

Auteur Song as a Meeting Ground between "Art" and "Popular" Cultures (with Critical Notes on a Few Tendencies in Popular Musicology)

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At the root of any kind of human activity centred around music lies a primary experience of listening, or better yet listenings, which is more or less broad, intense and internally structured. Everything our ears happen to hear, in the earliest phases of our existence in particular, cannot but have a decisive influence on the later development of our overall personality, identity and cultural background involving (not only) music. It will also have implications, in a more specific context, for the orientations and methodological approaches that will become more natural for us to adopt, explore and promote in musicological – and educational – fields of research. I would therefore like to address these issues in a few brief preliminary remarks on my own auditory-musical apprenticeship, both because it is the one I know best, and because I believe that my own experience in this area is in no sense an exception (at least within my generation).

I am indeed firmly convinced that the foundation of my current way of understanding musicology – in particular, the study of the relations between music and words – lies first and foremost in the great variety of listenings to which I was introduced from birth by my father, Paolo La Via (with a more discreet but no less active contribution from my mother, Laura Siglienti). The soundscapes within which I so happily spent various phases of my childhood and adolescence in Rome owed their existence to a fairly wide slice of the huge variety of recordings released and concerts performed in the 1960s and 1970s. My father, a passionate musicophile, long before he began taking us to operas and concerts in the foremost venues in Rome, as well as performances by certain singer-songwriters, squandered his banker's salary every month by purchasing LPs and singles of all genres and repertoires – above all, so-called "classical-art" music from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century. This in no way prevented him from listening, just as frequently, to alternative repertoires that were not part of that tradition: mainly jazz and all those genres that today we roughly classify as *popolare* and/or "popular", particularly songs, in any possible literary-musical vein. I will not attempt to set out a list, not even a highly selective one, of these repertoires and musicians, which would certainly be much too long. The point is that my dad listened to all of this music without the least bias, perhaps reacting with different degrees of appreciation, but with an involvement – emotional, above all – that never failed to infect the rest of the family.

I was later overjoyed to come across the two main lessons I learned from my father, which had since settled into my way of thinking, expressed by two highly refined listeners, both composers and performers, Fabrizio De André and Nicola Piovani:

1. «Non esistono arti minori ma artisti minori o maggiori. Bob Dylan o Brassens hanno significato qualcosa di più di certi crostaroli spacciati per gran pittori» [De André (1974) in Sassi–Pistarini 2008, 141].^[1] Perhaps my father would have mentioned Jacques Brel and the Beatles instead of the first two names, and spoken of the fair number of "classical-educated" composers that he openly loathed instead of "crusty" painters. In spite of this, he

would have willingly added, along the same lines as Piovani [2014, 124], that «la musica merita rispetto, che si chiami leggera o pesante, colta o commerciale».[2]

2. «Se amiamo davvero una musica ce ne appropriamo emotivamente, e soltanto allora possiamo dire di conoscerla. Sono convinto che si conosce solo ciò che si ama [...]. In musica, come in amore, si ama ciò che si conosce e ri-conosce. Amare è un continuo processo di conoscenza e ri-conoscenza [...]. Conoscere è un atto d'amore, non solo nell'accezione biblica del verbo; riconoscersi in una tela di Caravaggio o in un tango di Piazzolla è una mozione degli affetti intimi» [ivi, 127].[3]

Listening as a primal cultural and aesthetic experience; a transversal opening towards any form of music, above and beyond any kind of preconstituted ideological barrier; studying music as a necessary form of knowledge whose nature is first and foremost erotic. From my childhood to the present, these three points have remained the pillars of my way of understanding music and of studying and teaching it. Studying musicology at university, while carrying on with my activity as a musician, enabled me to acquire the cultural and technical tools – above all regarding music theory and analysis – that are indispensable not only to expand and deepen one's knowledge, but also to try out new methodological approaches without betraying one's basic convictions – on the contrary, developing insofar as possible their entire potential.

Unlike my father, none of my academic teachers could ever have completely endorsed, without reserve, each one of those three postulates. Musicologists such as Fedele D'Amico, Pierluigi Petrobelli, Harold Powers, Kenneth Levy – each of them in very different contexts and with different methods – never stopped giving great significance to both the primary experience of listening and the importance of emotion for the historiographical, aesthetic, analytical understanding of musical phenomena that, however, tended not to go beyond the limits of the so-called "classical art" tradition. Petrobelli, influenced in particular by the fundamental contributions of Nino Pirrotta and Diego Carpitella, showed a certain open-mindedness towards "oral tradition" repertoires, but always in close relation to his preferred "written tradition". Powers – an outstanding representative of American comparative musicology – adopted an even more flexible and transversal approach: erotically, as well as rationally and analytically, he turned with an equal degree of interest towards Western liturgical plain chant, Renaissance polyphony and Italian opera, Indian *raga*, Arab *maqam*, Indonesian *gamelan* and Japanese *Nō* theatre. Even in the latter areas, however, he excluded from his interests any repertoire that did not, strictly speaking, fall within the sphere of "classical art" music. From this point of view, the prize for the broadest-minded of my professors must without doubt go to Levy. While primarily a scholar of medieval music, his teaching ranged from ancient Greece to the present day, and included among the most significant twentieth-century musicians not only Stravinsky, Bartók, Varèse, Boulez and Babbitt, but also Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Aretha Franklin and the Beatles. As to the crucial importance he gave to the experience of listening, suffice it to recall the title of his monumental textbook (conceived mainly, but not only, for the undergraduate students of his quite popular Princeton course, Music 103, to which I had the great pleasure of contributing as teaching assistant): *Music: A Listener's Introduction* [Levy 1983]; this is also the title of the associated set of six LPs (later CDs) containing recordings of the most important compositions examined in the book, from the eleventh Kyrie of the Vatican edition to Parker's *Ornithology*.

The only one of my teachers, at least among the Italians, to show some degree of interest in what today is called (including in Italy) "popular music" – previously referred to as "light", "consumer" or "commercial" music, or, again, music "for the masses" – was not by chance an ethnomusicologist but the aforementioned Carpitella. What we owe to him, however, is mostly a certain kind of reflection, which has remained fundamental until today, on key terms, such as

folclore musicale versus *folk-music revival*, *popolare* versus *popolaresco* etc. [Carpitella, 1978; 1992], rather than true analytical studies matched by university courses. These were later offered by a few of his students (most notably Serena Facci) and dedicated to the vast group of repertoires that, taken as a whole, are known as *musiche popolari contemporanee* (popular contemporary musics). These also include what I choose to translate as "auteur song", given that the original Italian expression *canzone d'autore* does not correspond exactly to the English "singer-songwriter music". This latter repertoire obviously never interested my very first music-history teacher, Fedele D'Amico; yet it is perhaps not by chance that he – a brilliant essay writer and an "authentic music lover" [Piovani 2014, 46] rather than a musicologist strictly speaking – more than any other stood out among my teachers for the importance he always attached not only to listening and to the emotional aspects of music, but also to the necessity of providing explicit formulations and reasonings as to one's own value judgements.

One of the most problematic anthropological-cultural habits, so to speak, concerning musicology as a "science" consists in its tendency to relegate all subjective considerations based on taste, all personal value judgements, to a realm that is either implicit or private. Musicologists, sharply distinguished in this sense from music critics, tend to devote themselves to one repertoire rather than another because they take for granted, without having to explicitly say so in their academic publications, that one is "better" – more "beautiful", "worthier" of being loved and studied – than the other. Ethnomusicologists, at least in their official writings, are even stingier with their value judgements, perhaps because they hold them to be inappropriate, from the outset, to the very nature – generally "non-artistic" or "non-aesthetical" – of the repertoires they are studying (but are we sure that this is always the case? And in any event, why on earth should I repress or conceal the enthusiasm I feel for any number of traditional African, Asian or South American, or again Mediterranean and European musics?). At least in my own experience as a student, I was told more than once that it doesn't matter which repertoire you choose to study, nor whether you like it or not, because the only thing that counts is the method you apply to it. At the same time I was struck by the fact that the professors themselves – and also, later on, many of my most esteemed colleagues – only while speaking privately set aside their reserve and shared passionate value judgements.

To each of my musicologist and ethnomusicologist mentors, including the ones I have not mentioned here, I owe not only my familiarity with essential working tools, not only the opportunity to cultivate them and apply them with passion, and not only the privilege of turning them into a profession, but also the freedom that each of them gave me to follow my own personal path, inevitably different from their own. Mine is centred in particular on a "three-dimensional" study of the interaction between musical expression and verbal language [La Via 2006] according to a perspective that I have recently [La Via 2012a; 2014a; 2014b] and increasingly been able to define as "transcultural" (this is a controversial term that at present I will use as it is employed in historical anthropology, initially by Ortiz (*transculturación*) in 1940 [1983, 86–90], and which is complementary to the more schematic but in some respects useful historical-philosophical and sociological musings offered by Welsch (*Transkulturalität*, transculturality) in 1992 [1999; 2002]).

