

# Un-mind the gap: questioning the division between artistic instrumentalism and autonomy from an ethnomusicological perspective

Claudia Chibici-Revneanu

Escuela Nacional de Estudios Superiores (ENES), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico  
claudiac@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

This article aims to contribute to on-going cultural policy debates on artistic instrumentalism vs. autonomy, striving to undermine this apparent dichotomy by drawing from ethnomusicology and related fields. Ethnomusicology, although frequently ignored by cultural policy studies, has an established tradition of exploring the functionality of music. As such, it not only provides profound insight into social effects of music, but also helps reveal that the division between instrumental art and "art for art's sake" is largely a historical and culture-specific invention of the Western (musical) world. Moreover, the article will show that Western music has always been functional, paradoxically partly due to its ideational separation from instrumental (especially economic) pressures. Hence, this article argues both in favour of a recognition of music's powerful functionality and the need to keep the musical sphere at least partially separate from too straight-forward monetary and quantitative impact concerns.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*This work was supported by the Research Programme UNAM-DGAPA-PAPIIT [grant number IA400614].*

## Keywords:

Ethnomusicology

Cultural policy

Artistic instrumentalism

Autonomy of the arts

Music

## Introduction

Within the field of cultural policy studies – especially, but not exclusively within a European context – there has been an ongoing debate as to whether the arts are to be valued intrinsically, or rather for their potential socio-political and monetary contributions. This debate seems particularly heated because “the culture lobby has to confront a political reality in which resources are scarce and where economics provides a basis for determining how those scarce resources be divided up” (Street, 2013: 283). In other words, a lack of resources is often coupled with a cultural faith that numbers – mainly in the form of economic benefits and qualitative research data – provide the best illustration of value and justification for the allocation of funds.

Many voices have been raised on both sides of the instrumentality “battle front”. O’Brien, for instance, in his report for the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport “Measuring the Value of Culture”, stresses the need for cultural organisations to make their case for funding in terms of a cost-benefit analysis compatible with the “Treasury’s Green Book on policy appraisal and evaluation” (2010: 8). This emphasis is partly a reaction to advocates of intrinsic artistic value, such as the often-quoted statement by the Barbican’s ex-managing director Tusa that:

*Mozart is Mozart because of his music and not because he created a tourist industry in Salzburg or gave his name to decadent chocolate and marzipan Saltzburger kugel. Picasso is important because he taught a century new way of looking at objects (...) Van Gogh is valued because of the pain or intensity of his images and colours (...) Absolute quality is paramount in attempting a valuation of the arts; all other factors are interesting, useful but secondary (Tusa, cited in O’Brien, 2010: 12).*

Hence, there is a seemingly irreconcilable gap between those urging to articulate the value of the arts in economic terms and those claiming that the arts cannot be reduced to such monetary – or indeed any functional (“absolute quality is paramount”) – aspects.

Both arguments are problematic. Tusa’s statement verges on the discriminatory, as he cites examples of male, white, European artists only. In fact, the defense of the arts’ “absolute value” has often helped to uphold oppressive power structures such as colonialism and patriarchy, defending the intrinsic value of white men’s work (Chibici-Revneanu, 2016).

However, O’Brien’s (ibid.) emphasis on economical evaluation of culture appears at least as dangerous, in part because – as will be discussed in this article – it risks losing many of the manifold and often crucial socio-political (among others) functions the arts are able to fulfil, including its provision of aesthetic experiences which form the key focus of Tusa’s notion.

Of course, the debate has also been shaped by works which occupy a “middle-ground” of arguing for the multi-functionality of the arts, yet typically understood in non-monetary terms. Examples are Belfiore and Bennett’s *The Social Impact of the Arts* (2008) and, with an emphasis on humanities-oriented approaches to arts’ evaluation, “Beyond the ‘Toolkit Approach’: Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy-Making” (2010). With particular reference to music, it is also worth mentioning Behr, Brennan and Cloonan’s “Cultural value and cultural policy: some evidence from the world of live music” (2014), as well Street’s previously quoted “Music, markets and manifestos” (2013).

This article is ideologically placed within this “middle way”. While influenced by the aforementioned writings, it also tries to respond to a perceived lack of engagement with some of the rich and relevant literature of ethnomusicology and related fields. Furthermore, it aims to illustrate that the debate surrounding the instrumentality vs. the intrinsic value of the arts is in itself based on a historical and culture-specific division which differentiates the Western art world from many other traditions. In many cultures, music is appreciated for its multiple functions, including those of aesthetic concern. In fact, multiple physical, mental, as well as social and spiritual effects of music have been well-documented by ethnomusicologists (e. g. Merriam, 1964; Blacking, 2000[1973]; Martí, 2000; Nettl, 2015) and others interested in musical functionality (e.g. Frith, 1996a [1987] & 1996b) for decades. What is more, this article will claim that even Western, “autonomous” music has always been highly functional. Paradoxically, even its ideational separation from instrumental (especially economic) concerns can be seen as enabling some of its social and spiritual operations. Hence, this article argues both in favour of a recognition and celebration of music’s powerful functionality and the need to keep the musical sphere at least partially separate from straight-forward monetary and quantitative impact concerns.

The article is theoretical and interdisciplinary in approach, referring chiefly to the fields of cultural policy studies and ethnomusicology, here broadly defined as

## **"THE NOTION OF ARTISTIC AUTONOMY IS A CULTURALLY SPECIFIC IDEA WHOSE HISTORICAL ORIGINS HAVE BEEN WELL DOCUMENTED. ALTHOUGH ELEMENTS OF AN IDEOLOGY OF ART CAN BE TRACED TO THE RENAISSANCE, IT ARISES LARGELY DURING ROMANTICISM TOWARDS THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY"**

"the study of music in its social and cultural contexts" (The Society of Ethnomusicology, 2019). Other fields such as the sociology, psychology and religious studies of music will be alluded to, in order to complete this approach to the functionality of structured sound.

