

“As Long as the Boat Goes”: Singing by Metaphor in the Years of Lead

By Pier Paolo Bellini*

“There is everything in the Sixties ... it is a phase of magmatic confrontation” (Colombo 1998, p. 248). Those that in Italy will be called “years of lead”, marked by the well known dramatic social and cultural changes, claim the tension of real “worlds” and “point of view of worlds” alternative, a new and an old no longer reconcilable, but forced to cohabit. The Italian song of those years is a photograph of this situation: in it, old aspirations, imaginary, values face each other with new ones, without getting to definitively eliminate the antagonists. If it is true that the text of the most famous “ditty” of the Italian singer Orietta Berti is able to make people talk about its hidden meaning even today, it must be admitted that the musical creation of those years is a forge of “polysemic” production. “Where there is metaphor, there is conflict” (Goodman 1968, p. 67). Even in its narrative function, the metaphor presents conflict: it can have, in fact, a “selective” function or, on the contrary, an “explanatory” function, aimed at favoring the understanding of obscure things, those not easily communicable through the usual narrative practices.

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The “Stigmatized” Creativity

The sociology of cultural processes must recover many years of inattention to a certain type of “expressiveness”, considered (due to the heavy inheritance of the humanistic tradition) production of “low interest” at a qualitative level: of course, the differences are relevant and stating that “everything is the same” is not a sign of scientific expertise. De facto, however, every discipline must deal with its object of study: artistic value can be “evaluated” by philosophy, aesthetics, history or art. This does not change the fact that, whatever level a product is able to reach, it represents a “cultural object”, that is a bearer of meaning. The production of the so-called “cultural industry” (in our case, that one linked to popular music) presents itself today as a very rich repository of information on the aesthetic and values “environment/fields” of our cultural history. This is true despite the “stigma” (more or less justified) that it carries with itself since its birth, in the first half of the 20th century.

Dwight MacDonald certainly gave the most stigmatizing definition of American cultural industrial production: it is labeled as Masscult, making it clear that it is not about culture, but rather a “parody” of the High Culture. The characteristic of this parody is that of not offering its customers “neither an emotional catharsis nor an aesthetic experience, because these things require

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effort. The production chain grinds a uniform product whose humble purpose is not even entertainment, because this also presupposes life, and therefore effort, but simply distraction. It can be stimulating or narcotic, but it must be easy to assimilate. It asks his audience nothing, because he is 'completely subject to the viewer'. And it gives nothing" (MacDonald 1960, p. 21).

It should be actually noticed, that already thirteen years before, Theodor Adorno (with much more refined aesthetic and philosophical instruments) had been focused precisely on the "diversionary" function of American cultural production, according to a radically negative perspective of the experience of "having fun". "To have fun means to agree. Having fun means every time: not having to think about it, forgetting suffering even where it is exposed and displayed. At the base of fun there is a feeling of powerlessness. It is indeed an escape" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2010, p. 154).

The German philosopher and sociologist (great connoisseur of musical language) had gone on to investigate the mechanisms of this "depressive" process of expressivity, highlighting in particular that consumer music would not have the spread and success it gets without what in America it is called plugging. The songs chosen to become successful pieces are continuously imposed, "hammered into the heads of the listeners until they have to recognize them and then love them" (Adorno 1962, p. 42).

The feeling, therefore, that the musical product is in some way "predigested" generates mass listening habits that "do not imply any intellectual commitment. Furthermore, the familiarity of melodies tends to reassure users, reducing the perception of conflicts and critical capacity" (Savonardo 2010, p. 54).

But, something, at the same times in the 1960s, begins to change from the point of view of the analytical horizon of the social sciences: Umberto Eco is certainly one of the first intellectuals that offers an alternative frame to the dominant one at that time. The well-known Italian semiologist and writer confirms the "diversionary" purpose of industrial cultural production: "One of the characteristics of a consumer product is that it amuses not revealing something new, but reaffirming what we already know, which we anxiously awaited to hear repeated and which just amuses us" (Eco 1965, p. 280). This "fun", however, can provide very useful information to the scholar of culture, who must, in order to respect his scientific mandate, have to do with this type of production: "One of the objections to such research is to have put in place an exaggerated cultural apparatus to speak of things of least importance, like a Superman's cartoon or a Rita Pavone's ditty. Now, the sum of these minimal messages that accompany our daily life constitutes the most visible cultural phenomenon of the civilization in which we are called to work" (Eco 1965, p. 26).

