THE *SCENE*: A CONCEPTUAL TEMPLATE FOR AN INTERACTIONIST APPROACH TO CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

Joseph A. Kotarba and Nicolas J. LaLone

ABSTRACT

The concept of the music scene *has served sociologists well in providing a template for studying the organization of various musical styles and the people who work together to create the musical experiences. Writers including Howard Becker, Richard Peterson, Andy Bennett, David Grazian, and Joseph Kotarba have explored music scenes ranging from jazz, blues and rock to country and Latino styles. Although there is no one consensual definition of music scene, the notion of* place*, in a physical, empirical, and geo-local sense, seems to be a universal concern in the literature. In this chapter, we will outline a more inclusive, interactionist-oriented, and updated concept of the music scene that is at once interactionist in tone and perspective, while sensitive to dramatic changes occurring both in the world of politics and in the world of digital media. Perhaps most importantly, the concept of* music scene *can*

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provide insight into the historical fact that, in spite of technological advancements, the live music experience is still at the heart of musical experiences across communities and cultures.

The concept of *music scene* has served as a very useful tool for the development of a social scientific literature on music. Although there are various configurations of the concept, it essentially points to a location where people get together to produce, perform, and enjoy, or other use music. Recent developments in communication technology and musical styles have created a need to refine and update the way we talk and write about music scenes. In this chapter, we will briefly review the literature on music scenes and provide illustrations of the application of the concept to various musical genres. We will then extend the concept to account for contemporary developments in the digital world of music. We will argue that, even as the technology mediating music has evolved dramatically in recent years, the key features of the concept hold. The most important feature of the concept of music scene is the lasting importance of the notion of *place* in the experience of music. The sense of place can be physical and immediate, historical and nostalgic, or futuristic and political. In the digital era we live in, place can involve any or all of these locations. Thus, we propose a *hybrid* model of the music scene. AU:2

VARIETIES OF MUSIC SCENES

Irwin's (1977) concept of scene is a useful framework for analyzing emerging cultural phenomena. The scene is an inclusive concept that involves everyone related to a cultural phenomenon (e.g., artists, audiences, management, vendors, and critics); the ecological location of the phenomenon (e.g., districts, clubs, recording studios, and rehearsal rooms); and the products of this interaction (e.g., advertisements, concerts, recordings, and critical reviews). Scenes generally evolve around entertainment-oriented phenomena, such as music, theater, and dance. People typically enter or join a scene for its expressive and direct gratification, not future gratification. Participation is voluntary, and access is generally available to the public, occasionally for the simple price of admission. Irwin's original formulation of the scene used illustrations from 1960s and 1970s California lifestyles,

but we apply his basic ideas to a contemporary situation in Houston in which music is the common medium textured by ethnic variation.

Shank (1994) applied his own operational meaning of scene to the production of music in Austin, TX. He describes the "6th Street" phenomenon, near to and nurtured by the University of Texas, in terms of its history, cultural roots, and economic context. His focus is on the effects the production of music scenes has on the identities of their participants, an area of interest in this study as well.

Bennett and Peterson's (2004) conceptualization of music scene focuses on the geo-social location that provides a stage on which all of the aesthetic, political, social, and cultural features of local music are played out. Peterson and Bennett also highlight the way participants use local music scenes to differentiate themselves from others. Silver, Clark, and Rothfield (2008, p. 5) have argued that what makes a scene "is the way … collections of amenities and people serve to foster certain shared values and tastes, certain ways of relating to one another and legitimating what one is doing (or not doing)." Further, scenes "answer questions about what is right, who or what is a proper authority, how we know and are known, what is the proper way to behave with and toward one another, what we are and what constitutes our core identities" (p. 13).

Bennett and Peterson proposed a model of music scenes in very much of an analog fashion: scenes were somewhat limited to time and location. Bennett and Peterson (2004) differentiated local from translocal and virtual music scenes. For example, Punks identify themselves through their proclivity to defy authority, their destructiveness, their clothing, and the area they live (Davis, 2006). Music scenes have become the normal or routine way of identifying other members of a scene.

