The Rhetoric of Sociopolitical Popular Music

Tracing the Rhetorical Process within the Social Context

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"Music is your own experience, your own thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn. They teach you there's a boundary line to music. But, man, there's no boundary line to art." -Charlie Parker, jazz musician

Introduction

Popular music in society has become a social phenomenon dependent on the value placed on it by the community in which the music reaches. The term "popular" even warrants the idea that a collective community of listeners must first agree that a certain kind of music—whether it be a specific genre, style, or artist—has value before they accept and support the form of music. Without such a value, music may be totally forgotten, pushed underground to a limited audience, or, if it existed with some value for a long time before, deemed outdated or unpopular. The challenge, then, to music artists that have an inherent social or political agenda becomes finding a way in which their message—in the form of musical expression—reaches as large an audience as possible and develops a profound value within the community of listeners. Only then can their social or political ideology merge with the ideology of a wide-ranged community, creating an even larger sphere of ideology focused on social and political awareness.

How does popular music receive value in society? According to Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, and Institutions, popular music scholar Simon Frith refers to “good” popular music as being “authentic—not to people’s socially decontextualized sensibilities, but to a person, an idea, a feeling, a shared experience” and refers to “bad” popular music as “unauthentic—it expresses nothing” (2). In regards to this form of authenticity, popular music reaches a collective value when its expressed message—its delivered musical style—relates to issues associated, or identified, with the larger context of the community as a whole, not with each listener’s individual, personal feelings and beliefs. This process of identification in which
the value of popular music hinges upon how well it aligns itself with the contextualized community of listeners—how well it expresses the ideas and thoughts relevant to the collective audience as a whole—can easily be observed from the music delivered by artists that have an inherent sociopolitical agenda. After all, the ideological sphere generated from such artists’ rhetorical message easily identifies with the ideological sphere generated by the whole community of listeners because their message focuses on the authentic issues present in the context of the society, namely, the society in which both ideological spheres operate, the society in which both artist and audience live. Thus, the rhetorical message generated by the popular music of the sociopolitical conscious artist represents the truly authentic means by which the musician identifies with the audience, allowing the larger context of listeners to place a value on the music, encouraging acceptance and relative support of the artist’s message.

Use of the term “relative” when referring to the support of the artist’s rhetorical message addresses the idea that not all listeners in the wide social context will absolutely support what the artist expresses. Although the rhetorical message may be generally accepted by the community of listeners as a valuable form of expression, some of the listeners may not wholly support the sociopolitical commentary made by the artists. These listeners may view the rhetorical message delivered by the music negatively or they may not even acknowledge the message enveloped by the music and view the expression merely as a form of entertainment, paying no attention to what the rhetorical expression has to offer for society. This type of audience usually develops on the outside of a merged ideological sphere, influenced heavily by the limitations imposed on valued popular music by the mainstream industry of the music business. In fact, Simon Frith refers to “bad” popular music in this respect. “Bad” popular music turns “unauthentic” when it becomes “standardized, its creativity and distinctiveness quashed by the music industry” and
when it becomes more of a “commercial” form of entertainment rather than an authentic form of identification (Bennett 2).

Ultimately, the mainstream music industry extends the merged ideological spheres of artist and audience into the realm of institutionalization, where the popular music delivered by the sociopolitical artist reaches a wider, uninterested community of listeners, who pay attention to the music on the basis of undependable fancy. By rendering the original rhetorical message of the popular music ineffective and by allowing the process of identification within the complete ideological sphere to deteriorate, the extenuation of the merged ideological spheres leads to a transitive weakening of the larger superimposed ideological sphere due to the growing amount of social space between the original ideological sphere and the new ideological sphere introduced by the mainstream music industry. In other words, as the superimposed ideological sphere covers more social space—due to the exploitation of the mainstream—the community of listeners within the increased social space will begin to spread out, thereby weakening the support of the original message delivered by the musicians, since support is greater when concentrated in a tighter social space, a space in which listener acceptance and support remains static. Whereas “power can be connected to popular music as a communicative forum through which some people engage in political action” and music could act as “a tool or resource that increases political capacity, especially for people who have historically been blocked from participation in more traditional and institutionalized political arenas,” the mainstream music industry has the ability to decrease this power of popular music by ironically increasing the music’s capacity to the point where it becomes institutionalized and available to everyone, both politically interested and politically uninterested (Mattern 35). In short, the ideological sphere
becomes unidentifiable and pointless in the eyes of those who viewed the ideological sphere in the beginning as their own form of identity and political expression.

