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The Philosophy of Popular Music: Aesthetical Categories and Cultural Relevance. A Commentary on My Publications

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**The Philosophy of Popular Music:  
Aesthetical Categories and Cultural Relevance.  
A Commentary on My Publications**

**Alessandro Carrera**

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor in Philosophy  
by Published Works

**The University of Huddersfield  
March 2016**

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(29,553 words, including footnotes)

## Abstract

In the mid-1970s, my approach to popular music was shaped by aesthetical categories developed in the fields of Euroclassical music and continental philosophy. In fact, my interest in the avant-garde movements of the 20th century predated my involvement with popular music. In 1980, however, when I completed my philosophy thesis on Arnold Schönberg at the “Università degli Studi” in Milan, Italy, I had already been working for years in the field of rock, jazz, and folk music. Now that the borders between musical languages have become more porous, my double background in classical and popular music would not be unusual. In late-1970s Italy, it was. Yet in my mind, the two worlds co-existed and have co-existed since. From this dual commitment to the intellectual reasons of criticism and the *raisons du coeur* of passionate involvement with all genres of music, four themes have emerged in my scholarly production:

Section A. The 1977-1982 sociological phase now revived thanks to the new edition of my first book and the volume on music and society in Italy I have edited in 2015.

Section B. Articles written mostly in the 1980s and up to 2004, in which I combined post-romantic aesthetics, psychoanalysis, and hermeneutics in a parallel analysis of contemporary minimalism and the “music of the spheres” theme.

Section C. Writings on Bob Dylan and American culture (1998 to now), in which I also found the way to expand on the “poetry and music” theme dating back to my Schönberg thesis.

Section D. Articles on songwriters and songwriting in which I have combined different critical approaches such as historical survey, “portrait-of-an-artist,” and in-depth analysis of specific songs and of their cultural relevance.

Conclusions. An excerpt from my current work on descriptive categories that I intend to apply to the study of popular music.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Rupert Till for advising me on the best way to give a coherent form to my puzzle-like curriculum, for supervising my dissertation, and for allowing me to participate from a distance to his graduate seminar. In a way, it felt good to be a student again.

Philosopher and musician Carlo Sini, my thesis advisor at the Università degli Studi of Milan in 1980, urged me to keep working on music. He meant classical music. In fact, he had a hard time reconciling the fact that I was studying Schönberg's *Lieder* Op. 15 and at the same time writing a book on the impact of popular music on Italian society. Facts prevented me from undertaking a musicologist career. I have always remained on friendly terms with Professor Sini, and I think he will appreciate the irony if I say that this dissertation is also for him.

From 1976 to 1980, I was part-time press agent of the Milan-based, indie label L'Orchestra, a co-operative of rock, folk, and jazz musicians that produced more than forty records before it folded in the early 1980s. I owe a great deal of my education as a music critic to the daily conversations I had with Franco Fabbri, Umberto Fiori, Lorenzo Leddi, Piero Milesi, Moni Ovadia, and Toni Rusconi. I also had the chance to meet musicians, critics, and music writers as diverse as Anthony Braxton, Chris Cutler, Nick Hobbs, Bernhard Lassahn, Giacomo Manzoni, Luigi Nono, Evan Parker, Shlomo Mintz, and Luigi Pestalozza.

From 1982 to 1987, I was part of the editorial staff at Edizioni Riza, a Milan-based publishing house specialized in alternative medicine. Thanks to the open-mindedness of the then company administrator, Federico Ceratti (1952-2008), I was able to delve into ancient musical cosmologies and the psychology of music. The other half of my work of the 1980s, which focused on minimalism, came through the encouragement of Alessandro Melchiorre, then the editor of an innovative music journal and now the director of the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi in Milan.

My work on Dylan would have not been possible without the support of publisher Carlo Feltrinelli, who also entrusted me with the task of translating Dylan's songs and prose into Italian. I thank Franco Fabbri again for putting me in contact with Professor Till and the University of Huddersfield. My wife Victoria has supported my dissertation project from the beginning and I dedicate this thesis to her.

## List of my published works on music

The PDF of all publications is available on the accompanying flash drive, which contains copies of all the works discussed in the context.

### SECTION A. PUBLICATIONS ON MUSIC AND SOCIETY IN ITALY (Publications in English are underlined)

#### A.1 – Books

- A.1.1 - 1980 *Musica e pubblico giovanile. L'evoluzione del gusto dagli anni sessanta ad oggi*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980, pp. 260. Italian National Library: 806445 [Music and Young Audiences: The Evolution of Taste from the 1960s to Now]
- A.1.2 - 2014 *Musica e pubblico giovanile. L'evoluzione del gusto dagli anni Sessanta agli anni Ottanta*. Bologna: Odoya, pp. 336. ISBN: 978-8862882644 [Music and Young Audiences: The Evolution of Taste from the 1960s to the 1980s. Expanded edition and with a new introduction]

#### A.2 – Guest-Edited Journals

- A.2.1 - 2015 *Music and Society in Italy*. Monographic Issue. A. Carrera ed. *Forum Italicum*, 49 (2), pp. 420.
- My Contribution: “Editorial: Down in the Grooves of Italian Music,” pp. 274-277.

#### A.3 – Articles

- A.3.1 - 1977 La politica della sinistra in campo musicale. *Cineforum*, 17 (162): 86-105. [Music and Left-Wing Politics]
- A.3.2 - 1977 Musica e pubblico giovanile: la creatività ambigua. *Cineforum*, 17 (164): 259-266. [Music and Young Audiences: The Ambiguous Creativity]
- A.3.3 - 1977 Musica e pubblico giovanile: L'evoluzione del gusto (dai Beatles a Braxton), *Cineforum*, 17 (165): 342-347. [Music and Young Audiences: The Evolution of Taste (from The Beatles to Braxton)]
- A.3.4 - 1977 L'evoluzione del gusto (dai Beatles a Braxton): 2) Il periodo '68-'73, *Cineforum*, 17 (166): 409-419. [The Evolution of Taste (from The Beatles to Braxton): 2) from 1968 to 1973]

- A.3.5 - 1977 L'evoluzione del gusto (dai Beatles a Braxton): 3) L'accostamento al jazz, *Cineforum*, 17 (170): 747-759. [The Evolution of Taste (from The Beatles to Braxton): 3) Approaches to Jazz]
- A.3.6 - 1977 L'evoluzione del gusto (dai Beatles a Braxton): 4) Ascesa e caduta dei grandi raduni, *Cineforum*, 17 (172): 97-107. [The Evolution of Taste (from The Beatles to Braxton): 4) The Rise and Fall of Music Festivals]
- A.3.7 - 1978 Musica e pubblico giovanile. L'evoluzione del gusto (dai Beatles a Braxton). 5) Il jazz italiano, *Cineforum*, 18 (177): 495-507. [Music and Young Audiences. The Evolution of Taste (from The Beatles to Braxton). 5) Italian Jazz]
- A.3.8 - 1979 L'evoluzione del gusto (dai Beatles a Braxton): 6) Dal jazz alla musica improvvisata, *Cineforum*, 19 (182): 118-129. [The Evolution of Taste (from The Beatles to Braxton): 6) From Jazz to Improvised Music]
- A.3.9 - 1979 La musica popolare e le sue ideologie: 1) Dagli anni Cinquanta al Sessantotto, *Cineforum*, 19 (185): 358-369. [Folk Music and Its Ideologies: 1) From the 1950s to 1968]
- A.3.10 - 1979 La musica popolare e le sue ideologie: 2) Dal '68 al Blues Revival, *Cineforum*, 19 (189): 647-659. [Folk Music and Its Ideologies: 2) From 1968 to the Blues Revival]
- A.3.11 - 1980 La musica popolare e le sue ideologie: 3) Ricalco e rielaborazione, *Cineforum*, 20 (192): 90-97. [Folk Music and Its Ideologies: 3) Reproduction and Innovation]
- A.3.12 - 1980 I cantautori in Italia e il loro pubblico, *Musica/Realtà*, 1 (2): 133-150. Reprinted in *Musiche/Realtà. Generi musicali / Media / Popular Music*. Franco Fabbri ed. Milan: Unicopli, 1989, pp. 313-330. [Songwriters in Italy and Their Audiences]
- A.3.13 - 1982 Questioni di musica e cultura giovanile, *Quaderni piacentini*, New Series, 7: 165-176. [Music, Young Culture, and Related Issues]
- A.3.14 - 2015 Music and Criticism toward the 1980s: A Time to Revisit, *Vox Popular* [Journal of IASPM's Italian Branch, Special Issue, forthcoming 2016].

#### **A.4 – Book Chapters**

- A.4.1 - 1985 La musica dalla riproduzione alla simulazione. In *Musica e sistema dell'informazione in Europa. Ricerca, produzione, consumo*. Francesco Rampi ed. Milan: Unicopli, pp. 169-172. [Music from Reproduction to Simulation]
- A.4.2 - 2015 Music and Young Audiences in the 1970s: A Debate Revisited. In *Sociology of Music. Interdisciplinary Insights from Theoretical Debate and Field Work*. Ilaria Riccioni and Paolo Somigli eds. Milan: Franco Angeli, pp. 81-92.



## SECTION B.

### PUBLICATIONS ON MUSIC AND THE MIND, AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MINIMALISM

(Publications in English are underlined>

#### B.1 – Chapters from my 2004 Book, *Lo spazio materno dell'ispirazione*

2004 *Lo spazio materno dell'ispirazione. Agostino, Blanchot, Celan, Zanzotto*. Fiesole: Cadmo, pp. 256. ISBN: 88-79233025 [The Maternal Space of Inspiration: Augustine, Blanchot, Celan, Zanzotto]

Chapters on Music:

B.1.1. Il canto perduto. Sguardo e scrittura nell'Orfeo di Blanchot, pp. 27-80 [The Lost Song: Gaze and Writing in Blanchot's Orpheus]

B.1.2. La traccia dell'eterno. Tempo e musica in Sant'Agostino, pp. 81-124 [The Trace of Eternity: Time and Music in St. Augustine]

#### B.2 – Guest-Edited Journals

B.2.1 – 1984 *La musica e la psiche. Saggio di cosmologia*. Monographic Issue. Alessandro Carrera ed. *Riza Scienze*, 1 (6). Milan: Edizioni Riza, pp. 96. [Music and the Mind: An Essay in Cosmology]

My Contributions:

Editoriale: Tra cosmologia e psicologia, p. 6 [Editorial: Between Cosmology and Psychology]

Dell'essenza sonora del mondo, pp. 8-29 [On the Acoustic Essence of the World]

La funzione della musica nelle teorie della libido, pp. 42-59 [The Role of Music in the Theories of Libido]

L'ascolto del Sé e l'appello del suono, pp. 86-96 [Listening to the Self and the Call of Sound]

#### B.3 – Articles and Review Articles

B.3.1 – 1979 Boulez e la necessità di un'estetica (Pierre Boulez: *Pensare la musica oggi*). *L'uomo, un segno*, 3 (3): 57-59 [Boulez and the Need for an Aesthetic. Review article of Pierre Boulez's *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*].

B.3.2 – 1980 Ossessione e musica secondo Lacoue-Labarthe. *L'uomo, un segno*, 4 (1): 93-98. [Music and Obsession in Lacoue-Labarthe]

B.3.3 – 1982 Schönberg, Schopenhauer e il nipote di Rameau. *I Quaderni della Civica Scuola di Musica*, 6: 54-70. [Schönberg, Schopenhauer, and Rameau's Nephew]

B.3.4 – 1983 La storia della musica secondo Ernst Bloch. *I Quaderni della Civica Scuola di Musica*, 7: 36-44. [Music History According to Ernst Bloch]

- B.3.5 – 1983 Il mito di Parsifal. Il simbolo del sangue nel *Parsifal* di Wagner. *Riza psicosomatica*, 25: 87-94 [The Parsifal Myth: The Symbolism of Blood in Wagner's *Parsifal*]
- B.3.6 – 1983 Musica da tavola nell'unità di abitazione. Note su Brian Eno. *Musica/Realtà*, 4 (10): 83-99. [Table Music in the Habitation Unit: Notes on Brian Eno]. Reprinted in *Musiche/Realtà. Generi musicali/Media/Popular Music*. Franco Fabbri ed. Milan: Unicopli, 1989, pp. 399-415.
- B.3.7 – 1983 Nella stanza di Alvin Lucier. Note su musica e ambiente. *I Quaderni della Civica Scuola di Musica*, 8: 49-56. [In Alvin Lucier's Room: Notes on Music and Ambience]
- B.3.8 – 1984 La cosmologia del suono nelle Upanishad e in Schopenhauer. *Yoga & Ayurveda*, 1 (7): 27-38. [The Cosmology of Sound in the *Upanishads* and Schopenhauer]
- B.3.9 – 1985 La dissipazione sociale del suono. Verso un'ecologia della cultura. *I Quaderni della Civica Scuola di Musica*, 11: 9-20. [The Social Dissipation of Sound: Toward an Ecology of Culture]
- B.3.10 – 1986 L'esorcismo della grande scienza. Le nuove musiche tra natura e tecnologia. *I Quaderni della Civica Scuola di Musica*, 13:15-22. [Exorcising Big Science: The New Music between Nature and Technology]
- B.3.11 - 1988 Il confine della musica. Sul senso cosmologico dell'esperienza musicale. *I Quaderni della Civica Scuola di Musica*, 16: 107-112. [The Edge of Music: On the Cosmological Sense of Musical Experience]
- B.3.12 – 1993 Lo sguardo di Blanchot e la musica di Orfeo. Visione e ascolto nell'ispirazione poetica, *Itinerari filosofici*, 3 (5): 3-14. [Blanchot's Gaze and Orpheus' Music: Vision and Listening in Poetic Inspiration]
- B.3.13 – 1996 Il romanzo familiare di Orfeo. Variazioni sull'interpretazione del mito proposta da Franco Fornari, *Gradiva. International Journal of Italian Literature*, 6 (2): 84-96. [Orpheus' Family Romance: Variations on Franco Fornari's Interpretations of the Orphic Myth]

#### **B.4 – Book Chapters:**

- B.4.1 – 1995 La musica come confine simbolico tra microcosmo e macrocosmo. In *Östliches-Westliches. Studien zur vergleichenden Geistes- und Religionsgeschichte. Hommage an Cyrill J.C. von Korvin-Krasinski*. Mirko Sladek ed. Heidelberg: Manutius Verlag, 1995, pp. 25-35. (Slightly revised version of "Il confine della musica," 1988.)
- B.4.2 – 2002 Blanchot's Gaze and Orpheus' Singing: Seeing and Listening in Poetic Inspiration. In *Panorama: Philosophies of the Visible*, Wilhelm S. Wurzer ed. London-New York: Continuum, pp. 45-54.

**SECTION C.**  
**PUBLICATIONS ON BOB DYLAN**  
**(Publications in English are underlined)**

**C.1 – Books**

- C.1.1 – 2001 *La voce di Bob Dylan. Una spiegazione dell’America*. Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. 304. ISBN 88-07490129. [The Voice of Bob Dylan: An Explanation of America]
- C.1.2 – 2008 *Canzoni d’amore e misantropia*. Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. 160. ISBN: 978-8807 730207. [Songs of Love and Misanthropy]. Also available together with the Italian DVD release of the Dylan-inspired film, *I’m Not There*, Todd Haynes dir., 2007.
- C.1.3 – 2011 *La voce di Bob Dylan. Una spiegazione dell’America. Nuova edizione riveduta e ampliata*. Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. 400. ISBN: 978-8807722660. [The Voice of Bob Dylan: An Explanation of America. New, Revised, and Expanded Edition]
- C.1.4 – 2015 *Bob Dylan*. E-book. Milan, February 2015. ISBN: 9788897685449 [http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/ebook/alessandro-carrera-bob-dylan].

**C.2 – Edited Books**

- C.2.1 – 2008 *Parole nel vento. I migliori saggi critici su Bob Dylan*. Alessandro Carrera, ed. English essays translated by A. Carrera, M. Murino, and S. Pettinato. Novara: Interlinea Edizioni, pp. 232. ISBN: 978-8882125776. [Words in the Wind: The Best Critical Essays on Bob Dylan]

My Contributions:

Prefazione. Ci dev’essere un modo di uscire di qui, pp. 9-23 [Introduction: There Must Be Some Way Out of Here]

Del tradurre Dylan, pp. 193-210 [On Translating Dylan]

**C.3 – Edited and Annotated Translations**

- C.3.1 – 2005 Bob Dylan, *Chronicles Volume 1*. Translated and annotated by A. Carrera. Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. 272. ISBN: 88-07490366 [*Chronicles Volume One*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004].

My Contribution (besides translation):

Note del traduttore, pp. 263-270. [Translator’s Notes]

- C.3.2 – 2006 Bob Dylan, *Lyrics 1962-2001*. Edited, annotated, and translated by A. Carrera. Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. 1248. ISBN: 88-07421178 [*Lyrics 1962-2001*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2004]. My Contribution: Translation (for Notes see C.3.3)

- C.3.3 – 2006 Bob Dylan, *Lyrics 1962-2001*. My Contribution: Note del traduttore, pp. 1135-1225. [Translator’s Notes]

C.3.4 – 2007 Bob Dylan, *Letras 1962-2001*. Traducción de Miguel Izquierdo y José Moreno. Notas de A. Carrera, pp. 1280. Madrid-Barcelona: Alfabeta / Global Rhythm. My Contribution: Notas (translated into Spanish by M. Izquierdo and J. Moreno), pp. 1170-1260. [Notes to the Songs]

C.3.5 – 2007 Bob Dylan, *Tarantula*. Translated by Andrea D'Anna. Translation revised, edited, and annotated by A. Carrera and Santo Pettinato. Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. 348. ISBN: 978-8807819377 [*Tarantula*, New York, Macmillan, 1971].

My Contributions (besides translation):

A. Carrera, Lettere da Desolation Row. Guida alla lettura di *Tarantula*, pp. 249-315. [Letters from Desolation Row. A Guide to Reading *Tarantula*]

A. Carrera and S. Pettinato, Indice dei nomi e delle canzoni, pp. 316-340. [Index of Names and Songs]

#### C.4 – Articles

C.4.1 – 1998 Bob Dylan. Poesia del tempo immemorabile. *Poesia*, 11 (117): 50-55. [Bob Dylan: Poetry from a Time Out of Mind]

C.4.2 – 2002 *Ut pictura carmen*. Bob Dylan e la pittura. *Materiali di estetica*, 6: 145-153. [*Ut pictura carmen: Bob Dylan and Painting*]

C.4.3 – 2003 La pioggia alla fine del tempo. Bob Dylan tra simbolismo e modernismo. *Ácoma. Rivista internazionale di studi nordamericani*, 9 (26): 104-115 [The Rain at the End of Time: Bob Dylan between Symbolism and Modernism]

C.4.4 – 2007 Un libro di voci. L'autobiografia di Bob Dylan. *Intersezioni. Rivista di storia delle idee*, 27 (3): 405-421. [Book of Voices: Bob Dylan's Autobiography]

C.4.5 – 2007 Bob Dylan. Il morso della tarantola. *Poesia*, 20 (213): 2-9. [Bob Dylan: The Bite of the Tarantula]

C.4.6 – 2012 "To Live outside the Law You Must be Honest." Dylan e la giustizia. *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, 25 (61): 43-57. Bologna: Clueb. [To Live Outside the Law You Must Be Honest: Dylan and Justice]

C.4.7 – 2012 Mia moglie è nata all'inferno. Bob Dylan e il Blues. *Musica Jazz*, 68 (3): 80-83. [Hell is my wife's hometown: Bob Dylan and The Blues]

C.4.8 – 2014 Bob Dylan dall'appropriazione alla trasfigurazione. *Estetica. Studi e ricerche*, 4 (1): 171-185. [Bob Dylan from Appropriation to Transfiguration]

C.4.9 – 2015 [A Dialogue about Shadows in the Night \(Alessandro Carrera & Marc Zimmerman\)](http://www.elbeisman.com/article.php?action=read&id=607) [[www.elbeisman.com/article.php?action=read&id=607](http://www.elbeisman.com/article.php?action=read&id=607)]

## C.5 – Book Chapters

- C.5.1 – 2002 Bob Dylan, l'inafferrabile. In *Ravenna Festival 2002*. Franco Masotti and Giovanni Trabalza eds. Ravenna: Fondazione Ravenna Manifestazioni, pp. 36-41. [Bob Dylan: Impossible to Catch]
- C.5.2 – 2009 Oh, the Streets of Rome: Dylan in Italy. In *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan from Minnesota to the World*. Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 84-105.
- C.5.3 – 2011 Il folksinger e il presidente. In *Bob Dylan Play a Song for Me*. Giovanni A. Cerutti ed. Novara: Interlinea, pp. 89-98. [The Folksinger and the President]
- C.5.4 – 2012 “To Live outside the Law You Must Be Honest”. In *Giustizia e letteratura Vol. I*. Gabrio Forti, Claudia Mazzucato, and Arianna Visconti eds. Milan: Vita e pensiero, pp. 444-457.

