

ROCK MUSIC: SECULARISATION AND ITS CANCELLATION

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Abstract Postmodern questioning of the sacred/secular binary, when applied to the cultural form of rock music, yields the understanding that rock music is saturated with types of weak religiosity ranging from the use of rock to convey the messages of established religions to the appearance of distinctive forms of religiosity endogenous to rock that involve the relations of artist and audience. The discussion moves from a consideration of religious symbolism and ideas in rock lyrics, through a formal analysis of rock stars as charismatic artist-heroes who are worshipped by their audiences, to an interpretation of the rock concert as a religious ritual. The religiosity found in rock music indicates that in the postmodern condition piety floats free, ready to attach itself through specific forms to a succession of transient contents.

Music is the most powerful of idealist drugs except religion.

(Stephen Spender, quoted in Dunaway 1987 : 51)

Rock'n'roll is my religion and my love.

(Ozzy Osbourne)

One of the great binaries forming the subject position of the 'modern' is sacred/secular. Indeed, the typical late modern ('modernist') story is Nietzsche's tale of the Death of God: How it Happened and its Aftermath.

Postmodernism treats the sacred/secular binary as simply one of the formative structures of a certain self-understanding, that of Western 'man' at the very point at which 'Western Man' was about to be decentred. Western Man had been condemned-liberated to exist on the earth without (belief in) any outside concern or care to sustain Him. Sociologists would then add that into the void created by God's absence had come a purposeless rationalism and/or an outbreak of solipsism (*anomie*). Of course, as we now know, secularisation was a fiction (a deconstructed fairy-tale) that never happened (came true). The old faiths were never extinguished and a profusion of new ones, recalling the forms of polytheism in ancient (post-)civilisations, grew up where the old ones had died.¹ The postmodern religious situation is characterised in great part by weak religiosity in which aspects of pre-modern and modern religions are mixed with commercial hype and fads. Weak religiosity is easily taken up and discarded; from a sociological perspective, that is not a defect but simply a condition. We might, indeed, well think of modernist/postmodern culture as saturated with weak religiosity.

A postmodern reflection on secularisation can usefully begin with Max Weber's insight that along with the decentring of Christianity and the

rationalisation of the world goes an eruption of religious intentionalities through the diverse 'regions' of life, including art which 'takes over the function of a third-worldly salvation' (Weber 1946 : 342). A postmodern historicisation of the modern(ist)/postmodern might be: The decentering of Christianity had two effects — first, intentionalities, practices, activities, sentiments and dispositions formerly bound to Christianity were released like free radicals in chemistry, ready to be attached to any activities and belief systems; second, non-Christian religious elements began to penetrate social activities. The result is a pervasive religiosity that includes the persistence of 'pre-modern' faiths along with the eruption of religion substitutes and the religionising of activities not conventionally considered (according to the sacred/secular binary) to be religious.

Religiosity refers here to the elements identified as 'religious' in the modern discourses on religion, such as magic, faith, worship, ritual, avatar, fetishism, communion, to name a few. The discussion to follow indicates the ways in which conventional religion and postmodern religiosity penetrate and, in the case of religiosity, even constitute that apparently 'secular' form of 'entertainment': rock music.

Religio-rock

On first appearance rock music would be the last place where one would expect to find religiosity. Rock seems to be one of the agents of secularisation. Its major roots are in the Blues and Tin Pan Alley Pop, each of which is secular to the core. 'The blues is still primarily the song of those who have turned their backs upon religion ...' (Oliver 1963 : 306). Pop also has a non-religious bias. Most pop songs are about romance and/or carnality. Even songs about religious celebrations have been profaned. Irving Berlin transformed the holy days of Easter and Christmas into fashion parades ('Easter Parade') and snowy weather ('White Christmas').

