

Review of Jonathan D. Kramer, *Postmodern Music, Postmodern Listening* (Bloomsbury, 2016).

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For those of us influenced by Jonathan Kramer's seminal *The Time of Music*, it is a delight to see his last book in print. With his untimely death in 2004, this manuscript has taken quite a journey. From the whispers of drafts floating around in the hands of various students, to quotations and references showing up in various places, admirers of Kramer's work have been longing for this final publication to become available. It is commendable that Robert Carl took on the role of editor and we should be grateful to Carl, Deborah Bradley-Kramer and Jann Pasler for seeing the work through to publication and for sharing Kramer's ideas with the rest of the world.

As with his past work, Kramer's brilliance often shines most brightly when he is discussing pieces of music and his experience of them, and there are numerous places where his discussions excel in this regard. The first part, entitled Book I: Ideas, is a sustained and topical exploration of various issues surrounding what postmodernism means in regards to music; Kramer creates a number of theoretical scaffolds and conceptual tools that are insightful and useful. As with much of his writing, Kramer's command of secondary literature is impressive, though his sources are somewhat dated given the delay in publication and the radically shifting ground on postmodern discourse—and even, by now, post-postmodern discourse.<sup>1</sup> Book II,

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I am grateful to Anton Vishio for his many helpful comments and keen editorial eye; his suggestions have improved this review substantially.

which is only 56 pages long compared with the 234-page Book I, contains two detailed analyses: a reading of the final movement of Mahler's Seventh Symphony, and an overview of Nielsen's *Sinfonia Semplice*. Lastly, to provide a conclusion to the book's unfinished state, Robert Carl solicited six essays that are included as an Appendix and provide reflections on postmodernism and Kramer.

### BOOK I: IDEAS

Book I is divided into three parts: Part I—Chapters on Postmodern Concepts of Music, Part II—Chapters on Concepts of Postmodern Music, and Part III—Postmodern Chapters on the Concept of Music. The clever rotational structure of these titles shows the broad progression of his discussion from more abstract ideas to more specific pieces, and finally to more playful discourse. That said, several chapters could have been placed in more than one part, and only the final chapter exhibits the “postmodern” character promised by the title of Part III.

Like many authors, Kramer is uncomfortable offering a definition of postmodernism as it relates to music. Despite providing a list of sixteen characteristics (9), he clearly does not want these traits to be taken as necessary or sufficient conditions for something to be classified as postmodern music. He does not take postmodernism to be a historical period that helps classify current music, since he finds postmodern trends in earlier music. Yet he also acknowledges that the current ideas of postmodernism were only possible recently; that is, only recently did it become possible to articulate these traits as important trends in music. Importantly, Kramer writes:

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jeffrey Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

Although I do refer informally throughout this book to ‘postmodern music’ and ‘postmodern compositions,’ I do not strictly believe that such things exist in the world out there. Where they exist is in listeners’ minds, since it is listeners—operating under the influence of various traits (in my list) that they can discover in the music they are hearing—who constitute the postmodern musical experience. (10)

This understanding of postmodernism, as a relationship between a listener and a piece instead of a characteristic of a work, tills fertile ground, and I wish Kramer had had the chance to explore this notion further.

“Modernism, Postmodernism, the Avant Garde, and Their Audiences” is focused on these artistic styles and how they interact with various institutional structures. Kramer draws some sensible distinctions between modernist composers and avant-garde composers based on how they relate to tradition. He writes that avant-garde pieces “defy more than seduce the listener, and they extend by potentially unsettling means the very idea of what music is” (45). A composer like Schoenberg or Stravinsky may have started as avant-garde, but as musical institutions began accepting their work as mainstream, they were seen instead as radical modernists. While the line Kramer draws is arguably fuzzy, the distinction between an avant-garde and a radical modernist composer seems to hinge on how widely accepted they are. His useful counterexamples to the evolution from avant-garde to radical modernist are Cage and Partch who remained avant-garde by consistently pushing boundaries in the case of the former, and never gaining widespread acceptance in the case of the latter. Kramer finds that this continuum from progressive to radical to avant-garde is mirrored in postmodernism, with suitable adjustment in the labels found along the continuum, now antimodernism, conservative postmodernism, radical postmodernism, and avant-gardism.<sup>2</sup> The final category, that of the postmodern avant-gardist, is problematic for Kramer, because “the concept of the avant-garde