## SECTION D.

### PUBLICATIONS ON SONGWRITERS AND SONGWRITING (Publications in English are underlined)

#### D.1 – Edited Book

- D.1.1 – 2016 Introduzione. In *La memoria delle canzoni. Popular music e identità italiana*. A. Carrera ed. Pasturana (Alessandria, Italy): Puntoacapo Editrice, forthcoming 2016. [*The Memory of Songs: Popular Music and Italian Identity*]
- D.1.2 – 2016 Com'è profondo Lucio. Epitaffio per Dalla. In *La memoria delle canzoni. Popular music e identità italiana*. A. Carrera ed. Pasturana (Alessandria, Italy): Puntoacapo Editrice, forthcoming 2016. [*The Memory of Songs: Popular Music and Italian Identity*]

#### D.2 – Articles and Review Articles

- D.2.1 – 1977 Woody Guthrie sullo schermo: la realtà e il recupero. *Cineforum*, 17 (168): 602-613. [Woody Guthrie on the Screen: How Reality Gets Trivialized]
- D.2.2 – 1980 Mark Rydell: The Rose, *Cineforum*, 20 (197): 605-611 [Review Article].
- D.2.3 – 1980 Attraverso la California sulle tracce di Woody Guthrie. *Cineforum*, 20 (200): 856-861. [On the Tracks of Woody Guthrie in California]
- D.2.4 – 1994 Il lamento di Narciso. Le poesie friulane di Pasolini musicate da Giovanna Marini. *Italica*, 71 (3): 337-353. [Narcissus' Lament: Pasolini's Friulian Poems Set to Music by Giovanna Marini]. Reprinted in *Musica/Realtà*, 15 (46): 123-142.
- D.2.5 – 2002 Italy's Blues: Folk Music and Popular Song from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s. *The Italianist: Journal of the Department of Italian Studies*,

University of Reading, 21-22: 348-371 [Expanded version of “Folk Music and Popular Song,” D.3.1].

- D.2.6 – 2006 Di mondegreens e altri malintesi. Poetica del fraintendimento e fonetica dell'identità. *Annali d'Italianistica*, 24: 211-231. [On Mondegreens and Other Misunderstandings: The Poetics of Getting It Wrong and the Phonetics of Identity]
- D.2.7 – 2009 Schönberg and Petrarca – Petrarch Project Website, University of Oregon, Eugene, posted in the Autumn of 2009  
[\[https://language.uoregon.edu/petrarch/?q=en/node/791\]](https://language.uoregon.edu/petrarch/?q=en/node/791)

### D.3 – Book Chapters

- D.3.1 – 2001 Folk Music and Popular Song from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s. In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*. Zigmunt Baranski and Rebecca West eds. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, pp. 325-335.
- D.3.2 – 2007 La risposta è caduta nel vento / Blowin' in the Wind. In *Il mio posto nel mondo. Luigi Tenco, cantautore. Ricordi, appunti, frammenti*. Enrico De Angelis, Enrico Deregibus, and Sergio S. Sacchi eds. Milan: Rizzoli, 2007, pp. 348-350. [The Answer Was Lost in the Wind / Blowin' in the Wind]
- D.3.3 – 2009 Poesia americana e poesia dell'America. In *Poesia 2009: Quattordicesimo annuario*. Paolo Febbraro and Giorgio Manacorda eds. Rome: Gaffi, 2009, pp. 69-107. [American Poetry and the Poetry of America]
- D.3.4 – 2012 *Il ricatto del godimento. Contributo a un'antropologia italiana*. Verona: QuiEdit, pp. 164. ISBN: 978-64641447 [Blackmailed by Enjoyment: Contribution to an Italian Anthropology]
- Relevant chapters:
- 1) Su De André e il deandreismo, pp. 69-73 [On De André and Deandreism]
  - 2) Giorgio Gaber, o della malinconia di sinistra, pp. 74-79 [Giorgio Gaber, or Left-Wing Melancholy]
  - 3) Ivan Della Mea, l'ultimo proletario, pp. 80-83 [Ivan Della mea, the Last Proletarian Standing]
- D.3.5 – 2013 Mystical Arrogance: Franco Battiato's Esoteric Pop. In *Made in Italy: Studies in Popular Music*. Franco Fabbri and Goffredo Plastino eds. New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 136-148.
- D.3.6 – 2016 If All Heavens Were Parchment...: Setting to Music a Letter from the Shoah. In *Musica pop e testi in Italia dal 1960 a oggi*. Andrea Ciccarelli, Mary Migliozzi, and Marianna Orsi eds. ed. Ravenna: Longo, 2015, pp. 11-27 [ISBN: 978-8880637875]

## **Note on my publications unrelated to music**

I have many other publications that are not related to music. In my complete CV, I have divided all my publications according to three areas of research and/or creativity:

1) Literary Criticism and Critical Theory: 8 authored books, 5 edited or co-edited books (two with Fordham University Press), 4 guest-edited or co-edited monographic issues of academic journals, and 53 articles and book chapters, either peer-reviewed or commissioned. In the previous section of this dissertation, I have also listed one of my critical theory books (*Lo spazio materno dell'ispirazione*, which includes two chapters on music (**B.1.1 – B.1.2**).

2) Creative Writing, Essays, and Translations: 7 poetry collections, 6 fiction books (novels and short stories), 3 collections of personal and journalistic essays (1 co-edited), 8 books of literary edition and translations into Italian, including three novels of Graham Greene (*The Third Man*, *The Quiet American*, and *The Honorary Consul*). I have already listed the edited and annotated translations from Bob Dylan in the previous section of this dissertation (**C.3.1, C.3.2, C.3.3, C.3.4, C.3.5**).

## Awards received

- 1993: “Eugenio Montale” International Poetry Prize, awarded in Rome, for a series of unpublished poems. The poems have subsequently appeared in *7 Poeti del Premio Montale. Roma 1993* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1994).
- 1998: “Arturo Loria” Prize for an unpublished short story, awarded by the City of Carpi, Italy. The story has been subsequently published in A. Carrera et al., *La stagione della strega* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 1998).
- 2006: “Premio Internazionale di Poesia Attilio Bertolucci,” Literary Criticism section, awarded by the County of Parma, Italy, for the collection of literary essays, *I poeti sono impossibili* (Rome: Edizioni Il Filo, 2005).
- 2009: Knight of the “Star Order of the Italian Solidarity” (Ordine della Stella della Solidarietà Italiana) by Decree of Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Republic of Italy, April 2, 2009.
- 2012: “Fanfullino della riconoscenza per l’anno 2012” (Distinguished Citizen Award), awarded by the City of Lodi, Italy (my hometown).
- 2015: “Teaching Excellence Award,” University of Houston, awarded April 30.



Google Scholar Page (accessed 08/12/2015)

124 articles – 71 citations

Citation indices	All	Since 2010
Citations	71	29
h-index	5	3
i10-index	1	0

A.1.1 - 1980 *Musica e pubblico giovanile*. Book. **22 citations.**

C.1.1 – 2001 *La voce di Bob Dylan*. Book. **2 citations.**

D.3.1 – 2001 Folk Music and Popular Song from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s. Book Chapter. Cambridge UP, pp. 325-335. **6 citations.**

B.1. - 2004 *Lo spazio materno dell'ispirazione*. Book. **3 citations.**

Citations of publications not related to music

1995 *L'esperienza dell'istante. Metafisica, tempo, scrittura*. Book. **6 citations.**

1995 Franco Ferrucci, *Ars poetica*. Review. **1 citation.**

1999 Introduzione. Per Leopardi in America. In *Giacomo Leopardi poeta e filosofo. Atti del convegno dell'Istituto italiano di cultura*. Edited book with introduction and one authored chapter. **1 citation.**

2002 Gli strumenti istituzionali per la promozione della cultura italiana all'estero. Book chapter. **7 citations.**

2005 *Carlo Michelstaedter. Un'introduzione*. Book by A. Carrera and other authors. **2 citations.**

- 2006 *La luce migliore. Poeti americani in Italia*. Edited book by A. Carrera and Th. Simpson. **2 citations.**
- 2007 *La consistenza del passato. Heidegger Nietzsche Severino*. Book. **2 citations.**
- 2009 Giacomo Leopardi. In *The Literary Encyclopedia* (online). Article. **8 citations.**
- 2010 *La consistenza della luce. Il pensiero della natura da Goethe a Calvino*. Book. **4 citations.**
- 2010 Peter Carravetta: Del postmoderno. Review. **1 citation.**
- 2011 *La distanza del cielo. Leopardi e lo spazio dell'ispirazione*. Book. **2 citations.**
- 2011 *Italian Critical Theory*. Guest-edited monographic issue. **1 citation.**

**Plus the co-edited book, *Il dovere della felicità* (citations appear under the name of the co-editor):**

- 2000 *Il dovere della felicità*. Edited book by A. Carrera and Filippo La Porta. Introduction by both authors and one chapter by A. Carrera. **5 citations.**

(I could list many other reviews and citations that preceded the widespread use of the Internet or which have appeared in Italian journals that are not found on Google Scholar. It would be a tedious list, though.)

**The Philosophy of Popular Music:  
Aesthetical Categories and Cultural Relevance.  
A Commentary on My Publications**

## Section A

### Publications on Music and Society in Italy

#### 1. Biographical premise

The centrepiece of my work on the rich, complex, and often infuriating relationship between music, politics, and society in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s is my first book, published in 1980 and reprinted with a new introduction and four additional chapters in 2014 (*Musica e pubblico giovanile*, A.1.1 – A.1.2). Different critical approaches have shaped the book, from anecdotal history to sociology of culture, and from a ready-made aesthetics of popular music to a more ambitious, phenomenological analysis of “creative music” (as free improvised music was called back then).

In the late spring of 1975, at the age of 21, I participated as an amateur singer-songwriter in the third “Re Nudo Music Festival,” an independent, alternative musical meeting held in Milan and organized by “Re Nudo” (Naked King), the then-leading magazine of underground culture in Italy. On that occasion, somebody told me that L’Orchestra, a newly formed co-operative of folk, rock, and jazz musicians was welcoming new talents and suggested I get in touch with Franco Fabbri, leader of the progressive rock group Stormy Six and founding member of L’Orchestra. One month later, I went to a Stormy Six concert and introduced myself to Fabbri. After a few weeks, I had a part-time job as press agent of the record label, writing press releases and establishing contacts with journalists, radio stations, cultural and political associations. I was also asked to write short articles about L’Orchestra and the alternative musical movement in Italy, which I did with the enthusiasm of someone who had finally find not so much a pulpit but a home.

Toward the end of 1976, the editors of *Cineforum*, a film studies journal, asked me to contribute with a few articles on the “cultural politics” of left-wing parties and groups in

connection with the growing interest in popular music among the young generations. Music had clearly become the cultural mediator of the day, possibly even more so than film, and in those days, the sheer number of grass-roots musical events, conferences, round-tables about music, meant the social and political role of music was simply staggering. As a traveling folksinger and singer-songwriter, and press agent of an independent, alternative record company, I was constantly called on to participate in debates in Italy as well as in England (the initial stages of Rock in Opposition, 1977) and Germany (the Tübingen Folk Festival in 1978 and 1979). I was therefore in an ideal position to report on the matter. I had first-hand knowledge of the national, local and even obscure literature on the subject, and I could offer a comprehensive view of what was going on in the music field and how political organizations were dealing with the role that music was playing in the life of their sympathizers. My first contribution came out in February 1977 and the collaboration lasted more than four years (from **“La politica della sinistra in campo musicale,” A.3.1** to **“La musica popolare e le sue ideologie,” A.3.11**). From the *Cineforum* articles, I drew the structure of the book that I completed in December 1979 and which was released six months later.

Why was an established film studies journal interested in my contributions on music? In 1977 Italy, no “serious” music journal in Italy was open to publishing articles on popular music. *Cineforum*, however, had a readership that went beyond film critics and film buffs. It was distributed to a large network of film clubs all over Northern Italy, whose attendants looked at the journal as a source of qualified criticism, not necessarily confined to film. The first scholarly music journal that opened its doors to popular music was *Musica/Realtà*, founded in 1980 by musicologist Luigi Pestalozza, and my first article for *Musica/Realtà* appeared in the journal’s second issue (**“I cantautori in Italia e il loro pubblico,” A.3.12**). In 1977, I was also invited to take part in the first major Italian conference on free jazz and free improvised music at Teatro La Fenice in Venice. It was my baptism of fire as a young music critic, since all the most reputed jazz scholars were there (or, at least, the few jazz

scholars who did not dismiss free jazz and improvised music as unbearable noise and arrogant posture). The paper I gave, on the aesthetics of free music, was my first attempt to blend philosophy and music criticism and, three years later, it became a key chapter in my book.

## **2. Music criticism in Italy and *Musica e pubblico giovanile* [A.1.1 – A.1.2]**

*Musica e pubblico giovanile* addressed the impact of American and British popular music and jazz on Italian young audiences and youth culture. My initial frame of reference owed a debt to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and post-Gramscian Marxism. Was 1960s European Marxism, still heavily influenced by the Frankfurt School's disdain for popular culture, useful in assessing the importance of pop music among the baby boomers on both sides of the Atlantic? Was phenomenology appropriate in outlining the aesthetics of avant-garde jazz and other genres of black music that owed little to the European tradition? How was I to evaluate the contrasting aesthetics of the folk revival movement, torn between authenticity and innovation?

When I speak of “young audience” and “young culture,” I am not referring to teen-age lifestyles in a way that would make one think of an Italian equivalent of *American Graffiti*. Post-War Italy was a heavily politicized and partisan environment, sharply divided between Catholics, Communists, Liberals, and Socialists, not to mention the radical wings on both sides of the aisle, and with all the possible alliances and *mésalliances* among the various sides. Political consciousness among young people started at a very early age, in fact in high school, even before the 1968 upheavals shook things up all over Europe. “Young audience” meant a *politicized* young audience, and “young culture” described those cultural preferences that often stemmed out of political orientation. My ambition was to map the intersections and inevitable clashes between the emerging political stances and cultural orientations in their opposition to what was then called the “establishment” and/or “culture industry.” But it was also a book on *music*.

At the time of the book's publication, jazz criticism in Italy was largely conservative and folk music was the precinct of old-school ethnomusicologists (with the relevant exceptions of a few politically oriented, highly skilled researchers that I discussed in the book). Criticism of *musica leggera* (or "light music," as pre-rock songs were called) dated back to the early 1960s, but it was overtly ideological and highly dismissive of everything the recording music industry produced.<sup>1</sup> Umberto Eco was dismissive as well, but his notes on pop songs in *Apocalittici e integrati* were more nuanced. In fact, Eco hinted at popular music as a possible field of studies, although limited to sociological analysis. However, and despite his friendship with Luciano Berio (who was aware of developments in rock music, from The Beatles to Grateful Dead), Eco did not have a lasting interest in music, and soon dropped the topic.<sup>2</sup>

Rock criticism had a breakthrough in 1973 with the publication of Riccardo Bertoncelli's *Pop Story*, a highly idiosyncratic, bizarrely written, and very personal account of "pop" (meaning 1960s and 1970s rock) versus 1950s "rock," which in the opinion of the author was a forgettable prehistory (Elvis Presley included) of the true revolution that the 1960s had started.<sup>3</sup> Whimsical as it was, Bertoncelli's book provided a fascinating narrative I tried very hard to distinguish myself from, lest I became one of his many imitators. Only a small number of foreign books were available in translation. I relied on Carl Belz for 1950s rock and roll and on Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser for the 1960s and beyond.<sup>4</sup> In the summer of 1979, however, I took a trip to the U.S. and I was able to get hold of non-translated material that helped me make my book less parochial. Yet I could not get over entirely the biases I

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Michele L. Straniero et al, *Le canzoni della cattiva coscienza*, Milan: Bompiani, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati. Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della comunicazione di massa*. Milan: Bompiani, 1964, pp. 275-294. The English-American edition, *Apocalypse Postponed*, ed. and trans. by Robert Lumley, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994 and London: British Film Institute, 1994, does not include the section on pop songs.

<sup>3</sup> Riccardo Bertoncelli, *Pop Story. Suite per consumismo, pazzia e contraddizioni*. Milan: Arcana, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock*. New York: Oxford UP, 1972; Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser, *Underground? Pop? Nein, Gegenkultur!* Köln-Berlin: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969. I have referenced non-Italian books by their first English translation or by their original publication if no English translation is available.

inherited from the first authors I read. Bertoncelli's snobbery surfaced here and there in my approach, and Kaiser's dismissal of rhythm and blues and soul as purely commercial music affected negatively my judgment of black music.

### **3. A commentary on *Musica e pubblico giovanile* [A.1.1 – A.1.2]**

*Musica e pubblico giovanile* is made up of a preface, fourteen chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter, "The Need for Music," asks whether music was an "interest" or a "need" for the generation born in the 1950s. The distinction was crucial to the post-Lukács Marxist school, quite influential in Italy at the time. According to Ágnes Heller, who in those years was championing her "theory of need," the concept of "interest" was inherently *bourgeois*. The working class did not have interests, only needs.<sup>5</sup> Yet, if such was the case, why did so many working-class young men and women care so much about music, given that demand for music does not seem to compare with the need for food, shelter, and a job? I analyzed the then current literature on the dialectics that posited the recurring crises of capitalism against the organization of the productive forces, and my answer was that the analysis of commodity consumption in the available Marxist literature was, at best, outdated.

It was not crucial to ascertain whether music was an interest, a need, or a desire. Music was primarily a universe of signs, a communicative code. I was in disagreement with the ultra-utopian and often violent dreams of the "autonomous," radical left, which was gaining momentum in Italy toward the end of the 1970s (the heyday of bipartisan terrorism). I was also in disagreement with the stubbornness of the Marxist critics who followed the tenets of the Frankfurt School and who would depict the "culture industry" (as Th. W. Adorno defined it) exclusively in the garb of a vampire bent on sucking the blood of creativity from unsuspecting urban youths. I am not claiming that I was anticipating Keith Negus's provocative counterargument, namely, that culture produces the industry and not the other

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<sup>5</sup> Ágnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*. London: Allison and Busby, 1976.



way around.<sup>6</sup> I was rather inclined to advance the notion that the culture industry contributed to create the same new trends that the same industry would subsequently exploit. The culture industry was like the recording studio, part of the music it eventually put on tape.

The chapters of the book addressed the following themes:

- 1) The beginnings of “youth culture” and the teenager-oriented market in the U.S. during the 1950s (I drew from Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of a Counterculture* and other material I found during my 1979 trip to California).<sup>7</sup>
- 2) A brief assessment of the evolution of music from 1950s rock and roll to a wider notion of “rock.”
- 3) The impact of free-jazz and jazz-rock in Italy and how a politicized audience experienced jazz, naively but sincerely, as having an immediate political dimension, an instantaneous instrument of liberation projected onto the “mythical” civil rights struggle undertaken by African-Americans in the 1960s. I outlined a phenomenological aesthetics of free improvised music with references to Derek Bailey, Anthony Braxton, and the libidinal economy of Jean-François Lyotard, which I used against Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s myth of the absolute productivity of desire.<sup>8</sup> (I must admit that discussing jazz, which was “serious” music, made me feel more comfortable than addressing rock and roll and pop, genres that deep down in me still elicited some Schönbergian biases).
- 4) A brief history of the music festivals from the Isle of Wight to their Italian counterparts, including extremely successful jazz festivals (Umbria Jazz).

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<sup>6</sup> Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Dérive à partir de Marx et de Freud*. Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1973. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. New York: Viking, 1977.

