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CHAPTER 9

Production vs. Reception in

Postmodernism:

The Górecki Case

Luke Howard

In February 1993, a new recording of Henryk Górecki's Third Symphony, the "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs," reached the no. 6 position on the British pop album charts, outselling new releases by Madonna and REM.¹ It was twice the fastest climber on that chart, achieving silver and gold record status in the same week, while in the United States it appeared on *Billboard's* classical charts for 134 consecutive weeks. Never before had a recording of any piece of art music attained such sudden and spectacular success; that it should happen with a slow and somber contemporary symphonic work by a relatively unknown Polish composer was, to many observers, even more bizarre.²

In subsequent years, Górecki's symphony has insinuated itself so deeply into the ears and minds of a new, predominantly young audience that the repercussions of that phenomenon continue to sound long after the symphony's notoriety had crested. One of the more unusual manifestations of this phenomenon is in the work of pop musicians who have taken Górecki's popularity and crossover appeal as a point of departure, creating songs that combine pop styles and technologies with quotations or references to Górecki's music.

In the ways that it challenges traditional boundaries between "high" and "low," past and present, elitism and populism, this body of work and the whole Górecki phenomenon might be viewed as quintessentially postmodern. For example, taking Fredric Jameson's essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" as a measure, it would be easy to label Górecki's symphony itself as postmodern. Jameson posits two general principles that unite many of the varieties of postmodernisms across the arts: first, an effacement of key boundaries, especially the distinction between high culture and mass culture; and second, a specific reaction against high-modernism (Jameson 1983, 111–12). But if the Górecki phenomenon in general (and not just his symphony specifically) is to be understood as post-

modern, then the focus must move beyond the cultural artifact alone to consider issues of reception and the audience.

The task of determining which aspects of the phenomenon may be profitably understood from the vantage point of postmodernism is made even more difficult by the web of myth, media hype, and misinformation that surrounds the Górecki case. Clearly the best-selling recording of the Third Symphony, released on the Elektra-Nonesuch label in 1992, effaced some very obvious and long-standing boundaries. Its level of popular success, especially among young listeners used to MTV and alternative rock, challenged the whole notion of a dichotomy between "high" culture and pop culture to the extent that the composer was labeled by the press a "hero of Generation X" (Croan 1994). Concurrently, Górecki's music began to infiltrate another principal channel of pop culture—the movie industry—where it continued to be associated with pop music. Peter Weir's 1993 film, *Fearless* (starring Jeff Bridges, Isabella Rossellini, and Rosie Perez), uses lengthy excerpts of the Third Symphony alongside tracks by the Gipsy Kings. The soundtrack for Julian Schnabel's *Basquiat* (1996) includes the Third Symphony and songs by Joy Division, Public Image Ltd., and other pop artists. And Bertrand Blier's 1996 soft-core porn film, *Mou Homme*, juxtaposes Górecki's lesser-known Second Symphony with the sultry verbal foreplay of Barry White. Through its appeal to young listeners, and its association with pop musicians and cinema, Górecki's music had clearly entered the realm of popular culture.

Conforming to Jameson's second criteria of postmodernism, the Third Symphony, with its relative consonance and readily coherent form, provocatively challenged the prevailing stylistic traits of high modernism that prevailed in the mid-1970s, when it was composed. Premiered at the 1977 International Festival of Contemporary Art in Royan, France—one of the most important avant-garde festivals of the time—it was largely a critical failure in that venue. Alan Rusbridger (1993) later reported in the *(London) Guardian* that one "prominent French musician" (possibly Boulez, though Górecki doesn't name him specifically) let out a very audible "Merde!" as the symphony's final chords died away. Some of the critics in attendance even questioned whether the work belonged at such a festival, admitting that it was unquestionably "beautiful" but, therefore, not sufficiently avant-garde (Kanski 1977, 15). In a telling comment that positions this work as post—"high modernist," if not expressly postmodernist, Górecki told a reporter for the *(London) Independent* that he considered his symphony the most truly avant-garde piece he heard at the festival.

