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Editorial Note

Welcome, music enthusiast, to this issue of the *Music Research Forum*!

Now entering its fourth year of digital publication, the *Music Research Forum* has provided a space for the presentation of cutting-edge scholarship by young practitioners in the disciplines of music theory, musicology, ethnomusicology, aesthetics, music therapy, and related fields since 1986, shaped by the graduate community of the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music.

In preparing the thirty-fifth volume, I faced many challenges presented by the ongoing pandemic. I could not have surmounted these challenges without the assistance of many people. Highest thanks go to the *Music Research Forum*'s faculty advisor, Professor Jenny Doctor, who has provided patient counsel and guidance through every step of the publication process. The notes left by Rebecca Schreiber, the editor emeritus of volume 33, served as a beacon of light to a new editor negotiating the stormy waves of publishing. I am grateful to my tireless Editorial Board for their insight and comments that shaped the contents of this journal, and to Drs Shelina Brown, Scott Linford, and Catherine Losada who generously gave of their time and expertise to ensure the quality of this issue's contents. I am thankful to the article and review authors who attended patiently to my editorial suggestions.

Both of the articles in Volume 35 discuss the intersection between music, religion, and, to some extent, race. Philip Bixby begins with an article discussing Evangelical anti-rock literature in America during the 1980s, and how those discourses illuminate an ontology of music that has existed since early Christianity. Marco Pflanz's article examines Kendrick Lamar's album, *DAMN.*, demonstrating how it navigates race, religion, and cultural politics in twenty-first century America. The issue ends with two book reviews: Alexandra Doyle reviews *Performing Propaganda: Musical Life and Culture in Paris during the First World War* (Boydell Press, 2018), and Anne Delfin reviews *Analytical Approaches to 20th-Century Russian Music: Tonality, Modernism, Serialism* (Routledge, 2021).

Please enjoy the scholarship presented in Volume 35! We appreciate your interest in reading the *Music Research Forum*.

Shortly before going to press, we heard the sad news of the passing of Dr Mark Konecny, the Scholarly Communications Coordinator with UC Press. Mark helped transition the *Music Research Forum* when the journal moved from print to online format. He gave us invaluable assistance with issuing volumes 32 to 35 on the OJS platform. Mark's kind patience, and his generosity in giving time to ensure our success, will be deeply missed.

Warmest Regards,
Andrew Van Dyke

Satan Sounds: The Ontology and Efficacy of the Sonic in Evangelical Anti-Rock Literature

Philip Bixby

Abstract

In 1985, the United States Senate held a hearing to discuss the potentially deleterious effects of the decade's most popular rock songs. The hearing was convened at the behest of the Parents' Music Resource Center, an organization that sought to affix "parental advisory" labels to offensive albums. Over the course of five hours, the committee heard testimony from members of the PMRC and other sources. The PMRC's discursive position was clear from its testimonies: because rock lyrics discussed violence, sex, and drugs, they encouraged children to engage in these activities. Therefore, parents needed to be warned about these explicit messages before allowing their children to purchase these records.

Any deliberation on the sound of rock is conspicuously absent from this official congressional discussion. However, the contemporaneous discourse of evangelical Christians concerned itself with the music's sonic qualities in addition to its lyrical content. Evangelical anti-rock literature from the 1980s critiqued rock's uniquely sonic dimensions and described how those sounds could adversely affect the physical, psychological, and spiritual condition of human beings.

Through an analysis of several anti-rock texts, I argue that while both secular and religious criticisms of rock attack the genre's lyrics for promoting immoral messages, the evangelical Christian discourse tends to implicate the sound of the music as a message in itself, investing sound with the capacity to convey negative spiritual forces and to traverse the boundary between the physical and the spiritual. Sound possesses a dual ontology in this literature, as a simultaneously physical and spiritual medium.

Keywords

Evangelical Christianity — Rock Music — Auditory Culture — Ontology — American 1980s Culture

§§§

Introduction

In September of 1985, the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a hearing to discuss the potentially damaging effects of the decade's most popular rock songs. The hearing was convened at the behest of the Parents' Music Resource Center, an organization seeking to pressure record companies to affix "parental advisory" labels to offensive albums. Over the course of five hours, the committee heard testimony from members of the PMRC, members of the U.S. Congress, and several dissenting musicians. The PMRC's position on rock was clear from its own presentations: because rock lyrics prevalently discussed violence, sex, and drug use, they encouraged children to engage in these activities. Therefore, parents needed to be warned about this explicit content before purchasing – or allowing their children to purchase – these records.

Any deliberation on the sound of rock music was conspicuously absent from this official congressional discussion. The PMRC only indicted the semantic content of rock, that is, the meaning of the words that rock musicians used. However, the contemporaneous rhetoric emanating from evangelical Christian circles concerned itself with the music's sonic qualities in addition to its lyrical content. Fundamentalist evangelical literature from the 1980s critiqued rock's uniquely sonic dimensions and described how those sounds could adversely affect the physical, psychological, and spiritual condition of human beings.¹

Through an analysis of several anti-rock texts, I argue two claims. Firstly, while both secular and religious criticisms of rock attack the genre's lyrics for promoting immoral messages, the evangelical Christian discourse tends to implicate the sound of the music as a message in itself. Evangelical anti-rock writers display an understanding of the sonic medium that (at least superficially) resonates with Marshall McLuhan's medium-concept. For McLuhan, it is the structural characteristics of a medium – not its apparent content – that determine that medium's effects.² Because of this commitment, these evangelicals invest rock music's sound with the capacity to convey negative spiritual forces and to traverse the boundary between the physical and the spiritual. Indeed, sound possesses a dual ontology in these

¹ A deep investigation into the ontological status of the human in evangelical Christian cosmology is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is worth briefly addressing an ambiguity that arises in several of my primary sources, and that the reader will no doubt notice in this article. Many of these evangelical texts seem to consider the human as ontologically tripled, consisting of a physical body, mind (or "soul" or psyche), and spirit. Evangelicals might point to First Thessalonians 5:23 as biblical evidence for this position: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray to God that your whole spirit and soul and body [τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα] be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This complicates the dualistic conception of the human familiar to some branches of classical philosophy. In his treatise on this fraught topic, the reverend J. B. Heard writes that "the distinction between soul and body is obvious, and is as old as philosophy itself. But what of the distinction between soul and spirit? It is this which distinguishes Christian psychology from that of the [other philosophical] schools" (ix). At the same time, he recognizes that the conflation of soul and spirit has occurred at various points throughout Christian history: "From attending to this distinction between Psyche and Pneuma [spirit], the Greek fathers seem to me to have reached that golden mean, which was lost in Latin theology generally, and which even the Reformers, Lutheran and Calvinist, alike failed to reach" (viii). As inheritors of this ambiguity, evangelical anti-rock texts sometimes use murky language when discussing human ontology. "Soul" and "spirit" are sometimes clearly distinguished, but at other times they seem to be conflated. For more background, see John Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man: Body, Soul, and Spirit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875), ix-xvi.

² McLuhan writes that "the medium is the message because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. Indeed, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium." Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 9.

writings, as a simultaneously physical and metaphysical substance. Secondly, I argue that this anti-rock literature provides a subject-specific glimpse into an auditory culture whose commitments descend from much earlier Christian listening practices. I trace the development of this auditory culture in pre-modern Christianity, eighteenth-century revivalist spirituality, and mid-twentieth-century evangelical racializations of sound, ultimately arriving at the 1980s.

My primary sources for this article share several common features. All are book-length texts printed by small Christian publishers and distributed primarily through churches and Christian bookstores. Most were published between 1980 and 1990. Additionally, all express a fundamentalist evangelical Protestant worldview, meaning that they embody a biblically literalist and socially conservative Christian faith whose theology embraces personal revelation from God and prioritizes proselytization and conversion.³ While these texts represent the most reactionary religious stance against rock music during this period, it is important to note that many evangelicals embraced rock music styles. For example, the largely evangelical Jesus movement of the 1960s often turned to rock music for the purposes of attracting young people, and many later evangelical churches continued this trend.⁴ Thus, one cannot create a monolith out of the evangelical reception of rock, as these Christians were often some of the most enthusiastic adopters of the rock sound. In this paper, I limit my inquiry specifically to the critical side of rock's reception among evangelicals, focusing on those writers who resisted and attacked the music that others found useful for proselytization.

Methodologically, my approach is akin to what Michael Lynch calls an ontography: a “historical and ethnographic investigation of particular world-building and world-sustaining practices that [does] not begin by assuming a general picture of the world.”⁵ While I am interested in uncovering sound's categories of being in evangelical literature, I concede that these ontological categories are not transcendent but rather historically constituted within a particular community. As Brian Kane clarifies, “ontologies emerge by capturing the ways that agents and actors understand, totalize, substantialize, and engage with the shared historical, geographic, cultural, scientific, and political situations in which they find themselves.”⁶ Unlike the classical conception of ontology, in this article I treat ontology as subsequent to (and thus a product of) epistemology, not describing how the world objectively is, but describing the categories by which some people come to understand the world.

The Power of the Beat

Any investigation into evangelical anti-rock literature must begin with the concept of “the beat.” For these writers, the rock beat possesses several specific qualities: it is typically played on drums, it is overtly loud and repetitious, and often involves syncopation. Evangelical writers contend that such a beat can

³ Consider Tanya Luhrmann's anthropological definition: “[Evangelicalism] is typically understood as implying three commitments: belief in the literal or near-literal truth of the Bible; belief that one can be saved only by choosing a personal relationship with Christ or being ‘born again’; and belief that one should, to some extent, evangelize and share the good news of salvation with others.” T. M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 13.

⁴ John Haines, “The Emergence of Jesus Rock: On Taming the ‘African Beat,’” *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (2011): 230-231. Also see his discussion of “Jesus rock” in Haines, “The Emergence of Jesus Rock,” 248ff.

⁵ Michael Lynch, “Ontography: Investigating the Production of Things, Deflating Ontology,” *Social Studies of Science* 43, no. 3 (2013): 444.

