
SEPARATING THE MUSIC FROM THE ARTIST: IMMORAL ARTISTS AND MUSICAL RECEPTION^{*}**Müziği Sanatçıdan Ayırmak: Etik Dışı Sanatçılar ve Müziksel Alımlama****Selim TAN^{**}**

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how audiences' perceptions and evaluations of music are affected after an incident that undermines the moral legitimacy of admired artists. It investigates the extent to which music can be perceived separately from the artist, and the attitudes, actions, and strategies adopted in possible attempts to dissociate the two. The physical bond between the artist and the music—referred to as “authenticity as authentication”—in which the audience and the artist share a role, is analyzed in detail. The construction of authenticity toward the artist as author is explored within the framework of the continued relevance of authorial power in the contemporary postmodern world. Methodologically, this paper employs a qualitative approach, drawing on secondary sources and examining various historical and current examples. It argues that the author, whose metaphorical death was proclaimed by Barthes and Foucault, and even stardom as a particular manifestation of authorship, can still occupy a powerful position in texts and be part of their polysemy. Additionally, it is claimed that once an imaginary threshold of fascination is crossed, negative biographical information about the artist can make the “experience impact” inevitable, and attempts to separate the music from the artist may result in a loss of meaning and pleasure.

Keywords: Artist, Authorship, Authenticity, Ethics, Musical Work, Musical Reception.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, hayranlık duyulan sanatçıların ahlaki meşruiyetlerini sarsan bir hadise sonrasında izlerkitlenin müziği algılama ve değerlendirme süreçlerinin nasıl etkilendiğini sorgulamaktadır. Bu kapsamda müziğin sanatçıdan ne denli ayrı alımlanabildiği ve olası müziği sanatçıdan ayırma girişimlerinde benimsenen tutumlar, eylemler ve uygulanan stratejilerin neler olduğu incelenir. İzlerkitlenin ve sanatçının beraber rol oynadığı sanatçı-müzik arasındaki fiziksel bağ yani “otantikleştirme olarak otantisite” üzerinde etraflıca durulur. Burada bir yazar olarak sanatçıya yönelik otantisite inşası süreci, günümüz postmodern dünyasında yazar gücünün güncelliği çerçevesinde irdelenir. Çalışma, çeşitli tarihsel ve güncel örnekleri ikincil kaynaklarla yorumlayan nitel metodolojiye sahiptir. Sonuç olarak Barthes ve Foucault'nun metaforik düzeyde ölümünü ilan ettikleri yazarın ve hatta yazarlığın hususi dışavurumu olarak yıldızlığın (*stardom*), metinlerin yorumlanmasında güçlü konum arz ettiği ve çokanlamlılığın parçası olabildiği ileri sürülür. Ayrıca hayali bir *etkilenme eşiğinin* (*threshold of fascination*) aşımı sonrasında sanatçıya dair olumsuz biyografik malumatların “deneyim etkisini” kaçınılmaz kılabileceği, müziği sanatçıdan ayırma gayretlerinin de anlam ve haz kayıplarını beraberinde getirebileceği savunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sanatçı, Yazarlık, Otantisite, Etik, Müzik Yapıtı, Müziksel Alımlama.

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The urge to separate the music from the artist and appreciate “music as music” is primarily the result of the immoral actions of artists admired by the audience. Following Suchman (1995), *moral legitimacy*—a positive normative evaluation of a popular artist and their activities—establishes the context for “normal” or ideal reception. However, an artist’s possible immoral behavior, criminal acts, or deviant actions (misogyny, racism, antisemitism, harassment, rape, pedophilia, and murder), particularly radical political statements—in other words, moral illegitimacy—can completely disrupt the conditions of ideal reception. This phenomenon manifests itself in many areas of art, namely plastic arts, literature, cinema, and music. For example, allegations such as Paul Gauguin’s “exotic” child abuse, Ezra Pound’s support for fascism, and Johnny Depp’s violence against his wife led to conflict. In music, allegations including Wagner’s antisemitism, Gesualdo’s murder of his wife, Kanye West’s “I like Hitler” statement, and R. Kelly’s child abuse have generated significant controversy. Wagner is perhaps one of the oldest and most well-known examples. Wagner’s antisemitic views, expressed in his article “Das Judenthum in der Musik” (1850/1894), later turned into a propaganda tool for Hitler and his supporters. In Nazi Germany’s concentration camps, Jewish prisoners were forced to listen to Wagner’s music repeatedly (Fackler, 2017: 64). This trauma has led to the association of Wagner’s music with Nazism for Holocaust victims. As a result, attempts to perform Wagner’s music in what is now Israel since 1938 have been met with controversy, leading to protests and censorship (Sherwood, 2012). The undermining of ideal reception conditions due to the moral illegitimacy of the artist—given its historical significance, this phenomenon can be referred to as the *Wagner effect*—indicates that music cannot always be perceived as pure music. Here, the state of *cognitive dissonance* (Festinger, 1957) caused by deviant acts that cannot even be imagined to be juxtaposed with the concept of “artist,” which was shaped as a sublime being by the ideology of Enlightenment and Romanticism, is clear. Matthes’ (2022) provocative term “immoral artists” epitomizes this cognitive dissonance. The central question arising from this dissonance is whether listeners can continue to engage with immoral artists and their art (both previous and new) in the same way as before the exposure of the artists’ transgressions. In short, do the listeners have the ability to separate the music from the artist? If so, to what extent and at what cost? As Grady (2019) asks, “How do I reconcile aesthetic pleasure with moral disgust? Which of my feelings will win? What do I do with art I love that was created by a monster?” Comprehending these questions’ projection onto music constitutes this paper’s purpose. This paper also argues that, in parallel with the increased fascination with artists, the audience comprehends music through the integrity of the artist and the art, producing meaning and pleasure in this context. Therefore, this paper asserts that there will inevitably be some “experience impact” (Ralston, 2022) on the audience regarding the art of admired immoral artists, that absolute separations between the music and the artist are not possible, and attempts to make such separations may lead to a loss of meaning and pleasure.

