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Music and territory from a geographical vantage

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Résumé :

Lorsqu'une géographe s'invite à des débats généralement investis par d'autres sciences humaines et sociales, on lui demande souvent : « Que vient faire la géographie dans cette affaire? ». Elle doit alors se justifier en rappelant que la géographie n'est pas une simple description de la terre mais une science sociale à part entière, traitant de l'espace des sociétés, de la position des hommes dans le monde et des représentations qu'ils s'en font. Prenons l'exemple de l'association musique et territoire : le géographe peut appréhender le son et l'environnement sonore comme une source d'information sur l'espace, envisager la musique et les pratiques musicales comme des indicateurs de l'organisation des lieux, les politiques musicales comme une façon de gouverner etc.. Cela lui permettra de construire une connaissance plus fine des territoires en l'aidant à comprendre la manière dont les hommes et les femmes se les approprient et comment ils les transforment.

Dans cet article je résumerai les différentes étapes de construction d'une « géographie de la musique » telle qu'elle s'est développée en France depuis 2006 grâce à un réseau de « musiciens-chercheurs » de toutes disciplines (géographie, ethnologie, sociologie, sciences de la communication, études anglosaxonnes) mobilisés autour des rapports entre musique et territoire. Ensuite je proposerai quelques outils d'analyse permettant d'envisager le couple « musique/espace » comme un objet géographique. L'objectif consiste certes à définir ce qui fait la spécificité de la géographie dans l'étude des phénomènes musicaux, mais aussi d'apporter un point de vue complémentaire à celui des sciences humaines et sociales en faisant apparaître en premier la dimension spatiale de la musique.

Abstract :

When geographers¹ attend debates generally taking part among other social sciences, they are often asked what geography has got to do with it. They have to justify themselves, pointing out that geography is not a simple description of the earth, but a social science in its own right, dealing with the places and space of societies, the position of men in the world and their representations. Let us take the example of the association between music and territory. The geographer may grasp sound and the environment of sound as a source of information on the space, and see music and musical practices as geo-indicators of the organisation of places, musical policies as a form of territorial governance, etc. This will enable him to refine his knowledge of territories by helping him understand the way men appropriate them and transform them.

In this article, I shall first sum up the various stages of construction of a “geography of music” as it has developed in the English-speaking world since the 1970s, by referring to

¹ Dans la suite de ce texte le masculin sera utilisé comme représentant des deux sexes sans discrimination à l'égard des femmes et des hommes et à seule fin d'alléger le texte.

publications by the geographer, Claire Guiu, and then I shall present a few examples of work carried out in France since 2006 by a network of musician cum researchers from all disciplines interested in the relationship between music and territory. Then I shall put forward some tools for analysis so as to make it possible to grasp the couple of “music” and “space” as a geographic object. The objective consists albeit in defining the specificity of geography in the study of musical phenomena, but also in offering a complementary view point to that of the human and social sciences by focussing first and foremost on the spatial dimension of music.

Geography and music: a brief overview of an ongoing academic debate

According to the recent inventory drawn up by the geographer, Claire Guiu (C. Guiu 2007, 2009) articles published about the relationship between geography and music have proliferated throughout the world. These include publications in the United States such as the pioneer work by G.O. Carney (1974, 1977, 1980), special editions of journals (such as the *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 18/1, 1998), specialised publications (Leyshon et al., 1998, Knight, 2006, Krim, 2007); works published in England (R. Hudson (1995), M. Crang (1998), B. Anderson (2002, 2005), New Zealand (C. Mc Leay (2006) and Australia (Connel and Gibson, 2003); and finally those published in the rest of Europe and France in the course of the last decade.² The study of the dissemination of musical genres in the United States and the world inaugurated the quest for relationships between space and music, but at the same time pioneering research on « sound landscapes » or soundscapes related to the geography of perception and sensorial experience emerged. It is also the time at which the French composer, Pierre Schaeffer tried to analyse the structures of the urban sound environment in order to enrich his compositions.

In geographic publications, music is appearing increasingly as a stake in the process of recognising social groups, particularly dominated groups. It seems to be taking place in a subtle game of appropriation and misappropriation of space, sometimes accentuated by the music industry, and sometimes corrected by the intervention of public policies. However, it was not until the “cultural turn” of geography (J. Lévy, 1999) that music was taken into account (as well as the arts or the media) as a vector of representation and musicians as actors in processes of territorialisation.

