

# Diversifying MIR:

Knowledge and real-world challenges,  
and new interdisciplinary futures

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# ISMIR: how can MIR refresh itself and its endeavors, scholarly and real world?

- International Society for Music Information Retrieval
- 20<sup>th</sup> conference, Delft University of Technology
- **Theme: 'Diversity'**
- Email from ISMIR organisers: 'The focus of our conference this year is on **diversity**, so any insights on benefits and also ways [to create] a more diverse ISMIR in terms of discipline is more than welcome. We are trying hard to overcome the current bias [towards] western male engineers'

# Gender, class and race/ethnicity in UK music technology & music degrees

- Of the young people entering Higher Education in the UK to study music technology between 2007 and 2012, 90 per cent were male, they came from a lower social class and there was only a slightly higher representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity students than the average for all British students

G. Born and K. Devine, 'Music Technology, Gender, and Class: Digitization, Educational and Social Change in Britain', *Twentieth Century Music*, 12, 2 (2015)

# *Diversity: 4 interrelated dimensions:*

- 1) **Who gets to be a practitioner of MIR: what is the social makeup** of the profession?
- 2) **Whose music and which music** get to be the focus of MIR's scientific practices?
- 3) **In the face of greater musical diversity, can MIR's foundational epistemological and ontological premises be sustained**, or are they fundamentally challenged?
- 4) **Which master or mistress does the science and engineering of MIR serve?** Could MIR cultivate more plural orientations and institutional partners to include non-commercial, non-profit and publicly-oriented initiatives aimed at enhancing and expanding human musical flourishing and sustainable music economies?

# 1<sup>st</sup> dimension of diversity

- Who gets to be a practitioner of MIR: what is the social makeup of the profession? Could it be more diverse?
- Madeleine Akrich (STS: science and technology studies) – focuses on how engineers ‘script’ envisaged uses into their technologies, in this way ‘configuring’ user identities and preferring certain patterns of use

M. Akrich, ‘The de-description of technical objects’, in W. Bijker and J. Law (eds.), *Shaping Technology / Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (1992)

# I-methodology

- ‘The dominance of the I-methodology...resulted in a **gender script**: the user who came to be incorporated into the design of [ICT] matched the preferences and attitudes of male rather than female users. As almost all designers were male and technologically highly competent, they made [the ICT] into a masculine technology.’

Oudshoorn et al. 2004, p. 44

# Hegemonic masculinity and technical design?

- ‘In contemporary Western society, the hegemonic form of masculinity is still strongly associated with technical prowess and power.... Notwithstanding the recurring rhetoric about women’s opportunities in the new knowledge economy, men continue to dominate technical work. ... These sexual divisions in the labour market are proving intransigent and mean that women are largely excluded from the processes of technical design that shape the world we live in.’

Wajcman 2010, p. 145

# 'Materializing morality: Design ethics and technological mediation'

- 'The ethics of engineering design... [should] take more seriously the moral charge of technological products and rethink the moral responsibility of designers accordingly.'

Verbeek 2006, p. 379



## 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension

- Whose music and which music get to be the focus of MIR's scientific practices?
- 'Since the beginning of [MIR],... most of its models and technologies have been developed [on the basis of] mainstream popular music in the... "Western" tradition'. But the last few years have seen 'an increasing interest in applying available techniques to the study of traditional, folk or ethnic music' (Gómez, Herrera et al. 2013: 111).

# Music, Digitisation, Mediation: Towards Interdisciplinary Music Studies

MusDig

<http://musdig.music.ox.ac.uk>



**European Research Council**

Established by the European Commission

# Dr. Aditi Deo: digital recording and archiving of folk music in Rajasthan, N. India

- Part of 'MusDig': ERC-funded research program – 10 ethnographic studies tracing the impact of digitization and digital media on musical practices worldwide
- Rajasthan project uniting Lokayan, Bikaner cultural organisation, and Kabir Project, Bangalore-based and funded by Ford Foundation etc: high caste intellectuals and urban activists: Kabir re-interpreted for secular nationalism
- ... Recording local elderly, illiterate, low caste women folk singers renowned for songs devoted to Kabir, a 15<sup>th</sup> century Hindu mystic poet and saint popular among low caste communities – for whom Kabir signifies resistance to caste-based discrimination and inequalities
- > Gender and caste inequalities get into these recording and archiving practices

