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A Sociological Reflection on Sound, Language and Music

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ABSTRACT

The reflection on the relation between sound, language and music is necessary to clarify how these concepts are connected with "dimensions and senses of collectivity". In a panoramic and introductory way, this paper tries to explore the social long-process constituted from the "unarticulated" human sounds that serve as a base to an articulated (musical) language and a simultaneous generation of music. The main objective consists in clarifying some central topics for sociology of music. The argumentation presents each concept in interdependence with the others and recurs to a process-sociological perspective. Thus, sound, language and music are particularly thought in connection with their social function and not only as an esthetical, physical or philosophical phenomenon.

KEYWORDS sound, language, sociology of music, social process.

Humans are disposed to feel from the beginning of their existence. Sounds, lights, temperatures, smells, and many others stimulus affect their lives. Sensibility and affections form a dialectical unity that is evident through bodily answers as movements, tastes, sounds, among others (Serres, 2011). In this opportunity I want to refer to the sounds produced by humans, not only as a base for our language but also as a musical condition related to the "social (dis)harmony" constituted among persons. In this line, I assume that musical factors are joined with the configuration of social relations. For instance, babies have a set of basic sounds that functioned as a base to produce -in interdependence with "others" and in accordance with the organic development day by day- a more complex sounds and meanings (Elias, 1987). One assumes tonalities, modulations, volumes, accents and rhythms that other individuals present to one -in interactions- when speaking: as a social song that each person learns when belongs to a group.

Humans start "to being" with sounds, movements and touches before starting "to think rationally". Over time -and in relation with others humans- they learn to be rational, it is part of a process that includes actions as talking, reading and writing. When I refer to sound, language and music, I suggest a differentiation that implies a processual condition. This condition indicates that humans possess sonic recourses (developed in a bodily way and with the influence of their environment) that allow a language figuration, in this context music is a specific development of our fundamental sounds as well as a language specialization. Also it means that humans are musical in their movements (these movements produce and follow rhythms) and in their different sonorous dimensions. It is necessary to take into account that movements and sounds are not only subjective expression -even though it is the way that they are presented to us- but also they refer a bodily movements and sounds of each society (Scribano, 2012).

This perspective understands our physiological and environmental sounds in a primordial way, they are "primary sources" to configure human sonorous patterns. Thus, language understood as a "dynamic and flexible pattern" has a bodily origin more than a pure intellectual (or logical) condition centered in our minds (Elias, 2011). In this way, our sonorous properties reach different developments learned necessarily in interdependence with other persons. Sounds can be understood in terms of their social function and not only as evidences of an "innate language or mind structure". So, I assume that they function as a basic guide for the social orientation and the interpersonal communication. Besides, they require a social disposition from individuals to listen each other –it is a precessual disposition that is also historic. The Sounds configured as language imply an adaptation from the individual in relation with their group in accordance with common sounds-symbols. It means the construction of social regulations interiorized as a self (sonorous) regulation, in other words: the individual learns to discipline their vocal sounds hearing an adult (Elias, 1987).

The sonic regulation constructed and established in society belongs to a long process that today, for example, is presented in idioms. It means that babies learn sonorous patterns (an idiom) from adults as a "collective song" that allows the "harmonization" of their group. The symbols and sounds used by each human group to communicate their ideas change gradually in accordance with the regulations exerted in each historical moment. In this way, language is assumed as a form to organize sounds which can be also understood as musical foundation. It implicates certain intentional purpose oriented to the communication that has a musical character, it is more clear when we compare idioms as a "social melodies". If I compare sounds of French and German perhaps I will find that one of these is "more softly" than the other, I am not sure about all the implications of this differentiation but I can assure that each idiomatic sonority indicates a particular form of social sensibility.

