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## Ageing of the new: the museum of musical modernism

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The cultural event that most conspicuously marked the turn of the millennium in Britain was the opening of London's Tate Modern, the refurbished power station that is now, spatially, the world's largest museum of modern art. The building itself is significant since it marks a transformation from an industrial utility to a cultural space; together with its contents, it signifies a commitment to modern art at the end of the twentieth century. It is even able to include a replica of Marcel Duchamp's celebrated urinal – an object designed to test institutional limits. So reconstructed, museums no longer instil a dominant view of culture, nor do they display artists as overbearing bastions of authorial rectitude: they are more likely to present contrasting outlooks and leave spectators to find ways of accommodating them. Like the exhibits in the Tate, modernist musical artefacts cannot survive without support, yet their institutions can evolve and need not be governed by the curatorial attitudes normally associated with museum culture. Institutions, like music, are embodiments of human ideas and are therefore potentially mobile and subject to interpretation.

### Institutions and performers

The most remarkable institution of twentieth-century music must surely be IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique). Adjacent to the Centre Georges Pompidou in central Paris, IRCAM is devoted to the technical and creative advancement of music. Remarkably, it derives from the vision of one man, Pierre Boulez, whose stature as a musician enabled him to secure funding from the French government for the development of a music research institute. Since the pioneering days of the 1950s, Boulez had believed that musical life was locked into a museum culture that discouraged technical advances in instrument design and educated performers to reproduce the conventions of the classical repertoire. Advances in sound technology, he

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felt, offered few compositional resources because they served the same system, geared to producing quality recordings of a stagnant repertoire.<sup>1</sup> In Boulez's opinion, the solitary efforts of individual composers were likely neither to transform such a mindset nor to develop the technology that would enhance musical creativity. It was more probable, he argued, that such advances, like other late-twentieth-century innovations, would be generated by collaborative team efforts. Accordingly, he based IRCAM on the model of a scientific research institute with different specialists pooling their expertise.

Boulez secured funding for IRCAM in 1974 and the building was completed in 1977. Built underground, it contains studios, laboratories, offices, and a concert hall in which the reverberation time can be modified by moving electronically adjustable wall panels, and in which the three sections of the ceiling can be moved separately according to performance requirements. The institute was originally established with departments devoted to areas such as electro-acoustics, computer music, and extended instrumental techniques, with each domain directed by an established figure. In 1980, however, after three years of running at full capacity, the institute entered a crisis, with all five directors resigning. Boulez responded by reconfiguring the organization into two sectors, one musical and one scientific, with a pedagogical unit coordinating the two. The new structure reflected the subsuming of electroacoustics within computer music, even though it was research in Berio's electroacoustic department that had led to the development of the important 4X computer. In recent years Boulez has distanced himself from the day-to-day running of IRCAM, even though his influence on its behalf remains vital.<sup>2</sup>

Rarely in its history has music received patronage on the scale that IRCAM, with its extensive public funding, has enjoyed. It is thus a privileged institution and has, not surprisingly, triggered much debate. Born in the 1970s, IRCAM consolidated the modernist belief in technical advance at a time when its authority was being questioned elsewhere by the success of minimalism and pop art. It tended to reinforce the idea that modernist values are dependent on powerful institutions that seek to exclude other voices, particularly those deriving from popular music.<sup>3</sup> This controlling tendency was confirmed, in the initial stages at least, by its commitment to developing powerful mainframe systems instead of exploring the increasing potential of micro-computers – and there was a degree of self-protection in this stance, since micros, and

<sup>1</sup> For more on Boulez's frustrations with music's institutions, see Jonathan Harvey, 'IRCAM', in William Glock (ed.), *Pierre Boulez: A Symposium*, London, 1986, pp. 239–46.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the history and development of IRCAM, see Dominique Jameux, *Pierre Boulez* (tr. Susan Bradshaw), London, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> This point is consistently made in Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant Garde*, Berkeley, 1995.

more recently the Internet, encourage desktop composition and dissemination without requiring institutional affiliation. This said, IRCAM's ability to pursue research without an immediate need for commercial delivery remained vital in an age driven by marketing, and its willingness to commission composers from all over the globe has been important for the continued health of musical life.

While IRCAM was becoming established in the mid-1970s, the Darmstadt summer school, which had cradled so much new life in the 1950s, was witnessing the ageing of the avant-garde and the emergence of a new generation. The turning point in the 1970s was the so-called neo-Romanticism of composers such as Manfred Trojahn, Detlef Müller-Siemens and, above all, Wolfgang Rihm. Casting off the fetters of what they considered to be an ageing avant-garde, this group offered a more inclusive aesthetic in the pursuit of musical freedom and intensity. The ensuing debates triggered a response from the eminent musicologist Carl Dahlhaus who was critical of what he considered to be indiscriminate mixtures of the beautiful and the ugly, the significant and the trivial, though he noted a concern with tone colour that could be traced to post-serial music.<sup>4</sup>

More traditional Darmstadt values were represented by Brian Ferneyhough, who became a major figure at the summer courses in the 1980s. This decade also saw attention given to previously neglected figures such as the American Morton Feldman, a guest composer in 1984 and 1986, and the Italian Giacinto Scelsi, whose music received special attention in 1986, while interest in Luigi Nono also revived at this time. Alongside such revaluations, the 1980s also saw heated debates about minimalism, and in 1994 a concert was devoted to the music of La Monte Young.<sup>5</sup> No less significant was a symposium in the same year devoted to the writings and music of the major philosopher and cultural critic Theodor Adorno, an event that demonstrated that modernism was becoming increasingly reflexive and willing to examine the interests and functions served by its own discourses. Finally, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 heralded a much wider European participation at Darmstadt.

The ageing of Darmstadt was of course part of the means by which high modernism became sedimented into history. The importance of this process was recognized by the opening of the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, in 1986. Initially based on the collections of its wealthy patron, the Foundation acquired the

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Achim Heidenreich, 'Ein Rhythmus im Alltäglichen. Zu Wolfgang Rihm', in Rudolf Stephan et al. (eds.), *Von Kranichstein zur Gegenwart: 50 Jahre Darmstädter Ferienkurse (1946–1996)*, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 487–93; p. 489.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of Darmstadt 1982–94, see Christopher Fox, '1982–1994: L'Atelier Énorme', in Rudolf Stephan et al. (eds.), *Von Kranichstein zur Gegenwart*, pp. 461–7.

estates of Stravinsky and Webern in the 1980s and now houses the archives of many of the composers mentioned in this chapter, including Berio, Birtwistle, Boulez, Carter, Feldman, Ferneyhough, Gubaidulina, Lachenmann, Ligeti, Nancarrow, Rihm, and Rochberg. Both reflecting and shaping the writing of twentieth-century music history, it provides a major international resource for music scholars.

Contemporary music depends not only on a responsive cultural climate, but also on the accumulated expertise of ensembles dedicated to that repertoire. The need for specialist groups such as Ensemble InterContemporain, the London Sinfonietta, and the Arditti String Quartet clearly indicated that new music required performers who were familiar with the idiom, or prepared to learn, and used to interpreting certain notational conventions. This was no less true outside modernism since the minimalists Philip Glass and Steve Reich also founded ensembles specializing in their own music. Such ensembles, in whatever genre, create conventions on which scores rely, and hearing new sounds inevitably stimulates composers to explore further. Since the 1980s, moreover, performers have been able to use readily available CD technology to cater for a specialist and geographically dispersed audience.

Because composers rely on specialized performers, many of them foster close associations with new-music ensembles, and none more so than Boulez, who brings a wealth of conducting experience to twentieth-century music. He established himself as a conductor in the 1960s, with a view to furthering his desire to create a climate that would push public taste beyond a curated canon and encourage interest in modern music. It was not just the listening public that he set out to reform; he also attempted to overcome the animosity to new music of institutions such as symphony orchestras steeped in the classical repertoire (though it is only fair to point out that individual players frequently transcended such limitations). Much progress was made on both fronts during Boulez's sojourn from 1969–75 as Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and with such aspirations, it is not surprising that, in 1975, Boulez founded the Ensemble InterContemporain as an intrinsic part of IRCAM. The group has two main functions: one is to perform music generated by IRCAM and to take part in developments of electronic techniques, while the other is to perform what might be called the modernist repertoire from Webern to Ferneyhough. Boulez's overall hopes for the acceptance of modern music have been dashed by the crisis in modernism; nevertheless the ensemble has established a formidable reputation, recorded and performed extensively, and done much for the public perception of IRCAM. Working closely with Boulez, it has achieved a degree of flexibility and accuracy that would have been impossible in less favourable conditions.