Separating the art from the artist is experienced differently in each branch of art. The artist’s perception and the unique functioning of the production process in plastic arts, literature, and cinema demand examining music on its own. Even within music, the nature of artistry/authorship varies in the classification of folk music, art music, and popular music. However, due to the limitation of (ethno)musicological studies on this paper’s subject, I intend to understand the similarities and differences by referring to broader literature (Moulard et al., 2014; Kraus, 2017; Maltwood & O’Meara, 2021; Ralston, 2022; Kaube, Eiserbeck, & Abdel Rahman, 2023). The methodology of this paper is qualitative, based on secondary research, and focused on the interpretation of selected historical and current examples. Finally, this paper conceives the artist as an author/auteur. The notion of separating the art from the artist or the text from the author is explored by considering the author’s constructed authenticity and the role

of authorial power in the contemporary postmodern world. As a result, it is central to question how authenticity, which includes meanings such as “real,” “genuine,” “honest,” and “sincere,” is constructed in music (Stokes, 1994; Moore, 2002; Han, 2011/2021; Erol, 2015), the actuality of authorial power (Barthes, 1967/1977; Caughie, 1981), and even stardom as a specific output of the authorship (Goodwin, 1992).

AUTHENTICITY, AUTHORSHIP, and MUSIC

The concept of authorship, rooted in literary studies, refers to the creative subject who is “perceived” to be responsible for any artistic text. For Shuker (2006), authorship as an ideological construct is emphasized through the concepts of “creativity” and “aesthetic value.” For example, despite the collective nature of film production, the perception of the director as an author develops as a result of critical studies in the 1950s (Shuker, 2006: 14). Similarly, the collective performance of a symphonic work of Western art music and the inevitable differences between each performance does not change the fact that the author is unquestionably the composer. The advent of the artist as an author in Western art music history is directly tied to the Romantic ideology of the 19th century. The ideology of Romanticism, emerging from the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, encompasses a set of philosophical and aesthetic values that highlight the cult of the genius artist (e.g., Bach, Beethoven, Mozart), along with notions such as “serious listening” and *l’art pour l’art* (art for art’s sake) (Beard & Gloag, 2005: 121-122). In addition, the singer/soloist can be positioned as an author in most folk music that aspires to reflect the folk spirit (*volksgeist*), whether anonymous or composed. Finally, in popular music, while producers, music video directors, songwriters, and DJs are authors, the singer/soloist remains the central and most prominent figure. For Erol (2015), the audience often lacks a comprehensive understanding of the various agents involved in the complex production process of popular music and the extent of their contributions. The singer/soloist, as an author in popular music, is the limiting agent of the discourse of authenticity, acting as the dominant figure of consistency (Erol, 2015: 221). However, unlike fans who center on the persona of the artist, *aficionados*—who concentrate on being aware of the secondary involvements in music (record companies, producers, etc.) and so require high cultural capital—can be considered an exception (Shuker, 2006: 99). It is essential to assume that the cultural capital of the listeners may be a factor in separating the music from the artist.

To truly grasp an author’s power in a text, it is key to understand what authenticity is and how it works. Thus, it is helpful to revisit the concept of authenticity through the lens of cultural relativism, a dominant perspective in anthropology and ethnomusicology. Social scientific concepts and theories also bear cultural traces, just as the material and immaterial values produced by various human cultures. For example, notions of authenticity differ between the Far East and the West. For Han (2011/2017), the West maintains that the essence remains constant despite change, while Chinese philosophy embraces deconstructionism, which severs the connection between Being and essence. While the essence resists transformation, the Tao (literally “the way” or “the path”) accepts change. Chinese thought pursues the pragmatics of things rather than fixed/unchanging essences or principles. China’s *Shanzai* culture manifests in industrial goods/services and art. Notably, shanzai phone brands such as Nokir, Samsing, and Suny-Ericsson are cheap and offer extra features not found in the originals (Han, 2011/2017). In art, Han (2011/2017, Zhen ji: Original section, para 4) describes a similar situation: “A Chinese masterpiece never remains the same in itself. The more it is admired, the more its appearance changes. It is regularly overwritten by connoisseurs and collectors.” In China, skillfully imitating a master’s art is a recognized form of artistic achievement and is met with appreciation. This contrasts with the Western imagination of authenticity centered on

“originality” in art. As a result, the perception of authenticity in (ethno)musicology, especially in popular music studies, is Western-centric.

