

Material Music: Reclaiming Freedom in Spatialised Time

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The work of Lois Fitch,¹ following Paul Griffiths,² has situated Brian Ferneyhough's compositional practice within a synthesis of modern and postmodern concerns. By reading his music through a Marxist critique of the politics of musical temporality, this conception can be further contextualised as a resolution of the antagonism between temporal and spatial perception. This allows for a reimagining of the implications of well-documented frictions and drama in his music, where "coherence is not lost, but constantly walks a tightrope over the abyss",³ and in which the "creative dialogue between structural determinacy and local contingency [...] explores the tensions of modern subjectivity".⁴ Seen in this way, the composer's work gains political relevance to our current historical moment, one where the postmodern sense of perspectival multiplicity combines with an older, monad-like individual certainty.⁵ Ferneyhough's music provides us with an almost complete inversion of these trends, whereby rigorous yet disorientating objective structures become paramount to the maintenance of subjective freedom: one that is seen as a fluid, dynamic series of perspectives. Regarding the relationship between 'modernist' temporal direction and 'postmodern' plurality, he holds that each can be used to re-read its counterpart:

The subject will not go away merely because its existence is an impossibility. My essential premise is that there is a danger of allowing the very totalizing tendency of soi-disant 'postmodern' thinking to emerge as the representative 'metadiscourse' of our time, without considering the necessarily limited and restructured perspective in and through which the

1 Fitch, "Brian Ferneyhough, Postmodern Modernist", 2009, p. 159.

2 Griffiths, *Modern Music and After*, 1995, p. 264.

3 Toop, "Against a Theory of Musical (New) Complexity", 2010, p. 92.

4 Williams, "Adorno and the Semantics of Modernism", 1999, p. 35.

5 That is, 'Post-truth' (for want of a better term) is characterised by an internalisation of the global capitalist marketplace, allowing for a dazzling variety of contradictory positions, each with an equal, reified absolutism in their claims to truth.

individual composer faces the world, attempting to evoke and re-articulate aspects of it. 'History' exists primarily within the intellectual universe of the reflecting and acting individual as a series of uneasily existing, interconnected frames or models: its defining essence is motion, its articulating paradigm, perspective.⁶

Linear history and decentred perspective, Ferneyhough argues, are by no means mutually exclusive. This passage gives voice to one of the most striking wagers of Ferneyhough's music: that, just like the subject of which he speaks, processive logic and developmental direction can exist as paradox, multiplicity, and fractured, broken discourse. At the heart of this idea lies the dialectic of compositional spatio-temporality: the tensions between the disjunctive and the processive, or, in the terms of the Marxist tradition from which this critique is derived, the 'spatialised' and the 'temporal'. In navigating them, the material physicality of the body and the score – bridges between, perhaps, or even confluences of very specific forms of spatial and temporal perception – open up new potential beyond the limited givenness of contemporary experience.

As to methods, I will begin by outlining the critical framework that surrounds this idea, first attempted in my study of Elliott Carter's *String Quartet No. 4*: a re-reading of Theodor W. Adorno's *The Philosophy of New Music* through Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, and within a tradition of political thought that grapples with the interplay between material conditions, ideology and aesthetic form. I have quoted extensively from these and other important texts so as to preserve the stylistic colour that is, I believe, vital to the meaning of good aesthetic criticism. An examination of John Zorn's *Cobra* and Earle Brown's *Novara* will demonstrate the phenomenon of spatialisation at work; then, by following Ferneyhough's development from the influence of that tradition through three key stages, I suggest how it can be seen to originate in and transcend those limitations. As the origin of this turn lies in the physicality of the music and the demands placed upon the performer's body, I here include interviews with New Complexity performance specialists Jenni Hogan and Ben Smith, who speak about their competing perspectives on the experience of performance. I have foregone the use of musical close reading as much as possible, instead contextualising trends and approaches in Ferneyhough's music within a Marxist analysis of time perception. However, when

6 Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings*, 1995, pp. 78–79.

