

Authenticity for investigating the theory of musical cultures media essay



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For years authenticity has been an intriguing issue for journalists and academics investigating the theory of musical cultures. The early investigations concerned the comparison between the integral, honest and authentic folk music deriving from traditional culture against artificial, manufactured and inauthentic products of mass mediated and marketed business (Gardner, 2005).

Alongside the popularisation of mass culture and the industries behind it, music fans developed the perception on traditional music, reflecting lives, practices and folklore of people by means that “ pop” music was not. In order to differentiate themselves from the masses, people started to look for authenticity in music as identification with their culture, experiences, feelings and views (Moore, 2002). Also the ways in which the textual content has been delivered, as well as the means of instrumental expression were significantly related to the culture of music listeners (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008).

With the technological progress new instruments (for example synthesisers) were introduced by the increasing number of music performers, who at first were rejected as inauthentic, not associated with traditional artists’ craft. However, technology soon started to form new musical cultures, effectively mixing with the existing, long-established ones (Moore, 2002). Not only the instruments were subject to technical changes; the ways of documentation of artists’ performances also transformed over the years, supporting better quality recordings as well as more advanced and precise techniques of producing and editing recorded music (Persson, 2006).

The use of digital music production has become more popular in recent years, allowing fixes and changes to the recorded performance. This study shall examine the relationship between authenticity of an artist's craft and digital music production techniques.

Background of the problem

Many artists, even those who derive from the cultures they claim to represent, tend to work on improving their studio recordings to the point of even mechanical perfection. This can be the pitch excellence of every note played or sung, as well as beats and bars precision. Also the musical arrangements offer broader opportunities that can be acquired much easier than by traditional means, for example with digital synthesiser imitating the sound of violin or brass (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008). Such an attitude stands in opposition to the traditional meaning of craft as a profession based on particular set of skills. Thus, by denying the conventions of honesty, truth and genuineness, being authentic as an artist can be rejected by some of the fans.

By identifying the correlation between such operations and perception on the artist's craft in terms of its authenticity, another field in the music culture theory shall be acknowledged. In other words, understanding how the creation of recordings influence authenticity will update the subject data by one of the most recent issues.

Statement of the problem

By increasing ease of access to digital sound recording and editing tools, a number of music fans become more aware of how music is being made. This

has influence on perceiving artists' authenticity, especially referring to their craft, which can lead to interpreting them as well as producers as inauthentic manufacturers of music, whose main factor is no longer self-expression, but commercial success only.

Statement of purpose

The value terms of "authenticity", "honesty", "integrity" and "realness" are probably the most loaded (Moore, 2002). In an effort to identify possible correlations between those related to an artist's craft and digital studio production techniques, the study will examine the perception on recorded music and how contemporary technologies can change it. In doing so, the study will uncover the key determinants of such changes.

Rationale

Digital recording and editing of music is relatively new subject. Therefore, the availability of academic articles on its impact on authenticity of an artist's skills is very limited. Most of the bibliographic sources pertinent to the concept of authenticity, dating back to the late 1960s, investigate the subject area from different angles (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008). Although the majority of research has been conducted since the early 1990s, which is the time when Digital Audio Workstations were gaining popularity, very little of the studies focused on the relationship between authenticity and digital studio production techniques.

A number of studies investigated authenticity as an ideological notion motivated culturally and industrially, included mostly in lyrics, interviews and artists' image itself (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008). Drawing from the fields of

history and music cultures evolvement, several studies looked at areas such as development of folk music, which primarily celebrated provincial culture, as well as rock genre, originally belonging to the entertainment music domain (Moore, 2002). Even more recent research does not cover the music production angle of the problem, only mentioning it occasionally in different sources.

This study is guided by the rationale of exploring these determinants.

Aims and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to identify the relationship between modern music production techniques and the craft of an artist.

