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Toward a Postmodern Avant-Garde: Labour, Virtuosity, and Aesthetics in an American New Music Ensemble

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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Toward a Postmodern Avant-Garde: Labour, Virtuosity, and Aesthetics in an
American New Music Ensemble

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

John Robison Pippen

Graduate Program in Music

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Music

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the aesthetic beliefs and labour practices of the American new music ensemble eighth blackbird (lower-case intentional). Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with the ensemble for the past six years, I show how the ensemble responds to specific cultural pressures endemic to the classical music scene, its new music vanguard, and to the contemporary United States. eighth blackbird, I argue, has created an ensemble identity and performance style designed to satisfy numerous audience positions, from experts well-versed in the intricacies of musical techniques to lay-persons unacquainted with the values and practices of new or classical music. This attempt to satisfy such a range of perspectives has led to an oscillation between modernist values traditionally associated with art music culture and postmodern values typically found within more profit-driven musical practices. Modernism—partially defined here as a belief in a linear and stable history, structural listening, musical virtuosity, and restrained performer movement—is foundational to eighth blackbird’s work. At the same time, ensemble members embrace postmodern values including a celebratory mix of musical styles, attempts to provide accessible concerts, and an adoption of post-Fordist branding wherein personality and the display of labour figures as part of a marketing strategy. By examining the specific rationalizations of and objections to eighth blackbird’s practices, I theorize the existence of a “postmodern avant-garde,” a subculture of musicians and arts workers who attempt to remake avant-garde music into a more accessible and profitable enterprise.

Keywords

Avant-garde, new music, classical music, modernism, postmodernism, virtuosity, branding, labour, aesthetics, eighth blackbird, ethnography, performance, choreography,

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Introduction

Is an avant-garde of postmodernism possible? (J. D. Kramer, 2002a, p. xvi).

In the last 20 years, musicians in cities around the United States—including New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore—have formed performing groups dedicated to playing new musical works and promoting unusual musical experiences.¹ In some ways following in the footsteps of groups like the Kronos Quartet, ensembles such as Alarm Will Sound, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Wet Ink, the Playground Ensemble, No Exit, and eighth blackbird (lower case intentional) regularly present audiences with a eclectic mix of recently written music and pieces from previous generations of avant-garde composers. Described by most as “new music,” the types of compositions performed by such groups may range from serialist puzzles to mash-ups of pop songs, from chance pieces to arrangements of electronic dance music.

While the activities of these groups have received considerable attention in the press, little academic research has examined the new music scene in the contemporary United States. Furthermore, the kinds of activities and performances found within these circles raise many questions. Many of the musicians involved in the new music scene have studied music formally at prestigious musical conservatories and universities such as the Eastman School of Music, SUNY Stony Brook, and the

¹ New Yorker critic Alex Ross has a list of new music ensembles on his website, www.therestisnoise.com, organized by city. While his list is extensive, it remains challenging to keep track of all the groups that form (and fold). For a representative sampling of press pieces covering the activities of new music ensembles in the United States during time period I will discuss here, see Mark (2008), Allan Swed (2005, 2009), Richard Kozinn (2007, 2008, 2010), or Alex Dyer (2005, 2006).

Oberlin Conservatory of Music. To what extent do their educations and training inform their aesthetics? How connected are these ensembles to “classical music,” the presentation of musical “works” of art in revered settings? Are they affected by assertions of its imminent demise?² Some ensembles seem dedicated to audience outreach while others are more focused on performing the newest works regardless of who’s listening. Does the modernist stance of the previous generation of composers such as Milton Babbitt or Pierre Boulez endure? Has contemporary culture influenced these performers in any way? Is there an avant-garde, or are we simply seeing the latest fashionable trend in classical music?

In order to examine these questions in detail, I present here an ethnographic study of the Chicago-based new music ensemble eighth blackbird. This sextet (flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, violin, and cello) regularly presents concerts that seem to seek to attract new audiences while simultaneously celebrating works associated with the challenging modernist vanguard of the twentieth century. One of the most widely known and celebrated ensembles in the new music community, eighth blackbird offers a way to examine the challenges of performing new music in the United States. By placing this group within a cultural and historical context, it becomes possible to account for recent developments in the new music scene while also recognizing the endurance of long-standing historical values in the classical and new music communities.

² Such claims have become so pervasive that even their rebuttals seem cliché. For some recent examples of articles about the death of classical music, see Ross (2013). For examples of arguments to the contrary, see Stove (2008), Vanhoenacker (2013), or Kramer (2009).

This dissertation argues that the activities of eighth blackbird oscillate between work models and aesthetics associated with modernity on the one hand and those of postmodernity on the other. This oscillation is driven by the practical requirements of professional music-making and by fears about the status of art music in the United States. Partially in response to these issues, the musicians and employees of this Chicago-based ensemble have adopted a mixture of promotional strategies, aesthetic dispositions, and performance choices that can both appeal to new audiences and appease the modernist tenets of the new music community. My dissertation will treat these issues in detail and provide an academically rigorous study of new music as a cultural practice in the contemporary United States.

This mixture of aesthetic dispositions and promotional strategies leads to a series of apparent paradoxes. My research reveals that the musicians have combined aspects of the aesthetic values and virtuosity of classical music with promotional techniques such as self-branding associated with capitalism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Similar to branded individuals working in for-profit industries, the eighth blackbird brand draws on workplace values to create a marketable identity. It celebrates performer personality, choreographed shows, a commitment to accessibility, and a devotion to the newest developments in art music. However, the members of eighth blackbird also maintain a certain autonomy from market forces because of lingering yet consistent commitments to various practices and ideologies typically associated with high musical modernism. These include: a belief in historical progress, a reliance on institutional support, and attempts to create and preserve a canon of stable works.

Simultaneously, eighth blackbird's members embrace contradictory ideologies associated with postmodernism; specifically, the members recognize a plurality of authority centres, celebrate a mixture of musical styles, attempt to reintegrate art into society, and engage in an (uncritical) celebration of postmodern music. By combining certain postmodern trends with the modernist notion of avant-garde, eighth blackbird works with and against tenets of classical music culture in their efforts to attract new audiences to new music concerts. This suggests a new contradiction within the classical music vanguard: the emergence of a postmodern avant-garde.

I categorize eighth blackbird as avant-garde because of the members' dispositions regarding the performance of unconventional music, and their attempts to change both art music and its place in society. This conception relies on a distinction between aesthetic modernism and avant-garde. As Peter Bürger (1984) has demonstrated, early twentieth century avant-garde movements reacted strongly against the institutionalized notions of art inherent in aesthetic modernism. Musicians associated with earlier avant-gardes, for example that of New York City in the 1920s, viewed broad popular support of their music as worthwhile, even essential (Oja, 2000). Such anti-institutional reactions persisted throughout the twentieth century as various avant-gardes (including those associated with John Cage, Fluxus, and even early minimalism) positioned themselves as antagonistic toward institutional forms of high art music and the high modernist serialisms and atonal musics they created. A tension between these two categories of avant-garde music—institutional and anti-institutional—emerged as both sides advanced their own aesthetic agendas.

However, following Bürger, Andreas Huyssen (1986), Lydia Goehr (2007) and, most importantly, Georgina Born (1995), I argue that these earlier struggles were

all ultimately enveloped within a broader modernism. Mid-century vanguards in fact shared with high modernism both the criteria of artistic evaluation and a broader disdain for mass culture. In their musical works and their criticism both avant-gardists and institutional modernists invoked structuralist music theory, even when they seemed to critique it. Born thus asserts that by placing emphasis on specific musical techniques, musicians and composers created a language of specialists, a seemingly objective method for evaluating musical works. Such views were expressed infamously by Milton Babbitt (1958) in an article written for *High Fidelity*. Babbitt compared advances in musical composition to advances in the sciences, understanding the composer, like the scientist, as one whose experiments would likely never be understood by the general public. Similar claims of artistic isolation and new music's scientific achievements were made by serialist composers Pierre Boulez (1984; Foucault, Boulez, & Rahn, 1985), Charles Wuorinen (1963) and others, as well as by composers writing ostensibly more mainstream works such as William Schuman (1951). Even John Cage aspired to such objective criteria (Born, 1995). Objective methods bestowed legitimacy on musical compositions by emphasizing certain acoustic or musical ideas and portraying them as somehow advanced or scientifically rational.

Objective, rationalized criteria served as a form of cultural capital and helped create and sustain what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1980) has called an economy of symbolic goods. Bourdieu's theory describes an economy in which prizes, grants, publications (cultural capital), and social relationships (social capital) all function as forms of symbolic (as opposed to "real") capital. For Bourdieu and Born, art culture is a field of struggle in which various parties vie for social and cultural capital that will later be converted (or so they hope) into economic capital (i.e. money). Born has

applied Bourdieu's theory to the history of twentieth century art music and demonstrated that structuralist music theory provided a mechanism by which musicians and composers could evaluate music without relying on the for-profit marketplace.

Both avant-gardists and modernists thus maintained a key distinction between art music and commercial music by bestowing symbolic and cultural capital through structuralist evaluation, a practice that created an aura of scientific detachment and artistic objectivity. Crucially, Born extends this argument to the so-called return to tonality among composers from around the late 1960s on. Though such music seems to embrace popular music because of its use of tonal techniques, quotation of particular songs, or mimicry of particular styles, newly tonal works fall within a broader cultural modernism in part because of composers' participation in the economy of symbolic goods (Born, 1995, p. 21). Furthermore, an implicit understanding that popular music and mass culture in general are separate and less inherently valuable than art music remained intact for many middle and late twentieth-century composers and musicians (Born, 1995, p. 64).

Ultimately, the avant-gardes of the mid to late twentieth century—including aleatoric music, experimentalism, and minimalism—all represent an extension of cultural modernism. Furthermore, though anti-institutional avant-gardes have influenced various music practices somehow seen as popular (Corbett, 2000; Prior, 2008), many artists remained culturally bound within the “socioeconomic circuit” (Born, 1995, p. 21) of high musical art. Thus we may speak of a modernist avant-garde comprised of musicians interested in somehow advancing music while maintaining key distinctions between themselves and commercial popular music.

Institutional modernism's ability to absorb and canonize the critiques of avant-gardes may historically seem inevitable, but we should remember that this was a surprise. The notion of an avant-garde working "ahead of its time" in such a way to be eventually re-absorbed into received notions and institutions of art was in fact not intended by many avant-gardists active in either the early or mid twentieth centuries. Many projects, from Dadaism and Italian Futurism, from Fluxus happenings to early minimalism, were intended to reposition the relationship between art and society and between participant subject and artistic object. The failure of this revolutionary view and the inability of all the strange, disturbing, hilarious, and amazing projects of various twentieth century artists to truly change the place of art in society have lead scholars such as Huyssen (1986) and Bürger (1984, 2010) to view the avant-garde as dead. Thus Bürger writes,

The paradox of the failure of the avant-gardes lies without a doubt in the musealization [sic] of their manifestations as works of art, that is, in their artistic success. The provocation that was supposed to expose the institution of art is recognized by the institution as art. The institution demonstrates its strength by embracing its attackers and assigns them a prominent place in the pantheon of great artists (2010, 705).

Modernism has proven incredibly able to adapt and transform various creative objections into solid works of art on display. Thus one finds Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (a mass produced urinal) on display in an art gallery and treated as one more development of European artistic modernism. It is this state of affairs that leads to Bürger's use of the term "neo-avant-garde," which he defines as a movement internal (rather than external) to the machinations of institutional modernism wherein the freedom in materials associated with various avant-gardes is reduced to technique:

“The neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions” (1984, 58).

Following these arguments, it might seem more accurate to refer to eighth blackbird as a neo-avant-garde. After all, they rely heavily on musical institutions (conservatories, concert venues, and symphony orchestras) for money and recognition.

However, while the modernist institution has proven able to absorb external critiques associated with various avant-gardes, the respect and prestige afforded the institution has eroded in the contemporary culture. It is the combination of neo-avant-garde tendencies and a new instability in the belief in Art (what I will explain as part of the postmodern condition) that have encouraged me to employ “avant-garde.” In a context where high art and its associated classical music institutions seem ever precarious and increasingly devalued, where the conservative political position touts not Beethoven but Ted Nugent, simply claiming high art can seem, paradoxically, revolutionary. It is this very odd condition that leads Alex Ross to proclaim, “Classical music is the new underground” (Ross, 2005).

Despite (shrill) celebrations of a groovy underground, I believe the best term to summarize eighth blackbird’s aesthetic position is avant-garde. My argument thus differs from Bürger, who views new radicalism as part of the neo-avant-garde modernist practice of Art. I also differ from Huyssen, who has argued that avant-gardism, as a truly significant break with fundamental premises of art and culture, died with the postmodernism of the 1960s. Huyssen writes:

Postmodernism [and its associated avant-garde] has [in 1981] lost that capacity to gain shock value from difference, except perhaps in relation to forms of a very traditional aesthetic conservatism. The counter-measures the historical avant-garde proposed to break the grip of bourgeois institutionalized culture are no longer effective (1981, 36).

I do not disagree with Huyssen as much as I argue that the context in which eighth blackbird operates is, ultimately, qualitatively different from that described in his excellent scholarship from the 1980s. Classical music, I would argue, is exactly that “very traditional aesthetic conservatism.” Is it not the most conservative, in a literal sense, of musical practices in the modern world? The term museum culture is, after all, widely accepted by academics and performers. The best musicians, furthermore, generally come from schools called conservatories. In many ways, I believe the fight between the postmodernist avant-garde and the modernist institution only recently arrived at the doors of the actual institutions of classical music. The fights of the sixties are underway today in 2014 in the classical music concert hall and groups like eighth blackbird are leading the charge. (This state of affairs owes to a wide variety of issues that I explore more fully in Chapter 1.)

This dual site of conflict, occurring both internal to classical music’s field of production, and external as musicians attempt to redefine “classical music” and find a place for it in postmodernity, have lead to practices that are both avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. The musicians of eighth blackbird and many of their fans strongly believe that the institution must change. They thus are able to engage in practices that are potentially destabilizing and challenging to the institution in a manner worthy of the term “avant-garde.” And yet they also want to believe in an art that can last, in a stability of techniques and procedures, and in providing a place in which that art can be presented. They thus fall back into the neo-avant-garde described by Bürger. I have thus retained the term “avant-garde” as a way to account for the variety of strange, new, potentially radical activities described here. To dismiss this term and to accept

Huyssen's summary would require that we ignore the issues surrounding classical music today, the reactions garnered by eighth blackbird's performances, and the deep aesthetic change that I will describe in this dissertation.

Furthermore, I believe the term *avant-garde* serves as a reminder to many in new music who remain wary of the term. At a time when alternative categories are much used, "*avant-garde*" can, I believe usefully remind musicians that they are, after all, celebrating and (not) selling music that few people seem to actually enjoy.

My theorization of a postmodern *avant-garde* to describe the goals and attitudes of eighth blackbird thus recognizes a continued legacy of musical modernism and *avant-garde* practices and strategies. This legacy manifests most clearly in the combined emphasis on newness and structuralism found among eighth blackbird's members and among other performing groups in the postmodern *avant-garde* (e.g. the Kronos Quartet, Alarm Will Sound, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and the Firebird Ensemble, to name a few). Furthermore, eighth blackbird maintains strong links to the tradition of classical composition and the institutions (universities, orchestras, and professional organizations) that sustain Western art music in the United States. The postmodern *avant-garde* constitutes a musical subculture within the broader classical music culture, a culture steeped in modernist ideas such as structuralist (allegedly asocial) theory, historical progress, a canon of stable musical works, and continued distinctions between high and low cultural forms. The postmodern *avant-garde* represents a site in which prestige and modernist ideas of artistic autonomy remain in circulation, even as groups like eighth blackbird contest them. eighth blackbird's tendency to avoid emphasizing financial gain; its participation in an economy of symbolic goods; its celebration of art for art's

sake; its enthusiastic performance of structurally complicated music; and its constant search for the new and different marks the ensemble as a part of avant-garde culture, a culture with lasting ties to twentieth-century modernism.

At the same time, eighth blackbird and other ensembles like it are not simply modernist, in the broad understanding of the term I offer here. This is because they challenge fundamental concepts of modernism and attempt to recruit audiences from outside classical music's institutions who are unacquainted with the modernist ideas they espouse. Its members attempt to make the avant-garde relevant to postmodern culture writ large. Following Jameson (1991), I employ the word "postmodernity" or "postmodern" to describe the culture of late capitalism in the United States. I will use "postmodernism" to describe various artistic trends endemic to this culture. As a cultural phenomenon, theorists conceive of postmodernity as marking a number of important shifts in twentieth- and twenty-first-century aesthetics and labour (Harvey, 1990; Huyssen, 1986; Sennett, 2006). Crucially for my purposes here, knowledge itself has in postmodernity come to be seen as "situated" rather than "absolute" (Haraway, 1988). As a result, the concept of authority has become increasingly suspect, both in general and as implied in the concept of a universal musical art and its canon. An overall unifying cultural authority no longer obtains, replaced by a multiplicity of authority centers, each advancing its own argument for legitimation (Frow, 1995; Lyotard, 1984). Simple distinctions between high and low culture have given way to increased hybridity—a celebratory and mixture of popular and elite that has, in effect, become the dominant paradigm (Jameson, 1991; Taylor, 1997). The result, I argue, is an avant-garde both expressing postmodern aesthetics (an avant-garde of postmodernism) and an avant-garde of the broader cultural epoch (avant-garde of

postmodernity).

Yet importantly for the purposes of my dissertation, even as these postmodern ideals have become established in communities that create and perform Western art music, modernist ideas regarding high art and aesthetic universals (primacy of form and craftsmanship, autonomous music, and belief in the autonomy of musical experience) have not entirely been abandoned. As Giles Hooper (2006) has argued, the classical music world and its pedagogical centres continue to rely on a canon of musical works. Postmodernity, as a cultural and historical epoch, is a time in which the contradictions between canonizing practices and attempts to create a more pluralistic art appear simultaneously. Following musicologist David Brackett, I examine these contradictions not out of a desire to present a “totalizing” label, but to demonstrate how art music culture is shaped by, responds to, and engages the broader culture of the United States (Brackett, 2002, p. 208). Tensions between lingering notions of a stable authoritative art and attempts to avoid the unfashionable snobbery associated with this authority pervade the contemporary scene in classical music circles, as evidenced in part through the use of various monikers (“new classical music,” “indie classical,” or “contemporary classical”) to describe the classical music as one genre among many, rather than singularly authoritative. My interpretation of eighth blackbird as the product of a postmodern avant-garde thus speaks to the overlapping and potentially contradictory positions—modernist, avant-garde, and postmodern—at play within the ensembles’ actions and attitudes.

I theorize a postmodern avant-garde to highlight a historical “shift,” as Huyssen (1986, p. 181) calls it, in the sensibilities and practices of musicians at work within the contemporary avant-garde. As several scholars have argued (Auner & Lochhead,

2002; Fink, 1998; McClary, 2000), this shift has had lasting consequences for art music in the United States. Many musicians have embraced advertising and popular musics; most importantly, they have less faith in the absolute authority of classical music and its canon as the premier form of musical art. This sense of waning or even lost authority shapes many of the strategies employed by eighth blackbird, as well as those of other musical groups working to promote new classical music in the United States.

A postmodern avant-garde acts in wilful defiance of postmodernity. It is more complicated than a watered-down neo-avant-garde. Instead, the constellation of ideas and sets of practices associated with a postmodern avant-garde constitutes an ongoing, enthusiastic, and occasionally violent debate about art, society, commodity, and music. This debate lies at the very heart of how eighth blackbird's members see themselves and their place (or lack thereof) in the world.

An important component in my theorization of eighth blackbird as postmodern is my study of the group's labour practices, practices that can be understood as an expression of the values of post-Fordist labour. Accompanying changes in the aesthetic realm are changes in the realm of production, changes that scholars of labour explain with the term "post-Fordism" (Harvey, 1990; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Kumar, 1995). Post-Fordism describes the rise of flexible production and the attendant capitalization of increasingly smaller markets; it also describes the breakdown of the traditional work model in which employees work for a single company over many years. Named for Henry Ford's approach to automobile construction in the United States, Fordism sought to rationalize the manufacturing process and relied on strong organized labour to do so. In post-Fordism, companies, with the enthusiastic support of conservative politicians, have attempted to dismantle organized labour in order to become more

agile and able to respond to the whims of the market. In a post-Fordist economy, workers therefore enjoy less job security and must become as flexible in their skill sets as their companies have become in securing cheap labour and means of distribution.

Post-Fordism has significantly altered contemporary labour and, by extension, contemporary conceptions of selfhood (Hearn, 2008; Lazzarato, 1996; Sennett, 2006; Virno & Hardt, 1996). The possession of particular skill sets alone no longer qualifies workers for jobs. Instead, workers must perform identities that facilitate advancement in a newly precarious workplace; each must try to become the kind of person employers and/or consumers desire and market themselves accordingly. Subjectivity itself has thus become a tool of the post-Fordist economy, and workers must become, as Paolo Virno had argued, “virtuosos” who have mastered the media of subjective production (Virno, 2004). This type of self-fashioning has historically been found in the culture industries, but has become the new norm of production across economic sectors. My study thus offers much to the study of labour more generally. If we are all now compelled to engage in virtuosic self-fashioning through mediatized platforms (such as Facebook), then a study of musical virtuosos ought to offer a model for the study of contemporary life more generally. Studying musical virtuosity ultimately reveals some of the broader cultural issues surrounding all of us bound up in post-Fordist postmodernity.

Following this logic, eighth blackbird’s members portray not only their difficult music as accessible; the members themselves also attempt to be accessible and friendly as performing subjects. Individual members tailor their behaviour to the interests of audiences unfamiliar with avant-garde music. Identity thus becomes a means to gain

audience favour and to recruit fans: eighth blackbird's musicians shape and market such identities through branding, online media, and their interactions with students.

This is not say that long-term stable employment has disappeared entirely. Fordist workplaces and working conditions still exist, and, as Adam Krims has argued, “[m]any if not most of the aspects of Fordism continue” in the present (Krims, 2007, p. xxii). Nevertheless, since the 1970s, flexible production has had a major impact on the economy of the United States and the world in general. “Post-Fordism” summarizes this tension between older traditional economic forms and newer ostensibly more flexible forms of production and employment. As argued by Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter:

the ambiguous nature of the term “post-Fordism,” as it teeters between the old (*post-Fordism*) and the new (*post-Fordism*), has its merits. It emphasizes the paradoxical nature of change....The problems of the market reappear, mutated but intractable. It is precisely in this equivocal space between continuity and discontinuity [between *post-Fordist* and *post-Fordist*, that we make our analysis” (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, & de Peuter, 2003, pp. 65-66).

Change versus continuity emerges as a central theme in this dissertation, and I visit the issue frequently. Just as my use of postmodern is meant to encapsulate certain aspects of a lingering modernism, so too my use of post-Fordism allows for lingering Fordist models of labour. As we shall see, accounting for eighth blackbird's activities requires that we move from contexts that are clearly modernist to others that can only be seen as postmodern. Likewise, the group moves from standardized labour practices (*post-Fordist*) to labour practices specific to a very different economic situation (*post-Fordist*).

In these ways, post-Fordist and postmodern theory allow me to interpret eighth blackbird and a sector of the American avant-garde as a product of both artistic and economic forces. Importantly, however, such forces cannot ultimately be reduced to

one another. Post-Fordist production and the sweeping economic changes beginning in the early 1970s coincided with major shifts across a range of artistic circles, shifts dubbed postmodern by contemporary critics. Several studies provide broad outlines connecting these economic and cultural changes (Harvey, 1990; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Jameson, 1991), and a number of authors have summarized how such shifts have manifested within and impacted art music and avant-gardes in the United States (Auner & Lochhead, 2002; Gloag, 2012; J. D. Kramer, 2002b; L. Kramer, 1995; McClary, 1989, 2000). However, few studies attempt to situate specific performing groups within the broad shifts of both postmodernity and post-Fordism (for an example of this argument in popular music, see Chapman, 2013). My dissertation will provide such connections by interpreting eighth blackbird's labour practices as part of post-Fordist postmodernity, while also illustrating their cultural allegiance to avant-garde aesthetics and modernist institutionalized art. Strictly speaking, what I will be describing would be more accurately termed a post-Fordist postmodern avant-garde: I use the term "postmodern avant-garde" for brevity. Thus, following Harvey (1990), I understand the term postmodernity to encompass changes in both the aesthetic and economic realms.

To be sure, characterizing eighth blackbird as part of an avant-garde may seem to contradict the aspects of post-Fordist postmodernity that I described above. The autonomy of musical art central to modernism requires a strong belief in artistic authority, a belief in some sort of distance between the work and its social situation, and a belief in the power of certain individuals and institutions to define what does and does constitute a lasting (potentially ahistorical) music (Subotnik, 1991; A. Williams, 1997). Furthermore, the idea of blatant self-promotion and identity marketing that

characterizes post-Fordist labour seems to run counter to the intellectualization and privileging of musical works (as opposed to performer identity) commonly found in avant-garde and modernist musical discourse from the twentieth century. However, the community I describe has become increasingly suspicious both of modernist views of art as universally meaningful and popular culture as inherently banal. It therefore tentatively embraces hybrid forms and celebrates mixing high and low culture. These attitudes accompany and reflect sincere concerns about new music's viability, concerns that echo twentieth-century composers' "rhetoric of survival" (Born, 1995, p. 4; McClary, 1989, p. 62). Originally deployed by Susan McClary (1989), the phrase "rhetoric of survival" identifies a discourse of anxiety expressed by composers who relied on institutions for their financial livelihood. Many widely respected composers—including Arnold Schoenberg, Pierre Boulez, Milton Babbitt—felt that outside of this context, a truly revolutionary avant-garde could not endure. As a result of this historical legacy, many of my informants have pushed the avant-garde to reach out to new audiences unfamiliar with the techniques and sounds of contemporary art music. These musicians seek to remake abstract art music into a more palatable enterprise—to "rebrand" contemporary art music. Marketing, image production, and performer identity have all been deployed as tools for resuscitating art music.

Specifically, eighth blackbird's members market themselves as what I call "friendly virtuosi," a kind of brand that they can sell to both connoisseurs and the broader public. This type of identity construction represents what cultural theorist Alison Hearn has dubbed the "branded self":

The branded self is a commodity sign; it is an entity that works and, at the same time, points to itself working, striving to embody the values of its working environment. [...] As such the branded self must be understood as a distinct

kind of labour; involving an outer-directed process of highly stylized self-construction, directly tied to the promotional mechanisms of the post-Fordist market (Hearn, 2008, p. 201).

Friendly virtuosity can therefore be understood as the embodiment of the tensions between post-Fordist postmodernity and art music's cultural beliefs. eighth blackbird's performances and promotional materials include a range of activities not normally associated with the avant-garde, or with classical music in general. The group regularly choreographs their concerts, meaning musicians move about the stage as they perform musical works. They dress in less formal clothing, and give off-the-cuff spoken notes from the stage in concerts of abstract modernist music by Arnold Schoenberg or Pierre Boulez. In making these changes to the conventions of concert performance, they attempt to make avant-garde music accessible.

However, many of eighth blackbird's efforts continue to operate according to avant-garde principles in that they challenge established norms of the art music tradition. The members themselves often espouse a goal of shocking audiences. As eighth blackbird's flutist once said in a press interview, "We want people to love our concerts - it's even alright to hate them. But what we don't want...is, 'Oh, that wasn't so interesting.' We're trying to react against complacency" (Capanna, 2011).³

Choreography itself constitutes a strange case in which eighth blackbird's members manage to appeal to both avant-garde ideas of newness and postmodern challenges to autonomous art. eighth blackbird's concerts, especially those that feature choreography, elaborate lighting techniques, actors, dancers, puppets, or video projections, generally represent a reconfiguration of the standard concert experience.

³ All press sources are cited in electronic article format, thus page numbers are not given. Capitalizations of "eighth blackbird" are maintained as they appeared in the original sources.

As I will demonstrate in my examination of eighth blackbird's treatment by the press, concerts in which musicians move freely around the stage while they play represent a challenge to art music as an intellectual endeavour, a challenge to the correct use of the performing body, and a challenge the way expert listeners (critics, composers) experience art music. These are dramatic statements worthy of the term avant-garde if only because of the potential for controversy that surrounds them, even as their motivations come from a commitment to demystifying modernist art.

By analyzing specific labour techniques, performances, and their reception in the press, I demonstrate how eighth blackbird endeavours to move the avant-garde away from modernism and into postmodern culture. Performance—both of the musical kind and in terms of the construction and presentation of identities—thus represents a crucial area of inquiry in my research. The ensemble members' choreography, their celebration of connections with popular music, their friendly disposition, and even their comparatively hip clothing all function to create and promote a branded self, an identity upon which eighth blackbird can trade for social and economic capital. Understood as post-Fordist labour, eighth blackbird's concerts provide a way to examine the articulation of art music's tenets today, as musicians attempt to cope with a changing cultural landscape. eighth blackbird's members become postmodern subjects, both in terms of their artistic dispositions (in other words, in their relationship to the history of art music in America), and in terms of their position within contemporary cultural production in the United States.

Literature Review

In recent years, musicologists and ethnomusicologists have published ethnographies, elaborate hermeneutic readings of musical works, and research on musical performance that offer sophisticated perspectives on Western art music as a cultural practice. The increasing interest and variety of analytic approaches available today has suggested significant new avenues of research for scholars in both ethnomusicology and musicology. My dissertation is the first work of scholarship to study the contemporary performance of art music using methodological approaches from both these fields—ethnography and reception history. I combine these approaches with cultural theory from sociology, anthropology, music theory, and performance and feminist studies. Specifically, very little literature engages new music, especially the type of virtuosic performances created by eighth blackbird, as an expression of a widespread sociocultural condition.

Despite this lacuna, several significant ethnographies of Western art music provide an important foundation for my study. Four monograph-length ethnographies of Western art music by Henry Kingsbury (1988), Bruno Nettl (1995), Georgina Born (1995), and Stephen Cottrell (2004) each engage Western art music at various geographic sites. Born's *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Avant-Garde* lays important groundwork for a critical investigation of new music culture, and provides a detailed history of Pierre Boulez and his avant-garde musical redoubt, the Institute for the Research of Acoustic and Music in Paris, France. Born argues that the artistic conflicts between musical modernism and postmodernism visible in the new music scene all ultimately fall within a broader cultural modernism. My dissertation, however, will complicate this view by interpreting the musical avant-

garde, specifically eighth blackbird, as primarily a postmodern (and post-Fordist) enterprise, even as modernist values remain central to the group's overall mission. Both Kingsbury and Nettle examine music conservatories as centers for the institutionalization of values such as talent, the creation of canon, and the cultivation of star performers. Kingsbury's book, *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* will be an important source for my theorization of concert halls and the construction of the performer's identity exhibited in such venues. Cottrell's *Professional Music Making in London: Ethnography and Experience*, a detailed look at the work of freelance musicians in one of the busiest classical music cities in the world, also offers much to the ethnomusicological research on performance. Kingsbury and Cottrell both theorize the formal concert as a ritual, and examine the implications of this classification at length. I draw on their work in my own ethnographic studies of eighth blackbird's performances, though I attempt to provide a more detailed connection between performer, (expert) listener, and specific musical texts than is found in these studies.

A few recent studies further bolster my attempts to connect new music with broader cultural trends. Research by Lorriane Plourde (2009) provides a useful case study of musical avant-gardism and capitalism in Tokyo. Plourde examines the interaction of modernism, avant-garde, and commercialism in Japan, arguing that the avant-garde of Japan became subsumed within commodity production during the economic bubble of the 1980s. In a study of classical music recording in Great Britain, Greg Weinstein (2013) has theorized the labour conditions of recording producers and engineers as post-Fordist, thus demonstrating a dramatic change in the construction of musical recordings in the classical music world. Both Plourde's and Weinstein's

research provides precedents to parts of my arguments here, thus demonstrating how ethnography can be used to connect local practices with broader national and international trends.

While each of these works marks a significant contribution to the study of new music in its socio-cultural context, none connect the performance of avant-garde musical works as an embodied practice with American capitalist culture. Despite the relative dearth of material, important contributions have been made by several authors. Musicologist Robert Fink's (2005) book *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* connects minimalism in music with advertising and the rise of repetitive culture in the middle and late twentieth century. More than any other single work, Fink's research demonstrates how the sounds of new music enact sociocultural forces and suggests a way to hear new music as an expression of twenty-first-century culture. A similar approach can be found in the work of Cecilia Sun (2004, 2007), a musicologist who provides interesting connections between new music culture and broader cultural forces.

In contrast to the relatively sparse literature on contemporary music and current cultural values, a rich literature examines the history of art music so as to account for the rise of a canon of masterpieces found in contemporary classical music. Susan McClary's (1989, 2000, 2002) work on classical music as a cultural practice provides the foundation for much of the arguments I make here. Her research examines the history of autonomy in art music, the tendency toward increased musical complexity, and the practice of musical consumption so as to situate classical music as part sociomusical practices in the Romantic. During this time, the notion of the composer as genius emerged in full force, a shift that placed the composer at the top of

a musical hierarchy. A historical study of musical canon and its impact on the concept of “music” comes from Lydia Goehr’s excellent book, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* in which the changing notion of the musical work is examined in detail. Goehr’s research facilitates a detailed understanding of how, over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the West, “music” came to mean, in part, a stable piece collected and exhibited in the museum of the concert hall. Her work provides a way to understand modernism’s influence on the rise of a stable “classical” music that could withstand the vicissitudes of an increasingly mechanized world. An examination of this trend in the United States comes from historian Lawrence Levine (1990), who illustrates a movement spanning the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Originally a blend of musical genres performed for an audience of mixed socioeconomic background, several musicians, impresarios, and performing organizations moved toward a musical practice based on the performance of canonized masters for an elite audience of high class. A similar move is studied in Micheal Broyles’ (1992) *Music of the Highest Class: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston*. More focused on a single geographic site, Broyles’ work illustrates further the creation of a musical art in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Boston.

Research on art music performance as a cultural practice has influenced my approach to eighth blackbird’s performances and concerts. Musicologist and performer Elisabeth Le Guin (2006) also understands musical experience as culturally constructed in her book *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology*. Le Guin’s investigation of the Baroque composer’s music draws heavily on her experience as a cellist. She connects physical performative sensation to the values of Enlightenment Spain and Europe as a means to understand the very powerful effect of Boccherini’s

music. Meanwhile, music theorist Naomi Cumming (2000) has delivered an extremely detailed theorization of musical performance and the construction of performer identity in her book, *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification*. As Le Guin and Cumming demonstrate, the performer's musical identity originates in his or her manipulation of sound, and mixes with the identity assigned to the composer of the work. In the Western art music tradition, performance is not a simple delivery of musical text, but an elaborate and tenuous exercise in the construction of musical subjectivity. I use this idea as the basis for my analysis of eighth blackbird's approaches to performance and in the reception of those performances by critics and other expert listeners. The work of music educator Christopher Small (1987, 1998) is also useful here, as it examines the experience of listening to classical music and orchestras. Though not explicitly ethnographic, Small's writing seeks to engage the experience of attending a concert of classical music and how that connects with the elitism of high-class culture. My dissertation will for the first time combine these methodologies with the ethnographic approaches employed by Kingsbury, Born, Cottrell and Nettl.

Recent literature on virtuosity as a cultural phenomenon provides much-needed historical context for my claims. The work of William Weber (1977, 1979, 2004), especially his recent volume *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists*, provides several useful and new perspectives on musical labour. As Weber's research and that of this volume's other contributors demonstrate, the working lives of musicians, especially since the rise of the virtuoso in the nineteenth century, have always involved a certain amount of financial risk. Music historian Dana Gooley's (2004) research on Liszt and work by Maiko Kawabata

(2004) on virtuosity in the early nineteenth century also illuminate connections between virtuosic performance and nineteenth century desire, demonstrating how musical performance can represent a site of cultural fantasy and fulfillment by providing an appropriate articulation of violence. Taken as a whole, the work of these authors shows that, while originally focused on celebrating performer identity, virtuosity became increasingly focused on the presentation of works. By the twentieth century, performers had become physically restrained and the work had become at least as important as the performer him or herself. This trend parallels the rise of intellectual modernism found in twentieth century composition, thus pointing to another contradiction in the performer-focused virtuosity eighth blackbird brings to avant-garde music.

My approach to musical experience and identity construction through music also draws heavily on specific works from the rich literature on popular music. In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Philip Auslander (2008) has articulated a theory of performative liveness to demonstrate how forms such as film and television have become a standard part of many musical experiences, even in the classical music realm. I extend Auslander's arguments to my analysis of eighth blackbird's choreography as an example of how the group has come to emphasize the visual component of musical experience, a shift that challenges the emphasis on auditory musical experience found in the avant-garde. This shift is tantamount to a move toward the mediatized practices commonly considered endemic to postmodernity writ large. Chris McDonald's (2009) *Rush, Rock Music, and the Middle Class: Dreaming in Middletown* provides an important precedent to my approach by connecting the actions and reputation of a specific musical group, Rush, with broader cultural issues,

especially middle-class suburban life. McDonald combines ethnographic research, textual analysis, and discourse analysis to investigate how certain musical structures and tropes serve to reinforce important or desirable aspects of middle class identity. A similar combination of analytical approaches appears in Robert Walser's (1993) book on popular music and virtuosity, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Walser's work examines the ways in which heavy metal musicians drew on ideas of classical virtuosity through overt displays of musical skill, quotation of classical music, and by implementing a discourse of performative technique evocative of classical music's conservatory culture. As I will show, eighth blackbird engages in similar, though less overtly sexualized, displays of virtuosity that shape the identity of the group.

In addition to Born's research, several key works shape my understanding of the musical avant-garde and modernism. Theodor Adorno's (2002a, 2006) writings on modernism and avant-garde music, composed more than half a century ago, help me define longstanding conceptions of modernism and the avant-garde, especially his analysis of the complicated nature of musical works, and the emphasis on structural listening. As several authors have shown (Goehr, 2004; Paddison, 1993; Subotnik, 1988; A. Williams, 1997), structural listening was and continues to be one of the key practices of musical modernism, and provides a means with which both to evaluate the integrity of the work and to gauge its critical stance toward mass culture. These ideas remain in circulation in the avant-garde of today, though eighth blackbird's actions do challenge them. Bürger (1984) has posed an important critique of Adorno's work, and has argued for a clearer distinction between the avant-garde and modernism, adding much to my reclamation of the avant-garde concept from aesthetic modernism. Adorno

thus occupies a dual position, offering important critiques of classical music that I explore in Chapter 1, while also figuring as part of the subject I study here. Born similarly places Adorno as both subject of her study and informing her own use of theory, noting, “The key lacuna of Adorno’s thought, then, is the social critique of subsidized high culture—the sphere in which he was himself enmeshed” (Born, 1995, p. 22).

Andreas Huyssen’s (1986) *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* provides a detailed history of twentieth century art’s avant-garde, noting its original political agenda and its reaction to high modernism and institutionalization in the early twentieth century. He provides an excellent overview of the history of the avant-garde, modernity and postmodernism in art that adds much to my own reading of twentieth century art history. For Huyssen, the 1960s avant-garde’s embrace of postmodern ideas marked the end of the avant-garde as a political project. However, the avant-garde community that I examine does not carry the overt political agenda of its early twentieth century forbearers. The desire to reach out to new audiences, the celebration of connections to popular music, and the group’s approach to labour all mark eighth blackbird as postmodern.

In contrast to Huyssen, I situate this avant-garde as part of a broader postmodernity. Additional literature suggests an increased splintering of the avant-garde into genre-specific domains, and scholars have proposed the existence of multiple vanguards in various musical cultures and subcultures (Atton, 2012; Prior, 2008). The postmodern avant-garde I examine here thus appears as one part of a fragmented collection of vanguards that respond to overlapping though ultimately

different concerns. The sociological logic of an avant-garde remains alive and well, changed as it is by the rise of post-Fordist postmodernity.

