

ON DEFINITIONS

As defined by **John Cage**, experimental music is the result which is not foreseen by the composer, and this definition was further extended by **Michael Nyman** to describe mainly the american music scene and european free jazz. During the years this term slowly shifted its meaning, which now is basically a synonym of avant-garde. So, there's concern on the possibility that something that is now classified as experimental should be classified as traditional, because of the use of procedure already used in the past. There's a couple of flaw in this statement. The first could be seen from the meaning perspective: the term experimental was never conceived to be a synonym of avant-garde but, according to Michael Nyman, was used to differentiate this kind of music from the european one, revolving around **Darmstadt**, which moved from the lineage of classic avant-garde e.g., dodecaphony.

There's a rationale for this distinction; while the score of experimental music was conceived to let the sound evolving without a composer's intention, the score of avant-garde was based on the concept that the sound has to be fully controlled by the composer. The second is from an aesthetic perspective: the absence of a composer's intention is folded to the refusal of lineage based on a constant progress in language's complexity. The concept of form of avant-garde aimed to ensure a never ending progress expanding the control of the composer on the result, because it's focused on scores depicting exactly the development of sonic parameters. The concept of form of experimental music resulted in performance actions untied to the properties of the sound source, so it's its particular configuration to determine the perceived output.

One of its synonyms is Sound Art, as intended by **Brandon Labelle**, defined from the concern that "since the early 1950s, sound as an aesthetic category has continually gained prominence. Initially through the experimental music of John Cage and musique concrète, divisions between music and sound stimulated adventures in electronics, field recordings, the spatialization of sonic presentation, and the introduction of alternative procedures". The underlying idea is not innovation in itself, as it was for avant-garde, but the substitution of melody for sound, viewed as something described in visual, or procedural, terms. When in one of his **Compositions 1960 La Monte Young** instructs the performer saying "draw a straight line and follow it", he doesn't follow a music's linear evolutive path but rather a sonic allusion. Music is bound to a visual image which is, from a certain perspective, his meaning, and his form is the translation of the image.

There's a concern about why experimental music now is closer to the traditional concept of avant-garde and it's journalism's sketchiness or critique's simplification. Modern Music is now roughly divided in two basic categories: popular and experimental, mirroring the old division between folk and classical. This approach leaded to the creation of a category for all music which doesn't follow the rules of Romantic Music for practical reasons, but has also obfuscated the causes behind genre's definition. So Experimental emerged as the most popular definition, but it now means something at least slightly different from what it was. This is an example of how definitions change with time and how there's an historical perspective on aesthetics.

Author: Andrea Piran

Website: <http://fluxproject.altervista.org/sulle-definizioni>