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<sup>2</sup> Kramer includes ‘antimodernism’ as a nod to critical consensus, but he disputes any “substantive” relationship between it and postmodernism.

depends on a linear view of history,” which is largely rejected by postmodern thinkers (48). He concludes the chapter and the first part of Book I by examining the gulf between audiences and modernist composers, whom he understands as peripheral to most musical currents, and surveying how postmodern composers are trying to narrow this gap. According to Kramer, this desire by postmodern composers to reach audiences explains the frequent use of quotation in their pieces. He perceptively points out that these quotes allow listeners to make personal associations with a piece and perhaps to engage more deeply and creatively while listening.

The first chapter of Part II, “Postmodernism and Related Isms in Today’s Music,” begins by examining the notion of meta-narratives and how they have been questioned and disrupted at various points in music history. His discussion quickly turns towards how contemporary composers are once again disrupting certain meta-narratives. Here, Kramer sets up useful conceptual distinctions between compositional trends and revisits his classification scheme of conservative and radical postmodernism. Yet, he finds these tools to be too blunt and repeatedly cautions us to resist using them for classification. He puts forward these conceptual distinctions “not to create a taxonomy but to identify ideas that have informed twentieth-century composition in varying ways and in varying degrees” (68). His understanding of postmodernism is ultimately dialectical and he consistently finds elements of both modernism and postmodernism in the various pieces he discusses, rendering misguided a classification in one category or the other.

This chapter is also a very rich resource for creating a playlist of what he considers postmodern compositions. Kramer makes sparse comments on a number of interesting pieces such as: George Rochberg’s Third String Quartet, Rhys Chatham’s *The Heart Cries with 1000 Whispers*, and William Bolcolm’s Third Symphony. John Zorn gets particular praise for his radical postmodernism and *Forbidden Fruit* is repeatedly cited as an example of this aesthetic,

even though his quotation from Zorn's own self-reflection about the work seems to indicate more continuity with traditional compositional values.

The two chapters focused on unity are selective but intriguing investigations into this seminal topic of music analysis.<sup>3</sup> Kramer gives a helpful overview of some of the historically changing understandings of unity in music, discussing synchronic vs. diachronic notions of cohesion and exploring how the understanding of organicism has changed through different modernist lenses, through a consideration of Schoenberg and Schenker and their heirs (86–88).<sup>4</sup> He then maps out some alternative perspectives in Chapter 6 (“Beyond Unity”), drawing inspiration from chaos theory.<sup>5</sup> Although his discussion is suggestive, Kramer never explains chaos theory in enough detail for one to know how to use it to approach and understand seemingly unordered experiences; indeed, he indicates that the theory is some distance from being able to account for episodes of potential disunity in traditional music, while casting doubt on its relevance to the analysis of postmodern music (110).<sup>6</sup> Shifting the focus away from compositions, Kramer rightly identifies unity as a meta-narrative in analytical writing, and he offers a critique of analysts' desire to unify the messy surfaces of a composition and bring order

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<sup>3</sup> See Jonathan Kramer, “The Concept of Disunity and Musical Analysis,” *Music Analysis* 23/ii–iii (2004): 361–372. As noted in the introduction to the issue, this essay was the last piece that Kramer published before his passing and unfortunately, he did not have time to incorporate his final reflections from this article into the book. This special issue of *Music Analysis* is significant as Kramer and others respond to a critique by Robert Morgan concerning unity in music and analysis.

<sup>4</sup> A notable exclusion from Kramer's discussion is Kevin Korsyn, “Schenker's Organicism Reexamined,” *Integral* 7 (1993): 82–118.