Though a large number of other books and articles have been written about new music, in my experience, many of these adopt either an inherently laudatory position (see, for example, Epstein, 1986; T. A. Johnson, 1993; Johnson, 1994; G. Smith, 1998; Strickland, 1993), or condemn new music or some school found therein as a compositional failure (Bernard, 1993, 1995, 2003). Given my interest in analyzing the language with which we describe contemporary music-making, deciding which research counts as important secondary literature and which represents something more akin to primary source material has been a constant challenge in my work. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described the problem of such research in his work on art cultures in France:

[T]he major difficulty lies in the need to make a radical break with [...] the deceptive certainties of the language of celebration, without thereby forgetting that they are part of the very reality we are seeking to understand, and that, as such, they must have a place in the model to explain it (1993a, p. 35).

Following Bourdieu's suggestion, I have attempted to examine musical experience in a way that could account for the scholarly discourse surrounding new music in general. What my dissertation will offer, therefore, is thus not so much a rebuttal of music theory or its tradition of textual fetishization, but rather an attempt to expand our understanding of the performance of new music as bound up in a "web of significance" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Musical pieces are important points of inquiry, but they represent one node in a complex network of sociomusical meaning. My dissertation will thus situate musical works within very specific contexts as a way to link the cultural power of the work with embodied sociomusical experience.

In order to accomplish this connection, I draw on a variety of work from outside the realms of historical musicology or ethnomusicology. Literature from the sociology of music and the sociology of art comes from the research of Richard Peterson and Roger Kern (1996) and their theory of the “cultural omnivore.” In contrast with tendency to connect classical music with the taste of high class, high income individuals, Peterson and Kern find that “highbrow” increasingly indicates an eclectic taste in music. Rather than investing in the “imaginary museum” of canonized musical works, people are increasingly developing their own canons of musical genres, drawing on a wide variety of styles. This research is further supported by work by Douglas Holt (1997) who argues that middle income individuals are more likely to appreciate a wider variety of musical genres than lower income individuals. John Frow (1995) argues that easy distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow no longer appear in contemporary society, and theorizes these empirical findings as part of a broader shift toward a plurality of styles. In such a sociocultural setting, music functions to reinforce ideas of taste and consumption.

Several scholars (DeNora & Belcher, 2000; Kassabian, 2004; Meier, 2011; Sterne, 1997) have extended these findings to the use of music in advertising and retail settings to argue that music has come to function as one more component in the ubiquitous promotionalism of contemporary postmodernity. These claims draw upon the notion of promotion theorized by Andrew Wernick, who argues that promotion is “a species of rhetoric. It is defined not by what it says but by what it does, with respect to which its stylistic and semantic contents are purely secondary, and derived” (Wernick, 1991, p. 184). In commercial spaces, music often reinforces ideas aligned with a particular company’s brand identity and is intended to spur consumption. As

Jonathan Sterne has argued, “[p]rogrammed music in a mall produces consumption because the music works as an architectural element of a built space devoted to consumerism” (Sterne, 1997, p. 25). Music signifies not so much by what it is, as by how it is used and consumed.

The types of approaches embraced by the musicians of eighth blackbird and other members of the postmodern avant-garde reflect, in a way, the use of music in these retail spaces, and emphasize a more passive listening practice than that associated with modernist structural listening. I am not arguing that such practices necessarily represent some sort of deeper moral failing on the part of our society, or what Adorno called a “regression of listening” (Adorno, 2002b). I do, however, argue that there has been a shift in the attitudes of avant-garde musicians away from modernist aesthetics toward what might be theorized as a more postmodern approach to musical practices. In a society in which the omnivore has replaced the snob, art music stands on a more or less equal footing with its popular counterparts. The musicians of eighth blackbird and other groups feel the need to promote themselves and their music in ways that would have seemed uncouth in the fifties or sixties, but which have become increasingly endemic to the art music scene in general. At the same time, the legacy of aesthetic modernism and the belief in the supremacy of classical music lingers on. The musicians of eighth blackbird are not, after all, selling their music for use in commercials (though another new music ensemble, the Spektral Quartet does sell ringtones comprised of commissioned piece). They want people to sit and think about the content of the music they perform. Yet they also embrace branding, identity work, and promotional concerts that all resemble, even mimic, the use and promotion of music in for-profit spheres. It is this strange collusion of

postmodern egalitarianism and highbrow snobbery that has produced an ensemble like eighth blackbird, whose members celebrate genre mixture while simultaneously promoting modernist composers such as George Perle or Pierre Boulez.

Methodology

Engaging eighth blackbird as a cultural entity bound by tradition and enmeshed in a broader postmodern condition requires a mixture of methodological approaches.

Ethnography and its attendant methods (interviews, participant observation, and detailed fieldnotes) have served as my primary methods of research. Between 2008-2011, I conducted numerous interviews with all of eighth blackbird's current ensemble members, most of its employees, as well as numerous critics, composers, and performers who came into contact with the group. I also attended concerts, sat in on rehearsals and meetings, and worked briefly for eighth blackbird as an unpaid intern. After ending formal fieldwork in 2011, I kept up with the group through follow-up interviews and by reading concert reviews and blog posts about or by the ensemble members.

My approach to ethnography includes a critical view of ethnographic techniques. In this, I draw upon anthropologist James Clifford's (1986) concept that ethnography itself is a "partial truth" comprising both fact and fiction. Clifford's notion of partial truth itself relies on anthropologist Clifford Geertz's position that "Analysis ... is sorting out the structures of signification...and determining their social ground and import" (Geertz, 1973, p. 9). Along these lines, I employ recordings, notes, and memories of my fieldwork to create a text that describes new music as a cultural practice. My recorded perspectives constitute a significant portion of the "data" from

which I construct the material used in this dissertation. What I offer here is a focused study of parts of the eighth blackbird organization, not a complete account of every aspect of its membership or activities.

Ultimately my interpretations, like all interpretations, must in turn rest upon other people's cultural and individual constructions. To quote Geertz:

Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right. But that, along with plaguing subtle people with obtuse questions, is what being an ethnographer is like (Geertz, 1973, p. 29).⁴

My theorization of a postmodern avant-garde is thus an incomplete account of new music activities in the United States. I offer the construction postmodern avant-garde as a way to suggest how it might be possible to understand eighth blackbird and the ensemble's successes and failures as part of a specific cultural practice. Whenever possible, I have endeavoured to share with my interlocutors my interpretations of the activities I have observed. Ultimately, the constructs, frames, and language I employ describe my own position as much as those of my informants (Kisliuk, 1997).

The primary rubric I apply to new music is that of "culture" itself, which I define here as a complex collection of practices, beliefs, and behaviours (Clifford, 1986). Ethnomusicologist Aaron Fox argues that researchers should treat culture with sensitivity and careful consideration (2004, p. 33). In light of his suggestion, I acknowledge here that my ethnographic work and culturally-oriented perspective run

⁴ Along similar lines, cultural theorist John Van Maanen has argued that ethnography posits "questions at the margins of two cultures [that of the ethnographer and that of the people he or she studies]" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 4). Van Maanen's observation brings to light the constructed nature of ethnography in general, and illustrates the subjectivity of my own research.

counter to the historical and lingering contemporary valuation of autonomous musical works found in the new music scene (Adorno's arguments notwithstanding). Appearing alongside such valuations, however, were consistent opinions and activities designed to remake music into a less autonomous, more culturally grounded activity. Following the methodology advocated by these anthropologists as well as Bourdieu's (1993a) call for a "radical break," I have situated tensions found in the new and classical music communities as part of an ongoing debate—spoken and unspoken—currently undertaken by performers, critics, composers, administrators, and audience members. My own perspectives, my attention to particular aspects of eighth blackbird's activities and opinions, and my choice to focus largely on the ensemble are themselves major contributing factors in my understanding of modernism, postmodernism, performance, and virtuosity.

My desire to problematize my own findings stems from the all too often accepted presentation and examination of new music as a collection of fixed, analyzable objects. All musical scholarship consists of partial truths constructed from other partial truths, though many scholars seem prepared to argue otherwise. Indeed, in much musical scholarship the dogmatic objectivism of music theory promotes the goal of impartial analytic completeness and can hide the inherent subjectivity of the analysis and the music it treats (Guck, 1994, 2006).⁵

⁵ Performers, critics and scholars thus often treat "music" as an autonomous and abstracted object, free from external reference, defined solely as a collection of "purely musical" parameters (Kingsbury, 1988, 1991). Along these lines, music theorist Michael Kowalski, for instance, states: "Until willfully structured sounds are played by someone and enjoyed—as a structure—by someone else, there is no music" (1982, p. 6). Ethnomusicologist Henry Kingsbury argues that architectural terms commonly used to portray music, "such as 'structure,' 'form,' 'level,' and 'bridge,'" privilege fixity, "greatness," and monument as crucial elements of musical value (1991, p. 199-200). In Kingsbury's examples and Kowalski's statement, the veneer of written impartiality in fact betrays biases toward structuralism. Lydia Goehr has noted, "Few theorists still seem to feel comfortable working solely within the

Nevertheless, some ideas associated with structuralism can be reinterpreted and reapplied in useful ways. Criticizing approaches that limit “musical structure” to form, musicologist Susan McClary advocates cultural consciousness and somatic awareness.

She writes:

The power of music — both for dominant cultures and for those who would promote alternatives — resides in its ability to shape the ways we experience our bodies, emotions, subjectivities, desires, and social relations. And to study such effects demands that we recognize the ideological basis of music’s operations — its cultural constructedness (2000, pp. 6-7).

Structures, at once musical and cultural, prove fluid, encode power relationships, and speak to personal subjectivities. Furthermore, the persistent structuralist values, in particular the practice of structural listening, pervade the new music scene. I thus pay close attention to the nature of specific pieces as well as the manner in which they are presented.

New music’s “cultural constructedness” changes and reacts according to the subjective perspectives of those who produce and consume it. Like ethnography, the sociomusical domain consists of both facts and fictions, continually deconstructed and reconfigured. Despite claims to the contrary, the practice of new music does not exist outside social or cultural contexts. Elsewhere, McClary (1989) has written extensively on the abstracted and elitist opinions of dominant American modernist avant-garde composers. She argues that much stands to be learned from a culturally grounded study of this music. Ethnography, with its double focus and reflexive stance, strikes me as particularly valuable for approaching avant-garde performance. New music shapes

parameters of their traditional methodology. And the number decreases as the original criticisms proffered by Continental theorists of Hegelian or phenomenological influence are reinforced and developed by followers of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Gadamer, and Habermas” (Goehr, 2007, p. 6). While I am inclined to agree, I am surprised by the continued prevalence of formalist studies of music, which approach music as an object governed by internal forces.

people's lives in tangible, experiential, and empirically observable ways. The poetics of new music culture express complex relationships, multiple meanings, and the dynamics of power.

The nature of my fieldwork, drawing as it does on both personal and electronically mediated experience, has shaped many of the conclusions I draw about the ensemble. Prior to my survey of eighth blackbird's press reviews, I was not as sensitive to the notion of the group as a brand in circulation. The repetition of specific tropes in online discussions and in print descriptions of the ensemble, especially ideas of accessibility and friendliness, virtuosity, and the visual aspect of eighth blackbird's performances, all suggested to me that the group's identity was itself a brand treated by critics and fans and embodying the tensions found within post-Fordist postmodernity. Interviews conducted with eighth blackbird's members and employees have confirmed my hypothesis. "eighth blackbird" is an identity greater than the identity of its members, though the recognition of individual members remains a factor in discussions of the ensemble. My dissertation is thus a theorization of the brand "eighth blackbird" that focuses largely (though not exclusively) on the ensemble identity more than the identity of any individual member.

I combine my ethnographic research with detailed analyses of discourse and musical performances. As a highly influential musical ensemble, eighth blackbird's concerts and tactics are the subject of frequent discussion. I supplement my own analysis of this discourse (much of which manifests in the form of concert reviews, blog posts, and podcasts) with my ethnographic research in order to situate eighth blackbird within the debates and tensions of the postmodern avant-garde. My dissertation accomplishes this by describing the creation and deployment of friendly

virtuosity, the attitudes and intentions of eighth blackbird's members, the controversies surrounding their performances, and the implications of their performances for the classical music performance model.

Because of its importance in eighth blackbird's work, "virtuosity" represents a key concept within my argument, a fact that requires attention to history. As ethnomusicologist Adelaida Reyes notes:

Expressive culture...presupposes a frame of reference that is historically constructed, a treasury of collective experience and associations from which members of the culture draw for meaning that transcends the merely literal or semantic to become cultural meaning (Reyes, 2009, p. 14).

Understanding eighth blackbird's impact on the new music scene and their particular type of virtuosity requires that we examine the "collective experience and associations" surrounding virtuosity in both new and classical music. As a performing figure, the virtuoso has historically been treated with a mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism: indeed, these divergent responses continue to characterize much of the press and discourse surrounding eighth blackbird.

Thus, the methods of reception studies are central to my study. On the one hand, virtuosos are seen as capable of executing seemingly impossible musical feats, and the word has come to represent extreme and even superhuman skill. Accompanying such views are ideas of the supernatural, sexual attraction, and power. On the other hand, virtuosos have been treated as musical charlatans, as poseurs whose technical expertise distracts from the spiritual power of musical art (Weber, 2004). Flashy technique and extraneous movement, especially the kind offered by eighth blackbird, all "get in the way" of the proper reception of the musical text. This distinction between moving bodies and the musical text as an intellectual object speaks to a

separation of mind and body that has long been a feature of Western thought, perhaps best described by scholars as Cartesian dualism in reference to the ideas of seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes. As I will show, Cartesian dualism, as a way of thinking about and understanding musical performance, continues to shape understandings of musical experience for eighth blackbird and the press.

To analyze eighth blackbird's concerts and to explain the impact of the idea of Cartesian dualism on the history of virtuosic performance, I employ various theoretical approaches. Specifically, studies of performance and embodiment (Bourdieu, 1984; Cumming, 2000; Cusick, 1994; Kingsbury, 1988) provide useful tools with which to analyze eighth blackbird's physical movements in performance and to connect their choreography (or lack thereof) with the modernist tenets of art music culture.

Cartesian dualism creates a musical experience comprised of three stages, moving from the mind of the composer through the body of the performer to the mind of the listener. Musical listening in such a configuration is an exercise in private contemplation, and because it occurs within the mind of the listener, it represents an act of interior subject formation. Over time, this interiority became an article of faith in modernist thought, as composers, musicians, and followers sought to isolate themselves from the torrents of mass culture (Fink, 1999; McClary, 2000). Understood thusly, concert halls serve as spaces shut off from the outside world, designed to facilitate musical interiority. Performance in this context is guided toward specific ends that conform to the Cartesian model, and the resultant virtuosity is decidedly modernist. eighth blackbird's members' occasional use of choreography challenges the Cartesian model of musical experience because it seems to emphasize the performer to a much greater extent than normally found in the performance of classical music. The body

itself merges with the musical text, and mind and body become less easily distinguished.

More often than not, however, eighth blackbird's members stand relatively still when they perform, adhering to performance traditions long established in classical music culture and preserving the modernist model of virtuosity. Indeed, they are acutely aware that when they do choreograph movements in an effort to increase accessibility, they often provoke controversy. I examine the tensions between movement and relative performance stillness in my theorization of a musical "habitus," a theoretical concept that engages the stage as a site of cultural negotiation. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, I examine the unspoken conventions of the concert hall and their manifestation within eighth blackbird's concerts. eighth blackbird's members monitor their employment of normal, traditional musical movements such as cues, breaths, and dramatic gestures, in order to avoid distracting the listener from the musical text. The musical habitus of the classical concert hall thus shapes musical experience by confining members in their efforts to maintain proper performing attitudes. The concept of a habitus highlights how cultural values affect the performing body. Furthermore, my theorization of a habitus provides a way to analyze choreography as a merging of text, performative tradition, and embodied experience, as I will show in my analysis of an eighth blackbird performance of choreographed works. Understood as a reaction to modernism and an integration of ideas of virtuosity, I theorize eighth blackbird's choreographed shows as constituting a postmodern virtuosity, a type of performance that draws on the tenets of the modernist virtuoso even as it seems to challenge the separation between work/mind and performance/body.

My dissertation also seeks to connect the sounds of avant-garde music with sociocultural beliefs. In this endeavour I draw on the work of ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (1981, 1982, 1984), specifically his goal of understanding sound structures as social structures. Might it be possible to listen to the music performed by eighth blackbird and to hear the social structures of an avant-garde? Could I hear even more broadly, and recognize something of a larger cultural phenomenon? Though several ethnomusicologists have examined the avant-garde as a cultural practice, none have sketched out clear connections between musical sound and social forces. Indeed, Georgina Born openly acknowledged the lack of such a connection in her research on IRCAM (1995, p. 22). My intention here is to demonstrate how musical text is interwoven with cultural experience and thus to demonstrate how even this austere music represents a part of a cultural phenomenon. This dissertation attempts to rectify this gap in the literature by linking the sounds of specific musical works such as Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* with an ethnographically informed analysis of musical experience.

My theorization of identity as a means to secure both symbolic and economic capital draws on the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. A primary challenge when studying avant-garde art is the celebrated disconnect between art music and broader cultural forces, a disconnect found most obviously in the alleged disavowal of economic capital. Bourdieu's mapping of the avant-garde and his attempts to engage it in terms of its relationships with other cultural forces allow me to account for this separation by recognizing it as part of the philosophy of avant-garde culture itself. Bourdieu argues that the avant-garde never truly achieves the isolation claimed by even the most radical artists. The autonomy celebrated to varying degrees by people

within new music is thus part of a culturally constructed epistemology, which composers and performers use to justify the complexity of the music they write and perform. Thus, broader cultural forces influence this rarefied sphere of artists, critics, and patrons not in simple one-to-one equations. Rather, as Randall Johnson puts it:

the field's structure refracts, much like a prism, external determinants in terms of its own logic, and it is only through such refraction that external factors can have an effect on the field. The degree of autonomy of a particular field is measured precisely by its ability to refract external demands into its own logic (R. Johnson, 1993, p. 14).

The field in which eighth blackbird operates, I argue, does not enjoy the extreme autonomy of something like Boulez's IRCAM, though it certainly has more autonomy than, for example, the field of cultural production associated with reality television. Bourdieu's field theory provides a way to account for the lingering, if suspect, influence of aesthetic modernism found within eighth blackbird's concerts and activities.

Applied to eighth blackbird, Bourdieu's idea of refraction allows me to view the group's identity construction as a form of postmodern labour while simultaneously allowing for the politics of new music culture to be understood as detached from culture at large. I draw heavily on the work of cultural and social theorists (Frow, 1995; Hearn, 2006, 2008, 2010; Lazzarato, 1996), and political economists and sociologists (Harvey, 1990; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Sennett, 2006) to show how eighth blackbird's self-conscious performance of friendly virtuosity employs the techniques of postmodern identity construction intended to secure symbolic and economic capital. This connection also facilitates a more detailed explanation of how symbolic capital is converted into economic capital, a crucial point that Bourdieu, for various reasons, leaves rather vague in his theorization of art cultures. Understood as combining post-

Fordism with high culture, I illustrate how different pressures influence eighth blackbird, and how we can see the contradictions found within the ensemble's activities as endemic to the project of an avant-garde working in postmodernity. Ultimately, I combine ethnography with specific approaches from cultural, social, and economic theory in order to demonstrate how the avant-garde sounds out tensions inherent in post-Fordist postmodernity.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation examines eighth blackbird from a series of perspectives in order to establish the ensemble's engagement with and construction of the values of a postmodern avant-garde. Unpacking the logic of the ensemble's promotional strategies, aesthetic dispositions, and performative techniques requires a consideration of ensemble labour within the historical context of the new music field. Ensemble members' challenges to certain aspects of performance practices and the group's cooperation with other ensembles all constitute part of an ongoing negotiation between the modern and the postmodern, between beliefs in an economically disinterested art and attempts to promote new music as a relevant and vital practice. Additionally, the ensemble's reliance on institutional support and appeals to the classical mainstream require an examination of specific historical values resulting in the rise of a modernist notion of musical art. The ensemble moves constantly between modern and postmodern aesthetic poles. By examining their labour and performance choices, and reactions to these practices, it becomes possible to posit the existence of a postmodern avant-garde.

The first chapter of this dissertation provides a detailed explanation of my theorization of eighth blackbird's brand. Based on my interviews with the ensemble members and employees, as well as fieldwork with the ensemble, I theorize this brand as a form of postmodern virtuosity that I call "friendly virtuosity." This brand combines historic constructions of virtuosity with post-Fordist labour techniques and a postmodern goal of broad accessibility. Previous constructions of the virtuoso relied on performers who presented thoughtful renditions of stable musical works; the virtuoso was thus modernist and performer personality was, ostensibly, subdued. In contrast, the friendly virtuoso uses personality and enthusiasm to draw in audiences and to counter the elitism historically associated with new music performance. Such labour thus falls within the affect-laden identity work endemic to post-Fordism and constitutes a tenuous move toward commodification. A contradiction emerges between the anti-commodity values of the new music community and the commodity-oriented techniques used by eighth blackbird's members to promote those values. I examine this contradiction in detail, while also explaining the cultural and historical logic of eighth blackbird's strategies.

Chapter 2 examines the deployment of virtuosic identity by considering the rhetoric surrounding several eighth blackbird concerts in which musicians moved freely about the stage as they performed. By exploring this discourse, I show how critics and performers rely on an epistemology based on Cartesian dualism when attending concerts. This separation between thinking mind and moving body mediates musical experience in many ways, from the way people interpret musical works, to the construction of recital halls. By outlining the history of virtuosity and the autonomous musical "work," it becomes possible to understand how the classical music virtuoso

became physically restrained in accordance with the modernist valuation of autonomous, stable musical masterpieces. In seeming violation of this mind/body divide, eighth blackbird regularly performs concerts in which ensemble members move as they play in an attempt to provide a visual reference for abstract music. Drawing on the work of Suzanne Cusick (1994), I argue that Cartesian dualism positions the performer as a conduit mediating between the composer's mind and the minds of audience members. Performer movement, especially the choreography occasionally offered by eighth blackbird, poses a challenge to this model because it disrupts Cartesian dualism by placing heightened attention on the performative body. Excess attention to the performing body has been a concern applied to virtuosi since they first became a sociocultural phenomenon in the nineteenth century. Thus eighth blackbird and their critics demonstrate strong connections to past models of musical experience, and the concert hall itself is transformed into a space in which subject formation and exploration become possible. I offer a theorization of the concert hall as a space designed to explore and mould the interior subject, a space that reinforces extant modernist ideas of a subject removed from the influence of mass culture.

Chapter 3 is a detailed examination of the spectrum of performance practices found within eighth blackbird's concerts, which span from modernist virtuosity to postmodern virtuosity. Drawing on fieldwork with the ensemble undertaken at Ithaca College in 2011, I show how, in their performance of Bruno Mantovani's *Chamber Concerto No. 2* (2010), the group restricted physical movements and conceived of their bodies as external and potentially distracting from the musical work proper. In this instance, they offered a modernist version of virtuosity that distinguished between the work and performance in the Cartesian terms outlined in Chapter 2. I build upon this

argument to show how Cartesian dualism is part of the “habitus” of the new and classical music recital hall. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of habitus as a “structuring structure,” it becomes possible to understand how cultural values mediate musical performance for eighth blackbird’s members. I argue that this distinction constitutes a lingering modernism. Furthermore, I show how the ensemble’s use of added choreographed movement challenges this habitus, and moves the musical work from an abstract autonomous state toward a site-specific instance. The musical work becomes bound up in performers’ movements, and the musicians figure, in some ways, as co-authors with the composer. These performance choices amount to a postmodern form of musical virtuosity that seems to challenge the Cartesian values of the modernist recital hall while simultaneously remaining contained in the concert stage. Finally I show how the recital hall is foundational to the construction of virtuosity by examining an eighth blackbird performance at New York City’s Park Avenue Armory, a space imagined to free performers and audiences from the confines of the recital hall. In the absence of the recital hall’s divisions between audience and performer, virtuosity fails to register as part of the musical experience.

In Chapter 4 I weave together ideas of interiority, modernist concert ritual, branding, and postmodernism in a study of a single massive concert from 2011. Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork, I analyze “Chicago Counterpoint: A Steve Reich Celebration” as a case study for the contradictions found within the postmodern avant-garde. Set in Pritzker Pavilion in downtown Chicago’s Millennium Park, this concert required the collaboration of eighth blackbird, the Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture, composer Ryan Ingebritsen, Third Coast Percussion and New Music Chicago. At this event, I show, organizers attempted to draw a large audience while

simultaneously appeasing the modernist values of the classical music structure.

Chicago Counterpoint presented the music of Steve Reich as “masterpieces” worthy of and requiring close structural listening. However, the concert also seemed to move toward an avant-garde edginess with the playing of Reich’s tape piece *It’s Gonna Rain* after the concert had seemed to end. The reactions to this piece bolster my claims that the concert violated the unspoken conventions of musical experience.

In Chicago Counterpoint, organizers attempted to promote new music as part of the cultural attractions found along downtown Chicago’s “Magnificent Mile.” Many musicians and audience members emphasized the concert’s urban location as part of its incredible success, which was achieved despite the performance of *It’s Gonna Rain*. By examining the discourse surrounding this concert, the music of Steve Reich, and participants’ views of the Pritzker Pavilion, I argue that Reich’s music and modernist concert ritual itself were both packaged into a postmodern cultural commodity.

My conclusion outlines the implications of a postmodern avant-garde and the need for further study. Here I address the question raised by Jonathan D. Kramer at the beginning of this introduction—a question that underpins much of my research: “is an avant-garde of postmodernism possible?” (J. D. Kramer, 2002a, p. xvi). Can one really make the avant-garde postmodern? I believe eighth blackbird has effectively done this, though accounting for the group as postmodern and avant-garde requires a detailed consideration of the ensemble and its mixture of promotional and modernist goals. Ultimately, to truly establish a broad artistic movement that could be called a “postmodern avant-garde” requires greater study of the intersection of money and music. What I offer here is a starting place for such a project. How profit-driven, ultimately, can new music become? More research is required to answer these

questions, but I believe my dissertation offers a useful starting point for such a project. I also suggest new areas of research. Gender and race in new or classical music have yet to be treated with academic rigour. How do these factors influence the views of musicians and critics? There are no simple answers to such questions, but I believe that by considering the possibility of a postmodern avant-garde, we can begin to answer them.

Chapter 1

Branding eighth blackbird: Labour, Cultural Values, and Friendly Virtuosity

The ensemble displayed remarkable virtuosity as they charged through the lightning-fast barrage of notes, stalking the stage theatrically, confronting one another as their instruments' parts intertwined and collided. The close of the piece's first movement elicited a breathless gasp of "Wow" from the audience (Gillespie, 2005).

Formed in 1996 by students at Oberlin College, the blackbirds are examples of a new breed of super – musicians. They perform the bulk of their new music from memory. They have no need of a conductor, no matter how complex the rhythms or balances (Swed, 2009).

Hyperbolic laudatory rhetoric appears frequently in writings about eighth blackbird. Critics and bloggers celebrate the Chicago-based sextet and its musicians' abilities to make new music exciting and meaningful. While the musicians of eighth blackbird are certainly excellent performers, perceptions of the ensemble also reflect the group's success in creating a brand. In fact, the "eighth blackbird" discussed in the press and viewed from some distance by fans, composers, and performers constitutes an identity carefully crafted by ensemble members and employees. They devote long hours to discussing, programming, and packaging concerts and promotional materials that appeal to the contradictory values and anxieties of the new music scene. The result of their labour is a brand that members can circulate and exploit for symbolic, cultural, and economic capital within classical and new music networks.

In this chapter, I draw on my fieldwork with eighth blackbird, on interviews with members and fans, and on press pieces about the ensemble to show how the eighth blackbird brand is created. The eighth blackbird brand projects a post-Fordist,

postmodern virtuosity that I call “friendly virtuosity.” The group combines the heavily affect-laden branding strategies of post-Fordism with postmodernism’s ebullient “structure of feeling” (R. Williams, 1977) and its aesthetic dispositions. As such, the eighth blackbird brand both reflects and shapes issues of the new music workplace. Yet at the same time, members struggle with new music’s often fraught modernist legacy of difficult music and elitist practices.

I explore the eighth blackbird brand in four stages: in terms of the logics of post-Fordist branding; through historical and contemporary constructions of virtuosity; through the recent history of new music; and through eighth blackbird’s incorporation of friendliness. The eighth blackbird brand is shaped both by the classical and new music marketplace and by a belief that individual musicians can positively influence audiences’ reception of musical pieces through personality work. In this way, the professional personalities of the musicians are, to a certain extent, supplied and moulded by the pressures of capital (or, more accurately, the fear of lack of capital). However, unlike workers in other domains of the cultural industries, eighth blackbird maintains a degree of autonomy from ubiquitous corporate promotionalism (Hearn, 2008; Meier, 2011, 2013). This, despite the fact that the cultural capital that affords this autonomy is not accompanied by commensurate amounts of economic capital. eighth blackbird thus continues to operate within what Bourdieu calls an “economy of symbolic goods” that values symbolic and cultural capital over blatant bids for economic capital (see Introduction).⁶

⁶ Indeed, as I argue in Chapter 2, the performance ritual most often employed by eighth blackbird depends on the modernist notion of private subjectivity removed from commodity culture. Not everything the ensemble does is designed for profits, nor can the members afford to be seen as engaged in a full throttled fund-raising campaign for new music.

With this caveat in mind, I argue that the members of eighth blackbird enjoy a certain mobility, able to move between market pressures and relatively autonomous aesthetic goals from which they reap little economic capital. The members' use of affective labour in the construction of the eighth blackbird brand locates them within post-Fordism's emphasis on experience and symbolic capital. It also locates them within postmodern discourses of accessibility and a postmodern musical tourism in which every eighth blackbird concert "has something for everyone." The tensions between these various cultural forces (post-Fordist branding, postmodern accessibility, art and commodity, historic forms of virtuosity, and the modernist legacy of new music) form the basis of my concept of a postmodern avant-garde: the ensemble members and employees move between modernist artistic autonomy and postmodern marketability as they work in the business of new music.

Branding within Post-Fordism

Like many other not-for-profit organizations operating today across an array of industries, the musicians and employees of eighth blackbird have adopted promotional strategies that, until recently, have been associated with for-profit corporations. "eighth blackbird" has been packaged as a consumer brand able to appeal to a wide variety of potential customers. This type of approach is a response to a series of historical, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures generated both within the art music community and outside it. The adoption of these techniques indicates a move toward a deliberate and consistent type of promotionalism associated with recent economic shifts that is typically described using the term post-Fordism. However, despite this approach, eighth blackbird's musicians strive for (and achieve) a certain degree of

autonomy from the marketplace. In order to understand how eighth blackbird can be thought of as located within post-Fordism, it is necessary to examine the features of this type of economy.

eighth blackbird's self-presentation draws on aspects of branding unique to the post-Fordist economy. Branding has been a component of capitalist production through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (see Introduction). Under Fordism, from roughly the early to mid-twentieth century, managers applied ideas of scientific rationalism to the organization and application of labour (Braverman, 1974). They then adopted concomitant ideas of craftsmanship and universality in the promotion of their products. Companies used branding to distinguish themselves from competitors; a brand was, potentially, a mark of craftsmanship and product quality (Arvidsson, 2006). Ultimately, therefore, the brand was subsumed within the commodity. In the post-Fordist economy, however, brands have become far more than merely markers of superior craftsmanship. They have become the goal of production itself and, consequently, more important than the commodities ostensibly for sale. Because of this shift, "immaterial labour"—that is, labour that produces marketing, social relationships, and other types of promotionalism—has risen to new prominence in post-Fordism (Lazzarato, 1996). Commodities have become subsumed within brands.

More than stamps of quality, brands have come under post-Fordism to represent a set of values important to consumers—to imply the personal tastes and beliefs that the consumer of that brand would have. More and more, brands represent lifestyles. Sociologist Adam Arvidsson writes:

Today, the value of brands ... builds only in part on the qualities of products. To a great extent it is also based on values, commitments and forms of community sustained by consumers. This way, brands are mechanisms that

enable a direct valorization (in the form of share prices, for example) of people's ability to create trust, affect and shared meanings: their ability to create something in common (Arvidsson, 2005, pp. 235-236).

This shift has given rise to a new marketplace, what some have dubbed an "experience economy" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999), in which companies must emphasize lifestyle and affect as well as more traditional concepts of use-value. Liz Moor argues that the emphasis on affect has led to the production of events designed to "recast...space as a space of (real-time) marketing" (2003, p. 43). Thus, Nike organizes outdoor runs where amateur athletes get together and socialize during a workout, all while trying on the latest sneakers. Apple's retail shops become not simply stores, but fun hangouts where we can casually use the newest iPhone or Macbook Pro. By reorienting corporate goals toward, in Arvidsson's words, "trust, affect and shared meanings," corporations seek to produce conduits of consumer desire that guide potential customers down a path ending, inevitably, at whatever products the company offers. It is this state of affairs that leads Lazzarato to argue, "If production today is directly the production of a social relation, then the 'raw material' of immaterial labour is subjectivity and the ideological environment in which the subjectivity lives and reproduces" (1996, p. 142). Companies are not simply advertising their products through innovative marketing; in post-Fordism, capitalists sell subjectivity itself.

The production and capitalization of subjectivity also appears in the post-Fordist workplace. Employees are increasingly expected to take on and project the values of their company's brand. As Ernest Sternberg writes, "Workers must act out their persona on the job. Aspirants to promotion and success must demonstrate their merit ... through the evocativeness of their self-presentations" (1998, p. 11). Where

this type of mediatized performativity was previously reserved for the celebrity, it has increasingly become necessary to workers across a range of economic sectors (Sternberg, 1998). Employees must play with and against type as they align their work persona with the brand values of their employers. A male nurse must cultivate a certain personality that conforms to a specific model of nursing found at a particular institution. A paediatric nurse must present himself as loving toward children, playful but also caring, attentive, and precise, while an airline flight attendant must be viewed as deferential and accommodating. Under Fordism, skills qualified individuals for work, but in a post-Fordist economy workers must draw attention to their skills and their personalities. Individuals must be seen to project the values of their workplace. Alison Hearn theorizes this type of performativity as a representation of a new type of subjectivity, a “branded self”:

The branded self is a commodity sign; it is an entity that works and, at the same time, points to itself working, striving to embody the values of its working environment. Here we see the self as a commodity for sale in the labour market, which must generate its own rhetorically persuasive packaging, its own promotional skin, within the confines of the dominant corporate imaginary. As such the branded self must be understood as a distinct kind of labour; involving an outer-directed process of highly stylized self-construction, directly tied to the promotional mechanisms of the post-Fordist market (2008, pg. 201).

Post-Fordism asks workers to create an entire workplace persona around a particular job, a personal brand that they can circulate both within the workplace and outside it.

This post-Fordist ethos of promotionalism influences how the members of eighth blackbird build publicity and reputation, but it also comes into conflict with cultural tenets central to classical music. In the world of new music, post-Fordist

branding is refracted through a sociocultural prism that shuns blatant promotionalism.⁷ Though profitable in the sense that the organization provides a livelihood for its musicians and some of its employees, eighth blackbird is a non-profit organization that remains somewhat detached from the commercial market. Much of the money earned by the ensemble comes from institutional support in the form of long-term residencies or grants. Securing this financial support requires considerable amounts of symbolic capital (relationships and recommendations) and cultural capital (the prestige derived from previous performances, awards, grants, and residencies).⁸ There are no venture capitalists seeking to invest in eighth blackbird, and the musicians themselves have ultimate control over the organisation. However, in practice clear distinctions between profitability and artistic credibility are difficult to make, and practical concerns related to money, prestige, and reputation mingle somewhat freely. The musicians do, after all, work for money, and the booking of gigs requires the consideration of time, money, relationships, and potential artistic notoriety.

Nevertheless, a tension between artistic concerns and financial ones, between art and commodity, manifests regularly in eighth blackbird's daily operations. Thus, for example, the group's board responsible for fundraising, networking, and facilitating some of the needs of the ensemble remains insulated from musical projects. These distinctions and the degree to which eighth blackbird's musicians enforce them are the

⁷ I borrow here from Randall Johnson's work on Bourdieu in which he explains the relationship between the artistic field of production and the broader culture in which it functions as a prism refracting light (1991, p. 199).

⁸ This distinction manifests at all levels of the eighth blackbird organization. During my fieldwork, clear lines were drawn between artistic decisions and management decisions, and employees associated with management routinely prohibited from achieving a strong influence over artistic matters. The musicians always maintained control over the selection of projects, repertoire, concert venues, and collaborators.

practical source of the group's autonomy from the marketplace and, implicitly, from mass culture. It is this autonomy that gives eighth blackbird an air of authority and that connects the ensemble with the lingering legacy of modernist art.

Because the ensemble operates within an ostensibly non-profit domain that traditionally prioritizes artistic texts over performer personality, its successful use of post-Fordist branding signals a shift within art music culture. The post-Fordist valuation of worker personality in addition to skills comes into direct conflict with classical music culture's conventional wariness of performer persona and its ability to distract from musical texts (see Chapter 2). Indeed, as I show below, the history of virtuosity and classical music reveals recurring concern about soloists' ability to steal the focus from music works. In part because of its perceived commercial viability, virtuosity becomes synonymous with commerce and antithetical to artistic autonomy and integrity. Such concerns continue to this day for virtuosic performers like the musicians of eighth blackbird. Performer personality risks becoming overly dominant, a perspective expressed occasionally in concert reviews. For example, writing for the *Boston Globe*, Richard Dyer commented in 2006 that "The players are so good they can overshadow the music, and they run the danger of going the Kronos Quartet route—re-creating music in their own image" (Dyer, 2006).

Despite such critiques, eighth blackbird and others have embraced a branding strategy based on social relationships and personality work like that described by Hearn and Sternberg, perceiving it to be a necessary skill in the twenty-first century. No longer barriers to art, performer personalities and branding are viewed by members as a way to attract new audiences and create the "persuasive packaging"

described by Hearn. In an interview with Kyle Vegter, the group's office manager, I asked if he thought of the group as a brand. He replied:

Totally. 100%....We talk about branding all the time, and we talk about image all the time. I mean, me and Jen [eighth blackbird's manager] do. Yeah, I think of eighth blackbird as a brand. And I think that we're pushing towards more [branding]. And we're trying to make them [eighth blackbird] more identifiable as such (personal communication, November 8, 2012).

Vegter's comment here illustrates not only the fact that eighth blackbird's members and managers consciously create a brand, but that they want the group to be understood as brand. They want audiences and fans to associate "eighth blackbird" with a set of values and ideas.

My conversations with members of eighth blackbird have led me to theorize their brand as "friendly virtuosity," a phrase of my own invention. When asked to summarize the eighth blackbird brand, Vegter explained:

It's them playing really difficult music, really virtuosically. It's making new music more approachable. It's explaining the concepts behind new music. So I think it's breaking down the sort of like wall of classical music, the sort of big institutional wall that classical music has built for itself (personal communication, November 8, 2012).

Clearly, the ensemble cultivates a brand built on virtuosity, but the eighth blackbird brand reflects more than a stamp of performance quality. The musicians' friendliness is a reaction to a perceived alienating distance, Vegter's "big institutional wall" surrounding new and classical music. A desire to make these genres "approachable" has encouraged the musicians to portray themselves as friendly. And yet the ensemble continues to rely on the very institutions whose walls they purport to break down.

New music and accessibility, virtuosity and friendliness, and an investment in changing the image of classical music are the hallmarks of the eighth blackbird brand. Far from being some sort of phony façade, friendly virtuosity reflects the personal

concerns and beliefs of eighth blackbird's members. Like other post-Fordist workers, eighth blackbird's members amplify extant characteristics and draw attention to them—as Hearn writes, “striving to embody the values of [their] working environment” (Hearn, 2008, p. 201). Personal qualities become amplified as part of a glossy image that is designed to entice audiences, and that simultaneously addresses and shapes the concerns of a postmodern avant-garde. The eighth blackbird brand looms large in the minds of musicians and employees at all levels of production—from creating concerts and choosing repertoire to making promotional material. What will this gig say about us? What advantages for our image might come from working with this composer? What does this venue say about our values? A good example of such thinking occurred during my fieldwork with the ensemble in August of 2011. During a planning meeting, the group considered whether or not to participate in an artistic charity project. Despite seeming enthusiastic and discussing various pieces they could play, the members ultimately decided to decline because the project did not align with the overall values of eighth blackbird in general. As pianist Lisa Kaplan put it, the project was “not even a small part about what eighth blackbird is about.” While nobody used the term brand, the issue of image and personal fit clearly contributed to their decision, a fact that reveals that the musicians consider gigs not simply as performance opportunities, but as opportunities to promote their broader mission of making new music accessible and relevant. The eighth blackbird brand is more than a stamp of quality; it is a projection of values, social relationships, experiences, and subjectivity. Considered in relation to broader changes in labour and promotion in late capitalism, the eighth blackbird brand is decidedly post-Fordist.

