# ECLECTICISM, POSTMODERNISM, SUBVERSION: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

SARAH ELIZABETH WALKER

Ph.D.

City University

Department of Music

JULY 1995

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Permission has been granted by the composers for the use of all recorded extracts. The author gratefully acknowledges Schott & Co. Ltd. (London) for the use of extracts of the music of Gavin Bryars, Rubble Publications for those of Andrew Hugill, the BBC for the use of Ian Gardiner's *Monument*; and Matchless Records for the use of Dave Smith's *1st Piano Concert*. The score of *After Hours* by Dave Smith is reproduced with permission.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


I wish to thank my supervisor, Doctor Steve Stanton, for his guidance and inspiration throughout the preparation of this project, and his colleague Doctor Simon Emmerson who assisted me in the first year of my work.

The most valuable research could not have been conducted without the assistance of the composers concerned. Gavin Bryars, Christopher Hobbs, Andrew Hugill, Dave Smith and John White were all extremely generous with their time and supplied me not only with insights but materials unavailable elsewhere, including tapes, scores, writings and catalogues. I owe special thanks to Ian Gardiner, whose music provided the initial inspiration for my thesis and who shared many of his thoughts on British new music with me in innumerable telephone conversations. I would also like to thank Hugh Shrapnel, whose music is not discussed here but who shared his clear and honest recollections of the Scratch Orchestra with me on several occasions. Peter Anthony Monk also contributed helpful viewpoints relating to his experience of composition.

I am grateful to my colleagues at BBC Radio 3 who provided me with huge support, not to mention the means to pay the rent, during the past seven years: Stephen Haylett in particular went out of his way to make many rare and ageing recordings available to me.

Finally, I owe a great deal to my friends Rory Ridley-Duff and William Prescott, who enabled the thesis to be word-processed and printed.


## DECLARATION

# ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the use of reference and quotation in English experimental music. Observing that these phenomena are also common in other areas of music, it attempts to make firm distinctions between various manifestations and offer reasons why eclectic compositions emanating from the experimental tradition are the more effective, both in purely musical terms and in the maintaining of a subversive stance.

Chapter One explores the extent to which pluralism in the arts is a direct result of postmodernism. The social effects of postmodernism and their influence on the arts are documented, leading to the conclusion that all instances of eclecticism in contemporary art and music could be categorised as postmodernist in some measure. The idea is then introduced that postmodernism is more than an environmental phenomenon and is an artistic aesthetic in its own right. Works which fall into this category are introduced, and ethical criticisms of them discussed. The idea is asserted that music from the experimental tradition is not connected to this problematic aesthetic.

Chapter Two seeks to prove the last point by investigating the history of English experimental music and its independence from the modernist and postmodernist mainstream. After demonstrating this detachment it goes on to suggest ways in which its own history may have provided seeds for the later pluralistic tendencies.

Chapter Three focuses on attitudes to history which are peculiar to composers of the experimental tradition. The influence of certain romantic composers is demonstrated with regard to the recent prevalence of transcription and arrangement, and eclectic works which stem from the admiration of earlier composers are discussed in detail.

Chapter Four deals with ways in which composers from the experimental tradition have referred to source material from popular culture. It demonstrates how Satie and Ives have been important role models and gives details of compositions which utilise idioms from background music and 'muzak'.

Chapter Five presents a methodology for the analysis of pluralistic music which rests on the principles of semiotics. It shows how the methodology could be used to reveal the interaction of references within a work, and suggests how conclusions could be interpreted to serve a better critical awareness of pluralistic music.

# INTRODUCTION

Eclecticism is arguably one of the most ubiquitous characteristics of British contemporary music. In particular, the phenomena of quotation and reference, particularly when appertaining to popular music and jazz, are enjoying an unprecedented vogue whose tenacity and pervasion cannot be explained away in simple terms. The conspicuous absence of specialist commentary on this subject bears witness to the elusive nature of the topic; in order to understand the role played by a gesture whose presence in a new composition may appear incongruous within the conventional concert situation, the listener may be tempted to seek enlightenment from outside the musical sphere altogether. The largest bank of information on contemporary eclecticism exists primarily in the form of arts criticism, but also as part of sociology and media studies. Appraisal of such literature is helpful in gaining an understanding of the use of quotation and reference in music, not only because of the multitude of interesting stylistic parallels which can be found in other fields of art, but because of the high standards of perception and objectivity cultivated by critics such as Lucy Lippard, Lawrence Alloway, Frederick Jameson and Suzi Gablik from which the music scholar can attain considerable benefit.

It is the specific aim of this thesis to investigate the increasing incidence of pluralism in English experimental music, to add to the existing literature by attempting to contextualise and evaluate such developments rather than to simply describe them. The theories of the writers listed above are discussed in relation to the music of Gavin Bryars, Ian Gardiner, Christopher Hobbs, Andrew Hugill, Dave Smith and John White. The decision to specialise in these six composers reflects the extent to which their output has played a leading role in the expansion of experimental music into new areas, consolidating and refining the pluralistic tendencies which had begun to assert themselves in the early experimental period, covered by Michael Nyman in his study *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (1974).

The thesis does not attempt to continue Nyman's work in cataloguing and categorising the full range of experimental activities. In choosing to concentrate on the feature of eclecticism (also described as pluralism, association or reference), its origins and its manifestations, one is forced to consider the music in a wider context, given that eclecticism has taken root in other areas of music and art synchronously. A number of contentious issues are set in motion by this observation. Pluralism in art from the late 1950's onwards has been largely interpreted as a manifestation of postmodernism; postmodernism has been largely interpreted as a manifestation of social decadence. If English experimental music is to escape such condemnation, a full definition of postmodernism must be sought. Concerns of value and morality must be confronted: in her book *Has Modernism Failed?*, which has played an important role in motivating this

thesis, Gablik states that the issues at stake now are "how to determine which artists are merely scavenging the past and which are seeking, more actively, to influence and transform the spiritual vacuum at the centre of our society" (Gablik, 1984: 123).

Gablik's book focuses on the difficulty of maintaining not only a position of integrity, but a subversive, oppositional stance in the face of the commodification of art. While *Has Modernism Failed?* concentrates on why this stance is almost impossible to maintain, her sequel *The Re-enchantment of Art* (1991) is more optimistic, sifting through the glut of practitioners in search of positive role-models. In response to the disappointing lack of similar, evaluative work in the musical sphere, this thesis examines how composers have interacted with the demands and rewards of our culture, and implies that an art as ethical as Gablik recommends can be found in the work of English composers of the experimental tradition.

Chapter one is responsible for providing the cultural backdrop against which new perspectives of English experimental music may be achieved, and is therefore far longer than any of the other chapters. It deals directly with the issue of postmodernism, unravelling its various nuances of meaning and their manifestations in society, art and music. The relationship of the experimental tradition to postmodernism is considered, and is compared with that of other areas of contemporary western classical music. The second chapter corroborates the conclusions of the first by looking at the history of the experimental tradition itself, showing how in many respects experimental music is only distantly related to postmodernism. The work of Cage is considered from two angles; firstly showing how a break with modernism was effected, (eliminating the likelihood of a later association with postmodernism) and secondly revealing possible precedents for the later eclecticism. The third chapter deals with the experimental view of music history and the acceptance of repertory shunned by the modernist view of the past, suggesting that this may be the most significant motivation for experimental eclecticism whilst also representing an effective means of subversion. The influence of the salient features of the repertory favoured by English experimental composers is considered, including the preponderance of transcription and arrangement, versatile scoring, an everyday, 'furniture' tone, the defiance of conventional analysis, the interest in extra-musical concepts, and the acceptance of popular idioms. Chapter four shows how English experimental composers have managed to use these idioms in a musically satisfying, challengingly subversive way, by means of a peculiarly experimental outlook greatly influenced by Satie and Ives. After assessing the importance of these two precedents, it then goes on to reveal the one way in which eclectic experimental composition is in fact reflective of postmodernism, in its willingness to deal with the contradictions of the commercial environment of the late twentieth century. The final chapter outlines a methodology for the analysis of eclectic music, using principles of semiology as a means of clarifying the myriad of messages that can be planted within an eclectic score.

## CHAPTER 1

# REFERENCE AND QUOTATION AS MANIFESTATIONS OF POSTMODERNISM

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# INTRODUCTION

Although many writers in the field of music would agree that eclecticism is one of the most important characteristics of postmodernism, it has been left to literary and artistic critics to attempt more than a superficial understanding of what postmodernism means. In *After the Wake* (1990), an article charting the rise and fall of both modernism and postmodernism, Malcolm Bradbury traces the origins of the term to its first systematic literary use at the end of the 1950's[1], particularly in the work of Irving Howe. Howe's essay *Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction* of 1959 surveys the post-war American novel and perceives in it a state of "affluent alienation". This simple meaning was to be short-lived, and postmodernism took on more elaborate associations in the 1960's, where the modern movement had been virtually assimilated as popular style. Since then, there has been a great deal of confusion as to the precise meaning of the term, with the result that any artistic endeavour showing a tendency to refer to other works is now considered to be postmodernist.

Scholars in the field of visual art and literature, perhaps more accustomed to large-scale cultural evaluation, have made the most significant contribution to the attempt to find a more fundamental definition. The first, and largest, section of this chapter considers their arguments in some depth before going on to discuss specific examples where the postmodern environment has had a direct influence on eclectic art, rock music, and finally classical music. The small quantity of literature directly pertaining to such music is also reviewed in this section. The chapter then proceeds to consider the purely aesthetic pressures of postmodernism, before dealing with the various ways in which postmodernist visual art has been subjected to strong criticism. The final section looks at the very different critical responses to similarly pluralistic music.

## 1.1 THE POSTMODERN ENVIRONMENT

### (i). External factors

It has frequently been stressed that one cannot come to a full understanding of postmodernism by studying art in isolation from society. In his book *Modernism/Post-modernism/Realism: A critical perspective for art* (1987: 122-123), Brandon Taylor writes:

> ...artistic modernism was part of a wider process of societal modernisation which includes the self-improving project of science, the utopian mission of technology since its inception, and the promise implicit in the whole of secular modern life that justice and happiness are in principle possible for all. These modernisation processes were unable to fulfil their own promises, in spite of certain impressive gains and achievements. What is then called post-modern appeared not as an autonomous development within the artistic sphere alone, but as a result of the alienating pressures exerted by extreme modernisation processes elsewhere - in science, technology, and the 'low cultural' products which the technology-dependent media carry.

Although Taylor uses the term 'modernisation' to refer to the social sphere, as distinct from 'modernism' in the artistic sphere, it is reasonable to surmise from his account that 'postmodernist' can be used to describe the period of extreme, hyper-modernisation which followed that of the initial phase of modernisation which took place at the turn of the century.

Frederick Jameson (1985: 124) agrees that the break between modernist and postmodernist periods can be described in terms of periods of social life. He states that non-Marxists and Marxists alike feel that at some unspecified time after the second world war a new kind of society began to emerge which has been dubbed variously as post-industrial society, multinational capitalism, or media society. The new society was characterised by planned obsolescence; rapidly changing fashion and styles; the penetration of advertising, television and media in an enormous way; the standardisation between city and country in place of the old tension that had existed in these realms; and finally automobile culture. Jameson believes that the emergence of artistic postmodernism is closely tied to this consumer society, and that its formal features reflect the deeper machinations of this social system.

With this in mind, one must consider the extent to which the characteristics of the postmodernist environment have been directly responsible for the growth of associative art, irrespective of any other aspects of its aesthetic background. Although quotation, pastiche and parody can be found in western music at various points throughout history, including the modernist period, it cannot be denied that the recent opportunities for artists of different cultural backgrounds to mix brings a far stronger likelihood than before of pluralistic works being written. However, it is arguable whether international travel and immigration alone could have encouraged eclecticism on behalf of either musicians or artists in any significantly new way. Several of the other social conditions of the postmodern period, identified by Jameson above, were necessary to put the new manifestations and high levels of eclecticism firmly on the agenda. A change in the profile of popular culture was one of these conditions, raising it to a level where it could infiltrate the work of "serious" artists. Central to this change was the arrival in the artistic world of a major sector of the audience for popular music - the working class. Composers who grew up in Britain during and after the pop music boom of the 1960's are likely to have enjoyed direct involvement in non-classical music, from the school rock band to the local jazz club, and this has contributed to the desire to remain in close contact with these early roots. Young people from working-class backgrounds, who constitute the traditional audience and practitioners of rock music, have had improved opportunities to progress from school to music college, from where they have established themselves as professional composers. Many working-class rock musicians gained access to art college, again encouraging an exchange of cultural ideas, for example Keith Richards, Pete Townshend, Syd Barrett, Brian Ferry and John Lennon.

Increased pluralism in the area of fashion was also a result of the influence of the working class, for example in the street-wise clothes of Mary Quant; and although pastiche and the rifling of history for decorative motifs has been part of fashion at least since the early 19th century, the scale of the borrowing was greatly intensified in the aesthetics of 'retro-chic'. This pluralism was more than simply a new-found freedom; it reflected the fact that society had developed more subtly-defined groupings beyond the old identifications of class and generation.

Perhaps the most significant condition of postmodern society which contributed to the development of the new eclecticism was the expansion of power of the mass media. Significant changes occurred in radio and the record industry in the 1940's, raising the profile of popular music as the principal point of convergence between the young in search of identity and big business in search of consumers. These developments included the introduction of 45rpm singles, 33 1/3rpm long playing records and transistor radios. Through the advancement of radio and the record industry in the 1950's, an unprecedented degree of stylistic cross-over occurred within popular music itself; the cover version in particular flourished, and although it was common for the new version to obliterate the original, no-one could disguise the fact that black music had penetrated the pop music mainstream and was set to dominate it. In Britain, the conservative BBC was threatened by the arrival of the pirate station Radio Caroline in 1964, and was finally forced to respond to the popularity and significance of Afro-American popular music.

By the 1960's, even the British Arts Council were forced to admit that popular culture was not going to go away. The emphasis of the Council's campaigning changed subtly from the 'democratisation of culture' - disseminating high culture among the educationally disadvantaged - to 'cultural democracy', where all types of art, high or low, were to be encouraged if a creative role could be found for them in people's lives. Marghanita Laski, who was to become vice-chairwoman of the Arts Council, admitted in a 1965 broadcast that "many people are, after all, made happy not by high art, but by pop art; not by Bach but by the Beatles; not by ballet but by dance halls; not by Henry Moore but by plastic herons brooding over garden pools" (Shaw, 1987: 117).

Finally, television guaranteed popular culture an all-pervasive power. It has often been seen as the major medium to contribute to the extreme objectification of culture, with an impact upon art even greater than that of photography earlier on. Between 1945 and 1975 alone the number of television sets in the UK increased from none to eighteen million (Taylor, 1987: 9); computer data-processing, electronic news-gathering equipment and satellite transmission made the Global Village that media theorist Marshall McLuhan had heralded in the early 1960's a reality. The fact that television commands a huge slice of a nation's economic resources guarantees its social impact. Even the most conservative painters and composers cannot avoid encountering their art in reproduction form.


JUKEBOX JURY
new dimensions in listening pleasure.
I SEE YOU'VE UP-GRADED TO COMPACT DISC...VERY NICE...
WHAT ABOUT SOME MUSIC, EVERYONE?
ANYONE MIND IF I TURN THIS OFF?
TRANQATE
WOW...THAT WAS QUITE A BLOW-OUT... I'M PODGED!
YES-IT'S A GOOD WHEEZE, THAT SELF-SERVICE TANPOOR!...
I'LL GO AND MAKE SOME COFFEE.
WHAT'S IT TO BE, DEREK... YOU'RE THE MUSIC BUFF.. WHAT ABOUT A SPOT OF COUNTRY?
TSK!-LOAD OF SENTIMENTAL CODSWALLOP IF YOU ASK ME!
FAIR ENOUGH-THOUGH I UNDERSTAND RICKY SKAGGS REWARDS REPEATED LISTENING... WHAT ABOUT SOME COPLAND?
-YOU SERIOUS? ALL THAT VACANT PRAIRIE MOODMUSIC INTERRUPTED BY IMITATION JIGS?..
YOU'RE A HARD MAN TO PLEASE, DEREK!
HOW ABOUT SOME JAZZ THEN?
PAH! MUSICAL TRAIN-SPOTTING! ALL QUOTES AND SUSPENDED ANTICIPATIONS!
HURRY UP DEREK-WE WANNA BOOGIE!
HERE-LET ME HAVE A LOOK THROUGH THIS LOT...
..PUNK... ANGRY ENERGY BUT ESSENTIALLY THE PORNOGRAPHY OF DESPAIR...
HEAVY METAL.. ..EXECRABLE PROTO-FASCIST JUNK!...
I WOULDN'T LIKE TO GET LANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND WITH THIS BOZO!
..MINIMALISM... KNITTING PATTERN MUSIC...
SALSA...REGGAE... ..AFRICAN.... CULTURAL SNACKING...
NEW AGE MUSIC... ... CAUSE RELATED MARKET... MINDLESS DROSS FOR YUPPIES TO DRY THEIR HAIR TO....
EUROVI HITS
BUT..DEREK.. ALL THIS..THIS UNRELIEVED NEGATIVITY MUST END SOMEWHERE!
YES...IT ENDS IN SILENCE!
RIGHT! WHO WANTS COFFEE?
NOT FOR ME, THANKS, -GETS MY ADRENALIN GOING...
SILENCE

Television culture has absorbed both modernist and postmodernist aesthetics so that the disturbing perceptions of modernism are now commonplace diversions, and even the violent scenes of the news are presented to us as mere images, safely contained within a box and available for use as artistic material. In addition to the obvious moral disadvantages of this, which will be discussed later, the mass media have played an important role in altering society's attitude to the past, to its sense of history. Taylor acknowledges that while publishing, by the mid-sixties, had eradicated the natural temporal and geographical boundaries between cultures, periods, and schools, television did far more:

> It is the first cultural medium in the whole of history to present the artistic achievements of the past as a stitched-together collage of equi-important and simultaneously existing phenomena, largely divorced from geography and material history (Taylor, 1987: 103).

The result of this is the perception of history as an endless reserve of equal events from which an artist can quote according to his cynical requirements. There is also a tendency towards nostalgia: although this has characterised certain artistic movements of the past (for example Cocteau's penchant for the traditional feel of Parisian popular entertainment), the ability of the mass media to wipe out true memory of events and replace it with an unprecedented number of superficial images makes it more desirable than ever for an artist to delve into the past.

The 1980's comic strip *Biff*, which appears in *The Guardian* and formerly in *City Limits*, gives an unflattering illustration of the penetration of the mass media into the human consciousness. A particular cartoon entitled *Juke Box Jury* (Garratt and Kidd, 1988) reveals the extent to which all kinds of music are instantly accessible to the consumer, and indeed to the composer, simultaneously raising questions about the concept of the composer - as - consumer. The scenario is a gathering of stereotyped adults, further type-cast by their rigid fifties-style clothing and postures which in turn serve to emphasise their exclusively eighties topics of conversation (see illustration). The central character's laser-sharp cultural analyses are a parody of the 1980's pluralism which is normally taken for granted, or celebrated in publications such as *The Wire*, *The Face*, *N.M.E* and the quality press, on radio shows by Andy Kershaw and Charlie Gillett, or on television with *Big World Cafe*, *Wired* and *The Rough Guide*.

(ii). Psychological factors

The loss of a sense of individuality, mentioned above in relation to the stereotyped formats of television, has played a central role in developments in post-war psychology; several theorists have taken this into consideration as part of their drive to establish how the postmodern environment has influenced eclectic works of art. Subjective individual expression was undoubtedly one of the tenets of modernism. Adorno's views of tradition and popular culture as a repressive father which the artist

had to cast off in order to find his own truth and freedom, entailed the adoption of Freudian psychology, the authority of which has gradually been eroded (Franklin, 1985: 62).

With the dawning of the postmodern age, Frederick Jameson announced the end of individualism as such, or the 'death of the subject' (Jameson, 1985). Great manifestations of modernism depended on the invention of a personal, private style, which implies that the aesthetic was organically linked to the conception of a unique self, a private identity which was expected to generate its own unique vision of the world and forge its own unique style. Many music critics still applaud compositions which attempt this objective, although theorists in the areas of sociology, feminism, psychology and linguistics have all explored the notion that individualism and personal identity is a thing of the past, no more than a typically bourgeois attempt to cover the cracks of disintegrating capitalist society, or a reflection of the desire of a patriarchal establishment to extend the highly-discriminatory cult of the genius (Taylor, 1987: 46-48). Lacanian theory deals with the idea that corporate capitalism, and the resulting demographic explosion have destroyed the individualism which previously existed. Lacan discredited the concept of individual style, arguing that the ego cannot create language - language exists before it does. Language determines the consciousness; it speaks the artist, not vice versa (Taylor, 1987: 48-50). The next logical progression from this view is that if thought is a result of language, then so are emotions. Even pain is simply a text to be viewed objectively through the images of the mass media. Collage is central to this view of the human mind not containing a unified self but a schizoid conglomeration which perceives everything at an objectifying distance, merely as a text to be read. The standardised portrayal of humans and their relationships on television is an important factor in the psychological changes which have encouraged artists to reject originality and to employ quotation, parody and pastiche. Even more radical is the view that the bourgeois individual never existed at all, and is a myth - a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they had a unique personal identity. The dilemma brought about by this is obvious. Either we consider that the old modernist models such as Picasso or T.S. Eliot are no longer useful, as nobody has that unique private world and style to express any longer; or far worse, we face the uncomfortable possibility that the old models were always misguided. Referential art is a logical response to either viewpoint.

The new schizoid mentality has been identified in the performance art of the postmodern period, and in collage. It is recognised as a kind of obscurity, an opaqueness, in which the onlooker is able to perceive points of meaning - signs - without having access to their underlying signification. It is in this manner that a schizophrenic may perceive a word as a thing in its own right rather than a token representing an entirely

separate entity. On losing the ability to see beyond a sign to its signification, the schizophrenic, like the alienated postmodernist artist, nevertheless gains a particular quality of vision which is denied to others.

The new, 'meaningless' manner of observing and listening is fundamental to the eclecticism of Jasper Johns and John Cage. What interested Johns about flags and targets, to take the example of his famous early works, was their essential invisibility: in its normal context, an observer would see straight through a flag's outer appearance to its underlying signification as a national emblem, but when painted and hung on a gallery wall it would be noticed in its own right. In collages which employ more than one symbol, Johns similarly ensures that a collective meaning is entirely impossible to reach. For example, in *Target with Plaster Casts* of 1955, he depicts two kinds of spaces, each containing very different symbols; above a large target is a row of 9 small compartments which contain a plaster cast suggestive of a human body-part. The juxtaposition is mysterious; the images seem to be permeated with an unseen something (Rosenthal, 1990: 117). Cage's desire to let sounds be themselves rather than using them to represent emotions or political viewpoints has much in common with Johns' attitude:

> Why should they [listeners] imagine that sounds are not interesting in themselves? I'm always amazed when people say "Do you mean it's just sounds?" How they can imagine that it's anything but sounds is what's so mysterious. They're convinced that it's a vehicle for pushing the ideas of one person out of his head into somebody else's head, along with - in a good German situation - his feelings, in a marriage that's called the marriage of Form and Content. That situation is, from my point of view, absolutely alarming (Kostelanetz, 1989: 234).

Hating to be emotionally manipulated by organised sounds, Cage became notorious for his indictments of popular classical pieces such as Handel's *Messiah*. When asked whether it was not possible to appreciate the sounds of *Messiah* just for themselves, his reply gave some idea of the parallels between musical simultaneity and collage in visual art:

> I think so. But you'd have to listen to a lot of other music at the same time, in some kind of "Apartment House"[2] situation. Then it might be very entertaining. You can get rid of intention by multiplying intention (Kostelanetz, 1989: 234).

His collaborations with choreographer Merce Cunningham show a similar desire to avoid the extraction of meaning from the relationship between the activities of music and dance, making them more noticeable in themselves. Cunningham generally prepared the dance by himself in a studio, and would have no idea of the nature of the music until the first performance; for his part, Cage would have been warned only of the basic practicalities of the event. Occasionally the music would have been written entirely separately from the dance and would be used simply because it was judged to work; likewise the scenery. Cage asked:

> Why do you always ask about the relationship or connections between us? Let me put it to you this way. Don't you see that the fan is here and

> that the Norfolk Pine is there? How in Heaven's name are they related? If you can answer that then you can answer these other questions...they are in the same space and the same time and they're not interfering with one another (Francis, 1990: 25).

(iii). Manifestations in the visual arts

Collage played an important role in Pop art, and this is one area which reveals the limitations of the theory that postmodernism is best represented by an opaque, or meaningless, simultaneity. 'Pure' Pop art - as it has been analysed by art critics such as Lucy R. Lippard[3] - rarely presents the viewer with an opaque text, but it is undoubtedly influenced by many other fundamental aspects of the postmodern environment. For example, Richard Hamilton's collage *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, often considered to be the prototype work of British Pop, contains cuttings taken from the everyday world of advertising and juxtaposes them so that the viewer is able to perceive an underlying comment on the stereotyping of the 1950's media. Similarly, Roy Lichtenstein's works often contain a comment which is readable by anyone at all familiar with the recent history of art, and can still be appreciated by those who are not. His *Woman with Flowered Hat*(1963) shows the format of a classic Picasso viewed through the media of the comic-book; it is diagrammatic, economical in terms of detail and colour spectrum, utilises multiple 'Ben Day' dots to represent areas of shade, and is thickly outlined in black. A painting whose worth depends on its uniqueness is represented as a commodity, able to be cloned and possessed by the world outside great art. Whether this is to be understood as a derisive caricature of cubist expressionism or as an indictment (or merely a gently ironic illustration) of the all-embracing nature of the media depends entirely upon the viewer's own standpoint, but the signs of the painting are not so contradictory as to render the text opaque. British Pop artist Richard Smith wrote in 1963 that "in annexing forms available to the spectator through mass media there is a shared world of references. Contact can be made on a number of levels" (Alloway, 1970: 48).

Interviewed in 1991, Richard Hamilton admitted that his works of the 1950's onwards were not solely motivated by his admiration for popular art; there were other motivations centring around his need to replace the existing, abstract expressionist models (Graham-Dixon, 1991). These aesthetic motivations for borrowing from popular culture will be discussed at length in the next section, but for now it is important to note that in looking for a return to representation, Hamilton and his colleagues turned to their immediate environment for source material. One of the important questions Hamilton asked himself on deciding to go back to the visual world was simply "What do I look at?" He realised that the answer was popular culture, and he refused to be ashamed of this, accepting that for better or for worse, he was deeply affected by his own world. Dislike of the snobbery of the British art world was a major motivation to the Pop artists. It has been suggested that the borrowing of comic images for art was in part a deliberate

strategy by some of the first artists to benefit from the huge explosion of university education in both America and the United Kingdom: Reyner Banham declared that "Pop [art] represents the revenge of the elementary schoolboys" (Wagstaff, 1987: 66). Comic images were only part of the weaponry of these "elementary schoolboys"; it has already been mentioned earlier in this chapter that the access of the working-class to art school led to a closer relationship between art and rock music. In addition to the famous Warhol representations, Elvis appeared in several of Peter Blake paintings: *Girls With Their Hero* was a scrap book-like collection of Elvis magazine photos; *Self-portrait With Buttons* featured the artist holding an Elvis fanzine. The Beatles were also a prime source of iconography for artists such as Blake, and by the late 1960's several famous collaborations had taken place including Blake's own sleeve cover for *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and Richard Hamilton's design for the *White Album* sleeve and poster.

Hamilton gauged the distinction between this new work and that of earlier artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec by contrasting the new, huge scale of popular culture to what had existed before in small cafes and clubs. Britain in the 1950's had recently been inundated with popular artefacts from the United States; artist John McHale had studied at Yale University and returned in 1955 with a box stuffed with American ephemera which spoke of a more rich popular culture than in London in terms of billboards, comics, the graphics industry, movies, car styling, interior design, music and clothes (Wagstaff, 1987: 66). All these things were of interest to the intellectuals who formed an organisation called the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. McHale and Hamilton were members of this informal discussion group which convened to plan themes and find public speakers for the ICA, and in a meeting during the Winter of 1954-55 became aware that it was more concerned to discuss popular culture than high art. Lawrence Alloway describes the climate of the time:

> We discovered that we had in common a vernacular culture that persisted beyond any special interest or skills in art, architecture, design or art-criticism that any of us might possess. The area of contact was mass-produced urban culture: movies, advertising, science fiction, Pop music. We felt none of the dislike of commercial culture standard among most intellectuals, but accepted it as a fact, discussed it in detail, and consumed it enthusiastically (Alloway, 1970: 31-32).

Pop art's positive response to the urban landscape was not comparable to earlier artists' response to theirs. Pop is a meta-language: a language which comments upon others. It does not scrutinise reality directly, but appropriates existing representations of reality found in the mass media. This ability to observe the postmodernist environment through the eyes given to it by that same environment gives Pop art a subtle voice despite its brash superficial appearance. The images of Elvis mentioned above dealt with the ideas of fame and superstardom. They were in no way about his music or Elvis himself; they dealt with his 'ready made' image as it appeared in countless magazines, TV shows, films, newspapers and fanzines.

(iv). Manifestations in rock music

Scholars of postmodernism have yet to find a parallel of Pop's multi-layered reflection of the urban environment in western classical music. Apart from Cage, whose motivations for eclecticism are discussed above (and will feature in more detail in Chapter 2), and to a certain extent Philip Glass whose ventures with Ravi Shankar have aroused some interest, the area of contemporary "concert" music appears to be intriguingly out-of-bounds to most cultural analysts, who instead have preferred to focus on music in a multi-media context or in the area of rock. In a sense this is understandable, as a great deal of cultural commentary has indeed taken place in the work of certain versatile rock musicians. Rock music has generally enjoyed stronger links with art college than classical music has, making it more likely to benefit from the most radical schools of thought than classical music. The exchange between pop and art was not simply a one-way traffic, with art at the receiving end; The Velvet Underground was managed by Andy Warhol as part of his *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* mixed-media show in New York, and excelled in an ironic awareness of popular culture, particularly in the album *White Light/White Heat*; solo albums by John Cale after he left the group also showed this tendency. Laurie Anderson is one of the few musicians whose work is mentioned in *Art in the Age of Mass Media*, a study of postmodernism by John A. Walker, formerly a student of Richard Hamilton. Anderson's work takes as its theme the phenomenon of mediation itself: after studying art history in New York she later became known for her performance art, which uses an elaborate structure of visual and musical symbols to portray the dehumanising crack-up of modern society. In Britain, the groups of Henry Cow and The Art Bears were known for their similarly art-influenced stance, and the ironic, self-conscious cover versions of Bryan Ferry's group Roxy Music were undoubtedly influenced by Ferry's background working with Hamilton in the art department of Newcastle University. In the late seventies, various prominent punk rockers including Cosey Fanni Tutti and Genesis P. Orridge, constituting the group *Throbbing Gristle*, alternated musical performances with performance art.

The ability of rock music to comment upon its environment by using techniques of quotation, pastiche and parody is particularly well-illustrated by the work of Frank Zappa. Zappa mirrored contemporary culture - from Sinatra to Varèse - as a "giant scrap heap of disposable consumer trash" (Paddison, 1982: 215). He reflected contemporary American reality, concentrating on teenage themes early on in his career and political life later, using an extraordinary variety of modern techniques and material. Cynicism about the themes of popular culture influenced his third album with the Mothers of Invention, which caused controversy by imitating the cover of the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper*; it was considered dangerous enough for Paul McCartney to delay its release until 1968. Called

*We're Only In It For The Money*, this album criticised the hypocrisy of the hippy generation with songs such as *Flower Punk.*

By the time that the sort of pastiche practised by Zappa became widespread in rock music, it was part of a general nostalgia package and often entirely without irony. Writing in 1990, journalist Simon Reynolds isolated the magazines *Q, Vox* and *Select* as leading the calculated attempt to lock into the 'retro-Zeitgeist'. Reynolds complained that these journals were concerned only with the myths and memorabilia of rock :

> For all the rhetoric about a New Age, a new "positivity" and hope for the future, 1989 and 1990 have been dominated by the "re" prefix... Reissues now account for a hefty proportion of record sales. Even dance music relies on cover versions...Of course, the REworking and REmotivation of elements of its own history has long been the name of the game in pop, and goes back at least as far as Bowie's glam post-modernism in the early Seventies. But now it's the norm, oppressively. Virtually all new groups invite you to play the reference game (1990).

(v). Manifestations in classical music; literature review

Although the increasing flexibility of barriers between the serious and popular arenas shown by Zappa and some of the other examples above is an important phenomenon of the postmodernist age, it is another challenge altogether to find examples of entirely concert-hall-based music which takes a similar attitude to popular culture to that of the Pop artists. Although it too can be found in reproduction on T-shirts, diaries and calendars, Pop art initially was a pure gallery art having little in common with the popular culture it appropriated,[4] whereas the rock musicians mentioned above are already an actual part of popular culture. For classical music to open its mind to the postmodern environment would require a greater break with tradition, and the exclusion of such music from postmodernist studies and the corresponding absence of postmodernism from musical studies would lead one to believe that this break has not taken place. It cannot be denied, however, that despite the resistance which has kept scholars of postmodernism at bay, the increase in the referential tendencies described by Simon Reynolds above has had parallels, however discreet, in the sphere of classical contemporary music. It is no surprise to find that early developments in this direction within the sphere of experimental music have mostly passed unnoticed, but even in the work of better-known composers stylistic pluralism has rarely been given a great deal of attention. Considering the importance accorded to these stylistic features by critics in other artistic disciplines, this oversight hints at the musical world's isolation and relative backwardness compared to the other arts. The following section presents examples of what is often dubbed 'cross-over' music, and briefly reviews the small amount of literature dedicated to it. A fuller aesthetic categorisation of these examples, taking on board ethical considerations, is reserved for the final section of the chapter, when the subject of postmodernism has been more fully explored.

Peter Dickinson's article *Style-modulation: an approach to stylistic pluralism* (1989) is one of the few attempts to get to grips with this issue. Style-modulation is the use of different musical styles within a single work "in a way which is as calculated as any other element of control".[5] While Dickinson is to be admired for recognising the importance of pluralistic music in this century, his study is limited by concentrating on the period up to the 1960's, avoiding the complex issue of the increased occurrence of "style-modulation" in the postmodernist period and discussing instead composers such as Ives, in whose revolutionary output the importance of quotation has already been recognised:

> ...what I am concerned with emerges only in the later 19th century and gains stature through the works of Charles Ives. It often involves types of popular music at a time when the harmonic language of composers had become too advanced to incorporate a folksong as effortlessly as in Schubert or Brahms. And it has something to do with the impact of Afro-American musical practices as they filter through popular songs and dance music in both Europe and America.

This is as close as Dickinson comes to putting style-modulation in context; his study is little more than a list of examples, briefly analysed and entailing no cultural evaluation whatsoever. As a footnote however, he does name a handful of well known practitioners of style-modulation since the sixties including John Corigliano and William Bolcom from the USA and the British composers Dominic Muldowney, whose Second Quartet includes references to Stravinsky, and Jonathan Lloyd whose Fourth Symphony is discussed below. Many other names could have been included, not least that of Tim Souster; Souster was quick to find a use for popular idioms in his work, although his enthusiasm for trying to integrate opposing styles was to diminish in later years. A characteristic composition of the early 1970's was *World Music* for 8 instruments and 4-track tape (originally written in 1973-4, with a new version in 1980). This ambitious composition begins with a section entitled *Lift Off & Orbit 1*, which sets the scene for a simulated journey into space. Abstract electronic sound contrasts with snippets of the everyday world, represented by saxophones and rhythmic riffs; cuttings of dialogue and snatches of rock band cut through alongside echoes of Nixon's inauguration. Souster also arranged several songs by the Beach Boys, including *Surfer Girl, Wouldn't it be nice, God only knows, Good vibrations* and *I get around.*

David Matthews is also an admirer of the Beach Boys; he has written an essay welcoming composers' attempts to draw from what he sees as the 'vernacular' language of popular music:

> My own generation, those born during and immediately after the Second World War, encountered the beginnings of rock as we were emerging from childhood into adolescence, and for many of us it was a crucial event. Some of my earliest genuine musical experiences were of hearing mid-1950's rock - Elvis Presley and Little Richard: the effect on me of this wildly orgiastic music, so different from anything I had encountered in my cosy suburban childhood, was overwhelming (Matthews, 1989: 249-250).

Matthews' optimistic outlook regarding future attempts to "rehabilitate the vernacular" is shared by Robert C.Ehle, who sadly fails to give any examples of relevant composers in his essay *Music and Change: The Music of the New Millennium* (1984: 187-292). Ehle acknowledges the new internationalism in composition and welcomes the sensitivity of composers to the resources of the musics of the entire world:

> Although this is something that has been progressing throughout the entire century, it has now reached a fairly advanced stage, and musical fusions of the musics of many cultures are practically an everyday occurrence today.

Perhaps the most prominent composers of so-called 'cross-over' music in the 1980's and 90's have been Steve Martland and Mark Anthony Turnage. Like Tippett, Martland (born in Liverpool in 1959), is strongly motivated by his allegiance to the working class. Examples of this include his 1986 work *Shoulder to Shoulder*, produced in collaboration with the Dutch Orkest de Volharding, described as a 'street orchestra'. *Shoulder to Shoulder* features chromatic harmonies and spiky, 'klangfarbenmelodie' effects; beneath this are hints of funk bass which become more dominant as the piece progresses. Martland, who has been outspoken about his preference for working with musicians who are not classically trained, wrote of Orkest de Volharding:

> Their working methods in accordance with their strictly left wing political orthodoxy exclude a conductor; new pieces evolving after many months of collaboration with the composer who is challenged to confront the specific qualities of the musicians whose experience lies outside the domain of classical, composed music.[6]

In 1988 Martland composed *Glad Day*, a set of three songs for solo voice and fourteen players, including saxophones, flugelhorn, drums, synthesiser and bass guitar as well as conventional strings. One of these songs, *The World is in Heaven*, features a combination of a broadway-style, expressive verse followed by a funk/rock chorus. Another composition, *Remix*, is scored for jazz ensemble, and features a relentless repeated bass motif, supporting a minor harmonic progression of Ib-7Vc-I and dotted rhythms derived from the music of Marin Marais.

Mark Anthony Turnage, born in Essex in 1960 has also gained a reputation for the strong working-class flavour of blues, soul and rock which runs through his music, most notoriously in his anti-Thatcherite opera *Greek* (1986-88), with its braying saxophones, and his Feeney Trust commission for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, *Three Screaming Popes* (1989), described by critic Gerald Larner as having the "raunchy brashness of a thriller soundtrack". An earlier work, *Before Dark* (1982-83) not only comprised effects such as walking bass and a lyrical jazz-like solo for clarinet, but also a homage to Benjamin Britten in the form of material taken from *The Turn of the Screw*. More recently, *Kai* (1989-90), for solo cello and ensemble, involved a characteristic commentary on jazz along with material deriving from an opera about bass player Charles Mingus, much admired by Turnage.

These examples are all concerned with the borrowing of popular styles by classical composers, but no less typical of the postmodern environment is the easy accessibility of the music of the past. Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle have both shown a particular interest in the artifice of medieval and renaissance music, and the reputation of Robin Holloway was founded on his Schumann-influenced works, the first of which was composed in 1970 under the title *Scenes from Schumann.*

Pluralism in the work of composers of the English experimental tradition is perhaps even less likely to attract attention than that of better-known composers. The major source on British experimental music is still, after more than two decades, *Experimental music: Cage and beyond* (Nyman, 1974). Nyman's book predates much of the eclectic music discussed in this thesis, but reveals that even in the early seventies composers such as Christopher Hobbs, Hugh Shrapnel, John White and Gavin Bryars were frequently appropriating music from pre-existing sources (135-147). However, only a small proportion of his study deals with this phenomenon, and in line with the aim of the book, Nyman puts examples of pluralism into a context of experimental music as a whole, not considering them in terms of developments in the arts generally. Christopher Hobbs sums up the merits and limitations of the book:

> Nyman's book was out of date when it appeared. That's a problem, because things are moving very fast, so you can't make hard and fast definitions about everybody. Especially at that period, everybody's music was changing quite quickly, and so much of what he said about the Scratch Orchestra, about individual composers really didn't apply by the period of time after he finished writing the thing and it being published. The Scratch was a sort of melting pot; there were a lot of groups and ensembles coming out of it, and Nyman's book reflects that. Probably ten years later one would deal with different people in the book perhaps; some people would be more important than others.[7]

In 1991, Leigh Landy published a detailed study of experimental music which gives some consideration to Michael Nyman's definition of the term (which places the music of the Scratch Orchestra and its associates at the hub of experimental activity), but ultimately rejects it in favour of a more wide-ranging view of experimental music as that in which the innovative content of a piece takes precedence over its technical craftsmanship (Landy, 1991: 3-7). This definition does not make discussion of the composers dubbed 'English experimentalists' irrelevant, nor does it exclude recent eclecticism generally, but although Landy includes a chapter on 'Fusion Music' he entirely overlooks the output of the composers who feature in Nyman's book.

Much of the literature on English experimental music is to be found in the journals *Contact* (edited by Keith Potter, who contributed many articles) and *Studio International* (dealing with music and art, and which went bankrupt in 1977). Much of this has been written by composers themselves, in particular Brian Dennis, Michael Parsons, Gavin Bryars, Andrew Hugill and Dave Smith (whose catalogue of the works of John White is an invaluable source of information, containing many colourful reviews

alongside Smith's own detailed descriptions of White's works) along with a handful of sympathetic associates. Virginia Anderson is one of these, and her brief review for the Guardian entitled *New music in need of a tradition* (1989) is perceptive enough to single out reference to pre-existent music as a central issue to those both involved in experimental music (again, using Nyman's definition of the term) and those opposed to it. Anderson also recognises that quotation and pastiche are currently important issues in architecture, therefore acknowledging that experimental eclecticism takes place in a wider context, but her plea for the music of Christopher Hobbs, Dave Smith, John White, Gavin Bryars, Michael Parsons, Howard Skempton, Brian Dennis, Hugh Shrapnel, Andrew Hugill and Ian Gardiner is not completely convincing. To say that "the mainstream avant-garde creates anew; the alternative group mimics the old. The avant-garde forgets in this argument that all new creation has some reference to experience" is to ignore the fact that a great deal of eclecticism, including references to tradition, has taken place in music outside experimentalism.

Despite their enormous value in terms of insight, composers' writings do not attempt to make an objective study, viewed from a distance sufficient to allow their music to be seen in context with other artistic endeavour. There can be no doubt that the postmodern environment has played a part in the experimentalists' recourse to cultures past and present since the early 1960's: that fact can be demonstrated by reference to the careers of various composers in and out of different musical spheres, noting the importance to them of recorded music but most of all considering the extent to which they have found source material in the everyday world: all phenomena which are discussed at length in Chapter 4.