In Britain the London Sinfonietta, founded in 1968 and at the time of writing directed by Oliver Knussen, is likewise dedicated both to the performance of established twentieth-century music and to fostering new scores. In the first capacity, it has mounted festivals celebrating the work of Schoenberg, Webern, Britten, Tippett, Stravinsky, Ravel, and Varèse. In the second, it has been instrumental in supporting both established British composers such as Birtwistle and younger talents such as Thomas Adès (b. 1971), while also providing performances for senior figures such as Elliott Carter. Even though it is now usual for orchestras to have an education programme, the Sinfonietta has been pioneering in this respect since 1983, working both in schools and in the wider community. At the time of writing, for example, it is providing resources on Boulez and his compositional techniques for curriculum-based school projects.<sup>6</sup>

The Arditti Quartet was founded in 1974, close to the inception of IRCAM, and thus celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1999. Revealing just how indebted new music is to committed performers, the quartet places great value on individual preparation so that all the players are aware of one another in rehearsal. Normally, the composer will give advice on a new score and, where the music significantly extends the bounds of traditional notation, may well offer guidance from the start. The Ardittis' dedication is exemplified in their approach to Brian Ferneyhough's Second String Quartet, of which Irvine Arditti comments, 'We worked on that not bar by bar, but beat by beat, and I think in those days, in 1980, we spent about sixty hours learning the piece. It was some twelve minutes long.'<sup>7</sup> Unlike, say, a Haydn quartet, Ferneyhough's Second Quartet is not fully immersed in tradition, so problems need to be solved, procedures invented, and traditions established which – though not beyond dispute – carry a residue of the music that is not present in the notation. Such circumstances encourage us more than ever to think of the score as something that requires imagination from performers to bring it into being. Indeed it was Irvine Arditti's performance of the first sixteen of Cage's *Freeman Etudes*, which brought the seemingly impossible into the realms of possibility, that inspired Cage to complete the set.<sup>8</sup> By pushing string playing beyond established limits, Arditti and his colleagues feed the imaginations of composers and enhance their creative freedom. Much of the music discussed in this chapter depends on such commitment from performers.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the London Sinfonietta, see <http://www.londonsinfonietta.org.uk>

<sup>7</sup> Irvine Arditti, 'Irvine Arditti in Interview with Max Nyfeler', programme for Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, 1999, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> See James Pritchett's liner notes to Irvine Arditti's recording of Cage's *Freeman Etudes*, Books One and Two (Mode, 1993).

## Composers 1: Boulez, Carter, Ligeti, Berio, Nono, Stockhausen, Cage

Chapters 13 and 17 were devoted to a pioneering group of composers who made reputations for radical innovation early in their careers. This section charts their subsequent development. Mainly associated with the initial years of the Darmstadt summer courses and mainly born in the mid-1920s, these figures made such an indelible impression on music in the second half of the twentieth century that their careers after those heady years in many ways define the trajectory of modernism. The two Americans, John Cage and Elliott Carter, were born some years before the main European group, but both were established mid-century and Cage's 1958 visit is part of Darmstadt legend.

Pierre Boulez, who was born in 1925, made his mark as a composer and polemicist; subsequently, as we have seen, he also secured an international reputation as a conductor before founding a major institution. These different roles not only show what a multi-talented figure he is, but also demonstrate that music flows through a number of channels and cannot be understood in only one dimension. Along with Mahler, Wagner is the figure from the orchestral repertoire that most engages Boulez's empathy (milestones in his conducting career include *Parsifal* in 1966 and *The Ring* between 1976 and 1980, both at Bayreuth), and it is arguable that the gestural and theatrical tendencies of both these composers have affected Boulez's own compositions since the mid-1970s. Such influences are not direct, however, because – unlike, say, Wolfgang Rihm – Boulez refuses to import stylistic references into his own music, instead insisting that material should be generated by the compositional process.

Although Boulez continued to compose even during the busiest phases of his conducting career, his output diminished. While this might not seem surprising, Boulez candidly attributed the situation to an impasse in contemporary composition, admitting, in his words, that 'orchestral conducting was the consequence and not the cause of the compositional silence'.<sup>9</sup> The solution of course was the founding of IRCAM, described by Boulez as 'an institution which is to have musical research as its function, acoustics as its subject, and the computer as its instrument',<sup>10</sup> in a programme that exerted huge pressure on himself to create something of significance that would embody the intersection of music and science. That something was *Répons*, but before turning to this, we should note premieres in the 1970s of an early version of... *Explosante-fixe*... (1972–4) and of *Rituel in memoriam Bruno Maderna* (1974–5), an orchestral work written in memory of the Italian composer and conductor, which has proved to be one of Boulez's most approachable scores. His œuvre is

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Jameux, *Pierre Boulez*, p. 169. <sup>10</sup> Ibid.

distinguished by its 'work-in-progress' status, and even the earliest pieces are liable to be revisited. *Notations* offers an example: in its 1945 incarnation it comprises a group of twelve piano pieces, four of which have so far been transformed into a set of orchestral pieces, *Notations I–IV* (1977–8), that offer glittering studies in modern orchestration. Boulez intends to complete all twelve.

*Répons* is another incomplete work: three versions were performed between 1981 and 1984 before the score was, at least temporarily, consolidated in its present form. It is written for a small orchestral ensemble, electronic equipment, and soloists who play the following instruments: cimbalom, piano 1, xylophone doubling with glockenspiel, harp, vibraphone, and piano 2 doubling with synthesizer. A computer is used to distribute and transform the sounds of the soloists, which are heard through six loudspeakers, while the soloists and speakers are grouped around the ensemble, allowing complex trajectories of spatialized sound. As far back as 1958, in *Poésie pour pouvoir*, Boulez had tried to achieve an organizational continuum between acoustic and electroacoustic resources, and had been sufficiently frustrated in his efforts not to explore electronic resources again until developments at IRCAM enabled him to pursue his ideal. The instrument that brings this aim to fruition in *Répons* is the 4X computer, which enables live electronic processing of sounds, so ensuring that there is not a timbral gap of the sort often experienced between pre-recorded tape and an instrumental ensemble. This sonic continuity is heard to dazzling effect with the entrance of the soloists, whose arpeggiated chords are expanded to vast spatial spirals by the 4X.

This very audible, dramatic effect is a manifestation of Boulez's tendency throughout his œuvre to proliferate an underlying idea. *Répons* is built from five generative chords, which are multiplied and transformed to form its sometimes luxurious web of sound. The same chords provide the material for *Dérive* (1984), which also shares *Répons*'s trilled textures. Recent compositions include another version of... *Explosante-fixe...* (1991–3), this time for MIDI flute, two solo flutes, ensemble, and electronics; *Incises* (1994) for piano; and *Sur Incises* (1996) for three pianos, three harps, and three keyboard percussionists. *Répons* remains the major work by Boulez of the past twenty years, and has fulfilled its tough obligation to create an aesthetic justification for IRCAM's attempts to overcome the schism between acoustic and electronic music. Despite a dwindling flow of music in recent years, Boulez remains a giant figure in contemporary music because his activity on so many fronts has done so much to transform musical institutions.

Elliott Carter (b. 1908) – one of the few contemporary composers held in high esteem by Boulez – has been an energetic composer throughout three of the four quarters of the twentieth century, and his output in the last quarter was both

prolific and significant. Modernism in American music is broadly split between an experimental tradition (of which Cage was a leading exponent), keen to leave behind a European past, and a form of modernism that – like its European counterpart – is concerned with advancing musical material, though from the perspective of American experience. David Schiff argues that 'Carter's mature style dares to bring together these seemingly irreconcilable musical sources', and by doing so combines freedom of invention with intellectual challenge.<sup>11</sup> Dramatized instrumental roles are a regular feature of Carter's music and Schiff chooses the Third Quartet, which is divided into separate metric pairings of instruments, as a metaphor for the gap negotiated in Carter's music between Europe and America.

With a decline in the institutions of modernism especially marked in the United States since the 1980s, it is from Europe that most of Carter's commissions have come in the last twenty years, mainly from ensembles such as the London Sinfonietta and the Ensemble InterContemporain: it was perhaps recognition of this interest, and of the resources offered by the Sacher Foundation, that prompted him to accept an invitation from Paul Sacher to deposit his sketches in Switzerland.<sup>12</sup> In Carter's late style we see the dramatic contrasts so characteristic of his earlier music played out in less confrontational ways.<sup>13</sup> This fluidity is evident in *Night Fantasies* for piano (1980), in which all-interval twelve-note chords are used to convey, according to Carter, 'the fleeting thoughts and feelings that pass through the mind during a period of wakefulness at night'.<sup>14</sup> Shifting modes are also found in the piano piece 90+ (1994), written for the ninetieth birthday of the Italian composer Goffredo Petrassi, in this case underpinned, Carter says, by 'ninety short, accented notes played in a slow regular beat'.<sup>15</sup> The 1980s and 90s also produced oboe, violin, and clarinet concertos, the Fourth and Fifth String Quartets, and two substantial orchestral triologies: *Three Occasions* (1986–9) and *Symphonia: Sum Fluxae Pretiam Spei* (1993–7). The former puts together three separately composed pieces, all with Ivesian titles: *A Celebration of Some 100 × 150 Notes* (which includes Ivesian fanfares), *Remembrance*, and *Anniversary*. The three components of *Symphonia* – 'Partita', 'Adagio tenebroso', and 'Allegro scorrevole' – can also be played separately; together they constitute a symphony that ends with weightless sonorities instead of a synthesizing statement. 'Adagio tenebroso'

<sup>11</sup> David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (2nd edn), London, 1998, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Carter comments on this decision in Jonathan W. Bernard, 'An Interview with Elliott Carter', *Perspectives of New Music* 28/2 (1990), pp. 180–214; pp. 206–7.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of style in late Carter, see Arnold Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford, 1999, p. 262.

<sup>14</sup> Elliott Carter, Preface to *Night Fantasies* for piano, New York, 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Elliott Carter, programme note to 90+ for piano, London, 1994.

is generally considered to be one of Carter's darkest meditations, and for Schiff it 'seems to encompass all the suffering of the twentieth century'<sup>16</sup> – a century nearly encompassed by Carter's life. Of all the music considered in this chapter, Carter's makes the strongest claim to represent a mainstream modernism.