The musicians and employees of eighth blackbird have advanced a new type of postmodern virtuosity that incorporates the promotional strategies of post-Fordist capitalism. They circulate a brand that guides consumers toward musical works created, allegedly, with some autonomy from market forces. Though they have appropriated techniques and certain values, their goals remain, to a certain extent, contradictory to the type of raw drive for profit seen in Hearn's branded self or its constituent corporations, a consequence of their position in an artistic field of production. However, the perceived precariousness of classical music's status (and institutions) have encouraged the members of eighth blackbird to present the ensemble in ways previously disparaged in classical music of the twentieth century, namely in baldly promotional terms. "eighth blackbird" emerges as a branded entity that communicates values crucial to the art music marketplace – values that, until recently, were at odds with one another: friendliness and virtuosity.

In the sections that follow I examine the major components of the friendly virtuosity brand and explain its cultural significance. Starting with an overview of the history of instrumental virtuosity, I illustrate how eighth blackbird draws on established cultural values in their construction of virtuosity. However, the anxieties surrounding new music's survival and importance have encouraged musicians to embrace a more accessible disposition than that typically associated with the virtuoso. This move constitutes a remaking of the virtuoso into a more human figure, while simultaneously attempting to retain virtuosity's cultural power. It also points toward a blurred distinction between commercial and not-for-profit sectors. Insofar as they have use-value (as expressed in art's ability to inspire) and exchange value (people pay to listen), the performances and works offered by eighth blackbird are commodities. The

friendly virtuosity brand is thus doubly veiled: in the first veiling, the brand reifies the commodities offered by these musicians by communicating ease not labour (virtuosity) and friendliness instead of snobbery and musical difficulty. This first veiling is endemic to the process of commodification itself. However, a second veiling occurs because eighth blackbird and its performances are presented as part of a non-commodified artistic practice.

Finally, I show how some in the classical music community have embraced the eighth blackbird brand and the ethos of post-Fordist promotionalism as a way to reinvigorate classical music. Performative skill is no longer considered sufficient for securing a job. Classical music students are encouraged to embrace the post-Fordist techniques of branding and identity work as they embark on their careers. Thus we can see how the post-Fordist labour practices of postmodernity are coming to influence the gradual emergence of a post-modern avant-garde and the institutional centres that support it. However, despite the enthusiastic celebration of post-Fordist practices, economic instability remains endemic to the new and classical music workplaces in general. Post-Fordist branding within art music communities functions as one more set of strategies in which the entire burden of success, both for the musician and the arts in general, falls on the individual, while structural instability continues.

A Brief History of Virtuosity

eighth blackbird's members have achieved great success in branding themselves as virtuosi. Appreciating the significance of this move requires a brief examination of historical notions of virtuosity and its relationship with modernist art and classical music in the twentieth century. Until recently, despite the virtuoso's mass appeal and

potential for commercial success, he or she has not been imagined as friendly, but as mysterious, exceptional, and able to transcend the constraints of polite society.

Individual virtuosos were perhaps polite and caring individuals, but the construction of virtuosity did not draw on ideas of friendliness. Reviewing the history of virtuosity illustrates how this component of the eighth blackbird brand draws on long established Romantic and, later, modernist concepts of art and “the struggling artist.”

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, instrumental virtuosity dazzled audiences and attracted crowds. Much of the Romantic virtuoso’s power came from his (or, less often, her, c.f. Kawabata (2004)) ability to execute impossible musical feats and improvise on any given tune. Virtuosity became synonymous with boldness and daring, and military tropes appeared frequently in contemporary descriptions of virtuosity. Virtuoso violinists and pianists in particular created spaces for socially sanctioned (musical) violence⁹:

Virtuoso violin performance was richly nuanced—visually and aurally—with codes of military heroism. Violinists from Paganini to Boucher, Spohr to Lipinski, wielded their bows like swords and commanded armies of orchestral musicians, inviting comparison with military leaders, ancient and modern (Kawabata, 2004, p. 91).

Richard Leppert has argued that the virtuoso fulfilled a latent desire for escape and social deviance, a desire especially prevalent as the emerging middle class attempted to embrace the etiquette of high-class society. The virtuoso exploited a place—the concert hall—where society’s rules could be acceptably challenged. Leppert writes that in the nineteenth century, “one role anticipated for artists is to play the part of transgressors,

⁹ Kawabata (1993, p. 12) and Gooley (2004) each explore the issue of violence at length in their respective research. Gooley demonstrates how Liszt’s performances involved a greater display of physical gesture and how he was commonly compared with Napoleon in the popular press (despite looking nothing like the Frenchman).

[thus creating] the carnivalesque safety value that ironically helps guarantee the hegemony of the status quo” (2007, p. 36).

As virtuosity flourished in the nineteenth century the idealization of artistic struggle also increased. At the same time an aspect of musical art (and art in general), the work, came to be seen by some as autonomous, detached from society’s mundane daily interests. Janet Wolff has argued that struggle and autonomy were direct consequences of a transition from court patronage to market patronage: “Thus the actual situation of the artist/author from the mid-nineteenth century helped produce the myth that art is an activity which transcends the social” (1987, p. 3). A belief in autonomy became implicit within the concept of art itself. Music theorists and aestheticians viewed the musical work as independent of musical performance; musical works, detached from any apparent social or physical reality became intellectual concepts, thus creating the work concept (Goehr, 2007; Samson, 2001). The Romantic artist, composer, or performer was one who struggled against the pressures of daily life. With the rise of the “work concept,” the virtuoso, and the musician more generally, figured as a conduit to an increasingly elevated sphere of experience. Music provided a fantasy space of sorts, not just for social deviance, but for escape from society in general (McClary, 2000) and virtuosi were seen to possess the ability to provide access to this psycho-spiritual plane. Virtuosity thus represented a collection of ideas ranging from super human (and commercially viable) showmen to economically disinterested spiritual shepherds.

By the twentieth century, the role of the artist as social transgressor had been solidified – though the composer had replaced the virtuoso as the artistic transgressor *par excellence*. With the rise of the modern concert tradition, virtuosity’s techniques of

transgression — personal embellishments to pieces, showy improvisations, and other “added” music — were increasingly considered suspect. Descriptions of virtuosity as frivolous date back at least to the writings of Robert Schumann, but in the twentieth century such critiques increased and became part and parcel of an accepted and disparaged notion of virtuosity. The 1908 edition of the *American History and Encyclopedia of Music: Musical Dictionary* describes a virtuoso as being “constantly tempted to indulge in an undue exhibition of their wonderful technic [sic]” (Hubbard, 1908, p. 565). To be sure, alternative perceptions of virtuosity flourished as well, for example in jazz music. Despite the fact that early modernisms showed a love of speed and mechanization that celebrated performative virtuosity (Cohen, 2012; Harvey, 1990; Oja, 2000), the performance of art music (along with musical art in general) was becoming ossified into a collection of older works performed along relatively narrow parameters. For the audiences of the bourgeois concert hall, the flashy improvisations of the virtuoso performer had come to be seen as a distraction.¹⁰ The status of the artwork and composer now eclipsed that of the performer, and virtuosity was needed to reinforce this newly reconfigured musical hierarchy (Horowitz, 2005).

Meanwhile, art music as a cultural practice became increasingly austere (a practice against which many avant-gardes of the early twentieth century rebelled, (see Eksteins, 1989; Oja, 2000)). An aesthetic emerged based on interpretation, precise technique, and textually accurate renditions. Musicians of the concert hall now almost exclusively performed music written by others, a significant shift from the early nineteenth century when instrumental soloists frequently performed a mixture of

¹⁰ I explore the troubled relationship between virtuoso performer and musical text more fully in the next two chapters.

music by themselves and others. By the early twentieth century a canon of great works emerged that focused largely on the music of German master composers (Weber, 1979). Musicians studied at prestigious conservatories, and musical performance became increasingly professionalized, even standardized. Such performative standardization was exactly what Theodor Adorno was critiquing when he wrote of classical music performance in 1938,

Perfect, immaculate performance in the latest style preserves the work and the price of its definitive reification. It presents it as already complete from the very first note. The performance sounds like its own phonograph record (Adorno, 2006, p. 301).¹¹

Adorno's invocation of reification expresses a central criticism of the virtuoso: his tendency to commodify musical art. Rather than engage works through in a way that offered nuance and insight, virtuosity and a seeming standardization of musical performance, for Adorno, made for boring and predictable performances. While many might take issue with the notion of a standardized art music practice as described in Adorno's writing, his opinion nevertheless expresses a wariness of musical virtuosity in many ways typical of the early and mid twentieth century. By some accounts, all young musicians were forced to become virtuosic or at least market themselves as such (Burk, 1918). At the same time performers and professional orchestras created strong class barriers around the performance of the relatively new canon (Levine, 1990). Long since established in Europe (Frankenbach, 2012), the public concert experience emerged as a formal, elitist, intellectual ritual and twentieth century concert audiences in the United States gradually became silent. The combined efforts of various

¹¹ Adorno addresses this implicitly in many of his writings, and explicitly in his *Philosophy of New Music* and in the essay "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening" (c.f. Introduction, Adorno, 2006; Adorno, Leppert, & Gillespie, 2002).

performers and institutional patrons cast European art music as part of a prestigious, stable, and historic legacy, a legacy consistent with the aims of mid-century high modernism (see Introduction, Harvey, 1990).¹² Musical performance was, in effect, becoming *classical*, in the sense that the term is now used colloquially. Examining the elaborate ritual and austerity found in mid twentieth-century classical music, Edward Said writes that

the result is what can be called an extreme occasion, something beyond the everyday, something irreducibly and temporally not repeatable, something whose core is precisely what can be experienced only under relatively severe and unyielding conditions (Said, 1991, pp. 17-18).

Virtuosity now manifested itself within the strict confines of a highly ritualized affair wherein audiences remained silent and musicians rarely spoke directly from the stage. Once seen as heroic and directly engaged with the public, virtuosos (in classical music) had become austere and detached, confined within the sacralised acts of high culture. The transgressive power of the virtuoso had been contained by the “extreme occasion” of classical music performance.

Constructing Musical Virtuosity

Though constituting a seeming contradiction to the above outlined history, eighth blackbird’s friendly virtuoso brand combines the austerity of the high modernist virtuoso with a certain amount of postmodern accessibility. Through a variety of promotional material the brand invokes the nineteenth century virtuoso’s superhuman musical skill, willingness to transgress boundaries, and willingness to entertain, while

¹² Adorno (2002) was highly critical of this state of affairs, an attitude that puts him at odds with high modernism’s museum culture, which I summarize here.

also working within the much more recent configuration of the virtuoso as an exceptionally accurate interpreter of texts. eighth blackbird's current biography, for example, is formatted as a definition entry:

- eighth blackbird \`ātth 'blak- bərd\ slang (orig. and chiefly U.S.).
1. verb. to act with commitment and virtuosity; to zap, zip, sock
 2. adjective. having fearless (yet irreverent) qualities.
 3. noun. a flock of songbirds, common in urban areas since 1996 (Munro, 2014)

The ensemble portrays itself as combining playfulness, daring, dedication, and musical skill all at once. This combination reflects the continued tension between work and performer found within new and classical music circles. The musicians must balance their performative accomplishments with a focus on musical texts privileged by art music culture. To some extent, this construction is in keeping with contemporary modernist views of classical music virtuosity. Musicologist Owen Jander defines “virtuoso” in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as “A person of notable accomplishment; a musician of extraordinary technical skill” (Jander, 2013, n.p.). He continues, “the true virtuoso has always been prized not only for his rarity but also for his ability to widen the technical and expressive boundaries of his art” (Jander, 2013). Jander’s description points to a model in which the virtuoso labours in service to his field, like a craftsman, while also working to advance the field as a whole. He also subtly distinguishes between “true” virtuosi and, implicitly, charlatans, thus maintaining the historic wariness of the figure unless he eschews cheap spectacle and works for the good of the whole art. The true virtuoso must align with this modernist conception. While this characterization certainly applies to the musicians of eighth blackbird, their liberal use of visual elements and choreography invokes the performance approach, transgressiveness and (hopefully) populism of nineteenth

century instrumental virtuosity, thus challenging received classical music performance models of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Rather than treat virtuosity as some sort of mystical gift (as Jander does), I argue that eighth blackbird's virtuosic brand represents the culmination of a considerable amount of conscious labour: rehearsals, meetings, and the frequent repetition of new repertoire. However, eighth blackbird also makes a practice of hiding the labour required to produce its famous style of virtuosity. This reifying move is a nearly omnipresent characteristic of branded commodities since the rise of modern capitalism. Musical performances are assumed to be unique and precious, but whenever musicians perform the same concert over and over, like eighth blackbird does (or for that matter, the Trans Siberian Orchestra, or any regular Broadway or Vegas¹³ act), musical performance is reified. This is because of the way that virtuosity in general fetishizes performance while simultaneously obscuring the labour required to produce it (Harvey, 1990; Lukács, 1971; Marx, 1977).

eighth blackbird's members enthusiastically construct musical virtuosity through a variety of techniques. In order to analyze this reified construction, I treat virtuosity as the result of a series of calculated choices. Virtuosity is constructed both on stage and off, both in the actual performance space and in the spaces where those performances are created: the rehearsal hall, individual practice rooms, and in the meetings where performers select repertoire and create concert programs.¹⁴ This type of approach reflects the twentieth century's emphasis on performers as polished interpreters delivering challenging musical texts, an emphasis consistent with and

¹³ On which see Burston, 2000.

¹⁴ I will examine the concert space in Chapters Two and Three.

constituent of high modernism's concept of a stable and revered catalogue of musical works. By examining various eighth blackbird repertoire, rehearsals and performances, I show how the group combines nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideals in its postmodern virtuosic brand.

Virtuosity through Repertoire

eighth blackbird's members establish their virtuosity in part through the choice of what to perform and how to perform it. Groups like eighth blackbird who specialize in new music often gain some status as virtuosic simply on the basis of their repertoire. However, not every piece performed by eighth blackbird is especially demanding, and some are even relatively easy. Others, though, are exceptionally challenging, and preparing even simple pieces always takes time, so musicians must consistently balance more challenging works with easier ones. Programming too many difficult works places too much stress on the group's time, and programming too many easy ones could potentially undermine its reputation.

The work of choosing and presenting repertoire contributes to the construction of eighth blackbird's virtuosic brand and is a regular topic of conversation among the members. During an artistic meeting in August 2011, Matthew Duvall, the group's percussionist, commented that "the virtuosity of the parts needs to be considered" before deciding whether to perform a certain piece. This comment, and others like it that I heard during my fieldwork, illustrate that ensemble members, like many classical musicians, view particular works as inherently virtuosic because of their performative requirements. Sometimes musicians would intentionally choose to perform certain

pieces because of their capacity to impress audiences.¹⁵ In another conversation, Tim Munro, the group's flutist, said that a particular work would be better to program than another that was being considered because it was "more virtuosic." Munro intentionally sought to create virtuosity through the performance of works that seemed hard to perform, making repertoire a major component in the construction of virtuosic identity.

Virtuosity has had a major impact in how composers approach commissions for eighth blackbird. The ensemble's enthusiastic attitude toward new music and the members' ability to successfully perform challenging works has influenced how composers write for the group. Composers typically approach commissions for eighth blackbird with the group's virtuosic reputation in mind and often create especially challenging works.¹⁶ Composer Jennifer Higdon explained her approach to writing for the ensemble as an opportunity to explore innovative musical techniques. In an interview with a major performing arts blog, Higdon commented:

Having already written two chamber works for eighth blackbird, I am familiar with [its members'] ability to do all sorts of cool things on their instruments, from extended techniques, to complex patterns, to exquisitely controlled lyrical lines (Don411.com, 2011).

Another press interview reinforced the idea that Higdon wrote music that was itself more virtuosic because of eighth blackbird's reputation. As the writer reported:

¹⁵ I do not mean to imply that eighth blackbird's repertoire choices were ever insincere. The group, as far as I could tell, generally believed in the inherent quality of what they were performing, at least at the beginning of the season.

¹⁶ As a major part of their mission to promote new music, eighth blackbird regularly commissions new pieces from composers. Every concert season features at least several and sometimes numerous world premiers.

Higdon said she keeps coming back to writing music for eighth blackbird because they always play so marvellously.

They are always willing to try new things,” she said. “I think, in all the pieces I have written for them, I have pushed their normal playing to try other colours. That is particularly true in this concerto, which has something called “bowed piano” (Veltman, 2011).

Higdon here aims to take advantage of both the attitude and technical prowess of eighth blackbird’s members. She feels able to push them to “try other colours” and points to their reputation for excellent concerts. Higdon recognizes eighth blackbird’s virtuosity, and her words echo Jander’s definition of the virtuoso as someone able to “widen the expressive and technical boundaries of his art” (Jander, 2013).

Where eighth blackbird’s virtuosity presented opportunities for Higdon, it has intimidated others. A press piece about Canadian composer Allan Gordon Bell described his perspective on writing for eighth blackbird:

Bell said that it was a daunting challenge writing a piece for an ensemble the Los Angeles Times calls a new breed of super-musicians. “I listened carefully to many of their recordings. Then I let that sit for a while and thought about what I wished to create for this particular grouping (flute, clarinet, violin and piano). Knowing that they are virtuosos and could play much more difficult music than is part of my aesthetic, I decided to give them a couple of unusual challenges by incorporating vocal sounds into their parts,” he said (“Eighth Blackbird performs “Sage” during world premier on Jan. 26,” 2013).

This excerpt portrays Bell as self-consciously altering his normal compositional style and philosophy to match the expectations and image of eighth blackbird. His understanding of the group’s skills came from their recordings, many of which feature exceptionally demanding pieces. Perhaps worried about his own abilities, he chose to write something more demanding that actually challenged the ensemble.

Repertoire thus figures as a major component of eighth blackbird's virtuosic brand. Like previous virtuosos, the musicians choose virtuosic music and perform in a way intended to impress audiences. Composers have responded to this reputation in their approaches to writing for the ensemble. They see commissions as opportunities to explore new techniques, or even as an intimidating challenge that demands more from them. In a way, virtuosity represents a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy: people think of the group as virtuosic, so composers write music for the group that makes the musicians seem more virtuosic. Most importantly, though, eighth blackbird's members consciously use musical works to portray themselves as exceptionally skilled and to build a brand based on virtuosity.

Preparing the Parts

In addition to the repertoire itself, a major component in the construction of eighth blackbird's virtuosic brand comes from how the ensemble rehearses. Once the repertoire for a concert has been chosen, musicians must set about preparing that music for performance. To some extent, such preparation is taken as a matter of course in classical music. All professional musicians must maintain their skills and prepare individual parts. However, virtuosity implies a level of skill no normal musician could attain. In fact, the musicians of eighth blackbird have cultivated rehearsal techniques that, combined with their particular level of technical skill, will all but guarantee their success on stage. Pieces are dissected and small individual sections rehearsed over and over again, often with the help of tuners and metronomes. However meticulous and laudable their rehearsal practice, the invisibility of such labour has the effect of reifying performances; the eighth blackbird brand promises flawless execution and

guarantees reliability. An examination of both the group's work in rehearsal, and their fans' reactions to this work, demonstrates how the musicians labour to construct the musical skills implicit within the virtuosic brand.

During fieldwork with the group, I studied the ensemble's rehearsal technique as musicians prepared one of the hardest pieces in the group's repertoire at that time, Bruno Mantovani's *Chamber Concerto No. 2* (2010). Commissioned by the ensemble, Mantovani's piece had no consistent pulse, was centered on an atonal pitch collection, and featured very difficult (and occasionally impossible) individual parts.¹⁷ eighth blackbird approached this piece by breaking it down into small, manageable sections. Initial rehearsals for the Mantovani began with only four members of the sextet — Nick Photinos, cello, Tim Munro, flute, Michael Maccaferri, clarinet, and Yvonne Lam, violin — a choice designed to save the time of the pianist and percussionist who would not need to concern themselves with the numerous pitch bends and intonation challenges in the wind and string parts. These rehearsals often featured the use of tuners so that the musicians such sections and focus on small passages, often devoting several minutes to individual gestures. In a process musicians called "looping," sub-groups of musicians would repeat a short series of notes in order to practice landing on a particular note in tune. After several quartet rehearsals, Lisa Kaplan, piano, and Matthew Duvall, percussion, joined rehearsals. Of all the pieces I watched the group rehearse in the August of 2011, the members spent by far the most time on Mantovani's piece. Where other rehearsals often included a fair amount of joking or funny comments, rehearsals for the Mantovani were generally more serious. Members

¹⁷ By impossible, I literally mean writing that a given instrument could not actually execute. This happened rarely, and players simply approximated the gesture in question.

were also much more likely to become frustrated with the music in these rehearsals. Clearly, this piece represented a significant challenge to even these seasoned performers.

The intense work done to obtain the immaculate precision and polish that I witnessed in the group's performances is crucial to the construction of eighth blackbird's virtuosic brand. An emphasis on accuracy became a hallmark of classical music performance in the twentieth century, and continues to be a major feature of classical music in the twenty-first century. Wrong notes, out of tune cadences, or sloppy rhythms have no place in any professional classical music performance, but the virtuoso takes precision to an extreme. For eighth blackbird, every note, passage, gesture, and rhythm—indeed, every part of the sonic aspect of their performances—must be perfect. The labour required to produce this perfection is itself extreme, as demonstrated to me in conversations with other musicians who had seen the group rehearse. When I interviewed composer and pianist Sarah Gibson about her experiences with eighth blackbird, she emphasized the ensemble's impressive rehearsals:

And their rehearsal technique is *flawless*.... I mean they know the piece so well, backwards and forwards. [In rehearsal] I could hear them dissect it. And they don't give up until it's like *perfect*. And they aren't afraid to tell each other if something sucks. [The] piece [they rehearsed] has this A major chord that comes out of nowhere a little bit, and it was between the viola and the cello. And it was like *slightly* out of tune. I didn't even notice it was out of tune when they played it through and so they'd stop and they were like, "OK, let's just set this like four times." It was cool (Emphasis original, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

The way the group rehearsed impressed Sarah as much as their subsequent performances. "Flawless" actually describes the product of such a technique as much as the technique itself. Her assertion that "they know the piece so well" is also notable

in the context of new music performance. In classical music, performers of chamber music are certainly expected to know their music, as Sarah puts it, “forwards and backwards.” In contrast to the work of new music specialists, however, performances can often be unpolished and hastily thrown together by performers who do not truly understand the relationships between their individual parts and the piece as a whole. Sarah’s desire to draw attention to this detail points to how comparatively unusual it is for new music performers to have such a complete command of their repertoire. Their attention to minutia that other performers might gloss over, such as the slightly out of tune A major chord, their professional candour, and their intimate knowledge of their music all struck Sarah as exceptional and quintessentially virtuosic.

Though eighth blackbird’s rehearsals regularly feature this kind of intense labour, many musicians are surprised to learn about it. Such reactions result from the glamour of the eighth blackbird brand and likely because many accept the commonly held idea that virtuosity is inherent, not learned and constructed. A visiting flutist, Christie, sat in on one of the rehearsals for *Chamber Concerto No. 2*. In an interview with me afterwards, Christie told me how surprised she was to watch eighth blackbird spend so much time on small sections. She also said that the group’s use of an amplified metronome (a regular feature of many of their rehearsals) validated her own experiences with new music: “It was refreshing to hear them have the same struggles with music that my group has” (personal communication, October 6, 2011). Christie told me that she might have assumed that the musicians would just “whiz through” a piece like the Mantovani. Her comment demonstrates the extent to which eighth blackbird has successfully marketed itself as virtuosic, and the extent to which virtuosity hides the labour required for its production from consideration. eighth

blackbird's virtuosic reputation is so strong that Christie was surprised to see its musicians struggle. Once branded virtuosic, musicians in eighth blackbird take on an aura of superhuman ability and are reified as talented musicians able to transcend boundaries of human work.

In Concert

A final domain in eighth blackbird's brand of virtuosity is performance itself, where musicians present themselves and their work. Chapters Two and Three examine this domain more fully, but it must be noted that performances and the group's strategies in approaching concerts play a major role in their virtuosic identity and thus their brand in general. Acutely aware of their image and reputation, musicians spend considerable time creating concerts designed to impress both expert and uninitiated audience members. Specifically, the group regularly memorizes their music and choreographs their shows, techniques that bolster their claims to virtuosity.

The musicians tap into virtuosity whenever they choreograph their shows. Although the group only choreographs about a quarter of the pieces they perform, the effect of such performances on their reputation has been significant. Choreography helps eighth blackbird achieve virtuosity by adding an extra layer of difficulty to repertoire already viewed as very challenging. Their performances become theatrical and visual—tropes associated with instrumental virtuosity since the nineteenth century. Furthermore, by animating the performing body to such an extent, eighth blackbird actively challenges the austerity typically associated with classical music performance—with Said's (1991) "extreme occasion." Emphasis shifts from the intellectualism of the listening act to the visceral and visual domain of the moving body

(see Chapter 2). The musicians thus salvage some of the transgressive attributes of their nineteenth century virtuoso ancestors.

Group planning meetings often center on how to package and present the performers and their music in concert. In one meeting I attended, members discussed possible programming ideas for a future concert. Various themes and pieces were suggested as organizing ideas intended to give the concert some sort of focus. Jen Richards, the group's managing director, suggested they use memorization of their repertoire as a theme. eighth blackbird periodically memorizes entire pieces and performs on stage without reference to sheet music, another practice that connects them with the historical legacy of virtuosity. Matthew Duvall rejected this idea because he felt that memorization was more impressive when they did not announce it to the audience ahead of time. Matthew spurned Jen's suggestion in part because he wanted to show off the group's skill in a way that made memorization seem natural. In fact, memorization at the group level is rather rare and often comes across as an impressive accomplishment because it implies both great skill and large amounts of rehearsing. Matthew's desire to let the impressiveness of memorization speak for itself demonstrates how he and the group adopt strategies designed to portray the ensemble as virtuosic and their construction of a brand that hides their considerable labour.

New Music in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Powerful as it is, virtuosity alone is not enough for eighth blackbird to succeed. Classical music virtuosity—comprised of passionate renditions of relatively stable musical texts—does not suffice to draw audiences to new music concerts. In the twenty-first century, new music's reputation is so poor that groups such as eighth

blackbird feel the need to create an atmosphere of accessibility and friendliness in order to build audience interest. The negative image of new music stems from a number of issues ranging from a history of avant-garde composers eschewing audience pleasure to audiences' seeming unfamiliarity with contemporary compositional techniques to the challenges posed by performing new works. Furthermore, classical music and its avant-garde have lost the prestige they enjoyed at the beginning of the twentieth century. High culture simply no longer commands the levels of respect it once did, though it certainly remains an idea in circulation (Fink, 1998; Frow, 1995; A. Williams, 2004). Musical modernism's drive for newness and the consequent avoidance of tonal musical material was never reabsorbed into the classical music mainstream. That is to say, unlike other musical genres in which the sounds of historical vanguards have impacted the contemporary sound of the genre, classical music remains sonically defined by its nineteenth century cannon. This is starkly different from other historical vanguards such as those of Jazz (bebop), electronic dance music (or "EDM," with its so-called intelligent dance music (IDM) vanguard) or hip-hop, all of which have to some extent been absorbed into various sorts of received mainstream, sometimes even commercially viable forms. The music of many of the most respected modernist composers (Babbitt, Boulez, Boretz, Wolpe) and those anti-modernists who objected (Rochberg, Young, Terry Riley) have never been fully embraced by concert hall audiences (Born, 1995; Bürger, 1984). Indeed, though several authors (Cohen, 2012; de Graaf, 2005; Oja, 2000; Ross, 2007) have taken great pains to argue that the history of new music reveals many composers and performers trying to bring "the new" to the public, the sense of "new music" as an anti-populist, inaccessible, thorny affair remains strong. As a result, some musicians now strive for

an attitude that welcomes newcomers, a stark contrast to the stereotypical high modernist understanding of new music as intended only for intellectuals and specialists interested in advancing musical art.¹⁸

eight blackbird's friendly virtuosity addresses anxieties about new music's accessibility and is intended to create a less austere musical event. At the same time, this friendliness inherently contradicts the gravity associated with classical music and the modernist virtuoso because it makes art music seem more approachable. eight blackbird's decision to create a brand built on friendliness represents a reaction to a unique set of historical issues endemic to new music and classical music in the United States, issues that include both the nature of musical works and the elitist way composers and musicians have historically positioned themselves and their work.

The rise of an austere art music at the beginning of the twentieth century led to certain practical difficulties for composers. Specifically, the reception of new works was inhibited by a belief in the unparalleled value of old music and the audience's familiarity with and expectations for these works. As a canon of works became standardized, many people came to value characteristics of those works implicitly (namely, functional tonality) just as many contemporary composers were searching for alternative techniques. Despite this tension, many vanguard composers and musicians in, for example, 1920s New York City, sought broad acceptance. Musicologist Carol Oja has argued that this city saw a "thriving marketplace for modernism" in which new music figured as part of a vibrant, oft-discussed, and enthusiastically cross-genre

¹⁸ I would argue that such issues have had a direct impact upon the compositional techniques of composers since at least the 1970s. While such a claim is the topic of another dissertation, my impression is that composers now consciously eschew techniques (serialism, true atonality, or Cagian type works) believed to be highly alienating.

musical scene (Oja, 2000, p. 361). However, due in part to the influential critic Paul Rosenfeld and his sway among these composers, modernism became synonymous with high art (Oja, 2000, pp. 362-363), a move that I argue has had lasting and, in the context of postmodernity's ostensibly egalitarian tastes, damaging consequences for the legacy of new music.

Simultaneously, a different group of modernist composers, epitomized by the Second Viennese School, felt that they had to write music for future, rather than contemporary, audiences. To some extent their goals echoed aspects of the political and artistic avant-gardes of the nineteenth century. A great deal of concert music in the nineteenth century followed an aesthetic that valued a search for new musical techniques and forms; thus the mixed early reception of music by any number of nineteenth century composers ranging from Beethoven to Berlioz to Wagner. However, by the twentieth century innovative expression had been taken to the new extremes of serialism and atonality, techniques that sought a complete rejection of a central operational premise of Western music, tonality (Born, 1995). In the shadow of such influential techniques, composers struggled between writing music that pleased concertgoers and music that satisfied the modernist drive for innovation. Though numerous composers wrote relatively accessible music, many wrote music incomprehensible to even seasoned concertgoers. After World War II, high musical modernism emerged as a set of techniques designed to map out a musical future free from tonal constraints and meant for a future canon of musical masterworks in the halls of high culture.

The term "difficult" became a common descriptor of many new pieces. Works that were especially hard to understand, especially atonal or serial works, were often

described using this word. Susan McClary (1989) has traced the use of the term “difficult” by various twentieth-century composers, especially composers whose musical works presented extreme challenges to listener comprehension. She shows how many early and mid twentieth century composers openly acknowledged that their works were alienating—a fact that demonstrates a wilful attempt to create something musically new at any cost. However, unlike their nineteenth century counterparts, most of the twentieth-century listening public never seemed to come around. To this day, the word “difficult” remains part of the cultural lexicon. “Difficult” summarizes a history of musical rejection that has had a profound impact on musicians, audiences, and the concept of musical art. The effects of that rejection are still being felt today, and eighth blackbird's attempts to both appease committed modernists on the one hand and, simultaneously, to assuage fears of classical mainstream audience members on the other, constitute the legacy of difficult music and the legacy of the modernist avant-garde.

In addition to the alienating compositional techniques associated with new musical works, issues arose from the extreme challenges often posed by the performance of such works. So severe were the problems surrounding new music's performance and reception that various organizations emerged dedicated to the performance of new music. Arnold Schoenberg and Henry Cowell each created special societies for the performance and presentation of new music, and from 1935-1940 the New York City Composer's Forum attempted to present lay people with new innovations in American art music (Berg, 1973; de Graaf, 2005; R. H. Mead, 1981). Despite such interventions, many composers felt that professional performers disparaged new music and gave it poor performances. One 1966 article from

Perspectives of New Music titled “Tanglewood, etc: Sightreading as a Way of Life”

described what the author felt to be a typical professional attitude toward new music:

In one of these contemporary pieces, if you play the right notes and wrong notes, right rhythms and wrong rhythms, right entrances and wrong entrances, *with no change of facial expression or tone-quality*, nobody will know the difference; and after you've pulled it off for ten or twenty years, *you won't know the difference yourself* (Emphasis original, Randall, 1966, p. 178).

Such comments suggested that the majority of performers not only cared little for new music, but that poor performances failed to negatively impact the performers' own reputation because the public had such low opinions of new music.¹⁹ In addition to lacklustre performances, few composers achieved the fame of their nineteenth century counterparts even when their works received excellent premiers.

As the twentieth century progressed, many modernist composers sought employment in private institutions or public universities, places that supported them financially as they explored the future of music. Their writings became laden with what McClary (1989) has called a “rhetoric of survival,” a self-conscious acknowledgment that they had become increasingly isolated from the public. Born has extended McClary's idea to postmodern composers as well, arguing that many such composers felt that the “continuity of Western art music was at stake” (Born, 1995, p. 4). In recognition of this state of affairs, many American composers and musicians in the 1970s and 1980s increasingly embraced an ethos and sonic vocabulary that had more in common with various popular music vanguards than with their modernist

¹⁹ I have encountered similar sentiments not only during my fieldwork, but while studying classical performance myself. On one occasion, I was performing some new music in a chamber ensemble and one of the musicians confidently assured me that playing the right notes piece “didn't matter.”

predecessors (Rockwell, 1983). In spite of such trends, the cultural authority once ascribed to the new music vanguard continued to decline.

By the late twentieth century, when eighth blackbird's members had begun their musical training, new music in general was seen as a troubled endeavour.

Echoing the observations of a number of her contemporaries, McClary argued in 1989 that

[i]ronically, the “avant-garde” no longer identifies with the new: institutionalized as it is in the universities, it has become the conservative stronghold of the current music scene, for it holds stringently to difficulty and inaccessibility as the principal signs of its integrity and moral superiority (1989, p. 67, see also Born, 1995).

Writing nine years later, Robert Fink described both classical music and the new music vanguard as having lost both financial and symbolic control over what counted as musical art:

Both these domains are in the final stages of a thirty-year collapse as we speak: ... for the first time since the mid-nineteenth century, neither the performing canon nor the avant-garde canon has any real authority in American culture (Fink, 1998, p. 141).

Plagued by stereotypes that depicted it as overly complex, hard to perform, or even a ruse, new music still struggles to find its place in contemporary society. For many, it operates as a fringe of classical music, and many decades old pieces such as Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), Witold Lutoslawski's *Cello Concerto* (1970), or Steve Reich's tape piece *Come Out* (1966) are viewed as edgy programming for the classical mainstream. This stems in part from an institutional and pedagogical canon of tonal musical masterpieces and the performing institutions where new music figures as a peripheral repertoire (Cottrell, 2007; Nettl, 1995). Indeed, Gerard Phillips (2008) argues that the lack of new music in the standard repertoire of classical music concerts

lies at the heart of classical music's waning popularity. To be sure, certain composers have enjoyed a presence in the standard orchestral repertoire, and vibrant pockets of new music exist in major cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, or wherever local universities have strong programs in composition and performance such as SUNY Stony Brook or Florida State University. However, in the United States the performance of new music in art music venues is the exception rather than the rule, a dramatic reversal from musical life in the first half of the nineteenth century. eighth blackbird's members are deeply aware of the precarious state of new music. I have seen the members of eighth blackbird express such views, for example in a 2011 masterclass at the School of Music at Ithaca College when violinist Yvonne Lam asked the students, "If we don't play this music, who will?"

At the same time, critics, musicians, and some fans have become increasingly concerned about the viability of art music in general. More than a reaction to declining ticket sales, such fears point to a sense of lost prestige and echo the rhetoric of survival. In new music circles and among academics who study new music, this sense of lost prestige has prompted passionate defenses of the modernist tradition and its repertoire. Such views have become considered in some ways a foundational notion for the very study of musical modernism. Thus musicologist Alastair Williams writes for the *Cambridge Guide to Twentieth Century Music*,

[musical] modernism achieved prominence not because it was popular, but because it was considered important. [...] It occupied the institutional space of high art and derived prestige from that position, particularly by retaining the mystique of the individual craftsman in the age of mass production (2004, p. 535).

So powerful is this sense of lost prestige that Williams' own writing becomes, in a final section of this article subtitled "Survival," a defense of modernist music and

autonomous art. Classical and new music blogs reflect this same anxiety about lost prestige. Many people have dedicated their careers to attempting to solve what they perceive to be a major problem. Some such as Greg Sandow seek to analyze the problem in terms of a broader aging of the classical music audience, while others like Alex Ross (2007) and Molly Sheridan have debated the veracity of the idea of an endangered art. Still others propose a proactive solution through the promotion of new music such as that found in the website, newsletter, and magazine *I Care if You Listen*.²⁰ Whatever the cause, the result is that in the United States classical music and the new music vanguard seem to stand on more or less equal footing with the myriad musical genres offered up in the postmodern marketplace (see Introduction).

Many of today's new music ensembles seek to solve a series of problems raised here: poor performances resulting from the difficulty of works, lost prestige, and fears of flagging interest due to audience alienation. eighth blackbird's emphasis on virtuosity addresses, in part, the first two items; friendliness seeks to solve the third problem. Friendliness is a disposition adopted by performers who fear for both new and classical music's survival. No longer towing the modernist party line, these performers care very much "if you listen." Furthermore, they emphasize friendliness in order to ameliorate the "extreme occasion" of twentieth-century classical music performance.

²⁰ The title of this newsletter is a telling reference to Milton Babbitt's (1958) infamous article "Who Cares if You Listen?"

Becoming Friendly and Accessible

Carefully curated program [sic], impeccable performances, friendly tone, refreshing energy, ... the list could be longer and still that is enough to prove that eighth blackbird is one of the more solid assets of the contemporary scene today (Deneuve, 2011).

More than just a stamp of quality, the eighth blackbird brand conveys a series of values and dispositions important to classical music culture and the new music marketplace. The friendliness of eighth blackbird's brand aims to challenge the austerity associated both with classical and new music performance. It is an attempt to rebrand virtuosic artistic practices as inviting and welcoming. In this new presentation, new music becomes an exciting subcultural scene: excellent musicians give daring performances while, at the same time, smiling at the audience and inviting them into the concert hall.

For contemporary critics and fans concerned about the survival of new music, eighth blackbird's brand represents exactly what new music needs. Many have noted and praised the ensemble's efforts. Andrew Sigler, in a concert review, pointed to the group's construction and deployment of friendliness:

The group has always been more *bon vivant* than *enfant terrible*, their collective personality more welcoming than foreboding. I'm pretty sure everybody is smiling in their press photo. Having said that, not all audience members attending these shows know exactly what to expect. "New Music" can still shiver a few timbers among concertgoers, and when they see a program full of unfamiliar composers, some will look for the exit doors. Of course, eighth blackbird put any concerns to rest with their spot-on performances and engaging personalities (Sigler, 2013).

Sigler here evokes the kinds of stereotypical views engendered by new music programs. Many audiences shudder at the sight of new music on a concert program. eighth blackbird eases audience fears, through both their "spot-on performances" (virtuosity) and their "engaging personalities" (friendliness). Sigler's views echo

Sternberg's analysis of post-Fordist identity work: "Performers gain market value by mobilizing demeanor and conduct so they reference a realm of meaning that consumers find evocative" (1998, p. 11). For Sigler, eighth blackbird simultaneously accesses the realms of the virtuoso and the cheerful tour guide, a *bon vivant* who can show you around the strange world of unfamiliar composers. In what follows I explore how the group achieves this seemingly contradictory presentation, while continuing to aspire to a market autonomy that allows for the presentation of difficult music. The group's brand is a reflection of market pressures, a quality that connects them with the type of branding and subject creation found within for-profit sectors. However, musicians continue to promote ideals of artistic market autonomy in part through their persistent support of "difficult" music. As I show, the group cultivates friendliness through a number of carefully considered strategies. Concerts, personal relationships, promotional material, and social media all figure in eighth blackbird's efforts to promote both the musicians and their mission of making new music accessible.

