Mythologisation of music.

A discursive enquiry into the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music.

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Abstract
The thesis focusses on how music has been mythologised in different ways. Mythologisation refers to 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” issues and questions in the sense that they have no empirical answers and thus necessitate believing while there may be overwhelming evidence against them. In the thesis, mythologisation of music is addressed in relation to the postsecular attempts to rescript the sacred, by paying specific attention how different conceptualisations of the “popular” and the "sacred" become interrelated. Thus, the treatment is predominantly theoretical in nature and linked to a broader interest in the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music. The analysis does not focus on religious popular music, or popular music and religion, but on a more conceptual level on how different apprehensions of the popular and the sacred become operationalised and politicised in musical situations.

On the basis of existing research within ethnomusicology and the philosophy of music, mythologisation of music is divided in the thesis into four general categories: first, origins of music, detectable not just in the ubiquity of cosmological explanations in various epics and indigenous mythologies but crucially also in the hard-core neuroscientific approaches to music; second, 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; third, individuals with allegedly exceptional musical propensities, whether labelled as stars or geniuses; and fourth, authenticity, particularly in relation to presumptions about pureness and excellence.

Methodologically, the thesis builds on the cultural study of music and anthropology and sociology of religion. Through socio-constructionist discourse analysis the categories of mythologisation of music are examined in relation to the multidimensionality of the popular and the sacred. Regarding the popular, at issue are its quantitative, aesthetic, sociological, folk, partisan and postmodern dimensions; the sacred in turn is examined in terms of religious, subcultural, national, economic and political aspects.

The analysis reveals that the dimensions of the popular that become emphasised in mythologisation of music are the aesthetic, folk and postmodern ones, while on the sacred side it is the cluster of subcultural, national and economic facets which is connected to all areas of mythologisation of music. All five aspects of the sacred have however a fairly equal footing in the ways to mythologise music, which is somewhat unsurprising given the close connection between myths and the sacred in the general sense. With respect to the popular in turn, the conspicuous links between myths about individuality in music and quantitative and mass cultural dimensions are notable. Moreover, the findings indicate that overall the discourses of autonomy and authenticity carry a paramount weight when considering the intersections of the popular and the sacred in mythologisation of music.

Keywords
music, mythologisation, popular, sacred

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1 Introduction

1.1 Incentive and objectives

“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 practices. “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 1966).

With this passage of some twenty seconds from a rather eccentric television series, it is my intention to point to the multiple ways of conceptualising music and investing it with diverse ideologies, 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; alongside – and crucially because of – its alleged universality, or its ability to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, and beliefs in its positive eschatological power, it is often conceived as a transcendent autonomous force that is capable of affecting human behaviour and attitudes. This is in fact the line of reasoning behind Taleban extremists’ violence against music and musicians; in its converse form, it has been influential also in the construction of Lutheran Christian musical practices. It is yet imperative to recognise that musical transcendence, as it were, need not be religious or spiritual. To the extent to which the notion of transcendence refers to “other-worldly” phenomena and the crossing of 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 Marxist utopia.

Different understandings of music accrue a pronounced importance in contemporary times of global migration and religious or spiritual plurality. To be sure, these two phenomena are 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 focussing on the interrelations between postcolonial and postsecular processes. In other words, it is undeniable that the consequences of European colonialism and imperialism have affected music, and the same can be said of the effects of the resurgence and broadening of religious and spiritual forms of life especially in allegedly secular Western states and countries.
In order to address the role and position of music in the contemporary global postcolonial and postsecular condition, it is my objective to examine how music has been – and continually is being – mythologised in different ways. By mythologisation, building on Wendy Doniger’s (2011: 16, 61–62) ideas, I refer to 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” issues and questions in the sense that they have no empirical answers and thus necessitate believing while there may be overwhelming evidence against them, or at least a great deal of controversy. Typically, these issues pertain to 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)?

My examination is geared 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 such 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 eg. Elliot 1991; Bicknell 2002), I will leave this debate aside and instead depart on the basis of the fact that music is constantly surrounded by competing myths and explanations, whether religious, journalistic or academic in kind. This qualitative multifariousness alone confirms that there are different premisses, agendas and intentions involved in the mythologisation of music.

Furthermore, in order to narrow this broad field down, I aim at addressing mythologisation of music in relation to the postsecular attempts to rescript the sacred, by paying specific attention how different conceptualisations of the “popular” and the “sacred” become interrelated. Thus, my treatment is predominantly theoretical in nature, linked to a broader interest in the intersections of the popular and the sacred in music. Here, it is important to realise that my analysis does not focus on religious popular music, or popular music and religion, but on a more conceptual level on how 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 forms of popular music – as universally important (i.e. sacred, at least potentially), but also how Chopin (amongst others) holds a peculiar position as a “popular” composer within a hallowed musical tradition.

Certainly, various forms of popular music in its conventional conceptualisation 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 categories imply. One may begin with the concept itself: to the extent to which “music” indeed is a universal phenomenon, what are the implications of a term deriving from Greek mythology for addressing the phenomenon’s significance? Indeed, while the practices associated with the Eurocentric notion of music surface globally, the notion itself may not make sense in local, vernacular discursive settings; in contrast, it 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 century “lodged itself at the heart of a discourse that pried Europe and its histories apart from non-European lives and cultures.”

My examination is also geared towards the criteria of the label “popular music”, particularly when the epithet is used in a taken-for-granted manner. The label has its institutionalised usages, especially in education and media; yet often no clear definitions of the musical category are offered, and as a result the label emerges as vague and therefore easily politicised. For instance, despite his evident popularity, Mr Chopin is not mentioned even once in Popular Music, the leading academic journal of popular music studies.

While analyses based on 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 often remain undiscussed. In his excavation into the dynamics of the sacred and the profane in popular music, Christopher Partridge (2013: 5), for one, is rather inclusive in his adoption of the generic label, as he posits 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 are risks of circularity, as the notion of the sacred (or profane as its constitutive other) provides the basis for the indiscriminate definition of popular music – which then is subjected to an analysis of the sacred/profane relations. The point is not whether
Partridge is right or wrong with his nonchalant classifications, even if they are likely to cause confusion; instead, more pertinent for my purposes is to consider the implications of such use of terminology and the agendas – or politics – behind it, particularly in relation to mythologisation.

Thus, I aim at unearthing and questioning the variety of mythologisation that surrounds and even determines music, its categorisation into “popular” types among others, and its relations and structures of power. For analytical purposes, I have divided this variety into four general categories on the basis of ethnomusicological accounts on the issue in particular. First, following Bruno 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 hard-core 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. Third, there is cross-cultural evidence about assigning exceptional musical propensities to certain individuals, whether labelled as stars or geniuses. 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 ruminations find support from philosophy of music, albeit with a focus on Western art music. In his introduction to the field, R. A. Sharpe (2004: 6, 27) notes that debates 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. While these bear a connection 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, presents four general themes of philosophy of music: ontology, performance, expression and appreciation. Questions about origins remain outside his scope, but emotions and authenticity pierce through the topics, and canonised composers 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.”

1.2 Previous studies in brief

The scholarly connections between popular music and religion have been fairly rare. For instance, *The Popular Music Studies Reader* (Bennett *et al.* 2006) issued a decade ago does not include the headword “religion” in its index. In a similar fashion, in his influential accounts on understanding popular music and its key concepts, Roy Shuker (2008: 225–238; 2012) does not afford “religion” a key status, but has included entries on “Christian rock” and “gospel” which are discussed explicitly in relation to religious issues, as are “moral panics”, albeit briefly and primarily in their US (anti-)Christian incarnations. Also on the basis of Tim Wall’s (2013: 275) textbook it appears that religion is of no importance when studying popular music culture, except when noting the “dramatic” increase in the sales of a genre called “religious music” during the first decade of the twenty-first century. 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 of chanting the Koran in a sound collage by “pop avant-gardists” David Byrne and Brian Eno (McLeod 2015: 601–602).

The lack of interest may indicate a common trend to treat popular culture and music as separate from religious ideologies. It may also 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 over others. Consequently, it is only recently that “an auditory or acoustic turn” has taken shape in the study of religion. (Hackett 2011: 447–448.)

An indication of the recent shifts in addressing popular music in relation to post-secularisation is constituted by the changes in the content of a a textbook devoted to *Understanding Society Through Popular Music* (Kotarba & Vannini 2009). Originally, of religions only Christianity was mentioned in the book, but in the second edition released in 2013 there was an entire chapter reserved for the topic (Kotarba *et al.* 2013). Rupert Till
(2010), in turn, has approached the field through the notion of cult, emphasising for example the importance of sex, psychedelia, death, stardom and locations. He introduces the notion of the “sacred popular” by which he refers to the idea that in contemporary Western culture functions conventionally served by religions have been replaced by new forms of spirituality that are based on popular culture and popular music in particular (Till 2010: 169–172).

