

« Fictionalizing Populism: a music analysis of recent political journalist soundtracks »

Martin Knust, Linnæus University

Abstract:

Background music in political journalism has a long history. It is as old as audio and audiovisual mass media, that means, about a century. Surprisingly, media and journalism research have virtually ignored this communicative layer in journalism and focused entirely on texts and images. This means, that there are no theories or methods for investigating this kind of mass media music that is heard by millions every day and thus part of a popular culture. This essay is the first attempt from a musicological perspective to get a grip on non-diegetic music in political journalism. It will present the problematic nature of this music that shares features with fictional film music on a surface level. But since it accompanies stories, images and statements that are non-fictional, its function and ontology have to be seen as fundamentally different from feature film music; it is linked to political opinion shaping and the articulation of political programs and does in fact share features with political propaganda on a deeper level.

Keywords: Film music, political journalism, propaganda, non-diegetic music, populism, political campaign, sci-fi and horror soundtrack

Introduction and a very short history of music in the news

Does music belong to political journalism? That is the central question of this essay. It may appear surprising to ask given the fact that there is hardly any awareness, let alone research about it.² Research about journalist texts, imagery and technical design is abundant. Until now, journalist discourses have

¹ This essay is about three short film sequences that are on the internet. These are referred to as example 1 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=251&v=z0Kp1PaQsTU, the youtube channel of the German daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), example 2 (<https://lincolnproject.us/news/how-it-starts/>, the homepage of the Lincoln Project) and example 3 (https://www.cbc.ca/fifth/m_episodes/2015-2016/the-fire-breather-the-rise-and-rage-of-donald-trump, the homepage of the Canadian public service TV channel CBC). It is essential for the reader to watch them to understand analytical details. I would like to thank the Linnæus University Research Center for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (LNUC IMS) for supporting this research project.

² Contributions about this topic are very few of which only two are more extensive: Claudia Wegener: *Informationsvermittlung im Zeitalter der Unterhaltung. Eine Langzeitanalyse politischer Fernsehmagazine*, Westdeutscher Verlag: Opladen 2001; Nicholas Engstrom: « The Soundtrack for War », *Columbia Journalism Review* 2003 no. 1, 45–47; James Deaville: « Selling War: Television News Music and the Shaping of American Public Opinion », *Echo* 8 (2009) <<http://www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume8-Issue1/roundtable/deaville.html>>, retrieved July 29 2020; Anna Eveliina Hänninen: *Journalistinen musiikin käyttö. Analyysi Ajankohtaisen kakkosen inserteissä*, Master Thesis University of Tampere 2014; James Deaville: « Sounding the World. The Role of Music and Sound in Early < Talking > Newsreels », in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, Holly Rogers (ed.), Routledge: New York 2015, 41–55.

been analyzed virtually only based on their words and images³ which is fine when analyzing print media. But what about audio and audio-visual formats of journalism? Developing music theorist James Buhler's statement about film studies further, journalist and media studies suffer from a verbal and visual bias⁴ as they often ignore the auditory nature of audio-visual media which is more than a century old. Music has been there from the very beginning.⁵ In the silent film era, newsreels were accompanied by live music. The soundtrack of sound film newsreels – both those produced for the cinema and for TV⁶ – consisted of the voice of the news speaker and orchestral music from the 1930s through the 1950s. The music accompaniment of newsreels was wall-to-wall – i.e. playing without any interruptions from the beginning through the end – and employed styles, formulae and expressive means of classical music. In the 1950s a paradigm shift occurred and music was virtually banned from news and other broadcast journalist programs; it persisted in journalist documentaries.⁷ This may have happened due to the implementation of new objectivity and neutrality standards in Western journalism that differed from journalism in totalitarian political systems. In the 1970s another double paradigm shift appeared in the daily news bulletins and related genres of TV journalism: gradually music was re-introduced to hard-fact formats like daily news and live reports and this music did increasingly employ popular music genres and styles, for instance, jazz and soul that merged with the classical news music forms of march and fanfare. This re-introduction gained momentum during the 1980s and 1990s and was propelled by private US-American and British networks like CNN and Sky News. Ever since, the amount of music in political journalism has increased continuously both in terms of playing time and genre breadth.

