

# Authenticity as authentication<sup>1</sup>

ALLAN MOORE

## Abstract

*This article argues for the prematurity of any dismissal of the notion of authenticity as meaningful within popular music discourse. It synthesises a range of views as to how authenticity is constructed, and offers a tri-partite typology dependent on asking who, rather than what, is being authenticated. It focuses on rock and folk genres, but also argues that the generic nature of the typology makes it applicable to any other genre wherein listeners are concerned to ask whether a musical utterance can be construed as sincere.*

## Preamble

'Authentic'. 'Real'. 'Honest'. 'Truthful'. 'With integrity'. 'Actual'. 'Genuine'. 'Essential'. 'Sincere'. Of all the value terms employed in music discourse, these are perhaps the most loaded. They are familiar from the writings of academic scholars, as will be made plain below. They have been present, in their various ways, in fan and journalistic writing (most notably in the pages of *Rolling Stone*). In almost all cases, it is music to which these qualifiers can be attached that such writing, and presumably thinking, has prized. Of the terms, it is the first which is most familiar from academic discourse and is, therefore, the one to which I shall reduce the others for the purposes of this article. On occasions, attachment of this term can be justified with close reference to details of sonic design, even if such a process is extremely long-winded: in a previous article, I have demonstrated the viability of just such an approach.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, such an attachment is more arbitrary. In the long run, the resultant experiences in these latter cases may be even more analytically interesting in that the influence of the musical text on these occasions may be said to be nil.<sup>3</sup> There are, however, various authenticities, sharing a base assumption about 'essential(ized), real, actual, essence' (Taylor 1997, p. 21): they are concisely described in Gilbert and Pearson's identification of the requirements of a 1980s 'authentic' rock, wherein

artists must speak the truth of their (and others') situations. Authenticity was guaranteed by the presence of a specific type of instrumentation . . . [the singer's] fundamental role was to represent the culture from which he comes. (Gilbert and Pearson 1999, pp. 164–5)

The purpose of this article is to explore just some of the ramifications of the term and to offer a globalising perspective analysing the three senses conflated in the above quotation: that artists speak the truth of their own situation; that they speak the truth of the situation of (absent) others; and that they speak the truth of their own culture, thereby representing (present) others. It will do this with primary reference to rock music and to contemporary folk music, although I believe my analysis to be applicable to other genres. Only two other writers appear to have

attempted to cover this general ground, and reference will be made throughout to Taylor (1997) and to Fornäs (1995). This article is not set up in opposition to them, but rather in opposition to two key features in the discourse of authenticity.

As suggested above, discussions of the attribution of authenticity cannot always take place with explicit reference to matters of sonic design. I start, therefore, from an assumption that authenticity does not inhere in any combination of musical sounds. 'Authenticity' is a matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicised position. It is ascribed, not inscribed. As Sarah Rubidge has it: 'authenticity is . . . not a property *of*, but something we ascribe *to* a performance' (Rubidge 1996, p. 219). Whether a performance is authentic, then, depends on who 'we' are. However, if this quality that we call 'authenticity' does not inhere in the music we hear, where does it lie? It is my second assumption in this article that it is a construction made on the act of listening. In part, I take this tack to accommodate my own doubts about the positing of both a unified and a fragmented subject. However, it seems to me that far from resolving such doubts before advancing positions on authenticity, theorisation of observations made on how things count as authentic will in turn inform the question of how such observers constitute their subjectivity.

Thus, rather than ask *what* (piece of music, or activity) is being authenticated, in this article I ask *who*. I also recognise that, even in my proposal of a globalising perspective, my own exploration is undertaken from within a bounded cultural position. Michael Pickering is alive to this difficulty when he argues that "'authenticity" is a relative concept which is generally used in absolutist terms' (Pickering 1986, p. 213), while Fornäs argues that a 'realist' approach to the question is far too limiting in aesthetic discourses. I trust that my own subjectivity will be understood in reference to the examples I shall employ in what follows.

The issue of what can be understood as 'authentic' is not exclusive to popular music discourse. It is, of course, pertinent to the hallowed distinctions between 'pop' and 'rock' on the one hand, and to the less hallowed (because more recent) distinctions between dance music genres on the other (for instance, the necessity of 'hardcore' in relation to commercialised raves in the late 1980s). It is pertinent to debates within the 'folk' music tradition and, indeed, this understanding has historical priority. It is even pertinent to contemporary approaches to the performance of music in the Euro-American formal music tradition (Kenyon 1988 is an authoritative text), although discussion of this aspect is well outside the scope of this article. Judging from recent critical writing, one may think it has become less pertinent. Born and Hesmondhalgh have recently pointed out that the concept 'has been consigned to the intellectual dust-heap' (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000, p. 30) since, in a postmodern world where appropriation (of material by producers of music) is everywhere evident, it no longer carries its originary force. However, there seem to me three particular reasons why such an abandonment is premature, the first two of which I develop. The first is that to identify the authentic with the original is only one understanding which is currently made, an understanding which should not be allowed to annexe the whole. The second is that in one sense, appropriation (of sonic experiences by perceivers) remains foundational to processes of authentication. The third is that the social alienation produced under modernity, which appears to me the ideological root of such striving for the authentic, and of which we have been aware for decades, grows daily more apparent.<sup>4</sup>