Though the Third Symphony appears to satisfy Jameson's two criteria cited above, such a case for its "postmodern" status would be misguided. In particular, the "effacement of boundaries" did not begin until years after the work was premiered, suggesting that there was little that might be

regarded as inherently postmodern in the music itself, and it was regarded as reactionary only in the very narrow and specific context of a particular avant-garde festival. If there is a case to be made for a postmodernist interpretation of the Górecki phenomenon in general, then it would appear to hinge on the symphony's popularity in the 1990s, and the pop musicians who quote or reference Górecki's music in their own work.

Even before the Third Symphony's phenomenal success in 1993, it had begun to intrigue and influence pop musicians. The English industrial group Test Department played recorded excerpts of the symphony in a pre-concert mixed-media collage during their "Unacceptable Face of Freedom" tour in 1985–86, and in several smaller concerts before then; years before the work had even been given its British concert premiere.³ Test Department gave a tape of the symphony to the young British composer Steve Martland, who indicated in 1991 that there was a burgeoning underground interest in the work at the time, fueled by young musicians trading pirate copies of the symphony (Martland 1991, 45).

As the Third Symphony's popularity grew in late 1992 in early 1993, its connections with the world of commercial music accelerated. Warner, the parent company for the Elektra-Nonesuch recording label, advertised the symphony as one of its Christmas specials in 1992, alongside Madonna's *Erotica*, REM's *Automatic for the People*, and a re-release of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*. A more direct interface with pop music occurred in 1993, when the Norwegian "goth"-music band Ildfrost sampled the opening of the Third Symphony on their track "Hearts Perturb" from the *Absolute Sinner* album. Over a foundation of cellos and basses quored from the opening of the symphony's first movement, Ildfrost layered speech fragments, radio noise, synthesized chords, and choral interjections, creating a softly ambient sonic collage. A similar procedure was followed by Faust, the famed *Krautrock* band from the '70s, who in 1994 produced their first studio album in over twenty years, *Ren*. In the track "Eroberung der Stille, Teil 1," the opening orchestral canon from the symphony's first movement serves as a scaffold for Faust's trademark industrial noises and violent vocalizing. Ildfrost's track seems relatively innocuous compared with the political and aesthetic implications of Faust's Górecki quotation. Faust's artistic manifesto, released in 1973, promotes a situationist absurdity whose intent and intensity transcend the blank ecdecticism of Ildfrost's collage. The common (though inaccurate) perception of Górecki's Third Symphony as an anti-Nazi work (Howard 1997) resonates with Faust's ongoing attempts to confront Germany's history through music. Rather than being merely a sonic aggregate, Faust's appropriation of Górecki is a tightly constructed anti-fascist political statement that coalesces as the listener connects the disparate sonic layers, linking the sampled screams with the violent subtexts of Górecki's symphony, the helicopter sounds and the industrial noise with the machinery of war. This

postmodernist placement of meaning within the listener (as opposed to a meaning situated in the musical work itself) is one of Faust's primary aesthetic goals. As stated in their manifesto:

Faust have mentioned that working as they do in the space between concept & realisation they are in fact doing nothing. Faust would like to play for you the *sound of yourself listening*.

Then we would have consciousness.

then we could talk about altering that consciousness.

then we could forget about the music.⁴

The same year that Faust issued the *Rien* album, William Orbit recorded electronic versions of some Górecki pieces, alongside works by Satie, Barber, and Arvo Pärt, and planned to release the recording under the title *Pieces in A Modern Style*. The title is a play on Górecki's *Three Pieces in Olden Style* (a favorite "filler" track on many recordings of the Third Symphony), from which Orbit had arranged two pieces for synthesizer. Publishing-house lawyers threatened to file lawsuits over the unauthorized arrangements of the Pärt and Górecki pieces (which were still protected by copyright), and the recording was pulled from the shelves the week of its release.⁵