In addition, in a collection on *Religion and Popular Music in Europe*, the editors maintain that especially since the late 1960s’ hippie movement “existential questions, ideology and religion have been negotiated and expressed” in the field of popular music. Importantly, in relation to global migration, the editors also stress the links between changing religious landscape and changes in ethnicity. (Bossius *et al.* 2011: 1–2.) Moreover, in a recent collection eponymous *Pop Pagans* (2013) have for their part provided a point of departure for some, and Partridge (2013: 3) has even more recently emphasised the importance of analysing “the confluence of two of the principal dynamic forces shaping contemporary human life, popular music and the sacred”.

Yet it has been a common trait in the emergent accounts on popular music and religion to celebrate the new forms of spirituality that emerge, and occasionally the operationalised definitions of popular music are questionably broad and arguably even purpose-driven. A case in point is Partridge’s (2013: 33) inclusion of the works of “the prolific avant-garde jazz musician” John Zorn in his idea of popular music. While this kind of generic classification compels one to reconsider the epithet “popular”, there is not much help offered. Instead, in the above accounts this potential is drained by a reliance to conventional ideas of what “popular culture” is. The same applies by and large to the recent landmark collection in the field, *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music*, as for instance in the introductory chapter neither religion nor popular music are defined or the problems of defining addressed in detail (Moberg & Partridge 2017).

Relatedly, there has been a remarkable upsurge of studies that focus on different forms of religiosity and spirituality in relation to popular culture, discussed for instance in terms of new religious movements, post-secularisation, re-enchantment and occulture. This body of research attempting to “rescript the sacred” (Santana & Erickson 2008), as it were, emanates especially from within anthropology and sociology of religion. Yet also here, a trend towards taken-for-granted utilisation of “popular culture” is evident. Crucially, the plenitude of unproblematised references to mass-production, everyday life, consumerism, leisure and media in particular (eg. King 2010; Pattison 2009; Deacy 2009) raise in the end the question whether there is anything outside “popular culture”.
Moreover, in the music-related attempts to rescript the sacred there is very little attention paid to questions of mythologisation. As a topic, “myth and music” is rather commonplace within historical and philosophical studies of Western art music in particular, but instead of focussing on how music has been mythologised, these studies have frequently dealt with the musical representations of antique myths, especially those of Orpheus and Prometheus (e.g., Marchenkov 2009). Another fairly threadbare strand in this scholarship is constituted by semiotic approaches that aim, following the seminal work by Barthes (1973), at unearthing modern myths behind musical works and expression.

With respect to analysing mythologisation of music there are nonetheless incidental accounts that intriguingly 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 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 the popular–sacred dynamics, is that he stresses the way in which the mythological and the religious touch on "activities ordinarily considered secular”. (Leonard 1987: ix.)

Additional insights about mythologisation of music can be drawn from another jazz scholar, namely Tony Whyton (2010: 134), who in his scrutiny of jazz icons emphasises “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).
2 Methodology

2.1 The cultural study of music and religion

In the most general methodological terms, my analysis belongs to the sphere of cultural study of music. Essentially, this entails subscribing to ethnomusicological premisses and points of departure; while ethnomusicology is dominated by investigations into various types of folk, traditional and vernacular musics, as opposed to classical, jazz and popular ones, 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 2017). As the ideas expressed within ethnomusicology have been gradually accepted within other strands of music studies, such labels as “new”, “critical” or “cultural” musicology have been introduced; here, rather than embarking into ethnographic excavations, it has been commonplace to succumb into textual analysis informed by various strands of cultural theory. Popular music studies aligns with these trajectories, and additionally owes methodologically a great deal to sociology and communication studies, and lately has become increasingly associated with media studies.

Given the general principle of ethnomusicology to study music as a sociocultural phenomenon and practice, it is somewhat surprising that religious issues feature relatively rarely in the disciplinary literature. This may be primarily the result of the disciplinary boundaries in the Western academy, where all things religious have conventionally been the domain of theologians and conceptualised as institutionalised, world-wide phenomena. In contrast, the less institutionalised religious aspects of the communities subjected to ethnomusicological enquiry in the guise of anthropology of music have been treated more commonly as “belief systems” or “sacred” rather than “religious” dimensions of cultural expression (eg. Arnold & Kramer 2016). Indeed, the ethnomusicological journals contain twice as many articles with the word “sacred” in their title when compared to “religion”.

The basics for an investigation into the interrelations between music and religiositiy can nevertheless be found in the classics of ethnomusicology. One of the most influential models for ethnomusicological enquiry is provided by Alan P. Merriam (1964: 32–35), who introduces a tripartite design comprising of a cultural level of concepts, a social level of behaviour, and a material level of sounds. These levels are, according to him, inextricably
interrelated through constant processes of feedback. Merriam (1964) does not delve deep into religious or spiritual realms, yet it is rather obvious that such issues constitute an important aspect of the conceptual, or cognitive, aspect of music, particularly when it comes to questions about music’s ontology and “proper” usage, as well as its role in validating religious rituals (see Merriam 1964: 33, 224).

Another ethnomusicological music-culture model is provided by Jeff Todd Titon (2009: 19–20), built on “four components of a music-culture”: ideas, activities, repertories and material culture. The first aspect of “ideas about music”, in turn, relates to “belief systems”, which involves questions about music’s ontology, origins and effects, often – but not always – with explicitly religious undertones. The three other ideational aspects of music-culture are aesthetics, contexts and history, which provide further possibilities to investigate the beliefs and convictions related to ideas about “proper” and “beautiful” music, appropriate occasions, surroundings and memories, as well as state interventions, debates over preservations, and revivalist movements. (Cf. Titon 2009: 21–24.)

Bruno Nettl (2005: 24, 260–261), for his part, emphasises the importance and outright primacy of the conceptual issues in music-culture models, noting for instance that questions about music’s origins are usually to a substantial degree and almost always at least partially dependent on the definition of music, often yielding anachronistic confusion in the matter. There are furthermore numerous other links to processes of mythologisation in his weighty account to the main issues and concepts of ethnomusicology, including cross-cultural ideas about supernatural musical individuality, the ubiquity of mythological and cosmological explanations regarding music in general, as well as the overall centrality of religion and rituals in musical practices and the tendency to ascribe “the origin of music to the need for communicating with or within the supernatural” (Nettl 2005: 37–38, 175, 261–263).

More recently, Alison Arnold and Jonathan Kramer (2016), in their ethnomusicologically inflicted textbook, have devoted one “unit” out of four to “music and the sacred” (the other units focussing on foundations, identity and social life). It should be noted, however, that in their treatment the sacred translates primarily if not exclusively as an aspect of religiosity, even if they are highly sensitive to the problems inherent in defining and applying the notion of religion globally. “Nevertheless”, they maintain, “throughout the world, systems of belief, moral codes, explanatory narratives, sacred texts, communication and communion with unseen powers and beings, calendrical and life-cycle rituals together constitute powerful frameworks by which people find order, meaning, and control over their lives.” Moreover, they posit that in such frameworks, often conceptualised as religious, it is “a
The unit, then, is divided into three “lessons” which deal with liturgical chant and devotional singing, embodiment and enactment of religious states and narratives, and “the power of music to separate sacred spaces and times from secular, everyday experience”, as well as to structure religious rituals (Arnold & Kramer 2016: 149).

In relation to the study of religions, the methodological emphasis on the cultural study of music and its insistence on treating music as an irrevocably social and cultural phenomenon foregrounds the anthropological and sociological approaches to religion and the sacred. The former approach resembles anthropological 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 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 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” (Marti 2014: 506). Some sociologists of religion have nevertheless dared to examine music, if only fleetingly; in the 77-year history of the journal Sociology of Religion, there are two research articles published that have 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).

### 2.2 Socio-constructionist discourse analysis

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. Oftentimes, this co-dependent relationship is approached through the notion of discourse, which on one hand can be understood as an emphasis on the importance of language and conceptualisation in creating and maintaining social relationships and their material surroundings; on the other hand, and surpassing the boundaries of verbal communication, it can be taken as a reference to all forms of knowledge production – aural, visual, kinetic, tactile, olfactory, gustatory – and their inextricable participation in the formation of power relations, or politics in the broad sense of the term. In its simpliest terms, this means recognising that every utterance or enunciation, whether in the form of words, music, wine or wafer, is always implicated in historically contingent social and cultural power relations.

While there exists a wide variety of forms of “discourse analysis” presently, the foundational work of philosopher Michel Foucault (1972) is still useful in deciphering the basic principles of such analysis. Admittedly, he does not write about music but language, and as a consequence discourse is frequently dealt with as an exclusively verbal phenomenon. Indeed, within the study of religions the promises and challenges of discourse analysis have been discussed all but exclusively as a matter of words and language, while only marginally mentioning the possibility to include images in the analysis (Hjelm 2011: 149). In music research in turn, the notion of discourse has emerged on one hand in semiological debates concerning the possibility to conceive music as a particular type of a linguistic system (e.g. Nattiez 1990), yet with no connections to Foucault’s work. One of the few analyses of music that rely explicitly on Foucaultian notion of discourse is Bernard Gendron’s (1995) take on the so-called bebop revolution in jazz in the 1940s. With the concept of “aesthetic discourse” he nevertheless stays firmly within the linguistic realm, as by it he means “a grouping of concepts, distinctions, oppositions, rhetorical ploys, and allowable inferences” as well as “acrimonious disagreements” over the nature and qualities of jazz (Gendron 1995: 34).