The seeds of this specific methodological approach were sown during my earliest work on late-Renaissance polyphony, in particular the madrigals of Cipriano de Rore's later production, the primordial model for Claudio Monteverdi's *seconda pratica* (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1991). On that occasion I limited myself to verifying, on theoretical and analytical bases, two or three fundamental historical-aesthetic premises closely bound to one another: the validity of Monteverdi's main argument in his own defence, i.e. the "non-fortuity" – or expressive aim – of

each one of the choices he made while composing, including the more "unconventional" ones that offended the ears of the canonical Artusi; his concrete acceptance of the Platonic-Zarlinian slogan, according to which "harmony" was to be put at the service of "oration" (of its intelligibility, its form and its contents) and not the other way round; and, lastly, the hypothesis that this sort of conception – "logogenic" and "mimetic", so to speak – had already been implemented by the "divine Cipriano" in those very madrigals mentioned by Claudio's brother, Giulio Cesare Monteverdi, within the same diatribe. These early analyses led me not only to provide greater detail for, and substantially reinforce, the case put forward by Monteverdi – seriously challenging one of the most trite and schematic commonplaces of music historiography (the *querelle* between the *prima* and the *seconda pratica* as the reflection of an aesthetic and technical-compositional watershed) – but also to become aware of, and to focus on, the necessarily three-dimensional nature of these compositions. Using styles and languages actually quite distinct from one another, Cipriano and Claudio aimed not only at musically "imitating"/"expressing" the meanings and affects of their respective poetic texts, but also at bringing together these two elements – words and music – in such a way as to create a third linguistic-expressive level. In order to grasp the overall sense of their compositions, in the end I could not settle for analysing separately the verses by Petrarch or Tasso, Guarini or Rinuccini, and the way they were set to music, let alone allow one aspect to dominate the other (as had the great majority of my predecessors). I was forced to immerse myself in this third linguistic-expressive dimension created by the convergence of the two elements, and thus study their phenomenological aspects and interactive mechanisms, reconstructing, so to speak, a "poetic-musical vocabulary" that continually changed, evolved and regenerated itself. Not by chance it was never written down nor codified, and yet was founded on a few, but resilient, universal principles.

If the original nucleus of this "poetic-musical" approach began to take shape during my doctoral work in the US (1986–91), its full growth and evolution took place later, during my teaching and research in Italy (and in particular at the University of Pavia's Faculty of Musicology, located in Cremona), beginning in the early 1990s. Over a span of more than two decades, it was in fact teaching that encouraged me to verify and apply this working method to an ever broader range of poetic-musical repertoires: not only polyphonic Renaissance madrigals (beginning with Verdelot), but also a huge variety of monophonic forms, more or less accompanied, going from the troubadours' *canso* to the modern auteur song and including Monteverdi's "representative" and dramaturgical output, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cantatas and opera, the classical-Romantic *Lied*, and the early twentieth-century American theatrical song. While the process by which I gradually broadened the horizons of my work began with my very first courses at Cremona (music criticism and aesthetics, music analysis), it received a greater, even decisive, impetus with my following – and current – teaching experience, centred around a course entitled History of Poetry for Music (*Storia della poesia per musica*).

The fact that a course with such a name was entrusted to an analytical musicologist who also had a literary background, and whose outlook was generally interdisciplinary if not transcultural, broke at least two major academic-humanistic taboos:

1. the idea that studying and teaching "poetry for music" revolves solely around the words, verses and verbal structures of poems potentially destined to be set to music, and is thus virtually the sole prerogative of philologists, linguists, literary critics – as though the second part of the expression (music) were to be put in parentheses, something like an ornamental detail;
2. regarding musicology, the more or less implicit prohibition of doing any kind of "scientific" research – which could thus be part of a university curriculum – on repertoires that lie

outside the great tradition generally defined as "classical-learned", or "art" music – almost as though to exclude *a priori* the slightest possibility that even in these "non-learned" repertoires one can find examples of both "poetry" and "music" or even, I would add, a high "three-dimensional" definition of poetic-musical phenomena.

My violation of both taboos within the unquestionably atypical context of the Faculty of Musicology in Cremona (now Department of Musicology and Cultural Heritage) paved the way for the publication of a textbook entitled *Poetry for Music and Music for Poetry: From the Troubadours to Paolo Conte* [La Via 2006] and the creation of a new university course entirely dedicated to the history of auteur song (*Storia della canzone d'autore*), as well as the more recent publication of historical-aesthetical and analytical essays devoted to such song repertoires, mainly Italian, French and Brazilian (cf. the selected references in the bibliography).

The paradox on which I will dwell in the following pages is that my gradual penetration into "extra-learned" poetic-musical repertoires came into conflict, in turn, with a series of "anti-academic counter-taboos", so to speak, that had long since been codified by some of the foremost representatives of what is known as popular music studies, alias popular musicology (the latter terminology was proposed, with full awareness of its ambiguity, in two volumes edited by Allan Moore in 2003 and 2007). The only convergence between this branch of research and the traditional musicology described above can be located precisely in one basic shared epistemological premise: Western art music and popular music are two so distant, extraneous and incompatible worlds as to necessitate the use of radically different technical instruments and methodological approaches. A scholar of Schubert or Stravinsky will never be able to study, if not in an inevitably inadequate and superficial way, De André or Genesis, and vice versa. The divergence, quite drastic, lies in the respective attitudes with which each considers the other's field of study. The founding fathers of popular musicology (for example, Van der Merwe [1989] or Richard Middleton [1990; 2001]), as well as some of their immediate successors (such as Philip Tagg or the aforementioned Moore), have necessarily had to reckon with centuries of musicological tradition (or at least its Anglophone and/or German version) in order to criticise it and, ultimately, oppose it. Contrary to this, the other group, as mentioned above, has, with rare exceptions (such as Cooke [1968] or Hamm [1979]), never been interested in popular music, nor has it ever taken into consideration the possibility that it could be "elevated" into a subject for "academic" research. This very lack of interest, or closed-mindedness, this aprioristic distance taken by the traditional musicological elite, unleashed a comprehensible reaction within the movement that only recently gave way to today's popular music studies. Both sides have agreed on the tendency to distinctly separate the respective repertoires – and disciplinary tools – and to perpetuate the more or less implicit ideological dogmas and value judgements indicated so well by the labels attached to the two fields of study: Western art music – in Italian literally *musica d'arte occidentale*, better known as *musica classico-colta* (classical-learned music) – and popular music, literally *musica popolare*.

I will return to this latter issue, which certainly involves more than terminology, further on. For now I would like to underline the fact that both branches, owing to the fact that they agree on accepting the two disciplines' "brands", also seem to agree perfectly on an axiom that in my opinion does not hold water. The idea in question is that only in one of the two domains – the one traditionally known as "learned" or "classical" (or both) – can one speak of "art music"; this concept thus becomes foreign to that other, far-off planet called "popular", in which various and more modern commercial interests – first of all, the recording industry – supposedly tend to constantly prevail over any expressive necessity whatsoever that can be considered, somehow or other, "artistic", including this term's autonomous and freely experimental overtones. At this point we have reached the first of the many taboos within popular music studies that I myself, without

the least premeditation, realise I have definitely infringed. In my university courses, as well as in my studies of auteur song, I have come across innumerable "works of art", or, better yet, true "masterpieces" of what I call "poetic-musical art". I am referring not only to single songs but also to entire songbooks, whose authors/composers – whether individual, collective or something resembling a theatre or film director – have proved able *not only* to:

1. write verbal texts with a "high literary quality" and/or dense with "poetic realism", and/or "social/political commitment" (Santoro [2010], following De Angelis [(1969) 2009]);
2. compose music (vocal, with an instrumental accompaniment) having a more or less complex "beauty", expressive richness and formal and stylistic variety of its own;

but also to:

3. fuse together those words and that music in a "personal" language of their own in the three-dimensional terms of a specific poetic-musical idiom (as grasped by De Angelis [2009]) as early as his 1969 text dedicated to Tenco and Italian *canzone d'autore*);
4. perform their own songs, alone or with the help of other professional musicians/"artists" (perhaps self-taught, which does not, however, mean "amateurish", as stated in Santoro [2010, 45]);

and last but not least, to:

5. unite and coordinate all of these poetic-musical creative, performative and communicative experiences into a great "work of art". This in turn may represent their own vision of the world, and – in some cases – have a direct, deep and long-lasting influence on the ideas, and the existential experience itself, of listeners coming from the most varied cultural and social backgrounds and with different degrees of competence and orientations regarding taste (*cf.* in particular La Via [2011b; 2014a]).

