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**Genre theories and their applications in the historical and analytical study of
popular music: a commentary on my publications**

By Franco Fabbri

University of Huddersfield
June 2012

**Genre theories and their applications in the historical and analytical study of
popular music: a commentary on my publications**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
by Published Works

The University of Huddersfield

June 2012

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Abstract

There can be little doubt that the usage of the concept of genre remains widespread in discourses around music, cinema, theatre, literature. However, for a long period of time, musicologists have paid little attention to genre which is considered to be an outdated legacy of positivism: a concept belonging to amateurish criticism or daily musical practice – and incompatible with the hegemonic ideology of ‘absolute music’. In the commentary that follows, the history of my own efforts to bring genre back to the theoretical core of musicological debate is outlined, and intertwined with the work of other scholars (sociologists, cultural theorists, anthropologists) who helped re-define genre as a useful concept in the scholarly study of music. Popular music, as a set of genres from which para-musical elements – and related social conventions – were never expelled as spurious (as formalist musicology did with respect to Western art music), was obviously my main focus, although in some writings I deal with classical music, electronic music and traditional (folk) music.

After examining at some length the development of my theory of genre (definitions, ‘rules’ and conventions, inter-genre relations and intra-genre diachronic development), the commentary focuses on a number of studies of specific (mostly popular) genres, music scenes, forms, artists, where genre is an underlying concept. One of the most delicate aspects of any theory about genre, and one that has been at the centre of my investigation for so long, is that of diachronic development; as a consequence, the history of popular music became at some point a favourite subject for my study – my contributions are outlined in the commentary which can be read in conjunction with my writings on the subject. Finally, a section is dedicated to my writings on music technology, music industry, and media. In the conclusions my work on genre is contextualised nationally and internationally, with some considerations on linguistic issues; the commentary ends with a brief outline of my future research plans.

Acknowledgements

As a report of my activity as a music scholar in the past thirty-three years or so, the following commentary borders (if anything like a border can be invoked, according to my theory) with the genre of intellectual autobiography. But many names are missing. Remembering them here is much more than obeying a stylistic (or generic) convention. First, I would like to thank Robert Davis for supervising my thesis, for his help in clarifying concepts that often were developed in another language, for his precious editing of my sometimes awkward English.

My reflections on genre were prompted in the 1970s by passionate, sometimes heated discussions with other members of the Stormy Six and fellow musicians from other bands: I am particularly indebted with my colleague (in music and in scholarship) Umberto Fiori, and with Chris Cutler (Henry Cow, Rock In Opposition). Luigi Pestalozza, Luigi Nono and Luca Lombardi (my teacher in composition) were among the first who took my study of genre seriously. Then I met Philip Tagg. Without his encouragement, his example, his theories, very little of what I published on genre or on any other musical subject would have existed. I owe him almost everything (my passion for polemics was already there). An interminable list of mentors and friends should follow, starting with Gino Stefani and including an entire generation of Italian popular music scholars – let me just name a few: Luca Marconi, Roberto Agostini, Paolo Prato, Francesco D’Amato, Goffredo Plastino, Dario Martinelli, Vincenzo Perna. A number of British scholars helped me clarifying my ideas, with their support and criticism: I’d like to mention especially Simon Frith, Richard Middleton and Allan Moore.

In an almost life-long commitment to the practice and study of popular music, I was lucky to enjoy the company, affection, and curiosity of Monica Silvestris along with our daughter Francesca, and of Alessandra Gallone, who have been and remain in the centre of my intellectual and emotional existence. My life and work in the past nine years have been sustained by the empathy, warmth, encouragement and exceptional sharp-mindedness of Marta García Quiñones, to whom this thesis is dedicated, with love.

Published Works

Published works are available as reprints except where the work is of substantial length. The PDF is available on the accompanying CD which contains copies of all the works discussed in the context.

Section 1. Main theoretical publications on genre and related subjects

- 1981 I generi musicali. Una questione da riaprire. *Musica/Realtà*, 4. Bari: Dedalo: 43-66
- 1982 A Theory Of Musical Genres. Two Applications. *Popular Music Perspectives*, ed. D. Horn & P. Tagg. Göteborg and Exeter: IASPM: 52-81. ISBN 917260610X
- 1982 What Kind Of Music. *Popular Music*, 2. Cambridge University Press: 131-144. ISSN 02611430
- 1985 Comunicazione e ascolto (ai margini e sui margini della musica contemporanea). *Musica/Realtà*, 17. Milan: Unicopli: 149-166
- 1986 Musica contemporanea e media: la ‘fallacia concertocentrica’. *Musica/Realtà*, 20. Milan: Unicopli: 95-110
- 1999/2007 Browsing Music Spaces: Categories and the Musical Mind. *Critical essays in popular musicology*, ed. A. Moore. Aldershot: Ashgate: 49-62. ISBN 9780754626473
- 2001 Appunti sui generi: da Aristotele a Yahoo!. *Sound Tracks*, ed. F. D’Amato. 2001, Rome: Meltemi: 89-96. ISBN 8883531302
- 2005 *L’ascolto tabù*. Milan: il Saggiatore (320 pp. – ISBN 8842812277) [CD only]
- 2006 La musica: un falso molto autentico, veramente fasullo. *Rivista di estetica*, 31, *Falsi, contraffazioni, finzioni*, ed. Paolo D’Angelo. Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier: 161-171. ISSN 00356212
- 2007 Tipi, categorie, generi musicali. Serve una teoria? *Musica/Realtà*, 82. Lucca, Milano: LIM-Euresis: 71-86
- 2008 Hacia un campo musicológico unificado. De los estudios de música basados en el repertorio a los estudios de música basados en la perspectiva, *Experiència musical, cultura global*, ed. J. Ayats, G. Ginesi. Mallorca: Consell de Mallorca, Departament de Cultura i Patrimoni: 383-388. ISBN 9788496069831
- 2008 *Il suono in cui viviamo* (third edition). Milan: il Saggiatore (387 pp.) [CD only]
- 2009 La musica come forma dell’interrelazione sociale. *Musica/Realtà*, 89. Lucca: LIM: 67-90
- 2010 Il plurale di ‘musica’. *Musica/Realtà*, 93. Lucca: LIM: 49-65
- 2010 La musica di strada, il senso comune, le buone intenzioni. *Senso comune e creatività. Nuove prospettive della comunicazione sociale*, ed. Ave Appiano. Torino: Cartman Edizioni: 55-62. ISBN 9788889671139
- 2010 What is popular music? And what isn’t? An assessment after thirty years of popular music studies. *Musiikki*, 2. Helsinki: 72-92. ISSN 03551059
- 2011 I nomi delle musiche. *Musica/Realtà*, 96. Lucca: LIM: 7-11
- 2011 Curiosità armoniche e vite parallele. Philip Tagg, *La tonalità di tutti i giorni*. Milano: il Saggiatore: 7-14. ISBN 9788842816690 [CD only]
- 2012 How Genres Are Born, Change, Die: Conventions, Communities and Diachronic Processes. *Critical Musicological Reflections*, ed. S. Hawkins. Aldershot: Ashgate : 179-191. ISBN 9781409425601

Section 2. Publications on specific genres, music scenes, forms and artists

- 2001 La canzone. *Enciclopedia della musica. Volume primo. Il Novecento*, ed. J.J. Nattiez. Turin: Einaudi: 551-576. ISBN 8806158406 [CD only]
- 2002 Paint It Black, Cat: Pop, Rock And The Mediterranean. *Mediterranean Mosaic. Popular Music And Global Sounds*, ed. Goffredo Plastino. New York: Routledge: 37-56. ISBN 9780415936552

- 2003 Il suonatore Faber. *Belin, sei sicuro? Storia e canzoni di Fabrizio de André*, ed. Riccardo Bertocelli. Florence: Giunti: 9-39. ISBN 8809028538
- 2009 Ritorno a Tilos ('la musica che c'è'). *Antropologia della musica nelle culture mediterranee. Interpretazione, performance, identità*, ed. P. V. Bohlman, M. Sorce Keller, L. Azzaroni. Bologna: Clueb: 181-190. ISBN 9788849131666
- 2009 Verse, Chorus (Refrain), Bridge: Analysing Formal Structures of the Beatles' Songs. Paper presented at the 14th International Conference on Popular Music Studies, Liverpool, UK, 13 July 2009 [CD only]
- 2010 Culture del suono nei paneghria di Tilos (Dodecaneso): spazi, riti, tecnologie e stili del confronto popolare/popular. *Popular music e musica popolare. Riflessioni ed esperienze a confronto*, ed. Alessandro Rigolli, Nicola Scaldaferrì. Venezia, Parma: Marsilio, Casa della Musica: 165-178. ISBN 9788831707442 [CD only]

Section 3. Publications on popular Music History

- 2005 Ricostruire una storia della popular music e dei suoi generi: problemi epistemologici e valutazione delle fonti. *La divulgazione musicale in Italia oggi*, ed. Alessandro Rigolli. Turin: EDT: 41-50. ISBN 9788860400420 [CD only]
- 2007 Orchestral Manoeuvres in the 1970s: l'Orchestra Co-operative, 1974–1983. *Popular Music*, 26/3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 409-427. ISSN 02611430
- 2008 *Around the clock. Una breve storia della popular music*. Turin: Utet Libreria (247 pp. – ISBN 9788802079257) [CD only]
- 2009 Altre musiche a Milano, dal dopoguerra a 'Musica nel nostro tempo'. *Milano, laboratorio musicale del Novecento. Scritti per Luciana Pestalozza*, ed. Oreste Bossini. Milan: Archinto: 125-145. ISBN 9788877685261 [CD only]
- 2009 Il Trentennio: «musica leggera» alla radio italiana, 1928-1958. Paper presented at the conference *Radio e musica. Storia, effetti, contesti*. University of Parma, 2 December 2009 [forthcoming in the proceedings] [CD only]
- 2011 *Album bianco. Diari musicali 1965-2011* (third edition). Milan: il Saggiatore (321 pp. – ISBN 9788842816898) [CD only]
- 2011 La popular music a Napoli e negli USA prima della 'popular music': da Donizetti a Stephen Foster, da Piedigrotta a Tin Pan Alley. *La canzone napoletana. Le musiche e i loro contesti*, ed. Enrico Careri, Anita Pesce. Lucca: LIM: 85-96. ISBN 9788870966619

