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1. Introduction

[1.1] In this volume, Georgina Born shows ambitious intellectual reach and breathtaking cultural scope in the analysis of a
narrow topic. Her tools of analysis span many disciplines, and her list of acknowledgments to consulted scholars extends to slightly over two pages. This is a huge and somewhat sprawling book that practically necessitates reviews by a multitude of scholars; indeed, the scholarly community will need several reviews to reach an evaluation of sufficient interdisciplinary range and depth. I shall limit this review to an exposition of the book’s general aims and organization, and focus specifically on issues relating to music theory and composition. Even so, the issues and the ground covered require a somewhat lengthy review.

[1.2] The scope of the book makes it difficult to summarize its general aims. Nor does the eleven page introduction help much: in addition to listing the intended audience and the author’s qualifications, it is thick with various kinds of statements of purpose. Unfortunately, it is not clear what priorities our author has for these purposes; thus, I will summarize what I take to be the most important of these goals.

[1.3] One of the most important aims seems to be Born’s ethnographic study of IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique), a computer music research center funded by the French government. IRCAM is located in Paris and was founded and initially led by the highly regarded composer/conductor Pierre Boulez. This ethnographic study is set against a discursive characterization of modernism and postmodernism in music. Born asserts that the musical avant-garde, a species of musical modernism, is in crisis: it is no longer marginal and critical of the dominant order, but still promotes a view of history in which the present state augurs yet a better musical future through technology. The avant-garde has, thus, lost its original legitimacy—and hence must in her view—search for a new raison d’etre: the means and methods needed to attract a large audience. Born sets out to examine how her claims about the musical avant-garde are manifest at IRCAM. In this examination she borrows concepts from the fields of anthropology, ethnomusicology, sociology, art history, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. Using techniques of reflexive postmodern anthropology, Born studies and critiques forms of power and forms of society and culture that have not yet been so analyzed; IRCAM and Boulez are the guinea pigs featured and at times submerged in this interdisciplinary stew.

[1.4] This is a participant-observer study: Born took the three-month instructional program called “the stage” for visiting composers, and stayed on site for a year (page 8). She made efforts to avoid the appearance of being co-opted by the institutional elites (page 9) and spent time with each sociological subgroup (page 8). And she continued to keep in contact with a variety of people within the institution over an approximately ten year span (page 8). Born addresses the issues of scholarly objectivity as follows:

“I stress above all the historicity and the socioculturally sited character of my own interpretations. But this does not amount to a surrender of any claims to approaching objectivity or imply that the status of my discourse is no different from that of the subjects whom I have studied.” She further states: “If in the course of this book I make a critical analysis of IRCAM as a high-cultural institution and of its cultural forms, this is not with the intention of initiating a relativizing exercise. The existence of other cultural orders of value and complexity I take for granted, . . . Nor should the study be read as a masked critique of all forms of subsidized culture; nor finally, does it have a hidden agenda of vindicating postmodernism or the neoliberal promotion of market forces in culture” (page 10).

[1.5] The first two chapters provide necessary background for exposing the problems (as she perceives them) that faced IRCAM under Boulez’s leadership. Chapters three and four provide background information on the creation, culture, organization, and status of IRCAM. Chapter five traces the internal politics, power relations, and conflicts that naturally arise in any institution. Chapter six covers concepts and relations between and of repertoires consisting of an IRCAM fostered and approved body of twentieth century music called the “canon” and other musics of this century. (See page 173 for a listing of the “canonic” composers.) IRCAM’s canon, shaped in large part by Boulez, is read as supporting IRCAM’s aesthetic position, a variant of “modernism.” Chapter seven focuses on IRCAM’s scientific research programs on music perception, computer music software and hardware creation, and their interactions with on-site compositional theory and practice. Chapter eight concerns the quite serious problems encountered by a prominent composer in his visit to IRCAM where he was to fulfill a commission from that institution. He was in residence and given significant access to the unique resources available only at that institution, such as technical staff, software, and hardware. The last three chapters explore
what Born considers to be system-wide problems of IRCAM under Boulez's leadership, and they also provide conclusions. Chapters four through ten constitute the ethnography of IRCAM (page 11).