My aim, naturally, has never been to set the "genius" of the "true author" apart from the bland mediocrity of the "pop singer" promoted in many social and/or commercial forums. One reason for this is that I don't in the least exclude the possibility that the latter may well compose and play songs that move me, teach me something, or even simply allow me to discover the beauty of a novel chord progression or a verse sung in a certain way (on this point, as well, I feel close to what has been expressed, in a very different context, in Manconi [2012]). Nor do I exclude in the least that a "great author" should or must take into account the commercial requirements of his/her producers, agents, music-industry executives, arrangers etc. to "sell" that which is in any case being promoted in the same way as any other industrial "product". Forced, in this sense as well, between a rock and a hard place, I do not believe that I can be mistaken for a relic whose intention is to restore a musical "genius" inspired by Romantic aesthetics. Nor do I think I share much with the modern critic or blogger, always ready to exalt or destroy, idolise or massacre one pop star or another on the sole basis of his/her own intuition, taste, mood or – in the worst-case scenario – in obedience to fashion or mere professional opportunism. In contrast to these positions, I am not interested in establishing any sort of "canon", be it the "grandiose", "monumental" canon of "Western art music" or the other, evidently "non-artistic" but "emerging canon of popular musicians" [Negus 2011, 607] (as opposed to the accurate contextualisation and historical-critical examination provided in Borio [2010]). No, my aim corresponds if anything to the more properly musicological task, inspired by the writings of Dahlhaus even before Powers's teachings, of providing the concrete analytical and exegetical tools, as adequately and effectively as possible, that, among other things, can help each one of us to motivate and argue in favour of our interpretations and – why not? – even our value judgements [Dahlhaus 1987]. I believe that a

song is more or less "beautiful", and that its creator is more or less a "great" "author" (as value judgements, these are necessarily *subjective*), on the basis of the facts (in themselves closer to the *objective* sphere) that emerge not only from the experience of listening, which remains fundamental, but also from an analysis (auditory, visual, if possible performative), which for me is necessarily three-dimensional, of the poetic-musical text. If such transversal and interdisciplinary analytical efforts are not made, I am convinced, it would not even be possible to begin writing something like a "History of Auteur Song".

It should also be made clear that:

1. the (poetic-musical) text of a song, given the almost complete lack of author-written scores, tends more often than not to be identified with its *sound* as recorded;
2. this kind of *sound-text* is, paradoxically, well defined and at the same time open, malleable – i.e. capable of undergoing the widest possible range of variants, modifications and even distortions introduced by the writer-performers themselves even before their many possible interpreters. Naturally, this also goes for many nineteenth- and twentieth-century repertoires, such as classical Neapolitan songs or early twentieth-century American songs, where scores written by authors are, on the contrary, quite common;
3. however, without a transcription as accurate as possible of this sound-text (based on its first recording, possibly integrated by other recordings or historically relevant sonorous and audiovisual documents), hopefully assisted by analogous analytical/representational tools (outlines, graphs, various kinds of tables), scholars or critics will never be able to clearly define and illustrate to others, concretely speaking, the relatively objective facts that enable them, at the very least, to set out convincingly the reasonings underlying their own readings and value judgements. These judgements, in turn, though not enjoying the least claim to absolute objectivity, must not leave the aesthetic level and encroach on that of ethics ("I like this"/"I don't like this" or "beautiful"/"ugly" are in no way synonyms of "right"/"wrong", and yet this confusion is much more common than one might think).

This is not the appropriate place for a detailed description or exemplification of a methodological approach that, in any case, I have previously illustrated and applied in great detail not only in didactic contexts but also in various more specifically theoretical, historical-aesthetical and analytical articles [from La Via 2006 to La Via 2014a; 2014b; 2014c]. To these latter texts I must also add various contributions – masters and doctoral theses, articles and books – written by at least two generations of students, as well as colleagues with similar orientations (for reasons involving space, these are only partially included in the bibliography). What emerges from all of these works is certainly not a "new canon of popular musicians", but an astonishing variety of poetic-musical songbooks, on the whole so rich, variegated, articulated and complex that, even while giving life to a macro-tradition that is quite distinct from the properly "classical-art" tradition, cannot either be pigeonholed into the category, ultimately quite reductive, of "popular music". The latter, as many specialists themselves openly admit, tends to solely include Anglophone repertoires, whether British or North American. Middleton [1990, vi], for example, in introducing that which remains today the most systematic attempt to define the concept and the field of studies in question, has stated the following:

I deal almost, though not quite exclusively, with popular music in the "developed" societies of the industrialized West, and within that sphere I focus on Great Britain and the United States. Partly, this is simply because these are the musics and the cultures I know more about. To discuss European popular music before the nineteenth century, or music in the Soviet bloc countries or in Africa, South America or other parts of the Third World would go beyond my competence [...]. At the same time, it is also the case that, over the last half century particularly, American and to a lesser extent British popular musics have

spread more widely than any others; for better or worse, they constitute a dominant sector with which variant or competing musics must come to terms. Moreover, I believe that the theoretical position advocated in this book can, *in principle*, be applied to these other musics

A similar position has been expressed, albeit in different terms, by another important representative of the British school, the aforementioned Moore [2001, 702]:

occorre anche tenere nel dovuto conto l'importanza dell'origine stessa della pratica musicale contemporanea negli Stati Uniti alla metà degli anni Cinquanta. È per questo (non per altre ragioni) che la lingua dominante nelle canzoni di musica popolare, e magari anche nella critica, tende ad essere l'inglese. Di fatto, la maggior parte dei miei esempi sarà tratta da artisti britannici, perché questa è la mia personale prospettiva geografica.[4].

Both scholars – who are only two, albeit particularly relevant, examples – legitimately use the English expression "popular music" (which in the case of Moore 2001 alternates, in the Italian translation, with *musica popolare*) to designate the repertoires most familiar to them, which are strictly Anglophone and actually do represent the overriding subject of their analyses and theoretical reflections. Little does it matter if they, unlike myself for example, do not feel the need, nor have the curiosity, to dedicate themselves to musical cultures different from their own, in which English has never been perceived as a "dominating language". More debatable, in my opinion, is Middleton's cautious claim that his own personal conception of popular music «can, *in principle*, be applied to [all of] these other» modern and contemporary "musics": including, it would appear, the French *chanson*, the Italian and Neapolitan *canzone*, the various forms of *canção* that for centuries have continued to enrich the unlimited universe of *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB), along with many other repertoires. No less developed, the latter are also provided with a specific identity of their own, long since recognised both in Europe (Spain, Germany and Holland, Greece and the Balkans, Russia) and in Hispanic American countries (Chile, Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay), as well as in Africa and Asia, where, considering poetic-musical aspects among others, to me it seems risky at the very least to speak indistinctly of a "third world".

It would be even more problematic, at least to my eyes as a transcultural musicologist, to take Middleton's invitation literally, transferring his system rather sluggishly into a non-Anglophone context – such as Italian music – while maintaining the English terminology intact as regards both the research topic – "popular music" – and the discipline itself – "popular music studies". As has been clarified by the foremost representative of this field of research in Italy, Franco Fabbri [2002, 11–12]: «Purtroppo, "musica popolare" non è una traduzione accettabile di "popular music"» [unfortunately, *musica popolare* is not an acceptable translation of "popular music"]; the latter expression refers in fact to «musica di larga diffusione che circola attraverso media come il disco, la radio, la televisione» [widely distributed music that circulates through media such as recordings, radio or television], and not to «musica di tradizione orale» [music of oral tradition], which in English is «già indicata dal senso comune come *folk music*» [referred to by common sense as folk music], or else, by researchers, as traditional music]; «e dato che non abbiamo tradotto parole come jazz, come rock, come blues, come *fado*, come *Lied*, non si vede perché dovremmo sentirci degli snob a tradurre *popular music*» [and given that we have not translated words such as jazz, rock, blues, *fado* or *Lied*, it is hard to see why we should act snobbishly and translate the expression "popular music").

