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BOOKS

Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore, eds, *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014).

The category of the *experimental* in music has two developed histories. The first and most familiar, at least to English-speaking musicians and musicologists, is used to group together a range of composers and associated musicians, predominantly from the US or UK, with John Cage and other members of the 'New York School' as central figures, preceded by earlier composers such as Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Harry Partch. Their work is said to form a category of 'experimental music', distinct from an 'avant-garde', in which latter category are placed the likes of Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luigi Nono and many others. It can be dated back to when László Moholy-Nagy invited Cage to form a Center for Experimental Music in the School of Design in Chicago in 1941, which fell through due to lack of funding. In 1954, Wolfgang Redner lectured on 'American experimental music' at Darmstadt,[1] and the following year, John Cage published his key essay 'Experimental Music: Doctrine'.[2]

There was then something of a hiatus in the written exploration of the term until the publication in 1974 of Michael Nyman's book *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, in which the 'experimental' vs 'avant-garde' dichotomy was cemented. Since then, the term has been used widely in literature on new music and the experimental/avant-garde model continues to inform the wider historiography of twentieth-century art music. Some have attempted to expand the term 'experimental music' to encompass variously a wider range of improvisational traditions, radical work undertaken by African-Americans, or more generally many types of iconoclastic music,[3] though these endeavours often threaten to render an already diffuse term so vague as to lose distinction.

The term had earlier antecedents: Christoph von Blumröder and Heinz-Klaus Metzger have traced the use of the terms *Experiment* and *experimentell* back to the mid-nineteenth century in writings of Schumann, Wagner and Hanslick, then in a form of German music historiography originated by August Reißmann in 1877, by which history can be read in terms of speculative experiments with arrangements of tones and the derivation of systems thereof;[4] then in critics' responses to new music by Schoenberg – Schoenberg himself wrote in his *Harmonielehre* (1911) of 'those purely formal investigations, those experiments, that would reduce beauty to an arithmetical problem' – or the microtonal work of Julián Carrillo, Ivan Wyschnegradsky and Alois Hába.

This conceptual tradition feeds into the first history, but arguably more profoundly into the second, for which a key event is Pierre Schaeffer's lecture 'Vers un musique expérimentale' at a conference in Paris in 1953.[5] Schaeffer employed the term to refer to music produced in a laboratory, thus especially that involving electronics, tape or computers, used in various ways that can be compared to scientific experiments. This type of definition was taken up by Lejaren Hiller, [illegible]es, Luigi Rognoni, and others, sometimes expanded to incorporate other extensions of musical means and resources, and was also employed in writings of [illegible]ert, [illegible], Nono, Stockhausen and [illegible]seul, from the [illegible]50s up to the 1970s; overall as the dominant conception, especially in

[1] Wolfgang Edward Redner, 'Amerikanische Experimentalmusik' (1954), in *Im Zenit der Moderne. Geschichte und Dokumentation in vier Bänden – Die internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt, 1946–1966*, vol. 3, ed. Gianmario Borio and Hermann Danuser (Freiburg: Rombach, 1997), pp. 178–189; translated into English in Amy C. Beal, 'Negotiating Cultural Allies: American Music in Darmstadt 1946–1956', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 53/1 (Spring 2000), pp. 128–35.

[2] John Cage, 'Experimental Music: Doctrine' (1955), republished in Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), pp. 13–17.

[3] For example, George Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: the AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c. 2008); James Saunders, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009); and Jennie Gottschalk, *Experimental Music since 1970* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[4] Christoph von Blumröder, 'Experiment, experimentelle Musik', in *Terminologie der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), pp. 118–40.

[5] Pierre Schaeffer, 'Vers une musique experimentale' (1953), in *La revue musicale* no. 236 (Vers une musique experimentale), ed. Pierre Schaeffer (Paris: Richard-Masse, 1957), pp. 18–23.

continental Europe, until the appearance of the Nyman book.

If this second history has been in relative decline for several decades now, then many of the articles in this important new volume edited by Darla Crispin and the late Bob Gilmore use the term 'experimentation' to renew that history. Not only renew it, but also expand it, for if it had earlier been used primarily in the context of composition and some related use of technology, here it is also employed to investigate performance and other practical musical activities (and not just those employing markedly new resources or techniques). In many cases, these render 'experimentation' as a sub-section of the discipline of *artistic research* into music, for which the Orpheus Research Centre in Music (ORCiM) in Ghent, who produced this book, is a leading pioneer. This connects with the debates on composition and performance as research conducted in *TEMPO* by John Croft, Camden Reeves and me, but the emphasis here is upon theorisation and documentation in the form of writings about practice.

