

## 5 'Message Understood?'

### Textual analysis and popular musicology

The term 'text' has traditionally been used to refer to an author's original words, or a prose work – especially one recommended for student reading. More recently, as a cultural studies term, text refers to any media form that is self-contained and conveys cultural meaning, including television programmes, recordings, films and books. Popular music texts are quite diverse, embracing both sound and visual examples, with these at times combined. The most prominent are aural texts: sound recordings, in various formats, the focus of this chapter. In addition, there are graphic texts, most notably album covers, and audiovisual texts, primarily music videos. Other forms of popular music text include music magazines, posters, t-shirts, tour brochures and fan club merchandise. Musical performances, especially concerts, and DJ discourse have also been analyzed as forms of musical text. These various forms are frequently interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Following a brief consideration of the nature of textual analysis, I turn to musical texts with particular reference to issues around musicology, the analysis of song lyrics, and the nature and status of 'covers'. Chapter 6 considers texts as 'collectivities', through discussions of genre and the album canon. Due to its close association with MTV and YouTube, music video, the main example of an audiovisual music text, is discussed in Chapter 8.

It is obviously difficult to express through language qualities that are often visual and aural, rather than linguistic. Accordingly, the book's associated website provides links to websites where album cover art, song lyrics and recordings can be accessed.

#### Textual analysis

Textual analysis is concerned with identifying and analyzing the formal qualities of texts, their underpinning structures and constituent characteristic. As such, it has become closely associated with various approaches to content and discourse analysis, including semiotic analysis. Studies of album covers, for example, show how they convey meaning through the semiotic resources they draw on and display, via language, typography, images and layout (Machin, 2010). They make an artistic statement in relation to the style of music though their association with

particular iconography, for example the use of apocalyptic imagery in heavy metal and the fantasy imagery of progressive rock (see the examples in Ochs, 1996). Album covers also consolidate and sustain the representation of artists as iconic figures. For example, Island's marketing of Bob Marley and the Wailers, with covers constructing Marley as a star figure and the band as politically authentic style rebels, was important to their commercial success and the mainstreaming of reggae in the 1970s (see the discussion of this in Chapter 7). The album covers of the Beatles recordings were especially notable: 'groundbreaking in their visual and aesthetic properties (and) their innovative and imaginative designs' (Inglis, 2001: 83), they forged a link with the expanding British graphic design industry and the art world, while making explicit the connections between art and pop in the 1960s.

A major form of textual analysis is the examination of the musical components of songs, including their lyrics, in their various recorded formats. Musicology is central to this, although its traditional approach has been modified in relation to popular music. While recordings are usually analyzed independently, they can also be considered collectively, as with content analysis of chart share in terms of genres, record labels (especially majors compared to independents), performers and country of origin. A similar approach has been applied to radio and MTV airplay, especially in relation to relative shares of local content and imported repertoire (see Chapter 14).

Intertextuality is important here: the idea that a text communicates its meaning only when it is situated in relation to other texts; it is often characterized as meaning that 'arises' between texts (Gracyk, 2001: 56). An example of this process is the musical dialogue that occurs between cover versions of songs, their antecedents and the performers of both (see later). Intertextuality is also evident in the discourse around preferred styles and performers and implicit in the repackaging of the back catalogue of recordings as generic compilations and boxed sets. Theodore Gracyk (2001: Chapter 3) provides a number of interesting musical examples, making the point that such 'influences, connections, and allusions create nuances of meaning that cannot be grasped simply through a general intertextuality' (59).

A point of debate around popular culture is its ideological role in reinforcing and reproducing dominant values through their representation in popular texts. Critics who concentrate on the text itself, often using concepts from semiotic and psychoanalytic analysis, argue that there frequently exists in the text a preferred reading, that is, a dominant message set within the cultural code of established conventions and practices of the producers/transmitters of the text. However, while many consumers may, at least implicitly or subconsciously, accept such preferred readings, it must be kept in mind that it is not necessarily true that all listeners do so. In particular, subordinate groups may reinterpret such textual messages, making 'sense' of them in a different way. The Strawbs 'Part of the Union', intended as a direct attack on trade unionism, achieved the opposite effect when sung by striking Coventry car workers. The study of pop fans similarly suggests that cultural meanings are ultimately made by consumers, even if

this process is under conditions and opportunities not of their own choosing (see Chapter 10). This opens up the idea of popular resistance to, and subversion of, dominant cultures, a view that has informed analysis of the nature and reception of popular song lyrics and music videos.

### **Musicology and popular song**

Clearly, the central textual form in popular music is the song, primarily reproduced as individual sound recordings: the single. The analysis of these has been dominated in popular discourse by fans, the music press and music critics and in academic work by musicology. To illustrate the issues, the discussion here concentrates on rock and pop, the dominant metagenres in popular music.

Musicology developed with Western art music and historically privileged the text by placing the emphasis firmly on its formal properties. Musicologists have investigated genres such as the blues, jazz and, more recently, pop and rock, as music, using conventional concepts derived from the study of more traditional/classical forms of music: harmony, melody, beat and rhythm, along with vocal style and the lyrics. A major early debate in popular music studies was around the value of such an approach to pop and rock musical texts. Indeed, there was an argument as to whether popular music, especially rock and pop genres, even merited such a 'serious' analysis. This was clearly evident in the 1980s, in the bemused reaction of the mainstream British press to the emergence of 'popular music studies', reflecting conservative notions of high culture set against the mass society critiques of popular music.

Academic musicologists at first largely ignored rock and pop music, although a notable early exception was Wilfred Mellers' sympathetic study of the Beatles, *Twilight of the Gods* (1974); his example was followed by the pioneering work of, among others, John Shepherd, Philip Tagg, Robert Walser and Susan McClary. Most musicologists, however, were reluctant to engage with a form of music accorded low cultural value in comparison with 'serious' music. At the same time, many sociologists writing on popular music were wary of musicology. Simon Frith, in one of the first extended academic treatments of pop and rock music, noted how both rock musicians and rock commentators generally lacked 'the vocabulary and techniques of musical analysis, and even the descriptive words that critics and fans do use – harmony, melody, riff, beat – are only loosely understood and applied' (Frith, 1983: 13).

Frith saw rock critics as essentially preoccupied with sociology rather than sound and identified what has been too ready a willingness to dismiss musicology as having little relevance to the study of popular styles. The arguments here were well rehearsed through the 1980s: traditional musicology neglected the social context, emphasized the transcription of music (the score) and elevated harmonic and rhythmic structure to pride of place as an evaluative criterion. Popular music, by way of contrast, was seen to emphasize interpretation through performance and as received primarily in terms of the body and emotions rather than as pure text. Many rock musicians observed that classical music

operated according to a different set of musical criteria, which had little validity for their own efforts.

Certainly, attempts to apply traditional musicological criteria could all too easily appear pretentious, as shown by Frith's comparison of two explanations of the Animals' 1964 hit 'I'm Crying'. Richard Middleton, a musicologist, in his explanation emphasized the formal musical qualities of the composition, including the point that:

The cross relations in the ostinato (which is melodic and harmonic) are the equivalents of blue notes, arising from a similar conflict between melodic and tonal implications. The modal melodic movement of the ostinato, with its minor thirds, clashes with the tonal need for major triads imposed by the 12-bar blues structure.

(cited in Frith, 1983: 13)

Compare this with Alan Price's description: 'I wrote the music and Eric (Burdon) did the words and we just threw it together in rehearsal in Blackpool. We just stuck it together and recorded it and by chance it was successful' (Frith, 1983: 13). Middleton's analysis, while accurate, places considerable demands on the reader, while Price's casual explanation reflects a romantic rock ideology, with its ideal of spontaneous and inspired creativity.

In the early 1990s, there were signs that the largely negative attitude toward applying musicology to popular music was changing. Several musicologists engaged with popular music genres and texts (for example: McClary and Walser, 1990; Moore, 1993; Tagg and Clarida, 2003), while popular music scholars generally began to accord musicology more weight in their analyses. This work varied in the degree to which such analysis simply took as a given the concepts and tools of traditional (e.g. more classical music oriented) musicology or modified these in relation to popular music.

Much of this work recognized that the traditional conception of musicology, especially as present in the study of western art/classical music, was inadequate when applied to popular music in any straightforward manner (equating the two forms). For example, a concentration on technical textual aspects alone – the score – fails to deal with how the effects listeners celebrate are constructed, what Susan McClary and Robert Walser (1990: 287) term 'the dimensions of music that are most compelling and yet most threatening to rationality'. This takes into consideration the role of pleasure, the relationship of the body, feelings and emotions, and sexuality in constructing responses to genres such as dance, rock and the blues.

The past decade has produced a substantial body of what came to be termed 'popular musicology' (Hawkins, 2002), with several substantive edited volumes containing extensive discussion and examples (Middleton, 2000; Moore, 2003; Scott, 2009). This work has engaged further with the more affective domains of the relationship between the text and its listeners and into the generic and historical locations of texts and performers. A prominent part of such an approach is the question of 'listening'.