<sup>5</sup> An important source for his discussion of chaos theory is N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). Some readers may recall that this book was the topic of a discussion on the nascent Society of Music Theory email discussion list in the early 1990s. —Ed.

<sup>6</sup> The “seeming irrationality” of the introduction of a tune in the last movement of the Bartók Fifth Quartet is mentioned as an event of the sort that chaos theory addresses; but the analysis proceeds without any reference to chaos theory per se, a missed opportunity.

to music instead of celebrating its diversity. Despite my qualms, Kramer's overall case here is persuasive, since unity as a meta-narrative has been discarded in some recent music; his encouragement to wrestle with this explicitly in writing about music is thought-provoking.

Like the chapter on unity, the chapter on Postmodern Listening provides a selective overview of some issues regarding communication and music. In a short span, he moves from Barthes's "Death of the Author" to semiotic levels while providing short excursions to discuss Ives's *Putnam's Camp*, Schumann's *Soldier's March* from *Album for the Young*, and few other pieces. While the analytical excursions are quite good, understandably missing is an engagement with recent work in narrative theory and musical meaning, which has blossomed in various ways since the early 2000s when this chapter was written. In an interesting swerve towards the end of the chapter, Kramer claims that given the multiple and varied perceptions of listeners and the postmodern inclination to validate these disparate experiences, "postmodern thinking is skeptical of the very idea of musical communication" (149). Those invested in the idea of musical meaning would find a lot to argue with here, and would likely critique this as an unfair comparison with language communication.

Given his longstanding interest and work on temporality, the chapter on Postmodern Time would seem to hold promise. He returns to some of his previous ideas, although occasionally the conclusions, presented without argument, have an impressionistic quality: "In *The Time of Music* I conclude that vertical music 'reflects a thoroughly modernistic time sense.' I now realize that vertical time is also postmodernist" (158). There is also a lengthy discussion about gestural implication— e.g., opening vs. closing gestures—and formal placement that focuses on pieces that are rarely considered postmodern. Kramer discusses several pieces in this chapter, making it worth reading for those interested in how various composers manipulate time.

One of his main examples is the finale of a Haydn Sonata and how it uses closing gestures in odd formal locations (163–166). While he certainly does not argue that Haydn is a postmodern composer, Kramer’s point here is that the experience of temporal disjunction and *non-sequiturs* in Haydn’s finale can be understood in light of postmodern ideas. Unfortunately, the discussion is marred by a serious and nigh unconscionable production error: Example 8.2 shows the *wrong* Haydn piano sonata in Eb. The sonata that fits the discussion is Hob. XVI: 52, not Hob. XVI: 49.

Kramer concludes Part II with a short chapter that engages with the work of Daniel Albright in order to explore the relationship between musical surrealism and postmodernism.<sup>7</sup> Kramer takes a “yes and” approach, acknowledging that the music of Poulenc among others is surrealist, but also claiming that some of these same traits are also postmodern. Kramer also supplements Albright’s examples of surrealism by discussing Jacques Ibert’s *Divertissement*, which he considers to be “the most direct nontexted musical parallel” to surrealism (183).

Although Chapter 10 (“Economics, Politics, Technology, and Appropriation”) is the first of Part III, it perhaps fits better thematically with Parts I and II. It is a wide-ranging discourse on issues such as the commodification of music, various economic pressures on contemporary composition, and social and political institutions that influence contemporary music making. Kramer discusses John Oswald’s composition *Plunderphonics*, which went through various legal challenges due to the extensive quotations on the disc. He also examines issues of authorship and appropriation in Bob Ostertag’s *Say No More*, a piece which questions the boundary between performer and composer. Kramer ends the chapter describing some of his ambivalence about the commercialization and commodification of music.