What this essay will analyze is the music soundtracks of recent journalist audio-visual contributions on TV and the web that deal with the rise of far-right populism. There are various genres and sub-genres in journalism⁸ and the claim of objectivity and political neutrality is borne out only in a few of them, if any. A genre which perhaps materializes the ideal of neutrality the most is the evening news on independent public service channels while political magazines tend more towards opinion and advocacy journalism. Documentaries can be openly partisan.

The methodology applied in this essay is taken from the traditions of the Frankfurt School and the Kittler School, which analyzed media like radio, film and recorded music critically. The introduction of these media in the 1920s became the premise for many technical, aesthetic and political revolutions in the 20th century and created a new media landscape. The ongoing digitalization of media will probably have a similar deep impact on societies. The way popular culture is employed, distributed, consumed and produced today differs in many respects from the situation 20 years ago. Following Foucault and Kittler, an analysis of journalist media automatically becomes media archaeology. The technical and institutional means of producing, employing and consuming music in political journalism are changing rapidly and fundamentally and so do the requirements for musical expression and genre. Even though traditional TV news still exists they are losing ground massively. Instead, the internet is becoming the main field for new intermedial forms of journalism. Music is melting into a new compound form of digital communication as Kittler predicted 35 years ago: « Only as surface effect, [...] [as] interface, exist sound and image, voice and text. »⁹

³ « News [...] is literally made of words and pictures », as John Heartley defined it paradigmatically (*Understanding News*, Routledge: London 1982, 5).

⁴ Buhler, James: *Theories of the Soundtrack*, Oxford University Press: New York 2019, xi, 11, 100–101.

⁵ What follows here is the first ever overview over the history of news music in the West. It is based on results that I gained during my ongoing research project and that will be developed more in future publications.

⁶ Cf. the BBC TV news intro in the 1950s, a lively march, with the intros of the 1930s newsreels.

⁷ Generally, documentaries constitute a journalist genre that can be more subjective and partisan than hard-fact formats like daily news, reports or live transmissions. Documentaries will not be included in this essay.

⁸ Deutscher Fachjournalisten-Verband (ed.): *Journalistische Genres*, UVK: Konstanz and Munich 2016.

⁹ Kittler, Friedrich: *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter*, Brinkmann & Bose: Berlin 1986, 6 [my translation].

This essay will select one aspect from this emerging new media landscape and narrow down the specific questions: How does non-diegetic¹⁰ music in TV series and feature films intersect with journalist soundtracks? And how does this background music deliver messages in journalism?

Fictionalizing political communication

One reason why music in political journalism has been hitherto virtually ignored by music scholars may be that it does not constitute a genre on its own.¹¹ Music in journalism instead draws from other styles and genres and is sensitive to new trends. In the 1930s and 40s it resembled the music that could be heard in the concert hall, signifying respectability. In the 70s and 80s it started to resemble styles of contemporary jazz, pop and funk, signifying progressivity and youthfulness. Music in news thus followed the developments in feature film music with a little delay.¹² In the 1990s the visual design of news began to resemble that of computer games; CNN was criticized for doing this in its reports from the first Iraq War. In journalism research the pejorative term « Nintendoization » was coined.¹³ During the second Iraq War even the audio design of US-American news started to imitate that of a computer game.¹⁴ This means that the design of a non-fictional genre like TV news became more and more similar to that of fictional genres like feature films and video games, a process that is ongoing and that touches the core of journalism which is supposed to be factual, not fictional.¹⁵ During the past two decades several styles of music have been inserted into news and reports, something that has been widely unrecognized. An exception is the media journalist Barbara Dribbusch who criticized the music in the public service news coverage of the 2016 Brussel terrorist attacks. She disclosed that journalists act without any guidelines when choosing background music.¹⁶ This happens probably eclectically. Hence the choice of music from different genres and styles may depend widely on individual experience, taste and mood.¹⁷ Virtually any music may be inserted into a news segment. When speaking about music in journalistic contexts I do therefore not claim that it constitutes a specific genre. Rather it should be understood as part of a media ecosystem that shares music styles. Music in political journalism draws on film and game music, conventional commercial popular music, elements of art and folk music, dance or motivational background music that can be heard in shopping malls, clubs and gyms. The examples presented in this essay will choose one genre of music that occurs in feature films and computer games that was taboo until recently and that is now entering the political arena and media as we speak: horror film music.