Section 4. Publications on music and technology, music industry and media

- 1984 *Elettronica e musica* (with an introduction by Luigi Nono). Milan: Fratelli Fabbri (239 pp.) [CD only]
- 2009 La musica nell'era digitale. XXI secolo. *Comunicare e rappresentare*, ed. T. Gregory. Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Fondata da Giovanni Treccani S.P.A.: 625-634
- 2010 'I'd Like my Record to Sound Like This': Peter Gabriel and Audio Technology, *Peter Gabriel, From Genesis to Growing Up*, ed. Michael Drewett, Sarah Hill, Kimi Kärki. Aldershot: Ash-gate: 173-182. ISBN 9780754665212

Section 5. Reviews

- 2008 Genre in Popular Music, by Fabian Holt. *Popular Music*, 27/3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 490-492. ISSN 02611430 [CD only]
- 2011 Carnal Musicology (in Beethoven's arms, hands and fingers). *Trans*, 15. SIBE. ISSN 16970101 [CD only]

Genre theories and their applications in the historical and analytical study of popular music: a commentary on my publications

Introduction: early thoughts on genre theory

Is genre a useful concept in the study of popular music? When I first approached this matter, in the second half of the Seventies, I asked those whom I thought should know the answer, and most of them said: “No.” They were composers of contemporary music (‘musica contemporanea’, ‘neue Musik’, or ‘musique contemporaine’), musicologists and music critics (who specialised in Western art music, from any era: from medieval to modern). They were ‘my’ authorities for music theory and criticism. For the majority of them, genre was an outdated concept, and it was useless to try to bring it back from the past where it belonged. In spite of such an almost unanimous denial, as far as I was aware, genre was not only used almost daily in literary and film criticism, but also used for practical reasons in most of the discourses about music I could think of. Why should a concept that proved to be so useful in current musical practice, and in other arts, be outdated in music theory? Was such a paradox embedded in the concept, or did it originate in the relation between hegemonic music studies and current musical practice? Was such a denial of genre particularly confined to that musical and musicological community? Could even basic concepts like genre be valued differently in different communities, within the same historical, social, cultural, national context?

In the late Seventies and very early Eighties, in Italy – as well as in other countries I visited at that time, like Germany or Sweden – it was clear that music and politics were two closely related worlds. Many heated discussions were taking place concerning the political value of music: frequently, these discussions were based on genre. Is folksong intrinsically progressive? Can jazz or avant-garde art music be politically committed, and how? By means of titles and dedications, or by developing new languages, or by composing accessible music ‘for the masses’? Is rock a product of cultural imperialism? Are some genres better than others? Such discussions went on in various communities (political militants, folk revivalists, singer-songwriters, jazz musicians and critics), but – again paradoxically – they also touched the musicological and contemporary music community, who appeared so suspicious about genre. The usage of the concept in these debates was ambivalent:

on one hand, many would reach the conclusion that political (or aesthetic) value was independent from genre (was *transversal* with respect to genre: a buzzword in the artistic and cultural debate that started circulating at the time); on the other hand, very few seemed to care about a possible definition of the concept they were using; furthermore, should genres be thrown away, and demolished, like the *barriers* (another buzzword) between them? Or should they be acknowledged, and used as basic categories in a new socio-anthropological (and relativistic) view of the music world?

It is no surprise, then, that the first articles I wrote on genre were published in musical-cultural-political magazines, like *La Comune*, the review of the Circoli La Comune (1975),¹ or *Laboratorio musica* (1980),² a monthly directed by Luigi Nono and published jointly by Ricordi and by ARCI,³ the recreational and cultural association closely linked to the two main left-wing parties, PCI⁴ and PSI.⁵ They were short, non-academic articles; the former was polemically involved in the debate about the political value of music, but the title (“The game of revolutionary music”) is strongly suggestive of rules and coded behaviours; the latter is much closer to my first scholarly account on genre, and anticipates – as I’m going to comment below – some theoretical clues. Soon after writing the article for *Laboratorio musica*, I had an exchange of letters with Umberto Eco: I wrote to him commenting on an article in *l’Espresso* I didn’t agree with (he had written that the music of the Italian demented-punk band Skiantos was ‘atonal’),⁶ and he responded apologizing for not being able to develop his argument in the very short format of his article. He said: “unfortunately, I believe in literary genres”.⁷ Apart from the specific musical issue, that sounded to me like a great and unexpected encouragement.

The transition from my early thoughts on genre in the mid Seventies, closely related to my activity as a musician and music organizer, to my deeper accounts on the subject in the early Eighties is clearly influenced and informed by Umberto Eco’s essays: *La struttura assente* (1968), which I read in the summer of 1978, *Le forme del contenuto* (1971), *Il segno* (1973) and *Trattato di semiotica*

¹ “Il gioco della musica rivoluzionaria”, *La Comune*, 1, 1975, pp. 28-30. Playwright and actor Dario Fo (Nobel Prize in Literature in 1997) was, at that time, politically close to Circoli La Comune.

² “Musica tra le musiche”, *Laboratorio musica*, 14-15, luglio-agosto 1980, p. 42.

³ Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana.

⁴ Partito Comunista Italiano.

⁵ Partito Socialista Italiano.

⁶ Umberto Eco, “Tic & Tabù”, in *l’Espresso*, 15 June 1980.

⁷ Personal communication 20 July 1980; here’s an excerpt of the letter: “Io credo purtroppo ai generi letterari. Un saggio è una cosa seria, un articoletto di due cartelle cerca al massimo di buttare giù una impressione, spesso solo una irritazione. [...] Quello su cui rimango fermo, e rispetto a cui gli esempi musicali erano solo una allegoria, è la omologazione della trasgressione. Che non giudico fenomeno positivo: e in questo senso il punto d’arrivo finale delle trascrizioni di Deleuze e Guattari è, credo, una sorta di classicismo piatto del Desiderio, senza più opposizioni che facciano senso”.

generale (1975), which I read between 1978 and 1979.⁸ My short article for *Laboratorio Musica* (less than 500 words) included the following (uncommented) definition: “... genre [is] a set of – real or possible – music events, whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted norms.” It is almost exactly the same definition I would formulate months later in my longer articles. The influence of Eco’s semiotics is apparent: the close relationship between genres and codes, the role played by communities sharing such codes, even the reference to ‘objects’ in the semantic space (“real or possible”) which need not have a counterpart in the real world.

In a further article I wrote with friend and comrade Umberto Fiori, published in the first issue of *Musica/Realtà* (dated April 1980, but – as far as I remember – actually published during the summer of that year),⁹ genre is described as “... a context defined by socially accepted functions and norms, which govern the theoretical and material conditions of musical communication”.¹⁰ In the same article where I discuss the activity of the Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano, I suggest that: “... it is like saying that a stable context was created, characterized by specific commissioning, economic and proxemic conditions where communication takes place”.¹¹ My personal contribution to that article can be easily distinguished from that of the other author by its constant reference to genre as a basic concept which is able to deal with issues of political value. It goes without saying that hints at “economic and proxemic conditions” suggest that I already had in mind a typology of generic norms.

In fact, as the basic structure of my (early) theory was already outlined, I spent the time between the delivery of those articles and that of my first scholarly account, again for *Musica/Realtà*,¹² studying historical genre theories: from Aristotle and his school (especially Theophrastus) to discussions of genre from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth century. In the first draft, an overview of ancient and modern theories preceded a description of my semiotics-oriented theory. Quite rightly Luigi Pestalozza, the journal’s editor, suggested I should present my own reflections at the beginning of the article, and leave the historical overview at the end in order to avoid giving the impression that my theory was a consequence of that long development (which it wasn’t as I would spend several years trying to understand how a semiotic theory of genre could be informed by historical debate on

⁸ Umberto Eco, *La struttura assente. Introduzione alla ricerca semiologica*. 1968, Milan: Bompiani. Umberto Eco, *Le forme del contenuto*. 1971, Milan: Bompiani. Umberto Eco, *Il segno*. 1973, Milan: Isedi. Umberto Eco, *Trattato di semiotica generale*. 1975, Milan: Bompiani (*A Theory of Semiotics*. 1976, Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

⁹ (With Umberto Fiori), Crisi e prospettive della canzone politica italiana. *Musica/Realtà*, 1. 1980, Bari: Dedalo: 161-176

¹⁰ Ibid.: 161

¹¹ Ibid.: 162

¹² I generi musicali. Una questione da riaprire. *Musica/Realtà*, 4. 1981, Bari: Dedalo: 43-66

the subject). Even the title was changed: composer Giacomo Manzoni (also known for being the Italian translator of most of Adorno's writings on music) proposed to alter my original title from "Musical genres", which implied a kind of definitive statement, into "Musical genres: an issue to be re-opened".

By the time the essay for *Musica/Realtà* was published, I had already received from Philip Tagg an invitation to submit a paper proposal for the first International Conference on Popular Music Research, to be held in Amsterdam in June 1981. The contact with Tagg had been established by means of Günter Mayer, then professor of aesthetics at Humboldt University, whom I had met in Berlin during the Festival of Political Song in 1979 and 1980.¹³ At the end of April 1980 I received from Tagg "the version of your paper outline which we plan to duplicate for the conference".¹⁴

Franco FABBRI: President of "L'Orchestra" Collective, Segrate, Italy

Paper synopsis: A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications

A musical genre is "a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules". The community accepting these rules – in an explicit or implicit way – involves authors (if any), performers (if any), audience (if any), critics (if any), promoters (if any) and so on. Rules accepted concern acoustics, musical composition, performance, economy, proxemics, behaviour, etc.

Such a definition allows us to examine in any given period the division of genres as well as their overlap, according (or in contrast) to the different social functions of music.