Concerts for Everybody

Repertoire, as one of the most salient components of eighth blackbird's concerts, is an important topic of discussion and negotiation in the construction of the group's brand. When creating a program for a concert, musicians often attempt to choose contrasting musical works. This stylistic breadth in programming is one of many ways in which eighth blackbird appeals both to contemporary concerns about new music's survivability and traditional values found within both the new music and classical music communities. The group makes programs designed to entice the uninitiated, to

build trust, and then expose them to “difficult” music.²¹ At the same time, connoisseurs can rest assured that they will get to hear highly regarded pieces by Pierre Boulez or George Perle, for example, that are rarely heard live. Many concerts thus employ a form of tourism in which audiences may choose from all that new music has to offer. In a way, such touristic strategies bear much in common with various approaches to musical product promotion found in commercial spaces such as Starbucks or Banana Republic (Kassabian, 2004; Meier, 2011). eighth blackbird concerts figure, as flutist Tim Munro often describes it to reporters, as a “wild ride” for audiences members, a move that seeks to counter the perception of new music as boring and overly intellectual. Musical variety is a way to promote both accessible *and* difficult music, and pretences to artistic autonomy remain crucial.

This touristic approach to programming appears in many of the concerts presented by eighth blackbird. One program, created for a 2011 new music festival in New York City, featured music by composers aged forty or younger. The chosen works employed a range of styles, contrasting harmonic and rhythmic profiles, and were of varying length and instrumentation. Some pieces required all six members, and some used only one or two. This strategy provided a variety of timbres and an opportunity to showcase individual members of the group. Stylistic breadth also manifested in the musical characteristics of the pieces themselves. Many of the works had a relatively consonant, even tonal, harmonic profile, though several other works were much more difficult. This particular concert concluded with Mantovani’s

²¹ eighth blackbird’s concept of “difficult” generally includes atonal, serial, or other musical techniques drastically different from those of the classical music canon. The group also believes that no amount of education or explanation will persuade some people to enjoy difficult music. As cellist Nick Photinos told me, “A lot of people just don’t dig Schoenberg” (Personal communication, June 18, 2008).

Chamber Concerto No. 2, a decision I found surprising because it was certainly the least accessible piece. Unlike many of the other pieces on this program, the *Chamber Concerto* employed atonal pitch collections extensively and featured several freely metered solos for the performers. When I asked Tim Munro about this, he replied that he liked ending with Mantovani because, by that point in the program, eighth blackbird had created a sense of trust. Specifically, Munro felt that programming easier, more accessible pieces early in the evening softened the shock value of the difficult pieces that came later. Gaining the audience's trust, for Munro, was extremely important because trust engendered a willingness to listen to a difficult piece like the Mantovani (personal communication, October 21, 2011). Accessible music balanced the program. Engendering trust created an aura of friendliness—a sense that non-specialists could find something to enjoy. At the same time, programming the Mantovani satiated the desire of audience members well acquainted with new music and eager to hear new pieces by composers on the cutting edge. eighth blackbird thus presented a concert that preserved the group's friendly brand while simultaneously positing the group as loyal to the artistic autonomy and drive for newness found within the high modernist tradition.

Cultivating a range of works requires substantial group discussion, and musicians spend large amounts of time debating the characteristics of a particular piece, its place in the concert program, and its reception by the intended audience. Is this piece accessible? Will they like it? Is it a good piece of music, regardless of accessibility? What precedes and follows this particular work? For example, in the same planning meeting cited above from August of 2011, ensemble members discussed various pieces to be paired with a performance of Arnold Schoenberg's (1912) *Pierrot*

Lunaire. Musicians were interested in programming a different kind of piece that, in contrast to Schoenberg's music, did not "scare people away" as Tim Munro put it. They wanted to find a way to present Schoenberg's piece along with music that would be less alienating and more accessible. Defining accessibility is ultimately impossible (and perhaps counterproductive), but in general eighth blackbird's members conceive of accessibility in terms of a piece's musical materials and structural characteristics, especially the degree to which the piece can be said to be tonal. In my experience, musicians use this term relatively loosely; tonality implies more a sense of harmony or consonance than a strict adherence to the established conventions of tonality. Thus minimalist music might be seen as relatively tonal—and thus accessible—compared with an atonal piece. Other musical characteristics come into play as well, and can range from the length of the piece in question to its instrumentation, character, and rhythmic profile. The musicians constantly analyze their repertoire, and use these informal analyses when creating musical programs.

eighth blackbird's efforts to present a range of music to audiences have, by and large, been met with praise, in part because stylistic breadth is often celebrated within new music. While claims of a newfound hybridity of musical styles in the classical music community have been in circulation for the past thirty years or so (Fink, 1998; Sun, 2007), many critics and musicians continue celebrate the concept in press pieces about the new music scene. Writing for the *Washington Post*, Stephen Brooks asserted that an eclectic range of influences has become prevalent among many New York composers, including several composers regularly featured on eighth blackbird

concerts (S. Brooks, 2011).²² Members of the ensemble also emphasize the diversity of influences found in recent compositions—another move that shows their efforts to attract an array of audiences. Tim Munro expressed such an opinion in a press interview prior to a 2013 concert in Austin, Texas:

Young composers today draw from thousands of musical traditions, everything from fourteenth-century Italian music to early rap to the Beach Boys, and new music today reflects that insane patchwork quilt of influences. In contrast, I imagine that western European composers of Schoenberg's generation felt themselves to be part of a single musical tradition: Mozart-Beethoven-Schubert-Wagner-Schoenberg (Zigman, 2013).

Munro's comment, typical of many of his press quotes, describes a stylistic plurality among composers of new music, and echoes many descriptions of postmodern art in general. His choice of words, especially his use of "insane," may seem hyperbolic and potentially negative, but in fact aims to create excitement and promote eighth blackbird as eclectic – and even cool and youthful. In his characterization of "Schoenberg's generation," Munro also distinguishes contemporary composers' influences from that of their older counterparts (though the veracity of his claim remains problematic). For Munro and many people working in the postmodern avant-garde, stylistic breadth figures as a defining characteristic, and the press frequently promote claims to musical diversity exactly like his.

Many critics also view eighth blackbird's stylistic breadth as itself virtuosic. For example, in his review of concerts from the 2009 Ojai New Music Festival, Mark Swed described eighth blackbird thusly: "They are without stylistic allegiances.

²² According to the article, "A largely Brooklyn-based group of composers and performers — people such as William Britelle, Nico Muhly, the NOW Ensemble (which will perform with Victoire on Saturday), Judd Greenstein, Nadia Sirota and many others — are producing music of exceptional complexity and sophistication while remaining, Mazzoli says, "unabashedly committed" to building audiences" (S. Brooks, 2011). Both Muhly and Mazzoli have been regular contributors to eighth blackbird's repertoire in recent seasons.

Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, experimentalism, New Romanticism, old Expressionism, rock, smooth jazz, not-so-smooth jazz—all come easily and naturally” (Swed, 2009). For Swed, the group can and do play anything, any style, any genre “easily and naturally.” An ability to play a wide variety of styles with verve and zest constitutes a type of virtuosity worthy of praise for many working in the new music scene today.

Exploring the Score

In addition to creating musically diverse concert programs, eighth blackbird cultivates friendliness through interactions with audience members and musicians during performances. The group often incorporates a range of activities, including conversations with audience members and spoken program notes, into their concerts. Designed to encourage audience members to listen, as the musicians say, “with an open mind,” such activities seek to ease the conventional formality associated with new music concerts. Group members also work hard to be friendly and supportive whenever they work with composers, a characteristic celebrated by many of their collaborators. Such activities reinforce the friendliness promoted by the eighth blackbird brand.

One of the implicit values of friendly virtuosity is audience education, a goal that points at once toward both a museum culture of art and a culture of promotionalism. As Kyle Vegter said, the eighth blackbird brand consists of members “making new music more approachable—it’s explaining the concepts behind new music” (personal communication, November 18, 2011). Explanations usually take one of two forms, either as program notes or as conversations with the audience.

Immediately prior to or following individual concert pieces, a musician might speak to the audience and direct their attention toward a particular aspect of a work. Such guides also appear regularly in eighth blackbird's printed programs. Common in both classical music and new music concerts, program notes allow the composer and/or the group performing the work to give a rationale for a given piece, to explain its inspiration, the logic of its construction, or to highlight a particular idea, characteristic, or theme important to the work.

Audience conversations outside of the performing event proper play an important role in eighth blackbird's efforts to create a more inviting atmosphere. Before or after a concert, the group sometimes holds "talk backs" in which musicians answer questions from the audience.²⁵ Cellist Nick Photinos explained that his goal in an audience talk back is to change how concert-goers might listen to a piece of new music:

I often talk, either before pieces or after pieces, about art versus music. I mean like if you go to a Jackson Pollock show expecting to see figure painting, you're going to be really disappointed because [you're] trying to find a figure in there and not able to find it. Same thing is true of our concert. Maybe the piece that we're playing isn't about melody, but I think a lot of people are trained to kind of listen for a melody and maybe the piece is not about that. And that's kind of what most people think when they're sitting in an audience, that they're supposed to get it. And I think that's really where, it's a really hard thing to give up that kind of goal-oriented understanding. I mean, like I really encourage people to try to let it wash over them and, you know, pick out just from a very simple standpoint what is happening on stage. Is one person playing? Are a lot of people playing? Is it fast? Is it slow? Is this sad music? Is this dramatic music? Is this schizophrenic music? You know, what kind of mood is trying to be portrayed? (personal communication, June 18, 2008).

²⁵ In her dissertation on the American Composer's Forum during the Great Depression, Melissa de Graaf describes similar audience conversations between composers and audience members after new music concerts (de Graaf, 2005). Both pre- and post-concert talks have also become common for many professional symphony orchestras, especially when new music appears on the program.

This explanation constitutes a clear recognition of the group's status as avant-garde, as demonstrated in Photinos' acknowledgement that any given piece in the eighth blackbird repertoire may lack any of the typical characteristics of Western music (whether artistic or commercial). His description of a common listening experience signals his understanding that many, perhaps even most, of eighth blackbird's audience members approach new music with reference to the classical music canon. His use of the phrase "goal oriented" points to the teleological nature of the most celebrated works of the canon, a feature absent from much of eighth blackbird's repertoire.

Musicologist Robert Fink has written about teleology extensively, arguing that

This feeling that the work as a whole is "going somewhere" (and that it makes you, the listener, want to go there, too) has long been considered *the* virtue of Western music. ... Coherent, perceptible teleology has been seen as an essential feature of art music since the early nineteenth century (Fink, 2005, pp. 31-32).

Fink's description of teleology echoes that of authors including L. Kramer (1995), McClary (2000), and even Adorno, in "On Popular Music." For Photinos, however, teleology and other standardized aspects of musical forms are limiting, predetermining audience expectations so that they cannot begin to understand the musical works offered by eighth blackbird that fail to conform to such expectations. In a way, Photinos subtly echoes Adorno's critiques of audiences, as articulated in *Philosophy of New Music*:

Ever since the compositional process has come to be measured uniquely on the structure proper to each work and not on generally and tacitly accepted exigencies, it has no longer been possible to "learn" once and for all what is good music and what is bad. Whoever wants to judge must look the unique questions and antagonisms of the individual work in the eye without having any general theory of music or any music history to instruct him (Adorno, 2006, p. 11).

Both Adorno and Photinos call for a consideration of musical works “on their own terms,” whatever those may be. However, while Adorno claims that “[s]carcely anyone is capable of doing this,”²⁴ Photinos and the other members of eighth blackbird have positioned themselves as mediators willing to explain music, a move that puts them at odds with Adorno’s philosophy of new music. Attempting to get audiences to think of music differently takes considerable work, in Photinos’ experience. His questions sound like instructions for how to listen to new music: count the performers, gauge the tempo, and characterize the mood. Photinos wants to encourage his audience to think of the music differently, without relying on their expectations.

Nick’s explanation of the talk-back, and the fact that eighth blackbird’s members have these conversations, shows the group offering audiences a way to assess the new music repertoire. They take on the role of teachers or tour guides moving listeners through a potentially bizarre gallery of musical works. Such tactics contrast dramatically with high modernist new music concerts like those organized by the Second Viennese School’s Society for Private Music Performance, which the public and press were forbidden to attend. Here we see an avant-garde attempting to explain themselves to their contemporaries, and building contemporary audiences rather than crafting music for the future.

A crucial part of eighth blackbird’s friendly and accessible brand comes from their interactions with composers. The group always attempts to perform a given work as accurately as possible, often paying attention to details overlooked or glossed over by other performers. In my interviews and conversations with composers, the theme of

²⁴ On which see Adorno (2002b).

poor performances emerged consistently: they believed that many performers spend inadequate time preparing new musical works, thus echoing the types of remarks found in the above cited article, “Tanglewood, etc.: Sightreading as a Way of Life.” A good example of eighth blackbird’s dedication to composers and their use of friendliness comes from an interview with composer Jeremy Sment. One of the winners of a 2007 student composition competition judged by eighth blackbird, Sment’s piece had been selected by the ensemble for rehearsal and performance. He spoke very highly of the ensemble:

They were really cool, really nice. They really made me feel like an equal, even though it’s pretty clear that I’m not an equal. For example there was a passage [in my piece] for one-shot shakers and they actually went out and got caxixi shakers. They actually got a lot of the ethnic percussion [I wrote for] (J. Sment, personal communication, July 18, 2008).

Furthermore, Sment cited a genuine fondness for the musicians:

JS: I just *like* eighth blackbird. I think they’re really good at staying true to, like, working musicians, like anybody else.

JP: You mean as far as like being nice?

JS: Being nice, going out for a beer afterwards. Like you wouldn’t be able to tell that you were with one of the most prominent and prestigious ensembles in the country.

Where many performers and audience members see eighth blackbird as virtuosic, many composers see the group as willing to actually play what they wrote. For composers like Sment, eighth blackbird’s dedication signals a disposition of sincerity and authenticity.

Image and Style

The final aspects of the eighth blackbird brand I consider here are its most ephemeral: the style and sensibility of the brand. Like other brands, the friendly virtuoso generates sensibility in part through image, drawing on look and attitude to convey meaning. This type of image work is increasingly common in post-Fordism, as argued by Lazzarato (1996), and is a major component of contemporary branding, as noted by Hearn. She writes that a brand “must generate its own rhetorically persuasive packaging, its own promotional skin” using techniques which involve a “process of highly stylized self-construction” (2008, p. 201). Ephemeral labour and the “products” of such labour (e.g. publicity photos, press packages, social media posts, press interviews) all signal the group’s tacit recognition of the need to secure market position. Friendliness is, in this way, marketability. Stylized constructions take form in their clothing and demeanour for publicity photos, images that imply an attitude of friendliness intended to help address concerns about new music’s historic aloofness. Publicity photos, interviews with the press, social media, and music videos all help keep eighth blackbird and its brand in constant circulation. More than simple advertisements for the group, promotional materials help define the eighth blackbird brand by suggesting various values and dispositions of its members. Promotional labour also signals eighth blackbird’s commodity status by necessarily guiding attention toward commercially viable brand values (virtuosity and accessibility). This domain of labour takes a large amount of time and effort, a fact reflected in eighth blackbird’s hiring of staff members who help create and circulate promotional materials. In analyzing these materials, I treat them as physical and visual expressions of friendliness, virtuosity, and other values important to the postmodern avant-garde.

Publicity Photos

eight blackbird's publicity photos represent an important expression of their brand. The group spends large amounts of time and money creating the photos, and hires professional photographers and wardrobe personnel to help craft a message based on accessibility and musical professionalism. Two photos (Figures 1.1 and 1.2) serve to demonstrate this point, one from 2007 with the group's original violinist, Matt Albert, and the other from 2011 when Yvonne Lam replaced Albert. Though the first photograph is older, it remains in circulation and appears regularly in newspaper articles and online media about the ensemble.



Figure 1.1: An eighth blackbird publicity photo from 2007. © Luke Ratray. Used with permission.



**Figure 1.2: An eighth blackbird publicity photo from 2011, currently in circulation.
© Luke Ratray. Used with permission**

Three aspects of each photo convey eighth blackbird's brand values: physical position, clothing, and the location of the shot. In Figure 1.1 we see the group outside on a rusty staircase, with Matthew Duval frozen midair, apparently having jumped off the stairs. Matthew's jump conveys both literal and allegorical meaning. The group incorporates movement and staging into their concerts to a greater extent than normally found within classical music (see Chapters 2 and 3). Though many groups such as the Canadian Brass have used choreography in their concerts, new music performers have historically remained still in performance in their efforts to place priority on musical sound. Matt's jump conveys the idea of unexpected movement, a real feature of eighth blackbird concerts. His jump is also exciting and potentially dangerous, both concepts long associated with virtuosi's the avant-garde's desire to cross established boundaries. Several of the members slouch against the wall or stair railings, and they seem unsurprised by Matthew's jump, suggesting that such physical activity occurs frequently. Musicians appear dressed in a sort of business casual, a style that implies seriousness but also hipness. Matt Albert wears an undone bow tie, and Matthew Duvall pairs a dark suit with red Converse sneakers. The location of the photograph also conveys ideas of urban *chic*. Perhaps outside the backstage entrance to a concert hall, the location evokes Kyle's comment about the eighth blackbird brand "breaking down the wall of classical music." Musicians seem to have literally left the institution and embraced a gritty urban locale as their ideal performance spot. "You can't contain this group within conventional concert spaces," the picture seems to say. They need more room to jump and play, to be virtuosic and cool.

Figure 1.2 also uses physical position, clothing, and location to convey the eighth blackbird brand. Like Figure 1.1, the newer photograph suggests anti-

institutionalism and daring. In this photo, we again find the group in an urban space outside of classical music's concert halls. Some members perch somewhat precariously on pipes and latticework. Lisa Kaplan stands in heels atop a small ledge, her hand on her hip as if ready to explore this new environment. Seemingly comfortable in this strange setting, the group conveys an air of confidence, even bravado, and the players seem to be inviting you to join them in their urban playground. Members' clothing mixes casual and formal, with the men in unbuttoned collars and the women in sexy party dresses. Though we know they are new music virtuosi, they seem dressed for a cocktail party. The blackbirds can play anywhere, always with a casual coolness and a welcoming disposition.

Concert Clothing

Concert clothing conveys in person the same casual hipness conveyed in publicity photos. The musicians actually perform dressed much as they appear in the photographs, often wearing a mixture of formal fashion such as suits and more casual clothing such as t-shirts. The use of colourful and relatively casual clothing represents a critique of two sartorial stereotypes of art music. First, this clothing is consciously different from the tuxedos and formal gowns typically associated with classical music performance. Second, eighth blackbird concert clothing stands out within new music circles, where performers often wear either dark pants and matching coloured tops or just all black. Concert dress is a statement about the performer, and the relative uniformity seen in concerts has traditionally served to avoid distracting from the masterpiece being performed. In a manner in keeping with postmodernism's general compatibility with neo-liberal political philosophy, eighth blackbird's clothing

emphasizes the singular identities of individuals more than the relatively anonymous clothing often worn in group performances of Western art music.

Like other aspects of eighth blackbird's brand and performances, the group's concert attire has drawn a certain amount of criticism. For some, this clothing appears distracting, placing improper attention on the performers and their look instead of the musical works they perform. I spoke with one young composer who described the group's concert clothing as unprofessional and frivolous. Though a fan of the group, he felt that eighth blackbird's sartorial wardrobe choices made the musicians seem careless. Along similar lines, critic Andrew Druckenbrod criticized eighth blackbird's concert clothing as part of a disappointing shift within new music toward "that seam between rock and classical," a move that "lacked substance" (Druckenbrod, 2012). Hardly uncommon, such views point to the importance of concert clothing in the performance of new music. By expressing a casual attitude, the group risks seeming unserious in their presentation of serious music. The sartorial emphasis on individual personalities of the performers necessarily comes into conflict with modernist views of the proper role of the performer, who should always defer his or her personality in service of "the music." For eighth blackbird, postmodern virtuosity calls for a certain panache that sits uneasily in the sound-focused concert halls.

Social Media

Social media represents a final domain of ephemeral labour in the construction of eighth blackbird's brand and highlights one of the contradictions of ephemeral labour in general. While social media seems to provide a behind the scenes view of the ensemble, the musicians in fact employ social media toward specific ends that

inevitably show the musicians in a partial and invariably positive light. For example, during my fieldwork with the group, members regularly tweeted photos and Facebook updates about their rehearsals. One day in 2011 Tim Munro, the member generally in charge of the group's publicity, shot video of Yvonne Lam and Nick Photinos as they worked out the bowing for a particular phrase, and posted the video on Twitter with the caption, "First bowing conversation of the season!" Tim and other members post such video and photos regularly on Twitter and Facebook, and their YouTube channel has several videos of the group in rehearsals. This public online presence promotes the group constantly and shows followers that the group is continually working on exciting new projects and concerts. "eighth blackbird" becomes one more post on our social media feeds, reminding us to get tickets for the next show, and the ensemble enters into post-Fordism's ubiquitous promotionalism. We do not, however, see the group disagreeing about programming or arguing about the problems of a particular gig. Such carefully edited constructions are common components of post-Fordist branding as argued by Hearn (2006, 2008, 2010). Hearn states that the branded self "points to itself working" in ways that promote both the individual and her workplace in general (2008, p. 201). Videos of bowing conversations, while unusual, do not pose any controversy, and portray the musicians as diligently learning their repertoire. The "eighth blackbird" seen on Facebook must be understood as a construction of the musicians and employees, not an unmediated view of musicians at work. The ensemble is reified as your friendly neighbourhood sextet working hard — but always happily — as they get ready for their next sensational show.

These posts also stand out in the classical music world because, within classical music, the broadcasting of behind the scenes work is exceptionally rare (a fact pointing

to the commodity status of many classical music performances). Though ensembles may hold open rehearsals, copyright considerations and union regulations often mean that taping and posting videos of them online is generally prohibited.²⁵ Rehearsals are private spaces, and the work occurring therein usually remains out of sight. eighth blackbird, in contrast, regularly draws attention to rehearsal work. By publicizing their rehearsals, eighth blackbird accomplishes two important goals. First, members show themselves working hard, as all good classical musicians must. In a way, displays of such labour seem to undermine the ensemble's virtuosic status and even contradict the brand's values. However, such videos never show the musicians truly struggling as they did when learning the Mantovani *Chamber Concerto No. 2*. Second, they keep themselves in the public eye, in the news feeds and Twitter accounts of their fans and contacts. They promote the idea that the group is friendly and accessible—only a Facebook comment or Twitter post away. Social media also allows eighth blackbird to show themselves having fun after concerts, and members often post about particular brew pubs or after-parties they have attended.

Friendliness has become part and parcel of eighth blackbird's public identity or "brand." This friendliness is designed to attract new audiences and create excitement about new music. More than a sign of craftsmanship, the friendly virtuoso promotes a series of values important to the postmodern avant-garde, particularly accessibility,

²⁵ An exception to this appears in the form of commercially produced videos of major orchestras in rehearsal. Usually centered on a famous conductor, such videos are, I would argue, the exception that proves the rule. The videos often serve to provide evidence of a given conductor's or orchestra's virtuosity, demonstrating how hard they work or how they create such amazing performances. Unlike Facebook or Twitter posts, they are professionally produced and take large amounts of money and time. Ultimately they serve a very different purpose than the types of social media presence maintained by eighth blackbird. Where the videos promote virtuosity and are infrequently released, social media posts happen all the time and promote accessibility and a certain down to earth attitude.

musical skill, daring, friendliness, sincerity, and fidelity to the composer's work. These values address widespread concerns about new music's survivability, and serve as an attempt to offer solutions to new music's problems. Affect-laden branding, as a major strategy to market and define the group, has become a part of labour in the American avant-garde.

Branding, Post-Fordist Art Music, and Postmodern Virtuosity

eight blackbird's brand values (virtuosity, faithful interpreters, friendly workers, accessible artists) all illustrate how artists negotiate aesthetic and financial concerns in the twenty-first century. Their friendly virtuosity is a type of postmodern virtuosity, based on a particular mixture of modernist aesthetic goals, postmodern desires for accessibility, and fundamental concerns about the financial realities of the new music field. The musicians of eight blackbird genuinely want more people to enjoy new music and they thus adopt inviting dispositions. But they also feel that the type of snobbery stereotypically associated with high musical modernism is no longer affordable. In the current climate of orchestra closings and waning status, marketing and branding techniques offer a way to promote new music, pumping much needed vigour into a practice feared obsolete. At the same time, it suggests a cultural landscape in which musical art, whatever its intrinsic properties or artistic message, must compete on the same playing field as any other form of entertainment.

Hardly alone in its embrace of post-Fordist labour practices, eight blackbird's branding constitutes an emerging trend within the broader realm of classical music. An emphasis on branding is especially noticeable among the institutions that hire eight blackbird to perform and teach. The group maintains strong relationships with several

prestigious music schools, including the University of Richmond, the University of Chicago, and, most recently, the Curtis Institute of Music. A part of eighth blackbird's work at these institutions involves teaching young performers and composers the techniques of branding and marketing. Branding has come to be viewed by many institutions as critical to the success of the young classical musician.

The residency at the Curtis Institute of Music warrants particular attention here. One of the top music schools in the world, the Curtis Institute worked with eighth blackbird to secure a \$450,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation. The grant application stated that the ensemble would teach students to perform difficult contemporary music, but also would “encourage Curtis students to be inventive and entrepreneurial about their own careers and to connect more deeply with audiences and their community” (Curtis Institute of Music, 2011). Speaking of this desired combination of musical prowess and entrepreneurial spirit, Curtis President Roberto Diaz said in a press release,

These are essential skills for every musician — not just those who will forge their own path as solo artists or chamber musicians. Our students must become advocates for classical music, people who explore new performance and community engagement models and help classical music thrive (Curtis Institute of Music, 2011).

The grant itself explains that the ensemble will teach masterclasses on performance and coach a select group of students who participate in the conservatory's Leadership Workshop, a program in which “students design and implement a performance project that combines artistry with invention, leadership with advocacy, and citizenship with community” (Curtis Institute of Music, 2011). From this example we can see how the *type* of work seen in eighth blackbird has been recognized by prestigious institutions to

be crucial to students' success in the changing landscape of musical labour in the twenty-first century.

The grant points to a new type of musical subject or identity, a branded classical musician. As Diaz's comments illustrate, performers are now required to construct "highly stylized" versions of themselves as innovators and must go to great lengths to promote themselves and their music. They must be musicians, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and grant writers. Furthermore, the entire existence of classical music seems to rest on their young shoulders. They must constantly promote this new attitude and circulate their individual brands so as to "help classical music thrive." Thus, the branding that eighth blackbird recognizes to be crucial to its success is becoming increasingly attractive and important to classical musicians more generally.

It is here that we can see the most significant difference between previous modes of musical labour and the new post-Fordist musical workplace. Virtuosity, long established in Western art music and in some ways standardized through the intense conservatory education of places like Curtis or The Juilliard School, is no longer enough. In the current climate, music students are taught how to *be*—how to promote themselves using the techniques and values of the post-Fordist workplace. Sternberg writes, "[I]n every industry and line of business, each of us must learn from celebrities, those human icons whose successes in presenting the persona are verified through their renown" (1998, p. 11). The members of eighth blackbird certainly qualify as celebrities, both within new music and to some extent within classical music in general. They make a living from what purports to be an economically disinterested practice—the performance of avant-garde art music. Not only that: by focussing on appearing

friendly, and on other affective signifiers in their promotional efforts, they get people *excited* about avant-garde music. The students at Curtis are told that they must learn from these celebrities. Students, according to the President's remarks and the grant proposal, will now learn the skills of branding, presentation, and image cultivation, and they will learn how to mobilize those skills in their professional lives. Curtis students aren't the only ones being offered such opportunities. eighth blackbird regularly gives masterclasses and lectures to music students on the challenges of working in classical music. Indeed, most of the group's income actually comes from their institutional residencies at the University of Richmond and the University of Chicago that require the group to show students the skills of new music performance and marketing.

The Curtis residency and eighth blackbird's branding in general also signal increasing similarities between non-profit and commercial entities, whether individual or corporate. We find in this residency the language and practices of "entrepreneurialism," a postmodern buzzword that in recent years has legitimized neoliberal business efforts to decrease overall levels of waged employment, slash employee benefits, diminish union power and press for financial and industrial deregulation (Harvey, 1990, 2005). For a musical culture where status is waning and funds are evermore scarce, learning how to be a go-getter, make a website, and network aggressively seems truly appealing, and entrepreneurialism has become endemic to the new music scenes of the United States. In this context, "eighth blackbird" is not just a brand circulated to exchange symbolic and cultural capital for economic capital. Rightly or wrongly, it appears as beacon of hope for all those attempting to make a living in art music. "eighth blackbird" is a model that demonstrates the potential for a lifetime of music making. It suggests that young

musicians are, perhaps, not so crazy for wanting to work in the precarious world of classical music performance. Classical music and its avant-garde subculture have come to embrace the (sometimes dubious) “entrepreneurial” values of post-Fordism. At the same time, post-Fordist businesses now actively pursue social and cultural capital, as evidenced in the work of Lazzarato (1996), Moor (2003), Meier (2011), and Hearn (2008). Drawing clear lines between these two sectors, while never easy, has become increasingly difficult because commerce has taken on many of the strategies historically associated with art worlds. In postmodernity, art and commerce have become increasingly similar.

Given the instability of musical employment as well as economic instability in the United States in general, “entrepreneurship” reflects a tacit recognition on the part of conservatories and professionals that musical work consists largely of part-time precarious employment with no benefits. Institutions have come to celebrate neoliberal work strategies as a way to rationalize and legitimize what are, for musicians, the age-old practices of cobbling together work, collaborating with others, and cultivating the professional flexibility required to earn enough income to live.²⁶ Where in the eighties, musical conservatories implicitly understood that securing long-term stable employment was difficult (Kingsbury, 1988), contemporary schools now view financial success as the marker of overall achievement. This is a dangerous move for a culture where long-term stable employment has always been elusive (Weber, 2004). Even previously stable employment such as that found in major symphony orchestras has

²⁶ Over a series of essays, several authors examine the professional lives and practices of musicians throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in a book edited by William Weber (2004) called *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists*. I am not opposed to providing young musicians with business and marketing skills. But, I do believe that we ought to interrogate the efficacy of such practices, and, furthermore, that there are other indexes of success.

become increasingly scarce and less lucrative. Citing shrinking endowments and smaller audiences, major orchestras in St. Paul, Detroit, San Francisco, Chicago, and Nashville have all had major labour disputes, many of which lead to wage and benefit cuts for musicians with a simultaneous increase in temporary per-concert sessional employment (K. Brooks, 2012; Caro, 2012; Kerr, 2012, September 15; Schweitzer, 2011). While some orchestras have continued to thrive in this era of cultural egalitarianism and increased economic instability, a broader problem emerges from such trends: in a time when all musical practices are deemed more or less equal (or when it is rude to imply otherwise), when belief in the intrinsic value of anything might point to an unfashionable snobbery, the unregulated market has become the index of value. In an article for the *New Yorker*, Alex Ross made a similar point that, while critical of hyperbolic reactions asserting the death of classical music, nevertheless begged the question of how musical organizations are supposed to survive:

If there is a crisis, it stems from the culture at large. The extant network of orchestras and opera houses is an artefact of a very different America. City Opera, a pet project of Fiorello LaGuardia, emerged from the ethos of the New Deal, when government funds were allotted to the propagation of the arts for the masses. *These days, political leaders are largely absent from the discussion, and the winner-take-all economy is as prevalent in the arts as everywhere else.* While smaller groups struggle, donors flock to the Met and other deluxe institutions. A week after City Opera's demise, Juilliard announced a sixty-million-dollar gift from Bruce Kovner, a hedge-fund billionaire. Mayor Bloomberg, when asked about the fate of City Opera, feebly commented that "the business model doesn't seem to be working." In the face of this mentality, it's remarkable that "the People's Opera," as LaGuardia called it, lasted as long as it did (Emphasis mine, Ross, 2013).

Ross' assessment of the financial state of affairs in classical music in fact maps onto broader trends of increased economic instability and income inequality across economic sectors (Piketty, 2014). In a "winner-take-all economy," what remains for

non-celebrity musicians is a permanent state of employment insecurity. This economy favours small, flexible, and elite organizations such as eighth blackbird. The ensemble's success is not simply the result of their savvy use of social media or marketing materials; rather, the ensemble's status is the outcome of a particular set of economic and cultural stressors found within postmodernity more generally. eighth blackbird itself is thus reflective of an increasingly ubiquitous promotionalism endemic to classical music culture and postmodern capitalism in the United States.

Chapter 2

Cartesian Dualism, Modernist Musical Experience, and Making New Music Postmodern

In Chapter 1 I explained how eighth blackbird attempts to market new music through post-Fordist branding. The sextet's "friendly virtuosity" brand requires a greater emphasis on performer personality than historically tolerated in art music circles. In Chapter 2, I examine the controversy surrounding performer personality in detail. Specifically, I argue that eighth blackbird's use of choreography constitutes a move away from the modernist minimization of the performer in service of the autonomous work. Choreography, instead, invokes the emphasis on visual spectacle found with postmodern media. At the same time, ensemble members defend their use of choreography in modernist terms. Choreography thus reveals foundational tensions endemic to the eighth blackbird and to the broader postmodern avant-garde.

Choreography is a major part of eighth blackbird's friendly virtuoso brand and is employed as a strategy to make avant-garde music more accessible. The new music ensemble regularly incorporates staging, costuming, and other theatrical devices that they believe will illustrate the music they perform. Typically, musicians' use of choreography incorporates large physical gestures (e.g. walking around the stage, bending over, or swaying) that synchronize with the music. For example, in *Tied Shifts* (2004) composer Derek Bermel explores various combinations of instruments as he moves from theme to theme. In performances, members of eighth blackbird choreograph their movements in accordance with the relationships between individual parts found within the score for the piece. The flutist and violinist cluster around the

percussionist during a short shared section, but move apart as a new theme enters in the piano, cello, and clarinet. In this way, performances of *Tied Shifts* become visual illustrations of musical gestures. Sonic gestures thus become physical gestures, and the group's sounding and moving bodies figure as a locus for sociomusical meaning.

The group's members often celebrate their use of visual elements in their promotional material and in conversations with the press, and writers regularly cite choreography as part of eighth blackbird's virtuosity. Critic Richard Scheinin, for example, wrote:

[W]hat's unique to eighth blackbird is its fluid and playful choreography, the way the musicians move about the stage as they perform. It's not quite ballet, but that's the idea: to bring out a physical/visual representation of the music (Scheinin, 2010).

However, while many critics and fans enjoy the ensemble's emphasis of the body, others, including the group's own members, find choreography artistically dangerous. Choreographed performances poses a threat because the performers' bodies are deemed too prominent, suggesting to some that the performers consider themselves more important than the music presented in concert. According to this view, and as one member of the ensemble told me, the musicians risk "getting in the way of the music." The musicians of eighth blackbird thus perceive a hazard in excessive movement when they undertake choreographed performances. Along similar lines Richard Deyer, critic for the Boston Globe, asserted, "The players are so good they can overshadow the music, and they run the danger of going the Kronos Quartet route—re-creating music in their own image" (Dyer, 2006). Dyer's words imply that while choreography creates an impressive display of performative skill, it has the potential to undermine the concert experience by placing too much emphasis on the

performer, thereby detracting attention from the musical work itself. Rather, the musical work should maintain a certain independence from performer interpretation. Choreography, because it focuses attention on performers to a seeming extreme, inhibits the autonomy of the musical work and disrupts the accepted hierarchy in which the work is deemed more important than the performer.

In fact, the performing body and its relationship with the musical work has been a source of trouble for centuries within European and American art music. Composers, critics and aestheticians have historically positioned various aspects of the performing body and performer personality in opposition to the abstract musical work.²⁷ Reflecting ideological changes dating from the early 1800s, many writers of the period distinguished between performer and work and thus expressed an epistemological view of the world that echoed René Descartes' separation of the thinking mind from the moving body.²⁸ Nineteenth-century critic Eduard Hanslick, for example, privileged an emotionally and physically restrained engagement with musical works, and described proper listening as a "pure act of contemplation which alone is the true and artistic method of listening" (Hanslick, 1957, p. 157).²⁹ As a result of the proliferation of views such as Hanslick's, musical experience was increasingly

²⁷ There is no detailed history of the mind/body divide in Western art music. Generally, the subject appears from time to time in the work of various scholars such as Richard Leppert (1993), Susan McClary (2002), and Elisabeth Le Guin (2006).

²⁸ The history of dualist thinking extends farther back in time than Descartes, but it was with Descartes that the notion of an independent mind was crystallized. Literature on and arguments against this idea are numerous. Major texts that summarize Descartes' views and their legacy include Steve Nadler's (2011) *Occasionalism: Causation Among the Cartesians*, James Hill's (2011) *Descartes and the Doubting Mind*, and Nick Crossley's (2006) *The Social Body*, a work that builds on extant scholarship in sociology. N. Katherine Hayles' (1999), working from the perspective of literary criticism, summarizes important aspects of dualist thought, especially the mind/body split.

²⁹ For a detailed examination of Hanslick's views on music and how they changed over the course of his life, see Frankenbach (2012).

associated with a model in which the composer wrote the abstract work (a product of the mind) and transmitted it through the body of the performers and into the minds of the listeners. Typically described in scholarship as the mind/body split, the opposition between work/mind and performer/body appeared frequently in writings about virtuoso performers, musicians whose presence came to be seen as capable of eclipsing that of the work presented.

Paradoxically, choreography directly confronts the mind/body split while being positioned by members of eighth blackbird as a way to make new music accessible. For the musicians, choreography provides a way to illustrate abstract musical works and provide audiences with a visible illustration of musical phenomena. This, despite their occasional wariness occasionally expressed about the use of choreography. However, the controversy surrounding choreography demonstrates the continued and relatively unquestioned reliance on Cartesian epistemology.

Choreography and the reception of choreographed performances reveal a foundational tension within the postmodern avant-garde. Within the schema I am about to describe, choreography figures as postmodern because, for the musicians, it figures as part of the “friendly” access that choreography’s visuality will provide its audiences in the performance of inaccessible works. Because it aspires to accessibility through the visual and through an explicit celebration of the moving body, choreography figures as postmodern (Jameson, 1991). This stands in stark contrast to, for example, the persistent disdain for popular music and celebration of the intellectual aspects of music endemic to musical modernism (Born, 1995). At the same time, however, eighth blackbird’s choreography requires a reconfiguration of the concert experience and thus achieves avant-garde status for many concert-goers. Furthermore,

choreography, as explained by members of eighth blackbird, actually preserves the mind/body split because members view performance as separate from the “music itself.” eighth blackbird’s use of choreography is an attempt to remove the barriers separating classical music from the broader culture and to make it more accessible to society in general. Ultimately, however, the physical barriers of the concert space itself work against the musicians as they struggle to create a postmodern new music. Finally, I argue that eighth blackbird’s engagement with the postmodern includes an attempt to preserve the modernist values found within art music circles.

Cartesian Dualism, Virtuosity, and Musical Experience

As many scholars have shown, the experience of a Western art music concert and the very notion of music in this culture have been mediated by an epistemological split between thinking mind and moving body.³⁰ In this model, the work represents disembodied thought and performance represents the body. A successful performance is one in which the personality of the performer gently mediates musical works while preserving much of the imagined intent of the composer.³¹ “Music” as an operative concept remains located primarily and most importantly with the work (thus, for

³⁰ For critiques of Cartesian dualism in scholarship on music see Frankenbach (2012), McClary (2002) and Cusick (1994); Leppert (1993). For sources that theorize classical musical experience in non-Cartesian terms see Walker (2000), Le Guin (2006); A. Mead (1999), Sanden (2009), and Stubbley (1998). As a field, ethnomusicology has frequently considered interactions between body, sound, and meaning, often arguing that no clear separation manifests (c.f. Feld, 1982; Hahn, 2007; Plourde, 2008). Scholars examining musical practices all over the world have blended visual with sonic domains in their considerations of sociomusical meanings.