For the Western understanding of authenticity, what is the artist’s essence as a Being, and how should it be preserved unchanged? To answer this question, it is important to highlight certain (ethno)musicological implications of authenticity. For example, Stokes (1994) views authenticity as a discursive metaphor with great persuasive power. For Stokes, authenticity consists of statements like “This is what is really significant about this music” and “This is the music that makes us different from other people” (1994: 7). In this context, music perceived as “authentic” is often deemed valuable, and conversely, music considered “valuable” is often perceived as authentic. In other words, authenticity unavoidably intersects with discussions of musical value. For Erol (2015: 208), authenticity, as a discursive construction of what constitutes “good music,” carries connotations of “good,” “beautiful,” and “beneficial.” Thus, authenticity defines musical value through essential musical or non-musical components. In popular music, although the commercial nature of music is inevitable, rock’s claim to “artistry” against mainstream pop, which is positioned as purely “commercial,” represents a search for non-musical authenticity. On the other hand, Wynton Marsalis, an advocate for neoclassicism in jazz, exemplifies the musical determination of authenticity through his statement, “Swing, blues, syncopation, harmony, melody, rhythm. That’s jazz. Group improvisation, that’s jazz music, out of the church tradition. All this cacophony and noise, people (who) can’t swing, don’t know harmony, no technical proficiency on their instruments--that’s not jazz musicianship” (Guilliatt, 1992). However, no matter how it manifests itself, authenticity is *ascribed*, not *inscribed* (Moore, 2002: 210). Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010) mention various forms of authenticity, including “folkloric authenticity,” “authenticity as self-expression,” “authenticity as negation,” “authentic inauthenticity,” “body authenticity,” and “authenticity as transcendence of everyday life.” They emphasize that the concept of authorship is dominant in popular music, as reflected in the various authenticities listed. Indeed, the Greek prefix “auto” (self-) in the etymological root of authenticity directly indicates the concept’s relation to “authority” and especially to “authorship/auteurship” (Weisethaunet & Lindberg, 2010: 465). For example, Fornäs (1995: 274) considers authenticity a matter of representation that focuses on “how the textual structures are constructed to present themselves as related to the subjects that created them.” However, as Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010: 465) point out, Fornäs examines the construction of authenticity through all kinds of receivers, including the author, without privileging the author. Similarly, Moore (2002: 210) underlines that since the authenticity of a performance depends on who we are, the question should be “who” authenticates rather than “what.” Moore (2002) defines authenticity on three levels. The first level, *first-person authenticity* or *authenticity of expression*, relates to the audience’s connection not only to the artist’s sonic gestures and actions but also to the artist as the source of those gestures and actions (214). This occurs when the artist successfully communicates with the audience unmediated. *Second-person authenticity*, or *authenticity of experience*, occurs when the artist can convey and represent the listeners’ life experiences (220). Finally, *third-person authenticity*, or *authenticity of execution*, refers to the proper transmission and representation of ideals within a performance tradition (218). Thus, Moore (2002: 213) stresses that authenticity as an act of authentication operates through the perceiver’s rendering of the mental origin (the artist) and the physical manifestation (the performance) as “unmediated” by reducing the distance between them to zero. The essence that the artist as a Being must protect is the totality of inputs (norms, values, practices) that make perceptual unmediatedness possible. In the unmediated perception of performance (especially in popular music), the “natural” perception (or the ability to make it perceived) of the artist’s musical (sonic codes) or non-

musical (bodily, visual, and discursive codes) actions plays a central role. The three levels of authenticity mentioned by Moore (2002) depend on this. Moulard et al. (2014) define *artist authenticity* as the artist's passion and commitment to their art, driven by intrinsic motivation. Here, the artist must not be subject to an external motivation (profit, prestige, etc.) that could be perceived as "deception/betrayal" by the recipient. Moulard et al. (2014) argue that although the concept of *brand* is associated with companies, products, and services, people can also be interpreted as brands (Close, Moulard, & Monroe, 2011; Parmentier, Fischer, & Reuber, 2013; Thomson, 2006). Thus, Moulard et al. (2014) argue that artists can be considered human brands, as they are the producers and social faces of their works.