This weighty tome contains 35 articles; I will concentrate primarily on those relating to new music. The editors state explicitly that the term 'experimentation' should 'not be taken to refer only to the twentieth-century development of *experimental music*' but instead to an attitude and set of questions 'that can be applied to any sort of music, as the articles on Monteverdi, Brahms and jazz make clear' (p. 9). But despite this disclaimer various of the authors still feel the need to re-examine definitions, including Gilmore himself in 'Five Maps of the Experimental World'. He ponders why the work of Charles Ives might be considered more 'experimental' than that of Stravinsky, and is sceptical about the extent of commonalities between many composers labelled as 'experimental', noting the major dissimilarity between the later work of John Cage and Harry Partch. He concludes that experimental music might be best viewed as an 'invented tradition' in the sense defined by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in their 1983 book, *The Invention of Tradition*.

His five definitions, the first two derived from Cage's 'History of Experimental Music in the United States': (i) 'the introduction of novel elements into one's music' (allowing that some may become no longer novel after a period of time, as Cage argued about Ives); (ii) 'an action the outcome of which is not foreseen'; (iii) a canonical or historicist definition entailing a self-conscious engagement with an existing 'tradition', which Gilmore associates especially with the work of James Tenney, a tradition unified by analogies to scientific experiment as 'composition as *research*' and one which is differentiated from others by the fact that it can be continued over different generations and so is less focused upon individual works (p. 26); (iv) a tradition brought about as much through sociological as musical factors, with networks of institutions, promoters, patrons, performers, critics and others, drawing upon the work of art sociologist Howard Becker;[6] (v) the definition provided in Nyman's book, by which the 'experimental' is distinguished from the 'avant-garde'.

In line with his notion of an 'invented tradition', Gilmore makes clear his preference for definition (iii) but also unpacks some of the others. Definition (ii) has different implications depending upon whether the unpredictability of the outcome occurs during the composition or at the moment of performance. If the former, then this is also true of many types of composition employing systems to generate types of musical material unavailable through pure intuition, including for example some of the work of Stockhausen, Ferneyhough or Richard Barrett, none of who have commonly been categorised as 'experimental' composers. As such, it might be best defined as 'extra-intuitive process composition', a term which encompasses quite a bit of work examined elsewhere in the volume.

Overall, the volume includes roughly equal numbers of essays (viii) theoretical or practical emphases respectively. The attempt to provide a solid theoretical foundation for artistic research does not really add up to more than the sum of its parts, but nonetheless there is much from which future artistic researchers can draw and which they can develop. Inevitably the claims to produce a comprehensive theoretical model have to be gauged alongside consideration of 'admission': exactly which practitioners (or theorists) are allowed to participate, and how representative is their work? A glossary is provided for those less well-versed with the theoretical terminology, and the term 'Artistic Research' (parenthetically subtitled 'research in-and-through artistic practice') is given six different meanings (more than Gilmore provides for 'experimental music'), corresponding to its employment by different contributors. This lack of unity in terminology makes the process of finding a common theoretical framework even harder.

[6] Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

The most important contributor towards these theoretical foundations is Michael Schwab, who draws upon the theories of 'experimental systems' supplied by philosopher of science Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. Three terms from Rheinberger are core: *experimental systems* are the smallest units of empirical research, designed 'to give unknown answers to questions that the experimenters themselves are not yet able to ask' (p. 113). This conception enables a framework more in line with the nature of existing artistic practice than those constrained by the need to posit clearly framed initial research questions. Schwab argues cogently that the outcome matters more than the means, whether the latter be the material employed or the approach taken. Experimental systems employ *technical objects*, fixed and accessible objects, sometimes the results of previous experimentation, which condition and limit experimental systems, and 'embody the knowledge of a given research field at a given time' (p. 113). The results of such systems are Rheinberger's *epistemic things*, which are 'used to indicate the unknown as it arrives in a knowledge domain' (p. 113).

Schwab also derives a model specifically for practice *as* research from Rheinberger and talks about the 'exposition' of Practice as Research (PaR), arguing that the term can be replaced by 'the performance of practice as research', 'the staging of practice as research' (p. 36). Finally he arrives at a definition: 'the discursive supplementation of practice that can allow for the emergence of different identities of this practice', a formulation more in keeping with a distinct identity for artistic research, as always supplementary to some more conventional practice. This can be mapped onto a further term, 'second-order art-making' for a type of artistic practice as 'writing' (compared to first-order, more conventional artistic practice), 'in which one may see art's embrace of secondary formats that engage in difference or even *différance* . . . as a means to self-define a practice without relation to discipline or similar external frames that can be used to construe the identity of that practice' (p. 37).

