

The labelling process in popular music: being-called “musiques émergentes” in Montréal

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MedieKultur 2011, 51, 110-126

Published by SMID | Society of Media researchers In Denmark | www.smid.dk

The online version of this text can be found open access at www.mediekultur.dk

The words used to discuss genres matter. The multiplication of genres and subgenres is accompanied by a growing number of corresponding labels, which are consequently debated and disputed. Using the case of the label “musiques émergentes” (“emerging musics”), which has spread rapidly during the last decade in the cultural landscape of Montréal, Canada, this article examines one debate surrounding this label, focussing on discussions between artists and industry workers and their understanding of the usefulness of such a name/label in today’s popular music milieu. This discussion presents the labelling process as something that constitutes a group rather than capturing the likeness of its members. Drawing on the writings of Giorgio Agamben, the second part of this article examines labelling as a practice that exposes and renders possible the relation of something to something else – a cultural text to a genre – contributing to the production of “musiques émergentes” as a “being-called.”

“Musiques émergentes”?

Genre might be one of the most important issues in communication and media studies. What type of text is produced and circulated as well as how we routinely understand it as part of a larger set or group of texts (Jost, 2000) are just two examples of the various ways genre is examined. For readers and critics of media texts, genre provides expectations for

the content and the form of the product as well as how to decode it; “we enjoy and make sense of particular media texts in relation to other texts of a similar type” (Branston, 2006, p. 44). For cultural producers, the question that emerges is not just to which genre a particular text belongs, but also which vocabulary might be appropriate for marketing strategies or for rendering visible the production itself. For example, Kevin Hefferman (2004) proposed an analysis of the industrial efforts made by film producers from the 1960s to present art films – intended for a selected audience – as “grind” movies that mix eroticism and horror. He showed how this change in nomenclature helped widen the films’ audiences and provided the possibility for exhibiting these films at new times of day (e.g., during the afternoon) and in new theatres (see also Altman, 1999). This relationship of a genre to its label has been largely understudied. Cultural producers’ labelling processes are as much related to marketing strategies as they are to politics. In fact, since genre labels are one of the most prominent dimensions of genres, expressing or performatively evoking groupings or sets, they are also an important part of how media texts, subjects and objects belong to larger categories. Giorgio Agamben proposes an understanding of the relationship of one thing (a media text, for example) to the set of things to which it belongs (a specific genre) as borne by the name. In naming something, we perform its inclusion in a group or a collection of individuals, hence giving it meaning: “The fortune of set theory in modern logic is born of the fact that the definition of the set is simply the definition of linguistic meaning. The comprehension of singular distinct objects m in a whole M is nothing but the name” (Agamben, 1993, p. 9). In this instance, to understand genre one needs to understand the naming or labelling as mediation, as the genre’s exposition, the only way that it can exist “on the surface” (Probyn, 1996). Through the practice of labelling, a togetherness or set is exposed and rendered existent. This makes the decision about a label not just a marketing decision or a decision about the expectations that one should have from a particular text, but also a question of identity. In this article, I firstly investigate the power relations, strategies and hierarchies that are at play in this naming process, and secondly explore the identity formation that comes with it, from the point of view of media and cultural producers. I will examine the case of the genre label “*musiques émergentes*” (“emerging musics”) in Montréal, a disputed expression used to identify a wide array of musical practices that could be related loosely with young and new artists from almost all genres.

The multiplication of new hybrid cultural practices and their accelerated circulation through new technologies of communication often come with a burgeoning vocabulary to describe them (Saiber, 2007). Like other types of classifications, genres are “[...] objects for cooperation across social worlds, [...] that both inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them” (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 16). Words used to talk about them are constantly debated and contested among fans and practitioners, like cultural producers, marketing strategists, critics and legislative agents. This is the case with the label “*musiques émergentes*” in Montréal. It surfaced at the end of the 1990s as a contested and vague expression that holds together heterogeneous elements

– sounds, organisations, artists, artisans, venues or events – and makes it possible for them to act collectively.¹ For a decade, “*musiques émergentes*” have been gaining media attention and cultural significance in Montréal and in the international music press (della Faille, 2005). What is striking about “*musiques émergentes*” is the fact that they are constantly described as heterogeneous, fluid, diffused and evanescent. Many actors from cultural, media and political worlds have underlined the difficulty of identifying the borders of this collection of disparate elements. For example, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), an agency that regulates all broadcasting activities in the country, announced in 2008 its intention to establish new radio quotas ensuring a fair representation of “emerging artists” on private radio. In order to do this, the CRTC released a notice of consultation on a project defining this label:

[...] applicants [were invited] to propose a definition of an emerging artist that would be appropriate for their musical format. Discussions with individual applicants about the promotion and airplay of emerging artists ensued at some public hearings [...]. However, the lack of a commonly accepted definition or definitions limited the discussions (CRTC, 2008, unpagéd).

