Belonging to a land to come: Aesthetic experience, autochthony and social emancipation

Safatle, Vladimir [1]

[1] *Universidade de São Paulo*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss the relations between aesthetic experience and social emancipation from the point of view of the problems concerning the production of autochthony. The main question is: how aesthetic experience can produce a land, a space and a people? The article focuses specially in some peripheral modernists strategies as we can find in the music of Bela Bartok. These strategies are object of comparative considerations with another peripheral modernism as we can see in Brazilian modernism.

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...a natural phenomenon such as, for example,

the creation of shapes in nature.

Bela Bartok (on peasant music)

You can't move people with colors.

Flags are nothing without trumpets,

lasers modulate sound,

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Deleuze and Guattari

Crises and aestheticizations of politics

Belonging to oneself is something we learn to do in two ways. We can say that we belong to ourselves when we appear as the legislators of ourselves, when we govern ourselves. In this case, the law we give to ourselves is the clearest figure of the exercise of our self-belonging. It is the expression in act of our identity, of our capacity to be under our own jurisdiction. It thus appears as the main instrument of our self-determination, since it allows us to evaluate ourselves from a principle that is not an external determination, but the exercise of our "free will". We call this regime of self-belonging "autonomy", because there is a law (*nomos*) that defines what is proper to us (*auto*). This law would be internal to us, marking out the contours of what we should understand by a relationship of immanent identity

But it is possible to belong to ourselves in another way, namely, by having been generated by the land on which we stand. In this case, it is the land that defines belonging. There is a land that defines what is ours, like a *genos* that can be both 'birth', 'lineage', and/or 'family'. This land is the space in which we can circulate without hindrance or barriers. It is the space that defines relations of security not only against generalized dispossession but also against chaos. We call this regime of self-belonging "autochthony" because there is a soil (*chtôn*) that defines what is our own (*auto*).

It is no coincidence that these two regimes of belonging have historically determined the axes of what we understand as freedom and emancipation, with their own social struggles. Being free seems to us, quite naturally, to require both the mobilization of the capacity to give ourselves our own law, to not be subject to any legislation that is not the expression of our own will, and the possibility of preserving our ties to a land in which we can move freely because that is where we came from. This "coming from" has declined in various mythological constructions both as the act of being generated by the land and as the act of being manufactured through the land, the clay, the mud, the marsh, and the dust (see Loraux, 1996). In short, there are two devices of self-belonging, namely the law and the land: one marks a specific exercise of legislation, the other a specific regime of circulation.

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However, it is possible that our contemporary historical horizon shows certain limits to these two ways of defining the social realization of freedom, which forces us to consciously rework certain values that might seem unproblematic within our social practices. It would be a case of insisting that we are facing something we could call an "epistemic crisis". By epistemic crisis, we mean a crisis in the "conditions of possibility of all possible experience". Our social experience, with its forms of categorization, distinction, and organization of space and time, is not a transcendental condition but a social institution that defines material conditions of reproduction, that is embodied in repeated economic and political processes[1]. These forms, in turn, offer what we could call a "social grammar" that defines our way of determining not only the meaning of values with a strong normative potential but also the way to apply them, the clarity of their semantics and, above all, the form of the subjects who can enunciate them. When this social grammar goes into crisis, our ability to orient ourselves in the experience on the basis of values will also be in crisis.

I would like to insist that we are experiencing something similar today, and this is linked to the exhaustion of the hegemonic processes of progress, growth, material reproduction, and development that have marked our capitalist modernity. These processes could not impose themselves without the continuous mobilization of values aimed at justifying their course and their violence. The social production of wealth is not something that can be done without recourse to horizons of legitimization linked to the desire to have the material conditions to "be ourselves", thus establishing a relationship between social wealth and freedom (see Charbonnier, 2020). For this reason, capitalist extractivism, its dynamics of accumulation and colonialism, its subjection of things to the abstraction of the production of value were paradoxically presented as the material conditions for realizing our expectations of emancipation, either by making us "masters of nature", which would allow us to emancipate ourselves from the supposed material scarcity and unpredictability of natural forces[2], or by imposing the conditions for the emergence of societies of proprietary, autonomous individuals able to maximize their own interests all over the globe. As if freedom were only possible where societies were organized as associations of individuals with their own personal systems of interests and properties.

In other words, it was always in the name of the collective realization of freedom that took place what we understand as "economic development", with its necessary processes of social rationalization. The collapse of these processes cannot, therefore, leave unscathed the systems of valuation and judgment that they themselves mobilized. However, economics thinks of itself as an autonomous discourse in relation to values, its very structure of determining rational action and rational subject is already an expression of clear systems of moral values. In fact, there has never been science without morals; the question is where are the moral presuppositions and what they say.

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Therefore, when we talk about the current existence of related crises (ecological, political, economic, social, demographic[3], crises that feedback on each other and stabilize as crises, we must take into account that the association of these crises with the acceleration of the ecological decomposition of our living conditions highlights, in an increasingly urgent way, horizons of profound irrationality of our process of social modernization as a whole (see Löwy, 2024). The ecological crisis and its brutal acceleration is a new element in the crisis dynamics that capitalism has experienced until now. It shows, like no other, how the development of productive forces becomes the development of destructive forces, to speak like Marx, how the realization of our hegemonic forms of life produces an unviable material horizon. It is the awareness of such irrationality that accelerates what we can call an "epistemic crisis". In this scenario, I would like to insist that even what we have hegemonically understood so far as freedom and emancipation becomes problematic

Remembering this is a way of underlining how important is for contemporary critical thinking to reorient the structures and practices of emancipation, to be sensitive to their new configurations and demands. In other words, it's not a question of settling for discourses that see our crises as the fruit of partial rationalizations, as if we hadn't guided our modernization processes by demands for freedom for all, emancipation for all, but only for certain classes and subjects (see Habermas, 1989; Honneth, 2011). As if it were only a case of better universalizing what has guided our liberal societies providing solid bases for consensus. On the contrary, it would be a case of insisting that the problem is not one of partial universalization. Rather, the crises we are currently facing are necessary achievements of the values we have mobilized. These values could not produce anything else. Because, in a way, it's not just the dominant economic model that is showing itself to be extractive, segregating and violent. *Our hegemonic conception of emancipation was extractive, segregating and violent.* Assuming this perspective puts us before the task of recovering and reflecting on alternative conceptions of emancipation that have failed, at least until now, to impose themselves as paths capable of hegemonically mobilizing our social imagination.

There are multiple strategies that can be mobilized when faced with a similar task. They range from the recovery of epistemic matrices silenced and buried by capitalist expansionist colonialism to the *complexification of what we mean by modernity.* Complexification that aims to highlight how, even within the geographical spaces where capitalist modernity emerged, it is necessary to make resonate the conflicting matrices that have also been silenced or, if we want, that have remained as unrealized potentialities[4]. I would insist that such an alternative becomes particularly important at a time when modernity as such is disqualified as an aggressive, expansionist, and Eurocentric operation[5], without taking into account how such modernity that we know, with its

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problematic and colonial consequences, is the result of a particular and specific liberal-capitalist inflection. An inflection that, in order to impose itself, had to silence alternative possibilities and impose internal colonialism even on European soil. Not taking this conflict into account produces the illusion that we are describing a unitary and monolithic epistemic process, even though its social basis is contradictory, marked by varied and dispersed social conflicts and dispossessions in all the territories where such process takes place. For *it is impossible for an antagonistic society to magically produce a non-antagonistic episteme*. This shows that there is a lot of idealism in what we conventionally call decolonial criticism. The idealism of believing that epistemic matrices can develop without taking into account the material and social contradictions of their time.

