

Listening to the artist's identity: Music, artist, and hegemony

Sanatçı kimliğini dinlemek: Müzik, sanatçı ve hegemonya

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that musical reception is not merely an aesthetic experience but a sociomusical process shaped by the artist's identity and political stance within hegemonic relations. For Frith (1996), listeners' emotional alliances formed with the performer and the performer's other listeners are crucial for understanding how the bond with the artist is constructed. In conditions of heightened political intensity, the artist's political stance, articulated through their practices and statements as part of their public image, directly influences musical reception. Following Shiner's (2001) account of the "invention of art," it demonstrates that the concepts of art and the artist are historically linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie, highlighting how the connotations of "genius" and "freedom" have served as ideological foundations defining the artist's social role. In this regard, the paper examines anecdotes about the image of the artist, which Kris and Kurz (1934/1979) trace back to antiquity. By focusing on "listening to the artist's identity," this paper demonstrates how the artist's political position transforms musical reception itself. The artist emerges as a symbolic center of power, shaped through discursive processes that extend beyond the individual subject, carrying historical and social meanings and representing political positions. Within the framework of Gramsci's (1947/2021) theory of hegemony, it is argued that artists have the potential to produce either "consent" or "resistance" within the hegemonic order, as organic or traditional intellectuals. This paper presents a theoretical/critical review based on an interpretive reading of key literature and publicly available materials. Finally, it concludes that, because of the historical and ideological construction of the concepts of art and the artist, the artist's political stance can influence the listener's aesthetic experience. The paper highlights that the political alliance in which the artist, as a hegemonic subject, participates structures the emotional alliances listeners form with the artist. Thus, from a Gramscian perspective, artists – who are intellectuals by nature – can become key subjects influencing musical reception by assuming the organic or traditional intellectual roles within the hegemonic order.

Keywords: music, artist, hegemony, organic intellectual, traditional intellectual, musical reception

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, müziksel alımlamanın salt estetik deneyimin ötesinde sanatçının kimliği ve politik tutumunun hegemonik ilişkiler içindeki konumlanışıyla şekillenen sosyomüziksel bir süreç olduğunu savunur. Frith'e (1996) göre dinleyicilerin icracıyla ve icracının diğer dinleyicileriyle geliştirdiği duygusal ittifaklar, sanatçıyla kurulan bağın nasıl oluştuğunu anlamak açısından önem taşır. Bilhassa politik hareketliliğin arttığı koşullarda sanatçının politik tutumu gibi kamusal imgesini şekillendiren eylem ve söylemleri, müziksel alımlamayı doğrudan etkiler. Çalışmada, Shiner'in (2001) "sanatın icadı" yaklaşımı doğrultusunda sanat ve sanatçı kavramlarının tarihsel olarak burjuvazinin yükselişiyle ilişkili olduğu gösterilir; "deha" ve "özgürlük" gibi çağrışımların ise sanatçının toplumsal rolünü etkileyen ideolojik temelleri oluşturduğu vurgulanır. Bu kapsamda Kris ve Kurz'un (1934/1979) antikçağa kadar dayandırdığı sanatçı imgesine dair anekdotlar üzerinde durulur. Çalışma, "sanatçı kimliğini dinlemek" olgusu bağlamında sanatçının politik konumunun müziksel alımlamayı nasıl dönüştürdüğünü ortaya koyar. Sanatçı; tekil bir özne olmanın ötesinde söylemsel süreçler tarafından şekillenen, tarihsel ve toplumsal anlamları

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taşıyan ve politik konumları temsil eden simgesel bir güç odağı olarak belirir. Bu kapsamda Gramsci'nin (1947/2021) hegemonya teorisi çerçevesinde sanatçının organik veya geleneksel entelektüel olarak hegemonik düzende "rıza" veya "direniş" üretme potansiyeline sahip olduğu ileri sürülür. Çalışma, temel literatür ve kamuya açık verilerin yorumlayıcı okunmasına dayanan teorik/eleştirel derleme niteliği taşımaktadır. Sonuç olarak çalışma; sanat ve sanatçı kavramlarının tarihsel ve ideolojik inşasından ötürü, müzik alanında sanatçının politik tutumunun dinleyicinin estetik deneyimini etkileyebildiğini savunur. Çalışmada, sanatçının bir hegemonik özne olarak müdahil olduğu politik ittifakın, dinleyicilerin sanatçıyla kurduğu duygusal ittifakları yapılandıracağına altı çizilir. Böylece Gramsciyen perspektifte doğaları gereği entelektüel bir konumda bulunan sanatçılar, hegemonik düzen içinde üstlendikleri organik veya geleneksel entelektüel roller aracılığıyla müziksel alımlamayı belirleyen başat özneler hâline gelebilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: müzik, sanatçı, hegemonya, organik entelektüel, geleneksel entelektüel, müziksel alımlama

1. INTRODUCTION

Musical reception is a sociomusical process that extends beyond auditory and purely aesthetic experience. In his article "Music and Identity" (Frith, 1996), Frith argues that the experience of popular music is inherently an experience of identity. For Frith (1996), listeners engage with music by forming *emotional alliances* with the performer and the performer's other listeners. An artist is not merely a creator of music but also a bearer and representative of collective identities. Therefore, the artist's public image – particularly their political stance – can directly influence how their music is received. This relationship is historically evident in the conceptualization of the *Wagner effect* (see Tan, 2025). This effect refers to how the artist's moral illegitimacy disrupts the conditions of "ideal reception" by undermining the possibility of experiencing music as merely music. Wagner's antisemitic views (Wagner, 1850/1894) and the subsequent Nazi appropriation of his music have profoundly shaped the reception of his works. This implies that an artist's non-musical actions may transform the audience's aesthetic experience and challenge efforts to separate the music from the artist.