However, as the rules defining genre may change (some of them becoming socially unacceptable or substituted [or not] by others), genres are neither categories outside time nor living organisms subject to a predictable development from birth to decadence to death: their "life" is rather the story of a complex community, of society as a whole, and of the use of music in it.

In order to illustrate this theory from two different perspectives (synchronic and diachronic), we shall investigate:

- 1) The various musical genres based on the *canzone* form in *Italy to-day*;
- 2) The development of the *canzone d'autore* genre (singer/songwriter) in *Italy over the last twenty years*, where "development" means change in social rules governing the ways and means of producing such music, its distribution, uses, function, mode of reception, the behaviour of its musicians, audiences, critics, etc., in contrast to other genres.

¹³ Tagg's letter is dated 8 October 1980. It ends with a handwritten post-scriptum: "Sending you this on the recommendation of mutual friend and colleague Günther Mayer (GDR), a good comrade."

¹⁴ Letter from Philip Tagg, dated 13 April 1981. Quite generously, Tagg commented: "I thought your English was really good and I only had to change one or two words"...

It may or may not be relevant to this commentary, but a month later I received from Tagg “a second draft of proposals concerning the foundation of an International Society for Popular Music Research” that “... will be presented at a discussion at the first International Conference on Popular Music in Amsterdam on Friday June 26th”.¹⁵

I wrote my conference paper in Italian and had it translated into English by a friend who was neither an expert in music nor semiotics. It was also a very long paper and I definitely exceeded the time allowed to speakers. As it was the first conference on popular music ‘research’, there were few participants and the session chairperson was generous. Richard Middleton asked if my suggestions about ideology as a hyper-norm governing subordinate codes could be related to Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (which wasn’t the case, as I derived that concept from Eco: but I saved that precious comment for later); someone else objected strongly to my usage of matrixes and other schemes derived from mathematics (although they are quite common in semiotics, and other authors like Tagg used them consistently). I think the opponent was Frans A.J. Birrer, who in the following IASPM conference in Reggio Emilia, 1983, would present a paper titled “Definitions and Research Orientation: Do We Need a Definition of Popular Music?”, consisting of a stern critique of the “information theoretic approach” to music which seemed to include semiotics amongst other rogue ‘scientific’ disciplines.¹⁶ So, I can’t say that I convinced everybody in the audience! My paper was published in the conference proceedings¹⁷ and elsewhere,^{18 19} and contributed greatly to my reception in the Anglophone world as “the guy who writes about genre”. Richard Middleton asked me to write an article for the second issue of *Popular Music*,²⁰ suggesting I abandon the “deductive framework” of my Amsterdam paper in favour of an overview of the process that had led to the formulation of my theory. I am not sure if the result corresponded either to the editor’s wishes, or to mine. The article begins with a list of empirical examples concerning the usage of genre in various discourses (on practical or theoretical musical issues), but the theory is then expounded without any detailed

¹⁵ Letter from Philip Tagg dated 15 May 1981. In a handwritten note Tagg added: “Dear Mr. Fabbri, it would be of great help to us if you would consider taking part in the activities of the working committee described in the enclosed papers. Please could you let me know your position in this matter before the conference, if possible, if not, at the conference.”

¹⁶ Frans A.J. Birrer, Definitions and Research Orientation: Do We Need a Definition of Popular Music? *Popular Music Perspectives 2*, ed. D. Horn. 1985, Göteborg, Exeter, Ottawa, Reggio Emilia: IASPM: 99-105

¹⁷ A Theory Of Musical Genres. Two Applications. *Popular Music Perspectives*, ed. D. Horn & P. Tagg. 1982, Göteborg and Exeter: IASPM: 52-81

¹⁸ The System Of Canzone In Italy Today. *World Music, Politics And Social Change*, ed. S. Frith. 1989, Manchester: Manchester University Press: 122-141 (this is only the second part of my Amsterdam paper)

¹⁹ A Theory Of Musical Genres. Two Applications. *Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 3, ed. Simon Frith. 2004, New York: Routledge: 7-35

²⁰ What Kind Of Music? *Popular Music*, 2. 1982, Cambridge University Press: 131-144

reference to its origins in Eco's semiotics or Adorno's music sociology. (Adorno's hierarchy of listener types being an obvious formal model, albeit one that I was opposed to in respect to its content and ideology). Instead, examples are used inductively to illustrate aspects of the theory, as if that was the actual epistemological process involved. I would say that my early theory wasn't based either on deduction or on induction, but on *falsifiability*, as proposed by Karl Popper in his *Logic of Scientific Discovery*,²¹ which was the main subject of a course in epistemology I had attended at the University of Milan in 1974. Although all the examples presented in the article are definitely drawn from my previous (and at that time ongoing) experience as a music professional, they probably suggest a kind of empiricism that didn't correspond to my actual method. Another flaw in that article was that once more – and for the last time – I wrote it in Italian, which meant that the otherwise excellent translation by Iain Chambers blurred some of the linguistic distinctions I had made in the original. For instance, the title which was in Italian, “Che genere di musica?”, should have been translated as “Which [Music] Genre?”, and not “What Kind of Music?” (which, in Italian, would be: “Che tipo di musica?”). The different arrangement of the semantic space of terms like ‘genere’ and ‘tipo’ in Italian and ‘genre’, ‘kind’, and ‘type’ in English would become the focus of another paper on genre, which I would write many years later. As a consequence, I do not consider “What Kind of Music?” to be my best essay on genre, although it has certainly become one of the best known.

Writings 1982 -1996

My following attempt to clarify aspects of genre theory is documented by a paper I presented at an ISME (International Society for Music Education) seminar in Trento, in July 1982. It was only published in German,²² until I included an Italian version in a collection of essays in 1996.²³ My assumption in that paper is that music is described differently in different genres, because verbal metalanguages for music are codified (conventionally) within various music communities. The idea would be developed later for a research project on the aesthetics of the recording studio, but it would also emerge (as in the Trento paper) in reflections about popular music studies and the hegemony of the ‘classical’ lexicon in music theory. The same issue would be tackled systematically by Philip Tagg much later, in his *Everyday Tonality*.²⁴

²¹ Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1959, New York: Basic Books

²² Musikalische Gattungen und ihre Metasprachen. *Musik und Bildung*, 7/8. 1983, Mainz: B. Schott's Soehne.

²³ *Il suono in cui viviamo* (first edition). 1996, Milan: Feltrinelli

²⁴ Philip Tagg, *Everyday Tonality*. 2009, New York & Montréal: Mass Media Music Scholars' Press

In 1982, as a member of the first IASPM's Executive Committee, I was assigned the task to organize the second international conference on popular music studies, to be held in Reggio Emilia (Italy) in September 1983. From that point, most of the time I could dedicate to music studies was spent on IASPM's activities; I was elected again to the EC in Reggio Emilia and acted as Membership Secretary; I was elected Chair of the Association in Montreal (1985) and in that capacity I collaborated to the organization of the fourth international conference (Accra, Ghana, 1987). Another change that occurred in the same period was that I gave up my activity as a performing musician, and started collaborating with the music publisher Ricordi, first as a consultant on new music technologies, then as manager of their personal computer division. My interest in music technology had begun in the Seventies, and was initially related to studio production, industrial processes, and synthesizers; in 1980 I started writing regular columns for *Fare musica*, a monthly magazine for professionals (and would-be professionals) in music making and audio technologies; in 1982 I began experimenting with home computers. I will comment on my writings on music technology later in this text, but information about the above activities is necessary to understand the interval between "What Kind of Music?" and my next substantial paper on genre in English, presented in 1999 and published only in 2007. However, I went on writing on genre (or using the concept as defined in my early articles) in Italian. Genre was a methodological foundation for the survey on music consumption commissioned by the PCI (Italian Communist Party) to l'Orchestra in 1983,²⁵ which was presented at the Reggio Emilia conference.²⁶ I decided not to include it in my list of selected publications, as it was a multi-authored work. It can, however, be cited as evidence that genre was used as a reliable concept to support research on music consumption, in a survey which remained unique in Italy for decades :

[...] during the course of the survey, whenever musical genres are mentioned, they are taken from a reference list of eighty-eight genres compiled on the basis of the common view of the most informed listeners, gathered from conversations, articles and radio and television broadcasts. Evidently, the list is heterogeneous, for such is the semantic universe of [genre] organisation in general: in some cases stylistic considerations prevail; in others, sociological connotations; in others, historical reasons. The issue of homogeneity wasn't considered, simply because, from a homogeneous point of view (that is, from a privileged 'scientific' point of view) musical genres serve no purpose; they are useful to a

²⁵ *La musica che si consuma* (with N. Ala, U. Fiori, E. Ghezzi). 1985, Milan: Unicopli (135 pp.)

²⁶ Patterns of Music Consumption in Milan and Reggio Emilia from April to May 1983 (with N. Ala, U. Fiori, E. Ghezzi), *Popular Music Perspectives*, 2, ed. D. Horn. 1985, Göteborg, Exeter, Ottawa, Reggio Emilia: IASPM: 464-500; see especially pp. 468-471. The original version (in Italian) of the paper is: Schemi del consumo musicale a Milano e a Reggio Emilia (with N. Ala, U. Fiori, E. Ghezzi). *What is popular music?*, ed. F. Fabbri. 1985, Milan: Unicopli: 492-527

musicological and sociological study, insofar as they express one of the many points of view on music (sometimes the only one) held by the community interested into a specific music event.²⁷

I presented two papers in 1985 (one at a conference, the other as a lecture) that are also based on genre, although their main focus is contemporary music. Written in a slightly polemical tone, they related to the then ongoing debate about avant-garde music and its audience, and aimed to locate the subject in the wider perspective of contemporary media, the music industry, and popular culture. In the first,²⁸ there is a hint of an issue I would develop later, that of visual representations of the semantic space of genre. In both papers, contemporary music is seen as a genre among genres. This is especially true of the second paper²⁹ where contemporary music is discussed with respect to its relation to different media (radio and phonograms), to other genres, and according to conventions stipulated within its defining community.

