THE PLEASURE OF MODERNIST MUSIC

Listening, Meaning, Intention, Ideology

Edited by Arved Ashby

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The Pleasure of Modernist Music

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Arved Ashby

University of Rochester Press

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For my parents

and in memory of Jong, music lover and dear friend
(August 23, 1968–February 20, 1997)

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Introduction

Arved Ashby

> *The nice thing about an -ism, someone once observed, is how quickly it becomes a wasm. Some musical wasms—academic-wasm, for example, and its dependent varieties of modern-wasm and Serial-wasm—continue to linger on artificial life support, though, and continue to threaten the increasingly fragile classical ecosystem.*
>
> —Richard Taruskin, *New York Times*, March 10, 1996

> *Fortunately, we are witnessing the growth of a grass-roots movement comprised of composers and performers who, having peeked over the fence surrounding this dungheap [of the New Simplicity and the New Romanticism] have determined that shovelling shit is not to be their fate, and who are lovingly dedicating their lives to the seemingly endless, often agonizing labor which the production of challenging new works entails.*
>
> —James Boros, *Perspectives of New Music*, Winter 1993

> *Who knows what the new century holds for music? I predict that we will bury most of the musical modernism of the 20th, with its need to shock and cause distress.*
>
> —Donald Vroon, *American Record Guide*, March/April 2000

This is a book about twentieth-century art music with popularity problems. We haven't set out to draw all-encompassing, general conclusions on music of the previous century, or its listeners and contexts, but focus instead on specific repertoires long felt to be elitist and unapproachable. The music discussed is varied, stemming from different aesthetics, places, and decades. But what ties these pieces together is that they have all been recognized, from first hearing—or even from first rumor of their existence!—as challenging the ear and mind. Over the years they have therefore been praised (as liberating and healthily demanding of close attention) or vilified (as elitist or worse fraudulent, because their complexities resist perception). This debate over modernist music has continued for almost a century: such pro-modernist writers as Webern, Adorno, Varèse, René Leibowitz, Babbitt, and Boulez (as well as books and critical articles of Paul Griffiths, among others) have been answered, sometimes belatedly, in such frankly anti-modernist essays as Henry Pleasants's *The Agony of Modern Music*, George Rochberg's *Aesthetics of Survival*, and spirited publications by Susan McClary, Richard Taruskin, Fred Lerdahl, and Roger Scruton.

Our aim in this volume is to negotiate a varied and open middle ground between these polemical extremes, to map out new areas of discussion by opening up new questions of meaning. Our project is to trace the kinds of import, usually not the meanings the composers themselves would recognize, that these works have held for a significant number of listeners of different kinds. This music has never achieved much success and acceptance, beyond the *succès d'estime* that rules the Pulitzer Prizes and university appointments—or long did. But this doesn't mean that modernist music hasn't found an audience and couldn't find *more* listeners if we took a fresh look at its fabled difficulty—if we stopped approaching modernist works as pseudopositivist experiments to be praised or censured for rejecting conventional ideas of musical "coherence." Possessed of a certain useful naïveté, the contributors to this book go beyond questions of difficulty to ask what these compositions might mean, what their importance might be in daily life, and what role their creators played in constructing those meanings.[1]

In short, we have developed postmodern approaches to modernist music, sketching out the possible significance of a repertory that in past discussions has been deemed either evasive or iconic, meaningless or beyond describable structural meaning. And as with any pioneering attempt to offer new explanations, this book is by necessity preliminary and exploratory: we devise no taxonomies of interpretation, but instead put forth some possible directions for future thought. This study looks forward to a reconsidered future, but we also found it necessary to look back and revisit some familiar questions that still demand answers. And we felt compelled to take on this dual project in the most straightforward language possible, keeping in mind a non-specialist readership. Those readers not blinded by partisanship or turned away by the often dense expository styles of its advocates likely came to this music fairly recently, and that clientele calls for a less assuming mode of address.

Like anyone attempting to negotiate between warring factions—whether in law, business, or international diplomacy—this volume by its very nature risks incurring the wrath of all factions, but does so in pursuit of a higher good. It may endear itself neither to modernist composers nor to those who have an axe to grind with modernism, both of whom may castigate these writers simply for succeeding with what they set out to do. Modernists will likely decry the approaches to the music, and anti-modernists the music thus approached. The former will doubtless consider various of the essays simplistic, and the latter will likely dismiss the whole effort as both outdated and defensive. As much as this book will displease those with the biggest franchises in arguing for or against modernism, the volume will—or so it is hoped—speak to a quiet majority who are more interested in the music than in the composers or the politics surrounding, and often engulfing, them.

Our project, far from being idly revisionist, addresses a cultural and political emergency. The future of human culture—our bodily survival, even—may well depend on cultivating empathy across ideological battle lines, since our age sees ever more divisive factions, each increasingly sure of its own monopoly on virtue. There has developed in the public sphere a syndrome marked by such self-empowerment, such a sense of vindication and inability to entertain other points of view, that psychiatry has seen fit to give it a name: Cornell psychiatrist Robert B. Millman is preparing a book on the affliction he calls "acquired situational narcissicism."[2] Thirty years ago, Brandeis historian David Hackett Fischer diagnosed a slightly more scrupulous condition among scholars, something he called the "genetic fallacy" of ethical historicism. "Another contemporary variant of the fallacy of ethical historicism," Fischer writes, "might be diagnosed as Carr's disease, after an English socialist scholar who seems to think that morality marches triumphant through history, always on the side of the big battalions. Carr marches through history with them, too."[3]

Hubris of the kind under consideration here is found in the pro-modernist (or, more loosely, high humanist) convictions that systematic reason can solve all or most problems; that artworks can have permanent, inherent, and absolute value; and that the "new" atonality of the early- to mid-twentieth-century supplanted the "old" tonality of the common practice period. On the anti-modernist side, a similar sense of chronological privilege imbues millennial conclusions that, for example, capitalism has trounced socialism, that the unwitting sexism of earlier writers should be pointed out by attaching a [*sic*] to their indefinite male-gendered pronouns, and that the "new" tonality of the later twentieth century supersedes the preceding "old" atonality.[4] This editor feels that the world needs no more doctrinaire polemics on modernism and complexity in music after Susan McClary's "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition" and James Boros's contradictory "Why Complexity?"[5] The contributors to the present book believe that no one stands to benefit from restricted access to the modernist compositional projects of, say, Stravinsky, Martino, Ferneyhough, or Ruth Crawford Seeger. Unlike ethical historicists, we find it more fruitful and honest to see a Webern or Stockhausen composition not as an icon of indescribable importance or a hopeless relic, but as something inbetween: perhaps an important relic or describable icon. There is no reason to exclude modernist works from the current mandate of finding cultural meaning.

1. Listening

The title of our book invokes pleasure—not a sensation many would link with modernist music, but therein lies an important point regarding our volume. American critic Henry Pleasants excoriated modernism under the title *The Agony of Modern Music*, a study he published in 1955.[6] Referring to pleasure up-front in our own title highlights the fact that we have, in effect, come up with a broad-minded response to Pleasants's old book. The word also emphasizes the non-academic nature of our approaches: we complement Pleasants in that we, while sharing some of his aesthetic-historicist misgivings, arrive at different conclusions because we generally choose to approach modernist issues through listening—"listening" in the broadest possible sense—and find pleasure rather than agony therefrom. But it is perhaps a particular kind of pleasure that we discover: pleasure in the sense of *jouissance*, as the term was used by post-Freudian psychologist Jacques Lacan.

The word translates literally as "enjoyment" or "pleasure." But as invoked by Lacan, *jouissance* is more specifically the silent, unspoken possibility that drives desire.[7] All-fulfilling but also all-destroying, it is to be both aspired to and defended against: all desire *believes* it is striving for *jouissance*, yet actual arrival at *jouissance* would entail pain and anxiety, even psychosis. Indeed, the subject will subconsciously work to avoid fulfilling the *jouissance*—getting intimate with the most attractive girl in class, say—in order to continue his own desire. And what the subject really desires is the beautiful girl's desire for him as he imagines it. In this way, pleasure and *jouissance* are at the same time overlapping, intertwined, and at odds with one another.[8] The whole Lacanian circuit of desire manifests itself in processes of language and signification, so the formulations become all the more difficult to place in any parallel musical examples. Psychoanalyst and philosophy scholar Levi R. Bryant has described music as neither a language nor any kind of intuitive or hermeneutic system, but as a mark-based, problem-solving method like mathematics. In such a context, the Lacanian terms of pleasure and desire would become all the more difficult to formulate.