Repeating Test Department's experiment of a decade earlier, the Smashing Pumpkins played taped excerpts of the Third Symphony as a pre-concert warm-up for audiences during their 1996 world tour. At a concert in Auckland, New Zealand, on May 23, 1996, the mosh-pit became dangerously crowded. Concert management turned on the floodlights and rebroadcast the symphony over the sound system in an effort to calm the audience. A local rock critic, who described the scene as a "crowd crush baller" continued his account: "Under harsh fluoro lights, hundreds of kids were being pulled out of the steaming, squirming mass of greasy hair and wet t-shirts to the sound of Henryk Górecki's Symphony No. 3. Ominous cellos bellowing out of the speakers as bouncers struggled to save the fearful young kids who got more than they bargained for."⁶ This event occurred only days after a teenage girl had been crushed to death at a Smashing Pumpkins concert in Dublin, Ireland. In this case, Górecki's symphony may have helped save some young lives, while recalling in its lyrics the grief of tragically young deaths.

All these examples involve wholesale quotation or sampling, where the audience would be expected to recognize Górecki's music in the new context. But equally as significant as the musical borrowings themselves is the ease with which rock journalists and reviewers refer to these Górecki quo-

tations in their articles, without explanation or elaboration. His music was so well-known among rock/pop audiences that these writers assumed knowledge of Górecki's symphony among their readership.

In addition to these overt quotations, other mainly British pop musicians have produced works where Górecki's influence is much more subtle. Meriel Barham, the lead singer and guitarist for the British group Pale Saints, once said in an interview that Górecki is the only classical composer she listens to.⁷ According to the interviewer, Górecki lends name and musical inspiration to the track "Henry" from the Pale Saints' 1994 album *Slow Buildings*. The reference to Górecki is an esoteric one, as the musical style of this song is far removed from that of the Third Symphony, and there are no allusions to him or his music in the lyrics. There are, however, some slight connections that may indicate a subtle influence. At 10'47" it is rather long for a pop song, pushing the envelope of the genre just as the Third Symphony tested the limits of continuous *adagio* composition. "Henry" is based on a constantly repeating two-chord ostinato, a slow non-cadential progression in a minor key from consonance to slight dissonance that may refer obliquely to the opening of the symphony's third movement, though it's also not out of place in standard pop repertoires.

The closest reference to Górecki's music steals in almost unnoticed at the end of "Henry," where Pale Saints directly sample two orchestral chords from a later passage in the third movement of the Third Symphony. Pale Saints downplay the borrowing by quoting it in a different harmonic context, and not introducing it until the song's final fade is well under way (it is barely perceptible at normal volume levels). Once identified, the reference is unmistakable, though it is deeply buried in the musical form and texture, and not likely to be discernible to most listeners.

The English "future bebop" duo Lamb (Andy Barlow and Louise Rhodes) have had some success with the song "Górecki," from their debut self-titled album, released in 1996. "Górecki" made it into the U.K. pop Top 40 in late 1996, was included on the soundtrack for *Girlstown* and *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer*, and was featured in a third-season episode of *La Femme Nikita*.⁸ The instrumental remix became something of a dance-club favorite in the United States and Europe. The Third Symphony's influence on this song is more overt than in the Pale Saints' work, and not merely by virtue of the title. Like "Henry," Lamb's song alternates two slow chords in non-cadential progression in a minor key, but it also features a background arrangement of orchestral strings, along with the Górecki thumbprint of punctuating piano notes sustained by string chords.

The song's opening line of text, "If I should die this very moment, I wouldn't fear," is analogous to the symphony's second movement, which sets the courageous pleas of a young woman facing imminent death. But if Lamb's slightly cryptic lyrics seem more like a love song ("I've found the

one I've waited for . . ."), then it is important to remember that the Third Symphony is also inherently about a strong emotional bond, that between a mother and child, as much as it is about death. As in the Pale Saints' song, the clearest musical reference comes in an understated conclusion. The final note of "Górecki" is a low sustained E on the bass: an identical musical gesture (in pitch, register, and instrumentation) to the conclusion of the symphony's first movement.