Local scenes are also referred to as local communities that include what Howard Becker referred to as, "everyone involved the cooperation of everyone whose activity has anything to do with the end result" (Becker, 1982). In this case, the "end result" would be some sort of music and membership that could include everyone from fans, makeup artists, t-shirt makers, and graphic designers to band members, studio technicians, and club owners. This "local" is usually more about geography than it is about the music itself. As an example, the music scene of Austin, TX, maintains its identity through the music festivals South by Southwest and Austin City Limits (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). The Austin scene is distinctive and lasting, even though the styles of music performed and celebrated are many and fashionably fluid in popularity. The connections made during this festival spread the community of Austin, making sure that it remains an identity that carries into a new

festival. In a nonmusical example, The Burning Man brings artists together from around the world to maintain the identity that originated in the first shows that occurred there (Kozinets, 2001). The identity this well-known festival has maintained for the last decade is thanks entirely to the type of people who are most likely to attend it – technologists, programmers, and other tech industry professionals (Turner, 2009). Sometimes, local scenes escape their community. For example, the grunge movement in Seattle is an example of a local scene that quickly became translocal.

Translocal scenes are like local scenes but scattered around the world in tiny communities. In essence, translocal scenes are many local scenes connected together through a common cause, band, or identity (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). These scenes exist outside geography though they often originate in some "place." Translocal scenes are unique. The sense of place that is usually crucial to a scene is transformed through an act of translation. The local from somewhere else travels to a new "place." Or, to put it another way, a new community forms out of many different communities. Each "different" community imitates someone else's scene. The most common example of a translocal music scene is that of the Beatles (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). The Beatles became a sensation in England and through the new technologies available at the time, the Beatles' image and sound travelled to America. By the time the Beatles landed in the United States, American audiences had already decided what to make of them. A new scene had formed around the Beatles, but one based on a geography that had been translated to various localities around the United States. Translocal scenes are further complicated by even newer communication technologies. The third type of scene, the virtual scene, recalibrates the local.

At their core, virtual scenes take the place of local scenes. However, the local here is a place that exists within the Internet – a network of connections that forms a local maintained by the technology those members use to communicate. As the digital world sprung up around us throughout the 1990s (Khan, Gilani, & Nawaz, 2012), however, our mediated lives have changed. Time and place took on new meaning as certain aspects of our lives began to follow us around in real time, impacting us in ways they could not before (Latour, 2007). Music scenes could now carry on past the time concerts or performances occurred in ways that radically altered the speed and veracity through which members could maintain it. Before sites like *MySpace*, *Facebook*, *SoundCloud*, or any of the DIY blog communities gained members, music scenes were identified primarily by where they were and what was being produced. When Bennett and Peterson wrote about these in 2004, MySpace and Friendster had just recently begun to gather steam and change

the virtual scenes. As such, to these two authors, the virtual scene revolved around virtual newsletters, zines, alt.bin newsgroups, and forum communities. Blogs had begun to become popular but were often centered on a product like Livejournal, Xanga, and Word Press. Virtual worlds had also begun to become popular through games like *Habitat, Meridian 59, Everquest*, *The Sims Online*, and *Dark Age of Camelot*. When Bennett and Peterson released their edited volume in 2004, the very nature of virtual was undergoing an intense series of changes. In light of these changes, we believe that the very core of the literature on music scenes needs to be updated.

The scholarly goal now becomes the assembly of a general model of music scenes that transcends style and accounts for radical changes in mediation. Kotarba, Fackler, and Nowotny (2009) proposed a model of the music scene that they applied to the growing and exciting world of Latino music. This model included performers, audiences, producers, critics, and of course the music itself. They added two important components to the mix. The first is the notion of *idioculture*. Fine's (1979) interactionist concept of idioculture "argues that cultural creation and usage can be examined by conceptualizing cultural forms as originating in a small-group context" (p. 733). The researcher is better able to examine and understand the culture of a small group because the behavior associated with that culture is observable – in contrast to either societal cultures or subcultures. Cultural experiences are triggered by events that actually take place in peoples' lives, in their own communities.

