

for readers across a wide range of disciplines, professions and ideological orientations.

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Reference

Pieslak, J. 2009. *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press)

Music and the Myth of Wholeness: Toward a New Aesthetic Paradigm.

By Tim Hodgkinson. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016. 280 pp. ISBN 9780262034067

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This book, by the well-known and highly respected composer and improviser Tim Hodgkinson, is something of a *tour de force*, exhibiting a massively impressive grasp of a multitude of disciplines, all brought to bear on art practice in general and music production and reception ('listening') in particular. Written in a dense and sometimes elusive style, it is by turn assertive and evocative, provocative and poignant, with a multitude of subtly different voices phasing into each other, or 'colliding' as Hodgkinson himself would probably say. And it is this 'collision' of different selves or subjectivities that this book traces through its engagement with biology, neuroscience, information theory, anthropology, sociology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, existential ontology – the list goes on and on as the reader will discover! All of this laced together with the actualities of music practice, the account of which is noteworthy for the exquisite clarity and sheer believability that a lifetime of 'doing' brings to the discussion.

This is not to say that this is a fun read all the way: it is not. The first half in particular is quite daunting, not only thanks to the uncompromising complexity of Hodgkinson's theoretical groundwork established here, but also because of the almost exaggerated academic method adopted which bounces the argument around so many different secondary sources, with all of the dreaded references that academics (like me, although not me) love so much, that the radical dynamism of the underlying thought sometimes feels threatened from all sides. Mercifully, Hodgkinson manages to interject just enough 'personal' fragments to remind us that this is no ordinary academic tome, and that it is written by an improviser with excellent timing – most of the time.

The second half of the book which turns more specifically to the development of a 'new aesthetic paradigm', through a detailed and often brilliant discussion of both composed and improvised music practice, begins to reward the reader for all the hard work of the first half. Here one does get a genuine sense of moving 'towards' something, although it remains a moot point whether arriving at the destination would be desirable: isn't an anti-holistic paradigm a contradiction in terms? Without a word on paradigms in the text the question mark remains hovering. Anyway, I dwell on the writing because, at its best, it is true to the substance of

its argument and its underpinning ambition: a resistance to a mythical wholeness in the name of a recursivity that operates at the level of the writing as well as what is written about.

Whether we are moving towards a 'new paradigm' or not, I was often reminded of Alain Badiou while reading this, and particularly his conception of subjectivity as a multiple that is *produced* in 'fidelity' to an Event (art being one of four evental domains for Badiou), something that saves subjectivity from its premature 'death' at the hands of poststructuralism while protecting it from those among us (and this includes many improvisers) who yearn for wholeness. Hodgkinson, to his credit, is extraordinarily effective at exposing the latter as, what Adorno once described as 'dubious totalities'. This book is the perfect antidote for those, improvisers like me, who have long harboured an equal yearning for the singular, alterity, solitude, the irreducible, the neutral and the problematisation of 'agency', with all that comes in the wake of such a risky liberation. I must say, though, that Hodgkinson's return to politics and ethics on the last page (like iron filings to a magnet) was a bit of a blow: just when I thought it was possible to read a whole book on art practice that held out against what Hodgkinson himself rightly describes as music's 'colonization' (p. 8) by external forces such as 'theories of affect', 'languages of feeling', semiotics and so on. And I would add ethics and politics, always ready and waiting to step in and reduce the aesthetic to the extra-aesthetic. However, at least we're using the word aesthetic again, which must be progress.

Needless to say there are statements in the book, as well as more general emphases here and there, that I found either questionable or under-explored (that's what happens when you read someone other than yourself): an account of Heidegger on the Kantian imagination (in the former's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*) would have kept the latter in the picture (there speaks the Kantian in me) as would some attention to aesthetic judgement rather than the contemplation aesthetic of the neo-Kantians which kept cropping up. Introducing Arendt on judgement and solitude would also have been a nice way to link Kant and Heidegger, one that would have played very well with the open and transitory notion of subjectivity being worked with here. The general sense that improvisation is essentially concerned with the 'new', 'against plans and automatisms', (p. 70) and, with Lachenmann, opposed to habits and the habitual, is something I simply don't accept either as an improvising musician or as a thinker/philosopher, so that was a no no for me. Yet these are minor niggles which should not put anyone off reading this book: they're my hang-ups and prejudices at the end of the day. No, this is a very powerful and persuasive work that operates at a level of sophistication that, I have to say, is quite rare in the field. The winning combination of formidable intellectual rigour and deep experience of that which is under discussion makes this an inspirational book, demanding at times yes, but inspirational nonetheless.

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