



## Music, Noise and Singing in Silence: Industrial Soundscape and Working Experience in the Factory. The Case of Menorca.

Amadeu Corbera Jaume

Eulàlia Febrer Coll

Conservatori Superior de Música de les Illes Balears

### RESUM

En les societats preindustrials, cantar i treballar era -i és encara- concebuda com una mateixa activitat, d'una mateixa experiència vital. No obstant, la gran transformació social que suposarà la industrialització de bona part dels Països Catalans a finals del s. XIX, i la progressiva implementació del sistema productiu capitalista, sovint entrarà en conflicte amb les pràctiques culturals d'uns treballadors incorporats directament d'una societat agrària i artesanal a una d'industrial.

Així, centrant-nos en la configuració de l'espai sonor de les fàbriques menorquines, volem mostrar els processos de resistència i resiliència en la transició d'una cultura preindustrial a una de modelada pel capitalisme fordista. A través del fet musical i sonor dins la fàbrica, resseguim l'experiència obrera de la industrialització a Menorca, de l'organització comunitària de l'espai sonor a la jerarquització i control d'aquest espai: del lloc de feina com a marc on es modulen i recreen sonorament els límits d'allò socialment possible d'una societat en transformació.

**Paraules Clau:** Industrialització; capitalisme; paisatge sonor.

### RESUMEN

En las sociedades preindustriales, cantar y trabajar era -y es todavía- concebida como una misma actividad, de una misma experiencia vital. Sin embargo, la gran transformación social que supondrá la industrialización de buena parte de los Países Catalanes a finales del s. XIX, y la progresiva implementación del sistema productivo capitalista, a menudo entrará en conflicto con las prácticas culturales de unos trabajadores incorporados directamente de una sociedad agraria y artesanal a una industrial.

Así, centrándonos en la configuración del espacio sonoro de las fábricas menorquinas, queremos mostrar los procesos de resistencia y resiliencia en la transición de una cultura preindustrial a una de moldeada por el capitalismo fordista. A través del hecho musical y sonoro dentro de la fábrica, seguimos la experiencia obrera de la industrialización en Menorca, de la organización comunitaria del espacio sonoro a la jerarquización y control de este espacio: del puesto de trabajo como marco donde se modulan y recrean sonoramente los límites de lo socialmente posible de una sociedad en transformación.

**Palabras Clave:** Industrialización; capitalismo; paisaje sonoro.

### ABSTRACT

In preindustrial societies, singing and working was - and still is - conceived as part of the same activity, of the same life experience. However, the great social transformation that will imply the industrialization of much of the Catalan Countries at the end of the 19th century, and the progressive impetus of the capitalist production system, will often conflict with the cultural practices of workers incorporated directly from an agrarian society to an industrial one.

Thus, focusing on the configuration of the Minorcan factories sound space, we want to show the processes of resistance and resilience in the transition from a pre-industrial culture to different one modeled by Fordist capitalism. Through the musical and sound fact in the factory, we review the workers' experience of industrialization in Menorca, the community organization of the sound space to the hierarchy and control of this space: the workplace as a framework where the limits of what is socially possible is modulated and recreated sonorously in a transforming society.

**Keywords:** Industrialisation; capitalism; soundscape.

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- *Did people sing, in the factory?*

- *Oh, no: there was too much noise!*

Noise, a terribly loud and omnipresent sonic ambience, seems to have persisted within the «acoustic memory» of former old shoe factory and costume-jewellery workers in Menorca, in the Balearic Islands. In this paper, we explore how singing persisted as a resistant and resilient practice within factory environments, despite the changes generated within the traditional shoemaking productive model in favour of a capitalist form of production. We make additions and offer new insight on our previous work, presented under the title *Music and Industrialisation in Menorca* (Corbera and Febrer, 2016), where we explored the evolution of singing within industrial settings in Menorca.<sup>1</sup>

The results and reflections shown throughout these pages refer to the literature and extensive fieldwork carried out between the summers of 2015 and 2016, with the support of local institutions like Institut Ramon Muntaner (IRMU) and Institut Menorquí d'Estudis (IME). In this paper, we focus specifically on the transformation of the sonic environment and worker's musical and cultural experience in Menorca's industrial context during the 20th century.

Through the musical and sonic elements in the factory, we followed the working experience of shoemakers and costume-jewellery workers on the island, in their traditional-to-industrialisation journey, along the organisation of the sonic space that it implied. We also highlight how the hierarchisation and control of the space itself influenced the musical practice of industrialised workers, and explore the working space as a context where the limits of what is socially possible are moulded and sonically recreated. We include reference to the conversations carried on with more than 50 interviews, performed on both current and retired workers of the shoe-making and custom-jewel industry in Menorca, with ages between 40 and 85 years old, of both genders.