2. The “crisis of high art music,” IRCAM, and the “binary opposition” model

[2.1] Born’s argument (and perhaps justification) for IRCAM’s existence is to some extent dependent upon the thesis that “high-art” music is in a state of crisis: “. . . many composers who have experienced a disenchantment with the high-modernist project and with the perceived failures of serialism.” The sense of threat to the continued existence of western art music has, despite certain differences, been widespread in both Europe and the United States (page 3). Boulez’s writings for IRCAM proclaim that composers and scientists would open a dialog that would “forge a kind of common language that scarcely exists at present” (page 1). The creation of IRCAM with the appointment of Boulez as the founding director can be understood as a kind of “modernist” response to this crisis.

[2.2] This response, however, places young American computer scientists—needed for technical expertise to build and run IRCAM—and American composers born since World War II and working within IRCAM in various official and unofficial capacities—in aesthetic conflict with the French director’s (Boulez’s) aesthetics.

[2.3] Another conflict also appears at IRCAM. Born cites Pierre Bourdieu’s two forms of cultural power: one, economic capital, that is based upon economic forces; and the other, cultural capital, which is born of cultural and intellectual forces. The latter is the avant-garde cultural strategy. Born writes:

Bourdieu implies that the avant-garde cultural strategy is simply a different form of economic calculation, so that long-term cultural investment may reap even greater economic reward than mundane short-term calculation. More often, Bourdieu argues that economic and cultural capital are incommensurable and antagonistic spheres, embodied, for example, in the very different lifestyles of the two fractions of the dominant class . . . Overall, he leaves some uncertainty as to whether cultural capital is “really” convertible into the economic . . . (page 27).

[2.4] Certainly, other traditional kinds of conflict between social sub-groups within IRCAM occur; these give rise to the principal binary pairings of conflict that inform Born’s analysis. Born uses both “hard” statistical and “soft” interview techniques in arriving at her results. Her conflict pairings can be summarized with opposing concepts that are separated by a slash: modernism/postmodernism; elitist canon/“other” excluded repertoires (popular music, folk music, etc.); cultural capital/economic capital; Americans/French; scientists/musicians; men/women; producers (scientists and composers)/reproducers (technicians, staff, and administrators); composed music/improvised music; high tech (e.g. mainframe computers)/low tech (e.g. Apple microcomputers); composers/“tutors” (technicians who make it possible for visiting composers to use the in-house technology); secure in employment/insecure in employment; and well paid/poorly paid. Some of these “binaries” appear at times with a medial position between them. Born also at times combines two of these in order to produce a combinatorial design which is then used to locate the various people in bi-dimensional “pecking orders.” These reveal how power and influence are distributed within IRCAM (pages 134, 136, 137, 280).

[2.5] Given the complex multi-dimensional grid of conflict-types that Born exposes in IRCAM, the question arises as to how it could function at all. Indeed, at times it did not function well; the case of the visiting composer that Born documents in chapter eight is an egregious failure by many (but not all) standards of measure. In Born’s analysis, the stress of these multiple areas of conflict upon workers within IRCAM is dealt with by the psychoanalytic concept of “splitting,” an unconscious process considered by Melanie Klein to be one of the most primitive defenses against anxiety. Splitting involves a distortion whereby the “object” (of perception) is experienced as split into a “good” and “bad” object, which are both absolutely separate yet antagonistically bound. The good object is idealized, granted supreme and unquestionable legitimacy, and felt to be a refuge from persecution, while the bad object is denigrated as worthless, but also as a destructive and terrifying persecutor (page 37).

3. Issues and flaws with the binary “engine”
The terms “modernism,” “avant-garde” (a type of modernism), and “post-modernism” figure largely in Born’s discourse. They are involved in describing the “legitimation” of IRCAM and a prime source of conflict within the institution. These terms form the crucial debate on what will be the “cultural capital” a la Bourdieu. Thus, they also feature as engines driving Born’s study itself. As these terms have received multiple definitions in literature, it is helpful that Born provides us with salient features of what she believes to be the differences in music between modernism and postmodernism. They are presented as binary oppositions. Her Figure I, “The antagonistic counterpoint of musical modernism and postmodernism” (page 63) is reproduced below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modernism</th>
<th>Postmodernism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serialism, Postserialism</td>
<td>Experimental Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determinism</td>
<td>Indeterminism, nondeterminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationalism</td>
<td>Irrationalism, mysticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientism, universalism</td>
<td>Sociopoliticization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerebral, complex</td>
<td>Physical, performative, simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-centered</td>
<td>Practice-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear, cumulative, teleological</td>
<td>Cyclical, repetitive, static</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Within a unity of difference to popular music

