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Tim Rutherford-Johnson, *Music After the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture Since 1989* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), ISBN 978-0-52028-314-5 (hb), 978-0-52028-315-2 (pb).

There are two ways to read Tim Rutherford-Johnson's thoughtful *Music After the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture Since 1989*. The first suits the busy reader, who wishes to navigate concise reflections on particular contemporary works, composers, ensembles, and institutions – perhaps doing so out of the order in which the chapters appear. Useful section headings guide this reader, who might also want to discover, among the very many examples discussed, new works or avenues to be followed up independently. In the second, unhurried approach to this book, the reader instead appreciates the author's sustained exploration of intertwined musical and cultural themes, threaded throughout a knowledgeable and sometimes surprising survey of the contemporary musical landscape. Both readers (students especially) benefit from the excellent appendices, which include lists for 'suggested reading' organized by composer, region and theme, as well as a list of suggested listening.

In the first chapter, Rutherford-Johnson defines the scope of the book in terms of both the time period and the object of study focused upon; as he notes, during and after globalization and postmodernism, the meaning of each of the constituent words of the phrase 'Western art music' had been refigured or brought into question (21). He also identifies key themes around which to organize this vast and – it must be remembered – still emerging field, including 'social liberalization, globalization, digitization, the Internet, late capitalist economics, and the green movement' (19)—all themes that return throughout what follows.

In Chapter 2, the author provides an excellent discussion of the cultural and economic production of contemporary music and genre. Rutherford-Johnson engages at length with 'spiritual' or 'holy' minimalism, locating the formation of this genre in the dynamics of the marketplace, with its concomitant features of commodification, branding, and dissemination. Examining examples of marketing and promotion by labels such as ECM, he argues that the term 'spiritual minimalism' was 'a critics' invention, a branding convenience' (25). Important to the discussion here is the concept of *mediation*, 'the transmission of music from originator to listener via one form of media or another' (26), an idea which returns in the following chapters. Here, it allows the author to reflect on how processes of dissemination and translation across different media are integral to the meaning of works by Henryk Górecki, Arvo Pärt, and John Tavener. But Rutherford-Johnson does not merely dissolve this music into its constitutive contexts. He also considers how some technical features of these works

34 facilitate this mediation; for example via TV and film. For instance, its generally non-narrative
 35 structure means that this music ‘can easily be extracted, cut to shot length, or faded in or out
 36 as required by the director’ (36). This mediatized divorce of ‘material from [compositional]
 37 context’ returns in later chapters, in subsequent discussions of commodification, a process
 38 involving the ‘transformation of musical material into marketable units’ (64) – a recurrent
 39 theme of the book being music’s place within the context of contemporary capitalism.
 40 Rutherford-Johnson goes on to consider entities such as Bang on a Can and the Wandelweiser
 41 group within this framework. The tone and flow of this chapter is quite different to many
 42 that follow: while sections of other chapters might move quickly between very diverse works
 43 and composers in order to reflect on meaningful connections between these, the continuous
 44 nature of the discussion in Chapter 2 meant that sustained engagement with the argument
 45 here was, for this reader at least, particularly rewarding, and the conclusions convincing.

46 Postmodern cultural permissiveness is the thematic core of Chapter 3. Helpfully, the author
 47 problematizes this notion early on. In reference to works such as Mark-Anthony Turnage’s
 48 *Anna Nicole* (2010), an opera based on the life of the *Playboy* star Anna Nicole Smith, he
 49 suggests that some contemporary commentators believed that if the intent ‘was to shock
 50 or shake up a stuffy establishment, they didn’t go nearly far enough’, leading Rutherford-
 51 Johnson to ask if by this time the notion of the establishment had perhaps ‘become a
 52 straw man’ (53). Indeed, the author notes later that a kind of ‘dialectic’ of permissiveness
 53 (my word, not his) plays out under postmodernism, whereby ‘aesthetic permissiveness after
 54 postmodernism became an almost moral obligation to cross boundaries of style and genre . . .
 55 As these border crossings stopped being radical and became idiomatic, however, crossover
 56 work became a way of appealing to new audience segments and a tool within the marketing
 57 of contemporary music’ (75). Rutherford-Johnson also provides some thoughtful reflections
 58 on the role of neo-tonality in music during and after postmodern, suggesting that the place
 59 of tonality, ‘whether viewed as a return, rediscovery, regression, or relapse’, is an unavoidable
 60 aspect of the contemporary musical landscape (61). Here, following Jonathan D. Kramer,
 61 the author characterizes the German *Neue Einfachheit* (‘new simplicity’) composers of the
 62 1970s and 1980s as having ‘antimodernist’ tendencies (58).¹ Alternative characterizations
 63 could be contrasted usefully here – for instance, Alastair Williams’s recent suggestion that
 64 music in Germany at this time offered a ‘reinvigorated’ modernism, a ‘version of modernism
 65 [that] was softer, broader and able to absorb what had appeared to be the counter-impulse
 66 of historical reflection.’² In a later chapter, Rutherford-Johnson refracts his discussion of
 67 neo-tonality through Svetlana Boym’s distinction between *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia,
 68 suggesting that neo-tonality can come to manifest very different attitudes to the musical past;
 69 use of this label as such requires critical nuance.³ As he puts it, ‘the neo-tonality of John