The ways in which modernism has survived and transformed itself, after many of the beliefs that held sway at its height in the 1950s have foundered, are of central importance for this chapter. György Ligeti is interesting in this respect because his output has successfully traversed both eras, meeting the demands of both modernism and postmodernism without the one being obviously subsumed by the other. From the vastly reduced resources of texture scores such as *Atmosphères* (1961) – which took a sideways look at constructivist composition, using dense, imperceptible micro canons to produce highly perceptible transformations in texture – Ligeti has gradually reclaimed the resources of melody and rhythm. The opera *Le grand macabre* (1974–7) is often seen as a turning point in this incremental process because of its return to harmonic progression, particularly in the final scene.

Subsequent scores draw on a range of influences, as exemplified by a renewed engagement with the musical past evident in the Horn Trio (1982), intended as a homage to Brahms, in which 'horn fifths' progressions evoke classical horn writing. Nevertheless, this heritage is heard from a skewed perspective and integrated into Ligeti's own musical language, separating it from more eclectic tendencies that, in his view, theatricalize the past.<sup>17</sup> Ligeti also acknowledges, through a quirky version of phase shifting, the impact of minimalism, notably in 'Selbstporträt mit Reich und Riley (und Chopin ist auch dabei)', one of three pieces for two pianos, *Monument-Selbstporträt-Bewegung*, from 1976. The phase shifts of minimalism might be described as aural illusions since their beats are not notated but arise instead from simultaneous metrical processes.

Such illusions are an important part of Ligeti's compositional technique and have been enriched by diverse influences since the 1980s. These include the metric complexities of Conlon Nancarrow's Studies for Player Piano: by punching patterns into paper rolls for player piano, or pianola, Nancarrow was able to achieve levels of metrical intricacy that would surpass the capacities of human pianists. It is this idea of simultaneous rhythmic levels that appeals to Ligeti, who had already touched on it in his *Poème symphonique* for a hundred metronomes (1962), and who is also attracted to the simultaneous metric processes that occur in the polyphonic percussion playing of several sub-Saharan African nations. Neither Nancarrow nor African polyphony appear in

recognizable form; instead they are used as points of departure for Ligeti's own polymetres, which combine to create a kaleidoscopic texture. Another trait in the later scores, particularly evident in the Horn Trio (1982), is the use of natural harmonics to create the distorted effects that, in one dimension or another, distinguish most of Ligeti's music.

A range of techniques appear in the five-movement Piano Concerto (1985–8). The first movement is a polymetric *moto perpetuo*, based around displaced hemiola patterns, where, as the composer comments, 'the rhythmic events, too complex to be perceived in detail, hang in a suspended state'.<sup>18</sup> The second movement contains characteristic extremes of register, jarring clusters, and Bartók-like superimposed modal systems, along with the folk-inflected 'night sounds' of slide whistle and alto ocarina. Ligeti has been preoccupied since the mid-1980s with piano etudes, which explore in detail many of the techniques found in the Concerto: so far he has produced two books of studies, the first (1985) containing six and the second (1990) a further six and two added subsequently, and a third book is under way. 1990 also saw the Violin Concerto, in which we hear more of Ligeti's capacity for complex textures and strange tunings – the latter notably in a passage in the second movement where ocarinas and recorders carry the melody.

Ligeti is one of the most eloquent of the composers discussed in this chapter; and this capacity to verbalize his musical thinking has undoubtedly contributed to the interest taken in his work, strengthened the position he occupies in contemporary culture, and (arguably) also added to the clarity of his music. The following comment situates his aesthetic in the middle of many currents: 'Now with the Piano Concerto I offer my aesthetic credo: my independence both from the criteria of the traditional avant garde and from those of fashionable postmodernism'.<sup>19</sup> Ligeti means by this that his music is dependent neither on abstract compositional schemes nor on references to a range of styles. Instead, it has found a path between these extremes by absorbing a range of influences into internally-generated, audible musical processes.

Like Ligeti, Luciano Berio has retained widespread admiration since becoming a well-known figure in the post-war avant-garde. Though very much involved in the Darmstadt of the 1950s, he experienced the faltering of modernism less acutely than others because he was not principally a system builder and had long been comfortable with multiplicity. His affinity with vocal music and gesture not only guarded against structural obsessions but also lent itself to music theatre in the 1960s and 70s, and his output included a number

<sup>16</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, p. 319.

<sup>17</sup> György Ligeti, *Études* (tr. David Feuerriegel and Annelies McVoy), notes to *György Ligeti: Works for Piano*, played by Pierre-Laurent Aimard (Sony, 1996), pp. 11–12.

<sup>18</sup> György Ligeti, 'On My Piano Concerto' (tr. Robert Cogan), *Sonus: A Journal of Investigations into Global Musical Possibilities* 9/1 (1988), pp. 8–13; p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

of scores that engage the genre of opera – although the composer insisted that they were not operas. The first, ironically enough, was called *Opera* (1969–70), while the second two were both collaborations with Italo Calvino: *La vera storia* (1977–81) and *Un re in ascolto* (1979–84). Because Berio believed that opera in the traditional sense of a sung story was no longer viable, it is appropriate that *Un re in ascolto* (A King Listens), which is loosely based around Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, takes theatrical representation as its subject matter and dramatizes the process of staging a play. The weakening of the producer's control is staged with his collapse at the end of the first act and in his eventual death – a death paralleled, the composer suggested, by the music 'dying structurally alongside him'.<sup>20</sup>

In the last years of his life Berio also continued his string of *Sequenzas* – pieces that characterize a particular solo instrument – with compositions since 1980 for clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, guitar, bassoon, and accordion. He also continued to elaborate these scores into compositions for solo instrument and ensemble in the *Chemins* series, completing *Chemins VI* for trumpet and ensemble in 1996. This series shows a willingness to revise existing ideas that was even more marked in Berio's disposition to work with material by other composers, most famously in the third movement of *Sinfonia* (1968–9), which builds on a symphonic movement by Mahler. Later work in this vein includes *Rendering* (1989), which combines Berio's own ideas with orchestrations, or restorations, of fragments from what would have been Schubert's Tenth Symphony, along with an arrangement for baritone and orchestra of six early songs by Mahler (1987). Such practices show Berio to be aware, like contemporary critical theory, of just how intertextual creative acts are.

Berio and Ligeti have managed to respond in idiosyncratic ways to changing priorities in modern music. With Luigi Nono we encounter a more uneven career trajectory that culminates in the highly regarded scores of the 1980s. A prominent figure in the early days of Darmstadt, Nono was never confined by formalist ideals and became the most politically committed composer of his generation, with well-known scores such as *Il canto sospeso* (1956) and the opera *Intolleranza 1960* (1960–1) employing modernist techniques to convey themes of social injustice. These sympathies remain active in his second opera, *Al gran sole carico d'amore* (1975), which takes revolutionary struggle as its topic. But at this time his music also turned in a new direction, prompting much debate about whether this amounted to an abandonment of a politicized aesthetic. This issue is important for a more general understanding

of modernism at the close of the twentieth century, and will be considered after introducing music from Nono's later years.

*... sofferte onde serene ...* (1974–6), composed after *Al gran sole carico d'amore* for Nono's pianist friend Maurizio Pollini, uses electronic resources not for political realism, but for the exploration of sound. The tape part expands the live piano performance and includes recordings of the instrument's mechanism. Nono acknowledged the influence on this music of the Venetian bells that reached his home from across the lagoon, and such floating sounds are an important component of his late style. Sounds from nowhere – islands in space – are the core of the landmark string quartet *Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima* (1980), one of the few works without electronics from the last decade. The fragments and silences of the title are much in evidence in music that is predominantly quiet and often high – music that slows time and sounds from the threshold of existence. Friedrich Hölderlin, the author of *Diotima* and other poems from which Nono liberally inserted fragments in his quartet is present in a silent capacity: the composer was adamant that these quotations are not to be read out, recommending instead that 'the players should "sing" them inwardly'<sup>21</sup> – a quixotic instruction that might be interpreted as an indication that the players should use the quotations to access a certain emotional intensity in the music, which will be conveyed to the audience.

Composed shortly after the quartet, *Das atmende Klarsein* (1980–1) for small chorus, bass flute, live electronics, and tape utilized the electronic studio of Südwestfunk at Freiburg im Breisgau, and this resource, along with an associated group of performers, was to prove invaluable in the following years. The floating vocal textures and electronically modified instrumental sounds, which include breathing and fingering, herald the sound world of *Prometeo* (1981–5), an unstaged opera based on the myth of Prometheus, with a libretto by Massimo Cacciari. Eschewing narrative direction in favour of reflections on the god who brings fire to humankind at terrible personal cost, the opera unfolds at a predominantly slow tempo through timbral associations, using high vocal textures, microtonal inflections, and electronic modifications. This sound world is also present in subsequent works such as *Omaggio a György Kurtág* (1983–6), while the dispersal of orchestral units in *Prometeo* is also a feature of the large orchestral piece *No hay caminos, hay que caminar* (1987). This title is extracted from an inscription found on a cloister wall in Toledo, which in full means 'Wayfarers, there are no ways, only faring on.'