Yet it seems inescapable that music, modernist music especially, enshrines a peculiar dialectic of pleasure and *jouissance*. Because it is not a language, and also because it inspires unique feelings of empathy or even ownership ("*how* could you possibly interpret/analyze/play Schubert/Bartók/Ellington/Prince *like that* . . . !"), music is able to conquer the Real of *jouissance*, it offers a way of touching on and dislocating the *jouissance* that might otherwise invade us.[9] What might that *jouissance* be? Modernist and antimodernist partisans tend, in equally forced ways, to present modernist music as either a familiar text or as the Other: modernist music either makes no special demands (or at least none that should not be made), or it presents an alien and unnatural way of thinking. To pursue the polarity further: the music either represents an utterly organic system, a viable re-designing of nature itself, or it draws a frame around chaos and pathology. Many of us will admit Modernist music as Other, but also say that by definition it is a necessary, constructive, or even erotic impetus—like *jouissance*, in short. The faults that many critics find in it—its lack of hierarchy, goal-oriented motion, and closure—are the very Other-characteristics that keep desire-potential open and active. Courtesy of obscurity and novelty, modern music becomes a bottomless well of possibility: a good compositional example offers new discoveries with each visit, always promising and never entirely satisfying any listener.

By definition, modernist music is the most conflicted that we have. More than any other kind of music, except maybe for rock 'n' roll, it offers each listener a unique, volatile, high-stakes dialectic of inseparable pleasure and pain, reward and risk—with the final formulation doubtless unique to each individual who writes and hears it. As such, modernist music is closest to the Lacanian idea of the Real, and is indispensable in the way that it mirrors and plays out basic psychological processes. It is a music of extremes, and its closeness to reality—as opposed to Lacan's realm of the more manageable and easily conceivable Symbolic—means that it has cut too close to the heart of the matter for many listeners.

As we have already mentioned, the reference to listening in our title separates us from the aesthetic-based polemics of a Henry Pleasants. But then listening does not come up often in polarized discussions of modernism, since it might seem as inappropriate to a high humanist project within a history of ideas as it would to an exclusionary denial of music's "universality" of language. We advocate the term "listening" as opposed to "hearing," the first defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "giving ear to" and the second as "perceiving, having cognizance of by means of the ear." A listener participates in the construction of meaning while a hearer apprehends or (re)cognizes pre-existing meaning. As such, the listener follows connotation rather than denotation. Modernist composers, on the other hand, are generally keen on the idea of denotative communication—on hearing. As Judy Lochhead tells us in her chapter on the modernist program of hearing, the composer presumes a "program of objective structure or sound" that listeners are supposed to apprehend. "I intend it in such a way," goes the modernist idea, "and you should hear it in that same way." In its most extreme form, modernist hearing entails worshipful discussion of the music for its abstract, formal, and stylistic properties, including its degree of coherence, unity, and originality (seen as a kind of inherent good, along the models of technological-scientific progress). Our book works to avoid such aesthetic hagiography; listening to the music is our attempted means of escaping it. Such discussions lead some contributors to alternative listening strategies for modernism, alternative in that they bear no connection to the composer's thinking, documented or inferred. Those contributors affirm Leonard Meyer's statement that there is no necessary reason that principles of listening should relate to the specific principles followed in composition of a piece.[10]

Accordingly, none of us takes up the usual mandate of "educated listening" to modernist works: the notion that a person can appreciate "difficult" music if given enough time, college courses, readings on composition and aesthetics, and ear-training. Certainly none of us believes that it behooves the listener to make such efforts, that they are necessarily "good for" him or her, or that such labors will reveal some key element without which the work will not be "understood." This is not an aural skills book, nor do we develop a program for understanding large-scale musical forms in the twentieth century. In short, we don't formulate a musical equivalent to what modernist art scholar Philip Yenawine calls "directed looking": focusing on the artwork with "a spirit of open inquiry" and "us[ing] our eyes in a more demanding way than is normal." Under the heading "I Know You Can Do It," he makes the promise that "the more visually and intellectually rich the work, the more there is to grasp and ponder."[11] His first chapter ("Looking for Meaning") then goes on to give art history students the conceptual and analytic tools of perspective, line, color, shape, and form that they will need in their journey. By contrast, our own book is a corrective that concerns itself more with personalization than poiesis and methodology.

Here we arrive at the issue of "intention" also alluded to in the title of the book: do the composer's thinking and agenda have any bearing on the listener's search for meaning? Does an author mean what he or she *intends* to mean? Listeners with no idea of a composer's methods or intentions have proved able to reach some kind of consensus on aesthetic value, and this points to avenues of significance beyond those deemed appropriate by the composer or the academy. Most of the chapters that follow deal with the issue of compositional intention, if often implicitly and by another name. Greg Sandow brings up intention neither as a term nor an idea. But he dissipates the illusion of unity that Schoenberg created for his mature music, and this allows him to discuss disorder—which the composer recognized neither as an aesthetic nor a musical possibility—as a characteristic element of this composer's language. Martin Scherzinger adopts the particular anti-intentionalism of Marxist theory—more specifically, the ideas of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht as well as the critical thinking of T. W. Adorno and the Frankfurt School, who heard musical works not as abstract compositional achievements but as records of social and aesthetic struggle. Amy Bauer sets aside the idea of a compositional grammar, a fundamental intentionalist construct, and in doing so opens the door to metaphorical approaches. Pierre Boulez focuses on processes of writing, denying perhaps the most basic intentionalist assumption: that transcription of a thought, the ostensibly simple act of writing it down on the page, can serve as a transparent and neutral transmission of that thought. In a similar way, William Bolcom denies the idea that a compositional discipline (invertible counterpoint or a twelve-tone row, say) enables the composer to exert greater command over his or her musical results, but finds instead that it serves productivity and inspiration by pulling the artwork away from the composer's control. Intention foils intention, with beneficial results.

I have made a case for empathy and compromise between pro-modernist and anti-modernist causes. One specific rapprochement made by many of the authors in this book is to deny the composer his or her authority as cardinal source of meaning (a more-or-less universal postulate in twentieth-century music) but at the same time admit that specific works can be of signal importance by reason of their modern-ness. In this way, the authors (with the exception of Toop and possibly Mead) defy creative authority in a domain that has been long constrained by intentionalism. The thought has long been that the modernist composer, systematic and rationalist by definition, knows best when it comes to his or her modus operandi—whether it be the generalized combinatorial methods of Babbitt or the Biblical narratives of Messiaen—and has worked to maintain the relevance of those systems for the music.

The ideological freedom of "naive" listening is to be contrasted with the supposed freedom from ideology embodied in absolute music, which demands that the work be contemplated "for its own sake," as abstracted from the listener's thoughts, aims and desires. This vision of absolute music is rooted in Kant's concept of aesthetic disinterestedness, as described in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. But I hope the reader will note early on that the contributors to this book don't subscribe to a Kantian conception of listening. Indeed, we believe that decisions regarding musical and aesthetic value should be individual and personal ones, and that the same goes for listening. Ours tends to be an inclusive and subjective conception of listening—involving the mind as well as the emotions and the listener's sense of identity.

Is it possible to arrive at an apolitical hearing of a musical work, since such an idea would seem basically at odds with searches for cultural meaning? I would prefer to call it a descriptor-free hearing. Music-historical authorities usually believe they use -isms as mere descriptors. Even if they acknowledge the political import of their terms, they often fail to see the direct effect that ostensibly "descriptive" term has on musicians' and listeners' senses of aesthetic identity: the descriptor becomes a heuristic, in a word, especially as it has by this time become all but useless *as* aesthetic-historic descriptor. In referring to psychotherapy, Levi Bryant has pointed to the counterproductive nature of the term and idea of "addiction," which simply propitiates the addiction by defining the patient's identity around it, and, by force of terminological duality, makes it all the more difficult for the person to go from addict to "non-addict." For our own purposes, it would be as simple as it would be instructive to substitute the word "modernist" for "addict" in Bryant's statement: "The signifier 'addict' doesn't simply describe what I am, but initiates a way of relating to myself that informs how I relate to others."

Along these lines, it would be as helpful for the music listener to ignore the terms "modernist," "postmodernist," "academic," "serialist," "atonalist," or "tonalist" as it would be for the psychologist to refuse the title "addict" when the couch is taken by someone who washes his or her hands obsessively or abuses drugs. In both cases, the focus would shift from the person's need for cleanliness or intricate compositional systems to what their needs tell us about them as social beings. "We should treat substance abuse," Bryant writes, "as being on par with any other sort of symptom (in the psychoanalytic sense) and as being something to be *interpreted* (not treated) like anything else." In the same way, it is surely less useful to try to "treat" modernism and romanticism than it would be to work toward an understanding of them.

