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CHAPTER 11

Music, Postmodernism, and George Rochberg's Third String Quartet

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Music scholars have recently begun to use postmodernism as a basis for critical accounts of contemporary concert music and in their discussions, George Rochberg's Third String Quartet inevitably enters as an example. Many of these writers have turned to a binary conceptual model adapted from scholarship in art criticism that divides postmodern works into radical and reactionary categories. Typically, Rochberg's quartet is described as a "neoconservative" type of postmodernism whose use of a tonal art music genre and stylistic allusions to past historical styles indicates a nostalgic yearning for an imagined cultural golden age in Western civilization. Scholars contrast the "reactionary" neoconservatism of Rochberg with a "radical" strand of musical postmodernism that juxtaposes different styles and genres in an attempt to criticize accepted cultural standards. Although it has gained a degree of currency within musicological circles, this binary model of postmodernism is not without problems, and the characterization of Rochberg's Third Quartet exemplifies its limitations. In particular, it provides no understanding of the quartet contemporary to its composition and early reception; the question arises as to whether a critical conceptual model that ignores historically-grounded perspectives sufficiently explains a piece of music. An examination of Rocbherg's writings from the time that he completed the quartet in 1972 reveal a composer who advocates using styles from all historical periods in the making of new music, an approach which he labeled as *ars combinatoria*. This conception of composition may be understood as part of a larger intellectual discourse in which historical cultural forms have currency in the living present. Within this discourse, the Third Quartet is not a regression into the past but rather an expression of contemporary historical concepts. This tension between a historical interpretation of Rochberg's Third String Quartet and the notion of the piece as neoconservative postmodernism can be used as a starting point in

the reconsideration of this binary model and its implementation to the study of concert music.

In their work on music and postmodernism, Jann Pasler (1993) and Jonathan Kramer (1995) both employ a binary conceptual model, derived from the work of art critic Hal Foster, that identifies radical and neoconservative types of postmodernism. The radical strand critiques cultural norms inherited from modernism, including "organic unity" and stylistic homogeneity. An example is John Zorn's *Forbidden Fruit*:

> *Forbidden Fruit* . . . offers a considerable dose of postmodern chaos. . . . Listening to *Forbidden Fruit* can be as dizzying as it is electrifying. You never know what is coming next, nor when. The stylistic juxtapositions are amazingly bold. If there is any discernible thread of continuity, the music would surely be more tame, more predictable, more ordinary. But there is not. (Kramer 1995, 22)

For Kramer, *Forbidden Fruit* embodies the defining features of radical postmodernism. Its contrasting musical excerpts constantly interrupt each other, precluding a regular temporal flow and destroying any pre-conceived expectations of how music should function: the "postmodern chaos" awakens listeners from their own complacency. Through the "postmodern chaos" of their music, the radical postmodernists restore the element of shock to composition that was present in the activities of early-twentieth-century composers such as Anton Webern and Arnold Schoenberg, but do so by questioning these earlier composers' obsession with structural continuity. Neoconservative postmodernism, the second strand, also critically engages modernism, but rejects it out of hand. Neoconservative composers employ premodern styles in an attempt to bring a new type of coherence to the "heterogeneous present" and re-establish the dominance of Western musical practice. Jann Pasler notes the musical characteristics that are indicative of a neoconservative postmodernism:

> In music, we all know about the nostalgia that has gripped composers in recent years, resulting in neo-romantic works . . . the sudden popularity of writing operas and symphonies again, of construing one's ideas in tonal terms. . . . Many of those returning to romantic sentiment, narrative curve, or simple melody wish to entice audiences back to the concert hall. To the extent that these developments are a true "about face," they represent a postmodernism of reaction, a return to pre-modernist musical thinking. (Pasler 1993, 17)

It is through the use of established art music genres and the evocation of various musical characteristics from nineteenth-century-era common prac-

tice that a neoconservative, or reactionary, postmodernism manifests itself musically. The conventional musical syntax contributes to the creation of a more accessible music, presumably to please those who find the work of composers such as Schoenberg, Webern, or later serialists like Milton Babbitt, Pierre Boulez, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, too demanding. Reactionary postmodernism represents a return to music that people find "pretty" and easy to understand.

