

## If Walls Could Talk: Politics, Sound, Otherness

Se as Paredes Falassem: Política, Som, Alteridade

Alberto Simonetti  
Universidade de Perugia, Italia

### Resumo

This paper relates the philosophical theme of the wall and barriers with musicality. In various ages, music has had a progressive political significance, whereas the contemporary world expresses its regressive nature in commercial musical forms and sound marketing. The closed and obsessive forms of the technological universe appear to be universes of expressive freedom while, on the contrary, the language of harmonic forms has become impoverished and is often characterized by repetitive rhythms with strong identity repercussions. For this reason, the present essay analyses the theme of the wall referring to music as an expressive and artistic form born for the community and in itself open. Often today, though, music is used for marketing strategies or as a vehicle for racial suprematism, discrimination, xenophobia. Starting from the analysis of common idioms such as “if walls could speak” or “walls have ears too” this paper focuses on the difference between music used as a democracy/open space and as an instrument for a strong and closed identity regression.

**Palavras-chaves:** Barriers. Musicology. Political-critical philosophy. Discrimination. Identity. Contemporary.

### Abstract

Este artigo relaciona o tema filosófico do muro e barreiras com a musicalidade. Em várias épocas, a música teve um significado político progressista, enquanto o mundo contemporâneo expressa sua natureza regressiva em formas musicais comerciais e marketing sonoro. As formas fechadas e obsessivas do universo tecnológico parecem ser universos de liberdade expressiva enquanto, pelo contrário, a linguagem das formas harmônicas empobreceu-se e caracteriza-se muitas vezes por ritmos repetitivos com fortes repercussões identitárias. Por esta razão, o presente ensaio analisa o tema do muro referindo-se à música como forma expressiva e artística nascida para a comunidade e em si aberta. Muitas vezes hoje, porém, a música é usada para estratégias de marketing ou como veículo para supremacia racial, discriminação, xenofobia. Partindo da análise de expressões idiomáticas comuns como “se as paredes falassem” ou “as paredes também tivessem ouvidos”, este artigo centra-se na diferença entre a música utilizada como democracia/espço aberto e como instrumento de regressão identitária forte e fechada.

**Keywords:** Barreiras. Musicologia. Filosofia político-crítica. Discriminação. Identidade. Contemporaneidade.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Many times, we hear the saying: “If walls could talk”. In fact, first of all, they listen. The concrete and abstract wall, real and virtual, today becomes the paradigm of the violent and regressive return of the ignoble separation between living beings based on race, political ideas, gender, ability /disability, color. Can the screeching sound of the outcries for a more equal society be interpreted in music? Can music clear the barriers? Is there a political nature of music?

Musical forms have taken on different determinations in the course of the history of melodic development. The musical pieces in closed form have the characteristics of repetition and autonomy with respect to the more general work. The musical aria or the duets and trios or the choir represent this closure. In a more general sense, referring to politics, the repetition of the same identity and the obsession with the myth of traditions generate a closed civil form as they build a wall without openings, as opposed to the innovative capacity of music and every other art to erase barriers. The autonomy in musical works directed by the present aria has two characteristics: one of an aesthetic type because the composer concentrates on it with a greater musical incisiveness, closer to a melody that suits the human ear. Starting from another point of view, this typology becomes almost a hymn, an idiomatic form, the most awaited passage by the public.

## 2 SOUND BARRIERS

Another connection between music and the symbolism of the *wall* is expressed by John Street with the concept of *sound barriers* explaining that censorship has not only silenced musical art but authoritatively selected “official music”<sup>1</sup>. Starting from Plato, music resounded as cosmic harmony on the plain of truth in the Ilisso river. It passes through the vocal representations of Gregorian and Ambrosian chant typical of Christianity. It re-emerges the European courts, then from the great classical composers to the European *chansonniers*. It echoes in the tunes of the suburbs and that of the *Pussy Riot*<sup>2</sup>. Throughout the millennia

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. STREET, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. GARRATT, 2019.

music and politics have forged a great bond. Musical creation has crumbled the walls of divisions by narrating the emotional life of individuals in opposition to regularities of power; however, political power separated official and accepted music from public morality in a negative sense by constructing a wall of censorship. Consequently, a music that by contradiction becomes violence, imposition and domination creates a political division.