With this problem in mind, it would then be a case of recovering alternative conceptions of autonomy that are not linked to the traditional roots of self-legislation and self-government, with their naturalized legal horizon, their inner courts, and their coercive dynamics. Kant used to recall Horace's affirmation, "sapere aude", to speak of a courage that would be the central effect of the autonomy and self-determination (Kant, 2020). But we can ask ourselves if our notion of moral autonomy, which has such a paradigmatic expression in Kantian philosophy, isn't based on another affection, namely fear. Perhaps we should remember that an emancipation dependent on the grammar of self-mastery, *self-imposed* legislation, and the atavistic *fear of* being caused by what acts from outside us cannot be emancipation at all. For, as Spinoza rightly understood, if the affective basis of freedom is always the deposition of fear, we can say that we need to think above all about the deposition of one of the constituent fears of the modern definition of individuality, namely the fear of not being one's own cause, of no longer being in one's own jurisdiction. Fear of submitting to an external causality that would decentralize our consciousness, fear of being confused with what in us does not submit to the figure of the unitary and conscious will, fear of a corporeality that is not confused with egoity. In other words, they are all possible declinations of this confusion, so characteristic of a certain modern metaphysical dogma, between heteronomy and servitude, between not being in the jurisdiction of oneself and being in a condition of slavery[6].

This affective basis and its consequences become clearer if we remember the genealogy of autonomy. In it, we find a political theology whose roots take us back to St. Augustine, with his themes of human exceptionalism, of the split in supposed human nature between corporeality marked by libido and autonomous will capable of guaranteeing free will. This exceptionalism, this split, is the result of the demand that the insubordination of the body and nature should be contained, that the libido should not rule and that the resemblance to the rationality of the divine will should be felt (Augustine, 2005). This political theology, in turn, will be one of the foundations for the construction of the liberal notion of freedom as self-ownership, of nature as a

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space ready to be appropriated by value-producing labour and brutal extractivism, of development as the subjection and domination of nature, as if it were the case to remember how our idea of moral autonomy is the fruit of a political theology that spreads its consequences in the political-economic horizon that has hegemonically taken over our processes of social rationalization[7]. As if it were a case of remembering that the hegemonic process of modernization that the West has experienced, linked to the rise of capitalism and its liberal model of subjects, could only produce an autonomy that perpetuates internal divisions, fears, and external subjections. And there can be no emancipation where division, fear, and subjection prevail.

Against this political theology of autonomy, we can remember how aesthetic experience has provided us with alternative models of autonomy. As if certain social praxis, such as aesthetic experience, could open up possibilities that oppose hegemonic epistemic matrices, preserving the possibility of realizing what societies don't yet know how to realize. For there is no episteme without a counter-episteme, without praxis and discourses that preserve, within specific societies, possibilities those societies try to exclude.

Of course, this defense of a structural distinction between moral autonomy and aesthetic autonomy is not consensual. We know, for example, discussions that seek to benefit from articulations between aesthetic autonomy and moral autonomy in order to think about how relations of immanence would occur between *nomos* and *ipse*, between Law and Self (Arendth, 1982; Früchtl, 2011; Früchtl et al., 2012; Prado Junior., 2007). This would allow the emergence of a political autonomy based on the generalization of a model linked to the consolidation of procedures of self-legislation and self-government. In the same way that aesthetic autonomy would be linked to self-referentiality and the ability of certain works of art to thematize their own means, this notion of political autonomy would be realized as the ability of subjects and communities to be the legislators of themselves. Three mutually autonomous social practices would converge on the same normative structure, showing how the social imagination would not know how to go beyond freedom as a specific form of recourse to the law.

However, we can insist on the specificity of aesthetic autonomy in relation to moral autonomy, which would end up making room for another form of political autonomy. For, contrary to what some argue, I would insist that aesthetic autonomy cannot be understood as a question of self-referentiality that opens up from the self-thematization of its own means[8]. Rather, it is linked to the capacity of works of art to integrate processes able to tremble the naturalized order of sensibility, pointing to ways of relating to what until then appeared as a-normativity and otherness. The autonomous aesthetic form, whose origins lie in the musical form, not only opens up space for the circulation of expressive functions autonomous from social and ritual functions. It also

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integrates processes that impose on the aesthetic form a complexification of the sensible order that opposes the convention of social languages[9].

In the West, it was music that inaugurated the debates on autonomous form, back in the 18th century. In this case, what we find in the analysis of the development of musical form in the West is autonomy as a possibility for works of art to construct themselves by integrating elements expelled from the hegemonic regimes of social sensitivity, such as dissonance and its increasing generalization until it reaches its functional emancipation (see Hollander, 1970; Neubauer, 1992). In other words, far from the self-identity of a work that confuses law and form, we have autonomy as the ability of works to open themselves up to what appears to them as an alterity with a strong potential for a-normativity, or at least for imposing dynamics of complexification of the functional norms. Thus, autonomy no longer appears as a specific model of *legislation*, capable of provoking the establishment of relations of identity and supposed regularity, but as a specific model of *openness*, capable of defining new regimes of heteronomy that will not be experienced as servitude.

I have developed this issue at length in another paper, to which I refer anyone who is interested (Safatle, 2021, 2022b). In any case, I would like to defend that aesthetic experience can provide renewed models of social emancipation. As if works of art were crossed by a potential promise of what has not yet been realized, of what has not yet found ways of being socially realized.

A promise is a word pointing to the future. At a time like ours, when the power to create futures seems increasingly colonized by dynamics far removed from what we might understand as emancipation, it would be a case of recovering the centrality of this characteristic of aesthetic experience. Some might see this strategy as a kind of escapist maneuver that consists of wanting to talk about avant-garde art, away from the general public, as a way of compensating for the impossibility of building concrete political transformations. On the contrary, I would like to insist that the loss of sensitivity to the tensions inherent in aesthetic experience is a strong symptom of political atrophy. Perhaps even its most brutal one. This loss of sensitivity overlooks one of the main political problems: the social production of sensitivity. The political struggle is a struggle for the sensibility, for the limits and forms of the sensible, for the limits of what can and cannot be perceived, of the bodies we can and cannot see, of what can and cannot be imagined. All of this is politically determined and constructed, politically changeable, and the object of real struggles.

Such political atrophy also forgets that we live in an era of the aestheticization of politics. This diagnosis, first put into circulation by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s in the face of the

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/© 2025 Safatle V.

aestheticization of politics produced by fascism, has gained unprecedented relevance (Benjamin, 2008). The resurgence of fascist tendencies in our time is inseparable from a politicization of sensibility and perception. In other words, it is inseparable from how we are affected, from the social determination of the structure of our bodies. There is no segregation without insensitivity and disaffection, there is no destruction of difference without stereotyping and functionalization, and there is no defensive identity without limiting our capacity to be transformed by what does not resemble us. And insensitivity, functionalization, and stereotyping are all aesthetically structured, aesthetically learned operations.

With this in mind, we can say that because it depends on the social regimes of *aisthesis*, there is an aesthetic at the foundation of any and all politics. And this must be said to remind us that, against the aestheticization of politics that colonizes our circuit of affectis, we need not some form of "cooling of the passions" or "disembodiment of the social" (Lefort, 1983, p. 56), but another form of aestheticization of politics, another circuit of affects. Our fate is decided in the tense game of one aestheticization against another.

