

Genre and Influence:

Tracing the Lineage of Timbre and Form in Steven Wilson's
Progressive Rock

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Abstract

This thesis examines the music of contemporary British progressive rock artist Steven Wilson and explores the ways in which specific musical influences have informed and shaped his work. Wilson's solo output is extremely eclectic and draws from a plethora of diverse genres including progressive rock, electronica, metal, drone, pop, jazz, and industrial. Although it would be impossible to trace all of the influences involved in Wilson's unique musical idiolect, I study the influence of three seminal tracks upon his work: progressive rock band King Crimson's "The Court of the Crimson King" (1969), electronica duo Boards of Canada's "An Eagle in Your Mind" (1998), and progressive death metal group Opeth's "Blackwater Park" (2001). I demonstrate how Wilson's recordings share timbral and formal features with these earlier works and consider the analytic implications through the lens of genre theory. The findings are then synthesized through a focused analysis of Wilson's "Ancestral" (2015) in order to explore genre fusion and demonstrate how these salient musical features are integrated within a single song. This project ultimately seeks to situate Wilson within the progressive rock tradition, consider the role of timbre and form in popular music genres, and investigate the complex relationship between genre and influence.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Objectives and Project Outline

[Art] starts from a point where a person that makes the art has reference points, has influences, has inspirations ... If your personality is strong enough, whatever you beg, borrow, or steal will still sound like you.

Steven Wilson (2016)¹

While there are many musical artists whose output seems to fall clearly within a well-defined genre, this is not always the case; some artists create music that seems to exist between the boundaries of genre labels. In the solo work of progressive rock artist Steven Wilson we find an example of a musician who defies traditional categorization: his music frequently mixes together a number of seemingly disparate influences – often even within a single track. Due to Wilson’s unique and complex melange of musical ideas, his solo career offers a great opportunity to explore the processes of both musical influence and genre fusion. It additionally demonstrates the means by which new music – and consequently genres – is largely derived from pre-existing material, a concept Jason Toynbee refers to as “social authorship”.²

By exploring how Wilson’s solo output employs many of the same musical characteristics as his primary influences, I establish links to specific genres within his music. While there are certainly a number of both musical and extramusical factors that are relevant in characterizing genre, I limit myself in this study to an analysis of two musical factors in particular: timbre and form. By tracing the lineage of these elements and considering their

¹ FreqsTV, "Steven Wilson on Into the Machine." *YouTube* video, 5:21-5:41. February 11, 2016. Accessed March 6, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tezwUT-ZnJQ>. It is appropriate that Wilson uses the phrase “beg, borrow, or steal” here, appearing to quote lyrics from Pink Floyd’s “Eclipse” (1973).

² Jason Toynbee, *Creating Problems: Social Authorship, Copyright and the Production of Culture* (Milton Keynes: Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research, 2001).

implications through the use of genre theory, it is possible to identify how both an artist's output and popular music genres are informed and shaped by influences – especially with respect to progressive rock, a genre of music largely characterized by the integration of multiple musical influences.³

In this introductory chapter I present the main goals of the thesis and summarize my research questions. Furthermore, I provide the necessary contexts for progressive rock and Wilson's music, career, and reception. I additionally address the state of research for the main scholarly areas in which this study operates, in particular the fields of genre theory, timbral and formal studies, as well as progressive rock studies. I conclude the chapter by providing a more thorough overview of the methodology I employ for my analysis in the subsequent chapters.

Although Wilson's vast array of influences makes it unfeasible to trace them all individually, in this project I provide in-depth comparative analyses of timbre and form between three highly influential songs and Wilson's "Ancestral" from the album *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* (2015) in order to draw direct connections between Wilson and influential artists from three different genres. Chapter 2 considers King Crimson's "The Court of the Crimson King" from their debut album *In the Court of the Crimson King* (1969), a track that is particularly representative of the early symphonic progressive rock style. The focus of Chapter 3 is "An Eagle in Your Mind" from Scottish duo Boards of Canada's first album, *Music Has the Right to Children* (1998), a unique piece that combines elements of electronica and ambient music. Chapter 4 analyzes Opeth's progressive death metal piece "Blackwater Park" from their highly influential 2001 album of the same name. All three of these songs are seminal tracks in their respective genres, and the influence of those genres on Wilson's music can be clearly traced.

³ I provide a summary of progressive rock's history, characteristics, and state of scholarly research in the "Contexts" and "State of Research" sections found later in this chapter.

While analyzing these three earlier recordings facilitates a chronological, forward-looking comparison to Wilson's work, in Chapter 5 I conduct a more thorough analysis of timbre and form in Wilson's "Ancestral". I use this opportunity to put all three of the aforementioned influences in dialogue with one another and additionally discuss elements of other genres that can be detected in the song. This analysis synthesizes my findings concerning the influence of many different genres on Wilson's music and demonstrates how he integrates these influences cohesively into a single song, often expressing characteristics of multiple genres simultaneously. Ultimately, this will allow me to discuss the process of genre fusion as well as the broader implications of the study with regards to genre and influence. This chapter is then followed by a brief conclusion that summarizes the findings of the project.

Through this study, I address a number of the gaps in the current popular music studies literature. In the field of popular music genre studies, very little research traces the impact of timbral and formal influences on genres and a given artist's music, a lacuna I hope to address with this project. Furthermore, the vast majority of academic literature focusing on progressive rock is restricted to the study of British groups from the late 1960s and 1970s; in particular, the bands King Crimson, Yes, Genesis, Emerson Lake & Palmer, Pink Floyd, and Jethro Tull have formed something of an unofficial canon that has received the lion's share of attention.⁴ Although this situation has been somewhat rectified in the past few years, modern progressive rock still remains woefully underrepresented in the scholarly discourse and there are very few studies that focus on individual contemporary progressive rock artists. This study of the solo output of Steven Wilson, a leading figure in the genre with a rich corpus, expands the musicological discourse to encompass more contemporary progressive rock artists.

⁴ Chris Anderton, "A Many-Headed Beast: Progressive Rock as European Meta-Genre." *Popular Music* 29, no. 3 (2010): 417-418. Accessed March 31, 2017. doi:10.1017/s0261143010000450.

In summary, by tracing the lineage of timbre and form in Wilson's solo work through comparative analyses with influential tracks I hope to further the understanding of the role that influence has in shaping genres and an artist's music and gain a greater understanding of the relationship that timbre and form have to popular music genres. Additionally, by studying a successful and influential contemporary progressive rock artist whose music exemplifies genre fusion, I attempt to expand the current scope of research on that genre. Due to his highly eclectic music that integrates tendencies from many genres, Wilson's solo output offers great potential for insight into the relationship between genre and influence.

Research Questions

By looking at Wilson's solo career in relation to his influences, this project aims to explore the means by which musical influences play a key role in the development of an artist's music as well as the genres in which that artist works. It also aims to examine some of the specific musical features responsible for such development. In addition to these broader concerns, throughout the project I also attempt to answer three main questions, all of which tackle facets of the underlying discourse on the relationship between genre and influence:

- I. How have Steven Wilson's solo career recordings been informed by his influences with respect to timbre and form?
- II. How is Steven Wilson able to incorporate elements of several different genres in his music in a way that is cohesive?
- III. How and where does Steven Wilson's music fit within the lineage of progressive rock as a genre?

Contexts

Progressive Rock – History and Definition⁵

Before exploring the necessary contexts for Steven Wilson himself, it is important first to provide a brief overview of progressive rock, the genre with which he has been most closely associated throughout his career.⁶ This will not only be beneficial for our understanding how his music is consistent with progressive rock traditions, but is also relevant to our investigation of how musical influence plays a role in shaping Wilson's music. An understanding of progressive rock and its characteristics will also reveal why it is particularly well-suited to a study of genre and influence.

Progressive rock is a genre of music that developed in the late 1960s as a musical outgrowth of psychedelia and, more broadly, the 1960s British counterculture movement.⁷ For a period of time in the 1960s and early 1970s, rock musicians had an unprecedented amount of creative freedom; in an attempt to discover a winning formula for commercial success, experimentation was encouraged rather than stifled by the music industry. This led to the development of progressive rock, a genre of music spearheaded by bands such as King Crimson,

⁵ Given the nature and scope of this thesis, the history of progressive rock provided here will necessarily be limited to the key details and focus predominantly on symphonic progressive rock. For more a more comprehensive history of progressive rock, please see Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Bill Martin, *Listening to the Future: The Time of Progressive Rock, 1968-1978* (Chicago: Open Court, 1998); Paul Stump, *The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock* 2nd ed. (Whitstable: Harbour Books, 2010); Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell, *Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock since the 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2011); Stephen Lambe, *Citizens of Hope and Glory: The Story of Progressive Rock* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011); and Will Romano, *Mountains Come out of the Sky: The Illustrated History of Prog Rock* (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books, 2010).

⁶ "Neil McCormick's Needle Time: Steven Wilson." *YouTube* video, 1:15-1:18. Posted by "Alejandro Togo," May 9, 2016. Accessed September 28, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJ7uRnxOuxI>.

⁷ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 15-29. Macan notes that the label "progressive rock" was originally used in the 1960s to differentiate psychedelic music from pop music and that it was not until later that it took on its current, more specific connotations. He further suggests that while the terms are often conflated, progressive rock should be kept distinct from the labels "classical rock" and "art rock".

Yes, and Genesis who sought to merge characteristics of rock with other music (most notably Western art music, but also often jazz and folk), emphasizing instrumental virtuosity and improvisation, large-scale forms and concepts, and expanded timbral palettes. While early progressive rock bands were typically built around the standard rock format (vocals, guitars, bass, and drums), certain instrumentation in particular came to be intimately associated with the genre: keyboard instruments like the mellotron, the Hammond organ, and the Moog synthesizer are staples of the classic progressive rock sound,⁸ and one does not need to look far to see the extensive use of woodwind instruments such as the flute and saxophone throughout early progressive rock repertoire.

Characteristics of what would become progressive rock are rooted in the ambitious experimentation of many 1960s artists. Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell suggest that it was the release of three seminal albums in 1967 that can be seen as the genre's point of origin: The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Pink Floyd's *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, and The Moody Blues' *Days of Future Passed*.⁹ Albeit in quite different ways, all three of these albums challenged the norms of the time and pushed the envelope of what was considered musically possible by reaching beyond or directly defying the rules of popular music with genre fusions and a hefty dose of experimentation. Although characteristics of the embryonic progressive rock genre can be found in the music of the above-mentioned albums and the late-60s work of other groups including The Doors and Procul Harum, it is often suggested that it was not until the release of King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson King* in 1969 that all of those

⁸ Lambe, *Citizens of Hope and Glory*, 61-67. A more thorough description and discussion of the mellotron and its significance in progressive rock is found in Chapter 2.

⁹ Hegarty and Halliwell. *Beyond and Before*, 43.

features coalesced in a cohesive manner that would become representative of the genre.¹⁰ The genre attracted a huge following and the stretch of time from approximately 1971-1976 was one of artistic and commercial success for progressive rock artists and marks what is frequently considered to be the genre's "golden age".¹¹ I will henceforth refer to music from this time as "classic" progressive rock, a label musicologist Edward Macan employs when discussing this music.¹²

Moving into the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, progressive rock lost its commercial viability. In Bill Martin's words, "progressive rock bands in the late seventies were stymied. For a few years, some limped along, in configurations that carried on with some aspects of progressive rock, but that also seemed a faint echo of the glory days".¹³ While it is likely that this decline is a natural consequence of a number of different factors, the rise of punk rock is often attributed as a major catalyst for this change.¹⁴ A number of progressive rock artists disbanded during this time while others, such as Yes and Genesis, began writing more straightforward pop songs that garnered commercial success at the cost of belying the musically-ambitious nature of their earlier work and ostracizing many of their original fans. As John Sheinbaum discusses, this transition to a mainstream sound was largely met with claims of

¹⁰ See Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 11; Stump, *History of Progressive Rock*, 43; Romano, *Illustrated History of Prog Rock*, 31; and Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 160. More information concerning *In the Court of the Crimson King* and its significance will be provided in the Chapter 2.

¹¹ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 258.

¹⁴ Hegarty and Halliwell. *Beyond and Before*, 1.

inauthenticity and was not met favourably by fans of the bands' original output.¹⁵ Sheinbaum himself, however, proposes that this should not be the case, arguing that in eschewing their original art music tendencies and embracing contemporary popular music styles these bands were evolving rather than simply "selling out".¹⁶ This points to the importance of incorporating contemporary influences in progressive rock.

Later in the 1980s a number of new bands surfaced who composed and performed in a progressive rock style reminiscent of that from the 70s, albeit typically minimizing the jazz influences and developing a simplified sound more informed by mainstream pop music. These artists, including groups such as Marillion and IQ, are often labelled as "neo-progressive rock" bands. In a study of fan reception, Jarl A. Ahlkvist found that while many fans of progressive rock do enjoy neo-progressive rock because of the return to a classic progressive rock style, many also feel these bands are too similar to their predecessors and are musically stagnant rather than "progressive" in the truest sense of the word.¹⁷ In their assessment of the neo-progressive rock style, both Macan and Stump voice the view that the music is in many ways derivative of earlier artists and music – Genesis' 70s output in particular.¹⁸ Given this response, continuous innovation can be considered an important characteristic of progressive rock for listeners, something that is largely achieved through new fusions of genres.

¹⁵ John J. Sheinbaum, "Periods in Progressive Rock and the Problem of Authenticity." *Current Musicology*, no. 85 (2008): 21-51. Accessed March 7, 2016. <https://currentmusicology.columbia.edu/article/periods-in-progressive-rock-and-the-problem-of-authenticity/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Jarl A. Ahlkvist, "What Makes Rock Music "Prog"? Fan Evaluation and the Struggle to Define Progressive Rock." *Popular Music and Society* 34, no. 5 (2011): 639-60. Accessed March 4, 2016. doi:10.1080/03007766.2010.537893.

¹⁸ See Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 197-206 and Stump, *The Music's All That Matters*, 256-263. Stump goes so far as to accuse Marillion of blatantly plagiarising Genesis.

This importance attached to innovation can be seen in another movement that developed in the 1980s and 1990s and is what is sometimes referred to as “post-progressive rock”. Including such bands as Radiohead, Tool, and Steven Wilson’s own Porcupine Tree, post-progressive rock fused elements of the classic progressive rock style with more contemporary influences and found great success in doing so. Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell suggest these kinds of bands have “helped to resuscitate [progressive rock’s] long-lost credibility”.¹⁹ Macan is likewise full of praise for the post-progressive style and claims that “not only do [post-progressive rock artists] bring a contemporary sensibility to the ‘classic’ 1970s idiom, they introduce a number of entirely new elements”, again pointing towards the importance of drawing together a number of diverse influences in progressive rock.²⁰ Over the past several years, with these artists and with the potential for Internet dissemination, progressive rock has been experiencing a resurgence in popularity.²¹ While admittedly not achieving the same degree of commercial prosperity as their 1970s predecessors, there are numerous contemporary progressive rock acts that are finding success releasing experimental and creative new music.

While this discussion of eras or movements in progressive rock provides a general and relatively tidy overview of the genre’s trajectory, as with any genre the reality is messier and more complicated; since it originated, progressive rock has splintered into myriad subgenres that have developed in different directions over the years. The musical style of most early and famous progressive rock artists (i.e., Emerson, Lake & Palmer and Yes) is often designated as symphonic or “classic” progressive rock due to the strong influence from Western art music,

¹⁹ Hegarty and Halliwell, *Beyond and Before*, 3.

²⁰ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 212.

²¹ See Lambe, *Citizens of Hope and Glory*, 158 and Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 272.

however many progressive rock bands have taken inspiration from other influences. To name some examples, the music of Canterbury Scene artists like Caravan and Soft Machine is, for instance, more heavily influenced by different styles of jazz, whereas certain progressive metal groups like Opeth and Cynic are largely an outgrowth of the death metal scene. *Prog Archives*, an online progressive rock resource and database, lists over twenty distinct subgenres under which close to ten thousand artists and over fifty thousand albums are organized.²² What is significant about this variety of subgenres is that, despite often having radically different sounds and drawing from different influences and styles, they all fit under the umbrella of progressive rock.

Given the musical eclecticism in progressive rock and its subgenres it is challenging to arrive at an unequivocal definition. Popular music scholar Kevin Holm-Hudson acknowledges this challenge, saying that “progressive rock as a *genre* has remained largely unstudied because of its complexity and diversity of styles”,²³ while music journalist Will Romano candidly suggests that “only gluttons for punishment dare try their hands at the definition of ‘progressive rock’, as it is almost too extensive, too elusive, too amorphous and contradictory to put down on paper”.²⁴ Allan F. Moore avoids the issue of defining progressive rock as a monolithic genre by discussing it as a “series of related but separate styles”.²⁵ Although these comments do little to further our understanding of precisely what progressive rock entails, they all point towards the

²² Prog Archives. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.progarchives.com/Progressive-rock.asp#definition>.

²³ Kevin Holm-Hudson, "Introduction." In *Progressive Rock Reconsidered* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2. Emphasis in original.

²⁴ Romano, *Illustrated History of Prog Rock*, 1.

²⁵ Allan F Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*. 2nd ed. (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2001), 64.

difficulty of defining it as a homogenous, independent genre due to its musical and stylistic diversity.

In what Holm-Hudson considers to be “perhaps the best definition of progressive rock, if only to highlight the diversity within the genre”,²⁶ Jerry Lucky outlines a number of features that are typical in progressive rock:

- Songs predominantly on the longish side, but structured, rarely improvised.
- A mixture of loud passages, soft passages, and musical crescendos to add to the dynamics of the arrangements.
- The use of a Mellotron or string synth[esizer] to simulate an orchestra backing.
- The possible inclusion of a live symphony orchestra backing.
- Extended instrumental solos, perhaps involving some improvisation.
- The inclusion of musical styles from other than a rock format.
- A blending of acoustic, electric and electronic instruments where each plays a vital role in translating the emotion of compositions which typically contain more than one mood.
- Multi-movement compositions that may or may not return to a musical theme. In some cases the end section may bear little resemblance to the first part of the song.
- Compositions created from unrelated parts.²⁷

This list of characteristics is undoubtedly helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of some of the musical conventions commonly associated with progressive rock, but functions more as a general guideline than a focused and encompassing definition.

Others have tended to identify ties to art music and the use of genre fusion as progressive rock’s defining features. Macan hones in on the genre’s associations to art music, saying that “the defining features of progressive rock, those elements that serve to separate it from other contemporary styles of popular music, are all drawn from the European classical tradition”,²⁸

²⁶ Holm-Hudson, "Introduction", 3.

²⁷ Jerry Lucky, *The Progressive Rock Files* (Burlington: Collector's Guide Publishing, 2000), 120-121, quoted in Holm-Hudson, "Introduction", 3.

²⁸ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 12-13.

while John Covach similarly claims that progressive rock bands “attempted to blend late-‘60s and early-‘70s rock and pop with elements drawn from the Western art-music tradition”.²⁹ While there is much merit in these views – especially when discussing the symphonic progressive rock that has come to be most associated with the genre – they are ultimately too narrow when discussing progressive rock in a broader context. As mentioned earlier, a number progressive rock bands define their sound largely through non-classical influences, and these definitions do not fully take into account the wide range of possible influences from which progressive rock artists draw. Chris Anderton notes this tendency for research to only consider symphonic progressive rock, and argues that progressive rock should be considered a European meta-genre that includes other types of progressive rock outside of Britain, such as the *Krautrock* from Germany and the *Rock Progressivo Italiano* (RPI) from Italy.³⁰

The definition provided by Peter Wilton is perhaps slightly more comprehensive, describing progressive rock as “a style of rock music of the early 1970s with a tendency to eclecticism, producing compositions influenced by ‘classical’ music ... ‘folk’ music ... and jazz, and also encompassing heavy or [hard rock]”,³¹ however even this definition appears to delimit the network of influences found in progressive rock. One of the most encompassing approaches to defining progressive rock is offered by Hegarty and Halliwell who propose that it is “an incredibly varied genre *based on fusions of styles, approaches and genres*” and that it “taps into broader cultural resonances that link to avant-garde art, classical and folk music, performance

²⁹ John Covach, "Progressive Rock, "Close to the Edge", and the Boundaries of Style." In *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis* ed. Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10.

³⁰ Anderton, "A Many-Headed Beast".

³¹ Peter Wilton, "Progressive Rock." Oxford Music Online. Accessed March 9, 2016. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e5374>.

and the moving image”.³² This approach to progressive rock, while necessarily slightly vague, highlights the importance of drawing from a range of other styles of music and consequently makes *influence* an integral feature of the genre. While it would ultimately be problematic to define progressive rock solely based on genre fusion (genre fusion can be found to various degrees in many different types of music), all of these attempted definitions do point towards the importance of genre fusion and ties to art music as defining qualities of progressive rock.

Although it may not be possible to arrive at a comprehensive, universally accepted definition of progressive rock, from this brief history and overview of how it is commonly defined I hope to have demonstrated that it is a genre of music that, since its beginnings in the late 60s, relies on an extremely wide range of influences both old and new. This reliance on multiple influences and fusions of genres situates progressive rock as an ideal type of music for a study of genre and influence, and in this respect the solo music of Steven Wilson is exemplary.

Steven Wilson – Career and Musical Characteristics

Accomplished multi-instrumentalist, composer, and producer Steven Wilson first gained prominence as a progressive rock artist in the 1990s and has continued to maintain prolific output ever since. While a detailed history of Wilson would cover enough content to span an entire book itself, here I will provide a relatively brief overview of his main musical projects, with more detail being given to his recent solo career. An understanding of Wilson’s career will provide invaluable context for the analysis of his solo work, demonstrate his significance in the modern music scene, and draw attention to some of the unique features of his work that raise interesting scholarly questions and establish his music as a worthy topic of study.

³² Hegarty and Halliwell. *Beyond and Before*, 3. My emphasis.

Wilson was born in England on November 3rd, 1967, and his experience with music began at a young age: he recounts his first significant exposure to music being when he was eight-years-old through hearing his parents' LPs of Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) and Donna Summer's *Love to Love You Baby* (1975), albums that – while far removed from each other in terms of style – would both become integral in shaping his own musical style.³³ When Wilson was slightly older, his father, an engineer, built him a four-track cassette recorder, and he suggests that through his sonic experimentation with this recorder at a young age he received an introductory education in music production.³⁴

While Wilson became a member of a few bands as a teenager and young adult – including Altamont, Karma, and Pride of Passion – as either a guitarist or keyboardist, his first significant success came through his groups No-Man and Porcupine Tree, which he operated simultaneously for many years. Formed in 1987, No-Man is primarily a collaboration between Wilson and vocalist Tim Bowness.³⁵ It was the first of Wilson's bands to sign to a record label, and consequently he claims that it was the band that got him started in the music industry.³⁶ No-Man's genre is hard to pinpoint, drawing from a wide range of hip-hop and electronic music influences as well as art-pop. Wilson, describing the band's early musical style, suggests that “[No-Man] were ... aligned with what became trip-hop” but notes that “there was this

³³ "Steven Wilson Biography." Steven Wilson HQ, para. 1. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://stevenwilsonhq.com/sw/resources/biography/>.

³⁴ Technics TRACKS, "Technics TRACKS Spotlights feat. Steven Wilson in 'Inspiring Moments'" *YouTube* video. January 22, 2015. Accessed October 30, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFO33Hark-k>.

³⁵ While the roots of No-Man – originally called No Man Is An Island (Except The Isle Of Man) – can be traced back to 1986 as a Wilson solo project, it was not until 1987 that Wilson started collaborating with Bowness on the project and it materialized into its recognizable form.

³⁶ "Needle Time: Steven Wilson", 4:02-4:07. The record label that signed No-Man was One Little Indian Records.

intellectual artist side to it too”, citing inspiration from artists such as The Pet Shop Boys, A Tribe Called Quest, and Brian Eno.³⁷ No-Man has gone on to release a total of six studio albums to date, the most recent being 2008’s *Schoolyard Ghosts*.

Wilson reveals that until the release of No-Man’s second full-length album, 1994’s *Flowermouth*, he and Bowness had been “making music to try to please the record company, try to please the management, to try to sell records”, but, disillusioned by the lack of commercial success (despite strong reviews by critics), gave up trying to cater to others.³⁸ This decision marks a significant shift in Wilson’s approach to music; rather than bending to the whims of fans, critics, and the record industry, he began to write less commercially-driven music. This is immediately noticeable in *Flowermouth*, which proved to be much more experimental and even further defied musical categorization than past work, but can be recognized throughout nearly all of Wilson’s subsequent output.

The second launch pad for Wilson, Porcupine Tree, was also formed in 1987 and would serve as the primary songwriting vehicle for the majority of his career throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Originally a fictional band formed by Wilson as a joke, when Porcupine Tree began it was essentially a solo project for which Wilson wrote and recorded all of the music.³⁹ It was not until 1993 when Porcupine Tree were two albums deep that it evolved into a full-fledged band, allowing Wilson to begin putting on live performances with the group.

As with No-Man, describing the musical style of Porcupine Tree is undeniably challenging; not only are the releases themselves often difficult to categorize due to the diversity

³⁷ Ibid., 3:40-3:59

³⁸ Romano, *Illustrated History of Prog Rock*, 233.

³⁹ "Steven Wilson Biography", para. 1.

of influences, the band's trajectory over the years took it through many distinct stylistic shifts. Recounting Porcupine Tree's early days, Wilson says "I had started to put together my own little home studio, and in the time I wasn't working with No-Man, which was a trio, I was kind of doing these strange sort of psychedelic, progressive, 70s, 60s homages that I thought no one would be interested in".⁴⁰ Despite these misgivings concerning the band's commercial potential, Porcupine Tree attracted more attention than Wilson could have expected and had enough popularity to propel it through over two decades of continuous activity. While in the beginning Porcupine Tree's sound drew heavily from psychedelia and featured lengthy improvisations, across the course of the band's history they moved through various distinct phases ranging from more straight-ahead pop songs to progressive metal. According to Romano, Porcupine Tree are "alternately described as progressive rock, post-progressive, neo-psychedelic, progressive metal, experimental/ambient, and even trance/club", highlighting the musical diversity in their recordings that cannot be pigeonholed into a single genre or style.⁴¹

Despite the band's commercial and artistic success, Wilson put Porcupine Tree on hiatus shortly after releasing and touring their tenth studio album, *The Incident* (2009), so that he could focus on his newly realized solo career. While leaving the possibility of a future reunion and album open, Wilson has directly stated that it "would be a bit of step backwards" for him to return to Porcupine Tree at this point in his career.⁴²

⁴⁰ "Needle Time: Steven Wilson", 4:15-4:32

⁴¹ Romano, *Illustrated History of Prog Rock*, 230.

⁴² Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson: 'My New Record Feels to Me Like a Piece of Cinema for the Ears'." Interview by Steven Rosen. Ultimate Guitar, para. 40. March 5, 2015. Accessed September 22, 2016. https://www.ultimate-guitar.com/news/interviews/steven_wilson_my_new_record_feels_to_me_like_a_piece_of_cinema_for_the_ears.html.

Although it was Porcupine Tree and No-Man that spurred Wilson to success and brought him to the forefront of the progressive music scene, he has formed and participated in numerous other musical projects throughout his career as a means of exploring his various musical influences: Bass Communion is a solo project that reflects Wilson's interest in ambient and drone music; Continuum is a collaboration between Wilson and Dirk Serries that also features ambient and drone music; I.E.M. is another solo project that explores experimental-electronica, free jazz, and psychedelic influences very much in line with the music of *Krautrock* artists; Blackfield is a collaboration with Israeli musician Aviv Geffen that blends aspects of art-rock and pop; and Storm Corrosion is a collaboration with progressive death metal band Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt that features experimental, cinematic progressive music. All of these musical projects – as well as the plethora of other minor collaborations Wilson has taken part in – indicate the breadth of musical styles and influences that he reflects in his recordings.

Even though a number of the aforementioned projects were essentially Wilson solo efforts in all but name, the first inklings of a bona fide solo career can be traced back to 2003 with a series of two-track singles released under his own name. Each of these two-track singles was part of a series called *Cover Version* and contain one original song and one cover song.⁴³ Wilson's covers on these releases are often radical reinterpretations of the originals and are frequently from unlikely artists like ABBA and Alanis Morissette. Over a several year period from 2003-2010 Wilson released a total of six of these two-track singles, and in 2014 these twelve songs were compiled into a single release, also titled *Cover Version*. Wilson also released a collection of electronica songs called *Unreleased Electronic Music Vol 1* under his name in 2004.

⁴³ There is a single exception to this format: *Cover Version IV* contains a cover song and a traditional English folk song rather than a Wilson original.

While this handful of songs may have been among the first to be released under Wilson's own name, it was not until 2008's *Insurgentes* that he released his first official full-length studio record as a solo artist. Wilson lists "being able to work with different musicians and being able to explore – or to fuse – all of the different aspects of my own musical tastes together" as a couple of the reasons why he decided to embark on a solo career.⁴⁴ Further, he claims that operating as a solo artist gives him greater freedom over the music he can create as he is not limited by the musical preferences and leanings of bandmates.⁴⁵ It is worth noting that while Wilson's solo career recordings do feature other musicians who leave their own musical fingerprints, he prepares all the demos for his songs on his own to a nearly finished state before the other musicians even become involved in the process.⁴⁶ The move to a solo career seems to be a natural progression in Wilson's career given his extensive experience composing on his own from an early age, something he confirms when he says "I had to acknowledge ultimately that I was meant to be, right from the early days, a solo artist".⁴⁷

Insurgentes was released while Wilson was still actively working with Porcupine Tree, but it is on this album, with the new-found freedom of being a solo artist, that Wilson is able to explore all of his disparate influences unhindered. In his words, "the reason this is the first time that I can really say this is an album by Steven Wilson is because ... everything of my musical personality is represented in this record. From the rock, to the grunge, to the pop to the

⁴⁴ Classic Rock Magazine, "Steven Wilson - On Porcupine Tree vs. Solo Work | Classic Rock Magazine." YouTube video, 1:55-2:02. March 10, 2015. Accessed March 6, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxruvIBRaG8>.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 0:22-0:33.

⁴⁶ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson: Past Presence" Interview by Anil Prasad. Innerviews, para. 20. 2013. Accessed November 2, 2016. <http://www.innerviews.org/inner/wilson2.html>. Many of Wilson's demos for his songs can be found on YouTube and often are remarkably close to the finished product.

⁴⁷ "Needle Time: Steven Wilson", 42:45-43:04.

progressive, the psychedelic... it's all in this one record".⁴⁸ Wilson's sophomore album, *Grace for Drowning* (2011), is an ambitious double-album that follows and further develops the path laid down by his debut. According to Wilson, "[*Insurgentes*] was an important step for me into something new. [*Grace for Drowning*] takes that as a starting point, but it's more experimental and more eclectic".⁴⁹ Indeed, from the twenty-three minute, intensely dissonant, jazz-fuelled "Raider II" to the short, melodic, and accessible ballad "Postcard", the album is an impressive display of musical variety.

If Wilson's first two albums are a testament to his diversity, then *The Raven that Refused to Sing* (2013) – a concept album in which each song tells a different ghost story – showcases his ability to focus and hone in on a consistent musical tone. Musically speaking, this album harkens back to the early days of progressive rock, replete with intricate compositions, instrumental virtuosity, and towering mellotron. In Wilson's own words, he was "very much into the idea of making an album that sounded like it almost could have been made in 1972. Like a real vintage, old-school progressive rock album".⁵⁰ It is further worth noting that *The Raven that Refused to Sing* marks the first solo release on which Wilson establishes a core band to record with. Until this point, Wilson recruited a slew of renowned guest musicians to perform whatever parts himself would not record. Although Wilson still uses guest musicians and performs a great deal himself (it is not unusual for him to record various vocal, guitar, bass, and keyboard parts), his

⁴⁸ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson Interview (04/2009)." Interview by Jeff. Metal Storm, para. 8. April 10, 2009. Accessed September 21, 2016. http://www.metalstorm.net/pub/interview.php?interview_id=513.

⁴⁹ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson – Grace for Drowning – 2cd Digibook Edition (2cd Digibook)". Burning Shed, para. 3. Accessed March 8, 2016. <https://www.burningshed.com/store/stevenwilson/product/175/3174/country/106/>.

⁵⁰ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson at AIR Studios, September 2014 - Part 1" *YouTube* video, 3:27-3:39. October 4, 2014. Accessed March 6, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIHxl5Q3pIA>. Accessed October 28, 2016.

primary band features virtuosic instrumentalists Guthrie Govan on guitar, Marco Minnemann on drums, Nick Beggs on bass, Adam Holzman on keyboards, and occasionally Theo Travis on miscellaneous woodwinds.⁵¹ Having these world-renowned players at Wilson's disposal allows him to write music that is more technically ambitious than ever before, something that he utilizes to great effect on *The Raven that Refused to Sing*. Significantly, these musicians all have extensive experience performing in many genres including progressive rock, jazz, metal, and new wave.

