Chapter 27

Political Music and Protest Song

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General Definition of Political Music

As the term "political music" indicates, there is music we consider to be related to politics. But how does music relate to politics? Imagine the scenario that a composer wants to write a piece of political music—a hymn, for instance, that praises the French Revolution or a march that aims at motivating a social group to fight against unemployment. She will face a serious problem: she cannot easily 'make' music, as a sign configuration,[1] that refers to nonmusical issues such as politics. Whereas, in verbal language, conventions determine which words (the signifier[s]) refer to which phenomena or concepts (one or several signifieds), such conventions are rather rare or nonexistent in music.[2] We understand music (as a sign system) not on the basis of abstract conventions, but *similarities* and what we call *associations*:[3] consciously or unconsciously, we observe or construct features that are shared by a sound configuration (a motive, a rhythmic pattern, or a chord progression) on the one hand, and another sound configuration (of the same piece or another piece) and/or non-musical phenomena (motion, color, shape, structure, etc.) on the other.[4] We attribute to the former the function to refer to the latter, and transfer our associations evoked by the former to the latter. Moreover, grammar in the verbal-language sense does not exist in music. Because of the specific ways that music is used and understood as a sign system, we cannot use it to formulate arguments. There are no logical operators in music that can negate something—for example, in the manner of various antinuclear icons that depict a nuclear sign radiation symbol being crossed out. Therefore, the composer of political music will

have to deal with the difficulty of expressing her message in an equivocal medium. In this light, the question arises: how can she ensure that her hymn hailing the French Revolution will not be mistaken as a paean to the monarchy? How can she clearly express resentment over unemployment instead of projecting solidarity with the employer class?

There are essentially three strategies for using music effectively despite its equivocality in political contexts: (1) The composer complements the musical piece with less ambiguous *verbal language* that defines the political message: a text to which the music is set and/or a title and/or commentary in the score (the latter perform their function only if the title and commentary are known by the composition's addressees, the performers and audiences alike). (2) The composer might trust that the *context* in which her composition is performed will clearly define its political orientation. Her hymn on the French Revolution will be recognizable as approving in nature if performed during an event celebrating the anniversary of the revolution. The composer's march against unemployment will receive its political determination when a group of angry-looking, poorly dressed people, equipped with some posters reading "More jobs!," hum or whistle the march's melody. (3) Most importantly, the composer chooses musical means to which Western listeners usually attribute an "expression" [5] that corresponds with the mood of the political camp whose ideas, ideologies, critiques, and aspirations she wants to support. In order to hail and affirm the existing political system she uses musical means to which we respond with positive feelings. In contrast, protest music with which engaged composers aim at criticizing the current state and supporting the change of the political system tends to be "negative" and marked by tension. This "expression" is produced by means of unresolved dissonances and harsh timbres to which listeners usually attribute discontentment, conflict and anger—that is, emotions protesters themselves often feel. Other protest music has march-like, agitated rhythms that correspond with the activists own energetic mental and bodily state.

Why, however, is music performed in political contexts? What ends does political music serve? Music for state-*affirmative* and state-*critical* purposes operates in part differently, and it thus makes sense to discuss both types separately.

General Cultural Functions of Political Music in State-Affirmative Contexts

In order to maintain power, rulers aim at making their power manifest to the citizens who are for their part expected to submit to them. To this end,