In rock discourse, the term has frequently been used to define a *style* of writing

or performing, particularly anything associated with the practices of the singer/songwriter, where attributes of intimacy (just Joni Mitchell and her zither)<sup>5</sup> and immediacy (in the sense of unmediated forms of sound production) tend to connote authenticity. It is used in a socio-economic sense, to refer to the social standing of the musician. It is used to determine the supposed reasons she has for working, whether her primary felt responsibility is to herself, her art, her public, or her bank balance. It is used to bestow integrity, or its lack, on a performer, such that an 'authentic' performer exhibits realism, lack of pretence, or the like. Note that these usages do not mutually exclude one another, nor do they necessarily coincide, and that all are applied from the outside. Lawrence Grossberg (1992) has argued that the distinction between 'authentic' and its opposite ('entertainment' at some times, 'commercial' at others) underpins the history of popular music from the time of Elvis Presley onwards, and that such a history proceeds as a pendulum, swinging from one extreme to the other, frequently with much disagreement among fans and critics as to which term to apply to which music – again, such attributions are to be fought for. Roy Shuker takes this historicisation further, declaring 'that using authenticity to distinguish between rock and pop is no longer valid, though it continues to serve an important ideological function' (Shuker 1994, p. 8). In each of these accounts, there is a sense in which different understandings of authenticity are conflated in the presence of this fundamental authentic/commercial paradigm, a view supported in Shuker's later discussion (Shuker 1998). In what follows, I attempt to bypass this conflation such that these different understandings become more accessible.

### First person authenticity

In terms of music, it seems that debates over authenticity can best begin from the 'folk'. In praising the institution of the English folk song revival at the beginning of the last century, the composer Hubert Parry noted that folk songs had 'no sham, no got-up glitter, and no vulgarity' (quoted in Boyes 1993, p. 26). In these terms, he opposed (authentic) folk song to (commercial) music hall, thereby making plain both his, and the revivalists', disdain for the music of the urban working-class. Parry's was a voice to be listened to. He was professor of music at Oxford and the leading composer of choral and orchestral music of his (late Victorian and Edwardian) generation, arguably the first since the seventeenth century to develop a distinctive English compositional voice capable of positive comparison with central European contemporaries (the likes of Brahms or Wagner). And, his view also finds expression throughout the pan-European folk-aestheticist movement. As we now know, of course, the 'folk' are better considered a bourgeois construction, assembled by views such as these: as Harker (1985) has pointed out, their 'material' (the traces of their culture, be that song, dance, story) are unavoidably mediated. Pickering argues that this discursive move can be understood as marking the conception of a folk aesthetic as robust as that of high culture, in that both become identified by their freedom 'from commercial imperatives and influences, and thus authentic and good' (Pickering 1986, p. 205). The opposition between 'authentic' and 'commercial' is, thus, not a new one. Nor has it vanished from this particular field. As part of the second English revival of the 1950s, leading figure Ewan McColl insisted that one should sing only in one's own native tongue, and sing songs only from one's own social or cultural setting. In some clubs, this was taken to exclude

not only recent (particularly US) material, but also such recent instruments as the acoustic guitar, leading in the 1970s / early 1980s to a high degree of separation between 'traditional' ('policy') and 'contemporary' clubs (as they often styled themselves), separation which in some cases even led to separate clubs in the same venue on different nights of the week:

As late as 1984, a band which played entirely 'traditional' material encountered objections on 'policy' grounds because they used electronic instruments. Yet, unaccountably, no 'policy clubs' seem to have refused to accept a performer who sang with a concertina accompaniment. The concertina was, after all, 'authentic' – old(ish), used by the Folk (sometimes) and, most of all, unsullied by modernity. (Boyes 1993, p. 238)

This issue is developed in Redhead and Street (1989). The privileging of anachronistic modes of performance, on the grounds of their 'authenticity', derives in the UK from the 1940s Dixieland jazz revival where it had a role within the bourgeois romantic critique of industrial society. Note that 'authenticity' is here opposed by Boyes to 'modernity' whereas, in the terms introduced at the beginning, it can be opposed to 'postmodernity' (on which see also Redhead 1990 and Redhead and Street 1989). The issue is confounded by Jean-François Dutertre's insistence that 'the modernity of traditional music lies in the very heart of the [original authentic] forms and lessons that it offers us' (Dutertre 1996, p. 149): the type of relationship between the authentic and the modern cannot simply be assumed.

For Richard Middleton, any approach to music which aims to contextualise it as cultural expression must foreground discussion of 'authenticity', since 'honesty (truth to cultural experience) becomes the validating criterion of musical value' (Middleton 1990, p. 127). In rock discourse, this validating criterion is reinterpreted as 'unmediated expression', by which is assumed the possibility of the communication of emotional content (inherent possibly in the music itself, but certainly at least in the performance) untrammelled by the difficulties attendant on the encoding of meaning in verbal discourse (Moore 2001a, pp. 73–5; 181–4). The recent singing of Paul Weller provides a rich example of this. On 'Changingman' he employs gravelly vocals connoting a voice made raw from crying or shouting.<sup>6</sup> The assumption here is that his listeners have personal experience of what gives rise to such crying and shouting and that, therefore, the result conjures up an active memory of the cause.<sup>7</sup> His voice eschews the finesse of embellishments and melismas and carries no sense of being treated as an end in itself. These features can *convey* to his audience that they are perceiving real emotion (although US audiences tend more to hear his (inauthentic) references).<sup>8</sup> They are *supported* by a number of other factors. There is his instrumentation – a rock line-up which recalls the early 1970s – and a particular liking for using late 1960s model guitars, recalling the sound-world of Pete Townshend. There is the line of descent of his voice from Joe Cocker's 'blue-eyed soul' of the late 1960s.<sup>9</sup> There is the harmonic pattern inherited from Cream's 'White Room'. There is his practice of recording 'live' in the studio, i.e. with an absolute minimum of the overdubs, multi-tracking and other devices which 'cheat' the listening ear. This latter point also is historicised, since it recalls the practices of established studios like Stax in the mid 1960s (Bowman 1997), where such recording situations were normative and highly prized. Weller is, in effect, saying to the audience he attracts, 'this is what it's like to be me'.

