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Against Populism: Music, Classification, Genre

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Abstract

Often described as a social pathology, populism currently finds virulent expression in political movements across the world. Unlike the recognition that involves mutuality and respect, populism is typically founded on misrecognition; it pursues alterity, essentializes identity, offers 'protection' against the threat of hostile 'others'. Often the social consequences are tragic. Music, however, can confirm or disrupt the way populism constructs identity. Epistemologically, genres can enable us to both understand and misunderstand our world: we can recognize ourselves ('us') in the genres that undergird the music we identify with, and (mis)recognize others ('them') in those we find alien. But genres can be undermined; they can be integrated, hybridized and directed towards more inclusive or cosmopolitan ends, thus destablilizing ontologies frozen around pre-fixed identities. I elaborate this theory, illustrating it with examples of focused genre-transgression, particularly in South African jazz, where progressive social tendencies have sought to create an integrated, cosmopolitan society.

The problem

> The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will . . . [T]he principle of this structuring activity is . . . a system of internalized, embodied schemes which, having been constituted in the course of collective history, are acquired in the course of individual history and function in their practical state, for practice (and not for the sake of pure knowledge).
>
> Pierre Bourdieu[1]

Western democracies face a crisis. Sometimes characterized as post-democracy, more commonly as populism, the crisis is a consequence of thirty years of neoliberal hegemony that have seriously weakened the left, rendered voiceless many of those who once felt able to make themselves heard, and pressed most social-democratic parties into decline.[2] In this post-democratic condition, we have become familiar with the linked spectres of authoritarian nationalism, deeply conservative identity politics, rampant xenophobia, and even, in the

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1 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 466–7. Original emphasis.

2 See, for example, Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), 5 and 79, and Marco Revelli, *The New Populism: Democracy Stares into the Abyss* (London and New York: Verso, 2019). Revelli pointedly characterizes populism as 'a "senile disorder" of liberal democracy, a "revolt of the included" who have been pushed to the margins' (9).

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shadows, the ghost of fascism. It is hard to point to a time when the politics of recognition has been as widely menacing as it is today: with hatred, walls, breakaways, trigger warnings, essentialist ideologies, and identity fetishism. The names of political movements or leaders readily evoke the character of the era. Among these, one might mention UKIP in Britain, the National Rally in France, Lega Nord in Italy, the Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik and Fidesz in Hungary, Jörg Haider in Austria, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Narendra Modi in India, Julius Malema in South Africa. The list could go on. And the politics of recognition plays out also on the smallest scale. A popular Twitter hashtag page,[3] for example, judgementally classifies books on the basis of authorial identity rather than literary merit. It lists books we must avoid because the author does not share the marginal identity of the book's main character[4] – a logic that implies that we should have nothing more to do with *Othello*: either Shakespeare's play or Verdi's opera. A related logic – 'race' as an exclusive ground for culture – is invoked to support accusations of cultural theft against differently raced artists working in a variety of art-forms. Among many recent examples of such accusation one might think, almost at random, of the 'appropriation' criticisms (for using the blues) levelled against Amy Winehouse, Gwen Stefani, Janis Joplin, and the Rolling Stones, or (for using hip-hop) against Eminem and Iggy Azalea.[5] Though such widely various manifestations have their origin, fundamentally, in 'the expression of resistances against the post-democratic condition' (in Chantal Mouffe's acute diagnosis),[6] they now exhibit another character. In different ways and to different degrees, they tend to be symptomatic of virulent forms of identity-assertion that have spread across the world, fragmenting human society into sharply antagonistic

3 #ownvoices. Twitter does not keep running totals on the use of any particular hashtag, but on Instagram the posts that refer to #ownvoices currently run to more than 53,000.

4 Francine Prose, 'The Problem with "Problematic"', *New York Review of Books*, 1 November 2017, www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/11/01/the-problem-with-problematic/.

5 There is a large number of such accusations, many of them available on the internet. Here are a few examples: Sammy Gordon, 'Amy Winehouse and the Importance of Crediting Black Influencers: Where is the Line between Appropriation and Influence?', *34th Street*, 15 February 2018, www.34st.com/article/2018/02/amy-winehouse-music-appropriation-addiction-thinkpiece; Daphne Brooks, 'Amy Winehouse and the (Black) Art of Appropriation', *The Nation*, 10 September 2008, www.thenation.com/article/amy-winehouse-and-black-art-appropriation/; Michelle Vincent, 'Gwen Stefani Has a Long History of Cultural Appropriation – And She Doesn't Regret a Thing', *Femmestella*, 21 November 2019, www.femestella.com/gwen-stefani-cultural-appropriation-harajuku-girls-bindi-bantu-knots/; Wanna Thompson, 'Sadly, Gwen Stefani Has Been Problematic This Whole Time', *Vice*, 16 November 2018, www.vice.com/en_us/article/nepnqq/gwen-stefani-cultural-appropriation-legacy; K. Tempest Bradford, 'Commentary: Cultural Appropriation Is, In Fact, Indefensible', *NPR*, 28 June 2017, www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/06/28/533818685/cultural-appropriation-is-in-fact-indefensible; Noah Berlatsky, 'Miley Cyrus and Janis Joplin, Cont.: How Racism Subverts Good Intentions', *The Atlantic*, 30 August 2013, www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/08/miley-cyrus-and-janis-joplin-cont-how-racism-subverts-good-intentions/279197/; Lauren Jones, 'Hey Fellow White People, Let's Stop Praising Eminem and Start Actually Listening to Black People', *The Tempest*, 13 October 2017, https://thetempest.co/2017/10/13/entertainment/eminem-donald-trump-freesyle/; Ellie Harrison, 'Iggy Azalea Responds to Cultural Appropriation Accusations after Backlash', *Independent*, 7 August 2019, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/iggy-azalea-music-cultural-appropriation-accusations-response-not-sorry-a9044946.html.

6 Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 79.

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camps. A sticking-to-what-you-know, a boundary protectionism, a horror of the different, has become a toxic feature of our populist moment.

How did we get here?

