

TURNTABLISM AND AUDIO ART STUDY 2009

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Radio Policy
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SUMMARY

Turntablism and audio art are becoming more common forms of expression on community and campus stations. Turntablism refers to the use of turntables as musical instruments, essentially to alter and manipulate the sound of recorded music. Audio art refers to the arrangement of excerpts of musical selections, fragments of recorded speech, and 'found sounds' in unusual and original ways. The following paper outlines past and current difficulties in regulating these newer genres of music. It reports on an examination of programs from 22 community and campus stations across Canada.

Given the abstract, experimental, and diverse nature of these programs, it may be difficult to incorporate them into the CRTC's current music categories and the current MAPL system for Canadian Content.

Nonetheless, turntablism and audio art reflect the diversity of Canada's artistic community.

1 HISTORY

Turntablism, which is sometimes referred to as 'DJ-ing', and audio art are newer forms of musical expression. Both genres rely heavily on the use of technology to alter existing sounds or pre-recorded music.

1.1 Definition: Turntablism

The term 'turntablism' was first coined in 1995 by DJ Babu (Christo Macias) of the Beat Junkies to describe a form of advanced turntable music stemming from hip-hop and DJ-ing. In 1996, Macias offered the following definition of the form:

...A turntablist is a person who uses the turntables not to play music, but to manipulate sound and create music¹.

The International Turntablism Federation (ITF), the organization which organizes yearly turntablist tournaments, offered a similar description in the same year:

Turntablist: One who uses the phonograph turntable as a component to make music as well as an instrument to literally play music.²

The distinction between turntablist and DJ is often confusing. The art of turntablism involves the simultaneous manipulation of two or more turntables to create *new* compositions. It differs from DJ-ing, where musical selections are blended one after the other.

¹ Macias as cited in Madan, Emmanuel. *Music Availability Study for Campus Radio.*, 1999 :19
http://web.archive.org/web/20010320065058/http://www.crtc.gc.ca/ENG/Proc_br/NOTICES/1999/1999-30e/study_e.htm

² ITF as cited in Madan, Emmanuel. *Music Availability Study for Campus Radio.*, 1999 :19

1.2 A Brief History of DJ Mixing

A DJ mix is a sequence of musical selections that create a constant and fluid stream of music. Until the 1970s, DJs in nightclubs linked consecutive records with chat and banter. However, the role of the DJ was revolutionized when Francis Grasso, a popular disc jockey from New York City, invented slip-cueing. While one record is playing on one turntable, a second is set up to its desired starting position on another turntable which is held stationary. When the second turntable is released, its record starts immediately, producing an instant and synchronized switch from one recording to the other. This creates a continuous and seamless mix where the fading from one record to the other is easy.

The DJ can also alter the speed and pitch of the two recordings. By the late 1980s, as club culture grew in popularity, many DJs had become more famous than the recording artists they played. For example, a popular night club DJ could acquire more fans and a bigger following than some of the obscure selections they were playing. Many DJs had also transitioned into recording 'mixed tapes', 75 minute DJ sets that are released on CD.

Although there have been significant technological advances since the 1990s, slip-cueing and the use of pitch control have remained integral parts of DJ mixing. DJ mixing provides the foundation for turntablism³.

1.3 Evolution to Turntablism

Turntablism involves the use of turntables as instruments. Much like a violinist uses his bow to create various musical effects, the turntablist uses his hands to 'scratch' the records. Scratching involves pushing and pulling the records on the turntable to create backwards sections, short stabs, loops and musical bursts. This has its best effect when a mixer is used to cut and fade between the two turntables. Turntablism evolved to have its own terminology and styles, ranging from the 'baby scratch', a sharp forward and backwards movement, to the 'crab scratch', a complex four finger movement of the fader at the same time as the record is scratched⁴.

