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Hugh Davies's *International Electronic Music Catalog*: A preliminary exploration of its classification system and subsequent influence

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This paper concerns Hugh Davies's *Répertoire International des Musiques Électroacoustiques / International Electronic Music Catalog*.[1] The *Catalog* is a volume of 330 pages, published in 1968, in which Davies attempted to list every single piece of electronic music ever composed anywhere in the world. It remains to this day the only publication to have attempted a comprehensive global picture of all electronic music activity up to the end of 1967.

I intend to suggest that the *Catalog* is more than just a list of compositions, and that it in fact expresses a particular view—encapsulates a particular narrative—of electronic music. I also intend to show some of the ways in which that particular narrative has been carried forward in subsequent writings that have referenced the *Catalog*. In this way I hope to indicate how the *Catalog*—and by extension Davies's narrative—has shaped subsequent discourses on electronic music and its history. To do this I'll be referring to the *systems of classification* used in the *Catalog*, through the theoretical lens provided by Bowker & Star in their book *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*.[2]

> In order to communicate information in the aggregate, we must first classify.[3]

'A classification,' say Bowker & Star:

> is a spatial, temporal, or spatio-temporal segmentation of the world. A "classification system" is a set of boxes (metaphorical or literal) into which things can be put to then do some kind of work— bureaucratic or knowledge production.[4]

(I'll come back to knowledge production later.) In the *Catalog* Davies listed 7450 electronic music works, composed in 560 studios in 39 countries. In doing so he presented a large body of information in aggregate form. So how did he organise this information? What system of

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[1] Hugh Davies, *Répertoire International Des Musiques Electroacoustiques / International Electronic Music Catalog* (Paris & Trumansburg, NY: Groupe de Recherches Musicales de l'ORTF & Independent Electronic Music Center, Inc., 1968).
[2] Geoffrey C Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).
[3] Bowker and Star, p. 68.
[4] Bowker and Star, p. 10.

classification did he use? How did Davies, as it were, 'segment the world' of electronic music in order to present this large body of information in printed form?
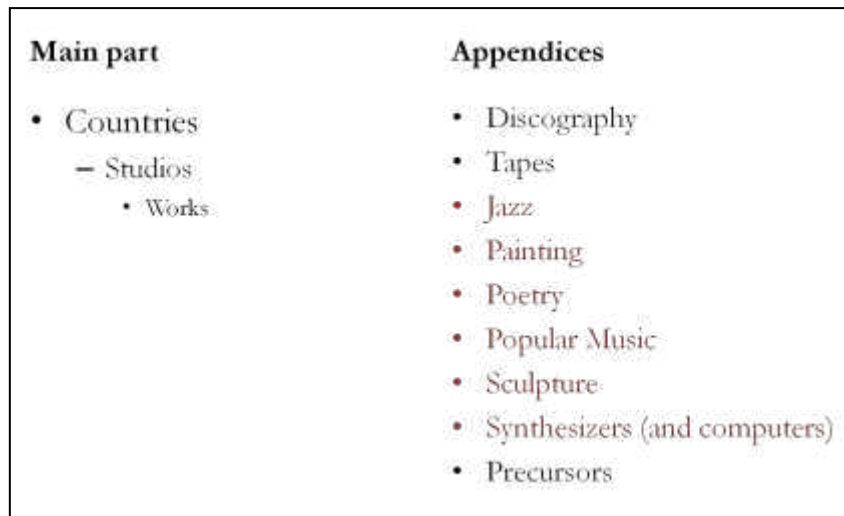

Figure 1. Overall structure of classification used in the Catalog.

At the highest structural level the *Catalog* is divided into two sections: the 'main part' of the *Catalog*, and the appendices. This is illustrated in Figure 1, above. The main part of the *Catalog* is organised alphabetically by country, so it's divided into 39 sections, one per country. Within each country, electronic music studios are listed, alphabetically by city. Underneath each studio heading, there's a list of all the electronic music works created there, ordered chronologically by year of composition. Compositions are listed under the following headings: composer; title; date; duration; number of tracks (e.g. 2 for stereo, 1 for mono); and function. The 'function' of a work describes the context in which it's heard (and, for concert works, the technical means). There are three main categories—concert music; non-concert music (live); non-concert music (recorded)— each with a number of subcategories, as shown in Figure 2, below.

Concert Music	Non-concert (Live)	Non-concert (Recorded)
C (tape only)	O (opera)	F (film)
C+ (tape & instruments)	B (ballet)	R (radio)
C* (live electronic)	Th (theatre)	TV (television)
	MT (music theatre)	D (disc)
	Sn (sonorisation)	In (interval signal)
		St (study)

Figure 2. Functional classifications of compositions used in the Catalog.