If the argument up to this point is accepted, that many aspects of the postmodern environment have been a direct influence on classical composition both within the area of experimental music and outside of it, then a conclusion may already be reached: that the resulting eclecticism, and therefore the music itself, could be reasonably categorised as postmodernist. However, there are several reasons why the hypothesis cannot be allowed to rest here. Experimental music is different from other areas of British contemporary music and the use it has made of its borrowed source materials is peculiar to it. To rationalise the pluralism as being a mere side-effect of postmodernism is to fail to come to terms with these differences. It becomes apparent that when its sociological ramifications are emphasised, postmodernism - like modernism before it - takes on the character of a chronological term which then expands uncontrollably to cover almost everything in its path. It embraces not only developments in the arts, but also in religion, science, technology, psychology, economics, philosophy, and even academic discourse itself; anything, in fact, which has featured in the period which followed that of the initial technological advancement known as the period of modernism. One cannot deny the logic of this application; it features strongly in the work of academics who write from a

socio-political viewpoint. The problems begin only when one begins to attach stylistic ramifications to the concept of postmodernism, whilst still retaining its all-embracing quality as a chronological term. Letting social upheaval account for certain stylistic characteristics in this way creates a danger of overlooking more subtle and aesthetically significant influences upon artists, creating over-generalised categories in which the true character of the works are obscured. If we are to understand all associative, pluralistic art and music since the nineteen-fifties as being directly formed and shaped by the postmodernist social environment, how are we to differentiate between the employment of quotation and reference in the music of an enormous range of composers, from Gavin Bryars, Dave Smith, John White and Ian Gardiner to Tippett, Robin Holloway, Mark Anthony Turnage, Steve Martland and Jonathan Lloyd? It is insufficient to assert simply that Bryars, Smith, White and Gardiner are 'experimentalists', and that this distinguishes them from the others. Whilst certain stylistic characteristics can be easily identified with one school or another, to a non-partisan listener the common use of referential techniques may be seen to represent a significant sharing of common ground between composers who inhabit the same pluralistic, 'postmodernist' world.

Although it is virtually impossible for any artist to avoid direct contact with socio-political actuality, its power to manipulate their work has been variable, and cosmetic similarities in the usage of pre-existent material (in the case of the period of concern here) do not necessarily indicate aesthetic relatedness. There is a dualism inherent in the concept of postmodernism which can be dangerously misleading: although many writers have emphasised the importance of investigating the extent to which a pluralistic external and psychological environment has encouraged the growth of stylistic pluralism generally, it is equally vital to go on to explore the more complex, internal struggles which helped artists along what is frequently considered to be the Faustian path to pluralism.

## 1.2 POSTMODERNIST AESTHETICS

It cannot be denied that the cosmopolitan nature of our society, capitalism, the technological boom, the rise of popular culture and the mass media have together conspired to provide both inspiration and incubation for the current abundance of stylistic pluralism. However, to over-emphasise the social origins of art suggests that its creators - perhaps the most free-thinking members of society - are passive channels through which common worldly experiences flow unchecked. It is essential to venture beyond sociology to aesthetics, in order to consider the possibility of other motivating forces behind the creation of today's eclectic works, which may reveal enormous distinctions between works which are all arguably postmodernist. Although the intangible artistic pressures which came in the wake of modernism may still be situation-bound, they have nevertheless assumed an identity and power of their own which is

capable of operating in the ivory tower of the university art or music department regardless of ongoing developments in the outside world. This is the hidden side of postmodernism, easily disguised, but still identifiable in the work of many artists and composers.

In music, one is accustomed to hearing about the post-serialist dilemma, in other words the problem of how to continue in a logical way the further refinement and renovation of the western musical tradition after the cul-de-sac of total serialism. This situation is considered to be the result of inevitable historical progress and is rarely linked to postmodernism, which is understood, if at all, as the collection of social circumstances described above which are merely coincidental to the historical development of serious music. However, in the sphere of visual arts, equivalent aesthetic problems have been regarded as being central to the postmodernist situation. This chapter-section lists these problems, leaving the discussion of music until later, and considers their relationship to the rise of the new eclecticism. It may be helpful at this stage to be reminded of the tenets of modernism which contributed to these dilemmas. The following list is based on John A. Walker's summary of the situation (Walker, 1983: 80):

> 1. Modernists rejected the stylistic anarchism and eclecticism of Victorian art and design on the grounds that a new age of machines and technology had been born. They therefore considered it necessary to develop new forms appropriate to the new situation.
>
> 2. Since modernists believed that a new age had dawned, they insisted on a complete break with history and tradition. Novelty and originality became overriding values.
>
> 3. Decoration and ornament were rejected as superfluous; unity, clarity and rationality were preferred.
>
> 4. National, regional and vernacular styles were rejected in favour of an international style, as the tenets of modernism were thought to be universally applicable.
>
> 5. Idealism reigned: socialist architects and designers wished to sweep away the old order to create a brave new world which would in itself improve human behaviour.

Novelty was one of the major characteristics of modernism to directly affect the work of later generations of artists. To reject history and tradition was central to the modernists' embracing of the new age, and while this was not easy for the original modernists (as it required enormous personal resources of self-sufficiency and confidence), it was even more difficult for later artists who realised that, paradoxically,

innovation had become a tradition in itself. Suzi Gablik describes this as the "decline of the new" (1984: 75), and an important aspect of the decline of modernism itself. In *Has Modernism Failed*, and to some extent in its sequel *The Reenchantment of Art*, she considers how pluralism arose as a natural response to the unrealistic demands of continual innovation. In this extract from *The Reenchantment of Art*, Gablik refers to an interview with the artist and critic Ronald Jones:

> As the great juggernaut of modernism, ruled for a century by the notion of perpetual innovation and the creation of new styles, reaches its fateful closure, the idea of participating comfortably in the old discourse of "originality" and change no longer seems possible...change only exists by permission of the culture industry, which likes to create the illusion that the culture is transforming itself, but which has not been engaged in turning itself over in any fundamental way for a long time. To act as if it will, therefore, is counterproductive, since the supply of spare parts for this lumbering pageant of perpetual change ran low long ago. Former strongholds of radicality can only exist now as agents of the system, rotating in time "with the economic tick-tock of the art market and requiring rewinding about every eighteen months" (Gablik, 1991: 13-14).

The elitism of modernism, its assertion that there should be an international style subscribed to by all artists and imposed on the general public, was an important point of departure for the Pop artists. Lawrence Alloway emphasises that Pop art was not simply a neutral reaction to its surroundings, but rather that it had many aesthetic uses: in England its primary aim was to oppose established opinion, which by now was modernist opinion. For some artists it also had the advantage of representing a renewal of figurative art after the dominance of abstract expressionism. In a recent interview with Andrew Graham-Dixon, Richard Hamilton discussed his retrospective view of Pop art, affirming that artists in the late 1950's and early 1960's did have considerable awareness of the aesthetic limitations of abstract masters such as Pollock, Rothko and Malevich:

> What Pop Art was, to my mind, was the desire to look for some kind of figuration capable of bringing meaning, bringing symbols, back into art. In 1961 I wrote a piece called 'For the Finest Art - Try Pop', and it was a serious statement, arguing that we had lost the basic ingredient of art, which is myth (Graham-Dixon, 1991).

In America, the situation was similar. The immediate post-war period found artists searching for a peculiarly American idiom, but without turning immediately to their own popular culture; their initial reaction, in other words abstract expressionism, was what the art critic Sheena Wagstaff has described as a "cerebral flirtation" with European myth and existentialism, whilst unquestioningly subscribing to the model of a European avant-garde. Wagstaff asserts that the American Pop artists had two motivations: to continue the traditional search for an American vernacular, and to undermine the pictorial conventions of European art along with its rigid hierarchy of highs and lows of taste (Wagstaff, 1987: 65).

Unlike Gablik and Walker, whose writings portray pastiche, parody, quotation and pluralism in general as phenomena equally indicative of postmodernism, Frederick

Jameson makes a clear distinction between the motivation of those who practise parody and those who practise pastiche. The parodist capitalises on the uniqueness of a style, and seizes its mannerisms to produce a mockery of the original. This does not mean to say that the artist is necessarily unsympathetic towards the original, but the final impression is that there is a linguistic norm against which the source material can be made to stand out. Pastiche, on the other hand, occurs when there is no longer a linguistic norm; art consists of a sea of private languages - not only small groups with their own, shared language, but actual individuals, each possessing his own private idiom. According to Jameson, this is the climate which has resulted from the modernist (and capitalist) quest for freedom and individuality, and in such a climate parody becomes impossible and eventually pure pastiche appears. He defines pastiche as being, like parody, "the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is the neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic" (Jameson, 1985: 114). What he appears to be saying is that postmodernism is represented by the non-competitive coexistence of different artistic principles.

Roy Lichtenstein's attitude comes close to Jameson's ideal of the egalitarian pluralist postmodernist, the artist denying any sense of parody in his work: "In parody, the implication is the perverse, and I feel that in my own work I don't mean to be that. Because I don't dislike the work I'm parodying" (Lippard, 1970: 87). However, Jameson admits that the parodist is unlikely to dislike entirely the subject of his or her scrutiny, and indeed not all of Lichtenstein's work comes close to a neutral pastiche of comic strip art. In the case of *Woman with Flowered Hat*, discussed earlier, it is probable that the observer will find that neither the cubism nor the comic-strip style seem the more normal; both are well-known, familiar styles, both can be bought, sold and reproduced. However, this is still some way away from Jameson's model of postmodernism. Unlike his prototype, the connotations of the styles involved in Lichtenstein's work are highly accessible and it is hard not to envisage an element of parody in the juxtaposition. Possessing connotations of seriousness and uniqueness, the integrity of the Picasso is compromised when represented in a manner which implies levity and cheapness.

I have already implied that there is more to defining postmodern art than simply identifying the presence of popular icons; however, the diversity of a single area such as Pop art shows that neither is it sufficient to apply, in a simplistic fashion, Jameson's theory that pastiche is genuinely postmodernist and parody is not. It must be remembered that Jameson is dealing with a hypothetical situation of postmodernism, one which can only be set into motion once modernist individualism has reached a somewhat implausible zenith. It is more helpful to regard pastiche and parody as opposite poles on

a scale, with infinite possibilities in between, and also to take into consideration the countless other issues which go to build up a work's historical identity.

In *Has Modernism Failed?* Suzi Gablik concentrates on one such issue, all the more surprising because it does not involve pluralism at all, and yet it represents one of the ways in which a work can be most unequivocally postmodernist. Although this chapter is dedicated to discussing to what extent the origins of pluralism can be found in the situation of postmodernism (rather than looking at postmodernism in its own right), this is an important point. If a work does not have to exhibit pluralistic tendencies in order to be classified postmodernist, then there is an implication that these tendencies themselves may not be representative of postmodernism in every case, a concept which moves us towards a clearer perspective of recent music from the English experimental tradition.

Gablik relates how, between 1910 and 1930, art withdrew from its social moorings as a response to alienating capitalist and totalitarian systems. Artists concentrated on expressing their own inner life, wary of the malignant influence of society, and this situation is what gave birth to what we now recognise as the uncompromising stylistic features of modernism. According to Gablik, by the 1960's and 1970's works of art were being created which exhibited the stylistic features of modernist works but entirely without the ethics listed above and the anger and unrest which accompanied them. An innovative work could be considered aesthetically good regardless of its meaning, and indeed to look for meaning in a work was seen as philistine: radicalism had become aestheticism. Works of art which stubbornly adhered to the old stylistic features despite this loss of modernist ethical content are postmodernist in the sense that they are created in the wake of modernism; they could not exist without a modernist history and yet they share only the surface characteristics of their predecessors. Jameson commented: "Even if contemporary art has all the same formal features as the older modernism, it has still shifted its position fundamentally within our culture" (Jameson, 1985: 124). The term neo-modernist may be more accurate to describe such works, but even this more specialised label still implies a strong collusion with postmodernism.

Modernism's loss of moral authority is better known for its role in the rise of the controversial pluralism than the more acceptable neo-modernism. It made more sense for artists to relinquish the old aesthetic with the passing of time, than to cling to its now-empty shell. The old tactics which had successfully opposed the middle class Victorians and Edwardians had little hope of hitting home in a post-nuclear society; in addition to this, modernism had been absorbed by the establishment to a large extent. In 1945, Duchamp commented that he believed that about ten people in New York and one or two in New Jersey liked avant-garde art; twenty years later such art was no longer unpopular and elitist but possessed a wide audience and a thriving market (Gablik, 1984: 12). Art inspired by social injustice and psychological pain became likely to hang on the

walls of the rich, in private or in galleries. Frederick Jameson agrees that the acceptance of modernist works into University as part of the canon was a factor in their declining moral powers:

> Indeed, one way of marking the break between periods and of dating the emergence of postmodernism is precisely to be found there: in the moment (the early 1960's, one would think) in which the position of high modernism and its dominant aesthetics became established in the academy and are henceforth felt to be academic by a whole new generation of poets, painters and musicians (Jameson, 1985: 124).

Whether it exists as a reflection of its environment, or as a response to modernism's dialectical problems, or whether its relationship to these problematic aspects of postmodernism has never been demonstrated at all, pluralist art has been subjected to a great deal of criticism: Suzi Gablik's sceptical attitude has already been implied. When ethical issues are at stake it is more important than ever to exercise caution in the categorisation of art. The next section of this chapter continues with the process of differentiation between the various strands of eclectic visual art, with the ultimate aim not only of understanding the relationship between postmodernism and English experimental music but of gaining a clearer ethical judgement of that music.

## 1.3 POSTMODERNIST PLURALISM IN THE VISUAL ARTS: COMMON CRITICISMS

The mystique of modernism may lay partly in its unpopularity, but the multi-layered condemnation of postmodernism is perhaps even more fascinating. The fundamental criticism that pluralism in art is irrevocably linked to art's loss of moral authority has been stimulated by the opposing popular view that pluralism is politically correct and should be celebrated. John A. Walker's *Art in the Age of Mass Media* reflects a largely optimistic view of the exchange of ideas between high and low culture, but one of the strongest supporters of pluralism in a more general sense is the architect and writer Charles Jencks.

Jencks welcomes the fragmentation of postmodern society into a greater number of cultural divisions than before; in place of the old triad of 'high brow', 'mid brow' and 'low brow', the 1960's saw new categories of 'young' versus 'old'. Each new 'taste-culture' is itself divisible into smaller groups, as the subtle targeting of consumers by market researchers testifies, so that what once seemed to be a simple cultural pyramid really is a "many-faced, dynamic structure, a kaleidoscope. The influences go all ways at once: not only top-down, but bottom-up and side-to-side" (Jencks, 1992). Jencks argues that this variety is capable of improving the quality of art, and after citing examples of Shakespeare and Mozart, uses as a modern paradigm Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose,* a work which is accessible on several levels as a detective story, a philosophical treatise, a comic romance and a historical novel. Jencks reminds the elitists who panic and start

talking about falling standards that whether a work is demanding or not is only one of the crucial queries; a pluralistic work can succeed or fail by the quality of creativity and imagination applied to the transformation of its source languages: "Eclecticism need not devalue invention, indeed a unique high art can come from dealing with heterogeneity" (Jencks, 1992).

These ideas are not discounted by those who have a more pessimistic view of the future of postmodern art. However, writers such as Suzi Gablik and Brandon Taylor concern themselves with wider moral issues as well as purely aesthetic judgements, and find a large part of contemporary artistic endeavour sadly wanting. Their writings form a wall of dissent, containing overlapping and occasionally contradictory opinions from which I have been able to isolate four major criticisms, three of which are directly concerned with pluralism. These are discussed in turn below.

1. ***Art which is modernist in appearance can no longer expect to carry the same subversive power as original modernist works in terms of either intention or effect; far from being radical, these works are merely formalist.***

This is the 'neo-modernist' art discussed earlier, existing in the gap between modernism and postmodernism and typifying art's loss of moral authority. While the early modernists stood apart from society in order to criticise it (the initial meaning of avant-garde implied a process of aesthetic innovation and social revolt), their successors stood apart from society in an act of individualistic self-absorption; stylistic decisions previously made on ethical grounds were now made on purely aesthetic ones. Gablik describes the freedom of such artists as dangerous, leading to a narcissistic preoccupation with the self; she cites the example of the 'color-field' painters Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, whose stylistic innovations are purely aesthetic, harbouring no revolutionary pretensions, religious fervour or remnants of transcendence. Peter Fuller, an English neo-Marxist, believes that the freedom of such contemporary artists is illusory, "like the freedom of the insane; they can do what they like because whatever they do has no effect at all" (Gablik, 1984: 31).

The adoption of modernist art by the art market played an important role in the reduction of its kudos and in the transformation of revolt into style, as George Melly put it; students of the 1980's could wear black in the manner of the Parisian existentialists of the late forties without being aware of the latter's social protest. Gablik states that the primary function of the last fifty years of art has been to create a critical consciousness, but she notes that "more often than not, this critical function has simply disappeared, as mass bureaucratic culture assimilates potentially subversive forms of art and deprives them of their antagonistic force by converting them into commodities" (Gablik, 1984: 52).

*2. Art which uses commercial icons as its source material is advocating the acceptance of capitalism.*

It is easy to see that Pop art falls neatly into the embrace of this accusation. Lucy Lippard admits that neither American nor British Pop art had any sociological intentions. In addition, its use of elements of popular culture lent a false feeling of stability entirely lacking in the spiritual content of earlier, religious iconography. Pop's opposition to the art establishment could be dismissed by reference to its huge success and rapid assimilation into the canon. Pop artist Robert Indiana commented how it was "enormously important" to belong to the art establishment and even surmised that being "in the right place at the right time with the right thing" was what Pop amounted to (Gablik, 1984: 60).

Andy Warhol's work has been particularly vilified for its opportunism. Although Warhol may have recognised that marketing unique works of modern art took away their subversiveness, his response of mass-producing his works hardly prevented them from being marketable, too. Brandon Taylor commented that Warhol became postmodern when he stopped making images about the world and began making images about other images instead. The questionable virtues of this can be ascertained from the pictures in Warhol's *Death and Destruction* series: the gruesome representations of car accidents or electric chairs could be viewed as challenging the onlooker's usual indifference to media images by magnifying them and changing their context, or as merely aping the distancing, anaesthetising effect of the media.

It is not impossible to interpret Pop to the advantage of left wing politics; James Rosenquist for example considered his work an exploration of how sublimation and hardsell invade our privacy and desensitise us. In addition, Pop art apologist John A. Walker reminds us that the actual artistic produce of the mass media is by no means contemptible, having considerable scope for individual creativity despite limited freedom. He implies that the anonymity of the commercial artist, ensured by the collective, collaborative methods of production, contributes to the art's dismissal. However, despite his positive view of the exchange of ideas between 'high' and 'low' cultures, he admits that Pop is unlikely to ever be regarded as a politically correct art whilever the mass media is reviled by intellectuals as the maintainer of the dominant ideology, encouraging passivity and apathy and helping power to remain concentrated in the hands of a few greedy capitalists (Walker, 1983: 20).

*3. Many works of art employ techniques of pastiche, parody and quotation irresponsibly, and because these are the only escape from the modernist choice of innovation versus conservatism.*

Suzi Gablik describes this situation as 'hover culture', and the works themselves as mere 'endgames'(Gablik, 1991: 13-14). 'Hovering' is about negating the now-stale modernist idea of change. The artist refuses to feed the culture's demand for new shows

and innovative works, renouncing both authorship and originality. To illustrate this, Gablik refers to an exhibition by Sherrie Levine in 1981 in which she rephotographed the work of two well-known photographers and displayed it as her own; the work of Jeff Koons also falls into this category. Recently Koons was the subject of controversy when the author of one of his sources, photographer Art Rogers, took him to court for infringement of copyright. The case involved a polychrome wood sculpture entitled *String of Puppies*, exhibited in 1988 and closely modelled on a photo of a couple holding puppies. Critic Adrian Dannat wrote:

> There are many enjoyable ironies to the Koons V Rogers case...the greatest irony of all, however, is that Koons, star of a whole group of artists termed 'appropriationist' or 'simulationist', should be caught so literally in the deliberate artifice of his aesthetic. The entire point of Koons's work is that he is minimally responsible for any of it, either in inspiration or execution, making him a kind of punning 'Minimalist' (Dannat, 1992).

Some critics are less tolerant of such borrowing. In his article *When life imitates arts programmes*, Cosmo Landesman complains that "We've gone from cultural puritanism to a postmodern promiscuity where any artefact that can flash its populist credentials is automatically applauded." (Landesman, 1990). Dealing with art based on more historical sources, Tom Lubbock shares Suzi Gablik's impatience with 'deconstructive' postmodernism in his review of the work of Scottish painter Steven Campbell:

> The subject is basically art history, and the scenes are packed with numerous, self-conscious devices: quotations of style and imagery, visual puns, pastiches; the many languages of painting jumbled and juxtaposed...the pictures are ignorant where they think they are most knowing, for what is exposed here is not art, but art backwards. It is as though a novel really was its own 'study notes', just a mixture of 'style' and 'theme' and 'webs of imagery'"(Lubbock, 1990).

These artists are described by Gablik as 'deconstructive' postmodernists. While they have obviously attained an intelligent appreciation of the futility of continuing with modernist ideology, they are nevertheless passive victims of circumstances. Their cynicism and failure to invest in a positive art of the future is no less than a denial that there *is* a future to look forward to: they deconstruct the past without a thought for the reconstruction of art. Gablik concludes:

> Instead of carrying forward the betrayed ideology of the old avant-garde, the deconstructive artist may resort to fraudulence, or deliberately adopt the posture of a charlatan by becoming, for instance, a counterfeiter who simulates the work of other artists. He or she is not going to get us out of the mess we're in, but uses strategies of subterfuge and calculated insincerity to disguise his (or her) intentions (Gablik, 1991: 20).

***4. Within the gallery system, subversive commentary of any kind, whether respectably modernist or aesthetically new, is rendered impotent.***

This final point represents the great dilemma of postmodernism. Any subversive spirit in art can only exist by permission of the culture industry: corruption is therefore

inevitable, for without it the artist's voice cannot be heard. The emphasis in the 1980's on career success and the desirability of security within the system has led to a greater likelihood of conformity. Brandon Taylor reports that, in a recent Gulbenkian Foundation Report on the Economic Circumstances of the Visual Artist, the definition of 'professional artist' favoured by most interviewees was that of someone who had gained a place in the mythical continuum known as the history of art, with the help of a 'reputation' constructed by museums, critics and institutions of art (Taylor, 1987: 156).

It is difficult, in any case, for any work of art to shock and unsettle today's bourgeois viewer, but the gallery context itself takes away much of the potential sting. Gablik describes the implausibility of works such as French sculptor Arman's two truckloads of rubbish which filled a Paris gallery in 1960, or several works by the American Walter de Maria. The latter filled a New York art gallery with 220,000 pounds of earth, his dealer buying the entire building in order to keep the work there permanently. At the opposite extreme, Yves Klein presented the idea of art as nothing, painting an empty Paris studio white and exhibiting the space as art. Such works may be attempting to subvert the objectification and commercialisation of art, but they are inextricably reliant upon the gallery system's approval and as such their subversion goes unnoticed.

It is hoped that while perusing the four points above, musical equivalents may have emerged in the reader's mind to form an outline of postmodernism in music. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to flesh out that entire skeleton, although any attempt to do this must be seen as desirable and long overdue. Instead, the final section of this chapter uses the above analysis of postmodernism as a way to assess the categorisations and judgements of music critics with regard to a limited selection of pluralistic works. Common mistakes and misconceptions are considered before my own conclusions about English experimental music's relationship with postmodernism are offered.

## 1.4 POSTMODERNIST PLURALISM IN MUSIC: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

So far, this chapter has demonstrated the degree to which the increased eclecticism in the arts in the latter half of the 20th century is the result of the sociological and aesthetic pressures of postmodernism. It has also attempted to explain the ethical problems and common criticisms that pursue any such art, and in view of this condemnation has endeavoured to guide the reader towards a fairer judgement, not only of the extent to which a work is affiliated with postmodernism, but also the extent to which postmodernism itself is a discreditable phenomenon.

The balance of power between the establishment and practitioners in the sphere of music calls for a different approach when attempting to form an ethical judgement.

Here, the challenges posed by postmodernism are not consciously confronted, resulting not in a blissful naiveté but in dangerously confused attitudes. Ironically, Brandon Taylor laments the fact that art critics are too busy reviewing new work to have time to evaluate the overall drift of contemporary art, or its connection with wider society. The isolation of music however is taken for granted, not only by musicians and critics who rarely achieve the visual artists' clearer thinking, but also by cultural analysts who, perhaps frightened off by the mystique of the score, fail to include music in their accounts of postmodernism. One of Frederick Jameson's most interesting points highlights the seclusion of music, when he states that a major manifestation of postmodernism is the breaking down of boundaries between different kinds of theoretical discourse, for example between political science, sociology and literary criticism to produce what might simply be called 'contemporary theory'. Even within music itself, strictly partitioned methods of study are stubbornly adhered to: theory, analysis, and musicology, making it more unlikely than ever that musicians might consider looking further afield for the answers to some of their problems.

Before I go on to suggest musical equivalents to the postmodernist issues considered above, and to reveal how commentators have failed to perceive the predicaments clearly, there must be a point of caution. There is a great difference in the nature of the actual industries of contemporary music and the contemporary visual arts. The charge made against certain postmodernist artists, that they are colluding with capitalism, can hardly be equalled in the world of concert-music where even for the most successful, profits are still relatively small. Furthermore, Gablik's most damning indictments against postmodern amorality are generally reserved for those who have played into the hands of the omnipotent art market of New York. She is dealing with conspiracy on a different scale, where the material rewards are beyond the grasp of the most successful British composer.

Nevertheless, the co-operation of composers with the musical establishment was condemned as no less than 'serving imperialism' by Cornelius Cardew. Cardew's enduring reputation as a zealous Marxist has to some extent obscured the fact that he was one of the very few critics to confront the ethical issues of postmodernism, albeit under a different name. Many of the criticisms voiced in his book *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (1974) exist in parallel to the four major points outlined earlier, and frequently contradict the values of other musical commentators. Firstly, Cardew's repudiation in the early 1970's of his earlier works reflects his perception that avant-garde music was no longer a vital force of resistance. He noted cynically that while avant-gardists appeared to oppose conservative academics, the two were often to be found fraternising on some international panel, each one keen to dispatch younger rivals. He perceived that modernist stylistic decisions were being made on superficial grounds, and insisted, after Marx, that "it is not enough to decorate the world, the point is to influence it" (Cardew,

1974: 81). More significantly, he suspected the motives of avant-gardists such as Stockhausen as being not only formalist - adhering to prescribed forms without any regard to their inner significance - but actually corrupt in their desire for success. He observed that many talented composers longed to escape their tiny audience and 'serve imperialism' in a more public way, achieving better rewards.

Although Cardew's views have proved increasingly influential, in the early years of his career they were rarely accepted outside his own experimental circle. The polemics of the avant-gardists were more pervasive, with a figurehead of Pierre Boulez. Boulez was more concerned with perfecting a system of compositional control than in finding an atonal style which would truthfully reflect the tensions of the unconscious mind, as was the case with his serialist predecessor Schoenberg, and in this respect his work is typical of the move from modernist radicalism to aestheticism which has been called into question by Gablik. Boulez has recently defended this standpoint, which glorifies originality and innovation, by attacking the historical authenticity movement and its obsession with the past:

> It's a phenomenon of a dying civilisation. When they are dying, and I'm afraid that ours is dying from a cultural point of view, they always refer to their past. Look at Greek civilisation and Roman civilisation. When they were dying, in their last moments they were looking always to the past, to the past, to the past...It is much more frightening to me than whether the next thing is mannerism or whatever. An avalanche of memory is burying us (Kettle, 1992).

Several British composers have shown themselves to be as uncompromising as Boulez in adhering to modernist aesthetics. The work of the so-called 'New Complexity' and 'Microtonal' composers must be considered as part of this 'neo-modernism', with its attempts to surpass itself in terms of intricacy, novelty and sophistication. Composers Ian Willcock and Richard Barrett have both displayed a strong concern with the sociological function of music, taking an interest in the values of Cardew, and yet the logical continuation of academic modernism in their work guarantees its acceptance by the music establishment. But even ineffectual homage to the original subversive role of the avant-garde is rare in the work of the neo-modernist composer: the refinement of technique is sufficiently admired in its own right to allow an apparent conceptual justification to grow up around it. The complexity of Brian Ferneyhough's work is regarded as part of a new aesthetic which celebrates the overtaxing of the performer so that he or she hovers permanently on the brink of incompetence. Ferneyhough's modernist credentials are self-evident:

> One of my firmly held tenets is that, in the face of the high level of stylistic plurality, the term 'style' itself needs to be seen as an essentially diachronic function - that is to say, the composer needs to pursue the goal of a slowly developing, quasi-organic linguistic usage capable of providing for some equally gradual semantic enrichment of musical vocables which only some form of historically linear perspective would seem to afford. Although I don't of course wish to deny the possibility of

> other, divergent approaches, my own way of working and my artistic world-view demand this sort of concentration upon the concept of 'individual style' as the presupposition for any sense of ordered evolution (Griffiths, 1985: 73).

Despite the continued prevalence of modernism, and its entrenchment in the academic establishment, certain senior figures have appeared to feel threatened by the advance of postmodernism. Jonathan Harvey's article *Sounding out the Inner Self* (1992) reflects such a stance. In place of the pluralistic works which he dubs 'rococo', he wishes to see more self-exploratory and sublime composition - values which reflect the psychological profile of the early modernist:

> ...unfortunately it appears that a pluralist culture of everything, so plausible on the surface, harbours the threat of trivialisation. It can too easily make alliances with commercial forces and too easily marginalise the important pioneering impulses which will steer a civilisation to greater consciousness. In our new rococo age, a generation of Boccherinis is succeeding the overwhelming weightiness of modernism for all the world as if they wanted some fun after the crushing intensity of the high baroque (Harvey, 1992: 613-615).

Harvey's fears, and his prescription for a worthwhile alternative to pluralism, are extremely close to the views of Adorno. As a product of the age of Freud, Adorno saw popular culture as a repressive father which the progressive artist was obliged to cast off in order to find his own freedom and individuality. This truthful voice was to be found in the unconscious mind, away from the comfortable womb of set forms and gratifying musical clichés. In this light Adorno was unsympathetic to the music of Berg, which in his opinion was weakened by the composer's inability to renounce anything at his disposal (Franklin, 1985: 70).

Like Adorno, Cardew was highly suspicious of the power of the mass media. He believed that the media aimed to lower the level of consciousness of the people, feeding them platitudes by way of education, and crime, violence or sentimentality as entertainment. He stated boldly that the ruling class hoped that film music, pop music and musical comedy would serve for the ideological subjugation of the working class (1974: 53-58). However, where Adorno harnessed his Marxist ideology to the service of the avant-garde, Cardew looked elsewhere for an answer to the dilemma of how to compose music untainted by capitalism.

Although there remains in Britain a strong hard-core of modernist composers, an increasing number have shown postmodernist tendencies of pastiche, parody and quotation. However, in common with the reactionary modernists, the aesthetic implications of their work have often been misunderstood. Referential techniques most often come about as a response to the unreasonable demands of the avant-garde, i.e.. rejecting tradition and insisting upon innovation: highly-respected composers such as Robin Holloway speak of their associative works in terms of an escape, relief from stylistic confines. The subversive origins of those confines, and the ethical implications of

abandonment, are not an issue in Holloway's work, and the strong sense of compromise which haunts the music remains unchallenged.

Holloway's early works were written in an atonal idiom, and even after the personal landmark of *Scenes from Schumann* (1969-70), the composer was to return to his modernist inclinations frequently throughout his career. In defence of his love of certain romantic and impressionist composers, Holloway denounced serial Schoenberg; however Bayan Northcott has suggested that the pro-Britten and anti-Schoenberg blasts "resolved something, or perhaps the romantic retreat was always a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter*", witness the more academically-acceptable second *Concerto for Orchestra* which appears to "integrate dialectics with the harmonic lushness of the romantic works in an encouraging new synthesis" (Northcott, 1979: 12).

Difficulties in dealing with his modernist musical inheritance was also a significant issue for Pousseur's pupil Peter Anthony Monk, who turned to eclecticism in the late 1970's with a composition entitled *The I Met Pousseur in the Rue Forgeur Blues.* Monk experienced a strong personal crisis in response to what he describes as the musical equivalent of 'splitting the atom'. He was alienated by the "accepted, intellectual styles championed by the BBC and the BMIC"[8] and realised that even his own music was not accessible to the man-in-the-street. For Monk, quotation allowed for the introduction of humour, which for him represented a 'way in' to an inevitably difficult art. Otherwise, his music adheres strongly to modernist principles in its use of quotation; the underlying language is frequently atonal, often as a result of the composer's contrapuntal layering of pre-existent materials with the aim of thorough integration.

The associative works of Peter Maxwell Davies have also been justified by reference to modernist tenets; Paul Driver has described how the composer's Schoenbergian approach was crucially enriched and personalised by its link with medieval methods of systematically deriving a musical work from lengths of plainchant. Davies admits that his interest in medieval and renaissance music is largely technical, for example his main concern in the 1965 work *Leopardi Fragments* was the vocal decorative methods of Monteverdi. When asked whether he would consider using a post-classical period piece as source material, Davies's response reveals the high value he places on the foundation of his own unique, individual voice:

> From a practical point of view, there's earlier works that have enough individuality to make it worth while basing one's work on something taken from them but not the overpowering individuality of say a romantic work which is a very specialised thing which would make it extremely difficult to base a work on a piece from that period. Can you imagine, for instance, basing a work on Mahler's Third Symphony?[9]

The self-conscious compromise between the parental auspices of modernism and the child-like desire to reclaim the forbidden music of the past, far from being criticised as 'endgame art' - the decadent reflection of an irreconcilable dilemma - has received a

large degree of praise. One of the main reasons for David Matthews's favourable view of such eclecticism, as expressed in *The Rehabilitation of the Vernacular*, is that he sees in it an reversal of the modernists' forfeit of melody:

> The loss of such accessible, singable melody in the music of Schoenberg and his successors is a devastating blow to its comprehensibility, and also a limitation to its comprehensiveness. To return for a moment to the two Schoenberg string quartet melodies referred to earlier: without trying to evaluate them as melodies, there is no doubt that few of those who can sing the First Quartet's tune would also be able to sing the Third's. Fewer still would be able to sing any melody by Webern or Boulez. Again, does this matter? I believe, with Deryck Cooke, that it does; there is something very wrong with contemporary music if its melodies cannot be sung by those who can sing Mozart's or Wagner's or the young Schoenberg's (1989: 244).

Matthews considers the music of the American minimalists to be a significant contribution to the rehabilitation of the vernacular, but with the failing that it does not reintroduce melody and remains essentially 'primitive'. The composers whom he lists as the major exponents of the new eclecticism have all managed to maintain the respectable, serious mantle of modernism; Matthews is at pains to emphasise their creative dialogue with the past, "and with tradition" (1989: 246). Alexander Goehr's music, having recently widened its vocabulary to include explicit references to tonality, is described as "having evolved distinctively from its Schoenbergian starting-point: in the last ten years he has become preoccupied with the fugue, and in doing so has sometimes chosen to use a modal language which has drawn him more closely and comprehensively within the contrapuntal tradition" (1989: 246). Similarly, Nicholas Maw has concerned himself with the rediscovery of musical archetypes - singable melodies, dance rhythms, tonal harmonies - "which can be used in new ways while retaining their traditional resonance" (1989: 246-247).

Matthews' critical vision of this music is coloured by the premise that any eclectic tendencies must be seen to be reconciled with the composer's unquestionably modernist past. As long as modernist principles are seen to be appeased, a warm reception is guaranteed, and many obvious problems in the music are overlooked: for example, while he admits that Tippett's usage of electric guitar in *The Knot Garden* and *Songs for Dov* is "faintly embarrassing", the equally irreconcilable clash of cultures in Jonathan Lloyd's *Fourth Symphony* - a work similarly highlighted in Peter Dickinson's study of 'style modulation' - are described as as an "intriguing collage". Lloyd's *Symphony* was premiered at the Proms on July 26th 1988, and represents a typical example of pluralistic endeavour within the sphere of British classical contemporary music. After an almost impressionistic opening, lushly orchestrated and featuring simple rising scales in the violins, Lloyd introduces disruptive electric guitar riffs into the texture; these hint strongly at the theme music to the 1960's television series *Mission Impossible* and as such are totally at odds with the surrounding mellow atmosphere. Other instruments

including a jazz drum kit and latin percussion, join in with these rhythms; sleazy, quasi-improvisatory passages on saxophones and blues-style bass can also be heard. The original riffs are subjected to a strong ritardando and act as a final fanfare at the close of the piece. The composition is puzzling because of the utterly disjunctive relationship between the two, equally mask-like styles of the piece. As a text one could describe this as opaque, postmodernist in the psychological sense; despite this obvious difficulty however, the *Symphony* was well-received.

Hugo Cole is one critic who has recognised the aesthetic boundaries of such compositions, using unflattering but revealing metaphors to sum up the situation:

> When change threatens, those of the true faith join together to defend the purity of the musical game against the environment. Against commercialism; against contamination by contact with lower cultures. Even those who rebel against the stiff conventions of the games insist that if change comes, change must be dictated from within the system, not arbitrarily imposed from without (Cole, 1978: 15).

Although several prominent younger composers have viewed the maintenance of the modernist tradition as being incompatible with the new social and artistic circumstances, their work has not escaped the problems of postmodernism. The music of Steve Martland and Mark Anthony Turnage has received critical acclaim for its recognition of the need for a more provocative, assertive stance against the complacence of the well-established composers who feature in David Matthew's view of the future; however, like the controversial art of Walter de Maria or Yves Klein, their work has been patronised by the establishment they intend to confront. Martland and Turnage's chief weapons against the bourgeoisie are rock, jazz and pop idioms, alongside a street-wise personal image.[10] In its early days, rock music was regarded as a threat to social hierarchies, and indeed it proved to play an important role in the emancipation of youth, aiding the development of a separate teenage identity and thereby helping to erode the authority of the adult world. Martland has justified his abrasive musical language in the following terms:

> Massive unemployment and the debilitating consequences for its victims are two of the most depressing features of our society, yet, rather than confronting social evil, most contemporary art remains unconcerned. On the one hand is the bourgeois escapism of neo-conservative romanticism and, at the other extreme, and worse still, the deliberately hermetic mystification of complexity...It is surely the moral duty of art and artists to raise a voice of protest that confronts the contradictions existing within society, rather than remaining passive or immune.[11]

BBC Radio 3 has frequently been the target of Martland's vitriolic polemics, for its contribution to the denigration and censuring of music such as his, which is commonly described as 'cross-over' music. However, there is little evidence that such music has not received widespread acceptance. Martland featured on the front cover of the launching issue of the BBC's Music Magazine in September 1992, and his work *Babi Yar* was performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra later that month at the Royal

Festival Hall in London. Prior to this concert, the composer was interviewed on stage by the controller of Radio 3, Nicholas Kenyon. Martland stressed that *Babi Yar* was not intended to be regarded as an orchestral piece, but as an attempt to deconstruct the orchestra by dividing it into three sections. The large audience acquiesced and the piece was well-received. This suggests parallels with Cardew's comment:

> Ten years ago, Cage concerts were often disrupted by angry music lovers and argumentative critics...But they soon learned to take their medicine. Nowadays a Cage concert can be quite a society event (1974: 35).

*Babi Yar* was not, arguably, a provocative piece in its use of the BBC symphony orchestra or in any other respect, its stance against anti-semitism being reflective of mainstream British ideology; *The World is in Heaven* and *Remix* are more disquieting but this is partly due to the crudity in their use of popular idioms, implying on behalf of the composer an incomplete commitment to those idioms combined with a lack of sufficiently rigorous stylistic knowledge.

The rapprochement of composers such as Martland and Turnage with the music establishment has been, paradoxically, obscured by their publicity which stresses their political zeal, and composers from the experimental tradition form part of only a handful of outspoken detractors. Gavin Bryars remarks:

> I think that it [the music of Martland and Turnage] is in fact entirely within the terms with which the establishment can accept it and can understand it...it's well-meaning enough but I think a lot of it is opportune. And it doesn't seem to me to address those political questions at all: a lot of it seems to me to be posturing.[12]

Bryars describes the patronage of such composers as blood-letting on behalf of the establishment; suffering temporary discomfort secure in the knowledge that the threat will eventually return to the fold. Through being handled by a major publisher, Schott, both Martland and Turnage are part of a commercial/business infrastructure; they meet the needs of the publisher to have a diverse catalogue. Gerald Larner, writing in The Guardian, has implied that market forces have dictated the images of Martland, Turnage and James MacMillan (another staunch anti-Thatcherite whose music has been commissioned by the BBC and aired at various major festivals), and have contributed to their success:

> I wonder whether the present situation in this country, where so many different trends are pointing in the same direction, can have come about in the usual composer-led way. In an area where, not long ago, impenetrability was a matter of pride and communication was no concern of the serious composer, there is now a new and widespread accessibility. The reason, I suspect, is that the promoters of new music - the publishers, the concert and festival organisers, and perhaps even BBC Radio 3 - can no longer afford to encourage a product which leaves the consumer feeling baffled, inadequate, and, if not irritated, bored...There are now sponsors to please and high-percentage box-office targets to achieve. Market forces are at work (Larner, 1990).

Finally, it is worth noting one of Morton Feldman's strongest observations of British musical life:

> The word 'Establishment' is, of course, just a music-hall joke. No country is free of it, and it's constantly changing...But seriously, this thing you feel in England, this waiting for the Establishment, waiting to be taken in, taken up, it's stronger than any place I know (1985: 59).

It only remains now to consider the extent to which the traps and dilemmas of postmodernism have ensnared the composers of the English experimental tradition. Eclectic compositions emanating from this area have divided critics far more than any of the music discussed above. This does not mean to say that any of the major ethical problems associated with pluralistic art, discussed earlier, have been demonstrated to apply to the music of Bryars, Christopher Hobbs, Andrew Hugill, John White, Dave Smith and Ian Gardiner, but simply that the characteristic way in which they use found musical material has either provoked suspicion worthy of the most decadent postmodernist work, or been simply overlooked. During the course of this research, I have had occasion to discuss informally with many musicians, music producers and administrators the work of these composers and have gained an impression of general miscomprehension which is reflected in the relatively small amount of experimental music published, broadcast, reviewed, or otherwise promoted.[13] Lewis Foreman's introduction to *British Music Now: A Guide to the work of Younger Composers* sets a precedent of neglect. Writing in 1975, Foreman welcomes the association of serious and popular styles in British music, whilst paradoxically giving a damning indictment of the influence of the Scratch Orchestra, itself highly concerned with the elitism and inaccessibility of the avant-garde:

> I believe that most of these changing groups may be important by their example but their actual music will amount to very little. They will probably be seen historically as more important as pamphleteers than as composers per se. Probably the cause most vigorously fought in this respect is for Cornelius Cardew and his 'school'...The Scratch Orchestra and its progeny is clearly of some historical importance but has very little place in the mainstream, or mainstreams, of musical development now...The wasteland of indiscipline and politically inspired changes in the very nature of music itself is more insidious than the stylistic problems of the Fifties...(Foreman, 1975: 13).

