NEW MUSIC AND THE CRISES OF MATERIALITY

SOUNDING BODIES AND OBJECTS IN LATE MODERNITY

Samuel J. Wilson

ROUTLEDGE

New Music and the Crises of Materiality

This book explores the transformation of ideas of the material in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century musical composition. New music of this era is argued to reflect a historical moment when the idea of materiality itself is in flux. Engaging with thinkers such as Theodor W. Adorno, Sara Ahmed, Zygmunt Bauman, Rosi Braidotti, and Timothy Morton, the author considers music's relationship with changing material conditions, from the rise of neo-liberalisms and information technologies to new concepts of the natural world.

Drawing on musicology, cultural theory, and philosophy, the author develops a critical understanding of musical bodies, objects, and the environments of their interaction. Music is grasped as something that both registers material changes in society whilst also enabling us to practice materiality differently.

Samuel Wilson's research focuses on music and twentieth- and twenty-first-century modernity. He lectures in music aesthetics at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and interdisciplinary theory at London Contemporary Dance School. He is the editor of *Music—Psychoanalysis—Musicology* (Routledge, 2018).


Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

New Music and the Crises of Materiality

Sounding Bodies and Objects in Late Modernity

Samuel J. Wilson

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2021 Samuel J. Wilson

The right of Samuel J. Wilson to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-48185-8 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-48911-3 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-03853-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times
by SPi Global, India

Contents

Previously published material

Part I integrates and greatly expands on material from the following journal article: 'The Composition of Posthuman Bodies', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, special issue on 'Bodily Extensions and Performance (Avatars, Prosthetics, Cyborgs, Posthumans)', Vol. 13/2 (2017), pp. 137–152.

Chapter 5 develops material from the following article: 'Notes on Adorno's "Musical Material" During the New Materialisms', *Music & Letters* 99/2 (2018), pp. 260–275. A small amount of the material from the opening of this article is also integrated in the Introduction.

Chapter 5 also includes a short passage, updated, from my unpublished PhD dissertation. See Samuel Wilson, 'An Aesthetics of Past–Present Relations in the Experience of Late 20th- and Early 21st-Century Art Music', PhD Dissertation (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2013).

Acknowledgements

There a number of people whom I must thank for their support and assistance with the finalisation of this book project.

I am grateful to the composers and performers who have granted me permission to include third-party material, and for their interest in the project: Aaron Cassidy for granting me permission to reproduce an excerpt from his *Second String Quartet* and his photograph of Séverine Ballon's performance of Liza Lim's *an ocean beyond earth*; Lim for supplying this photograph and that of the bow from her *Invisibility*; Ballon for granting me permission to include the former photograph of her and the second photograph, taken by her. Thanks also to James Saunders for enabling me to include an excerpt from his *materials vary greatly and are simply materials*, and to Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri and Pe Lang for their photograph of a detail from *Untitled IV*. I am grateful to Breitkopf & Härtel for allowing me to include the excerpt from Helmut Lachenmann's *Pression*.

Some material that makes up this book took earlier form in journal articles. I am indebted to Sita Popat, Sarah Whatley, and the peer reviewers for their insightful comments on an article which has been incorporated into Part I. I am similarly grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers who provided careful and constructive feedback on the *Music & Letters* article that constituted Chapter 5 in an earlier form. Additionally, Isabella van Elferen's generous feedback on an early draft of Chapter 4 was hugely helpful. The positive feedback and encouragement provided by the anonymous reviewers of the book proposal and completed manuscript have also been enormously valuable, as has guidance from Genevieve Aoki, Music Editor at Routledge, in taking the book from proposal to publication.

My hope is that this book might resonate particularly with a recently emerged and currently emerging generation of scholars for whom indeterminacy and multiplicity are not so much abstractions as conditions embodied in the precarity of their working life – one now typified by multiple and temporary and only ever partial institutional associations, short-term contracts, and a blurring of professional and personal time. In light of this, I am thankful to a wider community of supportive scholars – many in the early stages of their careers and working on the margins of the (relative) security afforded by higher education institutions – with whom I share conversations and alliances in these times. For those working in teaching-focused positions, such as myself, the truism that academic writing

happens slowly manifests in a very particular way. For me this meant a temporality of working and writing typified by long periods of reflection between sporadic bursts in times that were themselves characterised by betweenness: in evenings, lunchtimes, weekends, the very early morning before (paid) work, time booked as 'holiday', whilst commuting, sometimes even in waiting rooms. Again, to the numerous colleagues and friends who sustain both ongoing discussion and one another in this context, I must again say thanks. This includes many current and past members of the London Critical Collective – I am especially grateful for many energising conversations with Edwina Attlee, Sam Johnson-Schlee, Rebecca May Johnson, Matt Mahon, Chrys Papaioannou, Victoria Ridler, and Philippa Thomas.

