

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

## The Matter of Musical Experimentation

A two-day seminar: 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> May 2012

*Rymer Auditorium, Music Department, University of York*

O R P H E U S

INSTITUUT

The Department of Music at the University of York has a long-standing interest in practice-based research, whether in social contexts as with its MA degree in Community Music, in the extensive research undertaken by PhD composers, or its PhD in performance by portfolio. The Orpheus Institute, Ghent, is at the forefront of international developments in artistic research, and the Orpheus Research Centre in Music is the first centre of its kind to focus its research questions through the perspectives of the artist-researcher.

The present two-day seminar, 'The Matter of Musical Experimentation', brings together expertise from these two institutions, with presentations from doctoral and senior researchers. We are also delighted to welcome our keynote speaker, Professor Christopher Fox from Brunel University. This is the third York-ORCiM seminar—the first took place in 2010—and forms part of the ongoing collaboration between the institutions.

The topic of this seminar relates to ORCiM's 3-year research focus on processes of artistic experimentation, concentrating on one particular aspect: the (often ambiguous) relationship between materials and processes. Composers, improvisers and performers experiment with the materials of music making; with sounds and their qualities, articulation and duration, technologies and mediating forces, but also with the processes and contexts of devising, rehearsing and performing and the relationship between sound, action and perception. This seminar will examine the ways in which these 'matters' interrelate with musical experimentation, conceived variously. What is the impact of creative experimentation on the understanding of musical materials? On processes for working with them? To what extent is the nature of experimenting contingent upon the 'matter' chosen? How does one affect the other?

***William Brooks & Catherine Laws (co-conveners)***

***Rob Carruthers and Matt Lawson (administrators)***

## **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> May**

### **1330 – Coffee and Welcome**

### **1400 – Three Presentations**

- ***Experimentation within the creative process of music composition (Hans Roels)***

In the first part of this presentation I will briefly present my recent research on the creative process in music composition. The data for this research were obtained from a group of 15 professional composers that were commissioned to write a short composition. Through interviews and the collection of computer files, sketches, emails and recordings I gained more insight in the thoughts, problems and actions that occupied these composers.

Parallel to this work I composed 'Eigengang', a work for 3 pianists playing on one piano. I also collected data from my own creative process through saving so-called save-as files, recording experiments and making regular retrospective reports.

In the second part of this presentation I want to introduce three remarks on the use and nature of experimentation in the pre-composition phase, based on the preliminary results of the analysis of the aforementioned data. These topics relate to the current debate on artistic experimentation within the Orpheus Institute and the larger community of artistic researchers. Firstly I want to criticize the view of artistic experimentation as an isolated activity to obtain knowledge. Experiments, tests or trials do not exist as separate units but are linked together in a chain of experiments leading to the production of a new composition. Trying to examine one experiment is rather absurd as at the same time an experiment with another method, outcome or aspiration might be performed by exactly the same composer.

Secondly, especially in the beginning of the creative process -but also later on- the main ideas and methods in the pre-composition phase are vague and ill-defined. This makes the use of analogies from science -where at the beginning of the experiment the researchers have quite a clear idea of the goals and methods- problematic. This ill-defined character also brings up the question of how time-dependent our view on experimentation may be. To answer it, one cannot look at experimentation and its results but one has to research what the composer thought before the experimental process. An experiment may be successful in the sense that it provoked a change in the final product -the composition- and therefore afterwards the composer may talk about it as an activity with a clear goal. Through research it may become clear that the composer only had a vague sense of direction before the experiment and conducted other try-outs without traceable results at the same moment.

A third point that I will develop is the reflexive function of experimentation. In the experimentation process a composer is not only trying to find workable solutions for matters like instrument techniques or composition structures, but also a working method to compose this specific work.

In general I will focus on the situatedness and the emergent properties of the chain of experimentations within the creative process of music composition.

**Hans Roels** studied piano and composition and during the 15 years that he was active as a professional composer his works were played in several European countries. Between 2001 and 2008 he was responsible for the concert programming in the Logos Foundation, a centre for

experimental audio arts. Since October 2008 he is working on a Ph.D. in the School of Arts, University College Ghent (Belgium). Since 2010 he also works as a researcher in the Orpheus Research Centre in Music (ORCiM) in Ghent.

