An Approach to Medieval Music and the Study of Present-day Pop and Rock Festivals
The 'Bangor project' as a Source of Inspiration

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1. Introduction

In my PHD-research I tried to discover whether people attending secular pop or rock festivals could have experiences that might be called 'religious'.[1] Several authors had already studied relationships between popular music and new religious expressions or experiences, phenomena they thought were related to the decline of institutionalized religion in our society. Starting from this idea, they sometimes also paid attention to festivals, extrapolating results from analyses of aspects of the music (such as lyrics) or interpreting observations they had made at festivals, taking them at face value, rather than studying festivals from the inside. This was one of the reasons why I decided to focus on methodological aspects and concluded that I needed to carry out fieldwork. I was very interested to hear of John Harper's enactment project, a many-sided strategy to explore the experience of medieval worship. Although my research concerned people in the present and notwithstanding several differences between Harper's project and the one I had in mind, closer inspection revealed that the enactment approach showed a number of interesting parallels and proved to be very stimulating. It offers important clues for current sociological or anthropological research into the relationships between modern popular and rock music and religious experience.

To explore what people really experience during pop and rock festivals observation does not suffice, according to current sociological or anthropological handbooks on research methods, in-depth interviews are required.[2] However, in actual practice during the festivals it turned out to be impossible to interview people at any length. The conditions simply did not allow it. The overwhelming noise, the general behavioral dynamics, the state of mind of the participants, these all stood in the way of any extensive discussions. This essential part of the research therefore had to be realized after the festivals, after the actual experiences. This separation in time between people's actual experiences and the opportunity to discuss these posed fundamental problems. How was I to bridge the gap between 'the field' and 'after the field'? Initially I tried to overcome this problem by using a standard technique known as the photo-elicitation method:

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[1] H. KOMMERS: *Hidden in music. An approach to religious experience and pop or rock festivals* (PHD-dissertation Tilburg University 2013).

[2] In this article I propose to go beyond those standard methods (see section 3).

on the basis of their being shown a specific selection of pictures, respondents are expected to reconstruct their experiences, and as far as possible to re-live these. However, this procedure turned out not to be very successful. It was thanks to the informants' own creative contribution – to be discussed below – that the conversations about their experiences turned into an 'extension of the field'.

It is at this point that an interesting parallel emerged with John Harper's enactment approach as it was developed in a research project of the University of Bangor in Wales. The procedure followed in this project comprises the enactment of medieval musical performances by modern actors to restore various aspects of those performances in an attempt to explore the way people once experienced worship. A striking element of correspondence with my research lays in the time-gap – in his case the gap between the time of the actual medieval performance and to-day's re-enactment of it. This gap not only concerns different (historical) moments, but also implies an attempt to bring together two different social or cultural spheres resulting in fundamental problems of interpretation. In this article, I will focus on the relevance of Harper's procedure for the kind of research I did and on certain questions arising from the approach.

However, this article is not confined to a strictly methodical treatise. Harper's research concerns a world which at first sight differs completely from the one I studied and one may wonder whether it is justified at all to compare his procedure – to have religious performances that took place so many centuries ago enacted by modern people – with my strategy to simply elicit experiences from a recent past. Another important difference between his research and mine is that the people that I asked to 'relive' their experiences were not 'substitutes' like those participating in the enactments organized by Harper. Also, my research was aimed at secular rather than religious performances.

In the next few sections, I will discuss several aspects of the research procedures I followed, connecting these with the enactment-approach as presented on the website of the University of Bangor, School of Music, under the heading 'The Experience of Worship'.[3]

First, I will go into the use of religious symbols (not infrequently stemming from the Middle Ages) in rock and metal performances. With current interpretations being based predominantly on observing events 'from the outside', I will explain here how Harper's enactment strategy can offer a valuable contribution to approaches 'from the inside'. The vast majority of studies about pop or rock music and religion focus on socio-cultural aspects rather than on musicological ones. Partly, this is related to the research methods commonly in use, which are inadequate for studying musical developments. What happens to the musical experience when secular musical performances become part of religious experiences? The 'Bangor project', which included detailed historical-musicological

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[3] www.bangor.ac.uk/music/AHRC/

research, offers strategies relevant for the study of this topic, as well as for the study of music as a multi-sensory phenomenon. In the third section, I focus on a problem I shared with the 'Bangor project': the time-gap between the actual (historical) events and re-enacted performances. *A posteriori* reconstructions also imply specific problems concerning the relationship between researchers and participants in the enactment. I will discuss the contribution Harper's approach may offer to strategies to elicit or re-live experiences people once had. In the 'Bangor project', the character of the specific sites on which the enactments were organized received special attention. In section four, I will consider the relevance of a site-centered approach to supplement current behavioral studies about pop or rock music and religion. Finally, inspired by Harper's experiences with the use of modern media, I will reflect on effects these modern media may have on the way one approaches a subject.