In 2015 Wilson released his fourth and most recent full-length studio album as a solo artist, *Hand. Cannot. Erase*. This is another concept record inspired by the harrowing true story of Joyce Carol Vincent, a woman living in London whose death went unnoticed for over two years. Throughout the album Wilson adopts the perspective of a woman living in the 21st century to tell a story that grapples with present-day issues including the effects of technology and the isolation of an urban environment. The music on the album is wide-ranging, drawing together almost all of the elements in Wilson's oeuvre, from electronica to pop to metal and everything in between. He says that "in some ways it feels almost like a combination of all my solo work and maybe *all* my work".⁵² Perhaps Wilson's most ambitious record to date, he also expands the narrative beyond the musical realm through the use of social media tools – such as a fictitious blog and Twitter feed from the viewpoint of the story's protagonist – and through convincing artifacts such as postcards, photographs, and birth certificates that are packaged with the deluxe

⁵¹ While I have listed each of the musician's primary instruments, most members of the band are multi-instrumentalists and regularly contribute to Wilson's albums with other instruments as well.

⁵² Wilson, "Steven Wilson at AIR Studios", 4:46-4:56.

version of the album.⁵³ The song “Ancestral” from this album will be used in comparative analyses in the following chapters and will be the focus of Chapter 5’s analysis; its abundant fusions of genres and styles makes it an appropriate choice for a study of genre and influence and in many ways it can be seen as a culmination of Wilson’s influences to date.

Following *Hand. Cannot. Erase.*, Wilson released *4 ½* (2016), an EP that contains previously unreleased original material and a live recording of an old Porcupine Tree song called “Don’t Hate Me” from the 1999 album *Stupid Dream*. In a post from his official Facebook page on January 23rd, 2016, Wilson wrote that a fifth full-length studio album, planned for late 2017, will “move in quite a different direction” and that the release of *4 ½* marks the “closing of one chapter before the next begins”.⁵⁴ More recently he has stated that this forthcoming, unnamed-as-of-yet fifth album will have a greater focus on song-based tracks and have a more contemporary and electronic slant to it.⁵⁵ While each of Wilson’s solo releases has a unique musical identity, they all share the characteristic that the music is in many ways an amalgamation of Wilson’s many musical influences while still being firmly rooted in the progressive rock style.

Wilson’s credits do not stop at his extensive list of releases as a bandleader and composer, however; he is additionally an accomplished producer and remixer. As well as producing and mixing his own material, Wilson has collaborated with numerous, well-respected artists. This includes work remixing classic albums by iconic progressive rock bands like King Crimson, Yes, Jethro Tull, and Emerson, Lake & Palmer, as well as taking on production

⁵³ Steven Wilson, *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* (Deluxe Edition). Kscope, KSCOPE522, 2015. Wilson’s fictional blog and Twitter account can still be accessed at <http://handcannoterase.com/> and <https://twitter.com/handcannoterase> respectively.

⁵⁴ Steven Wilson’s Facebook page. Accessed January 23, 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/StevenWilsonHQ/>.

⁵⁵ “Un Incontro con Steven Wilson.” *YouTube* video, 8:10-9:50. Posted by “guido bellachioma,” September 9, 2016. Accessed September 28, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8RYkYv7Uus>.

responsibilities for more contemporary artists, including Opeth and Orphaned Land.⁵⁶ Wilson's mixes have been favourably received: Stephen Lambe, praising Wilson's surround sound mixing skills, claims that he is the "king of 5.1 mixes".⁵⁷ In addition to further emphasizing his musical diversity and his direct connections to other progressive rock artists, Wilson's closeness to the work of other musicians undoubtedly, on some level, has an influence on his own work; in his own words, Wilson says "I think probably without consciously being aware of it, the things I'm working on outside of my own music always do have a kind of positive knock-on effect in terms of my own creativity".⁵⁸ This is yet another sign of how influence comes to shape the music of an artist.

All told, as of now Wilson has released over forty studio albums across his major projects and hundreds more releases if one considers the number of EPs, singles, live albums and videos, compilations, and other minor collaborations he has been involved with as a bandleader and producer.⁵⁹ Beyond the impressiveness of his sheer number of releases, what is of interest here is the remarkable amount of musical diversity in these releases and the vast network of influences that have come to integrate themselves in his various output.

Although Wilson's ambitious compositions and extensive use of genre fusion seems to place him squarely within the progressive rock tradition, his relationship to the term "progressive rock" is turbulent at best. For a number of years he blatantly rejected the label in attempt to

⁵⁶ Uwe Häberle, *Steven Wilson – The Complete Discography*. 10th ed. May 17, 2015. Accessed September 21, 2016. <http://www.voyage-pt.de/swdisco.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Lambe, *Citizens of Hope and Glory*, 174.

⁵⁸ Wilson, "Steven Wilson: 'Cinema for the Ears'", para. 20.

⁵⁹ For a comprehensive list of Wilson's discography up until May 2015, Uwe Häberle has put together a 564-page book available at <http://www.voyage-pt.de/swdisco.pdf> detailing the hundreds of releases Wilson has been involved with as a performer, composer, and producer (see Häberle, *Steven Wilson Complete Discography*).

distance himself from a genre that had, over the years, accrued negative connotations.⁶⁰

Eventually, however, Wilson came to acknowledge his association to the genre, saying “what I do understand and have come to appreciate now about my style and approach over the years is that everything I do does have a certain progressive sensibility about it. I have definitely learned from listening almost exclusively as a teenager to progressive music ... it’s certainly almost in my DNA”.⁶¹

But even if Wilson can be classified as a progressive rock artist, this by itself admittedly does little to further our understanding of his music or answer the underlying questions that arise from the eclecticism that places him in this genre to begin with; to do this, one must also analyze the influences themselves. While any artist’s – and Wilson’s in particular – web of influences is too extensive and elusive to attempt to chase down and analyze each and every thread, comparative analyses between Wilson’s solo work and select influential songs will help demonstrate the nature of genre fusion, elucidate aspects of his musical idiolect, and further the general understanding of how musical genres are shaped and transformed by influences.

Wilson’s own views on the essence of progressive rock and on the nature of musical influence are also worth taking into consideration at this point as they will provide critical insight into his process, influences, and musical identity, something that will prove highly beneficial when analyzing his work. Describing what characterised early progressive rock, Wilson says:

In a way progressive rock was all about the hybridization of music. So you had rock musicians for the first time combining jazz into their music, you had rock musicians for the first time taking symphonic, orchestral music and combining it with rock, you had folk music and rock being brought together, blues and rock ... So there is

⁶⁰ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson Interview." Interview by Dave Baird. *Dutch Progressive Rock Page*, para. 16-23. 2012. Accessed October 28, 2016. http://www.dprp.net/wp/interviews/?page_id=2502. In particular Wilson seems to be distancing himself from some of the neo-progressive rock bands on the basis of their close resemblance to the progressive rock artists of the 70s.

⁶¹ Romano, *Illustrated History of Prog Rock*, 230.

something about being in the tradition of so-called ‘progressive rock’ that you should kind of borrow from other genres.⁶²

He is also open about his influences and freely admits that his musical input has shaped his musical output, saying “I like to think that all of those things I’ve ever listened to somehow find their way into my musical personality”.⁶³ In addition to the complexity, scope, and eclecticism of his music, this emphasis on borrowing from other artists and incorporating his myriad influences into his music demonstrates the value in examining Wilson’s output.

Steven Wilson – Reception

Being hailed as “modern progressive rock’s undisputed figurehead”⁶⁴ and “one of the U.K.’s most critically acclaimed cult artists”,⁶⁵ Steven Wilson is undoubtedly one of the most successful contemporary artists composing in the progressive rock genre. Considering his solo efforts alone, each of Wilson’s full-length albums has charted progressively higher than the last, indicating his growing success and popularity as solo musician: looking at the *Billboard 200*, *Grace for Drowning* reached spot 85, *The Raven That Refused to Sing* reached 57, and *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* climbed as high as position 39 – uncommonly high for a contemporary progressive rock album.⁶⁶ Also, quite tellingly, Steven Wilson is the only artist to have any

⁶² "Needle Time: Steven Wilson", 37:08-37:37.

⁶³ Ibid., 39:19-39:25.

⁶⁴ Dom Lawson, "Steven Wilson: Hand. Cannot. Erase Review – Sonic and Spiritual Modernity." *The Guardian*, para. 1. 2015. Accessed March 06, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/feb/26/steven-wilson-hand-cannot-erase-review>.

⁶⁵ Jon O’Brien, "Steven Wilson: Biography." *AllMusic*, para. 1. Accessed March 6, 2016. <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/steven-wilson-mn000455886/biography>.

⁶⁶ "Steven Wilson Chart History." *Billboard*. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://www.billboard.com/artist/280703/steven-wilson/chart>.

album released in the 21st century appear within the top fifty albums ranked on *Prog Archives*, a website that averages thousands of fan ratings and reviews for thousands of different progressive rock albums.⁶⁷

Wilson has additionally been the recipient of a number of awards and nominations. He has been honoured many times at the Progressive Music Awards since its inception in 2012, winning three awards in 2015 alone for *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* in the categories for best album, commercial breakthrough, and best box set.⁶⁸ His work as a producer and mixer has been just as well-received; he has been nominated for the Grammy award for the “Best Mix in Surround Sound” category on four separate occasions for Porcupine Tree, Storm Corrosion, and his solo work.⁶⁹ The continuing and climbing commercial success as well as the widespread critical and fan acclaim of Wilson’s solo work points towards its significance and merit in the modern music scene.

State of Research

As the analytical undertaking of this project necessitates a network of different approaches, in this section I provide a review of the literature for the main areas of research that I will be drawing from. After providing a summary of the literature written about genre in popular music, I provide fairly brief synopses of the state of research of timbre and form in popular music and how scholars have connected these musical features to genre. Further, as Steven

⁶⁷ Prog Archives. Accessed March 7, 2017. <http://www.progarchives.com/>. As of writing this, Wilson’s albums *The Raven That Refused to Sing*, *Hand. Cannot. Erase*, and *Grace for Drowning* currently rank as 38, 54, and 91 respectively on the list of the website’s highest rated progressive rock albums of all time from a growing selection of over fifty thousand.

⁶⁸ "Prog Awards 2015." uDiscover. September 4, 2015. Accessed March 5, 2016. <http://www.udiscovermusic.com/prog-awards-2015>. Wilson was the only artist to win more than one award in 2015.

⁶⁹ Steven Wilson, Twitter post. December 6, 2012. Accessed October 19, 2016. <https://twitter.com/stevenwilsonhq/status/276646846787633153>.

Wilson's music falls under the progressive rock genre and one of the main goals of this study is to situate Wilson within the progressive rock tradition, the remaining portion of the literature review will be devoted to a review of scholarly material on progressive rock. The following section of this chapter will tie these various topics together in order to clearly present the methodology used in this study.

Genre in Popular Music

Despite the significant role that genre plays in popular music for listeners, musicians, and music industry personnel alike, it is a slippery term; although it has received significant scholarly attention, there is no consensus on precisely what it means and entails. One of the most significant early papers discussing genre in popular music was written by Franco Fabbri in the early 1980s when popular music studies was still a nascent field. Fabbri defines genre quite generally as “a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules” and discusses a number of rules involved in defining a genre: formal and technical, semiotic, behavioural, social and ideological, and economic and juridical rules.⁷⁰ Subsequent musicologists Stuart Borthwick and Ron Moy say they use genre as an attempt to “categorise musical styles within certain broad textual and extra-textual parameters”,⁷¹ whereas Fabian Holt similarly claims that “genre is a type of category that refers to a particular kind of music within a distinctive cultural web of production, circulation, and signification”.⁷² David Brackett strips his own definition down even further, simply saying that “the term ‘genre’, at its

⁷⁰ Franco Fabbri, "A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications." In *Popular Music Perspectives* eds. David Horn and Philip Tagg. (Gothenburg and Exeter: IASPM, 1982), 52.

⁷¹ Stuart Borthwick and Ron Moy, *Popular Music Genres: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁷² Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

most basic, refers to ‘type’ or ‘kind’” and emphasizes the role of community and culture in how genres are received and established.⁷³ In the field of literary theory, John Frow, on the other hand, avoids a direct definition of genre, but suggests that it is multi-faceted and asserts that any definition of a genre must take into account formal, rhetorical, and thematic dimensions.⁷⁴ What can be gleaned from all of these different definitions and explanations – other than that they are necessarily nebulous – is that genre in popular music predominantly serves as a means of categorization and classification that is informed by a number of both musical and extramusical factors.

But while genre is frequently used as a means of categorization, many scholars suggest that such categorization is not static. Frow, for instance, emphasizes the dynamic and flexible nature of genres, saying that “all texts are strongly shaped by their relation to one or more genres, which they may in turn modify”.⁷⁵ Although his focus is on genres in film, Steve Neale says that genres function as processes and offers that “the process-like nature of genres manifests itself as an interaction between three levels: the level of expectation, the level of the generic corpus, and the level of the ‘rules’ or ‘norms’ that govern both”.⁷⁶ These ideas can be extrapolated to popular music and also indicate the role of audience expectation in genre.

Brackett, specifically addressing genre in popular music, likewise stresses that genres evolve. Speaking of conventions associated with particular genres, he writes, “these conventions

⁷³ David Brackett, "Popular Music Genres: Aesthetics, Commerce and Identity." In *The SAGE Handbook of Popular Music* eds. Andy Bennett and Steve Waksman (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), 190.

⁷⁴ John Frow, *Genre*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 83.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁶ Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre." *Screen* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 45-66. Accessed March 3, 2016. doi: 10.1093/screen/31.1.45.

are constantly being modified by each new text that participates in the genre”.⁷⁷ Elsewhere Brackett also discusses how genres can be reclassified and how generic crossover “points to the complexity and instability of individual genres and identities”.⁷⁸ Also discussing genre in popular music, Toynbee says that “even as generic codes become embedded through repeated selection, they are at the same time charged with volatility and made susceptible to change” and proposes that generic change can happen in one of two ways: translation or transgression.⁷⁹ Further, he suggests that new genres are formed through the accumulation of small creative actions, indicating how new genres are shaped and produced by older ones.⁸⁰ The ever-changing nature of genres helps explain why it is so difficult to arrive at any concrete definitions of specific genres and further highlights the role of influence on genre formation and development.

Despite this close relationship between influence and genre in music, it is an area that has received very little scholarly attention. In fact, David Beard and Kenneth Gloag suggest that influence in general is a topic that has received minimal attention in musicology since the early 1990s.⁸¹ One musicologist to discuss the role of influence with regards to musical style in Western art music, however, is Leonard B. Meyer, who stresses that influence is a product of choice rather than causation: “since any specific source of influence ... is only one among a large number of possibilities available to a composer, it is never more than a *potential influence*. To be

⁷⁷ Brackett, “Popular Music Genres”, 195.

⁷⁸ David Brackett, *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music* (California: University of California Press, 2016), 26.

⁷⁹ Toynbee, *Creating Problems*, 15-17.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁸¹ David Beard and Kenneth Gloag, *Musicology: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 139.

an *actual* influence, it must play a part in the composer's process of choosing".⁸² Meyer also states that "what is involved in influence is ... making a new compositional option or alternative available to a receptive artistic intelligence".⁸³ These comments foreground the role of the artist in the process of influence and further indicate that influence leads to new artistic possibilities.

From this overview, a number of insights concerning genre in popular music are made apparent. For one, while definitions of genre tend to be vague, the term is generally used as means of categorization. Furthermore, the codification of genre is not determined solely by musical features, but is also heavily influenced by external factors such as culture. Additionally, genres are dynamic entities or processes that are continually transforming as new texts are introduced. This means that genres themselves are influenced by the texts that they categorize and new genres are frequently formed based on the influence of pre-existing genres. The artist can also be seen as integral with regards to the relationship between genre and influence, as they are ultimately the ones choosing what influences they incorporate into their music in order to create something novel. In this project I will apply these scholarly views of genre to gain a deeper understanding of how timbre and form play a role in genre determination and how influence plays a role in shaping genre codes and conventions.

Timbre in Popular Music

Timbre, a term generally used to refer to specific sound qualities, is an element of music that often plays a defining role in popular music. Many musicologists and sound recordists have investigated the qualities and significance of timbre, particularly with regards to its role in

⁸² Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 143. Emphasis in original.

⁸³ Ibid., 144.

popular music. Scholarly discussion of timbre has primarily been divided into two categories based on what Albin J. Zak III calls its physical properties and rhetorical properties.⁸⁴

William Moylan divides the physical properties of timbre into three parts: the dynamic envelope, which represents changes in a sound's amplitude over time; the spectrum, which consists of all of the frequency components; and the spectral envelope, which is a combination of the dynamic envelopes of different partial frequencies.⁸⁵ Jason Corey stresses that timbre is a multidimensional attribute and defines timbre using essentially the same three properties as Moylan, but using the terms amplitude envelope, spectral content, and spectral balance to discuss Moylan's dynamic envelope, spectrum, and spectral envelope respectively.⁸⁶ Likewise, in his discussion of timbre, Zak uses the same physical attributes to define what he calls a timbral signature.⁸⁷ An understanding of these physical properties of timbre allows for direct, empirical comparisons between timbres and can consequently be used to demonstrate influence.

But while this gives a clear view of *what* timbre consists of, another aspect that is equally important to consider is timbre's function in popular music. Zak, discussing the rhetorical potential of timbre, suggests that particular sonic qualities draw associations and can subsequently function as symbols. Stressing the importance of timbre in popular music, he further claims that it is the aspect of rock music that allows for the most experimentation and is

⁸⁴ Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 62.

⁸⁵ William Moylan, "The Elements of Sound Recording." In *Understanding and Crafting the Mix: The Art of Recording*. 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier/Focal Press, 2007), 6-10.

⁸⁶ Jason Corey, *Audio Production and Critical Listening: Technical Ear Training* (Burlington: Focal Press, 2010), 6.

⁸⁷ Zak, *The Poetics of Rock*, 62.

often the first thing a listener is engaged with.⁸⁸ Moore also acknowledges the importance of timbre in popular music composition and agrees that timbre can have symbolic qualities. He claims that a listener's exposure to certain timbres will influence their perception of them, and also says that the imaged origins of a specific timbre as well as the class of gestures it suggests can be used to generate specific meanings within a work.⁸⁹ Paul Th  berge echoes the idea that specific sounds can have associations and says that sound is an "identifying mark of contemporary music-making" and that it has "come to carry the same commercial and aesthetic weight as the melody or the lyric in pop songs".⁹⁰ Lelio Camilleri notes that the advent of recording technology marks a shift where "sound becomes the central parameter to develop".⁹¹ Timbre is also important in relation to sonic space and can be an integral part of an artist's particular sound: Camilleri claims that "the spectral content (timbre) of sound plays a relevant role in the overall perception of space" and notes that distinct sounds can function as "sonicprints" that characterize songs and albums.⁹² This research all suggests the significance that timbre has in popular music and how it functions as more than mere sonic quality.

The rhetorical properties of timbre have specifically been used to show how sonic qualities can be used to trace the relationships between works and genres, a concept that is key in this project. This is immediately apparent when considering Holm-Hudson's concept of sonic historiography, which uses timbre to reveal connections between rock songs. He suggests that

⁸⁸ Ibid., 60-70.

⁸⁹ Allan F. Moore, "Shape." In *Song Means Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 44-49.

⁹⁰ Paul Th  berge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 195.

⁹¹ Lelio Camilleri, "Shaping Sounds, Shaping Spaces." *Popular Music* 29, no. 2 (2010): 200. Accessed March 29, 2017. doi:10.1017/s0261143010000036. Emphasis in original.

⁹² Ibid., 202, 210.

“any accurate analysis of rock music must ... ultimately account for its timbre and studio production at least as much as on the traditionally analyzed parameters of tonality, harmony, and meter; in other words, how the song sounds is as important—if not more so—than *what* is sounding”.⁹³ He additionally comments that a “link [to an earlier style of music] may be made on the basis of a distinctive instrumental timbre”, establishing a connection between timbre and genre.⁹⁴ Similarly, Rebecca Leydon suggests that specific instruments can function as musical topics and draw associations to genre.⁹⁵ Looking at indie music, David K. Blake argues that “timbre is the primary vehicle by which indie music is produced and heard as different from its contemporaneous mainstream”, further reinforcing the relationship between timbre and genre.⁹⁶ It is also worth noting that many studies in the burgeoning field of Music Information Retrieval (MIR) have been using technology to identify and categorize music based on timbre.⁹⁷ These studies indicate that timbre is a musical parameter that is closely associated with genre and can be used to trace influence.

Although timbre plays an integral role in popular music genres, it proves to be one of the most challenging features to analyze; as Blake indicates, “timbre is especially frustrating for

⁹³ Kevin Holm-Hudson, "The Future Is Now ... and Then: Sonic Historiography in Post-1960s Rock." *Genre* 34, no. 3-4 (2001): 245. Accessed November 2, 2016. doi:10.1215/00166928-34-3-4-243. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁹⁵ Rebecca Leydon, "Recombinant Style Topics: The Past and Future of Sampling." In *Sounding out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music* eds. Mark Spicer and John Covach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 209.

⁹⁶ David K. Blake, "Timbre as Differentiation in Indie Music." *Music Theory Online* 18, no. 2 (June 2012). Accessed March 28, 2017. <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.12.18.2/mto.12.18.2.blake.php>.

⁹⁷ For more information about MIR and its applications, please consult Downie, J. Stephen. "Music Information Retrieval." *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 37, no. 1 (2005): 295-340. Accessed March 20, 2017. doi:10.1002/aris.1440370108.

analytic description, at once the most apparent and least systematizable musical parameter”.⁹⁸

One tool, however, that can be particularly fruitful for analysis of the physical properties of timbre is spectrographic analysis, which allows for visual representations of sound – called spectrograms – based on the intensity and frequency of an audio signal. Robert Cogan, one of the earliest proponents of the spectrogram for musical analysis, released a number of writings from as early as 1969 applying spectrographic analysis to the study of music by numerous Western art music composers including Mozart, Stravinsky, and Debussy as well as traditional music from various cultures across the globe.⁹⁹ In his work, Cogan demonstrates that spectrograms can be used to visualize an artist’s “sonic fingerprint” and that they can be an effective tool for the comparison of musical passages.¹⁰⁰ Though they claim that spectrograms have yet to be largely adopted in popular music studies, Eric Smialek, Phillippe Depalle, and David Brackett argue for the “musicological utility of spectrograms in drawing attention to subtle means of musical expression that can easily be overlooked”, suggesting its uses in analyzing properties of music – such as timbre – that cannot be easily or accurately expressed in Western notation.¹⁰¹

Spectrograms will be used extensively throughout this study in order to conduct comparative

⁹⁸ Blake, "Timbre as Differentiation in Indie Music", para. 7.

⁹⁹ For a selection of Cogan’s many writings on the uses of spectrographic analysis for the study of music, please refer to Robert Cogan, "Toward a Theory of Timbre: Verbal Timbre and Musical Line in Purcell, Sessions, and Stravinsky." *Perspectives of New Music* 8, no. 1 (1969): 75-81. Accessed March 28, 2017. doi:10.2307/832123; Robert Cogan, *New Images of Musical Sound* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Robert Cogan, *Music Seen, Music Heard: A Picture Book of Musical Design* (Cambridge: Publication Contact International, 1998).

¹⁰⁰ Cogan, *New Images of Musical Sound*, 56, 71.

¹⁰¹ Eric Smialek, Phillippe Depalle, and David Brackett, "A Spectrographic Analysis of Vocal Techniques in Extreme Metal for Musicological Analysis." Paper presented at Non-Cochlear Sound: Proceedings of the International Computer Music Conference 2012. Ljubljana, September 9-14, 2012. Accessed March 6, 2016. <http://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/MUSIC130/spectrographic-analysis-of-vocal-techniques-in-extreme-metal.pdf>.

analyses of the physical properties of timbre between passages of music and will additionally help extend the use of spectrographic analysis into more current popular music research.

To summarize, this section on timbre clearly divides its study into two distinct – though related – approaches: physical and rhetorical. Timbre's physical properties are important for examining the precise characteristics of a sound, and entail a sound's dynamic envelope, spectrum, and spectral envelope. Its rhetorical properties, on the other hand, are more important in how a piece is received by a listener and how specific sounds can draw references to specific works, genres, or even meanings. Further, the spectrogram is introduced as an effective tool for the analysis of timbre's physical properties. This project, through conducting timbral comparisons on the physical level through use of spectrograms and considering their rhetorical implications, will indicate how an artist's use of specific timbres indicates influence and creates associations to particular genres.

Form in Popular Music

While genre and form are often inextricably bound in Western art music, form – at least when considered by traditional methods – often does not play the same determining function in popular music; in fact, a great deal of popular music, regardless of genre, recycles the same few forms. Though he stresses that there is no shortage of unique forms in popular music, Covach identifies a handful of formal schemes that are used for the vast majority of popular music: the twelve-bar blues, AABA form, simple and contrasting verse-chorus forms, simple verse form, and compound forms.¹⁰² He suggests that these forms are established primarily via harmony and duration, and that musical form should be treated separately from lyrical form. Moore's

¹⁰² John Covach, "Form in Rock Music: A Primer." In *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis* ed. Deborah J. Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 65-76.

discussion of form in popular music primarily looks at how time (meter, hypermeter, and phrase structure) and harmony (modal harmony, looping progressions, and periods) are used to establish form, but in contrast to Covach he believes that lyrical form should not necessarily be treated separately.¹⁰³ Both of these works establish time and harmony as determining features of form and explore some of the more common formal strategies employed by popular music artists.

While the classifications of form by Covach and Moore are based primarily on time and harmony, other scholars have adopted a more flexible view of form and have explored other musical elements that can influence a song's form. Walter Everett says that "terraced instrumentations often demarcate formal divisions in pop music", highlighting the potential role of texture in form.¹⁰⁴ While this accounts for marked changes in texture, other approaches look at more gradual changes: Mark Spicer, for instance, identifies "cumulative" and "accumulative" forms in popular music, with the former involving some kind of expansion or development (be it textural, registral, or otherwise) throughout an entire piece and the latter referring to expansion within an individual formal unit such as a buildup section.¹⁰⁵ Robin Attas likewise looks at how form can be a process that unfolds in real time by examining the rhythmic attributes of buildup introductions in popular music specifically.¹⁰⁶ Another paper, by Ciro Scotto, uses the "dist-space" tool to demonstrate how sonic distortion can actually play a role in shaping and directing

¹⁰³ Allan F. Moore, "Form." in *Song Means Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012), 51-89.

¹⁰⁴ Walter Everett, "Pitch Down the Middle." In *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays* (New York: Garland, 2000), 115.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Spicer, "(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music." *Twentieth-Century Music* 1, no. 1 (2004): 29-64. Accessed March 4, 2016. doi: 10.1017/s1478572204000052.

¹⁰⁶ Robin Attas, "Form as Process: The Buildup Introduction in Popular Music." *Music Theory Spectrum* 37, no. 2 (2015): 275-96. Accessed March 4, 2016. doi: 10.1093/mts/mtv020.

a song's form.¹⁰⁷ These writings indicate that analysis of popular music form by non-traditional parameters can reveal complexities that would otherwise not be accounted for.

Another popular music scholar, Brad Osborn, discusses ways in which popular music can subvert the standard verse-chorus form that it has become so closely entwined with. One of his papers deals with the use of terminally climactic form in recent popular music, and suggests there are three main types of this form: two-part, three-part, and extended.¹⁰⁸ In another paper Osborn demonstrates the use of through-composed forms in post-millennial rock genres, and groups these forms into four archetypes: one-part monothematic, two-part monothematic, one-part polythematic, and multi-part polythematic.¹⁰⁹ He also believes that “there exists a substantive link between form and genre in post-millennial rock”, which highlights the interconnectedness of form and genre that is elsewhere often missing from the discourse.¹¹⁰

The discussion of form in popular music brings a number of features into focus. First, a large portion of popular music falls under just a few formal schemes when using harmony and time as determining features. Additionally, new insights concerning form can often be gleaned through a consideration of form from a non-traditional perspective. Finally, some modern bands are deviating from the standard verse-chorus paradigm found in popular music by experimenting with strategies like terminally climactic forms and through-composed forms, and these scenarios

¹⁰⁷ Ciro Scotto, "The Structural Role of Distortion in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal." *Music Theory Spectrum* 38, no. 2 (February 10, 2017): 178-99. Accessed March 6, 2017. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/mts/mtw013>. The “dist-space” approach involves plotting distortion intensity against duration.

¹⁰⁸ Brad Osborn, "Subverting the Verse–Chorus Paradigm: Terminally Climactic Forms in Recent Rock Music." *Music Theory Spectrum* 35, no. 1 (2013): 23-47. Accessed February 14, 2016. doi: 10.1525/mts.2013.35.1.23.

¹⁰⁹ Brad Osborn, "Understanding Through-Composition in Post-Rock, Math-Metal, and Other Post-Millennial Rock Genres." *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 3 (October 2011). Accessed February 14, 2016. <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.osborn.php>.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 35.

seems to indicate a close relationship between form and genre. Drawing from this research I will demonstrate that form and genre are often linked in popular music and further show how specific formal features can suggest an influence from other artists and genres.

Progressive Rock

Although there were a handful of scattered articles written on progressive rock, it was not until 1997 with Macan's *Rocking the Classics: Progressive Rock and the English Counterculture* that a comprehensive, scholarly undertaking of the genre was attempted.¹¹¹ Macan's approach blended musicological and sociological methodologies to present a clear understanding of the genre. In addition to providing a thorough account of the origins, development, and critical reception of progressive rock, he also provides an analysis of the music, lyrics, and visuals through descriptive means. As the title implies, Macan figures the counterculture movement heavily into his exploration of the genre. While Macan's book extensively covers the genre during its commercial heyday in the late 60s and 70s, he is not as thorough in his discussion of the genre's subsequent developments and restricts himself to only examining British artists.

Though *Rocking the Classics* was the first book of its kind, at the time of its release two other books concerning the genre were also underway and were released the next year. Music journalist Paul Stump's *The Music's All that Matters* is an in-depth history of the genre beginning in the 60s and offers many insights into the how the culture influenced the development of the genre.¹¹² Philosopher Bill Martin's *Listening to the Future: The Times of Progressive Rock 1968-1978* likewise explores the genre's history and the conditions that gave rise to it, but a large portion of the book is dedicated to guiding the reader through what he

¹¹¹ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*.

¹¹² Stump, *The Music's All That Matters*.

considers to be some of the most influential works of progressive rock.¹¹³ While both of these books offer a wealth of information, they face the same shortcomings as *Rocking the Classics*: they both focus almost exclusively on British artists and music released in late 1960s and 1970s. It is worth noting, however, that the vastly revised second edition of *The Music's All that Matters*, released in 2010, at least partially remedies this parochial view of progressive rock by including more information on international groups and more recent music.

Since the release of these three formative books, progressive rock has been a burgeoning area of scholarly research. One of the most significant works to be released is a collection of essays edited by Holm-Hudson titled *Progressive Rock Reconsidered* (2002).¹¹⁴ The essays contained within this book attempt to expand academic discourse on the genre, considering a richer variety of artists and often shedding an interdisciplinary light on some of the subject matter. A few other books dedicated to the genre as a whole have also been released in recent years: Hegarty and Halliwell explore the genre's history and development, looking at many artists whose music contains progressive elements;¹¹⁵ Stephen Lambe also looks at the genre's history and provides a number of reviews of albums he deems particularly significant;¹¹⁶ and music journalist Romano investigates a lot of the genre's significant artists, drawing heavily from interviews with key figures in the progressive rock movement.¹¹⁷ While these materials are more successful in mentioning more modern progressive rock artists, they are still largely dedicated to the earlier bands.

¹¹³ Martin, *Listening to the Future*.

¹¹⁴ Holm-Hudson, *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*.

¹¹⁵ Hegarty and Halliwell, *Beyond and Before*.

¹¹⁶ Lambe, *Citizens of Hope and Glory*.

¹¹⁷ Romano, *Illustrated History of Prog Rock*.

A number of scholars have written articles that discuss general characteristics of the genre. Sheinbaum, for example, considers how classic progressive rock fused elements of “high” and “low” art values,¹¹⁸ while Jérôme Melançon and Alexander Carpenter look at how the music of Yes and Pink Floyd can truly be considered “progressive” and meets Theodor Adorno’s criteria for art music.¹¹⁹ Covach examines the stylistic crossover that occurred between progressive rock and jazz fusion with certain American bands in the 70s.¹²⁰ Additionally, Anderton discusses how progressive rock should be considered a meta-genre,¹²¹ while Moore offers a lengthy chapter outlining the history and characteristics of progressive styles in his book *Rock, the Primary Text*, adopting a much broader understanding of progressive rock.¹²² These articles and chapters help shape the values and practices behind progressive rock and provide a better understanding of the principles governing the genre.

Much of academic literature on progressive rock, however, focuses on specific songs, albums, or artists, and uses a number of analytical approaches: an article by Holm-Hudson, for instance, uses Neo-Riemannian theory to demonstrate voice leading in Genesis’ keyboard parts;¹²³ Gregory Karl discusses King Crimson’s use of convergent evolution in an analysis of

¹¹⁸ John J. Sheinbaum, "Progressive Rock and the Inversion of Musical Values." In *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*, ed. Kevin Holm-Hudson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 21-42.

¹¹⁹ Jérôme Melançon and Alexander Carpenter, "Is Progressive Rock Progressive? YES and Pink Floyd as Counterpoint to Adorno." *Rock Music Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015): 125-47. Accessed December 16, 2015. doi:10.1080/19401159.2015.1008344.