There are evidently limitations to the present work. Its focus is deliberately broad – a fact caused by the decision to provide a general overview rather than specific insight into one of the many issues related to questions of artistic instrumentality vs. autonomy. Thus, it relies on somewhat problematic generalisations regarding "Western" and "non-Western" music and in relation to most of the specific musical traditions and genres from around the globe mentioned. It is important to bear in mind at all points that overall trends will be highlighted, with many exceptions to the presented "rules".

The article also pays little heed to distinctions such as popular vs. classical music, classical versus folk music and making vs. listening to music etc. This is motivated by lack of space, but also by the notion, already outlined by Blacking, that some of these distinctions (especially those attempting to classify and/or hierarchise) are "neither meaningful nor accurate as indices of musical differences" (2000 [1973]: 4). Also, they have often been implicated in divisions to be explored. The fact that this article will discuss on music as a general phenomenon is not to say that all types and genres perform all musical functions explored. Music may be universal in its world-wide existence, probably even its functionality, but not its specific effects and meanings (ibid). The type of music and the way it can unfold its cultural "work" is sensitive to socio-cultural contexts that cannot presently be analysed.

The discussion is divided into two sections, followed by a brief conclusion. The first section, "On the multiple functionality (and ideas of non-functionality) of music", aims to provide a theoretical basis, defining key terms and further illustrating the instrumentalism vs. artistic autonomy debate. It will also show how

some important ethnomusicological texts on the functionality of music can actually help to "un-mind" the gap between both "extremes". The second section, "On two crucial functions: Social cohesion and spirituality", then focuses in more detail on two particular functions, which are considered relevant to matters of cultural policy, namely social cohesion and spirituality.

I hope this article will help to counter-act the fact that, according to Jowell, "We lack convincing language (...) for how culture lies at the heart of a healthy society" (cited in Belfiore & Bennett, 2008: 9).

### **On the multiple functionality (and ideas of non-functionality) of music**

#### ***Defining – the link between instrumentalism and functionality***

In the introduction, two crucial concepts for this article have been mentioned, namely instrumentalism and functionality. Starting with the former, Vestheim defines instrumentalism as using "cultural ventures and cultural investments as a means or instrument to attain goals in other areas" (1994: 65). While this definition has had an important influence on questions surrounding instrumentalism within a cultural policy context, it has recently come under scrutiny by authors such as Nisbett, who argues that it "falls short through its inability to recognise the complexity and nuance" of the issue (2013: 569). She thus proposes a broader reconceptualisation of instrumentalism, suggesting that it could simply yet significantly be viewed as "'a means to something else' or 'helpful in bringing something about'" (2013: 570).

With regard to functionality – and even though its related ethnomusicological meaning will be explored in more detail – the term is commonly deployed in fields such as sociology and anthropology to indicate an element doing "work" of some kind, fulfilling a socio/cultural (or other) purpose (see, for instance, Durkheim,

1912 [among others]; Malinowski, 1974). Both can thus be broadly regarded as referring to phenomena "bringing something about".

### ***The gap: Instrumentality vs. the autonomy of the arts.***

Turning to a more detailed overview of the instrumentalism vs. autonomy debate, Nisbett argues that it is usually "a polarised discussion, simplifying instrumentalism as inherently 'good' or 'bad', and largely focusing on the harmful impact of instrumental policies" (2013: 558).

The position focused on instrumentalism as "bad" for the arts (as briefly exposed with regard to Tusa's statement) tends to defend the autonomy of the arts, considering, for instance, that "criteria from the ethical realm should not be imported to evaluate the aesthetic realm" (Carroll, 2000: 351). This idea of artistic separateness has been particularly strong within the field of music, because structured sound often "seems to be generated by its own self-contained, abstract principles" (McClary, 1996: 16). With a certain homonymic irony, "instrumental" (i.e. using instruments but no voice) music has often been regarded as the least instrumental (i.e. functional) type, because of "having no purpose beyond its intrinsic pleasures" (Shiner, 2001: 196).

As will be shown, beliefs in the independence of the arts and their need to be "useless" form part of a Romantic tradition of thought. Many of the more recent outcries in favour of this position seem inspired by developments within the arts and cultural policy sector speeding into the opposite direction. As stated, increasing pressure is being put on the arts to justify their existence and claim for monetary support in terms of their ideally quantifiable and economic usefulness (e.g. Thetford, 2013). As briefly explored, there has been a need for the arts to prove their functionality (e.g. Arts Council England, 2019), and "notions of 'instrumentalism' (...) are often couched in stark economic terms" (Behr et al, 2014: 406).

It may be added that this tendency can also be observed in other contexts, such as the USA. A report on the arts in the USA economy proudly claims that "we are now able to quantify the impact of arts and culture on GDP for the very first time" (Pritzker, cited in National Endowment for the Arts, 2013, par. 2). Also, it is explained how in "2011, the value added from arts and cultural production (ACP) accounted for nearly 3.2 percent, or \$504 billion, of GDP" and goes on to

list which "arts commodities, from advertising to arts education" have been the most "valuable" financially (National Endowment for the Arts, 2013, par. 7).