If English language publications were initially influenced by *cultural studies*, the production of doctoral dissertations and master’s theses in France has been showing the rise of a generation of young researchers of all disciplines observing the development of musical practices and the way they relate to space. At a meeting of academics³ organised in Paris in 2006, it was suggested that music be considered a “*geo-indicator of feelings of belonging, mobility, values and social behaviour (...), a agent of performance in the construction of territories*” observing that when “*related to a territory*”, it could contribute to “*the development of territorial ideologies and imaginations*”. This was followed up at an academic symposium organised in Bordeaux in 2007, entitled “How does music come to the territory?”⁴. The project consists of crossing the cultural approach of geography, new regional

² Ce recensement n’est évidemment pas exhaustif et des travaux analogues sont en cours dans d’autres pays, nous nous excusons à l’avance de ne pas les citer tous.

³ « *Géographie et musiques : quelles perspectives?* » Laboratoire Espaces, Nature et Culture 8/06/2006, Université de Paris IV Sorbonne.

⁴ Colloque organisé à Bordeaux le 12/03/0707 par le laboratoire de recherche ADES et la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme d’Aquitaine. La notion de territoire est commune dans sa complexité aux géographes, (qu’ils l’envisagent dans une définition minimale et stratégique « d’espace à métrique topographique » [Jacques Lévy], comme « toute portion humanisée de la surface terrestre » [Jean-Paul Ferrier], aux anthropologues (qu’ils l’envisagent dans son sens éthologique en comparaison avec les territoires de l’animalité ou comme espace « approprié »), aux politologues (qu’ils le définissent par l’Histoire qui l’a construit

mechanisms for evaluating public cultural policies and a local study of the interplay of actors so as to take account of spatial dynamics at a scale of new territorial entities.

A few preliminary questions have to be dealt with. Is music a “geographical object”? Most of the papers presented tended to answer yes. Certain papers took music as a guiding principle in interpreting a territory (street music, Darkhad chanting in Mongolia, *bandas* in south-western France). Others analysed territories through their musical production (*sega* and *maloya* on Reunion Island, Breton music, rap as the music of the depressed outskirts). In all of these cases, music appears to be a possible cognitive reality for grasping the space or place of societies, or even the principle of territorial organisation.

Does conventional geography not have a problem with the immateriality of music as an object? Publications in the social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century show how music took on the status of a social object as soon as it was consolidated through the cultural industry as a good materialised through the sale of records, instruments and concert tickets. It was then possible to grasp music as an element which provides structure to societies through the market, through distinctions made by music between individuals as consumers, by the risks that globalisation imposes upon cultures which are unequally armed to face mass medias, etc. (Buxton, 1985, Green, 1997 ; Béra et Lamy, 2003). Most pioneer publications of geographers of music map out this materiality (or the dissemination of forms of music on the basis of a taking of inventory of economic activity). However, the immateriality of music is patent when it appears as a sound, then as a language, and it was interesting to take a detour through sound geography (the geography of urban sounds, listening through a headset when moving through an urban environment), and then to look at the structures of musical language so as to learn what they tell us about space.

Does music as a language enjoy a sort of autonomy? This is the question put to us by a creative artist: if he is a bearer of a collective culture and its socio-spatial meanings, he can also transform them. From this vantage, we might consider that music is part of the ideal sphere (Godelier, 1992) in which humans are capable of constructing the materiality of the world around them through ideas and thus, by extension with regard to our interest, through language and musical objects. On the scale of a group, a people, or a nation, it may become a meta-language which concentrates upon sensorial propositions related to collective emotions: the expression of the *saudade* or nostalgia in Portuguese or Brazilian music is an example. Nothing would prevent the appropriation and reconstruction of these musical languages from becoming performative, or these languages from materialising through artistic production, a market, public policies and town planning.

Between the materiality of music (as a cultural good which is part of socio-spatial representations) and its ideal (which makes it the active principle in the construction of territories), there is a third dimension. Music clouds issues, for its fluidity is adapted to organisation in networks, and through connections (Amselle, 2001), and music is proliferating through information and communication technologies. One must take account of this when analysing the changes which sometimes seem to owe nothing to structures inherited from the past – the emergence of new global territories (rap from urban peripheries), the transfer of references from an original territory (such as Brazilian *batucadas*), the re-composition of local

et/ou le fait qu'il soit contrôlé-borné par l'Etat) etc. Le jeu des définitions n'est qu'apparemment contradictoire et on aurait tort de ne pas envisager tous ces aspects porteurs d'éclairages variés sur les objets musicaux étudiés.

identities which had disappeared through borrowings of border cultures (the *bandas* of Aquitaine in south-west France)...

