Sorted: Categorisation & Genre in Contemporary Music Business.

It has been suggested in a number of discussions that genre is a hopelessly ambiguous and in-
consistent way to organize and explore music.
(McKay & Fujinaga 2006 p.3)

Categorisation is one of the most contentious and wide-ranging subjects in the popular music sector. Whether industry personnel working on the orderly business of marketing acts, fans policing the borders of their subcultural taste-worlds or emerging artists resisting pigeonholing of their work, the inside/outside dichotomy of categorisation is fraught with tensions and multiple competing voices. Arguments of sorting and naming echo across the development and history of popular music theory and practice. Musicologist Franco Fabbri, who features heavily in this chapter, explores categorisation as "a class, a set of objects and events grouped according to some criteria" (1999, p.2). However, nowhere is this tension of categorisation more evident than in the case of popular cultural genres like music; which we might classify as

> a conceptual tool most often used to classify varieties of cultural products, particularly in the fields of visual art, popular culture video games, film, literature, and music. It describes the manner of expression that governs artists' work, their peer groups and the audiences for their work. (Lena, C and Peterson, R. 2008, p. 697).

The tensions within the use of this conceptual tool, particularly in popular cultural genres like music, are evident. Artists, once contracted and labeled as being within a genre, may face expectations to conform in various aspects, perpetuating the notion that genre rigidity could harm their careers. This practice deeply influences the music industry, as highlighted by various scholars (Frith, S. 1996; James, R. 2017; Silver, D., Lee M., & Childress, C. 2016). Fans of these genres often find themselves actively resisting market-driven tastes, striving to stay one step ahead of industry forces (Taylor 1999) and algorithms. Regardless of the resistance of artists and fans, genre remains a "set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning." (Frow, J. 2014 p.13) . However, the site of meaning in the contemporary landscape of popular music is changing. The relatively recent, but exponential growth, fracturing, blurring and splintering of genres, predominantly although not exclusively driven through the practices of streaming services has moved from a useful distinction in sub-categorisation within what we might call meta-genres (such as Heavy Metal or Hip Hop) to a world of over-categorisation to the point of meaninglessness.

Beyond the initial historical categorization of popular music, such as the association of the seven-inch single with rebellion and youth (Osborne 2012, p. 130) in contrast to the more mature positioning of LPs, the growth in genres, especially in pop and rock, progressed gradually until the 1970s. It was during this period that a proliferation of genres emerged, accompanied shortly after by the development of subgenres. Examples of early subcategorisation include the case of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM), in 1979,[1] as a descriptive marker distinguishing it from the recently settled category of Heavy Metal[2] or John Savage's coining of Post-Punk in 1978, as a genre demarcation after the split of the Sex Pistols. New genres, or sub-genres, such as these linguistically marked the passing of time, signalled a break from the old, or old-fashioned, and heralded the emergence of the new, or newly marketed in the same way that physical records went out of print and were promptly replaced with the latest formats at an alarming pace. Tastes overwriting tastes give form to the palimpsest of popular music history.

In our contemporary context, the ownership of naming conventions has switched from that of the journalist to that of the streaming services. However, the old genre worlds are not replaced, but remain and linger alongside the new; nothing is replaced, nothing erased or written over. This poses new and interesting challenges for thinking about and studying genre in the context of the music industry. Every 1.4 seconds a new song appears on Spotify, sixty-thousand a day, twenty million a year (Benitez, C 2024) that are, in an act of musical and capitalist gluttony, squeezed into playlists, artist radio and listener suggestions. Similarly the amount of genre categories on the platform have grown from 1,932 in 2019 to 6,302 in 2023, producing more and more categories than could be practically meaningful (at least outside of the world of algorithms). As musicologist David Brackett put it, 'the more closely one describes a genre in terms of its stylistic components, the fewer examples actually seem to fit'. (Bracket, D 2015 p. 190)

Thus, the landscape of music marketing, music fandom, music making, and writing and theorising about music genres is impacted by new practices of naming and categorisation in to genres or playlists. Relentless additions, where the burden of the recent and not-so-recent musical contributions creates a world where being a music fan is made better every other? day due to the increased amount of choice. Or, we might question whether this grossly expanding, laborious behemoth of choice contributes to cultural inertia, a notion referenced by cultural theorists Franco Bifo Berardi (2011) and Mark Fisher (2014) as the slow cancellation of the future.