Nicholas Kenyon later hinted at the charge of plagiarism: "Satie without the wit; Ravel without the grace; Cage, without the silence; Rakhmaninov without the tunes; the recent music of Gavin Bryars and John White is all this, and less" (Kenyon, 1979). Accusations of conservatism have also occurred; Felix Aprahamian commented that "John White's 3rd and 6th symphonies, neither heroic nor pastoral, even shorter than those written by Milhaud in the 20's... suggested that... the pendulum of defensive musical ecology has swung back to basics" and Edmund Tracey likened White's Piano to a composition by the Romantic composer Henry Charles Litolff, after receiving an imaginary "thrashing" by Nadia Boulanger: "...for an RCM professor to publicise this pot-

pourri of feeble tunes, fidgety harmonies and rambling, purposeless key-changes, even if unprecedented, will never do." (Tracey, 1963)[14]

Finally, Paul Griffiths confesses that the meaning of the music eludes him:

> Maybe one is bound to develop a worm's-ear view of music if one spends one's formative years playing the tuba, and maybe it is some incentive to cultivate an esoteric personality if one has so bland a name as "John White". Of course, there are also more sophisticated explanations for the way White's music is, but they never seem adequate to the task.
>
> White's simplicity opens up a great conceptual hole into which one shovels approaches and arguments, and gets nowhere. It might be easier just to label his work as boring, naive, ironic or humorous, and no doubt it is all of these in some measure. But he also goes about his business with a seriousness that is bound to suggest a labyrinth of double and probably quadruple bluffing behind the cool facade.
>
> Perhaps the only thing about White that is at all plausible is his admiration for Satie, and accommodatingly he opened Tuesday night's concert by playing four severe and rock-like studies in fake medievalism, the Ogives of 1886. After that, there was an endless piece of trash [Ladislav Kupkovic's Requiem for my Suicide] of which I missed the name (most of the titles were announced by the soft-spoken White himself, which at least gave one some reason for feeling one was gently losing one's mental grip on the world...
>
> ...White's The Oppo's [sic] Contained for tuba and piano, confirmed his tastes for the mindless and awful. After the interval there was a selection of "Garden Furniture Music" for various selections from the appalling instrumentation available: tenor [actually baritone] horn, tuba, viola and piano. Then we went electronic with new digital pieces of doodling by White and Ben Mason. After the recent IRCAM invasion of the same hall, this homespun music-making had something refreshing about it. Boulez, though, is so much easier to understand.[15]

It cannot be denied that the postmodernist environment, with all its media saturation and capitalist connotations, has left its mark on English Experimental music. Firstly, any use of reference cannot fail to be stimulated by today's easy availability of source material, but more significantly, the sources referred to are frequently of the most mass-marketed kind. The music of John White, from the electronic *Symphonies* through the collaborative work of *Live Batts* (with Christopher Hobbs) to the more recent *Fashion Music*, has celebrated the music of the high street with its intentionally cheap keyboard sounds, use of drum machines and clichés from popular dance music. A night club atmosphere can be found in several of Dave Smith's compositions, including *Disco Soleil Brillant* from his Third Piano Concert and *Dub* from First Piano Concert. Whilst retaining a non-judgmental stance, Ian Gardiner has referred to 'muzak' (such as one might hear in a hotel lift) and Acid House music in his 1992 composition *British Museum.* All these works, and the many others which share these characteristics, will be discussed in their own right in Chapter 4.

It must be stressed that the obvious delight taken by the composers in working with these styles is not comparable to the more evangelistic position of Martland and

Turnage whose work, conscious of a barrier between musical spheres, seems to attempt to raise the dignity of popular music to that of classical music. The questionable power of such statements to subvert mainstream values has been discussed earlier; experimental music invariably manifests a less confrontational stance, and this may be a major reason for its easy dismissal. However, anyone who is prepared to explore the issue of eclecticism more thoroughly, and with an open mind, will learn that this area of music, far from being passive and parochial, is unique in its freedom from most of the major ethical problems associated with postmodernism and that a great deal can be learned from it in these artistically difficult times.

The following chapter hopes to demonstrate this hypothesis, paying particular attention to how the eclecticism of the English experimental composers cannot be linked with the controversial problems of sustaining the modernist aesthetic. It explores the idea that experimental music developed independently of modernism and that the origins of its employment of musical reference are peculiar to it. Finally, it hopes to show that whilst even the most abrasive postmodernist music has very little power to criticise the prevailing artistic and social system, the experimentalists have succeeded in maintaining a subversive stance.

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[1]John A.Walker (1983: 81-82) implies that the term *postmodernism* first emerged at the end of the sixties; Suzi Gablik (1984: 73) even suggests the end of the seventies. The fluctuating meaning of the term could account for the inconsistency between these writers.

[2]*Apartment House 1776* is a composition by Cage involving the simultaneous performance of many kinds of American music.

[3]Jasper Johns' work is regarded as a precursor of Pop art, but its painterly surfaces are in stark contrast to the more commercial techniques imitated by Roy Lichtenstein for example. Both the flag paintings and sculptoral work such as the bronze beer cans of 1960 were executed in an almost expressionistic manner which sets them apart from pure pop. The boundaries of Pop art are discussed further in Lippard, 1970: 69-72.

[4]The difference between Pop art and its source material is discussed by John A. Walker (1983: 23). Using the particular example of Roy Lichtenstein, whose work is particularly close in appearance to its source material. Walker compares *Girl with Ball* to the original cartoon image and identifies a considerable discrepancy between the two pictures, ranging from Lichtenstein's painstaking hand-painting to the way in which he simplifies the form of the original.

[5]Writing about the same subject, with regard to Tippett's Third Symphony, Arnold Whittall has used the term "transmogrification" (Matthews, 1989: 249).

[6]Steve Martland, programme note for unspecified concert (Amsterdam 1987)

[7]Christopher Hobbs interviewed by Sarah Walker, 17th October 1990

[8]Peter Anthony Monk interviewed by Sarah Walker, Croydon, 23rd September 1989

[9]Extracted from a transcription of an interview with the composer made for BBC radio on 22nd October 1965. Transmission details unavailable.

[10]The Factory Classics recording of Martland's *Babi Yar* and *Drill* featured a cover-photograph of the composer aggressively bare-chested and with a flat-top hairstyle, unequivocal symbols of the

rock star and the working class male respectively. The design, by Neville Brody, helped to confirm Martland's notoriety as a rebel.

[11]Programme note, Amsterdam 1987; specific identity unknown.

[12]Interview of Gavin Bryars by Sarah Walker at Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[13]There are notable exceptions to this rule: Adrian Jack has given consistent support to the composers, and a handful of enlightened music producers are gradually eroding the false image of experimental music. In his article of 1972, *As The Titanic Went Down,* Nyman relates how Bryars was recently asked by a BBC producer to provide some tapes of experimental music for a discussion programme: "She hoped that the nastiness of the sounds would stir up some sort of controversy. Instead all she heard was the mellifluous consonances of pieces by Bryars, Howard Skempton, Christopher Hobbs and Ivan Hume-Carter."

Most of the published compositions by Smith, White, Gardiner and their colleagues are available through *Forward Music*, an enterprise run by enthusiasts Michael Newman and Sean Rourke. Until 1993, Gavin Bryars published his own music.

[14]These three reviews are quoted by Dave Smith in his unpublished catalogue of the works of John White (1991). The exact date of Aprahamian's review, in the Sunday Times, is unspecified; Kenyon's review for the Financial Times dates from around 6 February 1979; Edmund Tracey's review was published in the Times Educational Supplement on 25 October 1963.

[15]Paul Griffiths writing in *The Times*, 31st October 1985

## CHAPTER 2

# THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ENGLISH EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC: INDEPENDENCE FROM POSTMODERNISM

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the many ways in which it has shaped late-twentieth century art's eclectic tendencies, postmodernism contributes little to our understanding of the eclecticism typically encountered in recent English experimental music. This chapter demonstrates how the historical forces driving mainstream, modernist music towards pluralism have not affected experimental music, and in looking at the roots of the experimental movement, begins to unearth alternative origins for its pluralism.

The issue of terminology is central to this argument. Confusingly, 'experimental' is often regarded as being synonymous with 'avant-garde', and 'modernism', which strove to be a universal movement, is taken to include most artistic endeavour in the first two thirds of this century - particularly the avant-garde. This thesis follows Michael Nyman's example in making a clear distinction between experimentalism and the avant-garde, treating them somewhat as opposites, and much of the argument rests on the premise that modernism is not a universal movement but simply a prominent one.

## 2.1 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC AND THE AVANT-GARDE

To suggest that the origins of experimental music are to be found outside of the modernist canon is a problematic postulation because the history of western music up to the present is normally viewed as a single, continuous line, with any irregularities being reconciled as branches springing forth from that line. In order to maintain that view, music students are expected to entertain the concept of historical inevitability; *"It was inevitable that tonality would outlive its usefulness"* is the first sentence, Chapter 1, of Joan Peyser's *Twentieth Century Music: The Sense Behind the Sound* (1971: 3). Schoenberg is the key protagonist in the dilemma of historical inevitability, but he cannot be held solely responsible for dispelling his problems upon successive generations of composers. The story of Schoenberg has been packaged as a totalitarian artistic creed preached by academics who have invariably relied on the writings of Adorno for support. Adorno certainly believed in the inevitability of Schoenberg's personal development, but the attention given to his anti-Stravinsky, pro-Schoenberg polemics has obscured the fact that he did at least consider the possibility of a valid music existing outside these two approaches.

Adorno actually thought that an authentic art could be made from the use of reference and allusion to pre-existent styles, an idea which is radical in two ways: firstly in its implication that modernism was not a necessarily universal movement, and secondly in its implication that one could create valid work outside modernism whilst still avoiding the decadence of Stravinsky (who failed to resolve art's ethical problems to Adorno's satisfaction, just as the postmodernists failed to resolve such problems to

Gablik's satisfaction). In *Minima Moralia*, a text which reflects less extreme views than the more well-known *Philosophy of Modern Music*, he draws parallels with the idea that history has hitherto been written by the victor and a fuller picture could be gained by it being written from the point of view of the vanquished. "Theory must needs deal with cross-grained, opaque, unassimilated material, which as such admittedly has from the start an anachronistic quality, but is not wholly obsolete since it has outwitted the historical dynamic. This can be most readily be seen in art" (Paddison, 1982: 231).

Max Paddison has undertaken a thought-provoking study of Adorno's attitudes towards eclecticism and popular music. He stresses that Adorno did not regard popular and classical idioms as opposites; for him, the crucial distinction was to be made between, on the one hand, music which accepts its character as commodity, thus becoming identical with the machinations of the culture industry itself, and on the other hand, self-reflective music which critically opposes its fate as commodity and thus alienates itself from society. This second category of music is more truthful, even in a paradoxical way; its use of unreconciled, opposing musical materials accurately reflects the falsehood of twentieth century society. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno allows for the possibility of a music which is neither that of a "Schoenberg, which attempts to develop and rationalise the tendencies and contradictions of the traditional tonal system *from within* so that they turn back on themselves and reflect themselves, nor is it the music of a Stravinsky which, according to Adorno, attempts to reconcile the contradictions *from the outside* by resorting, for example, to stylistic forms of the past. It lies, instead, somewhere between the two extremes. For its material it draws on the "left-overs" and worn-out gestures of traditional (mainly nineteenth-century) music as well as the stock formulae of popular (that is, consumer) music, but gives them new meaning by putting them in an entirely new context. The contradictions of the material are both revealed and held unreconciled within the compositional structure. Such music is therefore regarded by Adorno as critical and self-reflective, and it thus comes under his concept of 'authentic' music" (Paddison, 1982: 213).

It is impossible to overlook the parallels between this concept and the qualities of English experimental music; Adorno even quoted Satie, one of the experimentalists' most important influences, as an example of this 'authentic' music which stood outside of mainstream developments. In *Minima Moralia* he writes: "...in Satie's pert and puerile piano pieces there are flashes of experience undreamed of by the school of Schoenberg, with all its rigour and all the pathos of musical development behind it" (Paddison, 1982: 214). However, Adorno considers Satie's art as being basically child-like; neither progressive nor regressive, but simply avoiding interaction with the dominant system. He is more keen to recognise the value of Mahler and Weill's use of ready-made material, praising Weill for his "montage-style, which negates and at the same time raises to a new level [aufhebt] the surface appearance of neo-classicism and juxtaposes and cements

ruins and fragments up against one another [aneinander ruckt]; or, through the addition of "wrong notes", it composes out the falseness and pretence which today have become apparent in the harmonic language of the nineteenth century" (214). Paddison concludes that Adorno had recognised the possibility of working meaningfully with regressive tonal and formal material within the sphere of classical music.

British and American experimental music exemplifies this search for an alternative to the problem-racked dominant musical system, and its non-modernist origins strongly imply that its eclectic later developments cannot be categorised as postmodernist. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that, whilst 'postmodernism' is not a valid categorisation, neither is the adjective 'experimental' entirely satisfactory any more. Regardless of Nyman's break-down of the characteristics of experimentalism, the larger proportion of which can still be applied to the recent repertory (to be discussed below), the term cannot fail to imply a state of incompleteness which is certainly no longer true. Cage considered in 1961 that "Experimental music can have many definitions, but I use the word *experimental* to mean making an action the outcome of which is not foreseen" (Kostelanetz, 1989: 216). Indeterminacy was one of the most important ways in which experimental composers in the 1950's were able to distinguish themselves from the mainstream, but it pales besides eclecticism as a major feature of recent experimental compositions. 'Experimental' no longer has any descriptive significance, as Bryars testifies:

> I find it quite hard to put a label on what I do now, but what I do think is that I'm someone who's located within an experimental tradition... maybe once I started composing again in 1975 almost, apart from one or two earlier pieces around that time, I'd stopped being an experimental composer, if you think of experimental music as being the kind of stuff which was associated, say, with the Scratch [Orchestra] and the kind of things described in Michael Nyman's book. Almost none of those pieces do I play any more, apart from *The [Sinking of the] Titanic* which I've done a few times and the new recording of. Even there, I reinterpret it in a new way, I add more things and it becomes much more diverse. So, in a way, it almost stopped there, in the mid-70's. But in that sense, there's probably nobody who's still an experimental composer, apart from possibly the odd Howard Skempton or Michael Parsons. Almost everyone has moved on, certainly people like John White and Chris Hobbs, they've all changed in one way or another.[1]

Would the use of a term such as 'post-experimental' be less misleading in discussing the music of Bryars, White, Smith, Hobbs and Gardiner? It would certainly possess the advantage of distinguishing between the work of more traditional experimentalists like Skempton and Parsons, identified by Bryars above, and the eclectic repertory which is of greater relevance to the current argument.[2] However, the cases of 'postmodernism' and 'postfeminism' show that the *post* prefix is often taken to mean 'opposing' or 'replacing' as well as 'following chronologically'. A more satisfactory solution would be to retain the experimental label, as it refers truthfully to the parentage

of the music, and its unfortunate association with the avant-garde is being progressively eroded by the usage made by more knowledgeable commentators.

In interviewing Bryars, White, Gardiner, Smith and Hobbs about their pluralistic compositions, a major point upon which clarification was sought concerned the questions "How have you managed to avoid the contradictions of postmodernism and the 'inevitable' progress beyond serialism? What makes you more resistant to mainstream thinking and able to use associative techniques in a different way to so many other composers?" The remainder of this chapter aims to read between the lines of the predictably self-effacing replies of the bemused interviewees, revealing how the background of the experimental composers, which is irrevocably linked to their independence of spirit, has allowed both for the negation of modernist ideology and for the positive adoption of an eclectic language.

The composers' answers to these questions show that they have never suffered the problems of continuous innovation and increasing complexity, nor any other modernist dilemmas which have been shown to lead to eclecticism. The historical awareness of the experimentalists is entirely different to that of the modernists and postmodernists; in place of a convincing semblance of continuity, leading from Wagner's chromaticism through to Schoenberg's atonality and beyond, the background of Experimental music consists of a series of isolated figures such as Ives, Grainger, Godowsky, Scriabin, Sorabji, Busoni and Satie (even these figures represent influences more than forbears as such, and their significance will be discussed in later chapters). Stripped of his laurels of historical significance, Schoenberg becomes simply a composer of atonal music, and the pervasiveness of the modernist ideology is subverted.

John White considers the importance to him of Cornelius Cardew's example in rejecting the traditional linear view of music history:

> ...He threw every door in the house open, and okay, a lot of valuable old ornaments were blown over and aged in the process, but I think they had it coming. The analogy that comes to mind is very much that Zen thing about people who acquire enlightenment leading a perfectly normal life again...but a couple of millimetres off the ground, and so it's possible to listen to Rimsky Korsakov's *Sheherezade* now with absolute delight, because I listen to it as though it had no prehistory. Whereas before Cardew, there was an obsessive toffee-like consistency in musical history that glued everything into place in a rather soggy, unadventurous way. Since Cardew, there's something delightful about, say, Telemann; all those symmetrical constructs seem exciting. So although Cardew didn't direct my thinking, he was responsible for a sort of waking up, which probably says something about my receptivity as well as what he had on his mind.[3]

The experimental concept of music history does not require Schoenberg to be dismissed, but the twelve-tone revolution is undoubtedly marginalised by this perspective. White describes his preference for tonality:

> There are these "primary colours" musically speaking, that [are attractive to] some of the tonal people at the moment, and we're availing ourselves of them, and why the hell not, because they're potent musical elements, and it seems unnecessarily unsporting not to use them. I think that the influence is there already; I don't claim it as my own, it's something that I feel part of, privileged to be part of, because it's a strong survival thing. I feel like a breed of rats that nobody has been able to poison.[4]

His freedom to take whatever he requires from the history of music is complemented by his dissatisfaction with the direction of contemporary music in general:

> Given an hour and a half in which to either listen to a Bruckner Symphony or a kind of *Music Now* collection of fairly familiar gestures from the world of avant garde music, I'd prefer the Bruckner, because I would actually feel it renewing my tissues, whereas a lot of these private language things turn out not to be so much as a private language to my perception as part of a kind of artificiality that I don't relate to. It's quite easy to learn how to sound like a proper avant-garde musician.[5]

He makes it clear that he does not reject atonality in itself:

> I'd really like to put down on record that I'm not opposed to abstract music; my first great love in music was Messiaen, and to me the wonderful quality that Messiaen embodies is the ability to go from very physical music to very cosmic, very devotional, very abstract, very questing music. In Turangalila, which was my first big musical explosion, there are all of those bits which are in rhythmic canon; there are all of these abstract qualities which he embraces as well as an enormous physical presence...I'm not opposed to Stockhausen, to the Second Viennese School, because there are things that are very aptly and very well said in those bodies of music. But it is much easier [for young composers] to learn to apparently express themselves but really express the text book, while making that kind of statement.[6]

Messiaen was also an important influence for Gavin Bryars, though like White this did not entail a slavish adherence to the technical methods of the influential total serial experiment *Modes de valeurs et d'intensités*, and in fact his interest in the French composer post-dated his involvement with the avant-garde and Stockhausen. Bryars admits that he was tempted to subscribe to the modernist ideology at the outset of his career, when he first listened to Stockhausen:

> The earliest things I tried to write actually accepted that premise. But they're part of the pre-history of my writing music, and they don't exist any more - at least I hope not. It's student work, frankly, even if I was rather old to be a student. So, in the early stages, yes; but I actually ultimately ...by the mid 60's, I found Messiaen more interesting. I actually very naively wrote, in about '65, to Messiaen, and got a very sweet letter back from him, so I was always quite grateful to him. I actually arranged the last movement of *l'Ascension* for jazz trio... I continue to find Messiaen's influence on music more interesting than a lot of those other guys. And he's probably the one composer from that whole mainstream that I actually find interesting, still: but only in bits and pieces. There are some things I find as completely bombastic and completely megalomaniac as some Stockhausen, but he's a different kind of character... but certainly in the early stages of Stockhausen that's true [he was influenced] but then fairly quickly, certainly by the time I did *Plus Minus*... I was certainly subverting what was there, or using the

rules, following the letter of the law, and letting it come to absurd conclusions. [7]

Like John White, who "withdrew from the world of accepted innovation" as early as 1959 (Potter, 1983), Bryars does not consider innovation to be an important aspect of his work, whether it involves making the next piece more complicated, adventurous or simply different to the one before. Alexander Balanescu's identification of new stylistic features in the second String Quartet, jointly commissioned by the Balanescu Quartet and Huddersfield Festival in 1990, were greeted with no more than mild curiosity and pleasure by the composer, who concludes that the modernist aesthetic was simply "not a seductive pull" for him, and like White, voices his considerable disdain for the majority of new pieces in which the arts council invests money. However, he rejects the idea that Experimental composers are somehow immune to, or ignorant of, to mainstream musical principles:

> That would be negative; I think it's partly that they see greater strength in what they're doing. So that's a positive thing. When I was doing some interviews with Daniel Cohen in France, he said something which I thought was really quite extreme. He said that for him, in the post-war musical world, by which he means World War 2, there had been three substantial musical innovations in terms of major stylistic advance. He left serialism out, because for him that was a pre-war phenomenon which had obviously been consolidated post-war, but he said one was the music of John Cage, the second was the American minimalists, and the third was English Experimental music. The rest was there before, or else is unimportant. And that seemed to me to be an extraordinary thing to say; and that's the perception of someone outside this country. Within this country that would be unthinkable for a critic to say that - or even to think it. But it gave me the idea that there is a sense that we are working from a position of strength, and we needn't be defensive about it at all.[8]

He quotes the example of a former experimental composer who proves that these composers are in no way immune to the pull of modernism: Benedict Mason, who like Peter Anthony Monk, discussed in Chapter 1, became a pupil of Henri Pousseur. Mason, it seems to Bryars, has retreated:

> He seems have gone in the direction of something he was in before he met John White - he went to Belgium to study with Pousseur, and he's gone back to that whole territory, which I think is a shame, because it seems to me to show that he really didn't understand what he was getting when he was with John and Dave [Smith]. It's interesting that he doesn't even mention Garden Furniture [Music Ensemble], because it would undermine his present position. He's got ambitions to get back into a different camp...it seems to me that musically what he's doing is he's actually retreated a little bit. He could've found some other way - even some other way of getting beck into the mainstream. But virtually everyone who's in the Experimental tradition has in a sense rejected the advances of the modernists.[9]

Like White and Bryars, Ian Gardiner does not reject atonality but has never come close to regarding it as inevitable. He considers it simply as a more complex version of tonality, which can be used when required;[10] correspondingly, he finds it difficult as a

listener to avoid the perception of diatonic relationships even in works such as Webern's Concerto, Op.27. He therefore is dismissive of what he sees as the attempt, by high modernists such as Boulez and Stockhausen, to redefine the use of pitch, and to change the listener's way of interpreting musical gestures. Experienced in free improvisation, where similarly complex, atonal textures can occur spontaneously within a valid musical structure, Gardiner considers fully-organised total serialism as redundant. However, he has more respect for the composers who in the 60's and 70's were consciously attempting to make listeners redefine their musical ears, than for the later practitioners of serial complexity who merely take it for granted that listeners have a certain ability. In parallel with Gablik's indictment of 'aestheticism', Gardiner is critical of how sounds originally meant to provoke self-questioning now are simply presented for cool analytical listening. He also rejects complexity because he perceives it to be a waste of both money and time for promoters and musicians, and because it alienates all but the most elite audience; finally, his dismissal is enhanced by his awareness that such music feeds off the growing status of music analysis, being composed with its own academic reception in mind.

Coming from a younger generation, it is likely that Gardiner has found it easier to reject modernism than those who paved the way, like Cardew or even Bryars who began their musical careers under the influence of Stockhausen. For Bryars, the rejection of Stockhausen's aesthetic was catalysed by his experience at art school.

## 2.2 ART SCHOOL INFLUENCES

The experimentalists' independence from a modernist historical awareness was to a large extent brought about by the composers' connections with artistic disciplines other than music. This was vital in bringing about an emphasis on conceptual content which contrasted enormously with the modernist concern with technique which dominated a great deal of musical composition in the 60's and 70's.

Many experimental activities around the time of the Scratch Orchestra (1969-72) crossed the boundary into performance art, which was enjoying an unprecedented vogue during that period. Often the ideals of performance artists directly echoed the concerns of the experimental composers; conceptualism flourished as part of the reaction against the objectivisation of art. David Hockney applauded the performing duo Gilbert and George, suggesting that their work was an "extension of the idea that anyone can be an artist, that what they say or do can be art. Conceptual art is ahead of its time, widening horizons" (Goldberg, 1988:169). An interview of the artist and musician Tom Phillips, by Gavin Bryars and Fred Orton,[11] describes a typical event of the time, involving a performance of Cardew's multiple work *Schooltime Compositions* (1968). This composition comprised a "post-Fluxus notebook of observations, ideas, notations, hints, diagrams, concepts, scientific experiments, geometric analogies...with no covering instructions" (Nyman, 1974:100-103); each composition was a "matrix", designed to extract the interpreter's

feelings about certain topics or materials. In the performance discussed by Bryars, Orton and Phillips (which took place at the ICA on 29 March 1969), each realisation was performed within separate booth, giving the overall effect of a market-place. Phillips projected slides and typed aphorisms to reinforce conceptually his performance of Cardew's graphic score *The Little Flower of the North;* students from the Maidstone College of Art also took part alongside several experimental musicians.

John White's interest in Dada, entailing a desire to subvert the expectations of the musical establishment, also gives many of his works the quality of performance art, in particular the "Machine" compositions. Although these works demand a great deal of discipline on behalf of the performer (they were inspired by White's experience of performing Cardew's graphic score *Treatise* (1963-67), in which he felt that the disciplined execution of instructions was crucial in order to allow for an attitude of "greater chivalry toward the internal needs of the material" (Nyman, 1974: 142-143)), they are often iconoclastic in effect. On the sleeve of the album *John White/Gavin Bryars: Machine Music,* produced on Brian Eno's Obscure label in 1978, White summarises:

> The Machines, which date from the period 1967-1972, represent a departure from the more traditionally "narrative" nature of the rest of my pieces. I use the word Machine to define a consistent process governing a series of musical actions within a particular sound world and, by extension, the listener's perception thereof. One might thus regard the Welsh Rarebit as a Machine in which a process is applied to the conditioning and perception of the world of bread and cheese.
>
> Autumn Countdown Machine presents the guaranteed dis-simultaneity of six pairs of bass melody instruments, each conducted by a percussionist playing in time with, and making minor adjustments to the setting of a bell-metronome.
>
> Son of Gothic Chord presents four keyboard players' mobilisation of a sequential chord progression rising through the span of an octave,
>
> Jews Harp Machine presents various permutations of the articulations "Ging, Gang, Gong, Gung Ho!".
>
> Drinking and Hooting Machine presents some observations on the world of bottles and their non-percussive musical potential, The effect of this piece has been compared to that of a large aviary full of owls all practising very slow descending scales.[12]

The Machine pieces did not always involve the rationalisation of musical events. Banal everyday gestures can also be permutated in this way, for example *Sunday Afternoon Machine,* which mechanises the conventional pastimes of a typical Sunday afternoon, including the rituals of listening to the radio and reading newspapers. RoseLee Goldberg's description of Dada in Germany reveals many parallels with the attitude of White, himself born in Berlin. According to Goldberg, the movement demanded "the introduction of progressive unemployment through comprehensive mechanisation of every field of activity" and was "determined to ... banish Expressionism from the city limits and to establish itself as an adversary to abstract art. The Berlin Dadaists pasted their slogans throughout the city - 'Dada kicks you in the behind and

you like it!'"(1988: 69-70). Reflecting a comparable attitude are compositions such as *Sun Reader* (1991), a tribute to American experimentalist Carl Ruggles' work *Sun-treader*(1926-31). White's composition defiantly introduces the questionable sexual morality of the tabloid press into the concert hall. In his programme note for the premiere of the composition, given by the ensemble George W. Welch, directed by Ian Gardiner, White wrote:

> ...The form and content of the composition correspond in many ways to those of the eponymous organ: there is a recurring theme expressing a general sense of braggadocio (or 'ERE WE GO x 3), a theme of sighs (size) relating to the STUNNA of the day, some insistent percussion which says, in effect, "NUKE THE B*ST**DS", and there is also to be perceived the occasional dissonant organum of the trouserless vicar.[13]

The interest in structure shown in the Machine pieces developed after the dissolution of the Scratch Orchestra in 1972. Michael Parsons observed that a strong factor in this development was the growth of a close association with the English Systems group of artists, including Malcolm Hughes, Michael Kidner, Peter Lowe, David Saunders, Jean Spencer and Jeffrey Steele (Parsons, 1976: 815). Parsons himself had taught art at Portsmouth Polytechnic from 1970, and had enjoyed a regular exchange of ideas with Steele and Saunders, and with students interested in experimental work. He draws parallels between the music of the four members of the PTO (Promenade Theatre Orchestra, contemporaneous with the Scratch Orchestra), Alec Hill, Christopher Hobbs, Hugh Shrapnel and John White, and the works of the visual artists, in particular its numerical basis, clarity of structure and economical use of material. All four composers had taken part in an exhibition of Systems art organised by the Arts Council at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1972, and, along with the keyboard duo of John Lewis and Dave Smith, made frequent appearances at the Lucy Milton Gallery, which specialised in showing Systems works. Howard Skempton, co-founder of the Scratch Orchestra alongside Parsons and Cardew, recently described the Systems artists as one of the most important early influences upon him as an experimental composer[14], and Parsons has compared his work with that of Clarke and Steele, particularly in its embracing of chance (p.818) to determine the time sequence in his miniature *A Humming song* (1967):

> Skempton compares this to the way one looks at a painting: how it is experienced in time on any occasion is arbitrary and will be different for each observer, but the work itself remains constant and 'outside time'(Parsons, 1976: 818).

It is likely that none of the experimental composers have been more strongly affected in their outlook by artistic experience outside music than Gavin Bryars. Bryars studied Philosophy at Sheffield University, playing jazz bass professionally throughout his course. After a spell as a lecturer in liberal studies at Northampton College of Technology, he was invited to the University of Illinois where his stay coincided with Cage's residency, and where he was able to familiarise himself with the performance art of the Fluxus movement. Upon his return to England, he became a lecturer at

the Portsmouth College of Art (the art college later merged with the polytechnic, mentioned earlier), and worked there from 1969 to 1970. Considering that he was never a member of the Scratch Orchestra, preferring to dedicate much of his time to the Portsmouth Sinfonia, this close contact with practitioners of the visual arts was a crucial factor in Bryars' adoption of an experimental outlook. At Portsmouth he discovered a sympathetic atmosphere and a genuine interest in his compositions, many of which were close to the state of performance art as is the case of *Private Music*, a text score of 1969. In his article 'As the Titanic Went Down', Michael Nyman reported how Bryars found "working as a teacher with art students far more stimulating than working with musicians, since their imaginations are less conditioned and limited by musical considerations (as was the case with the Scratch Orchestra). Bryars mentioned a realisation of Toshi Ichiyanagi's *Distance*[15] made by Portsmouth art student Jimmy Lampard...which was far more inventive than anything he ever found with musicians" (1972: 14).

Bryars has continued to be involved with performance artists in more recent years, in particular with producer Robert Wilson, who also collaborated with Philip Glass in *Einstein On the Beach* (1976). He was involved in the earliest sketch rehearsals of Wilson's grand operatic spectacle *The Civil Wars: A tree is best measured when it is down* (1984), and composed music for the French section of the work; Wilson in turn provided the libretto for Bryars' opera *Medea* (1982, rev. 1984, rev. 1995).

In 1972 Bryars gave up composition altogether to study the work of Marcel Duchamp, whose conceptual approach prefigured significant aspects of English experimental music. Many aesthetic problems were answered during this time:

> I wasn't working with music, I was working in an art college and teaching more art history, so I was looking at aesthetic questions from a non-musical perspective, and it seemed to me that there were many other models, many other ways of approaching, of solving problems, other that the ones I'd used in the past. And so the things in the past which might have seemed problematic no longer seemed problematic any more, because I'd found some of the answers by a different route.[16]

Duchamp's subversion of the retinal, painterly aspects of art in favour of a conceptual approach was enormously important to Bryars. He was not swayed by the apparent contradiction between this outlook and Cage's emphasis on the physicality of sound and of listening, and in his article *Notes on Marcel Duchamp's Music*, writes:

> Although I've always felt that John Cage's text, *26 Statements re Duchamp*, is one of the weakest ones that he wrote, it has for me one memorable line: 'One way to write music: study Duchamp'(1976: 274).

Bryars describes in more detail how the work of Duchamp and the network of writers and artists to whom his work relates proved to be a way out of his musical inactivity (which included a renunciation of improvisation as early as 1966):

> One aspect of this lay in the use of found material, of the use of references to other composer' works, or to works by non-musicians. For

> example, the first successful piece after this period came from an observation of technical procedures in the music of Satie's Rose + Croix period, as evidenced in his notebooks and in the pieces themselves, allied to the impression made on me by the imagery in Raymond Roussel's Impressions d'Afrique. Further to this ideas of Oulipo (Ouvroir de la Litterature Potentielle) showed me the possibility of writing an entirely synthetic piece of music, using almost entirely material from other sources, and this shows itself clearly in the realisation of the opera Irma for Obscure Records in 1977.[17]

Bryars has drawn attention to the fact that Duchamp himself was active in several arts, including musical composition, and his belief in the benefits of this can be grasped from his extensive writings on other equally multi-faceted figures such as Lord Berners, Henri Rousseau and Erik Satie. His article on these three artists begins with a quotation:

> "Lord Berners/Told a crowd of learners/That if they wished to compose/ They should paint or write prose." (M.Cassel) Erik Satie wrote music, a play, scenarios and executed a large number of drawings and short texts; Henri Rousseau painted, wrote plays, poems, composed and taught music; and Lord Berners, apart from a public life ranging from the diplomatic corps to being the focus of fashionable society, produced a curious body of music, painting and literature whose importance is often masked by the very nature of his life-style. All three had very little tuition in the art for which they are best known, and yet their work is of such startling originality that perhaps this in itself has been a contributing factor. Certainly awareness of the work other than that for which they are best known can only make for a more balanced picture of their real worth.(1976a: 308).

The point that requires emphasis at this stage is that by becoming a conceptual musician in the manner of Duchamp, Bryars avoided the possibility of being carried along by current, modernist musical concerns; his usage of "found" material and reference to pre-existing works of music, literature or fine art cannot, therefore, be considered to be essentially *post*-modernist but rather *non*-modernist. This does not mean to imply that the study of Duchamp effected merely a negative effect upon Bryars, shielding him from undesirable influences; on the contrary, Duchamp's ready-mades, with their rich conceptual content, are perhaps the major positive motivation for his eclectic compositional style. This point is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

## 2.3 CAGE'S DEPARTURE FROM THE MAINSTREAM

The experimental works and activities described above all have one major factor in common: indeterminacy. An interest in the musical potential of chance procedures, with a corresponding willingness for composers to release their grip on the outcome of a work, played a vital role in shaping the alternative musical culture of the experimentalists. Central to this new permission - permission to go against what had previously been regarded as the inevitable progress of western music in a particular direction - was John Cage. It seems paradoxical that while in a sociological sense Cage's

all-inclusive pluralism makes him a prototypical postmodernist, his example provided musicians with an alternative to the cul-de-sac of modernism and a means of avoiding the aesthetic aspects of postmodernism, as defined in Chapter 1. Morton Feldman strongly believed that despite the continued dominance of the modernist and postmodernist mainstream into the 1980's, Cage's influence had been vital to the establishment of alternatives:

> John recently said that he felt that if he did *anything*, he made it possible for other streams to exist, other than the mainstream. And I don't think there would have been other streams without him. I think he dramatised in big capital letters THE MAINSTREAM STOPPED HERE.(Gena, 1982: 66)

Like Duchamp, the case of Cage must be considered from two angles: firstly in demonstrating how the experimentalists were able to avoid the highly influential aesthetics of modernist music (in support of the argument that the recent referential works should not be labelled post-modernist), and secondly in revealing direct influence on the eclecticism itself.

The number-systems discussed above all illustrate the influence of Cage, whose decision that musical structure should be based upon rhythm rather than pitch was one of the most radical aspects of his thinking. Cage reasoned that rhythm was more fundamental to the nature of music, as it concerned the juxtapositioning of sound and silence, whereas the harmonic structure that Western music revolved around relied upon pitch, which had no being in silence. Cage was encouraged in his revolutionary thinking by disillusionment with Schoenberg, with whom he studied at the University of California, Los Angeles; in one of the lectures Cage attended, Schoenberg was heard to declare that it was his aim to make it impossible for his students to write music. Finding harmony a personal weakness, and being too poor to afford more sophisticated instruments, Cage began to work with percussion: "I only truly detached myself from Schoenberg's teachings on the structural character of tonality once I began to work with percussion. Only then did I begin to make structures' (Cage, 1981: 72-73).

Even before he introduced chance into his composition, Cage was making radical breaks with Western tradition. He was interested and inspired by musics not regarded as central by most composers, in particular Erik Satie, and the music and philosophy of the far East. While all around him musical trends were progressing towards increased complexity, Cage had no qualms about creating pieces with the most simple technical resources, and innovations such as the prepared piano were undertaken for practical, not idealistic, reasons. The heroic artist dwelling at the core of western music was foreign to Cage, and his personal identity as a working musician can still be perceived in the experimental composers of today. However, indeterminacy itself was Cage's most radical opposition to the increasing control, complexity and purity of modernist composition. Chance was the major point of contention between Cage and Boulez; in the

1940's they were on friendly terms, interested in each other's structural innovations, but despite experiments such as the third piano sonata with its mobile form, Boulez could not take on the full implications of relinquishing compositional control. 4'33", the so-called silent piece, sums up these implications: it subverted the idea of a composer actually communicating something to the audience; it robbed the score of its kudos and the composer of any pretension to creative genius; there was no expression, no climax, and extraneous sounds were welcomed into the musical experience. In combination, these elements showed no respect for the continuity of western musical tradition, something which was of fundamental importance to Boulez. Cage's interest in isolated figures such as Satie and Grieg followed this line; his view of what and who was important was revolutionary.

If at first Cage appeared to his contemporaries to be simply another avant-garde composer, his high regard for Webern was partly responsible for the misunderstanding. However, it became obvious that Webern's work could be admired from two, completely opposing, viewpoints which provided a major catalyst to the creation of the second musical stream to which Feldman refers above. Cage and his experimental successors were not interested in Webern's 12-tone methodology. Instead, Cage noted that his structures were based on time rather than pitch and drew parallels between this and the work of Erik Satie. The modernist 'post-Webernians' "only sought in Webern what related to their interest in control" (1981: 39).

John Tilbury, one of the founder-members of the Scratch Orchestra, articulates a Cageian attitude to Webern in an interview with Michael Parsons (1969: 150):

> I would like to draw a distinction between playing the keyboard and using the piano as a sound-source. I see Webern's Variations Op.27 as the start of 'using' the piano, as opposed to playing it as a keyboard instrument in the conventional sense. The pointillism of the last movement dissolves the traditional associations of keyboard playing, which arise from the use of adjacent fingers for adjacent notes, the 'normal' hand positions for playing scales and arpeggios, and so on.

He discusses with Parsons the extent to which Cage and his colleagues were influenced by Webern:

> The American composers, Cage, Feldman, Brown and Wolff, were all much more indebted to Webern than they now acknowledge. They played this down later because 'influenced by Webern' came to mean something quite different in the light of what the European serialists did. The Americans reacted to Webern in a more realistic way, not by trying to describe sounds more exactly as Boulez and Stockhausen did, but it some cases renouncing this idea completely.

The inspiration which Cage found in the music of Webern proved fundamental to his new artistic standpoint. The importance of framing musical sounds with equally noticeable silence emphasised rhythmic rather than harmonic structure; this in turn contributed to Cage's interest in percussion instruments which then influenced his acceptance of everyday noise into the musical experience. The acceptance of everyday

noise brought the music closer to the experience of everyday life; this drew attention to the role of chance which in turn altered the role of the composer. All the major characteristics of the early experimental music, English or American, can be linked to the challenges posed by these developments, as the following list (modelled on Nyman's breakdown of experimental qualities (1974: 3-19)) shows:

1. Notation: described by Michael Parsons (Tilbury and Parsons, 1969: 150) as a "directive to the performer" rather than a description of the sound required. Represents the composer's relinquishing of control over the outcome of the music.

2. Processes: actions to be carried out by performers, involving imaginative ways of uniting chance and choice and resting on the premise that sounds which occur and combine without predetermination are as worthwhile as any determined by a composer.

3. Uniqueness/ephemerality: like the occurrences of everyday life, sounds occurring by chance are unlikely ever to be repeated; the endurance of the music is not an issue.

4. Time: the most fundamental characteristic of music, the frame to be filled by a process. Many compositions relied on the natural time-span of certain events; the burning of candles (George Brecht's *Candle Piece* for Radios), the slowing down of swinging microphones (Steve Reich's *Pendulum Music*), the drinking of a bottle of beer (John White's *Drinking and Hooting Machine*).

5. Performing: carrying out tasks. With no description of the sounds they must extract from the instruments, performers of experimental music take on more responsibility. However, their concern for the quality of the outcome of their tasks must not be confused with self-expression, which interferes with the ability of sounds to manifest freely (Cage was notoriously antipathetic to improvisation and jazz in particular).

6. Performing: difficulties. In following the tasks, the performers must expect occasional, extreme difficulties; these must be confronted to the best of the player's ability, in the spirit of allowing the process to unfold authentically (so that human limitations interfere with the process as little as possible, unless they are an integral part of it). The acceptance of this sort of risk, often resulting from the arbitrary rules of the process, gives a strong game element to experimental music.

7. The instrument is regarded as a source of noise; its traditional role is not relevant.

8. In carrying out processes over a certain time-span, actions become as much part of the music as sound and silence.

Cage's role in the differentiation between early experimental music and the modernist mainstream can be identified from the above list. However, as in the case of the artists discussed above, Cage's work is important to the understanding of experimental eclecticism not only because it demonstrates how pluralistic art and postmodernist aesthetics are not interdependent: his philosophy actively encouraged quotation and reference, topics which Nyman, writing in the early 1970's, did not award

a great deal of importance. The music of Dave Smith, for example, does not feature in his book at all. However, with the benefits of hindsight and when one is searching specifically for these tendencies, it is obvious that they had been steadily increasing, and were clearly related to the characteristics of early experimental music listed above. Cage's own associative works may not have acted directly as models to later experimental compositions, but the outlook which led to their composition was passed on, (not only through Cage himself but by means of Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, LaMonte Young and Earle Brown) to Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra.

Cage's usage of pre-existing compositional materials, which was a natural extension of his desire to relinquish traditional compositional control and admit into his work aural elements taken from everyday life, was tied in with his contact with visual artists. The New York art scene in the 1950's was characterised by a pluralism, open-mindedness and lack of concern over technique which contrasted enormously with Cage's experience of the polarity of musical life which centred around Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Setting an important precedent, Cage became involved with visual artists ranging from Duchamp himself to the Americans Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Claes Oldenburg, all known for their work with popular and everyday iconography (see Chapter 1). He described a project planned in 1969, involving the accurate reproduction of a thunderstorm, as a response to Jasper Johns' beer cans: it "sets out to make something which is as much as possible this other thing"(Kostelanetz, 1989: 203). He also valued the way in which an artist like Rauschenberg enabled the onlooker to notice things which he had previously not actively 'seen', mundane objects such as a Coca-Cola bottle. The great admiration he expressed for the objectivity of these artists and their indifference to affecting the actual feelings of the onlooker can be linked to his own lack of concern over the active compositional structuring of music in order to create a certain premeditated effect. The cutting and pasting of incongruous objects in the work of surrealist painters did not interest Cage; he disliked art with psychological overtones:

> I wanted them [paintings by Tobey] to change my way of seeing, not my way of feeling. I'm perfectly happy about my feelings. In fact, I want to bring them, if anything, to some kind of tranquillity. I don't want to disturb my feelings. I don't want to spend my life being pushed around by a bunch of artists. (Kostelanetz, 1989: 177).