2. Whose Modernism?

By necessity, we walk a fine line in this volume between defining a modernist aesthetic and common focus of discussion around a modernist repertory, and working to resist the usual aesthetic terminology and the boundaries and political impasses that attend it. Our conceptions of "modernism" range far and wide—the composers discussed range from Schoenberg and Berg to Hindemith, Babbitt, Ligeti, Brian Wilson, Lou Reed, and Bernard Herrmann. And so prefatory remarks are needed on modernism and just how we have found it necessary to deviate from the traditional aesthetic terminology. In other words, we need to give some specifics up-front before we can try to re-appropriate terms or set them aside.

Authors of standard volumes on the subject have emphasized several defining aspects of modernism over the years. In *Children of the Mire* Octavio Paz described modernism as "a tradition against itself," and Matei Calinescu picked up on this paradoxical movement-basis when he defined modernism as "a conscious commitment to modernity, whose normative character is thus openly recognized."[12] Jochen Schulte-Sasse differentiated between modernism and avant-gardism in his foreword to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, where he ascribed different social-aesthetic roles to modernist and avant-garde artists, declaring the former someone who chooses to attack traditional ways of writing and the latter a figure who opposes the very institutions and business of art.[13] More recently, Fredric Jameson has listed those aspects of modernism that were no longer thought desirable in full postmodernity: "The asceticism of the modern, for example, or its phallocentrism (whether it was ever altogether logocentric I am a little less sure); the authoritarianism and even the occasional repressiveness of the modern; the teleology of the modernist aesthetic as it proceeded on triumphalistically from the newer to the newest; the minimalism of much that was modernist as well; the cult of the genius or seer; [and] the non-pleasurable demands made on the audience or public."[14]

The musicians discussed in these pages are perhaps modernists in that they have carved out and followed conscious paths toward modernity, and thus practiced a certain asceticism and technical introspection. (Cage and Steve Reich qualify as modernists in that they are unusually concerned with method; and Lochhead discusses them from that perspective. It is interesting in this context that Jameson should cite minimalism as an aspect of modernism.) The modernists generally operate within bourgeois channels and institutions. This operating-from-within-the-industry quality, as described by Schulte-Sasse, is one modernist characteristic that allows us to stretch that term to include popular culture figures like Herrmann, Pete Townshend, and John Cale. But our musicians are defined by their individualism, whether it be covert or overt, and share a basic urge toward disruption of musical discourse: they attack traditional standards of writing and discourse and make anomalies a necessary part of their would-be language. As Scherzinger cites Lydia Goehr in these pages, the modernist premise lies in a "critical gap" between artist and society.[15] In this respect, the modernist re-enacts the project of Schoenberg, who in Robert Morgan's account "attempted to transform musical language from a public vehicle, susceptible to comprehension by ordinary people (but thereby also limited to more or less ordinary statement), to a private one capable of speaking the unspeakable. Music became an incantation, a language of ritual that, just because of its inscrutability, revealed secrets hidden from normal understanding."[16]

All that said, the contributors to the present book tend to play loose with tried-and-true dualities of modernism and avant-gardism. Readers may also fault some of these essays for pursuing no systematic distinction between modern and "postmodern." A few contributors resist these distinctions, or even use the words within these dualities interchangeably—and thus fly in the face of respected thinking on modernism by Renato Poggioli and (as we have seen) Calinescu.[17] In this respect, our terminology is less like Calinescu's and Poggioli's than George Perle's in *The Listening Composer*, where he uses several designations to circumscribe the same (as he sees it) peculiarly novel body of twentieth-century music: Perle refers in the same sense to "the art music of our century," "the new music," and "twentieth-century" and "modernist" works. The revolutionary music he describes makes use of "a scale that comprehends the total pitch-class content of that universal set [of twelve pitch classes]." As we do in our own book, Perle sees the operative conflict not between nineteenth- and twentieth-century aesthetics, but between those of the twentieth and twenty-first: he refers to a "classical" body of music by twentieth-century composers, musicians who remain at the start of the twenty-first century "problematical and controversial as to the substance and meaning of the foundational elements of their musical language, as Mozart and Beethoven certainly were not to Brahms and his generation."[18]

In loosening our terminology in such a way, we are acknowledging the decreasing relevance and usefulness of these old dichotomies (as Perle, hardly a careless judge, would seem to concede). After all, Calinescu, Poggioli, and Schulte-Sasse produced their influential accounts of modernism some thirty years ago. One could even ask if avant-gardism exists at all after the Cold War, as a movement or even as a historiographical term. The word originated in military history, and in this day of "smart bombs," terrorism, and waging war with microchips, old ideas of a front line—along with spatial differentiation in deploying the forces of war, or even the idea of war itself in any conventional sense—are increasingly irrelevant, at least for a rich superpower like the United States. One can't escape a similar conclusion in culture and the arts. And with no current, practicing sense of avant-gardism, do we know it well enough even to use it in good conscience as a term for past projects? And then there is the wholesale repackaging of the modernist impulse in recent decades, and its impact on historical-aesthetic terminology. There was a time after World War II when modernism went mainstream in the academy and the art museums. But then came (neo-)conservative and spiritedly commercial times, and modernist and avant-gardist impulses alike were forced underground, to the point where they became synonymous—like besieged political parties forced to become one in order to survive. In the sense that Greil Marcus has talked about "alternative histories," smaller histories that have transpired alongside and in spite of the grander historiographical narratives, avant-gardism has been subsumed into modernism, and all such subversion has become what could be called "alternative modernisms." In the aesthetic fabric of today, such telltale rumples can be found in, for instance, the non-syntactic qualities of Philip Glass's film music, the Noise phenomenon in Japanese dance clubs, and the crudity of draftsmanship in the popular cartoon *South Park*. (The essays toward the end of the book by Lochhead, Bernard, and myself pursue the idea of alternative modernisms further.)

There is also a necessary and symbiotic relationship between our inclusive conceptions of modernism and our continuing belief in the modernist impetus. To that extent, several chapters put forth arguments about terminology: are Steve Reich, early Paul Hindemith, or John Cale to be described as modernists, postmodernists, or perhaps neither? The radicalness of our aesthetic-historical terminology comes to a head in my own conclusion in chapter 15, that Glass's soundtracks for *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Naqoyqatsi* are modernist: they are basically tonal, yes, but the structure and semantics of the music are just as radical as those of Ligeti and Wolfgang Rihm. Glass has shown the new "alternativity" of modernism: in his film scores, subversion (a latterday version of what Hanns Eisler called "the new musical resources") has found a way to survive, find a public, even make some money, when paired with appropriate visual images. An even more imposing example might be John Cage, who is single-handedly responsible for much of today's alternative modernism, and himself the subject of heated debate: was he a postmodernist or a modernist? In her chapter Judy Lochhead claims him as a modernist. But the arguments are sure to continue, which in itself is a sign of the durability and immediacy of Cage's aesthetic.

3. About the Writers

Taking the described platform as a given, I set out to compile a diverse list of contributors including scholars of comparative literature, composers, musicologists, cultural historians, and—yes—some music theorists. In this or any other book, there is no benefit in lining up writers along the same aesthetic, perspective, or form of address. To the contrary: I cannot help but be suspicious of compendia where the outlook is uniform, the writers sharing sympathies beyond what is necessary for a book simply to cohere under a title, and their essays converging toward similar (or even the same) conclusions. Consensual books, like political rallies in a one-party state, protest too much: they beg the questions of what dissenting voices are excluded from the discussion, and what hidden circumstances of discontent necessitate such line-toeing.

The present book sprawls constructively, and its diverse roster is a strength. I can only feel that the variety of our writers and approaches—even the conflicts and contradictions that arise between chapters—is testimony to the continuing influence of modernist repertories and their relevance to different contexts. The only belief all authors share is the conviction that works of the twentieth-century modernists represent a vital if not definitive aspect of our cultural past, present, and future. That shared belief does not necessarily make us disciples of music theory. Not everyone who takes an interest in modernist music is a "music theorist": at most, four of the thirteen contributors could be described as music theorists, whatever that might mean in this day and age. Accordingly, this is not a book about music theory. The volume as a whole is neither "pro-theory" nor "anti-theory," and I did not see how politicizing our project across-the-board in such a way would attract readers to it.

