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Historical Assumptions of the Avant-Garde and Experimental Movements: The Participants and Their Historians

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There's a kind of strange story attached to this paper. It perhaps gives away more of my personal history than I would like, but because it reinforces the point in my article that aesthetic choices are made in the formulation of history are based upon unstated assumptions about history I've reluctantly decided to relate it. There is a danger that in doing so I am chewing sour grapes in a public forum—that I am blaming the system for rightly rejecting a bad and poorly argued paper—but if there is a useful idea or two in this out-of-date paper I'm willing to risk it.

I wrote an early version of this paper in about 1984 for a Ph.D. seminar in the philosophy of history taught by Leo Treitler at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. When I left Stony Brook in 1985 (the new head of graduate studies told me that I could not write my dissertation on British experimental music because it was too recent and obscure to be evaluated—a complaint with which I had already dealt in this paper) I worked it into something like its present form and submitted it to Perspectives of New Music. As is the common practice with most journals a team of three readers gave their opinions: one—a strong approval—was from Barney Childs, who had suggested that I submit it in the first place (and so it could have been considered close to nepotism by those who disagreed). The other two readers were negative: one may have had reservations that the paper was badly written (which it probably was); the other complained that the paper was about British music and PNM was an American journal. This was interesting: I remember noting then that a current issue featured that All-American boy Karlheinz Stockhausen. The editor, John Rahn, took the time and the trouble to go through the piece with good suggestions as to how to improve it, even though, since it was rejected, he didn't have to do it. I have added my sincere thanks in a footnote below but such a kindness deserves more prominent display.

After a few more rejections elsewhere I put this article aside. I tried, in the late 1990s, to revamp it for an Internet journal but I couldn't silence the sound of creaking out-of-date sources. As such, I am leaving it here as I found it in my computer, with some slight updates and adjustments from the abortive Internet preparation. It is not in the style in which I would write today, and it reeks of the excitement of new ideas and new sources met in graduate school (with the impulse to try to work all new ideas into an overarching theory) but, as with my thesis (which we flog here at the EMC), I think it has some use as an historical document in its own right. I think, also, that the main premise still holds: there is still a strong percentage of critics, academics, and arts mavens who denigrate experimental music. I firmly believe that they do so partly for the modernist historical assumptions which are outlined below.

GARY TOMLINSON, the editor of *Nineteenth Century Music* and musicologist, states that we are caught in our 'web of culture',¹ a set of beliefs and attitudes which comes from our own background and environment. Hans-Georg Gadamer says further that our view of an historical period or artefact is a mediation between data available to us and our own biases stemming from

¹ Gary Tomlinson, 'The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 7/3 (April 1984), 350-362.

our particular experience and culture.² Given these premises, contemporary histories, histories of art of the writer's own lifetime, have the closest correlation between biases of both the writer and the artists of whom he writes. Within a given time, differences in theoretical and historical biases between groups of musical pundits, some national, others variously sectarian, may cause almost polar aesthetic judgements of contemporary works. A classic example is the Hanslick-Wagner controversy of the last century. Even more close to our own time has been the opposition of experimentalists and the avant-garde in the post-war Western world, the premises of which have a vital role in shaping our various aesthetic, historical, and theoretical assumptions today. The historians and theoreticians of the avant-garde have accepted and continued to promote the basic tenets of the mainstream of nineteenth-century music: a reliance on increasing complexity of method and a belief in an evolutionary or organic development with a mainly German national bias. Experimentalists have been more eclectic, finding inspiration in various international, non-chronological, non-organic, and artistic and philosophical sources.