A related example can be found in the case of much of the punk movement of the 1970s. In its direct opposition to the growth of disco, it was read as an authentic

expression (Laing 1985, pp. 14–17; Garofalo 1987, pp. 89–90). Here, authenticity is assured by ‘reflecting back’ to an earlier authentic practice. Bruce Johnson, however, points to the limited adequacy of such a procedure, and perhaps to the observation that it is found much more in music intended for established circuits: ‘especially in vernacular music, so often generated in the moment of performance, kinaesthetics rather than artistic logic is often the key to why music sounds the way it does’ (Johnson 1997, p. 13).

The expression I am discussing here is perceived to be authentic because it is unmediated – because the distance between its (mental) origin and its (physical) manifestation is wilfully compressed to nil by those with a motive for so perceiving it. This is thus one basic form of the *authenticity as primality* argument put forward by Taylor (1997, pp. 26–8), wherein an expression is perceived to be authentic if it can be traced to an initiatory instance. This argument surfaces most clearly in academic folk discourse. For Philip Bohlman, identification of the ‘authentic’ requires ‘[the] consistent representation of the origins of a . . . style’ (Bohlman 1988, p. 10), such that ‘When the presence of the unauthentic [sic] exhibits imbalance with the authentic, pieces cease to be folk music, crossing the border into popular music instead’ (Bohlman 1988, p. 11). Thus, for Bohlman, authenticity is identified by a *purity of practice*, whereas for Grossberg, it is more clearly identified by an *honesty to experience* – a subtle distinction perhaps, but one which remains potent. Starting from a very different point, Steven Feld develops a similar line, arguing that ‘authenticity only emerges when it is counter to forces that are trying to screw it up, transform it, dominate it, mess with it . . .’ (Keil and Feld 1994, p. 296), equating authenticity to a concept of genuine culture dependent on the anthropology of Edward Sapir. Bohlman’s identification has found its way into rock discourse, in that proximity to origins entails unmediated contact with those origins: ‘Real instruments were seen to go along with real feelings in Springsteen’s rise: a certain sort of musical and artistic purity going hand in hand with a sincere message’ (Redhead 1990, p. 52). The constructed nature of this interpretation is clarified by comparison with Bob Dylan – in order to achieve the same result in his early work, the ‘real instruments’ he had to employ had not to be amplified, *contra* Springsteen.

Walser (1993) insists that this is one of two clear types of ‘authenticity’ that can be observed in rock in general, wherein technological mediation (whether a reliance on signal modifiers, ever more powerful means of amplification, and even technical mastery in many spheres) is equated with artifice, reinstating as authentic/inauthentic the distinction between ‘vernacular’ and ‘trained’ or ‘professional’. There is thus a relationship here with an alternative category developed by Taylor, which he terms *authenticity of positionality* (Taylor 1997, pp. 22–3). Through this, he identifies the authenticity acquired by performers who refuse to ‘sell out’ to commercial interests. Weller exemplifies this again, as do Taylor’s examples of non-Western musicians involved in ‘world music’ – for such musicians, ‘selling out’ appears to equate to ‘sounding like Western musicians’, i.e. by adopting the style codes of pop/rock (which codes, in such an analysis, would be seen as inherent within the individual rather than open to appropriation: see Moore 2001b).

In its incredulity towards subjective autonomy, postmodernism may seem incompatible with authenticity. Redhead (1990) argues that constructions of ‘authenticity’ are no longer made by denial of commercial processes, but consciously, within them, an argument paralleled in Fox’s (1992) discussion of country music. Whereas in the late 1960s, authenticity was the preserve of a politicised, selfless

counter-culture, in the late 1980s there was no such counter-culture, and thus 'authenticity' became allied to constructions of 'innocence', and an unreserved embrace of the 'pop' to which it was so antithetical twenty years earlier. We may observe this in the singing of Neil Tennant. In his flat, regular delivery, especially when this is combined with his generally static posture, the refusal of emotional involvement he conveys is widely perceived as a refusal to 'cheat' the listener. For Elizabeth Leach,

the contribution to the authenticity debate made by Tennant . . . merely re-inscribes the terms of the discourse. [In conversation] Tennant simply trumps one marker of authenticity that the Pet Shop Boys don't possess (the ability to perform live), with another (the personally authentic honest address to the fans who they do not attempt to deceive). (Leach 2001, p. 147)

'So hard' exemplifies this, with its matter-of-fact tone where everything seems to be kept rigidly under control (to prevent felt emotions from escaping) in singing lyrics which purport to tell a true story.<sup>10</sup> The listener desiring to make such an interpretation is probably not, however, one who would listen to Paul Weller in the way discussed above. Theodore Gracyk finds the concept of rock authenticity bound up with rock's association with the project of liberalism (citing in particular U2), founded as it is on the identification of a pre-existent subjectivity (Gracyk 1996, pp. 221–3). As such, he argues against Grossberg's view that authenticity has become increasingly irrelevant in the face of postmodernism, in the process equating authenticity to self-expression (Gracyk 1996, pp. 224–5).

What unites all these understandings of authenticity is their vector, the physical direction in which they lead. They all relate to an interpretation of the perceived expression of an individual on the part of an audience. Particular acts and sonic gestures (of various kinds) made by particular artists are interpreted by an engaged audience as investing authenticity in those acts and gestures – the audience becomes engaged not with the acts and gestures themselves, but directly with the originator of those acts and gestures. This results in the first pole of my perspective: *authenticity of expression*, or what I also term 'first person authenticity', arises when an originator (composer, performer) succeeds in conveying the impression that his/her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience.