When an artist reaches a certain level of public admiration, listening to their music becomes a way of listening to their identity, a process rooted in the historical and ideological construction of the concepts of art and the artist. The artist, as a subject who conditions the meaning and pleasure of musical experience, functions in Gramscian terms (Gramsci, 1947/2021) as an intellectual embedded within the hegemonic order. Artists, particularly prominent ones, tend to become embedded in hegemonic relations through their music, public statements, and political engagements, often during periods of heightened political intensity. In this sense, the political alliances an artist forms can influence listeners' emotional alliances. Thus, the act of listening becomes tied to the artist's position within the hegemonic order, indicating that aesthetic experience is inherently embedded within power relations. Power is not only exercised through hegemonic structures but also circulates through discursive formations that shape how the artist is perceived and interpreted. As Foucault (1980) suggests, power relations are inseparable from the production of discourse.

Building on this theoretical framework, this paper examines how the historically and ideologically constructed concept of the artist shapes musical reception and enables musicians to function as hegemonic subjects. In the (ethno)musicology literature, studies addressing artists' moral illegitimacy and its impact on musical reception are limited, and the ideological implications of conceptualizing the musician as an artist within reception processes remain unexplored. Using Gramsci's (1947/2021) theory of hegemony, this paper reconceptualizes musical listening as a sociopolitical practice embedded in power relations, political alliances, and the historically constructed meanings of art and the artist.

1.1. Significance of the Study

It is essential to bring into focus this paper's contribution to the (ethno)musicology literature. Studies examining how an artist's identity affects the reception process generally focus on the fine arts (see Kaube et al., 2023; Maltwood & O'Meara, 2021; Matthes, 2022; Moulard et al., 2014; Ralston, 2022), while research dealing solely with music (see Tan, 2025) remains relatively rare. Similarly, there is a clear gap in the literature regarding the artist's ideological and hegemonic role within musical reception (for a visual-arts exception, see Kraus, 2017). As a result, the artist's role as a hegemonic subject – considered here through the musician – and its impact on musical reception have not been adequately explored. While Tan's (2025) previous paper examined how the artist's deviant behaviors – including misogyny, harassment, pedophilia, and murder – affect musical reception, the present paper aims to fill this gap by examining the artist's political positioning within hegemonic relations. It considers how the artist's political stance serves as a site where aesthetic aspects and hegemonic relations intersect in musical reception.

1.2. Research Questions

This paper addresses two research questions: (1) how do the historically and ideologically constructed concepts of art and the artist shape the artist's potential to act as a hegemonic subject? and (2) how can an artist's role as a hegemonic subject influence the audience's musical reception?

Furthermore, the paper draws attention to an often-overlooked aspect of the (ethno)musicological literature: how the connotations of the term "artist" structure musical reception and reveal the musician's position in modern Western societies. It signals the importance of rethinking the musician as an artist.

1.3. Scope and Delimitations

This paper presents a theoretically grounded critical analysis of the narratives that construct the image of the artist and constitute their potential to function as a hegemonic subject, particularly in relation to musical reception. In this paper, illustrative examples drawn from selected artists are not intended to form an extensive case study analysis; instead, they serve to concretize the theoretical arguments, that is, to reveal the artist's potential to become a hegemonic subject. Thus, the paper does not aim to provide an empirical or genre-specific analysis but rather to develop a theoretically grounded discussion, supported by illustrative examples taken from diverse musical domains, such as Western art music and popular music. The term "(ethno)musicology" is used here to reflect ongoing developments that challenge boundaries between historical musicology and ethnomusicology (see Stobart, 2008; Cook, 2008), aligning the paper with an integrative and critical analytical framework that treats music as a cultural and social practice. Future research may empirically deepen or extend the theoretical arguments presented here across different genres, political contexts, and local settings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This paper develops a theoretically grounded critical review through interpretive analysis of key literature and publicly available materials. Rather than relying on an empirical research model, it critically examines existing literature, theoretical texts, publicly available materials, and selected illustrative examples in relation to its conceptual framework. The literature is reviewed thematically, with an emphasis on debates on the invention of art, the formation of the image of the artist, the act of listening to the artist's identity, and the artist's role as a hegemonic intellectual. To understand the concepts of art and the artist, the paper builds on Shiner's (2001) foundational work on the archaeology of the concept of art and Kris and Kurz's (1934/1979) influential account tracing the image of the artist to antiquity. In addition, considerations of musical reception draw on the work of (ethno)musicologists and music sociologists such as Becker (1982), Nettl (1992), Cook (1998), Brackett (1995), and Frith (1996). Lastly, Gramsci's (1947/2021) theory of hegemony and his conception of the intellectual are used to understand the artist within power relations, particularly the musician. At the same time, Foucault's (1980) notion of discourse is drawn upon as a complementary perspective to consider how the artist's identity is constructed and circulated.

