

# Musical institutions in times of crisis

Franco-German junior colloquium supported by CIERA

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*« Nos sociétés ne font pas seulement "de la musique"  
(composer, exécuter, interpréter, pratiquer, etc.) : elles la font  
(produire, organiser, instituer), y compris lorsqu'elles en  
parlent. En-faire et Dire, c'est ici Faire-être »  
(Cheyronnaud 2002 : 25)*

Does a crisis offer an opportunity to question what was taken for granted? Or, on the contrary, does it lead to a retreat into conjectural "safe values" to the detriment of originality, diversity and creativity? Thinking about musical institutions through crisis, whether current or past, near or far, leads us to question the creativity of the institutions and the people who make them exist. Actions made by cultural policies legislators of, internal managers of institutions, artists, audiences, and sponsors daily create the complexity of the musical and cultural institutions that we intend to question: the approach of this colloquium invites us to consider these actors and cultural institutions both as witnesses and as drivers of the evolution of societies.

The questioning of the colloquium starts from the current sanitary crisis and the different strategies developed by musical institutions to maintain themselves or not. Impacted by the interdiction of gatherings and curfews, concert venues and music festivals are the last to be able to resume their usual activities and their future still remains uncertain. "The cultural sector is heavily affected by the health crisis"<sup>1</sup>, even if it is not the first crisis reported by the world of European cultural institutions, which regularly uses the term in the form of "apology, observation and analysis" (Zalfen 2007). But behind this apparent homogeneity of an art world in difficulty at the European level, national specificities reveal the impact of cultural policies in the permanence or renewal of institutions. This year, in France, the "année blanche"<sup>2</sup> granted to the "intermittents du spectacle" (intermittent workers in the performing arts),

<sup>1</sup> Interview of Franck Riester, French Minister of Culture in the daily *Le Monde*: "This crisis will be counted in billions of euros", April 18, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The "intermittence du spectacle" allows performing arts professionals to combine unemployment benefits and salaries linked to short contracts specific to shows or rehearsals (fees) provided they have paid sufficient contributions (507 hours or 43 fees during the year). Faced with the cancellation of most spring and summer concerts and festivals, the government allowed them to benefit from an exceptional extension of compensation for those who were unable to work all their hours until August 31, 2021. <https://www.pole-emploi.fr/spectacle/covid-19---mesures-exceptionnell/intermittents-du-spectacle--lall.html>

reveals a more organized and uniform professional community in the performing arts than in Germany, where many actors of the “Freie Szene” (literally the free scene, it is a term grouping together different artistic scenes carried by independent professionals) are forced to apply for the Hartz 4 program<sup>3</sup>, contrary to the permanent salaried artists of subsidized musical institutions. What does the “2 billion euros for culture” cover out of the 100 billion euros of the French government's recovery plan and the one billion euros made available to the cultural sector by the federal “Neustart Kultur”<sup>4</sup> program in Germany? The French state centralization and the German federal functioning promote musical and cultural institutions that are differently equipped to face the current sanitary crisis and encourage the exploration of the diversity of the crises in the music sector that are appearing in the world and the various responses that are, today and yesterday, developed to face them<sup>5</sup>. Can the covid-19 crisis be at the origin of new institutions or significant transformations? Does it reveal, above all, pre-existing problems which are thus reinforced? Or, on the contrary, does it bring out the very limits of institutions whose foundations cannot easily be reshaped? How do we untangle the complexity of the institutional networks of culture and the very individual responses of institutions? Is there creativity at work in responding to new forms of instability?

The analysis of decisions and actions responding to the covid crisis deserves to be launched today. It invites us to take seriously the question of the historian Yuval Noah Harari: “Will we travel down the route of disunity, or will we adopt the path of global solidarity? If we choose disunity, this will not only prolong the crisis, but will probably result in even worse catastrophes in the future. If we choose global solidarity, it will be a victory not only against the coronavirus, but against all future epidemics and crises that might assail humankind in the 21st century”<sup>6</sup>.

Finally, this “sanitary crisis” follows a series of other crises relayed by the press in recent years: “subprime crisis”, “debt crisis in the euro zone”, “employment crisis”, “migrant crisis”, “political crisis”, “democratic crisis”, “ecological crisis”... Beyond the confusion and proliferation of the term, it is the multiplicity of potential disruptions of balance that emerges from political and media discourse, at the risk of overstretching it and masking the growing strengthening of existing structures. In fact, in the context of this instability, institutions appear to be identifiable entities with a certain predictability and characterized by multiple discourses and actions intended to ensure their persistence over time. Regularly disputed, the importance of art, and in particular its public financing, divides: the definition of activities “essential to the nation” maintained in times of lockdown in France refers to the famous question “erst Brot, dann Kunst?” (lit. “first bread then art”) in Germany in the late 1920s, in the midst of inflation (Bekker, 1932). Faced with the recession of the early 1980s, the newly elected French socialist government chose to increase the budget of the Ministry of Culture to revive an economy overwhelmed by the oil crisis. Since 2015, Europe has invested massively in cultural projects artistically dealing with the “migrant crisis” (Orpheus XXI, Migratory Music

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<sup>3</sup> Hartz 4 is a specific measure for those who cannot receive unemployment assistance because of their self-employment or because they have used up their rights. This system does not take into account the particular situation of self-employed artists and is strongly criticized. See among others : Lars Schmedeke, « Husten Sie mich an, ich bin DJ! », *die Zeit*, 1e Avril 2020.

<sup>4</sup> An additional one billion was added after a decision by the Deutsche Kulturrat (German Cultural Council) on February 3, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> For a comparative analysis of cultural structures in France and Germany, see the thesis of Myrtille Picaud (2017) and earlier work by Michael Werner (Werner et al. 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, « the world after coronavirus », *Financial Times*, 20 mars 2020

Manifesto, etc.). The cases to be studied in closer detail are numerous and the crosscutting views of anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, historians, geographers, musicologists and philosophers are expected here.

The aim of this colloquium is thus to bring together case studies that question the activity of various musical institutions through different crises without geographical or historical limitations, in order to enrich the perspectives offered by the human and social sciences in the analysis of the current situation while exploring how the possibility of generalization could proceed on the reflexion about collective fabric of how musical worlds respond to contemporary challenges.

Contributions from a broad spectrum of humanities and social sciences (history, anthropology, musicology, ethnomusicology, political science, sociology, education, theater studies, etc.) are very welcome.

**To propose a communication:**

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Send to the following email address [colloque.musiques.crisis.shs@gmail.com](mailto:colloque.musiques.crisis.shs@gmail.com) the proposal in a single PDF document containing the following elements:

- surname, first name
- institutional affiliation, function (for students, specify level of study)
- a short scientific biography of about 100-150 words in French, German or English.
- a title and a communication summary of about 300 words in French, German or English.

Deadline for receipt of communication proposals: **March 10, 2021.**

The selected participants will be informed at the end of March.

Presentations will last 20 minutes.

French, German and English will be the working languages. We expect that each participant will be able to speak fluently one of these languages and understand another.

*In view of the current health situation, the symposium may be postponed or organized under different modalities to allow everyone to participate. Nevertheless we still hope to have the possibility to organize this meeting in May and we wish that the persons interested in these themes will manifest themselves by proposals of communication according to the current calendar, this will allow us to constitute a working group.*

We look forward to reading your proposal!