Hidden in Music
An Approach to Religious Experience and Pop or Rock Festivals

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Chapter 1 – Introduction[1]

1.1. *Some introductory remarks*

> 'Music is a way to escape reality. […] The vibrations of the music make it spiritual.'
> —Philippe Herbaut, guitarist in Act Of Gods
> 'Music: my drug, my pain, my relief, and sometimes my mood. How could music not be more spiritual? […] Living without music is missing out [on] a meaning of our existence.'
> —Sathor, guitarist in Ars Macabra[2]

Countless testimonies express, sometimes poetically, what music means to people. Music arouses feelings, it recalls memories; it evokes experiences. In our society, the idea that classical music can raise deep existential feelings and emotions is well accepted. Indeed, such music is so ingenious that it seems only natural that people connect it with dignified sensations; it touches people deep in their hearts. It is quite another idea when it comes to popular music, let alone 'satanic' hard rock or *black metal*. Many adepts of 'high culture' find it difficult to understand how people can associate such music with deep inner experiences. If this counts for the music, it applies even more to pop or rock festivals where the music joins the body rather than the soul – so it seems – with the smell of sweat and beer mingling vapidly with deafening noise and dazzling lights and where movements seem out of control.

Yet, this scene is the subject of my study that bears the title *Hidden in Music: An Approach to Religious Experience and Pop or Rock Festivals*. The title calls for elucidation. It points at a twofold objective. On the one hand this research joined studies about religion and popular music. On the other it paid special attention to methodology: it is a plea for reflective ethnography.

First let me say something about the subject. Why explore a connection between something as intimate and personal as religion and massive, seemingly impersonal events like pop or rock festivals? My research was designed as part of a project to discover new, unexpected forms of religion that were supposed to come into existence when people could no longer rely on the traditions and conventions offered by institutional religions (Van der Tuin 2008). For, as churches are quickly

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[1] An earlier version of this chapter was published in the *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture (*JRPC), 23, No. 1, April 2011: 14-26. As this article was written just after my initial exploration of the field, it contains many ideas that originally shaped the project..
[2] Both quotations were recorded by Justin St. Vincent, 'The Spiritual Significance of Music—The Metal Edition,' http://www.xtrememusic.org/metal.html (accessed February 15, 2011).

losing ground in our society[3], the expectation is that the vacuum they leave will be filled by new ideas, concepts and behaviours. This notion is widely accepted in the literature, in particular in discussions within the fields of practical theology and the philosophy of life. It is mainly those fields that this study aims to address.

In line with this idea, the original aim of my research was to identify – in particular among young people – forms of religious experience and expressions and explore the meanings participants attached in pop and rock festivals contextually (i.e., as part of cultural formations, Middleton 1990: 10-11). This idea originated in the Department of Practical Theology at Fontys University of Applied Sciences where researchers were exploring the question of how an understanding of relations between pop music and personal existential experiences could contribute to the development of religious and theological education. The research was expected to result in an inventory. But achieving that would imply interpretation. To reach the chosen objectives, the formulated research questions were: 'Does pop or rock music (and in particular participation in festivals) have a transcendental potency, resulting in religiosity? And: can these festivals be seen as a *milieu* in which people get sensations that may be compared with religious experiences?' As part of the wider project, this research should be confined to secular festivals, thus excluding reli-pop festivals. On urgent recommendation of some participants, I decided to make an exception for *Castlefest*, a rather spiritual festival (3.4.; 6.1.).

During the research process I became more and more impressed by the relevance of methodological reflection as propagated by ethnographers from various disciplines. Questions like the ones formulated above involve presumptions, even presuppositions, which should be made explicit to allow critical discussion. Right at the start of the project, we decided focus on a qualitative approach with special attention to interpretation and (transcendental) experiences (Van der Tuin, 'Surfing for meaning', 2008: 50; see also 51). The result should be an explorative, interpretive study rather than a data-collecting study aiming at theory-formation. By characterizing this project as 'interpretive study' I felt inspired by Van Maanen's classic treatise of ethnographic texts (1988). In contrast to anthropologists who consider those texts as compilations of 'data', he stressed their meaning as contributing to an 'ongoing discussion' with people under study to gain mutual understanding. This approach implies a cyclic character concerning the realization of the research, as well as concerning its textual representation (see 4.2.).

Usually, explorative research is regarded as merely a first orientation. In fact, this type of research is more complicated than this modest characterization suggests. For instance, when surveying an unknown field for the first time, researchers lack

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[3] The very moment I was revising this text, an in-depth article by Dutch church historian Peter Nissen appeared in *De Gelderlander* (June 16, 2012) under the heading: 'Every third day a church closes down.' This situation concerned the Netherlands (pop. 16 million people).

clear-cut criteria for selection. Starting from various assumptions (some of which can easily remain implicit) which may have an as yet unclear impact on the formation of a research perspective, the researcher will be dependent on available concepts. This final aspect explains why conceptual scrutiny is essential. In the case of this project, aimed at 'unexpected' manifestations of religious experience, scrutiny of *available* concepts is of special relevance because these concepts may easily direct one's train of thoughts. How to discover the 'unknown' when you cannot but start from the 'known'? I think one should always be prepared to be flexible, self-critical and willing to discard once-held assumptions in exchange for other, more suitable views, as they occur. Grounded theory, using various methods, and combining their results in interpretation might be apt strategies.

When surveying literature from the fields of (practical) theology and philosophy of life, one aspect struck me in particular. Authors discussing religion in relation to popular culture, or to popular music, often tended to be influenced by their own (religious) background. Or, to formulate it in more general terms: in the study of 'worldviews' it appears difficult to eliminate the researcher's own worldview.

Especially religiously inspired authors (e.g. those focusing on pop music and liturgy), appear to be influenced by norms and values inherent in their particular religious views. That is: the 'worldview' they think to discover among the people under study often bears traces of their own worldview. At times this is clear from the way researchers conclude to 'religion' directly from *overt behaviour*, encompassing very different expressions, varying from *raves* to trance or spirituality. Sylvan (2002) offers a moderate example of such direct interpretation (see below, his appeal to the 'unconscious'); Jennings (2010) is a more extreme illustration. Critics of the projection of the researcher's background tend to refer to a concept well known in anthropology: *ethnocentrism*. In this discipline the risk of ethnocentric interpretation of 'strange customs', deviating from the researcher's own culture stimulated the rise of a strong *reflective* and even *introspective* tendency. Here, my argument is that in particular in studies about 'worldview' (to which religion in its conventional sense is closely related) (self)reflection is imperative.

Because of the paucity of reflection I observed in the kind of studies referred to, in the course of this research I developed an additional aim: to explore reflective methodologies to be able to offer relevant suggestions to the approach to the subject within the mentioned fields. In this process I felt encouraged by the study of reflective methodologies as recently produced also outside the discipline of anthropology. That is why I gave this study the subtitle *An Approach* to the subject of religious experience and pop or rock music and decided to devote a special chapter on method.

The growing interest in reflection helped me to reconsider various assumptions that seemed at first self-evident. Of course, it also influenced genre characteristics of this study. Therefore I also will pay due attention to textual dimensions. As I will point out, there can be a close connection between a certain type of research problem and textual forms of the report. Besides, according to theories about ethnography, the exploration of new phenomena may require new forms of expression, even new literary genres (4.6.).

Thus, during the study I rejected some initial assumptions and others, first criticized, I reconsidered later on. This led to some important shifts with regard to the original plans guiding me when I started the project. In the present and the following chapters, I explain and justify those shifts[4]. This is certainly not to say that the original perspectives lacked any value. For example, the original idea behind this research focused on young people as the project was initiated with the students of the Department of Practical Theology in mind[5]. Later on, during fieldwork, it became clear that older people should also be included. The original focus on youth culture, however, resulted in valuable insights as well as in a critical view on current theories within the fields to which this study is addressed. Therefore this study should be considered as the outcome of a *cyclic process*: initial impressions gained from the survey of literature and reactions to the *JRPC*-article deeply influenced my specific approach, which in turn left its mark on the formulation of the research problem. This problem, of course, was decisive in the choice of research strategies, which again influenced further selection of literature. As we decided to execute an interpretive, rather than a data-collecting research, the cyclic dimension was also of particular relevance during the empirical phase, expressed by the notion of *triptych* (5.5.).

I first approached pop festivals as social situations or rituals in which young people not only have excellent opportunities to experience and live through the multiple dimensions of pop music, but also have the chance to enter an atmosphere

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[4] Recent studies – particularly by researchers inspired by post-modern trends; see e.g., Van de Port 1994: 44 – are usually explicit about deviations from original research designs, even if the designs remain inaccessible to readers. This has to do with the trend in being open about autobiographical aspects that are relevant to the construction of the research problem and with methodological considerations. For an extensive discussion, see Chapter 4.

[5] This study was conducted in the framework of Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Theology Department. The policy of this educational institution focuses on combining theory and practice, i.e. the field where scientific research and professional practice meet. Research should pay tribute to the development of both educational curricula and professional innovation. The wider aim of the project is to contribute to our understanding of the 'new religiosity' a phenomenon prominent in Practical Theology and Religious Studies courses. In this context, a relevant question is how to incorporate insights into these new forms of religious manifestation (including presumably religious experiences connected to pop music) in educational curricula in the philosophy of life. Considered from this perspective, the 'insider's approach' is most relevant.

favourable to the genesis of new ideas. Pop festivals are particularly important to young people who are, to use a classic expression by Victor Turner (1974), 'betwixt and between [and] revel in their anomalous status' (Weinstein 1999: 103). During this intermediate state, people are exceptionally receptive to new impressions. 'Youth' may be considered as a *rite de passage*, a phase in life not only characterized by the transmission of ideas but also by creativity. Recent literature about pop music, refuting normative approaches like Adorno's (1941) which focused on passivity, emphatically highlights this creativity. Turner's theory on *rite de passage* brought me to the concept of *communitas*, which proved useful to study certain aspects of the festivals as social communities experienced by participants as 'outside' the wider society of 'daily life'. And the discussion about youth culture as a source of creativity rather than as an environment leading to alienation induced the thought that the whole idea of pop or rock festivals as *substitute*, in this case for religion, should be subjected to critical consideration (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, the tendency to relate as almost self-evident youth with pop came under pressure during my pilot study of some festivals when I noticed for the first time the specific position of older people. It made me to pay special attention to this category and to confine my focus on 'youth' to studies criticizing notions of alienation and the like, notions which are still prominent in normative treatises (3.1.). Precisely because of ample attention to youth culture and related aspects within the disciplinary fields referred to above, I decided to refrain from further specific study of this domain.

Recent decades has seen the production of several studies on the topic of 'religiosity in pop music'. Some clearly aimed at liturgical, ritual practice; aiming at establishing (and evaluating) new liturgical forms to attract 'the younger generation' and to motivate them to actively participate in religious services. This focus led to an extensive and at times emotionally worded debate about the functions pop or rock music could fulfil, for example, within Christian liturgy. The debate presented the 'pros' and 'cons' of introducing popular music or rock music in liturgy and an analysis of these arguments unveils a great variety of presuppositions concerning pop/rock music, some cultural-historical assumptions, others of a moral or ethical disposition (sometimes clearly influenced by esthetical bias), but mostly characterized by approaches 'from the outside', dominated by 'adult' perspectives[6].

This appears particularly problematic because participants in the debate feel strongly concerned with those young people who, as these discussants see, are confronted by existential questions when they have lost contact with the religious

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[6] Ardui 2006 offers an extensive overview of this debate. His analysis illustrates the 'outsider's view'. He approaches rock (strongly generalized and anthropomorphized with motives and intentions) from the perfectly legitimate position of the theologian. However, as a theological insider he remains an outsider to the rock scene he describes in analytic, experience-distant terms. By personalizing rock, he ignores the personalities of *people* who creatively interpret and experience rock music. Instead, he focuses on the formal programmes of some performers and producers' statements.

institutions that – backed by extensive expertise – might have helped them find the answers. Sometimes, emotional phrasings and normative arguments betray this involvement and concern. At the same time, however, depictions of youth as passive consumers, ready to be misled by rock's false promises clearly show the drawbacks of the outsider's standpoint. For instance, an indication of a fundamental difference between those specific researchers and the youth under study is the idea that young people who enjoy rock music and feel it is part of their lifestyle are in fact 'unconscious' of the 'real' potential of rock and its 'misleading promises' (see e.g., Ardui 2006, passim, esp. p. 129).

However, rather than only criticizing this perspective, I will point out that paying due attention to the 'old' participants may result in new dimensions, deserving further exploration. Thus, a study of those older people may indicate aspects which are easily ignored when equating pop with youth. For instance, I came to recognize the importance of 'memory' and noticed a phenomenon as 'constructed' or 'local history' (6.3; 6.4; footnote 58), both relevant when considering the subject 'religion'.

As this study is the result of a Ph.D.-project, it was bound to severe limitations concerning scope, but also in relation to practical aspects of execution. Therefore, I had to make choices, sometimes to my regret. This forced me to confine some findings to suggestions for further research. For instance, it proved not possible to further explore studies about 'memory', like Anne Whitehead's *Memory* (2009). Nor was it possible to pay due attention to discussions concerning Hobsbawm & Ranger's well-known concept of 'invention of tradition' and recent theories about ways in which people 'use' their constructed histories. In some cases, like concerning the idea of *authenticity*, the concept of *site*, and the interview strategy I further elaborated the theme in separate publications (Kommers 2011b; Kommers & Hoondert 2013; Notermans & Kommers 2012).

This chapter touches on my approach, including a plea for ethnographic fieldwork to overcome the problem of the 'outsider's perspective'. One objection is that current views that stress a socio-cultural change perspective may unwittingly result in limitations and may neglect *continuities*. Thus, a popular concept in circles of practical theology is 'religiosity', a notion that should express distancing from 'institutionalized' religion. This is a well-considered strategy to focus on 'new' forms of religion, not to be impeded by conventional notions (Van der Tuin 2008: 6). When researchers start out from current concepts of (institutionalized) religion, they tend to leave out those forms and experiences which are not recognized when starting from those concepts. New phenomena may remain hidden, in the same way that important qualities of popular music remained hidden to those who start from well-established ideas about classical or instrumental music (Horner 2006: 19-20, see below, Sylvan's 'second' and 'fourth reason'). However, as will be argued below, this

strategy has serious drawbacks, one of which is the risk of overestimating the effects of changes by contrasting the present with the past.

First, let me exemplify my motivation and arguments. Because I conducted my study in the Netherlands and the findings will initially be fitted in with the Practical Theology Programme of Fontys University of Applied Sciences, in this introductory chapter I mainly confine my description of the research domain to some studies diagnosing the Dutch condition (see e.g., Fijen 2007: 7 who explicitly refers to this function of diagnosing the religious situation).

1.2. *Hidden religion*

A special source of inspiration for me was Robin Sylvan's *Traces of the Spirit*, a fascinating comparative study with due attention for cultural history that tries to discover 'the hidden religious dimensions of popular music' (2002: 1). Sylvan's study inspired the title of this dissertation and although I disagree with some of his ideas and for a long time rejected a major aspect of his functional approach, *Traces of the Spirit* had a definitive impact on my research. Sylvan engages in the question of why the religiosity embedded in pop music remained hidden from view. He traces four more or less explicit phenomena.

First, in the course of history 'a genuine religious impulse went underground and became entangled in the hodgepodge hybrid now called popular music' (2002: 5). Sylvan's main objective was to explain this process, starting from the African Diaspora when religiously focused music was introduced in America and became the foundation of recent forms of commercially produced secular pop music. During the period of slavery, religious African forms had to be concealed from the master's view but according to Sylvan traces of the spirit survived until today. This historical perspective, tending to both change and continuity, induced Sylvan to approach popular music from the perspective of classical interpretations of religion, like Van der Leeuw's or Otto's.

A second factor proved to be a bias fostered by 'observers of culture and scholars of religion' who used to consider 'popular music as a trivial form of entertainment' and thus the religious dimensions that 'went underground' remained hidden even to the inquisitive glance of researchers, who since Descartes were used to push aside irrationality and corporality in favour of rationality (2002: 3, 25, 68).

A third phenomenon identified by Sylvan is closely related to his functional approach. He demonstrates that music may serve as a 'vehicle *par excellence*' to convey a complex and multidimensional phenomenon like religion (2002: 21-33, 215). Music functions in the same way as a religion and the musical subculture operates as a religious community, albeit 'in an unconscious and post-modern way'. Skipping for the moment the theoretical dimensions of this approach, here I focus on one aspect of special interest to my research, Sylvan's view (which he shares with

several other authors on the subject) that those involved do not recognize the religious dimension. Or, what is more: Sylvan concludes to 'religion', even when the people reject or squarely oppose to that idea (2002: 42). Thus, religiosity in pop music also remains 'hidden' to the participants. This view seemed interesting yet particularly problematic. It has to do with the idea that religion in pop music is (to put it succinctly) 'religion in disguise' (see Van der Tuin 2008: 16). Later on, I discuss this topic in depth.

A fourth reason why religious dimensions in popular music remained hidden is also of special interest. The very dynamics and creativity of many forms of pop music require an approach suitable for tracing the unconventional, the unexpected. As noted above, it requires an approach that allows the researcher to discover phenomena difficult to anticipate because, as Sylvan says, 'who knows what significant and unexpected transformations lie ahead?' (2002: 13, see also 78). This approach may tempt one to develop a perspective that no longer focuses on – or even rejects – traditional expressions of religion. Therefore Van der Tuin, for instance, emphatically used the concept 'religiosity' ('the experience of religion') 'to avoid any association with institutionalizing' (2008: 6). According to Van der Tuin, many descriptions and analyses of the manifestations and transformations of the new religiosity remain vague and superficial, deficiencies he attributes to a tendency to study actual practice 'from the inner perspective of the traditional religions', using words, images and notions of traditional and familiar religions (2008: 16).

1.3. *Religiosity as 'religion transformed'?*
Strikingly, many studies of new forms of religion refer prominently to 'what was', sometimes using concepts that should clearly indicate a break with religion in its 'traditional' sense. Often the 'new' is characterized in terms of differences with (deviations from, transformations of) traditional forms and described as part of wider assessments of socio-cultural change, as in studies about 'modernization' or 'individualization'. This tendency is most notable in approaches starting from substantial definitions of religion, sometimes resulting in normatively phrased conclusions about the 'disappearance' of religion. However, it can also be traced in functional studies, which may result in quite the opposite by stretching definitions to end up in all-embracing vagueness and discrepancies with participants' views. Even explicit attempts to avoid association with familiar institutions may indicate implicit concern with tradition as the point of reference. Thus, there is a tendency to conceptualize religiosity as a transformation of religion, even a 'two-fold transformation' (Van de Donk 2006).

What is more, *traditional forms of religion* are usually described from the perspective of institutional frameworks rather than from the point of view of 'common people' acting within these institutions. On the other hand, *religiosity* (as distinguished sharply from 'religion') is often emphatically approached from the

perspective of the actors, focusing on *agens*. Traditional believers are depicted as 'followers', sharing (uncontested) communal views, obeying rules and (passively) adhering to doctrines. In contrast, participants in the new religiosity who have shed the 'institutional burden' (see Van der Tuin's short characterization of 'post modernity', 2008: 15) fully enjoy personal freedom. The current image seems dominated by dualisms, often phrased in binary oppositions as communal *versus* individual, organized *versus* fragmented, modern *versus* post-modern, structure *versus* anti-structure.

This tendency to approach new forms in terms of the traditional, from the perspective of religious change, rather than choosing new religiosities as the starting point and approaching them on their own terms, may be related to specific problems of conceptualization, as well as of method.

Several prominent studies conducted in the final years of the 20th century were quantitatively oriented and may be characterized as short-term studies with limited comparative scope (Dekker 1997; Bernts 2007). This requires specific ways of interpreting those studies. Publications like *God in Nederland 1966-1996* can exert a great influence and are still constantly referred to – and used as authoritative sources ('God in the Netherlands'; Dekker et al. 1997, is recommended on its back cover as 'an extremely fascinating publication for policy and opinion makers and scholars'. The authors confirm this view on p. 122). This popularity is even more notable because the authors of these large-scale studies *are usually clear about their limitations*. Thus, although the editors of *God in Nederland* explicitly indicate that their research was *not* about new forms of religiosity ('we are well able to conclude what is disappearing in the religious Netherlands, but not what is appearing', 1997: 112) and although they almost in passing refer to developments outside Europe that reduce ideas about the social invisibility of religion to a 'misconception' (1997: 117), their study played an important role in many subsequent (Dutch) treatises about the *future* of religion. Interestingly, this survey builds upon an earlier inventory (1966) and was followed up ten years later (Bernts et al. 2007) which almost grants these studies the status of 'monitor'.

One reason for the continuous prominence of surveys is a preoccupation with quantitative data in bureaucratic societies like ours. In the public domain of Western societies (and even more pronounced in some so-called developing countries), this aspect is also related to the authoritative status of generic conventions characteristic for reporting on (and diagnosing) social developments in terms of statistics and graphics. In this context qualitative descriptions, representing 'the local', 'the exotic', often in idiosyncratic voices, are decidedly at a disadvantage, which may account for the rather low status qualitative research holds in such societies (Van Maanen 1988: 22; Jespers 2009). This situation may in its turn account for the relative scarcity of qualitative studies initiated by policy makers, for example, which otherwise could have acted as counterbalance (Shadid 1998).

Closely related to the large-scale perspective and socio-cultural change approach, often referred to in the field of practical theology and philosophy of life, are conceptual problems that resulted in the vagueness signalled by Van der Tuin. Conceptual problems appear from subtle shifts in terms, in tendencies to stretch the meaning of concepts, in vagueness about the character of definitions. All this not only resulted in conflicting theories (disappearance *versus* revival of religion), in 'paradoxes', and the like, but also in fast-shifting approaches. Concepts and views that were in vogue only some fifteen years ago are now subject to strong criticism (a tendency already noted in 1997 by Fijen in his introduction to *God in Nederland* when he qualified certain kinds of research as guided by 'issues of the day', 1997: 7). Apparently, it is problematic to conceptualize new religiosity starting from current, well-established notions (Juchtmans 2008: viii). On the other hand, just because of validity, it would be difficult to completely dispose of 'etic' definitions of religion or religiosity. (By the way, participants in pop and rock festivals seem well acquainted with classical ideas of religion and well versed in the Judeo-Christian tradition that is dominant in our culture, whether they are 'believers' or not.) Certain criteria of demarcation seem inevitable to achieve validity (what is 'religion' and what not?); however, they should not hamper the search for 'the unexpected' from the start. Qualitative fieldwork, focusing on 'local discourses' may offer the opportunity to put external characterizations into perspective, at the same time explicitly connecting findings to particular subcultures or subgroups (compare Jespers 2009). Thus, to interpret certain expressions as 'religion' one should at least be clear about their status. For instance, should experiences of exaltation ('raves'; see Stringer 2008: 95) be interpreted as an indication of 'religion', or considered as psychological phenomena? Should the blasphemous expressions abounding in e.g. *black metal* references to Christianity be interpreted as '…*in fact*, reaffirming Christian theology by mocking outdated superstitions'? (Lord 2008: xx, my italics). What to do with the overt use of religious symbols by the *Collegium Musicum* during the *Qlimax* dance party in 2008, when the ensemble performed a 'colourful mix of references to religion, the occult and science', but seemed – according to one interviewed member – to throw notions of religion far from them (Bongers 2008)? In these cases problems of interpretation, validity and representativeness demand a contextual approach that allows 'embedded' interpretation, to do justice to particular discourses (compare Houben & Van der Velde 2008: 105).

1.4. *Religion in society: an ethnographic approach*
Exploring the new forms of religion 'hidden' in the vibrant world of pop music requires approaching this world 'from the inside', using concepts moulded by the social and cultural context suitable for 'narrating the immediate' (Gay y Blasco & Wardle 2007: 76, 120). Or, as Clifford Geertz once proposed: one should use 'experience-near' notions that duly convey the participant's 'voice', rather than

'experience-distant' ones (Geertz 1973). Therefore, the starting point of my research was the social and cultural world of pop music, more specifically pop music and pop festivals as a means of expressing *and* generating religiosity (as I initially chose to conceptualize it) in youth culture. By exploring a specific (sub)culture, I intended to trace what is going on in the minds, expressions and behaviours of people who are related by a shared interest in various kinds of pop music and to whom this music is a significant aspect of their life style. Following Weinstein's (1999) suggestion about the *liminal* status of youth, I focused on their language, their rituals and symbols. I participated in pop festivals to share experiences and local discourses and tried to interpret related festival literature and interviews from a generic point of view, paying special attention to the narrative dimension. However, representing local narratives in a scientific text poses specific problems, to be discussed in due course (see 7.2.).

Thus, to gain inside experience, I decided to do ethnographic fieldwork, commonly called 'participant observation'. Traditionally, ethnographic fieldwork meant long-term participation, usually executed in far away, exotic places. In recent years, the idea to live at least some part of the year cycle among the people to be studied has been abandoned because it proved ethnocentric, guided by our 'Northern' idea of a complete succession of seasons and a 'Western' concept of time. It has made place for a variety of alternative forms. Some ethnographers advocated life-long participation (Paul Stoller 1987: 'to grow old with the people'). This proved relevant in cultures in which certain knowledge is transmitted at various stages in life (Borsboom 2006). Different forms of fieldwork have been developed for other kinds of societies. Some scholars argued the necessity of 'multi-sited' fieldwork (Marcus 1995), periods of (short-term) participation at different locations, following ambulant people like migrants. Thus, the idea of ethnographic fieldwork has changed hand in hand with, for instance, augmented and worldwide mobility and cultural change. In my case, multi-sited fieldwork is the most obvious course to take: participant observation at a series of pop or rock festivals. Obviously, this method implies various kinds of communication. The current indication of fieldwork as 'participant observation' may be misleading. It seems to focus on visualization, whereas participation in pop festivals is a multisensory experience that, besides sight, involves the senses of hearing, feel, touch, taste, and smell. Jackson's observations relating the 'senses of understanding' are of special relevance here. I refer to the idea that a sensual experience, privileged in one culture (e.g., the visual in Western culture), may be an obstacle to understanding what is going on in another (sub)culture in which other senses prevail (Jackson 1989: 8).

Besides changes in views regarding ethnography as a 'method', important developments regarding ethnography as a means of representation (texts, pictures, film, documentaries) took place in the closing decades of last century (see *Etnofoor*, special issue on 'Writing Culture', 2009). Both developments are of great significance

to my subject which is characterized by vibrancy, creativity, global communication and mobility.

An ethnographic approach implies the idea of musical and religious expression and experience as cultural or social phenomena. Starting from a particular (sub)culture or society to discover religion, rather than considering traditional or essentialist conceptions of religion as the point of departure (if not the point of calibration) joins the approach followed by the editors of the 2008 edition of the *Handboek Religie in Nederland*. Religion is considered part of culture, rather than 'the source or the heart of culture' ('Handbook of Religion in the Netherlands'; Ter Borg 2008: 8). The editors of *Handboek* justified their approach to 'look to religion from the society, instead of looking to society from religion' by pointing at a 'new religious situation' that had developed since 1992. That year also marked the date of publication of a similar handbook, to which they refer. The title of this publication differed significantly from that of the 2008 edition, reflecting a major change in both perception and approach. Following Featherstone's discourse analysis (1991), here it may be interesting to pay some attention to this shift because it may easily have affected my research, which, because of its focus on participation, inevitably implies personal involvement.

1.5. *Religion in society: observation, perception, and involvement*
While the editor of the 1992 edition used the concept of *Godsdienst* (lit. 'Divine service'; *Handboek Godsdienst in Nederland*, Schaeffer, ed. 1992), in 2008, the notion was replaced with the word 'religion'. The Dutch concept of 'Godsdienst' implies a focus on practicing religion through participating in church rituals, worship, devotion and in a relationship with (a) God, whereas the use of the word 'religion' according to Ter Borg (2008: 8) bears witness to the idea that 'to understand religion, one has to study its position in and relatedness to the rest of society and culture', rather than starting from 'an own, intrinsic meaning' of religion which exerts influence upon society. The conceptual shift symbolizes the idea of a fundamental change not only from institution to person, but also from 'society as religion' (Sylvan 2002: 5, referring to Van der Leeuw) to 'religion in society', from 'substance' to 'experience' (Sylvan 2002: 80, 216)[7].

The implications of this perspective are far-reaching. Here I would like to limit myself to pointing at an interesting aspect in line with what is noted above, the fact that a fundamental change in perspective and approach is related to socio-cultural changes that presumably took place within a very short time. The issue is reflected by a series of short-lived, quickly outdated conceptions. According to Featherstone

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[7] Ardui 2006: 191n48 points at a similar shift when he discusses essential changes in view behind the translation of Greeley's *God in Popular Culture* (1988) into German as *Religion in der Popkultur* (1993).

(1991), who points at Goethe's dictum, cited by Max Weber[8]: 'Ein jeder sieht, was er im Herzen trägt', significant conceptual shifts should make us alert to the possibility that changing 'reality' may coincide with a change of our perception of it. Therefore, Featherstone thinks, it is important 'to investigate the processes of concept formation and deformation amongst … specialists' (1991: viii). To me, this seems particularly important in a research domain in which interpretation often is related to worldview. Beyond doubt, this was the case with normative studies of popular music. However, various interpretations of religion and religiosity also betray an intertwinement or interference between observation and perception. For example, in comparison to the 1992 edition, the *Handboek Religie in Nederland* speaks of 'a new religious situation'. What is more, the *Handboek* 'itself is also expression of the new religious situation' (2008: 8), which might imply a specific involvement, not to say interference, perhaps noticeable in a particular rhetoric characterizing at times the phrasings of recent events. Although the explicit aim of the *Handboek* is 'first and foremost to present and to explain', it also interprets current trends to infer future developments. These inferences, based on short-term analyses that also make use of quickly changing conceptions, may be extra vulnerable to interference, e.g. with the researcher's personal views. That is why both the conceptual vagueness noted above and the swiftly alternating predictions, as well as the way in which specific sources are used, justify our critical attention.

According to a wide variety of studies and large-scale sociological analyses that appeared at the close of the 20th century, traditional churches are definitely losing ground in Western societies. Some of these studies are used as authoritative sources to justify the idea that 'religion' is disappearing, and at the same time re-appearing. Thus, a report by the Scientific Board for Dutch Government Policy (a popular source of reference in circles of practical theology; Van der Tuin 2008: 12) concluded that the sharp decline in participation in religious institutions did not look promising for the connection between institutionalized religion and traditional churches. However, the collapse of churches did not imply the disappearance of religion. This was (and still is) a widespread idea, expressed in often convincing rhetoric, like paradoxes or strong naturalistic metaphors (Van der Tuin 2008: 5). Even after the 'death of God', even if there is no longer 'worship' or 'belief' (Van der Velden 2011), religion will persist as an individual and communal phenomenon. It will seek new forms of expression and will be related to new experiences. However, as indicated before, many of those explorations and studies cover short-term processes, mainly focused on developments starting in the 1970s and particularly related to what is sometimes called the late-modern or even post-modern society. Striking is the often pertinent way in which indications of the extent of the change

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[8] By the way: Weber did not mention Goethe, but writes: 'Jeder nur anschaulichen Schilderung haftet die künstlerischer Darstellung an: "Ein Jeder sieht….'; Weber 1904:82.

are phrased, sharply contrasting with the vagueness that governs descriptions of the actual processes of change.

Those clear statements may result from the tendency to typify 'traditional believers' as obedient participants of organized religious institutions, almost neglecting their agency, while (post)modern religiosity is often related to individuality, strongly focusing on agency, and nearly neglecting conventionality. Thus, the 2008 *Handboek* also creates a strong contrast between traditional religion ('handed down') and present-day religiosity by opposing the past (generalized as *ooit*, 'ever' and in its starting position sounding almost like 'once upon a time') as characterized by doctrine rather than what people actually experienced, with the 'now', dominated by what people actually experience (compare Gwynne 2008, focusing on 'lived experience' of world religions, on pragmatics). Add to this a constant shift in conceptualization and the result is a variety of analyses resulting in squarely opposite conclusions, 'paradoxes' and the like. Besides, the researchers' own involvement easily resulted in strong fluctuations in the popularity of concepts, perspectives and explanations[9].

These reflections are, of course, not intended to deny the impact of fundamental changes. Indeed, significant developments took place in post-World War II Western society and culture, deeply affecting the worldview and notions of the individual in society as well as the means of expressing and communicating experiences related to these phenomena. In line with those processes, in the second half of the 20th century 'secularization' and 'individualization' became popular concepts in modernization theories, not only to describe but also explain (and sometimes even evaluate) major changes in religious domains. The main conclusion was that communal, institutional forms of religion would give way to new forms better fitted to individual experiences and to new ideas about this world and beyond, to forms incorporating new technical means of expression and communication. One such means would be pop music and festivals, distributed and organized by commercial enterprises and addressed to a mass public. This idea, which constituted the original motive for my project, not only implies the risk of approaching those festivals as a *substitute* for religion (and thus as a reduction to something different), but also tends to uncritically validate the view that religion is really being transformed (Stringer 2008). Furthermore, it can easily encourage to

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[9] Normative involvement is almost inevitable in research into aspects of worldview, particularly when the phenomena contrast strongly (ethically or aesthetically) with the researcher's own worldview. In some analyses of rock music, as in Ratzinger's *Ein neues Lied fűr den Herrn* (1995: 142; cited in Ardui 2006: 219) this is evident in emotional language and pejorative expressions. Here it is interesting to cite a classic 19th century study on 'primitive' religions: Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilisation* (1870) which discusses characteristics of the 'so-called religion of the lower races' trying 'to avoid as far as possible, anything which might justly give pain to any of my readers' (1870: 114,116). Incidentally, several of these characteristics have much in common with elements abounding at rock performances that nowadays are the object of serious studies of religiosity. Involvement as such is not necessarily the problem: it becomes problematic when it remains implicit (compare Jensen & Rothstein 2000).

pass over continuities in collective behaviour and in people's need for social structure.

1.6. *Religion in society: change and continuity*

Short-term studies of socio-cultural change run the risk of becoming anachronistic, particularly those concentrating on developments to which the researchers too are subjected, or in which they feel closely involved. It is hard to escape contemporary ideas as soon as these gain the appearance of being self-evident, or when they become generally acclaimed. Thus the late 20th century idea that religious institutions pass through a unique and all-pervasive transformation closely fitted the general idea of our modern society as passing though a unique series of changes. 'Never before have things changed as fast and as comprehensively as in our times' seems to be an unquestionable statement in a society focused on – or perhaps fascinated by – change. On the one hand, there is the risk of underscoring the impact of past changes as well as the forces of cultural stability. On the other hand it is very well possible that such an attitude encourages expectations or predictions for the future, overestimating the impact of contemporaneous developments. Thus, pertinent predictions like the current idea that institutional forms of religion will collapse under the pressure of individualism, might be premature. The previously mentioned Scientific Board for Dutch Government Policy (Van der Tuin 2008: 11) observed a sharp drop in membership of traditional churches. Statistics indicated that nowadays only 30% of the country's youth admit to belonging to a religious group. The conclusion is: 'a rebirth of religion in its traditional form is out of the question'. However, this resolute statement lacks the cultural-historical (longitudinal) and comparative background to qualify such a prediction; it can be little more than a short-term conclusion. Cross-cultural research, for instance, indicates that 'modernization' can proceed very well in hand with the (re)creation of definite forms of religious institutionalization (Geerts 2003: 7; Borgman & Van Harskamp 2008: 14). In our society, we too cannot foresee the effects of new ways designed by traditional churches to guide youth back to the church, nor can we predict the consequences of recent 'restorative' trends in reaction to confrontations with other religions, like Islam. To me, it is particularly pressing to be careful about conjectures concerning future developments, because in the world of pop music, God has never entirely disappeared from the scene and (Christian) religious symbols remain a vital element in signifying practices, notwithstanding overt changes in meaning. Even institutionalization and communalism, also organized in new ways, were never completely on the wane (Gilmour 2005). And although 'reli-pop' exceeds the object of my research, this genre cannot be ignored because (particularly in multicultural societies) it proved to be a source of inspiration to various kinds of 'secular' commercial pop music, on the levels of symbolism as well as of ritual and social organization (Guadeloupe 2009). By the way, at the very moment I was writing

the first draft of this chapter – before I started my empirical research – with some publications on the 'God is dead' idea on my desk, the radio announced the day's news headlines in the *De Telegraaf* (5.4.2009), including an article on the explosive growth of religious websites created by both religious organizations and individuals.

Of course, even if re-institutionalization did occur, 'it will never be the same', but it might be an 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) from which churches could emerge, changed but afresh. Several 'traditional churches' have already followed that path more than once. The specific outcome of the 'double transformation' signalled in 2006 by the Scientific Board for Dutch Government Policy is still a matter of speculation in a society considered as hovering in between secularization and 'renewed sacralisation' (Borgman & Van Harskamp 2008).

As will be clear from the above, it cannot be my intention to speculate about the future, but these reflections touch upon my approach. In the world of pop music, there are many kinds of corporate groups and (new?) kinds of social organization arise all the time. Besides cynical anti-religious expressions, there are testimonies bordering upon traditional views that enjoy enormous popularity (Assayas 2005). Here it might not be redundant to repeat Sylvan (2002: 13), 'who knows what significant and unexpected transformations lie ahead?' But perhaps even more relevant than a critique on speculations about the future is an attempt to question the almost self-evident assumption that religion is *returning*. Below (2.8.2.) I will further elaborate this matter.

As from the very beginning my research took 'unexpected phenomena' into account, this not only required the use of specific methods, but also an open mind, not dominated by traditional concepts on the one side, nor by theories about secularization and individualization, such as those ideas qualifying a large-scale revival of known religions as 'nonsensical' (Borgman & Van Harskamp 2008: 16). I think such an attitude is essential for my research. At times it confronted me with extremes, ranging from overt religious confessions to traditional religious concepts used in blasphemous and anti-religious contexts. Sometimes seemingly incompatible expressions were manifest in the same setting. Particularly if confessions were formulated in relation to the experience of existential problems, their 'coping' character might give them the appearance of opportunism and one might be tempted to interpret these expressions as insincere. My research brought me into contact with people who perform rituals, use symbols and refer to transcendental experiences, qualified by the author Robin Sylvan as 'religious', but who themselves emphatically – sometimes even cynically – denied any religious dimension. In this study I tried to approach these phenomena not by extrapolating or projecting from classical notions of religion or ideas about religious organizations, but by exploring the meanings given to them by participants in the pop scene. This might require a re-evaluation of some vested ideas, for example a reconsideration of the current distinction between reli-pop (related to established religious communities or as part

of preaching and religious festivals) and secular forms of pop music. Alternatively, it might require a reconsideration of the idea that the supposedly new forms generated during the festivals are only substitutes for what 'once was'.

1.7. *Some concluding words*

> 'Observers of culture and scholars of religion have said many things about the slow decline of religion and the death of God in Western civilization. Yet for the millions of people religion and God are not dead, but very much alive and well and dancing to the beat of popular music; the religious impulse has simply migrated to another sector of culture…'

This statement by Robin Sylvan (2002: 3) initially guided me in this study aimed at discovering forms of religion, which, according to Sylvan's analysis, have been hidden underground. I have, however, one major proviso to Sylvan's phrasing cited above, the statement that the religious impulse 'simply migrated' to another sector of culture. Indeed, this impression might underestimate the creative, generative forces in culture. Of course, it could be interesting to study how exactly religious ideas and images are transferred from traditional institutions to other cultural domains, as in the case of the adoption of Christian symbols in rock music. However, the culture of musical performance manifested at pop and rock festivals also deserves to be studied in itself as a place or event where (new?) ideas and expressions of religion may emerge. After studying the social and cultural context of certain kinds of pop and rock music, by sharing the ideas of communities devoted to idols, by participating in concert rituals and symbolic communication concerning the festivals, I tried to explore not so much how people experience religiosity as 'transformed' (or 'migrated') religion, but rather whether festivals offered an apt *milieu* in which people could experience 'religion'. All the while I remained alert to the 'hidden dimensions', and 'the unexpected'.

During my encounter with various disciplines, the perspectives offered by post-modernists such as Norman Denzin, Paul Stoller and Michael Jackson (see Chapter 4) proved illuminating yet problematic. Many of those post-modern insights, particularly critical reflections on 'modern science', I experienced as forceful and convincing to such an extent that they inevitably influenced my views. At the same time I realized that those insights, developed and disseminated by highly experienced researchers were often too much for me to put into practice. At times, I was confronted by serious dilemmas. I thought it my duty to formulate certain reflections, inspired by the post-modernists, despite knowing that I could not substantiate all my ideals. Unintentionally, this may have resulted in provisos or criticisms that might seem pretentious. Or it may make some of my suggestions questionable. One of the aims of the post-modern movement was to criticize the certainty of what was called 'modern science' and openly admit doubt, stimulating

reflection or introspection (Geuijen 1992: 25). That idea certainly appealed to me when I explored this new and complex domain.

In this chapter I presented preliminary reflections on a subject discussed in a great variety of disciplines, characterized at times – to use Foucault's concept – by very different discourses. Popular ideas about multi- or interdisciplinary research often neglect or underrate this aspect. As histories of science illustrate, disciplinary discourses are often related to worldviews and conventions that usually remain implicit. Hence multidisciplinary projects may easily suffer from miscommunication between scholars guided by strongly differing concepts, premises or social positions. In the case of confronting alternative ideas about normative standards, values, and esthetical ideals that deeply touch researchers' worldviews – as in this study – explicit reflection on the implications of disciplinary approaches seems imperative.

Further, I noted some observations that struck me when I entered the field as a relative (and sometimes complete) outsider to certain disciplines. In Chapter 2, I will discuss some approaches of religion and religiosity in more detail. First I pay special attention to some authors who studied the relation between popular music and religion. Next to Sylvan's study (2002; my primary source of inspiration), I focused on two authors who may be considered as representatives of the field of practical theology and philosophy of life (Koenot and Ardui), one of whom presented a normative approach. As a counterbalance I decided to include a section about a study of the often maligned music industry.

After that, I pay attention to various secular approaches, focusing on attempts to define religion. Chapter 3 is about approaches of popular music and popular culture. The aim of these first chapters was, in connection with a pilot study, to specify the subject so that I could develop an inventory of aspects of religion that would be instrumental during the fieldwork and in interviews. Chapter 4 is devoted to methodological discussion. One of the aspects that struck me during my survey of literature was, as said, the paucity of fundamental methodological reflection. The first four chapters took shape in relation to the pilot study and the first period of fieldwork. During this pilot study not only I came across conflicting views in literature, but I also noticed strong inconsistencies in attitudes and expressions among participants (see 2.8.2.). These experiences again influenced the final fieldwork and the way interviews have been processed, thus completing the cyclic character of this project. The main objective of the pilot study was to visit a variety of concerts, festivals, and other activities encompassing big crowds and a lot of 'noise' to exercise observational and communicational strategies (see 4.7. and 7.1.). But all the time there was a close intertwinement between field experience and conceptual choices. The three chapters that follow discuss the empirical findings while the final chapter is devoted to the substantial conclusions, as well as to those concerning the approach.

Chapter 2 – On theory, approaches of 'religion'

2.1. *Introduction*

This research focuses on pop and rock festivals as places or events where religion might emerge; where people might have experiences that can be considered religious. It also pays special attention to the question: how to approach this subject? In the first chapter, I offered arguments in favour of a reflective study. Therefore this will be a recurrent theme, apart from the extensive discussion in Chapter 4. This chapter discusses some theories about religion in general and in connection with music festivals to specify my research topic. With the same intention the next chapter surveys the literature on (pop) music and (youth) culture.

Right from the start, one expectation haunted this project, the idea that a study of the relationship between religion and pop or rock festivals is reasonable. That religion can indeed be found in these festivals or that they can initiate religious experiences. This expectation is part of a set of presuppositions about religion and one aim of this chapter on theory is to make these presuppositions explicit. Therefore, after noting some preliminary thoughts, I turn first to the *research problem*, because phrasing a research problem implies reflecting on initial premises, and it has consequences for the theoretical choices and the perspective of the approach to the subject (e.g., the outsider's *versus* insider's perspective). It also touches upon the type of readers with direct consequences for the type of ethnography to be expected, and has implications for the social relevance of a study. The particular formulation of the research problem elucidates the character of the study. In my study reflection plays a prominent role (also because of methodological reasons; see Chapter 4).

Next I will devote a section to a *survey of literature* on religion and pop or rock music. In this section, besides Sylvan's inspiring work, I discuss two representatives of the field of (practical) theology and philosophy of life. The paragraph on the music industry serves to counterbalance stereotypical views about the production of pop music which are prominent within that field. This survey is instrumental in choosing perspectives, in phrasing research questions, in making central concepts operational, and in selecting research procedures.

Finally, I try to characterize *religion* on behalf of this study. Rather than attempting to phrase a definition, I will survey its characteristics with the intention of checking which of these can be found in pop and rock festivals. These characteristics can be subsumed under a series of 'labels' functioning as sensitizing concepts to decide for a *milieu* in which religious experiences may emerge. Such an approach appears to rest on some highly contested premises that therefore need explicit justification. For example, the idea that with the decline of institutionalized religion in Western society, people are trying to find other ways to satisfy needs formerly served by churches encourages a *functional approach* and tends to start from

conventional ideas about religion. This is why Stringer for instance emphatically rejects the idea of starting 'with a definition of religion – generally based on the Christian model [….] – and then, seeing that the numbers of those who practice traditional religions have declined dramatically, sought other contexts in which something that looks like the predefined religion is taking place. This is not a sensible way of theorizing about religion.' (Stringer 2008: 102). Or, to give another example, the idea of festivals as sites or events where religion might be generated may suggest correspondence with Jennings's concept of 'proto-religious phenomena', of something that 'precedes religion' (Jennings 2010: 115), or with the notion of 'implicit religiosity' (Ter Borg 2008). Stringer – and several other researchers I discuss below – would have no mercy with such an approach (Stringer 2008: 101).

The domain of religious studies is characterized by a great diversity of often opposing or contradicting theories. I will try to find my way out of this minefield by using an approach inspired by the perspectives of sociology, anthropology and Cultural Studies and by confining my study to the specific context of the Western secularized world. Below these choices will be explained.

2.2. *Introspection: some preliminary reflections*
When I was starting my survey of theoretical perspectives, I was strongly influenced by Ronald Grimes's *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (1995). Grimes pointed at the bewilderment students of ritual performance often experience (1995: [3]). Although pop and rock concerts are not rituals in the traditional sense, they teem with ritualistic moments and acts that are as overwhelming as the rituals to which Grimes referred in his study about 'ritualizing'. Grimes's study offers ample suggestions for reflection, especially for a research beginner.

Grimes gave two reasons for students' bewilderment when participating in a ritual performance. The first is the complexity of a ritual and the second is the fact that researchers usually come from a culture that is ritually 'poverty stricken'. They suffer from their 'lack of a sense of ritual'.

The first conclusion also counts fully for pop and rock festivals, the object of my research. Those festivals not only comprise many ritualistic moments, but also are overwhelmingly full of symbolic actions, sounds, bodies and objects.

The second conclusion is also relevant to my research. As a representative of the 'second generation' (Hoondert 2006: 296), from parents who were members of an institutional church but did not transfer this membership to me, I not only lack 'a sense of [liturgical] ritual', but also an intimate 'sense of religion'. Research aiming at the interpretation of 'deep experiences' (Jennings 2010: 108), inevitably involves the researcher and this requires special attention. During fieldwork, a researcher cannot remain neutral, people will not allow that. As a participant, the researcher will also exert influence on what is happening. At the same time, the event will change the researcher. As my pilot study clearly indicated, participating in pop festivals

'involves far more than having a technique to apply, a theory to validate, or a vocabulary to mobilize. It also involves one's style, tone of voice, way of watching, intended audience for writing, and imagined monograph. These are the hidden, thus efficacious, factors, because they are the points at which methods are the most ethno- and religiocentric' (Grimes 1995: 13).

To these dimensions Grimes emphatically adds the aspect of body, which is also crucial in pop festivals. 'One of the most sadly neglected roots of scholarly method is bodily attitude. [...] To see is to effect' (Grimes 1995: 17). And, one may add, to see is to be seen; ambiguously phrased by Yogi Berra as 'You observe a lot watching' (Van Maanen 1988: 45).

Here I extensively refer to Grimes' *Beginnings*, because in many respects this book is a valuable source of inspiration. Like Grimes who explored a field of study that was still full of uncertainties, I also felt at the threshold of a new world whose outlines are still vague and the ways to approach it are still subject to discussion. Moreover, in this world I am studying a far from consolidated phenomenon.

Many of the qualities Grimes ascribes to ritualizing are reminiscent of pop festivals. I think of actions 'thick of meaning', gestures and postures as dynamic or stilling acts, evoking feelings and sensibilities transformatively related to everyday actions, peculiarities of time and space, and so on. When I imagine a festival site abandoned after a thrilling concert, Grimes's characterization of empty ritual spaces really appeals. It is 'curiously vacant, even haunting' (1995: 67-72)[10]. Thinking of how even the most banal of everyday acts are transformed into social happenings, as depicted in a beautiful documentary on Dutch pop festivals (Van Terphoven 2009; the section on Dixi toilets), I feel an affinity with Grimes's project.

However, Grimes's characterization of 'defining' as 'scholarly ritual in verbal form' (1995: 60) seems too relativistic. Of course, the phrasing of a *workable*, *instrumental* definition of central concepts can be worrying, particularly when those concepts are the subject of much confusing discussion. Although I am aware that definitions 'are risky adventures' (Parkin 1992: 18), I also realize that they are pragmatically indispensable, if only to limit the 'bewilderment', to avoid – in Grimes's words – 'becoming exhausted by trying to take notes on everything that will cross my field of vision' (1995: 11), and to prevent remaining deeply insecure about the validity of my findings. Therefore, in this chapter, I survey current discussions on the topics that are central to my research subject to (literally) 'come to terms' with them and make them approachable. I must be able to identify these topics in the midst of hectic field situations and in the course of chats in which

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[10] Grimes's suggestion to pay attention to the *site* proved very fruitful: I began noticing aspects, which might have escaped observation if I had used an exclusively behavioural approach. See Kommers & Hoondert (forthcoming) and Grimes 1994: 26ff., 'Mapping the Field of Ritual').

respondents often cannot express their existential experiences in anything other than vague and conventional language.

At the same time, I feel this urge for definitions is at odds with the open-minded attitude indicated in the first chapter, to remain responsive to what Sylvan called 'the unexpected', the 'hidden dimensions'. Alternatively, to use Hoondert's compelling expression, it may contradict the wish 'truly to fall for surprise', to approach praxis unrestrained (Hoondert 2006: 70, 75).

These introductory remarks are part of the autobiographical dimension, which, according to Grimes – who was also frank about his 'beginnings' as a researcher – is imperative in interpretive research based on a self-absorbed mandate (2.3.). Particularly when one aspires to be receptive of 'the unexpected', one should always be aware that inexperience may play an unwitting role in determining what is 'unexpected'. Is something surprising because of my own inexperience, or because the scientific community has not encountered it until now? This question brings me to the research problem.

