

## **The Shifting Locus of Musical Experience from Performance to Recording to Data: Some Implications for Music Education**

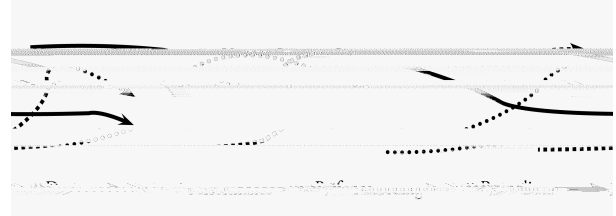
Matthew D. Thibeault  
*University of Illinois —Urbana, U.S.A.*

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### **Abstract**

*This paper provides a speculative history and theoretical exploration of the shifting locus of musical experience over the 20th century, from live performance to recorded and broadcast sound, and increasingly toward computer-mediated sound*

While many writers explore change as a progression wherein technological changes and advances contribute to shifting practices, others, notably ethnomusicologists, have discussed these innovations without such directionality. Nettl (2005) discusses modes musical transmission: from aural, to written, to printed, to recorded; noting, "These could even represent a chronological order, valid for Western civilization, but it is also a continuum of relationships, from close to distant, among composer, performer, and listener" (p. 292). Turino (2008) presents a four field framework based on Peirce's semiotics: participatory and presentational musical fields within live music practices, and high fidelity and studio audio art musical fields for recorded music. Like Nettl, T3 ( (m) -) -3 0 9 -56((T3 ( -387 4 2.0 1 1 2:) 2 ( T2.0 11 (e) 1 ) 1(s) 1 (e) 1 387 4 2.0 1) 2 ( 4 (-381 (e) 7 4 :



world around it changes. This kind of attention to the shifting locus invites us to explore the implications of Marx's (1844/1988) famous words, "The forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present" (p. 108).

The shifting locus provides a fit for music educators who need to come to terms with technology without losing the social and educational dimensions, and who require richer causal accounts of technology that go beyond technological determinism (Smith & Marx, 1994). While there are many possible approaches to understanding the enmeshment of music, technology, and education, the particular needs of educators are here foregrounded by focusing on the enmeshment of people, practices, institutions, and technologies as they become ubiquitous enough to form the basis of habits. Whether one wishes to resist or embrace this shifting locus, the conceptualization presented in this article can help music educators organize action and begin to make sense of the fact that to perform in the world now involves different values and practices than to have done so when performance was the locus of musical experience.

The view of the shifting locus is derived here from two short stories where music plays a central but contrasting role, and the exploration of the careers of three musicians whose work is both held in high regard and emblematic, perhaps even a prototype, of each locus. The view of the performance locus comes through James Joyce's story "The Dead" (1914/1969). The skeptical resistance to recording is captured through an examination of John Philip Sousa's essay "The Menace of Mechanical Music" (1906). Glen Gould's writings and interviews allow a shift to the evangelistic adoption of the possibilities of recording,







Washington, D.C. Sousa so disdained recordings that he famously refused to conduct his band for any recording dates or broadcasts until 1929, three years before his death. He articulated strong beliefs and a coherent view of the ways recorded music might negatively impact the musical world he knew and

audience and performer, and the performer can respond to the audience. By contrast, a film actor may be filmed in multiple takes, perhaps from multiple angles, and often out of sequence from the final film. For Benjamin, with regard to the final product of the film, "During the shooting [the actor] has as little contact with it as any article made in a factory" (p. 231).

Just as films found advantage in estrangement, Gould envisioned benefits Sousa did not. Two years before he stopped performing, Gould published the essay "Let's Ban Applause," wherein he stated, "... I have come to the conclusion, most seriously, that the most efficacious step which could be taken in our culture today would be the gradual but total elimination of audience response." (1962/1984b, p. 246). Given that the estrangement of recordings, it would seem that Gould supposed I ha.3691y24 72 50 T9 4 .36974(er) 2osllpoesopool 50 T9 o -475...oeo 50 T9





are made across the globe, mixing and mashing of music drawn from hundreds of years of history, and the rise of an amateur culture of creativity that blurs the line between their work and that of professionals, remaking the idea of house-music culture. The hundreds of re-creations posted by others point to participant audiences whose contribution rises to a level that blurs the distinction between creator and audience.

