

CfP - Sounds of Fascism: Media, Practices, Imagination

University of Bonn, September 24-26, 2025.

The word “fascism” designates a political category with a disputed historical definition, as so-called “fascist” regimes and movements from the end of the First World War to the present day can differ widely in their forms and actions. Stanley Payne describes those of interwar Europe using a wide range of criteria that specify their ideology, aesthetics, organization and enemies (Payne 1980). For Roger Griffin, who extends his study to post-World War II movements, their fundamental and common characteristic is to be palingnetic ultra-nationalist political projects (Griffin 1991). However, this proposal for a consensual, root definition has not put an end to historiographical (Costa Pinto 2011; Costa Pinto & Kallis 2014) or political debates, as shown by the latest polemics concerning Trump’s identification with fascism (Zerofsky 2024). Considering the central role sound plays in the mediation of politics, in political practices, and as a propaganda instrument, how could its study contribute to this debate and help us define fascism?

In order to address these issues, this conference will encompass a period spanning from the interwar years to the present day, and totalitarian regimes as well as small groups struggling for their survival. It will focus on the political uses of sound as a means of persuasion, amplification and expansion, through an estheticization – musical, oratorical, event-based – of fascist political projects.

This conference will also focus on the conditions of these use’s implementation, through the imaginaries that help shape these uses, the media that support them, and the practices that carry them out. Its epistemic framework will welcome interdisciplinary proposals from the fields of political science and history, sound studies, media studies, musicology and cultural sociology.

The aim will be to examine the musical and non-musical sounds produced and disseminated as part of a fascist political project, by group organizations and state institutions alike, in order to convey information of all kinds, i.e. relating to current events, community memories and future objectives, as well as to disseminate the aesthetic sound framings associated with a particular form of fascism.

These sounds may concern, for instance, the political practices that make up mass gatherings (Birdsall 2012) or invade ordinary public spaces (Epping-Jäger 2010 & 2011), cultural policy efforts such as the programming of festivals or opera seasons (Palazzetti 2021), the sonic dimension of everyday life, where people listen to radio news broadcasts or the latest propaganda song (Monteleone 1985), online propaganda, cinema and audiovisual contents, or the creation of music groups or the distribution of sound recordings marketed by small militant structures, with aesthetics or textual references related to fascism (Multiple Authors, 2004; Toscano & Di Nunzio 2016; François 2022).

It is then important to question listening practices and sound cultures as fascist regimes have attempted to regulate them, or as smaller organizations attempt to bring them into existence. For example, we might look at a redefinition of the notions of listening, hearing, noise and space in the light of fascism (Novak & Sakakeeny 2015). What forms of listenings are sought in order to further fascist expansion through more penetrating propaganda (Goodman 2010)? What signs are desired or excluded from fascist sound cultures? How are the force and even violence of amplified sound used in a fascist framework (Papenburg 2020)? While the soundscape can be seen as one of the everyday frameworks of action (Guillebaud 2017), what would a fascist soundscape be? So, if there is a “political ecology of the ear” (Pecqueux & Roueff 2009), is there a “fascist ecology of the

ear” where sounds, particularly music, contextually take on a particular political meaning (Buch 2016, 2018)?

These questions can be addressed from the point of view of the media, and thus of the mediations effected by various objects; of the sound practices, notably of production and listening, that are engaged in by the actors, be they regimes or small groups, of fascist politics or must be engaged in by those they target; of the political imaginaries of sound, which orient the theoretical conception of its fascist uses and give them part of their effectiveness. We suggest below a number of themes and questions that could be addressed at this conference:

Medias

- Technical mediations of sound (transduction, transmission, conservation, amplification) and their relationship to space as political territory
- Uses and incorporation of technical sound objects (loudspeakers, radios, records, amplifiers, etc.) into fascist propaganda apparatuses and their socio-technical networks
- Construction, development and durability of fascist sound broadcasting institutions and structures
- Production and economics of sound media in fascist contexts
- Creative conditions and aesthetics of musical and non-musical sound compositions
- Sound media and archives, time and memories of fascism

Practices

- Creating, occupying, appropriating and contesting a territory through sound
- Does sonic totalitarianism exist, and if so, how?
- Linking sound and images in fascist propaganda
- Managing strangeness, hybridity and musical interpenetration in gendered, ethnic or racial terms
- Sonic challenges to fascism and its repressive consequences
- What is the role of sound in fascist policing practices?
- Practices of silence in fascist regimes and organizations
- Organizing the sound dimension of fascist gatherings, from group meetings to mass gatherings
- Sound commemorations

Imagination

- Modernity of sound objects
- Implementation, evolution and current relevance of the relationship between fascism and the sound aesthetic avant-garde
- Establishment and evolution of the relationship between sound, war and military imaginary within fascism
- Sound power and volume
- Positive and negative sonic imaginations of the foreigner in ethnic, racial or political terms
- Imagined agency of sound forms
- Fascist sound and martyrology

The conference will be held in English on September 24, 25 and 26, 2025 at the Abteilung für Musikwissenschaft/Sound Studies of the University of Bonn.

Proposals are for 20 min. presentations. They should be written in English and should not exceed 250 words. They should be accompanied by a short biography (no more than 120 words) and should be sent by January 15, 2025 to jthomas2@uni-bonn.de.

Responses to proposals will be sent from February 15, 2025.

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