Since the 1960s, multicultural societies have increasingly experienced two contradictory pressures: on the one hand, minorities of various kinds and a number of disadvantaged groups have rightly demanded respect for their rights; on the other, conservative movements within such societies have resisted these claims, seeing them as alien, and demanding cultural and economic protection from those advancing them. Seriously aggravating the problem since the 1980s has been the rise of neoliberalism[7] (as the new hegemonic formation is currently termed), with its legacy of huge recessions, high unemployment, worsening economic inequality, and the fact that 'in most developed democracies the median income has remained stagnant over the past 25 years'.[8] Under the banners of race, ethnicity, culture, nationalism, sexuality, gender, and religion, identities have become noisily assertive. Buttressed by claims that aspects of these identities are being overlooked or misrecognized, the embrace of identity politics has of course been valid, overdue, and necessary; it has, for example, turned a spotlight on forms of racism that were previously ignored, other sorts of discrimination or harm that went unrecognized, and forms of sexual harassment or even sexual assault that were overlooked or even considered 'acceptable'. Samir Gandesha puts this well:

> In contemporary identity politics, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other identities demand recognition and affirmation, and in societies constituted, in part, by the mis-recognition or non-recognition of these identities, this is perfectly understandable and legitimate, to some extent at least. This is especially the case with "trans" and indigenous identities that have asserted and re-asserted themselves, respectively, in recent years with particular force.[9]

Yet, as valid, overdue, and necessary as these identity claims have been, their limitations as *forms of political theory and action* have – from a left perspective – been trenchantly pointed out and extensively criticized. As Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty have noted, the positive view of 'minority social movements' that once prevailed

> has been transformed. Identity-based liberation movements and their politically active constituencies, which include ethnic and racial groups, women's groups, gay and lesbian groups, and disability groups, have come under sustained attack by people on both the Left and the Right of the political spectrum in the debates over multiculturalism, identity politics, and political correctness. Thinkers as different in their political perspectives as Nathan Glazer and Judith Butler seem to agree at least on

7 See, for example, Wolfgang Streeck, 'The Crises of Democratic Capitalism', *New Left Review* 71 (September–October 2011).

8 Yascha Mounk, 'Pitchfork Politics: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy', *Foreign Affairs* 93/5 (2014).

9 Samir Gandesha, 'Insurgent Universality', *Radical Philosophy* 2/04 (spring 2019), www.radicalphilosophy.com/reviews/individual-reviews/insurgent-universality.

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> this one point – that identity-based social struggles are politically limited and misguided . . . [For] those on the Left, they are seen as threatening the progressive coalition and wallowing in victimization.[10]

This is not to say that identity politics has not enjoyed some success. Nor is it to imply (and this needs to be clearly understood) that identity politics is always populist. As Jan-Werner Müller has argued, 'populism is always a form of identity politics (though not all versions of identity politics are populist)'.[11] But it is to point out that, in the eyes of its critics, identity politics has some fatal flaws, the most significant of which is its disavowal of the class antagonisms of the modern neoliberal capitalist state. Indeed, one of the consequences of this flaw is that it leaves the defenders of the neoliberal system entirely unchallenged and a plethora of human problems unaddressed, including, ironically, many of those that were at the root of the identity protests. Wendy Brown has made this point with particular clarity, arguing that 'what we have come to call identity politics is partly dependent upon the demise of a critique of capitalism and of bourgeois cultural and economic values'. And when these protests are made without a structural critique of capitalism,

> identity politics concerned with race, sexuality, and gender will appear not as a supplement to class politics, not as an expansion of left categories of oppression and emancipation, not as an enriching augmentation of progressive formulations of power and persons – all of which they also are – but as tethered to a formulation of justice that reinscribes a bourgeois (masculinist) ideal as its measure.[12]

There are also further, and tragically ironic, consequences. As pointed out by Asad Haider in his acclaimed and widely discussed recent book on the topic, in the absence of a structural critique of the neoliberal capitalist order, identity politics becomes the '*neutralization* of movements against racial oppression', 'ensures our continued subjection' by 'lock[ing] us into the state', and thus 'paradoxically ends up reinforcing the very norms it set out to criticize.'[13]

Given these theoretical and political weaknesses,[14] it is unsurprising that, in some manifestations of identity politics, unhealthy developments have occurred. Notably, there are instances in which the politics accompanying the demand for group or cultural recognition has changed in such a way, and to such an extent, that it has become socially *pathological*. It is

10 Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty, 'Reconsidering Identity Politics: An Introduction', in *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, ed. Linda Martín Alcoff, Michael Hames-García, Satya P. Mohanty, and Paula M. L. Moya (New York and Basingstoke, 2006, 1–9), 1–2.

11 Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 3.

12 Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 59.

13 Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), 12 (original emphasis), 10, 11, 24.

14 For a cognate critique of identity politics, but from a musicological and border-studies perspective, see Alejandro L. Madrid, 'Listening from the "Other Side": Music, Border Studies, and the Limits of Identity Politics', in *Decentering the Nation: Music, Mexicanidad, and Globalization*, ed. Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell (Lanham and Boulder: Lexington Books, 2020).

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these, and only these, that we label populist. Political philosophers Onni Hirvonen and Joonas Pennanen[15] have developed the concept of pathology in this context, for the purpose of introducing 'normative considerations into the populism analysis'. They argue that identity politics becomes pathological, first, when it goes 'against social norms that are deemed necessary for the functional individuals and societies', and, second, when it relies 'on an "original" identity [that] has the effect of closing the prospects of a development', and may indeed be 'stagnant'. In line with this, they argue that, if and when this occurs, the resulting 'populism is fundamentally hostile to an open-ended and pluralist political contestation process', and that despite the fact that it 'may well have a legitimate basis in social discontent and suffering, its logic will turn out to be pathological from the recognition-theoretical perspective'. One striking manifestation of this is that 'in order to mobilize people effectively, the threat of the other must be stirred up constantly', leading, *inter alia*, to a form of politics based on 'the logic of exclusion and simplification'.[16]

When this happens – to cite some random examples – ethnicities harden; citizenship laws founded on *jus sanguinis* (the right of blood) are emboldened; white nationalisms become resurgent; cultural differences become occasions for fierce animosity; religious hatreds escalate, sometimes with fatal results; gender wars are broached; and the need to defend identities against alternative ways of thinking or feeling is so ferociously enforced that some speakers are 'no-platformed' (just as some artworks are removed or defaced), with the result that democracy as a structure in which different or opposing ideas must compete is undermined. In short, in these arenas of populist passion dissenting voices are silenced; virulent 'othering' becomes the norm; identities ossify; societies fracture; democracy, human rights, and the rule of law retreat.