On the other hand, there are studies where music, particularly on the level of genre, has been examined as discourse, involving a range of expressive practices, conventions and their equally conventional interpretations. Thus, the discourse constituted by, say, heavy metal music may be thought of as a combination of such musical features as distorted timbres and loud volume with an imagery of androgyny and horror, among other things. (Walser 1993.) In a similar fashion, the musical genre of African-American funk has been interpreted as “a discourse of social protest” that is based on “extreme talk, style, dress, behavior, and […] extreme musical expression” (Morant 2011: 75).
Such a multimodal notion of discourse foregrounds also the political implications at stake through pointing to the material circumstances and effects, the allocation of resources and the deliberation of future action, particularly with respect to disciplining human bodies (see Foucault 1977; 1978). The connection to relations of power, or politics, is paramount 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 “pure”, almost spiritual 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 may thus 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.)

In my treatment I will focus on literary statements, even if to study mythologisation of music could just as well rely on for example on an iconographic approach with cave paintings or Renaissance altarpieces as primary material. Yet to examine mythologisation in Doniger’s (2011: 17) sense entails considering myths as stories and narratives that are not bounded by discrete texts but form the foundation of series of tellings. As such, myths may be communicated through various expressive techniques, yet they invariably have a verbal component, beginning with the naming of things and agents (such as a lyre and Orpheus, or a kantele and Väinämöinen, in Greek and Finnish epics, respectively). What is more, given the emphasis on conceptual and classificatory issues in my analysis, particularly in relation to the notions of the popular and the sacred, it is the (written) word that calls for attention.

Informed by the ethnomusicological and philosophical postulations about the myths that surround music’s origins, effects, individuality and authenticity, the practical application of Foucauldian discourse analysis as a method to instances of mythologisation of music entails, first of all, considering every occurrence where music is mentioned in relation to myths as a discursive statement. Both music and myth may be used in such situations either in a very
general sense or through references to particular musical genres, repertoires or artists and to specific aspects of mythologisation. The utterance “Elvis is alive” serves as an example, as in it the musical output of a certain deceased member of the Presley family is taken as a guarantee of continuing physical existence, if not messianic resurrection even.

It is of paramount importance here to consider each statement as the “atom of discourse” that has its “distinct enunciative characteristics” and signals a specific “modality of existence” (Foucault 1972: 80–81). This means that a statement is always already a relational, ideological and thus also a political event that in its singularity establishes connections between symbolic content, physical objects and subject positions. Statements are never mere sentences or any other type of allegedly neutral linguistic units, but part and parcel of social cognition and therefore irrevocably implicated in relations of power that regulate the production of knowledge and what counts as truth about a given subject matter. (Foucault 1972: 107; van Leeuwen 2008: 6.)

To apply these methodological principles in an analysis of the intersections of the popular and the sacred as they manifest themselves in instances of mythologising music necessitates, then, first of all, isolating discursive statements concerning music and its origins, powers, individuality and authenticity. Next, the statements are to be examined in terms of their modalities and regularities in relation to the multidimensionality of both the popular and the sacred. Finally, on the basis of the outcome of this examination, their underlying power relations, politics and more or less explicit agendas need to be (re)considered.

2.3 Demythologising music with the popular and the sacred

It may be that to a considerable degree the debates and assertions about the powers and mysteries of music stem 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 (eg. Tagg 1998). Whether this is so or not, is a topic for another thesis altogether; the empirical fact remains that there are myriad different claims 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 organised sound” or “soundly organised 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.
By demythologising I refer to an analytical procedure that aims at unravelling the presuppositions and axioms 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 becomes by necessity geared towards considerations of 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 is this act of mythologisation linked to the notions of the popular and the sacred, and for what possible and probable purposes and effects.

Regarding the multidimensionality of the denominator “popular”, an influential point of departure is provided by John Storey (2009) who sketches out six definitions of popular culture which all demonstrate different outcomes of “theoretical labour within particular historical and social contexts”. The six 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 2009: 5–12.)

It is crucial to note that Storey (2009) does not consider 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. This issue becomes even more pressing when one considers the quantitative dimension involved, meaning the undeniable fact that religions are popular, or widely favoured, movements by definition. One should not forget the economic imperatives of institutionalised religions in general either.

While the problems of the popular have become apparent in the research conducted by scholars of religion, cultural scholars tend to equate the sacred forthrightly with the religious.
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 worship and music in Jewish and Muslim communities. While scholars of religion are quick to stress that there are no straight-forward 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), it may very well be that the notion of the sacred constitutes “the defining essential of religion” (Pals 2006: 13).

Be it as it may, the attempts to “rescript” it indicate it need not be reserved only for religious contexts. It is entirely possible to ask what are the sacred dimensions – or rituals, taboos, ways of purification, and so forth – of politics, law, medicine and science. This entails recognising the broader implications of the sacred, particularly with respect to how social identities become formed and constructed. Following anthropologist of religion Veikko Anttonen (2000: 204), this means considering the sacred 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.”

In a similar vein, Gordon Lynch (2012: 5–7) offers a wider definition of the sacred as a “cultural structure” that hinges on ideas and conceptualisations of “absolute, normative realities that exert claims on the conduct of social life”. Certainly, while institutional or otherwise organised religious movements constitute an obvious area of enquiry here, one may consider the implications of such “extension of sacred forms”, as Lynch (2012: 18) puts it, for instance in relation to national identity, child welfare and ideals of democracy. All these aspects are instructive also with respect multidimensionality of the popular: the national and the democratic lead to contemplation over the political dimensions, albeit in different ways, whereas the sanctity of children points towards the folkish and sociological extents.

Pushing this line of thought further, it may be argued that the sacred becomes manifest in the context of various ideological domains, whether these are primarily religious, political, national(istic), economic or subcultural in nature (see Angrosino 2004: 9; Bielo 2015: 21–22). As a result of this multidimensionality of both the popular and the sacred, their possible and probable intersections become manifold and not without risks of confusing overlaps, as both include a political dimension. Hence, I have taken the liberty of renaming this as “partisan”
on the popular side, on the basis of Storey’s (2006) explanation of this aspect as countercultural in nature. To connect this multiplicity of intersections to the primary areas of mythologisation of music leads to considerations of how ideas about music’s origins, powers, individuality and authenticity facilitate and construct conditions where the distinction, let alone opposition, between the popular and the sacred becomes futile (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. The connections between the popular, the sacred and areas of mythologisation of music.
3 The origins and ontologies of music

3.1 Epics and evolution

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, teeth and bones of a pike of monstrous measurements (Lönnrot 1888: Rune XL). The passage in question 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” (Lönnrot 1888: Rune III). 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 the scientific treatises on the issue. In his recent 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 the emergent field of so-called biomusicology with its reliance on the starting points of cognitive science and evolutionist biology, even if the emphasis shifts from music to musicality. The reason for this is the absence of a cross-cultural definition of music, while musicality may be defined as “a natural, spontaneously developing set of traits based on and constrained by our cognitive and biological system” and hence as “a prominent characteristic of humankind.” According to this school of musicology, music, then, “in all its variety can be defined as a social and cultural construct based on that very musicality”, and therefore “the study of the origins of music is conditional on the study of musicality.” (Honing 2018: 4.) Yet 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: 204–205) argues more specifically that while “early in our history” spoken language intensified human beings’ sense of self, the communal and
socialising power of music provided “an essential counterweight to the individualization experienced by increasingly intelligent and articulate members of ‘Homo sapientor’”, or “wiser humans” who occupied the earth roughly two hundred millennia ago. What is more, Harvey (2017: 205) believes 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 pester 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).

Regarding the possible musical intersections of the popular and the sacred in Harvey’s (2017) work, it is noteworthy first of all that he uses the notion of music with no appellations, as a singular category. In the opening pages of his account he does acknowledge the existence of “many different types of music and many different modes and scales, played on many different types of musical instruments”, yet subjects all these differences to the physical laws of harmonic series and to the allegedly universality of “the structural components of pitch and rhythm” – and, of course, to the neurological attunements of the human brain. Admittedly, another universal quality of music he mentions is its role in facilitating social cohesion and coordination. (Harvey 2017: 1.) Furthermore, while there are occasional references to ethnomusicological research and the intimate link between music and dance, “music” remains in his treatment an internally undifferentiated category by and large. Occasionally, he contextualises the discussion by referring to “favorite pieces of music” and “our culture” (Harvey 2017: 3), yet whether the latter notion refers to national, regional or global dimensions is left unexplained.

Moreover, in relation to the popular–sacred dynamics involved, Harvey (2017: 4–5) maintains that music “forms a core component of ceremony and ritual”, not least since many cultures and civilisations have (or have had) separate deities for music, and also because of the myriad forms of group musical events people participate in. He further 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, but maybe more crucially it betrays Harvey’s own mythologising attitude towards music.

