

How research in Ottawa can

IDENTIFY THE FUTURE OF MUSIC

in Germany



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Paul Théberge, PhD
Carleton University's Canada
Research Chair in Technological
Mediations of Culture

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Research snapshot

Purpose

To research the effects of new media and technology on musical culture.

Scope

To examine the impact of recording practices and distribution networks on music creation and performance and the relationship between fans and artists.

Thesis

Recording technology and the internet are now an integral part of music making and musical culture.

Outcome

New theories and methodologies that promote a better understanding of contemporary music.

Selected publications

- Théberge, Paul. "Almost Silent: The Interplay of Sound and Silence in Contemporary Cinema and Television." in Beck, Jay & Grajeda, Anthony (eds.). *Lowering the Boom: New Essays on the History, Theory, and Practice of Film Sound*. University of Illinois Press, (in press).
- Théberge, Paul. "Everyday Fandom: Fan Clubs, Blogging, and the Quotidian Rhythms of the Internet." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 30 (4) Fall, 2005, pp. 1-18

Grad student projects

- Paul Jasen,
second year, PhD in cultural mediations
Mediated Belonging and Electronic Music Subcultures
- Benjamin Wright,
second year, PhD in cultural mediations
Three-Dimensional Audio in Cinema and Gaming

Honours

- 2000 book award from the Society for Ethnomusicology
- 1998 book award from the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (US branch)

Mixing it up: the effects of new media and technology on musical culture

There was a time when mashing applied only to potatoes. In the modern era, though, mashing can also refer to the mixing of two or more audio recordings to create a whole new track that, with access to the right software, anyone can do at home.

Musician and cultural theorist Paul Théberge suggests that this new recording practice is just one example of how technology can affect musical culture. As Carleton University's Tier II Canada Research Chair in Technological Mediations of Culture, he investigates the impact that digital media and techniques have on music making and distribution and on the relationship between artists and fans.

He believes that modern recording technology and the internet are as critical to musical culture today as the parlour piano and music publishing were 100 years ago.

"In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, demand for popular songs led to the sale of millions of copies of sheet music to amateur musicians who regularly entertained themselves and their audiences by playing these songs on pianos at home or local dances," he explains. "Modern technologies also enable the dissemination of music, offer recording artists new tools with which to compose music, and allow fans to be more active in the music-making process by manipulating and combining music in unexpected ways."

MIXING WITH GLENN GOULD

Given his interest in recording technology, Théberge was inevitably drawn to the work of classical pianist Glenn Gould who, before his death in 1982, enhanced his performances with modern recording technologies.

In 1964, Gould retired from public performing, in part because he believed that, by using the studio and the editing process, he could better communicate his musical ideas. He complemented his well-known interpretive methods, such as extreme variations in tempo, with recording, editing, and mixing techniques to provide himself with more

powerful tools with which to interpret the music.

In a handful of his more experimental recordings, Gould positioned several microphones in different locations around the studio. The distance of the mikes from the instrument would result in a greater or lesser ratio of reverberation (i.e., the sounds that persist in an enclosed space after the sound source has stopped) to direct sound from the piano. He then integrated these variations in reverberation into different musical passages so that he would have two layers of artistic interpretation: the first created at the piano and the second created in the mix. Gould often compared these methods to the use of close-ups and long shots in film.

A NEW MIX FOR AN OLD RECORDING

In 1970, Gould recorded Scriabin's *Piano Sonata #5* using these miking techniques and it was eventually released as a standard stereo recording. Théberge believes the work never received the kind of mix that Gould had intended and, having secured a digital copy of the original tapes from Sony-BMG, intends to analyze the recording and mix it according to Gould's ideas. "In the thirty-six years since Gould recorded this sonata, other artists have pushed the boundaries of music and technology. However, Gould's technique remains intriguing and, in an era of surround sound systems, may offer new insights into the relationship between music and acoustic space. I want to engage with the technology so that the results of my research are both critical and analytic but also directly informed by the technical practices associated with making music in contemporary culture."



"Modern recording technology and the internet are critical to musical culture today."

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