- 5) The place of classical music in youth culture, from symphonic rock to scattered episodes of avant-garde composers such as Stockhausen and Cage crossing over to a young audience. I gave a first-hand account of the historic—and very amusing—confrontation between John Cage and two thousand unsuspecting young men and women who came to see him at the Teatro Lirico in Milan on December 2, 1977, believing he was some kind of cultish, underground rock star.
- 6) A brief assessment of the rise of punk and new wave at the end of the 1970s. This is the chapter where I mostly got it wrong. Being firmly on the side of progressive rock, as I was at the time, I looked down at punk and new wave as mere “regressive rock,” more an involution than a revolution, and therefore doomed from the start. I still had a long way ahead before I could understand the broad meaning of “pop.” It is no wonder that the birth of hip-hop totally bypassed me.
- 7) Three chapters on the aesthetics of the folk revival and the political impact of folk music in the U.S. (Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger), U.K. (Ewan McColl, Albert Lloyd), and Italy (Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano, Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare, Giovanna Marini). This was my turf, very much like jazz. I discussed the aesthetics of reproduction, creative intervention, and performance styles bent on emphasizing the perceived “otherness” of folk music’s stylistic traits.
- 8) The politicization of Italian songwriters in the 1970s (either sincere or faked).

In the Conclusion, I expressed the fear that the “need for music” that I had discussed at the beginning of the book was being replaced by an anonymous “need for sounds,” an anodyne ambient which one could slide through unobtrusively instead of living it. (It is ironic that in the 1980s I became quite interested in minimalism and ambient music.)

#### 4. The impact of *Musica e pubblico giovanile* [A.1.1 – A.1.2]

In the second half of the 1970s, Italian literature on popular music was ripe with Bertoncetti's look-alikes who wrote passionate, baroque reviews in trendy music magazines (*Gong*, *Muzak*), and whose style was heavily influenced by the most emphatic postures of Beat Literature or the latest trends in French critical theory. A growing number of topical, collective, instant books, halfway between fan prose and radical left-wing stranglehold ideology were also available. All these books and pamphlets were the effort of small publishing enterprises such as Arcana in Milan, and Lato-Side, Savelli, and Stampa Alternativa in Rome. Neither musicians nor the rock critics assumed that major publishers were interested in such a flimsy topic as music marketed to the young. Feltrinelli, however, was an exception. A large publisher with an expanding chain of bookstores, Feltrinelli was at the forefront of political literature and political analysis of culture. By the end of the 1970s, they published a book virtually *every day*. They bet on my book, which immediately sold 5,000 copies. As I saw during my travels, it reached all the "cultural operators" (as those young music journalists, promoters, and disc jockeys called themselves) who were active in the business of bringing music to "the people" or, as they were wont to say, to "the masses."

#### Reviews

I have nineteen reviews of *Musica e pubblico giovanile* in my files, all positive. They all appeared in national newspapers and magazines:

- 1) Franco Pecori, "Fame di musica," *Paese Sera*, 12 luglio 1980
- 2) "Musica e pubblico giovanile, di Alessandro Carrera," *Stampa Sera*, 21 luglio 1980
- 3) "Alessandro Carrera, Musica e pubblico giovanile," *Musica e Dischi*, luglio 1980
- 4) Roberto Gatti, "Jazz Pop Rock," *L'Espresso*, 27 luglio 1980
- 5) Claudio Santini, "Rock, non solo musica," *Il Resto del Carlino*, 18 agosto 1980
- 6) G. Cesari, "Una storia sociale della nuova musica," *Il Mattino Illustrato*, 13 settembre 1980
- 7) Fabio Malagnini, "Inseguendo rock 'n' roll dalle cantine agli stadi," *L'Unità*, 16 settembre 1980
- 8) Fabio Malagnini, "Sì, parliamo di musica ma senza più ascoltarla," *L'Unità*, 2 ottobre 1980

- 9) Marcello Lorrai, "Musica? Un 'bisogno primario'," *Lotta Continua*, 3 ottobre 1980
- 10) "Musica e giovani," *Roma*, 8 ottobre 1980
- 11) Claudio Fossati, "Uno studio in rosso," *Linea*, 15 ottobre 1980, p. 14
- 12) Davide Ferrario, "Musica e pubblico giovanile," *Cineforum*, XX, 200, ottobre 1980, pp. 703-704
- 13) Flaviano De Luca, "Il futuro è nel rock. 'Musica e pubblico giovanile', un'accurata analisi degli ultimi 10 anni," *Il Manifesto*, 2 novembre 1980
- 14) Gian Mario Maletto, "Musica e pubblico giovanile," *Musica Jazz*, novembre 1980 "Discografici in volume," *Tempo medico*, novembre 1980
- 15) P. Mat., "La musica e i giovani," *Paese Sera*, 28 novembre 1980
- 16) "L'editore Feltrinelli ha pubblicato...," *Problemi dell'informazione*, 1980
- 17) "Alessandro Carrera, Musica e pubblico giovanile," *Appuntamenti* (Modena), 1980
- 18) Umberto Fiori, "Musica e pubblico giovanile," *Laboratorio Musica*, anno II, n. 17, ottobre 1980, pp. 61-62.
- 19) "Alessandro Carrera, Musica e pubblico giovanile," *Libri e riviste d'Italia*, luglio-agosto 1981

Gian Mario Maletto in *Musica Jazz* (review no. 14, above) observed that I had wisely used foil rather than sword in my ironic criticism of some key figures in Italian jazz. Roberto Gatti in *L'Espresso* (no. 4) gave a positive review while lamenting that I gave too much space to the "unhappy years" of political clashes at rock star concerts (but those years were not over yet). Umberto Fiori in *Laboratorio Musica* (no. 18, a monthly magazine directed by Luigi Nono) pointed out that the twists and turns in the history of music appreciation, as I had chronicled them, showed that no history of popular music in the traditional sense of the word was possible. Popular music was now too vast a subject to be constrained in a linear narrative and every attempt to do so was tantamount to writing the biography of a Disney character.

Then, in the space of a year or little more, everything came to a halt. Despite the positive reviews and adoptions in sociology departments, the book was not reprinted, for a few reasons that had nothing to do with the book and other reasons that had *everything* to do with it and the cultural-political climate in which I wrote it. In the first months of 1982, Feltrinelli went through a severe crisis of overproduction and had to cut down. Furthermore, the cultural-political landscape was changing so fast that even by 1982 the book would have needed a thorough revision. In Italy, the early 1980s were the years of the "receding tide"

(*riflusso*), marked by disillusionment toward leftist utopias. By the mid-1980s, the public conversation about music was unrecognizable to anyone who was still approaching it with the political and aesthetic categories of the 1970s. A mere sequel of the book would have been unthinkable.

The whole “music and politics” issue had become suffocating. I needed a breath of fresh air or maybe *old, very old* air. I immersed myself in the study of ancient musical cosmologies, Renaissance Neo-pythagorism, and the literature on music and psychoanalysis. This will be the subject of the next chapter. I came back to the “music and young audiences” theme for the last time in an article I published in 1982 (“**Questioni di musica e cultura giovanile,**” **A.3.13**). In 2014, however, while I was working on the book’s new edition and I was undecided whether to add the article as an appendix, I re-read it for the first time. I found it dismissive, even a little arrogant, and I decided to leave it out. By 1982, I was clearly eager to move away from the “debate on music” and toward a more comprehensive understanding of “music.”

## **5. The new edition of *Musica e pubblico giovanile* [A.1.2]**

In the spring of 2014, thirty-four years after the first publication, Odoja, a Bologna-based publisher with a passion for retrieving lost books, approached me with the intention of publishing a new edition of *Musica e pubblico giovanile* in a “cult book” series. I was glad that I had the chance to add four chapters on folk-revival songwriters that I could not include in the first edition for reasons of length (no re-release is complete without bonus tracks).

I will transcribe here, with some adaptations, a few paragraphs from the introduction to the new edition of the book, as my final thoughts on the matter (they also appeared as a separate book chapter, “**Music and Young Audiences in the 1970s: A Debate Revisited,**” **A.4.2**):

*Musica e pubblico giovanile* did not cross the threshold of postmodernity. I tried to avoid the heavy weight of ideology, yet a rather firm belief in the “critique of alienated consciousness” still framed my perspective. According to the general presupposition of such “critical criticism” (to quote Marx’s *The Holy Family*), the breaking-up of artistic barriers was essential to the gradual self-awareness of the disenfranchised classes, whose “desires,” “interests,” and “needs” I discussed in a fashion that was still too much in debt to the minor Marxist schools of the time. Not only that. The book’s underlying premise was that the “aesthetic education of humankind” (here I am purposely mixing up Schiller and Marx, which I did back then without knowing it) was supposed to cause a “dialectical fall-out” (here I channel the political jargon of the age) that in turn would enhance whatever rational process was active in the political and economic reality of those times.

It was a rusty, idealistic theoretical frame, which had not lost its charm; at least not yet. Things were moving fast, though, and not exactly in the direction we hoped (“we” meaning the artistic-political segment of society I belonged to). In fact, *Musica e pubblico giovanile* came out just in time, at the last minute of a game that in the end was lost. It was the game of underground or alternative counterculture wishing to save the world on the strength of its own otherness, in the stubborn hope that one day “we” would be released (“we shall be released”, as Bob Dylan sang in a Woodstock cellar in 1967). By 1980, however, we did not know whether we had to free ourselves or whether someone else would have to come to our rescue, be it Lenin or Deleuze, the traditional working class or the “metropolitan Indians” (as the unaffiliated, “autonomous,” rioting youngsters were called in Italy by the end of the 1970s). We did not know if our liberation would make us feel less alone.

In addition, *Musica e pubblico giovanile* came out at the end of the avant-garde age, when the force of the Darmstadt avant-garde and American free jazz was nearly

spent. I was sympathetic to American minimalism, but I could not anticipate the musical restoration of the decade to come, Neo-tonal composers, MTV, or Neo-romantic techno-pop – back then I would have regarded them with horror, but now they sound like the last great age of pop song. The 1980s were the years when the survivors of the 1960s lost their grip, their sound, the sense of their presence in the music scene, and only a handful of them got their mojo back in the 1990s or even later. Yet the utopia of full disalienation was too pervasive to be completely dropped. I could not drop it. And if you hope that any day now you shall be released or find yourself reintegrated within the totality of your Self (according to the jargon of New Age psychology that was the new talk in the 1980s), you cannot help but becoming impatient, short of attention, unbearable to yourself and to whoever is close to you. You become a millenarist.

Rock music criticism in the 1970s had largely adopted a reverse Gospel narrative. The successful rock musician was treated like a Christ who instead of dutifully climbing on the cross signed a contract with Pilatus, started a propaganda tour of Galilee in support of the Roman legions, married a groupie named Mary Magdalene, and settled in an upscale neighborhood of rich Pharisees, protected by walls, barbed wire, and armed security. In terms that are familiar to the readers of G. B. Vico's philosophy of history, at the end of the 1960s the death of Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Jim Morrison signaled the end of the age of the gods. In December 1980, the murder of John Lennon marked the end of those whom destiny had already scaled down to demigods. In 1994, the suicide of Kurt Cobain put a seal on the age of those who could have become heroes, professionals, journeymen, or nothing of the above. In my Puritanical 1980 attitude, I was anxiously waiting for the moment when the myth-making obsession polluting the music scene would finally be done with. Alas, that result has been achieved. After Michael Jackson's death in 2009, there are

no more myths, only celebrities, and the criticism directed at the mythologization of rock stars is now irrelevant.

Yet I was too dismissive of the music that did not keep the torch of the avant-garde forever burning. I was unjust with Italian musicians who did not feel an affinity for experimental and anti-populist trends. I also overvalued European avant-garde rock, which did not entirely keep its promises and, with few exceptions, seems to me now the partially doomed enterprise of well-intentioned practitioners whose musical scores were more demanding than the music they could actually play. I regret my disparaging treatment of electric Miles Davis and the insufficient interest I had in rhythm and blues and soul music. That was entirely my fault, yet it is also true that in those times the inner dynamics of U.S. black culture were too complex for the white European mind to grasp. We in Continental Europe understood the blues because Eric Clapton and John Mayall had “explained” them to us. But the African-American community did not listen to the blues. They listened to Motown, Stax, or the deep black music of Cobra and King Records that no white performer could make (more) palatable to a white audience—true homegrown American art, free from European influences.

Critics must not lose their sting, lest their work be reduced to irrelevance. Yet Robert Schumann was right: when we hear a perfect piece of music, such as the *Allegretto* in B flat from Beethoven’s Symphony No. 8, “one has no choice but to be quiet and happy”.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the critic should do a little soul-searching and try to understand why the passing of the years has made him so self-indulgent. In my book, I wrote that Keith Jarrett’s *Köln Concert* embodied “the obsession of petit-bourgeois

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*. Ed. Konrad Wolff, trans. Paul Rosenfeld. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1946, p. 98 (entry of December 10, 1840).



pleasantness, eighty minutes of unbearable musical molasses”.<sup>10</sup> The young come into the world with the precise mandate to be contemptuous; it is the sense of their appearance on this earth, and I did not want to be an exception. I could not stand any music written after 1945 that was not harsh, dissonant, and intolerable to the ears of the casual listener. At times, however, I really liked listening to Keith Jarrett the same way you pass by a pastry shop and there is no diet in the world that will stop you from stepping in and buying a Napoléon. There is a place in my mind where I am still certain that Jarrett’s *Köln Concert*, with its Celtic, modal cascades, its long pentatonic meanderings, and the implicit promise to reconcile all genres and styles, is a perfect example of musical molasses. The fact is that eventually you reach an age when you realize that all dreams of personal, collective, utopian, and musical happiness are a little syrupy. Or a lot. And there is not much you can do about it except, sometimes, enjoy it.

## **6. *Music and Society in Italy* [A.2.1]**

While I was working on the new edition of *Musica e pubblico giovanile*, Professor Mario B. Mignone of SUNY Stony Brook asked me to be the guest editor of a special issue of *Forum Italicum*, the journal he directs. Published by Sage, *Forum Italicum* is one of the most authoritative journals in Italian Studies outside Italy. I proposed “Music and Society in Italy” with the idea of creating a portrait of Italian musical civilization, without barriers of time, period, genre, and style. I selected twenty-eight articles out of forty-five for a 420-page volume. Scholars, musicians, and authors from Australia, Italy, France, Switzerland, and the US participated in the project. Classical music, opera, folk music, pop and rock, jazz, songs, music of minorities and immigrants—all genres and modes of music production were given

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<sup>10</sup> “...l’ossessione della gradevolezza, ottanta minuti di melassa sonora insopportabilmente piccolo-borghese.” A. Carrera, *Musica e pubblico giovanile. L’evoluzione del gusto musicale dagli anni Sessanta agli anni Ottanta*. Bologna: Odoja, 2014, p. 101.

equal room. In addition to selecting and editing the articles, I have contributed with an editorial (“**Down in the Grooves of Italian Music,**” in **A.2.1**) that assesses the role of music in Italian society from the 17th to the 21st century. The *Forum Italicum* issue is in many ways a continuation, a correction, and a validation of the book on music and young audiences that I published thirty-five years ago.

## Section B

### Publications on Music and the Mind, and the Philosophy of Minimalism

#### 1. Biographical Premise

In the first months of 1982, I found a job as managing editor at Edizioni Riza, a new, Milan-based publishing house that was tapping into the growing market for herbalism, homeopathy, naturopathy, yoga, Ayurveda, and other branches of alternative medicine. The publishing house was a branch of Istituto Riza, a private association of psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and psychologists in training that gathered around two young psychiatrists, both senior house officers in a Milanese hospital. Their aim was to revive and update the psychosomatic therapy championed by maverick psychoanalyst Georg Groddeck (1866-1934) and mix it with the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung. Both the institute and the publishing house were open to forays into rather esoteric therapies. In *Riza*, the monthly magazine that was the flag of the Institute, one could read articles by respectable physicians, psychiatrists, and philosophers side by side with articles on theosophy, anthroposophy, medical practices of ancient India, Taoist medicine, symbolism, astrology, physiognomy, and alchemy. Sincere intellectual curiosity and fascination with the unscientific therapies of the past shared room with a good dose of easy New Age holism and an ideological distaste for official, well-funded, drug-based medicine. The Riza environment was rather distant from the debonair music critics of the radical left I used to hang out with in my musical apprenticeship. If music, literature and the arts did not provide useful clues to therapeutic solutions, the Riza people dismissed them as just “culture.”

Such a complete change of direction was exactly what I was looking for. The ultra-politicization of the previous years had stressed the entire nation, it had ushered in an ugly season of terrorism that in the end benefited only the reactionary forces, and it had become

psychologically untenable to say the least. Working side by side with fringe psychologists, no matter how weird their ideas sounded at times, was in itself a healing process. It so happened that I immersed myself in the study of alchemical symbolism. My *Angel of the Odd*, to quote from E. A. Poe, definitely had a field day when *La Repubblica*, a leading national newspaper, interviewed me as a representative of the “young alchemists” movement.

I had no intention to abandon music, though; nor was the music abandoning me. My book on music and young audiences was still in circulation and I was often asked to write articles for cultural journals and national magazines. In 1983, I witnessed the Philips-sponsored official launch of the CD at Villa D’Este near Como. In 1984, I wrote an article for *Panorama Mese*, a popular monthly magazine, on the difference between LOR (Listening Oriented Music) and DOR (Dance Oriented Music). In 1985, I gave a paper in a scholarly conference in Milan on the current developments in music reproduction (“**La musica dalla riproduzione alla simulazione,**” A.4.1). I also gave papers in two early IASPM conferences, Reggio Emilia (1983), and Montréal (1985). However, I was moving away from the sociopolitical debate. I had found two new subjects that were of great interest to me.

The first one was related to my job at Edizioni Riza: I wanted to explore how psychoanalysis had interpreted the ancient, cosmological myths on the origins of music and the myths that narrated an “acoustic” origin of the world. The second one was my growing fascination with minimalism, either classical (Steve Reich, Philip Glass), popular (Brian Eno, Laurie Anderson), between-two-worlds (Terry Riley, LaMonte Young, Meredith Monk), or highly conceptual (Alvin Lucier, Robert Ashley).

Several articles on music, cosmology and psychoanalysis that I wrote from 1982 to 1988 appeared in the journals of Edizioni Riza. The articles on the philosophy of minimalism appeared in scholarly journals such as *Musica/Realtà*, which I have already mentioned (page 20), and *I Quaderni della Civica Scuola di Musica*, a musicology quarterly founded by Alessandro Melchiorre, who was then a young professor of composition and who is now

director of the “Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi” in Milan. My 1988 article, **“Il confine della musica. Sul senso cosmologico dell'esperienza musicale” (B.3.11)** was later reprinted with few changes in *Östliches-Westliches*, a book published in Heidelberg in 1995 to honor Benedictine Father Cyrill Korvin von Krasinski (1905-1992) (**“La musica come confine simbolico tra microcosmo e macrocosmo,” B.4.1**). Father Krasinski was a scholar of Buddhism and Tibetan medicine I met in Germany in 1979 when I was writing my Schönberg thesis. I also managed to have one of Krasinski’s articles published in one of the journals of Edizioni Riza.

I also participated in the 1986 annual symposium of the Traditional Cosmology Society at the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, where I had the privilege to meet the scholar of Scottish ballads Emily Lyle, who had organized the conference and who was the editor of *Cosmos*. I gave a paper called “Music and the Creation of the World.” The three papers I read at in Reggio Emilia, Montréal, and Edinburgh were my first presentations in English.

My direct involvement with Edizioni Riza lasted from the beginning of 1982 to the end of 1984. A bitter, outright nasty dispute between the president of the Institute and the director-administrator of the publishing house led to drastic change of personnel. After the administrator was fired, it was my turn to be ousted. My indirect involvement lasted until 1987, though, because no one else was equipped to deal with the esoteric areas of expertise. Being the esotericist-in-residence was a dubious honour, but I still needed the job. I liked it when Chris Cutler gave me permission to publish an article in which he explained his historical-materialistic and decidedly anti-Jungian view of alchemical symbolism—a view that was his inspiration in the lyrics of Art Bears’ *Winter Songs* (1979).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Chris Cutler, “Winter Songs / Canti invernali.” Trans. Umberto Fiori. *Kemi-Hathor. Rivista internazionale di alchimia*, 3 (10), 1984: 176-183.