Neither does our common conviction necessarily make us partisans of modernism, or even defenders of that cause. Several authors single out aspects of modernist thought they feel continue to serve as examples, but most of us would not claim that modernist goals and artistic-aesthetic criteria are themselves still viable at the turn of the twenty-first century. Many are too young to have known modernist ideals in any incumbent form. Most of the authors weren't around to witness the epochal Darmstadt *Ferienkurse für neuen Musik* in their heyday or even the American network TV airing of Stravinsky's late mystery play *The Flood*. To work on the book half of the authors interrupted projects on topics as diverse as Joni Mitchell, the Pet Shop Boys, Zimbabwean mbira songs, Frank Zappa, film and video, and Miles Davis. Half of us, and not necessarily the same half working on popular culture topics, are more likely to remember *Dark Side of the Moon* and the Sex Pistols as decisive musical influences. Greg Sandow, Jeremy Tambling, William Bolcom, and Lloyd Whitesell are particularly ambivalent about modernism as a musical-aesthetic project, and it proves mutually illuminating to juxtapose their perspectives with the views of Andrew Mead, Jonathan Bernard, and Richard Toop.

Some of us—perhaps most—have contributed to this book because we love the music and find the telling of that love, the process of fathoming its beauties and its depths, to be both personally fulfilling and a powerful advocacy for the music. In chapter 12 Andrew Mead, long an articulate expositor of the compositional aspects of serialism and twelve-tone music, shows the empathy he feels for Babbitt's music (and that of Sessions, Carter, and Schoenberg). Mead hears this composer's work as something larger, broader, and yet more personal than Babbitt's own edicts would allow. A composition like *Philomel* induces the most urgent searches for meaning: "I find myself seeking sense from the dazzle and glitter of the sounds I am hearing." But Mead primarily laments a fault of the technical terminology which Babbitt's devotees use to discuss his music: that this kind of "shorthand," like most forms of shoptalk, tends to hide the fact that it is describing human experience, that the very specificity of that terminological evolution has politicized the musical experience and alienated people from it.

Babbitt has stood at the center of arguments over academicism and modernism for many years, and any new study of those subjects must perforce continue those Babbittian debates. Greg Sandow has long been interested in Babbitt, for musical and affective reasons rather than aesthetic-historical ones: he clearly loves this music as much as Mead, if for different reasons. His work on Babbitt dates back to the early 1980s, and I have elected to reprint his 1982 essay "A Fine Madness" in this volume for the simple reason that it has become an underground classic of new music criticism. Marked by real enjoyment of Babbitt's music, but perplexed and even angered by the composer's daunting pronouncements on just *how* it is significant, this essay represents one of the very first inquisitions—perhaps *the* first—into the extrastructural meaning of this composer's work. Indeed, Sandow was doubtless the first to talk about Babbitt's music as something *listened to* rather than heard or heard about. In his second, entirely new essay, Sandow goes in a different direction and chooses to argue specifically against institutionalized forms of music theory and analysis as dominant vehicles of meaning in modernism. He ends here with a specific example of how much we stand to lose by assuming such approaches to be exhaustive and definitive. According to him, academic discussions have blinded us to a basic—also poignant, and highly modernistic—characteristic of Schoenberg's music, and perhaps that composer's legacy: his fracturedness, the very *dis*unity of his art.

Like Sandow, Fred Maus attends to qualities of the sounding music and stresses the almost universal tendency to limit the qualities of Babbitt's compositions to those denoted and connoted by the composer's own polemics. As Maus would have it, much of the conflict between music and discourse stems from the hidebound dualities and institutions of our time—particularly the "musical museum" mechanism which has conflated diachronic differences into synchronic dichotomies and conflicts, and which has propitiated the music-aesthetic dualities that have become so intertwined with twentieth-century socio-sexual dualities. Maus has written about music from the perspectives of theory, aesthetics, and gender and sexuality. It is therefore appropriate that his discussion of power structures and power relations should recall Foucault, who writes in the introductory volume to his *History of Sexuality* that power places human activity in an irrevocably binary system: licit and illicit, mainstream and stigmatized.[19] Music and sex become analogous playing fields for this kind of opposition, since they are both experiences hinging on intimacy, vulnerability, transcience, and inexplicable pleasure.

Maus discusses the actual duality mechanism behind the tonal-vs.-atonal and heterosexual-vs.-homosexual oppositions, and their ideologies. In a related inquiry, Lloyd Whitesell investigates some of the metaphors that have cloaked the traditional-vs.-modern dichotomy through the twentieth century and shows us what they reveal (and what they hide). Like Maus, Whitesell explores the idea that people have generally encountered twentieth-century modernist music only through the prism of ideology. In short, ideological positions—one's situation within the essential Foucauldian duality—have conditioned how modernist music has been heard. And yet Whitesell ends by wondering if an escape from ideology is even possible: in his view, compositional ideologies can be propounded ad infinitum, and ideology is inseparable from style.

At least one chapter in our volume, Amy Bauer's, goes beyond local ideologies of reception and intention to take on the very assumption that "listening" is necessarily an obverse, recursively plotted process to "composing." Bauer argues that comprehensibility of compositional processes is a non-issue with modernist music, or any other. In doing so, she argues against music cognitionist Fred Lerdahl, who conceives music as a grammatical construct founded on the dual notions of compositional and listening grammars. Lerdahl faults modernist composition for the discrepancy it produces between the construction of a modernist work and the mental representation that "comprises the 'heard structure' of the piece." Though the dichotomy itself can be traced to modernism, Bauer offers a powerful counterargument to this persistent idea that listening to a modernist work must involve tuning into its one specific compositional grammar: working from Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's models of conceptual blending, she argues that music is intrinsically a polyvalent experience that requires the listener to mix metaphors from different aesthetic- and thought-domains.

A rather different inquisition into the relevance of signifying and signification is offered by Jeremy Tambling, a scholar of comparative literature with particular interest in opera. Tambling considers any misconnection between modernist composition and hearing not from a compositional or cognitive perspective, but as a *necessary* and grammatical disjunction between signifier and signified, as the modernist breakdown of "unitary meaning." He considers it similar to schizophrenia in that respect, and focuses his discussion on Berg's *Wozzeck*, a repertory staple that illuminates these breakdowns in meaning—partly because of the fact that it is an opera, a theatrical genre that is schizoid in itself, but also because it happens to be a modernist opera *about* schizophrenia. But the second side of Tambling's investigation concerns itself with Berg's (compensatory?) structural obsessionalism, his need to effect balance and unity in his work. In Tambling's analysis, Berg's *Wozzeck* offers a unique perspective on the paradoxes and ambiguities of musical modernism.

Toop, a composer and musicologist who worked as assistant to Karlheinz Stockhausen in Cologne in the early 1970s, is also concerned with the breakdown in communication between composer and listener. But he differs from other authors in the book, most obviously Bauer, in saying that comprehension of compositional processes and "audible form" is an issue. In addition to discussing compositional structure, though, Toop addresses the problem of a common wisdom about modern music that has nothing to do with compositional thinking. Turning to Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel*, for instance, he finds a structure that proves distinctly audible without virtuoso listening, but which is not usually noticed "since the work is, by repute, 'pointillist,' 'totally serialized,' etc. Here, listening may be not so much a matter of tuning in as switching off." Much of the misunderstanding of modernism can, in Toop's estimation, be attributed to misconceived notions that "since innate capacities to recognize form and coherence in certain kinds of music are apparent from a very early age, these form the essential, nature-based template for all future musical perception."

Boulez follows Roland Barthes (more specifically, his influential monograph "Writing Degree Zero") by choosing to discuss the "writtenness" of composition as something distinct from its "hearedness."[20] By invoking "writtenness" Boulez defines writing as act and condition, as a separate agency that participates in the creation of meaning. He contradicts the idea that the written form of a musical work—its score, in most cases—functions only as a means of transmission of the musical thought, which passes unimpeded from the author to the listener. (He writes: ". . . since writing is so overloaded with intentions, the question is no longer even, 'should we listen naively,' but rather, 'can we still do so?'") Boulez believes that the "writing" of a piece of music is more than mere transcription of ideas already present in the mind of the composer. In fact, writing is an object or activity in its own right, and composition involves a two-way process in which the writing participates in the creation of the piece.