2. Rock and (medieval) religion

To explore the possible religious potential of music festivals I studied a series of secular festivals. We know from people taking part in so-called reli-festivals that those who are already religiously inspired can have more intense religious experiences during these festivals. The situation is comparable with musical performances in churches.[4] However, the research proposal from which I started focused on secularization and the waning influence of religious institutions and I therefore had to confine myself to secular events. One of the initial questions was whether these events can fulfill functions formerly performed within the churches now closing down so massively? What emerged from my studies was that if one analyses a series of characteristics of religion (in an anthropological sense[5]) and subsequently looks for the occurrence of these characteristics at music festivals, it is rock or metal festivals in particular that show several major features typical of religion.[6] These festivals are named after certain musical genres which originally were distinguished sharply (also by performers) from commercial popular music. Today this distinction is far less sharp but for the general public these musical genres are still rather difficult to access. They require (a certain) familiarity with a specific lifestyle, with specific sub-cultures. Unlike the pop (= popular) music played at regular pop festivals, which are organized on a much larger scale and attended by a wide variety of performers as well as spectators, the music played at hard rock or metal festivals is difficult to recognize as music by outsiders and the symbolism used by participants is often shocking to those who are not familiar with the scene. The crowd at rock

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[4] See M. KLOMP: *The sound of worship. Liturgical performance by Surinamese Lutherans and Ghanaian Methodists in Amsterdam* (Leuven / Paris / Walpole, MA 2011).

[5] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 44-45.

[6] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 166.

or metal festivals reminds one of religious sects. In comparison to crowds at regular pop festivals, they appear to experience performances far more consciously (attentively), far more intensely. They somehow show a higher level of identification, which may well be required to fully appreciate the music. The symbolism used at rock festivals tends to be much less neutral, less innocent one might say than symbolic expressions at regular pop festivals. The rock and metal crowds generally have severe outside prejudice to contend with, which at the same time strengthens their in-group feeling. They usually emphatically display their identity towards outsiders – like representatives of religious denominations sometimes do –, for instance by decorating their bodies in specific ways, or by wearing peculiar clothing. The way they participate in the event also is different from the way other festival goers participate in 'regular' pop festivals. At rock and metal festivals, social or cultural criticism often take up a central place, while pop festivals are aimed predominantly at offering entertainment. At pop festivals, the different types of audiences and music are usually located in various zones, dividing the festival site into separate areas; at rock or metal festivals the greater uniformity both musically and physically results in a strong community spirit.

As I said before, one of the similarities between John Harper's medieval ritual and present-day rock and metal festivals concerns the use of religious symbolism. In contrast to the more neutral pop festivals, participants at rock or metal festivals often make use of religious symbolism, in particular symbols referring to a distant past. At the festivals I attended, the confrontation with medieval symbols and religious expressions was at times intense. Particularly at metal festivals, the resemblances with satanic communities were striking. What comes to mind in this respect are the so-called hell fire clubs as described by Evelyn Lord.[7] At rock and metal festivals, the performers as well made ample use of Christian and what we might call 'pagan' symbols, frequently referring to medieval situations. Rather than being based on any kind of serious historical study of the Middle Ages, it simply concerns images and constructions generally known and felt to belong to that period (who is to say that modern listeners to medieval music might not equally be inspired by images rather than by the fruits of historical scrutiny).