Leo Treitler, writing in *Perspectives of New Music*, notes the circularity of mainstream historicism:

when the actor in history adopts the beliefs of historicism he places himself under the compulsion to act in accord with his understanding of the historical process. Historicism is not merely a mode of *understanding*; it is also a standard for *action*.³

This statement follows two quotations he cites from prominent American representatives of opposite 'camps' of new music. One is Milton Babbitt:

If [advanced] music is not supported..., music will cease to evolve, and, in that important sense, will cease to live.⁴

The other, John Cage:

I'm devoted to the principle of originality. Not originality in the agnostic sense, but originality in the sense of doing something which it is necessary to do. *Now obviously, the things which it is necessary to do are not the things that have been done, but the ones that have not yet been done...*; that is to say if I have done something, then I consider it my business not to do that but to find *what must be done next* [italics added by Treitler].⁵

These two 'camps', the 'avant-garde' and the 'experimental', thus hold to different sorts of the same historicism for Treitler; that is, one of a line of inheritance which should be continued, in the first case, or reacted against, in the second. Histories written by defenders of the avant garde support Babbitt's use of an evolutionary model, and hence assume a line of succession and development. The historicism Treitler sees in the experimental movement (or at least in Cage) is not as defined as Babbitt's. Even if Cage meant a constant reaction (or even revolution) by his definition of originality, it does not follow that reaction creates its own evolutionary momentum. A line is ill-defined in those groups and individuals who have associated with experimental music. Treitler also discounts or is unaware of the timeless, 'here-and-now' effect of Zen philosophy behind most of Cage's statements.

Treitler drew these historical battle lines in the 1960s, but the formal treatments of these movements as history, with all their assumptions, appeared in the 1970s. I have chosen Paul Griffiths' *A Concise History of Avant-Garde Music*⁶ and Michael Nyman's *Experimental Music: Cage*

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

³ Leo Treitler, 'The Present as History', *Perspectives of New Music*, 7/2 (Spring-Summer 1969), 4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

and Beyond,⁷ because they were both written in the 1970s by English music critics. As such, their attitudes will diverge only through their subject matter and not through any national or temporal differences.

Both writers mention the historical stance of at least one of their subjects. Griffiths says that

one might ask why it should have been Schoenberg who took the first step into atonality. His own answer was typical, that it had to be somebody: the historical imperative was inescapable.⁸

Nyman quotes Cage:

I rather think that influence doesn't go A B C, that is to say from Ives to someone younger than Ives to people still younger, but rather that we live in a field situation in which by our actions, by what we do, we are able to see what other people do in a different light without our having done anything. What I mean to say is that the music we are writing now influences the way in which we hear and appreciate the music of Ives more than that the music of Ives influences us to do what we do.⁹

Schoenberg's invocation of historical imperative is clear. Treitler sees a kind of reciprocal relationship of Schoenberg's statements and his inclusion in histories:

'When asked on one occasion if he was *the* Arnold Schoenberg, he said, "Someone had to be; no one wanted to be; so I volunteered.".... It is worth asking how much responsibility Schoenberg bears for the historical style of the modern century, as well as for its musical style. The answer will surely be that, as has happened before, historians have accepted with insufficient reflection and then perpetuated a self-image that has the authority of documentation.¹⁰

Treitler types certain historical concepts—his 'Crisis' theory and (my favourite) 'Music History as Strip-Tease' (Part IV). Griffiths' statement resembles more 'music history as relay race', with Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven (or Wagner) as strong runners of the first three laps, and Schoenberg as the star to take the team home. Nyman's quotation from Cage is a clearer historical statement than Cage as presented by Treitler. Here Cage combines the non-progressive, non-linear view found in James Ackerman's concept of art history as a reservoir and in T.S. Eliot's concept of present art changing that of the past.¹¹

Griffiths must entitle his book 'from Debussy to Boulez', that is, from the first composer mentioned in the book to the last, as historical inevitability cannot be seen in new composers and works. There are younger (and older) composers within, but he has decided that Debussy was the first avant-garde composer. Younger ones, such as Reich, have not proved themselves equal to the task of carrying on the tradition. He gives the last chapter the title 'Multiplicity', indicating an inability to find an heir to the line of figures and styles presented in the earlier chapters. Nyman's title, 'Cage and Beyond', also indicates a chronological history, but one without closure. Nyman could title most, if not all, his chapters 'Multiplicity' without textural changes, which is not an indictment of sloppy historical writing. He is not concerned with presenting historically 'important' composers—the last group mentioned is the Ross and Cromarty Orchestra, whose

⁷ New York: Schirmer Books, 1974.

