

Annotated Bibliography

"An examination of contemporary music technology from a post-postmodern perspective"

The sources below have been chosen to support an investigation into post-postmodern (metamodern) music-making technologies, with particular emphasis on the role technology plays in the context of live electroacoustic music. Also in focus is a consideration of the difference in approach as compared to postmodern thinking, and investigating how and why these changes occurred. Being inevitably intertwined, both technological and aesthetic/cultural factors will be examined. The sources vary from those purely asking what metamodernism is, to those closely examining the relationship between the development of technology and the progression of music-making from the postmodern to the present day.

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Emmerson, S. (2017). 'Playing space': Towards an aesthetics of live electronics. In S. Emmerson (Ed.), *Living electronic music* (pp. 89-116). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351217866>

In Emmerson's book chapter, a particular paragraph wherein he quotes Boulez regarding the use of extended techniques on acoustic instruments is especially relevant to our discussion on music technology. The latter advises against using "peripheral effects" (extended techniques) in the foreground due to the difficulty of integrating them with electronic sounds, them containing too many connotations of the everyday to be compositionally useful. For Boulez, whose thinking is highly representative of postmodernism, technology exists only to supplement and extend acoustic instruments. This provides us with a useful contrast to a metamodern perspective, where noise-like sounds are not only compositionally useful but perfectly capable of occupying a central, focal role in a work, which Emmerson argues has been made possible by 21st-century digital technology. This in turn invites the question of whether technology has precipitated a shift from postmodern to metamodern ideals (i.e. technological determinism), if at least in terms of how we perceive the role of the available technology (supplementary or primary).

Elsewhere in this chapter, Emmerson identifies three historical events between the mid-20th-century and today that have shaped the culture and aesthetics of live electronic music, which may present parallels to the transition from the postmodern to metamodern: 1) the miniaturisation of circuits allowing for modular synthesis and practical recording technology; 2) the invention of MIDI and the personal computer allowing for real-time "event processing" (i.e. sequencing); 3) the quantum leap in processing power allowing for real-time signal processing (e.g. live sampling). Emmerson contends that at each stage the preceding technologies and their practitioners have only adapted and incorporated without significantly changing their aesthetic ideals, resulting in the highly genre-blurred hybridisation in today's music. The difficulty of categorising 21st-century music due to this might be seen as another characteristic of the metamodern.

Hugill, A. (2016). On style in electroacoustic music. *Organised Sound: An International Journal of Music Technology*, 21(1), 4-14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355771815000333>

Hugill's article offers firstly a unique rebuttal against the received view of today's electroacoustic music being an all-encompassing melting pot of diverse styles, particularly in a section entitled "The Myth of Inclusivity". Here, he argues that electroacoustic music as a genre is highly selective in the sounds any particular work may choose to use, and that everyday sounds may not be the most compositionally useful; a stark contrast to the genre-blurring as depicted by numerous other sources. Later on, he presents an equally relevant discussion regarding "acousmatic music", here defined as music requiring reduced listening (*écoute réduite*) to be fully experienced. Hugill extends the concept of reduced listening to what he calls "technological listening", "where (the) listener perceives the technology

behind the music rather than the music itself". He argues that acousmatic music has become a definitive genre characterised by a purposefulness in its practitioners in both aesthetic and technological aims. This emphasis on the technology in use, as well as the significance of reduced listening, might be seen as a metamodern approach to musicking (contrast this with Boulez's thoughts on the matter as mentioned earlier). Elsewhere, Hugill also examines and questions the inclusion of "beat-based music" in the electroacoustic genre, referencing the collapse of the previous generations' high- and low-art distinction, as well as discussing the role of music recordings within the live performance practice.