Experience also tells us that walls can have ears. Breaking the barrier of political dogmas is possible through the opening of the work; a concept expressed by Umberto Eco in 1962 with *The Open Work*<sup>3</sup>. The *opening* of the artistic work cuts through the wall, tries to cross the closure by making the individualities dialogue in a plural, democratic sense. Thus, the musical ear breaks the wall only if someone on the other side of the wall hears and reflects. Contemporary Cultural expression, as Derrida recalls, has the inverted sense of *colonization* (from the Latin *colo*); in that sense, a mystified culture that has created walls; therefore, it is necessary to make a critique and bring cultural expression back to a space that develops freedom, multiplicity, political horizontality.

The concept of “wall” leads to a one-dimensional vision of reality (in Marcuse's sense), it closes the expression of civilization in all its aspects even if it wants to appear equally artistic. At stake is the significance of the role of art trying to understand that its approach must necessarily be critical and not self-celebratory or demagogic. Only in this way does the narration of individualities become a *living question*: “As organized sound, it expresses aspects of the experience of individuals in society”<sup>4</sup>.

From the contemporary point of view, the relationship between *philosophy* and *music* does not acquire a very distinct dimension as the conceptual centrality of music is increasingly evanescent. Beyond the function of potentiality and creative energy (Nietzsche and Schopenhauer), archived the ancient wisdom on harmony (Pythagoras, Plato), the philosophy of the twentieth century conceived music as a constitutive component of the history of thought and the history of living beings; in fact, starting from Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno's theories<sup>5</sup> on Mahler, Beethoven, dodecaphony or jazz, *the musical fact*, the *sound event*, has

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. ECO, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> BLACKING, 1980, p. 101. Cf. BLACKING, 1973.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ADORNO, 2006.

outlined the conformity to philosophical-cultural styles, currents and temperatures reflecting their own epoch, both in the conservation and in the preservation of traditions (think of the distinction that Adorno defines between Schönberg and Stravinskij)<sup>6</sup>. As such, the junction of this transition does not only concern a change in taste but, on the contrary, has a relevant political aspect.

Since the means of mediation, fusion and circulation are pervasive as the dominant political model (in the form of circulating and no longer custodial capitalism), music itself as an aesthetic horizon has undergone this paradigm. With good reason, music emerges in the philosophical and political horizon as a decisive piece and the expression of this real “philosophy of music” (including various examples, from jazz to punk, to rock or rap) has accompanied many struggles and protests, identity claims, manifestations of unease and marginalization. On the other hand, national anthems have often enshrined in a nationalist and fanatical cohesion. This concept can be seen in the work of comparison between Gilles Deleuze and Pierre Boulez.

For both, the sound intensities determine a profound conceptual relevance. Today, the styles have lost their originality; two characteristics can be, strictly speaking, rediscovered and reinvented: on the one hand the connection between music and history and on the other the relationship between *politics* and *musical expression*, joined in the philosophical investigation. In the first case, music fails to interact with historicity in a critical sense<sup>7</sup> because it is prey to the dominant technology. If with the avant-garde (Pousseur, Berio, Stockhausen, Varèse) it was up to the innovative sonority to tear through tradition and open critical fissures in the discourse of modernity, today, following Benjamin<sup>8</sup>, it is music that loses its aura, conforming to the market and needs of advertising. Often the new forms of youth rap outline a dangerous increase in the absolutization of the ego, centered on the chase for easy money, on mystified frailties, on the constant prevarication of the Other in itself. It is the technical horizon of global capital that determines the style and enjoyment of music in an

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<sup>6</sup> “[...] egardless of the cunning naïveté of the culture industry, these works become offensive for the sake of their truth, as antitheses to the total control aimed at by the industry”; ADORNO, 2006, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. NIETZSCHE, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. BENJAMIN., 2008.

obsessive vortex of brevity and repetitiveness. Sunset of harmony and eclipse of anti-harmony. Music that raises walls is no longer such.