However, the paradox of shifting from the placement of value upon popular music to the exploitation of its popularity and to its consequential devaluing can be avoided. As long as the original rhetorical message of the sociopolitical artist is effective enough to warrant an intense identification with the community of listeners and as long as the artist continually delivers an equally—or, perhaps, even stronger—message, then the original ideological sphere generated by the artist and the musical delivery will act more like a magnetic dynamo, keeping the process of identification closely surrounding to the original sphere of ideology, as the superimposed ideology of artist and audience encompasses more and more social space. In this respect, the community of listeners will become attracted to the original ideology generated by the artist’s authentic sociopolitical message enveloped in his or her form of popular music, and a sense of identification will remain largely centralized around the artist’s social or political expression, despite the fact that the merger of the two ideological spheres continues to inflate and to include more social space, due to the exploitation of the mainstream music business.

The purpose of this paper is to set up such a model in which a rhetorical message received in popular music acts as a magnetic dynamo. This model will follow the rhetorical process of the artist’s message from the origin of the message itself to the extenuation of the merged ideological spheres by the mainstream. Most importantly, it will cover the process of identification between artist and audience and how the interaction between the two influences the merging of two ideological spheres in order to create one distinct community that accepts and that is aware of the ideas and thoughts expressed in the artist’s music. Then, this model will be used to observe how the specific style and delivery of rhetoric used by certain artists effectively
influence a sense of identification between them and their listeners and how the interaction stemming from this sense of identification allows their merged ideological spheres to remain centralized and focused on the sociopolitical implications expressed by the artists’ original message, despite the emergence of mainstream limitations on the popular artists’ discourse.

**Aristotle and Rhetoric as Art**

Centered at the core of the rhetorical model of popular music is the traditional triangle used by rhetorical scholars to depict Aristotle’s three *pisteis*, or means of persuasion. Why use Aristotle as the core of our model? Simply put, Aristotle can be seen as the key figure in the advancement of rhetoric as an art of communication that remains “morally neutral,” that could be used for good or for evil (Kennedy ix). His philosophy of rhetoric, then, becomes the core of the present model depicting the advancement of socially and politically concerned popular music as a form of social rhetoric and of artistic communication between the artist and a community of listeners.

The purpose of this social rhetoric “is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case,” relating to the idea that the artist must perform in the realm of an entertainer, not a preacher (Aristotle 35). In this respect, artists performing in the realm of popular music must state their sociopolitical message in the form of entertainment in order to advance their own ideology. They do this by artistically crafting a message encompassing the three means of persuasion—*ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. Rather than the artists actively persuading the community of listeners to accept their message, the community of listeners persuade
themselves, in a sense, by actively participating as audience members. The persuasion becomes inherently entangled in the performance of the artists, and they advance their ideology by focusing on creating a rhetorical message that persuades from the inside-out, rather than the outside-in. In fact, Aristotle even refers to this use of rhetoric as an “offshoot” of “ethical studies (which it is just to call politics)” because the artist comes to grips with the three pisteis, becoming “one who can form syllogisms [logical arguments] and be observant about characters and virtues and, third, about emotions (what each of the emotions is and what are its qualities and from what it comes to be and how)” (39). Ironically, Aristotle aligns the artist’s use of rhetoric with the exact field in which the sociopolitical artist expresses concern—the political implications of society needing change.