As influenced by the aim of the study, the primary objective of this dissertation is to examine and analyse the impact that digital retuning, elastic audio and general fixing of recorded sound and the impact of these changes on authenticity of an artist's profession. In this context the main objectives of the research study could be stated as:

To identify the correlation between contemporary music production techniques and the craft of an artist

To evaluate the influence that digital changes, made to the recorded sound, have on authenticity of the artist's profession

Research question

Is applying any digital changes or fixes to recorded sound influence authenticity of an artist's craft?

Definitions of terms

The following definitions are supplied to guarantee a common understanding of the primary terms used in this study.

Mass culture is the whole of the culture shared by all, except for infrequent individuals who still appreciate the traditional high culture, which stands to the opposite to the term. It is argued that the mass, meaning the people, enthusiastically accepts whatever manipulative elites provide it with (DiMaggio, 2004).

Craft is any object or output that is the development of practical and aesthetic skills and of the vision through the formation and creation of personal work, sold for profit (Houghton, 2005). Although it must have high degree of hand-made input, it does not have to consist of traditional materials or ways of production. The design of craft may be culturally set in the geographical place of creation (McAuley and Fillis, 2005).

Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) is a digitally based platform that is designed mainly for recording and editing sound. It replaces the traditional tape-based recording techniques, which were complex and time consuming, with fast, precise and convenient digital ones, providing wider choice of tools to process recorded sound (Dye, 2008).

Research method

The study was both desk-based and ethnographic. Books and articles on authenticity and different angles of defining the concept, as well as on modern audio production techniques were reviewed. In addition, primary

data on perceiving authenticity by artists, producers and fans of music was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study also examined transformations in interpreting authenticity of an artist's skill in relation to changes applied to the sound.

Assumptions and limitations

This study was affected by several assumptions and limitations. First, it used a multiple choice survey, which means that the respondents were not entirely free to specify their views on the questions. This could imply some of the answers not to be accurately representative in terms of the respondents' point of view, but only closely related to it.

The second limitation of this study is the sample size, which was small and limited to the High Wycombe based population and online respondents only. In fact, there is no indication that the sample in this study is representative of the broader population.

The third limitation of this research is the fact that the collection of data took place at particular period of time. Thus, there is no guarantee that the received responses would be indicative of responses requested and given at other time. There is also a possibility that other issues, remaining outside of the researcher's control (time of day, recent conflicts, setting, or tiredness of the respondents) might influence the answers (Laurel, 2003).

Description of thesis organisation

The research consists of five chapters. The first one shapes the area of interest and delineates the examined problem. The research questions are

introduced, the study's limitations are characterised and the selected methodology is generally and briefly discussed.

The second chapter reviews literature on authenticity and modern music production techniques, particularly relating to those basing on digital sound changing.

The third chapter discusses the study's methodology, the strategies used for collection of primary and secondary data, as well as concludes with a rationalization of the defined selections, recognising some inherent boundaries.

The fourth chapter presents the study's discoveries as updated by the primary and secondary data collection and answers the research questions described in the first chapter. Responses to the research questions evaluated in the first chapter and an investigation on the accuracy of the research assumptions are presented in the findings.

The fifth chapter concluded the research and defines the study's recommendations.

Conclusion

As described in this chapter, the study's subject shall be the relationship between digitally based music production techniques and authenticity of an artist's craft. The next chapter presents the literature reviewed for this study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2. 1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on authenticity and contemporary music production techniques. Although there is a wealth of literature on the subject of authenticity, very few focuses on the process of the formation of recorded music, while none exploits the correlation between an artist's craft authenticity and modern audio production. Instead, and as will be seen throughout this review, the majority of studies consider the socio-cultural aspect of perceiving artists' authenticity by fans and theorists of music, as well as the historical one.