⁶ Brian Kane, “The Fluctuating Sound Object,” in *Sound Objects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 67.

communicate demonic forces into human bodies. As evidence for these claims, writers often turn to the apparent resemblance between rock music and “pagan” ritual music.⁷ Preacher Lowell Hart asserts that “pagan dances and rituals are always accompanied by the incessant beat of drums. Rhythm plays a major role in these demonic activities.”⁸ Like “heathen” drumming, “rock has a heavy, incessant, throbbing beat, the same beat that people in primitive cultures use in their demonic rites and dances. If the beat is monotonous enough and the volume loud enough it can induce a type of hypnosis.”⁹ By hypnosis, Hart means that the drumbeat overcomes the mental faculties, “bypasses the mind and works directly on the body.”¹⁰ The rhetoric here fixates on the loss of subjective control and the imposition of sonic control. Listeners cannot help but surrender their cognitive inhibitions to the sensual animation of the body through sound. Indeed, it is ultimately “the rhythm that controls the body’s action” when listening to rock music.¹¹

However, this sonic control of the body is not merely a physical phenomenon. Rocker-turned-evangelist Jeff Godwin claims that “music is a spiritual creation,” and thus “it will always strike a positive or negative chord within our spirits. Enough evidence now exists to clearly show that when rock is played, our bodies, minds, and spirits suffer.”¹² Related to this, he states that the beat of rock “destroy[s] the body,” “hypnotizes the mind,” and “attracts evil spirits.”¹³ Such a statement reveals the spiritual dimension of what at first appears to be only physical or psychological. There is a continuity and a porousness between physicality and spirituality in these evangelical descriptions of rock sound. The specific sonic qualities of the drumbeat not only have physical ramifications, but those ramifications are effected by demonic spiritual forces conjured by the sounds themselves. Godwin explains that “beats and counter-rhythms play a vital role in getting demons into the bodies of the [demon] worshippers.”¹⁴

Other statements from the primary literature support the spiritual efficacies of musical sound even in positive contexts. Both Godwin and Hart include a Biblical episode between David and King Saul as evidence for the spiritual power of sound.¹⁵ In this story, an evil spirit torments Saul, so he calls upon the musician-shepherd David to ameliorate the situation. By playing soothing tones on his lyre, David drives the demon away from the king.¹⁶ The inclusion of this story in anti-rock texts indicates two things. Firstly, sound can act as a medium between physical and spiritual realities in both positive and negative ways. Secondly, the timbre, qualities, and associations of the sound matter in determining whether that sound will invoke positive or negative spiritual responses.

Based on the associations and powers ascribed to rock’s sound by these writers, we can begin to sketch out an evangelical ontology of sound. On the one hand, sound is certainly physical. These writers

⁷ The racialized history of these associations is touched upon in the “Historical Precedents” section of this article below.

⁸ Lowell Hart, *Satan’s Music Exposed* (Huntingdon Valley, PA: Salem Kirban Inc., 1981), 71.

⁹ Hart, *Satan’s Music Exposed*, 94.

¹⁰ Hart, *Satan’s Music Exposed*, 103.

¹¹ Hart, *Satan’s Music Exposed*, 77.

¹² Jeff Godwin, *Dancing with Demons: The Music’s Real Master* (Chino, CA: Chick Publications, 1988), 10-11.

¹³ Godwin, *Dancing with Demons*, 13.

¹⁴ Godwin, *Dancing with Demons*, 125.

¹⁵ Godwin, *What’s Wrong with Christian Rock?* (Chino, CA: Chick Publications, 1990), 28-29. Hart, *Satan’s Music Exposed*, 48.

¹⁶ The original biblical passage is First Samuel 16:23.

tie the production of rock music to material bodies and instruments emitting sound waves, and these sound waves have material consequences. But as we saw, they do not stop at mere materiality. Rather, evangelical writers insist that rock music's physical origins and effects are concomitant with spiritual origins, powers, and entities. Claims of demonic communication and transference via rock music explicitly indicate that sound is a spiritual medium. As a medium, it traverses the porous boundary between matter and spirit, implying that the ontology of sound is twofold in this evangelical discourse. It fluidly embodies both the being-categories of the physical and the spiritual. As we will see, this dual ontology of sound gives "satanic" sounds (like those of rock music) particular abilities that they usually do not possess in more secular discourses.

First Case Study: Christian Rock

The evangelical reactions to Christian rock and backward masking provide some of the best evidence for sound's unique efficacy in this discourse.¹⁷ Jeff Godwin tends to be tenaciously McLuhanian in his arguments against Christian rock, advocating that the physical-spiritual medium of rock sound possesses a demonic power regardless of the words being sung. As he claims, "[music] is never neutral... music is not a piece of wood or chunk of steel waiting to be used / abused by whoever picks it up. Music has a life of its own" since it "is a spiritual creation."¹⁸ Such a claim insists upon a fundamental difference between a purely physical medium (wood or steel) and a medium that is both physical and spiritual. The physical medium is entirely passive, while the sound of rock music is living and active, inevitably transferring a spiritual content.¹⁹ Godwin's assertion that music is never neutral – a claim repeated in his other writings²⁰ – also indicates this distinction. In Godwin's cosmology, musical sounds must be either godly or satanic, and this must be judged based on the sonic qualities of the music, not on the semantics of the lyrics. He reinforces this by stating that "even without words, rock is a loud, grating, obnoxious blast of confusion and dissonance. It instantly projects an ungodly message, no matter what words may be included."²¹

In *The Devil's Disciples*, Godwin makes his McLuhanian commitments even more explicit. He writes that "there is a famous phrase that goes like this: 'the medium is the message?... I maintain that the heavy metal 'sound' is a message into and unto itself."²² Here, the medium of sound deterministically dictates how the listener responds. Godwin explains how simply shouting "praise God" over the crashing and banging of rock causes the ostensibly "good message" to be "obscured by the medium."²³ The results of this process are both physical and spiritual. On one side, Godwin insists that "there is a spiritual

¹⁷ A backward mask (or "backmask") is a recorded message on a rock album that is only intelligible when played backwards. I explore this in greater detail below.

¹⁸ Godwin, *Dancing with Demons*, 10.

¹⁹ Godwin, *Dancing with Demons*, 18. Here, the "rhythmic beat" forms "a battering ram that smashes into the listener's mind and spirit."

²⁰ For example, see Godwin, *What's Wrong with Christian Rock?*, 28-29. In these pages, Godwin also recapitulates the story of David and King Saul.

²¹ Godwin, *Dancing with Demons*, 245.

²² Godwin, *The Devil's Disciples: The Truth about Rock* (Chino, CA: Chick Publications, 1985), 280.

²³ Godwin, *The Devil's Disciples*, 280.

power to this music, a power that does not come from God. Some try to clean it up, tone it down, or even claim it for the Lord, but rock music never changes, no matter how it's perfumed."²⁴ According to Godwin, attempting to use rock music as a medium to convey Christian morals is futile. The spirit of the music itself is satanic, and therefore it will communicate satanic forces regardless of lyrical content. On the physical side, "all rock music promotes one thing: animal lust."²⁵ These sounds act directly on the body, bypassing the rational control of the mind and leading to unrestrained sexual activity. In this evangelical discourse, the loss of control of one's physical body is heavily enmeshed with the spiritual control exerted by demonic entities. In other words, some spiritual force is always in control, whether that be God and his angels or Satan and his demons. The apparent loss of physical control is evidence for a spiritual control effected through sound. Because these ramifications are tied to the qualities of sound and not to the meaning of words, Christian rock becomes an oxymoron in Godwin's worldview. Christian and secular rock use the same medium – the sound of rock – and thus communicate the same negative effects.

Other writers express a similar anxiety regarding Christian rock. Hart, for example, begins his book with an account of a Christian rock concert, in which "the singers... were sincerely trying to get a message [of God] across. But again, the medium contradicted the message."²⁶ Throughout Hart's discussion, certain sonic features of rock music are suffused with demonic power, and this spiritual power can manifest physically through the body, overriding even the most edifying of lyrics. As he states, "no matter how doctrinally sound the words are, rock, by its nature, can never be used to communicate spiritual truth.... Rock music and godly things just don't go together."²⁷ Similar to Godwin's account, Hart links rock's sound to both "sensual movements"²⁸ and the "reality of demonic activity,"²⁹ indicating the dual ontological status of sound and its power to influence both physical and spiritual domains.

This may raise the question of what kinds of music would be acceptably godly within this evangelical discourse. Besides traditional Protestant hymns, classical music is given some treatment in these texts. Hart provides a list of acceptable classical pieces that, without words, provide spiritual edification to the listener.³⁰ This list includes everything from Bach concertos and Mozart opera overtures to the symphonies of Brahms. However, not every piece of classical music passes the evangelical sonic test. Classical music that is dissonant, repetitive, or rhythmically propulsive has the capacity to produce negative effects like rock music. For example, Maurice Ravel's *Bolero* is criticized for its sensual and trance-like rhythms.³¹ This critique should come as no surprise given the ontology and spiritual efficacy that the evangelical discourse ascribes to sound. This discourse implies that music will communicate the spiritually good only when its sonic qualities reflect certain vague principles (balance, harmoniousness,

²⁴ Godwin, *Dancing with Demons*, 8.

²⁵ Godwin, *What's Wrong with Christian Rock?*, 29.

²⁶ Hart, *Satan's Music Exposed*, 25.

²⁷ Hart, *Satan's Music Exposed*, 112.

²⁸ Hart, *Satan's Music Exposed*, 77.

²⁹ Hart, *Satan's Music Exposed*, 76.

³⁰ Hart, *Satan's Music Exposed*, 150-52.

³¹ Hart, *Satan's Music Exposed*, 149.

moderation) associated with good spiritual practices. According to pastor Jacob Aranza, when musicians truly turn to Christ, then God will change “both their music and their message.”³²

Second Case Study: Backward Masking

Evangelical accounts of backward masking present another instantiation of the unique being and power of sound in this discourse. A backmask is a message recorded onto some physical medium that is only consciously intelligible when the recording is played backwards. Both the PMRC and evangelical writers discuss the deleterious effects of backward masking, citing a plethora of pseudoscience regarding the ability of the human brain to decode backward recordings.³³ Both subscribed to the idea that backmasks could be subconsciously deciphered and thus negatively influence behavior. In evangelical literature, however, the origin of the backmask itself – as a sonic phenomenon – emphasizes the dual ontology of the sound of rock. Thus, these writers tend to describe the backmask as a demonic phenomenon that manifests simultaneously as a physical phenomenon.

For example, the backmask is often considered to be the literal voices of demonic spirits. Jeff Godwin states that “the voices we hear on these songs in reverse are actually the sounds of the demons themselves!”³⁴ His justification for this comes from his survey of recordings of live rock performances, to which no overdubs or studio production effects were added. By studying these recordings in reverse, Godwin claims to have uncovered secret satanic messages that, given the nature of the recordings, could not have been planned by the musicians. Rather, these messages are “backmasked broadcasts from hell.”³⁵ When musicians begin to play rock music, they invite evil spiritual forces to communicate through sound. Thus, the rock sound spiritually conjures the backmask into existence, and the backmask is the physical trace of spiritual activity. Because the rock sound is satanic by its nature, Godwin equally critiques the apparent presence of backmasks on Christian rock records. As he says, “if backmasks are on ‘Christian’ rockers’ songs (and they are), then something’s drastically wrong somewhere. A doorway has been opened for satanic manipulation with or without the group’s permission. By messing with Satan’s music, they have left themselves wide open for all kinds of demonic devices beyond their control.”³⁶ Here, sound generates an opening that connects material human musicking to the demonic spiritual realm. It also reveals the assumption of spiritual control that is caused by rock’s sound by virtue of its dual ontological status. The intentionality of the Christian rock musician is almost completely irrelevant. By using Satan’s sounds, they invite negative spiritual forces that manifest physically on their recordings in the form of satanic backward messages. Though the demons’ activity has been captured in the physical medium of the LP, this does not mean that it ceases to partake in a spiritual ontology. When a listener plays the record, the sound of the backmask (whether consciously perceived by the listener or not) allows

³² Jacob Aranza, *Backward Masking Unmasked: Backward Satanic Messages of Rock and Roll Exposed* (Shreveport, LA: Huntington House Inc., 1983), 57.

