

# Editorial

Within the seemingly vast and proliferating range of practices grouped together under the umbrella term ‘electroacoustic music’, there appears a diversity and plurality of musical landscape that is perhaps without precedent. Within this context it seemed to us timely to raise questions regarding musical genre and musical style; what usefully might be teased out through a re-interrogation of these two distinct but related concepts? What is the nature and status of contemporary electroacoustic music as a *super-genre*, albeit one which tends very rarely to be discussed in generic terms? The very title of this journal resonates electroacoustic music’s intimacy with early twentieth-century modernism, yet subsequent postmodern tendencies and imperatives seem without end: the complex interactions of these modernist and postmodern legacies seeming to insinuate themselves at the heart of such an inquiry. The eclecticism in evidence in contemporary electroacoustic practice seems very much to be reflected in the articles offered up in response to the call for papers, representing a wide range of perspectives and covering a breadth of musical practice.

Andrew Hugill’s article (‘On Style in Electroacoustic Music’) is a full frontal response to one of the questions asked in the original call for papers: why is musical style so infrequently discussed in the analysis of electroacoustic music? Through a critique of the very nature in which electroacoustic music is conceived of as a super-genre, he offers a historically minded account of why this could be the case, and argues persuasively for a habilitation of the concept of style in this music. He emphasises the importance of going beyond the identification of stylistic features through comparative analyses to better understand *why* stylistic similarities and differences exist, and cites the work of Charles Tilly with four types of comparative analysis in the social sciences that could be applied: *individualising*, *universalising*, *variation-finding* and *encompassing*. Opportunities and challenges in applying recent work in Music Information Retrieval (MIR) to the elucidation of style are discussed, and Hugill concludes by speculating that not only would such a project enrich the musical analysis of this corpus per se, but also would likely aid the general appreciation of this music by the wider public.

Many of us recall the furore surrounding the decision of the Prix Ars Electronica (Linz) to embrace a wider group of experimental practices in the late 1990s. Prizes are seen by many as a dubious kind of accolade – unless one is fortunate enough to get one of

course. And within such prizes ‘categories’ represent the organising committee’s view on the genres that lead the field and are to be celebrated through the award and usually performances. The categories of the annual prizes of the Bourges group (GMEB/IMEB) did evolve over the years but mostly around how a core group of practices was described (itself an important history) – but in Linz the changes seemed (to outsiders) to be much more than a descriptive issue, indeed a fundamental change of direction. The idea that music whose roots lay in more popular and commercial practices could be ‘experimental’ was simply not accepted by a certain kind of ‘establishment’. Christopher Haworth’s article (“All the Musics which Computers Make Possible”: Questions of genre at the Prix Ars Electronica) examines this controversy over a longer time-frame, from rumblings of discontent from committees and panels, through a short period of rapid change to one of more recent consolidation. As usual, simple issues of conflict turn out to have more complex contexts when examined in detail. Some of the polemics of those years are still to be fully worked through and divisions remain. This article places the issues into both sharper focus and more nuanced perspective.

Jeremy Mayall examines his own and other practices from the composer’s point of view (‘Cross-genre Hybridity in Composition: A systematic method’). Starting from an eclectic range of personal experiences as a musician working in many genres, he suggests that it is not inevitable that we simply ‘switch hats’ as we cross from one to another. We may consciously choose to combine our different practices in new and interesting ways. Exactly what aspects of genre may be integrated in practice? We could consider from two to many contributors. Taking an intensely practical approach, he describes how material can be categorised into a taxonomic structure, not simply for analysis but for practical application. This he has systematised into a ‘hybridity chart’. His overt aim is to move beyond ‘intuition’, to allow the creation of a practical method. Of course the descriptors are his and readers may like to add their own and to develop the chart to suit their particular needs. While he frames this tool as valuable for other composers, it could easily have an additional role in teaching composition at many levels.

The boundaries of this subject and topic can (as we described above) be broad. In discussing how

descriptions of style or genre work, we often lack the appropriate tools: sometimes simply linguistic descriptions, possibly also new ideas as to what aspects of the music to examine. Jeff Wragg ('Just Don't Call it Trip Hop: Reconciling the Bristol sound style with the trip hop genre') takes as his starting point what appears to be a 'spat' between practising musicians, journalists, followers and writers about how to describe a particular electronica genre: as 'trip hop' or 'Bristol sound'. He unpacks the argument in terms of style and genre descriptions and how these can easily be misunderstood – even seen by some as demeaning of their practice. In the end he settles on tools (spectromorphology and spatio-morphology) developed for one genre in unravelling the characteristics (differences to be more precise) of those in this discussion. He seems to lead us *towards listening* – possibly in a different way, that is, to 'listen out for' key characteristics that distinguish the various styles. He suggests that it is the *sound* that is important.