Deleuze and Boulez, up to the 1970s, had represented a productive (multiple) conflict on an aesthetic and philosophical level. This is, perhaps, best exemplified by the series-multiplicity connection in Pierre Boulez. In today's globalized world, the link between music and expression is distorted as the tendency of use and the ideological profile of industrial circulation have made the expressive power a negative value, a *malus*, something to be rejected. The category of *expression*, as Giorgio Colli<sup>9</sup> recalled, is man's ability to grasp a part of the world and, after recognizing its boundaries, his attempt to transform it just as melodrama was originally reinvented by the Verdi and Rossini *overture*. The musical discourse was and always has been a set of expressions capable of breaking down every wall, every limitation, and being universal in itself. The musicological style and the internal practice of the academies, while often creating excellence, risks remaining an area reserved for technical specialists when, on the contrary, it would be useful to bring the creativity and expressive consistency of *thinking* and of *making* music. Expressive void in music as in politics. The wall bears witness to both the silence and the agony of screams (think of the famous perimeter wall of Auschwitz and of all the extermination camps). The music finds the cracks, passes fragments of dissent that weaken the structure of the wall. Pierre Boulez conceived music as an unexpected crack in the wall of ignorance and dogmatism.

*Freedom* is the largely unwritten *raison d'être* of Boulez's music. He seeks to overcome the limitations of the *chance* material by making it *necessary* in order to realise his freedom as an autonomous subject. The concept of freedom is typically denoted in Boulez's writings by the terms of the "imagination" and the "imaginary" and is associated with the concept of "mobility". The realisation of this freedom manifests itself in the appearance of the "unforeseen" which demonstrates that one has overcome the means-to-an-end limitations of the inherited material<sup>10</sup>.

Among the lost dimensions there is silence and the philosophical notion of *pause*, decisive in supporting the activity of asking and a certain *tranquillitas (De otio* of Seneca, for example) that can give us the opportunity to resume, to share

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. COLLI, 1969.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. WALTERS, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3093>.

between mind and matter a *rhythm*; John Cage's experience of 4'33" would result, in the compulsive fixity that is repeated without pauses in today's musical enjoyment, vain and incomprehensible. In political terms, music seems to have dissociated itself from life as the standardized format of today's hyper-technical reproduction has made listening an *anonymous sequence*<sup>11</sup>; the heartbreaking cries of the world seem completely outclassed by the silencing of the compulsiveness of *marketing sounds*; the "spirit of music" evoked by Nietzsche fades today into an obsessed rhythm and the driving principle of vitalism is no longer pervaded by philosophically relevant sound cadences. This existential thread that connected Proust to Camille Saint-Saëns's *Sonata of Vinteuil*, marking the passages of his own time as traces, would be meaningless in the modern world. Its absence represents a central problem for the entire philosophical and cultural vision, appearing as a process that is also politically irreversible. What is obscured is the very form of the music, its contents, and its keys because the alterations and rhythmic changes are completely mystified, as is the political absence from the dimension of an authentic aesthetic-civil κοινή. This *political-aesthetic design* shapes the vital thrust and, if conflictually extruded from the dominant and global technological paradigm, it would bring its existence and its politicality back to a rhythm also as a timbral pulsation of lived experience, *Erlbenis*.

Totalitarian forms have politicized music to build walls. This aim has impoverished the *open* aesthetics of musical art because it had to be only a representation of a regime. In contemporary society, music is hyper-technological and perfectly inserted in the horizon of total audio-visual sharing. This is a regime of political signs, symbols, meanings (the pursuit of money and success, for example). However, it is useful for music to return to critically participate in political life to convey the democratic message, in opposition to any form of racism.

When music takes on political intentions, these can only be seen through the scope of the work, found within the form of the work and entirely contained in the syntax and morphology of the

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<sup>11</sup> "In principle, the work of art has always been reproducible. Objects made by humans could always be copied by humans. Replicas were made by pupils in practicing for their craft, by masters in disseminating their works, and, finally, by third parties in pursuit of profit. But the technological reproduction of artworks is something new"; BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 20.

musical idiom [...]The political aspect in music may be sought in the composer's attitudes, but these are insufficient for identifying the political aim of a musical work<sup>12</sup>.

