

BOOK REVIEW

Artistic Research in Jazz: Positions, Theories, Methods. Edited by Michael Kahr. Routledge, 2022. 224 pp. \$57.99 paperback / \$200.00 hardback / \$46.39 eBook.

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Some time ago, a colleague confided in me that any performer who added “Dr.” to their name would quickly become the laughingstock of their musical peers. Relatedly, I continue to see scholars struggle with the notion of artistic research, for example, in failing to grasp how it differs from musicology. These anecdotal accounts are indicative of how artistic research (AR) is often perceived within both academia and the arts: a Cinderella discipline, looked down upon (“artists cannot pursue ‘real’ research”) or framed with platitudes (“arts do not need explaining”). Yet, AR certainly is not going anywhere. Since implementing the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the discipline has slowly been accepted into institutions of higher education and gradually gained respect from practitioners, academics, educators, funding bodies, and cultural and creative organizations. Indeed, as Michael Kahr, the editor of *Artistic Research in Jazz*, puts it: “Artistic research in music has reached a first level of comfort at academic institutions” (xvi). Nevertheless, he quickly admits that jazz-specific AR has “only recently [been] acknowledged by jazz research communities,” as evidenced by the relative lack of literature on AR in jazz (xvi). This volume provides a fundamental first step in filling that gap, and is part of a broader scholarly turn that includes the recent launch of a dedicated journal, *ARJAZZ – Journal for Artistic Research in Jazz* (2025).¹

On a more generic level, AR has been the subject of a significant amount of literature, in no small part due to the contentious debates that inevitably accompany the formative stages of a discipline. One may wonder if a book on AR in jazz has much to add to the current discourse. “What can be said about the relation between artistic research and jazz or improvised music that cannot be said about the relation between artistic research and ‘non-improvised’ music?” questions Marcel Cobussen (3). The answer can be found throughout this volume. As Kahr notes, AR in jazz and popular music—and Western art music, by extension—“commonly [foreground] rather specific aspects of their domains” (xix). Thus, a volume dedicated to jazz-centered AR is hugely beneficial as it

¹ For full disclosure, I was a contributor to the first issue of *ARJAZZ* and am currently on its editorial board. However, I was not involved in any capacity in the volume under review.

allows readers to engage with specific examples, circumventing the conceptual debates that have dominated AR literature in the past decades. When needed, these discussions are referenced in this book, but the focus stays sharply on jazz. In three parts over eleven chapters, the authors, all experienced jazz practitioners active in academia, share several methods, contexts, and insights based on their own experience as first-generation artistic researchers. They invite us “to critical[ly] [engage] with artistic research in jazz, aiming to establish a sustained discourse regarding the theoretical, methodological and analytical perspectives in the field” (xvi–xvii).

Kahr leads the way by introducing and positioning AR. He does an admirable job of unthreading its multifaceted history, considering general developments such as the 1999 Bologna Declaration that led to the installment of AR programs in higher education and also referencing specific initiatives such as the Eight International Conference on Artistic Research (2017), which, according to Kahr, is when the discipline reached a level of maturity. The introduction does not simply list such critical moments but attempts to map this extensive field, with its multitude of often conflicting debates and discourses.

In Part 1, Cobussen opens with a series of pertinent questions, including the one mentioned above about the legitimacy of AR in jazz as a separate subfield. He quickly reverses this query by reflecting on what improvisation can contribute to AR. Improvisation is tackled from two distinct but intertwined angles: the improvising body and improvisation as a method. Using ethnography and phenomenology, Cobussen builds upon David Sudnow’s exploration of the “knowing hand” but avoids unilaterally centering on the human body by acknowledging the instrument as another crucial agent (6). This evolves into a stimulating evaluation of improvisation as a method, aiming to encourage reflexivity rather than generate exact knowledge, as more traditional methods tend to do. Cobussen argues that it is not about “merely applying a set of research techniques” but about “modesty, uncertainty, flexibility and adaptability”; he then stipulates that this uncertainty does not grant one safe-conduct to act without systematic guidelines for the sake of “absolute freedom or originality” (8, 10).