Between 1985 and 1987, I was managing editor of “Essere secondo natura” (“To Live in Accordance with Nature”) a new journal of “ecology of the mind and body.” In the August of 1987, I edited a special issue on music therapy for which I also wrote a few articles. I do not mention them in my list of published works because “Essere” was not a scholarly journal, yet I managed to include in my special issue a chapter on New Orleans voodoo and jazz from Michael Ventura’s *Shadow Dancing in the USA*, and a seminal article by Philip Tagg on the soundscape of the modern city.<sup>12</sup> Ideally, I was juxtaposing a writer from the “new cosmology” school (Ventura) and a semiotician (Tagg). It was my last venture into the realm of the cosmology of music until I published my tenure book, *Lo spazio materno dell’ispirazione. Agostino, Blanchot, Celan, Zanzotto*. Two chapters, “**Il canto perduto. Sguardo e scrittura nell’Orfeo di Blanchot**” (B.1.1) and “**La traccia dell’eterno. Tempo e musica in Sant’Agostino**” (B.1.2), hark back to my work in the field of music and the mind. An outline of the philosophical and literary themes I discuss in those chapters would take up too much space. I will therefore concentrate on my 1980s articles on cosmology, psychoanalysis, and minimalism.

## 2. Articles on music, cosmology, and psychoanalysis

### 2.a – Theoretical Framework

Between 1978 and 1984, I spent time in Germany and I had the opportunity to study in the gorgeous library of the Benedictine Abbey in Maria Laach near Koblenz (the place where I met Father Krasinski). While working on Schönberg, I became familiar with the “Harmonie der Welt” theme. I was struck by the traction that such neo-Pythagorean, quasi-mystical

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Ventura, *Shadow Dancing in the USA*. Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1986; Philip Tagg, “Le città sono come impianti stereo a bassa fedeltà” [Cities are Low-fi Stereo Systems], *Essere secondo natura*. “Il farmaco sonoro,” monographic issue, ed. A. Carrera, 2 (16), 1987: 60-69. Tagg’s article was originally written for *L’Unità* where it was published in three parts (August 10, 15, 19, 1986) to accompany the Italian translation of R. Murray Schafer’s *The Tuning of the World*, New York: Random House, 1977. I asked *L’Unità* permission to reprint the article in its entirety. The author’s final version, “Reading Sounds or an Essay on Sounds, Music, Knowledge, Rock & Society,” is available at [<http://www.tagg.org/articles/readsound.html>].

approaches had in German culture, from the erudite musicologists of the nineteenth century to Paul Hindemith, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Joachim Berendt. Then, in 1981, after the completion of my thesis, I read the latest book of my advisor, philosopher Carlo Sini.<sup>13</sup> According to Sini, the correspondence between human body and the cosmic dimension (the Renaissance icon of the “cosmic man” whose body parts correspond to constellations, etc.) had remained alive from Plato to the post-Copernican cosmology of Giordano Bruno. The birth of modern, Galilean science, however, got rid of the “great animal” that the universe had once been. As a result, modern truth is no longer “out there”; it derives from calculation or it is confined to the interiority of the soul. I could see that in their sympathy for Jung, alchemy, and symbolism, the *Riza* psychologists were trying, albeit awkwardly, to check the pulse of the sick animal that the cosmos had become. And I connected the dots.

First, there were the neo-Pythagorean scholars living in their parallel universe of arcane analogies between the veins of a leaf and the Greek modal scales (Albert von Thimus, 1806-1878; Hans Kayser, 1891-1964; Marius Schneider, 1903-1982; I also include Jules Combarieu, 1859-1916, for his studies on music as an offspring of ancient magic). Second, there was Sini’s lament over the lost cosmologies that had given human beings a central role in the universe until they were expelled from legitimate culture when science took over. Third, there was my hypothesis, namely, that psychoanalysis had become the last refuge of the lost cosmological wisdom. Not necessarily Jungian psychoanalysis, because I never converted to the Jungian cult. I had to rely on Jung, however, because Freud never showed a great interest in music and only Theodor Reik and a few others looked at music from a Freudian point of view.<sup>14</sup> Jung, on the other hand, wrote a few albeit crucial pages in *Symbols*

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<sup>13</sup> Carlo Sini, *Passare il segno. Semiotica, cosmologia, tecnica*. Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1981. The title is based on an untranslatable pun: “passare il segno” means both “overcoming the sign” and being “beyond the pale.”

<sup>14</sup> Theodor Reik, *Ritual: Psycho-analytic Studies*. Trans. Douglas Bryan. London: Hogarth Press, 1931; *The Haunting Melody: Psychoanalytic Experiences in Life and Music*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1953, and *Mystery on the Mountain: The Drama of the Sinai Revelation*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959, pp. 75-77.

of *Transformation* on the relationship between creation myths and musical imagination (I will refer to them later).

My argument went back, however, to the third chapter of my Schönberg thesis—a chapter on Diderot, Schopenhauer, and Schönberg that I eventually revised and published in 1982 (“**Schönberg, Schopenhauer e il nipote di Rameau,**” **B.3.3**). I pointed out that in Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew* (1762-1774) the rationalism of eighteenth-century French music was turned upside down when Diderot described how the “Nephew” trusted two contradictory statements at the same time. Namely, that the pleasure of music lies in the pure, disinvested perception of the relations among sounds, and that the aim of the music is to express the “animal cry” (*cri animal*) of unrestrained passion. That *cri animal* went a long way and culminated in the total hysterization of music in Schönberg’s one-act monodrama, *Erwartung* Op. 17 (1909). I could also have said that Diderot’s *cri animal* transferred its power to popular music in the course of the twentieth century, from Hank Williams’s wail to Billie Holiday’s dignity in sorrow, up to James Brown’s relentless staging of his sexual persona. I was not ready to do that, however, and it was not the right venue to do it.

At that time, I was also influenced by the German philosopher Ernst Bloch who, in *The Spirit of Utopia* (1923), stated that music is both the most ancient art and the youngest one, insofar as it attained a formal set of rules after all other arts had already established theirs (“**La storia della musica secondo Ernst Bloch,**” **B.3.4**). The archaism/modernity dyad from Diderot to Bloch was the theoretical framework of my research into the psychological interpretation of musical cosmologies. Four other articles that I published in 1984 were relevant to the topic, and I will discuss them now (**in B.2.1, B.3.8, B.3.11 and B.4.1**).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The first three articles I will discuss here are included in *La musica e la psiche. Saggio di cosmologia* (**B.2.1**), monographic issue of *Riza scienze*. I relinquished my position at the Edizioni Riza at the end of 1984. When the monographic issue came out, I was no longer the managing editor, although my name still appears on the credit page.



## 2.b – Cosmology and psychoanalysis

The analogical thinking that connects music to the creation of the world moves quickly from one similarity to the next and rarely stops to ask why the world is supposed be an *analogon* of sound. In the work of the positivist scholars who were fascinated by the abundance of numeric analogies between musical scales and constellations, the transition from the invention of analogies to their rational justification was always retroactive: human beings create myths to justify, *a posteriori*, the event in their lives. In other words, the positivist scholars took for granted that humankind has always been “rational” in the Western sense of the word, and that ancient, mythical imagination was nothing more than an underdeveloped science. I am not saying that such approach should be completely dismissed (science historian Giorgio de Santillana has made use of it, sometimes, with persuasive efficacy). Yet it runs the risk of reducing myths down to mere deductive explanation. My approach was rather a defence of cosmology *qua* cosmology, and of music *qua* music. If we understand myth not as an explanation but as *the same thing it narrates*, then we also understand what Lévi-Strauss meant when he said (I am quoting him loosely) that we should listen to music the way we would listen to the narration of a myth.<sup>16</sup>

In “**Dell’essenza sonora del mondo**” (in **B.2.1**), I pointed out that Marius Schneider was perhaps the most coherent mythographer of music. His explanations never abandon the analogical level and do not claim hypothetical-deductive certitudes. He creates a “golden chain” (to use a metaphor that had currency in post-Renaissance esotericism) that connects breathing and singing to rubbing and stroking. The musical creation of the world comes down to singing as a form of attrition that congeals the chaotic original essence, and this deviation (or *clinamen*, following Democritus) is responsible for the coming into being of all things. Tension and release is the essence of breathing and singing as much as it is the essence of

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<sup>16</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked – Mythologiques Volume One*. Trans. John and Doreen Weightman. New York: Harper & Row, 1969, pp. 1-35.

creation. Schneider's explanation of the holy syllable *Om* as man's contribution to the balance of creation also sums up his own quite idiosyncratic metaphysics. To me, Schneider's cosmology was never an article of faith. I just found the narrative fascinating.

Years later, while I was working on my Dylan book, I found out that the maverick anthropologist Harry Everett Smith (1923-1991) had edited his seminal *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952) on the assumption that folk music was the true "music of the spheres." He based his operating principle on the *Tabula smaragdina* or *Emerald Tablet*, an ancient Hermetic text of third century Egypt, or possibly an Arabic text of the sixth or seventh century, subsequently translated into Latin. In Isaac Newton's translation, the text reads, "That which is below is that like which is above & that which is above is like that which is below to do the miracles of one only thing".<sup>17</sup> In Smith's interpretation, folk music ("that which is below") is like "that which is above" (the music of the spheres). It would have been appropriate to include Harry Smith in my project, if I had known about him back then. I mentioned him, however, when I discussed Dylan's approach to the ancient ballads of the British Isles.

In "**La funzione della musica nelle teorie della libido**" (in B.2.1), I described Jungian psychoanalysis as an ambitious translation project that aimed to make viable the lost tongue of cosmological myths in a language modern man could relate to. In a way, where cosmos was, there psychology shall be.<sup>18</sup> Psychology was perhaps the only way to save the ancient wisdom from positivistic reductionism. Not so much experimental psychology as psychology in a broad sense, which includes psychoanalysis and psychology of culture. Yet psychoanalysis, dependent as it is on the spoken word, has largely ignored music. The pages

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<sup>17</sup> Isaac Newton, *Commentary on the Tabula smaragdina* (ms Keynes 28, King's College, Cambridge). Quoted in B. J. T. Dobbs, *The Janus Faces of Genius: The Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 175.

<sup>18</sup> My obvious paraphrase of Freud's 31<sup>st</sup> introductory lecture on psychoanalysis, final remark: "Wo Es war, soll Ich werden" ("Where id was, there ego shall be"). See Sigmund Freud, *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse. Gesammelte Werke, chronologisch geordnet* 7. Aufl. Frankfurt: Fischer, 1979, p. 86.

in which Jung, in *Symbols of Transformation*, “amplifies” the erotic-musical dreams of one Miss Frank Miller to a cosmological scale were therefore significant to me. Jung attempted to give shape to a libidinal theory of music by means of analogies and symbols (the “creation song” is a wind that impregnates, and the air, the “spirit,” is itself libido).<sup>19</sup> If Freud was particularly “deaf” to music, some of his followers (Sigmund Pfeifer was one of them) tried nonetheless to include singing in that particular “organ-related pleasure” that characterizes the anal-sadistic stage.<sup>20</sup> Yet this is where psychoanalysis becomes as reductive as positivism. I concluded therefore that an explanation of music as libido remained a fascinating enterprise but it was ultimately unsatisfying. The tension between the externality and the interiority of music was too complex for a unified theory. I ignored, at that time, Darwin’s contribution to the understanding of musical protolanguage as part of the courtship ritual, and the possible links between psychoanalysis and the evolutionary theory of music.<sup>21</sup>

When I wrote the articles that I have discussed here, I was still under the sway of the great wave of expressionistic optimism that produced Arnold Schönberg’s *Theory of Harmony* and Ernst Bloch’s *Spirit of Utopia* (published in 1922 and 1923). In 1984, I was not ready to abandon the Romantic notion of “Self,” either in cosmological or psychological fashion. The utopian power of music is the promise of a non-split Self, yet I was already familiar with the early writings of Jacques Lacan and I should have known by then that there is no Self that is not internally split.<sup>22</sup> The remaining years of the 1980s, however, did their best to inoculate many of us, in Italy and elsewhere, against persistent bouts of utopian fever. The criticism of utopian time, and especially Bloch’s, is in fact one of the themes of my

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<sup>19</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Symbols of Transformation (Collected Works of C. G. Jung Vol. 5)*. Trans. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967, pp. 39-78.

<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Pfeifer, “Problems of the Psychology of Music.” *Imago*, 9 (4), 1923: 453–462.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Vol. 1 (1871). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> I am referring in particular to “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2002, pp. 75-81.

philosophy book, *L'esperienza dell'istante* (1995), in which I also criticized Bloch's interpretation of Beethoven's *Fidelio* as too dewy-eyed.<sup>23</sup>

In my 1988 article, “**Il confine della musica. Sul senso cosmologico dell'esperienza musicale**” (B.3.11), I tried to clarify further the notion that music and its explanations, as in quantum mechanics, are objects whose complementary properties cannot be measured with accuracy with respect to one another. In a complementary relation, A may be true and B may be true, but A has no meaning with respect to B and B has no meaning with respect to A. To give an example, I may believe in the Book of Genesis and Darwinism. From the point of view of a logic of non-contradiction, one account is probably true and the other one is probably false. As systems of beliefs, however, both accounts may be functionally “true” in their proper context, but the Book of Genesis has no meaning with respect to Darwinism and Darwinism has no meaning with respect to the Book of Genesis. To the extent that music, as Lévi-Strauss said in his introduction to *The Raw and the Cooked*, is both understandable and untranslatable, a similar case can be made. For music is not the opposite of language, but with respect to language, it inhabits a parallel world. Conversely, in a hypothetical musical thought (the one the aliens speak in *Close Encounters*, perhaps?) language takes place in a different dimension. So far, the semiotics of music has been the most serious attempt to stretch music on to a signifying grid that may be able to detect specific occurrences of musical signification. A dream project, one for which a team of scholars is required, would perhaps connect the semiotics of music to the hermeneutics of what the “event” of music means, i.e., the ontological question of why there is music instead of just noise.

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<sup>23</sup> A. Carrera, *L'esperienza dell'istante. Metafisica, tempo, scrittura*. Milano: Lanfranchi, 1995, pp. 117-128. In the book, I rewrote a previous article of mine, too short to be included in the list of published works: “Ernst Bloch. La musica come tempo dell'istante.” *Kemi-Hathor. Rivista internazionale di alchimia*, 3 (8), 1984: 29-33.

There is one paragraph, in my article, **“La funzione della musica nelle teorie della libido” (in B.2.1)**, in which I tied my 1984 research on music and cosmology to my 1980 book, *Musica e pubblico giovanile* (A.1.1 – A.1.2). Here is my translation:

Music harbours the stages in the growth of consciousness and the psychological and physiological “Self,” which is always the growth of a “world.” The ancient cultures that gave music a high role in the formation of personality were aware of its power better than we are. In our music-as-art, we mourn the loss of that power. The young know it as well, as they grow up “within” the music (good or bad it does not matter), making themselves remote and impenetrable to the grown-ups thanks to the “mystic screen of sound” coming from their radios and stereos. With all their limitations, which are the limitations of an entire culture centered in psychology, the libidinal theories of music do their best to confirm this old truth. (**“La funzione della musica nelle teorie della libido” (in B.2.1, p. 53).**)<sup>24</sup>

## 2c – Minimalism

From 1983 to 1986, I wrote four scholarly articles on minimalism and ambient music. In **“Musica da tavola nell'unità di abitazione. Note su Brian Eno” (B.3.6)**, my first concern was to define what “ambient” meant to the new school of composers or—in Brian Eno’s case—non-composers. I understood “ambient” as an organizational structure. Ambient music does not occupy a previously organized space. It recruits the same space as an essential component of its structure. Eno’s chance sequences (his “Oblique Strategies”) did not make him a latecomer aleatoric musician. In fact, the difference between Cage’s *Music Walk* (1958) and Eno’s *Music for Airports* (1978) is the same as that between a mechanical tool and an electronic device. If Cage was a sound creator, Eno was a sound programmer, more interested in software than in hardware. His reliance on intuition was based on the thrill that he felt every time he found out what his technological extensions were capable of doing without him. And if the technological extensions would produce nothing but repetitions of the same pattern (something that Cage would never accept), that was fine too. The radical difference between the old avant-garde and the new was therefore the rejection or acceptance of repetition,

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<sup>24</sup> The “mystic screen of sound” is a quotation from Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* (1964), Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994, p. 303: “The mystic screen of sound with which they are invested by their radios provides the privacy for their homework, and immunity from parental behest.”

respectively. Cage attended Schönberg's classes and grew up in a time when repetition was anathema. He was also a reader of Henry David Thoreau and inherited Thoreau's individualism. In his worldview, repetition ushers in indifference, which is not acceptable because everybody is different. In the end, it was a question of moral stance, which bothered the old guard but not the new generation of minimalist composers, for whom repetition was not indifference but modularity and the possibility of working with discrete units, which would form a seamless continuum once they were put in a sequence (*a* sequence as well as *any* sequence).

What attracted me toward the aesthetic of minimalism was that the minimalist composers had turned *my* musical world upside down. I was a devotee of free jazz and the European avant-garde. I always expected the unexpected harmony, the unexpected timbre, the abrupt change in intensity and sonic mass. The last thing I expected was a music where there was (apparently) very little to expect, and yet that very lack of expectancy about the unexpected inevitably raised my level of attention. I found out, in other words, that redundancy provided additional information by means of subtracting it. In fact, the assumption that Glass, Reich, Eno, and Soft Machine in their *Sixth* and *Seven* albums produced articulations in which elements mattered because of their relative indifference was in itself reductive. Several years later, in my book on the "maternal space of inspiration" (*Lo spazio materno dell'ispirazione*, **B.1.1** and **B.1.2**), in which "maternal" means pre-discursive, I laid down the theoretical framework that now allows me to understand in retrospect how minimalism was indeed working with pre-discursive pre-signifiers.

Ultimately, pleasure was the issue at stake. Why did the endless recurrence of small musical cells give pleasure to the same audience that had grown up with the 1960s avant-garde (as I witnessed when I attended a concert of the Philip Glass Ensemble in Milan in

1985)? Why did it give *me* pleasure? Or was it enjoyment (*jouissance*) rather than pleasure?<sup>25</sup> Schönberg's *Pierrot lunaire* and Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître* gave me pleasure. A Frank Zappa solo gave me pleasure. Was it the same pleasure that I had from listening to Glass's *Music in Twelve Parts*? Why did I find some satisfaction every time I perceived a slight *clinamen* in a sequence, given that I could have derived endless satisfaction from, say, Boulez's Third Piano Sonata, if all I wanted was change?

By mid-1980s, I had not progressed enough in my understanding of pre-discursive communication to answer the question in a satisfying manner. In Lacanian fashion, I would now venture to say that those ludicrously simple musical cells were “permeated with the substance of enjoyment” precisely because they resisted transitioning to fully formed signifiers.<sup>26</sup> In the vocabulary of C. S. Peirce's semiotics, they belonged to the stage of “Firstness” (feeling, possibility, vagueness, unspecified quality). By repeating themselves (or by being indifferent to their repetition or disappearance), they resisted the inevitable move to “Secondness” (relation, actuality) and then to “Thirdness” (representation, necessity). They would rather insist on their kernel of non-significance because where there is fully formed significance, there can be pleasure but there is no enjoyment. In my essays of 1983-1986, I circled around the issue, but I knew it was *the* issue. I even published an article on music and the pleasure of repetition for *Spirali*, a monthly magazine that popularized Lacan in Italy!<sup>27</sup>

I was not blind, however, to the socio-political implications of the calculated passivity of minimalism. Marius Schneider had found a musical score hidden in the architecture of the

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<sup>25</sup> In Freud's parlance, the “pleasure” of repetition has an obsessive-compulsive connotation and it is related to the ego-drives or death drive (because, unlike erotic pleasure, it focuses on the survival of the individual and not on the continuation of the human race). Lacan has introduced the notion of *jouissance* to differentiate the “enjoyment” or “thrill” of the death drive from erotic *plaisir*.

<sup>26</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> A. Carrera, “La musica e il piacere della ripetizione.” *Spirali*, 8 (78-79), 1985: 51-52 (too short to be included in the list of published works).

Cathedral of Sant Cugat in Catalonia.<sup>28</sup> If the music sculpted in the columns of Sant Cugat represented a (supposedly) harmonious community of religious and political subjects, Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* celebrated the faceless non-community of travelers who meet in airports-cathedrals, "harmoniously" united in their rituals of shopping, eating, passing customs, handling tickets to the attendants, and disappearing inside the airplanes' womb. Minimalism was a sophisticated form of musical Darwinism. The very concept of "ambient" had biological, ecological, and ultimately biopolitical implications, whose ideology was that the "ambient" and nothing else made the music. The "ambient" selected the best sequence, the "ambient" reduced the range of possible mutations down to those having the best chance of survival. Yet there was nothing natural about the process. "Ambient" was another name for the current state of the forces of production positing themselves as "the" natural forms of production and exchange.