Versions of this inscription appear in the titles of several late works, and the idea of a journey without established paths offers some insights into Nono's

<sup>20</sup> Luciano Berio, 'Eco in ascolto: Luciano Berio Interviewed by Umberto Eco' (tr. David Osmond-Smith), *Contemporary Music Review* 5 (1998), pp. 1–8; p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Luigi Nono, notes to *Fragmente-Stille, An Diotima*, Milan, 1980.

turn away from overt political themes. Another pointer is offered by Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', which forms the basis of Cacciari's *Il maestro del gioco*, a prose poem that appears in *Prometeo*. Famously, Benjamin talks of redeeming past suffering and of breaking open the continuum of history. Such ideals surely link Nono's early and late styles, suggesting that the strident calls for political action became transformed into an awakening utopianism.<sup>22</sup> The matter is well put by Helmut Lachenmann, a Nono pupil, when he comments: 'The silence into which Nono's late works lead us is a *fortissimo* of agitated perception.'<sup>23</sup> Formulated like this, we find in Nono a rejection of modernist formalism, alongside a heightening of modernism's critical charge at just the time when its institutional prestige started to wane. So Nono's late style finds space for (again in Lachenmann's words) an 'unprotected creative process' in which the familiar is estranged by heightened perception.<sup>24</sup>

Espousing a mysticism far removed from Nono's imagination, no composer demonstrates the contrast between the post-war years of dynamic invention and subsequent consolidation better than Karlheinz Stockhausen (b. 1928). Perhaps the most adventurous innovator of the 1950s, since 1977 Stockhausen has devoted his musical energies to work on the opera cycle *Licht*, scheduled for completion in 2002.<sup>25</sup> Conceived on a vast scale, *Licht* will comprise seven operas, one for each day of the week, six of which are complete at the time of writing. The sequence of composition was *Donnerstag* (1978–80), *Samstag* (1981–4), *Montag* (1984–8), *Dienstag* (1988–91), and *Freitag* (1991–6), while *Mittwoch* was premiered in 2000, so the cycle will finish when *Sonntag* is completed. Stockhausen has approached this mammoth task in a practical manner by allowing sections to stand as pieces in their own right: *Klavierstück XII*, for example, is to be found in *Donnerstag* and *Klavierstück XIV* in *Montag*. Furthermore, the orchestra used in *Donnerstag* has been replaced in later operas by synthesizers and electronic resources, thereby making production more manageable.

As one would expect from such a versatile approach to production, the operas do not possess a sense of unfolding drama, but dwell instead on the cosmic themes that underpin the cycle. These are found in the three central characters: Michael, who embodies dynamic action, Luzifer, who embodies idealism, and Eve, who embodies wisdom – each of these qualities being associated

<sup>22</sup> For more on Nono and Benjamin, see Mário Vieira de Carvalho, 'Towards Dialectical Listening: Quotation and Montage in the Work of Luigi Nono', *Luigi Nono (1924–1990): Fragments and Silence, Contemporary Music Review* 18/2 (1999), pp. 37–85.

<sup>23</sup> Helmut Lachenmann, 'Touched by Nono', *Luigi Nono (1924–1990): The Suspended Song, Contemporary Music Review* 18/1 (1999), pp. 17–30; p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> For an overview of Stockhausen's music, including *Licht*, see Robin Maconie, *The Works of Karlheinz Stockhausen* (2nd edn), Oxford, 1990.

with a musical formula. These characters can be split into several personae, with the same person being represented, sometimes simultaneously, as a mime artist, a singer, and an on-stage instrumentalist. Since the on-stage instrumental parts need to be memorized, they make great demands on performers, and Stockhausen has found players equal to this task by drawing on an inner circle of family and acquaintances. There is fine music in *Licht*, as exemplified in the huge role of the solo trumpet, played with virtuosity by Stockhausen's son Markus, found in Michael's journey around the earth in the second act of *Donnerstag*. But this inspired writing is let down by stereotyped representation of the world cultures that Michael encounters on his journey. Unfortunately, such miscalculations are never far away on a more general level, since *Licht*'s celestial images rely on the kind of essentialized gender roles that have been hotly contested in the later twentieth century. However, Stockhausen's creativity remains impressive, even if his grand vision is not always convincing.

This section opened with Boulez, and so it seems appropriate to close it with the figure with whom Boulez shared so many interests in the early 1950s and so few in subsequent years.<sup>26</sup> That figure is John Cage, a composer and inventor whose diverse activity was sustained by the prospect of letting sounds speak for themselves with as little interference as possible from intentions and traditions: '4' 33'' (1952), which simply invites audiences to listen to the sounds around them, offers the best-known example of this aesthetic. We have seen that after the system-building of the 1950s, many composers have explored broader conceptions of meaning and identity in music, and the same can be said, in an oblique way, of Cage, despite his willingness to subject the richest of semantic resources to the distancing of chance procedures. Generalizing, there are two main strands in Cage's output from the late 1970s to his death shortly before what would have been his eightieth birthday. One strand comprises a series of instrumental compositions, of sometimes extreme virtuosity; the other (which I will examine first) constitutes major multimedia works such as *Roaratorio* and the five *Europervas*, both of which draw on existing materials that contribute strongly to the meaning of the music.

During the 1970s Cage wrote a series of mesostic poems: poems, that is, with a keyword in capital letters running through the middle of the typescript. The results include a series of readings of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, with the words 'JAMES JOYCE' running through the centre. 'Writing for the Second Time through *Finnegans Wake*' forms the basis of *Roaratorio* (1979), a radio play commissioned by Westdeutscher Rundfunk. With a view to recreating Joyce's

<sup>26</sup> Shared interests are conveyed in Jean-Jacques Nattiez (ed.), *The Boulez–Cage Correspondence* (tr. Robert Samuels), Cambridge, 1993.

text in a different medium, Cage made recordings of sounds referred to in the novel and also recorded at places mentioned in Ireland. These sounds, along with recordings of Irish traditional musicians and the composer's reading of his mesostic text, were mixed down to a stereo tape for radio broadcast, using the facilities at IRCAM (in concert performance the text can be read and the traditional music played live). The result on the CD recording, which used sixty-two-track tape, is a jumble of sounds of varying density fading in and out, with Cage's expressionless reading taking place in the sometimes inaudible background.<sup>27</sup> The experience is neither about Joyce nor an interpretation of him; it is better understood as a presentation of him.<sup>28</sup> However, by drawing on a specifically Irish-American identity that emphasizes predominantly rural sounds and recognizably traditional music, even such an unorthodox presentation relies on established meanings more than Cage's aesthetics might lead us to suppose.

Issues of identity and tradition also arise with the five *Europeras*, Cage's major multimedia offerings of the 1980s. The Joyce-like compound *Europera* combines the words 'Europe' and 'opera' and sounds like 'your opera' when spoken. *Europeras 1 and 2* (1987) were Cage's response to a commission from the Frankfurt opera, while *Europeras 3 and 4* (1990) and *Europera 5* (1991) were written on a less grand scale, with piano accompaniment making them suitable for performances outside the opera house. Cage found the material for *Europeras 1 and 2* by plundering the New York Metropolitan Opera's archives for repertoire operas that were out of copyright. These provided vocal and instrumental lines that could be combined using chance procedures, yielding arias to be sung in no particular order by the nineteen singers. Sets and costumes were also extracted from archives and distributed randomly, while lighting was organized by chance operations that made any highlighting of a character accidental. *Europeras 1 and 2* are therefore collages of independent events and components, and because the quantity of chance decisions that fed them was so huge, a more technological solution than Cage's tried and tested coin-tossing procedures was required: a computer program was designed to simulate the chance procedures of the I Ching on a large scale. The result was a typically Cagean paradox: a very precise set of instructions generated by random means themselves derived from a computer. And the contradictions do not stop there, for the *Europeras* are caught in a tension between a genre associated with intense expression and the automated procedures Cage applied in order to defamiliarize learned responses. For some critics and listeners, these

scores give permission to cast off the fetters of tradition; for others they map a growing indifference to bourgeois culture.

After reaching the age of sixty, Cage felt free to develop a number of techniques that he had explored earlier in his life.<sup>29</sup> With *Roaratorio* and the *Europeras* we have looked at a strand in Cage's output that developed from earlier multimedia events. His already cited *Freeman Etudes* for solo violin, on the other hand, echo the strictures of instrumental compositions such as *Music of Changes* for piano (1951). Composed in two groups (1977–80/1989–90), these thirty-two studies were assembled by using procedures determined by star charts; the resulting music is so difficult that the violinist is forced to make decisions in order to render the music playable. In the final years of his life Cage wrote a series of so-called 'number compositions', which also hark back to another characteristic of his earlier music: sparse isolated sounds. Using a widely adaptable time-bracket method of composition, these pieces comprise fragments of specified duration ranges that occur during given time ranges in performance. The resulting music, taking *Four* (1989) as an example, is still, with gaps and single notes fading in and out, sometimes forming chords, sometime occupying lonely space. Cage completed some of his most significant projects in the last twenty years of his life, and even though these refined earlier techniques, he never lost his ability to perplex.