Nonreference, absolute difference, nonacknowledgment

Reference, transformation

Within a unity on technology

Scientistic, theoreticist

Empiricist, artisanal

High-Tech, institutional

Low-tech bricolage, entrepreneurial

Institutional base

East Coast universities

West Coast, art colleges, art institutions

Institutionally and state-backed

Self-employed, performance-backed

The concepts embedded within this figure are worth examining in detail because so much of the book appears to rest upon them. As many of these issues continue to appear in the literature, I hope that an examination of each “opposition” will be of use and interest to the non-specialist: I ask for the indulgence of composers and those who specialize in this century. Thus, let us consider in turn some problems with each of these binaries.

Born, surprisingly, does not clearly define determinism. However, a definition of determinism found in a dictionary of philosophy starts out like this: “Determinism: (lat. de + terminus, end) The doctrine that every fact in the universe is guided entirely by law (Runes 1960, 78).” Yet the vast majority of modernist composers never embraced “total serialism”—the closest attempt in music to determinism—and even the few who briefly did try it (such as Boulez) rejected it immediately. Babbitt, a quite important figure in total serialism, wrote pieces setting texts (for example, Philomel, with text by John Hollander) that were not deterministic; thus, the resulting work itself could also not be. Therefore, the binary opposition between modernism and postmodernism fails.

The next opposition, “rationalism” versus “irrationalism, mysticism” also fails in that Schoenberg, the arch-modernist,
was deeply interested in religious mysticism and numerology. He was not alone among modernists in this regard: Dane Rudhyar and Alban Berg quickly come to mind here.

[3.5] “Scientism, universalism” versus “sociopoliticization” are not true binary oppositions—nor are they necessarily “antagonistic.” Neither side of this “opposition” are new to musical discourse. In the mid and late 18th-century, Jean-Philippe Rameau attempted to use acoustics and mathematical concepts to provide a scientific basis for his universal theory of harmony (Christensen 1993). He kept a steady correspondence about these matters with members of the French Royal Academy of Science (Cohen 1981). In the early 19th-century, the Belgium premier performance in 1830 of Auber's opera La muette de Portici inspired the revolt against Dutch rule in Belgium. Luigi Dallapiccola, a modernist and serialist for most of his career, wrote politically committed music that was hardly in support of the status quo.

[3.6] As to the following opposition “cerebral, complex” versus “physical, performative, simple,” where is the locus of cerebral or complex in this opposition? Is it in the score, in the composer's mind during the acts of composition, in the minds of the performers during the act of performing, in the minds of the listeners, or some combination of the preceding? The same questions can be asked of the word “simple.” What are the criteria for judgment? Born does not present them.

[3.7] The opposition of “text-centered” versus “practice-centered” where practice-centered means scores which do not use traditional musical notation and typically exist as written instructions to performers is based on a misunderstanding of the inherent nature and limitations of notation for any piece of music. No notational system can convey all of the information necessary for performers to realize the score successfully in sound. Only the outlines of the most important features of a piece of music can be communicated in a score; performers must rely upon a variety of concepts not directly addressed in the score in order to realize it. Thus, any opposition here does not reside in text-centeredness or practice-centeredness, but rather in the fact that different types of music have different aesthetic viewpoints and, thus, different structuring processes based on those aesthetics. These differences are reflected in the notational systems the composer selects or develops in order to communicate the most important features of the piece—according to the composer—to performers most likely to perform the piece for audiences already extant or possibly only imagined.

[3.8] “Linear, cumulative, teleological” versus “cyclical, repetitive, static” falls to many counter-examples. Jonathan Kramer has showed the deep non-linearity of modernist composers such as Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Stockhausen, and Webern (Kramer 1988). The concept here of “cumulative” is undefined by Born. While some modernist pieces can be construed as “teleological,” others may better be described as “generative” (Hermann 1994, 1995). The second movement of modernist and serialist Webern's Piano Variations, Op. 27 could easily be described as “cyclical, repetitive,” and “static.”