As this song's popularity was peaking, there were media reports that Lamb, like the Pale Saints, had actually sampled the Third Symphony. While there doesn't appear to be any direct sampling from a recording of the symphony, Lamb's Andy Barlow didn't exactly deny the reports either. He did admit that sometimes he will tape musicians as they play a composition, and then sample those sounds.⁹ If this is the case in "Górecki," then the background string arrangements and the song's final low E on bass may have a closer, direct origin in the Third Symphony.¹⁰

In a 1997 review of Lamb's "Górecki," the reviewer claimed that the Third Symphony had been "more ably and slyly referenced in Tricky's re-imagination of Garbage's 'Milk,'" than it was in Lamb's song.¹¹ Garbage—a noise-pop band out of Madison, Wisconsin, but led by the sultry Scottish redhead Shirley Manson—recorded "Milk" as the final track on their 1996 self-titled debut album. The popular and critical success of this album prompted the release of a CD single that included two remixes of "Milk," one of them by Tricky, the Bristol-born "trip-hop" musician who had previously worked with the Bristol bands Massive Attack and Porishhead (the band with which, incidentally, Lamb is most often compared). The original version of "Milk" shares much in common with Lamb's "Górecki." Both are in the same key (E-minor) as the opening movement of the Third Symphony, and both feature a slow simple harmonic progression as the basis for the song. The repeated refrain in "Milk"—"I'm waiting, I'm waiting for you"—is closely related in textual theme to the refrain of Lamb's "Górecki" ("I've found the one I've waited for").

The repeated text—"I'm waiting"—is set to a three-note motif of a rising minor third, followed by a descending half-step. Adrian Thomas, in his study of Górecki's music, has identified this motif as the "Śmierkowski turn" (Thomas 1997, 85, 91), a characteristic figure in Polish folksongs and in much of Górecki's oeuvre, but especially apparent in all movements of the Third Symphony. While Garbage's "Milk" might exhibit these similar features with the Third Symphony only coincidentally (there is no evidence to suggest Górecki's music influenced Garbage directly), Tricky makes the most of these similarities and explicitly alludes to the symphony in his remix. His whispered doubling of Manson's breathy delivery is juxtaposed against brief snippets of a classically-trained soprano singing a rising four-note scale (from E to A in E-minor). It is precisely the same musical gesture as the first vocal entry in the symphony's first movement. While the

soprano voice in Tricky's remix has been altered in the studio, the vowels are identical to those in Górecki's text ("Synku," Polish for "my son"), and the halo of orchestral strings that surround this vocal excerpt further suggest that it might be an actual sample from the symphony.

The other remix of "Milk" on this CD single is by the British jungle/drum 'n' bass musician, Goldie, who would later release his own tribute to Górecki on his 1998 *Saturday Return* album. Issued as a double CD set, the first disc of *Saturday Return* consists almost entirely of the track "Mother." Goldie's tribute not only to his own mother, but to Górecki and the Third Symphony. He had been introduced to the symphony by fellow musician and former girlfriend Björk. Goldie later admitted, "Björk showed me Górecki, and Górecki showed me something else. Don't fuck with Górecki. I love him so much. I just went and smashed his head with a sledgehammer and pulled out his whole brain, and that's what 'Mother' is."¹²

In this song, Goldie works completely outside of his idiom.¹³ He eschews the jungle rhythms and rapid drum 'n' bass tempi that made his *Timeless* album so popular. Instead, he writes a slow track for thirty-piece string orchestra, with added ambient synthesized sound and digital echo. Described by one critic as "monstrously long, desperately ambitious," "Mother" is, at over an hour in length, actually longer than the symphony that inspired it.¹⁴

Over sustained string clusters (borrowing another Górecki thumbprint), Goldie repeats a call to his mother using the three-note motif of the "Śmierkowski turn," as well as a variation on it consisting of just the descending half-step. Often in Górecki's music, this motif and its variant represent a call for divine help, though in the second movement of the Third Symphony it is used explicitly for the word "Mamo," a Polish word for "mother." This seems to be the passage that provided the most direct inspiration for Goldie's "Mother."