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and the Visual Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Part III concludes with a chapter titled “Beyond the Beyond: Postmodernism Exemplified,” where Kramer includes personal tales, lists of quotations and other artworks, reflections on the reception of *The Time of Music*, and larger contemplations on diverse topics. Kramer was aiming for a playful mix of stories, similar to those “told around a restaurant table on a relaxing evening (as they actually have been, many times)” (234), and when I first started reading I was quite amused by the clever interplay between footnotes and the main text. As I read further though, I cringed at some accounts that showed a side of Kramer that I was increasingly uncomfortable to discover. Postmodernism often deals with difficult, grotesque, or even taboo subjects in complicated ways, and including these stories may have been Kramer’s way to incorporate these elements into his own narrative; but the incorporation is not without cost.

His section on “multiculturalism” (226ff.) makes some unfortunate and stereotypical generalizations about “several young Asian composers” and “my Korean students” (228). While multiculturalism is admittedly a difficult topic to discuss, he slips uneasily from a critique of compositional craft to explanations from cultural heritage. Even more disturbing is a story where Kramer encourages an “extremely shapely” female student to perform her composition for the class so that he can see her nude (223–224). Kramer seems somewhat aware of how this story sounds, writing: “I could never do this in the politically correct climate of the 2000s, but I asked to see her after class.” (223). I think many readers will find the story objectionable. Especially in the current social climate—I write this review in the Fall of 2017 amid a torrent of sexual harassment scandals that began with many victims of filmmaker Harvey Weinstein coming forward—the story reads as yet another example of a man in a position of power who leverages this power to objectify a woman. The ingenious female student volunteers her boyfriend for the



nude part, so the story does have a twist that creates a better ending. That said, the apparent motivations behind Kramer's request for the student to perform are ignominious.

Kramer concludes this chapter, and Part I of the book, by evaluating its success; he questions whether it exemplifies the radical breaks and shifts in discourse between varied topics and stories that he sees as characteristic of postmodern music. Ironically, this self-reflexive turn could be described as "postmodern", as it often is in literature, even as Kramer describes it as too "cadential" and laments how it "draws the chapter toward a logical conclusion" (234). Though some of the stories in the chapter were closer to his intended mark, the overall effect provides a nuanced picture of Kramer as a person, revealing his keen insight and charisma, but also some of his flaws and shortcomings.

## BOOK II: CASE HISTORIES

The two chapters that comprise Book II are perhaps the most engaging ones of the book and really play to Kramer's strengths in analysis and description. The chapter on Mahler's *Finale* expands considerably on the brief analysis offered in his article "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time,"<sup>8</sup> providing much more detail than the original article and additional insightful commentary. The second chapter is essentially a reprint of Kramer's essay on Nielsen's Sixth Symphony that was originally published in *The Nielsen Companion*.<sup>9</sup> While his analysis is

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<sup>8</sup> See "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time," *Indiana Theory Review* 17/2 (Fall 1996): 21–62, which has been revised and expanded into section 12.5 in this volume. See also Martin Scherzinger "The Finale of Mahler's Seventh Symphony: A Deconstructive Reading" *Music Analysis* 14/1 (Mar. 1995): 69–88; Scherzinger's analysis was developed in Kramer's graduate seminar at Columbia and offers an analysis of the movement based on Derrida's idea of the *supplément*.

<sup>9</sup> See Jonathan D. Kramer, "Unity and disunity in Nielsen's Sixth Symphony" in *The Nielsen Companion*, ed. Mina Miller (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994): 293–344.

excellent, in this case there are only very slight changes from the earlier version of this essay, which boasted a much higher production quality and more careful editing.

Chapter 12 explores how the *Finale* to Mahler's Seventh Symphony is "a precursor (though hardly the only one) of late-twentieth-century postmodernism," citing the radical disjunctures, non-coinciding cadences and thematic returns, and a host of other techniques that critics have seized upon when discussing the work's disunity. The misalignment of the formal and structural elements in this piece creates radical ruptures and disorientations. Mahler relies on the familiar materials of tonal music but uses them in profoundly different ways. Kramer claims that "in a postmodern manner, [Mahler] used history to destroy history. He used tonality to destroy tonal form" (246).

