

# Socio-material negotiations of authenticity in a digitally mediatized world

*On the problems of aura and passion in  
postmodern popular music cultures*

*Steffen Lepa – Audio Communication Group – Technische Universität Berlin, Germany  
Alexander Geimer – Institute for Sociology – Universität Hamburg, Germany*

# [ On the Mediatization of Music ]

- **„Mediatization“:**  
Broad European research programme preoccupied with inquiry on **the long term processes of social change potentially resulting from ever-new media technologies** increasingly diffusing into every part of social life
- **DFG-PP-Project: „Survey Music and Media“ (Lepa & Weinzierl 2012-2014):**  
In which ways have the various forms of mediatization of the last 150 years changed everyday musical practices and the social functions of music?
- *„A medium is a technology within which a culture grows“ (Postman 2000)*
- *„The transition from artisanial production transforms not only the technology of distribution but also that which is distributed“ (Adorno 1928)*
- *Agenda:* Ideal-typic description of broad 20th century transformations in musical practices & functions by drawing on Media Convergence Theory (Jensen 2010) enriched through empirical material from interviews, discourse, and observation

# 1st Degree Musical Cultures



- Based on media of 1st degree (Jensen 2010): **Material Artifacts**  
→ Tools, Instruments, Prostheses, Surfaces
- Musical practice and meaning part of “sacred” social rituals performed by individuals, groups or cultures („Musicking“, Small 1999)
- Rituals are processes whereby reality and social order is “produced, maintained, repaired and transformed” (Carey 1989)
- **Live Music as ritual social practice:**
  - Music as expression of shared cultural traditions
  - Unity of music performance and music reception
  - Music production and reception conceived as public activities
  - Music as creative commons of the people
  - Listening and Performing is a form of sacred „commitment“
- Dominated also European musical traditions until the 18<sup>th</sup> century



# „Aura“ - The Story of an Irreversible Loss

- Mediatization started with the reproduction of score sheets but reached its climax with technological reproduction of musical sounds from the 1890s onward
- *“For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility”* (Benjamin 1936)
- Reproduction of music meant the death of its “Aura”: *“the unique ambience that surrounds and gives authenticity to a work of art. [...] the immediacy, the here and now in this presence and no other [...] the radiance given off by things that are absolutely unique and therefore absolutely irreplaceable - religious objects above all”* (Carey 1986) → synonyme for **non-reproducibility of certain experiences**



Thomas Alva Edison

# 2nd Degree Musical Cultures



- Based on media of 2nd degree (Jensen 2010): **Reproduction Technologies**  
→ + Recording, Storing, Copying, Transmitting, Playback
  
- Musical practice and meaning part of instrumental actions or symbolic practices performed by individuals, groups or cultures („Transmission Music“, Blaukopf 1996)
  
- **Music playback as everyday social practice:**
  - Music as expression of one's developed identity
  - Separation of music performance and music reception
  - Music production and reception conceived as private activities
  - Music as private commodity
  - Listening and Playback is a form of profane „entertainment“



# [ Popular Music as a hybrid music culture ]

- Regardless of mediatization, 1st degree musical cultures persisted, but were increasingly colonized by influences from 2nd degree musical cultures
- Popular Music developed as a *hybrid cultural form & stress field* regarding Aura:
  - Audiences demanded records of their performers who in turn embraced the new revenue sources
  - Audiences started to expect performances to adhere to the ideal of the record (Gould 1964)
  - Conversely, audiences also began to expect performances to go beyond the record in terms of Aura
- **Consequence:**  
Increasing pressure on popular music performers to invent practices and strategies that maintain the ideal of an auratic musical experience and performance in spite of a continuing infusion of from reproductional technologies
- **Predominant form of realization:** Identity politics in terms of „authenticity“

# Identification of the subject position of an ‚authentic self‘

- Sample: Participants (10) of the “Popkurs” (at the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg): interviews, group discussion
- Qualitative Method: modification (Geimer 2012) of the documentary method (Bohnsack 2010, 2009)
- Research question: Which imperatives of self-regulation do young musicians perceive and how do they relate themselves to these imperatives?
  - In every interview:  
Different references to the ‘trueness’ of the own music or the ‘realness’ of being a musician, *that is*: to the authenticity of making music and being a musician
  - ‘You have to be real to be successful!’
  - ‘You have to tell an own story in your music to be catchy!’
  - ‘To catch on, you have to be maximally present on stage and in your songs!’
  