Goldie has been severely criticized for what might be regarded as this self-indulgent, hypertrophic work. Steven Segeman wrote, "This spooky and esoteric piece tells us very little about Goldie's mom but I'm sure that every time he hears or plays it, it serves some Oedipal-curative function in his subconscious and that's sweet."¹⁵ But in this regard Goldie also mimics Górecki, who has manifested a fixation with the maternal in several of his compositions. Górecki's mother died on his second birthday, and his sense of loss is plainly expressed in works such as the Three Songs (Op. 3), *Ad matrem*, and of course the Third Symphony.¹⁶

It was the grieving emotional focus of the Third Symphony that influenced the work of Craig Armstrong, a classically-trained Scottish composer who has also done orchestral arrangements for Madonna, U2, Massive Attack, and other prominent pop artists. Górecki's influence is most conspicuous in Armstrong's work on Baz Luhrman's 1996 film *William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet,"*¹⁷ which also included pop

songs by Des'ree, Burthole Surfers, and (significantly, in this context) Garbage. In Armstrong's underscoring for the young lovers' double suicide at the climax of the movie (titled "Death Scene" on the soundtrack), the allusion to Górecki's symphony is overt and obviously intentional. Armstrong imitates the vocal climax of the symphony's first movement, resonating with the soprano soloist's text in that passage: "Because you are already leaving me, my cherished hope." Both the passage from the symphony and Armstrong's cue begin with an open octave in the orchestral strings, and a sustained pedal-point as a soprano sings a rising minor-mode scale (Phrygian in the symphony, harmonic minor in Armstrong's cue). Both feature a huge orchestral crescendo as the singer reaches the end of her phrase, and both resolve this crescendo into an intricate web of *fortissimo* orchestral counterpoint at the climax. Armstrong must have known that the audience for this movie would include many of the young consumers who had responded so enthusiastically to Górecki's symphony, and who continued to enjoy the music of Lamb, Goldie, Garbage, and Tricky. The reference is therefore not merely coincidental or opportunistic, but an astutely placed symbol of the acceptance of Górecki's music within the idioms of pop culture; a connection that many in the movie theater would have recognized immediately.

Each of these examples—the symphony itself and the commercial music that alludes to it—have clearly challenged the boundaries between high art and mass culture, thus satisfying one of Jameson's postmodern principles. The issue becomes a little more complex when we consider what Jameson suggests is the *practice* of postmodernism: namely, "pastiche" and "temporal schizophrenia." He defines pastiche as "the imitation, or better still, the mimicry of other styles and particularly the mannerisms and stylistic twitches of other styles" (Jameson 1983, 113). It's exactly the mannerisms of Górecki's music—the alternating chords, the Skierkowski rum, the rich string-dominated orchestrations—that Pale Saints, Lamb, Tricky, Goldie, and Armstrong have mimicked, and that Lidtost, Faust, and Orbit have borrowed. But Jameson outlines only two possible motivations for stylistic imitation: one that mocks the original model (which he labels "parody") and one that is emotionally neutral, or "pastiche," which he describes as "blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor" (114). Convinced that contemporary culture—"a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible" (115)—has lost the ability or inclination to admire, Jameson fails to acknowledge another kind of mimicry, namely, that which functions as *hommage*. The primary reason, I would argue, that each of these commercial musicians, from Test Department in the mid-'80s to Goldie in the late '90s, appropriated Górecki's music is that they had been deeply affected by it, just as Górecki himself appropriated Chopin and Beethoven out of sincere respect.