The presence of this conceptualisation of authenticity is undeniable. Two problems attach themselves to it. The first is the extent to which it is itself trustworthy, or whether it is mere illusion, which I have raised in the introduction and will return to. The second is that, in tending to conceive authenticity as inherent rather than attributed, this conceptualisation tends to mask two others, equally valid, to which I now turn.

### Third person authenticity

The very naivety of such a *perception*, of taking on trust the unmediated utterance, is embedded in Fornäs' generalisation of Grossberg's typology of authenticity. Grossberg argues for three genre-specific authenticities, that of rock (founded in the romanticised ideology of the community, cf. Paul Weller above), of black genres (founded on the rhythmicised and sexual body), and that of self-conscious post-modernity (showing honesty in the acceptance of cynical self-knowledge, cf. the Pet Shop Boys above). Fornäs generalises these to produce *social authenticity*, *subjective*

*authenticity* and *meta-authenticity*, each of which has both conservative and progressive variants (Fornäs 1995, pp. 276–7). Thus, ‘social authenticity’ is ensured in an act of judgement legitimate within a particular community, while ‘subjective authenticity’ is validated by the individual. ‘Cultural or meta-authenticity’ is a more recent development, validating ‘synthetic’ texts through the evidenced meta-reflexivity of their authors (as discussed above by Redhead). The third of these is particularly marked as an authentication of the author, although this aspect is also strong in Fornäs’ first two categories. Moreover, Fornäs argues that authenticity is not directly opposed to artificiality since authenticity is, after all, necessarily a construction we place upon what we perceive (Fornäs 1995, p. 275). Such a construction is perhaps more obvious in the blues rock movement than in those cases considered above.

The blues rock movement of the 1960s was partly founded on the employment of a style (‘the blues’) which, in its origins in the racist and economically deprived Mississippi delta, was felt to embody such a harsh reality that the reality became embodied in the style itself. Thus, it became a matter of ideology that to employ the ‘blues’ within a thoroughly different social context, by venerating its originators thereby enabled the appropriation of their very authenticity. This is exemplified by the early work of Eric Clapton. Clapton’s employment of the blues began with the work of urban blues artists like B.B. King but, as he discovered that style’s ancestry, he worked back to the country blues particularly of Robert Johnson, in whom Clapton found ‘the most powerful cry that I think you can find in the human voice . . . it seemed to echo something that I had always felt’ (Clapton 1990). In performing Johnson’s ‘Crossroads’ with Cream,<sup>11</sup> not only do we interpret Clapton conveying to his audience that ‘this is what it’s like to be me’ but, doubly vicariously, that ‘this is what it was like to be Johnson’, with all the pain that implies: ‘[The blues] comes from an emotional poverty . . . I didn’t feel I had any identity, and the first time I heard blues music it was like a crying of the soul to me. I immediately identified with it’ (Clapton quoted in Coleman 1994, p. 31). For Clapton, for Peter Green, and to a lesser extent for guitarists like Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page, the search for the musical soul of blues singers like Robert Johnson was propelled by a desire to appropriate the ‘unmediated expression’ which was thought to be the preserve of the country blues style, entailing an unquestioned assumption that African Americans in the southern USA were somehow more ‘natural’ beings than white, college-educated Londoners. The observation that such an appropriation is commonly considered normative is dramatically conveyed by its treatment in Brunning (1986); a hagiographic narrative is constructed whereby a host of musicians discover this blessed ‘other’ music, and by rendering such a move unproblematic, it becomes ‘natural’ (in the Adornian sense).

The importance of retaining a point of origin is also exemplified in Paul Gilroy’s conceptualisation of the equation for black listeners of local (‘original’) expressions of culture with authenticity, and more global manifestations with cultural dilution (or lack of aesthetic value: Gilroy 1993, p. 96). This is therefore a separate manifestation of the *authenticity as primality* argument, since it is the tracing back to an original which validates the contemporary. Middleton’s conception of the construction of authenticity is useful here. He argues that this conceptualisation builds a refuge of meaning within the bourgeois romantic critique of industrial society. And yet, within this manoeuvre, there do hide real processes - he focuses on what he calls ‘continuity’ and ‘active use’ (which combine as ‘tradition’) and

which suggest that ‘from the debris of “authenticity”’ (Middleton 1990, p. 139), we may rescue the notion of ‘appropriation’. And, as he argues following Janós Maróthy, such a move is universally available; it is not tied to any particular stylistic formulations.

By appropriating, by exhibiting trust in and making available to a broader audience, the patterns of performance exemplified by black blues artists, Clapton (whose own authority was underlined by the familiar ‘Clapton is God’ graffito) authenticates them. Two points are worth making here. First, it is no great distance from this ‘appropriation’ to the actual invention of a tradition in order to authenticate contemporary practices.<sup>12</sup> David Harvey notes that this is no new endeavour:

the ideological labour of inventing tradition became of great significance in the late nineteenth century precisely because this was an era when transformations in spatial and temporal practices implied a loss of identity with place and repeated radical breaks with any sense of historical continuity. (Harvey 1990, p. 272)

Second, there is an important link to first person authenticity. According to Grossberg, the authentic rock singer requires ‘[the] ability to articulate private but common desires, feelings and experiences into a shared public language. It demands that the performer have a real relation to his or her audience’ (Grossberg 1992, p. 207) in terms of shared, or at least analogous, experiences. The music needs both to transcend that experience in some way (in order to be presented as an idealised, i.e. artistic statement, rather than through everyday conversation), but also to authenticate it by expressing it in a way particular to that singer. Grossberg argues for the construction of ‘community’ rather than ‘tradition’, but the locus is the same as that posited by Harvey: disruption of continuity through geographical and social mobility requires the fabrication of a secure ground, a conceptual (if not historical) point of origin. Taylor points to a similar problem encountered by non-Western musicians as they attempt to attract Western audiences – their music must be simultaneously timeless and new (Taylor 1997, p. 28). This argument is striking in its resemblance to Ralph Vaughan Williams’ construction of musical nationalism. Vaughan Williams was heavily implicated in Parry’s praise (above), and his views are worth discussing in a little detail.<sup>13</sup>