Kramer's exploration begins with a rather close reading of the opening measures of the movement, pointing out the implications and juxtapositions of different harmonies. His narrative stresses the disjointedness of the music, and he even explicitly downplays a connection he draws between a local move from C major to A minor and the large-scale tonal contrast involving these keys and their parallel major third-related tonalities:

I am not convinced that anyone can actually *hear* that relationship. . . . Nor am I convinced that traditional analysis's ideal listener should hear this parallelism as related to the large-scale tonal contrast, since a parallelism such as this underlines similarity more than contrast (242).

In the process of examining these opening 51 measures, he repeatedly calls attention to strong gestural cadences that do not align with important phrase divisions and even seem to interrupt a prolongation of tonic harmony.

He then goes on to discuss other instances of this misalignment of harmony, tonal form, and theme throughout the movement. Finally, he presents a chart, Example 12.8, which lists various measures in the piece and whether the following events are present: a start of a new

section, a return of rondo theme, a tonic return, a V–I cadence, a return to diatonicism, and lastly, a return of metric regularity. The chart is hardly elegant and seems an anachronistic tool to make a postmodernist point. That said, he problematizes the binary (yes/no) in some of his categories, especially in judging a return to diatonicism and a return of metric regularity, and is able to show that “no two returns of the tonic are supported in the same way,” which emphasizes the disjointed alignment of these normally structure-clarifying actions.

After looking at how Mahler deploys structural events in a way that questions the nature of this rondo form, Kramer turns his attention to the major third cycles that dominate the tonal plan of the work. As with any mapping of key centers of a composition as complicated and quickly changing as a Mahler symphony, there are many ambiguous spots that would afford multiple readings. That said, Kramer’s interpretation is persuasive and provides insight into Mahler’s tonal plan of three major third cycle axes that avoid the Dominant area, which would have been part of the fourth possible major third cycle.<sup>10</sup> His Example 12.9 is essential for following this argument; unfortunately, it is barely legible without a magnifying glass. It shows the three different axes on separate staves and shows triads as they occur in time to represent the different key areas explored in the movement. Those familiar with hearing along major third axes, or interval cycles, may be persuaded by his idea that the A—Db—F axis can be “understood as substituting for the dominant cycle” in the sense of something oppositional to the primary C—E—Ab cycle (257).

Kramer continues his analysis with a brief examination of the different themes employed in the final movement and how they clash with the expected key schemes. He points out the lack of a proper development area, and his reasoning for why the potential spans of music do not

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<sup>10</sup> Though he does not cite Ernő Lendvai, Richard Cohn or George Perle, there are certainly resonances with their ideas here.

function as developmental is plausible, involving a consideration of length, conclusiveness, and lack of teleological goal. He also describes some of the sections that work against the cyclic procedures mentioned above. He concludes with an extended mediation on the penultimate chord of the piece, a beguiling augmented triad that could easily be taken as a synecdoche for the major third cycle. But ultimately he proposes this tempting reading only to reject it. He also dismisses the idea that the G# is merely an upper neighbor to the G of the final chord. Tracing the large disjunct leaps in each part involving the G#, he concludes that the “voice leading encourages us to hear the augmented triad as a harmony in its own right” (262). Many analysts would not find it difficult to both hear this moment as a special augmented triad and also make the symbolic connection to the earlier major third cycle. Kramer anticipates this objection; he notes “that is not the way it sounds (at least, not to me),” arguing that a simultaneous chord does not sound the same as the progression at this moment in the piece (261).

