

ABSTRACT

ROBERT WESTON HAZELGROVE. *The Boundaries are Limitless: Use Values and Generic Instability in Contemporary Music*. (Under the direction of Professor Carolyn R. Miller.)

The world of contemporary music is replete with genres and subgenres. Literary critic Thomas Beebee uses the concept of use values to draw out differences between genres. In contemporary music, use values are helpful in the ways that they distinguish between the myriad of genres and subgenres. Use values are derived from contemporary music in terms of the ways it can be used, the goals that can be accomplished by it. A potential use value for a performer is that music allows him to express himself; a potential use value for an audience member/fan is that music grants him a cathartic release. Understanding music genres by describing the use values that are derived from contemporary music can be challenging.

This project aims to address this challenge by discovering the ways stakeholders (those with interests or concerns in music) use contemporary music and the values that they derive from it. I looked at recent discussions of contemporary music by reading 28 blog posts from widely read music blogs, and synthesized the ideas that were expressed in them. I followed this study by conducting a survey consisting of ten questions and sending it electronically to members of each group of stakeholders. After a month of reaching out to people through email and social media, I received 75 completed surveys. The questions on the survey drew from rhetorical works of genre studies (Beebee, 1994; Fornäs, 1995; Frow, 2005; Drott, 2013), and ranged from users' favorite genre of music, to perceived importance of genre classification, to the actual valuable aspects of contemporary music.

I argue that while borders and boundaries between stakeholders in contemporary music seem fixed, borders can be crossed and lines can be blurred, as different stakeholders are able to share the same use values. The information that I gathered was composed in the form of a multi-part blog series (<http://whazelgrove.wordpress.ncsu.edu/>), and it is intended for a non-academic audience because I want to communicate my research to as wide a public as possible in order to reach out to the stakeholders in contemporary music. As such, I have presented my ideas clearly to diverse audiences outside of an academic setting. The implications of my study add to the corpus of genre studies in contemporary music, while simultaneously making these studies accessible to a non-academic audience.