1 See Jonathan D. Kramer, ‘Bernard Rands’s . . . *Body and Shadow* . . . : Modernist, Postmodernist, or Antimodernist’, *Contemporary Music Review* 20/4 (2001), 29–43.

2 Alastair Williams, *Music in Germany since 1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 231.

3 See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). To summarize briefly: *restorative* nostalgia rectifies aspects of an imagined past, *reflective* nostalgia meditates critically on them. For a discussion of implications for musical modernism of Boym’s thinking, see Samuel Wilson, ‘Valentin Silvestrov and the Symphonic Monument

Adams or David Del Tredici is restorative, whereas that of Laurence Crane or Peter Garland, which uses tonality against the background of modernity, is not' (238).

While Rutherford-Johnson states explicitly that Chapter 3 'is not about postmodernism as such' (55), the concept of postmodernism frames the discussion, and this frame's theoretical construction seemed slightly limited in some ways. While the author is right to note the difficulties of defining 'the postmodern', I suggest that the provisional definition offered, that postmodernism 'at its heart is a turn (or return) to the freedom of the individual subject' (54), does not manifest the critical sensitivity – to economic and institutional logics that shape music and its cultures – that is so much in evidence elsewhere in the book.⁴ In this chapter the author goes on to usefully make links with Freya Jarman's work on how marketing reflects "a logic of affect" that prioritizes listener responses . . . rather than obeisance to old-fashioned notions of historical greatness, in how it assigns value' (56).⁵ However, I had a few minor reservations about the author's discussion of 'postmodernism's wider turn toward the body' (54). My hesitation here was based not on what is included in the discussion, but what *isn't*: how this characterization of postmodern musical bodies relates to very different – contrary – accounts of postmodernism, most prominently Fredric Jameson's influential suggestion that postmodernism has been said to be a depthless surface shorn of affect.⁶ With this alternative framing in mind, one might reach another interpretation of works like *Anna Nicole*. Instead of this work reflecting on Smith's status as 'an extreme manifestation of the primacy of the body in identity-formation – the subject reduced to practically nothing more than a body, identity a matter of image and physical augmentation' (54), one might instead suggest the opposite: the opera reflects a situation in which the *image* of its eponymous lead – as simulacrum – asserts primacy over the bodily matter that it supposedly represents.

Chapter 4 revolves around the notion of fluidity. Ideas from social and art theory visibly make their way in here – as they do more implicitly through a number of the other chapters. Evoking Zygmunt Bauman's work on a 'liquid modern' society, characterized by flows, mobility, and transitoriness, along with Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of the 'radicant aesthetic' – 'the idea of rootlessness, or of being in motion' – enables Rutherford-Johnson to explore these connected themes across a number of modalities: in performance, in recordings and reproduction, and in musical life in the more immediate, everyday sense of the word (94–5).⁷ Helpfully, Rutherford-Johnson considers the flipside of fluidity

in Ruins', in *Transformations of Musical Modernism*, ed. Julian Johnson and Erling E. Gulbrandsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 201–20.

4 Critical reflection on individuality and postmodernism is pronounced in the work of social theorist Zygmunt Bauman, which Rutherford-Johnson draws on in later chapters. See, for example, Bauman's *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

5 See Freya Jarman, 'Relax, Feel Good, Chill Out: The Affective Distribution of Classical Music', in *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*, ed. Ian Biddle and Marie Thompson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 183–204.