More info: [www.hansroels.be](http://www.hansroels.be)

- ***A day in my life – artistic encounters with a text (Kathleen Coessens)***

This lecture draws upon the exploration of everyday experiences and their transformation into artistic and aesthetic experiences — through the artistic project *A day in my life (2011-2012)*. In 2011 I wrote *A day in my life*, an instructional poetic text, meant to be sonified, and aiming at a musical 'bricolage' with everyday life materials — be it literal or metaphorical.

The score offers open-ended instructions for exploring the relation between everyday experiential knowledge and artistic know-how. The score reveals life as an experiential activity: it has a beat, a rhythm, a movement, sounds. It describes life as performed in travel and trajectories, gesture and motion, movements in space and time. In these elements, music resembles life. It is an invitation to create music out of life experience, everyday materials, embodied and enacted in the now, and to look at art as a form of intensification of the body that links the intensities and energies of the human being to the rhythms and forces of the earth itself.

From June 2011 to June 2012, different improvisers, composers and performers engaged with that text. Musicians were asked to interpret the text in a sounding result, implying personal artistic actions of translation and transformation. Different compositions and improvisations were made (Music output 1 by C. Laws; Music output 2 by Juan Parra; Music output 3 by Vanessa Tomlinson and Kim Cunio; Music output 4 collaborative improvisation by Kim Cunio, Vanessa Tomlinson, Eliot Britton, Erika Donald, Ben Duinker, Juan Parra, Catherine Laws, piano; Music output 5 by Ann Eysermans; and forthcoming Music output 6 by Bart Vanhecke; Music output 7 by Hans Roels; Music output 8 by Stefan Ostersö and Bennet Hogg; Music output 9 by Kathleen Coessens).

Drawing upon these musical examples and upon the experiences of the other artists — on the basis of music recordings, video and interviews — I will unravel part of the experimental and artistic research processes of transformation from everyday life towards the aesthetic creation and experience. Three kinds of 'matter' prevail: material (sonic, instrumental), relational (relation between the writer of the text, the improvisers, musicians, composers, but also between the different semiotic layers) and experiential (both artistic and personal). By way of an investigation of the 'materials' and their transformation, the 'relations' and their transformation as well as of the 'experiences' and their transformation through processes of artistic experimentation, I will explain elements of the artistic rationale as well as point to the multiplicity and ineffability of artistic creation and transformation of an individual lifeworld.

- ***Tracking physicality and embodied musicality in computer performance music***  
**(Juan Parra Cancino and Henry Vega)**

This project seeks to pick up and refocus the inherent artistic research elements found on the collaborative work developed by Juan Parra and Henry Vega as members of the percussion and computer music trio "The Electronic Hammer", where the role of the computer and its performer was challenged, explored and developed to achieve the same level of musical nuance, expressiveness and responsibilities as traditional instruments in a chamber music setting.

The main focus of this project will be to identify and formalize the various experiences that the trio's six year of repertoire development has created, focusing on answering (among others) the following questions:

- What are the possible musical relationships between traditional instrument(s) and electronic set-ups?
- How does the inter-related roles of composer-performer-instrument designer of computer music practice work together in collaboration with 'traditional' composers and performers?
- How can we move from an 'emulation' model to a differentiation of skills in computer music instruments?
- How can the non-sounding aspects of music performance help to enhance the malleability and richness of the electronic media in a concert situation?

This research-through-practice project will aim to determine what has been learned by the two computer performers of the trio in terms of musical and technical performance development and will explore (both as duo as well as in combination with selected instrumental performers) what salient elements of the unique setting can be further developed. The final outputs will be both in the shape of a collective paper as well as a collections of musical 'etudes' (working title: Flux-Pattern # 1 -3) where aspects of "traditional instrumentality" will be contrasted with performance and musical elements that can be perceived as unique to the potential of electronic media.

For the 2012 ORCiM-York Seminar Festival I am proposing to present the context and initial findings of the project in a 20 minutes lecture and the second practical implementation, "Flux|Pattern#2\_PIANO, performed by Catherine Laws, Henry Vega and myself (approx. 7-10 minutes of duration)

#### **1545 – Coffee Break**

#### **1615 – Keynote Presentation**

- ***Experimental matter – experimental method (Prof. Christopher Fox)***

I want to consider whether it is possible to locate the 'experimental' in music, either in the material of that music or in the way in which musicians choose to present that material.