2.3. *The research problem*
The central question of this study implies several presuppositions, some highly contested. Therefore I choose to follow Van Maanen, who criticized starting directly from a central question, while leaving implicit what preceded the construction of this question. He stressed the importance of phrasing a research problem. In his classic study of ethnographic genres, Van Maanen analyzed how researchers formulate their research problem and he differentiated between several 'mandates'. He focused on how a 'problem' comes into existence. Is it 'discovered' or constructed, and how?

The *author-proclaimed mandate* characterizes 'realist tales', ethnographies that pretend to be authentic. By using naturalistic concepts the author suggests there is a self-evident correspondence between text and reality. Authenticity is enhanced by the way the research problem is phrased. In this case the problem 'imposes' itself on the author (and the reader) and it 'arises' from society. The author is merely an intermediary. He or she just 'discovers' and proclaims the problem, rather than constructing it (Van Maanen 1988: 45).

In contrast, the *self-absorbed mandate* emphatically refers to the researcher, who actively constructs a research problem, for instance based on personal experience (1998: 73). Clearly, in that case the researcher has to explain (and often justify) the background of the problem, which can be far from self-evident. This way of formulating the research problem is usually related to reflective studies.

Thus, as a rule, an author-proclaimed mandate starts with a seemingly uncontested (indeed, self-evident) observation. A strong rhetorical form is the 'riddle', or a paradox; 'God is dead, but religion is vibrant'. It urges the question, 'How is that possible?' The obvious sub-question is 'If God is missing, how do people

express or manifest religious ideas?' In contrast, in case of a 'self-absorbed mandate' the problem arises from the researcher's personal experience and explanation (or justification) requires reflection on the motives for one's specific interest, for instance (Van Maanen 1988: 83). An author-proclaimed mandate on the other hand seldom calls for introspection; the 'facts' indicate the problem. These may be presented so compellingly that one is tempted to accept them as self-evident. This is typical for many studies concerning the 'God is dead' theory which are often worded in appealing, naturalistic metaphors (Van der Tuin 2008: 5) or in prosaic statements, such as 'institutionalized religion may vanish, *but* religion remains. It is transforming into various (often still unknown) forms.' [Observation based on an authoritative report by the Dutch Scientific Council for Governmental Policy, see Chapter I; my italics].

When I started my project, I used such an observation as 'mandate' for my research. The obvious question was, 'Can pop festivals be considered as 'unknown' expressions of religiosity?' If so, then these will be good places to look for 'new, unexpected forms'.

So far, so good. The observation seemed to offer an uncontested starting point. But did it? In a later stage of my study I discovered Stringer's *Contemporary Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (2008). Stringer says that the difference between 'institutionalized religion' and 'other forms' of religion suggests a paradox that rests on an idea deeply rooted in our (Christian) culture. Because of a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of religion, according to Stringer, researchers thought they had noticed forms of a 'new religiosity'. However, he thinks that these forms already existed, only they had become manifest with the downfall of dominant discourses favouring institutional forms. Seen from this view, the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy's observation suffered not only from an implicit idea of religion, but was also closely related to 'our' worldview, internalized by the researchers.

Research problem analysis is not only relevant to premises or presuppositions. Van Maanen emphasized the close connection between a certain type of 'mandate' and specific ethnographic genres characterized by literary strategies. These may divert – or, on the contrary, refocus – attention to certain aspects of the research process. Thus the author-proclaimed mandate usually results in 'realist tales', such as Stringer's *On the Perception of Worship* (1999), in which Hoondert sadly misses 'transparency' (2006: 83). Realist ethnographies are characterized by a curious form of 'experiential authority'. Paradoxically, the author's authority as empirical researcher emerges from *omitting* details about the real field experience, which is full of uncertainties. Indeed, a detailed account of the author's vicissitudes during fieldwork may expose the researcher as vulnerable (Van Maanen 1988: 46-48). It is much like the phrase often used by politicians: 'The figures indicate...' Such a phrase prevents critical questions; it suggests a direct, not-

mediated relation between 'reality' and the figures, whereas formulations as 'From the figures I come to the conclusion...' or: 'According to my interpretation of the figures...' may focus the reader's attention on the role of the interpreting speaker/writer. Therefore, in realist ethnography the interpreting 'I' is absent in conclusions. Experiential authority is derived from indications of impersonal, disciplinary authority. In that case, ethnography is primarily conceived as a methodology, rather than a 'style' as Grimes proposed (see e.g. Stringer 2008: 33; see also Chapter 4). On the other hand, the self-absorbed mandate typically incites to what Grimes calls autobiographically presented introspection, or, in Van Maanen's classic terminology, to the 'confessional tale'. He speaks of 'character-building conversion tale' (1988: 77) where the author's risk of being exposed as vulnerable is mitigated by literary conventions. Van Maanen emphatically uses the word 'tale' when analyzing scientific texts, to focus the attention to literary strategies which, as he amply demonstrates, play an important role in ethnographies, but also in other kinds of scientific texts.

When I started to study various publications on religion and pop or rock music, I soon uncovered deep controversies and widely differing interpretations. On closer inspection many differences seemed related to presuppositions which often remained implicit, for instance because they were inherent to specific disciplinary approaches. Thus, the previously noted, widely held idea that religion is universal stimulated the notion that after institutionalized religions have disappeared 'religion' will 'go underground'. This hypothesis resulted in several theories, including substitution theories, theories about implicit religion, about spirituality, and even about residual religions (Stringer 2008: 101-102). Where participants overtly reject any association with the notion of religion (Moynihan & Søderlind 1998; see Arnett 1996: 126ff.) the researcher can try theories about the 'unconscious' (Sylvan 2002), the 'subconscious' or 'an enduring latent demand for religion' (Bruce 1996: 58).

All this brought me to the conclusion that another problem precedes the problem of vanishing *versus* emerging religion (compare Van der Tuin 2008: 6): a lack of insight that seriously complicates interpretations of 'new' religious dimensions and expressions, like those perhaps manifest in pop or rock festivals. The incentive for this conclusion is – next to the great diversity of often opposing theories about relationships between pop or rock music and religion – the paucity of studies about festivals in relation to the subject of religion and the dominance of studies presenting 'outsider's views'.

Although it was easy to find studies on religion and pop or rock music, most of these seldom pay attention to *festivals* as rituals or social happenings where religion may emerge. Studies of those festivals have predominantly been conducted by representatives of disciplines other than religious studies (compare Van Noort 1995, Arnett 1996, Mulder 2003). Besides, several studies of religiosity in pop or rock music aimed at assessing the position of this music to liturgy, thus adding a specific

social dimension to the subject. Particularly because of their mostly normative character, welcoming or rejecting this music in liturgy, the author's personal perspective often appears prominent. These studies seem to miss most urgently 'inside information', the perspective of (young) people expressed in their own words (Hoondert 2006: 72, see also 81n73). Thus, the problem is not just a lack of knowledge, but also shortage of a certain *kind* of knowledge: of 'local knowledge' (Geertz 1983), worded in 'local language' as requisite to interpretation.

This requires a specific approach, namely an insider's perspective as offered by ethnography. In Stringer's words (2008: 19): 'ethnography is probably the only way in which we could ever understand the reality of religion as practiced by ordinary individuals'. In his *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* (2005: 150-151) he referred to the social anthropologist Gerd Baumann, who conducted fieldwork in Sudan and London and 'discovered that he had to listen very carefully, not just to what was being said by the different communities, but also how they said it and the meaning that each group gave to significant terms such as 'religion' and 'community' in different contexts.' In Chapter 4, I elaborate on the theme of ethnography as both method and writing *genre*, because, to mention one point, the ideal to do justice to the participants' narratives, with their own generic qualities, implies polyphony (representing the participant's voice alongside the author's).

Studies approaching the subject from the outside instead of from the perspective of the people concerned abound in generalizations and normative judgements. They not only misunderstand, but also repudiate essential aspects of contemporary youth culture, thus contributing to the much discussed topic of alienation of youth. What is more, the outsider's approach incited many students of pop and rock music to accept as self-evident the identification of this music with 'youth'. They followed (or criticized) studies from the period when these musical genres rose to prominence in our culture, neglecting the fact that the 'youth' from the 1970s have meanwhile become 'middle-aged'. My participation in rock festivals soon showed me the important position 'old hands' held, which offered the opportunity for me to introduce the concept of memory (see Chapter 6).

Thus, my research problem also focuses on the questionable character of insights generated by outside perspectives. And, because of the implications of this kind of research, it also touches on the social problem of alienation and exclusion (see Hoondert 2006: 30). This problem is closely related to the question of how to take seriously religious – or religiously inspired – ideas manifest in (youth) culture, even if they seem improper from the perspective of established religions (compare Aranza 1983). This aspect may contribute to the social relevance of my project, in which the matter of alienation and exclusion is but one aspect. McGrath (2002: 162), who studied religion in science fiction, concluded that inasmuch as such ideas are 'part of contemporary culture and held to be true by many, it is important for mainstream religious traditions to give some kind of answer.'

To conclude this section, the research problem guiding my project concerns a *lack of knowledge* – specifically *inside knowledge* – about possible relationships between pop or rock festivals and religion. Phrased as such, it does not look very spectacular. One might wonder why I devote a whole section to phrasing this research problem. I hope the preceding lines made clear the importance of explicitly thinking about the research problem, rather than starting off – as researchers so often do – with the 'central question'. It not only brings to the surface presuppositions which otherwise would remain implicit, but it may also elucidate the particular character of a study. In my case, the 'problem' resulted from personal experience, when I was consulting literature from various disciplines with strongly diverging disciplinary discourses and therefore may be characterized in Van Maanen's words as a 'self-absorbed mandate'. This also explains why my study pays due attention to (self-)reflection and why it is focused on strategies to acquire inside information. It analyzes sources specifically related to the festivals (Chapter 5), it comprises fieldwork (Chapter 6), and conversations with various categories of participants (Chapter 7).

As indicated above, I drew conclusions for my research problem from a survey of literature that brought many controversies to light. In the next section I give my impression of the literature on religion and pop or rock music. After that I discuss some approaches to religion and religiosity. The final section is devoted to an inventory of 'labels', a set of characteristic aspects of religion used as indicators (or rather as an attention-drawing instrument) in the analysis of the results of the ethnographic research.

2.4. *Religion and pop or rock music: a survey of literature*
In this section I discuss some studies with which I initially began my research to get a first impression of the subject. Although later study made me change my mind at times, these first studies exerted a notable influence on my approach. As explained in Chapter I, with my background in religious studies and anthropology, I found the great diversity of disciplinary insights into the theme and the variety of approaches almost overwhelming. Therefore, I confine myself here to the 'guiding' studies. For the moment I will not differentiate between 'pop' and 'rock' music because some authors under discussion join these genres under 'youth culture'. But in the next chapters it will become clear that the differences are indeed relevant for this project.

2.4.1. *Robin Sylvan: 'Traces of the Spirit'*
Robin Sylvan's major study (2002), drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, is extensively referred to in the first chapter. Sylvan focused on popular music, trying to trace its roots in the West African religious music brought to America by slaves. These slaves kept their religious spirit alive by hiding it in their music (2002: 7), thus escaping the seemingly all-penetrating eyes of their masters who tried to suppress their religions.

When 'black music' migrated into 'white' popular music, traces of the religious spirit remained and sometimes surfaced, unnoticed by prejudiced researchers (9, 68). According to Sylvan, the youth subcultures emerging in the second half of the 20th century 'had powerful but unconscious religious dimensions, not only because of the hidden traces of West African spirituality implicit in the music, but also because they were deifying their musical heroes and engaging in what might be described as a form of worship.' This 'worship' represents a further transformation of West African religious sensibilities by joining the once separate roles of performer (e.g., the priest) and deity (72-73).

A significant aspect of Sylvan's approach is that he starts from religion *inherent* in the music, demonstrated by historical analysis. He has no need to conjecture substitution, the idea that religious needs, no longer fulfilled by institutionalized forms of religion, find a way out in other cultural domains. The musical subculture already contains 'almost everything for its adherents that a traditional religion would [and] it provides a powerful religious experience which is both the foundation and the goal of the whole enterprise, an encounter with the numinous that is at the core of all religions' (2002:4). It provides forms of ritual activity and communal ceremony, a philosophy and a worldview. Besides, it offers a cultural identity, a social structure, and a sense of belonging. Thus, Sylvan concludes, these subcultures function in the same way as a religious community, to which he adds 'albeit in an unconscious and post-modern way'. Popular music as an essential element of youth culture has *in itself* the capacity to fulfil the need for spiritual expression (4, compare 75, 215). In this respect Sylvan's approach differs essentially from outsiders' views that consider pop and rock music as a (poor) substitute for institutionalized religion or survey its suitability for liturgy, often stressing the alienating qualities of such 'surrogate' forms like a false sense of freedom, imagined creativity, and so on.

Although Sylvan recognized that fieldwork allowed him to deepen his understanding of the subcultures, he admitted that it 'was no easy project', because the form of constituted religion is quite different from conventional ones and does not fit neatly in a standard religious analysis. Special attention should be paid to the modes of transmission and the cognition afforded by these modes, characterized by a great diversity of technology and resulting in 'powerful experiential states […], states that are clearly analogous to a variety of classic religious experiences'. To analyze this religious experience Sylvan proposed an approach closely resembling Grimes's ritual analysis: an inside view (fieldwork), *epoche*, analytical categorization of phenomena combined with the scholar's empathetic interpolation of his or her own experiences and emotions, systematic introspection (78-82), and a focus on the body (216). For, as Sylvan concluded, 'There's More to the Picture than Meets the Eye' (214, see also Hughes-Freeland & Crain 1998).

Notwithstanding the inherent qualities which make popular musical subcultures favourite places for the emergence of religion, there are, according to Sylvan, substantial ways in which they differ from religion in its conventional sense. They take place within the secular framework of performative genres and commercial entertainment. Spiritual energies, '*if acknowledged at all at a conscious level*, are usually vague and amorphous, and there is little knowledge of how to relate them or what to do with them once they appear' (218, my italics). Nevertheless, 'it is clear that powerful religious phenomena are occurring within these musical subcultures and that these phenomena are having a life-changing impact on many young people' (220). The vagueness, combined with eclecticism and at times 'bordering on vulgarity' seriously impedes the identification and analysis of emerging religion, for instance leaving room for conflicting views.

In contrast to Sylvan, a sociologist like Steve Bruce (see 2.8.1.) diagnoses these aspects in terms of 'secularization'. In my research I examine this 'vagueness' as a semantic field (as a set of meaningful expressions; see Chapter 7), at the same time staying alert for indications of conventionalization in the way people express themselves (see Bruce 1996: 35).

Sylvan's field study offers many clues to approaching musical subcultures as emerging religious phenomena. As such, his study is an important empirical addition to Koenot's philosophically oriented analysis *Voorbij de woorden* (Beyond Words; 1996) and a forceful corrective to Ardui's *Rockin' in the Free World* (2006), two publications I discuss in the next sections.

2.4.2. *Jan Koenot: 'Voorbij de woorden'*

The title of Jan Koenot's essay *Voorbij de woorden* (Beyond words, 1996) refers to George Steiner's characterization of contemporary Western culture as a 'culture after the word', a culture in which 'logocentrism' has been dethroned by 'musicalization'. Although songs are essential to the culture of rock, song-words [lyrics] should not be isolated from the voice singing the words (Koenot 1996: 100, 118). According to Koenot this advance of music at the expense of the primacy of verbal expression also touches on the realm of religion. Over the ages in Western (and Islamic) cultures music – because of its sensory experience – raised a certain resistance. Nowadays, however, with the shift from word to music, 'fundamental anthropological and theological dimensions' are involved (176 ff.; 181). The idea of music as an inherent quality of our culture incited Koenot to a thoughtful approach to several aspects of rock that are often used by opponents of this kind of music, like commercialization (47-48, compare 191), manipulation (77-78), or (alleged) lack of authenticity (85ff.). Koenot observed rock 'from the outside' (he conducted no fieldwork) and is very well aware of this position. 'Also scientists who study rock as a particular expression of youth culture with benevolence run the risk of remaining outsiders' (76, 77). This consciousness incites Koenot to prudence when judging rock

culture 'in all its excesses and confusions' (191), but – with his theoretical position stressing the primacy of music over words – also enables him to make relevant observations of rock festivals. Thus, he pays attention to the symbolic qualities of festival sites, the 'sound architecture', the mass movements to these sites ('as in a pilgrimage'), and the unique intensifying experience of time and the significance of nightfall, 'when clear shapes fade away and reality shows itself from its other, magical quality'. Particularly this last aspect is a disadvantage in summer festivals. '[O]nly those who perform the final acts get the night on their side' (139). Koenot's observations remind me in many ways of Grimes's specification of ritual dimensions (Grimes 1995, Chapter 2, 'Mapping the Field of Ritual'). For instance, the festival site has many dimensions. In some instances it is a historical place, full of symbolism (see below, Chapter 5) or the same site can have different meanings depending on what is (not) happening. Thus, the 'deserted' site after a performance is not just an empty space. It evokes a feeling of desolation, of lost enchantment, to 'what was'. It reminds one of people's intense enjoyment. It is as if one can still hear the sounds.

A deserted festival site (photo: Heleen Kommers)

Thus, although its argumentation is abstract and in some respects questionable[11], Koenot's sophisticated analysis offers several perspectives to empirical research of

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[11] For instance, the idea that music is a 'universal language' (Koenot 1996: 109). Much of the literature terms this idea commonplace, but the ethno-musicologist Alain Daniélou (*Die Musik Asiens zwischen*

rock festivals, fruitfully enabling the researcher to join Grimes's suggestions for ritual analysis in the study of rock festivals as places of emerging religiosity. This is all the more fruitful, because Koenot points out that the experience of rock cannot be reduced to psychology (18) and rock festivals may be approached like 'spontaneous liturgy' with its great variety of qualities (139/140, 190). This insight comes from his conclusion that 'in the anthropological sense rock is evidently religious' (138). He is referring to cultural anthropology focusing on a universal duality between the ordinary and the extraordinary, expressed variously, such as temporal *versus* eternal, secular *versus* sacred, and so on. However, his further reflections on spirituality and a theological perspective do not offer clues for empirical research. This brings me to Johan Ardui who, in his *Rockin' in the Free World* (2006), explicitly related pop and rock music to 'the project of theology', presenting his findings in terms of a 'dialogue' between rock and theology.

2.4.3. *Johan Ardui: 'Rockin' in the Free World'*

Ardui's PhD thesis bears the subtitle 'God, Rock and the call for liberation'. He starts with an extensive historical analysis where he notes such tendencies as a desire for freedom, a turn to 'vulgarity', a change from intellect to sensation, and a revival of pantheism. Following Pattison he presents rock as 'the triumph of vulgarity' (2006: 25-48). Here is not the place to elaborate on the methodological weaknesses of Ardui's analysis (e.g. how he personalizes and generalizes rock, his rhetorical strategies and use of sources as authorities, to mention but a few). Like Koenot, he sees rock as a religious phenomenon, but his perspective urges him to normative judgement, interpreting 'freedom' in terms of alienation and fake (36, compare below 6.2.), considering the industrial and commercial basis of rock as enemies of creativity and as reasons why rock is unable to transcend 'ordinary experience' (80-86).

Therefore, 'of course' – according to Ardui – the religious character of rock is incompatible with the message of Christianity (169; for the background of ideas on the incompatibility of 'banal' rock with 'noble' Christian values, see Chapter 3). Ardui's normative approach is closely related to a research problem that remains implicit in the first part of his book and only surfaces in the final section, the problem of the compatibility of rock music and Christian liturgy. In this section Ardui examines the arguments of advocates and opponents to the idea of rock as a possible part of liturgy. Here too the intertwinement of research problem and attitude becomes evident. His discussion of the pros (e.g., like Treml's, who's 'theological embracement of rock' focuses 'too easily' on texts, Ardui 2006: 198, 235) and of the cons (e.g., Ratzinger's emotional and prejudiced rejection of rock, characterized by Ardui as 'analysis', 221) betrays a lack of critical introspection which – I refer again to

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Missachtung und Wertschätzung. Wilhelmshafen 1973) criticized it heavily, concluding the exact opposite. See also Howells as cited in Negus 1992: 66.

Grimes's argument – is crucial to a study of a subject inevitably touching on the researcher's worldview.

Notwithstanding all this, a critical reflection on Ardui's approach may point at many aspects deserving attention in my research, the idea of 'freedom' as a focus of rock music, the matter of 'illusion', the manifestation of transcendence and search for the meaning of life, the relation between commercialization and creativity, and pantheistic expressions. Besides, Treml's characterization of the rock concert as 'religious ritual', as *Parallelwelt* as discussed by Ardui (2006: 199) complements Koenot's observations of the festival.

2.5. *A view from the music industry*

Keith Negus offers a quite different perspective. In his study *Producing Pop; Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (1992) he focused on the world currently generalized impersonally as 'the music industry'. Although his study is not directed at a relationship between pop music and religion, I thought it interesting to conclude this section with a discussion of his book, because many normative studies (of which Ardui's represents only one) use the notion of 'music industry' in their argument to characterize experiences of pop music which might have some correspondence with religious experiences as 'false consciousness'. Or studies that consider pop music as a cause of existential problems, like Arnett's (1996). In my opinion Negus's study forcefully illustrates the misunderstandings or stereotypes resulting from a lack of insight, in this case into the world of the music industry. Therefore it played an important role in the formulation of my research problem. (In the next chapter I will further elaborate on theories about pop music and popular culture and also enter in more detail into this idea of 'false consciousness'.)

Another reason to discuss Negus's study here is his explicit attention to the relationship between authenticity and 'belief'[12]. According to many authors 'belief' is an essential aspect of religion (compare, however, Van der Velden 2011) and Negus's view seems to join closely Stringer's idea of situational belief (see 2.8.2). Much what 'ordinary religious believers' believe is situational belief and related to a particular moment and a particular situation meaningful to them, rather than to 'official beliefs' (Stringer 2008: 51). The belief of the festival public in the authenticity of the performers is also situational, rather than what producers want to make them believe.

In the music industry world, Negus discovered a great variety of workers who actively contribute to the sounds and images of pop. The people engaged in music companies are not just producers, but also consumers, listeners, who are well versed with existing conventions (67). They plan, and design marketing strategies sometimes actually directed to creating desires. But they also meet regular resistance or unpredictable reactions from both musicians and 'the public'. In

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[12] For this subject of authenticity and belief see Kommers 2011b: 31-45, especially pp. 36-37, 40-42.

approaches by outsiders, these idiosyncratic aspects often get lost. In the introduction to his book, Keith Negus states that he is 'offering an implicit defence of the music business against various forms of sociological and journalistic cynicism, with its emphasis on corruption and exploitation' (Negus 1992: vi). Approaching this world from the inside, he discovered a quite different image. He cites the political economist Jacques Attali, 'When observed from the outside the music business appears as "an ordinary consumer industry" yet it is "a strange industry on the borderline between the most sophisticated marketing and the most unpredictable of cottage industries"'. (Negus 1992: vi)

Negus also criticizes post-modern approaches, which, in his view, pay too much attention to the activities of the audiences. These authors 'prioritise the way in which musical sounds and technologies have been used in the act of consumption', neglecting the creative forces which play a major role in the production process (vii). Instead, Negus emphasizes how pop music results from a continuous interplay between production and consumption.

An important conclusion from his research is that people in record companies seem to be fully aware – even more than the musicians – of visual primacy, 'You See What You Hear' (66; for a more extensive discussion of this aspect, see below, 3.3.2.). In the Western world visual identity is essential in presenting music. The relationship between visual images and musical genres is complex. They are connected on the semantic level (meanings, interpretations), as well as in terms of attitudes, values, and beliefs. Sounds evoke images and visual images denote particular sounds. 'This is most apparent at live performances; when male hard rock fans share the long hair, leather, buckles and bodily postures of the artist they are watching and imitate' (Negus 1992: 66. By the way, to this notion of shared iconography I would add a shared (conventional) language. I discuss this in the parts on method and ethnographic study, Chapters 4-7).

Visual identity is closely related to authenticity. This concept is crucial to marketing. The idea of authenticity becomes more complicated when transgressing social, cultural and national boundaries because then current conventions are no longer safe beacons in determining the difference between 'real' and posture. Authenticity is not in the first place a matter of 'reality', but predominantly a matter of situational 'belief'. As Negus says, pointing at the 'ironies of authenticity', 'There is a widespread belief that the image and the music should in some way express the character and personality of an artist'. This matter of authenticity is central to many debates in the industry and seems to contradict the idea of a 'calculated approach' and 'the assertion that there is nothing natural about the production of music or presentation of artists' (69). Indeed, these debates often result in trespasses of the 'rigid belief systems' as worded by personnel in the interviews (70).

In sum, Negus's study presents an image of the music industry that differs strongly from the views advocated by those who stress pop music is an alienating

phenomenon manipulated by rational and calculating enterprises to which listeners can only be victims. But he also makes clear that correction is needed to theories that one-sidedly present 'the public' as *agens*, creatively escaping the industry's strategies ('resistance theories'; see 3.1.). When presenting the music industry as a creative and acting force, Negus also underscores the essential role visual and bodily factors play in creating and accepting 'authenticity', a concept that appears closely related to *belief*. Here it is interesting to note that many scholars see the intense (at times excessive) identification between fans and musicians in terms of 'idolatry' rather than 'belief'. Thus, guided by stereotypical views, they seem to be stressing the differences between this kind of relationship and religion, rather than trying to trace the similarities.

2.6. *Pop and religion, the studies reconsidered*

In the preceding sections I discussed four different approaches: Sylvain's sympathetic inside approach, Koenot's thoughtful reflexive essay, Ardui's normative external study and Negus's critical analysis of a phenomenon since Adorno et al. often stereotyped in studies about possible existential aspects of pop music. They nicely illustrate the effect of chosen perspective on the interpretation and central dimensions of the subject. Their conclusions differ greatly and are often opposing. Thus, to Ardui, drawing a distinction between 'pop' and 'rock' is meaningless because both are structurally tied to the capitalistic entertainment industry (2006: 125), which in his view is the source of illusion, self-deception, and quasi-creativity. Negus explicitly criticizes this view.

Koenot, in his turn, recognizes major differences between the two and ascribes qualities to rock that are essential to its religious appearance (1996: Chapter 2). And to Sylvan, rock is a major cultural force. He refers to McLoughlin who saw continuity between rock festivals and religious revival camps of the 'great awakenings' of the 18th and 19th centuries. Does Sylvan consider the worship of pop idols as transformation of (West African) religious sensibilities (2002: 72), Koenot specifies the intimate connection between idol and fans in terms of mutual social relationships (1996: 35 ff.), and Ardui characterizes the phenomenon as 'magic of the idol', as in a Dionysus cult (2006: 169). Where Sylvan interpolates traces of African spirituality, Negus points at the creative input of music company employees.

These examples may suffice to elucidate the influence of a specific approach on the interpretation of major concepts as well as their interrelations. On the one hand, my survey of albeit only a small selection of studies was instrumental as a source of inspiration for my research; as 'recommendations' that helped me to focus my attention at rock festivals filled at times with frenzied ecstatic experiences. On the other hand, they intensified my concern with disciplinary discourses that seem critically important to how researchers consider the domain of rock and religion.

Now I shall proceed to various disciplinary approaches of a main phenomenon in my research: religion (2.7. and 2.8.).

2.7. *Secular approaches to religion: general introduction*
Besides disciplinary approaches to religion, characterized as a rule by historically developed discourses, one may distinguish views shaped by personal perspective (the researcher's agenda) such as religiously inspired *versus* secular opinions. However, there is often a significant correlation between disciplinary background and personal stance. Thus, secular views are usually prominent in anthropological or psychological approaches, while theological approaches often have affinity with religious traditions. In this section I survey disciplinary positions, encouraged by Peter Connolly's statement that 'all accounts of religion are accounts by people who approach their study from a particular starting point'; from 'a set of assumptions about the nature of their subject-matter' and 'a set of methods for obtaining information and making sense of it' (Connolly 2007: 1). This insight is at the base of a book that could serve as a 'guide' helping students 'to orient themselves quickly and learn to recognize the standpoint of any writer or speaker', because 'otherwise they can drown in the confusion generated by a conflicting mass of what seem to be equally authoritative pronouncements' (Connolly 2007: 1-2).

Another collection of essays, presented by Jensen and Rothstein in their *Secular Theories on Religion* (2000), not only offered an overview of current secular perspectives, but, together with Connolly's inventory of disciplinary views, also helped me to come to terms with major concepts. Comparing disciplinary traditions inevitably leads to a discussion of definitions and methodological procedures.

My ideal of studying pop or rock festivals open-mindedly, on the alert for 'hidden dimensions' is reminiscent of the anthropologist approaching 'exotic', still unknown religious manifestations. Or, to use the title of James McGrath's article, one is studying 'Religion, But Not as We Know It' (2002). To achieve this aim, one can find inspiration in classic phenomenological approaches, as well as in Clifford Geertz's much discussed ideas on meaning and culture as text, paying attention to the participants' interpretations alongside the researcher's (Geertz 1973; Gellner 2007: 20-29; Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 103-104). Here I confine myself to pointing at Geertz's symbolic anthropology, focusing on how individuals make sense of the world. Religion may be seen as a means of understanding the world (Geertz 1966). This brings me to the anthropologist Robin Horton who in the 1960s analyzed African religious systems and compared these with the ideals of Western science, considering them as systems of thought whose point is to explain, control, and predict the natural world (Gellner 2007: 29). Horton's article, first published in 1967, received much interest again in late-20th century post-modern studies criticizing the (what they called) arrogance and ethnocentric attitude of modern science and pointing at the illusion of 'open' science as opposed to the 'closed' systems of

religious thought[13]. Horton's views are more or less akin to McGrath's findings in science fiction, which for many people serves as a religion (McGrath 2002: 154, 163). In the same way as the notion of ethnocentrism functions in cross-cultural research, representations of inter-galaxian religion arouse awareness of geocentrism (McGrath 2002: 168). Both emphatically point at the problem of the researcher's worldview influencing the interpretation as well as the approach of other worldviews.

Because of the strong awareness among anthropologists of the risk of ethnocentrisms in the study of 'exotic' religions, phenomenological insights are popular in the anthropology of religion (Bowie 2000: 4-6). They are the subject of Erricker's article in Connolly's 'guide'. Most fruitful for my research of religion in pop or rock festivals is the typology developed by Ninian Smart which Erriker discussed extensively[14]. Smart tried to identify the difference between religion considered from the inside (the 'participant's view'), and from the outside (the 'researcher's view'), 'without rupturing the connection that must exist between them' (Erricker 2007: 86). In his *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969), Smart tried to identify the 'phenomena' or 'dimensions' of religion (Smart 1969; Erricker 2007: 87). He distinguished various phenomena: ritual (public or private), mythological (narrative), doctrinal (philosophical), ethical (moral), social, material, and experiential. Several dimensions, such as the ritual, the material, or the doctrinal lend themselves to empirical research and inspired me to formulate the 'labels' I used as indicators for religious potential (see below, 2.9.). How Smart proposes 'a very strong *epoche*' (bracketing out), as well as *eidetic vision* (the capacity to see 'objectively'), both traditionally inherent in phenomenology, is also of interest to my project. By considering Smart's typology instrumentally[15], to draw my attention to certain domains which might be indicative for expressions of religiosity, I hope to escape essentialism (Erricker 2007: 92; Joy 2000: 69-86) and related ethnocentrisms (Stringer 2008; Bruce 1996: 7).

On the one hand, I agree with Connolly (2007: 4) that some idea of scope, about 'what can and cannot be legitimately included within the boundaries of the term 'religion'' is necessary. Particularly when transgressing the familiar and exploring new fields – and trying to join the participants' views – validity is difficult to

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[13] The article is reprinted in an important section on African ways of thinking in Roy Grinker & Christopher Steiner (Eds): *Perspectives on Africa*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, and in the influential publication edited by Bryan Wilson *Rationality*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1970.

[14] Here I refer to Erricker's recent reappraisal of Smart's inventory because it is presented as a 'guide', stressing the instrumental significance of the typology. Smart's publications are – re his approach to 'World Religions' – considered somewhat outdated now, but his 'dimensions' are still useful.

[15] In his *The World's Religions* Smart refers to this instrumental aspect: 'The point of the list is so that we can give a balanced description' (ed. 1995: 21). Although Smart's studies, e.g., like one on 'World Religions', seem vulnerable to criticism (see e.g., Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions* (2005, especially p. 5 note 7)), his inventory of 'dimensions' of religion drew my attention because he did not distinguish between 'religion' and 'worldview' and also applied his list to 'secular worldviews' (1995: 21ff.). What is more: his characterization of his study subject (to paraphrase) as ideas and practices which move human beings (Smart 1995: 9) appealed strongly to me.

assess if the terms in use are too flexible (see Juchtmans 2008: 48, Doss 2008: 169, Hoondert 2006: 78n68, and in particular Ter Borg 2008: 302). On the other hand, I well understand the importance of postponing classification until I established what Clifford Geertz called the 'conversation' with the people concerned (to which Gellner added the necessity of deconstructing one's cultural discourse – in Connolly 2007: 96).

Meanwhile, I think this conversation should not risk ending in mutual misunderstanding or in projections ascribing to the participants what the researcher wants to find. 'Conversation' implies speaking the language of the people as well as being acquainted with their *narrative conventions*. To the researcher exploring new grounds, this may be too high a goal. Thus, for instance, the 'experience-near' concepts central to Geertz's interpretative approach are characterized by being used 'spontaneously' as casual remarks. To notice these as such implies an intimate familiarity with the language as well as its social and cultural context. In Chapters 4 and 7, I touch further on this problem, which is closely related with a theoretical perspective that holds the participants' view as the focal point. For the moment let me proceed with the matter of defining, approaching disciplinary insights eclectically to try to identify some indicators for tracing religion empirically. In the next section, I discuss some views on religion in our secularizing world.

2.8. Secular approaches to religion: various ways of defining religion
In particular, (historically oriented) sociologists and anthropologists, researchers who focus on societies significantly different from today's 'Western' Christian society or who devote their time to specific communities, often feel uneasy with general definitions of religion. Those definitions tend to be ethnocentric or hodiecentric, focused on modern meanings. Next I discuss some studies that allow further analysis of this aspect. It is an important issue, because many lovers of popular music and participants in the festivals I met during this study are well acquainted with current (Christian) notions of religion, using them as stereotypes and at the same time contributing specific (often very personal) meanings to certain religious concepts.

2.8.1. Steve Bruce: a sociologist's view
In his inspiring *Religion in the Modern World* (1996) Steve Bruce, the advocate of the 'secularization thesis'[16] extensively discusses the pros and cons of functional and substantive definitions of religion. He points at the difficulty of using functional definitions consistently and at the risk of tautology ('mixing in the designation of religion precisely those features of it which we want to establish empirically'). But most interesting to me is the problem that functional definitions 'may count as religious things which do not on the face of it look terribly religious and which their

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[16] After completing the final draft of this text, I came across Bruce's *Secularization: in Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (2011), when it was too late to process it for this study.

adherents regard as secular' (1996: 6-7). In my study of rock festivals, sometimes teeming with anti-religious expressions or with religious symbols emphatically referring to secular intentions, this aspect of functional definitions poses serious interpretive problems. In studies like those by Ardui or Sylvan, the difficulty is solved by referring to the 'unconscious'. People are in fact religious, but they are unaware of that. Although sociological or psychological research often indicates qualities people possess, but which they themselves do not recognize and even deny, such an assessment requires special research techniques and at least a clear, unambiguous definition of the quality concerned – in this case 'religion'. The literature I consulted seems unanimous on at least one thing, that such a definition of religion (or, as some say: religiosity) is an illusion.

With substantive definitions, there is not only the risk of ethnocentrism, as Bruce indicates, but also the chance that they limit the outlook of the researcher. Of course, this would be disastrous to a study putting central 'discoveries that might be done in the field' (Hoondert 2006: 75).

Bruce (1996: 7) proposed solving the riddle pragmatically, suggesting a definition 'that fits with broad contemporary commonsense reflection on the matter'. To Bruce the purpose of a definition is 'to bring together analytically similar phenomena, aspects of which we believe we can explain in the same terms.' He is aware of a close connection between theoretical perspective and constructing a definition. Bruce explicitly chose in favour of a substantive definition because such a definition offers the opportunity to formulate theories with, in his opinion, considerable explanatory scope. Although my study is mainly exploratory rather than explicatory, Bruce's instrumental approach at first sight seems inviting. He decided on a characterization of 'religion' encompassing 'what ordinary people mean when they talk of religion'. 'Religion […] consists of beliefs, actions, and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose.' However, a main problem of this approach seems to me his reference to 'what ordinary people mean'.

Who are those 'ordinary people'? How to identify essentially anonymous 'ordinary people' and assess what they mean by religion? In my experience of 'ordinary' respondents, I often gained the idea that they used conventional language. To put another question in relation to my study, do Bruce's 'ordinary people' who phrase sometimes only stereotypical views on religion, correspond with my 'research population'? Are participants in rock festivals 'ordinary people'? Besides, the notion of transcendence admitted in his definition seems contradictory to his warning for ethnocentrism, pointing at (non-Western) cultures where the distinction between natural and supernatural phenomena is not relevant (Bruce 1996: 7)[17].

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[17] By the way, this may be a main reason why 'indigenous knowledge' of non-Western peoples is often approached from the perspective of 'religion' (characterized e.g., as 'magic', 'witchcraft', and

Here it may be interesting to refer to Meerten ter Borg, who, in search of a working definition of 'implicit religion' (a concept rejected by Bruce: 1996: 58) compares waving arms in a trance at pop concerts with primitive religions (Ter Borg 2008: 301; compare above, Chapter 1, note 9). Because Bruce is focusing on Western societies, the problem of ethnocentrism does not seem relevant. However, according to Stringer this problem is closely related to the dominance of a Christian perspective, which deeply influenced the study of religion(s).

2.8.2. *M.D. Stringer: the view of an ethnographer*
Stringer argues in his *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (2008) that 'in studying religion […] we have fundamentally misunderstood the nature of 'religion'. Because of a 'Christian' notion of religion, deeply embedded in our culture, researchers overlooked the 'underlying religious sensibility'. In his discussion about definitions of 'religion' Stringer points out that those definitions (whether focusing on content or on function) are based on intellectual reflection by mainly Western researchers who cannot but start from some presuppositions. These resulted in 'the highlighting of the Christian, 'coherent', 'transcendent' and 'transformative' nature of religion […] over the superstitious, the disordered, the pragmatic and the immanent' (Stringer 2008: 2, 3). This is why those researchers thought to notice a new religiosity, together with the downfall of churches. But, according to Stringer, in fact existing religious forms just became manifest when they were no longer concealed by the dominant discourse that favoured religious forms that were consistent, referring to the transcendent, and implying personal or societal transformation (Stringer 2008: Chapter I; these aspects are exactly the ones referred to by Bruce!). As Stringer concluded:

> '[…] the form of religion I have been exploring has always been present; but we have not sought it, and we have therefore never really seen it. […] Secularization [...] has revealed this layer of religiosity rather than caused it' (2008: 110).

Stringer speaks of a 'layer' that always existed and that may be considered 'but a continuation of a fundamentally human process found in all societies.' (2008: 111).
His study is of close interest to my project because Stringer focuses attention on 'hidden' religion. His argument joins Sylvan's in that he explains how disciplinary conventions resulted in certain phenomena being overlooked. He admits that 'any

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'superstition'), in contrast to Western scientific knowledge. This view has had serious implications. The idea that religious knowledge belonged to a 'closed system' made researchers neglect epistemological developments in indigenous knowledge systems (see Horton 1994). To me these reflections are relevant because the culture of rock makes many references to pre- or non-Christian ideas. How do participants interpret these, which meanings do they attach to them? See also Klomp's critique of the Western scientific discourse, below: 3.2.2.

attempt at definition' of religion is 'futile'. On the other hand, he thinks it 'actually impossible for any academic to get away from definitions entirely.' (2008: 3) Without trying to formulate an explicit definition, one runs the risk that preconceptions remain implicit and therefore beyond control. The Western discourse, emerging from the protestant rejection of mediaeval Christendom, set in definitions that have three traits in common. They consider religion a 'unified object'. They postulate that religion is connected with transcendence, and they see religion as transforming the individual or the society (4-13). To escape these preconceptions, Stringer proposes starting from *empirical studies* of 'ordinary people engaged in everyday life' to determine in that context 'what can be defined as 'religion''. This reminds me of Bruce's attempt, discussed above. Only Stringer enters into two problems in more detail: the methodological and contextual, both very interesting for my research.

The *methodological* problem concerns the difficulty of identifying what exactly 'religious' is in everyday life, if people do not have explicit expectations about the notion of 'religion'. What do people consider 'religious'? This question aims at the 'demotic discourse', the folk or perhaps banal discourse. However, this discourse has also been influenced by the Christian discourse. Trying to find a neutral criterion, Stringer focuses on the 'non-empirical'; that which cannot be proven by any accepted method (16). Concerning the *context* Stringer starts from the idea that there will be a certain correspondence between scientific and 'ordinary' ideas about religion (both influenced by the Christian discourse). To escape this, he proposes finding 'somewhere in the world where the traditional Christian models of religion do not hold sway, and see what is going on there' (17). This could be a non-Western, 'primitive' religion. But Stringer prefers studying discourses about the non-empirical in Western society, 'discourses that are not dependent on the Christian model, then surely this challenges the Christian model far more persuasively than if we first explore a religious discourse that has never been influenced by Christianity at all.' (17) Belmont's idea that 'Christendom' does not touch every aspect of life, that there is room for 'superstition', is reasoning 'from the top down' according to Stringer, who asks: 'What would the same situation look like if viewed from the bottom up? Would it be any different?' (49)

The *situational* theory of belief, as Stringer discusses, holds that belief statements are 'symbolic' assertions. He is interested in individual statements, made at a particular time for a particular purpose. In various situations, these statements may be highly inconsistent or even contradictory. People 'will state any belief, official or popular, that is of value to them at any particular moment and in any particular situation.' (51) The question is, why do people need such statements? Stringer refers to Sperber, who argues that we use a symbolic statement when empirical statements no longer make sense, in situations of illness or misfortune 'this is as true for superstition as it is for official beliefs.' (Stringer 2008: 51)

In my research project, these discussions are important because they link religious statements with existential experience. Many young participants in the festivals I talked to did not relate their festival experiences in any way with 'belief' or existential matters. They usually interpreted religious symbols used in performances as criticism directed at established religions or in terms that had nothing to do with the religious belief systems from which the symbols are derived. Exceptions were young people who had undergone special existential experiences in life, and older participants who tended to react in a more thoughtful way. To them 'narratives of the non-empirical' could be helpful in everyday life (Stringer 2008: 67; see below Chapter 7.3.2)[18].

But the idea of 'coping religion' could be extended to other expressions than those of 'belief'. Stringer points to Lynch's approach to 'raves'[19] that might perform a religious function for those attending them (Stringer 2008: 95; compare Van der Tuin 2008: 21):

> 'While they [the researchers] have been unable to find anything in the way those who attend raves approach or talk about the experience that could traditionally be seen as 'religious', or even 'spiritual' […] they have noted that many of those who participate do so in order to enable them to cope with their everyday lives in difficult and stressful jobs. It is the ability to get out on a Saturday night and to completely unwind, even to lose control for a short time, that re-energizes many of those involved, so that they can go back to their desks on Monday morning.'

This observation seamlessly joins the opening phrase of an important book about the 'festival feeling' (Van Terphoven 2009: see below, 5.2. See also the DVD *IMPACT* (20.4.1995; www.beeldengeluid.nl) showing a female *metal* fan who expressed herself in exactly the same way). This idea of 'coping religions' refers to a 'principle', rather than to a religious discourse as such. It is one principle (beside situational belief and the imminence of the non-empirical) that, according to Stringer, could be found in various religious discourses (2008: 101).

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[18] However, if existential experience is relevant when it comes to narratives of the non-empirical, it only underscores the importance of widening the research population to include those with 'memories' and 'experience' in life, who can 'draw on the past' (Stringer 2008: 50). Here it may be interesting to note that at festivals where religious symbols are prominent (at rock, especially *metal* festivals), older participants (both performers and the public) play an important role (Chapter 5).

[19] During the final stage of my research, I came across Robin Sylvan's *Trance Formation. The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of Global Rave Culture* (2005). He refers to 'strong statements describing spiritual and religious experiences of a profound, life-changing nature', experiences [which] are widespread among ravers, perhaps more so than even for people who participate in formal religious traditions.' (2005: 9). Sylvan concludes: 'To put it simply: global rave culture is a significant new spiritual and religious phenomenon' (2005: 179). As in *Traces of the Spirit,* he tries to relate some forms of rave with religious or spiritual sources such as African possession religion (20) or Hindu spirituality (28).

Stringer considers the expressions of these principles as the fundamental or elementary form of religion. His study aimed 'to change the way we talk and think about religion.' He wanted to offer 'a new definition of it that is rooted in people's unsystematic use of belief statements, their intimate relationships with the non-empirical other, and their need to cope pragmatically with everyday problems.' (113-114). Stringer thinks that dominant religions are 'aberrations' of 'popular religions' (114). The unsystematic, incoherent and sometimes even internally contradicting qualities of popular religions make it difficult for people to fully articulate their beliefs (49-50). Therefore, to researchers who are accustomed to start from coherently formulated religious beliefs as offered by institutionalized religions, these 'popular religions' may seem second-rate.

I paid much attention to Stringer's study because of his attempt to unveil what in conventional studies of religion remained 'hidden'. His analysis adds many fruitful insights to Sylvan's, which I choose as starting point. Above all, it not only helped me to pay serious attention to non-theological, even 'banal' forms of religion expressed in vague and incoherent narratives, but also offers indications on how to study these. His analysis of 'a layer' that always existed and that may be considered 'but a continuation of a fundamentally human process found in all societies' (111) also seems to underscore the anthropological idea that religion is universal, but that we should be aware of manifestations that can be completely different from those usually considered as 'religion' in dominant discourses. One may think of manifestations that – seen from those dominant discourses – are not recognized as religion, or are considered subversive, even 'anti-religious'. This brings me to the prejudices about rock festivals discussed above.

Precisely because the people who are the subject of my research often use Christian symbols and often emphatically reject Christianity (yet explicitly refer to their *ideas*, their *images* about Christianity), it seems all the more urgent to escape the dominant discourse which inevitably would result in interference (see Stringer 2008: 15). Therefore, I decided to follow Stringer who focuses on the contradictory, the non-systematic, the situational, the instrumental and the intimate. My research mainly concerns people who grew up in the Western Christian tradition, churchgoers or not. They are well acquainted with its worldview. In festivals and various musical genres, they refer in specific ways to elements of this worldview. An approach guided by the conventional discourse would perhaps hamper appreciation of their idiosyncratic presentation of these elements, their particular choices and *collages* and their meanings. Like Stringer, I approach festival goers as specific communities, characterized by specific discourses. By using ethnographic studies of well-defined communities, Stringer gave a 'face' to what Bruce called the 'ordinary people'.

This approach requires a characterization of 'religion' to be determined in the context of the festivals. My pilot study revealed a widely shared aversion to the notion of 'religion', usually referring to Christianity. Besides, it brought to light strong

inconsistencies in attitudes and expressions, ranging from almost solemn vows to plain ridicule of, and poking fun to, the use of religious symbols. If it were not for being acquainted with Lord's view (2008), already during the pilot study I would have been tempted to reply with a clear 'no' to the original research question. In any case, this pilot study encouraged a critical attitude to replacement-theories; in particular to those starting from conventional ideas about religion. Stringer's approach offered a definitive way out of that debate. His plea to take inconsistencies, even contradictories seriously, rather than as indications of insincerity or of alienation, as in some theological studies, proved very relevant for interpretation. Besides, his location of religion 'at the kitchen table' was most helpful in overcoming original worries in how to handle trivial or banal situations considered inferior as seen from institutionalized religion. In the context of pop and rock festivals, focusing on the 'non-empirical' (Stringer 2008: 16) seems adequate. During festivals, references to non-empirical entities abound, from the devil to the activities of wicked monks. Song texts, in the phrasing of ideals and identities and in symbolic interpretations, make many references to non-empirical matters. However, referring to the non-empirical to cope with existential problems (personal, but also social, like inequality or lack of freedom) is only one aspect of both performers' and listeners' expressions at the festivals. In the next section, I add several other aspects derived from the other studies discussed in this chapter. I repeat, it is not my intention to fix 'religion' to these aspects, but to construct an instrument to help me: (a) to focus on some 'indicators' while taking part in the bewildering world of the festivals and (b) to understand the often vaguely worded narratives of my respondents, sharing their festival experiences with me.

2.8.3. *Bruce and Stringer reconsidered*

Studies like those by Bruce and Stringer are interesting because they underscore the way researchers are struggling to come to terms with phenomena like universal aspects of 'religion' in a secular world. In this world, like the world dominated by *heavy metal* pretending to atheism (Arnett 1995: 5), religious institutions are collapsing and people are rejecting associations with 'religion' as they understand the notion. This world is also characterized by references to non-Christian or pagan rites and symbols, which sometimes seem more than ordinary forms of protest or expressions of shocking behaviour. Beyond this, Bruce's approach to contemporary religious and wellness movements offers opportunities to include qualities of youth culture that are often dismissed in normative studies, such as mass consumption, or 'prefab lifestyles'[20]. Stringer's notion of the 'elementary' or 'primary' form of

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[20] Here I mean elements predominant in youth culture that seem to relegate young people to passive consumers. A recent article about the fashion line *Mexx* called it 'no longer young and effervescent' because 'Mexx no longer thinks with the client. If one has a trend-following target group, one has to show the client how to wear clothes. Mexx should guide the client.' (*De Gelderlander*, 10 March 2010:

religion seems the most adequate approach to these worlds. It also includes forms of religion that in terms of the dominant discourse were considered 'superstitious' or 'inferior' (Stringer 2008: 112, 113).

I think an important consequence of this approach is that it could contribute to an *emancipation* of those religious expressions that once were condemned or minimized, such as the 'tribal' or 'primitive religions' mentioned above (see e.g. Smart 1995: 18). This is important because the festivals that form the subject of my research are often multicultural events, sometimes including traces of the (African) spirit, referred to by Sylvan (2002), other times adoring the tribal cults of Wodan or other 'heathen' traditions. However, in terms of the concept of 'religion', Bruce's advice does not seem superfluous. 'Given that there are still strong residues of Christianity in the cultures of most Western societies, we should be a little cautious of self-descriptions as 'religious'. Here he points at self-descriptions critics of the secularization thesis often used as evidence of an enduring latent demand for religion, but which could well be a matter of conventional language.