I am indebted to my colleagues at London Contemporary Dance School, where I am lucky enough to have if only a few days of research time per year, with whom I have ongoingly discussed many of the ideas that inform this project. Carolyn Deby, for her knowledge and openness in talking about some of the ecological ideas related to the last chapter, deserves particular mention.

Connected with the sense of unpredictability mentioned above, this book, like many others, was finalised and revised during the UK coronavirus lockdowns of 2020. Given this writerly present, and the reading after this, one might read (on the part of the author perhaps) an overdetermination of the notions of precarious present and unpredictable futures. That said, it should not be read only in that context; these ideas of indeterminacy are explored most fully in the final chapter, which was nonetheless written before these events.

The deepest thanks I have for my wife Harriet, for her untiring support, and for being a partner in thoughtful conversation as much as any other kind.

Samuel J. Wilson

Introduction

New musical materialisms

Matter seems to be the solid ground on which we stand. In the European art music tradition, it provides the sturdy enclosures of the concert hall and the opera house, and the objects and beings – instruments, musical technologies, and persons – that reside within them. An immaterial music floats above this ground – the musical work an object on display – and is sounded within these walls. But under some circumstances of listening one notices the space, and its objects and bodies, resonating responsively. Recording technologies and acoustic apparatuses help us quantify these physical relations of sound and its imagined enclosure, and this space becomes thought less as a void filled with music and more as a quantity of air vibrating harmoniously. As 'I am sitting in a room', the ethereal materialises. Further, on relistening, the bodies of listener and performer, and the latter's relationship with their instruments and voice, begin to undermine our assumptions about music's ephemerality. This is underpinned by a historical shift in understanding, in which the materiality of these same bodies and bodily relations transform: bodies are today thoroughly embedded in technological networks and, conversely, technologies are literally placed within bodies; today one is disposed to consider bodies in their situatedness within wider ecologies of the human and nonhuman, and indeed bodies themselves are understood increasingly as complex systems and not as unitary wholes.

Echoing these shifts, in this book I seek to develop a better understanding of the problematic relationship between matter and sound. I focus on some indicative late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century contexts, which, I argue, themselves place great urgency on contested notions of materiality through compositional thought and practice. I suggest that music not only becomes an object understood as material, but itself becomes a practice of understanding, changing notions of matter during this time.

What I am both diagnosing as condition and prescribing as theorisation is the emergence of *new musical materialisms*. This phrase can be read playfully, in two complementary ways. The first alludes to the concept of 'new music' – and more particularly to the notion that new music undertakes certain kinds of practices with respect to its material. This is to understand new music as material(ist) practice. Second, it makes reference to something distinctly new of and in materialist theories – and more acutely, the idea that contemporary materialism should take

a fuller account of music, historically considered perhaps as the most abstract of the arts.

On the first reading: the concept of new music as called forth here is developed in the work of Theodor W. Adorno, for whom it is defined as a challenge to conventionally inherited ideas about what music is and what music does. This challenge need not be dramatised or stated openly. Adorno argued that this is because musical material embodies the contents of the world from which it emerges – indeed, it embodies the paradoxes of that society and history. This is enacted within the fabric of the work, at the level of its technical construction. As such, compositional technique cannot be isolated from this aspect and, by the same token, any technical issue in composition is always more than 'merely technical' in character. In his essay, 'Criteria of New Music' (1959), he writes:

> The truth of the work of art is […] that its meaning registers the ideological stage that has been reached, the contradictions of the situation right down to the depths of the technical contradictions that have to be mastered, and may even surpass them by articulating directly the truth of philosophical consciousness.[1]

The quality of this embodiment also has a historical dimension that is hidden, owing, in large part, to the apparent immediacy of the music before us and its non-representational nature (an idea explored in depth in Chapter 5): 'Music possesses no contents borrowed directly from the external world. In exchange, contents have become embedded in the traditional forms,' Adorno suggests elsewhere.[2] Importantly, the concept of new music emphasises a (self) critical outlook with respect to the place and function of artistic works in society and the 'ideological stage that has been reached': the social and historical antagonisms they embody are a source of concealed excitation. This means that the development of music is not defined solely by 'purely musical' advances, but also by a relationship with what is outside it; indeed, as suggested already, to refer to compositional 'technique' or 'musical material' is to refer already to an outside that is paradoxically embedded within these musical features.