Are there intrinsically experimental sorts of sound, intrinsically experimental methods of music forming? I will discuss this in relation both to a number of earlier works and to some of my own recent music.

**1745 – Leisure time and wine**

**1830 – Buffet dinner**

**2000 – Evening Concert**

- ***Too Far (Christopher Fox)***
- ***Wallpaper (Christopher Fox)***
- ***The Journey I (Christopher Fox)***
- ***The Journey II (Christopher Fox)***
  - *Eleanor Dann, soprano*
  - *Sophie Simpson, violin*
  - *Will Descrettes, cello*
  - *Joe McGrail, piano*
- ***A Day in My Life (Kathleen Coessens and Ann Eysermans)***
  - *Kathleen Coessens, piano*

'A day in my life' will be interpreted in a short multimedia performance, based on the text of Kathleen Coessens and the composition/tape and video of Ann Eysermans. Interaction between the recorded and the improvised/composed will take place. The experimental work relies upon text, image and sound material as well as upon a self-referential questioning of the actors and materials of and behind such a performance. The demand of Coessens to Eysermans to cope with the text was returned in a new demand of Eysermans to Coessens. Artistic materials, relations and experiences are explored in mirroring ways.

- ***Eigengang (Hans Roels)***
  - *Catherine Laws, piano*
  - *Lukas Huisman, piano*
  - *Hans Roels, piano*
- ***Flux|Pattern #2\_PIANO (Juan Parra Cancino)***

Flux|Pattern #2\_PIANO is part of a series of etudes created during a yearlong research project aimed to pick up and refocus the inherent artistic research elements found on the collaborative work developed by the authors, where the role of the computer and its performer was challenged, explored and developed to achieve the same level of musical nuance, expressiveness and responsibilities as traditional instruments in a chamber music setting.

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what salient elements of the unique setting can be further develop. The final outputs will be both in the shape of a collective paper as well as a collections of musical 'etudes' where aspects of "traditional instrumentality" will be contrasted with performance and musical elements that can be perceived as unique to the potential of electronic media.

- ***rasch (2): schumann's body without organs (Paulo de Assis and Gerhard Nierhaus)***

*rasch: schumann's body without organs*, for piano, tape and data-projector is an experimental performance, and a critical reading of robert schumann's *kreisleriana* op. 16 (1838). taking a well-known article by roland barthes on this work, and the performance of its first three pieces as starting points, this performance enacts a reflection on the bodies of schumann, of the performer, and of the listener. connecting this with the deleuzian 'body without organs' (BwO) the performance proposes a radicalization of the music experience, creating unprecedented conjunctures, hybridizations, and bifurcations of diverse materials. in addition to the creation of a labyrinth of sounds and images, a 'state of conflict' of the materials will lead to a situation where the listener accepts the impossibility of analyzing, of understanding, and of assimilating everything. the transdisciplinary quality of the proposed sensory experience made (including a video specially conceived for this performance by Gerhard Nierhaus) invites the listener to forget traditional categories of music reception and to enter a 'post-aesthetic' regime of listening.

**Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> May**

**0930 – Two Presentations.**

- ***Rasch (1): Robert Schumann's Somatèmes (Paul de Assis and Gerhard Nierhaus)***

ORCiM's research project 'Experimentation versus Interpretation' challenges the concept of *interpretation* in music performance, investigating the concept and practice of *experimentation* as a new path. In addition to the discussion of relevant key concepts around *interpretation* and *experimentation*, several *experimental* performances are proposed and realized, offering unexpected readings of old scores, as well as collusive uses of audio and video devices. This communication will present and explore the conceptual background of the performative presentation *rasch: Schumann's body without organs*, expanding on Roland Barthes' idea that beyond the 'wise language' of pitches, rhythms, harmony, phrasing, and formal construction, there is a more essential 'beating' body, producing 'figures of the body' (*somatèmes*) that directly communicate a 'second text'. This 'second text' is determined and produced by the body, and comes back to the audience as bodily experience through the means of a complex network of 'beats' and accents. The integration of visual images and pre-recorded texts aims at creating an intermediate layer of reception, somewhere between the 'first' and the 'second' text. Such intermediate level brings the musical experience to new areas, creating unprecedented conjunctures, hybridizations, and bifurcations of diverse materials – a new 'critical environment' for the music.