⁸ Griffiths, *Concise History*, 27-8.

⁹ Nyman, 27.

¹⁰ Treitler, p. 38; quotation from Richard Crocker, *A History of Musical Style* (New York: MacGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966).

¹¹ James Ackerman, 'Art History and the Problems of Criticism', *Daedalus* (Winter 1960), 253-63; T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in Frank Kermode, ed., *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, (London: Faber, 1975).

works appear only in a 1971 issue of *Source*,¹² and who are almost completely unremembered today.

Both writers have chapters on historical backgrounds, but while Nyman's opens with the Cage quotation, Griffiths begins his first chapter with

If the term 'avant-garde music' suggests the music being written today, or even tomorrow, it might seem paradoxical to attempt a 'concise history of avant-garde music'. However, those composers most associated with radical development in music do have *roots* in the past. And if one were to *trace those roots back*, one might well find oneself...at the beginning of the Prelude a '*L'après-midi d'un faune*' by Claude Debussy [italics added]....¹³

Griffiths' second chapter, 'The Late Romantic Background', continues, though tacitly, the concept of organic growth. The title even lends itself to a pictorial analogy of support and context.¹⁴

It only may be coincidental that the authors' own backgrounds indicate a possible reason for their historical approaches. Both are critics, but while Nyman studied composition and musicology before becoming a performer of experimental music (and of course he is now better known for his compositions), Griffiths' education was in biochemistry. This might explain Griffiths' interest in more-or-less numerically determined compositions and in scientific models (the organic growth mentioned above; also cause-and-effect relations, although not in as strict or knowing way as the historian Carl Hempel¹⁵) for the organisation and selection in his history.

Both 'avant garde' and 'experimental' have achieved a rather narrow usage. Nyman acknowledges this division—in fact, he defines experimental music through its differences from the avant-garde, following Cage. Griffiths sees a wider use of the word 'avant garde'. In an expanded version of the book under study, *Modern Music: The Avant-Garde Since 1945*,¹⁶ Griffiths explains this use:

Since 1952, when the whole range of music appeared to have been contained between the extremes of Cage's *4'33"*, and Boulez's *Structures I*, new vistas have repeatedly been opened to show that this was not the case, until the avant garde has lost whatever defining features it may have had. Attempts to draw up new distinctions, between 'avant-garde' and 'experimental', 'bourgeois' and 'revolutionary', 'post-serial' and 'minimalist', may offer useful signposts, but no borders may be firmly drawn in the heterogeneous musical commonwealth of today.¹⁷

Of course, writers do overuse labels, which sometimes approach the ridiculous (although not as weird and wonderful as in the indie pop scene that arose in the 1970s, in which labels, such as post-punk-queercore-thrash-metal, can be strung together endlessly), but here Griffiths ignores, as far as possible, the difference in compositional technique and ideas between those 'signposts'. He evaluates all music written in the twentieth century in light of the ideals of the

¹² 'Groups: Scratch Orchestra, Naked Software, Portsmouth Sinfonia, and Gentle Fire', *Source* 10, 5/2 (1971), 69-89.

¹³ Griffiths, *Concise History*, 7.

¹⁴ I am grateful to John Rahn, the editor of *Perspectives of New Music*, for the concept of the pictorial analogy, as well as for close and helpful editing of an earlier version of this essay submitted (unsuccessfully) to *Perspectives*. I am also grateful to the unknown reader for *Perspectives* who, among other negative comments, rejected the article on the strength 'that perhaps the writer is...British...', thus giving me, American by birth, encouragement that I was at last becoming closer to my subjects (the 1960s British experimentalists).

¹⁵ Carl Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History', in Patrick Gardiner, ed., *Theories of History* (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 344-355.

¹⁶ New York: George Braziller, 1981.

¹⁷ Griffiths, *Modern Music*, 294.

avant garde in its narrowest sense, and so he treats Cage, Young, and Cardew less thoroughly than Boulez and Stockhausen. This practice is common in histories,¹⁸ and by the 1980s had become more frequent in journals.¹⁹ In the period in which the books under discussion were written, experimental and minimal composers were not as likely to receive performances, reviews of their works, or funding from government and private bodies as those who composed in the approved academic style—as can be seen in lists of composers who have been awarded Pulitzer prizes, or those who had appeared on the BBC's 'Music in Our Time'.