I have found it necessary to illustrate directly the ways in which his compositional techniques work together to produce a new music (with all its extra-musical intervention), I have done so as simply as possible, using the opening page of the *Second String Quartet*, which provides an elegant and readily perceived example for those without musical literacy. Ferneyhough's music, despite its reputation for complexity, is something that addresses itself to all, and the issues at stake are the concern of every individual constructed within the logic of capital.

Among these critical tools, Jameson's remains the key text: in its argument that our experiences under late capitalism are "dominated by space and spatial logic [...] by categories of space rather than by categories of time".⁷ This theory originates from György Lukács' analysis in *History and Class Consciousness*, which shows how the division of labour transforms what were "empirically average" processes of making into "objectively calculable work stint[s] that confront the worker as a fixed and established reality".⁸ He writes how

[t]ime sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality: in short, it becomes space. In this environment where time is transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space, an environment at once the cause and effect of the scientifically and mechanically fragmented and specialised production of the object of labour, the subjects of labour must likewise be rationally fragmented.⁹

Creative development is replaced by an alienated space of specialised action, through which aspects of the worker's individuality are separated from one another. At the heart of this is the dialectic between object and process, between movement and its reification. For the Marxist tradition, subjectivity is a work of self-actualisation: a process accomplished in time as temporal, developmental linearity. The transformation of that experience into a series of alienated, objective instances – of spaces – precludes the realisation of this process. Instead of engaging with the temporally based process of free subjectivity, the individual's unity becomes splintered into the

7 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 1991, p. 16.

8 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 1971, p. 88.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

maintenance of skills: specialised fragments best suited to whatever task is dictated by that block of the timetable. These are the roots of the postmodern fragmentation of the subject: the earlier spatialisation of temporal experience under capitalism.

Jameson's contribution to this tradition is to trace the phenomena through the entire superstructure of postmodern culture, exhaustively determining how it compromises the subject's ability to structure temporal bearing.

The crisis in historicity now dictates a return, in a new way, to the question of temporal organisation in general in the postmodern force field, and indeed, to the problem of the form that time, temporality, and the syntagmatic will be able to take in a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic. If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organise its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary.¹⁰

This failure is tracked outward in a number of instances. Firstly, 'Lacanian schizophrenia', in which temporal orientation is problematised by structuralism's disassembly of syntactic direction. Secondly, the phenomenon of postmodern 'decentring', where the end of modernist individuality problematises private and public historical certainties: the lodestar of the monad now just another point on the intertextual web. Finally, this intertextuality itself: a spatially mediated reproduction of the past, an 'omnipresent pastiche' in which all become images – become spatialised. Jameson makes clear the consequences of what Lukács had earlier perceived, with spatialisation now at the heart of the postmodern cultural dominant. Multinational capitalism installs this all-encompassing 'hyperspace' as its new sublime, beyond the limited modality of our changed, fragmented subjectivity.

It is significant that this critique is essentially an expansion of ideas first set forth by Adorno in *The Philosophy of New Music*. Jameson himself says (almost) as much, declaring that his forebear's "prophetic diagnosis has been realised, albeit in a negative way: not Schönberg [...] but Stravinsky is the true precursor of postmodern cultural production".¹¹ It is striking (for questions of a work's unspoken subtext and

10 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 1991, p. 25.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

indebtedness, especially when taken with the relative omission of music from its analysis) that Jameson here uses Adorno's influence to comment on pastiche when, although the two concepts are fundamentally and inextricably linked, the book's greatest debt is to *The Philosophy of New Music's* analysis of the temporal/spatial antagonism. In this, Adorno finds in Igor Stravinsky an almost exact musical expression of what Lukács had previously described: the erasure of the subject through the reification of living processes into static commensurable spaces.