In his writings collected under the title *National music*, Vaughan Williams suggests that the musical life of a nation is like a pyramid:

At the apex are the great and famous; below, in rank after rank, stand the general practitioners of our art . . . the musical salt of the earth . . . Lastly we come to the great army of humble music makers, who, as Hubert Parry says, ‘make what they like and like what they make’. (Vaughan Williams 1987, p. 239)

The common people are rescued from their obsession with the burgeoning commercial music market through the activity of composers who are to return to a child-like state of musical immediacy (the folk-singer’s ‘state of grace’) before combining this with their technique. Vaughan Williams’ theories begin from two assumptions, both denying fundamental precepts of bourgeois aesthetics. Firstly, he assumes that the artist does not create from a position of total autonomy – the process of invention necessitates an audience, and is built on the work of predecessors: ‘Supreme art is not a solitary phenomenon, its great achievements are the crest of a wave; it is the crest which we delight to look on, but it is the driving force of the wave below that makes it possible’ (Vaughan Williams 1987, p. 50). Secondly, he denies the universality of a musical ‘language’: ‘It is not even true that music has an universal



vocabulary, but even if it were so it is the use of the vocabulary that counts' (Vaughan Williams 1987, p. 1). What is important to him is the 'rootedness' of a music in shared practices with an observable history:

The art of music above all the other arts is the expression of the soul of the nation, and by a nation I mean . . . any community of people who are spiritually bound together by language, environment, history and common ideals, and above all, a continuity with the past. (Vaughan Williams 1987, p. 68)

Thus his aim of uniting the social function of music (folk-song, founded in the above values) with the transcendent claims of a functionless art music, in a music both timeless and new. This duality seems to me key to the identification of what I shall term a third person authenticity. Gilroy, however, is heavily critical of this sort of view:

the syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone supplies powerful reasons for resisting the idea that an untouched, pristine Africanness resides inside these forms, working a powerful magic of alterity in order to trigger repeatedly the perception of absolute identity. (Gilroy 1993, pp. 100–1)

A second example – a very different type of strategy for tapping in to 'original' practices – can be taken, again, with reference to 'folk' genres. Many singers of the second revival (of the 1950s) developed a particular habit when playing traditional ballads of interspersing one, or two, lines of lyric with an odd number of instrumental beats, as a way of maintaining a certain traditional metrical flexibility while accommodating material to accompaniment by guitar. Thus, to take a widely known example (strictly outside this line of development, but a song learnt from revivalist singer Martin Carthy), Simon & Garfunkel's recording of 'Scarborough Fair' (1966) alternates 3+4 and 3+2 beats (where the last, strong syllable of the lyric, appears on the first of the even-numbered beats, the '4' or the '2'). There seem no intrinsic reasons why such a song needs to be performed in this way – all that can be said is that the interpolations cushion the steady monotony of the regular rhythm of the lyric.<sup>14</sup> Its force can be recognised by its appearance in John Lennon's 'Working-Class Hero' (1970), where the metre remains rigidly 3+4. In this song, Lennon appears to have wanted to convey an intensity, an utter lack of pretension, and an integrity to the experience he relates, making it clear that it is his own experience. The device, however, suggests that he is building on the harsh reality of the traditional singer, in an analogous way to Clapton's employment of the blues.

The current popularity of the 'tribute' band provides another, markedly different, example. There is no single ethos which underlies the activities of this mass of everyday musicians, but that of faithful reproduction in order to recover the reality of originary performances can be widely found. Thus, the Portsmouth-based Silver Beatles are lauded because they 'purvey a far more natural feel to their performance' – Cynthia Lennon is reported as claiming that they 'look alike, sound alike and even think alike' (Silver Beatles n.d.). The US Rolling Stones cover band Sticky Fingers draw attention to the trustworthiness of their approach, in declaring themselves 'not just a band playing covers', but a real 'tribute' to the Stones (Sticky Fingers n.d.). The leading Genesis tribute band, ReGenesis, for a February 2001 gig went as far as attempting to reconstitute the 'vintage' keyboard rig played by Genesis' Peter Banks c.1973 as a way of strengthening their ability to give people access to an experience (that of a particular live performance) otherwise denied them by Genesis' demise. They play their repertoire 'because Genesis don't play it any

more . . . some of us like to hear 'Supper's Ready' or 'Return of the Giant Hogweed' live once in a while' (ReGenesis n.d.). Note that for ReGenesis (and for their fans) it is the song which has an identity, which is the key to the experience. The parallel with one tradition of European concert practice, whereby contemporary performers attempt to re-create for contemporary ears the aural experience of earlier performances, via the re-creation of earlier instruments, is blatant.

Robert Walser (1993) insists that the most plausible identification of authenticity in heavy metal (an association which is perhaps infrequently made) is in terms of the Romantic vision of the artist as hero, an identification which is frequently overplayed, and thus, compromised, by the phenomenon of heavy metal as visual spectacle. This vision of the explorer returning with a more authentic form of expression, explored here and with reference to blues rock above, is also employed by Taylor (1997, pp. 28–30) as part of his category of the *authenticity of emotionality*, which relates to the spiritual origin of the music-making impulse (Taylor 1997, pp. 23–6). The acquisition of an authentic mode of expression from those whose possession it is gives rise to the second pole of my perspective: *authenticity of execution*, or what I also term 'third person authenticity'. This arises when a performer succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded within a tradition of performance.