³¹ As Naomi Cumming (2000) has argued, performers must negotiate between the dictums of a particular style, for example that associated with Brahms’ violin concerti, and their need to present an interesting interpretation of the musical work. However, though Cumming has presented a theorization of the performance experience specifically designed to argue against Cartesian dualism, many, if not most critics and performers continue to make such a distinction when explaining the relationship between performer and work.

example, the critical injunction offered by Christopher Small's (1998) notion of "musicking"). If the performer embellishes the music too much, or takes liberties somehow viewed as excessive, he or she risks disrupting the listener's sense of contact with the text of the composer. Essentially, "too much body" prevents the successful delivery and creation of music. Furthermore, this binary opposition maps on to other binaries found in Western thought from around the nineteenth century on: mind vs. body, male vs. female, and art vs. commodity (McClary, 2000, 2002). To better understand Cartesian dualism in music, its relationship with modernism, and its role in mediating the reception of eighteenth-century concert music, I want to examine the history of its role in shaping the concert music experience.

The bodies of performers have posed something of a problem throughout the history of Western art music. Performers have always had the power to scandalize and, since at least the eighteenth century's proliferation of *opera seria*, have been criticized for stealing focus from "the music itself" and/or the work's narrative. Drawing attention to the body has been seen to risk overemphasizing the visible, sensual, and public aspects of musical performance. In the nineteenth century these characteristics, though meaningful and oft-celebrated, came to be viewed as disruptive of the true purpose of musical performance: the presentation of disembodied abstract musical texts.³² Lydia Goehr has theorized this notion of disembodied texts with the term "work-concept," arguing that, over the course of the nineteenth century, it

³² The history of this endeavour is too long and complicated to retell here, but several scholars have retraced the project undertaken by various nineteenth-century critics to promulgate the notion of art as autonomous from society (Elias, 1982; Hoffmann & Charlton, 1989; Kittler, 1990). For a useful summary of these sources, see Chapter 4 of Susan McClary's (2000) *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form*. The best summary of this practice with regards to music is Lydia Goehr's (2007) book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*.

emerged as the dominant concept by which all [musical] activities would be arranged. Henceforth, there would be composers of works, commissions of works, reviews of works, copyright laws introduced to protect the works and halls built to house the concerts of works (Goehr, 2007, p. xviii).

The needs of “works” governed the discursive strategies and labour strategies of the musical world. “Music” became increasingly understood as an object to be appreciated.

Virtuosity, that type of performance in which the body is undeniably present and powerful, came to be viewed as antithetical to the goals of the musical culture of late nineteenth-century Europe. Goehr has argued that the practice of improvisation associated with virtuoso performances came into conflict with the work-concept:

Extemporization was not now [in the early nineteenth century] generally thought to approximate to the condition of composition “proper” and less respect was gradually given to the virtuoso performer.... [V]irtuoso performance had fast become regarded as popular spectacle comparable to a circus act (Goehr, 2007, p. 233).

The idea of flashy performances inhibiting the expression of deeper musical meaning appears frequently in the writings of nineteenth-century composers and aestheticians.

Richard Wagner, for example, wrote in 1840:

The highest merit of the executant artist, the virtuoso, would accordingly consist in a pure and perfect reproduction of the composer’s thought.... For it is the work of art, purely reproduced, that should step before us, and never the distracting individuality of the performer (Wagner, 1973, p. 139).

Here, Wagner emphasizes the performer’s role as a communicator of “the composer’s thought,” and “the work of art” figures as a mental abstraction. The musical work must be “purely reproduced” when presented in performance. To be sure, Wagner writes much about the importance of excellent performance, thus emphasizing the performing body, but the ultimate goal is to ensure successful communication between the minds of the composer and his audience. For Wagner, the ability of the performer to render

the piece must never deviate too much from the intentions inherent in the musical score. Such deviations are “distracting” and inhibit musical experience.

Fuelled in part by the mind/body split, the alleged autonomy of the musical text metaphorically reinforced the autonomy of the individual from society and the artist from the market. Audience silence served to reinforce notions of interiority, of a self removed from the public sphere. In this configuration, musical sound served as an exercise in intellectual disembodied self-making. As Chantal Frankenbach has argued, “the stillness encouraged by German critics established one’s social status as an inwardly ‘active’ individual” (Frankenbach, 2012, p. 32). Summarizing this historical practice, Susan McClary has argued that

one of the tasks critics such as E. T. A. Hoffmann, [Robert] Schumann, and [Eduard] Hanslick took upon themselves was the production of a new kind of consumer: one who would renounce the easy pleasures of sentimentality or virtuosity and gravitate toward music that rewarded...structural listening (McClary, 2000, p. 114).³³

This new mode of listening increasingly became the norm in concert halls across much of the Western world. A musical work somehow separated from the society that created it was considered better able to comment upon the world, critiquing its failings or celebrating its accomplishments. This separation found experiential expression in the mind/body epistemology employed within the concert ritual, and reinforced beliefs in art’s status as rational, masculine, and anti-commodity. It was this practice that enabled the experience of art.³⁴

³³ McClary (2000) goes on to situate structural listening as foundational in the philosophy of Theodor Adorno, a point made elsewhere by Rose Subotnik (1988, 1991) and Lydia Goehr (2004), respectively.

³⁴ McClary (2002) has connected the divisions between mind and body to a parallel division between male and female, arguing that such divisions inevitably place the feminine and bodily concerns as weaker than or subservient to the masculine mind.

By the twentieth century, such views had become widely accepted. The conception of virtuosity and reactions to virtuosi who embellished their works were premeditated by Cartesian dualism to such an extent that virtuosity *per se* came to be viewed as inherently disruptive to the notion of the work. Many critics and musicians made concomitant distinctions between virtuosi and “true artists,” like the violinist Bronislaw Huberman who argued in a 1911 article for *The Strad*, “the accomplishment of a musician is an intellectual one” (Huberman, 2013). Similarly the critic Lawrence Gilman, reviewing a 1906 concert by the virtuoso pianist Moriz Rosenthal in an article titled “The Bane of Virtuosity,” criticized the performer’s addition of elaborate embellishments to a waltz by Chopin: “The result is, of course, that Chopin is buried quite out of sight” (Gilman, 2006, p. 52). As in Wagner’s comments, the performer is seen to change the work of the composer to the point that the piece becomes unrecognizable. Though Gilman cared little for Rosenthal’s performance, he reported an enthusiastic reaction from the New York City audience, whom Gilman derided as “largely a worshipper of personalities” (ibid, p. 51). This performance violated Gilman’s expectations for a less showy, more constrained performance conducive to the experience of interiority. For both Gilman and Wagner, the performer’s personality, as expressed through various performing conventions, acts to inhibit true musical achievement.

In new music of the twentieth century, the virtuoso was regularly positioned as somehow blocking musical experience because performer personality distracted from considerations of musical works as autonomous objects. While certain music seemed to thrive on virtuosity (e.g. Jazz, the neoclassical works of Stravinsky), the practices of classical music informed the terms on which many works entered into the concert hall

and the orchestral repertory. Thus, a wariness of virtuosity's potential to destabilize the mind/body split of the musical experience became part of the performance culture within new music, especially among early proponents of what would become high modernism. For example, the Society for Private Musical Performances in Vienna, the performance club of the Second Viennese School, prohibited all press and, in its manifesto, articulated a clear ban on the type of showmanship described by Gilman:

[T]hat kind of virtuosity will be shunned which makes of the work to be performed not the end in itself but merely a means to an end which is not the Society's, namely the display of irrelevant virtuosity and individuality, and the attainment of a purely personal success (Berg, 1973, pp. 1307-1308).

As with Wagner's statements, personality and an excessive physical agent was seen as damaging to the musical work. The body risked blocking the transmission of musical ideas and violating the mental contemplations of serious listeners. The Society's statement also emphasized the idea that new music was inherently difficult both to comprehend and perform. New music called for excellent performers to be sure, but they had to keep themselves in check so as to best deliver the works of composers. The Society's statement implicitly argued that virtuosity in art music ought to facilitate structural listening, be physically restrained, focused on composer intent, and be subservient to the work concept.

Mediated by the mind/body split and encouraged by the belief in the value of structural listening, virtuosity continued to be a fraught endeavour throughout the twentieth century (c.f. Chapter 1). Views of the virtuoso as self-serving, meretricious, and musically damaging persisted throughout the century. Composer William Schuman wrote in 1961, for example,

In our day of the omnipresent virtuoso, virtuosity is in itself not the wonder. The wonder is that any virtuoso performer is more interested in music's vast literature than in displaying his performing gifts (Schuman, 1961, p. 379).

Schuman here describes the virtuoso as inherently self-serving and uninterested in presenting the contributions of contemporary composers.

In contrast to such statements, the work of mid-century avant-garde artists such as John Cage, La Monte Young, and the members of the Fluxus movement challenged Cartesian dualism and aesthetic modernism in music. Simon Shaw-Miller has described such work as revolutionary in part because it disrupts the mind-body-mind model of musical experience. He argues:

Through the inheritance of the work and ideas of John Cage and the Fluxus aesthetic, the performance, or concert occasion, is to be viewed as a complex field of activities—visual, textual, and sonorous—one that, among other things, understands the concept of music as a discourse. That is, the performance exists as a conceptual constellation, orbiting sound but including the scaffolding that is necessary for the sound to exist [...] This view, which stands diametrically opposed to modernist references to music as a paradigm of autonomy, introduces the concept of music to evaluation on a number of levels both performatively and textually, not the least of which is the visual (Shaw-Miller, 2002, p. 201).

In much of the work discussed by Shaw-Miller, the work is almost or completely indistinguishable from the act of performance, a move that necessarily confuses or even erases divisions between mind and body. Anti-Cartesian works promoted a praxis in which the labour and act of performance was central to whatever works were presented. The types of musical art created by Cage and others negated the distinction between work and performance and provided a critique of the entire concert ritual. Aleatoric works, after all, often inherently blur any easy work/performer or mind/body distinction. The entire premise of what I would term modernist virtuosity—a unique, insightful, and physically restrained rendition of a text—deflates in this new

configuration. While truly distinguishing text from performance has never been an easy affair, it has been imagined to be relatively clear. This distinction allowed listeners to grasp in more or less precise terms the specific contributions of a performer's rendition of the musical text. Naomi Cumming, for example, argues that an appreciation of solo violin performance requires an intimate familiarity with the text in question in order to understand the distinctive artistry (or lack thereof) of the soloist (Cumming, 2000, p. 27). Modernist virtuosity requires an a priori understanding of music and performance on Cartesian terms.

However, in spite of the work of various avant-garde artists, many of their critiques and contributions have been reabsorbed into high modernism. First, Cage and others continued to invoke the notion of aesthetic autonomy in terms that have been (perhaps wrongly) reabsorbed into modernist notions of art (Born, 1995; Huyssen, 1986). Georgina Born has argued that Cage and his ilk remain modernist because of their implicit disdain for popular culture, a negation central to high modernism (Born, 1995, p. 64). Ultimately, the concert hall and its offerings remained sealed in a bubble of aesthetic modernism, detached from society and isolated from the surrounding world. Second, though revolutionary, the impact of mid-century avant-gardes and their challenges to Cartesian dualism have gone either ignored by classical composers in the United States or, more strikingly, absorbed into the institutional machinations of Classical music culture. Goehr has argued that even John Cage's radical contributions have become part of a canon of musical works:

Performers and listeners receive his music with the same respect many of Beethoven's contemporaries had for his innovative works. [...] Cage's "real" and "random" sounds have not stayed real or random. The "real" sounds of "his" "work" have been made subject to all the tradition, temporal, presentational, organizational constraints associated with the concert hall

experience. The institution has not shown itself to be so flexible that it could allow Cage's "real" sounds to remain real (Goehr, 2007, p. 265).

Goehr goes on to defend the contribution of Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and other members of the mid-century avant-garde. It is not so much that their ideas failed, she argues, but that the institution of Classical music proved too rigid to accommodate them.³⁵ This is not to say that avant-gardes have had no impact (see, for example, Smith's (1998) "Composing after Cage"), but that their impact has not changed the stable institution of art music. Along similar lines, Cecilia Sun has argued that in the years since the activities of the mid-century avant-gardists, prominent composers such as La Monte Young have worked to reign in the wild exuberance once associated with their output and to establish a history of stable works (Sun, 2004).

Finally, many composers and performers never positioned themselves as avant-garde and remained, instead, completely bound within the concert tradition and its implicit Cartesian dualism traditionally taught at conservatories. Composers such as William Schumann, Norman Dello Joio, Ned Rorem, and David Del Tredici, for example, continued to rely on a model in which the composer created works, the performer interpreted them without deviating too much from the written text, and the audience received them through (preferably structural) listening. Even the once-experimental minimalist composers Steve Reich and Philip Glass have effectively fallen back into this traditional concept of the concert experience. Jeremy Grimshaw (2002) has argued that Glass has himself embraced the contemporary concert culture

³⁵ There are various experimental music scenes around the country. In my research, I came across people truly vested in a reconfiguration of the concert experience. However, such movements remain on the fringe, more avant-garde than eighth blackbird, and typically less well supported because of it. See further Prior (2008).

of classical music, even while attempting to maintain his status as an avant-garde innovator. Though Glass promotes himself as a crossover artist, he invokes and benefits from traditional ideas of the composer, “his” “work,” the musical canon, and all the Cartesian elements of classical music experience (Grimshaw, 2002).

Contemporary press reviews of new music reflect this absorption of mid-century avant-garde injunctions. The true philosophical implications and challenges to the experience of art music are rarely discussed in the popular press. Reviews of eighth blackbird concerts, for example, almost never feature any consideration of the history of the avant-garde, even when written by critics who have demonstrated a strong working knowledge of this history. Ultimately, the critique of Cartesian dualism posed by anti-modernists failed to achieve the critical mass needed to affect lasting aesthetic change. High modernism, as a cultural force that absorbs, codifies, reifies and indexes practices, remade avant-gardes into more or less canonized art music.

Viewed with this history in mind, the concert ritual—with its attendant structural listening and Cartesian epistemology—emerges as part of the lingering legacy of musical modernism and a foundational epistemology in the experience of classical music today. Concert halls are spaces in which performers present musical works for contemplation, as ethnomusicologist Stephen Cottrell has theorized (2004). Concerts, he writes, involve private experiences,

personal adventures not shared by those around us, in which, by losing ourselves, we enter something of a dream world where various visual and aural objects mix with our own inner reality (Cottrell, 2004, pg. 179).

The experience of attending and enjoying a classical music concert certainly invites, perhaps even requires, a considerable amount of private introspective thought. When we sit in a concert hall, especially those of us who have been trained to listen for and

consider musical structures, we act out the role of receiving minds, attentively listening to and thinking about the musical sounds produced by the performers. Moved by musical sound, we engage in private musings and revelatory meditations as we withdraw from our outer, more public lives, from our physical concerns, and from society at large.

While the concert ritual necessarily utilizes the body, many musicians and audience members discuss music and musical experience in terms that often (though certainly not always) erase various aspects of embodied experience. Along such lines, ethnomusicologist Janet Sturman has argued that

performers in western art music tend to devote [little attention] to movements not directly related to the demands of sound production; expressive body awareness represents a missing element in the practice of performance. Attention to physical movement, as both an interpretive tool for enhancing sound production, and as a means of connecting performance to a larger community or audience represents an interpretive gap in the contemporary performance and study of western art music (Sturman, 2008, p. 5).

The terms by which we evaluate music as both object and experience often entail an unexamined (perhaps even unconscious) distinction between work/mind and performance/body. Whenever the performer's contributions seem to overshadow those of the composer, the autonomy of the musical work central to modernist considerations of music is threatened. Among contemporary classical music performers, clear distinctions between musical work as abstract product of the mind and performance as physical delivery system remains a major part of the epistemology of classical music performance.

Cartesian Dualism in eighth blackbird Reviews

As in the broader classical music community, Cartesian dualism and modernist conceptions of virtuosity mediate eighth blackbird concerts and shape musical experience for critics. Reviewers often distinguish between musical works as disembodied objects and performative gesture as body activities by treating the music as if it had some metaphysical existence outside of performance. LA Times critic Mark Swed, for example, once commented “A really good performance, then, feels like a barely contained explosion between your ears” (Swed, 2008). Though performance is mentioned, Swed nevertheless locates musical experience within the mind of the listener. In order to demonstrate how this epistemology impacts writings about the group, I want to examine several reviews of eighth blackbird performances—reviews that demonstrate how choreography disrupted the “correct” modernist model of musical performance as a mind-body-mind activity.

While reactions to choreography as a concept vary, many critics find fault with eighth blackbird’s use of added movement. Mark Swed’s review of a 2005 eighth blackbird concert in Los Angeles provides a case in point. The performance featured eighth blackbird moving around the stage, with the instrumentalists coming together when their music was similar and separating when their music differed. Swed distinguished between the piece performed, *Tied Shifts* (2004) by Derek Bermel, and the group’s performance. While he praised both, Swed described the group’s choreography as “annoying” and “way too cute.” He accused eighth blackbird of “Mickey-Mousing every musical gesture:” the music, he wrote, has “a captivating sense of the spontaneous, and all this business [of choreography] kills it” (Swed, 2005). For Swed, the group’s “musical” performance was very different from their “visual”

performance, all of which was separate from Bermel's musical work. In "mind/body" terms, eighth blackbird had too much "body," a characteristic that proved detrimental to Swed's experience.

Critics reacted similarly when writing about another choreographed work, *singing in the dead of night* (2008). Commissioned by the sextet, the work features music by the three Bang on a Can composers Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon, and David Lang and choreography by dancer Susan Marshall. In this instance, music and movement were conceived as parts of a whole, as demonstrated by the program notes used in performances of *singing in the dead of night*: "The delicate shades between dance/movement and music/theatre are fully embraced by the collaborators of singing in the dead of night, a work that balances on the intersection of these artistic worlds" (Music Sales Classical, 2008).³⁶ Premiered in 2008, the group toured with the work for several months in various U.S. cities, and the piece continues to rotate the piece into its repertoire. *singing in the dead of night* featured eighth blackbird moving around the stage, with each member performing a variety of instruments. The ensemble also dropped various objects, metal cans, bars, and sand (later changed to quinoa), onto an amplified pad at multiple points throughout the show. Reviews of the piece *singing in the dead of night* varied widely, though by all accounts the ensemble performed exceptionally well. Mark Stryker, writing for the Detroit Free Press, separated the sounds of the metal objects hitting the amplified pad from the "gentle music" made by the flute and percussion. He criticized the work in general while praising the group's playing:

³⁶ Tellingly, the description of this work on the publisher's website seems to contradict this description: "During rehearsals, [Susan Marshall] added her touch, yet she took great care to work within the limitations. "It is a great tribute to Susan as an artist," Julia Wolfe commented on the choreographer. "She didn't want to interfere with the music." - See more at (Music Sales, 2008).

Still, less is more in this idiom and the falling instruments and magic-sand tricks grew wearisome.... On the other hand, the players attacked the music and theater with such vibrant virtuosity that it was easy to overlook the imperfections (Stryker, 2008).

In another review, critic Charles T. Downey wrote:

Although it is revolutionary...the Bang on a Can thing runs the risk of becoming a sort of shtick—dropping pans on an amplified pad, followed by the repeated spreading of pots of grain...on an amplified table. The playing was all excellent, but for all its appeal, *Singing in the Dead of Night* [sic] felt undisciplined.... (Downey, 2008).

Both Stryker's and Downey's comments echo Gilman's above cited review of the 1908 Moriz Rosenthal concert. Just as Gilman found Rosenthal's embellishments of the Chopin cheaply showy, eighth blackbird's critics saw the use of sand and pots and pans as "tricks" and "shtick." Neither Gilman or Downey question the performers' abilities, but they both bemoan what they see as distortions of, or distractions from, "the music itself." Visual and bodily performance become parts of a silly show that risks cheapening the austerity of the musical performance event.

Choreography Explained

In light of the perceived damage done by excessive movement, eighth blackbird's decision to employ choreography and staging to make new music friendly can seem somewhat odd. When I discussed choreography in conversations with musicians, two issues became clear: first, Cartesian ideas linger in musicians' descriptions of performance, and second, choreography is viewed as a way to make new music accessible. The musicians themselves continue to view classical music and new music performance in Cartesian terms. In interviews, members frequently stressed that movements always, in their words, "served the music" or somehow brought out ideas

already present “in the music.” Violinist Yvonne Lam told me that eighth blackbird used choreography “for musical reasons, to highlight musical things. It’s not because the music is lacking, not because the music doesn’t work without it” (Y. Lam, Personal Communication, October 7, 2011). Her emphasis that choreography comes from a musical place in fact preserves Cartesian dualism because it puts music into an experiential and ontological category that remains distinct from choreography. Choreography is legitimate only insofar as it remains somehow connected to specific musical ideas. Though it enhances the visual aspect of performance, it comes from a place of truth, the “music itself.” Such statements echo criticisms of added movement that have accompanied virtuosic performance since the nineteenth century, and call for a rationalization of performer movement in Cartesian terms that preserves music’s abstract intellectual ontological stature.

Flutist Tim Munro invoked this perspective when I asked whether choreography risked destabilizing the entire premise of abstract absolute music because it added a sort of physical narrative:

That’s always a criticism and for me, personally, [there] is a real danger of getting in the way of the music. And whether we like it or not a lot of the music that we play was written with that sort of abstract musical idea in mind. And ... this is funny because we’re constantly fighting against this [idea]. We want to make this music broadly accessible. So what we do is we will add elements that we hope come out of the music to try and bring it to the audience.... This is like a tradition that we are actually part of and yet we’re fighting against it. So it’s this total, this constant tug of war between those elements. (T. Munro, Personal Communication, July 24th, 2008).

Choreography, for Munro (and to some extent for the other members of eighth blackbird), risks blocking the successful transmission of the musical work, as if the MIND-body-MIND model suddenly became mind-BODY-mind. Cartesian dualism

thus remains a central component of the musical experience for the eighth blackbird musicians.

Secondly, the musicians view choreography as a way to make abstract music accessible to audiences. Immediately after defending the musical origins of eighth blackbird's choreography, Lam added that, "anything eighth blackbird can do to make new music less antagonistic is good" (ibid). For Lam, new music's potential for, in her words, "antagonism" warranted the use of choreography. Similarly, Munro implied that audiences struggled with the kind of music typically found on new music programs, and he argued that added elements—choreography—helped make new music "broadly accessible." eighth blackbird pianist Lisa Kaplan defended choreography this way, "Our target audience is the everyday Joe, not the critics" (personal communication, November 11, 2011). Thus, the tension surrounding the reception of choreography is a result of eighth blackbird's efforts to change new music and to make it relevant to contemporary audiences.

A seeming contradiction thus emerges from musicians' explanations of choreography: choreography is sold as audience outreach and defended as art. It is a strange case wherein choreography figures simultaneously as avant-garde and accessible, a living expression of eighth blackbird's tug of war between the new music's modernist tradition and attempts to change that tradition. By adding a visual component to the new music concert, a practice historically viewed as oriented toward auditory intellectualism, eighth blackbird's musicians work to create experiences legible to contemporary audiences and to a culture that they believe places more value on the visual than the aural. Cellist Nick Photinos put it to me this way:

The funny thing is I think a lot of people listen to a lot more new music than they realize through movies and through television. And that's actually behind why we move around on stage because a lot of what we do is hard to get. Or sometimes there is not necessarily anything to "get", but maybe [because] we're able to convey the music more through movement people can see relations that they wouldn't otherwise see. And also just the fact that we're very visually oriented, that we take in so much more information visually than any other way that it helps to show that on stage (N. Photinos, Personal Communication, June 18, 2008).

For eighth blackbird, therefore, the animation of musical gestures serves to make difficult music appealing to audiences by invoking contexts in which audiences have heard post-tonal music. Tim Munro, speaking in a separate interview, similarly emphasized that the way people experience the world has become increasingly influenced by electronic technology:

I think a group like eighth blackbird is very much just a product of its own time. Where we grew up as kids watching lots of TV as children, and watching lots of movies and then growing up, playing computer games and we're very visual people (T. Munro, Personal Communication, July 24, 2008).

Choreography as a Figuration of the Postmodern Avant-Garde

The group's emphasis on a new "visual culture" echoes the arguments of numerous major cultural theorists. Harvey (1989) and Jameson (1991) and many others have examined the rise of visual media in the twentieth century, often pointing to it as a major factor in postmodernity. Harvey, following the work of Hassan (1985), posits an opposition between modernism's valuation of depth versus postmodernism's celebration of surfaces (Harvey, 1990, p. 43). Sociologists Kenneth Allan and Jonathan Turner summarized such views, writing "Postmodern theorists generally stress the importance of visual media for culture and individual identity" (Allan & Turner, 2000, p. 370). Connecting the development of communication technologies such as television with the rise of advertising, and the importance of image as an

ontological concept within capitalism, they argue that the visual has had a profound impact upon contemporary life: “Together, these forces produce constantly shifting images that inundate individuals in postmodern societies changing the nature of culture and personal identity in ways heretofore unknown in the modern world” (Allan & Turner, 2000, p. 370). Visuality often figures as part of postmodernism’s alleged superficiality, when contrasted with modernism’s valuation of subjective depth (Jameson, 1991). In line with such academic arguments, musicians’ descriptions of “visual culture” demonstrate a more or less explicit attempt to make new music legible to postmodern audiences. The use of visual stimuli is an attempt to make new music postmodern.

The appeal to the visual in fact represents a significant challenge to the modernist values of interiority and autonomy endemic to classical music’s performance culture. From the modernist perspective particular to art music’s history and culture, eighth blackbird’s invocation of “visual culture” and their use of choreography risks in the performance of new music risks making new music a superficial affair. An emphasis on auditory phenomena supposedly insulates classical music from the surrounding world, including postmodernity’s visual values.

Summarizing the professed privileging of aural over visual, Chia-Jung Tsay has argued that the visual remains suspect in Western art music’s professional domains:

Hiring committees [of professional orchestras] have embraced “blind” screenings not only out of the pursuit of fairness, but also in response to critics who disparage those who prioritize visually stimulating choreography over the composer’s intended sound. Professional musicians consistently report that sound is the most important information in the evaluation of music. After all, the foundation of the field was built upon the creation of a better sound; ear-

training classes are part of the core curriculum at major conservatories, and performance is evaluated during auditions (Tsay, 2013, p. 1).

Classical musicians place a high value on sound because it functions as part of the modernist experiential model designed to facilitate autonomy and interiority. Abstract and disembodied non-visual sound symbolizes interior privacy and removal from society. By suppressing our bodies, we can free our minds, go deep and explore positions outside of and even counter to those promoted by mass culture. Thus Susan McClary writes,

[T]he tendency to deny the body and to identify with pure mind underlies virtually every aspect of patriarchal Western culture. Thus it is not surprising to find that this fundamental mind/body split likewise informs classical music as well as its institutions (McClary, 2002, p. 53).

Excessive movement disturbs attempts to achieve the interior catharsis sought after by many classical music and new music fans. Virtuosity has constantly risked shaking up this model of musical experience, and whenever people (whether critics or the musicians themselves) critique eighth blackbird's choreography, they invoke Cartesian dualism and a subsequent "demonization of the visual" (Martin, 1993, p. 67).

What's worse is the connotation lurking in much criticism of eighth blackbird's choreography: that eighth blackbird, in their attempts to adopt the promotional strategies of postmodernity, have effectively "sold out" new music. This is what Mark Swed suggests when he writes that the ensemble is "Mickey-Mousing every musical gesture." It is, likewise, what critics Downey and Stryker implied when they used the words "tricks" and "schtick," respectively. Like the virtuoso pianist Moriz Rosenthal, the musicians of eighth blackbird have employed performative stunts to impress audiences, but the cost is the subjective depth supposedly achieved through the restrained performances of the modernist virtuoso. According to such views,

promotionalism and eighth blackbird's friendliness have supplanted their commitment to true artistic meaning.

Despite the use of choreography and musicians' attempts to align themselves with postmodernity's visual experiences, the ensemble remains bound within a culture that has conventionally prized music texts above all other aspects of artistic expression. Indeed, the very notion of music remains distinct from concepts of performance. "Music" is sound, form, design, and concept. Performance is body, expression, and personality. This Cartesian model is in fact built into many of the concert spaces employed by eighth blackbird. Concert halls, especially in schools built in the mid-twentieth century, are literally insulated from the outside world. They are rooms within rooms, typically located deep in the center of a school or venue, and featuring multiple barriers to physical entry and sonic disturbance in the form of double doors and thick walls. The recital hall itself represents part of the lingering legacy of musical modernism: performers act and sound in a space in which any musical work, whatever its structural parameters or performing forces, may be heard and considered on Cartesian terms. The concert hall allegedly provides a place in which we may consider music as an autonomous object, free from the distractions of context. The concert experience necessarily entails a ritual wherein notions of work and struggle generally remain offstage (except where imagined to be part of the work itself) and performers present polished interpretations to docile and largely quite audiences (See Chapter 4).

eighth blackbird's choreography is one of the most confounding contradictions of the postmodern avant-garde. They have effectively defended a move toward the postmodern using modernist terms of debate. On the one hand it seems to preserve the tradition of musical modernism and its construction of the virtuoso, of difficult music

presented well to an audience and with which audiences may explore private interior thoughts. On the other hand choreography figures as a strategy to present audiences with a legible, visual experience. Choreography makes new music postmodern by transforming it into a visual embodied phenomenon. Yet in the context of classical and new music, the use of choreography remains shocking and avant-garde, despite its goals of accessibility.

eight blackbird's members walk a fine line, here. In some ways, they make difficult music even more difficult by adding an additional layer of performativity to an already artistically dense affair. To be sure, highlighting musical relationships between performer parts, as in *Tied Shifts*, does provide a sort of pedagogical device by which to illustrate structural aspects of the work. But it also shifts our attention to performers' bodies, to their legs, arms, waists, and fingers; in short, to all those body parts normally channelled and contained in classical music performance. *Tied Shifts* becomes, in this sense non-Cartesian, and highly contextual rather than autonomous, engaging as it does entire bodies and relationships between them. But, from the perspective of the performers, this layer of meaning remains detached from the work proper. Like a costume worn for show, choreographed performances of *Tied Shifts* are projections of the mind work of composer Bermel, while the performers' bodies remain conduits of musical meaning.

Choreography's function, at least in the context of eight blackbird's performances, is thus tied closely to the objectives of approachability and marketability that are more and more typical of the new music scene. In his description of postmodern art, for example, David Harvey argues that much postmodern art seeks a "*rapprochement* between popular culture and what once remained isolated as 'high

culture” (Harvey, 1990, p. 59). Harvey argues that the resulting postmodern art or performances are “anti-auratic, anti-avant-garde”. Here, he invokes’ Walter Benjamin’s concept of “aura,” a marker of live performance’s uniqueness and resistance to production (Benjamin, 1968). Insofar as it is meant to align dominant forms of expression, eighth blackbird’s choreography can in some ways be seen as this kind of anti-auratic *rapprochement*.

However, eighth blackbird’s use of choreography is not “anti-auratic, anti-avant-garde” and thus postmodern in the terms outlined by Harvey (1990). It is, in fact, highly “auratic:” the result of choreographed shows is, in part, a reinforcement of eighth blackbird’s virtuosity, though now in terms that are consistent with postmodernity’s emphasis on visual aesthetics and its associated, ubiquitous culture of promotionalism. Choreographed shows are not disavowals of artistic authority akin to that found in Dadaism or Cagian happenings.

eighth blackbird’s choreography in many ways preserves the reification of performance described in Chapter 1 and is a key part of friendly virtuosity. While this moveThe performance becomes, in some ways, a spectacular commodity that results from allegedly pre-existing relationships in the musical work, while the labour required to produce these performances remains hidden out of sight.

Whether viewed as reified commodity or anti-auratic *rapprochement*, choreography reinforces performative skill while embracing the visual domain so vilified and disparaged within classical music culture. It signals a shift within new music, a conscious recognition that the texts crafted by contemporary composers require packaging and promotion even at the level of music performance proper. In this way new music becomes one more of the “constantly shifting images that inundate

individuals in postmodern societies,” one more commodity recognizable on the terms of the dominant forms of entertainment such as television and film. Though auratic in its liveness, choreography emerges as a conscious attempt to align new music with dominant concepts of a culture shaped by mechanically reproduced commodified media (Auslander, 2008).

In the next chapter, I explore the range of performance practice found in eighth blackbird’s concert. I examine their performance practices in detail to illustrate how the ensemble’s concerts constitute, in some ways, a performative negotiation between modernist and postmodern virtuosity. By theorizing these performing models in detail, I show how eighth blackbird offers alternative conceptions of the work, the performer, and their relationships. While the performer remains subservient to the composer and the reified abstract musical work in modernist virtuosity, postmodern virtuosity places the performers on equal footing with the composer.

Chapter 3

“Showing too much”: Performer Movement, Virtuosity, and the Habitus of the Classical Music Stage.

I sit in the auditorium of the School of Music at Ithaca College watching eighth blackbird rehearse Bruno Mantovani’s *Chamber Concerto No. 2*. eighth blackbird will play a concert this evening featuring this and several other pieces by young composers. During the rehearsal, the musicians work out last minute details: the arrangement of performers on stage, minutia of phrasing, and the cuing plans of pieces. Cuing involves the placement of small added gestures — nods, glances, or hand motions — at various points throughout *Chamber Concerto No. 2* so that musicians can coordinate the start of a particular phrase or section. Musicians map out the musical terrain with their bodies in order to stay together as they perform. As I watch, the musicians negotiate the placement of cues and the execution of individual sections — a tedious and time-consuming process. At one point, pianist Lisa Kaplan asks if her head nod at measure 226 is needed to signal the entrance of the other musicians. Nick Photinos says that it helps him, to which Kaplan replies, “OK, I’m confused. Who is cuing 266?” Matthew Duvall says that Photinos is supposed to be indicating the entrance. Kaplan says that she moved the cue prior to a concert in Richmond, Virginia. Michael Maccaferri says they both have to give a signal because his location in front of the piano means he can’t easily see Kaplan’s gestures. Photinos confesses that he forgot to cue in the last run-through and that he has not been good about cuing today. They play through the section again, after which Duvall and Photinos discuss alternative ways to signal

particular sections. Kaplan announces, “I don’t care what happens,” and says that she just wants a cue. Photinos responds by asking Duvall to not give a gesture, “just to reduce cuing.”

I am struck by the request to reduce cuing. Why would the musicians seek to reduce the use of signals when it seems so important to their ability to perform this difficult piece? After the rehearsal, I ask Kaplan about cuing in the Mantovani, pointing out that they seem to avoid using too many gestures. She replies that, for one thing, too much cuing can confuse the performers. For example, Duvall’s signal for one passage consisted of giving three conducted beats. The musicians felt this might be risky because it could cause a false start if one of the members forgot to wait for all three gestures. Abundant cuing could mislead the performers. Kaplan goes on to add, with a slight smile and lowered voice as if sheepish, that she does not want to “show too much.” I am left wondering why these musicians, with their reputation for choreography and theatrics, would worry about a physical display that facilitates the performance of difficult musical works. After all, the rehearsal for other pieces on this concert program involved discussions about added choreographed movements that were far more noticeable than the subtle motions required for cuing. Musicians had also discussed the arrangement of the piano and percussion so that the performers appeared visually “balanced.” The resulting arrangement was based on the audience’s visual perspective (See Figure 3.1). If the visual had already entered consideration, why worry about “showing too much”?



Figure 2.1: Photo of player arrangement used for the Ithaca performance of Mantovani's *Chamber Concerto No. 2* (2010), though here Lisa Kaplan stands away from the piano to give spoken program notes.

This question points to a larger concern for the musicians: the use of their bodies in classical music performance. “Showing too much” is an expression of modernist sociocultural values in which the performer’s body risks distracting audiences from the musical work. In a culture focused on the appraisal of stable musical works, musicians’ moving bodies risk destabilizing the alleged timelessness of pieces by foregrounding the nuances of a specific performance. Such views shape performance and musical experience, and linger in spite of both musicians’ participation in an avant-garde and their status as virtuosic. In a way, being avant-garde virtuosos would seem to afford musicians complete freedom to subvert, challenge, or do away with the conventions of the classical music concert hall. However, because eighth blackbird’s members continue to work within the “socioeconomic circuit”

(Born, 1995, p. 21) of recital halls like those at Ithaca College, they remain bound within the established norms of the classical music stage.

By examining how eighth blackbird musicians move or restrain movement in their performances of specific musical texts, this chapter describes several points on the spectrum of aesthetic positions evoked during the ensemble's concerts. This spectrum ranges from modernist constructions of virtuosity requiring a restrained use of the body to relatively postmodern forms of virtuosity in which movement figures as a central component of the musical work. Limits on cuing, for example, indicate a modernist model in which "music" is understood to remain autonomous from the bodies required to produce it. Such approaches to movement signal the continued influence of Cartesian dualism in the classical music concert hall. This influence constitutes a lingering modernism, even as performers add visual and physical components to other pieces so as to make new music postmodern (see Chapter 2). Cartesian dualism, classical music's museum culture, disciplined movement, and adherence to the score are foundational to the construction of the modernist virtuoso and are tenets of the classical music stage that pose certain limits on what the performer may do at any given concert.

Yet while modernist values shape musical experience for performers and audience members, postmodern approaches to musical performance such as added choreography, multimedia, narratives, and other theatrical devices also appear in eighth blackbird's shows. The musicians move back and forth between modernist virtuosity and postmodern virtuosity—sometimes within a single concert—as they negotiate the requirements of performing particular pieces and their specific aesthetic goals. Thinking of performance in such sociomusical terms illustrates how text, body,

place, and tradition interact to shape performer agency and musical experience. Meanwhile the concert hall itself figures as a crucial, if untheorized, component in the construction of virtuosity. I argue that postmodern virtuosity—though often viewed as transgressive, spectacular, daring, and populist—in fact channels and even limits performers’ aesthetic agency because it remains bound within the concert hall and its traditions. In such cases where the musicians perform outside the concert hall, virtuosity disappears from the equation. Ultimately, understanding the range of aesthetic positions found within eighth blackbird’s concerts provides specific examples of the negotiations endemic to the postmodern avant-garde. Musicians, critics and audiences, through their choices and tastes, engage in a larger dialogue about classical music, the stability of its autonomous works, and the desires to build new audiences.

Theorizing Classical Concert Hall Virtuosity

Analyzing the musical virtuosity of eighth blackbird, whether postmodern or modernist, poses a methodological problem. Much of the performance studies literature invokes Cartesian dualism uncritically (as in the vast literature on performance analysis).³⁷ Fisher and Lohead, for example, “analyze from the body” by invoking ideas of gesture that nevertheless reinscribe Cartesian dualism. They examine

³⁷ There is considerable literature in music education and music psychology on the subject of musical rehearsals and performance in Western art music (see, for example, Davidson, 1993; Davidson, 1997; Ford & Davidson, 2003; Juchniewicz, 2008; Williamon & Davidson, 2002). However, much of this literature fails to account for music as a cultural phenomenon, examining instead the pedagogical, physical, and psychological aspects of performance as if they were outside of culture. This perspective has blinded researchers to the simple argument I am making here, that virtuosity in western art music limits movement and performer agency. In spite of such shortcomings, this literature offers much to the study of performance in Western art music, especially in terms of simple summaries of performance norms. By combining contributions of this literature with an ethnomusicological consideration of music as inherently social, we can see performance as a cultural practice and virtuosity as a type of “performance ideology” that mediates and shapes performer agency (Davidson & Clarke, 1998, p. 76).

two types of gesture: “musical gesture, the more sonically oriented concept” and “physical gesture, which is more bodily oriented” (Fisher & Lochhead, 2002, pp. 47-48). Ultimately, the authors advocate for a framework in which the music acts upon and through the body, and the music/mind and text/body binary remains in play.

Shove and Repp, summarizing a history of such approaches, write:

Traditionally, to explain the source of musical motion, theorists, philosophers and psychologists alike have turned to musical structure, which by most accounts is abstract [i.e. disembodied]. This has led some to believe that the motion heard is virtual, illusory or abstract.... Hidden from this view is perhaps the most obvious source of musical movement: the human performer (Shove & Repp, 1995, p. 58).

A clear division between the musical text and performers’ bodies remains central to the way academics have approached the study of classical music performance.

