Bodily Expression in Electronic Music Symposium

Organisers' Preface
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While Electronic Music has a running discourse between its practitioners (e.g. the *Cambridge Companion to Electronic Music*, the *Leonardo* journals and books series, the *Organised Sound* journal, the second part of the *Routledge Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*, etc.), outside the circle of artists and the context of historical musicology there are only few examples where it has been made topic of concrete aesthetic reflection. Particularly current Music Aesthetics, as reflected most notably in Roger Scruton's *The Aesthetics of Music*, or Andy Hamilton's *Aesthetics and Music*, hardly make it a full blown topic. Issues here concentrate on whether Electronic Music is a musical art at all, or whether it could be understood as 'sound art' (as Hamilton argues), or 'sonic art' (see Trevor Wishart's *On Sonic Art*; or Leigh Landy's *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* for a review of the debate). All the while, following on mainly from substantial theoretical work by two early composers of Electronic Music, Pierre Schaeffer (*Traité des Objets Musicaux*) and Karlheinz Stockhausen, theoretically minded composers, for instance Denis Smalley, have built the said discourse amongst practitioners (writers include Simon Emmerson, Joel Chadabe, John Dack, Natasha Barrett, Rolf Inge Godoy and Karlheinz Essl).

Characteristic of this latter discourse is the pragmatic attitude of practicing artists to whom their work and its historical context stands at the foreground of their interest. Here, the history of Electronic Music is part of living knowledge, and the complexity of the activities going on under this and other names is, naturally, self-evident to its professional practitioners. The spectrum of existing compositional and performance practices of Electronic Music includes *musique concrète*, the historical 'Electronic Music', *musique acousmatique*, Computer Music (Algorithmic Music and Generative Music), Live Electronics, Laptop Music, Soundscape Music and Network Music. These can, for the sake of a general overview, roughly be grouped into types excluding performers (or nearly so, since composers often adapt the concert presentation of their works to the local acoustic givens, including some live mixing), and those (largely 'interactive') types which include them. Another distinction that can be made is that between aesthetics which

include and exclude a live involvement of 'traditional' (non-electronic) instruments. It is clear that the said discourse of practitioners is aware of all these varieties of production, and of coherence as well as contrast between them (past and current practices and aesthetic motivations are well represented in Simon Emmerson's *Living Electronic Music*).

Yet discourse has so far not addressed some essential *aesthetic* issues arising from the very conditions of practice. The role of the body in forming musical expression, notably, has rarely been made topic of detailed critical reflection (Emmerson's book represents one of few cases), despite its relevance to the idea of 'interactivity' and the varied levels in which composers become performers in some Electronic musics. This might be due to a general hesitation in Western contemporary (art) musics, and its aesthetic discourses (as opposed to discourse concerning music up to the first half of the 20th century) to consider what *is* expressive (or *not* expressive) in it. While music may be expressive of psychological phenomena *other* than emotions (e.g., characters, moods and attitudes, or even ideas and thought), contemporary music, including Electronic Music, is sometimes held to be *inexpressive*, as some other aesthetic aspects become relevant to its production and reception. The Hanslickean (formalist) concept of musical experience behind this is everything but clear and self-evident, and has been object of a long drawn debate in the philosophy of music.

It seems of little attraction to try and import an unresolved musicological issue into the realm of Electronic Music, however. Instead, the medium of *potential* expressivity, the performer's body (and, beyond this, the composer's, passive or dancing listener's and sound production techno-logies' implicit and figurative bodies), seems to lend itself to fruitful discussion, as the traces of human agency are, after all, of particular significance for aesthetic experience. For if there is bodily involvement in the 'making' of Electronic Music, then there *is*, this is at least a hypothesis behind the present symposium topic, some kind of bodily expression, be it intentional or non-intended, in Electronic Music. A musical performer's presence is always, to some degree, bodily presence, apart from sonic and auratic aspects. The body is, *also* in Electronic Music, a medium for musical activity and articulation in a great variety of ways, with one strikingly consistent characteristic: in Electronic Music, the tie between the body and the sound producing process is not any longer limited by the constraints of the mechanical and acoustical features of traditional instruments, but can be made subject to composition by means of interface and software technology. Both fascinatingly alter bodily expression as formerly known.

This condition makes Electronic Music a superb domain for an investigation of the aesthetic relevance of the above bodily tie, ultimately concerning the question as to how we hear our *making* of the music in the music, and how this shapes what we come to hear *in* the music as part of musical experience in all musics. The goal of this interdisciplinary symposium – bringing together composers, performers and thinkers, from Electronic and 'Acoustic' Musics, Dance and Performance Arts, Philosophy and Sociology – may in this light be seen to make a musical practice in which the relevance of bodily expression to musical expression is technically exposed and a crucial part of the compositional conditions, a topic of shared reflection.