### Second person authenticity

While the question of why particular (groups of) listeners give value to some musical experiences above others may depend on what music connotes or denotes, it also depends on how the musical experience is constructed around a basic distinction which may be summarised as mainstream/margin, centre/periphery, or coopted/underground. The burning question is one of belonging and, while this has been theorised in terms of subcultural theory (from Hall and Jefferson 1976 through to Thornton 1995 and beyond), a more useful source here is Green's (1988) theorisation of how music's inherent meanings affirm or aggravate us, as we feel positively or negatively towards a particular style's delinquencies, and as we are not necessarily united by more than music. The basic distinction most relevant at this point is that which originated in the mid-1960s between a popular music centre ('pop') and periphery ('rock'), concerning as it did the nature of the commercial enterprise surrounding examples of each particular style: the degree to which it could be perceived as 'authentic'. Dispassionately speaking, of course, this commercial/authentic polarity is illusory, since all mass-mediated music is subject to commercial imperatives, but what matters to listeners is whether such subjection appears to be accepted, resisted, or negotiated with, by those to whom they are listening. Robert Walser identifies this as the second of his two identifications of rock authenticity, one upheld by critics who have equated commercial mediation with ideological compromise, and who have thus decried the reliance on recording contracts with major record companies and the ensuing big distribution deals.

In Grossberg's analysis, the growth in the 1950s of new structures of technological, economic, and social practices tended to deny many (most particularly working-class, adolescent males) access to the heady, future-oriented, post-war social enterprise. This rejection engendered an alienation which was nurtured by a spirit of optimistic liberalism which in turn repressed social and cultural differ-

ences, and which was articulated by the emergence of the lascivious hips, the narcissistic gaze, and the analgesic beat of rock'n'roll. Grossberg identifies this as a key moment: the 'authenticity' which its fans found in this music was defined not by its anchorage in the past, nor by the integrity of its performers, but by its ability to articulate for its listeners a place of belonging, an ability which distinguished it from other cultural forms, particularly those which promised 'mere entertainment' (in which they invested nothing more than cash), or those belonging to hegemonic groupings (in which they could not invest). Moore (1998a) follows Allan (1986) in defining this 'place of belonging' as a 'centredness', calling attention to the experience that this cultural product offered an affirmation, a cultural identity in the face of accelerating social change, in large part because it itself had no history apparent to its participants. This 'centredness' implies an active lifting of oneself from an unstable experiential ground and depositing oneself within an experience to be trusted, an experience which centres the listener. The opposition to a post-modern characterisation of 'de-centred' experience is here intentional.

We are moving toward a third distinct authenticity here, and again two examples are pertinent. Within the synthesizer-dominated rock scene of the 1980s, focus on the guitar was taken to signify commitment to traditional rock values and, for white urban bourgeois youth, the music of musicians nominally from the Celtic periphery (U2, Big Country, Simple Minds, The Alarm, Dan Ar Braz) or socially disadvantaged areas of the USA (Bruce Springsteen) created a space within which metaphorical escape to a pre-modern communitarian ideal became possible. This was achieved through a variety of features. Dominant among these were the very employment of the guitar (physically accessible to all) together with a certain stolid simplicity (pentatonic formations and open-ended harmonic sequences – see Moore 1998b). The Celtic bands also often employed a sound-box full of sonic potential (the connotation of wide-open spaces) and at times a pre-linguistic vocality (for both, see Moore 1998a). Middleton takes his analysis (above) further, when he argues that, as listeners, we have a variety of avenues open to us in our encounters with styles, stretching from 'appropriation' at one extreme, through the milder 'acceptance', 'toleration' and 'apathy', ultimately to 'rejection'. The music we declare to be 'authentic' is the music we 'appropriate'. This recognises that the process of authentication is one of transfer, from a situation in which the 'naïve' individual, secure in her subjecthood, authenticates her actions and experience simply by undergoing them, to a situation whereby others are allotted the same vividness of experience such that their actions ground the first individual's security. And this activity is open to listening publics too. In this case, it is what I have simplistically characterised as 'white urban bourgeois youth' which undertook such an appropriation, but however they are characterised, it is not a universal appropriation but a cultural construction which is involved.

A second example comes from a more unlikely source. In her discussion of dance culture, Sarah Thornton describes the process whereby enculturation naturalises technologies. She argues that authenticity inheres in a musical form<sup>15</sup> at the point at which that form is essential to a particular subculture (Thornton 1995, p. 29). Part of her argument traces the reorientation of reception from live performances to records, this latter medium acquiring its own authenticity:

the authentication of discs for dancing was dependent on the development of new kinds of event and environment, which recast recorded entertainment as something uniquely its own, rather than a poor substitute for a 'real' musical event. (Thornton 1995, p. 51)

This process of enculturation which develops authentication over a period of generations thus has material foundations, but it is nonetheless in these that its listeners authenticate themselves. The artificiality of the medium is also no bar for Fornäs: 'A seemingly artificial text may also be an authentic expression of true life experiences in an artificial society' (Fornäs 1995, p. 275). Finally, no scholars with children can have failed to observe the crucial impact on their self-authentication of that conventionally most inauthentic music, that of unashamedly 'manufactured' pop.<sup>16</sup> Within my own daughter's peer group it is (still) currently S Club 7's 'Bring It All Back' that most clearly performs this function and, perhaps importantly, it is in imitation of bodily gestures as much as in imitation of vocal mannerisms that this group seems to discover itself. So, here we have what I identify as 'second person' authenticity, or *authenticity of experience*, which occurs when a performance succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that that listener's experience of life is being validated, that the music is 'telling it like it is' for them.