Similar to brands' ethical marketing strategies that ostensibly put the profit motive in the background, artists' authentic constructions based on producing for themselves (emphasizing internal motivation) lead to a positive evaluation of the artist and their art (Marshall & Forrest, 2011). How does this happen? Moulard et al. (2014) provide examples from the plastic arts, such as artists personally applying paint or molding sculpture, emphasizing the importance of the physical bond between the artist and the art. A similar situation occurs during a musical performance when the sounds emanating from the instrumentalist/vocalist are integrated with the performer's bodily movement (hands, feet, breathing, vocal cords). Unlike a performer, a composer, by the very nature of the compositional activity, brings mental design to the fore. In addition, beyond sonic codes, the visual (clothing, album covers, music videos), bodily (facial expressions, physical gestures, touch, proxemics), and discursive codes (lyrics, artist biography, media statements) associated with the music are also dominant components of the artist-art bond. For example, Hennion (1990/2005) states that in pop music, having a "good voice" is a marker of the artist's persona rather than vocal technique or mastery. In other words, the characteristic expressiveness of the voice is significant. Hennion (1990/2005) emphasizes that the singer's appearance, movements, posture, and clothing also contribute to the expression of the persona and in captivating the audience. However, for Hennion, the voice is less deceptive at the perceptual level than the overall image of visual and bodily codes, and it reveals the real persona more accurately because the voice cannot be manipulated as easily as appearance. In Goffman's (1956) terms, the voice is the most demanding dimension of image control in the artist's *impression management*. Hennion stresses that the singer's biography is the source that gives meaning to sound and image and that sonic, visual, and verbal aspects also shape the biographical construction. Thus, the totality of the sonic, visual, bodily, and discursive codes related to the artist as author, which were mentioned above, reveals the persona's manifestation as a component of impression management and the physical bond between the author and the text.

The consolidation of the bond between the artist and the music, on both musical and non-musical grounds, relies on the act of authentication by the audience. For Moore's (2002) first-, second-, and third-person authenticities to be achieved, the artist needs to produce strategies that can reduce the mental and physical distance to "zero point" (unmediated communication) for the receiver. It is helpful to reconsider Moore's approach that it is not "what" but "who" authenticates that matters, as "who" authenticates "whom." Several empirical studies (Baugh, 1988; Fine, 2003; Dutton, 2004; Marshall & Forrest, 2011; Moulard et al., 2014) have demonstrated that art and artists are closely related and cannot be perceived independently. This supports the arguments presented earlier. However, unlike the plastic arts and literature, music's temporal nature and unique function remind us that music should be considered separately. Therefore, it is necessary to rediscuss the extent to which Barthes' idea of the "death of the author," which has profoundly influenced cultural studies, is realistic.

RETHINKING the “DEATH of the AUTHOR” in MUSIC: DEAD or ALIVE?

Before discussing Barthes’ essay “La mort de l’auteur” (1967/1977), which has significantly influenced postmodern criticism, I will briefly address biographical criticism and New Criticism. Biographical criticism argues that an author’s personal life determines the text they create and emphasizes the importance of understanding the author’s experiences and struggles to access the “true” meaning of the text. In contrast, New Criticism completely separates the text from the author, claiming that meaning is contained solely within the text and seeking meaning through formalist analyses. Barthes’ idea of the “death of the author,” a response to New Criticism, posits that the text’s meaning(s) lie in the reader’s interpretation. Barthes (1967/1977) begins his famous essay by examining this sentence, “This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility,” from Balzac’s story *Sarrasine*. Barthes analyzes whether these expressions belong to the protagonist or the author’s personal or narrative self. At the end of his article, Barthes notes that the sentence in Balzac’s story was not spoken by anyone because the main issue here is not “writing” but “reading.” In this way, Barthes undermines the theological authority of the author and places the reader at the center of textual analysis. For Barthes (1967/1977: 147), an author-centered approach to the text is “to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.” The “birth of the reader” can only occur at the expense of the “death of the author” (Barthes, 1967/1977). As Grady (2019) points out, since readers are free to interpret a text independently of the author’s intentions, there is no fixed, definitive, or final interpretation of texts. For example, the idea of the “death of the author” implies that a musical work can have as many interpretations as there are listeners and that there is no distinction between the interpretations of those with high cultural capital (music critics, academics, etc.) and those of the general listener in terms of uncovering the “true” meaning. Dismissing the author also means that biographical information about the artist is ineffective for a “true” understanding of the music. While I do not aim to initiate a discussion on musical meaning, it is crucial to understand that meaning is a “sense” not dependent on one’s cultural capital (in terms of access to “true” meaning)¹ and can always be “revised” (Huovinen, 2011). In constructing meaning, it is essential to question to what extent Barthes’ assertion of the “death of the author” can correspond to and function at the empirical level. Barthes’ approach to the processes of meaning construction in the concrete world, without accepting the “death of the author” as *a priori*, also allows us to grasp the exceptional role of the author in the act of musical authentication.