# The Kabir Project, from Bangalore to YouTube: TEDxDelhi and secular nationalism

The image is a screenshot of a YouTube video player. The main video shows a woman, Shabnam Virmani, speaking on a stage. She is wearing a dark, patterned top and holding a piece of paper. The background features a large orange 'T' logo. Below the video, the title 'TEDxDelhi - Shabnam Virmani' is displayed, along with the 'TEDx Talks' channel name and a 'Subscribe' button with 2,341,474 subscribers. The video has 16,910 views. To the right of the main video is a 'Up Next' sidebar with several recommended videos, including 'TEDxMumbai - Lakshmi Tripathi', 'The Joy Of Giving : Narayanan Krishnan at TEDxGateway', 'TEDxDelhi - William Bissel', 'TEDxSRM - Rahul K Easwar - India is My Religion', 'TEDxDelhi Veer Bhadra Mishra', 'TEDxDelhi - Subodh Gupta', and 'TEDxColumbus - Jason Barger - What's Next: Now'. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHz5ypl2ZDI&feature=player\_embedded'. The browser's tab bar shows several open tabs, including 'Spread the word', 'The Guardian vie...', 'The American Fil...', 'urgent request! pl...', 'TEDxDelhi - Sh...', 'YouTube Video C...', 'Bob Ostertag', and 'screen recorder p...'. The browser's search bar is empty, and the 'Upload' button is visible in the top right corner.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHz5ypl2ZDI&feature=player\_embedded

YouTube GB

Up Next

Autoplay

TEDxMumbai - Lakshmi Tripathi - 04/03/10  
by TEDx Talks  
86,075 views  
22:06

The Joy Of Giving : Narayanan Krishnan at TEDxGateway  
by TEDx Talks  
95,207 views  
14:29

TEDxDelhi - William Bissel  
by TEDx Talks  
1,439 views  
15:29

TEDxSRM - Rahul K Easwar - India is My Religion  
by TEDx Talks  
42,376 views  
18:40

TEDxDelhi Veer Bhadra Mishra  
by TEDx Talks  
1,119 views  
20:16

TEDxDelhi - Subodh Gupta  
by TEDx Talks  
2,481 views  
23:01

TEDxColumbus - Jason Barger - What's Next: Now  
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1,254 views  
14:06

TEDxSRM - Rahul K Easwar - India is My Religion  
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42,376 views  
18:40

TEDxDelhi - Shabnam Virmani  
TEDx Talks  
Subscribe 2,341,474  
16,910

5:01 / 28:24

# Gavara-Devi Gosayi sings at the Kabir Yatra festival, Bikaner, Rajasthan (2012)





# Lokayan-Kabir Project partnership: Gavara-devi Gosayi prepares to record inside the booth





# Lokayan-Kabir Project: inside the recording session with Gavara-devi Gosayi



# 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension

- In the face of greater musical diversity, can MIR's foundational epistemological and ontological premises be sustained, or are they fundamentally challenged?
- *If* more musical diversity is sought, and if respecting the musical ontologies of the source communities is ethically (and musically) desirable, ***then* what kind of knowledge practices might support MIR to model these kinds of musical cultures 'as a whole'** (Serra 2017: 1)?



# R. Murray Schafer on schizophonia (1969)

- ‘Since the invention of electronic equipment for the transmission and storage of sound... we have split the sound from the makers of the sound. This dissociation I call schizophonia, and if I use a word close in sound to schizophrenia it is because I want very much to suggest to you the same sense of aberration and drama that this word evokes, for the developments of which we are speaking have had profound effects on our lives... Schizophonic: it's a word I invented..., phono pertains to sound [and] the Greek prefix schizo means split or separated.’

(Schafer, 1969, p. 43)

# UK ESRC-funded research: 'Interdisciplinarity'

(Born, Barry & Strathern)

- Empirical studies (ethnographies) of 4 major interdisciplinary fields > **3 basic forms of interdisciplinary practice:**
  - 1) **Additive or synthesis mode of interdisciplinarity:** brings different disciplines to the table and allows each to contribute as they are, without any of them being changed
  - 2) **Subordination mode of interdisciplinarity** (akin to situation now in MIR): a core discipline (computation) supervises inputs from other, subordinate disciplines (eg EM), so a 'dash' of the social or cultural may be added to the framework without disturbing the premises of the master discipline - nothing much changes
  - 3) **Agonistic mode of interdisciplinarity:** promising because there is no hierarchy, and the potential is that *all* contributing disciplines might change through mutual transformations and the genesis of unforeseen, novel methodologies

Barry and Born, *Interdisciplinarity: Reconfigurations of the Social and Natural Sciences* (2013)

# 'New knowledge infrastructures'

- **Geoff Bowker** –
- 'The epistemic cultures of the academy all have their own historical "ways of knowing" ... [But today], the objects of study... require the triangulation of multiple methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, and call upon... investigators to integrate multiple epistemic viewpoints'

Bowker 2018, p. 207

# 4<sup>th</sup> dimension

- Which master or mistress does the science and engineering of MIR serve? Could MIR cultivate more plural orientations and institutional partners to include non-commercial, non-profit and publicly-oriented initiatives aimed at enhancing and expanding human musical (... and social, cultural, economic...) flourishing and sustainable music economies?
- On sustainable music economies: K. Devine, *Decomposed: A Political Ecology of Music* (MIT, 2019)

# Thanks!

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