When Jameson talks about the second of his criteria for postmodern

practice, "temporal schizophrenia," he uses the term not in the clinical sense, but as it is understood by Lacan: the discontinuity of linear time and an uncertainty about the historical past (Jameson 1983, 118–19). He states, "Our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, and has begun to live in a perpetual present. . . . [The media] serve as the very agents and mechanisms for our historical amnesia" (125).

Just one small example from the Górecki phenomenon suffices to suggest this may not be entirely true. Each of the three texts from the Third Symphony is historical, and unapologetically so. The first movement sets a fifteenth-century text based on the theme of Mary at the foot of the cross, the second is a graffiti from a Gestapo prison cell wall, and the third an early twentieth-century Polish folk text about a political uprising. Each of these texts has tremendous immediacy, especially for Poles but also for the many others who have interpreted the symphony as a memorial or a cathartic expression of grief. Górecki's musical setting aids the listener in understanding the texts' historical narrative, and confirms that his approach to the past remains essentially linear. The oldest text, that of the first movement, is preceded by a lengthy canonic exposition in the orchestra. After the short text, the canon starts up again and proceeds to unravel itself in reverse, ending exactly where it started, with a low E in the double basses. It is as if Górecki uses the orchestral prelude and postlude as a kind of musical time-machine to carry listeners to the distant past, then bring them back to the present.¹⁸ The most recent text, the second movement, has the shortest orchestral introduction and conclusion. The third movement continues the pattern, suggesting that the composer used this technique consciously to represent the texts' relative historical distance. Additionally, the composer quotes the symphony's oldest musical sources (Polish hymn and folksong) in the first movement, which sets the oldest of the three texts. The second oldest text quotes Chopin and Beethoven, and the most recent text makes no direct use of pre-existent music. Thus, in this composition that was so widely disseminated through mass media, Jameson's blanket claim for historical amnesia appears somewhat overstated.

The divisions between "high" art and mass culture (however permeable or imaginary they may be in the first place) have clearly been breached. The key issue is one that Jameson points to in the title of his essay: the "consumer society." It was the collective consumer, not the composer, who crossed traditional boundaries in listening and responding to the recording of the symphony. It was the *reception* of the symphony, rather than its *production*, that initiated this crossing of boundaries and the subsequent amalgamation of symphony with pop song. If we continue to emphasize cultural production in our understanding of postmodernism, then it will remain merely a function of artistic intention and the art object

itself. But if we acknowledge the role of cultural consumption, then Górecki's symphony and the commercial music that references it become part of a much larger experiential phenomenon, a postmodernism that we, the audience, define and create.

NOTES

1. As indicated in the list of recordings, at least three earlier recordings (and several reissues on various labels) were already available in commercial release at the time Elektra-Nonesuch released their version in 1992.
2. For a more comprehensive discussion of the "Górecki phenomenon" and the reception of the Third Symphony, see Howard 1997.
3. The first concert performance of the Third Symphony in England was given on September 20, 1988, by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, with David Aherton conducting and Margaret Field as soprano soloist.
4. from the website <http://195.92.248.101:802/fanus/manifesto.asp>.
5. Orbit subsequently received permission to include the Górecki tracks; *Pieces in a Modern Style* (though still without the Pärt arrangements) was released February 2000.
6. This concert review was published online at <http://www.wiwi.net/nikki/ripup.htm> (this URL no longer functions).
7. Interview and recording review published online under the pseudonym "Yellow Peril," <http://www.cia.com.au/peril/texts/features/pale.htm>.
8. Episode 306, "Cat and Mouse."
9. Sam Quicksilver, "Fabulous Fusion," <http://www.lettherecords.com/zine/archives/features/lamb.html>.
10. Significantly, the two-chord osminario that Górecki uses in the third movement of the symphony is borrowed from the opening of Chopin's A-minor Mazurka, Op. 17/4, and the piano punctuations in the same movement are a subtle reference to the crunching climax in Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony (Thomas 1997, 92–93). It seems that Górecki "samples" in precisely the same way the Lamb does, with an almost transparent subtlety that still manages to keep the allusion intact.
11. P. N. Bryant, "Circa," <http://alirewired.com/19970703/music.html>.
12. http://web.ict.nsk.su/house/interviews/goldie_1.html.
13. Goldie later remixed "Mother" as an eight-minute drum 'n' bass dance track on the EP album *Ring of Saturn*, released in 1999.
14. http://web.ict.nsk.su/house/interviews/goldie_1.html. Another critic, apparently unaware of the direct connection to Górecki's Third Symphony, wrote that the main orchestral motive in "Mother" is "as darkly emotive and starkly spiritual as anything by Górecki or Tavener" (See Steven Dalton's review at <http://www.ime.com/reviews/reviews/19980101000236reviews.html>).
15. Steven Segeman, online review of *Saturn's Return*, <http://home.imekom.com/intenew/Explore/Entertainment/Reviews/Goldie.html>.