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[1] Geoff Barton - Sounds May 1979 although coined by the editor Alan Lewis

[2] The naming of Heavy Metal explored in Deena Weinstein's article 'Just So Stories'

This chapter explores the ways in which we might think about and theorise genres as well as the practices and cultures of those contributing to the naming and enforcing of genre today. This encompasses actors in the music business, music makers and music fans, while asking questions around who gets to define genres and, indeed, who gets to define genre. Ultimately I ask if the concept of genre is still useful in the contemporary music industry, and if it is, useful for what? The next section introduces Fabbri's theoretical model of genre, which centres around five rules. I describe each of them then discuss some problems with this model, namely how the boundaries of each rule category are fuzzy. Then, I turn to more recent developments that problematise the notion of genre itself, such as algorithmic categorisation and the playlist. The chapter ends with reflections on the continued usefulness of genre for contemporary music industry studies.

1. Naming and Framing.

> Categories, or genres, of popular music exist in an odd kind of limbo in public and scholarly discourse. On the one hand, musicians and consumers often resist requests to categorize themselves, insisting that their tastes are unclassifiable. It is common to hear discussions that have invoked the idea of genre end with the declaration that musical genres do not really exist, that they are mere fabrications of the music industry. (Brackett, D. 2016 p.1)

We might think of genre as simply being a synonym of 'kind' or 'type'. While this aligns with the literal translation of the nineteenth-century French word, it may oversimplify the question of 'what type of music do you make or like'. In this context, we're typically freer to explore various comparators to describe our preferences without constraints. However, digging a little deeper reveals that the concept of genre is much more loaded than in its French usage. It inhabits the Latin 'genus' or 'group', which complicates our original question, which must now be qualified by 'what group of music does the music you make or like' fit in to. This extra qualification highlights the structuralist qualities of the term genre – the hunt for other examples of music in the same family that somehow share laws, rules, principles and uncover the structural similarities of the music. In either case "Genres establish horizons of expectation.' (Ballantine 2020, p. 260). And yet the concept has been underdeveloped compared to other areas in cultural studies and explorations of youth culture in particular have kept pace with the new and more fluid ways of

engaging with popular cultural forms, and these practices have been theorised from a number of positions. (Evans, 1997, Maffesoli 1996 Thornton 1995)

Franco Fabbri (1981) introduced a new way of looking at music genres. Instead of just focusing on the sounds and conventions of making these generic sounds, he divided genres into five elements beyond the sonic landscape of the genre world. Still today, this idea helps us understand how broad communities of artists and fans define their musical preferences in conjunction with industry practices and how each party contributes to definitions of genre worlds. While some scholars (Frith 1996; Negus 1999; Bannister 2006) were not completely satisfied by the theory, Fabbri's approach expands our understanding shifting our focus to the broader aspects that shape musical tastes within genre communities. This is important for a number of reasons, not least because later in this chapter I will discuss the contemporary phenomenon of software analysing songs and assigning genre and other forms of categorisation.

Fabbri proposed that we might understand any genre through thinking about them as a series of overlapping elements, within which everything to do with that genre world might satisfyingly fit (even if messily). For the purpose of the chapter Fabbri's five rules might be simplified into the following statements. Firstly, what the music sounds like, secondly, how the genre makes meaning (including visually), third, how the music(Ian) and fans behave, fourth, what beliefs and values are attached to the music, and finally how the music makes money . I will go through each of Fabbri's rules with some explanation and examples to highlight their usefulness and limitations.

Fabbri's first rule - "The Formal and Technical Rules"(p.3), or the conventions that drive 'what the music sounds like' is governed by a series of informed musicological practices and expectations, including a song's tempo, rhythm, melody, instrumentation and arrangement.That is, the sonic content of music revovles around the conventions of how the notes are articulated through instrumentation, timbre, tempo, harmony and so on. The kinds of instruments that are typically used in the making of genres of music fall within this rule, guitars, drums, bass, keyboards, brass, percussion for example. The level of detail here includes the brands of those instruments, like Gibson, Fender, Ludwig, DW, etc as well as the models of instruments - the Telecaster, S.G. These details contribute to the genre-ness in ways that are as important as the songs themselves.