These constructed symbols are meant to evoke a mysterious or sinister atmosphere. While the aim of the grotesque fantasies is often quite simply having fun (*plaisir*),[8] they nowadays often also express or include social criticism. Both aspects become evident in the conscious de-sacralization of Christian symbols, or in the inversion of religious morals. Promiscuous monks are easily connected with images of a debauched medieval Church. The images appear to be very flexible and their use situational. Thus, the sexual abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church did not escape the participants' attention and featured promi-

[7] E. LORD: *Hell fire clubs. Sex, satanism and secret societies* (New Haven / London 2008).
[8] J. STOREY: *Cultural studies and the study of popular culture* (Edinburgh 2008²) 124.

nently at recent festivals. To outsiders, this flexibility creates the impression of their not being very serious, gives them the appearance of insincerity, of opportunism.

One may wonder where this preference for religious symbols comes from and why there is a special interest in a distant past. The preference for religious symbols has often been explained by pointing at a connection between pop music and religion.[9] In considering the question about the interest in the past, researchers point at creative freedom: images of a distant past allow for almost unbounded manipulation. The particular preference for the Middle Ages can be connected with a popular symbol central to rock or metal festivals: Satan.

There is abundant literature connecting pop and rock music with religion, mostly, however, without approaching the subject from a musicological point of view. As indicated before, the religious dimension is seen first of all from the perspective of a substitute for the institutional religions, which are generally felt to be losing ground in our society. However, interpretations are extremely diverse. Some authors speak of surrogate religions that only result in alienation.[10] Others stress similarities with institutional churches. They focus on doctrine or on communal or organizational traits, or point at aspects like the production of meaning or identity.

With regard to the use of specific Christian symbols in pop or rock performances, opinions also differ widely: several authors refer to it simply as a fashion, once started by a particular band. Others see a connection with the psychedelic of the nineteen sixties and seventies. According to one author, this resulted in an iconographic tradition that ended up in kitsch.[11] Another student sees a direct link with the Christian culture in which secular society is firmly rooted.[12] Yet another researcher refers to self-religion, as found in New Age spirituality's. Paul Heelas, for example, points at this aspect to understand the satanic expressions frequently occurring in rock and metal.[13] Originally, Satanism was most prominent in Norwegian black metal-music. Later on Satanism proved easy to mix with other Christian symbols and with ideas about medieval religion.

As was said above, the adoption of religious (medieval as well as pagan) symbols is characterized by flexibility and situational use. In particular rock per-

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[9] See, for instance, R. SYLVAN: *Traces of the spirit. The religious dimensions of popular music* (New York / London 2002).

[10] J.J. ARNETT: *Metalheads. Heavy metal music and adolescent alienation* (Oxford 1995) is a prominent example. For a more detailed discussion of this and other interpretations, see KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 28-31, 48-52.

[11] W. STRAW: 'Characterizing rock music culture. The case of heavy metal', in S. DURING (ed.): *The cultural studies reader* (London / New York 2001²) 450-461.

[12] C. ROJEK: 'Celebrity and religion', in P. DAVID MARSHALL (ed.): *The celebrity cultural reader* (London / New York 2006) 389-417.

[13] P. Heelas as cited in A. DYRENDAL: 'Darkness within. Satanism as a self-religion', in J.A. PETERSEN: *Contemporary religious Satanism. A critical anthology* (Farnham 2009) 59-74.

formers show an almost boundless creativity in mixing images and related symbols. They also appear to mix motives most easily. Idealistic motives alternate with very pragmatic ones.

That is perhaps why researchers differ greatly in their appraisal of the authenticity of the phenomenon or with respect to the question whether or not one can speak of belief. During my research I noticed an interesting tendency. Authors who are unfavorably disposed towards rock music tend to interpret the use of Christian symbols as blasphemous, presuming that people do not believe in them,[14] while they consider the use of so-called heathen symbols as authentic, suggesting that people really believe in those superstitious images. On the other hand, authors who are favorably disposed to the idea of there being a religious meaning to pop and rock music tend to stress aspects that resemble characteristics of religion. They usually regard these as sincere indications of religion.[15] In the course of my research, I became intrigued by the close connection that appears to exist between the researcher's worldview and their interpretation of the worldviews of the people they studied. This has to do with engagement. In contrast to those studying a distant period like the Middle Ages, students of recent religious phenomena easily feel personally involved. Therefore, interpretational difficulties may differ from the ones emerging in Harper's research.

Should we interpret the references to religious symbols (ranging from Jesus to Satan) as being authentic? Should we regard them as being part of a worldview or a philosophy of life? Or are they simply part of a pose?