Whilst avoiding emotionalism, Cage's indiscriminate pluralism did occasionally serve a pre-planned intellectual concept. His first composition to use ready-made musical material was *Credo in US* (1942), composed for dance choreographed by Merce Cunningham. It was scored for percussion quartet with piano and either record player or radio, the unpredictability of which was exploited by Cage many times in later years. In the case of *Credo*, Cage could afford to be unconcerned with the exact nature of the material being transmitted because whether it was romantic music, cowboy songs or jazz, the American idea of culture was guaranteed to be symbolised; the ambiguous 'US' of the

title hints at the irrevocable links between patriotism and an American's sense of identity. If records were to be used, Cage correspondingly suggested repertoire by Beethoven, Shostakovich, Dvorak or Sibelius, composers who were enjoying widespread popularity at that time. The critical standpoint he maintained in this way can be compared to Richard Hamilton's ironic collage *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?*; for experimental composers however, the important point of departure lay simply in the use of the contemporary environment as a source of musical material. It is also significant that while postmodernist composers are often motivated by a desire to raise the status of the non-western classical music to which their works refer, Cage's eclecticism made status, particularly in terms of historical placement, irrelevant. Many would consider Cage's treatment of Satie in *Cheap Imitation* disrespectful; when refused permission from the publishing house Eschig to arrange *Socrate* for Merce Cunningham's dance company, Cage deconstructed the score using I Ching chance operations, and chose a title in accordance with Satie's own characteristic taste in names.

By 1960, the music of Cage and other American experimental composers was dominating the concerts given by Cardew his colleagues in London. John Tilbury joined Cardew for a two-piano concert at the Conway Hall in that year, and the programme featured works by Cage, Wolff and Feldman. Tilbury was impressed by the way in which Feldman's music showed the imprint of the human spirit in contrast with the prevailing avant-garde music. He admitted that artificial systems existed in this music but felt that these did not 'police' the music like serialist systems (1981: 16). Feldman in turn reported:

> Cardew and his circle interested me very much. In fact, the whole atmosphere there [in London], the whole situation, was interesting to me. There's a genuine involvement, a genuine excitement about the new ideas coming from New York. I found the same talk, the same climate I remember here [New York] in the early fifties. It's just the groundwork, but one feels a change, a break with the rhetoric of France and Germany. 'Renaissance' is the wrong word; it always implies a reference to the past. What's going on in England these days is not a return to the past or a rebellion against it. It's what I've described elsewhere as a getting *out* of history. The young intellectuals I met...they're not looking to New York for a *Guernica* or a *Gruppen*. What they identify with is the whole spirit coming out of the New York scene, the fantastic paradox of *down with the masterpiece; up with art*" (1985: 56).

Tilbury speaks of the attraction of the anti-historical view of music (rejecting the 'inevitable' development towards increased complexity and sophistication), but Cardew was also impressed by the Americans' reappraisal of the composer/performer role. Although the loosening of compositional control and the consequent increase in the performer's creative input sprang from Cage's non-political, eastern philosophy (he expresses interest in some ideas of Chinese Communism in his foreword to *M*,(1973) but was in fact a true anarchist, opposed to all systems of government), it attracted Cardew as the symbol of a socialist issue: that of the composer's potential abuse of power over the performer. It is not surprising then that the Scratch Orchestra, as a performing body,

became the most enduring symbol of experimental music despite its short life span. However, the overt democracy of the Scratch Orchestra can be misleading in the search to find the origins and motivations behind the later eclectic experimental music.

## 2.4 THE SCRATCH ORCHESTRA: ITS RELEVANCE TO LATER EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

(i). Myths

It is not a simple matter to trace direct links between the work of the experimental composers in the period of the Scratch Orchestra and their output twenty years later. Few of the original composers are still considered to be writing truly experimental music; Michael Parsons is a rare example who continued working on research projects initiated by the Scratch Orchestra, exploring the subject of Arctic exploration in a series of works, including the chamber piece *Arctic Instrumental Music* and the staged work *Expedition to the North Pole.* Christopher Hobbs comments that "Michael Parsons has probably kept the spirit of those days more than anyone else has, in terms of his activity and the almost monastic single-mindedness with which he pursues his musical career, I think he's the great heir of Cardew." [18]

However, even as early as 1979, Keith Potter tentatively suggested that the term 'experimental' was no longer valid or had become a historical tag like 'baroque' or 'romantic'. He asserted that the music of John White and even Skempton had little to do with the approaches of Cage in the 50's and 60's or the activities of the Scratch Orchestra around 1970 (Smith, 1980). However, Bryars has noted that Nyman's book, with its list of experimental characteristics which appear to almost preclude the later inter-textuality (this is discussed at the very end of the book but does not appear in the opening list of major features), was written before Cardew's death; he suggests that at that time, onlookers would have received a set of 'experimental' values which were tied up more with Cardew's personality than with the ideas of the other musicians. Remarking on the apparent gulf between the old music and the new, he explains that the latter is simply "where experimental composers are now"[19].

Although this chapter aims to show how the later eclecticism is, in fact, grounded in the experimental tradition, Bryars' reference to Cardew is a reminder of certain pitfalls which may be encountered in trying to do this. It is tempting to try to link the democracy of the Scratch Orchestra (in terms of allowing membership regardless of musical ability) with the acceptance of different styles into the musical fabric regardless of their commonly-accepted status. Cardew's emphasis on the performer's contribution could be linked with the inclusion of improvisatory styles like jazz into the later experimental repertoire: "Scratch Music - its performance - is about "live and let live", peaceful cohabitation, contributing to society, meaningless and meaningful work, play,

meditation, relaxation." (Cardew, 1974: 14). His acknowledgement of the need to engage with the preferred music of the working class - pop music - and that of the working professional in the music industry, could also be linked with the later eclecticism.

During the course of this research project, both of these avenues have been explored in some detail and have been found to be ultimately unrewarding. Firstly, it is worth remembering that even Cage believed that only a limited number of his own compositions were suitable for performance by non-musicians. In addition, he was largely opposed to improvisation, feeling that the player could only escape familiar clichés by beginning improvisation training at a kindergarten level. In England, the untrained performer ceased to play a significant role in experimental music after the demise of the Scratch Orchestra; Christopher Hobbs, who at the time of joining was the orchestra's youngest member, recalls an important transitionary period which can be traced in his own music and that of John White, where graphics gave way to standard notation inaccessible to the untrained. These developments were undertaken with some regret but with a sense of inevitability - "that's show business", as Hobbs said:

> The performance I do now is much more mainstream [than Scratch]. Having said that, one of the gigs John [White] and I did in Austria last year was playing piano duets in a jazz club...though none of the music we played, apart from some Satie, was really suitable for that scene. And the Live Batts thing could be done in the old-fashioned way that the P.T.O. used to work, playing in galleries; theoretically it's possible, but otherwise the music I play tends to be for piano recitals. And that naturally has a certain formality about it...it's more formal than it used to be, but of course the kind of music I'm playing has changed. One isn't playing verbal, "experimental" pieces any more, one is playing notated, difficult piano music.[20]

When asked if this did not exclude the amateur performer, Hobbs replied:

> I think it always did. One of the things that started to drive the Scratch Orchestra apart was the difference between gentlemen and players, 'pro' and 'am'. Those of us who could read music tended to band together fairly quickly and make groups like the P.T.O... Now, the danger has gone but the very act of performance is still as nerve-wracking as it ever was; it doesn't get any easier as you get older. In the Scratch Orchestra I didn't get particularly nervous before a performance. I think the Scratch Orchestra is a red herring. It's a group which existed for a rather short period of time, and things have changed a great deal since then. One doesn't get the same danger in rock concerts either; that era has died away. People don't set fire to their guitars any more; it's all very sanitised and big budget.[21]

Although composer/performer ensembles are still an important medium for experimental music, it can be assumed that the involvement of non-specialist performers has no significant effect on the level of difficulty of the music or influence the choice of tonality over chromaticism or popular styles over complex, modernist ones. This can be illustrated by the case of Ian Gardiner's ensemble George W. Welch and its employment of the artist and publisher Mark Thomson on drum kit and percussion. While Gardiner dislikes the cult of the 'virtuoso contemporary music specialist', he ensures that the parts

he writes for Thomson are well within the player's ability and allow for no risk of compromising the overall standard of the ensemble. He also is confident that the part will be painstakingly practised. It is also a mistake to assume that experimental music cannot be performed by a mainstream, 'outside' performer. Andrew Hugill has insisted that such performers can and do play experimental music perfectly well (examples include Leslie Howard, Ian Lake, and the Hilliard Ensemble); he has also stressed that the mixed assortment of players that constitute George W. Welch is essential to the group's identity but has nothing to do with an outlook of democracy. Other assumptions about the political nature of the combined ensemble are undermined by the fact that George W. Welch has never had a constitution, formal or otherwise.

To this day there is an undeniable split between the outlook of Cardew's musical colleagues and his political followers, which many would like to ignore. Only when one realises that the political aspect of Cardew's musical personality is not what interested the other composers the most, does one realise that it is futile to search for political motivations behind the recent eclecticism. Cardew's polemics make it appear that a political system is reflected in experimental musical practice, but the subjectivity of this can be gauged by the way in which Cage's logic could make similar practices appear independent of government of any sort. John White describes his alienation from the political activities of Cardew:

> We parted company when he got attracted to his political research, because I felt I wasn't informed enough to either argue against what he was doing or to go along with it. In the early stages though [there was] something rather camp and exotic about little red book and all that talk about correct thought and what would go down well with the broad masses, jingoistic stuff: I took it all very lightly because I thought that it would pass, which by now of course it all has! Twenty years later he was a wise old owl, but at the time it looked rather suspiciously as though it wouldn't all pass, and I was quite prepared to stand up in front of a firing squad like a good man, but since we parted company every now and again he would get in contact with me and say "We're doing a concert, it's a workers' benefit and I'd say "I'm sorry, you've got to count me out, I can't put my shoulder to that particular wheel.[22]

Smith has emphasised the subjectivity involved in assessments of the work of the Scratch Orchestra:

> At the time, the relevance of the Scratch to any one composer within it was probably completely different, and people did not always see it as serving the same kind of function for them; everybody's view of it would be different...One of the things that came out of the Scratch orchestra, I think, was that when it broke up, composers who were working within it would ask themselves some very crucial questions about communications and things like this, which were old Scratch Orchestra hang-ups. And probably even to some extent *why* they were doing it, which probably wouldn't have happened without the Scratch orchestra.[23]

However, when asked whether his own abundant use of reference and quotation is motivated by a desire to improve communication with the audience, his answer is predominantly negative:

> Yes and no. Yes to the extent that you can relate to a genre which people are aware of, although quite a lot of the genres that I refer to aren't necessarily those that people are aware of, except on a superficial level, if that... I think probably my music has various levels at which it can be appreciated... one might actually put in a quotation from something which may or may not be well-known, within a certain piece. Now it's not important whether that quotation's recognised or even perceived to be a quotation; some people will perceive it, some people won't, and I'm not saying that those who will perceive it get extra enjoyment. So things like that tend to be incidental.[24]

Smith also emphasises that, unlike other eclectic contemporary composers such as Martland and Turnage, moral judgements about the worth of non-western styles have little to do with the motivation behind his compositional technique. Respect for, and expertise in the various styles used is regarded as essential, but any political or moral principles which may support this are not intended to be made public. Smith disagreed entirely with my suggestion that a combination of classical and non-classical styles in a traditional concert situation tended to emphasise divisions of race and class in society. He quoted Steve Reich's output as an example of highly eclectic music which made no social comment whatsoever (this interview took place before the composition of *Different Trains* which heralded an increase in Reich's political consciousness).

Bryars concludes that the political activities of the Scratch Orchestra were not even as important at the time as they seem in retrospect:

> In a way, it didn't really come to the forefront until maybe the Scratch had been in existence for a couple of years. So I think if you want to look at the history of the Scratch, you look at it in a balanced way, from middle '69 when it started through to early '71, about the time they did the tour when *Sweet FA*[25] was done, when the discontent files started up. That period is one of the highlights of the Scratch, and then you get into the whole debate about how the Scratch should exist, and the whole question of political or otherwise happens from there on, and then the Scratch goes into a kind of limbo. But people tend to overestimate or over exaggerate the political side. And that's partly when you get things like *Stockhausen serves Imperialism*: the preface, the history of the Scratch, was actually written by someone who came into the Scratch at that time, but who wasn't involved in the earlier period [Rod Eley]. Whereas someone like Nyman, who was in the earlier period, gives a different view of the Scratch in *Experimental Music*, and the political stuff comes in later in his account. So a lot depends on where you were in the Scratch as to how you portray it.[26]

The point of emphasis here is that the involvement of experimental composers in the Scratch Orchestra should not lead to a predominantly political interpretation of the eclecticism of their later work; this does not mean to say, however, that the Scratch Orchestra's activities were not a significant influence in other ways.

(ii). Popular Classics

Although they appeared under a different guise, the ideological problems which Cardew confronted were those at the heart of postmodernism itself, and this gives him a unique status among musicians. His willingness to engage, in a practical way, with seemingly insoluble problems regarding the social status of music goes far beyond the work of mere academics; he was instrumental in allowing other experimental composers their freedom from the decaying mainstream. The work of the Scratch Orchestra helped establish this freedom and also laid down roots for the later, associative compositions.

Working with amateurs nullified several modernist *bêtes-noires* whilst simultaneously creating new responsibilities for the experimentalists. Cardew complained that modernist composers had no criteria to determine whether their work was nonsense or not, and in order to establish a set of such criteria for the Scratch Orchestra, he posed certain questions: Why compose? Does the music fulfil the audience's needs? Should we accept their needs or try to change them? Do pieces meet the demands of the players? What is composition - notes or ideas? How should composers survive economically? The last point is particularly significant; firstly, it illustrates how Cardew's associates came to discard the notion of originality; the ideal of the unique voice was scorned as a mere 'brand-name' (Cardew, 1974a: 14) which enabled the bourgeois composer to sell his merchandise. The demise of originality was to have further repercussions; it paved the way for the revolutionary concept of using popular classics as source material. By acknowledging the cultural preferences of the amateur members of the Scratch Orchestra and the Portsmouth Sinfonia, experimental composers experienced a revival of interest in what Hobbs called 'third stream' music (Nyman, 1974: 138). A typical manifestation of this was John Tilbury's presentation in 1970 of a series of five concerts under the name of *Volo Solo*[27], which included some of the pianist's favourite passages from the classical piano repertoire. Hobbs himself admired Victorian salon composers such as Albert W. Ketelby, who wrote the once-popular *In a Monastery Garden*, for applying themselves to the needs of the musical public rather than self-consciously trying to produce great art for posterity. Anticipating White's attitude towards such music, he commented: "having experienced silence we return to the old sounds; only, hopefully, with our feet a little off the ground" (Nyman, 1974: 138).

The use made by English experimental composers of classical source material was initially comparable to that of Cage: the symbolic and associational value of the quotes was irrelevant, and the material was to be subject to systems and processes just like abstract sound or action had been. Attempts by the Portsmouth Sinfonia to perform, for example, the *William Tell Overture*, subjected the material to aleatoric transformation in the same way; Skempton described how the players' unpredictable and divergent abilities could enhance the beauty of an over-familiar and hackneyed work:

> Some of the lost magic can of course be restored through distortion, since the introduction of uncontrolled variables is bound to make the situation more interesting, but juxtaposition with the unfamiliar is equally capable of making the over familiar sound strangely beautiful (Nyman, 1974: 138).

The output of composers marginalised by the conventional view of music history is still a major influence on experimental composers, and Hobbs maintains that the notion of Popular Classics was the most successful initiative of the Scratch Orchestra:

> It gave birth to a lot of other things; I don't know whether it influenced the Portsmouth Sinfonia, or the Portsmouth Sinfonia influenced the Popular Classics, but there is that notion at the same time...one doesn't expect a group of people who've never picked up an instrument before to be able to play the *William Tell Overture* well. But the fact that they've dared to do it at all, and record it, is quite admirable.[28]

(iii). Collectivity and dual roles

In addition to devaluing the ideal of originality, Cardew's question, "How should a composer earn a living?", clearly entails an appeal to be thoughtful about the placement of one's loyalties. Although the Scratch Orchestra did apply for Arts Council funding, and appeared on television and at major venues such as the Royal Festival Hall, the composers involved learned to rely on collective effort rather than outside endorsement in order to air their music. The financial independence of the post-Scratch Orchestra ensembles was vital to the composers' independence from the musical mainstream; as Gablik has said, "Pursued as a career, art becomes inevitably less concentrated as a charismatic activity, and less able to break with prevailing cultural values or archetypes"(1984: 86).

It is not surprising that several experimentalists have been critical of Benedict Mason, the only composer to reject the experimental approach and apparently pursue a career in the mainstream. Christopher Hobbs explains:

> There is a kind of anti-establishment feeling, because the establishment is about getting yourself known, about getting published, about getting commissions, which is the way that Benedict Mason's music has changed, for example, since he's given up the comical stuff and tends to do it for real nowadays. He gets commissions and obviously would like to see himself as part of the European tradition, which I certainly wouldn't be part of. I think that if someone like John [White] or myself goes to Holland or to Austria, the kind of music we play has a kind of novelty value rather than being seen as part of the same tradition as the other composers who are working in these countries.[29]

Similarly, Dave Smith has commented on the ambitiousness of the American minimalists, and despite a strong active interest in their work, makes a clear distinction between their output and that of the English experimental ensembles:

> It might seem so [that the ensembles are related] on the face of it, in that the music is related, or used to be. It certainly isn't now. People like Steve Reich and Philip Glass are guys who want to make careers out of

> themselves writing music. They get a band together, they organise in a business-like way; the ensembles I played in were very much more laid back affairs. One didn't tend to make a business out of it, one did it for different reasons.[30]

A determinedly anti-careerist attitude can be identified in all experimental composers, and continuing to organise the performance of their own music instead of attempting to find favour with outside promoters provides the bedrock of their artistic independence. This survival mechanism, based on co-operation between like-minded artists, has parallels in the work of many ground-breaking performing artists from jazz musicians to choreographers who realised that within the system there could be no challenge to the system. It is in maintaining this independence that the continued blurring of edges between the roles of composition and performance is a significant influence on experimental music. Michael Newman, a director of the publishing company Forward Music, which has also promoted concerts of experimental music (Newman is a composer, performer and lecturer on experimental music and not an 'outsider' in the sense implied above), regards the performance practice as a direct challenge to the working methods of contemporary groups such as the London Sinfonietta or Lontano, where he believes the players are passively reproducing what is put in front of them, in accordance with the artistic policy of someone else. Newman believes that the best way to avoid problems such as lack of financial support from the Arts Council is to generate musical activity from a grass roots level; this has the advantage of bypassing the interference of administration generally. In this situation, composers will write with the individual players and performance situations in mind. Gavin Bryars describes this as an important part of his experimental identity:

> The idea of actually writing for specific people rather than for ideal ensembles, to work with what you've got...to deal with practical issues, that seems to me to be something which is a feature of experimental composers. I suppose the second thing would be the ability to adjust quickly, not to be precious about what you do, and to change tack in midstream if necessary. A case of that might be in the rehearsal period of *Medea, when* I had to write a new scene; ditch one scene and write another one. Or...when all the English things had to be done in French which meant rewriting completely the vocal line - this was just a few weeks before the performance. It seemed to me perfectly reasonable; so you do it... So there's a relaxed attitude to the production of music which I think stems from Experimental music; not thinking of yourself as a Great Composer....[Being a performer] means that I see things almost entirely from the performers' point of view, and one of the things I'm concerned about is to make sure that the players get something which makes sense to them and gives them some pleasure to perform within their own instrument or voice. Whether they like the piece I suppose is another question, but it would be nice if they did.[31]

Bryars' sense of phrasing, one of the most distinctive aspects of his compositional style, is grounded in his experience as a performer:

> I certainly don't use any system. I think it's more likely to be instinctive. That's probably related to having been a performer, the fact of seeing

> what just seems right. It's rather like the kind of instinctive sense that maybe a theatre director will get when he tries a particular move and says "sorry, it doesn't work". You have that, mainly through experience, a sense of how something should be paced, and the kind of proportions it should have. I hate to get into that whole kind of mystique of the artist - "you've either got it or you haven't" - that seems to me to be absolute bull. You can acquire that by hearing enough music, by playing enough music, and by writing it and just seeing how things make sense. I think you're more likely to do that if you don't have a system. It's like how you get by socially. If you use a particular mannerism that you use every time, people soon find you boring... You've got to keep finding ways of keeping things alive and one way is not to do it the same every time... There are times when the material itself will dictate something, and then what you've got to do is make the rest of it fit the relationship you've set up because of imposed structures. Sometimes it can be to do with what a voice or instrument can do; it can be related to practical things. Sometimes quite artificial things, like page turns. In certain pieces the page turns have actually governed phrase lengths. That is one area where I'm probably more instinctive than systematic.[32]

For Dave Smith, maintaining close contact with other composers not only helped him to develop a sense of each player's particular characteristics, but also influenced his wide range of references. The Garden Furniture Music Ensemble (1977-1979) was particularly important in this sense. The character of this ensemble developed around the ideal of a music described by Bryars as "less comfortable, more rough-hewn and more likely to survive in a hostile environment" than Satie's interior version; like many experimental ensembles, it began as an ad-hoc group to play a single concert (consisting mainly of works by John White and held at the Air Gallery, Shaftsbury Avenue, London). The other players included White, Ben Mason, and occasionally Bryars, John Lewis, Pat Garrett and Ted Szanto; Smith reported how "the frequent exchange of cassettes between members of the group and those on its periphery... was a way of sharing enthusiasms and bringing other source materials forward for possible treatment."[33]

(iv). Subversion (origins)

The ability to maintain a subversive stance is where experimental music most distinguishes itself from postmodernist eclectic music. In a musical system where angry young composers are never unexpected and never unfashionable, and where the confrontational sounds of dissonant neo-modernism are revered by academics, the self-effacing modesty and innocuous surface of English experimental music still manages to discomfort and confuse. The independence of the composers is central to this, as described above, but the subtle nature of the subversion also figures in its success.

Apart from certain works by Dave Smith, such as *Second Piano Concert "Ireland one and Ireland free"*, direct social comment has become almost entirely absent from the output of the experimental composers. This, combined with its alliance with ideologically-unsound genres such as bourgeois Victorian parlour music and commercial

music, has caused it to be dismissed and underestimated by left-wing critics. There is an awareness among experimentalists of the futility of angry political gestures, and of the ability of an increasingly sophisticated establishment to absorb such threats; when the Scratch Orchestra disbanded in 1971, one of the major points of contention surrounded the dilemma of whether to sell one's product on the market, or drop out. In later years, the experimental composers were able to reconcile this problem by subtly undermining the accepted history of music upon which so many careers in the music establishment depend.

Cardew's example was important in this matter; it must be remembered that his criticism went far deeper than to attack mere politicians, but drew attention to the way in which the music industry itself had become a reflection of capitalist ideology: elitist, uncaring in its treatment of workers, manipulative, profiteering, dominated by megalomaniacs. John White has described the inspiration he found in Cardew:

> Cornelius Cardew *was* subversion, and such a quiet and saintly man. He got interested in working with me because back in the middle 60's I was a brass player who was interested in doing new music and as somebody with musical articulateness and discipline who could be called upon to realise these strange, exotic scores of his, and of people whom he was in contact with. I felt that the period of work with him was a very far-reaching education. I feel as though my aesthetic education almost started with Cardew, and that it was a sort of lens through which I could see all the experiences I'd had before. There was something about him and his work that depended so much upon one's being actively committed to him and what he was thinking about which excluded people who weren't; so the work that he did was given very bad press. The Scratch Orchestra had this operatic project called *Sweet FA*, which they took to Newcastle, and I remember a lot of newspapers commenting on the fact the Cornelius Cardew was doing this dreadful disruptive thing in the course of which he distributed pieces of toilet paper with obscenities written on them to children. He just seemed to attract that kind of journalistic assassination job, and I just can't explain it at all.
>
> I was sorry that we lost contact, because we had some very enthusiastic exchanges in the earlier days, but that was when I felt that as a questing musical spirit he was the first in the field. I felt that he was less didactic than Cage and therefore more interesting; he was always very anti-personality but he couldn't help being a personality, which is why...from beyond the grave he's managed to still influence a kind of negative area of music: *"don't employ this man, he was a friend of Cardew's!"* I don't think anyone will actually own up to that now!
>
> I feel very unresentful about what's happened [in terms of lack of interest from promoters] because I feel that my life is aimed at finding the light somewhere rather than shedding darkness on things, or screwing money out of people or whatever. I feel that that sort of exclusivity [of promoters] has made people poorer than they should be. I look back over some of Cornelius's pieces and think "well, that seemed like a good idea at the time;"...I think a lot of his opinions were open to question, but that was the nature of it. It *was* open to question. If you go to Covent Garden you don't get plunged into a great question about what goes on there; you get told "this is Pavarotti", singing somebody important in an

> important opera and you will kindly keep your questions to yourself, whereas almost everything Cardew did in the sixties and early seventies was, in the most welcome way, open to question. And it was a quality that we most desperately needed in music, because modern music at that time consisted of somebody's quintessential string quartet done at the McNaughten concerts or something, that would have taken 160 hours of rehearsal and would have a duration of 5 minutes. There would be a question mark over everybody's head and circumflex eyebrows; a kind of 'seriosity',...there's a certain attitude when you go to a concert of new music, you will put on your thinking cap and consider all of this stuff very closely. The stuff that Cardew was doing had a kind of levity about it in the early stages that I found really delightful. There were concerts involving the Marks & Spencer's in Richmond and that sort of thing, a feeling of discrete hooliganism; we weren't sort of destroying anybody or doing anybody any harm, and that was all terribly good news.[34]

Hobbs's recollections of the Scratch Orchestra tend to focus more on the sense of danger inherent in many performances, and this is something which he still tries to capture in his music despite its accessibility to safe, trained performers only. One of his favourite tapes of Scratch music involves a raucous song, *And the fat people want what the skinny people got/and the skinny people want what the fat people got*, by two anonymous female performers, neither musically trained:

> It's very nice because as the session goes on the guitars get more and more out of tune, and occasionally the instruments change over channels for no apparent reason; you suddenly get the drums coming out of the left channel rather than the right channel. Occasionally they're almost rhythmically together, but not very often. That is in a way much more truly dangerous music than the [Portsmouth] Sinfonia because the Sinfonia knew what they were doing and I don't think those kids did. They were quite oblivious to the fact that they were neither playing in time nor in tune with each other. They made a second album which apparently isn't so good because they'd done a bit of practice. You get the feeling with that recording that they'd picked up the instruments a few weeks before and gone straight into writing music. That's *really* subversive!... I think that kind of culture and the delight in that is very important and quite fundamental, certainly to my thinking. It's why, when Brian Dennis asked me to write some songs, I decided to set some songs from *Der Struwwelp ter;* they're very violent songs about death. ...It was meant to sound like an art song, with the settings as good as I could make them, with just voice and piano. There's no danger there, [except in] the idea of using those words.[35]

This chapter has explored the historical background of experimental music, with a view to achieving a clear differentiation between recent experimental repertoire and the similarly pluralistic works of composers whose work could be considered postmodernist. It has revealed the independence of experimental composers from several problems inherent in the aesthetics of postmodernism, and has hinted at experimental music's greater success in maintaining a subversive stance. This stance is characterised by a defiant contradiction of the established, linear view of music history, largely achieved through the use of quotation, reference and allusion to the music of composers commonly considered to be marginal, eccentric and unimportant. The next chapter considers in more detail the manifestations of this alternative perception of music history.

[1]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[2]The term 'postexperimental' has been used by Keith Potter (Potter, 1991) to describe the recent music of Howard Skempton. The fact that Skempton is regarded by Bryars and others as one of the more fundamental experimentalists testifies to the ambiguity of the term and its ability to mislead.

[3]John White interviewed by Sarah Walker, 13th February 1990

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]*Hobbs End* (1988), composed for Gardiner's ensemble George W. Welch, contains dissonant, 12-note chords in its central section, but they exist for colouristic purposes only, not organisational ones. A more recent work, *Epanaroscope Phakometre,* the 5th movement from *British Museum* (1990-91), contains a frantic, complex section in which extracts of works by Birtwistle, Cage and Finnissy are combined and reworked mechanically for the purpose of creating a dense, atonal texture and a certain irony when taken in context with the rest of the piece.

[11]"Tom Phillips: Interview by Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars", *Studio International,* November/December 1976, pp.290-296

[12]John White, March 1976. The record number is OBS 8.

[13]Programme note for concert given by George W. Welch at the Purcell Room, London, 18th March 1991

[14]Tom Morgan interviewed Parsons and Skempton at the SPNM's *One Day* event, 30th January 1994, which was dedicated to experimental music.

[15]Japanese performance artist resident in New York. *Distance* was created in 1962; see Nyman, *Experimental Music,* p.95

[16]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[17]From the sleeve notes to *Hommages,* Les Disques du Crepuscule, CD TWI 027 - 2

[18]Christopher Hobbs interviewed by Sarah Walker, Hackney, 17th October 1990

[19]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[20]Christopher Hobbs interviewed by Sarah Walker, Hackney, 17th October 1990. Feelings of regret over the increased technical difficulty of experimental music have been expressed even more strongly by American composers such as Feldman and Wolff: some of Wolff's recent work however has shown considerable complexity, for example *Rosas* for piano and percussion (1991).

[21]Christopher Hobbs interviewed by Sarah Walker, Hackney, 17th October 1990.

[22]John White interviewed by Sarah Walker, Lower Edmonton, 13th February 1990

[23]Dave Smith interviewed by Sarah Walker, Dalston, 10th July 1989

[24]Ibid.

[25]Sweet FA was an operatic project performed by the Scratch Orchestra in Newcastle.

[26]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[27]*Volo Solo* is the name of a composition by Cardew written in 1965 in an attempt to satisfy John Tilbury's request for a virtuoso piece.

[28]Christopher Hobbs interviewed by Sarah Walker, Hackney, 17th October 1990

[29]Ibid.

[30]Dave Smith interviewed by Sarah Walker, Dalston, 10th July 1989

[31]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[32]Ibid.

[33]Quoted by Bryars in his sleeve note to Smith's album, *Albanian Summer*

[34]John White interviewed by Sarah Walker, Lower Edmonton 13th February 1990

[35]Christopher Hobbs interviewed by Sarah Walker, Hackney, 17th October 1990

## CHAPTER 3

# EXPERIMENTAL ATTITUDES TO HISTORY: PRECURSORS AND INFLUENCES

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## INTRODUCTION

The experimental view of music history allows for the acceptance, rather than the rejection, of pre-modernist musical repertoire and concerns. The composers in this category, including Sorabji, Lord Berners, Holst, Alkan, Busoni, Ives, Grainger, Godowski and Satie, are important as role models as well as in their capacity as providers of musical source material. They do not represent an arbitrary collection of the rejects of modernism; experimental composers employ a distinct set of criteria with which to judge the music of the past, and their lists of interests and influences are extremely consistent. This chapter discusses the manifestations of these precursors and influences with reference to specific examples of recent compositions.

## 3.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NATIONALITY

The fact that some of these figures are English merits attention, as it has been the preoccupation of many English composers to gather ready-made materials for personal use. For this reason, it is worth considering that quotation may be a manifestation not only of the experimental tradition generally, but also of a particular English tradition.

There are certain similarities between the establishment of eclectic styles in both generations. Like the experimentalists, Britten and Bridge were active as performers, and Britten was a keen radio listener. Both these things contributed to their eclecticism to a considerable degree; in *Paul Bunyan* for example, Britten used parodies of italian opera, jazz, American folk ballad, and the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan; elsewhere in his music, evidence of his extensive research on Balinese gamelan can be heard. Donald Mitchell has revealed how Britten "ruthlessly and comprehensively ransacked past and present, orthodox and unorthodox, fashionable and unfashionable, traditional and innovative, and took whatever was useful to him; and that was a lot. It could well be that Britten's 'eclecticism', newly defined and understood, will offer composers and music a way forward" (Mitchell, 1984: 32).

Another link lies in the fact that composers from both generations have subjected their source material not only to quotation within new compositions, but to arrangement and transcription. The desire to democratize, to make music playable by a variety of combinations, forms part of this. Both Britten and the contemporary experimentalists were influenced by Percy Grainger; Grainger loved percussion and unconventional instrumentation, which appealed to Britten due to their suitability for childrens' performance. Grainger's elastic scoring is in stark contrast to modernist tenets; he anticipates experimental practises by the fact that the process of discovery through composition was more important to him than the final result.

The subject of nationalism is also of some interest in the study of English experimental music; surprizingly, there are parallels between the motivation of the

contemporary composers and that of figures such as Vaughan Williams, who turned to folk music in search of an alternative to the musical mainstream which was seen to be dominated by glamorous foreigners. Turning away from mainstream theory towards local, environmental sources as a form of cultural resistance is a significant similarity between the two groups, and seems to reinforce the commonly-held notion that the English have struggled over the centuries to forge an identity for themselves away from the dominant culture. Vaughan Williams's relative humbleness is also comparable to the attitudes of contemporary English experimentalists; he was embarrassed by the sham pretensions and worship of big names of English musical life, and felt that there was little to be gained by English composers aspiring to the state of great masters. In his famous article 'Who Wants the English Composer?' (1912) Vaughan Williams articulated this view:

> The English composer is not and for many generations will not be anything like so good as the Great Master, nor can he do such wonderful things as Strauss and Debussy. But is he for this reason of no value to the community? Is it not possible that he has something to say to his own countrymen that no one of any other age and any other country can say?

It is also worth noting that Vaughan Williams possessed a belief in craftsmanship comparable to that of Bryars, refusing to be precious about the nature of musical inspiration, and that finally, he was scornful of the ideal of musical originality, for which acclaimed European composers were admired. With these similarities in mind, one cannot ignore the possibility that attitudes which appear to have originated in experimentalism itself may infact be part of the composers' national heritage.

However, there is a far stronger case against this argument than in favour of it. If one is to dispute the influence of the experimental tradition in favour of aspects of nationality, one must consider whether or not all English composers have been similarly affected. The case remains that the majority of English composers *are* strongly influenced by European modernism, even those who have referred to national folklore in an explicit way, such as Peter Maxwell Davies. It seems an unlikely coincidence that only the experimentalists, who have shown no active interest in the folksong school, have inherited the earlier composers' sense of purpose. One could even dispute that the folksong tradition is a particularly English phenomenon; it must be borne in mind that composers such as Vaughan Williams dominated English musical life, exaggerating the importance of their individual concerns and making them appear to be intrinsically English. It is more realistic to argue that Sorabji, Lord Berners and Holst are of no greater significance than Satie to the outlook of the experimentalists, and that the nationality of these composers is incidental. The only member of the experimental group whose activities resemble the collecting and cataloguing of the folksong composers is Dave Smith, who visited Albania eleven times between 1973 and 1990 recording as much national folk and classical music as he could, photocopying whatever scores were

available, with the aim of arranging performances in Britain. With this exception, the material referred to by the experimentalists is often non-indigenous, the very stuff of modern, ignoble, post-industrial civilization. For the earlier composers, the use of folksong represented a desirable link with nature and the rapidly fading traditional village life. Vaughan Williams for example was regretful that working class people preferred to sing music-hall songs to the more pure folk songs, and found them blatantly vulgar. His veneration of folk songs was supported by his conviction that they could defy the ravages of time, the evidence of which lay in the fact that one could harmonize them in several different styles without causing an anachronism. This contrasts with the delight of experimental composers in transient popular musics, although they too pay homage to music which they believe to have survived the subsequent changes in musical taste.

It is also interesting to note that Ernest Newman, writing in 1919, considered that quotation was particularly alien to the English mentality. In his essay *Quotation in Music* (110-111), Newman remarked that the English were so musically uneducated that they were unable to pick up on the simplest musical puns:

> It is a pity educated people do not know music as well as they do their own and foreign literatures, for then a whole new world of delightful allusion would be open to composers, and some rich effects could be made, especially for comedic purposes. The music hall, in its own limited way, is doing something of the kind. The music hall public is a fairly constant one, that keeps well abreast of whatever goes on in its own small sphere. It knows pretty well all the popular songs of the last few years, and the most delicate allusion to a phrase from one of them in the accompaniment to another is detected at once. Some quite good fun is made in this way. It does one good to observe how quick the house is to see the joke; and it makes one wish there was a similar community of musical culture in the concert room and the opera-house.

Newman concluded that serious musical life was unlikely to embrace such practices of allusion, as probably "not more than one-tenth of one per cent. of the ordinary audience would know that a phrase in one of Elgar's Enigma Variations is a quotation from Mendelssohn's Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage overture, unless they were told so in the analytical programme" (111). He went as far as to suggest that the sober English character was particularly badly suited to appreciating musical quotation:

> It is a dangerous thing joking with the average Briton; for he has a way of taking irony in the theatre with deadly earnestness, and, on the assumption that the author is talking nonsense, he has a nasty way of walking out in order to show his superior mind (112-113).

As far as the link between national characteristics and eclecticism is concerned, it is perhaps tenable only to suggest that the English tradition of politely resisting the acceptable routes to success has provided a climate which has encouraged an experimental practice to take root.

The pre-history of experimental music is in fact largely European and disjointed. The composers listed at the opening of the chapter are all linked by their marginalisation by the conventional view of musical progress, and the reasons for their disfavour are often the very reasons for their appeal to those with an experimental outlook.

## 3.2 TRANSCRIPTION AND ARRANGEMENT

Several of these figures were well-known for their activities as arrangers and transcribers of music for performance by themselves and others. This typical late-Romantic phenomenon was part of the so-called 'Liszt tradition' and one of the first targets of the modernists. Anxious that their radical new styles should not be misunderstood, both Schoenberg and Stravinsky wrote bitter polemics against the distorted personal interpretations of contemporary music by pianists in particular, traditionally the most creative of concert performers. Busoni, whose work is greatly admired by the English experimentalists, was one of the first victims of the disapproval which gathered momentum in the late-Romantic period, as revealed in a letter dated the fifth of December, 1895:

> The board of the society for which I am playing is very highly esteemed. The Directors are very conscientious (so they say), and permit no transcriptions in their programme. I was obliged, therefore, to withdraw the Tannhauser overture. But when I said that the Bach organ fugue was also a transcription, they said it would be better not to mention it in the programme...(Busoni, 1938).

Schoenberg's essay 'Today's Manner of Performing Classical Music' (1948: 320) attacks the tendency of virtuosi towards forced expressivity; he complained that many artists thought that music was created merely to give them opportunities to go before the audience. His suspicion of the piano reduction was therefore inevitable; he despised the fact that its existence had a practical purpose. The lack of integrity Schoenberg perceived in the pianist-composer, coupled with what he saw as slipshod technique, led him to describe the art of piano playing as being made "more and more into the art of concealing ideas without having any" (Schoenberg, 1923: 350).

Role-specialisation, vigorously endorsed by modernists, and the increasing complexity of their language had a mutually augmenting effect which represents one of the most tangible divisions between music composed in the modernist and experimental traditions. Experimental composers have found inspiration in the work of the late 19th century performer-composers, in their very practicality and engagement with the performance situation. Dave Smith is perhaps the most prolific arranger of the group; in order to bring attention to Albanian music and to take part in its performance, he transcribed and re-scored several large scale works to enable them to be heard in Britain. He arranged folk melodies for his own ensemble, Liria (the Albanian for Freedom); other pieces, in particular nationalistic orchestral rhapsodies by composers such as Feim

Ibrahimi and Aleksander Peci, were reduced for solo instrument and piano; the 5th tableau of Nikolla Zoraqi's ballet *Cuca e Maleve* (The Highland Girl), which Smith admired for its Liszt-like technique of thematic transformation, was arranged for two pianos. Smith firmly believes that the Romantic quality of much Albanian classical music does not derive from nostalgia or primitivism, and his defence of the repertoire could be equally applied to certain pieces of his own (such as the G sharp minor study *Al Contrario,* inspired by the music of Alkan). In his article 'Music in Albania', Smith corroborates his opinion with the words of Simon Gjoni, author of 'The Modernist Distortions in Contemporary Bourgeois-revisionist Music':

> Composers have flourished for barely 40 years in Albania and yet their music ignores almost all the fashionable tendencies in Western music from Schoenberg and Stravinsky onwards (though Albanian higher musical education includes study of such phenomena). Their reasons for this lie in a popular political stance, which maintains 'that the effort of the present-day reactionary aesthetes to advertise a 'universal' art serve the interest of the imperialist bourgeoisie which has always striven to denigrate or to eliminate the cultural traditions of smaller nations and the national spiritin art and culture, to facilitate its cultural aggression and the subjugation of nations...starting from impressionism and expressionism [and continuing] to the present dodecaphonic, serial, punctualistic music...they all try to justify themselves under the cloak of 'innovation', the 'search for the new' at all costs, while breaking down every connection with the best progressive traditions of the peoples and, above all, seeking to divert attention from the essential problems of the content, from the major questions that are concerning mankind today, the working class, the youth, the peoples of the world, who are fighting for their liberation and their social rights.'(Smith, 1983: 20).

Arrangement plays an important part in much of Smith's educational work. He directs a percussion ensemble at DeMontfort University (formerly Leicester Polytechnic) with Christopher Hobbs, consisting of between ten and fourteen players, and has arranged works for them by many composers, often concentrating on those whose own work treads a fine line between transcription and composition, including Alkan (who transcribed pieces by Bach, Beethoven, Gluck, Gretry, Handel, Haydn, Marcello, Meyerbeer, Mozart, Weber and others). Smith has arranged several of Alkan's works for his tuned percussion orchestra, including *Ouverture,* (No.11 of the minor key studies (Op. 39)), *Benedictus* (Op.54) and *Marche Funebre* (Op.26). Other arrangements which reflect his interest in arrangers and transcribers of the past include Godowsky' *Gamelan* from *Java Suite* (for tuned percussion ensemble), and Liszt's *Unstern* (for horn, baritone horn and accordion). Occasionally Smith has turned his attention towards works which are already transcriptions, including Busoni's *Kammer-Fantasie uber Bizets Carmen* (for chamber orchestra) and Godowsky's *Tambourin* (based on Rameau, for chamber orchestra). Christopher Hobbs has suggested that arrangement and transcription can replace academic analysis as one of the best ways of learning about a piece:

> By doing transcription you can see how the music works; I find it a useful way of doing what is basically a rather tedious process which is analysis, for a composer. It's just an instinctive thing. I don't set out

> consciously to say 'I would like to analyse *Three Places in New England'*, but simply 'that would be an impossible piece to arrange for piano, let's try and do it.' You learn a lot about how a piece works.[1]

Bryars emphasises a less pragmatic benefit of arrangement, to go beyond the original work towards a creation which defies fashionable standards of authenticity:

> Turning to transcription and arrangement, it's probably more important for someone like Dave [Smith] than for me, but certainly I like the lack of authenticity in the concept of transcription and arrangement and the kind of state of excess which can develop. Certainly for me, Liszt, Godowsky, Sorabji are great transcribers; Busoni too, only in the sense that things then go beyond the original - they're not simple transcriptions. I think for example two piano versions of Mahler Symphonies are not interesting because they're simply expedient ways of getting those things heard, whereas certainly the Liszt operatic paraphrases even those which are very close to the original, like some of the Wagner ones, seem to me to be intrinsically interesting, and not only in terms of their source. So that in a way is a territory where I find that [romantic] tradition interesting. It's where they're actually transforming known stuff into a new state which seems to me to be not unlike, or perhaps a slightly simpler form of some of the things I've done myself, actually starting from one standpoint and turning something into something else.[2]

## 3.3 ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS: ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

> My reasons for doing things in different versions are usually practical. I don't do it for the hell of it - I'd rather write another piece. So it's usually because there's a necessity. But then you make a virtue out of that necessity.
>
> Gavin Bryars[3]

Original compositions by experimental composers often exist in several different versions, written to satisfy particular performance situations. Several experimental works and pieces by other related composers have been arranged for Gardiner's ensemble George W. Welch. The unconventional, percussion-dominated instrumentation of this group, (the usual line-up includes string trio, piano, clarinet doubling saxophone, tuba, two tuned percussionists, drums) and its specialisation in works of flexible scoring reflects Gardiner's interest in Grainger, whose music played an important role in his recruitment to the English experimental school in the early 1980's, As an undergraduate at Royal Holloway College, London University, Gardiner attended some lectures given by Christopher Hobbs, who drew his attention to a recording of arrangements by Grainger, including re-scorings of Under a bridge [*Under en bro]* and *Eastern Intermezzo* for combinations including trumpet, woodwind, tuned percussion and harmonium. In 1982, Gardiner attended concerts given by what was known as the John White/Gavin Bryars ensemble as part of a Contemporary Music Network tour; White's acoustic symphonies (numbers 4 to 6) were performed, involving White on tuba and piano, Bryars on piano and tuned percussion, two reed players doubling on clarinet and saxophone, a

cellist, a double-bass player, and three additional percussionists. Gardiner was struck by the originality of the ensemble, but his decision to base the line-up of George W. Welch upon this precedent was equally affected by the influence of co-founder Andrew Hugill, (then Thomson) who was at the time a close colleague of Bryars and strongly interested in Grainger. The title of the group was chosen as an intentionally clumsy diversion from the streamlined names of other contemporary ensembles; it was originally used as an alter-ego by Duchamp, and was considered by the players to contain an appealing hint of debt-evasion.