This reasoning would be faultless if by "popular music" we were to understand a specific genre or repertoire, such as the ones listed by Fabbri, two of which (blues and rock) represent indeed only two of the many planets, as vast and important as they may be, of the immense

Anglophone galaxy defined and studied so accurately by Middleton. The latter, incidentally, has held its "technological-economic" definition to be "insufficient" and even "useless", unlike Fabbri, who largely accepts it, maintaining that "popular music is disseminated by mass media and/or in a mass market". Middleton's stance is instead that "the development of methods of mass distribution (first printed, then electromechanical and electronic) has affected *all* forms of music, and any of them can be treated as a commodity" (including the "recording of a Tchaikovsky symphony", which he mentions as an example [Middleton 1990, 4]). Nor is it fully adequate to associate only folk music with the sphere of "oral tradition" (this association has long since been overcome by Pirrotta and Carpitella, but is even more systematically discussed in Leydi [2008, III, *Musica colta e musica popolare*, 183–245]; concerning this and other similar matters – not only regarding terminology – cf. also the wide historical overview, accompanied by precise critical reflections, in Agamennone [2010]). And Fabbri's reasoning would be impeccable if he himself had not studied – as an excellent writer-performer, and not only as a competent expert in popular music – not only songs by the Beatles or Dylan [Fabbri 2002], but also a highly composite corpus of songs, such as those written by De André [Fabbri, 1997; 2009], in which the impact of some North American (Dylan, Cohen) and British popular music (progressive rock through the New Trolls, PFM and Mauro Pagani acting as a single co-author) is almost as clear as that of the French *chanson* (Brassens), not to mention the various other traditions – Italian, Ligurian, Neapolitan, Mediterranean, Arab and even Latin American – which appear in his music. That all of this and more, according to him, is in any case to be ranked within the sphere of "popular music" – maintaining the Anglophone term and its meaning – is confirmed in the title itself of the volume *Made in Italy: Studies in Popular Music* [Fabbri-Plastino 2013], dedicated to our home-grown *canzone* in more or less all of its shapes and sizes (whether by great authors and singer-songwriters, presented at the Sanremo Festival, or progressive).

While Middleton offers an overview of the various usages that the term "popular" has gradually taken on in Anglophone countries, Fabbri [2002, 11] isolates two in particular: «*popular* come "del popolo" e *popular* inteso come "che piace a molti"», [5] which are sufficient to create a certain amount of "ambiguity". In every language, however, including our own, the term corresponding to "popular" is inevitably marked by a high degree of polysemy; and even here in Italy "popolare" may mean – more or less vaguely – both "of the people" (but which people?), and "liked by many" (but which many?), and much more (varying highly according to one ideology or another). Therefore, why should we substitute a term that for us is "ambiguous" with another term, taken from a foreign vocabulary, that is no less "ambiguous"? Why on earth should we impoverish a term that is so important, rich and polyvalent by reducing it to a single meaning that is rather vague in itself ("of the people"), recognising in the English term one single meaning ("liked by many") that actually – at least in English – is not "single" in the least?

«C'entra Gramsci, naturalmente» [*ibid.*]. [6] And yet the well-known and anything but ambiguous way in which Gramsci brings together the "popular" and the "national" (overlooked, to tell the truth, by the Gramscian Middleton [1990, 7–16]), if read in its own terms, could turn out to be more up to date – and useful in our context – than one might think. When speaking of our literature – and including sporadic references to music as well (Italian opera, French *chanson*) – Gramsci basically lamented the fact that in our country, unlike others, "popular" and "national" tend "not to coincide" in one single reality, never mind one single concept: «perché in Italia gli intellettuali sono lontani dal popolo, cioè dalla "nazione", e sono invece legati a una tradizione di casta [...] "libresca" e "astratta". [...] Tutta la "classe colta", con la sua attività intellettuale, è staccata dal popolo-nazione [...] perché l'elemento intellettuale indigeno è più straniero degli stranieri di fronte al popolo-nazione» [Gramsci 1975, 135, 137–9]. [7] "Popular", in this sense, can refer at the most to great opera composers of the past, such as «Verdi, Puccini, Mascagni etc.»

[ivi, 93], given the lack – at least at that time – of a poetic-musical tradition, of a *canzone* that could be compared to the French *chanson* (with a precise reference to Pierre Jean de Béranger) [ivi, 139]. Further on, Gramsci takes up the three categories formulated earlier by a broad-minded man of letters and politician of the Risorgimento, Ermolao Rubieri [1877, 237], and defines as truly "popular" all of those *canti* (songs), regardless of whether they were "written" "by the people" or "for the people", that "by the latter" have been simply «adottati, perché conformi alla sua maniera di pensare e sentire» [ivi, 273].^[8] Indeed, Gramsci continues [ivi, 273–4]:

ciò che contraddistingue il canto popolare, nel quadro di una nazione e della sua cultura, non è il fatto artistico, né l'origine storica, ma il suo modo di concepire il mondo e la vita, in contrasto con la società ufficiale. In ciò e solo in ciò è da ricercare la "collettività" del canto popolare, e del popolo stesso.... il popolo stesso non è una collettività omogenea di cultura, ma presenta delle stratificazioni culturali numerose, variamente combinate, che nella loro purezza non sempre possono essere identificate in determinate collettività popolari storiche; certo però che il grado maggiore o minore d'"isolamento" storico di queste collettività dà la possibilità di una certa identificazione.^[9]

Almost one century later, our country's social and cultural reality – much like elsewhere – has undergone changes that are radical to say the least; not, however, enough to justify throwing into the junkyard the sense originally given by Gramsci to the term "popular", along with the set of problems that it continues to raise and even its persistently utopian type of tension. These changes have in fact also led to positive effects, that can be expressed in the very same terms as Gramsci's discourse: for example, from the point of view that interests me here, the birth and affirmation in Italy of a kind of song that at least made serious efforts – in the intentions of its authors – towards speaking to the "people" as understood by Gramsci, and therefore not to just one but to all of its social levels (even if they have, in the meantime, radically changed). I am referring to our *canzone d'autore* in all its manifold manifestations, all of which are in any case accompanied by a high degree of awareness in this sense. I cannot of course exclude – in agreement with both Gramsci's followers, such as Facci and Soddu [2011, 9, 18–19], and with someone who defines himself as «colpevolmente non gramsciano, per costituzione fisico-ideologica»,^[10] such as Manconi [2012, 71] – that in some instances, even the "lightest", most "consumer-oriented", "commercial" or "Sanremo-style" – or however else one might want to put it – songs have been able to make a contribution in this same sense. This, despite the fact that this later phenomenon – tied above all to the Sanremo Festival *canzonetta* – has been described with the expression "national-popular", in a generally negative and journalistic sense, that in truth has very little to do by now with the one originally conceived by Gramsci.

Getting back to our modern *canzone d'autore*, I will simply observe that its official birth and first real success – during the 1950s and 1960s – received from no other than the model of the French *chanson* (well defined by Armellini [1996]), so dear to Gramsci, one of its most decisive cultural, stylistic, formal and content-related stimuli. Other important references have existed and continue to appear, growing at the same pace as the process of planetary globalisation: from jazz to North American and British popular music in all its various forms (including those that Borio [2010, 79–80] has so convincingly linked to pop art), without of course excluding the equally rich variety of forms and genres coming from South America, nor the infinite universe of folk music – and/or so-called "ethnic music", "world music" etc. – coming from the Mediterranean, Africa or the Middle East. The problem of the modern Italian song, including the *canzone d'autore*, lies if anything in its difficulty in embracing one or another of these idioms – or even a range of them – without losing its own identity, and therefore also losing the ability indicated by Gramsci to communicate, first and foremost, with its own "people". The "greatness" – if I may be allowed the term – of some of our singer-songwriters (for instance, Tenco, De André or Capossela) lies among other things in their awareness of this problem and in the deep need felt more or less strongly by

each of them to attempt to solve it. In a few cases this has led them to find an authentic poetic-musical voice, sufficiently grounded even though inevitably composite, and therefore truly communicative and able to sustain crossovers: in a word, "popular".

