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Attachment after the End: Grief and Repair in Modernist Percussion

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Abstract

This article seeks to cast a critical eye on musical modernism through the experiences of its percussionist practitioners. It charts the origins and accepted truisms of percussion ontology as it is understood through the modernist sensibility, and demonstrates how certain modernist assumptions have been inherited by many contemporary practitioners. Some of these individuals' resulting expressions of grief, anger, and sadness in the wake of modernism's waning are presented, and a reparative reading of modernist percussion that seeks to make the repertory inhabitable and sustaining is instead offered. This practice is illustrated through a feminist and performer-led analysis of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Kontakte* (1958–60), for piano, percussion, and tape. It is ultimately argued that performer knowledge and affective attachment is essential to understanding modernism's history and aesthetics, as well as its place in the contemporary moment.

Introduction

The percussion part to Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Kontakte* (1958–60) opens with a gong trill. Out of the combined resonance of the electronic tape and tam-tam, a hiss shoots past the percussionist's ear like a sonic arrow. At the peak of the hiss's crescendo, the score instructs the percussionist to perform a roll. Because of the speed of the arrow, however, the roll must be accomplished in a split second. It must reach out as the arrow passes by, like the hero of a fantasy novel, and catch it mid-air, stopping its flight. My interpretation of the figure is somewhat analogous to the catching of this arrow: the stick in my left hand buzzes and rebounds on the edge of the gong, an arm extending towards the arrow's trajectory, before my right hand plays a slightly louder tap as the sound ceases. My hand closes around the arrow's shaft before it can continue onwards. Catching the arrow, and subsequently preparing the rest of the thirty-five minute work, became a summer project of mine during the uncertain times of the summer of 2020. During a pandemic where so many kinds of contact were impossible, *Kontakte* took on a kind of poetic valence as I practised the piece. Through it I contemplated

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distance and the impossibility of true contact. In the face of such impossibility, I began to wonder what we as performers arrive at instead.[1]

This article is about musical modernism seen through the eyes of its percussionist practitioners. Modernism, however, is a polysemic and complex term that covers a number of artistic, political, and cultural movements, orientations, and ideologies.[2] It is defined along different axes by each theorist or historian that seeks to characterize it: axes such as high culture vs. mass culture, tradition vs. progress, or totality vs. fragmentation.[3] Historical modernism can thus be analysed along various trajectories, each with their own emphases and access points. Modernism also denotes a certain kind of affective state, one often characterized as a type of broad and varied melancholia. As Jonathan Flatley succinctly puts it, modernism's place is the 'insecure position between the promises of modernity and the realities of modernization'.[4] It is a way of aesthetically and politically coping with the traumas of technocratic modernization, while holding onto the belief that its promises of utopia will someday arrive. Despite the often-jarring nature of its aesthetics and negational energies of its ideology, modernism is thus fundamentally an optimistic orientation. The conditions of modernity push the modernist artist to strive towards a world in which modernity can be tolerated or overcome.

This is how modernism is *historically* understood, but performers of modernist music, and here in particular percussionists, do not live this repertoire *only* historically but instead perform it in the present day. Furthermore, as I will show, modernist repertoire and ideology forms the bedrock of percussion's self-narratives: modernist avant-garde buzzwords such as 'revolution' and 'liberation' make frequent appearance when characterizing the art form, even in contemporary accounts.[5] What results from this is a confusion where modernism is both a historical past and a lived present. This lived present is difficult to inhabit and maintain, because each modernist instantiation defines itself by what it contests. As Perry Anderson writes, modernism is reliant on 'the possibility of other social orders'; on a bourgeois or academic establishment against which to pit itself.[6] The era in which we find ourselves today, in which such technocratic optimism for a better world, society, or

1 A performance of *Kontakte* by the author and pianist Shaoai Ashley Zhang at the Conrad Prebys Music Center, La Jolla CA in 2021 can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gFBBjve82c.

2 The pluralism of musical modernism was recently treated in a special issue of *Twentieth Century Music* in 2023. See Gavin S. K. Lee and Christopher J. Miller, eds., *Twentieth-Century Music* 20/3 (special issue: 'Global Musical Modernisms') (2023).