How should the object of music in its relationship to space be approached? We have chosen to approach it not according to the chronology of research (i. e. upon the basis of diffusion, practice, and then the meaning that actors accorded to these practices), but in grasping it as a phenomenon as it appears to each of us in its singularity: sound and the sensorial approach.

Examples of approaches to sound

The publications that appear as precursors to the Canadian, Murray Schafer and the French composer, Pierre Schaeffer show what can be a sensorial experience of the city, and how the sound impact (impersonal noises, voices, music played or broadcast, and superposed noises) can be broken down and classified and also offers a political and aesthetic reading of day-to-day sound. Vincent Rouzé offers us a report on sound in the heart of a major city, in the Paris metro.

Another approach (that of Anthony Pecqueux) shows listeners with headsets taking the Paris public transport, pointing to the individual within their collective space-time environment. He writes that this may help us to understand how music, the social environment and territory mutually affect one another and are changed during the experience that users make when contacting other users.

In this type of paper and others (for instances those carried out by the *Cresson* research centre in Grenoble, cf. Augoyard, 1995), questions of the sound environment and atmosphere are primordial. This makes it possible to establish the relationship with sciences of urban planning and architecture, but also points to the harmonisation of public policies in Europe related to noise and the management of sound and music within the city. Solid and deep bonds may exist between a city, its architecture and its “music”. Vienna, Prague and Budapest thus permanently maintain their status as “musical cities” by encouraging all forms of musical activity in their streets and inside restored monuments.

Music in Berlin

Boris Grésillon describes the main stages of the history of the German capital in the twentieth century through its musical production: as an imperial capital, referred to as “Germania” during the Third Reich, the city was destroyed in 1945, before being divided in two by a wall that lasted forty years, while continuing to produce contributions to international culture drawing from both classical and underground culture. To what extent does the urban matter of Berlin, moulded by its chaotic history, influence the musical matter? Possibly the urban form and the town’s specific architecture mark the artists and their artistic choices, or at least the urban production and artistic production interpenetrate, and inseminate one another.

The tragic history of the German capital has led to a doubling of its prestigious musical production through the competition between East and West Berlin after the war, accompanied by an exceptionally developed practice of amateur music, but also by underground culture on either side of the world. Music stakes its own claims, and has an impact on the creation and construction of new identities. The emergence of discourses of protestation through musical currents is a central issue for popular music of the twentieth century. Many publications on rock, rap and hip-hop culture work on this basis, and particularly reveal the effects of globalisation on local cultures and the way urban territories become uniform while at the same time becoming differentiated through the cultures they produce.

Rap at a world and local level

On the basis of common denunciation, rap has undergone many processes of hybridisation with local cultures, which have also been laid claim to by artists (Swahili, Anglo-Indian, Turkish, Brazilian rap, etc.) The spatial dimension of rap is complex, and it borrows both from the models channelled through globalisation and through local heritage: when comparing productions of rap singers in three different contexts (United States, France and Tanzania), Claire Dubus shows the connections and articulations between the world territories of rap, the networks and local identity. In Tanzania rap's modernity is only opposed to Africanness in the local context, because Africanness has become exportable in a post-colonial economic context. In an extended essay on rap in Dakar, Sophie Moulard-Kouka specifies the articulations in the spatial organisation of the city: the world phenomenon is appropriated by youth of the quarters, and rap becomes a stake in competitions between the centre and periphery of cities as well as between municipal districts. Through the production of texts and video clips, artists from quarters engage in rivalry, participate in the creation of local identity and render Senegalese artistic creation more complex, thereby regenerating it, within the context of world rap.

Others who write on these subjects are close to radical geography as developed in the United States. The post-colonial context, the grasping of ethnicity (and even explicitly of the black "race") as an element of discrimination appears to be a unifier of world rap. The production of knowledge through interviews, the study of texts and music provide new materials for geography. Publications question the world musical order and show its capacity for recuperating forms of art which are emerging through the market.

Other publications on closely related subjects illuminate the interplay of actors rather than the context in the production of space: amateur rock groups, creators of local "scenes", organisations of *batucadas* and *bandas*, groups of folklore related to a specific *terroir* or locality.

Musical practices in their relationship to territory: connections and mixtures

Marie Pendanx explains the musical phenomenon of « bandas » as a filling of the gap left when the rural musical cultures of Gascony disappeared and connections were made with the festive musical cultures of northern Spain. Forms of sociability which develop in bandas, linked with other territorial markers such as bullfighting, the culture of festivity and to a lesser extent certain dominant sports such as rugby have turned this musical expression into a local culture in its own right within a few decades. This emergence was possible due to the relative stability of the local societies in south-western France in the context of the mutation of rural territories.