This "possibilist" attitude is based on the observation that, beyond the discordant evaluative orientations of scholars in industrial cultural production, the separation between high culture and low culture tends to be reduced. The spread of culture "no longer occurs according to a pyramid structure for which a narrow vertex elaborates tastes and values that, once consumed and become obsolete, are made their own from the base (the so-called trickle-down model), but rather it reproduces the model of a mosaic culture" (Abruzzese and Borelli 2000, p. 137).

The consequence of this “directional” change is the diffusion of a new type of culture, a new type of influence and new strategies and persuasion dynamics. For the baby boomer generation the media were the main producers of “subtle culture”, so-called “because breathed everywhere, discussed among equals, caught between the folds of high culture still absorbed and looked at with respect. For the first time there was a ‘youthful world’ abstracted from the adult world [...]. The ‘youthful world’ thus became what it is today, that is, a ‘galaxy’ in which even contradictory trends coexist and clash” (Colombo 1998, p. 242).

This “subtle culture”, generally “light” in its contents, nevertheless had a very significant impact on the way of “feeling the reality” of an entire generation and, inevitably, of the following ones: “Perhaps the student movement cannot be understood without taking into account the substantially romantic subtle culture (in the broad sense) that had permeated that generation. Indeed, perhaps, the romantic aura of the first phase of the protest is explained precisely by that cultural tradition, naturally updated and embodied in the needs of that present time” (Colombo 1998, p. 270).

For this reason, mass culture has been interpreted as the “mythological device of the twentieth century”, that is, “a system of meaning that, on the imaginary level, reflects, elaborates and communicates normative ideals and behavior patterns of everyday life. As all mythology even mass culture has its own heroes, rituals and divinities” (Abruzzese and Borelli 2000, p. 189).

And like all the good mythologies, even the one produced by mass culture has found itself having to deal with previous and subsequent mythologies. This struggle for the supremacy and the monopoly of representations is extraordinarily interesting for the scholar of cultural processes. When the “sacred” ganglia of a society are attacked, this latter battens down the hatches. This creates a war of representative powers, in which the “metaphorical” dimension becomes a fundamental weapon for the survival of the minority ideology.

The “Censored” Creativity

If the vast majority of industrial cultural production is therefore stigmatized because of its “lightness”, it is true that in some cases, such lightness is produced with great formal expertise to “veil” uncomfortable depths. The ancient custom of “censorship” is extremely interesting for the sociologist. Through it, in fact, we have always tried to “preserve” (more or less legitimately and more or less effectively) the values of the entire social system. In Italy, this preservative action is legally formalized in the somewhat uncertain concept of “good costume”: it is necessary (as Durkheim well understood) that the boundary between “sacred” and “profane” is marked with (variable) precision for a society to exist. For this reason, in the Italian Constitution we rely on this fundamental concept that is ever more mutable because, clearly, the identification of its content cannot take place without referring to the social context existing in a certain historical period and, immediately afterwards, to the principles and to the ethical-social values that belong to that society-community. Therefore, “good costume” can be filled with

correct contents only in reference to the historical-social-moral contingency of a community.

The ancient custom of the censorship has therefore arrived (in a process of uninterrupted "updating") up to our days and, in the years that concern us here, has had a strong influence on musical creativity. In that period in Italy an institute was created that "was not called 'censorship commission', because the memory of the fascist one was too close, but 'preventive listening and control commission on the texts', which were to be considered suitable for the radio public" (Targa 2011, p. 8). The "lightness" of contents and forms, in fact, in this case was considered not as a limit but rather as a real quality, in the belief (Dario Fo points out) that "nothing is needed to sing. No need to be educated or graduated. You don't need to know how to read or know how to write. You don't even need a good voice. Perhaps this is why so many songs, those born under the table, on the street, in the fields, in factories and in other unfortunate places, have always been so afraid of power and its thugs. Poor, illegitimate ditties, with a common blood: red, lively and vigorous. Strong and inextricable like the bad grass, they always appear everywhere, in the deserts and in the cities, in the East and in the West" (Fo in Korpe 2004, p. ix).