[3.9] The sole opposition contained “Within a unity of difference to popular music,” “nonreference, absolute difference, nonacknowledgment” versus “reference, transformation” is also fraught with problems. Mahler's Symphonies and Debussy's piano music employed quotations and parodies of folk and popular musics; Schoenberg and his students made arrangements of works by Johann Strauss, the “Waltz-King”; with his Ebony Concerto, Stravinsky fills a commission from swing/jazz band-leader Woody Herman; Schoenberg and Stravinsky were both involved with film music (unsatisfactorily to them as it turns out); and Schoenberg had wonderful things to say about the music of George Gershwin.

[3.10] Two oppositions are contained within Born's category of “Within a unity on technology.” The first is “scientistic, theoreticist” versus “empiricist, artisanal.” As science is usually described as being heavily empirical, the “opposition” seems empty. As for composers employing theory in a prescriptive manner, the great majority of works that we today consider to be the body of music theory handed down to us over many centuries were written by composers, and most of these are solidly prescriptive. Not only have modernists Babbitt, Boulez, and Schoenberg written theoretical treatises so have the postmodern or experimentalist composers (per Born's description) Reich (page 303), and Cage (page 56); although the writings of Reich and Cage are not usually described that way, the description falls within Born's range for theory. Further, just because some composers do not write down and disseminate theoretical materials does not justify a conclusion that all such non-disseminating composers are not involved with theory and are, therefore, “artisanal.” The second opposition within the category “high-tech, institutional” versus “low-tech bricolage, entrepreneurial” has the problem of equivocation on the term institutional. The development of technology whether deemed “high-tech” or “low” is dependent on institutions that can amass the people, finances, and equipment needed whether the institution is deemed entrepreneurial or not. Many modernist
composers in American academe run and produce pieces in computer music studios that are quite “low-tech” in comparison with those at Stanford, IRCAM, MIT, or UCSD.

[3.11] The last of Born’s categories, “institutional base,” also has two oppositions within it. The first, “east coast universities” versus “west coast, art colleges, art institutions,” suffers from numerous exceptions. The University of California at Berkeley had the modernist Imrie as its lead composition professor for many years. The University of California at Los Angeles supported Schoenberg, and Stravinsky lived in the same town. The Princeton-educated serialist John Rahn has taught for many years at the University of Washington at Seattle. On the east coast, Robert Cogan (a music theorist and post-modernist composer) received his terminal degree from Princeton and has taught at the New England Conservatory (Boston) for over twenty-five years. Thomas DeLio, an experimentalist composer and music theorist specializing in both modernist and experimentalist music, teaches at the University of Maryland at College Park. The second opposition is “institutionally and state-backed” versus “self-employed, performance-backed.” Again, counter examples are easy to come by. The modernists Stravinsky and Copland supported themselves while postmodernists/experimentalists Cogan and DeLio are institutionally supported.

[3.12] Given the above, major portions of this book that build upon aesthetic concepts of modernism, avant-garde, experimentalism, and postmodernism are simply without foundation. Efforts to save these descriptions of aesthetic positions founder upon the counter-examples, the false dichotomy, and vague, undefined, or misunderstood terms, and any future appeals to “exceptions prove the rule” are incoherent as any philosopher or logician can confirm.

[3.13] In all fairness, Born is aware that there are multiple aesthetic positions within these terms. But she misses several opportunities to bolster (or salvage) her theoretical foundation. For example, one such tactic might be to define systematically various versions of these broad aesthetic categories and tie them to specific groups of composers at specific times and locations as appropriate. In one case involving an IRCAM brand of postmodernism, Born has done just that (pages 300–04); however in Born’s book, these broad aesthetic terms suffer from equivocation or lack of contrast because the various “dialects” of these aesthetic positions are either not systematically defined, referred to, or related to one another.

