

Making Sense of Genre and Style in the Age of Transcultural Reproduction

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Introduction

Style and genre are key concepts to consider when approaching issues of musical production, performance and reception, and no less so in today's rapidly changing musical landscapes. In the following article, I consider this claim in light of the increasing cultural diversification of contemporary Western societies, new concepts and practices of music mediation facilitated by web-based technologies, and the corresponding diversity in how people engage as producers and consumers of music. The premise here is not that cultural diversity is somehow causally related to musical diversity, but rather that people with a variety of cultural and musical backgrounds increasingly utilize the same musical resources, thereby complicating the politics of attachment and ownership whereby styles/genres are maintained and »controlled.« Clearly, that various musics are consumed, enjoyed and appropriated outside of their »original« contexts and functions

Abstract – Résumé

Through a discussion of the theoretical and empirical foundations of the concepts of style and genre, this article draws attention to the conceptual dilemmas that emerge when established regimes of musical ownership and production/reception dissipate in the wake of radical changes in how music is mediated. Concurrently, it is noted that gatekeeping institutions are often strongly persistent despite superficial appearances of the contrary. On this basis, the article argues that concepts of style need to be understood in terms of the consolidating authority of certain hegemonic narratives and discourses and their associated (dominant) trajectories of musical practices.

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is not a new phenomenon.¹ However, what is new is the scale and scope of musical exchanges, which have proliferated exceptionally through online resources and interactions (Johnson). One of the potential implications of this tendency is a further blurring or dissolution of the interface between particular forms of music and particular cultures, ethnic groups and subcultures. This, in turn, introduces the conceptual challenge of accounting for stylistic formation within a context of multiple authorities: if »the same« music is used and understood in markedly different ways (to an extent that it is no longer the same music by any reasonable account), is it then sensible to speak of genre/style with the implication of musical coherence and categorical sameness carried by these terms? A complementary question: if musical diversity is supposed to be infinite, how is it that people make and engage with music in such consistent ways? Why are musical practices (still) institutionalized into discrete and recognizable branches (styles/genres) given the astounding possibilities at hand for the music maker and audience member? It would seem that the persistence of categories and processes of categorization, despite the ongoing cultural diversification and stylistic hybridization of musical landscapes, indicate that they are important to the way people organize their perception of socio-musical space, as well as to how the field of music is politically and commercially regulated; likewise, that there is somehow an inbuilt resistance to a further fragmentation of styles/genres and a corresponding propensity for communalities in musical intelligibility. Clearly, a pressing issue is to understand the mechanisms that ensure such consistency given the multiplicity of positions and approaches within and across musical worlds.

To address these questions, I will start by building a conceptual framework for the discussion, which takes the form of an argumentative outline of the theoretical and empirical foundations of the concepts of style and genre. This introductory discussion also revisits the issue of distinguishing between style and genre as separate concepts, ultimately arguing that there is no way around the meaning of these terms being contextually determined. From this point of departure, I proceed to discuss the possible transculturality of stylistic formations. Of particular issue is the process whereby the geo-cultural affinity of musical styles is challenged and trans-

¹ We only need to consider how the canon of classical music, which once was exclusively bound to central European high culture and its associated institutions, now is a global mass-market phenomenon as well as it is accessible to audiences and performers through orchestras and teaching institutions around the world. It could of course be argued that this has done nothing to skew the balance when it comes to the authority over the performative interpretation and reception of the great masters. As will be subsequently discussed, the (hypothetical) dispersion of such authority over different cultural groups or interpretive communities introduces the quandary of recognizing different conceptions and practices of »the same« music as equally legitimate, as opposed to one being viewed as an inferior or defective version of the other. The question also emerges under which conditions such »alternative« takes on a given form of music should be considered in terms of new stylistic formations rather than as intra-categorical variation.

formed through the global proliferation of local or national musics and the reformulation of socio-musical formations in its wake. In assessing the implications of such tendencies, I attempt to draw attention to some of the conceptual contradictions and dilemmas that emerge in the wake of stylistic institutions being dissolved, as noted above. The scope is limited to popular musical forms and practices with examples drawn from mainstream pop music and contemporary Nordic folk music.