In contrast, a number of studies attempt to examine performance from a less dualist perspective. These studies position bodies as implicitly bound up in the musical process in such a way that “music itself” necessarily includes physical activity and movement. Such perspectives offer ways to circumvent the received dualist nature of classical music performance. Over a series of articles, for example, Neil P. McAngus Todd (1992, 1994, 1999) has argued that the body is central both in perceptions of musical motion (that is, how we perceive musical change as “movement”) and in how performers approach issues such as tempo and dynamics. Drawing on literature from cognitive theory, Lawrence Zbikowski (2002) posits a theoretical frame wherein notions of “music” build upon cultural metaphors that necessarily invoke embodied experience. Other scholars make similar arguments, variously positioning bodies as central to musical experience (Bergeron & Lopes, 2009; Cook, 1999; Cumming, 2000; Cusick, 1994; De Souza, 2013; A. Mead, 1999; Sanden, 2008; Stubbley, 1998). For

many academics, “music” is thus already an embodied phenomenon. These authors all argue for an understanding of music as non-Cartesian and inherently embodied.

Nevertheless, these important contributions do not provide a way to account for the dualist beliefs expressed by performers. I argue that studying how musicians conceive of performance requires that we acknowledge Cartesian dualism without allowing this philosophy to dictate the terms of inquiry. Performers, critics, and many audience members around the world unconsciously rely on a Cartesian model of musical experience. Thus Eric Clarke, summarizing academic critiques of music’s alleged autonomous status and the Cartesian epistemology that facilitates it, writes:

[H]owever unsustainable it might be in principle, the *idea* of musical autonomy, and of a particular listening attitude in relation to that autonomy, is still a powerful social construct, and one which has important consequences for the ways in which people listen—or perhaps think that they *should* listen—within concert culture (Clarke, 2005, p. 128).

Clarke goes on to argue that the very notion of autonomous music itself relies on the mutually reinforcing intersection of environment, ideology, and cultural practice. Thus structural listening in the concert hall is the practice of perceiving and experiencing autonomous musical objects. Taken as a whole, the physical site, ideology, and habits of the classical music stage and its modernist virtuosi are shaped by and expressive of the Cartesian separation between thinking mind and moving body.

Analyzing virtuosity, I argue here, requires a methodology wherein Cartesian dualism is situated as part of the “habitus” informing embodied practices of Western art music (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu described habitus as

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express

mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53).

Habitus is the cultural logic of individual choices. These choices may be conscious or unconscious, but they are the result of cultural reasoning according to certain beliefs, norms, and histories. The habitus of classical music performance is one in which the Cartesian notion of a stable musical text, ontologically distinct from performance, structures the choices and movements of performers. Cartesian dualism disciplines the musicking body to be restrained and conservative, to avoid “showing too much.” Modernist virtuosity, for eighth blackbird and for many performers in new music, is the identity formed through a sociomusical habitus based, in part, upon dualist thinking (See Chapter 2). The identity of a performer, what Cumming (2000) calls the “sonic self,” is expressed through the thoughtful manipulation of organized sound, and intrinsically requires a distinction between work and performer that maps onto a Cartesian distinction between mind and body. Though ideas of visual spectacle have surrounded the virtuoso for centuries, the model of performance adopted by classical music communities in the twentieth century continued to value disembodied sound over the visual aspects of performance (see Chapter 2). For the modernist virtuoso, expressive contributions must remain constrained within this habitus.³⁸

³⁸ In some ways the Cartesian component of modernist music’s habitus is itself integral to the critical perspectives found within the works themselves. In a close reading of twentieth and twenty-first-century musical works and their historical context, Samuel John Wilson has argued that “ideas of mind and body ... have been sedimented into musical language and practices” despite the fact that “modernist critical music, as with critical art and the avant-garde more generally, in these arts’ ‘self-reflexive’ dimension, *disturb the established categories by which they themselves are experienced and/or contemplated*” (emphasis mine, Wilson, 2013, p. 99). Much modernist music is thus in some ways critical of the very habitus in which it exists, operating in tension with the internal dynamics of the very culture in which such music is created. It nevertheless continues to function according to the Cartesian logic of the classical concert hall, even when it seems to challenge various ideas of autonomy, interiority, or elitism.

Postmodern virtuosity is a conscious invocation of the visual in terms that directly challenge the concept of a pure, disembodied music. If the modernist virtuoso projects a sonic self, the postmodern virtuoso combines the visual with the sonic in a way that directly informs the very nature of the work. Such a model is much closer to the types of virtuosity associated with, for example, the heavy metal performances discussed by Robert Walser (1993). Indeed, a series of discursive tropes — musical autonomy, performer prowess, avant-garde individualism — circulates in heavy metal scenes that parallels the discourse of both new and classical music communities (Walser, 1993, pp. 53-107). Nevertheless, there are of course important differences: the influence of the modernist habitus of the concert hall means that eighth blackbird's postmodern virtuosity differs in significant ways from that of the rock performer. While the social meanings of such tropes vary, both within heavy metal's assorted practices and between heavy metal and classical music, such similarities point to a steady erosion of easy high/low, popular/art distinctions often made by those in art music circles (see Chapter 1).

This spirit of musical eclecticism has been a cause of celebration for many of those attending eighth blackbird's spectacular shows. In a description of a major project involving eighth blackbird at the Texas Performing Arts Centre (TPAC) that was designed to reinvigorate classical music in Austin, Texas, critic Robert Faires wrote for *The Austin Chronicle*:

[T]he three-year program seeks to update the image of classical music from stony-faced white guys in powdered wigs writing for the blue-blood-and-lace-ruffle set to of-the-moment composers raised on rock and hip-hop using technology and fusing music with dance and theatre to speak to the jeans-wearing, iPhone-toting, wired-to-the-new crowd of today. To do this, it's zeroed in on new work [sic], programming projects that blur boundaries of genre and discipline, or employ tech to transform our experience of a piece,

and, naturally, commissioning compositions to be premiered here.... You couldn't ask for a better embodiment of that spirit than eighth blackbird (Faires, 2013).

Visual displays, performer showmanship and theatricality all figured prominently in the TPAC project, and eighth blackbird was, at least for Faires, the perfect fit for such an undertaking. Citing the group's penchant for commissioning new works and theatrical performances, Faires placed eighth blackbird at the "frontiers of classical music" (Faires, 2013). Postmodern virtuosity is a conscious invocation of a series of musical and discursive ideas — spectacle, performer prowess, genre hybridity — normally thought of as antithetical to classical music cultural values within the musical event proper (see Chapter 1).

The musicians' consistent challenges to concert hall norms, including the use of choreography, calls for a methodology that permits an analysis of musical performance as both Cartesian and non-Cartesian. Examining musical performance as bound within a habitus of classical music requires that we view performers' choices as expressive of specific values. Performers themselves are not docile bodies through which musical texts can achieve sounding life. Rather, musicians' performative choices, including the details of their cuing, are an expression of or challenge to the habitus of the concert hall and the modernist virtuosi who perform there. An implicit part of the classical music habitus is its disciplinary power.³⁹ The classical music concert hall emerges as a

³⁹ Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* remains a major source in the consideration of discipline. However, while Foucault's arguments provide a provocative analysis of power as a disciplining force, his argument has been critiqued by scholars seeking to understand the body as central to culture, rather than simply produced by culture. Along such lines, Carrie Noland has argued that Foucault produces a "largely binary account of power, which reduces the field of cultural practices to techniques of 'strict subjection'" (Noland, 2009, p. 3).

site of discipline, as a space in which bodily movements are channelled and restrained so that the illusion of a disembodied autonomous music can be achieved.

Discipline expressed through physical restraint is the performative logic of Cartesian dualism. Several scholars have identified discipline as a defining characteristic of the performance event of Western classical music. Richard Leppert has argued that discipline results from the separation of mind from body found with classical music:

The problematics [sic] of contemplation, a “mental” activity, emerge the moment the mind intersects with body. The etiquette of “contemplation” is, before anything, a controlling of the body in time, a working against the body, whether self-imposed or imposed by others. And it is an etiquette that turns music from an inherently participatory activity into a passive one in which the listener maintains physical stasis by exerting the cultural force of will against the body’s desires. The auditor may move toes in time to the beat but not hum, stomp feet, sway the torso, or bob the head: bodily reaction to music in the concert hall must be neither audible nor visible. To give oneself over to any of these reactions invites rebuke (Leppert, 1993, p. 25).

Serious restrictions remain in place for the audience members and performers in the classical concert hall, and the act of listening is itself an embodiment of the “mind” role. Analyzing performance contexts in classical music, scholars Henry Kingsbury (1988) and Christopher Small (1998) have also described the modern concert hall as a space in which people restrict movement. Small, for example, argues:

All other considerations are subordinated to the projection and reception of the sounds. In particular, care is taken so that listeners will not be disturbed by the presence of others as they listen. For this purpose, the auditorium floor is raked to give uninterrupted sightlines, the audience is fixed in the seats and knows it is to keep still and quiet; the program book politely asks us to suppress our coughing, and nobody enters or leaves during a performance (Small, 1998, pp. 26-27).

In his description of the student solo recital, Kingsbury describes a similar atmosphere of anticipation combined with restraint as audiences watched to see how young

performers negotiated the potential challenges of their repertoire. At all times, the audience maintained an extreme silence, clapping only at appropriate moments, and speaking in very low whispers if at all. Nearly all of the eighth blackbird concerts I have attended functioned according to these parameters (see Chapter 4 for an example of an exception). Yet not every aspect of these performance situations is identical. The musicians of eighth blackbird do not, for example, have exactly the same goals as Kingsbury's student. The musicians I study have already established their prowess and expertise, though the danger associated with performance mistakes certainly lingers. Most importantly for my purposes here, for both the performers and the audiences the context of musical embodiment in the concert hall is one in which the body is restrained so that nothing may distract from the performance of musical texts rendered on stage.

To be sure, our bodies still constitute a crucial part of musical concerts. The psychological experiences ascribed to the classical music experience remain, as several authors have shown, reflective of and bound within embodied phenomena. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Fisher and Lohead argue that, "Although listeners' embodied experience may involve little or no visible movement their performative enaction of musical meaning has an intercorporeal dimension" (Fisher and Lohead, 2002, 47). While I agree that our bodies remain a key part of the musical experience, I nevertheless contend that listeners engage in a ritual that reduces, or at least attempts to reduce, the experience of the body to near invisibility in order to engage in structural listening. Clear distinctions between musical text and embodied performance remain in circulation (see Chapter 2). Understood as an embodied

practice, the movement or lack thereof on the part of the audience represents a performance of the mind-body-mind model outlined in Chapter 2.

Just as discipline shapes listeners' experiences and roles, so too does it shape the roles of performers in the concert hall. When properly understood as bound up within and reacting to a specific habitus, eighth blackbird's movement in performance reveals a tension between modernist values and postmodern goals. In order to understand how the ensemble projects both modernist virtuosity and postmodern virtuosity, I examine a variety of eighth blackbird performances. Across this spectrum, we see both the modernist model of virtuosity and its adherence to Cartesian dualism, as well as a more postmodern model of virtuosity that blends musical work with performance and mind with body. However, in spite of the choreography's challenge to modernist autonomy, it nevertheless relies on important aspects of the modernist habitus, including a concert hall isolated from the surrounding world, and a division of labour between performer and composer that preserves dualist notions of music. Thus, when virtuosity moves toward the postmodern, notions of musical mind and autonomy remain in play to a certain extent because the concert remains key to the construction of virtuosity. The postmodern here figures as bound to the modern. As a way to illustrate this point, I examine performances outside the concert hall.⁴⁰ When eighth blackbird leaves the concert hall entirely, virtuosity no longer figures as part of the

⁴⁰ By "outside the concert hall," I mean contexts in which the structure or embodiment of the structure of the concert hall does not appear at all. Many new music ensembles have performed in alternative spaces such as mall atriums, subway stops, bars, or dance clubs. However, while such deviations are oft celebrated in the press, they often conform quite closely to the performance norms of the classical music concert hall. The Bang on Can Marathon, for example, occurs in the Winter Garden of the World Trade Centre in New York City, but effectively conforms to the mind-body-mind model of performance. In contrast to such performances, eighth blackbird and others occasionally perform in such a way that no remnant of the classical music concert hall remain.

musical experience. By examining these types of performances, I argue that the concert space itself is central to the construction of the virtuoso. In such cases, the very notion of autonomous music is destabilized because the work becomes bound to specific instances. “Music” becomes almost entirely contextual.

Modernist Virtuosity

In order to show how eighth blackbird projects modernist virtuosity—the traditional end of the spectrum of virtuosity I explore in this chapter—let us return to Mantovani’s *Chamber Concert No. 2*. In eighth blackbird’s October 11, 2011 performance of this piece in Ithaca, New York, the habitus of the concert stage informed the types of movement employed by the musicians in their performance. Within this habitus, performers were obliged to create the illusion of an autonomous disembodied musical work. The score and the cultural values embodied by and surrounding it dictated when and how performers were allowed to move. Performer movement was intended to keep the focus on the sounds of the work. Added movement such as cuing was treated as separate from the musical work proper. By attending to how the musicians moved in their performance of this piece, the distinction between musical work and performance becomes clear, and it becomes possible to understand how performers construct virtuosity within the physical limits of the modernist habitus.

In their performance of Mantovani’s piece, the musicians regulated their movement in a way that conformed to the habitus of the modernist concert hall. As explained above, eighth blackbird’s members limited their use of cuing because they considered it potentially confusing and because it “showed too much,” that is, it risked

emphasizing the musicians' bodies rather than the musical work. In order for Kaplan's remark to make sense, Cartesian dualism must remain in play: an autonomous musical work remains the focus of eighth blackbird's Ithaca performance. Besides the movements required to perform their individual parts—what we might call the respective habitus of individual instruments—performers generally employed two types of movement: expressive movements and cuing.

Expressive movements consisted of performer motion that, while perhaps not absolutely necessary, was somehow reflective of the nature of the musical part performed. For example, from measures fifty-one to seventy-six the six instruments played short fragments (e.g. two to three sixteenth notes) that were rhythmically staggered throughout the ensemble in such a way as to obscure the metric pulse. As they played this section, the performers moved in accentuated short, sharp spasms in time with their parts. In contrast with the added choreography found in other eighth blackbird performances, these movements were never discussed by the ensemble, and seemed to develop more or less instinctively as the ensemble rehearsed the piece together. While the result of such movements was a visual expression of the scored music, such movement was not considered tantamount to "music," but simply treated as part of the performance. The score thus motivated the nature and quality of performer movement in accordance with the habitus of classical music performance. If the parts had not had these qualities, such movement would certainly not have occurred. For example, in contrast to this section, measures thirty-one to thirty-eight called for the flute, clarinet, violin, and cello to play a long unison phrase. During this section, performers played with as little movement as possible in accordance with the musical stillness of the score.

In contrast to this expressive movement, cuing consisted of added movement that did not relate directly to the qualities of the instrumental part. One musician would move in a way designed to signal the execution of a particular musical phrase or gesture, for example, giving an upbeat and downbeat. During the long unison phrase of measures thirty-one to thirty-eight cited above, the musicians all watched violinist Yvonne Lam for cues to perform. In my video of the Ithaca performance, the other musicians all position themselves so that they can see both their respective parts and Yvonne's cuing. Their movement to these ends are very discrete and eye contact seemed to be crucial to the musicians' coordination. Clarinetist Michael Maccaferri, for example, leans every so slightly forward and to the side. If you were not watching for their attention to Yvonne, it would be easy to miss. The musicians refrained from any extra movement in this section because the music here consisted of long sustained notes that gave the impression of stillness. Any added movement, besides the tolerated cuing, was not deemed to be a direct reflection of the quality of the musical work itself, and would therefore have been considered inappropriate.

Clearly, the musicians' ability to watch each other was crucial to their execution of this piece, and they felt free to move in a way that somehow aligned with the properties of their respective parts. Both of these facts would seem to call into question any attempt to diminish the musical or visual significance of performers' bodies. In this way, musicians embodied the abstract work, providing visual signposts designed to facilitate its execution as well as expressive movements that physically conveyed particular concepts associated with particular musical gestures. Empirical research on classical music performance has shown similar uses of cuing and expressive movement among musicians. In a study of physical movement in professional chamber ensembles,

for example, Ford and Davidson found that, “eye contact was the most popular form of non-verbal communication,” (Ford & Davidson, 2003, p. 64). Furthermore, researchers have shown coordinated physical movement as a consistent and crucial feature of classical music performance, and Martin Clayton (1985) has argued that musicians found it difficult to execute musical pieces without visual feedback. In a study of classical music pianists, Williamon and Davidson found that “co-performers often rely on visual information—such as direct eye-contact, facial expressions, specific physical gestures and continuous swaying movements—for communication amongst themselves” (Williamon & Davidson, 2002, p. 54). They found, furthermore, that the style of the work in question determined the type and degree of performer movement. For a Romantic piece by Camille Saint-Saëns, pianists moved their arms and hands much more than in a duet by J. S. Bach.

While it is obvious that physical movements are crucial to classical and new musical performance (indeed to all musical performance), their status as part of “the music” remains in doubt. When understood with respect to the strong cultural belief in the dualist nature of music, the significance of cuing and other types of performer movement are consistently relegated to an instance of performance, not integral to the ontology of the musical work itself. Whatever the cuing plan or expressive movements, “showing too much” remained a lingering concern for the eighth blackbird musicians (and, I would argue, for other modernist virtuosi as well). Performer movement was determined, first and foremost by the structure of the musical work as well as by certain “musical”—as contrasted with “performative”—gestures.

Comparing the relationships between music and the body in other cultural contexts further illustrates how the approach of classical musicians reflects a very

specific set of cultural values. In contrast to the Cartesian model dictating the movement or lack of movement found among classical musicians, other musical cultures rely on models in which the performer's body and interaction with her instrument are central to the concept of "music."⁴¹ Ethnomusicologists John Baily and Peter Driver, for example, have argued that, for blues guitarists,

the spatial layout of notes and the physical structure of the guitar provides a framework for musical conceptualization, a compositional tool used for the development of musical ideas, an interface to be manipulated and acted upon in certain specific ways (Baily & Driver, 1992, p. 70).

For musicians in the folk blues tradition, the technological qualities of the guitar dictate the parameters of the "music" created. Rather than a mind-body model of development, the performer and guitar "provide a framework for musical conceptualization" and the gestures idiomatic to guitar playing directly inform the quality of sounds heard. To be sure, in classical music, composers are expected to write in a more or less idiomatic style for a given instrument. But the notion of what is and is not "music" does not necessarily entail a detailed consideration of how well or poorly a given gesture lies on a particular instrument.

Such an approach differs dramatically from the view of musical autonomy found in classical music. Indeed, in Mantovani's *Chamber Concerto*, many of the gestures were extremely difficult to perform, even for the highly skilled musicians of eighth blackbird (see Chapter 1). They nevertheless endeavoured to perform their parts because their physical labour was understood as distinct and quite separate from "the

⁴¹ Vijay Iyer (1998) has offered a detailed summary of much of the literature on embodiment and performance in African musical traditions. He argues that improvisational structures themselves dictate the large scale forms of specific works. The work, in such traditions, is thus intimately bound up within the practices and whims of performers. Such models offer important contrasts to the Cartesian model I am theorizing here.

music itself.” In contrast to the guitar-centred approach to musical composition found among folk blues musicians, performative labour in classical music figures as a means to an end, not necessarily interwoven with the end in itself. Movement has a certain instrumentality that serves the music, as opposed to being in dialogue with or constituting “music.” To consider the physical work of the musicians—their gestures for cuing, their fingering patterns, their breathing, bowing, choice of reeds or preference for types of rosin—in short, the physical labour required for the production of Mantovani’s *Chamber Concerto No. 2*, would require a consideration of “the music” as intimately embodied and locational. Given the Cartesian nature of modernist notions of “the music,” such a perspective would be antithetical to the belief in musical autonomy found within classical and new music culture.

The eighth blackbird performers thus disciplined their movement in the Ithaca concert of Mantovani’s piece in accordance with the habitus of the classical concert stage and projected a modernist construction of virtuosity. A good example of the stage’s disciplinary power can be found in their lack of movement when resting during the Mantovani. During their performance, musicians who were not playing exhibited little to no movement at all. Other than watching their parts, breathing, or subtly shifting their standing or sitting positions, musicians were very still. Such examples further demonstrate that the score, that physical embodiment of the work-concept, determined when and how musicians could move. It was as if performers simply stopped existing when not playing their instruments. Their very existence, in terms of a “musical” performance, was entirely determined by the work.

Aesthetic modernism, as defined by a belief in and performance of stable musical works, clearly shaped the type of performer movement seen in the Ithaca

performance of the Mantovani *Chamber Concerto*. Performers embodied not only the work in question, but the modernist values of autonomy, stability, physical restraint, and discipline, thus presenting an experience designed to facilitate what Cottrell would call the “inner realities” of the listening audience (Cottrell, 2004, p. 179). Subjective interiority and a private autonomous musical experience were central—though largely unspoken—goals of this performance. Viewed in terms of a habitus, performance context and performers’ interaction with a specific musical text each contributed to the modernist construction of the musical virtuoso.

eightth blackbird, a virtuosic chamber music sextet known for their physical theatricality, gave a performance that, while excellent in terms of its accurate and thoughtful rendition of this extremely difficult musical work, was largely in keeping with the Cartesian habitus of the classical music concert stage. Despite their reputation as members of a daring and populist vanguard (see Chapter 1), the musicians of eighth blackbird continue to participate in a performing tradition shaped by the ideals of modernism.

Postmodern Virtuosity

In contrast with restrained performance, eighth blackbird regularly performs with choreography intended to challenge the habitus of disciplined movement. Here, the physical restrictions found in classical music’s habitus seem to fall away, though certain restraints endure as the performers remain bound to the score and contained within the concert hall. Performers’ movement are intended to reflect certain qualities already believe to exist in the work proper (see Chapter 2), and a “work concept” remains in circulation (Goehr, 2007). Such cases speak to the possibilities of

postmodern virtuosity and its potential to confuse modernist dualism.⁴² Furthermore, understanding postmodern constructions of art music virtuosity illustrates the lingering presence of modernist ideas as well as the range of aesthetic positions found within the postmodern avant-garde more generally. As explained in Chapter 2, not all critics react favourably to choreography, despite the celebratory language seen in Chapter 1. Postmodern virtuosity is, in some ways, the result of an ongoing negotiation between the aesthetic modernism of classical music culture and new trends and goals of contemporary musicians.

As a way to theorize postmodern virtuosity, I examine visual aspects of physical arrangement and movement in three difference cases. In the first, performers emphasize visual qualities of performance through their on stage arrangement while maintaining relative stillness when playing. In the second, performers add choreography, as in Derek Bermel's *Tied Shifts* or in Stephen Hartke's *Meachwhile: Incidental Movement for Imaginary Puppet Plays* (2007). In a third invocation of the visual, performers present works created with physical movement and the visual built into the work itself. Pieces such as Amy Beth Kirsten's *Colombine's Paradise Theatre* (2013), Steven Mackey's and Rinde Ekert's *Slide* (2004), or even *singing in the dead of night* (2008) by Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon, and David Lang were all created as theatrical works that erase modernist distinctions between mind and body.

In all of these examples, performances emphasize a visual element that challenges the Cartesian ideology of the classical music habitus. In a way such

⁴² In some ways, the enthusiastic reactions to such works point toward the kind of historical amnesia and ossification I described in Chapters 1 and 2. Theatre troupes and various avant-gardes have combined music and theatre in similar ways, for example in the work of Meredith Monk, Laurie Anderson, or even commercial shows like *Cirque du Soleil*.

performances position performers' bodies as central to the very notion of the work, whether the piece was written to the specifications of restrained modernist virtuoso or not. Like other virtuosi who add impressive movements or physical tricks, many visually oriented eighth blackbird shows require a combined consideration of sight and sound in terms that challenge the classical music habitus. However, eighth blackbird's visually oriented performances differ from more conventional physical virtuosic displays, for example those associated with the Canadian Brass, because the movements employed by performers are, according to the musicians, demonstrative of ideas found within the work itself. Viewed in such a manner, eighth blackbird's concerts can be seen as an extension of conventional classical music ideas about interpretation and disciplined movement in general, a quality that distinguishes postmodern virtuosity from the virtuosic and comedic displays of performers such as Liberace or Victor Borge. Discipline, performer restraint, and the insulating power of the concert hall all remain key to the construction of postmodern virtuosity.

Thus, within postmodern virtuosity a contradiction emerges between Cartesian explanations of choreography (see Chapter 2) and the performances proper wherein such distinctions between work and performance become difficult, if not impossible, to pin down. Performer arrangement or movement is not simply meant to show off performer skill or clever ideas; rather, it is presented as implicitly part of the musical work, as part of "the music itself." Postmodern virtuosity, as a sociomusical construction, is an attempt to balance the modernist belief in disembodied musical autonomy with the virtuosic physicality found within choreographed performances. As argued in Chapter 2, such movement represents an attempt to align new music, even when written for a modernist virtuoso, with the emphasis on visual spectacle found

within postmodern culture more generally. Thus, postmodern virtuosity does not completely refute modernist virtuosity; rather, it moves the performer to an equal (or perhaps an even higher) ground than the composer. Furthermore, postmodern virtuosity, like modernist virtuosity, continues to rely on the habitus of the classical stage, in that it calls for a sonically isolated space designed for the consideration of musical works. The lingering issues of performer discipline and musical autonomy all figure as the legacy of modernism that lives on through the shift that is the postmodern.

The first example of postmodern virtuosity I consider here consists of a very limited use of movement that nevertheless emphasizes visual aspects of musical performance. When playing certain musical works, the eighth blackbird performers will arrange themselves on stage in such a way as to invoke a particular idea or concept believed to exist within the musical work itself. At the same Ithaca concert in which eighth blackbird performed the Mantovani piece discussed above, the evening opened with Fabian Svensson's *Two Sides*. At this and several other concerts that featured the same program, the performers arranged themselves in two distinct inward facing groups: flute, percussion, and violin stage left and bass clarinet, cello, and piano stage right (See Figure 3.2).



Figure 2.2: Physical arrangement of players used for Svensson's *Two Sides. eighth blackbird* shown here in rehearsal for the 2013 Ithaca College of Music performance. Photo by author.

Though not called for explicitly in the score, the arrangement was meant to emphasize the fact that Svensson had written a piece in which these two groups seemed to fight against each other. In performance, the first group (flute, percussion and violin) walked on stage and, without bowing to the audience applause, began the piece. The members of the second group of musicians did not enter the stage until immediately before the beginning of their respective parts. Near the end of the work, musicians exited once their respective parts concluded (rather than waiting until the end of the piece). Other than these movements, performers employed the same approach to physical movement as that found within the *Mantovani*.

In their reviews of semi-choreographed performances, critics often understood the added visual aspects of *eighth blackbird*'s performance as intertwined with the work itself, though such movement where not added by the composer. Writing for the website *Chamber Musician Today*, Thomas Deneuille wrote:

The concert opened with *Two Sides* for sextet by Swedish composer Fabian Svensson. This antagonistic piece split the sextet in two trios facing each other: high pitched vs. low pitched. A game of question and answer quickly settled and since the material was pretty much the same in both camps (highly triadic) the piece moved to a rhetoric[al] plane: a power struggle, with delightful frictions and dynamic contrasts. Somehow the two parts couldn't reach an agreement and the performers left the stage one by one, leaving the stubborn piccolo arguing with the piano that eventually also gave up (Deneuve, 2011).

Here, Deneuve describes *Two Sides* and eighth blackbird's performance in a way that points to a blended concept of the work/performance binary. For the critic, music and performer choreography merge together, as in his statement that "the two parts couldn't reach an agreement and the performers left the stage one by one." From Deneuve's description, the added choreography does not distract, but merges with the work proper in the expression of the idea of an argument.

A second example of postmodern virtuosity features a much more integrated use of performer-added choreography. Performer movement in pieces which feature choreography throughout necessarily blend musical work with performer body. Performers often defend such choreography as a hermeneutic designed to enhance "the music," but the choreography seen in, for example, Bermel's *Tied Shifts* can also constitute a more dramatic reconfiguration of the relationship between performer and composer. Choreographed performances of *Tied Shifts* require that we view the bodies of the performers as central to an understanding of the significance of the sounds heard, and "musical" sound blends with "visual" performance. Reviews of this work often map onto this dual perspective: sometimes critics see the choreography as implicitly part of the work, and at other times they see it as distracting. Such perspectives are themselves either celebrations of postmodern virtuosity that embrace the visual, or implied endorsements of modernist virtuosity in which performers refrain

from added movement. In a 2006 performance at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art (a favourite venue for eighth blackbird), performers moved about the stage as they performed. In a review of this concert, theatre critic for the Chicago Sun-Times Hedy Weiss wrote, "The staggeringly difficult work was full of ingenious 'conversations,' with the musicians ... often walking around to create wonderfully theatrical closeup [sic] encounters with each other" (Weiss, 2006). This positive review of the eighth blackbird performance stands in stark contrast to the negative reviews of music critic Mark Swed (see Chapter 2), who referred to the choreography as "Mickey-Mousing every musical gesture" (Swed, 2005). For Swed, choreography was a distraction from the musical work while Weiss positioned eighth blackbird's choreography as central to her consideration of the work itself. *Tied Shifts* is "full of ingenious 'conversations,'" a view that necessarily invokes the choreography employed by the ensemble. The contrasting reviews of eighth blackbird's performances express contrasting understandings of the proper role of performers and music. Weiss adopts a more postmodern perspective in which work and performance are intimately interwoven, while Swed's view relies on a modernist Cartesian understanding of the performer-work relationship.

Considering choreographed movement as integral to the musical work itself positions performers' bodies as part of the work presented, rather than part of a unique performance ontologically distinct from the autonomous work. In the 2006 performance, the instrumentalists entered the stage only immediately prior to their specific entrances, as in Svensson's *Two Sides*. While the cellist, pianist and percussionist were more confined in their movements because of the requirements of their instruments, all members moved with considerable freedom, variously huddling

together or standing apart. In the second movement, piano, cello and violin played a long sustained theme while the percussion added dramatic high-hat rolls and the flute and clarinet executed rapid scalar runs that embellished the long sustained theme. The clarinetist and flutist stood off to the side of the stage, positioning themselves out of the way of the musicians with the long note theme. For this brief moment, the performers stood still. Because of the frequent movement enacted by the performers up to this point, their stillness here dramatically reinforces the sonic impact of the themes' appearance. The unison statement in violin, cello and piano stands out, grabbing our attention sonically as well as visually.

Considered in the terms outlined by Fisher and Lohead (2002), what, precisely, differentiates a "musical" from a "performative" gesture? If, according to the musicians of eighth blackbird, their movements are "musical," then distinguishing between these two categories is impossible. To do so would be to interpret the *Tied Shifts* performance in modernist terms that prohibit consideration of the body as seen in Mark Swed's review). This example constitutes a significant shift away from the restrained movement seen in Mantovani's piece. Where for that work performers all stayed put and any movement figured as separate from the work proper, in this choreographed performance of *Tied Shifts* the physical movement of the performance becomes key in our understanding of the work. The choreographed movement of *Tied Shifts*, its origins in the decisions of the performers, and its power to shape our understanding of the work itself all signal a shift away from a Cartesian modernist model toward a postmodern virtuosity in which work and performance are much more blended.

To a certain extent, performer movement is still motivated by the structure of the piece in question, as in the Mantovani. I doubt that the performers would, for example, swap instruments or execute some other type of performative feat typically associated with musical virtuosity. However, in choreographed performances such as this one, describing the “structure” of the piece necessarily entails a consideration of the bodies of the performers. Take, for example, the above cited passage in which the clarinetist and flutist stand to the side of the stage. If the clarinetist and flutist were to stand stage front, facing the audience, their parts would seem not to be peripheral embellishment, but rather musically central to that particular section. No longer physically subservient to the main themes, the winds might be seen as equals or even more important than the musicians playing the long theme.

In this way, performer movement can be seen to signal a move toward dual authorship. The ensemble’s choreography and their interpretive choices become bound up in Bermel’s work proper, in the notion of the work itself. In this case, virtuosity shapes the musical experience not simply through the channels of work/performer, but through an added layer of physical gestural meaning taken in visually as well as aurally. To some extent, this is true of classical music virtuosi normally, but in *Tied Shifts*, the combined invocation of the aural and the visual necessarily entails a challenge to the Cartesian terms of most classical performances. In choreographed performances, performers have gone beyond the layer of interpretation theorized, for example, by Naomi Cumming (2000), as explained above. When describing conventional, modernist virtuosity, critics speak of Hilary Hahn’s Beethoven Concerto, or Itzak Perlman’s Brahms Sonata. But such constructions rarely consider visual elements in great detail, and certainly not as central to an understanding of the

performer's identity. In contrast, eighth blackbird's *Tied Shifts* is a spectacle, and musical sounds are rendered solid in the bodies of the performers. Their contributions change musical work into physical drama, and eighth blackbird's collective identity is both visual and sonic. Rather than an added veneer of performative interpretation, the musicians' choreographed movements place them on equal footing with the composer of this work, Derek Bermel. By foregrounding performers' movement to such an extent, eighth blackbird become co-authors with the composer. To remove the visual would be to remove a major part of their interpretive contribution, tantamount to changing *Tied Shifts* from a musical and visual display back into a solely sonic work.

A third example of postmodern virtuosity manifests in works created with movement in mind from the very beginning. Throughout their career, the musicians of eighth blackbird have commissioned works that amount to semi-theatrical pieces, collaborating with choreographers, composers, and, as the need arises, other artists. In such pieces, it is impossible to consider the work without at least some understanding of how performers move in performance. Such shows, presented in the context of the classical music stage, constitute an overt shift toward the postmodern. *Colombine's Paradise Theatre* (CPT), for example, was designed to be a work of theatre. In a post on eighth blackbird's blog *thirteen ways*, Kirsten and DeChiazza explain:

The music of CPT plays with, among other things, the concept of musical movement. Much of the music is composed with its physicality in mind, so much so that it's not only musical ideas that make up the fabric of the piece, but also the body movements required to play particular gestures. Inextricably linked to sound, these physical gestures are treated compositionally throughout. The music and the staging, developed in cooperation with eighth blackbird, are geared to the particular talents of the individual players. Kirsten drew inspiration from each of the instrumentalists and designed the sound world – and the characters – around an expanded palette that often merges the players' voices with played parts, creating an amalgam of character/instrument/body/voice (Kirsten & DeChiazza, 2013).

Here we see the creators consciously employing both physical gesture and musical gesture in the construction of the work itself. The piece is designed to incorporate the visual domain of physical movement as an integral part of the musical structure. Performers are not simply skilled interpreters, they are co-authors “creating an amalgam of character/instrument/body/voice.” Toward this end, the piece was constructed over the course of six workshops where the choreographer, composer, and performers all collaborated closely to construct the performances seen in the fall of 2013. This approach differs dramatically from the type of that of Mantovani, for example. In *Chamber Concerto No. 2*, a work is handed down to performers for rendition. Performers’ interpretations of Mantovani’s piece result in a sonic identity that, while intimately bound up with the work, remains in many ways distinct from the work. In *Colombine’s Paradise Theatre*, mind and body are blended from the very beginning. The work calls for the musicians to act out, in costume, scenes between Colombine, Pierrot, and Harlequin. The musicians become characters engaged in communication through song, movement, and music.

This type of integration of performers, set design, costume, and story initially appear to be more or less in keeping with the *gesamtkunstwerk* concept initially posited by Wagner, suggesting it might not be as new as it appears. However, where Wagner saw his singers as conduits designed to reproduce the “composer’s thought,” Kirsten and DeChiazza wrote *Colombine’s Paradise Theatre* with the individuality and physicality of the performers in mind (Wagner, 1973). Furthermore, the performative habitus of the classical music concert stage of is not, after all, the same as that of the opera house. While the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a part of the operatic tradition and foundational to

aesthetic modernism (Shaw-Miller, 2002), the total art-work is not normally thought of as part of the classical music performative habitus.⁴³ Being able to act, sing, and move, all while performing your instrument at a high level is not, after all, part of the training of classical music virtuosi. In this, eighth blackbird's performance constitutes a virtuosity quite different from the modernist virtuosity taught in the classical conservatory or found on Wagner's stage. The postmodern virtuoso must be able to move, act, sing, and play his instruments exceptionally well, able to invoke the visual and the sonic simultaneously without apparent difficulty.

The Limits of Postmodern Virtuosity

In spite of the possibilities for performer transgression seen in the choreographed works discussed above, descriptions of these performances nevertheless frequently invoke a Cartesian split between work and performer. A positive review of a choreographed 2013 performance of *Tied Shifts* described performers' movements as "animating the score in a most amusing fashion" that "acted out the gradual buildup [sic] and variation in the work" (Dunn, 2013). Such remarks demonstrate the persistence of the idea of the autonomous work. In a similar vein, critics reviewing performances of *Colombine's Paradise Theatre* wrote in such a way as to position the concert hall as a sort of psychological mind space. Washington Post critic Stephen Brookes wrote:

⁴³ For a detailed explanation of Wagner's sung drama and its relationship to modernism, anti-modernism, and postmodernism, see Simon Shaw-Miller's (2002, pp. 210-211) *Visible Deeds of Music*. Shaw-Miller explores the relationships and differences between Wagner's opera and the kinds of intermedia works created by John Cage and other Fluxus artists.

“Columbine” [sic] unfolds with the seamless, compelling logic of a dream.... When the lights come up at the end, you feel as though you’ve awoken from some strange, ancient ritual—and you want to go back (Brookes, 2013).

In both cases, the work is conceived of as relatively autonomous from the specific environmental or performative context. Such comments echo historical modernist descriptions of the concert hall as a space outside of time or place that facilitates a sense of psychological departure. Adorno, for example described the concert experience in terms that parallel Brookes’ review:

The dispute whether music can portray anything definite, or is only a play of sound-patterns in motion, no doubt misses the point. A far closer parallel is with dream, to the form of which, as Romanticism well knew, music is in many ways so close.... While the music lasts we are in it as we are in dream (Adorno, 1998, pp. 7-8).

In light of Adorno’s remarks, the reviews of *Colombine’s Paradise Theatre* and the persistence of the notion of the autonomous work point to the lingering legacy of musical modernism and its habitus in today’s new music scene. Whether performances blend musical mind-work with performance-body-interpretation, the concert hall remains a space of contemplation and consideration.

Both the concert hall and the autonomous work-concept must thus be understood as integral to the construction of postmodern virtuosity. Despite the power of the *Tied Shifts* example (as well as other similar performances given by eighth blackbird), the virtuosity of the performers continues to rely on the constraints of the classical music habitus. While it is this habitus that provides the means for the production of postmodern virtuosity, it is also a habitus that continues to encourage distinctions between work and performance. Whether in *Colombine’s Paradise Theatre* or in *Tied Shifts*, the power of eighth blackbird’s performances necessarily relies on a space sonically isolated from the outside world that disciplines the bodies of both

listeners and performers. After all, our ability to comprehend *Tied Shifts*, with or without choreography, relies on our ability to hear its sounds. Substituting a different musical work would dramatically change the meaning of the movements seen in performance, and hearing in a space entirely different from a concert hall would change how we conceive of the work. If *Tied Shifts* or *Colombine's Paradise Theatre* were, for example, presented in an un-staged setting such as a park or forest, the interaction between sight and sound would be lost, and the defining characteristics of the work would slip from consciousness, resulting in a dramatically different concept of what a performance of these pieces would mean and what our role as listeners would be. The concert hall remains implicit to the ontological categories of both "work" and "performer" and remains foundational to the construction of postmodern virtuosity.

"Virtuosity," as an identity assigned to performers, necessarily relies on a series of unspoken norms, and on a habitus of the concert hall: a distinction between performer and audience and the focused and undivided attention of the relatively docile audience. Performer movement, even when constitutive of the musical work proper, remains by and large determined by the musical score, even when the performance itself erases or confuses easy distinctions between the work/mind versus text/performer binaries. A version of the work concept thus continues to exist in postmodern virtuosity, as it does in modernist virtuosity. In postmodern virtuosity, however, "the work" is necessarily enmeshed with the performer's bodies and gestures in an explicit manner, though we may continue to distinguish between performance and work. Thus certain limits remain in place for eighth blackbird's virtuosity, limits that provide the very means with which to construct virtuosic performances. The concert hall and its habitus also limit the friendly aspects of eighth blackbird's friendly

virtuosity, relegating friendliness to the promotional register. Modernist virtuosity may be challenged, but its legacy in the concert hall also pushes the musicians to remain focused on attending to the “needs” of musical works.