Science-fiction and horror film established themselves as B-movie genres on TV during the 1950s. The music in classical horror and sci-fi soundtracks was similar from the beginning.¹⁸ Of all film music genres, these were the closest to avant-garde in terms of musical structure.¹⁹ Film composers like Ber-

¹⁰ About this term cf. Claudia Gorbman: « Narrative Film Music », *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980), 188–192; diegetic music is defined as music that is part of the narrative world – e.g. the pianist Sam playing the song « As Time Goes by » in *Casablanca* – while non-diegetic music is not heard by the characters in film but only by the spectator / listener. Most of the Hollywood film music belongs to the latter category.

¹¹ News opens and short sound elements (e.g. bumpers, teasers etc.) are perhaps an exception and could be seen as a music genre on its own. Examples of these sonic elements are presented in Deaville 2009.

¹² About the music genres in feature film and TV cf. Kristopher Spencer: *Film and Television Scores 1950–1979. A Critical Survey*, McFarland: Jefferson & London 2008 and Ron Rodman, *Tuning In: American Narrative Television Music*, Oxford University Press: New York, 2010.

¹³ The audiovisual design of CNN news during the first Iraq War 1991 is in the literature referred to as « Nintendo Warfare » (Louw, Eric, *The Media and Political Process*, SAGE: Los Angeles, second impression 2010, 153–156).

¹⁴ Deaville 2009.

¹⁵ MacNair, Brian: *Fake News: Falsehood, Fabrication and Fiction in Journalism*, London / New York: Routledge 2018, 88.

¹⁶ <http://taz.de/TV-Nachrichtendramaturgie-und-Bruessel/!5289616/>, retrieved July 31 2020.

¹⁷ This was a typical complaint in an era when broadcasters still employed music advisors (Schmidt, Hans-Christian: « Musik als Einflußgröße in der filmischen Wahrnehmung », Schmidt, Hans-Christian (ed.), *Musik in den Massenmedien Rundfunk und Fernsehen. Perspektiven und Materialien*, Schott: Mainz 1976, 128).

¹⁸ Spencer, 171–172, 188.

¹⁹ Music of the avantgarde composer Krzysztof Penderecki (1933–2020) can be heard in classical horror movies like *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Shining* (1980).

nard Hermann who created the soundtrack for many Hitchcock films including *Psycho* employed atonality,²⁰ rhythmic and metric irregularity, electronic instruments and other innovative or unusual sound sources and combinations of sounds.²¹ Jerry Goldsmith's music for *Alien* (1979) displays means of the horror and sci-fi genre in music that are still valid: sharp contrasts in loudness and pitch for creating shock effects, eerie percussive timbres that connote the insect-like otherness of the space monster, avoiding clear metrical structures that might constitute some kind of feeling safe or comfortable, icy long chords that remind the spectator of the hostility of space – « In space no one can hear you scream. » reads on the film poster –, abrupt rhythmic outbursts that sound like panicking, stumbling beats, amorphous and shadowy melodies, extreme sound frequencies, often avoiding the comfortable middle register²² and splitting the sound into high, cold, directionally clear and low, threatening, directionally obscure²³ frequencies, and – an important means in horror film and horror survival games²⁴ – sudden silence that makes the spectator/listener hear with the protagonists ears searching for the uncanny creature. Goldsmith employs for the most part classical instruments but there are some unusual sounds, for instance one that reminds the listener of crawling insects and that has some similarities with the *col legno* technique of string instrument players: turning the bow upside down and hitting the strings with the wooden part of the bow. This creates dull noise rather than a distinct pitch. Among the commercial film genres, sci-fi and horror film music and sound design are especially innovative. The task of the sound designer or composer is to find new, unheard, alien sounds that correspond to the protagonists encounter with the unknown. Music of this kind has been part of the movie and TV soundtrack for many decades and sent shivers down the backs of its spectators. It is used in public relations and election campaigns. More recently, it has entered political journalism on TV.

In US-American politics and political communication, music and elements from popular culture have played an important role for a long time. During political rallies popular songs are played, film actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Clint Eastwood or Ronald Reagan held office as politicians and political campaigns on TV employ pop and rock or stock music that normally occur in film and advertisement. Currently, the latter has been increasing exponentially. Political actors employ popular culture for cumulative communication with each other as well as for fighting against one another. Two examples illustrate this:

Example 1: Glorification

The first one is a four-minute video with music accompaniment that was produced on behalf of the Trump administration by the ominous company Destiny Productions; a homonymous film production company denied any involvement.²⁵ The video was made for the first American-North Korean summit that took place on June 12 2018 in Singapore. On this occasion the US American president Donald Trump and the North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un met. There were two aims for the presentation of this video. It was shown to Kim Jong-un before he met Trump and to journalists who attended this summit, in Korean and in English. Therefore, it could be interpreted as a press release, although an odd

²⁰ In atonal music pitches do not follow the rules of traditional major / minor tonality or modal structures. Its main characteristic can be described as a chain of dissonances that are not dissolved into a consonance or a triad. In Western Music, dissonances are expressive means for creating tension.