2. 2 Authenticity in the history of popular music

The early theorists of popular music warned against the expanding mass consuming culture that offered artificial art, considered to be inauthentic. For example, Walter Benjamin stated his predictions concerning the world of art and music as uniformed by mass production and with no perspectives for any heterogeneity (1935). Before the growth of the culture oriented industry, musical styles and practices were less influenced by what is considered entertaining and instead they were developing independently, aiming for pure expression of the art. Then, the rise of the business, led to the standardisation of popular culture, which was influenced by its modernisation and industrialisation (Adorno, 1991). In other words, the industry started to apply fixed formulas to the music, considering them to make it more entertaining and therefore more likely to be consumed by more people.

Such an approach from the industry's side, led the fans to start missing more honest and integral cultural expressions, and thus, to seek for more genuine, traditional alternative. This was often found in folk music, as by the specifications of it, folk has been developed traditionally as an expression of peoples' lives and experiences in different manner than popular culture (Gardner, 2005). Because people were searching for identity and integrity, that would distinguish themselves from the masses, the industry started to adopt different genres, marketing them as more soulful and real options (Sloop and Herman, 1998).

It was not only the industry standards that influenced perceiving music as inauthentic. Together with the technological development, people started using amplified electric guitars or electronic instruments, such as synthesisers, which led to a division of music listeners (Moore, 2002). This was quickly adopted by the industry, which appeared to separate music clubs between traditional and contemporary ones. The situation was as serious as the traditionally oriented venues tended to refuse to accept a performer who used modern technology as part of the performance (Boyes, 1993).

2.3 What is authenticity

Although the concept of authenticity is explained differently in variety of sources, most of them present similar view that the definition is very subjective. Allan Moore for example, presents a set of value terms that are identified with authenticity: real, honest, truthful, with integrity, actual, genuine, essential and sincere (2002). Also Gilbert and Pearson specify the requirements of authentic rock of the 1980s, wherein the fundamental role <https://assignbuster.com/authenticity-for-investigating-the-theory-of-musical-cultures-media-essay/>

of artists' was to represent the culture from which they come, speaking the truth of their situations and using particular type of instrumentation (1999). In other words, these theorists claim that authenticity is not any fixed combination of musical sounds or set of lyrical content, but it refers to the artist or the whole of their performance as a matter of interpretation, which should be made from cultural and therefore historical position (Rubidge, 1996). Thus, it is not the integral part of a performance, but something that can be assigned to one, meaning that the choice whether it is authentic or not, depends on who the "one" is.

Moore considers the rock discourse to be the one frequently referring to authenticity in the textual and musical spheres. He argued that it is the style of writing and performing that made the audience decide of its authenticity, and that it particularly referred to the singer (2002). What also should be noted is the attributes of an artist's intimacy and immediacy, that indicate authenticity, meaning that one should uncover their feelings and experiences in unmediated shape and with the purity of sound production (Moore, 2002). Grossberg goes further by stating that the difference between the authentic and the inauthentic lies within the purpose that an artist has in the musical expression. Whether it is the art itself, the public or the income driven by this, defines the authentic as the opposite of commercial (1992). Thus, in order to classify the integrate, the performer's realism and "lack of pretence" have to be examined (Moore, 2002).

2. 3. 1 First person authenticity

The fundamental form of authenticity that was introduced by Charles Taylor (1997) as an expression that can be outlined in an initiatory instance, which <https://assignbuster.com/authenticity-for-investigating-the-theory-of-musical-cultures-media-essay/>

Moore later describes as immediacy of expression (2002). This concept has also been reviewed by Bohlman, who identifies the authentic as the constant demonstration of the stylistic genesis, which means the purity of practice (1988). In other words, he presents his idea of an authentic artist as the one whose musical style remains loyal to the origins of the genre.

On the other hand, Grossberg (1992) indicates the honesty of experience as the main determinant of authenticity, meaning the lyrical content of the song expressing real experiences of an artist. Both Bohlman's and Grossberg's views are supported by Redhead, who claims that real instruments (referring to the purity of practice) should go along real feelings; the artistic transparency and loyalty to the roots of music in conjunction with a genuine message (1990).