The paper examines Wagner and Beethoven in Western art music and Sting and Woody Guthrie in popular music, selecting them for their well-documented political positions and symbolic significance, treating these examples as illustrative rather than as case studies. The publicly documented political positions and historical importance of these artists reveal the contrast with organic and traditional intellectual roles. In light of Gramsci's (1947/1985) distinction between organic and traditional intellectuals, the discussion examines how artists can function as intellectuals within a hegemonic order and how this, in turn, shapes musical reception. Finally, this analysis demonstrates that the image of the artist structures the conditions of musical reception and reveals the inseparability of aesthetic experience from power relations.

2.1. The Invention of Art and Politics of the "Beautiful"

Shiner (2001) states that the reduction of the concept of "art" to the "fine arts" arises from a specific rupture in eighteenth-century Europe. This rupture, or *the great division*, positioned the new category of the fine arts (poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, music) in opposition to crafts (shoemaking, embroidery) and popular arts (storytelling, popular songs), in Shiner's (2001) classification. Shiner (2001) argues that the fine arts emphasize aesthetics through extraordinary individual creation, treating values such as "genius," "inspiration/sensibility," "spontaneity," "creative imagination," "originality," "creation," and "freedom" as inherent aims.

In contrast, crafts and popular arts function within the parameters of "skill" and "rules," serving utilitarian purposes, often driven by monetary concerns, or simply aiming to entertain. By the nineteenth century, the adjective "fine" had dropped out of use, and "art" came to denote exclusively what had previously been called the fine arts (Shiner, 2001). The rising powers of the period actively constructed this category, and the meaning of art developed within power relations. The emergence of the art category in Europe coincided with the rise of the bourgeoisie, which Shiner (2001, p. 79) describes as "polite arts for the polite classes." The growth of the bourgeoisie was crucial to the development of the art market and the cultivation of a middle-class art public. The discussions outlined by Shiner (2001) clarify the ideological connotations of the concepts of art, and their formative influence on music, musical reception, and hegemonic relations, thereby providing a basis for the remainder of the paper.

Understanding the image of the artist first requires recognizing the values that underlie art itself. In ancient Greece, before the great division, Plato (ca. 390 BCE/1982) – like other moralist philosophers – linked art with morality, arguing that "the good is useful," "the useful is beautiful," and, thus, "the good is beautiful." Similarly, in late eighteenth-century France, Voltaire, Diderot, and the Encyclopedists believed that art should serve "virtue" and "freedom" (Plekhanov, 1959/1999). On the other hand, aesthetic thought within German Idealism articulated the principle of "art for art's sake" (*L'art pour l'art*). For example, as Freville (1959/1999) notes, Kant regarded art as a "purposeless," "useless," and "free" domain of individual engagement. After 1830, Romantic writers such as Flaubert and Gautier also supported the "art for art's sake" approach without placing particular emphasis on its social role (Plekhanov, 1959/1999).

During the repressive reign of Nicholas I in Russia, intellectuals such as Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Dobrolyubov – who laid the foundations of materialist art criticism – argued that art should preserve its connection to life and be grounded in "social utility" (Freville, 1959/1999). Similarly, Plekhanov (1959/1999), who introduced a class dimension to the materialist critical tradition, contended that art must serve the working class's struggle for emancipation. Thus, these views conceive of art in terms of values such as "the good," "the beautiful," "enlightenment," "education," and "social utility," forming the basis for the idea that "art is for society" (*L'art pour la société*). Here, art does not merely reflect reality but rearticulates it as a socially mediated and human-centered construction (Tunali, 1976). The views that attribute a social function and purpose to art provide the ideological ground upon which the image of the artist – constructed through connotations such as "free," "genius," and "rebellious," as discussed in the next section – is built, enabling listeners to experience musical reception as inseparable from the artist's social and political positioning.

As a result, Kant, Gautier, and Flaubert – who regarded art as free from social concerns – stand in direct opposition to Voltaire, Diderot, and certain materialist-Marxist intellectuals, who emphasized its moral, social utility, and revolutionary functions within the "art for society" approach. While the "art for art's sake" approach remains philosophically influential, the archaeology of the art concept – as Shiner (2001) illustrates – reveals that its historical formation is inseparable from an ideological and social framework.

The contrasting approaches to art discussed to this point also significantly influence how the audience perceives the image of the artist and how they relate the artist to their art. The question of the artist's social and aesthetic significance, however, requires examining how that image is formed.