Stepping back from his analysis, Kramer concludes the chapter with two broader questions. Firstly, does the movement “work”? And secondly, can we then consider Mahler a postmodernist composer? Kramer seems to deliberately dodge both questions, and the conclusion appears almost as if he is encouraging the reader to break free of these traditional modes of thought. To the former he responds:

The postmodernist answer to this dilemma is that success and failure are not inherent in the artwork but are a product of the interaction of the perceiver’s expectations and values with the work’s structures and intertextual references (262–263).<sup>11</sup>

While this is correct, it seems simplistic and a broadly generic answer to many more interesting ways of reformulating the first question—for instance, what frameworks allow this work to be

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<sup>11</sup> Although it was not available to Kramer at the time he wrote this, his discussion could be productively complemented with the ideas of dialogic form as shown by the work of Seth Monahan; see his *Mahler’s Symphonic Sonatas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

appreciated aesthetically? or, how can listeners focus their attention to experience the postmodern aspects of this piece? In taking up the second question, Kramer largely sidesteps an answer as well. He quotes Umberto Eco's claim that every period can be understood as having its own postmodernism, and concludes that it is "reasonable to speak of Mahler (and of some other composers as well) as postmodernists of the romantic era" (263). Kramer then goes on a tangential swerve, conjecturing on the relationship between Mahler and Nietzsche, and how the latter has been understood to have features in common with postmodern trends. The idea is intriguing but presented more as an afterthought than an argument.<sup>12</sup>

The second chapter in part II, Chapter 13, offers another sustained analysis of a single work: Nielsen's *Sinfonia Semplice*. The symphony has had a mixed critical reception, but Kramer understands it as "the most profoundly postmodern piece composed prior to the postmodern era" (265). Over half of Kramer's analysis is devoted to the first movement, where he traces numerous motives and develops the idea that there is an overarching "expressive paradigm" that governs the music. This paradigm involves a move from "apparent simplicity" to "darker complexity" and then a "resolution to a newly won simplicity" (266).

Motivic saturation is one of the leading traits that Kramer finds in the piece: "the numerous motives produce an overall consistency because of their pervasiveness" (266). Kramer discusses the initial motive (mm. 3–4) and finds that despite its simplicity, it sets up a pattern of metric ambiguity for the rest of the movement. Kramer enumerates the introduction of various other motives but more significantly traces a pattern whereby Nielsen sets up passages of

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<sup>12</sup> For a more extensive investigation into the relationship between Mahler and Nietzsche's ideas, see Carl Niekerk, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2013), and William J. McGrath, "Mahler and the Vienna Nietzsche Society" in *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture*, Jacob Golomb, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997).

stability—rhythmically, metrically, tonally, etc.—and then dismantles or disrupts them. Kramer finds this pattern repeatedly, but his argument is best exemplified by the three fugal passages in the first movement. The first fugue quickly breaks down and sets up a pattern that the later fugal sections will repeat; the second fugal passage breaks down faster than the first, and “the third fugue hardly begins before it falls apart” (278). This discussion of the fugal passages is most interesting since it places Nielsen’s music in dialogue with expectations of fugal development; by showing the breakdown of expectations in these fugal passages, Kramer makes a strong case for his “expressive paradigm,” which continues to be the focus of his analytical discussion as he progresses through the work.

On reflection, Kramer’s attitude towards his “expressive paradigm” seems similar to how analysts typically look for thematically unified elements of a composition. One could wonder what makes this a specifically postmodern approach; after all, finding and linking various manifestations of the paradigm seems driven by a rather traditional analytic aesthetic of pointing out connections. The main difference here is that the relationship is not on the level of notes and tonal scheme but instead on the level of compositional strategy. While most analyses will draw out relationships of some kind, Kramer is pointing out a strategy of disorder. This certainly seems to represent a different set of values than those normally brought to an analysis, which often privileges order and organicism.

This question of organicism is one that Kramer deals with head on. He clarifies that he does think the first movement is “surely unified by the pervasive motives and the persistent expressive paradigm”, but that the composition is not concerned with organic connections and the revelation of one fundamental generating idea (282). This distinction between unity of

material and organicism is a useful one and could be applied productively to other twentieth-century compositions.