After 1985, genre and semiotics remained as a methodological backdrop of my work on music technology and music analysis (as I will comment later in this text). The opportunity to go back to my reflections on genre presented itself about ten years later by the publication of *Il suono in cui viviamo*,³⁰ a collection of writings on popular music, which I decided to open with a synthesis of my Amsterdam and *Popular Music* papers, both unpublished in Italian at that time. In the interval between those articles and 1994-95 (when I actually worked at *Il suono in cui viviamo*, which was published with some delay), a few comments on my theory had been made by music scholars, especially by Philip Tagg,³¹ Allan Moore,³² Ola Stockfelt,³³ and Keith Negus.³⁴ Later, more extensive comments would be made by Simon Frith in a full chapter of his *Performing Rites* entitled “Genre

²⁷ Patterns of Music Consumption cit.: p. 469. I have slightly adjusted the English translation.

²⁸ Comunicazione e ascolto (ai margini e sui margini della musica contemporanea). *Musica/Realtà*, 17. 1985: Milan: Unicopli: 149-166

²⁹ Musica contemporanea e media: la ‘fallacia concertocentrica’. *Musica/Realtà*, 20. 1986, Milan: Unicopli: 95-110

³⁰ *Il suono in cui viviamo* (first edition). 1996, Milan: Feltrinelli (202 pp.)

³¹ Philip Tagg, Towards a Sign Typology of Music. *Secondo Convegno Europeo di Analisi Musicale. Atti.* ed. Rossana Dalmonte and Mario Baroni. 1992, Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento: 369-378

³² Allan Moore, *Rock: the primary text. Developing a musicology of rock.* 1993, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

³³ Ola Stockfelt, Adequate modes of listening. 1993, *Stanford Humanities Review*, 3(2), 153-169. The article is also included in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, ed. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassbian, Lawrence Siegel. 1997, Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia: 129-146

³⁴ Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures.* 1999, London and New York: Routledge. See pages 25-27

Rules”.³⁵ My work on genre has continued to be cited very recently (for example, by Lars Eckstein³⁶ and Marco Santoro),³⁷ although the only referenced articles are almost invariably those dated 1982.

In the chapter I wrote for *Il suono in cui viviamo* (titled “Che genere di musica?”) I critiqued Allan Moore’s discussion of genre and style which seemed to reverse the approach I had taken by using ‘style’ where I would use ‘genre’ and vice-versa.³⁸ Moore and I met at one of the two seminars he gave at the University of Bologna in 1998, and both his texts were published later in *Musica/Realtà*.³⁹ Notwithstanding our conceptual disagreement, Moore generously invited me to give a keynote at the 3rd Triennial British Musicological Societies’ Conference, University of Surrey, Guildford, in July 1999. The paper⁴⁰ presented the first substantial revision of my early theory, taking into account other approaches to categorization (namely, those of US cognitive scientists), after suggestions from mentors and colleagues, such as Gino Stefani and Luca Marconi. My interest in those studies, of course, had also been raised by Umberto Eco’s *Kant e l’ornitorinco*, which was mainly a commentary on American cognitive science and issues of conceptualization and categorization published in 1997.⁴¹ Curiously enough, as I had written my lengthy keynote in English, when *Musica/Realtà*’s editor asked me to publish it – and I had no time to translate it immediately – the text was given to a professional translator, who transformed it into a perfect, almost incomprehensible Italian academic paper,⁴² that very few would recognize as mine. This is also the reason why that is the only paper on genre missing in subsequent editions (2002 and 2008) of *Il suono in cui viviamo*.

Since the first edition, *Il suono in cui viviamo* has been, relative to the small size of the Italian market for music essays, a success. It was one of the earliest collections of ‘serious’ essays on popular

³⁵ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites. On the Value of Popular Music*. 1996, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (the chapter on genre rules is at pages 75-98)

³⁶ Lars Eckstein, *Reading Song Lyrics*. 2010, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi (in the chapter titled “Generic Conventions and Cultural Capital”, pp. 43-48)

³⁷ Marco Santoro, *Effetto Tenco. Genealogia della canzone d’autore*. 2010, Bologna: Il Mulino

³⁸ I wasn’t aware of Stockfelt’s comments, and there was nothing to say about Tagg, who wrote “... I am using ‘genre’ and ‘style’ in the precise senses defined by Franco Fabbri [1982]”. Philip Tagg, “Towards a Sign Typology...” cited, p. 376.

³⁹ The text where Moore discusses style and genre is Questioni di stile, genere e idioletto nel rock. 2001, *Musica/Realtà*, 64, Lucca: LIM: 85-102. It can be found in English on his website: <http://allanfmoore.org.uk/>

⁴⁰ Browsing Music Spaces: Categories and the Musical Mind. *Critical essays in popular musicology*, ed. A. Moore. 2007, Aldershot: Ashgate: 49-62

⁴¹ Umberto Eco, *Kant e l’ornitorinco*. 1997, Milan: Bompiani. English translation: *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*. 1999, New York: Harcourt Brace & Co

⁴² Navigando per gli spazi musicali: le categorie e la mente musicale. *Musica/Realtà*, 61. 2000, Lucca, Milano: LIM/Euresis: 89-108

music published in Italy, and the first by an Italian author. In the third edition (2008),⁴³ which is almost twice as large as the first one, the initial part, about one third of the total page count, includes almost all my essays on genre theory, as well as two essays on popular music history; the second part is mainly about popular music analysis; the third is mainly about music, technology and economy. The volume includes:

“Perché la chiamiamo popular music?”; “Musiche nel Novecento”; “Musiche nel XXI secolo”; “Che genere di musica?”; “I generi musicali e i loro metalinguaggi”; “Generi in trasformazione: l’elettrificazione di alcune musiche nel Mediterraneo”; “Musiche, categorie, e cose pericolose”; “Tipi, categorie, generi musicali. Serve una teoria?”; “Il re è nudo: il campo musicologico unificato e la sua articolazione”; “Abbiamo un riff, o due?”; “Forme e modelli delle canzoni dei Beatles”; “Questo pacchetto ti soddisferà: qualche cenno su ‘From Me To You’”; “(Verse)/Chorus/Bridge Revisited”; “Don’t Bore Us – Get To The Chorus. Serve la ‘noia’ alle canzoni?”; “Complessità progressiva nella musica dei gruppi angloamericani, 1960-1967”; “Acquiring the Taste”; “De André il progressivo”; “La musica seria di Keith Jarrett”; “Vero o falso? Estetica della musica ‘riprodotta’”; “Il suono di chi? Popular music e tecnologia”; “Cucina elettronica e paesaggi immaginari”; “You’re pushing the needle to the red, ovvero della prospettiva, arte dell’illusione”; “Diavolo d’un Gabriel?”; “Come la vuole, la sfumatura?”; “Mai dire mai”; “Cuffia o altoparlanti?”; “Le ‘bolle musicali’: musica e automobile”; “Soluzioni criptiche”; “Traduzioni milionarie”; “Forza Milan!”; “Diritto, diritti e dritti: la Siae divide (e impera)”; “Muzak per le nostre orecchie”; “La bassa fedeltà è indigesta”; “Frank Zappa e gli altri ragazzacci”; “Organizzare il sound”; “Come il disco”; “Il *Prometeo* di Luigi Nono: l’occhio colpisce ancora”; “Il gesto e la musica automatica”; “Dalla musica automatica a quale cinema?”

The montage of longer essays and shorter articles appealed to a heterogeneous readership, that included music professionals (from various genres), journalists, teachers, students. It was appreciated by Luciano Berio and by film composer Nicola Piovani, who elected it as his *livre de chevet* (bedside book). On the other hand, a few conventional musicologists raised their eyebrows at such a mixture of discursive levels and musical genres, fearing my ‘pernicious relativism’ and ‘dangerous ideas’.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Il suono in cui viviamo* (third edition). 2008, Milan: il Saggiatore (387 pp.)

⁴⁴ One of such ‘dangerous ideas’ was my suggestion that the sheer intensity (or volume) of sound could be an aesthetic factor in some genres: and I was just quoting Adorno’s *gemeinschaftsbildende Kraft* (T.W. Adorno, *Der getreue Korrespondent*. 1963, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag), and Bekker’s study on the symphony (Paul Bekker, *Die Symphonie von Beethoven bis Mahler*. 1918, Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler)

Writings 1996 -2011

The success of *Il suono in cui viviamo* opened new professional opportunities for me. From 1987 to 1996 I had been mainly involved in the computer industry, and that job would continue until 2003. However, after an interview about the book in 1996, I was asked to collaborate as a presenter of music broadcasts with the Third Programme of Italian public radio (Rai Radio Tre), and that part-time occupation continued for years. Paradoxically it wasn't *Il suono in cui viviamo* that prompted my career as a university teacher, but another book, a kind of musical autobiography, that was published in 2001,⁴⁵ with a second and third edition respectively in 2002⁴⁶ and 2011.⁴⁷ Professor Giorgio Pestelli, a music historian from the University of Turin, appreciated the simple analyses of song fragments included in *Album bianco*, and asked me to give a course on popular music in 2002. I had been teaching for a while at the University of Trento in 1996, but following a course in Turin I was hired in 2008 as a 'ricercatore'.⁴⁸ My official discipline: ethnomusicology.⁴⁹

An invitation to Barcelona in March 2003 offered me a new chance to participate in international conferences, presenting papers in English – after 1987 the only conferences I had attended abroad were in Paris (IASPM 1989) and Guildford (1999). In Montreal (2003), although I didn't attend, I was elected again to the EC of IASPM; I was one of the organisers of the Rome conference (2005), where I was elected Chair of IASPM; in that capacity I helped organize the Mexico City conference (2007). During the last decade I have also lectured or given seminars in Spain (Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Logroño, Salamanca), Cuba (Havana), Finland (Helsinki, Imatra, Seinäjoki), the UK (Liverpool, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, London, Leeds), Germany (Berlin, Cologne), France (Paris), Malta. Many papers I wrote after 2000,⁵⁰ concentrate again on genre, in the effort to integrate my early theory with the findings of cognitive scientists (especially George Lakoff and Mark Johnson) and semioticians (Gino Stefani, Luca Marconi, and, of course, Umberto Eco; later, Rubén López Cano), and at the same time to correct weaknesses in my theory. A keynote I delivered in Havana, Cuba, in 2006, was my biggest effort to elaborate a kind of 'complementarity principle' between the

⁴⁵ *Album bianco. Diari musicali 1965-2000*. 2001, Rome:Arcana (216 pp.)

