

Music and Youth Audiences in the Era of Musimorphose

Second Edition of the International Conference Musimorphoses
Faculté de Musique / Université de Montréal

June 8–10, 2017

Call for papers

Introduced in the early 2000s, the concept of “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001, 2009, 2011) emphasized the generational rupture entailed by the dissemination of digital technology beginning in the 1980s. Digital technology is thought to contribute to the socialization of youth audiences and direct their cultural practices in very specific ways, marked at once by the contents’ dematerialization and Internet networking. Although the concept has become popular, it has also been the subject of much critique: it designates only a segment of the youth population – students – rather than the whole; it is only partly or poorly periodized; it does not consider the effects of gender or social position; it unifies the “youth” into a group in which individual competencies in appropriating digital technology have gone unchallenged; and the category of “digital natives” seems too flexible to have the slightest operational and heuristic value for sociological analysis.

While limited by its unquestionable metaphorical reach, the concept nevertheless has brought our attention to a number of issues regarding the articulation between young audiences and digital technology. Enriching the theoretical frame notably put forth in Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, the predictive value of the influence of age and generation on matters of taste is being raised in several studies (Octobre and Mercklé), particularly concerning music. As Olivier Donnat (2016) has shown, the opposition between “popular” and “classical” is less important than that between “young” and “old” music, which seems to structure the space of music preferences. We might also question whether the musical experience – whether it be in the context of a concert or listening at home – is similar to or different than that experienced by the older generations prior to the digital revolution, both with regards to practices as well as to the various ways of conceiving music. Whether in a concert hall or at home, do we experience music in the same way as our elders, given how genres have become minutely segmented, free access has become predominant as physical media (vinyl records, cassette tapes, and CDs) give way to streaming, algorithms have become the principal means of getting recommendations, and cultural practices are by and large mediated by screens?

In analyzing the connections between innovation, digital technology, and music, the Musimorphoses network will devote its second international conference to the study of youth audiences. Organized in collaboration with OICRM (Faculté de musique, Université de Montréal) and following the inaugural event that took place in Paris in November 2015, the second edition of the Musimorphoses conference seeks to examine the following issues:

1/ « On ne change pas »: Effects of rupture, principles of continuity

How do we analyze the influence of age and generation on listening practices? How do we evaluate the changes in taste with increasing age? What kinds of research data are available to establish longitudinal comparisons? Is the “youth” category homogeneous, or rather quite scattered, regarding music practices? How might we analyze the threshold effects described by a number of authors, that occur, for example, with the transition from middle school to high school? What methodological resources are being used to study youth audiences, and do these audiences require a specific line of questioning? Do the variables of age and generation prevail over those of social position or gender to account for youths’ preferences? How can music be situated within the general context of the cultural practices of the youth? Are the practices of youth audiences identical, if we were to compare different contexts within and outside Europe?

2/ « Ton accordéon me fatigue Yvette »: Likes, dislikes

Studies on musical taste in youth audiences seem to indicate a clear polarization of their preferences around rap, R&B, etc., and, symmetrically, their dislikes around classical music. This phenomenon merits further analysis. Does it suggest that audience development for these genres is not likely, or only marginally so? What are the explanatory factors for likes and dislikes? Has digital technology contributed to the diversification of musical taste or rather to a homogenization of preferences for a limited number of artists?

3/ « On nous inflige des désirs qui nous affligent »: Mediation and recommendations

Given the observation regarding youth audiences’ disinterest in certain repertoires, what mediation strategies should be utilized, notably for schools and institutions? What are the objectives of mediation: increasing the cultural capital in youth audiences, offering them new experiences, or arousing their appetency? And how do we analyze the effects of music consumption organized primarily around the home computer, and which seems to have disrupted the activities traditionally carried out in spaces like multimedia libraries? For that matter, how might we analyze what appears to be, at first glance, a refusal to pay for music? What factors do the youth privilege most regarding listening: the quality of recommendations? sound quality? the quality of the social experience connected with the music? How have technological innovations modified the terms of the concert experience, by enabling audiences to watch an opera in a movie theater or listen to live streaming over the Internet?

4/ « Si j’avais un marteau »: Devices and their strategies

Youth audiences are perceived intuitively as particularly sensitive to technological innovations that affect how they listen to music. How might we describe their choices and practices of the devices they use? How might we explain the importance of headphones and their effect on the musical experience? What features of these devices are particularly appreciated or sought after? What is the history of innovation of digital listening devices? What do these devices and their practices tell us about the means of appropriating, classifying, archiving, and exchanging music today?

5/ « Mes amis, mes amours, mes emmerdes »: Musical socialization

Listening to music is an activity that cuts across relational spaces of variable proximity and geometry (parents and siblings, friends, networks of sociability ranging from strong to weak connections, romantic relationships). Here we are interested in the ways in which digital technology has modified – or maintained – the musical experience in the interactions between the young listener and his/her amicable, familial, social, and emotional environment. For instance, has digital technology contributed to young listeners' isolation from the sphere of parental influence by rendering their listening practices invisible? What is the relationship between the youth and his/her parents' tastes and music collection? Is the practice of making mix tapes (which allows the creator to stage his/her identity in giving the tapes to someone) still appropriate with digital media? What place does music occupy at teenagers' parties or in the schoolyard now that everyone can bring their own MP3 player or Bluetooth speaker?

6/ « J'suis snob »: Music and social models

The final point concerns how the youth perceive the representations conveyed by music, for instance, via YouTube videos. Are these representations desirable social models that enable the identification, for example, with subcultures, forms of social success, or ethnic communities? How do youth audiences perceive gendered and sometimes strongly sexualized models?

Information about submissions:

Paper proposals should include:

- The author's first and last name, and a brief biography (maximum 300 words)
- An email address
- The title of the paper
- An abstract of 750 to 1,000 words. The abstract should include an original proposition, and a description of the field and the methodological approach that will inform the paper.

Paper proposals (in English or in French) should be submitted to the conference's *EasyChair* platform by September 15, 2016 (final deadline). The platform will be activated from June 6, 2016, and accessible from the Musimorphoses conference website (<https://musimorphe.hypotheses.org/category/musimorphoses-2-le-colloque>) and the DPMQ website (<http://dpmq.oicrm.org/>).

Inquiries should be directed to the conference organizers at: musimorphoses2@gmail.com.

The results of the program committee's deliberations will be announced by October 31, 2016.

Registration:

There will be a registration fee for the conference, \$CAD 50 for students and \$CAD 75 for faculty.

Organizing committee:

Michel Duchesneau (*Université de Montréal*)
Irina Kirchberg (*Université de Montréal*)
Philippe Le Guern (*Université de Nantes, EHESS*)
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