2.2. The Formation of the Image of the Artist

Although the invention of art dates back to the eighteenth century, Kris and Kurz (1934/1979) examine the roots of the image of the artist in antiquity. They view the signatures inscribed on the works of sixth-century BCE Greek artists as precursors to artistic fame. While this approach appears plausible, the great division described by Shiner (2001) also introduced connotations specific to the term "artist." Nevertheless, Kris and Kurz's (1934/1979, p. 8) "anecdotes about artists" remain essential for understanding the image of the artist. For example, they interpret a Gnostic apocryphal text added to the Bible, describing a childhood miracle of Jesus, in which he copies sparrows from clay and brings them to life at his command, as a portrayal of the divine artist, expressed in terms such as *divino artista* or *alter deus* (Kris & Kurz, 1934/1979). This narrative of Jesus's miraculous act of sculpture-making evokes both the "divinity of the artist" and the theme of the "artist's childhood miracle." Another example is Mozart, who, at the age of fourteen, reportedly heard Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere* only once in Rome and, on the same day, transcribed the entire piece flawlessly (Wright, 2008, p. 3). For Kris and Kurz (1934/1979), the artist's ingenious actions and remarks, extending beyond their art, also contribute to shaping their public image. For them, the artist's biography is crucial to interpreting the works and to demonstrating the bond between the artist and the art. This reflects a tradition

– extending from antiquity to modern times – that views the work as the artist's "child" and the act of creation as a kind of "sexual act" (Kris & Kurz, 1934/1979, p. 115). Such an account is important for demonstrating how the relationship between the artist and the art is constructed as closely integrated and could be difficult to separate in musical reception.

Shiner (2001) emphasizes that, after the great division, the ideal image of the artist came to be defined by poetic qualities such as "inspiration," "imagination," "freedom," and "genius." Attributes associated with the image of the artisan, such as "skill," "rules," and "service," were increasingly met with reproach (Shiner, 2001). Furthermore, Shiner (2001) notes that "suffering" and "rebellion" are long-standing stereotypes in the image of the artist. These stereotypes emerged during the Romantic period, which followed the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, portraying the artist as a "sublime" and "genius" figure (Beard & Gloag, 2005). For Dahlhaus (1980), the cult of genius was central to nineteenth-century aesthetic religion. Building on this, Shiner (2001, p. 203) argues that the Romantics viewed the artist's suffering through the lens of the "curse of genius." The theme of the artist's "freedom," which carries into Romanticism, also merits attention. Although some earlier artists refused to follow their patrons' instructions, demands for "freedom" and "independence" grew over time (Shiner, 2001). For example, Mozart left the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg, Hieronymus Colloredo – known for his repressive practices – in what Finkelstein (1952/1970, p. 48) describes as a "historic declaration of artistic independence." In the Romantic period, as the aristocracy declined and the rising bourgeoisie drove the expansion of the art market, Beethoven's radical struggle for freedom gained greater significance, resonating with the *zeitgeist* (see DeNora, 1995). Thus, the artist's capacity to act "freely," guided by inner motivation rather than external influence, became another defining feature of the image of the artist. This dynamic indicates that, as with the concept of art itself, the concept of the artist is also structured by social and ideological conditions.

The historical account presented here, though centered on high culture, also applies to popular music artists. In popular music, musicians who achieve cultural prominence are often regarded as artists. Regardless of genre, every artist – when viewed through the connotations of the image of the artist – can be considered a central element in the process of musical reception.

2.3. Listening to the Artist's Identity

Becker (1982, p. 22) begins with the observation, "the work, after all, does not change if we learn that someone else did it; the plays are the same words, whether Shakespeare or Bacon wrote them, aren't they? Yes and no." He refers to Borges's (1964) short story about a writer named Pierre Menard, who seeks to rewrite Cervantes's *Don Quixote* without ever consulting the original. Although Menard succeeds in producing a text identical to Cervantes's, the historical and social conditions under which he writes – together with the fact of who he is – render it a different work (Becker, 1982). Becker (1982, p. 23) also notes that an artist's reputation is the "sum of the values we assign the works they have produced," and that every painting by Titian is judged according to how great an artist he is considered to be. For example, novelist Trollope tested the advantages of an established reputation by publishing under a pseudonym; however, when the works issued without his name failed to attract attention, he abandoned the experiment (Trollope, 1883/1947).

A similar situation can be observed in (ethno)musicology. For example, historical musicology often frames research as the "discovery of documents that fill the gaps of history." In addressing the gaps in Western music history, sources such as composers' unpublished scores and personal letters play a central role in historical inquiry (Özer, 1997). In studies where historical and aesthetic perspectives intersect, knowing the artist is essential for evaluating the music "accurately." Netti's account demonstrates this:

"I was sitting after dinner with a group of music scholars. 'What if it were discovered that Meistersinger had not been composed by Wagner, but by Herr von X? Would it still be the same work?' 'Certainly not,' was the consensus, vehemently reinforced by an art historian in reference to works by Leonardo or Van Gogh" (Nettl, 1992, p. 11).