Genre and Style – Conceptual and Empirical Foundations

A wide spectrum of scholars from various disciplines agree on the fundamental point that art in any form is created and perceived under the guidance of some sort of framework: a crime fiction novel is crafted and assessed as a crime fiction novel; a reggae song is crafted and assessed as a reggae song etc. Genre and/or style are the terms most frequently used to indicate a framework of this sort. This is not meant to imply that all works of art fall neatly within the boundaries of clearly defined styles/genres, only that artistic practices are always coded in stylistic/generic terms, which is especially apparent in the case of music. As Toynbee argues, even so called »free« music is coded in the sense of being delimited by a system of orientations, expectations and conventions, not to mention that »freedom« inevitably is constituted in dialectical opposition to the generic. Another apparently problematic case is crossover, but while this category seems to defy the logic of a coherent, structuring framework, it simultaneously highlights the fact that we seemingly cannot do without classification. It could be added that the term 'crossover' implies the act of crossing over between two or more different styles/genres, which in turn need to be identifiable for the term 'crossover' to make any sense. Alternatively, the crossover takes on an identity of its own, in which case it tends to be governed by its own set of (unwritten) rules and conventions, i.e. it becomes a new style/genre as opposed to coming off as a juxtaposition of different styles/genres. In both cases, what the term 'crossover' signifies is completely dependent on context: crossover in the context of contemporary bluegrass is something completely different than crossover in the context of heavy metal, not only in terms of the musical language but the whole attitudinal, behavioral and expectational framework within which the very concept of crossover makes sense. Again, this is about framing (i.e. generic/stylistic contextualization), which situates the particular musical practice in question relative to its history and tradition and in a dialogic relationship with other styles/genres. In simple terms, then, if generic categories were not important to the process of making and making sense of music we could simply use the term 'music' without any further sub-categories.

I acknowledge that this issue deserves to be nuanced and elaborated and it is also one of my aims to do so. However, my main point remains that genre and style as theoretical and empirical concepts are about the coding and constitutive

framing of musical practices;² this as opposed to more descriptive or classificatory approaches.³ Thus, although I agree with Moore (432) that genre and style »are terms concerned with ways of erecting categorical distinctions, of identifying similarity between different pieces,« an important addition needs to be made for this description to be useful as a starting point for my discussion; that is, how musical pieces or events are interpreted and made sense of from a production as well as a reception perspective, which is precisely what the term 'coding' refers to in this context. The implication of this stance goes beyond the conventional culturalist notion that the meaning of an artistic expression is assigned and culturally constituted rather than inherent, i.e. that there is no such thing as what a piece of music actually means. Because nor is there such a thing as how a piece of music actually sounds. Or, more precisely, the constitutive parts and relations of the piece are not discernible from some »objective« study of its absolute properties. This may seem far fetched, but is easily demonstrable: features such as metric organization and the structure of tonal relationships are inferred or imposed rather than representing the pattern of physical sounds in some unmediated way (Blom & Kvitte; Cooper & Meyer; Lerdahl & Jackendoff). Such strategies of inference are learned (Meyer), and since music is not a universal language, this form of learning is about the acquisition of culturally embedded stylistic codes. This argument is equally relevant whether the issue is a more general level of comprehension (the music making any sense at all)⁴ or highly detailed assessments of, say tiny nuances in production strategies or performance style.

In sum, then, »the music itself« does not tell us either how it is ordered into meaningful patterns or what the music might mean in terms of aesthetic appeal, symbolic value, ironic intent etc. The music only communicates in this sense when it is framed and coded, and it is this framing and coding which are at the heart of

² Be it noted that I adhere to a broad understanding of *musical practices*, including not only the act of playing and singing, but the totality of activities associated with the production and consumption of music (cf. Small).

³ In advocating my position, I recognize the validity and relevance of a number of academic sources on and approaches to the subject: Frith (»Music and Identity,« »The Popular Music Industry«), Negus and Hesmondhalgh's insistence on the importance of (generic) labeling in the workings of the music industry and its market dynamics and in the organization of popular culture as a whole; Walser on the role of genre in regulating the reproduction of particular ideologies; Toynbee, Gunn and Green on the inevitability of genre/style in musical understanding and enjoyment; Straw, Bennett and Whiteley et al. on the significance of musical scenes to stylistic formation; and Mitchell and Solomon on trans-local appropriation, and consequent transformation, of global popular musics. In addition, I draw on ethnomusicological literature that stresses the multiplicity and relativism of understandings pertaining to musical classification (Blacking, *Music, Culture*; Bohlman; Keil & Feld; Merriam; Nettl; Rice; Stokes).