¹²⁰ John Covach, "Jazz-Rock? Rock-Jazz? Stylistic Crossover in Late-1970s American Progressive Rock." In *Expression in Pop-rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays* ed. Walter Everett. (New York: Garland, 2000): 93-110.

¹²¹ Anderton, "A Many-Headed Beast".

¹²² Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text*, 64-118.

¹²³ Kevin Holm-Hudson, "A Study of Maximally Smooth Voice Leading in the Mid-1970s Music of Genesis." In *Sounding out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music* ed. Mark Stuart Spicer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 99-123.

“Larks’ Tongues in Aspic” (1973);¹²⁴ Camilleri looks at a number of progressive rock songs from the 1970s in order to develop a model for discussing the use of sonic space in recordings;¹²⁵ and Brian Robison looks at how King Crimson’s “Dinosaur” (1995) musically and lyrically represents the history of progressive rock.¹²⁶ Further, a number of books dedicated to the hermeneutic analyses of specific albums and artists have also been released in recent years: Phil Rose has released an in-depth look at the concept albums of Pink Floyd and Roger Waters,¹²⁷ Allan F. Moore has written a book on Jethro Tull’s *Aqualung* (1971),¹²⁸ and Holm-Hudson has undertaken a thorough analysis of Genesis’ *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* (1974).¹²⁹ These books all analyze the lyrics and musical content of their respective objects of analysis in order to develop interpretations of the works in question.

Given progressive rock’s inclination for large-scale, expansive forms, numerous scholars have explored the formal strategies used by progressive rock bands in specific songs and albums. Many of these writings demonstrate the similarities between uses of form in progressive rock and Western-classical music: Nors S. Josephson details the forms of many progressive rock compositions and relates them to those found in various eras of Western art music, ranging from

¹²⁴ Brian Robison, “King Crimson’s “Dinosaur” as (Post)Progressive Historiography.” In *Progressive Rock Reconsidered* ed. Kevin Holm-Hudson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 221-242.

¹²⁵ Camilleri, “Shaping Sounds, Shaping Spaces,” 199-211.

¹²⁶ Gregory Karl, “King Crimson’s *Larks’ Tongues in Aspic*: A Case of Convergent Evolution.” In *Progressive Rock Reconsidered* ed. Kevin Holm-Hudson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 121-142.

¹²⁷ Phil Rose, *Roger Waters and Pink Floyd: The Concept Albums* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015).

¹²⁸ Allan F. Moore, *Aqualung* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

¹²⁹ Kevin Holm-Hudson, *Genesis and the Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

Baroque to 20th century;¹³⁰ Spicer explores how the band Genesis utilizes intertextual references and is able to use motifs and harmony in “Supper’s Ready” (1972) in a similar fashion to 19th-century composers to create a cohesive work;¹³¹ Covach shows how Yes’ “Close to the Edge” (1972) has large-scale formal elements derived from both Western art music and popular music;¹³² and James Borders suggests that Frank Zappa’s early music was largely influenced by the formalism of composers such as Stravinsky.¹³³ Other papers also examine the compositional strategies used by progressive rock bands to create large-scale works without directly linking them to Western art music: John R. Palmer examines the use of recurring harmonic material and motivic development throughout Yes’ “Awaken” (1977);¹³⁴ Holm-Hudson details Emerson, Lake & Palmer’s use of multiply directed time and macroprogressions in “Trilogy” (1972) to create a large-scale tonal plan;¹³⁵ Gilad Cohen discusses how lyrics, recurring motifs, and structurally important interludes and guitar solos are used to maintain interest in Pink Floyd’s lengthy “Dogs” (1977) despite its relative lack of harmonic material;¹³⁶ and Holm-Hudson looks

¹³⁰ Nors N. Josephson, "Bach Meets Liszt: Traditional Formal Structures and Performance Practices in Progressive Rock." *The Musical Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (1992): 67-92. Accessed February 14, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/741913>.

¹³¹ Mark Spicer, "Large-Scale Strategy and Compositional Design in the Early Music of Genesis." In *Expression in Pop-rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays* ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland, 2000), 313-334.

¹³² Covach, "Boundaries of Style".

¹³³ James Borders, "Form and the Concept Album: Aspects of Modernism in Frank Zappa's Early Releases." *Perspectives of New Music* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 118-60. Accessed January 28, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/833535>.

¹³⁴ John R. Palmer, "Yes, 'Awaken', and the Progressive Rock Style." *Popular Music* 20, no. 2 (2001): 243-61. Accessed March 2, 2016. doi:10.1017/S026114300100143X.

¹³⁵ Kevin Holm-Hudson, "A Promise Deferred: Multiply Directed Time and Thematic Transformation in Emerson Lake & Palmer's "Trilogy"." In *Progressive Rock Reconsidered* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 111-120.

¹³⁶ Gilad Cohen, "Expansive Form in Pink Floyd's "Dogs"." *Music Theory Online* 21, no. 2 (June 2015). Accessed March 4, 2016. <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.15.21.2/mto.15.21.2.cohen.pdf>.

at the unifying effects of segues in Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* while Shaugn O'Donnell looks at the use of large-scale tonal structure in the same album.¹³⁷ This wealth of literature concerning form in progressive rock indicates not only its interest to scholars but also its significance to the genre.

This overview of scholarly literature on progressive rock demonstrates that a great deal of research has been done on the genre, particularly in the past few years. However, despite the large amount of attention the genre has been receiving, the scope of artists being examined is still quite narrow. Additionally, much of this scholarly material focuses either on the history and culture surrounding progressive rock or the types and features of forms employed by progressive rock artists. This project, which examines influence and genre fusion in a contemporary progressive rock artist through an analysis of timbre and form, can be seen as remedying this gap in the current progressive rock literature.

Methodology

Having explored the state of research for the main areas this project will be drawing from, in this section I detail how they tie together to form my methodology. In order to study genre and influence in the music of Wilson I conduct comparative analyses of timbre and form between Wilson's "Ancestral" and King Crimson's "The Court of the Crimson King", Boards of Canada's "An Eagle in Your Mind", and Opeth's "Blackwater Park". I then use genre theory to

¹³⁷ See Kevin Holm-Hudson, "'Worked out within the Grooves': The Sound and Structure of *The Dark Side of the Moon*." In *Speak to Me: The Legacy of Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon* ed. Russell Reising. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 69-86 and Shaugn O'Donnell, "'On the Path': Tracing Tonal Coherence in *The Dark Side of the Moon*." In *Speak to Me: The Legacy of Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon* ed. Russell Reising (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 87-103.

connect the uses of timbre and form to specific genres and make broader claims about the relationship of genre and influence as unearthed by these analyses.

Although Wilson's music incorporates elements from a number of different genres, I have chosen to look predominantly at the influence of classic progressive rock, electronica, and metal on Wilson because, as I will demonstrate, these influences constitute a particularly large portion of his musical identity. The songs analyzed in this project were chosen because they are particularly representative of these genres, something that will be discussed in more detail in a brief background and contexts section at the beginning of each subsequent chapter. As mentioned earlier, Wilson's "Ancestral" is used for the comparative analyses because it showcases his musical eclecticism and can be viewed as expressing an amalgamation of his major musical influences, making it an ideal track to study genre and influence in his work.

The first musical characteristic that I analyze is timbre. In a series of comparative analyses between the aforementioned songs and Wilson's "Ancestral", I consider both the physical and rhetorical properties of timbre in order to demonstrate instances of similarity or influence between the artists and to come to meaningful conclusions about timbre's role in genre. In order to be comprehensive, where appropriate my analysis of timbre does not only consider instrumentation but also performance strategies and aspects of production; according to Lori Burns, "some timbral effects are controlled by the performer's expression and some are owing to recording and production technologies",¹³⁸ and to focus solely on instrumentation would fail to take into account all of the attributes that influence timbre in recordings.

¹³⁸ Lori Burns, "Sculpting a Vocal Narrative Across the Concept Album: Vocal Delivery and Treatment in in P!nk's The Truth About Love." Paper presented at the Society for Music Theory Conference. Milwaukee, November 6-9, 2014.

Rather than relying solely on descriptive analysis, I additionally make use of the software *Sonic Visualiser* to generate spectrograms in order to visualize and analyze the physical properties of timbre.¹³⁹ In order to explain how the spectrogram is read, an example spectrogram from Wilson's "Ancestral" (4:47-5:17) can be seen in Figure 1.1. The x-axis represents time, the y-axis represents frequency (Hz, ranging from 0 to roughly 22,050 unless otherwise specified), and the intensity of colour reflects the intensity of the audio signal (dB, running on a spectrum where green is the weakest, red is the strongest, and black denotes a lack of signal). In many cases, where indicated, I have adjusted the spectrograms' gain settings to higher dB levels. This has the effect of increasing the colour contrast between instrument parts to more clearly identify the details of the sonic profile, but results in spectrograms that display more intensity than when visualized without adjusting the gain setting. The spectrogram therefore allows, to an extent, for a visualization of the physical properties of timbre, such as a sound's dynamic envelope and spectrum. In Figure 1.1, for instance, it is possible to identify overtones for the string parts being played (outlined in black). These visualizations lend themselves well to comparative analyses, making it possible to easily identify similarities between the specific timbres used by Wilson and his influences. Using the physical and rhetorical properties of timbre gained through these tools and approaches I demonstrate how particular sonic qualities can function as markers of genre and be used to track the relationship between Wilson's music and the music of his influences.

¹³⁹ Chris Cannam, Christian Landone, and Mark Sandler. *Sonic Visualiser*. Computer software. Version 2.4.1. 2013. Accessed October 28, 2016. <http://www.sonicvisualiser.org/>.

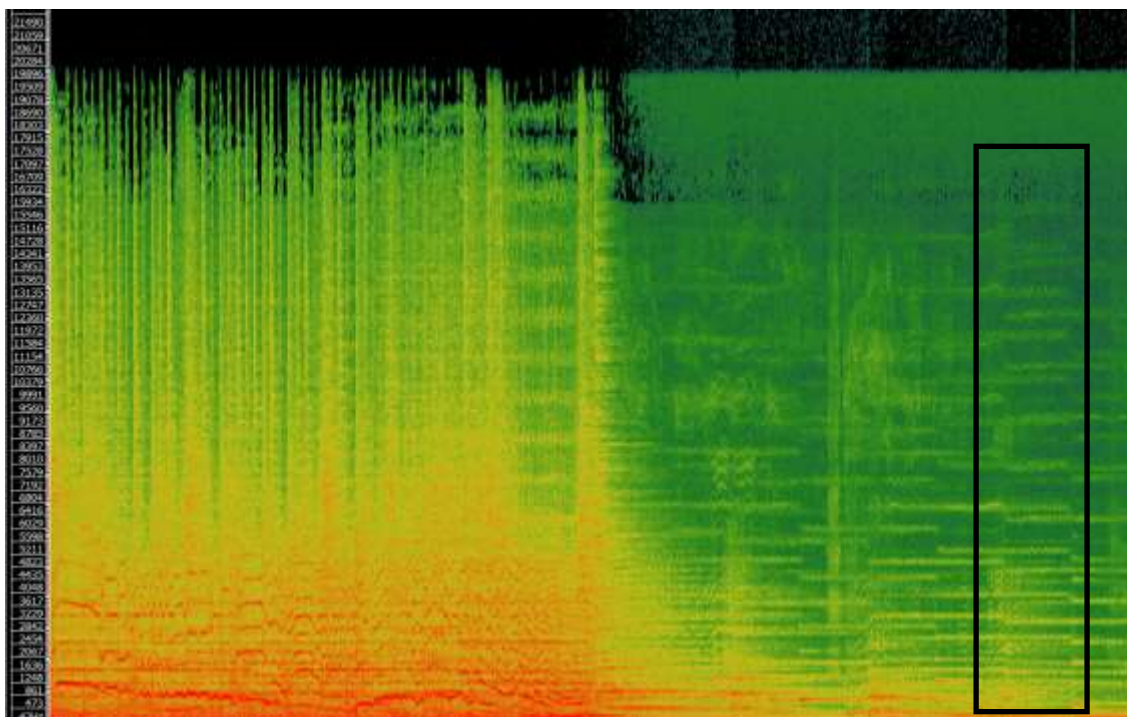


Figure 1.1 Spectrogram for Steven Wilson’s “Ancestral” (4:47-5:17) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain.

Following my consideration of timbre, the second musical parameter I analyze is form. Once again I conduct comparative analyses between Wilson’s “Ancestral” and representative songs from genres that have influenced him, highlighting similarities and discussing form’s role in genre. As I will be analyzing a wide range of music using different formal schemes, I will not adopt any single methodology for studying form but rather address each situation as it arises. Given that many of these forms do not follow the standard verse-chorus form, in most cases I will adopt Osborn’s approach of using consecutive letters to define thematically distinct sections and the prime symbol (') to denote sections that are “based on the same thematic material, yet are recognizably different”.¹⁴⁰ The parameters that I will use to delineate formal units include

¹⁴⁰ Osborn, "Understanding Through-Composition", para. 5.

harmony, time, lyrics, and texture, and I will additionally consider non-traditional formal strategies such as Spicer's cumulative and accumulative forms.¹⁴¹

For my analysis of form I will make use of *Variations Audio Timeliner*, a program for creating formal diagrams,¹⁴² in order to visualize the forms of each of the tracks discussed. I will additionally make further use of *Sonic Visualiser* in order to generate wave data for each song, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of how the tracks unfold over time. Through analyzing and comparing the forms used by Wilson's influences and his own compositions it will be possible to gain a greater understanding of how form is connected to genre and, once again, how musical influences can come to inform new music and genres.

While this accounts for how I analyze the specific musical features of the pieces in question, I also use genre theory to draw meaningful conclusions about genre and influence. Although popular music genre theorists have extensively discussed the importance of extramusical factors in determining genre, I predominantly focus on the musical characteristics themselves, what Fabbri refers to as the formal and technical rules of musical genre.¹⁴³ This is by no means an attempt to discount the importance of the extramusical factors, but rather to focus the scope of my thesis and specifically address the relevant musical materials. By examining how the uses of timbre and form in the pieces I analyze belong to the formal and technical rules of specific genres, I discuss how these can be seen as markers of influence and demonstrate that they are all integrated into Wilson's music. From these findings I then address the larger issue of genre and influence and return to Toynbee's concept of social authorship in order to describe

¹⁴¹ Spicer, "(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music".

¹⁴² Yorgason, Brent, Jim Halliday, Chris Colvard, and Eric Issacson. *Variations Audio Timeliner*. Computer software. Version 1.0.1. Variations Audio Timeliner. 2008. Accessed March 25, 2017. <http://variations.sourceforge.net/vat/>.

¹⁴³ Fabbri, "Theory of Musical Genres".

how Wilson's complex music can be explained as the intersection of many different influences.¹⁴⁴

Overall, my analysis unfolds in the following steps: 1) I analyze timbre and form in the three influential tracks that I have chosen by King Crimson, Boards of Canada, and Opeth using the approach outlined above; 2) I situate these musical elements in the context of their respective genres and draw connections between these elements and Wilson's output as a solo artist; 3) I analyze timbre and form in Wilson's composition "Ancestral" for links to those three major artists; and 4) I synthesize the analytic data about genre and consider the larger implications of how musical influence operates at the level of genre through the lens of genre theory. Ultimately, through this methodology I attempt to provide a thorough examination of genre and influence in Steven Wilson's solo career.

¹⁴⁴ Toynebee, *Creating Problems*.

Chapter 2 – King Crimson’s “The Court of the Crimson King” and Progressive Rock

In order to trace the impact of Steven Wilson’s musical influences on his solo material and his own unique brand of progressive rock, a logical place to start is with an analysis of a representative track from the progressive rock genre when it first emerged. As such, this chapter considers “The Court of the Crimson King”, the title track from King Crimson’s 1969 debut album that exemplifies the classic progressive rock sound. I begin this chapter by providing contexts for the song and album, looking into both its historical significance as well as its relationship to Wilson. Following this I examine both timbre and form in “The Court of the Crimson King” and make direct comparisons to Wilson’s “Ancestral” from his album *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* (2015) in order to arrive at conclusions regarding early progressive rock’s influence on Wilson’s musical output. I conclude the chapter by offering some preliminary remarks on the nature of genre and influence as revealed by the analysis.

Background and Contexts

From the blistering saxophone riffs on the opening “21st Century Schizoid Man” to the mellotron-heavy, apocalyptic atmosphere in “Epitaph”, King Crimson’s 1969 debut record *In the Court of the Crimson King: An Observation by King Crimson* was unlike anything that had come before it in rock music. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, while many of the characteristics of what has now come to be known as progressive rock were present on earlier recordings in the late 60s by artists including The Moody Blues, Procul Harum, and The Beatles, it was not until the release of this particular album that all of these characteristics cohesively coalesced. Indeed, the band’s tendency to incorporate Western art music, jazz, and folk influences into their rock-

based compositions as well as their diverse sonic palette, complex forms, and technical virtuosity would all serve as a template for much of the progressive rock that followed.

The notion that *In the Court of the Crimson King* can be considered the first true progressive rock album is something the authors of the first three significant books on progressive rock all agree on: Bill Martin claims that “there is nothing arbitrary about taking *In the Court of the Crimson King* to be the first full-blown album of progressive rock”,¹ while Paul Stump argues that “if Progressive rock as a musical form and ideology can be said to have a discrete inauguration, this is probably it”.² Edward Macan goes so far as to claim that this album “may be the most influential progressive rock album ever released”.³ Reviews and ratings are equally indicative of the *In the Court of the Crimson King*’s legacy and reception: it is the fifth highest rated album on *Prog Archives*, and *Rate Your Music* and *Sputnikmusic* (community-based music review websites) respectively rank it as the sixth and twelfth best album of all time.⁴ As with the comments from Martin, Stump, and Macan, the positive reception of the album assists in cementing its historical significance and its importance to the progressive rock genre and to popular music in general.

The influence of such a classic album on subsequent progressive rock artists is to be expected, and Steven Wilson has, on many occasions, specifically addressed his admiration for

¹ Bill Martin, *Listening to the Future: The Time of Progressive Rock, 1968-1978* (Chicago: Open Court, 1998), 160.

² Paul Stump, *The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock*, 2nd ed. (Whitstable: Harbour Books, 2010), 43.

³ Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23.

⁴ See Prog Archives. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.progarchives.com/>; "Top Albums of All-Time." Rate Your Music. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://rateyourmusic.com/charts/top/album/all-time>; and "Best Albums of All Time." Sputnikmusic. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.sputnikmusic.com/best/albums/9999/>.

King Crimson. He praises the band's tendency to continually reinvent themselves throughout their career, and also, like so many others, posits that they "in some ways created the blueprint for what we think of as progressive rock with *In the Court of the Crimson King*".⁵ Wilson also mentions that it is an album he grew up listening to, further suggesting the influence the album likely had on his own musical career.⁶ And in addition to his extensive listening experience with the album, Wilson has worked closely with the material itself in a professional context: he was hired to remix King Crimson's catalogue in 5.1 surround sound, starting with *In the Court of the Crimson King* in 2009 for its 40th anniversary, and worked directly with King Crimson bandleader Robert Fripp on the projects.⁷ Wilson claims that his closeness to this material has had a tremendous impact on his own music, saying "I cannot emphasise how much I've learned [remixing] the [King] Crimson records".⁸

For this chapter I have chosen to analyze the album's closing track, "The Court of the Crimson King", as it is representative of the album's overall sound (and thus is arguably representative of the early progressive rock sound more generally) and consequently serves as an ideal piece to examine the music and its influence on Steven Wilson's solo work. Looking specifically at the significance of "The Court of the Crimson King", on *PopMatters*'s list of the

⁵ "Neil McCormick's Needle Time: Steven Wilson." *YouTube* video, 26:00-26:45. Posted by "Alejandro Togo," May 9, 2016. Accessed September 28, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJ7uRnxOuxI>.

⁶ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson: Past Presence" Interview by Anil Prasad. *Innerviews*, para. 31. 2013. Accessed November 2, 2016. <http://www.innerviews.org/inner/wilson2.html>.

⁷ See Sid Smith, Liner notes to *In the Court of the Crimson King: An Observation by King Crimson*, King Crimson. DGM 5009, CD, 2009 and Steven Wilson, "An Update on Steven Wilson's Remix Work." Interview by Stephen Humphries. *Steven Wilson HQ*, para. 4. December 12, 2015. Accessed November 21, 2016. <http://stevenwilsonhq.com/sw/an-update-on-steven-wilsons-remix-work/>. King Crimson's albums were the first albums by another artist that Wilson remixed, and as of October, 2016 Wilson remixes of ten of the thirteen King Crimson studio albums have been released.

⁸ Grant Moon, "Steven Wilson: I Can't Emphasise How Much I Learned Working With King Crimson." *TeamRock*, para. 5. September 26, 2016. Accessed November 21, 2016. <http://teamrock.com/feature/2016-09-26/steven-wilson-i-cant-emphasise-how-much-i-learned-working-with-king-crimson>.

top twenty-five progressive rock songs ever released it secured the first place position, with the article's author Sean Murphy praising it as "the purest and most perfect expression of everything [progressive rock] was capable of being" and "at once the introduction and apotheosis of what progressive rock became".⁹ Commercially speaking, the song was also one of the most successful King Crimson ever released, being one of only two of their songs to chart in the United States, reaching rank 80 in the *Billboard Hot 100* in 1970.¹⁰

Given the significant role that the album *In the Court of the Crimson King* played in defining the early progressive rock sound, Wilson's own acknowledgement of its influence on his work, and the fact that Wilson's solo output is largely considered to belong to the overarching genre of progressive rock, it seems appropriate to first study influence through an analysis of a song belonging to what is quite possibly the definitive progressive rock album.

Timbre

One of the most distinct aspects of *In the Court of the Crimson King* is its unique timbral palette, and the album's title track is exemplary in this regard. The instrumentation for "The Court of the Crimson King", as seen in Table 2.1, consists of a standard rock ensemble (vocals, guitars, bass, and drums) augmented by flute and various keyboard instruments (mellotron, pipe organ, and electric harpsichord), resulting in an eclectic combination of instruments unusual for a rock song.

⁹ Sean Murphy, "The 25 Best Progressive Rock Songs of All Time." PopMatters, para 7-9. May 22, 2011. Accessed November 21, 2016. <http://www.popmatters.com/feature/141547-best-25-rock-songs-of-all-time/>

¹⁰ "The Hot 100: Week of February 14, 1970." Billboard. Accessed November 21, 2016. <http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1970-02-14?page=2>. The only other King Crimson song to chart in the United States was "Heartbeat" from their 1982 album *Beat*.

Table 2.1 Instrumentation in “The Court of the Crimson King”.

Instrumentation
Lead and Backing Vocals (Male)
Acoustic Guitar
Electric Guitar (Clean and Distorted)
Electric Bass Guitar
Mellotron Mark II Strings
Pipe Organ
Baldwin Electric Harpsichord
Flute
Drums and Percussion

This use of instrumentation in “The Court of the Crimson King” is highly suggestive of the genre it belongs to. According to Macan, “perhaps the most readily identifiable characteristic of the progressive rock sound is its persistent use of tone colors drawn from a variety of European art music sources”,¹¹ and this is immediately apparent in this song with the use of instruments such as the flute, harpsichord, and string-simulating mellotron. And beyond instrumentation, the performance strategies employed by each of the album’s instrumentalists and the various aspects of production also play a key role in defining this song’s unique sonic tapestry and classifying it as a progressive rock song, something that is explored in more detail shortly.

Wilson’s sonic palette across his solo career is extremely diverse, and his debt to King Crimson and their use of timbre is quite overt. While the implementation of particular instrumentation and specific timbral qualities does not always indicate a direct or substantial influence from a song, artist, or even genre, in certain cases particular instruments and timbres do possess rhetorical properties, as was discussed in Chapter 1. Kevin Holm-Hudson, for instance, suggests that a “link [to an earlier style of music] may be made on the basis of a distinctive

¹¹ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 31.

instrumental timbre”,¹² while Rebecca Leydon says that “in popular music it is not unusual for single instruments to serve as tokens for style ... and it may be one of its key features that genre and instrumentation are so closely connected”.¹³

In order to consider the use of timbre in this song and Wilson’s solo work as well as the implications for genre classification, I will now provide comparative analyses between passages in “The Court of the Crimson King” and “Ancestral” using spectrograms generated by *Sonic Visualiser* to support and illustrate my claims. It is worth noting here that over the course of the nearly fifty years since *In the Court of the Crimson King* made its debut it has seen countless re-releases. While Wilson’s aforementioned recent remix of the album is arguably the definitive version given that he worked directly with Robert Fripp and from the recently recovered original multitrack master tapes,¹⁴ I use the 2004 remaster of the song in order to work with a high-quality audio file of “The Court of the Crimson King” but avoid allowing the subtleties of Wilson’s own personality as a mixer to compromise the conclusions drawn about the music’s influence on him.

The spectrograms in Figure 2.1 visualize musical passages from “The Court of the Crimson King” (top, 0:01-0:15) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 7:08-7:21). Even at first glance these spectrograms are seen to exhibit extremely similar sonic profiles and, when considered closely, elucidate a number of shared characteristics between King Crimson and Steven Wilson’s use of timbre. As both passages run for similar lengths of time, the temporal window or “spread” of the

¹² Kevin Holm-Hudson, “The Future Is Now ... and Then: Sonic Historiography in Post-1960s Rock.” *Genre* 34, no. 3-4 (2001): 256. Accessed November 2, 2016. doi:10.1215/00166928-34-3-4-243.

¹³ Rebecca Leydon, “Recombinant Style Topics: The Past and Future of Sampling.” In *Sounding out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music*, ed. Mark Spicer and John. Covach. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 209.

¹⁴ Robert Fripp, liner notes to *In the Court of the Crimson King: An Observation by King Crimson*, King Crimson. DGM 5009, 2009.

spectrogram is comparable in these two examples. Before identifying and commenting on some of the more specific attributes of the music here, it is worth considering what is revealed by the full spectrograms.

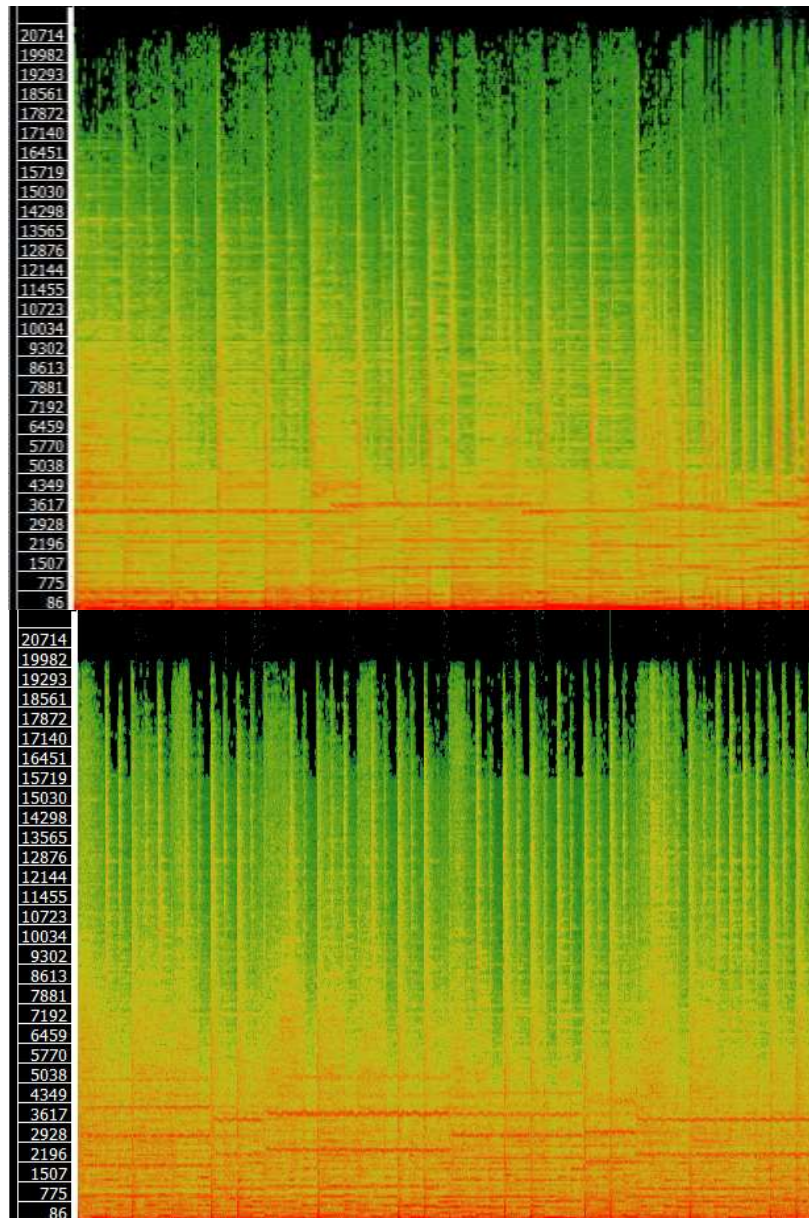


Figure 2.1 Spectrograms for “The Court of the Crimson King” (top, 0:01-0:15) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 7:08-7:21) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain.

In both of these examples the majority of the frequency spectrum is occupied, with most of the activity ranging from roughly 0-5,000 Hz and with particular density in the low end due to the prominent electric bass. This area is also occupied by sharp acoustic guitar strums and electric harpsichord stabs in the King Crimson, arpeggiated electric guitar lines in the Wilson, and in both examples, as is discussed in more detail shortly, abundant use of mellotron strings. While not reaching the same levels of intensity, there is still quite a lot of sonic activity from 5,000-20,000 Hz in both cases; this largely arises from instrumental overtones and the heavy use of the snare drum and cymbals, the sharp attacks of which cut through the frequency spectrum and punctuate the spectrograms with vertical lines. All of these features in tandem result in remarkably similar spectrograms that help illustrate the textural connections between these two examples.

Both of these passages of music share a number of timbral features, but perhaps the most striking and revealing is the prominent use of mellotron strings. The mellotron is a keyboard instrument that is commonly considered to be the very first analog sampler, with each key of the keyboard triggering a magnetic tape that reproduces a particular sound.¹⁵ While originally intended to provide a convenient substitute for other instruments (the strings, choir, and flute sounds in particular have received heavy use), the unique timbres produced by the instrument have since become iconic in their own right. The mellotron has seen occasional use in a number of different genres and recordings, but it is without a doubt most intimately linked to symphonic progressive rock; according to Stephen Lambe, “the Mellotron, even more than the Modular and Minimoog synthesizers, has become the key instrumental symbol of the Progressive Rock

¹⁵ Hugh Davies, "A History of Sampling." *Organised Sound* 1, no. 1 (May 1996): 3-11. Accessed November 2, 2016. doi:10.1017/s135577189600012x.

movement. The unearthly sound that the instrument makes ... has reached such iconic status that modern synthesizers have specific Mellotron samples as opposed to generic orchestral samples”.¹⁶ Taking this into consideration, one can hear Wilson’s inclusion of the instrument in this context as instantly drawing an association to the progressive rock genre.

The mellotron parts in both examples in Figure 2.1 can be easily recognized by the dark red horizontal bands running throughout the excerpts, with the red colour indicating their high level of intensity in the mix. Figure 2.2 provides a closer look at the mellotron parts, restricting the frequency range of the same passages to 6,000 Hz. In both instances the instrument occupies a similar frequency range and intensity and also has similar functional roles in both passages, primarily being used to provide harmony and slow melodic movement.¹⁷ A closer look at the mellotron parts in the spectrograms reveals slight frequency fluctuations in certain instances, particularly in the Wilson example – this is partially due to the instrument’s unique spectral envelope and the fact that tape mechanisms tend to result in an effect known as “wow and flutter” in which the playback of the tape causes minor fluctuations in pitch; this is one of the key sonic markers of the instrument and helps give it its own unique timbre.¹⁸ While, expectedly, these two mellotron parts sound extremely similar from a timbral perspective, minor variations in the sound of these two mellotron parts arise from the use of different models: King Crimson used a Mark II model of the mellotron on “The Court of the Crimson King” whereas Steven Wilson

¹⁶ Stephen Lambe, *Citizens of Hope and Glory: The Story of Progressive Rock* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011), 63.

¹⁷ Due to the delayed attack time of the mellotron, users traditionally employed it for sustained chords or slow melodic material rather than for fast passages (see Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 34).