This dynamic affects the audience as much as it does historical musicologists. As Cook notes:

"When we listen to Beethoven's music we don't just listen to the sound it makes. We hear it as music by Beethoven, hear it in relation to the image of the composer that we build up through listening to his music and reading about him" (Cook, 1998, p. 81).

For example, the Wagner effect I mentioned earlier appears differently in Kolland's (1984) interpretation. He argues that the "real Wagner" was a revolutionary who, had he lived, would not have sided with the Nazis, and that his association with them is therefore implausible. For Kutluk (1997/2018), Kolland's admiration for Wagner's music leads him to overlook the composer's personal traits. Underlying this position are traces of the aesthetic-moral approach, from ancient Greece to Enlightenment thought, which holds that "the good is beautiful," an ideal clearly at odds with Wagner's antisemitic views. Taken together, this example and the preceding analysis demonstrate that musical reception is not a purely objective process but is shaped by ideological and ethical processes rooted in the artist's reputation and political stance.

The artist's identity is less relevant in the context of national anthems. Cook highlights this with the example of "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika," the South African national anthem composed in 1897 by Enoch Sontonga, a teacher at a Methodist missionary school, noting that:

"For those who sing or hear it, the meaning of 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica' is inextricably tied up with South Africa, but not in the same way with Sontonga; knowing it was composed by Sontonga may be interesting, but has little if anything to do with what it means" (Cook, 1998, pp. 80-81).

In this sense, in national anthems, even when the author is known, the symbolism of an authorless collective identity often prevails, reflecting Anderson's (1983/2016) notion of *imagined communities*. A similar pattern can be observed in anonymous folk music; yet in many cases, the performer actively assumes the role of the author. In Turkish folk music, the Anatolian *âşıklık* (minstrelsy) tradition and composed works (e.g., Âşık Mahzuni Şerif and Neşet Ertaş) illustrate how powerful the author's presence can be. In Western art music, the composer has been associated with a "sublime" status, reflected in expressions such as *divino artista* or *alter deus*.

In contrast, the notion of a single author is less apparent in popular music. For Brackett (1995), in popular music production, the songwriter, arranger, studio musicians, and lead singer each play a vital role. Erol (2015, p. 175) defines these agents as a "collective subject." Here, listeners often perceive the lead singer as the primary source of a song's emotional content (Brackett, 1995). In short, as in Western art music, the artist's identity in popular music can be "listened to" and can shape the construction of meaning. As Frith (1996) notes, listeners engage with music by forming an emotional alliance with the performer and the performer's other listeners, making music a collective experience. From a Foucauldian perspective (Foucault, 1980), the artist's identity can also be understood as a discursive construct, produced through historically specific statements, narratives, and institutional practices. What listeners "hear" in the artist, then, is not a given identity but a discursively produced subject-position.

The points I discussed so far indicate that the artist's identity directly influences musical reception. For Becker (1982), art and the artist acquire meaning within *art worlds*. This paper examines how an artist's identity, constructed within art worlds, is shaped by political worlds, and how the artist's engagement in a political alliance can affect listeners' emotional alliance. In this sense, understanding the artist's political stance requires an understanding of Gramsci's theory of hegemony.

2.4. The Artist as a Hegemonic and Intellectual Subject

Gramsci's theory of hegemony distinguishes between "leadership" and "rule," highlighting that the leadership capacity is vital to maintaining or transferring power. A social group, whether the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, may exhibit leadership qualities even before attaining power, or may lose the ability to lead, even to govern, while holding power (Gramsci, 1947/2021). This indicates that, unlike "domination," which denotes the absolute superiority of one social group, hegemony is established through the production of "consent." Santucci (2005/2010, p. 154) emphasizes that the loss of consent leads to a stage in which "the old dies and the new cannot rise," thereby triggering crises of authority. In such moments, Bennett (2005, p. 24) argues that the ruling class can reestablish hegemony only through the "accommodation of opposing class values."

At its core, hegemony entails a continuous pursuit of alliances and negotiations through which the dominant group maintains – or attains – its ruling position. It is helpful to understand hegemony through Gramsci's distinction between "minor politics" (*piccola politica*) and "major politics" (*grande politica*). As Santucci (2005/2010, p. 173) notes, minor politics refers to "day-to-day politics, parliamentary politics, and the politics of lobbying and intrigue." This form of politics operates within the framework of the "established order," where capitalist relations of production remain unquestioned. In contrast, major politics manifests

in the founding of new states or in the transformation and defense of socioeconomic structures (Santucci, 2005/2010). Gramsci's (1947/2021) theory of hegemony undoubtedly prioritizes major politics, focusing on the strategies through which class dominance is established and maintained. Yet the theory of hegemony also proves effective for understanding the struggles between ruling and opposition blocs within Western democracies, particularly in how "consent" and "resistance" function in minor politics.