In other countries, owing to various historical reasons that I do not have the space to even summarise here, this kind of process and the sharp definition of an identity that it implies – as regards a poetic-musical language – was neither so difficult to achieve nor so late in coming. I would mention for example France (*chanson*) or the Anglophone countries (popular song), but also, in its own highly particular way, a country with a long colonial history, such as Brazil (MPB) – on whose complexities I have dwelt at length in various studies (from La Via [(2007) 2017] to La Via [2012a; 2014c]). At present, suffice it to recall, that in the cultural history of this immense country – perhaps more so than elsewhere – there have been phases, above all between the 1930s and the 1960s but also more recently, in which it has been possible to create something very close to Gramsci's ideal. So much so that the term *popular* (spelt as in English but with a different accent and pronunciation) has taken on the widest possible range of meanings, without leading to the least confusion or ambiguity (and least of all to snobbish attitudes). In Brazil, *popular* (with the accent on the *a* and a more or less rolled final *r*), according to the context, can refer to any kind of *música* that is not fully part of the *erudita*, or "classic-art", sphere. Traditional and highly composite genres, beginning with *samba* or *choro* in all their infinite formal and stylistic varieties (well summarised by Guaccero [2011; 2012]), have actually never stopped being "liked by many", and still represent some of the most solid references for the identity of the Brazilian "people", which is not so much multi-ethnic/multicultural as it is strongly "transcultural" (according to the specific definition given in Ortiz (1940) [1983], and in some way even "trans-ethnic" [La Via 2012a, 151–155]). During modernist times, many intellectuals and musicians – such as Mário De Andrade or Heitor Villa-Lobos – were perfectly aware of this, engaged at length as they were in the ethnomusicological study or compositional elaboration of those models. It was not, however, in the truly *erudita* sphere that it became possible to establish new links with these matrixes and to develop, and disseminate internationally, the truly national-popular movement that not by chance took on the name *Música Popular Brasileira*. It was, rather, the popular urban *canções* by Chiquinha Gonzaga, Donga, Pixinguinha, Noel Rosa, Ary Barroso, Dorival Caymmi, Luiz Gonzaga and Cartola, and later those by Tom Jobim, Vinicius de Moraes and João Gilberto, Chico Buarque, Edu Lobo, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, João Bosco, Milton Nascimento – and many more – that gradually but truly resonated with the Brazilian "people", and attempted to (and often succeeded in) "satisfying its intellectual and moral needs", reflecting its "way of thinking and feeling", and therefore also actively contributing to achieving a deeper social and cultural national unity.

The case of Brazil, which is anything but marginal, can help to better clarify a few of my perplexities – mentioned above – that are certainly not only terminological. If in Great Britain, in North America, in more or less all of Central and South America – and particularly in Brazil – expressions that are endogenous, so to speak – such as "popular music" or *música popular* – are used in an essentially similar way, indicating, according to the context, the widest and most inclusive meaning of the respective terms, or again a more specific galaxy of urban repertoires that stand as an alternative to those of "classical" music strictly speaking, why on earth could such a thing not happen in any country, including ours? One objection might be that British and North American popular music has had and continues to have a profound impact on the modern repertoires of the Italian *canzone* – including those by singer-songwriters – as well as on its processes of production and distribution. One cannot deny this fact, but is also true of *música popular*: let us recall, even limiting ourselves to formal and stylistic aspects, the role played in various historical periods by the American theatrical songs composed by the Gershwin brothers or Cole Porter, by blues, rock and roll, the entire output of the Beatles, and the more recent forms of

rap and hip hop, within the respective Brazilian lineages of *bossa nova* (Jobim and Gilberto), *tropicalismo* (Veloso and Gil), or even in the singular but no less multifaceted collections of songs by Buarque, Lobo, Nascimento, Djavan, Ivan Lins and so on.

The point is that popular music, as vast as it may be, represents only one of the many models for *música popular*, which in its very blend – in its ancestral transcultural inclination to mix together heterogeneous elements with the most varied origins, and obtain something that is new, coherent, homogeneous, unmistakably "Brazilian" – cyclically continues to recognise its deep matrix as the very key to its own oscillating identity. Other "ingredients" included in the blend are even more important than those mediated by the Anglophone tradition, and obviously do not only concern musical aspects but also linguistic-verbal ones: Brazilian *música popular* arose, at the outset, from the encounter and fusion of a variety of elements, including African (above all Bantu and Yoruba), European (above all, but not only, Portuguese) and autochthonous Amerindian (Tupinambá and yet others). Not only this, but its very anthropological-cultural penchant towards combination and syncretism paved the way – perhaps more than elsewhere – for a reciprocal opening, interaction and in some senses also fusion of the spheres of so-called "art" and "popular" culture. We need only to mention a few examples among the many, such as the harmonic language of Jobim or Lobo, the guitar styles of Caymmi, João Gilberto, Baden Powell or Guinga, the tropicalist arrangements of avant-garde composers such as Júlio Medaglia or Rogério Duprat, the literary – in addition to musical – quality of songs by Vinicius de Moraes or Chico Buarque, or even only the single *letras* by José Carlos Capinan or Paulo César Pinheiro. The *populár* works of these and other *músicos*, *letristas* and *cancionistas*, which are so dense in intertextual references to European poetry and art music (from Dante to Pessoa, from Bach to Debussy), would not be remotely conceivable without the stimulus and teaching, sometimes even directly (as in the cases of Jobim and Buarque), of *compositores* and *literados* from the *erudite* tradition: from Joachim Koellreutter to Villa-Lobos, from Cabral de Melo Neto to Guimarães Rosa, from de Moraes himself as a poet to the concretists Augusto and Haroldo de Campos (the latter intimately tied to Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil and the tropicalist movement as of its earliest phases). From this latter point of view, Brazilian *música popular* represents an emblematic and perhaps even extreme case (for the variety, richness and quality of its artistic production), but is not entirely an exception. In any auteur song repertoire, in fact, as I have maintained elsewhere, «i confini tra "colto" e "popolare", di per sé già abbastanza labili, tendono a diventare ancor più sfumati, talora fino a dissolversi completamente» [La Via 2014a, 9].^[11] This is clear throughout the entire history of the French *chanson* – not by chance taken as a model by Gramsci – or even only in a few of its major twentieth-century representatives: Charles Trenet, Léo Ferré, Georges Brassens, Jacques Brel and Barbara. In each of their respective songbooks, as different as they may be among themselves, the ties with models coming from "learned" literature (from the troubadours and *trouvères* to Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Aragon, and passing through Villon or Ronsard) are even closer and more constant than the relationship – which comes out above all, but not only, in Ferré and Barbara – with the tradition of "classical" French and German music (Satie, Ravel, Debussy, the Romantic *Lied*). In these repertoires as well, the latter coexists pacifically with forms and styles whose origin is more pronouncedly *populaire* – or even popular – such as the French *ballade*, the *chanson/song*, with its verse–refrain structure, or, again, swing and other jazz idioms coming from North America. Something of the kind can be seen even in our own *canzone d'autore*, above all – but not only – in the kind that arose precisely as an imitation of transalpine models. Suffice it to mention once again, De André, a quite learned and highly refined "poet for music", who was initially fully committed to a guitar and melodic-vocal re-elaboration of his favourite *chansonnier*, Brassens [La Via 2011a], later evolved as a true auteur (in a "directorial" sense of the term close to the one proposed by the *Cahiers du Cinéma*). De André was capable of distilling the most diverse aesthetic, creative and performative experiences, both his own and others, according to an

extremely personal vision of the world: that represented in his own, unmistakable, *canzoniere* [Cosi-Ivaldi 2011; La Via 2014a]. And one might draw attention also (if this had not already been done in La Via [2006; 2009] and in Bico-Guido [2011]) to the very different case of Paolo Conte: a pianist-composer-singer with a background predominantly in jazz but with considerable openings towards the Hispanic-American and Neapolitan universes, and who nonetheless never renounced his more or less open dialogue with both "classical" music (once again Ravel, Debussy and the Romantic Lied) and with French and Italian literature (from Proust to Gozzano and Montale). Must I continue? And mention, alongside De André and Conte, figures such as Bindi, Tenco, Paoli, Endrigo, Dalla, Jannacci, Gaber, Guccini, De Gregori, Fossati, Capossela, Têtes de Bois and so on?

And how can one exclude from this limitless and transversal panorama of continuous and fruitful crossovers between "popular" and "art" music (and poetry) the great singer-songwriters coming from the British and North American traditions? One could easily mention the Beatles (including George Martin) and Judy Collins's *Wildflowers* (1967), an album with songs written by the performer herself as well as by Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Jacques Brel and even the fourteenth-century composer Francesco Landini, and with brilliant arrangements by Joshua Rifkin (a transversal musician and musicologist as refined in his knowledge of Bach as of Scott Joplin). This long list would include most of the historical British progressive rock groups (and their no less interesting Italian counterparts), the majority of whom had classical training. It would also include the no less multifaceted area of Anglophone poetic-musical experimentation, from Frank Zappa to Brian Eno, from Peter Gabriel to David Byrne, and from Laurie Anderson to Björk (even if English is not her first and only language). But even to remain with the most well-known English, American and Canadian singer-songwriters, it would be difficult to find examples of a complete separation between "popular" and "art" vocal music. On a literary level this would be virtually impossible: Leonard Cohen, before dedicating himself completely to song, had first established himself as one of the greatest poets and narrators in the English language of the twentieth century. The same cannot be said of Bob Dylan [Bratus 2011], whose immense songbook nevertheless stands out for a richness, novelty and literary quality – overflowing with highly varied "learned" references – that may never be equalled in the entire history of international song. Taking into consideration different points of view and tastes, the bridging of "popular" and "art" vocal music is evident, too, in the compositions of other singer-songwriters, from Paul Simon to Tom Waits, from Lou Reed to Bruce Springsteen, from Joni Mitchell to Patti Smith, from Annie Lennox to Laurie Anderson. With regard to the strictly musical language within the same area, it is somewhat easier to discern a gap between it and the "classical-art" tradition: what tends to be generally different is not only the creative process and the specific method of production and transmission of the (not only) musical text – as may also be the case in the repertoires mentioned above – but also the parameters, idioms and styles referenced. This is not, however, the case for the fundamental formal principles, which, as I have illustrated in detail elsewhere [La Via 2014a]:

1. do not only concern the music but also its interaction with the sung word;
2. are always geared towards very specific expressive, poetic-musical needs;
3. continue to be retraceable to basic formal models perfected within the area of "classical-art" vocal music (which, in turn, had always constantly interacted with "popular" repertoires) from at least the times of the troubadour *canço* until the present day.