[3.14] Another tactic might be to declare that these are a proposed formal or idealistic definition of these terms and that various composers inhabit a continuum of states between these two aesthetic poles. Thus some composers are perhaps more “modernist”; others are more “experimentalist”; and still others occupy a position somewhere in between. But I can think of no major composer—much less groups of composers—who completely occupies either of these polar positions of aesthetic opposition—even for a single “stylistic period” of their careers. But given the problems with the figure mentioned above, why should this particular formalist definition be accepted over others that could be constructed by exchanging one or more locations of the contents of binary oppositions from one proposed aesthetic pole to the other? Without specific reasons for why the contents of the binary oppositions should be distributed in the proposed manner, the choice of any one of the many possible permutations of the contents of these binary oppositions between the two polar aesthetic positions is simply arbitrary.

4. Problems with basic definitions and musical concepts

[4.1] The assumption made in this book is that these terms apply to music. We see that the problems with these aesthetic terms for music are many as these terms were not generated from music criticism, but rather from other cultural domains such as architecture, art criticism and literary criticism, among others. Born’s considerable difficulties in dealing with these terms is evidence that this assumption might, at best, not yet have found a coherent form or, at worst, is simply not applicable. For insight into how the term postmodernism might apply to music composition and music theory, see Cogan 1995, Cook 1995, and Kramer 1995.

[4.2] Other significant problems surface in Born’s discussions of “serialism,” “neoclassicism,” “mediation” as applied to computer compositional process, and also “modernism” in regard to the terms “tonal” and “modal.” The term serialism is of particular importance because the main human subject of this study, Boulez, reached fame as a serial composer. But later Boulez retreated from total serialism. Thus Born classifies Boulez’s current work as “postserialist”—a type of modernism she uses to describe composers who “continued in the scientistic, deterministic, rationalist, and theoreticist vein of total serialism,
to which was increasingly added a prominent technological dimension . . . It is the discourse that Boulez began to enunciate in the late '60s and that became the basis of his manifesto for IRCAM” (pages 55–6).

[4.3] Born states that “Serialism implies the principle of the homogeneity of chromatic space, while by contrast tonality centers on the functional and symbolic hierarchy of the tonic or key note, its dominant and subdominant. In this sense, serialism negates the hierarchical ordering of pitch space in tonality (page 48).” Her footnote 17 (page 349) further adds: “According to this principle, each pitch in the series has equal importance and is dependent upon its position relative to the other eleven notes.”

[4.4] Clearly whether composer, artist, or writer, the techniques of any style or technique can be used with greater or lesser acuity. Serialism as practiced by such composers as Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Stravinsky, Dallapicolla, Babbitt, Martin, Wuorinen, and others does not always represent a “homogeneity of chromatic space” in actual composition; there are often “functional and symbolic hierarchies” between pitch-classes. Thus, each pitch-class does not have equal importance; moreover, in both theory and practice, unordered set-class relations and transformational relations between overlapping and non-overlapping subsets of pitch-classes in a series are frequently more important than the relations between adjacent pitch-classes. Much misleading thought about serialism is in print and careful examination of actual scores by recognized serial composers in conjunction with accurate information and concepts would greatly clarify the situation. Certainly, serial music “negates the hierarchical ordering of pitch space in tonality” just as surely as modal music (very loosely, music before 1600) does. Both systems conceive of pitch space in their own ways; otherwise, they would not have their own musical identities and, indeed, would be tonal.

[4.5] Another common misconception concerns neoclassicism in twentieth-century music: frequently, serialism or expressionism has been set up as antipodal with neoclassicism. Schoenberg and his followers are the exemplars of serialism or expressionism, whereas Stravinsky (excluding his last serial style-period) and his followers are the exemplars of neoclassicism. On this topic Born says “ . . . neoclassicism associated with composers such as Stravinsky and Hindemith: an attempt to reinvigorate the present by reference to the principles of musics from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and earlier” (page 49). However, Straus (1990b) makes a quite convincing case that these “neoclassic” tendencies were every bit as evident in the work of Schoenberg and his followers as in the so-called neoclassists.