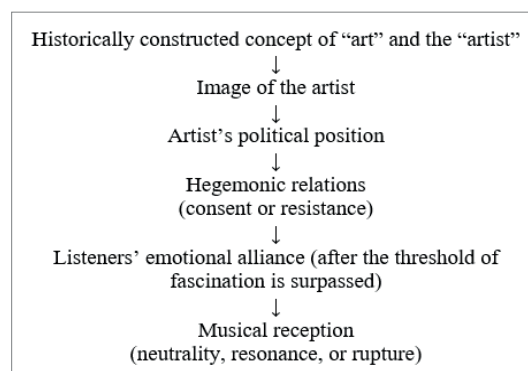
The theory of hegemony outlined thus far enables Cultural Studies to approach popular culture without resorting to a reductionist perspective. In this sense, it diverges from the Frankfurt School's approach (particularly that of Adorno and Horkheimer), which views popular culture consumers as "cultural dopes." As Hall (1981) emphasizes, popular culture is neither an autonomous culture existing independently of power relations nor a mere reflection of the culture industry's absolute dominance. For Hall (1981), popular culture is a site of struggle where "resistance" and "consent" are articulated, in line with Gramsci's conception of hegemony. By focusing on reception and relegating the producer to the background within the "author-text-reader" triad, Cultural Studies resists the producer-centered approach of the Frankfurt School and draws on Barthes's and Foucault's notion of the "death of the author" (Caughie, 1981; Goodwin, 1992). For Tan (2025), however, the assumption that readers disregard authors risks overlooking the sociocultural and ideological power of the author. Considering the author's power as an artist entails recognizing the artist's presence in hegemonic relations and thus in musical reception.

To understand the specific role that artists may play in power relations, it is necessary to focus on the intellectuals to whom Gramsci attributed particular importance in the production of hegemonic consent. For Gramsci (1947/1985), since even the most mechanical manual labor contains an element of creative thought, all people are, in a sense, intellectuals. However, the disproportionate distribution of mental and manual labor in society suggests that not everyone can perform intellectual functions. Here, Gramsci (1947/1985) distinguishes between organic and traditional intellectuals. *Organic intellectuals*, as "experts in legitimation," are tied to social groups that seek to govern society and are connected to transformations in the mode of production (for example, from feudal to capitalist production) (Swingewood, 1984, p. 213). As representatives of a class, organic intellectuals generate ideas that either maintain or subvert the existing hegemony. *Traditional intellectuals*, by contrast, are products of an "uninterrupted historical continuity," linking the past to the present without close ties to the mode of production or the dominant class (Swingewood, 1984, p. 213). Examples include religious thinkers, jurists, physicians, teachers, academics, writers, philosophers, and artists. In short, for Gramsci, any social group aspiring to power seeks to assimilate and conquer traditional intellectuals while simultaneously developing its own organic intellectuals (Santucci, 2005/2010). Finally, Gramsci (1947/1967) assigns to the political party, the "modern prince," as he calls it, the task of uniting organic and traditional intellectuals.

Among traditional intellectuals, artists – whom Gramsci (1947/2021) ranked alongside scientists and philosophers at the highest level – must be considered critically in relation to hegemony. The image of the artist, rooted in nearly two centuries of historical and ideological context, assumes a distinct role as a traditional intellectual in articulating "consent" and "resistance" within the hegemonic order. The possibility that an artist may shift from being a traditional to an organic intellectual gains particular significance within the framework of class contradictions, as the artist's political stance reflects them. Moreover, in a climate marked by intense political polarization, the "pressure to speak" regarding which bloc an artist supports directly influences the reception of their music. The theoretical relationships outlined thus far are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The relationship among artist identity, politics, and musical reception



In this sense, the political statements of artists who, as Tan (2025) argues, have already surpassed the *threshold of fascination* – that is, who have attained a certain level of public admiration – can trigger disappointment and lead to emotional or even financial repercussions. This is because when an admired artist speaks on political matters, it can contribute to either the legitimation or the destabilization of the hegemonic order. This relationship is examined through the illustrative examples that follow.

2.5. Illustrative Examples: From Wagner to Guthrie

The artist's potential to function as a hegemonic subject can be clarified through examples taken from Western art music and popular music. An intellectual role, whether organic or traditional, depends directly on the artist's relationship with the hegemonic field. As noted earlier, artists positioned within what Gramsci, as discussed by Santucci (2005/2010), calls minor politics may function as traditional intellectuals, whereas those engaged in major politics are more likely to act as organic intellectuals. This intellectual role extends beyond musical practice and is also expressed through the artist's public statements and the construction of their identity. To illustrate the argument, Wagner and Sting stand as traditional intellectuals, whereas Beethoven and Woody Guthrie exemplify organic intellectuals within the contexts of Western art music and popular music.

Wagner briefly engaged in major politics when he joined the Dresden uprising during the Revolutions of 1848, adopting a stance against feudalism and the monarchy. However, as Wagner's antisemitic and German nationalist views became more pronounced over time and were reflected, at least in part, in his music, he came to occupy a traditional intellectual position embedded in the hegemonic bloc and situated within the field of minor politics. For example, in his essay "Das Judentum in der Musik" (Wagner, 1850/1894), Wagner depicts Judaism as the source of musical degeneration and turns the idea of a "pure" German culture into a discourse of artistic superiority. For Ticker (2016), the themes in Wagner's music dramas, such as *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Wagner, 1868) and *Parsifal* (Wagner, 1882), highlight an aesthetic nationalism tied to German identity. The appropriation of Wagner's political ideas by the Nazi regime led to a rupture in the interpretation of his music, resulting in the Wagner effect mentioned in the introduction. Wagner's traditional intellectuality, formed in the context of minor politics, rests on a highly contentious ground that reaches beyond artistic activity.