  - In every interview these imperatives were referred to –  
but in completely different ways
- **Subject position of an ‘authentic self’ and different forms of appropriation and negotiation of this subject position**

# Appropriations and negotiations of the „authentic self“ – Adam

Sequence	Interpretation / Abstract
<b>Biographical <i>narration</i></b> (at the beginning)	<i>Steps of his career as a musician, ends with income</i>
<b>Most wonderful experience as a musician (<i>narration</i>)</b>	<i>Intense experience during a concert when a girl started to cry while he was playing a ballade on the guitar (authentic sharing of experiences)</i>
<b>Last working day as a musician</b> ( <i>description, reflections</i> )	<i>Highlighting of organizational constraints and his way of dealing with them ('entrepreneurial self')</i>
<b>General or music-related idols</b> ( <i>reflection</i> )	<i>Gifted musicians who don't need rehearsals and who easily combine work and private life</i>
<b>Theme of the image</b> ( <i>reflection</i> )	<i>"Image is everything" – "Artist is an artwork which is to be sold"</i>



# Appropriations and negotiations of the „authentic self“ – Paul

Sequence	Interpretation / Abstract
<b>Biographical <i>narration</i></b> <b>(at the beginning)</b>	<i>Problematic relationship of parents, cancelling of school, work in production studio with (nationally) famous artists</i>
<b>Most wonderful experience as a musician (<i>narration</i>)</b>	<i>Taking part at the “Popkurs“, making music with colleagues who are to be understood as friends</i>
<b>Last working day as a musician (<i>narration</i>)</b>	<i>Day at the “Popkurs“, musical experiments, sharing ideas, getting drunk</i>
<b>General or music-related idols (<i>detailed description</i>)</b>	<i>Singer of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, unmusical musician, representing real life in his music due to close friendship with band member</i>
<b>Theme of the image (<i>reflection</i>)</b>	<i>“Image is an intense way of communicating oneself” , repulsion of strategic presentation of oneself</i>

# Appropriations and negotiations of the „authentic self“ – Esther

Sequence	Interpretation / Abstract
<b>Biographical <i>narration</i></b> <b>(at the beginning)</b>	<i>From classical music to pop, from Hannover to Berlin, where she is “lingering around”</i>
<b>Most wonderful experience as a musician (<i>narration</i>)</b>	<i>Communication with the audience in different ways, especially through her songs which deal with own feelings and experiences</i>
<b>Last working day as a musician (<i>narration</i>)</b>	<i>She slept too long, had silly meeting with music teachers, was teaching at music school, then developing ideas with friends, practicing on her new micro piano until 2 a.m.</i>
<b>General or music-related idols (<i>narration</i>)</b>	<i>Her aunt, who is a very alternative artist (making music in fantasy languages and with drain pipes)</i>
<b>Theme of the image (<i>reflections</i>)</b>	<i>Distances herself from stereotypes (“Pianotante” / “Klaviermädchen” / “Mädchenkram”) and from the cliché of an ingenious artist</i>

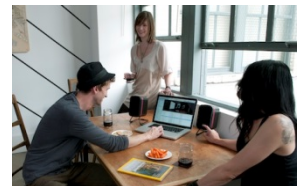
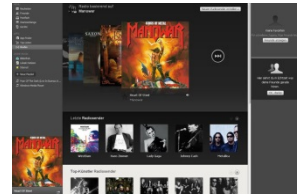
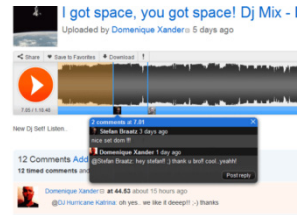
# Typology

