



# Music scene. Where Popular Music, its Media and Cultural policies meet in Communication studies.

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## **Music scene. Where Popular Music, its Media and Cultural Policies meet in Communication Studies.**

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For my undergraduate thesis at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, I first observed and analyzed the Parisian popular music sphere, and for my Master's thesis I wrote about the concept of cultural mediation in relation to the notion of cultural democratization. While continuing my research as a one-year exchange student at Macquarie University in Sydney, I was able to localize, and redefine these concepts by comparing the French and Australian popular music spheres. My research showed that culture can be understood through the interactions in act in different contexts of cultural policies in spite of the fact that there isn't always an official treatment of the idea of mediation.

For my PhD research, popular music<sup>1</sup> is examined in its political context and as a means of expression for cultural movements. After having had the opportunity to live in Québec City for nearly two years, I was then able to focus my field of study on three specific cities – Paris, Sydney, Québec – and this provided me with the opportunity to make an international comparison.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “popular music” will be used throughout this paper. It can be perceived as problematic in the French speaking countries as it can refer specifically to Marxist issues of class. Thus some scholars prefer “chanson”, “amplified musics” (“musiques amplifiées”), “actual/current musics” (“musiques actuelles”) or “emergent musics” (“musiques émergentes”) to specify the practices evolving around specific musical aesthetics. Cf. GUIBERT, G. “Is the French word chanson equivalent to the English term popular music?”, Actes du colloque IASPM, Université de Rome “Meaning music”, Rome, 2005; KASSABIAN, A. “Popular” in HORNER, B. and SWISS, T. (Eds.), *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden (USA), 1999, pp.133-123.

Analysing popular music raises some interesting questions and problems about the nature of this term and about how one makes sense of this subject of study, especially in France in the field of Information and Communication Sciences. Understanding the various activities occurring around popular music (from media consumption to live performance) leads directly towards a debate about power dynamics and recognition. In a time of cultural diversity and globalization, the construction of cultural identities within popular music and how this is handled politically ought to be considered.

This paper questions directly the heuristic value of the concept of “music scene” in the sociological understanding of popular music and its media of expression in relation to its cultural policies. Popular music can be analyzed within specific cultural spaces “in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other” (STRAW, 1991:373), audiences being characterized “by the interlocking operation of the various institutions and sites within which musics are disseminated” (STRAW, 1991:384). Local music scenes have developed around certain artists, venues, shops, businesses, associations and all kind of amenities: the '93 hip-hop scene' in the Parisian Northern suburbs, the 'Indie Rock scene' in Melbourne or the 'Reggae scene' in Toronto for example. As some scholars point out, “'Scene' is concerned with a far broader spectrum of musical activities which also include performance, production, marketing, promotion and distribution” and “has been recast to encompass local, trans-local and even virtual activities” (BENNETT et al., 2005: 96). There is thus a more global aspect emerging from this concept leading to studies on musical communities that are dispersed geographically<sup>2</sup>. Scenes create “embryonic signifying communities” (SHANK, 1994:121), a certain “sense of community” (GELDER, 2005:469) is being produced and tends to move away from the more rigid and homogeneous notion of “oppositional or disruptive subcultures” (NEGUS, 1996:23). Scenes emerge from specific “affective alliances” (GROSSBERG, 1984:227) that are “always tied to particular musical practices” (GELDER, 2005:436), defining a more flexible framework of examination anchored in the reflexivity of everyday life: “Contacts and information between scenes are also established and disseminated through the media, as well as through word of mouth and face-to-face contact” (COHEN, 1999:244). Culture is hence determined by active interactions, articulations, a “stacking up of mediations”<sup>3</sup> (HENNION, 1993). 'Music scenes' are subsequently cultural spaces with particular networks of relations, dynamics of social practices and meanings in which one seeks a sense of self-realization.