The ability of an artist to achieve inherent persuasion within his delivered message depends on the ability of the speaker to artistically mix ethos, artistic credibility based on what is said, pathos, emotional appeals to the audience, and logos, logical displays of evidence, such as examples and enthymemes—arguments based on signs and probabilities (i.e. if all A is B and all B is C, then A is C) (Aristotle 37-39). Mastering these means of persuasion in their songwriting allows artists to craft songs that influence the community of listeners to accept the view expressed by the artists in regards to their social or political ideology. Specifically, whether or not the views about the social or political climate of the day become agreed upon by the listeners remains contingent on whether or not the listeners align themselves with the ideology artfully expressed in the artist’s rhetorical message. This idea becomes clear as Aristotle states that a “speech [situation] consists of three things: a speaker and a subject on which he speaks and someone addressed, and the objective of the speech relates to the last (I mean the hearer)” (47). As a result, the community of listeners becomes the key for a sociopolitical discourse created by
popular music to operate effectively, once again disparaging the idea that persuasion depends more on the ability of the artists’ performance rather than the audience’s reception of the rhetorical message created by the artist.

In addition to the consideration that an artist’s sociopolitical message must include a mixture of the three pisteis, the ideological display in popular music must also include an aim. Among the three species of rhetoric prescribed by Aristotle, the sociopolitical discourse of popular music relates closest to the epideictic. Because the artists concern their musical expressions with what is wrong with society and with the injustices of the political realm, such epideictic use of rhetoric relates to playing the blaming game against the current situation of society. In fact, “the present is most important; for all speakers praise or blame in regard to the existing qualities, but they often also make use of other things, both reminding [the audience] of the past and projecting the course of the future,” which can be noticed when the artists give examples of past experiences that align closely with the present social context and when the musical message include predictions of society’s soon-to-be dismal future for the many under the rule of the few (Aristotle 48). In more political terms, Mark Mattern refers to music that “helps assert the claims of the community, which are believed to stand in direct opposition to the claims of others,” by opposing “the exploitation and oppression exercised by dominant elites and members of dominant groups” as the “confrontational” form of political music (25, 26). Obviously, popular music operating in the epideictic rhetoric—in which the artist expresses about what is wrong with society—easily relates to Mattern’s form of “confrontational” political music—in which musicians make opposing claims against the present context of society.

Accordingly, the Aristotelian foundation of rhetorical construction based on the three pisteis and an epideictic aim constitutes the core of the rhetorical model of sociopolitical popular
music. In this core, the sociopolitical artists transfer their ideological beliefs and thoughts into an effective rhetorical message to be delivered musically to the larger social context of the community of listeners. Because the effectiveness of the musical discourse depends on how receptive the community of listeners is to message itself, the strength of the core in this rhetorical model determines how attractive the ideology of the artists is to their audience, or whoever will listen to the message. As a result, the ongoing process in which the artists craft a rhetorical message based on inherent forms of persuasion that make the message more receptive to those that listen turns the core of the rhetorical model of popular music into an active magnetic dynamo in which the determined artist delivers a musical ideology that attracts the audience of a larger social context.

Bakhtin and the Merging of Ideologies

The next element, or layer, in the rhetorical model is the transition between artistically crafted message and advanced ideology. In this portion of the model, the delivery of the crafted message provides for a series of interactions between the community of listeners and the artists, establishing a social space in which the two ideologies begin to merge with one another. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, a Marxist rhetorician, an easily recognizable link exists between the signs created by the artists in their rhetorical message and their corresponding ideology; in fact, the “domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs” (1211). In other words, the artists’ conscious expressions found in their songwriting reflect their overall ideology. Every expressed emotion or cited example that furthers the sociopolitical artists’ agenda becomes an ideological sign embodied in the delivery of their music. Bakhtin even goes further to say that the word—lyric in the case of popular music—is “the ideological phenomenon par excellence”
and that it "is precisely in the material of the word that the basic, general-ideological forms of
semiotic communication could best be revealed," furthering the idea that the songs themselves—
the crafted rhetorical construction based on the three means of persuasion—provide the best
material for the advancing and defining of an ideology, even though symbolic action may define
ideology as well, such as when Rage Against The Machine draped an up-side-down and
backwards American flag over their amplifiers during their performances (1213). Ironically,
Bakhtin makes a musical reference when discussing that such symbolic ideological signs cannot
be wholly explained without the accompaniment by words, "just as is the case with singing and
its musical accompaniment," which again stresses the importance that words, or lyrics, play in
discovering the overall ideology of the artists (1214). Of course, specific lyrics of certain bands
will be observed later on in order to show exactly how words define ideologies, and the musical
accompaniment will also be observed in order to show how delivery embellishes the rhetorical
message, making it easier to advance its corresponding ideology.