Gardiner has arranged several works by John White for George W. Welch, enjoying the opportunity to perform works which matched his own compositional personality. White's use of montage, the elusiveness and brevity of his music, and its frequent interjections of crude vernacular styles appealled to him; he perceived an aspect of pseudonym in White's music which could be compared to that of Satie, for example in the *Sonata Bureacratique,* where the composer's true feelings and musical values are hidden behind a disguise. Gardiner also enjoyed the challenge of forcing the unlikely ensemble to balance itself, despite the obvious difficulties; one of his most successful arrangements was of White's *Sonata No. 109* (1984), formerly for solo piano but also existing as the first movement of *Symphony No.10* (1984), as *Incantation* (1987) for solo viola, and as *Robust Melody* (1988) for two pianos. Its rhythmic allusion to Messiaen's *Dance de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes* is emphasised by the intense unison passages of the ensemble version (see Appendix 2, example i). He also arranged White's *Idleburger Salsa,* which due to its abundance of 11th chords was originally planned as the central movement of White's *Symphony No.11* (1984), but eventually became the finale of *Symphony No.13* (1986) for electronic keyboard (see Appendix 2, example ii). With its resolutely non-symphonic character - it is a brief, up-tempo piece which contrasts mellow jazz-like harmonies with hyperactive electronic latin percussion - *Idleburger Salsa* stands well by itself and was arranged for the ensemble by Gardiner in 1991. In the programme notes for an early performance given by George W. Welch, Gardiner commented:

> (White's)...large body of Piano Sonatas [is] a collection that forms an ongoing musical diary of deceptively urbane and concise entries spanning his compositional lifetime...I've had the daunting, but fascinating task of transferring their subtleties into the misshapen vessel that is George W. Welch. The first three to be completed already have instrumental qualities within the piano writing - horn calls in 110, bells at the opening of 116, 'cafe-concert' band in 112 - but the principal problem has not been the orchestral realization of piano textures, but in capturing the understatement on all levels within the arrangement.[4]

The ensemble version of Dave Smith's *Disco Soleil Brillant,* premiered by George W. Welch in February 1994, first appeared in 1982 as *Wallydrag Rock,*for three Casio keyboards and drum machine. Smith composed an extended version of the piece in 1984, scored for marimba, vibraphone, 2 pianos and glockenspiel. The hard, unsustained textures of the ensemble version emphasised the repetitive, mechanical aspects of the

composition, with the persistent and occasionally flamboyant drum machine adding humour (see Appendix 2, example iii). The piece was transcribed for solo piano and renamed in 1990, when it became the fourth movement of *3rd Piano Concert*. Smith recreated the robotic character of the earlier versions by replacing four-bar phrases of solo drum machine with total silence, and where the first version featured an exciting contrapuntal accumulation of brief, disco-like motifs, the transcription compensates by means of its virtuosity. Thick chords shared between players take on a more virtuosic quality in the right hand of a solo pianist, who is required to pedal generously in order to attain a clangorous 'chorus effect' akin to that which can be attained on an electric organ. In the later version for George W. Welch, the dry cheap sound of disco music is translated into a more glamorous sound reminiscent of a typical American television theme tune, and the mechanical aspect is lessened by the use of a live drummer and a larger format including strings and winds.

The motivation behind the second version of Bryars' *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1993) was the prospect of a CD recording on the Point Music label; this gave him the possibility of extending the piece beyond its original length, which had been limited by the length of a long-playing record. This new version proved to be no less thought-provoking than the original. The raw material of the piece consists of a recording of an elderly tramp singing a sentimental religious song, which was intended to form part of a film about the homeless people of London. The recording was not used in the film and was passed on to Bryars, who discovered that the old man's singing was in tune with his piano; this prompted him to improvise an accompaniment to the tape, and discover that it had potential to make an interesting loop. His faith in the project was confirmed during the process of copying the loop onto a continuous reel of tape; while he left it playing, students in the adjacent room began to listen, and Bryars returned to find several of them weeping. Convinced of the emotional power of the tramp's singing, he added an orchestration which he felt would reflect the man's simple faith. The first version, recorded in 1971, proved to be unsettling to many sophisticated listeners. The naivety of the song and the noble, dignified accompaniment, combined with the quavering voice of the tramp, could be dismissed as embarrassingly sentimental if heard only once; when subjected to the countless repetitions, however, even the most cynical listener is challenged to surpress an emotional reaction (see Appendix 2, example iv). Bryars managed to surpass this boldness in a later version which included full orchestra, chorus, and string quartet. The recording of this was released in 1993, to coincide with the premiere at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, of a similar version, scaled-down for Bryars' own ensemble. Towards the end of both new versions, the tramp's singing was joined by the extravagantly husky voice of the American singer and songwriter Tom Waits. Bryars explained the new developments in the sleeve notes to the disc:

> For the new version I decided to make the first twenty-five minutes almost the same as this version, but when the fade-out happens, as the

> ensemble fades away, the old man's voice remains at full strenth. When the instruments have almost gone, a new ensemble is heard - six cellos and three double basses, and a much darker kind of orchestration emerges, with some changes to the harmony too...soon this ensemble too, fades away about two-thirds of the way through the piece, leaving the tramp to be joined by a full string orchestra which begins a new build-up of instrumental groups for the last third of the recording, Here we have three choirs, many different solo and ensemble combinations from the orchestra and, eventually, Tom Waits singing with the old man. This is the first time that someone sings *with* the tramp rather than *accompanies* him. After this, one of the choirs also sings with him and the 'separation' of the song and accompaniment is less clear. Finally, as the whole ensemble - the tramp, Tom, the choir, the orchestra - fades away we hear, briefly, an ensemble we haven't heard before - a group of high solo strings - playing an accompaniment, but now with no singer...[5]

For many listeners this seemed to represent a transformation of the tramp into a purer, more unworldly spirit, further challenging their credulity. However, Bryars's belief in the validity of the music's extreme emotionalism is unshakeable, saying that "for me there is great poignancy in his voice and, though I do not share the simple optimism of his faith, I am still touched by the memory of my first encounter with what Grainger would call the 'human-ness' of his voice, and through this piece I try to give it new life."[6] Since *The Squirrel and the Ricketty Racketty Bridge* (1971), written in response to his strong opposition to jazz improvisation, Bryars has rarely displayed a cynical or ostensibly ironic attitude to his source material, and this is what makes his music difficult and effectively subversive. A piece like *Jesus' Blood Never Failed me Yet* is discomforting because it serves as a reminder that however wise we may be to the emotional manipulation that is all around us, however numb to the tragedy on the daily news, our sophistication cannot always protect us from responding to the most obvious stimuli.

Many of Bryars's recent works, including *Cadman Requiem*[1989] are unsettling in this way; there are no contradictory symbols to indicate that the emotion is a mere mask, an anomaly which only partly shields a cynical or detached observer whose coolly intellectual character might be more consistent with prevailing musical values. And yet it remains difficult to take Bryars' work at face value as one might take that of his friend, the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, with whom Bryars is increasingly compared; one is never even tempted to consider whether Pärt is being *faux-naif*.This ambiguity, the ability of the music to work equally convincingly on different levels, is present to a large extent in all eclectic works by composers of the experimental tradition, and Andrew Hugill's conclusions on the music of Bryars could also be applied to Smith or White:

> Bryars was, and remains, an ironist. There is something artificial about his compositional approach which confirms Duchamp's dictum that 'Art, etymologically speaking, means to make'. However, in recent works, characterised by Bryars as 'meta-ironic', this artificiality has disappeared so far behind the surface of the music as to leave an impression of interest *and*, dare it be said, beauty (Hugill, 1989: 724-728).

## 3.4 HOMAGE

Bryars' own musical loyalties reveal an awareness of the shortcomings of irony and a fascination with emotional honesty; homage more than mere reference. He has condemned the hypocrisy of composers who listen to certain kinds of music and yet write in a completely opposing style, afraid to face up to what they really love. For experimental composers, there is a close link between the music composed and that which is listened to, and this is a major reason for Bryars's championing of the Czech composer Ladislav Kupkovic, often reviled for his seemingly retrogressive pieces. Kupkovic's career acts as a symbol for the history of associative experimental music. His interest in the avant-garde developed towards indeterminacy; later, he began to introduce isolated parts of existing pieces into his extended, environmental performances. From this he began writing satirical pastiche, and finally become a composer whose work is sometimes indistinguishable from that of classical composers.

Kupkovic conducted the premiere, and was the dedicatee of Stockhausen's *Mixtur*,and initially composed music in a modernist idiom. In 1968, however, he began to write pieces which were different: firstly the *Morceau de genre (nach E.Elgar)*, then later *Souvenir*, in the style of a traditional violin exercise by Sarasate or Paganini. With these pieces, Kupkovic attempted to reconcile his background as a violinist with his own musical language as a composer; he was aware of his genuine preference for the romantic violin repertoire and became determined to allow this to govern his new works. Bryars explains:

> Simon Holt loves listening to Richard Strauss; what Richard Strauss do you find in Simon Holt? I love Richard Strauss and yet you do find Richard Strauss in my stuff, so I'm a little bit more honest about where it comes from. Kupkovic felt that there was a gap between what people actually liked as composers and what they wrote; there was a historical obligation in what they wrote which didn't match their own emotional or musical needs.[7]

Kupkovic noticed that in the progress towards this sort of musical honesty, a composer was likely to go through three stages: firstly allowing a tonal quote into the context of their atonal piece; secondly writing entire pastiche, with a tongue-in-cheek attitude; and finally writing tonal music which they actually believe in. The reviews discussed in Chapter 1 reveal how seldom a distinction has been made between these three stages of maturity; in addition, Bryars draws attention to the fact that critics have often failed to distinguish between music such as Kupkovic's and that of conservative composers:

> The difference between those composers who do that and those composers who have always written tonal music is that they've come through a different route and their consciousness is different. I would say you could make the same analogy between composers coming from an experimental route to writing tonal music. They're not the same as

> Robert Simpson. They're writing music which is tonal but which doesn't behave in the same way, because its aesthetic premises are different.[8]

These aesthetic premises include not only the immediate historical background but also the conscious motivation behind experimental diatonicism; paying homage to tonal composers of the past who have either fallen from favour or have never been regarded as important is a major means by which the experimental tradition defines itself. Richard Strauss, one of the least marginal composers endorsed by the experimentalists, has been regarded as being limited by his failure to keep pace with modernist developments, to turn back just as he reached the precipice of atonality. His influence is nowhere more evident than in Bryars' vocal music, where the ability of Strauss to exploit the qualities of a particular type of voice and to accompany it orchestrally provided important inspiration, and other works such as *Dr Ox's Experiment (Epilogue)*(1988) and *The Old Tower of Lobenicht* (1987), conceived in the manner of Busoni as satellite works of larger operatic projects,[9] show a harmonic richness that strongly associates them with the earlier composer.

In 1981 Bryars recorded an album entitled *Hommages* on the Crepuscule label, which comprised the works *My First Homage* (1978),*The English Mail-Coach* (1980), *The Vespertine Park* (1980) and *Hi-tremolo* (1980). Each composition contained a Duchamp-like network of references to works of the past which were important to him, often linked by serendipitous associations and puns. *My First Homage* was the first composition by Bryars to make a conscious homage to an area of music which fascinated him. It was written at the end of the long phase during which he rejected his jazz and improvising roots, and it refers to the work of the Bill Evans trio (Evans, Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian), whose harmonic approach and rhythmic flexibility he particularly admired. In his composition, Bryars took Evans' idiosynchratic harmonisation of the jazz standard *My Foolish Heart* and augmented it beyond easy recognition. In the recorded version, for two pianos, two vibraphones, cymbal and tuba, a single harmony would be extended for the length of an entire phrase by means of a hypnotic ostinato in one piano part; the other part featured improvisatory phrases loosely reminiscent of the familiar melody of the standard. Consecutive phrases were based on the subsequent chord of Evans' harmonization, and were separated by breath-like pauses. The overall effect is static, but a modest sense of climax is achieved when a quotation of the melody of Gershwin's *I loves you Porgy* emerges from the improvisatory piano part (see Appendix 2, example v). Bryars described the composition in a radio interview with the jazz journalist Charles Fox:

> I did a piece for two pianos originally, and later made an ensemble piece which was a re-working of probably the recording that had meant the most to me, which was the last recording before Scott LaFaro was killed in 1961...in particular the piece *My Foolish Heart*, which for me is one of the great ballad performances, not just for Evans' own playing but also for the way in which LaFaro cl ses his notes...also the way in which Paul Motian plays, to me it's one of the peaks in jazz ballad playing. So I decided to make a piece, *My First Homage*, which happens to have those

> same initials as *My Foolish Heart*. I did a transcription of that to see just precisely what it contained, and then took various phrases from it... There's only one quotation in the whole piece, which is from Bill Evans, and that is from the piece *I loves you Porgy*, which in fact wasn't on the original issue but was on the reissue, so I thought I'd make a little historical point between the time I wrote the piece and the time when the record had been issued. And there are a lot of little references to aspects of Evans' style, voicings and so on, and in a way I did get over this rather silly period when I had hated jazz so intensely.[10]

Although this particular piece obviously provided Bryars with a way of laying the past to rest, of making a fresh start, he stresses that this is not always the case with associative composition:

> At the time when I wasn't playing jazz and I'd repudiated jazz, disliked it, I found myself in a situation where I actually started to teach in a context where jazz was going to be around again, and also playing in a town where jazz had been important. It was written for the first gig I'd done in New York. So that particular example, that was true, but others not so. It's often out of a genuine sense of homage to something which actually I have cared for and have admired, and felt that I'd like to in some way acknowledge that and take it further than its source so it's a homage in the sense that something exists and I'd like to acknowledge that.[11]

Bryars admits that there are certain conditions in order for the homage to be satisfying to the audience as much as to the composer:

> Well then you go into the uneasy relationship between the homage and its source. Whether, for example, it's possible to enjoy something as a homage and actually dislike the thing on which it's based. Would it be possible for someone to, say, like the Godowsky/Schubert transcriptions and hate Schubert? It may be possible. I can imagine it, but it seems unlikely. And if you're taking what seems to you be essential elements from a source and you're the using them I think it would be quite hard for people to acknowledge and enjoy what you do and to dislike intensely the source. They may not particularly care for it, or be relatively indifferent, but have something brought to their attention that they hadn't noticed before...they could then go back and look at it with new ears. And that's one of the ways in which people say you reinterpret the past from what you hear in the present...if you listen to Perotin having played Steve Reich, it sounds fine; Perotin sounds fine without Reich as well for that matter, but at the same time one enhances the other. And Reich has actually said since that one of the things he would like to be programmed with is Perotin. That was since we did *Music for 18 musicians* and *Sederunt Principes* in the same concert here.[12]

In addition to their obvious emotional significance, many of Bryars' homages relate to a philosophical, literary or pataphysical concept. *The Sinking of the Titanic*(1969-) is perhaps the best illustration of the conceptual inclination of Bryars' imagination, being permanently open to alteration by the composer as new details surrounding the disaster come to light. Articles by Hugill (1989), Potter (1981) and Nyman (1972) discuss this in detail, and in addition show how by studying the compositional process of this work, some grasp of the meaning of pataphysics[13] can be achieved. However, present purposes can be served by giving an example of how the work has been subject to revision. The

following programme note, written by Bryars to accompany a performance in the 1990 Huddersfield Festival, gives a general introduction:

> The piece evolved from a detailed investigation into the musical and 'pataphysical implications of the loss of the Titanic in April 1912. The starting point for the piece was the report by Harol Bride, the junior wireless officer, of the behaviour of the ship's orchestra, and from there the various researches, interviews, reconstructions have provided a body of material out of which performance may be constructed. In this sense it is a 'conceptual' piece...versions have been recorded on Obscure Records (Edition EG) in 1975 and Crepuscule in 1990. Both of these versions use various conjectures about the hymn tune that the band were reported to have played during the last five minutes of the sinking - in extraordinary physical circumstances. There is no account of the band having stopped playing. None of the materials in the piece is gratuitous, each element has a precise connotation and reference. The piece is an open one in which new information can generate new performance possibilities, or nullify former ones.[14]

The 1990 performance, which took place in a nautical-style nightclub in Huddersfield, contained several new features, most notably an expressive bass clarinet solo which dramatically exploited the entire range of the instrument and lasted for about seven of the sixty-five minute duration of the piece. The solo was justified conceptually by the fact that a bagpipe player had been playing on the Titanic before the ship hit the iceberg. Rather than attempting to quote an actual tune which the player might have performed, Bryars decided to write a simple, modal solo in the ancient pibroch form, using the progressively elaborated ornamentation typical of the genre. By staying within the parameters of his musical source, Bryars offers the alert listener a hint of a poignant detail from the work's underlying concept, and to one who is less familiar with the specific conventions of the pibroch, a sense of lament can still be grasped. A similar effect is achieved in the coda of his saxophone concerto commissioned by the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, *The Green Ray*, where laments are heard on saxophone, cor anglais, French horn and solo violin (see Appendix 2, example vi). The title refers to a particular moment as the sun is setting when a green ray of light appears fleetingly. Bryars witnessed this himself in California, but equally importantly, it is witnessed by a character in the Jules Verne romantic novel *The Green Ray*, set in western Scotland, where a number of piping traditions originated.

The conceptual backgrounds of many other musically-associative works by Bryars are discussed in detail elsewhere; more relevant to the current thesis are the ethical issues surrounding this type of work. Although pieces such as *My First Homage* or *Sub Rosa* (1986) (a paraphrase of the Bill Frisell track *Throughout*[15]) offer a frank, unapologetic homage and are to be admired for their honesty, it must be acknowledged that references in Bryars' music are often completely concealed by his methods of augmentation, resulting in a relationship with the listener which is quite distinct from that of other eclectic experimental composers. Bryars explains how references become buried in his work, also admitting to the practical function they fulfil:

> I've always used association even in early pieces like *[The Sinking of] the Titanic*...in a way, my initial motivation is a kind of technique just to get started writing something. Everyone has a problem of "what the hell do you do?" when you've got a deadline and you've got a blank sheet of manuscript paper. I'll look at some other music or have some other reference in mind in order to focus my thinking, so it has a very practical purpose. And in a way, what happens more and more is that those initial sources get pushed further and further away the more I get into composing the piece; they become less obviously stated. In the earlier stages they're clearly there in the context of being like homages to other composers, and a lot of those associations are blatantly up-front references - things like *My First Homage* and *Hi Tremolo* which has all that Grainger stuff in it. Those kind of things are very definitely not just association but reference, and clear reference. Later, things become more like an allusion to something else, or maybe even a kind of footnote to something, and they're less obviously essential in terms of understanding the piece.[16]

It must be acknowledged that the increasing concealment of references in Bryars' later music reflects a declining interest in musical homage. Several of his recent works have been based upon intricate literary concepts, but have expressed this by means of a verbal text rather than through the use of musical quotation or allusion. Bryars explains this as being a largely unconscious side-effect of his increasing involvement with singers since the success of his opera Medea *(1986)*, with the result that the greater part of his musically-associative work took place in the years preceding that. Bryars retains the belief that a concept is basically a personal creative aid, and so does not attach particular importance to its actual accessibility to the audience. Significantly, he had explored the idea of privacy as a concept in its own right in the early text piece *Private Music* (1969), whose score gives no precise indications of content but simply a set of instructions advising the performers how to interact. In his article *Just the Tip of the Iceberg: Some Aspects of Gavin Bryars' Music*, (1981: 5-6) Keith Potter commented:

> The sound sources should be such that probably only the player can hear them. What the audience sees or hears will probably be the by-products of the performer's attempts to follow the score's instructions...[Bryars'] whole input in the composition of *Private Music* has been on the conceptual level: the idea *is*, in an important sense, the piece; few hints are given in the score as to how it may be realised...a performance of Private Music will focus attention on the fact that the piece is about the fact that 'the piece is not for hearing'.

Potter's article implies that for Bryars, music is actually of less interest than conceptual content in a work, and goes on to state that "concept and percept have not matched up on anything like a one-to-one basis for the listener, who must do an awful lot of homework unless he simply wants to wallow in Bryars' sentimentalities" (1981: 14). Although it is the case that Bryars' ideas are likely to be channelled into the construction of artistic installations or radiophonic work as well as into music, this notion is misleading in its suggestion of a certain disregard of the listener. Bryars was recently asked to respond to the question of which was of greater importance, the concept or the music:

> In the end, undoubtedly the music. Because there are millions of people who have what they think are good ideas, but when they're articulated, they don't communicate anything of interest. There are many art works which might seem interesting in terms of the explanation, but as an experience they're not. And there are many art works which can be justified and reasoned into existence, but as an artistic experience they don't really grab your attention. So it has to be the music itself. But ideally, it's a situation where there's a healthy balance between music and concept, so the music isn't simply a surface and nothing else, so that it has to be an authentic musical experience which is informed by an interesting concept, or gives a sense that there's an intelligent mind operating behind this music.[17]

This does not mean to say that he refuses to face the consequences of the fact that many musical references which have conceptual significance for him are unlikely to be recognised by the listener, or alternatively, may be wrongly identified. For example, *Cadman Requiem* (1989) contains in its third section a series of interlinked two-bar phrases which do not relate thematically to the surrounding of the music and which closely resemble a phrase from the *Kyrie* of Fauré's *Requiem.* As if to challenge the hierarchy of great liturgical composers, Bryars actually selected the passage from a more obscure work by the organist and composer Louis Vierne: *Idylle melancholique,* from *Pieces in Free Style,* and decided to include it because of its sad character and harmonic compatibility with his own composition. In addition, he noted the similarity of the name Vierne to the surname of Jules Verne, whose work has formed the basis of several of his compositions including *Effarene* (1984), *Dr Ox's Experiment* (Epilogue) (1988), *The Black River* (1991) and *The Green Ray* (1990). Whilst in this instance the erroneous association unwittingly serves to reinforce the conceptual identity of the piece (and there is a genuine connection with Fauré's *Requiem* in the inclusion of the *In Paradisum,* a movement not normally present in settings of the Requiem mass), such cases are more likely to give rise to the perception of a completely independent mental image. For instance, *Out of Zaleski's Gazebo* contains direct references to Grainger in its use of sudden, unpredictable cadence figures cut and pasted from *Mock Morris;* other homages include Lord Berners' *Valses Bourgeoises* and Karg-Elert's organ interludes (see Appendix 2, example vii). A non-specialist is unlikely to identify the last two, but the obsessive repetitiveness, flamboyant use of two pianos and cascades of chromatic thirds over prolonged whole-tone harmonies easily remind the listener of a more popular, yet completely unconnected piece, Arthur Benjamin's *Jamaican Rumba.* After the urgent tempo of the main body of the piece, the languid, expressive ending, with its bell-like figurations and unambiguous major harmonies, even has the potential to evoke the Queen single *Bohemian Rhapsody.* Bryars does not regard this as a problem:

> That seems to me to be one of the functions. If you make the association not so overt, people are capable of reinterpreting and hearing it in a different way. In a sense what you're doing is setting up a trigger which can actually lead somewhere else, and that is often through perhaps something which all those things have in common...it could be rhythmic, it could be a melodic phrase, the way in which certain things are

> combined. And that's one of the great advantages. It's like what Duchamp says: it's the viewer who actually completes the art piece. The piece doesn't exist until the viewer completes the triangulation. So the artist can do what he likes with the piece but the art work is completed in a creative act by the viewer. So that seems to me to be absolutely right; ideally a viewer should always bring something in addition to what I put, otherwise I could simply tell them the story and they don't have to sit and listen to anything, so that it would seem to me to be fundamentally important. In fact, [to perceive] these things...which I hadn't put in the piece, seems to me to be perfectly acceptable.[18]

Evidently, one could regard Bryars' use of quotation and reference in the same way as one would approach a detective novel; subtle clues are available to the alert reader, but pleasure is not necessarily sacrificed if one misses the connections. If characters and events come to life sufficiently to allow the reader to imagine details about them quite independently of the novelists' input, pleasure is actually increased. The act of weaving ideas into the fabric of the work is as much of a constant challenge to the composer's imagination as it would be to a novelist; it is no coincidence that the ensemble piece *Out of Zaleski's Gazebo, a* more refined reworking of the earlier piece *Poggioli in Zaleski's Gazebo*, was actually inspired by the working methods of fictional detectives, reflecting one of Bryars' strongest enthusiasms.

The points discussed above reveal that for Bryars, association is a device with which to imbue a composition with the same level of logic as can be possessed by a verbal concept, rather than being used as a guaranteed means of communicating that concept. Andrew Hugill, who has worked closely with Bryars as a teaching and performing colleague and assistant in the preparation of several pieces including *Medea*, draws attention to the fact that many of Bryars' early works, such as *Ponukelian Melody* (1975) and *The Sinking of the Titanic* itself are saturated with conceptual content so that every note is justified in a logical way which leads to "aesthetic rightness"(Hugill, 1989: 724)[19]. Viewed from this angle, Bryars' approach invites comparison with the avant-garde reliance upon similarly pervasive, often imperceptible matrices of a numerical nature, but he dismisses the idea of a parallel:

> I've used random number-generators in computers before, but only in the old days when I was hanging around with Cage and those guys. All that stuff doesn't disinterest me, but not in that "hands off" way. I think the dissimilarity is that one, in a sense perhaps, has a more poetic connotation. You're creating a kind of climate of thinking, rather than a precise mode within which the piece has to be understood. One can get into that whole kind of 'Darmstadt' territory where people would go along to performances and have the composition matrix for the piece and say 'Look! That's a wrong note. Tell the composer he's written a wrong note, because the matrix tells him he should do this.' If you get into that territory it seems to me you're lost...A compositional formula will give you notes and a procedure, it will tell you how to proceed bar by bar; a concept won't tell you that.[20]

Andrew Hugill's own compositions, unlike Bryars', have continued to feature conceptual structures whilst maintaining a strong interest in obvious musical reference,

giving an overall impression of surrealism and irony contained within a lyrical surface. Plays on words are of great importance to his work, exemplified in the composition for George W. Welch, *A Slight List* (1985) (see Appendix 2, example viii). The inspiration for the piece was found in one of Raymond Roussel's instructions to an artist hired to illustrate the novel *Nouvelles Impressions d'Afrique*: "A man laboriously making out a list of names. (If the names are legible they should be cryptographic)."[21] The piece contains several musical lists derived from works by composers of importance to the experimental view of music history, in particular the 113 scales mentioned by Busoni in *Sketch for a New Aesthetic of Music*. These subtly-changing scales are heard in the piano part where they descend in octaves against a repetitive backdrop of chugging strings, and are imitated by the tuba. The central section of the piece is marked by a falling away of the strings' insistent cross-rhythms, and continues with the piano scales, now in more expressive fourths. The scales alternate with sustained, melancholy chordal passages whose rich harmony derives from the enharmonic modulations featured in Max Reger's *Supplement to the theory of Modulation*. The final cadence of the piece is taken from Liszt's Fantasia for organ *Ad nos salutarem*, which is quoted in Casella's *History of Music through the Perfect Cadence*. To further associate the musical material with its conceptual background, Hugill includes the name 'Raymond Roussel' in ciphered form, along with 'Reger', whose palindromic name coincidentally shares the double R configuration. He also allowed the character of the piece to be conditioned by some possible alternative interpretations of the title, which included a small border or piece of material; a thin moulding; a certain desire; a certain amount of inattentive listening; a certain gelding (to 'put on the list' is to castrate, in racing slang); a little duel and a catalogue of insults.

Hugill has based several works, including *Catalogue de Grenouilles*, (1988), *Brisset Rhymes* (1993), and a choral piece still in progress, on the writings of Jean-Pierre Brisset, the philologue and philosopher greatly admired by the surrealists. *Catalogue de Grenouilles* (see Appendix 2, example ix) is based on Brisset's reinterpretation of the Creation, which rests upon the idea that mankind is descended from frogs. In a programme note to the work's premiere, given by George W. Welch, Hugill wrote:

> Brisset transcends the commonplace observation that tadpoles resemble spermatozoa by interpreting the frog's interrogative "Quoi?" as the first and most fundamental question. Through an incredible network of puns he develops this idea to incorporate the whole of evolution and God himself. My piece presents an arbitrary environment in which actual frogs call and speak. I have made no attempt to doctor the calls, or make them into 'electro-acoustic music'. Inevitably, they are rather lo-fi. The musical content of the work is not fixed, the performers choosing from a large range of options; it is, however, derivative to a certain extent. The percussionists play a systemic pattern drawn from Beckett's *Watt* (!) in which the hero falls into a ditch and hears three frogs calling regularly this 120 beat pattern. There is a brief reference to John White's *WUT (! again)* and the piano part is solidly based on the motif from *Uranus* by Holst, Brisset makes much of the pun "ure anus" and the coincidental fact

> that frogs urinate through their anus and Uranus was the father of the gods.[22]

Hugill's reference to the fact that he has not attempted to "doctor" the frog calls in *Catalogue de Grenouilles* to make them more technically impressive represents an important aspect of experimental eclecticism. Homage entails the acceptance of the source in its entirety, no matter how unfashionable its characteristics may be; correspondingly, many associative experimental compositions allude closely to the harmonic language of the source as well as to its more abstract qualities such as repetitiveness (both Dave Smith and Brian Dennis have linked John White's machine pieces with Alkan and Schumann). The chromatically enriched, romantic harmony of much experimental music is a direct result of the influence of Alkan; several of John White's piano sonatas illustrate this, including *No. 10* (1960), *No.53* (1972), *No.76 "The Rustic"* (1973), and *No. 90* (1973), a diabolical moto perpetuo in F minor. Christopher Hobbs has also paid homage to Alkan in the *Sonatina 1* of 1973, of which he wrote:

> ...The eight sections of the piece present a reasonable cross-section of my preoccupations of the time, Busoni and Alkan presiding over whatever other guests my musical subconscious may have invited to the feast. At this time, John White and I were in the habit of writing pieces at each other on a weekly basis and my theft of a chord progression from him in the last section is an open acknowledgement of the beneficent influence he has had, and continues to have, on my music.[23]

In sharing his interest in Alkan with Dave Smith, Hobbs became the dedicatee of one of the most significant works of homage to emerge from the experimental tradition in recent years, *Al Contrario* (subtitled *G sharp minor study*). Smith describes his composition, after Busoni, as a 'fantasia canonica'. It originally formed the second movement of his *Third Piano Concert*, where its length (over half an hour) brought it in line with epic structures such as the first movement of Alkan's Concerto (Op.39). *Al Contrario* pays homage to two works of Alkan, the miniature in G sharp minor *Morituri Te Salutant*, from the 2nd suite of *Esquisses* (Op.63), and the chorale theme from the final movement of the *Grande Sonate* (Op.33); however, a substantial portion of the piece alludes to Hobbs' *Piano Piece 10* of 1973. Hobbs and Smith shared a fascination not only with Alkan but with the key of G sharp minor generally; the various minor key signatures encountered in *Piano Piece 10* lent it a dark, often exotic harmonic colour, and its sense of doom (the performing instruction is 'tenebrous') also suggested to Smith a closeness with Alkan's G sharp minor mood. Unusual combinations of source material are often to be found in Smith's work:

> If you take composers like Duke Ellington and Busoni, they have a lot of things in common, although on the face of it you'd think that somebody who actively went against the idea of ideas for popular appeal in his music, i.e.. Busoni, would have absolutely nothing in common with Duke Ellington, who obviously did. But if you look at the music you find that both are imbued with extremely strange colouring, and both tend to not follow the path you would quite expect, in other words, you always come up with something unexpected. The most clear example of

> that is the way they end pieces - like modulating on the last bar and ending on a question mark, which very few others do. So if I, as a musician, perceive that kind of contradiction, I might be tempted to write a piece that incorporates those kind of elements, and referring to those two kinds of style, because at the same time - for ironic purposes or whatever - one can go off at one's own tangent as well and suggest other connections. Now, in so far as things like that are concerned, it would tend to indicate that the choice of genres is not immediately the most important thing. So much is what can be done with them, in the light of other knowledge. That's one reason I would say that the kind of music I write could only be written with today's view of music and music history.[24]

A great deal of the repertoire Smith composed for the Garden Furniture Music Ensemble involved the unusual voicings and unexpected endings characteristic of the common ground between the two composers mentioned above. In the case of *Al Contrario,* there is a certain irony in Smith's juxtaposition of minimalistic figurations which feature Bryars-like, slowly shifting suspended harmonies with tortuously chromatic canonic passages, but all have a meditative, weighty feel and a power to evoke orchestral sonorities which allow them to coexist without clashing obviously, and Smith's own performance of the work, which he premiered in February 1992, emphasises the continuity of the piece rather than the cut-off points in its block-like structure (see Appendix 2, example x). Five distinct areas of material are presented in the first half of the piece; these then reappear in modified form, only occasionally being allowed to integrate, for example at bar 162, when the four upper voices present the chorale theme in canon over a bass line of the chromatic *Morituri Te Salutant* melody. Busoni's *Fantasia Contrappuntistica* is integrated into the musical fabric in the sense that it inspired the 5-part canonic treatment of the Alkan themes, but it does not actually appear as a reference. There are several other personal touches woven surreptitiously into the fabric of the piece which connect it to its dedicatee, and with other composers admired by the experimentalists: the letters DSCH (Dave Smith Christopher Hobbs/D, E flat, C, B) appear at the outset, over a bass line taken from the opening of *Piano Piece 10.* Although Shostakovich is commonly associated with the DSCH motif, Smith's inspiration came from the *Petite Symphonie Concertante* and the *Trombone Ballade* of Frank Martin. Alkan's *Les Diablotins* is referred to in a series of rising chromatic chords, marked "without brilliance", at bar 150; the fugue from his *Funeral March for a Dead Parrot* is referred to, inverted, in a tender passage at bars 156 - 160. The strangely ethereal, atonal sections close to the beginning and ending of the piece involve rhythmic canons which evoke Smith's systemic work in the 1970's. An appearance is also made by Sorabji, relevant to the experimental tradition for his Satie-like avoidance of thematic development, in that the final bars of the piece represent a skeletal version of the end of the *Opus clavicembalisticum,* the longest non-repetitious published piano piece.

There is no attempt to develop any of this source material in terms of complexity; in the chorale theme from the *Grande Sonate* for instance, Smith adheres to the original

harmonies, only substituting the final bar, which modulates suddenly and restlessly towards an unexpected key, for a more static one which resolves less unexpectedly but still sounds authentic (all sections of the work which feature Alkan's material respect his harmonic vocabulary; double sharps are used extensively, wherever the key signature demands it; clashing harmony often occurs due to the rigorously uncompromising part-writing). Despite the static, non-developmental nature of Smith's music, with its extended passages of free-floating harmony acting to neutralise the tension and expectancy of Alkan's themes, the *Grande Sonate* chorale manages to achieve a climactic role, appearing in its full homophonic power only towards the end of what is a mainly contrapuntal work. In maintaining the original characteristics of his thematic material, re-contextualised in a dream-like way (but never parodied) by a synthetically cut-and-pasted structure, Smith respects his own subjective experience of what is for him significant repertoire. This invites parallels with the standard of 'emotional honesty' set by Bryars, and also with the approach of John White.

For White, associative compositions are like diaries, encapsulating private emotional states which can be referred to at a later stage:

> You'll find a kind of 'telegraphese', 'telegramese', that will communicate to you when you look back on the diary if you should wish so to do, and I think that happens in my music quite a lot; there is quite an exaggerated clarity of language, but it refers back to a state of spirit or a predilection or something, without stating the whole thing. So in the same way that I won't quote a whole Bruckner symphony in a piano sonata, on the other hand a couple of fourths or fifths will inform one that there's a sort of Brucknerian pounding going on in the background. Yes, a reference; very important, all of that. When people say "do you realise you've ripped off a bit of Petrushka", or something, I say most certainly I have; delighted to acknowledge parentage. In the same way that I'm not at all embarrassed about my parents, I'm proud of what they've done, who they were and so on, I'm proud of being acquainted with the music I'm acquainted with...I predict that very shortly there are going to be all sorts of pieces by Granville Bantock for instance that are going to become of interest that have been deeply unpopular...I'm just mentioning Bantock because by popular consent very little of his has been played for a very long time although he was a very prolific and very considerable composer, and I don't think he was somebody who composed in error, somebody who ought to be ditched off the edge of the earth, because we don't have the correct means of assessing him at this moment in time...[25]

Unlike Smith in *Al Contrario*, White rarely offers positive identification of his references in the score. His use of quotation is less literal than Bryars', but there is the same aspect of reminiscence:

> Gavin ...has a very studied way of coping with his chain of references. If he, like in *Out of Zaleski's Gazebo*, refers to the world of Grainger and Karg-Elert, they're actual quotes, actual chords that he got off a score; whereas my attitude to reference is much more of somebody who's familiar and will possibly misquote, but will go for the spirit of the original.[26]

White's piano sonatas, of which over 120 have been written since 1956, represent a "free-ranging commentary on musical encounters in an inner landscape"[27], and richly illustrate the composer's approach to homage. An abridged list of these musical encounters, and their salient features, appears in Dave Smith's article on White's sonatas (1980: 4):

ALKAN: The exposition of mysterious order

SCHUMANN: The wealth of inner life half concealed behind the engaging and mobile nature of the musical patterns (Kreisleriana!)

BUSONI: The masterful containing of a wide range of musical vocabulary, structure and resonance

SATIE: The arcane charm of apparently simple musical statements

REGER: The sympathetic ability to be simultaneously serious and lost

SCRIABIN: The volatile and winged nature of the musical thought and its manifestation

MEDTNER: The tactile fluency of piano layout and the intellectual fluency of thematic and structural organisation

BRUCKNER: The dignity and magnificence of diatonic chord-progressions and unswerving metre.

*Sonata No. 15*, from 1962, is one of the earliest to manifest White's fully-fledged stylistic pluralism; it alludes to several composers who since then have remained consistently important to the experimental composers. White wrote:

> In the first movement, shades of Brahms and Frank Martin slug it out with Weber for supremacy in a tersely jokey sonata allegro. The 2nd movement is a pastorale about Janacek's death (with Szymanowski as concealed observer). The 3rd is in the 'cosmic' mode, containing fleeting allusions to Reger and Busoni among its reverberating 5ths and octaves.[28]

At the time of composition, Janacek's music was one of White's strongest interests, and the Sonata reveals his influence in both its detail and its overall character: for example, the turns which first appear in bar 10 recall the trombone writing of the Sinfonietta, while the impression of clumsy eccentricity represents a more general homage. The pastorale of the second movement is an ironic reference to Janacek's demise of a heart attack due to a sexual encounter in a field; its insistently repeating 6/8 rhythms lend a feeling of over-exertion. Harmonically, the work is indebted to Reger, whose writing was felt by White to be similar to that of Brahms but less worked-over or careful; in addition to the presence of colourful enharmonic changes there is also a sympathy for Reger's unusual juxtapositions, and exaggeratedly elaborate bel-canto writing at bars 17-22 also lend humour to the Sonata, recalling the clarinet writing of Weber.

White's reference to Brahms, represented by the vigorous classicism of the first movement and its chorale-like textures, is particularly interesting; very few experimental

composers have shown any interest in Brahms's work, due to its tendency to extend or develop musical ideas objectively rather than, as White explained in a personal communication (1994), to simply "patrol" the area it inhabits to "make sure everything's all right", in the manner of the composers listed above. However, White regularly refers to music he dislikes, as if grudgingly acknowledging its appeal and its inevitable interference in his busy musical life, and this is important to his sense of humour. One of the aspects of Brahms's music which particularly irritates him is the "earnest rumbling sound" which plays some part in informing the less attentive listener that material is being developed. In *Sonata No.15*, White refers ironically to this practice for the first time since *Sonata No.1* of 1956; however, his development section is very much a dummy, with no organic unity whatsoever. It lurches from key to key in a random fashion and makes extensive use of repetition, techniques which White enjoys in the music of Satie, whose enormous influence upon English experimental music is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Other examples of his ironic reference to works he dislikes include the brief *Symphony No.3* of 1981, which incorporates a quote from Rodrigo's *Concerto de Aranjuez*; the scorned academic world is also implied by slithering chromatics combined with organum and predictable, equal phrase lengths which again reveal a debt to Satie (see Appendix 2, example xi). White admits that certain allusions are inspired by accident; for example, the instrumentation of the symphony, with its two clarinets playing alongside cello, double bass, percussion and piano, gave rise to references to Mahler. The final effect, punctuated throughout by a tolling tubular bell, is intentionally surrealistic (White is an admirer of surrealism, in particular the etchings of Max Ernst), and the clear, recognisable harmony is a conscious attempt to articulate strange ideas with maximum clarity.

White reinforces this clarity of idea for the performer's benefit, not by specific identification as is the case in Smith's *Al Contrario*, but by instructions which constantly jog the player's memory, indicating the kind of music with which the piece is associating itself. The bleak, fifths-dominated final movement to *Sonata No.15* contains the comment "ker-crash" to accompany a heavy chord, preceded in the style of Schumann by an acciacatura two octaves below the bass note proper; on the final page, instructions such as "suddenly eloquent", "sort of rocking gently", "very steady and reflective" and "important quiet Bach cadence" urge the player to evoke the spirit of the late-19th century piano virtuoso, Busoni in particular.