What a territory can do

Within this horizon of social tension, one cannot help but wonder about the other aspect of our problem concerning the forms of belonging to oneself, namely autochthony. For if our struggles for emancipation also involve the articulation of a field of antagonisms between possible aestheticizations of politics, between possible politics of forms of aesthetic affections, they could not be indifferent to the fact that land has become one of the central political devices of the present day[10]. Whether in the contemporary resurgences of fascism, in the current configuration of social struggles with an anti-colonial matrix[11], or in the struggle of autonomists to occupy zones, even temporarily, in order to allow other forms of life to flourish there, the mobilization of land, territory, and space plays a fundamental role. In other words, the relationship to land is a major axis of dispute within political horizons of transformation and rupture (David-Ménard, 2020). This reminds us that a discussion on emancipation centered exclusively on the motives of autonomy, as it has been hegemonically understood within our contemporary debates until now, is simply insufficient. In other words, as much as the development of capitalism has sought to impose the notion that our era has erased ties to the territory in order to lead societies to mimic the free and unimpeded flow of Capital, with its constant relocations, thus creating the illusion that any ties to the territory could only be a kind of social regression, we must be sensitive to the fact that various struggles for emancipation use precisely the recourse to the territory as a strategy. For this

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

is a way of trying to disconnect space from its flow of monetary indifference, from the mercantile affirmation of its homogenization, building singularities[12].

So, it's no surprise to see how autochthony tends to become an increasingly fundamental object of aesthetic experience. So much so that some, like Deleuze and Guattari, stated as early as the early 1980s: "Territory is an effect of art. The artist is the first human who raises a barrier or makes a mark" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981, p. 388). This is a way of remembering that concepts as politically central as territory, space, land, and place are creations dependent on aesthetic operations that define the regimes of organization and recognition that are fundamental to the act of belonging to oneself.

That artistic expressions are mobilized to identify the links between people and land is something we have known since time immemorial and in a global geographical dispersion. For we know well that there are no people without its hymns sung in unison, its songs, its ritualized ways, instruments, poems, visual representations of dramatic historical moments such as battles and struggles for independence, images of specific features of the territory that are emotionally charged, monuments that mark the historical depth of places. In other words, there are no people without the aesthetic affirmation of its territorial existence, without the aesthetic confirmation of its self-determination embodied in the land. This aesthetic affirmation is both the configuration of space and the structuring of time. It's a question to configure the place in which I participate in a common generative principle, to structure a temporal unity between present, past, and future that allows subjects to establish relationships of transmission, alliance, and filiation.

But let's remember how has always been unstable the meaning of autochthony. Let's start with the Greeks due to their hegemonic influence on our ways of life, although it would be possible to make this path from several different worldviews. First of all, let's remember how the Greek concept of freedom is constituted progressively on the grounds of a negative experience of disorder and chaos. For this reason, *eleutheria*, which we usually translate as freedom, will always be linked to the unhindered growth ensured by the link to one's native place. Just consider how the term *eleutheria* has its roots in the Indo-European *leudh*, which means: to grow, to develop. Growing thanks to roots in a people or territory allows one to be and remain who one is. That's why some commentators will say:

> Contrary to an idea that has become as common as it is difficult to justify rigorously, freedom was not initially perceived by the Greeks as the legal property that distinguishes the man *eleutheros* from the slave, but as the exclusive and precarious

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

> relationship to a shared ground over which one must always defend it from threat. (Avez, 2010, p. 31)

Therefore, we could ask ourselves about the types of ties to the land authorized by this notion of autochthony. For example, when thinking about the Greek experience of freedom, Michel Foucault highlights the profound sense of "possession" that the exercise of being free implied for the Greeks. Hence, statements such as:

> In ancient philosophy, sovereign life is generally a life that tends to establish a relationship with oneself that is of the order of jouissance, in both senses of the word: at the same time as possession and as pleasure. Sovereign life is a life in possession of itself, a life in which no fragment, no element escapes the exercise of its power and sovereignty over itself. To be sovereign is above all to be one's own, to belong to oneself. (Foucault, 2020, p. 245)

However, jouissance as possession, and Foucault knew this well, is linked to the legal horizon of the use of contractually recognized property, which poses important problems. For there are cases in which the possession and belonging presupposed by freedom is no stranger to certain social forms of dispossession. For example, let's remember how autochthony is thought of among the Greek Cynics. The Cynics opposed the polis in the name of a return to nature as the plane of immanence that guides virtuous action. This virtue ethics is not just the result of the belief that exclusive considerations about the moral character of agents can define the conditions for happiness. It is, in fact, a matter of naturalizing moral virtues, breaking down the distinction that was so fundamental for the Greeks between humanity and animality. Nature can thus appear as the name of the space of belonging to oneself in cynicism. This shouldn't surprise us since, as Heidegger reminds us, *physis* appears as a fundamental Greek word for being (Heidegger, 2015).

But let's note how this gives the Cynic understanding of autochthony its uniqueness. If cynicism is radically cosmopolitan, it is because autochthony is not linked to the community I come from, but to the nature that makes me at home everywhere. This explains why Antisthenes claimed that: "the wise man does not live by respecting the laws of his homeland, but by respecting virtue" (Laercio, 2003, p. 10). Let's also remember how Diogenes defined himself as: "without a city (*apolis*),

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

without a house (*aoikos*), without a homeland (*apatris*), a beggar and a vagabond, living every day" (Laercio, 2003, p. 20).

Let's note how, in this context, autochthony has a paradoxical characteristic of dispossession. The link to *physis* doesn't exactly produce a *nomos*. Rather, it removes us from the social order. This is how autochthony, in the case of Greek cynicism, can function as a fundamental axis of political criticism, denouncing the alienating nature of social life and seeking to create a system of conduct that, even if it doesn't necessarily establish another social bond, allows for the exercise of a certain self-sovereignty.

As I insisted earlier, this understanding of the relationship between emancipation and autochthony, with its tensions and multiplicities, is not unique to the Greeks but runs through the social experience of emancipation in a constant and varied way (see Geschiere, 2009). An analysis of comparative anthropology would be necessary for us to have an articulated view of the extent of this relationship[13]. In any case, this variation reminds us, among other things, that relating to a territory is not an operation that is always identical and always produces the same effects. In fact, territoriality can often be confused with the affirmation of organic ties to communities, habits, and traditions. In this case, it might initially seem that autochthony, the affirmation of self through belonging to a territory, should be understood as the fundamental expression of forms of emancipation that have an identity as their central device and a temporalized recourse to origin as a guarantee for the social production of meaning.

However, it would be a case of being attentive to other possibilities that complexify our understanding of the temporality inherent in the political affirmation of autochthony and its function within a dynamic of recomposition of social effects. It would be a case of asking under what conditions autochthony can operate beyond the act of taking possession of an origin, of securing oneself in an already assumed identity. Territoriality can be thought of as the construction of a field of new circulations and new forms of implication. A territory can be understood not as the place that defines the landmarks of the restoration of habits and traditions but as the space in which one can circulate freely and, above all, allow the free circulation of what was previously seen as a threat or risk to the preservation of a static identity[14]. Or, as we have seen in cynical cosmopolitanism, belonging to oneself can be constructed by denying the current configuration of the territory and its divisions, with a view to affirming a space that is not a *polis*, *an oikos*, or even a *patris.*

A strategy of peripheral modernisms

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

> The artist has ceased to be the One extracted from himself, but he has also ceased to address the people, to invoke the people as a constituted force. Never has he needed the people so much, but he realizes at the highest point that the people are lacking - the people are what is most lacking. It's not the popular or populist artists, but Mallarmé who can say that the Book needs the people, and Kafka, that literature is a question of the people, and Klee, that the people are the essential thing, but nevertheless lacking. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981, p. 427).