3.2 Fantastic fiction and enchanted listening

In his equally recent article on the origins of song, Bernd Brabec de Mori (2017: 115) juxtaposes the neuroscientific “biomusicological” approaches with ethnomusicological ones while also assigning credibility to indigenous belief systems and myths as explanations of music’s origins. Through a synthesis of indigenous epistemologies with modern scientific and scholarly theories he comes to the concluding proposal that ritual and religious practices “emerged together with humans’ musical faculty.”

What is of particular interest in Brabec de Mori’s (2017: 115–116) account is that he alongside indigenous myths considers also modern-era fiction and fairy-tales as relevant points of reference. In particular, he refers to J.R.R. Tolkien’s fantasy-world and the creation myth therein, Ainulindalë from *The Silmarillion* (1977). From a scientific stance, he notes, Tolkien’s fictitious narrative does not differ essentially from ancient Greek or Hindu myths and narratives, or Neoplatonic, medieval Islamic or European renaissance-era “entirely magical theories of music”. Yet even if all these stories and explanations are made up and contradict scientific or scholarly evidence about prehistoric musical practices, Brabec de Mori (2017: 116) maintains that “they tell much about what may have motivated prehistoric humans to raise their voices in song rather than speech.”

Regarding modern narratives and theories about the origin of music, or “evolutionist hypotheses” as he calls them, Brabec de Mori (2017: 116–117) suggests that there are three main categories involved: first, “theories that emphasize individual benefits” in the Darwinian tradition where mating is considered the primary purpose of musical performance; second, theories that “relate musicking to group activities and communal benefits” and “are based on the assumption that music functions as ‘social glue’ within a specific group”; and third, “non-adaptationist” hypotheses for instance in the form of treating music as “the exaptation of emotionally loaded speech” where such factors as pleasure and curiosity – and also magic and belief to supernatural powers – guide development, as opposed to the adaptation to the socio-physical environment. As another non-adaptationist hypothesis he mentions the idea that the human “musical faculty forms, of necessity, during [the] long period of pregnancy”, as “every
human fetus experiences a mother’s heartbeat, speech, steps, and other sounds” (Brabec de Mori 2017: 117). Cognitive scientist Henkjan Honing (2018: 9) for his part juxtaposes the Darwinian adaptationist explanations based on sexual selection, parent-infant bonds and group cohesion with a prominent nonadaptationist one based on the idea of music as “a technology or transformative invention that makes use of existing skills and has important consequences for culture and biology”. It is noteworthy here that the focus of discussion shifts from the origins of music as a general phenomenon and practice to the formation of human musical aptitude, thus reinforcing the assumption that the origins of music cannot be separated from the origin of human species – even if the hypothesis of “fetal music”, as it were, would benefit from a more nuanced consideration of possible abnormalities that result in congenital sensorineural deafness, as well as of the consequences of the absence of later-stage intrauterine sounds in the case of preterm babies (see Harvey 2017: 201–202).

In Brabec de Mori’s (2017: 117) defence it should be noted that he uses the word “experience” instead of “hearing”, and likewise the earlier formulations where at issue is “musical performance” and “musicking” rather than mere “music” imply a stance that emphasises the inextricability of music from human actions, regardless of the ontologies and epistemologies involved. What is more, he introduces the notion of “enchanted listening” that “respects 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.” In the end, he suggests that “enchanted listening hypothetically enables the correlation and consequent auditory experience of transcendental beings with any kind of music, whether this possibility is culturally exploited or not.” (Brabac de Mori 2017: 119, 124.)

In his classic in ethnomusicology, How Musical Is Man?, John Blacking (1973: 55) 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 this is undeniable and admitted also by Brabac de Mori (2017: 124), there might be 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 hard-core science. In this sense, mythologisation – or demythologisation in the scholarly and scientific cases – of music’s 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 even fairly often, the final outcome of the explanations is quite similar in nature.

Regarding mythologisation, Brabac de Mori (2017: 125) furthermore raises the issue of interests and power relations, or politics, involved. Crucially in this respect, he notes that “theories of origin tell us less about what happened in human prehistory (we will never know) and more about the circumstances of formulation. Theories speak to the social and cultural context within which they developed […] and the aspects of humanity considered important to the person and society responsible for their formation.” While he willingly admits that also his own originating theory is “necessarily speculative” and that there is a need to consider both the past and the theoretician’s present position, he does not dwell on his own motivations or position of power. While Harvey’s (2017) hidden agenda, so to speak, is arguably based on his recurrent pleas for the use of music in mental therapy, Brabac de Mori’s (2017) implicit “master plan” is most credibly linked to his own fieldwork amongst Amazonian indigenous populations and to a need to reconcile obvious differences between indigenous and scholarly ontologies and epistemologies. There is, admittedly, also an element of postcolonial pragmatism present, in the sense that it would hardly be beneficial for the scholarly collaboration if the researcher presented scientific empirical evidence as the ultimate form of knowledge and truth.

3.3 Plural ontologies and techno-religious apocalypse

Importantly, as noted by Brabac de Mori (2017) as well as many other ethnomusicologists, questions about the origins of music depend crucially on the ontologies involved. In other words, at issue is the definition of music; one is wise to remember here that the word itself derives from Greek mythology and thus may be considered as a very Eurocentric concept. In his take on the ontologies of music, Philip Bohlman (1999: 26) maintains in relation to this 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, that which is invested with sacred religious qualities is 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 insights in terms of the idea of multiple sacreds, 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”. Indeed, the debates about the origins of national musics are equally common – or popular – as the ones about music in general; for instance, it has caused a considerable amount of intellectual pain to many a music historian to decide whether “Finnish music” worthy of the name was born out of the pen of Friedrich
Pacius, the German-born composer of the national anthem, or of Jean Sibelius through his masterful use of folk music “influences” in order to create “a truly Finnish tone language” (Salmenhaara 1996).

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, such worries are familiar, given the pervasiveness and endurance of high–low distinctions 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; 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 ruminations 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 so-called Western world as fundamental discursive 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 of the scholars than of music itself, however conceived.

3.4 Demons of the sacred capital

A recurrent trope of apocalyptic qualities 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’n’roll
and heavy metal, all of which serve also as evidence of the inextricability of theological argumentation from societal concerns that 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 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) popular music carries a promise of religio-socio-political transgression and democratisation against the hierarchies of religion and authoritative regimes. 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, on the basis of such genres as gospel and “Jesus music” of the 1960s, that “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, reggae, hip hop and trance as examples belonging to “a history of religious popular music” (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 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 political spheres of the sacred. In many respects, this echoes the high/low 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 (eg. 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 his work has been emphasised 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 cultural industry for whom the music functions only as a social adhesive and a false promise of emancipation from the yoke of capitalism.
Another classic point of departure with respect to the high/low dynamics 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), is based on 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 with 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 legitimize, 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 the high/low distinctions and questions of sacred capital to 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 political aspects of the sacred are of particular use. Following Adorno’s lead, one may postulate that the fullest or “true” meaning of music and its potential of social critique is decipherable only in the “highest” forms of Western art music, and while this does not reveal anything about the origins of music explicitly, the extent to which there is a tendency to sanction such forms of musical expression with sacred capital constitutes an implicit connection between celestial authority and the ultimate meaning of music. Such sanctioning might not take place in the public very
often anymore, yet the recent history of demonising popular music suggests that the inclination is alive and well and manifests itself mainly through negation. In the eyes and ears and minds of religious authorities and by extension the 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.

3.5 Versions of rights of rampant capitalism in the works

Regarding ontologies of music, issues of various forms of capital accrue additional significance when considered in the framework of copyrights and intellectual property in more 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. For instance, in the current copyright system generally adopted in the European Union, musical genres and repertoires are treated equally, but this has not always been so; before the socio-political turmoil of the late twentieth century, “serious music” tended to be favoured when calculating royalty tariffs. 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 Reichsmusikammer 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).

This signals 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 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 wide-spread 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 (1992) 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.

Such challenges have been recently 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 furtherforegrounds the empirical consequences, especially in performances, of ontological judgements and conceptualisations
of what counts as a musical work (de Assis 2018a: 17). Drawing from Deleuzian “differential ontology” of possibilities, forces and intensities, he criticises various strands of music philosophy for “reintroducing a transcendental entity into the picture” and a preoccupation with “the conditions of identity of musical works”, and argues for an understanding whereby works 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 straight-jacket 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).

3.6 Followers of the road to nowhere

On the basis of epics, 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 organised humanity” (Blacking 1973). An exception here is the fantasy world created by Tolkien (1977), 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 such a form of mythologisation invests music with an existence and essence of its own, it follows the general maxim postulated by 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 them. 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. Indeed, 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 responsible for introducing the term “ethno-musicology” *(sic)*, deems the label “primitive music” as a Western misunderstanding, he subscribes to ideas about a “psychophysiological” linkage between a certain type of music and its “organic” community: “each bird is known by its song.”

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 -lefts. 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 (see Figure 2). This may be axiomatic to a degree, on the basis of the extended definition of the sacred as involving the fundamentals of existence, and hence closely associated with ontological rumination.