- ***Bach and the Belly Dancer: Jacky Lansley's Guest Suites (Jonathan Eato)***

*Guest Suites* collaboration between choreographer Jacky Lansley, composer Jonathan Eato and cellist Audrey Riley – resulted in four performances in early 2012. The starting point for the collaboration was the first three of Bach's Suites for solo cello, and the fundamental challenge that the artistic team sought to explore was to find a space for creative participation within this material given that we exist in a post-Casals, post-historically informed era.

This presentation will focus on the four *Suite Inserts* which were composed to be interpolated into a performance of the first three Bach suites and to act as a bridge between the live cellist and the recorded legacy of Pablo Casals.

**1030 – Coffee Break.**

## 1100 – Three Presentations.

- ***Musical journeys – the development of new gamelan music through experimental processes of improvisation and collaboration (Charlotte Pugh)***

My research question concerns the impact of collaboration and improvisation on the creativity of the participants when creating new music. This is explored through experimental processes which have a basis in traditional gamelan music. In this presentation, I will discuss some elements of the experimental process of collaborative improvisation in a trio with John Jacobs and Jon Hughes.

The project used photographic and hand-drawn images as a starting point. Musical material was developed through experimental improvisation, and structures emerged from this material – they were not imposed before the improvisation process.

- ***Perspectives on Experimentation in Music (Adilia Yip)***

In this presentation, I am going to discuss my perspectives on experimentation in music—a process of explore, test and invent. Experimentation could be in search of new materials amidst the vast music tradition, either from a western or non-western culture; it is not obliged to avant-garde ideas.

In my project, I search for new materials from the ethnic culture to enrich the repertoire of the marimba, a Western idiophone instrument. The African balafon tradition is under investigation, which is one possible origin of the instrument. It shares common features with the marimba in motor mechanisms but greatly differ in playing technique, performance practice and musical approach. It is aimed to explore new musical materials from the ethnic tradition and implement into the Western instrument.

During the field study in January, learning with the traditional African musicians has given insights to the project. New artistic materials are obtained in the areas of pedagogy, performance practice and playing technique, via the experimentation in communicating intercultural musical matters with the Africans. It is an experimental experience in an unknown musical and cultural environment—unlike the Western marimba performing practices that I am used to. The presentation will explain the new findings of balafon music in temporal perception and holistic approach in learning.

**On Ying Adilia Yip** is currently a first-year doctoral student of the docARTES program at the Orpheus Institute, Gent and a project researcher at the Royal Conservatory, Antwerp. Born in Hong Kong, she has obtained a bachelor degree in music at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and later she travelled abroad to Belgium for the postgraduate training in marimba and percussion performance at the Royal Conservatory, Antwerp.



- ***The Threads Project Part 2: 'An Experiment in Musical Reconciliation?'***  
(Jonathan Brigg)

When I first composed for the Threads Orchestra (the results of which were heard at the Orpheus Conference two years ago), the very bringing together of jazz and classical musicians felt to me like an 'experiment'. Of course, the idea was far from new, but the musical materials (and 'personalities') in negotiation were unique to the situation. Having since ventured deeper into the common (and not so common) ground between the 'worlds' of contemporary classical and jazz music, I have sought to intensify the interaction within my compositions for Threads by exploring a 'shared' musical language. Now I engage much more in experimentation at a pre-compositional level; for example, many of my pieces for Threads use material that I have previously 'tested' in different situations, and which I have reinvented and re-contextualised. I also take bigger chances with the kinds of musical material that I bring together, knowing full well that only sensitivity on the musicians' part will ensure that the music has a chance of working. Greater familiarity with the individual styles of the players has influenced how I *present* the material, and subsequently what I might expect to hear by notating things in a certain way.

The recordings on *Ranch*, my recent album composed for the Threads Orchestra, are one 'version' of events. I will play and discuss music from the album that I think best illustrates the points I have outlined, and consider ways in which other renditions of the pieces might come about.

**Jonathan Brigg** was born in Bradford and is currently pursuing a PhD in Composition at the University of York, where he is recipient of the Sir Jack Lyons Award. His music is influenced by early twentieth-century American composers and contemporary jazz. He has been working with the vocal duo Tryst as an arranger, improviser and composer, and with Threads Orchestra – a dynamic ensemble comprising some of the UK's leading jazz and classical musicians – culminating in a new album, *Ranch*, which will be released in May. He is an experienced ensemble leader, and was the Conducting Scholar with Huddersfield Choral Society for the 2010-2011 season.