Kramer's discussion of the second movement finds a chaotic opening that gives way to a simpler texture and melody. After tracing the movement of melodic material and the multiple surprises such as percussion interjections and trombone glissandi, Kramer discusses two surprising moments that appear to be "quotations" from Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto and Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. Kramer is quick to acknowledge that these are not actual quotations since the symphony was composed before either of these works existed, but that listeners may perceive the passages as "references" to these popular works. While still validating this perception of quotation as a symptom of postmodern listening, Kramer acknowledges that it is anachronistic and perhaps "inappropriate or even unfair" from the composer's perspective (284). He concludes his discussion of the movement by commenting on the pitch and harmonic structure of the clarinet melody (mm. 29ff.), and how it is incongruous with the much of the triadic and harmonic language of the other movements.

Kramer's opinion of the third movement is bleak: "The movement remains a statement of disappointed hopes" (288). He understands the overall strategy as a return of the "expressive paradigm" which breaks apart the contrapuntal structures set into motion. The movement introduces two primary contrapuntal textures: a slow fugal passage in the opening and a canon in the middle. Kramer understands both passages as ultimately failing to provide continuity and stability to the movement. His argument that the fugal entries never really take hold and provide direction to the movement is convincing, although they do so in a manner quite different from the breakdowns in the fugal material of the first movement, complicating the connection to the "expressive paradigm." Fragments from the fugal theme never disappear as they did in the first

movement; the longest stretch of music without some nod to the fugal theme is six measures long. His analysis of the canonical passage seems less debatable as it is first interrupted by and then dissolves into statements of the fugue subject. Though he does not draw out the connection, the aimless melody introduced in m. 13 would also seem to suggest the expressive paradigm, but perhaps because it does not create clear expectations for continuity it did not fit as well into his argument.

While brief, Kramer's discussion of the fourth movement captures some of the unusual juxtapositions posed by this set of variations on a theme. Working against the usual predictability of variation form, Nielsen's movement contains surprising combinations of eclectic styles. Kramer argues that while a convincing analysis could be made of the thematic relationship and transformations in this movement, it would ultimately fail to capture the radical disjunctions and contrasts that are more characteristic. He makes brief analytical comments on each of the variations, often relating them to his sense of surprise and foiled expectation, especially noting the move towards less complexity as the movement comes to an end. He concludes: "And so the simple symphony is not simple. It may contain simple music, but its innocence is always compromised in one way or another" (293).

There are quite a few typographical errors in the chapter, including among numerous other spots a capital "G" instead of the sharp sign (269), an "H" where a flat sign belongs (270), and the production quality is lacking. In particular, some of the musical examples are too small with poor resolution; most readers will want to consult a full score when going through this analysis. These unfortunate issues aside, the essay is valuable and provides wonderful insights into this strange symphony.



ESSAYS ON POSTMODERNISM AND JONATHAN KRAMER

As mentioned above, Robert Carl solicited six authors to comment upon various topics related to Kramer and postmodernism to serve as a conclusion to the book.

The first essay by Deborah Bradley-Kramer reflects upon Jonathan Kramer's postmodern compositions and how a performer must often grapple with the challenges of these scores. She provides a fascinating perspective on performing this kind of music, where one must approach radical shifts between styles, not as an opportunity for synthesis, but rather a place to emphasize discontinuity. Playing a piece with these severe ruptures involves a risk akin to improvisation, for in both "one must express and perform with utmost conviction" (305). This may include playing closing gestures that signal an ending with sufficient gravitas regardless of their formal placement or whether they actually function as closing gestures in the music. She finally muses that this mode of thought, embracing disunity and celebrating stylistic variety, could suggest profound changes to music pedagogy and could invigorate performance practice.

Brad Garton's contribution, "Are We Postmodern Yet?" reflects on Part I, and specifically Kramer's 16 traits; he measures their accuracy in light of the intervening decade between the books writing and publication. Some of these traits have aged better than others, but overall Garton finds that many of Kramer's traits have been accepted by contemporary culture: "Postmodernism has, to a large extent, become a part of our lives, and as such does not have as pronounced an existence as an independent, oppositional philosophy" (312). He reflects on the importance of technology and the different attitudes that young composers have in relation to the past and their sense of purpose. He finally laments not having Kramer's perspective to help illuminate the current cultural moment.