Kramer and Pasler both describe George Rochberg as the "quintessential" neoconservative postmodernist composer and identify the Third String Quartet as the epitome of his reactionary aesthetic. Although neither discusses the characterization in great detail, Kramer supports his point by referring to Rochberg's "Can the Arts Survive Modernism?" in which the composer criticizes musical modernism as a serious artistic gaffe committed by Western culture and perceives the contemporary pluralism of the musical scene as potentially hazardous to social stability (Rochberg 1984). Rochberg argues that the only option is to look to music of the past Western classical tradition as a model of articulate artistic expression.

> The hope, now, is the growing demand to reclaim the past, to bring into existence by an intense exercise of will and self-consciousness languages which embrace the traditions of the premodern and modern periods. To bring into balance again the polarities of heart and mind, or what lies within and what lies without in the experience of man, is a sign that, once again, the arts may be pointing the way to a time when these qualities and characteristics will, perhaps, again appear as new values on the visible plane of a new social, economic, racial, and political order. (Rochberg 1984, 338)

Rochberg's comments substantiate Pasler's sense that the invocation of tonal music represents a reversion to a nineteenth-century notion of the composer as romantic hero, and justifies the judgment on the piece as anti-modern and reactionary (Pasler 1993, 18).

Kramer and Pasler rely on the statements of the composer to legitimate their classification, but they use an article written over ten years after Rochberg completed his quartet. An examination of writings from the time that Rochberg composed the Third Quartet reveals a distinctly different aesthetic stance that introduces a possible new interpretation of the piece. In his writings from the late 1960s and early 1970s, Rochberg advocates a "stylistic pluralism" in music. He believes that in contemporary culture, the past and present exist all around artists, allowing them to use techniques and styles from different historical periods. Rochberg labels this new approach as *ars combinatoria* and describes it as:

> . . . the use of every device and every technique appropriate to its specific gestural repertory in combination with every other device and technique,

> until theoretically all that we are and all that we know is bodied forth in the richest, most diverse music ever known to man. (Rochberg [1972] 1984, 238)

His concept of *ars combinatoria* amounts to a critical commentary on the accepted teleological approach to history and its implications in the study of music. When musicians develop a teleological view toward music, they assign particular works to the epoch of their creation and ignore their validity as cultural forms in the present. Rochberg adopts a different approach to history that underscores the relevance of past art to the contemporary composer:

> I stand in a circle of time, not a line. 360 degrees of past, present, future. All around me. I can look in any direction I want to. Bella Vista. (Rochberg [1969] 1984, 158)

Standing in the middle of this "circle of time," the artist can make use of all the different techniques and styles of different artistic periods to create a rich and diverse *ars combinatoria* Rochberg presents a different approach to history that would underscore the relevance of past art to the contemporary artist and usher in a new type of musical composition based on figuring out ways in which to integrate different historical styles.

> On the contrary, the twentieth century has pointed—however reluctant we may be to accept it in all areas of life, social as well as political, cultural, as well as intellectual—toward a difficult-to-define pluralism, a world of new mixtures and combinations of everything we have inherited from the past and we individually or collectively value in the inventions of our own present, replete with juxtapositions of opposites (or seeming opposites) and contraries. (Rochberg [1974] 1984, 240)

Composers can use past artistic styles as a repertoire of possibilities that they can combine, reconstruct, or juxtapose in the light of the present. They draw upon musical gestures that already exist in the cultural domain, and play off that knowledge to create something that is new, yet meaningful to their audience. While composers from past historical periods have been aware of historical predecessors and have even attempted to synthesize techniques of previous composers into their own music, few have articulated an aesthetic that resulted in the juxtaposition and integration of recognizable styles within one contemporary piece. The composers of this twentieth-century *ars combinatoria*, for Rochberg, could do just that, embracing the presence of past historical styles in the pluralistic contemporary culture and use it to their advantage.