As noted above, my research mainly concerns people who grew up in the Western, Christian tradition, whether churchgoers or not. They are well acquainted with its worldview. They often use Christian symbols yet at the same time firmly reject Christianity (as they imagine it). At first sight, their expressions seem original and authentic, and indeed may be meaningful to them. But on a closer look, their *language* for religious matters usually seems highly conventional. Therefore, interpretation 'on face value', as in Jennings's analysis (2010: e.g. 118, 120), is risky. Jennings directly linked participants' verbal statements to analytic concepts like proto-religion (118) or natural religion (120). The sociological study by Bruce and the ethnographic approach by Stringer offer ways both to escape abstract concepts and their inherent ethnocentrism and to interpret religious narratives contextually, helping to place the phenomenon of religion straight into the life of ordinary people. In the next section, I reconsider the results of my survey of literature to design an instrument that will allow me to approach the subject of religion as open-mindedly as possible, and yet pragmatically, to avoid the 'bewilderment' Grimes warned of, which is all too obvious in the hectic world of pop and rock festivals.

2.9. *Analyzing the literature, 'labels' as instrument*
The main objective of this chapter was to gain insight into the central concepts and various approaches to religion to choose a way to study the object of my research

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21). This article presents young people as followers, who need examples to follow. Their freedom to choose clothes seems an illusion, in line with views presented by Adorno and his followers. Yet at the same time, the threatened fall of a once popular fashion label shows that people *can* and *do* choose. More important is the recognition that dimensions like commercialization and mass movements are essential to contemporary youth cultures; they should be considered as qualities of the subcultures rather than as threats to these (see 3.2.).

and avoid pitfalls related to conventional ideas about religion. Reconsidering the discussions featured here, from a pragmatic standpoint it might seem useful to start from one of Sylvan's conclusions. The musical subculture he studied contained 'almost everything for its adherents that a traditional religion would.' (Sylvan 2002: 4; see also 2.4.1.). This conclusion requires one to 'just' construct an inventory of the 'everything' that makes up traditional religion. This is precisely what Stringer rejected, since it places 'the argument the wrong way up' (2008: 101).

That Sylvan's approach prevails in the studies I surveyed is unsurprising if we agree with Stringer's ideas about the dominant (Christian) discourse favouring consistency, transcendence and transformation (2008: 5). Stringer stressed instead inconsistency (even the contradictory), the ordinary (everyday views), and the instantaneous (directed to a particular purpose, often implying continuity) (2008: 5, 50, 51). Both authors, Stringer and Sylvan, were looking for a world 'hidden from the majority of observers' (Stringer 2008: 65). But how to reconcile their opposing approaches?

Because I am studying people who grew up in the Judeo-Christian culture, who are usually familiar with religious ideas (albeit stereotypical), I think it may be useful to draw up an inventory of aspects of religion to see whether these can be traced in pop or rock festivals or in people's accounts of their experiences. Not in an attempt to define 'religion'. Neither as an instrument to examine the hypothesis that the more those aspects are applicable to a festival (to think of Sylvan's phrasing, 2002: 220), the more likely that this festival will be a place or event where religion may be experienced or generated. Indeed, such a supposition (hypothesis is too pretentious a concept) may sound naïve, as seen from Stringer's viewpoint and it will be hard to transcend conventional ideas about religion when starting precisely from characteristics derived from those ideas of religion. Therefore, the instrument should only be a 'signal'; it should help focus my attention to avoid the 'bewilderment' Grimes fears. That is why *during observation, conversation and interpretation* I use sociological and anthropological perspectives, of which the latter seems most fruitful. At the same time, in the course of my activities, encounter with new aspects not discussed in the literature should result in additions to the inventory (see appendix).

In anthropology, religion is studied in the social context. Attention is directed to contextually related meanings, rather than 'official' views, and focuses on the informal aspects (e.g., popular religion as protest against formal religious structures expressed in forms that were rejected by representatives of those structures). This aspect focuses attention on 'local language', the 'lingo' (Weinstein 2000). The anthropological approach is pragmatic. What do people 'do' with religion (Stringer's 'coping' religion)? This aspect implies an emphasis on agency with participants as 'actors' using religious expressions opportunistically. The approach pays due attention to the blending of religious expressions, often resulting in specific *local*

forms. In my case, I think of the mix of 'heathen' and Christian symbols at certain *metal* shows. And last but not least, the anthropological approach favours a critical stand in connection with its own 'truths', presuppositions, and conventional research questions. This is closely related to the comparative approach typical of the anthropological perspective. Stringer's extensively discussed publication offers a good example. To these dimensions the Cultural Studies approach (originally strongly focused on social criticism and forms of representation; see e.g., Barker 2004; Hall 1997 and Storey 2008) and the sociological approach (mainly directed to our own Western culture, see e.g., above; Bruce 1996) added valuable insights.

     With these perspectives in mind, I think it possible to overcome Sylvan's and Stringer's contrasting views *on a pragmatic level* (concerning research strategy), although fundamental differences remain (Gellner 2007: 36-37). And it is with these perspectives in mind that I surveyed the characteristics mentioned by several of the authors discussed above[21] to coin an inventory of aspects that may suggest the religious potential of the festivals I studied. I formulate these characteristics (or in Smart's terminology 'phenomena' or 'dimensions') in shorthand 'labels' that guide my attention during various phases of the ethnographic research[22]. The inventory resembles Grimes' (1995: 26-39) which can also be used to hone attention on (ritual) space, objects, time, sound, language, identity, and action. All aspects deserve scrutiny. Based on my survey of literature and pilot study, I could specify dimensions such as community, inclusion *versus* exclusion, recognition and belonging, memory, (grades of) participation, and authenticity. In the course of my fieldwork and

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[21] To start the summary with Sylvan (2.4.1.), he considers 'an encounter with the numinous' the core of all religions. This is expressed in ritual activity, communal ceremony, and worldview and is related to cultural identity, social structure, and a sense of belonging. The technologies used in festivals result in 'powerful experiential states' analogous to classic religious experiences.
– Koenot (2.4.2.) points at a transformation in our culture. The music advances at the expense of the primacy of verbal expression, which also touches the realm of religion. He looks at symbolic qualities of festival sites and to 'sound architecture' that with nightfall may evoke a 'magical quality'. The festivals may be 'spontaneous liturgy' expressing a duality of the ordinary and the extraordinary.
– Ardui (2.4.3.) refers to freedom (albeit 'illusory') and pantheism.
– Negus (2.4.4.) considers authenticity in relation with 'belief'.
Besides the authors who studied religion/religiosity in connection with pop and rock music, I surveyed literature on interdisciplinary approaches to 'religion' and studies on the problem of defining religion. This offered some characteristics worth noting:
– Connolly's *Guide* (2.5.) offered insights into relations between religion and worldview (means of understanding one's/the world) with special attention for inventories of religious dimensions, like Southwold's (Connolly 2007: 36) or Smart's (which corresponds in some significant respects). Above, I specified Smart's inventory because it has become widely used.
– Bruce's study (2.6.1.) focused on 'ordinary people' and 'supernatural entities' or processes related to moral powers, ideas critically discussed by Stringer in his analysis of the 'non-empirical' and 'belief statements'.
– Stringer's study (2.6.2) of the 'demotic discourse' ('folk' or banal discourse) and his views of the concept of 'coping religion' related to situational belief offered useful clues. His idea of 'domestication of the sacred' and attention to ordinary aspects of rituals as well as the 'neglected worlds', also studied by Juchtmans (2008), closed the circle begun with Grimes and Sylvan.
[22] See Appendix.

interviews I added several other dimensions to these listed here. But it should be clear, none of these indicates (the potency of) religion, or religious experience. The inventory is only a set of instruments, compiled from a great variety of approaches in an attempt to transcend Stringer's 'conventional dominant discourse' and be prepared for 'the unexpected'. Thus, for instance, the notion of 'authenticity' helped me to interpret colourful festival histories as a specific genre, rather than as biased sources, as narratives for insiders by insiders (Chapter 5). Or the notion of 'sound' encouraged me to pay special attention to criticisms of limited conceptions of music as current in our society (below 3.3.2. and 3.4.1).

Like Smart's *dimensions*, or Weinstein's *signifiers* (5.2.) the *labels* offer broad outlines rather than specific indications. They may be applied to also quite different intense experiences or happenings with which people strongly identify. A characteristic of sensitizing concepts is their broad meaning, not blocking alternative views from the onset. In my pilot study I started to design the inventory of labels by linking some conventional aspects of religion. Later on, these have been connected with 'religious experience' as indicated by Stringer (see also Gobo 2007: 103), adding 'experience near' concepts (e.g. *fun*; *moshpit*) to be used as abstractions (*plaisir*, see note 24; *site* and grades of participation).

But before I enter upon the results of my ethnographic research, let me first present a second theory-oriented survey of the literature, now dealing with pop and rock music and its socio-cultural context.

CHAPTER 3 – On theory: approaches of popular culture and pop music

3.1. *Introduction*

In this chapter, I explore some theories concerning the second factor in my research object, pop music. When I started my study about possible relations between pop festivals and religion, I soon came across an extensive body of literature composed by theologians who were interested in the question whether pop or rock music could play a role in liturgy (e.g., the very influential Ratzinger (1995) who rejected the idea; or Treml (1997) who emphatically embraced it[23]). When young people increasingly turned their backs on the religious services organized by institutionalized churches, church leaders sought new ways to attract them. For instance in the 1970s, Roman Catholic priests introduced 'beat masses' or 'youth masses', fully recognizing the importance of music in the lives of youngsters.

Many studies of such developments take as gospel that popular music is a major aspect of popular culture inextricably linked with youth culture. The sociologist Deena Weinstein succinctly formulated the relationship. 'Rock and youth were born Siamese twins' (1999: 101). Many researchers found the two almost identical. Even the critical John Storey skips from a general notion of subculture to 'the young' (2008: 119) almost in passing. In this chapter I pay special attention to theories of the relationship between pop music and popular/youth culture and criticize the taken-for-granted relation between pop music and young people or youth culture.

Ideas about the role and influence of popular music in the lives of young people differ sharply. In studies on pop music and liturgy, these differences can be traced back to presumptions resting on theories that remain too often implicit. In line with Adorno, some authors consider popular music a prominent force through which the music industry manipulates young people as part of the Western capitalist economy. Some authors refer to classic theoretical discussions, but in normative studies, they often derive their authority from rhetoric. Those normative treatises usually condemn popular music and relegate the freedom it promises youth to the realm of illusion. These studies tend to oppose sharply 'authentic' folk music with 'alienating' popular music and conclude that popular music (particularly certain kinds, like rock) should be refused a place in liturgy.

In contrast, other scholars emphatically recognize the importance of popular music in the daily lives of young people and stress the necessity for churches to incorporate new forms of music to reach youth and recognize the creative force of popular culture that would be capable of generating religion. Thus, the research problem stating a lack of 'inside knowledge' (see 2.3.) appears justified, also when surveying the literature on pop and rock music in relation to religion or religious experience. In this case the contrasting, even opposing views tend to be related to

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[23] For an extensive discussion of these authors and their works: see Ardui 2006: 175-231.

'outsider's views', betraying a lack of insider's knowledge (Till 2010: ix). And they have social implications, of which the discussion concerning liturgical practices is but one example.

In the next section, I first introduce some analyses of the contrasting views noted above. After that, I pay attention to evaluative approaches mainly because of their social implications. Although several theoretical assumptions behind evaluative treatises (like those based on Adorno's views; see Ardui; above, 2.4.3; see also below, 3.2.) have been criticized sharply; particularly among 'believers' normative or evaluative interpretations are still far from ruled out. Yet some evaluative studies have been justified explicitly on the basis of particular, explicitly formulated (e.g., theological) perspectives and those interpretations may offer relevant insights into the subject of my research. Here I confine my discussion to such well-argued studies. This section is followed by a review of approaches to pop and rock music and festivals that guided me during my ethnographic research.

3.2. *Popular music and popular culture: contrasting views*
As indicated above, authors disagree sharply about the influence of pop music on young people. Some consider the rise of this music in Western culture as the devil's work and connect such genres as rock or *metal* with destruction, alienating youngsters from the true values of our society (Aranza 1983; compare Turner 1988: 160-163, who opposes condemnation of rock as 'devilish'; Farley (2009: 74) rejects social criticism linking *heavy metal* with crime and even suicide as lacking evidence, and Walser (1993: 170) scapegoats *heavy metal* as threatening). Others see popular music as a benevolent force stimulating creativity (often indicated by concepts like *bricolage* or hybridization; Van Harskamp 2002: 20, 21; Sylvan 2002: 220. Walser (1993) concludes that fantasies and mythologies in *heavy metal* offer a way of transcending oneself).

But almost all authors seem to agree on at least two aspects usually seen as self-evident. Pop music is a very influential phenomenon and should be identified with youth. The first aspect is worded by Noël Coward: 'Extraordinary how potent cheap music is'. This characterization gained repute because Middleton (1990: v) quoted Coward in his influential study on popular music and performance. In relation to the second aspect, Weinstein signalled in her monograph on rock music a stereotypical view characterizing fans as people in their 'mid-teens', which she calls 'an accurate *external* description of the vast majority of enthusiasts for the genre, *from its beginning through the mid-1980s*' (2000: 99; my italics). But many authors as well as commentators seem to overlook the fact that most of these early fans are now middle-aged. This neglect is an implication of the stereotype 'pop/rock music = youth culture', also applied to performers. David Pattie (2007: 153) observed an interesting tendency. When 'old' bands went on tour 'journalists would gleefully

total the combined ages of the band members; and each time a performance failed, age would be cited as the overwhelming reason'.

The rise of pop music in Western culture fuelled a fierce debate about its influence and one sometimes gets the impression that researchers are still focusing so much on those early analyses (whether confirming or rejecting) that they entirely overlooked the aging of the participants. This may also be related to the prominence of 'outsider's views'.

If we follow a major representative of the Cultural Studies approach, John Storey, opposing views concerning the influence of popular music might be linked to two 'previously dominant but antagonistic ways of thinking about popular culture'. On the one hand, some approaches consider popular culture as 'a culture imposed by the capitalist culture industries; a culture provided for profit and ideological manipulation'. On the other hand, one may distinguish conceptions of popular culture as 'a culture spontaneously emerging from below'. The first tradition viewed popular culture as 'structure', the second as 'agency' (Storey 2008: 4).

During the final decades of the 20th century Cultural Studies, a discipline developed mainly in Britain that was highly inspired by other national scientific discourses (Barker 2004: 94), contributed decisively to the study of popular culture, stressing a 'compromise equilibrium' approach. This approach considers popular culture as a contradictory mix of forces from 'below' and 'above', both 'commercial' and 'authentic', and marked both by 'resistance' and 'incorporation', focusing on the dialectical play between agency and structure, and between production and consumption (Storey 2008: 4-5). In this way, Cultural Studies tried to overcome the current dichotomies arising from a supposed opposition between 'authentic' and 'imposed' and to escape related normative evaluations considering 'authentic' as positive and 'imposed' as negative. 'Authentic' (folk) music would be spontaneous and characterized by creativity and integrity, whereas pop or rock music would be the result of manipulation and characterized by restriction and power (see Ardui 2006, passim).

In this context, Storey refers to Michel Foucault who, concerning the power entangled in representation, pled for an approach that considered power as productive. 'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks", it "conceals". In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.' (Storey 2008: 6). This view – incorporated in the constructionist approach advocated in the volume *Representation*, edited by Stuart Hall (1997) – is prominent in studies focusing on 'popular vitality and creativity', rather than in those aiming at 'tracing the process of incorporation' (Storey 2008: 33). One example is Fiske's analysis of television, discussed in Storey's introductory survey (2008: 9-35). Fiske showed how ordinary people resist the continuous attempts of the culture industry to incorporate audiences as commodity consumers.

They have the power to 'produce' or construct their own meanings and often this power is evident in failures of the industry to predict what will sell (see also Negus 1992).

Studies like these also highlighted and criticized a widely shared negative evaluation of mass culture, which is considered incompatible with personal integrity, with human dignity. According to this view mass culture is related to anonymity, impersonality, and dehumanizing forces. Therefore, popular music as a prominent aspect of (banal) mass culture (and especially overtly anti-religious rock music) might seem nearly incompatible with Christian doctrines characterized by noble values.

However, this is perhaps not the main reason for the uneasy relationship between some representatives of theology and popular culture. In his introduction to Cultural Studies, Chris Barker extensively discussed the 'high-low cultural boundary' that is deeply embedded in Western culture and that 'decries commodity-based culture as inauthentic, manipulative and unsatisfying.' (Barker 2003: 66). Thus, normative approaches are by far not limited to theological critiques of mass culture; rather they are closely related with the Western worldview and therefore seem self-evident. According to Barker, this perspective of high *versus* low culture reproduces again the 'inferiority' of popular culture (2003: 66). The major aim of deconstructive analysis is to dismantle the variety of hierarchical binary oppositions to which we have become so accustomed that they seem 'natural', *thus escaping critical reflection* (Barker 2003: 438). Therefore, popular music, related as it is with the body, may be considered inferior as seen from the conventional hierarchy: body (low), spirit (high).

Normative approaches to popular music often refer to Adorno's classic theory (Adorno 1941, edited by Bernstein 1991). This analysis, as well as its interpretation by various authors, seems to underscore Barker's conclusion about the prominence of the high-low dichotomy in Western culture. But, in reference to pop *music*, Adorno's theory needs further qualification. Richard Middleton, who presents a well-balanced view on Adorno's theory, starts his chapter on the topic with the question, 'Why Adorno?' For, notwithstanding Adorno's vehement polemics against pop music, no serious study on the subject can neglect his writings. However, it is remarkable that many authors following Adorno's conclusions barely attempt to analyze the theory behind them.

According to Middleton (1990: 34) the theory is characterized by 'a striking richness and complexity, demanding to be examined from a variety of viewpoints, notably that of musical production (in relation to general production in capitalist societies), of musical form (discussed by Adorno in terms of 'standardization') and of musical reception and function (which he sees as almost totally instrumentalized, in the service of the ruling social interests)'. Middleton (1990: 42) concludes that whatever the problems with this theory, it relates pop music forcefully to society and culture. Adorno's study opens the way to discussions about the autonomy of music,

about standardization and conventions ('formal schemes' like the exclusive way of presenting *double bass drums* in *metal* – 1990: 45), about musical evolution (1990: 55), and about forms of listening (1990: 58). All these topics are relevant to my study for besides the *deconstruction* debates (which are strongly analytic, rather than 'experience near'; not to say 'from the outside'), particularly the diachronic approach noted by Middleton is of major importance, if only to escape current stereotypes of pop and rock music and youth subculture. But above all, he pays due attention to the *music* which is poorly treated by those representatives of Cultural Studies who predominantly focus on power relations in society and culture.

Middleton's approach can also bring to light major changes in musical performance and related social aspects. A good example is Takahashi's analysis of the revolution in the position of DJs. She characterized the DJ's ascension as a shift from the elusive, marginal 'music selector' to 'Technoshaman'. Yet, even this author, paying due respect to historical developments, contrasts the DJ – who precisely because of the originally marginal position could work without restriction – with other artists who would be 'dependent or subservient to the record industry' (2005: 241).

Despite the 'from-the-inside' studies, like Negus's (2.4.4.) and despite the Cultural Studies approaches, the notion that the music industry exerts a dominant influence on both performers and listeners is still vital. It is central in the argumentation of evaluative studies that categorically suspect popular music. But, as noted before, we should differentiate between such normatively motivated studies and sophisticated studies, consciously aiming at evaluation from an explicit theoretical or disciplinary perspective. In the following section, I confine my discussion to some of these.

3.3. *The significance of popular culture: evaluative studies*
In this section, I discuss two evaluative studies based on disciplinary perspectives, rather than on normative – often emotionally motivated – assumptions, Lynch's *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (2005) and Klomp's *The Sound of Worship* (2009, 2011). Normative treatises (usually implying or stating ethical judgements) tend to escape scientific scrutiny because motives originating from personal views as a rule are not open to criticism. They tend to remain implicit. To the adherents they seem self-evident as part of what Foucault called a 'regime of truth' (see Barker 2004: 199/200, see also Chapter 1, 1.6.). Those views are – as far as I know – always 'from the outside'. However, as said before, they still are influential. Therefore, rather than merely rejecting them, it is important to understand why they could resist criticisms from various sides that pretend to be neutral. After my discussion of Lynch's general survey and Klomp's theological study of musical performance in 'African' churches, I return to this question.

Lynch's study offers a critical review of theological studies on popular culture and opposes normative studies 'that are very high on criticism and very low on

thoughtful analysis', as well as those that refuse every kind of normative judgement (2005: ix). He pays special attention to the ethnographic study of popular culture (2005: 162ff) and refers to the risk of focusing on 'otherness' by defining popular culture in reference to other forms of culture (like the 'genuine' and 'unadulterated' folk culture of Ratzinger, or Hall and Whannel's 'infinitely richer jazz'; see Storey 2008: 118) and to the problem of Eurocentrism (2005: 27-28). This last problem also occupied Klomp, who related it to the broader perspective of Western scientific discourse and its limitations, resulting in a multisensory approach to music which is highly relevant for the study of pop and rock music that makes 'plain talk dance' as Frith formulated in his *Sound Effects* (1983: 37).

3.3.1. *Gordon Lynch: 'Understanding Theology and Popular Culture'*
Lynch observed a growing interest in popular culture among theologians and representatives of religious studies but concluded that it is 'a very difficult area on which to get a clear overview' (2005: viii). His study is interesting for my research because he aims at an evaluative approach ('some forms of popular culture are actually *better* in some sense than others') and suggests that theological traditions and methods have a distinctive role to play in this process of evaluation. Lynch criticizes studies of popular culture that shy away from the matter of evaluation for in everyday life we continually make judgements about the quality, usefulness or beauty of popular cultural texts and practices. According to him this resulted in studies 'which can be seen as indiscriminately celebratory of all forms of popular culture or which are simply banal.' (2005: ix). Therefore, making choices based on well considered judgement is preferable, particularly in relation to a specific aim, such as the use of elements of popular culture in religious performances.

In the case of my research, reflection about an evaluative approach like Lynch's, focusing on the aspect of religion, contributes to a better understanding of the great divergence of sometimes contradictory approaches of popular music and religion, which seems to make selection inevitable. And, as every choice is somehow connected with (implicit) personal opinions related to one's favourite approaches, introspection may be important. To illustrate, Storey wanted to avoid 'opinion writing' (2008: 7). He proposed to present theories and methods neutrally and tried to keep criticisms to a minimum. However, on the same page he admits that he had to choose, knowing that his selection 'will not meet with universal approval.' Defending himself with reference to the limited space the book offers (a much used rhetoric excuse), he concludes, 'I have, however, selected the approaches which *I* [his italics] believe are most significant.'

In my case an open approach to popular culture, focusing on creativity, is inviting. But, due to my focus on religion it would be inadvisable to 'indiscriminately celebrate all forms of popular culture', to paraphrase Lynch. Thus, it would be naïve not to differentiate between 'disturbing' developments in some kinds of popular

culture such as noted by Arnett (1995: 24) and for instance new ways of creating social coherence. Besides, the participants appeared well able to make distinctions. Most people I met during my study rejected, for instance, the racist elements or Nazi ideologies applauded by some bands.

Lynch aimed at giving an overview of key debates and methods relevant to theologians and students of religion interested in 'the critical study' of popular culture. One of the main problems in defining popular culture is that it is rarely characterized in its own right; it is commonly defined in relation to other forms of culture (Lynch 2005: 3). Pop or rock music is regularly compared to 'high culture' or to classical music. One example is an article by Sarah Meuleman, who compared Lady Gaga with Beethoven (in a Dutch newspaper, *NRC Next*, 18.01.2012). Telling is that she did that in a plea against culture pessimism!

According to Lynch, who differentiates popular culture, culture *for* the people rather than culture *of* the people is alienating. But culture *for* the people as offered by the entertainment industry can be transformed into culture *of* the people. People can incorporate popular culture in many ways, for instance by interpreting elements offered by the music industry creatively; to foster identity, criticize social trends, or even join lyrics and religion, sometimes by reviving gothic fiction combined with Christian or 'heathen' symbols (Bayer 2009: 5, 8).

Cultural Studies approaches, such as those favoured by Hall or Fiske, stress the quality of resistance; popular culture as the opposing dialectical form to the dominant or elite culture. In such studies, the authors' personal views seem important. As Storey noted about Fiske, his approach is essentially optimistic (2008: 34). On the other hand, an author like Arnett (focusing on adolescents) seems pessimistic in his study of *metalheads*. He considers the music and subculture of *heavy metal* as 'symptoms of a pervasive failure of socialization in American society', a form of socialization resulting in loneliness and isolation, which, in their turn may lead to cynicism (1996: 17). And Bayer et al. (2009) criticize Cultural Studies approaches of neglecting the music itself, thus continuing some myths about political resistance. None of these authors could escape evaluation. Lynch's overview of current debates makes clear that evaluation should be legitimized explicitly. Therefore in this study I pay due attention to introspection (mainly in Chapter 4) but also to evaluations as expressed by festival participants as these may offer indications to their ideas about society and to their worldviews (Chapter 7).

3.3.2. Mirella Klomp: *'The Sound of Worship'*
Another study explicitly inviting to an evaluative approach is Mirella Klomp's *The Sound of Worship* (2009; 2011). This study is not about popular culture, nor about pop music, but about the much wider field of 'sound' and as such relevant to my project (3.4.1.). The analysis helped me 'perceive' music, to listen as a participant and at the same time watch as a researcher. Chapter 4 discusses the methodological

aspect of this concept of sound. Although Klomp focuses on theological valuation, here I would like to discuss her approach mainly because of her critical evaluation of Western scientific discourse that allowed her to study music within the much wider context of sound. Besides, her study inspired me to consider the aspects of 'joy', of 'fun' and 'having a good time' as perfectly connectible with religious experience (Lord 2008: xx).

Klomp comments on cultural-anthropological studies of which the findings 'are almost never subjected to a theological valuation', and wants to take 'this critique seriously' (2011: 8). Her theological valuation transcends the empirical character of my research, which remains within the limits of an anthropological study. However, the idea of sounds and behaviours impeding the possible encounter with Christ as experienced by participants and recorded by the researcher (2009: 136-137, 175; 2011: 185, 262) is certainly relevant to my research. Indeed, from Klomp's frank autobiographical introduction (2009: 1; 2011: 1) and her descriptions of participants' experiences, one may conclude that quality of sound really matters. Musical performance can have an alienating effect. But rather than just stating this effect, as so many normative texts do, it should be the object of scrutiny. Klomp's study offers important clues. She shows that if performance takes unfamiliar (or even 'improper') forms, it can result in alienation (2009: 91, 100; 2011: 127).

This joins Lynch's plea for evaluative differentiation and Stringer's situational theory. Just as culture *for* the people can result in alienation, an unfamiliar or improper musical performance can have the same effect. The social or cultural background is decisive in people's ability to 'incorporate' a performance (Lynch 2005, the transformation of culture *for* the people into culture *of* the people; see Klomp's concept of 'embodiment', 2009: 158, 164-165; 2011: 233; 244-245). This background is closely linked to one's worldview and reflected in one's lifestyle. Depending on one's lifestyle, popular culture can become a means 'through which people *potentially* enjoy a range of experiences – including experiences of pleasure, beauty, and transcendence' (popular culture as 'shared environment, practices, and resources of everyday life'; Lynch 2005: 15-17; 96).

This may bring us back to normative analyses, because the same argument may count for *researchers* for whom a performance could be unfamiliar or improper. Like participants may feel alienated by what they consider an improper or unfamiliar performance, also researchers may feel uneasy when confronted with what they see as such a performance, which can result in (esthetical, moral) evaluation. As discussed in Chapter 1, the researcher's worldview easily interferes with their study of other worldviews. In case the researcher (hampered by his or her worldview) is unable to (at least) imaginatively 'embody' the worldview under scrutiny, normative evaluation seems unavoidable. Therefore Klomp came to 'dislike' an orthodox form of worship that 'sounded bad' to her, performed by churchgoers who looked 'as if they had been sent up for punishment' (2009: 1; 2011: 1). Perhaps the qualities of

West African sound (2009: 40, 41; 2011: 47-49) greatly helped her to feel at home in the African Churches (2009: 9; 2011: 15). These reflections are extremely important for the study of my object. To many educated people, pop festivals may seem trivial or banal; they may see rock festivals and particularly *heavy* and *black metal* performances as expressions of uncivilized, reprehensible conduct. As seen from their worldview (to which the experience of sound is closely related[24]) they are unable to seriously consider this music as related to other peoples' worldview. Therefore, to them any conjecture about a religious potency of this music may seem ridiculous.

But there is more. Next to the problem of worldview (to which the high/low dichotomy is related), a limited sensory approach may strengthen a negative attitude to pop music. This brings me to Klomp's critique on the *Western* scientific discourse that, according to her, tends to neglect certain sensory faculties resulting in a very limited approach to music. Students starting from this discourse are unable to 'hear'. Klomp's critique adds an important dimension to Sylvan and Stringer's critique focusing on Christian notions of religion that impede the scientific study of religion.

At first sight, the discussion on Western scientific discourse belongs to Chapter 2, but I think it concerns more than just theoretical criticism such as discussions of analytic or conceptual approaches. For many scientists research *is* their 'life', and their perceptions are deeply influenced by their cultural or social background. Their scientific life is interwoven with their worldview. The dimension of worldview sometimes makes it impossible for some Christian theologians to consider completely different religions as other than superstition or the like. As the anthropologist Paul Stoller noted, for Western scientists it is difficult, if not impossible, 'to hear the ancestors in the trees'; an experience quite common to the Songhai in Niger. Or to understand possession rituals in which the music ordered by spirits is essential to bring those spirits among the people (Stoller 1989b).

In her discussion, Klomp touches on the Western scientist's worldview and how the limitations of the narrow sensory views of Western empirical science stand

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[24] Klomp considers the relation between sound and worldview as typical of the West African holistic experience of world and life, which is mirrored by a holistic experience of music (2011: 47). However, I think in our culture sound is also closely related with worldview. This is why music can generate 'plaisir' (according to Roland Barthes 'pleasure linked to cultural enjoyment and identity') as well as 'jouissance': 'orgasmic moments of release, beyond meaning' (see Storey 2008:124). See also Van der Tuin 2008: 21 and Lynch 2005: 166-168 about 'raves' as symbolic acts or as performing religious functions. Klomp's study illustrates that religious performance (worship) can be united with having joy, relaxation and even 'jouissance'. Therefore, I think it would be wrong to reduce experiences like exaltation in festivals (as well as during worship) to 'coping religion' or part of it (see Stringer 2008: 96, also 102). According to Ratzinger, liturgical music is inherently joyful and can be exuberant or ecstatic, embracing all human emotion (Ardui 2006: 214). In the same way, I think, fun, joy, 'raving' or ecstasy during festivals should also be considered as inherent qualities directly connected with latent religious experiences and not only as meaningful via 'coping' functions. It may be noteworthy that a recent volume on religion and emotion (Corrigan 2004) discusses 'joy' only in passing and pays hardly any attention to music. See also Sylvan 2005: 70).

in the way of a holistic study of (religious) experience and music. Klomp's critique of Western scientific discourse much resembles late 20th century post-modern views representing Western science as Eurocentric, governed by a non-holistic and non-dialectic worldview; as a 'regime of truth'. According to Klomp 'Europeans should keep in mind that their way of experiencing life and the world around them [...] is just one out of many possible ways' (2011: 6), thus suggesting the possibility that Western science can be considered a kind of 'local knowledge' (see Geuijen 1992; compare Klomp 2011: 38). Her plea for a multisensory approach (Klomp 2009: 15) reminds me of Paul Stoller. In his *The Taste of Ethnographic Things* (1989) he not only described the history of the senses in Western culture, moving from multisensory experience in pre-modern times to the present primate of vision[25], he advocated a multisensory approach and devoted a part of his book to 'sound' (1989: 99-122). Klomp also enters upon the European dualistic self-image related to a dualistic worldview, resulting in a hierarchic and normative self-image, referred to above.

In the case of Klomp's research, those reflective comments were important for her study of Surinamese and Ghanaian forms of worship that confronted her with the effects of globalization and the enormous growth of multicultural forms of worship. These also implied a development towards a larger variety of sounds, 'especially as far as the sound of music is concerned. These sounds differ in musical style and genre, loudness, instrumentation, tempo and rhythm.' (2009: 3; 2011: 5) Her multisensory approach significantly widens the researcher's perspective concerning the concept of sound: it comprises music, but also exclamations, clapping, dancing, noise, and even (in particular contexts) silence. Thus, for example, Stringer's student interviewed an older woman who was sitting in the empty church during a great storm, when she heard 'the voice of God in the wind outside' (Stringer 2008: 55). The silence of a deserted festival site can evoke memories of the sounds and awaken intimate, almost supernatural feelings (see 2.8.2.).

The critique of Western analytic discourse is also relevant because it opens the way to emancipation of bodily experiences, which are essential in pop and rock festivals. Inextricably bound up with performance, sound encourages a holistic approach, joining in a non-hierarchical way music, movements, (electronic) images, symbolic objects, and texts. As in the liturgical ceremony of bread and wine Klomp refers to, people are also listening at festivals, but at the same time, they are feeling, smelling and tasting[26]. This multisensory approach is relevant to fully understanding

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[25] In this context it is perhaps noteworthy that Mirella Klomp gave the first chapter the following title: '*Looking* at the sound of worship' (2011: 1; my italics)

[26] At rock festivals, people *feel* the music penetrating their bodies. Since the start of the prohibition of smoking, participants have had to get used to new smells, like sweat and beer, formerly concealed by cigarette smoke. In the evaluation of sensory experiences the dichotomy 'high' versus 'low' culture may matter a lot. Thus, the sensory experience of beer at the festival may seem vulgar in comparison to wine, a beverage held in high esteem by 'the civilised'. Sweat, as a bodily secretion is suspect (Mary

the way people experience musical performance. As Storey states: the meaning of performance is in the performance itself; 'the body in the voice as it sings. [...] The pleasure and power of popular music is not in the performance of emotion, but in the emotion of performance'. The performance 'is not an invitation to meaning and understanding' as might be assumed if one focuses on lyrics or on the symbolic, but 'an invitation to be lost in music' (Storey 2008: 124). This may refer to the experience of raves that cannot be understood but by reference to multisensory experience.

Mirella Klomp's conscientious analysis offers a good illustration of Lynch's argument to differentiate between evaluative studies, but above all, to appreciate perspectives offered also by certain evaluative (but non-normative) approaches for the study of popular music. Beyond that, her critique of Western scientific discourse also helped me to understand normative approaches as part of a wider dominant discourse rather than one limited to specific religious or theological views.

3.4. *Popular music*

First I will pay attention to the concept of 'sound' which is of particular relevance, not only for 'listening' and people's ideas about music, but it may also draw our attention to the interpretation of sensory experiences in culture as well as in empirical science. In the section that follows I will justify my choice for specific musical performances focusing on the notions of participants rather than on general ideas about musical genres.

3.4.1. *Music and sound*

Klomp's study is particular inspiring for my project because of the notion that 'sound' is more than only music and the idea (because of its inextricable relationship with performance) that sound is multidimensional and multisensory; its meanings are deeply embedded in culture (2009: 40-41, 65). Thus, in a 'wired world' of electronics (Sample 1998, cited in Klomp 2009: 16) one may expect new kinds of sound to be adequate to carry worship as well as to express religion.

I cannot focus on 'qualities of sound' in my study, the way Klomp did in her extended case studies. (Her approach offers rather more possibilities for complex comparisons than my more limited case studies of festivals; see Chapter 4). Yet her *analysis* of the phenomenon of sound was an eye-opener for me. Klomp refers to the experience of sound as related to worldview, to the mediating role of sound (sound is functional in the attribution and appropriation of meanings), and to sound as social happening (2009: 40-41, 74; 2011: 49). She concluded these aspects from an analysis of West African music, but that does not weaken the importance for my

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Douglas: *Purity and Danger*; see particularly Bowie 2000: 44-50). Postmodern ethnographers emphatically paid attention to 'vulgar' or 'banal' aspects of behaviour to criticize what they called the 'elitist' approach of 'modern' science that tends to discriminate 'low culture' (see e.g., Stoller 1989b: 1-6).

research, because, as she aptly stated, African(-American) sound 'is the foundation of today's popular music, which has strong influences on Western (and thus European) culture at large' (2009: 6). The approach to sound as multidimensional phenomenon stimulates 'thick description'[27] and event-centred analysis (McGann, cited in Klomp 2009: 72-73, 88ff.; 2011: 84) of musical performance. Such a holistic approach is particularly important for adequate interpretation of expressions which, on first sight, seem 'only conventional', 'insignificant', or even 'banal'. Or for the interpretation of such opinions as 'this music is boring', 'it's cheerful', 'it's outdated', and so on (see e.g., Klomp 2009: 112; 2011: 145). It offers opportunities to relate such expressions with underlying cultural dimensions (Heath & Street 2008)[28]. All this is relevant to the study of festivals, which may be considered 'event-centred' happenings to which 'insignificant' opinions abound (Chapters 4 and 7).

However, the use of the concept of 'sound' should not reduce 'music' to 'only a kind of sound' or to only 'one of the manifestations of sound' (Klomp 2009: 37; 2011: 42). I agree with Klomp's assertion that besides music, people give meaning to other sounds (even silence that one can 'hear'). However, her interviews make clear that the meanings people ascribe to *music* are usually more explicit than those they attribute to other sounds. Music takes a special place, certainly a more prominent place in their experience, while the meanings they attribute to other sounds are far more limited to specific contexts. In the next section, I pay special attention to the diversity of musical genres and their performances and related symbolism.

3.4.2. *Pop and Rock music: a focus on specific performances*

Many authors find popular music hard to define. Richard Middleton stresses in his *Studying Popular Music* (1990) the subjective character of definition and following Frans Birrer, distinguishes four predominantly 'etic' kinds (1990: 4): normative, negative (excluding), sociological, and technologic-economical definitions. 'Emic' definitions, paying due attention to participants' categorization, face the problem of identifying those participants.

Middleton states that pop music is popular amongst people, 'but who are they? Should one say it is 'well liked', or 'well favoured' by those whose opinion counts?' (1990: 3) In my research this problem, related to essentialist definitions (what *is* popular music?) is the more pressing, because the research population is not

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[27] Klomp used the concept to designate a minute description of her observations. The word was coined by Clifford Geertz, who stressed construction and interpretation: data as 'our own construction of other people's constructions' (Moore 1997: 242), he designed it as a method to 'explicate explications'. The ethnographer 'reads' the culture 'over the shoulders of the native' (Barth et al. 2005: 288).

[28] By the way, it may be important to consider ethnography as a textual phenomenon, as 'writing culture', an approach to which Klomp refers to only in passing (2009: 68; 2011: 77). Her study uses ethnography mainly as a method. See Chapter 4, where I pay attention to how the 'literary turn' resulted in experimental ethnography, which is particularly important to the description of new phenomena that cannot aptly be described by using conventional descriptive strategies.

clear-cut. Even if I use certain criteria, such as age or gender, the research population remains 'open'; there is no fixation to a particular group or community. Thus, according to Bayer (2009), the current association of *heavy metal* with masculinity incorrectly led to the idea that this music was only a passing phenomenon in a world dominated by women's emancipation. The *heavy metal* scene has changed decisively, not only including more women, but also other age groups. Early performers, like *Black Sabbath*, *Judas Priest*, or *Saxon* aimed at young male audience and their lyrics were often sexist. But with the changes of target audience, performers later on also changed their symbolism and lyrics.

Will Straw tried to characterize rock music culture in very general terms, focusing on its distinguishing features as manifest in the professionalism of musicians and in the iconography, such as satanic imagery (1999: 457-459).

By concentrating on festivals from an 'insider's perspective', in characterizing the music I relied on the way producers and advertisers qualified certain festivals, thus following Middleton's suggestion 'to locate musical categories *topographically*' (1990: 7; his italics) and avoid the problems he noticed in relation to emic definitions. As Bayer et al. (2009) concluded, identifying a musical genre (in this case *heavy metal*) with a certain population led paradoxically to less attention for the music and its transformations[29].

According to Middleton – who follows Stuart Hall – it is illusory to expect to encounter popular music in a 'pure' sense. Musical *practices* always contain contradictories between the imposed and authentic, between elite and common, predominant and subordinate, then and now, theirs and ours, and so on. The ways in which these contradictions 'are worked on the ground' result in transformations. 'The apparent coherence of most musical styles, and of the relationship they have with the societies in which they exist [...] is the product of cultural work.' (1990: 16). Therefore, musical genres can merge with other musical genres (1990: 31). Some elements remain and meanings are reinterpreted.

This explains why the music of counterculture can be co-opted so easily and its radical implications defused. In this process several elements continue to exist, but the meaning of these elements is reinterpreted (1990: 32). The world of pop and rock music displays continuities, betraying underlying conventions; on the other hand, it is characterized by fluidity and locality, pointing at continuous processes of interpretation and reinterpretation. Thus, symbols used by artists vary considerably,

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[29] It is interesting to note that the identification of *heavy metal* with young, aggressive males focussed attention on violence or sexism in lyrics and symbolism. This made it difficult to explain the change to more 'poetic', literary or religious expressions. Concentrating on the music, researchers could point at the important legacy *heavy metal* derived from blues and classical music. This perspective appeared important in understanding those changes. Comparably, stereotypical characterization of *heavy metal* as an expression of social resistance by an exclusive group resulted in underrating commercially oriented performers. That is why, according to Earl, in particular representatives of the Cultural Studies approach overlook How Metal Goes 'Pop' (Earl 2009: 33-51).

related to attempts to distinguish themselves from others, to suggest uniqueness. But looking at these symbols over time shows iconographic continuities. In their turn, these continuities can be related to changing interpretations. A good illustration is C. Szpajdel's *Lord of the Logos. Designing the Metal Underground* (2010), a publication of iconographic designs related to *metal*. According to the publisher's blurb, the book is 'in the style of a black prayer book'. It offers an impressive overview of logos and clearly shows changes as well as continuities.

Thus, because of this locality and changeability as analyzed by Middleton, I focus my study on specific performances, rather than on 'metal' or 'rock' as such. This allows me to stay away from general discussions and definitions of genres. There is another reason for this. The tension between words and music, noted by Horner and Swiss (1999). They not only refer to music and the words of song texts, but also to the power of our (descriptive, analytic) words *about* music. The terms we use to describe music shape our thoughts about the music, the values we attach to the music and our judgements. This conclusion is, of course, very important. In my study the 'words' of participants in real performances are of primary importance, rather than analytic musical concepts. In contrast with discussions on the concepts of religion or religiosity – words rarely used at festivals and mainly of analytic value – the names of musical genres can be linked directly to (and derive their meanings from) actual performances[30].

This choice implies that I cannot generalize and relate my findings to musical genres, as Sylvan or Koenot did in relation to pop or rock. Instead, I consider the various festivals I attended as case studies, offering some qualitative insight into the relation between participant's views of certain types of music festivals and religion as defined by Stringer (2008). The focus on participants is closely related to the central research question directed at their experiences at festivals[31]. In one case, this resulted in following a participant's advice to visit a certain festival, *Castlefest* (Chapter 7). At first I thought this festival was beyond my scope, as it was mainly focused on spirituality and dressing experiments. But at this festival, music did appear prominent (compare also Sylvan 2011: 45-46).

3.5. *Festival: a short history*

Because my ethnographic research focuses on pop and rock festivals, permit me now to give a concise description of their development and note relevant characteristics of the international scene, which inspired the Dutch and Belgium organizers and was

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[30] See also Grezel's article (2010) about the language of periodicals specialized on 'meaning of life', or on 'wellness', and the like.

[31] There may be significant differences in opinions between (external) reviewers, focusing on musical performances, and participants who experience the festival in a 'multisensory' way. A critic could conclude that a 'concert was spoilt by a thunderstorm', while this weather only improved the festival for the participants. See for an example: http://fanclub.anouk.nl/nieuws/22/94315/anouks-westerpark-show-2valt-deels-in-het-water.html.

a reference factor in the compilation of the histories presented in special festival books. After that, I will outline the festival tradition in the Low Countries.

3.5.1. *Festival tradition from an international perspective*
In his *Het festivalgevoel* ('The Festival Feeling'; 2009: 18) Van Terphoven refers to Bob Dylan's performance at the *Newport Folk Festival* on July 28, 1965 as the first time that a large festival public listened to amplified guitar music. Before that, Dylan played acoustic guitar 'like all folk-artists; as it should be.' The use of amplified guitar broke down more conventions than only the ones directing musical performance. In those days open-air performance usually concerned jazz for an elitist public. 'Common people' used to listen to folk music.

According to Van Terphoven this music was usually about common, human subjects with often social-critical texts. Dylan created a transformation from a *descent community* to a *dissent community* (Kaufman-Shelemay 2011). His unrivalled popularity brought many people under the spell of protest and at the same time initiated the trend towards *amplified* folk, pop and rock. Bob Dylan's prominent influence on pop music is of special relevance here. Bruce Springsteen once said, 'As Elvis liberated our body, Bob liberated our mind'. His performances contributed highly to reflectivity and creativity in early pop lyrics. Together with this change, technique became important in performance and ever since this role has only increased. Today, several techniques are dominant factors at festivals: the electronics in music, in the lighting, and in communications. Large-scale festivals are unimaginable without these.

At the beginning of 1967, the time of *flower power* and *hippies*, so many love-ins (e.g., *Gathering of the Trips*, organized on January 14, 1967[32]) and concerts were organized in the USA that one may speak of a true festival fever. And in the *Summer of Love* of 1967 the first real pop and rock festivals took place in the form that is still familiar today. It all started in California with the *Magic Mountain Fantasy Fair*, followed a week later with *Monterey Pop*. The participants were intensely aware that they belonged to the counterculture, opposing the political and economic establishment but foremost their parents' lifestyle. *Californian Monterey Pop* took place on June 16-18, 1967, visited by around 50,000 people. It was the first multi-day rock festival. Later on, it was filmed in the movie *Monterey Pop*. In the following years festivals where put on all over the USA. The most famous is the *Woodstock Music And Arts Fair* (August 15-17, 1969). Organizers counted on 150,000 visitors, instead, 400,000 came and the festival became the symbol of hippy idealism, characterizing what later was called the 'Woodstock generation'. This festival was also filmed with a double album soundtrack of live material.

During the 1970s the organization of large-scale festivals continued. The concept of annual festivals (mainly in England) implied the emergence of festival

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[32] I took many details of developments outside the Netherlands from the OOR encyclopaedia (2008).

traditions. The early 1980s saw a new phenomenon, the women's pop festival (*Venus Weltklang* in Berlin, 19-21 June, 1981). There was also a growing integration with ethnic music. Another upcoming genre was the beneficiary concert, which counted *Live Aid* as the most famous. Meanwhile conventional pop festivals remained popular and *hard rock* and *heavy metal* became the object of specialist festivals, like *Monsters of Rock* and *Wacken Open Air*.

In recent decades television broadcasts of festivals have become important, extending the impact on a huge scale. For instance, the *Freddy Mercury Tribute*, organized to remember the *Queen*-singer who died of AIDS, was watched by millions of people. At this concert (April 20, 1992) David Bowie knelt down and prayed the 'Our Father'. Since 1991, the new formula of the festival caravan, like *Lollapalooza*, has united the club circuit with large stadium performances. This idea of the caravan is still popular; performances under the banner 'From coast to coast' were planned for July and August 2012 in the Netherlands.

In the first decade of the 21st century beneficiary festivals became more political (Bob Geldof: *Live 8* in 2005, which earned him the epithet 'Saint Bob' and the Nobel Peace Prize). Its aim was to exert pressure on the G8 economic forum under the slogan 'Make Poverty History'. *Live Earth*, aimed at making people aware of the consequences of climate change is another example of pop performance related to societal ideals.

3.5.2. *Festival tradition in the Low Countries*
In the Netherlands, the first pop festivals were organized in the late 1960s. Jazz and folk music festivals were already well-known, but these were mostly much smaller.

In 1967 in *Flight To Lowlands Paradise* and *Hai In De Rai* (Amsterdam)[33] were still held indoors. Music was important, but primarily these events were meant for likeminded people aiming at love, peace, and happiness and included theatre, movies and the use of incense and hash (Van Terphoven 2009: 22). Within a few years, the *Lowlands* festival grew from a small-scale event to a gigantic festival. At the same time, *Woodstock* in the USA epitomized the climax of the festival period. It is still the reference point for all festivals. In 1970 the Netherlands held its own Woodstock with the *Holland Pop Festival*, the first multi-day open-air pop festival. However, it had no follow-up because of huge debts.

It was quite different for another festival, the first edition of *Pinkpop* that began a week earlier in the south of the country. The first *Pinkpop* proved to be the start of a long tradition. In 1970, the festival attracted some 10,000 visitors and within a few years it had become one of the most important pop festivals in Europe.

In Belgium, besides various folk and blues festivals, the three-day *Jazz Bilzen* became the first big pop festival (1965). Originally, it was a jazz festival meant for a

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[33] 'Hai' (high) refers to the use of soft drugs. This festival does not exist anymore, in contrast to *Lowlands*, which is now so popular it cannot be held indoors.

more varied and younger public than usual in those days. At the end of the 1960s it developed into a diverse and popular festival, possibly a forerunner to all festivals in the Benelux (Van Terphoven 2009: 18). In the 1980s the concept of *Jazz Bilzen* had been adopted by the two-day parallel festival *Torhout/Werchter. Holland-België*, a 'face off' between bands from both countries developed into a major national music festival, *Noorderslag*.

From the 1990s onwards, saw a growing number of festivals, at times resulting in fierce competition and specialization. Especially the older music lovers seemed to become the focus of organizers. Several festivals focused on the past, such as *Arrow Rock Festival* (2003) which featured many celebrities from the past and *Pinkpop Classic* (2007; nicknamed 'Alzheimer festival'), which had about 10,000 people. A notable Dutch development was *FortaRock*, which began in 2008 and is nowadays the most important *metal* festival.

3.6. *Conclusion*

This chapter presented some approaches to popular culture and pop music, including a variety of ideas on the significance of phenomena originally closely related to youth culture. The divergence (and at times straight contradiction of the findings resulting from the various approaches) brought to light the consequences of approaches mainly from 'the outside'. At first I referred to the 'believers' and theologians who were deeply divided on the question whether pop and rock music could play a role in liturgy.

Widening the scope revealed that these ideas were related to a dichotomy in Western society between 'high' and 'low' culture and to a limited notion of musical sound, dominated by the primate on vision that – according to post-modern ethnographers – characterizes empirical experience, in 'modern' science as well as in Western society. These prejudices resulted in normative approaches (esthetical, ethical, analytical), which were far from limited to theologians or representatives of religious institutions. The normative approaches should be differentiated from evaluative studies, motivated by explicit disciplinary and reflexive thoughts. These studies played an important part in discovering the roots of normative evaluations that are still important in discussions of the role of pop and rock music in the emergence of religious experiences. The evaluative studies may also make one aware of the meaning of evaluations held by participants. Festivals (especially rock and *metal*) can be rough on anti-Christian expressions, but this does not seem to bother the participants. However, they usually reject as immoral any performances that fly in the face of certain generally accepted social values, such as racist or fascist expressions.