⁴ Lucy Green (33-34) makes this point strongly: »Style is the medium by virtue of which we experience music, and without which we could have no music at all [...] we must have some knowledge of the style of a piece of music in order to experience inherent meanings as distinct from non-musically meaningful sound, at all.«

understanding the concepts of style and genre. This also implies that there are no neutral criteria for classifying sounding representations into styles or genres, which is because the experience of similarity and difference in itself is stylistically coded. This idea applies to all levels of musical knowledge; from the broadest categorizations (say pop vs. rock) to the most specific ones. With regard to the former, categorical distinctions may be very difficult to account for in terms of musical characteristics. For instance, *rock*, rather than being a specific form of music, is often described as an attitude, an ideology, a philosophy, an approach, an image and as standing in opposition to (the attitude/philosophy/image of) *pop* (see Frith, *Performing Rites*; Negus). With regard to the latter, distinctions made on the basis of musical features are as relative as those based on some sociological criteria. As is the case with spoken languages, the significance of particular sounds or combinations of sounds in voicing a stylistic distinction is culturally (i.e. stylistically) and contextually determined. In John Blacking's (*Music, Culture*, 161) words, »'different' melodies may be regarded by singers as the same,« a statement that could well be reversed: two melodies, performances or musical details that appear to be the same may be regarded by singers (or any participant) as significantly different. A variety of everyday examples lend support to this supposition, such as when people who are not familiar with a particular style of music complain that »all songs sound the same,« while this is clearly not the case for the dedicated followers of the style in question (Cowdery).

As the above discussion illustrates, determining the extent to which different musical objects and events conform to a common definitional framework requires the examination of cultural classifications. In other words, from this perspective sameness concerns culturally negotiated boundaries and sensitivities which cannot be determined by mere observation and comparison. It is also implicit that the type of criteria by which a style/genre is identified varies greatly (see the discussion below). Thus, while stylistic sameness is coded by definition there are no universals in *how* this coding works.

Divergences and Convergences between Style and Genre

So far, I have used style and genre synonymously, indicating a convergence in meaning. On this note, I argue that it is not justified to make a general conceptual distinction between these terms. The argument, in short, is as follows: given 1) that there are inevitable overlaps between style and genre in terms of their uses and functions; 2) that these concepts are constitutive and performative rather than descriptive (see previous sections); and 3) that criteria of categorization are relative and contextual, it is not possible to give precise enough definitions that allow for a clear distinction between style and genre. More precisely, I argue that there is no way around the meaning of these terms being contextually determined.

One cannot dismiss the communicative relevance of statements such as »she has an interesting style,« in which case the term style cannot possibly be substituted by the term genre. On the other hand, in a statement like »the style within which she operates« genre could be an equally appropriate term. As these examples indicate, style is the more general term, which, by being structured in hierarchical levels (Meyer), might be said to cover all aspects of categorical musical behavior, from the broadest classifications (pop, folk, classical) down to individual idiom. Moreover, in line with the views of Coplan, Feld (»Aesthetics«), Keil, Waterman and others, style is a truly comprehensive concept by representing, not only a certain type of music or a particular approach to music making, but an ethos according to which the social, the cultural and the aesthetic are inseparable. The term genre does not carry such connotations and is not synonymous with concepts like tradition or culture, as (potentially) is the case with the term style.

Many attempts have been made to define a distinction between genre and style, the most common of which is to define genre as a category or type of music (the what), while style is defined as a way of making music or a manner of articulation (the how) (see Hernandez; Moore). The problem with this definition is that it presumes that 'the what' can be clearly separated from 'the how' and that this distinction can be made in more or less the same way for different musical cultures. This is not the case: »a manner of articulation« (say a particular »style« of performance) may be the all-encompassing definitional criteria for categorical determination (the what), while in other cases the distinction between matter (»genre«) and manner (»style«) is more apparent. Clearly, the present argument does not translate into an alternative way of distinguishing between style and genre; it is only meant to underscore the point that these concepts are elusive in the sense of evading precise definition beyond the scope of specific cases and contexts. Therefore, while insisting on the point that categories of music only exist through culturally coded representations of similarity and difference, resorting to a contextually determined use of terminology seems a matter of necessity. Concretely, whether to use the term style or genre may be seen as determined by their relational role in any given context.