In popular music, Sting occasionally makes notable political statements, but his stance mostly remains within the field of minor politics, grounded in ethical concerns. The events in which Sting participated after the 1980s reveal his social awareness. His participation in famine-relief projects such as Band Aid in 1984 and Live Aid in 1985, his advocacy for environmental and Indigenous rights through the establishment of the Rainforest Foundation Fund in 1989, and his support for human rights during the 1988 Human Rights Now! tour are examples. Sting's ethical sensitivity is also reflected in his songs. For example, in "Driven to Tears" (The Police, 1980), recorded with The Police, Sting addresses the famine crisis in Africa and the apathy of Western societies; in "Invisible Sun" (The Police, 1981), also recorded with the band, he turns to the political violence and despair in Northern Ireland; and in "They Dance Alone (Cueca Solo)" (Sting, 1987) he calls attention to the suffering of the relatives of the disappeared during Chile's dictatorship, taking a clear stance against the Pinochet regime. Sting's critiques generally target the problems caused by the system rather than the system itself, and thus remain distant from the aims of social transformation or any class-based content. As a traditional intellectual, Sting uses his actions and his music to cultivate an ethical sensibility within the field of minor politics. This sensibility establishes moral legitimacy for the audience and positively influences his musical reception.

Beethoven's engagement in the major politics of his time through his revolutionary ideals makes him one of the most prominent organic intellectuals in Western art music. As mentioned earlier, Beethoven's break from the feudal patronage system and his emphasis on the identity of the "independent artist" reveal a politically transformative stance that is not merely aesthetic. For example, Beethoven composed the *Eroica Symphony* (Beethoven, 1804) in republican admiration for Napoleon Bonaparte; however, after Napoleon declared himself emperor, he withdrew the dedication, thereby making his republican and anti-monarchical stance clear (Wright, 2020). For Jones (2014), the opening motif of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* (Beethoven, 1808) carries echoes of Cherubini's *Hymne du Panthéon* (Cherubini, 1794) and functions as a kind of "Jacobin" leitmotif, similar to what is heard in revolutionary anthems such as "La Marseillaise" (Rouget de Lisle, 1792). Moreover, Beethoven's ideal of major politics is evident in his musical expression of Enlightenment ideals of freedom, equality, and brotherhood in the setting of Schiller's poem "An die Freude" (Schiller, 1785) in the *Ninth Symphony* (Beethoven, 1824). Taken together, Beethoven functioned as an organic intellectual who,

through both his practices and his music, embodied the anti-monarchical, republican, and Enlightenment values of the rising bourgeoisie of his time. In contrast to Wagner, Beethoven's overtly revolutionary political stance does not undermine musical reception; instead, it reinforces his image as a "genius."

Woody Guthrie, a folk singer-songwriter, is one of the most prominent organic intellectuals in popular music, as Carr (2019, p. 321) also notes in his article. Emerging during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl of the 1930s, Guthrie, as a socialist, built his music around themes of the working class, poverty, migration, and injustice. Although his well-known song "This Land Is Your Land" (Guthrie, 1945b) is often received through themes of "national unity" and "shared homeland," it emphasizes collective sharing and challenges capitalist notions of property on class-based grounds (see Stadler, 2021). Guthrie's songs, such as "Ludlow Massacre" (Guthrie, 1944) and "1913 Massacre" (Guthrie, 1945a), highlight the violence against the working class and foreground class struggle, calling for working-class consciousness. On the other hand, with his song "Grand Coulee Dam" (Guthrie, 1941), Guthrie presents a socialist vision grounded in collective production within the U.S. context. Guthrie's songs, such as "Hard Travelin'" (Guthrie, 1947) and "Ramblin' Round" (Guthrie, 1949), address hobo life and migrant labor; for Guthrie, hobos – like workers – are part of the same whole, living under the dominance of "the capitalistic few" and "Profit Grabbers" (Carr, 2019, p. 315). In short, Guthrie aims to link folk music with working-class consciousness by making music guided by class politics and critical of the capitalist mode of production. With these qualities, Guthrie turns his music into a counter-hegemonic form of intervention and becomes a concrete example of the organic intellectual artist. Although Guthrie's protest music is often perceived as an expression of ethical sensitivity, listeners who do not share his worldview may experience these songs as ideologically unsettling or alienating. As Dwyer (2022) critically argues, the admiration Guthrie receives today may result from ignorance, romanticization, or a general sympathy for leftist ideas, a claim he reinforces by stating that those who honor Guthrie as a hero "should hang their heads in shame." This perspective further shapes the musical reception by framing Guthrie's legacy through an ideologically charged lens. The illustrative artists are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Illustrative artists, hegemony, and musical reception