To illustrate the complexity of the subject of Satanism and Christian symbols, I refer to a study edited by Jesper Aagaard Petersen.[16] It illustrates the intricate history of a phenomenon like Satanism and its relations with the Christian worldview. These relations turn out to be quite variable, depending on the circumstances. A present-day example that illustrates this is the following. Apart from pop and rock festivals I also visited what is known as Castlefest, a festival with spiritual elements. During this festival people not only dress like creatures from the Middle Ages, but also try to behave like them; they consciously revive old superstitious ceremonies and sometimes even explicitly claim to believe in them. Needless to say that in this case as well the medieval expressions were predominantly based on images. I participated in this festival after a pressing suggestion from informants at a rock festival with whom I discussed the topic of religion. They told me that, if I wanted to experience religion during a festi-

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[14] J. ARANZA: *Backward masking unmasked. Backward satanic messages of rock and roll exposed* (Shreveport, LA 1983).

[15] M. JENNINGS: 'Collective effervescence, numinous experiences or proto-religious phenomena? Moshing with Durkheim, Schleiermacher and Otto', in E. DE LA FUENTE & P. MURPHY (eds.): *Philosophical and cultural theories of music* (Leiden 2010) 114-141; R. SYLVAN: *Trance formation. The spiritual and religious dimensions of global rave culture* (New York / London 2005).

[16] J.A. PETERSEN: *Contemporary religious Satanism. A critical anthology* (Farnham 2009).

val, this was a happening that I should attend. Although the rock festival where I met these informants was teeming with religious symbols, they said that they did not believe in them; instead, they stressed the social-critical dimension. This was quite different from the way they perceived the use of religious symbolism during Castlefest. Here their attitude appeared to be quite different and like many attendants they took the religious expressions seriously. The socio-critical attitude to religion seemed to have vanished completely. They participated freely in scenes with religious or spiritual overtones. How are we to see this? Was their criticism opportunistic or authentic? And – again – why the religious symbols?

In my interpretation I follow Stringer, who stresses the situational dimension of religious expressions.[17] According to Stringer, religious expressions are usually inconsistent or even contradictory, depending on the situation. In the case of the two festivals just mentioned, one notices intense (at times even existential) experiences alternating with fun and pragmatic motives. The reference to symbols related to a distant past or to non-empirical entities enhances the flexibility of their use, ranging from expressing sincere criticism to opportunistic ways of attracting attention. But religious expressions were also used for fun, as well as to express a sincere belief in spiritual phenomena. The use of religious symbols appeared to be contextually determined.

Religious symbols allow people to express intimate feelings and experiences which may very well differ from values as propagated by institutionalized Christianity. According to Stringer, the decline of dominant religious discourses resulted in the surfacing of the 'demotic discourse': the ordinary every-day beliefs of common people. Secularization has offered these commonplace, pragmatic and disordered religious expressions – formerly considered as superstitious or even improper – the opportunity to be displayed openly and frankly and – according to Lynch – to act as 'coping instruments' to react to everyday situations.[18] The frequent use of religious symbols in rock or metal festivals with their peculiar social characteristics fits this theory quite nicely.[19]

This discussion illustrates how problematic the interpretation of religious experiences can be and emphasizes the importance and significance of an approach from the inside. Harper's enactment offers an apt procedure to realize this ideal: to come as closely as possible to the original performance and its various qualities, including the authentic experience. But of course, because of the time-gap, the strategy also poses problems. Before discussing this matter more extensively, it may be interesting to say something more about the subject that my research and Harper's enactment have in common: music.

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[17] M.D. STRINGER: *Contemporary western ethnography and the definition of religion* (London 2008).

[18] STRINGER: *Contemporary western ethnography* 2, 3, 110; G. LYNCH: *Understanding theology and popular culture* (Malden, MA 2005).

[19] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 165-168.