I want to highlight the non-intentional factors that accompany the transit from sound to language and from language to music. Babies do not have planned intentionally to learn one or other language and adults do not know all the combinations and results of the ideas learned by new generations. It means that adults teach children how to produce and use sounds in order to be understood by others, but in other way adults are not always totally conscious of the power of organized sounds to communicate ideas and to produce new ideas. It is necessary to remember that thousands of years ago the physical power was more important in quotidian relations than taking a time to think the actions and speak about them (Elias, 1994, 2011). I am not saying that persons in remote times did not have any kind of thoughts; I am saying that they not gave primacy to their vocal sounds in comparison with the dominant use of physical imposition over others. It does not mean that those persons were morally bad but it evidences two conditions for our sonic present: it has constituted by wide grades of indetermination and it is consequence of a social process of bodily regulations that has no end.

Then, I can insist on the non-oriented (or unintentional) generation of the social dynamics. It means that people from certain historical period not planned the conditions and characteristics

of the posterior historical period; for example, the members of the European medieval society neither design nor organize their actions -as part of a predetermined plan- to produce the European bourgeois society (Elias, 1994). In the same sense, the musicians of the court society (surrounded by courtiers, princes and kings) did not plan to produce a 'modern music' as a consequence of their harmonic conceptions (Edström, 2012). This non-deterministic (or uncertain) condition is central to my reflection on music and their place in human societies, because in this way it is possible to debunk the idea of music as an independent esthetic ambit with inherent and universal laws.

I want to suggest that recent understanding on 'what is music' refers to a form of the uses of sounds, it could be better understood as a part of a long social process configured from the language development (that implicates a "correct" use of vocal sounds and a gradual generation of complex ideas). The music understood as a language depends on human interactions in society, it includes relations of emission and reception of sounds fundamentally. The position constituted between the transmitter of musical ideas and the receptor of them impulses or discourages one or other form of sounds, I do not consider that only the physical structures of sound contains the "laws" of the "esthetic human sense". The construction of social musicality and their materialization as a dominant music "is produced from one (and 'produce a') socio-sonic geometry" that change in an unplanned way (Sánchez Aguirre, 2015).

One main work for the sociology of music consists in understanding that kind of unplanned process of musical development. The work must be complemented with a socio-historical comparison among idiomatic sonorities, social forms of hearing and musical senses from different regions of the world. In this way, the sociological, historical and (ethno)musicological information is necessary to recognize two central aspects: (1) different dimensions in which the sounds figure society and (2) how the sociability constructs music. If a social structure of music is restored then it will be easier to recognize the relation between the three elements that guide this reflection: sound, language and music. I think that the construction of a language is a central axe that articulates sound, sociability and music; humans without a language could be understood as humans without primordial musical knowledge (without "a base to generate (musical) ideas"). The possibility to produce and hear sounds are human conditions that confirms our disposition to be musical and relational beings.

As the language, at least in their basic foundation, music consists in sonorous actions directed from one person to another: I am talking -at least- on the "first moments" in which language or music starts to be "learned" by children, maybe over time music can be a merely subjective experience (as an artistic experience). In this sense, human form of living in groups makes possible music (that is founded in language) and it (music) plays a main role to enable and maintain our lives in group. The figuration of music by humans has a similar importance as the discovery of the fire -for instance, with their warm attraction and "illuminating" the darkness-. I consider that music -more than a discovery or an invention- is mainly a derivation from the human necessity of contact and communication. In this way music has had a strong influence in the social cohesion (and in the process of individualization). In any case, I recognize different social uses of music not only as a kindly art but also to prepare and stimulate soldiers for the war or to torture prisoners (as happen in Auschwitz or Guantanamo).

I have suggested along this brief paper the relevance of sounds in human interrelations. In this context language is understood in a musical way, as an organization of vocal sounds according to "social harmony". This collective harmony refers to the structural modes of sensibility and action that are figured as human sounds. I have highlighted the unplanned effects of human actions and how it can be evidenced in the historical process of music, this issue is -to me- essential for sociology of music. I must recognize the introductory and panoramic sense of the different lines of reflection presented here, these ideas are preliminary and they are open to be discussed and complemented.

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