Schönberg, however, demonstrates how many walls have to be demolished. The most pressing and most urgent for us in the political one, but also the wall of the artistic tradition that Schönberg was able to overturn with the twelve-tone structure. The wall becomes a “solo of the void” that prevents contact between living beings. The music contrasts this “emptiness” with harmonies, disharmonies, sonorities and silences.

Who are the troubadours today? Who in music can destroy the walls? Who are the researchers of language and musicality? Apparently, few or none. In the contemporary world, work and reflection are oriented towards new technical and synthetic codifications, but they do not care about the philosophical elaboration of music, even with its political implications. The *refrain* (Deleuze-Guattari) is a principle of the cosmos and of the material structure of nature. By itself, it possesses the possibility of an expressive development; today's urgent task of thought is to rediscover music as a global activity of life and intelligence, reactivating the multiple cognitive complex that can make a sound flow as something endowed with expressiveness. There is a Greek political nature in this dimension, forgotten and annihilated by the serialized pervasiveness of fruition. Music as a universal language is deviated from the market because in the vacuum of understanding of the *Internet Galaxy* there are forms of *rhythmic discomfort*, of the absence of variations and differences as the harmonic sense is now a compulsive assembly line but, compared to classical Fordism, animated a mystification that passes through hyper-personalization and virtual hyper-sharing of the social. This is the political implication of the mass-media function of our time. There is an anti-musical sound decreed by advertising that raises walls and reinforces the nationalism that comes from flag music.

The philosophy of difference theorized by Deleuze intends to productively connect thought, sound, images, and function in a transversal way referring to the plurality of interconnected fields of knowledge. We are talking about a *multidimensional velocity* with differences in the rhythmic cadences that make up a melody. For this reason, there are numerous pieces of various forms that insist

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<sup>12</sup> DONEGANI, 2004, p. 9.

on a tone and, in a sense, shape the content according to the logic of *global merchandising*. To use the fruitful concepts theorized by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Planes*, we can speak of *smooth* and *striated*<sup>13</sup>. It is a short step from maritime spaces to music along the political line.

The language of music and music itself as an articulation of the world have found, starting from the hyper-technological era, a concrete obstacle contained in the paradigm, internal to globalization, of *speed*, now obsessive (Virilio is central for this argument). We speak of a *one-dimensional* speed and not the differences between rhythms that make up a melody. For this reason, there are numerous pieces of various genres that insist on a tone (almost recalling and at the same time for evident purposes different obsessed rhythms of a tribal mold) modeling the content according to the logic of the global market. Here the political and social aspect begins since such a directive homologates psychology, technology and speed under the aegis of what we could define acoustic repression. By becoming a *space of thought* the concepts of smooth and striated define a plane of immanence that pervades the universal. Bio-capitalist politics has streaked the sound space by encapsulating the pluralism of tones within a pure dimension of standardization. The neo-shamanic sound forms of Washington's attackers, the violence of white supremacists and racists are an example of an acoustic wall. Popular music has a long connection with politics. Political protest has often been the vehicle of criticism since the days of popular songs. However, is not simply a soundless institution but produces its own musicality. Institutional domination develops in two ways: the commercialization of music (mass media festivals and reality shows); the conservative subsoil of traditions with a strong superstitious matrix (national anthems, refrains with a racist political basis). It is essential to explore the various dimensions of the interaction between popular music and politics and between commercial music and political power<sup>14</sup>. Music and politics include two essential components that unite humans of every age at different levels: the soundscape of the world and life among others (the Aristotelian political animal). As Rex Thomson writes:

The very nature of politics is, like music, rooted in conflict and harmony. The heart of music is the interplay of the physical and

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. DELEUZE-GUATTARI, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Government and Opposition*, 2003, pp. 113-130.

the mental, as the compromise between them forms a cohesive whole. Compromise is also the heart of the political process, trying to find common ground and consensus solutions to problems of society through open communication. Both seek to inspire their targets, and both have made great use of the other to advance their ideas<sup>15</sup>.