If this example clarifies how matters of the arts have indeed often become "couched in stark economic terms" (Behr et al, 2014: 406) of "added value" and "commodities", it is interesting to observe that the so-called emphasis on the autonomy of the arts has also frequently displayed arguments of functionality. It seems that this side has not so much argued for an actual "uselessness" of the arts, but for their operations in "higher" realms, yet "'helpful in bringing something about'" (Nisbett, 2013: 570). According to Shiner, the (fine) arts were "given a transcendent spiritual role of revealing higher truth or healing the soul" (2001: 6). More specifically with regard to music, Bowie discusses how Romantics regarded it as capable of expressing the inexpressible (2009: 244) and "unsayable" (2009: 245), which was "understood in religious and mystical terms, as a realm only accessible by means which resist rational analysis" (ibid.). The ability to move into this realm has been seen as "an essential means of responding to the world (...) fulfilling needs which philosophy (and religion) cannot, or can no longer, fulfil" (ibid.: 246).

Although the citations of Bowie are taken from a section entitled "Absolute music", it is fairly self-evident that the notions expressed never really focus on the uselessness of music, but rather its elevated functionality. Hence, the debate between musical or general artistic autonomy vs. instrumentality has rarely been framed in opposing terms, but rather hovered around different nuances. This has done little to clarify the issue, often leading to a lack of consensus of which elements may in fact be considered instrumental (e.g. Gibson, 2008: 250-251). Being aware of these overlaps, however, can potentially help "un-mind" the gap between two seemingly irreconcilable "poles".

In fact, the notion of artistic autonomy is a culturally specific idea whose historical origins have been well documented. Although elements of an ideology of Art can be traced to the Renaissance, it arises largely during Romanticism towards the end of the 18th century. Romanticism was in itself a cultural response towards many important occurrences and changes, including the increasing "rationalisation" of life associated with Enlightenment thought and a growing connection between the arts and an emergent market for literature and music (Shiner, 2001). Many ideas typically associated with Romanticism, such as the celebration of nature, the irrational, fantasy, emotional

intensity etc. can be seen as forms of rebellion, as creating a space sheltered from an increasingly rationalised and industrialised world.

Also, and arguably in part as a reaction to these elements (Chibici-Revneanu, 2011), Romanticism gave rise to many divisions within the artistic field, promoting ideologies that have had an impact on our conception of creativity to this day. As Shiner explains in a section of *The Invention of Art*, notably entitled "The Great Division":

*in the eighteenth century a fateful division occurred in the traditional concept of art. After over two thousand years of signifying any human activity performed with skill and grace, the concept of art was split apart, generating the new category fine arts (...) as opposed to crafts and popular arts (...). The fine arts, it was now said, are a matter of inspiration and genius and meant to be enjoyed for themselves in moments of refined pleasure, whereas the crafts and popular arts require only skill and rules and are meant for mere use or entertainment (Shiner, 2001: 5).*

Here, a division of "higher" vs. "lower" arts goes hand in hand with a conception of autonomy vs. instrumentality, or really – as indicated – of "higher" and "lower" functionality. Moreover, as Shiner explores (e.g. *ibid.*: 7), this separation indirectly yet powerfully helped to create an artistic hierarchy, where those who emerged as the "great" were "incidentally" also those in cultural power; it strongly affirmed the artistic dominance of white, upper-middle class, mainly European, men (Chibici-Revneanu, 2011). However, one must not overlook that the "great division" also indicates a need for "shelter", an ideological wariness caused partly by an increasing assignation of market-value to the output of human creativity.

### **Un-minding... Ethnomusicology and the functionality of music**

Moving specifically onto the field of music, it has been regarded and praised for its functionality in and by many cultures where arguably this split did not occur. According to Hunt, in the Hindustani musical tradition, there is a well-established notion of the functionality of music, regarding it – for instance – as a "house with four rooms (...) catering to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual" (2000: 70). Also, Olson explains how "most South American Indians traditionally view their music as

having supernatural qualities. (...) In many instances they themselves have described the function, symbolism, and meaning of their music and musical instruments" (1980: 363). In his analysis of the Venda of Southern Africa, Blacking emphasises how they "generally classify their music according to its social function, and the name for the function and its music is often the same" (2000 [1973]: 41).

These examples have not been mentioned in order to lead to the erroneous conclusion that all non-Western cultures tend to be socially inclusive and musically homogeneous. The musical variety of the world is almost beyond our grasp, and there is not even a universal consensus of what is understood as music (see, for instance, Olson's further observation that among many South American indigenous groups, "no word expresses the concept of music as Westerners employ it" (*ibid.*: 365)). However, as Nettl puts it in *The Study of Ethnomusicology: 33 Discussions*: "in many cultures – dare I say most – music is thought to have power to accomplish something for humans; humans use music to 'do' things. It's an idea that has been of interest to colleagues in my field from the very beginning" (2015: pos. 5531). Moreover, as the Hindustani house image implies, many seem to have perceived less of a contradiction between music's often "elevated" spiritual and more direct physical functions.

Indeed, the field of ethnomusicology, originally preoccupied with "non-Western" music – and of course far more heterogeneous than the present inquiry can pay homage to – has a long scholarly tradition of listing, exploring and classifying the many uses and functions of music. To illustrate this, two classics and one more contemporary work have been selected, namely Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music* (1964), Blacking's *How Musical is Man?* ([1973], 2000), and Martí's *Más allá dell' arte* (2000) (Beyond art).

Starting with the latter, Martí – for instance – regards music both as a means of affirming power and its subversion, partly because music is so closely linked to "the social construction of reality" (2000: 10)<sup>1</sup>. He explores the way music assists in the process of identity formation, expression and affirmation, helping not only to create "the spirit of an epoch" (2000: 11), but also regional, national, ethical, general gender and generational conceptions of groups and individual selves (*ibid.*). In this way, he sees music as a crucial ally when it comes to "satisfy[ing] our need for difference" (*ibid.*: 14).

<sup>1</sup> All quotes whose original reference is in Spanish have been translated by the author.