The second new component is a specific and direct reference to *place*. Whereas the concept of scene suggests the location in which music contributes to the ongoing experience of self, a comforting sense of place is the desirable outcome of participation in music scenes. We engage in a reflexive relationship with the places we occupy. We make places as places make us, our selves, and our identities (Gruenewald, 2003). In terms of music, Cohen (1995, p. 434) notes that "music plays a role in producing place as a material setting compromising the physical and built environment; as a setting for everyday social relations, practices, and interactions; and as a concept or symbol that is represented or interpreted." The consumption and production of music also draw people together and symbolize their sense of collectivity and place.

The purpose of this chapter is to propose a new model of music scene we call the *hybrid scene*. This concept takes into account all of the relevant dimensions of many contemporary music scenes, which have a way of being local, translocal, and virtual at the same time. In addition, they also have a way of being digital. We can assemble the disparate groups across nations,

languages, technologies, and cultures – across mediums, media, codecs, and formats. The virtual that allows a scene to travel around a globe also allows many individuals to participate within a scene in a myriad of ways to which we are only beginning to have access. This chapter presents two brief examinations of moments when different types of scenes blended together and created a hybrid.

First, we examine the Arab Spring, also known as the Arab Awakening (Khouri, 2011). During this time, citizens from many different Arab countries and many different Arab communities around the world combined their efforts to release the conservative, traditional Arab community behind (Wright, 2011). They sought to establish a new Arab identity, one that embraced the west without sacrificing the Arab essence. The remarkable thing about this awakening was how many different modes of communication the activists harnessed to spread their message around the world. While we do not have room to discuss the political and technological implications of the Arab Awakening in detail, we will discuss the music produced during these revolutions. In particular, we will discuss how these revolutions utilized web services like *Twitter*, video content through *YouTube* and *Vimeo*, and social networks like *Facebook*.

Second, we will discuss the recent appearance of holographic Tupac Shakur on the concert stage with Snoop Doggy Dog. The virtual representation of a deceased gangsta rapper was "creepy" (Carone, 2012). However, across the world, Japanese audiences are watching in awe as their new pop idol, Hatsune Miku, a voice synthesizer program given a virtual body to perform with onstage with a real band (Meyers, 2012). The technologies behind these two striking virtual scenes even further challenge the static concept of scenes. Finally, we will conclude with a brief overview of what is next for the concept of *scene*. As we grow more augmented, as our ability to express ourselves changes, the very concept of art is being challenged. By changing the way we approach the study of a scene, we gain a more dynamic means to explore the world of art.

THE ARAB AWAKENING

The formation of an identity that was both Arabic and "western" began shortly after the World Trade Center attack in 2001 (Khosrokhavar, 2012;

Wright, 2011). The political unrest amongst younger citizens in Arabic nations grew as their conservative governments slowly degraded due to sanctions imposed on them because of their conservative religious beliefs (Wright, 2011). Most notably, frustrated that he could not afford official bribes to the police of Tunisia, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in December 2010 and died a week later on January 4, 2011 (Wright, 2011). Bouazizi's death symbolized the beginning of the collective series of events referred to as the Arab Spring.

The more acceptable name for these revolutions is the Arab Awakening (Khosrokhavar, 2012; Khouri, 2011). The reason for this is that the former name is assigned by outsiders whereas the latter is self-created (Khosrokhavar, 2012). Awakening symbolizes the Arab people's sudden and collective desire to cast off conservative fundamentalism for more complex identities involving western materialism (Wright, 2011). Within days of Bouazizi's death, another 15 people in five different Arab nations had emulated his sacrifice (Wright, 2011), but there was more to the start of this revolution than a heroic suicide. Concomitant to the desire for desire to meld the identities of western and Arab worlds, there were multiple communities assembling into a new type of scene, what we call the hybrid music scene.