Adam (25)	Paul (19)	Esther (29)
<p><b>Reflective Negotiation of the “authentic self”</b></p>	<p><b>Seamless appropriation of the “authentic self”</b></p>	<p><b>Dissociative Appropriation of the “authentic self”</b></p>
<p>Compromises between family and job, strategic use and production of own image (gothic band)</p> <p>Presentation of self by narration of the most wonderful moment pertaining to the “authentic self”</p>	<p>Authentic and experimental communication with other musicians leading to the development of his art</p>	<p>Authentic and emotional communication with the audience, distorted by distancing herself from stereotypes and clichés of the ‘ingenious artist’</p>
<p>References to other subject positions: “entrepreneurial self”</p>		<p>References to other subject positions: “creative self”</p>

# 3rd Degree Musical Cultures



- Based on media of 3rd degree: **Digital Meta-Technologies**  
→ + interlinking, assembling, cloning, navigation, simulation
- Within digital musical cultures, music is performed “not with traditional instruments but by means of record players, mixing desk, and possibly other electronic equipment” (Pfadenhauer 2009)
- functional roles of performers and recipients become increasingly blurred
- Future tendencies still difficult to make out (2 examples follow)
- **Digital Music as hybrid social practice:**
  - Music as expression of shared traditions **and** of one’s identity
  - Unity **and** Separation of music performance and music reception
  - Music conceived as public **and** private activity
  - Music as creative commons **and** private commodity
  - Music as sacred „commitment“ **and** profane „entertainment“



# „Realness“ in Hip Hop Sampling

- Technically, „sampling“ refers to use of **ready-made material as basis for musical composition and performances** („remediations“ / Bolter 1999)
- Hip Hop historically developed as one of the first musical styles in popular culture relying predominantly on **samples from vinyl records**
- The auratic value of a Hip Hop track (its „**realness**“) was initially seen in the (DJ) performers‘ abilities to find interesting material („crate-digging“) and their manual skills in combining it „live at a jam“ to create impressive „DJ tracks“
- With the diffusion of cheap synthesizers and affordable digital sampling devices in the 1990s, Hip Hop was increasingly produced „offline“ – a discourse of „**sampling functions/ethics**“ emerged (Pelleter & Lepa 2007)
  - Sampling as a device for music composition and simulation of sounds
  - Sampling as a device for cross-cultural quotes and references („New School Realness“)
  - Sampling as a device for emphasizing material practice in production („Old School Realness“)

# Aura as enacted in Club Music / EDM

- Club Music / EBM is based on the artisanial playback and manipulation of audio tracks or loop material distributed on special interest media channels and seldom listened to by a general audience in the everyday. Instead it is produced, sold and consumed predominantly for use in the club context (Poschard 1997)
- The EDM DJ or Live-Act “*ideally* generates the impression of *one* continuous composition, *one* track to which, if not the whole party, then at least the party, dances: namely the party that *this* DJ ‘is making alive’ by *creating his/her* sound ***in the situation for exactly this situation*** [...] “To be more precise, the competent DJ orients himself/herself to their diffuse, incalculable collective demand for precisely *that* music which ‘now’ (paradoxically) all at once takes in, expresses, transforms *and* evokes their mood” (Pfadenhauer 2009)
- “clubbing has a **quasi spiritual element** to it based on the components of mythology, formulism, sacredness, communitas and transformation” (Goulding & Shankar 2011)

# Conclusion: Return to the Ritual?

- Performers of **hybrid musical cultures stemming from the mass media age** seem to develop complex strategies for **substituting** the loss of aura in musical experiences and performances by performing socio-material strategies that produce an „authentic musician to-be-experienced“
- Performers of **3rd degree musical cultures** seem to increasingly refrain from those substitutional strategies and instead employ „ritual enactments of aura“ centered around media technologies now conceived of as „musical instruments“
- *"With meta-technologies, communication has come full circle to the sort of interactive and multimodal forms of interchange that characterize face-to-face settings." (Jensen 2010)*
- *„The Here and Now of the primordial live performance is increasingly substituted by the Here and Now of the media performance. Contrariwise to Benjamin's assumptions, Aura is not disappearing but increasingly put back on stage through new techno-cultural configurations of performance“ (Grossman 2010)*

Thank you for your patience!