The appendices provide, in essence, nine differently filtered versions of the information given in the main part of the *Catalog* according to the classifications given in Figure 1. The 'discography' appendix, for example, is a collated list of all the compositions from the main part of the *Catalog* that were available commercially on record. Notice that several of the appendices (Jazz, Painting, Poetry, Popular Music, Sculpture, Synthesizers (and computers)) pertain to different musical, artistic, or technical disciplines. These list the electronic music works exhibiting some kind of crossover with the discipline in question: for the jazz appendix, electronic music works involving jazz musicians or using jazz recordings, for example.

> [A] classification system [say Bowker & Star] […] does more than provide a series of boxes into which [things] can be put; it also encapsulates a series of stories that are the preferred narratives of the [classification system's] designers.[5]

The way information is structured and classified in the *Catalog*, as I've just outlined, is not merely arbitrary but, rather, reflects several aspects of Davies's own 'preferred narrative' of electronic music. At the highest structural level the classification system used in the *Catalog* does two things: (1) It divides up electronic music activity according to which country it took place in; (2) it provides a set of appendices that, roughly speaking, allow the use of electronic music techniques in disciplines other than avant-garde art music to be registered. The decision to structure the *Catalog* in this way directly reflects two of Davies's main concerns: electronic music as an international phenomenon; and electronic music as an interdisciplinary practice.

Davies conducted his research in the 1960s, at a time when electronic music discourse and practice was comparatively fragmented and parochial, characterised by activities carried out in more-or-less isolated geographic and disciplinary enclaves. Davies's preferred narrative—or part of it, at least—was that there should be a truly global, international discourse on electronic music. He saw the domination of avant-garde music by a small number of Western European and North American traditions as an aesthetic dead-end—destined only for incestuous self-referentiality—and believed that the influence of musical traditions from outside this inner circle could be used as a way out.[6] Corresponding with this view, as a student Davies had campaigned for increased exposure for the avant-garde musics of under-represented nations. For example he made efforts to secure publishing and distribution deals for Polish and Japanese composers whose scores were, at the time, unavailable in Britain.[7] Accordingly, Davies considered international exchange—particularly with countries outside of Western Europe and North America—to be essential for the aesthetic diversification—and hence future survival—of electronic music.[8] Davies was also interested in how local electronic music practices around the world varied according to local political, economic and cultural conditions,[9] and believed that such issues should be addressed as part of a cross-cultural discourse.

I won't say too much about interdisciplinarity, partly for reasons of time. Suffice to say that Davies was interested in charting the use of electronic music techniques in areas outside of its native territory of avant-garde art music.[10] The appendices of the *Catalog* reflect this in that they focus on non-art-music traditions—popular music and jazz—as well as non-musical disciplines. Other details of Davies's narrative of electronic music can be gleaned further down the line in the systems and structures of classification he chose. The very fact that Davies listed *studios* in the *Catalog* is symptomatic of a studio-centric narrative that—as Davies was well aware—was not truly reflective of reality. Out of 560 so-called 'studios' listed in the *Catalog* almost 60% were what Davies referred to as 'improvised' studios—'equipment […] collected together into a "studio" [Davies's scare-quotes] just for the realization of a particular composition'[11]—in other words, not really studios at all. Similarly, the functional classifications of electronic music might be considered biased in favour of the concert as the *de facto* way of presenting music (the 'concert' categories are the ones where the most information is provided, since unlike any of the other categories they include information about technical means) and in favour of essentially Western forms such as ballet and opera. (I'll come back to the latter point later.)

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[5] Bowker and Star, pp. 77–8.
[6] Hugh Davies, 'New Directions in Music', *The New University*, 12 (1963), 8–17.
[7] Hugh Davies, 'Letter to Denis Stevens', c 1964.
[8] Davies, 'New Directions in Music'.
[9] Davies, *Catalog*, pp. iv–v.
[10] Davies, *Catalog*, p. v.
[11] Davies, *Catalog*, p. xiii.