**Listening: why do songs have words?**

Listening is a physical process situated in social contexts and mediated by technology. Listening to music is an activity that takes place with varying levels of intensity, influenced by the consumption context and the style of the performer: 'the "distracted" environment of many club settings and the hushed concentration typical of singer-songwriter concerts might represent two extremes' (Middleton, 1990: 95). More melodious and 'non-abrasive' styles of music form the staple of radio 'easy listening', and the loose genre of 'lounge music', while louder genres (heavy metal, hard rock) have been seen as dangerous to listeners' hearing. The development of headphones and portable stereos, such as the Walkman, as well as the iPod, enabled different styles of listening, while reconfiguring the social locations and contexts within which it occurred.

Listening to particular musical styles requires distinct cultural capital, including, but not limited to, knowledge of the sonic codes and conventions of the genre and the previous work of the performer and similar artists. Unfamiliar music requires 'work', musical labour to situate the piece in relation to other, already familiar music. Antoine Hennion (2003) has been prominent in developing what he calls a sociology of mediation, and a related history of listening. Undertaking fascinating empirical research into how people listen, he argues that listening technologies have transformed, and in a sense created, the act of listening (see also Tagg and Clarida, 2003).

This is to utilize a more extended definition of 'musical', where what is crucial is the link between musical structures and people's use of them. As Stan Hawkins observes, 'the task of interpreting pop is an interdisciplinary task that deals with the relationship between music and social mediation. It is one that includes taking into account the consideration of the sounds in their relationship to us as individuals' (2002: 3).

Even when there has been a concern to address popular genres such as 'rock' as music, this has largely concentrated on its lyrical component, an approach I have cautiously followed here. In his insightful historical discussion, 'Why Do Songs Have Words?', Simon Frith showed how through the 1950s and 1960s the sociology of popular music was dominated by the analysis of the words of the songs. This was largely because such an approach was grounded in a familiar research methodology—content analysis. It did make a certain amount of sense given the dominance of popular music by the well-crafted but generally bland songs of Tin Pan Alley, but assumed, however, 'that it was possible to read back from lyrics to the social forces that produced them' (Frith, 1988:106). I want to consider two instructive examples of such difficulties.

***Stand by your lyric***

'Stand By Your Man', co-written (with Billy Sherrill) and sung by Tammy Wynette, was a no. 1 hit on its release in 1968 and the song remains one of the best-selling records by a woman in the history of country music. Wynette adopted

it as her theme song, performing it in all her concerts and using it as the title for both her autobiography and the television movie about her life. The song even sparked a no. 1 hit response: Ronnie Milsap's Grammy-winning '(I'm A) Stand By My Woman Man' (1976). The popularity of 'Stand By Your Man' was matched by the controversy and critical response it created. This focused on the song's apparently sexist message:

Stand by your man  
Give him two arms to cling to  
And something warm to come to  
On nights he's cold and lonely  
Stand by your man  
And tell the world you love him  
Keep giving all the love you can  
Stand by your man.

This chorus was generally interpreted as a simple clarion call for women to subserviently support their male partners, reducing the woman's role essentially to a physical one, providing 'arms' and 'something warm'. *Newsweek* headlined a 1971 article on Wynette's music: 'Songs of Non-Liberation', while other reviewers labelled her work 'pre-feminist' and equated it with traditional views of women's 'allegiance to the stronger sex'. But while the dynamics of the song emphasize the chorus, the lyrics to its only verse make its interpretation more problematic:

Sometimes it's hard to be a woman  
Giving all your love to just one man  
You'll have bad times  
And he'll have good times  
Doin' things you don't understand  
But if you love him  
You'll forgive him  
Even though he's hard to understand  
And if you love him  
Be proud of him  
'Cause after all he's just a man.

The verse is presenting the hardships women face in their relationships with men, with the last line a neatly condescending assertion of women's superior gender status. A literal reading of the lyrics (especially in print, as here) is misleading. The slightly maudlin and world-weary tone of Wynette's recorded vocal suggests an ironic stance. Another dimension that reinforces this emphasis was Tammy Wynette's personal life. Then a twice-divorced mother of three, several of her previous hits had asserted the views of a wronged and righteous single woman, especially her song 'D-I-V-O-R-C-E'. Furthermore, her subsequent tortured personal life (she died in 1998), including three additional marriages and

further songs elaborating the earlier pro-woman themes, suggested Wynette was using 'Stand By Your Man' to make an ironic statement about the contradictory dimensions of women's experience of relationships. The verse and chorus of the song represent the dilemma women face of meeting their gender obligations, while anticipating their ideal achievement, and must be understood as a totality.

The Sherrill-Wynette songwriting partnership was mirrored in the song, with the male-mandated chorus providing the main theme, which is countered by the female-authored verse. It is also significant that Wynette distanced herself from the interpretations of the song as sexist, observing in her autobiography:

I never did understand all the commotion over the lyrics of that song. I don't see anything in that song that implies that a woman is supposed to sit home and raise babies while a man goes out and raises hell.

(Wynette, 1980: 193)

To validate this interpretation of 'Stand By Your Man' as ironic, it would be necessary to ask women (and men?) how they respond to and interpret the song, given that listeners respond in a variety of ways to the same musical text. This simple but essential point is also illustrated by the song 'Born in the USA'.

### ***Patriotism and irony in the US***

Songs create identification through their emotional appeal, but this does not necessarily mean that they can be reduced to a simple slogan or message, although some listeners may do just that. Bruce Springsteen was a dominant figure in 1980s' rock music and his song 'Born in the USA' (1984) represents one of his most powerful political statements. It reflecting the self-consciously political stance evident in his work, then and now, and his view that 'I don't think people are being taught to think hard enough about things in general, whether its about their own lives, politics, the situation in Nicaragua, or whatever' (1987 interview, cited in Pratt, 1990). 'Born in the USA' is a bitter narrative of life in the American underclass. The first person singer-narrator, Springsteen, joins the army to avoid 'a little hometown jam', fights in Vietnam, where his brother is killed and returns to unemployment, seemingly with no hope or future.

Born down in a dead man's town,  
The first kick I took was when I hit the ground  
You end up like a dog that's been beat too much  
Til you spend half your life just covering up.

The music has a militaristic flavour, especially in the upbeat chorus sections, with the anthemic refrain:

BORN IN THE USA  
I was BORN IN THE USA

I was BORN IN THE USA  
BORN IN THE USA

It is an open question to what extent Springsteen's listeners appreciate the song as a resigned and ironic comment on the US. Springsteen himself was highly conscious of this:

I opened the paper one day and saw where they had quizzed kids on what different songs meant to them and they asked them what 'Born in the USA' meant. 'Well, it's about my country', they answered. Well, that is what it's about – that's certainly one of the things it's about – but if that's as far in as you go, you're going to miss it, you know?

(1987 interview, cited in Pratt, 1990)

Casually listening to the song, many of my own students regard it simply as a straightforward homage to America, picking up on the celebratory anthem-like chorus, rather than the verse narrative. This perspective is adjusted when a provocative comparison with the original recorded version of the song is provided by Springsteen's live acoustic version, which appears on *Tracks*, 1999. Here, due to Springsteen's vocal and guitar being fairly constant throughout, the verses 'compete' on an equal footing with the chorus and listeners are more conscious of the song's ironic celebration of the US.

'Stand By Your Man' and 'Born in the USA' both demonstrate that listeners use songs for their own purposes and the popularity of particular performers is only in part derived from the substantive musical content of their work. As the earlier discussion of stardom showed, performers can function as 'texts' in a broader sense, with particular cultural meanings attached to them. This involves considering how particular stylistic and musical techniques serve to encourage certain responses from their listeners and the role of genre in determining musical meaning. The following examples illustrate such an approach.

### ***The Who: 'Talkin' 'bout My Generation'***

Always very self-reflexive in his attitude towards rock in the early years of the Who, their lead guitarist and main songwriter Pete Townshend was concerned to promote rock as an art form, capable of inspiring and promoting social change. Townshend wrote a string of hits dealing with the frustrations of youth, most notably the anthem 'My Generation', a no. 2 chart success in the UK in 1965. (In the US, where the Who had yet to perform, and receiving limited promotion, it only reached no. 74 on the *Billboard* chart). The record established the band as one of the most innovative of the new British rock groups in the wake of the Beatles; it became the end piece of their concerts and provided the title song on their first album (on Brunswick in the UK): 'Suddenly the Who went from being one, albeit the most promising, of a mass of beat groups to spokesmen, stuttering on behalf of an entire generation' (Perry, 1998: 30). While the song had a very

spontaneous sound to it, 'My Generation' had actually been laboriously developed by Townshend, through a number of intermediate stages.

As a band, the Who and 'My Generation' were linked to the mod subculture, which began in London around 1963. In a deliberate marketing move by the group's managers, the Who were originally called the High Numbers, whose first single, 'I'm the Face/Zoot Suit' (1964) drew on mod slang and dress. A youth subculture, mod was basically a working-class movement with a highly stylized form of dress, the fashions of which changed frequently and an interest in American R&B music. Living for weekend partying, the mods took pep pills, particularly 'purple hearts' (amphetamines). Several class-based strains of mod appeared, each with distinctive styles: an art school, high-camp version; mainstream mods; scooter boys; and the hard mods, some of whom developed into skinheads. The mod lifestyle parodied and subverted the respectable conventions of their class backgrounds and the relatively unskilled office jobs many of them held.