¹⁸ Carlos G.R. Echeverri, "Detection of Genre-Specific Musical Instruments: The Case of the Mellotron." Master's thesis, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, 2011, 16. Accessed December 17, 2016. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.353.3754&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

used a newly-made M4000 model on “Ancestral”, and the unique nature of each model and individual instrument inevitably results in marginally different timbres.¹⁹

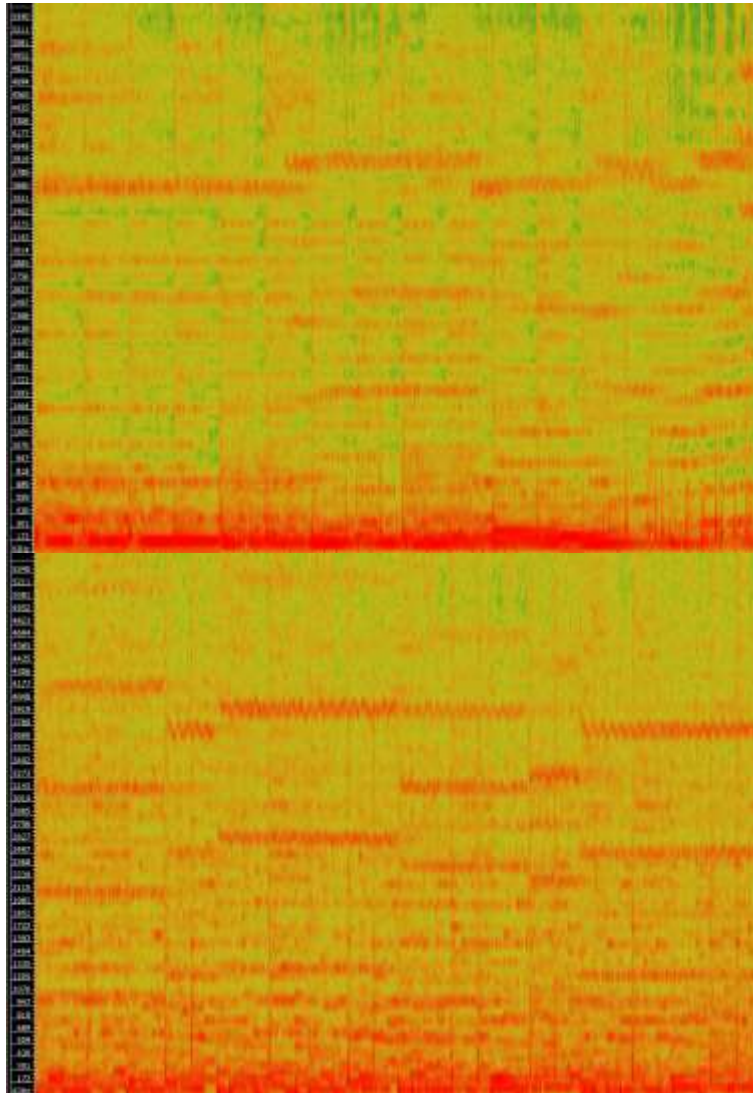


Figure 2.2 Spectrograms for “The Court of the Crimson King” (top, 0:01-0:15) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 7:08-7:21) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain and a frequency range of 6,000 Hz.

¹⁹ See Andy Thompson, "Planet Mellotron Album Reviews: King Crimson." Planet Mellotron Album Reviews: King Crimson. Accessed December 17, 2016. <http://www.planetmellotron.com/revking1.htm> and Audioholics. "Steven Wilson Interview: Hand Cannot Erase & Multi-Channel Mixing." *YouTube* video, 31:46-32:16 May 10, 2015. Accessed December 17, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaUR3j-YXP4>.

The use of mellotron is fairly ubiquitous throughout Wilson's recorded output, appearing on ten out of eleven tracks on *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* alone. Tellingly, before ordering his M4000, Wilson actually purchased one of the two original Mark II mellotrons that were used to record *In the Court of the Crimson King* from bandleader Robert Fripp.²⁰ It features prominently on Wilson's third studio album, *The Raven that Refused to Sing* (2013), and creates a direct timbral link between the output of the two artists. Ultimately, Wilson's frequent application of an instrument that is so closely associated with progressive rock inevitably draws connections to the genre and can be recognized as a marker of influence. And beyond the use of the mellotron, the similarities in the use of frequency and intensity as visualized in the spectrograms in Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2 further reinforce the timbral and textural similarities.

Figure 2.3 visualizes flute solos from both "The Court of the Crimson King" (top, 4:57-5:10) and "Ancestral" (bottom, 1:00-1:13). Unlike in Figure 2.1 where there is significant activity throughout the majority of the sonic space, in these two examples there is much more unused space, something especially true for the upper end of the frequency spectrum. This sparseness allows the flute to be more prominent in the mix. With the exception of overtones, percussion (light cymbal work in the King Crimson track and programmed drums in the Wilson track), and some background signal (recognized by the pale green colour that fills in the otherwise unoccupied sonic space in both examples), almost all of the sound here is confined to the lower end of the frequency spectrum, ranging from approximately 0-1,500 Hz.

²⁰ Adam Holzman, "Adam Holzman Straddles Prog Rock and Jazz Fusion." Interview by Tony Orant. KeyboardMag, para 7. September 20, 2013. Accessed November 21, 2016. <http://www.keyboardmag.com/artists/1236/adam-holzman-straddles-prog-rock-and-jazz-fusion/29419>.

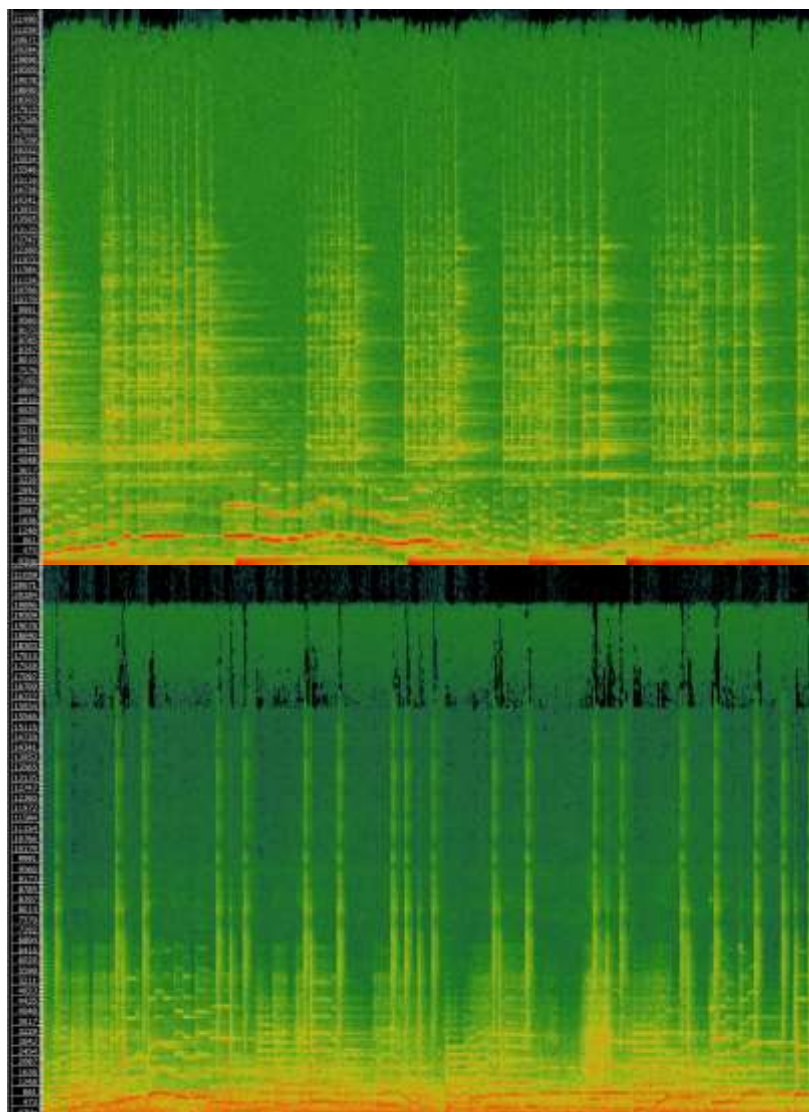


Figure 2.3 Spectrograms for “The Court of the Crimson King” (top, 4:57-5:10) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 1:00-1:13) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain.

The flute solos – performed by Ian McDonald for King Crimson²¹ and Theo Travis for Wilson²² – can be identified by following the dark red line that weaves through the frequency

²¹ While not pictured in the spectrogram here, the ending of McDonald’s flute solo is a quotation from Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade*, Op. 35, providing an intertextual link between the two and yet again highlighting the influence of Western art music on *In the Court of the Crimson King* (see Will Romano, *Mountains Come out of the Sky: The Illustrated History of Prog Rock*, (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books, 2010), 36).

²² Travis also serves as a link between the music of Wilson and King Crimson as he was featured on a handful of Porcupine Tree records since the mid-90s and has also released several ambient albums as a duo with King Crimson bandleader Robert Fripp.

spectrum in each example, and the flute's overtones are also easily recognized above the fundamental line (a more focused view of the flute is presented in Figure 2.4, which restricts the frequency range to 6,000 Hz). In addition to the flute, King Crimson's arrangement in this passage includes electric bass, clean electric guitar accompaniment, and occasional cymbal use, again visualized by the vertical lines in the spectrogram. Wilson's arrangement here, on the other hand, is a bit denser in the lower frequencies with programmed drums, double bass, and a blend of electric guitar and electric piano. Despite some differences in the complexities of the instrumentation, we still see both artists crafting very similar sonic profiles with a focus on the lower end of the frequency spectrum in order to highlight the flute.

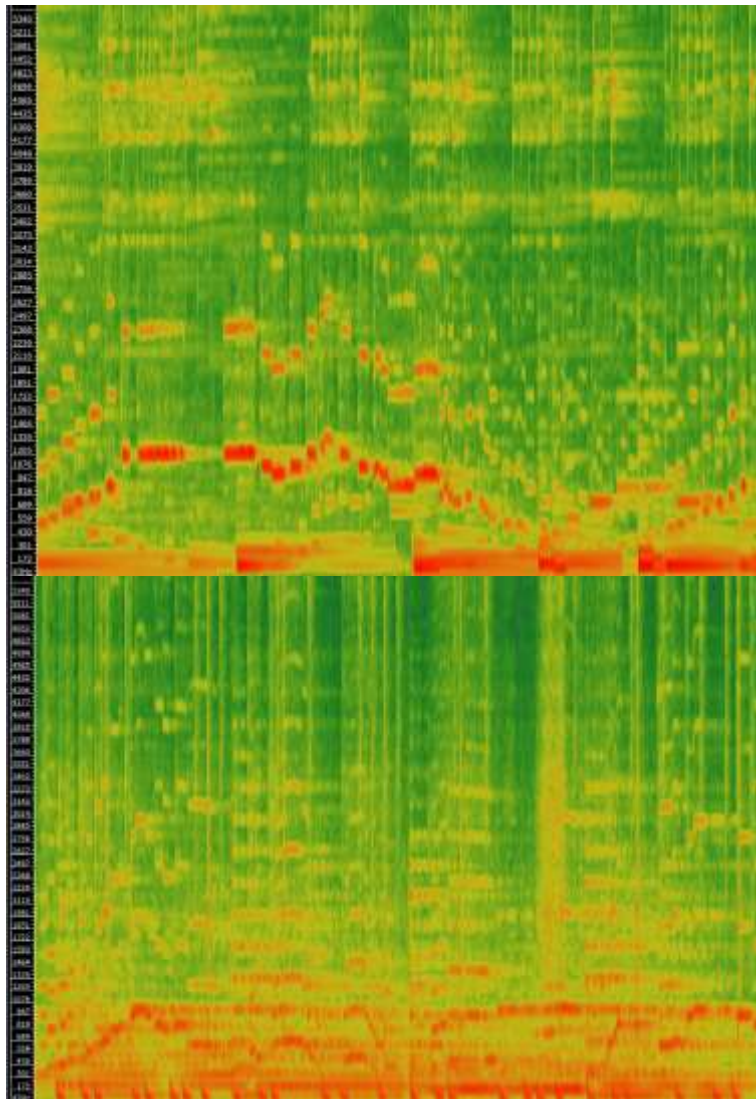


Figure 2.4 Spectrograms for “The Court of the Crimson King” (top, 4:57-5:10) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 1:00-1:13) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain and a frequency range of 6,000 Hz.

The use of woodwinds – and flute in particular – came to be another identifying feature of a great deal of progressive rock; according to Macan, the flute “previously had played virtually no role in rock music” but “played a major role in progressive rock”.²³ While King Crimson were one of the earlier rock bands to incorporate instruments such as the flute and

²³ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 37.

saxophone as integral instruments in their compositions, this tendency quickly spread to other significant progressive rock acts: Genesis, Camel, and especially Jethro Tull all, for instance, relied heavily on the flute as a lead instrument. One also does not need to look far to see the extensive use of woodwinds in the improvisation-heavy, jazz-influenced Canterbury scene progressive rock bands like Caravan and Soft Machine.

While it would be a stretch to suggest that the use of flute on its own is necessarily enough to connote a particular genre, in this context the similarity between Wilson's implementation of the flute and its use in earlier progressive rock is quite similar and consistent with generic expectations. And beyond the presence of flute in both compositions, there are similarities in the specific flute timbres that arise from performance strategies: with the exception of a couple grittier and breathier moments in Travis' performance, for the most part both his and McDonald's solos are quite clean with a rich, sonorous tone. As Simon Frith suggests, the means by which musicians perform their instruments are important in defining a genre's formal and technical rules, and so hearing a similarity in performance practice here further underlines the connection between Wilson and the early progressive rock sound exemplified in "The Court of the Crimson King".²⁴

The passages shown in Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.4, then, not only reveal a resemblance between how King Crimson and Wilson shape their music, but also reveal the resemblance in some of their specific uses of timbre, in this case the use of flute and the particular performance strategies used to conjure a specific sound. And although "Ancestral" is the example in question, there are many other instances of various woodwinds adorning Wilson's solo career pieces:

²⁴ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91.

“Luminol”, “Raider II”, and “No Part of Me” are just a handful of examples that carry on this tradition.

A final comparison of timbre is seen in Figure 2.5, showing spectrograms for verses of “The Court of the Crimson King” (top, 0:28-0:43) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 0:35-0:47). Both spectrograms illustrate the relatively sparse texture of the passages and, putting aside the faint background noise in the King Crimson passage, we again see the two artists making very similar use of frequency and space.

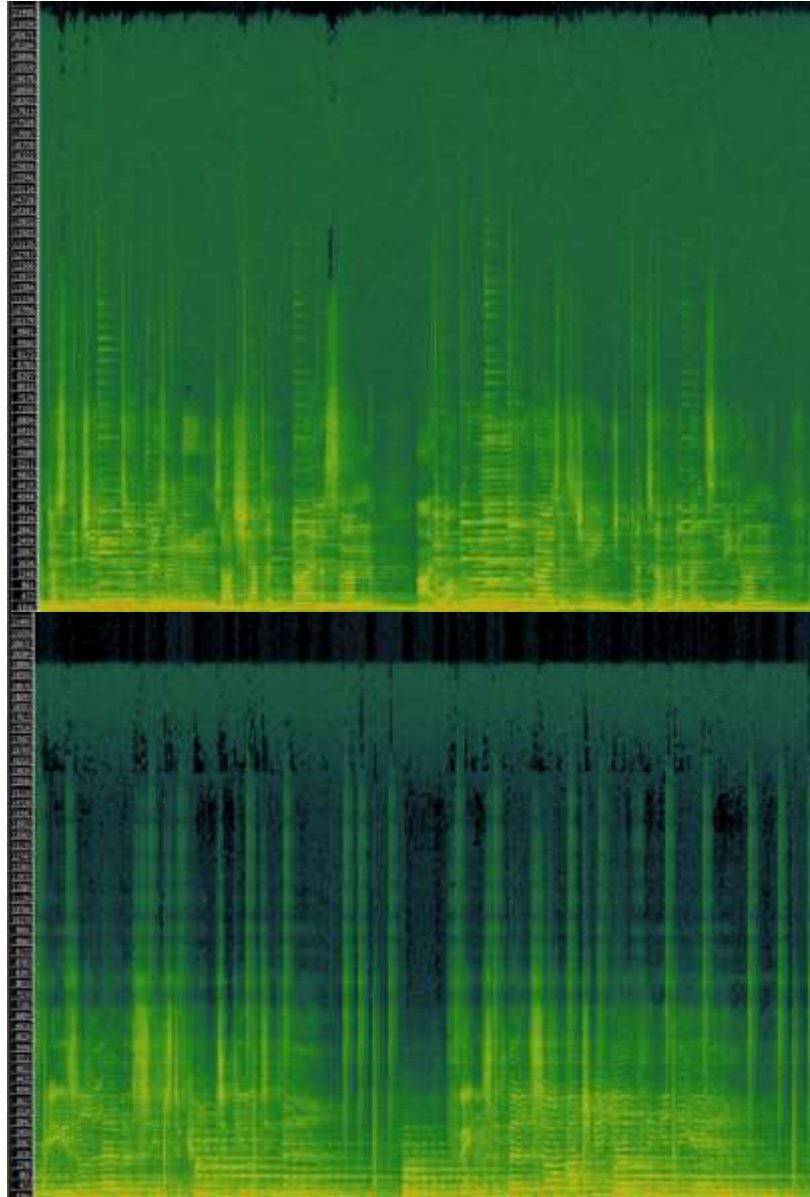


Figure 2.5 Spectrograms for “The Court of the Crimson King” (top, 0:29-0:44) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 0:35-0:47) generated by *Sonic Visualiser*.

The primary focus of each of these segments is the vocals, which occupy most of the musical territory here. The lead vocals in “The Court of the Crimson King” are sung by Greg

Lake,²⁵ while Wilson himself takes on lead vocal duties in “Ancestral”. The otherwise sparse textures in both instances makes it even easier to isolate and compare these vocals and their distinctive overtones. The vocals in the King Crimson example are accompanied solely by acoustic guitar, while Wilson has programmed drums and makes sparing use of clean electric guitar and electric piano in this example. In all, these fairly thin textures bring out the vocals as the prominent feature.

In a great deal of popular music vocals are one of the most important aspects of the music, and according to Frith they play a role in determining genre.²⁶ This means, not unsurprisingly, that a vocalist’s particular characteristics can be indicative of their associated genre. Speaking specifically about the typical vocal qualities of classic progressive rock singers, Macan suggests that the singers are usually tenors and that a “straight, pure head tone with relatively little vibrato is preferred”, rather than the “rasping vocals” and “blues-derived vocal stylizations” that characterize many hard rock and heavy metal vocals.²⁷

Taking this into consideration, we hear that the vocals heard in both of the passages depicted in Figure 2.5 largely comply with Macan’s description. Both Lake and Wilson occupy the tenor range with their vocals (both melodies for the parts in question, in fact, occupy nearly the exact same range) and possess a fairly rich, clean tone with none of the aforementioned blues inclinations heard in the performances of many other rock singers. And while inevitably we see some degree of vocal vibrato in both examples here (the slight vertical fluctuations in the vocal

²⁵ Greg Lake was only King Crimson’s vocalist for *In the Court of the Crimson King* and on select tracks of its follow-up, *In the Wake of Poseidon* (1970), before going on to found Emerson, Lake & Palmer with Keith Emerson and Carl Palmer. Unfortunately Lake passed away in early December, 2016.

²⁶ Frith, *Performing Rites*, 91.

²⁷ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 39.

lines and overtones in Figure 2.5) it is for the most part relatively mild, again conforming to Macan's description of the common progressive rock vocals.

There are no doubt some differences in their vocal qualities as well, to be sure: Wilson has a slightly more nasal tone, for one, and the vocals in this part of "Ancestral" are treated by delay and are filtered, thus resulting in a less "natural" vocal timbre than heard in "The Court of the Crimson King" (although there are other moments in the song when Wilson sings without the effects, resulting in a cleaner tone closer to Lake's). But while there are some differences in vocal timbre in these two examples, Lake's and Wilson's approach to vocal performance are overwhelmingly similar and conform to the expectations of the progressive rock sound as outlined by Macan.

Through these comparative analyses of passages in "The Court of the Crimson King" and "Ancestral" it becomes quite clear that there are strong similarities in the uses of timbre between the two songs. This was explored through aspects of the instrumentation – notably through an examination of the mellotron, flute, and vocals – as well as through performance and production strategies and the overall use of intensity, space, and frequency. The similarities in the physical properties of timbre lead to rhetorical effects: not only do they suggest influence on a direct level but also draw associations to progressive rock, demonstrating, in part, the genre's timbral impact on Wilson's output.

Form

Despite its length, an examination of the form of "The Court of the Crimson King" reveals that it to some degree resembles a standard song form – albeit with some modifications. This can be seen in Figure 2.6, which presents mixed-channel amplitude wave data from *Sonic*

Visualiser along with a formal diagram created using *Variations Audio Timeliner* for the song. While the song clocks in at over nine minutes, it consists solely of three harmonically distinct sections that undergo various transformations throughout the course of the track, and unlike the other songs that are analyzed in this project, “The Court of the Crimson King” can quite easily be thought of in terms of the standard popular music formal units outlined by Walter Everett: verse (V), chorus (C), and bridge (B).²⁸ These sections can be differentiated from each other based on a number of factors including melody, harmony, duration, texture, and lyrics, and ultimately fit together in a fashion that resembles John Covach’s notion of a compound form.²⁹

²⁸ Walter Everett, “Pitch Down the Middle.” In *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays* (New York: Garland, 2000), 112-113. While sections A and B in “Ancestral” can be argued to have verse and chorus functions respectively in the first half of the song, the number of unique sections in the piece ultimately renders this system of labelling futile for its analysis.

²⁹ John Covach, “Form in Rock Music: A Primer.” In *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis*, ed. Deborah J. Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 74-75.

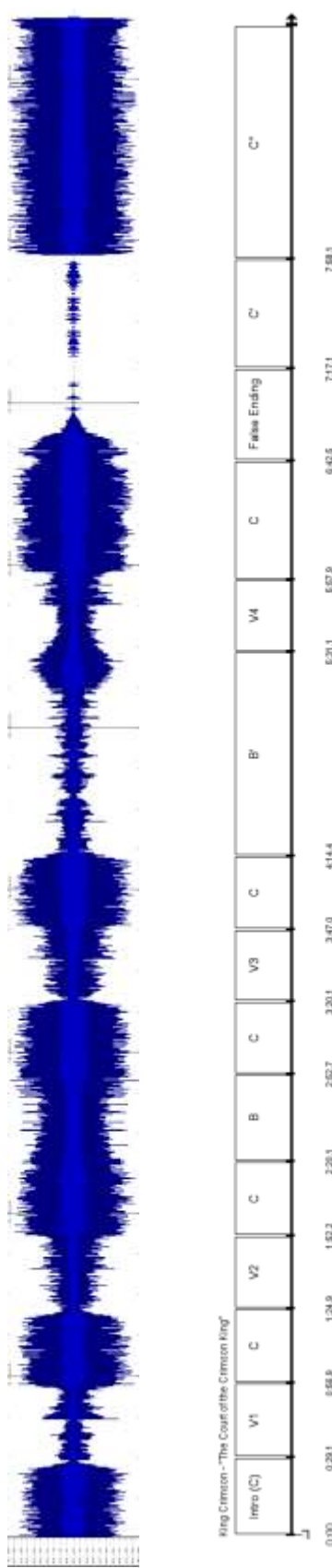


Figure 2.6 “The Court of the Crimson King” Sonic Visualiser wave data (mean channels) and Variations Audio Timeliner form.

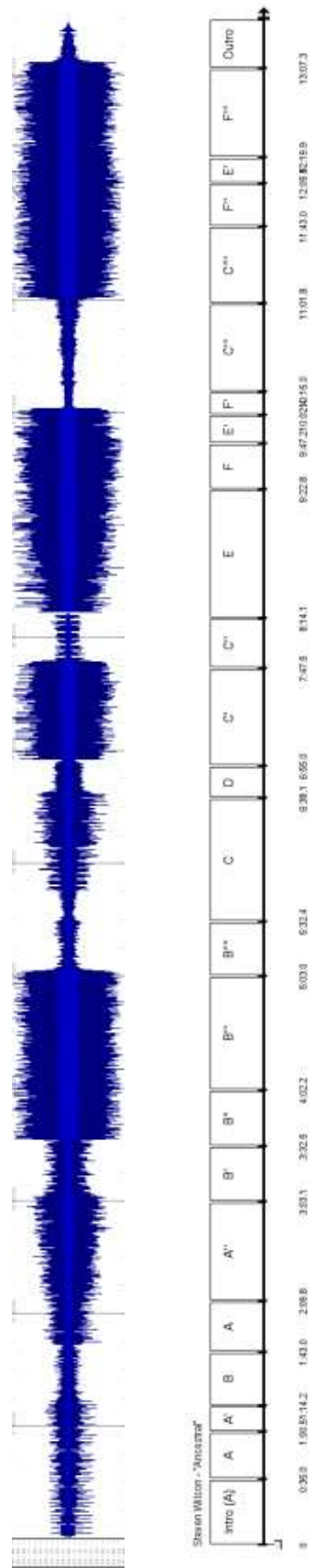


Figure 2.7 “Ancestral” Sonic Visualiser wave data (mean channels) and Variations Audio Timeliner form.

The most immediate similarity between the forms of “The Court of the Crimson King” and “Ancestral” is their extended length and formal structures: King Crimson’s song runs just over nine minutes while Wilson’s approaches fourteen minutes in length. This alone is significant: as discussed in Chapter 1, there is a lot of scholarly writing on the importance of large-scale forms in progressive rock. Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell, for instance, point to “the extension of rock songs into larger pieces” and “the linking of these pieces into song suites and concept albums” as key features of progressive rock.³⁰ Similarly, Mark Spicer suggests that classic progressive rock artists “were famous for crafting rock pieces of much greater scope and complexity, compositions in which the multiple shifts of texture, affect, and tonality echo those typically found in a nineteenth-century symphonic poem”.³¹

While “The Court of the Crimson King” is perhaps not as formally ambitious as some other classic progressive rock compositions that would follow in the years to come – such as Yes’ “Close to the Edge” or Genesis’ “Supper’s Ready” – it is certainly far beyond the typical three to four minute pop song. It is also worth noting that the album’s official track listing, “The Court of the Crimson King” sports two subtitles: “The Return of the Fire Witch” and “The Dance of the Puppets”. These subtitles are used to denote subsections of the song and hint at the song’s larger, suite-like nature.³² Further, while *In the Court of the Crimson King* as a whole may not be a concept album in the traditional sense, it does have a sense of large-scale cohesion; Andrew

³⁰ Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell, *Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock since the 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 19.

³¹ Mark Spicer, “Large-Scale Strategy and Compositional Design in the Early Music of Genesis.” In *Expression in Pop-rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland, 2000), 313-334.

³² It is rumoured that King Crimson included subtitles to many of the tracks on *In the Court of the Crimson King* in order to maximize royalties from the album, but after extensive investigation I was unable to find any convincing evidence of this. Even if true, this does not take away from the fact that the form is structured in such a way as to make such sub-sections easily identifiable.

Keeling, in his guide to the album, argues that it “resembles a five-movement orchestral song cycle”.³³ In comparison, “Ancestral” likewise eschews standard pop song forms and exhibits a much more complicated and involved formal structure, as seen in Figure 2.7, with several distinct sections and frequent changes. And to consider the form beyond the scope of the song itself, “Ancestral” is just one component in the concept album *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* As such, simply on the basis of the tracks’ lengths and large-scale structures we can detect an influence of progressive rock on Wilson.

But beyond both songs simply having larger-scale forms, the means by which they shape these forms and give them direction are also significant and worth considering. Macan suggests that, in order to maintain variety in lengthy compositions, progressive rock artists frequently used “systematic juxtapositions of what can best be termed masculine and feminine sections” and that this “is rare in most other rock styles, and thus became one of progressive rock’s defining characteristics”.³⁴ He also states that progressive rock artists maintain a sense of direction in their lengthier compositions by “building up tension until a shattering climax is reached, abruptly tapering off, and then starting the whole process anew”.³⁵

Moments of extreme contrast are present in many instances in both “The Court of the Crimson King” and “Ancestral”, something that becomes quite clear when viewing mixed-channel wave data in tandem with formal diagrams, as seen in Figure 2.6 and Figure 2.7. These kinds of juxtapositions largely arise due to both abrupt changes in dynamics as well as marked shifts in texture. Looking at Figure 2.6, in the King Crimson song this is perhaps most

³³ Andrew Keeling, *Musical Guide to In the Court of the Crimson King by King Crimson* ed. Mark Graham (Cambridge: Spaceward, 2009), 49.

³⁴ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 43. Macan stresses that the terms “masculine” and “feminine” in this case should be considered simply as metaphors, although such terminology remains problematic.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

immediately apparent when observing the change from the dramatic fourth chorus with the full band to the pastoral flute-led bridge (the fourth repetition of C to B), or as seen with the contrast from the quirky, humorous solo pipe organ rendition of the chorus near the end of the song (C') to a bombastic outro with the full band (C"). In the Wilson song this kind of contrast is just as prevalent, as seen in Figure 2.7: just as one example – though looking at the diagram reveals many – the quiet, violin-driven D leads directly into the heavy and loud C' section with its towering mellotron, drums, electric guitar, and bass. The strategy of building and releasing tension that Macan mentions, on the other hand, is seen to some degree in “The Court of the Crimson King”, but is especially clear in “Ancestral” where the wave file in Figure 2.7 indicates steadily growing volume followed by an immediate drop off in a number of instances.

A final formal technique that I will discuss that is commonly employed in progressive rock is the tendency to revisit musical ideas and present them in new contexts throughout the piece.³⁶ Both King Crimson and Wilson use a number of strategies to get the most mileage out of their music. For one example, in “The Court of the Crimson King”, the first iteration of the bridge material (B) is led by a mellotron melody accompanied by electric harpsichord, an active bass part, and a steady stream of sixteenth notes on the cymbals. This same harmonic and melodic material appears later at the beginning of (B'), but with a flute taking the lead and with restrained bass and cymbal work, utterly transforming the musical context and renewing the listener’s interest. Beyond this, as mentioned above, we see the main chorus material reprised in a different key and with different textures in C' and C" and even each of the four verses has a different accompaniment in order to maintain interest and formal momentum. Likewise, “Ancestral” also repurposes many musical ideas throughout the course of the song, and none are

³⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

heard as carbon copies; in fact, the last eight minutes of the song almost exclusively consists of three short sections (C, E, and F) that undergo continuous transformations in texture, tempo, and dynamics. In this way the two artists are able to make coherent, lengthy songs out of only a handful of harmonically distinct sections, a technique that is prevalent in progressive rock but relatively uncommon in other popular music.

Through the above examination of form in “The Court of the Crimson King” and “Ancestral” we can quite clearly see many shared characteristics. In fact, many – if not most – of Wilson’s solo career compositions stray from standard song forms in one way or another. And while this is not necessarily indicative of a specific influence from this song, it stands to reason that these extended forms and the accompanying strategies used to maintain interest and ensure cohesion are largely derived from his influence from progressive rock – especially considering that one of the genre’s defining features the use of large-scale musical forms unusual to most other popular music. The number of Wilson’s songs that do conform to standard popular music forms should not be construed as evidence to the contrary: according to Macan, “most progressive rock albums contain at least a few songs of three to four minutes in length which follow the conventions of standard pop-song forms fairly closely”,³⁷ even if these are not the tracks that have received the most scholarly attention. As with the analysis of timbre, these similarities in approaches to form are rooted in the generic conventions of progressive rock and reveal an underlying influence of the genre on Wilson’s output.

³⁷ Ibid., 43.

Genre and Influence

The comparative analyses of timbre and form conducted in this chapter for King Crimson's "The Court of the Crimson King" and Steven Wilson's "Ancestral" demonstrate many commonalities, indicating that Wilson's music in many ways adheres to or, at the very least, heavily borrows from some of the genre codes of progressive rock. While the larger conclusions concerning the nature of genre and influence are reserved for Chapter 5 after having examined the influences of other artists on Wilson, I will make a few brief comments here.

Although it would be beyond the scope of this project to discuss the network of influences informing the early progressive rock sound in great detail, it is interesting to note that the timbres and forms that came to characterize the genre were generally from outside sources: Western art music, jazz, and rock to name a few. Yet the way in which these different influences came together was novel and ultimately created a new genre. This helps illustrate Jason Toynbee's concept of social authorship, revealing that new genres and music are largely derived from pre-existing content and do not arrive from nowhere.³⁸

Likewise, Wilson's solo output features a conglomerate of features from different musical genres, amongst which the early progressive rock sound (which itself is a combination of different genre features) is but one. Yet despite being only one of the sources from which Wilson draws (albeit an important one), it is still possible to detect a direct influence from the genre and its artists through timbral and formal markers that surface throughout his music. Moving into Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 it will become increasingly evident how other genres of music (namely electronica and metal) have also influenced and been incorporated into Wilson's

³⁸ Jason Toynbee, *Creating Problems: Social Authorship, Copyright and the Production of Culture* (Milton Keynes: Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research, 2001).

solo output, and the concept of social authorship will prove invaluable when drawing broader conclusions about Wilson's work in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3 – Boards of Canada’s “An Eagle in Your Mind” and Electronica

Whereas Chapter 2 looked at markers of influence from an iconic progressive rock song on Steven Wilson’s solo career, in this chapter I investigate signs of influence from an entirely different genre: electronica. In particular, I examine Boards of Canada’s “An Eagle in Your Mind”, from their 1998 debut album *Music Has the Right to Children*, as a means of exploring the influence of electronic music on Wilson’s solo material. Following a brief discussion of the contexts surrounding “An Eagle in Your Mind” as well as Steven Wilson’s relationship to the genre of electronica, I conduct comparative analyses of timbre and form between “An Eagle in Your Mind” and Wilson’s “Ancestral” (2015). I then, to close the chapter, offer a few comments on what these analyses reveal in terms of the relationship between genre and influence.