Kouvaras, L. I. (2013). Neo-modernist arts of noise in a post-postmodern era: The dawning of the altermodern. In L. I. Kouvaras (Ed.), *Loading the silence: Australian sound art in the post-digital age* (pp. 199-221). <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au>

Kouvaras's book chapter offers a descriptive insight as to what exactly is metamodernism (as compared to postmodernism), and identifies, by way of numerous case studies of contemporary artists, two significant themes with which she characterises the movement. The first of these is the theme of "Nostalgia", which she defines as metamodernism's reverence towards the preceding movements and their accomplishments, along with a desire to publicise them in a new form. From this we may infer firstly a degree of "emotional sentiment" much unlike the mechanical single-mindedness of postmodernism, and secondly a legitimate concern for public exposure, again distinct from postmodernism's insularity and irreverence for public opinion. The second theme she identifies is that of "Incongruity", drawing our attention to the democratisation of musicking in the most recent decades, and its associated genre-blurring and mashing of unlikely-partnered sound-sources. Again, these are characteristics quite distinct from postmodernism. Kouvaras supports her findings with a quote from Christopher Cox, who describes postmodernism as being "mixture, overload, content and concrete", and metamodernism as "purity, reduction, form and abstraction". Especially relevant is Kouvaras's statement that "a revival of acousmatic listening is at the core of a neo-modernist approach... a return to the modernist ethos". From this we might then raise questions concerning sound-source and identity in *écoute réduite* (are we hearing a violin, or the sound of a violin?), as well as how this relates to the proliferation of online music (is reduced listening to be expected from an online listener?).

Livingston, C. (2010). A leap of faith: Composing in the wasteland of postmodernism. *Tempo*, 64(253), 30-40. <http://doi.org.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/10.1017/S004029821000029X>

This article questions the purpose of composition in in the 21st-century, i.e. "in the wasteland of postmodernism". Livingston questions her own motivations to compose, challenging the notion that artistic expression is (or should be) synonymous with "self-expression". She portrays postmodernism as the ultimate cynic, leaving us with nothing to believe in, "disqualifying reality by exposing its technicalities". (We should note here that this is very much a received view of postmodernism.) Livingston contends that if postmodernism leaves us nothing to revere, we must find other methods to motivate ourselves; that "perhaps there is a meaning to art". Here we see from Livingston's sentiments how postmodernism has given way in the 21st-century, having collapsed under the weight of its own cynicism, leaving artists with a profoundly personal desire to return to some kind of "emotional truth", and a desire to share what the artist sees in their work. Hers is a highly impassioned take on metamodernism (as well as an unabashed assault on postmodernism), highlighting especially the current movement's concern for public exposure along with its desire to find "meaning" in some form, and ultimately offering us a thought-provoking insight as to what metamodernism is all about, relative to postmodernism. Livingston reiterates at the end of her article: "Artistic expression is *not* self-expression".

Rudi, J., & Spowage, N. (2018). Editorial: Sound and kinetics – performance, artistic aims and techniques in electroacoustic music and sound art. *Organised Sound: An International Journal of Music Technology*, 23(3), 219-224. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355771818000122>

Rudi and Spowage's article primarily explores the gestural elements of music along the historical continuum spanning modernism to the present day, noting early on the modernist desire to capture motion and dynamics in their work. According to them, this was then expanded upon through the postmodern concept of "transmediality", facilitated initially by the advent of MIDI, the personal computer etc., and finally by the introduction of the internet and online streaming: "demarcation lines between art genres have become less important, and the public increasingly accepts different mixes of expressions". We read this as a clear demonstration of the democratisation of music particular to the metamodern, marking the decline of an "artistic elite" gatekeeping what is and isn't art. The article then takes a technologically deterministic approach to explaining how this democratisation has occurred as a result of globalisation, technological advances, etc., and describes this as an answer to the call of "several composers (who) argued... that the arts needed to embrace the new technology... to remain relevant and carry their share of responsibility for social development" – a decidedly metamodernist notion. Ultimately we grasp from this article that today, absolutely anybody can make music; that today's DIY approach to musicking are the results of, not a response to, the electroacoustic music of the 50s and 60s; and perhaps most significantly, that today we ask "What can we do with this technology", rather than "What can this technology do for us". This article presents metamodernism as an extension and maturation, rather than an outright rejection, of postmodernism. In response to this, we might consider the risks of music-making in an entirely uncurated online world, and how online streaming may or may not completely replace live performance.