[4.6] Born points out the difficulties that composers have in learning to compose through specification of all aspects of sound with a computer “language”—a “patch language” in Born's terminology—designed specifically for the purpose. These composer generated instructions then must be automatically “translated” into an all-purpose computer language then into assembly language and finally into machine language after which the computer generates a digital stream that is recorded on tape or hard drive. This digital stream can then be converted into sound waves and heard as the music the composer originally specified. Born has this to say about the extensive “mediation” between composer specification and verification of effort through sound:

. . . computer patch languages were characterized by profound abstraction, complex scientistic conceptualization, and delay: in other words by extreme mediation, both temporal and conceptual. From this stems a further limitation inherent in earlier computer music. Given the exhaustive acoustic information required by patch programs and the time delays before playback of a sound, it was very difficult for the user to isolate precisely which parameters were responsible for which aspect of the resultant sound. Not only was it therefore difficult to judge which parameter to change in order to improve the sound, but the programs treated each acoustic parameter independently and did not lend themselves to exploring the interplay between them. So in addition to the programs being abstract and laborious, users found them unpredictable (page 182).

[4.7] Born is correct in pointing out the occasionally quite frustrating difficulties of the compositional processes employing computers. At times a few hours or days—in most highly powerful “cutting edge” computer studios the machine must be shared among several composers—are required before composers can hear the results of their work. However, any composer who teaches a standard orchestration course at the university level can attest to the fact that computer composers are hardly alone with many of these kinds of difficulties. Students read a textbook on how to write for the individual
orchestral instruments and their combinations in this course, and they frequently have to wait days if not weeks to hear the results. They also are baffled as to which “parameters” to change in order to improve the sound. Further, textbooks give only vague descriptions of the sound, and what information they do give is hopelessly inadequate. Experienced instrumentalists with analytical minds and acute hearing unsurprisingly tend to do little better than singers, pianists, or organists at the initial stages. For budding composers or orchestrators must not only know the ranges of the instruments but also the timbral, articulative, and dynamic possibilities within each subrange of each instrument. In the end, professionals even learn the rudiments of the playing techniques such as the fingering systems for each instrument. If learning all of the various individual instrumental “codes” is not enough, then the problems must be faced of how to employ all of the available instrumental combinations in all their possible subranges with all of their possible variables. Even quite experienced composers and orchestrators get surprised by the results from time to time when trying something new. Making even slight changes in the way instruments are used based on hearing an earlier version of the music requires notating the changes in a score and then copying out the parts for each instrumentalist. This process can take days of very hard, unmusical, and boring work.

[4.8] Thus, we see that those who write for the orchestra have problems very similar to those encountered by composers working with computers. By not providing this continuing historical context, Born gives a reader not knowledgeable about music the false impression that “modernism” and technology have created an artificial, difficult, abstract compositional process heretofore unknown; one that would appear to make it nearly impossible to create “good” music. Just as composers and orchestrators learn over a sometimes quite considerable period of time how to write for the orchestra so have composers learned how to write for the computer.

[4.9] On modernism and in regard to the terms “tonal” and “modal,” Born claims that “ . . . the modernist aesthetic eschews tonal or modal bases; it is arhythmic or rhythmically irregular and avoids pulse and sustained pattern in favor of calculated durations and complex irregular temporalities; it avoids perceptible or simple repetition; and improvisation, if brought in, is highly constrained and determined by score-based compositional directives” (page 302).

[4.10] While it is true that some modernist pieces satisfy some of these claims, far more counter-examples exist. For example, nearly all of Hindemith’s music is in some sense tonal or modal, and it has regular pulse and employs sustained patterning. Most of Stravinsky’s music does, too. In the midst of his last and serial style-period, Schoenberg wrote his Theme and Variations for Band, Op. 43a and Variations on a Recitative for Organ, Op. 40 both of which he considered to be tonal pieces. Debussy too used tonal and modal materials. Any piece from any “style-period” (e.g. Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Modernist, Postmodernist, etc.) that uses what today is considered standard notation must literally have “calculated durations” because inscription of rudimentary temporal relations into a score relies upon multiple systems of proportions.

[4.11] I propose that most of the music that we continue to listen to from the past (limited here to Western “art music”) features “complex irregular temporalities.” It seems to me that the primary issue is how these manifest themselves in the various styles. In the music of Boulez, the durations of local and relatively adjacent events in the score present complex durational relationships while the larger design rhythms are comparatively simple. In Mozart or Haydn, the local and relatively adjacent events in the score are rhythmically comparatively simple while the translocal pitch and design structures are rhythmically quite complex. 

