

Swaying to the Symphony of Destruction¹

Análisis crítico del discurso político presente en las dos primeras estrofas de la canción Symphony Of Destruction del grupo Megadeth

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Abstract

Colombian Political discourse has been flowing through conveniences and utterances of hierarchy, relations between powers, and discourse, dominance and social cognition manipulation pop up at the moment of communicating discourses and ideologies from political elites. This reflective paper explores from critical discourse theory (Van Dijk, 1993b) such components of political speech above listed, the *legitimate* dominance that Governors and national parliamentary “*fathers*” socially asserted upon worker and common class from micro and macro-levels of discursive lyrical structure. In this case, it will be decoded since the two first stanzas of *Symphony of Destruction* satirical song, written, composed and performed by Dave Mustain, leader of the Heavy Metal band Megadeth.

Key words: Power, discourse, dominance, social cognition, critical discourse analysis, access.

Resumen

El discurso político en Colombia se ha estado moviendo entre las conveniencias y las manifestaciones jerárquicas, relaciones entre poder, discurso, dominación y manipulación de la conciencia social surgen al momento de expresar ideologías y comunicarse por parte de las élites políticas. En este artículo de carácter reflexivo se explora la realidad discursiva de la clase política desde la teoría del análisis crítico del discurso (Van Dijk, 1993b), muchos de los componentes anteriormente mencionados y, la *legítima* dominación que los padres de la patria y la clase política ha acentuado sobre la clase común y sobre la clase trabajadora desde las micro y macro estructuras del “*discurso lírico político*”. En este caso, se realizará una decodificación desde las dos primeras estrofas de la canción *Symphony of Destruction*, compuesta e interpretada por Dave Mustain, líder de la banda estadounidense de Thrash Metal Megadeth.

Resumo

O discurso político na Colômbia vem se movendo entre conveniências e manifestações hierárquicas, as relações entre poder, discurso, dominação e manipulação da consciência social surgem no momento de expressar ideologias e comunicar pelas elites políticas. Este artigo reflexivo explora a realidade discursiva da classe política a partir da teoria da análise crítica do discurso (Van Dijk, 1993b), muitos dos componentes acima mencionados, e a dominação legítima que os pais da pátria e da classe A política acentuou a classe comum e a classe trabalhadora a partir das micro e macroestruturas do “discurso político lírico”. Neste caso, uma decodificação será executada a partir das duas primeiras estrofes da música *Symphony of Destruction*, composta e interpretada por Dave Mustain, líder da banda americana de Thrash Metal, Megadeth.

Introduction

The importance of unveiling true intentions among different contexts have taken relevance in academic, social, religious, political and many other scenarios nowadays. This is when Critical Discourse Analysis takes role; most people want to show their feelings and emotional thoughts by means of several communicative ephemerides. One of these is music, an enchanting lyrical form to communicate, to “spellbind” and to share direct and indirect ways to life reality.

In this way, comes the word “Music”. In the first place a word. As a word, it has meaning. As a word, it gives meaning. It takes

sounds for example: this sound is music. Which actually conveys: ‘we’ consider this sound as music. Music – as word – frames, delimits, opens up, encloses. To call (‘consecrate’ as Pierre Bourdieu 2013, would say) something music is a political decision-making process.

As a grammatical concept, ‘music’ is useful: using this concept, we differentiate between various sounds. We divide, classify, categorize, name, and delimit: not every sound is music. Although, since Cage, no single sound is by definition banned from the musical domain. The word ‘music’ brings (necessary) structure and order into the (audible) world.²

Musical discourse in all its diversity opens up infinite possibilities for multidimensional analysis combining social, linguistic, psychological, visual, gestural, ritual, technical, historical, and musicological aspects. (Aleshinskaya, 2013); it is a wondrous world full of possibilities and no restrictions, a world where artists like Dave Mustain (Megadeth singer) can bask themselves in the “licenses” such free place provides and invite their listeners to analyze beyond a simple lyrics or riff-pitch super speed combination but a deeper connection with real life and its inflexible perils.

Thereby, C D A³ appears, in Van Dijk’s words (1995), “Critical Discourse Analysis” has become the general label for a special approach to the study of text and talk, emerging from critical linguists, critical semiotics and in general from a socio politically conscious and provisional way

2 <https://cobussen.com/teaching/what-is-music/> : Definition of music and its virtues from grammar.

3 Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dik (1993).

of investigating language, discourse and communication.”

As is the case for many fields, approaches and sub-disciplines in language and discourse studies, however, it is not easy to precisely delimit the special principles, practices, aims, theories or methods of C D A. Thereupon, the role of *power, elites, hierarchy and access* unveils many connections and interactions those sounds, lyrics, hidden messages and subliminal codes incrustated onto music. Thereon, in this paper I pretend to reveal from “Symphony of Destruction” master musical piece, how people like Mustain and most of his listeners perceive political and elites sways into “mortal-men” such as me and any other *folk* by means of music.