Although earlier industrialisation had developed internationally (Messenger 1980, Korczynski et al. 2013) and in other spots of Catalan-speaking regions in the Iberic Peninsula (Ayats, 2008) Menorca showed a later incorporation of industrialising mechanisms, in accordance to its longer standing traditional work-production model, and marginal position within the Spanish panorama, until its touristic development in the 1970s (Menéndez, 2019). Small towns with family industries would become the norm, later on, shaping the relation between workers and music to some extent. Nevertheless, industrialisation and the introduction of the Taylorist productive model would have a similar impact to that described by authors such as Messenger, Jones

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<sup>1</sup> This study can be accessed at Amadeu Corbera and Eulàlia Febrer, *Música i industrialització a Menorca* [online] [https://www.academia.edu/29594153/MÚSICA\\_I\\_INDUSTRIALITZACIÓ\\_A\\_MENORCA](https://www.academia.edu/29594153/MÚSICA_I_INDUSTRIALITZACIÓ_A_MENORCA) [last access 13 December 2019].

or Korczynski in similar environments, in England and Northern Ireland. The introduction of *noise-making machinery* would become, after all, a transversal element in factories across the entire industrialised world.

*Noise* is, in fact, the first and automatic answer given by old factory operators in Menorca when asked if there was any singing in the factory: ‘impossible’ – they say –, ‘there was too much noise!’ But was it really the noise what kept them for the old singing practice? What was the industrial sonic space like? What was the acoustic and social experience of the Menorca’s workers? In the following pages, we offer some answers – and further questions – to contribute in opening up a field that has only started to develop, which comprises the study of music in the factory.

## 1. An Industrial Soundscape

Since R. Murray Schafer (1994) coined the term *soundscape* in the 1970s, the interest of new musicology for cultural relations between sonic activity and physical and social space has grown. There are many studies on urban, rural, jungle and forested soundscapes, relating to the present and to the past – including the field of archeomusicology. These proposals aim to surpass the traditional paradigms of ethnomusicology, through *sound studies*, acustemology (Feld, 2013) and ecomusicology (Allen and Dawe, 2016).

However, at a crossroad between urban musicology and classic ethnomusicology, the study of music in factory environments is yet, largely and surprisingly, a widely unexplored field (Korzczynski, 2011). It is a field that has been overlooked by thousands of people in our country, who during more than 150 years have been working and coexisting in factories, workshops and manufacturing colonies, and who have seen their lives, social relationships and cultural practices organised around industrial discipline, work and production needs. These are stories that we are only beginning to discover and explain, and that need amplification in further studies.

In our research, we started from an initial and basic premise: singing and working are, and have been through history, the same social activity. One of the first scholars in our country to address this issue was the Mallorcan musician and musicologist Baltasar Samper, who during the 1920s and 1930s directed the research missions of *Obra del Cançoner Popular de Catalunya* in the Balearic Islands.<sup>2</sup> Samper observed that the Mallorcan singers could not remember any working songs without the reproduction of the specific action —bodily, gestural and culturally necessary— that went with it:

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<sup>2</sup> The *Obra del Cançoner Popular de Catalunya* [Work of Catalonia's Popular Songbook] was a large folklore research project set on 1922 to 1936 by the Catalan patron Rafael Patxot. It looked for collecting all the traditional songs of the Catalan Countries, through missions carried out simultaneously in the different areas. Samper was appointed as responsible on the Balearic missions, which he conducted from 1924 to 1932. See Ayats (2001)

Among many other scenes that could be reported, a singer to whom we asked to perform a carving song [*cançó de llaurar*], could not remember it in any way, until he picked up a cane and started sliding it across the floor like a plough, and as soon as he started this simulation, he sang with all composure.<sup>3</sup>

Baltasar Samper wisely interpreted that singing and working were «something consubstantial, [...] organic» (Samper, 1994: 36), and that, therefore, it was absurd pretending to separate one thing from the other. Ayats, Sureda and Vicens (2004: 11) went a step further in assessing that singing well «proved the acquisition of skill at the job» and that, therefore, when in need to rent a worker, the owners showed preference for the labourers that could sing best (Ayats, 2008).

In his missions, Samper also underlined that in some of the most industrialised Mallorcan towns, like Alaró, existed explicit prohibitions on singing in the factories: in a letter to his colleague and supervisor Francesc Pujol, he explains that «[...] in some of these workshops singing is strictly forbidden. They think that this is modernising. We have seen signs that say: *The good worker arrives on time and works without singing.*»<sup>4</sup>

In the book *Cantar al coro, cantar a la fàbrica*, Jaume Ayats (2008: 33-34) also reports examples of singing prohibitions in factories in the Catalan county of Osona, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This book, on the workers' musical experience around Ter river basin factories, and its relation with the origins of *Cors Clavé* on the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is the first monograph published specifically on singing activity, in or outside the factories, in industrial social contexts in the Catalan-speaking region. Nevertheless, there is an article, from some years earlier, by Josep Vicent Frenchina (2001), '*Allà a la fabriqueta ...' Una mirada al cançoner industrial valencià*,<sup>6</sup> which briefly introduced the industrial singing repertoire of Valencia for the very first time.

In a review published in the journal *L'Avenç*, musicologist Joaquim Rabasseda considered that Ayat's work opened, in our country, «a new discipline: industrial musicology». On the same article, Rabasseda (2008: 65) pointed that «English musicology has not made too much emphasis on its huge industrial patrimony». However, this is only true to an extent.

It appears that neither Rabasseda nor Ayats were aware, at the time, of the quoted article by Frenchina, or of the research on music and the industrial context carried out in Britain, mainly by Marek Korczynski, and collaborators such as Emma Robertson, Michael Pickering, Michael Elmes, Craig Prichard and Keith Jones. In his work, Korczynski takes the opportunity to report the small academic research performed on music in factory

<sup>3</sup> Samper 1994: 38. This and the rest of quotes were originally in Catalan and have been translated by ourselves.