It is within this conflictive situation that the communication strategy at the center of this study should be placed, that which is indicated with the expression "writing between the lines". One of the main functions of the "metaphorical" communication is that of "veiling" inconvenient or inadmissible contents due to the current "good costume". Already in the seventeenth century, the intellectuals who wanted to give a broader resonance to their ideas or aimed at cultural hegemony underwent "the path of publication protected by the necessary precautions and by adequate rhetorical screens. Thus, in the humanistic age, an art of dissimulation and of dissimulated writing on the subject of specific treatments was codified in specific rhetorical techniques" (Frajese 2014, p. 70).

Interesting, from this point of view, the "countermeasures" of the dominant culture of each era: in the sixteenth century, "the screens and ambiguities of writing were well known to judges who, for this reason, demanded texts that were always transparent and not leave room for doubt or effective defensive barriers. And in order for ambiguity not to be a convenient resource for writers, judges presumed a hostile sense behind the ambiguous expressions" (Frajese 2014, p. 83). It is humorous the recent version of this strategy, as a result of which, in 1968, the El Paso radio station in Texas censors all Bob Dylan's songs because they were "too difficult to understand": "The broadcaster is afraid that, in the verses, offensive or illegal messages are hiding. It is true that Dylan splutters a little too much and those who are not native speakers find it hard to understand it, but it is surprising that, having censored him, his covers, his songs performed by other artists, were broadcast in the American broadcaster's programming. Perhaps it was Dylan's somewhat hen and nasal voice that disturbed?" (Targa 2011, p. 144).

As you will have guessed, the key problem of what has been outlined so far is concentrated in the meaning and in the dynamics linked to the concept of "sense", inherent in any symbolic practice: it is therefore necessary to try to clarify its semantic profile.

Sense, Meaning, Polysemy

Is art communication? Is it capable of producing meanings? If it is, which ones and how?

The Italian sociologist Franco Crespi uses, to clarify these dynamics, the distinction between “sense” and “meaning”, a distinction that can be useful to identify basic symbolic strategies for the objects we are analyzing. According to the author, the first dimension (sense) coincides with “the original pre-reflective environment” (needs, stimuli, emotions), within the conscious reflexivity of the subject is realized. It is what is given as a biological and relational structure, and being “given” does not allow the ultimate awareness of its origin. “It is existence itself that, giving itself, gives meaning: for the simple fact that something is given, it necessarily gives sense” (Crespi 2005, p. 25). Our reflexivity is inevitably brought to question the sense, or, if you want, directionality of existence, without nevertheless being able to comprehend it comprehensively on a cognitive level. Therefore, it can be deduced from these passages, a little provocatively, that “sense” can be considered a “non-cultural” element.

The culturally determined meaning, instead, “being always a reduction of the complexity of the original sense, fails to say completely the latter, but only to approximate or indirectly allude to it. The sense remains rigorously unattainable, not traceable within the meanings, even if it is always lived by us. For this reason, with respect to the sense there is always a dimension of unspoken, a difference irreducible to meanings” (Crespi 2005, p. 26). The peculiarity of the creative symbolic dynamics (as we will explain later) is precisely that of trying in every way to avoid the “predictability”, the “uniqueness”, the ease of “meaning”, aspiring instead to something more vague, unattainable and therefore more challenging and fascinating: the “sense”.

This perspective perfectly matters, on the one hand, the complex condition of musical communication and, on the other hand, the exponentially and dangerously “polysemic” situation that is created with the overlapping of multiple expressive codes. When one approaches, as in our case, the analysis of the text of a song, it is necessary not to be naive in front of the objective “complexity” of the operation (regardless of the qualitative level of the object analyzed). In fact, among the problems that content analysis must face up, “the most relevant ones concern the difficulties deriving from the opposition between ‘manifest’ content and ‘latent’ content, from the de-contextualization made by analytical procedures that isolate simple units of content in the messages, from the failed or intuitive reference to the specificity of the codes and their overlap and intertwine in any message that is not a written text” (Losito 1993, p. 30).