²¹ Spencer, 186–188, 228–234.

²² The central register in classical music corresponds roughly to the frequency range of the male voice. It is difficult to give an absolute range definition from a musicological point – this is more a question of psychoacoustics – but the two middle octaves of the piano keyboard (c–c'') may well cover the comfortable middle register for most listeners.

²³ For human ears it is impossible to locate the sound source of extreme low frequencies between 16 and 100 Hz or so. That is why in multi-channel audio systems only one subwoofer is necessary (Glenn D. White and Gary J. Louie: *The Audio Dictionary*, University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, third impression 2005, 379).

²⁴ Summers, Tim: « Playing the Tune: Video Game Music, Gamers, and Genre », *ACT. Zeitschrift für Musik und Performance* 2 (2011), 9–10.

²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jun/13/trump-video-national-security-council-destiny-pictures>, retrieved July 29 2020.

one.²⁶ The style of the video is a mixture of a corporate video and a film trailer. Footage is shown, accompanied with music. Its message is clear but is additionally explained by a solemn and technically manipulated male voiceover. The North Korean regime is alternately asked for cooperation and promised economic reward or threatened with military action and sanctions if it refuses to do so. Throughout the video the American president and the North Korean dictator are presented as the two individuals who can decide the fate of their people and make history. As the voiceover puts it: « Two leaders. One destiny. » The montage of footage and the soundtrack are redundant in expressing the two possible outcomes of the summit: confrontation or cooperation. Every time the images and the few words spoken change between these two topics the music changes in expression. The rhetoric of the video is strictly binary and consequently the music oscillates between expectation and melancholy during the first half of the video. To illustrate the latter music is chosen that displays formulae of disorder, for instance, a sudden lowering of the loudness and a piano playing cold austere single tones after energetic outbursts in c minor while black-and-white images after colorful sequences appear (minute 0:29–0:44), the noise of a film projector that interrupts the music and the constant promises of the speaker while the film strip is melting (2:02–2:08) – an allusion to the threat of a nuclear conflict –, images of poverty and military threat – the sound of a military jet starting from a carrier cuts massively through the soundtrack – accompanied with the previous melancholic piano sequence (2:08–2:27) before the remaining part of the trailer paints images of future prosperity which are accompanied with pulsating, optimistic string rhythms and a sweeping melody (starting 2:34). At this point the music marks a breakthrough. A new harmony – an e minor turnaround – replaces the static c minor and instead of a free rhythm a string pad is playing motoric semiquavers, suggesting progress. It intensifies (starting 3:10) in volume and at the end heavy beats are added. The pseudo-orchestral electronic soundtrack of this finale reminds the listener remotely of a Hans Zimmer score with its repetitive harmonic loops, heavy percussion effects and straightforward climaxes.

The binary design corresponds to the technique of propaganda films²⁷ and newsreels that were produced during WW II. Only two alternatives are given – defeat or victory – and the quasi-orchestral music remotely mirrors the orchestral soundtrack of the 1930s and 40s newsreels: Dissonances and sharp accents are symbols of conflict and both leaders are presented with drum whirls and pompous chords like the heroes of a drama (1:20; 2:45 etc.). The disturbing and depressing sequences of the video narrative serve as a retarding moment, a dark backdrop that makes the grandiosity of the two single protagonists shine. The music needs much space on this soundtrack. There is only little left for the voiceover which has to deliver short and platitudinous messages that hardly develop an argument but become paratactic truisms (« Seven million people inhabit planet earth. [...] History is always evolving [...]. The past doesn't have to be the future. » etc). From a technical perspective the production of this video resembles that of a 1930s newsreel or propaganda film. First, footage was collected from the archive and music chosen from a so-called music library. Music libraries are collections of recorded music that are sorted according to mood or other most often non-musical parameters. This enables non-musicians to find a piece that suits their intentions without having to ask an expert. After combining images and music the voiceover may have been the last layer to be produced which means that the speaker – and the sound technician finalizing the mix – had to follow the ups and downs of the music like in ancient melodrama, a two-century-old music genre that combines instrumental accompaniment with spoken words. The sound of the words becomes thus melodramatic in a double sense. Verbal information which normally constitutes the most important part of an information film was probably genetically secondary to images and music when this clip was produced. Compared to analog standards, modern digital technology facilitates the production of such audio-visual messages enormously which can be done now by one single person

²⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/06/12/reporters-thought-this-video-was-north-korea-propaganda-it-came-from-the-white-house/?noredirect=on>, retrieved July 29 2020.