**1230 – Lunch.**

**1400 – Two Presentations.**

- ***Investigating re-embodied sound*** (David Coll)

The crossover between electronic music and sound installation poses interesting questions relating to musical material, particularly when a wide array of materials are used to create loudspeakers. In this talk I explore these various relationships and their ramifications for composers, performers and listeners.

The talk is in three parts: first, an investigation of an historical example in David Tudor's *Rainforest* (particularly its fourth manifestation); the second, a summary of my own contributions to this area in installations and concert music; and the third part, in which, using ideas of Barthes', Wishart's, and my own, I call into question the distinction between speaker, instrument, and sound sculpture.

**David Coll** is a composer working in various disciplines, from concert hall to theatre and dance to interactive installations. He has studied at the University of Illinois, IRCAM in Paris (*Cursus* and *Cursus 2*), and at the University of California-Berkeley, receiving his PhD in December 2010. His work is slowly gaining exposure both in the US and abroad with performances at festivals such as the World Music Days/Gaida Festival, Gaudeamus Music Week (2005 and 2009), Voix Nouvelles (Abbaye de Royaumont), the Spark Festival, the *Tzllil Meudcan* Festival, the MATA Festival (2012) as well as with collaborations with musicians such as cellist Severine Ballon, soprano Donatienne Michel-Dansac, baritone Lionel Peintre, and pianist Sebastian Berweck. For the calendar year 2012, David will be living in Belgium, working at the Orpheus Institute, with composer Luc Brewaeys as his tutor for a new work for Orchestra.

His music has been performed by, among others, Vocaallab Nederlands, Ensemble Itineraire, Ensemble Praesenz, *Les Jeunes Solistes*, sfSound ensemble, the Eco Ensemble, and the Berkeley Symphony (Under Construction Series composer in residence 2010-2011), at venues such as IRCAM, the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Musikgebouw aan 't IJ, the Contemporary Art Centre of Vilnius, and the Zellerbach Performing Arts Center.

Along with artists Kim Anno and Ricardo Rivera, David is part of the artist collective and series *Ice on the High*, curating and creating works that blend music and the arts with ecological and cultural sustainability issues. Previous shows at the Berkeley Arts Center and the Pacific Basin. *Ice on the High* is in residence at the Milkbar in Oakland, CA in the Fall of 2011.

David has studied with Edmund Campion, Ken Ueno, Franck Bedrossian, Yan Maresz, Erik Ulman, and Jason Eckardt. He has participated in master classes with composers Chaya Czernowin, Steven Takasugi, Brian Ferneyhough, Alvin Curran, Martin Bresnick, Mauro Lanza, Philippe Leroux, to name a few. He is a member of Poto ([potoweb.org](http://potoweb.org)).

- **Questioning Certainty (Anne Douglas)**

Allan Kaprow, as a visual artist who was very influenced by John Cage, has something to offer the idea of experimentation in musical practice and its research. To experiment meant to raise a question about certainty in artistic practice, creating forms of activity that challenged preconceived ideas about how art comes into being, radicalising processes and shifting cultural attitudes. This particular notion of experimentation switches the direction of artistic endeavour from expertise centred in a particular medium, style or genre of practice to a new kind and quality of activity that re-negotiates/resituates practice in the world. I argue that this flipping represents a shift from efficiency that emerges out of certainty to an aesthetics of waste/doubt where doubt acts as a catalyst to a new beginning and increases diversity in the creative process.

Where are there examples of these conceptual pairings of certainty- efficiency and waste-doubt in current forms of artistic practice? How do they play out? The paper will focus on the work of the visual artist and poet, Guiseppe Penone, Arte Povera, tracing how he constructs a vascillation between expectation (certainty) and the kind of unexpectedness that takes us to a new place. His shifts are subtle and nuanced but nonetheless exemplify what Kaprow proposed as 'experimental art'.

By drawing on a domain that is not music in relation to experimentation, the paper aims to offer a view that situates artistic experimentation in research as profoundly related to questioning certainty by means of art practice.

1445 – Final Discussion and Conclusion

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- *A day in my life – artistic encounters with a text* (Kathleen Coessens)
- *Tracking physicality and embodied musicality in computer performance music* (Juan Parra Cancino)

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