**Figure 2.** The origins of music as an intersection between the popular and the sacred.

Valkare’s (2016: 250) solution to the quandary of “where does music come from” 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 nonadaptationist dismissals of music as a biologically useless “cocktail of recreational drugs that we ingest through the ear”, as “auditory cheesecake” (Pinker 1997: 528, 534). This is another way of noting that, ultimately, “music does not come from anywhere” (Valkare 2016: 227).
4 Musical autonomy

4.1 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” (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.

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, Slavic Rusalki (sing. Rusalka), not to mention the variety of mermaids – and mermen – in folklore virtually worldwide. Hardly surprisingly, such characters are stock also in contemporary fiction and entertainment; in Tolkien’s literary fantasies, for instance, duels and enchantments by singing feature prominently, both in the service of good and evil.

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 *Doctor Faustus* (1947). On a less fictional level, stories about virtuosity of satanic origin surround violinist Niccolo Paganini and blues guitarist Robert Johnson. As the etymology of “virtuoso” suggests, stemming from Latin *vir*, “man”, it is no wonder such legends tend to celebrate masculine capabilities; yet there are rumours in circulation about such contemporary popular music artists as Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Adele and Katy Perry being amongst “Illuminati celebrities who sold their soul to the Devil” (Tapoos 2017). It may also be noted that the history of European art and popular music includes numerous examples of how certain musical features and practices have been deemed diabolical, including mixtures of Christianity and racism in the twentieth-century claims about the sub-human and evil
quality of African-American musical styles. Within Christianity, there are still some sects within which it is maintained, for example, that 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” as the ultimate seducer and enchanter (LUR 2017).

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” (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 – even if in the Koran the closest one gets to music is the reference in Sūrat Luqmān (31:6) to buying “diverting tales to lead [people] away from the path of God without any knowledge and to take it in mockery” (as translated in Jones 2007: 376).

4.2 The crude, critical and postcolonial politics of musical autonomy

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 & Kramer 2016: 2). Such claims may exist primarily because of promotional purposes, 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 Romantic aesthetic movement that flourished in the nineteenth century. 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). 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 relation to questions of music’s autonomy and by extension transcendence, music philosopher Lydia 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”, while the latter 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 a earthly substitute for religion in more general, is brought forth also in cultural musicologist Milla Tiainen’s (2005: 52–145) analysis of texts written by two prominent Finnish composers, namely Paavo Heininen and Einojuhani Rautavaara. As the outcome of her scrutiny, ideas about musical autonomy are closely connected and even implicated in Christianity most evidently through claims about the transcendent nature of music and composing, whereby the composers are invested with deific creative powers or, alternatively, subjected to the celestial “will of music” itself. Writing from an explicitly postcolonial stance, Virinder S. Kalra (2015: 25) 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 as interwoven amalgamation out of colonial modernity, 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 postcolonial demand for a singular religious identity” that manifests itself not only in the “colonial repetition” that ascribes monolithic religious identity even to the pre-colonial era (Kalra 2015: 62–63), but also in the contemporary formation of Hindy 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).

4.3 Transcendent paradoxes of relative autonomy

The strength of the ideology of autonomous music becomes apparent in that while ethnomusicologists and popular music scholars have historically been more receptive to recognise the inextricability of aesthetic, political and social realms, they have been willing to foster the idea of “relative autonomy” of music. This signals a recognition of “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). 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 & 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 “soul” of music. 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 noteworthy here in relation to the 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 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, popular music scholar Richard Middleton’s (1990: 7) less essentialist 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, is reasonable. 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). 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. 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. Frith (1996: 254–255), for one, is highly 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.

4.4 The clandestine technomysticism 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 pivotal case in point is provided by the tract *Music and the Ineffable* by philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (2003: 25–26) where he on one hand criticises forcefully all “expressionist prejudices” that lead to ideas about “a supra-sensible, supra-audible music, something like lost, wandering music, music anterior not only to instruments capable of playing it but to the creator capable of composing it”. On the other hand, he 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” (Jankélévitch 2003: 51). 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).

In addition to the affinity to religious and mythological aspects of transcendence, the ineffable Charm converges with enchantment and bewilderment, producing “a fertile aporia” and unleashing “a state of verve” (Jankélévitch 2003: 72). Curiously then, as pointed out in the prelims of the tract, a tension emerges between “an aesthetics and morality of simplification in which the virtue of understatement is made to stand out against the excesses of magniloquence”, and an appreciation of “the transcendence of virtuosity” and a fight “against the threat of complacency” (Davidson 2003: vii–viii). In a similar fashion, the emphasis on “the intense materiality of music” and the physical labour required for musical works to exist might not be so straightforwardly reconcilable with charme as “the summons made by enchantment” (Abbate 2003: xviii). What is more, despite his emphasis on material conditions and the relativity of aesthetic norms, Jankélévitch (2003) focusses in his treatise on musical works as creations of (male) composers and does not discuss the contexts of reception. In this respect, he enters the realm of transcendent ingenuity, albeit with a specific stress on “inspired violence” (Jankélévitch 2003: 41) that in his estimation is fundamental particularly with Igor
Stravinsky, Béla Bartók, Sergei Prokofiev and Darius Milhaud, thus betraying a fascination for neoclassicist idioms of composing. Questions concerning the implications of his privileging of certain types of music and the particularities and consequences of his assertions about ineffability are indeed pertinent. For instance, instead of celebrating the neutral indeterminacy of the ineffable (see Abbate 2004: 516), it might be asked to what extent are Jankélévitch’s supposedly universal claims based on discourses that derive from historical modes of French nationalist pride, or how his neoclassical preferences relate to interpretations about the complicity of the musical style with fascist politics (Currie 2012: 249).

Indeed, an additional dimension linking Jankélévitch’s (2003) ideas of the ineffable to the sacred is his own historical situatedness as a World-War-II veteran, a French Jew whose citizenship was revoked during the Nazi invasion, and a member of the anti-Nazi Résistance in southern France. According to Carolyn Abbate (2003: xvii), the translator of Music and the Ineffable, he “never forgave the Germans and could not return to their art, their philosophy, or their music”, and as a consequence music for him is – as insinuated by the list of “truly brilliant composers” above – “a French and Russo-Slavic phenomenon, with Spain in secondary orbit [and] as if German music simply does not exist except as trivial and marginal”. What remains a given for Jankélévitch (and by extension Abbate) is that “music” includes only the kinds usually considered “art” or “classical”.

Jankélévitch (2003) is by no means the only philosophically oriented scholar propagating for the ineffable qualities of music, and after the release of the English-language translation of his pamphlet, the debate has increased tremendously. Abbate (2004) holds a key position in these discussion on the basis of her Jankélévitchian arguments concerning the necessity to pay attention to real musical performances and their “drastic” indeterminacies, as opposed to the assumed supra-audible legible or “gnostic” significations of the musical work. Regarding the latter aspect, Abbate (2004: 517–518) accuses conventional musicological hermeneutics of “clandestine mysticism” that grants music “certain grandiose powers” and “revelatory force”, especially when the interpretation draws from psychoanalytical transcendentalism. Such “Freudian romanticism”, she maintains, conceives music as a primary medium for the unconscious, investing it with the ultimate authority to monumentalise and give aura to ideas and “truths” about cultural values and political circumstances that are otherwise inaccessible. As a result, through associations with the unconscious, music verges on “occulted truth”. (Abbate 2004: 520.)

Claims about mysticism, transcendence, occult and ultimate authority in particular connect the discussion to the extended notion of the sacred. Regarding the popular, in
contrast, Jankélévitch (2003) offers very little – apart from the obvious possibility to consider all forms of music, including the “popular” ones, as potential sources of the ineffable Charm(e). Abbate (2004: 520) instead provides some explicit links by referring to aspects of Freudian romanticism in the yearn for “secret histories” of rock music, discoverable only through musical sound. More stringent still is her critique of musical hermeneutics and its unawareness of its “thrall to the cryptographic sublime”, or, the tempting fascination for “technomysticism”, a complex mechanism of encoding that merely awaits for its enlightened decipherer. According to her, “popular movies regularly exploit and poke fun at this mélange of mysticism and information science that assigns music a starring role”. (Abbate 2004: 524–527).

In more recent years, the theological and metaphysical aspects and implications of Jankélévitch’s philosophy of music have been associated for instance with the nineteenth-century ideologies based on sacralisation of music, to the extent that his insistence on the Charm, or “the magic spell of art”, is ultimately an article of faith that leads to bracketing out questions about the cultural and social implications of music, and to a failure to understand “such alluring and ‘ineffable’ things as music, art, and religion” as contingent cultural practices dependent on certain material and political forces (Hepokoski 2012: 224–225, 229). In addition, issues of music’s ineffability and the Charm have be discussed in relation to the mystical, the magical and the sublime, all signalling various dimensions of transcendence that remains beyond linguistic expression or any other form of intellectual mediation, or historical particularity for that matter (Lochhead 2012: 233; Puri 2012: 243). Bearing a connection to the extended notion of the sacred, to some Jankélévitch’s (2003) ideas have signalled efforts to represent “noumenal absolutes”, even if as “necessarily failed” ones (Gallope 2012: 239).