From the start of the socio-cultural phenomenon of pop festivals in the Netherlands we can note characteristics relevant to my study. These include the prominence of technology in communication and in creating experiences, and a

communal dimension considered meaningful by participants, who also recognize particular standards that result in the attribution of an iconic status to certain festivals. In turn, this played a major role in the recognition of festival histories that paved the way for factors on the level of personal experience, such as memory, nostalgia, and inclusion.

Finally, the social-critical tendency of certain festivals might point to a reflexive mood, already evident at an early stage. Chapter 5 focuses on the (re)presentation of festival traditions from the perspective of participants (mainly produced by organizers and addressed to 'the public'). On the one hand, to supplement the historical sketch given above (mainly derived from 'external' sources) with information about the festivals I visited during my fieldwork. And on the other hand, to survey representational strategies participants employ in depicting 'their' festival and aiming at 'their' public.

CHAPTER 4 – On method

4.1. *Introduction*

Following Stringer, Grimes and Sylvan, I chose an ethnographic approach resting predominantly on a variety of documentary sources, on ethnographic fieldwork, and on interviews. In anthropology the concept of 'ethnography' is mainly used to designate two related activities: the execution of fieldwork (generally called 'participant observation', although communication and interpretation are essential) and the textual description of the results of field research (Hammersley 1990: 1).

Stringer, who devoted a special chapter of his book on religion to ethnography, stressed the importance of the strategy of (long-term) fieldwork. He studied the '*reality*' of religion 'as *practiced* by ordinary *individuals*' to discover their 'engagement with *the non-empirical*' (2008: 19, 100; my italics):

> 'Ethnography is probably the only way in which we could ever understand the reality of religion as practiced by ordinary people…' (2008: 19)

Unlike Stringer's research, mine is not directed at the individual's practice of religion but aims at discovering experiences, which might be called religious, or at events that *might* generate those experiences. I also try to broaden my scope beyond the non-empirical (Chapter 2). But, like Stringer, I try to transcend conventional Christian notions of religion (Sylvan's 'the unexpected'; see Stringer 2008: 101-102).

As explained in Chapter 1, my research is primarily interpretative, focusing on meanings, rather than data collection. This implies a participant-focused approach encompassing both ethnographic fieldwork and other forms of research directed to expressions of participants as manifest 'outside the field'. I am thinking of expressions in recently developed (and still developing) social media, in specialized print media (Weinstein 2000) and in conversations, all related to festivals, but not part of the performances *on site*. Because of the circumstances, to be discussed later, the interviews could not be organized on the spot. However, to be informative about experiences as lived during the festivals they had to be linked to 'the field'. This posed technical problems to which participants offered their own interesting solutions (Chapter 7).

To achieve this I made grateful use of recent developments in theory formation in ethnography focusing on both the ethnographer's and the participants' narrative.

The next three chapters successively discuss three major ways of getting insight that proved to be closely intertwined: media analysis, fieldwork and interviews. In each chapter I pay attention to specific methical aspects of the approach under discussion. This chapter focuses on general methodological issues

and recent developments concerning the ethnographic approach to elucidate my research practice.

4.2. *Changes in ethnography and their relevance to this study*
Originally ethnography meant the description of the 'manners and customs' of exotic peoples. Its sociological equivalent was 'sociography'. Both sub-disciplines were considered descriptive in contrast to theory-generating approaches[34]. But within sociology, compared to ethnography, sociography was often considered inferior to theory-building. Because sociologists usually work in their 'own society', recording what is said or observing and interpreting behaviour is considered less problematic than in the case of exotic worlds (Van Maanen 1988: 20).

Even an advocate of 'description' like Den Hollander considered sociographic problems only a matter of analyzing factors causing bias in order to eliminate them and in so doing make social 'reality' and social description equivalent (Den Hollander 1968). In anthropology, however, ethnography still enjoys a quite different status. It has always been considered the heart of the discipline. This has mainly to do with the linguistic and interpretational problems that face almost every researcher of 'other' cultures. Ethnographers entering a strange world continuously have to be prepared for the unexpected; it proved usually risky to start from their own familiar ideas. That is precisely why ethnography in its anthropological sense is so inspiring for my research.

Since the final decades of the 20th century, ethnography has been the subject of many theoretical debates and has undergone important developments. Partly, these resulted from major socio-cultural changes like worldwide migration and the globalization closely related to the revolution in communication. This stimulated, for instance, the development of new kinds of fieldwork, such as 'multi-sited ethnography', short-term research at various places following the people or events (see for instance Marcus 1995). In the case of my research this meant that for two years I followed the Dutch festival calendar, participating in major multi-day festivals (Chapter 6). Compared to classical fieldwork, the periods of fieldwork were short, but, according to Falzon (2009: 9) this does not imply a weakness; deep insights are not necessary among people who experience their world as fleeting or even shallow (see also Brice Heath & Brian Street 2008: 33, 46).

The transition from ethnology (*Völkerkunde*) to anthropology resulted in an important broadening of the discipline's scope. New subjects gained attention, many brought up by 'others' who no longer accepted the role of passive 'strangers'. These subjects required new methodological approaches as well as new forms of

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[34] Thus, 'ethnology' was used to designate the theoretical branch, in fact the dichotomy theory – description was never very sharp in anthropology. According to Jacobson (1991:2-3), in the early 20th century ethnographers were already aware of problems in textual representation and paid explicit attention to (even experimented with) textual forms. Many were also aware of the theoretical aspects of data collection and representation.

description[35]. This development proved of major importance for my research. It helped me develop a generic approach to festival books (Chapter 5), and appreciate participants' initiatives to bring the classic elicitation method up to date (Chapter 7).

Theoretical reflection on ethnography also received an important impulse from new categories of users, such as political and educational scientists and theologians. Some decades ago Grimes noted in his *Ritual Criticism* (1990: 214):

> 'To their own detriment the humanities and social sciences studiously ignore theological disciplines, while the latter are busy reading, appropriating the former. Anthropological perspectives have deeply penetrated the heart of Christian theological reflection on ritual, otherwise known as liturgiology or liturgical theology.'

But since the early 1990s much has changed. For instance, anthropology and religious studies have been joining forces (James 2003) and psychological insights have deepened the understanding of emotions in fieldwork (Davies & Spencer 2010). The use of anthropological fieldwork instigated political scientists to develop new ways of writing about fieldwork (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007). In my research it helped me develop an eclectic approach, using insights from various disciplines ranging from anthropology to ritual studies, from sociology to theology, from musicology to Cultural Studies.

Perhaps the most important development is called 'the self-reflective turn' in ethnography, which led to in the 'writing culture' debate. In short it meant a change from the idea of ethnography as describing a culture to ethnography as constructing culture. Ethnography as merely recording what is going on seemed an illusion. When writing, ethnographers in fact construct a narrative (text) about the culture they have studied rather than reproducing 'reality' (Geertz 1988). This development led to insights that deeply influenced my ideas about qualitative research. Therefore, I devote a separate section to the 'writing culture' debate. Here it may suffice to say that to interpret the participants' experience of festivals and grasp how they give meaning to their experiences not only require understanding their 'lingo' (Chapter 5), but also ways of coping with the often vulgar shocking expressions characterizing certain kinds of rock and *metal* performances. How to reconcile 'data' that are incompatible with current conventions of scientific writing (Van de Port 1994: 167)?

First, let me now discuss some aspects of the idea of ethnography as a data-collecting strategy.

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[35] Van de Port (1994: 39-55) studying the Balkan Wars stated that ethnographers should pay foremost attention to what affected ordinary people, e.g. the sufferings of war, rather than formal subjects. His plea implied giving the people 'a voice', requiring new forms of narrative ethnography.

4.3. *Questioning ethnography as a data-collecting strategy*

Many non-anthropological ethnographers consider ethnographic fieldwork from a methodological point of view, as just one type of qualitative research (Wester 1995, 2000). Yet recently, there is also a tendency in anthropology to consider self-reflective approaches as too relativistic, even nihilistic, and to return in some respects to classical ideas of ethnography as a data-collecting strategy serving theory formation. This idea was especially popular in the post-war period and culminated in the *Human Relations Area Files* (Murdock 1958). The current expression 'participant observation' as equivalent to ethnographic fieldwork bears testimony to this; it is in line with the emphasis on observation in methodologies that consider ethnography as technique (compare with Geschiere 2010 on 'the craft'; see Jackson 1989: 6 on visual bias; also 3.2.2).

In fact, ethnographic fieldwork rarely seems based on 'real participation' (Brice Heath & Street 2008: 31). Instead of observation, communication is prominent; the exchange and interpretation of meanings. This implies a strong theory-building quality to ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnography is inevitably far more than just a data-collecting strategy. At the same time it is a research procedure (participation), a way of concept formation, a way of 'radical empiricism' (according to Jackson – 1989: 3, see Geschiere 2010: 141-143 – 'a philosophy of the *experience* of objects and actions *in which the subject itself is a participant*'), a kind of 'grounded theory' (Charmaz 2008), and an expression of empathy and consciousness (Falzon 2009: 10). If one recognizes all these qualities, it becomes clear that the dimensions relate to a great diversity of *media,* each with their own conventional peculiarities.

Thus, for example, 'participation' requires behavioural qualities such as both engagement and distancing, qualities that can be made 'public' (acceptable to co-researchers) mainly by confession or autobiography (Till 2010: ix ff). Theory and concept formation require being well versed in disciplinary discourses. 'Radical empiricism' implies the ability to participate in methodological discussions about the epistemological consequences of subjectivity. And the transmission of data often means being familiar with media ranging from texts to pictures or statistical models, each with their own form of exercising authority (Clifford 1983). In their turn, these *media* require special qualities. For instance, when literary competence is lacking, autobiographical texts may easily evoke accusations of narcissism (Grimes 1990: 213). In particular, in fieldwork settings culturally different from the researcher's background, interpretation and concept formation require special linguistic capabilities, not only in designing apt research questions, but also in representing local narratives far more than just using 'native concepts' (Marcus & Cushman 1982; see below, Chapter 7).

All these aspects made ethnography too complicated to be treated univocally, in standard procedures. For many scientists who focus too strongly on ethnography as a method, its multi-facetted character implying a great diversity of

conventions (behavioural, literary, discursive or reasoning) is confusing and stressing. They tend to qualify (stereotype?) ethnography as art or as subjective (see Stringer 2008: 26-27), impressionistic and even unscientific (see Grimes 1990: 192 about the 'impure genre' and Dimitriadis 2004 about 'genres of research', requiring familiarity with divergent conventions).

As for me, recognizing this multi-facetted character posed great problems with the *practice* of ethnography. It is one thing to be aware of the complexities; to bring these insights into practice is quite another thing. Peter Geschiere was well aware of this when he reminds us of what he calls 'the sombre announcement' in Matthew 22:14, 'For many are called but few are chosen' and made a strong plea for going 'back to craft' (2010: 138; 142). At the same time, he stresses extensively the importance of the self-reflective turn in ethnography, calling the 'writing culture' debate 'one of the best things that happened to anthropology in its already fairly long history' (Geschiere 2010: 137).

Geschiere's 'sombre announcement' made me aware of my lack of routine and literary proficiency to do adequate justice to all the complexities that have arisen in recent debates. On the other hand, being in touch with those recent developments made it hard for me to ignore them for the time being and just carry out research conventionally, following handbooks like Bernard's (2006) or Naroll & Cohen's (1970).

Because of diverging notions of ethnography, ranging from ethnography as research technique (the dominant approach and usually clearly codified in standard texts) to ethnography as inter-subjective form of knowledge production, it may be necessary for a researcher to explicitly legitimize his or her position. Indeed, confusion about the precise concept of ethnography may result in unspecified criticism. To illustrate, Philip Auslander, in his *Performing Glam Rock* relates the – according to him – general neglect of the performance behaviour of musicians to the influence of sociology and use of ethnography. He does not specify this concept but his references indicate that he aims at ethnography as a technique (Auslander 2009: 2ff.). I think this criticism is undeserved. Ethnography may well shed light upon the performance behaviour of musicians. But it may require a willingness to abandon conventional (prosaic) forms of description in exchange for new (e.g., poetic) forms to express the dynamics or moving aspects of a performance (compare e.g., Keith Alexander 2008 on 'performance ethnography').

However, those forms of representation may pose problems in multi-disciplinary projects in which various *discourses* meet. Therefore, because of my particular position (using ethnography as a main procedure in religious studies) and because of the special qualities I ascribe to ethnography – agreeing with Brice Heath and Street (2008: 29) that ethnography has undergone developments 'critically

distinct'[36] from qualitative methodology in general which focuses on research tools and stresses values like reliability, validity, and replication – I think it relevant to elaborate on some recent discussions about ethnography.

4.4. *On subjectivity: the problematic relation between ethnography and 'science'*
In his book on ethnography and the concept of religion, the anthropologist Stringer devotes a separate section to subjectivity and the development of ethnography (2008: 19; 23-27). It is not my intention to repeat his argument, but I think it useful to add some nuances and connect the discussion with recent contributions from other disciplines.

Judged from ideas about ethnography producing data to serve theory formation[37], fieldwork is subjective and its results are hard to use, if ever useful, for the sake of generalizations. Therefore, some anthropologists preferred to call anthropology an 'art', rather than a 'science' and even considered the production of a continuous flow of ethnographies redundant ('more of the same' as the prominent Dutch anthropologist Kloos once remarked – Kloos 1984). The often highly personal and impressionistic experiences on which it is based, as well as its peculiarly literary forms of representation raised doubts about the replicability and representativeness of ethnographic fieldwork (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007: 75, 107, 117). Stringer extensively discussed these problems and questioned whether collective fieldwork, executed by a team of researchers all focusing on the same subject, could offer solutions to the problems (2008: 20ff.). In the case of my research (a one-person PhD project) this was impossible. Whenever I gained assistance, it was from friends who were not scientifically educated. Besides, the character of the research situation stood in the way of making long-term relationships in the field and my research object (centred on meanings, interpretations, or experiences) allowed no quantification. Thus, all the ingredients for 'subjectivity' seem present.

In the history of anthropology (where fieldwork is prominent) several attempts have been designed to incorporate 'objective' strategies, ranging from empiricist procedures (Kaplan & Manners 1972) to mathematical anthropology (Naroll & Cohen 1970, see Blok 1976, 1977). Ultimately, most attempts ended in oblivion and after 1980 a strong reaction led to postmodernism and the 'literary turn' in anthropology (see below 4.6.). In his classic on ethnographic writing, John van Maanen tried to overcome the feeling of being second-rate to 'exact' research procedures with irony, wit and even self-mockery. Van Maanen's ironic approach,

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[36] Like the above mentioned transformation of ethnography as a reproduction of social reality to ethnography as a construction of social reality.
[37] In the final decades of the 20th century in ethnography the idea of a 'positive relation' between 'reality' and description (in principle, the two can be interchanged on condition that all bias is eliminated) has been counterbalanced by the idea of ethnography as textual construction. This view implied bringing the 'constructor' to the front, which had important effects on forms of representation. For an illuminating discussion: see Geuijen 1992: 17-36.

using strong normative expressions to counterbalance what he saw as classic methodological value judgements, is only one way in which ethnographers self-consciously tried to assess their status in academia. Recently, as Geschiere noted, this trend resulted in a preoccupation with the researcher him/herself ending up in precisely the opposite of what the 'writing culture' debate originally aimed at. Instead of polyphonous representation, ethnography seems to have returned to monologues, now focused on the researcher, rather than on the people concerned (Grimes' narcissism, referred to above). Although the so-called *Methodenstreit* may be considered as something from the past, one may still observe some sensibility, in particular when presenting unfamiliar non-prosaic forms of representation or autobiographic details as part of methodology. For instance, in a very short book on the concept of religion, Stringer (2008) felt the need of a rather long paragraph 'on subjectivity'.

Reading 1: 'On subjectivity'

At the height of positivistic tendencies in anthropology, Malinowski's wife Valetta published his diaries (Firth 1967). Malinowski is generally considered to be the originator of fieldwork as the way of study with which anthropology became identified. He explained the fieldwork procedure compellingly in his introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), and also set standards for disciplinary ethnographic writing in his publications.

According to Stringer, the diaries 'proved to be [...]a turning point in ethnography'. They brought to light a significant difference between Malinowski's 'true feelings and opinions of the people' and how he described them in his ethnographies (2008: 24). Indeed, the discrepancies between Malinowski's sometimes pejorative descriptions of the Trobriand people in his personal documents, and their dignified representation in his ethnography immediately made anthropologists of the time conclude that something was wrong with the reliability of ethnography.

Later on, when introspection became studied as an essential aspect of ethnography, it was understood that a diary should not be directly compared to a publication (in fact publishing Malinowski's diaries was his wife's act of vengeance). Indeed, public texts obey quite different conventions, prescribed by the scientific community, while a personal diary is more idiosyncratic. Every field researcher may feel sick or frustrated, conditions that may affect personal feelings about the people who are the subject under study, and nowadays the importance of writing down such feelings in a confidential diary as a basis for introspection is generally recognized. Of course, such instantaneous emotions can differ strongly from retrospectively formulated experiences as published later. There is not necessarily a direct relationship between emotions and the methodological notion of 'subjectivity' as bias (see also Young 2004). Indeed, as I discuss below, 'raw experiences' may be of epistemological relevance. They can be disturbing, but they may also be informative: sometimes the only way to get at certain information and insights (Hastrup 2010).

I raise this to illustrate how strong the pressures from positivist, 'exact' methodology still are experienced and to show the importance of generic conventions on the interpretation of texts. Even the very sceptical Van Maanen followed the chorus by typifying Malinowski's diary as 'scandalous' (1988: 36), and in 2008 Stringer – well acquainted with postmodern theory about ethnography, see Stringer 2008: 26-27 – used the episode as an opening to a section, 'On Subjectivity'.*

Concluding that the ethnographer's 'final text is, inevitably, a highly subjective account', Stringer poses the question, 'Should this emphasis on subjectivity worry us?' By referring to various reactions (from methodological testing procedures to openly allowing subjectivities) he answered the question in the negative (Stringer 2008: 26).

Of late, there seems to be a growing tendency – particularly outside of anthropology – to consciously recognize subjectivity in ethnography and to try to analyse this dimension in terms of 'knowledge production'. A notable example is the above mentioned collection of essays edited by Kouritzin and others, entitled *Qualitative Research. Challenging the Orthodoxies in Standard Academic Discourse(s)* (2009). The authors were motivated by weariness, after having to 'endlessly defend the scholarly nature of their work to those who demand answers to issues of objectivity, validity, reliability, and generalizability, the means by which researchers exert control over the accuracy, stability, and consistency of the research process, and thus establish that their research has met standards of rigour.' (2009: 5) The authors focus on 'narrative writing' and pay attention to non-Western ways of knowing (2009: 135 ff.; Denzin et al. 2008a).

Several contributors to *Qualitative Research* studied objects of religious significance 'stressing grounded research, acknowledging that data not only reflect real-life situations but are also unavoidably coloured by people's values.' (2009: 135-136). They attempted to break away from 'an over-reliance on "objectivist" models for ethnography' by representing multiple voices and presenting themselves in strong autobiographies. At first sight, these presentations clearly seem to suffer from the narcissism noted by Grimes (see above). However, as the research is directed to 'the deep meanings in human lives', the autobiographical narrative approach may well be defended by pointing at the 'power to heal or destroy' stories possess (Kouritzin 2009: 193).

Dramatic events deeply affect ethnographers and should be considered part of the process of knowledge production, not merely as sources for bias. For instance, writing down these experiences, in private as well as in public (the construction of the 'story') may be essential to what Davies called 'personal proclivity', affecting the way in which individuals (participants as well as researchers) respond to cultural models and social practices (Davies 2010: 21[38]).

Thus, when I started my fieldwork as part of the pilot study, I visited a festival quite alone. Soon I felt miserable. As a lone young woman I was potential 'booty' for men; making contact with people focused on their in-groups was difficult; and

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[38] In this respect, Caplan's Introduction to *African Voices, African Lives*, entitled 'Anthropology and personal narratives' (1997: 6-22) is illuminating, as is Shostak's *Return to Nisa* (2000).

overall I felt like an anomaly (perhaps just as many ethnographers do, entering a 'strange society'). But this position made me see many aspects that could easily have escaped my notice if I had been part of a group (a reason why classic treatises on ethnographic fieldwork often recommend entering the field alone). By feeling the 'mood' of a festival and by recognizing my own emotional experiences during participation I could also better understand the enthusiasm and joy (and sometimes grief, as in the case of a terminated relationship) respondents felt when looking at their recordings on YouTube during interviews (Chapter 7).

This theme of personal proclivity permeates a recent collection of essays edited by James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer, entitled *Emotions in the Field. The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience* (2010). Rather than pointing at the importance of subject-object interrelations influencing the course and outcome of fieldwork – which had already formed a major topic in the post-modern period at the end of the 20th century – contributors to this collection explicitly stressed the epistemological significance of 'bodily, emotional, or imaginal modes of learning which can provide entrées into knowing' (Davies & Spencer 2010: 20).

Although the history of ethnographic fieldwork has always displayed extra-intellectual dimensions, methodologically these usually remained marginal. Scepticism about detachment at times resulted in pleas for phenomenological and interpretive approaches (*Verstehen*; *Einfühlen*, empathy), but any expression of emotion inevitably related to these approaches remained *taboo*. It is no coincidence that one of the first books to display a fieldworker's emotions was published under a pseudonym[39] in the form of a novel (Laura Bohannan's *Return to Laughter*, 1954). Until the 1970s only well-established scientists ventured to write 'confessional tales'. Ironically these were originally published as methodological elucidations to strictly 'realist' (see 2.3.) ethnographies, like the famous and still reprinted *The Forest People* (1961) by Colin Turnbull, whose once important *Ethnographic Survey* of Mbuti Pygmies (1965), has now sunk into oblivion[40]. Later on, confessions became an accepted genre.

When considering Davies and Spencer's argument, it appears crucial to note in relation to my project that emotions should be understood not just as idiosyncrasies beyond control or as highly individualistic mental states of researchers. They also comprise shared feelings evoked by specific bodily experiences, by the effects of sounds and other non-visual senses that transcend 'observation' but may be vital for the way in which researcher and the people concerned meet, and may be of essential help to understand 'the other'. Therefore, as Hastrup (2010) argues, research *in situ* may be essential.

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[39] Elenore Smith Bowen.

[40] I owe great thanks to the Nijmegen missiologist Wilhelm Dupré who always inspired me during my Religious Studies period (for this case, see Dupré 1975: 151-190).

For example, Stringer reports that one of his students tried to understand the conservative – and in the student's view contradictory – views among Anglo-Catholic women in central Birmingham. An older woman told the student about a particular moment, when she was in the church during a great storm. At that moment, the woman felt especially close to God. It appears that the woman felt that the space was truly sacred, only when the church was empty of other people (see also 3.8.2). She came to the church 'to sit through mass, or polish the altar steps and hear the voice of God in the wind outside'. To grasp the deeper meaning of these words, it proved essential for the student to become familiar with the woman's world, with 'the field', to share her 'space'. According to Stringer, the student initially entered the place with ideas of educating the women. The student left the field, however, 'with a far deeper understanding of these women's point of view' (Stringer 2008: 54-55). This episode emphasizes that we should not confine ethnography to codified research techniques, although these remain always important. But an aspect like 'being there'[41], personal acquaintance with the 'site' (in this case sharing and living through the 'sacred space') is essential for a deeper understanding (see also Luhrmann 2010: 217-218).

Like conventional concepts of religion stood in the way of noticing 'unexpected forms' of religion, conventional ethnographic methods (and ways of noting down experiences; ways of writing; see 4.5.) may severely restrict the researchers' 'gaze' and make them overlook something their informant takes for granted (Stoller 1989: 56-57; an impressive example: White 1987: 259). For example, the concept of 'respondent' in anthropological handbooks on interviewing betrays the underlying notion of the active researcher *versus* passive participant (who reacts to verbal stimuli emitted by the researcher). This may result in neglecting strategies, which are obvious to participants but unfamiliar to the researcher[42].

Visitors to pop or rock festivals change their attitudes as soon as they enter the enclosed space. They become excited, are caught up in feelings of sociability, of unity, or of intense joy in 'being there', sentiments which do not leave the researcher indifferent. Specific places influence experiences and emotions, among participants as well as researchers and may create 'moments of knowing' difficult to access by conventional techniques (Hastrup 2010: 203). Certain physical experiences or events may decisively change the researcher's vision. These moments may turn up suddenly and their effects may far exceed methodologically and rationally acquired knowledge. But, because of the normative character of conventional ethnographic discourse, according to Hastrup, they seldom find their way into publication other than in retrospectively reconstructed forms (Hastrup 2010: 206).

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[41] Note here that Clifford Geertz (1988) related this 'being there' only to textual authority.
[42] On the 'emancipation' of respondents, see Notermans & Kommers (2012).

Notwithstanding the many textbooks on the subject (e.g., Robben & Sluka 2007) fieldwork is still considered 'something one learn[s] best by doing' (Van Maanen 1988: 18; 23). It largely remains an idiosyncratic enterprise. Apparently, much of how one learns about and experiences 'the field' cannot be caught in codified treatises. And that is precisely what fieldwork is all about, convincing the reader that one 'really experienced' the reality described in the ethnography. That is why, according to Van Maanen, writers of realistic ethnographies (stressing authenticity) resorted to textual strategies radiating 'experiential authority'. As he wrote, 'Ironically, by taking the "I" (the observer) out of the ethnographic report, the narrator's authority is apparently enhanced, and audience worries over personal subjectivity become moot.' (1988: 46) An important consequence of the 'disappearance' of the researcher was that the epistemological significance of experiential dimensions of fieldwork largely remained unclear. To explore these is the main goal of those political scientists, linguists, and educational scientists, who are joining trends that have been developed in anthropology during the final decades of the 20th century.

I paid much attention to the subject of 'emotions in the field', not because I undervalue the importance of technical procedures and fail to appreciate the need to make these explicit. On the contrary, the publications by several participants in the *Music Research Group* mentioned above (e.g., Hoondert 2006; Klomp 2011; see Chapter 2) are undoubtedly exemplary. My elaboration on this theme is related to the hope to add some new insights to current methodological discussions in the field of for instance (practical) theology and philosophy of life, in particular to the study of popular music in these disciplines. For, as Grimes noted already some decades ago (1990: 214), these disciplines were busy appropriating anthropological perspectives, but as far as ethnography is concerned researchers still use to confine themselves to ethnography as technique (4.3.). In my opinion introspection is crucial, especially relating to studies where interpretation is prominent, as in religious studies, in which 'meaning' and the interpretation of meanings play a major role. I mean studies that touch on the deep existential feelings of people and that attempt to describe experiences which the participants as well as the researcher sometimes only inadequately can express in words, being often hampered by conventional language (Chapter 7). It astounded me that many of the studies I consulted to become acquainted with my subject lacked introspection (and even critical reflection). It is one of the merits of post-modernists that they demonstrated the importance of (self)reflection. This brings me to what Geschiere called 'one of the best things that happened to anthropology' (2010: 137): the 'writing culture' debate.

4.5. *Writing culture*

Ethnography is about representation (Stuart Hall 1997). According to such scientists as Den Hollander (1968) who were very well aware of the representational status of descriptions, there is a gap between reality and the way it is described. This gap is caused by a large number of factors that play a role in the process of transforming the 'real world' into text. On the one hand these factors concern the author's 'bias', on the other hand they relate to 'prejudices' from the side of the interpreter, the reader. Methodical analysis and correction of these biases might eventually bring reality and description together and turn description into 'data' to be processed in theories. These critical procedures would give scientific descriptions a particular status, clearly distinguishing them from literary tales.

However, in the 1980s it became increasingly clear that this particular status was based far less on methodical grounds than on rhetorical strategies. When in 1982 Marcus and Cushman published their *Ethnographies as Texts*, it opened the eyes of many anthropologists who started to focus on the analysis of ethnographic texts and on the role of the ethnographer as writer (Geertz 1988). This development strongly inspired the post-modernists who sought to criticize what was sometimes called 'the arrogance' of modern science, which claimed universal validity for the insights generated by its scientific procedures, often resulting in the depreciation of alternative forms of knowledge. Many anthropologists, aware of the criticisms of the colonial background of their discipline made in the 1970s, found this unacceptable. This resulted partly in a tendency to 'emancipate' non-Western forms of knowledge (Stoller & Olkes 1987; Jackson 1989; Denzin et al. 2008a) and to give room to the participant's voices next to the author's (polyphony), and partly in scrutinizing literary strategies aiming at influencing the reader (Clifford 1983).

This focus on textual forms and their generic characteristics was combined with the notion that ethnographies constructed images of cultures, rather than representing the realities described. Van Maanen used the word 'tales' to designate scientific descriptions, in that way emphasizing that there is no essential difference between literary stories and texts that claim scientific status; principles of literary criticism are also applicable to these texts. The approach resulted in an important differentiation in genres of ethnographic writing and incited writers to experiment with literary forms.

Thus, Van Maanen differentiated between various genres of ethnographic writing, the major ones being the realist, the confessional, and the impressionist tale. His terminology has become widespread. The *realist tale* is naturalistic in character; it represents a culture so that it gives the reader the illusion of a direct reproduction of the culture without interference by the presence of a researcher. Research problems just pop up in 'reality', rather than being constructed by the author and interpretations are phrased in a way that make them compelling. The idea of questioning these interpretations does not occur to readers. All this results in a

strong naturalism, radiating authenticity, and it is supported by a variety of textual strategies (Van Maanen 1988: 45-72; above 2.3.).

The *confessional tale*, in contrast, allows ample space for authors to present themselves. Credibility is attained by a combination of confession (the author may make mistakes) and the assurance that misinterpretations and mistakes were eventually overcome. 'The implied story line of many a confessional tale is that of a fieldworker and a culture finding each other and, despite some initial spats and misunderstandings, in the end, making a match.' (1988: 79) The development of this genre is related to growing criticism of empirical approaches advocating 'pure description' as collections of data (1988: 74). This genre, too, rests on a great many textual strategies, as Van Maanen discussed and illustrated (1988: 45-100).

The third major genre Van Maanen describes is the *impressionist tale* (1988: 101-124). As in an impressionist painting, a worldly scene is captured 'in a special instant or moment of time. The work is figurative, although it conveys a highly personalized perspective.' Daily life is exposed unconventionally, showing 'down to earth' aspects, not just the dignified or relevant, but the banal and even shocking details are not shunned.

Impressionist tales try 'to evoke an open, participatory sense' in the reader and 'to startle' readers 'accustomed to and comfortable with older forms' (which can be a risky business, resulting in misunderstandings; Van Maanen 1988: 101). Characteristic is the genre's innovative use of literary strategies which paved the way for the development of various experimental forms of ethnography, including some designed to capture new subjects (only briefly discussed by Van Maanen: 1988: 127-138). For the most part the different genres developed in historical sequence, but nowadays they may be combined in one and the same ethnography and are subject to continuous change.

The study of ethnographic modes of representation led to greater freedom for ethnographers. It can be seen as a two-sided (cyclic) development. Changing conditions required new forms of verbal expression to do justice to new social-cultural phenomena. On the other hand (of special interest to a project aiming at discovering 'the unexpected') the idea that literary experiment should be acceptable within science made researchers open to noticing phenomena that formerly would have been considered beyond the discipline's scope or even inappropriate[43]. Together with the notion of polyphony, this led to an appreciation of genre conventions not only in ethnography, but also in participants' tales (see Chapter 5). In conventional ethnographies it was quite usual to render participants' tales in fragments (isolated 'native concepts') completely neglecting indigenous narrative structures.

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[43] This aspect is of special relevance to my research. 'Vulgar' pop music has long been regarded an unworthy subject for scientific research, or studied while one-sidedly stressing its derailing effects.

As long as ethnographies were considered collections of 'data' and 'files to be ransacked' (Van Maanen 1988: 30; a notorious example, *Human Relation Area Files*) no one paid attention to textual integrity[44]. The appreciation of narrative forms allowed for a better understanding of local narratives which paved the way for the study of 'indigenous' epistemologies, of local forms of knowledge and of local ways of rendering meaning to the world[45]. Thus, the 'writing culture' idea or 'literary turn' in ethnography resulted in important new insights in anthropology. However, ultimately, these developments went so far that critics pointed at the inward tendency to study the ethnographer instead of the people who supposedly were the subject of the ethnography. Over and above that, extreme relativism finally resulted in nihilism. If all ethnography ultimately proved to be just an idiosyncratic story, what could it contribute to theory formation? As Van Maanen puts it, 'My own view is that the accumulation of ethnographies indicates and enhances an enduring domain of human discourse more than it signals any advance in our formal understanding of cultural affairs.' (1988: x)

This modest aim of ethnography, 'keeping the conversation going' as its ultimate attainable goal, and the one-sided attention to form rather than to content proved unsatisfactory and resulted in strong criticisms of the 'literary turn' (Geuijen 1992: 17, 22). However, although my overview of the history of anthropology undoubtedly falls far short of Geschiere's, I agree that the analysis of scientific writings *as texts* produced many fruitful insights, also for my particular research. Without John van Maanen's inspiring study, *Tales of the Field* (1988), I would never have developed the idea to study festival books as a literary genre[46]. And my plea for the 'emancipation' of the 'informant' (see Notermans & Kommers 2012) was motivated by ideas about polyphony.

Crucial to my project is the stimulus offered by new ways of approaching and describing social and cultural phenomena that opened the way to embracing new subjects that had remained beyond the vision of empiricists. In Chapter 2, I noted the importance of going beyond the dictum 'what you don't see doesn't exist'. Closely related to the notion of 'the unexpected' is the insight that methodologically inaccessible phenomena, beyond the reach of specific methods, are easily depreciated in their empirical existence (Davies 2010: 14, 15; what we do not 'see' or cannot 'name', does not exist).

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[44] This is why Den Hollander could break up the process of writing and reading in a series of 'phases' related to specific dangers of bias. His inventory ultimately affected what Van Maanen called 'textual integrity': it overlooked the text as a whole, the level at which generic characteristics appear.

[45] These insights in their turn supported the idea, held by some postmodernists, that Western science should also be considered a 'local' form of knowledge production, as only one out of many ways (Geuijen 1992: 27-30).

[46] Of course, Van Maanen's emphatic literary approach incited criticism, e.g., Hammersley 1990: 22 rejects his 'anti-realism', but acknowledges the importance of analysis of conventional ethnography.

This reminds me of Sylvan (see Chapter 1) who advocated unorthodox approaches to religion and music because well-established procedures (as well as predefined perspectives and concepts) often stood in the way of discovering new, unconventional expressions of religion. Thus, what is sometimes called 'concealed religion' or 'implicit religion' may well be *overt* religion, albeit unrecognized by scientists 'imprisoned' in specific discourses (apart from being unaccepted by representatives of conventional religions; see Stringer 2008: 101-105).

Although I lacked the experience and routine to implement many of the recently developed critical procedures as discussed for instance in Denzin's *Interpretive Ethnography* (1997) or in handbooks to which he contributed (2008; 2008a), studying these developments certainly influenced my approach, consciously, but perhaps in many respects also unconsciously. In any case it fostered a reflective attitude and further stimulated my conviction that particularly in studies about 'new' forms of religion (where the interpretation of people's meanings is crucial and interference with the researcher's worldview is common) methodical reflection *and* introspection are vital (see Grimes 1995: 13, also 2.2 above.).

4.6. *Ethnography, reflection, and the study of popular music*
My special attention for recent reflective literature also emerged from a notable paucity of descriptions of what 'participant observation' actually comprised that struck me in many studies on pop music and religion. As Auslander (2009: 2) noted, descriptions of musical performance and musical behaviour are often impressionistic and synoptic. Not so long ago studies of music were highly selective, focused on 'high art' music. Music not only was reified, but also approached normatively (see Chapter 3) and ethnocentrically (focused on Western 'art' music). Impressionistic statements abound in such studies, often as self-evident remarks[47]. In his *Analysing Popular Music* (2010: 1-31) David Machin extensively criticizes many stereotypical views on music.

With the shift in ritual studies from normative texts and formal procedures to performance, the character of related disciplines such as theology or liturgiology increasingly approached the domain of social sciences, which resulted in borrowing much of the latter's methodological discourses and related techniques. Until recently, these studies usually applied standard ethnographic techniques instead of reflecting on the methodological implications of the often ephemeral and whimsical qualities of field relations. Even Sylvan (2002: 223-229), notwithstanding his plea for

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[47] A nice example is the opening sentence of a lecture by Roger Scruton: 'There is no other civilization than the European, in which music played such an important role' (translation from the Dutch text, the original English version was unobtainable; Scruton et al. 2010: 11). Of course, this view betrays ignorance of non-Western kinds of music cultures.

an alternative approach, devoted a special appendix to his research techniques which sounds quite conventional[48].

But, as indicated before (4.4.), this is changing rapidly, particularly in studies aiming at alternative perspectives on pop and rock music. A good example is Dimitriadis, who studied *Hip Hop* also as 'lived practice', as 'performance'. He used participant observation and stressed the importance of ethnographic approaches, drawing on Denzin & Lincoln's *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1994). He also stated that he used some techniques 'in the spirit of the "*bricoleur*"' (Dimitriadis 2004: 11). He is very explicit in indicating sensitive contexts, which deeply influenced the way he executed his research. His *Introduction* is full of references to emotions, to the force of stories (which he never 'believed, but which created a reality to the young people concerned'), to phenomena 'which…never ceased to surprise me' (2004: 4). He advocates a 'creative and humble attempt to engage in the complex lives of young people' and criticizes one-sided textual analyses which created 'an image of young people as without complexity, as one-dimensional and evil' (2004: 7, 8) and testifies that he approached the ethnographic dimension of the sometimes disturbing world of *Hip Hop* 'in the spirit of sober reflection' (2001: 9).

Like other students trying to break down conservative views on popular music, in attempts to understand young people, Dimitriadis criticizes conventional pedagogical approaches ('fixed narratives of pedagogy among teachers, researchers, and policy makers', 2004: xi), and argues in favour of recognition of the importance of *Hip Hop* and rap music as means young people use 'to understand themselves and the world around them.' (2004: 3). Such understanding is at the heart of my subject, religion. His approach, together with the insights offered by recent theoretical debates about ethnography, influenced the way I executed my research.

4.7. *The craft of ethnography: how I conducted my research*
In their very interesting book, *Improvising Theory* Cerwonka and Malkki consider ethnographic fieldwork 'an especially rich form of interpretive knowledge production' and critically address ethnography as 'research practice' (2007: 2; see also Puddephatt et. al. 2009). Similar to the linguists Brice Heath and Street they present a 'research conversation' (Brice Heath & Street 2008: ix) to illustrate differences between ethnography as knowledge production and qualitative methods, and on the other hand to offer ways of 'how to do the craft of ethnography'.

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[48] Thus, for instance, his presentation of the people he interviewed is rather matter of fact, offering some contextual information but significantly differing from later 'humane' presentations which characterize ethnographies of the 'reflective turn', paying ample attention to mutual relations between researcher and researched.

If we consider ethnographic fieldwork, following Cerwonka & Malkki (2007: 154), as an '*embodied* form of knowledge production' (my italics[49]), methodological reflection should not be limited to procedures for approaching the researched, but should include the researcher as well. This is underlined in Crapanzano's classic study demonstrating that the ethnographer's presence induces a change of consciousness in the 'informant' as well as in the ethnographer him/herself (1980: 11). Embodied experience was essential in my study of pop and rock festivals; participation is intense, not only in emotional sense, but also physically.

Besides, the idea of 'the unexpected' needs specification for methodological reasons. Do we concentrate on alternative forms of behaviour, on non-conformist narratives, or on non-conventional places – see e.g., Timothy Beal's *Roadside Religion* (2005) or Paul Post's *Voorbij het kerkgebouw* ('Beyond the church building', 2010)? At first sight pop and rock festivals seem to be non-conventional places, where daily rules make place for 'freedom'. Besides, performers and participants at rock or *metal* music and related festivals overtly reject current ideas about worldview, whether advocated by established religions or by society at large (Strinati 2004: 209). They express this emphatically in their behaviour and use of special symbols, many of which refer to ancient forms of 'heathenism', Satanism, or spiritualism. At times their behaviour is shocking, even nauseating, as if a rejection of all the 'good manners' people usually follow in daily life outside the festival world.[50]

This posed real problems for my research. I fully recognized the importance of 'local narratives' (4.6.) to my project, but how to do justice to narratives full of shocking language, outrageous racist statements or obscenities? With impressionist ethnography (compare e.g., Van Maanen 1988: 111)? This would be difficult as it requires literary proficiency. Besides, literary criticism amply illustrates that readers easily tend to misinterpret or become confused when confronted by unexpected literary conventions (or unfamiliar subjects).

Presentation of local narratives as a rule implies mixing genres, often a risky business. Notorious examples are two widely circulated books (at times they were obtainable even in local supermarkets), Shostak's *Nisa: the Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (1981) and *Aman. The Story of a Somali Girl*, co-authored by Janice Boddy (1994). These studies tried to represent 'local' narratives as well as aspects of life, which 'locals' thought of great importance, but which Western readers consider inappropriate. The language, and the topics discussed by the people telling their stories, were misunderstood, even belittled by Western readers and the authors suffered insinuations. Even professional anthropologist and prolific author Gerrit Jan Zwier could not accept Nisa's narrative, which, to the Western reader is

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[49] They refer to the literal body of the researcher. For a discussion of the body in pop music, see Middleton: 1990: 258ff.
[50] When I think of such scenes, it reminds me of an impressionist ethnography by Paul Stoller, who described some disenchanting aspects of the performance of an African dance (Stoller 1989: 3-4).

characterized by obscenities, and he openly questioned Shostak's integrity (Zwier 1980)[51].

Before starting fieldwork I executed a pilot study. On the one hand I attempted to check initial impressions gained from the survey of literature by publishing these in a specialized journal (Kommers 2011). On the other hand I executed pilot-interviews to become acquainted with the 'lingo' and visited concerts and festivals to train my senses. This latter aspect was of special importance, because until then I used to participate in festivals as member of the public. During my education in religious studies I became familiar with an array of research strategies varying from observational to interviewing techniques. However, now these had to be applied to extremely noisy and exiting situations in which, next to involvement, I had to keep the 'distance' needed for analytic view. Included in the pilot were concerts of Kiss, Combichrist and Rammstein and local festivals like Appelpop, Beach Lent, Elsrock and the intercultural Music Meeting Festival. Although the main objective was to exercise and to select research strategies, these festivals offered also opportunities to explore some concepts I borrowed from the survey of literature. Certain experiences induced further study of literature and in the end helped to focus on specific aspects during the final fieldwork-phase. As such, the pilot study was also part of the cyclic process that characterized the project. During the pilot I developed notions like 'zones of participation' or 'inversion', which later on could be used to focus observation or to generate analytic concepts. Pilot interviews helped to create a 'photo-elicitation toolbox' (later to be discarded, see Chapter 7) and to design a list of topics and questions to be used by the person who assisted during some interviews and festivals. They also offered occasions for feedback with interpretations of the literature. For instance, in September 2011 I had an extensive interview with somebody I met before at several festivals. In this interview he spontaneously formulated ideas that showed striking resemblance with Koenot's account.

During the pilot study Angrosino's *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research* (2007) and Gobo's *Doing Ethnography* (2007) have been tested out. In particular Gobo's guide proved useful because he appeared very well acquainted with – and at the same time critical about – post-modern ideas. He emphatically refuted, what he called, the post-modern fallacy that operationalization only concerns quantitative research (2007: 81). His criticisms proved of special importance, because in studies about 'new' forms of religion authors regularly refer to what they call 'post-modern' ideas (e.g. Sylvan, see 2.4.1.). Rather than reducing ethnography to 'method' (*tools*), Gobo approaches ethnography as *paradigm*, as a way of seeing (cognitive) and doing. He even compares this with a religion: a scientist

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[51] See also: M.L. Pratt's 'Fieldwork in Common Places', 1986, particularly p. 44ff. Also instructing is Janice Boddy: 'Writing Aman. The perils and politics of the popular book' (1997).

who 'believes' in a paradigm and may be 'converted' to another (2007: 21-22). He consistently elaborates the cognitive and conative (concerning action) aspects of research and reaches an equilibrium between reflection and action. He argues in favour for the use of 'open', sensitizing concepts 'that is to say, configured so that 'the unexpected is expected'…' (2007: 76). He depicts ethnographic research as determining 'the status of cases on an attribute relative to a concept'. For instance: festivals ('cases') can be related to attributes (identity, effervescence, recognition and belonging) identified with religion. Of course, such 'open' sensitizing concepts can be related to a wide variety of social phenomena, but the final conclusion about the relationship between certain attributes and a specific phenomenon is eventually constructed in the ethnographic project, for instance by what he calls 'theoretical sampling' (2007: 103; a sample of attributes may originate from a theory, but during the research the sample may change). Gobo's treatise definitely influenced the pilot study, during which the first steps were made to compose a 'sample' of *labels*. To stress the instrumental and conceptual dimension, I choose for that term, instead of the word 'attributes' which within other discourses might be associated with substantive descriptions of religion.

Together with the survey of literature and the pilot, I used three ways to gain insight into my subject. First I glanced through specific literature on festivals. These books were for and by the participants: the founders, organizers, volunteers and public. Then I engaged in the fieldwork. I have never enjoyed the privileges of formal training, so I entered the task in the way Hammersley (1990: 2) defines as 'the sort of approach we all use in everyday life to make sense of our surroundings.' (See also Van Maanen 1988: 13, 18) The first period (2010) followed after the pilot studies specified above and offered the basis for the second period in 2011. Afterwards, I studied the festival books again. The fieldwork experience made me consider these from quite a different perspective. I was now able to appreciate many aspects that had escaped my notice or seemed meaningless to me on first reading. I came to understand that it was not very fruitful to interpret this particular literature as it was overtly presented, as histories. However, inspired by the literary approach, I decided to analyze this literature as a genre. Textual analysis combined with the ability to interpret certain details of festival life resulting from my field experience, brought to light some very interesting aspects (see Chapter 5).

Finally, I organized a series of interviews. Of course, at earlier stages, during the fieldwork period, I had many conversations, but now I tried to have in-depth discussions about the various participants' festival experiences. It was impossible to have involved conversations at a festival. To retrieve their experiences, I first tried the classic technique of photo elicitation. But it soon became clear that this would not work. Instead of my static images my respondents suggested using current social media like *Facebook* or *YouTube* (Notermans & Kommers, 2012).

It might be obvious to apply triangulation to those three ways of studying my subject particularly because of the way I conducted the ethnographic fieldwork, as a *rite de passage* (Van Maanen 1988: 14). It therefore seemed indispensable to use procedures 'that enable all elements of the work to be tested by reference to other sources, and so to be less reliant on the ethnographer' (Stringer 2008: 26). As Hammersley (1990: 84) states, 'A useful form of check on the validity of descriptive claims that ethnographers sometimes employ is triangulation.'

Recently, among ethnographers the concept of 'triangulation' has gained popularity to point out reciprocal corroboration of various data. But the question rises whether it is methodologically acceptable to combine different varieties of data to establish the validity of one particular kind of findings (Gobo 2008: 28).

Special attention to matters of subjectivity, reliability or representativeness in many ethnographic studies of religion seems connected to the idea of ethnography as primarily a data-collecting technique[52]. As my focus was on interpretive, rather than on data-collecting research, the corroboration of data does not seem an urgent necessity. I do not consider my ethnographic research findings as 'data' to be used for theory construction. Rather, I am concerned with interpretation, with 'practices of looking' (Sturken & Cartwright 2001). Therefore, I prefer to use the metaphor of a *triptych* referring to the three approaches I used. In this way I stress the provisional and cyclic character of interpretation, rather than a preoccupation with checking ethnographic claims.

Indeed, a certain way of looking at one ethnographic aspect may well influence how one looks at other aspects, just as a shift in perspective will change the view of the whole, as if one is turning over part of a triptych.[53] Thus, once the interviews had convinced me of the importance of social media, I reconsidered my fieldwork experience and the festival books, all the while looking at videos on YouTube. This made me reconsider earlier impressions. It is not so much a matter of checking earlier acquired data, or of constructing 'grounded theory', but rather of ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation. Therefore, in the next three chapters I will complete the description of the results generated by each of the three research strategies with some tentative conclusions, which I prefer to designate 'impressions', in that way stressing their provisional character. In the final chapter I will bring these impressions together with the theoretical insights discussed in the first chapters to reach my definitive conclusions.

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[52] Besides the fundamental question whether combining different data as a check mechanism is acceptable, some authors note other problems with the concept of triangulation. Ironically, this concept, derived from land surveying, originally pointed to exact precision (Price 1957: 627; Skelton 1958: 607).

[53] Compare Richardson's and St. Pierre's suggestion of using the metaphor of a crystal simultaneously reflecting and refracting resulting in 'different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions' (in Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 7-8).

Chapter 5 – Ethnographic impressions: festival books and social media

5.1. *Introduction*

For my research I took part in several music festivals in the Netherlands, some of which have attained iconic status. To introduce my ethnographic account, I planned to describe the history and character of the major Dutch festivals, ranging from large-scale commercial enterprises to intimate happenings. Several festivals appeared to be the subject of special publications. It soon became clear that although these books presented developments in chronological order, they offered a mere selection of events in specific expressive contexts, thus reducing their usefulness as objective historiographies. Their authors are often deeply involved in the festivals and besides, they are directed at a public, which they simultaneously pretend to represent.

This aspect seemed related to certain narrative characteristics, which made me to think of this literature as a particular *genre* inviting generic analysis. Rather than reading the festival books as historical sources, they should be considered as *texts from participants for participants* or as festival impressions *communicated among participants.* This proved a promising perspective. Indeed, regarding my objective, aiming at personal experiences rather than 'objective' historical facts, these books offer interesting information, beside specialist magazines and internet *forums*.

One may consider those festival books as sheer journalism with advertising purposes, not worthy scientific study to gain insight in the subject of this research. However, developments in other fields of study have offered interesting illustrations of what analyses of even trivial or banal phenomena that are approached from a perspective different from original intentions may bring about (e.g. for children's books: see Buijnsters & Buijnsters-Smets 2001). Of course, other strategies are possible, like content analysis, but here I choose for generic analysis which offers the possibility of approaching those books as a specific category of the 'print media'.

