

Call for papers

Music, Politics, Ideology in the Era of the Internet

Semiotics, cognitive sciences, political sciences, sociology, media studies, cultural studies

Louvain-la-Neuve, 8-9 May 2020

Université catholique de Louvain
Centro di studi italiani, Globalit, ISPOLE



<https://uclouvain.be/fr/instituts-recherche/ispole/actualites/music-politics-ideology.html>

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Keynote Speakers (confirmed):

- Dario Martinelli, Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania), director of the International Semiotics Institute.
- David Hesmondhalgh, Leeds University.
- Franco Fabbri, Università di Torino, Università Statale di Milano, founding member and several times chair of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music.
- Olivier Urbain, Min-On Concert Association (Tokyo).

Some say, by paraphrasing George Steiner, that music cannot say no, no to being abused by Nazis, for example. Music can be filled with any kind of Ideology or any kind of political content. This is even more the case when music is absolute and does not rely on lyrics. Music does not possess the same semantic dimension and preciseness of a natural language like English or Italian, music has apparently no double articulation. The same song, in different spatial, social and/or temporal contexts, can express the most different, opposing meanings.

It does not surprise that today more and more musicians try to protect their music from appropriation and misuse by politicians (Bruce Springsteen denied Ronald Reagan to use *Born in the USA* during his 1984 campaign), while others support exactly this (*Don't Stop* by Fleetwood Mac and Bill Clinton, 1992 campaign).

Music can be used and abused by politicians, ideologues, revolutionaries or dictators for their own purposes. Insurgents can adopt songs or musical genres to use as signature tunes for their political and social concerns or to give their concerns and desires a recognizable form, shared by their community. Political parties use tunes to rally their members and supporters, to create group solidarity. Music in Hollywood films can convey or underline ideological and political messages. Music can be used to manipulate and to sell ideas, in advertisements and in politics.

The importance of music today cannot be underestimated. As George Steiner states in *Bluebeard's castle*, our cultures and societies are undergoing a profound musicalization, first triggered by radio, TV, cinema and vinyl. Now, iPods, the Internet, Smartphones, intelligent speakers, or (intelligent) earphones contribute to making music omnipresent and all-pervasive in our everyday life.

One of the reasons of this omnipresence is that music is one of the most efficient art forms when it comes to triggering physical and emotional reactions in the listener. Comprehensibly, music plays an important role in film, theater, politics, or advertisement. The Internet (YouTube, Vimeo, Spotify, Music, VEVO, etc.) relies even more on music, more and more intrinsically tied to (moving) images.

With music it is possible to make politics and to influence people, through music people express their adherence to political programs and to specific world views.

But why and how do politics make use of music and by which means? Which aspects, constituents of music are vital for political uses? Which musical aspects are identified (consciously or unconsciously) by listeners in a political context?

It is a common claim to affirm that the political dimension of music and its triggering of emotions and other bodily responses are mainly driven by lyrics or by extra-musical aspects (images, staging, e.g. in conventions or rallies). This is certainly the case on a first level. However, the lyrics are usually extremely simple. This means that the lyrics alone do not make the difference, they are not efficient enough to make a difference or to explain why music can foster change, have an impact on the listeners.

In other words, does music have an impact on the (intended) change/trigger/persuasive impact or is music simply the expression of change that is happening?

In this conference/workshop, we will investigate the different aspects that turn music into a political statement. We will investigate when/whether music as such can say no, when/whether music is only a projection screen that can be adapted to any exigency. We will investigate in which circumstances music acquires a political dimension. We will focus essentially on the last decennia, from the eighties to today, to wit the period where the extreme musicalization of our society took place and the Internet began to be all-pervasive.

Proposals should deal with one or several of the following points:

Use of music by Politicians, Parties, Political movements

- on the internet
- in rallies, political campaigns, etc.
- in protest marches, demos, etc.
- in advertisements (radio, TV)

from a political, literary, linguistic, musicological, semiotic and/or cognitive point of view.

In the following we will refer to the agents that make choices (which song can be used and when? Dramaturgy? Adaptation? Etc.) and/or the composers and copywriters, as well as the parties, movements, politicians who are the commissioners, responsible for a demo or a political campaign.

- (a) Choice/composition of music as a poetic act: choice/adaptation of existing jingles, pop songs, or on purpose composed songs/music/jingles.
 - a. What does the choice/composition reveal about a party, a politician, a movement?
 - b. What does the choice/composition reveal about the intentions of the creators?
 - c. What does the choice/composition tell about their intended target audience and its “image”?
 - d. Which cognitive abilities are triggered/intended to be triggered in the target audience?
 - e. How are slogans adapted to music?
 - f. How is existent music (instrumentation, voice, or lyrics) adapted to its new target?
 - g. Which aspects of music (and lyrics, text) are considered important?
 - h. Which functionality attribute the creators to music?
- (b) Music is often part of a vaster dramaturgy.
 - a. How is music used in a staging?
 - b. How is music used in advertisements?
 - c. How is music combined with (moving) images?
 - d. While lyrics are often banal, or nonsensical (in the sense that they sometimes do not express the content a political creator intends), and the music itself does not imply any political intention directly, it is quite common that songs obtain a political dimension. By which means (extra-musical, contextual, musical, etc.)?
 - e. Which channels are used and how? (Twitter, MMS, advertisement, rallies).
- (c) Case studies of different European, American, Asian contexts. For ex. Music, ideology and politics in (Southern) Italy, in the United States, Hong Kong, Hungary, Serbia, Turkey, Germany, etc.

Proposals:

Please send your proposal to each of the three addresses:

- costantino.maeder@uclouvain.be, mark.reybrouck@kuleuven.be, and lucio.spaziante@unibo.it

A proposal should include a title, a short description of no more than 500 words, as well as a short CV.

Please submit a proposal by January 15, 2020. Accepted speakers will be informed by January 30, 2020.

Concrete details about registration and accommodation will be sent after acceptance of your proposal. The conference fee will amount to 50€.