A song represents a “superposition” of stimuli and “communicative” codes (verbal, non-verbal, visual, acoustic, corporeal...) whose final meaning does not coincide with their sum but rather with their complex interaction. Even the verbal language used in it “does everything”, as we will see, to get rid of the referential cage in which it is forced in everyday or scientific use. The music then, means “in another way”, as Alfred Schutz had already guessed in the sociological field: if it can be said that a piece of music represents “a context with meaning”, it will be

necessary to clarify that, applied to music "the terms 'meaning' and 'context', 'understanding' and 'interpretation' are used in a specific way, different from other systems of meaning such as languages" (Schutz 1976, p. 29).

If logic, in fact, has always been mainly a science of concepts, when you face the question of musical signification, you are forced to admit that "music is an example of a context endowed with meaning without reference to a conceptual scheme and, strictly speaking, also without immediate reference to the objects of the world in which we live, to their properties and their functions. Music has no representative function" (Schutz 1976, p. 30).

Another extremely challenging aspect, when we want to analyze the communicative dynamics of music, is the decisive function carried out by the "affective" element. The American philosopher and composer Leonard B. Meyer (reference point for later musicology and sociology) considers that the affective and intellectual approaches to musical enjoyment are not alternative. They rather "are competitors not in the sense that one excludes the other, but in the sense that both contribute to defining the profile of the aesthetic experience of music" (Meyer 1956, p. 12). The communication mode proper to music does not, therefore, consist in its denotative or referential (almost absent) potential, but rather in its evocative power of richly polysemic connotations. "The fact that music does not specify or define in particular the connotations it evokes, it has often been called into question as the main obstacle encountered in the attempt to formulate a theory of the connotative meanings of music" (Meyer 1956, p. 336).

However, we could say that, if polysemy is an essential characteristic of musical language, it presents itself as the objective of any other code aimed at expressiveness or creativity: even in the specific of verbal communication (the most harnessed in referentiality). "The poetic message uses the terms on purpose so that their referential function is altered; to do this it puts the terms into syntactical relationships that contravene the usual rules of the code; it eliminates the redundancies so that the position and the referential function of a term can be interpreted in several ways; it eliminates the possibility of unambiguous decoding; it gives the decoder the feeling that the current code is violated in such a way that it no longer serves to decode the message [...]. The work of art is proposed as a message whose decoding involves an adventure, precisely because it strikes us through a way of organizing the signs that the usual code did not include" (Eco 1965, pp. 94 and 100).

Let's try to put these points of method in the specific of our analysis carried out on the songs (on their "sense"), adding to what has been observed other problems not sufficiently highlighted in the authors encountered.

Let's start, as stated, from the fact that in the song there is a complex encounter/clash between verbal code (at constant risk of reference) and non-verbal codes (inevitably further from that risk). From the first experience in the field, the purely empirical one, it is to wonder if the classical available analytical categories of sign (index, icon, symbol, according to the traditional classification of Charles Sanders Peirce) are effective tools in situations of such strong interaction between symbolic different codes: it is to hypothesize, in fact, that the signs belonging to a given code undergo a sort of mutation at the point of encounter with another code.

Another consideration that came up from the analytical work is that a cultural product like a song, with its many functional and interpretative sides, offers a more or less accentuated measure of a hierarchy of “possible and differentiated levels of interpretation”, all plausible even autonomously. That is, it is possible to enjoy the simple aesthetic, emotional, ideological, verbal, stimulating effect of a song without considering the interaction that occurs between these different elements. At the same time, however, it is necessary to recognize that the most interesting levels of information are often the least immediate. In other words, it is clear that, if you do not “put your mind to it”, it becomes very difficult to understand “a part” of meaning (sometimes the most decisive for the identity of the song itself). It often happens, then, to be surprised discovering inedited “senses” of known passages, consumed and re-consumed without nicking that depth that was just below the surface. Well-known songs destined for a long time to remain in their state of message in a bottle. The phenomenon already mentioned of plugging, in other words, can represent a very resistant obstacle to the reconstruction of the less superficial sense of a piece. From this point of view it is evident that, in the great majority of cases, the “memorized” lyrics are often those “less understood”.

Moreover, it is a common experience that the text of a piece (i.e., the most referential aspect among the many present) hardly, especially among young people, comes to be perceived as “essential” in order to appreciate a song. On the other hand, as we will see, the authors themselves frequently, use the words “regardless” of their meaning, that is, only as “verbal sounds” on musical sounds.