I'll turn now to how the system of classification—partly reflecting Davies's chosen narrative of electronic music—is reflected in subsequent literature that has drawn upon the data provided in the *Catalog*. Two further quotes from Bowker & Star:

> [The codes of a classification system] define what is considered to be relevant… They make it easy to structure studies in those terms... [Subsequent studies that make use of the data, that is.] At the same time, these codes do make it much more difficult to deal with unrecognized contexts… [—contexts that are not catered for within the classification system.] It is not impossible to do these latter studies, but the information is not at hand in the way that it is for sanctioned contexts.[12]

To put it another way:

> [A classification system] makes a certain set of discoveries, which validate its own framework, more likely than an alternative set outside the framework, since the […] cost of producing a study outside of the framework of normal data collection is necessarily much higher.[13]

What set of discoveries does the *Catalog* foretell? What forms of knowledge production does it enable? (In considering these questions we are implicitly also asking what kinds of knowledge production the *Catalog* impedes or disables, which is just as important a question.) To approach answers to these questions, I've studied an arbitrary sample of 58 texts published between 1968 and 2014 that draw upon the data provided in the *Catalog*. (That's not an exhaustive sample, but a representative one.) For reasons of time I'll focus on just one group of those texts, which ought to be enough to demonstrate the general points that I want to make.

Several of the texts that reference the *Catalog* have an explicitly national focus, that is, they focus specifically on the electronic music of a particular nation or geographic area. This, of course, reflects the fact that—being organised by country—the information required for such studies is 'close at hand.' The texts in question are listed in Figure 3, below.

1) Ricardo dal Farra, 'Something Lost, Something Hidden, Something Found: Electroacoustic Music by **Latin American** Composers', *Organised Sound*, 11(2) (2006), 131–42

2) Martin Fumarola & Horacio Vaggione, 'Letters', *Computer Music Journal*, 26(1) (2002), 5–8 **[on Latin American / European issues]**

3) Anselmo Guerra, 'Electronic Music Review de 1967: O Pioneirismo Na Produção Eletroacústica No **Brasil** E Sua Relação Com a Identidade Musical Latino-Americana', conference paper, *XXII Congresso da Associação Nacional de Pesquisa e Pós-Graduação em Música*, 2012

4) Petri Kuljuntausta, *First Wave: A Microhistory of Early **Finnish** Electronic Music* (Helsinki: Like, 2008)

5) Emmanuelle Loubet, 'An Annotated Bibliography of **Japanese** Electroacoustic Music', *Computer Music Journal*, 22(2) (1998), 4–6

6) Yukiko Sawabe, *Neue Musik in **Japan** von 1950-1960: Stilrichtungen und Komponisten* (Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1992)

7) Libor Zajicek, 'The History of Electroacoustic Music in the **Czech and Slovak Republics**', *Leonardo Music Journal*, 5 (1995), 39–48

Figure 3. Some 'national' studies that reference the Catalog.

Notice that the countries/geographic areas represented in these studies (Latin America, Brazil, Finland, Japan, Czech and Slovak Republics) are all what Davies—recalling his campaigning activities—might have regarded as under-represented or marginalised nations: countries not

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[12] Bowker and Star, p. 82.
[13] Bowker and Star, p. 82.

normally featuring prominently (or sometimes at all) in published histories of electronic music prior to 1968. This is not, I suggest, a mere coincidence, but a reflection of the fact that the *Catalog*—being organised *alphabetically* by nation—did not afford privileged status to France, Germany, and the United States: countries more canonically associated with the early history of electronic music (and more prominently featured in preceding published histories). By classifying alphabetically by nation, Davies enabled the production of a particular kind of knowledge, focusing on marginal nations.

Earlier I mentioned that Davies believed there ought to be a global discourse on electronic music that specifically addressed cross-cultural differences, and one of these texts (numbered 2 in Figure 3) provides an example of such an exchange.[14] It is, in fact, an exchange of letters between two Argentinean composers—Martín Fumarola and Horracio Vaggione—that was published in *Computer Music Journal* in 2002. The letters record, in essence, a dispute between natively-domiciled Argentinean composers—represented by Fumarola—and expatriate Argentinean composers—represented by Vaggione. Fumarola's argument is that the expatriate composers have no real understanding of Latin American electroacoustic music. He accuses them of being 'Eurocentric and imperialist,' and of attempting to judge Latin American music by incompatible European standards.[15] Vaggione responds by explaining his reasons for leaving Argentina during the military dictatorship in the mid-1960s, and reasserts his own status as an authority by describing his involvement in early electronic music activities in Argentina prior to this. As proof he provides a reference to Davies's *Catalog*, wherein it is recorded that Vaggione realised 25 works of electronic music *in Argentina* between 1961 and 1965.[16]

Such a reference relies upon Davies having classified the information in a way that placed geographic locale at the fore. The exchange between Fumarola and Vaggione—centred upon cross-cultural differences—exemplifies the kind of international discourse foreseen by Davies (though perhaps he might have hoped it would be less acrimonious). By presenting the data as he did Davies maximised the likelihood that this aspect of his preferred narrative would be actualised in subsequent texts referencing the *Catalog*.