The cultural studies tradition, which examines media messages from an empirical and critical perspective, has been influenced by Barthes and Foucault, who argue that the author has been eroded (Caughie, 1981; Goodwin, 1992). Cultural studies’ view of culture as a site of struggle within Gramscian hegemony has clearly influenced this perspective, especially through its emphasis on how readers interpret texts in terms of “resistance” and “consent.” Cultural studies have examined the ambiguity and contestation of reception processes regarding consumers (readers) rather than producers (authors) responsible for the texts. However, the belief that readers do not consider authors as text producers overlooks the author’s sociocultural, ideological, and manipulative power in constructing meaning. Therefore, instead of the text-reader perspective of cultural studies, it is important to establish a tripartite perspective centered on the author-text-reader. As previously noted, it is challenging to

¹ In the Barthesian approach, the level of cultural capital is not a determinant in “finalizing” meaning. In addition to cultural capital, each reader’s sociocultural background, social class, and psychological characteristics also contribute to polysemy.

separate the music from the artist in the process of authentication, and every musical piece contains traces of the artist. In this respect, Goodwin (1992: 109) argues that popular culture primarily promotes its products through stardom and authorship, citing David Lynch, Bruce Springsteen, and Prince as examples. Goodwin even points out that in pop and rock, authorship is “consumed” through the artist/singer more than in any other field of popular culture. This case is relevant to folk music, Western art music, and popular music. It is evident that authorship and stardom are not concepts confined to popular music; notably, canonical artists of Western art music such as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven are also “consumed” as stars. Of course, it is worth mentioning that stardom is an exceptional expression of authorship. Although the star, like the author, is responsible for the text and is the central figure of consistency, the star agent has a unique *star legitimacy* that operates beyond the text. Star legitimacy refers to a musician’s power (fans, being a role model for other musicians) acquired through an exceptional reputation and prestige in the musical world (symbolic capital in the Bourdieusian sense), that is, *charismatic authority* (Tan, 2022). The charismatic authority of stars is embodied in the characteristics that fans attribute to them, including holiness and heroism, as discussed by Weber (1947/2017). Stardom, closely related to fandom, is most evident when the star’s aura is directly experienced (concerts, speeches, meet-and-greets, etc.). The hysterical expressions of fans (screaming, fainting, crying, etc.) at the beginning of the Bucharest concert in 1992, when Michael Jackson stood like a statue for about three minutes, are examples of stardom power. Similarly, concepts such as *Beatlemania* and *Madonnamania*, which refer to the extraordinary fan followings created by the Beatles and Madonna, reflect this issue. Thus, stardom is an act of “consecration” that encompasses and transcends authorship by materializing through the passionate efforts of fans. As the exceptional output of authorship and stardom, aura shapes how texts are received. Based on this, Goodwin (1992) notes that star-texts are central to the music industry and emphasizes that stardom is highly functional (loyalty to the star) and can guarantee or enable sales in advance, in the longevity of the artist’s career. Stardom creates a possibility of identification for the audience; that is, in Moore’s (2002) terms, first- and second-person authenticity. Goodwin (1992) reminds us that the manipulative power of the music industry should not be underestimated and mentions classic strategies like (1) fabricating a biography of a new artist as coming from the lower classes or (2) making the artist appear much more successful than they already are. For example, the first is the exposure of the record company’s fiction that rapper Vanilla Ice came from the lower classes; the second is Guns N’ Roses’ “Paradise City” music video, which depicts the band, despite their early years, giving a concert in front of tens of thousands of fans at New York’s Giants Stadium (Goodwin, 1992: 106). Thus, Goodwin (1992) argues that authorship—and stardom as its particular manifestation—can function as a manipulation by the music industry and that not all theories of manipulation need to be elitist, as in the Frankfurt School. Unlike the text-reader-oriented approach of cultural studies, as indicated, the physical bond between the author and the text affects what the text “is” within the framework of “who” the author is. In this way, the question of not only “who” authenticates “what” but also “who” authenticates “whom” becomes very important. In other words, Barthes’ idea of the metaphorical “death of the author,” beyond wishful thinking, does not seem to work in practice. In music, it is doubtful how the audience receives the art, regardless of the “who” behind the artist. How and how often the music of stars and cult composers—including Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven from Western art music and Michael Jackson, Madonna, and the Beatles from popular music—is listened to and paid attention to cannot be considered independent of who they are. For Frith (1996: 121), who notes that experiencing music is also experiencing identity, listeners engage with songs by forming an *emotional alliance* with the artist and their fans. This emotional alliance brings with it the

audience's production of meaning and pleasure about the artist. Therefore, the author cannot reduce the audience's readings to a single one and undermine polysemy. My critique of Barthes' idea of the "death of the author" is to defend a polysemy in which the author plays a substantial role instead of an "authorless" polysemy. Tan (2018) found that SongMeanings.com users' dominant/preferred readings of Imagine Dragons' "Radioactive" centered on the thoughts of the band's lead singer, Dan Reynolds. It can be imagined that a listener's "realization" and a particular interest in the artist as an author of the music can occur after a possible *threshold of fascination* (Figure 1) has been crossed. It is crucial to consider that the listener's ability to make the physical artist-music bond depends on crossing the imaginary threshold of fascination. Therefore, if it is not even known who the artist "is" on the radio or in streaming platforms (e.g., Spotify) playlists, the author cannot influence the interpretation of the text.