³³ John Brackett, “Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide: The Formation of an Anti-Rock Discourse in the United States during the 1980s,” *American Music* 36, no. 3 (2018): 278ff.

³⁴ Godwin, *The Devil’s Disciples*, 151.

³⁵ Godwin, *The Devil’s Disciples*, 157.

³⁶ Godwin, *What’s Wrong with Christian Rock?*, 152.

the negative spiritual power “to break out against the listener.”³⁷ For this reason, Godwin pleads with us to “never, ever listen to such records for research purposes without prayers for protection and the power to bind those demon spirits!”³⁸

Though their accounts are not as detailed as Godwin’s, Aranza and the Peters brothers share a similar commitment to the spiritual dimension of backward masking. In *Why Knock Rock?*, the Peters brothers acknowledge that “many [backward] messages have been inserted intentionally, while others remain a mystery.”³⁹ Indeed, none of these evangelical writings deny the fact that some backmasks are intentionally placed by the musicians. What separates the evangelical discourse from other discourses is its belief in humanly unintentional – and therefore demonically produced – backmasks. The Peters brothers go on to clarify that “the effort it would take to say something in English which would mean one thing forward and another backward is incredible! And yet, cases apparently exist.”⁴⁰ This is because “the genius of satanic influence has been a factor in some albums. This would explain the many times that words spoken forward say something else entirely when played backward.”⁴¹ Likewise, Aranza claims that “some groups that have backward masking on their albums or songs don’t realize that though they have not intentionally placed backward satanic messages in their music, they are simply ‘pawns’ in the hands of Satan.”⁴² Both Aranza and the Peters brothers believe that the sonic power of rock is simultaneously physical and spiritual, allowing a connection between these two realms that results in the presence of demonic messages regardless of human intent (or “forward” lyrical content, for that matter). From these passages, we can see that the evangelical interpretation of the backmask reveals a commitment to sound’s dual ontology and thus to its heightened spiritual efficacy.

Historical and Theological Precedents of Evangelical Audition

The evangelical discourse explored in this article can be traced historically to older Christian auditory practices. In *The Presence of the Word*, Walter Ong discusses the importance of sound in early Christian communities, exploring the “primacy which this [Christian] economy [of revelation] accords to the word of God and thus in some mysterious way to sound itself.”⁴³ In the auditory culture of early Christianity, the sonicity of God’s word has several unique consequences. For example, the preaching of the gospel and the faith that results from it are tied to the sonic word. As Ong states, in preaching “the human word exists in a mysterious connection with the divine.”⁴⁴ The gospel is sounded forth by the physical human voice, but that physical sound is simultaneously a godly spiritual substance that moves the spirits of

³⁷ Godwin, *The Devil’s Disciples*, 158.

³⁸ Godwin, *The Devil’s Disciples*, 158.

³⁹ Dan Peters and Steve Peters, *Why Knock Rock?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 170.

⁴⁰ Peters and Peters, *Why Knock Rock?*, 173.

⁴¹ Peters and Peters, *Why Knock Rock?*, 173.

⁴² Aranza, *Backward Masking Unmasked*, 4.

⁴³ Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 12.

⁴⁴ Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 13.

other humans.⁴⁵ More broadly, one might say that sound makes sensible the always already imbricated presence of the spiritual within the physical domain. This ability to mediate between the physical and the spiritual gives sound special powers of communication, truthfulness, and reality-manifestation.⁴⁶ In this cosmology, spiritual reality is more real than the material world with which humans regularly interact. Thus, it follows that sound, having the capacity to access this higher metaphysical plane, also has the capacity to communicate truth more reliably than visual phenomena.⁴⁷

By virtue of these features, the Christian cosmology tends to treat sound as a spiritually efficacious medium, not simply an ephemeral sensory stimulation. In this auditory culture, the sonic word of God reveals God's subjective presence. But the sounded word is not merely intelligible; it also powerfully affects the hearer. As Ong argues, "in the Bible, ...the word of God often refers to an exercise of divine power. God's word is efficacious."⁴⁸ More generally, "sound signals the present use of power," compelling the listener to act.⁴⁹ The commitment to sound's physical-spiritual being that one finds in Ong's account resonates strongly with the discourse expressed in evangelical anti-rock literature of the 1980s. Perhaps this is surprising, given that Ong himself considered this kind of aurality to be a feature of "early oral-aural man" (Christian or otherwise) and not of our current "visualist" culture. Ong's grand narrative is one of desacralization and disenchantment, but such a narrative is too simplistic (and has been roundly critiqued).⁵⁰ Instead of locating this auditory culture only in the distant and lost past, I find it more interesting to address the persistence of this kind of culture in an era of increased modernization and secularization. In other words, when it comes to Christian discourses about sound's ontology, it appears that these discourses still exist into the late twentieth century, underlying and informing the deeply held convictions of the evangelical anti-rock movement. Ong's narrative of early Christian audition – though flawed – gives insight into the historical and theological conditions for such beliefs.

Leigh Eric Schmidt traces this auditory culture into the modern era. His book *Hearing Things* is primarily concerned with revivalist, vernacular Christianity during the First Great Awakening, a movement that is in many ways the ideological precursor of twentieth-century American evangelicalism.⁵¹ He investigates the "devotional ordinariness of hearing voices, the everyday reverberation of spoken scriptures, and the expectedness of a conversational intimacy with Jesus (as well as angels and demons) in pietistic Christian circles."⁵² In these vernacular traditions, the expectation of hearing the voices and sounds of spiritual entities supports an understanding of sound possessing

⁴⁵ A commonly cited biblical passage for this belief is Romans 10:17: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

⁴⁶ Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 33.

⁴⁷ Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 111.

⁴⁸ Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 182.

⁴⁹ Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 112-13.

⁵⁰ For just three brief critiques of Ong's grand narrative, see Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 77; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 8; and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 15ff.

⁵¹ For an overview of the historical and theological connections between eighteenth-century revivalism and twentieth-century evangelicalism, see Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 9-15.

⁵² Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, vii.

a dual ontological status. This might manifest as a divine call, when a common person would hear the voice of God exhorting them to become a preacher of the gospel.⁵³ As Schmidt explains, the regularity of hearing spirits in vernacular Christianity implies a metaphysics of the senses, in which the “bodily [physical] senses [had] been prepared to become spiritual senses.”⁵⁴ The physical ears, ostensibly designed to discern physical vibrations, were understood to be able to discern metaphysical presences as well. In much Protestant Christianity of the time, the ears had to be carefully regulated since they were inlets that mediated physical and spiritual realities. Thus, the ears were the location of divine-human encounters, in which “the spirit and the flesh were under constant negotiation.” As Schmidt makes clear, “sounds and words were the apt media of such in-between [physical-spiritual] experiences.”⁵⁵

While hearing the voice of God represents a powerful instantiation of the power of sound in Christian cosmology, the voice of the devil is even more relevant for the evangelical anti-rock writers examined here. Long before anti-rock preachers condemned the sound of rock for its demon-conjuring power, similar concerns were already present in revivalist Christianity. Schmidt explains that “the devil’s voice often had a quite tangible reality for the devout” and that “from cases of possession as well as popular tales of demonic encounters, the devout... had definite expectations about the guttural sound of the devil’s voice.”⁵⁶ Significantly, the devil’s voice had a distinct timbral characterization. Though known for their capacity for deception and dissimulation,⁵⁷ Satan and his demons could still be recognized by the sound of their voices, even when they seemed to be suggesting something godly to the devout listener. The guttural sounds of demons contrasted strikingly with the “harmonious sounds” that Christians were apt to hear when they were truly communing with God.⁵⁸ One can see this same concern recapitulated in evangelical literature from the 1980s, in which the sound of Christian rock, despite its positive lyrical content, still faced scathing criticism for its unholy timbres. In general, Schmidt’s arguments help to explain and contextualize the twentieth-century evangelical’s “readiness to hear.”⁵⁹ While the preconditions for this tendency were based upon a presumed sonic intimacy with Jesus Christ, those same conditions also afforded the audition of negative, devilish spiritual phenomena manifesting in the material world. Given their shared commitment to sound’s dual ontology and to the spiritual efficacies of sound, we see that evangelical anti-rock sentiments of the 1980s can be traced back to these vernacular revivalist foundations and anxieties.

In the twentieth century, the evangelical propensity for spiritual audition intersected with a distinctly racialized discourse in the white reception of African American-derived popular musics.⁶⁰ This discourse largely revolved around a white framing of black culture as threatening, excessive, and spiritually suspect. Analyzing the history of black singing voices in the New World, Lindon Barrett

⁵³ Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 39.

⁵⁴ Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 47.

⁵⁵ Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 50, 56, 57 (respectively).

⁵⁶ Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 59, 60 (respectively).

⁵⁷ Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 59.

⁵⁸ Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 218.

⁵⁹ Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 70.

⁶⁰ A full discussion of the white reception of black music in the twentieth century is beyond the scope of this article. The three following paragraphs are merely a schematic overview of the interaction between the specifically evangelical sonic discourse and the broader racialized discourses surrounding African American musics.

observes that, “forcibly, blackness is positioned as excess in relation to a more ‘legitimate’ and significant presence known as whiteness.”⁶¹ As they did with jazz in the 1920s, white critics (both Christian and not) often linked rock music to the presumed moral impurity and uninhibitedness of African American culture. Fundamentalist evangelical writers in the 1950s and 1960s explicitly racialized the sonic qualities of rock.⁶² As Randall Stephens explains, “many whites feared that the new wild, mixed-race music – along with the intermingling of black and white bodies on the dance floor – would overturn their evangelical Zion.”⁶³ Due to various socio-economic factors during this period (including the expanded availability of commercially recorded music), black and white youth were frequenting the same venues and consuming the same music, contributing to widespread white fears of integration and miscegenation. In response, many evangelicals portrayed African Americans as savage and pagan primitives, whose musical traditions would corrupt the decency of white teenagers.⁶⁴ Anti-rock preachers such as David Noebel and Bob Larson couched their critiques of rock’s sound (especially its rhythmic characteristics) in explicitly racist and anti-left rhetoric. Writing in 1966, Noebel exclaimed that “[rock] music is a designed reversion to savagery!”⁶⁵ For evangelist Bob Larson, “the power of rock awakened uncontrollable sexual urges in unsuspecting young people, urges more pronounced in blacks.”⁶⁶ These evangelicals identified rock’s blackness with sonic excess and spiritual perversion, drawing a connection between sound, spirituality, and race. Given its already established inclination to associate sound with metaphysical reality, the evangelical anti-rock discourse of the 1950s and 60s understood rock’s “wild” beat as an indication of the moral and spiritual dangers posed by black people. It condemned rock’s blackness together with its sound, easily bolstering the pervasive racist views of the period.