### Discourses

The most innovative work in post-war modernism – what might be called high modernism – took place in the 1950s and 60s. During these decades composers such as Stockhausen extended serial technique beyond pitch to include rhythm and duration, and also pursued these organizational possibilities into the electroacoustic studio. The overriding concern was with developing new musical techniques, a project that was pursued not only in composition but also in the related articles that composers and theorists wrote in journals such as *Die Reihe*. The most prolific and outspoken of these essayists was Boulez, who was equally dismissive of music's nineteenth-century institutions and of composers inclined to ignore developments in serialism. Despite this dependence on the written medium, high modernism ironically saw itself as concerned far more with how to do things than with what they meant. It formed this outlook in opposition to Romantic aesthetics, which associates music with extra-musical ideas, but in so doing encountered the paradox that technical advancement is of course an aesthetic in itself, not an avoidance of aesthetics; and one,

<sup>27</sup> Cage, *Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on 'Finnegans Wake'* (Mode, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> For discussion of this distinction, see James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 190–1.

<sup>29</sup> Pritchett makes this point; *ibid.*, p. 174.

when pursued in isolation, that ignores the range of ways in which music signifies.

As a consequence, much of the rethinking that has occurred since the height of modernist constructivism has concerned itself with the aesthetic considerations that were originally ignored. In a lecture from 1960, given at Darmstadt, we already find Boulez asking: 'Were we not set on a course that could lead only to what might seem to be a perfect "technological" rationality but was in fact a monumental absurdity?'<sup>30</sup> And this absurdity was spelt out in Ligeti's analysis of the opening piece of Boulez's *Structures*, Book 1 (1951–2).<sup>31</sup> Responding to these dilemmas, much of Boulez's subsequent work has been devoted to overcoming the contradictions generated between imposed form and individual moments that can pull in other directions – as can be seen in later works such as *Répons* and the orchestration of *Notations*, where we find a creative play between an underlying order and its expansive proliferations.

The new was built on the prospect of inventing a future through rejecting a past; nevertheless it was also a continuation of 'art' music, harking back to this tradition even as it jettisoned many of its tenets. One facet of the past that modernism was keen to develop was the notion that music enjoys a critical distance from everyday concerns: in a twentieth-century context new techniques might display an affinity with technological advancement, but music was also seen as offering a freedom that lay outside the constraints of mass production. Nevertheless, a combination of technical invention and critical values proved hard to sustain – a point forcefully made by Theodor Adorno in an address delivered at Darmstadt (as early as 1955) and later published as 'The Ageing of the New Music', in which he berated composers for hiding behind systems. Just one example of his large output on aesthetics and music criticism, this essay resists the modernist tendency to focus on technique by understanding music as a medium of subjectivity beset by all the dilemmas of modernity. Even though the article has been criticized for the vagueness of its references,<sup>32</sup> the ageing of the new remains an acute issue for modernism after the initial waves of innovation.

The inventions of the 1950s looked to a new future and this is perhaps the most significant reason, together with its critical impulse, why 1960s modernism was able to form a surprising alliance with new social movements. The 1970s proved to be a more difficult decade during which belief in

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Boulez, 'Putting the Phantoms to Flight', *Orientations: Collected Writings by Pierre Boulez* (ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, tr. Martin Cooper), London, 1986, p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> György Ligeti, 'Pierre Boulez: Decision and Automatism in *Structure 1a*' (tr. Leo Black), *Die Reihe* 4 (1960), pp. 36–62.

<sup>32</sup> Notably by Heinz-Klaus Metzger, 'Just Who is Growing Old?' (tr. Leo Black), *Die Reihe* 4 (1960), pp. 63–80.

modernism faltered, even though we have seen how it was then that many of its present-day institutions were established. The decade also saw something of a rethink, with modernism widening its semantic resources to include references to other musics, as we have already seen in connection with Darmstadt. However, this was a time of transition not just for modernism, but for a whole range of cultural practices. Most notably, it was a time when the youth culture of the 1960s became absorbed into mainstream values: rock music, which like new music sought an authenticity that would defy commercialization, saw its message of freedom becoming increasingly used as a marketing tool. And as gender studies became more sophisticated, critics and academics became increasingly sceptical of a music that so ostentatiously celebrated its male guitar heroes. Nor did progressive rock provide an escape from this impasse: as it became more like 'art' music, it increasingly reinstated the outdated ideologies of Romanticism, for which it was brutally condemned by punk rock with its anarchic impulses. Finally, the transition from the 1970s to the 80s saw conservative regimes installed in the UK and USA that had little sympathy for the aspirations of the 1960s. The result, in these countries at least, was that the public funds that had subsidized much modernist music became tighter throughout the 1980s and 90s, as free-marketeers insisted that culture should pay its way, with the consequence that modernism was reduced to a specialist sector.

A changed political climate has obviously not helped modernism; nevertheless internal contradictions and increasing theoretical understanding of aesthetic discourses have also affected its trajectory. In order to understand this cultural shift, it is instructive to see how these debates have been played out in the domain of architecture. Here the high-modernist aesthetic was most marked in the so-called international style which used new materials, such as reinforced concrete, and promoted efficient design over the needs of those who would occupy the buildings. The ideal is flawed because such inhabitants rarely conduct their lives in accordance with the systems that were supposed to channel their needs. Formalist architecture has been strongly criticised by, amongst others, Charles Jencks, who points out that buildings cannot just be about their own form because their colour, texture, and shape will interact with the surrounding buildings and environment.<sup>33</sup> Extrapolating from this, we can say that modernism is situated by its surrounding discourses, even if it chooses to work from a narrow aesthetic base.

Such insights derive from critical theory, which saw intense development in the last quarter of the century, both drawing on the reflexive powers of

<sup>33</sup> Charles Jencks, 'The Emergent Rules', in Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader*, Hemel Hempstead, 1993, pp. 281–94.

modernism and turning its attention to those same generative discourses.<sup>34</sup> Most criticisms and modifications of modernism focus on the ways in which its obsession with technique serve to disguise particular interests. How, they ask, does modernism portray gender, how does it relate to popular culture, and what is the listener to make of its focus on production? On close inspection, modernism reveals a number of contradictory values. One such paradox is embodied by a constructivist aesthetic which, on the one hand, might appear to strengthen the control of a composer while, on the other hand, allowing the composer to be marginalized – as Cage repeatedly demonstrated – by a system unfolding with a logic of its own. And we have already seen how elaborate compositional schemes leave a gap, of sometimes creative significance, between the compositional structure and what a listener may make of the music in performance. For this reason, a listener presented with a stream of sounds that shun a familiar organizational logic needs to find strategies for interpreting that experience. In so doing that listener, in the language of poststructuralism, treats the score more as a text than as a work, by creating meaning instead of simply decoding authorial intention.<sup>35</sup>

The same listener may of course hold views on gender and popular music that deviate from the prevailing modernist postures, which derive from institutions dominated by men. From the perspective of gender studies, modernism's narrowly constructivist aesthetic creates the illusion of a self-controlling subjectivity that reins in music's sensory, somatic qualities so that a hard-won institutional prestige is not tainted by feminine associations.<sup>36</sup> In the same vein, this doctrine of autonomy, it is argued, also rejects what is often seen to be the 'feminine' dependency of popular music.<sup>37</sup> However, while there is no disputing that the history of modernism has been excessively populated by men, attempts to convey it as an obsessively controlled discourse encounter problems because one of the most interesting facets of modernism is its continual dialogue with particulars that escape systematic control: with elements, that is to say, that undermine a closed subjectivity.

Before concluding this section with a more general consideration of postmodernism, I want to examine transformations in the discourses of modernism by reference, as a concrete example, to the values represented by discipline-specific journals. The American journal *Perspectives of New Music* was founded

<sup>34</sup> For more on applications of critical theory to musicology, see my *Constructing Musicology*, Aldershot, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> The key essay on this topic is Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Image-Music-Text* (tr. Stephen Heath), London, 1977, pp. 155–64.

<sup>36</sup> For a feminist view of modernism, see Susan McClary, 'Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition', *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989), pp. 57–81.

<sup>37</sup> For more on this association, see Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other', in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism*, London, 1986, pp. 44–62.

In 1961 along lines similar to *Die Reihe*, the journal in which many key early Darmstadt debates had appeared. The initial advisory board was made up entirely of composers, including Igor Stravinsky, Darius Milhaud, and Roger Sessions, while committed modernists such as Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, and George Perle all exerted strong influence in these early editions. The emphasis was on the intersection between modernist composition and theory, with both composers and theorists writing primarily on compositional systems and techniques – and thereby demonstrating (as I put it) more interest in how things work than in what they mean. Nor has the journal abandoned this strand, as a recent edition, which includes 'A Symposium in Honor of Milton Babbitt', demonstrates.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, true to the peculiar alliance of modernist rigour and hedonism that emerged in the 1960s, *Perspectives* has covered Cage and the experimentalists as well as minimalism.

From the mid-1980s, established concerns vie in its pages with influences that have transformed the field of contemporary composition and music theory. Recent issues devote sections to critical theory and to feminist music theory, with Susan McClary, in the latter, proposing cultural studies as the ground on which the contextualizing concerns of feminism and the technical preoccupations of music theory might meet.<sup>39</sup> A shift from means to meaning is also marked in a collection of essays published in 1994, all taken from the journal, entitled *Perspectives on Musical Aesthetics*. Amongst other things, it includes a series of essays by Benjamin Boretz, one of the founding editors, that reveal a crisis of confidence in modernism and in the Western canon. Arguing that masterpiece culture is based on symbolic autonomy and thus echoing much recent musicology, Boretz wishes to emphasize that music is something 'done by and among people' and thereby relates to specific human circumstances.<sup>40</sup>

Recent music scholarship has expanded not only the scope of interpretive methodologies at its disposal but also the range of contemporary music it examines. This diversity is well reflected in *Contemporary Music Review*, a journal founded in 1984. The eclectic range of topics is illustrated by the special issues devoted to 'Flute and Shakuhachi' and to 'Music and Mysticism', while significant space was devoted to music and the cognitive sciences.<sup>41</sup> This breadth

<sup>38</sup> 'A Symposium in Honor of Milton Babbitt', *Perspectives of New Music* 35/2 (1997), pp. 5–136.