This state of affairs is shared, even with all their differences, by all of the planet's repertoires of modern auteur song, including the Anglophone singer-songwriter tradition. From this point of view, at least, they can to a certain degree be brought into line with the "popular", in its widest sense, and yet not necessarily reduced to the specifically English meaning of the "popular" that has been imported to Italy and other countries.

None of the contexts and questions summarised above, as far as I know, has ever been taken into serious consideration by the proponents of today's popular music studies, many of whom (though not all) have if anything directed their efforts to identifying and stressing any possible characteristic – general or specific – that serves to differentiate their "popular music" from "Western art music". Perhaps some of these efforts might make sense ideologically, in a particular historical phase; they are, however, a bit less tenable from an epistemological and methodological point of view. If one proceeds to examine the differential traits that have emerged from such attempts to clearly define the "popular", in some cases, at least, a few doubts may arise as to their actual relevance and applicability. The following four examples should clarify what I mean.

(1) *Groove*. According to Moore [2001, 704–705], that which «differenzia gli stili popolari da quelli della tradizione colta occidentale» [12] is not so much the use of certain musical instruments as the "presence" of specific "functions" with which they are entrusted. The foremost of these is «articolare una serie di pulsazioni, il cosiddetto *groove*. È questo il ruolo della batteria [...] in combinazione con il profilo ritmico di qualsiasi strumento basso venga utilizzato». [13]. Should we thus conclude that the "presence" of such a patently popular groove could not be perceived if even only the drums are lacking? There are clearly too many cases in any possible repertoire of "popular song" in which drums can perfectly well not appear for this to be true. The majority of artists – depending on varying context (for example, a studio recording versus a live concert) or a phase of stylistic change (for example, acoustic folk versus electric rock in early Dylan) – in any case feel perfectly free to make use of drums or not to. Others only rarely use them, and only if certain conditions are met: for example, the father of the *bossa nova*, João Gilberto, who after having created serious difficulties for the most skilled Brazilian and American drummers of his day (with the exception of Milton Banana, Sonny Carr and very few others), began as early as the 1970s and 1980s to do without them, preferring to sing accompanied only by his ever-changing and yet unmistakable *batida de violão* (this is the path that leads from the "white album", João Gilberto (1973), to his *Live at the 19th Montreux Jazz Festival* (1986) and more or less all of his live CDs recorded over the following decades). Still others have stubbornly resisted the pressure of arrangers and record producers, and refused to include a drummer among their musicians: for example, the early Leonard Cohen versus John Simon [Simmons 2013, 155], or, before Cohen, Dorival Caymmi's *Canções de Mar* [La Via 2012a, 189–193]. There are even those who have never included drums in their instrumental ensembles: for a case in point, see the entire recorded productions of Brassens, an excellent swing guitarist, who even when playing live included at most a second guitar and a double bass; another example is the (unfortunately much less prolific) solely guitar-vocal productions of Nick Drake. Groove, masterly practised by each of the artists just mentioned – and therefore in a sense that is closer to those that have been codified in various ways, for example, by Keil-Feld [1994, 59–60, 67, 98, 111–12], Caporaletti [2000, 237–240; 2014, xi–xii, 293–311] or Zbikowski [2004, 282] – can evidently be performed not only with drums but with any other instrument, not necessarily percussion, capable of "articulating" a series of pulsations or continuous pulse in relation to a base line. The instruments able to carry out both functions no doubt include the guitar (above all, but not only, if played by Django Reinhardt, Caymmi or João Gilberto), which in turn interacts, rhythmically as well, with the melodic line.

(2) *Root-position chords*. Another of the differential "functions" listed by Moore [2001, 704] consists in «quella di rendere esplicita la successione delle fondamentali armoniche. Questo strato viene, di norma, articolato dal basso elettrico o, a volte, da una tastiera. [...] Comunque, anche se è possibile incontrare qualche occasionale rivolto, in genere sono le fondamentali a presentarsi nella parte più grave della tessitura». [14]. Actually, as incidentally well grasped by Tagg [2011, 144, point 4 of his summary], the use of chords in their first, second or third inversion – in the same repertoires mentioned above – is not in the least so rare as to represent an "occasional"

phenomenon, and all the less an exception to the rule. I am referring above all, but not only, to the *cantautori*, *cancionistas* and singer-songwriters who composed and performed their songs with the guitar – for example, Dylan and Joni Mitchell to the more extreme but no less relevant case of Buarque, who in this respect was a student of the *bossa nova* artists Jobim and Gilberto. Here, indeed, the use of inversions – which is never fortuitous and always expressive – by the great jazz guitarists (recall, once again, the *manouche* repertoire of Django Reinhardt and his followers) is closely tied to both the instrument's idiom – in particular the technique used by the left hand (obviously coordinated with the right) – and the unquestionably "audio-tactile" nature of the compositional-performative process in question (regarding which I again reference the fundamental studies by Caporaletti [2000, 161–162, 174–176; 2014, 197–249]).

Beginning with the creative-performative act itself, the guitarist-composer tends to favour chord positions that can follow one another on the fretboard in the most fluid, natural, physically gratifying (to the ear, the fingers and everything else) and expressive way possible, and suited to the audio-tactile musician's emotional experience as represented in the poetic-musical text. In this sense the systematic use of inversions (in particular the third, in songs such as *Umas e outras* - Buarque, 1969 - or *Águas de Março* -Jobim interpreted by himself, or by Gilberto, as of 1972), tied to the descending chromatic movement in the bass, is "structural" in a sense that includes the spontaneous and inevitable outcome of a need that is physical, emotional and aesthetic at one and the same time [cf. the statements by Buarque in La Via 2014c, 471–472]. Even when the guitar chords remain in root position, another instrument, acting as the bass, can perfectly well turn them into inversions: one beautiful example is the use of the double bass in Brassens's *Dans l'eau de la claire fontaine*, which not by chance appears in exactly the same form in the Italian version by De André [La Via 2011a, 88–89]. One could add many more examples to those provided by these singer-songwriter/guitarists, including the "pianistic" songbooks of artists such as Ferré, Brel, Barbara, Bindi, Tenco, Ray Charles, Conte, Waits, and so on, or Anglophone pop repertoires not as closely related to auteur song but which demonstrate a rich and highly refined harmonic vocabulary (and there is no need to provide a long list here of the greatest historical protagonists of British or Italian progressive rock, from King Crimson, Genesis and Pink Floyd to PFM, Area and Banco del Mutuo Soccorso).

(3) *Repetition*. The two other "layers" on which Moore focuses, "melodic lines" ("motifs") and the "harmonic filler", even in their terminology do not appear (fortunately) to be put forward as differential and characterising elements, at least not as much as others far more convincing – for example, the "sound" and therefore the predominant influence of recording (and, implicitly, performance) «sulla canzone in quanto testo ancora da eseguirsi»^[15] [Moore 2001, 706] (even though it remains to be seen, in this passage at least, what defines the nature and substance of this "text"). Moore himself, and before him and even more systematically Middleton [1983; (1990) 2001] and Tagg [1994] (both in turn taken up by Fabbri [2001]) – more or less all reacting to the radical positions defended by Adorno [1941] – find instead in "repetition" one of the distinctive principles of that which is popular in music, and which can be observed on both the "musematic" level (as with the iteration of a minimal rhythmic unit) and the "discursive" level (as with the recurrence of broader phrases and periods, and in the corresponding harmonic patterns). From this perspective as well, and using these same terms and analytical tools, one could easily include an enormous portion – truly, too large – of the Western art tradition within these varying dimensions of repetition. I will do no more in the following remarks than insist on a point already expressed, providing examples in my essay on the principles and formal models of the international auteur song [La Via 2014a, 33–43].