4.5 The latest hits of ineffable terror

A different stance towards the possible ineffability of music and its links to the sublime is provided by 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’n’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, in all parts of 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”, or what he calls the “changing same” (Gilroy 1993: 105–106). Another crucial concept connecting the diverse styles of black music is “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 insights 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 such historical narratives, 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 history of transatlantic slavery and its effects 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 “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, such investments based on the ideas about music’s powers and its exceptionalism – “the idea that music occupies a more important place in our culture that other forms of expression or cultural production” – are not lost on advertisers, as emphasised acerbically by Timothy Taylor (2012: 1–2). Certainly, important shifts have taken place; for example, while 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).

4.6 A job for a music engineer

Whether expressed in national epics, pagan tales, religious scriptures, fantasy fiction or urban legends, 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 such sophisticated interpretations may have been a benevolent awe at a loss of words, the very same potential of ineffability and indeterminacy has been demonstratably 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 connections of the idea of musical autonomy to the multidimensionality of the popular and the sacred in more detail, 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 political 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 modernism for its part creates linkages extending from the popular as postmodern mass culture to the economic core of the sacred. To complete the picture (see Figure 3), 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.

Figure 3. Musical autonomy as an intersection between the popular and the sacred.
5 Stars and geniuses

5.1 Individualism and idolisation (to be televised)

As a consequence of the gradual increased division of labour throughout modernity, the sphere of music is dominated by ideas that stress the individuality and specialisation of musicians over forms of communal creation and expression. In fact, 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. While the marginal number of people suffering from outright amusia, or the incapability of distinguishing musical frequencies and timbres from each other, has been noted in various studies, and despite projects where “amusical” people have been trained to become competent performers (by Western standards), institutions of music education and performance are 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.

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 three labels may converge at times, they carry distinct implications that relate to charisma, skilfulness and creativity, respectively. Moreover, it is noteworthy in terms of the intersections of the popular and the sacred that all these “popular” figures are associated with certain transcendent, supernatural or mythological qualities. Stars are, in the modern astronomical sense, luminous celestial objects and as such, unattainable, extremely hot aggregates of nuclear reactions; in the realm of art, 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 in turn are equally gendered creatures by name, as the word stems from Latin vir, “a man”, and its abstraction virtus, “manliness”, with allusions of moral excellence and in Christianity, also heavenly
power. Geniuses for their part are spiritual beings too, in terms of the word’s origins, 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 2018.)

Continuing in this superficial “paganist” line of thought, it may be noted that stars, divas, virtuosos and geniuses are also interconnected through the notion of idolisation. Etymologically, one enters the realm of excessive adoration, veneration and worship of a (false) image or an object representing deities, one that “usurps the place of God in human affection” (OED Online 2018). While there are no reasons to doubt the ubiquity of idolisation in its various forms world-wide, 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 in more than fifty countries, in some cases renamed as SuperStar (Wikipedia 2018a). Whether the prevalence of the show and its standardised format have trivialised and inflated the term or not, it undeniably 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 world-wide popularity of the Idols franchise provides additional insights 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 2018). 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 profound shift from an object-oriented industry to “managing intellectual property”, 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, despite the changes in technology and
distribution, “roughly the same small percentage of artists still managed to take the lion’s share of music sales”. Thus, he continues, “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” (Fairchild 2015: 450). 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, which has been influential also in the sociological thinking as the basis of treating certain exceptional individuals “as endowed with supernatural, super-human, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (OED Online 2018).

5.2 Necrophonic superstars and intermundane collaboration

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” in the business magazine Forbes, in 2017 amongst the thirteen there were seven musicians, with Michael Jackson topping the chart with an income of $75 million. The other six were Elvis Presley (#4), Bob Marley (#5), Tom Petty (#6), Prince (#7), John Lennon (#9) and David Bowie (#11). (Greenburg 2017.)

With respect to the productive and profitable qualities of the dead, particularly in the realm of art, drama scholars Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut (2010: 14) suggest punningly that “[w]hat is ‘late’ about late capitalism” is 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 & 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 live 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, 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”, 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), such 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) extended notion of the sacred, he relies on reconceptualisations of spirituality as a variety of transformative meaningful or blissful experiences that is not necessarily associated with organised religions and their beliefs and dogmas.

A prime example of “quasi-religious ephemeral ‘second coming[s]’” for McLeod (2016: 504) is the holographic resurrection of Tupac Shakur (a.k.a. 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 (2009) 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 “distended pasts that swell up with delays, pre-echoes, calls, and incitements […] spill over into multiple presents and futures”, and by recognising the “unpredictably 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 & 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 & 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, such responses 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 & 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 & 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 straight-forwards 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 we 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-revertible production processes” (Stanyek & Piekut 2010: 35).

5.3 Decomposing composers and dark tourism

The irrevocable mundane materiality of music-makers of any gender and occupation becomes apparent at the moment of their demise. In 2016 alone, a number of musical megastars ceased to twinkle: David Bowie and Prince for sure, but also Pierre Boulez, Keith Emerson, Merle Haggard, Paul Kantner, Sir George Martin and Maurice White, to name the most obvious. Alongside self-inflicted or natural causes, homicidal deeds against musicians are not unheard of either, one of the most famous of victims being John Lennon of Beatle fame. 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 unpopularity to the extreme. In more recent years, raï artists such as Cheb Khaled have been assassinated, not to mention the more or less accidental hoe-downs 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, 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 extended notion of the sacred. 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 eminently mythic proportions is 3 February 1959, also known as “the day the music died”. The event yielding such an exclamation is the aeroplane crash in Iowa in the USA that resulted in the death of three major rock’n’roll musicians of the time. Correspondingly, after the numerous musical departures in 2016, 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 (see Jones 2005: 273).

In 1959, the music died not only at a specific time but also at a particular location. Likewise, in the case of individual musicians and their demise, either their death-beds or other sites that have been significant for their career have become sanctuaries and destinations of pilgrimage. In the exhibition Thank You for the Music, hosted by the Helsinki Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in 2012, a number of such sites were reproduced as careful replicas, including the shed of bluesman Robert Johnson, the tree onto which Marc Bolan crashed his car fatally, the bench dedicated to Kurt Cobain in Viretta Park close to his home, the Abbey Road road sign associated with the Beatles, and Freddie Mercury’s Garden Lodge garden door. A central aspect of the four latter replicas, crafted by visual artist Graham Dolphin, is that also the pictures, signatures, lyrics and other paraphernalia planted by the fans on the original sites have been copied in detail.

Dolphin’s replicas as well as the Johnson shed (by David Blandy) evince not only artistic attentiveness but also the cultural value assigned to the original items and their geographical locations in London, Seattle and Hazlehurst, Mississippi. The site of Johnson’s hut belongs moreover to the realm of so-called Delta Blues tourism, just as the Abbey Road sign is associated with Beatles tourism. The remaining three examples may not be exploited excessively within the tourism industry, yet all five are implicated in so-called dark tourism. With respect to blues tourism in particular, Mark Duffett (2015: 249–250) maintains that through possible romanticising aspects and the ambivalency of “witnessing social injustice and voyeristically consuming it”, ethical questions concerning this type of pilgrimage and ritualistic conduct become foregrounded.
5.4 Little Ms Mozart and other musical prodigies

While the exceptionality of music stars, dead or alive, is to a significant degree 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 of such individuals contain more than one hundred names, including for instance Björk, Glenn Gould and Michael Jackson who all made their debut before their sixth birthday. The most recent child music prodigies mentioned in these lists are pianist-violinist-composer Alma Deutscher and vocalist Sreya Jayadeep, both born in 2005. What is nevertheless worth noticing in such 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. (Wikipedia 2018b).

To the extent to which these lists represent the general, or “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 recent 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 such 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”. (Williams 2017; see also OED Online 2018.)

With respect to mythologisation, it is nevertheless particularly crucial to note how in the article, despite the multifaceted and quite disillusioned treatment of the topic, the claim is made that “Alma was born into music” (Williams 2017). One one hand, there is an element of fatalism in the utterance, with allusions of the autonomy of music. On the other hand, however, when considered in relation to the remarks that follow about one of her
grandparents being a pianist and another an organist, and about her parents as amateurs, sociohistorical circumstances become foregrounded. 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 encyclopedias, the type of musicianship also plays a part in this, as vocalist prodigies tend to be female, while those inclined towards keyboards are predominantly male, as well as the young composers and conductors in question. The same applies by and large to the “non-classical” whizz-kids, 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 epiteth, also for young ladies. This might provide grounds for various queer and transgender-related readings, but to degender 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 2018b.)

More serious-minded music historians in turn have debated whether Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre (1665–1729) 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 sociocultural
conditions, the unabashed publishing proposition serves as another reminder of the inextricability of the discourse of musical prodigies from institutional and industrial interests in the twenty-first century.

5.5 Ingenuity and intermediation

Mr Mozart is not only the quintessential musical prodigy, but also a crucial constituent of what ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl (2005: 37, 175) deems as “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 genius”. Nettl (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” (Nettl 2005: 37).