Finally, throughout this reflective paper, most of the political sways – a fashion topic nowadays- will be linked with the metaphors expressed in the lines of *Symphony of Destruction* two first stanzas; whereas, Colombia social cognition (Clegg, 1989) consistently takes manipulation from many “*sides*” of the table⁴. As long as people keep on voting and electing traditional groups elite members, the *swaying to the symphony of destruction* process will remain “unbroken”; and the strategic ways to change the mind of others in one’s own interest shall prevail upon the social *battered* cognition.

Methodology

This reflective paper is about the song “Symphony of Destruction” by Megadeth,

4 The expression *Sides of the Table*, refers to different political forces (parties) present in Colombia, directing the “flow” of the future in our country.

applying a Critical Discourse Analysis upon its two first stanzas following the notions provided by Teun A. Van Dijk. As there are many ways to do “critical discourse analysis. Paradigms, philosophies, theories and methods may differ in these many approaches, and these may sometimes also be related to “national” differences (Van Dijk, 1993, pp.279). This analysis then, will focus on the social realia present in Colombia, the connections made between the *power elites* and the power privileged access to socially valued resources such as voting, options to choose who should decide our polling and control over the mass-population uttermost.

Critical Discourse Analysis in the first two paragraphs of the song: Symphony of Destruction by Megadeth. In the Album: “**Cou-ntdown to Extinction**” (1992) :

“SYMPHONY OF DESTRUCTION”

*You take a mortal man
And put him in control
Watch him become a god
Watch people’s heads a-roll
A-roll
Just like the Pied Piper
Led rats through the streets
We dance like marionettes
Swaying to the Symphony of Destruction.*

Analysis

In general aspects, this song remarks how this “*Thrash Metal Band*”⁵ sarcastically and

5 Thrash metal (or simply thrash) is an extreme subgenre of heavy metal music characterized by its overall aggression and often fast tempo. The songs usually use fast percussive beats and low-register guitar riffs, overlaid with shredding-style lead work. The lyrics often deal with social issues and criticism of The Establishment, using direct and denunciatory language, an approach borrowed from hardcore punk. Sharpe-Young, Garry (2007). *Thrash Metal*. Zonda

subliminally refers to political leaders and how they “exploit” general audiences in their countries; moreover, how this exploiting leads them to havoc and destruction for their own selfish purposes... a not very aloof view of “globe” reality.

For example in the first two paragraphs, Dave Mustain- Author, portraits such Havoc:

*“You take a mortal man
And put him in control
Watch him become a god
Watch people’s heads a-roll a-roll
Just like the Pied Piper
Led rats through the streets
We dance like marionettes
Swaying to the Symphony of Destruction”*

In the first two lines Mustain remarks how from **taking a simple mortal man** and **put him in control** dominance in discourse and social power is inflicted from *authorities, politicians, church system* and even from people themselves and relate such **“put him in control”** to a close relation between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the position of the discourse before the conception of **“Pied Piper”** to empower an invest in people’s *own mental manipulation*.

Besides, Mustain in the very first word of the stanza asserts the personal pronoun **YOU**, deducing it as “someone who starts the manipulation exercise, especially combining the following metaphors: **“You take a mortal man and put him in control”**”, in Van Dijk’s (1993, pp .249) words, the relation between power and discourse is the patterns of access to (public) discourse

for different social groups. Any “you” can place someone else in order to manipulate systems and social-political corpuses. A not far away concept of what is currently happening in Colombia, where most “you” subjects are taking their *pets* and putting them in control, and sadly most of “us” help them to become *Gods*.

Afterwards, Mustain shows the consequence of such proposed action by claiming that: **“watch the peoples’ heads a roll a roll”**, he describes “power elites” thinking about ordinary “mob” and its outcome from giving them control; it is implied that the mob will *roll and roll*, which means they will not be able to grasp their own lives and minds control and will crumble apart into an endless existentialist hesitation. In addition, I can unveil from the utterance: **“watch the people’s heads a roll a roll”** how Mustain invites the listener to behold a sinister outcome of putting a “mortal-man” (which can be any common person, any human being, someone aloof of the elites and political sways, a *mortal* man who can be pictured from a simple worker class folk until a PhD non-political academic person) this is why he says: **“watch”**...

As if society were beholding a socio-political *covenant*, Mustain invites his audience to “watch...”plus, the word “head” linked to *people’s* remarks how the social cognition of every-one individual (head) will simply **“roll a roll”** which is connected to the premise of destruction; if it is seen deeply. An endless confusion is introduced onto this *a roll a roll* utterance. From theory, Van Dijk (1993, pp 254) claims that *power* involves **control**, namely by (members of) one group (in this case the elites and political kin) over other groups (in this case the “mob” as the *mortal men*).

Coming next, Mustain stresses an *outcome* of that *roll a roll*, with a metaphor **“Just like the Pied Piper led the rats through the streets, we dance like marionettes swaying to the Symphony of destruction”**, with his first word *just like* he makes a comparison, an actual similitude with persons during “polling-times”, he says **“just-like”** since he compares an exact situation of *handling* which is primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues; from this, listeners will hope to better understand the role of *Pied Piper*, which will be assumed by candidates or even by the governors themselves.