These statements come from Deleuze and Guattari in the same book I mentioned earlier, *Mille Plateaux*. They appear in the midst of a reflection on the way in which aesthetic experience, especially through the musical form, constitutes modes of territory, carrying out processes that we can already find in nature. "Art is not the privilege of human beings" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981, p. 389)[15], say the two in a bold proposition since the animal world would know the autonomy of expressive functions in the agonistic sharing of territory in ritualized parades between individuals of the same species.

However, this aesthetic naturalism of a different order recognizes a point of dissociation between art produced by humans and art produced by other animals. It refers to works of art that note "at the highest point" that the people are missing, that the land is not there. Not by chance, the examples all come from aesthetic modernism: Stephane Mallarmé, Franz Kafka, and Paul Klee. In fact, the statement comes from Paul Klee's writings. When talking about the way in which modern art seeks to express a foundation prior to the forms that circulate socially as if it were a case of going towards a "Great Nature", an "original background" from which creation is drawn, Klee states:

> We are left with this last force. Without a people to support us. We want popular support; we started, at the Bauhaus, with a community to which we donate everything we own. We can't do more. (Klee, 1985, p. 33)

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/© 2025 Safatle V.

The point is clear. There are no people that can be confused with the space of circulation and forms expressed by modern art. At most, there is a link between restricted communities, and students of a bohemian artist who lived around their art schools. But "we can't do more". So far, we haven't been able to go beyond the consideration that the people are missing, that we haven't yet found the territory that would be created from the emancipation of sensibility.

But in order to understand the kind of problem that such a consideration makes evident, it is necessary to take a step back and understand how romanticism is already crossed by the question of the aesthetic construction of the people, how it thus stresses the way in which art constitutes relations of autochthony. For, in fact, we know of a romantic tradition of critical thinking that looks to art as the force that induces the construction of a people to come, of a community to come. As if it were up to art to produce the bonds and myths that were once assumed by religion, with its unifying power[16]. As if it were a case of art dislodging religion from its position as the unifying power of the social spheres of values, reconstructing social horizons of experience through a certain aesthetic experience. We can find the roots of this impulse in programmatic texts from the European 19th century, such as Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man* and his affirmation of the need for a "total revolution of the entire mode of sensation" (Schiller, 2011, p. 129), without forgetting its decisive influence on the young Marx. Or we could remember "The oldest program of German idealism", a fragment of text that united Hölderlin, Hegel and Schelling in a confused authorship.

This short text is paradigmatic of a certain form of social criticism and political action that would run through the 19th century. The search for social emancipation involved the rejection of institutions that until then had not been capable of being the organic expression of popular force: "Faced with the idea of humanity, I want to show that there is no idea of the State because the State is something mechanical, just as there is no idea of a machine. Only what is the object of freedom is called an idea. We must, therefore, go beyond the State!" the text will say, clearly marked by the destitutionist impulses of the French Revolution. This rejection of current institutions would lead us to open up towards a new community based on the power of creation inherent in poetry and its suspension of the dichotomies between myth and reason, reason and sensibility: "Only then will we be awaited by the identical formation of all forces, both the singular and all individuals. No force will be oppressed anymore. Then, the general freedom and equality of spirits will reign!" (Hegel et al., 2003). In other words, the production of social emancipation, a space in which no force will be oppressed anymore and in which real equality is finally realized, involves the renewal of social ties through the capacity for new sharing produced by the poem, through the poem's ability to call for a land and a people that do not yet exist. For fundamental sectors of Romanticism are marked by the revolutionary processes that will take

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

place at the end of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century on European soil. The time in revolution is also the space in revolution because the instability of the present or, rather, *the insubmission to the present forces the emergence of another land and another people.* This impulse will not end at the beginning of the 19th century but will continue throughout the 20th century.

However, there are at least two ways of calling for a missing people. The missing people can be embodied as a self-determining people within the emergent nation-state, as we see in the music of 19th century composers crossed by the affirmation of the national people (Grieg, Smetana, Dvorak, Borodin, Rimski-Kossakov, Lizst, Carlos Gomes, Wagner). A people that spreads over time by recovering or recreating centuries-old myths. But the other land may not be exactly the new national land, but the cosmopolitan land of friendship called for by the chorus of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. A land that problematizes the very notion of people in order to make us move towards something else.

Let's start with the first case. There will be this transition from the missing people to the national people also in modernism, especially if we pay attention to the configurations of "peripheral modernisms" (see Sarlo, 2010), that is, the modernism that appears in these peripheral countries in relation to the development of capitalism, such as Brazil, Argentina, Russia, or even Hungary, Romania, and other Eastern European countries. Because in these cases, social modernization, attempts at national construction, and aesthetic modernization will end up developing multiple and unique articulations. In other words, at this point, we have a certain form of modernist realization of a program whose roots actually lie in romanticism.

In this sense, the Brazilian and Russian cases are of extreme interest because they are associated with different types of revolutionary processes. In a period not too distant from each other, Brazil and Russia went through revolutionary processes that turned modernism into a real state project. In 1917, Russia underwent a popular revolution that turned its first years into a unique moment of mobilization of the power to establish aesthetic modernism as a condition for the aesthetic construction of a new people. Brazil will undergo a "passive revolution" in 1930, i.e. not a popular revolution but a top-down revolution that will use the association between the populist state and the modernist avant-garde to articulate conservative social modernization and radical aesthetic modernization. This extensive movement goes from the inauguration of the first Brazilian modernist building, the Capanema Palace (1943), to the inauguration of Brasilia (1960).

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

A note on the Brazilian aesthetics of national conciliation

Let's focus on the Brazilian case because of its uniqueness. From the 1930s onwards, state power in Brazil was faced with a system of transformations led by disgruntled oligarchies and the army, which until then had played a marginal role in power. This alliance aimed to pull the country out of backwardness, break the power of the hegemonic oligarchies, and build a new national unity, affirming a new configuration of Brazilian identity in a process inseparable from its aesthetic component. One of the axes of this process would be the unstable integration of social demands and organized sectors of the working class into this consortium of power, creating a figure typical of Latin American populist dynamics.

Within this process, a hitherto unprecedented association between state power and the aesthetic avant-garde was inaugurated. It spanned several languages. In music, we will see the composer Heitor Villa-Lobos involved in the creation of the Superintendence of Musical and Artistic Education (SEMA), a federal body for the dissemination of musical education, mainly through the dissemination of orpheonic singing. Through these practices and institutions, it was a case of creating the conditions for a much broader education than simply musical awareness. As Villa-Lobos said: "Orpheonicsinging is one of the highest crystallizations and the true appanage of music. Because, as its enormous power of cohesion, creating a powerful collective organism, it integrates the individual into the social heritage of the homeland" (Santos, 2010, p. 73).

But it was architecture that served as the main driving force behind modernism as a state project, a phenomenon that began with the creation of the Capanema Palace, home to the Ministry of Education and Culture. We should consider the fact that this aesthetic construction of the country began with a national Ministry of Education, until reaching, in less than twenty years, a maximum point of junction in this dynamic of recreating the state and realizing the aesthetic utopia. This point of junction took shape in the early 1960s with the transfer of the national capital to the interior of the country and the creation of a modernist city designed for 500,000 inhabitants based on Lucio Costa's urban plan and Oscar Niemeyer's architecture. In order to feel the impact of this gesture, let's remember, for example, what Marxist art critic Mario Pedrosa said at the time, in statements not very different from what we could find on the lips of others:

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

> Brasília is, in essence, a work of art that is built. For it is nothing more than "a fragment of nature that bears the mark of a finite creative effort so that it stands alone, an individual thing, detached from the vague infinity of its *background*". As an era that wants to be one of synthesis, our end of the century will increasingly be one of building cities and regions. Building the new city is the greatest work of art that can be done in the century. (Pedrosa, 2014, p. 65)

It's hard not to hear in these words echoes of the expectations of reconciliation between the "construction of cities and regions" and aesthetic creation that have run in the West since the 19th century. It's hard not to notice, in words like these, the conscious affirmation of the belief that it was up to Brazil to achieve a synthesis between development and creativity, to speak like the economist Celso Furtado. Urbes as a concrete utopia. A synthesis sponsored by a total work of art, a new kind of city whose constructive force would be at the service of producing a new people, a new territory, and a new country. This led Lúcio Costa to state that Brazil's technological, economic, and social future would be made "under the sign of art" (Costa, 1995, p. 298).