Rochberg advocated a renewed "contact with the tradition and means of the past" in contemporary composition, but only from the perspective of a

pluralistic present (Rochberg [1974] 1984, 242). For Rochberg the educated composer actively confronted the pluralistic mélange of styles in an active way, located artistic similarities that will allow for their integration, and used these compatibilities to bring a fresh new way of organizing a composition.

> Pluralism, as I understand it, does not mean a simplistic array of different things somehow stuck together in arbitrary fashion but a way of seeing new possibilities of relationships; of discovering and uncovering hidden connections and working with them structurally; of joining antipodes without boiling out their tensions. . . . We struggle for clarity and order, to gain not a permanent certainty (which is not possible anyhow) but a momentary insight into how it is possible to resolve the chaos of existence into a shape or form which takes on beauty, perhaps meaning, certainly strength. (Rochberg [1974] 1984, 241)

Rochberg perceived a pluralism that was the result of an acute historical awareness, embraced it, and developed an *ars combinatoria* aesthetic to deal with it. At this point in his life, Rochberg was not acting as a musical conservative who wished to nostalgically revive a past method of composition, but was attempting to create a new compositional outlook that would respond to the cultural condition of the late twentieth century.

Rochberg's comments can be understood as part of a larger public discourse on the arts and society in the 1960s and 1970s. Writers at that time begin to identify particular features of contemporary society and examine their implications for cultural output in ways that are similar to the manner in which Rochberg discusses the relationship between a pluralistic world and his *ars combinatoria*. The published work of these authors, while having different foci and methodologies, were all concerned with the tenor of the times and helped to steer the intellectual conversation on such issues into a direction that focused on social and cultural pluralism. One of the most famous examples of this public discourse is the work of Canadian media analyst Marshall McLuhan. In his book *Understanding Media*, McLuhan presents his concept of human society as a "global village" of diverse groups brought together by electronic communication technology into a synchronic, eternal present (McLuhan 1964, 3–4). The electronic media operated as an external nervous system that connected people worldwide, allowing geographically distant communities to share information by radio, phone, or television; this rapid communication synchronized international events and abolished traditional notions of linear time and spatial distance:

> Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the

> final phase of the extensions of man—the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media. (McLuhan 1964, 3–4; see also McLuhan and Fiore 1967)

According to McLuhan, the creation of a global village had profound positive implications in the political structure of society. Once-ignored factions such as "the teen-ager" and "the Negro" were now connected to the dominant cultural groups by that surrogate central nervous system, the electronic media. The world was in the midst of a new era of cooperative pluralism in which everyone was empowered:

> As electronically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree. It is this implosive factor that alters the position of the Negro, the teen-ager, and some other groups. They can no longer be *contained*, in the political sense of limited association. They are now *involved* in our lives, as we in theirs, thanks to the electric media. (McLuhan 1964, 5)

The global village is a multicultural mêlange of different peoples living within a synchronic, eternal present. Electronic media do not blend the mix into a homogeneous texture, but wrap the separate groups in a "global embrace." Because of the electronic nervous system, an event that occurs in one part of the world is a "simultaneous happening" that is received immediately by everyone everywhere (McLuhan and Fiore 1967, 63). Society is, according to McLuhan, a heterogeneous bundle of peoples united in time and space by the electronic media.

Five years before McLuhan published his pronouncements on how the media would change society, historian and economist Robert L. Heilbroner predicted that the tendency toward historical stasis would be a key characteristic of society in the 1960s (Heilbroner 1959, 195). Heilbroner that history demonstrates as many eras defined by stasis as those by the desire to move forward through revolutions, battles, and upheavals. He predicted that the 1960s would be a time of historical stasis.