the former organize political ceremonies that generate what Bourdieu has called "symbolic power,"[6] meaning the power to change the world through the use of signs (instead of physical power).[7] Music, together with other signs such as clothes, gestures, insignia, and speeches, serves as an important factor in the creation of "symbolic power". To give an example, the ceremony and festive procession through Paris on the occasion of the celebration of the French military victory of Steinkerque on 3 August 1692 included the parade of the king, the music of the Grande Écurie (the wind ensemble used for royal occasions), the deployment of the Swiss Guards, the proclamation of the peace treaty, and the performance of the "Te Deum" (H. 146) that Marc Antoine Charpentier had composed for this event.[8] Whereas the Grand Écurie—through its high social status and the heroic-military music it performed—served the king and his ministers to demonstrate the French state's power to the witnessing aristocrats, bourgeois, and crowd, the sacred "Te Deum"—its music and its lyrics[9]—was supposed to suggest that the French military's war and Louis XIV's reign had divine blessing. In order to achieve this, in addition to the hymn's pompous opening movement, "Prélude,"[10] whose *stile di tromba* (full orchestra, trumpets, and timpani) the listening French citizens could again identify as signifying the king's financial, cultural and general capacities, the devotional parts (featuring a solo singer accompanied by an organ) evoked an individual, Louis XIV, who submitted himself to higher—here: divine—powers and, in doing this, received divine support. These cognitive-associative procedures of the listeners generated Louis XIV's "symbolic power," a kind of power that is essentially based on sign interpreters who have been willing to understand the signs—here: music—in a way that confirmed their—subjective—belief in another individual's physical power, which made them to submit to and support this individual.[11]

In the twentieth century, performative, ritualistic practices contributing to the generation of "symbolic power" have hardly changed. During the ceremony marking the first inauguration of Barack Obama on 20 January 2009, that, still today, serves to "magically" transform a normal human being into a superhuman individual of global power, the two main musical agenda items, the well-known American patriotic folk song[12] "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" and John Williams's arrangement of Aaron Copland's "Air and Simple Gifts" for classical quartet aimed at multiple identity generation with the United States. The following properties of the music and its creators advanced the nationalist-patriotic ideals: drawing on a Shaker—that is, an *authentic* American–folk tune, Aaron Copland's "Simple Gifts"[13] was used by the inauguration's organizers to remind the listeners of the US-American nation's founding myth: the settlement of religiously persecuted

groups in North America, the high esteem of religious freedom and work ethic. Both Copland and Williams[14] are *truly* American composers, holding up the American field of composition against Europe's perceived historical superiority (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Wagner, Schönberg, and so forth). In completion to this, the performers—the black soul singer Aretha Franklin, the Chinese American cellist Yo-Yo Ma, the Venezuelan American pianist Gabriela Montero, the Israeli American violinist Itzhak Perlman, and the African American clarinetist Anthony McGill—epitomized the United States's self-image of a multicultural, tolerant nation. The organizers of the inauguration obviously expected that the audiences in front of the Capitol and the television would produce the same associations with the state's origins and key values.

Even more than democracies, authoritarian regimes such as the Third Reich and the Soviet Union put the weight on music's assumed performative quality, that is, its impact on the world through purely semiotic means. On the one hand, they employ beautiful—sometimes cheerful, sometimes glorious—propaganda music to make their citizens believe in the paradisiacal conditions that the authoritarian state promises to bring about. On the other hand, nowhere more so than in dictatorships do rulers fear music's equivocal character. They do this because, depending on the specific context of a composition's performance, listeners do in fact understand a composition as supporting their own subversive, state-critical attitude. State officials, however, searching for the subversive messages in the abstract sound configurations alone instead of the combination of several factors—the performance context, the composition and, first and foremost, the associations and constructions of similarities by the listeners—achieve no more than a mere reading of the musical tea leaves.

The Role of Music in Protest Cultures, Exemplified by the Protest Song

Like the composers and organizers of state-affirmative political music performances, the composers and organizers of performances of protest music, that is, state-critical music, want to shape their audiences' opinions regarding the state's actions—yet in a critical way. Songs in the context of—overt—protest usually criticize the existing social conditions by means of their pithy lyrics and thus help to convey the protesters' grievances; they demand change and negotiations with opposing political groups, mostly state officials and groups in power (workers vs. employers, environmental activists vs. industry, feminists vs. the patriarchal society, New-Leftist students vs. the establish-