These "formal and technical rules" (Ibid) drive the making of music inside genre worlds. Whether the acceptable range of beats per minute for genres of dance music or the tones,

timbres and tunings in branches of heavy metal, the internal rule system of musical articulation is transparent. This highlights the overlapping nature of these expectations.

Fabbri's second category - the semiotic rules - is perhaps the most complex and contentious but may be simplified to how it makes meaning. "Of Course" Fabbri States "all the rules of genre are semiotic, since they are codes which create a relation between the expression of a musical event and its content." (p.4) also carefully pointing out that these rules apply beyond the musical text. In Fabbri's 1981 text and in Simon Frith's (1996) article that draws upon it, both author's focus on the way genres make meaning through words and through a variety of linguistic functions, as does Matthew Bannister in his 2006 application to Indie in relation to the intertextual, the communicative function and levels of intimacy. However, I would suggest that we consider all semiotic codes here and not just the lyrical, or the meaning of notes/notation. I would argue that we consider style, fonts, fashions and artist names under the remit of the semiotic rules, as languages in their own right, as these all have signification within the genre world and as defender of its boundaries. As Caroline Evans suggests "Social meanings are produced through the commodity form" (1997, p.172). We make genre decisions, assumptions or analysis of the myriad artists presented to us daily, based on how they visually present themselves to us, before we have encountered their 'formal and technical' articulations. The font of a Heavy Metal act, is as important a genre identifier, as the tuning, tempo or vocal technique that lies beyond the artwork. Haircuts, jackets and shoes betray the sounds of artists, as well as their politics, as much as the content of their lyrics.

Fabbri, in a third category, "Behaviour rules" (1981, p.5) also suggests that there are acceptable, or expected behaviours in genre worlds, from artists and audiences alike. For the artist, Simon Frith suggests that "These are gestural rules, then; they determine the ways in which musical skill on the one hand, and musical personality on the other, are displayed" (1996, p.92). However, in a more clearly demonstrated example, various genres have their own dances associated with them that audiences might engage in at gigs or at clubs and artists too will behave in ways that are expected by their audiences in interviews, onstage, in photographs and in videos - with "aloof rock detachment or ingratiating country familiarity" (Negus, 1999, p. 25). Bannister highlights the "shambling amateurism" (2006, p.80) of indie bands, a behaviour that articulates the politics, beliefs and values of the genre in embodied ways, whilst genres such as progressive rock may well privilege virtuosic gestures or what Lehmann and Kopiez (2013) call 'show per-

formance' that highlight the necessary skill to execute the required formal and technical aspects of songs.

The fourth rule that Fabbri explores is the "social and ideological" (1981 p.5) aspects of genre and how they frame the beliefs and values of genre worlds. These are both foundational and fundamental in taste communities and "reflect what the music is meant to stand for as a social force, its account of an ideal world as well as of the real one" (1996 p. 93), demonstrating, with various degrees of transparency, the belief systems that unite the fan and band communities. Straight Edge would be a case in point here "in the proclamation of an aesthetic manifesto" (Fabbri, 1999, p.8) where one must subscribe to an explicit ideology to be part of the community in relation to alcohol, drugs and other substances. Gender, sexuality, politics, the environment are all topics that fall within this rule and all genres have a range of ideological positions in relation to the broader cultural world.

How labour is divided is also within this set of expectations with 'who does what? And why?' As ideological questions that we might ask of a genre. How are tasks like this divided along lines of race or gender - who is the artist, or in the band? Who is in the video and importantly, who is making the money are all questions that highlight the politics of the genre world and can be classed as conventional through repeated examples.