3 See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990); and Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

4 Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 32.

5 Thomas Siwe's monograph on the history of twentieth-century percussion titles itself *Artful Noise*, a nod to the 'noisy', 'other-than' nature of percussion. Samuel Z. Solomon similarly writes that the story of percussion is one of 'novelty, exoticism, and spectacle'. Thomas Siwe, *Artful Noise: Percussion Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois University Press, 2020); Samuel Z. Solomon, *How to Write for Percussion: A Comprehensive Guide to Percussion Composition*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

6 Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), 92 and 86.

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civilization feels outdated, 'is what occurs when, without any victory, that adversary is gone.'[7] The ensuing grief for a vibrant art form, which could deliver a promise of alternative futures, is in many ways the legacy of this non-victory, and is the affective state percussionists invested in modernism inhabit today. We will see this affective state cross generations later in this article when percussionist Steven Schick remarks on his own doctoral students' melancholic feeling that 'they missed the conversation where we all got to decide what percussion was going to be'.[8]

The historical/ontological question of 'what percussion was going to be', both historically and presently, is made legible through claims made by early composers and practitioners of modernist percussion music. These claims have reified values that percussionists inherit through institutional study. The first is an iconoclastic attitude towards traditional classical musical aesthetics. This can be characterized as a feeling that the materiality of percussion (often 'exotic' or 'found sounds') automatically subverts the bourgeois expectations of Western classical music. The second is what I term 'percussionistic exceptionalism': the belief that percussionists are somehow best positioned to navigate abstract conceptions of sound and culture because of the diffuse nature of their instrumental practice.[9] I trace the development of these values through the twentieth century, discuss how they have changed under the stress of cultural shifts in the last fifty years, and suggest ways in which this historiography has shaped the subjectivities of its practitioners.

In following the narratives of these practitioners, I chart patterns of melancholia that many percussionists experience as a result of their clinging to modernism despite its waning. I take as my case study the anthology *The Modern Percussion Revolution*, published in 2014.[10] While reading this anthology I was struck by the recurring themes of frustration found across the essays. To these percussionists, many of whom are well-known practitioners, percussion has lost its artistic meaning, lapsing into mere cycles of 'professionalization'[11] and 'career-advancing'.[12] I will discuss the context of these claims in more detail later in this article. For now, I ask where this melancholia may productively lead, and how it might encourage percussionists to revisit their attachments to modernist repertoire and its underlying assumptions. I ask whether such new approaches may open upon previously unseen ethical and political horizons within the discipline, on both the subjective and the institutional level. Furthermore, in the hands of performers, I argue that the tools given to music studies scholars by feminist epistemologies can provide new ways of understanding even the most abstract instantiations of modernist aesthetics. By mapping the affective contours of percussionists'

7 Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 86.

8 Steven Schick, 'Meandering', in *The Modern Percussion Revolution: Journeys of a Progressive Artist*, ed. Gustavo Aguilar and Kevin Lewis (New York: Routledge, 2014), 203.

9 I am indebted to Amy Cimini for coining this highly useful expression in our conversations.

10 While this anthology is the best example of a collected volume of percussionist melancholia, this mood itself is something that is pervasive through modernism. See Flatley, *Affective Mapping*.

11 Gustavo Aguilar, 'Not Knowing, the Cart Got in Front', in *The Modern Percussion Revolution*, ed. Aguilar and Lewis, 8.

12 Allen Otte, 'Letter to a Young Percussionist (Preferences in Percussion, 2010)', in *The Modern Percussion Revolution*, ed. Aguilar and Lewis, 288.

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attachment to modernism, we learn not only about percussion as a discipline but also about the lived reality of modernism in contemporary life more broadly. Percussion's condition could then serve as a case study that other modernist disciplines can use to orient their own attachments: to both better critique and ameliorate, as needed.