Experimentalists are not part of the line of composers revered by the avant garde. The exceptions are Cage, who has been accepted because of his short time as a student of Schoenberg,²⁰ La Monte Young, whose early works were serial and who attended the Ferienkurse in Darmstadt, and Cornelius Cardew, who was Stockhausen's assistant in the late 1950s. However, the mature works of these composers are a reaction, not only to their teachers, but also to the basis of musical thought up to that time—the very roles of performers, composers, and listeners, the very definition of music as sound. Far from being historicist reaction, the revolts by Cage, Young, and Cardew resemble a divorce from historicism. The opposition posed for Renaissance and Baroque art by Heinrich Wölfflin and Wylie Sypher (in its simplest sense, an opposition of line and shape) is a reaction in the historicist sense, although this too is filtered through the analysis of later writers.²¹ Cage could only take his work as an historicist statement if he had seen the work of Ives, the Futurists, Partch and so on as a progression of reaction, and his statement in Nyman's book negates this.

Because Cage's work cannot be brought into line with avant-garde theory, Griffiths mentions him only where he can be compared to Boulez or where he 'anticipates' Stockhausen's use of live electronics. The approved 'line' also seems to justify reassignment of the invention of technical features in Griffiths' book and other sources. Cage's chance music was laughed at during his first visits to Europe, until Stockhausen and Boulez 'invented' aleatoricism, and Larry Austin's improvisation sessions in Italy in the early 1960s (inspired by his collegiate work in jazz) were ignored while Stockhausen's later *Plus-Minus* was hailed as a 'first'.

If Griffiths judges experimentalists who broke from the 'line' of the avant garde improperly, those who never were a part of that line (those whose early works are experimental) are almost totally ignored. The experimentalists' disinterest in a traditional 'school' may make such inclusion difficult or unnecessary to the author. There has never been the equivalent of the Darmstadt *Ferienkurse* or Boulez's research-based IRCAM in experimental music. Although experimental music provides useful educational material for the amateur (as has been found in the valuable group COMA in recent times), the diffusion of information between composers seems more collective than didactic. Cage's oft-cited 'students' of the 'New York School'—Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, and Christian Wolff—were really associates, as were the artists who attended Cage's loosely structured lectures at the New School of Social Research in the late

¹⁸ Treitler (pp. 21-2) cites Richard Crocker, *A History of Musical Style*, Lewis Foreman, in *British Music Now* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), could not include consideration of Cornelius Cardew and his 'school' [again, the sense of succession in these writers shows]:

The Scratch Orchestra and its progeny is clearly of some historical importance but has very little place in the mainstream, or mainstreams, of musical development now [p. 13].

¹⁹ *Die Reihe* and *Perspectives in New Music* would print articles by experimentalists and avant-gardists in the 1950s, but the content became more constrained later. While a former teacher of mine claimed that *PNM* had 'descended into the hot-tub' in the 1980s with a change of editorship, the journal remained tied to European avant-garde models well into the 1990s, with the exception of occasional forays into other styles, such as the 1983 improvisation symposium issue.

²⁰ Griffiths, *Concise History*, 116.

²¹ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*; Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style*.
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1950s. Cornelius Cardew taught experimental music courses at Morley College and composition lessons at the Royal Academy of Music from 1967-73, but the former were a set of rehearsals which led to the formation of the Scratch Orchestra, where Cardew had, at best, an equal voice; and the latter were given to allow musically trained members of the Orchestra to obtain credit toward their diplomas (and to give Cardew some income besides his work in graphic design) and were as loosely structured as those of Morley College.²² Thus there is no reason for Griffiths to mention these composers and artists; not only are they not associated with the 'line' he acknowledges, it is hard to determine if they even have a 'line' of their own. Presumably following the 'student' assumption, Griffiths cites Feldman, Brown, and Wolff for their early work in notation, while ignoring groups and movements such as Fluxus, AMM, Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV), the Sonic Arts Union, and the Promenade Theatre Orchestra.