Anais Vaillant's article creates a contrast between this ideal-type of cultural relocalisation and the dissemination of a musical form of Brazilian origin (batucada) through very active amateur groups spread out all over France and the world. Although all of these groups recognise one another through their empathy for Brazilian percussion and the folklore of Carnival, the ways they express their rootedness in those initial models vary. For certain musicians, the return to the musical sources is necessary and is rendered concrete through trips to Brazil aimed at participating in carnivals, music courses and meetings with Brazilian musicians. By travelling to the sources of their preferred music, they in turn contribute to the re-localisation and revival of these musical styles in a context of the development of tourism, in a sort of waltz of authenticity between musicians of either side of the Atlantic Ocean.

The production of musical space through infrapolitical organisations offers a micro-geographical vision of the construction of spaces as they are lived in and their overlapping in imaginary world territories. This production can also be analysed during representations, for instance by looking at the specific character of music produced and relating it to the various contexts in which it is adapted and in which it appears.

Musical and spatial variations

Laurent Legrain has observed the changes which take place in Darkhad singing over the course of a century through variations of vocal techniques,, notably due to the effects of fifty years of communism. If he can see permanent relationships between traditional singing and natural and supernatural regional spaces, he then goes on to show how these relationships, formerly produced by the political and religious borders between Lamaism and shamanism, were reconfigured under the effect of collectivisation and secularisation during the communist regime and how they are at present undergoing re-compositions.

Julie Mansion presents the hypothesis that the wave of festive ska-rock among young musicians in Bordeaux draws from sources at various territorial levels and can in the short run become a marker for identity. This hypothesis is

based upon the musicological analysis of the repertoire and instruments of the groups. The association of instruments, rhythms, intervals and modulations in most pieces corresponds, according to her analysis, to an aggregation of musical influences and to territories to which they refer (such as Jamaica, Spain, urban rock, oriental music), going on to create a new style which is linked to a local identity.

For other authors, territory is understood in its most institutional acceptance, as are those musical forms which refer explicitly to it: municipality (Bordeaux), *département* (La Réunion), region (Brittany), autonomous community (Andalusia). In certain cities, hip-hop becomes gentrified, offering a refined version of this popular culture through selected choreographies of repertory companies which are compatible with the distinctive criteria of subsidized culture (such as (Loïc Lafargue at Grangeneuve). Analogously, on a regional scale, Olivier Goré shows how the music of Brittany sled from the cultural towards the political sphere. He shows the relationship between the territorial compromises that made this evolution possible and the aesthetic, economic and territorial evolutions which result from it. The comparison between these two examples would deserve a long commentary: in one case, cooptation and the symbolic focussing upon a marginal culture, and in the other the sliding of a broadly shared popular culture towards a consensual cultural policy; in one case an aesthetic consideration of a territory subject to discrimination; in the other the spreading of identity to an entire region, sometimes at the cost of the disappearance of local particularities.

The way music is taken account of in political projects is recurrent in projects of local economic development when regions and cities which are competing try to enhance the economic or touristic attractiveness of their territory.

Music, identity and local development

The history of flamenco shows the emergence of a marginal music, originally borne by a few gypsy families which had settled down at Jerez-de-la-Frontera, but adopted by all of Spain as a mark of national identity and then disseminated throughout the world. The popularity of flamenco gradually led to its relocation in Andalusia, becoming one of the driving forces for social and economic development in the city of Jerez de la Frontera (Nicolas Canova). It is no longer a mere local and political consensus related to musical expression: the aspect of performance in flamenco in Jerez-de-la-Frontera has been expressed through the project of creating cultural infrastructures which are supposed to contribute to the economic development of this formerly enclosed region of Spain, and which may soon be at the heart of economic exchanges between Europe and Africa.

The quest for foundations and methods

A consensus emerges through these highly diverse approaches: music is not viewed as something essential any more than its relationship to territory. Approaches are interdisciplinary and in principle intercultural. Mongol music, Senegalese rap and festive ska-rock go together, amateur *bandas* coexist with organisations of *batucadas*, *flamenco* contributes to local development as a lyrical art form. The juxtaposition of objects which

appear to be so different calls out for comparison, calls ethnocentric approaches into question, encourages critical analysis and confronts methods.

