temptation to challenge the conceptual creed of one's own field is so strong that the nuances of other pastures remain unnoticed. However, given the extent to which interdisciplinarity nowadays is at the crux of the academic credo as it were, to overcome and resist those

temptations is pivotal if one wishes to enjoy the scarce mundane material resources that the academia has to offer. The intersections of the popular and the sacred in music purvey one possibility, one where cultural studies, the study of religions and ethnomusicology, I daresay, cut across each other meaningfully. Through an ecocentric approach, there might even be a place for a natural scientist in the future investigations into the music-cultural dynamics at issue.



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Index

- Aalto, Kari 80
ABBA 62
absolute music 51–52, 89, 163
abuse: of children 109, 117, 143; sexual
28, 110, 139; *see also* violence
acoustemology 159; *see also*
epistemology
acoustic: instruments 42; sound 13,
18, 25, 53, 55, 63, 86, 93, 104, 109,
144, 159
acoustics 84, 126
activism 130, 139, 151, 154; *see also*
politics; power; protest; resistance
adhān 144; *see also* Islam
adolescence *see* youth
adult contemporary (music) 95
advertising 9, 22, 56, 81, 160
aesthetic(s) 9, 24, 27, 28, 54, 63, 74,
87, 88, 93, 94, 100, 109, 125, 151;
experience 146; popular 20, 43, 57,
141, 157
affect 34, 57, 60, 108, 115, 125
Afghanistan 2, 140
aficionados 36, 52, 72, 126, 133; *see also*
fandom
Africa 47, 55, 77, 92
African-American musics 49, 77, 87,
97–98, 104, 131
African Americans 36, 97–98, 116, 118
Africentrism 55
Africa Bambaataa (Kevin Donovan) 117
African-Caribbean musics 55, 77, 131
age 7, 43, 64–65, 74–76, 80, 99, 102, 107,
116–122, 131–135; ageing 76, 116, 120,
131, 133–135; discrimination based
on 131; and gender 75–76; sanctity of
118; *see also* children; youth
agency 63–64, 81, 118, 119, 130, 148; of
music 1, 39, 49, 66, 109
Áigi 153
alcohol 120–121, 155
alienation 36, 92, 100, 108, 161
alternative spiritualities 16, 18, 88,
114, 120, 149; *see also* new religious
movements; re-enchantment
ambient (music) 101, 115
ambiguity 12, 80, 92–93, 107, 126, 138;
moral 28, 35, 73, 93, 109; of the
popular 12, 92
America (continent) 11, 144; Latin 92;
North 2, 11–12, 124
Amish, the 102–103
amplification 42, 105, 126–127, 159, 163;
see also instruments
anāshīd 106, 114
anthropology 2, 20, 87, 89, 96, 148, 162;
of music 2, 25, 52, 96, 162, 163; of
religion 4, 21, 23, 27, 162
anti-disco campaigns 77, 103, 105
anti-gay prejudice 105; *see also* sexuality
anti-Semitism 107; *see also* racism
apocalypticism 42–43, 150, 153
appropriation 5, 17, 55, 114; cultural 63,
80, 88, 138–139, 147, 149; mis- 119;
re- 81, 153
Arab music 78
Arab Spring, the 153–154
Armstrong, Louis 36
art 8, 22, 32, 34, 38, 46, 51–53, 71,
96, 101, 104, 132, 147, 150, 159,
164; autonomy of 51–52; *see also*
musicking; performance; works
articulation (Gramscian) 29, 53, 115,
122, 139, 144, 150; *see also* cultural
studies
art music 5, 25, 46, 49; Austro-German
46; autonomy of 52, 69–71; modernist
44; racism in 59; “serious” 45–46;

- Western 25, 33, 35, 45–46, 49, 52, 59, 69–71, 110, 119, 144
- Asia 2, 79–80
- Asian music 78, 83
- Asian musicians 67, 78–79
- assemblage 23, 29, 47; *see also* cultural studies
- atmosphere (of a situation) 124–125
- audiovisual media 9, 62, 78, 102; *see also* cinema; films; television
- aura 55, 77
- Aurora (artist) 71
- authenticity 14, 17, 35, 56, 59–60, 63, 65, 72–83, 105, 114, 116–117, 125, 128, 160–162, 164; “black” 56, 77; commercial value of 75; displays of 76; ethnic 80, 82, 101; in- 75, 76, 82, 111, 114; Indigenous 101; objectified 75; racialised 77–78, 80, 82; “street cred” 65, 116; *see also* individualism; ingenuity; originality; romanticism
- authoritarianism 45, 137
- authorities 106; public 138, 141, 143; religious 21, 45, 50, 104, 109, 141
- authority 19, 27, 97, 141, 155; of music 55–56; of religion 43, 44; supernatural 45
- authorship 60, 98–99, 148–149
- autonomy: musical 1, 3, 13, 33, 35, 49–57, 66, 68–70, 76, 159, 160, 163–164; physical 106; relative 52–53
- baby-boomers 118
- Bach, Johann Sebastian 3, 35
- Bali 25
- Balkans, the 109
- Baptism 87
- Bartók, Béla 54
- Batman* (television series) 1–3
- Bayreuth 128
- Beatles, the 20, 25, 67
- Beethoven, Ludwig van 26, 35, 69
- behaviour, social 7, 24, 36, 133, 152
- beliefs 20, 21, 24, 47, 51, 52, 59, 60, 61, 63, 91, 92, 105, 121, 133, 144, 152, 161, 162
- Benedict XVI 109
- Berry, Chuck 76, 78, 131–132
- Beyoncé 49
- Bible, the 88
- Biblical 9, 20, 103, 114, 143–144
- big band jazz 56, 84, 126
- Billboard* (magazine) 98
- biography 13, 35, 139
- biomusicology 38–40, 49, 158
- birth: immaculate 42; of genres 31, 42, 104; of music 38
- Björk 67
- Black Atlantic, the 55; *see also* blackness; ethnicity; race
- black Britain 55
- black metal 31, 114; Muslim 153
- “black music” 55–56, 77, 107
- blackness 55, 77–78, 108; *see also* ethnicity; race
- blasphemy 13, 88, 138, 153
- blues 3, 43, 49, 67, 68, 87, 105, 115, 126, 145; *see also* rhythm and blues
- body, human 22, 28, 42, 78, 125–126, 163; “black” 78; *see also* corporeality
- Bortnick, Ethan 69–70
- Boulanger, Lili 68
- bourgeoisie, the 10, 44, 81
- Bowie, David 62, 64–65
- Brazil 87
- Britain: black 55; *see also* the UK
- Buddhism 21, 88, 91
- Burma (Myanmar) 21
- Byrne, David 17
- Cage, John 36
- Calkins, Earnest Elmo 57
- canonisation 2, 3, 32, 35, 65, 71, 132; *see also* historiography
- cantors 85, 86, 88, 100
- capital 95, 130; cultural 44; economic 45; sacred 44–45; symbolic 44
- capitalism 4, 6, 21, 44, 46, 56, 59, 62–64, 71–72, 77, 88, 96–98, 130, 141–143, 149; *see also* class; commerce; consumption; copyrights; culture industry; economy; high/low; ideology; intellectual property; labour; marketing; marketplace; mass; music industry; ownership; politics; power; production; publishing
- Carrington, Terri Lyne 68
- Catholicism 11, 87, 92, 106–107, 109–110, 143
- Cave, Nick 13
- CCM (contemporary Christian music) 9, 11, 95–96, 98, 127
- censorship 29, 46, 99, 121, 137–138, 140–141; market 137–138, 142; “new” 138
- chamber music 80, 84–85, 98, 131–134, 154; as subculture 132–134