Furthermore, while new music does often appear technically complex and 'difficult' for the listener, for Adorno this was not simply an effect of its intricate construction, but was owing to its radical difference when held against the consumables of mass culture. The 'products' of new music composition are very different from the products of mass culture, not only in their form but in that the latter encourages frictionless consumption. Given the dominance of mass culture in everyday life, this characteristic ease of consumption becomes a naturalised model of reception, against which reception in general is otherwise measured. And this radical difference – alongside the paradoxical notion that music is intimately connected with society through its embodiment of social antagonisms – was for Adorno part of its utopian function, in so far as this reminds us of the possibilities of a world different from one of a manufactured culture and administered society. New music should therefore not be thought

of as a 'style' but as a characteristic criticality vis-à-vis historical and social conditions, a critical impulse enacted *within* musical material.

A key claim made in this book is that an Adornian understanding of musical material can today be read productively in light of recent materialist theories and philosophies. I also suggest, looking in the other direction, that the dialectical and historically reflexive character of Adorno's conception of musical material remedies potential pitfalls in these more recent philosophies. I develop these ideas in detail throughout; this is implicit in how numerous musical examples are discussed and theorised. This applied thinking lays the groundwork for the more direct, though perhaps abstract, examination of these ideas that come later; principally this happens in Chapter 5, in which I argue that the dialoguing of these perspectives provides critical resources for theorising materials' activities in music, for thinking through the contemporary specificities of materials' antagonistic character, and for reassessing how one conceives compositional agency when facing these materials. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge here that, while points of continuity can be traced, it should go without saying that today's world is different to that inhabited by Adorno. The socially and historically situated character of music also means that one would therefore not expect the new music of today to sound like the music that is discussed in his writing (Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler, Schoenberg, and others). To speak of new musical materialisms is thus also to suggest that new music's relation to material has changed since this time. In this book I make the case that strands of new musical activity insist we attend to changing notions of materiality, including that of bodies, objects, and the wider environments in which these find themselves.

I also argue that these developments should be considered in their relation to a still developing modernity – a term, discussed below, which I use to signify a long-standing historical era and set of socio-cultural practices, and to evoke the understanding of these through the critical theory of Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Fredric Jameson, Zygmunt Bauman, Rosi Braidotti, and others. And this, in fact, helps to clarify *the* central claim made in this book: that *changing notions and contested practices of materiality are one central but as yet underemphasised concern manifested and explored in the critical music of the (particularly late) twentieth century and after*. Furthermore, to discuss new musical materialisms is to say something crucial of the historical situation and aesthetic valences of the materiality in this period: music does not just reflect the material conditions of its production but actively enables critical play and reorientations vis-à-vis what we believe materiality to be in our contemporary historical moment. Music expounds the felt sense of this time's changing material conditions.

The second reading of this introductory phrasing is suggestive of a specifically musical dimension to what has been widely referred to as the 'new materialisms'. This is a term used by a number of scholars and practitioners to mark out some contemporary, interrelated philosophical and interpretive directions. In the singular, this term is a necessarily problematic label. A recent volume of essays – *New Materialisms* – reflects this issue in its plural title. Nonetheless, this volume lays claim to a certain kind of thinking, calling for more material modes of socio-cultural analysis and interpretation.[3] As in other recent titles, this is stated contra

some earlier methodological turns: for Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, the radicalism of the 'cultural turn' is now exhausted;[4] for Braidotti, 'neo-materialism' resists the dominance of the 'linguistic paradigm' as its mode of analysis.[5] (New) materialism, as considered here, is thus not a distinct method, but a field of related concerns, questions, and theoretical inclinations. Despite engaging material thinking, music studies has not yet taken account of some emerging materialist trends encountered in interconnected fields such as philosophy, art theory, and cultural and gender studies. Furthermore, while new materialist perspectives have recently come to focus on artistic practices, these discourses predominately tend to refer toward the plastic and visual arts, over music.[6] Just as musicology could find something productive in some forms of recent materialist theory, new materialist philosophies could likewise learn something from engaging music – an art that has often been considered to cut across the material and ephemeral, the physical and the abstract, problematising each term in dialectical relation to its other. 'New materialism', as Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin put it, 'takes scholarship into absolute deterritorialization, and is not an epistemic class that has a clear referent. New materialism is something to be *put to work*.'[7] I undertake some of this work here.