Corporeality, now in the form of tactility, is also central to Vincent Meelberg’s chapter, which speaks to the significance that embodied knowledge has in AR discourses. Indeed, a crucial contribution of AR is its emphasis on certain forms of “tacit knowledge”—knowledge that is not readily apparent through conventional means, such as the embodied experience of a performer. Meelberg’s performance by his trio Molloy informs his contribution, offering readers an example of autoethnography, which many consider a central method

of AR. The chapter is structured along three types of touch relevant to musical performance: instrumental, sonic, and interpersonal. Overall, Meelberg constructs an autoethnography that moves beyond an autobiographical report and into a valuable method that helps to concretize and structure a generic and potentially vague concept such as tactility.

While affect is mentioned discursively in Meelberg's chapter, the contribution by Chris Stover puts it front and center. He posits that jazz theory and practice are "two modalities [that] are complexly intertwined, each feeding transversally into the other" rather than the "conventional dictum that theory *follows* practice" [*italics in original*] (30). Indeed, Stover reasons that theory, and by extension analysis, are forms of practice. Underpinned by a Deleuzian-Guattarian perspective, he discusses some aspects inherent to jazz (performance) discourses, such as the storyteller trope or the notion of the thinking body. While his overall argument is appealing, mainly through his idiomatic use of ethnography, cartography, music analysis, and narrative analysis, it is one of the few chapters that is rather heavy on theory. Budding artistic researchers, some of whom may lack a formative background in academia before venturing into a graduate program, may find it somewhat inaccessible at first, though further readings will prove to be rewarding.

Following Stover is, once more, Kahr, with a chapter that moves in a different direction to historically contextualize AR in jazz. It acts as a twin to his introduction, so much so that it could have been the book's first chapter. Mirroring Cobussen's opening gambit on the validity of jazz AR, Kahr begins with an implicit but engaging question: Is not every musical performance a form of AR? He invites readers to reconsider this query, which is especially important given that in certain circles, this reasoning is used to undermine AR as a discipline. Kahr leads the reader through several "examples of reflexive practice and epistemic activity... selected from jazz history," focusing mainly on "musician-based" jazz theory such as George Russell's Lydian Chromatic Concept (48). He argues that these practices should not be understood as AR, at least not by current academic norms, but that these inform(ed) jazz research practices to a certain degree. By juxtaposing these historical approaches with his former research project, *Jazz & the City* (2011–13), he allows readers to better understand how historical jazz practices and AR in jazz are discrete yet firmly connected: historical music theory bears early traces of AR while AR can be a useful method to study jazz history in a practice-oriented way.

The book's second part, "Institutional and Pedagogical Considerations," contains three chapters with Petter Frost Fadnes offering perspectives mainly from Europe and Britain while Tracy McMullen and William C. Banfield

provide a US-based viewpoint. Fadnes's contribution documents the "culture clash" that emerged when, following the 1999 Bologna Declaration, higher arts education (HAE) institutions were asked by the EU (or forced, depending on one's perspective) to introduce and adopt certain aspects from academia (69). This resulted in an ongoing clash between two "working cultures" with long-standing traditions of their own, one of "theorized research" and another of "art practices" (72). The emergent tensions are multifold: an "institutionalized unwillingness to discuss what an AR methodology *might* be" [*italics* in original], HAE's fear of being "swallowed up" by academization, and the no man's land that performers with PhD qualifications often inhabit (72). Fadnes puts forward some solutions that can help negotiate this "discoursal schism" with transdisciplinarity and decanonization (in both repertoire and pedagogy) as keywords (80). While this may be easier said than done, Fadnes's reflections can help set the wheels of change in motion.

