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A term, American in origin, widely used from the late 1970s onwards, with a broad range of meanings. Some come from multiple associations with 'modern' and 'modernist' (see *Modernism*), others from disagreement over what the prefix 'post' implies about the 'modern' – contestation or extension, difference or dependence – and whether postmodernism is a regressive or progressive force.

1. History, definitions.

As a historical period, postmodernism can denote that which postdates the period 1450–1950, reflecting a crisis of cultural authority and world view, especially that vested in Western culture and its institutions (Jameson, 1991). A growing ecological sensitivity encouraged a broad critique of modernity and modernization (Huyssen, 1986). In music, Cage appears postmodernist because he threw into question both the concept of artistic genius that developed during the Renaissance (Hamm, 1997) and the notion of music as organized sound. Postmodernism can also signal a change from developments that began around the beginning of the 20th century. Some see this as a shift from imperialist centralization, nation states and utopian philosophies to a decentralized world economy, supranational entities and relativism. What is postmodernist in this sense depends on one's definition of Modernism.

The concept may also refer to a socio-economic condition, a reaction to the 'modern condition' that began with the Enlightenment (Habermas, 1981). Some have used it to describe the penetration of capitalism and mass media into all aspects of life, undermining faith in various religious and historical metanarratives. Others understand the postmodern condition as 'marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality – to be accepted as legitimate expressions of the true and the good' (Gergen, 1991), or as a 'time when no orthodoxy can be adopted without selfconsciousness and irony because all traditions seem to have some validity' (Jencks, 1986). Similarly, in philosophy and the arts, it is often used to denote a way of thinking or operating (Eco, 1984) that sees the world as the product of multiple perspectives all of which have some truth. This has led to a breakdown in boundaries between elite and popular culture and to receptivity to those on the margins of power.

Postmodernism is also used to describe a style that throws into question certain assumptions about Modernism, its social basis and its objectives. These include faith in progress, absolute truth, emphasis on form and genre and the renunciation of or alienation from an explicit social function for art. Many use the term to describe a style that posits discontinuity over continuity, difference over similarity and indeterminacy over rational logic (Harvey, 1989). From this perspective, some aspects of postmodernism have Modernist antecedents (Dada, the futurists) or long traditions in music (collage, juxtaposition, appropriation, quotation). Questioning the modern aesthetics of the sublime which 'allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents' and leaves the 'recognizable consistency' of the form to ensure 'solace and pleasure' for the reader or viewer, Lyotard (1979) idealizes a postmodernism that 'puts forward the unrepresentable in the presentation itself'. Those who see it as an attitude that disdains analytic or perceptual unity and embraces other forms of order (J.

Kramer, 1995) argue that postmodernism is an attitude recurring throughout history. From this perspective, the modern/postmodern dialectic is an alternating aesthetic cycle, like classic/romantic. Those who support this conclusion point in music to Alkan as a precursor because he wrote in an old style without seeking novelty, Reger for his 'double coding' and restorationist tendencies (La Motte-Haber, 1995), or Ives and Mahler because of apparent disorder in their music (J. Kramer, 1995).

Certain trends have determined the change from a Modernist to a postmodernist sensibility in music. First is the reaction to the internationalism of Modernism, to the centrality of Europe in that tradition and to abstraction as a universal language, particularly that which developed in Darmstadt after World War II. The Modernist drive for progress produced not only anxiety over influence but also exclusivity, an art increasingly limited to those who had the resources to support experimentation and technological innovation. In music, the institutional power of those composing in modernist styles fuelled this reaction; so did the ambitions of those using computers to increase their control over musical materials.

Cultural politics and critical theory of the last quarter of the 20th century focussed on the role that differences have played in society and culture, specifically those of race, class and gender. With the growing complexity of global interconnectedness and an increasing awareness of the need to respect rather than attempt to dominate non-Western cultures, attention turned to individuals and groups 'whose histories have prepared them to make productive use of contradictions, to embrace the dynamism of difference and diversity' (Lipsitz, 1994). The music of post-colonialist and other subaltern voices throughout the world and of immigrants struggling against power, poverty and discrimination within Europe and North America became recognized as a major form of subcultural as well as national expression (Slobin, 1993). In place of universalizing metanarratives, this music often addresses issues of personal or local relevance. Whereas some traditions communicate a sense of place, others express dislocation and privilege movement over stasis.