For the CRTC, as well as for many other cultural, political and media agents, the uneasiness of dealing with the label “*musiques émergentes*” as a fixed and identifiable object poses the label as something problematic, but nevertheless undeniable. I want to use this case study and the difficulties with this label in order to help understand how heterogeneous sounds, actors, organisations, ideas or places could be held together in one genre.

Labelling festival, labelling music

On August 28, 2003, the launch of the first gathering of the *Festival de musique émergente* (FME) took place in Rouyn-Noranda, in Québec’s northern area Abitibi-Témiscamingue (about 600km from Montréal). This event features concerts that gather artists of disparate sonorities, with different status, unequally recognised, and participants in divergent networks. The organisers themselves describe their festival as an inclusive event that celebrates a wide array of genres: “Rock, folk, electro, hip-hop, garage, pop, indie, country, world beat, trad... almost all music styles will be joined together and will combine themselves under the banner of the FME” (FMEAT, 2011, unpagéd). From the media perspective, the heterogeneity of the artists invited is one of the salient dimensions of the FME (Masbourian, 2006). The creation of this festival and its use of the label “emergent” echoed the rise of “*musiques émergentes*” in the Québec cultural landscape: “Emerging scene, ‘*musiques émergentes*’, and now a festival of emergence: [...] [the] co-organiser of the first FME in Abitibi-Témiscamingue admits, ‘OK, we agree, we are starting to get bored hearing the word’” (Renaud, 2003, p. B10).² The claimed heterogeneity in the organisation of the festival led many cultural commentators in the media to raise questions about the definition that comes along with the

label “*musiques émergentes*” when used by its creators. A festival dedicated to “*musiques émergentes*” is a festival that celebrates who and what exactly?

This question keeps popping up in media interviews with FME organisers. For example, during a radio interview given by Sandy Boutin, principal instigator and general director of the FME, the interviewer asked: “I look at the programme, I listen to you and I see that there are artists – it seems to me – who have finished emerging. When one speaks about [them] [...], can one still regard them as emerging artists” (Masbourian, 2006)? In his answer, Boutin proposed a use of the label “*musiques émergentes*” as an inclusive formulation: “It depends on the way you define and use it. We take it in a very, very broad sense” (Boutin, in Masbourian, 2006). This “very, very broad sense” resonates with the heterogeneity and the fluidity that seem to characterise “*musiques émergentes*,” not only at the festival, but also in the term’s diffuse deployment on the Montréal cultural scene. When I interviewed Boutin and asked him why he gave this name to his festival, he argued that the ambiguity of “*musiques émergentes*” is in itself interesting:

First of all, it doesn’t exist, a definition for ‘*musiques émergentes*’, a focused one. [...] Some have tried, they’ve associated many things with the term, but it was always diverging and you have to adapt it in your way. And ‘*émergente*,’ we thought it was cool because it was not just a question of musical style, it was a question... you make something emerging... I don’t know! (Boutin, 03.08.2006)

Boutin’s hesitation underlines one of the questions addressed in this article: how can one think about “*musiques émergentes*” as a genre if one cannot precisely define the label, or the conditions for using the label in itself and its distinctive characteristics?

In the answers to the question, “it is a festival of who and what”, given by the organisers of FME, multiple facets appear. For example, the website of the festival describes the annual event, as do the various media and promotional documents representing the FME, using expressions such as “independent”, “*relève*” (“rising artist, young, new”), “underground”, “alternative”, “amplified” or “local.” The website also reports: “The FME is a non-profit organization that works in the field of the diffusion of independent music” (FMEAT, 2007, unpagé). A few lines later, the FME’s mission statement is reported as the following:

The *Festival de musique émergente* in Abitibi-Témiscamingue is worried about the future of the musical *relève* [young rising artist]. Its mission is to support and facilitate the diffusion of Québécois and Canadian independent music as well as the emergence of its young artists. The organization of such a festival constitutes an important occasion to make independent music available to an avid audience of new music. In addition [...] the festival meets all conditions essential to a productive exchange between the actors of the local scene. (FMEAT, 2007, unpagé)

The undifferentiated use of diverse expressions in order to account for the artists, the organisations and the companies taking part in the festival should not be regarded as lazy

writing or a lack of rigour. On the contrary, the distinctions and the similarities between the terms are themselves constitutive of the ambiguity of the festival's object.

