

Broken Music

Ursula Block & Michael Glasmeier
(Editors)

Primary Information Pbk 280 pp

Reproduction as a means of, or pathway to production (and that notion's attendant complexities), are at the heart of *Broken Music*, a 1989 book whose original publication was the engine for an exhibition of what it called artists' recordworks curated by Ursula Block, who ran Berlin's notorious gelbe MUSIK store, and art historian Michael Glasmeier. It's now offered in a painstaking reproduction by New York's Primary Information.

There are introductory texts from Glasmeier, Block and her husband René, with reprinted essays by Theodor Adorno, Jean Dubuffet, László Moholy-Nagy, Hans Rudolf Zeller, plus Milan Knizak, whose 'broken music' artworks (and album of the same name) provided the curators with their title.

The real business, though, and the

reason for the volume's notoriety, is the massive compendium of recordworks that occupies the bulk of the book. Chosen by a system of criteria hilariously abbreviated as COPS (Cover, Object, Publication, Sound), its alphabetical list of artists is peppered with grainy black and white reproductions of select sleeves (or images of works which defy the possibility of sleeves), offering a glimpse into the expanse of Block and Glasmeier's obsession with the highly charged conceptual crossroads between fine art, music, sound and the presentation thereof.

The list of artists is overwhelming: Joan La Barbara, Takehisa Kosugi, Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono, Laibach, Annea Lockwood, Christian Marclay (who co-curated Extended Plays with Block in 1988), The Residents, Henning Christiansen, Harry Bertoia and Laurie Anderson are but a paltry sampling. And there is no shortage of cross indexes for categories like sound poetry or Brian Eno's

Obscure label.

This edition contains a flexi 7" (even the cuts in the paper holding the disc are exact reproductions of the original book) with The Arditti Quartet offering an inexplicably jaunty rendering of Knizak's impenetrable recordworks. It's arguably the most baffling aspect of the entire package – why accompany an index of such difficult music with an easy listening 7" of the material it's interpreting? But if head-scratching's what it's all about, why argue?

In the years since its initial publication, the book has gone from a catalogue of drool-worthy rarities to an object of covetous drooling in itself – a gallery-grade Nurse With Wound list (with plenty of crossover between the two, naturally). "Since music that results from playing ruined gramophone records cannot be transcribed to notes or into another language (or if so, only with great difficulty)," writes Knizak, "the

records themselves may be considered as notations at the same time."

This reprint emerges during a time when vinyl records have reinstated themselves as the preferred medium of the connoisseur, and when reproduction, in one way or another, has become the dominant mode of presenting much of the music that reaches our ears. *Broken Music* is a catalogue of items that operated upon an explicit understanding of this potential. Does a reprint offer insight into this cyclical conundrum? Does it speak to anything deeper than it intended to in its original incarnation? The precision of Primary Information's reproduction eschews nostalgia entirely, and the openness of the book's conception allows for its rich conversation to continue – broader, better informed and more incisive now that this thing is back out in the world again instead of languishing on dusty shelves.

Matt Krefting

De Motu

Evan Parker

Editions Lenka lente Pbk 58 pp

De Motu consists of the text of a talk by the improvising saxophonist Evan Parker that accompanied a commission of the same name, performed at the Rotterdam arts centre Zaal de Unie's Man & Machine symposium in May 1992. At just over 4000 words, the text in both its English version and a French translation by Guillaume Tarche fits into a petite paperback similar to one of the old Penguin 60s of the 1990s.

Previous, similar sized titles from Lenka lente have spotlighted brief but illuminating moments from cultural history; one transcribes the 1966 radio interview between Frank Kofsky and John Coltrane in New York. Parker has long acknowledged Coltrane as the major figure in his musical development: *De Motu*'s cover captures him looking thoughtful next to a large poster of Francis Wolff's *Blue Train* sleeve photo, and his talk opens with Coltrane's reaction when faced with a transcription of his own improvisation: "I think I know what it is but don't ask me to play it."

The difference – or, in Parker's opinion, lack of difference – between composition and improvisation forms the basis of *De Motu*. He views such a binary as a "false antithesis" born out of ideological battles among the improvising community of the 1970s, leading to the absurd situation where "non-idiomatic improvisation" could be applied to "something as instantly recognisable as Derek Bailey's guitar playing". At the time, Parker was a strong critic of the perception that free improvisation was undisciplined, ruled by habit and deserved its inferior position to notated composition in the cultural hierarchy.

As he points out here, this notional divide between the perfectly notated, endlessly reproducible score and the entirely spontaneous improvised

performance soon breaks down. On the one hand, notation overloaded with Ferneyhough levels of prescription is unlikely to be followed with accuracy. On the other, any 'free' improviser carries the baggage of technique, style and past improvisations.

That today his argument seems eminently reasonable, even self-evident, reflects how thinking about improvisation has changed, not least through the efforts of Parker himself, whose instant composing – a term drawn from his association with The Instant Composers Pool – these days sits comfortably alongside or interacts with notated works at concerts and festivals.

Parker goes on to outline his own creative process, drawing upon the (often over-simplified and now disputed) left/right brain model to describe the moment when an improvisation shifts from left hemisphere realms to a more subconscious right brain flow. He also offers insight into his signature techniques: multiphonics and the use of acoustic spaces, polyrhythmic cross-fingerings and his fearsome circular breathing abilities which, he recalls in a nod to the symposium theme, he first tested his endurance with when asked to improvise to Max Eastley's mechanised sound sculptures.

De Motu can be seen as a bridge between the polarities of 1970s improvisational discourse and today's multiplicity of thought, about which, in his introduction to the 2014 book *Soundweaving: Writings On Improvisation*, Parker is positive: "There can be no better proof of the core strengths of improvisation than a willingness to proceed in the face of apparent contradictions." Curiously, the resulting performance itself in Rotterdam appears lost to history, although I'm happy to be proved wrong by anyone who can locate a recording.

Abi Bliss



Evan Parker