'My Generation', claims Gary Herman, 'epitomises everything that Mod meant to the mods themselves and to a whole generation of kids for whom mod was the only adequate expression of their feelings' (Herman, 1971: 62). The song presents a picture of a confused and inarticulate adolescent, with lead singer Roger Daltrey singing the vocal in a stuttering fashion that mimics the speed-induced verbal stoppages associated with mod methedrine use.

People try to put us down  
(Talkin 'bout my generation)  
Just because we get around  
(Talkin 'bout my generation)  
Things they do look awful cold  
(Talkin 'bout my generation)  
Hope I die before I get old  
(Talkin 'bout my generation).

The song itself employs what Townshend called 'the Who brag form', with its self-assertive aggressiveness concealing a basic insecurity. Its pace is fast and frantic. It is a combination of bravado and inarticulateness; the stuttering conveys a mix of rage and frustration – as if the singer can't get the words out.

'My Generation' was a logical progression from the earlier Who singles 'Can't Explain' and 'Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere'. Like them, it opened with a series of power chords and rustling drums, which Keith Moon subsequently develops into a slashing attack on his drum kit and John Entwistle's rumbling bass ('perhaps the most prominently recorded electric bass in rock up to that time': Marsh, 1983: 186). This style, which had developed because the Who had no rhythm guitarist, accordingly meant Townshend's lead guitar is strongly rhythmic, emphasizing chord structures rather than melodic lines. A series of simple chord changes keep the momentum going. The song builds in intensity, with a crescendo of feedback, climaxing with sounds reminiscent of the demolishing of lead guitar and drum kit which formed part of the Who's auto-destructive stage act. But what was most

revolutionary about the song was its use of feedback. Rather than being used 'as a gimmick separate from the basic flow of the music', 'My Generation' uses feedback 'for the first time as an integral part of a rock composition – without it, the song would be incomplete' (Marsh, 1983: 187).

This indicates Townshend's reputation as a lead guitarist, in addition to his standing as the writer of some of the most memorable lyrics in rock. The Who toured exhaustively through the 1960s, particularly in the US where explosive stage appearances at the Monterey Pop Festival (1967) and Woodstock (1969) consolidated their standing as one of rock's premiere live acts. Townshend's guitar work earned him recognition among his peers and fans and he consistently placed well in performers' polls in the music press. What made his playing distinctive was his incorporation of it into the group's stage act, with his trademark propeller-arm playing style earning him the nickname the Birdman. Townshend's destruction of his guitar at the end of many of the Who's early concerts became a performance trademark, as did his experimentation with feedback.

The reputation of the Who, and Townshend, rests largely on their early hits: 'musical acid bombs, uniquely summing up that Sixties teenage attitude which compounded swaggering confidence with spluttering frustration', and which 'are still touched by a magic that has rarely been duplicated in English rock' (Sinclair, 1992: 381–82; see also Perry, 1998). 'My Generation' is regularly included in volumes presenting a canon of rock records and today's youth still finds it of interest. It has clear links with the later 'three-chord thrash' of late 1970s' punk and the recent revival of 'garage rock', which many students listen to. This, and the mod association, acts as a nostalgic prompt to further investigation of the song and the Who.

The Sex Pistols, 'Anarchy in the UK', and punk rock, further illustrates how songs are situated in terms of a combination of their formal musical properties, genre and social context, along with listeners' responses to them.

### *Sex Pistols: 'Anarchy in the UK'*

Punk rock was a musical style with a closely associated youth subculture. The historical roots and antecedents of punk have been much debated, as have its subsequent influence (see Sabin, 1999). Punk emerged in response to a specific social and political context, in the UK in 1976 and 1977, affirming a politics of dissatisfaction with contemporary social and economic upheaval, which included sharp rises in youth unemployment, racism and industrial unrest.

Evaluation then and since gives 'Anarchy in the UK' (Virgin, 1976) and the Sex Pistols debut album *Never Mind the Bollocks* (Virgin, 1977), which for many listeners was their first exposure to the song, a key place in the advent of punk rock in 1977–1978 in the UK and accords it a lasting influence. For Dave Marsh, it illustrates the musical fracture presented by punk in the late 1970s:

somebody had figured out how to make artistically and commercially viable pop music based on a rhythmic process outside R&B, a feat unequalled since

the advent of Elvis Presley; consequently, things were fundamentally different thereafter. It was a true historic disjuncture.

(Marsh, 1989: 72)

For Jon Savage (1991), it was 'an index of their increasing ambition ... a call to arms, delivered in language that was as explosive as the group's name'. For Greil Marcus (1992: 594), it was part of the Sex Pistols' rupturing of rock 'n' roll, as they 'broke the story of rock & roll in half', turning it back on itself, and recasting key questions as to its cultural weight (see also the reviews collected in Heylin, 1998: 137ff.).

Savage traces the genesis and impact of 'Anarchy', giving it a definite political intent and accusing John Lydon (Johnny Rotten) of 'deliberately using inflammatory imagery' particularly the terms 'antichrist' and 'anarchist', both conveying images of apocalypse, the second coming and social chaos: 'there seems little doubt that Lydon was fed material by Vivienne Westwood (McLaren's designer partner) and Jamie Reid (the Pistol's graphic artist), which he then converted to his own lyric' (Savage, 1991: 204).

The raw sound of the song is hardly accidental, as it went through a number of versions and recording sessions. 'Anarchy in the UK' was one of seven songs recorded by the group in July 1976 and it was these tapes that their manager Malcom McLaren took to the recording companies. With a stagnant music industry largely reacting to trends rather than initiating them, the Pistols' material at first created little interest:

When production values were complex and smooth, the Goodman (producer, Dave Goodman) tapes capture the group's live sound 'of broken glass and rusty razor blades'. In 1976, they must have sounded to the uninitiated like a rougher, more inept version of the new wave of Pub Rock bands, none of whom had reached the attention of the industry.

(Savage, 1991: 206; see also Heylin, 1998)

Two days after they signed for EMI, the Sex Pistols again recorded 'Anarchy in the UK', which was to be their first single. The first attempts 'to get the spirit of live performance' (bass player Glen Matlock) proved unsatisfactory and it was eventually re-recorded with a different producer, Chris Thomas replacing Dave Goodman. On 26 November 1976 the single was finally released: 'A much cleaner, more mainstream version, it was by that stage so loaded with expectation that it was difficult to listen objectively' (Savage, 1991: 255). Following the infamous Grundy interview of the group on Thames Television on 2 December and the subsequent controversy and distribution problems, the single climbed to no. 43 on the *NME* British chart and eventually reached no. 27 in late December; it never charted in the US, however.

The ingredients of 'Anarchy in the UK' typify punk rock (the following discussion is based largely on Laing, 1988). First, punk bands relied on live shows to establish an identity and build a reputation, consequently 'techniques of recording

and of arrangement were adopted which were intended to signify the "live" commitment of the disc' (Laing, 1988: 74). In short, punk records generally sound 'live', as if the studio had not come between the intentions of the musicians and their listening audience. Second, the use of the voice is in an identifiably punk mode, blurring the lyric with the singer's aggressive vocal, which lies between ordinary speech and singing. This makes the sound of the recording (voice plus instruments) more important than the actual identifiable lyric. Thus, for Laing 'any hope for the pure message, vocals as reflector of meaning, is doomed', which makes it 'possible (if difficult) to find pleasure in this celebrated punk rock song without the necessity of agreeing with the message' (Laing, 1988: 75-6; 78). This is rather at odds with Savage's view of 'Anarchy' as a political text, but is the dominant impression of the song retained by most casual listeners. Indeed, how 'seriously' are we to take punk lyrics like 'Anarchy'? The ideology of sincerity was central to punk and, in interviews, 'the stated beliefs of musicians, and their congruence with the perceived messages of their lyrics, became routine topics' (ibid.: 90). But, as various analyses demonstrate, in many cases punk lyrics are like collages, a series of often fractured images, with no necessarily correct reading.

Third, there is punk's mode of address. Compared with much popular music, the confidential stance is rare in punk rock and 'Anarchy' is strongly in a sardonic declamatory mode. As with other punk songs, there is also an emphasis on addressing individuals other than 'lovers' and a 'plural specific' address. Fourth, the tempo of punk is usually described as 'basic' and 'primitive'. As a musically minimalist genre, punk rock eschewed the growing use of electronic instruments associated with 'progressive' rock, and featured a strict guitar and drums instrumental line-up: 'this was a sound best suited to expressing anger and frustration, focusing chaos, dramatizing the last days as daily life and ramming all emotions into the narrow gap between a blank stare and a sardonic grin' (Marcus, 1992: 595). What also set punk apart from other rock styles was its rhythmic patterns, the main reason for the 'un-danceability' of much punk rock. This 'provided a feeling of unbroken rhythmic flow, enhanced by the breakneck eight to the bar rhythm of much punk rock' (Laing, 1988: 85), adding to the urgency that the voice and aggressive vocals evoked. The lack of emphasis on instrumental virtuosity reflected punk's frequent association of skill with glibness. The frequently alleged musical incompetence of punk bands, however, was largely a myth, often fuelled by the bands themselves. (On this point, see McNeil and McCain, 1996; and Marcus Gray's study of the Clash, *Last Gang in Town*, 1995, which takes issue with much of the received wisdom regarding punk's supposed values.)