3. Reconstructing musical experience

Most studies about religion and pop or rock music (including mine[20]) focus on socio-cultural aspects, rather than on musicological ones. This constitutes an important difference with Harper's research, which focuses on musical performance. Particular kinds of music imply specific forms of expression inherent within that music. In my research, I tried to stimulate people to re-live their experiences by way of post-field interviews. However, conventional interviews are mere exchanges of words and do not feature the relevant music, which implies that one runs the risk of reducing musical events to social ones.[21] The enactment strategy may therefore offer a necessary supplement to interviewing, in particular when the research concerns religious music with its special characteristics.[22]

An announcement of the conference on Harper's enactment included the remark that religious music is no longer the exclusive property of religious communities. At the same time, studies about popular music and religion indicate that – to paraphrase the remark in the announcement – secular music is no longer the exclusive property of secular communities. Of course I am not claiming that secular pop or rock will end up becoming religious music. I am merely suggesting that secular music can help to generate religious experiences. Or, to phrase it in terms of Stringer's theory: secular music can help to bring to the surface religion that until recently has been suppressed by dominant institutional religion.[23]

Now, what seems interesting to me is the question: if secular music does indeed come to be connected with religion, will this affect the (experience of the) music? Although people attending rock or metal festivals mostly denied there being any relation for them between the music and religion, they did appear to experience various aspects usually related to religion. I am thinking of certain specific kinds of social coherence; of the context of the musical performance being 'set apart', distinguishing it from 'daily life';[24] of expressing identity, and so on.

In my (anthropologically-oriented) research I was not able to assess developments in musical experience related to secular musical performances when these become part of religious experiences. If those researchers who assume that popular musical performances may offer a substitute for disappearing insti-

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[20] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 170.

[21] See KLOMP: *The sound of worship* 40-42.

[22] See M. HOONDERT, A. DE HEER & J.D. VAN LAAR (red.): *Elke muziek heeft haar hemel. De religieuze betekenis van muziek* (Budel 2009).

[23] STRINGER: *Contemporary western ethnography* 110.

[24] The festival sites may be characterized as 'sacred sites' having much in common with those religious sites as described by STRINGER: *Contemporary western ethnography* 56ff.

tutional religions are correct,[25] how are we then to explore possible musical transformations related to this development?

As was noted before, almost all studies on the religious potential of pop music focus on phenomena other than the music itself. They concentrate on socio-cultural, liturgical or theological issues; but rarely (or very occasionally) on long-term historical developments.[26] They therefore do not offer much insight into related developments in the music. It is here that the proposed study of medieval religious music through modern enactment can offer fruitful insights. The enactment approach offers us an opportunity to compare medieval music as performed in more conventional ways by an orchestra – lacking certain essential qualities of the original performances – with reconstructions of the music as 'acted'.[27] How do modern enactments affect the music and the musical experience? Close inspection of the effects of such enactments on the music may perhaps offer clues that are relevant to my question whether the performance of secular music executed in a religious milieu can have consequences for the music itself. The analysis of medieval musical re-enactment may also offer procedures for long-term historical research, which is only too scarce in the study of popular music.[28] If such an idea appears to be sound, it might offer a stimulus for paying more attention to the music itself, as well as offer suitable research procedures. But, how to (re-)enact festivals?

4. The interview as re-enactment

As said, in my research there was a time gap between the actual experience of the performances and the interviews. It was impossible to organize extended interviews during the festivals. People were too busy, the music was too dominant; people were tired or (a bit) drunk. During the festivals I only managed to have superficial conversations. As my aim was to discover how people experienced the performances, how was I to realize this goal if I had to postpone interviews till after the field work period? In order to revive people's experiences, I thought of using the classic photo-elicitation method, referred to above. But instead of responding to the pictures presented, people reacted by reaching for their laptops, their iPads, or mobile phones to show me their selections of the performances, the pictures or movies they had shot themselves, embedded in contexts they had chosen themselves. They thus made use of their own media instead of concentrating on the researcher's selection of pictures. This is an

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[25] See L. VAN DER TUIN: *God droeg zondagavond een blauwe trui* (Tilburg 2008).

[26] See for example G. BAYER (ed.): *Heavy metal music in Britain* (Farnham 2009).

[27] W. WOODS: *England in the age of Chaucer* (London 1976) 89.