## 3.5 SUBVERSION

White's combination of homage and humour typifies how experimental composers have maintained a subversive stance, in response to the perceived problems inherent in the musical world:

> I do feel that some changes are necessary, perhaps in our listening habits; it's been my good fortune to mingle with some people with a very inquiring musical mind, whose listening habits don't need any kind of changing at all; people like Dave Smith and Chris Hobbs, Andrew Hugill, Ian Gardiner, all of these are people who listen to a broad spectrum of music with an open mind. I find that a lot of people don't. There are people who bring a certain kind of seriosity - that's a deliberately chosen word - to the work that goes on in a concert hall, and I feel that seriosity has to be undermined somehow or other. Not that I want people to be giggling loudly to the slow movements of Mahler symphonies...but I think that the emotional response to music ideally should be the same as an emotional response to any sort of communication. By now things have loosened up a lot, but it's very typical that in Berlin during the 20's, things like the Busoni *Piano Concerto* should be regarded as a real pain because it had got lots of populist Italian music in it; a piano concerto was supposed to have serious, noble stuff in it.[29]

White's form of protest is discreet, never up-front or angry; experimental composers are aware of the establishment's power to patronise, to subvert any oppositional force by granting it a certain measure of approval, or fashionable status. Works such as the piano sonatas contain no obvious signs of disrespect, no musical 'bad language', but neither do they contain any obvious concessions to popular standards of compositional 'excellence': linguistic novelty and complexity, textural density, extreme difficulty of performance or overt seriousness of intent. However, White takes humour extremely seriously, recognising its subversive power in a field where very little else can shock or unsettle:

> (There is) a disruptive element that I'm quite enthusiastic about; there's still a kind of 14-year old mentality that I have that would like to disturb, but I'd like to disturb as discretely as possible. I'd like to lead people down the garden path as far as possible before springing the unacceptable truth on them , that something either isn't being taken seriously or that my objectives are not what they'd thought. This touches on the subject of humour, I suppose, which I do take very seriously because it's like the laws of perspective in figurative painting, that it is very different seeing the figure of an imposing person in close up, and seeing them at 200 yards distance surrounded by much larger objects. And that kind of perspective I suppose, that perception of perspective, sums up my attitude to humour in a way, that there's a kind of context that makes the most ordinary things seem strange.[30]

Several of the piano sonatas illustrate White's ability to reframe and juxtapose references for maximum humorous impact. No 109, mentioned earlier with regard to the several versions in which it exists, begins with a strong modal theme in additive rhythm, reminiscent of Messiaen's *Danse de la fureur pour les sept trompettes* from the *Quartet for the End of Time.* The performer receives a hint that Messiaen, who was an important formative influence on the eclecticism of White, is not to be taken too seriously, in the instruction 'Beefy non legato'. Within two bars the penetrating octaves have melted into 6ths and have resolved onto E major; this premature and unjustified resolution is then celebrated by a series of rising octaves on the new-found tonic, a device which occurs

throughout the piece in several surprising keys. The mechanical repetitiveness of these octaves suggests a link with some of the textures in White's pieces for electronic keyboard, in which the composer makes highly creative use of the clichés of 'muzak'. Never attempting to either associate himself with, or to plead for the validity of the more serious, artistically-ambitious manifestations of popular music, White alternates block-like phrases of Messiaen-like material (including jarring, leaping chords similar to bird-calls, but which actually were inspired by the craggy harmonies of Janacek) with humorous passages of repeated, non-resolving dominant 7th chords reminiscent of early 1960's soul jazz. These contrasting sources, not integrated or continuous but following on from each other with a seamless sense of urgency, challenge the listener to acknowledge their unlikely relationship: to White, Messiaen's music is ironically comparable to that of Geraldo and his orchestra, and their total dissociation of artistic intent cannot conceal their shared bouncy rhythmic quality, rich chordal colour and strident, joyful character.

White's bald use of repetition is one of the most characteristic features of his music, and although its mechanical, child-like quality evokes the contemporary world of 'Nintendo', it owes a significant debt to the romantics. Schumann and Bruckner in particular are role models in their use of repetition to communicate excitement, but the reiteration of short, one or two-bar cells of music in *Sonata No.109* pay homage specifically to Jehan Alain's *Liturgies*, which reveal an obsessive and seemingly unjustified desire to recall material. White's interest in Alain was stimulated by the French composer's comparison of his use of repetition in music to the feverish reiteration of a prayer by a Christian, who utters the same words so many times that their meaning disappears, while the underlying faith actually mounts. An involvement with postmodern psychology is revealed by White's interest in signs stripped of their original meaning in this respect; he is conscious of how the expressive power of Messiaen's music is sabotaged by his almost cubist treatment of it. This serves as a reminder that even composers who have rejected mainstream modernist-to-postmodernist artistic developments are still nevertheless obliged to interact with their surrounding social actuality; environmental elements of postmodernism (such as psychology and the equal accessibility of sources from the present and the past) are bound to be reflected to a certain extent.

Bryars admits that the challenging nature of such works of homage is not always obvious. His own success in recent years has often been interpreted as the relinquishing of a subversive stance:

> In Japan, someone said to me, "You're now an Establishment composer." I said there's a sense in which that's true, in that I'm promoted by the British Council, but there's a difference between being an established composer and an Establishment one. And he said, "No there isn't. If you're established, then the Establishment has taken you over." I said well in that case, the Establishment don't know what they've got: they think they've got something they haven't. So if you write something for

> soprano and orchestra and string quartets they think this is safe territory; but ask the players, they'll say "these things behave in ways which other stuff we play doesn't.[31]

The advocacy of deeply unfashionable turn-of-the-century composers represents one of its most significant ways in which experimental music threatens the musical status quo of Britain today, which rests on the acceptance of the supremacy of modernist composers. However, equally threatening is the way in which this romantic musical world is evoked; references or quotations are never marked out by means of a contrast with more obviously 'original', up-to-date music, nor are they subsumed by techniques of hyper-integration. Despite the personal nature of their references, the experimentalists use homage to defy modernist standards of individualism, or what Auric called 'sublimity': the artistic vanity and the overpowering presence of the composer in every chord, note, and measure of a musical work (Perloff, 1991: 17). A composer such as Peter Anthony Monk, mentioned in Chapter 1, may share the experimentalists' enthusiasm for Grainger and Grieg, and indeed use these as the basis of a composition; however, as the flamboyantly theatrical piano solo *Percy - a cameo of idiosyncrasies of the celebrated composer and pianist, Percy Grainger* (1983) shows, the sources are all intricately 'modernised' by fragmentation, reharmonisation or accompaniment by a *sprechstimme* vocal part. Homage in the experimental tradition is far more difficult to be critically assessed using current criteria, and therefore less likely to be embraced by the establishment. As Gablik wrote, difficult art disrupts habits of thought: "By being subversive of perception and understanding, art can break through stereotyped social reality and produce a counter-consciousness that is a negation of the conformist mind"(1984: 37).

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[1]Christopher Hobbs interviewed by Sarah Walker, Hackney, 17th October 1990

[2]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ian Gardiner, programme notes for George W. Welch concert, Lauderdale House, London, 28th March 1988

[5]Gavin Bryars, sleeve notes for *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet,* POINT 438823-2 (CD)

[6]Ibid.

[7]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[8]Ibid.

[9] *Dr Ox's Experiment* is based on a novella by Jules Verne; The *Old Tower of Lobenicht* derives from a scene in Thomas de Quincy's *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant.*

[10]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Charles Fox, broadcast on BBC Radio 3, 30th January 1988

[11]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[12]Ibid.

[13]Members of the *College de Pataphysique* are forbidden to define the term pataphysics to outsiders. However, the college itself is described by Andrew Hugill's unpublished dissertation 'Music of Association - Mr Gavin Bryars and 'Irma': An Opera Op.XII by Mr Thos. Phillips' as "a nebulous, hierarchical organisation (the principal of which is a fictional character: Dr. Faustroll) of which Duchamp was a member, [which] is devoted to the "science of imaginary solutions". Thus it too depends on the work of individuals, arriving at not a fixed result, or a set of solutions, but a group of ideas which are given unity simply by their association with the College itself."(p.13) Another description is quoted by Keith Potter: "'pataphysics is to metaphysics as metaphysics is to physics". The apostrophe is used consistently by Potter (1981: 12); however, this is only necessary to describe a conscious 'pataphysician; Bryars' habits of conceptual thought are so deeply ingrained as to be almost unconscious. I am grateful to Andrew Hugill for this information.

[14]Gavin Bryars, programme note for *The Sinking of the Titanic* at Flicks Nightclub, Northumberland Street, Huddersfield, on 28th November 1990.

[15]Track 2 of Bill Frisell, *In Line*, ECM 1241. Also available on Bill Frisell, *Works*, ECM 837 273-2. This track was used by Bryars on his personal stereo as an aid to overcome the fear of flying.

[16]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]More information on the conceptual background of *Ponukelian Melody* is available in Hugill's dissertation 'The Music of Gavin Bryars', submitted to Goldsmith's College in 1988 for the degree of MPhil, subsequently withdrawn.

[20]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[21]Quoted in Andrew Hugill, programme note to a concert given by George W. Welch, 5th May 1987, at the British Music Information Centre.

[22]From a programme note to a concert given by George W. Welch, 28th March 1988, at Lauderdale House, London

[23]From programme note to a concert given by Ian Lake as part of the *Forward Music Nights* series, 13th November 1990, at Blackheath Concert Halls

[24]Dave Smith interviewed by Sarah Walker, Dalston, 10th July 1989

[25]John White interviewed by Sarah Walker, Lower Edmonton, 13th February 1990

[26]Ibid.

[27]White quoted in programme note for a concert by George W. Welch, Purcell Room, 7th July 1991

[28]Programme note for concert given by Ian Lake, Blackheath Concert Halls, 13th November 1990

[29]John White interviewed by Sarah Walker, Lower Edmonton, 13th February 1990

[30]Ibid.

[31]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

## CHAPTER 4

# SOURCE MATERIAL FROM POPULAR CULTURE

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## INTRODUCTION

The usage of source material taken from the everyday world of popular music is perhaps the chief way in which English experimental music can be erroneously linked with other areas of contemporary composition. Chapter 1 demonstrated how jazz, rock and blues play an increasingly important role in contemporary music generally; premieres of concert compositions which ally themselves to popular idioms are frequently the main focus - the selling point - of advertising brochures. The unlikely ethical and musical success of many such attempts, faced with the artistic problems of postmodernism, has been explained earlier. The aim of this chapter is to show how English experimental composers have managed to use popular idioms in a musically satisfying, challengingly subversive way, by means of their lack of engagement with modernist and postmodernist artistic concerns in favour of a peculiarly experimental outlook inspired to a great extent by Satie and Ives. After assessing the importance of these two precedents, it then goes on to reveal the one way in which eclectic experimental composition is in fact reflective of postmodernism, in its willingness to confront the contradictions of the commercial environment.

## 4.1 THE INFLUENCE OF SATIE

### (i). General

Satie's central role in the development of experimental music towards an eclecticism unrelated to postmodernist aesthetics should be distinguished from that of the composers discussed in the previous chapter. As a strong influence on Cage, who was responsible for the greater dissemination of his work, Satie actually helped to shape the fundamental experimental artistic values which then facilitated the adoption of other apparently marginal figures. Cage saw an encouraging antidote to the dominance of Austro-German musical aesthetics in several aspects of Satie's work; the most important by far was its reliance on rhythmically-based, rather than harmonically-based structures. He would not accept that music could be structured other than from its root components of sound and silence, and was rewarded by the discovery at the Paris Conservatoire of some of Satie's notebooks, containing numerical lists similar to those made by himself in preparation for composition. He bravely shared his opinions with an audience largely consisting of German emigrants in a lecture 'Defence of Satie', delivered during the Black Mountain College Satie Festival of 1948:

> In the field of structure, the field of the definition of parts and their relation to a whole, there has been only one new idea since Beethoven. And that new idea can be perceived in the word of Anton Webern and Erik Satie. With Beethoven the parts of a composition were defined by means of harmony. With Satie and Webern they are defined by means of time lengths. The question of structure is so basic, and it is so important to be in agreement about it, that one must now ask: Was Beethoven right or are Webern and Satie right?

> I answer immediately and unequivocally, Beethoven was in error, and his influence, which has been as extensive as it is lamentable, has been deadening to the art of music (Kostelanetz, 1970: 81).

Several other aspects of Satie's work also appealed to Cage in their contradiction of mainstream musical developments. Again referring to Beethoven as a paradigm against which to contrast Satie's revolution, he highlighted the tranquil continuity of Satie's music:

> I admire his sense of psychology. His music reflects exactly my theory of aesthetics. There are none of the bursts of energy or climaxes we usually associate with Beethoven (Cage, 1981: 184).

Nyman sensed that this emotional stasis was fundamental to the experimental movement. In *Experimental Music* (1974) he drew parallels between various English and American compositional techniques and how, in Satie's music, chords and melodies follow each other but do not actually progress; repetition replaces development, jump cuts replace transitions. He compared the absence of variety exemplified by *Socrate* to Cage's *4'33"*, and to the white paintings of Robert Rauschenberg, and even drew attention to the attitude of self-effacement and iconoclasm common to Satie and the experimentalists. Typical of Satie's outlook was a self-portrait of 1913 which resorts to a ridiculous mockery of the concept of the Great Composer:

> ...We should not forget that the master is considered, by a large number of 'young' musicians, as the precursor and apostle of the musical revolution now in progress...
>
> Having discussed the more lofty genres, the precious composer now explains his humorous works. This is what he says about his humour:
>
> -'My sense of humour recalls that of Cromwell. I also owe much to Christopher Columbus: for American wit has sometimes tapped me on the shoulder and I have been pleased to feel its ironical and icy bite...(Perloff, 1991: 82).

Bryars implies that all experimental composers entertain a similar impatience with the idea of genius:

> There's that fairly relaxed attitude to the production of music which I think stems from experimental music; not being, not thinking of yourself as a Great Composer. Recently there was someone doing a dictionary of contemporary composers, and they asked people to give a statement on their pieces, and I'm afraid I couldn't do it... I hate using the expression 'my work' or 'my music'... I'd refer to it as 'the stuff I'm doing', so it's just what I produce. I could be a carpenter or a sculptor or a gardener, and that would be 'the stuff I do'.[1]

The issue of self-deprecation is far from incidental, and these quotations bear witness to the casting-off, or for the later experimentalists, the non-inheritance of the weighty mantle of orthodox western musical history. Satie's allusion to themes taken from the world of the cafe-concert and music hall was indicative of this stance. Like the modern experimentalists and White in particular, his eclecticism was frequently regarded as a sign of levity rather than subversion by means of humour; in the programme note to

the ballet *Relâche* (1924), he included a statement in which he defended his use of popular themes and defied any moralist to criticise the everyday mood of his music:

> The music of Relâche? I depict in it people who are gallivanting. In order to do that, I have made use of popular themes. These themes are naturally evocative...The "timid", and other "moralists" reproach me for the use of these themes. I don't have to concern myself with the opinion of such people (Perloff, 1991: 84-85).

(ii). Irony

Although he was attracted to the coarse impiety of the Parisian popular world as a means of undermining the prevailing artistic mood of sublime seriousness, Satie's attitude was never one of apologist for his source material. In common with the English experimental composers, and in contrast to those composers who have tried to make a case for the artistic seriousness of popular forms, his ironic wit was aimed at both the popular and the classical music establishments. The boundaries between styles are not broken, or attempted to be broken (as in Milhaud's *La Création du Monde*, or Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G*, roughly contemporaneous works which effect a kind of integration of jazz and classical styles), but are held in place in order to create irony and humour. His actual opinion of his sources is difficult to ascertain from the music alone, but what is obvious is that he took a subversive pleasure in introducing all manner of themes into potentially compromising situations.

One of Satie's most characteristic and humorous techniques entailed the subjecting of 'serious' classical material such as a Clementi piano sonatina (in *Sonatine Bureaucratique*) and an extract from Chopin's *Marche Funebre* (in *d'Holothurie*, from the *Trois Embryons Deséchés*) to ridicule by arranging them in the most sterile and predictable way possible. He used blank key signatures to replace colourful harmony, obsessive repetition to replace the subtle regularity of an accompaniment figure, brusque cadences to replace gentle dove-tailing. This mask of a pedantic academic was also worn when dealing with more light-hearted themes; in the opening theme of *Le Golf* from *Sports et Divertissements* (which is almost identical to Vincent Youmans's later composition *Tea for Two*), he achieves a stop-start clumsiness as the left-hand accompaniment rests whenever the right hand does, the chords appearing to move in all the right directions but without any hope of real progress. A sense of inevitability is set up, and the listener experiences the paradoxical surprise of having his or her expectations utterly fulfilled. Satie also achieved a particularly humorous and sometimes surreal effect by setting a reference against the seemingly oblivious background of a busy ostinato. In *Les Courses* (*Sports et Divertissements*) wounded national pride, represented by an expressively-harmonised version of *Le Marsellaise*, emerges as if through a cloud of dust as horses' hooves - the quaver ostinato - thunder past the finishing line.

On the 8th of June 1990, Christopher Hobbs and John White demonstrated their expertise in the humorous techniques of predictability, repetition and incongruity in their presentation of a sequence of works for two small, battery-operated casio keyboards under the title of "Live Batts! (The Concert)". The ironic qualities of English experimental music have never been better represented than by this unique concert, which consisted of 13 pieces, all composed or arranged by either White or Hobbs. The two composers had often worked as a duo in the past, firstly as percussionists, later as piano/bassoon, then tuba/bassoon (Hobbs on bassoon); White describes Live Batts as an electronic remarriage, partly inspired by his own admiration of works composed by Hobbs for the Promenade Theatre Orchestra between 1970 and 1973. These early quartets made extensive use of toy pianos and reed organs, and featured humorous referential titles such as *The Back Gate of Kiev, Dufay Accompli* and *Scriabin Readymade.* Hobbs had also explored the mini-electronic keyboard medium in a work from 1983, *Back Seat Album,* for tape and Casio VL Tone, which the composer describes as "the tiniest keyboard casio ever made. It's about nine inches long and makes quite horrible noises. The tape part is using a synthesiser, and various other electric keyboards; we played VL Tone live with it. It's a monophonic little thing - nasty."[2]

The name of the new electronic duo was coined as a pun on *dead batts,* a phrase employed by users of battery-operated portable keyboards. The titles of the works made various plays on the word *batt:*

1. Batt Jogg (Hobbs)
2. Bestial Batt Boogie (White)
3. Celestial Batt Choir (White)
4. Bats in the Belfry (Billy Mayerl)
5. The Batts of the Delectable Mountains (Hobbs)
6. Battel (White)
7. Batt out of Heaven (White)
8. Batt Scrapps (Hobbs)
9. Batt Flapp (Hobbs)
10. V.T.R (Vampire till Ready) (White)
11. Batt Fancie (Hobbs)
12. The Dog and his Whistler (White)
13. Pavan (Richard Dering)

The works are unified by their fragmentary eclecticism, their dead-pan humour, and their impressively creative use of an instrumental medium limited in its expressive possibilities (most of the pieces employed the Casio SK 5, others the Yamaha DX 100).

Brief references to various genres, subjected to extensive repetition like those of Satie, are juxtaposed and layered mechanically, often over Satie-like background ostinati which act to distance the listener from the familiar source; the naiveté of the regular phrasing seems feigned and the surprise is all the greater when themes return, unmodified and as bare-faced as before. Hobbs' piece *Batt Jogg* exemplifies this; a tuneful, two-bar gamelan-like ostinato is set up at the outset of the piece and repeated once before an eight-bar syncopated theme is presented. Two bars of the ostinato figure follow before the theme returns in sober parallel fourths, and a predictable pattern is set up whereby the theme and ostinato keep on reappearing with slightly modified timbre and harmony (see Appendix 2, example xii). The effect is more humorous when the accompaniment figure is altered from 4/4 time to 3/4, and the theme, whose entry after two bars of ostinato is by now obligatory, is made to fit clumsily into the new metre.

White compares his works for Live Batts to Satie's compositions for the Parisian cafe-concert, cabaret and music hall; a genre he particularly relates to is that of the scie (from the phrase *scier quelqu'un à la mort*, to bore someone stiff), a repetitive song which would have been used to warm up, and wind up, the audience before the entry of the main act. Particularly close to this concept is *V.T.R (Vampire till ready)*, which conjures up the world of the seaside organist improvising aimlessly due to the non-appearance of the comedian: the sampled belches which punctuate the music add to the feeling of combined tastelessness and embarrassment. Hobbs feels that rather than an attitude of reverence towards popular source material, experimental composers take a leaf out of the pop artists' book by combining tolerance with laughter:

> Lichtenstein borrowed cartoon culture to make art, and there's always a feeling that one could steal little things from jazz or the world of rock, as well as from the great classic masterworks, or the music of Bali, or God help us, the music of Wales or something like that.
>
> I don't think there's an attempt to form all these influences into a coherent style, I'd rather have a kind of incoherence. Obviously there is a style in which I write but I'm not consciously aware of it, and I'd much rather present things as in Live Batts.[3]

On the eclecticism of the Live Batts compositions, and of his own output generally, Hobbs explains that the cultural associations of the musical medium determine to a large extent the style used:

> I could do a pastiche Schoenberg piece in that without having to do something which must sound like the rest of my music. I think that comes about very largely from the kind of instrumentation one's using. If you use an electric keyboard, very much like the piano, it carries a wealth of cultural associations with it, so that the piano as one knows it is a late 19th century beast. Its construction hasn't changed since then. That's when it reached its highest peak, if you like. As soon as you pick up an electric keyboard like the one over there, that's got 110 rhythms on it; naturally I'm adopting the culture that those rhythms are part of. It would be silly to use that keyboard to write something that sounded like a Beethoven piano sonata. But one could, as John has, write a kind of Renaissance chorale and then put a rhythm track against it. So you're

> mixing two cultures. There's no reason why you shouldn't do that, but one wouldn't try to integrate them. One makes a joy of the fact that here's a piece of Elizabethan harmony that happens to have a drum track with it.[4]

Many of the Live Batts pieces involve the intentional misuse of keyboard technology as a challenge to the reverence accorded to composers of sophisticated electronic music, whose expertise is often seen as synonymous with musicianship.[5] Typical of this phenomenon is *The Dog and his Whistler* (see Appendix 2, example xiii), based on Ethelbert Nevin's popular piece for light orchestra, *The Whistler and his Dog*. In this piece, White employed 'whistle', one of the most unattractive stops on the SK5, with its over-generous vibrato and shrill piercing register. The final reiteration of the light-hearted melody features a voice normally considered as a toy, but one which White has developed a particular penchant for: the dog bark. He also used this sound to great effect in *Bestial Batt Boogie*, where it acted as an unsuitably conspicuous component of the rhythm section. The inevitable culmination of this experimentation with barking noises - the representation of a dog fight - occurred in a later piece for electronics with live flautist, *Scenes of Violence*, discussed below.

White's piece *Battel* also concerned itself with the use of unattractive voices, featuring the distorting effect of the 'sample and hold' programme on the DX 100 to give a nauseous, random filtering of sounds; this forms an unsuitably obtrusive, wavering background to the two main areas of material. Firstly, a naively optimistic sequence of rising chords occurs, followed by an anticlimactic, stilted drum machine fill. These figures then proceed to alternate continually, becoming harmonically more oblique to create an amusing sensation of build-up without foundation (see Appendix 2, example xiv); the same sort of Satie-like, repetitious mock-development found in White's piano sonatas. This device is also a feature of White's *Celestial Batt Choir*, which is dominated by another ugly voice which the composer could not resist using: 'choir'. The piece begins with a rapid drum beat which is silenced abruptly to herald the entry of angelic, close harmonies whose unpredictable rhythms and affirmative tonality refer to Messiaen's *Trois Petits Liturgies*, but whose surprising resolutions suggest the medieval cadences of Machaut. As the final chord is sustained, an enthusiastic samba beat enters, returning after four bars to the original rhythm track. The three elements then alternate in a straight-faced ritual which draws attention to the ironic similarity of Messiaen's additive rhythms, with all their spiritual purpose, to the mindless syncopation of the electronic samba (see Appendix 2, example xv).

The employment of ironically unsuitable keyboard programmes has some basis in White's work at the London Drama Centre, where one of his chief roles is to provide dramatically suitable music. White considers this to be a highly beneficial exercise, and has also learned to respect the way in which actors apply intelligent choice in their

interpretation of a role, but admits that these strong doses of logic have contributed to his sense of the ridiculous. His arrangement of Dering's *Pavan* for Live Batts entails a perversely inappropriate dramatic choice; the vehicle for his literal transcription of this dignified Jacobean keyboard piece is a distorted, cheaply artificial sound with tastelessly wide vibrato. In contrast, and standing alone in the midst of this pageant of ironic reinterpretations, *Batts in the Belfry* is a more respectful homage. Billy Mayerl was an early role model for White, who learned *Bats in the Belfry* at the age of seven under the tuition of Helene Gipps; his arrangement for Live Batts uses a realistic piano sound for the melody, accompanied by an imitation of acoustic guitar chords.

A wide variety of musics are viewed through the ironic distorting lens of Live Batts. The earnest, serious use of repetition in Steve Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ* is subjected to unflattering imitation in *Batt Scrapps*, by Hobbs (see Appendix 2, example xvi). In this piece, which uses organ and vibraphone voices, one-bar cells of music are each repeated four times in the manner of a classically minimalist piece, with colourful, almost romantic harmonies taking the place of Reich's gradual shifting. There is also a moment of travesty when the repetitive semiquavers resolve onto a held major 2nd for two bars, to herald the entry of a disco-like 16-beat drum track. In line with Hobbs's irreverent interpretation of subtle minimalist conventions, this turns out to be a mechanism for temporal modulation; the original moving patterns return, now in quavers with a new speed dictated and accompanied by the drum beat.

The use of late-romantic harmonies in unsuitable situations is an important constituent of the Live Batts repertoire, for example in White's *Bestial Batt Boogie*, where expressionistic chromatic chords appear in rapid, dry rhythms, punctuated by a heavy-metal style electric guitar and later accompanied by the zapping sound of space invaders' guns. Hobbs made a more overt reference to the expressionist style in his *The Batts of the Delectable Mountains*, whose title contains a fanciful translation of the name of Schoenberg at the same time as referring to Vaughan Williams' composition *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*. Hobbs' composition is in fact a beautiful serialist miniature, dolefully atonal, sparse and linear. Its irony stems chiefly from the pluralistic context in which it is heard and in its medium; although Hobbs chose voices compatible with Schoenberg's own writing for chamber orchestra, such as vibraphone, piano, flute and trumpet, the electronic keyboards' interpretations of these noises leads to inevitable absurdity (see Appendix 2, example xvii). There are also sections for the cheap-sounding 'organ' and 'whistling' voices, particularly in the central section marked 'recitative', in which a brief angular phrase is repeated in different transpositions four times, over sustained organ chords whose increasing density add an incongruous Victorian-gothic element to the music. Both performers admitted that they had indulged in a discreet parody of frenzied counting to help inform the audience of the music's essential difficulty.

Both White and Hobbs have continued to work independently with live electronic keyboards since the Live Batts concert. Hobbs moved to California in 1992 where he produced *17 One-Minute Pieces for Bass Clarinet and Casio MT 750*, which alluded to many genres, including samba, cool jazz, the English pastoral style, and the music of Michael Nyman and The Residents. White spent a great deal of time travelling to Europe, giving concerts in Spain and Innsbruck under the billing of Fluffy Dice; the repertoire of this act includes *North American Diary, Nintentions, Zahnina Bohxana, Eduardo Ratt's Picture Postcards from Sunny Spain, Scoring the Blue* and *Scenes of Violence*. These works develop many of the techniques used in Live Batts but in general employ a richer vocabulary of percussive and orchestral sounds. Again, the main focus of the compositions is the degradation of technology, but *Scenes of Violence* sets a more overtly political agenda. It was inspired by a comment made in May 1994 by the Prime Minister John Major on the subject of begging, which he believed should be regarded with contempt rather than sympathy. The piece was premiered at the British Music Information Centre on the 23rd of June 1994, with Nancy Ruffer in suitably shoddy costume playing the role of a busking flautist against a pre-recorded electronic backdrop, played on a ghetto-blaster. Ruffer's simple flute part consisted of lyrical melodies and sustained notes, expressing sadness without a hint of irony, while the accompaniment conjured up an urban landscape both harsh and ridiculous. White described the taped part as a systems piece, where musical and environmental sounds were subjected to a process which guaranteed their return at some stage, but without allowing the order of events to become predictable. This irregularity gave the piece a less friendly feel than the four-square Live Batts pieces, and the tape was characterised by ominous, almost under-water background noises over which the sound of bells, breaking glass, roadworks and a dog fight were heard. However, this last element, particularly when recognised as stemming from one of White's trademarks - the dog bark - caused a great deal of tearful laughter throughout the audience. White chose three pitches of bark, to imply dogs of different stature and fierceness, and allowed the sounds to accelerate in pace arhythmically over a period of several seconds to suggest mounting violence. The risibility of the prime minister's opinions was brought home by this recurring feature, but there was also a sense of the black comedy of vagrancy itself.

Bryars feels that White's ironic eclectic music has suffered a similar fate to that of Satie, whose works are still viewed with ignorance. He insists upon the spiritual power of both composers:

> People think of Satie as being either frivolous or trivial because he doesn't write big pieces, or that the only mass is the *Messe des Pauvres*. They can't see the poignancy and the emotional content of something like *Socrate* which seems very plain, or things like the late *Nocturnes*, which seem to me to be often quite profound pieces. And similarly some of the pieces from the Rosicrucian period seem to be quite big statements; granted, often a big statement doesn't have to be long or loud, but it seems to me that there are things in there which are quite eloquent, and

> are certainly not retreating behind a veneer of frivolousness at all. So I think ... that because there might be a flip-side to some aspects of what experimental composers do - especially with John White and titles like *Greek Takeaway* - people think 'Oh well - the whole thing's a farce!', which is, in a way, a quite clever trick on behalf of someone like John and those who have done that, as a way of deflecting the Establishment so that they don't look there. It's a way of keeping people at arm's length, so that when people do get close enough to it they find 'Ah, there *is* more than that to it'. But they rarely take the trouble, so it has that protective quality.[6]

Satie's self-portrait *What I Am*, written in 1913 as part of *Memoirs of an Amnesiac*, reveals his ability to mock the establishment through the satire of pedantry. He coined his own scientific terminology to describe the measurement of musical pitches, relating how "the first time I used a phonoscope, I examined a B flat of medium size. I can assure you that I have never seen anything so revolting. I called in my man to show it to him" (Perloff, 1991: 83). Ian Gardiner has shown a similar, wry attitude towards fake scientific terminology, expressed in *Epanaroscope Phakomètre*, the fifth piece from his set of variations for George W. Welch, *British Museum*(begun in 1990). The piece was inspired by a spurious scientific instrument of the 19th century, visually convincing but entirely without function, which caught the composer's eye at an exhibition at the British Museum in the summer of 1990 entitled 'Fake? The Art of Deception'. The microscope-like object, which was exhibited alongside more famous fakes such as 'Piltdown Man', the Cottingley 'Fairies' and the 'Vegetable Lamb of Tartary' may be dismissed as nothing more than a light-hearted and well-aimed jest on behalf of its creators; however, the exhibition provoked great debate in the art world on the value and meaning of authenticity and the culpability of the forger, and Gardiner himself was stimulated by the similarities which he perceived between the instrument and his own musical style. He noted its blatant forgery, its mechanical, non-functional character, aspects of ambiguity and collage, and the humorously paradoxical way in which great effort had evidently been applied to the naming of such a purposeless construction.

All the works in the *British Museum* collection, which is not considered by Gardiner to be unequivocally finished, are in some respect variations on four minor chords, arranged through their various inversions to form an ascending twelve-chord sequence. In the case of *Epanaroscope Phakomètre*, the twelve chords were subjected to algorithmic permutation; in other words, random number patterns were extracted from them in what Gardiner describes as a "cod-academic" way. Like the object which inspired it, *Epanaroscope* is a machine of machines, almost entirely fabricated from block-like sections of ready-made material, awkwardly 'glued together' by yet more borrowed material. More of a Dadaist collage than any other work by Gardiner, it refers ironically to music by four composers who are all experts in the arcane science of number-generated compositional methods. For example, an important role is played by the fragmentary junctions which glue sections together; these consist of single events such as

a chord or sustained note and are based on material taken from Birtwistle's mechanistic composition *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum*. There is also an angular, dramatic refrain which is strongly reminiscent of the jerky rhythms of *Carmen Arcadiae;* the first entry of this material features marimba, tuba, strings and piano to form a convincingly modernist facade, but when the material is repeated Gardiner adds a funk rock beat on drum kit. The section which follows the first hearing of the refrain is extremely brief, featuring solo sequencer with canonic material in quartertones, presented in a clangorous voice reminiscent of a fairground-organ. This material is also based on number-patterns derived algorithmically from the 12-chord sequence, but its cartoon-like high speed acts to sabotage its complexity and subtlety of intonation. Gardiner admits that this is an ironic reference to the intricate player-piano music of Conlon Nancarrow, who worked mathematically with regard to relationships between tempi.

The second entry of the refrain contains references to the machine-like methods of Cage; sequences of repeated notes which pass between the instruments represent the pasting-on of pitch to rhythms taken from the *Second Construction* for percussion ensemble. A muffled, high-pitched bass-clarinet solo emerges from this, written in a florid style based intentionally on that of Michael Finnissy, also a user of number-codes in composition; the music then plunges again into the aggressive refrain, which sounds increasingly simplistic and well-suited to its rock rhythm track as the listener's familiarity with it grows. The last entry of the sequencer heralds a final ironic comment; in an almost macabre fashion this electronic instrument begins to wind down, accompanied by the wailing bass-clarinet solo, until it comes to a complete halt. What then remains is the crackly sound of an old mechanical gramophone which discreetly began to play during the previous sequencer entry, and asserts its permanence long after the modern musical world around it has disappeared (see Appendix 2, example xviii).

Gardiner describes *Epanaroscope Phakomètre* as 'ugly'; the raw material, which is ungoverned by any one prevailing style, is indiscriminately treated as commodity, edited into lumpy sections in which it is unable to function normally. In order to carry out this distancing procedure, the composer is forced to call upon enormous resources of technical expertise; he beats his victims at their own game, turning mechanism into meta-mechanism. Gardiner has always insisted upon the importance of understanding thoroughly any style to be referred to in a composition, and possesses a wealth of practical experience in popular music. In particular, he spent many years refining his ear by playing jazz:

> Jazz was very important [for me] from the middle teens. I think what interested me was the sound of it, obviously, the excitement of it, the instantaneousness of it - it's a music of the moment, in fact certain moments can be extremely interesting and complex and you have to listen very hard to hear it. Jazz is all about listening, quite attentively, and to listen to jazz properly I think you have to have a pretty good harmonic ear, and I've always been interested in harmony. So it was a

> question of here was this whole arcane science of jazz harmony and jazz structure, and it was just a question of learning how it was all put together; which is very interesting. I'd like to think I fully understand it, in all its ramifications; but a lot of contemporary music composers will not have that understanding of jazz harmony - they may understand about [classical] harmony, but they won't understand how jazz harmony is created, simply because they don't have the ear to understand it.[7]

Gardiner believes that to meddle with non-classical styles can be dangerous:

> I think it can lead to the wrong kind of impression - to this sort of exoticism kick that you find in the turn-of-the-century French and Russian music; and of course, the contemporary music establishment plays to this. It's a great marketing ploy to have a "jazzy" piece (jazzy just means it has some kind of syncopated rhythm in it). And of course rhythm is another whole aspect of contemporary music which is still really exotic; somebody like Steve Reich comes along and does pieces based just on rhythm, and people just think "God, how radical!"[8]

## 4.2 THE INFLUENCE OF IVES

(i). Inclusivity

Two of the most striking features of Gardiner's work include its collage construction and its inclusivity; the range of styles referred to can range from Birtwistle-like mechanisms to commercial 'elevator' music. Gardiner believes that while his sound is strictly of the mass media age, his eclecticism owes much to the influence of Ives, who would appear to throw disjunct materials together and watch them react, always maintaining an objective or ironic stance rather than attempting to plea for the validity of his sources. In addition to his current popularity with Gardiner and Smith in particular, Ives' example was important to the establishment of the experimental tradition generally and the growth of eclectic tendencies within it. Nyman awards him equal importance to Satie in his study of the precursors of eclectic experimental music, noting how "Satie and Ives invented a kind of musical pop art by putting into their pieces the sounds of their musical environment - popular songs, cabaret songs, marches, patriotic songs, hymns, band music, etc." (Nyman, 1974: 34).

However, like Cage, Nyman denied that there was a direct link between Ives and the later music. At the time of his writing, allusion and quotation were not the dominant features of experimental music; without the music of Smith or Gardiner to influence his judgement, he chooses not to focus his attention on the Ives' pluralism, but concentrates instead on his awareness of the social role of music and the random effect of the amateur performer's ability, as these are obviously relevant to major experimental phenomena such as the Scratch Orchestra and the Portsmouth Sinfonia. However, the enormous range of references found in experimental music twenty years later, coupled with the younger composers' continued enthusiasm towards his music and his anti-careerist attitude, would suggest that Ives' importance has actually grown. There is even a sense in which Ives' own compositional development is reflected in the progress of English

experimental music towards greater eclecticism. In his book *American Experimental Music 1890-1940*, David Nicholls notes how in Ives' work, two kinds of experimentalism developed side by side, the first concerning the actual exploration of new compositional techniques, and the second concerning the innovative combination of styles. These worked together so that "the norm in Ives' music is that once a new technique has been successfully tried out in a piece - as bitonality was in Psalm 67 - then it becomes simply another available colour in his ever-widening palette of compositional resources" (Nicholls, 1990: 10). The progress of English experimental music, from the wide range of radical compositional techniques expounded in a work such as Cardew's *The Great Learning* and the fascination with popular classics to the eclecticism of Gardiner's recent works, invites close comparison with this.

Dave Smith considers Ives to be a more fundamental influence on his own music than Satie. The *Aubade* from *First Piano Concert*, for example, shows a sensitivity towards resonance and sonority in the spacing of chords which is reminiscent of *The Pond*, from Ives' *Water Colours*. However, apart from these colouristic tendencies and occasional allusions, the influence of Ives in a stylistic sense is not particularly apparent in Smith's music. More important is the liberating effect of Ives' lack of reliance upon tradition. He rejected the idea that atonality and complex chromatic tonality were historically necessary, though by means of free experimentation they were both quite likely to occur in his music; correspondingly, the harmony of a work like Smith's *Al Contrario* runs the gamut from free atonality to hymn-like diatonicism. Neither composer achieved this outlook from naiveté, but through educated understanding leading to personal choice. Discussing the future of tonality, Ives commented:

> How quarter-tones will affect tonality, how they will help work out satisfactory polytonal and atonal systems, involves so many considerations that I won't venture to say much about it - I've ventured too much already...But quarter-tones or no quarter-tones, why tonality as such should be thrown out for good, I can't see. Why it should be always present, I can't see. It depends, it seems to me, a good deal - as clothes depend on the thermometer - on what one is trying to do, and on the state of mind, the time of day or other accidents of life (Ives, 1969: 117).

Ives' disregard of rules governing musical hierarchies and conventional standards of consistency also set an important precedent. There are two basic ways in which these attitudes manifest themselves in his work, and both of them are paralleled to a great extent in the output of Smith. Firstly, Ives' output as a whole is stylistically unpredictable rather than smoothly progressive. His tonal, charming setting of *Spring Song* (Z78) from 1907, for example, has little in common with the declamatory style and chromaticism of *Soliloquy*, written shortly afterwards. Secondly, individual works and movements of works were likely to feature completely contrasting styles from different musical worlds, often jostling for the listener's attention to give an impression of life-like simultaneity (for example *In the Inn*, from *Set for Theatre or Chamber Orchestra*, or *Putnam's*

*Camp, Redding, Connecticut*, from *Three Places in New England*), or layered to a graduated landscape with a clear foreground and veiled horizon (as in *Central Park in the Dark*, or *The "St Gaudens" in Boston Common (Col. Shaw and his Colored Regiment)*, from *Three Places in New England*). The *Fourth Symphony*, which is particularly admired by Smith, combines these effects using old hymn tunes, popular songs, ragtime, circus music, and references to Ives' own *Concord Sonata* to create the impression of a religious celebration of the richness of life.

Ives' total indifference towards the pursuit of a musical career, reinforced by his familiarity with the essays of Emerson and Thoreau, is likely to have facilitated his unpredictable progress, as a certain degree of logical creative evolution is applauded - if not expected - by critics and academics alike. Smith displays a similarly low regard for the outer trappings of worldly musical success, even more so than his colleagues, and his personal musical development is baffling in orthodox terms. This can be grasped by the study of his series of five *Piano Concerts*, major multiple works which have occupied Smith since the early 1980's. In addition to their Ivesian discontinuity, the *Piano Concerts* involve enormous stylistic diversity both between movements and within them. *First Piano Concert (24 sonatas in all the keys)* deserves the closest examination, being perhaps the most liberally pluralistic work in the entire experimental repertoire. Smith explained in a programme note:

> Since 1983 most of my music has been written for solo piano. The result is a series of piano "concerts", each lasting about one and a half hours...The first piano concert consists of 24 pieces, each lasting about three minutes. The subtitle "sonatas" suggests a concern with differing aspects of pianistic resonance and a type of exploration or completeness not implicit in a prelude or miniature. Most of the pieces relate in some way to a manner of performance or musical genre, past or present, real or imagined. They record several interests of the time, revealing in particular an increasing awareness of the popular music of the Caribbean and South America. Each is dedicated to a colleague or friend who has played the piano publicly and who may also have unwittingly determined some aspect of the composition.[9]

*First Piano Concert* is a modern-day *Well Tempered Clavier* exploring not the art of counterpoint but the personal experience of the musical repertory itself. Smith composes in the spirit of a 19th-century music lover who, through the medium of the piano, gains access to areas normally beyond the scope of the domestic location; the sonatas allude to a huge variety of popular genres, several of them also referring to the smaller classical forms of the late-romantic and early modernist periods. Unaccustomed to a highly pluralistic work which shows no desire to preach a message of pro-integration, and unsure of how to react to genres such as *Bossa Nova* (see Appendix 2, example xix) which in themselves are devoid of political symbolism, many educated listeners have found it difficult to assess the *First Piano Concert*, and in some cases have attempted to dismiss it as an act of mere pastiche. John White strongly opposes this:

> When he writes his baions and merengues and what-not, they usually have subtexts, there are references to other things; it is music that is about merengues and baions; it's also about the atonal aspects of Duke Ellington's music, about Scriabin, about Godowsky... It's more than pastiche. It's a personal expression that's founded on the most economical manner of delivery....To say Dave's music is no good because it's pastiche is a load of nonsense. I don't think Dave's music comes under the heading of arrangement; I don't think that one should study what form goes into the baion for instance by listening to one of Dave's pieces, because his use of some of the mannerisms and some of the gestures is inextricably bound with some of the things he wants to say anyway. Talking with people you're familiar with, you don't criticise their conversation, you listen to what they're saying, and I feel that our much more inclusive musical culture at the moment makes it very necessary that we should abandon a lot of those thoughts about good and bad.[10]

The interaction of musical languages in *First Piano Concert* is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5; however, Smith's own brief descriptions of the pieces make his creative intentions quite clear[11]. They reveal how, despite their simple, label-like titles, the sonatas are not intended as pastiche; instead, they show the composer's perception of a style viewed through the filter of a particular personal situation, often commenting affectionately or ironically upon similarities found within apparently disparate styles:

1. Charleston - E flat major, dedicated to Ron Reah. Completed 1.4.86. Popular 1920's dance from USA; relates to the pianism both of George Gershwin and Ron Reah.

2. Maxixe - F sharp minor, dedicated to Dika Rancigaj. Completed 25.12.85. Brazilian dance, the forerunner of the samba: ancestry in the works of Ernesto Nazareth.

3. Ramble - A flat major, dedicated to John Merrick. Completed 21.10.85. Title from Percy Grainger; a condensed operatic transcription on themes from Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess".

4. Dub - B minor, dedicated to Richard Ascough. Completed 26.10.85. Unextravagant skeletal reggae; the house next door used to contain a late-night reggae club.

5. Mambo - D flat major, dedicated to Michael Parsons. Completed 11.8.85. Anglo-Cuban style from 1940's; like Michael Parsons' music, it displays spareness and rhythmic challenge.

6. Nocturne - E minor, dedicated to Dorothy Howe. Completed 27.1.86. The colourful hothouse variety associated with Sorabji but considerably less ornate.

7. Bossa Nova - G flat major, dedicated to Howard Skempton. Completed 1.8.85. Brazilian jazz samba of 1950's; Skemptonian in economy and apparent simplicity.

8. Boomerangs - A minor, dedicated to Patricia Hancock. Completed 9.6.86. The musical material is worthy of the title, the dedicatee being Australian.