The Brazilian case has the singularity of responding to the clamor for missing people through the action of a populist state that seeks to reconcile the new people to be built with its state structures and institutions. The state conquers new geographical spaces and pushes the people into the interior of its own hitherto sparsely populated territory through the literal construction of new cities, and the internalization of development. As if the clamor for a missing people that we have heard since romanticism was resolved in a great aesthetic of national conciliation of modernist inspiration. We can speak of an "aesthetic of national conciliation" because the missing people would be found, they could exist as the people of a nation-state, of its institutions and history, even if that history needs to somehow heal its wounds without leaving scars.

This aesthetic of national conciliation in its healing character can be heard in a piece by Heitor Villa-Lobos such as the Bachianas Brasileira n. 2, in his Tocatta entitled "O trenzinho do caipira". Perhaps no other music in Brazilian history has so clearly expressed a certain desire for the aesthetic construction of a people that runs through us, or at least ran through some of our most significant moments. It's not hard to see the mimetic nature of the music, all of which is built around the idea of a train leaving the station, going through its journey, and arriving at its destination. The technique of constructing musical images isn't exactly the most interesting point

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

of this piece, not least because Arthur Honneger had done something similar ten years earlier, with a song called Pacific 231.

What I'd like to draw attention to is how this song, so present in our social imaginary, speaks of movement in space, of a space in which one could move around. It speaks of a land that has finally been reconciled. A movement that foreshadows the dream of national integration that would be the axis of national development in the 1950s and 1960s in Brazil. The train does not advance like abandeirante entering the territory promising a development whose surname is destruction, extermination, and subjection of the peoples placed in a subordinate condition. It advances like someone seeking to establish conciliation and heal wounds. For this reason, the martial force of the machinery, mimetically constructed from percussion, serves as the basis for the presentation of a melody that has nothing affirmative about it, which has the magic of, even in C major and made in an upward movement, having a clear nostalgic tone inspired by children's circles.

And it's this reconciliation between machinism and lyricism that gives the music its unique combination. It's as if it promised to reconcile development and poetry, progress and fantasy. Something that could stop the violence of a country that was built by destroying itself, exterminating its original peoples, and being America's greatest experiment in enslavement without having to make its contradictions explicit. As if another era had begun, the era of an "organized fantasy", to use the words of Celso Furtado. Not by chance, this is a train that goes inland, which at one point allows the lyricism of the melody in progression to resolve into motifs that recover a certain tone from the music of the original peoples, as if on this path there was a reunion of modernization with erased memory. Like everything else in Brazil, this construction of a people is a true state program. It is the promise of a conciliation that will haunt us to this day (Safatle, 2023, 2024a). It's no coincidence that this will be the song played in the Praça dos Três Poderes when Luís Inácio Lula da Silva's third term as president comes to an end in 2023, after four years of extreme right-wing government. The idea was clear: it was as if the country was returning to its dreams, its original fantasies ... and its illusions.

The aesthetics of the irreconcilability of territory: the Bartók case

But I'd like to take this discussion to another horizon. It would be a case of showing how the modernist impulse to call for a missing people can lead to an expression of a different order, in this case, an expression for a landmarked not by an aesthetic of national conciliation but by an

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

awareness of the profound irreconcilability of the territory. In this sense, the relationship to autochthony would not be thought of as the production of a reconciliation with the territory or as the production of a reconciled territory, whether this territory is indexed in the form of the nation or in the multiple forms of the community that meets its ancestry. Rather, territory appears as the space of a form in open conflict or rather the form of open conflict. A space crossed by the awareness of its own impossibility of unity, of the need to deal with the crossing of forces and forms coming from dynamics that have colonized us, but which at the same time, have produced a global connection of dispossession that can be recovered by the subaltern classes as a condition for a land to come. This global connection of dispossession builds another territory, of the circulation of musical forms that are not completely configured as a people. At this point, there is something that will only appear in a more finished form with a certain modernism.

It would then be appropriate to talk about a unique case where something opposite to the Brazilian and Russian examples occurs, namely, the idea of aesthetic construction of a people in a modernist key appears not in association with the strength of the state, but exactly when the state order breaks down. This is the case of Bela Bartok and his musical experience, which began at a time when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was breaking down. This moment led Bartok to say: "There has never been such a dark moment in the history of the country". Cases like this are interesting because they show how these upheavals in order can be moments to explore the breakdown of hierarchies and the construction of new meanings for notions such as space, territory, and place.

We know how it is part of the process of social subjection to turn non-hegemonic social experiences and their aesthetic forms into expressions of archaisms. As if the process of constituting hegemonies needed to establish the idea that the music that runs through the experience of the peoples who are to be colonized is "folklore", in other words, something that has no power to produce futures, but only to preserve pasts, thereby nullifying the productive and transformative force of these populations' ties to the territory.

In this sense, Bartok is a privileged example of someone who seeks modernity through a meticulous look at the music of subalternized peoples, peoples who were minoritized by Europe's own imperial potentials, such as mainly Hungarians, Romanians and Bulgarians, although Bartok also researched the music of Serbo-Croats, Algerians, and Turks. As we know, together with Kodaly, Bartok set out to record and analyze the melodies and musical forms of the peasant class, discovering not only melodic material of impressive richness. He discovered a creative potential for forms, for the complexification of rhythms, tempos, and structures. Let's start with the way in which Bartok himself understands the uniqueness of his creative process:

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/© 2025 Safatle V.

> In the 19th century, the rise or rise of nationalism, within the smallest and most solvent politically oppressed nations (such as the Poles, the Czechs, and the Hungarians), was accompanied by the ever stronger demand for art in national colors; but, in the intellectual circles of these countries, we don't know any more about the country than the popular-style classical music which, thanks to its touches of exoticism here or there, is certainly not devoid of any attraction. (Bartók, 2020, p. 124)

It's clear that Bartok starts from an impossibility of listening. According to him, musical romanticism, when it turned to listening to a national people to be formed, only listened to the musical projections of its local bourgeoisie, what he calls "popular-style classical music". In this sense, the people are missing in a more dramatic sense: they simply aren't there where they're summoned, this musical material isn't theirs. And it couldn't be otherwise, because popular music is a peasant music averse to writing:

> When put into writing, folk melodies lose precisely what they had to offer the musician, namely, lived experience. The fixed notation is capable of restoring the finer nuances of rhythm or intonation, glissés, in short, all the vital pulse of country music. Once it has been written down, a peasant melody is nothing more than the theoretical sign of itself: anyone who has never understood this melody, or any others that may have appeared to them in a living form, such as the bouche of the paysans, will never obtain a correct image of it. (Bartók, 2020, p. 126)

A vital pulse, a living form that would be distorted by writing, because the writing of Western concert music wouldn't know how to describe rhythms whose pulse is mobile, intonations that use quarter tones. Ever since Rousseau, we have been familiar with the criticism of musical writing as a form of exile from expression. We only have to remember statements such as: "This methodical, rhythmic music, but without genius, without invention and without taste, which is called *written music* par excellence in Paris and which, in fact, only serves to be written, but never to be performed" (Rousseau, 1753, p. 309). As if writing were a rupture of presence, the exile of the people, and the loss of the land.