²⁷ E.g. Herbert Windt's music to the German propaganda production *Feldzug in Polen* (1939) that was shown in cinemas worldwide for justifying the German attack on Poland as a counter-attack. In its first minutes it alternates between hailing the German legacy in the Eastern parts of Germany (illustrated with footage from Danzig accompanied by a serene string melody) and the threat allegedly caused by Poland (depicted in black color spreading on a map of Central Europe and accompanied with hectic, dissonant brass fanfares). About this film composer cf. Reimar Volker: « Von oben sehr erwünscht. » *Die Filmmusik Herbert Windts im NS-Propagandafilm*, WVT: Trier, 2003.

without any higher education in either film or music production; in the analog era many specialist competences were required for filming and cutting the images and for composing, playing, recording and mixing the soundtrack. The design of this video is technically quite cheap with its heavy synthetic voiceover – the electronic manipulation of its sound doesn't allow a timbre to solidify –, its imbalance of voice and one-dimensional music – which is actually too much in the background and sounds a little bleak – and its blurred directionality of sound which leads to the presumption that it was perhaps not produced by a professional. What surprises most is its lack of substance that corresponds well to the spectacular summit – never before have two leaders of these countries ever met – that yielded no real consequences or substantial changes in their relation but just delayed problems.

Example 2: Shock and alarm

The second example is part of a political campaign. It employs methods that are typical of tabloid journalism.²⁸ Music that relies on techniques used in horror and science-fiction film music – both music genres are basically similar in terms of music structure and mechanisms²⁹ – has been heard in US American election campaigns for decades. Its aim is to denigrate and vilify the political opponent. A recent example that has been produced by the Lincoln Project puts a new twist to this history of political communication through music.³⁰ The Lincoln Project is a group of Republican politicians – the party of the 45th president – that is campaigning *against* Donald Trump. The video has the title « Trump's Authoritarian Show of Force » and shows footage from fights between demonstrators and the federal police in Portland, Oregon, in July 2020. Its message is repeated five times in this short clip: « This is how it starts. » The music style is close to that of a dystopian sci-fi movie. The abrupt horn calls, rhythmic instability, sudden shifts of orchestration and dynamic and various unforeseeable – or unforehearable – sound effects appearing from all corners of the stereo field remind one of a score like Jerry Goldsmith's for *Alien*. The dark hammering rhythms calls to mind films scores like Brad Fiedel's for *Terminator II: Judgement Day* or Hans Zimmer's for *The Dark Knight* without their melodious moments. This clip is monochrome both in visual and in musical respect. There are dissonances, hard brass attacks, surprising rhythmic syncopations and shock effects. It displays the typical split horror film soundtrack with its low threatening blows and biting high frequencies, leaving the warm middle register void. This void is filled by the sonorous male voiceover. The dramaturgy is intensification. After presenting single upsetting aspects of the brutal behavior of the federal forces in Portland a map of the US is shown while the speaker concludes: « Everywhere. Your town. Your neighborhood. » Each of these short lines is interrupted with massive brass attacks while the percussive accents become louder and the black-and-white map turns red. The occasional irregular violent drum beats correspond to the narrative which presents « faceless » policemen sent by the Trump administration to beat surrendering Portland protestors « with clubs and fists » (0:38). Compared to the White House video the sound mix is rich and well equalized, the music accompaniment of the voice full of unforeseeable details and the timing of the voice alternating with the instrumental background effective. The people behind the Lincoln Project have extensive experience with this kind of audio-visual campaigning that operates primarily with shock and malice. Its sound and music design is extremely dense, bombarding the viewer / listener with hundreds of audio-visual stimuli within no more than a minute; the entire spot is only 1:14 minutes long. Additionally, blurred footage and the voiceover add information. The concept of this campaign, as it occurs in other videos as well, is stimuli overload which is a common practice in political agitation. The condensed presentation of information does not give the listener / viewer time to reflect but creates emotions of shock and alarm in order to deliver the central message of the spot: that the US is standing on the brink of a dictatorship.