Truax, B. (2015). Paradigm shifts and electroacoustic music: Some personal reflections. *Organised Sound: An International Journal of Music Technology*, 20(1), 105-110. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355771814000491>

Truax's article offers a personal reflection on the development of electroacoustic music in the 21st-century. The article first challenges the notion of technology being the catalyst for contemporary "paradigm shifts", pointing out that although we are becoming ever more adept at creating and characterising complex sounds (technology allowing for analysis in ever greater detail), there has been little development in our capabilities to use such sounds compositionally. We see firstly a similar notion to our previous source (Rudi and Spowage) in that Truax is considering how we might use these technologically-derived/-assisted sounds, as opposed to asking what the technology can do for us; and secondly, an argument for cultural determinism in that knowing what to do with such sounds is a more powerful catalyst for change than simply being able to create such sounds.

Elsewhere, Truax identifies another paradigm shift as being the "end of the literate composer". He postulates that in a democratised musical world, the composer is more a guide than a dictator, and that musical sophistication has come to mean intelligently-designed sonic interactions rather than "just a lot of notes". Truax then introduces the concept of "ubiquitous" or "distracted listening", a uniquely 21st-century phenomenon where music listening accompanies some other everyday activity (driving, household chores etc.). Here he contends that in this kind of listening, no distinction can be made between environment and music – "everything becomes an installation, not a concert, with everyone a curator". This surely cannot be the same as acousmatic or reduced listening, and Truax indeed clarifies this by stating that "commercial music only educates consumers, not artists". For him then, the democratisation of music does not necessarily imply a unification between "high-" and "low-art", offering us a unique take on said democratisation that is otherwise very definitively characterised in the metamodern era.

Williams, D. B. (2015). The technology-music dance: Reflections on making sense of our tools. In C. Randles (Ed.), *Music education: Navigating the future* (pp. 153-168). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315777009-17>

Williams opens his book chapter with an Alan Key aphorism: "Technology is 'technology' only for people who are born before it was invented". His chapter explores the evolving relationship between music and technology, pointing out the ever-expanding sophistication of music-making tools and the increasingly unlimited access to making use of such tools, arriving at two fundamental conclusions: 1) The democratisation of music-making as a result of technology providing an instrument that anybody could learn to play with minimal effort; and 2) The rise of DIY musicians, or "participant-listeners-turned-performers". In support of this, Williams goes on to describe two non-contemporary cultures of music-making, the first being a "convergence culture" where new media co-exists with acoustic musicking, and the second being a "participatory culture" describing today's DIY artists. The latter, according to Williams, "embraces the creating and sharing of performance... with others with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement". Williams summarises by reminding us of three historical stages in the development of new media: multimedia (recording technology), intermedia (software) and transmedia (social networking). He prompts us, like several other earlier sources, to consider how we might use these technologies, instead of how the technologies might serve us: "The forms I end up with couldn't have been done without using digital tools, but... It's much more interesting if you can disrupt the expectations of what the technology can do".

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While the above sources present varied and often unique perspectives on the role of technology in a metamodern musical world, there are several themes in particular that go largely unchallenged. The first is the democratisation of music-making, stemming from the widespread availability of music-making technology. Absolutely anybody, regardless of ability, is able to create music of some kind and then disseminate it to an online, theoretically global audience. This results in the genre-blurring so often referenced in the metamodern world, as participants rely on their own cultures, background and intuition to create, rather than the instilled dogma of a formalised musical education. A second common and related theme is the desire to share music with others. This is particularly unique to the online generation and in sharp contrast to the insular, institutionalised practise of postmodern art. We may hypothesise this as being a result of the prolific and ubiquitous use of social media, where it has become the norm for people to remain permanently visible and communicable, perhaps instilling an atavistic desire to "not be left out". A few of the above sources, however, prompt us to consider the risks of sharing music, particularly non-commercial "academic" music, in an uncurated online world (Who is my audience? Does my need to share translate into consideration towards public opinion?). This then segues neatly into the theme of acousmatic listening, which numerous sources point to as an integral part of the metamodern music experience ("listeners perceive the technology at play, rather than the music"). We must then consider if acousmatic listening is indeed possible in an online environment, where there is no guarantee that the listener will not resort to "distracted listening"; we must consider if it is the music or the listener that dictates if a piece is "acousmatic" at all, and most fundamentally, consider if there is any distinction between acousmatic *listening* and acousmatic *music*.