Background and Contexts

While Scottish duo Boards of Canada – consisting of brothers Michael Sandison and Marcus Eoin – had been releasing electronic music since 1995, it was not until 1998 that they released their debut full-length studio album, *Music Has the Right to Children*. Although the scope of their output makes it somewhat challenging to precisely categorize their music, it can generally be classified as electronica, a genre of music which Frank Hoffmann broadly defines as “computer based or enhanced popular music”.¹ More specifically, Boards of Canada’s music is sometimes considered ambient music or is given the label IDM (“intelligent dance music”), a

¹ Frank W. Hoffmann, “Electronica.” In *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound* ed. Frank W. Hoffmann and Howard Ferstler (New York: Routledge, 2005), 735.

subgenre of electronic music that emphasizes sonic experimentation in lieu of the overt danceability of EDM (“electronic dance music”).²

Upon its release, *Music Has the Right to Children* was extremely well received and was regarded, according to music journalist Ken Micallef, as a “mini-revolution in ambient music”.³ Rave reviews of the album are not difficult to find: John Bush from *AllMusic* awards the album the highest possible ranking of five stars,⁴ while online music magazine *Pitchfork*’s Mark Richardson gives the album a perfect score of 10, claiming that the duo are “geniuses with texture”.⁵ *Pitchfork* additionally lists the album at position 35 in a list of the 100 best albums of the 90s, indicating its overall significance in popular music, especially at the time of its release.⁶

Although at first glance it may seem strange to look at the influence of an electronic music artist on Steven Wilson given the vast aesthetic and musical differences between electronica and progressive rock,⁷ it is important to consider that, as discussed in Chapter 1, one of progressive rock’s defining characteristics is its tendency to incorporate aspects of numerous different genres and embrace contemporary developments. Additionally, it has been proposed that electronica and ambient music at least partially stem from earlier progressive rock artists

² Joanna Demers, *Listening Through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 170. Despite its prevalent usage, the term IDM is contentious among many due to its elitist connotations.

³ Ken Micallef, "Northern Exposure." *Remix Magazine* 4, no. 7 (July 2002): para. 2. Accessed March 29, 2017. http://bocpages.org/wiki/Northern_Exposure.

⁴ John Bush, "Music Has the Right to Children Review." *AllMusic*. Accessed December 22, 2016. <http://www.allmusic.com/album/music-has-the-right-to-children-mw0000042674>.

⁵ Mark Richardson, "Boards of Canada: Music Has the Right to Children." *Pitchfork*, para. 4. April 26, 2004. Accessed January 6, 2017. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/838-music-has-the-right-to-children/>.

⁶ "Top 100 Albums of the 1990s." *Pitchfork*. November 7, 2013. Accessed January 6, 2017. <http://pitchfork.com/features/lists-and-guides/5923-top-100-albums-of-the-1990s/?page=7>.

⁷ There are some artists, such as Tangerine Dream, that close the gap between progressive rock and electronica, but by and large they remain quite distinct genres with different codes and conventions.

who made heavy use of synthesizers, suggesting that the connection between the two may not be as distant as one might think.⁸ Looking at the influence of electronic music on Wilson's output, therefore, provides an interesting opportunity to demonstrate the reciprocal nature of influences between genres: progressive rock played a role in the formation of electronica, and yet now electronica can be seen as having an influence on modern progressive rock. This is a concept I return to in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Furthermore, Wilson actually claims that “electronic music has always been there in my music, and in fact if I’m listening to anything these days it’s probably more likely to be electronic music than anything else”, going on to suggest its influence on his music by saying that “occasionally, I suppose, my own musical tastes in terms of what I listen to now come through”.⁹ Consequently, looking at a non-progressive rock influence on Wilson's output should also be revealing with regards to how an artist's musical influences outside of their own genre can shape their output. It is worth noting that some of Wilson's previous work – in particular his 2004 album *Unreleased Electronic Music Vol 1* and releases from his Bass Communion project, which focus on ambient and drone music – also makes his influence from electronica quite evident. According to Wilson, this electronic component of his sound will be even more prevalent on his forthcoming fifth full-length studio album.¹⁰

⁸ Hoffmann, "Electronica", 735.

⁹ Classic Rock Magazine, "Steven Wilson The Story Behind 'Perfect Life' | Prog Rock Magazine." *YouTube* video, 0:36-1:03. February 12, 2015. Accessed January 6, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HduGKFJDBQ>.

¹⁰ "Un Incontro con Steven Wilson." *YouTube* video, 8:10-9:50. Posted by “guido bellachioma,” September 9, 2016. Accessed September 28, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8RYkYv7Uus>.

In addition to mentioning his inspiration from electronic music generally, Wilson also specifically cites Boards of Canada as an influence.¹¹ He further singles out the duo as his biggest influence for his song “Perfect Life” from *Hand. Cannot. Erase.*,¹² and even a casual listening reveals remarkable similarities between this song and Boards of Canada’s output. Despite that glaring resemblance, however, I have chosen to use Wilson’s “Ancestral” as the topic of analysis again for this chapter so as to be able to demonstrate the presence of all of the influences discussed throughout this project converging in a single track. This will be beneficial in providing consistency to the analyses and will open up further possibilities for discussions on genre fusion in Chapter 5.

The significance of *Music Has the Right to Children* in the genre of electronica as well as Wilson’s openness about his influence from the band and genre makes “An Eagle in Your Mind” an ideal track for a comparative analysis. Through examining both the use of timbre and form in “An Eagle in Your Mind” and “Ancestral” I am able to demonstrate the influence of electronic music on Wilson’s output and some of the various ways by which he incorporates aspects of electronica into his own music.

Timbre

Discussions of timbre in electronic music typically differ greatly from other types of music because it frequently lacks traditional instrumentation and performance; electronic music is often digitally generated or modified rather than played on physical instruments.¹³ This raises

¹¹ "Neil McCormick's Needle Time: Steven Wilson." *YouTube* video, 37:38-37:51. Posted by “Alejandro Togo,” May 9, 2016. Accessed September 28, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJ7uRnxOuxI>.

¹² Classic Rock Magazine, "The Story Behind 'Perfect Life'", 1:20-1:25.

¹³ Simon Reynolds, *Bring the Noise: 20 Years of Writing about Hip Rock and Hip Hop* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2011), 314.

a key feature of electronic music that in part distinguishes itself from most other forms of music, and while this undoubtedly has a number of implications, one of the most significant for a discussion of timbre is that it means that the composer has much more control over the specific parameters of sound. According to Thom Holmes, in electronic music “the composer not only creates the music, but composes the very sounds themselves”, and he goes on to say that “the ability to get inside the physics of a sound and directly manipulate its characteristics provides an entirely new resource for composing music”.¹⁴

Given the role the composer has in sculpting timbre in electronic music, it is understandably frequently taken to be one of the most important and defining characteristics of electronic music. Rafał Zapała, for one, says that “the growth of electronics has ... resulted to some extent in the treatment of timbre as the dominant musical factor”.¹⁵ Discussing electronica, Allan Cameron says that “qualities such as timbre, resonance, and rhythm are frequently given precedence over melody and lyrics”,¹⁶ while Eric Tamm stresses the importance of timbre in ambient music, suggesting that “if in the classical work the timbre may be said to adorn the structure, then in the ambient work the structure adorns the timbre”.¹⁷ All of these comments serve to indicate the importance of timbre in electronic music despite it commonly lacking traditional instrumentation.

¹⁴ Thom Holmes, “Electronic Music.” In *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound* eds. Frank W. Hoffmann and Howard Ferstler (New York: Routledge, 2005), 733.

¹⁵ Rafał Zapała, “Live Electronic Preparation: Interactive Timbral Practice.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Interactive Audio* eds. Karen Collins, Bill Kapralos, and Holly Tessler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 545.

¹⁶ Allan Cameron, “Instrumental Visions: Electronica, Music Video, and the Environmental Interface.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media* eds. Carol Vernallis, Amy Herzog, and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 753.

¹⁷ Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), 173.

These principles regarding instrumentation and timbre in electronica are evident on Boards of Canada's *Music Has the Right to Children*: while the duo make great use of analogue equipment, practically every sound on the album has been electronically generated or manipulated in some way or another, resulting in an extremely synthetic sound world that dominates most other musical features. This holds true even in the cases where instruments were performed in a traditional sense: the duo claim that they "played electronic and acoustic instruments" on the album, but in those instances they "completely reworked their sound electronically".¹⁸ Some of Wilson's previous output – such as music by the aforementioned Bass Communion project and *Unreleased Electronic Music Vol 1* – does at times rely almost exclusively on electronically generated or manipulated sounds, but generally speaking his timbral palette for his solo career is more diverse. Even still, Wilson often integrates electronic sounds into his music in ways that reveals the underlying influence.

While the lack of traditional instrumentation and performance makes it less straightforward to compare the use of timbre in Wilson's work to Boards of Canada than when compared to King Crimson in Chapter 2, there are other sonic markers that can be analyzed instead. Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen and Anne Danielsen propose the concept of "digital signatures", a term they use to describe overt uses of digital recording technology to create sounds that belie their digital origins.¹⁹ Through finding similar digital signatures in the music of "Ancestral" and "An Eagle in Your Mind" it is possible to illustrate timbral similarities between the two and, in part, indicate the influence of electronica on Wilson's work. I additionally make

¹⁸ Marcus Eoin and Michael Sandison, "Two Aesthetes of Electronic Music". Interview by Ariel Kyrou and Jean-Yves Leloup. *Virgin Megaweb Magazine*, June 1998. Accessed March 29, 2017. http://bocpages.org/wiki/Two_Aesthetes_of_Electronic_Music.

¹⁹ Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen and Anne Danielsen, *Digital Signatures: The Impact of Digitization on Popular Music Sound* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

use of *Sonic Visualiser* again to generate spectrograms for passages of both “Ancestral” and “An Eagle in Your Mind” in order to illustrate some of these timbral markers and similarities.

Figure 3.1 shows spectrograms for the first few seconds of “An Eagle in Your Mind” (top, 0:00-0:11) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 0:00-0:08). These first few seconds are musically sparse but in both cases are significant for setting the stage and atmosphere for the rest of the song, something accomplished largely through the timbres of electronic drones and – in the case of “An Eagle in Your Mind” – a synth pad. These kinds of electronically-generated sounds are, as is discussed in more detail later, intimately associated with electronic music and serve as a marker of its influence on Wilson’s work.

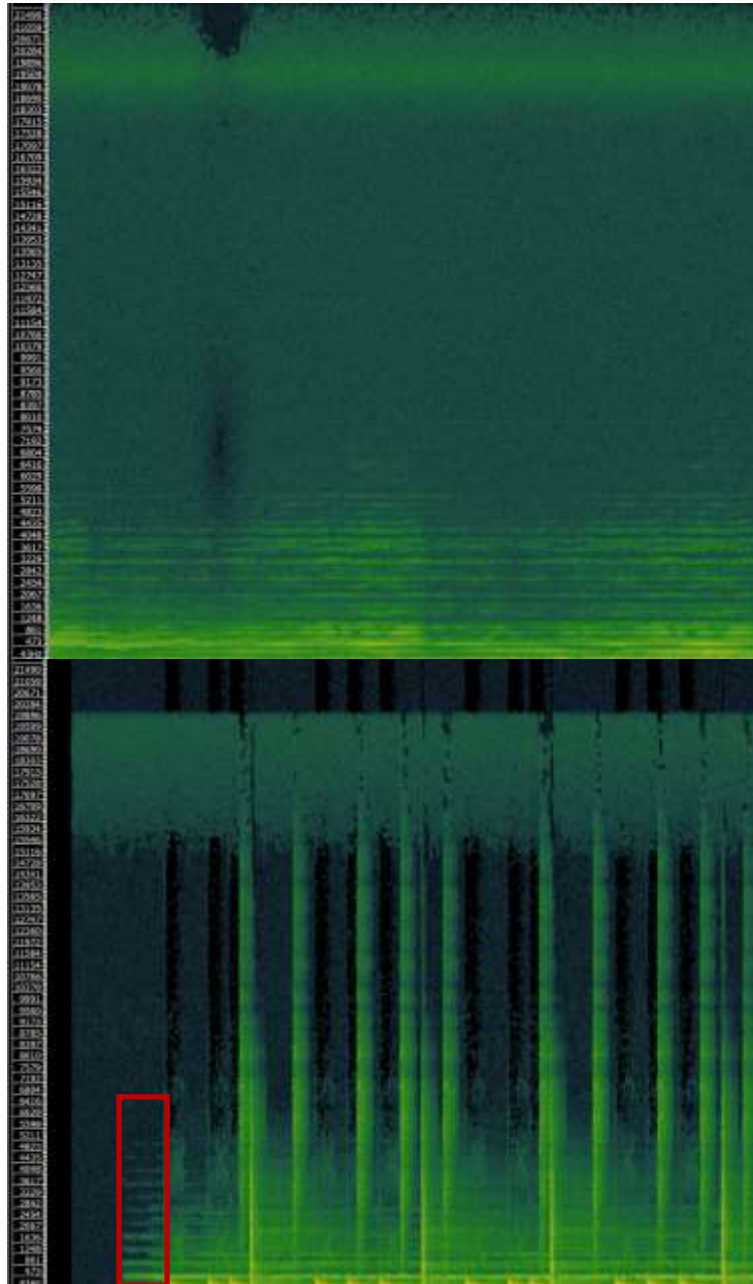


Figure 3.1 Spectrograms for “An Eagle in Your Mind” (0:00-0:11) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 0:00-0:08) generated by *Sonic Visualiser*.

The drones in both spectrograms can be identified by the series of horizontal lines moving across the spectrum from roughly the 0-6,000 Hz range, with the fundamental frequency being recognized as the lowest and most intense of these lines. The drone “An Eagle in Your

Mind” can be aurally recognized by the metallic, high-pitched timbre that is continually oscillating between the left and right speaker channels, and the synth pad can be heard at a lower frequency providing the song’s harmonic content.²⁰ In “Ancestral” the drone occurs uninterrupted for only a fraction of time at the very beginning of the song, highlighted by the red outline in Figure 3.1, before the addition of programmed drums. While the drone is relegated to the back of the mix and is mostly buried under the percussion and other subsequently introduced instruments, it can still be heard for quite some time and plays a subtle – but integral – role in establishing the atmosphere of the song. In both passages (with the exception of the percussion in “Ancestral”) there is very little to no activity in the upper end of the frequency spectrum, resulting in sonic profiles that are quite similar.

While drones can certainly be found in many styles of music ranging from ancient times to modern day, Joanna Demers claims that they are “especially common in recent electronic music”.²¹ And specifically discussing ambient artists, Joshua Evans reinforces the importance of drones by saying that “the timbre ... of particular sounds are manipulated to produce strange, otherworldly tones, such as ambient music’s characteristics drones”, something clearly demonstrated in both “Ancestral” and “An Eagle in Your Mind”.²² Indeed, what is particularly interesting in the context of this analysis is not the presence of the drone itself but the similarity in origin, function, and sound quality. Rather than these drones being produced by traditional instruments, in both cases they are generated electronically, giving them a distinct, synthetic

²⁰ Synth pads in electronic music often act similarly to drones but typically involve pitch to a greater degree, allowing for more traditional harmonic content.

²¹ Demers, *Listening Through the Noise*, 166.

²² Joshua Evans, "Painting Therapeutic Landscapes with Sound: On Land by Brian Eno." In *Soundscapes of Wellbeing in Popular Music* eds. Paul Kingsbury, Gavin J. Andrews, and Robin Kearns (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 177.

timbre that is directly associated with electronic music and can be seen as an example of Brøvig-Hanssen and Danielsen's concept of digital signatures. And furthermore, while it is possible to synthesize a plethora of distinct timbres with electronic drones, these two are exceptionally similar: both are eerie, metallic timbres that serve as a sonic backdrop, and, as Figure 3.1 reveals, they have similar spectral content (although the spectrum in "Ancestral" is slightly less harmonically dense).

Beyond "Ancestral", in Wilson's solo career – particularly on *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* – the use of these kinds of electronically generated ambient effects and backdrops are not uncommon.²³ They are typically, as in the case of "Ancestral", subtly woven into the sonic tapestry of his songs, but can be easily identified on certain tracks such as "First Regret", "Perfect Life", and "Ascendant Here On..." from *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* (2015) where they are more openly showcased. It is not too much of a stretch to suggest that the use of electronically-generated drones and effects in Wilson's music reveals a debt to the music and technology of electronica and ambient artists, especially considering their association to the genre, his openness about his interest in electronic music, and the similarities in timbral quality.

The spectrograms in Figure 3.2 illustrate additional passages in "An Eagle in Your Mind" (top, 0:52-1:01) and "Ancestral" (bottom, 2:10-2:16). This example serves to demonstrate the use of programmed drums and percussion in both songs and indicate how the timbral and functional similarities between them suggest the incorporation of electronic music elements in Wilson's music.

²³ It is significant that Wilson is specifically credited as providing "effects" and "programming" on many of *Hand. Cannot. Erase.*'s tracks.

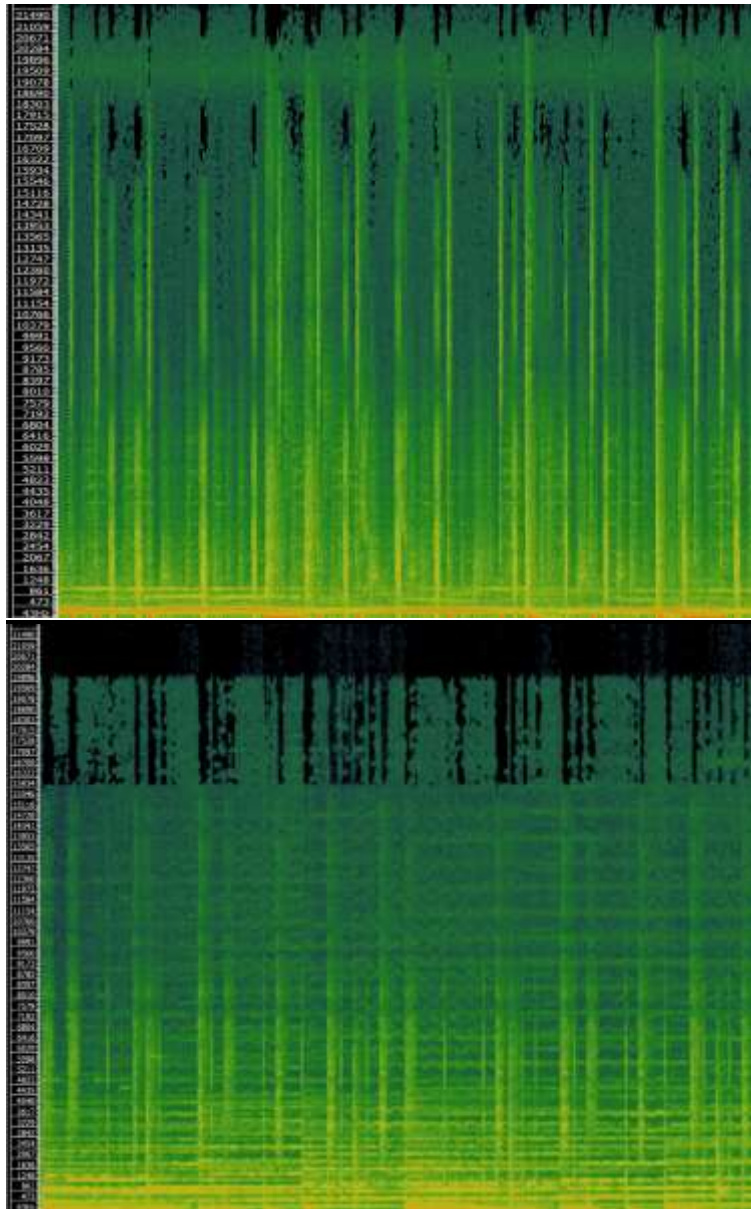


Figure 3.2 Spectrograms for “An Eagle in Your Mind” (0:52-1:01) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 2:10-2:16) generated by *Sonic Visualiser*.

For the passage in question, the texture in “An Eagle in Your Mind” consists solely of the aforementioned synth pad (which occupies the lower end of the frequency spectrum) and prominent, busy programmed percussion. In fact, one can quite clearly distinguish between three layers of percussion: a drum groove that is pushed to the back of the mix, a foregrounded kick drum, and a series of sporadic and glitch-like sounds and rhythms that pierce through the mix

resulting in the sharp vertical lines that reach close to 20,000 Hz. One notable feature of the percussion sounds in “An Eagle in Your Mind” is that they consist entirely of modified recordings of Michael Sandison’s girlfriend’s voice, further indicating the use of electronics to manipulate sound.²⁴

This passage of “Ancestral”, on the other hand, is significantly denser: in addition to very active, almost frenetic programmed percussion, the sounds of strings, bass, and keyboards fill in the mix. The violin in particular can be easily identified in the spectrogram given its rich overtones and characteristic vibrato. Despite the numerous instruments, however, the programmed drums still feature prominently in the mix. The programmed drums here can be broken down into a few layers as well, and each of them has a unique profile in the spectrogram: the kick drum, the hi-hat, the rimshot, and a clicking sound. These sounds have a lot of prominence in the sound space, and are seen as vertical lines on the spectrogram reaching up into the higher frequencies. While in the two spectrograms in question the textural density is quite different, it is still possible to observe in both how the electronic drums dominate a large portion of the frequency spectrum and result in many sonic similarities.

I will now consider the rhythmic complexity of these passages in more detail in order to provide a better understanding of how the drum timbres unfold over time and fill in the sonic space. “An Eagle in Your Mind” runs at about 96 BPM and is in 4/4, whereas “Ancestral” has a tempo of around 128 BPM in this passage and is in 7/4 (most easily considered as a bar of 3/4 followed by a bar of 4/4). Figure 3.3 uses spectrograms to break down the programmed drum rhythms for “Ancestral” and “An Eagle in Your Mind” over a stretch of two bars. The bright purple markers are used to indicate the downbeat, whereas the white markers are placed on every

²⁴ Marcus Eoin and Michael Sandison, “Northern Exposure.” Interview by Ken Micallef. *Remix Magazine* 4, no. 7 (July 2002): para. 27. Accessed March 29, 2017. http://bocpages.org/wiki/Northern_Exposure.

other beat. As revealed by considering the vertical lines of the programmed drums compared to the bar lines in Figure 4.3, these are extremely rhythmically complex loops full of syncopation. It is also worth noting that the drum loops feature subtle changes in both instances instead of repeating verbatim. In fact, while the drum loop in this part of “Ancestral” lasts for the duration of a bar, the entirety of the drum loop for the kick drum and glitch noises in “An Eagle in Your Mind” is not even contained in the two bars shown in Figure 4.3.

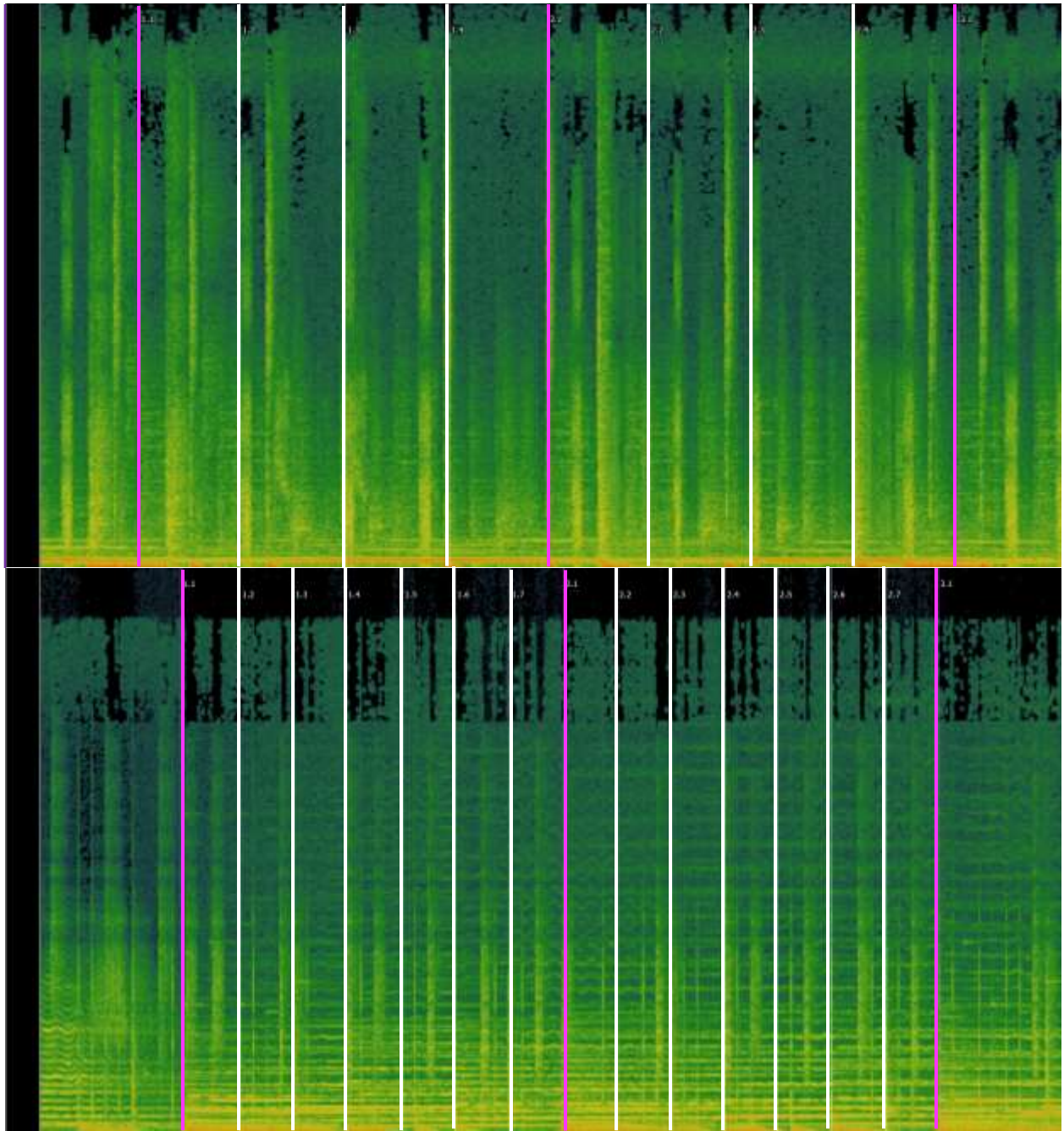


Figure 3.3 Spectrograms for “An Eagle in Your Mind” (top, 0:54-1:01) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 2:08-2:18) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* with beat markers.

The spectrogram in Figure 3.4 covers eight bars of “An Eagle in Your Mind” so that the whole loop of the kick drum and glitch sounds can be visualized. Here the purple markers note the downbeats of the bars when the kick drum and glitch sounds loop, and the white markers

signal the downbeats of the other bars. This analysis reveals that in this passage there is a four-bar phrase structure implied by the background drum groove and the synthpad, but the superimposed kick drum and glitch noises work on a three-bar cycle, creating an effect akin to that of polymeter but on the level of the phrase. Only after the kick drum and glitch loop repeats four times do the two phrases line up again. The rhythmic profiles analyzed in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 demonstrate how these specific drum timbre surface across the duration of a passage.

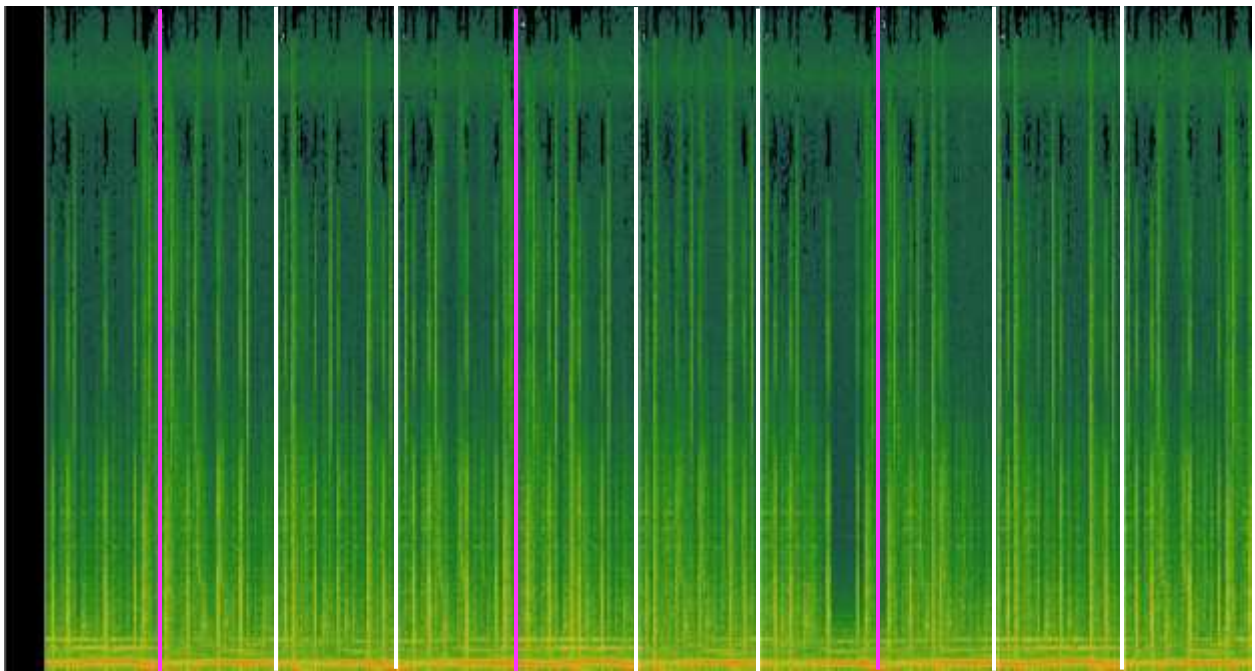


Figure 3.4 Spectrogram for “An Eagle in Your Mind” (0:52-1:18) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* with bar markers.

The kind of precise manipulation of sounds and rhythms at the micro level seen in Figures 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 is afforded by the use of digital technology and is a hallmark of electronic music. Brøvig-Hanssen and Danielsen, for instance, specifically suggest that this use of digital technology is prevalent in IDM and glitch music and can function as a digital

signature.²⁵ This kind of digital manipulation of rhythms, as found in both “Ancestral” and “An Eagle in Your Mind”, does not simply result in identifiable rhythmic uniqueness but also timbral uniqueness: the drum sounds are not attempting to accurately imitate the sound of live, acoustic drums, but rather possess a unique, electronic timbre of their own. How these timbres arise rhythmically also influences the overall timbral makeup of the music. In both songs, many of the percussion timbres are nothing more than sharp bursts of noise, sounding like audio glitches. This is a defining feature of certain electronic music in the 90s, according to Philip Sherburne,²⁶ and its presence in “Ancestral” is a key indicator of electronic music’s timbral influence on Wilson. Programmed drums are, in fact, a prominent feature in a number of songs from Wilson’s solo discography, from “Abandoner” off of his debut solo record *Insurgentes* (2008) to tracks such as “Perfect Life” and “Routine” from *Hand. Cannot. Erase*.

A third and final timbral marker of electronic music that I will discuss is the use of vocal sampling. Unlike the previous examples, however, spectrograms is not be able to visualize the details I am discussing as they are buried deeply in the mix amongst many other sounds. While – at least in the case of “Ancestral” – vocal samples are not a dominant feature of the timbral make-up, they are still worth considering due to their strong affiliation to electronic music.

In both “An Eagle in Your Mind” and “Ancestral” one can identify the sampling of human speech. This is used to the greatest extent in the percussion of “An Eagle in Your Mind” which, as mentioned earlier, consists of modified audio recordings of Michael Sandison’s girlfriend’s voice. But there are many other instances throughout “An Eagle in Your Mind” in which voices can be heard, often as brief fragments that have been heavily sonically manipulated. The clearest

²⁵ Brøvig-Hanssen and Danielsen, *Digital Signatures*, 3.

²⁶ Philip Shelburne, "Digital Discipline: Minimalism in House and Techno." In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (London: Continuum, 2006), 325.

use of vocal sampling, however, is dialogue in the background from 1:53-2:50 which is immediately followed by a brief snippet of a voice clearly saying “I love you”.²⁷ Vocal sampling is not uncommon in Boards of Canada’s work, and they openly acknowledge its significance in many of their tracks.²⁸

While vocal sampling is not as prevalent in “Ancestral”, buried deep into the mix, starting from 5:31, it is possible to discern a man’s voice saying a series of seemingly random numbers. These numbers are most likely sampled from number stations, mysterious shortwave transmissions believed to be used to convey encrypted information (significantly, Boards of Canada have also sampled what seem to be numbers stations in their music, such as on “Gyroscope” from their 2002 album *Geogaddi*). While the effect in “Ancestral” is subtle and may only be detected by intent listeners, it is an identifiable sonic feature that draws a clear connection to the music of Boards of Canada and electronic music. Again, the similarity here does not just stop at the use of vocal sampling, but extends to the timbre itself: in both of the cases discussed the timbre of the voice belongs to a man, is muffled, and is highly grainy.