Mustain also resembles mobs and crowds as *rats through the streets* by using similes of “normal-common” people manipulated through mass media and routinized daily contexts. If the minds of the dominated can be influenced in such a way that they accept dominance, and act in the interest of the powerful out of their own free will, the term *hegemony* should fit relevantly, (Gramsci, 1971; Hall 1977). This social, political and cultural organization of dominance also implies a *hierarchy of power*:

Some members of dominant groups and organizations have a special role in planning, decision-making and control over relations and processes of the enactment of power. These small groups are named “*power elites*”. (Doomhoff, 1978; Mills, 1956) such concepts resemble the **rats through the streets**, in the sense of domination from hegemony and the power elites (who will assume in this case the role of **pied piper**); and the streets Mustain cites are the contexts where manipulation, planning and decision making are organized and institutionalized.

“We dance like marionettes” who are we? What dance? Marionettes? Ideologies are fundamental social cognitions that reflect the basic aims, interest and values of groups. They may (metaphorically and hence vaguely) be seen as the fundamental cognitive *programmes or operating systems* that organize and monitor the more specific social attitudes of groups and their members (Billing 1982). The marionettes then, proudly represented from the elites, the conception of “merchandized minds” those ones deeply manipulated by the system, in such *dance* which would be the *symphony* described by Mustain in terms of metaphorically refer to daily senseless lives of many beings... going all around life into an endless void of nothingness thinking that everything is as “they” say.

This is because in Kramarae’s (1981) words: members of less powerful groups may also be illegitimately or immorally restricted in their communicative acts. Men may subtly or bluntly exclude women from taking the floor or from choosing specific topics. And such restrictions prevent persons to develop critical thinking and refuse to “follow the ropes around” in regards to politics, religion and cultural topics.

Coming next Mustain “shoots” at reality with this utterance: **“swaying to the symphony of destruction”**, sarcastically referring how people is swiftly going to the gallows because of their ideological, cultural and even mental naivety. This *swaying to the symphony of destruction* utterance if we unveil it *piece by piece*, it takes the “social-movement” of the institutions and their legal *requirements* implemented to **tame** “rats through the streets” and to lead them into a final destruction.

Taking advantage to the lack of power, which from the critical discourse analysis is measured by its lack of active or controlled access to discourse: in everyday life, most “ordinary” people only have active access to conversations with family members, friends or colleagues. (Van Dijk, 1989b, 1993b). The *symphony of destruction* then, is representing the social cognition⁶ “flow” that mediates between the micro- and macro- levels of society *ghoulishly* composed by power elites leading to “mortal men” destruction (such destruction represents the total submission of their ideas, thoughts, critical thinking and even arguing skills).

In addition, the two stanzas are accompanied by a fast tempo riff, powered by a mighty strong guitar and a torn voice performance which stresses the words: **man, control, god, a roll, streets, marionettes and destruction**. This whole “package” includes a “perfect” satyr to institutional order and accomplishes with *Thrash Metal* primary objective which is all about defiance and anarchy to all “laws and government institutions”.

Therefore, I can assume that in Van Dijk’s words (1984) directive speech acts such as commands or orders may be to enact power, and hence also to exercise and to reproduce dominance. And, Mustain in his “symphony of destruction” portraits what would happen if the notions of anarchy, social defiance and own being control giving are to take as a real. Apparently, what is involved in dominance are questionable conditions of legitimacy or acceptability ,

including what is usually called “abuse” of power, and especially also possibly negative effects of the exercise of power, namely social inequality, Van Dijk (1984).

Conclusions

First conclusion is to remark how music provide a critical point of view about most of society experiences in regards to the daily manipulation encrypted through different means such television, radio, internet, massive printing press and music. By means of C D A, I could notice the use of dominance —the exercise of social power—and how in this case Dave Mustain emphasizes it on his “Symphony of destruction”.

Second, I could make an analysis in how political discourses have “penetrated” public minds at such level that by making use of social cognitive micro- and macro- structures, it manipulates mental models of the audience in such way that “preferred” social cognitions tend to be developed, that is ultimately the target of dominant groups such political parties and government itself.

Third, musical discourse is a very complex multi-perspective and multidimensional phenomenon, and it can transmit several messages to audience by using its lyrical richness. To make an analysis around, it is required to integrate textual and contextual analysis; in order to create connections with every single possible context and to unveil the true intentions of the author. According to (Swales, 2009: 14) semiosis, social context, social agents, social relations and text in their diverse aspects in music determine both text-internal and external features of its discourse and act as reliable

6 Social Cognition definition provided by Farr and Moscovici, (1984): Socially shared representations of societal arrangements, groups and relations, as well as mental operations such as interpretation, thinking and arguing, inferencing and learning, among others, together define what we understand by **social cognition**.

criteria in distinguishing between its several messages. This is how Swales conclude the discourse of music is a valuable source to start doing C D A.

Finally, Musical discourse as many *sided* phenomenon offers a great number of top-

ics and ideas for further linguistic research, one of them being multimodal investigation of some of its genres for example, to investigate how different music genres foster emotions and feelings depending and how those emotional states provide a meaningful source to carry out C D A.

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