The distinctions, as well as the lack thereof, between many labels underline the tenuous relationships that "*musiques émergentes*" maintain with various ways of talking about musical phenomena. Noting a similarly loose description of Caribbean music – in particular between "soca," "rapso," "ringbang" and "ragga soca" – Jocelyne Guilbault proposed that these slips are significant:

[...] music labels cannot be looked at as cultural products simply referring to existing popular musics with identifiable traits. The ways in which they are used seemingly indiscriminately at some times and not at others, on a regular basis, cannot be seen simply as the result of lack of musical knowledge or the mark of sloppy journalism. The differentiation as well as the lack of differentiation made between the terms is of and by itself indicative of particular rapports that are established among them. (Guilbault, 1997, unpagéd)

Sometimes used as synonyms, other times in order to mark nuances in distinguishing subgroups, the multiple signifiers ostentatiously mark the fluctuation and heterogeneity of the music, artists, organisations and the companies, held together in and by "*musiques émergentes*". Drawing on Guilbault's proposition, in contrast to conceiving the inconsistent use of the various expressions as a lack of precision in the conception or the writing, I believe this slippage is a way of emphasising the variability of "*musiques émergentes*" configurations and the bonds they maintain with these various modes of regrouping musical phenomena. For this reason, I will use the expression "*musiques émergentes*" with the quotation marks in order to underline their non-obviousness, their heterogeneity and their continual movements, while acknowledging that it is not necessarily the only expression used to talk about them. The challenge of their fluidity and heterogeneity in terms of industries, organisations, artists, sounds, events, debates and places, for example, add a tricky dimension to the labelling process that goes with their *regroupment*.

Debating labels

This heterogeneity spurs debates about the label "*musiques émergentes*" among artists and artisans. But in order to reach goals shared by many of them, a strategic consensus on a single signifier seems crucial for the organisers of *Les Bazarderies*, a conference that aims to identify problems and solutions associated with "*musiques émergentes*". Held in Montréal during the spring of 2005, the event brought together around one hundred participants from the local independent music industries – musicians, journalists, festival organisers, label representatives, venue owners, musicians unions etc. – and the different public funding agencies. The organisers hope the event will be a recurring one, where "*musiques émergentes*" artisans can "regroup, discuss and analyse their reality, in order to find solutions" (Robillard Laveaux, 2005, p. 16). This event was part of a wide array of dialogues that have

been ongoing for ten years in Montréal, as one of the most important in terms of the scope of invited discussants (Faites de la musique, 1998, 2000). In a programme of Les Bazarderies specifying the topics that were discussed during the panels, particular attention seemed devoted to the labels used. "Although used by various authorities of the cultural sector, there is no terminology clearly defining the words 'alternative,' 'relève,' and 'emergence.' [...] Isn't now the time for the milieu [...] to agree on a common terminology" (Les Bazarderies, 2005, unpagéd)³ During discussions, the host of one the panels proposed using only one term in order to simplify the debates: "From now on, I myself will only use the term '*musiques émergentes*' to prevent us from mixing things up" (Laferrière, at Les Bazarderies, 21/05/2005). At Les Bazarderies, the terminological debates were organised to facilitate communication, in order to secure the relationship between a sign and its referent, but also to claim one's place for having it recognised in one way or another.

According to the panellists, many coexistent, circulating expressions and modifying terms qualify as "*musiques émergentes*." They expressed concern that this multiplication of terms weakened the legitimacy and decreased their importance compared with other actors in Québec's cultural sector. This sentiment was expressed by one of the participants:

What we want is for it to have a place in culture and to be recognised. And the pitfall of multiple labels is that we forget that we too belong to culture. [...] It is also that the others do not see us as culture, and there all the problematics of the recognition of cultural actors are raised. (Croteau, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005)

The panellists saw the fuzziness of the terminology as a difficulty preventing the participants categorised under "*musiques émergentes*" from taking their place in the cultural field and to be recognised as such.

At Les Bazarderies, the elements gathered under the umbrella term "*musiques émergentes*" made their mark in being named. For the panellists, the label was the visible face, detectable by actors such as the para-governmental organisations and the media. The multiplication of the labels was an important and alarming issue for the participants in the debate. The host of the panel, David Laferrière, summarised some of the labelling practices:

I had fun, without taking too much time, trying to note down the different labels used. They are organised in small groups: *relève*, self-produced artists. Then one falls in the group 'music': alternative music, '*musiques actuelles*', amplified music, specialised music. Then one falls into the 'scene' theme: the local scene, the underground scene, the indie scene, the emerging scene, the para-industrial scene. And of course, there are also 'amateur' and 'professional' practices. (Laferrière, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005)

This multiplication is perceived as a problem for which it is necessary to find a solution through dialogue and the choice of a specific label. For example, one panellist proposed that "*musiques émergentes*" could not appear on the radar of the media, state agencies or even the music industry in Québec without being labelled as an entity:

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[...] for that scene to exist, it has to be named. And the problem that we currently have in not labelling it is that it doesn't seem to exist. That's the whole problem of giving ourselves a name. As long as there is no label, which provides unanimity in and around that scene, that scene would not exist because it will not have named itself. (Saulnier, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005)

What this panellist underlined was that the very existence of the *regroupment* is dependent on the denomination. At Les Bazarderies, the relationship between the label – the expression used to designate a specific ensemble of musical practices – and what it is referring to was described as a very tight bond. In debating the use of a unique label for “*musiques émergentes*,” panellists discussed the difficulty of identifying a characteristic that could determine who and what is pointed out by the tag. For them, labelling “*musiques émergentes*” is giving a form to it, “informing” it.

The use of a label matters in a strategic way. It is embedded in an action toward a kind of self-recognition (undertaken by people to organise themselves, to secure resources, to share information), media recognition (through better press coverage, radio quotas etc.) and state recognition (through dedicated founding programmes, transformations in state organisations etc.). The panel description given in Les Bazarderies brings this strategic dimension of the label to the foreground:

At various political [and governmental] levels, one speaks of support for new and emerging musicians with no clear definition of what this means. Can we really help the artists and artisans that we cannot identify? [...] Isn't now the time to draw a picture that will help to achieve a common recognition? (Les Bazarderies, 2005a, unpagéd)

This issue is important; for panellists, the choice and use of a label are ways to insure the “development” of “*musiques émergentes*,” understood in social, economical and cultural terms. A definition that is not accurate and focussed means there will be inaccurate founding programmes and press coverage: “From their own admission, state agencies do not have good and clear definitions for *relève* and emergence and they are not mastering these notions. There are many negative consequences with respect to funding and representativity for our sector” (Laferrrière, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005). The choice and the promotion of a label were then the best way to reach what the panellists thought were the goals of “*musiques émergentes*.” These goals could have been to ensure recognition or development of (and to restrain the “negative consequences” for) “*musiques émergentes*.”

This strategy seems to have two major advantages, according to the participants in the panel of Les Bazarderies. First, it makes it possible for “*musiques émergentes*” to speak the language of the interested agencies. For example, one of the panellists stressed the usefulness of taking advantage of the labelling system employed by one of the most important governmental agencies, the *Société de développement des entreprises culturelles du Québec* (SODEC) – an organisation dedicated to financially supporting the creation and the development of cultural enterprises and industries – in order to be understood and get subsidies.

According to many panellists, "*musiques émergentes*" has to set an example and use the label in order to appear on a gridded surface governed by the agencies that have the funds for supporting them and the means of diffusion. The panellists argued that using state language makes it possible to be understood and to exist in systems of allocating government subsidies. They describe the label as necessary to enter the SODEC's field of vision, and a surface controlled by it, with its programmes using vague terminology. Second, the label is perceived as making it possible to gather all "*musiques émergentes*" under one unified flag. As one cultural journalist suggests, the labels used do not only open more possibilities for the media to cover "*musiques émergentes*." The labels also open more possibilities for other organisations to recognise them, and for those organisations to gather the heterogeneous elements all together, presenting themselves as their spokesman: "Perhaps those terms are necessary evils in that it takes a good label to bring together everybody, from a journalist's point of view, but also from organisations [...] that come to represent somebody, an emergent or underground scene" (Renaud, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005). The strategic use of the label for corralling these elements makes it possible for "*musiques émergentes*" to give themselves a voice and to militate for transformations within cultural industries and policies. The label also makes it possible to draw the attention of the press and the public, as well as to share resources, expenditures and information. In short, the recourse to a label is not innocent; it constitutes a strategy to achieve political goals in order to insure the development of "*musiques émergentes*."

In the debates, the surprising heterogeneity and emphasis on eclecticism and hybridity of the artists and artisans, their goals and issues that might be addressed, showed how the label "*musiques émergentes*" is convened as a means rather than an end. The denomination is not used as a claim for an eternal truth of "*musiques émergentes*" or for a list of characteristics which are associated with it, but as a process which can be put at the service of a wide array of artists, artisans and musical practices in order to achieve certain goals. At the panel, one speaker underlined this eclecticism and the troubled relations between many musical genres and the exclusive use of one label, raising the question, "is the expression '*musiques émergentes*' better [than underground, indie, alternative, local and so on]? Maybe not, but [...] it doesn't define a genre. It simultaneously includes electronic music, metal, hip-hop, etc." (Saulnier, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005). In the debates, the label surfaced as a tool used in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988, 1993) called "strategic essentialism," i.e., the interested use of a common term at the price of setting aside the many nuances, differences and surging debates that are going on in the regrouping. For Spivak, social movements often try to claim a common label – that of the woman or the subaltern, for example – to mobilise many different people within the same quest (Spivak, 1993). The label facilitates their belonging to a heterogeneous unit. It is proposing that essentialism, such as it takes form in the fixing of a label for a multiplicity of composite identities, can be "strategic"; it can make it possible to rally and claim the political identity of a group in giving them an effective instrument for their interests.