Since the 1960s and especially with the perceived end of the avant garde by the 1980s, some composers working within Western art traditions also re-evaluated music's expressive potential. Rejecting the need for constant change and originality and the increasingly difficult and often intellectual approach to music espoused by Modernists, they returned to more traditionally accessible notions of music. Some sought to renew a connection to the past by re-embracing harmonic and temporal strategies characteristic of 18th- and 19th-century composition. Sometimes, as with George Rochberg, traditional forms and syntax serve as a foil to Modernist ideas within one work; other times, as in the music of David Del Tredici and Ellen Zwilich, they signal a wholehearted return to tonality and conventional narrative. With William Bolcom among others, they enable integration of popular idioms. Such concerns forced reconsideration of the concept of consonance (H. Halbreich in Kolleritsch, 1993) and new concepts of tonality, as in the music of L. Ferrero (T. Hirsbrunner in Gruhn, 1989): this trend has been called a 'postmodernism of reaction' (Foster, 1987). In Britain and the USA, it was associated with 1980s neo-conservatism. Music critics, especially in Germany, called it neo-romanticism, especially in works that appeal to the emotions such as those of Wolfgang Rihm. In Arvo Pärt's music, it mirrors a return to spirituality and mysticism in the contemporary world.

Works embodying a second approach, 'postmodernism of resistance' (Foster, Huyssen, 1986) or radical postmodernism (Kramer), question rather than exploit cultural codes and explore rather than conceal any associated social or political affiliations. This music often addresses the 'master narratives' of tonality, narrative structure, Western hegemony and male dominance. In his music, John Adams makes

puns or ironic commentary on these narratives while others deconstruct their inherently contradictory meanings. Composers such as Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Michael Nyman and Louis Andriessen, for example, use continuous repetition to create non-narrative works that subvert the role of longterm memory in the perception of a work's structure. Huyssen points out that resistance of this sort 'will always have to be specific and contingent upon the cultural field within which it operates'; he argues that its point 'is not to eliminate the productive tension between the political and the aesthetic, between history and the text, between engagement and the mission of art. It is to heighten that tension'.

A third postmodernism, one of connection or interpenetration, results when a work's juxtapositions involve an eclectic inclusion of material from disparate discourses, sometimes elements that are not musical *per se* (Pasler, 1993). Whereas quotation in a Modernist sense often implies a desire to overcome and surpass one's predecessors, sometimes by distorting or satirizing the borrowed element, postmodernist appropriation functions without any desire to assert the dominance of one element over another. Works such as Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* (1968) and Alfred Schnittke's *Third String Quartet* (1983) quote predecessors' and contemporaries' music to comment on the history of musical traditions. They construct a sense of time as embodying many times, a self made of many memories. Stylistically what is important, from a postmodernist perspective, is not what is preserved from the past but the radical nature of what is included. And whether colliding new with old, original with borrowed, serious with popular, aesthetic with non-aesthetic, politically central with marginal, the ethics of postmodernism implies an acceptance of difference and sometimes a playfulness. Such works express a 'longing for a both/and situation rather than one of either/or' (Perloff, 1989).

The purpose of such collages can vary. In his *Musicircus* (1967), Cage shifted to the listener the burden of making sense of what he called the 'play of intelligent anarchy'. Similarly, in some of John Zorn's recordings, the effect of juxtaposing jazz, swing, pop, reggae, film and TV soundtracks and a recurrent Japanese voice is anarchic coexistence. This music's noisiness is meant to challenge traditional expectations of music and transform the listening experience (McNeilly, 1995). In the work of Laurie Anderson and other female performance artists of the 1970s, these juxtapositions come from the use of autobiography, story-telling, self-referentiality and a collage of myriad personal tastes; these help return the composer's 'shadow' to the music. In their pop-inflected music of the 1990s, Lang, Wolf, Torke and Daugherty incorporate commercial popular music not only to express their generational interests but also to challenge the troubling contradictions in American culture. In the popular music of migrants worldwide, music both expresses their exile identity and connects them to the real and imagined traditions of their homeland. This has resulted in works meant to help listeners reconcile profoundly different experiences. Postmodernism can thus be seen as 'an aesthetic vehicle for this struggle' (Manuel, 1995).

2. Reception, performance.

Related to these new forms of collage is another shift that gave rise to postmodernism: a preoccupation with reception. In an era of political image construction celebrating meaning as well as meaninglessness, play as well as nostalgia (Harvey, 1989), the idea that anything could reflect one coherent, consistent voice gave way to thinking about subjectivity as multi-layered, contradictory and performative. Taste too was found to be socially determined in a complex world of contradictory forces (Bourdieu, 1979). In 1968, Roland Barthes pointed to 'the death of the author' in terms of who was

responsible for meaning in a work. Conceptual artists and the Fluxus group re-evaluated the idea of art. Jameson later argued that in the postmodern age there could be no more 'works', only 'texts', or pretexts for what the reader or listener may bring. Cage's attention to silence, use of chance procedures and works like *4'33"* gave audiences an indeterminate space to find or negotiate their own concept of music. Focussing on the human organism, Pauline Oliveros created works that depend on the listener's participation for their shape and articulation. They aim to affect listeners' breathing and place them in a meditative state of 'deep listening'. New Age music often has a similar aim.