[28] SYLVAN: *Traces of the spirit* and J. ARDUI: *Rockin' in the free world. God, rock en de roep om bevrijding* (PHD Thesis Leuven 2006) focus on long-term social, cultural or religious developments rather than on the music itself.

important aspect, because these media implied very specific generic conventions requiring appropriate ways of interpretation.[29] There is much more involved than just the researcher's selection of pictures being replaced by YouTube movies for instance. Because of these particular generic qualities the newly introduced media better fitted the 'story' the informants wanted to tell. Rather than my pictures, it was the narrative peculiarities of the informants' 'tales' that proved to be suitable to express their experiences.[30] Thus, instead of following the interviewer, the respondents took over the initiative. One can even say that they introduced new elicitation techniques, not only to 'revive' their experiences, but to really *re-enact* their participation in the festivals. Thus the interviews rather than being restricted to mere conversations turned into real happenings characterized by exclamations and gestures to underscore how people re-lived, re-experienced particular moments, stressing their recognition of special relations during the festival, etc.

The way in which respondents behaved while selecting the movies was such that one can speak of an 'extension of the field'. Their gestures and their enthusiastic exclamations almost turned the interview event into an extension of *their* festival. It became more than just an event staged to recall experiences. It turned out that the modern social media made it possible to re-enact at least part of the festival, thereby making the interview an extension of the festival, resulting in continuity rather than carrying the marks of a gap. What emerged was continuity between the festival as they had personally experienced it, and the way they re-lived this experience.

However, this development also had its down side. By adapting to the approach introduced by the informants, the researcher ran the risk of losing grip on the content of the interviews. My analytical observations during fieldwork originally were intended to structure the interviews, to guide the selection of topics under discussion. But, because the informants took over the initiative, using their media to recall the festivals rather than mine, they also came to determine in large part what was to be discussed. Thus a new gap arose: that between the researcher's strategy and the respondents' presentations.

This brings me to some observations on performances of Harper's enactment procedure, as recorded by professionals in the field of certain modern media. The media they used were completely foreign to the original context and were characterized by genre conventions probably unknown to the (modern) performers involved in the event. For one thing, it resulted in the events being recorded in very specific ways. Harper points to the selective effects involved in audio-visual recordings because of the choices made by the film director and the camera-operators.[31] In my interviews, informants used their own social

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[29] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 101-102.

[30] J. VAN MAANEN: *Tales of the field. On writing ethnography* (Chicago / London 1988).

[31] J. HARPER: *Investigating medieval ritual through liturgical enactment* (conference paper 13 November 2012).

media or YouTube movies to re-enact their experience of the performance. Thus, their presentations were also selective, but the difference was that here the choices involved were made by the participants themselves. So, although Harper's enactment strategy cannot be considered an extension of the field (there continues to be a gap between it and the medieval context), the interviews as taken over by my informants can be considered as such. On the other hand, notwithstanding the difference between Harper's enactment and the interviews as enactments or as extensions of the field, the methodical specification of various dimensions of Harper's enactment approach offers important clues for joining researcher and respondent.

As I indicated before, my original aim was to start from impressions gained from the analytical fieldwork to try to work out certain topics that arose during the fieldwork.[32] Thus, for instance, I wanted to explore whether the festival site as 'set apart' from everyday life could shed further light on the experience of a 'sacred space'.[33] According to Stringer, referring to Durkheim's classical definition of the 'sacred', the sacred space can be defined as being in opposition to normal, daily life. This is precisely what I noticed during the festivals: claims made by organizers as well as by the visitors about the special character of the festival site, set apart from daily life through the use of fences that also acted as symbolic borders. However, as I had to leave my initial plan to conduct semi-structured interviews starting from the a priori selected pictures (a selection based on my analytical insights), and to turn to open conversations,[34] I lost control to a certain extent. Instead of – in this instance – exploring further the symbolic meanings of the festival borders, I found myself listening to people stressing continuities between the festivals and their daily lives. This, notwithstanding the many indications for discontinuities I noticed in the field (see the next section). During my research, I mainly saw the advantages of letting the respondents take the initiative. Harper's detailed description of the enactment procedure opened my eyes to the other sides of my approach. It offers useful suggestions for joining the participants' narratives and (re)presentational strategies with the researcher's analytical impressions. For, although the performers in Harper's enactments are 'substitutes' (modern people), the way they perform rituals firmly rests on historical insights into medieval performances and their conventions. Indeed: it is *they* who act and *they* who experience, but within the framework offered by the researcher and following his instructions.

On the website of The School of Music, Bangor, the project is described as follows: [35]

> The project explores what the experience of late medieval worship was like for all who participated in it, and how we can connect our present experience of surviving

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[32] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 130.

[33] STRINGER: *Contemporary western ethnography* 61-62.