For Spivak (1993), however, the risk of essentialism is that the group or ensemble might be reduced to this “essence.” To avoid this short cut, she stresses that the strategic dimension of essence must confront ontology. In this sense, Spivak notes that groups that use essentialism do not consider it a “theory” of what they are, but as a weapon turned towards dominant groups. The recourse to and the fixing of a label can be the means used within the framework of this type of strategy. For Spivak (1988), one of the ways to emphasise an interested essentialism in a strategic way is to refer to a shared history, a history that “is strategically essentialized.” From this point of view, one can understand how the labelling of “*musiques émergentes*” is marked by the search for the labels that would have been their supposed ancestors. During the debates at Les Bazarderies, historical narratives of this label were proposed many times. According to one of the panellists, the trajectory of the label “*musiques émergentes*” is rooted in the “punk” and “new wave” labels of the 1980s in Montréal, and related to other labels like “alternative” and “underground.” Others claimed that this historical narrative came from the title of a regular column in the Montréal cultural weekly *Voir*, entitled “Scène locale” (“local scene”), which supposedly originated the use of the label “local scene” and the enlivenment of today’s “*musiques émergentes*” through their press coverage. They tell the tale of the trajectory of the music covered in this column from the local scene through “*relève*” and then “*musiques émergentes*.” From that perspective, “*musiques émergentes*” were conceived as the last offspring of these families, the heirs of traditions with variable configuration, or a new entity willing to position itself at the head of these old lines of thinking. Another way to emphasise an interested essentialism in a strategic way is to refer to a shared relationship with other domains like economics, physics and perception theory. For example, one panellist proposed that there is a link between the idea of an emerging market and the one associated with “*musiques émergentes*”: “Emergence is a relative notion. For example, one talks about emerging markets – China, Brazil, India. From our point of view, it is emergent, but when you go there, you realise that there are other realities [...]. It is just that we were not realising it before and that now we do” (Mongeau, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005). This shared link with other conceptions of emerging phenomena in economics, physics, complexity theory and perception theory was also underlined by Jean-Robert Bisailon (2007), a key figure in the dissemination and the political use of the label “*musiques émergentes*”, in an editorial comment published on a popular music-related website. For complexity theory, emerging phenomena are new laws of nature or new properties that could not be deduced from their constitutive parts that spontaneously appear. John Urry (2006) gives the example of the flavour of sugar that cannot be deduced from its individual parts – atoms of oxygen, carbon and hydrogen: the flavour emerges. The problem of emergence has persisted since antiquity (Stengers, 1997), but it moves from one domain to another through the metaphorical use of the word (Thrift, 1999). The comments by the panellist at Les Bazarderies as well as Bisailon’s use of complexity theory as an allegory to understand emergence. They also use visual arts and perception theory to illustrate what is happening with “*musiques émergentes*”. These metaphorical links of the label “*musiques*

émergentes” with the use of the “*émergentes*” in other spheres give it a relative fixity; it gives to the genre and the things that are categorised within it a “strategically essentialised” connection with other domains. At Les Bazareries, the use of the label “*musiques émergentes*” appeared to be explicitly “[...] a strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak, 1988, p. 205). At the same time, the panellist at Les Bazareries constantly critiqued this view by stressing that it was a necessary evil, one in which they did not believe. Their strategic use of the label and their continuous critiques of its persistence emphasised the particularly delicate relationship that they had with the denomination.

Being-called “*musiques émergentes*”

At Les Bazareries, the strategic use of the label “*musiques émergentes*” was described as a way of opening the possibility to claim rights, to have privileges recognised or simply to exist culturally. This strategic essentialism by which a label is used in an ironic way, without being founded ontologically on essentialist logic, reminds us that belonging is quickly caught up with language. The debates at Les Bazareries emphasised the way in which naming that belonging is important in making it known and recognised. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben (1993) and Elspeth Probyn (1996), I propose that “*musiques émergentes*” are a being-called, that is, named, called upon and convened. A being-called is the result of a work of installation, recognition and highlighting. The label, as it was used in the panel of Les Bazareries, can be seen as one of the ways “to call” this belonging. Being-called “*musiques émergentes*” is not just a signifier pointing towards something exceeding it – the truth? who knows? – it is rather their belonging *as such*:

That you are exposed is not one of your qualities, but neither is it other than them (we could say, in fact, that it is none-other than them). [...] [E]xposure is pure relationship with language itself, with its taking-place. It is what happens to something [...] by the very fact of [...] being-called. A thing is (called) red by virtue of this, insofar as it is called such and refers to itself as such (not simply as red), it is exposed. (Agamben, 1993, p. 97)

In that sense, “*musiques émergentes*” can surface only through their “being-called.” Being-called by Les Bazareries, by award ceremonies dedicated to it, by sounds, by musical products, by debates, by associations etc. They are not visible as a unit because they have such-and-such properties, but because they are called *as such*. Being-called is what connects a term to a *regroupment*, what makes it possible to understand “something *as something*” (Agamben, 1993, p. 98), where it is the relation of belonging “as.” Belonging is said *as such*. A certain characteristic does not ensure the belonging of all “*musiques émergentes*” parts to the *regroupment*, but the fact of calling them as such does. Focusing on the belonging of an individual to a community, Probyn proposes to see the work of being-called: “[...] if belonging is not defined by any property, its possibility is always circumscribed by limits, the limits of ‘being-called’ [...]” (Probyn, 1996, p. 24). It is through being-called that the possibility

for identity differences is situated. Belonging is said, whether it's being-called man, being-called Québécois, being-called punk, or being-called "*musiques émergentes*." Thus, the fact of being-called is not "one more" quality added to "*musiques émergentes*", it is the artists' belonging in itself that is thus exposed.

Questioning the assumption that "*musiques émergentes*" would be a definite set of sounds and artists who have certain properties which differentiate them from "non *musiques émergentes*," being-called takes part in their regrouping in what Agamben calls a community without identity. In this type of community, their being-called is the only quality that all members of a group share. It is their only common basis, the only foundation to their togetherness. It is the exposure of their belonging that is produced through being-called. It is not the properties of "*musiques émergentes*" that are exposed, but the "as" – "it says something as something" – which is being-called. It is embedded in a double process in which the exposure is at the same time one of the connection and one of the *regroupment*:

[The word 'tree'] transforms singularities into members of a class, whose meaning is defined by a common property (the condition of belonging \in). [...] Linguistic being (being-called [tree]) is a set (the tree) that is at the same time a singularity (the tree, a tree, this tree); and the mediation of meaning, expressed by the symbol \in [...]. (Agamben, 1993, p. 9)

The existence of "*musiques émergentes*" as a group is possible only through the exposure and the circulation of being-called. Differently put, the words used to speak about things are participating in making them part of their own set or grouping. Being-called contributes in naming belonging and thus gathers them under the same meaning as a community without identity. As Lawrence Grossberg says:

In such a community, there is no common identity, no property that defines and unites the members apart from the fact that they are there, together, in that place. It is the fact of belonging that constitutes their belonging together. [...] Such a community defines a positivity based on exteriority, on the singularity of belonging." (Grossberg, 2000, p. 82)

For example, to name a sound, a disc or an artist *as* belonging to "*musiques émergentes*" is to produce it as a member of a grouping populated – and produced – by other singularities, without any other condition than that imposed by the "as."

Being-called does not offer the possibility of changing belongings as wished. Indeed, it preserves a certain stability from which it is particularly difficult to flee. For Probyn, belonging is not an individual activity – although singular – but a becoming that falls under particular limits, always crossed and guided by relations of power. In the same way, being-called takes part in these relations of power; being-called "*musiques émergentes*" urges artists to belong and to participate in certain groupings rather than others. As Probyn says:

[...] it bears repeating that the terrain of difference is deeply inscribed by the historical limits imposed by 'being-called'. These limits then constitute a condition of possibility for

belonging as well as the conditions for calling into question the inscription of difference.
(Probyn, 1996, p. 25)

Being-called is not an innocent exposure. It takes part in proposing a spectrum of possibilities for the belongings, and for the very scope of the set or grouping. One does not belong and become only what one wants. To give a name to belonging is to introduce it on a scene that is already organised.