There is something else to do. While songwriting, pop music was marked by the civil commitment against war, against inequalities, against racism towards everyone at least until the 1980s. This music has been subject to censorship. In the US as in Italy (Dylan, De André) the expression made up of words and music was an obstacle to power of any kind. Today, especially the most current youth music, it is dangerously encouraging new forms of racism and suprematism through the myth of money and success. The proletarian stereotype of the young man born in the ghetto is no longer a battle to break down the wall of diversity, but is an incentive to selfishness, to mere personal success. The *intelligence of power* (Baudrillard) succeeds in subsuming these false criticisms upon itself, taking away any possibility of the true criticism that remains, by now, at sunset. Protest music has always been an emotional drive to react to violence. The song and the simple melody were forms of resistance and at times represented the soundtrack of the demolition of the walls.

Protest music has always been an essential form of political expression in the US. And at times of political and social unrest, it becomes a crucial refuge — both for musicians, as a release valve for their frustrations and convictions, and for listeners in need of a rallying cry.

From call-and-response chants to viral videos, the layered history of these songs and the way they've adapted with changing technology informs the state of protest music today: primed to produce an artful, stirring soundtrack to an era of massive civil engagement. Protest music has been around for centuries: As long as people have been getting fed up with the status quo, they've been singing about it. And because music styles, human emotions, and social issues are so wide-ranging, protest songs are too [...] These songs are usually written to be part of a movement for cultural or political change, and to galvanize that movement by drawing people together and inspiring them to take action or reflect<sup>16</sup>.

Why has music always been a form of immediate protest? Among the various artistic expressions, music is certainly a universal language, perhaps

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. THOMSON, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. HENWOOD, 2017.

more than others. It immediately captures the mood, it is significant, it is without misunderstandings or doubts. The contrast is linked to the dimension of the relationship between *power as domination* and *power as force* while power as domination (corresponding to French *pouvoir*) makes spaces striated, power as force (corresponding to French *puissance*) flows along smooth lines, *in fieri*. Transferred to music, thanks to Boulez and Deleuze, these concepts are expressed in a double connotation: on the one hand the domination of power through a computerized level of wholeness that manages all sound streams (from film soundtracks to the various mass genres) inserting them in the channels of use of the mass media characterized by an instant use, already atrophied in advance. Conversely recreating smooth and politically democratic spaces means using the media against themselves, or opening critical fissures that make tonalities unpredictable even through a classic style like the *refrain* and, secondly, the power-force in music would return to free the expressive-cognitive game that expands from the sensible to the variegated melodic worlds, bringing the classicism itself back into the contemporary world.

Music plays an important role in our daily lives and is woven into the fabric of society. The acoustic gesture is one of the foundations of our life. The phonetic and pure sound dialogue is the ancestral path we all walk. Often, unfortunately, with censorship, music has become the wall itself. For example, the trap nails young people to a regressive and indifferent sentiment aimed only sentiment aimed at success and easy money. This contemporary genre has more political responsibilities than one may recognise at first. It is the model of the *social network*, of false sharing, of the renunciation of critical thinking and also of a game as another way of relating. The provenance from the suburbs of its protagonists - which is not always true - does not encourage us to conceive a collective that is democratic, culturally formed, participated. The message of this kind raises a definitive wall: "reality is like this, you don't change, just try to earn money to have fun". Music is just the obsessive repetition (even in the tone) that reminds us of the impassability of today's wall. The musical forms of the past, apart from some rituals of popular tradition, did not establish an identity without imagining its social redemption in a universally democratic world; jazz, rock, *chansonnier* and singer-songwriter spoke of the desire for freedom, for emancipation. They told of the end of the wall.

The spirit of music that Nietzsche conceived as “vitalism without walls” is today overturned in a conception devoid of aesthetic care. The repetition of serial music (Berio, Pousseur) expressed the characteristic of an open work; this is an emancipatory denunciation. The repetition of today's commercial sound is the representation of the communicative aridity (the new wall) even if we are in the age of hyper-communication.

Power-domination responds to the possibility of “what are you listening to return of return of xenophobia at all levels. Similarly, it stiffens the classical tradition from a museum point of view (remember Nietzsche). Bach, Rossini or Debussy, to name but a few, beyond the mere technical data, must return to deeply affect the open score of our life so as to link the aesthetics of listening to a renewed participatory politics. It is not a stretch; there is an indisputable political nature of listening where the smooth space joins freedom and music. Music must return to break down walls, creating a countermovement made up of multiple voices, beyond any barrier.