In this chapter I confine my analysis to the books describing Dutch festivals[54] with the exception for a separate section on interactive social media, which more and more participants used to talk about the festivals, something that became strikingly clear in the interviews. Although social media do not form a special domain in my research, I learned of their importance as 'elicitation' stimuli during the interview and decided to focus also on their generic characteristics (Chapter 7). Besides, social media brought me into touch with many helpful people. I considered social media, like festival books, as another means of gaining information offered by

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[54] Deena Weinstein discusses magazines in *Heavy Metal*. Although the first edition of her book (1991) was severely criticized by Robert Walser in *Running with the Devil* (1993:23-24), that does not affect her analysis of the magazines. Here I used her second edition. Weinstein does not refer to festival books. For magazines as a source of information for the researcher: see Hoondert 2006: 84, 85.

participants for participants. In the following section I analyze aspects of methodology and interpretation related to the generic qualities of these publications. In the sections that follow, I present various festival books, partly to give the insiders' descriptions ('stories') of the background of the festivals I visited, partly to give an impression of the narrative forms discussed in 5.2. And finally I discuss the social media that tend to replace more and more the print media.

5.2. *The festival books*

In her comprehensive study of *heavy metal*, Deena Weinstein pays special attention to print media, particularly magazines about *metal* music (2000: 174-180). Several of her observations deserve our attention because they also apply to the festival books.

Books like *Het festivalgevoel* (The festival feeling, 2009); *De wereld van Pinkpop* (The world of *Pinkpop*, 2007), or *25 edities Bospop* (25 editions of *Bospop*, 2005) constitute an interesting genre in Weinstein's category of print media that connect musicians, producers/organizers and audiences.

According to Weinstein the print media played an important role in the formation and identity of the subculture by strengthening the 'proud-pariah image' of *metal*. These media could 'more easily cater to specialized interests and audiences than the electronic media' like radio or TV. One reason is that people 'can read and look at them at their own pace, selecting just what they want to attend to and how intensely and in what order they want to attend to it.'

Another reason Weinstein gives is that these magazines (and, I would add, websites and festival books) offer a wealth of detail which radio or TV programmes lack. The most important aspect, however, is that print media 'freeze the signifiers of a subculture, allowing them to be learned and absorbed.' Weinstein specifies, 'The reader finds out what's "in" in terms of style, fashion, and lingo.' (2000: 175-6) Clearly these aspects might also touch the fieldworker[55], but my main concern here is what Weinstein concludes about the 'lingo' (in-group language, jargon). Since the 'inside view' and 'experience-near' conceptualization is of special relevance in my research, I paid attention to stylistic and idiomatic dimensions of the lingo. After all, insight into the specifics of the language-in-use can help us recognize or interpret peculiar modes of expression used at festivals and in interviews.

The festival books I consulted to become familiar with the (historical) background of the various festivals are profusely illustrated *chronicles* in the modern sense of the word: *stories* containing memorable facts, anecdotes, or chronologically arranged historical overviews with the addition of evocative festival impressions rendered through pictures or (fragments of) song texts. The concept of *story* is relevant because this form of telling what happened or what certain individuals experienced points to narrative conventions. Therefore, one can use these chronicles

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[55] Before embarking on the final stage of my fieldwork, I consulted many internet forums, magazine articles and reviews. During my pilot study I had became acquainted with some of these themes.

to recognize particular ways of expressing feelings; of articulating experiences. For instance, *Het festivalgevoel* (Van Terphoven 2009) opens with an evocative impression, written in the present tense and of a synoptic nature (the feeling is described referring at several festivals at the same time). Thus, the story is a chronological account of how an average participant would experience 'the' (generic) festival (arrival, initial settling in and putting out feelers, spending the night, awakening, taking part in the show etc.) worded in the terms a 'typical' participant would use and in that way strengthening the suggestion of empathy. This sense of empathy also derives from the fact that the author not only describes the main events, but also lots of trivialities, even banalities that insiders would recognize and appreciate, and who would therefore easily remember text fragments even after a quick glance.

These characteristics make such stories informative for the interested outsider, but what is more, they may give a strong feeling of recognition to the participants. The books are clearly aimed at festival goers. Here I touch on the 'educative' aspect Weinstein mentions. Because of the stylistic characteristics the texts are important in helping participants to express their feelings, offering them a vocabulary, perhaps even narrative structures, to formulate experiences, for instance when I asked for these in my interviews. This is all the more relevant because my research subject, religion, includes intimate feelings and highly personal experiences which people tend to find very difficult to express in words. Therefore, in accordance with the *triptych* perspective, I restudied the various books before starting the interviews. On the one hand this gave me the opportunity to trace various standard phrases and typical expressions that make up the 'lingo', and so helped my interpretation. On the other hand, my close reading of the books also influenced my approach during the conversations, for instance when phrasing questions or making remarks to invite a response.

The texts seem to explain or justify specific motives or behaviour, which readers can absorb easily and give in reply when asked, for instance, what makes a festival so special in their lives. On several occasions people contrasted the festival with 'the drag of daily life'. This made me think of the opening of *Het festivalgevoel*, a story dominated by the divergence from daily routine. Everyday life is described pejoratively and contrasted strongly with festival life. 'You work until you drop at the local grocer's shop for a meagre income', but then comes the festival and everything – even the most glaring triviality – is exciting. 'Normal life' is immediately forgotten, as something from another world. The festival is a 'parallel universe' that you share with 'a few thousand others who experience the same, as an annually recurrent fourth dimension. A group of people who just forget their daily sorrows […], a metaphor for how life ought to be, perhaps.' (Corton in Van Terphoven 2009: 10).

Or, as punk legend Henry Rollins put it, 'Festivals […] are the best places to find your way socially. Summer suddenly gains significance. Are you dirty? Do you

stink? Doesn't matter, everybody smells, it's part of being human.' (in Van Terphoven 2009: 81).

'The Festival Feeling' *devotes a whole section to the outdoor toilets!* (photo: Heleen Kommers)

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that all respondents who typified the festival as a contrast to their daily routine had indeed read the texts, but the expressive way the texts depict festivals makes them particularly apt for communication. Thus, if someone compares the festival in terms of its contrast to 'boring' daily life, they might have gained the idea from an acquaintance who had glanced through the book once. However, it could also work the other way around. Because of their evocative style, the texts may also 'create' participants. They may encourage people in their enthusiasm for a particular festival and stimulate their sense of involvement and belonging so that they come to identify with the festival. The festival books can become collector's items, precious items that deserve a special place with other ephemera from the festival, such as admission tickets, leaflets, or other souvenirs.

The connection between texts and current ideas among participants may also be considered from the perspective of the author-insiders, who 'just' represent the common feeling of the public. As insiders, these authors know the norms, codes, and ideals current in the festival world. Therefore their presentations may be considered sociologically relevant. In objectifying these notions in texts and pictures, they may influence the experiences, perceptions and expressions of the public. Of course, I did

not expect the author's actual words or literary phrasings to be repeated in the interviews, but their ideas and idiomatic expressions could well reoccur. Most participants do not buy these books to study them closely; they are souvenirs. But, as said, the accessibility (explicitly praised by the editors) of those print media make it likely that participants can quickly recognize and adopt certain ideas or impressions. Ideas like the equation of the festival with 'non-normal' behaviour or with queer situations (as Henry Rollins says in the above quote), can easily be adopted by participants and linked to incidents pointing at inversion. As Weinstein puts it: print media 'tend to reinforce rather than to dilute the particularities of subcultures; that is, they project and objectify the subculture's standards' (Weinstein 2000: 176). The importance participants give to these festival books also seems to be confirmed by the fact that some titles are real collector's items. On *Hyves* or *Facebook* people sometimes identify so closely with such books or fragments they use them as 'wallpaper' (background images to their profiles) and this may initiate extensive discussions about these publications among the fans.

The educational aspect is another reason why I want to pay special attention to this kind of literature, yet there is even more. With their expressive stories, chronological listings of relevant events and impressive photographical essays, these books definitely contribute to the iconic status of the festivals. For instance, they mark special moments in the 'life' of the festivals. They are monuments indicating the pride (in some cases even the grandeur) of the festival described. They help to create 'traditions' and offer participants tools to form their memories. And they also stimulate exchange among participants, thus reinforcing identities, and the pursuit of shared norms, aesthetic views and symbolic expressions. These aspects also correspond with Weinstein's conclusions about the magazines.

Like the magazines, the festival books may be considered 'extensions of the [...] subcultures, produced by members of the subculture(s) out of devotion' (2000: 178). Weinstein derived this view from the 'passionate, almost proselytizing, tone'. Indeed, the wording of festival books is often far from neutral, but really breathes a spirit of devotion. Rather than sketching a straightforward history, the stories aim at letting people *imagine*, almost *experience* 'how it was'. The strong evocative character seems intended to enthuse, even excite, the 'outsider' as well. At times the presentation is relatively normative, presenting ideas or ('traditional') concepts lying at the root of the festivals 'as they should be'. Again, these qualities seem to justify the concept of proselytizing in the case of the festival books as well[56].

Sometimes the stories resemble mythical representations. 'The book reads like a documentary in print and it requires hardly any effort to imagine how things happened' (Peter Verkennis in *25 Edities Bospop*: 7). History is almost *enacted* with the use of very many photographs. These stories account for the origin (and

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[56] Here it may be interesting to note that during the interviews some eager respondents tried to talk me into becoming a fan of their favourite festival.

persistence) of the festivals, and at the same time normatively orientate participants in the festival world. They resemble myths as defined in the anthropology of religion (compare Bowie 2000: 119). Illustrating are titles referring to the 'world': *The world of Pinkpop* and the subtitle of *The festival feeling*: *the world of Pinkpop.* Note that the myths not only indicate but also account for the origin of these worlds. *De wereld van Pinkpop* opens with 'cry from the heart'. A young man says, 'Nothing ever happens in Limburg'. He is referring to the provincial attitude of total indifference to what young people want that the festival definitely puts to an end. Another book opens with the phrase of a fairy tale, 'Once upon a time…' (*Het festivalgevoel*: 18). And *25 edities Bospop* starts with an evocative, almost heroic, definitely empathic description of 'the beginning' that explains the how and why of the festival's origin. All the descriptions radiate the devotion that Weinstein also recognizes in the fan magazines.

As in the magazines, pictures are a prominent aspect of the festival books. As far as the photographers are concerned, we may share Weinstein's conclusions. They know the codes of the genre and of the subculture and they tell 'stories of shoots'. Unlike the magazines, however, in the festival books the stories are not about the stars first, but about the heroic history of the festival. The pictures add an important dimension to the sense of intimacy and greatly enliven the histories. They are as evocative and poetic as the text so that the festival books may aptly be called *illuminated chronicles*. They are far more than merely factual resources for the history of the festivals: these books describe many rituals performed at the festivals. Because of their generic form they may be considered a part of these rituals.

5.3. *Stories about the pop and rock festivals I visited*
In section 3.5. I offered a short introductory account of the development of pop and rock festivals in general and section 3.5.2. focused on the Low Countries. The aim was to trace characteristics of the festivals and participants, the public as well as performers. Here I present the stories and histories of the subjects of my field research from yet another perspective.

With generic aspects in mind, I pay special attention to the representation of the festivals concerned. I introduce how author-participants see festivals (and how visitors possibly experience them afterwards). The stories are based on *their* selections and represent what *they* emphasized. They also serve to illustrate the generic details discussed above. From the stories told in various festival books, I draw conclusions on the major characteristics of each festival. As these conclusions are inferred from representations by and for participants, the characteristics might be considered 'experience-near' concepts (or signifiers, to use Weinstein's term). In my research these qualities may also be considered clues to identifying the character of the festival *milieu* in relation to my research objective.

5.3.1. *Pinkpop*

On May 26, 1969 Wim Wennekes, a journalist, and Hans van Beers, director of the Youth Centre *Trajectum*, organized a concert by some local bands on a camping site in Limburg. They called the event *Pinknick*, referring to Whitsun or Pentecost Monday – the day it took place; in Dutch *Pinksteren* – and to a popular radio programme called *Piknik*. The following year some workers at youth centres tried to give the festival a more international character. Among them was an experienced organizer of live music, Jan Smeets. When the booking of folksinger/songwriter *Melanie* had to be cancelled, Smeets decided to organize 'just a festival' with the remaining funds. It took place on May 18, 1970 and bore the name *Pinkpop*.

In the next years these modest beginnings grew into one of the biggest festivals in the Netherlands. *Pinkpop* is now one of the longest running festivals in the world. In the beginning its continuation was far from secure. Several bands cancelled. The turning point came when the Dutch band *Golden Earring* decided to cancel a performance in Belgium, in favour of *Pinkpop*. The performance by *Golden Earring* proved a huge success and the organizer, Jan Smeets, could plan another *PinkPop* for the following year (Van Terphoven 2009: 32). In the following years *Pinkpop* grew very fast from 10,000 visitors in 1970 to some 70,000 in 2006, despite equally fast-growing admission fees (from 2.50 Dutch guilders in 1970 to 150 Euro in 2011, the 42nd edition).

Right from the beginning there was a tendency towards commercialization. At first this was completely contrary to the intentions of the organizers who firmly regarded *Pinkpop* as a non-commercial festival and sharply condemned commercial acts by advance booking offices (*De wereld van Pinkpop*, 2007: 14). Today, *Pinkpop* is almost synonymous with commerce.

Since 1976, *Pinkpop* has been broadcast by Dutch national television. Nowadays, besides live performances, the television broadcast features interviews with visitors and artists and pays much attention to backstage recordings and impressions of the atmosphere at the festival.

De wereld van Pinkpop paid special attention to backstage events in a managerial story, which nicely fits the heroic character of the representation. The backstage area has a particularly strong appeal to the imagination of the public. Although during my fieldwork neither I nor the people I interviewed were allowed to visit backstage, my acquaintances shared a fascination with this almost mythical location. It is the area for 'the chosen ones': the artists, their assistants and people from the press. In very exceptional cases fans are admitted, for instance during 'meet and greet' moments. In the late 1970s several authors were already describing the particular status of backstage. For instance, in 1978 a journalist qualified the backstage area as 'a festival within the festival' (Elly de Waard, cited in *De wereld van Pinkpop*, 2007: 49). She described backstage as an important social event at which people from the world of music, the press, and politics meet each other.

These meetings, however, were not always harmonious. The extravagant behaviour of the musicians could sometimes be really disturbing (2007: 49).

According to the 'story' as told in this book, a remarkable detail in early reflections of journalists about *Pinkpop* was the idea that the pop festival could be considered something of the past. They thought this kind of festival was a sort of add-on effect of the 1960s' *flower power* 'where solidarity was celebrated and subculture experienced'. Jan Smeets, the organizer of the festival, seized on this idea to tell *his* story. He introduced the topic of management which, at first sight, seems an anomaly in the mythical representation. In *De wereld van Pinkpop* he mentioned the matter (which may not have been very interesting to the average visitor yet presented the perspective of the 'author-participant'), referring to a dramatic accident at the *Rolling Stones* concert at Altamont that seemed to mark the end of the phenomenon of the pop festival (2007: 46). Considering this idea, Smeets wrote that the same media expressed astonishment at the excellent organization of *Pinkpop* and its rapid annual growth.

Apart from maintaining 'very good' organization, which avoided the problems other festivals had, the organizers aimed at putting on a pleasant and sociable festival, accessible to a wide audience. They excluded some forms of entertainment, such as *dance*, not only because *dance* did not suit their policy concerning performances, but also because of the risk of drug traffic (Van Terphoven 2009: 54).

One aspect of the *Pinkpop* policy is the idea that a band performs for a large audience, rather than various performances in several places on the festival site, which is the usual case at another big festival, *Lowlands*. The massive audience creates a specific atmosphere, which I describe in my ethnographic account. At the moment policy is changing into a far more commercial enterprise. The musical genres are mainly pop and rock, with also some *metal* and alternative music. In contrast to the early years nowadays the festival engages famous international artists and there are three big stages: the main stage, 3FM-stage, and a tent stage. Formerly, the festival organizer always refused to book great artists who demanded huge fees. In 2011 even politicians interfered in the amount to be paid to book *Coldplay*.

Since the 1973 edition, *Pinkpopje*, a doll with black curls and a pink dress has become the festival mascot. It figures on the cover of *De wereld van Pinkpop*. Characterizing the festival merchandise, it is interesting to note that the logo hardly has changed in years. It was given a more active pose for the 1978 and 1979 posters only, and on the somewhat surrealistic 1980 poster its hands and head peeped out of a blade of grass. On the typographically interesting 1982 poster its hair was given a punk style. During the years that followed, however, the image remained the same. This is in sharp contrast with the outfits of the festival public, which have changed continuously over the years.

Right from the start the *PinkPop* has enjoyed a very heterogeneous audience: families with kids, 'old rockers' and 'hippies'. Many people visit the festival with friends, so groups dominate. The slogan on one municipal poster reads, 'partying together'. Posters like these also stress the locality of the festival (e.g., *De wereld van Pinkpop* 37, 77, 111). Although the festival cast has become more international, the event has remained closely tied to the province of Limburg. This proved to be an important factor in the construction of the *Pinkpop* identity, together with the specific period in the year, which remained *Pinksteren* (Whitsun or Pentecost) and the specific place (Landgraaf), which over the years has attained the status of almost a 'sacred site' with its own name, *Megaland*. The identity is idealized in a flyer printed on the occasion of the 40th anniversary (2009) with the slogan 'The whole world changes, *Pinkpop* stays *Pinkpop*', which notoriously ignores the major changes the festival has gone through in its 40 years. This 'bringing time to a standstill' contributes to the mythical character of the story.

Like the festival book, the anniversary flyer begins with a reference to the how and (message-like) why of the beginning (an alternative reading of the opening sentence of the book), 'What sort of nothing never happens in Limburg?' It may also be relevant to note that the flyer, like most of the book, is written in the present tense, bringing history and present together. Another interesting aspect contributing to how the book presents the heroic status of the festival is the format that draws each festival edition together with major events in the world of pop music and in world history. It recalls the stylistic form of epic concentration, strengthening the mythical status of the story.

The history of *Pinkpop* related in *Het festivalgevoel* (2009), *The world of Pinkpop* (2007) and *Posterboek Pinkpop* (1984) intricately links historic events and developments with codes, norms and ideals presented in such a way that today's public can easily identify with this history. Interesting ideas that emerge from the representation of *Pinkpop* in these festival books are: feasting, freedom (in contrast to daily life), tolerance, social coherence (community), identity, locality (site), beyond (historical) time. Fieldwork and interviews may bring to the surface whether these texts indeed represent or, as Weinstein (2000: 175) proposed, 'freeze' the signifiers of the specific festival subculture, signifiers that could contribute to the formation of a *milieu* in which religion might originate (see above, 2.7., re 'labels').

5.3.2. *Bospop*

The preface of *25 edities Bospop* (2005) offers a heroic account that explains the origins. The book is presented as a 'written documentary' (7) of a festival that was initiated 'without money but with a lot of creativity' and the help of many volunteers (13). Volunteers still play an important role in organizing *Bospop* at Weert in the south of The Netherlands. The early years saw much improvisation and the help of local bands. The book describes a truly heroic history of improvising and ups and

(severe) downs. The story begins in 1981 in a local youth centre that proved too small to hold a concert, let alone an outdoor festival. Despite the fact that no one had any experience of organizing a festival – a fact amply noted in the text – the first edition was a success.

After some years of only repeating earlier concerts, 1985 was the breakthrough. For the first time the organizers contracted two professional bands and the festival moved to an open-air theatre, *De Lichtenberg*. This site added another element to the heroic beginnings. It was in absolute decay, the facilities were in ruins and trees grew in between the galleries. During the following nine years *Bospop* was the only event that took place on this site. Therefore, every year anew, the theatre had to be unweeded from the shrubs and trees and in its heroic history this event figures like the yearly rebirth of the festival. Especially in the memories of older participants, this is still symbolic of the identity of a festival characterized by the prominent role of volunteers.

In 1992, the festival reached a climax with a special concert by *Fish,* thanks to the cooperation with a professional agency, *Mojo Concerts*. However, the following year proved to be a total failure, financially as well as artistically. *Bospop* was almost dead and gone. But in 1994 *Mojo*, which had partly contributed to the 1993 failure, became the 'salvation angel' as it is called in the text (5) and the festival moved to a new location, the sports ground *Boshoven*, a site later again exchanged for another. As specified in the text, these details seem to express certain disorientation after the original site was abandoned. From 1994 on, *Bospop* attained professional status, contracting national as well as international artists, but still kept its local identity – despite losing its iconic site – and the help of many volunteers. These volunteers constitute a special bond with the public.

The book presents a series of 25 *collages* of pictures, texts, and historical documents, reflecting what the authors think are the typical, most prominent characteristics of various festivals. The pictures show performing artists and the participating public, but also – at least in the early years – the workers, the cleaners. They refer to the mythical beginning, '*De Lichtenberg* and cleaning, two concepts which, according to many *Bospop* volunteers, will be connected forever' (19). During the years of crisis the volunteers also did a lot of promotion, travelling round and drawing attention to the festival. Interesting detail, they travelled in 'an old bus' (29).

After 1993, after the last festival in the dilapidated open-air theatre, pictures of the heroes of the first moment, the volunteers, become scarcer although they remain prominent in the text. The book includes an extensive chapter on them (57-91), which almost identifies the festival with the volunteers (83). The chapter contains a series of personal recollections and a recurrent theme is engagement with the festival. There is a strong emotional bond with local people, from politicians to neighbours or to mothers of volunteers. Over the years the volunteers guaranteed a consistent public, a collective memory, and a clear awareness of the unique

character of the festival, which had people ranging from young to very old taking part enthusiastically (61, 63, 83, 85, 120) As one participant said, 'I wonder when the first person shows up with a walking frame!'

In 1996, hard rock was introduced for the first time, but because the organizers were unsure whether the public would accept that change, they also added a special place for the blues. This formula has continued for several years, resulting in the ideal of two different days, a family day featuring pop bands (appreciated particularly by the early volunteers), and a rock day. Contracting bands with a historical reputation became a specialty of *Bospop*. Artists with a strong 'do you still remember them?'-quality, most already past their prime but still able to put on a good show with many old hits and songs perfectly fit for singing together' offer a good formula for engaging the public (51). Recognition and belonging, as well as a sense of identity and unity, fostered by such a formula, could be calculated in terms of gallons of beer (53).

A special chapter is devoted to backstage under the title 'About the magic world and the well-oiled machine'. It aims at refuting popular stereotypes about this aspect of festivals. Criticism of the idea of backstage as a place of extravagance and luxury is telling for the non-elitist character of *Bospop*. *Bospop* is no fantasy world but a place of hard work for many volunteers (105), described in minute detail, from the early preparations until the last tones die and the deserted site remains to be cleaned. Interestingly the pictures in this chapter mostly show the performing artists, and, indeed at a music festival that's what it all seems to be about. But at *Bospop,* companionship and sociability sometimes overcome the music.

25 Edities Bospop is a book about heroes. When you look at the pictures, the performing artists seem to be the heroes. They come and go. But in fact the story is about another kind of hero, the ones who were 'in at the beginning', and remained, the volunteers. They do not just represent a pragmatic aspect of the festival; they are the heart of *Bospop*. Through them the public (for an important part consisting of these volunteers, their families and acquaintances) strongly identifies with a festival that has grown nationally and internationally in cast, but has stayed local in character. The main qualities of this 'written documentary' are creativity, recognition and belonging, memory, identity, and communality. Particularly these last two aspects are prominent. As far as *Bospop* is concerned, the unique relation between festival and public is represented as a most relevant factor generating the qualities that presumably characterize the festival. This relation is essential, even more important than the music performed.

Reading 2: Anything goes at *Bospop*

Bospop **is organized solely by volunteers. So many sign up each year that there are waiting lists! On pp. 109-111 of** *25 Editions Bospop* **I read the following passage: 'Bospop tries to arrange one festival day for pop bands, the family day, and another for fans of the heavier stuff, the rock day. Volunteers who have been with the festival right from the start are mainly fans of the pop day [when more accessible rock acts are booked]. Another important aspect is the blues. A large group of fans come to** *Bospop* **especially for blues music.' Rob Trommelen from Mojo adds, 'Bospop puts on more traditional blues bands. There's lots of local demand for the blues and we cater to that.'**

Bospop **is truly a local festival. You can see this by things like the volunteers and family day (when the programme takes volunteers' tastes into account). Limburg dialects are the 'official language'. Sometimes you hear people in the audience joking about this. When the local heroes,** *Harry & de Gebroeëke Zwiêgelkes* **stride onto the stage and strike their first chord, they win over the audience totally, although nearly everything they say is incomprehensible to us. We might catch someone joke, 'Impossible to understand, man!' in a difficult to follow Limburg dialect, of course. The dialects evoke a pleasant sense of community, the Limburgers clearly feel connected with one another.**

There is lots of interaction, conversations start naturally and everyone treats you to a smile. The plastic seat mats sold at *Pinkpop* **(paid for with vouchers) are everywhere to be seen at** *Bospop.* **Obviously, those people attend several festivals. We ask some people carrying one of these mats: 'Hey! Did you go to** *Pinkpop* **too?' Some of the group were indeed there. Which festival did they like better? '***Bospop,* **for sure' they conclude eventually, because of its small scale and clear structure, the atmosphere. It's less 'formal', as far as you can say that about a festival, with more of an 'anything goes' feeling.**

5.3.3. *FortaRock and Pop podium Doornroosje*[57]

The third kind of festival I would like to discuss is a small-scale, non-commercial (at least nominally) festival with almost no history[58], *FortaRock*. This festival is of special interest because it focuses on *metal* and stands strongly on its connection with the 'pop temple' *Doornroosje* to which its origin is closely related.

Nowadays *Doornroosje* is considered the most important pop institution in the Netherlands, while *FortaRock*, despite lacking formal history, is reputed to be the major rock scene. Both aspects, the focus on *metal* and the bond with *Doornroosje*, seem to play a central role in the identity of a festival characterized by social cohesion and a tendency to sociocultural criticism taking regular shape in (anti)religious symbolism manifested in musical performances. For an understanding of the identity of the festival it is necessary to analyze *We Do Music* (2010), which sketches the 40-year history of *Doornroosje*. Because there is no literature on *FortaRock*, I will elaborate on the festival in the chapters on fieldwork (Chapter 6)

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[57] *The Sleeping Beauty*; literally, little thorny rose.
[58] Although *FortaRock* lacks history in the usual sense of the word, to participants this does not seem a problem: they 'construct' *their* history: they emphatically differentiate between 'old times' and the present. 'Old hands' enjoy recollections of 'bygone days'. One may speak of 'histories for use': people apply the histories e.g. to confirm or justify their social position or to cherish nostalgia.

and interviews (Chapter 7). That said, *We Do Music* also represents key elements that are relevant to a characterization of *FortaRock*[59].

We Do Music differs significantly in both form and content from the literature analyzed in the preceding sections. This is partly because this book focuses on the history of a site and related (bureaucratic) organization, rather than on festivals, although it pays ample attention to specific musical performances. This emphasis, however, is due to the underlying ideology, and not so much to the kind of performances. Apart from *FortaRock*, *Doornroosje* organizes concerts rather than festivals. As mentioned above, the other festival books also treat organization as a topic of some importance, but not as prominently as *We Do Music* does. At first sight the book's title does not seem to correspond with its contents: a comprehensive focus on management. But because of *Doornroosje*'s socio-critical and reflexive stand, its often exciting bureaucratic history seems very revealing in terms of the underlying ideology and therefore relevant to the central subject of my study. This ideology also permeates the cooperation with *FortaRock*.

The story of the origin of Pop podium *Doornroosje* has a striking resemblance to the mythical representations of the births of *Pinkpop* and *Bospop*. The story describes the 'how' and at the same time explains the 'why', the message that should guide the followers. It all started in the city of Nijmegen with the symbolic awakening of a 'sleeping' society when Eugène Meijs bestowed a kiss on Gonnie Schraven, dressed as the princess of the well-known fairy tale. The opening speech contained the following line, 'Act like Sleeping Beauty, take your first thorny steps towards the condition of Nirvana.' In 1970 the formalized *Doornroosje* settled in a building that has become a Nijmegen icon. Now even the decoration on the rear of the building (coloured circles, designed by Eugène Meijs) is part of the characteristic town view, adding to the local identity, and strongly related to the city. At the moment I was correcting my manuscript there appeared several articles in the local newspaper *De* Gelderlander (December 14 and 15, 2012) about municipal plans to maintain the old building as 'the icon of the city's youth culture'; as a monument to preserve after *Doornroosje*'s movement to a new building. Referring to the building, several participants said it made them feel proud to live in Nijmegen.

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[59] Thus, in terms of contents *We Do Music* is not a festival book in the strict sense. Nevertheless, to 'FortaRockers' it served the same purpose. Many of my acquaintances on the scene consider it a collector's item and shortly after its publication it sold out completely. To many people *Doornroosje* is by far not only *FortaRock*; but *FortaRock* is positively *Doornroosje*. That is why I think a generic analysis of *We Do Music* belongs to this chapter. Because it combines the two, this section is somewhat longer compared to the former ones.

The Doornroosje building, iconic location of FortaRock (photo: Heleen Kommers)

Over the years the site gained the status of pop temple and at the 40th anniversary[60], when a commemorative book was presented, subscribers received a small fragment of the building, a bit of plaster bearing graffiti, symbolically packed in a small plastic bag decorated with a marijuana leaf, as used in the hemp trade. This referred to the selling of soft drugs, tolerated by the municipality in the past.

The early history of *Doornroosje* was a tumult of counterculture, of alternative norms, at times evoking resistance from the locals, neighbours and shopkeepers who suffered from the noise and 'long-haired, labour-shunning scum'. The founding site, a dilapidated farmhouse in the middle of a respectable neighbourhood was a real free state of likeminded people (*We Do Music*, Chapter 1). Despite the opposition from local shopkeepers, which ultimately led to the end of the site, right from the start *Doornroosje* enjoyed political support. Although the specific music was of special interest, the social characteristics of the group, its *hippie* status, seemed to be a major factor in this political 'preferential treatment' (as other youth groups considered and criticized the situation).

Compared to those other groups (which could be associated with different kinds of music, like *soul*) the *Doornroosje* public was strongly motivated by the normative ideas of the 1970s counterculture. This may be why, in contrast to the

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[60] *We Do Music. 40 Jaar Doornroosje* (We Do Music. 40 Years of Doornroosje), Nijmegen 2010. Edited by Dennis Gaens.

festival books discussed in the preceding sections, the introduction to *We Do Music* seems like a social history, written in the style of a sober 'documentary' rather than in the form of evocative stories characterizing the rhetoric of those other books. As in the *realist tale,* the combination of a documentary style with (at times) minute details lends the story a naturalistic appearance, enhancing its authenticity (see Van Maanen 1988: 45).

Indeed, at first glance, this account seems far from heroic so that one may wonder, by participants, but *for* participants? However, if one looks closer at the narrative, it becomes clear why the publishers used this form to tell the story of this musical scene.

The historical events are written in the present tense and are generally concise, interspersed with often extensive quotations from the organizers written in the past tense. A striking aspect is the ample attention paid to the organization (always wrestling with new musical trends) and to the vicissitudes of the building, illustrated by many pictures (2010: 79ff.). Volunteers helping with construction activities claimed special treatment. They identified strongly with the site, and the activities concerning its reconstruction became 'a real social happening' (84). In fact, the intricate relation between social activities and the music performed at *Doornroosje* justifies the title of the book, WE DO MUSIC. The history of musical performances at *Doornroosje* is, far more than in the other festival histories, the result of ideological developments. This may explain why *Doornroosje* has stayed marginal and small-scale for years, both nationally and internationally. In spite of the organizers' intense ideological struggles, a large part of the book reads almost like a bureaucratic report[61], despite 'juicy' stories and ample use of lingo, underlined by many pictures of apparent trivialities, including a corridor full of rubbish or dilapidated walls covered in graffiti. Of course, in those days the public were unaware of these struggles, but they had an undeniable effect on the choice of music programmes offered by this 'temple of music' and tended to limit visitors to a particular type who – as volunteers – also identified intensely with *Doornroosje* (147).

The dry bureaucratic character of the story seems to enhance the heroism inherent in keeping the ideology on its feet, nicely fitting the uncompromising attitude as far as ideals were concerned. The titles of the various chapters strikingly depict the intricately interwoven vicissitudes of music and ideology. This close connection makes the book very different from the other festival books. Its ideological dimension also contributed a lot to the complex organizational history. 'Doornroosje was a standard measure for obstructionism', and often rejected 'modish' trends. At the same time it pretended to be focused on its public. According

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[61] Even management statistics and diagrams are not shunned!

to Gert Gering[62], 'Doornroosje was always more than just a concert broker.' (146) Someone else, a graphic designer and printer who moved to this pop temple, said of his experience, 'Suddenly I felt as if I was in a contemporary fairy tale. […] Lots of good music and nice people besides.' (98) But, in contrast to that impression, the organizational history is full of tensions and quarrels.

The title of the first chapter, on the origins of *Doornroosje*, refers to the site, 'It was a dark and dirty hole'. The second chapter alludes to the battle between punk rockers ('punkers' in Dutch) and hippies, 'Who owns Doornroosje?' While the hippies were tagged dreamers – the music was too violent for them – the punkers just wanted to shock. The third chapter, entitled 'Dance ghosts versus guitar beasts' relates the 'tribal war' (128) between *dance* and guitar music fans. The final chapter, 'New pragmatism', mainly tells about the organizational struggles to conquer 'the abyss' (169); the downfall was all too realistic in 2003. A reorganization, during which management seemed to become dominant, resulted in a wide variety of musical events ranging from a multicultural festival (*Music Meeting*) to *metal*-oriented *FortaRock*.

Nowadays (2012) *Doornroosje* (usually called *Roosje* or Little Rose) cannot be ignored in the local community and is even the focus of political debates, for instance concerning the plans to subsidize a prestigious new building next to Central Railway Station (thus making the venue easy to reach for future for people from other areas).

From the very beginning the scene was characterized by a reflective disposition, first related to the dream world of the hippies, later on to the rude awakening of punk. Finally the contrasting subcultures merged, exchanging each other's sub-cultural characteristics (72). Despite ending up bureaucratically with a 'new pragmatism', *Doornroosje* in the turbulent years that followed did not shatter its original identity, characterized by reflection and generation of ideas (191). What did change definitively was its introspective attitude that had in the past sometimes resulted in a focus on a particular public. The final section of the book discusses the organizational changes and the coming move from the 'sacred site' to a new location (regretted by many; 184) in terms of what should stay unaltered, the iconic concept of *Doornroosje*. One of the major aspects of this concept is to inspire and give DJs and new bands opportunities (see Chapter 7; interview with Steef). This may be why, despite all the organizational tension and quarrels *Doornroosje* has become equated with so many 'magical evenings' (165, 174).

On May 17' 2006 *Doornroosje* started the *metal* evenings that formed the run up to the first edition of the *metal* festival *FortaRock* in 2009. In February 2011 *Spits* (a free newspaper very popular among students) was already looking ahead to the

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[62] From 1997 to 1999, Gert Gering was on the organization team at *Doornroosje* and from 2001 to 2007, he was music programmer for *Pop podium 013* in Tilburg. In 2001, he was elected 'Programmer of the Year' by the periodical *Music Maker*.

2012 summer programme of *FortaRock*, which indicates what a good reputation the festival has gained in a short time. The organizers succeeded in contracting some of the 'Big 4', the most influential *metal* bands from San Francisco (see *We Do Music*, Chapters 6 and 7). A pre-party at *Doornroosje* the previous day forms an organic whole with the performances of *FortaRock* the following day at a nearby park. The atmosphere at the pre-party is characteristic of the festival. Exceptionally informal and relaxed communication between performers and public continues what has distinguished musical events at *Doornroosje* throughout its 40 years' history. In the words of one of the major participants, *Doornroosje* is a real 'way of life'.

The representation of *Doornroosje* is dominated by an ideology related to a strong identity expressed in telling symbols. For a long time, the ideology consisted of an almost severe normative attitude that excluded 'outsiders' and fostered a definite in-group feeling. Site (locality), memory, critical reflection and social awareness are related 'signifiers' that make up the story of this pop temple.

5.4. *Social media*

As said in 5.1., I insert a short section about interactive social media because these are becoming more and more important. The texts as communicated in these media may also be analyzed focusing on genre-characteristics. Social media offer a wide range of new possibilities to express experiences which may eventually result in a reconsideration of the current focus of research.

5.4.1. *Introduction*

Because of the dominance of internet in the world of communication about pop and rock music, the print media – important as they still are – are becoming secondary. Although this study is not on social media and does not pretend to offer 'online ethnography', there are several reasons to allow this subject to complement the discussion of print media. First, like with the print media, one can study social media as a *genre*, focusing on generic conventions and representational forms[63]. Second, social media played an important part in my research, as a way of making contact and a means of acquiring information. As they also offer stories *by* participants *for* participants, they too may unveil new, 'unexpected' experiences.

The social media scene has specific problems, such as its changeability, the difficulty in assessing participant types, and questions of how to enter online communities, which put it largely beyond my scope (see also Gaston in Denzin 2011, Chapter 31). Therefore I limit myself to offering a 'note' on social media as it is used in the Dutch festival context.

Where people once subscribed to periodicals specializing in pop or rock music, nowadays they just take the information they want from the internet, for example when preparing for a particular festival. Band members, producers, festival

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[63] Both social media and festival books shared a generic approach, hence this combined analysis.

organizers, fans and 'the ordinary public' are increasingly using various means of digital communication. In my research context it is crucial to realize that these new media go hand in hand with the development of new 'literary' and 'depicting' conventions. They are generating a new 'language' of shorthand and alternative words that comply with unwritten rules, which spontaneously come into being. This new language allows people to express new experiences arising from contact with novel 'worlds'. The creative ways of handling language also encourage creativity in other fields[64]. As such the emergence of social media and their use endorse the theory that content and form are closely intertwined in communication. This has direct implications for a study like mine, the main object of which is to discover new, 'unexpected' expressions of religion. When Weinstein conducted her research in the final decades of the preceding century, communication was far more unidirectional. Today, 'interactive communication' is the catchword. And this is the really essential aspect. The ability to respond directly to incoming news or to what other people say (acquaintances as well as strangers), highly enhances spontaneity in expressing one's opinions and feelings.

Before entering the field I consulted lots of websites, to see what was happening on the digital highway, and get used to new idioms, to 'ways of saying', or Weinstein's 'lingo', as well as the more narrative aspects. Social media made it easy for me to come into contact with many people, most of whom I did not know personally, and whom I never met. At first, my contact was limited, but that changed later, when I started my interviews. Not only could I get far more information via social media and make more enduring contacts, the informants made me aware of the specific media they used to revive their festival experiences. This aspect incited me to reconsider the conventional elicitation method I initially designed, to overcome the problem of *a posteriori* interviewing, and made me to appreciate 'respondents' as 'co-researchers' (below, Chapter 7).

5.4.2. *Popular social media in the Netherlands*
In the Netherlands, currently the most popular media are *Facebook*, *Hyves*, and *Twitter*. Less popular – but regularly included as *links* on websites – are *Hi5*, *LiveSpaces*, *Friendster*, *Tagged*, *WordPress*, and *Schoolbank*. Media directed

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[64] Hans Bennis, specialist in language variation, speaks of 'Korterlands' (lit. 'Shorter lands' with a nod to 'Nederlands' (= Dutch)): he refers to the tendency to develop a shorthand-based language system, with a spontaneously developing 'grammar'. Bennis says these developments are crucial for a living language that should offer people the creative 'tools' to express new things or events they encounter (*De Gelderlander* 16-2-12; *Onze Taal* 2012). See also Nathalie Carpentier in an article in *DeMorgen.be*, 02/02/12 that nicely illustrates an aspect of the convention: 'Of course, you don't spell properly in a chat, a boy remarks. Indeed, if he did, he would be the odd man out!
http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/5403/Internet/article/detail/1388803/2012/02/02/Wort-u-knttrgk-van-Facebooktaal.dhtml

particularly at contacts in the world of music are, for instance, *MySpace*, and *LastFM*. To download pictures and videos, for personal profiles on social media networks, people often use *Photobucket* and *Dumpert*. And last but certainly not least is *YouTube*, which appears to be the outstanding means of evoking 'live' experiences. Conversations that were rather dull in the beginning, suddenly gained momentum when the iPad and mobile phone entered the scene. This context recalls Grimes's conclusion; talking about a ritual is at the same time part of the ritual. In using social media, talking not only becomes linked to looking, but also to behaviour and 'material culture'; the electronics are not just devices, they are increasingly hyped as status symbols, as material expressions of one's personality (a variant on 'you are what you wear').

The rapid changes in this new world of communication distinguish it from print media. Thus, e-mail is now almost *passé* and some people consider phone calls totally outdated. As one schoolchild said in a recent interview about a TV programme, 'Using your cell phone ('mobile' in Dutch) to call people is 'sooooo 2005!' New conventions arise repeatedly, far more short lived than representational conventions in print media and therefore far more difficult to study. Weinstein pointed at the 'fixed' quality of the print media in contrast to the transient presentations offered by radio or television. These differences resulted in divergent effects on the public. The same counts for the digital social media. The wide range of activities, fast-changing communities and the rapid updates to media both set limits and offer new possibilities for the genre. For instance, the strong 'historical' dimension of the festival books (related to 'memory') is likely to be supplemented by interactively approachable topics which may result in the development of other 'signifiers'.

Activities on the internet vary from public messages – called 'scribbles' – sent via *Hyves*, to private messages using *Hyves*' mail, or 'swarming', chatting with several other people in one go. *Hyves* members usually design their personal profile to express their identity. The various components of these profiles, such as gadgets, pictures, videos and albums often display their main interests and at times even rather intimate feelings. In contrast to *MySpace* and *LastFM*, mainly unidirectional media (communication is limited mostly to reactions to band advertising), *Hyves* is prominently used for 'dialogue'. Therefore, in my study – focusing on personal experiences with music – these *Hyves* profiles were often more interesting than the public music networks. Besides personal *Hyves* profiles, group profiles like band Hyves or fan Hyves may be of interest. One of the most interesting sources is *Festival Peepz* (a Facebook group) where people constantly exchange information, personal experiences and opinions about festivals.

Reading 3: Festival Peepz on Facebook

C.S.
Lowlands 2012 Flashback http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxaVotw6OHg ♥
20 August at 3:15

C. van der W.
LOWLANDS 2012 peepz, thanks for the fun! It was another great party!!;)
20 August at 13:17

A. van O.
Hi! From Paris a big 'have fun' from Thijs and me for all LL-ers! Alas can't come this year...
16 August at 10:32 via mobile

W.V.
Whooooooooeeeewwwwwwwwwhat an unbelievably great party Lowlands was again!!!! Laughed so much and danced. Tnx to all my dear friends, old and new :D Musical highlights: Knife Party, Santigold, Foo Fighters, Kyteman, the Black Keys, Ben Howard, Boomshakalak Sound system, Skrillex, Bassnectar, Loadstar, Skism, Flux Pavilion, Camo & Krooked and Thursday in the 24/7 tent. Next year I will definitely come again, for the 16ᵗʰ time :)))))))))) You too?
20 Augustus at 21:24

R.G.
WHOOOOUUUWWWW... again Lowlands was GREAT. One big party from Thursday to Monday. Thanks to all dear friends and strangers for all the collective dancing, talking, drinking and water fighting. TIL NEXT YEAR!
20 August at 20:54

I.S.
Lowlands channel on YouTube. Here you can have a quiet look at it all again :D
 http://www.youtube.com/user/lowlands
20 August at 2:01

C.S.
hey lowlandzzzz peepz, is someone leaving on the Thursday after 5 by car or train?
13 August at 20:35

M.H.
Hello, I'm considering selling my ticket to Lowlands... Just want to check here if anyone else is interested in this...who's all going to be there btw????
30 July at 2:01

As with print media, the social media profiles can be analyzed in terms of their generic characteristics. Thus, a study of categories used in the construction of profiles may be revealing; it may draw attention to specific form as well as content. And, like literary genre studies, such an analysis may be useful to distinguish the idiosyncratic from the conventional. For instance, at first sight it may be strange that the profiles of several of my informants include 'religion' as a category since it plays little to no role in their everyday life, at least not overtly. This might give the impression that these profiles are personal, and the informants do indeed think so. But copying designs appears to be routine and the original design of many profiles

traces back to USA where the status of religion among youth is quite different to the situation in the Netherlands.

Yet even if the category of religion is included only by accidental copying, people can still make choices. They can leave the category blank or put in general or personal comments. On most of the profiles I consulted on rock music people had filled in the religion category, but – in contrast to the American sites – negatively. Thus, people creatively used 'prefab' (customised) section items, linked to certain *sites.* Sometimes they designed 'self-made' categories. And when completing those items, they may resort to print media for copying images.

Social media appear to be intensively and creatively used to express one's mood, often with symbols whose meaning is restricted to insiders. It may be reminiscent of the way conventional religions offer ample means to experience, convey and express personal emotions, means that are often mysterious to non-participants. As said above, discovering patterns and conventions that help interpretation would have required lots of specialized research, which would have gone beyond the limits of my project. However, my first attempts to survey interactive media proved useful in that I better could understand and appreciate new forms of lingo. I was impressed by the unrivalled creativity manifest in those media and in them I learned new ways of expressing and communicating emotions, ways of 'going about with oneself'.

The new possibilities offered by social media may have consequences for future research. For instance, there are indications that lyrics will gain a more prominent role (see Middleton 1990: 249-250, who points at the specific possibilities to (self-)identification offered by lyrics). This is one dynamic effect of what YouTube offers, the ability to merge song texts with images of live music in personal movies. This may imply a reconsideration of the current trend in giving prominence to performance and require a renewed attention to lyrics. There are internet forums where people discuss song texts, sometimes directly related to links to download a song, for instance to use as a *ringtone* on a cell phone.

5.5. *Conclusion*

Inspired by Weinstein (2000), in this chapter I focused on a particular category of print media, adding further information on the social media that are rapidly supplanting print media in popularity. Where Weinstein focused on a sociological analysis of print media, I studied festival books as a (literary) genre, bringing some striking characteristics to the fore, such as specific narrative forms and the mythical dimension of festival origins, as described in those books. As 'myths' (in the sense the concept is used in religious studies) the stories representing 'the beginning' contain at the same time explications of the 'how' and 'why' of the festivals and normative messages. By taking the form of illustrated chronicles these histories of

the rise of the festivals resemble 'epic histories', even 'enacted histories' so characteristic for many religions.

Print media contribute to the formation of identity. They offer means of expressing experiences of recognition and belonging. They help groups compose the in-group lingo. Many of these aspects may also be encountered in social media, where people refer regularly refer to what print media offer, including (besides images or 'lingo') song texts. The use of social media might result in changes, which might determine a reorientation of current research. I referred to a possible shift from performance to lyrics. Formerly, the song texts printed in festival books usually added only to the evocative descriptions of festival episodes (5.2.). Now participants can actively and creatively use (parts of) the texts on Hyves or Facebook (or sing the songs on YouTube) to express their feelings or as slogans declaring their identity.

Festival goers do not usually read festival books, just glance through them. People buy them as souvenirs, to be picked up now and then. The stylistic characteristics of this kind of literature are fit for that. The evocative descriptions of historic festivals are often sketchy, combining informative texts with pictures and (fragments of) song texts. This generic aspect gives users great freedom in selecting elements to use on social media thus further strengthening the 'educative' function that Weinstein assessed.

When I was preparing my fieldwork I consulted some festival books cursorily. During conversations with other festival goers I discovered the importance of this literature and the interviews and examination of social media underscored this impression. Later on, my analysis of festival books influenced my interpretation of fieldwork experiences as well as it directed my attention in interviews. Without this analysis, certain details might have escaped my notice. That is why I decided to start the ethnographic part of my study with this chapter on print and social media. Together with the next chapters on fieldwork and interviews, it forms part of a 'triptych', three research activities, separate yet closely related.

Chapter 6 – Ethnographic impressions: taking part in festivals

6.1. *Introduction*

This chapter gives an impression of the three major festivals I attended in 2010 and 2011. For my study I wanted to go to multi-day festivals that differed in several respects, in the kind of music, the sort of public, organization and size. I went to the huge, rather commercial *Pinkpop*, the locally oriented *Bospop*, and the small *metal* festival *FortaRock*. When I was explaining why I was visiting *FortaRock*, someone urged me to go to *Castlefest*, a multi-day festival offering a combination of music and 'experience'.

Besides these festivals I attended several concerts, conducted pilot studies, and read current periodicals and reviews. Although all these activities influenced my interpretations during the period of participant observation, this chapter focuses on the multi-day festivals. Several aspects drew my attention when I was participating in and comparing those festivals. This resulted in conclusions, some of which were perhaps too tentative to deserve this qualification. So let me call them impressions. It is important to be clear about this. For these field impressions constituted special points of interest in the follow-up interviews in which I, among other things, tried to verify these impressions; to find out whether my informants too experienced these as meaningful. For example concerning the differences I thought I had noticed between festivals, touching on qualities that seemed of special relevance to my research question.

Of course, I hoped to combine my festival observations with conversations with participants and I entered the field with several interview topics in mind. But it proved almost impossible to hold in-depth interviews during performances. I had to postpone them to a later moment, after the festivals. And when I wrote out my field notes I consulted the festival books that I had only glanced at before entering the field. Thus, although this chapter focuses on my field experiences, it should be considered as an integral whole with the previous and the next chapter.

Taking part in festivals as a researcher proved to be a special experience. Before embarking on this study, I had visited festivals as a music lover and became totally immersed in the events just like any other participant. But now I had to combine involvement with remaining detached to be able to notice aspects that had previously stayed unobserved. I focused on the 'labels' discussed in Chapter 2.7, taking inspiration from Grimes's suggestion to 'map' the field (Grimes 1995: 26-38) and his metaphor, 'Nothing makes a forest appear to be lumber except a carpenter's eye' (Grimes 1990: 10). This orientation, using preconceived ('professional') ideas was absolutely necessary to go beyond the naïve perceptions gained on earlier visits, and also because of all-pervading hectic of the 'field'; a vibrant dynamic that rather tended to disorientate the researcher. Meanwhile I constantly tried to stay aware of

the risk that such preconceived ideas might be at odds with the ideal to trace the 'unexpected'.

In the following sections I analyze my impressions, interspersing descriptions with fragments from my diary and apt illustrations. The analytic style may emphasize that the 'voice' rendered to note my impressions is intended to reflect detachment; this is in variance with the preceding and the following chapter, which focus on the participant's voice.

6.2. *Pinkpop: freedom and inversion*

Pinkpop is one of the Dutch classics. I took part twice, in 2010 and 2011. The first year I went alone, which proved a great problem because people as a rule go to the festival with friends and it is very hard – particularly for a lone woman – to join an existing group. The festival is too big and anonymous and so in-groups dominate the social scene. That is not to say that the atmosphere is not relaxed, On the contrary, in certain contexts people greet each other and initiate more or less conventional conversations about the quality of the food or other casual topics. Contacts between in-groups are usually superficial and not long lasting. This implies that, besides the formal regulations set by the festival organizers, there are lots of unwritten rules to regulate behaviour. On various occasions it seems that formal festival rules were collectively ignored, even by the organizers, but the informal rules seemed to be strict.