So what has all this got to do with music? A great deal. Many decades of scholarship have placed beyond any doubt the powerful impact that music (like the other arts) has on society. We know that music-making 'is a special kind of social action which can have important consequences for other kinds of social action';[17] that it can reinforce identities, create new ones, or repress their formation;[18] that it enables us, 'through imagination and the emotions [it] evokes, to participate in new experiences and to establish forms of relationships that are different from the ones we are used to'.[19] Most disturbingly, we also know that music has been present 'at moments of massive violence and death' – that it has participated 'in the cultural work of persecution and genocide'.[20]

15 Onni Hirvonen and Joonas Pennanen, 'Populism as a Pathological Form of Politics of Recognition', *European Journal of Social Theory* 22/1 (2019).

16 Hirvonen and Pennanen, 'Populism as a Pathological Form of Politics of Recognition', 4, 13, 14, 9, 10, 10, 11.

17 Reginald Byron, ed., *Music, Culture, and Experience: Selected Papers of John Blacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 223.

18 Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, 'Introduction', in *Western Music and its Others*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 31.

19 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013), 97.

20 Philip Bohlman, 'Music and Culture: Historiographies of Disjuncture', in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, Richard Middleton (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 53.

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A key thought here is that we recognize ourselves, and those who are like us, in the musics we love and identify with – and the reverse. As argued in one of the most influential musicology books of the last two decades, music is 'used as a referent for the clarification of identity', so that a person can be thought to be '"like" a particular type of musical material'.[21] This is because

> [t]he sense of 'self' is locatable in music. Musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity – for identity's identification. Looking more closely at this process highlights the ways in which musical materials are active ingredients in identity work, how respondents 'find themselves' in musical structures. It also highlights some of the ways that music is attended to by its recipients, how music reception and the units of meaning that listeners find within music differ dramatically from musicological and music-psychological models of music reception and their emphasis on the perception of musical structures.[22]

Adorno clearly also had this in mind when he wrote:

> What the gramophone listener actually wants to hear is himself, and the artist merely offers him a substitute for the sounding image of his own person, which he would like to safeguard as a possession. The only reason that he accords the record such value is because he himself could also be just as well preserved. Most of the time records are virtual photographs of their owners, flattering photographs – ideologies.[23]

But what is at stake in this self-recognition is much more than just familiar surface sounds: we recognize ourselves not just in the musics we love and identify with, but also in the *genres* that undergird those sounds. The reverse applies when we encounter genres that we find alien. There we recognize, or misrecognize, people who are different from us. Thus genres reward with the familiar, and shock with the strange; they help to constitute a sense of an 'us', against a 'them' who are 'othered', often in ossifying ways. In this manner, genres are foundational. They become part of our epistemology, helping us to 'know' our world, contributing to the ways we *classify* it.[24]

And classification is crucially important, both socially and politically. All societies classify their world, and everything in it. As Pierre Bourdieu reminds us:

21 Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday* Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44.

22 DeNora, *Music in Everyday* Life, 68.

23 Richard Leppert, ed., *Theodor W. Adorno: Essays on Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 2002), 274.

24 Since recognition is crucial here, it is important to note the ease and speed with which this recognition takes place. See Robert O. Gjerdingen and David Perrott, 'Scanning the Dial: The Rapid Recognition of Music Genres', *Journal of New Music Research* 37/2 (2008). In their study, the authors remark that 'the speed at which participants could perform this task [of assigning a variety of excerpts to one of ten genre labels], including above-chance categorizations of excerpts as short as 1/4 second, was quite unexpected' (93).

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> What is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classification schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of groups and therefore of their mobilisation and demobilisation.[25]

Apartheid – to take a notorious example – classified in ways that were especially brutal and dehumanizing. So when South Africans went to the polls for the first time in 1994, they set out to reclassify their world as a precondition for recreating it. This new world would surpass the old one, with its wretched orders of things, its categories of people, its ways of including and excluding, of enabling and disabling, of conferring and denying not just privilege, but even life itself. There would be new ways of classifying, of course; but these would be an enhancement: they would set people free, help them thrive.

Classification

What then, we should ask, is involved in classification? On what suppositions does it rest, and what are its consequences? We could approach this question via the great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. In 1942 he wrote an essay titled 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins', in which he laid out the challenges of human attempts to classify the world.[26] Mindful of the 'ambiguities, redundancies, and deficiencies' of classification schemes, Borges observed that 'obviously there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and speculative.' Yet nothing, he argued, could 'dissuade us from planning human schemes, even though it is clear that they are provisional'. In the essay's famous example, Borges illustrated his argument by reproducing – from 'a certain Chinese encyclopaedia called the *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*' – a classification of animals into fourteen categories:

> (a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's-hair brush; (l) etcetera; (m) those that have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that at a distance resemble flies.[27]

Michel Foucault laughed when he first read this, because the passage

> shattered [. . .] all the familiar landmarks of thought – *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old definitions between the Same and the Other.[28]

25 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 479.

26 Translated as 'John Wilkins' Analytical Language' in *Jorge Luis Borges: Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York and London: Penguin, 1999).

27 Weinberger, ed., *Jorge Luis Borgesi*, 231.

28 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), xv.

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Borges's point is that every classification of the universe is arbitrary. 'We do not know what the universe is', he says, though 'we suspect that there is no universe in the organic, unifying sense'; or if there is, its aim escapes us. We don't know the 'words, definitions, etymologies, and synonymies of God's secret dictionary'.[29] So we make up the world as we go along; we make up things and people and categories, classifying to serve particular goals, interests, and ideologies.