One may certainly hope that such future does not lie ahead for present-day musical geniuses of the M variety, such as 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 fifty million US dollars raised for various nonprofit causes worldwide (EB2015). All the praise may surely be taken as a common rhetorical trope, yet it alludes to an underlying discourse 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 Bortwick 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 such 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). According to some of the fiercest scholarly critics of Stravinsky, the composer’s adherence to ideas about the autonomy of music and his disavowal of the personal or expressiveness in music resulted in a questionable “insistence on music as a world cut off from everyday forces, including, evidently, those of morality” (van den Toorn & McGinness 2012: 282, 286).

While such a stance might constitute an uncomparably “sinister reading of the composer’s formalist beliefs” (van den Toorn & 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 ubiquity of the 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 discursive 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 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 constructed – mythologised – as the Chosen Ones who remain separated from “mundane materiality”, centrally through an exclusion of women. According to this line of argumentation, the exclusion rests either on an equation between femininity and materiality or on an emphasis on a “myth of martyrdom” deriving from the tales surrounding one Yeshua Ha-Nozri, also known as Jesus of Nazareth. (See Tiainen 2005: 75–78, 91–97.)

It may be nevertheless noted here that such vessel-ness is by no means confined within the realm of male composers of Western art music. In addition to Stravinsky, the digital information highway quickly leads to feature articles to, among others, “soul songstress” Joanna Teters who “encapsulates an ingenuity seldom discoverable in today’s musical
landscape” (McHale 2018), indie art rocker Florence Welsh and her “unique and exhilarating” performances with “an 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).

One can also entertain oneself with bluesman Todd Simpson’s performance online with accompanying “confirmations” that “he is doing exactly what he was put here to do” and about “the power that music has to make a difference in peoples lives” (YouTube 2017).

### 5.6 Object(ion)s of obsessive devotion

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 sing-along 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). 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. Popular music scholar Rupert 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.” For a cynic – or a more extreme functionalist than Till – it would be easy to replace “icon” with “God”, “fan” with “believer” and “popular music” with “religion”.

To push this line of thought further, one may ponder to what extent the obsessive devotion to a musically exceptional individual is a late modern form of monolatry, and reliant on processes of mythologisation based on transcendent unattainability of the object of adoration. Till (2010: 64–65, 71) alludes to such issues by speculating whether “Bacchus and Pan were originally music stars who have been deified with the passage of time” and by discussing in a more serious manner how “personality cults” of popular music may be approached, following Edward Bailey (1997), as “implicit religion” whereby one expects such cults “to show evidence in terms firstly of having axes of commitments, secondly of having
integrating foci and finally of featuring intensive concerns with extensive effects”. As may be expected, it is not hard to find such evidence in the various forms of fandom, especially when the musical star or genius is a global “mediapheme”, that is, “the media construction that enables a star to achieve the status of popular icon” through a reliance on “cultural stereotypes such as the first of a kind, a great rivalry, someone who risks all, outrageous behaviour, a young dramatic death, a hero or villain, saint or sinner” (Till 2010: 49).

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”, where the “sacralization of mediaphemes […] is part of a sacred popular musical culture that provides forever expanding opportunities for consumption” (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 (see Figure 4), 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 monolatric collectivity with sacralised mediaphemes 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.

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Figure 4. The intersections of the popular and the sacred with respect to mythologisation of music through an emphasis on individuality.
6 Authenticity

6.1 Romantic resistance

It is common to encounter claims where an individual’s musical stardom or ingenuity is associated with or even explained by relying on the notion of 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. It is by definition a populous category, and quite often supported with populist agendas. These same agendas construe it as self-evident, absolute, normative, 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? At the moment, it appears that in Finland to perform authentic reggae entails relying on Rastafarianism in the first instance and on the Finnish language almost equally centrally (see Järvenpää 2017). This signals of course how the generic authenticity of a given type of music easily becomes nationalised – and not forgetting the commercial interests involved. 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 might the different dimensions of authenticity 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 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’s (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, Gordon 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).

6.2 Generations and revenues of authenticity

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. 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. In his take on the issue, Christopher 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.”
Given the variety of interpretations over, objections against and defences for musical authenticity, this statement indeed appears blunt and in the end begs a closer examination on the epithet “popular”. One might even suspect that there is a certain element of sacralisation of popular music at work in Partridge’s writing, as one of his foundational points of departure is that “popular music is fundamentally transgressive” (2014: 6). Be that as it may, there is a fair amount of evidence that shifts in relation to authenticity have taken place; 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 Murray Forman (2012) has called “intergenerational 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) once suggested that at issue is a discrepancy between romantic historicism and post-World-War-I modernist performance aesthetics that may in the end “amount[t] to little more than time-travel nostalgia” (Taruskin 1982: 342).

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 (2009: 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”,

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“mass” or “inferior” form of culture? Not many would agree on this, 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 unwanted; 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).

Which brings me to the commercial value of authenticity and the ways in which it is linked to the popular and the sacred alike. On 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. At the same time, however, a star figure – or a musical genius, if you wish – 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.

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 thirty thousand dollars 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 from beatlesuits.dom for 359 dollars (plus shipping). In situations like these, the sacredness of an object becomes measured in monetary terms that crucially rely upon ideas and 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 exceptional wealth needed to obtain it.

This type of objectified authenticity, as it were, is thus a social 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 by no means 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 Shuker 2010: 34–36). 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.

6.3 Metaphysics of corporeal categorisations

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’n’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 music, 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’n’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, racialisation and (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):

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 at issue are forms of “black music”, as well as any other types of “ethnic” music. To reiterate Paul Gilroy’s (1993: 99) poignant remarks relating to the topic, the discourse of “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 discourse 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 such 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.) 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. According to Gilroy (1993: 97), at issue here is crucially “the hierarchy of creativity generated by the pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies blacks with the body and whites with the mind”.

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Similar mythologising metaphysics lurk behind the category of Latin music. Writing specifically (and rather opinionatedly) about salsa, Marco Katz (2005: 36) notes how studies focussing 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 – of 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).

6.4 Disembodied, recognisably and truly ethnic music

A different mode of mythologising music by “ethnicising” it is arguably at work in the disposition to evaluate classical musicians of (East-)Asian ancestry as technically consummate but artistically impassive and therefore incapable of expressing the compositions – or, more to the point, the composer’s intentions – authentically (enough). In her study about Asians and Asian Americans in classical music, Mari Yoshihara (2007: 185, 189–190) suggests that on one hand such invocations of authenticity in Western art music may be taken as “outdated purist illusion[s] about cultural traditions bound by geography and ethnicity”, while on the other hand they may be likened to postcolonial “strategic essentialism” in their stress of the cultural and historical rootedness in volatile and threatening circumstances. While the advocates of Western classical music may be quantitatively marginal, to parallel them with postcolonial minorities is provocative to say the least. Both certainly may share an interest “in forging alliances towards shared political goals” on the basis of alleged rootedness.
(Yoshihara 2007: 190), yet the institutional, socio-economical and political points of departure are utterly different for the two camps in question.

To associate Western art music with postcolonial strategic essentialism is highly problematic also because of the apparent tension between blatant Eurocentrism inherent in the construction of rootedness by grounding the composers territorially and the presumption about the irrelevance of performers’ ethnicities – even if it is easily demonstrable how Western conservatoires and consequently orchestras are deeply implicated in institutional and structural racialisation whereby non-white (and non-Asian) students are often pushed towards jazz and popular music programmes and repertoires (see Yoshihara 2007: 191; Katz 2005: 38–39). Delusions about disembodied performers notwithstanding, the considerable numbers of Asian musicians in Western symphony orchestras does foreground postcolonial cultural dynamics as the musicians are seldom considered as “transparent conveyors of Western traditions” because of their visible ethnicity. Yet while racialised 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 the premises underpinning the notions of authenticity within the classical music field. (Yoshihara 2007: 191.)

One result of such re-evaluations is the observation that even if Asian(-American) classical musicians decry geographically or culturally bound understandings of musical authenticity as “not only provincial but also racist”, fostering instead universalist ideals of individual free will and the ability of a true musician to express musical ideas regardless of their cultural origin, they often end up presenting claims about their cultural ownership of classical music on the basis of their upbringing and education in Western(ised) societal conditions. As Yoshihara (2007: 200–201) duly notes, such inherently contradictory logic risks ignoring the variety of institutional interventions in governing music and “the vastly different access that people from different regions – and, more important, classes – have to classical music”; at the same time, however, it holds the potential of “de-territorializing classical music from Europe and thereby de-centering the logic of universal humanism”. As an aspect of this, Yoshihara (2007: 201) further refers to the possibility to refute ideas about cultural specific essences of music and territorialised authenticities through demystifying (classical) music as a set of concrete elements and practicable actions.

Things are considerably different for composers, as instead of executing someone else’s intentions, they are expected to produce unique works (of art). Also here, essentialist modes of thought prevail in stereotypical and outright Orientalist ideas about the “Asian-ness” of music, and many composers of Asian descent have consciously attempted to distance
themselves from such musical features. Yet the tendency to even raise the issue when discussing the output of Asian (or other non-white) composers attests to the centrality of ethnicity in music-making and by extension to the fallaciousness of any ideologies or mythologies about the autonomy of music. In other words, while non-white composers and musicians are recurrently reviewed in relation to their ethnicity, thus foregrounding the inextricableness of the aesthetic from the social, the privileged cultural position of white (male) music-makers to insist on musical autonomy exposes the political undercurrents. In relation to this, Yoshihara (2007: 223) stresses the cultural and racial implications of conceiving classical music as originally European and, consequently, Asian composers and performers as cultural outsiders. She furthermore points to the particular socio-cultural circumstances by noting how the US racial politics regularly lead to demands of “recognizable forms of Asian-ness from the musicians and their music, even though their truly Asian voice may consist of sounds very different from such expectations” (Yoshihara 2007: 223).