As even this abbreviated discussion indicates, 'Anarchy' demonstrates the congruence between punk as music and the social location and values of the associated punk subculture. Music here exists very much within a broader set of social relations. My last example takes us into a different sort of musical politics from punk, with new technologies for producing music combining with the internet to create another field of debate around musical texts and their creators.

**Danger Mouse: The Grey Album (2004)**

*The Grey Album* is a mash-up created and released in limited quantities on the internet by then underground hip-hop artist Danger Mouse (Brian Burton) in 2004. The album combines (mashes) an a cappella version of rapper Jay-Z's *The Black Album* with instrumentals created from numerous unauthorized samples from the Beatles self-titled LP, better known as *The White Album*.

Although mash-ups came to public prominence with the release of *The Grey Album* and the controversy that followed, such a 'cut-and-paste' approach had its origins in sample-based music from the late 1970s onward, including early forms of hip-hop and disco medleys in which a mixer would segue from one song to another (on the evolution of the mash-up, see McLeod, 2005b; Sinnreich, 2010; Chapter 3). Mash-ups were made possible by the advent of simple computer programs that allowed home-based amateur composers to juxtapose two or more songs and the digital distribution facilitated by the internet and file-sharing networks that emerged through the early 2000s (Napster, Linewire).

Danger Mouse pressed only 3000 copies of his album, but it spread rapidly on file-sharing networks (see Chapter 2), boosted by favourable coverage in music magazines (*Rolling Stone*) and the mainstream press, including *The New York Times*. It was estimated that more than 100,000 downloads of the album initially occurred, enough for it to achieve 'Gold' status in the United States (Howard-Spink, 2004: 5).

Mash-ups are created exclusively from prerecorded sources and as such challenged traditional conceptions of copyright and 'fair use'. Although Jay-Z's work was copyrighted, he had actually released it to encourage remixes and mash-ups and praised the creativity he saw in *The Grey Album*. Paul McCartney also acknowledged that he was comfortable with Danger Mouse's project, but EMI, the Beatles' label, attempted to prevent the distribution of *The Grey Album*. Music activists responded by coordinating a major online protest, 'Grey Tuesday', with at least 170 websites risking a lawsuit by hosting the album (Howard-Spink, 2004; McLeod, 2005b).

In his extensive analysis of new 'configurable' technologies, Aram Sinnreich sees such mash-ups as further examples of the social and economic ramifications posed by these technologies, which are undermining the traditional consumer/producer dichotomy of musical production. Along with remixes, mash-ups problematize the distinction between the 'original' and the 'copy', in the process raising questions of authorship and the musical division of labour: 'Who is the author of a mash-up, and who is its audience? Are DJs composers or performers? Is a digital music file source material or finished product?' (Sinnreich, 2010: 8).

Finally, I want to consider a particular form of song text, cover versions, which again demonstrate debates around commerce, creativity and authenticity.

**Cover versions**

Cover versions are performances and recordings by musicians not responsible for the original recording. Historically, these were often 'standards' and were the

staples of singers' repertoire for most of the 1940s and 1950s. Reflecting industry competition and as part of marketing strategy, record companies would release their artists' cover versions of hits from their competitors. In the 1950s, white singers covered the original rock 'n' roll recordings by black artists, often sanitizing them in the process (e.g. Pat Boone's cover of Little Richard's 'Tutti Frutti'), in an effort by record companies to capitalize on the ethnic divide in American radio. Criticism of this frequently exploitative practice led to covers being equated with a lack of originality and regarded as not as creative, or authentic, as the original recording. This view was reinforced by the aesthetics and ideology of 1960s' rock culture, valuing individual creativity and the use of one's own compositions (Keightley, 2003). More recently, it has been recognized that many song covers have been creative in their own right (*The Wire*, 2005; Solis, 2010; and see the examples that follow).

There is an economic dimension to covers, since they are a proven product that an audience can often identify with. Accordingly, many covers, especially when played by cover and tribute bands, seek to replicate the original recorded version as closely as possible. Covers have also featured strongly in the charts, especially since the late 1980s. There is a fresh generation of listeners and a new market for a recycled song, as reissues, compilation albums and film soundtracks continue to demonstrate. Such marketing practices and career choices can undermine the status of covers, but the negative image of the cover song is undeserved. Interpretation of the original recording aside, covers have provided a training ground for musicians and have often served as a form of homage to the original artists. Playing and recording covers is a way for artists to authenticate themselves with their audience, through identification with respected original artists. Elvis Presley's Sun performances of 'That's Alright Mama' (Sun, 1955), originally recorded by R&B singer Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup, and his version of the bluegrass classic 'Blue Moon of Kentucky', rehearsed the singer's influences and contributed to the formation of rockabilly and rock 'n' roll in the 1950s. Later in their careers, established bands and performers will sometimes record entire albums of covers, in a 'tip of the hat' to their influences (for example, Metallica, Matthew Sweet and Susanna Hoffs).

In the UK, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a number of musicians became intensely interested in black American performers, including those whose work provided the antecedents of rock 'n' roll. Groups such as the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds, and the Animals began playing covers or reworked versions of American R&B and blues, gradually transforming the music into what became known as 'rock'. A significant audience emerged for this music, stimulated by tours of England by several leading American bluesmen, including Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters. Guitarist Eric Clapton was prominent among those reaching back beyond 1950s' rock 'n' roll to country and electric blues for inspiration and musical texts. In 1966, with two other key figures in the British rhythm and blues movement, Ginger Baker (drums) and Jack Bruce (bass), Clapton formed Cream. The trio came together in a conscious attempt to push the boundaries of rock through developing the potential of blues-based music and performed and

recorded versions of blues' classics, notably Willie Dixon's 'Spoonful', itself based on Charlie Patton's 'A Spoonful of Blues' (1929). Headlam (1997) instructively traces these back to their original sources in Chicago and Delta blues.

To illustrate how artists 'seek to define themselves in relation to traditions and genres other than their own', Butler examines two covers by the Pet Shop Boys: 'Where the Streets Have No Name', originally by rock band U2 (1987) and 'Go West', originally by the disco/dance group the Village People (1979). The musical sound, performance style and lyrical themes of each pair of songs, and the discourse surrounding their production and reception, show how these covers provide an intertextual commentary on the original works. He argues that the Pet Shop Boys subvert the U2 song, 'poking fun at certain common ways of exposing authenticity in 1980s rock' and their cover of 'Go West', as a 'stomping disco record', repositions disco as a form of roots music for the gay community of the 1990s (Butler, 2003: 1).

Covers are a significant part of the repertoire of many other performers, with the ability to 'mine' and revise the musical past, regarded as a virtue. Joan Jett, who played rhythm guitar in the teenage female hard rock band the Runaways, initiated a solo career with 'I Love Rock 'n' Roll' (Boardwalk, 1982). A remake of an obscure B side by British band the Arrows, Joan Jett and the Blackhearts' version was one of the biggest hits of the 1980s, spending seven weeks at no. 1 on the US *Billboard* chart. The song provided the title track for a successful album, which also included 'Crimson and Clover', originally a no. 1 hit for Tommy James and the Shondells in 1967. Released as a single, Jett's cover of this reached no. 7. She had further chart success with a cover of Gary Glitter's 'Do You Wanna Touch Me (Oh Yeah)' and subsequently released an album of covers, *The Hit List* (Epic, 1990), featuring songs she had frequently played in concert. As a quirky footnote to this, the Arrows' version of 'I Love Rock 'n' Roll' was itself an oblique form of cover, being written in response to the rather cynical and world-weary tone of the Rolling Stones' single, 'It's Only Rock 'n' Roll'.

At the beginning of her music career, punk poet Patti Smith appropriated and adapted songs associated with masculinity and the romantic rebel tradition in rock, inflecting them with a radical feminism. In her first single, a cover of 'Hey Joe', Smith replaced the original wife-murderer in the song with female terrorist and media celebrity Patti Hurst. On her critically acclaimed debut album *Horses* (Arista, 1975), Smith covered Van Morrison's 'Gloria' (originally recorded by Them, in 1966). Them had recorded 'Gloria' in a proto-punk, garage rock style, with a basic beat, Van Morrison's growled vocals and a ragged chanted chorus: 'G-L-O-R-I-A: Gloria'. The song's lyrics emphasize the appeal of Gloria – 'she'll make you feel alright' – and cater to the male fantasy of seduction by a female temptress. Them's 'Gloria' can be considered an example of male-coded rock 'n' roll, sometimes referred to as 'cock rock'. This became an alternative term for hard rock, highlighting the genre's often explicit and aggressive expression of male sexuality, its misogynist lyrics and its phallic imagery. Cock rock performers were regarded as aggressive, dominating and boastful, a stance, it was argued, evident in their live shows.