Everywhere, classifications are similarly arbitrary. Among the Zulu people of South Africa, for instance, cattle have for hundreds of years occupied a role of such economic importance that their herds – famous for their magnificently coloured hides and huge horns – have assumed aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. In Zulu culture, this is reflected in methods of classification that are rich in metaphor and the poetic, and that link hide pattern or horn shape to plants, birds, animals, or other features of the Zulu natural world. The classifications are vast, elaborate and complex; they give rise to categories of cattle whose names, in translation, include the following: the eggs of the lark, the gaps between the branches of the trees silhouetted against the sky, the hornbill takes to flight, the women repudiate the case, what stabs the rain, the stones of the forest, like old people, abundance, the women carry wood, of cutting in two, sour milk with flies, in which there lies a person, dregs after straining.[30]

Umberto Eco gives another example. He comments on

> the 'strange' categorizations of some Australian aboriginals, the Dyirbal, who seem to divide objects in the universe in four classes, which correspond to one of four distinct classifiers (*Bayi*, *Balan*, *Balam*, *Bala*) that must be used before any term included in one of the classes . . . The Balan class, by the way, includes women, fire, dangerous things, as well as platypuses, echidnas, some snakes, some fishes, most birds, etc.[31]

Eco also reminds us that people living in central Europe divide their world, through language, into broad categories that change across the continent. The classifications – signalled by such words as *il*, *la*, *der*, *die*, and *das* – are no less arbitrary.[32] Of course, this arbitrariness is a function of the fact that classification is historically constructed, and explains why, outside of any classificatory system, the terms, references and meanings of that system slip quickly towards the absurd. This was the starting point for Jean Genet's famous play *The Blacks*. In a preface to the publication, he tells us that one evening an actor asked him to write a play for an all-black cast. Genet feigned 'outsider' puzzlement. 'But what exactly *is* a black?' he wondered. 'First of all, what is his *colour*?'[33]

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29 Borges, *Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. Weinberger, 231.

30 Marguerite Poland and David Hammond-Tooke, *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni Cattle of the Zulu People* (Cape Town: Fernwood Press, 2003), *passim*.

31 Quoted in Franco Fabbri, 'Browsing Music Spaces: Categories and the Musical Mind', in *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology*, ed. Allan Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

32 See Fabbri, 'Browsing Music Spaces', 52.

33 Jean Genet, *The Blacks: A Clown Show* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960).

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Of course, we are not outsiders to our own classificatory systems: we are born into them. Indeed, it is the sheer *given-ness* of most systems of classification that 'naturalizes' them, masking their existence as arbitrary historical constructs, making their true status invisible to their users. Urgent questions then arise – not least because consensus about human arrangements is always limiting: it excludes those who have a different view.[34] Among such questions would be: What opportunities does any particular, ordained system of classification make possible? What possibilities for human flourishing does it shut down? Do our own classificatory systems enhance our powers, set us free, make us bigger and more equal human beings? Or do they play into what Roberto Mangabeira Unger calls the 'dictatorship of no alternatives'?[35]

The problem is that a system of classification tends to become a straitjacket, or worse. Adorno's metaphor for this process is the term 'molluscan'; classifications, he says, eventually become molluscs. For Adorno, the first precondition for any breaking out of the molluscan shell is for thought to 'give itself over . . . without reservation', even 'without a lifebelt', so that the categories of thought can open themselves to the contours of experience.[36] Beyond that, the struggle to break free of the mollusc may also take a symbolic, or aesthetic, form. During the Paris Commune of 1871, workers took up positions on street corners throughout the city, and unloaded their firearms by shooting at clocks. These clocks were on palaces, on church towers, on city buildings; and shooting at them was a way of signalling the termination of one time-continuum – a system of temporal and social classification – so as to allow the birth of another.[37] Herbert Marcuse believed he saw this also on the streets of Paris and elsewhere in May 1968, where it was expressed as much in the language of changing categories and shifts in classification, as in the language of political emancipation.[38]

One particularly damaging form of molluscan classification relates to the ethics of selfhood and society – and specifically a condition that Kwame Anthony Appiah, using a different metaphor, has named the Medusa Syndrome. In liberal societies, individuals place a value on laying claim to particular identities that they assert as their own; and they want acknowledgement of these identities, as a right. Quite properly, the holders of these identities increasingly get the recognition they seek. Such recognition, after all, gives 'contours to our freedom, as working-class and LGBTQ and national and religious identities have done in struggles all around the world'.[39] A danger, however, is that '[t]he politics of recognition, if pursued with excessive zeal', can be limiting to what Appiah calls 'personal dimensions of the self', and can make it hard for those who want to treat these personal dimensions as 'not too tightly scripted, not too resistant to our individual vagaries'. For then there would

34 See Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 85.

35 Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Left Alternative* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 1.

36 Theodor Adorno, *Vorlesungen über Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), quoted in Roger Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 150.

37 Herbert Marcuse, 'Liberation from the Affluent Society' (1967 lecture), in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, ed. David Cooper (Harmondsworth and Baltimore: Penguin, 1968).

38 Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 22.

39 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (London: Profile Books, 2018), 218.

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be – and in some recognition struggles there already are – 'demands that are made; expectations to be met; battle lines to be drawn'.[40]

Let me illustrate this with brief examples of such 'demands', 'expectations', and even 'battle lines', all from South Africa, the first from the heart of the apartheid era, the others from the recent (post-apartheid) past. The first example emerges from an argument made by the eminent journalist and short-story writer Nat Nakasa (1937–65). Writing in the early 1960s, Nakasa took issue with the way his identity had been classified.