<sup>39</sup> 'Critical Theory of Music', *Perspectives of New Music* 31/2 (1993), pp. 6–71; 'Toward a Feminist Music Theory', *Perspectives of New Music* 32/1 (1994), pp. 6–85; Susan McClary, 'Paradigm Dissonances: Music Theory, Cultural Studies, Feminist Criticism', *Perspectives of New Music* 32/1 (1994), pp. 68–85.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Boretz, 'Interface I–V: Texts and Commentaries on Music and Life', in John Rahn (ed.), *Perspectives on Musical Aesthetics*, New York, 1994, p. 125.

<sup>41</sup> 'Flute and Shakuhachi', Jo Kondo and Joaquim Bernitez (eds.), *Contemporary Music Review* 8/2 (1994); 'Music and Mysticism', Maxwell Steer (ed.), *Contemporary Music Review* 14/1–2 and 14/3–4 (1996); 'Music and the Cognitive Sciences', Stephen McAdams and Irène Deliége (eds.), *Contemporary Music Review* 4, 2 vols., (1989), also Ian Cross and Irène Deliége (eds.), *Contemporary Music Review* 9 (1993).

serves to demonstrate that current musical production and reception take place in a space that is pervaded by debates about methodology, textuality, identity, and meaning.

The space that such critical responses inhabit is often called postmodernism. Like modernism, postmodernism is also a contradictory affair, and much is gained from understanding it as a transformation of the same condition rather than as its successor. Postmodernism touches new music with the arrival of chance procedures in the 1960s, since, as we have seen, they undermine traditional notions of authorial intention. At the same time, however, such procedures are compatible with a modernist focus on technique, since chance operations are formal: with their arrival, we see music standing somewhere between determinate procedures and open textuality. Just as significant, however, is what might be called the semantic broadening of modernism, since as music becomes more referential and more willing to look beyond its own internal configurations, so it creates a level of meaning that is more obviously pitched at a semiotic level rather than a purely syntactic one. Put differently, as music become more reflexive, so its components increasingly participate in an intertextual and intercultural matrix.<sup>42</sup> And such expanded horizons are by no means limited to composition. Musicology, too, has become more sensitive to the range of ways in which music signifies and has sought to contextualize musics and discourses that were once considered autonomous. In so doing, it has challenged the selective reception history of early-twentieth-century modernism on which high modernism was based. Hence, as this volume testifies, the Second Viennese composers and Stravinsky are now understood within rich historical traditions instead of being valued primarily as inventors of new techniques. In this sense, the expanded horizon of postmodernism is more a reinterpretation of modernism than its abandonment.

### Composers 2: Ferneyhough, Birtwistle, Davies, Schnittke, Gubaidulina, Rihm, Saariaho, Saunders

We have seen that the prevailing response of established composers to the decline in modernism's fortunes was to consolidate their previous achievements, while moving beyond narrowly systematic concerns. In this section we encounter a more diverse collection of composers who came to prominence after the 1950s. It is possible to find shared concerns amongst them, particularly with regard to their ways of working through the tensions between tradition

<sup>42</sup> This argument is made in my 'Adorno and the Semantics of Modernism', *Perspectives of New Music* 37/2 (1999), pp. 29–50.

and restructuring that are the hallmarks of modernity, but they do not share the underlying sense of purpose that propelled the previous group to international significance. The most direct link with high modernism is provided by Brian Ferneyhough, whose music provides the principal exception to the general softening of structural obsessions since the 1950s. (Other British composers associated with this branch of new music, sometimes known as the new complexity, include James Dillon and Michael Finnissy.) Of all the composers discussed in this chapter, Ferneyhough has retained the most faith in the achievements of the 1950s, despite hailing from a later generation, so it is fitting that he should have initially found acceptance in Germany and became a major figure at the Darmstadt summer courses, particularly in the 1980s.

It should not, however, be assumed from this description that his music is without passion or urgency, though it is certainly forbidding on first hearing and even more so in its written format, due to the sheer density of information and detail. Generally written in short note-values, which give them a very black appearance, his scores are characterized by the extensive beaming used to articulate particular gestures and to create direction. Out of this mass of detail, often audible gestures arise such as the rhythmic unisons that open his *Second Quartet* (1980). The composer's own account of processes in this piece explains how the opening is meant to convey the idea of a 'super instrument' by adding instruments, one by one, to the opening violin to create a textural thickening of sound, into which he then introduces micro-variations such as different articulations of the same rhythm.<sup>43</sup> The underlying aesthetic orientation from which such practices arise is that, because most unfiltered musical statements fall into pre-established meanings, it is only by generating events from complex, unexpected intersections of objects that new energies can arise.

The complexity of Ferneyhough's music enables considerable intricacy to be achieved when writing for a solo instrument, and it is of course more practical for one person to devote significant time to learning convoluted music than it is for a large group. Established solo pieces from the mid-1970s include *Unity Capsule* (1975–6) for solo flute, *Time and Motion Study I* (1971–7) for bass clarinet, and *Time and Motion Study II* (1973–6) for cello and electronics. Solo instrumental compositions have remained an important medium for Ferneyhough: later pieces in the genre include compositions for piano (*Lemma-Icon-Epigram*, 1981); piccolo (*Superscriptio*, 1981); violin (*Intermedio all Ciaconna*, 1986); guitar

<sup>43</sup> Brian Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings* (ed. James Boros and Richard Toop), Amsterdam, 1995, pp. 119–20. For a detailed account of Ferneyhough's compositional procedures, based on sketch material, see Richard Toop, 'Brian Ferneyhough's *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*', *Perspectives of New Music* 28/2 (1990), pp. 52–100.

(*Kurze Schatten II*, 1985–8); and double bass (*Trittico per Gertrude Stein*, 1989). This concentrated medium also spills into pieces for soloist and ensemble, with *Terrain* (1991–2) for violin and eight instruments exemplifying Ferneyhough's daunting challenges for the soloist.

A series of chamber works from the 1980s, including the Second, Third, and Fourth String Quartets (the latter incorporating a solo soprano), demonstrate the increasing refinement of Ferneyhough's inventive capacity. 1982 saw the composition of *Carceri d'Invenzione I* (for chamber orchestra), which initiates a cycle of compositions by that name. The title, which means 'Dungeons of Invention', is derived from a series of etchings by Giambattista Piranesi that touched on a number of Ferneyhough's compositional concerns, inspiring him to consider how seemingly oppositional forces might be interlocked in the compositional process.<sup>44</sup> These preoccupations derive from systematic procedures that have their roots in the 1950s, although Ferneyhough's preference is to sieve complex material into smaller constituents, rather than to continually expand events in the manner of Boulez. Such concerns may seem narrow in an age of eclecticism; nevertheless they clearly provide a vital resource for Ferneyhough's imagination; his obsessions with system encourage, rather than inhibit, unexpected configurations, creating situations where, as Jonathan Harvey puts it, 'hyper-intellectual meets manic raver'.<sup>45</sup>

Twenty years ago, as now, composers such as Boulez and Ligeti would have featured in any survey of modern music; however, Harrison Birtwistle would have been less prominent.<sup>46</sup> Birtwistle's reputation advanced substantially in the 1980s, and *Secret Theatre*, a mixed ensemble piece written for the composer's fiftieth-birthday concert in 1984, is often seen as the turning point in his career: it received much critical acclaim and sums up his characteristic techniques. 1986 saw the premiere of *Earth Dances*, a large orchestral score, and it was in the same year that *The Mask of Orpheus* (1983) – a music drama started in 1973 – finally reached the stage. *Secret Theatre* is an apposite title for a Birtwistle score because drama is central to his musical imagination and permeates even instrumental pieces: *Tragoedia* (1965) for wind quintet, string quartet, and harp is concerned with the ritual and formal aspects of Greek tragedy, while the five woodwind, five brass, and three percussionists called for in *Verses for Ensembles* (1969) follow directions in the score to move around a four-tier stage in performance, dramatically enacting musical events. *Secret Theatre* itself establishes an interplay between a melodic

'tutus' and a mechanically repetitive continuum, with the collisions, mergers and separations of the two factions being dramatically underscored by staged movements.

It is apparent from such instrumental scores that Birtwistle is less concerned with character portrayal than with the formal procedures of drama – a priority that extends to stage works such as *The Mask of Orpheus*, where the three main characters of the Orpheus myth are represented in triplicate by masked singers, masked mime artists, and puppets. Dramatically, this device taps into Birtwistle's central musical preoccupation with, in his words, 'going over and over the same event from different angles so that a multi-dimensional musical object is created, an object which contains a number of contradictions as well as a number of perspectives'.<sup>47</sup> His next stage drama, *Gawain* (1989–91), based on the Middle English romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, yielded plenty of opportunities for such procedures, with scenes such as the Green Knight's appearance at King Arthur's court, his decapitation, and Gawain's seduction all experienced from several perspectives. This said, there is more of a narrative thread in *Gawain* than in *The Mask of Orpheus*, since Gawain gains self-knowledge on his journey to the Green Knight's chapel and returns to King Arthur's court refusing to accept a hero's welcome.