Repetition has been at the root of every musical system and language, not to speak of any form, whether in "classical-art" or "popular" music. What does vary, in whole repertoires but also in single compositions, are the layers and parameters involved in repetition. Also important is the amount of repetition, from the immediate presence of an *ostinato* to larger, cyclically recurring events, and even the degree to which it is perceptible, which in turn also depends on the listener's competence and aural sensitivity. One could perhaps maintain that "popular", compared to "art", repetitiveness tends to involve more levels and parameters, making use of a language that is *on the whole* "simpler" and thus more immediately – and more widely – perceptible/receivable. This might be true, perhaps, if one were to compare any Anglophone popular song with a few specific repertoires of the twentieth century and contemporary avant-gardes (not, for instance, anything that falls under the heading of so-called "minimalism") – i.e. excluding the vast majority of "classical-art" vocal forms that have appeared over the entire history of Western music (that I need not even mention here). Actually, the repeated emphasis given to repetition by today's popular music scholars has led them not only to underestimate its universal presence, but also to neglect the impact, even within the "popular", of alternative principles, generally relegated to the sphere of "high art". One such principle is "progressive mutation", which in the area of (poetic-musical) formal organisation appears as a series of "strophes", whose musical – and verbal – content is always different: the degree to which change prevails over repetition (which, however, does not completely disappear) is directly proportional to the need to represent, in musical terms as well, the temporal becoming, more or less, continuous, but in any case irreversible, of a narration, a chain of reasoning, an emotional transformation, an erotic tension, or even an apparently disorderly patchwork of images and emotions. This need is quite clearly shared not only by late-Renaissance madrigalists and *durchkomponiert Lied* composers but also by a few significant representatives of French, Brazilian, Italian and British song, such as Prévert–Kosma, Pixinguinha–De Barro, Caymmi, Buarque or De André (whether collaborating or not with musicians with a "classical" training, such as Reverberi, Piovani and Pagani), even including Lennon–McCartney's *Happiness is a Warm Gun* [*ibid.*].

(4) *Tonality/modality?* Philip Tagg however has the special honour of differentiating and separating what for him represents two specific and sharply distinguished musical traditions, to the point that completely different theoretical systems – and ensuing analytical instruments – must necessarily be adopted, first and foremost, in the truly crucial areas of "tonality" and "modality", and generally regarding all parameters pertaining to the organisation of pitch [Tagg 2011]. I cannot deny that his efforts have in some sense been useful, and not only to those interested in Anglophone popular music. They would be even more so, however, if they also took into due consideration the immense corpus of theoretical and analytical reflection that has already emerged within so-called "traditional musicology" (with some serious contributions from ethnomusicology). For some time now, these studies have amply illustrated the heterogeneous, changing and anything but univocal or absolute character of both the "modern tonal" and the "modal" systems in their manifold historical codifications and re-codifications, first and foremost within the classical-art tradition. Tagg seems instead to posit the existence and block usage of a single "tonal system", a single set of "rules of classical harmony", that obviously – as such – need not necessarily be applied to his popular music repertoires.

This leads him to both:

1. deny that certain characteristics of "tonal language" (the tonic-dominant relation and other degrees and functions, such as the leading note, concepts and morphologies of the "cadence" – "perfect", "half", "plagal" – etc.) can have any relevance to the real nature – which tends to be "non-tonal" in a "classical" sense – of the majority of the repertoires in

question (excluding a few that, in any case, do not seem to be fully part of the sphere of popular music: "operettas", "drawing-room romances", "marches", "national anthems and traditional religious hymns", "musicals", and even "styles such as the bossa nova" and most jazz "idioms" [*ivi*, 139–43]);

2. adopt terms, concepts and parameters prevalently borrowed from the specific "modal" system codified by jazz even before appearing in popular music.

From the first point of view, only to mention one example, beginning with the observation that the leading note is present in a Handel aria (B, related to a tonic C) but not in a traditional Irish song (B-flat, related to C), Tagg is able to conclude that «the term *leading note* is *wrong* if it indicates the kind of minor sevenths shown in example 1b [Irish song], since none of them must lead to any other point in particular» [2011, 58–59]. Any theoretician of any "tonal system" whatsoever would agree with this conclusion, not least because an abundance of examples of both cases appear in the repertoires of Western art music well before popular music. Scholars such as Powers (whom Tagg does not fail to quote on some underlying points of his discussion of modal music) have provided illustrations and examples of a much broader perspective, involving not only the various "modal" theoretical systems seen from Medieval times to the present, in a wide variety of cultures, but also, within Western "classical-art" music, the changing relations that gradually appeared between two radically different basic conceptions, "modal" and "tonal" music, which even in this case did not follow one another in an evolutionary way, but, at least as of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, inevitably began to be intertwined with one another. This made it possible, only to mention one example, for Beethoven to ascribe his own *Canzona di ringraziamento*, from the Quartet Op. 132, to the Lydian mode; however, see also the reflections of Piston [1989, 452–457], a "functional" theoretician par excellence (not mentioned by Tagg), on composers other than Beethoven: from Bach to Chopin, from Mussorgsky to Debussy.

From the second perspective, Tagg [*ivi*, 73–75] speaks of no less than "ecclesiastic modes" in relation not to the eight medieval categories (derived from the Byzantine *oktoechos*), to which this expression refers, but to the much more recent Anglo-American reworking (initially in the realm of folk music and later jazz) of Glareanus's Renaissance model (the twelve modes discussed by Zarlino among others). This re-codification not only leads to establishing categories that are foreign to both traditional systems (including the "seventh diatonic mode", called Locrian), but also creates a tendency to bring together concepts and parameters that were originally quite distinct, such as "mode" (and "modal octave species") and "scale". It also follows that the (modal) concept of *finalis* was substituted by the (if anything, scalar-tonal) one of "tonic" understood as a "tonal centre" [*ivi*, 73]. How can conflating all of these different senses possibly help establish any new theoretical system, even more so if motivated by a desire to contribute to a more correct analytical study of popular music? If one works towards such a goal, what need is there to draw on a "theory" considered "old" [*ivi*, 76], and of which, what's more, no sign appears of it being well aware of its key elements and fundamental concepts? If, in the end, one has no wish to pursue a deeper knowledge of the history and geography of modal theory, admittedly quite complex and well structured, then one might just as well leave the (presumed) "ecclesiastic modes" alone and refer directly to the "modal" scales and harmonies – as limited and often inadequate as they may be – of the system that has prevailed in jazz studies (whose purposes are actually more educational and practical than theoretical or analytical).

Even remaining within the domain of popular music, limited and yet in itself highly composite and open to the most various mixtures, it is clear that *all* of these systems – be they modern and "tonal" or medieval and Renaissance, and thus "modal", or, again, coming from jazz, without excluding those belonging to other cultures that are not exactly part of "Western classical-art"

music – can only be deemed more or less appropriate *case by case*. There is no need to add that the number of cases, vast in itself even within popular song, becomes immense if one widens the scope to include all modern song repertoires, particularly the one that I – for reasons I have amply illustrated here and elsewhere [La Via 2011b; 2014a] – insist on calling auteur song (*canzone d'autore* in the original). Entire repertoires, from classical Neapolitan song to Jobim-inspired *bossa nova*, from Ferré or Barbara's *chansons* even to the Beatles' or Peter Gabriel's songs, would scarcely be analysable (understandable on a deeper level) without considering their "tonal" premises, as analytically solid as they are perceptible (even when mixed with other, "modal" elements properly speaking that do not always, and not necessarily, derive from jazz); these premises can in other cases certainly be less relevant or entirely absent (as well illustrated by Tagg). The same goes for the more or less intentional recovery of a few ancient or else modern but not jazz-derived "modal" categories, as occurs with singer-songwriters having more or less "medieval" or "ethnic" inclinations, such as De André (and his French models), Branduardi, Pagani, Fossati and Capossela.

