Theory and Practice of Authenticity in Global Cultural Production

Subproject B: Musical Modes of Authenticity

Ethnomusicology has a longstanding tradition of recognizing “authenticity” as a crucial yet highly contradictory buzzword within various contemporary musical contexts. Examinations of the concept range from the construction of “authentic” musical traditions within the national movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the individualistic employment of the term within blues, jazz or rock and folk music movements towards the usage within the different realms of migrant contexts and its iconization within the western-global world music spheres. However, while the issue of authenticity is prominent within ethnomusicological and popular music literature, subproject B’s research on tropes of authenticity that systematically combine practical knowledge with a theoretical reflection constitutes a novelty. Profiting from the interdisciplinary setting of the over-all project, the subproject adapts the shared research questions as follows:

— How is the notion of “authenticity” constructed within a specific musical context? Can “musical authenticity” be defined at all? Are there central, recurring — and culture-transgressing — core elements and reference points? How far do these differ or overlap with other forms of art?
— How does the trope of authenticity affect the performance and perception of music which is a time-based and, thus, a highly flexible art form — e.g. within a national context and the music industry? And what is the impact of the various authenticity concepts on the changing social usage of music?
— How are notions of musical authenticity altered, translated, and challenged within the context of changing socio-political spheres of the modern globalized context?
— Which role does music play within broader communal authentification processes? Is the perception of “authentic music” indicative of a majority-minority dichotomy, e.g. in a migrant context?
— To what extent does the concept of musical authenticity become instrumentalized — and to what means?

As the concept of authenticity has also become a central issue within numerous music revival movements that emerged after the Second World War, subproject B primarily analyzes the pragmatic relevance and utility of the concept within two specific national music revival contexts. DOCTORAL PROJECT I (Lea Hagmann) is concerned with how notions of authenticity play out in the contemporary folk music revival in Cornwall (GB). The affiliated DOCTORAL PROJECT II (Theresa Beyer) takes a look at discussions centering on Swiss folk music, especially gendered “authentic” appearances.

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