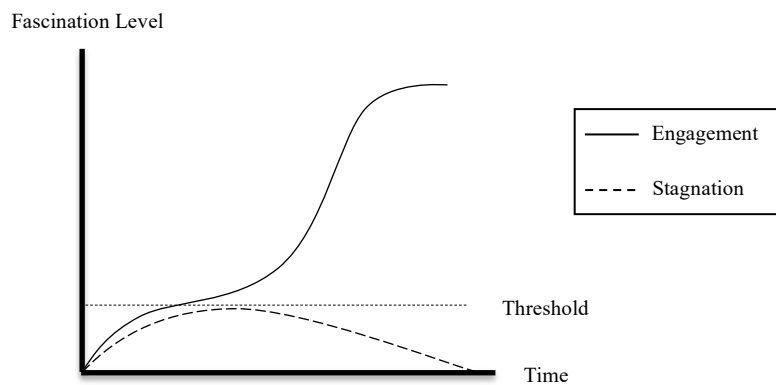


Figure 1. *Threshold of Fascination*

What might the physical death (literal level) of the artist as an author, rather than the metaphorical level Barthes refers to, change? It could change many things because a living author can negotiate and resist the meanings attributed to them and the texts they produce. A living author can attempt to intervene in readers' interpretations within their power. For example, the punk band The Clash's song "White Riot" was interpreted as a "race war" by some listeners, causing fights at concerts. Joe Strummer, the songwriter of the band, who was very angry about this situation, said about the lyrics, "They're not racist! They're not racist at all!" and he emphasized that the song was about the ability of white youth, just like black youth, to create their class-based rebellion (Miles, 1976). Moreover, while The Police's hugely popular "Every Breath You Take" is often read as a romantic love song, the band's songwriter Sting states the opposite. Sting says the song approaches love in a sinister way and is about "surveillance" and "control" (Eames, 2021). As these examples illustrate, authors can provide meaning-limiting explanations for their controversial songs. This implies a privilege that only living authors can exercise. On a literal level, physically dead authors are unlikely to be able to respond to disputed readings. For example, Michael Jackson, who died in 2009, cannot respond to the documentary *Leaving Neverland* (2019), which revisited allegations of child abuse against him, or to cynical readings of songs like "Do You Know Where Your Children Are" and "The Lost Children." Therefore, for an author, physical death brings the simultaneous unclaimed *textualization* of both themselves and the texts they produce. This textualization opens the doors to an advanced level of polysemy, bypassing the author's efforts to limit meaning while alive. The physical bond (through sonic, visual, bodily, and discursive codes) that the artist establishes with their music loosens and begins to function as a symbolic bond. It is no longer possible for the artist to keep the physical bond alive, either through new products or by reproducing their aura at concerts. Hologram performances aimed at supposedly resurrecting

dead artists (Michael Jackson, Tupac Shakur, Ronnie James Dio, etc.) are attempting to “imitate” the aura, which can hardly go beyond the activity of watching a three-dimensional video for the audience. Although it is apparent that the author, dead or alive, influences how readers signify the text, the realization of Barthes’ idea of the “death of the author” (the strengthening of the reader’s will) is to some extent linked to the “death of the author” on a literal level. In line with the previous discussion, it is necessary to examine the possibilities and limitations of separating the music from the artist through various empirical examples.

EXPLORING the SEPARATION of the MUSIC from the ARTIST THROUGH a BROADER LITERATURE

In their philosophical essay on the separation of the art from the artist, Maltwood and O’Meara (2021) present three possible theoretical positions. (1) First, they suggest that an artistic object, as the result of labor, is brought into the world by the artist, and art begins to exist in the world of human beings as the first artistic act (brushstroke, written word, produced sound, etc.). (2) Second, they highlight Heidegger’s (1962/1927) view in *Sein und Zeit* that art operates through poetizing life, and an artist’s experience of creating art is the disclosure of being. This approach suggests the inseparability of the art and the artist. (3) Finally, they reference Barthes’ idea of the “death of the author”, stating that the reader’s interpretation diminishes the artist’s authority over art. This strong reader-centric perspective enables a separation of the art from the artist. Maltwood and O’Meara conclude that while separation is possible within the first and third positions, it comes at the cost of neglecting the artist’s central role in art. While I appreciate their thorough analysis, it is critical to understand which tendency prevails in everyday life and the potential consequences of separation attempts. The studies and explanations in this section highlight that absolute separation is impractical, different separation strategies exist, and ultimately, separation can lead to a loss of meaning and pleasure.

Ralston (2022) questions film critics who focus on authorship theory and how the #MeToo movement—which can be seen as the recent culmination of cancel culture—affects their film reviews. As a reminder, the #MeToo movement refers to the period (2017-present) in which women shared similar experiences of sexual harassment, sparked by activist Tarana Burke following allegations of sexual misconduct against film producer Harvey Weinstein. These allegations spread beyond Weinstein to many prominent figures in the entertainment world. In his paper, Ralston (2022: 3) seeks to understand how these allegations influenced film critics at the time by examining directors such as Woody Allen, Roman Polanski, Bryan Singer, Nate Parker, and Casey Affleck. In this context, Ralston (2022) identifies five strategies of critics. These are “merit alone,” where the focus is solely on the film; “audience agency,” where the responsibility is left to the audience; “experience impact,” where it is openly acknowledged that the allegations irrevocably affect the viewing experience; and “textual impact,” where, as an extension of “experience impact,” the film is said to contain elements related to the allegations. Ralston’s (2022) classification can also be directly applied to music. For example, whether there are traces of antisemitism in Wagner’s *Parsifal* or child abuse in Michael Jackson’s song “P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing)” undoubtedly reveals the “textual impact” debate. Moreover, the immoral artist controversy is a test of “experience impact” for the audience. In such a situation, listeners must negotiate with themselves to what extent they can evaluate the music on its “merit alone.” At this point, the differences between film and music are worth discussing. Although a director is considered an author, unlike a singer, the director cannot be directly “heard” or “seen” in the film. Like a composer of Western art music, the director establishes a physical bond through their mental design. However, in