Walser argues that even technological mediation, for example use of signal modifiers or amplification, is synonymous to pretence, pointing at artificiality and thus inauthenticity of an act (1993). Such an approach is related to Taylor's authenticity of positionality, which describes the authenticity of musicians who reject to get influenced by the commercial music, for example by implementing the style of Western musicians by non-Western ones (1997).

Wiseman-Trowse underlines another aspect of the immediate performance, which is the stage one, where an artist has actual opportunity to engage the audience, as opposed to the recorded performance (2008). On stage it is possible for a listener to compare both recorded and live ones, as well as for an artist to convert the listener's perception on authenticity of the

performance. On this basis one can decide whether it is the genuine artistic skill that is present on a recording, or rather a result of the work of a skilful producer (Auslander, 1999).

As Moore underlines the concept of the first person authenticity, all of the above understandings of the term are connected by the direction towards they lead. This entails the perception on authenticity that is implemented by the personal interpretation made by an entity being a part of the audience (2002). In other words, the first person authenticity occurs when a performer is received by an individual as an integral one who expresses their art in an unmediated way.

2. 3. 2 Third person authenticity

Fornäs distinguishes three types of authenticity: social, subjective and meta ones. They differ with regard to the act of judgement: first is made by a particular community, second depends on the individual, while the last one is evidenced by the consideration of the performer or the author of lyrics (1995). Although meta-authenticity is described as an act of validation made by the author, this side of the subject is also present in the other two types. According to Grossberg, the authentic performer needs to express their own feelings, which are simultaneously shared with the public (1992).

This type of authenticity is pictured by adopting the original blues music style, deriving from the economically poor Mississippi delta, to the 1960s movement represented by artists like Cream. The band used to play a cover song of Robert Johnson, " Crossroads". Even though Cream did not grow neither over the Mississippi area, nor in the 1930s, they found themselves

identifying with the song (Coleman, 1994). This allowed them to express themselves through reproducing Johnson's art and remaining authentic (at least in their own opinion).

The third person authenticity is supported by Vaughan Williams, who claims that the artist can never create from the state of entire independence, without any influence of earlier musical acts. Thus, the musician needs predecessors in order to base the artistic experience on them (1987).

Thus, the third person authenticity occurs if a performing artist successfully represents the ideas, experiences and feelings of another.

2. 3. 3 Second person authenticity

Grossberg specifies another type of authenticity that, as opposed to the first and third person ones, is being justified by the artist's capability to successfully express the experiences of the listeners (1992). Thus, it is the audience that recognises the authentic by basing on their own feelings and thoughts that are presented by an artist. Moore exemplifies this approach by mentioning the 1980s rock scene, which was dominated by synthesisers. The dedication to traditional rock was therefore exposed by the focus on the guitar based instrumentation used by the bands like U2, Big Country, Simple Minds, The Alarm or Bruce Springsteen, who derive from socially disadvantaged areas. By using the guitar, that was easily reachable, they tried to metaphorically escape from their reality (2002). This means, that it is culturally constructed process of artists' authentication made by the audience that seeks for the validation of their own experiences in art.

2. 3. 4 Authenticity as a renewable resource

Richard Peterson (1997) introduced the concept of authenticity as a renewable resource, claiming that it is renovated with every era and expansion of popular music with its production. He states that the shifting conditions are reflected by the meaning of authenticity, which is defined by a collective argumentation of fans, performers and producers. It is argued that authenticity is not inseparable in the recording, or a performance, which intend to be authentic by design. In popular culture, the particulars of the word's meaning are not controlled by specialists and authorities; it aims to be credible qualified to a explicit model and simultaneously remain original. In other words, it has to fit within fixed framework, not being an imitation of it at the same time. Thus, what is authentic, varies continuously renewing all the time and never remaining static.

However, Robert Gardner (2005) disagrees with the generalisation of authenticity as renewable resource. He points out that even the genre on which Peterson has based his research, should not be considered authentic in the contemporary state of it, having been deprived of its integral roots, which displays for example on ABC's Monday Night Football, which uses Hank Williams Jr's theme song.