There is no music today that bears anything of the historical hour that is not touched by the collapse of experience, by a process of economic adaptation – ruled by the power of economic concentration – that is substituted for 'life.' The passing away of subjective time in music appears so inescapable in the midst of a humanity that makes itself into a thing, into an object of its own organisation, that at the extreme poles of composition something similar can be observed [...] in Stravinsky – music casts itself as the *arbiter temporis* and prompts listeners to forget the experience of time and deliver themselves over to its spatialisation. Music glories in the disappearance of life as if its objectivation were the music's achievement. In return it reaps revenge immanently. One trick defines every manipulation of form in Stravinsky and is soon used to exhaustion: time is suspended, as if in a circus scene, and complexes of time are presented as if they were spatial.¹²

Adorno connects the traits that Jameson identifies as the hallmarks of late capitalist culture back to an objectivist logic that he finds in the Stravinskian project, with *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring* forming the beginning of an enquiry that reveals how their contentual concern with the liquidation of the subject is directly related to the music's focus on semblance over essence. This is realised in two primary ways at a formal level: firstly, in how temporally dependent development of material is replaced by the arbitrary placement of juxtaposed elements within commensurable formal spaces. Secondly, in the ways this arbitrary juxtaposition is, in turn, linked to the Stravinskian aesthetic's focus upon quotation and simulacra, that is, the severing of historical styles from their context for stylistic effect rather than suggestive meaning. The formal construction of Stravinsky's music is related to a wider denial of history and a change in the logic of society towards one ordered by things: where free processes are exchanged for reified objects. Here we have all of the hallmarks

12 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 2006, pp. 142–143.

of Jameson's postmodernism: simulacra, disjunction and ahistoricism, all ultimately realised through spatialisation.

Reading Adorno retrospectively through Jameson gives a robust critical framework with which to analyse the tensions between the aesthetic and the social across the 20th century's 'spatialisation' of temporal experience and, by extension, music. Here, I would like to add another variable to this relationship in the hypothesis that this phenomenon becomes most characteristic through the introduction of certain aspects of late capitalist ideology regarding democracy into music: specifically, in the paradox between capitalism's dependence upon the ideological assertion of the subject's ability to act as a free and rational individual and the simultaneous negation of that very claim through the same system's various ideological practices, as theorised by Louis Althusser. In his 1970 polemic *On Ideology*, Althusser shows how the reproduction of the relations of production is dependent upon interpellation: the creation of centred subjects which assume roles within the system under the illusion of individual freedom. Central to this, as maintained by thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek¹³ and Alain Badiou,¹⁴ are the political, moral and philosophical dimensions of democracy in which the acceptance of democratic procedures as the sole framework for any possible change precludes any radical transformation of capitalist relations of exploitation. Thus, further to my earlier demonstration of this phenomenon in even the supposedly linear modernism of Carter's celebration of democratic conversation,¹⁵ I will now examine the same factors that Adorno observed in play under the

13 Žižek, "Democracy is the Enemy", 2020.

14 Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 2015.

15 A close reading (White, "Postmodern Hyperspace in Elliott Carter's *String Quartet No. 4*", 2019, pp. 359–369) of Carter's *String Quartet No. 4* reveals it to be constructed by, as Adorno identified in Stravinsky, "virtue of the rifts that furrow through it" (Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 2006, p. 138) rather than linear developmental logic (Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 1988). When understood through Dörte Schmidt's insight that Carter draws a connection "between [the quartet's] structural idea and the ideal society", (Schmidt, "On Elliott Carter's String Quartets", 2012, p. 171), we can recognise spatialisation at the work's ideological intersections. Firstly, in how Carterian polyrhythm must be heard with and against its constituent parts, as attested to by their individual characterisations through both rhythmic and intervallic means, and in line with the ideology of the work's programmatic conceit. Secondly, in the alienation of rhythm, melody and harmony from one another at the formal statement of the work's 'subject'. Thirdly, his problematisation of audiating local development through global play with interruptive blocks. Fourthly, the use of silhouetted forms from personal

system that Jameson is analysing, before tracing this retrospectively into a perhaps more surprising example.