²⁸ The publication of a Lincoln Project video clip about Brad Parscale, the manager of Trump's 2020 re-election campaign, insinuated that he exploited his position to get rich. He was removed from the campaign which, as the Lincoln Project group claimed, happened at least partly due to the publication of their video (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-election-2020/trump-pence-betrayal-lincoln-project-b1778209.html>, accessed 13 January 2021).

²⁹ Spencer, 167–281.

³⁰ <https://lincolnproject.us/news/how-it-starts/>, retrieved July 28 2020.

Fictionalizing political journalism. Example 3: Journalist horror

After these two examples which are located on the margin of journalism, the last example deals with traditional journalism. By European standards, American journalism employs much more music in terms of duration, loudness and stylistic breadth. Half-a-year before Donald Trump was elected as president of the US the Canadian public service CBC produced and broadcast on March 11 2016 a new episode of its political magazine *The Fifth Estate* with the title « The Fire Breather: The Rise and Rage of Donald Trump ».³¹ The sound design of this TV broadcast is quite sophisticated by European standards. The first seconds of the intro set the tone for the entire 45-minute segment. It starts with a hard blow that makes the spectator/listener cringe. Its sound is airy in the beginning like an object flying through the air and hitting a hard surface, immediately followed by a fast heartbeat and a drone that continue throughout the entire intro. This blow is the anacrusis (a half bar or so in music which leads into the first complete bar³²) of the opening words:

« On this edition of *The Fifth Estate* ». Then, after two seconds, the first moving images are shown: Donald Trump speaking at a rally of his supporters. Only then, after seven seconds, the voiceover starts explaining what this is about: « It may be the ugliest election in US history. And Donald Trump is the reason why. » These first seconds of the 1:06 minute intro have an effect that can hardly be overestimated. Already before the moment when both the voiceover and some experts start to explain what is happening, the spectator/listener is primed through a sound design that resembles horror and sci-fi films. The high loudness and low frequency of the initial hit echoes in high, sharp frequencies like shattering glass and the fast heartbeat sound might correspond to the stressed heartbeat of the spectator/listener who is taken by surprise. In fact, this acoustic opening that takes only one second is sufficient to make the spectator/listener feel uncomfortable and to make it virtually impossible to remain neutral or calm during what follows. And what follows in the intro is very close to the narrative of a horror movie in which Trump is presented as a monster – the word « monster » is used in the intro to describe his political movement³³ – not through manipulated images but through sound. On minute 0:42, 0:44 and 0:55 still images of Trump appear together with an eerie hissing, alluding to the title of the broadcast – « The Fire Breather » – and letting the still photographs with his facial expression full of hatred appear like an attacking Alien. To the moving images of his party rallies, sound has been added as well. At minute 0:09 a poster is ripped apart with the sound of tearing paper in pieces and at minute 0:14 a man is violently shoved down by a Trump supporter and hits a table with the sound of a massive bang that reverberates. This is not authentic because those events were filmed from too far away from any microphone to be able to catch the original sound. It is the product of a skillful sound technician in the studio. In short: There are so many audio-visual signals here which the receiver has to process during the first seconds of this intro while there are only hints of rational explanations given by the talking heads that the spectator/listener will be left with not much more than an uneasy feeling after having watched and – most importantly – listened to it. The purpose of this intro is to unsettle the spectator/listener who has no chance to reflect or form an opinion on his or her own. The initial blow of the intro becomes the sound logo of this edition. It is repeated three times after each commercial break (13:40, 23:00 and 34:00) and divides the edition into chapters that present the ongoing Trump campaign to become the candidate of the Republican party: his past, his authoritarian preferences and a dystopian future if he should really become president. This audio-visual logo – a still photograph of Trump in profile with the title of the edition and the hard blow – not only repeats the same sound or musical formula but develops it immediately afterwards according to the next chapter. At the same moment it gives the whole edition

³¹ https://www.cbc.ca/fifth/m_episodes/2015-2016/the-fire-breather-the-rise-and-rage-of-donald-trump, retrieved July 29 2020.

³² In Charpentier's Eurovision fanfare the first tone is an anacrusis. « Anacrusis » works in both a literal and metaphorical way here.