9. Quasi Tambura - B major, dedicated to Janet Sherbourne. Completed 13.6.86. Title from the 53rd variation of the POassacaglia from Sorabji's "Opus Clavicembalisticum": the tambura is an Indian drone-like instrument.

10. Tango - D minor, dedicated to Yvar Mikhashoff. Completed 22.6.85. Argentine, rather than Spanish or Brazlian; written for Yvar Mikhashoff's tango collection.

11. Thelonious - E major, dedicated to Erik Levi. Completed 5.1.86. A tribute to the great jazz pianist; the performer is instructed to "play like Thelonious Monk".

12. Allegro Barbaro - G minor, dedicated to Ursula Oppens. Completed 30.7.,85. Salvaged from an unfinished piece for Javanese gamelan; ancestry in Alkan, Bartok and Leo Ornstein.

13.Rag - A major, dedicated to John Lewis. Completed 3.1.86. A gently perverse salute to the early masters Joplin and Scott; premiered in the Tower Tavern, WC1, to a predominantly Irish audience.

14. Son - C minor, dedicated to Brian Dennis. Completed 1.1.86., Popular Cuban dance since early 1900's. The first chord and subsequent delicate textures relate to Dennis's earlier music.

15. Cornelius - D major, dedicated to John Tilbury. Completed 6.8.85. A tribute based on an arrangement of two Cardew songs (We Sing for the Future, and The Party's First Congress), performed at the memorial concert of May 1982.

16. Recuerdos - F minor, dedicated to John White. Completed 22.8.85. Exploits characteristics of rhythm and silence common to both the Colombian bambuco and White's compositions.

17. Merengue - G major, dedicated to Elizabeth Winship. Completed 24.12.85. National dance of the Dominican Republic, noted for its nervous rhythmic energy.

18. La Campanella - B flat minor, dedicated to Theresa Streatfield. Completed 2.8.85. Title from Liszt, the dedicatee requested that the piece be "easy, impressive-sounding and Rachmaninovian".

19. Aubade - C major, dedicated to Brendan Beales. Completed 23.3.86. a song of sunrise: fittingly, the only "prelude" of the set.

20. Biguine - E flat minor, dedicated to Peter Edwards. Completed 22.3.86. From the French Antilles (Guadeloupe, Martinique) but with reference to the Cuban charanga group, Orquesta Aragon.

21. Hokey-Cokey - F major, dedicated to Ben Mason. Completed 2.1.86. Possible ancestry in Carla Bley and Lord Berners; like Mason's humorous pieces, displays an apparently anarchic attitude to quotation.

22. Etrangeté - A flat minor, dedicated to Jon Parry. Completed 3.4.86. Title from Scriabin: precedent in John White's 37 Orchestral Snapshots.

23. Calypso - B flat major, dedicated to Richard Murphy. Completed 29.7.85. The dedicatee is a connoisseur of the musically berserk as featured in the repertoire of both the virtuoso pianist and the Trinidadian steel band.

24. After hours - C sharp minor, dedicated to Gavin Bryars. Completed 5.8.85. Originally a jazz song from 1969 revised for Janet Sherbourne in 1981

Showing an entirely non-Beethovenian approach to personal stylistic development, Smith's *Second Piano Concert (Ireland one and Ireland free)* is an entirely different conception to the first; it is an overtly political work recalling the fervour of Cardew, based on folk songs and traditional tunes relevant to the Irish struggle. Although some of the six movements were composed as early as the mid-1980's, the completed piece was premiered at the British Music Information Centre in January 1993, with Smith at the piano and John Tilbury in the prominent speaking role, reading the words of John Mackie, Bobby Sands, and Margaretta D'Arcy. *Third Piano Concert (5 Studies)* (1983-92) took a new turn again, comprising five contrasting movements which refer not only to the classical art music of Alkan (*Al Contrario*), and Albanian toccatas (*Toccantella*), but to popular styles such as Cuban charanga music (*Guaracha*), disco music and reggae bass-lines typical of the early 1980's (*Disco Soleil Brillant*), and a melting-pot of languid late-Romantic chromaticism, Latin American vigour, rich jazz chordal writing and hints of soul music (*Amble and Riffs*). *Fourth Piano Concert* is still in progress[12]; *Fifth Piano Concert "Alla Reminiscenza"* takes another direction altogether, existing as a single movement and making a surprising return to the stylistic features of Smith's much earlier systems music written for the Garden Furniture Music Ensemble. The composer wrote:

> The 5th Piano concert is in one continuous movement. Mostly slow and quietish; it tends towards either the improvisatory or the rigidly systematic musical material consisting of a 2-note bell-motif, a scale, 4 chords and a cross-rhythm. Unusually perhaps, the work displays features reminiscent of the work I was involved in during the early-mid 1970's. There is virtually nothing for solo piano from this period. Apart from 3 sets of song transcriptions, the only solo piece prior to 1983 is the brief *Fibonacci systems* (1975), an extended and recomposed version which forms the coda of the present work. Also there is at one point an approximation of an improvised "piece" entitled *Continuum* co-composed with John Lewis in 1970. The *5th Piano Concert* is dedicated to Michael Parsons.[13]

(ii). Collage

The compositions by Ives which are most attractive to Gardiner include the *Four Ragtime Dances* (1902-1904) and *Gyp the Blood or Hearst!? Which is worst?!*(c.1912). There are strong parallels between Ives' tendency to chop and change between unconnected musical worlds in these humorous pieces, and the techniques used Gardiner. Even more than Smith, he has shown a willingness to change gear instantaneously within a single

movement, creating a collage effect which gives his music a more fluid, dynamic feel akin to that in the pieces above. It is also interesting that while Cage was dubious about the localised nature of Ives' eclecticism, believing that his Americanisms were less relevant to the experimental aesthetic than an all-embracing globalism, Gardiner has followed Ives' lead in allowing a sense of place to dictate, on either a conceptual or an external level, his choice of source material. It could be argued that the personalised nature of the references in the music of all English experimentalists represents a break with Cage's indiscriminate approach to some extent, in favour of a more Ivesian desire to connect with a place and time of personal significance. For Gardiner, an upbringing and continued residence in London (until 1991) has provided inspiration for works such as his series of pieces named after real or imaginary London Underground Stations (*Charing Cross* (1985), *Green Park* (1986), *Bond Street* (1987), *Hobbs End* (1988), *British Museum* (1990 -)) and, more recently, a work composed specially for radio entitled *Monument (London 1935-1993)* (1993).

The structure of *Monument* could be described as a documentary collage, inspired by its raw material, which includes speech and actuality from the BBC sound archives. The piece is about perceptions of London, and especially about perceptions acquired through programmes such as the famous 1930's documentaries of Humphrey Jennings. *Monument* imitates the surrealist montage style which was fashionable at that time, with its strange mixture of humour, nostalgia, and oblique ways of putting clips of material together. To introduce the piece on Radio 3, Gardiner recorded the following talk (abridged):

> Life in any city contains ... hallucinatory moments, but in London, the codes of time, place, architecture, cultures, class, urban mythology, transport, weather, seem so intertwined, so confused at any one instant, trying to decipher it in words runs aground on its illegibility. Instead, London the modern city broods as a backdrop of chaotic possibility, a hidden protagonist in fiction from Dickens to Martin Amis. For composers, the response has tended to be more sentimental, looking back on a golden age. Elgar dreams of Victorian London in Cockaigne; Vaughan Williams evokes Edwardian London in his 2nd Symphony, and sundry light music composers provide tourist souvenirs, musical policemen's helmets and busbied guardsmen. London's discontinuity is perhaps most tellingly captured in single images; photographs, still-lifes of monuments, and unguarded shots of anonymous faces. In writing this piece, I searched for similar glimpses of past and present, in the recordings of the BBC sound archive, and there found another code to unravel; the means through which radio has reported and catalogued life for the listener. As in both photographs and architecture, it's often the incidental detail in these archive sources that resonate; in the inflections of speech, or the texture of radio sound itself, weathered and grainy in early outside broadcasts; sleek, breathless, immediate in 1980's news reports.
>
> This piece for radio, *Monument*, has been written for George W. Welch, a group of 12 instrumentalists, comprising string quartet, two reed players, trumpet doubling flugel horn, tuba, piano and three percussionists. They

> are in counterpoint with fragments of radio broadcasts since the 1930's; the voices of commentators, reporters, interviewers, weather forecasters, and "vox populae": bus conductor, commuter, stockbroker, children playing in the street, high rise block resident, East End gangster. The music supports the spoken text through a variety of disguises: as illustration and commentary, but it also follows its own themes and structures across the 35 minutes of the piece. And if the title, *Monument*, suggests a sober, elegiac tone, then perhaps it reflects a personal impression; that as it becomes homogenised through the corporate logo, the fossilisation of history through "heritage", the culture of capitalist realism, London's deeper structures will recede into the scrap-book of personal, not collective memory, made up of a few old photographs, some old newsreel footage, a few old recordings.[14]

*Monument* consists of seven movements. The odd-numbered ones are intended to be more timeless, and less nostalgic, than the even-numbered ones, and also differ in terms of their structure; whereas movements 2,4 and 6 are smoothly continuous and feature one basic historical idea, the others are each divided into four sections and cut between such disparate concepts as a bus travelling over Waterloo bridge, a rattling dot matrix printer, a policeman giving directions, and a high rise block of flats (movement one). Gardiner had originally hoped that this structure would be distinctly audible, and that edit-like breaks between sections would be strongly defined, but when the final production seemed to emphasise continuity, he decided that this was compatible with other hidden structural devices in the piece such as the use of the sixteen notes of the Westminster chimes to determine the tonal basis of the sixteen total sections of the odd-numbered movements. A certain amount of continuity is also written into the piece by means of a strongly-characterised lyrical chord sequence in triple time, featuring sliding dominant 7th chords, which emerges in the first movement (accompanying the resident of a high-rise flat), the fourth movement (children in a playground discussing their ambitions), the fifth movement (a man recites his poem *High-rise blues*) and the seventh movement (where it accompanies the voice of a seller of the magazine *The Big Issue*. Gardiner identifies the movements as follows:

I ...Bank...

II ...St. James's Park...

III ...Earl's Court...

IV ...Leicester Square...

V ...Bethnal Green...

VI ...Canary Wharf (under construction)...

VII ...Westminster...

It is hardly surprising that *Monument* makes use of many popular genres, but as a whole the piece illustrates Gardiner's idea that a composer should use whatever language is most appropriate to express a particular idea. The opening music (see Appendix 2,

example xx), responding to Robert Dougall's invitation of 1935 to "come with us on a visit round the city of London", is written in an atonal idiom and gives the impression of irregular meter despite a time signature of 4/4; bursts of percussion and string tremolandi lend a feeling of danger in crowds and busy traffic (these are also suggested by sound effects). This material expresses perfectly the general hustle and bustle of the city without being too closely associated with a particular period in time, and is consequently used later in the piece, at the opening of movements 3 and 5 (in conjunction with the voice of a harassed commuter and sounds associated with the telephone respectively), and at bar 43 of movement seven (in conjunction with 'office' atmosphere and the bleeping of an electronic cash register).

Familiar idioms from popular culture do occur in the odd-numbered movements, however. The music which accompanies Dougall's proud description of a London policeman ("...the Bobby: the familiar figure in blue, that deliberately stately figure, always with a keen eye for suspicious loiterers..."), heard most prominently in the first movement and returning in the third and fifth, is strongly reminiscent of the incidental music typical of the Ealing Comedy genre, with the dotted rhythms of a muted trumpet and clarinet melody dancing over a marching beat marked by pizzicato strings, side drum, and (in movement V only) spoons. In fact, Gardiner employs a 5/4 time signature here, which lends a certain elusiveness and humour to the theme without disrupting its military feel. This jaunty material also reveals the influence of the English composer of light music, Hayden Wood, in pieces such as the *London Cameos Suite* (c.1942), whose first movement features a similarly breezy muted trumpet theme. As he mentioned in his introductory talk, Gardiner refracts his image of London not only through the lens of the programme-maker, but also through that of earlier British composers. The alternation of jolly, extrovert moods with brooding melancholy, combined with the use of descriptive devices such as bell-chimes, links the piece with works such as Elgar's *Cockaigne,* John Ireland's *London Overture* and Vaughan Williams' *London Symphony.* The atmospheric epilogue of this symphony is paralleled consciously by Gardiner in his coda for *Monument,* which features low melodic phrases on clarinets, trumpet and tuba, sustained string harmonics and bell-like percussion to accompany a woman's description of the ghostly sight of boats gliding along the Thames at night.

Occasionally, an Ivesian, bitonal, layered effect is created when the composer's own evocation of a time and place coincides with music on the soundtrack itself. This is usually employed when poignancy is required, for example in the second movement which is based on events in the 1930's (see Appendix 2, example xxi). A commentator solemnly describes the scene of Edward VIII's abdication: "As the officers come out of the window, St James's clock will strike the hour, the guard in the courtyard will come to the slope, the trumpets will sound thrice, and the proclamation will be read.". Surrounded by the crackly atmosphere of this archive tape, the proclamation fanfares are then heard, in

E flat major; at the same time, Gardiner's score features doleful harmonies on clarinet, bass-clarinet and tuba, shifting plaintively through various minor triads which set the fanfares into stark relief. A roll on a low tom-tom tuned to A natural adds an extra note of contrast.

Later in the movement, the pace of the music picks up as the commentator moves away from St James's Park to describe the spirit of Lambeth. The piano introduces an indulgently chromaticised, sentimental derivation of *The Lambeth Walk* in D flat major, while a crowd of women in a pub discuss what they might sing for the benefit of the microphone. Their choice is, naturally, *The Lambeth Walk*, sung a few tones away from D flat. The prominent hiss of this faded recording and the off-key effect of the voices combine to distance the listener from the women and emphasise the sensation of wistful nostalgia.

The fourth movement illustrates how Gardiner rarely interprets a popular genre in a literal fashion, but makes selective use of its stylistic clichés whilst maintaining the original rhythmic and harmonic spirit. The latin-tinged pop music which accompanies descriptions of the *twist* is more unpredictable in its use of syncopation and harmonic resolution than a historically-authentic *twist* track, so that the 4/4 time signature is disguised by beats appearing to be either dropped or added (see Appendix 2, example xxii). This has the effect of reminding the listener that the music being heard is a contemporary composition; in the style of the "ironic narrator" to which Gardiner often aspires, it observes the past and reminisces upon it but is not itself a part of it. The power of this music to suggest images of the swinging 60's is enhanced later in the movement, when the soundtrack from a children's programme is heard, involving an elephant playing a mouth organ. Gardiner's music responds to this with a variation on the twist theme involving a lively melody on flute, somewhat reminiscent of Henry Mancini's *Baby Elephant Walk.*

The ironic narrator becomes a harder, less sympathetic parodist in the sixth movement, which begins with the voice of a young stockbroker:

> My alarm goes off at 6.30. I leave home at 7.15 from Wandsworth. I get into the office about a quarter to eight. All the market makers are in by half-seven. All the salesmen have to be in by eight o'clock. At twenty past eight we have a morning meeting, and then -

His voice is cut off suddenly by the blaring opening fanfares of a four-square theme in C major, using the whole ensemble further reinforced by the use of 4-hands at the piano. This theme is unashamedly based on the music of Michael Nyman, regarded with a certain amount of distaste by Gardiner, who intended the plodding, persistent, yet self-congratulatory character of this passage to be openly critical of the empty optimism of the yuppie (see Appendix 2, example xxiii). Along with the limited harmonic movement, often based on pedal points, the widely recognised style of Nyman's film scores is recreated by the predominance of alternating major seconds in the counter-

melodies (particularly evident in the vibraphone and marimba parts) and the use of 4/4 time signature combined with the strong emphasis of each beat. Gardiner allows the music to mock specific occurrences described in the soundtrack; as a news reporter describes the marvels of Canary Wharf, ending with the words "It's the biggest thing of its kind in Europe", the music fades to pianissimo, only to return with even greater vigour as a sarcastic response to the size, and the catastrophic failure, of the project. Later, the soundtrack returns to the City dealing room, and a commentator reports that "the computers at the heart of the new information system broke down. Frustrated dealers were spotted hammering their new hi-tech display screens with their fists." The ensemble responds to this by imitating the hammering with seven highly-chromatic chords which increase in volume and lead to a bar of near-silence, with only soft held notes from the strings remaining. This leads to a further parody when the previous violent bangings are echoed by two limper ones, lacking strings and bass drum. The Nyman-style music continues relentlessly, and a sudden reference to the *EastEnders* theme tune is woven into the lyrical soprano saxophone part as the commentator goes on to describe another phenomenon typical of 1980's Britain: the proposed conversion of Battersea Power Station into a Disney-style theme park designed to "bring the fun back into London".

The approach of an ironic narrator which Gardiner maintains throughout *Monument* means that although his own experience of London as a mass of facades is reflected, his actual personality is not exposed. This type of sophisticated allusion is often encountered in other media, especially television (even the most commonplace advertisements frequently portray stereotypical consumers of earlier decades expressing reactions to the product known to be compatible with the period); however, critic Paul Driver complained that the work was "breezily serviceable but not searching"[15]. Gardiner's response to this was that the work was not intended to be searching, and he speculated whether attempts by composers to drench their music with their own personality has contributed to the low success-rate of multi-media compositions. It must be said that in the case of ironic advertisements, the minimal profile of the actual seller is often an enormous contributor to its plausibility.

Another difficulty regarding *Monument* is the likelihood of Gardiner's score being mistaken for incidental music. Gardiner was aware that the nostalgic sound of the voices was almost certain to gain the attention of the ear, with radio listeners potentially treating the piece as simply an enjoyable historical documentary, but felt that this could be compensated for by allowing the piece to be broadcast twice on subsequent evenings. In the event, this was not possible; however, the music's low-key role is almost guaranteed by the fact that it relates extremely closely to the speech in an illustrative sense, reinforcing the connotations of the archive material. In this respect Gardiner's score has much in common with a great deal of subtle film music, whose skill in contributing

atmosphere does nothing to aid its appreciation by an audience concerned chiefly with the fate of the human characters. Gardiner, however, has been fascinated by the incidental music for television and films since childhood, and his ear is attuned to the score regardless of its role as subordinate to the drama.

## 4.3 THE INFLUENCE OF BACKGROUND MUSIC AND "MUZAK"

Gardiner has shown a particular interest in the subtle and imaginative incidental and theme music written for television serials in and around the 1960's, whose composers are only fleetingly credited and remain anonymous to most viewers. These include programmes such as *The Saint, The Man from U.N.C.L.E., Department S , Thunderbirds* and *The Avengers*. Their influence can be felt in the first four of Gardiner's set of pieces written for George W. Welch and named after real or fictitious Underground stations; these not only deal with the concept of anonymity but are strongly influenced by film music techniques. The naming of *Charing Cross* (1985), *Green Park* (1986), *Bond Street* (1987), and *Hobbs End* (1988) are intended to reflect the composer's interest in the concept of ambiguous identity rather than an association with public transport. The first piece was inspired by a poster on the London Underground which appealed to Gardiner's imagination; it was advertising a party to be held in a particular carriage on the Jubilee line, and expounded upon the idea that the Underground system should not be employed solely for the transport of sedentary passengers but could also be used for concerts and other social gatherings. The poster drew attention to the anonymity of the stations and the lack of success of any attempts to give certain stations more identity; Charing Cross station is a typical example, existing in people's minds as nothing more than an indicator of one's relative position on a line far removed from the real geography of London, despite its attractive murals. Gardiner was interested in the idea of a similarly anonymous piece, whose name bore no more relation to it than a person's name reflects their physical being. Having named the piece in this way, the choice of titles for the other pieces was determined chiefly by the composer's perception of them as a line or series of works, being linked by their musical language but contrasting in mood so that they could be successfully performed together.

All four of these pieces could be described as music for imaginary films. They contain many instrumental techniques, colouristic effects and harmonies reminiscent of the television film music mentioned above, in particular concerning their predominance of tuned percussion; however, they are also influenced by cinematic techniques on a structural level. The main theme of Charing Cross, for example, features tight, fragmentary gestures on tremolo strings against a rock beat, strongly reminiscent of some of Barry Gray's incidental music for the *Thunderbirds* series, and evoking an action-packed and somewhat glamorous cinematic visual image (see Appendix 2, example

xxiv). This is interrupted abruptly, in the manner of a cinematic edit, by a contrasting passage dominated by a marimba ostinato and tense sustained melody on strings, before the original beat returns again with cello, violin and viola presenting an angular sequential melody derived from the original tremolo gestures. The employment of a lively tuned percussion ostinato to accompany a more restrained melody in this way suggests echoes of Laurie Johnson's theme music for *The Avengers*. After this development of the main theme, there is another sudden cut, resembling the sort of build-up leading to an anticlimax often encountered in cinematic drama. The new, softer mood also has a familiar feel for the television generation, with its background of piano chords and sustained strings accompanying brief, enigmatic phrases played in unison on marimba and vibraphone. The use of vibraphone to add a certain supernatural colour to a melody is a typical cliché of 1960's film and television scores; here, Gardiner allows its slowly-pulsating tone to be obscured by the harder marimba until the final note of each brief, rising phrase, where it lingers on to create a highly atmospheric effect which contributes to the dramatic suspense. This technique was used to great effect in Edwin Astley's score for *The Saint*, where two charismatic, detached phrases on flute and vibraphone anticipate the main theme. The single, rising arpeggio which introduces *Green Park* also features this characteristic vibraphone doubling, and in addition uses blue-note harmonies in the manner of the introduction to *The Saint*.

Gardiner builds up the texture of the central section of *Charing Cross* using sizzle cymbal strokes, another characteristic means of creating atmosphere in 1960's film scores (for example in the eerie *Mysterons* theme which appeared frequently during episodes of *Captain Scarlet*).Following cinematic conventions again, he allows the uneasy calm of this section to be interrupted suddenly by an arresting revival of the original, aggressive material, which this time culminates in a rising marimba flourish and huge, tremulous chord.

Although his recollection of serials watched mainly during childhood is understandably vague, and the effects inspired by their incidental music are approximate rather than precise, Gardiner remembers clearly that many episodes ended on a similar, enigmatic motif: a minor 9th sharpened 11th chord. *Charing Cross*, *Green Park* and *Bond Street* all end with this chord, which seems to effectively seal their alliance with the world of light music without being too specifically associative. Gardiner usually alludes to popular musical styles rather than quoting literally. Rare exceptions to this include a reference to the familiar murder theme from *Psycho* in the central section of *Bond Street*. This passage is scored for violin, viola and cello and initially has a lullaby character formed from an unrecognisably-augmented version of the *Psycho* theme. The impression of a nostalgic "flash-back" is created, from which the protagonist is violently ejected as the *Psycho* theme suddenly springs out at its original pace, shocking the unwary audience in a classically cinematic way (see Appendix 2, example xxv). *Hobbs End* is also notable in

its inclusion of an actual film soundtrack; its title is derived from a fictitious underground train station which featured in *Quatermass and the Pit*, a series first broadcast by the BBC between 1958 and 1959. Gardiner's piece opens with a recorded extract of frenzied dialogue, concerning a horrific sighting, before going on to recreate the mood of films of the *Quatermass* era using effects such as tremolo strings, vibraphone, and high-pitched bongos.

Gardiner insists that *Charing Cross, Green Park, Hobbs End* and *Bond Street* are not entirely concerned with the concept of film and television incidental music. In addition to being satisfying in an abstract way, they also contain noticeable references unconnected with the cinema. For example, stereotypical minimalism is mocked in the opening of *Charing Cross*, where a tuned percussion motif gradually extends itself in a particularly mechanical, uninteresting fashion. This piece also makes use of accompaniment figures dominated by the alternation of major seconds, combined with enharmonic changes which strongly evoke the style of Gavin Bryars.

Gardiner's allusion to television background music supports the assertion made by John A. Walker in his book *Art in the Age of Mass Media*, that commercial genres of art are not synonymous with poor quality, that they often reflect great individual expertise and should not be dismissed simply because the identity of the artist is hidden behind a corporate image. In this respect his music is deeply indebted to the mass media explosion of postmodernism and celebrates its related phenomena. This does not mean to say, however, that Gardiner accepts postmodern popular culture indiscriminately, any more than he accepts the aesthetics of postmodern classical music. Several of his works, like many by John White, deal with types of pop music for which he has little respect in addition to the genre of modern background music broadcast in public places which is commonly referred to as 'muzak', and these have revealed a more critical, though often ambiguous, stance.

It is worth noting that the more denigrated areas of popular music, such as chart pop and muzak, have been conveniently ignored by many eclectic contemporary composers (such as Tippett or Turnage) who have preferred to endorse areas which are already well-respected artistically: blues, jazz and rock. Gardiner believes that the parallels between their attempts to find a place in the musical market for their own, seriously-intentioned music, and the commercial role of piped background music, are rarely perceived. In contrast, experimental composers have held up a mirror to consumer society, revealing its attractions as well as its obvious flaws, but frequently producing new work which appears far too frivolous to be commercially successful itself.

White's engagement with the commercial side of popular culture can be grasped from the titles of collections of his pieces on cassette, such as *John White's Wallpaper Music* and *Cheapskate Music*, and from many of his compositions involving electronic keyboards. While many of these use cheap sounds to express ironic observations of serious music

genres, compositions such as *Fashion Music* (1990) deal with background music itself. This piece was originally composed for a satirical ballet choreographed by Pat Garrett on the subject of the follies and foibles of the fashion industry. It consists of twelve pieces ranging in length from approximately two to nine minutes, and scored for electric keyboards (played by White and Jamie Crofts), clarinet (Ian Mitchell) and speaker (Crofts). The sleeve of the compact disc recording bears the warning: "Attention Please! This music is top-quality trash produced by the cheap-sound scene. We kindly ask the users of this CD to play it at the volume of a suburbian (sic) Paris sound machine or a London tube discman earphone as used by the kid next door."[16]. The fourth piece, *Doing it in*, is particularly deserving of the ironic comparison with "trash", being described by White as "muzak for the tired businessman and his friends" (see Appendix 2, example xxiv). Expressive, close jazz harmonies are presented on keyboard, giving a poor imitation of saxophones such as might occur in the accompaniment to a test card transmission which was never designed to be listened to with any degree of attention, but is simply intended to assure the viewer that the transmitter has not shut down. The mood of this ballad is sleepy, a double-bass voice marking every two beats, with Mitchell's clarinet entering at odd phrase-endings as if to take up a solo, before dropping out in an equally arbitrary fashion. The piece is cut off mid-phrase, giving the impression that the anticipated programme is at last ready to be broadcast, and confirming the piece's role as a mere time-filler. White's connection of the slow, mindless test-card style with the idea of a businessman contradicts the popular image of business in the 1980's, when almost any commercial enterprise was sure to be applauded by politicians in the British government. *Doing it in* mocks the comfortable surroundings and type of social intercourse preferred by the successful businessman, and hints that his single-minded ambition may be related to a lack of imagination.

Similar in style to *Doing it in* is Gardiner's *Happy Eater*, named after a chain of road-side restaurants which grew in popularity in the 1980's. This piece, which forms the seventh movement of *British Museum*, explores several major features of the muzak genre, sometimes hinting at familiar clichés and at other times exaggerating them. Gardiner manages to maximise the sonorities of George W. Welch into a convincing imitation of a radio orchestra; the saxophone plays a languid solo melody against a richly percussive background of slow samba rhythms, vibraphone and marimba supply decorative counterpoint, while the three string players contribute swooning glissando figures, tremolandi and colourful pizzicato. The steady beat is halted periodically, and a sweet moment of tension is created from the holding of a particularly expectant chord before the samba rhythm begins again. Gardiner draws attention to the conventions of the genre by occasionally prolonging this hiatus, but the most revealing part of the piece is a strange coda, played on sequencer alone; the previous slow samba material is heard at a more business-like speed which is further depersonalised by the soft-focus sound,

reminiscent of an electric seaside organ (see Appendix 2, example xxvii). It is thought-provoking to observe how, although the live ensemble section sounded as commercial as it is possible to be, the sequencer exceeds it in terms of fake joviality and impersonality; it is as if the familiar high street environment has revealed itself as a facade, behind which lurks an even more nightmarish spiritual void. The visual spectacle reinforces this as the musicians are forced to sit listening impassively, made redundant by the grinning spectre of a small, self-playing electric keyboard.

The harmony of *Happy Eater*, with the exception of some unexpected events which take place within the pauses mentioned above, is that of soft commercial jazz, interpreted (as in the case of White's *Doing it in*) completely convincingly. Gardiner manages to achieve a similar authenticity in transcribing the late 1980's dance genre, hip hop, into the acoustic instrumental style of George W. Welch in *Danses des Adolescentes*, the ninth movement of *British Museum* (see Appendix 2, example xviii). Production experience on albums by pop artists such as Betty Boo gave Gardiner an insight into the minimal contribution required from live participants in the mix, and the ways in which the studio could compensate for almost any shortcoming. This gave him weapons with which to mock the supposedly superior creative integrity of classical contemporary music (all the techniques in *Epanaroscope Phakometre* are the techniques of the house music producer: ostinati, sample, drum tracks); however, it also led to a cynicism regarding dance music itself which helps to explain the ambiguous stance of *Danses des Adolescentes*. As in the case of *Happy Eater*, the original style is so faithfully maintained that the idea of a mere mockery is far from the listener's mind; however, there is no attempt to reverse the cultural hierarchy by revealing hidden depths in the music, raising its status by displaying it in an acceptable artistic framework as some composers have attempted to do with so-called 'low' idioms. Like Pop art, for which similar sociological justification has often been sought, the well-intentioned breaking of boundaries between genres is not the issue; Gardiner's personal viewpoint towards the source material is not easily decipherable, nor is it meant to be. Unlike straightforward parody, which is by nature antipathetic and can easily be read by the audience without requiring a great deal of reflection, irony such as this can be open-ended and capable of being interpreted as a sympathetic stance as much as a critical one.

*Danses des Adolescentes* undoubtedly shines an unflattering light upon the repetitiveness of house music; it begins with a characteristic pattern of 3-part, second-inversion chords moving in parallel in the middle range of the piano before the entry of a heavy bass drum which gives equal intensity to each beat in the bar. An imitation sample for strings is then set up, featuring groups of semiquavers arranged in groups of six, in order to overlap the beat in a mindless fashion characteristic of electronic reproduction; in a similarly mechanical way the note values are later distorted to become triplets. This heavy-footedness continues in a section featuring a remarkable solo for talking drum in

unison with a melody for marimba, which creates a peculiarly sampled texture and a convincingly boorish impression of wordless rap. In order to blur the effect and make it more realistic, Gardiner also added an inverted version of the rap melody in the tuba part.

The central section of the piece diverts unexpectedly from the house style and enters an area of impressionistic, pulseless colour, moving on to a series of thick, chugging chords which represent a direct reference to *Danses des Adolescentes* from Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. It is impossible to ignore the huge discrepancy between Stravinsky's portrayal of a mythical ritual of youth, evoked here by means of the title of the piece and this direct quotation, and Gardiner's realist version. This is neither a negative comment upon Stravinsky's idealism nor upon the modern world's replacement of myth with mind-numbing experience; it is simply an ironic juxtaposition from which the listener can form an opinion if desired. Even the clumsiness and repetitiveness of the music cannot be taken simply as a criticism, when it is also obvious that stylistic features such as the regular beat, sampled figures and rap demand enormous respect from the live instrumentalists. The ultimate ambivalence, however, rests in the undeniable excitement of the piece, which confronts the audience with its own voyeuristic fascination with the music of youth and articulates one of the prevailing themes of contemporary cultural life, that of being attracted to something which one feels obliged to dismiss.

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[1]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[2]Christopher Hobbs interviewed by Sarah Walker, Hackney, 17th October 1990

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]White refers enthusiastically to one of Cage's anecdotes regarding his delight in observing a Shaeffer pen machine in a shop window, cleverly designed to produce calligraphic text infront of the watching crowd; instead of carrying out this task, the machine malfunctioned and began to tear up the paper and spray ink everywhere. Cynicism towards technology also played a part in Scratch Orchestra ethics; Rod Eley's introduction to *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (Cardew, 1974: 15-16) describes how members were originally opposed to electronics, as they rendered musical skills worthless, made live musicians redundant and did little to free them from drudgery.

[6]Gavin Bryars interviewed by Sarah Walker, Leicester Polytechnic, 4th March 1991

[7]Ian Gardiner interviewed by Sarah Walker, Willesden, 14th March 1989

[8]Ibid.

[9]Programme note from a recital by Dave Smith at the ICA, London, 26th April 1992

[10]John White interviewed by Sarah Walker, Lower Edmonton, 13th February 1990

[11]Programme note from a recital by Dave Smith at the ICA in London, 26th April 1992

[12]*Fourth Piano Concert* was premiered by Smith at the British Music Information Centre shortly after the completion of this script, on the 13th of December 1994. It consisted of five contrasting pieces: *Marinera* (1988), *Ogive 1* (1994), *Prelude, Aksak and Kaba* (1989-94), *Ogive 2* (1994) and *Indian Spring* (1980/1). Smith has since made the decision to omit the final movement and to compose a replacement.

[13]Programme note from a recital by Dave Smith at the British Music Information Centre, 3rd February 1994

[14]Introduction by Ian Gardiner to the first transmission of *Monument*, 5th October 1993, BBC Radio 3

[15]Review by Paul Driver in *The Times*, 9th April 1994

[16]John White: *Fashion Music*, recorded on compact disc by Gemini on LondonHALL docu 3

## CHAPTER 5

# A METHODOLOGY FOR THE ANALYSIS OF ECLECTIC EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

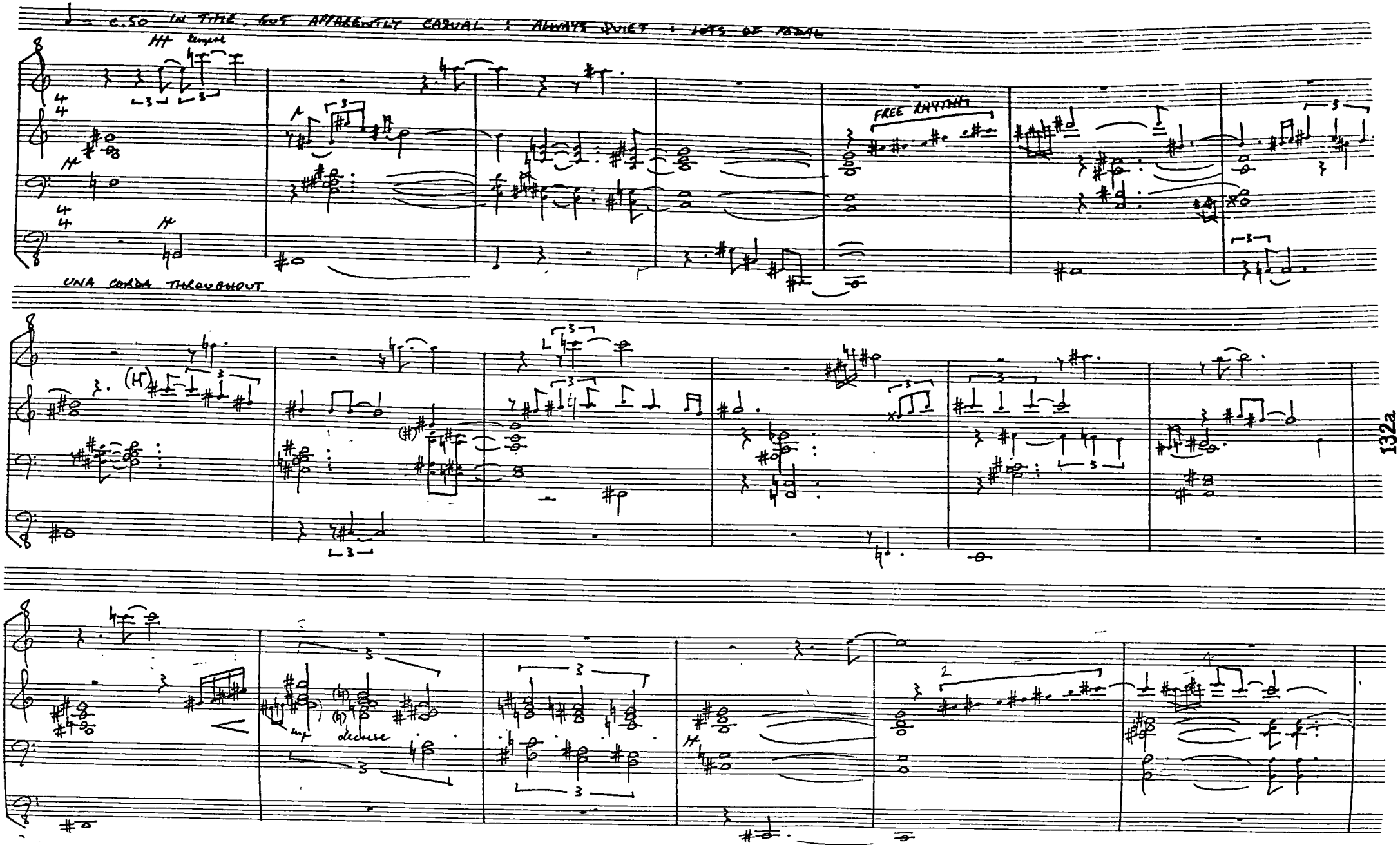
The original point of departure for this research was the desire to justify an instinctive belief in the superior quality of the eclectic music of experimental composers over certain other kinds of contemporary 'cross-over' music. With this aim in mind, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate that eclectic tendencies in experimental music cannot be accounted for in the same way as eclectic tendencies in the inherently-problematic postmodernist music. It has also drawn attention to the important subversive potential of associative experimental composition. However, the achievements of this area of music are unlikely to gain widespread respect until attention is paid to how associative music actually works. At present, there are seldom any attempts to distinguish between association that is an act of social ingratiation or artistic desperation, when radical originality is no longer possible, and association with a positive purpose such as homage, itself used in defiance of the musical status quo. It is not acceptable for critics to simply award points for each popular style used, applauding the political statement made by allowing such styles into the concert hall regardless of how the musical references interact, whether the composer in question is serving a genuine social purpose or simply serving his own career and soothing the conscience of the establishment. The subversion of experimental eclecticism is more subtle; experimental composers combine associative material to form a highly eloquent metalanguage in which irony and humour can be used for whatever purpose is required. The message received by the listener depends on his or her recognition of the origins of the musical material, so while the music can always work on a non-conceptual level (and this surface coherence is a major contributor to its validity), a critical stance is, at the same time, always possible.

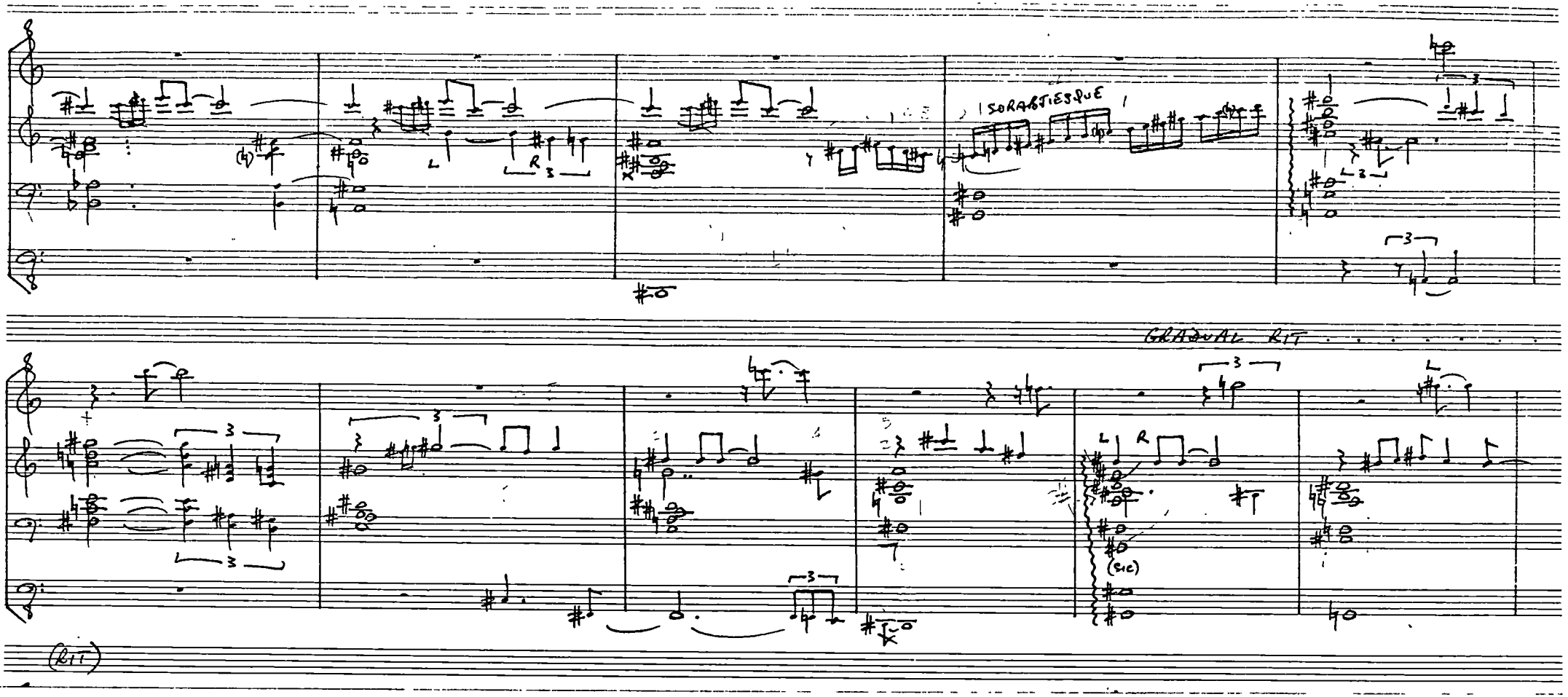
## 5.1 LIMITATIONS OF CONVENTIONAL ANALYSIS

Analysing the music semiologically can be a great help in observing in more detail how the associations interact, and thereby assessing more objectively the music's success in encapsulating a subversive stance. With this aim in mind, I have attempted to formulate a method of analysis which is gestural, rather than musical, but one which will go beyond the simple revelation of the presence of the gestures. Merely to reduce the music to its basic constituents does hold certain attractions in the case of a style which is packed with references, hidden and otherwise, many of which hint at the composer's private world: however, a musical system cannot be fully understood in terms of its isolated parts, regardless of how significant those individual parts may be.