For more information on turntablism culture and techniques, see Appendix A

1.4 Definition: Audio Art

Audio art is a diverse artistic practice that considers the notions of sound as its predominant focus. Like many genres of contemporary art, audio art is interdisciplinary in nature and may take on hybrid forms. It often encompasses acoustics⁵, psychoacoustics⁶, electronics, noise music⁷, audio media and technology, found and environmental sound, explorations of the human body, and more. Much like turntablism, audio art relies heavily on technology. Turntables are

³ Fulford-Jones, Will. *Mix*. Grove Music Online: Oxford University Press, 2008

⁴ Peel, Ian. *Scratching*. Grove Music Online: Oxford University Press, 2008

⁵ The scientific study of sound, especially of its generation, transmission, and reception

⁶ A branch of science dealing with the perception of sound, the sensations produced by sounds, and the notions of communication.

⁷ Music composed of non-traditional musical elements, and lacking the structure associated with either Western or Eastern music. A noise musician may incorporate, for example, tape hiss, manipulated recordings (e.g. intentionally scratched or skipping vinyl recordings), machine noise, feedback of various sorts, non-musical vocal elements, etc.

and guitarists. For example, in 1996 Canadian turntablist Kid Koala (Eric San) was the first North American DJ to be signed with UK label, Ninja Tunes. Since then, he has released four albums with Ninja Tunes and four others with various labels. He has opened for the Beastie Boys on their world tour, 'Hello Nasty', and has collaborated and toured with artists such as Radiohead and Bjork¹⁰.

While audio art programming seems to be less popular than turntablism, it exists on some community and campus stations. Like turntablism, it is showcased in both live-on-the-air performances and in pre-recorded material.

2 BACKGROUND: *Campus Radio Policy Review, 1999-2000*

Public Notice CRTC 1999-30¹¹ set out a proposed policy for turntablism and audio art:

New forms of expression

57. During the consultation process, campus stations raised questions about new forms of artistic expression, such as *turntablism* and *radio art*. In particular, campus stations suggested that they should be permitted to include such programming, when it is performed by a Canadian, for the purposes of calculating compliance with the Canadian content regulations.

58. The Commission understands that *turntablism* refers to the use of one or more turntables to alter (for example, by scratching, changing the speed, or adding effects) and combine parts of pre-recorded music to the extent that the turntable is used as a musical instrument. Some parties argue that *turntablists* are musicians who use turntables to create new and unique musical compositions.

59. The Commission understands that *radio art* refers to programming pieces in which fragments of recorded noise, speech, music and "found sounds" (that is, sounds produced by everyday machinery or technology or otherwise found in the ordinary environment) are arranged in original or unusual ways.

60. Both turntablism and radio art exist outside of the campus radio community. While turntablism has existed since the mid-1990s, radio art originated in the 1920s and 1930s. The *Music Availability Study for Campus Radio* provides more information about the definition and history of both of these forms of expression.

¹⁰ <http://www.ninjatune.net/kidkoala/>

¹¹ Public Notice CRTC 1999-30, *Call for comments on a proposed new policy for campus radio*, <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/1999/PB99-30.htm>

61. The Commission acknowledges that turntablism and radio art may be forms of artistic expression that are important parts of the programming of some campus stations. It may be argued that since this programming is not generally aired by other radio stations, its broadcast by campus stations adds to the diversity of the broadcasting system. In this sense, the provision of such programming may be seen as part of the role and mandate of campus stations.

62. However, the Commission does not consider that it has had sufficient input to determine, at this time, whether such programming should qualify as Canadian for the purposes of the Canadian content regulations. For example, in the case of radio art, it is not clear whether radio art comprised primarily of speech or "found sounds" could be considered as a "musical selection" for the purposes of the Canadian content regulations. The Commission notes that, currently, under the *Radio Regulations, 1986* (the regulations), only Canadian musical selections are considered in calculating compliance with the Canadian content regulations.

63. In light of these concerns, the Commission invites responses from all interested parties on the questions set out below:

(4) Is the programming produced in periods of radio art music? Under what circumstances, if any, could a piece of radio art qualify as a Canadian musical selection? How can the difference between music and spoken word programming be defined?

(5) Should broadcasters be permitted to include a period of turntablism, performed live on the air by a Canadian, as a Canadian musical selection? If so, how should such periods be defined so as to distinguish them from other ways of presenting music on the air?