However, artists do not develop their own personal ideologies from the ground-up; rather,
ideologies are created from within a larger social context. Each sociopolitical artist's agenda,
then, develops from the creation of an ideology based on personal experiences occurring in the
larger scheme of society. Since each sphere of "ideological creativity has its own kind of
orientation toward reality and each refracts reality in its own way," not all listeners will relate to
the personal experiences of the artists, but they will relate from the larger social context out of
which those experiences occurred because, after all, both audience and artist experience the
workings of a society (Bakhtin 1211). As a result, the artists' must turn their personal
experiences outward, so to speak, and bring the common beliefs of the larger social context
inward—such as beliefs about what is just and what is unjust—before creating a rhetorical
message based on an ideological agenda. Additionally, Aristotle also touches on this idea when he states that "speech based on knowledge is teaching, but teaching is impossible [with some audiences]; rather, it is necessary for pisteis and speeches [as a whole] to be formed on the basis of common [beliefs]," so whereas it is impossible for an artist advance an ideological agenda by merely grabbing a microphone and spouting off what he has learned from personal experience, it becomes essential for an artist to define an ideology by forming a rhetorical message based on the common thoughts and beliefs of the larger social context.

Because an artist cannot form a personal ideology based purely on their own personal experiences, an ideology's "real place of existence is in the special, social material of signs created by man" and "its specificity consists precisely in its being the medium of their communication," rather, ideologies exist within the social interaction (Bakhtin 1212). Without social interaction, an artist and a community of listeners would not be able to communicate and influence each other's ideological sphere, preventing the merge needed to advance an artist's sociopolitical agenda. Thus, it becomes imperative for the artists to construct a rhetorical message that considers the larger social context of the community of listeners as well as their own personal agenda, especially if they want to advance their sociopolitical message, or personal ideology, in order to gain more acceptance and support of
their agenda. Consequently, the “immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly define—and determine from within, so to speak—the structure of an utterance,” and the effective sociopolitical artist will work within the ideological sphere of his audience, merging both the ideological sphere of the community of listeners and the ideological sphere of the artist into a single sociopolitical consciousness (Bakhtin 1215). For example, instead of giving their listeners their personal opinion about the current state of American politics and the upcoming presidential election between two separate-yet-similar platforms, Rage Against the Machine’s “Testify” amplified the current social situation to express their dissatisfaction with the lack of political choice. Similarly, Ben Harper’s “Like a King” used the social situation of the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles to advance his agenda of social awareness among the black community.

As these two ideological spheres merge through social interaction and effective musical discourse, the artists aim to advance their ideological agenda by including it within the collective ideology. Achieving this allows the artists’ agenda to become ultimately realized and accepted by the collective group’s consciousness. This form of consciousness, of course, “takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse,” so the sociopolitical artists, after first crafting a rhetorical message dependent on the larger social context, achieve this social consciousness of their ideological agenda through a mutual acceptance of a prescribed musical discourse (Bakhtin 1213). In fact, consciousness “as organized, material expression (in the ideological material of word...musical sound, etc.)” agreed upon within the merged ideological spheres becomes an “objective fact and a tremendous social force,” which can easily create support and awareness of a sociopolitical agenda delivered by an artist of popular music (Bakhtin 1218). Ultimately, the artist’s main end is to create a
rhetorical message encompassing the agreed upon thoughts and beliefs of the larger social context in order to establish a collective consciousness in which both the audience and the artist accept and support a specified sociopolitical agenda delivered by the original rhetorical message.