<sup>4</sup> «Letter from Baltasar Samper to Francesc Pujol. 27th of August 1927» (CEDOC, fons Francesc Pujol i Pons, top.: BIB 2\_3.2.04.).

<sup>5</sup> *Cors Clavé* were workers' male choirs founded by Catalan republican politician and musician Josep Anselm Clavé (1824-1874). Following the orpheon French movement developed by Guillaume Louis Bocquillon Wilhem, through the organization of those choirs Clavé wanted to «build [...] a secular and republican alternative to religious sociability» (Ayats, 2008: 83) on the basis of male multipart singing tradition. They quickly became very popular through all the Catalan-speaking industrialised areas.

<sup>6</sup> In English: '*There at the small factory...*' *A look across the Valencian industrial Songbook.*

environments: «any meanings ascribed by workers to music on the factory floor have been treated as a black box, not to be opened» (2007: 254).

The research of professor Korczynski et al. has been a main point of reference in our research. The authors' work crystallised in 2013, with an excellent book by Korczynski, Pickering and Robertson: *Rhythms of Labour: Music at Work in Britain* (2013). In this volume, the authors report the little attention that, up to that moment, musicology and social sciences in general had taken on this field of study:

With only few notable exceptions, scholars have tended to ignore music at work, whether it be in the form of the singing of workers themselves, or in the form of relaying of broadcast music. We have the excellence and illumination of Betty Messenger's anthropological study of song cultures among Belfast textile workers in the early to mid-twentieth century [...].<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, during the 1970s, Betty Messenger, a North-American anthropologist settled in Northern Ireland, wrote a wonderful book titled *Picking up the Linen Threads* (1980) — a «study of industrial folklore», as she subtitled it — where she discovered a whole world of social relations within the linen textile factories in Belfast, through a strong sung practice. Among many other things, Messenger surprised herself when she discovered that, despite the hard working conditions of the workers, their practices, musical, «folkloric» or «ethno-poetic» — as suggested by Josep Maria Pujol (Pujol 2003) — were a social mechanism to be or feel happy within an alienating context: «Out of my reflections came a realization that there was a direct connection between the industrial folklore I was collecting and job satisfaction» (Messenger, 1980, XIX).

From our perspective, therefore, workers did not sing because they were happy at work and because they were happy working, but rather the opposite: they sang *so they could be happy* and to fight, culturally, the imposed social relations and management, and their strong hierarchisation. This is what Korczynski labelled *Stayin' Alive Culture* (2014: 32): «as a musically informed culture of worked happiness that was embedded in an alienating social order and protected workers from being dominated by alienation».

Based on the work of Ayats and on Korczynski's theoretical frame, we were able to finally define what we called the «three phases» or historical stages of the industrialising process in Menorca (Corbera and Febrer, 2018), departing from the observation of the control — and auto-control — mechanisms, communal resistance and resilience processes surrounding the musical activity in the working environment in the factory, and the management of the sonic space. These three stages consisted of three consecutive phases following each other, regarding the productive models followed in Menorca's industrial panorama: (1) pre-industrialisation, prior to the 1960s; (2) modernisation, between the 1960s and 1980s; and (3) consolidation of capitalism, from the 1980s onward.

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<sup>7</sup> Korczynski et al. 2013: 4

Through the Menorcan case, we were able to describe the process that goes from the horizontality and collective management of the sonic space, to a progressive and more strict verticality and forms of repression and unidirectionality, which work as a hierarchisation element and, thus, through the alienation highlighted by Korczynski, in relation to Fordist and Taylorist «modernisation». In Menorca, this process took place from the 1960s onwards. As Albert Garcia Balaña states, in relation to the Catalan case, previous to the events in Menorca:

The working discipline associated to the factory system run frontally into the autonomy that, until then, a wide fraction of workers had managed in their own work. A working autonomy that, indirectly, implied the autonomy of the whole social experience. This capacity to decide in relation to one's own work, and therefore in relation to the general organisation of social time, tended to be expropriated by the factory and the workshop.<sup>8</sup>

This *expropriation* is what Korczynski et al. (2013: 141) called the «silencing process» of the sung or musical activity in the industrial work and that, as we stated, in Menorca begun to show in a wider manner from the 1960s, during the phase that we have labelled as «*modernization* or implementation of manufacturing capitalism» (Corbera and Febrer 2018: 230).

## 2. The Soundscape of Capitalism: Noise and Singing in Silence in Menorca

We came from a situation of artisanal or domestic workshops — what is known as *putting out system* — in the fabrication of shoes and costume-jewellery, where time management and the construction of a socialising frame was created from singing and making music. As we explain in our research report (Corbera and Febrer, 2016), the patterns of fraternity among men, and sorority among women, were recreated and remade through singing; working hierarchies were delimited, and the working and festivity calendar was organised with the intervention of students and choirs. Although the working conditions and materials that workers managed were substantially different from those of pre-capitalist rural societies, the cultural and acoustic experience of the labouring context was the same, as most of the workers also were former peasants — or, at least, they had inherited the same cultural conventions —: there was no *other music* than that created by the workers themselves, who reinvented it and worked around the permissions and prohibitions constructed in the factories, forming bonds and social conventions for the community.