I identify the figure of a modernist percussionist who is trapped in the cycle of modernism's self-proclaimed urgency but ultimate inability to arrive.[13] They are caught in the fantasy of modernism, which Seth Brodsky explores in his *From 1989*. To Brodsky, the modernist impulse can be understood as a pattern of rupture and suturing. Modernism 'is a kind of fantasy, or, rather, that fantasy provides it an unconscious consistency, one that covers for the failures it invariably encounters in the public sphere where its struggle to hegemonize the discourse always falls short'.[14] The modernist thus promises, searches for, and is sustained by a revolution that categorically can never come, for if it did, the modernist would cease to be a modernist. As I will show, modernism in percussion often manifests through its diffuse ontology, one in which any sound-making object can be a percussion instrument. Modernist percussion accounts for the infinitude of its instrumental ontology by assuming logic where the sonic object *becomes* a percussion instrument through the percussionist's use of it. For example, a frying pan begins as 'not an instrument', offering an 'out of bounds' to percussion ontology. It is then transformed *into* a percussion instrument through a percussionist striking it. What was formerly Other becomes Same.[15] In so doing, modernist percussion assumes a totalizing directive towards new instruments and new sounds regardless of their original context.[16] This directive, as I will show, often takes a political valence in the quasi-phenomenological writings of percussionists about the art form. These political aims, however, have largely lost their edge with the decline of modernism and the loss of 'the possibility of other social orders' which serve as its 'essential horizon'.[17]

13 Modernism is rife with manifestos surrounding the need for new musical dialects and projects. In this article I discuss the two most relevant ones to percussionists: Edgard Varèse and Chou Wen-Chung, 'The Liberation of Sound', *Perspectives of New Music* 5/1 (1966); and John Cage's 'The Future of Music: Credo', in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, 50th anniversary edn (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011). Others include Henry Cowell's *New Musical Resources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noise*, trans. Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon, 1986). Sometimes these manifestos are written in retrospect, such as George Antheil's *The Bad Boy of Music* (New York: Samuel French, 1990).

14 Seth Brodsky, *From 1989, or European Music and the Modernist Unconscious* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 110.

15 I borrow this phenomenological language from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, whose own criticism of what he saw as Heidegger's totalizing ontology is well known. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

16 Ryan Dohoney clocks a similar modernist orientation towards non-Western, 'primitive' objects presented in Euro-American modernist spaces. He writes that 'primitivism' presents a 'continued relevance for the production of global modernism', which aims at a 'universal humanity sharing the same emotional life'. I extend this universalism not only to the 'primitive' instruments of colonized peoples but also to percussive objects writ large. Ryan Dohoney, *Saving Abstraction: Morton Feldman, the de Menils, and the Rothko Chapel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 126.

17 Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 92.

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I argue that percussionists, rather than festering within institutions and succumbing to the malaise of modernism's foreclosed horizons, must instead attend to their affective attachments to modernism itself. I turn primarily to two theorists in this regard: Jonathan Flatley and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Flatley offers the concept of 'affective mapping': a 'historicity of one's affective experience' that may reveal a previously hidden political problem and transform it from an object of depression into one that 'solicits and rewards one's attention'.[18] Percussionists can perhaps turn to their melancholia and use its creative impulses to situate themselves within a broader, historicized structure of feeling. In turn, Sedgwick's work (and especially those who have come in the wake of the 'post-critical' turn) may encourage percussionists to approach their modernist works as neither scripture nor grand narratives to be unmasked. Recent post-critical and affective theory can be used to search for clues that point to the possibility that 'things could have been different than they were'.[19] Modernist percussionists, I argue, can borrow from this feminist, reparative impulse, not to repair modernism *itself*, but instead to reimagine and qualify their own attachments to its repertoire and ideology. In doing so, the art form can pivot away from the defeatism exemplified by *The Modern Percussion Revolution* and instead affectively remap modernism in order to revivify its speculative energies for a different life: for its practitioners, for its repertoire, and for its ruined institutions. Analysing how percussion may repair its attachments to modernism suggests that similar acts of post-critical reinterpretation may afford itself to the other corners of modernism struggling to situate themselves in the contemporary moment.