Despite this context, I do not label my approach 'new materialist' in the sense used by these writers, though I do make reference to some thinkers sometimes labelled new materialist. I do this in the context of a longer history of materialist thinking, as I hope is made clear by my earlier references to Adorno and later references to Marx, Freud, and others. I would like to deny an easy 'either-new-or-old' materialisms binary and narrative of succession; while such distinctions can sometimes be useful, my use of theory is a little more nonlinear. More fundamentally, I am resistant to an (understandably strategic) act of self-branding that enacts a kind intellectual franchising where I would place a 'new materialist' sign at my front of shop, to ensure the reader knows this is just one outlet of an agreed and familiar model, and that they will know the kind of thing that's on offer even before they walk in.[8] I take inspiration in part from what I see in strands of Sara Ahmed's work: a sense of productive encounter with these new materialisms while also hesitating to dismiss the findings of past thinking (including the 'cultural turn') when seeking to develop contemporary materialist thought.[9] My aim is to mobilise some conceptual practices that seek to understand changing notions of materialism and materiality as these manifest in and around musical composition, an activity which necessitates engagements with and conversations among a range of recent and 'historic' materialisms.

This study also develops in the context of materialist thinking currently burgeoning within thinking about music specifically. Georgina Born has considered how identities are constructed musically and mediated materially.[10] Emily Dolan has sought to establish, with reference to Haydn's instrumental writing, 'how music's perceived immateriality and absoluteness depended upon concrete, material changes in orchestral practice'.[11] Christoph Cox has proposed a 'sonic materialism' that seeks to give dignity and a theorisable basis to the materiality of 'sound itself'.[12] While my focus is on music from the late twentieth century and after, this is also a period that comes after that focused on in a host of writings,

which outlined changes in cultures and technologies of listening in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These changes were themselves constituted in part by the emergence and systematisation of acoustics and sound as material phenomena.[13]

The plural 'materialisms' in this Introduction's subtitle therefore refers to two things: multiple yet interconnected theoretical orientations to matter in the work of philosophers, musicologists, and cultural theorists; and multiple yet interconnected approaches to musical material in the work of twentieth- and twenty-first-century composers. I position my discussion at the points of intersection and antagonism both between and immanent in the two.

(After) modernism and modernity

I situate this discussion within the context of some recent trends in modernity. The book's title refers to its 'late' period. This term I use to evoke a number of specific features that I hope will become more familiar – their conventional usages might also be defamiliarised – through their repeated usage, although most fundamentally I am referring to some shifts in organisation of living, principally in Europe and North America, from around the 1970s onward, as encountered in a constellation of terms, including post-Fordism, the information society, and the precarious service economy.[14]

This 'late' condition is envisaged as simply the latest chapter in a perhaps 500-year period from which, as Marshall Berman puts it, emerged a 'maelstrom of modern life'. This was rooted in many spheres including:

> great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology […]; immense demographic upheavals […]; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; systems of mass communication […]; increasingly powerful national states […]; mass social movements of people; finally, bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market.[15]

Echoing this, as Julian Johnson writes:

> Benjamin, Jameson, Foucault, and Habermas (among many others) have used the term [modernity] as a specific historical category to refer to a period of Western history beginning somewhere around the end of the sixteenth century and which appears to approach a terminal phase in the latter part of the twentieth century.[16]

And while I talk about music after modernism, for reasons that I outline below, I generally avoid the term 'postmodernism'; rather I take postmodernism (glossing Fredric Jameson) as a symptom of the cultural and material conditions (Jameson: 'late capitalism') which provide the framework for my discussion.[17]

What I do tend towards is an insistence that this discussion of music should be placed within a history of modernity, and of modernism. I do this head on in Chapter 3, which takes a wider historical view than the other chapters, in order to consider some critical issues that span early twentieth-century music and a more recent era of post-Cagean aesthetics. This echoes recent moves in musicology and music aesthetics to consider music's part in the formation of modernity – one sees this in the work of John Butt, Karol Berger, Mark Evan Bonds, Daniel Chua, Julian Johnson, and others[18] – and to consider modernism not just as a series of techniques (such as dodecaphonism and abstraction) but as a perplexing, paradoxical, and often critical engagement with the intellectual and material conditions of modernity: diversely enacting and disrupting logics of progress and rationality; often expressive of interests in the primitive Freudian self and the orientalised colonial other; and challenges to mass production, spectacle, and the commodity-form.