Leaving the Concert Hall, Losing Virtuosity

In order to further understand how the classical music habitus constructs virtuosity, it is useful to consider performances and works that move beyond its spatial and conceptual borders. While the majority of eighth blackbird’s performances consist of renditions of works in concert halls, the musicians have on occasion performed in spaces that could under no circumstances be construed as a concert hall. In such instances, virtuosity dissolves from consideration because its foundational boundaries are no longer in place.

As a case study, I turn to a 2009 performance of *Inuksuit* (2009) by John Luther Adams, which featured eighth blackbird and some seventy other performers for the 2011 Tune-In Festival at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City. As curators for the festival, the eighth blackbird musicians were responsible for programming music and hiring performers. The ensemble chose to perform this piece with performers arranged and moving about throughout the Armory, a 55,000 square foot building originally built as a drill hall for Civil War soldiers. Over the course of about eighty-five minutes, performers and audience members wandered around the Armory listening to the sounds produced by musicians. Examining the nature of this piece and the discourse surrounding it provides a case study in which the technical prowess of performers fades away in experiences with this work. In the absence of a stable work or a setting in which to perceive such a work, virtuosity cannot manifest.

Written for a percussion ensemble of “nine to ninety-nine performers,” *Inuksuit* does not exist as a stable work easily analyzed through a reading of a score. Indeed, there is no proper score for the piece, simply instructions and a collection of musical parts for the performers. This piece dissolves performer identity because it is, effectively, a conglomeration of solos. Composer John Luther Adams described it thusly:

[E]ach of the players is a soloist. Each is a solitary figure in the larger landscape.... [A]nd...each player has a different sort of instrument; they're tuned differently; they're using different notes, but each player [in *Inuksuit*] has a different touch and a different sound and that was such a beautiful thing to hear, whereas so often we're going for a blend, an homogenous sound (S. R. Smith, Adams, & Schick, 2009).

Inuksuit is not a stable work to be described. Rather, it is a study in place and individuality, a conscious attempt to invoke the site-specific politics of its environment. The piece can be absorbed by the environment in which it appears, a point acknowledged by Adams when he describes the experience that led to the creation of *Inuksuit*—an outdoor performance of *Strange and Sacred Noise* (1991-97). Originally written for a concert hall performance by a percussion quartet, Adams and director of the Banff Music Festival Steven Schick decided to try performing *Strange and Sacred Noise* outside on the Alaskan tundra. According to Adams, this changed the piece dramatically:

You hear *Strange and Sacred Noise* inside and it's big, it's complex, it's dark, it's overwhelming. It's at times frightening. And hearing it outside it's different. It's smaller. Some of it blows away in the wind. And it's very beautiful, but it's very, very different (E. Hurd, 2009).

This site-specificity is also central to *Inuksuit*. Because it incorporates the sonic environment of different places, different performances of *Inuksuit* in fact constitute

different *Inuksuits*. Any description of “the work” outside of a specific performance is inherently incomplete. This is true of other pieces as well, but for *Inuksuit*, such incompleteness is literally part of the experience built into performances of the piece.

Descriptions of the performance of *Inuksuit* at the Park Avenue Armory are reflective of the malleable, incomplete, and site-specific aspects of this work. In a lengthy review for MusicWebInternational.com, Bruce Hodges described the work as deeply enmeshed with the physical and acoustic properties of the Armory:

As the audience milled around the space, the 4:00 P.M. hour arrived, and quiet descended as the 72 percussionists took their places. First came air, aspirated through dozens of paper megaphones and creating a vast swooshing sound throughout the hall—as if the Armory had become a giant lung—coupled with the tribal horn blasts of conch shells. But soon the delicate palette began to thicken as drums, bells and cymbals entered. As time passed, the ante was upped again and again and again, until at about the halfway point, the hall became an aural thicket of bass drums, gongs and sirens, reaching an inescapable decibel level. (Some had fingers over their ears, but even I—normally sensitive to these things—had little trouble simply giving in to the throbbing texture.) Eventually the texture calms back down to a trickle of triangles, tiny bells and silence.

At the composer’s suggestion, audience members (perhaps 1,000 or so) wandered around the premises, each one snagging a unique aural snapshot; there was no “right” place to be. Even venturing into the Armory’s antechambers and hallways brought pleasure, discovering single musicians in out-of-the-way corners, creating intimate foreground solos, against a sonic backdrop of the enormous forces heard in the distance. Meanwhile, people listened intently, silently greeted friends, or smiled at strangers. The social aspect of this piece was equally intriguing (S. Smith, 2011).

Stable identities, whether performer or work-based, fail to figure in Hodges review because *Inuksuit* does not engender them. Rather, audiences spent their time “snagging a unique aural snapshot” as they wandered around the space. Instead of musical counterpoint or descriptions of certain styles, we read about hallways and corners—architectural features rendered musical. There is, ultimately, no single “work” to be experienced. This sentiment was expressed in a different review of this same

performance by Steve Smith of the *New York Times*: “But in effect, ‘Inuksuit’ is more like a natural process” (Hodges, 2011). Both Hodges’ and Smith’s reviews recall Simon Shaw-Miller’s description of art by John Cage:

the performance, or concert occasion, is to be viewed as a complex field of activities — visual, textual, and sonorous — one that, among other things, understands the concept of music as a discourse. That is, the performance exists as a conceptual constellation, orbiting sound but including the scaffolding that is necessary for the sound to exist (Shaw-Miller, 2002, 201).

Inuksuit is certainly a “complex field of activities” that necessarily includes “the scaffolding that is necessary for the sound to exist.” Both Smith and Hodges describe points in the performance in which the volume of sound became overwhelming because of its reverberation within the Park Avenue Armory. In an outdoor concert, such a build up of sound might not even occur, depending on the arrangement of performers.

Virtuosity cannot appear in the type of experiences engendered by an anti-modernist piece such as *Inuksuit*. Where performances of *Tied Shifts*, Mantovani’s *Chamber Concerto No. 2*, or *Colombine’s Paradise Theatre* all resulted in the presentation and perception of a performative identity and work concept, in *Inuksuit*, these concepts are ultimately illegible because the work itself is too unstable to be differentiated from the performance in question. Indeed, the only stable ontology engendered by *Inuksuit* is the context of its rendition: in this case, the Park Avenue Armory itself, which is itself transformed, in Hodges words, into “a giant lung.”

A performer/listener divide remains present, and performers certainly consulted parts for instructions (though many memorized their parts and improvised accordingly). Adams and his reviewers speak of “the work” without self-consciousness. However, delineating between the work and its rendition is extremely difficult,

perhaps even impossible, precisely because *Inuksuit* is designed to be integrated in a particular instance. The division between work and performer dissolves into a conglomeration of sound and context. Written musical instructions do determine performer movement to some extent, but that movement is much freer than that found in either the Mantovani or in *Colombine's Paradise Theatre*. The space of *Inuksuit's* performance determines movement at least as much as any written instructions. A performer's choice to wander up some stairs is different but ultimately as valid as a choice to move toward one of the bass drums.

Virtuosity, as an index of performer skill and relative transgressiveness, is not a part of this performance because we have left the habitus required to produce it. Without a traditional concert hall and without a stable work differentiated from musicians' choices, virtuosity loses legibility. It might be argued that *Inuksuit* represents virtuosity in the sense that it involves a great deal of labour on the part of performers, like virtuosity. But much of the work involved in constructing a performance of *Inuksuit* is readily viewable in performance. Rather than distracting us from the work, we see and hear the performers' physical arrangement in space as integral to *Inuksuit*. Indexing the "sonic self" of the performer, the degree to which his or her personal performance choices add or distract from the work itself becomes very difficult to quantify. Who's to say, for example, whether percussionist A's rendition of a bass drum solo is better than percussionist B's? Are Tom's wind sounds better—or more "virtuosic"—than Matt's? In a piece in which "each of the players is a soloist," individualism dissolves into a mass of sounding place. If anything, the Park Avenue Armory is the soloist—the identity constructed through sounding bodies.

Conclusion

eight blackbird's virtuosity relies upon the habitus of the classical music stage, either directly or in a self-conscious refutation, for part of the meaning ascribed to the music and to the performers. The concert stage and the sociocultural values surrounding it are the channels through which musicians achieve musical virtuosity. As a cultural identity, virtuosity in art music originates as much from the restraint of movement as from the use of excess movement. In the context of classical music, postmodern virtuosity remains in tension with the confines of the concert hall and virtuosity itself disciplines even as it seems to free. When we leave the concert hall and its autonomous works, virtuosity falls away completely. By analyzing eight blackbird performances as comprised of embodied knowledge, we see how both modernist and postmodern virtuosity are embodied states resultant from the choices of performers. Performers themselves are complicit in the disciplinary power of the concert stage, not merely subservient to it.

We also see how postmodern virtuosity necessarily relies on certain legacies of the modernist tradition: the silence of the concert hall, the distinction between audience and performers, and a relatively stable concept of the "work" (whether incorporated with musicians' bodies and movement, or distinct from such concerns). Even postmodern virtuosity must not "show too much." We do not see, for example, the musicians eating or dressing before the concert or the composer printing off parts or the ushers folding programs. Our attention is meant to point toward very specific phenomena.

Examining the range of performances eight blackbird presents at any given time demonstrates how the postmodern can be understood as a set of practices that

maps on to modernism even as it seems to contradict it. Postmodern virtuosity fits rather well into a concert hall designed for attentive modernist structural listening. Furthermore, the range of reactions engendered by the choreographing of concert performances reveals the limits of performers to affect wholesale change in cultural ideologies. Modernist concepts of music as a disembodied autonomous force continue to circulate in spite of postmodern virtuosity's attempts to highlight the bodies required to produce it. Despite such resistance, postmodern virtuosity represents a significant challenge to the very idea of autonomous music.

Postmodern virtuosity is thus the result of an unspoken negotiation between conflicting aesthetic tenets. This negotiation is itself foundational to the postmodern avant-garde more generally. As we will see in Chapter 4, eighth blackbird is not alone in engaging issues of work autonomy, audience outreach, and attempts to render musical modernism legible to postmodern audiences. Furthermore, the postmodern avant-garde is not simply a roster of musicians and critics seeking to change the classical music scene. Rather, it is the result of a series of choices and reactions. When we attend an eighth blackbird concert, we necessarily enter into an ideological space where the values of high aesthetic modernism (musical autonomy, subjective interiority, structural listening, disciplined movement) are both invoked and challenged by various strategies. Our responses to such strategies place us variously at odds or aligned with the ensemble. It is this site and these reactions that constitute the postmodern avant-garde. As a way to better understand this site, I turn in the next chapter to a detailed examination of a single massive outdoor concert in which all of these values were both invoked and challenged.

Chapter 4

Toward a Postmodern Avant-Garde: “Chicago Counterpoint,” Modernist Ritual, and New Music for the Masses

On a summer evening in August 2011, I sat amongst several thousand people in Chicago’s Pritzker Pavilion listening to Steve Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976). The piece was the highlight of the concert. Many had gathered in Millennium Park to hear *Music for 18* and other works by the famed minimalist composer performed in this unique open-air venue. This free concert, originally conceived by composer and sound engineer Ryan Ingebritsen and percussionist David Skidmore, was a collaboration between eighth blackbird (for whom Ingebritsen often runs electrical sound design), Third Coast Percussion, New Music Chicago (a collective of Chicago-based new music ensembles) and the Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture. They titled the concert “Chicago Counterpoint: A Steve Reich Celebration.” I listened from the red seats of the Pavilion, an area referred to as the “bowl” by event staff. Many more people spread out on the lawn behind the seats (See Figures 4.1 and 4.2).



Figure 4.1: The formal seating area, or "bowl," of Pritzker Pavilion on the day of the Chicago Counterpoint concert. Photo by author.



Figure 4.2: The lawn of Pritzker Pavilion on the day of Chicago Counterpoint. Photo by author.

From my seat, I could see the audience and the glowing city lights, as well as the last remnants of the fading day. The piece concluded with a very gradual decrescendo, a gesture that, in this particular venue, created the sense that the music was dissolving into night—into the quiet roar of Chicago’s night-time soundscape. Once *Music for 18 Musicians* came to an end, stillness hung momentarily before cheers began to punctuate

the night. The audience started to applaud, and their overwhelming appreciation became increasingly apparent as the din of clapping grew.

After several minutes of cheering, the lights in Pritzker Pavilion went out, and a new work began, Reich's tape loop piece *It's Gonna Rain* (1965). Because the bowl closed at dusk, guards also began ushering people out of the Pavilion's formal seating area, though many stayed on the lawn behind the seats. Considerable controversy resulted from this. Many audience members were uncertain about whether or not the concert had actually ended. Others objected to the performance of *It's Gonna Rain* because it disrupted the pleasurable silence achieved by the end of *Music for 18 Musicians*. One audience member went so far as to e-mail concert organizers directly, stating:

I thoroughly enjoyed the Steve Reich celebration last night. *Music for 18 Musicians* was magical. And then, you chose to follow it (with anything, frankly) with that awful, tedious, skree [sic] of a sound piece. While I otherwise enjoyed the tape/sound design pieces, this one completely wrecked the mood. It was a terrible programming decision to put anything after that masterwork, and it put an unneeded, unwanted, uncomfortable edge on what was otherwise a wonderful evening of music (Anonymous, e-mail to eighth blackbird, August 28 2011. Used with permission).

Several of the organizers agreed with this listener, and the decision was later the subject of a somewhat heated exchange in meetings. Yet at the same time, many critics, musicians and audience members spoke of the concert in glowing terms, praising organizers, the music, and the venue as facilitating a once in a lifetime experience.

These mixed reactions, and my experience that night, raise a series of questions that together reveal some of the most significant challenges faced by the postmodern avant-garde. What unspoken expectations did *Music for 18 Musicians* create that were disturbed by *It's Gonna Rain*? What led organizers to program *It's Gonna Rain* after

Music for 18 Musicians? Indeed, what kind of concert was this supposed to be? A classical music concert, an edgier new music concert, or some combination of the two? How did the park inform the reception of this music? How do you introduce minimalist music to an audience potentially unfamiliar with this repertoire?

In this unusual concert, we see eighth blackbird engaged in the “tug of war,” as flutist Tim Munro put it in Chapter 2, between a commitment to aesthetic modernism and a desire to build contemporary audiences. In fact, the nature of the collaboration that produced Chicago Counterpoint directly addresses this conflict. Part of the challenge of this concert was the need to negotiate between the various goals of the concert organizers. According to Director of Special Programs for the Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture, Lacey Capps, Chicago Counterpoint provided an opportunity to add new music to the park’s Dusk Variation concert series: names like Steve Reich and eighth blackbird, it was hoped, would help draw a large crowd (personal communication, November 15, 2011). Her objective was ultimately a promotional one. In contrast, Ryan Ingebritsen was more focused on presenting adaptations of Reich’s tape pieces made for Pritzker Pavilion’s speaker system; his was thus more focused on specific aesthetic goals. Finally, eighth blackbird attempted to negotiate the objectives of broadening new music’s popular appeal and promoting its aesthetic ideals. The sextet attempted to offer both a promotional and an aesthetic experience through the use of the repertoire, concert structure, and venue.

Tensions between competing modern and postmodern objectives shaped the very structure of Chicago Counterpoint. Drawing on my experiences at the concert and interviews with participants, I examine this concert in three stages, beginning with musical experience and moving outward from there. First, I focus on repertoire and

the structuring devices used to frame the concert ritual. The varied reactions to this concert are, I propose, the result of a disruption to the proper structure of the classical music concert ritual, a ritual based on modernist tenets such as structural listening and subjective interiority. *It's Gonna Rain* violated unspoken but widely held expectations about how music ought to be presented and how the concert in general should progress. In the second stage, I move outward to consider the context in which the music was presented, examining the rhetoric of the Master of Ceremonies Fred Child, the concert's setting in Pritzker Pavilion, and the way musicians view this venue. Because it allows for both formal and informal seating (facilitated by the bowl seats and the lawn, respectively), many people working in classical music see Pritzker Pavilion as a means to reach out to new audiences while preserving the modernist values of classical music. Chicago Counterpoint was designed to advertise new music to a broader public, a goal that pushed organizers to structure the concert using the type of promotionalism and passive listening found in malls and other retail spaces (DeNora & Belcher, 2000; Sterne, 1997). Furthermore, organizers sought to promote not simply the music of Steve Reich, but the modernist structure of the classical music concert in general. In the third stage, I move outward yet further to analyze the significance of Pritzker Pavilion's location. Situated in one of the busiest tourist destinations of Chicago, Millennium Park, the Pavilion evokes a thoroughly postmodern experience, surrounded by sites of postmodern art and commerce. Viewed from these three perspectives, from the level of the "music itself" to the broader level of geographic location, I argue that Chicago Counterpoint blended modernist aesthetics with postmodern promotionalism. The concert attempted to facilitate subjective experiences found within modernist art music rituals while simultaneously packaging

those experiences to appeal to tourists and shoppers. Reich's music and the concert ritual became, in effect, one more postmodern commodity available to visitors and shoppers along Chicago's "Magnificent Mile" of stores, museums, and other attractions. Thus, this concert serves as a large-scale expression of the values of the postmodern avant-garde, and a way to understand how eighth blackbird and others negotiate the tensions that manifest between different parties and competing agendas.

"Chicago Counterpoint: A Steve Reich Celebration" as Ritual

Designed to express the various positions of the postmodern avant-garde, Chicago Counterpoint attempted to combine several aesthetic positions in a single concert. The controversy described in my introduction resulted, I argue, from creation and subsequent violation of unspoken conventions commonly found within many classical and new music concerts. In order to understand these conventions and how they shaped the experiences of many performers and audience members, I analyze Chicago Counterpoint as a ritual. Until *It's Gonna Rain* began, Chicago Counterpoint relied on key structuring devices of the classical music concert ritual that fulfill modernist beliefs in autonomous music and subjective interiority. Examining Chicago Counterpoint as a modernist ritual explains why *It's Gonna Rain* caused such negative reactions among concertgoers and musicians.

My use of the concept of ritual here draws on a specific theoretical construct. Musicians and academics have used the term "ritual" to describe both the performance event as a whole and its constituent parts (Bohlman, 1991; Cottrell, 2004; Kingsbury, 1988; Small, 1987, 1998). I use the term here to describe an activity offset from normal daily practices. This distinction follows Catherine Bell's theorization of ritual as "a way

of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful” (Bell, 1992, p. 90). Thus, Stephen Cottrell (2004) theorizes the orchestral concert of Western art music as comprised of a set of “ritualized behaviours” that establish a privileged contrast between the concert and the rest of everyday life. He argues that though the concert ritual may constitute a common occurrence and part of the everyday life of performing musicians, venue personnel, and regular attendees, it nevertheless consists of structuring devices that offset it from the everyday. The purchasing of tickets, the special silence found in the concert hall, and ceremonial applause all serve as structuring behaviours that create the ritual. These aspects of the ritual all contribute to the fulfillment of enduring modernist tenets such as structural listening and subjective interiority (see Chapters 2 and 3). The classical music ritual remains modernist, and one of the goals of the concert organizers at Chicago Counterpoint was to engender an experience of music on these modernist terms.

By applying Cottrell’s theory to the Chicago Counterpoint concert, we can see how this performance operated according to a set of widely known conventions found at many classical or new music concerts. As in Cottrell’s theorized concert, participants at the Millennium Park concert, especially the performers and audience members in the bowl, acted in ways that established a “privileged contrast” to normal life. Within the history of aesthetic modernism and the museum culture of classical music (see Chapter 2), this privileged contrast fulfills the desire for autonomy central to modernist notions of art. Thus, sitting quietly and listening to music is meant to allow for an experience of intellectual and musical contemplation rarely available in normal life.

Chicago Counterpoint exhibited the three-tiered structure of ritual outlined by Cottrell. Drawing on the work of Victor Turner and others, Cottrell posits three phases: preliminoid, liminoid, and postliminoid. The preliminoid stage includes the symbolic separation of one group from another. In the concert ritual, this separation isolates the ritual subjects from everyday life. Normally in the concert ritual the audience would spend the preliminoid phase in the foyer of a concert hall and performers would remain sequestered off stage and out of sight (Cottrell, 2004). Pritzker Pavilion has no foyer, though performers did remain out of sight, waiting in the wings of the stage. Reich's tape piece *Come Out*, the concert's "sonic prelude" (as sound engineer Ryan Ingebritsen described it to me) can be understood as having established an imaginary sonic foyer to stand in place of a physical foyer (e-mail message to author, March 15, 2013). The work signalled to participants that they were, potentially, leaving their normal social roles and becoming, variously, audience members, performers, or concert hosts. Scheduled to begin at 6:30 P.M., organizers used *Come Out* to signal the informal beginning of the concert. During the concert, I sat with members of the Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture and helped administer their questionnaires. As I walked through the bowl toward my position at the table, I observed event staff and audience members either casually milling about or listening quietly. The staff I met at the table were comfortable talking during this portion of the concert, though they would later refrain from talking whenever performers were on stage. This period of time thus represented the preliminoid stage of the concert ritual, a time when participants prepared themselves for the roles they would perform during the concert ritual.

After this introductory preliminoid stage, musicians and audience members entered the liminoid phase of the concert ritual, a phase that allowed for the fulfillment of modernist practices and values such as subjective interiority and structural listening. This phase represents the heart of the ritual event. During the liminoid stage, the normal roles of all are suspended as they experience musical works through attentive listening. The deportment of the audience and musicians during the performances of acoustic works was typical of behaviour found in the liminoid stage of the concert ritual. Following *Come Out*, audience members applauded as Lacey Capps took the stage and gave an official welcome, signalling the formal beginning of the concert. Once she began speaking, audience chatter within the bowl diminished significantly, and those audience members who did speak did so discreetly. The audience became even more subdued when Master of Ceremonies Fred Child took to the stage, and they remained quiet during the performances of Reich's *Mallet Quartet* (2009) and *Double Sextet* (2008) that followed. However, during the performance of the tape piece *Melodica* (1966) that followed these live works, the casual atmosphere I witnessed during the performance of *Come Out* resumed. At that time, audience members approached our table to ask for information. Staff and audience members spoke in normal conversational tones. Many participants thus treated *Melodica* as a sort of intermission piece. While the use of music during intermission is rare in classical music, the lack of performers on stage seemed to signal a break in the concert ritual. Once the tape piece ended, Fred Child returned to the stage, was greeted with applause, and the conventional, formal structure of the concert resumed with the beginning of *Music for 18 Musicians*.

In this way, the live music performed at Chicago Counterpoint functioned as many outdoor concerts in similar parks have for decades. A group of highly trained musicians presented renditions of works by employing a ritual structure designed to fulfill modernist ideals of structural listening. While the musical text shaped experiences that ultimately differed from, say, a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the social structure employed to frame those experiences was largely the same. The tape pieces, however, seemed to figure only peripherally in Chicago Counterpoint. Unlike the acoustic works, Master of Ceremonies Fred Child never introduced or commented upon *Come Out, Melodica*, or *It's Gonna Rain*. Tape pieces seemed to function as reminders that a concert was underway but that audiences could relax a bit while performers were off-stage. In spite of this interstitial music, Chicago Counterpoint operated according to the received parameters of the classical music concert ritual.

The liminoid phase of the Chicago Counterpoint concert ritual allowed performers to shape subjectivity through sound and engendered the experience of *communitas*. Victor Turner has theorized this concept at length. He describes *communitas* as an "ecstatic state and sense of union (often lasting only a few seconds) [that] may be described as no more than a shiver running down the back at a certain point" (Turner, 1990, p. 13). The ritual functions to create this sense of union by providing a space—the liminoid phase—in which individuals can achieve the sensation of changing their experience of the world. Applying this idea to the orchestral concert, Cottrell (2004) argues that *communitas* occurs as the result of the deep attentive listening found within the classical music concert. While truly judging a person's experience of *communitas* is difficult, Cottrell argues that the stillness and silence of

audience members, especially immediately following the conclusion of musical works, evidences the achievement of a shared experience that remains shaped in part through private introspective engagement with musical works. During these moments, audience members move and speak very little, if at all. Such moments of stillness occurring during certain portions of the concert or immediately after the end of a musical work may be read as expressions of *communitas*. For many people, this feeling, the sense of having shared in something, indexes the success of the concert ritual. *Communitas* becomes a measure of the degree to which people listened to and thought about the music, as well as their positive reactions to the concert.

Based on my conversations with musicians and audience members, I argue that many at Chicago Counterpoint experienced *communitas* in terms that conformed to the expectations of the typical classical music concert. In one-on-one interviews after the concert, I asked the performers of *Music for 18 Musicians* to describe their experiences of that work in detail. Nearly all musicians described the sensation of losing track of normal time and entering into a special space inaccessible in daily life. Almost without fail, they described performing *Music for 18 Musicians* as feeling like they became part of something, as cellist Nick Photinos put it, “greater than the sum of its parts” (personal communication, December 4, 2011). Accompanying this imagery were descriptions of a confused sense of self. This experience was especially acute for pianist Amy Briggs who told me that in *Music for 18 Musicians*, “You lose awareness of yourself as a separate identity” because of the repetitive nature of the instrumental part (personal communication, October 1, 2011). For other performers, subjectivity waxed and waned as their parts included both constant repetition and abrupt harmonic or

textural shifts.⁴⁴ Photinos told me that such changes created feelings of catharsis, and described a point where “once I come in [it] makes everything more joyous. I’m more focused on what I feel there then what I’m doing.” For Photinos, the nature of the music itself engendered an experience of detached euphoria. Percussionist Robert Dillon described a similar connection between his sound on the xylophone and his sense of self (personal communication, February 9, 2012). One of four xylophone players, Dillon frequently played parts of musical patterns that interlock with the other xylophone parts. He told me that in *Music for 18 Musicians* “you sort of lose track that you’re playing half of these notes and another player is playing the other half,” a sensation that contribute to the sense that Robert is playing all the xylophone parts, “Like I am one hand and the other player is the other hand, like I’m playing all the notes.” In Reich’s piece, “We’re all part of one machine, you just start to hear” one continuous part. Marimba player David Skidmore similarly emphasized the communal nature of the work, stating, “it really feels like a community activity in a way that no other piece of classical music I’ve ever played does” (personal communication, December 6, 2011). eighth blackbird’s percussionist Matthew Duvall made exactly the same point in a recorded interview with Fred Child: “When you play the piece you are one part of a much greater whole” (M. Duvall interview by Fred Child, August 22,

⁴⁴ Understanding how performers connect their physical-aural experiences to their sense of subjectivity requires some elaboration. Within classical music, part of the goal of performance is to advance the idea of a viable subject. This subject is performed in part through the nuanced interpretation of musical works. Sonic gestures project an identity recognizable to discerning audience members. Naomi Cumming thus argues that “This interpretive identity can only exist in the way that [musicians] form sounds with interpretive nuance” (Cumming, 2000, pp. 27-28). However, the many nuances—tempo fluctuations, dynamic shifts, solo passages—described by Cumming and found in many other works hardly appear in Reich’s work. As a result, the potential for identity construction through nuanced interpretation is significantly decreased.

2011, eighth blackbird archives).⁴⁵ Lisa Kaplan, eighth blackbird's pianist who was also present in the interview with Child, quickly agreed.

These descriptions all point toward a process of change in which people become something other than their normal selves. Performers entered into a space outside of normal daily life and into a domain “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention,” as anthropologist Victor Turner famously put it (Turner, 1969, p. 95). In this state, performers transformed from distinct individuals into a sonic machine on display for thousands of audience members. Musicians seemed to engage in a union of music and community that lead to a sense of lost or fleeting subjectivity. The highly ordered ritual structure of the concert and the repetitive nature of Reich's music allowed for these experiences, and provided a legible cultural structure for those familiar with the performance of art music.

Audience members similarly described experiences of *communitas* in ways that signalled their adherence to the ritual structure of the modernist concert. Though different participants in the concert ritual experienced *communitas* in very different ways, they seemed to have enjoyed brief ecstatic unions, either with their fellow participants, their environment, with the musical sounds, or with some combination of these elements. In one review for the concert, Devin Hurd wrote for his popular blog,

Hurd Audio:

⁴⁵ Though they were intended for public broadcast, audio for the interviews between Fred Child and the performers are not publicly available. Despite the plans of concert producers, neither the concert nor the interviews were ever broadcast on *Performance Today*. On the day of the concert, eighth blackbird manager Jen Richards asked me to record the interviews and I obliged. With her permission, I kept a copy of the recordings and have transcribed them for this article. They should be read as public statements, as the musicians were told that the public, as part of the broadcast of the concert, would hear these interviews.

One could hear the gentle push and pull at the rhythmic pulse as the outstanding musicians of Eighth Blackbird [sic] and Third Coast Percussion collectively focused upon that all consuming pulsation. The sky darkened perceptibly over the span of this hour-long work. By the end, even the chirping crickets of the night had adjusted their own pulse to match.... [E]ach of these compositions overcame the challenges of being freed from the concert hall and recording studio and found a way to thrive as a music that builds toward transcendent experience (D. Hurd, 2011).

Devin's description of the blend of cricket sounds and musical pulses as well as his description of a "transcendent experience" both represent expressions of *communitas*. Similarly, the audience member who condemned *It's Gonna Rain* described his experience until that point as "magical." One audience member, a student composer who had travelled to town just for this concert described his experience in terms that echo Cottrell's theorization of musical *communitas*, saying that it was really exciting "being in a shared space with that many people into the same kind of music as I am" (Anonymous, personal communication, December 10, 2011). During the performance of *Music for 18 Musicians*, I saw many people sit with their eyes closed for the entire piece, and many on the lawn reclined leisurely. As the last pulses faded into the night, audience members began to cheer and applaud enthusiastically. The musicians rose from their seats, walked to the front of the stage and bowed, thereby formally accepting the applause and marking the end of their music-making. After the applause for *Music for 18 Musicians* finally ended, Pritzker Pavilion personnel turned off the lights and Millennium Park security began asking people to leave the bowl. The final phase of the concert, the postliminoid phase, normally functions to move participants out of the ritual and back into everyday life. In the concert ritual, this phase is marked by final applause and the participants' departure from the concert hall. At Chicago

Counterpoint, the postliminoid phase seemed to begin immediately after *Music for 18 Musicians*.

Then came *It's Gonna Rain*. Consisting of a recording of a street preacher's loud shouts about the coming apocalypse, *It's Gonna Rain* seemed to crash into the post-concert calm. Placing *It's Gonna Rain* at the end of the concert caused considerable controversy amongst participants, as we have seen. Though in some ways conceived as a postlude to the concert, the placement of the tape piece after the longest and largest work of the evening drew criticism from many people. One audience member I spoke with, an accomplished new music performer in his own right, said he hated hearing *It's Gonna Rain* because it followed the live performance (Anonymous, personal communication, September 4, 2011). In an artistic meeting several days after Chicago Counterpoint, members of eighth blackbird discussed the programming of the piece at length. One member initiated the conversation by arguing that the choice to follow *Music for 18 Musicians* with *It's Gonna Rain* had ruined the end of the night. Another member commented that hearing *It's Gonna Rain* "took me out of this space I was really happy to be in and I was like, 'Fuck!'" (personal communication, August 31, 2011). For this musician, *Music for 18 Musicians* had facilitated an experience of musical interiority ("a space I was happy to be in"), and the loudness of *It's Gonna Rain* had infringed on the meditative state engendered therein. Other members expressed similar sentiments, saying that the volume of the tape piece, as well as its distorted quality, exacerbated the situation. However, all stressed that they shared responsibility for this decision with the other concert organizers.

When coupled with the dimmed lights and closing of the bowl seats, the performance of *It's Gonna Rain* undermined the correct order of events required by the

classical music concert ritual. Specifically, the use of music at what appeared to many to be the end of the show represented a fundamental challenge to the ritual frame, a frame in which all sounds heard in the concert space take on an especially charged meaning. Audience members and performers typically work diligently to suppress any noise they may make that is not deemed music by the composer. The cough drops offered gratis to audience members at Orchestra Hall in Chicago as well as the constant reminders to silence all electronic devices in most classical concert venues inform all participating that extraneous sound is unwelcome in the modern day concert space. In an email after the concert, Ryan Ingebritsen told me:

In hindsight, I think we all wished that perhaps there had been an opportunity to present these [tape] works in a more prominent place on the concert or perhaps done “It’s Gonna Rain” [sic] as intermission and perhaps something a bit less grating like “Melodica” [sic] as the postlude (or perhaps have had no postlude), but I think we were thinking in terms of how a rock concert generally has pre-and post show music but trying to make it a bit more relevant to the show (e-mail message to author, March 15, 2013).

While rock and pop shows often feature the use of interstitial recorded music, classical music concerts rarely do so. Furthermore, *It’s Gonna Rain’s* abrasive characteristics place it within a more avant-garde domain of repertoire, as demonstrated in part by the angry emailer’s use of the term “skree” to describe Reich’s piece.

By playing recorded music when the audience thought the time for this mode of listening had passed (and having been perhaps conditioned to ignore the tape pieces heard thus far), the producers unwittingly sent a mixed message to audience members about the concert’s structure. Ingebritsen himself tacitly admits such a point in his above-cited statement: concert organizers realized that performing anything after *Music for 18 Musicians* was probably a mistake. The inclusion of *It’s Gonna Rain*

disrupted the postliminoid phase of the ritual and undermined both performers' and audience members' attempts to resume their non-musical social roles.

While these reactions reveal the extent to which the concert relied on the modernist ritual structure endemic to classical music, alternative reactions to *It's Gonna Rain* illustrate how some audience members, as well as Ingebritsen, brought a more avant-garde perspective to Chicago Counterpoint. A smaller group of dedicated listeners did stay on the lawn to listen to *It's Gonna Rain*, and seemed to enjoy the piece immensely. This suggests a range of audience expectations: some predisposed to enjoying the more avant-garde tape piece, whatever its place on the concert, and others more inclined toward the typical structure of the classical music ritual. After the show I spoke with one audience member who described Ingebritsen's work arranging Reich's original recording for the Pritzker sound system as "really amazing." In conversations with Ingebritsen after the concert, he reported:

I heard mostly from composer friends who actually pretty much universally praised the performance of the work at the end. One U of C [University of Chicago] Ph.D. graduate even referred to me as his "hero" on Facebook (e-mail message to author, March 15, 2013).

These reactions differ strongly from the sense of failure found in the audience member's angry email or in the post concert discussion by eighth blackbird. Those who enjoyed *It's Gonna Rain* clearly thought it was as much of a "performance" as any of the live music heard that evening. For Ingebritsen and the audience who cheered for *It's Gonna Rain*, hearing the tape piece in Pritzker Pavilion was a major accomplishment and a perfect ending to an equally successful showcase of Reich's music.

Chicago Counterpoint as Postmodern Advertisement

These mixed reactions demonstrate how the producers saw Chicago Counterpoint as an opportunity to present new music to a much larger audience than normal, designing their concert to grab the attention of park goers. Organizers wanted to achieve a musical and aesthetic “counterpoint” with the city of Chicago and its people. In a taped interview with Chicago Counterpoint Master of Ceremonies Fred Child, eighth blackbird pianist Lisa Kaplan described her hopes that the concert would accomplish this goal:

You could even just wander in. Maybe there'll be people just wandering around in the park [and say] “oh, there's music!” and come over and listen. I mean, even if they stuck around just for a few sections of [*Music for 18 Musicians*]...it would just be fun to experience that (L. Kaplan interview by Fred Child, August 22, 2011, eighth blackbird archives).

In this way, Chicago Counterpoint was a large-scale advertisement for new music in general. This goal ultimately differed strongly from the goal of presenting a ritual in which audiences could engage in Reich's music through concentrated structural listening, and yet organizers sought to present both modernist ritual and an introduction to musical minimalism.

This mixture of goals has become increasingly common to those engaged in the postmodern avant-garde. My description of Chicago Counterpoint as an advertisement stems in part from conversations with concert attendee and music critic Devin Hurd. He told me that he feels that new music concerts can be divided into two types: “concert concerts” and “event concerts” (personal communication, October 4, 2011). For Hurd, the former category denotes conventional indoor concerts—formal events that occur in acoustically controlled environments. Cottrell's theorized concert ritual would fall into the “concert concert” category. Chicago Counterpoint was, for Devin,

an “event-concert,” a hyper-theatrical concert that put new music on display in order to increase audience access. The use of *Come Out* as a sonic introduction and *It’s Gonna Rain* as a sort of postlude demonstrate the producers’ attempt to deploy music in a grand scale consistent with the nature of the “event concert.” For Hurd, both types of musical performance are valid, but are used toward different ends: a “concert concert” is designed to be a more formal affair while an “event concert” is intended to build new audiences and showcase new music in general (personal communication, October 4, 2011). However, while Chicago Counterpoint certainly differed from the typical new music recital, I argue that it nevertheless retained many characteristics of the formal concert ritual, of Hurd’s “concert concert.” Chicago Counterpoint was, for better or for worse, a “concert concert” packaged into an “event concert.”

Hurds’ description of the two types of concerts illustrates how thoroughly promotionalism and its attendant listening habits have shaped the activities of the postmodern avant-garde. The Chicago Counterpoint concert seemed to allow for the kind of listening found in malls, wherein music can slip in and out of your consciousness. Music has become bound up in the promotional strategies of commercial enterprises, consequently becoming, according to Leslie Meier (2013), “ubiquitous” while simultaneously becoming less valued. For musicians, producing a concert in Millennium Park, located along Michigan Avenue’s “Magnificent Mile” of shopping and cultural attractions, posed an opportunity to, as it were, rope in new consumers. This type of promotionalism aligns closely with that described by Anahid Kassabian (2004), or by Tia DeNora and Sophie Belcher (2000). DeNora and Belcher write, for example, that retail spaces, “depend upon and help to advance emotionally flexible, pliable consumer-subjects” (DeNora & Belcher, 2000, p. 82). Event concerts

rely on and create similarly flexible subjects: individuals wander through a space such as Millennium Park, become interested in the music heard from the Pavilion and, for a time, become audience members before drifting away to catch an exhibit at the nearby Chicago Art Institute or to shop at Brooks Brothers or the Gap. This type of experience stands in stark contrast to the structural listening required for the conventional formal concert. It takes considerable focus, after all, to listen to the music and hear it synchronize with the crickets.

But passive listening alone is not what pushes the event toward the postmodern. Rather, it is the conflagration of experiences and listening attitudes: a mixture of formal and casual; appeals to both focused and touristic listening; a lingering notion of musical Art; the mixture of relatively inoffensive minimalist musical sounds with the more shocking avant-garde tape pieces, and the setting of this event in Millennium Park. By analyzing Chicago Counterpoint as a promotional “event concert,” I illustrate how producers sought to create a postmodern concert experience that drew on ideas of promotionalism. Modernist values were, in effect, wrapped into a shiny promotional package in order to appear postmodern.

The hyperbolic opening remarks of Lacey Capps and Master of Ceremonies Fred Child demonstrate how organizers sought to promote Chicago Counterpoint to new audiences unfamiliar with new music or Steve Reich. Capps gave a spoken introduction that highlighted the impressive effort required by eighth blackbird, Third Coast Percussion, New Music Chicago, and the various personnel to produce the concert. She also told the audience that the concert fulfilled a “mission of spreading new music to the masses.” Taking the stage immediately after Capps, Child polled the

audience to indicate their familiarity with Reich's music by raising their hands.

Acknowledging the prompt appearance of many raised hands, Child said:

Lot of hands going up. But some hands not going up, too. But actually, I would venture to say that even those of you who didn't raise your hands, you know the sound of music by Steve Reich, even if you don't know that you know the sound of music by Steve Reich.

Throughout the evening, Child described Reich's influence as a composer, and offered suggestions on how to listen to each piece. He pointed out the special nature of the event by describing it as part of a birthday celebration occurring all year and "all over the world." As the object of this celebration, Steve Reich was presented as an extremely powerful and significant figure, a composer whose music had influenced, according to Child, all types of music:

[Reich's] music has been so tremendously influential in classical music, in rock, in jazz, and pop. In all kinds of music he has helped define the sound of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. In fact, a lot of times on T.V. commercials, you'll hear a soundtrack that is a direct rip off of Steve Reich. And you'll recognize that sound, even if you don't know you know it.