One final aspect of classification systems that I haven't discussed yet is their tendency to distort reality by attempting to represent a broad range of heterogeneous scenarios within a single, fixed framework.

> All complex classification systems have multiple sets of faults and fractures… The system of faults and tensions forms a kind of texture of any organizational terrain.[17]

The fixed categories of a classification system become 'fault-lines' along which tensions can build, particularly in cases where the scenario being described does not comfortably fit within the given categories. An example of this concerns the classification of several works by Japanese composers. The pieces listed in Figure 4 have all been given the functional classification 'C+' in the *Catalog*—concert pieces with tape and live instruments. However, in a later article by Loubet et al.—which didn't reference the *Catalog* but instead relied on the author's own interviews—all of these pieces are very unambiguously described as 'radio dramas':[18] pieces intended, not for live performance in concert, but for radio broadcast as recordings. (That's not the article by Loubet mentioned in Figure 3 that *did* reference the *Catalog*, but an earlier article that didn't.) Davies's

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[14] Martin Fumarola and Horacio Vaggione, 'Letters', *Computer Music Journal*, 26 (2002), 5–8.

[15] Fumarola and Vaggione, pp. 6–7.

[16] Davies, *Catalog*, pp. 3–4.

[17] Bowker and Star, p. 68.

[18] Emmanuelle Loubet, Curtis Roads and Brigitte Robindoré, 'The Beginnings of Electronic Music in Japan, with a Focus on the NHK Studio: The 1950s and 1960s', *Computer Music Journal*, 21 (1997), 11–22 (p. 18).

system *did* include a functional classification for this—the 'R' classification—which begs the question: why were these pieces not given the 'R' classification in the *Catalog*?

Composer	Title (year)	Classification (*Catalog*)	Reclassification (Davies's *Catalog*)
Makato MOROI	Pythagoras no Hoshi (1959)	C+	(C+)? -- R
Akira MIYOSHI	Ondina (1959)	C+	C+
Makato MOROI	Akai Mayo (1960)	C+	C+
Ioshiro IRINO	Nami to Fue (1960)	C+	C+ / R
Makato MOROI	Nagai Nagai Michi ni sotte (1961)	C+	C+
Makato MOROI	Kusabiro (1964)	C+	C+

Figure 4. Some Japanese works and their classifications, both in the *Catalog* as published, and in Davies's own annotated copy.

After the *Catalog* was published, Davies kept his own personal copy, which he updated with corrections and additions for the remainder of his life. In Davies's annotated copy of the *Catalog*, two of these pieces have been reclassified: one as 'C+ / R'; the other as '(C+)? – R.' (The difference between a slash and a dash is meaningful but I won't go into that now.) Suffice to say, there seems to have been some uncertainty as to how these pieces should be classified under Davies's system. One possibility—the one I'd like to highlight—is that these are pieces for which none of the available categories is a perfect fit. It seems reasonable to suppose that Davies's system of functional categories—which is essentially Western—might not map particularly well to areas of the world where such categories do not apply in the same way. Whether or not this was the case here is difficult to conclusively determine without further research, but the example nonetheless serves to illustrate the kind of noisy classificatory artefacts that can result from a dissonance between the classification system itself and the nature of that being classified.

I will conclude with a brief summary of the main points discussed. In the *Catalog* Davies presented aggregated lists of electronic music compositions according to a system of classification that reflected his own views of electronic music's history and potential future. Davies believed electronic music should be a properly international discipline, as reflected in his decision to undertake a comprehensive global survey in the first place, and again in his decision to organise the resulting data alphabetically by nation. This classificatory decision, in turn, played a part in enabling the production of certain types of knowledge, hence a conspicuous trend of subsequent studies that focus on the electronic music history of a particular nation or geographic area—usually one less well-represented in earlier published histories of electronic music. This demonstrates how the *Catalog* privileges certain interpretations of electronic music over others. It's reasonable to suppose that Davies's *Catalog*, by the same mechanisms, may have affected influences in other areas of electronic music discourse. I hope I've given an impression of how such influences could be explored by looking at the *Catalog*'s system of classification, and look forward to exploring the wider historiographic impact of Davies's work as an aspect of my future research.

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Fumarola, Martin, and Horacio Vaggione, 'Letters', *Computer Music Journal*, 26 (2002), 5–8

Loubet, Emmanuelle, Curtis Roads, and Brigitte Robindoré, 'The Beginnings of Electronic Music in Japan, with a Focus on the NHK Studio: The 1950s and 1960s', *Computer Music Journal*, 21 (1997), 11–22