The wall that separates the unwanted has absorbed the pain, the silence, the submission of marginalization. Today walls are still strongly present, and the commercialization of music has led to an almost political impossibility of criticism and protest. It is no longer a question of defending local ethnocentrism but of broadening the resonance as much as possible. To this end, the contemporary block is defined by two nodal points:

- Traditional musical themes remain such as obsessive repetition and delusional identity (*ancestral cause*)
- Technology has globalized music but only as a commodity (*technocratic cause*)

In this horizon, the relationship of *resilience* and *resistance* remains isolated. In recent years, both the physical and the ideological walls have increased. Racial hatred has returned to the top, violence against minorities, the demand for a strong and absolute identity are still strongly present. The melodies that represent all of this are hallucinated iterations that lose reality in favor of the

virtual. An offline life seems like a non-life. Ethnomusicological studies<sup>17</sup> have established that *sonic opposition* (similar conflict in general) can also be purely destructive. This conflict, in the contemporary era, is under the illusion of creating a critical movement. In fact, his musical work is integrated again in the labyrinth of the net; we know that some comments on online video do not radically shift the political impact. How, then, to find a music (an art in general) capable of uniting multiple individuals horizontally and collectively in plural differences?

A majority of researchers working on the relations between music and politics tacitly assume that a melodic – rhythmic structure and a melodic – rhythmic – verbal structure are music to the same extent. Such understanding of music is characteristic of culture theory and philosophy of music. It was popularized by Theodor Adorno and other critics of culture industry products centered in the Frankfurt School<sup>18</sup>.

The expressive forms of music are not harmless. Singing, on several occasions, marked the only possibility of crossing the wall. The sound waves that penetrate beyond the concrete barrier do not need anything, neither a pen, nor paper, nor books, but the voice as a projection of freedom. The voice is the most difficult instrument to censor because even if gagged, it can make you hear a noise, some phoneme. The ears and the words concerning the walls are pages of stories, sometimes of that story of the subsoil (see Foucault) which is the *true story*.

Sociologist R. Serge Denisoff speaks of protest songs as “magnetic songs of persuasion” as opposed to “rhetorical songs of persuasion”. Both had a strong political element; they involve the listeners in an approval movement. However, there is a difference. While the magnetism of protest songs such as the 60s-70s style wanted a critical, breaking involvement, from the 80s until today most commercial songs have clear solutions: identification of discontent. This is definitely a wall. They look like religious songs, during which the listener is passive even if he participates as a participant.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Music and Conflict*, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> MASSAKA, 2013, p. 322.

### 3 MUSIC AND CRITICAL THINKING

Listening is never indifferent to music. For this reason, there is no music without political implications, even that which seems furthest from social issues affects civilian life.

The musical forms are full of associations, meanings and images, which are derivatives of the situation, time and place in which they were heard. With this intent, situations and places of performance of musical compositions are sometimes oriented. Their purpose is to permanently express a particular message, eg. connected with a state, an ideology, state authorities, a nation and a preferable ethos. The deciphering of the message contained in a musical form, which is then sent in any situational and audiovisual context, takes place through the association with the context in which it was most heard. After a few performances in similar circumstances and moods, accompanied by appropriately matched images, the music expresses commonly communicable messages, inducing the adoption of specific attitudes and behaviors. The theory of encoding and decoding the message included in the musical structures elaborated as such by the Marxist musicological school<sup>19</sup>.