[34] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 130.

[35] www.bangor.ac.uk/music/AHRC

medieval cathedrals and churches with the texts, artefacts and music that were once used with them.

The specification of the key feature of the project offers a series of indications of how 'to recreate the full sensory experience of medieval experience (including smell, sound and touch)', e.g. through a detailed briefing of the participants and observers, by involving able musical performers, or by selecting adequate sites at which enactments took place. 'Selected participants at each ritual were asked to focus on specific aspects of the experience, and to record and analyze their reactions with the assistance of the project team and a specially appointed facilitator/psychologist.' To make it easier to recall/relive the experience, ritual objects used in the enactment were introduced during the performance. Although in a small-scale project like mine, carried out by only one researcher, several of the supporting means characterizing the large-scale Bangor project will necessarily be lacking, I think the enactment approach contains various clues to restore the researcher's input without disturbing the active role of respondents as described above. For instance, after conversations like the ones I had, follow-up interviews could be organized in which the respondents are asked to focus on specific aspects of the experience and in which they are confronted with their original responses to enable them to reflect on these, thus combining the researcher's analytical insights with those of the respondents. Or, as in the enactment-project, ritual objects could be introduced during the interview, for instance to bring about a multi-sensory experience. As Mirella Klomp argues, to study 'sound' requires a multi-sensory approach.[36] Such an approach is difficult to realize in conversations alone, without a proper context. The introduction of specific artefacts or the organization of follow-up interviews at suitable sites (like the specific sites – in that case particular church buildings – as indicated in the description of the Bangor enactments) can be helpful.

5. Performance and site

Considering the 'interview-event' as an extension of the field (in this case the 'festival-site') brings me to another aspect to be discussed in the context of research of – and by use of – performances. In recent years, in the study of pop music, there has been a shift from a focus on lyrics towards a focus on performance. This implied a shift from text to behavior and, as a consequence of this development, studies on pop music and religion more and more came to emphasize socio-cultural aspects that resemble the functions conventionally as-

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[36] KLOMP: *The sound of worship*. For an extensive discussion of the topic, see KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 11, 53-57.

cribed to religions.[37] The change also stimulated so-called replacement approaches, one of which was to view pop festivals as replacements of traditional religions. Seen from this perspective, the festivals may be considered as one of several ways to cope with existential experiences; experiences that used to be guided by institutional religions. In this way, the performance approach stimulated a view of pop music as a substitute for traditional religion. It helped to focus the attention on communal or organizational aspects, or on symbols and meaning. At the same time, however, it also contributed to the neglect of musical developments noted before. Attention came to be directed mainly on the receiving side, on the people listening to the music and on musical reception, on questions like: how do people 'use' festivals to cope with existential matters, to transcend the (harsh) realities of everyday life, or to put a meaning on social events.

However, to view festivals as replacements for something quite different (in this case: traditional religion) may result in misunderstanding the festival and the specific character of the music being played. Therefore, in my opinion, a behavioral approach should be supplemented by other approaches. In this respect as well the enactment approach is inspiring, paying as it does due attention to the site (a particular church) and the various sub-sites (e.g., sinners outside the church; the priest inviting them to enter the 'sacred site' after penance, changing their status by allowing them to enter).

In the case of my research, a site-focused approach proved most relevant. Festival sites are enclosures, in a material as well as a symbolic sense. To participants they can even be sacred sites. In several respects, they are set apart from ordinary life. At first sight, the fences bordering the festival ground would appear to be merely instrumental: to keep out non-payers. But to the visitors of the festival the fence also has a symbolic meaning. As soon as the music lovers enter the field, their behavior changes and they sometimes begin to decorate the fence with various items such as beer bottles arranged in such a way that they express messages, to underline the symbolic separation with every-day life. They enter, as organizers once explicitly indicated during a festival, 'the free world' in which particular community structures spring up, or inversions of common social rules as existing outside this 'world' can be noticed.[38] These festival sites, in their turn, can be divided into sub-sites or zones: a central or front zone, close to the stage on which the musical performances takes place; an intermediate zone beyond that central area, and a peripheral zone on the edges of the festival site.[39] As in the case of the various sub-sites in the Bangor project, the different zones can be associated with different types of behavior; they too have symbolic meanings and the position of the people within these

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[37] S. BRUCE: *Religion in the modern world. From cathedrals to cults* (Oxford / New York 1996).