John Zorn's *Cobra* constitutes a musical game which, through the communal participation of the musicians involved, creates a series of arbitrary juxtapositions of unrelated material in an extreme intensification of the spatialised Stravinskian aesthetic. All of what Adorno says about Stravinsky, and Jameson about postmodernism, is here: simulacra, in the mask-play of stylistic quotation; disjunction, in the arbitrary succession of blocks; and, through these, the liquidation of temporal perception into object-like spatialisation. This is justified by the democratic, game-like nature of the work, where the arbitrary juxtaposition of blocks becomes a practical and ideological production by the various subjects engaged in the piece. And, of course, one that directly corresponds to the nature of those subjects: Susan McClary has celebrated the way in which "the disintegrated subject so decried by Modernist theorists of Postmodernism (e. g. Baudrillard and Jameson) here flaunts itself without apology";¹⁶ while Kenneth Gloag relates Zorn's general "juxtaposition of unrelated fragments of sound" to an "engagement with aspects of popular culture and the attempt to relate musical sound to visual imagery". He remarks how "the fact that Zorn can bring together the music of Stravinsky and Carl Stalling in one statement of influence provides yet another reflection of the wide range of his highly personal and musical and cultural perspectives".¹⁷ Of course, the latter is indicative rather than idiosyncratic: Stalling, the composer for the Warner Bros. cartoons, can be understood as a direct development of Stravinsky's nonlinear disjunction. Jameson, again, is instructive here:

What MTV does to music, therefore, is not some inversion of that defunct nineteenth-century form called program music but rather the nailing of sounds [...] onto visible space and spatial segments: here, as in the video form more generally, the older paradigm – that lights up in genealogical hindsight as this one's predecessor (not the basic influence on it)

and classical traditions as competing elements of mask-play that interrupt and recontextualise one another. Finally, like the breaks in the sentence that poststructuralism engenders and the subsequent disorientation of temporal direction this effects, the use of breaks in the musical discourse which disorientate the listener's apprehension of the various streams of material and, through this, contribute to the spatialised aesthetic.

16 McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, 2009, p. 146.

17 Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 2012, p. 103.

is *animation* itself. The cartoon [...] was the first laboratory in which 'text' tried out its vocation to mediate between sight and sound (think of Walt's own lowbrow obsession with highbrow music) and ended up spatialising time.¹⁸

There is nothing radical in taking the forms handed down from capitalist realism; nor certainly, in providing those forms with justification through their realisation in a supposedly 'radical' aesthetic reality. Such music is easy to produce, undemanding to experience and, ultimately, encourages a co-option of the disempowering structures that produce the subject of postmodernism. *Cobra* is redeemed from much of its counterparts that simply regurgitate this style in that it attempts to use it as a formal justification for communal participation and engagement. However, as we shall see, this too is an ideological sleight of hand whereby, in the words of Althusser,

[t]he individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i. e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i. e. that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they 'work all by themselves'.¹⁹

Like *Cobra*, the processual nature of Brown's *Novara* actually comprises an admirable attempt to resist reification through a democratisation of the creative process, that is, by creating a living process which is dependent upon the human individuals involved alongside other contextual variables. In this way, the piece is supposedly able to accrue new meaning through a circumstantial redeployment of its material, which basically constitutes the work's form. This is justified by Brown's use of material throughout the work: notably, certain chords and gestures which develop between the blocks along certain possible trajectories that – could – be taken throughout the piece. However, the fact that the sequence of blocks is still arbitrary replaces the piece's musical form with one that is in part ideological, in that the participation of the musicians and the event of the piece itself become part of the aesthetic object that is contemplated. Furthermore, these blocks are ultimately the arbitrary concatenation that Adorno apprehended in Stravinsky whereby the plurality of juxtaposition replaces meaningful temporal development. The aesthetic pleasure is found in the

18 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 1991, pp. 299–300, emphasis in the original.

19 Althusser, *On Ideology*, 2008, p. 269.

combination of chaotic uncertainty provided by the democratic engagement of musicians and of the certainty of arbitrary succession through the spatialised structure; these two work hand in glove to justify one another. How this engagement functions as a mask for the work's fragmentary and spatialised conception is of particular interest. The musicians create the illusion of continuous development and transition from shifts in material that is fundamentally block-like and arbitrary. This interplay is fascinatingly realised in the notation itself. As Brown instructs in the performance notes regarding his 'time-notation': "it must be understood that the performance is not expected to be a precise translation of spatial relationships but a relative and more spontaneous realisation through the involvement of the performers' subtly changing perceptions of the spatial relationships".²⁰ Thus, time becomes not only space but a contextual and human interpretation of that phenomenon. In this way, democratic interplay and spatialised time work as ciphers for one another's meaning, mutually dependent on their joint realisation.