- chant 140; Gregorian 41; Indigenous 149; of Qur'an 17; Synagogue 100
- charisma 60–61, 71; *see also* stardom
- Charm (Jankélévitchian) 54, 158
- Cheb Khaled 65
- Chicago 103; blues 104
- children 17, 22, 67–68, 99, 101, 109, 122, 138; abuse of 109, 111, 117, 143; prodigies 67–68; sanctity of 122, 140; welfare of 22, 138; *see also* age; youth
- China 26, 88, 91, 144
- Chopin, Frédéric 1–2, 13–14, 26
- Christ 90
- Christianity 9–12, 17, 18, 20, 21, 42, 43, 49–51, 60, 69, 88–90, 92, 98–99, 103, 114, 127, 144, 147–148, 151, 154–155, 161; evangelical 11, 95–96, 98, 152–153; Evangelical Lutheran 84–85; Laestadian Lutheran 101; Lutheran 3; reformist 147; Zwinglian 103
- Christmas 84
- church (as institution) 6, 36, 45, 81, 90, 101, 105, 109–110, 137, 140, 142–143, 146–147, 152
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the 99
- cinema 9, 93, 117, 119; science-fiction 102
- civil rights 142
- Clark Chisholm, Jacky 98
- Clark Sheard, Karen 97
- Clark Sisters, the 98–99
- class (social) 2, 10, 19, 37, 44, 46, 53, 59, 71, 75, 77, 79–80, 94, 102, 104, 107, 118, 122, 129, 146, 153
- classical music 25, 32, 42, 51, 78–79, 89, 112–113, 119, 123; “Eastern” 14; Euro-American 2; European 46, 51; Indian 50, 67; Western 32, 67
- classicism 51, 89
- “Classical” music 51, 89
- cognition 32, 38–39, 79, 125; cognitive science 39
- collectors 75; of records 76, 123
- colonialism 4, 21, 51, 57, 89–90, 96, 106, 148, 154; cognitive 79; crypto- 81; neo- 163; *see also* orientalism; postcolonial; racism
- Coltrane, John 36
- commerce 4–7, 12, 15, 19, 21, 24, 28, 46, 56, 63, 73–75, 77, 94, 96–98, 122, 137, 139, 142, 145, 146, 149, 155
- commodities 75, 77, 82–83, 88, 90, 96, 122, 141, 149
- communities 14, 18, 35, 36, 48, 53, 72, 78, 92, 96, 105, 107, 121, 133, 138, 143, 147; fan 5, 113, 127; hip hop 117, 154–155; imagined 124; Indigenous 149; Islamic 100; migrant 130; Muslim 39, 106, 141; racialised 77; religious 27, 91, 102, 144; subcultural 45, 117, 161
- comparative musicology 48, 144
- composing 1–2, 13, 31–33, 36, 45, 46, 49–50, 54, 56, 58–59, 67–71, 75, 94, 115; and gender 1, 50, 68–71
- Confucianism 91
- conservatism 43, 81, 87, 95, 102, 105, 114, 117, 120, 141, 143, 151
- consumption 8–10, 12, 19, 21, 25, 37, 44, 56–57, 71–72, 79, 81–82, 88, 90, 95–96, 102, 105, 117, 122, 123, 131, 143, 163
- contemplative listening 50–51
- contemporary Christian music *see* CCM
- contextualism, radical 23; *see also* cultural studies
- conventions 32, 36, 108; aesthetic 125; generic 24, 46, 93, 105, 114–115; *see also* traditions
- copyrights 45–48, 98–101, 122, 161; infringement of 47, 142
- corporeality 28, 44, 76, 105, 114, 126–127, 135, 159
- cosmologies 30, 35, 41, 97, 106; Indigenous 26, 35, 101, 147–150, 153, 158, 161
- counterculture 22, 81, 83, 109, 114, 119, 151–152; *see also* subcultures
- country (and western) 13, 104, 115
- creativity 8, 46–47, 60, 71, 98–99, 103–104, 111, 119, 146, 148, 151, 160; “casino” 119; racialised 55–56, 77–79
- credibility 72, 80–81, 116, 123; “street” 65, 74, 81, 116; *see also* authenticity
- Crickets, the 26
- criminal code 138, 142
- Cronos (Conrad Lant) 121
- Cuba
- cults 17–18, 116, 120, 128–130
- cultural appropriation 63, 80, 88, 138–139, 147, 149
- cultural capital 44
- cultural diversity 25, 46, 137, 145; *see also* multiculturalism