In addition, rock music's basic audience, youth, has the lowest rates of attendance of any age group at church services. It is also the age group that is most likely to question all authority, including religious authority. Much rock music, in great part as a result of its audience, is focused on hedonism, especially on the pleasures of sexual activity (which are at least potentially sinful for most branches of Christianity). Rock music, finally, is produced by the 'entertainment' industry, the arch-agent of secularisation.²

Yet, despite first appearances, religion and various forms of religiosity permeate rock music as a cultural form reproduced by a social transaction and enacted in rituals. Rock music is a worldwide phenomenon and so is the religiosity that it spreads. Its production is centred, however, in Western Europe and North America which are the foci for the following discussion.

The interpenetration of rock music and religion/religiosity takes two general forms. In the first case, which is the far less interesting of the two, rock music is appropriated by conventional religious organisations, in particular by fundamentalist Protestant ministries for evangelical purposes; and by marginal

religious tendencies, specifically satanism. In the second case religion/religiosity is appropriated/generated by rock music, so that rock is religionised —takes on the qualities of religion — and even puts itself forward as a substitute (for) religion.

Lyrical religion

The most obvious, though not the most sociologically important, dimension of rock music in which religion/religiosity enters/is generated is narrowly textual: the song lyrics and other textual signifiers such as band names³ as well as album and song titles. These last three in great part determine interpretation of the lyrics by epitomising the artist's message/signature, providing a 'theory' of the lyrics and more generally of the music, setting up a discourse for interpreting the lyrics and music.

In part it is a false abstraction to separate rock lyrics from the rest of the music, all the components of the sound, from the rhythm to the timbre of the voice. All of these non-textual elements surround the lyrics and signify them in a 'musical language', at times to the point that the singer's words cannot be deciphered by the listener. Rock is, after all, primarily 'music' and not poetry. Yet it is also legitimate to separate the textual from the non-textual elements: lyrics and other textual signifiers comprise *texts* that can be, and are, read and interpreted separately from all other elements.

The most important example of conventional religion appropriating the power of rock for its own aims is 'Christian rock', which takes the non-textual elements of a wide variety of rock genres (like metal [Stryper], hard rock [Rez Band], thrash metal [Believer, Vengeance], and pop-rock balladry [Amy Grant]) and inscribes them with Christian texts. Often associated with evangelical Christian ministries, Christian rock artists are explicitly using non-textual elements of the music to spread the word, to preach. The (non-textual) music here, as it does rarely elsewhere in rock, serves the words, that is, the Word: '... the universal response from these [Christian rock] groups is that they are primarily evangelists' (Hart 1988 : 19).

Beyond the world of Christian rock, which functions at least as much to keep evangelical Christian youth in the fold by providing them with their own rock music as it does to win new souls, rock artists occasionally go through religious conversions and base their music on their new faith. Examples include Bob Dylan's Christian phase ('You've Got to Serve Somebody'), George Harrison's Hare Krishna period ('My Sweet Lord'), and Sting's (The Police) New Age spirituality ('Synchronicity'). Also, there are crypto-Christian groups, such as King's X and Kansas, whose lyrics can be read in conventional religious ways. If one includes reggae within rock, one finds many examples of Rastafarian religious music in praise of Jah.

The most important non-Christian religious tendency to generate rock music is satanism. It is not accurate to use the term 'appropriate' in this case because the metal groups that play satanist rock ('black metal') are not using the music as a mere means to spread the Word. Rather text and non-textual elements are

combined to incite a religious experience as well as to inculcate, or at least express, the musicians' religious beliefs. The lyrics, however, do inscribe a religious message, which is diametrically opposed to that of the evangelical promoters of Christian rock.

The belief systems of the most well-known satanist rock artists centre on power and personal assertion. An extreme case of the power of rock generated within satanism is Glen Benton, bassist, growler and lyricist for the Florida-based death-metal band Deicide, who sports an inverted cross on his forehead, which he branded on and reburns periodically. According to Benton: 'Christianity is like love your neighbor and let everybody walk all over you; in the satanic beliefs it's about controlling your destiny and being your own god' (Dasein 1992). The lyrics of most of Benton's songs reflect his religious commitment.