Transcultural Stylistic Formations – Implications and Theoretical Challenges

An important implication of the theoretical stance that I have advocated is that there are no absolute boundaries between styles, genres or music cultures. However, the process of constructing and negotiating such boundaries is indeed important to the understanding of musical behavior in any form or at any level. As noted repeatedly throughout this article, categories of music are the product of (rather than the precursor to) discursive constructs that temporarily stabilize

collective representations. A related argument is that style represents the institutionalization of the practices and conceptions that make up the reality within which artistic behavior and musical evaluation are framed. The latter implies that stylistic formations have a strong consolidating effect on musical practices, which in turn provides a degree of resistance to fragmentation. An important question to address, then, is what all this means when being contextualized within a transcultural space where boundaries are blurred. To clarify, the transcultural recognizes the global-local nature of contemporary expressive culture and takes as its premise that attachment to and identification with cultural forms are continuously performed and therefore situational and processual in nature; moreover that the functioning of such forms in creating a sense of belonging is not well accounted for in terms of a fixed relationship between distinct cultures and between cultures and their representations. Instead, cultural formations are seen as flexible and open-ended by »members« drawing on and appropriating (rather than merely inhabiting) multiple cultural resources (Welsch). This view assigns agency to social actors in creating meanings and negotiating cultural affiliations and suggests a focus on the dynamic and creative ways in which people bond to and through »cultural property.« A telling example is how »foreign« musical styles are appropriated (re-coded) by »non-native« audiences and the assertion that the formative power of such a process in terms of identification cannot possibly be considered less real or significant than that of any »original« cultural practice.

To assess the implications of the above predictions on the understanding of genre and style we need to consider a point that has largely been implicit so far; that these concepts are shared rather than individual. People do not experience or perform music under random or unpredictable conditions. We sense that there are some basic rules in the game, and we assume that the understanding of these conditions is shared by others. When we enter into meaningful interactions with and around music, we do so within a social, musical and interpretive setting organized by this presumed mutuality. More precisely, the presence of such mutually typified and institutionalized interpretive behavior indicates the presence of style. The question is what ensures such conceptual sharing. The answer that many scholars have turned to is some form of enculturation based on community participation. In anthropological terms, this could imply a form of group identity, which entails the sharing of a range of different aspects of life, including language, music, various customs and overall worldviews. In such a case, knowledge of style may be seen as implicit to a particular way of life and the participation in a community through which such a way of life is sustained.⁵

⁵ See Merriam and Nettl. These authors do not represent the idealized view of music in culture being referred to. Rather, this view forms a point of reference in discussing the historical development of ethnomusicological thought.

Notably, we do not need the exaggerated image of a so called »traditional society« to exemplify the process of musical socialization. We might as well imagine that learning about style stems from hanging around with people who share a common musical interest and who for this reason constitute a kind of community. When popular music styles are often identified and discussed in terms that suggest a close affiliation to community formations (Blacking *Music, Culture; Frith Performing Rites; Keil; Negus; Small; Toynbee*), definitions generally tend towards such communities of mutual interest among more or less dedicated »members,« as opposed to musics being viewed as the »property« of ethnic or otherwise hereditary groups. When it comes to conceptualizing such relationships, scholars have largely abandoned the idea of a homological fit between social identity and musical expression, instead seeing musical practices as constitutive of identity (Biddle & Knights; Bohlman 1988; Feld »Communication«; Frith »Music and Identity«; Stokes). But however the configuration between musical style and social formation is conceptualized, the notion of community remains a stubborn trope in scholarly and everyday discourse on style and genre. The conceptual foundation for such persistence may be the often unspoken notion that styles cannot exist without some form of institutional support. Again, the presence of style entails the presence of an institution within which criteria for inclusion and exclusion are negotiated and mutually (albeit tacitly) agreed upon. This is not a normative claim but a sociological one: categories (of music) are relationally defined and imply boundaries which in turn exist only by virtue of informal collective agreements between people (the »community«). This being said, in proposing a cultural alignment of musical style to social groups it needs to be recognized that processes of stylistic and social formation are becoming increasingly implicated in transcultural contexts (see above). Also, the ever more diverse ways in which musical experiences are mediated inevitably requires a modification of community-based approaches. Both these issues are highlighted in the ongoing revolution in web-based, interactive technologies, which has profound implications on the production and consumption of popular culture (Beer; Knowles; Munster), including the further loosening of institutional bonds related to stylistic formations in music.