As to Blacking, he explores the profound impact of music on our (social) lives and of our (social) lives on music. Two of the four chapters of his book are called "Music in Society and Culture" and "Culture and Society in Music", respectively, in order to show how musical sound and society/culture are involved in an extremely close, dynamic relationship, coming to mirror, inform and shape each other in many complex and significant ways (2000 [1973]).

With regard to music's more specific functionality, Blacking isolates different effects such as (in relation to the Nsenga tribe) "the power to bring together people in brotherhood" (ibid.: 12) or "the essential quality of music (...) to create another world of virtual time" (ibid.: 27), of helping to access an alternative world. Also, according to Blacking, some forms of music act as "tonal expressions of human experience in the context of different kinds of social and cultural organization" (ibid.: 31).

More specifically for the Venda (but with the implication that this can be generalised) he shows how some of their music actively expresses "concepts of individuality in community, and of social, temporal and spatial balance" (ibid.: 30) and is considered "essential for the very survival of man's humanity" (ibid.: 54). These are only a few of the most central and significant "functions" of music Blacking writes about.

Turning towards Merriam, the latter arguably enables much of Blacking's writing, providing a lengthy and detailed list of the manifold "uses" and "functions" of music. For the ethnomusicologist, the distinction is a fairly complex one, where music's "'use' (...) refers to the situation in which music is employed in human action" whereas a "'function' concerns the reasons for its employment and particularly the broader purpose which it serves" (1964: pos. 4169). In many ways, "functions" thus refer to "deeper" (ibid.: pos. 4162) operations, such as music's correlation with the survival

of a group (ibid.: pos. 4166). According to Merriam, a group tends to be aware of the use of music, but a function may only become evident through the analysis of an observer (ibid.: pos. 4160-1). While this distinction is interesting, I do not believe it contributes significantly to the matter at hand – except perhaps to show that "higher" and more "practical" effects of music can be

cognitively separated (perhaps highlighting Merriam's own Western tendency to distinguish between "higher" from "lower" operations) but, in practice, tend to co-exist, co-operate and merge.

Even though Merriam admits he could not possibly explore all uses of music, he strives to illustrate "the enormous range of activity in which music plays a part, sometimes tangentially but often centrally" (ibid.: pos. 4331). To name some examples, he presents music as an "accompaniment to or part of almost every human activity" (ibid.: pos. 4291) which is virtually omnipresent in the shape of different songs for different occasions (ibid.: pos. 4307) and thus deeply woven into the fabric of social organisations. On a more spiritual plane, he also explores how religious beliefs are constantly given shape through sounds, becoming "expressed through musical prayer, myth

and legend set to music, divination songs, cult songs, songs of religious functionaries" (ibid.: pos. 4315). Music is often seen as a way of establishing contact with the divine, and therefore used as a form of invocation or to acquire "supernatural assistance" (ibid.: pos. 4315). Moving onto Merriam's category of "functions", he lists a variety, including emotional expression, music's contribution to the continuity and stability of culture, the integration of society, and – importantly – both entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment (1964: pos. 4142-4522). Rather than separating aesthetic concerns from other "instrumental" aspects, they are all seen as part of the multiple functions of music, granting a

**"ALTHOUGH THERE  
ARE, OF COURSE,  
NUMEROUS  
COMPLEXITIES TO  
THE NOTION OF  
SOCIAL COHESION,  
ITS ENHANCEMENT  
CAN BE  
CONSIDERED  
AN IMPORTANT  
CULTURAL POLICY  
OBJECTIVE,  
RELIANT ON BOTH  
'AESTHETIC' AND  
'INSTRUMENTAL'  
OPERATIONS  
OF THE ARTS  
IN GENERAL  
AND MUSIC IN  
PARTICULAR"**

different perspective which clearly helps to underline the potential falseness of the "instrumental/ intrinsic dichotomy" (Gibson, 2008: 247) within cultural policy discussions.

## On two crucial functions: social cohesion and spirituality

### *Music and social cohesion*

Ethnomusicological scholars have thus provided an interesting overview of the multiple functions of music, highlighting its involvement in a vast variety of human activities and needs in a way that could significantly enrich the "increasingly sterile debate" (Hadley & Gray, 2017: 95) surrounding the intrinsic value of culture vs. instrumentalism. Indeed, music arises as a kind of panacea, beneficial for individuals and society on many different levels. In order to narrow down the discussion, now, two functions of music that have been chosen for their arguable relevance for matters of cultural policy studies will be explored, namely music's implication in promoting social cohesion and spirituality.

Starting with a definition of the former, Jeannotte defines "social cohesion" as "essentially why social systems hold together as opposed to falling apart" (2003: 37). In comparable terms, the work *Social Cohesion in the Western World: What Holds Societies Together* states that "Studying social cohesion essentially boils down to the question as to what encourages a group of people to act as one" (Dragolov et al, 2016: xxv). In the latter, it is also explained how social cohesion is not only increasingly understood as a significant policy aim in its own right, but also "a contribution to maintain long-term economic growth" (ibid.: xxvi). Although there are, of course, numerous complexities to the notion of social cohesion (see, for instance, Baeker, 2002), its enhancement can be considered an important cultural policy objective, reliant on both "aesthetic" and "instrumental" operations of the arts in general and music in particular.

As it has been shown with regard to Marti and his writings on the connection between music and group identity, with Blacking and his exploration of the Venda's use of music to express a concept of individuality in community music, as well as Merriam's emphasis on the function of music to contribute to the stability of culture and the integration of society, many musical expressions seem ideally placed to collaborate in the creation and affirmation of social coherence.