> Taking into account the human condition as it now exists, the laggard slowness with which improvements in institutions are followed by improvements in "life," the blurred and ambiguous fashion in which history passes from problem to problem, it is certain enough that the tenor of world history will remain much as it is for a long while to come. (Heilbroner 1959, 205)

While he does not deny the possibility that historical progress exists,

Heilbroner does concede that, at the very least, it will not exist in American life in the 1960s. The author sees the institutional configuration of American society and the random nature in which important problems are dealt with as two important contributing factors to this stasis. This prediction does sound much less optimistic than the concept of the "global village," but what it shares with McLuhan's work is an understanding of the world as being involved in a synchronous world event and its continuation in this state. Just as McLuhan was thinking of the world as a "global village," so was Heilbroner predicting a time in which no significant change would occur, when historical time would—at least temporarily—stop moving forward.

Heilbroner's and McLuhan's focus on political and social situations in their evaluations of contemporary life find a parallel in the work of Leonard Meyer, who considers how changes in society affect the production of cultural artifacts in the 1960s. In *Music, the Arts, and Ideas,* Meyer describes life in the late twentieth century as "perplexing and fragmented," and identifies a period of "cultural stasis" in which various styles of artistic media are practiced simultaneously (Meyer 1967, v, 134).

> Perhaps our time would be characterized, not by the cumulative development of a single style, but by the coexistence of a number of alternative styles in a kind of "dynamic steady-state." It is the exploration of this hypothesis which forms the central core of my book. (Meyer 1967, v)

One reason for this artistic pluralism is the changing notion of history and the role of artworks from the past in contemporary society. Society no longer views history as a progression of distinct epochs, and artists no longer believe that artistic styles can only be meaningful within the historical context in which they were originally created. Artists are now free to use styles of the past as a "repository" of material for the creation of works in the present:

> History is no longer a dialectic succession of necessary stages, but an objective ordering of recorded evidence; and truth is no longer single and ultimate, but provisional and pluralistic. Thus the ideological and psychological conditions which have hitherto precluded the free and open use of past means and materials no longer prevail. The present may now incorporate the past. (Meyer 1967, 190)

Elsewhere, Meyer emphasizes paradigm shifts within the academic community and their importance in changing the way people think. And he links new attitudes toward the use of historical musical material with changes in the fields of history and philosophy. Unlike Heilbroner and in alignment with the utopian vision of McLuhan, Meyer sees this condition as a positive development. The intellectual freedom from older modes of

thought allow the artist to make new decisions about their work that were never ever available before.

In light of Meyer's ideas of artistic pluralism, Rochberg may be understood as decidedly au courant, and not at all conservative or retro. His *ars combinatoria* embodies a desire to come to terms compositionally with the larger social situation that McLuhan, Heilbroner, and Meyer articulate in verbal terms. Not advocating the reconstruction of any glorified imagined past, Rochberg articulated a compositional approach compatible with the way we lived in the world. In fact, Rochberg advocated an aesthetic stance that has more in common with the radical postmodernism that Kramer and Pasler describe. The point here is not to reclaim Rochberg as a radical postmodernist, but rather to demonstrate the confusion that results when a different historical perspective other than the one presented by Kramer and Pasler is considered. Given the discrepancy between the ideas Rochberg verbally articulates in the 1960s and 1970s and those of the 1980s, the question must be raised whether it is possible to understand the piece and its allusions to past musical styles as an attempt to realize the *ars combinatoria* principle with respect to its contemporary intellectual context.

Stylistic allusion pervades the Third String Quartet; what is interesting about this feature is the way Rochberg organizes the music to create a sense of diversity that precludes any understanding of the piece as being unified by any one comprehensive compositional style. The first movement has no obvious stylistic allusions—it is written in a non-tonal style—but is a gradually unfolding aural mosaic of musical fragments whose organization sets the pluralistic tone for the rest of the piece (see Figure 11-1).

A	B	A	B/D	C	D	C	E	C	E	F	E	F	A	D	A'	B	A
1-24	27-39	40-62	63-74	75-80	81-102	103-5	106-8	109-11	112-13	114-17	118-20	121-24	125-27	128-48	149-253		

continuation · continuation · stretto reminiscence · continuation · cyclical recapitulation

Figure 11-1. Presentation of Gestural Units George Rochberg, Third String Quartet, first movement.