The strategy of using vocals is a non-traditional way is a hallmark of many electronic music songs: Mark Spicer suggests that “the use of vocal samples is a defining characteristic of many techno tracks”,²⁹ whereas Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson say that “vocal samples are used as pieces of sound rather than as meaningful phrases” while discussing electronic music.³⁰

²⁷ According to WhoSampled.com, these two speech clips are sampled from the documentary series *Nature* and from *Sesame Street* respectively (see “Eagle in Your Mind by Boards of Canada | WhoSampled”).

²⁸ Eoin and Sandison, “Northern Exposure”, para. 13-18.

²⁹ Mark Spicer, “(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music.” *Twentieth-Century Music* 1, no. 1 (2004): 55. Accessed March 4, 2016. doi: 10.1017/s1478572204000052. While techno differs in some ways from IDM, the two are very closely related (see Ramsay, 2016, 215).

³⁰ Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson, *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture, and the Politics of Sound* (London: Routledge, 1999), 38.

The uses of vocal samples in both “Ancestral” and “An Eagle in Your Mind” are consistent with these comments and thus their use draws an association to electronic music.

It is also important to note that the use of sampled voices in Wilson’s work is not unique to “Ancestral”; similar voices can be heard in other tracks like “Index” and “Regret #9”, suggesting their significance to the overall unique sound world he has cultivated over his career. Wilson is no stranger to sampling in general as well, and released *Ghostwriter* with Doug Rogers, a software package including hundreds of multi-sampled instruments and sonic effects.³¹ While the use of such sounds is often subtle, this by no means diminishes their significance in Wilson’s music.

Through the above examples comparing the use of electronic drones and effects, programmed percussion sounds, and sampled vocals between “An Eagle in Your Mind” and “Ancestral” it is possible to see how Wilson’s use of particular timbres instantly draws an association to the genre of electronica. Despite comparing sounds that do not arise from traditional instrumentation, by examining their digital signatures and visualising their sonic profile it becomes possible to see the similarities. Overtly digital and electronic timbres only make up a fraction of Wilson’s extensive sound world here, but their significance should not be overlooked as they are often an integral component in establishing atmosphere and indicate some of the subtle timbral means by which an artist can draw associations to other genres.

Form

Analysing the form of “An Eagle in Your Mind” looking strictly at traditional parameters would almost certainly come up short-handed: the song simply consists of one harmonic

³¹ More information about *Ghostwriter* can be found at <http://www.soundsonline.com/Ghostwriter>.

progression that repeats for its six-minute-plus duration with no obvious melodic development. Yet while the song is quite repetitious in a harmonic and melodic sense, its complexity is unveiled in its subtly shifting and building textures. This recalls Tamm's earlier comment that "if in the classical work the timbre may be said to adorn the structure, then in the ambient work the structure adorns the timbre", suggesting that formal design in ambient music is often dictated by timbre.³² While not immediately apparent when considering the formal diagram in isolation, when viewed in conjunction with the song's amplitude wave data (as seen in Figure 3.5) it becomes quite clear that the piece is steadily evolving over time.

³² Tamm, *Brian Eno*, 173.

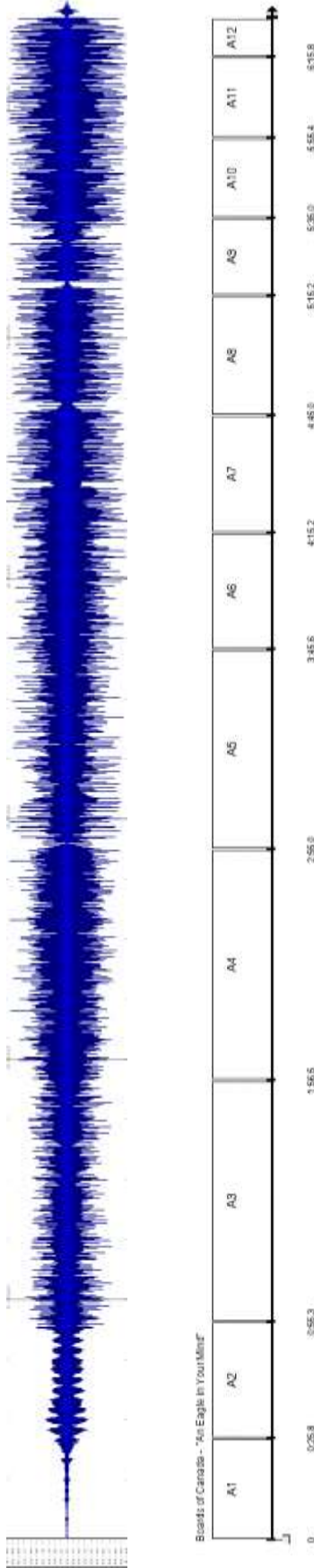


Figure 3.5 “An Eagle in Your Mind” Sonic Visualiser wave data (mean channels) and Variations Audio Timeliner form.

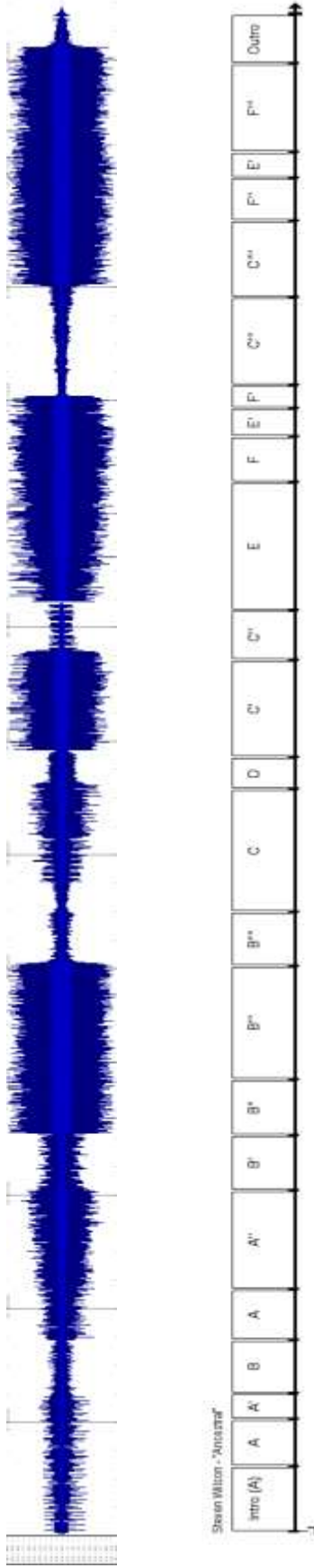


Figure 3.6 “Ancestral” Sonic Visualiser wave data (mean channels) and Variations Audio Timeliner form.

Despite the minimalist harmonic progression, formal sections can be demarcated primarily through these marked changes in texture. This type of through-composed form is an example of what Brad Osborn calls “one-part monothematic form”, in which a single theme (in this case established by a harmonic progression) is continually manipulated by “sonic parameters such as volume, timbre, and texture”.³³ Although Osborn uses successive prime symbols (') in order to denote different sections – a convention I adopt for the rest of this study – for the formal diagram in Figure 3.5 I have opted to use numerals due to the sheer amount of different iterations of section A. As seen in Figure 3.5, the entire song consists of one harmonically unique section (A) which appears in many different configurations. While Osborn’s examples are drawn exclusively from post-millennial experimental rock bands, we see this same type of form being used frequently in electronica and ambient music: the music is often highly repetitious rhythmically and harmonically but continually develops in other musical parameters. In the words of Nick Collins, Margaret Schedel, and Scott Wilson, “a lot of electronica seems to be setting up a situation, a particular delimited sound world, and letting it run for a while”.³⁴

In addition to it possessing a one-part monothematic form, “An Eagle in Your Mind” can also be recognized as having what Spicer calls a “cumulative form”, a term used to denote some kind of expansion occurring throughout a piece.³⁵ In this case the expansion primarily occurs through the gradually growing texture, which is reflected in the steadily expanding wave data shown in Figure 3.5. While this strategy of continually introducing sounds throughout the course

³³ Brad Osborn, “Understanding Through-Composition in Post-Rock, Math-Metal, and Other Post-Millennial Rock Genres.” *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 3 (October 2011): para. 9. Accessed February 14, 2016. <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.osborn.php>.

³⁴ Nick Collins, Margaret Schedel, and Scott Wilson. *Electronic Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 145.

³⁵ Spicer, “(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music.”

of a song is not strictly unique to electronic music, it is often a defining feature: Ben Ramsay suggests that “the structuring process of adding layers of sound on top of one another in sequence, gradually building and revealing the structure of a track, is an arrangement method transplanted directly from techno” and he additionally claims that “this compositional process is used to build tension within various types of dance music, including electronica”.³⁶ Ragnhild Torvanger Solberg also discusses the significance of the build-up in electronic music and notes that it plays an important role in determining form.³⁷

Because “Ancestral” has a lengthy and progressive form that goes through various transformations, as can be seen in Figure 3.6, it does not have a cumulative form when viewed at the macro level. However, zooming in on particular parts of the song does, in fact, reveal that many sections do feature textural expansion similar to that seen in “An Eagle in Your Mind”. Spicer uses the term “accumulative form” to discuss these kinds of formal expansions that occur at the level of individual parts,³⁸ and by examining occurrences of this in “Ancestral” it is possible to see similar principles governing aspects of formal design in both it and “An Eagle in Your Mind”.³⁹

Throughout the various iterations of section A in “Ancestral”, for example, there is development in the overall texture through the incremental addition of instruments and musical

³⁶ Ben Ramsay, "Analysis of Foil by Autechre (from Amber (1994))." In *Expanding the Horizon of Electroacoustic Music Analysis* eds. Simon Emmerson and Leigh Landy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 215, 226.

³⁷ Ragnhild Torvanger Solberg, "'Waiting for the Bass to Drop': Correlations Between Intense Emotional Experiences and Production Techniques in Build-Up and Drop Sections of Electronic Dance Music." *Dancecult* 6, no. 1 (2014): 61-82. Accessed March 1, 2017. doi:10.12801/1947-5403.2014.06.01.04.

³⁸ Spicer, "(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music."

³⁹ It is worth remembering that “Ancestral” is roughly twice as long as “An Eagle in Your Mind”, and this difference in length should be taken into consideration when viewing the formal diagrams in Figures 3.5 and 3.6.

parts constituting the backbone of the music: the song starts with an electronic drone and programmed drums entering almost simultaneously, and over the course of the next couple of minutes we hear other instruments such as keyboards, guitar, hammered dulcimer, bass, additional percussion, and strings gradually layered in. Looking at Figure 3.6 one can clearly identify these additions of instruments in the different iterations of section A by the growing amplitude in the wave data. This recalls the additive layers of sound that are found in “An Eagle in Your Mind”, but more importantly throughout electronica in general.

At this point, however, it is worth recalling how Edward Macan suggests that a common characteristic of progressive rock’s form is “building up tension until a shattering climax is reached, abruptly tapering off, and then starting the whole process anew”.⁴⁰ This results in potentially conflicting readings: is Wilson’s use of accumulative form an indicator of his influence from progressive rock or from electronica? I would argue that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and given Wilson’s openness about the influence that both genres have had on his music it is not beyond reason to suspect that his formal design was guided by the underlying formal principles of both genres.

While from a formal perspective “Ancestral” is less akin to electronic music than progressive rock, they still share a few strategies – particularly when looking at specific sections of the form that exhibit accumulative form – that suggest an underlying influence. These formal influences are evident in other Wilson songs as well: “Perfect Life”, for instance, displays an extremely similar form to “An Eagle in Your Mind” with a cumulative, through-composed form and constant changes in texture – not terribly surprising when recalling that Wilson cited Boards

⁴⁰ Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44.

of Canada as his biggest influence for the song.⁴¹ Overall, a comparison of forms is yet another way in which it is possible to recognize markers of influence from electronic music in Wilson's work.

Genre and Influence

The above analyses of timbre and form between Boards of Canada's "An Eagle in Your Mind" and Steven Wilson's "Ancestral" serve to indicate Wilson's incorporation of elements of electronic music in his own output. While Wilson's inspiration from electronic music may not be as immediately overt as his influence from the classic progressive rock sound that is discussed in Chapter 2, by looking at uses of timbre and form it is possible to see that aspects of electronic music have undeniably crept into his work and contribute to his unique sound world.

Unlike Chapter 2, which compares the music of two artists belonging to the same overarching genre of progressive rock (albeit forty-six years apart), here we see the influence of a separate genre of music, electronica, at play. As briefly discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the influence of electronica on Steven Wilson's progressive rock is particularly interesting because electronica is a genre that is considered, in part, to have developed out of the progressive rock movement. This assists in illustrating the notion that genres are fluid in nature and that the reciprocal nature of influences between genres can shift the means by which these genres are defined and develop. This is in line with the ideas of literary theorist John Frow, who says that "all texts are strongly shaped by their relation to one or more genres, which they may in turn modify".⁴² Likewise, David Brackett suggests that "[genre] conventions are constantly being

⁴¹ Classic Rock Magazine, "The Story Behind 'Perfect Life'", 1:20-1:25.

⁴² John Frow, *Genre*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 1-2.

modified by each new text that participates in the genre”.⁴³ Through considering the origins of electronica and its influence on Steven Wilson’s musical output we see these ideas in action in a tangible way.

Here again we can also see Jason Toynbee’s concept of social authorship at play, as it becomes increasingly evident that Wilson’s music can be explained as being a unique synthesis of numerous pre-existing musical features.⁴⁴ Having now looked at the influence of both the classic progressive rock sound and electronic music on Wilson’s work, Chapter 4 will illustrate this notion further by looking at indications of inspiration from progressive death metal through an examination of Opeth’s “Blackwater Park”. Chapter 5 then serves to synthesize the findings presented in Chapters 2-4 with an in-depth study of “Ancestral” in order to examine genre fusion and offer a more comprehensive discussion on genre and influence.

⁴³ David Brackett, "Popular Music Genres: Aesthetics, Commerce and Identity." In *The SAGE Handbook of Popular Music* eds. Andy Bennett and Steve Waksman (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), 195.

⁴⁴ Jason Toynbee, *Creating Problems: Social Authorship, Copyright and the Production of Culture*. (Milton Keynes: Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research, 2001).

Chapter 4 – Opeth’s “Blackwater Park” and Metal

Having explored the influence of progressive rock and electronica on Steven Wilson’s solo output in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, in this chapter I trace Wilson’s musical connections to the genre of metal. In order to do so I study the title track of Swedish progressive death metal band Opeth’s critically-acclaimed *Blackwater Park* (2001). The first portion of this chapter delves into the context surrounding *Blackwater Park* as well as Wilson’s close relationship to Opeth and involvement on the album. After discussing the necessary contexts I go on to demonstrate timbral and formal similarities between “Blackwater Park” and Wilson’s “Ancestral” from *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* (2015) through a series of comparative analyses, thus revealing metal’s influence on Wilson. These analyses are followed by a brief section considering their implications regarding genre and influence.

Background and Contexts

After a series of moderately successful records, Opeth reached a turning point with *Blackwater Park*, their fifth studio album, in 2001. It was a breakthrough for the band in terms of international visibility and commercial success, and according to Jeff Wagner, it “changed everything for Opeth”.¹ Though the band’s musical trajectory since their inception has taken them from “extreme death metal into far more lush, almost symphonic ground”² over the course of their career, their sound – particularly on *Blackwater Park* – can most accurately be described as progressive death metal, a genre of music combining characteristics of death metal with progressive rock.

¹ Jeff Wagner, *Mean Deviation: Four Decades of Progressive Heavy Metal* (Brooklyn, NY: Bazillion Points, 2010), 294.

² Stephen Lambe, *Citizens of Hope and Glory: The Story of Progressive Rock* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011), 145.

A consideration of *Blackwater Park*'s reception reveals that not only was it a commercial breakthrough for the band, it is also widely praised and considered a pivotal album in its genre. Eduardo Rivadavia of *AllMusic*, for instance, bestows the album a perfect rating of five stars, and claims that "not since the release of Tiamat's groundbreaking masterpiece [*Wildhoney*] in 1994 had the extreme metal scene witnessed such an overwhelming show of fan enthusiasm and uniform critical praise as that bestowed upon [*Blackwater Park*]"³ Fan reception of the album is extremely high, with the album receiving an average rating of 4.26 and 4.48 out of 5 on *Prog Archives* and *SputnikMusic* respectively based on thousands of ratings and reviews; these ratings rank *Blackwater Park* at position 61 on the list of the top 100 progressive rock albums on *Prog Archives* and at rank 56 on *SputnikMusic*'s list of the best albums of all time, further suggesting its popularity and overall musical reach.⁴

Opeth's preceding album, *Still Life* (1999), caught the attention of Wilson when he listened to a tape given to him by a journalist at Opeth frontman Mikael Åkerfeldt's request. Impressed by the album, Wilson ended up meeting with Åkerfeldt and shortly thereafter served as a co-producer on *Blackwater Park* – an unexpected collaboration given their different musical backgrounds and Wilson's inexperience producing metal at the time.⁵ This would be the first collaboration in a long-lasting relationship between the two that would see Wilson produce, mix, and contribute performances to a number of future Opeth albums. Wilson and Åkerfeldt also

³ Eduardo Rivadavia, "Blackwater Park Review." *AllMusic*. Accessed January 26, 2017. <http://www.allmusic.com/album/blackwater-park-mw0000114196>.

⁴ See *Prog Archives*. Accessed February 2, 2017. <http://www.progarchives.com/> and "Best Albums of All Time." *Sputnikmusic*. Accessed February 2, 2017. <http://www.sputnikmusic.com/best/albums/9999/>.

⁵ Wagner, *Mean Deviation*, 294-295. In addition to acting as a co-producer, Wilson contributed vocals to the track "Bleak" as well as keyboards and some guitar work on other songs. While this was Wilson's first foray into metal production, he would go on to work with other metal groups, including Orphaned Land.

teamed up to form Storm Corrosion, an experimental side project for the two musicians that released its eponymous debut album in 2012.

Given his direct involvement on the album as a co-producer, analyzing the influence of *Blackwater Park* on Wilson's music poses a unique challenge. But while his work as a co-producer undoubtedly contributed to the album's final sound, the experience surely had an impact upon his own future output as well. Reflecting on his time producing *Blackwater Park*, Wilson says "I will be the first to admit that having worked with Opeth definitely had an effect on my writing" and "it was really sort of a good opportunity for me to learn a little bit more about how those guys make those records, how they get some of the guitar sounds and stuff".⁶ Additionally, Åkerfeldt claimed after the album was released that Wilson directly confirmed Opeth's influence on Porcupine Tree's new music at the time.⁷ Indeed, it was shortly after working on *Blackwater Park* that metal influences first began to habitually crop up in Wilson's music; Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell note Porcupine Tree's inclusion of metal characteristics beginning in 2002 with the album *In Absentia*, a tendency that would only intensify in the band's future releases such as *Deadwing* (2005) and *Fear of a Blank Planet* (2007).⁸

The shift in Opeth's musical style on this album is also not significant enough to detract from the upcoming analyses: Wagner states that the band "hadn't radically moved their

⁶ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson Interview of Porcupine Tree." Interview by John Welborn. Guitar.com, para. 19, 24. Accessed February 2, 2017. <https://www.guitar.com/articles/steve-wilson-interview-porcupine-tree>.

⁷ Mikael Åkerfeldt, "Metal-Rules.com's Interview with Opeth's Mikael Akerfeldt." Interview by Jeff Kent. Metal Rules, para. 23. March 2001. Accessed February 3, 2017. <http://www.metal-rules.com/interviews/Opeth.htm>.

⁸ Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell, *Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock since the 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 272.

songwriting style forward”,⁹ while Åkerfeldt himself openly admits that “musically ... I don’t think we altered at all with [*Blackwater Park*]”.¹⁰ Åkerfeldt additionally suggests that on *Blackwater Park* “[Wilson] may have felt that he didn’t want to take up too much space” and claims that he was “not actually involved in the entire production”, but helped with the lead guitars and clean vocal work.¹¹ So while Wilson’s involvement on the album will have left an imprint on the timbral and formal content of the songs on *Blackwater Park* to some degree, it is not enough to compromise the integrity of the analyses and offers an opportunity to study a specific experience (serving as co-producer) that influenced his future music.

For this chapter I have chosen to analyze the title track from *Blackwater Park* because it is particularly representative of Opeth’s death metal sound. *Blackwater Park*’s status as a monumental album in the progressive death metal genre, Wilson’s direct involvement in the creation of the album, and his openness about how influential the experience was for him all contribute to making “Blackwater Park” an appropriate song through which to study metal’s influence on Wilson.

Timbre

The instrumentation used in “Blackwater Park”, listed in Table 4.1, is relatively narrow, consisting exclusively of the traditional rock band set-up of vocals, guitars, bass, and drums. Consequently, unlike the analyses in Chapters 2 and 3 where timbral similarities could largely be

⁹ Wagner, *Mean Deviation*, 295.

¹⁰ Mikael Åkerfeldt, “Opeth: ‘There Were Degrees of Chaos Making Blackwater Park’.” Interview by Malcolm Dome. Team Rock, para. 7. December 21, 2005. Accessed February 3, 2017. <http://teamrock.com/feature/2005-12-21/opeth-story-behind-blackwater-park>.

¹¹ Mikael Åkerfeldt, “Opeth Interview (10/2003).” Interview by Deadsoulman. Metal Storm, para. 26. October 2, 2003. Accessed February 3, 2017. http://www.metalstorm.net/pub/interview.php?interview_id=5.

identified on the basis of unique instrumentation or digital signatures respectively, the discussion here will largely be focused on the specific timbral qualities associated with each instrument and the accompanying performance and production strategies.

Table 4.1 Instrumentation in “Blackwater Park”.

Instrumentation
Vocals (Male, Clean and Death Growls)
Acoustic Guitar
Electric Guitar (Clean and Distorted)
Electric Bass
Drums

For the genre of metal, the quality of “heaviness” is an important factor in the shaping of timbral effects. According to Harris M. Berger and Cornelia Fales, “heaviness is the defining feature of the genre”, a concept they suggest is often applied to both compositional elements as well as the timbre of drums, vocals, bass, and – in particular – guitar.¹² While heaviness in metal is a subjective concept that can be applied to a number of musical features, Berger suggests that with regards to timbre it tends to refer to highly distorted electric guitar, large bass tones, drums that emphasize low and high frequencies, and vocals lacking harmonic content (also known as death growls).¹³ These are all timbres that are prominent throughout Opeth’s “Blackwater Park”.

Death growls are a performance technique by which vocalists “use the membranous folds above the vocal cords to exert pressure on the larynx to produce a deep, guttural growl that is

¹² Harris M. Berger and Cornelia Fales, "'Heaviness' in the Perception of Heavy Metal Guitar Timbres: The Match of Perceptual and Acoustic Features over Time." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures* eds. by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 181-182.

¹³ Harris M. Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 58.

virtually unused outside extreme metal music”.¹⁴ Eric Smialek, Philippe Depalle, and David Brackett, using spectrographic analysis to analyze death growls, reveal the timbral intricacies and distinctiveness that results from specific vocal performance gestures.¹⁵ Death growls are prevalent throughout Opeth’s discography until 2011’s *Heritage*, and so these specific vocal timbres function as a symbol for extreme metal. It is worth noting, however, that Wilson avoids the use of death growls – one of death metal’s most striking and unique features – in his own work. This can be seen as an indicator of Wilson’s musical decisions on this album and throughout his career. Even during his progressive metal explorations under the guise of the band Porcupine Tree, Wilson has never adopted the extreme vocal strategies associated with death metal.

Despite the lack of death growls, however, heavy timbres do comprise an important part of Wilson’s timbral palette. Recalling Kevin Holm-Hudson’s claim that a “link [to an earlier style of music] may be made on the basis of a distinctive instrumental timbre”,¹⁶ I will identify specific instrumental timbres in “Blackwater Park” and compare them to “Ancestral” in order to discern some of metal’s influence on Wilson. To demonstrate these timbral relationships I once more turn to *Sonic Visualiser* in order to generate spectrograms for the purpose of conducting comparative analyses between “Blackwater Park” and “Ancestral”.

¹⁴ Michelle Phillipov, *Death Metal and Music Criticism: Analysis at the Limits* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 74-75.

¹⁵ Eric Smialek, Philippe Depalle, and David Brackett, "A Spectrographic Analysis of Vocal Techniques in Extreme Metal for Musicological Analysis." Paper presented at Non-Cochlear Sound: Proceedings of the International Computer Music Conference 2012. Ljubljana, September 9-14, 2012. Accessed March 6, 2016. <http://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/MUSIC130/spectrographic-analysis-of-vocal-techniques-in-extreme-metal.pdf>.

¹⁶ Kevin Holm-Hudson, "The Future Is Now ... and Then: Sonic Historiography in Post-1960s Rock." *Genre* 34, no. 3-4 (2001): 256. Accessed November 2, 2016. doi:10.1215/00166928-34-3-4-243.

Figure 4.1 provides spectrograms for passages in “Blackwater Park” (top, 0:07-0:18) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 11:42-11:54). The samples in question predominantly feature the rhythm section (guitar, bass, and drums), and, as will be seen, a number of the identifying sonic markers of metal can be gleaned from these examples.

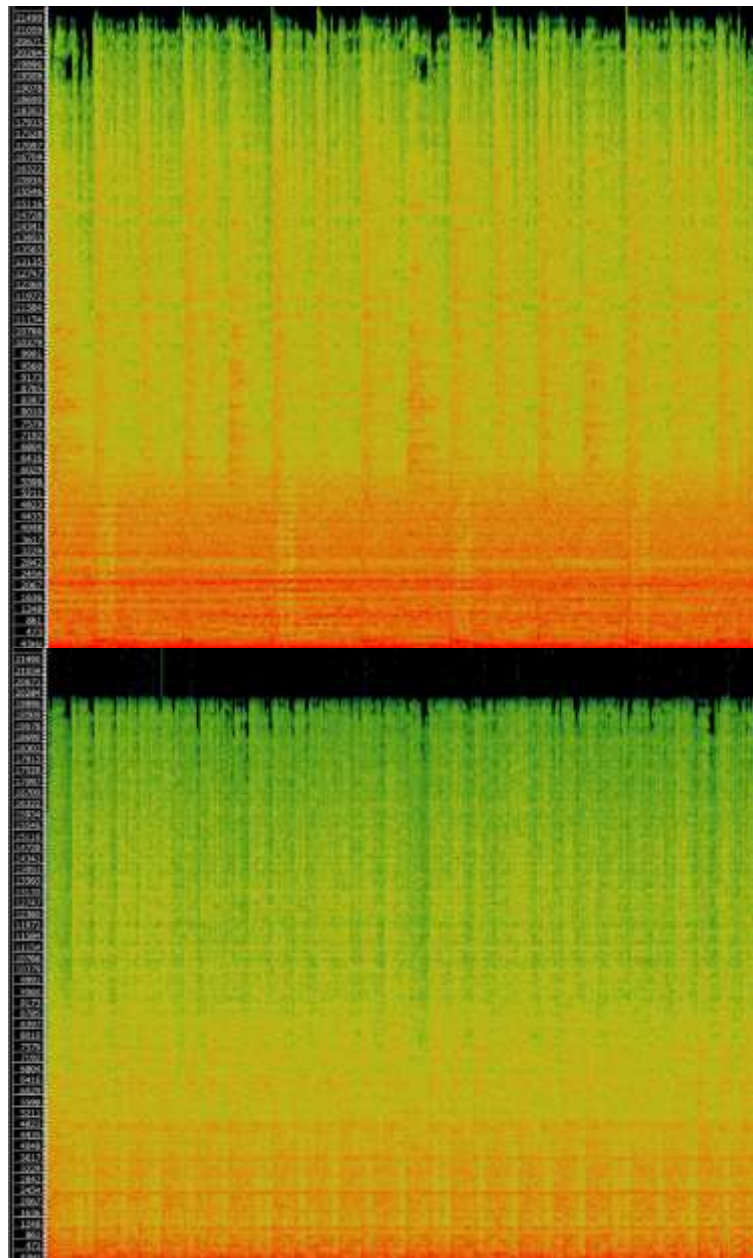


Figure 4.1 Spectrograms for “Blackwater Park” (top, 0:07-0:18) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 11:42-11:54) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain.

In both cases practically the entire frequency spectrum is saturated, with signal intensity at its highest towards the lower end of the spectrum and gradually diminishing moving upwards. Both examples feature extremely similar instrumentation, with this part of “Blackwater Park” featuring distorted electric rhythm and lead guitar, electric bass, and drums, while “Ancestral” here has distorted electric rhythm guitar, electric bass, drums, and mellotron. And more importantly than the instrumentation itself, the instrumental timbres are alike, with both showcasing heavily distorted guitars, aggressive performance techniques, and high volumes. The most prevalent part of the music in both examples is the rhythm guitar’s use of power chords, which Berger and Fales define as “chords that most frequently are composed of a root, a fifth, and the octave in the lowest octave of the guitar’s range”, further stating that they are “the most common harmonic material used in metal and the typical vehicle for displays of timbral heaviness”.¹⁷ The result is that both spectrograms reveal extremely similar sonic profiles that are characterized by their density and lack of space, something achieved through a combination of instrumentation, performance techniques, and production strategies.

This kind of intense wall of sound is typical in metal – and particularly in death metal – and makes it particularly challenging to isolate and identify any individual instrument in the spectrograms. According to Michelle Phillipov, “the intensity of death metal’s riff sections means that they often lack musical ‘space’, with vocals, drums, guitars, bass, and voice interlocking as a single unit of sound. This is something quite uncommon in other popular music styles”.¹⁸ While the similarities of the spectrograms in this sense are revealing as is, in order to

¹⁷ Berger and Fales, "'Heaviness' in Metal Guitar Timbres", 188.

¹⁸ Phillipov, *Death Metal and Music Criticism*, 82.

more fully explore the specifics of the timbres used to construct this sonic density I will interrogate the role of the specific instruments and how they are performed and recorded.

The most immediate marker of metal in these examples is the use of heavily distorted electric guitars, which is one of the most ubiquitous and significant timbral markers of metal.¹⁹ Berger and Fales, for instance, claim that “even more than other styles of popular music, heavy metal is defined by its guitar sounds, and the history of the music is intertwined with the history of these timbres”.²⁰ Duncan Williams says that “the most distinctive timbral characteristic of all metal guitar sounds is the use of distortion”,²¹ while Mark Mynett likewise notes that “harmonically distorted guitar embodies the primary identity of metal music”, additionally claiming that “the increased spectral energy and density resulting from the guitar signal’s harmonic distortion casts a sonically dense blanket over the majority of the other instruments and sounds involved”, a concept he refers to as spectral masking.²² Considering again the spectrograms in Figure 4.1, while each instrument contributes to the density of the images, the spectral masking of the distorted guitars plays a large role in occupying the frequency spectrum. This provides the moments of greatest intensity in the spectrograms (as seen by the dark red colour) and creates the heavy sound that is so inextricable from metal.

¹⁹ While I will present an overview of the timbral characteristics of distorted guitars in metal, it is beyond the scope of this project to go into all of the specifics. For more information, refer to Berger and Fales, "'Heaviness' in Metal Guitar Timbres"; Mark Mynett, "The Distortion Paradox: Analyzing Contemporary Metal Production." In *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies*, eds. Andy R. Brown, Karl Spracklen, Keith Kahn-Harris, and Niall Scott (New York: Routledge, 2016) 68-86; Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. 2nd ed. (Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 41-44; Ciro Scotto, "The Structural Role of Distortion in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal." *Music Theory Spectrum* 38, no. 2 (February 10, 2017): 178-99. Accessed March 6, 2017. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/mts/mtw013>; and Duncan Williams, "Tracking Timbral Changes in Metal Productions from 1990 to 2013." *Metal Music Studies* 1, no. 1 (October 1, 2014): 39-68. Accessed February 4, 2017. doi:10.1386/mms.1.1.39_1.

²⁰ Berger and Fales, "'Heaviness' in Metal Guitar Timbres", 185.

²¹ Williams, "Timbral Changes in Metal Productions", 48.

²² Mynett, "The Distortion Paradox", 68.

The tones of distorted guitars are additionally interesting based on the sheer diversity of timbres that can be – and are – produced. Ciro Scotto points to the timbral diversity of distortion and lists “crunch, overdrive, grind, warm, fat, and dirt” as a handful of the descriptors used to describe different types of distortion.²³ Robert Walser discusses the importance of guitar distortion and power chords in heavy metal and discusses the distinct timbres that result:

Distortion ... results in a timbral change toward brightness, toward a more complex waveform, since distorting a signal increases the energy of its higher harmonics. Power chords, on the other hand, produce powerful signals *below* the actual pitches being sent to the amplifier. Thus, the distorted guitar signal is expanded in both directions: the higher harmonics produced by distortion add brilliance and edge (and what guitarists sometimes call “presence”) to the sound, and the resultant tones produced by the interval combinations of power chords create additional low frequencies, adding weight to the sound.²⁴

While distorted guitar is a defining feature of metal, it is by no means exclusive to it, surfacing in many different genres and being particularly ubiquitous in blues and rock from as early as the 1950s and 1960s. That said, the specific distorted guitar timbres produced in metal can be differentiated from uses in other genres of music.