What is not yet clear is how this model and its terminology relate to a specifically musical context. Schwab himself notes that despite the currency gained by Rheinberger's ideas in debates around artistic research, 'no coherent picture has emerged as to how his theory may productively be employed in this context' (p. 31), other than loose allusions to work referencing the sciences. He set out to do this in a more rigorous fashion, by supplying ORCiM participants with a series of questionnaires. The resulting technical objects included scores, musical instruments and hardware, as well as habits of performance, and aspects of the institutional context including locating or funding. As for epistemic things, Schwab found that practitioners were not so focused upon the art work as some type of final definitive outcome but rather on a wider process, of which that might be part, and the importance of intensity of experience, more than knowledge, though most were happy with the production of supplementary output (lectures, papers, texts).

Paulo de Assis expands this to produce a model of 'epistemic complexity' in musical practice, defined as 'The continuous accumulation and sedimentation of such kinds of knowledge [through discourses and performance styles around sketches, instruments, editions, recordings] represents an exponential growth of complexity that involves technical, artistic, aesthetic, and epistemic components'. (p. 41). Here and elsewhere I have major problems with a primarily semiotic model of music, at least when formulated in a paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic manner. Kathleen Coessens writes that 'Semiotic and symbolic systems provide the medium – tools, languages, codes – that permit the artist to translate his or her creative thinking and acting into something durable'. (p. 75), going on to employ Yuri Lotman's concept of a 'semiosphere'.

But this model is reductive and de-materialising in a musical context, reliant on sounds needing some external referent (in this case 'creative thinking and acting'), and a somewhat antiquated idea of 'expression' (she says elsewhere in the same article that 'The body of the artist is his or her first medium of expression' (p. 71)); this does not allow for 'sounds being themselves' or a purer idea of research as utterly intrinsic to practice. More interesting is Coessens's 'Tiny Moments of Experimentation: Kairos in the Liminal Space of Performance', a solid attempt to theorise the uniqueness of a real-time performance. This has much potential (in any performing arts context) and some of the fundamentals she underlines – 'no revision, no reprise, no hesitations' – should be taken more readily into account by others assessing this type of research, as should the fundamental *impermanence* of performance (a recording is a quite fundamentally different entity).

Valentin Gloor focuses on the role of 'association' in artistic experimentation and is one of the few contributors who makes reference to Christopher Frayling's influential delineation of a tripartite model of research 'through', 'into'

and 'for' art.[7] Like others, Gloor is aware of the limitations of the scientific model, in particular a general principle by which experimentation takes place without external observation, as well as a need for an (assumed) 'objectivity', both principles which would exclude plenty of artistic practice; thus he argues that research methods need to be redefined.

In an essay on the ethics of artistic research, Marcel Cobussen describes a research project undertaken by two Swedish (Henrik Frisk and Stefan Östersjö) and two Vietnamese (Ngo Tra My and Nguyen Thanh Thuy) performers, entitled 'Six Tones'. Cobussen rightly explores the post-colonial differential of power between the two pairs of performers, and alludes to Gayatri Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'[8] That to 'speak' can take many forms beyond the verbal/written is certainly clear in the context of this volume, but this allusion is ironic when neither Ngo nor Nguyen make any written contribution of their own (though Östersjö co-authors with Coessens a more extensive article on this project).

Many of the writings in the volume by composers share a common format: first they set out their own views on what artistic experimentation/artistic research entail, then argue how these are made manifest in specific projects of their own. One of the most lucid essays is by Richard Barrett, who distances himself from a Cageian notion of 'experimental music', defining an 'experiment' for him as '*an interrogation of some aspect of reality* for the purpose of understanding and explaining it, enabling its integration into a more general understanding, which is thereby changed, subtly or radically' (p. 105), then expanding upon this in terms of the scientific model of presentation of a hypothesis, then testing this by experiment. Barrett goes on to argue that his 'questions' cannot be defined simply; rather, he suggests that 'making music is my way of trying to understand things' and 'my way of trying to share and communicate these things' (p. 106). Recognising how scientific experiment must encompass the possibility of failure, Barrett argues that musical experimentation involves listeners becoming fellow experimenters. From this perspective he addresses musical improvisation, defined as 'a *method of composition*' (p. 107), and traces its employment in his *codex* cycle, and also his major cycle *CONSTRUCTION* for which he does provide one research question, 'whether it was able to sustain its intensity over such an unbroken total duration' (p. 110) of two hours.