Even though this is a complicated matter in its own right, one can already draw from existent knowledge

as to why music may operate in this manner. It seems that one of the keys to music's contribution to social cohesion is its strong link to matters of selfhood and its somewhat paradoxical capacity to mediate between a highly individual and a communal sense of identity. Arguably because of its interpretative openness (the very reason it has, again paradoxically, been most closely associated with non-functionality), it lends itself to a myriad of individual interpretations, which can (as in the case of national anthems or emblematic songs) be brought together in the same song/musical piece. As Frith explains:

*Because of its qualities of abstractness, music is, by nature, an individualizing form. We absorb songs into our own lives and rhythm into our own bodies; they have a looseness of reference that makes them immediately accessible. At the same time, and equally significantly, music is obviously collective (1996a: 121).*

In somewhat simplistic terms, someone may thus be at a concert listening to a song she associates with a very personal childhood memory, while someone else can hear the same song and start dreaming of his last holiday. Still, they are united by the shared moment, possibly a vaguely shared emotion, a shared musical reference/preference and now a shared memory. Or, again in the words of Frith: "This interplay between personal absorption into music and the sense that it is, nevertheless, something out there, something public, is what makes music so important in the cultural placing of the individual in the social" (Frith, 1996b [1987]: 129).

This leads to two further points that seem to be essential to music's capacity to increase social cohesion: its ability to enhance both individual and collective memory and the possibility of calling forth strong (shared) feelings. As to the latter, it has been noted that Merriam considers the ability of music to convey and evoke emotions as one of its core functions (e.g. 1964: pos. 4336-4432), but precisely because the experience of music is often shared, it can also strengthen social cohesion through a (vaguely) common emotionality.

Albeit I will have to resort to a kind of cultural approximation/translation, it is – according to the World music scholars Miller and Shahriari – the creation of (shared) emotion that is part of a transformative power attributed to some music in the Arabic world (2012: pos. 5035-5044). In the Indian classical raga tradition, the emotion or mood (known as "rasa") associated with a particular raga, "creates in performer and listener alike a state of mind, such as love, heroism, or anger" that "can become so pervasive that listeners begin to

## “THERE SEEMS TO BE QUITE SOLID PROOF FOR THE FACT THAT MUSIC CAN, WHEN USED WITH THE RIGHT SENSITIVITY TO SPECIFIC CONTEXTS AND NEEDS, BE USED TO SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCE SOCIAL COHESION IN SEVERAL COMPLEX – AND OFTEN AESTHETICALLY HIGHLY MEANINGFUL – WAYS”

conceive of the *rasa* as a person" (ibid.: pos. 2497-2504). Whichever other effects these musical experiences may have (and a well-performed *raga* has been associated with magical powers (ibid.)), one needs to look no further than Durkheim to find theories on how shared emotions tie people together, strengthening social bonds (1912). The social ties created by (musically induced) group feelings have also been more recently explored by sociologists of music, with reference to the Heavy Metal concerts, in the West (see, for instance Meij et al, 2013: 69).

What is more – and possibly also because of its emotional intensity – music appears to have a privileged relationship to memory. Firstly, music contains many mnemotechnical elements. Among aboriginal groups in Australia, some of which still "maintain cultural practices that have existed for roughly 40,000 years" (Miller & Shahriari, 2012: pos. 1837), traditionally: "Myths and belief systems, along with practical knowledge and oral histories, pass from generation to generation through song and dance" (ibid., pos. 1817-1819). In a Western context, it is also common to resort to the mnemotechnical elements of music when trying to learn, for instance, the alphabet or multiplication tables through songs. Still, the musical relationship to memory goes beyond this. As it has been implied with regard to Blacking's idea of music providing access to "an alternative world", music can act as something close to a time-machine, powerfully evoking memories, especially of youth (e.g. Suttie, 2015). This can operate both on an individual, and on a collective basis, evoking both a sense of personal remembrances and a return to "the spirit" of an epoch or generation (e.g. Marti, 2000: 11). Hence, it can strengthen both an individual's notion of his or her personal story and a group's experience of a shared history, which may – again – be regarded as strengthening both their collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992) and a related sense of individual and group identity.

Evidently, this has only been a general introduction to a highly complex matter. Interestingly,

however, recent psychological studies of music strongly corroborate the claim that music is good for social cohesion. In his article "From Social Contact to Social Cohesion—The 7 Cs", Koelsch explains that, especially

*When playing music in a group, individuals (...) engage in social cognition, participate in co-pathway (the social function of empathy), communicate, coordinate their actions, and cooperate with each other, leading to increased social cohesion. Music making is special in that it can engage all of these social functions effortlessly and simultaneously. (...) The ability of music to increase social cohesion and strengthen interindividual attachments was probably an important function of music in human evolution (Koelsch, 2013: 204).*

There seems to be quite solid proof for the fact that music can, when used with the right sensitivity to specific contexts and needs, be used to significantly enhance social cohesion in several complex – and often aesthetically highly meaningful – ways. In fact, Frith observes in a statement that both sums up much of the present section and emphasises the compatibility of aesthetic and "instrumental" elements of music:

Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives. Such a fusion of imaginative fantasy and bodily practice marks also the integration of aesthetics and ethics (...) among African musicians an aesthetic judgment (this sounds good) is necessarily also an ethical judgment (this is good) (1996a: 124).

Perhaps Western cultural policy can learn from this idea that art can indeed "be good" both aesthetically and through its impact on society at large. For, as Jeannotte argues, it is often our engagement with music and other cultural activities that leads to "a transformative experience and one of the key elements of a sustainable community" (2003: 48).