Affective mapping offers strategies that a practitioner may use to come to terms with the stresses their subjectivities confront. Such an affective mapping is by nature phenomenological, and thus I cast my own practice of affective mapping in phenomenological terms. I present a case study of an affective mapping centred on my experience of performing Stockhausen's *Kontakte*. I will demonstrate that the realities of rehearsing this work demanded that I set aside certain modernist assumptions about sound, art, and aesthetics. Instead, performer experience guided by connection and attachment generated quite different conclusions about the modernist work itself. This kind of critical phenomenology, one 'that seeks not only to describe but also to repair the world, encouraging generosity, respect, and compassion for the diversity of our lived experiences',[20] can help percussionists and other instrumental practitioners to chart a way through the riches that modernism *does* offer, while keeping at an arm's distance the totalizing and universalizing dogmas that informed many of its manifestations in the twentieth century. This article is in some ways an effort at constructing a life-raft for my fellow percussionists to whom the modernist repertory is

18 Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 4. Flatley builds his own concept on the late Frederic Jameson's concept of 'cognitive mapping', a process in which a subject creates or maps a partial representation of a cultural totality in order to have agency within it. Flatley transposes this intellectual exercise into the bodily realm of affect and feeling.

19 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 146.

20 Gail Weiss, Ann E. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon, 'Introduction: Transformative Descriptions', in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, ed. Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2019), xiv.

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dear. It is an attempt to have a practice based in modernism without co-signing either its outdated assumptions of totality and perpetual revolution, or a sense of its untouchability as a problematic object of attachment. By doing so, it wagers that a modernism so revisited may once more offer both critical and ameliorative wellsprings with which to confront the contemporary conditions of institutional decay and iconoclasm run-amok, thus outlining possible trajectories for pro-feminist, pro-modernist musical communities and institutions.[21]

Percussion's (political) ontology and its (modernist) truisms

American percussion as an art form arose in its institutionalized form not during the genesis of its early repertoire (the 1930s and 1940s), but nearly two decades later as a result of post-war public funding.[22] As a result, despite being increasingly institutionalized within departments of music, many percussionists were performing repertoire composed to challenge such institutions.[23] To a percussionist, modernist repertoire loses the nuance of its epochal history: 'modernist' percussion refers to a massive, largely temporally undifferentiated period from roughly 1920 to 1990, a fact that I will show leads to some aesthetic and political confusion.[24] Percussionists adopted and proliferated the early modernist percussion writings of John Cage ('percussion music is revolution') and Edgard Varèse ('the liberation of sound') all from within the relative comforts of academic institutions.[25] These composers' early works such as Cage's *Constructions* or Varèse's *Ionisation* form the deepest bedrock of percussion literature. Percussionist Steven Schick writes that because of percussion's historical position as 'other' to European musical values, the 'percussion revolutionaries' rejected the nineteenth-century compositional paradigms they inherited and instead turned to 'vital and unpolluted sounds'.[26] Post-war modernist Vinko Globokar writes in his own percussion manifesto that 'the [percussion] instrument is no longer an object of fetishism but something functional that the percussionist or the composer can explore or manipulate according to his needs'.[27] To modernist composers and the percussionists who have adopted their orientation, non-Western tradition and its 'pre-modern' fetishisms present a backward, 'blind' approach

21 I take his inspiration from Ellie Hisama, whose *Gendering Musical Modernism* aims to present 'feminist accounts of post-tonal music that are pro-modernist'. Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10.

22 For a comprehensive history of the art form's development in the twentieth century, again see Siwe, *Artful Noise*.

23 The canonization and institutionalization of the early twentieth-century modernists, according to Raymond Williams, is what causes the modernists to ultimately lose their anti-bourgeois stance and become instead members of the bourgeois establishment. See Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (New York: Verso, 1989).

24 I recognize that the dates 1920–2000 are perhaps positioned a bit later than most historical accounts of modernism. I wager this is because of both the inertia of modernist music's embeddedness in its institutions and the tendency of communities centred on notated works (such as percussionists) to canonize and reproduce 'staples' of the repertoire through repeated performance.