Having thus clarified that the sense of a song does not coincide with (and cannot be reduced to) the verbal logic, it becomes easier to understand the provocative statement of Igor Stravinsky for whom “music means nothing”. This paradoxical expression cannot be read as an attribution of a non-sense intrinsic to the code of sounds, but rather as a multiplication of opportunities for a “different” sense from a simple “meaning”.

What are these meaningful strategies that we could identify?

First of all, as mentioned above, the meaning can derive from only one of the used codes, but it can be nevertheless emergent outcome from a multimedia and multi-sensory experience. Here we could introduce, metaphorically, some linguistic approximations to be able to describe the complexity of the interactions in place. It is possible, for example, to talk about a “sense of sensations”, or even about a “centrality of the belly” in the interpretative act (perhaps this is the sense of the colorful expression used by Franco Ferrarotti in 1985: *homo sentiens*). We intend to say that perhaps the frequent disqualification of the “feeling” as a semantic instrument must be reconsidered, since it represents a way of “feeling” things rich in information to be decoded. This centrality of sensation had already been underlined by Rudolf Arnheim, German art historian and psychologist, according to whom, with effective paradox, “who paints, who writes, who composes or dances, thinks through his own senses” (Arnheim 1974, p. ix).

Among the different levels of meaning, we must consider the one linked to the “functions” of the musical piece: each of us “uses” music for different purposes, aims/goals, in turn, more or less compatible. These purposes of the recipient can be configured in a coherent way with the contents and styles of the song but,

sometimes (often), even regardless of the contents wanted by the author. We must not forget that the research on the reception has the purpose of "finding how people give meaning to a particular media product" (Sorice 2007, p. 86), not defining what is the most plausible sense of the product itself. From this point of view, symbolic dynamics emerge that are non-existent in other expressive codes, but strongly incident on the meaning of a musical piece. Let us only think about the rhythm (so intrusive, cheeky, repetitive in light music) and how this extraordinarily communicative dimension is linked to pre-reflexive and reactive dynamics.

Different as a process, but similar in terms of the impossibility of categorical definition, is the "empathic" dimension of the musical experience. Each of us lives, even at a communicative level, a particular relationship with other people, understanding immediately some of them, refusing the comparison with others. The same (and certainly even in a more stressed way) happens with the songs, their lyrics, their music and, above all, their "interpreters". If I listen to a song that I do not know of Mina, I will be led to reconstruct its meaning based on the type of empathic relationship I established by listening to her interpretations for years. It is appropriate here to recall the enormous expressive value of the human voice, regardless of its artistic use. The word emission is a fast but complex result of a skilful management of many parameters, such as the paralinguistics, the vocal segregated, the timbre (unique and unrepeatable for anyone), the volume of the sound, the speed of speech, etc. To understand the decisive value of these aspects it is sufficient to bring to mind the sometimes abysmal difference of the same song played by different artists: in certain cases, one has the perception of being in front of different objects, with consequent different meanings.

Another interesting factor in order to identify the potential of a song's sense is the phenomenon of pieces that "rise again" after years of forgetfulness, as if they had preserved a life on their own under the ashes of their abandonment, to reaffirm themselves decades later (clearly in a setting of meaning inevitably changed). A similar phenomenon is the very widespread one of the covers, more or less known pieces re-entered the market with new clothes (from the voice, to the arrangement, to the organic...) often assuming real "new identities": sometimes these processes operate on one of the codes used to create a discrepancy between music (genre and style) and text. In these cases a new object is generated that takes on parodistic or metaphorical features. In any case, new objects.

To sum up, the sense of a song is the result of a complex process, with many signs and codes available and with many subjects in action. For this reason, we could define the meaning of a musical piece as an "emerging phenomenon", i.e., as the outcome of the interaction of different subjects (author, performer, singer, listener) who cooperate and negotiate among themselves, without anyone being able to claim its absolute ownership in the end. Indeed the song (like any "text") can be defined as "a strange spinning top that exists when it is in motion. To give birth to it, it is necessary a concrete act that is called reading, and it lasts as long as reading can last" (Sartre 1947, p. 33). The song therefore presents itself as a treacherous field for scientific research being inextricably linked to the "connotative" activity of the recipient.