## Music and spirituality

While there may be some consensus regarding the value of social cohesion and its relevancy to (cultural) policy measures, a more contentious claim will be made now; namely that there is an increased need for meaning and (inter-cultural) spirituality that cultural policy studies should more thoroughly address. The "spiritual value" of culture has already been highlighted by scholars such as Throsby (2001: 84) and Rowson, in texts such as "The brains behind spirituality" (2013) and "Can spirituality inform public policy? Yes, no, and maybe" (2014), taking the idea of a need to re-connect policy and spirituality further. For the latter, spirituality may be defined as:

*the lifelong challenge to embody one's vision of human existence and purpose (...) safeguarding our sense of the sacred, valuing the feeling of belonging or savouring the rapture of intense absorption (...) the quintessential gratitude we feel when we periodically notice, as gift and revelation, that we are alive (Rowson, 2013, par. 10-11).*

Even though the scholar recognises that many Western intellectuals get embarrassed around ideas of spirituality, he emphasises that an increased sense of spirituality, possibly addressed by public policy, may – among other important aspects – help us "become less vulnerable to terrorism, care for an ageing population, address the rise in obesity or face up to climate change" (ibid, par. 8). Comparable ideas have also been put forward by the Commission of Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, especially with regard to its thematic focus Culture, Spirituality and Conservation (CSC), with its interest in the complex "relationships between culture, biocultural heritage, spirituality and equitable governance in conservation, sustainable development, and environmental and cultural policy" (Commission of Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, 2019, par. 1).

Now, for many cultures around the world – including the "Western" musical tradition – music appears to have been one of spirituality's great allies; and recognising this may take one another step further to perceiving the profound functionality of music which, in fact, unites arguments of instrumentality and autonomy, thus arguably further "un-minding" the gap.

As already implied with regard to Blacking's insistence on music being able to "create another world of virtual time" ([1973] 2000: 27), or Merriam's notion that

it helps establish a relationship with the divine – music's connection to spirituality has long been established by ethnomusicologist and scholars of related fields. The fact that this link is maintained in many different religions and "non-religions" is highlighted by Beck in his introduction to *Sacred Sound: Experiencing music in World Religions* (2006), in which he explains how "the seemingly intrinsic connection between religious ritual and musical activity" can be found across "often radical differences in theological orientation", including "monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, monism, goddess worship, atheism" (ibid.: 1).

There is ample evidence for this. For many Australian aborigines, for instance, music represents a direct "link to the spiritual plane" (Miller & Shahriari, 2012: pos. 1819), a way of connection to the culturally central, spiritual sphere known as dreaming or dream time. In some musical traditions of the Arabic world (albeit generalising), music is – as briefly mentioned – often ascribed a transformative effect through an intense emotional commotion known as "tarab" (ibid.: pos. 5035-5044). Also, in Sufism, music and dance are used to enter a trance-like state and connect directly to god (ibid.: pos. 4736-4741). Among many inhabitants of Sumatra, Java and Bali:

*religious beliefs are expressed in myth, legend, and prayer set to music. Music is an indispensable part of family and community rituals, a form of instruction, and a means of entertainment. Music, dance, and theatre not only serve to express and share thought and emotion but also are important in rituals requesting supernatural assistance (Kartomi, 1980: 129).*

This statement not only illustrates the implication of music in many aspects associated with religion and spirituality, but also how there is no apparent contradiction between music being used for entertainment as well as "sublime" spiritual purposes.

Of course, as noted, music has also operated as a great ally to spirituality within the Western musical tradition, including but also beyond a directly religious context and even after the great divisions of Romanticism took place. In order to underpin this claim, it is paradoxically sufficient to return to previously outlined notions regarding music's non-instrumentalism and inherent autonomy. Returning to Shiner and Bowie, it has been shown how (instrumental) music was "given a transcendent spiritual role of revealing higher truth or healing the soul" (Shiner 2001, p. 6), came to express the "unsayable" (Bowie, 2009: 245) and helps to fulfill

(spiritual) needs that could no longer be catered for by other means (ibid.: 246). Hence, after music's apparent separation from its "utility", it actually seems to have been considered a form of accentuating spirituality, in a way not far removed from its definition by Rowson previously provided.

This is not precisely news. It has often been recognised that in Romanticism, the arts start to act as an ersatz religion (Shiner, 2001: 194-5) and the ideology of Art comes to counter-act an increasing sense of cultural alienation (Curie, 1974: 108). What has been less evident, is that the implication of arts and music in spirituality (apart from probably contributing to the music's ability to strengthen social coherence) are also an indication of their inherent functionality, not incompatible with, but often reliant on its aesthetic features.

Expanding on the relationship of the Romantic ideology of Art and its ability to help counter-act a sense of alienation, it seems that for many, music has acted as "spiritual" in the sense of providing access to "another world" ([1973] 2000: 27), one that is sheltered from immediate economic concerns. As Behr et al outline at the end of their detailed study of the cultural value of live music, as expressed by "different kinds of people who are pulled into the orbit of a concert venue" (2014: 416), in this case Queen's Hall in Edinburgh:

*Our respondents were clear that they went to music to forget about monetary concerns and to have a transcendent experience (...). There was a clear sense from our research that engaging with art was part of what it is to be truly human insofar as it gives meaning to a wider range of often more quotidian experiences. Any policy which fails to recognise this is unlikely to assist the Queen's Hall or, indeed, anyone else (ibid).*

**"EVEN THE IDEA  
THAT MUSIC  
CAN PROVIDE  
A PROFOUND  
AESTHETIC  
EXPERIENCE  
NEEDS IN NO  
WAYS CONTRAST  
WITH ITS ABILITY  
TO OPERATE IN  
OTHER SOCIALLY  
OR INDIVIDUALLY  
MEANINGFUL  
WAYS. IN FACT,  
THE AESTHETIC  
VALUE OF MUSIC  
OFTEN ENABLES  
ITS OTHER  
CULTURAL WORK"**

This is a powerful claim of relevance to those involved in matters of cultural management as well as cultural policy. I only disagree with Behr et al in their implication that this is a statement that moves policy away from questions of instrumentality (ibid.). Rather, it moves arts policy and cultural policy more firmly towards it. The "only" issue is that instrumentality should not be understood in clearly quantifiable or direct monetary terms, because this might end up "counting culture to death" (Phiddian, Meyrick, Barnett & Maltby, 2017: 174). Of course, we have implied that even long-term economic growth might result from an engagement with social cohesion, which music may partially supply. However, it seems to be part of the many paradoxes which music can help to unite, that this function – as many others here mentioned – may actually become undermined if monetary (and arguably other, easily quantifiable) results become the key focus of music policy.