16. For a more detailed discussion of Górecki and the maternal bond, see Harley 1998.

17. The various interactions between Górecki and Shakespeare are so numerous they perhaps merit an entirely separate study. For instance, Armstrong's reference to Górecki in this movie parallels Górecki's own admission that he was an ardent fan of the film version of Bernstein's *West Side Story*, which is based on the same Shakespeare play. (Coincidentally, Dawn Upshaw, the soprano soloist on Elektra-Nonesuch's recording of the Third Symphony, is likewise a fan of *West Side Story*, having sung the role of Maria numerous times.) The song "Maria," from *West Side Story*, sets that name with a motif very similar to the Skierkowski turn (in fact, Górecki's choral work *Totus tuus* sets the same name identically). The Naxos label recorded and released their own version of the Third Symphony in 1994, but later included excerpts from the symphony as incidental music on their "audiobook" reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Predictably, the symphonic excerpts accompany the scenes that deal most vividly with death and mortality, including Hamlet's monologue and the final death scene: "Goodnight sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." Górecki had earlier set this very text in his *Good Night* (1990) for soprano, flute, piano, and tam-tams. Dawn Upshaw has recorded *Good Night* for Elektra-Nonesuch.

18. Lidia Rappoport-Gelfand similarly appeals to an experience of history in her suggestion that the orchestral canons on either side of the central vocal section are designed to give the listener "a sense of the emotional experiences of participants in [the] ancient mystery [of the Crucifixion]" (Rappoport-Gelfand, 1991, 129).

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CHAPTER 10

"Where's It At?":

Postmodern Theory and the
Contemporary Musical Field

David Brackett

When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.

—Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" [1981] 1994

A major thread in discussions of postmodernism over the past twenty-five years has been the erosion of boundaries between high and low cultural production in the West. While this thread appears in much writing about postmodernism in music, there have been as yet few attempts to theorize postmodernism across different registers of music-making, including both high art and popular musics, in order to examine how this erosion might actually be occurring (important exceptions to this include the work of McClary 1989, 1991; Goodwin 1991; Born 1987, 1995; and Taylor 2001).¹

In contrast to the tendency to read the increasing exchange of materials between popular and art musics as signifying the implosion of these categories, my central premise is that the reciprocal influence of economic and technological determinations with musical style has not merged the spheres of "high" and "low" musics, even though it may have created shifts in production and consumption across the musical field that have affected the delimitation of these spheres. In fact, it is only possible to contend that the musical categories associated with "high" and "low" culture have dissolved if one ignores several aspects of contemporary musical production and consumption: first, the continued centrality of categories to the marketing of music, a practice that has a corresponding effect on the way consumers make distinctions; second, that categories are marked by differences in the way that different types of music are funded; third, that differences between categories persist in differing relationships between composers/performers, and audiences, as do their relationship to official institutions (for example, art music receives frequent government/university subsidies, while popular music rarely does); fourth, that distinctions persist in formal processes between types of music that are separate sociologically, even if there are some well-known instances of a new kind of eclecticism occurring between and within categories that were previously perceived as