Performance has played its own role in the development of this aesthetic, and not only in the work of composers such as Vinko Globokar who blur the boundaries between composition and performance. With its inclusion of jazz and world music in its concert repertory, commissions and recordings, the Kronos Quartet has attracted new listeners to art music and transformed audience expectations of the genre (Porter, 1995). Reaching a wide range of listeners of different races and social classes, popular groups too, such as hip-hop artists and British anarchists, have resisted expectations, especially the commodification of cultural forms under late capitalism. They have used music to promote postmodern narratives of political and cultural change (McKay, 1994; Potter, 1995). The music industry has used the concept to promote its own new category, postmodern rock (Veselinovic-Hofman, 1995).

Such perspectives have drawn attention to pleasure and desire as musical modes, the need to acknowledge more than the rational and cerebral in the musical experience, and recognition of the shared roles of composer, performer and listener in the creation of musical meaning. Whether postmodern music depends for its effect on an increasingly 'competent' audience (Thorn, 1992), able to understand its multiple referents, irony and pastiche, or whether it can speak to a much broader public, varies widely from composer to composer and work to work. With its focus on multiple, fragmented identities, postmodernism has flourished in the USA, Canada, Australia and Eastern Europe, in part as a function of the identity politics of their heterogeneous populations.

3. Scholarship.

The idea of musical experience as cooperative, collaborative and contingent has had a profound impact on musical scholarship. Suspicious of any narrative that aspires to closure, challenging all basic assumptions, seeing language as a play of signifiers, looking for systems of power at work in the narrowest as well as the broadest domains, postmodern scholars question not only positivist methods but also Marxist ones. They shift attention to the truths embedded in the local, everyday, variable and contingent aspects of music and music-making. They seek to break down hierarchies and show the multiple meanings any music can have. Like feminists, those engaged in this work see truth as relative and subjectivity as influenced by the body as well as the mind. They are often concerned with the physical impact of sound on the listener, and sometimes the spirituality that underlies it. Their goals include not only increasing knowledge of music, but also restructuring the experience of it. For example, the concept of structural listening has been deconstructed to suggest that responses to music are not just governed by a 'quasi-Kantian structure of reason' but are 'as diverse, unstable, and open-ended as the multitude of contexts in which music defines itself' (Subotnik, 1996).

Postmodernists seek alternatives to the formalism that has dominated music scholarship (G. Tomlinson in Kompridis, 1993, pp.18-24). Some explore how a variety of cultural codes inform the subjectivity expressed by music. Others suggest that the contextual analysis of history, politics and socio-cultural

circumstances should not be viewed as distinct from formal analysis (Miller, 1993). Those inspired by Barthes's 'The Grain of the Voice' (such as Abbate, 1991), concentrate on the relationship between the performer and listener in determining the experience of music: they analyse what is specific to individual performances and study how listeners understand meaning regardless of composers' intentions often as part of a dialectic of desire. They are interested in how the listening process in turn shapes personal, social and cultural identity. Postmodernism has encouraged scholars to value a wide range of listeners, to explore their own experience of music and the role they play in producing meaning for their readers, and to use this knowledge in generating research questions. Such concerns underlie much of the work in gay and lesbian musicology and have motivated interest in psychoanalytic methodologies.

Postmodernist work challenges the longstanding bias towards studying art music as distinct from other traditions and its listeners as belonging in segregated markets. Scholars now study musical hybrids and 'crossovers' resulting from the cultural exchange between Eastern and Western countries, Africa and the Caribbean, North and South America. Some use post-colonial theory to investigate the processes of appropriation and resistance. More and more scholars are crossing borders and reconsidering the boundaries of their research, not only that which has separated classical from popular music, written from oral traditions, but also historical musicology from other disciplines including ethnomusicology and theory.

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See also

Avant garde

Feminism, §3: Postmodernism

Fluxus

Women in music, §III, 5: World music: New research

Musicology, §II, 1: Disciplines of musicology: Historical method.

Hermeneutics, §5: Musical hermeneutics: 20th century

Madonna

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