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On the future of music analysis

ABSTRACT

A business model for culture

My presentation deals with the first Conference Theme proposed in the Call for Papers, and in particular with a main question: ‘Music analysis is today confronted with [...] the domination of economic models’; so, in a business model of cultural organisation, ‘given the necessity of proving its social utility [...] can it even [...] justify its existence?’

I shall start with a first possible answer to this question. I actually partially agree with it: the idea of music has changed under the influence of the mass media. Its main value is no longer qualitative but quantitative: quality can be discussed, while quantity is a fact. Moreover, while values change according to social needs and points of view, success is undeniable and it has an economic impact. In this framework music analysis, too, risks a decline in its importance.

One might wonder, however, whether cultural models based on economic principles are to be considered as symptoms of an historic change or ephemeral aspects of a social transition. First of all we can observe that - not only in Western culture - the philosophical discoveries of the intellectual classes and their artistic results have always been considered as models to be remembered and handed down to posterity. The role of the intellectual classes has always been not only to discover how to make money, but also to select knowledge and discuss ideologies able to improve the whole social mechanisms. So, if in our years literary and artistic studies - including musicology - are considered minor and not very useful activities, this does not mean that the general interests of the intellectual classes are necessarily destined to oblivion.

A different and commonly shared idea is that in the present years we are inside a profound and alarming crisis of democracy, which is raising doubts on many traditional ways of thinking: these may include some superficial and transient ideas, but there are also deeper values whose underestimation could prove dangerous. In other words I believe that intellectual thinking is not to be conceived as a privilege of a given social class, but as a resource for the whole society. For this reason I have no doubts: cultural models based on business must not be interpreted as an historical change, but as a transitional phenomenon.

Globalisation, music and musicology

In the above mentioned Theme n. 1 the domination of economic models is strictly linked to globalisation. Actually globalisation is not an ideology but a fact, and its presence in

our world is not only due to economical aspects, but also to the development of communication means, and particularly to the internet.

In music, globalisation started with the radio and recording industry, but it reached its first culmination with rock and youth music and their immediate diffusion in the Sixties and Seventies of the past century. In the fifth volume of the *Enciclopedia della Musica* Jean-Jacques Nattiez contributed a number of articles devoted to the sharing of European musical models in non European countries and a similar number of other articles on the presence of non European models in European tradition (Nattiez 2005). The musical genres accepted at the beginnings of the new millennium are fragmented into a multiplicity of styles, of production systems, of tastes, of ideologies, of social distributions, and geographic differences. Moreover also the functions of music have been fragmented and multiplied. Beyond the aesthetic functions, music now covers other different roles: in entertainment, in advertising, in cinema, in television, in technological experiences, in teaching, and even in medicine. The dominant area is entertainment, both in terms of diffusion and of economic importance (Borio 2015). In this field the main stylistic models come from Afro-American culture and can be identified in ‘popular music’ strengthened and expanded by the music industry.

A curious observation must be added at this point: the processes of transformation in the study of music do not parallel transformations in music itself. The rhythms of musicological modifications are much slower and follow a substantially different logic. As long as the dominant model was European classical music of the 19th and 20th century, musicology had two principal functions: that of maintaining the memory of its traditions, and that of giving a professional competence to the musicians, most of all the composers, offering accurate insights into the knowledge of the complex structural techniques required by that kind of music. The musical models of the new millennium do not have the same necessities. The memory of traditions lose the sacral values it conserved even in the years of Adorno (DeNora 2008): the dominant music is no longer interested in the conservation of memories, but rather in its daily use and the enhancement of novelties. And the study of traditional composition is only useful for musicians interested in those kinds of music. Lucy Green (2008) clearly explained the procedures of the new ‘informal learning’ common in popular music.

This does not mean that musicology is in crisis; it is in a phase of substantial modification. In the previous phase of its history it was normally at the service of music, but at the end of the millennium musicology is no longer strictly linked to the

practice of music: its developments have transformed it into a body of knowledge interested in exploring the nature and the function of human imagination: literature, architecture, cinema, the figurative arts. They are now at the centre of the human sciences alongside philosophy, sociology, psychology. So, unlike music, which also has economic interests, musicology can be considered outside of the so called business model for culture.

New trends of musicology and of music analysis

We must take into account, however, that the production and spreading of music has substantially changed over the last decades, and the concept of music itself has been modified: this implies that the objects and the methods of studying it must also necessarily change. In the already mentioned Theme 1 of our call for papers we find examples of changes: 'the structuralism expounded in the second half of the 20th century and schools of thought such as the New Musicology' are two cases in point. But we can also go further. Today's musicology can now acquire new knowledge able to interpret modifications in music: history is already a necessary branch of the discipline, but cultural studies suggest that other disciplinary fields have become equally necessary, such as the sociology and anthropology of music. And the same can be asserted for analysis: while in former years it was normal to speak of systematic musicology, today, according to the important suggestions of Richard Parncutt, (2004) is better to speak of the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach. And it is also worth mentioning another theme which in my opinion is primary in our epoch: the relationships between musicology and technological disciplines.

Three main aspects have been so far dominant in music analysis: the prevalence of European repertoires of the tonal and post-tonal epoch, the preference for well formalized analytical methods – for example Riemann, Schenker, set theory, neo-Riemannian theory – and the discussion of syntactic rules against other possible analytical interests: for example, inquiries on musical meanings and communication which are equally important in music. It is clear that even in the epoch of globalization the heritage of analytical knowledge cannot be neglected, both because models of Western music are now universally shared and because aspects of analysis can be applied to non Western models. But they were not born to study oral traditions, which represent the absolute majority of the existed and still existing kinds of music. Now, we can observe that in the so called and well known triple analysis model (Molino 2009), not only the immanent or neutral level is present: also production and listening have importance – poetical and aesthetical aspects, to use its terminology – , and corresponding analytical procedures have been developed. Moreover, we should add that the separation between the three levels is by no means a norm in oral music.

Thus the multidisciplinary attitudes I previously mentioned can acquire new functions in this scenario: for example semiotic traditions, cognitive studies on music emotion, body listening and body thinking, anthropological and cultural interests, not to speak of the immense field of new technologies, can be seen as analytical tools able to integrate and strengthen the 'immanent' analysis, and to open systematic interests for the knowledge of meaning and

communication in music. In other terms, I think that analysis is going to become no longer a discipline, but a field of disciplines. The increase of scientific information is a general phenomenon, and the amount of sub-interests creates unease and inconveniences in many aspects of research. So music analysis will probably be open to contrasts, uncertainties, and difficulties in its forthcoming growth. But unfortunately we do not yet have any reliable information on the events of the future.

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