Powers (2008), formidable when writing about music as well as science and technology, presents, through “Modulation,” an extreme view of music in the new media era. The plot centers on the global dissemination and eventual synchronized activation of a musical computer virus. These events tie together four separate characters whose musical lives capture much about music in today’s world: Toshi Yukawa, a former music pirate, works with record companies to find other pirates; journalist Marta Mota writes about the uses of music by the American military in Iraq; ethnomusicologist Jan Steiner looks back on his life’s research through recordings; and DJ Mitchell Payne presents a set of “chiptune” 8-bit audio that satisfies his audience’s “nostalgia for the blips and bleeps of their Atari childhood” (p. 91). Music is nearly always experienced via mobile phones, iPods, laptops, and

recalls the economic analysis of Jacques Attali in his book *Noise* (1977/1985), one that situates recordings as part of the overall rise of repetition in society:

Mass production, a final form, signifies the repetition of all consumption, individual or collective, the replacement of the restaurant by precooked meals, of custom-made clothes by ready-wear, of the individual house built from personal designs by tract houses based on stereotyped designs, of the politician by the anonymous bureaucrat, of skilled labor by standardized tasks, of the spectacle by recordings of it. (p. 128)

The climactic event of “Modulation” is the activation of a musical computer virus. The piece spreads across networks into every device capable of playing music. The virus synchronizes the playback of a single piece of music that is at once an unforgettable experience while simultaneously impossible to remember:

And here it was again, after an eternity away: a tune that sold nothing, that had no agenda, that required no identity or allegiance, that was not disposable background product, that came and went for no reason, brief as thunder on a summer night. (p. 102)

One reading of the role of the virus in “Modulation” is that it serves to show the profound shift in music. Whereas music was always ephemeral in “The Dead,” by the time of “Modulation” an ephemeral experience with music exists only as science fiction. Every sound worth hearing today is captured, recorded, shared, and sold. Like Powers, only with a feat of imagination or a leap of faith can we admit the possibility of a sound that will never be sold. It is this situation that “Modulation” helps us to mark, the distance between Aunt Julia and DJ Payne, from Michael Furey’s remembered song for Gretta to an ephemeral event provided made available through an anonymous computer virus.

The story presented thus far captures the shift in music, musician, and audience: the exchange of the ephemeral for a reproducibility that also estranges performer from audience, the rise of the concept of music as sonic object that favors unblemished recordings which feed back to put pressure on live musicians to create flawless

democratization of access to the means of creation and distribution. The inexpensive home studio, the personal website, and the ease with which art in digital form can be shared and enjoyed is perhaps the most fundamental change of the new media era, changes that closely align with the notion of convergence culture put forward by Jenkins (2006).

Another consequence flows from the ease of distribution as we transition from a recording era, namely, the rise of an overabundance of content. Recordings that were tangible were limited to the estimated commercial audience; but in the digital world, copies are created on demand. Reviewing a recent biography of Keith Richards that locates access to then-scarce blues records as critical for the creation of the Rolling Stones, Dan Chiasson (2011) captures this transition:

The experience of making and taking in culture is now, for the first time in human history, a condition of almost paralyzing overabundance. For millennia it was a condition of scarcity. ... Nobody will ever again experience what Keith Richards and Mick Jagger experienced in Dartford, scrounging for blues records. The Rolling Stones do not happen in any other context: they were a band based on craving, impersonation, tribute: white guys from England who worshiped black blues and later, to a lesser extent, country, reggae, disco, and rap. (p.19)

As with the rise of music as commodity, this overabundance is part of a broader trend that extends to other areas including academic scholarship (Jensen, 2007). Chiasson captures the sense of both something gained and something changed, in his formulation, something lost. In the context of Chiasson's review, the Stones emerged, in part, due to recordings. However, it was not enough that they lived in a time when recordings existed; they lived in

Lotus, “His setup is typical of the twenty-first-century musician: a collection of laptops, keyboards, and processing units, none of t





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**CHINESE ABSTRACT**

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Matthew D. Thibeault  
*University of Illinois —*