In popular music, the words used to talk about music are important. Very often disputed by musicians, the labels are frequently associated with the circulation and the marketing of popular music. Labels help the writing practices of the musical critics (Frith, 1996), the marketing strategies of artists (Inglis, 2006), the process of mediatisation (Morris, 2006) or the distribution and the organisation at the sales points (Jaujou, 2002). As François Ribac says: “The labels facilitate and allow the exchanges between various people and structures [...]” (Ribac, 2004, p. 44). Recognising that the labels are highly disputed, Ribac presents them as something appearing after the development of a *regroupment* of musical practices. For him, labels do not participate in the production or creation of music, but arrive with a time lag, in order to give an account of music. As opposed to what Ribac suggests, I contend that the label “*musiques émergentes*” participates in producing the regrouping in exposing the being-called of their belongingness. Being-called contributes to the embedding of artists, organisations, discs, sounds or ideas in a becoming-together, a unit, a set, an ensemble, and exposes and gambles their being as a community without identity. As Agamben says, each time, with each becoming, all the belongings are remade: “Being-called – the property that establishes all possible belonging (being-called-Italian, -dog, -communist) – is also what can bring them all back radically in question” (Agamben, 1993, p. 9). In this sense, being-called participates in putting uncertainty in “*musiques émergentes*.” The label becomes productive, not only by naming the belonging, but also by incarnating the way it is questioned, and exposing its becoming-together in the “as.” Drawing on Guilbault (1997), I argue that the label does not only describe, it prescribes. It is not only expressing a genre or the identity of an artist, a sound, a record etc., it is also prescribing the belonging of something to a set, and the way it should be.

Looking for other words

The label “*musiques émergentes*” seemed to circulate with escalated intensity for a few years. Indeed, a former chronicler of the column *Scène locale* underlined that the number of occurrences of the word “*émergent*” in the Québec printed press was seven times higher in 2006 than it was in 1997 (Parazelli, 2006). This increased frequency is considered by many commentators of the musical world to be a hint of the misuse of the label “*musiques émergentes*”:

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We hope that the expression '*émergent*' will reach the point of saturation and that we will stop using it wrongly and at every occasion. It is as reducing as it is very vague. There is no musician who says to himself: 'Well, I will start a band which makes '*émergent*.' What's that? 'Rising' is not better, but why do we absolutely need a word to describe new bands or those that are not resources for popular magazines? Since we are here, I suggest another one: 'interesting' [*intéressant*]. 'Yes, what's-its-name, it is a new band from the interesting scene, one says of it much good, and bla bla...'. That would be good. When a word is used as much to describe music as the economy, I think that it is time to find another term. (Caron, 2007, p. 7)

The possibility for "suggesting another word", other than "*musiques émergentes*", underlines the fact that it is not just a description or an account; other words can be used. On the one side, the word "does not describe." To the contrary, it participates in exposing the belonging. It incarnates the "as", in "language says something *as* something: the tree as 'tree,' the house as 'house'" (Agamben, 1993, p. 98). It is the relation of exposure, belonging such as it is shown, not dependent on properties, but in the unspecified singularity that qualifies it in a community without identity. On the other side, the expression "*musiques émergentes*" is depicted as a "reducing" and "vague" trap, describing "as much music as economy." The frequent use of the words seemed to be a problem; it indicates that too many things are being-called "*musiques émergentes*." Each time, the set and all its belongings are replayed, gambled. Potentially, with each being-called is played not only the membership of a sound, an artist, an organisation or an event, to an ensemble or a genre, but also all the other members' belongings.

The need for "finding another word" underlines the importance of a label for a community without identity. As Guilbault proposed, the labels can also be mobilised in some claims for groups: "[...] music labels do not only describe but also prescribe musical practices. And through them, they not only call upon, but also claim certain rights, respect, and recognition in regard to such sensitive and crucial issues as identity, autonomy, and power" (Guilbault, 1997, unpagéd). To think of "*musiques émergentes*" in terms of a community without identity poses the issue of their own recognition. Even if they have no identity – understood as a property that they would all share – they are recognisable in the exposure of belongingness. In this sense, the label contributes to the ways that heterogeneous members of the category "*musiques émergentes*" could recognise themselves, claim rights or privileges and make them recognised. As Jason Mittell underlined about genre in the context of television: "genres [and labels] are not neutral categories but are situated within larger systems of power and thus come 'fully loaded' with political implications linking genre distinctions to other systems of difference" (Mittell, 2001, p. 3). These political implications could be exemplified by some important actors in the Montréal musical milieu like the Musician's Guild (the union of all professional musicians in Québec) that proposed that the inaccuracy of the terms is an obstacle for the accession to government subsidies, among other things:

We should not forget that by maintaining the fuzziness of the words used, one prevents rising or emergent artists from being correctly identified and attaining the various subsidies, which, without a precise definition, have all the liberty to interpret these concepts in their own way. (Gilde des musiciens et musiciennes du Québec, 2005, p. 12)

These concerns with the multiplication of interpretations that can be made of the label "*musiques émergentes*" emphasise the importance of what Guilbault (1996, 1997) called the "politics of labelling": processes, controversies and debates giving form to relations of power implied in the "fixation" of a label. As the discussions that occurred at Les Bazarderies illustrate, this fixing of a label is the object of debates, disputes and, sometimes, agreements as well as strategies.