A month before Bouazizi's symbolic suicide, an Arab hip-hop artist named El Gènèral recorded and uploaded a song to *Facebook* named "Rais LeBled." This song's title was a play on the symbolism of the office of the President of Tunisia ("Rais el-Bled") and was meant to challenge the obvious corruption present within the government (Walt, 2011). The song, illegal because the president had forbidden El Gènèral from performing in public, being played on the radio, and from recording CDs, exploded in popularity. After recording and releasing two more songs on his *Facebook* account, the Tunisian government shut down his account, shut off his cell phone, and arrested him (Walt, 2011; Westand, 2011). For three days, El Gènèral remained in prison while the public uproar in Tunisia bled over into a full on revolt. By the end of January 2010, El Gènèral appeared onstage with Mannoubia Bouazizi, the mother of Mohammed Bouazizi (Wright, 2011). El Gènèral's "Rais LeBled" had become the anthem of the revolutions starting to take place throughout nearly every Arab nation. The communication tools, locale, and people that needed to come together to help these series of events occur demonstrate the power of the hybrid scene.

AU:5

Hybridity, in this sense, is the combination of all aspects of the local, translocal, and virtual scenes that had been established previously. El Gènèral was certainly not the first rapper from an Arab nation, and he certainly was not the first rapper to use the Internet to affect change or even to create a virtual scene out of a political debate. However, he was one of the most notable musicians in these scenes in that his message required a virtual method of communication to get his message outside of a scene. The President of Tunisia, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali had been systematically severing all ties to the outside world. By banning "Rais LeBled," he had inadvertently created a new type of scene. With the performer himself cut off from performances, recordings on CD, and constantly followed, the only choice he had left was to upload it to somewhere that other people could see without fear of government retribution.

Facebook as a tool of the revolution had begun to rise because of the Iranian revolution the previous year (Khosrokhavar, 2012). In reaction to and fear of a repeat uprising, governments like Tunisia's had begun taking steps to ensure that the ability of people using cell phones and computers to communicate outside the country was under their control (Khosrokhavar, 2012). The scenes involved here were populated by established citizens of Tunisia who had formed virtual communities based on art, politics, or government. In addition to this was a translocal scene based on El Gènèral's love of American rapper Tupac Shakur (Walt, 2012). This love was shared by all rappers in the Arab nations who took part in this collection of

revolutions. The most popular of these, the Palestinian group Da Arabian MC (DAM) was also part of a hybrid scene for similar reasons (Inskeep, 2011; Khaf, 2012). Their inability to leave Lyd, a West Bank city in Israel, forced them to find solace and collaborators online. When their song, "Min Irhabi" ("Who's the Terrorist?"), became popular in 2001, the Israeli government began to take steps to silence them. El Gènèral and DAM both share their love of Tupac Shakur and Public Enemy headman Chuck D (Inskeep, 2011; Khaf, 2012; Walt, 2011).

Ultimately, this hybrid scene was a combination of physical performances by El Gènèral that resulted in a political action to ban those performances. The local scene was eliminated. El Gènèral then began a virtual scene when his songs were uploaded to *Facebook* and eventually to *YouTube*. However, El Gènèral himself is a member of a translocal scene that of politically motivated gangsta rap. His love of Tupac Shakur is well documented and his similarity to previous bands like DAM symbolize a translocal community that is unable to communicate or form local communities due to their travel restrictions again imposed by political action. The categories of "Virtual," "local," and "translocal" fail to capture the nature of the music that symbolized these revolutions. The hybrid scene must exist in this case. While this scene was based on geo-physical-political reality in the real world, it took on a life of its own to some degree on the Internet. The new media did not simply transmit information about the revolution; they became a home to revolutionary activities.

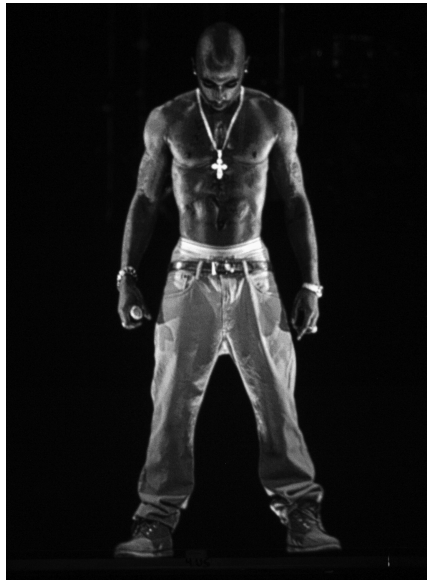
VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE IN THE REAL WORLD