Against this tradition, Patti Smith reworks the song from a female point of view, exposing Morrison's macho stance with an exaggerated leering 'male' vocal performance and using gender ambiguities to parody the 'maleness' of Van Morrison's song. At various points in the song, Smith slips into gendered 'characters', undermining the dominant male rock vocal of the original, along with its numerous cover versions by male rock bands (Daley, 1997: 237). On stage and in her personal style, Smith emulated the toughness of male rebellion, but regarded her band's music as 'feminine music'. In her striking photograph (by Robert Mapplethorpe) on the cover of *Horses* (Arista, 1975), Smith is dressed in jeans and a white shirt, with a tie draped around her neck, conveying an air of self-assurance and sexual ambiguity. Along with her music, this stance enabled Smith to challenge patriarchal control and attempt to bridge rock's gender gap, as have later performers such as Björk, P.J. Harvey and Tori Amos.

Recent analyses of covers have extended the earlier considerations of issues of gender and sexuality and ethnicity, to show how 'cover versions can supply case studies for the textual illustration and mounting of discussion around questions of identity and political power' (Griffiths, 2002; see also Solis, 2010).

## Conclusion

I have argued that musicology has much to offer as an approach to the analysis of musical texts, provided that we also recognize that songs exist very much within a broader set of social relations. As the musicologist Nicholas Cook puts it, there is a need for 'the reconciliation of today's broadened agenda with the traditional discipline's practices of close textual reading. In other words, we need to find ways of talking about music and its social or ideological meaning at the same time' (Cook, n.d.). Obviously, my discussion of the songs included here has been limited, especially in relation to the way in which the music 'works' with the lyrics to create an aural text: the recording. To engage with them further, it is necessary to listen to the recordings (through iTunes) and view them as performances (through YouTube). At the same time, it is necessary to go beyond musical texts as individual entities, and their qualities as music, to consider how they create particular listening experiences and an audience for their performers. This includes considering texts as 'collectivities' and the role of genre.

## Further reading

### *Popular musicology*

[See also Appendix 2: Musical analysis.]

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## **6 'It's Still Rock 'n' Roll to Me'**

### **Genre, authenticity and the canon**

Genre, its nature and significance, are a central aspect of popular music studies. I begin with a preliminary discussion of the concept and its study, including the concept of metagenres and then examine a number of examples of these. Rock and pop, often situated as in opposition to each other, illustrate the importance of authenticity in framing distinctions between genres, their associated musicians and audiences; heavy metal shows a common pattern of genre differentiation, with a range of subgenres developing during the history of the form; world music shows the importance of marketing to genre formation, and illustrates debates around cultural appropriation; and hip-hop demonstrates the shift to the commercial mainstream of once marginal musical styles. Finally, the influential notion of a 'rock canon' further illustrates debates around the authenticity and cultural value of different popular music texts.

### **Genre**

Genre can be basically defined as a category or type. A key component of textual analysis, genre is widely used to analyze popular culture texts, most notably in their filmic and popular literary forms (e.g. thrillers, science fiction, romance and horror).

Identifiable genres of popular music are understood as such by musicians, the music industry and by consumers. At the same time, there is considerable argument about the historical location and development of particular genres, their characteristics and the boundaries between them. Genres are constantly debated and contested; while they may share formal musicological characteristics and histories, they are situated in a commercial and cultural nexus. As Fabian Holt (2007: Chapter 1) claims, the complex cultural work associated with genre, and the multiplicity of sites in which it is active, mean that genre is not a simple concept amenable to easy definition. That said, there have been a number of substantive attempts to develop a broadly applicable definition of music genre (Fabbri, 1999; Frith, 1996; Negus, 1999; some accounts, wanting to ground the discussion more in musicology, prefer the term style to genre, for instance Charlton, 1994) and studies of particular genres have been forced to grapple with the issue.

Genre is central to the wider popular music culture. Genre categories are evident in the A&R and marketing practices of sound recording companies; the data collected by recording industry organizations (for example, the RIAA's consumer profile statistics); industry publications such as *Billboard*, especially its chart listings; the formats of radio stations and MTV channels; music retail; and the music press. Fans will frequently identify themselves with particular genres, often demonstrating considerable knowledge of the complexities of their preferences (sub-genres). The various popular music encyclopedias, the standard histories, journalistic and academic analyses, all use genre as a central organizing concept.

Jennifer Lena and Richard Peterson (2008) provide a useful survey of what they see as two dominant approaches to the study of musical genre: those grounded in musicology, which identify genre as music sharing distinctive musical characteristics, and accounts that place genre study more firmly in a social context, which they see as having greater explanatory power. Following the 'social context' approach, they define music genres as 'systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together an industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music' (2008: 698). This situates genre as a process: as Frith has observed, for musicians genre categories constitute an effective shorthand for discussing and making music; for listeners, genre helps organize the listening process; and for the industry, genre combines musical style (the sound) and the marketing of it (Frith, 1996: 79–95).

In part, critical analysis has concentrated on the tension between an emphasis on 'standardized codes that allow no margin for distraction' (Fabbri, 1999), and the fluidity of genres as these codes are elaborated on and challenged and displaced by new codes. While musical genres continue to function as marketing categories and reference points for musicians, critics and fans, particular examples clearly demonstrate that genre divisions must be regarded as highly fluid. No style is totally independent of those that have preceded it and musicians borrow elements from existing styles and incorporate them into new forms. Charles Kronengold (2008) provides an insightful example of this, in his discussion of the links between three late 1970s' genres – disco, new wave and album-oriented rock – normally viewed as distinct, but that 'overlap in varying degrees with respect to their historical moment, modes of dissemination, institutional frames (like record labels), musical materials, personnel, and audiences' (43). He observes that:

When you study these genres you can't entirely abandon the notion of genre as a set of rules and constitutive features; but these and other genres of the seventies can often be better referenced to their internal variety and proliferation of subgenres, their modes of revision and transformation, and their movement towards other genres.

(43)

Drawing on this literature, several distinguishing characteristics of genres can be identified and applied to their study. First, there are the stylistic traits present

in the music: their musical characteristics, which produce an identifiable sound, according to conventions of composition, instrumentation and performance. These may vary in terms of their coherence and sustainability, particularly within metagenres. Along with other aspects of genre, particular musical characteristics can be situated within the general historical evolution of popular music. Second, there are other, essentially non-musical, stylistic attributes, most notably image and its associated visual style. This includes standard iconography and record cover format; the locale and structure of performances, especially in concert, and the dress, makeup and hair styles adopted by both the performers and their listeners and fans. Musical and visual stylistic aspects combine in terms of how they operate to produce particular ideological effects, a set of associations that situate the genre within the broader musical constituency. Third, there is the primary audience for particular styles. The relationship between fans (and subcultures) and their genre preferences is a form of transaction, mediated by the forms of delivery, creating specific cultural forms with sets of expectations. Genres are accorded specific places in a musical hierarchy by both critics and fans and by many performers. This hierarchy is loosely based around the notions of authenticity, sincerity and commercialism. The critical denigration of certain genres, including disco, dance pop and the elevation of others, such as alt. country, reflects this and mirrors the broader, still widely accepted, high/low culture split. Fourth, there are the institutional frames and practices, especially within the recording companies (see Negus, 1999), which help shape genres.

Elsewhere (Shuker, 2012), I have identified and provided brief introductions to 12 popular music metagenres: blues (including R&B and gospel), country, EDM: electronic dance music, folk, heavy metal, jazz, pop, hip-hop, reggae, rock, soul and world music. Obviously, especially given the fluidity of genres I mentioned earlier, these designations are open to debate. For example, should R&B and gospel be 'lumped in' with blues or is the latter more appropriately placed with soul? These metagenre divisions are, in part, necessary heuristic devices, 'umbrella' terms to give some structure to a cultural field. Each is characterized by having a specific geographical, social and cultural and historical point of origin; a broad musicological identity; and a subsequent history of stylistic and international diffusion, with emergent associated major genres and subgenres. As an example of the framing of metagenres, let me consider the two most commonly referred to: rock and pop.

### **Rock, pop and authenticity**

The terms 'pop' and 'rock' are often used as shorthand for 'popular music', at the same time as there is a tendency to contrast and polarize the two styles. They are best regarded as broadly constituted metagenres and as commercially produced music for consumption by a mass market. Similarities of production aside, there are important ideological assumptions behind the distinctions between pop and rock, largely based around the concept of authenticity.