The intimacy and quarrel between modernism and modernity here informs my discussion of our more recent period. Centrally, I ask what the once-closely-held modernist commitment to one's artistic materials – be this the flatness of one's canvas in painting, or poetic experimentation not with expression conveyed through language but with the terms of language itself – means in a time when established notions of 'the material' are in flux. I seek to better account for what this commitment might mean, how it might change, in a music of a society in which not only 'all that is solid melts into air', but where notions of both society and self are increasingly understood as malleable and impermanent, as opposed to cast solidly. This is most recently embodied in the notion of the 'flexibility' of one's labour and the celebration of personal resilience – bending without breaking – above rigidity.[19]

Cast in these terms, new musical materialisms' critical explorations of materiality under late modernity is but the latest chapter in a longer history. Indeed, this is to suggest also that – 'immaterial' – music has an important function in establishing what we understand by materiality. A materiality specifically of and after modernism is characterised well by Douglas Mao, writing in the field of literary studies. He writes of 'modernism's extraordinarily generative fascination with the object understood neither as commodity (Goods) nor as symbol (Gods), but *as* "object," where any or all of the resonances of this complexly polysemous word might apply'.[20] In his *Solid Objects* he argues that this is a markedly modern state of affairs:

> This feeling of regard for the physical object as object – as not-self, as not-subject, as most helpless and will-less of entities, but also as fragment of Being, as solidity, as otherness in its most resilient opacity – seems a peculiarly twentieth-century malady or revelation, in any case; or rather, we might say, the open acknowledgement of such a feeling seems one of the minor trademarks of the writing of this period.[21]

I suggest that music has an important place in this story of materiality and modernity. I hope to contribute a discussion on what musical and sonic practices offer

by way of performed investigations of a distinctly 'problematic materiality' (outlined in Chapter 1) – which emerges urgently as a characteristic of recent modernity.

Bauman's distinction between *solid* and *liquid* modernity – with all the material evocations both words offer – is useful in articulating the needs of critical theory under this late modernity. He differentiates these terms in order to mark a shift in the character and practice of modern life, consistent with the shifts towards late(r) modernity I mentioned above. Bauman uses 'solid modernity' to refer to a modernity of the Fordist factory, a rationalised and rationalising bureaucracy, and a time of totalitarianism and surveillance. 'Liquid modernity' refers to something different. Bauman outlines some shifts that one might observe in the later twentieth century: this earlier modernity 'appears "heavy" (as against the contemporary "light" modernity); better still, "solid" (as distinct from "fluid", "liquid", or "liquefied"); condensed (as against diffuse or "capillary"); finally, systemic (as distinct from network-like)'.[22] A hundred years ago 'to be modern' meant to chase 'the final state of perfection' – now it means an infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired.[23] Solid modernity, Bauman suggests, 'was the target, but also the cognitive frame, of classical critical theory'; it provided an image of society and our emancipation within it which was for Adorno and Horkheimer a model akin 'to a shared household with its institutionalized norms and habitualized rules, assignment of duties and supervised performance, in which, with good empirical reason, the idea of critique was inscribed'.[24] Liquid modernity presents different framings and challenges for critical theory.

As I hope should be clear from the chapters that follow, I do not suggest Frankfurt School critical theory be jettisoned from this discussion; instead, I propose that, at risk otherwise of performing an anachronism, this critical theory be challenged and reassessed through facing the new circumstances of the late modern (Bauman's liquid modernity). This is to suggest one always historicise (glossing Jameson again) not only the substance theorised but theory itself. As implied through my reference to 'New Music', Adorno's thought continues to provide valuable insight into the music and society of today – although in a manner different to his own time. This is an argument I make directly in Chapter 5, through bringing into conversation Adorno's musical materialism and Jane Bennett's 'vital materialism'. And if one takes seriously the notion inherited from modernism – that art might embody criticality vis-à-vis the conditions of society – one should not be surprised to find that what music today addresses critically, and the manner of this address, will be different from the new music of an earlier modernity.