Barrett's conception of musical experimentation is inspiring and, in acknowledging that experimentation may provide enlightenment even if an initial hypothesis cannot be demonstrated, truer to the spirit of experimental science (in which he has some background) than other work here. Nonetheless, Barrett's conception does concur with Schwab's findings on epistemic things, as does that of Yolande Harris. Harris's work raises other questions of intentional and poietic biases, because of her more didactic attitude. Of the work of Hildegard Westerkamp, she says that 'participants explore these everyday soundworlds, activating the constellation of body-imagination-world' (p. 169). But might some listeners not equally appropriate Westerkamp's work as a novel form of ambient acoustic wallpaper, to accompany certain types of events and gatherings at their homes, for example?

Larry Polansky, in a short essay, outlines the techniques involved in the composition of several works: reversing the roles of conventional axes of musical notation, requiring a pianist having to learn sign language, even following an extremely extensive process which can take as much as three years. He legitimises this through didactic claims like 'if we truly hope to not have war, we can't just do what we usually do. We are xenophobic by nature. How we modulate that fundamental part of our makeup with the intelligence also handed to us by evolution is what might make it possible' (p. 183). I remain unconvinced that such an experience would have any impact upon any performer who is not already convinced of its premises – who else would undertake such a thing?

Much more successful is William Brooks, researching the history for particular collaborative oral deliveries of W.B. Yeats's verse (presented using the Rheinberger-Schwab terminology). Brooks then goes on to describe the process of composing and first performances of his own piece *Everlasting Voices*, directly drawing upon Yeats's work. He focuses in particular on the interdisciplinary aspect of much artistic research, simply in the sense of drawing upon problems or propositions from other art forms or science.

Godfried-Willem Raes notes the suspicions aroused when artists become embroiled in the humanities, suspicions about the ability of the

[7] ristopher Frayling, 'Research in Art and Design', *Royal llege of Art Research Papers* 1/1 (1993–94), p. 5.

[8] yatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *rxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271–316.

artist to achieve the level of critical distance expected of other types of scholars. Raes adheres more closely to older scientific models (with a separation between art and research, and a privileging of certain types of output) than most other contributors, claiming that research requires that there be 'something being researched' involving 'a question, a problem' which 'exists with respect to that something'. Raes puts this bluntly: 'Art and research are not the same thing, although they may occur together' (p. 56). More generous is the view given by Bart Vanhecke, that 'experimentation' in music or the arts refers either to 'innovativeness in artistic creation', 'unpredictability or indeterminacy in procedures or outcomes' or 'experimentation in the scientific sense' (p. 91); Raes would only count the latter of these as research. Vanhecke also suggests that artistic practice 'is the *expression* of the complete meaning of aesthetic concepts – aesthetic ideas – within his or her aesthetic universe' (p. 92), a definition upon which he expands, but which raises the same problem as the semiotic models of Coessens and de Assis.

Vanhecke identifies a tripartite model of experimentation identical to that of Frayling (though he is not mentioned), identifying research 'for' art with scientific experimentation; those forms of research taking place 'through' or 'in' art are quite distinct. As examples of the second category he suggests Cage's prepared piano, Partch's new instruments and scales, and Stravinsky's structural use of rhythm, all new *forms* of artistic expression, thus producing 'experimental music'. His example of the third category, Schoenberg's development of dodecaphonic technique as a response to the need to find new methods to handle and control the evolution of the tonal idiom, is much stronger. Broadly, to Vanhecke, experimentation 'through' art involves new means of expression of an essentially stable aesthetic universe; experimentation 'in' art entails developments in that universe itself; this may be predicated upon a rather old-fashioned dichotomy between form and content. Like Gilmore, he is relatively unsympathetic to calling something 'experimental' when it has achieved a certain normativity or cultural traction.

The contributions by performers are in general less theoretically sophisticated, even where they have provided important theoretical reflections elsewhere. Catherine Laws contributes a strong chapter on 'Embodiment and Gesture in Performance', considering bodily movement and gesture in a tradition of empirical musicology. In another chapter, she considers Morton Feldman's *Palais de Mari*, drawing upon an analysis of the work by Frank Sani,[9] but is less successful in translating this into a programme for performance (though this in part relates to the limitations of the analysis). Suggestions are presented for care over touch, minute matters of rhythm, gauging rests, and so on, but seem mostly intended to justify the model of 'the practice of practising as an experimental process' (p. 289).