We have examined the process by which actions in the real world are augmented by the virtual. This augmentation is not simply one way, since the virtual can also be augmented by the real. For example, the cartoon and digitally designed band *The Gorillaz* is a virtual mask for a real band. Another way that virtual scenes have impacted reality is through the ability to catalog video and audio performances long after a performer's death. However, the digitization of music is long studied and this aspect of the virtual scene is mostly taken for granted now so we will focus on the representation of the artist. Of particular interest when discussing music scenes is a novel named *Idoru* (Gibson, 1996). This novel, from cyberpunk author

William Gibson, offers another means through which the virtual spaces could create or maintain a scene, holograms, or a holographic performer. Through a hologram, an artificial intelligence becomes a pop idol complete with performances in virtual space or real space, or both at the same time. Even though she is virtual, love and all the complicated human emotions musicians elicit remain the same. After falling in love with her in cyberspace, an actual musician from the real world – now digitized inside the virtual world – tries to propose to her. What Gibson ultimately describes in *Idoru* is a hybrid scene – an imbalanced mixture of local, translocal, and virtual.

The hybrid scene in Gibson's *Idoru* integrates the reality of a local scene (Japanese pop music) to a virtual space (virtual Tokyo) that everyone could log in to and visit from anywhere in the world. Some would visit so often that they could be considered residents. At all times, this virtual pop star exceeded expectations by producing wonderful music with even more sultry performances. She was an ideal female body type that was created by a predominantly male design team that was meant to emulate male desire and imply femininity for females to aspire for. The implications of this particular fact resonate with the developments of virtual performance in the world, as we know it today because recently, two holograms have made it onto real stages in real cities, one based on a human hip-hop artist (Tupac Shakur) and one created to embody a "moe" pop artist (Hatsune Miku). Moe, in this sense, is a "euphoric" response from fans to an object that is particular to Japanese fans who are also called "otaku" (Galbraith, 2009).

The most recent, notable performance of a hologram in the United States was that of Tupac Shakur at the Cochella music festival in 2012. Shakur paved the way for hip-hop at a very early age. Before his brutal murder in Las Vegas in 1996 at the age of 25, Tupac recorded 11 albums worth of material (four albums released before his death, seven released posthumously). He has been hailed as one of the most successful and influential rappers of all time and has sold over 75 million albums around the world (Greenburg, 2010). His albums have inspired a variety of rap artists around the world. Shakur's song, "Dear Mama" was one of 25 songs entered into the national recording registry of the Library of Congress in 2010 (Associated Press, 2010). Because of his popularity and symbolism, because of the translocal scene he had created, noted rap entrepreneur, Dr. Dre, took steps to bring him back to life (Kosner, 2012).



Dr. Dre approached Digital Domain – a company founded by James Cameron, Stan Wilson, and Scott Ross – and asked them to create a holographic Tupac Shakur (BlackMediaScoop.com, 2012). To do this, Digital Domain gathered records of Tupac's live performances and combined them with cutting-edge computer-generated graphics. They then used an old-haunted house trick called Pepper's Ghost that reflected light off glass to produce an illusion. In this case, however, Digital Domain partnered with another company called Musion that has developed a 3D mode of projection that takes a specially developed foil that reflects a projected image onto a pane of mylar glass. The most interesting aspect of this was that Dr. Dre didn't want to recreate a translocal scene using old footage of Tupac performing songs he had already been recorded performing, but that he wanted to create an illusion, a virtual Tupac. Dr. Dre, who reportedly "has a massive vision for this," is creating a new scene – a hybrid scene (BlackMediaScoop.com, 2012). There are plans to take Tupac on tour in the future. The implications for this scene are clear. A human symbol, recreated digitally and sent on tour for live performances around the country, disassembles the neatness of the three-scene model (local, translocal, and virtual).

The virtualness of Tupac remains anchored to the local, however. The sale of this particular illusion requires the inclusion of those in the original scene: old fans and friends of Tupac. Because he died at the height of his popularity, his fans and friends want to see him perform again as they pass stories on to their children (Ajanaku, 2012). Dr. Dre is simply plugging into a previously existing scene with a virtual entity. Tupac was not the only hologram that has been created. Digital Domain's next project is rumored to be digital Elvis Presley; they will no doubt plug into an existing scene whose members have been clamoring that Elvis is still alive since his "death" in 1977 (Kaufman, 2012). These two illusions require an established scene for which a virtual scene can be established and marketed. For a hybrid scene to occur, the virtual performer must be more than simple analog recordings.