the case of a film actor, as with a singer, the acts of “hearing” and “seeing” come into play, and the ways they are experienced may differ.

Experimental studies on painting (Moulard et al., 2014; Kraus, 2017; Kaube et al., 2023) are also worth mentioning. For example, Moulard et al. (2014) point out that the perception of an artist’s passion and dedication to their work positively affects viewers’ attitudes toward the artist and their art. Similarly, Kaube et al. (2023) indicate that paintings by artists with negative biographical information are less appreciated and lead to higher arousal than those with neutral information. Kraus’s (2017) experimental study, which will be discussed in more detail because it also has content relevant to music, explores how artists’ political attitudes influence audience perception. Kraus argues that the paintings by artists with right-wing or discriminatory attitudes are viewed negatively. In contrast, left-wing attitudes have no significant effect on the perception of the paintings, as they are considered the default attitude of the artists. Kraus suggests that the “experience impact” toward a morally illegitimate artist is inevitable. He also notes that the viewer’s level of cultural capital shapes how they respond to allegations against the artist, with those holding lower cultural capital being more easily influenced. In contrast, viewers with high cultural capital are better able to focus on the painting and keep the “experience impact” under control (Kraus, 2017: 42). While it is conceivable that a similar situation exists in music—where a high level of cultural capital among the listeners could facilitate the separation of the art and the artist—I do not consider it is possible to completely reset the “experience impact” for artists who are beyond the threshold of fascination. Indeed, the power of association among sonic, visual, bodily, and discursive codes that underlie the physical bond the audience establishes with a singer they admire should not be underestimated. Seeing the artist’s face in music videos and hearing their voice are influential at this stage. Empirical studies (Abdel Rahman, 2011; Wieser et al., 2014; Junghöfer et al., 2017) reveal that having biographical information about a person’s crimes changes how we perceive their face and experience their emotional facial expressions.

All these studies reveal the inescapability of the “experience impact,” indicating that the absolute separation of the art and the artist is not very valid in practice. Similarly, despite differences in how it functions, the situation in music mirrors these findings. So, how do the listeners strategize against immoral artists? It is crucial to understand when listeners become aware of the allegations against the artist, whether the evaluation is (1) prospective or (2) retrospective. For example, (1) when listeners learn about the immoral actions of an artist they have never heard of (additional biographical information), it conditions the “experience impact” in their perception of the work. This aligns with the findings from the experimental studies in painting (Moulard et al., 2014; Kraus, 2017; Kaube et al., 2023). On the other hand, (2) when an immoral act is revealed about an artist who has already crossed the threshold of fascination for listeners, it prompts them to reevaluate both the artist’s previous and new works. As a result, retrospective evaluations are likely more demanding due to the negative biographical information(s) about artists they admire. In such cases, severe cognitive dissonance is evident, and listeners may attempt to reduce this dissonance by reconciling “actions” and “values.” In this respect, Liu’s (2023) comments on rapper Kanye West are particularly notable. West’s praise of antisemitism and Hitler sparked controversy in the United States, leading to the termination of his partnerships with Adidas, Gap, and Balenciaga and an eight-month suspension of his account on X (formerly Twitter). Liu (2023) argues that despite this controversy, songs like “Roses,” which critiques capitalism and the private healthcare system, and “Diamonds from Sierra Leone,” which addresses neocolonial exploitation in Africa, retain their intrinsic musical value. Although these texts still survive as mere art, West’s public perception has significantly declined, with his net worth plummeting from two billion dollars to

four hundred million, according to Forbes (Upadhyay, 2023). This situation illustrates how cancel culture, driven by political correctness and *hypermoralization* in today's postmodern world, can impact an artist's career. In essence, postmodernism seeks to separate texts from their authors, yet it paradoxically endorses censorship and sanctions based on the author's moral standing. This dynamic highlights the power of the "experience impact" and the prevalence of ad hominem responses, where attention shifts from the argument to the person. It is important to note that debates over the separation of the art and the artist have existed well before the era of postmodernism and cancel culture (as in the case of Wagner), rooted in the social construction of "art" and "artist" as a social category.