Musical power is definitely a liberating narrative. However, it can turn into a wall if it exclusively involves populations or ethnic groups. Nobody doubts that some geographical areas are characterized by their traditional music (ethnomusicology has been studying this sector for years); the problem arises when a musical expression ends as the soundtrack of a select few. On the contrary, art in general, and therefore also music, represents that principle of openness that needs to be shared. If music is not shared, regardless of the judgment of taste it has not achieved its goal: to be a *common event*. Music and songs in general have a precise semiotic meaning of recognition. In our theme linked to the wall and the political aspect there is a need for a further meaning. As Von Kleist recalled in *Santa Cecilia or The power of music*, the melody and harmony delineate “the music of oneself” as the individual and collective relationship with the world and with others. Schopenhauer affirms a similar concept in the discourse on *empathy* and being with others. The human being has marked borders and drawn walls. The idea of seeing beyond the limit, however, has always tempted the human being; Dante remembers him in Canto

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<sup>19</sup> MASSAKA, 2013, pp. 324-325.

XXVI of *Inferno*, his Ulysses who crosses the Pillars of Hercules to attempt a new adventure of knowledge. Faced with this contradiction that man carries with him, seeking protection and family closure on the one hand, trying the *novum* beyond the border on the other music has been able to interpret freedom, but it has also been used to silence dissent and standardize passively the masses.

We are still in the ancestral cause here. The technocratic cause is now more refined and concerns the music of higher consumption; it is precisely this even unconsciously and under the illusion of being a vehicle of protest creates the new walls. The market imposes a commercial rhythm without artistic ability, without creative quality.

At the simplest level, the music chosen to accompany election campaigns acts as a form of propaganda. It serves to evoke particular images and associations, much in the same way that politicians' photo-opportunities with pop or film or soaps stars are supposed to do. If anything, songs and sounds are more powerful weapons in this armoury because of the way music works directly on our emotions. Just as the soundtrack to films or advertisements generates moods and feelings, so too do campaign songs. And in choosing suitable songs, it is not just a matter of going for the right demographic (as the music of choice at dinner parties and in shopping malls), it is also about branding (creating an 'ident', in the jargon of advertising executives and broadcasters). The sounds are there to establish an emotional response to the party/product<sup>20</sup>.

John Street has clarified the problematic nucleus that cancels any conflictual and protest function of the song and of music in general.

Critics of the subcultural approach have raised doubts about, among other things, the extent to which popular culture can be read politically and whether its politics are as radical as some have claimed. But it is notable that within this debate, there is little challenge to the idea that cultural activity is a legitimate subject of enquiry and that it is revealing of experiences and attitudes. And what is also notable is how this argument has been confined, for the most part, within sociology and cultural studies. Political science has, until recently, taken relatively little interest in popular culture generally and popular music in particular. Indeed, it might be argued that where it has taken an interest, it has been to emphasize its deleterious effects. There are, however, signs of change. Recent political science conferences have, for example, featured panels and papers on Bob Dylan<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> STREET, 2003, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> STREET, 2003, p. 121.

Music can make emotions a creative and politically critical process, but it can also enter a vicious and obsessive cycle. The paroxysm of repetition that exalts the masses, the instrument of standardization. Today, it is a matter of standardizing indifference which, almost automatically, leads to xenophobic and violent positions.

The music contains and evokes emotional messages, which are the aspect of the meaning it includes. If the emotional ground, which is the place for socialization and sociotechnical actions using music, is appropriately recognized, it is possible to control social emotions successfully. The research into an emotional aspect of politics initiated by Plato, Aristotle, Descartes and Spinoza, continued by Ernst Cassirer, Vilfred Pareto, Leon Petrażycki and Gustave le Bon prove that guiding collective emotions is one of the most efficient ways of shaping a collective attitude towards authorities and also a political assessment determining adequate attitudes and behavior, and – consequently – essential for the development of a political situation. Emotions, as it was proved by psychology, cause prompt reaction and they are a strongly stimulating factor<sup>22</sup>.

It is necessary to study the popular aspects of music because in their sediment there are the political causes both of the collective relationship that intends to resist, make the revolution, and the regressive characteristics that raise walls. Music, like the other arts, is a fundamental vehicle for reaching the largest group of people; the current creative void is not simply a non-political nature of music but, on the contrary, a dangerous regression towards indifference. What matters is the visibility in media and social marketing. The walls continue to grow but they also continue to hear and, unfortunately, are unable to speak. The need for freedom in the contemporary world also passes through an awareness that *making music* is an activity that has a civil, political response.