25 See John Cage, 'The Future of Music', and Varèse and Chou, 'The Liberation of Sound'.

26 Steven Schick, *The Percussionist's Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 3.

27 Vinko Globokar, 'Anti-Badabum', trans. Nancy Francois, *Percussive Notes* 31/1 (1992), 77.

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to instruments that must be liberated before they can be properly utilized to destroy the fetishisms of the Western bourgeoisie.[28] Decades after modernism's institutional zenith, the assumptions and political motivations of modernist composers still set the terms of understanding percussion's ontology.[29] The dominance of modernist ideology does not only specify what kinds of percussion works are composed and how they are performed, but also shapes the very orientations of their performers.[30]

Through their training, percussionists are conditioned by truisms which find their origins in modernist sensibility. Perhaps the most ubiquitous is that 'percussion' itself is not really a material practice but more an attitude. Percussion's instrumentality is conceptualized as open-mindedness to unconventional sounds and techniques that makes percussionists more akin to what Håkon Stene calls 'nomadic gatherers' than to musicians rooted in a single instrumental idiom.[31] To this point, Schick writes that 'percussion is not even an instrument . . . the percussion family consists of thousands of instruments coming from dozens of world cultures . . . having a thousand instruments is very much like having no instrument at all'.[32] By this logic, not only conventional instruments such as drums, cymbals, and xylophones can be considered 'percussion', but also any object that a percussionist turns their interest towards. This seemingly ontological fact paired with the political motivations of modernist composers condition a percussionist-subject to position themselves as cosmopolitan and explorative. Percussionists are called upon to be curious about the world and its sounds, but are also indoctrinated to leverage these migratory capabilities towards the aesthetic-political aims of disrupting musical convention. The advantage of percussion's ubiquity to the modernist is not one of celebration of difference and intercultural dialogue, but the very possibility of effacing or circumventing the discrete characteristics of traditional practices for the purpose of a modern, abstract whole. This is itself an act of recovery or reformulation of a totality that the pace of modernization seems to have ripped away. The percussionist's practice and the subjectivity that is shaped by it is thus conditioned to see traditional, localized practices as somehow more myopic and short-sighted than their own. Percussion's ontology is thus based on a

28 Globokar, 'Anti-Badabum', 77. The ontology expressed here reflects what Edmund Mendelssohn terms an 'ontological understanding of sound'. Modernist deployment of non-Western ideas and instruments, of which percussion is a paradigmatic example, became the means through which these composers developed a conception of abstract or 'pure' sound. To Mendelssohn this understanding, indeed any conception of 'pure sound', is a 'white musical mythology', and one that is inherently imperial and colonial. Edmund Mendelssohn, *White Musical Mythologies: Sonic Presence in Modernism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023), 15–16.

29 The Percussive Arts Society New Music/Research Day that coincided with the John Cage centennial in 2012 was titled 'Thank You, John Cage, for EVERYTHING'. This topic is just one of a number of NM/R days over the past four decades that have centred on modernist composers, both American and European.

30 Sara Ahmed convincingly argues that phenomenological investigation is always in some ways conditioned by power. Any given subject is oriented in any number of ways to apprehend some objects and not others, or to be oriented towards certain objects in certain ways. See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2006; and Sara Ahmed, 'Orientations Matter', in *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

31 Håkon Stene, 'This is Not a Drum: Towards a Post-Instrumental Practice' (PhD diss., Norwegian Academy of Music, 2014), 12.

32 Schick, *The Percussionist's Art*, 3.

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certain kind of modernist phenomenology. I will demonstrate later that this modernist 'natural attitude' is exactly what must be, to some extent, bracketed, so that younger percussionists can freshly approach the modernist work at-hand.