(photo: Heleen Kommers)

Formal rules are ignored: 'Do not crowd surf' yet the crowd surfs anyway (photo: Marcel Krijgsman ©, www.marcelkrijgsman.nl)

Particularly unwritten rules created a paradoxical idea of freedom and sense of unity, even identity. What at first sight seems spontaneous, unrestrained action, on closer view often seems to be conventional. One festival book speaks of 'an illusion of freedom' (May, in Van Terphoven 2009: 25). This reminded me of Ardui's book entitled *Rockin' in the Free World* in which he interprets 'freedom' in terms of alienation and fakery (2.4.3.; more notorious are Aranza 1983 or Arnett 1995, see 2.5. and 3.2). I think the freedom the festival offers derives its meaning from deviations with 'normal' life rather than from a lack of rules and conventions. But informal rules are not experienced as pressing, as curtailing. On the contrary, people 'breathe' an atmosphere of freedom underscored by billboard slogans (see illustration below). Thus, rather than freedom being illusory because the music industry or festival organizers manipulate a false awareness or sense of alienation, it's true, it is an 'illusion' (as May calls it) but a *meaningful* one, cherished by participants. Indeed, 'self-made' festival-related social conventions replace 'normal' social rules but lack, according to people with whom I discussed the topic, their narrow-minded, cramped character. To approach the 'illusion' of freedom from a negative perspective usually results in failing to appreciate (and understand) its meaning for participants. By considering the music industry or organizers as *agens*, one misses a crucial perspective: the participants as *agens*: what they 'do' with the 'illusion'. I think of Stringer's discussion of 'superstitions' (see 2.8.2.), normatively evaluated in dominant religious discourses and therefore misunderstood and

despised. In line with his idea of 'coping' I would like to say that the 'illusion' of freedom is not only meaningful to participants but they also deploy it. Like in the case of the self-created 'histories for use' (see note 58), which one also might call illusions, the notion of freedom may function e.g. to cope with problems that bother people in 'normal life'. It can be of existential significance as in the case of Rick (see below: 7.3.2.) who during festivals felt relieved of fears that worried him in daily life.

Pinkpop *offers visitors freedom* (photo: Heleen Kommers)

People who upset the harmony are 'punished' collectively. Thus, where in normal life jumping a queue would incite critical remarks, here it is quite the opposite. Someone who objects to queue-jumpers, risks criticism and is told to 'cool it'. Oppositions to 'normal life' that characterize the festival and offer the idea (or 'illusion') of unbounded freedom are sometimes highly cultivated, almost pathetically

(Verdonschot in Van Terphoven 2009: 47). At times the festival gains *carnival* traits, underscored by the special outfits worn by both performers and members of the public. At *Pinkpop* these oppositions demarcate the particular moment, distinguishing it from the course of 'normal life' rather than forming a social critique as in the case of rock festivals. A good-natured, easygoing disposition characterized the festival and perhaps because of my 'solitariness' I noticed the conventionality which otherwise would have escaped my attention.

At the 2010 festival the line up was spectacular. Bands like *Motorhead* and *Rammstein* attracted huge crowds. The festival site seemed divided into various zones. Near the stage is the *moshpit*, mainly young people interacting closely with the performers. Then an 'intermediate zone' with attentively listening public, and finally a 'marginal zone' where people relax, eating, drinking and talking about all kinds of things, some of which have no relation at all with the performance.

The festival was one huge *fête*, which after the show continued in the camping site until deep into the night. However, there were great differences in intensity, which could be related directly to the varying quality of performances. Thus, during the *Green Day* act, a popular punk rock band, the *mosh pit* was tremendous. And *The Prodigy's* performance frenzied the crowd.

In all, this edition of *Pinkpop* was characterized by the true 'festival feeling' (Van Terphoven). However, because of the huge number of visitors, it lacked intimacy. Only at certain moments (related to particular musical performances) and at fixed places was the level of in-group communication transcended.

My second visit to *Pinkpop*, in June 2011, was a different situation. I had learned my lesson and now went with a close friend, Gonnie Wilkens, another experienced 'festival goer' who also acted as research assistant.

At the opening of the festival, while the huge crowd was passing through the gate, I recognized the same unwritten etiquette that I had noticed on my first visit, the same kind of 'inversion' and quasi-unstructured social behaviour. It seemed like an entrance into another world, not only physically separate from 'ordinary life', but also socially and even symbolically. At the camping site we soon developed a sense of identity ('our path') and easygoing contacts. While I was thinking of my experiences of the year before, Turner's concept of *communitas* came to mind but everything was still too transient to focus on such a specific concept.

The festival organizer's opening speech was a direct protest against to governmental budget cuts and plans to raise taxes on events like this, which brought rousing applause. When he introduced the first band, telling us where they came from, he asked the audience if anyone came from that place. The response was enthusiastic from the first rows with expressions of a certain unity between people. However, in the end, this *Pinkpop* proved to be rather dull and any manifestations of massive social coherence were very rare. Indeed, on the proper festival ground they were confined to only a few performances. To experience the true 'festival feeling',

we had to look for it. This particular atmosphere, characterized by communal participation and a sense of 'unity', of shared pleasure and commitment was strongly related to specific performances (too few on offer as the programme was dominated by guitar bands with hardly any variety) and to specific places where people met and enjoyed each other in a more intimate settings. The already familiar distinction between front, middle and peripheral zones was noticeable on the festival grounds.

In the front zone, people acted as a group, reacting and interacting with the performers, rather than with one another. At first sight the behaviour looked spontaneous and unstructured, but appears to be highly conventional and is clearly structured. Sometimes it looked like 'mechanical' behaviour; people acting as a mere *cohort* of mutually tuned individuals. Interpersonal communication in this zone was almost impossible, if only because of the overwhelming sound of the music. Interaction between the band and the public was almost always initiated by band members and was often predictable.

However, this did not necessarily affect the atmosphere negatively. Sometimes it evoked criticism and ironic reactions by the public, but as a rule people reacted in the way the band wanted. Depending on the quality of the performance the intensity of this social behaviour fluctuated. The public's perception of 'quality', had much to do with the experience of authenticity. When people gained the impression that a band was just putting on its usual act, not focusing on *this* public, the response was muted. At this *Pinkpop*, dominated by many guitar bands, all sounding the same, audience expressions were mostly weary and only at the close of the festival did this change into frenzy. In one of those moments of great enthusiasm, everything seemed to change. Mechanical behaviour suddenly became spontaneous interpersonal contact. Everyone started dancing with anyone else, people laughed merrily at one another. Then making contact was easy.

In the middle zone, participation in, and response to performances were usually less intense, as might be expected. The greater distance prevented direct contact between band members and the public. Internal communication was restricted to casual in-group contact. It was very hard to initiate conversations with people in this zone. As in the front zone, fluctuations in intensity of expression were closely related to the quality of a performance. I had to think of Pattie's (2007) concepts of 'communication' and 'mediation'. Here it seemed that bands had to work really hard to gain 'authenticity', but once they were able to transmit that feeling to the public, interaction became really intense and mutually stimulating.

In the peripheral zone, boredom reigned. People were really tired of listening to so many guitar bands that only offered more of the same. Criticism was rife. Normally people relax and rest in this zone. Communication as a rule is informal and can touch on a variety of subjects, including those not related at all to the music. But this time, making contact was difficult even in this zone. People seemed too weary to engage in discussion.

Outside the proper festival grounds it was different. There were special sites where people could relax, like the 'field of victors', an oasis of rest separated from the festival site by trees and shrubs.

The Joy Wheel. The board says, 'Welcome to the Field of Victors' and advertises delicious snacks and sangria. (photo: Heleen Kommers)

The calm of the Field of Victors contrasts sharply with the crowd on the main venue (photo: Heleen Kommers)

There was something special to this the Field of Victors. It had a children's Ferris wheel, named the Joy Wheel, too small for grownups to fit in it, an anomaly that made it funny so that people laughed when they saw it. But I think the anomaly was also symbolic. A 'normal-sized' Joy Wheel would be ridiculous at such a festival, but this children's Ferris wheel fitted the character of inversion and was thus acceptable. Its location, in this rest place, rather than the peripheral zone, permitted easy, informal contact. The same applied to other special places like the camping sites and the festival tents.

Reflecting on both *Pinkpop* festivals, theoretical concepts (see Chapter 2) such as *communitas*, *identity*, *mimesis*, *social structure*, *conventionality*, *inclusion and exclusion*, *solidarity*, *inversion*, and *anomaly* all seem applicable, but some only to certain moments and events. These concepts may be useful to identify contexts in which religion *may be generated*. But in that case the context should at least be characterized by the qualities indicated by these concepts. Thus, for example, the concept of *communitas* in Turnerian sense seems apt to qualify moments of inversion combined with the unwritten rules (or etiquette) noticed at the start of the festival, when people crossed the border between 'normal life' and life in the festival site (see also Sylvan 2005: 101).

Social behaviour, as in the queue and on the camping site at first seemed unstructured (and was experienced as the 'freedom' often associated with festival

life), but in fact was structured. According to Turner this characterizes a liminal phase in which *communitas* becomes manifest. Such *communitas* may be an important indication for rituality. But *Pinkpop* had only very cursory moments suggesting *communitas*. The same seems to hold for other concepts. *Mimesis* (imitating, copying), for example, is evident but only during certain performances.

Reading 4: The genesis and functioning of behavioural rules at *Pinkpop* 2010

As I expected (and also knew from other festivals), there were many people walking around the grounds. Others sat in their tents. It was sort of like becoming acclimatized, but then different. Straight away you feel at home and in a buoyant, party mood, yet like acclimatization, you need to get used to the surroundings. At *Pinkpop*, people seem immediately at home, but in fact they are busy finding their own place/spot in the 'new world' (for themselves and perhaps in relation to others). At least, that was my impression (and that's why I call it 'acclimatization' here). It was demonstrated by such behaviour as 'exploring the terrain' (to find the most suitable tent pitch for the next few days, or if they have finished dealing with all the practical matters, looking around to see what there is to do), or marking their own little territories (many people put up one or more party tents to roof off their 'own' piece of the grounds – handy if it rains! Others set their tent openings facing their friends' tents, thus creating their own space in the centre of the tents).

Typically, in the positively 'unbridled freedom' of the coming days that everyone seems to experience, having fun etc., there is clearly still a need for structure and there are (unwritten) 'rules'. People are engaged in considering each other's space. People ask if they can put up their tent somewhere; people keep in mind that another tent will probably be set up next to theirs. The busier it gets, the less people take this into account, but not because they 'can't be bothered', but because the others (i.e., those who have already set up their tent) find it self-evident that the spots will run out. Friends who arrive very late 'have to sort it out for themselves'. This comes not from any feeling of annoyance about someone's late arrival, but more from an attitude of ' it will turn out fine, even if they end up sleeping with so-and-so in the tent'. Actually, all this happens without discussion, as if 'automatically'. There is perfect harmony and everyone is excited.

If something or someone disturbs the harmony, those moments are, as it were, collectively punished. For example, one morning I was having breakfast, when two people at my table began grumbling about someone who had cause offence in the queue for food and drink tokens. That person had openly accused someone else of (allegedly) pushing into the queue. In normal daily life, say, waiting in line at a supermarket checkout, everyone would stand up for their own place in the queue. But not now. Now something remarkable happened, as I heard. Instead protesting against the intruder, the queue collectively turned against the challenger, saying things like 'This must be your first festival, or what?' and 'Relax, man, we will zip'. A couple of people at my table had fun making similar comments, finding it hilarious that the impatient person was 'accused' of being a festival newbie.

This led to a wider discussion about another 'less relaxed' person. Someone told us what happened to him. He's fairly tall and was standing watching the show when, to his surprise, a girl behind him said angrily, 'Tall people always block my view. You got here after me, so maybe you could move over a bit, right?' 'Incredible', the people at breakfast said in chorus. 'People like that shouldn't come to a festival.'
Conclusion: Festivals have different rules of engagement than 'normal life' (at least, as far this group is concerned, but it is has a wider reach).

With regard to my main research question, namely, 'can religion be generated in places and events like pop or rock festivals?' *during the fieldwork* I could not come to an unconditional affirmative conclusion when it came to *Pinkpop*. At times, depending on the performance rather than other qualities like the social dimensions of the festival, *Pinkpop* seems to offer people transcendental experiences as defined by Elzinga & Van der Tuin (2009). Huge festivals like *Pinkpop* give great pleasure to people; they offer a 'break' from ordinary life. But do they contain the 'religious potential' to *generate* coherent and meaningful transcendental experiences deserving the qualification 'religion' (compare Stringer 2008, see 2.8.2.)? No doubt such festivals can intensify religious experiences *when already present* (see also 7.3.1.; interview with Linsey). But there is nothing remarkable about this conclusion. Organizers of reli-pop festivals know it well. Before turning my attention again to the research question, let me analyze some other festivals to further qualify conceptual applicability and make comparisons.

6.3. *Bospop: local identity and memory*

Bospop is another iconic festival with a long history. As the preceding chapter pointed out, it is a real local festival. *Bospop* is characterized by a special programme policy. Besides the rock concerts, there is a *family day* with the theme of pop music, performed by more traditional bands. Blues music is also important. The local character is embedded in the prominent part that local volunteers play in organizing the festival. It is most evident in the language used, the local dialect. And some of the performing bands are true local heroes. The festival is small, conveniently arranged and characterized by an informal atmosphere. People consume huge quantities of beer, but this has no negative effect on the atmosphere. Dressing up is a special trait of this festival, not only among the performers – some of whom dress like the locals – but also among the public. Visitors dress mostly as 'teams' so that individuals are immediately recognized by other members of the public as belonging to a certain group. But, in contrast to *Pinkpop*, in-group formation barely impedes intergroup communication. Individuals from one group, let's say 'the Vikings' mix easily with members of another group.

The local character strongly stimulates *identity*. People feel 'at one', with the local bands as well. Performances contribute to that sense of identity. The 'insiders' (in fact most visitors) respond enthusiastically and join in performances which are, as said, often traditional and familiar. Music is expected to sound 'old'. Even when the composition of a band changes, people expect it to sound like it 'always' did. A regional newspaper phrased it as follows: the festival has a high quotient of 'do you remember', an attribute of another characteristic: the prominence of *memory*.

During the 2010 *Bospop*, there was an ironic reference to the pope, an indication of social criticism and a direct reference to current news about sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. But there did not seem to be an explicit interest

in religion. A band that reminded some visitors of reli-bands was immediately inundated by negative remarks.

Bospop offers visitors ample opportunity to relax. They can participate freely in performances, which are characterized by 'recognition'. There is a strong sense of *community*. *Bospop* is not entirely a 'break' from normal life. For instance, there were no noticeable moments of inversion, or symbols indicating the transgression of a 'border'. Particularly the *family day* seems an intensification of daily life, continuation rather than rupture. During my fieldwork I looked out for indications of such a 'break', not primarily from the idea of a dichotomy 'normal' *versus* 'special'. Anthropological studies of feasting or celebrating, like the one by Wendy James, explicitly reject such a dichotomy and propose instead a dialectical relation (James 2005:78, 79).

But during my observations the notion of a 'break' merely had the function of a 'signalling' concept, drawing attention to behaviour and symbolic expressions indicating that people *experience* the festival as a special site, a special event, participation in which required modes of transgression. Such modes played a role in all three festivals, physically (entering the closed off site) and socially (displaying specific ritual behaviour). But their prominence differed significantly, from outspokenly present at *Pinkpop* to nearly casual at *Bospop*. Many *Bospop* visitors also went to *Pinkpop* and almost unanimously they said they preferred the more intimate atmosphere of *Bospop*. The 'traditional' character and relative continuity resulting in a sentiment of 'recognition' did not only affect the sense of *community* in a positive way. It acted also the other way around; the festival made itself felt in daily life. As in the case of a TV interview with the father of a child suffering of a serious disease. Talking about a similar festival he said, 'During the performance one forgets the suffering and afterwards it seems like in the festival we found the solution for our problem.' The music continues to work, also beyond the fences.

At *Bospop* I also noted the difference between the informal rules and the formal rules drawn up by the organization, but not followed by the public (nor upheld by security). At the more relaxed *Bospop* I gained the impression that the official rules only had a function for the authorities, who had to keep public order. Concepts like *(local) identity, heroism, memory, ritualized space* (see also Sylvan 2005: 102), and *joy (cosiness)* seem applicable to the festival as a whole. However, it seems questionable whether this festival can be related to anything like an 'emerging religion'. People in fact appeared reserved in this respect.

Reading 5: Breaking the rules at *Bospop*, 10-11 July 2010

Day 1: *Bospop* has two podiums, the Main Stage and the Tent Stage. The house rules are listed in the programme booklet. One of the rules states that the tent is a workplace (albeit with a bar and obviously music is played) and as such it should be a smoke-free zone. Yet you see everyone smoking (even the staff sees this), but no one does anything to stop it. Also

smoking marijuana ('blowing') is considered okay (whereas the house rules states that drugs are not allowed on the festival site). At *Pinkpop* they state explicitly that 5 grams per person is tolerated on the *camp site.* Stricter rules apply on the festival site **>** anything to do with dealing drugs (i.e. if someone has lots with him) would be confisticated. However, having a bit for one's own use is condoned. Here people are just following the general tolerance policy in the Netherlands.

Another (written) house rule is that all glass, cans and plastic bottles are confisticated at the entrance. However, as they explain, you may take in a bottle without its cap (then there is less pressure in the bottle and so you can't do yourself or anyone else much harm). Then you see many people walking about with capped bottles. I too still have my cap. If you remove it in advance, no one asks where it is. And if security sees you walking about with a capped bottle, then again, nothing happens. Looking at the motive for taking the caps (i.e., reducing pressure and thus the chance of someone using a bottle as a weapon), it is extra remarkable that I get to keep my bottle, since I'd put it in the freezer beforehand and the drink had turned into one hard chunk of ice. Surely that would (must?) be a bigger problem than any pressure in the bottle?

Camping stools and inflatable chairs are also not allowed unless you can produce a medical certificate. All around me I can see orange inflatable chairs, but the people using them don't look disabled. The chairs appear to be on sale at the festival market. At *Pinkpop* I noticed that lots of the unwritten rules seemed to be in a mess as far as the festival *attendees*' rules are concerned. Here at *Bospop* the set rules are not always upheld by the festival *organizers.* Umbrellas are also not allowed in, but they are for sale and displayed in public (also umbrellas not bought at the market and obviously brought in).

6.4. *FortaRock: identity, memory, and intimacy*

Quite different, compared to *Pinkpop* and *Bospop*, is the next festival I went to. *FortaRock* is a small-scale happening characterized by another kind of subculture. Rock (*metal*) music is central and the festival – in sharp contrast to *Pinkpop* – is hardly commercial. Of course, commercial activities do take place, but there at least the idea is that these should not be prominent.

Before the start of the festival is a pre-party at the Nijmegen 'rock temple' *Doornroosje*. People are allowed in while bands are still busy preparing the stage. But, also in contrast to *Pinkpop* where fans try to reach band members off stage at every 'free' moment, here one gains the impression that performers and public ignore each other. This is interesting, because at pop festivals backstage is a very special place. Band members are protected by the organization. Only VIPs and select fans get admission to meet the 'crowd', for signing sessions. There is a certain hierarchy. Backstage is exclusive, on a higher social level than onstage where performers and listeners meet in public space.

Weinstein's spatial division between onstage and backstage (2000: 232) can be applied in a relational sense, symbolizing private *versus* public communication implying different social conventions. Before the performance starts, musicians have a higher status (indeed, they can only be reached by the happy few), during the act they are 'for the public', and afterwards they return to their intimate circle.

FortaRock does not seem to have such a hierarchical division. On the one hand this suggests the absence of hierarchical relations and fosters an idea of equality, on the other hand it indicates that this *metal* festival lacks a real 'fan culture' (associated with commercially directed music culture and characterized by *mimesis* and *charisma*; see also Straw 2001: 457; Rojek 2006). This presumption is in line with analyses as in Bayer et al. (2009) which show a certain restraint in following attitudes exposed by various kinds of *metal* bands. People tend to remain themselves.

This was certainly the case at *FortaRock* as participants repeatedly assure me. Thus, for instance, while some acts express strongly satanic ideas and symbols, the public's ideas appeared to be far from satanic. This underscores the general notion that *metal* culture is far more critical than pop culture and that the metal public is essentially independent, often driven by social criticism. But when it comes to the relation between public and performers I have to be careful not to jump to conclusions. *FortaRock* is a small-scale festival and many people and bands are 'old hands' having participated 'for years' in the festival (as noted before: the short life of the festival did not dissuade people to experience 'history').

In this particular case the lack of 'fan culture' may be the result of intimate acquaintance, or long familiarity with the bands and their music. People seemed more interested in the musicians playing as a band rather than in their individual personalities. Time and again you could hear the cry, 'play' or '[S]layer' (referring to one of the most popular *metal* bands) when musicians paused or took a break.

During the concerts, contact between performers and public was intense and effusive. At the start the *mosh pit* was empty, as if people could not transgress an invisible border. Once the atmosphere warmed up and people became exuberant, people started *moshing* (a dangerous kind of dancing featuring pushing and shoving). This was far more evident at the concerts than at the pre-party. At the open-air festival, people tried to stand as close as possible to the crush barriers, which kept a small space between the public and the stage, reserved for press photographers and security. In the music hall people were far more 'visible' and perhaps that tended to hold them back from crossing the line into the mosh pit, despite most people knowing each other well.

After the opening session the festival continued the next day in an open-air setting, with some 5,000 visitors. *FortaRock*'s public can be divided into two main categories, young and 'old'. *Metal* music originated in the 1970s and many listeners from the first hour visit this *metal* festival. This brings me to another quality, which may be relevant to my research subject, *memory*. At *Pinkpop* (with its long tradition), older people make up a substantial portion of the visitors. They appreciate 'classic' songs and performances, whereas younger visitors mainly come to experience new music. But here at *FortaRock*, with its particular scene, 'old acquaintances' are far more prominent. Performances are explicitly directed at them and the bands foster

nostalgia by playing old material and *come-backs*. Therefore, for many people *FortaRock* is a kind of reunion. While tradition at *Pinkpop* is organized from above, by management, at *FortaRock* it is closely tuned to the public. This was made clear recently (2010) when plans to change the character of the festival met with vehement resistance. At *FortaRock* 'tradition' should be interpreted 'locally', as an 'experience-near' concept.

Of course, at *FortaRock* there are also many different groups, also of various nationalities. But intergroup contact is easy and on second day, informal interaction between bands and the public is as frequent as during the pre-party.

The settings are conventional. All the familiar characteristics (ranging from typography to *decorum*, which I knew from the literature, see Machin 2010: 69ff.) are here. Thus, references to gothic culture abound and 'protest performances' as a rule include ironic references to religion, particularly the Roman Catholic Church (and especially the pope). There are also references to Satanism and these seem serious, at least they are not used ironically. People enjoy, but do not take the religious criticism too serious. In any event I did not notice spontaneous reactions to ironic expressions.
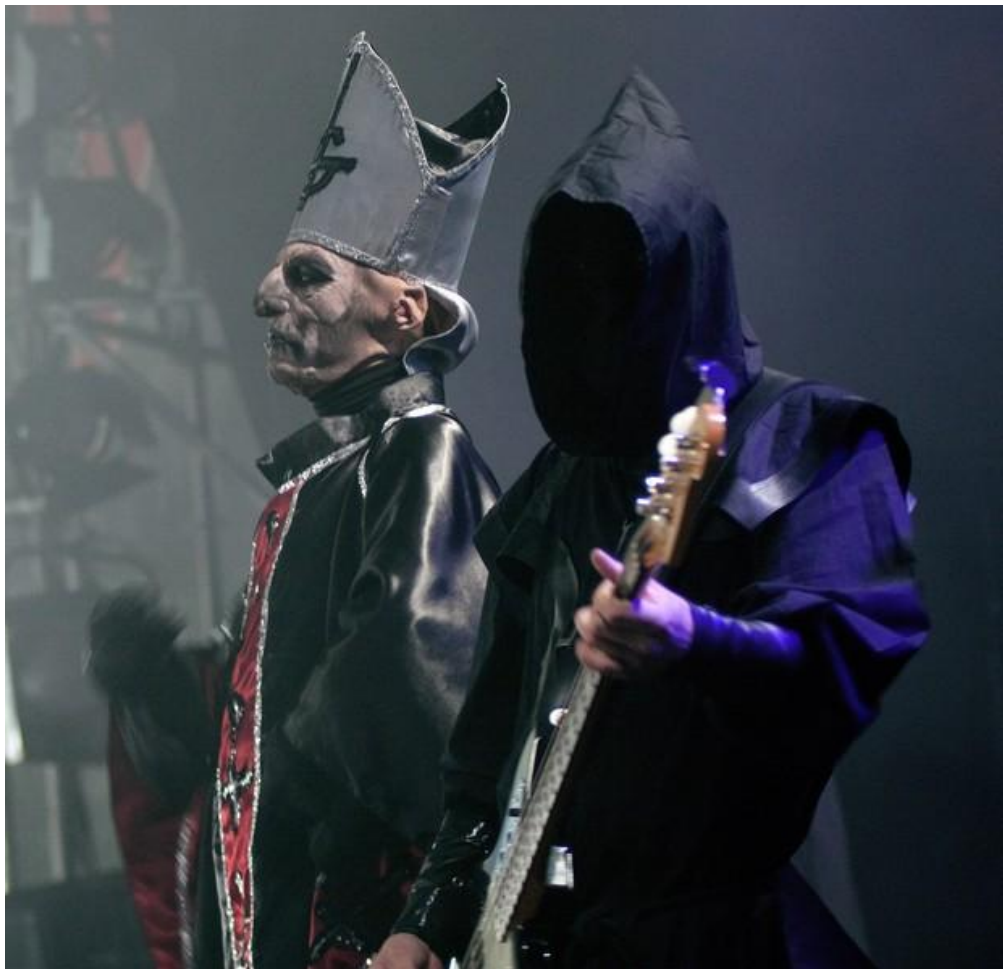
The band Ghost*, performing at* FortaRock 2011 (photos Heleen Kommers)

Michel gives 'the sign' (photo: Phaerion's DaemonArt ©)

The notion of subculture is confirmed by the absence of *inversion*. To many visitors the festival is not a 'break' from 'normal life', but a moment of intensification. There is a strong sense of reunion and the occasion is not transferrable, like *Pinkpop*, where people can now choose for this festival and next year for quite another. *Identity* is a main characteristic. People identify strongly with each other and the festival. Like at *Pinkpop* behaviour is experienced as 'free', as unconventional. Particularly when there are moments (performances) of explicit social criticism, one gains the impression of unconventionality. But mutual conduct is harmonious and well-regulated. As a continuation of the subculture that people live 'in daily life', *FortaRock* has far greater consistency than *Pinkpop*; one may speak of a *community* rather than of *communitas*. To outsiders the *metal* festival may seem an exotic ritual, very different from 'normal life', but to insiders continuation (albeit intensification) of their normal (subcultural) life seems far more relevant.

Reading 6: Is this *The Answer*?

Lead singer of The Answer (photo: Heleen Kommers)

On day one *The Answer* plays. [http://www.theanswer.ie/] While we're walking around, I hear two friends exchange views of the band. They've never heard of them before, and one hopes that her expectations will not be met, 'They sound like some or other dull reli-band'. Indeed, the front man seems to be making her fears come true. 'He looks like Jesus, man!' she says mockingly from behind us. We stay more or less near these girls.

Yet, a little while later, both girls are swaying along to the sound of the music. *The Answer* is not a religious band. The media often compares them to *AC/DC* and *Deep Purple* and they seem to guarantee a set of gripping blues and hard rock. After the band leaves the stage, I see lots of their merchandise has been sold. However, when I see the texts and artwork, I find the association that the girl had with the band's name and the lead singer's appearance is not all that surprising (*Rise, Keep believin', Never too late* and *Everyday demons*).

The strong communal character, sharing ideals and lifestyle, and consistency in the ways people interpret symbolic expressions in performances may generate a special feeling of 'belonging'. These may stimulate experiences of transcendence, a special point of attention in the interviews (Chapter 7). More than *Pinkpop* or *Bospop*, *FortaRock*, seems to offer elements favourable to generate religious experiences. In conjunction with the *Doornroosje* scene (Chapter 5) and the wider *metal scene* into which *FortaRock* fits perfectly, it has much in common with what Sylvan termed an 'alternative culture' (2005: 139). Indeed, the festival reminded me of a religious gathering such as those we know from churches. Certainly, all the ironic references to religious symbols during the act did not alter that idea in me.

All three festivals described here are explicitly secular. As noted above, any slight association with reli-pop leads to criticism. For example, the band *The Answer* at *Bospop* is not a reli-band at all (see Reading 6). In fact, *The Answer* plays blues and hard rock, but its symbolic expressions easily recall a religious message and therefore people reacted sceptically. This was in contrast to bands that used explicit references to Christianity that were clearly ironic, such as the Belgian band *Ghost* at FortaRock.

Reading 7: Personal communication from Robert Korstanje, initiator of *FortaRock*

'*FortaRock* began in 2006 with the eventual aim of organizing a viable concept, putting on concerts in *Doornroosje*/Sleeping Beauty (and later Merlin/Merleyn) and, as main activity, a one-day open-air, and *heavy metal* festival. The first metal night took place on 17 May 2006 with *Another Messiah, Textures*, and *Gojira*. The first *FortaRock* festival took place in 2009. I've been a fan of the genre since the 1980s (I'm not just a *metalhead* but above all a fan of music in general), and at the beginning of this century, the rest of the family also fell victim to the '*metal* virus'. After the disappearance of Dynamo Open Air in 2005 and the erratic organization of festivals like Fields of Rock, we found it a pity that metal festivals were no longer being held annually in the Netherlands, specifically Nijmegen.

'We often see that other festivals are somewhat incoherent, and that gives them very little appeal. For example, Sonisphere 2009 was an American concept put on in the Netherlands without any [concessions to cultural differences] and that did not go down well with most people hence the moderate number of attendees despite their having some good bands. We want affordable yet quality festivals. We don't need really huge bands like *Metallica* and *Rammstein* (*FortaRock* is already so huge that *Rammstein* is the headliner for 2013!). We go for the good mix. These bands are too big and would sell out *Doornroosje*, the Effenaar and 013 (two other pop venues). We want to keep entrance prices affordable. We are still in the

investment phase. You need endurance for festivals like this, you've got to uphold your name.'

A pre-publication poster for FortaRock (photo: Heleen Kommers)

Reading 8: Interview with Robert Korstanje in *De Gelderlander* (July 3, 2010)

In *De Gelderlander* (a local newspaper) of Saturday, 3 July 2010 Robert Korstanje was asked if *FortaRock*, in its second year, would be the biggest metal festival in the Netherlands. Robert answered, 'Waldrock in Friesland [a Dutch province] won't be on this year [2010]. There are not many other big metal festivals in the Netherlands. Fans go to many festivals in Germany, Belgium and France. I think in Nijmegen we are in a good location. [...] I can't stress this enough, there are trees so we have lots of shade in Park Brakkenstein.'

We have bands with a good reputation (*Deicide, Mayhem*) but mostly we're looking for bands that can draw enough of an audience to Nijmegen and fit in with the rest of the line up. Last time *Ghost* was hot and just before the festival the band were offered at us at a reasonable price, so that's how they came to be at *FortaRock*.

Certain bands like to mock religion or are very focused on Satanism, and they are often the ones that behave badly back stage (e.g., *Watain* made quite a mess backstage with their rock 'n roll behaviour). *The Devils Blood* also went to town at the first *FortaRock*. Younger fans like walking round, wearing the shirts of this kind of band. They think it makes them look scary and tough. I think that's the main reason. Incidentally, there are enough bands with a Christian background like *As I Lay Dying* and *Demon Hunter*. These bands are standard at both metal and Christian festivals, such as last year (at Flevofestival I think). We definitely get lots of feedback from visitors or the band bookers who deliver the bands. Many people are glad that we have another annual metal festival in the Netherlands and especially this year we're getting many compliments about the line up.

6.5. *Conclusion*

This chapter reports my impressions gained through participation and observations at some music festivals. When I reflect on what I heard and saw, and on the often cursory chats I had during the festivals, I recognize many dimensions of religion that are characterized in my 'labels'. But – except perhaps in relation to *FortaRock* – I doubt very much whether I can speak in terms of *milieus* in which religion may emerge, let alone of 'religious experiences'. The main problem is that many of the participants I talked with rejected the idea. Of course, overt rejection should not be interpreted immediately, on face value, in the same way that affirmations should be interpreted with care (see my criticism of Jennings's interpretations: 2.9.) Therefore, I had to add extensive interviews to my field experience. Although it did not offer any clear conclusions to my central research object, the fieldwork constituted the basis for the follow-up interviews. My fieldwork experience allowed me to put myself in the position of various categories of festival goers. This *empathic* approach proved essential during the interviews. On the one hand, insight into behaviour, attitudes, and expectations of festival goers was vital to my asking proper questions. On the other hand, being familiar with the participants' language and informal modes of communication was essential for my interpretation of their response.

The fieldwork experience also enabled me to differentiate between various festivals and related audiences so that I could explore differences in expectations, in commitment, or effect on daily lives. These insights were very helpful when I was putting the major concepts into practice (operationalization) and this intention allowed me to use the fieldwork to try to develop tentative conclusions, or rather 'guiding impressions'.

At the festivals I discovered how important it was to listen to the 'older' people. I realized then that it would be distorting to exclude them from my research because they not only interacted with young people (influencing their experience) but the musical acts were occasionally attuned to them. And there is more. Studying older participants led to new perspectives and concepts, which seem crucial to my research topic. I think of the idea of 'transcendence' that Elzinga and Van der Tuin (2009: 17) developed and the concept of 'memory', both central to current notions of 'religiosity' and 'religion' (see e.g., Sheldrake 2001). I must confess that after

recognizing the presence (and importance) of the older public, they increasingly drew my attention. Perhaps this was also because of the contrast with my original idea of an 'obvious' correlation between pop or rock music and youth.

As my study focuses on the question whether pop and rock festivals may *generate* religion – or, following Stringer I should rather say: 'may bring religion to the surface'; 'may emerge religion' – , I paid special attention to *qualities* which could offer an apt *milieu* for the genesis of particular experiences and expressions (see the theoretical chapters). The inclusion of 'older' participants significantly enhanced the chance of meeting people able to express intimate feelings because they are already familiar with a variety of transcendental experiences. Usually they have got some 'experience of life'. Young people were often far more vague or expressed themselves in clichés that are very hard to interpret. To include both categories also offered the possibility of a diachronic perspective. The related concept of *memory* can be connected with other relevant concepts such as *narrative*, *space*, *belonging*, *social structure* and *tradition* (Hinchman & Hinchman 2001, James 2005: Ch. 4, especially 4.3).

The fieldwork also added new insights into participants' communication modes (especially in social media) and in the relation between formal and informal rules, throwing more light on the idea of 'freedom'. At the festivals it became clear to me that the illusion of freedom people entertain is a 'cherished', self-made and meaningful illusion, rather than a 'delusion', as stated by several normative analysts (see e.g. Ardui 2006: 25 ff.). Even the 'orchestrated' freedom at *Pinkpop* could really comfort people who in 'normal' life experienced existential problems (7.3.2.). It was also very interesting that participants suggested that I could draw a comparison if I attended an 'experience' festival like *Castlefest*. I was never invited to a reli-festival.

In the introduction to this chapter I referred to my new position as a researcher, a fundamental change from my former situation, when I participated as a music lover. Fieldwork as 'participant-observer' means becoming involved as well as trying to remain detached. This detachment implied using analytic notions that result in the prominence of the 'researcher's voice'. In the preceding chapter I chose to consider festival books as representations by participants for participants and followed these representations as *their* stories about the festivals. In the next chapter I focus again on the 'participant's voice' when rendering the conversations I had with people who were involved with festivals in various positions.

Chapter 7 – Ethnographic impressions: words and pictures to share experiences

7.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters I discussed several indications pointing at festivals as a potential *milieu* for the emergence of religion. The festival histories, for instance, resemble myths as defined in religious anthropology. They 'describe' the origin and display a moral context connected to the origination and thus offer a normative frame. Describing festivals, 'participant'-authors represented them by selecting special qualities which could be interpreted in terms of the religious dimensions I characterized in my 'labels'. Some of these labels appeared to correspond with Weinstein's 'signifiers' (see 5.2.). Some, like 'memory' or '*communitas*', I noticed because of my specific theoretical focus on current views of religion (2.7. and 2.8).

During my fieldwork I noticed a variety of aspects which are well-known from socio-cultural studies of religious behaviour, ranging from the use of specific symbols (at times directly referring to the non-empirical) to diverse ritual behaviour. Although there are important differences among the festivals I attended, it seems beyond doubt that there are parallels between religion as defined in socio-cultural sciences – including its 'functions' – and what is displayed in pop and rock festivals. However, assessing similarities hardly goes beyond plain functional reasoning. If indeed we can assess similarities between (functions of) religion and the festivals, what is their significance? Do these similarities indeed indicate emerging religion? Do they indicate religious potency; a *milieu* in which people can have religious experiences? How to discover whether people really have religious experiences in these places or during the activities which seem to offer an apt *milieu* for religion? How do people interpret, for instance, the overtly religious symbols used during performances? To study questions like these, I had to approach people in a personal way to discover their interpretations and experiences. According to current methodological ideas this required in-depth interviews.

During the fieldwork I caught a glimpse of the intensity of lived experiences. Concerning the expressions of these experiences I could draw distinctions differentiating not only between festivals, but also between festival sites[65]. But at a festival long conversations requiring concentration were impossible, be it only because of the overwhelming sound of music. Apart from some casual conversations – mainly on the periphery of the festival site or on the festival camping site – it proved impossible to talk seriously at the very moment people were experiencing what is essential for the festivals, the musical acts. Therefore, I had to arrange interviews separately from the festivals, 'outside the sphere of the field'. This implied particular problems. As stated elsewhere (Kommers 2011b), because of

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[65] The relation between a specific site and experience on the festival terrain proved relevant. It really mattered *where* conversations took place. A *site*-focused approach may add complementary insights to a behavioural approach: see Kommers & Hoondert (forthcoming).

matters concerning authenticity, it would be most desirable to assess experiences as lived during the acts. At first I thought the classic elicitation method would do to 'revive' the live-experiences with respondents (see Notermans & Kommers 2012).

However, during the interviews the informants proved to be far from passive respondents. They drew my attention to a variety of digital means of communication, which perfectly served to revive their experiences (see 5.4.1.). Often we continually skipped from talking to looking on personal websites, and *YouTube* movies, to episodes recorded on cell phones, and so forth. Sometimes, looking dominated talking. It made me think of Strinati's discussion of the post-modern concept of 'designer ideology' referring to the phenomenon that in our society images become prominent in narratives (Strinati 2004: 206). It is also in line with Negus's conclusion about the close connection in pop music between music and images (Negus 1992: 65-66). The interviews became an extension of 'the field'. During the talks, my informants sometimes recalled their experiences of the acts so intensely that I too felt a participant-observer again. Therefore this combination of talking and following participants in looking at images and using social media should be considered as part of the ethnographic project, rather than as 'follow-up interviews'.

The impressions I gained thus emerged from input actively constructed by participants. Particularly the social media appeared most effective. Interviews that began hesitantly suddenly turned very lively, as soon as the *notebook* or the *iPad* entered the scene. In fact, the conventional elicitation method – presenting a selection of pictures of bands or of festivals – proved only useful as far as it induced people to refer to their personal pages on *Hyves* or *Facebook* which usually contained collections of pictures they personally identified with. Such references really 'broke the ice'. At once people were intensely engaged in the conversation and usually started to skip from one kind of reference to another and back. In my opinion this spontaneity solved many of the problems of authenticity I feared before starting the interview. Indeed, the casual conversations I had before – even those at festival sites – were mostly commonplace expressions. Then suddenly, during the extended interviews, the respondent became an active, creative co-operator taking over the initiative and enthusiastically pointing at occasionally unexpected aspects and stimuli! The social media added essential elements to the interview techniques which, up to then, I had mainly derived from conventional handbooks and the questionnaire designed by Sylvan (2002: 223-225).

I soon left the path of semi-structured interviews and switched over to open conversations, paying due attention to 'small talk' (Driessen & Jansen 2010). Of course I always had some questions in mind but focused primarily on giving the respondent ample room to tell his or her story. Or, I should say, to *enact* the story,

for some of the interviews were real performances[66]. I use the word 'conversation' or 'story' to underline this aspect (about narrative inquiry as 'a field in the making' see Denzin 1997: 82; see also Fontana & Frey 1994: 361-376, who emphasize the active character of the interview). Only in some follow-up conversations did I consciously choose to do semi-structured interviews, sometimes explicitly telling the respondent about my research. In a few cases I straightforwardly asked what the respondent thought about the idea of pop and rock festivals as places to experience religion.

Because most of my informants could not imagine what religion had to do with pop or rock festivals, any talk about 'transcendental' or 'existential' experiences soon tended to get bogged down in platitudes. Or they required lots of elucidation from my side which, of course, implied the risk of corroborating my ideas rather than evoking those of the respondents. Besides, interpreting the language and images used in social media can be problematic; 'face value' interpretations are particularly risky. Comparing several *Hyves* and *Facebook* sites revealed that many 'spontaneous' expressions appeared to be rather conventional (5.4.2.).

The same holds for the interviews. Meanings that at first sight seemed original, on closer inspection proved to be relatively common. Thus, for instance, the respondents tended to experience words which are current in religious language as problematic (see also Elzinga & Van der Tuin 2009: 17; 49). But their reactions to these words were usually similar. Concepts like 'God' or 'holy' were considered not genuine, insincere, or as referring to 'old-fashioned religions'. People were usually unable to connect such terms with their own feelings, or to lend them personal meanings. For instance, when they referred to such words in song texts, they usually interpreted them as used in an ironic sense. On the other hand, anti-Christian expressions were often seen as authentic, in contrast to straight anti-social terms as used by certain bands, which were considered to be just a pose, serving to draw attention, nothing more. It was sometimes difficult to conclude whether such interpretations reflected personal views or the obligatory ones. Already during the pilot study I struggled a lot with this problem. Replies to straight questions about people's experiences during festivals usually at first sight seemed platitudes and I exercised a lot in 'talking': in finding ways to introduce the subject without explicitly referring to it.

I think the only way to escape the closed cycle of conventional language and interpretations to catch a glimpse of genuine personal meanings and experiences is

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[66] At the Tilburg conference about John Harper's 'enactment' strategy to study mediaeval music and ritual (November 14, 2012), I presented my interview approach in terms of re-enactment: participants re-enacted *their* festival, not only by using social media, but also in their behaviour during the conversations: their movements, their exclamations showed the intense way in which they re-lived the festival as they experienced it. For Harper's programme, see www.experienceofworship.org.uk

to focus on spontaneous[67] reactions to certain stimuli, the most important of which are those suggested by the respondents.

7.2. *Transcripts of the interviews*

Recent theories about ethnography pay much attention to the narrative dimension. Formerly, ethnographers used to describe the participants' customs, behaviour, and even their ideas in the language in which they intended to publish their monograph. The 'inner perspective' as presented by the ethnographers (or as later critics concluded, their 'ethnographic authority'[68]) would become clear from their use of 'native terms', fragmented expressions taken from the informants' accounts, like politicians pretending to 'know' Islam, interspersing their sentences with isolated words such as *shari'a*, *hajj*, or *jihad*. In reaction to this use of 'native terms', while neglecting related literary conventions, postmodern ethnographers tended to stress the importance of narrative context. Sometimes this led to *verbatim* representations of interviews. However, when one pushes this too far, one runs the risk of publishing unreadable texts[69].

This aspect is relevant to my research. Indeed, as noted above (Chapter 5) knowing the *lingo*, the verbal slang or in-group language, is important to trace Robin Sylvan's 'new, unexpected' expressions of (religious-like) experiences (see 2.1.; Sylvan 2002: 77, 220). Merely reproducing *lingo* in the description of the interviews would make them vulnerable to the stated criticism. And there is another problem. Not only does *lingo* occasionally consist of offensive and 'improper' language, such as racist expressions, it is often confined to very small in-groups and is constantly changing and expanding. The first aspect might be of less relevance in a scientific study which would not be censored because of prudery[70].

But the second aspect poses serious interpretational and methodological problems. Meanings appear dependent on specific ever-changing contexts and difficulties concerning representativeness seem insurmountable. Idiosyncratic expressions may say something relevant about experiences, but to interpret these may require being familiar with various, often closed in-groups in a way that exceeded my possibilities. Yet frequently recurring expressions may be conventional, even meaningless albeit not necessarily. In the next sections I try to render as faithfully as possible the tenor of the conversations, interspersing the descriptions with extensive quotes from what the respondents literally said about aspects that I

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[67] By 'spontaneous' I mean when the respondent reacts enthusiastically, making propositions and suggestions and even tending to take the lead.

[68] See Chapter 4; also John van Maanen's *Tales of the Field* (1988).

[69] About differences between this narrative approach and the so-called New Ethnography that pretended to describe and analyze a culture as a participant would see it, see Van Maanen 1988: 28, 130-131. He refers to its representatives as being 'determined to write themselves out of existence', and indeed, nowadays, twenty years later, this school has sunk into oblivion.

[70] In 4.7., I pointed to the risk of presenting unconventional subjects or rendering uncensored local narratives: it may easily result in misunderstandings.

thought essential for my research objective. I also insert a few fragments from other sources, such as newspapers, to place the replies in a wider context.

As with the festival books (read from a particular perspective, the generic dimension), or in the case of my fieldwork report (to an extent inevitably dependent on specific characteristics of the fieldworker), my account of the interviews is necessarily a selection and thus already an (implicit) interpretation. I present the interviews in the present tense, and use the past tense for explicit interpretation.

What was inevitable during the festivals (separation of field experience and interviewing, see Chapter 4), afterwards seemed favourable. At the interviews I could better understand the informants' experiences because I had experienced many of the ups and downs of participating in a festival. As such, this final stage of my project really proved to be part of the *triptych*, the continuous interchange between the three research procedures.

7.3. *The interviews*
In the following sections I present a selection from the conversations I arranged with a variety of festival goers. Some were old acquaintances, whom I knew from earlier festivals, before I started this research. Others I met at the festivals. I offer the selection, aiming at diversity: participants with different backgrounds who approached the festivals from different perspectives.

Linsey was a specialist in advertising. Because of this background she looked at the festivals very differently from the perspective that that guided Rick, whose mental handicap made him experience the festivals quite idiosyncratically. Linsey, for example, created many beautiful pictures and anticipated incorporating her impressions in projects for her study.

Kiki and Doenja guided me to another kind of festival, joining the *metal* with the spiritual festival where music continued to play an essential role, but also other aspects, that, according to them, would fit the object of my research more closely. I met Erwin and Casper as members of the public, but they also turned out to be performers, though not at festivals but at *house*-parties. However, this influenced the way they reflected on festivals and the public-performer relation during the interviews. Pim is an expert on *metal*, closely acquainted with song texts and a member of a *metal* band. Steef played a leading role in the organization of *Doornroosje* and *FortaRock*, offering an inside view from the managerial perspective. Finally I present the results of my interview with Hugo, who shares my professional interest in pop culture.

Of course, all names and details of respondents are fictitious, to protect their privacy. That is also why I am careful in reproducing very personal outpourings. The same privacy rule stood in the way of illustrating the interviews with the all so important elements of pictures and reproductions of personal *sites*. Only when I was given explicit permission from the persons concerned, I reproduced intimate

expressions. The 'scene' – particularly at *FortaRock* and *Doornroosje* – is small and my various contacts are well-known, 'like knows like'. If I had rendered the interviews without special care concerning privacy and in case participants saw this text, it would be easy for them to identify the 'who is who' behind certain information.

7.3.1. *Linsey: 'It should always be like this'*
In September and October 2010 I had extensive discussions with an ardent lover of *metal*, a female fan, which might be a bit special since most metal admirers are usually male (Weinstein in Bayer, ed. 2009: 17ff.) although this is changing rapidly. I call her Linsey. I first met Linsey at the local *Appelpop* festival, which I visited with some friends. We agreed to meet some weeks later at a railway station coffee bar.

During the introductory chat about the music she loves best, Linsey explains that her interest in *death* and *black metal* is closely related to her youth; her father used to play rock and *heavy metal* records. Later on, during our conversation, memory was relevant. Several times she referred to her recollections of the time she had spent with her father. Linsey mostly visits festivals with friends and said that she disliked overcrowded festivals, like *Pinkpop*. At those festivals people usually operate in small in-groups and there is no 'festival interaction' according to Linsey. This agrees with my own experience. It is very hard for a lone festival goer to be accepted by such groups, which mostly remain on their own during a festival. Because of this lack of integration Linsey misses the intimacy she finds at far smaller *metal* festivals.

At huge pop festivals social interaction that transgresses in-group boundaries is mainly confined to the camping site where people are arranged at random, according to the order of their entrance to the terrain. On the camping site social control is relevant – if only to prevent burglary and theft – which brings people in adjoining tents together. According to Linsey these 'functional' bonds could result in an intimate atmosphere, which she also found in the festival tents where the bands performed to smaller audiences. Later on in our conversation she compares the festival camping site with being on holiday, leisure and freedom. 'A holiday and what's more, one with good music!' That is way she prefers to go festivals abroad, as on holiday 'you meet strangers instead of acquaintances, it's fun'. It also strengthens the feeling of freedom. If you 'break the rules' afterwards nobody 'tackles you about your behaviour'.

To Linsey, a festival is far more than a concert, it's not only music that counts. For instance, she dislikes the music at *Appelpop* (a festival focused on local music), but she appreciates its special atmosphere. Most important to her is taking an active part in a festival, but the way of participating is directly related to the 'spirit' of the festival at a certain moment, as well as the 'mood' of the people around her. She says these decide whether she prefers to sit calmly chatting with others or to jump into the *mosh pit*. Active participation means dancing, *head banging*, *moshing*,

joining in the singing, or looking for contact with the performers. Particularly when she knows the band members well, she tries to get as close as she can to the stage to have eye contact and sing loudly so that the performers can hear her. The anticipated reward, a band member addresses her directly, for instance to thank her. This gives Linsey a feeling of inclusion, of belonging.

For Linsey the social life at festivals is different to normal life. People are relaxed with one another, everybody is equal, and people are jovial and amiable. 'It should always be like this,' she adds. She illustrates this companionship by comparing it to a situation outside the festival. 'Imagine, out of the blue you start chatting to a stranger in a shop. People would find that odd but at a festival it's quite normal'. She refers to an advertising campaign by the idealistic organization SIRE, aimed at encouraging people to accept friendliness to complete strangers as 'ordinary behaviour'. 'Well, at a festival this advertisement would be superfluous!', Linsey adds, forgetting what she said earlier about in-groups at big commercial festivals. Later on she specifies, intimacy makes people more communicative and intimacy is directly related to the (small) scale and type of the festival. Particularly *metal* festivals can be characterized as pleasant, in contrast to punk festivals or events where people drink too much (according to Linsey, these are mostly German festivals). By the way, later on in the conversation she admits that as a student of media communications, she pays special attention to the advertising used at festivals and feels it should be in line with the festival. 'No commercials for plumbers, but funny ones for beer that involve people.'