- cultural politics of locations 132;
of popular music 14, 154; of
transgression 99
- cultural studies 17, 22–29, 124, 133,
161–162, 165; sub- 116, 118, 122, 154
- culture industry 44, 90
- dance-pop 95; *see also* EDM
- dancing 2, 36, 39, 41, 50, 77, 114,
146–147
- dark tourism 67
- Darwinism 38, 49
- Davis, Miles 36, 77, 119
- death 17–18, 54, 61–67, 114; ”to disco”
77; of music 42; of rock 17
- ”deep listening” 159
- ”delebs” 61–62
- delinquency 2, 116–117, 131
- democracy 22, 43, 89, 95, 98, 137–138,
142, 147, 159, 163; ”of the senses” 159
- demonic origins of music 43–45
- demonisation: of Muslims 141;
racialised 48
- demythologisation 34–38
- Deutscher, Alma 67–68
- diasporic 47, 55, 92, 130; *see also*
postcolonial
- digitalisation 40, 46, 63, 95, 97, 99, 163;
see also technology
- Dio, Ronnie James 62
- Dion, Celine 62
- disability 80–81
- disciplines (academic) 2, 8–10, 14,
16–17, 23–27, 39, 41, 90–91, 93,
96, 124, 159, 161–163; *see also*
anthropology; cultural studies;
education; epistemology; ethnography;
ethnomusicology; historiography;
interdisciplinarity; musicology;
ontology; philosophy of music;
science; sociology; study of religions;
subcultural studies; theology
- disco 60, 76–77, 103–105
- ”Disco Demolition Night” 103
- ”discophobia” 105
- discourse analysis (Foucauldian) 7, 10,
23, 37, 82, 93, 158; *see also* cultural
studies
- discrimination 80; age-based 131
- disenchantment 73, 81
- dispositif 10, 23; *see also* assemblage;
cultural studies
- dissemination 14, 90, 95, 104, 143
- divas 60; *see also* stardom
- diversity 4, 94; cultural 25, 46, 137, 145;
religious 6; *see also* multiculturalism;
postcolonial
- DIY (do-it-yourself) 116
- Donovan, Kevin (Africa
Bambaataa) 117
- drill (music) 118
- drone metal 15, 114, 126–128
- Duran Duran 113
- Dylan, Bob 13, 105
- early music 74–75
- ecocentrism 159, 165
- ecocriticism 150–151
- ecology 150–151, 155; media 9–10; *see*
also environmentalism
- ecomusicology 150–151
- economic ethnomusicology 96–97
- economy 3, 21–22, 28, 36, 42, 44–46, 53,
59, 64, 71–72, 75, 79, 87, 92, 95–99,
103, 108, 130, 138, 141–143, 149, 155,
160–161, 163; as sacred 22, 36, 44–46,
57, 71–72, 110, 142, 155, 158; *see also*
capitalism
- Eddie the Head 113–114
- education 11, 14, 44, 78–79, 90, 93, 95,
145, 162–163; musical 18, 27, 44, 59,
67, 79, 110, 120, 123, 132, 160
- El Cachivache Orkesta 134
- electric guitar 14, 85, 104–105,
126–127
- electronic dance music (EDM) 13, 85,
114, 147; *see also* dance-pop
- Elefteroi (Free Monks) 27
- Ellington, Duke 36
- embodiment 27, 105, 114–115, 133, 148;
see also body; corporeality
- emotions 35, 71, 146–147; music as
language of 35, 52, 71
- energy (physical) 59, 101–102, 125, 163;
see also sound
- Enlightenment, the 21, 89, 147
- Eno, Brian 17
- entertainment 6, 122; industry 95–96,
102, 121–122; music 84, 100, 132
- environmentalism 149–151, 159; *see also*
ecology
- epics 35, 38–41, 47
- epistemology 18, 20, 24, 28, 34, 37,
39–41, 51, 53, 89–90, 125, 149,
158–159, 162–164; *see also* disciplines
- eschatology 3, 37, 147, 155
- ethics 4, 5, 63–64, 67, 70, 73, 80, 91, 111,
116, 118, 143, 147, 151

- ethnicity 14, 72–73, 77–82, 100–101, 104, 107–108, 122, 137–138, 142–146, 153, 155, 163–164; *see also* Indigeneity; race; racism
 ethnography 25–27, 87, 89, 120, 162; “virtual” 162
 ethnomusicology 2–3, 9, 14, 24–28, 35, 39–40, 47–48, 52, 69, 96–97, 109–110, 124, 134, 144–145, 159, 161–165; economic 96–97
 Euro-American 107
 Eurocentrism 3, 14, 25, 41, 47, 91, 106, 115, 134, 158, 162
 Europe 2, 4, 14, 16, 20, 40, 46, 49, 51, 67, 80, 89, 101, 106–107, 123, 126, 137, 144–145
 European Parliament, the 40; Union, the 46, 106
 Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) 80
 Evangelical Lutheran Christianity 84–85
 evolutionary musicology 38–40
 exceptionalism 64; musical 56, 159
 exoticism 78–80, 88, 102, 149–150
 extreme metal 15, 86, 100, 114, 126–128, 153; *see also* black metal; drone metal
 extremism 2–3, 71, 106–107, 130, 141, 161, 164; *see also* fundamentalism

 “fair use” (copyrights) 98
 fandom 5, 61, 65, 71–72, 79, 98, 111, 113, 127
 fantasy (fiction) 30–32, 47–48
 fascism 93, 123, 137, 163
 film *see* cinema
 “Filthy Fifteen, the” 121
 Finland 30–31, 38, 42, 58, 76–78, 80–81, 84–85, 101, 113, 132, 136
 folk culture 6, 10–11, 19–20, 49, 56, 77, 93, 148; as popular culture 48, 57, 74, 81, 93, 157
 folk music 2, 11, 14–15, 24, 26, 32, 42, 67, 73, 83, 88, 93, 95, 101, 105, 115, 123, 163
 folk religion 91
Forbes (magazine) 62, 75
 France 68, 75
 Franklin, Aretha 65, 97
 freedom of expression 110, 121, 137–138, 141–142; *see also* censorship
 free jazz 15, 36, 98
 Free Monks (Elefteroi) 27
 Fry, Stephen 68
 fundamentalism 71, 87, 106–107, 139, 141, 164; *see also* extremism