ment). The lyrics of "Die Wacht am Rhein" ("The Guard at the Rhine"), for instance, that became the West German protest hymn of the mid-1970s not only criticized the French and West German governmental plans to build a chemical factory and a nuclear power plant in the rural winegrowing region Alsace/Baden, but also offered explanations to the citizens. Furthermore, they invited them to join the civil solidarity campaign that had organized itself to fight the industrial plans. Often sung together, protest songs, like pro-state music, serve to build solidarity and make protesters feel part of a strong community. They not only spiritually uplift the singing activists, but also support the formation of a collective identity. Which role, though, does the music (independent of the lyrics) play?

Like political music in state-affirmative contexts, the success of a protest song heavily depends on associations the listeners generate on the basis of observed similarities between the song and other music and/or contextual knowledge that contributes to its "meaning."[15] Regarding the melody, the singer-songwriter Walter Mossmann in "Die Wacht am Rhein" wisely avoided alienating the people of Baden, a majority of whom traditionally elected the Christian Democratic—that is, a right-oriented, conservative, and anti-Communist—party, by drawing on the musical language of the German Socialist–Communist workers song tradition of the 1920s and 1930s. Instead he enabled associations with a variety of traditions, including the Christian one. The melody is said to originally be a Christian chorale that Florence Reece, a wife of a National Miner's Union leader in Kentucky, adapted in order to accompany a poem that she had written to support her husband's fight in the coal miner strikes of 1931 in Harlan County.[16] Mossmann, however, appropriated the song not directly from Reece, but from Pete Seeger who had popularized it in the context of the American student and protest movements of the 1960s. In musicological terms, Mossmann created a contrafactum or parody: he substituted the text of a given piece of music with another. In doing so, he stimulated a wide variety of associations that the tune had "inherited" throughout its history: the Christian-Protestant protest tradition, starting with Martin Luther, the spirit of the old American workers movement and the union fights in the 1930s, and the optimistic striving of the student and protest movements of the 1960s.[17]

To stimulate these associations, the tonality played an important role. The ancient key, known as the Dorian or Aeolian mode[18] of this originally Christian hymn, is usually associated by Western listeners with ancient or archaic times. It evokes the cruel religious wars that had taken place in Europe from the reformation till the mid-seventeenth century. Mossmann, by the way, was fully aware of the song's similarity to ancient chants and even claimed to have *intensified* this reference by varying the melody. "Except

for the activist cadence with leading tone g sharp [Mossmann finishes the song with a modern dominant-tonic cadence, characteristic for major-minor-tonality, instead of a typically-Dorian minor dominant, as in the version of Seeger], the modified melody has more clearly become Dorian than the old version [of Seeger/Reece[19]]. ... In the church hymnbook, there are in fact numerous Dorian chorales ... What do people associate with the memories of these melodies in the church mode [Dorian]? The avowal, the consciousness of the togetherness of the community [or congregation], the feeling of higher right for which [however] people do not make allowance in this vale of tears."[20] In other words, the composition's close connection to the Christian-Protestant tradition should implicitly sanctify the protesters' actions. Even though these intentions might not have been consciously recognized by most listeners, the composers and performers of "Die Wacht am Rhein" could hope that the listeners would carry out the desired procedures: observing similarities between one musical piece ("Die Wacht am Rhein"), on the one hand, with another piece and its extra-musical contexts, on the other; and understanding (unconsciously) the former as a signifier referring to, and thus "meaning,"[21] the latter.

Theoretical and Empirical Research Perspectives

The investigation of political music belongs naturally to two disciplinary fields: musicology, on the one hand, and sociology and political sciences on the other. In musicology, the history of various genres of political music, especially protest song, has been extensively investigated (workers movement, rock music, folk music, French revolution, avant-garde music).[22] More recently, "music and protest" has developed into a musicological research field on its own. In this context, researchers have moved beyond the narrow focus on Western cultures to investigate "music and protest" in other areas of the globe.