His short treatment of the Scratch Orchestra and Cardew brings out two issues: politics and amateur involvement. He describes the amateurs who took part in the Scratch Orchestra as ones 'of no great skill',²³ another evaluation in terms of the avant garde, which values performance technique of a traditional type and known pedigree, awarded through degrees.²⁴ In light of experimental music, though, amateur involvement is not only acceptable but at times desirable. Amateurs 'of no great skill' can, while trying to play 'as well' as possible, produce so-called 'new techniques' (such as multiphonics) and complexities of rhythm and intonation that would take years of work for the professional musician.²⁵

Politics figure in Griffiths' history, from the Russian constructivists, Weill, and Eisler, to Nono, Cardew, Wolff, and Frederic Rzewski. Of the latter four, Luigi Nono is the centre of the chapter, 'The Theatre and Politics'; the others seem to have been added to fill out the chapter. While Griffiths (or his publishers) considers Cardew's earlier experimental piece *Treatise* important enough (or maybe beautiful enough) that he used it as cover art for *Modern Music*, the only experimental or avant-garde work he mentions of Cardew's in his first book is *The Great Learning*, and then only as an example of Cardew's political works. One can explain Griffiths' seeming ignorance that *The Great Learning* is a pre-political piece using a Confucian text by examining of his bibliography, which consists entirely of books, not periodical articles or reviews. Apparently, only music which has been heavily documented is worthy of consideration in introductory histories. As a result, Griffiths misses many beautiful and original works. In this case Griffiths does treat experimental music in a manner ignored by other British writers of the

²² Most of this information about English experimentalists is presented in greater detail in my *British Experimental Music: Cornelius Cardew and His Contemporaries* (unpublished thesis: University of Redlands, 1983; published by Experimental Music Catalogue, 2000).

²³ Griffiths, *Concise History*, 193.

²⁴ There are, of course, standards for experimental music performances; they are simply different and do not rely on the kind of sound and technique learned in conservatories. In 1997, I took part in a performance of Cardew's Paragraph 1 of *The Great Learning* with the London Sinfonietta Voices. Some performers (Ian Mitchell, Christopher Hobbs, Michael Chant, Nancy Ruffer, and Dave Smith) who were experienced in experimental music were drafted in to play the organ and the whistle solos, which are in graphic notation derived from Chinese ideograms. One of the members of the Sinfonietta Voices also played a whistle solo. His first attempt ended in his embarrassed laughter and a vow to look at the part (which, being a good musician, he did), while the experimentalists came prepared, discussed strategy, and practised their solos between rehearsal and performance.

²⁵ The joys of using performers of 'no great skill' can be seen clearly in the work of the Portsmouth Sinfonia, a band consisting mostly of art college students who played standard light classics whether or not they had any background in music. Their ineptness was calculated, but not so for the Shaggs, a three-member all-girl rock band of the late 1960s, whose father paid for recordings of their original songs. Because of their limitations in technique and lack of a sense of rhythm, they accidentally produced music of a startling rhythmic and tonal complexity.

time,²⁶ but through his reliance on books, he has made an assumption of English experimental music through a source, Cardew's *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*,²⁷ which, in retrospect, is of a transitory nature in the composer's life. *The Great Learning* did undergo a Marxist revision for the Promenade Concerts in 1972, one which Cardew renounced almost immediately after its premiere. Griffiths then ignores all of Cardew's genuinely political music, which has had no exposure in books.²⁸ His information on Wolff and Rzewski comes from *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* and thus is just as distorted.²⁹

Nyman avoids many of the assumptions Griffiths holds, primarily because not only does Nyman accept a division between 'experimental' and 'avant garde', but also uses the distinction to define his subject. As such, it is a work of narrower interest, one which has omissions only due to a lack of information. The lack results not from a paucity of large-scale works on his subjects (very few of Nyman's subjects have such sources), as Nyman took advantage of all sources, including interviews and questionnaires he made himself. It occurred only where Nyman had no access to composers by any means; those, like West Coast American composers, who had nothing written about them and who did not visit London when Nyman was researching the book.³⁰ He writes amateur involvement and a lack of a coherent 'line' into his definition, which also holds no prohibition against political statements or aesthetics.