### Conclusion

In practice, these three authenticities overlap, but maintaining their virtual separation makes for a more incisive analysis of any particular case. Within the British folk community, Dick Gaughan's authenticity goes entirely unchallenged. On the album *Sail on*, in the song 'No Cause for Alarm', the rock instrumentation, strong presence of a mixolydian VII, Gaughan's self-expressive electric guitar breaks and the palpable anger in his voice at the words 'They're trying to say our time is past – Hell, it hasn't even started' illustrate his widely known radical socialism in enabling a first person authentication. The album's following song, Hamish Henderson & James Robertson's 'The 51st (Highland) Division's Farewell to Sicily' employs a manner of (solo) acoustic guitar figuration which, when combined with the song's excessive length (nearly twelve minutes) and slowness, indubitably recalls the tradition of the piobaireachd, enabling a third person authentication. The next song, 'No Gods and Precious Few Heroes' combines a (third person) use of acoustic guitar and a (first person) rhythmic freedom in vocal delivery with a 'realistic' characterisation of contemporary Scotland which, for an English Celtophile audience enables a second person authentication. The strength of this procedure taken across this range of material is such that Gaughan can include on the same album a cover of Jagger & Richard's overt fantasy 'Ruby Tuesday', read (I think) through Melanie Safka's highly fey interpretation, without compromising his authenticity.

So, in acknowledging that authenticity is ascribed to, rather than inscribed in, a performance, it is beneficial to ask who, rather than what, is being authenticated by that performance. Three types of response are possible, according to whether it is the performer herself, the performer's audience, or an (absent) other who is being authenticated. Siting authenticity within the ascription carries the corollary that every music, and every example, can conceivably be found authentic by a particular group of perceivers and that it is the *success* with which a particular performance conveys its impression that counts, a success which depends in some part on the explicitly musical decisions performers make. Whether such perceivers are necessarily fooled by doing so is, perhaps, beside the point since we may learn as much from creative misunderstanding as from understanding. Although I believe it outside the scope of what I have attempted here to theorise either the rehabilitation of an 'authentic subject' or processes of the construction of subjectivity, it seems to me

that the evidence arrayed above far more easily supports the latter position. Academic consideration of authenticity should thus, I believe, shift from consideration of the intention of various originators towards the activities of various perceivers, and should focus on the reasons they might have for finding, or failing to find, a particular performance authentic.

## Endnotes

1. In various forms, this article has been presented at a Critical Musicology forum (University of Surrey, 2000), at a Comparative Music Praxes conference (University of Middlesex, 2000), and to various of my own students. My thanks also to my colleagues Andy Bennett and Dan Grimley for their comments and neat turns of phrase.
2. Moore 1998a. Some of the discussion of theories of authenticity on which I expand here appeared in that article.
3. Some of the circumstances under which this is the case are explored, from a musicological standpoint, in Kennett (forthcoming).
4. I write this (May 2001) in the midst of much media-related dismay at the high level of a(anti)pathy currently shown toward UK consensual politics in the run-up to a General Election.
5. Although gendered discourse is unavoidable here, and I prefer the feminine for reasons of balance, in this genre it happens also to be more accurate.
6. Gilbert and Pearson (1999, p. 134) go even further in claiming that *any* evidence of 'noise', as opposed to a 'cleaned up' production, is evidence of the authentic. They ally this to the lack of 'training' such a positioned voice has (p. 68).
7. Some substantive support for this position can be gleaned from the work of Paul Newham and Melanie Harrold (see Jungr forthcoming). There is clearly a cross-cultural element involved here: flamenco *cante jondo* singers, for example, appear to employ the same technique to the same end. See Woodall (1992, p. 95ff.)
8. My thanks to Robynn Stilwell for pointing this out.
9. In Cocker's performance at Woodstock, the physical rigidity of the front of his neck as his head is thrown back in order to eject his apparent pain is manifest. Weller holds his body in a very similar way in singing this song, as evident in his performance broadcast live on BBC2, 23 February 1996.
10. As Craig Kaczorowski argues in *Tension* magazine, they 'are dedicated to crafting the perfect pop bauble . . . [yet they] rarely lose sight of the fact that pop music today is supposed to be danceable yet desolate' (Kaczorowski 1998).
11. Headlam (1997) explores some of the musical differences between these performances.
12. The classic exposition of this is, perhaps, Trevor-Roper (1984).
13. My gratitude to Charlie Ford for once suggesting this line of interpretation.
14. My own favourite example of this feature is Ossian's 'I will set my ship in order'.
15. Rather than in instances of that form.
16. As Roe (1996, p. 94) points out, the almost total lack of research in this area is unsustainable.

## References

- Allan, G. 1986. *The Importances of the Past* (New York)
- Bohlman, P.V. 1988. *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington)
- Born, G., and Hesmondhalgh, D. (eds.) 2000. *Western Music and its Others* (Berkeley)
- Bowman, R. 1997. *Soulsville U.S.A.: the Story of Stax Records* (New York)
- Boyes, G. 1993. *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester)
- Bruning, B. 1986. *Blues: the British Connection* (Poole)
- Clapton, E. 1990. Liner notes to Robert Johnson's complete recordings, CBS
- Coleman, R. 1994. *Clapton: the Authorized Biography* (London)
- Coyle, M., and Dolan, J. n.d. 'Modeling authenticity, authenticating commercial models', in *Reading Rock and Roll*, ed. K. Dettmar and W. Richey (New York), pp. 17–35
- Dutertre, J.-F. 1996. 'Traditional music/topical music?', in *Music in Europe* (European Commission: European Music Office), pp. 145–9
- Fornäs, J. 1995. *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity* (London)