Numerous concerns arise when considering how the ghosts of twentieth-century modernism haunt how percussionists understand their practice and situate themselves in light of the preceding accepted truisms. For instance, the 'gathering' and 'exploration' of sounds must necessarily come from material bodies: from instruments, be they conventionally recognized as such or not. Given our contemporary standards, we must critically ask what it means to take instruments from global cultures (e.g., Mexican rattles, Chinese drums and gongs) and to put them side by side with the waste of industrial culture (e.g., tin cans, doorbell buzzers).[33] For that matter, what does it mean when composers take instruments from colonized cultures and render them categorically and ontologically equal under the hand of a Western percussionist's classically trained technique? Percussion in the hands of modernist composers advocates for a kind of 'sound for sound's sake',[34] where an instrument or object's sounding is taken as abstracted from its historical and traditional contexts and practices. Through a modernist lens it is often viewed as a political duty to do so. Here, degrees of superiority can seep into a percussionist's subjectivity. Percussionists can begin to see themselves as enlightened and untethered to a specific musical tradition. Adam Sliwinski, member of the notable percussion group Sō Percussion, writes that in '[John] Cage's capable hands instruments from other musical societies were appropriated in ways that deftly sidestepped the cultural complications that might arise. Since his new world of noise allowed for potentially any sound to exist on equal terms, instruments were happily adopted for their colors [*sic*] and characteristics.'[35]

To many percussionists, the gathering together of sounds in a so-called non-hierarchical relation frees them from their rootedness in any specific culture. This can at first seem ecumenical, but hierarchy is nonetheless present as these differences are subsumed under a totalizing conception of aesthetic progress.[36] Sliwinski demonstrates this exceptionalist attitude when he writes that 'no other outlet in Western classical music offers the richness of possibility for cross-cultural exploration that percussion does'.[37] This claim, paired with the

33 Here I describe the instrumentation used in much of the early percussion music of what has become termed the 'West Coast School': John Cage, Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, Johanna Beyer, and other American composers working primarily in the 1940s.

34 I am making a play here on modernism's famous *l'art pour l'art*. See John Wilcox, 'The Beginning of l'Art pour l'Art', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 11/4 (1953).

35 Adam Sliwinski, 'Lost and Found: Percussion Chamber Music and the Modern Age', in *The Cambridge Companion to Percussion*, ed. Russell Hartenberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 101.

36 One of the most famous examples of this sentiment comes from the preface to the published edition of Iannis Xenakis's *Rebonds* (1987–9), where Jacques Lonchampt describes the piece as '[a]n immense abstract ritual, a suite of movements and of hammerings without any folkloristic "contamination"'. See Iannis Xenakis, *Rebonds* (Paris: Éditions Salabert, 1989).

37 Sliwinski, 'Lost and Found', 104. The tensions between modernism, its purported cultural abstraction, and the ultimate impossibility of this project is present from the very onset of the repertoire, where Euro-centric distinctions are drawn between the abstract, modernist work of Varèse and the no-less modernist but nationally situated Latin American percussion music of Carlos Chávez (Mexico) and Amadeo Roldán (Cuba). Roldán in particular is a fraught case, as his

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understanding that percussion does not just refer to conventional instruments but to *any* sound-making object, gives percussionists a remarkable position within Western musical practice. Placing instruments and other objects side by side is a totalizing process carried out by the percussionist subject. Because of the diffuseness of its ontology, percussionists are encouraged to carry out this process under progressive auspices such as 'cross-cultural exploration' or the like, whatever the more nuanced nature of this exploration could be. Modernism has thus afforded to percussionists a global aesthetic and political reach, and one that is mired in conflicting affective and political sentiment.

From percussionistic exceptionalism to percussionistic grief

In the previous section, I established percussion as a modernist project and articulated some of the beliefs and values that modernist percussionists have carried with them through the decades since percussion's institutionalization. In this section, I now turn to emerging generational gaps and how these gaps are perceived by modernist percussion practitioners. As modernism's cultural and institutional hegemony waned over the latter half of the twentieth century, new approaches to percussion beyond modernism's tenets began to arise within percussion's institutions. Influences from beyond Euro-American modernism today attract a much larger audience and following than modernist repertoire, even within most American academic institutions.[38] This is further exacerbated by late capitalism's general favour of these more market-friendly and accessible practices vis-à-vis modernism, which positions itself as explicitly anti-market and sometimes even anti-audience.[39]