Nyman's limitation of his subject to American and British composers occurs because citizens of those countries wrote most of the kind of music he defines.³¹ Griffiths' organisation, which covers a much larger range of music, gives importance to the music of France and Germany. The German line of inheritance is common to most of these histories, but he structures the music of France and, to a certain extent, the United States in a similar way. Although he includes Penderecki in his later book, all music of Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, The Netherlands, Belgium, Japan, and the Soviet Union is absent, despite their active support of the avant garde. He abandons the Soviet Union, Finland, and Czechoslovakia after the Russian constructivists, Sibelius, and Janacek, respectively.

In what can only be described as a typical English musical inferiority complex, Griffiths only touches lightly on the music of England, even though this has been the most productive century for English music since the Renaissance. One could explain these omissions as a consideration of space; certainly a history should not have to be a confusing list of names found

²⁶ Foreman, for instance, in n. 18.

²⁷ Cornelius Cardew, ed., *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1975). Cardew wrote this (only two articles are not his) when he was working to the tenets of a certain view of Maoism, and he had renounced all his pre-political music. By his untimely death in 1981, Cardew had reconsidered the use of these works within his political beliefs. It is said that he had planned to return to working with the experimental improvisation ensemble AMM, but hopes for this reunion were cut short when he was killed by a hit-and-run driver near his home in Leytonstone. John Tilbury's long-awaited biography of Cardew will clarify details of his musical and political life.

²⁸ Griffiths does include 'Soon', Cardew's first overtly political song, in *Modern Music*, most probably because it had appeared in Nyman's book. Nyman, using primary research, presented this song because it was Cardew's newest work; by the time Griffiths published his second avant-garde history, Cardew had been writing political music for a decade and had refined his technique as well as his political philosophy. It is tempting to think that in this case Griffiths was not following a certain kind of historicism, but rather fell short in his research.

²⁹ The chapter of *Stockhausen* in question takes these composers to task for not conforming to Maoist aesthetics, and so is filtered through Cardew's belief system.

³⁰ Harry Partch is included in the 'Backgrounds' chapter; Lou Harrison is ignored. The younger composers had no sources available to the English.

³¹ A few Japanese composers are mentioned. More non-English and American experimentalists became active after Nyman's book was published.

in textbooks such as Eric Salzman's *Twentieth-Century Music*,³² but Griffiths' choices stem from a mainstream bias.

Nyman determines the organisation of his book, his choice of the Cage quotation, to a great extent by the sort of experimental music he was playing and reviewing when he wrote it. This is what was commonly referred to for years as 'neo-tonality',³³ music which, while occasionally using experimental techniques, uses traditional tonal criteria for note-to-note procedure. The particular English approach was to use music of common-practice composers, not as influences, but as almost meaningless material which was then manipulated through chance procedures. This can be found in Christopher Hobbs' 'ready-mades' (1969-72),³⁴ in which single measures of varying musical sources were rearranged in random order; Gavin Bryars' *Jesus Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1971, 1974), in which a tramp's song generates reactions from an orchestra; and Nyman's own *In Re: Don Giovanni* (1977), in which bits of the Mozart opera are used in a looser procedure than Hobbs'.³⁵ The 'field situation' Cage mentions thus would be especially attractive to Nyman.

Because of this, Nyman avoids linking chapters through associations as much as he can. He organises the chapters through the general decade (1950-60) or by medium (electronics), for example. He is careful to deny the concept of 'school':

And to talk of the 'influence' of Cage is an oversimplification. Dick Higgins wrote of Cage's teaching at the New School of Social Research in the late fifties that 'he brought out what you already knew and helped you become conscious of the essence of what you were doing'; and for Feldman (in those early days) Cage 'liberated me in terms of self-permission to go on with what I had decided I was going to do'.³⁶