> Who am I? Where do I belong in the South African scheme of things? Who are my people? . . . I am supposed to be a Pondo, but I don't even know the language of that tribe. I was brought up in a Zulu-speaking home, my mother being a Zulu. Yet I can no longer think in Zulu because that language cannot cope with the demands of our day . . . I have never owned an assegai or any of those magnificent Zulu shields. Neither do I propose to be in tribal dress when I go to the United States this year . . . I am just not a tribesman, whether I like it or not. I am, inescapably, a part of the city slums, the factory machines and our beloved shebeens.
>
> I'm not even sure that I could claim to be African. For if I were, then I should surely share my identity with west Africans and other Africans in Kenya or Tanganyika. Yet it happens to be true that I am more at home with [a white South African] Afrikaner than with a west African. Some of my friends who have been abroad say they got on best with [white] Afrikaners they met in Europe, instead of Englishmen or west Africans. We saw some evidence of this when a number of Nigerian students passed through Johannesburg once. We took them to a party in Soweto where they were welcomed like long-lost brothers. After marvelling at their flowing robes and talking some politics, we didn't know what to do with them.
>
> Being Muslims – and millions of Nigerians are Muslims – they did not drink. We could not offer them meat because that also would have gone against their faith . . . They were perfect strangers, more so than the many South African whites who spend some of their time in the townships. To speak of those Nigerians as 'my people' would not make much sense, even though we all had flat noses.[41]

A second example concerns a former student of mine – I shall call her Lerato – from a rural part of South Africa. Aged 25 at the time, and with Sotho as her first language, she was registered for a Master's degree in music. Her greatest musical passion, which she kept strictly secret during her student years, was (astonishingly?) the British pop singer Cliff Richard.[42] 'Nobody knows!', she told me. 'I listen to [him], but only when I'm alone, on campus, in residence. If anybody's coming, I just switch it off. I don't want them to ask me about it.'

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40 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 110.

41 Nat Nakasa, 'It's Difficult to Decide My Identity', in *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1990*, Vol. 5 ed. Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1997).

42 She confided this to me not long before her graduation, when she knew she would be leaving the university and the city to return to her distant home. The information is revealed with her permission.

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The reason for her secrecy was that she feared others would judge her – or worse.

> People would think it was weird that I'm black and I'm listening to Cliff Richard. Most of my friends are black, and they listen to other stuff, R&B, whatever, South African music. So I just think people would not understand: here is a black girl and I'm so into this white guy's music. They don't understand that, me, as a black girl, I'm a big fan to Cliff Richard, who happens to be white. They wouldn't understand why I'm not into more R&B and other stuff that black people should listen to, black people my age 'should' listen to. And [instead] I listen to things that probably they think some old white man should be listening to, or maybe just white youngsters.

Lerato's story can be endlessly replicated. Vincent, for instance, was a black postgraduate law student who loved rave music. But, he said,

> I can't let anyone know. I actually listen to it by myself, like in my room, by myself. I actually do. I don't want people to know that I actually listen to rave. *Ja*, I put this thing across to people that I'm black, I'm too black, I'm black in and out. So I can't let anything change that. I want people to know that I'm proudly black. It's like an identity kind of thing.'

But the rave music he loved was 'white music – because it's played at white clubs.' And so he dreaded being mistaken, as he put it, for one of those people

> who are losing their own identity: they are black outside and white inside; they don't know who they are. I'm always saying that rave music is white music and I'm black; I'm always saying that I wouldn't listen to rave, I wouldn't listen to rock; I'm always saying that to other people. I always deny that I like rave music. So if people were to know that I actually listen to rave music, they'd be, like, 'You're like an Oreo!' [A popular sweet with a dark chocolate coating and a white centre.]

Then there was Ahmed. Ahmed's reason for secrecy was a little different from the reasons given by his contemporaries Lerato and Vincent. Ahmed studied computer science; he listened to funky house music with his friends and went clubbing with them. Ethnically, he called himself an Indian South African, and he regarded his 'Indianness' as a vital part of his identity: 'I actually feel very strongly about it,' he said, 'because of the way I grew up, and all the traditions: it influences you, it influences your morals.' So it was no surprise to discover that Ahmed listened keenly to Indian music. The surprise, rather, was that he wanted nobody to know. 'People tend to stereotype you', he said. 'And you don't want to conform to the prescribed idea of what an Indian listens to. Because a lot of people judge you – who you are, and what you're capable of.'

What is going on in these stories and others like them? More precisely, what role are these hidden musical passions playing within the 'technology of the self'[43] that music is now widely

43 The term is DeNora's. See *Music in Everyday Life*, 46–74.

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accepted as being? Unless one argues (which I obviously do not) that these secret listeners are merely paranoid, it is clear what they have in common: they have been made fearful by socially based classifications – prescriptions, proscriptions, and modes of propriety – all of which entail particular categories of 'race' and culture, and the notions wrapped up in them. The stories involve personal identities that for one reason or another are illicit or dangerous, and therefore repressed (or at least shrouded in secrecy). We might describe them as covert, or dissonant, identities. And music classification plays as crucial a role in *their* definition and articulation, as it can do for any other personal identity.[44]

Covert or dissonant identities tend to exist only, or mainly, in secret: behind closed doors, like Lerato listening quietly to Cliff Richard, or Vincent dancing privately to rave, or Ahmed finding a sheltered place to listen to Indian music. Nor should we expect them to act differently: 'An appeal to truth', as Adorno reminds us, 'is scarcely a prerogative of a society which dragoons its members to own up the better to hunt them down.'[45] Similarly, Slavoj Žižek has made the point that 'what we experience as everyday reality more and more takes the form of the lie made real'. He writes that 'because of ethicosocial constraints', the 'core of my personality', appears 'perverse': so 'I am not able to act it out in real life'. But, he asks rhetorically, 'Isn't my virtual persona in a way "more real than reality"?' This virtual persona, Žižek suggests, 'is sometimes the truth on whose repression social reality itself is founded'.[46]

Repression of the truth (for Žižek), a new kind of tyranny (for Appiah), the metaphor of the hunt (for Adorno): all these are ways of talking about the regimen of decreed classification, including the way it polices conformity and enforces compliance with preordained social imperatives. Crucially, the institution in whose name this compliance is most often secured is the institution we call 'culture'. Social groups look for ways of keeping themselves together, as well as ways of differentiating themselves – classifying themselves differently – from other social groups. To do this work, culture is always close at hand. And culture will do this work better, the more it 'represents not only difference but the elimination of difference', as Appiah has written: for 'the group represents a clump of relative homogeneity, and that homogeneity is perpetuated and enforced by regulative mechanisms designed to marginalize and silence dissent from its basic norms and mores'.[47] That, precisely, is 'The Trouble with Culture' (the name he gives to one of his chapters).[48] Anthropologist Mary Douglas has an apt term for these regulative mechanisms: she calls them 'rules of pollution'. Individuals who dissent are individuals who are polluted; and the polluted must be marginalized. On the other hand, to conform is to remain clean and thus to appreciate in value: '*we who are not polluted*'.[49]

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44 This suggests that we should also start thinking of music as a technology of the *covert* self: as a technology of our *dissonant* selves.