[38] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* see picture at p. 110.

[39] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 110-114.

sites can be quite different. As in the Bangor project, because of the symbolic meaning of the sub-sites, the status of people and related behavioral standards change when they move from one sub-site to another. A site-focused approach can draw attention to certain aspects that may be overlooked if one confines the research to a performance-centered approach. In my research, for instance, I only began to fully appreciate the position of older participants when I studied the various zones. Current views on pop festivals, focusing on performance, tend to concentrate too much on young people. So much so that pop and rock festivals became almost identical with youth and youth culture. Studying sub-sites at various festivals brought to light important differences in the position of older participants at different festivals. In pop festivals, for instance, older people mainly stay in the central and peripheral zones, relaxing by enjoying the music or (at the periphery) by chatting or just being lazy. When focusing on the performance, which is most prominent in the front zone characterized by interaction between musical performers and the crowd, the older people can easily be overlooked. At the rock and metal festivals, where the crowd is characterized strongly by specific sub-cultures, the position of the older participants is quite different from that at regular pop festivals, which is reflected in their continuous movement between the various zones, including the front zone.[40]

Although the performance-centered approach has yielded important insights, it needs to be supplemented by other perspectives for a more comprehensive view of these events. This conclusion from my research underscores the importance of J. Harper's all-round enactment procedure, and in this respect I am thinking in particular of the performance space as mentioned in his conference paper *Investigating medieval ritual*.[41]

6. From performance back to lyrics: the effect of electronic media

During the final decades of the last century, studies of pop music and religion focusing predominantly on lyrics met with increasing criticism. As said, this resulted in a focus on performance, paradoxically disregarding musicological aspects. Although attention was directed mainly at the production and reception of popular music, interest remained predominantly sociological (focused on the music industry, for instance, and its supposedly alienating effects). Musical reception (how do people experience specific musical genres; how do they actually use the music as music – rather than as a coping instrument[42]) largely remained marginal in studies about pop music and religion. However, recent

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[40] KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 119-120; 164-165.

[41] HARPER: *Investigating medieval ritual through liturgical enactment*.

[42] See e.g. STRINGER: *Contemporary western ethnography* 95-96; KOMMERS: *Hidden in music* 40-41.

technological developments may have decisive effects on current approaches. When reading Harper's account on the use of modern recording techniques, I was reminded of the effects of electronic media on research.

The shift towards a performance approach was justified because both audiences and bands considered lyrics far less important than the actual performance. But we now notice a change going on in the direction of a re-appreciation of lyrics. Because both performers and audiences are increasingly using (excerpts or lines from) lyrics in social media, the importance of lyrics in the experience of participants is growing. People use (parts of) lyrics in personal profiles on Facebook. They select certain musical phrases from songs to indicate or underscore their identity on the internet. They use songs as ringtones for their mobiles. Bands increasingly use lyrics in advertising on the internet, combined with musical clips. All this may result in a need to reconsider the prominence of performance approaches in favor of a reassessment of the study of lyrics. Besides this, the development further underlines the urgent need for generating musicological approaches. The shift towards more attention for lyrics and music illustrates the importance of remaining flexible and staying prepared to reconsider what once was put aside. Also in this respect, the all-round enactment approach, joining the performance of ancient music and modern technology, proved inspiring.

7. Conclusion

In this essay, I discussed resemblances and differences between the enactment approach as illustrated in Harper's project and my study of present-day pop and rock festivals. It led me to consider the use of religious and historic symbols during these performances. But most of all I was fascinated by Mr. Harper's discussion of the enactment as a procedure to address both performance and the responses to it.

The subjects of his research and mine are fundamentally different. But students of the religious potential of present-day pop festivals can certainly use the experiences gained from the all-round enactment approach to their advantage. The procedure involved, comprising as it does musical performance as well as issues of practice and context, is one that appeals to me very much. It may help to overcome the one-sidedness that impairs in large part the research of pop festivals in relation to religion. The discussion of interviewing as enactment may illustrate the wider relevance of Harper's research procedure for the sociological and anthropological study of contemporary phenomena. At the same time, I hope that my methodological reflections on the enactment approach may also turn out to be of some relevance to those who study historical music and rituals.

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