Fabbri's fifth and final rule - The Economical and juridical rule refers to questions of money making and of intellectual property and look at "patterns of ownership and structures of organisation" (Negus, 1999. p.24). On a more granular level, the expectations around the formats that music might be released on that are expected by fans, artists and industry - streaming, vinyl, cassette, CD. And beyond this, whether the genre community might engage in limited editions, multiple variants etc. and how we might purchase these objects - at shows, via websites or platforms, labels and so on. How does merchandise operate here and are shirts, koozies, patches, pins, hoodies, caps acceptable without crossing the communities understanding of over-commercialisation? What about calendars, posters or socks? One might compare Kiss' approach of "licensing its name to carefully chosen products" (Barfoot Christian et al 2010, p. 10) and the fiercely anti-corporate legend of Fugazi for oppositional genre conventions here. Beyond the formats, contracts too are covered here - majors or Indies, albums or singles, self-released or corporate, licensed or owned, the relationship between artist and label is a conventional one in genre worlds, as is the type of live show - or whether live shows exist at all - stadiums, clubs, arenas. Some venues - CBGBs for instance - become associated with genre and, once this hap-

pens, they attract those that wish to tie their allegiance to that world and perpetuate the genre conventions - whether sonic, semiotic or behavioural.

Whilst there is clarity in the structure and detail of Fabbri's ideas - five rules to understand genre, the model is not without its problems. To illustrate this I want to bring in an example to illustrate the fuzziness of Fabbri's categorisations, in a way that highlights the intricacies and specifics of genre. I would argue that the length of a guitar strap is a signifier of musical categorisation that crosses a number of Fabbri's elements and is difficult to definitively home in Fabbri's model. We might call this example - the guitar strap rule. A short guitar strap, placing the guitar at the chest, is a signifier that traces from both The Byrd's Roger McGuinn and The Rolling Stone's Brian Jones, among others, through Orange Juice's Edwyn Collins to Alex Turner of the Arctic Monkeys and beyond in to a guitar convention of contemporary 'indie'. At the other end of the scale via a heavy metal trajectory, we see players such as Slash, continuing a lineage from Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page, where the guitar is worn low. With the logical end point being an artist such as Tatsu Mikami of Church of Misery who plays his bass with a strap so long that the guitar regularly touches the floor. How long one chooses to wear one's guitar strap reflects the internal logic of genre worlds in ways that notation or sheet music may not. This is a simple correlation between sonic qualities of artists and the positioning of their guitars, but which rule does it fit within? It may be a "formal and technical" rule as it is related to both the level of skill needed to play an instrument as well as being part of an instrument itself, both of which fall within Fabbri's description of that rule. It may be a "behaviour rule" as to play the guitar in particular ways is gestural and portrays those skill levels. It may of course, be semiotic as it is a visual cue and not a sonic one. We can assess this through either seeing the guitar strap itself or a photograph of the artist playing. Clearly this is an important part of a genre's articulation and we might suggest that which rule it sits within is not as important as the articulation itself. Fabbri does suggest early on in his paper that "this is not an attempt to resolve the problem of analysis of genres once and for all, but to indicate its complexity" (1981, p. 2). As mentioned earlier, a number of theorists have explored the model and commented upon its uses and flaws. In Simon Frith's revisiting of Fabbri's work in 1996, he suggests and immediately retracts a new version of the categories - only this time replacing the Formal and Technical, Semiotic, Behavioural, Social and Ideological, and Economic and Juridical "by dividing his rules more neatly into sound conventions (what

you hear), performing conventions (what you see), packaging conventions (how a type of music is sold), and embodied values (the music's ideology). But this would be to break the connections (if only for analytic reasons) that Fabbri was concerned to emphasize." (p.94), a model that is more user friendly than Fabbri's original and one that speaks a language that is more understandable to most genre users.

Whilst deciding which element of a genre's practice might fit in to which rule is not a neat act of analysis, a photograph of a band backstage with their instruments, might usefully tell us almost all we need to know about them through their behaved articulation of what they sound like, stand for, look like, and earn. Whilst Fabbri's genre rules provide a robust model for mapping genres synchronically - that is, as a snapshot in time of what a genre may sound like, look like and so on, today or ten years ago, or in the nineteen nineties, it does not easily allow for a neat diachronic analysis where we can explore the evolution of genre and how it might spawn sub-genres, subdivisions and splinters. Exploring the evolution of a genre like hip hop, from the Bronx of the 1970s to the global 2020s. It does, however, give us a framework for areas of study and comparison in a longitudinal study and the areas of cultural practice that we might look at. Hip hop's journey from a cassette based economy in the mid nineteen seventies (Masters, M. 2023) to a streaming based one is as fascinating as the stylistic journey through brands that the genre has undertaken across its fifty year history and gives us five areas of analysis to focus on.