 fusion jazz 105, 119
 Futurism 101–102, 104

 gamelan subculture in the USA 124
 gangsta (rap) 63, 121
 Gaye, Marvin 65
 “geek rock” 123
 gender 1, 7, 49, 54, 60, 64, 68–70, 78, 80, 86, 97, 100, 104–105, 113, 117, 164; and age 68, 75–76, 132; trans- 68; *see also* ingenuity; intersectionality; queer; sexuality
 genealogy (Foucauldian) 37–38
 generational dynamics *see* age
 geniuses *see* ingenuity
 genre theorisation 15, 24, 55, 63, 73, 76, 80, 93, 104–105, 108, 114–115, 122–123, 145
 Germany 51
 gift 50, 51, 68, 69, 79, 89, 96
 Glitter, Gary 111
 globalisation 4, 12, 18, 21, 27, 34, 59, 61, 63, 71, 79, 90, 116–117, 130, 143, 149
 gospel (music) 13, 43, 56, 84, 85, 87, 95–98, 105, 114
 goth (music) 115, 116
 Gould, Glenn 67
 Graceland 128
 Grateful Dead, the 114–115
 Greek Muses, the 32–33, 49, 164
 Gregorian chant 41
 grime (music) 108
 Gruber, HK 85
 guitar 13, 49, 75–76, 131; bass 14; electric 14, 85–86, 104–105, 126–127

 habitus (Bourdieuian) 44–45
 Hamilton (Aotearoa New Zealand) 128
 “halal pop” 87
 Haley, Bill 118
 hardcore punk 17, 115, 117
 hard rock 95, 103, 109
 hate speech 138
 heavy metal 15, 43, 81, 85–87, 100, 103–104, 109, 113–114, 117, 126, 153; *see also* black metal; drone metal; extreme metal
 hell 113, 142
 Helsinki 84
 heritage (cultural) 68, 149, 153
 heroes and heroines 36, 69–71; *see also* ingenuity
 heteronormativity 76, 105; *see also* sexuality

- heteroreligiosity 51, 89
 high/low (culture) 2, 6–7, 19–20, 42, 44–45, 52, 94–95
 Hillsong 87, 143
 Hinduism 50, 52, 88, 115
 hip hop 43, 95, 114, 116–117, 154–155;
 Evangelical 152; *see also* gangsta (rap)
 hip hop studies 116, 154
 historiography 49, 55, 59, 65, 110–111, 117, 119, 128, 139
 Holly, Buddy 65
 holograms 62–64
 homophobia 110, 143; *see also* sexuality
 Houston, Brian 143
 Houston, Whitney 49
 humanity 3, 37, 40, 51, 89, 102, 156;
 “soundly organised” 23, 25–26, 37, 48, 160, 163
 human rights 137, 140, 142
 hybridity 55, 63, 77, 91, 101
 hymns 10–11, 56, 85–86, 99–100, 104
- icons 36, 70–72, 76
 identity 7, 21, 26, 27, 55, 75–78, 80–82, 96–97, 105–107, 122, 124, 127–129, 142–143, 161; ethnic 101; Indigenous 101; local 128–129; minority 80; musical 52; of musical works 47; national 22, 80, 101, 132, 135, 137, 146; religious 51, 89; sexual 80; subcultural 114, 116, 127–128, 130, 133, 152
 ideology 3, 4, 7, 13, 14, 17–19, 22–24, 35, 36, 42–43, 45–46, 50, 52, 56–57, 59, 68, 72, 75, 81, 94–95, 98, 105, 107, 114–115, 123, 127, 137, 144–145, 151, 155, 158, 160, 162, 164; *see also* absolute music; authenticity; autonomy; beliefs; capitalism; colonialism; conservatism; high/low; individualism; liberalism; orientalism; patriotism; politics; populism; power
 idioculture 133, 135; *see also* local; subcultures
 idolisation 60–61, 71–72; *see also* stardom
Idols (television) 61–62
 Illuminati, the 49
 Ilmajoki 132
 imitation 46, 81, 100
 improvisation 46
 inalienable possessions and values 97
 inauthenticity 75, 76, 82, 111, 114
 India 51, 88–89
 Indigeneity 2, 26, 35, 40–41, 48, 92, 101, 139, 147–150, 153, 155, 158, 161; *see also* *joik*; the Sámi
 indigenisation 116
 individualism 11–12, 44, 60, 73, 81, 99, 147, 153, 159; *see also* ingenuity
 industrialisation 10–11, 19, 73, 95–96
 industrial paganism 151
 ineffability 53–55, 158
 ingenuity 33, 35–36, 49–50, 54, 58–60, 69–72, 75, 110–111, 160; *see also* heroes and heroines
 institutional(ised) religions 5–6, 21–22, 28, 45, 50, 72, 86–93, 99, 101–102, 106, 114, 120–121, 141, 143, 152, 155, 157
 institutions 6, 8–9, 14, 17, 24–25, 28, 36, 46, 59, 64, 67, 69, 78, 79, 92–95, 97, 106, 109–110, 120, 126, 145, 159–160; *see also* organisations
 instrumental music 14, 38, 42, 50; *see also* absolute music
 instruments (musical) 42, 75, 101–104, 125–126, 151; *see also* acoustic; amplification; guitar; orchestras; organs; turntables; violins; voice
 intellectual property 45–47, 61, 98, 137, 142, 148, 161; *see also* copyrights
 interdisciplinarity 8–9, 16–17, 25, 164
 “intermundane” 62–64
 intersectionality 68, 70, 75–76, 80, 97, 102, 104–105, 107, 122, 132; *see also* class; disability; ethnicity; gender; identity; sexuality
 Iron Maiden 113–114
 Islam 17, 20, 41, 43, 50, 60, 88, 100, 106–107, 114–115, 140–141, 155; “popular” 87; *see also* Muslims
 Islamic societies 88–89, 100, 141; State, the 106
 Islamophobia 106–107, 141
 Israel 109
- Jackson, Joe 111
 Jackson, Mahalia 50, 97
 Jackson, Michael 62, 65, 67, 111, 128
 Jacquet de La Guerre, Elisabeth 68–69
 Jamaica 73, 144
 Jara, Victor 65
 Jayadeep, Sreya 67
 jazz 3, 15, 25, 32, 36, 55, 60, 68, 77, 94, 101, 115, 119, 123, 145; big band 56, 84, 126; free 15, 36, 98; fusion 105, 119; swing 126