(6) Would the recognition of turntablism and radio art as Canadian musical selections for the purposes of the Canadian content regulations contribute to the objectives of the Act?

Public Notice CRTC 2000-12¹² outlines the Commission's revised policy for campus radio and responds to comments received regarding new forms of expression:

New forms of expression

40. The Commission received a number of comments in support of and in opposition to the recognition of turntablists or performers of radio art as "artists" for the purpose of the "MAPL" definition for Canadian selections under section 2.2(2) of the regulations. None of the parties offered any proposals or suggestions as to how these new forms of expression could be clearly defined for the purpose of the Canadian content requirements.

41. Accordingly, the Commission has decided not to recognize turntablists or performers or radio art as artists for the purpose of the MAPL definition. However, the Commission recognizes that some of these performances do contain distinct excerpts of musical selections, and may qualify as montages under the regulations for the purpose of receiving recognition as Canadian selections.

42. Pursuant to section 2 of the regulations, a montage is defined as:

A compilation of one minute or more in duration containing excerpts from several musical selections but does not include a medley.

43. Under section 2.2 (11) of the regulations, a montage is deemed to be a Canadian musical selection broadcast in its entirety if:

the total duration of the excerpts of Canadian musical selections from content Category 2 is greater than 50% of the total duration of the montage; [and] the total duration of the montage is four minutes or more.

44. Since turntablism and radio art are new forms of expression that have the potential of becoming more popular in the future, the Commission will follow developments in this area and will review its approach as necessary.

3 SURVEY 2008

3.1 Method:

The NCRA sent an email to all its members requesting information about turntablism and audio art programming. Stations were asked to submit programming that featured either turntablism or audio art or both. Stations were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Does your station have any shows dedicated to Turntablism and/or Audio Art (if both, please differentiate)
2. If yes, please indicate the name of the show, when it airs, and a brief description (please include relevant genre differentiation).

¹² Public Notice CRTC 2000-12, *Campus radio policy*, <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2000/PB2000-12.htm>

3. Does your station have programs that include Turntablism and/or Audio Art as a component of their programming?
4. If yes, please indicate the name of the show, when it airs, and a brief description (please include relevant genre differentiation)

Nine stations responded to this request, and this information was forwarded to CRTC staff.

CRTC staff then directly contacted community and campus stations who did not respond to the NCRA's request, but whose program schedule suggested turntablism and audio art programming were present. Program schedules were retrieved from the Internet and stations were contacted by telephone.

A formal letter was sent to all stations who either responded to the NCRA's request or who were contacted by telephone by CRTC staff. The letter expressed an interest in receiving programming that features both live and pre-recorded material as well as shows that use music in unusual ways, no matter how little music is actually featured. Stations were also asked to submit accompanying play lists.

In total, 22 stations responded and 99 programs were submitted.

CRTC staff carefully listened to all submissions while noting trends and similarities.

3.2 Results: Patterns/Trends

While programming content varied tremendously from station to station and from show to show, the following categories were observed:

- 1.) Turntablism in Urban, Hip Hop shows
 - programs that use sample-based turntablism, 'scratching', and sound effects.
- 2.) Turntablism in Techno, House, Dance shows
 - programs that use DJ mixing and sample-based turntablism.
- 3.) Turntablism under the larger umbrella of Audio Art.
 - programs that use turntablism as means of creating new and unusual sounds with or without music, and also includes experimental programs of non-traditional types of music

Within each of these categories, are two sub-categories:

- 1.) Those which featured pre-recorded material
 - music by turntablists and sound artists who have released albums
- 2.) Those which incorporate live performance
 - programs where the turntables and sound equipment are manipulated in real-time (on-air performances)

Of the 22 stations who submitted programs, 18 featured programming specifically for pre-recorded turntablism and audio art.