In addition, the transversal and virtually universal nature of a few *topoi*, that, rather than solely musical are truly poetic-musical, should be mentioned. These *topoi*, which conserve their harmonic-tonal and modal structure, appear in seemingly far-removed centuries, cultures and repertoires without radically changing their nature, morphology, emotional impact and expressive power. The best example I know is the tetrachordal *passacaglio* in its various minor (diatonic, semi-chromatic, chromatic) and major forms, which I have amply discussed elsewhere [La Via 2004b]. I imagine that even in this highly transcultural kind of poetic-musical study, Tagg could well find something to criticise. To him, for example, one of the diatonic minor tetrachordal forms considered here, the *cadencia andaluza* typical of many repertoires of the Iberian tradition (decidedly not only *flamenco*), should preferentially be classified under the "mode" of "Phrygian E" – associated with the chord progression $iv - bIII - bII - I$ (descending from a , understood as the subdominant, to E , understood as the tonic) [Tagg 2011, 154]. In my essay [La Via 2014b, 55 n. 28], on the contrary, even while perceiving Phrygian elements (certain melodic intervals and the nature of the final cadence), I cannot help but recognise more or less all of the structural features of the Aeolian/Hypoaolian modal pair (with A understood as the finalis and E as *confinalis* or *corda mezzana*): firstly, the species of fourth used mainly in the bass, $A-G-F>E$, but also at times in the vocal line, can be found above or below the species of fifth $E-D-C>B-A$ (unlike the Phrygian octave species, subdivided if anything into an upper-fourth $E-D-C>B$ e and a lower-fifth $B-A-G-F>E$); secondly, the practice, already common among Renaissance madrigalists, of concluding the composition on the mode's *corda mezzana* (e), and not on the finalis (A), for expressive (poetic-musical) reasons that at the time and through to the present have been ignored or at least underestimated by the more dogmatic theorists. In more recent repertoires, this kind of tetrachordal "modality" (Ionian or Hypoionian), and not the other (Phrygian), can easily be compared to the tonality of A minor (descending from A , understood as the tonic, to E , understood as the dominant, along the natural scale) without denying the Phrygian and suspended quality of the final cadence: i.e. $a - e^6 - \underline{d^6}>\underline{E}$ ($i - v^6 - \underline{iv^6}>\underline{V}$) – this is most frequently found in cases that are, so to speak, close to the "classical-art" tradition; or else $a - G - \underline{F}>\underline{E}$ ($i - VII - \underline{VI}>\underline{V}$) in cases that more clearly refer to the traditional Iberian model of the *cadencia andaluza*. Considering the ancient, or at least Renaissance, origins of the latter formula, in order to understand its nature it seems to me that the traditional modal categories are a bit more useful than those elaborated only recently and taken up by Tagg himself as though they were "ecclesiastic modes". And, in turn, the idiomatic guitar-and-chordal nature of this *cadencia* (which, incidentally, is also shared by the minor *passacaglio*, properly speaking), which has probably remained unchanged until our day, makes (cautious) use of terms that more properly belong to the modern tonal tradition as well: in this sense one can speak of a bass descent along the "natural minor scale" of A (with no need to

add flat signs to the two inner notes), [and] of the "tonality" of "A minor", and of a "Phrygian cadence" with a final "suspension" on the "dominant" (with no need of mistaking the *g*#, leading note of the final E-major chord that resolves on the following A-minor chord, for an accidental functional to a presumed "Picardy third" [Tagg 2011, 337]).

Without doubt, the "Phrygian" reading taken up by Tagg is the one to which virtually all guitarists, interpreters and scholars of *flamenco* or *canto hondo* refer to; one cannot ignore this theoretical tradition, which must be respected as such, and probably has a sense of its own with regard to these specific Iberian-Andalusian repertoires. Tagg, however, insists on also applying it to other repertoires (non-Iberian and non-folk-traditional) that involve the presence of an author and can be traced to the sphere of (his) popular song. This includes a Cuban *cancion guajira* such as *Hasta siempre, Comandante* (composed by Carlos Puebla in 1965, and to my knowledge recorded by him in 1969 with his group Los Tradicionales in the tonality of F# minor). Tagg refers, as his sole example, to the guitar refrain (lowered by a tone and represented as Em - D - Am⁶[sic] - B), which he states was used by Puebla «to end his ode to Che Guevara» [ivi, 154]. Yet the refrain, if anything, opens the song and repeatedly resurfaces within it, but not, however, at its conclusion, where a last and quite painful intonation of the vocal refrain appears (including the final Andalusian tetrachord, F#m - E - D > C#, corresponding to the lines *de tu querida presencia, Comandante Che Guevara*). The entire song is actually permeated not only by the *cadencia andaluza* (i - VII - VI > V) but also by simpler cadences (above all, i - iv > V), which do no other than continuously repeat both the Phrygian suspension on the dominant (C#) and the following resolution on the minor tonic (C#>F#m: V>i). The cyclical and ultimately definitive affirmation of the Phrygian cadence is perfectly in line – precisely in its sombre suspension – with the sentiments felt by the song's author (and perhaps, even before him, by Fidel Castro?) upon hearing El Che's fatal decision (sometime in Summer to Autumn 1965) to leave his own country. This feeling was shared by the Cuban people when the song was first played in public (at the first Encuentro de la Cancion de Protesta, August 1967), and only grew stronger after the *Comandante's* death (9 October 1967). Refusing at all costs to perceive this suspension (as a dominant of F# minor, or "Hypoaolian" as well, if you like), and preferring to hear a more gratifying resolution on the "tonic" (C# major, perhaps to be understood as a Picardy third?) in the context of a "Phrygian harmony" [ibid.] puts us at risk of losing sight of not only the objective reality of the music in question, but also the overall sense of the poetic-musical text and its emotional, sociopolitical and popular (in the Gramscian sense) implications, and therefore the historical scenario of one of the most important auteur songs of the entire Cuban repertoire.

Ultimately, theoretical systematisations that are in many ways admirable and useful, such as those proposed by Tagg (for example, those involved in the various types of "non-classical harmony"), nevertheless risk producing a counter-system that, while being opposed to the so-called "modern tonal" one, turn out to be equally schematic, dogmatic and fundamentally foreign to the nature – highly variegated and in continuous transformation – of its privileged object of study.

* * *

Truly from every point of view, the auteur song, precisely for its open and transversal, or, better yet, transcultural character, can in no way – if not forcibly – be limited to the sphere of "popular music" in the sense shared by the scholars mentioned above (in a particularly radical way, Middleton, Fabbri and Tagg). Nor, however, can it be confined to the much wider and more multifaceted sphere of that which, in Italian, I would like to be able to continue to call *musica popolare* (better still, perhaps, if expressed in the plural form). It would be enough for musicologists of popular music to begin to discard certain counter-prejudices, for which traditional

musicology bears some of the responsibility, and to broaden the horizons of their fields of research, which are in any case musicological and important in themselves, so as to be able to contribute one day in an even more decisive way to our knowledge and understanding not only of "music", however it may be defined, but also of its interactions – neglected even today – with the word.

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[1] There is no such thing as a minor art, but only minor or major artists. Bob Dylan or Brassens mean much more than certain crusty painters passed off as great artists.

[2] [...] music deserves respect, whether we call it "pop" or "classical", "light" or "heavy", "learned" or "commercial".

[3] If we truly love one kind of music, we emotionally make it our own, and only then can we say that we know it. I am convinced that we only know that which we love [...]. In music, just as in love, one loves that which one knows and recognises. Loving is a continual process of knowledge and recognition [...]. Knowing is an act of love, not only in the biblical sense of the verb; recognising oneself in a painting by Caravaggio or a tango by Piazzolla puts our intimate affects into motion.

[4] [...] one must also give due consideration to the importance of the origin itself of contemporary musical practice in the United States in the mid-1950s. This is why (and for no other reason) the dominant language in popular-music songs, and perhaps in criticism as well, tends to be English. In fact, most of my examples will be taken from British artists, because this represents my personal geographical perspective.

[5] "Popular", meaning "of the people", and "popular", meaning "that which many people like".

[6] Gramsci has something to do with this, naturally.

[7] [...] because in Italy intellectuals are far removed from the people, that is, from the "nation". They are instead linked to a tradition of caste ... "bookish" and "abstract"... The entire "educated class", with its intellectual activity, is detached from the people-nation ... because the indigenous intellectual element is more foreign than foreigners to the people-nation.

[8] [...] adopted, because they reflect its way of thinking and feeling.

[9] What distinguishes popular song, in the context of a nation and its culture, are not its artistic traits, nor its historical roots, but its way of conceiving life and the world, in contrast with "official" society; in this, and in this alone, can we look for the "collectivity" of popular song, and of the people themselves.... The people themselves are not a culturally homogeneous collectivity, but have many cultural layers, combined in various ways, whose pure nature cannot always be identified in given historical popular collectivities. Without doubt, however, it is the greater or lesser degree of historical "isolation" of these collectivities that permits a certain identification.

[10] [...] guilty of not following Gramsci, due to my physical-ideological constitution.

[11] [...] the borders between "art" and "popular", which are already somewhat faint, tend to become even more pale, sometimes to the point of completely dissolving.

[12] [...] differentiates popular styles from those of Western art music.

[13] [...] articulate a series of pulsations, the so-called groove. This is the role of the drums ... combined with the rhythmic profile of whichever bass instrument is used.

[14] [...] making explicit the line of harmonic roots. This layer, as a rule, is articulated by the electric bass or, at times, by a keyboard.... However, even if it is possible to come across the occasional inversion, generally speaking the roots are found in the lowest part of the texture.

[15] [...] on the song as a text yet to be played.