The first movement contains six distinct musical units whose temporal succession is characterized by juxtaposition. Unit A—a repetition of loud, quick gestures separated by short moments of silence—is interrupted by B, a progression of non-tonal chords introduced by an ascending sixteenth-note figure. As B fades away to *pianissimo* at m. 39, the A unit returns to continue its contrasting music. This is not a repetition of the original statement but rather its continuation. The second A music at mm 40–62 begins with the music that ends the first statement of A, not with its distinctive opening gesture. The connection between the two units allows for the recognition of section A as a continuation of the first, and B can be heard as an interruption in the musical flow. To invoke a spatial metaphor, B breaks A into two individual fragments. The cleavage of unit A by B is indicative of the musical juxtapositions and fragmentations of the rest of the movement and piece.

As the presentation of disparate musical material continues in the first movement, two new gestural units are presented: C at mm. 75–80, and D at mm. 81–102. C is a repetition of one three-bar phrase constructed of eighth-note tritones in the violins, while D consists of a recurring major second motive superimposed upon a tonal chorale in B major played in double-stops by the viola and cello. Unit C returns in mm. 103–5, but only the first phrase is presented before yet another distinct passage—unit E—pre-empts it. The final phase occurs at mm. 109–11, creating a separation of C by E that is similar to the fracturing of section A that occurred in the opening measures of the movement. When music of the D unit returns at mm 128–48, there is also a sense that these measures belong to the earlier D music, that they continue the earlier presentation. The first occurrence of D, at mm. 81–102, ended on the dominant chord of F$^{\#}$ major; the recurrence continues the tonal progression at m 128 with a vi chord that eventually settles into a clear B-major tonic key. Although tonality is used here, its usual sense of forward motion is stymied by both the fracturing of the unit into two parts—at mm. 81–102 and 128–48—and by the context in which it operates; D is just one fragmented unit within a larger whole of autonomous musical segments. In the midst of this musical mélange is unit F, mm. 114–17 and 121–24, which alternates with repetitions of unit E in mm. 112–13 and 118–20. The movement ends with a restatement of units A and B in mm. 149–235, the music that began this onslaught of different musical fragments.

The allusions to past composers' work begins in the second movement and continues to the end of the quartet. At almost every point in the quartet, one can compare what is heard to other music in the western classical repertoire: non-tonal passages evoke the work of such composers as Bartók, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg, while other sections incorporating common practice tonality are written in styles characteristic of Beethoven and Mahler. These moments of music are constantly being introduced, abandoned, and revisited with no overt continuity between them; they operate together within one piece of music, but have only limited connections (see Figure 11-2).

Second Movement	Third Movement	Fourth Movement	Fifth Movement
March Stravinsky/Schoenberg	Variations in A Major Beethoven	March (continuation)	Scherzo Bartók/Beethoven Serenade Mahler

Figure 11-2. Juxtaposition of Stylistic Allusions. Rochberg, Third String Quartet.

The second movement is an atonal march that calls to mind the opening of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* or Schoenberg's *Serenade,* Op. 24. Contrasting with the rhythmic drive and parodic intensity of the march music, the third movement is a set of variations in A major that calls to mind Beethoven's late string quartets, particularly Op. 131. The fourth movement continues with music from the second movment's march: the relation is enacted through similar motivic material and identical performance directions—both are to be played "spirited; but grotesque" at precisely the same tempo. The continuation of the march here creates an interesting relationship between the second, third, and fourth movements that is similar to the juxtaposition of material in the first movement. The slow Beethovenesque third movement temporarily interrupts the intense march music. There is no attempt to integrate the two sections in any way—the two manifestations of the march and the slow movement exist independently.

The fifth movement continues the onslaught of allusions, containing scherzo music reminiscent of Bartók and Beethoven, as well as a D-major serenade that evokes the *gemütliche* sentimentality of Gustav Mahler. Again in this fifth movement we hear the juxtaposition of individual musical moments of music, as the scherzo music and serenade alternate. It is as if one is constantly interrupting the other throughout the movement.