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/© 2025 Safatle V.

But there is something that completely distances Bartok from Rousseau. For it's not a question of recovering the expressiveness of melody, against the development of harmonic complexification, in order to submit musical form to a principle of clarification that is the condition for it to produce moral effects. In Rousseau, there is a politics of proximity and presence that the critique of the primacy of writing seeks to guarantee. It is foreign to Bartok because the living form of Hungarian rural music is a fundamental principle of tensioning form, rhythm and even the function of instruments. This couldn't be different for someone who understands the land as a space of continuous metamorphoses, of deterritorializations that leave their mark on the musical material. Hence a statement like:

> Any people, in fact, possesses a musical style of a certain degree of cultural development. According to different processes, foreign melodies of a higher degree of cultural development - whether they are savant melodies or the melodies of a poorer peasantry - come to the forefront of that peasantry. They are repeated, as well in space as in time. And, in the course of this process, variants are born, diversified according to their distribution in space - at first with fairly small deviations from the original form, then, by accumulation, with greater deviations. (Bartók, 2020, p. 122)

In other words, the earth is the space of a continuous process of creation by variation, of displaced assimilation of forms and melodies. This creation by variation does, however, have a temporal thickness in which it is possible to see: "more than one original trait shines through the newer melodies". So it is with the pentatonic system of Hungarian music, which preserves the traces of its Asian origin, from Central Asia, Mongolia, and China, even after various metamorphoses. This creates a geography of a different kind: the geography of improbable circulations and flows of subterranean continuities and surface discontinuities.

The result is impure music, marked by continuous "crossings and recrossings" (Bartók, 2020, p. 282). Bartok gives the example of a Hungarian melody that is borrowed by the Slovaks and thus "Slovakized". Later, it will be taken over by the Hungarians and "rehungarized". But this final form will be quite different from the original. In this process of listening, Bartok goes so far as to ask people to "put the brakes on national feelings and repress them" (Bartók, 2020, p. 255) and recognizes this as his case, i.e. the case of musicians from nation A who decides to research the

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

music circulating in nation B will be viewed with the strangeness of someone who would call into question the supposed naturalness of the places of speech and listening.

In a way, we can even say that what is discovered in this way is not exactly popular music because it is not the music of a people, but the music of the decomposition of the people as a unit. However, this decomposition leads to the true common and contingent ground built by musical circulation. The soil of peoples who take the melodies of colonizing peoples and recompose them, who open up a new understanding of who the real agents are in a given territory. Soil in which boundaries disappear, places are repeated and a new relationship between the static and the dynamic is constituted. This music thus calls for something that is even beyond the people as a unitary national subject. Perhaps it shows us that the people are missing because there is something that must come *after* the people, even if from the people. In other words, Bartok shows us what the place of the local means. Far from establishing an irreducibility of the particular, the local is the space where localization breaks down, where the deepening of genesis leads us to a continuous resonance between apparently distinct places.

A Bulgarian dance

But let's start with a paradigmatic example of his compositional processes, in this case, the 6 dances in Bulgarian rhythm, which make up the last volume of the MIkrokosmos. The piece is one of the last in this series of 6 volumes called Mikrokosmos. These are a set of didactic exercises that have had a great influence on the piano repertoire. The function of these pieces is, however, more ambitious. It aims to follow the pianist from childhood to maturity, from the most elementary pieces to his most consolidated mastery of pianistic technique and expression. And, not by chance, the final moment of this long process is provided by six Bulgarian dances. As if the pinnacle of the pianist's training consisted of being able to appropriate the modernity inherent in the expressions of people who have been placed in conditions of minority.

For example, an important point of Bartok's research lies in recognizing the productive power of the asymmetry of the rhythms discovered in his research. Normally, each of these pieces has a basic rhythmic pattern that develops. In the case of the piece mentioned here, we have a 4+2+3/8 rhythm. This means that in each bar, there will be 9 semiquavers in an irregular pulse of 4,2,3. Something much more elaborate and complex than our rhythmic structure, usually based on 2/4, ¾, or 4/4.

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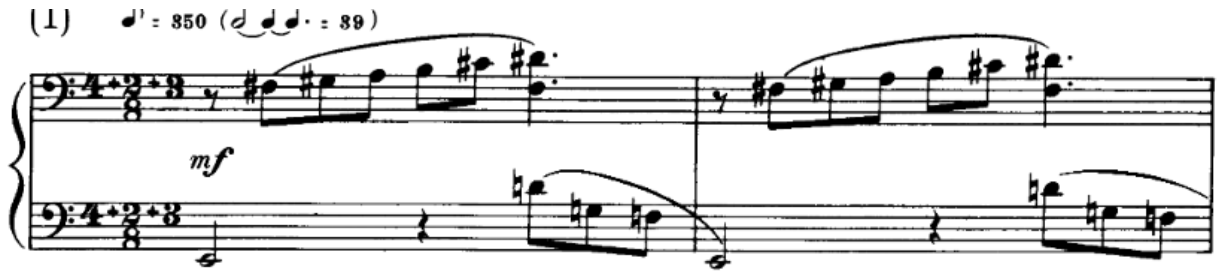
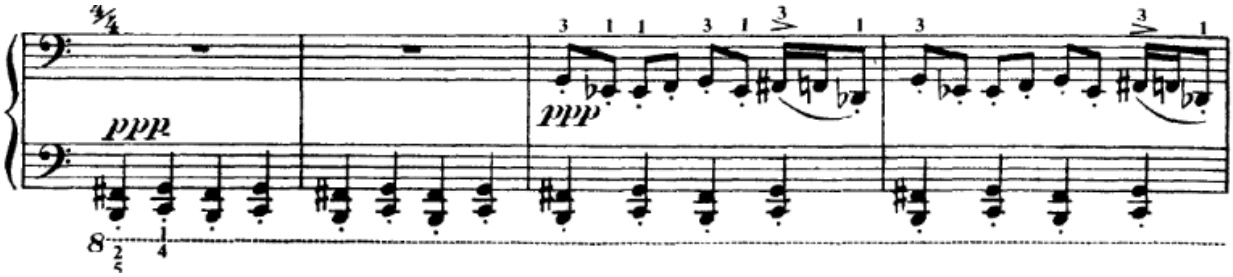
2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/



In pieces like the first of the *Two Romanian Dances*, from 1909, the rhythm often changes from measure to measure, starting with 4/4 and moving on to 2/4, ¾, 6/4, and 7/4. This rhythmic malleability allows the musical form to approach the free organicity of peasant singing. This piece also has the additional interest of showing how extensively Bartok unfolds a musical idea. The musical idea that generates the piece is a rhythmic dance marking made up of 6 eighth notes, 2 semi-eighth notes, and an eighth note that appears in the very first bars of the right hand.



This motive element will unfold throughout the piece, transposed, and divided into smaller fragments, creating a cohesion that will permeate various dance forms, from those that make the piano an eminently percussive instrument, as we see in these first four bars, to those that recover ballroom dance accompaniment modes. The unity is formed by the continuously unfolding motive cell.