There are, finally, existentialist appropriations of rock in the service of anti-fundamentalist, anti-(Judaeo-) Christian and anti-religious texts. The great rock existentialists are John Lennon (Beatles), Roger Waters (Pink Floyd) and Lemmy Kilminster (Motörhead), all of them British. Lennon is the closest among them to proclaiming a positive atheism that could stand beside religion as a faith. In 'Imagine' he asks listeners to imagine a world without religion in a positive way. He does not tell them what they should see (an atheistic *Book of Revelations!*), but trusts their imagination: Lennon is the existentialist of peace, love and consciousness expansion — a romantic-utopian existentialist.

Things turn more realistic when the 1960s die. Roger Waters and Lemmy Kilminster share the same basic view of existence: we are caught up in 'the machine' (Waters) or 'the orgasmatron' (Lemmy), an all-encompassing, predatory will to power combining the military-industrial complex, and what Althusser calls the ideological state apparatus (schools, religion, mass media). Lucid individuals understand that religion is simply a function of organised social power and come to terms with the condition of being finite beings among finite beings. Lemmy proclaims defiantly that there are 'No Voices in the Sky'. Waters avers: 'And all that you touch and all that you see/Is all that your life will ever be'. From that basis they draw their conclusions about conventional religion. There is no salvation in these visions, only the defiantly regretful acknowledgement that we have been abandoned to die in a technological hell. Flip to the side of rock appropriating/generating religion/religiosity.

We are now in the domain ruled mainly by what lyricist Jim Steinman (Meatloaf, 'The Answer') calls 'the god of sex and drums and rock'n'roll'.⁴ Worship of this deity has its pleasures and its perplexities.

AC/DC occupies the extreme hedonistic wing of the cult of Steinman's god. In their anthem 'Let There Be Rock' they translate the myth of creation in *Genesis* to the history of rock'n roll, proclaiming the good news that the white man's 'schmaltz' and the black man's 'blues' had combined to produce a musical miracle. In AC/DC's new dispensation of rock all the value signs of conventional Christianity are inverted: 'Hell Ain't a Bad Place to Be' — it's where you 'get your balls held every night' ('Big Balls'). Hedonistic good bad-boys happily cruising down 'The Highway to Hell', AC/DC proclaim a vision approaching a positive atheism.

Most of the artists who religionise rock textually are not utopians of AC/DC's sort. Bruce Springsteen's lyrical canon is permeated with Christian symbolism appropriated for a religion of rock. For Springsteen, the dilemma set up by the Judaeo-Christian dualism of an ideal good and a real evil is not resolved by the powers that be in the hereafter: all of us have to be our own redeemers, have to deliver ourselves and one another from evil, and raise ourselves 'above these badlands' in the here-and-now.

As a last example of religionised rock we can return to Lemmy Kilminster (Motörhead) who argues for rock as a substitute (for) religion. The flip side of Lemmy's grim and grisly vision of the all-consuming orgasmatron is an affirmatively resigned hedonism. Lemmy announces that 'the new religion, the electric church' (rock) is 'the only way to go' ('I was Born to Rock and Roll'). Here rock as religion passes over into rock as life strategy, a positive atheism purged of utopia.

The relational form of religio-rock

More fundamentally than in lyrical content (the level at which rock music represents ideologies that are already present in culture and projects its own ideologies on the cultural horizon), religiosity enters into rock as constitutive of the relation of musicians and their fans. In the myth-ideology of rock, and in great part in the actual practices that reproduce rock as a cultural form, the relation of rock stars and their fans is that of charismatic leaders and their followers.

Charisma is used here neither in its strong Christian sense as a gift of the holy spirit nor in its weak journalistic sense of personal appeal. Rather, following a path lighted by Weber, it is seen as a perceived quality of special gifts that place the individual to whom these gifts are attributed outside the constraints of social conventions and expectations. In Weber's conception of charisma, leaders of criminal gangs as well as exemplars of holiness can be charismatic. What is necessary is that the charismatic leader 'rejects all ties to the external order' (Weber 1946 : 250).