McMullen scrutinizes "the transfer of knowledge in and through jazz practices," focusing on sexism and racism (85). While she posits her arguments in an American context by examining Dr. Billy Taylor, Jason Moran, and Terri Lyne Carrington, her call for "a shift in the understanding of what jazz *is* in higher education" has a universal appeal [*italics* in original] (85). Her chapter, informative and well-argued, seems somewhat out of place in this volume as it pertains more to an educational than a research context. Both are closely connected, but the contribution would seem more at home in a collection on pedagogy or inclusivity, two topics central to McMullen's current work. A similar case can be made for Banfield's chapter on cultural relevancy in jazz education, which makes scant mention of research, artistic or otherwise. His "metaphorical 'dance'" results in an interesting free-flowing essay on cultural marketing, intergenerational value shifts, and young artists' embrace of new pedagogical paradigms through their interactions with social media, but it holds little information relevant to an AR scholar (98).

The closing section of the book considers the everyday applicability of AR, with four cases focusing on practice-based approaches. Roger T. Dean begins with an examination of the use of silence—silent rhythm, ambiguous grooves, and pauses—in the Miles Davis and Teo Macero collaboration "Shhh/Peaceful," and how this resulted in an artistic creation by his ensemble *austraLYSIS*. Dean frames AR in broader philosophical and psychological theories, resulting in a contribution that balances theory and practice. Next, Robert L. Burke presents a hands-on approach to jazz performance analysis that allows practitioners to analyze their improvisational practice through reflexive and reflective observations. Using a three-chorus saxophone improvisation by himself, he

makes a compelling case that subjective observations of one's background, influences, and performance experience complement formal analyses of sounding and notated music. Ultimately, this leads to a detailed assessment of a performance that allows for its improvement, arguably a primary goal of AR. While cursory analytical evaluations may be part and parcel of every performer's attitude, this chapter demonstrates the advantages of doing such self-reflective analyses thoroughly and methodically.

Contributors throughout the volume are not afraid to put the finger on the sore spot and propose pertinent solutions. Marc Duby, for example, argues for a more precise "articulation between practice and research" (156). He contends that a work of art resulting from a research process must make "explicit the forms of knowledge" (156). "The unspoken assumption that the product itself suffices and 'speaks for itself,'" so Duby posits, highlights "the challenge of translating [a] lived experience of performance into an altogether different medium" (157). This is a larger issue that has been scrutinized in AR literature, but Duby's particular focus on his ensemble's recording session is enlightening for jazz practitioners-researchers. As noted, artistic researchers are often stimulated to use reflection by exhaustively documenting their performative acts and the (physical, psychological, pedagogical) impact these exert. Given that few musicians are trained in ethnography, anthropology, or other disciplines that commonly employ such methods, artists are habitually left to fend for themselves. Andrew Bain's chapter offers a solid, hands-on example of precisely this, with a focus on "non-verbal musical interaction" and "group improvisation" (175). He proposes a readily applicable example of an (auto)ethnographic approach, reflecting on the entire process from project conception to nine-concert tour. Combined with other project-based contributions to the volume, readers are introduced to several stimulating real-life instances of AR in the recording studio, in the rehearsal room, and on the road. These practical perspectives will inspire budding researchers.

With *Artistic Research in Jazz*, Kahr and his contributors have delivered a highly needed reference book that can act as the go-to guide for artistic jazz researchers, while also introducing jazz AR to academics unfamiliar with the discipline. In a little over two hundred pages, this volume fills an essential gap in the literature, both in jazz and AR studies. This collection touches upon many issues, methods, and approaches central to AR but tackles them in a dedicated jazz context, staying away from the meta-discussions that often burden the AR literature. Overall, Kahr strikes a good balance between theory-based and practice-based chapters, ensuring the book is relevant to a diverse readership, from student-practitioners to experienced scholars. Some contributions can

easily be assigned to budding artistic researchers and immediately put in practice, making the volume stand out for its potentially immediate impact. The field of AR in jazz is gradually expanding, and the number of initiatives is growing. I have little doubt that AR literature in jazz will follow this upward trend. *Artistic Research in Jazz* certainly sets the bar high.