William Bolcom—compositional polystylist par excellence, pupil of Milhaud, and editor of George Rochberg's postmodern polemic *The Aesthetics of Survival*—presents conceptions of authorship and writing that are surprisingly similar to Boulez's. In an April 1996 letter to the arts editor of the *New York Times*, Bolcom defended serialist Donald Martino against an indictment penned by Richard Taruskin; and his essay in the present book grew from that short rejoinder. In both his original letter and the later essay, he speaks of modernism as an arbitrary period that was generally hostile to art and to the very idea of listenable music. (And non-listenable music is beside the point, he would seem to argue, while leaving listenability undefined.) But Bolcom saves his sharpest arrows for Taruskin's diatribe against compositional disciplines per se. Contrary to Taruskin, he portrays a compositional discipline as a catalyst for mystical and possibly wonderful happenings that lie beyond the immediate understanding of composer as well as listener. "I must defend one of the best examples of academic modernism in music," Bolcom wrote in his original *New York Times* letter. "I have always felt that the music of Donald Martino is proof that a strict twelve-tone composer can still make sensuous and passionate music. A musical ear can transcend any stricture."[21]

Martin Scherzinger supplied the necessary overview of what modernism represents in larger terms. A student of Edward Said and Andreas Huyssen, he is one of few authorities who can defend modernist aesthetics while working from an intimate knowledge of postmodern as well as modernist precepts. As previously averred, his essay differs from the others: Scherzinger is not concerned with meaning per se, except insofar as the modernist musical work takes on socioeconomic rather than purely aesthetic significance by resisting conscription into commonplace "meaning." He is concerned with the modernist ideal of autonomy for the artwork, and how misunderstood this idea has become in postmodernity. Against a background of Adorno and Benjamin, Scherzinger argues that to reject modernism's elevation of aesthetic autonomy today is shortsighted, counterproductive, willful, and arbitrary. At the very least it is a misrepresentation to argue against autonomy while ignoring the fact that the modernist work owes its particular power to this very distance between music and society. "By resisting absorption into the terrain of everyday meaning," Scherzinger writes, "the inherently non-discursive, absolutely musical work defied the ideological hold of such meaning." Postmodern incentives, on the other hand, "fetishize differentiality over totality," caught up as they are in imperatives of late capitalism. The natural outcome of a business conglomerate, an increasingly verticalized market is, perhaps paradoxically, a market oriented toward a multitude of equalized products (fragmented narratives) rather than a selective hierarchy of products (the meta-narrative).

Our book concludes with three essays that explore the boundaries of modernism as it confronts—and, in some cases, coalesces with—postmodernist aesthetics, popular culture, and commercialism. These contributors bring to their topics expertise in pop and rock, popular culture, and questions of listener agency in modern and postmodern music. Although Steve Reich's thinking of the 1960s was rooted in the idea of compositional process, Judy Lochhead describes how he—like Lerdahl—questioned whether compositional structures are *hearable* in themselves. While Reich's conceptions of compositional process and structure have roots in modernist thinking, then, he and George Rochberg did help mark a basic turn in the mid to late 1960s toward a "postmodern" conception of listener agency. Reich talks about *hearability* as an objective quality but doesn't ask if the listener can or should *make* it a *priority* to hear structure. Which is to say the listener that Reich describes has agency but that agency is to some extent indeterminate: the compositional object lies with the listener's perception rather than the grammar instituted by the composer.

The essays by Jonathan Bernard and myself are concerned with the possibility of modernism within popular, "postmodern" creative cultures—and more generally with the difficult and complex relationship between avant-gardism and the marketplace. I discuss the latterday modernism heard in many movie scores and, conversely, what I call the "phantasmagoric" concert styles resulting from the influence that modernist soundtracks have had on such composers as Penderecki and John Corigliano. Bernard finds remnants of early-century modernism in certain rock currents of the 1960s and 70s, and traces a particularly telling lifespan as those impulses fought briefly but tellingly for survival in a commodity-driven field. His essay and mine are complementary. We both follow up on Adorno's declaration that the modernist impulse is irrevocably transformed and commodified when it enters its second generation. In short, we both wish (Bernard with his "psychedelic" or "progressive" rock and me with my "phantasmagoric" acoustic music) to decide just what kind of legacy these modernism-remnants represent. Would Adorno's malediction of "pseudo-individualization" apply to them? Bernard concludes that yes, some of the music does effect false novelty. But he also maintains that the avant-garde element was redirected rather than nullified in the case of Deep Purple, Pink Floyd, and the British "progressive rock" bands—groups characterized by "stylistic consolidation and retrenchment, if not outright retreat from the avant-garde."

A Hegelian, almost deterministic sense of history leads me to the more extreme belief that recent film-inspired modernism has both supplanted and validated earlier art-music modernism.[22] American formalism and academia proved bankrupt when it came to invoking or supplying meanings for modernist music, perhaps because they have until fairly recently made it their business to take a positivist, fact-based approach rather than a hermeneutical one. At the same time, popular culture has stepped into the breach and instituted its own codes through the sociogenetically powerful mechanism of film. (Jeremy Tambling has similar things to say in his own chapter about opera's relationship with modernism.) Against early modernist expectations, it is popular culture that promises to carry modernist styles—albeit in altered form—well into the future.

4. Acknowledgments

The greatest debt is of course owed to the contributors, who so eagerly took up the premise and showed immense patience as the book was assembled, edited, and seen through publication: half of these essays were finished by 1999. We all owe much to Joseph Auner and Leo Balk, who took an interest in the book early on. Ralph Locke helped the volume along with his wisdom and unflagging support just when they were most needed, and we are all most grateful for his advocacy and encouragement. I am also very thankful for Tim Madigan's time and advice, and editor Louise Goldberg's guidance and wisdom. I thank the Society for Music Theory and especially the College of the Arts at the Ohio State University for their generosity in providing copyright and publication subventions just when they were urgently needed; as Associate Deans at the latter office, Judith Koroscik, David Butler, Esther Beth Sullivan, and the late Jim Hutchens were particularly gracious with their help and time. I also owe many thanks to Christian Bourgois for permission to translate and republish Boulez's "L'Écriture du musicien: Le regard du sourd," as published and copyrighted by him in the volume *Jalons* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1989; the essay originally appeared in 1981 in the journal *Critique*). In addition I am thankful for Jean-Jacques Nattiez's advice and help in procuring the necessary permissions to bring the Boulez essay into English, and for Robert Samuels's painstaking translation and discussions over its critical contexts. Jane Warburton worked tirelessly and extremely dependably as editorial assistant, checking citations and not letting up in the seemingly endless process of finalizing copyright permissions. Keith Dippre's skill in putting together the musical examples graces a good many of these pages. Finally, the book would not likely have been conceived or brought to fruition if it weren't for the encouragement and input of Yoshiaki Yoshinari, Philip Rupprecht, Amy Bauer, Dina Lentsner, Josh Heaphey, Rena Iwai, and a number of other friends and colleagues. Not only am I grateful for their moral support, their hypothesized readership was a constant point of guidance—and I hope very much they will enjoy the final product and decide that it was worth the wait.

Notes

1. By way of analogy, I offer my own first period of intoxication with Mahler. When I was searching for meaning in his music at that time, I found my search thwarted by his banality, which seemed an evasion of meanings as I then understood them. The Mahler literature that I found failed to discuss this aspect of his music, and therefore left me dissatisfied. The commentary on Mahler by T. W. Adorno and Carl Dahlhaus helped me through that impasse, but there are few if any such expositions on Schoenberg's restlessness, Xenakis's primitiveness, Ferneyhough's hermeticism, and other "extramusical" connotations in modernism that dare not speak their names.

2. "The Year in Ideas," *New York Times Magazine*, December 9, 2001, 50.

3. Fischer, "Fallacies of Narration," in *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1970), 155–57.

4. For a relatively brief account of general modern/postmodern oppositions, see N. J. Rengger, *Retreat from the Modern: Humanism, Postmodernism and the Flight from Modernist Culture* (London: Bowerdean, 1996).

5. McClary, "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition," *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989): 57–81; Boros, "Why Complexity?" *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 1 (1993): 6–9; Boros, "Why Complexity? II," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (1994): 90–113.

6. *The Agony of Modern Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955).

7. In Levi R. Bryant's description, the *jouissance* is "the inverse side (mobius strip) of [the subject's] desire and that which causes his desire to function as it does." Bryant, personal communication, March 21, 2004.

8. In *The Lacanian Subject*, Bruce Fink defines the Lacanian understanding of *jouissance* as the situation devised in fantasy, "this pleasure—this excitation due to sex, seeing, and/or violence, whether positively or negatively viewed by conscience, whether considered innocently pleasurable or disgustingly repulsive." *The Lacanian Subject*: *Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.60.

9. In this way modernist music differs from sado-masochism, in that pain is not directly or consciously aspired to, and therefore not experienced. I thank Prof. Bryant for suggesting these Lacanian descriptions of music. Levi R. Bryant, personal communication, March 21, 2004. I am also grateful to Amy Bauer for much information on Lacan, and for engaging in a number of most helpful and provocative Lacanian discussions.

10. Leonard B. Meyer, "Perception and Cognition in Complex Music," in his *Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture*, republished with a new postlude (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 311.

11. Yenawine, *How to Look at Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 7.

12. Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977), 86.

13. Schulte-Sasse, Foreword to Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xv.

14. Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 1.