Neither can associative music be fully understood by raking for the underlying unity between the references, in other words looking for linguistically unifying techniques in the employment of motives, harmony, rhythm or instrumentation; this tells

# AFTERHOURS for Gavin Bryars

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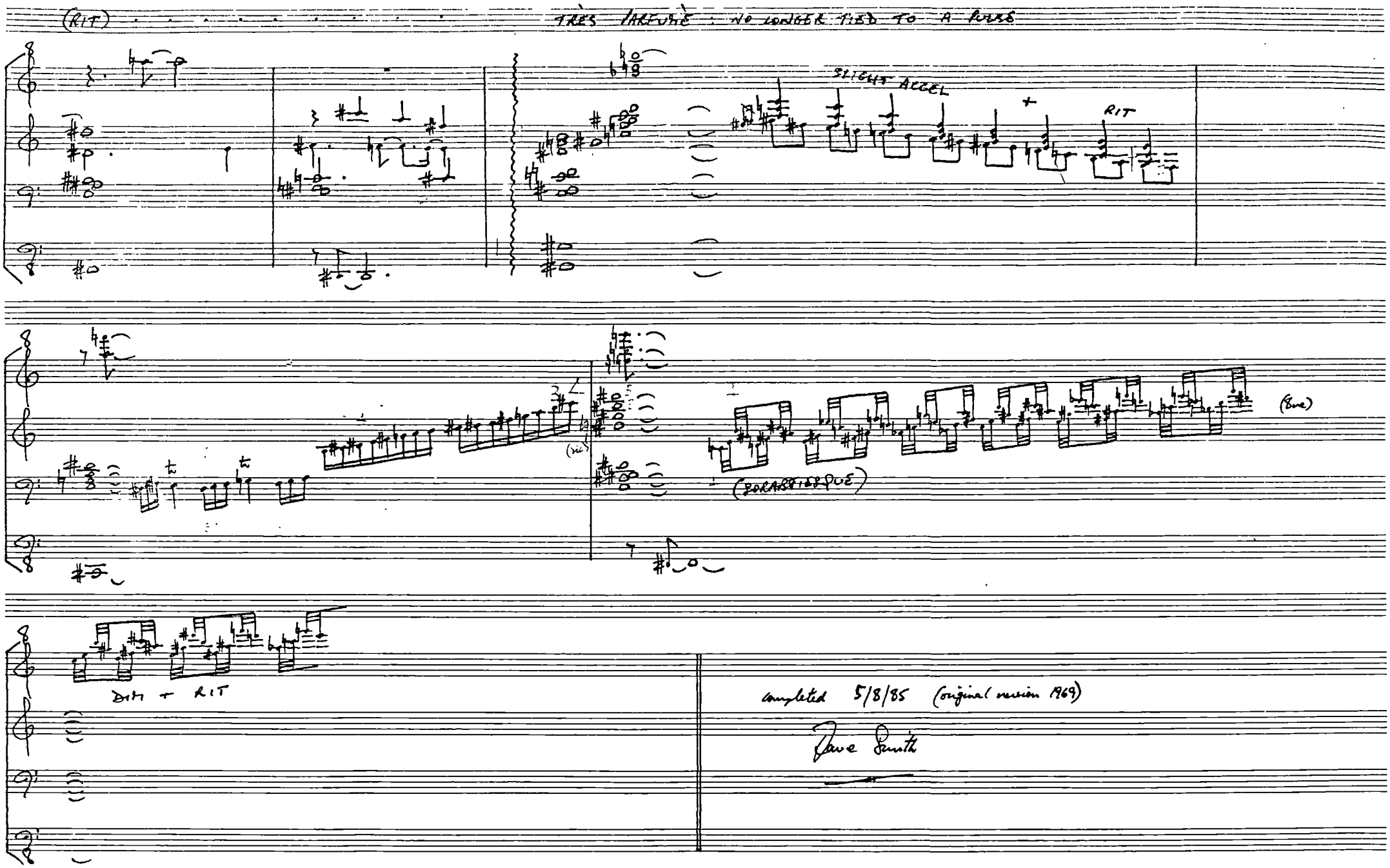

(RIT)
TRÈS LARGHE : NO LONGER TIED TO A PULSE
SLIGHT ACCEL
RIT
(8va)
(SCARABESQUE)
DIM + RIT
completed 5/8/85 (original version 1969)
Dave Smith

us how the gestures are constituted but not how they function. Nancy Perloff's study of Satie and Les Six, *Art and the Everyday*, considers the inadequacy of this type of conventional thematic analysis for certain referential musics:

> Certainly Satie and his circle were not alone in the 1920's in their use of popular sources. Stravinsky, Debussy and Ravel also incorporated French and American popular material. In the case of Satie, Milhaud, Poulenc, and Auric, however, the approach to vernacular idioms involved a use of principles antithetical to the nineteenth-century German notion of a sublime, well-integrated work: principles such as diversity and simultaneity of material, repetition, satire. Curiously it is only today, when these techniques have permeated late twentieth-century music and composers are juxtaposing heterogeneous musical sources, that we can look back on the works of Satie and his circle and apply appropriate analytic criteria. Thus the present illuminates the past... (Perloff, 1991: 212)

John White has reinforced this:

> While composing, I am generally more preoccupied with exploring outside the initial material, than with attempting to base every part of the work on what seems to me an arbitrary and unreal concept of thematic unity. The cross-references in this sonata are not structural supports but purely emotional retrospections.[1]

Whilst organic unity is undoubtedly an inappropriate gauge for analysis, equally unrevealing as an analytical method is to search for the composer's stylistic fingerprints. This attitude tends to minimise the 'ready-made' aspects of the new work by focusing only on the ways in which the music diverges from its source material. It is often the case that the ability of the piece to engage our attention rests in its very similarity to other genres or specific works; for example, the resemblance of Marcel Duchamp's 'Fountain' to a urinal must be acknowledged by the critic regardless of any additional elements, conceptual or material, which contribute to the whole identity of the finished piece. As in the understanding of a machine, the interaction of the individual parts (or references in the case of a piece of associative music) is what determines its productive use. The analyst must discover how the cogs manifest themselves, or in semiological terminology, what relationships exist between the signs, and how these relationships contribute to the overall cohesion of the piece.

## 5.2 TOWARDS A METHODOLOGY

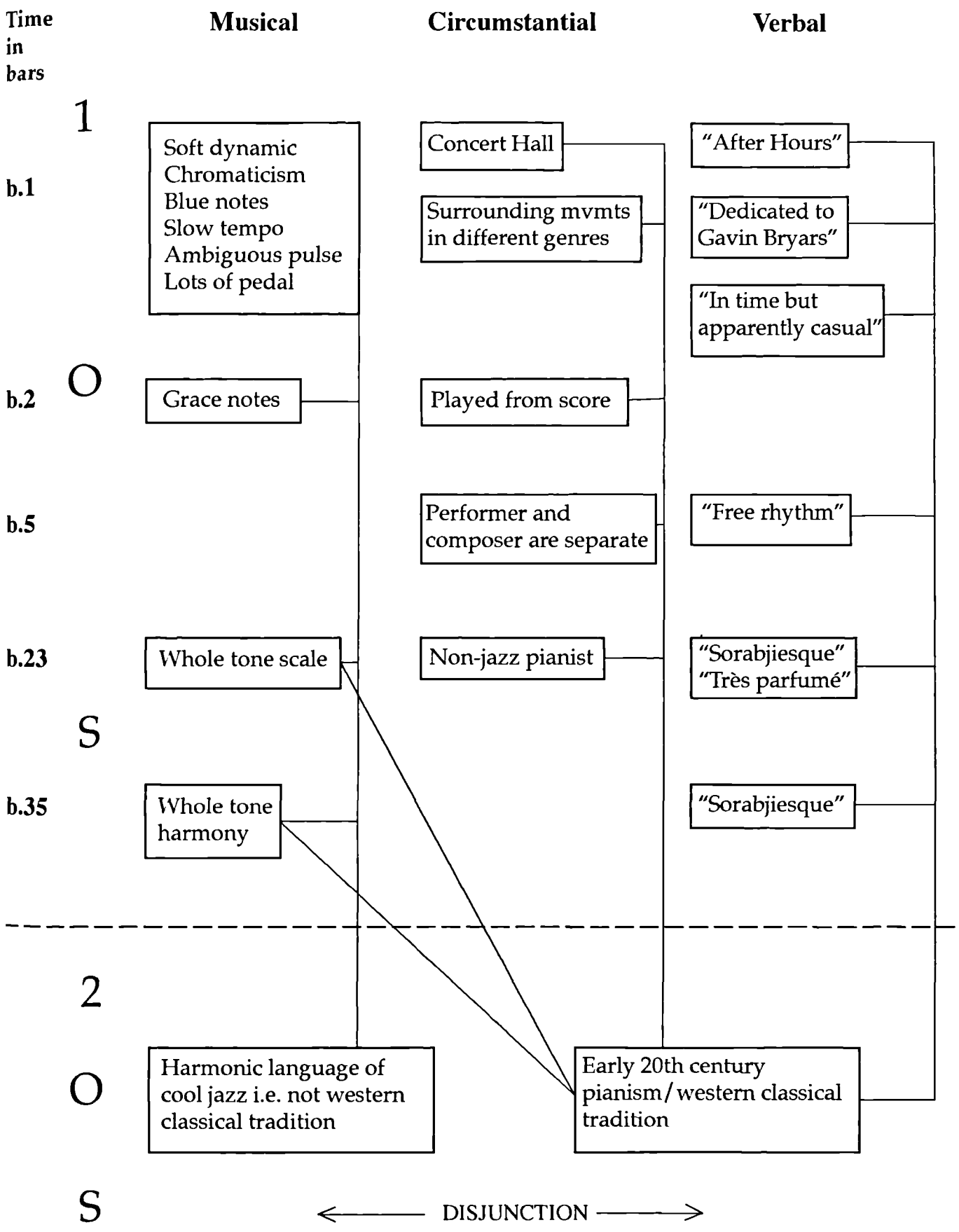
A piece which poses a typical challenge to anyone trying to explain its effectiveness is Dave Smith's *After Hours*, from *First Piano Concert* (see score opposite). Its jazz style and references to Sorabji are not backed up by an overall literary concept; there is no programme, no thematicism, no conscious assertion of a personal voice. In order to study how the composition works, instead of using traditional analytical criteria it is more logical to isolate the major semiological components of the piece and observe how they interact.

An attempt to list these constituents fully, taking into consideration every possible aspect that might contribute to the listener's comprehension, reveals a great variety of signs; not only musical ones (such as blue notes or whole-tone harmonies), but several important indicators from other systems (for example verbal markings such as 'Sorabjiesque'). This diversity suggests that the piece might be approached as an 'integrated text', a term is used by semiologists to describe a work that is constituted of various combinations of words, sounds, movements and visuals. Each of these categories entails different sign-systems - or in other words, different methods of communicating meaning - and is combined to create different experiences for the audience to interpret. The word 'integration' is therefore employed because it indicates that the sign-systems are combined into a whole, and the word 'text' is employed because the onlooker has to read, or assimilate, the experience. Although the term is more usually applied to a medium such as performance art, where the parts which constitute the whole are in themselves different sign-systems (music, words, action, etcetera) - purely musical works such as those by the English experimental composers do reflect fundamental aspects of the concept of the integrated text. An obviously ready-made quotation or subtle reference which occurs in a purely musical context, that is to say within a single sign-system, has the same power to signify another cultural world as an incongruous gesture communicated through a different sign-system. Furthermore, as the case of *After Hours* illustrates, a significant contribution is made to a musical text by other sign-systems such as the written words which constitute libretti, programme notes or even markings in the score, as well as the visual spectacle and social context of the performance. All of these are of considerable importance to the reading of a musical text from the experimental tradition.

After deciding upon the identity of the signs, the analysis proceeds by presenting them in columns according to category. As shown by the diagram opposite, the signs which make up the experience of *After Hours* are from musical, verbal and circumstantial systems. The musical and verbal categories are self-explanatory; the circumstantial system refers to the characteristics of the situation in which the piece is performed. Unlike the other sign systems, the circumstantial system has not actually been supplied by the creator of the work, but it can be predicted to a certain extent and therefore exploited by him. They cannot be dismissed as variable 'extras', not inherent in the actual composition; the experimental tradition requires the composer to take an active interest in the circumstances of performance, if not to actually participate. In this piece, the circumstantial signs are responsible for the difficulty, though by no means impossibility, of denying the identity of the text as a fully-composed piece and interpreting it as actual jazz.

The effect of the verbal system is perhaps less able to be determined by Smith. Most of the signs within it, except the title, depend on the reader's access to the score or

# After Hours diagram




1 O S - First order of signification
2 O S - Second order of signification

comprehensive programme notes (and it must be borne in mind that Smith's notes are brief and basic). This element of chance again opens up the text to a variety of readings. The reading represented by this diagram assumes that access to the score has been allowed; the performer is the principal reader. As in the music of Satie, the words are not intended to be somehow communicated through the performance, but rather to inform the performer of the conceptual background of the piece.

Naturally, listing the signs inherent in the piece is only a starting point; interest lies in what they imply. In order to make the distinction between these two areas, it is helpful to refer to Roland Barthes' concepts of the first and second orders of signification. The first order of signification concerns the identification of the sign - actually acknowledging its presence; the second order of signification concerns the reader's interpretation of the sign. The second order of signification is the most revealing for present purposes, as this is where the network of meanings on which the work rests is located. On the diagram this is represented in the area beneath the horizontal line, and in it the concepts deriving from the first order signs can be seen.

It will be noticed that this area is not governed by bar numbers, unlike the area representing the first order of signification. This is because the ideas in the second order of signification cannot be linked to a particular moment of perception; the point at which the signs in the first order are interpreted as cool modern jazz and music from the western classical tradition respectively is entirely non-specific, and remains constant throughout the piece. Of course, the musical events by themselves are encountered sequentially, likewise the expressive meanings that they, on a certain level, signify. But these make up only a portion of the signs on offer. The reading of the text as a whole - which means coming to terms with signs from the musical, verbal and circumstantial systems - is not tied to a fixed point in time. This bears witness to the conceptual nature of music from the experimental tradition in general; and concept, unlike narrative (as in the case of a traditionally programmatic piece), is a static thing.

The diagram so far has set out the first order signs present in the piece and shown their second order significations. Once the listener has grasped these significations, it is natural to investigate their relationship, to determine whether the concepts reflect upon each other in a meaningful way. A conjunctive relationship is one where the sign systems (or the signs within a system) are mutually supportive. A disjunctive relationship is one where the signs or sign systems express an opposition. In *After Hours*, the second order of signification contains the concepts of cool jazz and the western classical tradition; this could be considered to be a disjunction.

## 5.3 SUBJECTIVITY

Naturally, the diagram represents a personal experience of a piece of music. Other readers might perceive certain signs and miss others, become aware of signs at different times, and interpret signs differently. The nature of semiological analysis is one of attempting to express as objectively as possible something which is subjective - the experience of reading a text. This does not mean to imply that the sole purpose of the exercise is to achieve a 2-dimensional representation of the individual's reading experience, merely that this form of musical analysis uses the listening experience as its starting point instead of the score. It could be argued that there is a chance that the composer's intention could be misrepresented in this way, but that doubt can be overcome for two reasons. Firstly, the concept of such intention is largely scorned by experimental composers; Bryars for example enjoys the varied interpretations of his work by listeners, even if his references are wrongly identified, as is often the case with *Cadman Requiem,* where a quotation from Vierne's organ prelude *Idylle Melancholique* strongly resembles a well-known passage of Fauré's *Requiem,* as described earlier. Secondly, no relationship mapped out on the diagram is beyond the possibility of being perceived upon first hearing. Systematically arranging the symbolic materials of a composition in a two-dimensional form is intended to clarify the listening experience, enabling relationships between symbols to be revealed that the naked ear could possibly miss. It is a way of intellectualising the listening experience to enable more satisfactory critical appraisal of the music.

However, there are two significant areas of subjectivity which are more difficult to dismiss. These include the matter of what other signs surround the sign in question, preceding or succeeding it in time as the music progresses; in other words, the fact that interrelationships between consecutive signs are dependent upon the listener's individual memory. The issue of the listener's cultural conditioning must also be confronted, without which the various musical signs cannot be distinguished one from the other. Efforts to represent these two variables in the early stages of the methodology led to unhelpfully complex diagrams, but they were finally abandoned for the following reasons.

It was observed that the two dimensions of memory and cultural conditioning corresponded with Barthes' two 'axes' of language, which he claimed to characterise all systems. The first corresponds to the 'syntagmatic', sequential axis of language. In this axis, which could be considered the horizontal one, the significant units are ordered according to mysterious inherited rules. Each unit derives sense from the surrounding units. It therefore goes without saying that the human memory is therefore absolutely necessary before any kind of syntax - and therefore language - can take place.

The governing factor of the listener's cultural conditioning corresponds to Barthes' 'vertical' axis of language. This axis concerns the associations which a unit

evokes in the mind. These associations (known confusingly as 'oppositions') could be linked to the unit by virtue of a cosmetic similarity, or a similarity of meaning (thus *pig* is linked to both *jig* and *sow).* This chain of associations acts to reinforce the meaning of the unit. As with the case of the horizontal axis of language, the sophistication of the human brain is a pre-requisite here; without some knowledge of the world no unit would give rise to an association, and the units would be stripped of their signifying value.

The point which is emphasised by this truism is that the methodology should have taken the reader's conditioning for granted, as an absolute starting point. Semiology itself would not be possible if it were not for the short- and long-term memory, so it seems somewhat redundant to persist in pointing out that the jazz harmony, the repetition, the tempo or whatever cannot be proved to be there independently of an individual listener's perception of it. My apparent inability to prove that any sign was categorically present led to the impression of a spurious and subjective analysis, but the arbitrary functioning of the individual's brain is no less necessary to the perception of thematic unity as in Reti's methodology or harmonic development as in Schenker's. The analysis of the listener's actual experience of time or space is the domain of psychologists, an area which Barthes refused to be drawn into.

The fact remains that the signs exist side by side to be linked by the mind as it sees fit; they also are capable of evoking an infinite chain of associations as the mind sees fit. The perception of syntagmatic and associative relationships is not guaranteed, but these relationships are latent, composed into the music and waiting to be discovered or arising accidentally (as in the case of Bryars' *Cadman Requiem*).

The identification of the major junction or junctions in a work must be the analyst's starting point only, revealing issues which must then be assessed. In the case of *After Hours,* the implementation of the methodology has facilitated an objective revelation of the disjunctive relationship between the jazz language of the piece and its alternative parentage, the romantic pianistic tradition, which is communicated by the signs in the linguistic and circumstantial systems. It could be demonstrated how the piece does not make a confrontational attack on the bourgeois musical world, being fully-composed and featuring virtuosic figuration from the romantic past which makes it eminently suitable for performance on a conventional concert grand. However, there is irony in its comfortable bringing together of the incompatible worlds of the night club and the concert hall; showing how the two might marry is far more intriguing, and subversive, than showing how they are opposed.

Although I believe the central cultural issue of the piece to be represented by the disjunction discussed above, it does not necessarily follow that one is obliged to ignore the various conjunctive relationships between the purely musical signs such as blue notes, soft dynamics and chromaticism. These signify various nuances of expression in their own right, independently of their relationships with signs from other systems, but

because of their relationships with signs from other systems, it is possible to bypass this level of expressiveness and demote it to the rank of the First Order of Signification where it acts integrally as a symbol for cool jazz itself, for the concept of cool jazz.

## 5.4 FURTHER APPLICATION OF THE METHODOLOGY

The methodology is ideally suited to the assessment of complex texts, helping to determine whether or not a work really is 'opaque', i.e.. containing so many conflicting references that no junctions of meaning can be perceived. Opacity, which is an important part of the psychology of postmodernism, is almost always avoided in pluralistic texts coming from the experimental tradition. References are not often strongly disjunctional - Smith's juxtapositioning of Sorabji and cool jazz offers the listener a fresh viewpoint of the similarity of the different sources - and those that are more so are often humorous (organum and casio keyboards, Messiaen and soul in the music of White). Whatever the point of observation, irony, or humour, the listener is encouraged to engage in reflection about music. That reflection could be focused on what appear to be the composer's feelings on the source materials, or it could be directed inwards towards the listener's own personal opinions; perhaps the ideal is that it should do both. A listener who lacks strong opinions on the styles combined, or who is unaware of the typical concerns of the contemporary composer may access the underlying concept of the piece by reading the programme notes, and use that information to guide his imagination through the performance. As a final, and significant option, the disjunctive relationships set up by associative material and its context can be overlooked by concentrating on the conjunctions, which have their own, perfectly valid, network of meanings. As mentioned above, *After Hours* can be appreciated satisfactorily by a more passive listener as a piece of modern jazz due to the conjunctive relationships which exist between its harmonic language, its length, its dynamics, its instrumentation. Application of the methodology to further pieces would help to reveal that this is a characteristic of much eclectic experimental music, and one which plays an important role in the music's subversiveness. The diagram shows that in Smith's music, no 'personal' style, recognisable by some degree of superior normality, peeps through the gaps between jazz references to placate those potentially influential listeners who give faith, and rewards, to modernist ethics. It could be argued that pieces by cross-over composers such as Martland, Turnage or Lloyd could almost never be interpreted in this way, enjoyed as rock or as blues, due to their less-than-convincing use of these idioms; for this reason they are much more likely to be encountered as opaque texts, difficult for inexperienced listeners but far more appealing to the establishment than the music of Smith. Jameson might argue that Smith's approach, which encompasses many styles without any one appearing to be the main one, is the more postmodern. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, postmodernism is a polymorphous phenomenon which also concerns the conflict

between the old, modernist ethics and the new availability and attraction of non-western classical styles; between the desire to oppose the establishment and be rewarded by it. These problematic characteristics are not manifest in experimental music.

Issues such as the lack of opacity in pluralistic music of the English experimental tradition have been argued here with the help of other research in addition to the methodology of the integrated text. If one wished to reach any kind of broad perspective using the methodology only, it would be necessary to follow the advice given by Barthes in the conclusion of his *The Elements of Semiology*. Barthes believed that the aim of semiological research should be to find out how systems other than language function; to do this, the researcher must gather together a representative selection of objects to be observed, and approach them from a single point of view, refusing to be distracted by other issues which may arise (such as psychology or sociology). This corpus of works will naturally have a limit, and will inevitably contain a certain level of arbitrariness, but must be wide enough so that these disadvantages are minimised. After the collection of data from the corpus, Barthes suggested that the analyst would eventually come across facts and relations which have already been noticed; these returns will become more and more frequent until one no longer discovers any new material. The corpus is then said to be saturated.

To put this into practice, several works by each experimental composer must be subjected to the methodology, after which the diagrams must be compared to see if any patterns emerge both within a single composer's output and between composers in the experimental school. After this, analyses of music from outside the experimental tradition which employ referential techniques could be compared with those from within. As mentioned above, it must always be borne in mind that the isolation of the major point of disjunction or conjunction in a work is not an end in itself, as the same category of junction may be found in many aesthetically different works. It is the task of the analyst to explore the reverberations of the junction, as I attempted to do in the case of *After Hours*. The results of this could contribute to the understanding of what distinguishes experimental music from music of other traditions; alternatively, one could use the results in a more critical capacity, to help identify what made certain works more meaningful in their use of association than others.

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[1]Quoted by Irene Kohler in the programme note for the premiere of White's *Piano Sonata No.2.*

# CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to gain a critical insight into contemporary music based on the style of cultural analysis developed by writers active in the visual arts. These criteria were outlined in the opening chapter and used throughout the rest of the text as a means of assessing the use of quotation and musical reference in recent English experimental music. New questions came to light concerning the assessment of the postmodernist aesthetic in music; the motivation behind associative composition; its success in maintaining a subversive stance; the respect shown towards the source material; and finally, what it offers to the listener. I have attempted to demonstrate how, in response to these questions, music from the experimental tradition has used quotation and reference in a particularly successful way.

Although the writer whose criteria have most influenced this judgement is Suzi Gablik, it must be acknowledged that Gablik's vision of the ethical art of the future still represents an enormous challenge to those active in the musical sphere. The hypothesis of *The Reenchantment of Art* is that the rejection of modernist individualism and postmodernist apathy is long overdue, and must be replaced by a spirit of social integration, reflecting the ecological and feminist consciousness which has developed in response to new global threats such as pollution, poverty, and nuclear war. Whereas the experimental tradition can be demonstrated to possess a considerable amount of subversive power in its denial of accepted music history, its independence, and its use of irony, it can in no way be argued to be of the same tangible social purpose as the art which Gablik presents in her own conclusion to *The Reenchantment of Art*. Her paradigmatic artist is Bradley McCallum, an American sculptor who acted in close collaboration with homeless people to produce park benches with protective awnings, and stage performances connected with this work. His aim is for his art to "serve as a catalyst for dialogue and critical contemplation, and perhaps also as a bridge to link the homeless with sources of aid" (Gablik, 1991: 175). In contrast, one must observe that in the case of English experimental music, the familiar patriarchal canon of music history which contributed to the modernist aesthetic has been replaced by another list of heroes[1]; that the music is still designed for conventional concert performance; and that the subject-matter of the music is frequently music itself. Its association with Gablik's radical idea of an ethical art must therefore be considered to be limited.

Whether this serves as a negative judgement on the music is another matter. It must be borne in mind that the social issues which form the basis of Gablik's paradigm were thoroughly explored by many of the composers themselves in early experimental ensembles such as the Scratch Orchestra and Portsmouth Sinfonia. The progress away from overt politicism since that time cannot be considered a sign of compromise in return

for greater outward success, but an indication of perceived limitations in the effectiveness of that approach and in its ability to stretch practitioners to their full potential.

It was observed in Chapter 2 that the rich experience of the early period was never wasted, but was integrated into many features of the later music. John White's symphonies and sonatas, for example, may not comprise innovative structures of enhanced social relevance, but their actual content places the composer in a relationship to his environment, to people and things which are important to him, in a manner compatible with Gablik's community-oriented vision. The continued interaction of composers and performers in the actual presentation of much experimental music is also relevant to her anti-hierarchical approach.

Although many of the composers featured in this thesis have written extensively about the work of their colleagues and about other relevant issues in music, the visual arts and society generally, there has been a conspicuous absence of any attempt to explain or argue for the actual validity of the experimental viewpoint. The fact that the composers have not felt the need to justify themselves in this way should be regarded positively; however, it is hoped that the arguments contained here, which do enter into the area of moral justification, will fill this gap and go some way towards promoting the music.

# APPENDIX 1: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

## i. Gavin Bryars

Gavin Bryars was born in Goole in 1943. While reading philosophy at Sheffield University he played jazz double bass in his spare time and studied composition privately. On leaving university in 1964 he worked as a professional bassist, forming an improvisation group with the avant-garde jazz musicians Derek Bailey and Tony Oxley. With the money he earned at venues such as Greaseborough Working Mens Club ("The Palladium of the North"), Bryars purchased writings and scores by composers such as Cage, Feldman and Wolff, and soon found that the aesthetics of American experimental music were working their way into the work of the trio. A desire to concentrate on compositional ideas developed from this, influenced by a certain disillusionment with the egotism and conceptual limitation he perceived in improvisation. He met Cage in 1967 at the University of Illinois, and worked with him on his multi-faceted composition HPSCHD.

During the late sixties and early seventies Bryars made his living principally as an academic, teaching in the Fine Art department of Portsmouth College of Art. It was here that he co-founded the Portsmouth Sinfonia, which acquired a cult status for its performances and recordings of works from the classical repertoire using players of minimal musical skill. The ironic humour of the ensemble distinguished it from the more earnest Scratch Orchestra, of which Bryars was never a member, although he worked closely with several composers associated with it, including Cardew.

In 1972 Bryars withdrew from music for two years in order to devote himself a the study of Marcel Duchamp. The compositions which followed this period show a renewed interest in found material including references to detective fiction, jazz, football, and french literature, in particular the novels of Jules Verne. In 1974 he became a member of both Oulipo [Ouvroir de la Litterature Potentielle] and the Collège de 'Pataphysique.

Another major turning point in Bryars' career was his opera *Medea*, premiered at the Opera de Lyon in 1984. Since then he has been involved with several operatic projects, many of which have been heard in Britain in the form of 'satellite' works, such as *Epilogue* and *By the Vaar* from *Dr Ox's Experiment*,expected to be premiered in its entirety by English National Opera in 1997. These projects also led to a strong interest in vocal music generally; Bryars has been closely associated with the Hilliard Ensemble since 1988.

Selective list of compositions

*For ensemble/chamber orchestra:* The Sinking of the Titanic (1969); Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet (1971, revised 1993); The Cross Channel Ferry (1979); Les Fiancailles (1983); Allegrasco (1983); String Quartet No. 1 (1985); Viennese Dance No.1 (1985); Sub Rosa (1986); By the Vaar (1987); The Old Tower of Lobenicht (1987); Alaric I or II (1989); After the Requiem (1990); Four Elements (1990); String Quartet No. 2 (1990); The Green Ray (1991); A Man in a Room, Gambling (1992); Three Elegies for Nine Clarinets (1993) The Archangel Trip (1993); The North Shore (1993 & 1994)

*For two pianos:* Out of Zaleski's Gazebo (1977); My First Homage (1978)

*Vocal (with or withoutinstrumental/keyboard accompaniment):* On Photography (1983); Effarene (1984); Pico's Flight (1986 & 1990); Glorious Hill (1988); Epilogue [from Doctor Ox's Experiment] (1988); Incipit Vita Nova (1989); Cadman Requiem (1989); The Black River (1991); The White Lodge (1991, new version 1992); The War In Heaven (1993);

*Opera:* Medea (1982, revised 1984 & 1994); Doctor Ox's Experiment (in progress)

## ii. Ian Gardiner

Ian Gardiner was born in London in 1960. He studied at Royal Holloway College, University of London, where his composition tutor was Brian Dennis, a former member of the Scratch Orchestra and close associate of Cardew and John White. With a strong interest in jazz, Gardiner was active as a performer on piano and tuned percussion, and followed his degree with research into the music of Steve Reich at the University of Keele.

After more performing experience with ensembles such as Vocem, Drum Theatre and Harmonie Band, Gardiner became a co-director with Andrew Hugill of the ensemble George W. Welch, which began life as a pool of musicians and composers performing mainly their own compositions, and gradually deveoped an instrumentation in the spirit of what Charles Ives defined as a theatre orchestra, with three string players (violin, viola and cello), solo woodwind and brass (clarinet/saxophone and tuba), piano (two or four hands), two percussionists on tuned instruments and one on drum kit. George W. Welch initially performed at small London venues such as the British Music Information Centre and St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, where Gardiner was employed as a lecturer until 1990. Subsequently the group made regular appearances under Gardiner's direction at larger venues such as the Purcell Room and ICA, playing a specialised repertoire of original compositions by Gardiner and Hugill, and arrangements of the works of several other composers ranging from Satie, Schubert, Frank Zappa and Carla Bley to Bryars, White and Smith. It also contributed to television documentaries on Gavin Bryars and Erik Satie.

Gardiner's music was first recorded by BBC radio in 1989; since that time he has broadcast regularly. In 1992 he composed a work for radio commissioned by the BBC, entitled *Monument*, a montage portrait of London from 1936 to the present combining a live score for George W. Welch with voices and sound effects from the BBC's archives. It later won both a Sony Radio Award and the Special Prize for music programmes at the 1994 Prix Italia.

Gardiner has composed music in many genres, including orchestral and chamber works music theatre, music for dance, big-band scores, and electro-acoustic works. He has received commissions from the chamber group Quorum, the Endymion Ensemble, the electro-acoustic group Harmonie Band and Trio Phoenix. He currently lectures at Salford University and is Chief examiner for composition on the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.

Selective list of compositions

*For George W. Welch:* Charing Cross (1985); Green Park (1986); Bond Street (1987); Hobbs End (1988); British Museum [including Prelude, Scared So, Fugue, The SS Great Britain, Epanaroscope Phakometre, Happy Eater, Midnight, Danses des Adolescentes, Community song] (1990- ); Monument [for ensemble and tape] (1992)

*Film scores:* Vormittagsspuk [Ghosts before breakfast] (1992); Fetiche (1992 revised 1995)

*Other ensemble:* 21st Century Foxtrot (1980); Don't Turn It Loose (1987); The Sisters' Share (1987); Bass Clarinet Trio (1988); Piccolo Clarinet Trio (1991); Rictus (1993); Two Dances (1995)

*Solo piano:* Endless Paradiddle (1989)

## iii. Christopher Hobbs

Christopher Hobbs was born in Uxbridge, Middlesex, in 1950. After three years as a Junior Exhibitioner at Trinity College of Music, specialising in piano and bassoon, he attended the Royal Academy of Music where his tutors included Cornelius Cardew (composition) and Patricia Brady (percussion). In 1968 he founded the Experimental Music Catalogue, a publishing venture aimed at disseminating scores by young composers; a year later he became the youngest member of the Scratch Orchestra and one of the chief enthusiasts for the performance of so-called popular classics.

Hobbs became a leading figure in English Experimental Music in the 1970's, spending three years as a member of the improvisation group AMM and performing throughout Europe with associates such as Cardew, Christian Wolff, John Tilbury, Gavin Bryars and

John White, with whom he played in the Promenade Theatre Orchestra and later as a duo which has endured throughout the next twenty years. More recently he has given solo recitals, and in 1989 he recorded the twentieth century premiere of the complete score for Satie's *Le Fils des Etoiles.*

Since 1980 Hobbs has spent much of his time in the United States, being particularly associated with the University of Redlands, California. He was director of music at the Drama Centre, London, for 18 years, and currently teaches at De Montfort University and Melton Mowbray College.

Selective list of compositions

*For solo piano:* Piano pieces 1-12 (1973); Sonatinas 1-7 (1975-86); 24 Preludes (1992); 17 One-minute pieces (1992)

*For two or more keyboards:* The Remorseless Lamb (1970); Czerny's 100 Royal Bouquet Waltzes for the Piano by Lanner and Strauss, arranged for Such as cannot reach an Octave (c.1970); Back Seat Album (1983); pieces for Live Batts [including Batt Jogg, The Batts of the Delectable Mountains, Batt Scrapps, Batt Flapp, Batt Fancie] (1990)

*For Promenade Theatre Orchestra (initially a quartet of toy pianos, with later additions of Golden Graniosa and Michelson toy pianos, wind and small percussion instruments; all works composed between 1970 and 1973*[2]*):* MacCrimmon will never return; Aran; 2 Doomsday Machines; Dufay Accompli; Scriabin Readymade; The Back Gate of Kiev

*For orchestra:* The Arnold/Wolf-Ferrari Orchestra Book (1969-70)

*For voices:* The Mountebanks - operetta (1976); 5 Morgenstern Songs (1984); Drei Lieder aus "Der Struwwelpeter" (1990)

## iv. Andrew Hugill

Andrew Hugill was born Andrew Hugill Thomson in 1957, and studied English and Music at the University of Keele, gaining an M.A. in Musical Composition in 1982. A close association with Gavin Bryars began two years later when Hugill acted as musical assistant to the preparation and performance of the operas *Medea* and *Civil Wars*, and working as librettist for *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant.* Hugill continued to work closely with Bryars, accepting a post as a lecturer and subject leader in the department of Visual and Performing Arts at De Montfort University (formerly Leicester Polytechnic) in 1986. He also plays an active role in performance at the University, directing and playing piano, percussion and harmonium in several ensembles.

In 1983, Hugill founded the ensemble George W. Welch (see under Ian Gardiner, above), which he co-directed until 1989. The group's repertoire, which initially included several works by Bryars, was greatly influenced by his own tendency towards visual or literary stimulus in composition, and his love of surrealism and irony. These interests are reflected in his membership of numerous cultural societies: he is the British Cultural Attache of the Fondation Erik Satie; a member of the Collège de 'Pataphysique; *Maitre Chanteur* of the Academie de Museologie Evocatoire; a member of Les Amis de Valentin Bru; and a member of the Francis Bacon Society. He has led workshops and lectured extensively on subjects relating to Duchamp and conceptual art generally, and has published essays on subjects including Satie, Raymond Roussel and Bryars.

Selective list of compositions

*Instrumental:* Clarinette Quintette "Litanies of the chariot", Op.1 (1980); Bride, teeming with sweet to the Bridegroom, Op.3 [also version for solo keyboard] (1981); A.S.C.H. Op.4, (1982); Phaon, Op.9 [also version for four harmoniums and soprano] (1983); Sabotherm, Op.11 (1984); A Slight List, Op.13 [also version for two pianos, six hands] (1984); Golden Shower, Op.14 (1985 & 1986); Eastward Oh, Op.17 [also version for harmonium and two pianos] (1987); Simon and Ennoia, Op.18 (1987); Kodok, Op.20 (1988, revised 1993); Phoenix Phanphare, Op.22 (1988); Doublemain, Op.22 (1988) [tape optional]; Voyeurism and Coach Ride from "Eugenie de Franval", Op.26 (1990); Bachelor Machine, Op.29 (1991); The Way Things Are, Op.31 (1992/3);
Pax Aetherna, Op.34 (1994)

*Vocal (with or without instrumental/keyboard accompaniment):* Perles de l'Opera, Op.5 (1982); The Broken Heart, Op.23 (1988); One Hundred Thousand Billion Songs, Op.24 (1989); Annonce Spectacle, Op.25 (1990); Brisset Rhymes, Op.27 (1990); Les Origines Humaines, Op.35 (1994/5)

*Tape (with or without acoustic instruments):* To End, Caruso Sang Figure 1, Op.12 (1984); Catalogue de Grenouilles, Op.19 (1988); Delay in Glass, Op.30 (1993); Clinamen, Op.32 (1993); Modal spaces, Op.33 [sound-architecture project] (1994)

## v. Dave Smith

Dave Smith was born in Salisbury in 1949 and educated at Solihull school. Instrumental tuition included piano lessons from the age of seven, and horn lessons from the age of fourteen. Between 1969 and 1970 Smith studied music at Magdalene College, Cambridge, after which he moved permanently to London. He joined the Scratch Orchestra in 1971, and since then has worked extensively with other composers and performers associated with the orchestra, performing on keyboards, baritone and tenor horns and tuned percussion. Other ensembles with which he has been involved, both as a composer and performer, include a piano duo with John Lewis (1973-77) and *Peoples' Liberation Music* (1975-76). Smith was a founder member of the *Garden Furniture Music Ensemble* (1977-79), the *English Gamelan Orchestra* (1980-83), and *Liria* (an Albanian folk band formed in 1983).

He is also a member of the Gavin Bryars Ensemble with whom he has performed throughout Europe and the USA.

Sharing Cardew's conviction that a composer can and should allow his music to reflect his political views, Smith has taken a particular interest in the music of Albania; since 1973 he has visited the country regularly, performing and broadcasting works by many national composers whose music he has arranged and transcribed for presentation in Britain. He has also visited North Korea, where he took part in an international festival of music, dance and circus acts in 1988 and 1989.

Between 1974 and 1984 Smith lectured at Kingsway-Princeton College, and at DeMontfort University (formerly Leicester Polytechnic) from 1980 where he currently teaches 20th century music history and composition. He also coordinates student ensembles acting as a performer, arranger, director and composer.

Selective list of compositions

*For solo piano*: Fibonacci systems (1973-75); 1st Piano Concert (1985-86) "24 sonatas in all the keys"; 2nd Piano Concert (1984-93) "Ireland one and Ireland free"; 3rd Piano Concert (1983-92) "5 studies"; 4th Piano Concert (1988-95, still in progress); 5th Piano Concert (1993-94) "Alla reminiscenza"

*For two or more keyboards*: Diabolus (1974); Swings (1974); Organ Grind (1975); Diabolus Maximus (1976); Tidal Systems 2 (1976); Diabolus Apocalypsis (1976); Diabolus Harmonicus (1977).

*For Garden Furniture Music Ensemble (varied combinations of viola, baritone horn, euphonium, tuba, piano and percussion)*: Music for public convenience (1977); Music for public inconvenience (1978); Bryars KGB (1987); Potters Bar (1978); Multi-ethnic set (978-79); Cage No.3 (1978)

*Other ensemble*: Indian Spring (1980); Albanian Summer (1980); Wallydrag Rock (1982, 1984 [extended version]); Aragonesca (1987); Disco Soleil Brillant (1994)

## vi. John White

John White was born in Berlin in 1936, and has described his early musical life as "doing the greats as to the manner born". From the age of four he took lessons in piano and theory with Helene Gipps, and after some uncertainty about whether to pursue sculpture and interior design as a career instead of composition, studied at the Royal College of Music where his tutors included Elisabeth Lutyens and Bernard Stevens.

After leaving the Royal College in 1959, White spent a year working as musical director to the Western Theatre Ballet; his interest in dance was to lead to collaborations with various choreographers on approximately thirty ballets. Equally prolific as a composer of music for theatre, White worked as a freelance performer and director of West End shows from 1966 onwards. He has held teaching posts at the London Drama Centre, the Yehudi Menuhin School, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, and DeMontfort University (formerly Leicester Polytechnic).

White is both a pianist and tuba player, and has been involved in several composer/performer ensembles with other musicians associated with the English experimental tradition, including the Promenade Theatre Orchestra (1969-1972), originally known as John White and his Orchestra and for whom he wrote several of his "machine" compositions, the Scratch Orchestra (1969-1972), the Garden Furniture Music Ensemble (1977-1979), and the Farewell Symphony Orchestra (1979-1980). His performing and composing collaboration with Christopher Hobbs began in 1972 with a percussion duo, later featuring combinations of piano, tuba and bassoon, and most recently focussing on electric keyboards. White also performs as a solo pianist and keyboard player, and has toured Insbruch and the USA.

White's output is exceptionally prolific, and the following list can only offer a general guide based on the most characteristic works. Comprehensive details have been compiled by Dave Smith in his *Catalogue of Works* (1991).

Selective list of compositions

*For electronics (alone or with acoustic instruments/voice):* Symphonies 7-9 (1982-1983); Symphonies 11-13 (1984-1986), Faberge curate's egg parts 1,2 and 3 (c.1984); The merry samurai's return from work (1985); Breakfast time at the Academy of Martial Arts (1985); Symphonies 15-21 (1986-1989); Edouard Ratt parts 1-7 (1988); pieces for Live Batts [including Batt out of Heaven, Bestial batt boogie, Celestial batt choir, the dog and his whistler, VTR (Vampire till ready), Battel](1990); Fashion Music [originally for dance] (1992); Scenes of Violence (1994)

*For Promenade Theatre Orchestra (initially a quartet of toy pianos, with later additions of Golden Graniosa and Michelson toy pianos, wind and small percussion instruments, all composed between 1970 and 1973):* "Ready-mades" based on pre-existing sources, including Multiple Misereres mixtures machine; Nurnburger drive-in; 36 pastels of 7 pastels from the lake of Constance; Byrd mixtures; Mr Mayerl, his exercise; Polka-softening machine; A Skryabin plain-hunting; A Viennese give-away; 1st year minuet machine; Accidentals will happen; Christmas carol machine

*For Garden Furniture Music Ensemble (varied combinations of viola, baritone horn, euphonium, tuba, piano and percussion):* Gargoyles (1977-78); Air Zaire set (1978); Solemn Malady set (1978); Alice (1978); Cissy rock (1979); Various autobiographical tone-poems (1979)

*Other ensemble:* Symphony No.2 (1965); Drinking and hooting machine (c.1969); PT Machine (1969); Air [from The Four Elements for brass quartet] (1969); Jew's harp machine (c.1970); Sunday afternoon Machine (1970); Swanee machine (1970); Autumn Countdown Machine (1971); Chimes Machine (before 1972); Symphonies 3-6 (1981); Symphony No.10 (1984); Symphony No.14 (1986); WUT (1987); WUT again (1987); Not WUT (1987); Not WUT again (no way, Shitface!) (1988); SUN reader (1991)

*For solo piano:* 8 sonatinas (c. 1959-1961); 125 sonatas (1956- )

*For stage:* approx. 30 ballets (1956-1990); 28 theatre scores (1956-1989); 4 operas (1975-1991)

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[1]Dave Smith's interest in Lili Boulanger should be acknowledged as an exception to this rule.

[2]In a review for Music and Musicians of February 1972, Adrian Jack described the Promenade Theatre Orchestra as follows:

> The PTO is rather like a gentleman's club. Every Sunday they meet in White's front room and play only each other's music...Between them they produce 3 or 4 hours of music - for better or for worse - each week...As performers they are hermetically sealed. They don't rely on empathy with the audience...last summer I invited them to come and play for a day in my music pavillion at the Bedford Square Bookbang. The sun blazed, people browsed, paused, took it or left it. One man told his wife "Come along, darling, or the children might get the idea that this is actually music!"...they enjoyed playing in the canteen of Newport Art College while the students were having lunch.

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