Mo Zareei, Dale Carnegie, Dugal McKinnon and Ajay Kapur have made a contribution which highlights strongly how the description of genres may need to be reconfigured ('Sound-based Brutalism: An emergent aesthetic'). Some well-established genre descriptions become over-generalised and increasingly lack contemporary relevance – here 'minimalism' is critiqued and rejected. Perhaps there is a world of 'tags' out there that describe key elements of a practice. Then in a moment of inspiration they seem to reconfigure to suggest a new clustering of significance. In this article the authors have drawn inspiration from the world of architectural design. They conclude that much of the description of 'brutalism' in this (non-musical) field is totally appropriate to a specific group of music practices emerging steadily over recent decades. In this group, material has a much more literal presence; it does not *appear to be something*, 'it is what it is' – nothing less, nothing more. In this sense they (re)invent a genre that already existed (though we did not so describe it). Zareei develops his original contribution to this genre through creating the *Brutalist Noise Ensemble* (of sound-based sculptures which have contributed to an audiovisual work – giving examples on the accompanying website) – a sound art audiovisual homage to the brutalist architecture of the suburb of Tehran where he was brought up.

As a complement to Haworth's discussion of the 'Linz debates', we read Eliot Britton's discussion ('Genre and Capital in Avant-garde Electronica') on the way genre can 'weigh' in the cultural field. Following Bourdieu's ideas on 'cultural capital' and other genre descriptions, he focuses on two such practices. Here the relative weight seems to be generated by a dynamic exchange between avant-garde

(some would say experimental) electronica practice and the more traditional (art music) forms of electro-acoustic music whose 'cultural capital' – for some practitioners at least – is thereby threatened. But the clear democratisation of the means of production has destabilised these genre descriptions. He suggests the emergence of 'overlapping networks [which] encompass varying forms of capital, aesthetics, technology, ideology, tools and techniques'. Through this he develops a critique of this simple pairing and argues that we must account for convergence and hybridity with new vocabularies – and possibly reconfigure the genre descriptions themselves as they become increasingly inappropriate to the evolving new relationships within practice.

Takuro Lippit offers us a fascinating view of the state-of-the-art in South East Asia, a highly unique and personal one gained through his work to date on the Japanese state-funded Ensembles Asia project ('Ensembles Asia: Mapping experimental practices in music in Asia').

Constellations of musicians from across South East Asia share a hugely eclectic range of musical and cultural influences, the experimentalism within their devising processes when playing together often presenting at once genre-defying and genre-defining relationships between elements of traditional art forms and contemporary genres. On the one hand, these interactions are leading to the formation of idiosyncratic new genres, and on the other, key aspects of traditional musical practice sit clearly in the context of a postmodern plurality of generic features. Each of the musicians discussed is distinctly experimental in their own way, but does not operate in exclusively experimental genres of music or communities of artists. As is implied in varying ways in some of the other articles, the importance of *situatedness* in understanding genre and musical style is brought home with great clarity through Lippit's discussion of contemporary practices in this region.

Organised Sound has an 'open' element to its submission policy – that is, to invite off-thematic submissions for each issue. We include here Carolyn Philpott's article 'Sonic Explorations of the Southernmost Continent: Four composers' responses to Antarctica and climate change in the twenty-first century'. But it is in the nature of serendipity to discover connections where none was planned. Here she paints a strong picture of (a unique and very special) 'place' having its profound effect on the creative artist and how this is reflected in resultant music, and most especially how issues of environment and climate change may be encapsulated by the artwork and conveyed to the receiver. This is a dimension of practice that may only rarely at present be included in discussions on genre or style but is a vitally important one: the relation of ethics to

aesthetics. She examines a work from each of four composers to show both ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ in how the music was conceived and executed.

In conclusion, it is clear that definitions of genre in electroacoustic music are being reframed and reconfigured. It would be wrong to think that hybridisation of genre and style is somehow a phenomenon that technology has ‘let loose’, but it has profoundly changed its nature. Something that is made ‘easier to do’ changes

social habits (witness social and smart media), and in time leads to new practices, new ways of viewing existing genres – and perhaps new genres themselves.

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