⁴⁶ *Album bianco². Diari musicali 1965-2002*. 2002, Rome:Arcana (250 pp.)

⁴⁷ *Album bianco. Diari musicali 1965-2011*. 2011, Milan:il Saggiatore (322 pp.)

⁴⁸ The lowest grade in Italian universities; 'ordinario' or 'professore di prima fascia' is the highest, 'associato' or 'professore di seconda fascia' the second.

⁴⁹ According to the rules of the Italian Ministry of University, there are just two scholarly disciplines that focus on music: musicology and ethnomusicology. Popular music doesn't appear in the descriptions of their objects and tasks (*declaratorie*), neither in the internationally accepted English expression, nor in any of the common Italian synonyms, like *musica leggera*, *musica di intrattenimento*, *musica di consumo*, *musica mediatizzata*, and so on. Such music doesn't exist officially in Italian universities.

⁵⁰ Appunti sui generi: da Aristotele a Yahoo!. *Sound Tracks*, ed. F. D'Amato. 2001, Rome: Meltemi: 89-96

rule- (or, better, convention-) based theory and a prototypical interpretation of categorizing processes. Presented in Spanish, it was published in Italian both in *Musica/Realtà*⁵¹ and in the third edition of *Il suono in cui viviamo*. As the title “Tipi, categorie, generi musicali. Serve una teoria?” suggests, it is aimed at expanding my initial reflections on genre by outlining a general theory of music typologies. As such, I’d say that its most original contribution in that direction is in the adoption of Eco’s concept of ‘cognitive type’ to describe music works as collections of various musical objects or events (a score, a performance, a recording, etc.), related by similarity and identified by a title: an idea that had been developed in a previous article, published in the *Rivista di estetica*.⁵² My conclusions in the Havana paper are that:

...categorization processes – which are usually circumscribed by musicologists to classes of works (or of music events), therefore to genres, styles, repertoires – are actually functioning in every moment of our interaction with music. Some people see musical life as a history of individuals, i.e. individual works, which other people (substantially for non-musical reasons) classify into types. After a quarter of a century, I became convinced exactly of the contrary: that musical life is a continuous process of categorization, production and recognition of the occurrences of types, from the lowest semiotic level (multiple occurrences of a work, be it a song, a symphony, a cello suite, a tape recording of an album, etc.) to the most articulated level (occurrences of an author’s idiolect, of a style, of a genre).⁵³

A number of articles and conference papers I wrote after 2003 include further reflections on genre and categorization in the context of a critique of both conventional musicology and the traditional segmentation of academic music studies (historical musicology, analytical musicology, ethnomusicology, with more recent additions like jazz studies, popular music studies, music and the moving image studies, sound studies, etc.). In some of these writings I focus on the idea of an all-encompassing music anthropology, following Charles Seeger, John Blacking, and Philip Tagg (“the popular study of music, rather than the study of popular music”);⁵⁴ in others I concentrate on the hegemony of conventional historical musicology, especially in Italy, Germany, and France, and on the damage such hegemony may cause for music studies in general as well as historical musicology itself. The backdrop for such reflections was the climate of political and cultural intolerance that originated in the terrorist attacks of 2001 and subsequent wars. Hence the subtitle of *L’ascolto tabù*, a

⁵¹ Tipi, categorie, generi musicali. Serve una teoria? *Musica/Realtà*, 82. 2007, Lucca, Milano: LIM-Euresis: 71-86

⁵² La musica: un falso molto autentico, veramente fasullo. *Rivista di estetica*, 31, *Falsi, contraffazioni, finzioni*, ed. Paolo D’Angelo. 2006, Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier: 161-171

⁵³ Tipi, categorie, generi musicali. Serve una teoria? cit., 84.

⁵⁴ I have no reference for this quotation: it certainly was a recurring argument in discussions within IASPM in the early Eighties.

collection of essays and shorter articles that was published in 2005: “Music in the global clash”.⁵⁵ The main subjects are: background listening; genre ideologies and musicology; world musics and the ‘culture clash’; an analysis of Italian singer-songwriter genre and a discussion of the song vs. poetry debate; comments on the music industry; music programming on the radio. Essays dealing with genre, ideology, and musicology include “La musica, l’elettroacustica, i pensieri musicali” (thereby criticizing the idea that only in art music something like a ‘musical thought’ is developed), “Per una critica del fallacismo musicologico” (from Oriana Fallaci, the Italian journalist who championed the ‘culture clash’ theory in the early 2000s), “Studiare la popular music, in Italia” (on the history of ideological conflicts in Italian studies on popular music, and music studies in general).

Other papers written after the publication of *L’ascolto tabù* focus on similar subjects. In three of them, delivered at ethnomusicological conferences in Venice,⁵⁶ Mallorca,⁵⁷ and Newcastle,⁵⁸ theoretical reflections on genre are the starting point to comment and criticize the conventional division of musicological labour (the Newcastle paper is included in the 2008 edition of *Il suono in cui viviamo*). “La musica come forma dell’interrelazione sociale”,⁵⁹ originally prepared as a keynote at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya in Barcelona, is mainly about the concept of absolute music and includes a discussion of various definitions of ‘music’. “Il plurale di ‘musica’”⁶⁰ is another recent essay on genre, improving on the discussion of some crucial concepts like spatial metaphors and communities. “La musica di strada, il senso comune, le buone intenzioni”⁶¹ is an essay on common sense, musical competence and ideology. “I nomi delle musiche”⁶² is a short article on naming conventions, also in response to the proposal of a well known Italian music critic and musicologist, Quirino Principe, to create a new genre, *musica forte* (‘strong music’), as a kind of marketing strategy to improve the appeal of ‘classical’ music to prospective younger audiences.

⁵⁵ *L’ascolto tabù. La musica nello scontro globale*. 2005, Milan: il Saggiatore (320 pp.)

⁵⁶ Superstringhe folk, pop, classiche, e la Teoria Unificata del Campo musicologico. Dagli studi musicali divisi per repertori, a quelli organizzati per prospettive. 2007, Venice: Fondazione Giorgio Cini: <http://www.cini.it/it/publication/page/83>

⁵⁷ Hacia un campo musicológico unificado. De los estudios de música basados en el repertorio a los estudios de música basados en la perspectiva, *Experiència musical, cultura global*, ed. J. Ayats, G. Ginesi. 2008, Mallorca: Consell de Mallorca, Departament de Cultura i Patrimoni: 383-388

⁵⁸ The King is Naked: The Musicological Field and its Articulation. 2007, <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/music-conferences/BFE2007/roundtable.htm>

⁵⁹ La musica come forma dell’interrelazione sociale. *Musica/Realtà*, 89. 2009, Lucca: LIM: 67-90

⁶⁰ Il plurale di ‘musica’. *Musica/Realtà*, 93. 2010, Lucca: LIM: 49-65

⁶¹ La musica di strada, il senso comune, le buone intenzioni. *Senso comune e creatività. Nuove prospettive della comunicazione sociale*, ed. Ave Appiano. 2010, Torino: Cartman Edizioni: 55-62

⁶² I nomi delle musiche. *Musica/Realtà*, 96. 2011, Lucca: LIM: 7-11

Some of my most recent essays in English focus on genre. Chronologically, the first is a short review of one of the few specific accounts on genre published recently, which seemed to offer (judging by its title) new theoretical perspectives on the subject, but actually didn't, being limited to a series of genre-based ethnographies.⁶³ Another review, of Luca Chiantore's exhaustive essay on Beethoven's sketchbooks, offered me an opportunity to discuss performance, improvisation and the body as ignored items in conventional musicological debate, as a result of what Christopher Small described as music reification into scores.^{64 65}

"What is popular music? And what isn't? An assessment after thirty years of popular music studies",⁶⁶ originally delivered as a keynote in Seinäjoki, Finland, concentrates on the definition and development of the popular music studies 'field'. In this rather long paper both the 'prehistory' of popular music studies since the 1940s, and its history after the foundation of IASPM in 1981 are outlined, commenting underlying theories and definitions of the research field.

My most substantial recent account on genre is "How Genres Are Born, Change, Die: Conventions, Communities and Diachronic Processes",⁶⁷ a chapter I wrote for a collection of essays in honour of Derek B. Scott. Its theoretical core can be summarized in the following statement: "[...] no genre theory – be it a 'strong' theory or a simple description of how the concept is used in contemporary communities – can be valid if it doesn't take genre formation and diachronic processes into consideration."⁶⁸ In a way, the article is a response to criticisms of my early theory of genre (from the Eighties), which some authors – like Frith, Negus and Santoro, cited above in this text – deemed as 'static'. Diachronic processes in genres were, in fact, among my main preoccupations from the very beginning of my interest in the subject, but the frequent reference to terms like 'rule' and 'norm' probably obscured this interest in process. I have always maintained that rules and norms are defined by convention, that is, after the agreement by a community, and in these early articles I refer to the definition of 'convention' by philosopher David K. Lewis,⁶⁹ whose work continues to reliably

⁶³ Genre in Popular Music, by Fabian Holt. *Popular Music*, 27/3. 2008, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 490-492, a review of Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music*. 2007, Chicago: Chicago University Press, where I could read the rather unfair comment that my study on genre (as well as Keith Negus') was 'armchair research'.

⁶⁴ Carnal Musicology (in Beethoven's arms, hands and fingers). *Trans*, 15. 2011, SIBE, a review of Luca Chiantore, *Beethoven al piano*. 2010, Barcelona: Nortedur 3

⁶⁵ Christopher Small, *Musicking. The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. 1998, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press: 164

⁶⁶ What is popular music? And what isn't? An assessment after thirty years of popular music studies. 2010, *Musiikki*, 2. Helsinki: 72-92

⁶⁷ How Genres Are Born, Change, Die: Conventions, Communities and Diachronic Processes. *Critical Musicological Reflections*, ed. S. Hawkins. 2012, Aldershot: Ashgate: 179-191

⁶⁸ How Genres Are Born... cit., p. 180.