6 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991). Disjunct to Jameson's characterization of the surface nature of the postmodernism, Rutherford-Johnson also suggests that postmodernism, in often evoking the past, encourages a 'deeper historical awareness' (211).

7 See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2009). Bauman's concept of liquid modernity is in many ways an underdeveloped concept in

101 and transitoriness – for instance, by exploring composers’ and performers’ critical
 102 reactions to the cycle of ‘consumption, waste, and obsolescence’ that comes with the
 103 disposability of the was-once-new (116) and, further, by reflecting on what fluidity means for
 104 composers who explore relationships between live performance and the fixity of recordings
 105 (see 89, 103).

106 Rutherford-Johnson identifies some thought-provoking links and correspondences
 107 between music and social life in this age of fluidity. For example, he suggests that
 108 compositional techniques such as the ‘decoupling’ of parameters in performance (as, for
 109 instance, when the actions of left and right hands are notated separately for a string
 110 player) echo a contemporary sense of self defined not by unity but by parts that do
 111 not and cannot truly fit together; this technique ‘coincides with the deconstructionist
 112 philosophies and aesthetics’ of the turn of the twenty-first century and might act ‘as a
 113 way of capturing and expressing the moment-by-moment contingency of identity that is
 114 a reality for millennials’ (108). These perceptive connections are by no means limited to
 115 this single chapter. Later, in reference to the multi-layered ‘lines of force’ encountered in
 116 Ferneyhough’s music (176) – music sometimes characterized by others as retreating into
 117 a modernist jargon of autonomy – Rutherford-Johnson suggests that ‘the disorienting,
 118 destabilizing, and deferring processes of his music share much with the day-to-day aspects
 119 of our twenty-first-century lives.’ This music echoes, for example, the information age’s
 120 challenge to assumptions about the surety of the material world; it also plays with a constant
 121 shifting and deferring of meaning from the real to the virtual, the fixed to the open. As
 122 the author puts it: ‘Just as the sonata form says something about the metaphysics of the
 123 eighteenth century, so Ferneyhough’s complexity relates to the metaphysics of the twenty-
 124 first’ (177–8). One could further develop fruitful links here to recent publications that explore
 125 music and musical modernism in light of modernity’s development – for instance, Julian
 126 Johnson’s *Out of Time*, in which Johnson makes explicit links between the metaphysics of
 127 these earlier and later centuries in his discussion of Ferneyhough’s – and much other –
 128 music.⁸

129 From Chapter 4’s theme of fluidity, Chapter 5 moves to the closely related concept
 130 of mobility, and the terrain and institutions through which cultural flows are variously
 131 channelled and/or impeded. The author situates this in the context of a discussion of
 132 globalization – something noteworthy in itself given that this aspect is often absent from
 133 discussions of contemporary (‘art’) music culture. Focusing, for example, on the Silk Road
 134 Ensemble (124–8) allows the author to reflect briefly on how some negotiations of culture
 135 and identity play out – for instance, in the complex interaction between the ‘hegemonic’
 136 power of the Western classical tradition and the sometimes essentialized, sometimes malleable
 137 identities of this ensemble’s performers (126). The author provides an important contribution

music studies, with some headway being made by those such as Anthony Gritten. See, for example, his ‘Resonant Listening’, *Performance Research*, 15/3 (2010), 115–22.

8 See, for instance, Johnson’s discussion of Ferneyhough’s *Carceri d’invenzione*, in *Out of Time: Music and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 137–8.

to the discussion of the institutional underpinnings of contemporary composition, and how these relate to culturally and geographically located centres of power, enabling him to argue that ‘certain aspects of late modernist style have become vectors of Western high cultural influence’ (135). That said, less convincing is Rutherford-Johnson’s assertion that:

Many of the techniques, materials, and precepts of the late twentieth-century Western avant-garde are flexible and nonsituated enough to transcend cultural signification. Noise is noise. Silence is silence. A digital workstation is culturally neutral, whereas an orchestra is not. (135)

Indeed, this seems to directly contradict the earlier suggestion in Chapter 3 that noise can become a flexible and free-floating signifier well suited to the purposes of commodification (64) – and can, as such, take on cultural (and economic) significance.

