Creative achievement has been explained as a mysterious force issuing from a deity, or, in the case of artistic creation, from the intuitive "genius" of the human mind. More recently it has been demystified and theorised as a mechanism, ranging from materialist accounts of evolution in science to theoretical reflections on art and culture as the product of complex cultural systems. Such systems theories, as applied to popular music, are examined in this article. Henri Bergson's views are used to argue that neither model (from systems theory nor the genius model) is adequate, because both assume that "all is given"—either that there is a first cause or author, or that phenomena can be adequately understood as determined by a set of mechanical laws that arise from scientific observation. What both accounts omit, according to Bergson, is *time*. Time means that all is not given: the future is unknown, which is both frightening (because human knowledge is not absolute) and exciting, because it makes novelty possible. Rather than understanding the world in terms of fixed, eternal truths, Bergson argued for the primacy of change and difference; this is one with his insistence on time, or as he called it, *duration*. Duration is not clock time, divisible, measurable, linear, predictable, spatial; but more like time as experienced, yet not reducible to experience. Rather it is a way of linking "psychical existence" or "psychical life" to continuous, indivisible, open-ended processes of change. Bergson proposed that creativity is a fundamental life process, and that human creativity provides the best means to participate in, if not understand, life. Creativity is a differentiating movement in time. Examples discussed include research questions that typically frame practical music projects at the postgraduate level, framed in terms of genre analysis. Of clear importance to the study of all levels of creativity, from the mundane to the eminent, is that analytical questions are more suitable to assess finished work than work in process.