By the 1980s, the racialized discourse around rock presented by evangelical writers had largely been repressed or made implicit, sublimated into a more purely sonic discourse. While evangelicals of a previous generation would denigrate the “jungle drumming” of black people,⁶⁷ evangelical anti-rock literature of the Reagan era pursued a different strategy. As we saw earlier, criticisms of the musics of “heathen” and “demon-worshipping” people still proliferate in the texts of writers like Godwin and Hart. However, explicit reference to the race of these peoples is now mostly (if not entirely) absent. Also absent is the overt fear of racial integration, replaced now by vaguer rhetoric regarding mixture with the satanic secular world. But by recapitulating many of the same arguments from the 1950s and 60s (often through direct citation), these anti-rock writers covertly maintained the racist implications of the earlier generation while denying its terminology.

One could say that the racialized rhetoric against rock had been sanitized, but its arguments remained structurally intact. Certain evangelical writers of the 1980s acknowledged and attempted to

⁶¹ Barrett, *Blackness and Value*, 56.

⁶² Randall J. Stephens, *The Devil’s Music: How Christians Inspired, Condemned, and Embraced Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 90.

⁶³ Stephens, *The Devil’s Music*, 17.

⁶⁴ Stephens, *The Devil’s Music*, 92. See also Haines, “The Emergence of Jesus Rock,” 230.

⁶⁵ David A. Noebel, *Rhythm, Riots, and Revolution: An Analysis of the Communist Use of Music* (Tulsa, OK: Christian Crusade Publications, 1966), 78.

⁶⁶ This is addressed in Haines, “The Emergence of Jesus Rock,” 234. The text in question is Bob Larson, *Rock and Roll: The Devil’s Diversion* (McCook, NE: Larson Publications, 1967).

⁶⁷ For further context, see Stephens, *The Devil’s Music*, 87ff.

reject the racist rhetoric of earlier preachers. For example, at the end of their book the Peters brothers largely disavow the “African beat” theory: “That rock and its ‘evil beat’ originated with the slaves of Africa is a racist notion which will not stand up.”⁶⁸ In a slightly different approach, Leonard Seidel writes that “a discussion on this subject [of the rock beat] must be predicated on the knowledge that in no way do I intend to demean the music of the American black.”⁶⁹ The Peters brothers abstract the sound of rock away from its production by any particular racial group, condemning the effects of rock sound without invoking that sound’s previous associations. Seidel still links rock to African American (and African) musical traditions, and he certainly commits himself to criticizing the demonic spiritual effects of rock’s sound.⁷⁰ But he seeks to divorce his arguments from racial rhetoric, praising black spirituals, and blaming the demons for the beat instead of the people. By either ignoring or disavowing, evangelical anti-rock writers of the 1980s mostly sought to distance themselves from rock’s racist reception history. But by occluding yet holding on to many of the same racialized tropes and arguments, many of these writers strayed into an implicitly racist critique of rock’s sound. This implicit racialization did not contradict the dual ontology of sound, as evangelical Christians were already primed to hear negative spiritual forces in certain kinds of sonic phenomena. These phenomena were now only coincidentally affiliated with African American-derived popular music, instead of being caused by blackness.

To come full circle, we can observe that the evangelical commitment to sound’s dual ontology is absent from the ostensibly secular rhetoric of the PMRC. For the PMRC, the words of rock songs were wholly responsible for those songs’ negative effects. As John Brackett points out, “members of the PMRC were concerned about the mental and moral well-being of children and teenagers who were repeatedly exposed to sexually explicit, violent, and occult-based lyrics and images in rock music and videos.”⁷¹ Tipper Gore, one of the founders of the PMRC, makes this lyrics-based critique clear. She writes that “for many malleable teens and preteens who are searching for identity and who are beset by conflicts about authority, drugs, sex, religion, and education, a big dose of heavy metal messages like these can be extremely harmful.”⁷² In Gore’s view, immoral lyrics can psychologically persuade children to embrace immoral behavior. At no point does she put forward a purely sound-based critique. However, for a fundamentalist evangelical like Lowell Hart, “it mattered little what the words were. The beat was there. That’s all that counted.”⁷³ Popular music scholar Anna Nekola has similarly observed this evangelical-secular split regarding sound, which she traces to the rhetoric of 1960s preachers. Evangelicals such as David Noebel and Bob Larson were arguing that “not only was the culture of [rock] music morally threatening, but that the sounds themselves were inherently dangerous and fundamentally evil, and thus could harm the bodies and minds – and souls – of listeners.”⁷⁴ Rhetoric regarding the spiritual

⁶⁸ Peters and Peters, *Why Knock Rock?*, 196.

⁶⁹ Leonard J. Seidel, *Face the Music: Contemporary Church Music on Trial* (Springfield, VA: Grace Unlimited Publications, 1988), 29.

⁷⁰ For example, see Seidel, *Face the Music*, 19: “Not only is man’s spirit affected, his physical body is as well.” Here, Seidel clearly acknowledges the physical-spiritual detriments of rock’s sound, implying its dual ontology.

⁷¹ Brackett, “Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide,” 285.

⁷² Tipper Gore, “The Cult of Violence,” in *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), reproduced in *The Rock History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 231.

⁷³ Hart, *Satan’s Music Exposed*, 140.

⁷⁴ Anna Nekola, “‘More Than Just a Music’: Conservative Christian Anti-Rock Discourse and the U.S. Culture Wars,” *Popular Music* 32, no. 3 (2013): 408.

efficacy of rock's sound, the hypnosis of the beat, and sound's ability to conjure demons permeates these earlier writings.⁷⁵ For example, Noebel provides a chart contrasting the specifically sonic characteristics of "good music" and "rock 'n' roll." While good, spiritually edifying music is "accurate," "well-ordered," and "natural," rock is "unnatural," and possesses "constant repetition," a "wild sound," and the "complete dominance of the 'beat.'"⁷⁶ Such characterizations are cited by evangelical anti-rock texts of the 1980s, as we have seen. Nekola also points out the pertinent distinction between "a specifically religious understanding of musically inherent rhythmic power" and ostensibly non-religious anti-rock critiques, which "locate the danger of the music... in [its] libertine lyrics and cultural connotations of sex, violence, and rebellion."⁷⁷ I would attribute this to the evangelical writers' steadfast commitment to sound's twofold being-status, an ontology that results – as the primary sources attest – in the power of the sonic medium to summon spiritual forces into the physical realm.

My analysis in this article has begun to show how the evangelical critiques of rock music can be contextualized within a longer history of Christian audition. My arguments leave many paths open for further exploration. It is clear that there was considerable cross-pollination between Christian and conservative secular discourses during the 1980s. Not every discursive contrast is as stark as the PMRC Senate hearing (possibly constrained by the separation of church and state) versus evangelical anti-rock literature (intended specifically for a devoted Christian audience).⁷⁸ This was also the era of "satanic panic," a phenomenon that suffused American culture and media regardless of religious affiliation, and that branched out into domains far beyond music.⁷⁹ It would be intriguing to investigate more hybrid discourses on rock music from this period to see what other kinds of sonic ontologies might emerge. Given my limited number of sources, I can only say that this article has given a narrow slice of the complicated ideological landscape surrounding rock music in 1980s America.

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⁷⁵ Nekola, "More Than Just a Music," 413-14.

⁷⁶ David A. Noebel, *The Beatles: A Study in Drugs, Sex, and Revolution* (Tulsa, OK: Christian Crusade Publins, 1969), 57-58.

⁷⁷ Nekola, "More Than Just a Music," 420.

⁷⁸ For an overview of various politically conservative responses to rock music, see Lawrence Grossberg, "The Framing of Rock: Rock and the New Conservatism," in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (New York: Routledge, 1993). While his criteria are not based on spirituality or ontology, Grossberg does coincidentally place the fundamentalist Christian response in a different category from the PMRC response. The former exemplifies a total rejection of rock, while the latter attempts to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable manifestations of rock. Grossberg, "The Framing of Rock," 195-96.

⁷⁹ For a full account of this phenomenon, see Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993).

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CENTERS AND PERIPHERIES IN THE EXPRESSION AND ENACTMENT OF RELIGION, SOCIOPOLITICAL SIGNIFIYIN(G), & THE RECEPTION OF KENDRICK LAMAR'S *DAMN*.

Marco Pflanzén

Abstract

This article examines the political and social struggles of rap music in the twenty-first century through the lens of Kendrick Lamar's album *DAMN*. Focusing on the intersections of rap, religion, sampling, and the cultural politics of music, I examine how *DAMN*, as a model for identity, grants a way to navigate constructions and common understandings of religion, race, and politics in American hip hop culture and how rap music, as Loren Kajikawa defines it, "sounds race." By analyzing sampling, religion, and racial tension in the development and reception of *DAMN*, I argue that the album presents a revolutionary symbolic narrative of sonic resistance and struggle in the United States that ambiguates the cultural centers and peripheries of religion, artistic ownership, and American institutions. Although it cannot be essentialized with a single racial meaning, *DAMN* reflects, constructs, and seeks to explore the diversity of identities that ethnic minorities embody in this world—it is a sonic force that helps listeners to understand hip hoppers and their relationship to others. Exploring specific artistic decisions and paying attention to stylistic differences and transformation in the genre and culture of rap and hip hop, this article analyzes and interprets how artists create and sound identities in the realm of religion, music, and politics in what Daniel White Hodge terms the "wild."

Keywords

Kendrick Lamar's *DAMN*. — Hip Hop — Relation to Signifyin(g) — Religion — American Racial Tensions

§§§

DAMN.: An Introduction

It's part of what makes listening to *DAMN.* a somewhat agonizing, if enlightening, experience: Are we damned by our existence in America? Or are we damned by our reliance on a theology that paints us a cursed people? Is it the inherent wickedness of America's racialized politics or our weakness as a people that we must overcome? Or is our faith predicated on a false binary that only feels like free will while leaving us judged by our nation and cursed by our God?¹

Music as commentary, as Rodney Carmichael illustrates, provides a framework for engaging socio-political dialogue. This quote from Carmichael's NPR article, "The Prophetic Struggle of Kendrick Lamar's *DAMN.*," speaks to the complex and differing experiences that one can have while listening to *DAMN.* Considering Carmichael's aforementioned questions, how might scholars interrogate the ways that *DAMN.* describes the regulation and empowerment of bodies? Whose bodies are being regulated and empowered, and why? What then might those scholars make of the religious and social context of this regulation and why it matters? Lastly, what are the potential outcomes of different approaches to textual and sonic interpretation?

This article examines the political and social struggle of rap music in the twenty-first century through the lens of Kendrick Lamar's album *DAMN.* Focusing on the intersections of rap and religion, signifyin(g), and the cultural politics of music, I plan to explore how *DAMN.* creates ways of navigating constructions and common understandings of religion, race, and politics in U.S. hip hop culture and how rap music, as Loren Kajikawa suggests, "sounds race."² By analyzing sampling, religion, and racial tension in the development and reception of *DAMN.*, I argue that *DAMN.* presents a revolutionary symbolic narrative of sonic resistance and struggle in the U.S. that ambiguates the cultural centers and peripheries in religion, artistic ownership, and institutions.

