

The First Law Suite

Dr. Stace Constantinou



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Figure 1. (cover)
The E.P Artwork for The
First Law Suite.

Title

The research project *First Law Suite* (5-track E.P.) establishes a discourse about the nature of electronic music and its relationship to past artistic styles, methods and processes. As such the new works are a practice-led sonic speculations on the future of electronic music making.

This practice-led research generates a set of five musical pieces, ranging in length from 1- to 7-minutes in duration. They were presented in the public domain through a radio interview and premier performance as well as via a community based online music hub.

Submission Details

Researcher	Dr. Stace Constantinou
Collaborators	None
Title	The First Law Suite
Output Type	Composition
Output Component(s)	Sonic works
Dates	2017
Dissemination	Music track, exhibition
ORCID	https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8053-4699
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Additional Information

The First Law Suite is a body of five electronic music pieces juxtaposing musical epochs and linked by the thematic of Science Fiction writing. The research takes two contrasting and potentially culturally adversarial areas of musical practice the baroque and electronic dance music, and combines them with the futuristic and sometimes menacing robot short stories and novels by the science fiction writer Isaac Asimov.

Typically, participatory electronic music events take place inside a nightclub at the weekend, whereby the workforce leave their workaday regimen behind, losing themselves in the shared experience of a collective dance floor beat. The effect of this music could be interpreted as military-machine-like sound the compellingly repetitive robotic beat comparable to the sound of industrial work. The musical counterforce deployed in *The First Law Suite* is the world of classical dance music of the baroque musical forms epitomised by the Prelude, Courante, Allemande, and the Sarabande, the then popular precursors to the four-to-the-floor repetitions of contemporary electronic music.

In this series of pieces, the sonic textures of contemporary dance music lose the machine-beat, take influences from classical dance and music forms, all the while using modern electronic music production techniques. In the work two oppositional worlds co-exist, *The First Law Suite* incorporating forms of music and dance from today and yesteryear combined with elements inspired by Asimov's robotic futures to create atmospheric electronic sonic compositions.

Research Aims

To explore the possibilities in musical composition by combining contemporary electronic musical style with features of past forms of music.

Objectives

- * To produce music artefacts that become an engaging point for provoking thought about contemporary styles and culture
- * To create works that might speculate on the future of electronic music making.
- * To create a 5-track E.P. at the intersection of several de-contextualised musical styles

Research Context

A survey and interviews were held with a group of contemporary electronic music producers from within the Techno and Electronic Music community, producers who are from the various club scenes in London, the UK, Europe and the US, which has a history of radical and hedonistic culture. What emerged was a contradiction; on the one-hand a desire for freedom from the oppressive cultural milieu, whilst on the other a close adherence to a self-imposed highly rigid musical monism of machine-beat rendered using the common time of 4/4. This genre of music appeared to have remained relatively static over a long period and was not exploring or experimenting with new forms.

The research then aims to bridge the gap between contemporary electronic music production and its traditions used in for example Techno, and explores the possibility of fusing this with something new, in a process of adding or taking away from the original. By removing the ever-present machine-beat, new textural nuances are able to emerge more prominently.

Means to engage with audiences to engender discussion and reflection on this research were developed to allow for continuing and progressively refined interpretations. This was via open online encounters, via a respected community based radio station and music platforms as a means of provoking discussion, about the possibility of countering the dominance of a perceived formation of musical adherences, collective values of the past, present and a potential future of electronic music.

Research Methods

A literature review and a review of practices included interviews with electronic music producers and engaging with a community of London-based, but also globally connected performers and artists.

A music-led approach to create works that juxtapose different historical musical styles and to test their reception

Five musical pieces were produced that comprise the extended play suite:

1. Pre-Topia (2-minutes)
2. Unresolved Conflict (5-minutes)
3. Can't Scap(E)=(nc)2 My Head (3-minutes)
4. Glowverse (7-minutes)
5. Input Complex (2-minutes)

The music was premiered on a London-Based Radio show curated by Loose Lips and is permanently featured on their online Soundcloud and Youtube premier sites (Loose Lips, 2017). In addition to the above *The First Law Suite* is now permanently available on the arts community focused music site Bandcamp (Constantinou, 2017). Both sites offer interpretative material accompanying the musical artefact.

The extended play suite has also been produced as a compact disc, to encourage interaction with those audiences who continue to derive value in physical musical artefacts. Thus, my emphasis in the process of creating iterations of the work is about publishing and acting instead of arriving at one final design solution.



Figure 2.
Stace Constantinou with Frederick
(Freddie) Sugden outside the New
River Studios, the Community Arts
and Radio Station in East London.

Dissemination

An appearance as a guest speaker on London-based Loose Lips Radio Show, enable me to present via broadcast radio to a wide audience who engage with electronic music. This included presenting on the research work so contextualising its content during the show, referring to key artists such as Clara Rockmore. The Loose Lips radio interview afforded me the opportunity to introduce the histories, theories and practices of electronic music, providing music performed by an early practitioner of said medium Rockmore (Ziegler, T., and Gross, J., 2000, p.16) performing the first space-controlled musical instrument the Theremin, named after Leon Theremin the inventor (Moog, B., cited in Ziegler, T., and Gross, J., 2000, p.19) through to contemporary electronic music producers such as Mani Dee and Shelley Parker (Constantinou, 2019). Through the content provided, the radio interview offered the audience a potential first glimpse of the historical roots and contemporary theorizing of the terms electronic, music technology, music in a wider cultural milieu, identified in relation to electronic music practice.

Before the Loose Lips radio show, I had conducted seven interviews with contemporary electronic producers. The interviews formed the empirical basis for a book chapter about producing music for Routledge. At the time of the radio interview, however, the full findings of these seven interviews had not been analysed and critically evaluated in full, so *The First Law Suite* represents an immediate, musical response to this data.

The First Law Suite is now receiving international attention outside of the electronic music scene, as it has been included as part of the soundtrack for a three channel video, by the artist Soni Kum in her film 'Morning Dew - the stigma of being "brainwashed"' (60min). Morning Dew was performed in an exhibition from 5th November to 10th November. See the bilingual online art magazine: https://www.art-it.asia/en/top_e/admin_expht_e/212255

- * Soni Kum is an interdisciplinary artist who was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan as a third generation Korean. www.sonikum.com
- * The film was funded by Socially Engaged Art Support Grant, the Kawamura Arts and Cultural Foundation: <http://www.kacf.jp/support.html>
- * Name of Exhibition Space: Buoy: <http://buoy.or.jp>
Address: 49-11 Senjunakacho, Adachi-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Date: 5-10 November 2020



Figure 3.
The E.P Artwork for
The First Law Suite.

Insights

1. An openness in the electronic music community to reflect, putting their practice into a historic context;
2. The ways in which new electronic music might be produced whilst still, no matter how marginal, be considered a part of the scene;
3. Methods on how to engage with a specific audiences of practitioners and their wider community of electronic music fans;
4. The problematizing of the loosely defined genre, that nevertheless retains as a part of its key features a rigid adherence to a machine-beat common time, whilst exploring the possibility of using the atmospheric sonic world, another key feature of the electronic music scene as a means to escape this adherence.

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