But let's return to Bulgarian dance. Its development reveals continuous lines of conflict. First, the asymmetrical rhythm is sustained by the left hand while the right-hand builds a melodic phrase. However, the right hand is not at the same pitch as the left hand. This is a beautiful example of the way Bartok uses polytonality, bitonality, and polymodality. Bitonality and polytonality mean that, in a long piece of music, the music develops from two or more simultaneous tonal principles. As if it followed two different orders at the same time. In the case of polymodality and bimodality, these are different modes.

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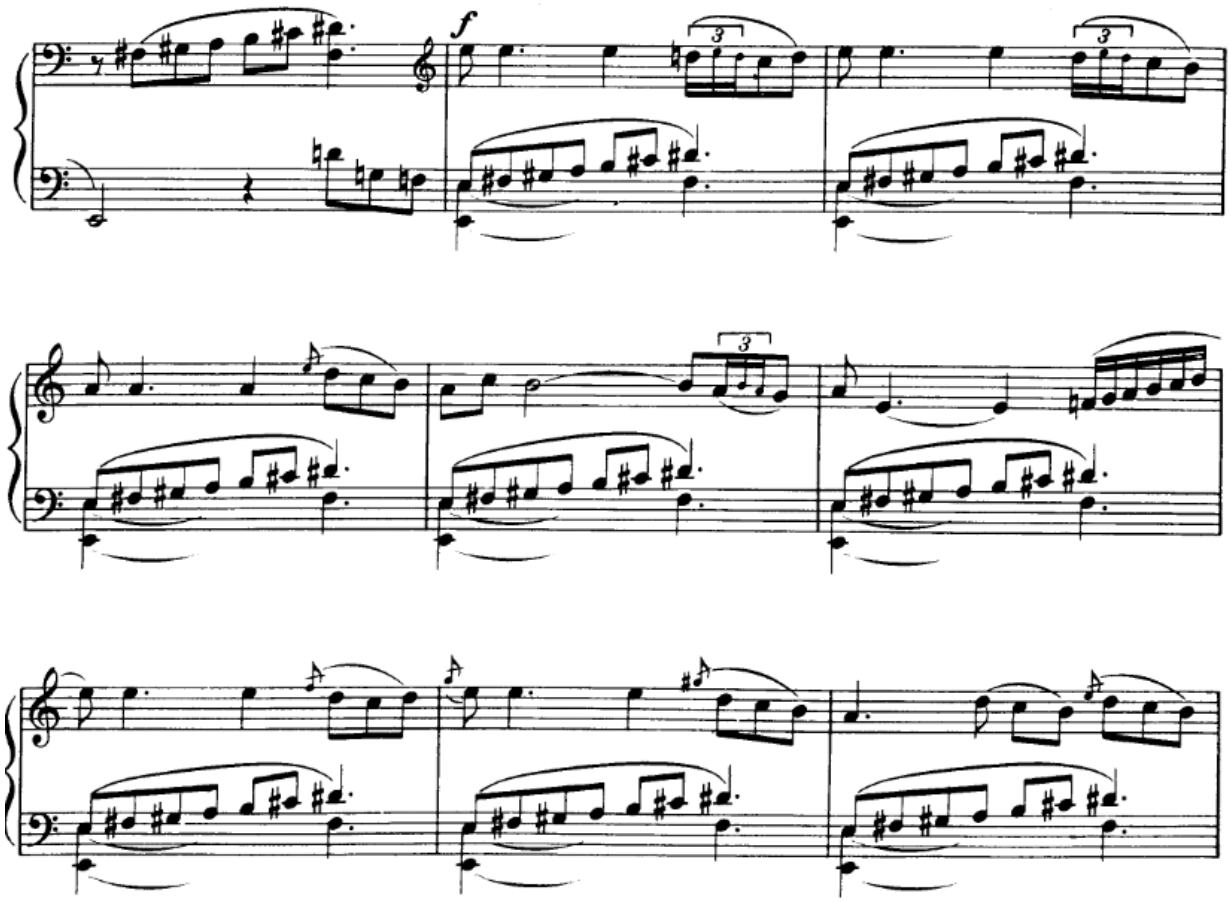
2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/



In this piece, we see a clear example of the use of a pentatonic base scale, starting in E, and the use of modal registers, such as Phrygian and Lydian. Modal registers are forms of organization with a "circular" characteristic, typical of non-modern societies because they don't have the system of tension and resolution of dissonances typical of the tonal system that characterizes Western modernity. Bartok's uniqueness in this case consists of using all these elements simultaneously within a dynamic that still preserves important elements of tonal logic, such as the modulations of the fundamental note of the left hand that obey a perfect chord of A major[17]. In other words, everything happens as if Bartok were building a territory where the power of peasant creation, with its elements refractory to the hegemonic forms of the time of "progress", would eat away at the music of the bourgeoisie. Adorno spoke of a certain peasant cunning in hiding from the powerful until they can seize power from them. There is something of this in Bartok's music. This reminds us that the critic couldn't be Lot's wife, prevented from looking back if she didn't want to become a salt statue. The works of art show how listening to what has been left behind by the processes of social modernization is a condition for the liberation of the emancipated form.

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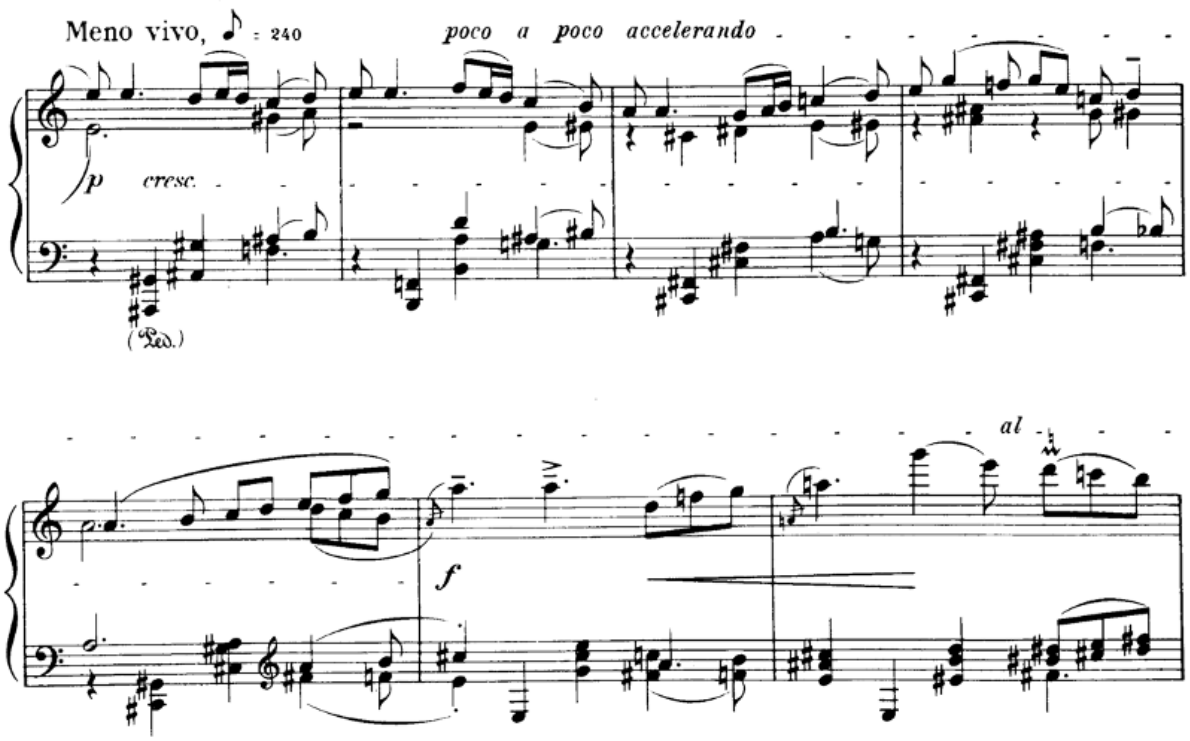
2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/© 2025 Safatle V.