With this final sentence, Child suggested that even those unfamiliar with Reich's music had heard music that was influenced by Reich. That evening, he repeatedly referred to *Music for 18 Musicians* as a masterpiece, a descriptor that signalled his desire to play up the prestige of Reich's music. To be sure, the raising of hands in response to Child's question as well as my own conversations with audience members suggests that many people were well acquainted with new music, or at least with Steve Reich. Based on Ryan Ingebritsen's comments, the audience included composition students from the University of Chicago who would surely have been familiar with Reich. In spite of this, Child continually spoke as if most people had never heard of Reich and had little exposure to his music. This rhetoric demonstrates how producers framed the event as

an advertisement—an introduction to Reich’s music. Child offered a tutorial on both the music and the appropriate manner of musical consumption. Chicago Counterpoint became, in effect, a beginner’s guide to minimalism, an advertisement for new music and for the correct manner of listening required to enjoy it.

The physical structure of Pritzker Pavilion itself further contributed to organizers’ hopes that Chicago Counterpoint would appeal to a diverse audience. The venue embodies the ideals of accessibility held by many working in new music and in classical music in general. While the fixed seating in the bowl encouraged formal structural listening, the casual seating on the lawn invited touristic listening. Many people on the lawn reclined leisurely, played with their children, or enjoyed picnics. Along such lines, Director of Marketing and Patron Services for the Grant Park Music Festival Tony Macaluso wrote that Pritzker Pavilion constituted a “laboratory” in which audiences unfamiliar with classical music could test out the classical music experience:

The simple fact the concerts are [sometimes] free and the venue is uncommonly accessible means that on a typical night, according to surveys, 25% of the audience or 2,000-3,000 might be experiencing their first-ever live orchestra concert (Macaluso, 2011).

Macaluso and others view the outdoor venue as enabling access precisely because it allows people “to overcome the cultural barriers [e.g. money or formal clothing] of going to a formal concert-hall” (Macaluso, 2011). As I spoke with musicians about their experiences performing at Pritzker, the idea of accessibility came up again and again. Percussionist David Skidmore summed up his perspective in an e-mail to me about the concert:

Millennium Park's Pritzker Pavilion is a unique and wonderful venue for new classical music. Audiences are able to opt-in for whatever level of experience

they want—fixed seating in the pavilion offers a more traditional concert experience, while those on the lawn can fully experience the concert thanks to the venue's state-of-the-art sound system, or relax, picnic, chat with friends, etc. The typical indoor concert venue demands a certain degree of decorum which, [sic] for better or worse, is not something that everyone is comfortable with today. By relaxing those demands, audience members may experience new music that they might otherwise not have sought out (e-mail message to author, May 17, 2012).

Skidmore here describes a space in which audiences may choose how they engage with the music performed in the pavilion. Though producers relied on the established concert ritual in spite of their desire for accessibility, they saw the park space as a way to attract new listeners to partake in this ritual.

In this concert, therefore, organizers sought to be in “counterpoint” with Chicago, both musically and aesthetically. Though Pritzker Pavilion’s speakers focus attention toward musical sound, the city lingered in the sonic background, with an occasional car horn or train screech puncturing through the music to create a collage of musical and urban sounds. This is true of most concerts at the Pavilion, though it had an especially powerful connotation at Chicago Counterpoint because many people hear Reich’s music as an artistic expression of urbanity. ChicagoMag.com editor Whet Moser later commented in a Chicago Counterpoint concert review that:

[*Music for 18 Musicians*] sounded like the city, or what the internal life of the city might sound like as converted to music.... I flash back to Reich's music whenever I'm at Union Station waiting for the Metro, where the track location announcements, meant to aid the blind, overlap in a minimalist cacophony: almost like the city paying tribute back to Reich and his contemporaries (Moser, 2011).

In the days leading up to the concert, the similarities found between city noise and minimalist music was a regular topic of conversation among members of eighth blackbird. The group’s manager, Jen Richards, told me how, after listening to *Music for 18 Musicians* several times, she had begun to hear the echoes of the work in the ambient

noise of the city. The day of the concert, Jen brought this up again during the sound check as she and I walked from the Pavilion through Millennium Park and across Michigan Avenue. Tim Munro described *Music for 18 Musicians* similarly in an interview with Fred Child immediately before the concert:

[Reich's] music is the perfect urban music. I feel like his music is the soundtrack to urban America in a lot of ways. It has this sort of grand beauty, but also the sort of incredible attention to architectural detail (T. Munro interview by Fred Child, August 22, 2011, eighth blackbird archives).

In the same interview, eighth blackbird clarinetist Michael Maccaferri described how much the experience of playing Reich's music differed when played in different venues. Though he had performed the piece in a rural outdoor concert hall in California, Pritzker's location in Chicago lent a particularly urban feel: "it's gonna be interesting to feel the city embrace the music as we're performing it, instead of feeling a beautiful sheltered little bowl in Ojai, California" (M. Maccaferri interview by Fred Child, August 22, 2011, eighth blackbird archives).

These descriptions illustrate how participants understood the acoustic sensation of Reich's music as analogous to an idealized version of the hustle and bustle of city life more generally. Sitting and listening to the artistic rendering of a city while actually being surrounded by a city created a sense of what you might call urban *communitas*. Reich's music and the sensation of listening to it in Pritzker Pavilion were packaged in such a way to seem especially relevant to the lives of Chicagoans.

Millennium Park as Postmodern Pleasure Citadel

The "Chicago" of Chicago Counterpoint thus represented a very particular postmodern idealization of the city. Located within the consumer and cultural

attractions of the Magnificent Mile, this concert promoted the idea of a city whose citizens could enjoy any range of pleasurable diversions. Nearly every person I spoke with about this concert before, during, or after the event, emphasized his or her excitement at hearing minimalist music in this particular venue. The park and the event informed one another, each seeming to reinforce each other's *raison d'être*. By analyzing the concert's setting in downtown Chicago, I show how organizers wanted Chicago Counterpoint to be all things to all people: modernist concert, avant-garde exhibition, and postmodern experience.

In his analysis of modernist and postmodern urban architecture, geographer David Harvey (1990) provides a way to analyze spaces like Millennium Park as part of the material culture of postmodernity. Harvey describes how post-war modernist architecture and urban planning sought to regulate space using new forms of mass production, creating huge monuments and monument-like buildings such as the Chicago Tribune building and Rockefeller Center as part of a movement that celebrated "advances in human welfare" (Harvey, 1990, p. 70). However, after manufacturing jobs began to permanently leave cities in the early seventies, urban renewal created downtown spaces that emphasized tourism, spectacle, and leisure. Harvey writes, "Imaging [sic] a city through the organization of spectacular urban spaces became a means to attract capital and people (of the right sort) in a period (since 1973) of intensified inter-urban competition and urban entrepreneurialism" (Harvey, 1990, p. 92). These projects, including Baltimore's Harbor Place, New Orleans' Piazza d'Italia, and New York's South Street Sea Port, responded to the deindustrialization of space by creating "pleasure citadels" that would produce new jobs and sources of municipal revenue. Gone were the austere monuments to human

welfare. In their place postmodern architects emphasized the new goals of the city as destination and leisure space. Harvey writes, “An architecture of spectacle, with its sense of glittery surface and transitory participatory pleasure, of display and ephemerality, of *jouissance*, became essential to the success of a project of this sort” (Harvey, 1990, p. 91).

The Millennium Park project perfectly exemplifies the type of urban renewal discussed by Harvey, and the park’s architectural features and urban locale were central to descriptions of the Chicago Counterpoint experience. Completed in 2004, civic leaders conceived of the park as a way to renovate space and add value to surrounding property while simultaneously attracting tourists to the heart of downtown Chicago (Gilfoyle, 2006). The result was a twenty-four acre park atop a parking garage and train station. The park is home to several large works of art that serve as icons of both the park itself as well as the broader city of Chicago. Both the Crown Fountain designed by Jaume Plensa and Anish Kapoor’s Cloud Gate sculpture (affectionately nicknamed “the Bean” by Chicagoans) are destinations for many tourists, and while I was at Millennium Park I saw many people posing at these locations and taking pictures. Broad walkways cross lush grass lawns and tree lined gardens. The park contains rows of trees and a large garden filled with exotic flowers and ornamental grass not normally found in Illinois, and certainly not found in the concrete jungle of Chicago. Surrounding the sparkling art and chic gardens of the park is a Chicago city skyline comprised of buildings built at various points in the twentieth century, all of which create a sense of timelessness as the different styles of architecture jostle with one another. In the years since its completion, the park has become one of the most popular destinations for tourists in Chicago (Vaira, 2009). For

many of the musicians at Chicago Counterpoint, these features made the concert especially exciting, as the park's destination status for tourists would mean a much larger crowd than that found at most of their other concerts.

These physical and architectural characteristics all mark the park as a postmodern space. Harvey argues that "Postmodernism cultivates...a perception of the urban fabric as necessarily fragmented, a 'palimpsest' of past forms superimposed upon each other, and a 'collage' of current uses, many of which may be ephemeral" (Harvey, 1990, p. 66). Millennium Park certainly emphasizes the ephemeral, with its open-air music pavilion, indoor theater, and leisurely paths. To be sure, these are features shared by other parks as well. New York City's Central Park, for example, has spaces for outdoor concerts, gardens, and paths. However, the overall experience of Central Park advances a comparatively unified theme of rural escapism, and many of its features were originally designed by single individuals all working to fulfill the vision of Frederick Law Olmstead. Architect Calvert Vaux, for example, designed all the bridges in Central Park, while Ignaz Anton Pilat served as the park's master gardener (Reed & Duckworth, 1972). Millennium Park, in contrast, contains several art works all designed by different artists, a characteristic that, when placed within the smaller space of the Park, gives the impression of collage. Thus Michael J. Lewis, writing for the *New York Times*, described Millennium Park as "something of a crazy quilt, sliced by roads and without a unifying theme" (Lewis, 2006). Through its incorporation of disparate art objects, its emphasis on spectacle and its ephemeral palimpsest of art forms framed by the Chicago skyline, Millennium Park emerges as a space shaped by postmodern aesthetics.

More than an aesthetic, Millennium Park's status as pleasure citadel in the heart of downtown Chicago originates in the confluence of corporate and municipal capital. Harvey argues that in the contemporary postmodern economy "it is not simply products, but the corporate image itself that becomes essential" (Harvey, 1990, p. 160). His analysis thus has features in common with much of the scholarship on post-Fordism cited in Chapter 1. Branding is a major component of the artwork and spaces of Millennium Park. Coupled with the spectacular art of the park are displays of corporate capital, a characteristic increasingly common in a culture where "corporate sponsorship of the Arts [sic], of universities, and of philanthropic projects is the prestige end of a scale of activities...that constantly keep the company name in the public eye" (Harvey, 1990, p. 160). Millennium Park overflows with corporate brand names: the McDonald's Cycle Center, BP Bridge, Exelon Pavilions, Chase Bank Promenades, AT&T Plaza, and the Boeing Galleries. Many individual art works were similarly funded by wealthy private donors, who enjoyed absolute control over which artists were commissioned for specific works (Gilfoyle, 2006).

Millennium Park is thus much more than a standard city park. It is a pleasure citadel designed to enhance municipal and private capital, celebrating corporate and private wealth as much as it provides access to leisure space. While many of the park's events are free (including Chicago Counterpoint), not all are (especially if the event is a classical music concert), and food and beverages never come cheap in Millennium Park, a characteristic criticized by Loren Kruger:

[Millennium Park] may merit the label "people's park" for its open access and democratic appeal, but the presence of expensive concessions from the outset and the more recent efforts of institutions that charge entry fees...leave the whole in precarious balance between a public space of recreation...and a playground of affluent consumption (Kruger, 2009, p. 11).

Kruger goes on to describe Millennium Park as a place where “transnational capital displays an optimistically global future framed by the postmodern urban-scape of service and consumption” (Kruger, 2009, pp. 12-13). Indeed, in the years immediately following the opening of the park, housing costs in nearby neighbourhoods increased substantially as new developments opened up in the surrounding area (Sharoff, 2005). These characteristics remind us that Millennium Park appeals to a certain clientele comprised of those with the disposable income as well as the time to enjoy the park’s many amenities. Guards roam quietly through the park, ready to respond to any commotion or usher out any undesirables.

A final component of space I wish to analyze and a major feature of the Chicago Counterpoint Concert is the architecture of Pritzker Pavilion itself. This unusual concert space represents, for many, a major part of the Millennium Park project (Gilfoyle, 2006). Designed by renowned architect Frank Gehry, the venue exemplifies many of the characteristics of postmodern urban design and space described above: like other *object d’art* in Millennium Park, its design emphasizes spectacle and ephemerality. Huge sheets of metal twist out from the center stage, as if the walls and roof of a concert hall had been peeled back so that all could look inside (See Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3: Pritzker Pavilion the day before the Chicago Counterpoint concert. Speakers hang from the latticework throughout the pavilion. Photo by author.

Behind the impressive metal sheets that curve up into the air are simple support poles, a characteristic that reminds us that nothing lurks behind the space but more open air. Even the building's legal status emphasizes the ephemeral. The venue has been legally designated a work of art rather than a building in order to bypass the city ordinance limiting the height of structures in Millennium Park to 144 feet (Gilfoyle, 2006). This special designation demonstrates how wealth can bypass law.

While the Pavilion was created by an influx of private capital, many concert organizers celebrate accessibility in terms endemic to postmodernism. As Harvey writes, "much of postmodernism is consciously anti-auratic and anti-avant-garde and seeks to explore media and cultural arenas open to all" (Harvey, 1990, p. 59). As explained in Chapter 2, Harvey is here referring loosely to Walter Benjamin's (1968) concept of "aura," the effect of experiencing art live rather than through mechanically reproduced media such as film. "Anti-avant-garde" art would be presented without any

revolutionary impulse. Because it imparts a degree of casualness compared to the typical concert hall or recital venues, Pritzker Pavilion seems to tap into this idea of a cultural arena open to all. Many view the park and the Pavilion in these terms, as Macaluso's description of the park as "uncommonly accessible" and Skidmore's argument that audiences can "opt-in" demonstrate. An open air venue in a major American metropolis that functions in part as a tourist attraction seems the perfect place to promote a musical practice viewed as both alienated and alienating (see Chapter 1). Indeed, had it not been for *It's Gonna Rain*, it would be hard to view Chicago Counterpoint as avant-garde at all.

Pritzker Pavilion's location in downtown Chicago distinguishes it from other outdoor venues in Chicago such as Ravinia or Ohio's Blossom Music Centre, both of which are regularly frequented by major symphony orchestras. These venues, found in rural or suburban settings quite different from the indoor halls normally associated with classical concerts, are intended to allow for a more casual atmosphere that nevertheless upholds the classical concert ritual. Pritzker Pavilion, in contrast, is located in a park also designed as a tourist attraction and figures as a strategy of urban renewal. Skidmore's description of the listening habits of park-goers, able to "opt-in," recognizes this touristic quality. Such optional participation maps onto the "anti-auratic" ideal theorized by Harvey as endemic to postmodernity. Pritzker Pavilion taps into this postmodern aesthetic while simultaneously allowing for the more "auratic" experience engendered by the formal concert.

An extension of this mixture of the auratic and the anti-auratic ideal emerges in the Pavilion's extremely elaborate amplification system. Speakers hang from the latticework that covers the lawn (See Figure 4.3). The sound system is capable of

rendering a consistent sense of space throughout the pavilion through an electronic delay. As a result, those sitting on the lawn behind the formal seating area hear the music from the stage at the same time as they hear the music from the speakers so that there is not echo occurring between the sound coming from the stage and the sound coming from the speakers. Describing the paths in the park, Kruger suggests that many aspects of Millennium Park “orchestrate without appearing to constrain [...] not only bodily movement in but also affective response to that space” (Kruger, 2009, p. 11). Kruger’s comments about the paths apply equally well to the speaker system. Just as the paths of Millennium Park channel attention toward certain (corporate friendly) ends, so too do the speakers of Pritzker Pavilion channel sound so that even casual listeners may enjoy an acoustically controlled experience. The speakers shape the acoustic environment into a musical collaboration between the sounds of the surrounding cityscape so that the listener’s sonic world becomes a collage of music from the Pavilion and the sounds of urban Chicago. This speaker system thus enables promoters’ claims that all who come to the park, even the casual picnickers, may participate in a significant musical event. In such a venue, works like *Music for 18 Musicians*, already imagine to be the sound of urban life, are a natural fit, creating a sense of urban communitas that orchestrates (without appearing to constrain) subjective experience.

Toward A Postmodern Avant-garde

Viewed with the aesthetic and financial politics of postmodernity in mind, Millennium Park stands out as an ideal venue for a concert designed to promote new music. The classical music ritual was portrayed on this occasion as casual, fun, and relevant. The

concert seemed to tell people: “Want to sit on the lawn and let the kids play? No, problem! We’re just glad you stopped by. Need to grab some new pants or a meet a friend for a cocktail? Why not take minute to check out some new music on your way? Be sure to grab a CD or T-shirt on your way out from the merch booth!” Reich’s music and the classical music ritual in general became, in effect, one more attraction in the outdoor mall that is the Magnificent Mile. And audiences became touristic consumers. Musical modernism and its pieces were commodified into postmodern products exhibited in the urban playground of Millennium Park. Pritzker Pavilion’s ability to offer a range of experiences, from the casual to the formal, figured strongly in how musicians evaluated the success of Chicago Counterpoint. What venue, after all, meshes better with eighth blackbird’s brand of friendly virtuosity (see Chapter 1)? In Pritzker Pavilion we find an acoustically sophisticated concert space designed to accommodate structural listening that simultaneously caters to a more casual mode of musical engagement. At the same time, the concert also sought to be edgy and challenging—in a word, avant-garde.

The complexities and tensions endemic to this Chicago Counterpoint “event concert,” and the fundamental contradiction between promotionalism and autonomy that eighth blackbird negotiated within it, exemplifies the “postmodern avant-garde” I have described throughout this dissertation. Within this subculture we find combinations of ideas and practices normally thought of as antithetical. A primary concern for the postmodern avant-garde is the desire to expand the audience base for contemporary art music. A subculture of the larger classical music culture, “postmodern avant-garde” wrests the ideas associated with the history of the avant-garde from musical modernism. Thus, at Chicago Counterpoint, organizers

programmed Reich's music within the ritual frame of the classical music concert, and these works were supposed to appear as part of the canon of classical music, not simply fringe works enjoyed in dorm rooms or New York City loft spaces. *It's Gonna Rain* violated the tenets of this frame, but a small cadre of individuals nevertheless enjoyed the piece.

Claiming Reich's works as masterpieces demonstrates precisely how the modernist "museum culture" of classical music (Goehr, 2007) has been able to absorb the various avant-gardes of the twentieth century. For example, Reich has, historically, described pieces like *Music for 18 Musicians* as "processes" rather than a "works" (Reich, 2002), and intended them to pose a challenge to a cultural practice based on the celebration of relatively stable works. However, the concert ritual has proven capable of absorbing a great deal of music never designed to sound in its halls. As several authors have argued (Born, 1995; Bürger, 1984; Corbett, 2000; Goehr, 2007; Sun, 2004), the Western art music tradition has a tendency to absorb music, whether from avant-garde, folk, or (often exoticized) Asian traditions, and reshape it in such a way as to be a "work" that adheres to the standards and practices of the modernist ritual structure.⁴⁶ Reich's music thus becomes another "masterpiece" in the "imaginary museum" of classical music (Goehr, 2007).

However, in spite of this strong tendency to canonize avant-garde composers such as Steve Reich, the postmodern avant-garde attempts to remake art music into a less austere experience. This desire challenges many ideas inherent in modernist

⁴⁶ While such variety of musics are often celebrated, their use in the concert ritual "tends to veil any power politics inherent in such a program, to bury the intricate hegemonic relations between dominant Western musical ideology and local music cultures worldwide" (Corbett, 2000, p. 176) .

musical ideology while, in a seeming contradiction, simultaneously appearing to preserve key cultural tenets of musical modernism. Chicago Counterpoint thus used a ritual form designed to maximize the experience of structural listening, of attention to abstract musical patterns. As several scholars have demonstrated, structural listening and the theorization of specific musical gestures represented a key project of musical modernism (Born, 1995; McClary, 2000; Subotnik, 1988). At the same time, the concert also embraced the comparatively postmodern desire for diversity and accessibility. Thus, audience members could choose to sit on the lawn or in the bowl while deciding for themselves how to listen. However, the event's use of the concert ritual undermined, to some extent, the goals of the producers because it ultimately requires a much stricter adherence to formal practices. Within this ritual, there is no room for picnickers and laughing children, and there is especially no allowance for a relocation of audience members during the performance of a piece such as that which occurred during *It's Gonna Rain*. The controversy surrounding the reception of Chicago Counterpoint is therefore the result of an epistemological conflict between the modernist traditions of art music and attempts to remake art music into a more popular genre, thereby encapsulating the contradictions inherent in eighth blackbird's value system.

By repackaging musical modernism into a more accessible form such as the free outdoor concert described here, musicians in the American new music scene create a different avant-garde, an avant-garde aligned with the promotionalism, accessibility and friendliness of postmodernism in general. As many writers have argued, postmodernism is not a clean break with modernist forms, but a nuanced incorporation of modernist ideas into new epistemological frames that in some ways contradict the

aims of modernism (Auner & Lochhead, 2002; Harvey, 1990). Along such lines, Andreas Huyssen argues that postmodernism constitutes “not a wholesale paradigm shift of the cultural, social and economic orders” but a “noticeable shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations” (Huyssen, 1986, p. 181). eighth blackbird and other members of the New Music Chicago collective regularly engage in such a shift in many of their concerts.

To return to the words of flutist Tim Munro, for eighth blackbird modernism “is a tradition that we are actually part of and yet we’re fighting against it. So it’s this total constant tug of war” (personal communication, July 8, 2008). Few concerts I have attended have so perfectly epitomized the tension Munro describes as the Reich concert did that summer evening. A concert ritual established in the nineteenth century found itself juxtaposed with new forms of listening and leisure, a combination that created both cognitive dissonance as well as transcendent *jouissance*.

A postmodern avant-garde promotes a subjectivity unique to the contemporary condition. The postmodern subject can dissolve itself into unusual roles and can move between private contemplation and public displays, or between various forms of cultural consumption or tourism (Kassabian, 2004), a characteristic demonstrated in the various accounts of the Chicago Counterpoint concert. This subjectivity contrasts sharply with the experience of musical modernism, wherein comprehension of musical language requires specialized knowledge, a characteristic that offers the subject a sort of special private space, and that created the sense of an interior self (See Chapter 2). As Susan McClary has argued, modernist musical forms created a “distilled integrity of the ‘real’ subject, available only to those with higher powers of discernment” (McClary, 2000, p. 134). By retreating from a world viewed as increasingly

meaningless and unoriginal, this music provided as space where intellectuals found refuge from an ever-encroaching mass culture.

In contrast, the blurring of public and private life constitutes a key component of postmodern identity construction (Hearn, 2008; Sennett, 2006). As explained above, such flexibility has become endemic with the use of music in retail spaces as companies seek to attract and shape individuals and groups into profitable consumers (DeNora & Belcher, 2000). This flexibility lends itself especially well to a concert in which producers imagine audience members drifting in and out of musical awareness, switching easily between close structural listening, carrying on a conversation with friends in the park, or listening for thirty minutes prior to heading down the street for an afternoon of shopping. For the organizers of Chicago Counterpoint, a certain degree of modernist interiority lingers, though its opposition to mass culture is greatly diminished.

Conclusion

Is an avant-garde of postmodernism possible? I think not (J. D. Kramer, 2002a, p. xvi).

In his Foreword to *Music of the Twentieth Century Avant-Garde*, Jonathan Kramer argues that the postmodern ambivalence toward history precludes the idea of a vanguard somehow ahead of its time.⁴⁷ He also dismisses the revolutionary potential of contemporary art music, despite the controversy surrounding many contemporary styles of composition. For Kramer, art music nowadays attempts to promote “an inclusive and pluralistic art” appropriate for the “anything goes attitude” that dominates our culture (J. D. Kramer, 2002a, p. xvi).

As this dissertation makes plain, I disagree with Kramer’s position. I believe that eighth blackbird’s activities, aesthetics, and labour practices all constitute, at the very least, an *attempt* to create a postmodern avant-garde. In part, my disagreement with Kramer stems from our very different conceptions of what “music” means. I have treated “music” as both work and sociocultural practice—or as Christopher Small (1998) would put it, as “musicking.” In contrast, Kramer, a composer and music theorist, views “music” exclusively as works and evaluates the concept of “avant-garde music” from an entirely formalist position. Describing the qualities of contemporary works, he lists a series of micro-genres: computer music, microtonal music, crossover

⁴⁷ Kramer’s wording, “an avant-garde of postmodernism” may seem to relegate his claim to an assessment of aesthetic positions found within postmodern art music circles. However, I would argue that he in fact believes that any avant-garde of postmodernity, of our time and cultural situation, cannot exist in a meaningful way.

music, and spectralism. He then reduces these genres to styles and links them respectively with previous trends including “analog tape music, experimental scales, Ivesian eclecticism, mixtures of jazz into ‘classical’ music, and Darmstadt serialism” (J. D. Kramer, 2002a, p. xvi). He concludes that the newer techniques of composition “are not utterly unprecedented, nor do they aggressively defy musical tradition, however controversial they may be” (J. D. Kramer, 2002a, pp. xvi-xvii). They thus cannot be understood as avant-garde.

If we are to consider the existence of an avant-garde of the postmodern in music, an avant-garde that embraces postmodernism and is also grounded in the broader “condition of postmodernity” (Harvey, 1990), we must examine more than just musical works. We must look beyond a list of “-isms” like Kramer’s that reduce music to a litany of ever-derivative musical styles.⁴⁸ Considering the possibility of a postmodern avant-garde requires that we treat avant-garde, modernism, and postmodernism as I have here—as a set of practices as well as aesthetic philosophies. A postmodern avant-garde grapples with both modernism and postmodernism in the search for something new and radical. To flatten out the postmodern as simply a (mindless?) celebration of plurality risks an unacknowledged endorsement of modernist views of “music” at the expense of alternatives—a move that would check any attempt for truly radical breaks. If Kramer is right, if the modernist avant-garde has exhausted itself and if postmodernism has nothing unique to offer, then art music

⁴⁸ For a recent example of such views in the popular press about new music, see Matt Mendez’s (2014) review of a recent recording by composer Adam Roberts. Mendez summarizes the compositional trends in new music in terms that parallel Kramer, writing, “In this paradigmless, traditionless musical age, where each piece is a desperate wrestling match with the blank page, an endlessly repeated tabula rasa, it’s a wonder any young composer would still lay claim to the ‘modernist’ mantle” (2014, n.p.).

truly is dead. In contrast, I would suggest that it is the formalist ontology of music endemic to modernism that has lost its vitality, not the “music itself.”

Though I am not advocating for a complete abandonment of structuralist views, I do believe there is more to music than an accounting of the sonic qualities of works and their historical origins. Rather than simply summarize a series of aesthetic trends observable in new musical works, therefore, I have attempted to approach music as both object and practice. I have based my theorization of a postmodern avant-garde on my fieldwork with eighth blackbird and with other ensembles, on conversations with eighth blackbird’s members, and on their labour and performance practices, as well as on reactions to the ensemble. In contrast to the anaemic avant-garde that Kramer describes, eighth blackbird’s members attempt to present vibrant, enthusiastic, and challenging musical concerts to audiences both familiar and unfamiliar with the history of new music.

Yet theirs is not an “anything goes” approach, but one in which modernist ideas of autonomous music remain in circulation. As eighth blackbird flutist Tim Munro put it, the group is engaged in a “tug of war” between modernism and postmodernism, and the results in concert can, admittedly, be mixed:

I think sometimes when we do it well, we do it fuckin’ awesome, I mean it is amazing, and when we do it badly it’s awkward and the best thing that we can hope for when it’s awkward and not that great is that the audience will get something out of it (personal communication July 24th, 2008).

Munro is burdened by the history of musical modernism, which he refers to as a “tradition” of “pure music” (personal communication July 24th, 2008). Yet, in his own words Munro is “obsessed with abstract music” (personal communication, July 24th, 2008). He wants to at least explore the possibility that modernism might be made into

something new, something “amazing,” something *postmodern*. This tug of war also manifests between the repertoire performed by eighth blackbird and the negative reactions this music frequently elicits. In an interview with cellist Nick Photinos, I asked about audience reactions to pieces like Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912).

Though the sextet had staged the piece in a variety of ways—sometimes acting out the story on stage, using a dancer, or collaborating with a puppet troupe—Photinos felt that the musical work remained at the heart of negative reactions:

I mean, like, people were still not very enthused with it or just didn’t really get it. I mean the piece is almost a hundred years old, but even still it’s considered incredibly thorny by most people. For us it’s like playing Brahms. Like the gestures are incredibly lyrical and Romantic, it’s just that the sonorities aren’t. But the gestures are Brahms. At least, we feel they are. So I think the biggest stumbling point is actually still, for a lot of people, the music. A lot of people just don’t dig Schoenberg (personal communication, June 18, 2008).

For Photinos and, I would argue, for the other members as well, the musical work, in this example, remains the single biggest challenge to audience outreach, despite the piece’s age. Photinos even acknowledges that, from the perspective of the eighth blackbird performers, the music feels old, stating, “the gestures are Brahms.”

However, in spite of the passing of time and the familiarity of musical gestures, *Pierrot Lunaire* remains shocking for many audience members.

And yet eighth blackbird plays on. The sextet endeavours to bring about a real change in how people think of art music while also changing art music itself. They share a proclivity for engaging in musical (and thus social) controversy, for being avant-garde. Yet they have standards of success, and recognize that their projects will periodically result in failure. Here we find not the “anything goes” attitude described by Kramer. Rather, we find an acknowledgement of failure, a recognition of

controversy and, in spite of all this, an ongoing commitment to the presentation of “difficult” music (McClary, 1989). This is not abject relativism. This is struggle.

This dissertation has outlined the nature of eighth blackbird’s struggle between modernism and postmodernism and between the traditional values of classical music culture and avant-garde performance in detail. Over the course of four chapters, the qualities of musical works remained a central concern, but these qualities only partially informed the analyses offered. In Chapter 1, I argued that the sextet struggled to recruit audiences, and adopted branding strategies that emphasized personality to a greater extent than normally found in classical or new music. eighth blackbird’s brand of “friendly virtuosity” was shown to embrace post-Fordist marketing. In a way, the ensemble seems to move closer to the commodification associated with post-Fordist branding (Hearn, 2008). However, the ensemble’s wariness of performer personality, commitment to artistic autonomy, and the nature of the music performed prohibits complete commodification.

In Chapter 2, I examined this wariness as part of a deeper struggle between modernist and postmodern aesthetics, focusing on issues surrounding eighth blackbird’s use of choreography as a way to project friendliness. Because it emphasizes the performance as much or even more than the work, choreography seems to push eighth blackbird away from the notion of the autonomous musical “work” endemic to both classical music and its modernist vanguard. The result is a simultaneous existence as both friendly and avant-garde: eighth blackbird’s choreographed performances of Bermel’s (2004) *Tied Shifts* figure as exciting and accessible to some, while simultaneously violating the conventions of the concert hall, thus placing the group’s

performance within an edgier, avant-garde realm. New music becomes postmodern, not because of the intrinsic values of the work, but because of the way it is performed.

In this way, choreography challenges the “habitus” of the modernist recital hall, as I argued in Chapter 3 (Bourdieu, 1993b). Here I examine what happens to “music” as a result of the group’s embrace of visuality when considered in tandem with their lingering belief in musical autonomy. As a way to account for this lingering modernism, I argued that choreographed performances in which a “musical work” remained discernable constituted a postmodern form of virtuosity that blends musical work and performance into an audio-visual display.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I examined a single massive concert called “Chicago Counterpoint” as an expression of the contradictory values of the postmodern avant-garde. For Chicago Counterpoint, the sextet collaborated with other musicians from the Chicago new music scene to promote the music of Steve Reich and the modernist ritual of structural listening. I argued that musicians and concert organizers spread new music to mass audiences by packaging both Reich’s music and the modernist musical ritual as another postmodern commodity offered up on Chicago’s “Magnificent Mile.” Musical work, architecture, and urban setting all advanced a mixture of modernist and postmodern models of musical subjectivity in which individuals could choose to engage the music through structural or passive listening.

eighth blackbird’s values and artistic choices, as analyzed in the preceding chapters, make plain that modernism no longer fully accounts for the cultural logic of the new music scene today. Such claims contrast with those of Georgina Born (1995), who argues that the postmodern movements found within art music circles ultimately cannot help but fall back into a broader modernism that disavows popularity and

financial success. The case of eighth blackbird reveals that part of the new music field of production has reacted to and absorbed the values of contemporary culture, of postmodernity and its postmodernisms. To a certain extent, Kramer's view seems correct, in that the ensemble offers a number of seeming accommodations for those who "just don't dig Schoenberg."

And yet what we find in eighth blackbird—in its concerts, promotionalism, and internal debates—is also not a complete endorsement of postmodern hybridity and genre confusion. A struggle persists as eighth blackbird's members negotiate between modernism and postmodernism. Munro's "tug of war" pervades the performative and promotional strategies of the group. Understanding the impact of the sextet's concerts requires a nuanced understanding of music as a practice, while also recognizing that the context in which eighth blackbird operates is very different than the musical situation of IRCAM in the 1980s and 1990s.

At the heart of eighth blackbird's struggle between modernist and postmodern values is an attempt to do something revolutionary. Kramer may not see them as avant-garde, but I argue that they are, in effect, enacting dramatic changes to what classical and new music are in the twenty-first century. Whether or not critics can grasp the revolutionary potential of every concert, whether or not every audience member enjoys every performance, or even whether or not every show "works," the ensemble is exploring alternatives to the received dominant modes of musical experience found within art music circles. eighth blackbird's commitments to reconfiguring new music into something vibrant and relevant, to changing how art music is performed, and to challenging how we conceive of "music" all warrant the label avant-garde.

The struggles described here, which result from the confrontation of aesthetic and promotional agendas, are endemic to our current age. Summarizing this state of affairs, Harvey writes that

the degree of Fordism and modernism, or flexibility [i.e. post-Fordism] and postmodernism, is bound to vary from time to time and from place to place, depending on which configuration is profitable and which is not (Harvey, 1990, p. 344).

It appears that eighth blackbird has found a way to profit from both non-market forms of financial support (residencies) as well as market-oriented forms (concerts), although more research is needed to establish all of eighth blackbird's sources of income.⁴⁹

Their financial situation seems to make the oscillation Harvey describes inevitable. They must draw in audiences, but they can still occasionally "afford," both artistically and financially, to perform "difficult" music by Boulez, Mantovani, or George Perle without added choreography. If they are to thrive economically, however, the musicians must offer something like the postmodern virtuosity described in Chapter 3, as well as large-scale concerts like Chicago Counterpoint that, while not especially lucrative, promote the ensemble to large audiences. At the same time, the ensemble's modernist aesthetics, as seen in the lingering wariness of performer identity, seems to keep extensive personal commodification like that theorized by Hearn (2008) in check. eighth blackbird is not a manufactured pop group complete with moulded personalities

⁴⁹ Prior to beginning the dissertation in earnest, I had begun to research eighth blackbird's income. I have been told by members that a large portion of their overall income and benefits come through their residencies. Concerts, however, remain a major source of income, 60% according to Tim Munro, as do grants from various state and federal organizations (personal communication, June 7, 2012). Based on records from several venues as well as conversations with the group's management firm, it seemed that the ensemble usually received a one-time fee for a given concert and that ticket sales were not a part of their income. Venues want to draw audiences, but I am unsure how, precisely this works, or to what extent they charge ticket prices based on eighth blackbird's status in the new music community. Many concerts offered at schools are free or very inexpensive, relying for income on endowments created to bring art music to a particular area.

produced by a record company executive (Stahl, 2002). The sextet shows their continued commitment to the long-standing values of the classical music community by aspiring to a degree of autonomy and economic disinterestedness, a position made possible financially through their long-term residencies at the University of Richmond, the Curtis Institute of Music, and the University of Chicago.

This dissertation uses a case study to provide a first step in establishing the existence of a postmodern avant-garde, but in order to prove (or disprove) its existence as a broader cultural phenomenon more research is needed. Examining the financial realities of new music ensembles would contribute substantially to a detailed, empirically grounded accounting of how musicians and employees negotiate between conflicting aesthetic tenets. How profitable are modernism and postmodernism? Is it possible to make a living in the United States as a modernist virtuoso dedicated to new music—or at least to do so outside of New York City? What barriers must be negotiated? What changes are occurring, across art music genres and ensembles, to artists' conceptualizations of themselves as artists or as labourers? How do they negotiate the move toward spectacular production in post-Fordist economies?

At the same time, more research is needed to understand how issues such as class and gender influence the aesthetics and promotionalism of many new music ensembles. For example, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, the mind/body divide often maps onto a concurrent male/female divide (McClary, 2002). To what extent, then, might disparaging views of eighth blackbird's choreography be seen as gendered readings of their performances, as attempts to place music within its "proper" masculine mind place? Are male critics more inclined toward negative views of choreography than female critics? I suspect this might be the case, but such a claim

requires more detailed research. An ethnographic study of gender in new music would, I believe, shed much light on the working conditions of musicians, as well as on the unspoken values expressed by this culture. Even fully understanding how eighth blackbird, or other new music ensembles, operates within the new music scene requires more research. Do chamber groups compete aggressively with each other, or is competition more restrained somehow? How effective are eighth blackbird's promotional materials? Are concert vendors swayed by glossy photos? If so, why?

Understanding the business machinations of eighth blackbird more fully would further add to my theorization of a postmodern avant-garde. The eighth blackbird organization has changed considerably since I first started studying the group in 2008. At that time, the musicians themselves did the lion's share of administrative and promotional work. In 2009, Jen Richards joined as managing director, though she left in the fall of 2013. She was replaced by Peter McDowell, an arts consultant and former Program Director for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. He and a full-time staff now support the musicians. eighth blackbird also changed concert agents and is now working with David Lieberman's firm, the same company who represents the Kronos Quartet, Bang on a Can, and a number of edgy dance companies such as Lucky Plush and Indian Ink. If we are to examine the intersection of economics and avant-garde artistic aesthetics, it seems like a detailed study of Lieberman's firm would be an excellent place to start.

What hope remains, then, for new music? Is musical modernism dying out? Is structural listening becoming an anachronism? Ultimately, can a postmodern avant-garde offer something useful and interesting? Are the strategies of eighth blackbird the most effective way for this subculture to survive in the diverse musical marketplace of

the twenty-first century? I am inclined to agree with authors such as Alex Ross (2013) and Gerard Phillips (2008) who argue that classical music must shift toward more performances of newer works. Something like John Luther Adams' *Inuksuit* can help us reflect on our lived environments, on our acoustic and physical engagement with the world. Kirsten's *Colombine's Parade Theater* can make us think about historically marginalized characters and raises questions about gender, performance, and consent. Playing *It's Gonna Rain* after *Music for 18 Musicians* can remind us that music is more than works, and that Steve Reich's minimalism, now arguably canonized at least in new music circles, was once and still can be disturbing. Such pieces might show how new music expresses the cultural tensions of our time. In the end, a little friendliness can go a long way.

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Appendix



Research Ethics

Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Emily Ansari
File Number: 100635
Review Level: Delegated
Protocol Title: Ethnographic Study of Eighth Blackbird 18078S
Department & Institution: Don Wright Faculty of Music/Music,
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: January 16, 2014 **Expiry Date:** December 31, 2015

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Study End Date		

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Signature

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grace Kelly (grace.kelly@uwo.ca)	<input type="checkbox"/> Vikki Tran (vikki.tran@uwo.ca)	<input type="checkbox"/> Mina Mekhail (mmekhail@uwo.ca)	<input type="checkbox"/> Erika Basile (ebasile@uwo.ca)
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Appendix A: A scanned copy of the ethics approval form approving the research undertaken for this dissertation.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: John Pippen

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Tennessee Technological University
Cookeville, TN, USA
2001-2006 B.M.

The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN, USA
2006-2009 M.M.

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2009-2014 Ph.D.

Honours and Awards: Western Graduate Research Scholarship
2009-2013

Related Work Experience Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2009-2013

Adjunct Instructor
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2013-2014