Because the epideictic or "confrontational" form of rhetoric aims at claiming opposing views of society in the present situation, a collective consciousness based on these oppositions form a "sub-dominant" culture within the "dominant" culture being opposed (Mattern 26). This "sub-dominant" culture mirrors the merged ideological spheres of audience and artist, and as the superimposed ideological sphere grows with the increasing acceptance of the community of listeners, this "sub-dominant" culture becomes engraved—with the help of the widespread appeal of popular music—within popular culture. Consequently, extending the collectively accepted sociopolitical agenda into popular culture solidifies the awareness that the artist wished to propagate in the first place because popular culture "enables people to rehearse identities, stances and social relations not yet permissible in politics"—or the "dominant" culture (Lipsitz 137). Furthermore, "it also serves as a concrete social site, a place where social relations are constructed and enacted as well as envisioned," so that the popular music artist's agenda "does not just reflect reality, it helps constitute it" (Lipsitz 137). However, the artists cannot truly realize the full potential of social power from merging the two ideological spheres and engraving their agenda into popular culture without first surpassing the complex and problematic process of identification, which becomes the next addition to the rhetorical model of sociopolitical popular music.
Burke and the Complexities of Identification

The complexities of identification provide a line between a community of listeners that accepts and supports the artists' agenda and the community of listeners that accepts the agenda but does not support the agenda. As a result, the community of listeners featured in the larger social context separates into two distinctive audiences—the inner audience and the outer audience. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, this "ideological differentiation" occurs during "the growth of consciousness" and "is in direct proportion to the firmness and reliability of the social orientation," supporting the idea that strength of a collective consciousness depends on how the artists' rhetorical message inherently persuades the community of listeners and how the larger social context receives the delivered musical discourse (1216). In fact, the inner and outer audience mirrors Bakhtin's differentiation between "I-experience" and "we-experience" (1216). The difference between inner audience—"we-experience"—and outer audience—"I experience"—relates to how listeners of different ideological spheres in the larger social context identify with the artists' agenda.

Kenneth Burke, a modern rhetorician, places the process of identification in "an intermediate area of expression that is not wholly deliberate, yet not wholly unconscious," an area where the artists' agenda is not wholly realized by the larger social context, yet not completely away from experience (1325). In this area, the community of listeners teeters between identifying with the sociopolitical message provided by the musical discourse through "I-experience"—where the ideological agenda is accepted but not supported, merging the audience's ideological sphere with the artist's but not joining a collective consciousness—or through "we-experience"—where the audience's ideological sphere merges with the artist's ideological sphere, creating a social consciousness aware of the specific agenda. Whereas the "I-
Because rhetoric has the ability to reason “in opposite directions” and to be “concerned with opposites,” it should come as no surprise that the process of identification may lead to two separate audiences—one opposing the collective ideology and the other supporting it (Aristotle 34). Burke supports the partisan aspects of identification when he states that the process “considers the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another” (1326). However, this separation between the
inner and outer audience—which is based purely on experience—is not definitive (as denoted by the dotted line); just as social experiences continually change, the boundary line between inner and outer audience continually changes as well. Just as a listener may “identify himself with [the artist] even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes they are, or is persuaded to believe so,” a listener may also be persuaded to believe that their interests oppose each other, depending on his social experiences and how those experiences align with the merged ideological spheres (Burke 1325). For example, one listener in the outer audience may view a piece of music rhetoric that denounces America’s war on drugs—like System of a Down’s “Prison Song”—as unpatriotic or immoral, but that listener probably does not have the same social experiences—such as being or knowing a drug addict—that a listener in the inner audience, who would support the message of the musical rhetoric, would have.