Having paid my dues to sociopolitical analysis, I was free to investigate the other epistemological questions that ambient music raised. In "**Nella stanza di Alvin Lucier. Note su musica e ambiente**" (B.3.7), I focused on *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969), a performance piece in which Lucier first recorded his voice reading a text and then played it back into the room, re-recording the first tape plus the background noise on a second tape. Then he recorded the second tape back on the first tape, always with the "accompaniment" of background noise. The taping went on until the resonance frequencies of the room reduced the recorded voice to a vague flute-like melody.

Lucier's conceptual music was more radical than Eno's, whose attitude was specular to the indifference of the surrounding ambient. The "infinite mirrors" on the cover of Fripp and Eno's *No Pussyfooting* (1975) were indeed Eno's declaration of poetics. Lucier, on the other hand, put on stage the aggressiveness of the ambient: given  $n$  number of re-recordings,

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<sup>28</sup> Marius Schneider, *Singende Steine: Rhythmus-Studien an drei katalanischen Kreuzgangen romanischen Stils*. Kassel: Barenreiter, 1955.



any text or music will be reduced to a fluctuating wave. Hegel's chilling praise of table music (*Tafelmusik*) as a good expedient to fill in the empty time among people who are dining and chatting supported my point, namely, that *I Am Sitting in a Room* was the final nail in the coffin of whatever was left of existential-phenomenological subjectivity.<sup>29</sup> Alvin Lucier had the audacity to stage the metamorphosis of the composer into a piece of furniture. The room selects what the audience will ultimately hear. Nothing that the ambient does not allow reverberates from the walls of Lucier's room.

Yet the listener, albeit de-subjectivized, can still talk back, or better play back. The paradoxical obverse of Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969) was The Residents' *Third Reich 'n' Roll* (1976), a concept album in which the California-based group went through forty songs of the 1950s and 1960s, one minute each. The Residents played the songs absentmindedly, as if they were reproducing what casual listeners hear while doing other things, including interruptions, distortions, missing parts, and outbursts of radio static. The Residents' trivialization of Lucier's little chamber drama amounted to a sarcastic, postmodern version of what Luigi Nono would have later called "a tragedy of listening" (it was the subtitle of his 1982 opera, *Prometeo*).

Possibly, the transition from content to context and from context to ambient sums up the period that stretches from the high modernism of be-bop and early electric blues to the obsessive harmonic redundancy of smooth jazz and the equally obsessive diatonic unfolding of background acoustic music. Yet there was magic in Alvin Lucier's live performances (which I attended at the Brooklyn Academy in the 1990s). There was disenchanted shamanism at work, enough to make the audience aware that *somebody* must start the performance, *somebody* has to set it up, even if the outcome is somebody's disappearance.

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<sup>29</sup> "This walking to and fro, this clattering and chattering should be regulated, and since in the intervals of eating and drinking we have to do with empty time, this emptiness should be filled. This is an occasion ... when music comes to the rescue and in addition wards off other thoughts, distractions, and ideas." G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 907.

The question I addressed in “**La dissipazione sociale del suono. Verso un’ecologia della cultura**” (B.3.9) stemmed precisely from the juxtaposition of ambient-oriented music (Lucier) and the aesthetic of “chance listening” (The Residents). Was it possible to find a common ground between Adorno's structured listening and postmodern, absent-minded listening? Hearing was now competing with listening (a point I had already made in the last chapter of *Musica e pubblico giovanile*, A.1.1 and A.1.2), and the aesthetic of hearing was quickly building its repertoire.

Adorno had already said that the highest-minded listeners faced an endless exposure to music that had not been made to be listened to, yet they would listen to it because turning off the radio was more uncomfortable than keeping it turned on, and even the decision not to pay attention to in-store music would require an extremely demanding exercise. What mattered was that something was *on*. That was now the sound of the world, the music of the (semio)spheres.

The vulgarity of light music that Adorno lamented (Adorno, Attali and McLuhan were my authors, but I found McLuhan and Attali more compelling) had a specific social function that Adorno did not take into consideration; not unlike the “good taste” of the listener of old, light music filtered the information overload. The noise of the world must be channeled, and even the CDs of nature sounds are a sophisticated ideological filter in their own way. The production of indifferent music signals that the world is *on* like an idle machine, not like an engine in full throttle. Noise is a deadly weapon (as Attali said, following René Girard).<sup>30</sup> Music is a sacrificial rite that keeps the Real of noise at a safe distance. Any music? Attali speaks of music recorded and therefore removed from communitarian ritual. Let us put aside

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<sup>30</sup> “Noise is a weapon and music, primordially, is the formation, domestication, and ritualization of that weapon as a simulacrum of ritual murder.” Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Trans. Brian Massumi and Susan McClary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 24 (author’s italics). “The [Chinese] *Book of Rites* affirms that sacrificial ceremonies, music, punishments, and laws have one and the same end: to unite society and establish order.” René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1979, p. 8.

the obvious fact that recorded music has never killed live music. By pushing Attali's argument further, however, I argued that iterative music cut to the chase and instead of ritualistically repeated music, it offered music that provided a conveniently pre-packaged sacrifice by means of repeating itself. It was the *ad hoc* aesthetics meant for the age of artistic overproduction and information overload. It was indeed an *intelligent, sensible* answer, which has survived and thrived in many subgenres, including techno. On the other hand, it is entirely possible to see in it the music of zero-growth, the *muzak* the members of the infamous Rome Club may be willing to play at their meetings.

In my last article on minimalism, “**L'esorcismo della grande scienza. Le nuove musiche tra natura e tecnologia**” (B.3.10), I used Laurie Anderson's *Big Science* (1982) as a cultural *passepartout* in the same way I used Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room*. My initial move was to accept the premise that iterative music, conceptual performance, ambient, techno, and even late fusion jazz, whose harmonic structure tends toward pure redundancy, were steps toward the “ecological” reduction of information and/or meaning. Still, it was legitimate to ask where the dialectical turning point could be reached, *i.e.* where, in musical terms, the production of meaning stops altogether and pure redundancy takes over. Was it a matter of quantity or quality? Of time or of space? Several answers were possible, but one thing was clear, or at least this was my conclusion in 1984. The point of “ecological music” was not to go back to nature but to exorcise technology while using it.

The first move was the beautification of technology itself. Technology had to overcome the clunky stage of modernist machines and attain the seamless beauty and smoothness of liquid crystals. The Heideggerian “Question Concerning Technology”<sup>31</sup> was about to be replaced by another question, namely, how beautiful technology can be, because as long as technology is beautiful, we may be living in a beautiful world. This beautiful new

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. and with an introduction by William Lovitt. New York & London: Garland, 1977, pp. 3-35.

technology, however, needs management. As McLuhan said, “To prevent undue wreckage in society, the artist tends now to move from the ivory tower to the control tower of society”.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, the aesthetics of rock and roll wavered between the polar opposites of “Welcome to the Machine” and “Rage against the Machine.” In reality, rock and roll was getting old because the electric guitar and even the Moog Synthesizer were still machines, but the MIDI sampler was not. By breaking up stuff and reassembling it, the sampler is an extension of our hands and it brings the sampling musician back to the primordial activity of the hunter-gatherer.

And the hunters-gatherers, as Freud said in *Totem and Taboo* quoting Salomon Reinach, did not paint animals on the walls of their caves to give themselves pleasure, but to evoke, conjure up, and exorcise.<sup>33</sup> Beauty is in itself a form of exorcism, and when it so happened that the gods of technology became dangerously close, Laurie Anderson’s 1980s performances (*United States of America* and others) were the perfect embodiment of the gentle exorcism that beauty performs to keep the ugly side of technology at bay. In the staging of her music, zodiac symbols appeared side to side with scientific formulas while an old-fashioned airplane would rotate from the rafters like a modern mandala, a serene solar symbol keeping the predators at distance. Laurie Anderson made ready-made shamanism available. Hers was survival shamanism in the heart of the metropolis. Her aim was not to challenge Big Science but to draw a magic circle that would protect her and us from science’s raw power. With her vocoder, electric violin, and tapes, she was projecting a new cosmological awareness more in the spirit of the American visionaries of the 1960s such as Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller Jr. than in the spirit of the German cosmologists I have mentioned at the

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<sup>32</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). Introduction by Lewis H. Lapham. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994, p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreements between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Trans. James Strachey. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950, p. 106.

beginning of this chapter. Ultimately, all music that aspires to a shamanistic role ends up in a “portable cosmogony”.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Raymond Queneau, *Petite cosmogonie portative*. Paris: Gallimard, 1950.

## Section C

### Publications on Bob Dylan

#### 1. Biographical premise

In 1986, I applied for a position with the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs. I was offered a seven-year contract as “Italian Lecturer Abroad,” a visiting teaching position in foreign universities that included the organization of cultural events on behalf of Italian Consulates and the network of Italian Cultural Institutes. My destination was Houston, Texas, where I arrived on October 31, 1987. I spent four years in Houston (1987-1991) teaching Italian language and literature classes at the University of Houston and working as “cultural advisor” at the Consulate General of Italy in Houston.

In December 1991, I moved to Ontario, Canada where I spent my three remaining years teaching at McMaster University in Hamilton and coordinating the Italian classes at the Italian Cultural Institute in Toronto. In 1994, I was offered a second seven-year contract in New York. From 1995 to 2001, I was Assistant Visiting Professor at New York University. I organized literary and music events on behalf of the Italian Cultural Institute, and I taught classes for Ph.D. students: Italian literature at Columbia and SUNY Stony Brook, aesthetics at CUNY and New School University, and literature and music at Rutgers University.

In 2001, I applied for a renewal of my appointment. My new destination was going to be either the MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, or Boston University. Before I received the contract, however, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs decided that the Ministry-sponsored lecturers could not stay abroad for more than ten years without interruption. Having been abroad for fourteen years, I was therefore supposed to go back to Italy. At the same time, however, the University of Houston, which I had left ten years before, hired me as Assistant Professor and Director of Italian Studies upon the retirement of the previous director.

The University of Houston valued my previous experience and my publication record in Italian literature, continental philosophy, and music: the Dean with whom I had my final interview was particularly impressed that I had written a book on Bob Dylan, which indeed was about to be released. In 2004, I was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure with an accelerated procedure. In 2009, I became Full Professor and, in 2010, Graduate Director of the new Master in World Cultures and Literatures, which I created in collaboration with my Department colleagues.

Between 1987 and 2001, as a Ministry-sponsored visiting professor, my position was not on a tenure-track and I was not required to publish. I did it anyway. Between 1987 and 1997, I directed my research mostly toward Italian literature and continental philosophy. I also published a few music articles. My last article on music and cosmology, which I have already discussed in the previous chapter, appeared in 1988 (and, revised, in 1995). I will discuss my articles on Italian songwriters in the next chapter. The year 1997, however, was a game changer. Bob Dylan released *Time Out of Mind*, his so-called comeback album, and I wanted to write something about it.

## **2. Dylan Revisited**

In my 1980 book, *Musica e pubblico giovanile*, I included only a few pages about Dylan. I needed to learn more about his American roots, the folk ballads and the Delta blues that had nourished him. For a very similar reason, I concluded my dissertation on Schönberg when I came in sight of *Moses und Aron*. I needed to know more about Schönberg's Jewish roots if I wanted to address properly such a complex work. As much as *Moses und Aron* deserved a second dissertation, Bob Dylan deserved a book that I was not ready to write in 1980. I was, though, when *Time Out of Mind* came out in 1997. I was living in New York and I took advantage of all the Dylan material that was available around me.

I wrote an article for a poetry magazine (*Poesia*), on Bob Dylan's use of blues poetry in *Time Out of Mind* ("**Bob Dylan. Poesia del tempo immemorabile,**" C.4.1). Thanks to the intervention of a writer friend, my article caught the attention of Carlo Feltrinelli, president of Feltrinelli Publishing House and the eponymous bookstore chain, the largest in Italy. Mr. Feltrinelli, who was (and is) a die-hard Dylan fan, asked me if I wanted to expand my article into a book. He had already published an abridged version of Robert Shelton's Dylan biography, but he was looking for someone who could "explain" Dylan to an Italian readership.<sup>35</sup>

*La voce di Bob Dylan. Una spiegazione dell'America* (C.1.1 – C.1.3) came out in May 2001, in time for Dylan's sixtieth birthday. The title stressed that I wanted to focus on Dylan's unusual voice as his most distinctive trait. The subtitle, "An Explanation of America," was a quotation from the American poet laureate Robert Pinsky. It was not meant to say that I intended to "explain America," but that Dylan's voice, in its multi-ethnic overtones, was in itself an explanation of America.

### **3. *La voce di Bob Dylan* in detail (I refer here to the 2011 edition, C.1.3)**

The book is structured in two introductions (2001 and 2011), seven chapters, one intermezzo (a short chapter), and two conclusions (2001 and 2011). It also includes extensive discography, filmography, bibliography, and indexes. Each part of the book is titled after a Dylan song. I will follow the order of the chapters, leaving the 2011 introduction to last.

**Chapter 1) *Visions of Johanna: Poetry in the Age of Mass Media***

**Chapter 2) *Highlands: Poetry of Time Immemorial***

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1997.



In the first two chapters, I analyzed the combination of symbolism and blues witticism that has sustained Dylan's lyrics over the years. I was also looking for a better way to clarify the relationship between poetry and music. I had never been satisfied with the provisional conclusion I had reached in my Schönberg dissertation. I felt that my argument was incomplete and that it rely too much on the Viennese debate on the "limits of language" at the turn of the twentieth century, which affected philosophy, literature, and music (music and lyrics are separate languages that can look at each other and learn from each other, but cannot be translated into each other).<sup>36</sup> Its weakness was that it did not differentiate properly between orality, writing, sound, and performance.

In the liner notes of *Bringin' It All Back Home* (1965), Dylan writes, "a song is anything that can walk by itself / i am called / a songwriter. a poem is a naked person... some / people say that i am a poet." I used these lines as the basis for my argument: the difference between a poem and a song is not of a hierarchical nature; it is a matter of different expectations. The difference lies in the addition or subtraction of meaning that is inherent to the *performative practices* of poetry and song. No actor reciting a poem can make it "his own" or "her own." Not even the poem's author can, for that matter. A poem recited may acquire a surplus of beauty, but it is rare that it acquires a surplus of meaning. In a way, a written poem may be "more than written" (it is a "mouth," as W. H. Auden said), but it will never revert to orality.<sup>37</sup> A song, on the contrary, always falls short of being "fully written." It can be written and it can be scored (here I am thinking of popular songs rather than *Lieder* or arias, although they are not out of the equation), but it offers resistance to writing. It does not need just a mouth; it needs a throat, and it avoids identification with its author even when the author and the interpreter are the same person. Every performer can make a song "his own" or

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<sup>36</sup> My introduction to the Viennese debate was Massimo Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976.

<sup>37</sup> W. H. Auden, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*. In *Collected Poems*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. New York: Vintage, 1976, pp. 245-246.

“her own.” And every new performance has the chance to endow the song with a surplus of meaning.

In other words, a poem is a naked person; it belongs to its author (it strips the author bare) in a way that a song does not. A song is anything that can walk by itself. It is the paradox of writing versus performance. The universality of writing (the written alphabet has no individual “throat”) generates the individual author, the mouth; the song, which needs the throat that sings it, subtracts individuality to the throat’s owner, making him or her a link in a chain of throats and voices, each one of them unique, transient and contingent. Dylan must get credit for having turned this paradox into a poetics and an ethics of performance. The not-so-hidden meaning of “Here is your throat back, thanks for the loan” (a line from Dylan’s “Ballad of a Thin Man”) may very well be that throats are indeed borrowed and loaned.

### **Chapter 3) *It Ain’t Me, Babe: Anatomy of the Sentimental Dylanist***

With a nod in the title to Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), the chapter analyzes “I’m not There” (an incomplete 1967 demo in which Dylan made up lyrics and random phonemes on the spot) and “It Ain’t Me, Babe,” included in *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964). The chapter also includes a discussion of Arthur Crudup’s “That’s All Right Mama” (in Crudup’s, Presley’s, and Dylan’s interpretation) and Bob Dylan’s “It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding).”

“I’m not There” is a song that was never fully “written,” yet it acquired a mythical status among Dylan bootleg collectors, and was ultimately released for the first time in the soundtrack of Todd Haynes’s eponymous film (2007). People wanted to hear the song even though the words are mostly gibberish. (Or, in Lacanian-academic jargon: the singer enunciates a sequence of signifiers not to be subsumed under the law of the signified, and are therefore floating in an amniotic sea of uncanny enjoyment.) Mostly gibberish, yes, but not entirely. The song hints at a love story that ended badly or perhaps tragically. The narrator

admits that he would like to be close to the woman, who is in terrible pain, but he's not there, he's gone.

"It Ain't Me, Babe," written three years before, is on the contrary very much "written" and very straightforward. It belongs to what critic Ellen Willis called the new genre, which Dylan basically initiated, of "nonlove songs": songs explaining why A does not love B, or maybe that A would love B on the condition that their relationship is absolutely noncommittal and contemplates no restrictions to personal freedom; and if B disagrees, that's just too bad.<sup>38</sup>

The 1964 cut of "It Ain't Me, Babe" sounds like a demo. I followed therefore the song's live incarnations. First, the restrained, countrified version that Dylan played at the Isle of Wight Festival, stripping the song of all its venom (as a family man, in 1970, Dylan would not want to sing hymns to careless love). Then, the aggressive 1974 arrangement with The Band and the culminating reinvention of the song in the 1975 Rolling Thunder Revue, with great space left to the interaction of guitars and a highly imaginative bass line.

From its origin as a nonlove song, the "It Ain't Me, Babe" of 1975 had blossomed into a song of nonresponsibility (which is not the same as irresponsibility). It was a new manifesto, the community of rock and roll artists declaring their independence from their audience. It ain't us, babe, we are not here to change the world. We create our own world and we celebrate it. If you want to join the party, you are welcome. If you expect us to join you, well, we are not there, we are gone. Dylan and his band were not mired in a sociopathic frenzy. Wilfrid Mellers was the first one to point out that the key problem in Dylan is the constant negotiation and renegotiation between liberty and responsibility.<sup>39</sup> "It Ain't Me, Babe," "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleedin')," and "I'm not There" are all different stations of this particular cross.

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<sup>38</sup> Ellen Willis, "Dylan." In Craig McGregor, ed. *Bob Dylan: The Early Years - A Retrospective*. New York: Da Capo, 1990, pp. 218-239.

<sup>39</sup> Wilfrid Mellers, "Bob Dylan: Freedom and Responsibility." In Craig McGregor, ed. *Bob Dylan: The Early Years - A Retrospective*. New York: Da Capo, 1990, pp. 398-407.

### ***Intermezzo: Man in the Long Black Coat***

This short chapter traces the genealogy of “Man in the Long Black Coat,” a song included in *Oh, Mercy* (1987), back to “House Carpenter,” a traditional English ballad (“The Daemon Lover,” Child 243) that Dylan recorded in 1961 and left unreleased until 1991. Both songs are based on the traditional “type” of the lover who comes back from the underworld to reclaim his bride who has remarried. The explicit narrative in “House Carpenter” becomes elusive and implicit in “Man in the Long Black Coat” (we cannot tell whether the man in the song is alive or is a ghost, a husband or a seducer). In both performances, however, Dylan projects a feeling of uncanniness; in “House Carpenter,” he tells a ghost story as if it were news that he has just read in a newspaper. In “Man in the Long Black Coat,” he tells a story with a vague Sergio Leone-like Western backdrop, somewhat lost in the depths of time.

I discussed both the historical implications (how the ballads of the British Isles came to America, how they were half-forgotten and re-adapted in the new environment) and the moral ones (the contrast, which Dylan underlines, between the puritanical morality of the village where his story takes place and the irrepressibility of desire). I also focused on two significant features: the ominous minor chords that punctuate the song (only Hank Williams has been able to achieve the same effect in his rare minor-key songs such as “Alone and Forsaken”), and Dylan’s cold, staccato voice of 1987, in sharp contrast with the *sforzando* 1961 performance of “House Carpenter.”

Dylan does not “sing” a folk tune, or even his own tunes, for that matter. He *inhabits* them, occupying all the musical space they display. This is what makes him different from the other folksingers of his generation. They were still trapped in the assumption that a folk song must be conscientiously “delivered.” The song was the message; they were only the messengers. The aesthetic of the Greenwich Village / Harvard Square schools of folk singing (Dave Van Ronk, Paul Clayton, and many others) was founded on a political-anthropological

idea of what a folk song was supposed to be. Dylan, who cared little about politics and not at all about anthropology, and who approached folk music like an ancient Greek who would join an initiation ritual, managed to salvage the folk repertoire better than they did. If those songs are still speaking to the casual listener and not only to the specialists, it is largely thanks to the extreme dramatization to which Dylan subjected the folk material he encountered.

