

## Against Fundamentalism

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 Miguel A. García

In December 2019, Dante Mantovani, president of the *Fundação Nacional de Artes* of Brazil, fed the discriminatory narrative outlined by ultra-right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro through declarations which pointed to rock as the cause of drug use and a direct entrance door to sex, abortion and “Satanism”.<sup>1</sup> His declarations, supported by barely understandable references to Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, John Lennon, the CIA and the Soviet government, caused repudiation bordering on horror in academic, intellectual and artistic environments, not only because of its contents and the perspective from which they are made, but also because of the fact that they were uttered by an official supposedly responsible for encouraging the production and development of the arts in a plural way and who, besides, had university education –as it is stated on his Internet page, Mantovani boasts graduate and post-graduate degrees awarded by the *Universidade Estadual de Londrina*.<sup>2</sup> For various reasons, his declarations deserve an answer which goes beyond aversion, in particular because they usurp the authority which the State grants, conferred on him because of his position as an official, and that awarded by academia, attributed to him because of his condition as university graduate. But, should those declarations be discarded or rebutted?

The condemnatory references to drugs, sex and abortion inscribe Mantovani’s assertions in a conservative morality, and the allusion to “Satanism” links them to a religious thought which *a priori* reduces the rock phenomenon to a Manichean logic. This corroboration casts doubt on whether the religious perspective and its reductionism are sufficient reasons to discard his affirmations without further discussion or if, on the contrary, they must be attended to and their value as “true” impugned

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0Xg1RnRM2Q>

<sup>2</sup> See details in <https://dantemantovani.org/wp/>

through argumentation, criticism or evidence, or rebutted in any other term.

A way of approaching this doubt consists in assuming the policy of ethnomusicology and anthropology when they are confronted with knowledge founded on some sort of religious thought. If these disciplines have not undervalued, let alone discarded, this kind of thought when it manifests itself among native peoples or subordinated urban groups, in order to be coherent, neither should the religious character of Mantovani's statements be a sufficient reason to be dismissed *a priori*. Let's also remember, besides, that when a religious foundation has had room in the developments of social and humanistic disciplines –particularly philosophy– it has led to a refutation rather than to a rejection without an argument. Let's also take into account that Mantovani belongs to an environment in which religiosity has an extensive presence, despite many Brazilian university graduates preferring to keep it on the margins of their research routines and others being inclined not to unveil the importance it has in their academic work. Neither should their reductionist character be a valid reason *per se* to discard Mantovani's assertions without argumentation. Are most sociological theories about rock not themselves reductionist in some sense when they exclude the sound dimension of the phenomenon?

Another possible way to estimate the degree of consideration which Mantovani's declarations deserve is to put them in the orbit of the concerns of an eclectic and ever-expanding perspective which tries to distance itself from the Eurocentric and "epistemicidal" policies spread by the northern academic centers. According to the most radical version of this perspective, decolonial criticism leads to the recognition of knowledge normally branded as inconsistent, religious, partial or inferior and, as a result, to the emergence of a plural and decategorized scenario. The declarations which relate rock to "Satanism" reveal a limitation of the radically ecumenical character of this perspective: How to accept a knowledge which even pronounced from the margins denigrates a musical expression of mass consumption? How to accept declarations which seem to be reverent with a conservatism which some of us used to believe annihilated? How to include declarations which exclude, close universes and reduce experience to an only variable? How to coexist with a perspective which enthrones a religious type of morality and discards the charm of doubt and hermeneutic multiplicity? If the case is to avoid an indulgent paternalism or the subterfuge of political correctness in the face of the otherness, the inclusive and decolonized perspective must establish a limit: it cannot offer a cozy place to knowledge which obliterates the diversity of practices and

of knowledge. It cannot offer a cozy place to assertions which celebrate what that perspective itself has come to displace: monolithic thinking. Therefore, what must be refuted about Mantovani's declarations is not so much their contents but the world they prescribe, a unidimensional world, and the tool which designs it, fundamentalism. That is to say, his declarations deserve a political reply which denounces the type of power which they mask rather than a musicological or sociological trick aimed to defend a musical expression or to denounce the narrowness of the mind which focuses on it.