

Abstract:

In the first decades of popular music recording, Thomas Edison, through the promotion of his 'Diamond Disc,' had shaped the ideal within the recording industry that a recording should bear as much likeness to the original performance as possible. This concept had strong implications for the spatial characteristics of popular music recordings, as they had to evoke a realistic performance space in the mind of the listener. During the mono era (1877-1957), new forms of spatial signifying on popular music recordings emerged, which are still in use today. In this thesis I will investigate how sonic space in popular music evolved during this timeframe, how studio technology influenced this evolution and how spatiality changed on a semantic level.

In the first half of this thesis I describe the evolution of spatiality of recorded popular music during the mono-era, using the history of recording technology as a point of departure. By using Charles Sanders Peirce's three semantics categories, i.e. *icon*, *index* and *symbol*, as a theoretic framework, I postulate four categories of spatial semantics in popular music recordings, as they emerge chronologically during said timeframe. In the second half of this thesis I analyze the spatial characteristics of three recordings of studio engineer Bill Putnam, recorded between 1947 and 1952. On these recordings, Putnam experimented with different uses of artificial spatial techniques that had recently emerged, namely the echo chamber and tape echo. Each analysis will consist of a formal analysis of the sonic information of the recording, using William Moylan's method of spatial analysis, and a theoretical analysis, adding the lyrics, title, and technological and cultural context.