⁶⁹ David K. Lewis, *Convention, a Philosophical Study*. 1969, Cambridge: Harvard University Press

inform this very recent essay. ‘Rule’ and ‘norm’ (and ‘code’) are strongly related to structuralism and semiotics, and post-structuralist sociologists couldn’t obviously accept them uncritically. I hadn’t actually understood how the concept of a ‘rule’ – outside of the disciplinary frontiers of semiotics, where it is obvious that a rule be the result of social agreement – could be suspect and irritating to some sociologists and anthropologists, and be the subject of heated polemic by others, until I read an article by Roger Just (University of Kent).⁷⁰ Commenting a body of ethnographic data from Greece, Just maintained that some inheritance practices which Bourdieu explicitly refused to accept as deriving from rules (he explained them within his theoretical framework of the *habitus*), were *in fact* based on rules. According to Just, the *habitus* “simply relocates everything traditionally adduced in the explanation of social behaviour within some form of internal state that itself remains a psychologistic ‘black-box’”.⁷¹ I was encouraged, then, to explore a number of similar ‘black-boxes’ I had encountered in my readings, ever since I read Gregory Bateson’s discussion of the concept of ‘instinct’,⁷² up to Eco’s critique of conceptualization processes as described by cognitive scientists,⁷³ until recent perspectives on music categorization by neuroscientists like Daniel Levitin.⁷⁴

Finally, returning to writings in my mother tongue, my introduction to the Italian edition of Philip Tagg’s *Everyday Tonality*⁷⁵ offers a brief account of the coincidences that marked my early approaches to genre and Tagg’s reflections on the same subject before we had met. It isn’t especially relevant in strict theoretical terms, but in the process of reviewing old magazines and articles in order to write this introduction, I realized that my early formulations of a definition of genre had to be backdated by at least one year, which made the link to Eco’s semiotics much clearer.

Publications on specific genres, music scenes, forms, artists

My interest in musical form is related both to my practice as a performing musician and song composer (from the mid Sixties to date, with the band Stormy Six), and to my activity as a teacher firstly in music schools then later at the university. Hints at ‘formal and technical rules’ in defining genres can be found in my earliest essays on the subject which date back to the Eighties. Specific

⁷⁰ Roger Just, In Defence of Rules: Pierre Bourdieu en Grèce. 2005, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1: Malta: University of Malta: 1-24

⁷¹ Roger Just cit. p. 1

⁷² Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. 1972, San Francisco: Chandler

⁷³ Umberto Eco, *Kant e l’ornitorinco*. 1997, Milan: Bompiani. English translation: *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*. 1999, New York: Harcourt Brace & Co

⁷⁴ Daniel Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music*. 2008, London: Atlantic Books

⁷⁵ Curiosità armoniche e vite parallele. Philip Tagg, *La tonalità di tutti i giorni*. 2011, Milano: il Saggiatore: 7-14

accounts of form and other strictly musical details appear in my writings from the Nineties,⁷⁶ most of which were included in *Il suono in cui viviamo*. In fact, my essays on song form which focused especially on the Beatles and the AABA[BA] form, were among the most popular in that book, and – along with my essays on genre – probably became the main reason for my recognition as a ‘popular musicologist’ in Italy. On the basis of this recognition, I was commissioned to write further essays on singer-songwriters. Until very recently none of my articles on song form have been published in English. The first one will be the paper I presented during the opening plenary session of IASPM’s international conference in Liverpool, in 2009, due to appear soon on the Association’s website.⁷⁷ This was the cause of some personal discomfort, as US popular musicologists who approached that subject substantially later than my original publications (around 2005) weren’t aware of my studies from the mid-Nineties, didn’t make any reference to them (of course), and, moreover, introduced an *etic* nomenclature for song sections (poorly related to the *emic* nomenclature used both in the Tin Pan Alley era and by the Beatles) that now obliges me to justify my own.

A further long essay on song is to be found in the entry I wrote for the *Enciclopedia della musica* Einaudi,⁷⁸ edited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, which also appeared in the French version.⁷⁹ The analytical part draws to a great extent on my 1995 essay on the Beatles’ songs,⁸⁰ which included a discussion of rhetorical strategies implied in a number of typical song forms, and on a paper I wrote shortly afterwards in 1996, for a meeting of the International Council for Music Semiotics, in Bologna.⁸¹ In the same year I was asked to write a chapter for a book on Fabrizio De André,⁸² a famous Italian *cantautore* (singer-songwriter). As one of the earliest attempts to deal specifically with the music of the *cantautori* (whose songs were usually examined only on the basis of their lyrics),⁸³ and especially after the unexpected death of De André in 1999, I was invited to participate in many conferences on Italian song (and *canzone d’autore*) and to write articles and essays on various related

⁷⁶ The first one is *Abbiamo un riff, o due*. Paper presented at the seminar *Rock Steady, Rock Study*, Istituto Gramsci, Bologna, 6 May 1993

⁷⁷ Verse, Chorus (Refrain), Bridge: Analysing Formal Structures of the Beatles’ Songs. *Popular Music Worlds, Popular Music Histories*. Conference Proceedings, ed. Geoff Stahl, Alex Gyde. 2012, IASPM: 92-109

⁷⁸ La canzone. *Enciclopedia della musica. Volume primo. Il Novecento*, ed. J.J. Nattiez. 2001, Turin: Einaudi: 551-576

⁷⁹ La chanson, Musiques. *Une encyclopédie pour le XXI siècle, tome I: ‘Musiques du XX siècle’*, ed. J.J. Nattiez. 2003, Arles: Actes Sud: 659-702

⁸⁰ Forme e modelli delle canzoni dei Beatles. Paper presented at the conference *Analisi e canzoni*, University of Trento, 13 May 1995, published in *Analisi e canzoni*, ed. R. Dalmonte. 1996, Trento: Dipartimento di Scienze Filologiche e Storiche: 169-196, and in *Il suono in cui viviamo* (all editions).

⁸¹ Don’t Bore Us - Get To The Chorus - Serve la ‘noia’ alle canzoni? *Musical Signification Between Rhetorics and Pragmatics*, ed. G. Stefani, E. Tarasti, L. Marconi. 1999, Bologna: Clueb: 103-114; it is also included in *Il suono in cui viviamo* (second and third editions).

⁸² Il cantautore con due voci. *Fabrizio De André - Accordi eretici*, ed. R. Giuffrida, B. Bigoni. 1997, Milan: Euresis-Edizioni: 155-168; also published in *L’ascolto tabù*.

⁸³ There had been a very early attempt in 1964: Michele Straniero, Sergio Liberovici, Emilio Jona, Giorgio De Maria, *Le canzoni della cattiva coscienza*. 1964, Milan: Bompiani, especially in Liberovici’s chapter.

subjects. Most of these writings are now to be found in the third edition of *Il suono in cui viviamo*, or in *L'ascolto tabù* with the latest and longest of those essays appearing in another book on De André,⁸⁴ which was published as a new edition in April 2012.

A number of other publications are related to my interest in Greek music and, in general, in music cultures from the Eastern Mediterranean. There are many reasons for such an interest: knowledge of the places (that's where I have spent my holidays and other parts of the year almost uninterruptedly since 1976); a limited knowledge of the language (I started studying modern Greek in 2003); political reasons (solidarity with Greek expatriates during the colonels' rule in the early Seventies); an increasing experience of an extremely differentiated music culture (so many genres!); a special enjoyment (and a little practice as well) of some Greek genres, like *rembetika*, *nissiotika*, *endechnó*, *neo kyma*; personal acquaintances with musicians, be they singer-songwriters or traditional music makers. The only paper I wrote in English, dating back to the beginning of my discovery of Greek music, is the one that was commissioned by Goffredo Plastino for his book on Mediterranean music;⁸⁵ there I examined the concept of Mediterranean-ness as an ideological formation, and looked for its traces especially in Anglophone popular music.

Finally, I based a few papers on my field recordings and ethnographic surveys on a small island of the Dodecanese: they were presented at ethnomusicological conferences and published.^{86 87} One of the main topics is the usage of amplifiers and electro-acoustic devices for 'traditional music' performances, subject to ideological value judgement in different communities.

Publications on popular music history

My early articles on genre from the Eighties included the coverage of periods of popular music history. Quoting from my Amsterdam paper:

[...] This *synchronic* analysis is aimed at explaining the structure of a substantial part of the present Italian musical system, and at illustrating the possible distinguishing lines between similar genres usu-

⁸⁴ Il suonatore Faber. *Belin, sei sicuro? Storia e canzoni di Fabrizio de André*, ed. Riccardo Bertocelli. 2003, Florence: Giunti: 9-39

⁸⁵ Paint It Black, Cat: Pop, Rock And The Mediterranean. *Mediterranean Mosaic. Popular Music And Global Sounds*, ed. Goffredo Plastino. 2002, New York: Routledge: 37-56. It is also included in *Il suono in cui viviamo* (third edition).

⁸⁶ Culture del suono nei paneghiria di Tilos (Dodecaneso): spazi, riti, tecnologie e stili del confronto popolare/popular. *Popular music e musica popolare. Riflessioni ed esperienze a confronto*, ed. Alessandro Rigolli, Nicola Scaldaferrì. 2010, Venezia, Parma: Marsilio, Casa della Musica: 165-178

⁸⁷ Ritorno a Tilos ('la musica che c'è'). *Antropologia della musica nelle culture mediterranee. Interpretazione, performance, identità*, ed. P. V. Bohlman, M. Sorce Keller, L. Azzaroni. 2009, Bologna: Clueb: 181-190

ally confused under the common heading of ‘light music’. In the third part, one of these genres, the ‘canzone d’autore’, is analysed in its course through time; this *diachronic* analysis is aimed at the investigation of the ways by which a genre *becomes* codified, and its possible *transformations*.⁸⁸

Such suggested balance between synchronic and diachronic analysis, and the interest in codification and transformation processes, not only questions criticisms of a ‘static’ nature of that study, but is also an indication that my work on popular music history dates back to the early 1980s.