The result of the modernisation that began in the 1960s was the installation of big industrial units where to join all working forces, implementation of fixed schedules (everyone had to clock in and out) and introduction of a Taylorist production system in which each worker was isolated and in charge of a singular step in the manufacturing process — which was timed by *timekeepers*<sup>9</sup> to maintain production up to specific numbers. In the case of the shoemaking industry, the main one in Menorca following the rural industry also went through the

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<sup>8</sup> Garcia, 1995: 104

<sup>9</sup> Timekeepers were workers in charge of controlling and adjusting the time for each station of the manufacturing chain

installation of monorails or assembly lines, which were progressively automatised or semi-automatised.

These changes supposed a radical transformation of both the known sonic context, recreated by the workers until that time, and the acoustic possibilities of their cultural experience in the workspace, as well as of the expropriated autonomy capacity, in words of Garcia Balañà (1995), in the management of the own time and space, both physical and musical.

Nevertheless, we must underline that in Menorca there were very few prohibitions regarding singing in the factories, as we learned during our extensive fieldwork and archival work, in contrast to what Samper states in relation to Mallorca, or what Ayats (2008) or Korczynski et al. (2013) describe. Thus, the most common *emic* responses to the question of whether there was any singing in this new context were that it was impossible due to the deafening noise of the machinery, but not because it was forbidden.

Noise becomes the main sonic characteristic to define the soundscape of industrialisation (Jones 2005: 724); a soundscape that Schafer labels a *lo-fi soundscape*, in opposition to a *hi-fi soundscape*, free from noises (Schafer 1994: 43). For Schafer, a *lo-fi soundscape* is a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution; a soundscape constructed from noises and shrillness that covers or interferes with the natural-musical sounds.

The lo-fi soundscape was introduced by the Industrial Revolution [...]. The lo-fi soundscape originates with sound congestion. The Industrial Revolution introduced a multitude of new sounds with unhappy consequences for many of the natural and human sounds which they tended to obscure.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, Attali (1995: 16, 54) sees noise as an attribute of social power, so the exercise of this power requires «a theory of the localisation of noise and its formation. [...] The presence of noise makes sense. It makes possible the creation of a new order, at another level of organization, of a new code on a different network». The predominant noise in the soundscape of the factory may be considered an expression of this power, another way of dominance —sonic and, therefore, cultural— now embedded in a Taylorist manufacturing capitalist system, applied on a group of workers that, all the sudden, see themselves alienated from their pre-capitalist frame —a frame of relationships formed by a universe of connections between objects, sounds, and physical and acoustic spaces, a universe that will be fully expropriated and forcefully transformed. We coincide with the affirmation of Craig Prichard et al. when affirming that

For many workers, the noise of machinery would have provided a formidable obstacle to singing in the workplace. The imposition of musical silence by many employers can be seen as a wider development of management increasingly seeking to control the soundscape of the workplace.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Schafer, 1994: 43

<sup>11</sup> Prichard et al, 2007: 8

But every source of power generates ways of counter power (Graeber 2004). Despite the imposition of an acoustic context and radically different organisational conditions, the dissociation between singing and working could not be integrated overnight against a working force acculturated in a pre-capitalistic stage, where singing had been socially necessary. Messenger talks about the *industrial folklore* of the workers themselves as a «mechanism of social happiness» within an oppressive environment; for Korczynski (2007: 272), the musical expressions of this environment have to be seen «as a site for organisational misbehaviour in workers articulation of a negative experience of work and in workers' active resistance to being dominated by this work». The same author dedicates a whole chapter to examples of the singing activity in the factory (Korczynski et al., 2013: 175).

Back in Catalonia, Jaume Ayats points to the same problem that we encountered when we started our research in Menorca:

On the question of whether there was singing or not in the spinning and weaving textile factories, the first reaction is denying this possibility: with the noise of the machines, of industrialization, how could it be possible to sing while working? But refreshing the memory of the workers, the discourse is nuanced and becomes way more complex in the intervention of different elements.<sup>12</sup>

Following this process of «refreshing the memory» of the workers, in Menorca also appears a scene of musical and sung activity within its factories that is brought in after the initial response to the same question.

Even so, we cannot forget the assumption that within the factories there was far less singing than in the traditional workshops active until the 1960s:<sup>13</sup>

There we did not have a radio, there was not any singing or anything [...] The machinery then... The noise and everything. I think people used to sing more before because there wasn't any noise [...] There is always people that sing, there is people that sing while working, but they sing for themselves, they did not sing in a *group* (Juan Bosco de Coca Pons, Ferreries)

Singing, I remember that it happened in specific units of the factory. On the mechanical [...] there was noise, but it was a general ambience noise; they did sing there. On the unit with automatic machines they also sang. On the covering unit they also sang [...]. The engraving unit they also sang [...], and also did the welders. (Miquel Àngel Maria, Maó)

Maria Morena had a really good voice, like all the Morenes, she sang a song that I remember well [...] She sang this song, because they all went to their own pace there [...] This woman sang above the noise and all, and the people that were on the tabletop also sang for themselves, because one was on one side, the other on the other side, and maybe one sang a song, and the other one sang another song (Carmen Ribas Costa, Ciutadella)

These examples show what appears to become a thumb rule: workers that used to sing, kept on doing it for themselves, «at their own pace», despite the noise and the impossibility of singing in a group or in different voices, as it had been done until then. That is, the new soundscape provided by factory machinery did not have an immediate influence on the singing practice of the workers that came from traditional environments.