#### **Chapter 4) *Like a Rolling Stone: The Struggle with the Enemy Within***

My chapter on “Like a Rolling Stone” deals with the textual meaning as well as the musical impact of the song. The sophisticated rock and roll of the 1960s (Dylan, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, The Who, The Doors, Frank Zappa, Jimi Hendrix, etc.) was a perfect match for the “advanced” experiments attempted in the same years by avant-garde classical composers, free-jazz, and “cool jazz” musicians.

Rock and roll has a limited palette in terms of harmonic and rhythmic complexity, but it was the classical avant-garde of John Cage, Morton Feldman, Mauricio Kagel, and sometimes even Stockhausen and Nono, that got rid of the notion that each serious piece of music must have an incalculable number of notes, pitches, and rhythmic patterns. Berio, Boulez, and Xenakis were more ebullient, and so was Zappa for that matter. Yet in the post-minimalist landscape of today, the 1960s look more homogeneous than they did back then. The unifying requirement was that music, any kind of music, had to sound like it had never sounded before.

When Stockhausen recorded *Aus den Sieben Tagen* in 1969, he told the jazz musicians in his ensemble that he did not want to hear anything resembling jazz phrasing. When Dylan recorded *Highway 61 Revisited* in 1965, he told his lead guitar Mike Bloomfield that he did not want to hear any lick resembling B.B. King’s. It was the spirit of the time, warts and all. In the end, what mattered was the sound, the sonic ambiance. The “electronium” or “electrochord” played by Stockhausen in *Aus den Sieben Tagen* and the electric organ played

by Al Kooper in “Like a Rolling Stone” have the same function: they provide the quilting point that “ties the room together” (as Jeff Bridges’ carpet does in *The Big Lebowski*, that’s right). The “magic moment” that makes everything coalesce occurs when the spatialization of music (the recording studio as a new instrument, and not just a container of sounds) meets with the verticalization of time. Dylan’s rush to cut an album in the shortest amount of time, his impatience with the musicians who did not read his mind, as he was extremely reticent to give instructions or would rather give them in poetry (“play this solo like a seventeenth-century English squire coming down a hill at the break of dawn”) were indeed justified. The “occasion” of sound occurs in the here-and-now; in a couple of minutes it may be gone and it will be impossible to recreate.

In the 1960s, Western music bade farewell to the primacy of writing. The studio allowed for music that could not be written, and Dylan, Hendrix, and the electric Miles Davis, to mention only a few, were sometimes far ahead of their avant-garde European counterparts.

### **Chapter 5) *All Along the Watchtower: Allegories of America***

This is possibly the most complex chapter in the entire book. It is also the most literary one. I wrote it while I was teaching a graduate course on the aesthetics of the sublime at the New School University and it bears the traces of the literary theory books that I was using to explain the concept of the “American sublime” (Emerson, Whitman, Stevens, the open range, and the “sublimity” of technological power ). I used Dylan’s thoughts on Elvis Presley (“between heaven and nature”) and Jerry Garcia (“whatever is Muddy River Country at its core and screams up into the spheres”) for a close textual analysis of “All Along the Watchtower” and other songs in *John Wesley Harding* (1967).<sup>40</sup> I found an extremely

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<sup>40</sup> Dylan’s quotation on Elvis Presley comes from his blurb text for Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1994, p. i. Dylan’s obituary of Jerry Garcia appeared in *Fiddler 2* (a Grateful Dead fan magazine), August 1995. It is quoted in Clinton Heylin, *A Life in Stolen Moments: Bob Dylan Day by Day: 1941-1995*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996, p. 380.

significant textual link between Wallace Stevens's poem *The American Sublime*, T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower," which served me well to discuss Dylan's "sublime" disdain for politics and his reticence about Vietnam, a war he did not support, but was very reluctant to speak about.

### **Chapter 6) *Blind Willie McTell: Folklore as Religion***

Musical analysis comes back in this chapter, in which I outlined the genealogy of "Blind Willie McTell," a 1983 song that circulated widely in bootlegs until Dylan released it officially in 1991. I followed Michael Gray's analysis, adding a few discoveries of my own.<sup>41</sup>

"Blind Willie McTell" goes back to "The Unfortunate Rake," a well-known English ballad that through a series of textual changes and different musical settings became the cowboy ballad "The Streets of Laredo" (recorded by Johnny Cash and others) and the jazz tune "The Gambler's Blues" (recorded by Fess Williams in 1927). Then it became Blind Willie McTell's "The Dying Crapshooter's Blues" (recorded thrice) and, most famously, "St. James Infirmary," recorded by Louis Armstrong in 1928, by Duke Ellington in 1930, and pretty much by everyone else. Without quoting directly from its various sources, Dylan stages his love for the blues and his fascination with the Southern culture that gave life to the religious revivalism of the late nineteenth century (and he does so without omitting references to slavery, race, and class division). He also stages the love relationship that American Jews had with the African-American culture until the end of the 1960s, when the conversion to Islam of some prominent African-American leaders and a growing animosity on the part of both communities brought the love story to a halt.

### **Chapter 7) *Tangled Up in Blue: Stories That Make the Time Stand Still***

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Gray, *Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan*. New York: Cassell, 1999, pp. 517-547.

The chapter begins with a quotation from Horace on the similarity between poetry and painting. Dylan has always been fond of painting. He is an amateur painter himself and art galleries all over the world vie to exhibit his paintings, even when they are subpar. He has also structured many of his narrative ballads as paintings, twisting the narrative time and omitting crucial details to give the listener the impression that the events he narrates happen in a non-linear, reversible sequence. In “Tangled Up in Blue” and other songs from his 1970s trilogy, *Blood On the Tracks* (1975), *Desire* (1975), and *Street Legal* (1978), the spatialization of music that Dylan has been pursuing since “Like a Rolling Stone” has become a spatialization of lyrics, a break-up of the linearity of writing. Once again, Dylan’s motto seems to be, “where time was, there space shall be”.<sup>42</sup>

Dylan’s oblique narrative technique reaches its peak in “Tangled Up in Blue,” “Idiot Wind,” and “Lily, Rosemary, and the Jack of Hearts,” all from *Blood on the Tracks* (“Isis” in *Desire* and “Señor” in *Street Legal* are worthy follow-ups). The idea is to set up a first stanza where each line introduces a situation, not necessarily in linear sequence, so that multiple developments can follow, not necessarily consistent with one another. The “no sense of time” (or “No Time to Think,” a song from *Street Legal* whose title, according to Christopher Ricks, also means “that one of the things that must be promptly thought about is that there’s no time”) is achieved by rejecting, *in writing*, the linearity of writing.<sup>43</sup> It is an old modernist trick (the constantly shifting pronouns of the multiple versions of “Tangled Up in Blue” call to mind Stephen Dedalus’ monologue at Sandymount Strand), but it was unknown in pop songs, and it manages to make Dylan’s narrative ballads listenable repeatedly. Conversely, the more conventional narratives of “Hurricane,” “Joey,” and “Black Diamond Bay” from *Desire*

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<sup>42</sup> I cannot resist quoting Wagner’s *Parsifal*, Act 1: “Du siehst, mein Sohn,/ zum Raum wird hier die Zeit,” (“You see, my son,/ here time becomes space”), which is in fact the manifesto of the spatialization of music – all music – that the composers-performers of the second half of the twentieth century strove to achieve.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 427.



(all co-written with Jacques Levy, who was a straightforward lyricist and playwright) gain less from repeated listening.

In a way, Dylan has created the sonic-narrative equivalent of the “crystal image” that Gilles Deleuze has been looking for in the cinema of Max Ophüls and Jean Renoir: a deep, multilayered image that shows, in transparency, both its present and its past. The listeners believe they are listening to a story, while in reality they are hearing the echo of a reverberating space.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Beyond Here Lies Nothin’: Introduction to the 2011 Edition***

In the 2011 introduction, I discussed some of Dylan’s recent albums, “*Love and Theft*” (2001), *Modern Times* (2006) and *Together through Life* (2009). I addressed the “impolitical” or “unpolitical” side of Bob Dylan, which does not mean “apolitical”.<sup>45</sup> I argued that what he has been singing, saying, and writing in the last twenty years belongs to the realm of “self-affection” more than it does to the current political discourse. I also quoted a blogger who in 2003 wrote that he used to sing “Blowin’ in the Wind” when he was proudly serving in Vietnam and that his son was now singing the same song while proudly serving in Iraq. I pointed out that if we do not understand that Dylan is singing for this apparently deluded American patriot too, we do not understand what Dylan is about. It has nothing to do with political allegiances. Dylan’s refusal to “explain” what he does is an ethical stance. As a serious artist, he knows that he cannot and must not have control over the reception of his songs. Otherwise, he would be obliged to “correct” every “wrong” interpretation of them, as Bruce Springsteen awkwardly did when he objected to Ronald Reagan using “Born in the

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<sup>44</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: The Athlone Press, 1989, pp. 68-97.

<sup>45</sup> I refer here to Massimo Cacciari, *The Unpolitical: For a Radical Critique of Political Reason*, a book I edited in 2009 for Fordham UP, New York.

U.S.A.” as a campaign song (while, in fact, there was nothing in “Born in the U.S.A.” that Reagan could not claim as his own).

Bob Dylan’s songs are too weird to be of use to any politician. The real point, however, is that songs are forms of life. They walk by themselves, as Dylan understood back in 1965, and if they need the guidance of their author to wade through the world, chances are that they are not strong enough to survive. Plato wanted to ban the poets from the city. Dylan did not wait to be banned. He banned himself from the moment he stopped being a protest singer, and he has not come back.

Lately, Dylan has also been very effective in dealing with the submerged, *de facto* intractable issue of the blackface shows that were a stalwart of American entertainment until the 1940s. The title of his 2001 album, “*Love and Theft*,” goes in quotes because it refers to Eric Lott’s groundbreaking study of minstrelsy.<sup>46</sup> The issue involves the love of Jewish-American musicians for African-American music, from George Gershwin to Harold Arlen, from Al Jolson, the son of a cantor who painted his face in *The Jazz Singer* (dir. Alan Crosland, 1927), to Abel Meeropol (aka Lewis Allan, author of “Strange Fruit”), to Dylan himself. I analyzed Dylan’s performance of “Dixie” (in *Masked and Anonymous*, dir. Larry Charles, 2003), in which he rescues a minstrelsy song wrongly associated with the Confederate Army when in fact it was popular among the Unionists as well. I also analyzed Dylan’s own “Nettie Moore” (in *Modern Times*), a powerful funeral march for the whole minstrelsy culture.

I addressed the plagiarism charges that have plagued Dylan since his early years (a case of “Love and Theft” indeed). I have translated hundreds of Dylan songs and all his prose works and I have researched his sources. I do not think that Dylan is a plagiarist. However, I think I can tell: 1) when his appropriations are part of the borrowing practices of folk

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<sup>46</sup> Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.

tradition; 2) when they belong to the *bricolage* or *object trouvé* poetics that is consistent with hybrid arts such as songwriting; and 3) when they border on kleptomania.

I do not defend Dylan at all costs. In *Chronicles Vol. One*, a very strange autobiography, being mostly a puzzle of quotations from the widest range of sources, his borrowing habits betray a real compulsion. The most vehement charges of plagiarism, however, usually come from disappointed fans and obsessive bloggers who do not have any expertise in the quoting practices that are common in literature and music. In the opinion of the academic community, on the contrary, Dylan has created a semiotic universe that is even more interesting because of the cleverness and scope of his appropriations.

The case is not settled, and in fact I took it up again in “**Bob Dylan dall’appropriazione alla trasfigurazione**” (C.4.8) later revised and included in my 2015 *Bob Dylan* e-book (C.1.4). It is also true, however, that there was a time when Dylan had less need of borrowing. He could come up with songs such as “Positively Fourth Street” or “Simple Twist of Fate” that “made it new,” not because they combined and updated pre-existing material, but because they owed nothing to anybody; they did not sound like anything else, they came from Mars...

#### **4) Impact of *La voce di Bob Dylan* (2001 edition)**

##### **Reviews**

I have thirty-eight reviews of *La voce di Bob Dylan* in my files. One came out in the U.S. (n. 27) and one in the U.K. (n. 33).

- 1) Gian Luigi Paracchini, “Bob Dylan, sessant’anni di solitudine,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, 17 maggio 2001. p. 37.
- 2) Renato Tortarolo, “Bob Dylan, la voce spietata delle nostre coscienze,” *Il Secolo XIX*, 20 maggio 2001, p. 13.
- 3) Alfredo D’Agnese, “Happy Dylan,” *D* (Supplemento di *La Repubblica*), 22 maggio 2001, p. 83.
- 4) “E Bob Dylan spiega l’America,” *L’Avvenire*, 23 maggio 2001, p. 25.
- 5) Beppe Montresor, “Menestrello senza età,” *Il Giornale di Vicenza / L’Arena*, 23 maggio 2001, p. 9.

- 6) Paolo Grugni, "La leggenda ha 60 anni," *Donna moderna*, 23 maggio 2001, p. 30.
- 7) Paolo Boschi, "Alessandro Carrera, *La voce di Bob Dylan*," posted 2001, <<http://www.scanner.it/libri/vocedylan1133.php>>
- 8) Filippo La Porta, "Bob Dylan, il compleanno del poeta," *La Repubblica*, "Musica" (weekly supplement) 24 maggio 2001, p. 35.
- 9) Giancarlo Susanna, "Per sempre ribelle," *L'Unità*, 24 maggio 2001, p. 18.
- 10) Alberto Campo, "Una festa per Bob," *La Repubblica*, 24 maggio 2001, p. 14.
- 11) John Vignola, "La voce di Bob Dylan," 25 maggio 2001, <[http://www.kwmusica.kataweb.it/kwmusica/review\\_scheda.jsp?idContent=68084&idCategory=2070](http://www.kwmusica.kataweb.it/kwmusica/review_scheda.jsp?idContent=68084&idCategory=2070)>
- 12) Marco Costa, "Bob Dylan, un menestrello da Nobel," <[www.katalibri.it](http://www.katalibri.it)> posted 2001, [no longer online].
- 13) Matteo Romitelli, "La voce di Bob Dylan," 2001, <[www.pickwick.it](http://www.pickwick.it)>, now online at <<http://utenti.lycos.it/frankielee2/talking72.htm>>
- 14) "La voce di Bob Dylan di Alessandro Carrera," *Marie Claire*, 1 giugno 2001, p. 191.
- 15) p.n. [Piero Negri], "Il personaggio: Bob Dylan," *Famiglia cristiana*, 3 giugno 2001
- 16) Pier Andrea Canei, "Pop d'Accademia," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 3 giugno 2001, p. XV
- 17) Raul Montanari, "Dylan poesia senza età," *Superclassifica all. Di TV Sorrisi e Canzoni*, 13 giugno 2006, pp. 14-15.
- 18) "Bob Dylan anima dell'America," *La Gazzetta del Sud*, 19 giugno 2001, p. 15.
- 19) "Dylan e Conte in pagina," *Gioia*, 19 giugno 2001, p. 184.
- 20) Piero Negri, "La voce di Bob Dylan: Letteratura e blues alla fine dei tempi," *Famiglia cristiana*, 24 giugno 2001, pp. 112-113.
- 21) Cristiano Brandazzi, "Una firma lodigiana per il mito di Dylan," *Il Cittadino*, 30 giugno 2001.
- 22) "Alessandro Carrera, *La voce di Bob Dylan*," *L'ultimo buscadero*, giugno 2001, p. 52.
- 23) Ernesto Capasso, "Dylan, una voce tutta americana," <[www.lnuovo.it](http://www.lnuovo.it)> 26 luglio 2001 [no longer online].
- 24) Alberto Dentice, "Senti come somiglia a Dylan," *L'Espresso*, 26 luglio 2001.
- 25) Francesco Moroni, "La voce di Bob Dylan," 29 luglio 2001, <[www.caffeeuropa.it](http://www.caffeeuropa.it)>, at <<http://www.caffeeuropa.it/attualita02/143musica-dylan.html>>
- 26) Andrea Monda, "E Bob mise la poesia nel juke-box," *Il Mattino*, 29 luglio 2001.
- 27) LindaAnn Lo Schiavo, "Bob Dylan's Poetry and Music Explored in a New Book by an Italian," *L'Idea. Periodico degli italiani negli USA*, September 2001
- 28) "La voce di Bob Dylan," *Palomar*, 2001.
- 29) Riccardo Bertoncelli, "La voce di Bob Dylan," *Rockerilla*, 251-252, luglio-agosto 2001.
- 30) Alessandro Bolli, "Un inedito Bob Dylan. Lucido e furioso," *L'Indice dei libri del mese*, Febbraio 2002, pp 37-38.
- 31) Andrea Monda, "La voce di Bob Dylan," *Civiltà cattolica*, CLIII, 3645, 4 maggio 2002, pp. 312-313.
- 32) Giancarlo Susanna, "It's Life and Life Only: le biografie," *RaiLibro*, 2002, <<http://www.educational.rai.it/railibro/articoli.asp?id=410>>
- 33) A. J. Iriarte, "Educated Rap," *The Bridge*, V, 13, autumn 2002.
- 34) Matteo "Ferrato" Bordone, "La voce di Bob Dylan: Alessandro Carrera racconta gli USA grazie a Zimmerman," 7 luglio 2003 <<http://www.dispenseronline.it/showBook.php?id=404>>
- 35) John Vignola, "Dylan di carta," *Il Mucchio Selvaggio – Extra*, 11, 2003, p. 30.

- 36) Federico Vacalebre, “Dylan, memorie per sopravvivere alla legenda”, *Il Mattino*, 11 ottobre 2004.
- 37) Walter Mauro, “Mr Tambourine, ecco la ballata che si é dedicato”, *Il Tempo*, 15 dicembre 2004.
- 38) Alberto Dentice, “Il mito Dylan secondo Dylan”, *l’Espresso*, 26 dicembre 2004.

The reviews were mostly positive or *very* positive (nos. 1, 15, 29, 31). A couple of reviewers, however, were puzzled at the amount of “lofty” literary and musical references I had summoned (nos. 16, 33). (What puzzled *me* about those reviews was that they came from people who would not hesitate to compare Dylan to Shakespeare.) Incidentally, I know that I can count Academy Award winning film director Bernardo Bertolucci among my readers. Giovanni Mastrangelo, one of his screenwriters, told me that Mr. Bertolucci got hold of my book when Dylan called him with the intention to make a music video together. The project never materialized.

### **3. Timeline of my Dylan-related activities 1998-2015**

*La voce di Bob Dylan* made me a “Bob Dylan expert” overnight. To a certain extent, it changed my life. From the moment the book was published, I had to give Dylan a small part of my day, every day. And, from 2001 on, every summer break I spent in Italy has been punctuated by Dylan-plus-America lectures and talks in universities, schools, radios, national and local TV stations, literary and music festivals, not to mention a few lectures I gave in American universities (University of Houston, Wake Forest University in South Carolina, University of Minnesota, etc.).

**1998: “Bob Dylan. Poesia del tempo immemorabile” (C.4.1)** – Article, which became the basis of my 2001 book, *La voce di Bob Dylan* (C.1.1.).

**2001: *La voce di Bob Dylan. Una spiegazione dell’America* (C.1.1)** – Book.

**2002: “*Ut pictura carmen. Bob Dylan e la pittura*” (C.4.2).** Peer-reviewed article.

**2003: “La pioggia alla fine del tempo. Bob Dylan tra simbolismo e modernismo” (C.4.3).** Peer-reviewed article.

**2005:** Italian annotated translation of Bob Dylan’s autobiography, *Chronicles Vol. 1* (C.3.1).

**2006:** Italian annotated translation of Bob Dylan’s *Lyrics 1962-2001* (C.3.2 – C.3.3), including more than one hundred pages of philological apparatus. It is the only existing annotated edition of Bob Dylan’s lyrics. The recent *Lyrics since 1962* (2014) has been edited by Oxford professor Christopher Ricks, but he has focused on the textual variants and not on the literary, folkloric, and biblical sources as I did.