In Fluxus there has never been any attempt to agree on aims or methods; individuals with something unnameable in common have simply naturally coalesced to publish and perform their work. Perhaps this common something is a feeling that the bounds of art are much wider than they have conventionally seemed, or that art and certain long-established bounds are no longer very useful.³⁷

It is only in the first half of his last chapter, 'Minimal Music, Determinacy, and New Tonality',³⁸ that Nyman uses such historicist terminology as 'origins', 'sources', and 'lines of development'. It is also the first time that he strictly divides American and English music, and it is in the American sections that Nyman uses this terminology. The composers he describes—Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass—are also those whose music is most outside the definition of experimental music he presents in his first chapter. There are a few American minimal pieces which can be described under his definition—Riley's *In C*, Reich's *Pendulum Music*,

³² New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967.

³³ This term was disputed by most 'neo-tonalists' I consulted in the 1970s and 1980s.

³⁴ From Marcel Duchamp.

³⁵ All of Nyman's works (except student ones) were written after the publication of his book, and he considers few of them to be experimental. Most of his works which are celebrated today are empirically composed in a kind of rock/baroque minimalism. Quotes tend to be empirically used as well, rather than stitched into the fabric of the structure, as in *In Re: Don Giovanni*. The most unvarnished use of quotation in Nyman's work would seem to be 'Ich Grolle Nicht', from *Die Winterreise*, in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat*. The complete performance of the song, accompanied only by piano and unamplified as in the rest of the work, is an elegant and moving moment in this adaptation of Dr. Oliver Sachs' study of brain injury.

³⁶ Nyman, 43.

³⁷ George Brecht, quoted in Nyman, 64.

³⁸ Nyman, 119-35.

even Young's *Composition 1960 #7*—but by 1970 (the arbitrary beginning of the chapter) such criteria are absent. Processes are fixed in notation and are determined without the use of random procedures. Performers are professional. Actual music of other cultures and not their philosophies (as in Cage and Cardew) are models. This describes more the music of the 'line' of the avant garde (Griffiths does give some prominence to a few of these composers) and Nyman takes up some of its historical assumptions.

On the other hand, Nyman's treatment of English music of the time does not exhibit these assumptions, for example, that music is meant to be played by various performers from professionals to ultra-amateurs. Notation is mainly fixed, but is indeterminate either in composition (like Cage's early scores) or in performance (the Portsmouth Sinfonia was so 'bad' technically, only in that traditional 'popular classics' as the *William Tell* Overture became indeterminate graphic scores, which is poor Romantic performance practice, but advanced experimental practice). After the publication of Nyman's book, many of the English composers abandoned indeterminacy for numerically determined compositions not based on tone-rows or other techniques of the avant garde, but on the old English church practice of change-ringing and other worldly systems; and for tonal works, often entitled 'sonatas' or 'sonatinas', which have nothing to do with the classical models. These composers, including Nyman, believe that experimental music, for them, is dead, but their historical attitudes (for many of them) retain the eclectic nature of the 'field situation'.

Nyman presents a charming analogy of the field situation in an explanation for the 'return' to tonality:

[Christopher Hobbs] mentioned a story told by Keith Rowe of a Japanese monk, vegetarian for years, who having attained *satori*, eats whatever is put in front of him. The analogy with experimental music is clear: 'Having experienced silence we return to the old sounds; only, hopefully, with our feet a little off the ground'.³⁹

Satori does indicate a kind of evolution, but an unusual one; an evolution without chronology, without nationalistic bias. Hobbs certainly is not saying that his works are necessarily 'better' than those of Cage or of the older composers. The 'field situation' makes it hard to group these composers in any meaningful way, as their resources and techniques are very different. For a writer who tacitly accepts the line of succession as the basis for an historical work, the 'field situation' is not history at all. Conversely, the 'line' can lead to lazy history; a writer can totally ignore anyone who, say, is not from Germany, did not study in Germany or with someone who studied in Germany, and so on. Without the avant garde's historicism as 'a standard for action', the experimentalists are outside of the avant garde and its histories.

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³⁹ Nyman, 138. Hobbs no longer thinks it a 'return', and says that he was quoting Keith Rowe in relating this story.
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