Burke also addresses more specific complexities within the process of identification that relate to the rhetoric of popular music. First, identification through property especially relates to the rhetoric of popular music because it addresses ethics, which, according to Aristotle, is a foundation of rhetoric, and because ethics mirror politics, this form of identification essentially pertains to the sociopolitical artist’s agenda. In regards to property, Burke includes goods, services, position or status, citizenship, reputation, acquaintanceship, and even love. Therefore, as the sociopolitical artist surrounds his rhetorical message with properties that establish the identity of a specific social group—such as the black community or the disgruntled youth—the message’s “relation to other entities that are likewise forming their identity in terms of property can lead to turmoil and discord,” which again influences the division between inner and outer audience, “I-experience” and “we-experience” (Burke 1327). For instance, even the title of Bob
Marley's "Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)" places a division between the Jamaican regime—the outer audience—and the Rastafarian culture Marley is associated with—the inner audience.

Secondly, Burke addresses the issue of autonomy in the process of identification. The issue of autonomy within the rhetoric of sociopolitical popular music deals with the problematic occurrence of when, once again, a community of listeners differentiates, and the artist's musical discourse becomes interpreted differently—usually negatively—by the outer audience, while the inner audience interprets the message according to the artist's actual agenda. This usually occurs with rap music because the genre often uses instances of violence as a metaphorical symbol of change—such as in The Coup's "5 Million Ways to Kill a C.E.O."; whereas a member of the outer audience will associate the rap rhetoric with representations of an unruly, unlawful lower class, a member of the inner audience will associate the violence with a need for social change and respect. The reason why an artist's intentions cannot remain autonomous, or independent, is because the autonomous agenda takes place in the wider social context, a place with which the agent may be unconcerned (Burke 1329). Mark Mattern illustrates this point further:

> Popular music operates within a social context that also includes the people and sites directly and indirectly involved in its production, consumption, and use. In other words, the political work of a piece of music also occurs in the multiple ways that people use it and in the ways that it circulates in a context. The wider context of reception and use defines a communicative arena in which various individuals and groups appropriate music for different ends. (16)

Thus, the sociopolitical artist cannot expect to receive widespread support for his agenda and to establish a collective consciousness that encompasses the entire social context. Rather, as long as the popular music artist works within the wide social context, which is inevitable as an entertainer, he can only expect to experience the differentiation between those who identify with his rhetorical message and those who do not share the same social experiences that are needed to identify with his rhetorical message, to completely merge with his ideological sphere and enter
into a new social consciousness. However, Burke does offer a point of optimism when he states that the process of identification “has its peaceful moments” when “its endless competition can add up to the transcending of itself,” but “its ideal culminations are most often beset by strife as the condition of their [the artist’s] organized expression” (1327). Nevertheless, the artist can only hope to craft an effective epideictic message—using Aristotle’s *pisteis* and the common beliefs of the larger social context—that will appeal to as many listeners as possible during the process of identification, limiting the amount of differentiation and increasing the strength of a supportive social consciousness, equaling a powerfully aware social force set to oppose the dominant culture.

In addition, the process of identification, with all its complexities and problematic hindrances to the creation of a strong social consciousness, offers a justification of why the non-listener, absolutely uninterested audience, does not appear in the present rhetorical model of sociopolitical popular music. Since the differentiation and separation of the community of listeners remains inevitable—after all, the process of identification, let alone the need for sociopolitical interested popular music, would not even exist if all ideological spheres in the widespread social context coincided with one another—those that fall outside the model’s reach, that achieve absolute separateness, have no place within the communicative battleground, where the multiple identifications outside struggle with the solidarity of the social consciousness inside.