In conclusion

Many actors from the cultural, media and political spheres present the slippages in the uses of the label "*musiques émergentes*" as if they were obvious. Their heterogeneity and fluidity are taken as self-evident. For example, panellists at Les Bazarderies argued that it is impossible to agree on determining characteristics and the usage of the label "*musiques émergentes*." For them, there was no surprise. In the introduction to the debate, the moderator predicted the following: "Obviously, we will not have the chance today, I think, to agree on a conclusion about what is '*émergent*'" (Laferrière, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005). At the end of the session, he concluded: "At last, even if we are just a few people around this table, we are not able to agree on something, this is meaningful" (Laferrière, Bazarderies, 21.05.2005). In spite of this recognition of the difficulty of characterising and naming the set "*musiques émergentes*," the reality of the entity that they form is not questioned at Les Bazarderies. The notion of being-called allows them and us to take this claim seriously, and to understand the ways in which "*musiques émergentes*" enter a process of belonging to a community without identity. It also opens the door to understanding the relationship between genre and label. Labels are not tools to represent genres, or to account for their very existence. They are not expressions of a genre. Labels produce neither the ensemble nor the genres to which they are related. They are incarnating the "as," the relation of belonging as such. But as is the case with "*musiques émergentes*," this relation of belonging could only exist through its exposure in the space of language. As Agamben proposes, language is not only a site where labels circulate and are put in movement, it is also the space where the very existence of the singular thing and the class to which it belongs are at stake. As he stresses: "Language [...] is that whereby something exists rather [...] than nothing. Language opens the possibility of not-being, but at the same time it also opens a stronger possibility: existence, that something is" (Agamben, 1993, p. 105). Labels do not produce "*musiques émergentes*," they render possible the existence of the relation of belonging that qualify each occurrence as part of the genre. By the same process, they render possible the existence of the set as such, not as a list of criteria, but as a *regroupment* of things that have the ability of being-called.

The label “*musiques émergentes*” can be used in order to represent a fixed and well-determined group, but the doubt and hesitations that panellists at Les Bazareries expressed are signs of the uneasiness and delicateness of this possibility. The difficulty of characterising the set or genre and the strategic use of the label underline the function of language and other representational practices in creating a plane where these heterogeneous elements could cohabit. The juxtaposition of all “*musiques émergentes*” on the same “operating table” (Foucault, 1973) could happen solely in the space of language where they are allowed to exist near one another. Language creates this common ground as well as other representations of “*musiques émergentes*”, like festivals, awards ceremonies or media coverage, for instance. Following this, labels could not be understood as “imposed retrospectively” (Dowd, 2006, p. 14) on genres. They are the sites where the “nextness” of heterogeneous elements is possible. This is why we need to go beyond the mere distinction between the expressional hypothesis (labels are expressing a media and cultural genre already there) and the processual hypothesis (labels are producing this media and cultural genre) (Negus & Roman Velazquez, 2002): labels, names, designations or other representations of genres are the only sites where the things thus qualified could meet. The label as a being-called is the “as,” the middle position that underlines the primacy of the relationship (Massumi, 2002). In other words, this implies that the elements that are bound in a genre and the genre itself are not preceding the relation itself as exposed in the space of language. Outside of this site, there is no foundation to the assembly. In this sense, looking at being-called is a way to make sense of a community without identity, without shared and pre-existing characteristics that would help draw a limit around the set. Being-called is the “as” in “saying something as something,” but for “*musiques émergentes*” the two “somethings” are indeterminate and fluid. One could phrase it that way: it is “something indeterminate and fluid as something as indeterminate and fluid as the first element in the relation”, positioning the relation expressed through labelling practices as what is determinant.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge support from the *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* and the *Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture*. Each provided funding during the preparation of this manuscript. Also, I would like to thank Matt Stahl for his linguistic help with the final version of this article.

Notes

1. It is interesting to note that, around the same time, “emergence” began to have a very strong impact in many spheres of communication studies as well: in cybernetics (Wolfram, 2002), sociology of science (Pickering, 2008), organisational communication (Goldstein, 1999) and the studies of new media (Johnson, 2002), for instance.

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2. All French quotations are translated into English by the author.
3. The material used in this section was extracted from interviews I conducted with the organisers of the debates, as well as a recording made by them to which I was given full access. The recording itself was diffused on the Internet (on Les Bazarderies website), which is no longer extant. The data are also part of wider ethnographic research about the different spaces where the label “*musiques émergentes*” in Montréal was defined and debated (see Lussier, forthcoming).

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