Chapter 6’s focus on scale and excess builds on some of the themes of earlier chapters, while also introducing new, related ideas. For instance, echoing the dialectic of permissiveness identified in Chapter 2, this chapter further develops the sense that previously radical, culturally peripheral approaches to music and performance might become recuperated by capitalism and the mainstream. Here one finds that works that invoke the spirit of the ‘countercultural forms of Fluxus and the Cageian happening’ might now ‘(however unintentionally) lend support to the modes of spectacular capitalism’ (169). This accords with broad and widely chronicled historical trends unpinning the character of contemporary capitalism, namely the selling and consumption of services over manufactured goods (166). The author also considers another dimension of this context – the network – in compositional thinking, most prominently in the ‘revision and recycling’ of musical works and the emergence of new works from fragments of the old, as one might observe for instance in much of Boulez’s output (170–2). Other composers could of course be discussed in this light, in addition to those focused on here (Kurtág, Ferneyhough, and Mahnkopf); a notable absence is Wolfgang Rihm, who is well known for developing new works from his earlier output, along with his technique (borrowing from visual art) of ‘overpainting’.

Process is identified in Chapter 7 as an important aspect of much twentieth-century and recent music. This in itself will not be news to many. However, Rutherford-Johnson crucially goes one step further, suggesting that, in contrast with musically forging a ‘discursive *object*’, many composers were and are instead preoccupied with the emergence of ‘musical *states*’ (208, emphases in original). Indeed, this notion of ‘states’ returns near the very end of the book, where the author makes the interesting suggestion that minimalist composers, among others very different in aesthetic – in passing he cites Ferneyhough, Lachenmann, and the Spectralists by way of examples – were sensitive to musical materials as *themselves* suggesting implications for the emergence and development of compositional processes and, as such, musical states (261–2). Indeed, this might be even truer of a younger generation of composers who sometimes take inspiration from ‘new materialist’ philosophies which underline the activeness inherent in materiality and the non-human – Matthew Sergeant

178 (b. 1984), for instance, citing philosopher Karen Barad, has expressed an interest in ‘the
179 innate life in sonic material’.⁹

180 The role of the past in the musical present – a theme that returns throughout the book – is
181 at the centre of the final chapter. Rutherford-Johnson concludes that what unites the disparate
182 music discussed throughout the book is an interest in building or exploring a relationship with
183 the past. Furthermore, this is something which cannot be reduced simply to a ‘technique’, but
184 that, instead, becomes integral to ‘the musical discourse’ (262). Again, the reader encounters
185 a range of music, including – and resonating with Boym’s work on post-Soviet nostalgia –
186 that of a number of composers from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus: Avet Terterian (from
187 Armenia), Valentin Silvestrov (Ukraine), Giya Kancheli (Georgia), and Franghiz Ali-Zadeh
188 (Azerbaijan) (240–3).¹⁰ Rutherford-Johnson considers also those composers who feel less
189 constrained by the past and its potential association with loss and nostalgia (as is often
190 found in the work of those just mentioned). As the author puts it by way of example, for
191 Thomas Adès ‘the past is not so much a foreign country as an out-of-town supermarket’
192 (244). To develop further this reflection on past and present, the author introduces the term
193 ‘postproduction’, deriving originally from the world of TV and film. Drawing on while also
194 departing from Bourriaud’s use of the term, Rutherford-Johnson uses this ‘to refer to works
195 of music that not only use other music but also do so at a level beyond that of score-based
196 transcription’, and which thereby go beyond simple recomposition (257). Bernhard Lang’s
197 *Monadologies* (2007–) series provides an excellent example; these are process-based works
198 that algorithmically automate composition to a large degree, starting from ‘fragments of
199 music by others’ (259).

200 As indicated, the reader occasionally might want a little more critical engagement with some
201 aspects of the discussion and with additional secondary and contextualizing literature. That
202 said, these moments of briefness are credit to the breadth and diversity of the music explored
203 and to the author’s sensitivity to numerous issues inherent in the creation, performance,
204 and dissemination of music since 1989. They are also balanced with imaginative moments of
205 critical insight. This is a well-conceived and approachable study that offers valuable thoughts
206 on recent music and culture.

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SAMUEL WILSON

S.Wilson@gsmd.ac.uk

9 Jack Sheen and Matthew Sergeant, ‘Interview with Matthew Sergeant’, www.ddmmyseries.com/Interview-with-Matthew-Sergeant (accessed 9 June 2017).

10 Silvestrov is incorrectly referred to as Russian in an earlier chapter (59).