[4.12] The statement (in paragraph [33] above) that score-based improvisation “is highly constrained and determined by score-based compositional directives” exposes Born’s misunderstanding on the nature of improvisation. Even though some rock, blues, and jazz musicians do not read or make scores in traditional musical notation, my experience performing with such musicians reveals them to be highly aware of the technical structure of the music and the ways in which improvised materials relate to this structure. In essence, not only are they able to construct a mental score for each work, but they are intuitively cognizant of classes of such pieces. Besides, in the last thirty years, more and more rock, blues, and jazz musicians do read music and make scores.

[4.13] We see that Born has difficulties not only with aesthetic concepts but also more directly with technical concepts and even relatively recent historical facts about music. These difficulties are understandable given her comparative lack of technical training or historical study of music. Born’s qualifications in music consists of quite brief conservatory training and some performance experience with several kinds of popular music (page 7). Further, she did not analyze any of the music
under discussion (page 23).

[4.14] In this light, Born's relative ignorance of aesthetic, technical, and historical concepts in music is not surprising. Perhaps Born's consultant musicologists challenged her with the easily supplied counter-examples and pointed out the flaws in her aesthetic reasoning. Perhaps her technical and historical errors in music were pointed out. Perhaps Born ignored their advice.

5. The hidden agenda?

[5.1] The following statements by Born show another and quite different side of this book: blatant, unsubstantiated, and unmediated value judgments against modernism, at least as practiced by IRCAM. She writes “. . . the notion underlying the many instances that we saw within IRCAM of more arbitrary conceptual foraging from science (genetic biology, fractal geometry) as a basis for composition” (page 318); and “the instruments—trussed up in wires for measurement, pieced by intrusive electrodes and electronically monitored, the trumpet sacrificed to failed experiment—represent a kind of torturous binding of the musical body, an attempt to capture and so rationalize their complex organic aural workings” (page 233); and “. . . the sense of sterility attached to composition techniques such as serialism . . . ” (page 198). These are only a few of several such prejudicial statements found throughout.

[5.2] In response to these attacks on modernism, I might point out that, after Mark Evan Bonds (1991), one could accuse Mozart, Haydn, and other 18th-century composers of “arbitrary conceptual foraging” in rhetoric and Liszt, Wagner, and other 19th-century composers of the same in biology (organicism). The trumpet with various scientific measurement apparatus attached to it (found as 9. within a picture section between pages 222–23) can hardly be anthropomorphised into a natural object or being. For several hundred years, the sciences and associated technologies of metallurgy, geometry, and acoustics have been involved in its design and manufacture. The precedents for rational tuning systems—one of which the trumpet is designed to use—go back at least to Pythagoras. Some experimentalists such as Harry Partch (1974) rationally construct their own tuning systems and create instruments to play in them. I know of no musicians who advocate a rejection of trumpets in favor of a return to the ram’s horn. What of people who do not believe that “composition techniques such as serialism” are not sterile? Are they wrong? If so, why are they wrong? Born does not tell us.

[5.3] Among the somewhat more sophisticated of Born's attacks on modernism—again, in some cases at least as practiced by IRCAM—are implicit judgments of modernism as psychoanalytically sick, beset by crisis, and sexist. Taking the charge of sexism first, Born shows (pages 120, 134) that only two women reach mid-level management positions during her residency, and few women were allowed to produce pieces using IRCAM’s resources. On the face of it, this is a dismal record, but there are no sets of control data. What of the many other nationally supported French musical establishments that are clustered in Paris along with IRCAM? What of other similar musical institutions or art museums in Western Europe? Anecdotally, both the Berlin and Munich Symphony orchestras were within the last ten years thrown into turmoil when women won auditions respectively for the principal clarinet and principal trombone positions. Both were not permitted to retain their positions. As of summer 1994, the Vienna Philharmonic appeared to have no women members in a concert I witnessed at the Salzburg festival.