The specific charismatic role (subject-position) the rock star plays is that of the romantic artist-hero who follows his/her own vision regardless of the consequences for him/herself and society. The artist-hero, a product of nineteenth-century romanticism, is above and apart from ordinary humanity by virtue of exercising his/her special artistic gift: the claim to charisma lies in the art, in its character of transcending ordinary obligations through offering a higher calling — to be beyond the profane is to be sacred.

The relation of the rock star as romantic artist-hero to his/her audience is unequal. The rock artist is expected to adhere to his/her artistic vision without regard to any other considerations, including the judgements of the audience (this independence is tempered, as will be discussed below, at the concert). The audience is expected to love and appreciate the rock star's music and to adore the star: this is a form of worship.

The relational form of artist-hero — audience defines the ideal religious

relation in rock mythology. Some artists, such as Jim Morrison (Doors) come close to incarnating its dominant pole, but most only achieve the ideal partially. Rock has a commercial as well as a religious dimension. There is always the possibility that the artist-hero will 'sell out' and produce pop music aimed at catering to standardised mass taste. In order to avoid the taint of commercialism, some rock stars make a habit of publicly vilifying in interviews and/or songs their record companies and the industry in general. Further, as participants in capitalist media complexes, rock stars are known through their images — that is, charisma in great part attaches to an image: a charismatic *image* is the object of the fan's worship. Given these considerations, the rock star has a limited but genuine charisma, even if only as an image.

The charisma that is attributed to the rock star on the basis of an artistic vocation gives the star the licence, indeed the obligation, to transgress more general moral codes. These transgressions, in turn, confirm and enhance the star's charisma.

Most generally, rock stars are licensed/expected by their fans to go to hedonic excess, to be extravagant, and to be careless of sanity, safety, and even survival. As romantic artist-hero the rock star is credited with having special experiences associated with creativity that border on or fall into madness. Alcohol and other mind-altering substances are seen as facilitating the process of going crazy, of gaining access to the muse, and of suffering the agonies and enjoying the ecstasies of extra-normal experiences. Excess and extravagance carry over to the rock star's ideal relations with women (there are few female rock artist-heroines), with money, and with bearing toward life and death.

Rock stars are expected to transgress the norm of monogamous marriage, which can be done either by having a promiscuous sex life in which women (groupies) come to them to service their appetites or, much more rarely, by adhering to celibacy (Smiths). The expectation of promiscuity is so strong in rock mythology that stars who are married or are in committed relations tend to hide it from their fans and adopt the image of super-stud. Some stars add to their charisma by marrying women who incarnate the essence of 'femininity', such as the models married by Mick Jagger, Bruce Springsteen, Billy Joel and Rod Stewart. (The vicious remarks made about Paul McCartney's wife Linda, because she was not glamorous, serve as evidence for the punishment exacted for failing to comply with this norm.)

With regard to money, rock stars are expected to be profligate and ostentatious — to possess expensive cars and boats, to have expensive hobbies, and to party hard and sumptuously. The occupation of rock artist has no bureaucratic security. The artist's career often begins with famine and sometimes ends with the star's feast. Prudence is never a virtue in rock mythology. One struggles to make it to the top and one spends lavishly and carelessly if he/she succeeds.

Finally, the ideal rock star as artist-hero inverts the conventional value put on personal security by being careless about safety and survival. Rock stars may participate in dangerous sports like sky-diving and car racing, or take large quantities of drugs and alcohol and/or go without sleep. At the limit is death by

accident, overdose, or suicide, which may raise the rock star to a status analogous to sainthood. The deaths of John Bonham (Led Zeppelin), Keith Moon (The Who), Bon Scott (AC/DC), Randy Rhoads (Ozzy), Jim Morrison (The Doors), Elvis Presley and John Lennon (among the best known) increased their mystique. That is, for the rock star death can be a great career move.