A range of musical works and practices are discussed in the following pages. Many, though by no means all, are associated with composers' names well-established in scholarly discussions of late-twentieth-century modernist – and more broadly 'new' – music, for example Brian Ferneyhough, Helmut Lachenmann, and Gérard Grisey. Regarding my selection and framing of the music discussed, it should be stated immediately that this book is as much focused on theory as it is on music, and consistently poses a relation between the two whereby the music shapes the theory just as the theory does the music. This means that this book is not, at least directly, centred on composers' and practices 'after' (either chronologically or

figuratively) some event or date – modernism, World War II, 1968, or 1989 – nor is it a survey of a late-twentieth-century and contemporary compositional field.[25] It rather explores contemporary material and cultural conditions as a *problem* diagnosed in and through the particularities of compositional practices vis-à-vis musical materials. This problematic is manifest immanently in these materials, and not only in how we conceptualise and talk about materiality. This is to say that how we live, and collective conditions of living, needn't be propounded and contested exclusively through propositional, linguistic discourses, but are also actualised musically.

My method of discussion is often one of juxtaposition, seeking to trace subcutaneous thematic and technical connections by rhetorically posing associations between figures who might in all outward appearances seem entirely dissimilar: for example Grisey and Annea Lockwood, Heinz Holliger and Jacob Kirkegaard, and John Cage and Liza Lim. These methodological choices, and my decision not to focus on a single 'school' of composition, also reflects the very nature of the contemporary as – and this should go without saying – an always-emerging field, which precludes a periodisation or a surefooted typology. That said, within this diverse terrain, the influence of composers such as Ferneyhough, Lachenmann, and Grisey is no doubt felt by the younger generation who navigate it, as a consequence of the former group's impact on compositional thinking and aesthetics in general, as well as more directly on specific composers at the level of individual biography (for instance, Ferneyhough's influence on Lim and Aaron Cassidy, who are both discussed below). Additionally, within these contexts I have also attempted – albeit in a limited way – to address some historical oversights or underemphases through cognisance towards the makeup of the composers discussed, for example in terms of gender balance (this also goes for the theoreticians and philosophers whose ideas I have mobilised).

Chapter outlines

An intended argumentational trajectory runs throughout this book, from the context of recent material conditions to a focused exploration of bodies and objects, and then back towards the broadness of the environments in which these are embedded – and this is how I conceived of it as an author. But the reader might wish to approach it differently: one might, for instance, wish to start with Chapter 5 and explore the other chapters in the wake of the theoretical and philosophical issues foregrounded there. Starting with Chapter 3, instead, would emphasise the particularity of some musical case studies, through which these issues manifest. Nonetheless, each chapter aims to add something cumulatively to some common themes that emerge around bodies, objects, and materials. Hence I present the reader with a story in three interconnected parts, which take these notions as their impetuses.

Part I focuses on the place of the body in music in relation to contemporary changes in society, associated with a 'liquid' neoliberal service-based economy and new technologies, which problematised the notion of the body as organic, unified, and fully our own. It is argued that this musical approach to bodies not only reacted to but enabled the practice of new ways of being bodies during this time of change.

Chapter 1 explores the problematics of what constitutes materiality, especially the material body, within this context. This is a body that is composed of material and enacted materially, which might be made use of compositionally. The chapter title plays with a double notion, alluding first to the long-standing idea that virtuoso musical bodies are 'possessed' during performance, while, second, invoking an idea established in strands of materialist theory (Marx and after; more recently and differently in the context of posthumanist theory): that our bodies are also no longer our own when they are integrated into and directed through a technologically mediated society. Crucially, I propose that some contemporary compositional strategies constitute the exploration of *crises of materiality* that are enfolded within contingent historical, social, and technological particularities. They manifest repeated and plural attempts to navigate and determine materiality and material bodies, and their conditions of actualisation and imagining.