15. Lydia Goehr, *The Quest for Voice: Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998), 37–47.

16. Morgan, "Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism," in *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives*, ed. Monique Chefdor, Ricardo Quinones, and Albert Wachtel (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 49.

17. Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1968).

18. Perle, *The Listening Composer* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 42–43, 53.

19. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 83.

20. Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968). Barthes defines writing as that which goes beyond grammar (which is universal) or style (which is dictated by historical period) and remains the distinctive *choice* of the writer. The fact that Boulez insists on writing as an ideal or virtual construct, whose capabilities go well beyond the containment of the work's meaning, also recalls Derrida's discussion of writing. In particular, the writing of a piece demonstrates that it does not have one "present" meaning, but is always radically in need of interpretation; it also participates in the creation of meaning, instead of awaiting use by an author who already holds that meaning fully in mind prior to the creation of the (musical) utterance. I thank Robert Samuels for his helpful observations on the Boulez essay and its necessary situation in the contemporary French intellectual debates.

21. Bolcom, Letter to the Editor: "In Defense of Dodecaphonism," *New York Times*, 7 April 1996, section 2, p. 7.

22. Or perhaps I am influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective on history: "My existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out toward them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself (and therefore into being in the only sense that the word can have for me) the tradition which I elect to carry on. . . ." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology?" in *Phenomenology of Religion: Eight Modern Descriptions of the Essence of Religion*, ed. Joseph Dabney Bettis (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 15.

Part One

Reception & Politics

1

Intention and Meaning in Modernist Music

Arved Ashby

> *I am not very sympathetic to certain theses associated with postmodernism, such as that of the death of the author, or that according to which all works of art/cultural phenomena rightly impact the understanding or appreciation of all others, so that, for example, the music of Beethoven is properly heard differently after Kubrick's* Clockwork Orange.
>
> —A distinguished aesthetics scholar, when shown an early precis of this book

> *Little is left to the imagination [with Boulez's third recording of* Pli selon pli*], except the unanswered question of how and why our ears and minds perceive this music—as powerful yet elusive in syntax and semantics as the poetry of Mallarmé to which it pays tribute—as clearly as they do.*
>
> —Nicholas Williams, *BBC Music Magazine,* August 2002

> *[The music of Boulez and Stockhausen] makes no statement. It's music for after-the-bomb-drops. Boulez would fit perfectly for an atomic waste-dump. But could they write about the love of a child for his mother? I think not.*
>
> —James Galway, *Symphony Magazine,* June-July 2003

1. Music, Intention, Interpretation

Should the listener laugh at the apparent march parody in Xenakis's *Jonchaies,* when the work was put together on statistical premises? Would it be worthwhile to hear the untraditional syntax of Boulez's *Marteau sans maître* or Babbitt's *Dual* as an evocation of schizophrenia, when these composers are among the eminent rationalists of their time? What cultural mechanisms would a listener confront in making such readings? What would be the rewards of such interpretations, and what new limitations would be introduced?

One feels compelled to ask such hesitant questions only when it comes to twentieth-century music, particularly modernist works of the past one hundred years. And these questions of meaning and intention point out one of the more volatile confrontations between modern and "postmodern" sensibilities. Such inquisitions into individual reaction and meaning can embarrass American academics, because they cut so strongly against the way these authorities have been trained to discuss this music. But why? Autonomy from the everyday world was a founding rationale for post-Enlightenment modernism. But most would now say such high-humanist autonomy never was, and never could be, a possibility—especially in this least obviously semantic of the arts, the one therefore most imbued with social meaning. As for the importance that compositional ideologies have for listeners in postmodernity, it should be noted that the opera-going public has for some time now (at least in Europe and some parts of America) largely kept Wagner's own hateful ideologies from impeding the aesthetic pleasure it finds in his music. In earlier periods, and with twentieth-century music in more accessible styles, these widespread searches for meaning became an important part of reception history. Scott Burnham's book *Beethoven Hero* details the history and continuing usefulness of such approaches with regard to Beethoven's Third Symphony.[1] Nicholas Cook in *Analysing Musical Multimedia* has described Franz Fröhlich's detailed nineteenth-century explanations of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as a man's struggle against deafness; about which Cook writes, "To trace the reception of the Ninth Symphony through responses like Fröhlich's is to see musical meaning in the making."[2]

Before getting into my main discussion, I should offer a more detailed idea of what "meaning" might be in music. The questions of what instrumental music (music without the denotative specificity of words) can mean, and where such meaning might lie, have of course been topics of heated argument since the late eighteenth century. As one analogy for discussion of musical meaning, I offer philosopher Gary Iseminger's three categories of observations about a literary text. As Iseminger introduces them, these represent three avenues toward finding meaning in a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins:

> *interpretation*:
> (1) Hopkins's poem "Henry Purcell" refers to a famous English composer.
> (2) The poem "Henry Purcell" expresses the wish that Purcell shall have good fortune.
> *description*:
> (3) The first line of "Henry Purcell" contains two occurrences of the word "have," two occurrences of the word "fallen," and three occurrences of the word "fair."
> *evaluation*:
> (4) "Henry Purcell" is a great poem.[3]

Translating these categories into musical terms would present obvious and not-so-obvious problems, depending on just how one thinks music is or is not expressive. (For one, would I be interpreting or describing if I took the last two movements of Beethoven's "Pastorale" Symphony to represent a storm followed by peasants' merry-making at its passing? The question is not easy to answer since this is a famously programmatic work: I could simply be relaying the fact of the composer's own interpretation, which would make my role that of a describer.) Still, Iseminger's analogies help clear up my semantics. The idea of meaning in music would seem to coincide primarily with Iseminger's "interpretation" category. And this is also the kind of statement among the three types that is most difficult to make about a piece of music. Rather, such "interpretations" are *easier* to make about a piece of music than "descriptions" and "evaluations," but they are (for what it's worth) harder to substantiate. Iseminger's "interpretation" would seem the effort that the listener brings to the table, a kind of obverse to the music's capacity for expression; in other words, music *expresses* something which we then read through the act of *interpretation.* (The process is more complex than all that, of course, as I get into when I discuss the idea of authorial intention below.)

The literary critic Monroe C. Beardsley came up with a rather more polemical category that I could add to Iseminger's three: namely, the category of "superimposition." (Beardsley's description appeared in print thirty years ago, and today's post-structuralist critics would surely come up with a more charitable designation.) As an example of "superimposition," Beardsley's example is reading the children's tale "Jack and the Beanstalk" as Freudian symbolism or a Christian allegory.[4] To add a "superimpositional" claim to Iseminger's statements about Hopkins's poem, one could come up with an assertion like:

superimposition:
(5) "Henry Purcell" is a poem about homoerotic desire.

Such a "superimposition" is to be differentiated from Iseminger's other interpretations (or at least from interpretation and description) by the fact that it is less grounded in the semantics and specific denotations of the text. In statement (5), such is indicated by the phrase ". . . is about . . . ," which becomes a liberating interpretive tool but also invites vagueness: it moves us from denotative meaning to connotative meaning, and its new possibilities and dangers. Fröhlich practiced superimposition when he heard Beethoven's Ninth.

Post-Kantians have worked to define meaning in music. But the kinds of meaning sought out have changed. Iseminger's five categories help us generalize about the changes in how people have thought and written about instrumental music since the late eighteenth century. In brief, since the time of Fröhlich's writings about Beethoven's Ninth and, say, Adolph Bernhard Marx's writings about Beethoven's Third, "professional" discussions of music have seen a marked shift from such superimpositional, interpretational, and even evaluative statements toward the purely descriptive. Clearly, such changes have mirrored the rise of logical positivism, and the rise of modernism itself. Eduard Hanslick, the Viennese formalist and aesthetic opponent to Wagner, played a role in this. His treatise *Vom musikalische Schönen* (first edition 1854) is a polemic for description over interpretation: Hanslick believed it impossible to make interpretive statements about music, with the exception of what he called dynamic states. His philosophy proved influential, well into the second half of the twentieth century. And particularly with regard to newly written music, probably for the reason that its composers had become largely synonymous with its intellectuals and aestheticians. It is possible to hear the preponderance of *descriptions* of twentieth-century modernist music, and the allergy toward *interpretations* and especially toward *superimpositions,* as an after-effect of Hegelian accusations that music is especially handicapped by its inability to express, "mean," or embody anything specific, that it has no semantics. The compositional avant-garde had to negotiate such formalist polemics through the nineteenth century, continuing on (by way of Hanslick) through to the Weberns and Babbitts in our own century.[5]

The argument boils down to the concept, one that inspired strenuous debate in literary circles but has been virtually ignored in music, of authorial *intention*: does an author mean what he or she *intends* to mean? The subject is an old one among literary critics: the middle of the century saw the rise of the New Criticism in literary thinking, as presaged by Wimsatt and Beardsley's famous "Intentional Fallacy" article (1946), whereby what a reader found in a text was declared to have no necessary connection to what the author of that text actually conceived or believed, and in any event intention itself was deemed irrelevant and unknowable. This essay apparently marked the first appearance of the critical term "intentionalism," which Wimsatt and Beardsley were of course arguing against.[6] Finally, in the 1970s the intentionalist–anti-intentionalist debate was remade with the arrival of Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and deconstructive approaches to a text—a juncture in textual analysis where intention was at once subsumed and left behind as a concept because the critic took its limits as a point of departure.[7] Indeed, post-structuralists would recognize none of Iseminger's categories—believing, rather, that meaning lies behind the written text, or in its interstices.