The (mythological) rock star, then, carries out a far-reaching transvaluation of values in which possession and exercise of a special gift licenses the substitution of promiscuity for monogamy, profligacy for prudence, and recklessness for restraint. If not in actuality, then in image, the rock star is a charismatic figure who breaks the bonds of 'external order'.

The fans (a term derived from the word fanatic) offer the rock star devotion in return for the musical gifts bestowed on them and for the star's very existence as a charismatic personality image. As in conventional religions, the degree of devotion varies, among individuals and over time, from zealotry to negligent observance. On the whole, however, the religiosity is weak, matching the rock star's limited charisma. First, worship is not exclusive: as in 'New Age' religiosity fans can worship several bands and even adhere to more than one genre (there are no jealous gods). Second, there is no demand that fans change their life patterns or make significant sacrifices (one wears T-shirts rather than stigmata). Finally, the incentives to worship are the promise and delivery of benefits to the fans: there is never any threat of nor actual punishment.

Yet, despite the weakness of the religiosity of rock fans, proximally and for the most part, it remains religiosity. Sometimes it reaches the intensity of a cult in a conventional religion. The cult of Elvis Presley is one of the most widely known of these.⁵ As journalist Barbara Holland notes, Elvis' home, Graceland, has become a shrine where a candlelight vigil attracting 20,000 people is held each year: 'Graceland is a well-trampled shrine. Travelling museums display [Elvis'] clothes to respectful throngs as if they were the Shroud of Turin' (Holland 1993). Less extreme varieties of devotion are shown by fans who take the lyrics of their idols' songs as sources of wisdom,⁶ who go to concerts, and who collect and display fetishes such as posters, T-shirts, jewellery, and, of course, albums, tapes, videos and CDs (the latter four of which also provide the intrinsic gratification of the music).

Among the fans, groupies form a special category of worshippers.⁷ They are not expected to be concerned with the rock star's art but exist to sacrifice (or at least relinquish control over) their bodies to the heroes, to confirm the heroes' charisma and to propitiate them by providing them with sexual favours. Groupies do not engage in sex for physical satisfaction: they are means to satisfying the stars' appetites, often quickly and in a position of 'genuflection'. Groupies are not seriously attempting to become the spouses or significant others of rock stars: like lottery players they are motivated by the thrill of hope and not the expectation of success. Indeed, success for them is to service the gods who are adulated by the crowds, to abase themselves before greatness.

The religious relation of rock star and fans is brought out clearly against its negation by the genre of punk rock. Punk's view of the musician aggressively

deconstructed the rock star, smashing all the icons and god-like pretences. Appreciation for artists is demonstrated by 'gobbing' (spitting at) the musicians. Punk musicians are expected to mingle with their fans and to look just like them on and off a fairly low stage. Thus, punk deconstructs the distance of star from audience, dereligionising the artist in the same way that the Protestant Reformation removed the 'routinised charisma' from the priest, who was scaled back to a minister. Punk's spirit is exemplified by Billy Idol who came out of the punk scene as a member of the band Generation X and meant his name to be taken with heavy irony.

In concert

The religious relation of artist-audience is brought to its manifest and most complete expression in the concert, which can be understood in the sense of Mircea Eliade as a 'sacred experience' (1957 : 11). For Eliade the sacred is a reality that stands apart from and superior to the ordinary world. The sacred dimension enters into the perceptual world at certain times and within certain spaces. As Eliade explains, 'hierophany' characterises the sacred dimension; that is, within sacred spaces and times the sacred realities 'reveal themselves'. At the concert the artist-hero's charisma and the fan's devotion materialise in a ritual enacting the artist's gift and the fan's worship, and affirming the community of worship to which the fans and in part the artist-hero belong, but to which the artist-hero is also superior. As Bernice Martin states, members of the audience have 'an experience of common belonging and at the same time a heightened version of their own most personal experiences, disappointments, dreams, and desires' (1979 : 108).