**2007: “Un libro di voci. L’autobiografia di Bob Dylan” (C.4.4).** Peer-reviewed article.

**2007:** Keynote speaker at the first international Dylan conference, held at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul, Minnesota. My paper, “**Oh, the Streets of Rome: Dylan in Italy**” (C.5.2) has been published in the conference proceedings.

**2007:** New Italian translation, with facing text and very extensive notes (in fact, a critical edition) of Bob Dylan’s *Tarantula* (C.3.5), his 1971 collection of prose-poems. Done with co-translator Santo Pettinato.

**2007:** Spanish translation of my notes to *Lyrics 1962-2001* in *Letras 1962-2001* (C.3.4), trans. by Miguel Izquierdo and José Moreno, published by Alfaguara / Global Rhythm (Madrid-Barcelona).

**2008: *Parole nel vento. I migliori saggi critici su Bob Dylan* (C.2.1).** An edited book with my introduction and concluding chapter, plus a selection of twelve Dylan essays by English and American authors that I selected, edited, and assigned to translators.

**2008: *Canzoni d’amore e misantropia* (C.1.2).** Book. It includes sections adapted from *La voce di Bob Dylan* plus new chapters. It was also sold concurrently with the Italian DVD release of *I Am not There*, Todd Haynes’s 2007 film based on Bob Dylan’s life.

**2009: “Oh, the Streets of Rome: Dylan in Italy.” (C.5.2).** Peer-reviewed book chapter of the paper I gave at the 2007 Minnesota Conference.

**2011: *La voce di Bob Dylan. Una spiegazione dell’America* (C.1.3 ).** New, expanded edition of the 2001 book (C.1.1), with new introduction, new conclusion, and one hundred pages of added text.

**2011:** Invited at the first “Justice and Literature” conference held at the Catholic University in Milan to deliver a paper on “Bob Dylan and Justice.” Vita e Pensiero, the University Press of the Catholic University, published the conference proceedings in 2012 (C.5.4). There was considerable media coverage. Apparently, a paper on Dylan in a Catholic University could still make the news.

**2012: “To Live outside the Law You Must Be Honest” (C.5.4).** Peer-reviewed book chapter.

**2014: “Bob Dylan dall’appropriazione alla trasfigurazione” (C.4.8).** Peer-reviewed article.

**2015: *Bob Dylan* (C.1.4).** A 100-page e-book published by [www.doppiozero.com](http://www.doppiozero.com), a cultural website. Mostly, it includes articles and essays that did not make the 2011 book or which were written afterwards.

**2015:** Taught a summer graduate seminar on “Bob Dylan and American Song” at IULM, a Milan-based university that offers degrees in languages, communication, and media.

In the paper on “Dylan and Justice” I gave at the Catholic University in Milan in 2011 (C.5.4), I discussed “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” arguably Dylan’s most significant song of the civil rights period in the early 1960s. I used it as a starting point to discuss Dylan’s notion of justice, mired in a Jewish-Christian apocalyptic mindset, and I concluded my analysis with a reference to the biblical allusions in “I and I” from the 1983 album *Infidels*.

In 2013, I was asked to contribute to a special issue of *Estetica. Studi e ricerche* dedicated to copyright, appropriation, and plagiarism in music. I expanded the pages on plagiarism in my 2011 book (pp. 37-42, 355-361) and added a discussion on “transfiguration,” a theological term that Dylan used in an interview he gave after the release of *Tempest* (2012). I then proceeded to analyze “Tempest,” the key song in the eponymous album, showing how Dylan “transfigured” the Carter Family song, “The Titanic” (C.4.8).

My 2015 e-book, *Bob Dylan* (C.1.4), published by cultural website [www.doppiozero.com](http://www.doppiozero.com), includes revised versions of the articles on justice and plagiarism, plus additional material on Dylan’s latest albums. I will bring my work on Dylan to conclusion when I write a more comprehensive article on the civil rights songs and another article on Dylan’s religiosity, his oscillations between Jewish tradition and evangelical Christianity, and his use of the Bible.

## Section D

### Publications on Songwriters and Songwriting

#### 1. Biographical Premise

Aside from my publications on Bob Dylan, I have always had a strong interest in the theory and practice of songwriting. I have also been a regular performing songwriter from 1975 to 1982. My repertoire included Italian and American folk songs, Italian topical songs, a few German and Greek songs, either in the original language or in Italian translation, and songs that I wrote. I usually performed in musical events sponsored by public libraries, municipalities and regional governments, cultural associations tied to the “alternative network” of the official and less official Left, and “free radios,” which were a new thing in Italy in the second half of the 1970s. In 1978, I participated in the Tübingen Folk Festival in Germany, and in the Club Tenco Festival in Sanremo, the alternative version of the more celebrated Sanremo Song Festival and the most qualified national venue for songwriting as an art form. In the same year, I recorded a song for the collective LP, *Punto a capo* (Divergo, 1978), a reflection on the tenth anniversary of the 1968 upheavals. In 1980, Gruppo Folk Internazionale recorded “La fortezza” (“The Fortress”), a song I co-wrote with them about Germany in the years of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist panic. The song is included in *Il nonno di Jonni* (L’Orchestra, 1980). In the following year, I published my LP, *Le cartoline* (L’Orchestra, 1981). After I moved to the United States, I occasionally performed in academic venues. Although being a singer-songwriter has not been my profession for many years, I cannot say I have hung my guitar on the wall.

Back in the 1970s, while I was warming up to Bob Dylan, I already had a strong interest in Woody Guthrie. My first substantial articles on songwriting were “**Woody Guthrie sullo schermo: la realtà e il recupero**” (D.2.1), an extended review of *Bound for*



*Glory* (dir. Hal Ashby, 1976), loosely based on Guthrie's autobiography, and "**Attraverso la California sulle tracce di Woody Guthrie**" (D.2.3). I wrote the second piece after my first visit to the U.S. in 1979. I revisited Woody Guthrie's stay in California during the 1930s and I reported my conversations with Mario Casetta, who was part of the folk revival movement in the 1950s, and Ed Robbin, a former journalist for the defunct Los Angeles newspaper *People's World*, and who had been friend with Woody Guthrie and John Steinbeck. In 1980, I also wrote an extended review of *The Rose* (dir. Mark Rydell, 1980) a Janis Joplin biopic featuring Bette Midler in the main role (D.2.2). These writings were part of my growing familiarity with American songwriters and songwriting, but they were not scholarly articles. For the same reason, I will omit references to the various short articles on Italian songwriters that I wrote between 1976 and 1982.

## 2. Overview of my scholarly articles

My commentary will focus on eight peer-reviewed articles and book chapters that I published between 1994 and 2015, plus the chapters on music that I included in my 2012 collection of various essays, *Il ricatto del godimento* (D.3.4) and in my edited book, *La memoria delle canzoni* (D.1.1), forthcoming in 2016.

Instead of following a strict chronological order, I will begin with a comprehensive article on folk music and popular song that I published in two versions, "**Folk Music and Popular Song from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s**" (D.3.1) and "**Italy's Blues: Folk Music and Popular Song from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s**" (D.2.5). I outlined the development of Italian songs from folk to cabaret to pop, without forgetting the work of ethnomusicologists and poets who, from different angles, showed interest in the song as a cultural artifact and art form. My starting point was the year 1954, when ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax came to Italy on behalf of the Library of Congress and, with the help of his assistant Diego Carpitella, recorded more than one hundred hours of folk music that

revolutionized the field of Italian ethnomusicology. Before Lomax, Italian scholars were still suspicious of magnetic recording and still believed that a folk tune needed transcription to exist properly.

I then went back to the beginning of the 1800s, when folklorists coming from Northern Europe to look for Italian folk tunes met the ironic disbelief by Italian men of letters who could not understand what cultural value the songs of peasants could possibly have. At the beginning of the 1900s, however, Italy saw the printing of several important collections of folk tunes, mostly divided according to regions and dialects. I also traced the birth of the “songwriter’s song” back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when the term “cantautore” (singer-songwriter) had not been coined yet. I gave a brief account of the cabaret song, World War I songs (both in favour of and against the war), the Socialist and Fascist songs, the sentimental songs of the 1930s and 1940s, the birth of modern pop music, and the key role of singer-songwriters of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The article ended with an assessment of Italian hip-hop and the new phenomenon of regional dialects and local folk traditions grafted onto reggae, ragamuffin, and dub.

In his 2002 review of *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture* (where **D.3.1** appeared), Robert Lumley of University College London praised my article with these words:

Carrera provides a highly pleasurable as well as informed account of music in Italy from the death of peasant civilization to the emergence of new urban protagonists. The one-liners of this *aficionado* make one want to listen to the singers described (“Aristocratic, isolated, ironic, Paolo Conte (1937-) stands alone”).<sup>47</sup>

**“Il lamento di Narciso. Le Poesie friulane di Pasolini musicate da Giovanna Marini” (D.2.4)**, published in 1994, focused on Giovanna Marini’s song about the killing of poet, novelist, and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini (“Lamento per la morte di Pier Paolo

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Lumley, “The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture” (Review). *Italian Culture*, 20 (1-2): 216-217.

Pasolini,” 1975) and Marini’s subsequent setting of a choice of Pasolini’s poems for voices and instruments (*Per Pier Paolo*, 1994). Giovanna Marini (b. 1937) is the most important artist produced by Italy’s folk revival in the 1960s. An accomplished guitarist and composer with a solid training in Renaissance and Baroque music, she studied the rural music of Southern Italy and how to reproduce it in an urban and/theatrical environment without betraying its “otherness.” Such “otherness” is particularly striking in the case of Italian rural folksongs, which are very different from what usually passes for Italian music (Neapolitan songs, Venice boat songs, Renaissance polyphony, and opera) and which have survived only locally.

My article was the first scholarly piece ever published on Giovanna Marini. I showed how Marini based her Pasolini lament on two mourning song patterns from Abruzzo and Salento (Southern Puglia); how she rewrote the text of the Abruzzese song to fit the circumstances of Pasolini’s death, and how her singing style incorporated an emphasized rendition of a *prefica* lament (the *prefiche* being the professional mourners of Salento, the Southern tip of Apulia). I then analyzed the different techniques Marini adopted in her setting of a series of poems that Pasolini wrote between 1941 and 1953. Because Pasolini wrote those poems in Friulian (a language distinct from Italian, spoken near the border with Slovenia), I discussed the pros and cons of using a “marginal” language vs. standard Italian—a stylistic choice that was crucial to Marini’s attempt to blend Renaissance madrigals and contemporary songs in “folk” style. (Obviously, a definition as vague as “folk style” is in need of clarification; I am using it here only for the sake of brevity.)

**“Di mondegrens e altri malintesi. Poetica del fraintendimento e fonetica dell’identità” (D.2.6)**, published in 2006, deals with different linguistic traits in Italian and English, and their use in pop songs. First, I analyzed the endless production of phonetic misunderstandings or “mondegrens” that the English language allows. Harper’s journalist Sylvia Wright coined the term “mondegreen” in 1954, when she found out that an English

ballad she knew as a girl did not say, “They hae slay the Earl Amurray / and Lady Mondegreen,” as she thought, but, “They hae slay the Earl of Murray / and laid him on the green.” In rock music, the most famous mondegreen is the misapprehension of Jimi Hendrix’s line in “Purple Haze,” “Excuse me while I kiss the sky,” which countless listeners have understood as “Excuse me while I kiss this guy.” Eventually, Hendrix himself incorporated the misunderstanding in his live concerts by kissing one of his musicians every time he sang the line. In standard Italian, due to the proximity of Italian phonetics to its transcription, mondegreens are rare. In the past, misunderstandings were likely to occur between Italian and Latin, mostly when common people listened to sermons in Latin without knowing the language. In the Father’s Prayer, “dona nobis hodie” (give us today) happened to be understood as “Donna Bisodia,” variously identified as St. Peter’s mother or even “the mother of God” (there is quite a literature on the subject, going back to the 1300s).

Aside from historical references to what Mikhail Bakhtin would call the “carnivalization of language,” the point of my article was to demonstrate that cultural identity may be the result of complex linguistic negotiations involving standard language, local dialects, marginal languages, and “imperial” languages (either Latin or English) coming from the outside to hegemonize the local scene:

This article intends to explore the linguistic and semantic border between understanding and misunderstanding. Complex phenomena such as the defensive attitude towards one’s cultural identity (in all the meanings of the term), the negotiations of identity changes brought about by a new socio-economic situation, the *ad hoc* creation of a new identity (albeit justified by ideological homage to traditional values) can be detected in phonetic/semantic “accidents,” no matter how small they seem. Among these “accidents,” we intend to highlight: 1) a word that is misunderstood (in one’s own language or in another language); 2) an unfamiliar or foreign word that is unwillingly misspelled in a way that assigns a new meaning to the same word; 3) a purposeful distortion or mocking of unfamiliar or foreign words. Such distortion functions as a defense of one’s own cultural identity or as a defensive assimilation of seductive but potentially dangerous cultural changes. (“**Di mondegreens e altri malintesi. Poetica del fraintendimento e fonetica dell’identità,**” D.2.6, p. 211, my translation.)

My attention was directed toward the songs of Charlie Cinelli (Gian Carlo Cinelli, b. 1958) and Davide Van De Sfroos (Davide Bernasconi, b. 1965), two singer-songwriters from Northern Italy who have used their homegrown dialects to address the co-existence of tenacious local culture, globalized economy, and immigration from Africa and Asia in the communities to which they belong. I focused in particular on Cinelli's hilarious parodies of English and American pop songs, whose texts he rewrites "phonetically" in Italian or in his own dialect with total disregard for the original meaning (Prince's "Purple Rain" becomes "*Palpo lei,*" I fondle her). The juvenile aspect of Cinelli's re-phoneticization is rescued by the author's awareness that emphasis on standard Italian alone will not do in a world where, to quote from one of his songs, "My neighbor is from Sri Lanka, my baker speaks only masai, / the postman is from Siberia and I will never understand what he says." Cinelli's linguistic utopia, as he expresses it in "Parla el dialètt" ("Speak Your Dialect"), aims to harmonize all linguistic differences in a new world dialect, a *lingua franca* that hopefully will be able to navigate the sea of globalization better than standard national languages.

The article also discusses "Hoka Hey," a song by Davide Van De Sfroos (possibly inspired by Robbie Robertson's "It Is a Good Day to Die") that retells the Wounded Knee massacre (1890) in the language of Lake Como, generating unheard-of mondegreens between Lakota and "Comasco" dialect. In both cases, the re-phoneticization operated through the local dialect

...keeps at bay the invasiveness of the hegemonic languages and deflates the threat of the all-pervasive and delocalized capitalism that those languages represent. At the same time, it reaffirms that the local subjects do not want to be left out of the game and do not intend to give in to impersonal forces that are greater than any local reality. They want to talk back and pick up the challenge that forces them to create a new identity for themselves. The old tools of dialect and parody can still be quite useful to that purpose. (D.2.6, p. 223, my translation.)

Three more articles deal with the music/poetry issue. The short book chapter "**La risposta è caduta nel vento / Blowin' in the Wind**" (D.3.2) was included in a 2007

collective book on Luigi Tenco (1938-1967), a songwriter who in 1964 recorded the first Italian cover of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind." The arrangement, based on a quasi-hillbilly tonic-dominant alternating bass, was a failure (the song remained unreleased until 1972, five years after the singer's death). I therefore discussed the merits and demerits of Mogol's translation, which paved the way to the first Dylan covers in Italian (Mogol, b. 1936, is the pen name of Giulio Rapetti, a prolific professional lyricist).

In 2009, I had the opportunity to come back to the music/poetry theme with one more book chapter and an article for an online project. In **"Poesia americana e poesia dell'America" (D.2.3.3)**, I discussed one of Edgar Allan Poe's untitled *marginalia*, published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* (April 1849), possibly the first defence of popular song from the pen of a future canonical writer. Poe pointed out that song lyrics could not have the precision of poetry; they must remain vague and undefined. He also added that songs cannot be accused of "conceit" (in the context of the article, he meant "naturalistic fallacy"), not even if they begin like this song by George P. Morris: "Her heart and morning broke together / In the storm." According to Poe, Morris' poems were better than this song, but it was because of his songs that he was an *immortal* (Poe's italics).

It does not matter that George Pope Morris was not so immortal after all. Poe understood that there must be a difference between a poem and a set of lyrics. The reasons that make a poem great (or bad) are not the same ones that make a song great (or bad). I made my case with Lucinda Williams' *World without Tears* (2003). Before she recorded the album, Lucinda Williams sent the lyrics to her trusted editor, who for the first time did not change a word because in his opinion she had never been so close to poetry as she was in those songs. It is crucial to know that Lucinda Williams' editor was her father, Miller Williams (1930-2015), a well-respected poet, critic, professor, and translator from Italian. He did not say that his daughter's lyrics were good because they were poetry. They were perfect (unchangeable) the way they were, nearing poetry without being poetry. Miller Williams' opinion about

Lucinda's songs mends the wound that has torn apart poetry and lyrics in modernity, yet it reiterates the gap that separates them. In fact, if contemporary poetry were to disappear, U.S. songwriters would barely notice (the same goes for poets in case pop songs were to disappear). Dylan's assessment of the difference between a poem and a song has not lost its currency: a song is anything that walks by itself (without poetry's aid).

My final word (so far) on the poetry-music topic is my short article, "**Schönberg and Petrarca**" (D.2.7), posted in the Autumn of 2009 on the "Petrarch Project Website" of the University of Oregon, Eugene. To quote the title of a 1948 Schönberg article, "*On revient tojours*," I came back to Schönberg one more time. I discussed three Petrarch sonnets that Schönberg set to music in his orchestral *Lieder* Op. 8 (1905) and the Petrarch sonnet 256 (217 in the numeration that Schönberg followed) included in the *Serenade* Op. 24 (1923). Petrarch is present in Schönberg both at the end of his late-romantic period (the *Lieder* Op. 8 are perhaps his most Straussian compositions) and at the beginning of his twelve-tone phase. Petrarch's *Sonett Nr. 217* is in fact the first twelve-note song that Schönberg composed (the first instrumental piece being the piano *Walzer* Op. 23 No. 5). In the setting of the Petrarch sonnet, the twelve-tone technique is still in its infancy: the series is repeated without variations, and only the discrepancy between the eleven-syllable line and the twelve-tone melody prevents each line from sounding the same. However, the result is greater than the sum of its parts:

Gone the late-romantic emphasis of the Songs Op. 8, Petrarca's poem has been submitted to a cubist reshaping. The tone is direct, unsentimental, and even vehement. The unusual instrumental color ... adds a sharp edge to the geometric aggressiveness of the vocal line, matching perfectly the abstract vengeance invoked in the first line. The more the music refuses to be expressive, the more it achieves clarity of expression and precision in communicating the meaning of the text. The lush settings of the previous songs could not achieve the same result. ("**Schönberg and Petrarca**," D.2.7)

For the sake of brevity, I will not discuss here the short book chapters on four Italian songwriters (Fabrizio De André, Giorgio Gaber, Ivan Della Mea, and Lucio Dalla) that I have

included in my 2012 book, *Il ricatto del godimento. Contributo a un'antropologia italiana* (D.3.4) and in my edited book, *La memoria delle canzoni. Popular music e identità italiana* (D.1), forthcoming in 2016. I addressed the cultural impact of the abovementioned singer-songwriters in a way that is intimately close to the political, cultural, and anthropological landscape of Italy. It would be tedious to summarize it for a non-Italian reader. I will discuss instead two book chapters that I wrote with an English readership in mind.