Chapter 2 extends this thinking through the detailed focus on a case study. It draws on the figures of the cyborg and the posthuman to consider two pieces from Brian Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study* series, which each explore the body's relationship with technology. It is argued that *Time and Motion Study II* provides the listener with a 'problematic' human body – one intertwined with nonhuman technologies – in order to refigure what the body means within late twentieth-century modernity. *Time and Motion Study III* manifests vocalities envisioned posthumanistically via body as assemblage. Hence, in this chapter I offer a model for considering how the material crises identified in Chapter 1, which operate at the macro-level of socio-historical conditions, might be observed and interpreted at the micro-level of specific musical works.

Following this, Part II foregrounds the objects which engage, face, or extend the body. It also seeks to trace some contemporary developments within a longer historical frame, looking to genealogies and contexts that precede the chronology of the liquid modern. These include '60s experimentation connected with Happenings and Fluxus (Chapter 3), and some earlier twentieth-century modernisms, including Edgard Varèse's music and, a bit later, György Ligeti's (Chapter 4). Furthermore, Part II embeds a discussion of musical objecthood in multidisciplinary artistic contexts.

Chapter 3 emphasises one object – the piano – as a repeatedly invoked site of questioning via its relation to the bodily. I consider performers' orientations towards pianos as material objects – in particular, orientations constituting interstitial practices suspended between musical performance and performance art. Drawing on feminist phenomenology and Marxist theory, Sara Ahmed has argued that orientations and material relations conceal history, simultaneously foregrounding some aspects of perception at the cost of others.[26] Taken in this way, pianistic orientations are understood to not only necessitate physical relations but also relations to history and to relations of perception (that are themselves historically and culturally mediated). The 'universal' status of the piano in dominant institutions of ('classical') music-making also positions it readily as a particular material for exploring these relations and the values they (are perceived to) embody. Additionally, my aim is that the chapter makes a methodological contribution: through discussing the particularities of the

piano-as-object, I develop some terms for theorising a multiplicity of relations to objects in musical performance more generally. These bring into play the dialectics of activity and passivity, and of affirmation and negation.

Chapter 4 is outwardly about contemporary music's connection to sculpture and painting. More fundamentally, however, it explores what approaches to musical materials tell us about compositional actualisations of spatiality and temporality in music. Its frame of reference regards music and painting after modernism, although it looks back to modernist principles genealogically; it begins philosophically and art-critically from a dialogue between two influential essays, the first by Adorno (on music and painting), the second by Clement Greenberg (on modernist painting). It then traces more recent tendencies over, and extrapolates from, these initial coordinates. I contrast painterly and sculptural attitudes manifested in different compositional practices and suggest that in these cohere attitudes towards artistic materials, for instance in approaches to surfaces and texture, and towards materials' plasticity. I argue that from these has emerged a recent *sculptural-curatorial* tendency that is specific to some contemporary works: this attitude poses and explores temporalised relations between spatially situated musical objects. I suggest that this allusion to the tangibility and permanence of the sculptural connotes a particular, critical relation to the historical-material conditions in which musical materials are encountered – conditions typified by temporariness, heterogeneity, and flux.

Part III theorises materials and develops discussions of musical materiality in light of 'older' and 'newer' materialisms. Foremost in the discussion are the dialectics of musical material, their relationships and questions around agency. In Chapter 5, I do this through developing a dialogue between aspects of Adorno's work and some new materialist thinking. I use the former's concept of *musical material* as a prism diffracting the latter's theory. Correspondences and tensions are explored within and between Adorno's materialism and contemporary materialist perspectives (with particular reference to Jane Bennett's 'vital materialism').[27] Three main issues are discussed. First, musical materials are considered in terms of the dialectics of activity and passivity. Second, dualisms are considered with respect to compositional practices, discussions of musical material, and their ultimate problematisation. Third, compositional agency is explored. Through a dialoguing of Adornian and other materialisms, I suggest that agency may not be solely the 'possession' of the composer; it is also observed in a series of diverse material and historical relations.

The last chapter considers how material objects and bodies are situated within specific spaces and environments. I refer to emerging notions of sonic ecology that place objects and bodies within spaces of sculpted sound. This I link to a long-standing connection in the European art music tradition: music's affinity with nature, be this in evocations of the pastoral or in the seemingly natural 'immediacy' with which both nature and musical materials seem to speak. Chapter 6 hence discusses music and nature at a contemporary moment when notions of each – and the relation between the two – are changing. I suggest that while conceptions of an organicist and unmediated nature have been challenged by recent compositional work, nature – in some transformed sense – nonetheless