Ferneyhough's response to this tradition is to see division itself as a form of motion that is constitutive of identity. He writes that

[I]ines of force arise in the space between objects – not space as a temporal lacuna, atopia, but at the moment of conceptual differentiation in which identity is born – and take as their vehicular object the connective impetus established in the act of moving from one discrete musical event to another.²¹

These are the ideas behind the concatenation present in Ferneyhough's early works, such as the interweaving of material in *Sonatas for String Quartet* and the mobile form of *Cassandra's Dream Song*, with unity in the latter coming instead from the energetic gestures of the performer's body which seem to reach across the breaks in the material. The composer's assertion quoted above – that the breaks between blocks of material constitute a form of motion – is realised in the wild gestures that the work demands of the performer, the energies of which traverse their enclosure within the various static spatial blocks. While the concatenation in *Sonatas* works to deconstruct an earlier structure in the work's compositional history through commentary and contrast, in *Cassandra's Dream Song*, the expressive physicality

20 Brown, *Novara*, 1962, direction for performance.

21 Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings*, 1995, p. 38.

of the gestural material and the demands this makes upon the performer work to foreground the body as a source of temporal unity which displaces abstract material development to a secondary concern. This primacy of the physical is similarly present in Ferneyhough's renewal of notation's purpose: from denotational record to stimulus for events that reach beyond transcription. On this, I offer the thoughts of two specialists in the performance of New Complexity, the flautist Jenni Hogan and pianist Ben Smith. Hogan draws a parallel between the work's "illusion of choice"²² that always collapses into its own identity and the sensations of the body's encounter. She explains that, for her, *Cassandra's Dream Song*, unlike other mobile forms, "is not malleable. Whatever you do, it retains its own identity."²³ This maintenance of formal direction within arbitrary succession stands in sharp contrast to the illusion of freedom through spatialised structure in *Novara*. Though, for Hogan, all performance is intimately connected to gesture and physicality, she recognises a marked difference between *Cassandra's Dream Song* and other similarly dramatic works, likening the sensation to the image of a plasma-globe

with energy extending out of my body at all points. It's such an all-body experience: from the tips of your toe to the top of your head. I become more 'in my body', that is, aware of my body, and even my body and the flute, as a single thing. It gives you a unity that is uncommon to normal situations.²⁴

Though this experience is perhaps specific to woodwind practice, and that of the flute in particular, there are elements that span Ferneyhough's output and methodologies of its interpretation. While pianist Ben Smith is "skeptical that the kind of performative demands of realising a Ferneyhough score really create a *fundamentally* different kind of bodily experience than any other musical work"²⁵ he still notes that

22 Hogan, Personal Interview by Alastair White, conducted 27th Aug. 2020.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Smith, Personal Interview by Alastair White, conducted 4th Sept. 2020, emphasis in the original. Smith explains further that "Transcendentalism in performative terms can – in one sense – be a marker of the increased amount of practice time required. Some things simply take longer to get 'in the body' as a result of the amount of notational information. There are of course learning strategies particular to this kind of music, but in the 'moment' of performance, although the musical surface is intensely different to other musical styles, the foundational *type of embodiment* is not significantly

one difference between say, *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* and a much less dense work, is that, in the former, it is literally impossible to read all the notational information in real-time, so the music (unless the score is memorised, of course) can only be a reminder for a sequence of bodily gestures. This is true for a whole range of music, of course, but I feel it particularly strongly when playing music of this idiom. You have to dance it.²⁶

The relationship between the body and score, outside of the individual, is key here: for Hogan, in the parallel between the effects of creating unity through formal disjuncture and bodily unity through gestural demand (which, as I have noted, translates directly to the listener's phenomenological experience); for Smith, in the use of a bodily epistemology to realise notational density. Though, as Smith attests, this is by no means original or peculiar to Ferneyhough, *Cassandra's Dream Song's* employment of subjective choice to effect its own negation in bodily physicality articulates the beginning of a path: one that will lead towards the elimination of the significance of the subject in favour of a materiality that reclaims subjective freedom in the aesthetic experience.