45 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: NLB, 1974), 30.

46 Slavoj Žižek, 'Freud Lives!', *London Review of Books*, 25 May 2006, www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n10/slavoj-zizek/freud-lives.

47 Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, 152.

48 Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, 114–54.

49 Ian Hacking, 'Why Race Still Matters', *Daedalus* 134/1 (2005), 114. Original emphasis.

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So, for example, when Lerato shut her door and played Cliff Richard at a low volume so that her fellow students would not find out, she was protecting herself from pollution rules – and from the marginalization that befalls those who break the classification norms that underlie those rules. She was in no doubt about what those norms were meant to protect, and what her disobedience to them portended. By bonding with Cliff Richard, Lerato knew that she was resisting racial and cultural essentialism, and thus affirming her, and our, humanity:[50]

> It doesn't matter where the person comes from. He is in England; I'm Black and I'm in South Africa. And for me, as that person embracing someone who I've never seen, who isn't connected to me in any way, it's a good indication that, you know, does it really matter? You know, here in South Africa, we still don't embrace each other; it's still a struggle. I mean, just embrace it. I mean, it's like, there are no boundaries, like, nothing is stopping me to, actually, really love this guy and his music – and it's okay, it's okay, it's okay.

My argument has supported the view that music plays an important role in the technology of the self: in the way individuals mobilize identities for themselves. But I have also tried to extend and complexify that argument, by showing that music plays this role in ways we have not previously recognized, still less understood; that is, in social contexts involving 'molluscan' repression, the Medusa Syndrome, and cultural policing through pollution rules, where both music and identity may hide and become secret. Clearly there is a need for continuing research here – especially today when, globally, debates about identity, and about the kind of society we may or may not aspire to, have become increasingly charged. Music offers signposts to our covert, or dissonant, identities – and this is potentially of crucial importance in a world of increasingly fractured societies, where the need for us to 'find' ourselves and each other is vital to all our individual and collective futures. Xolela Mangcu, a leading South African public intellectual, has diagnosed the growth of what he calls a 'totalitarian mindset' – an intolerant public culture, fed by a 'concept of racial identity' and a desire 'to protect the native culture from foreign influences'. The use of culture as a way of 'marking out' people, he argued, was a dehumanization 'that has been the precondition for ethnic pogroms in all of history'. And he feared that this 'racial nativism and cultural essentialism . . . will haunt us and our children into a nightmare of despair for a very long time to come'.[51]

Whether in relation either to South Africa today or to the global present more broadly, the general point is clear: the need to resist molluscan classification and defy the rules of pollution is urgent and important. One of the ways to do this is to interrogate these secret musics, the hidden identities they foster and mirror, and the classificatory systems on which they rest. Another, and more radical, way is to bring to the centre of our attention a classificatory system that anchors all human engagements with music. The name we give to this system is *genre*.

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50 For evidence of similar anti-essentialist musical identifications in South Africa, see Mary Robertson, 'The Constraints of Colour: Popular Music Listening and the Interrogation of "Race" in Post-apartheid South Africa', *Popular Music* 30/3 (2011).

51 Xolela Mangcu, 'With Blacklists, Our Leaders are Sowing the Seeds of a Nightmare', *Business Day*, 29 June 2006.

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Genre

Genres establish horizons of expectation. But as Lerato painfully discovered, horizons can confine and foreclose, just as easily as they can open vistas and create possibilities. Genres are more than just methods of classifying varieties and processes of musical sound: they also entail consequences that are usually hidden. Smuggled along with them are life-worlds and ideologies relating not just to value, but, more importantly, also to social pragmatics such as 'race', class and gender. On Bourdieu's argument, the 'most successful ideological' work is done by those 'institutional mechanisms' that 'have no need of words, and [that] ask no more than complicitous silence'. Genres are among such institutional mechanisms. And each time we fail to interrogate these wordless processes, we make 'a contribution to the efficacy' of the ideologies so insidiously embedded within them.[52]

Like other forms of classification, genres are unmistakeably ideological: 'their intention is that of confirming or criticizing established hierarchies of value'.[53] It is for this reason that genre boundaries tend to be policed for correctness by gatekeepers of various sorts, with the often notorious consequence that works, or authors of works, that break loose of genre-defining precepts, or that straddle genres, typically run into trouble – as for example happened to Miles Davis when he started to fuse jazz with rock in 1970, or to Bob Dylan when he went electric at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, or to Beethoven after the first performances of his Razumovsky Quartets of 1806, or to Stravinsky at the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps* in Paris in 1913, or to *marabi* in the urban ghettos of South Africa approximately 100 years ago.[54] This policing can be violent. For when it comes to 'the propagation of dominant classifications',[55] music is much more than just a social witness, or an accompaniment. Rather, music is 'intensely involved' – not least because the 'violence which enforces [these] dominant classifications is seldom far away'.[56] On the street, this violence often turns lethal.

Genres, after all, and as their enforcers know, are not set in stone. For a start, they have no fixed essences. As recent research on musical genre has shown, 'genres are more about beliefs and practice than about theory'; so 'the more closely one describes a genre in terms of its stylistic components, the fewer examples actually seem to fit'.[57] But that, as Wittgenstein demonstrated, is a feature of many categories and concepts that have currency in language. His paradigmatic example was 'the proceedings that we call "games"', which 'have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all – but that are *related* to one another in many different ways'. This, he argued, could be 'expressed like this: I use the name "N"

52 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of the Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 188.

53 Franco Fabbri and John Shepherd, 'Genre', in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World. Volume 1: Music, Industry and Society* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 403.

54 On *marabi*, see Christopher Ballantine, *Marabi Nights: Jazz, 'Race' and Society in Early Apartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012).

55 Martin Stokes, 'Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music,' in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994), 10.

56 Stokes, 'Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music', 8.

57 David Brackett, 'Popular Music Genres: Aesthetics, Commerce and Identity', in *The SAGE Handbook of Popular Music*, eds. Andy Bennett and Steve Wacksman (London and Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 190.