The world is viewed through a 'frame', or as they prefer, culture generates a 'cognitive praxis', which provides the resources for mobilizing social movements. Music becomes 'both knowledge and action, part of the frameworks of interpretation and representation produced within social movements.' These thoughts, which bring together musical experience (how and where we hear sounds) and political action, are immensely suggestive, providing the theoretical bridge implied by historical case studies of the link between music and social movements<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> MASSAKA, 2013, p. 326.

<sup>23</sup> STREET, 2003, p. 126.

The role of music can never be far from the community. The *engagement* is always there. There can be no *indifferent music*. Instead, this is the falsely critical objective of the most influential panorama in global terms; the guy who raps in the street no longer carries the stigma of discomfort but is the inverted side of capitalism. The Afro-American underground is finally a strong movement (*Black Lives Matter*) and it is very important that it has certain musical landscapes to spread the theme of rights, freedom, democracy. Thus, music acquires an influential, lively, creative aesthetic and political profile once again.

It was revealing of the relationship between politics and music. Not only was it one among many instances when politicians have made use of popular music for propaganda effects, but it is also part of a large family of links between politics and popular music. The corollary of music's use as propaganda is the fear that music can be socially disruptive, and hence the need for its censorship. And while these state reactions may expose ignorance and prejudice, more revealing of the state's political interests and motives than of the music's power, they are indicative of music's capacity to provoke a political response. Such responses are most familiarly identified in the use of music in political movements. What is more important, though, is that this use is not confined to giving formal expression to political sentiments and formations already in existence, but extends to actually forging both the sentiment and the organization. This shifts the emphasis from what the political actors do with the music to what music does to political action. What is at stake here are the ways in which popular culture and political thought and action are connected. And there are two issues involved. The more obvious one is what political science has to say about popular music; the less obvious one is what popular music can teach us about politics. Not only is it important to see how states (and other agencies) use and affect culture for particular political ends, to treat cultural policy to the same kind of attention that is given to economic or education or foreign policy; and indeed to see cultural<sup>24</sup>.

The *fertile* character of music, as Pierre Boulez recalls, has in itself the power to overturn the conditions of violence, racism, segregation because it is a common force. It will be fundamental to bring the younger generations back to listening by trying to update egalitarian themes in an increasingly widespread way. The problem of *false musical consciousness* raised by Adorno in *Philosophy of New Music*<sup>25</sup> is still present. The process of aesthetic and melodic creation is

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<sup>24</sup> STREET, 2003, p. 129.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. ADORNO, 2006.

a progressive growth of the cognitive universe of each, both physical and mental. This is also a political moment, an active juncture with a strong civil character. It is an example the role of Giuseppe Verdi's music in the horizon of the Italian war of Independence against the Austrians is famous. Making music is not only divertimento, but it is also the responsibility of *making people listen*. In recent years, many new walls have been built with the usual ugly motives of the past: fear and hatred. The square is no longer a guarantee of protest, the distance between individuals has reached very high levels (even more so after the Covid-19 pandemic). However, the creative flow that the walls have heard and of which they cannot (unfortunately) speak must be rediscovered. Conducting the sound that breaks down the walls is a task that the community must bear. The resurgence of xenophobic and racist sensibilities is the risk of entering an obsessive and deadly sound loop. Music can be a real and concrete tool for breaking down prejudices of race, ethnicity, gender. The musical genre does not matter. What is fundamental is to return to conceiving music as a founding aspect of civilization, of social life and no longer a vehicle of indifference and closure. If walls could talk, they would want to be pulled down forever. Music can do it.

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## DADOS DOS AUTORES

### Alberto Simonetti

PhD Philosophy and Human Sciences. Postdoc Fellowship in Philosophy and Anthropology. He studied in Perugia, Florence and Urbino. Among his publications: *Follia e politica*, deComporre, 2014; *L'insavio*, Morlacchi 2016; *La filosofia di Proust*, Mimesis 2018; *Il penultimo del pensiero*, Mimesis 2019, *La talea della terra*, Morlacchi 2022. He is the author of numerous articles, as well as contributions in collective volumes on various topics published in numerous philosophical and human science journals. *E-mail*: [alberto86simonetti@libero.it](mailto:alberto86simonetti@libero.it)