2. 4 Digital audio

Today's recording systems, like Pro Tools, Cuebase or Logic, are using the digital way of sound capturing. It is then saved as samples, which are small bits that recorded sound consists of. Frank D. Cook describes sound samples as analogical to pixels in digitally saved images (2009). In order to

understand digital audio, it is important to present what sound essentially is.
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When a human ear hears a sound, it in fact experiences variations of the air pressure around it. These are result of vibrations of objects, that are moving in cycles. “ If the object is vibrating at a frequency that falls within the range of human hearing, we perceive it as a sound” (Cook, 2009, p 21). The actual character of the sound depends on the waveform, frequency and the vibration’s amplitude.

2. 4. 1 Waveform

The waveform is the very thing that creates the human’s perception on the shape of the sound. This means that one can find out what is the source of the sound, as every object vibrates differently, giving the waveform the distinctive nature and tone (Cook, 2009).

2. 4. 2 Frequency

Human hearing has the range of approximately 20 and 20000 cycles (the whole back-and-forth vibrations) per second, measured in Hertz (Hz). This determines the pitch of the sound, where lower frequencies generate lower sounds; while higher frequencies produce higher pitches (Cook, 2009). For example, the frequency of 130 Hz is assigned to the musical note C3, whereas the semitone lower B2 names the frequency of 123 Hz.

2. 4. 3 Amplitude

The loudness perceived by the human ear depends on the pressure or intensity of the sound variations and is measured in decibels (dB). Thus, the sound becomes louder as the amplitude of vibrations increases. For example, the loudness of a regular conversation is 60 dB. In order to double

the loudness, the amplitude would have to be increased to 70 dB (Cook, 2009).

2. 5 Modern studio production techniques

Dan Daley suggests that listening to the recorded vocals on the radio nowadays brings to mind the increasing popularity of guitar effects in the 1970s, when fuzz, distortion, flanging and wah-wah processors overwhelmed traditional sounding guitars (2003). As it was argued then, whether the non-purist approach is inauthentic or rather an artistic expression of modernity, it is arguable if changing recorded vocals or instruments digitally can be perceived as genuine representation of art (Daley, 2003).

The turning point of pitch correction technique came along Cher's single "Believe" in 1998, on which digital vocal processing has been not only used, but made very noticeable. Since then, the number of artists using these features is continuously increasing, as well as there are more and more ways of using them, even to the point of intentional distortion of recorded sound (Daley, 2003).

2. 5. 1 Pitch correction

The pitch correction feature, available by both DAW plug-ins as well as standalone programs allows automatic or manual change of recorded sound's pitch. The most common use of pitch correction is fixing a vocal performance; if a singer sings a false note, the digital technology allows the producer to fix it quickly, without another take. There are two ways of correcting pitch. Automatic mode usually lets the user to choose a musical scale according to which both flat and sharp notes should be corrected.

Manual mode provides a graph of the notes that allows the producer to change the pitch of separate sounds manually, by moving the graphical representation of them up and down (Bartlett and Bartlett, 2009).

2. 5. 2 Elastic audio

Huber and Runstein point out another feature that provided by digital technology. Elastic audio allows the change of the timing of recorded sound (2009), for example fixing a guitarist's performance, who might have recorded a solo slower than the actual song and then speed it up. This tool does not only generate a change of a track's speed, but also each sound can be stretched or shrunk separately and manually by the producer (Huber and Runstein, 2009). Such a tool can repair a poor performance that is out of time and make it sound technically perfect.

2. 6 Contemporary production techniques and authenticity

An American singer and songwriter, Neko Case, expressed her views on auto-tune in the interview for Pitchfork. She claims that singing is not important anymore, as instead bad singing is fixed by the producer (2006). Case also argues that an artist who uses shift correction on vocals cannot be taken seriously, losing all the integrity. Moreover, the singer clearly points out that an artist's craft needs more work and thus, those who do not "spend this extra hour in the studio trying to hit the note" are not valid (Case, 2006).