At this point, a counter-narrative is needed to reach a reasonable balance between perspectives. That is, the supposed blurring of social spaces and scattering of conceptions need to be understood against the backdrop of a recognition that virtual, and allegedly cross-cultural, interactions generally unfold in a relatively consistent manner (Farrell & Schwartzberg): people act as if they understand each other and online forums that »may appear chaotic and anarchic [...] are [instead] characterized by informal rules that shape conversation.« (*ibid.*:1). It could be argued that while such instances of »institutionalization« do not imply that the »community« is unified in its conceptions and visions, they may be seen as a testament to a shared understanding of the contexts and conditions within

which discussions and disagreements take place. An illustrative example is YouTube comments directed towards an artist/song/video, which supposedly feature opinions and arguments from people with very different cultural backgrounds and whose knowledge of the artist and style/genre in question is equally diverse. Despite this diversity in opinions and conceptions, there is a striking sense of unity in the way participants engage in the interactive dialogue.⁶ To account for such unity, one might invoke notions of imagined communities (Anderson), as well as the idea that communicative activities are constitutive of mutual understandings (Berger & Luckmann). One might also propose that the possibility of music being under-coded, which in turn facilitates its adaptation to culture-specific conceptions and perspectives, is constantly balanced against the human desire for mutual understanding and communality. Taken together, these concerns would seem to indicate that the concept of community, and the process of community formation, need to be updated rather than abandoned altogether.

To further develop the above argument, I evoke Max Weber's famous definition of a social relationship. According to Weber, »a social relationship is the conduct of a plurality of persons which according to their subjective meaning are mutually concerned with each other and oriented by virtue of this fact.« (Quoted in Wagner 214). This definition is interesting in that it does not presume a community or culture in the conventional sense. People may be mutually concerned with each other and oriented by virtue of this fact for a number of reasons and in a number of ways. And any social relationship of this sort carries the possibility for mutual experiences of belonging and identification, be that between artists, between artists and audiences or between audience members. This sharing does not presume cultural homogeneity, nor does it presume the sharing of norms and values, including the various symbolic meanings that may be assigned to the music. In short, the distance between people, be that geographical, cultural, religious, linguistic etc., does not exclude the possibility of concep-

⁶ This is perhaps particularly apparent with regard to topics on which opinions vary greatly. A good example is comments on YouTube-posted songs and videos of the late Michael Jackson (see e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNJL6nfu_Q). Characterized by a striking love-or-hate dichotomy, the comments are mostly ordered in familiar and distinguishable categories and frequently concern extra-musical issues (how Jackson died, whether or not he was guilty of child molestation etc.). Celebratory comments on Jackson's musical qualities range between vague notions of greatness and (commercial) success and more »musicological« remarks on performance and songwriting skills. Strikingly, rarely, if ever, are the criteria for and concepts behind these evaluations (or their negative counterpart) discussed; these are instead tacitly taken for granted as a common ground of self-evident preconditions for discourse. This may be seen as quite remarkable considering the extraordinary diversity of stylistic elements and references in Jackson's music (Johansson, »Michael Jackson«), as well as the assumed inconsistency in the culturally conditioned ways of making sense of these elements and references. On the other hand, the overall consistency in the participants' engagement is to be expected if priority is given to the view that people tend to strive for mutual intelligibility and efficiency in communication even when conditions would seem to disfavor such communicability.