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<sup>12</sup> Ayats, 2008: 27

<sup>13</sup> All fieldwork quotes appear on our research report (Corbera and Febrer, 2016). They have been translated from Catalan to English.

Furthermore, these quotes show clear examples of the value of the singing practice as embedded within the working experience and the consistency of the same across diverse factory departments.

The idea of highlighting specific workers for having «a good voice», as stated in the third quote, also reflects some of the practices that coexisted with what we have called the *modernisation* stage, in group-singing contexts such as *Orfeó* ensembles.<sup>14</sup> The most popular genres at the time, as pinpointed by the workers themselves, and in relation to the group singing carried out with these ensembles, were Spanish *zarzuelas*, *boleros* and *habaneras* – introduced in great measure with the arrival of records and reproduction systems on the island. Therefore, having a good voice meant singing in accordance to the aesthetic standards provided by this repertoire.

In Menorca we did not explicitly find what we labelled as «singing in silence» in other contexts (Corbera 2015): examples such as those observed by Ayats (2008: 30), regarding the workers of a textile factory in Vila-seca (Catalonia), who «even sang in *sign language*»; or locations geographically distant such as Bunyola, in Mallorca, where the workers of the textile factory prayed in signs at the same rhythm, and finished together with an «Amen»; and Belfast, where because of the strident noises of the linen looms, the weavers sung in silence moving their lips at the same time: «we were used to move our lips, looking to each other, at the same pace» (Corbera, 2015: 3).

A great example of «active resistance», in the words of Marek Korczynski, against the mechanisms of sonic and spatial control, was the insistence in multipart-singing —harmonizing two or even three different voices. We have stated that singing, and especially doing it in a multipart form like in the rest of the Catalan-speaking regions (Ayats, 2007), was or had been essential in the construction of masculine and feminine sociability frames in Menorca, during the preindustrial phase: the creation and re-creation of a heterophonic soundscape in the working environment formed part of the mechanisms of socialisation and acculturation regarding the limits of what was socially possible, both in masculine and feminine contexts (Corbera and Febrer, 2018).

This is the case of Rafel Pons, from Ciutadella, a shoemaker and great singer, who used to sing with his colleagues around the working stool, until towards the end of the 1950s when he started working in a factory, where he was assigned an isolated spot in front of a machine designed for gluing shoe soles. Like he himself explained:

Sometimes we tried to turn on a machine that made the music for us to sing on [...] With Pau *Laganga* we turned on the machine and we both sang, on the assembly line, he on one side and me on the other.

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<sup>14</sup> The *Orfeó* ensembles were the local version of the Cors Clavé as described above (n. 5). The members of these ensembles were predominantly male, but the practice and aesthetics of the singing that they performed extended to daily contexts, entering the singing practice of working and leisure spaces. In Menorca, some of these *orfeons* were *La Armonia de Ciutadella*, *L'Orfeó Maonès* and *El Orfeón Villacarlino* in Es Castell.

The *unexpected* relationship of this shoemaker with the machine that had been assigned to him, and the *noise* that it made, makes Tia DeNora's perspective pertinent, when affirming that

[...] artefacts do not compel users to behave in preferred or prescribed ways. To argue along those lines is to succumb to what Bruno Latour calls «technologism» — that is, a form of technological determinism [...] that elides the question of how artefacts can and are appropriated for use in a variety of ways. [...] Artefacts, and the scenarios with which they come (through use) to be paired, provide means for enacting scenarios as motivation and opportunity arise.<sup>15</sup>

Rafel Pons used his machine in a non-appropriate way — or *re-appropriated* way — as a *fauxbourdon* (Ayats 2007), to obtain the aesthetic and performative effect that had been taken away from him with the imposition of the productive —and sonic— model of manufacturing capitalism. Thus, he appears as an example of resistance and resilience in the re-appropriation, even if symbolically or temporarily, of «the sonic space and the control that had been lost with the change of productive phase» (Corbera and Febrer, 2018). His musical behavior was, at the same time, a mention to what we may label as his «material expectations», established *a priori* between him and the machine, since his cultural system and conventional frame, learned before entering the factory, allowed him to re-interpret the object at stake in a totally different manner than what was expected.

This action or use of the machine and its sound, that can be considered as paradigmatic in the ways of working resistance, breaks the «technologising» or materializing story around the industrial machinery and the *lo-fi soundscape* that, according to Schafer, was its direct sonic result. As Kelman criticises, Schafer's soundscape concept did not allow this kind of dissent:

The devolution of Schafer's soundscape is so totalizing, so deterministic, that it provides little hope for the ears of humanity against the din of his historiography. In Schafer's description of modern life, few opportunities exist to produce new meanings out of old sounds, or to hone one's hearing amidst all of the noise [...].<sup>16</sup>

Summarising, an action such as «singing in silence», through signs or moving one's lips, within an imposed noisy environment —or in the case of Menorca, of diverse people singing for themselves or adapting to the acoustic possibilities— can be seen as a social act of «active resistance», versus the sonic and spatial control mechanisms and, in general, the processes of communitarian «dehumanisation» of manufacturing capitalism:

So therefore, the relevance of singing in the factory does not seem to rely on the aesthetics nor even the words (although all of that is also important), but rather on the fact of doing it together, even in silence in terms of setting a sense of class and, as we said before, draw the community's boundaries. There also is a sense of resistance against the control and the industrialization's purpose, against their own alienation, as workers and as human beings as well.<sup>17</sup>

Later on, another mechanism that came to control the sonic space was the introduction of music reproduction systems, radios, or radio-cassettes. Although, in the first instance, we could consider it as a concession from the industries' managers towards the *cultural needs* of their workers, who were resistant to «shutting up» at work, Korczynski and Jones highlighted that

<sup>15</sup> DeNora, 2000: 35-36

<sup>16</sup> Kelman, 2010: 217

<sup>17</sup> Corbera, 2015: 3

the development of factory music can potentially be analysed in a way in which the loudspeaker is seen as a technique of power, and in which the nature of music production and consumption is intimately linked to the reproduction of hierarchical capitalist social relations.<sup>18</sup>

In the British Islands the introduction of broadcasted music into factories started during the II World War (Marek Korczynski et al, 2013). In Menorca this process took place from the second half of the 1960s — meanwhile, Ayats (2008) does not report any reference to that specific issue.

As we were indicated during our fieldwork, the implementation of these systems was gradual and quite flexible, in a process that we call «the last sample of the persistence of socially flexible pre-capitalist mechanisms» (Corbera and Febrer 2016: 33). This flexibility allowed that, for example, the workers were able to bring in their own records or negotiate with other co-workers what to play, in a similar way that Robertson, Korczynski and Pickering describe referring to Cadbury factory:

In April 1949, the men's works council reported in the factory magazine that, 'An attempt is to be made to provide more popular programmes of Music While You Work for night men by terminating the hire of records in June and purchasing records for an experimental period of six months'. This appears to have been a response to worker complaints about the repetitiveness of the music being played.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, in Menorca we can find the same situation, where workers were able to choose their own music in a collective negotiable process allow by factories' management:

Then, because the radio was kind of boring, we bought a lot of records [...] Whoever was closer [to the machine] put the records on, or maybe someone was walking by and that recording had ended so they changed it (Eulàlia Serra Truyol, Ferreries)

The record collection that we had here was impressive [...] There was people that maybe didn't like *sarsuela*, and "well, we could play some other kind of music, this is so boring, every day..." [...] Usually, it was the manager who was in charge, and sometime after it was someone else (Juan Fernando Palliser Sintes, Alaior)

However, these centralised systems made everyone listen to the same song. As a consequence, due to the male predominance in the shoe-making manufacturing process in the factory, women were mostly dismissed from this negotiation system, losing the access to their specific and purchased repertoire — mainly romantic songs and *boleros*. Unlike what Emma Robertson et al. report (2007: 224), female workers were not the «principal beneficiaries» of that negotiation. Thus, the sonic space became in Menorca an environment of extreme reproduction and imposition of patriarchal inequality.

Another problem that was brought in by this model was the «generational collision» among young and elder workers, usually with different tastes (older workers liked *zarzuelas* and *rancheras*; younger workers liked The Beatles, rock'n'roll and *auteur* songs). That conflict was usually solved from the management, with the imposition

<sup>18</sup> Korczynski and Jones, 2006: 147

<sup>19</sup> Robertson et al, 2007: 223.

of their own criteria.

### 3. Time Management and the Silencing Process

All the examples that we have provided show that, on the one hand, there is some unanimity among Menorcan workers in the consideration that singing at work, in the factory, it became harder because of the noise. However, sung and musical activity was still present: the imposition of a new acoustic platform, what Schafer calls a *lo-fi soundscape*, does not show as the only existing or final argument to explain the silencing process of this activity.

Music was there when factories opened in cellars, then they sang [...] Afterwards, when working with an assembly line one had to shut up... [...] With an assembly line you can't work [...] and sing. (Toni Riudavets Salom, Ferreries)

In the factory, [the owner] did not allow anyone to sing, we had to go like *this* [...] Singing, I never heard [...] Not because it was forbidden, it was because the factory had a unit for the *talladors* ["cutters"], a unit for the *ajuntadores* [women who put the shoe together] [...]. I guess that because everyone worked at piecework everyone really worked, they didn't fool around, because if one could make two pairs of shoes, it was better than making just one (Jaume Pons Morlà, Alaior)

They thought a man to timekeep our work [...]. Es posava as costat teu, i si tu per exemple engomaves tires, i ell controlava: «mira, en cinc minuts ha fet 20 peces, amb una hora ha de fer açò, as cap des dia ha de fer tantes peces» (Carmen Ribas Costa, Ciutadella)

These testimonies highlight two elements that we consider to be key: monorails – and, by extension, assembly lines – and time management.

Without getting into the specifics, Ayats (2008: 31) gives the example of women that sang more than those who worked by a «settled price» or at piecework, that is, with a fixed amount of work, which «gave her more freedom».