The rise (and subsequent fall, some would say) of anti-intentionalism has somehow bypassed those who discuss music of the twentieth-century modernists, though it is difficult to ask whether a basic emphasis on description over interpretation propitiated this oversight or is merely symptomatic of it. Because they are so often covertly anti-intentionalist but phrased in intentionalist terms, theoretical discussions of twentieth-century music tend to have a particularly strange, even bigamous, relationship with intentionalism and anti-intentionalism. (Ethan Haimo surely confused the issue further in a recent *Music Theory Spectrum* article where he proposed a basic intentionalist–anti-intentionalist difference between certain descriptions of music, when more often than not the differences in his examples are purely semantic.[8]) Institutionalized discussions of twentieth-century music were founded on the dual platform of twelve-tone theory and Fortean pitch-class set analysis—two scientistic methods of investigation that for the most part advance supra-intentionalist arguments, many very useful ones among them, in a vocabulary of compositional-theoretical intentionalism.[9]

1. "The Death of the Author"

One particular essay encapsulates anti-intentionalist thinking, and provided a phrase that became a commonplace in philosophy and literary aesthetics. Post-structuralist linguist and critic Roland Barthes—and particularly one Barthes essay with a title that quickly became a commonplace phrase in philosophy, history, and literary aesthetics. Barthes wrote "The Death of the Author" ("La Mort de l'auteur") in 1967.[10] Whether by reason of its intellectual virtuosity or *bon mots,* the article defined the beginning of an epoch, and some have even called it an augury of postmodernism, despite the fact that much of what Barthes said had already been laid out by, among others, Wimsatt and Beardsley and by Georg Steiner (*Language and Silence*).[11] The fiercely intentionalist E. D. Hirsch even saw the decades before Barthes as "a heavy and largely victorious assault on the sensible belief that a text means what its author meant."[12] But it was Barthes who had the éclat (the sensationalism, some would say) to use the decisive metaphor of death for the fate of the author as source and nexus of a text's meaning. He invoked death because he wanted to echo Nietzsche and his pronouncement of the death of God, and thereby show the author's demise to be profound and irreversible. In short, Barthes—like Nietzsche—was writing more than a prouncement on literary study, he was writing an obituary for something deep within ourselves and our culture.

What exactly did Barthes say and want? Like Nietzsche, he called for a revolution: to free the text "from any authoritarian control" by reducing the figure of the "Author-God" to the level of mere "scriptor," and thereby ceding the text and its meanings to the reader. ("The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination."[13]) But he was also describing a situation that, chez Barthes, was already well in existence with Mallarmé and Paul Valéry: a situation where "it is language itself that speaks, not the author; [and] to write is . . . to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs,' and not 'me.'"[14]

More specifically, Barthes was eager to differentiate between God-like Author and proletarian scriptor, and to ensure polyvalent meanings for a text. "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."[15] Just as important, he declared the critical task of deciphering "a 'secret,' an ultimate meaning" to be just as moribund as the figure of the author:

> Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is "explained"—victory to the critic.[16]

To describe the new process of reader-based explanation, Barthes suggested we replace the idea of deciphering with the less directional notion of "disentangling." Or, to return to Beardsley and Iseminger's categories as I spelled them out earlier, we could call Barthes an advocate of "superimposition": at least this is the closest thing in my fairly conservative terminology thus far to Barthes's idea of the text as a reader-based "multi-dimensional space," his conclusion that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination."

The predictions of Barthes have been realized most conspicuously by the joint critical projects of marxism and feminism. Along with their offspring of gender and ethnic studies, these two lines of inquiry have tried to institute a hermeneutics with no transcendant, text-based meaning; or, in the case of Derrida- or Paul de Man-ian styles of deconstruction, a hermeneutics based on denial of such meaning. These paradoxical critical projects have by no means been universally accepted. Indeed, a good number have found them philosophically and rationally unsound, and many have seen them as an invitation to a kind of interpretive meltdown: the path toward concluding that *The Tempest* is really about incest or *Moby Dick* an allegory about castration. Still, whatever the residual structuralist resistance, the Barthesian multiplicities of textual meaning—and the marxist and feminist projects more generally—have become a permanent and undeniable fact of critical life.

Barthesian techniques of "disentangling" have become a necessary part of understanding music, at least to post-structuralists. However, and here I return to the main thrust of my essay, they have played a very limited role in approaching modernist music of the twentieth century. Adorno, apologist for Schoenberg and the Viennese avant-garde, is perhaps an exception.

But even Adorno, as a composition student (once-removed) of Schoenberg, retained some of what Barthes deprecatingly called authoritarian control—a telling pun that equates authorship with fascism. When discussing Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music* and elsewhere, Adorno was still concerned to some extent with questions of authorial intent, compositional technique, and even the reification and distraction of authorship that he called "the compositional subject." And there is certainly a contrast to be drawn between, say, T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* and Ezra Pound's *Canticles* and pieces of music written at about the same time such as Schoenberg's Violin Fantasy and Xenakis's *Metastasis.* The difference concerns something literary theorists call *critical monism,* or the notion that a text can fulfill or embody only one meaning or interpretation. If the T. S. Eliot and Pound are "about" any one thing, it would seem to be refutation of critical monism; these works are designed to elude any one interpretation, and their very modernism resides in this aspect. The Schoenberg and Xenakis, however, are in the eyes of the musicologist and theorist a kind of composing-out of a single meaning imputed explicitly or implicitly to the composer: the Schoenberg manifests twelve-tone combinatorial relations, and the Xenakis a specific manifestation of stochastics, or probability theory. Anything beyond that is a derelict or adjunct meaning. (This is undoubtedly an oversimplification, in that these are manifold issues that can never be "solved" or answered absolutely. But they are rarely broached with any such caveats, and the complaint could be made that a kind of infinite but monodirectional inquiry has crowded out manifold questions—be their potential answers more or less "deep" than those of the structuralists.)

2. The Non-Death of the Composer

I averred a moment ago that Barthesian multiplicities of textual meaning have become permanent aspects of reading a text. Recent intentionalist philosophers and aestheticians would argue with this. Indeed, the importance of authorial intention has "come back to life" in recent years in the eyes of many aestheticians. In a word, the author has been restored to health—never feeling better. Several recent studies carry clever and epigrammatic titles on the "Death and Rebirth of the Author" theme, and intentionalist thinkers have run out of ways to work the phrase "premature autopsy" into their titles. Yet the modernist composer barely caught him- or herself a sniffle over this ideologically volatile span of time. The modern author returned from the dead under the aegis of literati like E. D. Hirsch and Stein Haugom Olsen,[17] while the modernist composer more or less retained impeccable control over the search for meaning in his or her work. How has the modern musical creator stayed so unequivocally "non-dead," so robust and healthy, in the Barthesian sense? I believe there are three main reasons.

The Musical Work

Much of the lack of freedom felt in interpreting music of the twentieth-century modernists is owed to some peculiarities of the musical—as opposed to literary—work. The compositional "Author-God" is so much more an insistent presence than the literary author, and this mostly has to do with the more difficult logistics of "reading" a piece of Western concert music. Textless "classical" music, compared to the other arts, offers a strange combination of immediacy and intangibility. The person wanting to encounter Joyce's *Ulysses* need only go to any reasonably sized bookstore and buy a mass-produced paperback in any one of several editions, at least one of them no doubt printed in a typeface or layout that the author would have disapproved of. But performances and recordings of Boulez's *Pli selon pli* or *Répons* remain the domain of Boulez himself. (His first two recordings of the former differ substantially in tempo, and in some ways the piece itself thereby seems to have changed between 1969 and 1981.) As a result, when we hear *Pli selon pli* we insistently see and hear the composer himself bringing the music to sounding form, seeming to create it before our very ears and eyes—seeming to compose it anew, thereby retaining his authorial authority over the work. (I have vivid memories of Boulez conducting *Répons* in Chicago in 1985, and since that evening have even found the way he turned the huge pages of the score to be an indelible part of hearing that composition.) Even when the composer is not a performer, he or she remains a kind of unspoken collaborator in the performance in a way unique to the twentieth century: it is a sign of the continued sway of the twentieth-century composer that a performance of Elliott Carter by the Chicago Symphony could make headlines in the mid-1980s when the conductor gave a few pre-concert words on the music that caused the composer to storm out of the hall. Or that Messiaen's music should be accompanied so persistently by the composer's incredibly monistic, and also singularly unrevealing, program notes. Or that Babbitt's writings and analyses could continue to be so fascinating and intimidating decades after they were written.