## Conclusion

The present article has thus shown that it seems fairly easy to cognitively undo the split between the idea of artistic autonomy vs. the instrumentality, especially with regard to music and some important writings focused on predominantly ethnomusicological inquiries. It has been manifested that many musical traditions around the world regard music as essentially instrumental, in the sense that it is expected to fulfil a number of crucial physical, mental, social and spiritual functions. In fact, it seems that in the West, the notion of (hierarchically) separating functional from autonomous music (as indeed in the arts in general) is also "simply" part of the socio-cultural changes occurring during Romanticism. However, it has been argued that even the notion that "lower" music is instrumental and "higher" music is simply valuable in its own right is inconsistent, as arguments in favour

of the latter were also instrumental but addressing "higher needs". Thus, it is not even really an argument between instrumental and non-instrumental music, but between the kinds of functions which music – and the arts in general – is/are expected to fulfil. Indeed, as manifested, even the idea that music can provide a profound aesthetic experience needs in no ways contrast with its ability to operate in other socially or individually meaningful ways. In fact, the aesthetic value of music often enables its other cultural work.

The article has thus presented an argument in favour of instrumentalism but understood not in the narrow sense of making music supply easily quantifiable (economic) benefits. On the contrary. Even though I do not believe it possible, or even desirable to keep the musical sphere strictly apart from the economic, it seems necessary to at least partially safeguard music as "another space", one that can – in many physical, mental, social and spiritual ways – help to make "this" space a more livable one. Nevertheless, caution should nevertheless be taken by cultural policies to (further) explore the full, functional potential of music, without, however, supporting the functions of (gender, social, "racial" etc.) exclusion, which are also inherent in many musical traditions around the world, including the West.

Finally, even though the present article has not been able to offer more than a glimpse of many complex issues, it hopes to have served to underpin the value that a culturally diverse perspective may grant debates on cultural policy. For, in our ever increasing age of diversity, I believe – with Shiner – that: "Instead of simply assimilating the arts of traditional African or Native American cultures" – one may add here, "and others" – "to European norms in the patronizing belief that we pay them a compliment, we need to learn from their very different understanding of the arts and their place in society" (2001: 7).

## REFERENCES

- ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND. (2019). Why art and culture matters. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/make-case-art-and-culture/why-art-and-culture-matters>
- BAEKER, G. (2002). Sharpening the Lens: Recent Research on Cultural Policy, Cultural Diversity, and Social Cohesion. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 27 (2), 179-196.
- BECK, G. L. (2006). Introduction. In: Beck, G. L. (ed). *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions* (pp. 1 – 27) Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- BEHR, A.; BRENNAN, M.; CLOONAN, A. (2014). Cultural value and cultural policy: some evidence from the world of live music. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 22 (3), 403-418.
- BELFIORE, E.; BENNETT, O. (2008). *The Social Impact of the Arts – An Intellectual History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- BELFIORE, E.; BENNETT, O. (2010). Beyond the "Toolkit Approach": Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy Making. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 14 (2), 121-142.
- BLACKING, J. (2000 [1973]). *How Musical is Man?* London and Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- BOWIE, A. (2009). Romanticism and music. In Saul, N. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism* (pp. 243 – 256) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CARROLL, N. (2000). Art and ethical criticism: An overview of recent directions of research. *Ethics*, 110 (2), 350-87.
- CHIBICI-REVNEANU, C. (2011). A Masculine Circle – *The Charter Myth of Genius and its Effects on Women Writers*. Doctoral thesis: University of Warwick, UK.
- CHIBICI-REVNEANU, C. (2016). The ideology of artistic vocation an implicit cultural policy? *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 24 (1), 103-120
- COMMISSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY. (2019). Culture, Spirituality and Conservation (CSC). Available at: <https://www.iucn.org/commissions/commission-environmental-economic-and-social-policy/our-work/culture-spirituality-and-conservation>
- CURIE, R. (1974). *Genius – An Ideology in Literature*. New York: Schocken Books.