All rock concerts do not realise the religious form to the same degree of completeness. The religiosity of rock, it must always be remembered, is weak for the most part, mixed with transient commercial hype and fads, and polytheistic. That charisma in great part attaches to an image, that the artist-heroes do not mete out any punishments but only give rewards (in return for cash offerings), and that the artist-heroes are parts of the community as well as beyond it indicate weak religion. This weak religion is not the absence or defect of religion, but a precise kind of religiosity that arises throughout popular culture in postmodernity. The intensity and completeness with which this religiosity is realised at rock concerts varies according to genre and specific artist.

The religious dimension or form of the concert is realised most completely with superstars and 'cult bands', and in genres in which a high proportion of fans compose a social world that sustains itself through lateral relations and not merely by the relations of individual fans to artists. A social world can precede the genre that emerges as the emblem of its identity (for example, heavy metal) or can crystallize around a genre (for example, 'alternative'). Frank Manning observes that the latter relation is more likely under contemporary conditions: 'Instead of social formations giving rise to symbolic expressions — the nexus identified by Durkheim — it is now symbols that are creating

groups' (1983 : 6). Again, when a symbol creates a group or co-creates it in great part, the religiosity generated within that group is likely to be weak, until and unless persistent communities are established among the worshippers.

When a community of worship exists whose members identify with one another and are oriented to a genre or artist-hero the concert serves to, as Durkheim put it, 'concentrate' that community by bringing together its relatively isolated components 'to celebrate, and indeed create, their corporate existence' (1965 : 470). In the religiosity of rock that 'concentration' is achieved through the ecstatic experience of the fans in response to the music bestowed on them by the heroes in their presence, and through rituals in which artist-heroes and fans exchange gratitude. The artist-hero stands apart from and superior to the community in providing the music that causes the ecstasy (though the artist-heroes can have their own ecstasies triggered by the fans' enthusiasm),⁸ and belongs to the community by participating in the exchange of gratitude.

Fans often come to a concert anticipating hierophany and ecstasy. They have listened to recorded versions of the music and, if they are devoted, have been to their heroes' concerts in the past, have shared their enthusiasm with other fans, and have further familiarised themselves with their heroes through the rock media. The great majority of fans at a concert know the codes of worship and the minority who do not know them learn what is required of them by observation or induction. In some subcultures, like those of Grateful Dead followers and heavy-metal fans, the worshippers ingest drugs and alcohol that enhance their ecstatic experiences.

At the most religionised rock concerts everything is organised to set off and confirm the community's ecstatic experience. Heavy-metal concerts are paradigmatic for such events. The artist-heroes are bigger than life, the music is very loud, the stage sets are imposing, and the lights are striking. The fans are carried on waves of music and other stimuli into, at peak experience, deliverance to moments of intense sensory excitement. The ecstasy is heightened by kinaesthetic participation in the experience; for example, arm thrusting, headbanging and imitating the heroes' movements (air guitar), which are also expressions of gratitude. Gratitude is further displayed by raucous cheering which is reciprocated by the artist-hero with praise of how 'great' the fans are and by efforts through call-and-response to whip up a greater frenzy. Fans will flick their disposable lighters in homage to the artist-heroes — to request an encore from them or during specific emotion-laden songs.

The heavy-metal concert, which is exemplary for the religious form of rock concerts, is deconstructed by the punk concert in which, as was stated earlier, the artist-(hero) does not stand apart from and superior to the fans and in which the artist-fan relation is sometimes one of (play at) mutual abuse. Yet at the most intense punk concerts ecstasy is generated and the underlying relation is the same kind of worshipful religiosity found in other genres of rock.

Conclusion

The analysis of religion/religiosity in the socio-cultural form of rock music

indicates that the horizon of postmodernity is not some secularisation that always already never was, but the ubiquity of religious intentionalities in varying degrees of strength, and their corresponding cultural forms. Postmodern culture, then, is in at least one important dimension religionised culture constituted by a glut of religious imaginaries. These imaginaries are reproduced by industrial and organisational technologies, the operative principles of which contradict the imaginaries. A great experiment is underway: can human beings survive within a mode of production based on high technology and an ideological environment that is hyper-religionised primarily with weak forms of religiosity? This is the Weberian problem restated for postmodernity: It is not a matter of being able to live with disenchantment, but rather of being able to live with the perennial enchantment now served up in thousands of varieties.

