# EDITORIAL

It is fitting that this issue of *Organised Sound* should open with a paper by Agostino di Scipio, a composer who has consistently explored in his practice (among other things) an interpretation of autopoiesis – the term Maturana and Varela (1973) devised to describe 'living systems' – in which the relationship between environments, and organisms and resources within those environments, is characterised by structural coupling. Di Scipio coined the term *Audible Ecosystemics* to refer to one such series of works, and, whether consciously or not, this must have resonated with my sometime colleague John Bowers's description of the relationship between improvising musicians and their performance environments – assemblages of physical objects, microphones, computers and software – in such a manner as to provoke my contributions to conferences in Belfast (Sonorities 2006) and Leicester (EMS 2007) and subsequent publications (e.g. Waters 2007) which were to result in the invitation to edit this issue of the journal.

My intention in writing about 'performance ecosystems' was not to arbitrarily import models from observations of biological systems into musicking, however, but to suggest that, following Lakoff and Johnson (particularly their *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 1999) and others, human behaviours are so fundamentally informed by our early bodily and sensory engagements with our environments that all our 'higher-level' functioning – language and other abstractions – are already imbued with or constructed from such models. In particular, I was taken by the notion that musicking might be such a key human activity precisely because it engages fully our capacities for high-level abstraction while simultaneously maintaining access to more directly connected sensory mechanisms.

Peter Nelson's consideration of rhythm 'as a mechanism for binding together agencies at moments of mutual time perception' draws on Bachelard and Bateson in its insistence on the power of music's social and relational dynamics. Nelson's is one of several articles that foreground the social and political – participation, attention, action. This becomes more explicit in Martin Dixon's contribution, a passionate critique of the idea that environmental science, biology and the science of the ecosystem might follow fractals, Markov chains and set theory merely as suggestive

metaphors for compositional processes. What might an art look like, he asks, which does not evade our responsibilities to the planet? Drawing on Heidegger he finds an interpretation of acousmatic music as occupying the air in order to further *dwelling*.

Di Scipio is insistent that 'we *construct* a nature; we do not replicate or model a segment of extant nature', and that the 'real world' is 'one's own construction' – incorporating knowledge of and sharing of others' constructions of the world. In this respect the distance between his approach and Dixon's insistence on the enduring significance of myth is not as great as might first appear.

Tom Davis also takes autopoiesis as a one of his starting points for his discussion of collective subjectivities (after Guattari) and Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, seeing connections between the latter's position that 'the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real' (Bourriaud 2002: 13), and the interpenetrations of human, technological and environmental agency suggested in performance ecosystems.

James Andean (following Luke Windsor) recasts the three agents of performance ecosystems subtly as organism, environment and stimulus in a paper which draws on ecological psychology in general, and the work of James Gibson in particular, in a consideration of various electroacoustic concert paradigms. To what extent, asks Andean, is Gibson's notion that 'perception is seen as a continuous and mutual relationship between organism and environment' productive to our understanding of what that context affords?

Part of my initial purpose in writing about Performance Ecosystems was to counter a tendency to present technologised musicking as inevitably innovative, and as affording 'radical' or unheard-of possibilities, in the face of considerable evidence that this was not, or at least not often, the case. Indeed, I hoped that by making explicit the extent to which all three agents in the system (performer, instrument, environment) bear or embody histories it might become possible to evaluate more critically the claims made with regard to digital technologies, acknowledging continuities as well as identifying breaks. Owen Green has taken up this challenge, and his contribution uses the notions of agility and playfulness

to explore both continuities and breaks with considerable precision.

Arne Eigenfeldt counterposes his view of real-time composition as a performance ecosystem conceived from the perspective of a composer motivated by performing with an example I had presented of a system designed by a performer motivated by a need for composing. In so doing, he draws attention to the extent to which institutional histories and practices may hinder or prevent a healing of what I characterised as a temporary historical rift in musicking between the activities of composing and performing. His paper also signals a shift in editorial focus within the second half of this issue of *Organised Sound* towards writing which draws on specific instances of practice – usually the authors' own. Eigenfeldt's concerns – technical and aesthetic – are increasingly with sonic ecosystems as described by McCormack and Bown.

Dan Overholt et al. present a series of recently developed actuated musical instruments which explore a number of possible hybridities between virtual and physical interaction, with the potential for complex interrelationships of agency in performance. The authors' establishment of an 'Actuated Musical Instrument Guild' signals both the open and ongoing nature of their project and their awareness of the historical baggage involved in any form of 'lutherie'.

Michael Gurevich and Cavan Fyans explore the performer–instrument relationship in a series of studies in which performer observations are compared with those of test groups of informed participant observers. The authors take the view that digital technologies have indeed resulted in new ecologies of performance, and that the design of digital musical instruments should embrace the malleability and dynamism of digital systems.

The body has been the focus of much research into instrument–performer relations, nowhere more pertinently that in a recent issue of *Contemporary Music Review*, in which Franziska Schroeder (2006) marshalls an impressive array of responses under the title *Bodily Instruments and Instrumental Bodies*. As Kim and Seifert (2006: 147) write in their contribution to that journal, 'integrating the physical body through musical interfaces into algorithmic sound development does not necessarily imply embodiment'; indeed, this can have the 'paradoxical effect of disembodiment of the physical body'. In his contribution to this issue of *Organised Sound*,

Nicholas Brown seeks to make a reciprocal point: that the *unaided* human voice in an electroacoustic performance context may indeed 'embody' electronically mediated sounds. Brown uses his recent installation-performance *As I Now Have Memoyre* as an instance of a paradigm which escapes the conventional electroacoustic concert model, and asserts the crucial function of proximity between performers and witnesses (audience members) in affording reciprocities between performers, 'instruments' and environments.

The final two articles in this issue are the most personal: practitioners focusing on instances of their own practice. Jean Penny deploys narrative account and journal excerpt in a performer's exploration of issues relating to voice which revisit some notions from Brown's paper, and of *Maskenfreiheit*: the perceived freedoms afforded by performance behind a mask, and the contiguities of this sense with that of performing with (behind) electronics. Composer Phivos-Angelos Kollias presents his algorithmic work *Ephemeron* as an instance of a self-organising system, returning us to the concept of autopoiesis with which the issue opened.

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