**Foucault and Mainstream Limitations**

The final element to the rhetorical model of sociopolitical popular music is the introduction of the mainstream music industry and the limitations it produces for musical discourse. Imagined as a thick line set on the outside of the outer audience, the mainstream
music industry acts as an absorption line, drawing in the effectiveness of valued sociopolitical concerned popular music and assimilating it into the outer realm of the merged ideological sphere, out of the reach of the inner social consciousness and into the hands of the widespread, unaware outer audience. In many ways, the musical discourse becomes commercialized for the enjoyment of the very audience that the original rhetorical message sought to oppose—the dominant, hegemonic culture (Street 102). For example, Mark Mattern gives an account of when
Bill Clinton, a presidential candidate at the time, with the involvement of the mainstream media, denounced the violent messages of rappers Sister Soulja and Ice-T and the misogyny of 2 Live Crew, giving millions of white listeners—those in the outer audience—the false impression that rap music is generically violent and misogynistic (21). Whereas 2 Live Crew was never really concerned with the sociopolitical arena, Ice-T certainly was; in fact, he eventually wrote a song entitled “Cop Killer,” which sparked controversy throughout the waves of mainstream media, leading to many prominent figures of the outer audience, such as President Bush, calling for removal of the track from Body Count’s debut album produced by Warner. These situations show how “a ‘good’ rhetoric neglected by the press obviously cannot be so ‘communicative’ as a poor rhetoric backed nation-wide by headlines,” and they show the tremendous power that the outer audience has over the musical discourse valued by the inner audience once it becomes absorbed into the mainstream (Burke 1328).

Furthermore, Michel Foucault provides a couple of thoughts in his discussion about the limitations placed on discourses that can better explain the limitations that the mainstream music industry can place on the rhetoric of sociopolitical popular music. The first of these thoughts is what Foucault calls the “author function,” and it limits a discourse by taking the chance-element out of creativity and forcing a discourse to subscribe to a specific style that the audience comes to expect (1466). As it applies to the popular music discourse, the “author function” limits an artist’s ability to remain creative and to craft continually effective messages, due to the prolonged exposure that one his particular songs may receive in the mainstream media. In this case, the widespread outer audience comes to expect a certain kind of delivery, and if the artist does not match the same type of delivery, then the outer audience turns their nose up at the artist, despite what his musical discourse aims to pronounce, and look for the next best thing.
Secondly, Foucault discusses the limitations placed on discourses by “societies of discourse,” which “function to preserve or produce discourses, but in order to make them circulate in a closed space, distributing them only according to strict rules, and without the holders being dispossessed by this distribution” (1468). In terms of the mainstream’s limitations on discourse in popular music, Foucault’s “societies of discourse” mirror the mainstream music industry’s control over how an artist’s rhetorical message is produced and disseminated to the widespread audience, starting first on the outside of the ideological sphere and then moving toward the inside, thereby increasing the social space and weakening the social consciousness. The situations discussed before dealing with Ice-T fall into this category of limitation. Additionally, limitations placed on musical discourse of this type also include the censoring of the message for radio play, the record executive’s decision on how an album should be produced, and the nationwide media’s ability to shun a sociopolitical message deemed controversial to the outer audience, those not in tune, so to speak, with the social ideals that the artist tries to amplify.

Regardless of the means, the mainstream music industry usually waters down the creativity and effectiveness of the sociopolitical artist by suffocating his once-authentic message with monotonous airplay or rules and regulations placed on the production of the musical discourse. The net effect of these limitations results in removing the artist’s sociopolitical message as far as possible from authentic origin deep within the inner sphere of ideology. As I said before, the increased social space between the mainstream influenced message and the original musical discourse ends up weakening the merged ideological spheres of artist and audience. In other words, “music leaves ‘natural’ communities to enter industrial production and marketing, of which it is a changing, fashionable expression,” so as quickly as the mainstream absorbs the popular music discourse, it soon vanishes and weakens, only to be replaced by the
newest fad in popular music, as the inner social consciousness breaks up, their social power surrendered to the outer audience (Lahusen 60).

However, as said before, sociopolitical discourse in popular music can only be as effective as its core allows. Thus, it becomes imperative for the socially concerned musical artist to craft a continually moving and changing rhetorical message based on Aristotle’s *pisteis* and *topoi*—the forever changing common beliefs and ideals within the larger social context. Such an active and focused core will act as a magnetic dynamo, keeping the inner audience and social consciousness cohesively bound and localized, while influencing many of the listeners within the outer audience to cross over into the inner audience, becoming more socially aware and more supportive of the sub-dominant culture.