Allison Moore, a singer from Nashville, goes one step further in her proclaiming about using modern production tools on records. She put a sticker on the front cover of her LP release, "Miss Fortune", which states "

Absolutely no vocal tuning or pitch-correction was used in the making of this record” (2002). She is a keen supporter of the view that albums should be recorded and mixed in the “ old” way, that is becoming progressively rare (Daley, 2003).

On the other hand, the guitarist of The White Stripes, The Raconteurs and The Dead Weather, Jack White argues that “ pop artists”, like Britney Spears can be more authentic than Tom Waits or Bob Dylan (2009). His rationale for such a controversial opinion was that he finds more authentic an artist whose musical expression is made the way they best know and feel. In other words, White points out that in the modern music world somebody who has grown listening mainly to pop (thus commercial, manufactured and by definition inauthentic) music, knows it as their primary way of articulating feelings and experiences and therefore is not pretentious, which leads to perceiving them as authentic (2009).

Some genres can be more focused on the authentic side of studio recording. An example of such an approach is Pearl Jam, representing grunge music. The band’s drummer, Matt Cameron called their album “ Riot Act” is an anti-Pro Tools record: “ It’s more interesting hearing musicians in a room playing hard, with the tempo fluctuating slightly as the band heats up. Perfection is boring (2009). He pointed out a significant thing about the modern technology by recalling one of the most popular DAWs as a synonym of commercial and unreal music.

Josh Binder argues that the features of pitch/timing of a recorded track does not have to be used only as a tool for fixing a bad performance. This young

producer, who has been learning his profession in the world that has already accepted the existence of digital retuning, claims that he uses Auto-Tune (one of the leading digital tools used for pitch correction) to enrich the vocal sound of even a perfectly sung track (2009).

An engineer, Michael Brauer, applies no limitations in terms of using available technologies to make a good-sounding record. He states that he is employed for the purpose of helping to make songs that can be sold, regardless of the artists' abilities (2009). Nevertheless, he still believes that one needs talent to be an artist and if they cannot sing or play at all, no technology can help them (2009).

2. 7 Conclusion

The subject of authenticity alone has generated vast amount of theoretical angles of consideration. This has been motivated by the very nature of it, assuming that perception of what is honest, genuine or integral depends on the actual perceiver. Moreover, three basic ways of interpreting the authentic have been specified, which determined further research direction.

Furthermore, the digital music production techniques have been described, clarifying how recorded sound can be changed or fixed by contemporary recording and mixing tools. The chapter also presented different perceptions on the relationship between digital production techniques and authenticity of an artist's craft.

Chapter III describes the methodology used for this study. A review of the study's purpose and investigated questions was presented. This is followed

by an outline of the research design and the survey instrument used for it, along with the procedures for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3. 0 Introduction

This chapter reflects the study's selected research methodology. As will be seen, the methodology is the subject of the purpose of this study and is supported by the evaluation of the most beneficial approach responding to the research questions. As such, this chapter presents the purpose of the study, the research questions and hypothesis, as well as discusses the data collection and data analysis procedures and the limitations of the research.

3. 1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of authenticity with specific focus on its perception as influenced by applying digital studio production techniques. The reason for doing so is determining what impact changing the recorded sound has on authenticity of an artist's craft. To fulfil this purpose, it was significant to review literature on authenticity, as well as on contemporary music production techniques. This necessitated an exploration of the nature of perceiving authenticity by music fans, producers (record manufacturers), as well as artists themselves. At the same time it was important to explore the ways in which recorded sound, being the performance can be edited, fixed and generally changed. All of this was done in order to fulfil the primary purpose of the study, which was the identification of the influence modern production practices can have on authenticity of an artist's skill.

As it can be presumed from the above, the current research has an explanatory purpose. According to Silverman, the aim for explanatory research is needed to define an occurrence or make a complex subject comprehensible (2006). This can be done by clarifying the correlations between variables. The purpose of the study aims to explain th