Some academics have pointed out that “the music industry is an aspect of popular music culture” (FRITH et al., 2001:27), and that “like the music media, the music industry has also played a significant role in creating and constraining scenes” (COHEN, 1999:246), making cultural industries a key element in the analysis. Popular music reveals territories of significant consumption, the activity of consuming music being a meaningful activity (CLARK, 2006:10). By locating diverse amenities and by taking into account consumers, scenes are being distinguished from neighborhoods (and residents) and from industrial/working districts (and producers), centering the study on the importance of music for people who listen to the same artists, go to the same venues, shops, bars, etc.: “the relevant social question is not focused on who you live or work with, but whether you can find others with whom to share your dreams and ideals” (CLARK, 2006:7). A 'scene' is a conceptual tool that gives the opportunity to apprehend all the activities that are evolving around popular music, from producers to consumers, and to understand what they mean for the people involved in such cultural practices.

Popular music 'scenes' can be described, from a broader point of view, as urban cultural activities revealing the dynamics between those activities and the social and institutional foundation of cities: “public policies of all sorts help to shape the spaces within which cultural scenes coalesce as moments in a city's collective life. Scenes actively seize these spaces in their own restless, creative quests for opportunity” (STRAW, 2004:419). I want to put forward the fact that specific cultural activities, such as popular music practices, can be perceived as evolving in genuine public spaces where diverse cultural movements and public policies exist and confront each other. People listening to particular artists, going to particular venues, selling and buying particular music in

<sup>2</sup> Cf. THORNTON, S., *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1996 ; HARRIS, K., « 'Roots'? : the relationship between the global and the local within the Extreme Metal Scene », *Popular Music*, Vol.19, n°1, 2000, pp.13-30.

<sup>3</sup> « empilement de médiations »: all the following quotes in English are my own translation.

particular shops, playing particular music in particular places, visiting particular websites, reading particular magazines, etc. participate in creating and maintaining specific 'scenes' that can be perceived as cultural movements challenging the public policies in place: "The very notion of 'cultural policy' is given new shape through the analysis of what we call scenes (... ) scenes capture the distinct ways in which concrete patterns of cultural amenities and personality characteristics attract groups of people" (CLARKE, 2006:3).

Indeed, the involvement in popular music 'scenes' differs from one individual to another, a social movement being a "form of concerted collective action in favor of a cause"<sup>4</sup> (NEVEU, 1996:10). These cultural movements are in perpetual confrontation for recognition in the public sphere understood as a "symbolic arena"<sup>5</sup> (MACÉ, 2005:48). The struggle for acknowledgment occurring around musical activities, those "affective alliances" and those "dreams and ideals" are central for individuals in their own definition: "Songs and musical styles do not simply 'reflect', 'speak to', or 'express' the lives of audiences members or musicians. A sense of identity is created out of and across the processes whereby people are connected together through and with music" (NEGUS, 1996: 133). Using an international comparison, I aim to inquire if public policies towards popular music scenes take into account the construction of identities.

Our field study, which was undertaken in three distinct cities - Paris, Sydney and Québec – is based on a multiple case study: "Case study is defined by individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used" (STAKE, 1994:236) and typically combines "data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations" (EISENHARDT, 2002:5). Quantitative and qualitative data has thus been collected to "examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context" (YIN, 1981:59). During the exploratory phase, some ethnographic material and personal, reflective observations were collected (during concerts and rehearsals), while statistics (on musical practices and consumption) and semantic items (from official documents and interviews with some of the actors of the music scenes) were gathered both in France, Australia and Canada. A multiple case study at an international level raises some questions about the act of comparing: How can I confront these cases? How can I take into account the 'micro' and the 'macro' dimensions of these phenomena? How can I respect the specificity of each local context but also reveal some common issues? How can I "compare the incomparable" (MAURICE, 1989:182)?

The case study is "a research strategy" (YIN, 1981:59) that allows the researcher to link the data to the propositions by pattern-matching. Those patterns are being perceived by the inductive posture of a societal analysis that is based on the "examination of the relations between 'actors' and 'spaces' rather than on parallels between or 'imitations' of 'forms' or 'structures' in organisations or institutions" (MAURICE, 2000: 18). By pointing out the relation between the actors involved in popular music 'scenes' and those cultural spaces and territories of consumption in three specific cities, the 'cross-national' and 'cross-national' dimensions were surpassed to determine "national patterns of coherences" (MAURICE, 2000: 31). Therefore, the use of a societal analysis for our international comparison has respected the characteristic of each local context and determined some factors of correlation.