The compositional history of the later *Time and Motion Study I* seems to confirm this trajectory, with its reworking from mobile form, as a companion piece to *Cassandra's Dream Song*, into a formidable work that bears the hallmarks of Ferneyhough's writing in the '70s. Central to these is the use of solo instrumental polyphony, with parameters taking on the form of musical characters that are subject to independent processes. These produce an audible polyphony from a single performer: a highly expressive texture that is marked by its performative, receptive and analytical difficulties. This division – of the individual into multiplicity – alongside the separation of parameter from material, in turn, effects the beginning of the separation between compositional process, performative realisation and phenomenological apprehension. Like the blocks of *Cassandra's Dream Song*, unified by bodily energy, these now become impossibly divided – yet, essentially and logically connected. Ferneyhough's notion²⁷ of temporal history enabling a series of competing perspectives can be seen at work here: in how the 'subjective' journey of the work, from idea to reception, fractures into different forms that recontextualise one another. These ideas

different (for me, at least).” (Ibid., emphasis in the original).

26 Ibid.

27 Quoted above: Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings*, 1995, pp. 78–79.

coalesce in the notion of the *Figure*, a concept designed to radically overcome the reification of musical energies into pre-given systems of meaning that reduce music's expressive and signficatory power. Ferneyhough explains it thus:

Much recent music relies heavily on variants of a rather limited repertoire of gestural types calculated to enervise the receptive and interpretational faculties of the listener in a culturally quite specific fashion. It is especially disturbing this species of 'Pavlovian' semanticism has succeeded in gaining so much ground at the expense of subtler and vastly more flexible views of expressive strategy [...] By proclaiming their tendentially absolutist iconic pretensions they become paradoxically, interchangeable, depersonalised tokens of generally (but only generally) recognisable categories of communicational activity, since it is principally by means of some degree of porousness that a gestural unit attains access to any viable framework of articulative possibilities. The sense of the arbitrariness of a gesture increases in direct proportion to its fundamental isolation [...] A gesture whose component defining features – timbre, pitch contour, dynamic level, etc. – display a tendency towards escaping from that specific context in order to become independently signifying radicals, free to recombine, to 'solidify' into further gestural forms may, for want of the nomenclature, be termed a figure. The deliberate enhancement of the separatist potential of specific parametric aspects of the figure produces a unit at one and the same time material presence, semantic sign and temporary focus of the lines of organisation force until the moment of their often violent release [...] A realistic re-integration of parametrically defined perspectives suggests the need for a stylistic ambience in which an uninterrupted movement from level to level, from largest to smallest element of form, is an ever-present possibility.²⁸

By giving time a unique materiality, compositional opportunities are created for the experience of temporality outside the process of spatialisation. These include, firstly, the practice of

(1) *Smearing*

where, instead of traditional temporal development, parametric aspects of an event spill over into the surrounding music: the logical conclusion of the overflowing bodily energies in the gestures of *Cassandra's Dream Song's* block form. Juxtaposition

28 Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings*, 1995, p. 23.

is given new propulsive logic, in that concatenation serves as a background against which a foreground of parametric separation can operate. Here, the spatial organisation of material is reinvested with developmental motion through concatenated organisation, that is, through its own spatialisation, rather than any appeal to an extra-musical ideological crutch. Compare this to *Novara* and the preservation of arbitrary material through performatively democratic codes. Furthermore, in conceiving of music not as a series of arbitrary, indivisible signifiers but rather streams of data that combine to create events, the logic of division becomes repurposed for the reclamation of temporal experience. For it is through the division of the classical gesture made possible by the experience of alienation – where pitch and rhythm can be thought of separately, and what were previously constituents of a music object be perceived as elements in their own right – that such ‘smearing’ is effected. In the use of parametric separation, this is directly related to the creation of