Artist	Music	Political Stance	Intellectual Role	Hegemonic Function	Musical Reception
Wagner	Western art music	German nationalism, antisemitism	Traditional intellectual	Consent within the hegemonic bloc	Wagner effect (rupture, discomfort)
Sting	Popular music (pop, rock)	Ethical activism	Traditional intellectual	Ethical positioning	Moral resonance
Beethoven	Western art music	Republicanism, anti-monarchism	Organic intellectual	Bourgeois revolutionary bloc	Enhanced aesthetic authority
Guthrie	Popular music (folk, protest)	Socialist, class struggle	Organic intellectual	Counter-hegemonic	At times ideologically contested reception

In this respect, these examples highlight how artists take different roles within the hegemonic order and how these roles influence musical reception. In the discussion section, these illustrative examples are examined in relation to the research questions to assess their theoretical implications.

3. DISCUSSION

Throughout this paper, two main questions have been addressed: (1) how do the historically and ideologically constructed concepts of art and the artist shape the artist's potential to act as a hegemonic subject? and (2) how can an artist's role as a hegemonic subject influence the audience's musical reception? As Shiner (2001) demonstrates, the concept of art that developed alongside the rise of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century has carried ideological connotations since its emergence. This also laid the groundwork for the image of the artist to be imbued with ideological implications. From Plato to the French Encyclopedists and Russian materialist critics, art has been evaluated on the basis of social utility. In this light, the German Idealists' and the Romantics' claim of "art for art's sake" could never fully materialize, since the concept of art emerged through ideological formations; the premise that "art is for society" was already embedded in its foundations. This perspective reveals that the image of the artist is inherently entangled with ideological

and political agendas. These agendas are not only maintained through hegemonic relations but are also reproduced through discursive mechanisms that define what can be said, thought, and heard about the artist (Foucault, 1980). Thus, although the artist – whether seen as a *divino artista* or an *alter deus* – is attributed with individual qualities such as “inspiration,” “imagination,” “freedom,” and “genius,” they essentially function as a social subject.

This suggests that the artist, whether functioning as an organic or a traditional intellectual, always bears a specific responsibility in relation to hegemony. From a Gramscian perspective, which emphasizes that all people are, in a sense, intellectuals, the audience can also be conceived as possessing political and intellectual qualities. In this sense, the audience expects the artist to assume an intellectual role and to contribute to strengthening the hegemonic bloc they support, particularly in politically intense periods. Accordingly, the artist may adopt a political position that reflects the historical and ideological meanings inscribed in the concepts of art and the artist, as the discussed examples illustrate. As Becker’s (1982) art world – constituted through interactions among various agents – indicates, it is inherently linked to the political world.

The artist’s functioning as a hegemonic subject may entail both cultural costs and benefits. As Tan (2025) points out, for listeners who have surpassed a certain threshold of fascination, their connection to the artist assumes emotional and ethical dimensions that transcend aesthetics. In Frith’s (1996) terms, listeners engage with music through an emotional alliance formed with the performer and the performer’s other listeners. Therefore, attitudes indicating that the artist has sided with a particular political alliance may rupture this emotional alliance (as in Wagner’s example). When connection with the audience collapses, the artist’s reputation may be damaged, producing what can be called the Wagner effect: reactivity, a loss of meaning, and a loss of pleasure. Conversely, when the artist’s political stance corresponds with the audience’s expectations and values, aesthetic appreciation tends to be reinforced (as in Beethoven’s example, even Guthrie) or at least remains intact. Significantly, whether this cultural loss or benefit occurs rests on how the artist embodies the historically ascribed qualities such as “freedom” and “independence.” Artists perceived as expressing these qualities tend to sustain audience connection more effectively.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper suggests that, particularly in periods of heightened political intensity, musical reception is not fully separable from an artist’s political stance. The act of listening is constituted as a relational process in which the music itself, the image of the artist, and hegemonic relations intersect. The musician can be understood as a historical and ideological bearer of the concepts of art and the artist, functioning not merely as the author of music but also as an intellectual and hegemonic subject who shapes its reception. This paper indicates that, within hegemonic relations, artists are intellectual subjects capable of producing “consent” or “resistance,” thereby influencing their audiences. Aesthetic experience in music is constituted through the music itself and from listening to the artist’s identity, conditioned by the ideological affinity between the artist and the audience. Thus, it is evident that art worlds and political worlds, often considered distinct, profoundly influence and intersect with one another. The paper expands the discussion of musical reception in (ethno)musicology and conceptualizes it as an extension of ideology and power relations structured by the social connotations ascribed to artistic identity.

Future research may further illuminate the artist’s hegemonic role in musical reception through empirical analyses across different genres, political contexts, and local settings. Particularly in the digital age, where political discourses and debates circulate rapidly across social media platforms, new possibilities emerge for deepening analyses of this role.

Ethical approval

This study does not require ethics committee approval as it does not involve human, animal or sensitive data.

Author contribution

Review conception and design: ST; literature review: ST; draft manuscript preparation: ST. Author reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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