- Jesus: popularity of 20
 “Jesus music” 43
 John, Elton 119
 Johnson, Robert 49
joik 101, 148–150, 153; ethnofuturist
 101, 104
 J-pop 79
 Judaism 20, 88, 100–101; *see also*
 klezmer
 Judas Priest 13
 Juilliard School, the 110

Kalevala (epic) 30–31, 38, 41, 49
 Karajan, Herbert von 112, 119
 Ketime, Arite 67
kirtan (Sikh) 89
 Kiss 131–132
 klezmer 100–101
 K-pop 79
 Kuhmo 132

 labour 42, 61, 64, 71, 99, 122; creative
 161; division of 24, 46, 59
 Laestadian Lutheran Christianity 101
 Lant, Conrad (Cronos) 121
 Las Vegas 119
 late modernity 6, 17, 57, 94, 122
 legitimization 22, 40, 45, 82, 94–95,
 106–107, 111, 119, 125, 133, 139–140,
 155; re- 159
 Lennon, John 62, 65, 75
 Liberace, Wladziu Valentino 119
 liberalism 2, 137–138, 141; neo-
 147, 151
 Liberation Theology 92
 lifestyle 66, 122–123
 liminality 114–116, 135, 160
 liturgy 11, 85, 92
 live music 13, 62, 71, 96, 104, 162, 163
 local 10, 14, 46, 51, 72, 74, 77, 79, 82,
 88, 92, 99, 116–117, 120, 122–124,
 128–130, 133, 147; “cults” 128–129;
 trans- 122–123; *see also* idioculture;
 scene
 Lordi 81
 low (culture) 7, 19, 42, 44–45, 52, 94
 Lucifer 49
 lyrics 9, 11, 95–96, 127, 136–137

 Ma, Yo-Yo 110
Mahābhārata (epic) 50
 Mann, Thomas 49
 marginalisation 130–131, 134, 146,
 152–154
 marketing 16, 17, 56, 64, 71–72, 77–78,
 82, 86, 90, 96, 121, 145; “necro-” 62
 marketplace 9, 21, 46–47, 56, 71, 75,
 79, 82, 98, 102, 105, 116, 121–123,
 137–138, 142, 149; academic 157; *see*
 also capitalism; censorship
 Marley, Bob 62, 65
 Mars, an ethnomusicologist from 27, 109
 Marsalis, Wynton 77
 Marxism 23, 92, 143
 mass audience 105; consumption 88, 90;
 culture 10, 19, 50, 57, 75, 93–94, 113,
 146; marketing 16, 56; media 4, 11,
 138, 141, 145; production 44, 72, 90,
 96, 141; success 75; *see also* class; low
 Masses (Christian) 84–86, 100
 materiality 42, 64, 70, 93, 159, 164; of
 music 42, 54, 108, 126–127; *see also*
 energy; sound; volume
 McCartney, Sir Paul 131–132
 McLaren, Malcolm 118
 mediation 4, 6, 9–10, 13, 14, 27, 29, 47,
 71–72, 78, 96–97, 99, 102, 121, 133,
 141, 145, 158
 mermaids and -men 49
 Metal Mass, the 84–86, 100
 metal music *see* black metal; drone
 metal; extreme metal; heavy metal
 Methodism 11, 87
 migration 4, 18, 92, 130, 137; *see also*
 postcolonial
 Milhaud, Darius 54
 misogyny 63, 110, 117; *see also* gender;
 violence
 modernism: in art music 44, 74; post- 12
 modernity 12, 19–21, 51, 53, 59, 77, 149,
 153; colonial 51, 89, 96; late 6, 17, 57,
 94, 122; postcolonial 115
 moral: ambiguity 28, 35, 73, 93, 109;
 panics 17, 105–108, 117–121, 135, 153
 Mormons 99
 movies *see* cinema
 Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus 36, 65,
 67–69
 multiculturalism 46, 78, 92, 104, 134,
 144, 163–164; *see also* cultural
 diversity; postcolonial
 multimodality 28, 158–159, 162; *see also*
 epistemology
 mundane, the 16, 42, 54, 70–71, 127, 142,
 164; “inter-” 62–64; *see also* profane;
 secular
 murder 65, 111; *see also* violence
 Muses, the Greek 32–33, 49, 164

- museums 8, 95
 music: as sound 1–3, 9, 15, 28, 54–55, 104–105, 109, 127, 140, 144, 158, 162; *see also* energy; materiality; noise; volume
 musicality 39, 59
 musical works 13, 25, 35, 46–47, 50–51, 54
 music-culture models 23, 26–27, 35, 134; *see also* ethnomusicology
 musicianship 7, 9, 16, 63, 68, 78, 80
 music industry 9, 14, 42–46, 56, 61, 65, 67, 69, 95–99, 102, 110–111, 132, 141, 142, 162–163; *see also* copyrights; production; publishing; technology
 musicking 13, 25; “scenic” 128
 musicology 9, 23, 25–26, 96; bio- 38–40, 49, 158; comparative 48, 144; “critical” 26, 161; “cultural” 124; eco- 150–151; evolutionary 38–40; “popular” 9; *see also* disciplines
mūsīqā 41, 106; *see also* Islam
 Muslim black metal 153; metal 100; rap 154
 Muslims 20, 39, 106, 109, 141, 144; Rohingya 106; *see also* Islam
 Myanmar 21, 106
 mythologisation 9, 32–45, 48, 52–53, 55–56, 60–61, 64, 68–71, 76, 78–81, 97, 108, 110, 132, 147, 157–161, 164