The observations I was able to make in Paris as a musician, as an artistic director and as a band manager<sup>6</sup> helped me contextualize the interviews I did: G.Castagnac and F.Drewniak from the "Information and Resources Centre for the Current Music"<sup>7</sup> and P.Berthelot from the "Venues of Amplified/Current Music Organization"<sup>8</sup>. I wanted to interview those institutional members to have their point of view on the eventual impact of public policies on popular music practices. I also used the official statistics to show the importance of popular music in the everyday life of the French in

<sup>4</sup> « formes d'action collective concertée en faveur d'une cause ».

<sup>5</sup> « arène symbolique constituée par les luttes de légitimation et de disqualification que se livrent, via les mouvements et contre-mouvements culturels, les acteurs inscrits au sein de rapports sociaux asymétriques ».

<sup>6</sup> With a Ska band from 2002 to 2006 (EP distributed by D'Jam Digital Music), at the venue l'Abracadabar, and for the Rock band *Melt*.

<sup>7</sup> With a Ska band from 2002 to 2006 (EP distributed by D'Jam Digital Music), at the venue l'Abracadabar, and for the Rock band *Melt*.

<sup>8</sup> Fédurock: Fédération des Musiques Amplifiées/Actuelles.

general, and of Parisians in particular. As a Research Fellow at the French National Library (BNF) since August 17<sup>th</sup> 2009, I am currently working on archives on the French music industry from the 1940's to the 1970's. This will enable me to situate historically the development of the Parisian popular music scene and, undoubtedly, to elicit the fact that this cultural space has developed outside of the domain of politics. The diverse official documents I have studied show the importance of local authorities in the cultural funding (in 2006, about 1/3 came from the state and 2/3 from local governments<sup>9</sup>). The public policies in place for popular music aim basically at helping on one hand the industry and on the other hand the youths so that they can find their place in society, especially the ones from the 'rough areas' (TEILLET, 2002), in the republican perspective of a welfare state (TEILLET, 2003/2004). The Paris popular music scene is thus characterized by the heterogeneity of the music you can find, by the concentration of the cultural industries and by the noise regulations in force restraining live performances.

My ethnographic material from the Sydney Bay Area was gathered while attending concerts and clubs, and by doing a few 'gigs' with local musicians. In addition, I interviewed R.Letts, Executive Director of the Music Council of Australia (MCA), and P.Hayward, Professor in the Department of Contemporary Music studies at Macquarie University, to better understand the specificity of public policies towards music in Australia and the characteristics of the music scene in Sydney. The official data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the MCA demonstrate that popular music is an important practice all over Australia, and those compiled by Arts NSW underline the importance of music in the every day life of the people of Sydney. Cultural funding in NSW is mainly provided by local institutions (in 2005-2006, 34% came from the Australian Government, 48% from the State Government, and 18% from Local Governments<sup>10</sup>) and, by supporting popular music, tends to encourage a certain 'Australianess' by helping most professionals produce local contents (STRATTON, 2006). Sydney remains the economic capital - whereas Melbourne is considered to be the cultural capital - "a scene strangled by bureaucratic red tape; rules and regulations have suffocated what once stood for rebellion"<sup>11</sup> and is no longer characterized by its Oz Rock tradition<sup>12</sup> but rather by its Dance clubs<sup>13</sup>.

While in Québec City, I had the opportunity to work for the 'Department of Study and Program Evaluation' (DREP) at the Ministry of Culture of Québec and to participate in the elaboration of a questionnaire using sociological tools to analyse the Québécois' cultural practices. In charge of the section of the questionnaire dealing with musical activities, I had access to numerous statistics that reveal over all the significance of popular music for the people of Québec. I also interviewed J.Laflamme, head of the DREP, G.Corbeil from the "Company for the Development of the Cultural Industries"<sup>14</sup> and S.LaRoche from the "Québec Arts and Literature Council"<sup>15</sup> were interviewed to better understand the subsidy process and to situate Québec's popular music scene. In this province of Canada, the local state plays a major role in cultural funding (in 2007-2008, 46% came from the Federal State, 33% from the Province, 21% from city councils<sup>16</sup>), the purpose of the public policies towards popular music being to support the industry but also to help a 'Quebecness' identity flourish (GRENIER, 1997). I also made observations during concerts in various venues in Québec and had the chance to perform a few times. Local artists, fans, media and cultural industries claim that Québec is not a "village" - Québec is the administrative city

<sup>9</sup> DELVAINQUIÈRE, J.-C. and DIETSCH, B., « Les dépenses culturelles des collectivités locales en 2006: près de 7 milliards d'euros pour la culture », [Internet] *Cultures Chiffres*, DREPS, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, [cited 2009 Mars], Available from: <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/deps>.