**Authenticity**

A central concept in the discourses surrounding popular music, authenticity is imbued with considerable symbolic value. As commonly used, the term authenticity assumes that the producers of music texts undertook the 'creative' work themselves; that there is an element of originality or creativity present, along with connotations of seriousness, sincerity and uniqueness; and that while the input of others is recognized, it is the musicians' role that is regarded as pivotal. Important in identifying and situating authenticity are the commercial setting in which a recording is produced, with a tendency to dichotomize the music industry into independent labels (more authentic, less commercial) and the majors (more commercial, less authentic). Perceptions of authenticity (or non-authenticity) are also present in the degree to which performers and records are assimilated and legitimized by particular subcultures or communities. As I outlined in Chapter 3, authenticity is traditionally associated with live performance, a view undermined by the rise of disco and later dance cultures. The use of authenticity as a central evaluative criterion is commonly seen in the discussions of the relative nature and merits of particular genres and performers within popular music culture, e.g. vernacular community-based styles of folk, country blues and roots music are frequently perceived as more authentic than their commercialized forms.

Alan Moore usefully moves the discussion of the concept beyond simple polarities (authentic versus unauthentic), by postulating a tripartite typology dependent on asking who, rather than what, is being authenticated. As he suggests, authenticity is most usefully conceived of as 'a construction made in the act of listening' (Moore, 2002: 210). Accordingly, we should be asking not if particular stylistic characteristics can be considered 'authentic', or non-authentic, but rather how authenticity is constructed in particular music genres and performers and the strategies involved. This process is evident in relation to pop and rock.

**Pop: 'Silly Love Songs' (Paul McCartney)**

As Philip Ennis (1992) documents, pop music was evident in three of the defining 'streams' that eventually overlap and fuse in the evolution of American popular music:

- 1 'Pop' as the commercial music of the nation, associated with Tin Pan Alley, musical theatre, the motion picture and the rise of radio.
- 2 'Black pop', the popular music of black Americans, commercially domesticated around 1900 and from 1920 to 1948 known as 'race music'.
- 3 'Country pop', the popular music of the American white south and southwest.

Alongside these were three smaller streams: jazz, folk and gospel.

Collectively, these six streams were the basis for the emergence in the 1950s of what Ennis, in common with many other commentators, terms 'rock 'n' roll', his seventh stream. Following its Tin Pan Alley antecedents, pop was seen as a somewhat watered-down, blander version of rock 'n' roll, associated with a more

rhythmic style and smoother vocal harmony, characteristic of the period of teen idols in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Musically, pop became defined by its general accessibility, its commercial orientation, an emphasis on memorable hooks, or choruses and a lyrical preoccupation with romantic love as a theme. The musical aesthetics of pop are essentially conservative: 'It is about providing popular tunes and clichés in which to express commonplace feelings – love, loss, and jealousy' (Frith, 2001: 96). Along with songwriters, producers are often regarded as the main creative force behind pop artists. Accordingly, as a genre in the marketplace, pop's defining feature is that 'It is music produced commercially for profit, as a matter of enterprise not art' (Frith, 2001: 94). Over the past half century it has frequently been collapsed into and equated with 'popular' and includes a range of styles under labels such as 'chart pop' and 'teen pop'. Much of pop is regarded as disposable, for-the-moment dance music; the best of it survives as 'golden oldies' and 'classic hits'.

While pop has a long musical history, predating the 1950s, it became used in a generic sense as the umbrella name for a special kind of musical product aimed at a teenage market, especially in the UK. Reflecting the dominance of teen pop in the late 1950s, pop became used in an oppositional, even antagonistic sense, to rock music (see later). 'Pop' became used to characterize chart- and teenage audience-oriented music, particularly the genres of dance pop, bubblegum, power pop, and the new romantics, and performers such as the girl groups of the 1960s, their 1990s' equivalents, and the ubiquitous boy bands of the modern era. Pop is also currently prominent in reality television shows such as *Pop Idol* (see Chapter 8). The most significant of these styles has been chart-oriented, dance pop. As with pop generally, dance pop is often maligned, in part because of its perceived commercial orientation and its main audience of adolescent girls – 'teenyboppers'. Commercially highly successful exponents include Kylie Minogue, Paula Abdul and Bananarama in the 1980s; the Spice Girls and Britney Spears in the 1990s; and, currently, Katy Perry, Justin Bieber and Lady Gaga.

The debate around the Spice Girls, who had enormous international success in the late 1990s, exemplified the discourse around dance pop, especially regarding its commodification and authenticity. The Spice Girls slogan, 'Girl Power', stressed female bonding, a sense of sisterhood, friendship and self-control, evident through their personas, press interviews and the lyrics to their songs. However, critics pointed to the contradictions between the Spice Girls' professed self-expression and their subversion to standard sexualized 'feminine' images and their incorporation into a male-dominated music industry, thereby sustaining dominant gender ideologies (see their career profile in Chapter 4).

The success of these pop performers was frequently attributed to the Svengali-like influence of producers and professional songwriters (e.g. Stock Aiken Waterman and British 'new pop' in the 1980s) and exposure through MTV and energetic video performances (e.g. Britney Spears), as much as or more than musical talent. Today, pop is increasingly identified with the wider culture of celebrity. Some pop performers capitalize on their prior public visibility in film and

television, fashion and society, using this to (they hope) launch a recording career (Paris Hilton, Hillary Duff). Conversely, others use pop success and celebrity as a launch pad to commodify themselves more widely, as with Kylie Minogue, Madonna and Beyoncé.

### 'Rock On' (Gary Glitter)

'Rock' became the broad label for the huge range of styles that have evolved out of rock 'n' roll since the mid-1960s; these include hard rock, blues rock, progressive rock, punk rock, psychedelic or acid rock, heavy metal, country rock, glitter rock, new wave, indie rock and alternative rock (Shuker, 2012). A semantic shift was confirmed in March 1967, when the influential *Crawdaddy* magazine changed its subtitle from 'The magazine of rock 'n' roll' to 'The magazine of rock'.

Rock is often considered to carry more 'weight' than pop, with connotations of greater integrity, sincerity and authenticity. Dave Hill, writing of the 1980s, observed:

Pop implies a very different set of values to rock. Pop makes no bones about being mainstream. It accepts and embraces the requirement to be instantly pleasing and to make a pretty picture of itself. Rock on the other hand, has liked to think it was somehow more profound, non-conformist, self-directed and intelligent.

(Hill, 1986: 8)

Similarly, for Martin Strong:

Rock music is written by the artist(s) for him or herself, not with the initial intention of making money, but to make music – and, possibly, to stretch its limits and boundaries a little further. This is music that may last forever, becoming 'classic' in the process. On the other hand, POP music is written with the sole intention (normally) of making a quick buck, either for the artist(s) or (more than likely) their record label.

(Strong, 2006: Preface)

Such distinctions attempt to keep commerce and artistic integrity apart on a central yardstick to identify particular artists with either pop or rock 'n' roll. This reflected a tendency in the 1980s (and still evident) to view popular music in terms of a series of dichotomies: mass v. community/local; commerce v. creativity; manufactured v. authentic; major record companies v. independents. This is a legacy of the mythology of 'rock', which was a product of the 1960s, when leading American critics – Jon Landau, Dave Marsh and Robert Christgau – elaborated a view of rock as correlated with authenticity, creativity and the romantic cultural tradition and a particular political moment: the 1960s' protest movement and the counterculture. Closely associated with this leftist political ideology of rock was *Rolling Stone* magazine, founded in 1967 (see Chapter 9).

This demarcation between rock and pop has continued to be evident in the music industry, the music press and among fans and musicians. The distinction is difficult to maintain, given the commercial production and marketing of both metagenres. Historically, the frequent refusal of rock musicians and fans to admit to commodity status, and attempt to position themselves as somehow above the manufacturing process, have all too easily become marketing ploys – 'the Revolution is on CBS' slogan of the late 1960s being perhaps the best example. Nevertheless, using authenticity to distinguish between rock and pop continues to serve an important ideological function, helping differentiate particular forms of musical cultural capital. Such distinctions also occur *within* the two metagenres, as with indie rock setting itself apart from mainstream rock music.

### Heavy metal

Heavy metal, now often referred to simply as metal, can also be considered a metagenre. It has a substantial history, distinctive fans and now encompasses a wide range of subgenres. The musical parameters of heavy metal (HM) as a genre cannot be comfortably reduced to formulaic terms. It is usually louder, 'harder' and faster paced than conventional rock music and remains predominantly guitar oriented. The main instruments are electric guitars (lead and bass) drums and electronic keyboards, but there are numerous variants within this basic framework (see Berelian, 2005). Some forms of the genre have enjoyed enormous commercial success and have a large fan base; other extreme subgenres have a cult following. As a subject of academic inquiry, 'metal studies' can now be regarded as a subfield in its own right, with a substantial body of recent scholarship (see Brown, 2011; also Cope, 2010; Waksman, 2009).

Some critics see heavy metal as beginning in the late 1960s, its origins variously being traced to several key recordings: Blue Cheer's 1968 reworking of Eddie Cochran's 1950s hit 'Summertime Blues', which turned Cochran's great acoustic guitar riff into distorted metallic-sounding electric guitar chords, accompanied by a thumping percussion, and Steppenwolf's 'Born To Be Wild' (1967) with its reference to 'heavy metal thunder' (from the William Burroughs' novel, *Naked Lunch*) in the song's second verse. HM was a logical progression from the power trios of 1960s groups such as the Jimi Hendrix Experience and Cream, who played blues-based rock with heavily amplified guitar and bass reinforcing one another.