 national 19, 22, 72, 78, 80, 128, 130, 132–138, 143–146; anthems 99, 136; composers 58–59, 71; music 42, 85, 97, 101; politics 35; as sacred 57, 72, 155, 157–158; trans- 79, 143; *see also* community
 nationalism 22, 54, 93, 97, 107, 137–138, 145, 163; banal 80; compensatory 130; extreme 130, 138
 nature 42, 90, 150–151; *see also* ecology; environmentalism
 Nazism 45, 93, 120, 137; anti- 54
 “necro-marketing” 62
 neoliberalism 147, 151; *see also* capitalism
 neo-orientalism 78, 88
 neo-tribes 122–123, 128; *see also* scenes; subcultures
 neuroscience 35, 38–40, 47–48, 161; -theology 90
 Neverland 128
 Newport Folk Festival 105

 new religious movements (NRM) 4, 120, 148, 152; *see also* alternative spiritualities; re-enchantment
 night, the 159–160
 noise 14, 28, 35, 48, 109, 126–127, 162; *see also* energy; sound; violence; volume
 normativity, norms 10, 13, 16, 20, 22, 39, 44, 47, 72, 76, 105, 108, 118, 127, 134, 144, 145, 150, 152, 153, 164
 North America 2, 11–12, 124
 notation 46, 53, 104
 Notorious B.I.G., The (Christopher George Latore Wallace) 63

 O’Brien, Richard 128
 occult, the 15, 55, 121, 153; “occultural” 151
 Offenbach, Jacques 113
 ontology 9, 24, 34–35, 37, 45–48, 53, 63, 98, 125, 149, 161, 164; “differential” 47–48; plural 41–42
 opera 32, 84, 126, 131–134; divas 60
 Orbison, Roy 62
 orchestral music 31, 32
 orchestras 59, 71, 79, 84–85, 94–95, 126
 organisations 24, 93–95, 106, 130, 143; *see also* institutions
 organs (instrument) 85–86, 104
 orientalism 88–89, 149; musical 59; neo- 78, 88; “techno-” 78; *see also* postcolonial
 originality 46–47, 59, 72–73, 75–77, 79, 119; *see also* authenticity; ingenuity; purity
 origins of music 17, 30–49, 78, 114, 160–161; “black” 56, 77; demonic 43
 Orthodox: Greek 27; Judaism 100; Russian 140
 Osbourne, Ozzy 13
 ownership 46, 63, 72, 79, 98, 101, 148–149, 161; *see also* copyrights

 Paganini, Niccolò 49
 paganism 18, 47, 49, 60, 114, 144, 151–153, 164; industrial 151; *see also* alternative spiritualities
 pain 109; *see also* violence
 Pakistan 2, 89
 Palestine 109
 panics: moral 17, 105–108, 117–121, 135, 153
 Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) 121

- Parker, Charlie 36
 patriotic rap (in Poland) 106–107
 patriotism 99, 140
 penal code 138, 142
 Pentecostalism 11, 87, 143, 147
 performance 13, 24–25, 35, 36, 42, 47,
 54–55, 62–63, 74, 76, 80, 93, 96–97,
 104, 131, 144, 150; *see also* ageing;
 Charm; early music; ESC; gift;
 holograms; live music; musicking
- Perry, Katy 13, 49
 Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät (PKN) 80–81
 Petty, Tom 62
 Phillips, Sam 118
 philosophy of music 35, 47, 50, 54, 57
 physics of sound 101–102, 125–127; *see*
also instruments; sound; volume
- pilgrimage 67, 127–128
 Pinochet, Augusto 65
 Platonism (musical) 36, 47
 Poland 31, 106–107
 politics 15, 21–22, 35, 43, 54, 64, 78, 115,
 121, 136–155, 158; cultural 14, 35,
 99, 132, 154; definition of 139–140;
 identity 63, 68, 75, 81, 105, 144, 148;
 of interpretation 36; of location 129,
 132; and music 52; of mythologisation
 35, 40; *see also* democracy; ideology;
 power; protest; resistance
- polka 113, 145
 pop: “cults” 17–18, 120, 129; culture
 10, 70, 74, 106–107, 111; “halal” 87;
 market 56; music 17, 56, 62, 79, 85, 88,
 95, 100, 105, 115; musicians 66, 71
- Pop Idols* (television) 60
 popular culture: conceptualisations of
 4–22, 87, 93, 95, 146; and religion 8,
 52, 115; and youth 120
 “popular Islam” 87
 popular music: conceptualisations of
 5, 9–19, 43–46, 50, 54, 73–74, 88, 90,
 94–96, 98, 103–104, 115–120, 123,
 128–129, 162; *see also* unpopularity
- “popular piety” 92
 popular religion 91–93
 popular song 132
 populism 72, 93, 106, 137
 postcolonial 4, 12, 34, 41, 47–48,
 51–52, 72, 79, 87–90, 115, 125, 144,
 163; *see also* colonialism; cultural
 appropriation; cultural diversity;
 ethnicity; Eurocentrism; Indigeneity;
 multiculturalism; orientalism;
 “primitive music”; racism; xenophobia
- posthumous careers and fame 62–65, 71
 postmodern 11–12, 56, 71–72, 116; as
 popular culture 19, 48, 57, 74, 81
 postsecular 4, 12, 16, 18, 34, 81, 90, 120,
 152, 162
 post-socialism 106
 post-subcultural theorisation 122; *see*
also idioculture; neo-tribes; scene;
 subculture
- power (relations) 7, 10, 19, 22, 28, 34,
 37–38, 40–41, 44, 46, 53; of music
 3, 35–39, 49–57; *see also* alienation;
 autonomy; capitalism; democracy;
 ideology; institutions; legitimisation;
 marginalisation; national; normativity;
 protest; resistance; violence
- Power of Music, The* (television) 70
 prejudice 14, 80, 144, 164; anti-gay 105;
 ethno-religious 130; technological 42
- Presley, Elvis 20, 50, 62, 65, 118–119, 128
 Presley, Lisa Marie 62
 “primitive music” 14, 48
 Prince 13, 62, 64–65
 printing press 11, 99
 prodigies (musical) 67–71
 producers 78, 118
 production 7–8, 14, 19, 46, 52, 55, 56,
 61, 63, 64, 72, 78, 79, 88, 90, 94–96,
 104–105, 141, 143; of knowledge 34,
 37, 40, 158; of sound 25, 86, 100,
 126–127
- profanation, profane 15, 20, 43, 73,
 88–91, 108, 115, 122, 128, 138–143,
 155; *see also* mundane; secular
- prohibitions 3, 122, 138, 141; *see also*
 censorship
- Prokofiev, Sergei 54
 prosperity religion 143
 protectionism 3, 35, 77; academic 14
 protest 94; *see also* resistance
- Protestantism 11, 87, 92, 143; Lutheran
 3, 11, 84–85, 100, 101; Zwinglian 103
- psychedelic music 18, 109, 115
 public interest groups (PIGs) 121
 publishing (industry) 46, 99
 Punjab 52, 89
 punk (music) 13, 76–77, 80, 85, 100,
 113, 115, 117–118, 123, 134, 154;
 Evangelical 152; hardcore 17,
 115; ultranationalist 138; *see also*
 subcultures
- purity: cultural 80, 105, 119, 161; generic
 80; of live performance 104; *see also*
 authenticity; originality