Retelling events, according to literary theory, enables us to see that they are constructed from particular viewpoints and are therefore open to interpretation; however such textual flexibility encounters some resistance from Birtwistle's preference for conveying archetypal situations by detached procedures. The advantage of such mechanisms is that, by leading both composer and audience away from hackneyed expectations, they can potentially release unexpected responses; the disadvantage is that they downplay human subjectivity in a manner that is somewhat at odds with an age fascinated by identity. After all, what may look like an underlying fundamental – a peep behind history – may be entirely historical: it may, that is to say, be an embodiment of modern alienation. Despite such cavils, dramatic situations clearly inspire Birtwistle's musical imagination; since *Gawain* he has composed two further operas, *The Second Mrs Kong* (1993–4) and *The Last Supper* (1998–9).

Birtwistle and Peter Maxwell Davies are often paired together on account of their shared British nationality, shared student experiences, and similar age. They also share an interest in music drama, even though in the later part of the century their responses to the tensions between tradition and modernity have diverged, with Davies looking to continue the symphonic tradition.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 131–2. <sup>45</sup> Foreword to ibid., p. xii.

<sup>46</sup> For comprehensive discussions of Birtwistle's œuvre, see Robert Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle*, Cambridge, 2000, and Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music*, London, 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Nicholas Snowman, 'Birtwistle the Dramatist: Some Reflections', programme to *Gawain*, Royal Opera House, London, 1991.

We see him turning in this direction with the orchestral score *Worlds* (1966–9), which is described by the composer as ‘a conscious attempt to reintegrate the shattered and scattered fragments of my creative persona’.<sup>48</sup> A new stage in this development was reached with the composition of the First Symphony (1973–6), which inaugurated another six symphonies (the Seventh was premiered in 2000 at the BBC Proms), and a wealth of concertos. The latter include the ten Strathclyde concertos written for members of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, an ensemble with which Davies has enjoyed close links since the mid-1980s.

In Davies’s recent music rigorous musical arguments jostle with evocations of the Scottish Orkney community in which the composer has chosen to settle, drawing on a range of resources, including chant, quasi-serialist procedures, the classical tradition, and folk. For example, two types of material – one derived from the overture to Haydn’s opera *L’Isola Disabitata* and the other from Jan Albert Ban’s *Vanitas* – are heard at the opening of the Fifth Strathclyde Concerto for violin, viola, and string orchestra (1991), before being absorbed into the musical process. The Fourth Symphony (1989), on the other hand, eschews such intertextuality, even though the influence of Sibelius is evident in the compression of four movements into a single form, and in the underlying developmental flow. Different sound-worlds certainly sit alongside each other in the ‘choreographic poem’ *The Beltane Fire* (1994), where Arnold Whittall finds ‘expressionistic symphonism and material evoking either solemn hymnody or exuberant folk-dance’, suggesting to him a conjunction between what he calls a “supranational” modernist manner and vivid representations of local people and places.<sup>49</sup> It is in such intersections that Davies most directly addresses late-twentieth-century worries about the erosion of traditions and communities.

Such concerns are of pressing urgency to Alfred Schnittke and Sofia Gubaidulina, two strong individualists whose lives nevertheless share core experiences. Both endured an intolerable Soviet regime and both experienced deep apprehension at what the collapse of the same system left behind. Schnittke comments: ‘The enormous problems in Russia which are building up just now will remain and possibly never be resolved’.<sup>50</sup> Gubaidulina, for her part, observes that ‘We are existentially shaken by what has happened to our country’.<sup>51</sup> Both composers sustained themselves financially by writing film

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After*, Oxford, 1995, p. 155.

<sup>49</sup> Arnold Whittall, ‘A Dance of the Deadly Sins: *The Beltane Fire* and the Rites of Modernism’, in Richard McGregor (ed.), *Perspectives on Peter Maxwell Davies*, Aldershot, 2000, pp. 138–58; p. 139.

<sup>50</sup> Schnittke, quoted in Anders Beyers (ed.), *The Voice of Music: Selected Interviews with Contemporary Composers*, Aldershot, 2000, p. 241.

<sup>51</sup> Gubaidulina, quoted in ibid., p. 45.

music, both experienced ambivalence towards modernist systems, both have prompted comparisons with Shostakovich, both chose to live in Germany after the collapse of Communism, and both convey religious feelings in their music, fuelled in Gubaidulina’s case by a deep-rooted mysticism. These shared life experiences, nonetheless, fuel very distinct musical identities.

Despite attempting, against all the odds, to keep abreast of developments in the West, Schnittke was frustrated by what he saw as the self-denial of constructivist composition and was not afraid to look elsewhere, notably to the Western canon, for expressive immediacy. His ties to the past are, however, complex since the polystylistism for which he is famous is torn between a clashing pluralism and a yearning for the certainties of tradition. Both these characteristics are strongly present in the *Concerto grosso no. 1* (1977), his best-known composition, in which a prepared piano and recognizably modernist techniques are heard alongside baroque figurations and a Tango. His desire for custom is more explicit in the Fourth Symphony (1984), in which chants from Russian Orthodox and Jewish litanies, amongst others, offer shelter from the confusion of modern life.

Redemption is an explicit theme in Gubaidulina’s violin concerto *Offertorium* (1980) – the work, premiered by Gidon Kremer, that made her an international figure – in which the central theme is sacrificed and resurrected; similarly, for the composer, the three personae of *The Seven Words of Christ* – cello, bayan (a Russian folk accordion), and orchestra – represent the Holy Trinity.<sup>52</sup> All Gubaidulina’s music is religious in inspiration; however, because it is not designed for the formal ceremonies of the church its meaning is not explicit, and so its intensity leaves interpretive space for the listener. In the Second Quartet (1987) this spirituality takes the form of a meditation around sustained sonorities, while *Zeitgestalten* (1994) creates an opulent tapestry of sound enriched by two electric basses.

We have seen that Ligeti, Boulez and, from a later generation, Ferneyhough feel that there should be a distinction between internal and external musical processes, drawing a firm line between their aesthetic and the eclecticism that has continued since the late 1970s. In doing so, they attribute primary importance to internal structural organization and less significance to the intertextual relations between a musical score and the range of discourses in which it is situated. This stance closes down horizons, while avoiding the hazards associated with mixing materials and traditions. Ligeti in particular distinguishes himself from neo-Romanticism – a nomenclature for a style of composition that rejects the structural obsessions of modernism and embraces the emotional

<sup>52</sup> Gubaidulina, quoted in ibid., p. 50.

resources of Romanticism. Arguing in favour of such stylistic expansion, the British composer Robin Holloway, a Schumann admirer, considers that composers should be at liberty to take inspiration from composers and styles of their own choice rather than being expected to follow the established examples of modernism.<sup>53</sup> At its most pronounced, this tendency involves a figure such as the formerly constructivist American George Rochberg turning to the emotional resources of Mahler and late Beethoven in his Third String Quartet (1972). An inclusive aesthetic is, however, hard to categorize because its nature is to suggest multiple possibilities.

Neo-Romantic is one of the labels, amongst others, that has been applied to Wolfgang Rihm, the leading German composer of his generation, even though his output is too diverse to be contained by this, or any other, category. Commenting on his relationship to history, in a typically extreme statement, Rihm boldly declares that 'Tradition can only ever be "my tradition".'<sup>54</sup> One reading of this pronouncement is that both the canon and modernism have become disembedded from the traditions that provided them with established meaning and have, consequently, become more open to interpretive practice. This loosening allows Rihm to take whatever he wants from music history, though it is generally a European past he looks to, reserving particular enthusiasm for the freedom of Schumann, the early atonal works of Schoenberg, and the fluidity of Debussy; influences which provide inspiration for a style that seeks directness, on occasion through violent or expansive gestures. Rihm's music sometimes filters tradition, sometimes distorts it, and sometimes finds refuge in it, while in all cases ensuring that references are heard through a thick semantic grid.

Rihm gained success in his early twenties and has continued to be a prolific composer. Scores from the mid-1970s such as *Dis-Kontur* (1974), *Sub-Kontur* (1975), *Klavierstück* no. 5 (1975), and the Third String Quartet (1976) gave him a reputation for drawing on late-Romantic style and challenging the stylistic strictures of high modernism.<sup>55</sup> *Sub-Kontur* is a large orchestral piece in sonata form, characterized by tempestuous sonorities and eruptions of ecstatic tonal harmony, both combined with a proportional tempo scheme reminiscent of the composer's one-time teacher, Stockhausen. The Third String Quartet, *Im Innersten*, alludes to a wide variety of sources from the genre and elsewhere; its second movement winds down to a Mahlerian adagio that functions as a

<sup>53</sup> Robin Holloway, 'Modernism and After in Music', *Cambridge Review*, June 1989, pp. 60–6; p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> 'Musikalische Freiheit', in Wolfgang Rihm, *Ausgesprochen: Schriften und Gespräche* (ed. Ulrich Mosch), 2 vols., Winterthur, 1997, Vol. I, p. 23.