3.3 Examples of programs using pre-recorded musical selections:

CFRC- Kingston

Speaking in Scratch (description provided by host):

Speaking in Scratch is inspired by the founders of turntablism like the Invisible Scratch Pickles, Dj Qbert, Mixmaster Mike, Dj Shadow and Cut Chemist-and then I branch out from there. I play a lot of scratching and beat juggling sounds- I try and play recent and upcoming Djs, with a focus on local and Canadian talent (this usually ends up encompassing a wider hip hop genre) I look to recent and past DMC and other Dj competitions for some of these artists of these artists. The structure on my show usually involves playing a lot of music, with frequent tidbits on the artists, information on their history, interviews etc. Some examples of artists I frequently play include: Kid Koala, Dj A Trak, Dj T-Rock, Dj Cam, Dj Faust, Dj, Babu, The Allies, Scatch Perverts, X-men etc.

CILU-Thunder Bay

Frequency (description provided by host)

This is an electronica and dance music program with features largely remixed selections (e.g. Sarah McLachlan- I Love You- BT Mix, Kylie Minogue-Slow- Chemical Brothers Remix)

3.4 Examples of live-on-the air programs:

CFRU-Guelph

*Mannlicher Carcano*_(description provided by host)

The show is an hour of improvised music, coming live from at least 3 different locations. The host of the show is at CFRU, but the other people making the music are in San Francisco (we get him through the phone hybrid) and at the Trent radio station (which we get a live stream of). The person in Peterborough is picking up the CFRU stream online, and then the person in Guelph brings in the Peterborough stream, which causes a two minute delay. It's an absolutely insane a show, but sometimes it works really well. What often ends up happening is that the SF guy creates a bed of noise, which is beamed back and forth between Guelph and Peterborough to make it even more wild. The guy in Guelph plays around with various junk instruments, and controls the levels of all the contributors. He also plays around with some vinyl and some just warped sounds. Guests are often invited into the studio. Anything goes. A wild noise results, and there are occasional moments of genius. Archives can be assessed at www.cfru.ca

CFRC-Kingston

The Night Wounds Time (description provided by host)

This is an experimental music program with a diverse range of styles (e.g. prog rock, post-rock, avant-garde jazz, modern composition, electro-acoustic). This program broadcasts audio art pieces on a regular basis, generally from the electro-acoustic scene.

CJSF-Burnaby

Sleizure (description provided by host)

Sleizure describes itself as follows: “A whole other set of electronic music exists past the point of what is commonly heard in today’s clubs and late night events. For those of you who like things a bit harder, weirder, and experimental we invite you to check out SLEIZURE. Combining the three elements of Sleaze, Seizure, and Leisure, SLEIZURE exposes you to harder sounds from the world and from recorded interstellar transmissions. Mixed live in the studio by Gene Eric using a combination of turntables, samplers, CD players, and synthesizers to create a show unlike anything else in the city”. (<http://www.sleizure.ca>)

NOTE: In the case of pre-recorded material, all stations surveyed always identified the turntablists or audio artists as the ‘artist’ on the accompanying play sheets. However, with live performance, 20 of the 22 stations were unable to produce play lists and are unsure how to log ‘artist’.

4 SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

4.1 Difficulty with using MAPL System to determine Canadian Content Status:

The MAPL criteria are difficult to apply to turntablism and audio art, primarily for reasons of artistic merit and copyright.

M (music)—the music is composed entirely by a Canadian

Both turntablism and audio art use existing musical excerpts and sounds to create new orchestrations. Sometimes the musical excerpt is distinguishable, while at other times, it is not.

A (artist) --- the music is, or the lyrics are, performed principally by a Canadian

Turntablism uniquely manipulates turntables like instruments. In the case of a live broadcast or a turntablism performance, the line between artist and mixer often becomes blurred. It also raises copyright issues: for example, artists could have difficulty with a ruling that they would no longer be considered the creator/artists of their own recordings when their recordings were played and altered by a turntablist on air.

As noted in the BACKGROUND section, ‘montage’ refers to:

a compilation of one minute or more in duration containing excerpts from several musical selections but does not include a medley

Turntablism and audio art are more complex than a montage, which is essentially DJ mixing, because it displays a compositional element- one where sounds are re-arranged like the notes in a score.