Indeed, the prominent distorted guitar timbres in metal have shifted over the years, becoming increasingly heavy over the genre’s development. This is confirmed by Berger and Fales, who state that “metal history has unfolded in a *progressive* fashion, with the music getting heavier and heavier ... over time” and that “the development of the genre as a whole is seen as being driven by the guitarist’s achievement of ever heavier timbres”.²⁵ This evolution of guitar timbre in metal exemplifies David Brackett’s comment on the continuously changing nature of genre conventions, saying that they are “constantly being modified by each new text that

²³ Scotto, “The Structural Role of Distortion”, 179.

²⁴ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 43. Emphasis in original.

²⁵ Berger and Fales, “‘Heaviness’ in Metal Guitar Timbres”, 187. Emphasis in original.

participates in the genre”.²⁶ Through studying Wilson’s specific distorted guitar timbres, then, it is possible to detect an influence from the more contemporary, heavier guitar tones of extreme metal bands like Opeth rather than those heard in earlier metal or rock groups (or even other genres that use the distorted electric guitar).

While perhaps not as remarkable to the same extent, the timbres and contributions of the drums and electric bass are also worth mentioning. Given the spectral masking of the guitar discussed above, other instruments face the difficulty of piercing through the mix in a way that is both audible and clean. Mynett uses the terms “punch” and “punchiness” to describe sounds that are capable of puncturing through the dense wall of sound produced by the distorted guitar, saying that the terms are subjective but “generally [refer] to a high level of energy, density, weight, and power within a particular duration of time”.²⁷ Listening to the examples presented in Figure 4.1 for both “Blackwater Park” and “Ancestral”, the punchiness of both the drums and bass are evident and contribute to the overall sonic space. In this regard, Opeth and Wilson’s use of the rhythm guitar, drums, and bass, are all consistent with the expectations of metal’s music and production.

The specific timbral qualities of each of the instruments are further affected by performance strategies. In these examples, many of the particular sound qualities arise from extremely aggressive playing of the instruments. Andrew L. Cope, stresses the importance of aggressive techniques in heavy metal and says that “performance style is itself part of the compositional process”, listing techniques such as violent drumming, strong guitar attacks, and

²⁶ David Brackett, “Popular Music Genres: Aesthetics, Commerce and Identity.” In *The SAGE Handbook of Popular Music* eds. Andy Bennett and Steve Waksman (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), 195.

²⁷ Mynett, “The Distortion Paradox”, 78-79.

aggressive vocals as characteristic of the genre.²⁸ These kinds of aggressive performances result in aurally identifiable differences in sound quality, adding additional overtones and frequencies to the timbres.²⁹ Mynett suggests that metal producers typically use compressors in order to maintain the unique sonic characteristics of aggressive performances while reducing the instruments' dynamic range to a feasible level for mixing, something that further influences the timbral quality of the recording.³⁰ While these spectral features are not easily discernible amongst the wall of sound visualized in the spectrograms, in both the Opeth and Wilson examples the presence of such aggressive techniques – particularly the sharp attacks of the drums and guitar – are aurally obvious and contribute to their timbral similarities. It is worth mentioning that Wilson's lead guitarist and drummer from 2013-2016 – Guthrie Govan and Marco Minnemann, respectively – are experienced metal performers, and this is very evident during their heavy performances in passages like this.

It is additionally important to not gloss over the use of volume in these examples, since volume not only influences timbral quality in general but plays a noteworthy role in heavy metal: Williams says that “the loudness of metal music is arguably one of its strongest defining characteristics”,³¹ while Walser suggests that “timbre is in part dependent on volume, and heavy metal is necessarily loud ... volume is important to the heaviness of heavy metal”.³² Walser also notes that such loud volumes are only achievable through the use of technology, something that

²⁸ Andrew L. Cope, *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 26.

²⁹ Mynett, "The Distortion Paradox", 83.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Williams, "Timbral Changes in Metal Productions", 42.

³² Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 44-45.

highlights the role of the sound engineer in metal's sound.³³ Both of the passages in question are very loud, which is easily visualized by the high degree of intensity displayed in the spectrograms in Figure 4.1.³⁴ The use of extreme loudness in both songs can also be seen in the wave data in Figures 4.3 and 4.4. The loudness of these songs is in part due to the aforementioned aggressive performance strategies, but also has to do with the mixing of the album. While "Blackwater Park" is mixed slightly louder than "Ancestral", both make strategic use of the loud volumes that have come to characterize metal's heaviness and play a role in its distinct timbral properties.

These attributes that are most readily associated with metal appear throughout Wilson's solo career. From the distorted, chugging power chord riffs found in the choruses of "Harmony Korine", the opening track of *Insurgentes* (2008), to the heavy guitar at the beginning of "Home Invasion" from *Hand. Cannot. Erase.*, one does not need to look far to see distorted guitars, aggression, and volume all at play in Wilson's work. The prevalence of these timbral markers throughout Wilson's work demonstrates his influence from metal music.

The spectrograms in Figure 4.2 visualize guitar solos occurring in "Blackwater Park" (top, 7:09-7:21) and "Ancestral" (4:40-4:51) respectively. In addition to being adjusted to a gain level of 10dB, the spectrograms have also been set to a frequency range of 10,000 Hz in order to zoom in and more easily identify the guitar parts and their features. While Figure 4.1 predominantly examined the use of the rhythm section, Figure 4.2 shifts the focus to the use of the distorted lead guitar.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ While these intensities are slightly higher due to the gain setting being at 10dB, the overall intensity of the passages is still evident due to the lack of space and extremely dark signal readings.

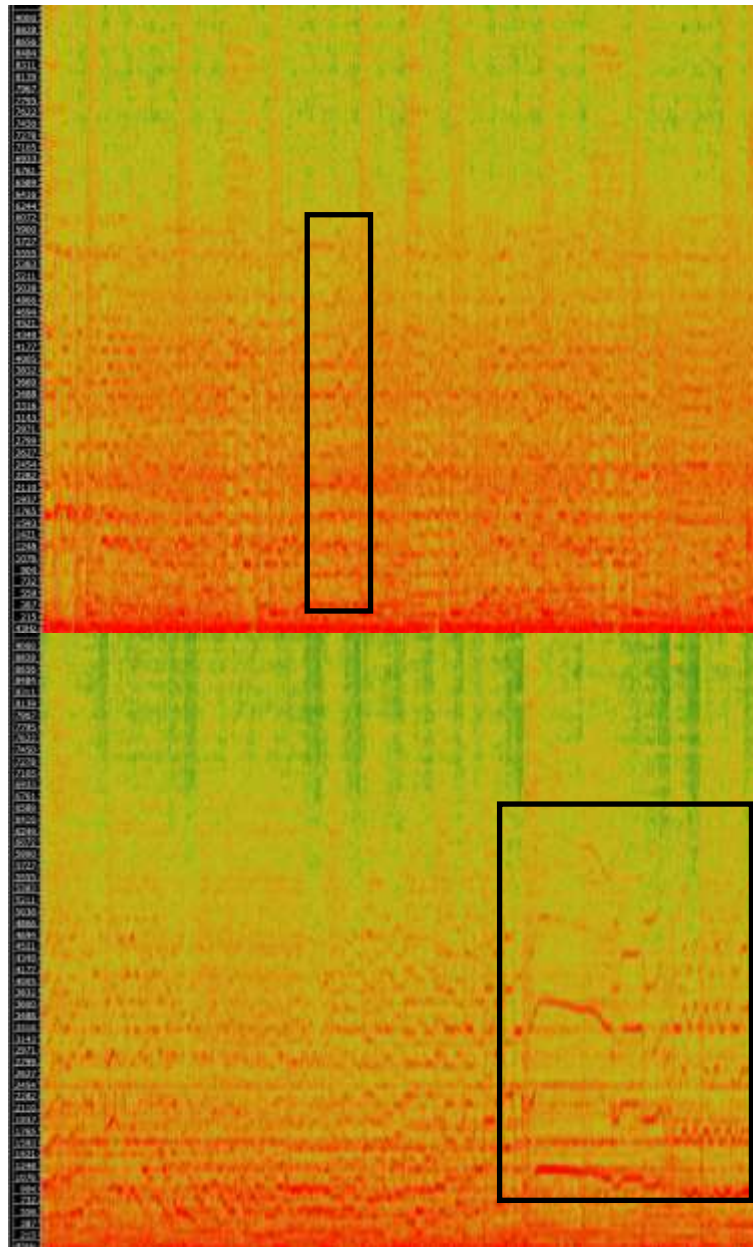


Figure 4.2 Spectrograms for “Blackwater Park” (top, 7:09-7:21) and “Ancestral” (bottom, 4:40-4:51) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain and a frequency range of 10,000 Hz.

All of the features of the metal rhythm section as discussed in Figure 4.1 – such as the high levels of distortion, aggressive performance techniques, and loud volume – are present in this passage of “Blackwater Park” as well, resulting in a spectrogram with high levels of

intensity and extremely little open space. This part of “Ancestral” also has a relatively dense spectrogram, but lacks the same levels of aggression found in “Blackwater Park”. It also features piano and strings in addition to the standard rock rhythm section, adding to the textural depth of the passage. The main focus in both examples, however, is a guitar solo, which can be identified on the spectrograms by the dark red lines moving throughout the spectrum. The rich harmonic overtones of the distorted lead guitar can also be discerned by the same line appearing at various higher frequencies in the spectrum.

Guitar solos are extremely vital in most types of metal, something Walser highlights when he claims that “virtually every heavy metal song contains at least one guitar solo”.³⁵ Guitar distortion is also integral when it comes to guitar solos, and Walser says that the “sustain of the electric guitar” makes it more viable for virtuosic soloing.³⁶ While there are undoubtedly slight differences between the lead guitar timbres in these examples, both are heavily distorted and exemplify the characteristics of metal guitar timbres discussed above. One can also identify in both examples instances of wide vibrato or significant pitch fluctuation that arises from bending the strings, which are highlighted by black outlines.

As with the common metal rhythm section characteristics, guitar solos also frequent Wilson’s work and, in fact, are often central features of some of his songs; *Insurgentes*’ “No Twilight Within the Courts of the Sun”, *The Raven That Refused to Sing*’s “Drive Home” (2013), and *Hand. Cannot. Erase.*’s “Regret #9” are all examples of Wilson songs with lengthy and structurally important guitar solos. Moreover, these solos are performed on the electric guitar with highly a highly distorted timbre, suggesting a direct influence from metal’s treatment of the

³⁵ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 50.

³⁶ Ibid.

lead guitar. As such, the examples presented in both Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 demonstrate some of the means by which Wilson has integrated timbral characteristics of metal into his solo material.

Form

If the form of Boards of Canada's "An Eagle in Your Mind" – as discussed in Chapter 3 – is an exercise in repetition and subtlety, "Blackwater Park" is the opposite: the song meanders through a plethora of distinct and seemingly unrelated segments and features a number of stark contrasts in texture and volume. As the formal diagram in Figure 4.3 reveals, "Blackwater Park" features no fewer than fourteen distinct sections, and the accompanying wave data has a number of dramatic shifts. Indeed, "Blackwater Park" features very little in terms of nuanced textural developments, rather opting for extreme contrasts – a tendency that is present in a great deal of Opeth's music. "Blackwater Park", like "Ancestral", is extremely long, with the former being just over twelve minutes and the latter passing thirteen.

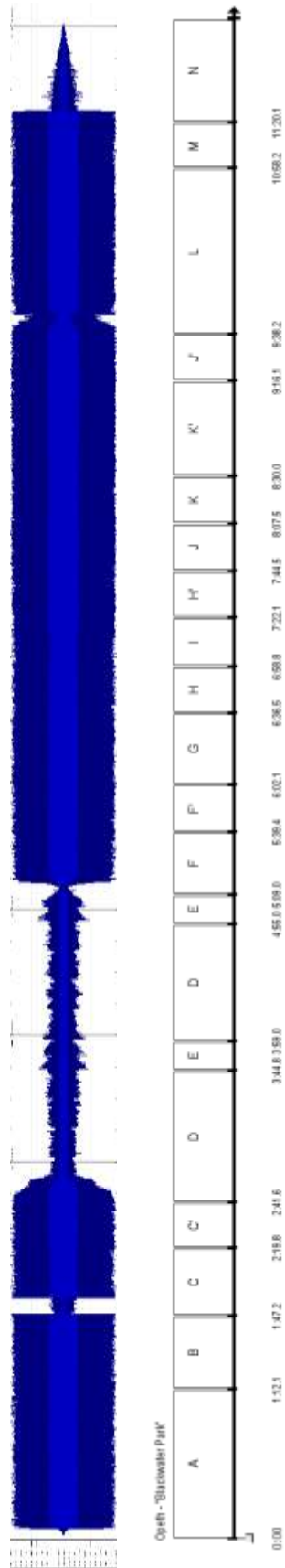


Figure 4.3 "Blackwater Park" Sonic Visualiser wave data (mean channels) and Variations

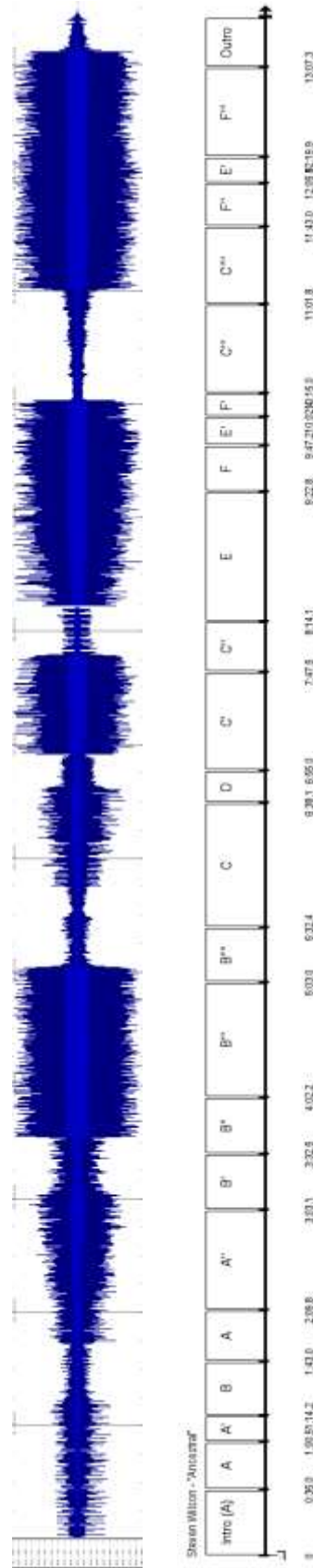


Figure 4.4 "Ancestral" Sonic Visualiser wave data (mean channels) and Variations Audio Timeliner form.

One important consideration when discussing the formal characteristics of metal is the propensity to abandon traditional harmonic progressions as structural features in favour of riffs – short repeated musical phrases – which are almost exclusively played by distorted electric guitar. Dietmar Elflein affirms this, saying that “as a musical style, heavy metal is based around riffs rather than chord progressions” and that “song structures are based on sequences of partly repeated guitar riffs”.³⁷ Looking at death metal specifically, the use of riffs is taken to the extreme: Phillipov stresses the linearity and unpredictability of death metal songs, saying that “death metal takes thrash and heavy metal’s focus on the riff to a new level: rather than a structuring rhythmic device used within an otherwise conventionally recognizable song form, the riff is death metal’s primary unit of songwriting”.³⁸ While the long lengths of the tracks and the inclination towards unusual song structures may point towards an influence from progressive rock’s formal strategies, a key difference here is that – unlike in progressive rock – the sections are rarely developed but rather are employed in a linear fashion. Hegarty and Halliwell, speaking of Opeth, say that “it is when adopting a structure that is easier to follow that Opeth comes closer to the developmental stretching of earlier progressive rock”, suggesting that the more linear, death metal songs like “Blackwater Park” follow a model or framework that is quite different.³⁹ Thus we can see the use of riffs as not only a hallmark of metal’s song structures, but also as the driving force behind death metal’s unique and complex forms.

“Blackwater Park” is no exception to death metal’s tendency towards the seemingly sporadic and abundant implementation of riffs, with the vast majority of the song consisting of a

³⁷ Dietmar Elflein, “Iron and Steel: Forging Heavy Metal’s Song Structures or the Impact of Black Sabbath and Judas Priest on Metal’s Musical Lineage.” In *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies*, eds. Andy R. Brown, Karl Spracklen, Keith Kahn-Harris, and Niall Scott (New York: Routledge, 2016), 38.

³⁸ Phillipov, *Death Metal and Music Criticism*, 82.

³⁹ Hegarty and Halliwell, *Beyond and Before*, 266.

series of heavy guitar riffs (of the song's fourteen distinct sections, only three – D, E, and N – are not dominated by distorted electric guitar riffs). So while sections D, E, and N offer more traditional harmonic material, they are by and large overshadowed by the use of riffs. We see the use of riffs as structuring tools in “Ancestral” as well: looking at the formal diagram presented in Figure 4.4, the various iterations of section E and F – which constitute a large portion of the latter half of the song – are both entirely based on riffs rather than on traditional harmonic movement. The riffs in “Ancestral” also defy standard song structure functions (such as verse or chorus) but rather operate, as in death metal, as a unit of songwriting. Thus the riffs in both “Ancestral” and “Blackwater Park” operate in a similar fashion. Wilson's use of riffs as structural units – especially when coupled with the timbral markers discussed before – makes his influence from metal increasingly evident.

In this chapter distortion has largely been discussed with regards to its timbral properties, but it also has formal implications. Scotto demonstrates, using the “dist-space” analytic tool that charts distortion intensity against duration, that the use of distortion in rock and metal is often used to guide form.⁴⁰ Although Scotto's analyses are restricted to metal songs that have more conventional song structures, these same concepts can be extrapolated to more progressive forms such as those seen in “Blackwater Park” and “Ancestral”. In “Ancestral”, for instance, both sections E and F undergo different textural treatments over the course of the song, but at their climax they are carried by heavy, distorted guitars. This trend towards higher levels of distortion in the second half of the song can be seen as an example of how distortion can create formal direction.

⁴⁰ Scotto, “The Structural Role of Distortion”. Scotto focuses mostly on metal in his paper, but does note that this tool is applicable to any track with distortion, guitar or otherwise.

Further, as mentioned earlier when discussing timbre, both Wilson and Opeth make use of extreme volumes throughout their tracks (often a by-product of distortion), and to a certain extent these are used to guide the forms and demarcate formal sections. As seen in the formal diagram and wave data in Figure 4.3, between sections B and C and E and F, for instance, there is a massive shift in the wave amplitude in “Blackwater Park”; Hegarty and Halliwell note this tendency of Opeth to jump from one extreme to another, specifically mentioning “Blackwater Park”.⁴¹ In “Ancestral”, although there are sections that build up to a climax in a way that is more akin to the formal structure of earlier progressive rock, there are also a number of instances when Wilson bounces between extremes without any development: looking at the wave data and formal diagram in Figure 4.4, the amplitude jumps from very quiet to very loud between sections D and C', C'' and E, and C''' and C'''' with next to no build. This use of volume juxtaposition in “Blackwater Park” and “Ancestral” is yet another way in which their structures are similar.

Of all of the formal comparisons conducted throughout this project, “Blackwater Park” and “Ancestral” are arguably the most similar given their lengthy durations, use of riffs as structuring devices, unpredictable, labyrinthine arrangement of sections, and uses of volume. The similarities here are important with regards to metal’s influence on Wilson: as Elflein says, “song structures are an important part of [metal’s] grammar”,⁴² suggesting that form is tied to the genre’s codes and conventions. Through the comparative analysis of form seen here it is clear that Wilson’s song structures demonstrate a debt to the forms typically seen in metal and, more specifically, death metal.

⁴¹ Ibid., 265-266.

⁴² Elflein, “Iron and Steel”, 47.

This is not to say, however, that there are no differences between the two song's formal strategies. First, while Opeth jump almost frenetically from section to section, often without ever revisiting materials, Wilson typically spends more time developing the sections in his songs. We see this in the fact that, while of comparable lengths, "Blackwater Park" has fourteen distinct sections and Wilson has six (excluding a very short outro). Further, while Opeth seem to deal almost exclusively in textural extremes, Wilson has a tendency to spend more time developing and revisiting his sections. And finally, while Wilson certainly features riffs, more traditional harmonic progressions are employed to a greater degree in "Ancestral" than in "Blackwater Park", which is almost exclusively dominated by riffs. These differences can largely be explained through Wilson's appropriation of formal techniques from other genres, such as progressive rock and electronica as discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 respectively. This notion of fusing together formal strategies from disparate genres is explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

Genre and Influence

The preceding analyses of timbre and form in Opeth's "Blackwater Park" and Wilson's "Ancestral" indicate the extent to which Wilson has subsumed characteristics of metal, something that is particularly evident in his use of "heavy" timbres and riffs. Having examined the similarities between the two, I will now discuss some of the implications of Wilson's influence from Opeth and – more generally – metal.

While the reciprocal influence between electronica and progressive rock that was discussed in Chapter 3 functioned on a broader scale, in this chapter it becomes possible to identify an almost precise moment in time at which influences were crossed over by artists. Indeed, it is almost certainly no coincidence that in the albums following the first collaboration

between Wilson and Opeth on *Blackwater Park* one can increasingly identify characteristics of progressive rock in Opeth's work and more metal in Wilson's music (Åkerfeldt himself suggested at the time that "[Opeth] is turning more into Porcupine Tree and they're turning more into Opeth").⁴³ And while it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve too deeply into the influences of all the artists discussed, it is worth pointing out that Åkerfeldt, like Wilson, was influenced at a young age by progressive rock bands such as King Crimson, saying that it is where he "found his own voice".⁴⁴ This further exemplifies the sprawling, tangled web of influences that go on to shape artistic output and define the musical characteristics of genres.

This phenomenon of crossover between metal and progressive rock was not unique to Opeth and Porcupine Tree. While a number of metal bands were veering into progressive rock territory in the late 1990s and 2000s, many progressive rock bands were likewise beginning to embrace aspects of metal.⁴⁵ According to Brackett, this kind of crossover between genres "points to the complexity and instability of individual genres and identities".⁴⁶ And more generally, while the two genres are certainly distinct, there has always been a relationship between progressive rock and metal: Wagner states that "prog rock and metal have been inextricably linked since their beginnings",⁴⁷ while Hegarty and Halliwell suggest that "[metal] shares many of [progressive rock's] characteristics",⁴⁸ further indicating that the genres do not exist in a

⁴³ Åkerfeldt, "Metal-Rules.com's Interview," para. 25.

⁴⁴ ARTE Concert, "Interview Opeth x Wacken 2015." *YouTube* video, 0:00-0:25. July 31, 2015. Accessed February 5, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uHEqJUijRs>.

⁴⁵ Hegarty and Halliwell, *Beyond and Before*, 272.

⁴⁶ David Brackett, *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music* (California: University of California Press, 2016), 26.

⁴⁷ Wagner, *Mean Deviation*, 9.

⁴⁸ Hegarty and Halliwell, *Beyond and Before*, 260.

vacuum and are not always entirely distinct entities. This demonstrates John Frow's notion that "all texts are strongly shaped by their relation to one or more genres, which they may in turn modify".⁴⁹

This chapter concludes the series of three analyses comparing timbre and form in Wilson's solo output to specific genres. As with the preceding two chapters, this chapter has further demonstrated Jason Toynbee's concept of social authorship,⁵⁰ exploring how Wilson's solo output, when examined closely enough, can be explained as a product of his influences. Having now examined the impact of three different genres on Wilson's music – progressive rock, electronica, and death metal – Chapter 5 will provide a more in-depth analysis of "Ancestral", examine Wilson's use of genre fusion, and address the larger issues surrounding genre and influence that have been unearthed through these analyses.

⁴⁹ John Frow, *Genre*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 1.

⁵⁰ Jason Toynbee, *Creating Problems: Social Authorship, Copyright and the Production of Culture* (Milton Keynes: Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research, 2001).

Chapter 5 – Steven Wilson’s “Ancestral”

While the preceding three chapters explored Steven Wilson’s integration of timbral and formal markers from progressive rock, electronica, and metal into his solo work through comparative analyses between representative tracks of said genres and Wilson’s “Ancestral”, this concluding chapter focuses predominantly on “Ancestral” in order to more closely examine how all of these seemingly disparate influences coalesce in a single track. Although many of the more general contexts and reception surrounding Wilson and his career as a performer, producer, and composer are outlined in Chapter 1, this chapter begins with a more detailed look at the musical contexts surrounding his 2015 album *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* and the track “Ancestral”. Following these contexts, I analyze the timbral and formal features of “Ancestral”, identifying a selection of musical threads and exploring how characteristic elements from different genres are effectively woven together in the song – often simultaneously. The analysis serves to both form a broader perspective by revisiting findings presented in the earlier chapters as well as to introduce detectable influences from other genres that have yet to be discussed. Following this analysis of timbre and form in “Ancestral”, I discuss the broader implications of the study with regards to genre and influence and offer concluding remarks.

Background and Contexts

Hand. Cannot. Erase. was released on February 27th, 2015, and (at the time of this writing) is the latest full-length studio album in Wilson’s solo career; it is the fourth album under Wilson’s own name as a solo artist and one of the most recent entries in a prolific career that has spanned over thirty years. A concept album that was inspired by the true story of Joyce Carol Vincent, a woman whose death went unnoticed for over two years in London, *Hand. Cannot.*

Erase. addresses complex themes such as social isolation and the increasing reliance on technology through a combination of lyrics, music, and accompanying materials, including a fictional blog, Twitter feed, and personal artifacts.¹ While generally labelled as progressive rock, the album integrates aspects from many musical genres to assist in telling its story, making it difficult to accurately classify it as belonging exclusively to a single genre.

To consider the album's reception, *Hand. Cannot. Erase*. was widely acclaimed upon its release. In his review, *AllMusic*'s Thom Jurek gives the album a rating of 4.5 out of 5 stars and says that "it is aesthetically attractive while being emotionally and intellectually resonant; pop music cannot hope to accomplish more".² It is also very highly rated on *Prog Archives*, where it currently ranks as the 54th best progressive rock album and has a rating of 4.29 out of 5 based on fan reviews.³ The album was the most commercially successful of any of Wilson's albums to date, reaching rank 39 on the *Billboard 200*,⁴ and was awarded three awards at 2015's Progressive Music Awards for best album, commercial breakthrough, and best box set – the only album to receive multiple awards that year.⁵ The positive reviews, awards, and commercial success this album has garnered indicate *Hand. Cannot. Erase*.'s significance and success as a contemporary progressive rock record.

¹ Steven Wilson, *Hand. Cannot. Erase*. (Deluxe Edition). Kscope, KSCOPE522, 2015. Wilson's fictional blog and Twitter account can still be accessed at <http://handcannoterase.com/> and <https://twitter.com/handcannoterase> respectively.

² Thom Jurek, "Hand. Cannot. Erase. Review." *AllMusic*. Accessed March 1, 2017. <http://www.allmusic.com/album/hand-cannot-erase-mw0002806391>.

³ Prog Archives. Accessed March 1, 2017. <http://www.progarchives.com>.

⁴ "Steven Wilson Chart History." *Billboard*. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://www.billboard.com/artist/280703/steven-wilson/chart>.

⁵ "Prog Awards 2015." *uDiscover*. September 4, 2015. Accessed March 5, 2016. <http://www.udiscovermusic.com/prog-awards-2015>.

In addition to the album's widespread acclaim and commercial success, the musical features of this album make it an excellent selection for the analysis of Wilson's artistic expression. While Wilson's many bands, side projects, and solo career albums cover vast musical territory, *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* is arguably the album that brings together all these influences in the most cohesive way yet; in Wilson's own words, "in some ways it feels almost like a combination of all my solo work and maybe *all* my work".⁶ Jurek also notes Wilson's proclivity towards genre fusion on the album, claiming that the album is "an immense, imaginative landscape that melds classic album rock, sophisticated '80s pop, metal, prog, and electronica in expertly crafted songs".⁷

While no single song is capable of sufficiently summarizing Wilson's eclectic and wide-ranging musical style, "Ancestral" – track nine of eleven on *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* – is arguably the closest at amalgamating all of these characteristics, prominently displaying features of a number of the influences that have come to define his music. As such, an analysis of "Ancestral" effectively uncovers the ancestry of many of the musical features constructing Wilson's idiolect and makes the song an appropriate choice through which to explore the presence and interactions between some of the different genre characteristics that appear in his career. Through an examination of timbre and form in "Ancestral", in the next sections I demonstrate a handful of these instances of genre fusion and comment on their significance.

⁶ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson at AIR Studios, September 2014 - Part 1" *YouTube* video, 4:46-4:56. October 4, 2014. Accessed October 28, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIHxl5Q3pIA>.

⁷ Jurek, "Hand. Cannot. Erase. Review".

Timbre

Of all the songs discussed throughout the course of this project, “Ancestral” has the most varied instrumentation (listed in Table 5.1). Jurek notes this involved instrumentation in his review of *Hand. Cannot. Erase.*, saying that “the sprawling, multi-sectioned ‘Ancestral’ details a poignant, frightened emotional abyss illustrated in various sections by loops, strings, synths ... stinging guitars, and stacked, layered vocals”.⁸ As I will demonstrate in the analysis that follows, this impressive array of instruments and sounds is a critical factor in understanding the relationship between Wilson’s music and the music of his influences

Table 5.1 Instrumentation in “Ancestral”.

Instrumentation
Lead and Backing Vocals (Male and Female)
Electric Guitar (Clean and Distorted)
Bass (Electric and Programmed)
Drums (Acoustic and Programmed)
Mellotron M4000 Strings
Piano
Fender Rhodes (Electric Piano)
Hammond B3 Organ
Synthesizer
Celesta
Hammered Dulcimer
Flute
Baritone Saxophone
Strings (London Session Orchestra)
Programming and Effects (Drones, Sampling, Loops)

The instrumentation in “Ancestral” augments the core rock band set-up (vocals, guitars, bass, and drums) with a host of additional instruments including mellotron, woodwinds, a string section, hammered dulcimer, and more. As mentioned in previous chapters, according to

⁸ Ibid.

Rebecca Leydon, the use of specific instruments – and consequently timbres – in popular music can function as symbols that draw associations to specific genres or styles,⁹ while Kevin Holm-Hudson also proposes that links to genres of music can be made through uses of instrumental timbres.¹⁰ Since Edward Macan suggests that “perhaps the most readily identifiable characteristic of the progressive rock sound is its persistent use of tone colors drawn from a variety of European art music sources”,¹¹ many of the instruments used in “Ancestral” – such as the strings and woodwinds – instantly establish a connection to classic progressive rock, an idea that was discussed in Chapter 2.

The song also features digital programming and effects in the form of drones, drum loops, and samples, which one can also view as functioning as timbral markers for electronica. In keeping with Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen’s and Anne Danielsen’s understanding of “digital signatures”, the use of these digital technologies create distinctive sonic effects and result in specific, identifiable timbres.¹² The unique timbres and digital signatures that arise from the use of programming and effects further intensify the connection of Wilson’s work on “Ancestral” to electronica, something that was seen in Chapter 3.

Additionally, timbre is also developed through performance strategies and the specific means by which the sonic qualities of the instruments are shaped in the production and

⁹ Rebecca Leydon, "Recombinant Style Topics: The Past and Future of Sampling." In *Sounding out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music* eds. Mark Spicer and John Covach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 209.

¹⁰ Kevin Holm-Hudson, "The Future Is Now ... and Then: Sonic Historiography in Post-1960s Rock." *Genre* 34, no. 3-4 (2001): 256. Accessed November 2, 2016. doi:10.1215/00166928-34-3-4-243.

¹¹ Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31.

¹² Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen and Anne Danielsen. *Digital Signatures: The Impact of Digitization on Popular Music Sound* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

engineering process. The use of distortion, aggressive performances, and high levels of volume and intensity, for instance, are prevalent throughout the course of the track. These ultimately lead to a “heavy” sound, which (as mentioned in Chapter 4) Harris M. Berger and Cornelia Fales refer to as “the defining feature” of metal.¹³

Through instrumentation, performance, and production, the timbres in “Ancestral” can thus be heard in connection to many different genres: the song effectively features the symphonic, instrumental diversity of classic progressive rock, the programming and effects of electronica, and the aggressive performance strategies, distortion, and intensity of metal. A host of other types of music, including industrial, Western art music, jazz fusion, and psychedelia can also be discerned in “Ancestral”. In many cases, the timbral markers for these different genres do not appear independently from each other but rather occur simultaneously. In order to demonstrate the timbral diversity that Wilson employs in this track as well as its role in drawing an association to multiple genres simultaneously, I will present a few brief examples using spectrograms generated from *Sonic Visualiser* to support my claims. Given that the comparative analyses in earlier chapters focused on the sounds themselves in more detail, the examples here will dedicate more time to emphasizing the fusions of genres achieved through uses of timbre.