Fabbri's model does not explicitly mention the privileging of one or more elements over others, but we might argue that in some genres there is a dominant rule. We might assume that indie and punk may have a different relationship with formal and technical aspects of genre than progressive rock does, and whilst progressive rock might have a comparatively longer list of compositional and skills based rules, punk may well have a greater relationship with the semiotic or ideological aspects. Where it is perhaps most useful in contemporary application where algorithms analyse 'songs' to denote genre, is to keep in mind the idea that " music genres are not wholly defined by their sonic qualities" (Silver, D. Monica, L & Clayton C, 2016, p. 3) but are complex sites of meaning that are hard to frame and understand. In later work Fabbri takes on the spatial metaphors, mapping and descriptions of categories and genres, styles and areas, exploring how these other spatial categorisations impact on genre. Whilst we might suggest that 'Heavy Metal' has grown to become one of the global meta-genres, (Fabbri 1999) might suggest that this imagining is at a 'basic level', with Doom metal being a 'subordinate' of this category needing more information to understand it and its parent category. We might suggest that Doom

is a genre as a subset of Heavy Metal and that it, itself, has sub-genres - traditional, funeral, epic etc which, with further information and detail again, "hierarchically put into order in a system of basic, superordinate and subordinate concepts" (Eco, in Fabbri, 1999. pp. 2- 3). Whilst this model works, it does seem to suggest a 'Russian doll' scenario with increasing levels of detail and knowledge needed to understand genres that have smaller and smaller communities.

I was taken with Fabbri's geographical and mapping ideas and metaphors when I first read the 1999 article and could not see any new ways of thinking about genre through the rigid hierarchical structural ordering of genres. As Fabbri himself suggests "I have the impression that the usage of terms based in the lexicons of geography and topography became more and more common in the last two decades" (Fabbri, 1999 p.11). Of course genre does not only apply to the categorisation of music but also to television, games, novels and a broad array of popular cultural forms including film, all of which have their own issues of subcategorisation. Some straight forward and some, more complex. Mikel Koven (2006) suggests a further geographic metaphor for thinking about genre.

> "Filone, on the other hand, would tend to be used primarily in a more scientific context, like geology (where filone would refer to a vein of mineral in a rock) or geography (as in the main current in a river) […] Putting these together, if we think of a larger generic pattern as a river, […] as genre, several smaller "streamlets" branch off from the genre-river, occasionally reconnecting to the main flow farther "downstream." Perhaps, in some cases, what we think of as a [genre], may be a cluster of concurrent streamlets, veins, or traditions." (p.6)

So we might, using this model, think of sub or micro genres as 'streamlets', still fed by and connected to their parental rivers and with the possibility of return, no longer neatly separated, rejected or ousted by a new name and noticeable differences in perhaps only one of Fabbri's conventions. Instead the umbilical connection remains, along with the notion of return, if only briefly. This notion of fluidity maps against the shifts in thinking mentioned earlier where youth cultural practices exhibit this fluidity and

> "do not therefore exhibit stable practices of inclusion and exclusion– they are integrative and distinctive at the same time. These new network socialities seem to encourage plural, fluid and part-time rather than fixed, discrete and encompassing group identities – individuals are able to flow between multiple signs of identity conceptions."