However, histories of the genre generally see the release of Black Sabbath's eponymous debut album (1970), which reached no. 8 in the UK album chart and spent three months on the US album chart, and their follow-up album *Paranoid* (1970) as establishing the early parameters of heavy metal. The band's origins in industrial Birmingham were reflected in their music, characterized by Tony Iommi's style of guitar playing (born of necessity following an industrial accident; see his interview in *Seven Ages of Rock*, episode 4), singer Ozzy Osbourne's vocal wail and lyrics drawing on black magic and the occult (see Hoskyns, 2004;

see also Christie, 2004). Also important contributors to shaping the new genre were albums from Deep Purple (*Deep Purple in Rock*) and Uriah Heep (*Very 'eazy, Very 'umble* in the UK, self-titled in the US), both also released in 1970. Christie (2004), writing from the viewpoint of a sympathetic critic, sees metal's early success as based on its devoted fans: an audience linked by tape trading and established by heavy touring and a strong commitment to the live concert event by bands such as Sabbath.

The commercial success of the British bands Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and, above all, Led Zeppelin, along with Grand Funk and Mountain in the US – despite the general critical ‘thumbs down’ for their efforts – consolidated heavy metal as a market force in the early 1970s and established a heavy metal youth subculture. Even this short list of performers demonstrates the difficulties of bounding the genre and there are notable differences in their treatment in the various histories and commentaries on metal. Led Zeppelin performed more traditional blues-based material and combined acoustic outings with electric guitars, yet are considered HM in influential early studies of the genre (Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 2000). Although Deep Purple and their American counterparts are often considered as HM bands, they have also been classified as ‘hard’ or ‘heavy’ rock. In the 1980s there was a clear distinction possible between the more overtly commercially oriented MTV-friendly HM bands, such as Bon Jovi and Poison with their glam rock images, and mainstream HM bands, whose styles merge into hard rock, such as Guns ‘n’ Roses, and Aerosmith.

Drawing on the work of Franco Fabbri (1999), Andrew Cope provides an insightful re-evaluation of HM as a musical genre and its distinction from heavy rock, with an extensive discussion of ‘the actual musical sounds, timbres and structures that uniquely combine to generate the identifiable fingerprint that listeners recognize as the heavy metal sound’ (Cope, 2010: 1). Of particular interest is his examination of the differences between Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin, identifying a ‘clear musical and aesthetic dichotomy between the two bands’. Cope develops a convincing argument that ‘Black Sabbath, through radical transgressions of their origins, initiated the evolution of heavy metal whilst Led Zeppelin, through a reworking of blues conventions significantly contributed to the evolution of hard rock’ (2010: 4, 5, Chapter 3).

Until the publication of Deena Weinstein’s comprehensive sociological studies (1991, 2000), Robert Walser’s more musically grounded treatment (1993) and Jeffrey Arnett’s study of its fans (1996), there were few attempts to seriously discuss the genre. Yet, as these studies showed, heavy metal displayed a musical cogency and enjoyed a mass appeal, existing within a set of social relations. During the mid-1970s, there developed a heavy metal subculture, predominantly working class, white, young and male, identifying with the phallic imagery of guitars and the general muscularity and oppositional orientation of the form. The symbols associated with heavy metal, which include Nazi insignia and Egyptian and Biblical symbols, provided a signature of identification with the genre, being widely adopted by metal’s youth cult following (see Arnett, 1996). The audience for HM later moved beyond this traditional male, white working-class

constituency, with glam metal playing an important role in the ‘feminization’ of metal.

Once established, heavy metal demonstrated the common pattern of genre fragmentation and hybridization. There are a number of identifiable heavy metal subgenres or closely related styles, notably:

- NWOBHM (new wave of British heavy metal)
- glam metal (also referred to as lite, hair or pop metal)
- thrash/speed metal
- rap metal
- extreme metal (including death, black and doom metal; grindcore).

Although historically specific, each of these has continued to be represented in the wide variety of contemporary metal performers (see the entries on each in Shuker, 2012). Metal has also been part of several hybrid styles, notably prog metal, and been drawn on by performers who are largely situated in mainstream commercial rock, such as the ‘funk metal’ of the early Red Hot Chili Peppers (*Blood Sugar Sex Magic*, WB, 1991). In addition, metal has interacted with related genres, notably punk (see Waksman, 2009) and grunge (Weinstein, 2000: Chapter 8).

Extreme metal demonstrates the process of intensification that occurs with the ongoing maturation of popular music genres. Keith Kahn-Harris observes that on the edge of metal culture, forms of metal that are much more obscure and that attract far less attention than contemporary mainstream heavy metal are thriving: ‘These forms of metal represent the most diverse, the most artistically vibrant, the most dynamic and also the most problematic aspects of metal culture. Collectively they are known as extreme metal’ (2007: 20). Although extreme metal ‘frequently teeters on the edge of formless noise’, it has been influential in providing ‘a crucial motor of innovation within metal’ (5, 6). The following discussion and page references are drawn from Kahn-Harris.

Black metal was arguably the first form of extreme metal to appear, popularized by the British band Venom, whose 1982 album *Black Metal* gave the style a label and inspired a new generation of metal bands. Venom presented ‘more extreme occult imagery than other metal bands’ and ‘a speeded up and stripped-down version of the genre’, which helped shape thrash metal. In the mid-1980s, death metal developed out of thrash, with bands such as Cannibal Corpse and Morbid Angel featuring fast, growled vocals, lyrics that dealt with themes such as war, violence and the occult, and complicated guitar work (albeit with few solos). Grindcore represented a ‘punk-influenced radicalisation of death metal’ (3), utilizing extreme speed and featuring short songs. Doom metal also emerged in the 1980s, as ‘an extremely slow form of metal with long epic song structures and melancholic lyrics’ (4). Nationally based variants of these styles developed, as with Norwegian black metal in the early 1990s. These genres ‘share a musical radicalism that marks them out as different

from other forms of heavy metal' (5) and are disseminated through small-scale but global 'underground' networks, rather than mainstream commercial modes of distribution.

Heavy metal has maintained a high market profile, despite frequent critical derision and a negative public image. The success of Metallica and newer bands such as Godsmacked and Disturbed has consolidated metal as part of mainstream commercial popular music, with its own dedicated festivals (e.g. Donnington's Monsters of Rock and, more recently, Donnington's Download), magazines (e.g. *Metal Hammer* and *Kerrang!*), web fan sites and record labels. At the same time, the intensification of the genre has created substyles on the margins of metal itself. Heavy metal fans are attracted by its sheer volume, the 'power' of the music; the genre's problem oriented lyrics, at both the global and personal levels; and by its performers general lack of a commercialized image. This is a form of authenticity, with metal fans seeking greater 'substance' than available through mainstream chart-oriented music.

### World music

While it can be considered a metagenre, world music is really more of a marketing category. World music became prominent in the late 1980s, as a label applied to popular music originating outside the Anglo-American nexus. The term was launched in 1987 as a new category of popular music by 11 independent British, European and American record labels specializing in music from developing countries, who were seeking to better market their catalogues. In the US, the term world beat was sometimes initially used, along with roots music for American forms. It is useful to distinguish between world music primarily situated within the western music industry and styles of 'world music', which are the subject of ethnomusicology.

World music was encouraged by the interest in, enthusiasm for and borrowings from non-western national musical styles by western artists such as David Byrne, Peter Gabriel and Paul Simon, although Simon's use of African forms, notably in *Graceland* (1986), has proved contentious. The category has been defined in essentially two related ways. First, world music is seen in a very heterogeneous manner as 'the other': music in opposition to the mainstream, Anglo-American and European genres. Second, in an extended form of the first definition, world music includes music from Europe, America and Australia and New Zealand geographically, but this is largely music from diasporic, oppressed or marginalized minorities (such as Aboriginal music in Australia). Both definitions recognize world music as the result of processes of globalization and the hybridization (and, in some cases, appropriation) of regional and nationally based music (for a helpful discussions of the definition of world music, see Guilbault, 2001).

The resultant breadth of world music is seen in the steadily expanding *Rough Guides* to the metagenre: the first was published as a single (albeit large) volume in 1994; this was subsequently expanded to two regionally based volumes; and recently these have been revised and published in three large

reference guides. The series constructs the category around national identity, even though that is clearly tenuous, given the diversity of styles within particular countries. As such, discussions of world music will embrace, among others, rai music from Algeria, Nigerian juju, Caribbean zouk and Brazilian bossa nova. Hybrid forms like the Anglo-Indian bhangra and Franco-American Cajun and zydeco, along with the globalized 'Celtic' are also included under the broad rubric.

A further aspect is the manner in which world music has becoming self-defined by virtue of musical festival programming (especially the success of WOMAD: World of Music Arts, and Dance, established by Peter Gabriel in 1982); the role of the music industry in constructed it as a 'genre market' (Laing, 2008; Negus, 1999), primarily through record labels specializing in the metagenre, notably Real World; and through several music magazines (*fRoots*; *Songlines*), along with regular coverage of performers and recordings in more general 'rock' magazines, such as *UNCUT*.