Finally, a financial boycott, reflecting an activist stance, is the most common strategy used by listeners against artists they already admire, yet who have lost moral legitimacy in their judgment. In this case, although most listeners consider the "experience impact" inevitable, they also mention that they withhold financial support when they want to hear previous or new art by the artists in question. For example, one writer considers it right to separate the art from the artist if it is unpaid ("Yes, we should," 2022). Chana (2020) notes that financial support can mean endorsing the immoral actions of the controversial artist, arguing that buying Harry Potter-related merchandise would support J. K. Rowling, who creates controversy due to being widely criticized as transphobic. In response to Chana's (2020) blog post, a user named May suggests that if one wants to read a book by a problematic author, one can read a pirated edition—without praising the author. Adams (2021) argues that musician Chris Brown, who has a history of violence against women and even assaulted Rihanna in 2009, continues to release music regularly, and for him, listening to Brown's music means "putting money directly in his pocket." Here, Adams lays out his strategy through the following two questions: "Is my consumption directly benefiting them in any way? Am I appreciating the art alone or celebrating the artist as well?" Thus, Adams (2021) advocates a financial boycott of controversial artists and a restriction of appreciation to the art rather than the artist. Moreover, Adams (2021) argues that overlooking the moral legitimacy of artists such as Frida Kahlo and Nina Simone—particularly their opposition to discrimination—constitutes an injustice and emphasizes that art should not be viewed as entirely separate from the artist. Finally, cancel culture, which operates in the cultural sphere, differs from ethical consumerism, its corporate-based version. Although financial boycotts may be present in both actions, it can be assumed that the moral illegitimacy of corporations can be taken for granted, leading to more limited reactions and boycotts. In the global capitalist system, corporate exploitation and environmental harm are more common. However, the morally idealized nature of the concepts of "art" and "artist," dating back to the Enlightenment and Romanticism, can create strong cognitive dissonance.

CONCLUSION

Is the influence of biographical information inevitable from the audience's perspective? In short, "Yes," however, this is conditional, depending on certain factors. It has already been mentioned that biographical information cannot be disregarded once the listener crosses the imaginary threshold of fascination with the artist. Biographical information, which is prospective for the artist, can lead the listener to a biased reception at the outset and constitute an obstacle to admiration. In such contexts, it can be predicted that the audience approaches the art of the immoral artist with an "experience impact" or even a "textual impact." In this sense, experimental studies in painting have been cited (Moulard et al., 2014; Kraus, 2017; Kaube et al., 2023). There is no reason not to assume a similar situation occurs in music. On the other hand, retrospective biographical information should not

be omitted because it causes a jarring and robust cognitive dissonance due to the listeners' already existing admiration for the artist (e.g., the star artist). At this point, listeners must negotiate how to position the existing and new art of the immoral artist who has acted contrary to the values and norms of both themselves and society. What makes this negotiation necessary is the excessive and negative biographical information the listener is aware of, willingly or unwillingly. Therefore, disappointment and heartbreak must end with an approach that reduces cognitive dissonance. There are two possibilities. (1) The first is the listeners' complete rejection of the immoral artist, removing the artist and their previous and new art from their lives. Listeners, unable to withstand the "experience impact" or "textual impact" caused by the artist's new negative state, impose complete censorship as a solution. (2) The second is that listeners continue to listen to the artist despite their moral illegitimacy, but do not take any action that implies financial support. Even if listeners make a strategic move, assuming that the "experience impact" or "textual impact" is invalid is largely incorrect. They may experience a loss of meaning and pleasure by being deprived of the idealized artist's image because they once understood music as a unified whole consisting of the artist and the art or the author and the text.

The physical bond underlying the author-text integrity, which leads to these losses, results from the "successful" and "effective" communication that the author establishes with the audience through sonic, visual, bodily, and discursive codes. In constructing authenticity as an act of authentication, as Moore (2002) mentions, the author (the mental origin) needs to reduce the distance between themselves and the performance (the physical manifestation), making it "unmediated." As an extension of authenticity, the physical bond suggests that reception occurs within the triangle of author-text-reader, going beyond the reader-text-based signification that cultural studies often focus on. Therefore, polysemy should be discovered and analyzed based on the contextual relationship between the author-text-reader, moving beyond the mere context of the text itself. I am trying to state that the author, whose metaphorical death Barthes (1967/1977) proclaimed, remains an influential component in the process of signification. However, the physical/literal death of the author pushes the boundaries of polysemy further by making the physical bond a symbolic one to some extent. It could be argued that in such a scenario, the audience would be less likely to impose a financial boycott on the immoral artist, thus diminishing any feelings of guilt. In summary, as the central figure of consistency and responsibility in Western art and popular music, the author functions as an agent that constrains the discourse of authenticity. Since authenticity, as a Western concept, assumes that Being has an unchanging essence, it questions the author and their texts in terms of "idealized" and fixed/unchangeable essences. This is a historical act of authentication that defines boundaries for musical value. As Moore (2002) states, authenticity is *ascribed*, not *inscribed*. Considering "what" is authenticated and "who" is authenticated also helps us better understand the author's role in the signification. This consideration is vital in today's postmodern world, where the legitimacy of authors, and especially stars, is evaluated through trends such as hypermorality, ethical consumerism, and cancel culture. As a result, future empirical and case studies on the components of the physical bond between the artist and the music will further our understanding of this subject and address the gaps in the (ethno)musicological literature.

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