tual and experiential sharing in musical-stylistic or other terms. This would be in line with the transculturalist stance and the idea of identities and identifications as open to appropriations from a variety of cultural positions. It is also consistent with the idea of *symbolic communities* of participants sustained through technologically mediated interactions, the internet in particular (Lamont & Molnar; Williams). Such indirect interactions represent a form of sociality, not only in the sense that people with common interests tend to cluster in »groups« (fan forums, wiki communities etc.) but by people simultaneously *living through* various aspects of globally distributed popular culture (cf. Anderson; Schutz). With regard to music, we might consider all those intense experiences of sharing something with remote others when listening to and watching our favorite artists, be that in terms of values, beliefs and personal narratives and/or in terms of a mere appreciation of the music. The latter easily translates into a sensation of a shared *understanding* of the music, even if this sharing of knowledge is not grounded in »real« social interactions. The extent to which this mutuality is imagined or actual is not important to the present argument. Listeners may well experience a piece of music very differently, while still imagining that, and acting as if, their experiences are similar or at least based on similar codes. This, in turn, is what can establish a shared sense of we-ness through musical appreciation, a point which is crucial to the understanding of stylistic processes in a transcultural context because it implies that socio-musical formations may be coherent in certain respects while allowing for diversity among their members.

Examples and Discussion

The above line of reasoning provides some ideas on how »community formations« or »stylistic institutions« may be accounted for in a context of a virtual, non-localized space of faceless interactions. Notably, however, the definitions focus on sociability per se; that people may experience togetherness through musical engagement without the physical proximity of other members of »the community.« As already indicated, this does not mean that musical objects and events are being made sense of in the same way. This suggests the rather obvious point that categories or labels may remain intact while their content (understood in terms of musical practices and conceptions) is constantly changing or even radically altered. Far less obvious, however, is how to reconcile this observation with the theoretical assumptions presented in this article on the role of institutional constraints in stylistic formations.

In attempting to negotiate this quandary, I shall briefly consider the case of Nordic folk music and some of the challenges of accounting for this label in terms of a field of musical practice. In certain contexts, Nordic folk music is used as an umbrella term to refer to the different national, regional and local folk music

styles existing within the geographic boundaries of the Nordic countries. In other contexts, the term Nordic folk music instead refers to a style of music; a category that makes sense in its own right, without implicitly referring to subcategories such as Swedish folk music, the Bingsjö (a village in county Dalarna) style of fiddle playing etc. These scenarios would seem to be hopelessly overlapping; however, in the latter case the distinguishing element is that artists and audiences self-reflexively relate to Nordic folk music as the label most representative of what they are into musically.⁷ The former, umbrella usage of the term, on the other hand, is associated with the view of Nordic (or Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish etc.) folk music as consisting of a range of different, highly specialized and localized musical practices, each representing its own musical subculture with its own associated set of stylistic sensibilities (see Aksdal & Nyhus; Lundberg & Ternhag). Within this situation, the prefix Nordic does not make sense as a stylistic designation (much in the same way as »American music« is not descriptive of any particular type/style of music). However, during the past decade this situation has changed and it is fair to say that established regimes of stylistic ownership has been in a state of dissolution. From being »owned« and controlled by communities of specialists, folk music styles are increasingly utilized, appropriated and claimed by musicians and audiences with a range of different musical and cultural backgrounds, particularly within popular music. Notably, this tendency goes hand in hand with an increasing internationalization and professionalization of folk music and folk musicians in the Nordic countries, as well as a general orientation towards popular culture (Arnestad; Berge).

Two somewhat contradicting notions emerge at this point: on the one hand, to transform into a popular music genre, the regimes of community attachment and ownership associated with traditional/folk music arguably need to be dissolved or at least modified. On the other hand, the folk-label has proven to be a valuable currency, commercially as well as artistically, implying that practices and discourses will tend towards boundary maintenance and the preservation of gatekeeping institutions (Berge & Johansson). It may be argued, then, that the emergence of Nordic folk music as a distinct brand at the expense of the commercial and artistic currency of national and regional folk music styles should be understood in terms of how these contradictory tendencies are balanced against each other. Somewhat simplified, the balancing implies that strong requirements of specialization prevail (implying that not anyone can successfully »pose« as a folk musician), but that stylistic categories are significantly broadened and generalized. In the situation referred to, »the Nordic sound« is instantly recogniz-

⁷ See Johansson (»Nordisk«) and Kolltveit for comprehensive discussions of the emergence of Nordic folk music as a notion of stylistic identity. Examples of bands/artists who explicitly proclaim themselves as Nordic in their orientation include Groupa, NOMAS, NID, Frigg and The Nordic Fiddlers Bloc.