P (production)—the musical selection consists of a live performance that is

(i) recorded wholly in Canada, or

(ii) performed wholly in Canada and broadcast live in Canada

If the turntablist is recognized as the artist/performer, then production can be claimed as Canadian.

L (lyrics) --- the lyrics are written entirely by a Canadian

Sometimes lyrical “hooks” can be identified in turntablism. However, these hooks are used for compositional purposes; they are most often used for purposes of emphasis, like a cadence is used at the end of a musical phrase.

The artistic boundaries between turntablism and audio art are often blurred. At times the musical excerpt(s) may be completely altered and thus unrecognizable, yet at other times, the selection may be distinguishable.

According to Ellen Waterman, assistant professor of cultural studies at Trent University:

Radio art may be concerned with the same ingredients as music, such as form, rhythm, timbre, repetition, pattern and dynamics, but it goes beyond music because it includes all manner of sounds not commonly considered music. Simply put, it is an aesthetic response to sound, a definition that would include music, but goes beyond the conventions of music. It is these conventions of music that have long been called into question by such diverse thinkers as John Cage, Murray Schafer, Edgar Varese, and Kurt Schwitters... The question should not be framed in terms of musical or non-musical qualities of radio art, but in terms of its status as made-in-Canada art... A better division, if one must be invoked, would be between information radio and creative radio¹³.

4.2 Canadian Content Regulations: turntablism/audio art

Since Public Notice CRTC 2000-12, turntablism and audio art have significantly grown in popularity. With the development of better technologies and the growing accessibility of at-home technology, turntablists and audio artists are able to create new works in their living rooms and basements.

Turntablism and audio art are making their mark in the Canadian music scene. Canadian turntablists like Kid Kola and DJ A-Trak have acquired international recognition by industry representatives and music enthusiasts alike.

This new type of expression is also being recognized by academic institutions: Concordia University (Montreal) has expanded its music program to include Electroacoustics, and the Groove Music Dictionary now includes terminology and definitions for turntablism and audio art.

The Canadian Council for the Arts recognizes turntablism and audio art as a legitimate category of artistic expression. Its *New Music Program* is devoted to the development of new music, and it supports innovation and risk-taking. It outlines some of the common forms of new music to include:

- contemporary
- musique actuelle
- improvised
- electro-acoustic
- electronic
- sound art/audio art

¹³ Ellen Waterman, Trent University, CFFF-FM intervention, 2000.

- sound installation
- radio art
- soundscape
- turntable art¹⁴

While these newer forms of expression are essentially exclusive to community and campus radio, they contribute to the objectives of the Broadcasting Act and enhance Canada's artistic landscape.

These types of programs fulfill the mandate of campus/community radio stations to provide alternative and innovative programming, to develop and promote Canadian talent initiatives, to encourage diversity on broadcasting and the broadcasting community, and to advocate and recognize new forays into novel broadcasting territory.

CONCLUSION

One possible way of resolving the problem is for the Commission to consider adopting a definition for experimental programming such as the following:

Category 36 for All Experimental Music

36 (Experimental): this refers to the unconventional and non-traditional uses of classical instruments and sound equipment to create new sounds and an orchestration of these sounds. Included is audio-art, turntablism, musique actuelle, electro acoustic, and sound ecology. It does not include spinning or beat mixing where the alterations of previously recorded tracks are limited to mixes between two or more pieces or samples.

When determining the requirements of the MAPL designation system, the artist component could be fulfilled if the turntablist or sound artist is Canadian.

¹⁴ <http://www.canadacouncil.ca/grants/music/qb127228040277031250.htm>

Appendix A

Spin Science: Online Turntable Music Resource

DMC Technics DJ World Championships

Turntablism: Beat Juggling and Scratching Videos

Skratchworx: DJ Technology News and Reviews

A duet between a turntablist and violinist

Turntablism: Listen to DJs using Turntablism Techniques

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DJ A-Trak, <http://djatrak.com/>

Kid Koala, <http://www.ninjatune.net/kidkoala/>

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