(2) *Multiple Directionalities,*

where the spatial apprehension of time is reintegrated back into temporal motion through ‘depth perspective’. As Ferneyhough contends: “The figure’s capacity to generate multiple (simultaneous and/or successive) streams of directionality (allowing time to flow not only horizontally but also ‘vertically’ and ‘obliquely’) [...] promotes the onward-flowing projection of multiple or ambiguous perspectives”.²⁹ By this, he is referring to the contradictory relationship between surface appearance and the undercurrents of residual compositional procedure. These create a plurality of perspectives within the composition; rather than referring forward and backwards in time within the piece, the various elements also refer to elements beneath the surface and their traces, which correspond to earlier compositional moments in the work’s history. This counterpoint between a piece’s immediate and auxiliary elements gives new dimensions to temporal movement. Fitch explains how

[t]he action of forces is oblique here insofar as force in-itself is not made musically explicit. One’s perception of force is always indirect, through figural deformation, in the same way

29 Ibid., p. 41.

as perception of depth in Ferneyhough's music is always indirect – oblique – due to its layer-upon-layer opacity in contradistinction to the ‘transparency of the musical surface’.³⁰

In this, I recognise not only the influence of but an answer to the “impossibly large hyperspace” detailed by Jameson. It is crucial that this multidimensionality is achieved not by tacking the work on to an external intertextuality but through the objective primacy of the material: the score’s relationship to itself – to its own history. I believe this correspondence is of equal or greater importance than that between the work and the listener, and that this is what gives such music its objective, rather than objectivised, quality. Compare this to the ideology of *Cobra*, where the maintenance and incorporation of its participating subjects are used to justify the paucity of musical form and structure, which, in turn, reproduces late-capitalist spatialised temporality. Relating the work to itself gives a multidimensionality of time’s movement and an abundance of pathways through the music for the listener to take: a subjective freedom. Here too, in the anticipation of the music’s perception, Ferneyhough intervenes via the concept of

(3) *Temporal Tactility*

or the subjective apprehension of time as a physical presence. He writes that

[w]hen we listen intensively to a piece of music, there are moments when our consciousness detaches itself from the immediate flow of events and comes to stand apart, measuring, scanning, aware of itself operating in a ‘speculative time space’ of dimension different from those appropriate to musical discourse in and of itself. We become aware of the passing of time as something approaching a physical, objectivised presence.³¹

This is effected through density of musical information, the relationships established between hierarchic levels and, crucially, the relationship between the body and the physicality of the material and its notation. As Fitch argues, its three key characteristics – polyphony, complexity and gestural demands – together produce a music that is mediated specifically between the bodies of the listener and the performer, with

30 Fitch, *The Logic of the Figure*, 2005, p. 205.

31 Ferneyhough, “The Tactility of Time”, 1993, p. 21.

their subjectivity surpassed in a physical, material experience created by the pressures of the performance. This is drawn from a metaphor for the same industrial processes that Lukács identified in the spatialisation of temporality, where the efficiency of specialisation effects a dehumanisation of the worker, with their actions realised almost unconsciously. Fitch explains how, in the *Time and Motion Studies*,

[p]erformer and listener experience musical expression physically, their whole body mobilised [...] There is a constant and deliberate ambiguity in play: [Ferneyhough] does indeed ‘dehumanise’ the performer to the extent that in each of the three pieces, s/he is part of a ‘super-organism’, comprising body, instrument and performance environment.³²