Or as journalist Peter Robinson puts it "Perhaps, in the age of endless ways to express yourself, it's also less necessary to define your identity in your teenage years by clinging to genres." Or in

the case of the cultures that operate around musical activity and genre: "it is possible to participate simultaneously in the activities of two or more such network socialities. The single members of these groups do not foster their community as a priority but use the group to satisfy their individual needs." (Muggleton & Wienzierl 2005, p. 23)

Genre Blurring, Genre Erasing: The Entropy of the Musical Universe

> playlists increasingly function as a means whereby music consumption taking place within the digital enclosure erected by streaming platforms can be used to track who we are, how we feel, and what we do outside this digital enclosure. (Drott, 2018 p. 36)

Whilst the adaptability of Fabbri's model may well be questioned or at least adapted as a way of understanding music genres now and in the future, I now turn to the new ways of categorising music that threaten Fabbri's model and even the notion of genre itself. Specifically, I am interested in the proliferation of genre creation or naming from streaming services and other ways in which music is increasingly categorised in playlists. Perhaps it is not the imagining, theorising and describing of genres that is the problem here but the very notion of genre itself. Perhaps - whilst still a useful way to explore snapshots of musical production and consumption - it is no longer the primary marker for categorising music outside of the portfolios of record companies and their respective marketing and PR departments, who may wish to cling to the orderly business of music marketing via genre and the staunch communities (and therefor consumers) of established genre worlds. There are other ways to describe music that still arises categorisation. The playlist does not necessarily mean the death of genre and many playlists are genre specific. However, Samuel Potts - head of radio for Columbia records suggests [slide] "look at some of the top Spotify playlists: Your Coffee Break, Feel Good Friday, Songs to Sing in The Shower. It's a 24-hour service providing a soundtrack to every moment in your life." (In Robinson 2016). Whilst some of the most popular playlists are compiled by task or activity, nostalgia features quite strongly with 80s, 90s, and 00s making the top twenty.

> "More recently digital technologies have promised to rapidly and deeply transform – and ultimately weaken –systems of musical genre classification. Several mechanisms may be at work. Music scenes are no longer restricted to a specific physical locality." (Silver, D., Lee M. & Childress, C. 2016 P.4)

Like many tasks, the naming - and decision making - around genre has become one where the labour of computers is becoming dominant and the notion of Music Genre Recognition (MGR) is devolved, in part, to machine learning. Indeed,"Given the steady and significant improvement in classification performance since 1997, we wonder if automatic methods are not already more efficient at learning genres than some people." (Sturm, B. 2013, p.374). In this world and visualised as a complex map by Spotify 'Data Alchemist' Glen McDonald in his Every Noise At Once project there are, at the time of writing, 6302 genres named on the platform, a number that has more than quadrupled from the 1,371 (Richman 2015) some eight years ago. By comparison, Franco Fabbri named only eighty-eight genres in his study of 1985. Whether the actual amount of named genres is even calculable, is not the point here, but the sheer number means that the relationship between sub-genre and genre or meta-genre has shifted. These genres are different. They are sub-genres, but what do these naming and dividing exercises mean? They arguably link to contemporary ideas of choice, but also raise the question of the tyranny or impossibility of choice. But this, of course, means that musicians who produce music in identifiable micro-genres have limited appeal and markets to those who fully subscribe to their 'rules', but allow signposted exploration to those who practice some kind of eclecticism in their music listening or streaming. When a sub-genre only contains one artist however, have we reached the end of community and reduced naming to description. If the logical conclusion of sub-genres is the genre of one, then at the other extreme is the genre of none, another identifiable practice in this 'post-genre' world; genre blurring. With the benefit of time genres which may have been sites of different or differing politics, geographies, social meanings and so on become, or can become detached from their contextual anchors and are more known through their aesthetic elements. These can then be matched, blended or blurred together to make grunge-gaze for instance a combining of the heavier rhythmic qualities of Seattle bands of the late nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties, such as Nirvana, Tad, Mudhoney et al and the contemporaneous U.K. based Shoegaze movement with artists such as My Bloody Valentine, Loop, Slowdive et al who focused on layered distorted guitar effects. Make it heavier? Switch grunge with the slower, sludgier genre of Doom and we have a new subgenera - Doom-gaze. The differing behaviours, socialites and semiotics of the parent genres are lost to the bricolage of genre blurring.