Linsey thinks people tend to express their musical preference through their clothing, tattoos, and so forth. It shows that people identify with a certain band, but it also makes them stand out.

When our conversation turns to idolatry (a singer identified with God), she becomes emotional. As a non-believer she rejects a relationship between music or performers and religion. At the same time she thinks that, for instance, *black metal* (often using religious or racist symbols) is more than just a musical genre, it is a lifestyle. 'But you shouldn't take these symbols seriously, you shouldn't *believe* in them. You should stop yourself from turning those symbols into a belief. […] It is a way of dressing, a way of talking […] and of believing in yourself!'

In a follow-up interview Linsey defines 'being yourself' as 'doing what is good according to yourself and your personal surroundings.' In reply to my asking what exactly does she 'believe' when she says 'believe in herself', Linsey answers:

> 'It is more than being self-confident, it's the idea that you can get support from people around you. […] I don't believe in God. I couldn't get any support from that idea. It's more that I believe in *people*, not in a god. In real things. You have to do it yourself. If you believe in yourself you know that eventually it will be good, one way or another. I find nothing in belief [in

God]. I'd rather believe in people, like my dad. I've lived with him for twenty years already.'

Linsey does not take symbols like an inverted cross seriously or references to the devil. To her this is the paradox. 'Even when Slayer sings "God hates us all" they are still a set of cuddly teddy bears.' A band should not be serious to be taken seriously. As soon as a band *acts* like Nazis – for instance by joining a neo-Nazi demonstration – it is rejected. Linsey adds, 'I just find the music super and don't bother with the text.' On the other hand, just pretending (e.g., to be satanic) is not enough, the context must convince. In line with this Linsey seems to experience the different 'zones' at the festival as real. Near the stage the experience is intense because of the close proximity of the band as well as the behaviour of surrounding people. At the back of the festival site the atmosphere is quiet and suits other activities like chatting or resting. 'I always go to the back if I don't like the music, then I do other things.'

Finally, at the last interview, I decide to conclude with a question directly to do with my study. I tell her about my research subject and then ask, 'What do you think of the idea? Is it nonsense? Or is it relevant?' Linsey's answer is 'Yes, I really think there is much in it. For me, there's nothing religious about a festival. But a festival is far more than sounds and visual images. At times I really feel intensely happy. But for people listening to Christian Rock or people who go a bit further in *black metal* or Satanism, they may have religious motives underneath.'

7.3.2. *Rick: 'Without music I would feel naked, unhappy, and vulnerable'*
When I approached Rick for an interview, he told me that he liked the idea. 'I live with music, so to me it's only nice to talk about it.' I also met Rick at *FortaRock*. He has Asperger's syndrome, which limits his social interaction and repertoire of activities and interests. Because of his disease, I decided to a totally unstructured conversation , which gave him the opportunity to feel free to jump from one topic to another. I also took ample time. I had planned on 90 minutes for the interview. In the end it took the whole afternoon and evening.

Rick is well aware of his Asperger's, but says it doesn't bother him. He starts by stressing that he likes talking about what music means for him. 'To me, music is really everything. Since I was a kid I always fall asleep to music, I really live with it.'

When Rick enters my living room (I did not visit his home, because he lives with his mother), I happened to be watching a Greatest Hits show on television. It immediately attracts Rick's attention and he exclaims, 'This is really awful! *Cartoon Network* is no longer on and I can't see my series. But for the rest, this is quite all right. They regularly schedule Jimi Hendrix and that's really fantastic! I used to watch this programme, because I always need to be surrounded by music. Now I use my iPod mostly, also when I'm in my room. Then I can seclude myself from everything.'

These outpourings are followed by another exclamation when he notices my

laptop. 'May I? You should really see this.' He surfs to YouTube to show me two films of Wes Borland, the guitar player and singer of the band *Limp Bizkit*.

As soon as Jimi Hendrix's name is mentioned, Rick starts talking about the way singers dress and decorate themselves for the show. It makes no difference for him personally, but he says he appreciates their efforts. That is what he meant when he showed me Borland, who is already busy getting ready for a concert while the public is still leaving their homes. 'It's such a nice idea that everybody, singer and public, are preparing for the same thing! It makes me happy to know that, it gives me even more enjoyment.' Rick turns again to the laptop. 'I am a real YouTube grazer, I know everything. I'm on YouTube for hours every day. My mum doesn't understand. I am always looking for cartoons and music. Since I play the bass, I look mainly for *bass tracks*.'

And then, suddenly he spots something. 'Wo*w*! I really must show you this! Do you know this!?'

I reply, '*Nine Inch Nails?* No I don't recognize this number at the moment.'

Rick looks disappointed. 'It's *Gave up*. Look, still with Marilyn Manson. They put out this number on my birthday exactly. It's one of my fave numbers!'

Then Rick indulges in an explanation of how the band developed and why certain music is convincing, authentic, in contrast to other kinds of music. To him, home grown *metal* is authentic. It contains *feeling*, while *pop*, written by others, lacks that feeling. He cuts his story short. 'I just want to show you something by *Metallica*' and he shows me *Robert Trujillo and bass auditions for Metallica*. 'You can see that he [Trujillo] really belongs to that band. It is as if he always played with them. And you see it right from the very first, aye?' He explains, 'It's in his movements. He doesn't stand still for a single moment. It's the same for me. I can never stand still when I'm playing. That's why they kicked me out of the band [...] and he [Trujillo] plays better than his predecessor! He really gives power to the music!'

While Rick looks for more movies of Trujillo he starts talking about something quite different, *Castlefest.* He jumps to a movie about *steampunk*: a song called *Airship Pirate* by the band *Abney Park*. Showing this movie Rick says, 'I want to be different, I want to stand out, not like the rest.'

For Rick festivals are extremely important. As a child, he was often teased because of his Asperger's but at festivals this never happens. On the contrary, at festivals he experiences a kind of 'warmth'. He tells me this in low voice, as if hesitant to admit this feeling. When I say that I've heard other people talk about a similar experience, he admits that he always feels this 'warmth' when he indulges in music, irrespective whether the music is loud or soft.

Once again he turns to YouTube to show me Wes Borland, to make clear what kind of music calls up that feeling in him. But when he starts the movie, it opens with a loud advertisement, which Rick finds very disturbing.

The next movie is the same. 'No, I don't want a fucking remix, I want the original!' Now he reacts very emotionally, which allows me to change the subject to emotions. Rick emphasizes:

> 'Music is really important to me. With music I can say more than usual, it can also be a release. That's why I am not allowed to play the drums. I once did it with so much force that I broke a friend's drum set. Without music I would feel naked, unhappy, and vulnerable. Music is my joy, with music I relax. Without music I couldn't function, I would get angry easily. With music I can say things I cannot put into words. It's inconvenient, so many people don't understand.[...] I think it's wonderful when I send music to somebody who understands and he returns music!'

While I'm arranging things for dinner, Rick shows some technical details of playing music, such as the *voice box* (a guitar player manipulates sound by moving his mouth) or *slapping* (a way of striking the strings). Finally he shows me the official trailer of *Brutal Legend* (a music-based videogame), in which Ozzy Osbourne saves the world with rock music; fellow rockers construct a *mosh pit* which they use to encircle the enemies. 'This is so immensely epic!' Rick exclaims. And then, straight from his heart and totally unexpected he says, 'Young people really lack belief. Once, I was at a concert where a Christian band performed. I don't care whether they already are Christians or they suddenly turn into Christians.' [He is referring to the often told stories about conversion. In this scene the rhetoric form of the confession is rather popular,[71] and Rick seems aware of that.] 'Often it sends out a forced, affected atmosphere on people.'

I am unable to pursue the matter in greater depth. It is already much later than we originally agreed upon and throughout the interview Rick has made clear that he was unwilling to follow my schedule. Which I only could appreciate!

As an Asperger's patient he needs order and discipline; any deviation from a time schedule normally brings unrest. However, our conversation on music made him forget the whole world around him. To end this account of my interview with Rick I think it appropriate – also out of respect for someone who really needs music to get along in life – to quote two poems that express what music means to him. In fact Rick did not talk much about the festivals he went to, but mainly about his feelings.

1.
Music made me
moulded me to who i am
music modifies the way i think

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it's what i do, it's what i feel
how i think what i say
why i am here
i need to make music
its how i survive why i wake up
in the morning what makes my body move
it tells me
music made me

2.
Music comes to life, When life is boring
Music can tell a story, That sounds like it's for me
Music can torture me, With old memories
Music can love me, When there's no love for me
Music can save me, When i am lost
Music can cure me, When i almost pay the final cost
Music can yell at me, Which keeps me awake
Music can speak softly, When i need a moment away
Music can teach me, That this world isn't just hate
Music, my favourite place

7.3.3. *Kiki and Doenja: 'Music calls up emotions and recollections'*

At the 2011 *FortaRock* I was talking with some people about the religious symbols and religious institutions and practices, which were prominently referenced to in some of the musical acts. Somebody said to me, 'If you are interested in this sort of stuff, you should visit *Castlefest*'. Enthusiastically she explained, 'People don't just express their spirituality at *Castlefest*, but they really act it out, mostly pagan, Celtic, or mediaeval and gothic. There are people who really believe they can make it rain. Every year at the happening they burn a coffin [as she calls the 'Wickerman', see pictures] and make offerings to certain gods. The ritual belongs to the festival. And the music is also very good!' That is how Kiki and her friend Doenja persuaded me to a visit to *Castlefest* (see Reading 9, below).

[*Castlefest* is a fantasy festival with a prominent music component, which is why Rick also referred to it. Kiki's enthusiasm is so infectious that I decided to take her advice and go, although strictly speaking it is not a pop or rock festival. But, as I said in Chapter 6, I felt I should take the advice of a participant seriously, as well as the earlier initiatives by informants to focus my attention on the importance of social media as instruments of elicitation. In conventional methodology 'informants' are often treated as passive 'respondents' who should reply to questions, rather than take the initiative on the level of research techniques. However, in my study I several times experienced that spontaneous responses came only when people could identify with the subject, and this was not possible until they could express their feelings with the media they were accustomed to using. And in this case they primarily associated a serious interest in religious symbols with *Castlefest*.]

Kiki and her friend Doenja seemed true fans of *Dark Tranquility*, which was performing at *FortaRock*. They came to this *metal* festival because of this band. They

captured my attention because I saw them talking with the band and it was clear that the band members had time for them. So I waited until they were finished and then approached the two girls. They were keen to tell me about their conversation. In fact they were in the middle of their analysis of their experience. A better opportunity was unlikely. I felt that what said at this moment would directly reflect their experiences. It was one of those rare moments at a concert that I was able to engage in extensive discussion. Because of the relaxed atmosphere at *FortaRock* it was possible to initiate short chats, but this opportunity for more was exceptional.

Kiki say, 'This band is so wonderful! So *cool* that they took the time to talk with us.' About her friend she says, 'Doenja is totally mad about this band, she always wants to see them when they play in the Netherlands, in Germany or in Belgium. [...] We nearly always go when they perform. This time the guitar player was a bit annoyed. Usually he is always friendly and talkative. But this time the singer had lots of time for us.' Replying to my questions, the girls say they really appreciate it when a band pays attention to the public. Doenja confesses that it moves her that the band is so intimate with the public:

> 'You are partying *together*, that adds to everyone's enthusiasm. Even if you are far away from the stage, you still feel involved. Direct contact, when a singer addresses the audience and ask us to do something that enhances a sense of belonging. Makes you feel they are approaching you personally.'

When I want to go a bit deeper into this topic (particularly when I ask if they have anything like a religious experience, like feeling enthralled), the girls seem a bit astonished and so I tell them that I am at the festival in connection with my study. 'You're here for work? You can't be serious!' they exclaim. I try to joke about it but then they become serious and it is at this moment that they start suggesting that *Castlefest* would be a more appropriate location for my research. On the one hand, this reveals something about their interpretation of my interest. They seem to identify my reference to 'religious-like' with spirituality. On the other hand, they draw my attention to close parallels between the spirituality at *Castlefest* and this *metal* scene. The difference is, they say, '*FortaRock* puts it on as an act, at *Castlefest* you see a more extensive and more serious version.'

I feel glad I managed to introduce the theme – almost as a slip of the tongue – for it makes us click with each other. They are willing to make an appointment to talk more extensively later on, sometime in the future. But already the next day I receive an e-mail inviting me to join them at *Castlefest* and to stay with them in their home in The Hague. Thus, the invitation not only offers the opportunity to take part in another kind of festival, but also to discuss things at length.

When I open the conversation Kiki and Doenja indicate that they want to watch YouTube movies while we talk. They show me a trailer of *Summer Breeze*, a big annual *punk rock/metal* festival in Germany. Then they play *Psychopunch*, showing a *mosh pit* or *circle pit.* 'This is the sort of crazy thing that makes the festival!' They point at a short episode that shows a glimpse of the two girls [*Dark Tranquility*[72]].They laugh. 'Everyone is in high spirits, making contact is easy, you're all on the same wavelength. Really, even the craziest people talk to you, people who you normally wouldn't ever connect with.'

Doenja says, 'Oh, I so want to go again!' She and Kiki both characterize the atmosphere as 'euphoric'. Doenja explains, 'You feel happy, more than that, it is an extremely positive ambiance. Music calls up emotions and recollections. The relationship with my boyfriend you saw in the *Dark Tranquility* movie is over. For a long time I felt sad when I heard this song. But when I see and hear it now, I only want to go back.' Doenja shows another YouTube fragment. 'Look, here's my ex. In this movie we are standing many metres apart. It was the first time we didn't go together to *Dark Tranquility*.'

Kiki adds, 'It was like the singer knew that.' And Doenja, adds, a bit shyly, 'Yes, that's what Kiki likes to think.'

Kiki says, 'Well, look for yourself [in the movie the singer holds his head against Doenja's and both sing together, in complete devotion.], It *is* true!' And Doenja admits, 'It was striking, indeed.'

The conversation now continues in some detail about fan relationships and the communication between bands and the public. Kiki suggest that we look at the singer of the band *Cimaira*, Mark Hunter, on YouTube. The public calls him 'Metal Moses', because he invented a particular ritual, the 'Wall of Death'. During the performance of the number *Pure Hatred* he opens his arms and the public (at times 20,000 people!) splits apart by some four metres. Then he claps his hands, and everybody runs across to close the gap.

Kiki says, 'This ritual of parting and joining the crowd, 'clashing', it's like the biblical scene of Moses parting the Red sea. That's why we call him Metal Moses[73]. […] I like this clip so much! At performances they play it on big screens.'

Doenja says, 'It lends meaning, it's not just screaming. When my mother sees it, she doesn't understand, but it goes really deeper.' In this context she refers to our experiences at *FortaRock*. This is my opportunity to bring the conversation round to the topic of religious symbols that are used so frequently at *metal* performances.

Metal Moses is a sympathetic, 'harmless' reference to an aspect of Christianity. But, for example, in *Ghost*'s stage act at *FortaRock,* the religious references are clearly satirical, perhaps even ridicule. To Kiki and Doenja the use of religious symbols adds to the atmosphere, they like it. But why use religion? Why not

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[72] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuB22gR2B_g.
[73] link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8gOBoddEMI

send up 'True Love', something that pop music praises so often? In *metal*, music features emotions like hatred and anger, often expressed in religious symbols. Why?

Although Kiki admits that some groups focus on politics, she agrees that religious symbols prevail. According to her the use of religious symbols serves a special purpose; it is shocking. 'Religions *pretend* to represent the good. The bands oppose this hypocrisy. *Dark Tranquility*, for instance, is not really satanic; it is a kind of social criticism. This in contrast to *Castlefest* where many people use religious symbols seriously, really believe in certain rituals. Music is prominent at *Castlefest*, but most bands play quite different genres, more in line with different kinds of spirituality. And they use authentic instruments.'

Both add, 'At this festival the show elements are very important, but it's the same at *FortaRock*, as you know. There, people dress in a special way and the huge video screens emphasize the acts on stage.'

Reading 9: *Castlefest*

[I decided to visit *Castlefest*, motivated by Kiki and Doenja's enthusiastic advice, but also because I had read Koert van der Velden's description of a similar event, *Elf Fantasy Fair* (Van der Velden 2011: 283ff.; see also Kommers 2011c and Jespers 2009: 9, 15; Hunt 2003: 221-230; Kronjee & Lampert 2006: 175). After *Castlefest* I interviewed Kiki again, when she explained one of the main rituals, the burning of *Wicker man* during *Omnia*'s performance. *Wicker man* is made of twigs and this year (2011) it was used in the 'offering of the Heathen Gang', a cockerel-like figure. Sending this offering to heaven blesses participants for the coming year.]

Immediately on entering the site I was deeply impressed by the pleasant atmosphere. Friendliness dominates. The public is extremely diverse and if I had to mention one characteristic *par excellence* – at least at first sight – it is openness and mutual respect. People pay lots of attention to their outward appearance and you see the most fantastic, indeed, absolutely weird attires. Taking photos is not a problem at all; participants even like it and pose patiently. Communication is very easy. In fact I only notice one source of 'tension', between *larpers* (live action role playing) and lovers of re-enactment, who consider the *larpers* inauthentic.

During *larp* performances much of the outfit is fake or invented. But all are fascinated by the same interest, to experience another time or world transcending the now and here. Although this transcendence is only for three days, it means far more to most participants. First they spend a long time on preparing their outfits. Second, to them *Castlefest* is a meaningful event in their life that they look forward to and enjoy in many ways. Before the event, communicating and planning with friends, and afterwards, discussing, remembering and looking forward to next time.

Essential to a festival like this is that the audience performs at least as much as the bands do. This is an important difference compared to e.g., *Pinkpop*, and to a lesser extent than *FortaRock* and *Bospop*, where members of the public also 'participate' (at *FortaRock* by

intermingling – in particular during the pre-party evening – with band members[74], at *Bospop* by volunteering).

The friendly and open atmosphere reigning at the festival is already noticeable in the festival programme booklet. It is written in a strikingly informal style, like the language friends use among each other. Participants are highly interested in symbols, in contrast to visitors of *metal* festivals where the average *metalhead* is usually ignorant of the exact meaning of symbolic expressions used by performers as well as by themselves. At *metal* festivals symbols are often used conventionally (Bayer 2009), but *Castlefest* participants are serious students of symbolism. This enhances, of course, the noticed continuity. People not only sing about their longing for another period or world, but also act according to their ideals, 'Practice what you preach'. The idea is closely related to notions of *authenticity,* another concept relevant to theories about religion.

In all the festivals described here, Grimes' *ritual* (Chapter 2) is essential. Besides various kinds of ritual behaviour (varying from decorum to celebration, Grimes 1995: 44, 53) and ritual spaces, at *Castlefest* the performance is focused on a spectacular ritual, burning *Wicker man* on the Pagan Night.

The Wicker boar (2011) (photo: Heleen Kommers)

Burning the Wicker boar (2011) (Photos: Pagan Dance ©, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWY1uncafPo)

My informants' reference to the 'spiritual' character of *Castlefest* made me curious. Perhaps if I took part, it would help me to notice aspects that I otherwise wouldn't see studying only music festivals. In terms of my research subject, this festival, with its transcendental ideas, meanings, and expectations, proved useful experience. It helped me to focus on the performers-public relation, on the importance of levels of participation and commitment in terms of creativity (creative contributions to the course of the performances) versus conventional behaviour (when the public reacts predictably). It also made me think of distinguishing between my 'labels'. Are some 'indicators' of religion better than others? In Chapter 8 I return to this question.

According to Kiki, *Castlefest* is a summertime beacon attracting many people. The whole year long they look forward to the festival as a turning point in daily life, thus corresponding with other festivals I have described. These events have a real existential meaning for many young people. Kiki says, 'If *Castlefest* wasn't on, my summer would be very bad. It's the same for many others, especially people whose daily lives are a bit different from everybody else's, the *nerds*, the people with an alternative lifestyle, who sometimes even get harassed.' (This makes me think of Rick, who feels vulnerable in ordinary life because of his disease and experiences the festivals as safe havens.) During the rest of the interview Kiki explains many details of the festival, like the meaning of decorations and clothing, aspects that appear to be of major importance as they offer the participants the means to identify personally and completely with the festival. For many people, being at the festival and wearing special dress, like Celtic or mediaeval costumes, means far more than merely role playing. At the festival they really *feel* like Celts, pagan priests, or mediaeval knights.

7.3.4. *Erwin: 'Sharing the same mood unites people. The music creates the mood'*
Together with Gonnie Wilkens, who assisted me at *Pinkpop*, I had a relaxed conversation with Erwin, who had been a DJ. Erwin and his wife Sonja often go to music festivals and dance parties. He was not surprised that Gonnie came along, because he had already met us as a 'duo' at *Pinkpop*. Erwin tells us how totally absorbed he gets in the music when he is DJ-ing as well as when he's just a member of the audience at a festival. The main difference is that when he is working he never takes 'a sweet' (XTC), whereas he does as an audience member to 'be in my head, rather than in my body. You don't think anything consciously, you just move to the music. Without the music, you wouldn't have this feeling.'

Many people use MDMA, the so-called 'love drug' which stimulates a strong sense of belonging. Sonja says, 'You feel very happy, mostly you're turned in on yourself, but everybody feels like that. At those moments you're sharing the feeling, everyone feels happy.' Erwin adds, 'It's not so much the drugs, for others get a similar feeling with alcohol. But without the music such a feeling is unthinkable.'

Remarking on *Pinkpop*, where we met, Erwin says that it had no festival feeling. It was too big, there were too many people. In this context he makes an interesting comparison with bygone days. 'Formerly, if you lost sight of your friends at a big festival, you wouldn't be able to find them easily. No cell phones etc. So you had no choice but to party with everyone else because we all had the same problem, making contact in such situations was easy. But nowadays, everybody has a cell, so it's no problem locating your friends. That's why there are so many in-groups at large festivals and why it is now far harder to make contact with strangers. I think I never made more friends than in the early days!'

'At a time when criticism of the line up of past editions had not even cleared the air, this year's criticism built to a peak of astonishment that, apart from the headliners, there were so ridiculously few big names. And then Jan Smeets announced the appearance of a teenage one-day wonder from a bygone era in the form of Hanson. With so little to get excited about, *Pinkpop*-goers let this year's event wash over themselves. Especially in the first two days, which traditionally attract the fewest day-trippers, the atmosphere was noticeably different. That sharp edge, the nervous tension, that hedonism that traditionally belongs to a summer festival, has completely worn off at *Pinkpop*. [...]

'And Foo Fighters? [...] Two hours of boundless energy, a boisterous rock show. Exactly what we expected from Dave Grohl and the like. And such a massive, frenzied people's party out on the field, that feeling of total release after a three-day festival, that is exactly what *Pinkpop* should be.'

Erwin notes yet another aspect, his age. A large multi-day festival is becoming too tiring for him. Besides, making contacts on the main festival site is difficult; older people are considered 'pitiful' in the hectic places, where young people dominate the central scene. It is quite different on the periphery and in the festival tents or on the camping site. Erwin explains, 'On the main site you attract attention if you are older; it's not really possible to make contact. But on the edges, it's easy.' Describing the difference between concerts and multi-day festivals, he says the concert experience is far more intense. People choose a specific concert because of the particular band. 'At a festival several bands perform and they may offer quite different kinds of music, some of which you won't like. Besides, a multi-day festival may be exhausting. And because of the booze, in the end people get hung over.'

But a festival offers a sense of freedom. 'Who you are or what you do, who cares? Sharing the same *mood* unites people.' Erwin is convinced that music evokes a special *mood* that cannot be compared to other means of uniting people. 'Music creates the *mood* and because it lingers in your mind it keeps the atmosphere going. That's why the music is essential. Other activities, like doing sport, might unite people too but in a different way.' I am not sure what Erwin means because his expressions, like 'getting totally absorbed' or 'paying no attention to anything outside your immediate surroundings' apply to other things too, like playing football. But it is clear that to Erwin the effect of sound on the body is something special. 'When I'm performing or listening, I simply can't stand still, I've got to move, got to dance.' His movements are 'unconscious', incited by the music, That's why outsiders may find certain expressions, like *head banging,* meaningless or absurd.

Erwin discerns three phases of a festival. 'The atmosphere must build up, then consolidate and finally run down. You can't start with a fast energetic number followed by a slow one, you'd make the audience collapse.' But ultimately, it remains

difficult for Erwin to pin down the unique feeling of solidarity music evokes. Gonnie concludes, 'Everyone feels this solidarity in their own way so describes it differently. It's so personal. And perhaps different festivals will have different solidarities?'

7.3.5. *Casper. 'The music joins people'*
Casper is another DJ who composes his own *house* music. In this conversation I focus on the performer's viewpoint. How can a DJ tell if the public likes his performance? When I ask him what happens when he creates music, Casper says it's like 'a video playing in my head; and images emerge from the music'. As a performer his task is to convey these images as clearly as he can to the public. In any case, he is not thinking of anything concrete but of 'the energy generated by the images in his head'.

When he manages to transmit his energy to the public and the resulting interaction reaches a state of 'frenzy', he knows he has succeeded. Although he recognizes the role of XTC in this process, he thinks the atmosphere is created mainly by the music. Casper's partner Elvira underscores this. 'Drugs make people more relaxed, but it's the music that counts.' They both agree that the feeling of solidarity is strongest on occasions where people who appreciate the same kind of music come together, thus at concerts of a certain band, or at *metal* festivals. The main point is not the kind of music, but the fact that the public generally likes this particular kind of music. The music joins people.

Talking about his feelings, Casper adds something to an aspect I discussed with his fellow DJ, Erwin. Casper says, 'Although you are on the same level as the public, as a performer you have to pay attention. I can't relax as much as the public, I must avoid making mistakes.' (Like Erwin, he says he does not use XTC when he's performing.) While he seeks unity with the public, when he's working he is constantly aware of his duty to the public and to other performers. For example, the kind of music he plays also depends on his relation to other performers. If he starts the concert, he plays music to build the atmosphere and after him other performers will take over. But if he has to finish the concert, he chooses music to calm down the audience. *Metal* concerts are an exception. Usually these do not end in winding down the music. People have other ways to wind down, for example by going to a *hard rock* or *metal* café. On special occasions, like big in-house concerts (e.g., the *Kiss* concert in a stadium), where people have to be guided into leaving the site quietly, the concert may finish with tracks from another musical genre.

7.3.6. *Pim: 'Religion influences your worldview, music influences your mood'*
Pim, an expert on *metal* heads starts straight in on my research subject. He differentiates between 'religion' (which he equates with belief in God, usually institutionalized) and 'religiosity', a concept he uses for everything that touches on the world view. Pim thinks that *metal* abounds with religiosity in this sense, as well as lots of pop and *blues*. He refers to various musicians, including the *metal* band

Skyclad and *Nick Cave* and *The Bad Seeds*. He thinks it is important to always do a study of religiosity in music from the performer's perspective because it makes a great difference whether anti-religious song texts are used by a Christian, a neutral, or a satanic band. Only then, Pim considers, you get an indication of authenticity, only then you know whether it is serious criticism or just conventional response.

Pim focuses strongly on texts. It touches him emotionally if performers don't sing a text 'from the heart'. And he cannot listen to 'bad texts, like those tainted by Nazi sympathies'. Pim adds, 'Religion influences your world view, music influences your mood.' During the interview Pim refers to many lyrics, including a song by Nick Cave, which closely resembles the biblical story of original sin, *Where the Wild Roses Grow* (see www.muziekbijbel.nl).

7.3.7. *Steef: 'Older people are relevant'*

Steef, manager of *Doornroosje* and *FortaRock*, is prepared to talk about the organizational aspects of festivals. Because he is accustomed to approaching the subject from a more abstract perspective, I thought I'd tell him straight away about my 'labels', and ask for his reaction.

We start talking about *FortaRock*, which he considers a small, 'intimate' festival that he knows the public characterize as a 'reunion'. An important aspect of such a small festival is that people run into each other several times a day which, Steef thinks, significantly contributes to a 'festival atmosphere that huge events like *Pinkpop* or *Dynamo Open Air* [this *metal* festival no longer exists] just don't have.' The crowd are so massive that you easily lose sight of one another. Besides, a 'local' festival, like *FortaRock,* attracts more local visitors, people you may have met before in a pub (or, in this case, at *Doornroosje*). Steef mentions yet another aspect. At an intimate festival, the contact between the public and the bands is also easier.

Steef's managerial perspective is a useful addition to my field experiences and other interviews, because he gives insight into the organizational background, especially the aspects that remain hidden to the public. For instance, he tells how management deliberately keeps security guards out of sight and how it tries to foster an atmosphere of 'freedom' by keeping the rules in low profile.

After this introductory chat I hand Steef a list of my 'labels', so that we can consider them together. Concerning the first concept, identity, Steef informs me that the organization does recognize its importance. 'We consciously select our sponsors, they should have a solid reputation.' Insofar as the festival replies on support from commercial companies – even *FortaRock* cannot do without it – 'their image should fit ours.' The notion that *metal* and commercial enterprise do not actually match is toned down. 'The *metal* public is really critical; sponsors cannot be too commercial in their eyes. Usually we only accept companies who want to reach the *metal* scene. […] Visitors want to experience a *metal* atmosphere and not feel that they are at a

fancy street fair. Nothing spectacular, just black, and a laid-back atmosphere that is different from what, say, a *dance* audience would want.'

Steef considers the self-regulating attitude of the audience characteristic of the *metal* atmosphere. People may drink lots of beer, but fights are rare. This is why the organization can keep a low profile on security measures. Connected to this, Steef feels, is solidarity. 'If youngsters get a bit aggressive, the older ones will calm them down.' This attitude is also reflected by the spatial organization. Whereas big festivals, like *Pinkpop*, fence in the *moshpit* (inhibiting spontaneity), 'at *FortaRock* we consciously do not regulate the *pit*. We know that the public is relaxed and will play by the unwritten rules (also the ones prescribed by law).'

The fenced-off mosh pit at Pinkpop (photo: Heleen Kommers)

Steef thinks this attitude applies in general to the *metal* public, but it is even more typical for Nijmegen, where many people know each other and the organizers personally. 'That doesn't mean it is a clique. We have people from England, Belgium, France and Germany! Of course we have rules, like the prohibiting *stage diving*, but we'll turn a blind eye on most things and instruct security to do that too. We tell our First Aid workers that the *metal* public may look weird, but they're really harmless.'

With regard to the three spatial areas I thought I'd recognized on festival sites, each with its own type of behaviour, Steef not only confirms my observations, but admits that the organization actually creates these zones, responding to the wishes of various groups. 'We want to attract a *metal* audience that is as varied as

possible, and we know that there some people come exclusively for drinking and hanging around. Although there is no fixed line between the *mosh pit* and the middle zone, in fact they are separated, just not formally. At big festivals the situation is, of course, different. You can't do without safety measures.'

Older people are very welcome, but the organization – keeping an eye on the future – focuses the composition of the musical programme on the younger public. Memory is an interesting aspect of *FortaRock.* This festival is relatively young, so memory has no historical meaning[75]. But it implies status if you can say you were at the first *FortaRock*. 'I'm used to hearing youngsters bragging that they were at the first *FortaRock*. Perhaps you and I would say, "What are you on about? It's only been put on a few years", but to them it may have some meaning. Perhaps they were sixteen at the time and it was the first time they had ever gone to a festival. And now they're 19 or 20. To them that really makes a difference.

A visitor (he called himself 'Wodan Heerst,'Wodan Rules') at FortaRock *with the festival logo tattooed on his hand (see poster in Reading 7). I never noticed anyone with such intimate identification at the pop festivals.* (photo: Heleen Kommers)

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[75] Here Steef reacts to my 'label'. We discuss the continuity with daily life *FortaRockers* feel which also appears from the tendency to join their experiences at *Fortarock* with those from other festivals they visited earlier.

Steef continues, '*Ozzfest* and *Rockin' Park*, two Nijmegen festivals that no longer exist, were mainly focused on older people. I think it's hard to make a festival a success if you focus only on one age category. Older people are relevant for the continuation of a festival[76]. They come more for the people, the atmosphere, the hanging around, or for the one or two bands they really like. Young people come for the whole programme, and the acts performed by the bands. New bands are mostly act-orientated, and they attract a young public.' New bands also influence the tempo of the festival. An older public accepts rest breaks between acts, but younger people call out 'Slayer!' or 'Play!' as soon it gets quiet. This reminds Steef of a festival with live recordings. 'Intervals were not allowed and all the rest breaks were filled in.'

Then, spontaneously, Steef points to 'ritual' on my list of labels. 'Well, that's funny. I see here you've put 'ritual'. Clearly you see young people wearing shirts with upside down crosses and pentagrams. Or shirts from the first *FortaRock* edition. Older people will wear a weird shirt on purpose, like *Take That*, or totally worn out shirts from the bands' early days. It's their festival shirt, like kids who take their blanket everywhere with them.' The festival shirt is formal dress for these special occasions. In daily life nobody would wear a *Take That* shirt. It may imply inversion [referring to my 'label'], 'such as *Blaas of Glory*, a brass band, dressed up like old-fashioned *heavy metal* fans, playing classic numbers.'

Finally Steef turns to some organizational points, such as the rule that nobody is allowed to leave the site during the festival. This is related to the prejudices about *metal* people. 'People in the neighbourhood are afraid of disturbances, just because of the rumours.' But immediately he adds, 'But *metal* people are just the same, they have their prejudices too.' Another point he makes is that part of the programme is kept as a surprise, precisely because the organizers know how intensely people anticipate the festival. It really is a break in their daily routine. 'But, as opposed to the *pop* public, *metal* people don't go crazy at the first sound. At a *metal* festival, bands must come up to the mark!'

Reading 11: Article on *FortaRock*'s new location in *Aardschok* (October 2012)

In 2013, with Rammstein as the closing act, *FortaRock* will probably be held for the first time in Goffertpark, Nijmegen. The October 2012 issue of the *hard metal* magazine *Aardschok* devoted full attention to the question of whether 'after this year's very pleasant and successful edition, the festival [should] continue to grow at a different location', or do readers think 'that *FortaRock* should stay in Park Brakkenstein, with all its noise problems in

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[76] After the most recent edition of *FortaRock* the local paper *De Gelderlander* (June 4, 2012: 11, 13) made a point of mentioning the advanced age of the performers. A big photo shows a frenzied crowd, filled with older, gray-haired people. Discussing performances, the writer uses the expression 'memories of youth'. .

the bargain?' Comments poured in, according to the editors of the magazine. Many readers thought it should stay. One reader said, 'We believe that the organization should ask themselves what the purpose of organizing the festival is. What was their original starting point? To be the biggest metal festival in the Netherlands? Of the Benelux? Of Europe? A festival for metalheads or for the widest possible audience? To put on a festival that will make them rich or a cosy, jovial festival that people will be chatting about for days and years after? (like now, even months in advance people are chatting about it on Facebook). In our opinion the starting point was to organize a good and pleasant metal festival with performances by well-known and (as yet) unknown bands. Clearly the organizers are driven by their passion for metal. That implies that they find it important to have contact with visitors and want to meet their expectations closely. That won't succeed if 15,000 or more come (the capacity of Goffertpark is 40,000!)

Should FortaRock move to a new location? The answer is no!
It's good here, the location is great. The organizers must keep it profitable, and naturally make a little profit. They must make sure to get bands talking about *FortaRock*, as they did with Dynamo Open Air (DOA), that it is an honour to perform there, because the audience is so keen. That they will be on the live EP because they played at [...] *FortaRock*. [...] *FortaRock* has the same [...] atmosphere [as DOA]! They should cherish that. So, do you have to be huge? No; on the contrary. And here comes the link to the old hard rock hassle that you get at the bigger festivals. If *FortaRock* moves to a larger location, like a Goffertpark, they won't be able to avoid booking famous bands to attract a bigger and wider audience. There's nothing wrong with these bands, though. We grew up listening to them and still play their CDs regularly. We'd love to see many old rockers again, but we'd never go to metal concerts. [...] You only reach that audience with old names. [...] They're people in their forties and fifties, who want to experience their childhood again. [...] We ask the organization to remember their primary goal especially well and as the English say, Count your blessings! In other words, be happy with what you have, don't be greedy!'

7.3.8. *Hugo: 'A festival is daily life on a micro level'*
At *Pinkpop* I met Hugo, who appeared interested in my research from a scientific point of view. He studies new media and had read an introductory article I had published[77]. Thus, during the interview I put my main concepts (labels) to him directly. His response is different from Pim's, more reflective. Starting with the notion of 'social structure', Hugo says he opposes the idea of inversion. 'The rules that apply in daily life, you also experience at the festival. In fact the festival is daily life on a micro level.'

He recognizes traces of anomalous behaviour, but these are only acceptable in a shared context. As such there is no fundamental difference with society beyond the festival. 'The difference is that during the festival deviant behaviour doesn't arouse judgement, or rather, judgements don't end in aggression or bullying, as may be the case in daily life. That's why you feel free at a festival. The degree of freedom depends on the particular festival and the character of the public.' Here he compares *Pinkpop* 2011, which many people felt lacked the 'festival feeling', to *Dour Festival* at Dour (Belgium), much bigger than *Lowlands* at Biddinghuizen (the Netherlands) but

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[77] In JRPC 2011.

with a mixed public of various nationalities. 'Here the atmosphere is relaxed, not just concerning nationality, but also as far as age, interests and personalities go. This gives a far more tolerant situation. Feeling solidarity with people who are 'different' has other dimensions than feeling united with likeminded people, with whom you already agree in many respects. It is precisely that feeling of being appreciated by totally different people; it's irrelevant who or what you are'.

Hugo continues, 'At a rock festival you stand shoulder to shoulder with other rockers, precisely because you are a rocker; thus indeed because who you are. In that case numbers are more relevant than at a festival with very different people.' Thus, the more varied the public, the lesser uniform the conventions, and the more sense of freedom. 'That's why a big festival like *Dour,* with so many nationalities, the atmosphere is completely different from *Pinkpop* with so many likeminded people.'

To which I object, 'Even if freedom is an illusion, people can experience the atmosphere as free, in spite of the rules. What counts is that people don't feel the rules are a burden.'

Our conversation becomes increasingly hesitant. It seems hard for insiders to phrase concepts like 'freedom' or 'atmosphere' exactly, so we decide to skip on to some other concepts. Hugo considers that the camping site is part of and not a space beyond the festival terrain, despite the fact that there is no contact between band and public. But the relevance of *music* is just as great on the camping site as it is on the festival site proper. People can get into a trance just easily in their tents, a situation Hugo describes as 'living surrounded by music and people, but experiencing the music internally, in your individual way and at that particular moment.'

7.4. *Interpretation: impressions of the interviews*
The chats with Linsey covered several topics (the 'labels', see Chapter 2 and Appendix). *Memory* seemed relevant, not only in relation to the music she had learned to appreciate by listening to the music her father liked, but also in relation to her 'belief in herself' which she explained in terms of the longstanding bond with her father. She related *intimacy* to the size of a festival and its site as well as to the kind of music. Small *metal* festivals are usually more intimate than large-scale commercial pop festivals. Intimacy, in turn, is related to the existence of certain kinds of social relations: closed in-groups versus open communication.

Linsey noted several phenomena which indicate the *inversion* of 'normal' behaviour and the presence of a kind of equality and communality at the festival – for its duration – which resembled *communitas*. Imitating band members' ('heroes') clothing and lifestyle recalls the idea of *mimesis* (Marshall 2006; idols and icons in relation to religion, see e.g., Frijhoff 1998). And, of course, together with all the other phenomena we discussed – varying from close contact with band members to identification with a specific musical genre – it all points at notions of *identity*, of *inclusion/exclusion* and *belonging*. But according to Linsey, it's not too serious.

Several times she refers to the notion of *fun* (see note 24; Middleton 1993: 247 who confirms a conclusion by Simon Frith. '[T]he essence of rock … is fun, a concept strangely neglected by sociologists.'). Especially the 'unwritten rules' (conventions), and the symbols and codes peculiar to the 'relaxed' atmosphere of a festival are in contrast to normal life and seem to underscore the feasibility of my concepts.

Although several of my labels can be discerned in the interviews with Linsey, her pertinent rejection of a religious dimension seriously complicates the analysis. Linsey recognized the possibility of a connection between religion and music festivals but only as something experienced by 'others', Christians and even Satanists. At the same time, she admitted that a simplistic interpretation of Satanism is risky. Usually it is a combination of presentation and a certain emanation. With some bands, people expect satanic expressions and accept corresponding behaviour, as long as it is confined to the festival. In the case of other bands, they would consider Satanism as mere pretence (compare Straw 1999: 460 who saw satanic iconography in *heavy metal* contributing to 'a 1970s kitsch', to the 'proliferation of fantasy and satanic imagery as vehicle and pinball arcade decor, as poster art and t-shirt illustration.' See also Farley 2009 who traced the development of Satanism in *heavy metal*).

Although Linsey acknowledged several times that the festival or the music is 'more than just…' it would be too much to apply the label of transcendence. Thus, although Linsey's description and experience of festivals do show some socio-cultural dimensions of religion, in her case connecting festivals with 'religion' – even if functionally – would seem inappropriate and would imply a total rejection of the participant's view, which was clear on this subject.

Rick is an excellent example of a music lover who is nearly always engaged in social media (discussed in Chapter 5). During the interview he constantly skipped from one website to another, from one YouTube link to another. Clearly, music is essential for him. Because of his Asperger's syndrome, and limited ability to initiate personal social contact, he is eager to employ all the opportunities to express and communicate meaning that the medium of music offers. Festivals are important because at these events people are usually more open to deviating behaviour, to expressions or appearances that may evoke critical reactions in 'normal' life. At festivals Rick feels at ease, he has no fear of harassment. What is more, because he usually does not go out, festivals are a good diversion. Music and music festivals offer him 'warmth', an experience that he cannot express in words, only by showing you a YouTube movie featuring a musical performer.

The *existential meaning* of music Rick experiences becomes clear when he admits that without music he feels vulnerable, unwell; 'naked'. For Rick music *is* joy. However, despite the essential role music plays in Rick's life, in the interview he could not recognize any religious dimension to his musical experiences. As soon as he qualifies a rock performance as 'epic', he immediately – without encouragement from my side – jumps to the notions of 'belief' and Christianity and rejects the idea

that these phenomena can be linked to young people or to authentic or sincere experiences at concerts. He referred to the Christian performers he had met at reli-concerts. His ideas resemble what Steve Turner (1988: 158) wrote about the uneasy relation between spiritually driven rock performers (or Christian converts).

My chat with Erwin shifted quickly to what he feels when he is engaged in music, as performer (DJ) or listener. The idea of being totally absorbed by music (with or without drugs; see Till 2010: 34ff. for a discussion on this subject) fascinated him. He considers music an experience ('mood') that one shares with others, resulting in a special solidarity specific to musical events, concerts and festivals.

In this interview with an informant who was both a performer (DJ) and member of the audience at many festivals, the context (a chat in the garden on a summer's night), did not permit the use of elicitation techniques, nor did we use a computer to view YouTube or other social media. It was interesting to see how easily Erwin recalled the concert or festival 'mood', and to note how absolutely convinced he was that music triggers a special feeling, a unique solidarity, yet it was impossible for him to formulate what exactly made musical experiences so special.

Erwin highlighted several interesting aspects, including growing older (direct impact on his personal capacity to endure big multi-day festivals) and modern technology (before cell phones arrived, people generated contacts differently: the cell phones stimulated in-groups whereas formerly people had to turn to random contacts).

Exclusion (being unable to break into an in-group) and growing older are more relevant at pop festivals and the *house* or *dance* festivals where Erwin usually performs. At rock festivals it is the opposite. Older people are treated with respect, perhaps because people have the idea that 'rock will never die'. This in contrast to the idea many critics hold that rock is in fact juvenile and will pass away as people become more 'sensible' (i.e. grow up). The same respect is given to older bands of middle-aged men, like *Slayer* or *Morbid Angel*. It can be related directly to the dimension of 'memory' as personal experience that is far more important at a *metal* event like *FortaRock* than at a pop festival like *Pinkpop*. People enjoy meeting old friends at small non-commercial festivals like *FortaRock*, also because things are changing and more young people are participating. This enhances the status of 'old hands' who have acquaintances made 'at the start'. Thus, the social character of the festival fits nicely with the ideology that *metal* 'is not just a phase'.

DJ Casper stresses that listening to music is like seeing a video clip playing in his head. Music is related to images (see Negus 1992: 66 about music and images). To him this principle guides his performances. When he is playing tracks he tries to convey these images as clearly as possible to the public. This means that he has to transfer the energy he gains from these images to the public. Although he is unclear about the actual images and their relation to energy, his explanation shows that performing means creating a kind of unity with the public. He considers his efforts

successful when people reach a state of 'frenzy'. At such moments, they all share the same conduct, expressing intense feelings.

Here the concept of community looms large. Music and communal behaviour expressing the feelings generated by the music results in shared ecstasy. When people think back on those moments, the communal feeling is experienced as a climax representing an intense moment of belonging. Despite the admission that drugs may play a role, Casper is convinced that music is the central factor generating this communality and sense of belonging. Like Erwin, he believes that people can become totally absorbed by music. On the other hand he stressed that when he performs he always maintains a certain 'distance' between him and the audience. He has to remain alert and avoid making mistakes; the performer as 'manipulator' or conductor. On the one hand he feels 'on the same level' as the public, on the other hand the difference in roles has implications.

This combination, being both conductor and participant, adds a special dimension to the DJ's ability to 'move' people, emotionally as well as physically. It is reminiscent of church services where preachers (often also musical performers) are able to stir up the faithful. It reminds me of the concept of collective effervescence as Durkheim used it. Temporality is characteristic of this communal state. And both Erwin and Casper talked explicitly about working towards building a climax, followed by a 'cooling down' phase. As far as feelings are concerned, Casper and his partner Elvira both emphasize the intensifying relationship between music and state of mind; feeling happy generates music, and playing music increases the happy feeling.

Pim is an older participant, nearing his forties. His interest in song texts is in contrast to what I noticed among the younger public. In my chats with people it struck me that the young ones usually ignore the contents of a song and focus on the music. (Mostly they use lyrics only on social media.) That is why some respondents admitted that they did not find crazy or politically incorrect songs annoying. They tended to think these were not intended seriously. But they did reject bands who openly behaved politically incorrectly, for instance by joining Nazi demonstrations.

Perhaps because of his greater social experience[78], Pim is more sensitive about this aspect. He is aware of the band's perspective as an indication of the authenticity of song contents but he did not confine his diagnosis to the bands' behaviour. He also paid attention to song contents in terms of a band's identity. Anti-Christian lyrics by a satanic band may express a (conventional) rejection of religion. On the other hand, if a 'neutral' or Christian band performed such songs, the meaning may be more authentic, a real protest to (some aspects of) religion. It is also striking that Pim was one of the few *metal* lovers I talked with who definitely related music with religiosity and worldview. Although he was clear and convincing

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[78] Pim was the first to draw my attention to the 'Parental Advisory' sticker sometimes fitted to albums that criticize existential aspects extravagantly.

in his explanation of how music influences one's mood, when he spoke of world view and religiosity (which he feels coincide) he referred to lyrics rather than to music.

My conversation with Steef offered insights into many organizational aspects of festivals. These were important because the organizers had to anticipate the ideas and wishes of the public to make a festival successful. This implies that they must be explicitly aware of these ideas and wishes, or at least able to formulate explicitly dimensions that may remain implicit and unclear to the participants. That is why I ventured to show him my 'labels' directly, hoping that he could formulate what had remained vague in other interviews.

Commonality is recognized as an important motivation for people – including the older ones – to go to a festival and create the 'festival feeling'. But how to create commonality? What conditions must be fulfilled? This aspect engages the organizers. Steef thinks it is essential that people can make easy and frequent contact. This speaks against fostering the emergence of in-groups and for favouring intimacy and locality. The kind of commonality that visitors expect from festivals is related to the idea of a distinction between 'daily life' and life on the festival site, a distinction characterized by 'freedom'. This 'freedom' in turn permits social aspects, such as inversion and acceptance of 'anomalous' behaviour, usually not accepted in ordinary life beyond the festival site.

Steef is well aware of the illusory aspect of this freedom. It is interesting to learn how organizers create, consolidate, but also at certain moments restrict this freedom. Managerial manipulation seems related to the type of festival (according to Steef). Compared to a *pop* public, the *metal* public seems more self-regulating. This notion may be related to the idea that the *metal* public is more self-aware (perhaps because *metal* is a lifestyle that has to be 'defended' against prejudice off the festival site) and more critical of current social conditions. This 'sectarian' aspect of the *metal* public appeared to be recognized and even accepted by the organizers, who dealt with it for instance in the regulations about leaving the site. In their choice of sponsors, management appeared to go along with the characteristics of the festival and their ideas of the public it would attract. The different zones which I recognized were indeed explicit notions held by the organizers, who systematically arranged the site according to a differentiated public, taking into account age as well as interests. Concerning the position of older people, Steef's view differed from my experience at the festival. As organizer he has a keen eye for the future and perhaps that is the reason why he, although acknowledging the special role and relevance of 'old hands', rather focused on the younger public.

The final interview, with Hugo, differed in many respects from the earlier ones. His analytical views seemed to oppose the experiences of my other informants and my field experiences. While the others unanimously consider festivals different from daily life, Hugo felt there is no fundamental difference (notwithstanding his statement that at *Dour Festival* 'it's irrelevant who or what you are' which seems to

contradict his view). With regard to the sense of freedom, his view was also different from what I had noticed in the others, who spoke of their *personal* experiences. I think Hugo's response was so different from the rest because he dealt with the *phenomenon* 'pop festival' in response to being faced with my analytic concepts. Rather than relating his personal experiences, my concepts made him reflect on 'the' festival, and illustrate his views with references to particular festivals. Ultimately my 'labels' resulted in doubt and hesitation. Despite the fundamental differences between his views and the other conversations (and my personal observations) I decided to include it in this chapter, also as a reminder that the researcher's views and concepts (including mine!) can easily influence interpretation.

7.5. *Conclusion*

I began this chapter by asking about the significance of similarities between what people experience at pop or rock festivals and religious experiences. How to interpret the similarities? If we look at festivals from a social anthropological, a sociological, or a Cultural Studies perspective, one may notice significant correspondences between their traits as analyzed in this study and the social-cultural (perhaps also psychological) manifestations and effects of religion, as defined in these disciplines. During the interviews it was not that hard to deduce several of my 'labels' from the informant's narratives. Perhaps that is why researchers with a religious background, who are positively disposed towards a connection between pop or rock music, tend to interpret informants' expressions as direct indications of religious experiences, sometimes even despite explicit rejections by participants.