However, my more systematic and more recent interest in popular music history was largely caused by external factors, specifically, requests from historians and musicologists to cover the subject for collective books and encyclopaedias. These requests were generated by my recognition as a ‘reliable’ popular music scholar as they all came after the publication of *Il suono in cui viviamo*.

My first essay on popular music history was commissioned for a collective work on the Twentieth century. As became common in the 1980s and 1990s, conventional music historians would be asked to write a chapter on music from the Twentieth century, and they would respond with an essay on Western classical music of that period (especially about the avant-garde); then, editors would comment that a great deal of Twentieth century music was missing, and would ask ‘other’ scholars to write on that ‘other’ music. A few times, I was that invited ‘other’ scholar.⁸⁹ I was also asked to write a substantial essay on the history of popular music for the fourth volume of the *Storia della musica* directed by Alberto Basso, one of Italy’s best known music historians, and published by UTET, a firm specializing in encyclopaedias and reference books (the sixteen-volume *Dizionario Enciclopedico della Musica e dei Musicisti, DEUMM*, an equivalent of the Grove, is also published by UTET).⁹⁰ This text became the reference for my courses in popular music at the universities of Turin, Milan and Genoa, even before the official publication. As the *Storia della musica* UTET was a big and expensive five-volume work, I used to circulate among my students a pdf version, that I went on improving and completing for a few years, until I convinced the publisher to release my essay as an individual book.⁹¹ The title (*Around the clock. Una breve storia della popular music*) is a compromise between the request by the publisher’s marketing department to find a catchy allusion to the book’s content, and my suggestion of parodying (kindly and modestly, I would say) the best

⁸⁸ A Theory Of Musical Genres. Two Applications cit., p. 52. My italics.

⁸⁹ Altre musiche. *Atlante del Novecento. Volume Terzo. Il declino delle certezze. Un secolo e le sue immagini*, ed. L. Gallino, M. L. Salvadori, G. Vattimo. 2000, Turin: UTET: 1060-1073. It was included in *Il suono in cui viviamo*, since the second edition, with a different title (Musiche nel Novecento).

⁹⁰ La popular music. *Storia della musica*, Vol. IV. 2004, Turin: UTET: 309-394

⁹¹ *Around the clock. Una breve storia della popular music*. 2008, Turin: UTET Libreria (247 pp.)

known textbook on music history in Italy, *Breve storia della musica*, by Massimo Mila.⁹² Both the first part of the title and the cover illustration (a photo of screaming San Franciscan Beatles fans in 1964) are actually more suggestive of the publisher's preoccupations than of the book's content, my main objective being that of offering a balanced overview of the 'third type' of music identified by Derek B. Scott in his paper "The Popular Music Revolution in the Nineteenth Century: A Third Type of Music Arises",⁹³ and to follow its development in many parts of the world until very recently (including, of course, rock 'n' roll, the Beatles, 'world music' and peer-to-peer file exchange). Although it has fitted perfectly the needs of my sixty-hour courses, the book is too short and too many things are missing. Even in its brevity, the amplitude of its scope probably deserves the comment made by the anonymous compiler of a short biographical note for a conference: "Fabri has published [...] on the intricate fabric of influences and coincidences in the history of popular music."⁹⁴ Anyway, it doesn't seem that anything similar to an outline of global popular music history *not* focused just on the Anglophone mainstream has been published anywhere else, to date. Here is the Table of Contents:

Premesse per una storia della popular music – Precursori: Stephen Foster, il minstrel show, la nascita di Tin Pan Alley – Dal fonografo al giradischi. I sogni di Edison, l'industria di Berliner. Primi repertori su disco – La canzone napoletana – Intrattenimenti e varietà, dal Salone Margherita al Cafè Aman. Aristide Bruant e i primi decenni della canzone francese – Origini del flamenco, del fado, del tango – Ragtime, blues, jazz – Musiche del Mediterraneo orientale: il rebetico, Umm Kulthum e la canzone araba – Il Kabarett – Il cinema sonoro. Canzoni e musica da film – L'età d'oro del musical e gli 'American Classics' – Voci e musiche alla radio – Race, hillbilly, crooners: le nuove voci dell'America al microfono – Musica leggera in Italia nel ventennio fascista – Il dopoguerra negli USA: dal rhythm & blues al rock 'n' roll – Il trionfo del rock 'n' roll – Il dopoguerra in Italia. Il Festival di Sanremo – Nuovi poeti e nuovi disturbi: gli chansonniers, la bossa nova – Cantacronache, Cantautori, il Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano – Negli USA dopo il rock 'n' roll: dalle alternative 'perbene' a Bob Dylan – L'era dei gruppi – L'Italia del boom, e del bitt – L' 'estate dell'amore' – La 'Woodstock Nation' e l'altra 'altra America', quella nera – Canzone politica e canzone d'autore, intorno al '68 – Cantautori in America Latina – Cantautori in Europa – Psichedelici, sperimentatori: da Frank Zappa ai Pink Floyd, al progressive rock – Musiche urbane e post-coloniali dopo la crisi del petrolio: punk e reggae. Dalla febbre del sabato sera alla new wave – Il compact disc, i campionatori, il videoclip: musiche sperimentali, innovazioni commerciali, solidarietà – Il potere di 'rappresentare': rap e rock a confronto. Il mondo entra in scena: la world music – Bricolage elettronico: techno, rave e musica sulla rete – Bibliografia – Indice delle canzoni, degli album, delle trasmissioni radiofoniche e televisive, dei film, delle pubblicazioni – Indice dei nomi

Soon after the publication of the *Storia della musica* UTET, and before I started the re-writing of my chapter, I participated in a conference in Parma (2004), where I discussed some methodological

⁹² Massimo Mila. *Breve storia della musica*. 1993 (1st edition 1946), Turin: Einaudi

⁹³ Derek B. Scott. The Popular Music Revolution in the Nineteenth Century: A Third Type of Music Arises, *De-Canonizing Music History*, ed. Vesa Kurkela and Lauri Väkevä. 2009, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 3–20.

⁹⁴ <http://www2.siba.fi/3rdmillennium2010/symposium/speakers.html>

issues in the historical investigation of popular music.⁹⁵ The reliability of sources, which I've had to question over the years also as a supervisor of dissertations by my students, is still among my main preoccupations. As an example, let me quote the paper proposal I presented for the next IASPM conference (Oviedo, 2013).

When popular music studies emerged in the Seventies, they weren't the consequence of an interest by academic institutions. They derived from different streams, whose sources could be traced to music practices, like the need to understand new elaborate forms of rock, the need to instruct educators so that they could deal with the music their students were listening to, the need to discuss ideological and political aspects of the mass media, etc. It is no surprise that, with few exceptions, early popular music scholars belonged to the same generation(s) and subcultures as the musicians whose work they studied, or were even music practitioners themselves. After half a century, the range of genres, repertoires, and geographical/historical scenes that can be studied has expanded dramatically, but the kind of 'natural' familiarity between scholars and their research object which characterised popular music studies until the Eighties or Nineties isn't to be taken for granted anymore. This poses, however, a tough methodological issue: what empirical evidence can be relied on? What sources (newspapers, magazines, broadcasts, audiovisuals, phonograms, etc.) can be trusted, when scholars aren't participants in the music culture they study? The issue, of course, affects scholars who study popular music of the past (from early fado or minstrel show to rock 'n' roll) but also those who study music from other countries.

My only paper in English on a historical subject is, in this respect, an exception: it is a reconstruction of the history of l'Orchestra – a co-operative of musicians I helped establish and manage in the Seventies and Eighties – from the point of view (corroborated by documents, of course) of a participant.⁹⁶ In many ways, the underlying method (comparing personal memories and diaries with historical documents and other evidence) is the same I had experimented with for my already mentioned musical autobiography, which was enjoying considerable success (it was at its second edition)⁹⁷ at the time I was writing my article on l'Orchestra. I know that it was a kind of a shock, for some scholars who only knew me as the author of 'serious' essays on genre, to read an article based on a kind of (declared) self-ethnography. However, that's the only article (of any kind, in any language) on l'Orchestra that has been ever written. L'Orchestra's archives are eagerly waiting for anybody else willing to consult them.

⁹⁵ Ricostruire una storia della popular music e dei suoi generi: problemi epistemologici e valutazione delle fonti. *La divulgazione musicale in Italia oggi*, ed. Alessandro Rigolli. 2005, Turin: EDT: 41-50

⁹⁶ *Orchestral Manoeuvres in the 1970s: l'Orchestra Co-operative, 1974–1983. Popular Music*, 26/3. 2007, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 409-427

⁹⁷ *Album bianco². Diari musicali 1965-2002*. 2002, Rome: Arcana (250 pp.)

Other more canonical – and recent – Italian writings on popular music history include popular music in Milan from the Second World War until the Eighties,⁹⁸ so called ‘light’ music on Italian radio from 1928 to 1958;⁹⁹ the origins of Neapolitan song in the Nineteenth century and a discussion of some parallelisms and influences in the United States of America.¹⁰⁰

Publications on music and technology, music industry, and media

As I have already mentioned in this commentary, because of my involvement as a musician and independent record producer in the Seventies, I started writing on music and technology, music industry, and media, at approximately the same time as I wrote my first articles on genre. Many of my essays and shorter articles on these subjects are now included in *Il suono in cui viviamo* and *L’ascolto tabù*. My first comprehensive account (from 1984) consists of an illustrated book on the technology, history and ideology of electromechanical and electronic devices applied to music production, from Telharmonium to MIDI and samplers.¹⁰¹ Concepts of conventionally defined ‘rules’ within communities (sound engineers, performing musicians, instrument designers, composers) and genres (pop, rock, experimental or avant-garde art music) form the basic theoretical thread of a non-academic text aimed at a wide readership. It was quite popular among music critics as a reference book.