Figure 5.1 illustrates a passage of “Ancestral” (2:49-3:02) in 7/4 in which timbral characteristics of electronica, industrial, Western art music, and progressive rock are all simultaneously expressed. This section prominently features the London Session Orchestra strings supported by programmed drums and bass, piano, and celesta. The strings occupy a great deal of the sonic space in this passage, and the rich overtones and vibrato of the strings – in

¹³ Harris M. Berger and Cornelia Fales, "'Heaviness' in the Perception of Heavy Metal Guitar Timbres: The Match of Perceptual and Acoustic Features over Time." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures* eds. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 181-182.

particular the violin – are easily identified in the spectrogram by the widely fluctuating lines. The programmed drums, as usual, cut vertically through the frequency range, and the programmed bass, piano, and celesta are recognized as dark red lines in the bottom of the frequency spectrum, mostly evident in the 0-2,000 Hz range.

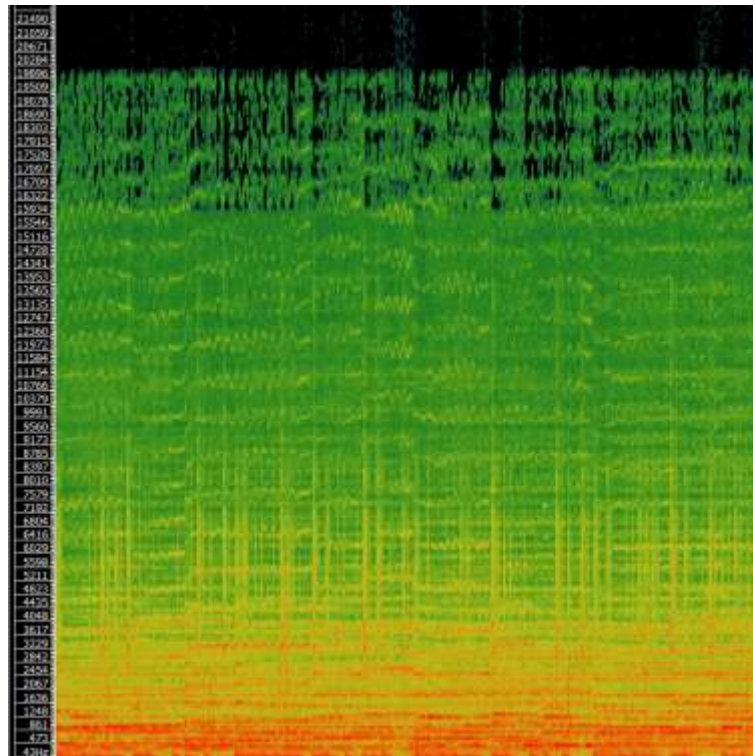


Figure 5.1 Spectrogram for “Ancestral” (2:49-3:02) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain.

The electronica influence is particularly prevalent in this example. As discussed in Chapter 3, the use of programmed drums is a hallmark of electronica.¹⁴ The programmed drums are extremely active in this excerpt, and the hi-hat timbres are similar to the “glitch” sounds that Philip Shelburne claims are a key characteristic of some 90s electronic music.¹⁵ The bass in this

¹⁴ Brøvig-Hanssen and Danielsen, *Digital Signatures*, 3.

¹⁵ Philip Shelburne, "Digital Discipline: Minimalism in House and Techno." In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (London: Continuum, 2006), 325.

passage, like the drums, is also programmed, adding further to the electronica influence. Beyond the more general association to electronica, one can also hear these mechanical drum and bass gestures – combined with the overall rock context of “Ancestral” – as suggesting an influence from industrial music, which *AllMusic* defines as a “fusion of rock and electronic music” with “intentionally mechanical” qualities.¹⁶ Discussing his influences, Wilson says he has “always loved industrial music” and grew up listening to it, specifically hailing Nine Inch Nails’ *The Fragile* (1999) as a masterpiece.¹⁷ Though perhaps lacking the rougher edge here, given the timbral similarities arising from the combination of rock and electronica as well as Wilson’s acknowledgement of the influence, it is not too much of a stretch to say that this particular sonic profile was at least partially inspired by industrial music.

These programmed and overtly digital sounds, however, seem to be in direct juxtaposition to the acoustic richness of the string section, piano, and celesta. The use of a string section in particular creates strong ties to Western art music, and it is noteworthy that Wilson uses a live string section instead of the mellotron that features heavily elsewhere on the track and album, indicating that he is acutely aware of their different timbral qualities and connotations. Given the broader context of this passage within “Ancestral” and the fact that progressive rock’s timbral palette is in part defined through its association to Western art music, this passage can be heard as referencing or owing a debt to features of both types of music.

As such, in Figure 5.1, timbres evocative of electronica, industrial, progressive rock, and Western art music are all subsumed in a single passage. In this sense the listener is faced with

¹⁶ “Industrial Music Genre Overview.” AllMusic. Accessed March 9, 2017. <http://www.allmusic.com/style/industrial-ma0000002658>.

¹⁷ Steven Wilson, “Steven Wilson: In Praise of Nine Inch Nails’ *The Fragile*.” TeamRock, para. 1. December 2, 2016. Accessed March 8, 2017. <http://teamrock.com/feature/2016-12-02/steven-wilson-in-praise-of-nine-inch-nails-the-fragile>.

conflicting genre codes, and while the highly digital, programmed features of this passage may seem at odds with the live, acoustic performances they are supporting, Wilson integrates them seamlessly here. This highlights how the influence of existing musical features and genres can be uniquely combined into something novel and hints at the dynamic, process-like nature of genre that is discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Figures 5.2 and 5.3 present additional examples of genre fusion arising from uses of timbre in “Ancestral”. Specifically, the passages displayed in Figures 5.2 (12:05-12:21) and 5.3 (11:22-11:42) demonstrate Wilson’s simultaneous incorporation of timbral traits from both metal and progressive rock. The instrumentation in the two passages is very similar: both feature heavily distorted electric guitar, bass, and drums. Additionally, mellotron strings provide a backdrop for a heavy riff in a fiendishly complex twenty-one beat phrase in Figure 5.2, while Figure 5.3 features a delay-heavy flute performance over distorted guitar arpeggios in 7/8. While individual instruments can, to some degree, be identified in the spectrograms, in both instances they are largely obstructed by the distorted guitar – a phenomenon Mark Mynett refers to as spectral masking¹⁸ – and the intensity of the drum performance. This results in very dense and saturated spectrograms.

¹⁸ Mark Mynett, "The Distortion Paradox: Analyzing Contemporary Metal Production." In *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies* eds. Andy R. Brown, Karl Spracklen, Keith Kahn-Harris, and Niall Scott (New York: Routledge, 2016), 68-86.

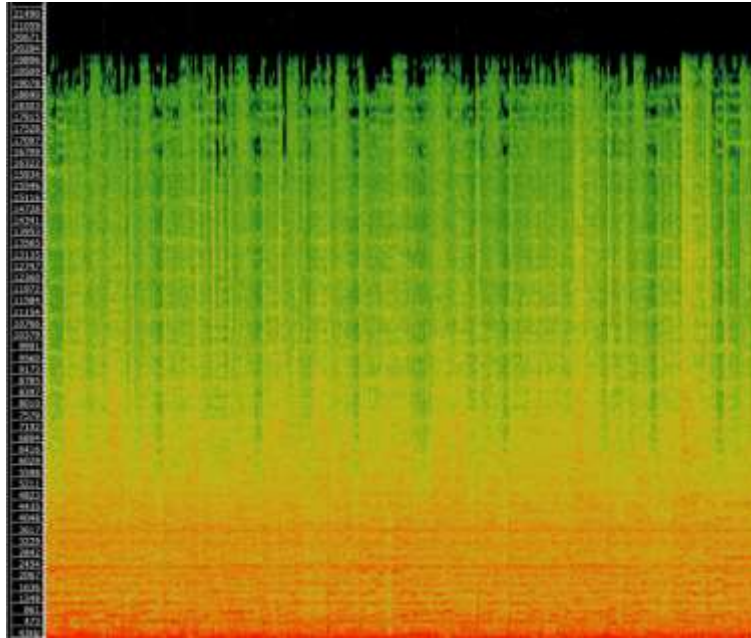


Figure 5.2 Spectrogram for “Ancestral” (12:05-12:21) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain.

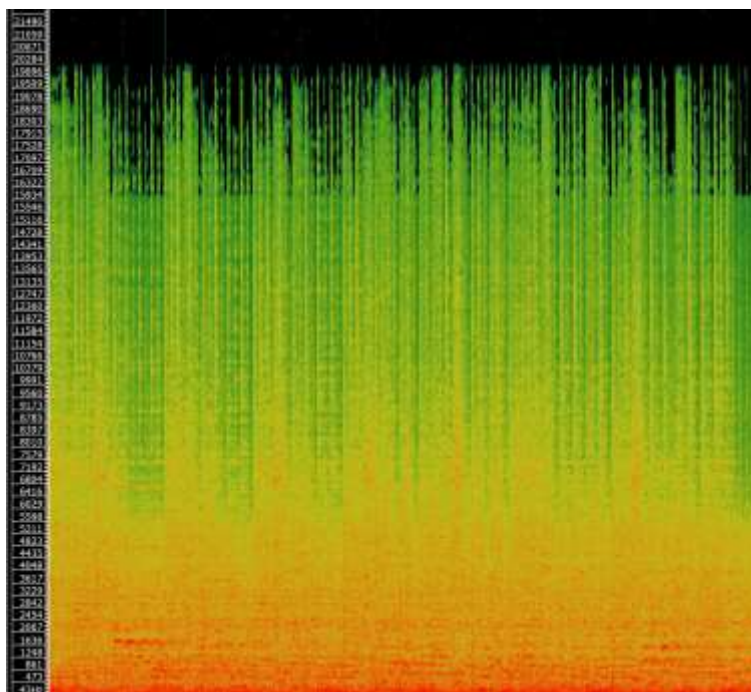


Figure 5.3 Spectrogram for “Ancestral” (11:22-11:42) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to 10dB gain.

Recalling the mellotron's ubiquity in classic progressive rock, as highlighted by Stephen Lambe,¹⁹ and Macan's comment that "the flute played a major role in progressive rock",²⁰ the presence of these instruments in the context of "Ancestral" can be seen as a timbral symbol for progressive rock. The influence of metal in this passage is obvious to detect as well, however: the guitar parts are highly distorted, the drums are played aggressively, and the overall levels of intensity and volume are quite high (as can be seen in the density and dark colours of the spectrogram).²¹ All of these features, as discussed in Chapter 4, are timbral markers of metal.²²

In the passages presented in Figures 5.2 and 5.3, then, through the use of timbre we see aspects of multiple genres – in this case progressive rock and metal – intermingle to create a new sound. The use of flute in a passage dominated by heavy metal timbres is particularly striking as its sonorous sound quality seems in stark contrast to the aggressive and extreme sounds typically valued in metal. As with Figure 5.1, this is yet another juxtaposition that seems to pit conflicting genre values against each other and demonstrates how genre fusion can be achieved via timbral means alone.

Figure 5.4 illustrates another passage from "Ancestral" (10:37-11:01) in which the use of timbre draws associations to multiple genres simultaneously, in particular progressive rock, jazz fusion, and psychedelia. Harmonically speaking, this excerpt is based on the exact same material as Figure 5.3 with the same guitar arpeggios (albeit with a slightly altered time signature: the

¹⁹ Stephen Lambe, *Citizens of Hope and Glory: The Story of Progressive Rock* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011), 63.

²⁰ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 37.

²¹ While these intensities are slightly higher due to the gain setting being at 10dB, the overall intensity of the passages is still evident due to the lack of space and extremely dark signal readings.

²² Refer to Berger and Fales, "'Heaviness' in Metal Guitar Timbres", 185; Mynett, "The Distortion Paradox", 83; and Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. 2nd ed. (Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 44-45 for discussions on distortion, performance strategies, and volume in metal respectively. For a more detailed exploration of these features, please refer to Chapter 4.

pattern here alternates between 7/8 and 9/8, creating the effect of a syncopated 4/4), but it is presented in an extremely different textural environment and at a slower tempo. The instrumentation here consists of flute, electric piano, drums, arpeggiated clean electric guitar, and bass. In contrast to Figure 5.3, the spectrogram is relatively sparse and at a low intensity level. This excerpt features simultaneous improvised performances by Theo Travis on flute and Adam Holzman on a Fender Rhodes electric piano that are both heavily treated by the delay effect and are panned left and right respectively.

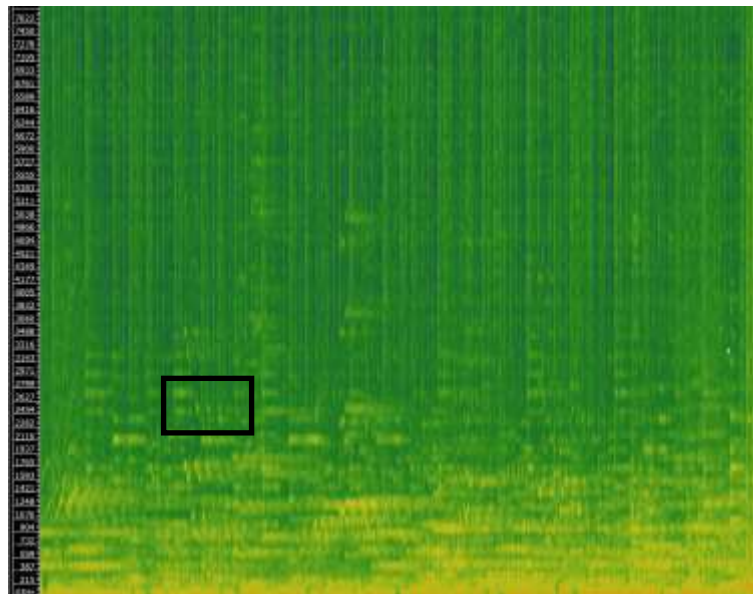


Figure 5.4 Spectrogram for “Ancestral” (10:37-11:01) generated by *Sonic Visualiser* and adjusted to a frequency range of 8,000 Hz.

The flute itself in the context of this piece, as mentioned in the previous example, draws an instant association to progressive rock, but one can also detect strong jazz leanings in the performance here. In addition to being improvised, the flute betrays a debt to jazz through the specific timbres that arise from Travis’ performance gestures: at 10:37 and 10:57, for instance, Travis uses flutter tonguing on the flute, an extended technique that is often associated with

jazz.²³ Additionally, the Fender Rhodes electric piano performed by Holzman in this passage is an instrument closely connected with jazz fusion, being used by some of the genre's most prominent keyboardists, including Herbie Hancock, Return to Forever's Chick Corea, and Weather Report's Joe Zawinul. According to John Covach, the Fender Rhodes was "the electric piano of choice for almost all fusion keyboardists [in the 70s] but an instrument almost completely absent from most progressive rock", and so its presence in this passage effectively furthers this association to jazz fusion.²⁴ It is also worth noting that both Travis and Holzman are practiced jazz performers with decades of experience in the genre. Holzman notably performed with jazz greats like Wayne Shorter and Michel Petrucciani and even acted as musical director for Miles Davis for a time during his fusion phase.²⁵ Some of this jazz experience undeniably creeps into both musicians' playing, leading to specific timbral qualities associated with the genre. Further tangling the relationship between influences, Wilson claims his decision to hire jazz musicians was actually inspired by King Crimson when he was remixing their albums.²⁶

Additionally, this passage's production with its sonically dizzying use of delay and space also suggests an influence from psychedelia. One instance of delay is identified by the black outline in Figure 5.4, showing the same descending flute line appearing multiple times before

²³ Howard T. Weiner, *Early Twentieth-Century Brass Idioms: Art, Jazz, and Other Popular Traditions* ed. Howard T. Weiner. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), xvi. Flutter tonguing in jazz is often discussed in reference to brass instruments, but it is a technique also commonly used by woodwinds.

²⁴ John Covach, "Jazz-Rock? Rock-Jazz? Stylistic Crossover in Late-1970s American Progressive Rock." In *Expression in Pop-rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays* ed. Walter Everett. (New York: Garland, 2000): 99.

²⁵ Adam Holzman, "Adam Holzman: Optimistic Evocations." Interview by Anil Prasad. Innerviews, para. 1. 2016. Accessed March 9, 2017. <http://www.innerviews.org/inner/holzman.html>.

²⁶ Steven Wilson, "Steven Wilson – Grace for Drowning – 2cd Digibook Edition (2cd Digibook)". Burning Shed, para. 3. Accessed March 8, 2016. <https://www.burningshed.com/store/stevenwilson/product/175/3174/country/106/>. King Crimson occasionally brought in jazz musicians to guest on their albums, something especially prevalent on their album *Lizard* (1970).

fading away. The panning of the flute to the left speaker and electric piano to the right speaker intensifies this sonic manipulation and use of space. Sonic experimentation and the resulting timbres have always been a feature that is closely associated with psychedelia: as Macan points out, “the exploitation of feedback, the use of echo machines and other effects devices that appeared during the late 1960s, and the utilization of then novel tape effects such as multitracking and splicing” were all crucial musical features of psychedelia,²⁷ and Wilson’s production here can be seen as both leaning on and continuing this tradition. Psychedelia has played a key role in Wilson’s music since his career began, as exemplified on albums like Porcupine Tree’s *The Sky Moves Sideways* (1995), and so it is no surprise that the sonic experimentation so entwined with the genre enters into “Ancestral” as well.

As such, characteristics of progressive rock, jazz fusion, and psychedelia can be heard as coming together in the excerpt of “Ancestral” shown in Figure 5.4, again pointing towards genre fusion in Wilson’s music through the use of timbre. The fact that this flute solo takes place over the same harmonic material as seen in Figure 5.3 but connotes different genres due to an utterly different timbral environment additionally reinforces the importance of timbre in determining genre.

This section has shown that throughout the course of a single track we hear a rich timbral palette and the defining timbral features from several different genres: the diverse instrumentation of classic progressive rock with the use of instruments such as the flute, strings, and mellotron, the digital signatures and the programming and effects from electronica, and the aggressive, “heavy” sounds and extreme distortion of metal. One can additionally identify markers from many other types of music including industrial, Western art music, jazz fusion, and

²⁷ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 18.

psychedelia through timbre alone. What is arguably more interesting than their presence, though, is that through the examples presented here it also becomes possible to identify moments at which these timbral markers of different genres intersect in novel ways. The timbral analyses presented throughout this study reveal some of the means by which Wilson's approach to timbre allows him to successfully fuse together characteristics of different influences and genres in an effective and meaningful manner, and it also reinforces timbre's significance in popular music genre determination.

Form

Although the form of "Ancestral" has been discussed in relation to other tracks in the preceding chapters, it has yet to receive a thorough analysis itself. In this section I go into more detail about the song's formal characteristics, in particular drawing attention to moments in which they evoke specific genres.

The structure of "Ancestral", which can be seen in the formal diagram in Figure 5.5, is quite complex and resists classification as any of common forms in popular music outlined by Covach.²⁸ It boasts a hefty running time of over thirteen minutes, something that is not a consequence of simply expanding a standard song form but rather results from integrating and developing several distinct sections in a single track. On a larger scale, "Ancestral" is most effectively considered as consisting of two main section groups which are further subdivided into smaller units, something that can be visualized in Figure 5.5. Drawing from the system of

²⁸ John Covach, "Form in Rock Music: A Primer." In *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis* ed. Deborah J. Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 65-76.

classification proposed by Brad Osborn,²⁹ these two section groups are labelled I (0:00-5:32) and II (5:33-13:33) respectively. The individual sections are named as consecutive letters, with the prime symbol (') denoting what Osborn calls “distinct presentations of shared thematic material”.³⁰ In the case of “Ancestral”, this typically refers to the same harmonic material being applied in different textural contexts or being used for instrument solos (such as the flute solos in A' and C''' and the guitar solo in B''').

²⁹ Brad Osborn, "Understanding Through-Composition in Post-Rock, Math-Metal, and Other Post-Millennial Rock Genres." *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 3 (October 2011): para. 4-5. Accessed February 14, 2016. <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.osborn.php>.

³⁰ Ibid., para. 5.

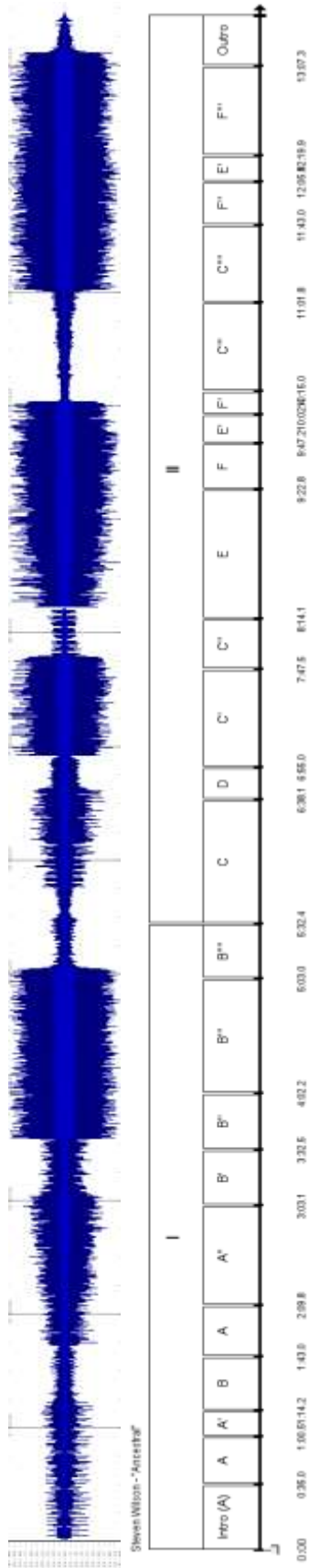


Figure 5.5 “Ancestral” Sonic Visualiser wave data (mean channels) and *Variations Audio Timeliner* form.

This separation of the song into two main section groups is justified by a number of formal features. Although there are a few individual musical parts that appear in both section groups I and II (the bassline from the second iteration of A resurfaces in C, for instance), none of the primary harmonic or melodic material from section group I is recapitulated in section group II. Additionally, section group I features vocals while section group II is entirely instrumental. The individual formal units are also demarcated using a number of strategies, such as rhythm, harmony, lyrics, and texture, and the resulting organization reveals the complex and sprawling form visualized in Figure 5.5.

While the formal diagram proves useful for a more general breakdown of the form, some of its subtleties are only apparent when examining the wave data for the song both independently and in conjunction with the formal diagram, as presented in Figure 5.5. The wave data for this song reveals a great deal of fluctuation within individual song sections, such as in section A'' and C, indicating real-time development of these sections. These are examples of Mark Spicer's "accumulative form", in which some type of development occurs over the course of a section.³¹ In other instances, such as between sections D and C', changes from one part of the form to another are concurrent with an extreme shifts in wave amplitude. These changes in volume – which result largely from performance strategies and terraced instrumentation – are another indication of how Wilson uses strategies other than harmony and duration to construct an involved form.

Having provided an overview of some of the formal strategies at play in "Ancestral", I will now briefly discuss it in relation to the three main genres discussed in this project: progressive rock, electronica, and metal. This will largely entail revisiting ideas about the

³¹ Mark Spicer, "(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music." *Twentieth-Century Music* 1, no. 1 (2004): 29-64. Accessed March 4, 2016. doi: 10.1017/s1478572204000052.

relationships between form and genre that were broached in the previous three chapters, but provides an opportunity to examine them all intersecting.

As Wilson's solo career music is often labelled progressive rock, it comes as no great surprise that a great many of progressive rock's formal characteristics are on display in "Ancestral". As Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell suggest, "the extension of rock songs into larger pieces" and "the linking of these pieces into song suites and concept albums" is characteristic of progressive rock,³² and this is apparent both in the length of "Ancestral" and the fact that it belongs to a concept album, *Hand. Cannot. Erase*. The song also satisfies many of the formal descriptions of progressive rock given by Macan:³³ as seen in Figure 5.5, the song features juxtapositions between loud and quiet sections, builds to climaxes throughout the piece, and revisits and develops sections of music. All of these formal features quite closely tie "Ancestral" in to the progressive rock tradition.

While less overt than its relationship to progressive rock, the form of "Ancestral" does additionally hint at an influence from electronica. This is particularly noticeable in Wilson's use of shifting textures and accumulative form, in which he continually layers in additional instruments. Ben Ramsay says that this process of adding instruments is prevalent in electronica,³⁴ and Ragnhild Torvanger Solberg likewise points to the importance of build-ups in

³² Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell. *Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock since the 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 19.

³³ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 43-45.

³⁴ Ben Ramsay, "Analysis of Foil by Autechre (from Amber (1994))." In *Expanding the Horizon of Electroacoustic Music Analysis* eds. Simon Emmerson and Leigh Landy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 215, 226.

electronic music,³⁵ connecting these formal strategies to the genre of electronica. In “Ancestral” this technique is most evident in the different variations of the A section in which a number of different instruments are gradually introduced one after the other. These changes can be identified in the wave data in Figure 5.5 and are particularly easy to visualize in section A” and C through the growing wave amplitude.

Finally, “Ancestral” also demonstrates a close relationship to structures common to metal, and death metal in particular. This is primarily accomplished through the use of riffs as building blocks and the use of less predictable, more linear song structures; Michelle Phillipov identifies the riff as “death metal’s primary unity of songwriting” and stresses that death metal songs frequently avoid standard song forms.³⁶ The use of riffs can be seen heavily in “Ancestral” in all iterations of section E and F, and while there is a great deal of development, the more linear nature of the form is also apparent (it is even broken down into two non-repeating section groups, labelled I and II).

Similar to the preceding section discussing timbre, here one can see Wilson’s use of formal features from a wide variety of genres present in one composition: there is the large-scale structure and the sectional developments reminiscent of progressive rock, the consecutive layering of instruments and subtle shifts in textures common in electronica build-ups, and the use of riffs as structuring devices as heard in metal. Despite some of these formal strategies competing with one another – such as the sectional development common in progressive rock and the more linear nature of death metal songs, or the gradual building of electronica textures

³⁵ Ragnhild Torvanger Solberg, ““Waiting for the Bass to Drop”: Correlations Between Intense Emotional Experiences and Production Techniques in Build-up and Drop Sections of Electronic Dance Music.” *Dancecult* 6, no. 1 (2014): 61-82. Accessed March 1, 2017. doi:10.12801/1947-5403.2014.06.01.04.

³⁶ Michelle Phillipov, *Death Metal and Music Criticism: Analysis at the Limits* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 82.

and metal's inclination toward extreme and sudden shifts – it is still possible to see how Wilson has chosen to include key aspects of these different techniques into “Ancestral”. Thus, while not being entirely faithful to any of the formal tendencies for each of the genres discussed, by blending together these different approaches from different genres Wilson manages to create a form that is – at least to some degree – simultaneously evocative of all of them while still being unique. This once again demonstrates how novel musical features arise from the combination influences an artist chooses to incorporate into their work, and the formal characteristics explored throughout this study also suggest the extent to which the features of form can be closely associated with genre.

Genre and Influence

Having now analyzed some of Wilson's musical influences through a series of comparative analyses of timbre and form and through an in-depth analysis of the genre markers in “Ancestral”, I will spend some time discussing the implications of these analyses. In particular, the findings throughout this project address a number of the different properties of genre and how it can be developed or shaped through influences. While I have briefly touched on these in the preceding chapters, at this point I will comment on them in more detail.

In addition to covering a timespan of over thirty years, the three main tracks that have been analyzed in this project and compared to Wilson's solo material each offer a unique angle on the relationship between genre and influence: King Crimson's “The Court of the Crimson King” (1969) offers insight into an artist's influence from an earlier development in music, Boards of Canada's “An Eagle in Your Mind” (1998) allows for an understanding of how an artist can be influenced by contemporaries operating in other genres, and Opeth's “Blackwater Park” (2001) is a case that demonstrates the musical crossover that can result from a direct

collaboration between two artists. Yet while each is a different example of how influence can take shape, in all three cases the analyses uncover some of the specific timbral and formal ways in which those influences affected Wilson's own music – in fact, in “Ancestral”, all can be seen in a single track.

If one of progressive rock's defining characteristics, as explored in the opening chapter, is the use of genre fusion, then Wilson's solo music can be seen as fitting squarely in that tradition: as this project has demonstrated, Wilson's music incorporates attributes from numerous, wide-ranging genres. The fact that his music does not remain entirely couched in the classic progressive rock sound should not detract from the claim that he should be regarded as belonging to the progressive rock lineage; if anything, his inclusion of more modern musical developments such as electronica and metal is more in line with the progressive spirit and forward-thinking nature of the original progressive rock bands.

Wilson's integration of contemporary influences into his own brand of progressive rock also emphasizes claims that musical genres are not static, rigid categories but are susceptible to change. David Brackett, for instance, suggests that genre conventions are “constantly being modified by each new text that participates in the genre”³⁷ and that generic crossover “points to the complexity and instability of individual genres and identities”,³⁸ and this is clearly seen in Wilson's music: though belonging in the domain of progressive rock, it is in many ways quite different than the music of his predecessors in the 1960s and 1970s. By not relying on one, established style of music but instead combining aspects of different influences across multiple

³⁷ David Brackett, "Popular Music Genres: Aesthetics, Commerce and Identity." In *The SAGE Handbook of Popular Music* eds. Andy Bennett and Steve Waksman (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), 190.

³⁸ David Brackett, *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music* (California: University of California Press, 2016), 26.

genres, Wilson's music demonstrates both changing conventions and genre instability. And considering John Frow's claim that "all texts are strongly shaped by their relation to one or more genres, which they may in turn modify",³⁹ it also becomes possible to see how influential songs can ultimately change the conventions of the genres they are associated with. Although these principles are particularly evident in the work of a progressive rock artist like Wilson whose music exemplifies genre fusion, it is also apparent that over the years such changes take place in any genre – albeit possibly to a less noticeable and radical extent – and can ultimately lead to the creation of new genres altogether.

At this point I will return again to Jason Toynbee's concept of social authorship, which he uses to describe how new music is created out of new configurations of pre-existing material.⁴⁰ Having looked at how the timbral and formal features of several different genres inform Wilson's solo career material, it is possible to recognize how each of the components of his music can be identified as coming from pre-existing musical materials. The analysis additionally reinforces Leonard B. Meyer's claim that influence is a result of choice and is used to open up new artistic possibilities;⁴¹ despite being able to trace the origins of musical elements in Wilson's work to pre-existing songs and genres, the influences he chooses to draw from and the unique means by which he combines them ultimately leads to novel music. The analyses of timbre and form conducted in this project serve to demonstrate this significant role that musical influence has in shaping an artist's output and the implications that this has for genre.

³⁹ John Frow, *Genre*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 1.

⁴⁰ Jason Toynbee, *Creating Problems: Social Authorship, Copyright and the Production of Culture*. (Milton Keynes: Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research, 2001).

⁴¹ Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 143.

Conclusion

Over the course of this project I have explored some of the means by which contemporary progressive rock artist Steven Wilson's key influences have informed his solo career music in order to arrive at conclusions regarding the relationship between genre and influence. Through detailed analyses of timbre and form in Wilson's music and the music of his influences, I have been able to, in a tangible way, demonstrate sonic and structural connections between artists and explore how these features have all been effectively integrated into Wilson's work. Additionally, my analysis reinforces the notion that timbre and form play a key role in determining popular music genres. Through these analyses I have also shown that musical genres are dynamic and are continually shaped and defined by artists' influences, in particular exploring how Wilson's unique style of progressive rock has been moulded by a number of the different influences he has chosen to incorporate into his music. These findings ultimately allow for a deeper understanding of the process of musical influence.

While progressive rock, electronica, and metal can largely account for Wilson's formal and timbral sound world – particularly on *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* and “Ancestral” – I will reiterate that the point of this study is not to suggest that Wilson's solo work is exclusively constructed of features drawn from these genres; one could also easily identify musical features associated with other types of music such as pop and grunge in his work. The point, then, is not to reconstruct the entirety of his music through interrogating each individual influence but rather to identify a few of these key contributors and explore the means by which they come together and inform Wilson's sound. In doing so, it has additionally been possible to determine some of the timbral and formal strategies that Wilson employs to achieve genre fusion.

For the sake of scope this analysis has largely been restricted to looking at timbre and form, but an in-depth analysis of other musical features such as rhythm or harmony would likely yield equally rewarding results with regards to genre and influence. It is also important to keep in mind that this study has limited itself to the formal and technical rules of genre, as defined by Franco Fabbri.¹ Musical genres, however, consist of much more than the music itself: Fabbri himself outlines many other rules for genres, including semiotic, behavioural, social and ideological, and economic and juridical rules.² Although the range of this study necessitated bracketing out these other facets of genre, one can easily imagine the potential benefits of future research expanding the findings presented here to these other dimensions of musical genre – such as stage gestures and aesthetics – and testing the idea of Toynbee’s social authorship on a larger scale that extends beyond just the music itself.³

Although attempting to untangle every one of the influences that have gone into informing a particular artist’s music would be a futile endeavour, this project ultimately demonstrates that isolating and analyzing a handful of those strands can be fruitful and rewarding. This project aids in extending the progressive rock discourse into the 21st century and hopefully opens up possibilities for future research in the area of genre and influence.

¹ Franco Fabbri, "A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications." In *Popular Music Perspectives* eds. David Horn and Philip Tagg (Gothenburg and Exeter: IASPM, 1982), 52.

² Ibid.

³ Jason Toynbee, *Creating Problems: Social Authorship, Copyright and the Production of Culture*. (Milton Keynes: Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research, 2001).

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