The Metaphor and its Sound

When you operate in a creative communication framework, you always find yourself having to deal with “noise”. We could say that every art form is the result of a “noise controlled”. Basically this is what distinguishes it from scientific discourse or everyday conversation, which perceive noise as a problem, essentially negative. Now, the operation of the imagination, as the writer Alberto Moravia called it, can be clear and rational, but it is always a bit ambiguous; instead, “the scientific one is not: if it says one thing, it must be that and nothing else. It is the type of language that assures the literary work the ambiguity of which art cannot do without” (Camon 1973, p. 21). It is certainly not a recent discovery: we can consider all the classical rhetoric (and not only the linguistic one) a sort of “encyclopedia of noise”, with its figures, its rules, its limits.

The most promising noise in the arts is probably the “metaphor”. One can try to clarify what a metaphor is using a splendid series of metaphors. It “is something like teaching new tricks to an old word ... it is a matter that takes place between a predicate with a past and an object that condescends by protesting ... where there is a metaphor, there is conflict” (Goodman 1968, it. transl. 1976, p. 67).

The metaphor's desired results can be of two types: the first is the “selective” one. The whole classical literary tradition is based on more or less “dedicated” codes to a more or less restricted reference audience. What is widely diffused becomes vulgar. Consequently, precious things cannot be accessible to everyone, as the troubadour Raimbaut explicitly states: “Because the most difficult lines make deaf the silly people”. Other times, as we have seen, the metaphor was a necessary tool not just to defend elitist cultural values, but rather to protect one's own safety put at risk by the ideology conveyed. “There are such well-protected writings that they certainly keep the author safe from every inquisition but at the price of losing all incidence on the public and being reduced to a coded language addressed to very restricted circles of initiates” (Frajese 2014, p. 73).

However, this selective function of the metaphor coexists, with the exactly opposite function. Let us take as an example the “evangelical metaphors”: the parables are justified with the consideration “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand” or also “though hearing, they do not hear or understand”. This somewhat extravagant connection makes us understand the second sought outcome of the metaphor. Not to exclude, but rather to give the possibility to understand things that otherwise would be completely incomprehensible. Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as “a way of conceiving one thing in terms of another”; it should have “understanding” as its primary function. This process takes place whenever we, through the metaphor, “transfer, dimensions that are known to us in our practical experience to dimensions that by their nature appear to us to be far less easily definable” (Crespi 2005, p. 19). We could say that it is an obscure speech because it speaks of obscure or confused things, which can only be approached “metaphorically”, by linking them to something more familiar. This, perhaps, is the main peculiarity of artistic languages, even if, precisely because the clash with “obscure and confused” things is actually a daily practice, we can say

that "the metaphor enters into all our ways of thinking about reality" (Crespi 2005, p. 21).

Let us now see, in an inevitably partial and temporary manner, a list of metaphorical situations frequently used in the Italian song of the years of lead, between 1968 and 1977, specifying that our sample is built on the "best selling" songs, that is "probably" the most popular ones because "probably" the most ones listened to.

One of the most widespread creative phenomena in Italy in that period is the "translation/transfiguration" of foreign pieces in Italian. In most cases, these are real "remakes" through which the original "sense" is radically disregarded: by enforcing the evocative power of music and exploiting its inherent polysemy and its lack of referentiality, it is possible to create products that "sound the same" but "say" totally different things. It is thus that a heartfelt evocation (Greek) of the homeland can become a passionate declaration of love (Italian) for a woman, while a moving invocation to God (American) becomes a real hymn to the "nihilism" of living for today.

Another metaphorical strategy is the "decisive" function of connotation: some songs "cannot be understood" if we are not given an "external" interpretative key to the text, which is not explicit and cannot be reconstructed through a careful textual analysis. It is impossible, in some cases, to reconstruct episodes and personal memories of life if the author does not intervene (ex post) to explain them. It is impossible to understand that a certain letter described in a song was dictated by "a prisoner" (something not declared anywhere in the text, but that radically changes its meaning, once explained by the author). It is impossible to understand that a text speaks of three different women (a nun, a prostitute and a single mother), if it had not been subsequently explained by the author; it is impossible that the "heart that flies" does not do it like the 99% of the known songs, because this time it takes flight to reach the singer's wife who died in childbirth. There is no explanation of this in the interstices of the text, but, once the thing is known, the text is irreparably revolutionized.