<sup>10</sup> Cultural Ministers Council Statistical Working Group, *Cultural Funding in Australia Three Tiers of Government*, National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2007, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> JOHNSTON, C. « The trouble with Sydney », [Internet] *TheAge.com.au*, [cited 2005 December 16th], Available from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/music/the-trouble-with-sydney/2005/12/15/1134500941583.html>.

<sup>12</sup> HOMAN, S. « Losing the Local: Sydney and the Oz Rock Tradition », *Popular Music*, Vol.19, n°1, 2000, pp.31-49.

<sup>13</sup> MONTANO, E. « The Sydney Dance Music Scene and the Global Diffusion of Contemporary Club Culture », [Internet] *Transforming Cultures eJournal*, Vol.4, n°1, 2009, [cited 2009 April], Available from: <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/TfC>.

<sup>14</sup> SODEC: Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles.

<sup>15</sup> CALQ: Conseil des Arts et des Lettres du Québec.

<sup>16</sup> STATISTIQUE CANADA, « Bulletin de service. Dépenses publiques au titre de la culture: tableaux de données. 2007-2008 », [Internet] Produit n°87F0001X, Ministre de l'Industrie, [cited 2010 April], Available from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/87f0001x/87f0001x2010001-fra.pdf>.

and Montréal the cultural and economic centre. Major artists do, in fact, come to the city on tour, but several significant venues have closed down<sup>17</sup> and strong noise regulations have made it in the long run a subsisting Rock scene.

A comparison of these three popular music 'scenes' (Paris, Sydney and Québec City) reveals different periods of cultural policy and treatment of popular cultures: 1- In the 1960's, different national organizations were created with the view to democratize culture, in particular the "high arts" with no consideration for the popular forms (MOULINIER, 1999 ; SAINT-PIERRE, 2003; ROWSE, 1985): the Ministries of Cultural Affairs were created in France in 1959 (A.Malraux) and in Québec in 1961<sup>18</sup> (G.-É. Lapalme), Australia being in an era of 'voluntary entrepreneurship'<sup>19</sup>. 2- Cultural relativism was central in the political orientations in the 1970's: the idea of 'cultural development' was present in all French public policies with an objective to facilitate "local development", "social cohesion" and "integration" (LUCAS, 2005); the Australian cultural policy was characterized by muticulturalism<sup>20</sup>, by "access and equity and community cultural development" (CRAIK, 2006), and by the establishment in 1968 of the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body, the Australia Council for the Arts; Canada adopted multiculturalism as official policy in 1971 but the province of Québec rejected it and made the French language a key element in the development of an intercultural policy (ROCHER et al., 2007). 3- With the expansion of cultural industries in the 1980's, especially in the field of popular music, cultural policy-makers had to change their scope: in France, under Lang's ministry, the adage was "economy and culture, same combat" (URFALINO, 1997:42) with an aim to establish a 'cultural democracy'; institutions were put in place with the purpose to support popular music artists and the industry generally, as well in Australia (BREEN, 1993) and in Québec (STRAW, 2000). 4- The globalization of cultural products intensified in the 1990's, and the appearance at the same moment of new information and communication technologies changed the policies' tendency : the notion of 'cultural exception' became a major inclination for French policy-makers in the field of arts and culture even though it was foremost an economic strategy (POIRRIER, 2002, 2006) ; the Australian Government adopted in 1994 the first enunciated federal cultural policy, *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy* with a goal to protect a culture "under assault from homogenized international mass culture" (COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA, 1994:1) ; in 1992, the National Assembly of Québec approved the first official cultural regulation *La politique culturelle du Québec - Notre culture. Notre avenir* to face the new cultural context at that time<sup>21</sup> and to assert a particular cultural identity in North America (MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE ET DES COMMUNICATIONS, 1992:7).