Let's also note how these elements of Bulgarian dance can be put back into a ballroom dance character.



As if some sort of, shall we say, class reconciliation were possible between the musical materials. Only, and this makes all the difference, the asymmetrical rhythm makes this approximation something that is always crossed by tension, by irreconcilability. That's why Bartok's music doesn't lie, it doesn't bring about the reconciliation that is impossible in society. It gives form to its tension. That's why the piece can only end with a descending chromaticism that leaves no doubt as to its true spirit.

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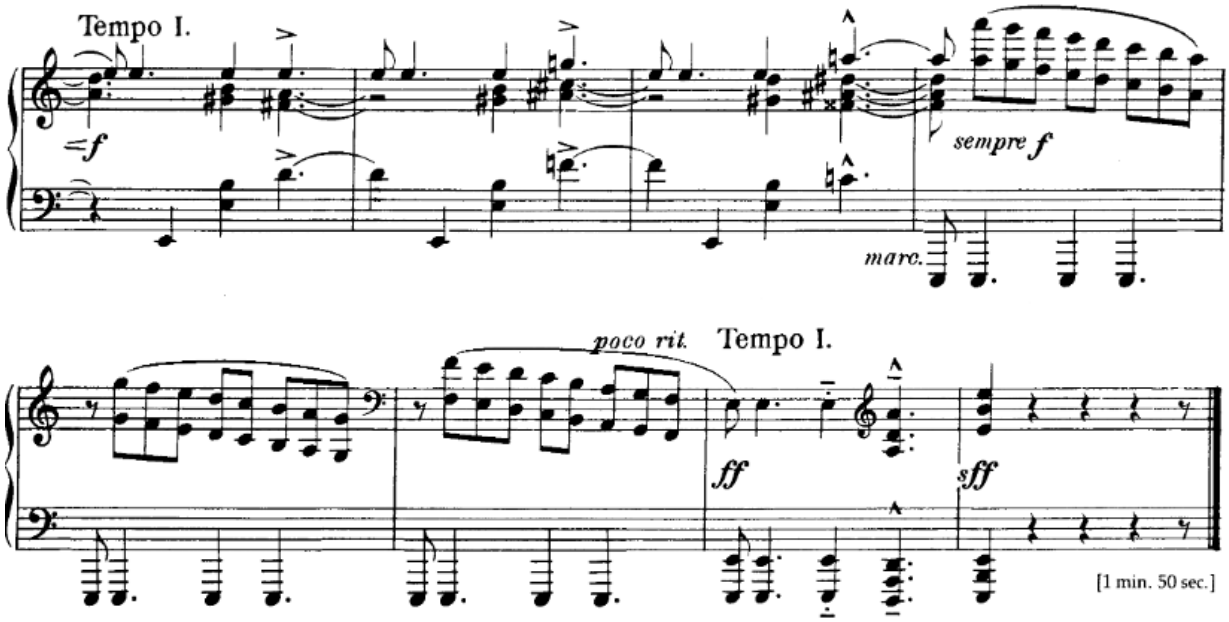

There is no possible conciliation. There is only giving form to irreconciliation as a creative social power. In other words, the territory that is constructed here is similar to a "space in insurrection" in which the fundamental creative principle is the instability of the form produced by the attempt to integrate elements of an insubmissive popular field whose complexity has been ignored until now. This form shows us another way of inhabiting a land, of referring to a territory, where unity, identity, and affiliation no longer play a structuring role. We could ask ourselves how listening to this land can remind the social imagination of what it is capable of creating when it returns to what has been erased and silenced, as someone who opens up to a path that has never yet been traced and is full of future.

Finally, there are those who might wonder about the sense of sustaining reflections of this nature by listening, once again, to productions of musical modernism. After all, they weren't the ones who "inflamed the masses", nor are they the ones who are present today, beyond a restricted circuit of elitist listeners in air-conditioned concert halls. This raises a beautiful question: how much are these works documents of a possibility that has not yet been realized? In other words, they are not exactly "obsolete" and "aged", but "suspended", like (and, well, I know this metaphor has its history) a message in a bottle thrown into the sea. Because their impossibility of realization doesn't exactly mean that these works were incapable of "communicating" with the people, but that they are marks of a possibility whose time is still suspended, that its "people" have not yet arrived. Their incommunicability is not a fault of these works, but an expression of what refuses to be actualized in our present.

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2025/4 - paris-ias-ideas - Article No.1. Freely available at https://paris.pias.science/article/belonging-to-a-land-to-come-aesthetic-experience-autochthony-and-social-emancipation - ISSN 2826-2832/

Few today are surprised that we must once again turn our eyes to the cosmovisions of native peoples if we want to recover the potential for the future that has been trapped and silenced in the past. Recovering them is not a gesture of restoration, but rather a conscious act of refusing the configurations of force of the present as a "fait accompli", insisting that the tradition of which we are legatees is much more conflicted and antagonistic than they would have us believe, that there are more possible paths than they sell us. It's possible that we should also do something similar to the tradition of aesthetic experience to which we are legatees. Silencing is a political weapon that can be used in various ways and in various places. It is up to us to understand the difficulty of aesthetic form not as mere formalism (regardless of what that might actually mean), but as a demand to live through liberated and emancipated listening. A listening that cries out for another land. This other land still inhabits us.

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Footnotes

1 : Topic well developed, from a Hegelian logic by Brandom (2002).↩

2 : A classic theme from Horkheimer and Adorno (1991).↩

3 : The concept of connected crisis derives from the notion of "polycrisis" developed by Edgar Morin in Morín and Kern (2010). But the first report that, back in the early 1970s, pointed to the consolidation of a scenario of multiple connected crises driven by the ecological collapse produced by exponential capitalist growth was Meadows et al. (2007).↩

4 : I have already insisted on this aspect in Safatle (2022a).↩

5 : The list here is extensive and ranges from Latour (2006) to Mignolo (2011).↩

6 : The task of dissociating heteronomy and servitude was first proposed by Derrida (2002).↩

7 : I developed this aspect in Safatle (2024b).↩

8 : The canonical version of aesthetic autonomy as self-referentiality was given by Greenberg (1997) and by Fried (1968). Let's also remember Arthur Danto, for whom: "with modernism, the very conditions of representation became central, so that art became, in a way, its own subject " (Danto, 2010, p. 9).↩

9 : This is a path opened up by Rancière (2000).↩

10 : See in this regard fundamental works such as those by Bispo dos Santos (2023), Danowsky and Viveiros de castro (2023), Escobar (2008) Goddard (2024), and Maniglier (2021).↩

11 : See the pioneering work of Mariategui (2024).↩

12 : See, for example, the description of the "people of merchandise" by a Yanomami shaman in Kopenawa Yanomami and Albert (2009).↩

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13 : See, for example, Laidlaw (2013).↩

14 : This theme of understanding territoriality as a space for free movement has already appeared in discussions linked to social emancipation struggles, especially in certain sectors of anti-colonial struggles, as we can find, for example, in Fanon (2022).↩

15 : Or this surprising statement: "Not only did art not wait for the human being to begin, but we can ask whether art actually appears in the human being, except under late and artificial conditions" (p. 394).↩

16 : On the relationship between art and politics in romanticism, see above all Löwy (2012), and Löwy and Sayre (2015).↩

17 : On this subject, see Antokoletz (1984).↩

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