The Third Quartet, with its plethora of different styles, is an artistic realization of Rochberg's *ars combinatoria* aesthetic, and an analysis from this perspective calls into question the characterization of the piece as a neoconservative manifestation of nostalgia. Rochberg used musical material marked as past for his own, "present-ist" composition. Kramer and Pasler, working within a binary model of postmodernism, do not acknowledge such an interpretation; their critical assessment is predicated on binary and non-historical framework which disallows the understanding I propose here.

While analytical discussion based in Rochberg's aesthetic stance in the 1960s and '70s and in the larger intellectual context precludes a neoconservative interpretation, some might still say that the piece exhibits neoconservative characteristics since its stylistic allusions refer only to canonical concert music composers. But it would help to keep three points in mind. The first is that Rochberg was a composer who worked in an American university music department, and his music was at least in part

a reaction to the institutional paradigm of composition as quasi-scientific research (see Davis 1992, 1993; Brody 1996). Rochberg began his career as a strict serial composer, working within a post-Schoenbergian atonal style and under the shadow of composers like Milton Babbitt. Measured against the music that was written under that paradigm, Rochberg's music does sound stylistically pluralistic. The second point is that he wanted to reconnect with music from the past because it was also the music of the present, enjoyed by many people through concert performances and recordings. Third, Rochberg conceived his compositional practices in terms of "possibility," not of establishing "a permanent certainty (which is not possible anyhow) but a momentary insight into how it is possible to resolve the chaos of existence into a shape or form which takes on beauty, perhaps meaning, certainly strength" (Rochberg [1974] 1984, 241). Rochberg conceived of the world as a mixture of cultures from the past and present; his approach to composition was one way of acknowledging the pluralism and creating music that can successfully operate as part of it.

An investigation of Rochberg's allusion to the style of one particular composer—Gustav Mahler—demonstrates how the Third Quartet constructs an understanding of music from the past as part of the present. Rochberg evokes Mahler's music in the fifth movement, the "Finale: Scherzos and Serenades." Jay Reise notes the evocation, comparing mm. 240–243 of the quartet with m. 75 from the final movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony (Reise 1980/1981, 404; and see Figure 11-1). Reise lists particular aspects of Mahler's music that are present in the quartet: "the double-changing note figure, the harmonic progression, the pedals, the mood, the dramatic leap of the minor seventh" (405). When hearing Rochberg's piece, I am struck by how evocative these characteristics are. Especially distinctive are the sixteenth-note turn, which Reise calls the "double-changing note figure," and the large descending melodic leaps, two musical elements that have become synonymous with Mahler's style and appear in many of his other works. A second comparison between the Third Quartet and the Ninth Symphony strengthens the connection between the two. In both excerpts an opening two-note motive slowly develops into a full-fledged melody. Both also have counter melodies—in the Ninth it is the horn, in the Quartet it is the first violin—and share a similar diatonic accompaniment figuration in D major. The tempos and dynamics are similar as well.

Rochberg's adoption of Mahler's style in his Third Quartet depends for its meaning on the audience's knowledge of that style. At the time that the quartet was composed, Mahler's music was particularly popular and listeners would surely have understood the reference. They would have probably also had a particular opinion of Mahler's music and would have been aware of its popularity. The Third Quartet highlights the importance of Mahler's oeuvre as part of the musical culture in the here-and-now, emphasizing the presentness of this past musical style as a music that is actively engaged by

the contemporary audience. Already versed in the style of the older composer's music, listeners bring their own meanings to bear on the allusions:

> If, as Rochberg claims, the past is indelibly printed in each of our psyches, and each of us is "... part of a vast physical-mental-spiritual web of previous lives, existences, modes of thought, behavior, and perception ... of actions and feelings ...," then our past experiences of the Mahler Ninth are a part of that web. (Reise 1980/1981, 405)