³³ It is emphasized rather subtly when spoken by one of the experts through turning up and down the volume very quickly on 0:39. This enlarges the rhetorical emphasis of the speaker who employs another pitch and a slightly slower speech tempo when pronouncing the word.

a repetitive element which is typical for American news TV. Not only sounds and images but also statements of the interviewees are repeated, sometimes three times, during the whole edition as are some of the most controversial statements of the presidential candidate and images from his rallies showing violence and racist behavior. Otherwise the variety of musical styles is enormous. During the whole edition music can be heard, ranging from Italo Western inspired sounds when showing Trump's vision of a wall at the Mexican border (7:50–8:20) to overtly theatrical music accompanying Trumps arrival at a rally with his own Boeing jet plane (24:00 and 26:15) which is described with exactly this word of the voiceover: « theatrical ». The music cuts in the program have a length of 30 seconds in average and almost the entire soundtrack is accompanied with non-diegetic music. Only a few lines of the interviewees and Trump are left without musical accompaniment which emphasizes them even more. The music accompaniment is adjusted in terms of rhythm and expression to the events depicted and narrated which follow each other rather fast. There are, aside from the sound / music logo of this edition, few musical elements that recur but the story develops permanently what is mirrored in the occasional swift musical shifts and rather short film sequences. One exception has to be mentioned because it stands out in its musical style and accompanies the beginning and end of the edition, rounding a narrative circle, and taking some time to play. After the theme music of the political magazine is heard, a dystopian future is depicted: Trump appears in front of his supporters taking the oath to become the US American president and to speak to them. This is a montage of original soundtracks and still photographs from his rallies (1:10 – 1:50). What is remarkable both in terms of expression and elaboration is the music that is accompanied by screaming and cheering masses. The music reminds us very much of the soundtrack of the blockbuster trilogy «Lord of the Rings » composed by Howard Shore, and the images evoke one particular scene from these films, namely the speech of Saruman from his tower Isengard in the second part of the trilogy when gathering his troops for war. We see Trump like him from the back and the shouting masses in front of him while we hear a fateful and bombastic piece of music played by an orchestra and – this is the remarkable point – a choir which sings wordless melodies like they do in Shore's score in moments of existential threat to the main characters, for instance in the first part of the trilogy when the fellowship of the ring is running for its life in the subterranean city Moria. The connotations of the Canadian journalist look into the US-American future where the scenes from the feature film are more than obvious: an evil sorcerer speaking to an army of raw and uncivilized creatures without a will of their own and ready to fight. It is exactly this music cut that returns at the very end of the edition when the possibility of Trump becoming the next president is discussed and this time the music is played for almost a minute-and-a-half which makes it one of the longest music cuts employed in this edition (40:30–41:45). Here the producers of the edition present their summary of the ongoing events in the neighboring country through the words of their interviewees. The bottom line of the interviews is that all bets are off and the music which announces the threatening arrival of a political movement that has been described in the edition with the term « monster » has the last word, leaving the viewers / listeners alone with a final cold shiver sent down their backs. This is a common tactic for ending horror films as well.

The producers of this program are clear from the beginning about their political standpoint. In this respect one could speak about a framing effect of the sound design. What is achieved through it is a – in a European context – quite drastic othering. Trump and his supporters are not only vilified but clearly demonized. This happens through employing aesthetic mechanisms of audio-visual fiction that provide the producers with certain psychological stimuli. Essentially, they are auditory stimuli. The advantages of this strategy are plenty. Auditory stimuli are processed within a fraction of a second, much quicker than (moving) images, not to talk about spoken words which need several seconds to be delivered and understood. Music and sounds are perfect for delivering a message instantaneously, which is advantageous in a context where several media compete for the spectators'/listeners' attention.³⁴ Sound has no boundaries in space like the image on a screen but will pervade the receiver's home or ears through the

³⁴ Van Leeuwen, Theo: *Speech, Music, Sound*, Palgrave Macmillan: Houndmills 1999, 196–197. Van Leeuwen, who together with Gunther Kress defined the field of multimodality in communication research, refers in his monograph often to this pioneering work in sound studies (despite some scientific shortcomings): Raymond Murray Schafer: *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Destiny Books: Rochester, 1977.

loudspeaker or headset. A gaze can be averted, hearing can't because it is omnidirectional. Finally, sound, unlike images, is physical like a touch when it moves the ear-drum and inner ear of the listener.³⁵ It is impossible to ignore being touched and to take distance from it while looking in a Western context always implies some distance, both spatially and intellectually.