Despite these fruitful achievements, thus far protest music as music, that is, not as lyrics, has only started to be analyzed in detail.[23] Which role have musical means played in which contexts to support the activists' expression of dissent? Regarding this question, the investigation of the similarities of protest music with music that was composed in dictatorships and which the dictatorial state authorities consider to be subversive appears to be most promising. In addition to the analysis of music, recent research results from sociopolitical fields—a deeper understanding of protest techniques, the mechanism of the performative subversion of sign systems, and the significance of the bodily presence during demonstrations—have not been applied

yet to political, especially protest music. More concretely, the interplay of music, on the one hand, and protest as sociopolitical activity and its various dramaturgies, on the other, has not been systematically explored yet. During which phase of protest—a demonstration for instance—is which music played? In which respects is music as a protest "tool" similar to or distinct from other protest "tools"? To what degree does the participation of the body in the performance of music including protest songs effectively play out in the context of demonstrations and political upheaval?

Beate Kutschke has taught at various universities in and outside Germany: among those, the Technical University Dresden, the University of Arts in Berlin, the Harvard University and the University of Hong Kong. In addition to numerous articles collections and journals, she has published two monographs on modern music: one concerning the end of history in the works of Theodor W Adorno and Wolfgang Rihm (2002) and the other on the New Left and West German and U.S.-American avant-garde music of the 1960s and 1970s (2007). She edited *Musikulturen in der Revolte* (Stuttgart, 2008), and coedited *Music and Protest in "1968"* (Cambridge, 2013) with Barley Norton. The latter received the Ruth Solie Award of the American Musicological Society in 2014.

Notes

1. I use "sign" instead of "symbol" because, in English as in other Western languages, the word "symbol" is not only used as a synonym for "sign" (in a semiotic sense), but also to refer to a multitude of concepts not compliant with semiotic theories.
2. Conventions determine, for instance, that the word "house," the signifier, refers to concrete houses or the concept of house, the signified.
3. Associations are based on the observation of similarities and the construction of structural analogies: since in a former context this or that music served to demonstrate this and that, a similar musical style serves to do the same in the current context.
4. The significance of similarities in the understanding of music does not mean that conventions do not play any role. They indeed influence on which of the numerous similarities between phenomena (such as the similarity shared by all phenomena of "being a phenomenon") we focus our attention. For more details on music as a sign system and the role of conventions as well as on the construction of similarities, see Beate Kutschke, "Music and Other Sign Systems" in *Music Theory Online* 20:4 (2014), http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.4/mto.14.20.4.kutschke.pdf.
5. What we call the "expression of music" is not an emotive property of the music, but the emotions that we, the listeners, experience while listening to the music and ascribe to it.

6. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, 1991), 113–16.
7. Regarding the use of the words "sign" and "symbol" see footnote 1.
8. Cf. Catherine Cessac, *Marc-Antoine Charpentier* (Portland, OR, 1995), 175.
9. "We praise thee, O God/ we acknowledge thee to be the Lord/ ... O Christ ... Thou sittest at the right hand of God ... O Lord, save thy people/ and bless thine heritage."
10. Today, the Prélude serves as the Eurovision opening hymn.
11. The power of the ruler is not his own—physical—power, but the effect of the power demonstration of his entourage, his army, courtiers and government who generate and maintain his power by behaving as it were his personal power that rules them.
12. The lyrics of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" revolve around the ideal of liberty, the pilgrimage myth, Christian faith, love of nature, and the power of music.
13. "Simple Gifts" is the seventh section of Copland's ballet *Appalachian Spring*.
14. The composer of *Star Wars*, *Jaws*, and *Schindler's List* has won several Oscars and Grammies.
15. Music—like any other sign system—does not *possess* meaning. What we call "meaning" is the mental effect of attributing to a thing or phenomenon the function to serve as a signifier referring to a signified. Furthermore, what we call an "association" is basically the same as what we call the "meaning" of a phenomenon: that is, the process of attributing the function to serve as signifier. Nonetheless, we use the words "meaning" and "association" differently. If we are sure that other sign users share our attribution we call it "meaning" while, using the word "association," we indicate that we are aware that our attribution is most likely subjective, that is, will not be shared by other sign users.
16. Which music Reece had in mind when she set her verses to it, could not be verified yet and is principally difficult to verify because of the rather unspecific shape of the refrain—upward motion from scale degree one to five and back again, omitting the second tone—that can be found in this way or the other in countless chorales and folk songs. Reece mentioned the Baptist hymn "Lay the Lily Low" and the hymn "I'm Going to Land on that Shore." Some folklorists and musicologists have believed that the model could have been the British ballad "Jack Munro" (or "Jack Munroe" or "Jackie Frazer"; see The Mudcat Café).
17. For scores see Walter Moßmann, "Die Wacht am Rhein," in *Alte und neue politische Lieder*, ed. W Moßmann and P Schleuning (Reinbek, 1978), 18–80.
18. The melody does not include the sixth tone of the scale and is as such equivocal.
19. The fact is however that both Seeger's and Mossmann's versions of the song are both Dorian and Aeolian in equally ambiguous measure. Whereas Seeger uses exclusively minor chords (i, iv, and v), Mossmann underscores the ancient, Christian-Protestant, and folk song character by harmonizing the melody by the typical Dorian chord set: i, IV, and v. At the same time, however, he weakens this reference by the V (dominant) at the penultimate chord. Mossmann's changes of the melody, the avoidance of the second tone of the scale, and thus creation of a twice-gapped scale, does not increase the similarity with the Dorian mode, but with Appalachian tunes; see Ralph Lee Smith and Madeline MacNeil, *Songs and Tunes of the Wilderness Road* (Pacific, MO, 1999), 20; Mary O Eddy, *Ballads and Songs from Ohio* (New York, 1939), viii.

20. Moßmann, "Die Wacht am Rhein," 65–66.
21. Regarding the concept of "meaning," see footnote 16.
22. See list of references of Hanns-Werner Heister, "Politische Musik," in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 7, ed. L Finscher (Kassel, 1997), 1661–82, and key words "political music" and "protest song" in the music bibliography RILM.
23. The conference "Protest Music in the Twentieth Century," held in November 2013, has shed new light on the multitude of phenomena that will require more in-depth investigation in the future (for the conference program see http://www.luigiboccherini.org/images/Programme%20Protest.pdf).

Recommended Reading

A comprehensive list of titles on protest music is indicated in the English musicological bibliography RILM (Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale), http://www.rilm.org.

Adlington, Robert. *Composing Dissent: Avant-garde Music in 1960s Amsterdam.* Oxford, 2013. Analyzes in depth protest music in the Netherlands around 1968.

Drott, Eric, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968–1981.* Berkeley, CA, 2011. Analyzes in depth protest music in France around 1968.

Eyerman, Ron, and Andrew Jamison. *Music and Social Movements.* Cambridge, 1998. Investigates protest music from the sociological perspective.

Kutschke, Beate, and Barley Norton, eds. *Music and Protest in 1968.* Cambridge, 2013. Presents a comprehensive picture on the relationship between social protest and musical expression in different countries across the globe around 1968.

Peddie, Ian, ed. *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest.* Aldershot, 2006. The contributors, situated in a wide range of disciplines, focus on post-1975 popular music.

Perone, James E. *Music of the Counterculture Era.* Westport, CT, 2004. Provides a comprehensive survey about its development in the context of the U.S.-American countercultural movements.

Robb, David, ed. *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s.* Rochester, NY, 2007. Traces back the West and East German protest song scene since the 1960s to the combat songs of the early twentieth century and the 1948 song tradition.