<sup>17</sup> For example, the venue « Chez son père » where major artists of the 70's started their career such as G.Vigneault, R.Charlebois or J.-P.Ferland, closed in December 2007.

<sup>18</sup> At a federal level, the Canadian Council for the Arts was created in 1957.

<sup>19</sup> « voluntary cultural mission of non-commercial entrepreneurs, sometimes enjoying Commonwealth support »: ROWSE, T. *Arguing the Arts. The Funding of the Arts in Australia*, Angus & Robertson, Melbourne, 1985, p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Although « Multiculturalism in Australia has not necessarily been very concerned with culture in the conventional sense. At a national level it has usually been administered through the Department of Immigration, which has little interest in cultural issues other than the teaching English to new arrivals »: JUPP, J., « The institutions of culture: multiculturalism » in Bennett, T. and Carter D. (Eds.), *Culture in Australia*, Cambridge, Melbourne, 2001, p.260.

<sup>21</sup> « pour préserver ses acquis et son dynamisme, la culture québécoise doit aujourd'hui être en mesure d'affronter de nouveaux et importants enjeux. Elle requiert, à cet effet, une politique culturelle claire, adaptée au contexte des années quatre-vingt-dix. L'internationalisation accélérée des échanges et la mondialisation progressive des marchés ont sensiblement les mêmes effets dans tous les secteurs d'activité. Dans le secteur culturel, cependant, les enjeux sont particulièrement lourds »: MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE ET DES COMMUNICATIONS, *La politique culturelle du Québec: Notre culture, notre avenir*, Direction de la Communication, Québec, 1992, p.6.

We have been able to show in this paper why and when popular culture became a political issue. By examining different definitions and political treatment of popular music and its media, and by comparing these three popular music scenes, we were able to reveal various conceptions of cultural identity that can be considered as surpassed in today's world: Can a 40 year old French rocker playing with his band in a subsidized rehearsal studio still be considered as a part of the 'youth'? In particular, the 'youths' with 'problems'? Is 'Indigenous music' more Australian than Dance music? Is an artist with an Anglo-Saxon background playing 'Indigenous music' more Australian than Indigenous artists doing Hip-Hop? Is an overseas-born artist singing in another language than French expressing Québec's cultural identity?

Article 2 of the *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* stipulates that “cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life”. Today, we can actually question the political models in place -the Republican model in France, the Multicultural model in Australia, the Intercultural model in Québec – as we read H.Arendt: “the plurality of *men* is embodied in the absolute difference of all men from one another, which is greater than the relative difference among peoples, nations, or races” (ARENDT, 2005: 96). Politics, and in particular cultural policies towards popular music, should not be apprehended within the structures, institutions or political ideals, but rather by grasping the tensions in every moment of life and tend towards “a definition of politics that moves from political structures to power relations in everyday activities” (BALLIGER, 1999: 57). By understanding the diverse forms of power taking place in the interactions of cultural activities, the concept of 'scene' could consequently be raised as a paradigm to appreciate popular music: “The production of scenes is, however, constrained or enabled by relations of power that shape the nature of the scene and the way which it is thought about or imagined” (COHEN, 1999: 245). Public policies should ultimately be able to take into account, in every specific cultural and consumption space of confrontation, the cultural rights of each individual (Art.5 of UNESCO's *Declaration*). But we can ask ourselves if such policies really exist?

Finally, this paper illustrates what E.Maigret as called a 'communication turn' in French sociology: “sociology has however renewed with the question of communication since the 1980's, in France particularly (...) To my mind, this rediscovery borrows three main processes: the first from research on the concept of public space, the second from the interbreeding within the field of *Cultural Studies*, and finally the third from the theories of reflexivity”<sup>22</sup> (MAIGRET, 2004:113). The concept of 'music scene', and the largely diverse methodology it allows, could become a key notion in the study of popular music and cultural politics, and furthermore an alternative paradigm to the arts 'field' or 'world'.

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<sup>22</sup> « la sociologie a cependant renoué avec la question de la communication depuis les années 1980, en France en particulier (...) Cette redécouverte emprunte à mon sens trois grandes voies, celle des recherches sur le concept d'espace public, celle des métissages avec les *Cultural Studies*, enfin celle des théories de la réflexivité »

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