As a form of weak religiosity, rock religion is indicative of how religious aspirations are satisfied in a typically postmodern way. The weak and undemanding forms of religiosity characteristic of rock are perhaps ways in which religiosity is dosed out at levels which do not interfere with the functioning of technocorporate organisations. Perhaps they also indicate a failure of religious nerve in the wake of the collapse of traditional disciplinary systems — weak religion in this case indicates the separation of piety from discipline.

Whether one takes a structuralist or a culturalist approach, or confronts the one with the other, as Simmel would, the case of rock music suggests that piety is floating free, ready to attach through specific forms to a succession of transient contents.

Notes

1. For discussions of the new, (post)modern, polytheism, see Weinstein (1985) and Weinstein and Weinstein (1989).

2. The complex relations between postmodern religiosity and the entertainment industry are beyond the scope of this paper. The religiosity in rock music is only one of the many forms in which religiosity appears in popular culture, each of which has its own relation with the context of capitalist commerce.

3. The genre of music called Heavy Metal is replete with bands whose names have religious connotations. The following is a fairly random listing of such bands: Atheist, Believer, Armored Saint, Metal Church, Exodus, Eyehategod, Heathen, Judas Priest, Mercyful Fate, Bibleback, Armageddon, Antichrist, Apocalypse, Burnt Offering, Cloven Hoof, Death of God, Heresy, Heretic, Helloween, Heaven, Godz, Grim Reaper, Hades, Infidel, Messiah, Prophet, Paradise Lost, Deicide, Dark Angel, King's X.

4. The domain of religion/religiosity appropriated/generated by rock is shared by gods, devils and heroes of power that appear in the texts of some heavy-metal groups. Judas Priest's 'Painkiller', on the album of the same title, for example, is a metal saviour who descends to earth 'flashing bolts of steel' and grinding evil underfoot with his 'deadly wheels'. Painkiller is a putative entrant to a techno-polytheism in the making.

5. Ted Harrison, a BBC religious affairs correspondent, sees the Elvis cult as religion in the making. He supports his contention with a wide variety of observations, including fans' descriptions of their 'personal' relationships with Elvis. He cites their belief that Elvis was born in a two-room shack not much bigger than a stable where a mysterious blue light appeared around the place where the infant lay. Elvis was the second of identical twins. His brother Jesse was stillborn, leading fans to view Elvis as being of the 'root of Jesse', an obscure biblical reference to Christ who, according to the gospels, was descended from Jesse, the father of King David. Harrison details the worldwide

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pilgrimages to Graceland, how Elvis' birthplace has been preserved as a shrine, and how fans cherish relics — scarves and shirts — worn by Elvis, and maintain shrines to him in their homes. Harrison argues that the numerous sightings of Elvis since his death are evidence of a belief in his resurrection (Harrison 1993).

6. Fans of some rock bands are active searchers for wisdom in lyrics of their songs. Although a minority, a 'talented tenth', many fans of popular acts such as Rush, Springsteen and Pink Floyd look for meanings, the more hidden or obscure the better. There is a Rush internet group of over 1,400 people who every day receive comments from one another, most of which relate to discussions of lyrical meanings.

7. Groupies serve a variety of kinds of celebrities besides rock musicians; for example, sports stars and serial killers. Women who become groupies want to attach themselves to or at least touch those who have escaped the mundane.

8. Ozzy Osbourne remarked: 'When we played Costa Mesa [California] and we did that jam it was fuckin' unbelievable. The audience, all their mouths dropped open. I don't know if you've ever been in a situation where time stops still. That's the feeling I got when I played Costa Mesa. It's kind of a divine feeling. It felt like God was going to pop out of the fuckin' P.A.' (telephone interview with author, 28 May 1993).

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