As said, correspondences are indeed not hard to find. But in my chats with several people at festivals and in my contact with respondents as introduced in this chapter, any suggestions of religious experiences at the festivals usually met with denial, sometimes vehement denial. When I think of my conversation with Hugo – which reminded me of a something that was already haunting me at an early stage of this study, namely the interference of worldviews (2.2) – I cannot but characterize my interpretations as 'impressions', *my* impressions. So, even after occasionally long and intense conversations, I am most reluctant to draw straightforward conclusions, like Sylvan (2002: 42; compare Sylvan 2005: 65) or (more definitely) Jennings (2010) did (Jennings linked his informants' words directly to analytic concepts).

However, I can say something more definite about the differences between the festivals. The interviews made it clear to me that a festival like *FortaRock* offers far more elements relatable to 'religion' than pop festivals. It seems no coincidence that two ardent *FortaRock* fans were also caught in the 'spiritual' spell of *Castlefest*. If I consider what I experienced at the festivals and during the interviews, I think the kind of music and type of performance is decisive. Of course, social dimensions, such as festival size and the composition of the audience have effect on such dimensions

as *memory*, *identity*, *freedom*, or *involvement*. And personal dispositions are undoubtedly relevant to the extent to which people are open for specific aspects.

Therefore, one cannot conclude 'the more the labels apply to a festival, the greater its religious potency' or 'the more likely this festival offers an apt *milieu* for the emergence of religious experiences'. Such a hypothesis seems too plain and almost certainly doomed to underestimate the meaning of experiences by those concerned – participants as well as researchers. Particularly during the interviews I noticed how differently people experienced certain aspects of the festivals.

In the next chapter I join my impressions gained from the academic literature with my impression resulting from the three ethnographic approaches and venture to draw some more definite conclusions and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 8 – Conclusions

8.1. *Introduction: the character of this study*

When I first approached my original research question, whether pop and rock festivals could generate religious experiences, I joined the current trend in identifying pop and rock music with youth and youth culture. Fieldwork experience forced me to discard this 'self-evident' notion.

During my analysis of available literature on the subject, for some time I followed conventional discussions on religion and religiosity, about functional and substantial definitions, and the emergence of new forms of religious expression as a result of the decline of institutional religion. Even then I noticed not only sharp divergences in interpretation, even contradictions, but also – often implicit – the normative presuppositions deeply influencing the approach of several authors. This made me realize how difficult it is to escape interference of the researcher's worldview with his or her interpretation of the worldviews of those under study. I decided to 'escape' the substantivist-functionalist dichotomy by using a functional perspective instrumentally, by characterizing 'indications' (dimensions, signifiers) for a religious *milieu* in terms of shorthand 'labels' (see Appendix, also below: 8.2.3.).

Mainly after reading Stringer's *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (2008) did I fully realize the importance of continuous reflection and introspection. At a very early stage, when I was consulting Grimes' *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (1995), and later on, when I was becoming acquainted with post-modernist methodologies, this reflective tendency was already emerging, but what made me even more alert was Stringer's idea that religious expressions that at first sight seem 'new' should be considered as pre-existing forms that emerge from behind suppressive dominant discourses.

My fieldwork and discussions with participants completed this process and fully revealed the complexity of the subject. The experience confronted me with overt rejections of 'religion', sometimes clad in abundant religious symbolism; with conventional interpretations of religious words and expressions by people who think themselves as absolutely irreligious but who at the same time easily mix expressions of identity and having fun with transcendental and existential notions.

One of the presumptions of my research was that 'religion' is a universal phenomenon. This facilitated my joining Stringer's view that current manifestations of religion should be approached from the perspective of *changing* expressions, rather than from the idea of the emergence of completely new kinds of religiosity. According to Stringer (2008: 112; see Chapter 2) the fundamental layer of religion that 'always' existed is changing and 'transforming itself to meet contemporary requirements'. This idea of transformation fits the anthropological theory that the student of culture change should always be attentive to *continuity* as well (Chapter 1; see below 8.2.3.). In this study I tried to survey such transformations in the

context of today's electronic mass culture, deeply affecting social relations, coping strategies and ideas of well-being and personal development (see also Stringer 2008). The festivals at the centre of my project constitute one aspect of that culture and – as I will indicate below – my findings at some of these festivals may add to the perspective emerging from Stringer's diachronic discussion (2008: 111).

In Chapter 2, I paid special attention to the research problem. It concerned on the one hand, becoming sharply aware of premises possibly underlying the project (such as the popular *paradox* 'God is dead, but religion is more vibrant than ever before'; note the emphasis on rhetoric form). On the other hand, analysis of the research problem deserves attention because of the close relationship between the kind of research problem (the 'self-absorbed mandate', see 2.3.) and the character of the eventual text – in my case marked by a reflective attitude.

The empirical part of the research has been structured as a *triptych.* It consists of three main approaches, continuously fertilizing each other during interpretation, rather than focusing on the corroboration of 'data' like in triangulation (Chapters 5-7). Starting from the statement of the research problem (lack of inside knowledge), I approached festival literature as 'local narratives', rather than mere (historical) information about festivals. My fieldwork – preceded by pilot studies – mainly comprised case studies of several types of pop and rock festivals. In the choice of one case (Castlefest) I permitted myself to be guided by my informants.

Finally, I conducted a series of conversations with various participants. A main problem that emerged while engaging in many casual talks before, during and after the fieldwork period was that people tended to express themselves in ever recurring catchphrases, such as 'I believe only in myself', 'music comforts me', or 'music is my life'. When they used religious words, these often referred to their images (or prejudices) of Christianity. These catchphrases are difficult to interpret. At first sight – because of their conventionality – they seem without individual meaning. But in fact, people were often really trying to express their particular experiences and meanings, only they seemed to lack an apt, idiosyncratic vocabulary. By focusing on various types of respondents (the student, the performer, the organizer, the handicapped) I attempted to reduce the problem by listening to 'conventional' phrases embedded in stories told by people who experienced the festivals from quite different perspectives (Chapter 7). This implied a familiarity with narrative conventions which I tried to achieve through empathic participation during the festivals and by my generic analysis of the festival books.

The character and complexity of this research emerged from the conflict between different theories related to very divergent disciplines (Chapter 1) and the fieldwork experience, which forced me to continuously refine and reinterpret the central concepts. For instance, I started with the idea that 'religiosity' was sharply distinguished from 'religion'; later on, when I joined Stringer's analysis, the concept 'religion' (in the sense he uses the word) regained importance.

This research was a quest to discover the religious potency that pop and rock festivals might hold. At the same time it turned out to become a continuous search for adequate approaches to study this subject. Therefore, I conclude with two sections, one focusing on substantial findings and the other on methodological insights and the approaches tried out or developed in the course of this research, some of which might be useful for future research.

8.2. *Conclusions to the research subject*
In this section I offer some conceptual conclusions and my main conclusion concerning the central question whether pop or rock festivals offer a *milieu* in which religious experiences might emerge.

8.2.1. *The concept of religion*
Besides the concept of religion, this study discusses several terms that indicate supposedly 'new' or 'post-institutional' forms of religion. Concepts like 'religiosity' or 'implicit religion' tend to refer to phenomena (attitudes, experiences, expressions, existential feelings) which may be related to what formerly was understood as (institutionalized) religion.

According to Lynch (2005, see Chapter 3) these concepts usually are linked to a functional perspective. As Chapter 2 explains, ultimately Stringer's concept of religion appeared to be the most adequate to study pop and rock festivals. His concept refers to expressions of belief that are 'unsystematic' (not subject to a well-defined or marked-out discourse). They concern 'situational belief statements', referring to the non-empirical, used at times to cope with everyday problems. These characteristics may lend these expressions the appearance of opportunistic statements, which is perhaps a major reason why several researchers interpret them in terms of insincerity, alienation or false consciousness (Chapter 2).

It struck me particularly that some (mostly religious) authors tend to take seriously the use of Christian symbols by attendees of pop and rock performances in the case of 'negative' references, such as to the devil, or to 'heathen' symbols. In these negative instances the authors think that people use these symbols in earnest. Yet they deny authenticity to expressions concerning 'positive' aspects of Christianity, such as to Jesus, God or representatives of the Church, and consider these references as 'just show' or even blasphemy.

During my research it became clear that people can and do constantly change the meanings they ascribe to the authenticity of (and experience from) performers, performances, and lyrics. Interpretations appeared to be prominently situational and dependent on changing personal or social contexts. What people imagine at one time as *canon* (definitive ideals, norms or values) appears situational in expression as well as in meaning.

A risk of functional approaches is that aspects considered as secular by believers come to form part of the definition of 'religion' as used by scientists, which may add to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. On the other hand, substantive definitions run the risk of ethnocentrism and premature curtailment of the research. We remain blind to expressions of 'Religion But Not as We Know It' (James McGrath 2002; see Chapter 2). The situational perspective requires an openness best reached by the functional approach, notwithstanding its limitations.

This view is confirmed by an analysis executed by Lynch who concluded that the functional approach is the most fruitful way to study the religious dimension of popular culture. He referred to the social, existential, hermeneutic and transcendent functions of popular culture, like 'raves' as 'walking meditation' (Lynch 2005: 29, 32; see also Sylvan 2005 and Stringer 2008: 95-96, 102). In my opinion, a functional interpretation is most fruitful when it is combined with an anthropological approach to religion, focusing on contextually related meanings, on informal aspects, on local language and other ways of textual and verbal expression (the 'lingo'), as well as on agency (the 'coping') and on local performances and categories ('emics').

In this study I developed an inventory of aspects which could be considered indicators for religion, or rather, as signalling elements (the 'labels'; see Appendix). Almost inevitably, when constructing such an inventory, one starts from well-known, 'classical' ideas about religion. Thus, Sylvan (2002: 220) concludes that the cultures of pop and rock music contain 'almost everything for its adherents that a traditional religion would'. Of course, this presents us with at least two problems. How to escape the ethnocentrism discussed at length by Stringer (Chapter 2), and how to assess that 'everything'? I concluded that the 'labels' inspired by Smart's 'dimensions' (Smart 1995, see Chapter 2) and Weinstein's 'signifiers' (5.2.) should be used as attention-drawing indicators and refined during the empirical research. I followed Grimes's dictum, considering labels an 'analytical categorization of phenomena combined with the scholar's empathetic interpolation of his or her own experiences and emotions, [and] systematic introspection' (Grimes 1995: 78, see also 78-82).

8.2.2. *Youth culture and pop or rock festivals*

When surveying the literature about pop music and religion, I gained the impression that many authors still focus too intently on criticizing or validating insights offered by studies of the period when popular mass culture arose as the main characteristic of youth culture. Particularly, theological studies and analyses by representatives of Cultural Studies still focus on that youth culture, resulting in the current idea that pop and rock festivals are mainly a matter of young people (see Walser 1993: xvii).

As indicated above, my fieldwork, executed during 2010 and 2011, made clear that several of these festivals do have a long tradition and are still attended by dedicated participants 'from the first hour', visitors as well as performers. But even

at a 'young' festival like *FortaRock*, nominal history appeared not to be decisive: people created and used their history (footnote 58). It is very important to recognize that older people play specific roles during the festivals. Their behaviour results in particular forms of sociality and enhances the differentiation of the festival site (Chapter 6, 7). They usually have a wider 'existential experience' than younger people, and in particular they represent 'memory' (Chapter 5). Memory is a relevant dimension of religious experience and in the case of the pop and rock festivals makes a major contribution to the iconic status of some festivals. Memory decidedly influences people's behaviour and interpretations and adds to the mythical dimension of some festival histories, helping people to consolidate those histories, and sometimes even helping to represent the festivals from an a-historical perspective. Thus the 'original' ideals, norms and values which according to mythical representation gave rise to the genesis of the festival, can be retained and considered as constituting its identity.

Memory is closely related to recognition. Reliving emotionally through the past (rehearsing the 'memories of youth') strengthens personal identification with the festival and helps to add special significance to collective rituals. The festival books, containing 'historical stories', have an important function in evoking these rituals as performed in the past, thus consolidating their significance in future festivals. Memory may be considered an important condition in creating the *milieu* in which religious experiences may arise or become manifest. Indeed, memory is an essential aspect of religion, also in its traditional sense. Therefore it is surprising that most studies I consulted about the subject of pop and rock music in relation to religion paid no special attention to this dimension, presumably because of their focus on youth culture.

8.2.3. *Pop and rock festivals and religious symbols*
Anti-religious expressions referring to Christian or 'heathen' symbolism may be approached very well from the perspective used by Evelyn Lord in her *Hell Fire Clubs* (2008, see Chapter 1). Anti-religious expressions may betray people's preoccupation with religion and belief in or experience with the non-empirical. The attitudes that moved the members of secret societies in the eighteenth century perfectly match those that drive today's hard rock and *metal* lovers. Particularly, hard rock and *metal* performances abound in the de-sacralisation of religious symbols: for instance projecting the cross upside down and using the inverted pentagram as an item of identification (referring to the devil), as well as inverting religious morals (shocking pictures of promiscuous nuns; dishonouring Jesus).

According to Lord, Hell Fire club members were motivated 'to shock society, cause havoc and first and foremost have a good time'. Nowadays anyone at a hard rock or *metal* festival will recognize the same motives and a similar 'mix of the secular and the profane' (Lord 2008: xx). It is important to be aware that

'blasphemous' expressions play a part in 'having a good time' (see 3.3.2.) and are not only aimed at giving offence, or (certainly the case among competing bands) used to vie against each other. The festivals also offer relaxation, a break from coping with daily circumstances.

Participants emphatically deny that they are engaged in 'religion'; references to the concept of religion usually raised strong resistance. But even those rejections were worded in terms matching religion. For instance, one rejects the idea of heaven or hell, but substitutes this notion with a reference to another supernatural place, as expressed on a printed t-shirt advertised by *Large Pop Merchandising*, 'Fuck hell, I will go to Walhalla' (http://www.large.nl/walhalla--t-shirt/art_166061/). Instead of honouring the Christian God, one praises Wodan.

It is difficult to apply the concept of 'belief' to these ideas, nor offers reference to 'unconscious' religion any clarification (Chapters 1, 2). Indeed, there is an intense preoccupation with religious notions and references to the non-empirical. However, authenticity is difficult to assess. People do not experience symbolism consistently. The meanings they attach to it are situational and statements are unsystematic, referring to the images people have of the most divergent religious discourses. But when we apply the 'labels' to those festivals, one may gain the impression that precisely those festivals which some theologians or religious believers abhor, such as *black* and *death metal* festivals, most closely approach experiences akin to religious experiences.

Participants of those festivals appear to experience performances far more consciously, more intensely than participants at pop festivals. Those rock festivals address a select public; participation requires a higher level of identification. People have to get over the severe prejudices held by 'outsiders', which strengthens the 'in-group' feeling, a sense of belonging that contributes to the rise of *community*. Sometimes it seems as if *metal* lovers act as sects, emphatically displaying their identity to the 'outside world', for instance in their clothing, like representatives of religious denominations do. This might also explain a difference in participation of older people at those festivals compared to pop festivals (see 8.2.1). Organizers are well aware of that self-consciousness (see Chapter 7[79]). What also may be considered telling is that these *metal* fans are capable to *construct* a history in which they really 'believe', or at least to which they (even the young ones: to them the 'old hands' have 'status' and they evoke their respect) attach meaning. It reminds me of religious dominations often being busy constructing an 'epic', meaningful history. The continuity with daily (sub-)cultural life may be related to a critical attitude

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[79] *De Gelderlander* (4 June 2012): 'Fortarock [sic] is a festival for real music lovers. At other music festivals, a large part of the public just lounges about on the grass. At Park Brakkenstein [the site of *FortaRock*] visitors move en masse between the tent and main stage to enjoy all the acts.' The organizers decided to erect two stages, so the acts could follow each other rapidly. An accompanying picture showed mainly older people near the front stage.

towards society that distinguishes participants at rock or *metal* festivals from those at pop festivals.

Notwithstanding all this, in the case of *black* or *death metal* it seems too much to speak of 'religion' (let alone of 'a' religion), in spite of the motto on one participant's t-shirt, 'Music is my religion'. But the correspondences in the just noted experiences and expressions might (next to aspects as 'fun', 'fashion', or 'sphere') explain why preoccupation with religious symbols at hard rock performances is far more prominent than at pop festivals. In particular the aspect of self-consciousness induced me to reject Arnett's idea of *heavy metal* as an expression of adolescent alienation (Arnett 1995).

Rather than considering *heavy metal* as a *substitute* (according to Arnett as a substitute for adolescent manhood rituals that, by the way, is doomed to failure; 1995: 164), my conclusion is that one should study this music and its festivals on their own merit. Therefore I do not consider them as realizing the same functions that formerly institutionalized religions fulfilled. Nor as offering what institutionalized religions did, like Arnett who sees *metal* as offering what 'socialization has failed to provide for' (1995: 16, 24). This negative approach (festivals as a replacement for something that has *disappeared*; as filling a *gap*) reduces the festivals to substitutes for something quite different and runs the risk of misinterpreting the own, peculiar character of the festival, which easily may result in a failure to appreciate (or even in condemning) its specific meanings. Thus, the straight comparison of rock festival values with, for instance, traditional Christian values might easily lead to the conclusion that secular rock is morally inferior and that its solutions to fill the functional gaps left by vanished churches cannot be but illusory. Rather, I propose to consider the festivals as a *milieu* where people gain the *opportunity* to *change* 'religion' in Stringer's sense (2008: 110: the religion that 'has always be present') and *adapt* it 'to meet contemporary requirements' (we may call that 'its religious potential').

To conclude whether the festivals offer an *apt* milieu, I used the *labels* as attention-drawing indicators (2.7.). Sometimes, it crossed my mind that the more labels are applicable to a certain kind of festival, the more the festival's religious potential. Further research might focus on the validity of this assumption. But that is beyond my project, which was not set up as a hypothesis-testing research. However, particularly from my interviews I gained the impression that such a hypothesis would be naïve and that it would be more sensible to try to differentiate the indications in terms of relevance as indicators for religious potential. This leaves room for taking serious the participants' views and experiences. In the end they 'decide' whether they use this potential. For instance like Rick, who consciously combined his existential experiences with what he saw as qualities of the festivals (see 6.2).

On the basis of my research I concluded that some of the pop festivals I studied lack certain aspects (or possess these in a lesser degree), such as the

experience of *communitas* and a reflective, self-conscious attitude, which might be critically relevant to assess the religious potential. Instead, when we consider festivals which do show such aspects (e.g., the spiritual quality in *Castlefest*, or the critical attitude in some types of rock festivals) we may perhaps conclude a 'higher' religious potential. This agrees with remarks by the informants who advised me to attend *Castlefest*. But to discriminate the labels in terms of 'religious significance' (an idea I had at *Castlefest*) was also beyond this project. It would make the labels too substantive and it would transgress the intended instrumental character. Therefore, as in the case of *black* and *death metal* (see above), I again confine my conclusions to an 'impression'. More research, specialized on these genres, is necessary to further substantiate this impression. But what I certainly want to avoid is an impersonal equation such as 'more labels = more religious potential' which neglects the experiences of the people concerned and the meanings they attach to their perceptions and the ways they 'use' these. Such equations tend to reduce the self-consciousness of people to something unconscious.

My research has brought to light that one should always be aware of continuities when studying the application of religious symbols in 'blasphemous' festivals, and when observing supposed major changes. Comparison with, for instance, Lord's analysis of the eighteenth century *Hell Fire Clubs* proved more fruitful than interpretations by the authors who stressed discontinuities (see also Rodman 1999: 38-39). Many normative studies appear to be anachronistic (see also Chapter 1).

8.3. *Conclusions to approaches of the research subject*
In Chapter 1 I referred to how I felt confronted at the beginning of this study by the numerous views from a great variety of disciplines. These views could be totally different and at times plainly contradictory and were based on a wide range of methodical approaches. It struck me that the authors I consulted on pop music and religion usually paid little heed to methodical reflection and introspection. And this while their studies concern a subject in which the researcher's (ethical or esthetical) views may easily influence perception and interpretation of the participant's world.

All this made me hesitant to follow standard procedures for data-collecting studies and made me focus instead on interpretive approaches and post-modern criticism of 'realist tales'. I hope that the extensive methodological discussion in Chapter 4 will be useful to those who study the subject in future. The interest in new developments in methodology was stimulated by Sylvan's pressing conclusion (I would like to quote one more time from the book that, at the start of my research, provided me with so much inspiration):

In a cultural landscape strewn with increasingly strange combinations of the sacred, secular, and profane, we as scholars need to develop theoretical and

methodological tools that allow us to see traces of the spirit in these hybrid forms and bring them into sharp relief and focus. (Sylvan 2002: 220)

The uncertainty and caution with which I formulated my findings partly stems from my study of post-modern views. But it also fits the object of my research. Much of it still has to be explored. To quote Lynch on the study of the relation between popular culture and religion, 'Popular culture may indeed serve certain religious functions within contemporary society, but we still need to develop clearer understandings of the ways and extent to which this happens' (2005: 33). In relation to the choice of research methods, he referred to 'the turn to ethnography', stressing reflexivity (2005: 165). That is why I conclude this study with a discussion of some approaches which I experienced as fruitful. Realizing I was unable to fully implement these, they might be considered suggestions to serve future research, to reach Lynch's 'clearer understandings'.

8.3.1. *The relevance of a spatial approach*

Weinstein's dichotomy front stage – back stage should be supplemented and differentiated. Besides sociological approaches focusing on behaviour, one should also use a spatial approach, paying special attention to the symbolism of the space, the *site* as factor to explain specific behaviour. In this respect I agree with Grimes (1990: 84, on the structure of space), Paul Post (2010), and Sheldrake (2001, on sacred space) who point to the symbolic meaning of sacred and ritual places. By focusing on space I was able to differentiate within back stage as well as the festival site and to connect these various 'sub-spaces' or 'zones' to various kinds of behaviour and particular meanings (Chapter 6).

The spatial approach also helped me to recognize the position of older people at the festivals who (particularly at pop festivals) used to participate mainly in the intermediate and marginal zones of the festival sites. At hard rock and *metal* festivals this was significantly different. Older people participated far more in the front zone near the stage and in the *mosh pit*. This difference could be related with particular qualities of those festivals relevant for my subject (Chapter 6).

8.3.2. *The relevance of a generic approach to print culture*

In Chapter 5 I discussed how a generic approach to the festival books generated vital insights in addition to Weinstein's interpretation of 'print culture'. According to Weinstein the print culture, combined with the acts (festivals), contributes to an idea (illusion) of continuity which gives people relief. My research indicates that studying a specific kind of print culture, the festival books, as a genre may complement this insight.

This approach sheds light on the mythical character of these texts. As myths, they explain (the genesis of the festival) and also contain moral and behavioural standards. The rhetoric of these books suits them well for cursory use, enhancing the 'educational' function Weinstein mentions and particularly to enliven 'memory'. This stylistic aspect seems relevant, because almost everyone I met tried to acquire a copy of the festival book, yet nobody actually read it. People only glanced through it. But because of the specific editing style, this literature proved effective. The form of presentation optimally suited 'fast scanning'.

8.3.3. *The relevance of a musical approach*

Many representatives of the Cultural Studies approach focused too closely on the production–reception dichotomy, overlooking specific aspects of those dimensions, inciting criticism. Thus, Negus (1992) criticized generalizations about 'the music industry'. Concerning the aspect of reception, Bayer's study (2009) comments on the underestimation of the musical aspect because of a focus on production-reception relations. (Chapter 3; compare Walser 1993, who paid particular attention to the music, for instance to the intersection of *heavy metal* and classical music). According to Bayer, certain developments in *heavy metal* can only be understood when focusing on the character of the music. In this study I also referred to Klomp's (2009, 2011) use of the concept of sound and its implications.

Although I mainly studied performances and related (ritual) behaviour and experiences, I think further research should also pay attention to the music and apply musicological insights. Usually, this requires musical ability, which I lack. To me the particular dimension of music in relation with performance appeared most strongly when I was listening to acts from behind the fence. Outside the festival site one cannot see what is going on and, for instance in the case of *FortaRock*, one may hear a lot of 'noise', but it is impossible to participate in the performances. Outside, music loses much of its meaning, even if one can understand the lyrics, and is reduced to noise. But inside, on the other side of the fence, music contributes decisively to the meanings people attach to a performance (Middleton 1990; see also Chapter 7). The relation between specific qualities of music and their effects, for instance on the emotional experiences of people, had to remain beyond my scope.

8.3.4. *The relevance of the informant as 'guide' to develop research strategy*

Because it was impossible to conduct extensive interviews during performances, I had to arrange those for after the festivals, thus missing the immediate experience, the on-the-spot engagement (Chapter 4). At first I thought I would employ the classic elicitation method of photographs (selected by the researcher according to specific procedures) to stir the informant's imagination. This well-chosen technique

considers the researcher as an active, creative agent and the informant as a passive respondent.

This is a current methodological perspective, particularly in 'modern' science, where the focus is on the 'clever' researcher. It is the target of much post-modern criticism, accusing 'modern' and 'modernist' science of arrogance. But in my research there was more; changing my view of 'informants' opened new perspectives. During the interviews the classic elicitation technique proved inadequate. The informants immediately proposed *their* means to evoke and elicit concrete experiences. This encouraged me to study a variety of internet means that these people were using all the time. Apart from this technical shift, this experience made me aware of the importance to 'emancipate' the informant, to consider him or her an assistant in designing research strategies, rather than merely as a 'source of information'.

Therefore, I preferred to use the concept of 'conversation' rather than 'interview', at the same time stressing the importance of the narrative dimension. The kind of cooperation with my partners-in-conversation enhanced engagement, empathy and also contributed much to the understanding of their narratives in which electronic representations play a major role.

I am aware that 'doubt', particularly in 'final conclusions' is a problem in modern science. But, as stated in the introduction to this study (1.8), I consciously joined post-modern criticism of the 'certainty' which modern science pretends to offer. Precisely because I discovered in much of the literature I consulted how easily researchers' ideas interfere with their interpretation of the ideas of others (the interference of worldviews) I thought it wise to refrain from pertinent conclusions and instead confine myself to suggestions, and stress their provisional character.

This research was a real quest: to gradually obtain a grip on insights generated by representatives of very different disciplines, to evaluate various approaches and eventually make choices out of these. But most of all, to enter new worlds, to get through to what is going on in the lives and experiences of those who enjoy pop and rock festivals; to explore their worldviews. In the end, the methodical 'risk' of interference between the researcher's and the informants' worldviews proved very informative.

Perhaps, in the end this project, initially aiming at clarifying a certain subject, eventually rather turned into a project to find my way in a domain governed by many discourses. At times opposing one another, but always affecting the researcher's personal views. I hope that my methodological itinerary can offer some inspiration to those who also want to implement Sylvan's and Lynch's calls. Ultimately I feel this research has been a journey into myself adding to my understanding of what the rock music I love so much means in my life.

Appendix – The labels

Several times I stressed the pragmatic, instrumental nature of the 'dimensions' (Smart, see above, 2.7), 'signifiers' (Weinstein, 5.2), or, as I call them, 'labels'. As in a stockroom (to put it prosaically), one starts with a few labels to stick on various objects, increasing the amount of labels when new objects enter the inventory. In more or less the same way I started the current set of labels, always prepared to add new ones whenever new phenomena drew my attention.

On the one hand, the labels serve to draw attention to specific characteristics of 'objects' (the festivals), to 'recognize' main aspects of what one is looking for (see above, 6.1. Grimes's *dictum* 'Nothing makes a forest appear to be lumber except the carpenter's eye'). On the other hand, the possibility of expanding the amount labels not only helped one to refine concepts – and label new ones when one is struck by the relevance a new dimension – but, to me, it also seemed in line with my aim to be open to 'the unexpected'. For instance, when I went to the festivals I discovered not only the importance of listening to older people, but also the great importance of festival histories as experienced by the public, the organizers, and performers. This induced me to introduce the label 'memory', a concept that had not crossed my mind when I began the research, not even during the theoretical orientation.

In the literature I consulted on religion and pop or rock music, the concept of 'memory' popped up nowhere as a central notion, despite its importance in religion (Sheldrake 2001). Considered from the oft-occurring identification of pop music – with youth culture (criticized in this study) this dimension was truly 'unexpected' until I participated in the festivals, approaching the scene 'from the inside'.

At first, when I began thinking about formulating the 'labels', I expected that I could use them as indications to assess the religious potency of festivals. Implicitly perhaps, the hypothesis, 'the more labels are applicable to a particular festival, the more likely the festival offers an apt *milieu* for the emergence of religious experiences' slumbered in my mind (at least it was never part of an explicit research strategy; this study was never conceived as a hypothesis-testing one). But all the time, I was very aware that such an approach might be considered a methodological weakness. It could easily stimulate the tendency to look uncritically, to see what one *wants* to see.

During my reading of the festival books and during the fieldwork I tried to counterbalance this possible weakness with constant methodological reflection. And if ever the 'hypothesis' could gain substance, I discovered in the interviews that the idea was absolutely naïve. If we focus on religious experiences, the relationship between 'indicators' of a favourable *milieu* for the emergence of religious experiences and personal characteristics and circumstances is too complex to suggest such a direct, univocal connection. Therefore again: these labels should be seen only as instruments, attention-drawing concepts, nothing more.

Reading 12: The labels

1.   identity (individual – collective)
2.   social structure (formal/informal rules)
3.   conventionality/creativity
4.   communitas
5.   solidarity and commitment
6.   community (continuation/intensification of or contrast with normal life)
7.   'fan culture' > related to mimesis (imitating 'heroes') and charisma
8.   show in relation to participation > relationship performers-public
9.   inclusion and exclusion/recognition and belonging (tolerance,
      solidarity –   but also relatively easy exclusion; recognition resulting in
      a feeling of unity)
10.   grades of participation > three 'zones': mosh pit, 'intermediate zone',   'marginal
      zone' > core activities (musical performance) versus
      marginal   activities and   behaviour in between > 'site-focused' approaches
      adding to   behavioural ones
11.   transcendence
12.   memory > related to: narrative (language), space, belonging, social
      structure   and tradition
13.   freedom, *fête*
14.   inversion (carnival traits, anomalies)
15.   authenticity > related to: communication, mediation or belief (e.g., as   understood
      by Negus 1992)
16.   decorum
17.   ritual (Ronald Grimes, 1994)
18.   the non-empirical references to/symbolization of (Stringer 2008)

Verborgen in de muziek. Een benadering van religieuze ervaring en pop- of rockfestivals.
Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

In deze studie, getiteld *Hidden in Music. An Approach to Religious Experience and Pop or Rock Festivals* onderzocht ik de vraag of pop en rockfestivals een milieu vormen, waarin (nieuwe) religieuze verschijningsvormen kunnen opbloeien. Die vraag houdt verband met een verschijnsel dat de aandacht van vele wetenschappers uit uiteenlopende disciplines kreeg: de sterke afname van praktiserende gelovigen in onze westerse samenleving. Het idee is dat mensen altijd behoefte hebben aan 'religie' en dat waar zij geïnstitutionaliseerde kerken de rug toe keren, zij toch op andere wijzen die behoefte zoeken te vervullen. Dat zou resulteren in nieuwe vormen van religie, of in religie-achtige verschijnselen (religiositeit), of zelfs in uitingen die op het eerste gezicht ver van conventionele religieuze manifestaties af lijken te liggen. De mensen zouden dan zelf ontkennen dat het om 'religie' gaat, maar de wetenschapper weet wel beter: die ontdekt 'verborgen', 'onbewuste', of 'impliciete' religie. In de loop van het onderzoek heb ik het uitgangspunt heroverwogen. Het idee dat religie, na het sluiten van kerken, in andere vormen zou opduiken, kan een tendens in de hand werken om die andere vormen, in dit geval popmuziek, te zien als *substituut*. Dat werkt *reductie* in de hand waardoor het eigene van die andere vormen onderbelicht blijft (8.3.3.) .

De studie komt voort uit een breder project van de afdeling Theologie van de *Fontys* Hogeschool en richt zich vooral op de Praktische Theologie en Levensbeschouwing. Een belangrijk deel van de studie is gericht op de verkenning van methodologische kwesties die samenhangen met het onderzoek naar religieuze beleving binnen genoemde disciplinaire velden. Daarom is het onderzoek in de ondertitel getypeerd als 'een benadering': het gaat om een benadering die enerzijds aansluit op het onderzoek van pop- en rockmuziek en religie binnen genoemde disciplines en die anderzijds diepgaand reflecteert op dat onderzoek. Met deze aanpak, die sterk is geïnspireerd door debatten in de Culturele Antropologie, maar die ook in andere disciplines aan belang lijkt te winnen, hoop ik een bijdrage te leveren aan het onderzoek rond pop muziek en religie. Mijn studie is een pleidooi voor reflectieve etnografie naast de gebruikelijke opvatting van etnografie als onderzoekstechniek.

Na een eerste kennismaking met het studieveld viel mij de grote diversiteit aan visies op, visies die niet zelden op belangrijke punten verschilden of soms zelfs regelrecht contradictoir waren. Ook de benaderingen liepen sterk uiteen: van onverhuld normatieve tot (ogenschijnlijk) neutrale. Al snel bleek ik geconfronteerd, niet alleen met verschillende wetenschappelijks zienswijzen, maar ook met uiteenlopende disciplinaire tradities, waarin bepaalde vormen van denken bestonden, die voor mij – met een achtergrond van religiestudies en antropologie – vreemd waren. Waarschijnlijk dat mij daarom bepaalde aspecten opvielen, zoals de neiging om geïnstitutionaliseerde religie te verbinden met collectieven van 'volgzame' gelovigen en religiositeit met kritische individuen, die hun eigen weg zoeken – en vinden. Ook was het interessant te constateren dat veel van de geraadpleegde literatuur over het 'verdwijnen' van kerkelijke instellingen nadruk legde op verandering en nauwelijks

oog had voor continuïteit. Vooral viel mij op hoe gemakkelijk het wereldbeeld van onderzoekers (nauw verweven met hun disciplinaire cultuur; met specifieke *discoursen*) interfereerde met het wereldbeeld (de religieuze beleving) dat zij meenden aan te treffen bij degenen die onderwerp van hun onderzoek waren.

Wat in het begin een nadeel leek, mijn onbekendheid met diverse disciplinaire tradities, bleek bij nader inzien niet ongelukkig: de confrontatie zette mij aan tot reflectie en introspectie die tot uitdrukking zijn gekomen in een speciale aandacht voor methodologische kwesties (hoofdstuk 4). Het is werkelijk opvallend dat onderzoekers die zich richten op wat er bij anderen (mensen met vaak totaal andere sociale en culturele achtergronden) in het diepst van hun wezen omgaat, over het algemeen maar weinig methodologische reflectie aan de dag leggen. Ik heb het hier niet alleen over (soms gezaghebbende) auteurs die in feite slechts met moralistische polemieken bezig waren. Ook auteurs van vele serieuze studies die ik raadpleegde leken methodologische problemen te onderschatten. Zo is de titel van mijn studie geïnspireerd door Robin Sylvan, die in zijn *Traces of the Spirit* (2002) evenals in zijn *Trance Formation* (2005) – ondanks zijn nadruk op ervaringen 'van binnenuit' – toch vaak tot '*face value*'-conclusies komt, zonder zijn eigen positie in de interpretaties methodologisch diepgaand te doordenken.

Deze en andere ervaringen hebben mij ertoe gebracht een vooral reflectieve benadering te kiezen, waarbij ik veel heb opgestoken van het 'writing culture' debat en van auteurs als Ronald Grimes, Paul Stoller of Michael Jackson. Zij schenken nadrukkelijk aandacht aan de rol van de onderzoeker in het onderzoeksproces, bijvoorbeeld hoe deze in een tekst een werkelijkheid maakt, eerder dan 'de' werkelijkheid weer te geven (constructie of *re*-presentatie, eerder dan presentatie). Daarnaast wordt aandacht besteed aan een benadering die de kennistheoretische betekenis van lichamelijke en emotionele ervaringen onderkent. Persoonlijke ervaringen 'in het veld' kunnen wezenlijk bijdragen tot het begrijpen van 'de ander'.

Het eerste hoofdstuk biedt niet alleen een kennismaking met het onderwerp (religieuze ervaringen die mensen zouden kunnen opdoen tijdens pop en rock festivals), maar toont ook mijn reacties op de kennismaking met uiteenlopende disciplinaire vertogen.
In het tweede en derde hoofdstuk heb ik getracht meer 'greep' te krijgen op centrale begrippen: religie en popmuziek. Ik behandel literatuur over de (mogelijke) relaties tussen die twee en tast verschillende benaderingen af. Was ik eerst geboeid door ideeën over nieuwe religie-achtige verschijnselen die buiten geïnstitutionaliseerde religies zouden ontstaan, mijn verkenning van de literatuur bracht mij er uiteindelijk toe om te opteren voor Stringer's religie-concept dat mij voor deze specifieke studie het meest geschikt leek. Stringer meent dat men niet van 'nieuwe' vormen van religie zou moeten spreken, maar dat wat men ziet als nieuwe vormen, in feite religieuze uitingen zijn die altijd al hebben bestaan. Vormen die nu aan de oppervlakte komen, nu ze niet langer door dominante religieuze vertogen worden verdrongen. Het gaat hem om wat 'gewone mensen' als religieus zien. Hun voorstellingen blijken vaak onsystematisch, waardoor ze vanuit geïnstitutionaliseerde religies gediscrimineerd worden ('bijgeloof'). Ze zijn

berekenend ('coping'), situationeel en kunnen heel inconsistent zijn. Daarom benadrukken sommige onderzoekers het opportunisme dat in contrast zou staan tot de meer principiële kant van gevestigde religies. Ook wijst Stringer op de gerichtheid op het niet-empirische. Allemaal aspecten die de onderzoeker van pop en rock festivals niet vreemd voorkomen. Zo bevatten rock en *metal* veel verwijzingen naar de duivel, naar archaïsche goden, e.d. Voorstellingen die mensen naar behoefte al dan niet serieus lijken te nemen. Onderzoekers die dan spreken van opportunisme of van vervreemding, miskennen de betekenis die deze voorstellingen voor betrokkenen kunnen hebben. Zoals geïnstitutionaliseerde religies de betekenis van 'volksgeloof' of 'bijgeloof' voor mensen in het alledaagse leven miskenden.

De verkenning van literatuur over pop en rock toonde ook veel etnocentrismen en normatieve opvattingen, niet zelden ingegeven door esthetische overwegingen of romantisering van de volksmuziek. Daarnaast bleken bepaalde benaderingen, zoals die van de *Cultural Studies* vooral gericht op de relatie productie-receptie. De muziek zelf bleef daardoor onderbelicht.

Hier bleek met name de studie van Mirella Klomp (*The Sound of Worship* 2009, 2011) inspirerend. Niet alleen gaf ze aan dat gangbare benaderingen veelal uitgaan van een beperkte opvatting over muziek, maar ook dat ons wereldbeeld doordrongen is van een dichotomie hoog-laag, die aanzet tot evaluaties gelieerd aan contrasten als geest-lichaam of elitair-vulgair. Ook wijst Klomp erop dat de westerse wetenschappelijke visie sensorisch eenzijdig is, waardoor een holistische studie van een religieuze ervaring van muziek wordt gehinderd. Die opvatting vond ik ook terug bij Paul Stoller die in zijn *The Taste of Ethnographic Things* (1989) laat zien hoe de westerse waarneming steeds meer verengde tot het visuele en hij bepleit een 'anthropology of the senses'. Deze onderzoekers benadrukken ook het belang van lichamelijke ervaring. Klomp bepleit een niet-hiërarchische benadering van 'sound', waarbij het lichaam en alle zintuigen als relevant voor de muzikale ervaring worden beschouwd.

Die benadering maakt het mogelijk om aspecten van de pop muziek – die lange tijd (vanuit de dichotomie hoog-laag) op denigrerende wijze werden getypeerd – als betekenisvol voor betrokkenen te zien en ze te interpreteren in termen van creativiteit, eerder dan (zoals voorheen) als factoren voor vervreemding of illusies. De verkenning van de literatuur maakte duidelijk dat het naïef zou zijn om te streven naar een bruikbare definitie van religie waartegen ervaringen tijdens festivals direct konden worden afgezet. Vooral omdat het mij te doen was om ook 'verborgen' aspecten, uitingen die vanuit gangbare religie-concepten over het hoofd gezien zouden worden. Stringer's religie-begrip bood een belangrijke oriëntatiemogelijkheid, maar de aspecten die hij noemt zouden als attenderende noties te beperkt kunnen zijn.

Daarom heb ik, geïnspireerd door Ninian Smart en Ronald Grimes uit de literatuur een aantal betekenisvolle aanduidingen afgeleid. Deze zouden mij tijdens mijn veldwerk richting moeten geven en ze zouden tevens moeten kunnen worden aangevuld, als daar aanleiding voor bleek. Deze 'labels', zoals ik ze noemde om het instrumentele karakter ervan te onderstrepen, zouden aanwijzingen kunnen geven voor de religieuze potentie van pop of rock festivals. Maar een hypothese als 'hoe meer van die aspecten in een festival worden aangetroffen, hoe meer het festival

een geschikt milieu is om tot religieuze ervaringen te komen', leek mij naïef. Al was het maar dat dan die aanduidingen te substantieel zouden worden opgevat. Maar de labels bleken nuttig om aspecten die betrokkenen als betekenisvol ervoeren en die tevens relevante indicaties voor religie (in de zin van Stringer) konden zijn, op het spoor te komen. Zo ontdekte ik tijdens mijn veldwerk dat de gangbare identificatie van pop en rock met jeugdcultuur ongelukkig was: ze deed het belang van ouderen over het hoofd zien en daarmee van ervaringen die voor betrokkenen relevant bleken en die tevens nauw met religie verbonden zouden kunnen zijn. Mijn focus op oudere deelnemers bracht mij op het spoor van 'memory': de betekenis van traditie, van nostalgie en gehechtheid aan het verleden. Die dimensie bleek ook prominent in de festival-boeken. Een genre-analyse daarvan, waarbij de boeken werden benaderd als verhalen *van* participanten *voor* participanten, maakte duidelijk dat het niet om historiografische bronnen gaat, maar om mythen die het historische met het normatieve verenigen. Ook bleek dat mensen tijdens een vrijwel historie-loos festival zelf betekenisvolle historie construeerden. Na veldwerk en etnografische interviews konden de labels dienst doen om tussen de festivals te differentiëren en kreeg ik de indruk dat het rock en *metal* festival dat ik bezocht het dichtst bij een 'milieu waarin religieuze ervaringen kunnen opkomen' kwamen.

Tijdens het veldwerk bezocht ik uiteenlopende festivals, variërend van commerciële pop tot ideologisch geïnitieerde *hard rock*. Ik lette op gedragingen, maar ook op ruimtelijke differentiatie van activiteiten en de betekenissen die mensen aan plekken (*sites*) toekenden en hoe hun gedrag en betekenisgeving daarmee verbonden was.

Omdat interviews ter plekke niet mogelijk waren (het oorverdovend geluid, om maar één factor te noemen), moesten de interviews buiten de festivals worden afgenomen. Omdat het mij vooral om ervaringen van uitvoeringen (*performances*) te doen was, trachtte ik met behulp van de klassieke foto-elicitatie techniek mensen weer in de sfeer van het festival te krijgen. Maar het pakte anders uit: betrokkenen namen het initiatief van mij over en met behulp van *social media* herbeleefden zij *hun* festival. Daarom konden de interviews als een extensie van het veld worden beschouwd. Weliswaar waren de ervaringen waarin de 'informanten' mij lieten delen selecties, maar het waren *hun* selecties van het festival zoals *zij* het beleefden.

De genre-analyse van de festival-boeken (hoofdstuk 5), het verslag van het veldwerk (hoofdstuk 6) en de conversaties (hoofdstuk 7, de term 'conversaties' leek mij geschikter dan 'interviews' waarbij de onderzoeker als actief en de 'respondent' als passief, slechts reagerend wordt gezien) heb ik beschouwd als een drieluik. Bij deze metafoor denk ik aan een telkens veranderend totaalbeeld, wanneer een van de luiken wordt verdraaid. Op een gelijkende wijze hebben zich mijn impressies gevormd waarbij de indrukken, opgedaan via deze drie strategieën, als het resultaat van hun vervlechting kan worden beschouwd.

In hoofdstuk 8 heb ik mijn impressies gebundeld in een aantal conclusies. Sommige daarvan hebben betrekking op het onderwerp. Maar ik heb ook speciale aandacht besteed aan bevindingen die betrekking hebben op de *benadering* van het onderwerp. Ik hoop dat met name die laatste van nut kunnen zijn voor onderzoekers

die zich in de toekomst willen wijden aan verdere studie van mogelijke relaties tussen religieuze ervaringen en (pop of rock) muziek.

Wat in aanvang leek op een empirisch onderzoek, – waarbij ik gericht met behulp van gangbare onderzoekstechnieken zicht zou proberen te krijgen op een wijze waarop jongeren mogelijk de leemte konden opvullen die verdwijnende religieuze kaders achterlieten – bleek vooral een zoektocht om grip te krijgen op inzichten vanuit heel verschillende disciplines en naar mogelijkheden om verschillende benaderingen te evalueren en keuzes te maken. Dat heeft ertoe geleid dat ik teruggekomen ben op bepaalde visies die in het begin vanzelfsprekend leken, en oorspronkelijk gemeden wegen alsnog ben gegaan. Zo leek de substitutie-gedachte heel aannemelijk: mensen kunnen of willen niet meer naar de kerk, wel, dan beleven ze hun religie ergens anders en op een andere manier. Het festival als *replacement* voor de kerk. Zo'n benadering neigt ertoe festivals te zien als ('slechts') substituut van iets heel anders, waardoor het risico ontstaat dat de eigenheid van het festival verloren gaat. En omdat men die specifieke kwaliteiten van het festival (en met name van de muziek) uit het oog verliest, wordt het bijna onmogelijk goed zicht te krijgen op de betekenis(sen) die het festival voor betrokkenen heeft. Op overeenkomstige wijze heb ik Stringer's kritiek op de voorstelling van 'nieuwe religieuze vormen' ervaren als *eye-opener*. Die voorstelling leek zo vanzelfsprekend en daarmee een begrip als 'religiositeit' gerechtvaardigd. Maar zo'n begrip (en meer nog een notie als 'onbewuste religie') kon gemakkelijk, zoals Stringer betoogt, de continuïteit-in-verandering van religie miskennen. Het geeft geen zicht op de continuïteit van de *underlying religious sensibility* die onder het dominante religieuze discours was verborgen; op de continuïteit van de elementaire of primaire vorm van religie waarop alle religieuze vormen stoelen. Het was vooral door postmoderne benaderingen en kritische analyses van Grimes en Stringer dat ik de in soms prettige retoriek gegoten vooronderstellingen (en vooroordelen) leerde te onderkennen. En omdat ik steeds meer doordrongen werd van het idee dat het wereldbeeld van onderzoekers vooral bij een onderwerp als het mijne maar al te gemakkelijk – en onmerkbaar – doorklinkt in de wijze waarop zij (zich) het wereldbeeld van anderen voorstellen, werd mijn onderzoek uiteindelijk ook een zoektocht naar mijzelf, naar waarom de rockmuziek waar ik op gesteld ben, zoveel voor mij betekent.

Summary

In this study, entitled *Hidden in Music; An Approach to Religious Experience and Pop or Rock Festivals*, I studied the question whether these festivals offer a *milieu* in which (new) religious expressions might come to the fore. The question is related to the generally accepted view that the downfall of institutionalized religion will result in alternative religious expressions springing up. These might be very different from conventional forms and at first sight might not be recognizable as being essentially 'religious'. Even the participants in these events themselves (the people under study) could emphatically deny there being any relation with 'religion'. These kinds of 'religious forms' thus could very well remain unnoticed as such both by researchers and by participants. In theological studies or in studies conducted within the framework of philosophies of life and focusing on the subject of popular music, these new forms of religious expression have been variously referred to as 'unconscious religion', 'implicit religion' or 'religiosity'.

However, the idea that religion, after the closing down of churches, may appear in new forms – in this case in the form of pop or rock festivals – may stimulate a tendency to consider these festivals as 'substitutes', with the risk of neglecting the particular character of the festivals themselves. Besides, according to Stringer (2008), the notion of there being 'new' forms of religion may (easily) result in overlooking continuities. He suggests that these 'new' forms of religiosity may in fact be expressions of a religious 'layer' that has always existed, but that is now surfacing because it is no longer being suppressed by dominant discourses. In this study, I follow Stringer's situational theory and adopt his concept of religion, pointing at inconsistency, coping and the non-empirical (see 2.8.2.).

Because of the fact – noted in various studies on religion and pop music or culture – that researchers' worldviews can easily interfere with the worldviews they think they notice among participants in these new forms of religion, I believe that reflection and introspection are imperative in researching the issue. To preclude any possible interference of this kind, I consulted various treatises on interpretive and reflective ethnography, which gradually came to characterize my approach. As a result ample attention is paid to methodological aspects to offer suggestions to those theologians and students of philosophies of life who want to engage in further study of the subject. This project is a plea for reflective ethnography *to supplement* ethnography as a research technique.

An initial survey of the field showed a broad variety of views and opinions on the subject of religion and popular music or culture, many of them being contrasting and at times even contradicting views. Many authors approached the subject 'from the outside', for instance by offering adult views on youth culture. They also tended

to start from implicit presuppositions, worded in naturalistic metaphors, paradoxes or other stylistic figures that at first sight seem convincing. In this study, several of these presuppositions are analyzed and criticized. One of these concerns the almost self-evident equation of pop/rock with youth and youth culture, which fails to pay due attention to older participants. Or, to mention another example, lumping together all approaches focusing on 'new' forms of religion (appearing after the downfall of institutionalized religion) as tending to stress creativity and individuality and contrasting them with traditional religious expressions, equally lumped together as being characterized by docile believers. The opposition 'past' *versus* 'now' (or 'future') turned out to result in a series of oppositions that affect observations.

The first chapter of this study offers impressions of my first survey of various disciplinary discourses. In the second and third chapters, I discuss the central notions of religion and pop or rock music. Chapter four contains a methodological essay followed by three chapters, each presenting an aspect of the empirical research: a generic analysis of festival books (considered as texts by participants for participants, containing their 'stories'; their narratives); the fieldwork and the interviews. The final chapter offers substantial and methodical conclusions.

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Naast mijn studie Religiewetenschappen aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, een studie die voor een groot deel ook Culturele Antropologie omvatte, heb ik een aantal vakken gevolgd aan het Instituut voor Talen en Culturen van het Islamitische Midden Oosten (Universiteit van Leiden), waaronder Islamitisch recht I en II. Arabisch voor beginners heb ik in Nijmegen afgerond.
Gedurende 2006 was ik parttime junioronderzoeker bij het Instituut der Religiestudies van de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, leerstoelgroep Godsdienstwetenschappen (prof. dr. G.A. Wiegers).
Alvorens in 2008 aan dit promotieproject te beginnen heb ik een aantal jaren bij uitgeverij Damon gewerkt.