It is a true "semantic revolution" and, consequently, even a sensorial one. A melody with typical childish characters (recently used also in an advertisement for melted cheese slices), getting to know that it actually tells a fact of chronicle of pedophilia ended with a suicide: at the following listening, the contradiction between the implicated codes becomes a sort of excruciating discrasia. The "sense", once identified and made explicit, is also able to distort the "sensory" perception of the piece (especially for the listener who is used to "hum" what he hears, making it his own). Once "the truth" is known, it is no longer possible not to reckon with it: the awareness that what has always been considered a nostalgic song for a girl left for the military service is instead the punctual and passionate description of a homosexual love, which is ended with the suicide of the protagonist, makes it impossible to go back, to the first serene sensation.

Certainly, sexuality is one of the most statistically "metaphorized" aspects of existence (also due to the consequences of not respecting the "good costume"): this justifies the rich harvest of metaphors that act as moralizing veils, which mainly affect you in situations in which one does not expect them, for the image of

the singer or for the feature of the piece. Double meanings, allusions or playful frames are the most common strategies for saying what one could not.

Other times the words “seem” metaphors: in reality they are used as “pure sound” among other sounds, they are arranged in “acoustic” order, they are accepted under conditions that are freed from the sense: “A sung text is reduced to its own shadow, when it is fixed on the page” (Fiori 2003, p. 86). The reasons or the occasions of these “non sense” operations can be of various types (very frequent in the Anglo-Saxon pieces): so we meet authors who cannot remember what they meant in that particular text, for the simple fact that they were drunk (and for years they have been trying to remember about it...!); we meet texts that are the simple mechanical and obsessive repetition of a name or an adjective connected to trivial figures (an accountant) or to mythical prehistoric characters, troglodytes; we meet known singers recognizing candidly “that the incomprehensibility of their texts derives from the function of mere filler that these ones play in their songs” (Nobile 2012, p. 25). Only a naive listener could commit to reconstructing the “meaning” of all this!

Finally, there are the “false metaphors”: these are true errors, which, “playing well”, are left there, “meaningless”, just “because they are appreciated” (whether it's Mogol or the Beatles).

Conclusions: The Eternal “Approximation”

“However, from a certain point of view this flexibility of connotation is a virtue. It allows music to express what we might call the immaterial essence of myth, the essence of experiences that are central and vital to human existence” (Meyer 1956, p. 336). The songs, their “metaphorical” communication, can offer man a useful tool, thanks to their remoteness from the everyday and worn-out referential function of language. This makes the communication frame that is created through the production and listening of the songs very special: in fact, “there is communication, Mead points out, only where the interpretation of the gesture is identical on both sides. The listener on the other hand does not necessarily have to put himself on the side of the composer's position” (Meyer 1956, p. 73).

It is therefore possible to state that “in its most authentic forms, the work of art presents itself as an attempt to express a sense, which is unseizable by other forms of knowledge and representation. The peculiarity of the artistic product is thus revealed in the fact that it is an objectification whose function is to show the unobjectifiable, or the proper limit of every form of determination” (Crespi 2010, p. X).

How, then, can “ditties” be a useful tool to overcome the determination? What important goal can they realistically make accessible more easily? Why continuing to produce them and listen to them?

It is useful, at this point, to share with Jean Duvignaud the question about the motivations of the “creative impulse”, that is, to ask oneself about the innate need that has always forced man to produce something “imaginary”. According to the

French sociologist, the perpetuation of this "extravagant" and incessant dynamism shows that "if our substance was actually given to us, and we had it at our fingertips, we would undoubtedly not project us beyond what limits us. But we are insufficient to ourselves" (Duvignaud 1969, p. 134). This "insufficiency" is therefore considered as a non-cultural fact (but a structural one) and as a primary impulse inherent in man to "project himself" beyond what limits him.

The artists, in the great majority, are aware of this dynamic: for the Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, for example, it is demonstrated by experience that between the word and what one wants to say there is always a huge gap, even when it may seem very small: "The language corresponds poorly to what one has in mind and one would like to say: sure, it does not correspond, if not very approximately. I will therefore say that I was looking for the least inaccurate approximation, the reduction, as far as possible, of that unavoidable gap" (Camon 1982, p. 11).

Singing by metaphors is perhaps another way to "get as close as possible", to reduce an uneliminable gap.

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