When a composer alludes to a historical style, there is usually the assumption that it will be understood and that the audience will have some sort of reaction to it. The popularity of Mahler's music in the early 1970s when Rochberg wrote his Third Quartet emphasizes this point. In 1971 movie director Visconti used music from Mahler's Third and Fifth Symphonies as the soundtrack to *Death in Venice*. Granted larger exposure through soundtrack highlight albums, this music was enjoyed by many who never really followed orchestral music:

> People who do not listen to much other classical music do listen to Mahler. ... Conversely, a person ignorant of or indifferent to Mahler's music is apt to get disqualified as a feeling human being. In other words, Mahler arouses more than ordinary emotions in his listeners, who form intimate relationships with his music and identify themselves by their allegiances to it. (Hoffman 1975, 52)

The exposure provided by *Death in Venice* was actually the commercial crest of a large wave of popularity that began in the 1960s. By the early 1970s, "Mahler ... is *in*, he is *heavy*" (Gross 1973, 484; see also Danuser 1991; Tibbs 1977). The Third Quartet builds upon this popularity and uses it to emphasize the existence of past music in our present. This approach to the past is not "an attempt to reverse time's arrow, to return to the untroubled virtue of an idealized past" (Meyer 1967, 1993). It involves the compositional use of past styles relevant in the present. This material is clearly recognizable as being similar to a historical style, allowing the audience to make that connection. When allusions are juxtaposed, as in the case of the Third String Quartet, the effect makes one aware of how the past fits into present-day life as music to be consumed.

My argument so far has been that a binary model of postmodernism provides a less than satisfactory understanding of Rochberg's music by ignoring historical evidence and alternative analytical approaches. Another effect of a binary model manifests itself in Kramer's and Pasler's work. The binary model derives from a desire to demonstrate the presence of a contemporary avant-garde that is the historical successor to early twentieth-century composers. By focusing on the similarities and differences between

modern and postmodern music in relation only to each other, writers are attempting to expand the imagined lineage of art music history. Such a limited approach—one that disregards or downplays how the composer understood the piece, critical reaction to it, and how the music might resonate with other cultural forms and discourses—sidesteps important evidence that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of a piece of music and its existence as an event experienced by people in a historical situation. I myself have certain biases and interests in my research: I personally feel that the use of historical evidence—composer's comments and early criticism—from the time in which a piece was written and first performed can be an effective basis for an analysis. But whatever analytical approach we take, we must always be aware that there are other strategies to be employed. In the case of Rochberg's Third String Quartet, it may not simply be enough to call it neoconservative.

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CHAPTER 12

Resistant Strains of Postmodernism:

The Music of Helmut Lachenmann and Brian Ferneyhough

Ross Feller

In the 1960s, as the hegemony of total serialism waned, the German composer Helmut Lachenmann and the British composer Brian Ferneyhough began writing pieces that posed extreme solutions to the compositional cul-de-sac young composers faced at that time. John Cage had already "invaded" Europe with his ideas about indeterminacy and aleatoricism in music. His presence at the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik at Darmstadt in 1958 encouraged many European composers to question and re-examine certain types of modernist practice such as serialism. Many opted to explore indeterminate forms and other types of perceived freedom. Lachenmann and Ferneyhough, however, pursued different paths in their respective efforts to move beyond the serial impasse. Each sought to reinject vitality back into the idea of closed-form composition through integrating excessive, unstable, and chaotic structures. Almost three and a half decades later, they continue to develop these issues in their work, issues that foreground qualities that make art a human endeavor.

Throughout this essay several binary distinctions are employed, not in order to demonstrate invariant separation, but instead to unleash the friction or contradiction that results from their points of contact. Rub two sticks together long enough and you'll begin to see a fire.

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On one side there are dreamers, poets, and inventors whose activities demonstrate a commitment to transcendence, infinity, and the sublime. They may resist pressures to quantify, package, and sort, by creating things that quantify, package, and sort in the extreme. Thus, opportunities are created for breakdowns and failures, requiring new categories, languages, and thoughts. On the other side are bureaucrats, preachers, and a few old-school scientists, who pay homage to the concept of truth, in a world which they see as moving toward total explanation and accountability.