The radical and hierarchical transformation of time and space management that supposed the imposition of Taylorist and Fordist production models, introduced a yet more substantial obstacle for the maintenance of the sung and musical activity. Charles Chaplin, in *Modern Times* (1936), magisterially describes the imposition of time control management in his famous scene where he absurdly screws bolts on the assembly line where he has been assigned, without time for resting or getting distracted. At the end of the sequence, Chaplin is literally swallowed whole by the machine, in a delightful metaphor of the limits of the de-humanisation of manufacturing capitalism structures' and the dictatorship of time.<sup>20</sup>

In Menorca, up to the installation of assembly lines towards the 1960s, the owners had tried to maintain some degree of permissivity with the conventions of the preindustrial society that had just been left behind. Besides

<sup>20</sup> Here we suggest a different analysis from that of Korczynski's (2014: 94) for the same scene, as he focuses on the body control of the Taylorist system that Charles Chaplin masterly performs.

the sung activity that we have described, it was usual that on special occasions, like Christmas, Easter or Carnival, there was singing and partying within the factory itself, with choirs and student music groups regulated by the own factory workers —such as *Can Menéndez* in the town of Ciutadella, or *CATISA* choir in Maó (Corbera and Febrer 2016)—, or with more spontaneous choral organisations that sang Easter couplets (Gomila, 2009). In the specific case of women, there was the Mes de Maria [Month of Mary]:

The *embauladores* [women who boxed the shoes], in those days, when May arrived, they sang the ‘month of Mary’. Because everything was manual and there wasn’t any noise, they sang the ‘month of Mary’ (Magí Pons Sabater, Ciutadella)

It was also usual that during Carnival or the annual town’s Fiesta, some of the workers excused themselves from work:

A couple of shoemakers of that time: “guys, it is Gracia [Maó’s annual town Fiesta] today huh, this is not right, working today... We could go to Maó and see how the Fiesta is going”, and two or three disappeared [...] They arrived at four in the afternoon, very drunk! “Good evening master, we are here to say that we are not late for work”... This kind of racket... (Fernando Palliser, Alaior)

The most noticeable case is that of the *estudiantina* — a coral ensemble with some other musical instruments — of *Casino 17 de Gener* in Ciutadella, known as «Casino Nou» [New Casino], which during the last days of Carnival sang in the factories, as in the case reported by Ayats (2008: 29) in El Lluçanès at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

‘The Last Days [Carnival] the *estudiantina* came into the factory, during Fat Thursday, the Thursday of Carnival, and because the *estudiantina* was in that evening we had it free [...]’ (Juana Torrent, Ciutadella). This allowed alteration on the working calendar came to an end, in Ciutadella, abruptly, in 1962: The assembly processes and the time division permanently arrived in Ciutadella [...] When the machine was running, no one could spare a moment, there was work to do and it had to be used, even if traditions resented: this was the case of the *Estudiantina*, that after surviving the Civil War and the obstacles to celebrate Carnival during the dictatorship, became seriously compromised by the new machinery (that could not be stopped), by the new productive process and by a high consumption demand. Fat Thursday could not be a moment for partying anymore, and they were not able to stop working when the *Estudiantina* arrived, since it was even difficult to recruit people to sing. This was their last apparition, during Carnival of 1962. The decision was taken jointly with the board of directors of *Cercle Artístic*, which also organized these student music groups.<sup>21</sup>

Singing or making music generally collides with the new conception of time at work (Korczynski et al, 2008), like Samper already stated in his letter: working without singing and punctuality. Time and silence. Order and control. It is the implementation of a new working logic that «fractures the workers’ experience to distinguish work from the rest of daily practices» (Garcia 1995: 111); in the case of Menorca, even above the violent trauma of the Civil War and the Francoist repression, or the implosion of a completely different working acoustic panorama.

Thus, the imposition of a time-kept, mechanised, and alienating model of work, drove to the forceful interruption of the physical and cultural process —both individual and communal— that had been associated,

<sup>21</sup> Alzina and Carreras, 2002: 169.

until then, with singing and working as an ‘organic’ process; even more than the transformation— if also forceful and hierarchised —of the working soundscape resulting from this new frame.

In his critique to Schafer’s model, Ari Y. Kelman quotes a study by Alain Corbin on bell-ringing in rural France, *Village Bells* (1988). For Kelman, what is interesting in Corbin’s book is his mention to Schafer’s technological determinism:

For Schafer, the rise in industrial noise led to the decline of the significance of the bells. However, Corbin found something far more interesting, as he refuses to lay responsibility for the decline of the bells at the doorstep of industrial noise. Instead, he concludes that «many different factors [that] account for this decline» including a decrease in the relative power of the church, and an increase in the prominence of printed material. He writes, «In the nineteenth century, posters, printed summonses, the dials of private clocks, and calendars gradually ensured the predominance of the visual» (Corbin 1998: 307). For Corbin, the rise of modern machines did not mute the symbolic and sonic power of the bells. Instead, he credits the rise of competing systems of communication – including the relatively quiet act of reading.<sup>22</sup>

What Corbin does, according to Kelman, is explaining the «silencing process» of the bell’s ringing in various towns in France, from the transformation of the cultural systems and communication codes, rather than from the *lo-fi* noise of the Industrial Revolution. This may be seen as a cultural disruption rather than an acoustic one, avoiding any technological determinism and the simple «cause and effect» relation between noise and silencing.

At another scale, this is what we observed in Menorca: a process in which the working experience was transformed and forced onto new practices and conventional frames, in spite of the mechanisms of active resistance of the workers taught in a pre-industrial stage, that in some way were reluctant to accept the imposition of an alienating soundscape.

The progressive abandonment of traditional practices shows that when the imposed cultural conditions, more than the material ones, were superior to their resistance capacity, they were assumed by the new generations of workers, who have been already acculturated in another order of social relationships, now fully capitalistic.