- DRAGOLOV, G.; IGNÁCZ, Z.S.; LORENZ, J.; DELHEY, J.; BOEHNKE, K.; UNZICKER, K. (2016). *Social Cohesion in the Western World: What Holds Societies Together: Insights from the Social Cohesion Radar*. Cham: Springer.
- DURKHEIM, E. (1912). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London and New York: The Free Press.
- FRITH, S. (1996a). Music and Identity. In Hall, S. & Du Gay, P. (eds.). *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 108-127). London: Sage Publishing.
- FRITH, S. (1996b [1987]). Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music. In Leppert, R.; McClary, S. (eds.). *Music and Society – The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (pp. 133-150) New York: Cambridge University Press.
- GIBSON, L. (2008). In defence of instrumentality. *Cultural Trends*, 17 (4), 247-257.
- HADLEY, S.; GRAY, C. (2017). Hyperinstrumentalism and cultural policy: means to an end or an end to meaning? *Cultural Trends*, 26(2), 95-106.
- HALBWACHS, M. (1992). *On Collective Memory*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.
- HUNT, K. (2000). India. Hindustani instrumental music. Ragas to riches. In Broughton, S.; Ellingham, M. (eds.). *The Rough Guide, World Music: Latin and North America, Caribbean, India, Asia and Pacific. An A-Z of the Music, Musicians and Discs* (Vol. 2, pp. 70-78) London: The Rough Guide.
- JEANNOTTE, M. S. (2003). Singing alone? The contribution of cultural capital to social cohesion and sustainable communities. *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 9 (1), 35-49.
- KARTOMI, M. J. (1980). Musical Strata in Sumatra, Java and Bali. In May, E. (ed.). *Musics of Many Cultures* (pp. 111-133) Berkeley: University of California Press.
- KOELSCH, S. (2013) From social contact to social cohesion. *Music and Medicine*, 5 (4), 204-209. Available at: <http://mmd.iammonline.com/index.php/musmed/article/view/MMD-2013-5-4-3>
- MALINOWSKI, B. (1974). *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. Westport: Negro Universities Press.
- MARTÍ PEREZ, J. (2000). *Más allá del arte: la música como generadora de realidades sociales. [Beyond art, music as a generator of social realities]*. Barcelona: Deriva.
- MCCLARY, S. (1996). The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year. In Leppert, R.; McClary, S. (eds.). *Music and Society – The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (pp. 13-62) New York: Cambridge University Press.
- MEIJ, J. M.; PROBSTFIELD, M. D.; SIMPSON, J. M.; KNOTTNERUS, D. J. (2013). Moving Past Violence and Vulgarity: Structural Ritualization and Constructed Meaning in the Heavy Metal Subculture. In Towe Horsfall, S.; Meij, J.M.; Probstfield, M.D. (eds.). *Music Sociology: Examining the Role of Music in Social Life* (pp. 60-69) New York: Routledge.
- MERRIAM, A. P. (1964). *The Anthropology of Music*. St. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. (e-book).
- MILLER, T. E.; SHAHRIARI, A. (2012) *World Music – A Global Journey*. Third edition. New York: Routledge.
- NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS. (2013). U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and National Endowment for the Arts Release Preliminary Report on Impact of Arts and Culture on U.S. Economy. Available at: <https://www.arts.gov/news/2013/us-bureau-economic-analysis-and-national-endowment-arts-release-preliminary-report-impact>
- NETTL, B. (2015). *The Study of Ethnomusicology - 33 Discussions* (3rd ed.). Chicago, Urbana: University of Illinois. (e-book).
- NISBETT, M. (2013). New perspectives on instrumentalism: An empirical study of cultural diplomacy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy Studies*, 19 (5), 557-575.

- O'BRIEN, D. (2010). Measuring the value of culture: a report to the Department for Culture Media and Sport. *Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Economic & Social Research Council; Arts & Humanities Research Council*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/77933/measuring-the-value-culture-report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/77933/measuring-the-value-culture-report.pdf)
- OLSON, D. A. (1980). Symbol and function in South American Indian music. In May, E. (ed), (pp. 363-385). *Musics of Many Cultures*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- PHIDDIAN, R.; MEYRICK, J.; BARNETT, T.; MALTBY, R. (2017). Counting culture to death: An Australian perspective on culture counts and quality metrics. *Cultural Trends*, 26 (2), 174-180.
- ROWSON, J. (2013). The brains behind spirituality. RSA. Available at: <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2013/07/the-brains-behind-spirituality>
- ROWSON, J. (2014). Can spirituality inform public policy? Yes, no, and maybe. RSA. Available at: <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2014/09/can-spirituality-inform-public-policy-yes-no-and-maybe>
- SHINER, L. (2001). *The Invention of Art – A Cultural History*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- STREET, J. (2013). Music, markets and manifestos. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19 (3), 281-297.
- SUTTIE, J. (2015). Can music help keep memory alive? *Greater Good Magazine – Science-Based Insights for a Meaningful Life*. Available at: [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can\\_music\\_help\\_keep\\_memory\\_alive](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can_music_help_keep_memory_alive)
- THE SOCIETY OF ETHNOMUSICOLOGY. (2017). What is Ethnomusicology? Available at: <https://www.ethnomusicology.org/page/FAQs#whatethno>
- THETFORD, K. (2013). Does art help the economy? Fearing budget cuts, Britain's culture secretary made an unusual case: That art begets economic growth. *The Atlantic*. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/07/does-art-help-economy/277842/-the->
- THROSBY, D. (2001). *Economics and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- VESTHEIM, G. (1994). Instrumental Cultural Policy in Scandinavian Countries: A Critical Historical Perspective. *The European Journal of Cultural Policy*, 1(1), 57-71.

To cite this article: \_\_\_\_\_

CHIBICI-REVNEANU, C. (2019). Un-mind the gap: questioning the division between artistic instrumentalism and autonomy from an ethnomusicological perspective. *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 9 (2), pp. 4-16.



## **ENCATC IS THE EUROPEAN NETWORK ON CULTURAL MANAGEMENT AND POLICY.**

It is an independent membership organisation gathering over 100 higher education institutions and cultural organisations in over 40 countries. ENCATC was founded in 1992 to represent, advocate and promote cultural management and cultural policy education, professionalise the cultural sector to make it sustainable, and to create a platform of discussion and exchange at the European and international level.

ENCATC holds the status of an NGO in official partnership with UNESCO, of observer to the Steering Committee for Culture of the Council of Europe, and is co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

Avenue Maurice 1

1050 Brussels,

Belgium

T + 32 (0)2 201 29 12

[info@encatc.org](mailto:info@encatc.org)

[www.encatc.org](http://www.encatc.org)



Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union