**Concluding Remarks—Suggestions**

Clearly, this rhetorical model portrays a philosophical framework for analyzing the rhetorical process associated with the sociopolitical phenomenon of what some popular music scholars call “protest music.” It is important to realize how dynamic the rhetorical process of popular music can actually become—it draws upon a countless number of cultural and political phenomenons dealing with everything from historical roots to individual psychologies. As such, the rhetorical model set up in this paper should be viewed as a general guideline in which someone can begin analyzing the effectiveness of musical discourse and the complexities that the process entails. Obviously, the rhetorical process of a sociopolitical discourse in popular music becomes very complex and problematic, supporting the idea that it is an extreme social phenomenon that seems, at times, especially in regards to the limitations placed on musical discourse by the mainstream music industry, short lived. However, I stand by my belief that the
artist has the power to create a continuously effective rhetorical core that will overcome the complexities of social interaction and identification and that will surpass the limitations imposed on it by the mainstream. As a result, all eyes are set on the politically or socially concerned artist; therefore, I offer three simple suggestions based on the effectiveness of present sociopolitical artists:

1) **Localize/Centralize Your Core**

Focus all of your energies within the inner ideology by limiting your discourse to the inner audience. Underground rap group The Coup achieves this by disseminating their musical discourse via independent record label, 75ARK. Because the group’s message is not fully available to the wider audience, they face fewer restrictions and are able to create an effective agenda that advances through a large underground following. Thus, the only community of listeners that they affect will virtually share the same set social beliefs and ideals, maintaining a strong sense of identification and stronger social force as the social consciousness keeps influencing the inner underground audience.

2) **Continually Evolve and Remain Creative**

Keep developing and re-developing your style and delivery. Politically conscious rock band System of a Down has graced the mainstream a few times, but they have hardly stayed there because their style and delivery often becomes too much for the mainstream to handle. For example, in “Prison Song,” put out on their second major-label album, vocalist Serj Tankian merely growls prison statistics based on “mandatory drug sentencing.” Although an effective means of persuasion—*logos*, actually—the musical quality would not meet the standards of mainstream radio play. In addition, System of a Down occasionally features dashes of Armenian
style guitar work within their musical discourse—something virtually non-existent on the radio of mainstream popular culture.

Although folk-rocker Ben Harper has produced six studio albums with Virgin records, he has yet to have a hit single blaze up the charts. This could be attributed to his blending of different styles, preventing the community of listeners found in the outer audience to pigeon-hole him into a certain popular genre. However, his sociopolitical conscious folk/rock/hip-hop/funk/soul discourses, such as “How Many Miles Must We Walk” and “Oppression,” remain in the social consciousness of his inner audience, his faithful following, especially in Europe, as his delivery remains untouchable by the mainstream outer audience.

3) **Use the Mainstream to Your Advantage**

If you find yourself caught within the mainstream of popular music, just do what Rage Against the Machine did—use the increased exposure to advance your agenda even further. However, this was truly effective for Rage because their rhetorical message was continually original, intelligent, and controversial. Lyricist Zach de la Rocha even crafted a couple of songs that illustrated their manipulation of the mainstream in order have their political voices heard—“Bombtrack” and “Guerilla Radio.” Although their discourses were absorbed into the mainstream a number of times, their message was always authentic and was never left unnoticed. Thus, Rage’s continuous barrage of rhetorical messages based on anti-government sentiments had more to gain from mainstream support than it had to lose.

Because the “outwardly actualized utterance is an island rising from the boundless sea of inner speech” and “the dimensions and forms of this island are determined by the particular situation of the utterance and its audience,” perhaps these simple suggestions dealing with situation can help the sociopolitical artist focus on the common beliefs within the supportive
inner audience and continually craft creative and effective rhetorical discourse that will lead to the actualization of an utterance that has the dimensions and form to surpass the complexities within the larger social context of popular music (Bakhtin 1222).