To develop a more expansive description of the intersection of hip hop and religion, I draw on the work of Daniel White Hodge in *Homeland Insecurity: A Hip Hop Missiology for the Post-Civil Rights Context* (2018). I will analyze how sampling and signifyin(g) are used in order to enact a political and social resistance in the album *DAMN.* by discussing the Fox News clips sampled within the tracks, "BLOOD," "DNA," and "YAH." and by considering the aesthetic ideology and cultural politics of the Fox News criticism that Lamar samples. Lastly, I will highlight centers and peripheries in the cultural politics of music, focusing on the album's win of the Pulitzer Prize award in 2018.

The concept of signifyin(g) makes apparent the ways in which the symbolic narratives embedded within *DAMN.* are part of larger rhetorical practices popularized by Black literary traditions. In his classic *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), Henry Louis Gates describes the practice of signifyin(g) as a mode of coded communication intended to convey multiple meanings. Gates's discussion of the act of signifyin(g) is specific to Black in-groups that have access to specialized information that help them understand the individual, object, or concept that is being signified.³ Although the concept was originally

¹ Rodney Carmichael, "The Prophetic Struggle of Kendrick Lamar's 'DAMN.,'" *NPR Music*, December 12, 2017, accessed March 4, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/12/568748405/the-prophetic-struggle-of-kendrick-lamars-damn>.

² Loren Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). See also Bakari Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* (New York: Civitas Books, 2005).

³ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1988).

applied to literary and rhetorical practices noticed by scholars in Black studies, signifyin(g) has also been widely used to analyze hip hop sampling, jazz improvisation, and the blues.⁴ Musicologist Robert Walser, for example, applies signifyin(g) to Miles Davis's music to explain the social production and negotiation of meanings at play in his improvisational techniques.⁵ As will be seen, signifyin(g) illuminates how the use of certain samples in *DAMN*. connect to Lamar's ability to "sound race."

Rap and Religion

Daniel White Hodge presents hip hop theology as a missiological tool for engaging adult populations in the "wild."⁶ Hodge insists that hip hop provides a space for youth and emerging adults to (1) find God in a contextual manner, (2) have room for lament, ambiguity, doubt and the profane, and (3) find diversity within Christianity while remaining true to their own cultural heritage.⁷ The post-soul era that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s rejected dominant structures, systems, and metanarratives that tended to exclude ethnic minorities, especially those in the "hood." The post-soul era in this context does not solely adhere to linear functional narratives but instead questions authority, challenges the status quo, asserts self-identity in the public sphere, and questions group leaders.⁸ In this section, I argue that Kendrick Lamar is a post-soul rapper who helps articulate concerns for the oppressed and marginalized voices of the "hood" by fusing the sacred, secular, and profane in order to create an argument with and about God.

Lamar's mode of wrestling with such religious concerns exemplifies the expression of religion as a cultural code, or as the practice of signifyin(g). In *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning* (2019), various authors point to several patterns of Black meaning-making from across his four albums.⁹ As Anthony Pinn and Christopher Driscoll observe, "Lamar matters for the study of religion because of the manner in which his art and the topic of religion exist in a matrix that helps demonstrate the way

⁴ For more examples, see Christopher Jenkins, "Signifyin(g) within African American Classical Music: Linking Gates, Hip-Hop, and Perkinson" in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77, no. 4 (2019): 391-400.

⁵ For Walser's analysis of Miles Davis's music, see Robert Walser, "Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis" in *The Musical Quarterly* (1993) 77: 343-65.

⁶ Hodge explains, "Hip hop culture is an urban subculture that seeks to express a lifestyle, attitude, and urban identity. Hip hop at its core--not the commercialization and commodity it has become in certain respects--rejects dominant forms of culture and society and seeks to increase a social consciousness along with a racial-ethnic pride. Thus, hip hop uses rap music, dance, music production, MC-ing, and allegory as vehicles to send and fund its message of social, cultural, and political resistance to dominant structures or norms. Therefore, hip hop theology is derived from this latter definition and from the bowels of oppression, marginalization, and disenfranchisement. It rejects normative and simplistic responses to such issues[...] Hip hop theology is composed of a theology of suffering, a theology of community, a theology of a Hip Hop Jesus, a theology of social action and civil disruption, and a theology of the profane." Secondly, Hodge describes his use of the word "wild" in relation to Kanye West's song "No Church in the Wild" and how it is more of a symbolic term used "to describe things outside of tradition or even a stereotypical missiological lens rooted in Western Christianity." The purpose of his use of the term is to create a healthy deconstruction of what it currently means to be Christian in the United States. Daniel White Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity: A Hip Hop Missiology for the Post-Civil Rights Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 13.

⁷ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 90.

⁸ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 183.

⁹ Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn, eds. *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning* (Routledge, 2019).

[Black] meaning is made.”¹⁰ Even outside disciplines such as musicology and music theory, Lamar’s music is known for his acts of signifyin(g) religion, religious expression, and religiosity.

By refusing to deal with binaries that are common in theology (especially Evangelical Christian theology), Lamar highlights and embraces the doubt, ambiguity, and complexity of being a hip hop missiologist.¹¹ In tracks of *DAMN.* such as “FEAR.,” Lamar addresses issues that are etched with hate, racism, misunderstanding, and overall disregard for Black people.¹²

Why God, why God do I gotta suffer?
Pain in my heart carry burdens full of struggle
Why God, why God do I gotta bleed?
Every stone thrown at you restin’ at my feet
Why God, why God do I gotta suffer?
Earth is no more, won’t you burn this muh’fucka?¹³

The idea of suffering, pain, and struggle is not new in the sphere of Black theology.¹⁴ Anthony Pinn questions the common notions of suffering and challenges the idea that a good God would allow suffering for a specific group of people.¹⁵ In “FEAR.,” Lamar asks these complex questions of God and looks beyond simple answers to explain the injustice, pain, and racism that minoritized people experience on a day-to-day basis. It is significant that tone policing holds no place in the missiological work of hip hoppers (the artists themselves as well as the broader community of audience, critics, etc.) such as Lamar. Explicit language is used to express the pain, which, as Hodge has noted, is a crucial element of post-soul missiology at the intersections of the sacred, profane, and secular.¹⁶ Speaking about the song “FEAR.,” in which he delves through the genesis and development of this emotion in his own life, Lamar said: “It’s not easy telling your truths and stating your fears from when you were seven, seventeen and a couple years ago. But I know at the end of the day, the music is not for me, it’s for somebody else.”¹⁷ In songs such as “FEAR.,” Lamar acknowledges the importance of owning fears in the process of overcoming them, and by speaking truth demonstrates his refusal to be silenced.

¹⁰ Driscoll, Miller, and Pinn, *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, 6.

¹¹ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 181.

¹² Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 200. Hodge asks intriguing questions: “Lamar, in that sense, places these issues at the altar but without trying to create a solution rooted in a mythic imagination of harmony, accord, and unity so often given to those in impoverished conditions. No, Lamar takes all of those issues and holds them next to God and begins asking: Why? How long? Can we ever see peace? He also walks with the listener on a journey of fearing death, love, hate, violence, and ultimately God.”

¹³ Kendrick Lamar, Lyrics to “FEAR.,” *Genius*, accessed March 3, 2019. <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-fear-lyrics>. It is important to note that I do not provide a comprehensive analysis of the full lyrical content of the album, and the profundity of religious allusions, mostly rooted in passages from the Old Testament and the book of Deuteronomy, is beyond the scope of this paper. For hermeneutic comparisons of the album’s association with these texts, see Rodney Carmichael’s “The Prophetic Struggle of Kendrick Lamar’s *DAMN.*”

¹⁴ For more on suffering, pain, and evil within Black theology, see Anthony Pinn, *Why, Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

¹⁵ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 93.

¹⁶ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 191.

¹⁷ “Kendrick Lamar, *DAMN.: Behind the Album*,” Lamar interviewed by Zane Lowe, Beats 1 radio, Apple Music, accessed March 10, 2019, [YouTube link no longer available].

Lamar further elaborated on his connections to speaking truths and to God in an interview with Zane Lowe: "I always felt like God used me as a vessel, whether to share my flaws, my intellect, my pain..." making it clear that he considers himself to be a conduit for a message larger than himself. "[I've] always been a vessel. I can say the nastiest thing on record, but I still feel like that's [being] a vessel. You need to hear it. I can't sugarcoat the reality."¹⁸ Here, Lamar is aligning himself and his music with post-soul ideology by developing a hip hop theology that is rooted in the wild, in the 'hood. In this ideology he is a voice, a Black male body that demands attention and forces religious people to focus on a theology that acknowledges the lived realities of Black people in the United States today.

As a messianic figure who embodies and expresses the oppressive conditions emanating from hegemonic institutions, Kendrick Lamar is a representation of "Hip Hop Jesuz." Hodge describes the concept of Hip Hop Jesuz, which has roots in African American Christology, as someone who constitutes the *figura* of Christ.¹⁹ Seen as a liberator and a mediator for Black people, Hip Hop Jesuz is a contextualized image of the deity figure Jesus through which hip hoppers can grow both spiritually and theologically. Hip hoppers have several pathways in which theological and spiritual growth can be experienced, including the persona of the artist themselves, performances and concerts, music, and spoken poetry. In the messianic narrative framework of *DAMN.*, post-soul missiologist Lamar can be seen as a Hip Hop Jesuz who "brings voice, shelter, identity, hope, dreams, love, and passion to a community seeking a higher consciousness" to those in the wild.²⁰

The "neo-secular" is a mixture of sacred and profane spiritual journeys and experiences in pursuing God outside spaces of traditional forms of worship, such as institutional religious centers like the Evangelical church.²¹ Post-soulists such as hip hoppers construct an ideology and theology in the sociopolitical conditions of the urban and ghetto domain, developing a contextual theology that is relevant for the current generation.²² Arguably one of the most notable effects of this contextual theology is its accessibility and inclusiveness. As Hodge points out, in the wild, sacred space embodies city corners, alleyways, clubrooms, cocktail lounges, and spaces/places that are extraneous to many who call themselves Christian, creating an inclusive and accessible soundscape for those hip hoppers who engage in theology.²³ Lamar's Hip Hop Jesuz persona reflects the fluidity of the secular and the sacred, and *DAMN.* gives its listeners space to flourish in neo-secular ways.

¹⁸ "Kendrick Lamar, *DAMN.: Behind the Album.*"

¹⁹ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 127-28.

²⁰ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 128.

²¹ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 183. The author describes how many of today's prominent evangelical theologians contend that Americans live in a secular culture. However, Hodge argues that in contextual relationship with post-soul ideals, spirituality reemerges and seeks to discover God in the ordinary. The neo-secular, then, is "a mixture of sacred and profane spiritual journeys pursuing God in a space outside traditional forms of worship."

²² Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 21.

²³ Hodge, *Homeland Insecurity*, 184. Hodge goes into further detail on this, especially regarding Tupac, in other writings: see Hodge *Heaven Has a Ghetto: The Missiological Gospel and Theology of Tupac Amaru Shakur* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Academic, 2009); White-Hodge, "Methods for the Prophetic: Tupac Shakur, Lauryn Hill, and the Case for Ethnolifehistory," 24-37, in *Religion in Hip Hop: Mapping the New Terrain in the US*, ed. Monica R. Miller, Anthony B. Pinn, and Bernard "Bun B" Freeman (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); and Hodge, "No Church in the Wild: An Ontology of Hip Hop's Socio-Religious Discourse in Tupac's 'Black Jesuz'" *Nomos* 10 (2013): 1-5.

Reverse Troping and Signifyin(g) in Sampling

The racial categories that are applied to music obtain meaning through various social practices. In *Sounding Race in Rap Songs* (2015), Loren Kajikawa argues that race materializes and becomes audible in music when distinct aesthetic ideologies become interconnected with particular ideas about social reality.²⁴ *Sounding Race* searches for a greater understanding of rap music as a locality of conflict and contestation, as a genre whose history is replete with revolutionary shifts guiding an era that embraces a multitude of contradicting identities that support an art form where sound plays a pivotal role. It is noteworthy that Kajikawa asserts that there is no straightforward connection between the racial identity of artists (or fans) and the meaning of musical texts. Instead, she believes that a sense of identity is created from the encounters that people have with music.²⁵ In this section, I consider how the sampling of a clip from Fox News and Lamar's criticism of the clip found in tracks such as "BLOOD.," "DNA.," and "YAH." are employed to ambiguate the roles of sampling in hip hop by subverting the clip's original message in order to use music as a weapon against white supremacist tropes.

As historian Michael Denning noted in his analysis of the relationship between music and politics, determining and differentiating the cultural politics and aesthetic ideologies within "protest music" is a complex process.²⁶ In the history of hip hop culture and rap music, sampling has been used to generate diverse musical identities. From the earliest days of hip hop in the Bronx during the 1960s and 70s to the music of Kendrick Lamar today, breakbeats have provided producers a method to guide how sound is structured.²⁷ Rappers that came before Lamar such as Public Enemy, Dr. Dre, and DMX emphasized the "noisiness" of the beat by employing various sound effects in order to convey and articulate, or, as Kajikawa would say, "sound" race.²⁸ Similarly, the sampling of the Fox News clip embodies the cultural politics of the music by evoking the audible tension and conflict within the racist and classist undertones of Geraldo Rivera's description of hip hop today: "This is why I say that hip hop has done more damage to young African Americans than racism in recent years."²⁹ Rivera speaks to

²⁴ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1998), xix, 115. Denning defines the term aesthetic ideology as the intrinsic political sensibility embedded in a text.

²⁵ Kajikawa, *Sounding Race*, 10.

²⁶ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, xix-xx, 115. As Denning explains, cultural politics is "simply the politics of letterheads and petitions, the stances taken by artists and intellectuals, the pledges of allegiance and declarations of dissent" that reveal the social consciousness of the individual artist.

²⁷ DJ Kool Herc first began isolating and featuring breakbeats at his parties in the South Bronx in 1973. Kajikawa, *Sounding Race*, 13.

²⁸ "Sonic characteristics that animated militant Blackness were rerouted and effectively transposed onto its sound effects of police sirens, gunshots, and screeching tires depicting a generation that still faces issues of discrimination." Kajikawa, *Sounding Race*, 95. Similarly, the track "XXX" from *DAMN.* goes from heavy harmony vocals to a downbeat rap over glitching, stuttering samples, to a frantic juncture where it erupts into a cacophony of screeching tires, sirens, and swelling basslines.

²⁹ Kendrick Lamar, Lyrics to "DNA.," *Genius*, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-dna-lyrics>. The sample was of Fox News host Geraldo Rivera criticizing Lamar's performance of "Alright" at the 2015 BET Awards. The specific lyrics referenced in the discussion are: "And we hate Popo, wanna kill us dead in the street for sure," which criticizes police brutality towards African Americans. For this footage, see Unruly YouTube Channel, "Geraldo Rivera Rips Kendrick Lamar's BET Award Set" (news clip, Fox News), accessed March 10, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3_hi8eWdbY..

the defiant, youthful, and “resilient” stereotyped image of rap music that still exists today.³⁰ The image of rap as “aggressive” and “dangerous” is part of an ongoing history of racial oppression in the United States. In the case of the group Run-D.M.C. in the 80s, publicists and defenders of their music praised and promoted rap as an authentically rebellious alternative to rock and roll. Although Run-D.M.C.’s music was being promoted, this form of marketing left rap music vulnerable to discourses that construct Blackness as a threat. Kajikawa describes inner-city gangs and the crack cocaine “epidemic” as two issues that became associated with the mainstreaming of rap—issues that news media, law enforcement agencies, and state and federal politicians then began to turn their attention to. These related issues became distinctly racially coded in public discourse as Black. For artists such as Run-D.M.C., these associations took form in mainstream media outlets, such as *People* magazine, that accused Run-D.M.C. of “attracting violent ‘ghettobred street gangs’ to public venues.”³¹ In a similar manner, Rivera’s quote about hip hop today perpetuates these stereotypes that have become associated with rap music.

The construction of the sample in “DNA.” and the dialogical interaction with it in “YAH.” emphasize the importance of sonic and textual discourse in relation to the racial politics about hip hop. Lamar articulates concerns for the oppressed and marginalized voices of the ‘hood while simultaneously sampling criticism of rap music that is etched with hate, racism, misunderstanding, and disregard for Black people. Similar to “FEAR.,” Lamar provides a voice for the oppressed in “YAH.,” but with a twist of irony and a sound of protest. Intertextuality and repetition are two ways in which Lamar famously engages in signifyin(g) to convey larger themes about race, religious expression, and politics in the United States.

Musicologist Felicia Miyakawa describes “reverse troping” as a practice that uses snippets of borrowed material to comment on new texts and music, as opposed to classic troping, which is a form of commentary in which new material comments on older material. Miyakawa states that “lyrical samples... reveal intertextual tensions between the borrowed source and the new song.”³² Such intertextual tension is illustrated in the track “DNA.” in the juxtaposition between the evocation of Geraldo’s voice and Lamar’s high-energy delivery of the lyrics “I got loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA.” Moreover, due to the placement of this reverse trope in a repetition of the chorus, “DNA” follows a general pattern

³⁰ It is interesting to note how these terms and ideas about rap music have been used against it, yet when other groups such as the Beastie Boys and other white rockers embodied this anti-establishment rebelliousness, there was no pushback. See Kajikawa, *Sounding Race*, 65-71. It is also worth thinking about the significance of racially coded genre expectations of music. As Kajikawa notes, Run-D.M.C.’s predicament was deeply ironic given that their publicists and defenders “were the same people currently praising and promoting rap as ‘aggressive,’ the kind of music that ‘says ‘fuck you’ to society,’ an ‘authentically rebellious’ alternative at a moment when rock and roll had become ‘sleepy’ and ‘safe’ Kajikawa, *Sounding Race*, 71. See also William Cheng, “Black Noise, White Ears- Resilience, Rap, and the Killing of Jordan Davis,” *Sounding the Break: Music Studies and the Political*, special issue of *Current Musicology* 102 (Spring 2018): 115-89, accessed March 9, 2019, <https://journals.library.columbia.edu/index.php/currentmusicology/article/view/5367/2596>. For detailed description of constructions of race as “soundtexts” (for the way that they become intelligible through an articulation of sonic and textual discourse), see Ronald Radano and Phillip Bohlman, “Introduction,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, ed. Ronald Radano and Phillip Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

³¹ “Despite their arguments, the association between rap and the threat of violence stuck, leading some venues to limit or stop booking rap acts, in part because of the higher insurance costs associated with them in the wake of the Long Beach melee. As Rose explains, “rap-related violence” became another “facet of the contemporary ‘urban crisis’ that consists of a ‘rampant drug culture’ and ‘wilding gangs’ of Black and Hispanic Youths.” Kajikawa, *Sounding Race*, 71.

³² Felicia M. Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop’s Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 117.

Miyakawa has noticed in which samples of speeches, sermons, films, and television are strategically placed to extend a new meaning onto a song.³³ Kajikawa has noted that although hip hop producers often do manipulate samples with little regard for their original context or meanings, it is still important to acknowledge that it is also possible for producers to choose samples that comment on lyrics and, in turn, amplify other elements within a musical track. By sampling Rivera's quote, Lamar deliberately attempts to make a thematic and symbolic connection to the sampled source.

On the album's third track, "YAH." Lamar addresses Fox and Rivera again, but instead of the direct sampling and insertion of Geraldo's voice, Lamar provides commentary/response.

Fox News wanna use my name for percentage
 My latest news is my niece, she's worth livin'
 See me on the TV and scream, "That's Uncle Kendrick"
 Yeah, that's the business
 Somebody tell Geraldo this n**** got some ambition.³⁴

As a simulacrum of resistance, these words display Lamar's ability to comment and respond to the racist and classist allegations that Rivera makes about hip hop.

Beyond such examples of reverse troping in tracks that address Fox News, other moments of the album express Black meaning-making by signifyin(g) through the use of samples and iconography. At its conception, signifyin(g), as a rhetorical practice established by Afro-American literary scholars, was a cross-genre semiotic concept. The cross-genre nature of signifyin(g) supports its use within various Black spaces of cultural production, including but not limited to literature, music, and the visual arts. In many cases, these forms of expression are combined to add historical depth and complexity. For Kendrick Lamar, this is evident in the iconography of his music videos.

Lamar's music video for "ELEMENT." is a great example of the possibilities of signifyin(g) as a cross-genre practice. Paying tribute to renowned photographer Gordon Parks, Lamar re-creates some of Parks's most famous photos. Park's depictions of African-American life in the twentieth century and documentation of the Civil Rights movement have been memorialized by the Gordon Parks Foundation. Upon discovering Lamar's tribute to Parks in "ELEMENT.", the foundation announced a new exhibition showcasing Parks's photographs that inspired Lamar's music video.³⁵ The intertextual exchange between Lamar and the Gordon Parks Foundation illustrates the cultural significance of signifyin(g) as a mode of Black meaning-making, and of continuing cultural practices that were established in the 1970s and 1980s.

Signifyin(g) by sampling voices from other forms of Black expression reinforces ties between the past and present of Black meaning-making. "DUCKWORTH." is but one example that highlights the interplay between important moments in Black history. Producer 9th Wonder describes the samples in this final track of the album as having come "from three different countries, with three different generations, three different genres covering all parts of Kendrick's life involving three people: him, his

³³ Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap.*, 118.

³⁴ Kendrick Lamar, "YAH.," *Genius*, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-yah-lyrics>.