[5.4] Indeed, many have written of a sense of crisis in composition for this century; however, Born does not consider much less disprove the possibility that this crisis may well touch experimentalists and postmodernists too. Similar kinds of statements of despair have come from the visual arts in the 1970s and in literature in the 1980s. This problem or crisis is hardly unique to musical modernism. Part of the problem is equivocation on the term “success.” For Born, it means acceptance of an aesthetic movement’s creations by a mass audience or at least the technical influence of the same on mass culture and its products. She claims that avant-garde visual arts has had impact on the commercial market (page 4); however, she fails to note that modernist musical styles have influenced mass market film composers when they depict the future, technology, ambiguous situations, or horror. But why should we accept Born’s definition of success and not some other? How can we compare success for Bach or Beethoven with success for today's composers, “popular” or not? Born does not engage these issues. By her measure of success, a Ford Taurus is a better automobile than a Mercedes-Benz. By this populist measure, it may be quite difficult if not impossible for any kind of “high art” whether Baroque or Postmodernist to “succeed.”
Another part of the problem is the increasing ease of dissemination of cultural materials throughout the majority of socio-economic classes in the West. This is a by-product of technological and economical development, the ability to measure marketing success such as “name recognition” and sales of products among the population as a whole—even among various kinds of small sociological subgroups. Further, we now have had relative stagnation—and even decline in the arts—of educational breadth and rigor for the last two and a half decades in the United States. These factors have not been sufficiently accounted for in cultural analyses of “high art” music. Born does not address these larger issues.

In describing especially American composers operating within IRCAM, Born advances Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic concept of “splitting” to account for how these composers dealt with the various kinds of “low,” “middle,” and “high” musical art forms. Perhaps some composers did employ this maladaptive psychoanalytic mechanism. However, Born gave no consideration to the possibility that there could be positive conscious attitudes within composers who practiced or admired modernistic musics and other musics. The thought that various kinds of music serve different functions within a culture and that to compare directly their aesthetic and technical positions might reveal a deep incommensurability was not explored by Born. Yet this notion of differing kinds of music serving different functions within Western culture is of at least four centuries standing. Considered in a more positive way, composers participating in composing or enjoying modernist music on one hand and non-modernist, even popular musics on the other need not display a psychoanalytically primitive defense mechanism or aesthetic disarray any more so than say Beethoven when he wrote popular flute and piano arrangements of Scottish folk-songs for the commercial publishing market of his day. One may wonder if it is possible within Born’s analytical model to be psychoanalytically healthy and also like, perform, or compose modernist music while also liking, performing, or composing “other” musics.

Foucault’s work has made it abundantly clear that ideas have political consequences and raise serious ethical issues whether or not they are so acknowledged in a text. At least one anthropologist (Barrett 1984) has made the point that the field must be morally involved in the issues surrounding socio-cultural phenomena that are the subject of study: all such study is value-laden. Thus, as readers we might well wonder what Born's values are and how she accounts for her prejudices that follow from those values. Born claims not to have a hidden agenda of vindicating postmodernism (page 10). Yet there are no negative value judgements made by Born against composers and concepts she associates with experimentalist or postmodern composition, and we have seen several blatant and unsupported as well as more sophisticated attacks on modernism, her “other” with regard to postmodernism and experimentalism as shown by her Figure 1 reproduced above.

6. Conclusion

In the end, at least with regard to music aesthetics, history, theory, and analysis, Born's book may well be successful in preaching to the less thoughtful or rabid members of the musical “experimentalist” and “postmodernist” choir. Simply put, this book is a polemic; it is not scholarship. Even so, Born’s work does point out the pressing need to examine cultural institutions with a variety of concepts from multiple academic disciplines. This, however, should be done with prejudices and values clearly revealed, with charity in presenting positions with which the author disagrees, and with appropriate context provided. That done, substantial engagement of well presented and thought-out issues can further scholarly discourse and knowledge while taking into account the various kinds of power relations between those directly and indirectly involved.

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Works Cited


Footnotes

1. Unquestionably, a review is not a place for exegesis on this topic. For a compact and accurate technical introduction to Schoenberg’s and Webern’s serial technique, see Straus (1990a) for elementary and Morris (1987) for more advanced technical information.

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2. See Rothstein (1981, 1989, 1990), Schachter (1976, 1980, 1987), and Yeston (1976) for information on the rhythmic complexity of 18th and 19th century European art music, and see Apel (1942) for information on rhythmic complexity in Medieval and Renaissance music of the West.

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3. Certainly, the same questions can be directed at this reviewer. My musical backgrounds include all forms of modernist, experimentalist, and postmodern figures as Born defines. My values and prejudices are simply for the music of this century—whether considered popular or not.

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