One can only wonder if the passage of time and the eventual passing of these "author-gods" from the scene will make a difference in interpretation and reception. Their presence actually resides in two places: in their physical or media appearance, and in the authorial consistency of their work as a whole (itself a modernist characteristic, and only the first of these will really disappear along with the author-god's bodily presence). Literary theorist Alexander Nehamas, unhappy with the Barthes-Foucault doomsday prognosis of authorial death, proposed a duality of writer (the physical figure) and author (the figure-through-the-text) and claimed that "what a text means is what it *could mean* to its writer."[18] More specifically, Nehamas sees an interrelated chain of writer, text, work, author, and interpretation. "Writers produce texts," he says. "Some texts are subject to interpretation:

Understanding them involves seeing them as the products of idiosyncratic agents. Interpretation construes texts as works. Works generate the figure of the author."[19] In this sense, then, any possible meanings deduced from the work will have to pass the test of consistency with what we know of author and oeuvre as "idiosyncratic agents."

The limited availability of modernist musical "texts" has also sustained this filial relationship between work and composer. Or, better said, there has developed a symbiotic relationship between that limited accessibility and that close affinity. At this point in history, the supposedly inherent, musical inaccessibility of a modernist work—the "difficulties" it presents *in hearing*—pales into insignificance compared to the logistical difficulty of getting access to the text—finding *a way to get around to* hearing it. That aforementioned second recording of *Pli selon pli* is a good deal harder to find on the shelves than Joyce's *Ulysses*. Whereas a 32-bar pop standard is malleable in meaning and owes this multivalence to its transmissability, its ease of physical-aural access, its omnipresence, a string quartet by Ferneyhough is far less likely to be found in a music store, record store, on the radio, or whistled on the subway. Even if the modernist composer were very much alive and kicking, and polemical, wide public success and dissemination of a work by him or her would cause its textual meaning to quickly spin out of his or her control—or away from any one person's authority, for that matter.

Music Analysis and Composition

The particularities of music analysis have also helped the modernist composer retain his or her authorial health. If the twentieth-century composer is more present in word and body than the twentieth-century literary author, this has something to do with institutionalized methods of analysis—his or her presence in analytic schools. A modernist composition is generally felt to require "professional" explanation, and a restricted one at that. Music analysis, to return to Iseminger's categories, is a language of *description*. If someone were to sponsor the unusual idea that the Schoenberg Fantasy, Op. 47, was "about" relating the two whole-tone scales or parodying a particular style of violin playing, he or she would invite confrontation with an authority who claimed connection, direct or indirect, with Schoenberg's own thinking. Or by someone who claimed, through their familiarity with the Schoenbergian twelve-tone system, to know just what the composer was trying to "do" in this piece. And both these kinds of testimony would differ in essence from a scholar substantiating claims about Beethoven's music, say, by citing that composer's letters or metronome markings.

It is easy to see such monistic projects as the very basis for modernism in music. For example, Schoenberg and Webern took exception to the innate variability and plurality of *Ästhetik*—to its "softness" and variability—and insisted instead on unalterable, natural laws as a model for discussing art. In his *Der Weg zur neuen Musik* (1932–33), Webern all but declared the twelve-tone row a monism, an escape from the arbitrary interpretative wills and wiles of aesthetics.[20] Even as late as 1964, Susan Sontag could say of the avant-garde art of her own time, that it "may be understood as motivated by a flight from interpretation."[21] Given such a basis and the ostensible difficulties posed by a hearing of modernist music, it is easy to understand why the authorial declarations of the composer might appear the most attractive option—or model, at least—for anyone now wishing to "read" the music. (Certainly, it is interesting to compare Schoenberg, Webern, Babbitt, or Nono with the likes of T. S. Eliot, Pound, Joyce, or Braque, who did not leave behind such a clear monistic legacy for future interpretation of *their* work. In Hirsch's eyes, Eliot and Pound were responsible for the very inception of the idea that a poem was autonomous from its author.[22])

Babbitt has developed a particularly influential and monistic view of music theory and analysis, describing the ideal apparatus as the one that uncovers a basic and constant aspect of the work and produces replicable results. The right approach is an objective one; he writes that music theory must provide "an adequately reconstructed terminology to make possible and to provide a model for determinate and testable statements about musical compositions." His ideal analysis betrays a monistic mindset, in that its specificity and precision work to circumvent the fact that "infinitely many true statements can be made about a musical composition."[23] Babbitt's approach is monistic; but it is more work-driven than composer-driven, and this distinguishes it from the Schoenberg school's philosophy.

As if in response to such monistic approaches, a particular listener-oriented brand of music theory has developed: semiotics, or the study of signs, has come of age as a post-Barthesian strategy. One could say similar things about narratology, the study of the functional units that create something similar to a literary sense of narrative. Here I refer to the work of, among others, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Anthony Newcomb, and Eero Tarasti. The multivalence and immediacy of semiotic readings might still rescue modernist music and its analysts from author-heavy irrelevancy. But such listener-based inquiries into this music have yet to appear, despite the fact that semioticians assume the mechanisms of language to be well outside the purview of authorial intent. It is easier to attribute this semiotic and narratological hesitancy to the politics discussed above than to any incompatability or semiotic insufficiency in the music itself, and semioticians and modernist compositions alike would benefit from such explorations.

Modernism and semantics

Third and last among the reasons for the modernist composer's consistent Barthesian health are the peculiarities specifically underlying the mortality of the literary rather than musical author. The "death of the author" project in literature was motivated at least in part by people who wished to demonstrate the semantic autonomy of written language, the notion that language need not convey any closed and definite meaning. Any such project would be harder to define and locate in music. Unless it would be an attempt to demonstrate how music can "work" when free of tonal constraints, but then advocates of atonality generally upheld the idea of authorship, and recent decades have seen greater incentive to show the cognitive and cultural rootedness of musical languages. The impetus now aims in the other direction, and scholars are at pains—especially in the realm of pitch—to find a musical semantics, or at least a particular set of meanings, and the phrase "tonal language" has become an acceptable one. Nowadays, there are more obvious contradictions to the idea that music might be free of semantics: specifically, the popular notion that "meaning" in music resides primarily in its tonality (or, more generally, pitch), and that the prime (the only?) true language-character of music lies in its tonal language.

Discussions of tonality have surfaced in various attempts to challenge modernist—and, more specifically, serial—projects in music. The most stringently argued of these is Lerdahl's and Jackendoff's *Generative Theory of Tonal Music*.[24] These authors approach music and meaning from a grammatical perspective. In brief, Lerdahl and Jackendoff assert that pitch (and harmony) is the only aspect of music that can be grammatical because it is the only aspect that can be *hierarchically* ordered. According to their thinking, one can properly speak of a "pitch language" or "harmonic language" but strictly speaking not a "rhythmic language" or "timbral language," because it is not possible to create hierarchies of rhythm or timbre. (For instance, one can speak of secondary dominant relationships in harmony, or even gradated relations through chains of fifths, but a certain rhythm cannot relate to another through a secondary-dominant-type of relationship.) In a later essay titled "Cognitive Constraints on Compositional Systems," Lerdahl follows up on this argument with the idea of reciprocal compositional and listening grammars, describing the incongruity between the two that proves frustrating and finally ruinous for a person trying to listen to modernist music.[25] According to him, the modernist composer generally contravenes the cognitive or perceptual constraints necessary if the listener is to understand and follow the piece (though Lerdahl does not claim outright that one, two, or all of these are necessary for the listener).

I don't believe music, even serial music, need be limited to a grammatical-linguistic conception of meaning. I would go further and say that modern art—or art in any period, for that matter—need not function grammatically. The work of Mallarmé and the Symbolist poets tends toward the oblique: they take lexical items (words) and ask that we process them not lexically, denotatively, but at a musical (or at least metaphorical) level. If we were to take a Lerdahlian approach to these writers, we could reach