Like the establishment of multiple directionalities, the utopian premise of such a process comes from its service in the emergence of a physicality, perhaps even a sense of subjectivity, from the musical material itself. As Ferneyhough puts it: “the idea of the figure seen as a constructive and purposive reformulation of the gesture should clear the path [...] the visionary ideal of a work entering into conversation with the listener *as if it were another aware subject*”³³ Fitch sees this as the elusive something within the composer’s music “that escapes conceptualisation [...] which is at the same time like a *body*”³⁴ This means that it is possible to contextualise the New Complexity of Ferneyhough and certain other composers within the appearance of new philosophical materialisms, particularly what Timothy Morton has referred to as “the age of hyperobjects”³⁵: objects too large to be perceived by any single consciousness, such as global capitalism and climate change, as well as within the slightly older ascendance of the symbolic over the subjective: in the way that the limitless possibilities of the symbolic material of the score are leveraged against the enclosed, interpellated limits of the individual.³⁶ Ferneyhough’s contribution to this is his creation of a relationship where the radical materiality of the score works directly with the body to overcome

32 Fitch, *Brian Ferneyhough*, 2013, p. 202.

33 Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings*, 1995, p. 83, emphasis in the original; Fitch, “Brian Ferneyhough, ‘Postmodern Modernist’”, 2009, p. 162.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

35 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 2013.

36 For more on this, see: White, “A Lacanian Reading of Michael Finnissy’s *Verdi Transcriptions*”, 2018.

given forms of experience and, in doing so, incorporates free subjectivity as a vital part of the aesthetic event.

This can be clearly demonstrated in the next phase of the composer's development, where the complexity is subsumed into the process of composition, creating the aforementioned 'depth perspective'. What this engenders is a combination of older forms of development and aesthetic immanence with the new form of radical materialism outlined above. The opening of the *Second String Quartet*³⁷ offers one of the simplest demonstrations of this (though something is, of course, lost when compared to the wilder, more ineffable examples in his work). M. 1 contains the initial event, which is developed in m. 3 by inverting the contour of the line and the transformation of the second chord into a glissando, which combines the idea of both the event and the silence – or the break – between m. 1 and 3. This development is then divided into its constituent elements and transformed in a variety of ways, with the rising melody of m. 3 developing in m. 6 before repeating itself and then developing this subsequent transformation into the repeated notes at the end of m. 6 and 10. The chords of m. 1 are developed through the glissando of m. 3 into an interplay between the two, as in m. 11. These constituent elements are then brought together at the entry of the second violin to create a new sound object through the combination of the original element's separate developments. This represents an intensification of the evolutionary trajectory in the Western Classical tradition regarding the relationship between development and polyphony, which could briefly be traced from the epic quality of Bach's fugues, where each voice contextualises its counterparts, to the humanist insights of Mozart, where themes are developed into fully fledged characters before being recombined as counter-contexts for one another, to the elevation of this to a level of technique in Schoenberg, where each note becomes both foreground and background. In Ferneyhough, the very aspects of the musical event become events – objects – themselves and, within this, function as contexts for one another's progress. In this way, even the disruptive silence that characterises this opening is itself developed across the work as a variable absence of gesture among excessive musical density. The arbitrary breaks, characteristic features of the trend toward specialisation, are repurposed here within a new form of development that foregrounds the agency of the listening subject: though the work is characterised by arbitrary concatenation, the reconfiguration of the musical process – as a meaningful totality

37 Published by Edition Peters, London 1980.

through which multiple logical paths can be taken – resolves the dialectic explored earlier between spatialisation and temporality. Subjective freedom is reclaimed as an intrinsic constituent of the artwork through the music’s objective materiality.

In Ferneyhough’s exploration of the possibilities of the materiality of music and notation, and their intersection with the body through performative challenges and the extremities of our receptive abilities, we are taken beyond the limits of our historical conditioning to a parallel universe where spatialisation and temporality, plurality and direction, multiplicity and meaning may coexist. It attests that the contemporary denial of mutable, dialectical engagement with a non-subjective reality in favour of post-truth individuality – whereby data is rammed together like postmodern collage with all the heady furore of some pre-war manifesto – was never inevitable or necessary. In both of these aspects, Ferneyhough’s music should be considered a forebear to the work of philosophers such as Alain Badiou³⁸ and Quentin Meillassoux³⁹, who, in a radical materialism that reconciles aspects of the modernist and postmodernist projects, have opened up thrilling new horizons for how we understand our relationship to an external world.

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