³⁵ For the Foundation's announcement, see Taylor Dafoe, "Kendrick Lamar Made an Homage to Gordon Parks-And Gets a Show at Parks' Foundation." on *Artnet News*, December 8, 2017, accessed June 18, 2021, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/kendrick-lamar-gordon-parks-1173287>.

dad, and Top Dawg.”³⁶ The three samples, from “Be Ever Wonderful” by Ted Taylor, “Ostavi Trag” by September, and “Atari” by Hiatus Kaiyote respectively, are thus seen by 9th Wonder as signifyin(g) samples that emphasize Lamar’s personal story-telling of a near-fatal encounter between his father and TDE CEO, Top Dawg. As Miyakawa notes, “sampling is one of the many bridges rap musicians [and producers] use to build a rap tradition firmly entrenched in the musical past.”³⁷ Within this album, Lamar uses the norms of hip hop and rap and their manipulation of sound (i.e. sampling) not only to question the constructs attached to the specific musical conventions and aesthetic ideology of the genre, but also to create a dialogue between and about historical temporality and sound. In this, Lamar uses reverse troping and signifyin(g) to express his intolerance for white supremacist allegations and his place in the history of Black musical traditions.

Centers and Peripheries in the Cultural Politics of Music

2018 marks the year that *DAMN.* made history by winning the Pulitzer Prize in Music.³⁸ Lamar has celebrated this win, and even embraced the “Pulitzer Kenny” background at his concerts during his tour in 2018. On the Pulitzer site page for Lamar’s win, a passage from *Pitchfork*’s author Matthew Trammell is featured: “Storytelling has been Lamar’s greatest skill and most primary mission, to put into (lots of) words what it’s like to grow up as he did—to articulate, in human terms, the intimate specifics of daily self-defense from your surroundings. Somehow, he’s gotten better.”³⁹ This passage highlights hip hop’s ability to incorporate nuanced readings of place, embodied knowledge of lived environments, and explicit references to sociocultural status in its narrative, or, more specifically in this case, the narrative of Kendrick Lamar’s *DAMN.*

As Hodge has shown in his argument for hip hop missiology, hip hop introduces marginalized voices and perspectives to address the problematic authority of whiteness that discernibly presides over America’s discourse on music, sound, and environment—a relatively homogenous and discriminative artistic discussion. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Lamar highlights what it means to him to be recognized in the academic world, and how “It’s one of those things that should have happened with hip hop a long time ago. It took a long time for people to embrace us—people outside of our community, our culture—to see this not just as vocal lyrics, but to see that this is really pain, this is really hurt, this is really true stories of our lives on wax.”⁴⁰ In this quote, Lamar refers to the importance of this storytelling ability, and more specifically to the importance of speaking to these concerns of pain and suffering in his community as well as the lateness of an academic institution such as the Pulitzer to acknowledge genres

³⁶ Chris Mench, “9th Wonder Breaks Down the Three Samples He Used on Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Duckworth.’” on *Genius*, April 8, 2020, accessed June 18, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/07/825949896/9th-wonder-breaks-down-his-beats-for-kendrick-lamars-duckworth>.

³⁷ Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap*, 122.

³⁸ “Recording released on April 14, 2017, a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African-American life.” Official statement on “*DAMN.* by Kendrick Lamar,” on *The Pulitzer Prizes* website, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/kendrick-lamar>.

³⁹ Matthew Trammell, Review of “Albums: *DAMN.*, Kendrick Lamar, 2017” *Pitchfork*, uploaded April 18, 2017, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/23147-damn/>.

⁴⁰ Lisa Robinson, “The Gospel According to Kendrick Lamar” [cover story], photography by Annie Liebovitz, *Vanity Fair*, uploaded June 29, 2018, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2018/06/kendrick-lamar-cover-story>.

such as rap. However, the recognition of *DAMN* in an academic world within this context is a complex issue. Herein lies a danger—if the only way white audiences see Blackness is through pain and suffering, the pain being perceived has potential to reify white supremacy. As for the acknowledgement of rap by the Pulitzer Prize Board, it is significant to point out that historically, this prize has mostly been awarded to classical compositions, with only three jazz compositions interspersed throughout: Wynton Marsalis's *Blood on the Fields* (1997), Ornette Coleman's *Sound Grammar* (2007), and Henry Threadgill's *In for a Penny, In for a Pound* (2016), making Kendrick Lamar the first non-classical, non-jazz winner in Pulitzer history.⁴¹

Musicologist Jeffrey Kallberg argues that genre is “better understood as a relational and hierarchical concept for addressing the way that music makers and music listeners negotiate shared expectations and cultural values. In other words, genres serve as sites where music’s meanings are contested.”⁴² In this way, genres represent more than a method of organization; in some cases, they represent revolutionary symbols. As a rap album (what many white audiences would consider to be “Black noise”), *DAMN* is a simulacrum of Black music that, by winning the Pulitzer, subverts the coded racialized expectations of an award-winning work within the hierarchy of a white patriarchal society.

Simon Ghebreyesus, a Yale student who was in attendance at Lamar’s Pulitzer award ceremony, shared his experience of being in a setting in which the boundaries of genre were being broken:

The juxtapositions of the situation were palpable: In a room full of mostly rich, white men in suits and ties, here was Kendrick Lamar, accompanied by Jay Rock and other family and friends, some dressed in sweatshirts celebrating Lamar’s Top Dawg Entertainment (TDE) record label, Los Angeles Lakers jerseys, and red TDE beanies. When you take a minute to consider the ways our spaces are policed—dress codes, noise violations—and the racial valence of such spatial politics, it made the moment even more jarringly poetic.⁴³

Many observers have questioned what this means for the future of the Pulitzer Prize, and whether classical and jazz music will lose an important platform with the acceptance and recognition of other genres within this institutional setting.⁴⁴ While the impact of this decision is still unfolding, what is clear

⁴¹ Simon Ghebreyesus, “Pulitzer Kenny: A Name Well-Deserved” on the blog, *Musiqology: Where Musics Past and Present Collide*, uploaded June 28, 2018, accessed March 2, 2019, <http://musiqology.com/blog/2018/06/28/pulitzer-kenny-a-name-well-deserved/>. Ghebreyesus also points out how it is possible that the genre limitation (as the Pulitzer is known for favoring classical works) has led to a dramatic lack of Black Pulitzer recipients. “In the 72 years the award has been handed out, Kendrick is only the fifth Black artist to hoist it. Miles Davis, Michael Jackson, and so many others were overlooked for the prize meant to reward ‘distinguished musical composition.’ A certain plateau—reserved for the highest excellence in music—was unreachable for Black artists and their art, itself.”

⁴² Kajikawa observes this in regards to disco and rap in *Sounding Race*, 44. See also Jeffrey Kallberg, “The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin’s Nocturne in G Minor,” in *19th-Century Music* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1988), 238-61.

⁴³ See Ghebreyesus, “Pulitzer Kenny: A Name Well-Deserved.” It is also noteworthy that in this article, Ghebreyesus aligns himself as a “disciple in the Church of Kendrick.”

⁴⁴ Columbia’s president Lee Bollinger (Columbia is the institution which holds the Pulitzer Prize) said America’s democracy faces its biggest challenge since the journalism and arts prizes began. “We are living in an era that demands of us a new understanding of and confrontation with the abuses of power,” Bollinger told the audience. David Beard, “Inviting Someone New to the Pulitzer Party,” on *Poynter*. news website, uploaded May 31, 2018, accessed March 5, 2019, <https://www.poynter.org/newsletters/2018/inviting-someone-new-to-the-pulitzer-party/>.

at this point is that *DAMN.* has crossed genre classifications, muddling the divisions so often prescribed for awards and recognition.

Conclusion

Kendrick Lamar's album *DAMN.* emphasizes how the articulation of sounds, symbols, and ideas are inherently linked to one's presentation of a sense of identity. However, an understanding of musical meaning requires knowledge about the context in which the music emerged, the language used to create discourse about the music, and the ways institutions in authoritative positions interpret the importance of a work. Hip hop culture and rap music have been points of contingency in which racial difference can be heard and expressed. Although it cannot be essentialized with one single racial meaning, *DAMN.* reflects, helps construct, and seeks to explore the diversity of identities that ethnic minorities, and specifically Black people, embody in this world and how bodies can be regulated and empowered. It is a sonic force that helps listeners understand the meaning of the existence of hip hoppers and their relationship to others within the social context of the regulation of religious bodies in the wild. Exploring the specific artistic decisions and paying attention to stylistic difference and transformation in the genre and culture of rap and hip hop in terms of textual and sonic interpretations, we can continue to analyze and interpret how artists create and sound identities in the realm of religion, music, and politics in the wild.

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RUSSIAN INDEPENDENCE: CONSIDERING STREAMS OF MODERNITY IN RUSSIAN MUSIC

Book Review: *Analytical Approaches to 20th-Century Russian Music: Tonality, Modernism, Serialism*

Edited by Inessa Bazayev and Christopher Segall

Anne Delfin

Russian music has emerged as a significant focus of study over the past several years. However, there remains a significant language barrier between English and Russian scholarship. *Analytical Approaches to 20th-Century Russian Music* addresses this gap by presenting thirteen chapters of in-depth analysis on music written by a variety of twentieth-century Russian composers. Bazayev and Segall recruit Russian music scholars to contribute to the book, and they divide the essays into three sections as indicated by the title: tonality, modernism, and serialism. I will provide brief summaries of each contribution and frame my summaries with the editors' remarks on each trend.

The editors advocate for scholars to use tonal theory as a lens to understand “new developments, extensions, and reconstructions” in tonality in Russian repertoire.¹ To encourage scholars to think more deeply about tonal centers, Ellen Bakulina analyzes how Rachmaninoff writes for two tonal centers in his songs “Water Lily,” op. 8, no. 1, and “The Migrant Wind,” op. 34, no. 4 to argue that he “challenges traditional norms of monotonicity.”² Scott Murphy examines Myaskovsky’s use of “antitonic” harmonies (harmonies that occur when the music vacillates between tonic and bii^4_2 to prolong tonic) to modify OPTIC pitch space so that it includes inversion (I), retrograde (R), and key (K).³ Rebecca Perry employs Prokofiev’s First Piano Concerto as a case study to understand his distortions of sonata form.⁴ To illuminate the origins of parallel thirds in Shostakovich’s music and suggest how he discovered his D-S-C-H motto, Patrick McCreless examines the 1+2+1 instrumental texture in Shostakovich’s string quartets.⁵ Finally, Knar Abrahamyan examines how Tigran Mansurian incorporates the augmented-

¹ Inessa Bazayev and Christopher Segall, eds., *Analytical Approaches to 20th-Century Russian Music: Tonality, Modernism, Serialism* [hereafter *AATCRM*] (New York: Routledge, 2021), 3-4.

² Ellen Bakulina, “Tonal Pairing in Two of Rachmaninoff’s Songs,” in *AATCRM*, 28.

³ Scott Murphy, “Abundant Novelty of Antitonic Harmony in the Music of Nicolai Myaskovsky,” in *AATCRM*, 32-35.