Mieko Kanno, like Laws, considers practising, in a brief article which details her separation of hands when learning Sciarrino's *Per Mattia*, drawing upon strategies developed by Michelangelo Abbado for studying Paganini Caprices, but this does not go much beyond simple pragmatic suggestion. Of the other articles by performers, the most interesting are Luk Vaes's interview with Theodor Ross about performing Kagel's *Acustica* with the composer, a type of contemporary HIP-style research which uncovers a wealth of fascinating and vital information, not least about Kagel's relationship with radio producers, but also the difficulties inherent in reconstructing the experience of working with the composer present, and Gloor's strong case for conceiving the *Liederabend* according to the Rheinberger-Schwab model.

Various writers are occupied with the boundaries between artistic research and experimentation (though others use the terms almost interchangeably), or between either and some supposedly more familiar artistic practice. Juan Parra Cancino is clear that one should avoid 'claiming that what we normally do as artists in itself constitutes research' (p. 307). But I have yet to be wholly convinced that the model of the 'experimental system' adds much to a simpler model of artistic research (in the broadest sense, which can include practice-as-research) as a part of *critically self-reflexive practice*, a model presented by Vanhecke, who thus concludes that only artists themselves can carry out such research, since others lack the same 'unmediated, direct access' (p. 94).

All of this raises crucial questions of *legitimation*. If, *contra* Parra, one accepts that a lot of what artists do constitutes research, and that it does not necessarily require extra written documentation, then those who invest time in such extensive theorisation would not necessarily

[9] Frank Sani, 'Morton Feldman's Palais de Mari: a pitch analysis', at www.cnvill.net/mfsani3/mfsani3.htm (accessed 7 March 2017).

gain additional academic capital. As career routes for composers and performers become more scarce because of cuts to arts funding in many parts of the Western world, many look to establish positions in academia instead, and are forced into an ever-more competitive economy of research prestige. This could translate into a new aesthetic hierarchy in which those whose work is deemed most 'research-like' or even 'experimental' (if one accepts various of the ideas in this volume) will be at a distinct advantage.

Raes's view on these matters is like a throwback to an unmediated modernist privileging of difficulty. He equates 'art that is not problematic' with 'art that does not research anything', which he decries as 'purely reproductive, at most somewhat interpretative, craftmanship' (p. 56), which he associates with commercialisation. His Babbitt-like solution to this degradation is 'the creation of permanent arts laboratories: sanctuaries from which experimental art can connect to its contemporary environment and to the resources provided by both science and technology within that environment' (p. 58), which might in Raes's utopia form the essence of higher arts education. He cites his own organisation, the Logos Foundation in Ghent, STEIM in Amsterdam and IRCAM in France as positive example because of their development of new instruments and electronic interfaces.

The economic arguments of Gilmore are wholly different: he notes positively the support of Ives for Henry Cowell's New Music Edition in the late 1920s, and that of Betty Freeman for Partch, Harrison, Cage, Reich and others. Ives became rich through his work in insurance; Freeman inherited from her father. Gilmore suggests that institutions for 'experimental music' such as those of Phill Niblock in New York, or Walter Zimmermann or Johannes Fritsch in Cologne, 'would never have survived as long as they did if they were purely dependent on institutional funding'. The implication is that the artistic possibilities for small-scale institutions relying upon private capital and ticket sales are wider and more adventurous than for those supported through subsidy, derived from taxation. This argument is perfectly respectable, articulated most explicitly in a musical context by Georgina Born,[10] but is that of a free marketeer; it would be music to the ears of conservative politicians who would cut subsidy further.

In Europe, unlike North America, the privately funded sector of academia is relatively small at present, and so artistic experimentation in an academic environment is likely to remain subject to wider external scrutiny. This is not necessarily a bad thing; the question is how, and on what basis, such scrutiny is conducted. If more musicians are to continue to engage in practice, as described in this volume, questions of legitimation will not go away; nor will competition for such funding from those whose artistic methodologies, attitudes and outputs are very different. *Artistic Experimentation in Music* dramatizes the issues and should serve as a major stimulus towards more incisive perspectives.

Ian Pace Q1
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[10] Georgina Born, 'On Music and Politics', in *Red Strains: Music and Communism Outside the Communist Bloc*, ed. Robert Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 64.