Thus, for geographers, music can be grasped both through spatial analysis (the localisation of practices, dissemination of forms of music, cultural hierarchies on socio-spatial territories, the circulation of musicians, global-local relations of amateur musicians), through the geography of social practices (territories of rap, of the rural day-to-day, festivals, *fêtes de la musique*, rave parties), through regional geographies, (Réunion, Brittany, Brazil), the scale at which one can observe phenomena of re-localisation, mixing, emergence and through cultural studies (the noise of Paris, cinema, urban mobility and listening through head-sets).

What then is the “smallest common denominator” of these approaches? The answer is the following: the aforementioned authors or those publishing on the subject are more or less in agreement that music is part of common representations for a group or a society in a given space or time. Musical practices and music, irrespective of what they are, consequently produce “social” meaning and therefore territory, and some authors affirm that these practices and representations “geography”. If I am to define the way the object of the couple of music in its relationship to space is grasped, I would suggest five entrees, while at the same time being convinced ahead of time of the limits of this conceptualisation and while asking that everyone use them in a moderate way.

First of all, music appears to be a geo-indicator, an element for describing and decoding socio-spatial realities, which are alternatives to images. Capturing the universe of sound of spaces makes it possible to escape the tyranny of the map and the dictatorship of images. We discover the other side of the décor, allowing us to put other data into perspective: reports on sounds (a street in Naples, musicians in the corridor of the Paris metro, the musical and sound ambiance of a major shopping outlet, the analysis of the sound track of a film) produce the immediate sensation of the overlapping spaces which the landscape consists of (and is “hidden” by the images) through the emotions procured by those listening.

Secondly, it appears as a vector of circulation between territorial scales. These scales are sensitive in the very structure of musical compositions which appeal to themes, instrumentation and the processing of sound while referring at the same time or alternatively to all levels of understanding (local/ global, tradition/ modernity...). Thus, the music of Brittany today may make use of the Breton *biniou* or bagpipes, Scottish (and now Celtic) bagpipes, classical or Spanish guitar, the electric bass guitar, or African or contemporary percussion to play melodies that standards refer to in all sorts of imaginary spaces and times, while nevertheless imposing a musical territory linked to a territory of reference.

Thirdly, it appears as a way of fixing territorial belonging. Music can be the sensitive support for senses of attachment identified through other cultural markers and functioning over the long term (the association of regional music, landscapes, languages, festivities) or transitional as for rave parties which create the ephemeral conditions of urbanity in anti-worlds intended to maximise social relationships over the short term. The process of belonging to a place can become a process of addiction, such as music lovers addicted to opera singing in opera halls and festivals, unless individuals who appreciate music are at several places at the same time, enjoying the charm of an eclectic rediscovery of the varieties offered by many places which form the inner landscape of post-modern man.

Fourthly, it appears to be a way of constructing territorial images. Music “performs” as is evident in musical festivities in town, initially a sham, which however gradually gains autonomy by creating a more satisfactory reality. The regularity of its repetition in the same

places ultimately leaves a material trace: musical kiosks, dance floors, show rooms, outdoor theatres. It is sometimes very much part of the regional and national heritage, particularly in countries in which part of the resources come from tourism: what would a Greek restaurant without bouzouki and Andalusia without flamenco be?

Fifthly, it appears as a form of territorial governance. Given the distances of citizens from politics, territory as directed by music appears to be a resource. Just as the region of Catalonia has imposed Sardana as its national music, (C. Guiu, 2009), policies for managing problem areas throughout Europe are based upon socio-cultural animation aimed at developing areas in which urban culture can be practiced: rock, rap and hip-hop are meant to channel the violence of youth in spaces of expression. Free musical festivities in renovated town centres attract enormous crowds and no major political event (such as a national holiday or election) is not accompanied by a free concert.

These five entrees may be used separately or simultaneously to take account of a concert, of the production of a musical group, of a musical style, of the ambience in sound of a district or a shopping centre, of a public music policy. Music goes beyond walls, calls people together, accompanies strolls and creates universes. It also shows its effectiveness in regulating human beings in spaces, all the more so in the case of post-modern individuals who are continuously called upon to adapt their conduct to a variety of situations imposed by growing mobility.

By way of conclusion, it can be seen that notions of the territory and space of societies appear among all of the previously cited authors as important in understanding the permanence or emergence of musical forms, in identifying the places and borders which separate them, in enquiring into representations which form territorial imaginations, and in projecting processes of acculturation, mixing, connecting and hybridisation onto space. Their common denominator is having considered music as a “cognitive construct which makes it possible to grasp a spatial phenomenon” (Lussault, in Lévy and Lussault, 2003, p.675). This allows us to pursue common work on music as a geographic object together with other researchers of all disciplines.

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