> "Two major conclusions flow from this sociological intervention in the analysis of music genre. First, music genres are not wholly defined by their sonic qualities. Second,

the non-sonic qualities of music genres often emerge relationally and categorically: relationally, because different musicological genres can share structural similarities and differences with sonically "unrelated" genres; categorically, because any given genre acquires some part of its meaning in virtue of its position within a broad and diverse topology of higher-order genre forms."
(Silver, D., Monica, L & Clayton C, 2016, p. 3)

It isn't just metal or alternative rock genres that have these multiple signifiers of genre but also the broader pop world. Where artists like Lana Del Ray listed or labelled as "pop, indie R&B, in-dietronica, chamber pop, synthpop" simultaneously. Artists "now straddle, or exist beyond, genres that seemed set in concrete as little as 10 years ago. They represent a cross-pollination that makes it harder than ever to definitively state that you like or dislike one genre or another." (Robinson 2016) That is not to say that music is no longer important to listeners "79% of 13- to 32-year-olds said their tastes didn't fall into one specific music genre. Just 11% said that they only listened to one genre of music." (Ibid) so, if at one extreme micro-genres are creating smaller and smaller scenes and at the other extreme multiple genre identities or no genre identity can be ascribed, what theoretical positions are available to analysts of popular music? Is the "entropy of the musical universe" that Fabbri hints at in his 1999 paper working at both ends of this spectrum? Whilst the fracturing and multiplying of genres do not necessarily require new ways of exploring them - Franco Fabbri's early eighties explorations of the "theory of musical genres" still works in the identification of the sound, image, behaviour, ideology and economics of each of these genres, the imagining and description of the relationship between genres might be worthy of exploration.

Fabbri draws on philosopher Umberto Eco a number of times in his explorations of mapping and musical categorisation. Eco suggests that for things to be categorised they need "to be recognized as such, they need reference to a framework of cultural norms" (Eco 1997, p. 139 in Fabbri, 1999 p.3) The playlist, it would appear, is, or has become, a cultural norm and so can be seen as a recognisable form of categorisation and perform some of he same functions that genre can, where "Labels such as genre and mood have the important advantage that they provide one with a vocabulary that can be used to discuss musical categories." (McKay & Fujinaga 2006 p.4) Spotify users surveyed by Norwegian researchers seemed to need this categorisation and "made efforts to save or stabilize their music listening by creating playlists to combat the tendency for their listening to become fragmented and ephemeral through music-streaming services." (Hagen

& Lüders 2017 p. 648) Whilst the playlist is a categorising device, by activity, mood or genre, it - the playlist - differs in a number of respects from genre both as a cultural practice and as a way of marketing music. Firstly, and in relation to cultural practice, a playlist is only recognisable in its totality; individual songs in isolation, removed from a playlist, can not be identified as belonging to one or other playlist, whilst they can, using Fabbri's rules for instance, be seen as part of a genre world. Secondly - the playlist is not defined by the community but by the playlist maker - its popularity might be defined by the community but not its inclusivity. Thirdly - the further reaches of genre do not necessarily apply to playlists. Whilst playlists may link to behaviours, or at least soundtrack them, they do not speak about broader behaviours or ideologies, nor do they link to the visual performance or packaging conventions. It may well be that genre is no longer the dominant way in which we categorise music particularly where it is consumed in online spaces. There are, of course, those genre worlds where the lure of the convenience of streaming services is rejected in favour of physical products where there is "something more human and fathomable about this physicality, about sensing the connection between the observable characteristics of an object and what it does" (Tuhus-Dubrow, R. 2022 p .102).

Whilst these cultural differences between genre listening and playlist listening might disrupt the orderly business of categorising types of music, playlist listening is making far more radical changes to the musical world and the ways in which the consumer/product relationship is positioned. We might start by looking at the types of playlists that we, as listeners, might engage with on streaming services as a way of choosing cohesive collections of songs. There are broadly speaking only two types of playlist. Those we make ourselves and those that others make. However this is only a partial picture. Of those that are made by others, there are artists playlists, which we might suggest are made for us, personalised playlists which are algorithmically made for us, editorial playlists the are also made for us. This then leaves within our own practices curated playlists that are made by us for a variety of reasons, sometimes private and sometimes shared with others. Some of these might be aligned with activity, where we have a morning jog playlists or workout playlists. They might be in party playlists or study playlists. There are even showering playlists (39,000 on Spotify in 2018) that the service can see and monitor and measure.