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without a *fixed* meaning. (But that detracts as little from its usefulness, as it detracts from that of a table that it stands on four legs instead of three and so sometimes wobbles.)'[58] Of course, the insight that 'the application of a word is not everywhere bounded by rules'[59] has gained insufficient traction in many scholarly fields. It has not, for example, stopped some musicologists from trying to define genre in terms of formal and technical rules, when what they should do is to consider genres socially, as a function of how genre categories have been used; that is, as historical constructs that look and behave differently when the 'race', class, age, gender or territory of audiences changes, when performing conventions change, and so on.

We could put this more emphatically and say that genres are not like things; they are like cultures,[60] with rituals, traditions, appropriate behaviour, divisions of labour, even codes that govern where one may sit or stand. If we understood this, we would not make the mistake of assuming that 'whatever is called "jazz" at the beginning of the story should be recognizably the same as what we call "jazz" today'.[61] Nor would we be surprised by the claim that 'rock could have been part of jazz, but did not become so for particular reasons',[62] or by the reminder that 'some jazz musicians did perceive rock 'n' roll – at least at first – as merely the latest in a long line of musical fashions to fall under the umbrella label of jazz'.[63]

Like many discursive practices, genre cultures carry enormous power. Wittgenstein showed that we are inscribed in what he called 'language games', and that these help shape our subjectivity and draw us to particular beliefs. Genres do the same thing: they teach us what to listen for, what to expect, what to value, what to despise. They create hegemony, naturalizing our views about class, 'race', gender and power, teaching us 'common sense'. In South Africa, for example, the 'success' (while it lasted) of the apartheid government rested, in part, on the massive ideological role of the media – and to a significant degree this involved a state broadcaster that insisted on genre purity: not just different radio stations and languages for different 'race' groups, but different and distinct music genres for each of them.[64]

So – and the importance of this point can hardly be overstated – if genres are like ideological cultures, and are malleable, then for groups seeking social change, genres can and should become front-line sites of musical struggle. These social groups will have accepted that the struggle for freedom and power is inseparable from a struggle against classification, and will have understood the work of genre. They can then devise strategies to destabilize it. For example, genre boundaries can be transgressed; they can be integrated, hybridized, and directed towards more inclusive or cosmopolitan ends, so that they disrupt ontologies frozen around pre-fixed notions of 'us' and 'them'. The chains of pathological signification can be

58 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 31–7.

59 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 39.

60 Matt Brennan, *When Genres Collide* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 23.

61 Scott DeVeaux, 'Struggling with Jazz', *Current Musicology* 71–3 (2001–2), 358.

62 Brennan, *When Genres Collide*, 184.

63 Brennan, *When Genres Collide*, 3.

64 See Charles Hamm, '"The Constant Companion of Man": Separate Development, Radio Bantu and music', *Popular Music* 10/2 (1991), 159–60.

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broken. New practices can sully genre purity, alter its rules and rituals, undermine its boundaries, put counter-hegemonic values into play, imagine new social collectivities, bring opposed groups into the same space, revivify processes of discursive identity formation, enhance pluralist political contestation, and build a new 'common sense'. I claim that these challenges are more important in the world today than perhaps ever before.

Despite the dead weight of institutions and their reifying practices, we are not short of instances of when and where such challenges have been made. Let me mention just a few. It is not hard to see the link between the identity politics of the 1970s, which sought to liberate formerly repressed identities, and the 'transgeneric' (jazz-rock) fusion music of the time. Joni Mitchell was explicit about this. Describing her own radical approach to genre as a process of 'breaking patterns', she said: 'I just wanted all the notes, everybody's part, to tangle. I wanted all the desks pushed out of rows. I wanted the military abolished, anything linear had to go.'[65] Fusion, as one recent theorist has argued, privileges 'flexibility, eclecticism, and idiosyncrasies over intransigence, purity, and orthodoxy'. It 'empowers individuals who do not fit neatly into given categories'; it 'allows them to challenge the displacements, misrecognitions, and histories that seek to silence them'. So fusion remains important for the growing number of people who live somewhere 'between belonging and nonbelonging'.[66]

Important, too, at least in the circum-Caribbean region, has been the creolized music-and-dance form known as the *danzón*. For decades, local elites rejected the *danzón* as 'African' and 'barbaric'. But that has changed. Ebbs and flows within competing 'networks of identification'[67] have placed the *danzón* in constant dialogue with a variety of cultural and social practices; these have loosened the genre from fixity, and, over time, fundamentally transformed its meaning and form.[68] More importantly, the *danzón*'s existence as a dynamic 'performance complex' (as it has been called) has enabled its participants to meet themselves and each other within 'sonic spaces of effective utopian longing'.[69] There, against the grain of identitarian shackles placed upon them by forces beyond their control, they have been able to validate their own 'sentient experience' and 'reconstitute themselves'.[70]

But let us be clear. This is not a campaign against identity, or against difference. In any case, the former has deep moral implications,[71] and it is ineluctably linked to the latter. Every identity is relational: an affirmation of identity is intrinsically also an affirmation of difference. Even so, this leaves us with a problem: if every identity entails difference, an 'us' and a 'them', then how do we prevent this relation from becoming hostile, or even violent? One

65 Kevin Fellezs, *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 158.

66 Fellezs, *Birds of Fire*, 227–8

67 Alejandro L. Madrid and Robin D. Moore, *Danzón: Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.

68 Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 8.

69 Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 11, 19.

70 Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 19, 12.