Music and sound are powerful devices for delivering messages in journalism and, in this example, deliver it physically; horror film has been categorized as a body genre because it causes physical reactions and it is this genre which has been imported into journalism and extended its display of emotions. But it is of course a double-edged sword because rationality may be eclipsed when politics is presented in this manner. From a historical perspective, this is what happened in the 1930s and 40s when politics became increasingly aestheticized and radicalized, a process, in which music had its fair share. This is why writers like Adorno or Thomas Mann³⁶ warned – only too justly – that music may pave the way for irrationality and fanaticism in politics. According to these writers, – both referred particularly to the Wagner cult that the Nazis cultivated – music was abused for intoxicating the masses and replaced rational thinking with emotion in politics. Instead of explaining or presenting evidence for political action, music conjured up the spirit of the nation, mirrored its mythical greatness and stirred up hatred against the many enemies that surrounded Germany and blocked its way to the total dominance it deserved. The rich canon of the Austro-German music tradition with its many famous composers served as an example for the superiority of the German “race” and music was promoted by Nazi propaganda perhaps not accidentally as the “most German” of arts.

Conclusion and perspectives

Music in journalism refers to narratives that resemble TV series and feature films. This applies especially to more recent broadcasts in political journalism. The narrative becomes pre-shaped to a high degree when choosing a music genre. Non-diegetic background music definitely does not contribute to making journalism more objective, neutral or informative. On the contrary: Music has both an emotionalizing and a fictionalizing effect. It is concerning, that as demonstrated, sound and music are becoming central communicational devices at the expense of words and arguments. Semiotician and linguist Theo van Leeuwen's remarks are prophetic in this context:

« Even though sound is at present [1999] still very much undervalued and overused in the new media [...] there is every chance that it will have a much increased role to play in the very near future. »³⁷

It is unclear how exactly music affects the spectator/listener of an information film.³⁸ What must not be taken for granted is that it *has* an effect and because neither the average news consumer nor media scholars are paying attention to people's suspicion that it has the potential to manipulate.³⁹ To answer the initial question of this essay: does music belong to political journalism? Technically it does. Music has been in the early days of electric mass media and became again during the onset of the digital era part of audio-visual journalism design. Ethically, however, music in journalism is a tricky thing since it will activate mechanisms that are historically and aesthetically rooted in political propaganda. Kittler, whose favorite topic was the military origin and communication structures in the mass media of the 20th-century, predicted as early as in the mid-1980s the dawn of a new digital era and he

³⁵ Chion, Michel: *L'audio-vision. Son et image au cinéma*, Armand Colin: Malakoff, fourth impression 2017, 43–44.

³⁶ Veget, Hans Rudolf: *Seelenzauber. Thomas Mann und die Musik*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2006.

³⁷ Van Leeuwen, 197.

³⁸ I found only very little research publications about this question which are already some decades old, for instance, Hans-Bernd Brosius: « Die Wirkung von Musik in Informationsfilmen », *Medienpsychologie. Zeitschrift für Individual- und Massenkommunikation* 2, (1990) no. 1, 44–55. According to this study music disturbs the transmission of facts in information films.

³⁹ This leads to the suspicion that music works subliminally, without being perceived rationally and even worse – since there must be some effect – it could affect the audience without them being aware of it.

did this in quite apocalyptic terms.⁴⁰ Digital media have been weaponized by populist movements and regimes which try to undermine trust in media, science and democratic parties. Journalism is under attack and it is fighting back with an audio-visual design that has been proven to be deconstructive in the past. The question is whether it could turn against its creator eventually. It might not be a good strategy to counter the current populist claim of « fake news » with fictionalizing news.

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⁴⁰ Kittler, 3–4, 7–8.

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Biography

Martin Knust (Dr. phil., M.A.) is associate professor in musicology and member of the research center for Intermedial and multimodal studies at Linnæus University (LNUC IMS). His research interests focus on opera and music theatre after 1800 (especially the historical performance practice of speech, song and gestures), north European music after 1800 (especially reception and cultural transfer processes between the North and continental Europe), 16th-century sacred music, the music of Angkor (especially its iconography), and music in audiovisual political journalism (especially its production and aesthetics).

ORCID: 0000-0003-2591-1663

martin.knust@lnu.se