Near the beginning of this chapter I suggested that genre categorisation was most useful to the music business and that it was fans and artists that were resistant to the notion, or the no-

tion of being fixed to one genre. This was because genre offered a stable set of products that were marketable to a (relatively) stable audience, through stable channels of advertising - magazines, television and so on. Genre arguably worked to keep stable capitalist channels of goods working. However, it is not only the number of genres that has shifted significantly with streaming, but another shift in terms of what is being sold to whom. Where genre allowed the selling of CDs, vinyl and cassettes to audiences, now the playlist via the streaming service, sells audiences, or at least their data, to the highest bidder. And this is where the playlists made by others in particular come in where these

> "Personalized, context-sensitive playlists hail listeners less as members of some abstract demographic category than as concrete particulars. As such each recommendation may be understood as a proposition about one's musical identity—or, more precisely, about one's identity at a particular moment, within a particular context." (Drott, 2018 p.21)

In this world "brands can be a part of each moment" (Spotify, cited in Drott, 2018 p. 40) and so our once private listening habits have become data, our personal tastes now "platforms habitually stress music's status as a "passion point" whereby attention may be captured, advertising messages imparted, and valuable consumer information harvested." (Ibid p.42). Of course, as mentioned earlier, some playlists are genre based and so this listening is perhaps the sweet spot of capitalist music business production. We are engaged via genre channels with artists who may well be selling their physical products via streaming platforms, whilst giving our data to advertisers so that we might be sold further goods.

To conclude this chapter then, we might usefully look at what genre might offer us, that the playlist does not, to explore if it is a useful categorising concept for music consumption and production beyond the capitalistic practices of those that might attempt to market our resistant tastes back to us (Taylor 1999) in a world where resistant music making has been "made obsolete by technology and capital" and "rock anthems are used to sell banks and cars" (Frith, 1988 p.1). Although, as Sarah Thornton has suggested, this boundary between the commercial and the authentic is a porous one, this is perhaps where Fabbri's understanding and analysis of genre from forty years ago may take on a new usefulness. If in Fabbri's rule system, the "economical and juridical rules" (1981 p.5) are the frameworks that deliver the sonic products generated by the "formal and technical" rules to us as communities of listeners and fans, it may well lie in the semiotic, behavioural and ideological realms that the articulation of genre, unmeasurable by the

computer recognition of MGR, is enacted through musical performance and fandom of varying degrees. There are still, regardless of the more fluid and part time involvements in taste groups, definite genres and communities of fans who adhere to the semiotic rules of their genre worlds. Genre based festivals, radio programmes, club nights, and compilation albums still circulate in abundance. Haircuts, leather jackets, trainers, shoes and jeans are all still powerful signifiers of cultural identity, and along with with badges, patches and t-shirts they still act as a forms of non-economic capital to be exchanged in the offline world and through the spaces where fandom is enacted in semiotic ways - online or off. Non economic capital is important to mention here, because although the private lives, spaces and practices of individual listeners might be used by streaming platforms and their advertisers to sell shower-gels and anxiety, creatives are not driven by economic concerns, but rather through the fulfilment that being creative offers (citation). Fans similarly accrue and display non economic forms of capital through their cultural and subcultural engagement with genre worlds, which, as Thornton (1995) suggests can be exchanged through the porous boundaries between fandom and industry. There are further developments in practice that spark return to previous forms of engagement with music; not necessarily in nostalgic ways but, for instance, the resurgence of the cassette as a format that bands can manufacture and sell quickly and cheaply to fans who, in their genre worlds, want physical formats to display their fandom means that cassette sales are at a twenty year high (Skinner, T 2023). Genres - as Steve Neale (1980) argued - work through both "repetition and difference" and these repetitions and differences operate through the interplay of Fabbri's five elements, incrementally nudging the development of types of music forward. Not so different that the music is not identifiable within its genre framing but not so repetitive that it sounds derivative. It is important that we continue to explore, analyse and study music however it might be categorised for us. Whilst the playlist currently offers us insights into the practices of new models of the music business as it has been colonised by the tech companies, genre currently remains key in our ability to understand the musicological shifts of artist practices and the visual, ideological and behavioural world of the whole musical community.

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