71 See especially Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

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of the beauties of transgeneric practice is that it points precisely to the answer: by breaking down boundaries or at least making them porous, genre transgressions seek to create spaces that might welcome those whose identities are different, and who have therefore been separated by border walls. So these transgressions explicitly create common ground. As genre practices, they are open, impure, unpoliced. They reject a hostile 'us–them' relation; in Chantal Mouffe's terms, their approach to difference is *agonistic*, not *antagonistic*,[72] and as such they promote dialogue, not warfare. Far from this being mysterious, many striking examples are close at hand. Miles Davis mediated musically between the sharply opposing genre worlds of jazz and rock;[73] the Art Ensemble of Chicago brought together 'bebop, doo-wop, swing, soul, reggae, South African song, minimalism, Dixieland, sound concrete and theatrical performance art';[74] John Zorn transgressed the boundaries between 'jazz, rock, noise . . . hardcore, and other . . . genres';[75] Hiromi Uehara harnessed, within the same frame, jazz and the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13 ('Pathetique'); Robert Glasper fused jazz with hip-hop (and much else); and perhaps most remarkably, on alternating tracks of a recent album Brad Mehldau agonistically connected preludes and fugues from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* and improvisations on those very pieces.[76]

Or one could think of the extraordinary strategies of transgression, disruption, interruption, and convergence that Steven Feld found in the jazz cosmopolitanism he encountered in Accra, Ghana. Under the leadership of Ghanaba (formerly known as Guy Warren), this was a scene that chose 'jazz disruption instead of jazz mimicry';[77] but it was more than that. It left Feld pondering conjunctures and disjunctures in music that intertwined 'Osei Tutu, John Coltrane, and Ludwig van Beethoven, analogized by a parallel philosophical pantheon of Kwame Nkrumah, Malcolm X, and Karl Marx, topped for good measure by the duo of Bob Marley and Frantz Fanon.'[78] The truly remarkable implication of these agonistic encounters was that, quite unlike populism's antagonistic boundaries and Donald Trump's walls, this music fleshed out the paradoxical concept of 'diasporic intimacy'. Feld describes this as a way of thinking and feeling about 'us and them' that is 'not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it'. It's a way of thinking that is 'rooted in the suspicion of a single home'[79] (rather like Adorno's assertion that today 'it is part of morality not to feel at home in one's home'[80]). Instead, home comes to be understood as 'multiple, transportable, detoured'. This is a crucial point. At this time of forced human population flows on an

72 Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, 5–7.

73 Gary Tomlinson, 'Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies', Black Music Research Journal 11/2 (1991), 256–62.

74 Howard Mandel, *Future Jazz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 37.

75 Brennan, *When Genres Collide*, 13.

76 Hiromi Uehara, 'Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 8 – Pathetique', on *Voice*, CD, Telarc Digital, 2011; Robert Glasper, *Black Radio*, CD, Blue Note Records, 2012; Brad Mehldau, *After Bach*, CD, Nonesuch, 2018.

77 Steven Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 49.

78 Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra*, 202.

79 Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra*, 204–6.

80 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 39.

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unprecedented global scale, in this crisis, Accra's transgenred music has shown us how to 'hear home as a musical lost and found'.[81]

Something very similar is happening in the bold genre transgressions of many younger players in South Africa. In this new multicultural democracy, issues of home, identity, and belonging provoke ongoing debate, in which the noisiest, most antagonistic voices belong to the populists. Responding to that noise are a number of jazz-trained musicians who work at the level of genre, approaching genre agonistically, dialogically, interrogating given certainties and fixed positions. One of these is the pianist and composer Bokani Dyer. His 'Mutapa',[82] for example, is a dialogue between jazz and the *mbira* music of the Shona people (Dyer himself describes the album – significantly titled *Neo Native* – as being 'about identity' and a way of asking, 'In the human experience beyond geography, where does the feeling of home reside?').[83] Another is the singer-songwriter Omagugu Makhathini, whose genre-bending piece 'Umoya'[84] involves an encounter with the *maskanda* music of Zulu migrant workers. Worth mentioning, too, is an extraordinary album issued by the School of Music at the University of KwaZulu-Natal; it features a number of the School's young jazz-piano graduates who interrogate and disturb genre rules in a variety of transgressive and transcultural ways.[85]

Disruptions of this sort might be welcome at those times when audiences or promoters allow musicians to destabilize given classifications, practices, and significations, or in those places where they permit music to unsettle too-formulaic social and musical worlds. But the existence of times and places that disturb fixed identities should not make us forget that the border police are always with us, constantly patrolling genre's boundaries. Ghanaba spent many unhappy years working in the United States, where he was typically seen as a sort of musical outlaw and dismissed as a freak. Much closer to the present, I think of a jazz concert presented alongside the 'Rhythm Changes' conference in Birmingham in 2016. There, the Mike Fletcher Jazz Orchestra gave the premiere of a supposedly jazz piece by the marvellously genre-defying English composer Anna Meredith. The piece, *Studies for Big Band*, was entirely unpredictable; it seemed to exult in its own transgressions. For some, this was simply thrilling. But others were appalled. Among them was an eminent jazz musician whom the piece left seething with rage. As she told me afterwards, she was furious that she had been asked to sit through music that refused to be pinned down by the genre rules she took to be essential.

Conclusion

I have argued that what is at issue in such classifications are the powerful, legitimating ideologies of our social and political world. To paraphrase Göran Therborn: it is precisely through

81 Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra*, 243.

82 Bokani Dyer Trio, 'Mutapa', on *Neo Native*, CD, Dyertribe Music, 2018.

83 Bokani Dyer website. www.bokanidyer.com.

84 Omagugu [Makhathini], 'Umoya', on *Uthingo LweNkosazana*, CD, Gundu Entertainment, 2016.

85 Piano Passion Project, *Piano Passions*, CD, 2018.

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such classificatory ideologies that we become subjects, and inherit a world; this is how we recognize '1. *what exists* . . . what does not exist . . .who we are, what the world is, what nature, society, men and women are like . . . 2. *what is good*, right, just, beautiful, attractive, enjoyable and its opposite . . . [and] 3. *what is possible* and impossible'.[86]

Of course, music on its own is not going to change the world. Yet progressive musical tendencies must continue to strive for an inclusive, cosmopolitan social order that will be a home for all. If what I have been arguing is correct, then my call is for approaches to genre that are agonistic, open, and transgressive – and for these to be enlisted in the struggle against the ossified identities and vicious, dehumanizing closures of populism. We must hope that the struggle against authoritarian populism will ultimately be victorious. If it is, let us also hope that jazz and other kinds of contemporary music will be able to step forward to take at least some of the credit.

We might then even be able to agree with Dr Das, of the Asian Dub Foundation. He makes broadly the same philosophical argument as I have done in this article, but does so in just eight words. 'My favourite Indian instrument', he says, 'is the bass guitar.'[87]

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