

## Musicality and politic from antiquity to nowadays

In 2019, a trial took place, the main defendant being a rooster, named Maurice, whose owners' neighbours accused of singing too early<sup>1</sup>. The trial opposed two theses: the first branding the cock's singing as noise pollution, the second defending it as the tradition of a threatened rurality. Judging from this affair, one can see how the definition of what is deemed musical or not can become a genuinely political issue, i.e. a topic pertaining to civic matters (in this case, peaceful coexistence). Whereas the musical experience is generally promoted as a pivotal part of collective celebrations and performances, noise pollution is considered a public nuisance. From one era to the next, a strong case is to be made on what separates nuisance from music and the significance thereof onto politics. While the Ancient were afraid of birdsongs, poets from the Middle Ages described those as akin to landscapes, namely the landscape of their real country or « oisel-patrie » according to Léonard Dauphant<sup>2</sup>.

In the wake of the most recent sound studies<sup>3</sup>, one wonders about the role and place of subjectivity in the relationship between humankind and sound. Our inquiry is about the socio-political mechanism qualifying sound as either beautiful and harmonic - and obviously on the actors and representations which participate at this ranking - or as pollution and nuisance. From a rather quantitative perspective, one of our aims is to study the importance of musicality in the public space, not unlike Romain Bénini's research on street singers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. Another aim would be to study the musicians from both a social and political standpoint, such as Alexandre Vincent's<sup>5</sup> publication on the roman occident, or to approach the subject using the historical sociology of music itself, as Etienne Anheim has done in his investigation of the papal court of the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>. A further line of inquiry relates to the political use of music in and out of itself, from odes to a given prince's glory<sup>7</sup> to the establishment of the so-called « degenerate music <sup>8</sup>» under the German nazi regime. In the same way as Fanny Chassain-Pichon, our inquiry is open to investigations on how music might motivate specific political behaviors<sup>9</sup>, for instance protests as Arnaud Baudérot has shown in his study on rock music. Finally, our inquiry also considers attempts at quantifying sounds in a city as relevant, interrogating the interplay between moments of sound and of silence in the manner of Alain Corbin<sup>10</sup>.

This conference is therefore open to trans-disciplinary contributions, ranging from the fields of history or other, such as musicology, literature, philosophy, anthropology, physics or biology. Neither a specific chronology, nor a precise geographical anchoring are prescribed.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/nouvelle-aquitaine/charente-maritime/ile-oleron-coq-maurice-pourra-continuer-ses-vocalises-1718185.html>, publié le 05/09/2019, consulté le 20 novembre 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Léonard Dauphant, *Géographies : Ce qu'ils savaient de la France, 1100-1600*, Ceyzérieu (France), Champ Vallon, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Christophe Vendries, « De la musique au son : nouvelles perspectives, nouveaux regards », in *Revue historique*, 2020/3 (n° 695), p. 191-212.

<sup>4</sup> Romain Benini, « La chanson, voix publique (Paris, 1816-1881) », *Romantisme*, 11 avril 2016, n° 171, n° 1, p. 4052.

<sup>5</sup> Alexandre Vincent, *Jouer pour la cité. Une histoire sociale et politique des musiciens professionnels de l'Occident romain*, befar 371, Rome, École Française de Rome, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Étienne Anheim, « La musique polyphonique à la cour des papes au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Une sociologie historique », *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre | BUCEMA* [En ligne], Hors-série n° 2 | 2008, mis en ligne le 16 janvier 2009, consulté le 01 décembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/cem/9412> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/cem.9412>

<sup>7</sup> Laura Jeanice Brooks, *Courtly Song in Late Sixteenth-Century France*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Laure Schnapper, « La musique « dégénérée » sous l'Allemagne nazie », *Raisons politiques*, 2004, no 14, n° 2, p. 157-177.

<sup>9</sup> Fanny Chassain-Pichon, *De Wagner à Hitler : Portrait en miroir d'une histoire allemande*, Paris, passés composés, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Corbin, *Histoire du silence : De la Renaissance à nos jours*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2016.

Our approach being a culturalist one, [i.e. one that would establish a comprehensive social history of the given topic,] it is in our intention to showcase the various trends of thought and representations of this topic, as well as to establish a social history of the said topic. We therefore suggest four lines of research:

### 1. Actors and networks

From the individual standpoint to the group's, we wish to inquire about public speakers and, more generally, about practitioners of music in the public realm. Their training, recruitment, and overall career are thus relevant, as are the affinities between singers/instrumentalists, composers, financial supporters, critics, listening public, producers and/or engineers. What kind of a role do these actors play in the city (in the sense of *polis*), and what are their ties to the political powers at hand? The public is also considered as an actor in the musical process.

### 2. Gestures and materialities

If « the sharing of the sensitive » as Jacques Rancière beautifully says<sup>11</sup>, is at the core of public politics, one shall question the diversity of material sensitivities and of musical activities inside the city. We shall therefore focus our interest onto the gestures and the materiality of music, for example the movements executed by an instrument maker during the fabrication process or the gestures of the one playing the instrument. Similarly, one could explore the political implications behind the techniques<sup>12</sup> and « taming<sup>13</sup>» of the human body for a musical experience. We could also question the musicality of political gestures, be it the sounds or music of protest barricades or of political slogans, as well as the political impact of musical media (musical instruments, CDs, virtual clouds, ...)<sup>14</sup>. Finally, the question of the instantaneity – as opposed to the recording and subsequent circulation – of musical performances also belong to our field of investigation.

Also relevant is the space wherein the sound is emitted, its harmony depending on the physical acoustics and its symbolic significance influencing the experience of the event by a given public. Performance halls, places of worship, palaces, studios, even avenues take part in the political stakes and material nature of musicality which we aim to interrogate.

### 3. Circulation, reception, appropriation

On the premise that music, just like class, gender or historical events, underpins the development of identity, we wish to question the relationship between the circulation of music and the establishment of said identities. How is music absorbed by the individual and by the community? How does it circulate from the private to the public realm? Let us think for instance of Homer's epic poems spreading around the Mediterranean Sea, of the migration of the troubadours during the Middle Ages, or of the circulation of the *Marseillaise* hymn across Europe between the French and the Russian revolutions. Through which processes do songs and musical culture become heritage? Do various political moments such as processions or royal coronations, have a specific musicality in them and if so, which one?

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible : Esthétique et politique*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975.

<sup>14</sup> Ludovic Tournès, *Du phonographe au MP3*, Paris, Autrement, 2008.

#### 4. Control and protest

Finally, how is music controlled by the public authorities, and which politically coercive tools and practices stem from music? Which arguments do authorities resort to in order to define whether a sound is musical or not? Which methods do they use to promote their vision to the public and musicians? As we take the example of rock, we can indeed observe the strength of music as a tool of protest and political critic.

##### ❖ Calendar:

Call for papers at the latest by February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Answers to candidates at the latest by March 12<sup>th</sup> 2021

Workshop “Musicality and politic from antiquity to nowadays”: **Mai 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

##### ❖ Terms and conditions:

This workshop is multidisciplinary and opened to several fields of research in humanities (sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, art history, musicology, literature, theater studies, film studies, visual history).

This call for papers is addressed to all PhD students and young doctors who presented their thesis defense in 2019-2020

Each paper will be in French or in English. Paper's propositions (about 500 words) have to be sent with a short presentation of the author (title, field of the PhD, if necessary year of the thesis defense and the university or the affiliated organization) at the latest by February 26<sup>th</sup> 2021 at the following address: [doctorants.chcsc@gmail.com](mailto:doctorants.chcsc@gmail.com)