The illusion that Dr. Dre created began in the real world and travelled to the virtual. It created a hybrid culture that travelled from the real to the virtual and united them on a stage. This scene also travels in the other direction. For example, Madonna performed onstage with the virtual mask of Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett, *The Gorillaz*, during the 2006 Grammy's. All four members of the band appeared onstage as Madonna walked around singing the recent *Gorillaz* hit single, "Feel Good, Inc." Each member of the band had prerecorded, prerendered performance onstage but, unlike Tupac, the four-man band was far more complicated to present onstage than the solo Tupac. Unlike Tupac Shakur, every aspect of the band had to be designed from scratch; there was no real entity to build from. The Grammy performance of *The Gorillaz* was meant to be the beginning of a world tour. However, Hewlett and Albarn cancelled the tour after the stress of the Grammy performance showed them how difficult and expensive the tour was going to be (Gorillaz-Unofficial, 2007).

More to the point is the virtual girl Hatsune Miku, the 7th version of the "Vocaloid" series – complicated voice-synthesizer software created by Crypton Future Media in Japan. The vocaloid series are virtual "cute females that professionals can create from" (Crypton, 2007). The "-oid" suffix is a computing term that serves as an identifier or name for objects in computer software. Hatsune Miku (初音ミク), whose name is roughly translated as "Voice from the Future" (Digital Meets Culture, 2012), was released in 2007 for the retail cost of $175. The software allows users to write songs that this virtual girl sings for them. The pitch, tempo, and words are all open and available for users to manipulate, and her vocal range is not limited by anything but the user's imagination (Digital Meets Culture, 2012). Because this program is a for-profit venture, it remains a closed source product (Leavitt, 2011). This

means that the product is unavailable for modification at the programmatic level. However, different tools have been created by users that allowed this program to become successful in ways that had not been anticipated. A user-created tool has allowed a manipulatable 3D model to read the words Miku would speak (Leavitt, 2011). This model is a representation of Hatsune Miku who can then be placed, performing songs created in her program, into moves that can be uploaded to sites like *YouTube*.

For those who are not aware of the virtual pop idol from Japan, she has invaded other aspects of culture in the United States: an internet meme named Nyan Cat (Leavitt, 2011). The scene around Miku, most notably a virtual one, grew with her popularity as she began to appear in manga (comic books), video games, and fan-created animations (Leavitt, 2011). Beginning in 2009, she started to appear in concerts in the real world – the virtual scene began to create independent local scenes. And, she has not remained in Japan. In addition to Tokyo, Miku has performed several times in the United States at Japanese Pop Culture-related events (AnimeNewsNetwork, 2012). The virtual scene has transitioned into a hybrid one.

CONCLUSION

Hybrid scenes are becoming more and more common as the ability of technology to broadcast in 3D becomes more cost effective. Additionally, government action taken against the freedom to perform, assemble, and speak in physical space creates new types of scenes that quickly grow and shift. Local scenes quickly become translocal scenes when they travel throughout the virtual. As we can see, the need to create a new terminology of hybridity between these scenes grows daily. The concept of the *hybrid scene* allows us to further explore innovations in the act of music creation as well as innovative types of musical instruments like the vocaloid project ("Hatsune Miku").

Perhaps most importantly, the concept of *music scene* can provide insight into the historical fact that, in spite of technological advancements, the live music experience is still at the heart of musical experiences across communities and cultures. Real revolutionary youth are listening, on their cell phones, to revolutionary music in the streets of Alexandria and Damascus. Real music fans will pay for tickets to attend the "live" in concert performances of Tupac. School children are sharing knowledge of and

experience with Miku in playgrounds and cafeterias around the (real) world. In spite of the fact that our personal listening devices have earbuds and not speakers, we still enjoy and appreciate music in the presence of others. We do this in ever more complex music scenes.

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