The juxtaposition between “recognisably” Asian music and the “truly” Asian compositional style nevertheless indicates the fluidity of the notion of authenticity in the context of music. What is of paramount importance with respect to mythologisation is that neither approach is immune to it; the expectations towards conventional Asian-ness in music may lead to reification and museumification just as easily as to Orientalist stereotyping, all at the expense of the constitutional hybridity of the expressive practice, while to equate authenticity with stylistic uniqueness is to elevate individual ingenuity, once again, above all else. The latter stance, brought forth by Yoshihara (2007: 214–222) repeatedly, neglects also the preconditions for originality and creative labour that are inscribed in Copyright Acts and other legal stipulations concerning intellectual property. This is to say that even if the letter and spirit of the law allowed for artistic originality based on combination and (parodic) imitation of existing works, in practice such manifestations are usually subject to copyright clearance – and not infrequently constitute grounds for litigation.

6.5 From conceptual Orientalism to monstrous Borealism

Questions of musical authenticity are thus part and parcel of the legal and economic structures of producing, distributing and consuming music. In such a framework, essentialist racial markers and stereotypes, despite their offensiveness, may be useful in creating market niches (Yoshihara 2007: 222). With respect to the stereotyping and Orientalising tendencies involved, one can in addition distinguish between two forms, namely those of “decorative”
and “conceptual” features. The former variety of Orientalism is based on the centuries-long practice of mainly white composers of assimilating and approximating Eastern sonic traits in Western music, discussed in more recent decades predominantly in relation to postcolonial processes. Conceptual Orientalism, in turn, rests less on musical sounds than on historical or cultural understandings about the Eastern civilisations. Regarding authenticity, it may be argued, there nevertheless are indications on both sides about certain suspicion towards hybridity in the form of either a critique of colonial domination or a more general “separatist ideology” based on ideals of cultural purity that “hamper [the] ability to come to terms with the inevitable change in creative work that results from the confluence of the two cultures.” (Tsou 2007: 450–451.)

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, Finland was represented by Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät (“Pertti Kurikka’s Nameday”, a.k.a. PKN), a punk band comprising of four musicians with mental disabilities. 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 (eg. Crouch 2015), all of which may be harnessed to the service of authenticity.

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. For challenging prejudices the band may very well earn the exotlment, 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. Such 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”. What is more, the case of PKN at the ESC adds to the complexity of spectacular banal nationalism as exhibited in the competition where also minority (sexual) identities are celebrated. The fact remains that in the ESC, sovereign states (or 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 one hand the uncompromising authenticity of PKN has been linked to Finnish-ness; 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.

6.6 The fundamental fashionability of authenticity

Conceptualisations of musical authenticity are indeed multifarious and may derive their vitality from Romantic individualistic disenchantment, postsecular re-enchantment, premodern folk ideology, counter-cultural 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 regarding the extended notion of the sacred, 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 dimension of the popular, the connections are similarly manifold, yet with an emphasis on the aesthetic, folk, partisan and postmodern manifestations. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5. The intersections of the popular and the sacred in relation to mythologisation of music through the notion of authenticity.

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 Charles 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 Romantic 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 form 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 expressivist 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. In addition to the marketing strategies that exploit “universalizing narratives of spiritual essence”, Shannon (2003: 275) continues, there is a wide-spread 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 discourse, authenticity is intimately connected to essentialist and therefore mythologising ideas about locality and ethnicity.

Similarly, Regina Bendix (1997: 3, 6–7) in her excavation into the formation of folklore studies in the United States 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 extended notion of 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, counter-cultural, 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.”
7 Conclusion

7.1 The omnipresent popularity of sacred myths of music

As a summary of the findings of the study, it is obvious that on a general level the intersections of the popular and the sacred manifest themselves in the mythologisation of 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 results resides in the differences between the chosen areas of mythologisation: origins, autonomy, individuality and authenticity. The main trajectories, as inferred from the examples and discussions related to these areas, are summarised in a graphic form in Figure 6.

As the figure and the underlying discussion evince, the dimensions of the popular that become emphasised in mythologisation of music are the aesthetic, folk and postmodern ones, while on the sacred side it is the cluster of subcultural, national and economic facets which is connected to all areas of mythologisation of music. It is noteworthy though, that all five aspects of the sacred have a fairly equal footing in the ways to mythologise music, which for its part is again somewhat unsurprising given the close connection between myths and the sacred in the general sense. With respect to the popular in turn, the conspicuous links between myths about individuality in music and quantitative and mass cultural dimensions are notable. Moreover, the findings indicate that overall the discourses of autonomy and authenticity carry a paramount weight when considering the intersections of the popular and the sacred in mythologisation of music.
Mythologisation of music through discourses of origins, autonomy, individuality and authenticity is indeed ubiquitous and multifarious to the extent it is arguably a universal phenomenon. The omnipresent popularity of sacred myths about music – whether in the form of indigenous cosmologies, religious doctrines, Eurocentric romanticism or biomusicological speculations – may be taken 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 Jankélévich 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 of mythologisation that are associated with the ineffability of music indicate that the issue is fundamentally epistemological in nature. In other words, a central question pertains to what counts as knowledge when 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 may be taken as a small wonder 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 as something that resembles to a significant degree the extended notion of the sacred as delineated by Lynch (2012). On the other hand, an emphasis on various musical forms of knowledge production might have its benefits in the critique of prevailing logocentrism and visual epistemology, even if it risks mythologising the power and autonomy of music.

The prevalence of mythologising music 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, mythologisation of music becomes a matter of politics (see Street 2012). Consequently, as musical myths become interweaved with deliberation and decision-making over material
resources, they have an economic component to them, too. 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 organised humanity” (Blacking 1973), 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”.

Similarly, the multiple myths and explanations about musical origins, individuality and authenticity suggest that in the final analysis, the fundamental debate concerns the cultural politics of mythologisation of music: what are the purposes and agendas behind musical myth-making, and are the consequences of the usage and reconstruction of musical myths? With the caveat about miscellaneous examples and the risk of circularity therein, my findings are in favour of Doniger’s (2011: 15, 98) ground-laying arguments concerning a myth as “a tool in the hands of human beings” that is used to “wrestle with insoluble paradoxes”, hence resulting in an immeasurable number of variants. “The failure to fit a round peg into a square hole”, she maintains, “generates potentially infinite ways of not fitting a round peg into a square hole”, and consequently the political agendas embedded in myths may be exposed by juxtaposing the different versions at hand (Doniger 2011: 98, 104). The emphasis on politics and hidden agendas should not, however, be considered as referring to somehow questionable or malevolent objectives alone but instead as an attunement and sensitivity towards the ways in which “myth reflects the changes in actual life and may in turn inspire changes in actual life” (Doniger 2011: 107).

As practices labelled “music” in the Western world are indeed global, their mythologisation also reflects and inspires 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. As 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 more general. Different native cosmologies may have conceptions of music’s origins and hence also its ownership that are radically different from the one inscribed in the Western copyright acts; it will be also quite interesting and educating to learn to what extent myths of ingenuity and national authenticity especially come to be utilised in 2027 in favour of extending the seventy-year limit of copyright protection after the death of the author, as the limit expires for Jean Sibelius, the alleged national composer of Finland.

In contrast to the elements of political and economic exploitation inherent in mythologisation 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 such 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).

7.2 Evaluating the harm done

To demythologise music 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 “subculturalist” 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 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 Mark Evans’s (2006: 13) notion of “theomusicology” which is effectively the type of ethnomusicological study that focusses on Christianity, thus foregrounding certain conceptualisations and “ideas about music” (cf. Merriam 1964; Titon 2009). Also the absence of explicitly ethnomusicological discussion from The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music is conspicuous, especially as four contributors to the volume self-identify as ethnomusicologists.

To this end, to introduce an approach that does not rely on axiomatic 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 pickering 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 kinds of sound 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 as manifested in the forms of mythologisation indubitably increases the complexity of the task, but this should be taken as a benefit and not as a detriment, however labourious 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 in an interdisciplinary manner.

The multiple dimensions and modalities involved raise inevitably questions about the abundance of available examples and consequently about the criteria of selection and risks of circularity. As the aim of the thesis is theoretical and not empirical in nature, the results remain to a considerable degree conditional and dependent upon the validity of the initial division of four areas of mythologisation, as well as upon new evidence that challenges or even contradicts the findings. The latter is a scientific truism, of course, but regarding the validity of origins, autonomy, individuality and authenticity as the main areas of mythologisation of music, it would be possible to put it to the test by using a systematic corpus. But, as the phrase goes, that is a topic for another thesis.
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