- qawwali* (Sufi) 89
 Quakers 140
 queer 68
 Qur'ān: recitation of 17, 41
- race, racialisation 2, 37, 43, 48, 55–57, 63, 73, 76–79, 97, 103–108, 111, 116–117, 144, 153–155, 163–164; of rhythm 59, 77, 144; sanctification of 163; *see also* colonialism; ethnicity; Indigeneity; postcolonialism; xenophobia
- racism 26, 42–43, 49, 56–57, 59, 77–79, 107, 110, 138, 154, 163–164; “cognitive” 79; “soft” 79; *see also* extremism; fascism; fundamentalism; hate speech; Nazism; totalitarianism; white supremacism
- radical contextualism 23; *see also* cultural studies
- rap 55, 63, 74, 85, 104, 107, 109, 116–117, 153–155, 164; gangsta 63, 121; Muslim 154; patriotic (in Poland) 106–107; ultranationalist 138; white supremacist 131; *see also* hip hop
- Rastafarianism 43, 73, 144; *see also* reggae
- records 20, 50, 63, 82, 100, 102–104, 119, 121, 123, 153; collecting 123; sleeves of 113
- re-enchantment 4, 13, 16, 18, 26, 73, 81, 90, 162, 164; *see also* alternative spiritualities; new religious movements
- reggae 43, 55, 65, 73, 85, 115, 144, 154; ultranationalist 138; white supremacist 131
- Reich, Steve 110
- religion(s), religiosity 17, 26, 41, 62, 105–106, 115, 121, 144; anti- 114; definitions of 16, 20–21, 27, 87–93, 149, 155; hetero- 51, 89; Indigenous 148–149; institutional(ised) 14, 21, 25, 50, 72, 86–89, 91–92, 99, 102, 114, 120, 141, 157; “musical” 27, 60, 109, 127; “popular” 91–93; quantitative popularity of 91; prosperity 143; study of 4–6, 16–19, 27, 89, 91, 161–162, 164–165; subcultural 114, 144; world 88, 147–150, 153, 155; *see also* spirituality
- religious authorities 21, 45, 50, 104, 109, 141
- religious popular music 13, 43
- resistance 52–53, 93, 103, 120, 160; as popular 19, 74; subcultural 113, 116, 130, 134, 151–153; *see also* politics; transgression
- rhythm 86, 100, 134; as “popular” 50; racialisation of 59, 77, 144
- rhythm and blues 55, 87, 104
- Richardson, Jiles Perry “The Big Bopper” 65
- rites, rituals 4, 7, 18, 20, 24, 39–40, 71, 73, 88, 92–93, 114, 126–127, 159; daily 9; of passage 121; *see also* cults; violence
- Robeson, Paul 50
- rock (music) 3, 9, 13, 17, 27, 56, 65–66, 71, 75–77, 85, 94, 103–105, 113, 115, 118, 126; critics 77; “geek” 123; historiography of 55, 111; psychedelic 109; “secret histories” of 55; *see also* authenticity; electric guitar; hard rock; punk
- rock and roll 43, 65, 76, 103–105, 118
- Rohingya Muslims 106
- Rolling Stone* (magazine) 121
- Rolling Stones, the
- romanticism 50–53, 57, 73–74, 81; “Freudian” 55; *see also* authenticity; individualism; ingenuity
- roots: of rock and roll 104; of salsa 78
- roots reggae 144
- Russian Federation, the 136–137, 140
- Saari, Wimme 101
- sacralisation 72, 122; of music 27, 39, 73–74, 89
- sacred: conceptualisations of 4–5, 12–22, 26–28, 42–46, 62, 73, 81–83, 91–94, 97, 99–100, 107, 120, 126, 128–129, 140–143, 146–150, 155, 162–163
- “sacred capital” 44–45
- sacrifice 126, 132; *see also* violence
- sacrilege 100, 105, 161; *see also* profane
- salsa (music) 78
- Salvation Army, the 11
- Sámi, the 101, 149–150, 153
- Sánchez, Adán 67
- Satan 43; satanism 43, 49, 114, 153
- scenes (musical) 100, 122–135, 153–154, 162; *see also* local; neo-tribes; subcultures
- Schwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar 21
- science 20–21, 34, 37–41, 48, 50, 89–90, 94, 102, 148, 151, 161, 164–165; cognitive 39; neuro- 35, 38–40, 47, 161; *see also* discipline; epistemology