Immediately after completing that work in 1984, on Philip Tagg’s suggestion, I presented a research proposal to the university of Gothenburg. I discovered it recently looking through old papers, so I would like to quote it here entirely, as a document of the theoretical and methodological premises I followed later (or didn’t):

THE MAKING OF POPULAR SOUNDS.

A Research Project, by Franco Fabbri, Milan.

I) Electro-acoustic and electronic media have a central role in the definition of popular music, as well as in the production of actual popular music pieces. That is, there would not be any mass dissemina-

⁹⁸ Altre musiche a Milano, dal dopoguerra a ‘Musica nel nostro tempo’. *Milano, laboratorio musicale del Novecento. Scritti per Luciana Pestalozza*, ed. Oreste Bossini. 2009, Milan: Archinto: 125-145

⁹⁹ Il Trentennio: ‘musica leggera’ alla radio italiana, 1928-1958. Paper presented at the conference *Radio e musica. Storia, effetti, contesti*. University of Parma, 2 December 2009 [forthcoming in the proceedings]

¹⁰⁰ La popular music a Napoli e negli USA prima della ‘popular music’: da Donizetti a Stephen Foster, da Piedigrotta a Tin Pan Alley. *La canzone napoletana. Le musiche e i loro contesti*, ed. Enrico Careri, Anita Pesce. 2011, Lucca: LIM: 85-96

¹⁰¹ *Elettronica e musica* (with an introduction by Luigi Nono). 1984, Milan: Fratelli Fabbri (239 pp.)

tion of music (in the form of what we know as 'popular music') if radio, TV, and above all recording equipment didn't exist; some define musical sets like 'folk', 'art' and 'popular' music in terms of memory storage, stating that magnetic storage is typical of today's popular music; it has also been said that electronic equipment has given birth to an 'age of electronic produceability' (Cutler, Tagg) which surpasses the well known 'age of technical reproducibility' (Benjamin); moreover, musicological and sociological accounts on popular music frequently stress the importance of electric and electronic instruments, and of the recording studio, as tools for the 'popular' musician and producer.

However, very little has been done to study how these instruments are actually used to create the sounds that make popular music 'popular', that is:

- 1) Which procedures are followed in the actual production of sounds;
- 2) Which meanings are given to particular sounds or effects;
- 3) How do the above mentioned procedures and meanings interact with the social structure of music-making;
- 4) How is the large public affected, that is, which interaction is established between the community of music-makers and the audience in terms of sound and its meaning;
- 5) Which economical forces are involved in the production of sound, that is what is the role of the hardware industry in a field where only the record industry appears to have attracted the attention of researchers and students;
- 6) Finally, where are the sound-making procedures firstly studied and defined (GOTO 1).

II) A musicological study of the actual music production, in terms of the musician's intentions and procedures, is almost impossible, though it might be the unspoken aim of every musicologist; though it's questionable (at least, according to certain behavioural rules in the musicological community) whether it's useful or not to know who and how a musician decided to arrange sounds in a particular way (that is, not in terms of the final overall result, but on a bar-to-bar basis), a large part of musicological studies wouldn't exist without this hidden aspiration to peek into the composer's room (or brain).

However, again, very little of the huge philological work that has been done in order to reconstruct the birth of musical pieces has ever taken into account the fact that musical ideas are at least thought for and in most cases actually tested on musical instruments, which have different sounds, keyboards and so on.

A recent exception, Piero Rattalino's *Storia del pianoforte* (Milan, 1982), demonstrates how much is still to be done even in the largely studied field of classical piano music. In popular music research, with the remarkable exceptions of Philip Tagg's *Kojak* and *Fernando* (which, however, aren't specifically dedicated to this subject) there are very few accounts on the importance of choosing one particular sound, or one instrument, not only for the timbral result (which is trivial), but for the melodic and harmonic profile, and meaning, of an individual piece. Interviews with recording musicians and pro-

ducers do not normally surpass the level of standard gossipy journalism; that is, only exceptional or curious events are reported, but the more substantial daily work is never dealt with (this can also be said about the well known *All You Need is Ears* 'by' George Martin).

III) It follows, from I) and II), that useful observations could be made, on musicological, semi-ological, sociological, economical and political levels, if it were possible to investigate the actual process of sound production during its course, that is:

- 1) At the instrument design and manufacturing stage;
- 2) During composition and rehearsals;
- 3) In the studio.

This is precisely what this research project is about.

IV) The chance is offered:

- a) By the author's activity as a journalist for a music instruments magazine and as a consultant for a music software publisher;
- b) By the friendly offer by a notable Italian rock singer-songwriter to assist the production of his new LP (with the technical sponsorship of an Italian synthesizers firm);
- c) By the fact that the studio engineer happens to be the author's neighbour.

Though it seems that 'participant observation' should be the main research tool (others might call it 'spying'), other sources and methods would be taken into consideration. For example, aesthetic and semantic implications of the sound decision-making process at instruments factories can be investigated both by means of interviews with engineers and of an analysis of adverts on music magazines; a reconstruction of the meanings of sounds and sound effects and a discussion of musicians' and producers' vocabulary can be performed by means of 'interobjective comparison' and 'hypotetical substitution' (see Tagg's *Kojak*), as well as through a psycho-acoustical approach.

So the research would consist mainly:

- 1) In collecting material (audio reports, interviews, a diary) during the LP production (video recording would be of great help, but unless a 'candid camera' method is used it might be disturbing);
- 2) In collecting all the extra information whose importance might arise during the first stage (for example, visit to instrument manufacturers, comparison to other records, studios, producers, etc.);
- 3) In (the effort of) putting it all together.

Part 1) is expected to start at the end of October 1984; part 2) presumably in January 1985; part 3) in (late) spring 1985.

As a matter of fact, it would take twenty years before I would write again on such topics, first in an article for a book on Peter Gabriel,¹⁰² where many of the issues included in my old research project are reconsidered, including a discussion of linguistic codes and the role of sound examples in interpersonal communication in recording environments. Finally (the publication date is earlier, but I began writing it later) I would cite a substantial historical and technical overview of digital sound processing and its applications in music production and distribution.¹⁰³

Conclusions

The papers submitted for the award of PhD, by published works, demonstrate my long-standing commitment to popular music studies and, more in general, to theoretical aspects (like genre) that have been given little consideration by musicology for quite a while. A significant number of my papers were published at the highest international level, and I would include here not only my essays and chapters that appeared in English (in collective books, conference proceedings, journals), in Spanish and in German, but also quite a few writings published in Italian, in journals and reference works which represent significant Italian contributions to worldwide music studies. My main Italian publishers (il Saggiatore, Feltrinelli, LIM) are among the most important in my country, also with respect to music studies; all of them published Italian translations of important books by Anglo-American authors (Charles Hamm, Simon Frith, Richard Middleton, Philip Tagg, Michael Bull), following my advice and with my editorial supervision.

Unfortunately, only a fraction of my writings are available in English, and some of my areas of interest are very scarcely covered (or not at all) by articles available in that language. All my writings in English were originally conceived to be published in that language; in other words, none of my articles or books originally written and first published in Italian were ever translated into English. But I could not name even one book or article on popular music or related subjects, by any other author, that was ever translated from Italian for Anglophone readers. Rather than simply complaining about such evident unbalance, I am now trying to find ways to at least moderate it, especially for non-Anglophone international scholars from younger generations. My work as a co-editor of a

¹⁰² 'I'd Like my Record to Sound Like This': Peter Gabriel and Audio Technology, *Peter Gabriel, From Genesis to Growing Up*, ed. Michael Drewett, Sarah Hill, Kimi Kärki. 2010, Aldershot: Ashgate: 173-182

¹⁰³ La musica nell'era digitale. *XXI secolo. Comunicare e rappresentare*, ed. T. Gregory. 2009, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Fondata da Giovanni Treccani S.P.A.: 625-634

new series of books on global popular musics (from Italy, Spain, Brazil, Japan, Greece, Turkey, etc.), written in English by local scholars, is a step in that direction.

The timing of publication (as I already mentioned) is also an issue. On genre, of course I consider my most recent essays to be the most precise, articulated and complete; most Anglophone scholars, however, seem to have read only my articles from the early Eighties, although newer accounts in English are available. On song form, on the other hand, my earliest papers predate by a full decade similar accounts by Anglophone music scholars, but as they were written in Italian they were never referenced. I am proud to have been a precursor in some of my areas of interest, and I have had some prestigious acknowledgement of my work in popular music: Philip Tagg dedicated to me and my students his *Everyday Tonality*, Allan Moore included my name in the list of scholars to whom he dedicated his most recent book, *Song Means*. My future plans are again related to genre: I am preparing a research project in order to receive funding both at national and international level (European Research Council) for an Observatory of Music Genres, based on an international research network. Let me quote from my draft:

The aim of my proposal, titled Observatory of Music Genres (OMG), is twofold: on one hand, the objective is to find methods to explore the music space (i.e. the universe of music activities and discourses about music), in order to detect music taxonomies associated with communities, producing as a result a list of “existing” (i.e. acknowledged) genres (Phase 1); on the other hand, the objective is to find ways to detect the appearance of “new” taxonomies and genres (Phase 2). Both methodological and factual findings of such research can be useful at various levels, from the highly theoretical to the practical: for musicologists, sociologists, anthropologists, cognitive scientists, for computer scientists and developers, for public administrators, for music and media industries, for musicians, for listeners. Any astronomical metaphor attached to the project name and description is intended: genres, as sets of music events associated by the conventional agreement of communities, can be seen as galaxies in the universe of music events, and the emerging of new objects can be observed only if an extensive mapping of a definite section of that universe has been recorded. So, in a way, my proposed Observatory of Music Genres functions, with respect to its first objective (Phase 1), in a similar way to the Hubble Deep Field observation; with respect to its other objective (Phase 2), it is based on the same premises as any observation aimed at the discovery of new objects (from supernovas to extra-solar planets to comets and asteroids) in a known region of space.

The duration of the project is five years and, if successful, will ensure the sustained continuation of my work.