

# Introduction

*Get up, as the popular song is getting up, if there's still something to say, if there's still something to do. Get up, as the popular music is getting up, if there's anything left to say, if there's anything left to say, it will tell us.*

*«The Popular Song», Ivano Fossati, 1992*

In 2016, the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to the singer and songwriter Bob Dylan “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition.” The award suggests how important pop music is in the contemporary society, and highlights how blurred the traditional boundaries are across all forms of art. Contaminations between tradition and pop culture are increasingly frequent and meaningful, and the languages of pop music keep influencing other forms of contemporary art and expression.

The book is about views and thoughts about popular music, media, and youth cultures, giving special attention to the relationship between the various languages of music and the technology development. In the literature, there are several (and sometimes opposite) ways to define “popular music.” However, it is necessary to investigate them from the perspective of the history of music, to appreciate both fixed and variable elements. Music is constantly changing, and popular culture is the turf where all these transformations occur.

Pop music is strictly connected to the widespread media, mass culture, world of youth, and its languages. New generations deliver a revolutionary thrust, exploding at the end of the '60s. This impetus leads to the rise of the youth culture. Pop/rock music (and its sub-genres) brings up new trends and it is equally influenced by cultural, social, and habits turmoil of our time. It is the soundtrack of entire generation, accompanying not only several forms of entertainment but also the social commitment, need of belonging, desire for recognition and limelight. Rock reflects the world of youth, its rituals and legends, and it represents an important tool to and get together.

Moreover, the evolution of communication media is strongly inter-wired with the main social and cultural metamorphosis of our age. Important changes, plurality and complexities of cultural and artistic forms, along with the variety of social contexts made scholars realise that they need to use new categories of interpretation, to better understand the changes. Nowadays, the difference between “elite art” and “mass art” is shaping up in an unexpected way. Art is going towards a new expression

through cultural hybridisation, leading to innovative forms of artistic consumption, and diverse mode of reproduction of social inequality. It is interesting to monitor these dynamics while taking a closer look at pop music, mass cultures, and youth languages.

These days, cultural industry and mass media are becoming increasingly instrumental for the production and the fruition of music, as they influence the way people listen and how people in general access it. However, mass media are moving towards the standardisation of cultural consumption and the flattening of the taste in music. However, they also allow pop music to develop and reach a wider audience, even when offering new trends and jargons.

Starting from these assumptions, this book analyses the main changes that occurred from the advent of electronic media in the digital era. Then, we will discuss the connection between music and technology, to assess how they affected sociocultural relationships and promoted hybridisation across musical languages and new creative modalities. With the introduction of digital technologies and new media, the expressive and creative potential of artistic productions and the way the public access them are set for further changes, and the result might at times be controversial. Mass media shook the traditional time–space dimensions, but they redefined the boundaries between the “public” and the “private.” This led to both homologation and differentiation. Furthermore, music’s digital technologies offered multiple occasions for aggregation and socialisation, and, at the same time, they conveyed new ways in the context of private consumption, within the domestic walls. These are social effects bursting during the digital era, through interaction and connections, and they affect any type of language and communication. The third millennium’s youth communicate, create, socialise, and feed on digital technologies, thus supporting the definition of new artistic and creative languages.

The disruptive technical and social changes occurring in the contemporary society in the last few decades affected also the way music is produced and consumed.

The ultimate purpose of this debate is to highlight how the presence of music (from classical to pop) in our daily life has somehow become more complex.

Starting from the most relevant theories about the sociology of music, we aim to analyse these changes, and how they relate to the youth cultures, pop music, mass media, and digital communication technologies. From the *Beat Revolution* (affecting the cultural movements from the ’50s onwards) to the *Bit Generation* (stemming from digital technologies and the *software culture*), the last chapter will go over the symbolic power of rock stars.

The goal of this investigation about the sociological role of sound and music in the contemporary society is to gather and interpret the links among the many factors contributing to the sound imagery, within several social and cultural contexts. However, given all the constant changes within the social dynamics, the boundaries between these topics (and the several branches investigating them) are increasingly ephemeral. Modern sociology of music cannot ignore this complexity, and it cannot fail to investigate the various connections among the several cultural factors,

to completely comprehend the dynamics typical of the contemporary music industry and the social consequences, both individual and collective.

We aim to contribute to the studies on musical phenomena, part of the never-ending streaming of late modernity, which is increasingly immersed in turmoil of sounds. By doing so, we will take into consideration emotions, which will be discussed further in the afterword section by the singer and songwriter Luciano Ligabue.