<sup>55</sup> For more detailed discussion of Rihm, see Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity*, pp. 136–45.

refuge from the surrounding music, while being touched by the same events. (Interestingly, Rihm appears not to envisage a full-blown Romanticism in this passage, since he discouraged the Arditti Quartet from using portamenti and wide vibrato in performance.<sup>56</sup>) His admiration for Schumann is clearly evident in the three pieces that comprise *Fremde Szenen I–III* (1982–4), subtitled *versuche für klaviertrio, erste folge*. In the second of these scenes, lyric lines and flowing piano textures reminiscent of Schumann's chamber works are cut into by sometimes violent modernist gestures, or transformed by frenzied repetition. The music can be understood as an attempt to harness the abundance and diversity of Schumann, to experience subjectivity as a succession of moods.

The European tradition is obviously important to Rihm and probably never absent from his imagination, but its influence is not always direct. In the 1980s he was influenced by the late style of Nono, with its isolated islands of sounds, though he has not emulated the latter's use of live electronics; spaces and silences characterise *Kein Firmament* (1988) for an ensemble of fourteen players, in which the energy Rihm always seeks is reduced to small gestures that are associated through timbral links, interrupted by fierce accents, and heard across empty spaces.<sup>57</sup> The sound-world, though not the tonal references, of his large orchestral scores from the 1970s is also felt here with the presence of bass clarinet, contrabassoon and double bass. This intensity is transferred to a continuous line with *Gesungene Zeit* for violin and orchestra (1991–2), in which the violin spins a high line that is coloured by what the composer calls an orchestral *Doppelgänger*. With the consistent top register generating a certain urgency, Rihm's suggestion that he is trying to make 'strands of thought audible', to make something that is both ephemeral and palpable, is helpful and appropriate.<sup>58</sup> During the 1990s, he was engaged, amongst other things, with a project entitled *Vers une symphonie fleuve*, the fourth version of which was written in 1997–8. Punning on Adorno's essay 'Vers une musique informelle', which ponders the prospects of a music beyond formal constraints, Rihm's title conveys the idea of a form in motion (flooding beyond the confines of the single work).<sup>59</sup> The range covered by Rihm's output shows just how inclusive modern music can be: it can, like the Third Quartet, operate through a combination of internal

<sup>56</sup> Personal conversation with Irvine Arditti, 8 August 2000.

<sup>57</sup> For a useful discussion of this piece, see Rudolf Frisius, notes to recording of Wolfgang Rihm: *Kein Firmament* and *Sine Nomine* (CPO, 1992).

<sup>58</sup> Wolfgang Rihm, 'Time Chant' (tr. Mary Whittall), notes to recording, DG, 1992. The suggestion that the orchestra is a *Doppelgänger* is made by Rihm in the same place.

<sup>59</sup> 'Mitteilungen zu Vers une symphonie fleuve', in Rihm, *Ausgesprochen*, Vol. II, pp. 402–3. See also John Warnaby, 'Wolfgang Rihm's Recent Music', *Tempo* 2/3(2000), pp. 13–15.

and intertextual associations or it can, like *Kein Firmament*, work within more defined environment. This eclectic style rocks rigid distinctions between modernism and postmodernism, suggesting that the future and the past can intersect on multiple horizons.

Composers teach as well as compose, and so it is appropriate to end this section by mentioning Kaija Saariaho (b. 1952) and Rebecca Saunders (b. 1967), one-time pupils of, respectively, Ferneyhough and Rihm. Saariaho also studied with Klaus Huber and attended computer-music courses at IRCAM; the computer has remained important to her, as has Paris where – though of Finnish origin – she has chosen to live. Her work is characterized by subtle inflections of harmony and timbre, often enhanced by interactive electronics, as seen in *Lichtbogen* (1985–8) for chamber ensemble and electronics, in *Nymphéa* (1987) for string quartet and electronics, and in the solo song cycle *Lohn* (1996) for soprano and electronics.

After studying in Germany, Saunders has established more of a reputation there, notably in Darmstadt, than in her native Britain; although her music does not sound like Rihm's (she was also taught by Nigel Osborne), it clearly has affinities with his regard for gestural directness, for extremes (witness the shrill whistles in *CRIMSON*) and for inclusion. In Saunders's music, instruments achieve a presence that often includes the mechanical sounds that performers are normally encouraged to minimize, and the sounds are heard as humanly produced, while generating other allusions of a less specific nature. The titles of both *CRIMSON – Molly's Song 1* (1995) and *Molly's Song 3 – shades of crimson* (1996), however, make such allusions more concrete: they refer to Molly's monologue from James Joyce's *Ulysses*. So when Saunders, speaking of the latter piece, tells us that it 'seeks to sustain a musical energy strong enough to withstand the assaults of a succession of destructive events', she does so in the context of a polymorphic passage celebrated as an example of *écriture féminine*, thereby offering a response to Joyce far removed from the mid-century fascination with his formal procedures.<sup>60</sup>

### Survival

The range of recent developments makes modernism less easy to define, even if it remains possible to identify a stream of music that flows in modernist channels. Such music will, typically, encourage reflection on its own procedures, mechanisms, and content, and will contain elements that identify it as indebted

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Robert Adlington, 'Into the Sensuous World: The Music of Rebecca Saunders', *Musical Times* 140/1868 (1999), pp. 48–56; p. 56. My comments on Saunders are indebted to this informative article.

to the conventions of 'art' music – though it will not necessarily espouse bourgeois values of conflict and resolution. There is no reason to think that modern music will not continue to invent new methods of organizing musical material, but it is just as likely to develop new ways of connecting with multiple discourses. The intersection of acoustic instruments and live electronics is also likely to be a key concern for technical development, and may well lead to music-making becoming a more obviously collaborative affair. This said, there is ample scope for creativity without electronic resources, thereby avoiding the hazard of computer programs tugging the compositional process in a particular direction.

At its zenith, modernism achieved prominence not because it was popular but because it was considered important. For all its radicalism and frustration with nineteenth-century institutions, it occupied the institutional space of high art and derived prestige from that position, particularly by retaining the mystique of the individual craftsman in an age of mass production. Its position was therefore always precarious in a world that might at any moment decide to dispense with 'high art', and as the world becomes more inclined to do just that, so the modernist musical 'world' takes on the configuration of one global community amongst countless others. People do not, however, only subscribe to just one such community: they interact with a variety of traditions and cultures that cross-pollinate one another, thereby making modernism a more hybrid culture (as the Tate Modern testifies).

From such a pluralist perspective, not all the odds are stacked against the survival of a transformed modernism. For one thing, as already mentioned, the relative ease with which CDs can be produced makes music with a small following viable. For another, the World Wide Web provides new opportunities for the dissemination of music without support from recording companies or publishers; composers working in electronic media are already able to place sound files and scores on the Internet, to be downloaded by people with similar interests. Information technology enables global access and has thereby increased the potential audience for modernist music, which need no longer be a primarily North American and European phenomenon. The technological revolution that facilitates such possibilities is very different from the production-based wave of innovation that characterized the 1950s, because such soft technology focuses primarily on the distribution of knowledge. For this reason, it is likely that modernist music will be driven not only by new compositional techniques but also by innovative patterns of circulation.

Nevertheless, even functioning as a specialist interest rather than a dominant form of culture, modernism still requires some form of support – preferably from institutions willing to create space for music of intrinsic value that is not

driven by mass sales. For if modernism can no longer sustain claims to be the only authentic musical voice of the modern age, it can still explore creatively matters such as the intersection of identity and difference that are of shared concern in the modern world. In doing so, it may well push human subjectivity in directions that are less easily envisaged in realms that face the responsibilities of everyday practicality. A sector of music that can turn the energy of innovation towards the experiences that pragmatism is prone to marginalize will fulfil a vital aesthetic need and has every chance of survival.

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• 20 •

## (Post-)minimalisms 1970–2000: the search for a new mainstream

ROBERT FINK

The conventional wisdom is that Minimalism – an idiom of clear, non-decorative lines, repetition, and great tonal simplicity which arose in the 1960s and 70s – was the last identifiable new style in music history. Actually, there has since been an accelerating series of new styles, many of them building on minimalist roots toward greater and world-music-inspired complexity.

Kyle Gann<sup>1</sup>

My music is very much an example of what's happened to music at the end of the twentieth century. We're in a kind of post-style era. Composers my age and younger, we are not writing in one, highly defined, overarching expression, like Steve Reich or Luciano Berio would write.

John Adams<sup>2</sup>

### After the last new style

As a label for trends in music history since 1970, the term 'post-minimalism' has, at first, a seductively familiar ring – if by 'music history' we mean the succession of compositional styles conceptualized as a linear progression, most memorably analogized by Donald Francis Tovey as 'the mainstream of music'. If 'post-minimalist' is a music-historical adjective of time, like 'post-Romantic' or 'pre-classical', then the familiar narrative strategies of classical music might still apply: an early style (minimalism) progresses – either through evolutionary ramification or dialectical synthesis – to another, later one (post-minimalism). The stream flows on.

So argues Kyle Gann, in the epigraph above and in his 1997 survey *American Music in the Twentieth Century*. But, as Gann acknowledges, minimalism is most often seen not as the beginning of a new drama of stylistic evolution, but as *finis Terrae musicologicae*, as the 'last identifiable new style in music history'.

<sup>1</sup> Kyle Gann, course catalogue listing for Music 217, 'New Musical Currents Since Minimalism', Bard College, Fall 1998.

<sup>2</sup> John Adams, as quoted in Stewart Ocksenhorn, 'John Adams: Opera Can (and Must) Be Relevant', *Aspen Times* 117/90 (1998).

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