**“Mystical Arrogance: Franco Battiato’s Esoteric Pop” (D.3.5)** has appeared in the first English volume entirely dedicated to Italian popular music (*Made in Italy*, ed. by Franco Fabbri and Goffredo Plastino, Routledge 2013). It surveys the entire career (up to 2012) of singer-songwriter, avant-garde and opera composer, painter, and filmmaker Franco Battiato (b. 1945), who at the end of the 1970s operated the Italian transition from rock-pop modernism to sarcastic, nonchalant, multi-stylistic postmodernism. This is what I had to say about one of his most successful albums, *La voce del padrone* (1981):

The secret of Battiato’s hit formula was the stern application of Cole Porter’s rule: “Anything Goes.” References to British and American rock songs, teen-ager Italian songs of the 1960’s and sentimental pop songs of the 1950’s were nonchalantly mixed with spices of Beethoven, Arab strings in strict homophony, references to Th. W. Adorno and quotes from G. I. Gurdjieff as well as an explicitly ironic, tongue-in-cheek, anti-ultra-intellectual scorn against all those “immondizie musicali” (“music garbage,” as they are called in “Bandiera bianca,” included in *La voce del padrone*) that smacked of populism, from the Red Army Choir to the latest ethnic fashion in music or the absurdly called “free-jazz punk inglese” (“British free-jazz punk”). For many survivors of the 1968 generation, listening to *La voce del padrone* after years of self-imposed revolutionary seriousness was a truly exhilarating experience. It would not be too out of place to say that Battiato’s songs saved someone’s mental sanity. It was postmodernism for the masses. And it worked. It worked immensely. *La voce del padrone* was the first Italian album that sold more than a million copies. (**“Mystical Arrogance: Franco Battiato’s Esoteric Pop,” D.3.5, pp. 140-141.**)

Because Battiato has always dabbled with the teachings of esoteric schools, from Sufism to Georges I. Gurdjieff (1866-1949), who has also influenced Robert Fripp and Keith Jarrett, my previous expertise in esoteric philosophies served me well in detecting hidden textual and musical formulae that Battiato disseminated in his works for the pleasure of the



cognoscenti. “Esoteric subtleties,” I wrote, “are obviously lost to the large audience, but that is precisely the point of the Gurdijeff *adeptus*, who participates in the world without being of the world.” I also pointed out that Battiato’s esoteric side goes hand in hand with his penchant for self-importance, which is particularly striking in some of his recent works and especially in his films, better described as vanity projects. (I say this to stress that when I am a critic I *criticize* as well as I praise; I appreciate Battiato as much as anyone else, but I have no truck with hagiographic prose.)

**“If All Heavens Were Parchment....: Setting to Music a Letter from the Shoah”**

(D.3.6) is the story, never told before in its entirety, of a letter that a Jewish-Polish boy managed to smuggle out of a Nazi concentration camp in 1944, shortly before he was killed. Chaïm’s letter, written in Yiddish, is now archived in Haifa, Israel. In 1954, it was translated into Italian and included in a seminal anthology of farewell letters by Resistance fighters and victims of Fascism and Nazism. The anthology appeared in Italy with Thomas Mann’s preface. Subsequently, avant-garde composer Luigi Nono (1924-1990) and topical singer-songwriter Ivan Della Mea (1940-2009) set the letter to music in two settings that could not be more different.

Chaïm’s letter opens with a quotation from rabbinical literature whose earliest wording goes back to first-century rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai. “If all the heavens were parchment, and all the trees pens, and all the oceans ink, they would not suffice to write down the wisdom which I have learned from my masters, and I took away from them no more than a fly takes from the sea when it bathes”.<sup>48</sup> Chaïm rewrites it as follows: “My dear parents! If the sky were made of paper and if all the seas of the world were ink, I could not describe my sorrow to you or tell you what I can see all around me.”

These powerful words, followed by Chaïm’s description of the camp and the anticipation of his death, inspired Luigi Nono for the central *arioso* of his Holocaust

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<sup>48</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Life of Johanan ben Zakkai. Ca 1-80 C.E.* Leiden: Brill, 1962, p. 46.

“Requiem”: *Il canto sospeso* (1956) for voices, choir, and orchestra. In the article, I discussed the “scandal” of *Il canto sospeso*—namely, that the words sung by the soloists and choir, and even by the tenor when he sings “If all Heavens were parchment...” are too musically elaborate to be understandable. Why give voice to the martyrs of the Resistance, many asked in 1956, if their voices were made inaudible? Why those specific words, if the compositional process would turn them into mere phonemes?

As the reader can see, my article on Chaïm’s letter is a further chapter in my ongoing investigation about poetry and music (is it a coincidence that Nono was Schönberg’s son-in-law?). Nono, of course, did have an accurate notion of the meaning of Chaïm’s letter. Even when he dismembered the words into phonemes, he made use of those words and not others. In the end, he behaved no differently from a composer of Renaissance polyphony setting a sacred text to music – precisely to the extent that the letters of the Resistance fighters and victims of Fascism are the sacred texts of our post-WWII civilization.

Ivan Della Mea’s 1964 song “Se il cielo fosse bianco di carta” is the other side of the coin: a rewriting of Chaïm’s letter in unrhymed quatrains set to music as an earthy waltz in minor key. The contrast with Nono’s setting could not be more strident, yet it is important to understand that both works, the avant-gardist and the populist, came from the same cultural milieu. Nono and Della Mea were both political militants and knew each other. In musical terms, they were galaxies apart, and it is difficult to compare the political sublimity of Nono’s engaged serialism with Della Mea’s devil-may-care vocal delivery and barbershop chords. Yet, as my article suggests, one world would not have existed without the other. Nono and Della Mea shared the same utopian space, which history has now sealed. I was lucky enough to know them both, and my article is an homage to a time that is now lost. But not completely lost, because I closed my article with a reference to a 2004 cover by Zuf de Zur, an Italian-Balkan combo from North-East Italy that has arranged Della Mea’s “Se il cielo fosse bianco di carta” as a klezmer waltz, thus bringing Chaïm’s letter back to the place where it belonged.

## Conclusions

### The Philosophy of Popular Music

#### Premise

On March 13-14, 2015, I was keynote speaker at the annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM), Italian Chapter, in Parma, Italy. The topic of the conference was “What Will Be Left of the 1980s?”, and I had been invited to talk about the new edition of my 1980 book, *Musica e pubblico giovanile*. In the last part of my paper, I looked back at the transition between the 1970s and the 1980s from a point of view that aimed to transcend once and for all my self-righteous aesthetic of old.

I intended to answer the following questions: 1) How wide is the distance that now separates my generation from the debates of forty years ago? 2) What significant steps have been taken in the understanding of popular music as a global cultural phenomenon? 3) Is it now time to introduce a set of working categories that will eventually lead to a “philosophy of popular music”?

I transcribe here the final section of the paper that I delivered in Parma as I have subsequently expanded it for the proceedings that are forthcoming in *Vox Popular*, the new journal of the Italian IASPM.

#### A State of Independence

The 1980s were the years when pop took over rock, and the stubborn generations of the 1960s and the 1970s did not recover easily. Now that the wounds are healed (are they?), it is time to acknowledge that there were deep lessons to learn in rock’s capitulation to pop, and the first lesson was that one pop song is all pop songs. I do not mean that in a reductive way. I just want to stress that at the beginning of the 1980s hierarchical categories ceased to apply to

popular music, if they ever applied in the first place. Richard Meltzer had already made the point in *The Aesthetics of Rock*, a work that is as unreadable now as it was when it first appeared, unless we decide to look at it as a striking example of proto-postmodernist prose.<sup>49</sup> In short – such was Meltzer’s thesis – there is no ontological difference between “A Day in the Life” by The Beatles and “I Think We Are Alone Now” by Tommy James and the Shondells. Back in 1970, Meltzer did not know how right he was. Now, anyone can see the validity of his argument just by following on youtube the next incarnations of “I Think We Are Alone Now” from Lene Lovich’s cover in 1979 to Tiffany’s in 1987. Regardless of artistic value, if there is indeed “a unit of rock significance” (Meltzer) in every song, then the most sublime rock song resides in its entirety in the stupidest pop song, while the stupidest pop song finds perfect shelter within the greatest rock song.

What matters is neither the original version nor the copyrighted one, but the signifying unit hidden in every song or, if you want, the kernel of the Real, “that which remains the same in all possible symbolic universes,” which in our case means in all covers.<sup>50</sup> Every song, in other words, contains a kernel of enjoyment that floats from one cover to the next (the first recording is also a cover, which is evident in the case of classical *Lieder* and standards, and less so – but often no less true – in the case of pop songs). Not only that: pop makes distinctions of style and genre very slippery. We need to hold on to those distinctions because without awareness of genre, form, and style, there is no criticism; but we also need to recognize the instance when the power of the song transmogrifies from one universe into another. In those instances, the result is not the perfect “relocation” of the transmuted object, as if we were using a 3D printer or Star Trek’s transporter, but a new entity whose kernel nonetheless has remained the same.

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Meltzer. *The Aesthetics of Rock* (1970). New Foreword by Richard Meltzer, new Introduction by Greil Marcus. New York: Da Capo, 1986.

<sup>50</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Verso, 2008, pp. 62-63.

The non-hierarchical and non-normative categories I am looking for are not general classes under which material or conceptual beings can be classified. In other words, I am not invoking the pop-music equivalent of Aristotelian primary categories (Substance, Relation, Quantity, Quality) and secondary categories (Place, Time, Situation, Condition, Action, Passion). I would rather refer to Wittgenstein when he says that there are no clear definitions that we can attribute to categories; rather a “halo” or “corona” of related meanings radiating around each term.<sup>51</sup> I may also think of Gilbert Ryle when he speaks of categories as “a galaxy of ideas” rather than a single idea.<sup>52</sup> Such categories are not normative. They are ready-made; they come after the fact and their purpose lies in connecting the dots. Or, conversely, they may “singularize” the dots by breaking up patterns that are too familiar and no longer useful. I am looking less for recurring tropes or indicators of style, to use Philip Tagg’s lexicon, than I am for indicator of problems, “event categories,” so to speak, in analogy with the “event horizons” of physics.<sup>53</sup> Undefined areas, that is, which contain their own kernel of enjoyment-significance whose meaning may be lost or become ambiguous beyond their border.

Meltzer’s “unit of rock significance” is one of those slippery syntagms that at first sight do not make sense outside the context in which Meltzer places them. True, Meltzer quotes W.V.O. Quine, “The unit of empirical significance is the whole of science” (p. 97), which is no more than a sophomoric stunt on his part (which is the same thing that can be said for 95% of his book).<sup>54</sup> Let’s make therefore a leap from the ridiculous to the sublime: the real issue is what Ernst Bloch, in his *Spirit of Utopia*, defined as “carpet as pure, corrective

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<sup>51</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978, pp.14, 181.

<sup>52</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers*, Vol. II: *Philosophical Arguments* (1945). London: Hutchinson, 1971, pp. 201-202.

<sup>53</sup> “Style indicators are in other words those aspects of musical structure that state the *compositional norms and identity* of a given style and that tend to be constant for the duration of an entire piece.” Philip Tagg, *Music’s Meanings: A Modern Musicology for non-Musos*. New York & Huddersfield: The Mass Media Music Scholars’ Press, 2013, p. 523.

<sup>54</sup> The quotation comes from “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” Ch. 2 of Willard Van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963, p. 42.

form” (*Teppich*), meaning all music from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance still lacking the realization of subjectivity, and being therefore a prelude to subjectivity.<sup>55</sup> (Incidentally, I think that “tapestry” would be a better translation of “*Teppich*” than “carpet,” given that Bloch was probably thinking of medieval tapestries.)

I do not subscribe to Bloch’s idealistic terminology in its teleological and normative features. I merely point out that contemporary, rock-derived popular music oscillates between two poles. One is a failed attempt at subjectivity (Bob Dylan in a 1966 interview defined rock and roll as “a fake attempt at sex,” which is accurate to the extent that the same definition could not be applied to jazz and the blues). The other is a diffuse, collective, interwoven, tapestry-like subjectivity, which is nonetheless the only possible ground for the pollination of the “unit of rock significance.”

In Bloch’s ideal history of music, the definition of non-subjective music as tapestry makes sense to the extent that at some point a solid subjectivity (say, Beethoven—who was Bloch’s hero) comes about and occupies the forefront. That is not the case in popular music, where tapestry is indeed the forefront. The diffuse subjectivity of pop songs means that we never encounter “the” pop song but only one of its *avatars*, the broken line of a pattern in the tapestry. The pop song is not represented; it represents itself. As much as the transcendental ego (“I think”) is the presupposition of experience, so “I sing” is the transcendental presupposition of the song. The “I,” however, is the “I” of the song and not the ego of the singer. In fact, it is not “I sing” as much as it is “It sings” (a rough equivalent of what, in Lacanian fashion, is known as *ça parle*). The song appropriates the singer.

It is all very well for Frank Sinatra to say that Billie Holiday would pick up any song and make it her own.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the song (think of “Strange Fruit”) made Billie Holiday its own—which goes to Billie Holiday’s credit, for songs do not just appropriate every singer.

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<sup>55</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (1923). Trans. Anthony A. Nassar. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000, pp. 37, 46, etc.

<sup>56</sup> Pete Hamill, *Why Sinatra Matters*. New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1998, p. 115.

The singer listens to the song. The song cannot listen to the singer, but the singer feels that the song “hears” the singer, and in this impersonal, objectified “hearing,” the song owns the singer. In time, “I’m a Fool to Want You” took possession of Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday, child prodigy Angelina Jordan (see her rendition on youtube), and lately Bob Dylan (listen to his cover version in *Shadows in the Night*, 2015). The transcendental “I sing” is actually a transcendental “I connect”—connecting one singer to another in an endless chain.

In fact, I can make a case that rivals “I’m a Fool to Want You.” At the end of the 1970s, no name among my crowd was more vilified than Donna Summer’s. She seemed to stand against everything we held dear. No one conveyed the stupid shape of things to come better than her senseless disco act, wasn’t that so? Well, a reassessment is long overdue. To me, it occurred some time ago when I listened to a conversation with Brian Eno recorded on August 29, 1998 at the Kunsthalle in Bonn, Germany. Eno put on Diana Ross and the Supremes’ “Someday We’ll Be Together” and then he said,

Pop music has been an incredibly brilliant, great experiment. That’s one of them, and another one is that Donna Summer song, “State of Independence.” Again, one of the most dignified pieces of music ... You know, I remember some classical idiot saying to me once, in a kind of snooty way, well, of course, everything in pop music had been done by 1832, meaning that pop music was simple, you know, structurally simple. It uses the same old chords, it doesn’t do anything melodically challenging, theoretically. And I said, listen to “State of Independence” sometime, you know, as a piece of very, very sophisticated folklore-art. Those pieces stand alone.<sup>57</sup>

Diana Ross and the Supremes have always been legit, but Donna Summer? For a moment, I honestly thought that Eno was pulling a Richard Meltzer on the audience. It wasn’t so. The 1983 live performance of Donna Summer’s “State of Independence,” available on youtube, is as dignified as any civil rights anthem of the 1960s. Donna Summer truly opens up some sort of Heavenly Jerusalem where Martin Luther King’s dream of freedom is being

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<sup>57</sup> “Michael Engelbrecht Interviews Brian Eno in 1998”  
[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9qAxrSKfCQ>] (38’ minute, my transcription).

realized in a space and a time that does not fully belong to this unhappy globe. While listening to the song, however, I knew I had already heard it. My recollection of it remained below the surface and did not want to come out. Thanks to the comments posted below the video, I found out that “State of Independence” was actually a track by Jon Anderson and Vangelis from their second collaboration, *The Friends of Mr. Cairo* (1981).

Now, can one imagine a shade of pale that is *whiter* than Jon and Vangelis? How could Donna Summer turn a mildly intriguing pile of prog-synth-pop-New-Age platitudes into a “meditation on integration,” to quote Charlie Mingus? (Incidentally, I wouldn’t mind if “State of Independence” would become the national hymn of the United States; I would love to hear the Congress sing “Shablam idi, Shablam ida” in unison). Did Brian Eno know who wrote the song? Did he bother to know? But my point is precisely that *it doesn’t matter*. It does matter to pop music historians and to the copyright holders, but “it doesn’t matter” insofar as the song lays out an excess of unattached meaning which is the mark of its indestructible kernel, of its inner enjoyment. What matters is the unit of significance—the “purloined letter” or the purloined interval, the metonymic signifier that cannot be pinned down in one definitive cover.<sup>58</sup>

I am advancing no idealist aesthetics; nor am I defending pop songs on the spurious basis of a Platonic idea of rock, existing independently from the concrete practices of productions and the accidents of life. Just the opposite. My aesthetics is materialistically contingent. I am saying that what survives in the metamorphic process going from the “original cover” to the next one is the power of the signifier that answers to no authorship and does not subscribe to any fixed idea of what the song ought to be.

When I first heard Eno’s speech, I heard a word he had not uttered. When Eno said, “Pop music has been an incredibly brilliant, great experiment,” I heard, “Pop music has been

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<sup>58</sup> The meme, indeed. See Steven Jan, “Replicating Sonorities: Toward a Memetics of Music.” *Journal of Memetics-Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission*, 4 (1), 2000 [[http://cfpm.org/jom-emit/2000/vol4/jan\\_s.html](http://cfpm.org/jom-emit/2000/vol4/jan_s.html)].



an incredibly brilliant, *planetary* experiment.” I do not know where that word, “planetary,” came from. There is nothing in the phonetics of “incredibly,” “brilliant,” and “great” that I could consciously rework into “planetary.” I do not know what subconscious stream took hold of me, but the beauty of the word I believed I heard struck me nonetheless. A couple of weeks later, in a case of sheer synchronicity, I opened *Death of a Discipline* by literary theorist Gayatri C. Spivak to warm myself up for a Spivak seminar in the Department of English at my institution. In a chapter called, yes, “Planetarity,” I found this quotation, which totally validated my aural misprision of Eno’s words:

I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics and so on, now drawn by the requirements of Geographical Information Systems ... The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe. I cannot say “the planet, on the other hand.” When I invoke the planet, I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition.<sup>59</sup>

Spivak’s seminar focused largely on her notion of planetarity. She distinguished between the “dogmatic” and “critical” adoption of the concept. The point was to avoid the double bind that is implicit in the uses of concepts as both critical *and* dogmatic (a mistake that virtually every school of critical theory is guilty of). To make decisions, one has to choose either dogmatic *or* critical use. The dogmatic notion of the planet as entirely knowable must be supplanted by the notion of the planet as ultimately *inaccessible*. One could also recall Heidegger’s notion of the inner safeness of the Earth with respect to the World, if it weren’t that Heidegger meant it in a reactionary, territorial, ultimately dogmatic sense.<sup>60</sup> Unsurpassable limitations in our power to gather a total knowledge of the planet—but also of

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<sup>59</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003, p. 72.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Heidegger. “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1975, pp. 15-88.

a text, a film, a song—is what cultivates an unconditional ethics in reading, watching, and listening. I also assume that, in Spivak’s terms, “unconditional” must be understood as in “unconditional love.”

Planetary rescues us from the abstract, value-deprived, barren “globe” of globalization. It makes us feel the earth beneath our feet again. It is not, I must stress, an idealistic concept, precisely because it will always remain *an incomplete tapestry*. Capitalism may possess the globe, but it will never possess the planet. Human folly can destroy the world, but it will not destroy the planet. Music born in a specific time and place (from Euroclassical music to synth-pop or African-American soul) re-territorializes all the time. People all over the world may feel moved by listening to any kind of music in their own terms, which includes appropriating the music and letting themselves be appropriated by it. In this process, they will make it essentially *incomplete*, open to an endless string of permutations, and therefore *planetary*.

Legend has it that there are currently forty million people studying piano in China. As Alex Ross has pointed out, “Now classical music *is* the world; it has ceased to be a European art”.<sup>61</sup> It is being written by men and women all over the planet, from Azerbaijan to South Korea, in a growing cross-pollination of Western and non-Western patterns. The same applies to jazz and rock. An unheard-of rhythmic pattern coming from Africa or East Asia may have us change our perception of the world a year from now. Popular music as a planetary experiment (which includes, possibly, contemporary “world” classical music) confirms that the flapping of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil can cause a tornado in Texas, for every music piece is a larva constantly changing into a butterfly changing into a tornado. Yet the experiment is unfinished, and it has to stay that way. The true event of the planetarization of popular music, as opposed to its globalization, may be that mere popularity is actually the

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<sup>61</sup> Alex Ross. *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007, p. 516.

sign of a non-event (a distinction should be made between popular music and celebrity music), while the true event is the move from emancipatory politics to emancipatory tapestry weaving.

By the end of the 1970s, progressive, experimental, and politically committed music narrowed itself down to a point where very few people could follow it. My mistake in those years was to look for more extreme avant-garde, not realizing that pop music in its full potential is always at the forefront of “something” (the virtual Gotha of African-American musicians singing the choruses of “state of Independence” is the best example). The 1980s saw many illusions fall, yet they did bring us a state of independence. We were free at last, and if we look back to that time now, it ought to be because we can do it freely, and not because of regret. Had we been able to listen to our hard-earned independence back then, instead of crying over the lost hopes of those years...

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This is how my paper ends, but the work on the “philosophy of popular music” is in progress. The Mouth and the Throat, the Kernel of the Real, Tapestry-weaving, and Planetary are the first operative categories in a rather long list that will keep me busy for a while.