## Conclusions

As Robertson, Korczynski and Pickering (2007: 227) point out, the industrial soundscape «is a space where power is enacted, negotiated and contested.» In this very sense, what we observed in Menorca was precisely worker’s enaction, negotiation and contestation in the island’s factories soundscape, all through the 20th century; or in own words: «the processes of resistance, resilience and social adaptation to the capitalist times» (Corbera i Febrer, 2018: 234), as previously stated.

We have seen how the industrial soundscape becomes the cultural frame where social relationships are musically

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<sup>22</sup> Kelman, 2010: 227.

created and recreated, and how, through the silencing process, these relationships became more hierarchical due the imposition of Taylorism, — not only as a production system, but «as a form of social order» (Korczynski, 2014: 25).

These processes of resistance and adaptation, on the other hand, put under discussion Schaffer's determinist model of the soundscape. As we observed, it was the cultural changes instead of technological or material ones what lead to the silencing process in the factories.

Nevertheless, music at work, as Marek Korczynski repeatedly denounces in his work, is still a neglected area for many scholars:

If we take an inquiry into how people live with and against the structures of rational capitalism as one of the starting points for contemporary cultural analysis, then the lack of attention given to cultural practices within the labor process is an alarming one. This is because the labor process represents the point where the contradictions of capitalism are at their sharpest, and it is there, therefore, where we may learn much about how people use cultural practices to live with and against the rational structures of contemporary capitalism.

Thus, and for the first time, our research proposes an integration of the theoretical frame and research developed by Korczynski and his partners together with the ethnography that Ayats carried out in Catalonia — an area closer to Menorca —, making a larger and deeper comprehension on the particular topic for its easier assimilation.

We trust that the ideas presented in this paper — and in previous works — will serve as a point of departure for future and more extended research projects around Catalan-speaking areas. The pursue of such studies can throw light on the experience and coexistence of the people in our country who, in the last 150 years, have shared the structures of contemporary capitalism and its contradictions.

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## Amadeu Corbera Jaume

emamadeucorbera@conservatorisuperior.com

Amadeu Corbera Jaume (1985) va néixer a Bunyola, Mallorca (Illes Balears). És cap del Departament de Musicologia i Pedagogia del Conservatori Superior de Música de les Illes Balears. Cofundador del Grup de Recerca Musicològica de Menorca (GREMe) i membre del Grup d'Estudi de la Cultura, la Societat i la Política al Món Contemporani de la Universitat de les Illes Balears (UIB), és autor de diversos treballs sobre música popular de Mallorca i Menorca. Actualment també treballa en la tesi doctoral sobre el músic i etnomusicòleg mallorquí Baltasar Samper.

Amadeu Corbera Jaume (1985) nació en Bunyola, Mallorca (Islas Baleares). Es jefe del Departamento de Musicología y Pedagogía del Conservatorio Superior de Música de las Islas Baleares. Cofundador del Grup de Recerca Musicològica de Menorca (GREMe) y miembro del Grup d'Estudi de la Cultura, la Societat i la Política al Món Contemporani de la Universitat de les Illes Balears (UIB), es autor de varios trabajos sobre música popular de Mallorca y Menorca. Actualmente también trabaja en la tesis doctoral sobre el músico y etnomusicólogo mallorquín Baltasar Samper.

Amadeu Corbera Jaume is Head of the Department of Musicology and Pedagogy of the Higher Conservatory of Music of the Balearic Islands. He is the Co-founder of the Grup de Recerca Musicològica de Menorca (GREMe) and member of the Grup d'Estudi de la Cultura, la Societat i la Política al Món Contemporani of the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB), and author of several works on popular music of Mallorca and Menorca. He is currently working on the PhD of the Mallorcan musician and ethnomusicologist Baltasar Samper.

## **Eulàlia Febrer Coll**

eulaliafebrer@conservatorisuperior.com

Eulàlia Febrer Coll (Doctora en Filosofia en Música Popular per la Universitat de Cardiff (2019). Es va llicenciar en Etnomusicologia el 2013 (Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya) i va fer el seu màster el 2014 (Universitat de Barcelona). Es co-fundadora i coordinadora del Grup de Recerca Musicològica de Menorca, i co-fundadora del Laboratori de Recerca Musical de Barcelona, a més de professora associada del Conservatori Superior de Música de les Illes Balears.

Eulàlia Febrer Coll (Doctora en Filosofía en Música Popular por la Universidad de Cardiff (2019). Se licenció en Etnomusicología en 2013 (Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya) y concursó su máster en 2014 (Universitat de Barcelona). Es cofundadora y coordinadora del Grupo de Investigación Musicológica de Menorca, y cocreadora del Laboratorio de Investigación Musical de Barcelona, y profesora asociada del Conservatorio Superior de Música de las Illes Balears.

Eulàlia Febrer Coll (Doctor of Philosophy in Popular Music by Cardiff University (2019). She graduated in Ethnomusicology in 2013 (Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya) and completed her Master Degree in 2014 (Universitat de Barcelona). Eulalia is a co-creator and coordinator at Grup de Recerca Musicològica de Menorca, and co-creator of Laboratori de Recerca Musical de Barcelona, and Part-Time Lecturer at the Higher Conservatory of Music of the Balearic Islands.

## **Cita recomanada**

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