able and clearly distinguishable from e.g. a »Celtic sound,« but it is no longer possible (even for an insider) to tell if the musician is Swedish, Finnish or Norwegian. Above all, this would be an apt example of a form of transculturation, whereby the geo-cultural affinity of musical style is reformulated in response to changing needs and relations among artists and audiences. What should be noted is that in this process stylistic categories and their associated institutions have changed rather than dissipated altogether. I anticipate that this situation will prevail as long as some form of symbolic economy is involved in the labeling of artistic practices as folk music. To this I want to add the speculative assertion that the (folk-) musical language and definitional authority may be generalized and extended up to a point, beyond which the folk-label loses its currency as a meaningful category around which artists and audiences will mobilize their creative and emotional investments.⁸ I suggest that these arguments should be viewed in terms of a contribution to the more general discussion on the inevitability of genre/style in musical production and reception (Toynbee ; Gunn; Green).

A possible counter-argument to the line of reasoning presented here emerges when considering the global nature of popular music: it belongs to everyone in the sense of its aesthetic and cultural significations being accessible and attractive to audiences around the globe. In addition, affordable do-it-yourself equipment and various web services have contributed to a technologically facilitated democratization of popular music, both in terms of production, marketing and economic-distributional accessibility (Goodwin; Hrac). Against these assertions, it could in turn be argued that popular music is inherently transcultural. That is, while it is a phenomenon that insists to be understood and appreciated by a wide diversity of audiences on a global scale, its success in this regard is not due to universality in codes and messages but its openness to diverse interpretations and identifications (cf. Blacking, »Making Artistic«). In other words, popular music may signify (aesthetically and symbolically) in dramatically different ways, all of which are equally valid to the groups and individuals in question. Yet there seem to be something missing if we want to account for the narratives and discourses that construct and sustain the dominant or hegemonic strands of popular music production and reception. Without such consolidating authority, popular music would arguably be far more diverse than is the case. Put in different terms, all those marginal, obscure or »other« forms of popular music are designated with these attributes by virtue of certain institutionalized forms of musical intelligibil-

⁸ Again, the argument rests on the premise that stylistic boundaries only exist to the extent that there are discursive practices within which boundaries are constituted and maintained. Moreover, practices of inclusion (this is folk music) and exclusion (this is not folk music) make empirical sense by being constitutive of the institution that sustains the category in the first place; a circular argument indeed, but an inevitable one. Ultimately, then, in a situation where (Nordic) folk music is everything and anything, it no longer exists as a separate style/genre.

ity, which in principle are no different from those associated with community-based stylistic formations on a smaller scale.⁹ Also, if musical conceptions somehow mirrored the cultural diversity of popular music audiences, consolidating effects of this kind could never occur. The precise nature of the processes through which such mutual consent is reached is another question, one that requires a comprehensive study of its own and which has to be left for future work. As a final note, I merely want to propose that such studies may benefit from a further consideration of the notion that musical practices are formative of the so-called cultural background that supposedly shapes how people understand and relate to music (Frith, »Music and Identity«; Feld, »Communication«). Moreover, as implicitly argued throughout this article I suggest that rather than dismissing the relevance of the concept of style in the age of transcultural musical diversity there is much to be gained from exploring this diversity against the very conceptual framework through which the notion of style makes sense in the first place.

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⁹ A case in point is the failure of Eastern European artists to reach global success with their version of (Western) popular music. There seem to be no way around these appropriations being perceived as derivative and obscure. One might also propose that there is a hegemonic order to this relationship in the sense that the »Other« takes on, as much as is assigned, the role of subordinate (cf. Ordóñez). It is thus not sufficient to note that evaluative designations are a matter of perspective.

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*Sažetak***Osmišljavanje žanra i stila u razdoblju transkulturne reprodukcije**

Raspravljajući o teorijskim i empirijskim temeljima pojmova stila i žanra u ovom se članku upućuje na konceptualne dileme koje se javljaju kada se uspostavljeni režimi glazbenog vlasništva i produkcije/recepcije rasplinjuju u osvit radikalnih promjena posredovanja glazbe. Istodobno, opaženo je da su nadzirujuće institucije nepopustljive unatoč tome što naoko djeluju suprotno. Na temelju rečenoga u članku se tvrdi da pojmove stila valja shvatiti u okvirima ojačanih autoriteta stanovitih hegemonističkih narativa i diskurza te s njima povezanih (dominantnih) putanja glazbenih praksi.