The contribution from composer John Luther Adams, “Music in the Anthropocene,” is a reprint of an essay that this composer wrote for the online magazine *Slate* in 2015.<sup>13</sup> The essay, a short and worthwhile call to environmental activism, would seem to have little to do with Kramer or this book, although Carl in his Editor’s Note to the concluding section highlights various shared concerns.

The third essay, by John Halle, offers reflections from someone who was at Columbia in the early 1990s, when Kramer’s text “was very much in the air” (319). He examines Kramer’s analysis of Schumann’s *Soldier’s March* to highlight the role of the listener in constructing musical meaning and structure and rightly points out how this upsets a more traditional hierarchy involving listeners, composers, analysts, and performers. Halle provides a nice counterpoint to Kramer’s argument about modernism and its relationship to economic realities; he observes that Kramer adopts a framework of relations influenced by the pervasive ideology of the market, which could be considered an impoverished understanding of culture. Invoking a Columbia colleague of Kramer’s, Fred Lerdahl, Halle offers a comparison between Kramer’s notion of postmodern listening and Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s understanding of listeners and aesthetics. Halle explores these ideas with references to modernist and postmodernist works and how perceptual insights from cognitive science interact with some of Kramer’s theses.

In “Uncommon Kindness: Reflections on Jonathan Kramer,” Duncan Neilson provides a warm reminiscence on working with Kramer as a composition student at Columbia. Neilson highlights Kramer’s “attitude of musical tolerance”, and how his teacher would voraciously

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<sup>13</sup> John Luther Adams, “Making Music in the Anthropocene: How Should Artists Engage with Times of Crisis,” *Slate*, February 24, 2015 (not 2014 as indicated in the book), [http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/02/john\\_luther\\_adams\\_grammy\\_winner\\_for\\_become\\_ocean\\_discusses\\_politics\\_and.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/02/john_luther_adams_grammy_winner_for_become_ocean_discusses_politics_and.html) (accessed 4/3/2018)

explore different and varied music, trying to understand these contradictory perspectives and finding something to appreciate in them (336). Neilson recounts discussing different reactions to pieces with Kramer, and how Kramer would often frame negative reactions to a piece in terms of perspectives and expectations of the listener. These memories of openness and tolerance to a variety of music help explain Kramer's remarkable acuity when listening, ideas that have stuck with Neilson to the present.

The final essay in the Appendix, "Kramer Post Kramer," is an affectionate remembrance by a fellow composer, Martin Bresnick. Bresnick explores Kramer's shifting position on the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, acknowledging how Kramer's ideas grew over the years, providing a perspective on the shifting grounds of the debate, and similarly embracing a dialectical understanding of the two ideas. Bresnick closes his essay with a long quote from the book in which Kramer comments on the radical originality of Sibelius's *Tapiola* and Janáček's *Sinfonietta*. Bresnick highlights the remarkable acuity of Kramer's perceptions and commentary, and wishes that he could talk with Kramer once again about "this vital subject that mattered so deeply to us both" (347).

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In reflecting on the book as a whole, I have a wide range of ambivalent thoughts. It seems somehow fitting that a book on postmodern music was left in a partially fragmented state and was finished off with an external appendix that suggests but does not quite provide a satisfying conclusion. Chapter 11, which closes Book I, provides the most convincing cadence in the whole text, and yet even there, the last playful footnote questions: "The end?" (234). Kramer's compositional inclinations surely influenced many of his organizational decisions, and yet the balance between artistic literature and scholarly tome seems heavily weighted toward the latter,

despite an undeniable influence of the former. Much like the topic of Kramer's text, various parts of it are fascinating and confusing and convincing and disappointing and thought-provoking and seemingly disconnected. We can relish Kramer's descriptions of his listening experiences, and his analyses, while still feeling that his sixteen traits are not developed and explored to the depths that they should have been. *Postmodern Music, Postmodern Listening* is an important book for anyone interested in these topics, and despite its flaws, the sheer abundance of ideas worth wrestling with makes it a rewarding read.

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