- Fox, A.A. 1992. 'The jukebox of history: narratives of loss and desire in the discourse of country music', *Popular Music*, 11/1, pp. 53–72
- Frith, S. 1989. 'Towards an aesthetic of popular music', in *Music and Society*, ed. R. Leppert and S. McClary (Cambridge)
- Garofalo, R. 1987. 'How autonomous is relative: popular music, the social formation and cultural struggle', *Popular Music*, 6/1
- Gilbert, J., and Pearson, E. 1999. *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture, and the Politics of Sound* (London)
- Gilroy, P. 1993. *The Black Atlantic* (London)
- Gracyk, T. 1996. *Rhythm and Noise* (London)
- Green, L. 1988. *Music on Deaf Ears* (Manchester)
- Grossberg, L. 1992. *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* (London)
- Hall, S., and Jefferson, T. 1976. *Resistance Through Rituals* (London)
- Harker, D. 1985. *Fakesong* (Buckingham)
- Harvey, D. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford)
- Headlam, D. 1997. 'Blues transformations in the music of Cream', in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, ed. Covach and Boone (New York), pp. 59–92
- Johnson, B. 1997. 'In the jumble, the genre jumble: the prison house of popular music discourse', unpublished paper delivered to Nordic popular music researchers, Magleås, Denmark, April
- Jungr, B. forthcoming. 'Vocal expression in the blues and gospel', in *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music*, ed. A.F. Moore (Cambridge)
- Kaczorowski, C. 1998. 'Post-Disco: the Pet Shop Boys', <http://www.vsd.cape.com/~mesh5/tension/current/pet-shop1098.html>
- Keil, C., and Feld, S. 1994. *Music Grooves* (Chicago)
- Kennett, C. forthcoming. 'Is anybody listening?', in *Analysing Popular Music*, ed. A.F. Moore (Cambridge)
- Kenyon, N. (ed.) 1988. *Authenticity and Early Music: a Symposium* (Oxford)
- Laing, D. 1985. *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock* (Buckingham)
- Leach, E.E. 2001. 'Vicars of "Wannabe": authenticity and the Spice Girls', *Popular Music*, 20/2, pp. 143–67
- Middleton, R. 1990. *Studying Popular Music* (Buckingham)
- Moore, A.F. 2001a. *Rock: the Primary Text* (Aldershot)
- 1998a. 'U2 and the myth of authenticity in rock', *Popular Musicology*, 3, pp. 5–33
- 1998b. 'In a big country: the portrayal of wide open spaces in the music of Big Country', in *Musica Significans: Proc. of the 3rd Int. Congr. on Musical Signification*, ed. R. Monelle (Harwood Academic), pp. 1–6
- 2001b. 'Conventions in music-discourse: style and genre', *Music and Letters*, 82/3, pp. 432–42
- Negus, K. 1992. *Producing Pop* (London)
- Pickering, M. 1986. 'The dogma of authenticity in the experience of popular music', in *The Art of Listening*, ed. McGregor and White (Beckenham), pp. 201–20
- Redhead, S. 1990. *The End-of-the-Century Party* (Manchester)
- Redhead, S., and Street, J. 1989. 'Have I the right? Legitimacy, authenticity and community in folk's politics', *Popular Music*, 8/2
- ReGenesis. n.d. [www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~andyrh/index2.html](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~andyrh/index2.html)
- Roe, K. 1996. 'Music and identity among European youth', in *Music in Europe* (European Commission: European Music Office), pp. 85–97
- Rubidge, S. 1996. 'Does authenticity matter? The case for and against authenticity in the performing arts', in *Analysing Performance*, ed. P. Campbell (Manchester), pp. 219–33
- Shuker, R. 1994. *Understanding Popular Music* (London)
- Shuker, R. 1998. 'Authenticity', in *Key Concepts in Popular Music* (London), pp. 20–1
- Silver Beatles. n.d. [www.silverbeatles.co.uk/main.htm](http://www.silverbeatles.co.uk/main.htm)
- Sticky Fingers. n.d. [www.StickyFingersBand.com/about.htm](http://www.StickyFingersBand.com/about.htm)
- Taylor, T. 1997. *Global Pop: World Musics, World Markets* (New York)
- Thornton, S. 1995. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge)
- Trevor-Roper, H. 1984. 'The invention of tradition: the Highland tradition of Scotland', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Hobsbawm and Ranger (Cambridge)
- Vaughan Williams, R. 1987. *National Music and Other Essays* (Oxford, originally published between 1934 and 1955)
- Walser, R. 1993. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH)
- Woodall, J. 1992. *In Search of the Firedance* (London)

## Discography

- Cream, 'White Room'. Polydor. 1969  
Dick Gaughan, 'The 51st (Highland) Division's Farewell to Sicily', 'No Cause for Alarm', 'No Gods and Precious Few Heroes', 'Ruby Tuesday', *Sail on*. Greentrax. 1996  
John Lennon, 'Working Class Hero', *John Lennon: Plastic Ono Band*. Apple. 1970  
Melanie, 'Ruby Tuesday', *Candles in the Rain*. Buddah. 1970  
Ossian, 'I Will Set My Ship In Order', *Best of Ossian*. Iona. 1994  
Pet Shop Boys, 'So hard', *Discography*. Parlophone. 1991  
S Club 7, 'Bring It All Back', *S Club*. Polydor. 1999  
Simon & Garfunkel, 'Scarborough Fair', *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme*. C.B.S. 1966  
Paul Weller, 'Changingman', *Stanley Road*. Go! Discs. 1995