Perhaps more so than other forms of popular music, world music is open to processes of hybridization and musical acculturation, factors, which, in part, account for the considerable attention given to it in recent academic literature. An important aspect here is the role of race/ethnicity in categorizations of 'world music' (Haynes, 2010), which in popular perceptions and in the music press is often equated with 'non-white' or 'black' music. The discourse around world music tends to be polarized between celebration and condemnation (Frith, 2000). But as Jocelyne Guilbault argues:

world music should not be seen as simply oppositional or emancipator. Neither, however, should world music be viewed as merely the result of cultural imperialism or economic domination. To understand world music fully, we must look at its place within the complex and constantly changing dynamics of a world which is historically, socially and spatially interconnected.

(Guilbault, 2001: 176)

### Hip-hop: from the margin to the mainstream

Genres can develop as oppositional, but then become part of the musical 'mainstream', usually through 'crossing over' into the pop and rock mainstream and charts. During the 1990s, this occurred with grunge, beginning with the huge success of Nirvana's album *Nevermind* (Geffin, 1991) and in country, with Garth Brooks and Shania Twain (see Chapter 4). Crossover has commonly occurred with black music in the US, with debate over whether this has compromised the authenticity of the music or can be seen more positively as part of the integration and upward social mobility of the black community (George, 1989). An example of crossover at its most successful is rap, which shifted from its origins in New York in the late 1970s, with a local following, to large-scale commercial success internationally in the late 1990s.

Initially a part of a dance style that began in the late 1970s among black and Hispanic teenagers in New York's outer boroughs, rap became the musical centre of the broader cultural phenomenon of hip-hop: the broad term that encompassed the social, fashion, music and dance subculture of America's urban, black and Latino youth of the 1980s and 1990s (see Potter, 1995). The antecedents of rap lie in the various storytelling forms of popular music: talking blues, spoken passages and call-and-response in gospel. Its more direct formative influences were in the late 1960s, with reggae's DJ toasters and stripped-down styles of funk music, notably James Brown's use of stream-of-consciousness raps over elemental funk backup. Rappers made their own mixes, borrowing from a range of musical sources – sampling – and talking over the music – rapping – in a form of improvised street poetry. This absorption and recontextualizing of elements of popular culture marked out rap/hip-hop as a form of pop art or postmodern culture. The style was economically significant as black youth were 'doing their own thing', largely bypassing traditional music retail outlets. Many of the early rappers recorded on independent labels, initially on 12" singles, most prominently Sugar Hill Records in New York. The label's 1982 release, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 'The Message', was one of the first rap records to have mainstream chart success and led to greater interest in the musical style. Run DMC, *Raising Hell* (London, 1986) was the first rap album to cross over to the pop charts and brought rap into wider public consciousness. As with other maturing musical metagenres, a number of identifiable genres emerged within rap (see the entries in Shuker, 2012; see also Chang, 2005; Krims, 2000). The genre was soon taken up by white youth, white artists (Eminem) and the major record labels, in a familiar process of the appropriation of black musical styles.

By the late 1990s, rap and hip-hop had become bracketed together as part of mainstream American culture. A *Time* magazine cover story, featuring Lauryn Hill, proclaimed the arrival of the 'Hip Hop Nation', referring to the music revolution that has changed America (*Time*, 8 February 1999: 40–57). The Fugees, *The Score*, Sony/Columbia, 1996, was a huge international success, with sales of 7 million by early 1997. In adding elements of R&B, soul and ragga rock to the genre, it foreshadowed the contemporary orientation of rap. By 1998, rap was the top-selling music format in the US market and its influence pervaded fashion, language and street style. The *Time* story noted that the two terms, rap and hip-hop, were now 'nearly, but not completely, interchangeable' (ibid.).

This conflation was cemented through the next few years. The record sales, product endorsements, associated fashion merchandising and public celebrity of artists such as Beyoncé (and her former group Destiny's Child), Kanye West and Eminem made rap and hip-hop, in effect, the mainstream. The broad genre also became globalized, with distinctive national variants of rap developing (Basu and Lemelle, 2006). In a major edited study, *Global Noise*, Tony Mitchell argued that 'Hip-hop and rap cannot be viewed simply as the expression of African-American culture; it has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world' (2001: Introduction).

## The rock canon

Art forms are frequently discussed in terms of a canon, where works are 'typically presented as peaks of the aesthetic power of the art form in question, as ultimate manifestations of aesthetic perfection, complexity of form and depth of expression which humans are capable of reaching through this art form' (Regev, 2006: 1). The canon embraces value, exemplification, authority and a sense of temporal continuity (timelessness). Critics of the concept point to the general social relativism and value judgments embedded in it, and the often associated privileging of western, white, male and middle-class cultural work. The gendered nature of the musical canon and its dominance by Anglo-American performers and recording has been strongly critiqued. Marcia Citron (1993) poses the question: 'Why is music composed by women so marginal to the standard "classical" repertoire?' Her study looks at the practices and attitudes that have led to the exclusion of women composers from the received 'canon' of performed musical works, important elements of canon formation: creativity, professionalism, music as gendered discourse and reception. The historical absence or marginalization of women in popular music histories has also been noted in popular music studies, along with the privileging of male performers and male-dominated or oriented musical styles/genres in discussions of authorship and the consequent domination of popular music canons by male performers.

Notions of canon are frequently present in popular music discourse, implicitly in everyday conversations among fans and more directly in critical discourse. As Motti Regev puts it: 'Canonisation in popular music has gone hand in hand with its very recognition as a legitimate art form' (ibid.). Music critics and the music press are major contributors to the construction of a musical canon, with the use of ratings systems for reviews, annual 'best of' listings, and various 'guidebooks' to key recordings. The canon also underpins accounts of the history of popular music.

A number of academic studies have focused on the historical construction of particular genre canons, including the western classical tradition (Tagg and Clarida, 2003: Chapter 1), jazz (Gabbard, 1995) and blues. An example of this process at work is provided by John Dougan in his insightful discussion of canonization and blues record collectors in the US. He describes these collectors as 'musical archaeologists, culture brokers, creators, keepers, and, through their entrepreneurial efforts (influenced by the release of Harry Smith's 1952 compilation *Anthology of American Folk Music*, on Folkways Records) disseminators of a blues canon'. He sees this role as playing a vital part in the taxonomy of the genre:

At its core, canon formation among blues record collectors involves organizing and defending a set of selections made from several possible sets of selections. The resulting 'canon' represents the essence of the tradition, and the connection between the texts and the canon reveals the veiled logic and internal rationale of that tradition.

(Dougan, 2006: 42, 45)

General coverage of historical figures, musical trends and recordings are standard content in rock music magazines, especially those aimed at an older readership, for example *MOJO* and *UNCUT*. In addition, many of these titles have begun publishing special issues and series. Given that many of these are rapidly sold out, this is a lucrative market, tapping into and reinforcing popular memory. Examples here include the *NME Originals*, the *UNCUT Legends* and the *Rolling Stone* special issues, such as *The 50th Anniversary of Rock: IMMORTALS. The 100 Greatest Artists of All Time* (Issue 642, August 2005). In addition to their economic motivation, these publications are playing an important ideological role. They contribute to the identification and legitimating of a canon of performers, in the same way as lists of 'greatest albums', with which, of course, they are closely aligned. The selection process at work here is an interesting one, indicative of particular views of creativity and authorship. The title *IMMORTALS. The 100 Greatest Artists of All Time* displays no lack of ambition and confidence, but the choices of artists from the 1950s excludes Bill Haley, presumably as his image does not conform to a notion of 'rock' authenticity.

The nature of the canon and the difficulties surrounding it are evident in the recurring presentation of a canon of rock and pop recordings in 'best of/greatest albums of all time' lists. Ralf Von Appen and Andre Doehring (2006) provide a meta-analysis of such lists, drawing on 38 rankings made between 1985 and 1989 and 2000–2004 (see Appendix 3). This 'top 30' is dominated by rock albums of the 1960s and 1970s, notably the Beatles and there is an absence of both women and black artists. The list represents the staple musical repertoire for 'classic rock' radio, which both reflects and reinforces the visibility and value accorded to such performers and albums. They suggest that two criteria underpin this pattern: aesthetic and sociological. The aesthetic places a premium on artistic authenticity and there is at times a limited relationship between such rankings and sales and chart success. The exclusion of compilation and greatest hits albums from most of the lists included reflected the view that the album must represent a showcase of the work of an artist at a particular point in time.

Von Appen and Doehring's discussion of the sociological factors at work here shows the role of the music press and industry discourse in shaping taste and the cultural capital and social identities of those who voted on the lists. The following chapters engage with some aspects of these.

### Further reading

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- Barker, H. and Taylor, Y. (2007) *Faking It: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music*, New York, London: Norton.
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#### Heavy metal

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#### Documentary:

- Metal. A Headbanger's Journey*, directed and produced by Sam Dunn, Scot McFadyen, Jessica Wise, Canada, 2006.

#### World music

- Guilbault, J. (2001) 'World Music', in S. Frith, W. Straw and J. Street, (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.176–92.