- scopocentrism 53, 125, 159; *see also* epistemology
- secular: conceptualisations of 5, 36, 51, 88–90, 96, 149–150, 155
- Seeger, Pete 105
- senses, sensory reception 28, 109, 125, 158–160; *see also* epistemology; scopocentrism
- “serious” music *see* art music
- Sex Pistols 118
- sexuality 63, 76–77, 80, 105–106, 109–111, 121–122, 144, 155; *see also* abuse; identity; intersectionality; violence
- Shakur, Tupac “2pac” 62–63
- Sibelius, Jean 31, 58–59
- Sikh, the 52, 89
- Simpsons, The* (television) 111
- slavery 11, 55–56, 77; *see also* racism
- sociology 9, 17, 19, 26, 52, 87, 89, 94, 122, 146, 152, 162; of religion 4, 21, 23, 27–28, 127
- son (music) 145
- song: origins of 39–40
- soul (music) 43, 55, 65, 71, 87
- sound 17–18, 24–25, 28, 40–42, 52–54, 56, 85, 96, 100–102, 109, 115, 125–126; musical 1–3, 9, 15, 28, 54–55, 104–105, 109, 127, 140, 144, 158, 162; *see also* energy; instruments; materiality; muckicking; noise; violence; volume
- “soundly organised humanity” 23, 25–26, 37, 48, 160, 163
- sound(scape) studies 159
- Soviet Union, the 136–137, 141
- Spacey, Kevin 110
- Spector, Phil 111
- spirituality 3–4, 11, 13, 17, 51, 62–63, 82–83, 88, 90, 95, 100, 115, 127, 129, 143, 149, 154–155; alternative 16, 17–18, 88, 114, 120, 149–152, 162; technological 62
- spirituals (music) 11, 59
- Stalin, Josif 136–137
- Stanley, Paul 132
- stardom 18, 35, 60–61, 67, 72, 75, 80, 119, 129
- Stradivari violins 75, 102
- Strauss, Johann I 113
- Strauss, Johann II 113
- Strauss, Richard 45
- Stravinsky, Igor 36, 54, 70–71
- street credibility 65, 74, 81, 116; *see also* authenticity
- subcultural studies 116, 118, 122, 154
- subcultures 16, 45, 96, 113–125, 128, 130–135, 151–154, 157, 161–162, 164; and ageing 131–135; *see also* idioculture; lifestyle; neo-tribes; scene
- sublime 53–56, 150; “slave” 55–56
- Sufism 89
- Suppé, Franz von 113
- sustainability 150–151, 163
- Swift, Taylor 49
- swing (music) 126
- symbolic capital 44
- symphony orchestra 59, 79, 94, 125–126
- synagogues 100, 150
- Syria 82
- taboos 20, 105, 151
- talent shows 61–62, 71
- Taliban, the 2–3, 106, 140–141
- tango 134, 145; in Finland 131–134
- Taoism 91
- Tchaikovsky, Pyotr 36
- technology 15, 28, 42, 62–64, 77–79, 95, 97, 101–105, 133, 164; of care 96; and gender 79; of power 77; “ritual” 18; *see also* digitalisation; instruments; mediation
- “technomysticism” 45, 56
- “techno-orientalism” 78
- television 1–4, 9, 60–62, 70–71, 102
- Teters, Joanna 71
- theodicy, urban 155
- theology 2–3, 5, 16–17, 19, 26, 39, 43, 51, 54, 61, 87–92, 115, 127, 154–155; Liberation 92
- timbre 126–127, 134, 158; *see also* sound
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 30–32, 34, 40, 48
- totalitarianism 3, 39, 95, 161
- tourism 21, 67, 128, 150
- traditional music 14, 24, 106, 123
- traditions 2, 7, 11–15, 18–19, 35, 37, 42, 51–52, 67, 72, 74, 79, 88, 96, 98, 101, 105, 121–122, 140, 148–149, 164
- trance (music) 43, 123
- transcendence 3–4, 18, 21–22, 35, 40, 47, 50–56, 60, 62, 69, 70–71, 82, 89–90, 97, 104, 125, 127, 129, 142, 147, 155
- transgression 43, 48, 74, 85, 99–100, 108, 114–116, 153, 159–160, 162; *see also* profane; resistance
- translocal networks and scenes 122–123, 129–130
- transphobia 110
- Trappists 140
- turntables 104

- UK drill 118
 UK, the 60, 62, 67, 151
 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the
 see the Soviet Union
 Universal Zulu Nation, the 116–117
 universality of music 1–3, 13–14, 17–18,
 35, 41, 54, 78–79, 147, 164
 unpopularity 15, 65, 123
 urbanisation 10, 19, 36
 urban theodicy 155
 USA, the 2, 43, 56, 65, 67, 82, 100, 114,
 121, 138, 154

 Valens, Richie 65
 Vatican 11, 92
 Venom 121
 verbal communication 1, 28, 53, 70,
 147–148; *see also* epistemology;
 scopocentrism; senses
 violence 3, 15, 35, 37, 48, 63, 65, 73, 89,
 106–110, 116–117, 121, 124, 126–127,
 140, 142, 153–154; analytical;
 “inspired” 54; misogynist; music as
 108–109; *see also* abuse; hate speech;
 misogyny; moral; murder; noise; pain;
 racism; sacrifice; volume
 violins 75, 102, 110
 virtual networks and scenes 122–123,
 130; tours 62–63
 virtuosos 60, 76
 voice (as instrument) 41–42, 62, 110,
 126; and ageing 131–132
 volume (loud) 86, 109,
 126–127

 Wagner, Richard 32
 Waldteufel, Emil 113
 Wallace, Christopher George Latore
 (“The Notorious B.I.G.”) 63
 Waters, Muddy 105
 Welsh, Florence 71
 western art/classical music 25, 33, 35,
 45–46, 49, 52, 59, 69–71, 110, 119, 144
 whiteness 56, 59, 78, 107, 117–119, 122;
 see also blackness; body; ethnicity;
 racism
 white supremacism 131
 Williams, Mary Lou 68
 Williams, Robin 110
 works of art/music 13, 15, 25, 31, 35–36,
 46–47, 50–51, 54; *see also* aura;
 authorship; commodities; composing;
 copyright; creativity; genre
 theorisation; ingenuity; intellectual
 property; musicking; ownership;
 production
 world music 14, 56, 67, 82, 123, 134, 163
 worship 20, 60, 88, 92; music 87, 99

 xenophobia 130, 135; *see also* racism

 Yangon 21
 youth 43, 82, 84–86, 96, 100, 105, 114–
 124, 131, 144, 133–135, 162; *see also*
 age; children; delinquency; education;
 subcultures

 Zine, Reda 100
 Zorn, John 15