⁴ Rebecca Perry, “House of Mirrors: Distorted Proportions in Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 1,” in *AATCRM*, 54-70.

⁵ Patrick McCreless, “A Curiosity in the Early String Quartets of Shostakovich and its Precedence in Previous Works,” in *AATCRM*, 71-90.

second *glas* formula from Armenian liturgical monody to bring religious connotations to his *Requiem* to decolonize Soviet rule.⁶

A second trend that Bazayev and Segall identify is Russian composers' anticipation and parallelization of Western atonal music trends.⁷ To argue that non-chord tones create a deeper interplay between poetry and text that was not possible in Roslavets's early compositional styles, Inessa Bazayev examines the interaction between synthetic chords and non-synthetic chord tones in his *Three Poems of Zinaida Gippius*.⁸ Daniil Zavlunov studies the significance of octatonic collections in Mosolov's Piano Sonata No. 1 to suggest that this scale is more vital to his generation than initially suspected.⁹ Klára Mórica describes Arthur Lourié's thoughts on melody's spirituality, its "primacy" over rhythm and harmony, and its morality with respect to his *Concerto de camera*.¹⁰ To demonstrate how Tcherepnin exploits the qualities of his nine-step scale, Joshua Bedford analyses the first movement of his First Symphony.¹¹ Maria Cizmic explores Galina Ustvolskaya's Composition No. 1, "Dona Nobis Pacem," through her own embodied experiences while listening to the piece and the experiences of the piece's performers. Cizmic discusses the "physicality" of Ustvolskaya's music and how it demonstrates the relationship between breathing and vibration.¹²

Finally, the third part explores how Russian composers experimented with Schoenbergian serialism and how, lacking instruction due to Soviet disapproval of this compositional method, they pioneered their own twelve-tone techniques. Zachery Cairns examines how multiple tone rows are at play in the first of Edison Denisov's *Five Etudes for Bassoon*.¹³ Joseph Straus demonstrates that, in her *Reflections on a Theme of Bach*, Sophia Gubaidulina develops streams of melody, imitative counterpoint, and canon that originate in the piece's opening and progress toward a chorale based on a BACH cipher.¹⁴ Christopher Segall details four techniques present throughout Alfred Schnittke's compositional output: monograms of dedicatees, twelve-tone rows, triads, and polystylism.¹⁵ He identifies similarities between contrasting themes to elucidate otherwise obscure connections in Schnittke's Viola Concerto.

All told, *Analytical Approaches to 20th-Century Russian Music* offers a thorough introduction to the topic for scholars who are unfamiliar with twentieth-century Russian music and a broad sample of scholarship for those interested in Russian music. The connections it draws between trends in Russian and Western European music makes the former more accessible. Indeed, this book would be especially useful as required reading in graduate coursework, because it both summarizes and contributes to

⁶ Knar Abrahamyan, "Navigating Post-Soviet Armenia: On Decoloniality in Tigran Mansurian's *Requiem*," *AATCRM*, 91-109.

⁷ Bazayev and Segall, *AATCRM*, 2.

⁸ Inessa Bazayev, "Fifths' Paths through Nikolai Roslavets's *Three Poems of Zinaida Gippius*," in *AATCRM*, 113-31.

⁹ Daniil Zavlunov, "Alexander Mosolov's Piano Sonata No. 1 and its Synthetic Modernism," in *AATCRM*, 132-54.

¹⁰ Klára Mórica, "The Rebirth of Melody in Lourié's Post-Neoclassical *Concerto de Camera*," in *AATCRM*, 157.

¹¹ Joshua Bedford, "Alexander Tcherepnin's Nine-Step Scale and its Use in the First Movement of his First Symphony," in *AATCRM*, 173-88.

¹² Maria Cizmic, "Timbre and Vibration in Galina Ustvolskaya's Composition No. 1, 'Dona Nobis Pacem,'" in *AATCRM*, 191.

¹³ Zachery Cairns, "Edison Denisov and Multiple-Row Serialism," in *AATCRM*, 205-28.

¹⁴ Joseph N. Straus, "Historical and Stylistic Reconciliation of Sofia Gubaidulina's *Reflections on a Theme Bach*," *AATCRM*, 229-42.

¹⁵ Christopher Segall, "Monogram, Theme, and Large-Scale Form in Alfred Schnittke's Viola Concerto," in *AATCRM*, 243-63.

previous scholarship. However, Bazayev has suggested the importance of examining Russian music through its Russian heritage.¹⁶ Some essays in this collection have done this more than others (those by Abrahamyan, Móricz, and Cairnes come to mind), yet there is still significant room to explore Russianness in these works. To borrow from the title of Gordon McQuere's overview of Russian music theory, how does Russian theoretical thought fit into this music?¹⁷ The next stage of Russian music study is to explore Russians' ideas of their music and consider the complements and contradictions that arise when combining theoretical traditions.

About the Author

Anne Delfin is a PhD student in music theory at the University of Cincinnati. Her research interests include form, aesthetics, and intersections in the development of music, technology, and science. She holds degrees in music theory (MM, University of Cincinnati) and flute performance (BM, Lawrence University; MM, Indiana University). In her spare time, she can be found running, biking, or playing flute.

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¹⁶ Thanks to Dr. Inessa Bazayev, the book's author, for permission to publish this extract from a personal email sent to Anne Delfin, on March 25, 2021.

¹⁷ Gordon D. McQuere, ed., *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009).

AT THE CROSSROADS OF MUSIC AND NATIONALISM

Book Review:

Performing Propaganda: Musical Life and Culture in Paris During the First World War

By Rachel Moore

Alexandra Doyle

In *Performing Propaganda*, Rachel Moore argues that the First World War was a turning point for music and its use as propaganda, not only in France but throughout the world. Situated between the Franco-Prussian War and the modern era, music professionals in the early 20th century stood between Wagner and the Second Viennese School – both facets of the Austro-German music tradition. For the French, this resulted in the following questions: “What music is acceptable for us? Which cultural artifacts should we embrace, and which should we shun?” The war brought other considerations, including how citizens should make music during a time of national mourning and what aspects of music production and performance to nationalize in the interest of spreading French culture to neutral and allied nations.

To explore the cacophony of answers to these questions, Moore devotes chapters to France’s musical institutions during the war and to musical propaganda in general. She then dives into lengthy examinations of a few selected institutions. Over the course of her book, Moore does an excellent job balancing readability with the richness of information that one would expect from a research volume. Casual readers might find the later chapters dense, but scholars exploring these narrow topics will find her book to be a trove of valuable information. Potential readers should know that Moore intentionally avoids discussing French avant-garde music from this time, as its relative lack of popularity made it a poor propaganda device.

The first section of *Performing Propaganda* addresses France’s musical institutions at-large during the war. At the war’s outset, musical institutions ceased operation, partially out of a sense of decency. However, when the war became a chronic rather than acute condition, many Parisians sought a return to as much normalcy as possible. Soon, artistic performances came to be viewed as a patriotic activity because of the importance of maintaining citizen morale on the home front.¹ Concerts often returned to the “miscellaneous” format popular in the 19th century, wherein a series of works or excerpts from a variety of genres were presented on the same program. These also often included readings of poetry or plays. Moore notes the necessity of wartime concerts appealing to many tastes within the same program because of the dramatic decrease in frequency of concerts.²

¹ Rachel Moore, *Performing Propaganda: Musical Life and Culture in Paris during the First World War* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2018), 20.

² Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 40-43.

The next chapter of Moore's book deals with wartime propaganda, both musical and otherwise. Most musical propaganda served to depict French culture in a positive light, whereas a great deal of written propaganda was negative and anti-German.³ The author delves into these distinctions and gives examples of positive French musical propaganda, such as international concerts in neutral countries, especially those that combined French and local performers.⁴ Moore also spotlights the differences between private propaganda and government-sponsored propaganda throughout her book, highlighting the change that occurred in 1916 as the French government took a more active role by creating an office for artistic propaganda.⁵

Moore's next topic is Saint-Saëns's *Germanophilie*, a series of five articles the composer published in the *Écho de Paris* beginning in 1914. In them, Saint-Saëns argues against the performance of German music within France, and specifically against works by Wagner. Most music publications stayed silent on the Wagner issue, instead dismissing Saint-Saëns as a product of an older generation who did not like to see change on the horizon.⁶ Moore concludes that Saint-Saëns's argument was ultimately ineffectual because he was viewed as part of an outdated musical culture that most of France had long since left behind, even though his propaganda methods themselves were *à la mode*.⁷

The following section is devoted to the *Matinées Nationales*, a government-sponsored series of Sunday afternoon concerts that took place throughout the war. Like other concerts during the time, they were often infused with poetry readings, excerpts from plays, and other non-musical works of art.⁸ Moore uses the *Matinées* as a case study in "quasi-official" propaganda and delves into the repertoire chosen for these concerts, including the initial lack of works by Austro-German composers. Although the *Matinées Nationales* persisted for three years, by the end of the conflict, many civilians had lost the patriotic fervor that drove the concerts' success, especially as they were faced with severe food shortages and other wartime desperations.⁹

Next, Moore discusses the Paris Opéra, which faced enormous difficulties at the outset of the war. Its personnel were greatly reduced, and high fuel costs and taxes made operation of the building itself nearly impossible. Additionally, the Opéra's biggest financial gains before the war came from staging Wagner's music dramas, which were politically uncouth during the war.¹⁰ After a brief hiatus, the Opéra reopened in December 1915 and turned to a kind of French historicism, which sought to demonstrate France's cultural viability and wealth by remembering its rich cultural past.¹¹ Some of this nostalgia took the place of reconstructing past concerts, such as one that took place at the court of Louis XIV.¹² Moore explores these concerts as examples of musical propaganda because of their glorification of French music history.

The final section of *Performing Propaganda* is devoted to music publishing during the war. As with other facets of life, music publishing became a nationalistic endeavor, and purchasing music

³ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 47.

⁴ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 59.

⁵ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 50-51.

⁶ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 89-91.

⁷ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 95.

⁸ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 97-99.

⁹ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 138.

¹⁰ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 139-41.

¹¹ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 154.

¹² Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 154.

editions became an exercise in patriotism. German editions became taboo, instead replaced by “French national” editions.¹³ The war inspired French music publishers to begin to view their goods as exportable propaganda, especially to neutral and allied nations.¹⁴ Moore discusses the 1917 Congrès national du livre, a conference that included all types of French publishers. She posits that the discussions of music publishing at the conference show that music transitioned during the war from a luxury good to a commercial good and therefore an extension of written cultural propaganda.¹⁵

Although lengthy chapters of her book are devoted to specific case studies, Moore does an excellent job painting a cohesive picture of musical propaganda in France during the First World War that includes not just performance but also publishing and musical academia. The book will no doubt be a worthy purchase for enthusiasts of music, politics, and the intersection thereof.

About the Author

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¹³ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 173.

¹⁴ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 176.

¹⁵ Moore, *Performing Propaganda*, 210.