Essential to understanding the contemporary malaise of modernist percussion is the gendered profiles and institutional positions of many of its practitioners. Both percussion and modernism have deep attachments to masculinity. In the former, we find this both in its historical usage in warfare and in the socialized habitus of drumming which privileges masculine forms of embodiment, and reprimands deviation in traditional pedagogical approaches.[40]

Rítmicas, a collection of works the latter of which are for exclusively percussion instruments, precede Varèse's *Ionisation* (often heralded as the first piece for percussion ensemble) by a number of years. A Euro-centric privileging of Euro-American and European modernists continues to this day, such as when Michael Rosen, emeritus professor of percussion at the Oberlin Conservatory, defends Varèse's music as somehow both 'individualistic' *and* 'universal'. See Michael Rosen, 'Terms Used in Percussion: "Ionisation"', *Percussive Notes* 53/3 (2015). For comprehensive histories on the tensions between abstraction vs. folkloricism and nationalism in early modernist percussion repertoire, see both John Hall's 'Development of the Percussion Ensemble through the Contributions of the Latin American Composers Amadeo Roldán, José Ardévol, Carlos Chávez, and Alberto Ginastera' (DMA diss., Ohio State University, 2008), and Haley Nutt's 'The Collegiate Percussion Ensemble: Institutional and Gendered Practices in the American Academy' (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2020).

38 These include a nostalgic return to traditional European harmony, non-Euro-American practices from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, popular music, and American drum corps (epitomized by Drum Corps International and its affiliate organizations).

39 Perhaps still the most famous example of this orientation is Milton Babbitt's 'Who Cares If You Listen?', an article most widely understood as arguing for composers to minimize their concern regarding audience reception. See Milton Babbitt, 'Who Cares If You Listen?', *High Fidelity* 8 (February 1958).

40 Such an approach could be summarized in the account presented by Russell Hartenberger of percussionist Alan Abel, who writes of percussion pedagogy that '"You need to discipline your hands so they do what your mind and ear say

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Modernism shares a similar history, privileging images of virility and mastery which have led some scholars to argue that modernism and any kind of feminist epistemology are mutually exclusive.[41] We hear in the writings of percussionists concerned with the state of the art form the same ontological question of 'what percussion is/was supposed to be' and this question cannot help but be anchored in a masculinist phenomenology. As shown earlier, modernist percussion has been a project of expansion and domination; a project of both aesthetic and material subversion. What follows in modernism's waning is not only the loss of a social adversary, as Anderson notes, but the insecurity of a certain kind of gendered discourse.[42] This will beg the question, then, of what alternative discourses may be possible in its stead, and what methodologies may fuel them.

The Modern Percussion Revolution, published in 2014, houses many of the essays that demonstrate these modernist percussionist's melancholia. In co-editor Gustavo Aguilar's essay, 'Not Knowing, the Cart Got in Front', Aguilar notes his disappointment in a PASIC (Percussive Arts Society International Convention) he attended in 2004. That year, the Focus Day concerts (a series of performances committed to a certain theme in new music) based on the theme 'The New Avant Garde' left him feeling as though percussion as an art form had failed its radical beginnings. Instead percussion seemed to have fallen comfortably into what he calls the 'professionalization' of the art form: a sterile, cut-and-paste practice that he juxtaposes with the unruly and unidiomatic modernist works of the twentieth century. Aguilar ventriloquizes the new percussion composition ethos as such: '*Compose a score. Dutifully construct it with a model of making that seems fixed on approaching percussion as merely the submission to time and metronomic rhythmic progression. Transcribe the existing ideal forms of speed, clear sound, coordination and virtuosity in your score. Replicate, ad nauseam.*'[43]

Aguilar's target is the same as many of the other contributors to *The Modern Percussion Revolution*: a conventional approach to percussion now permeated by influences from beyond modernism. Aguilar characterizes these changes and their resulting repertoire as a failure,

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should be done."' Such an approach to learning percussion may point to what Haley Nutt terms the 'masculine habitus' of percussion. The difficulty of the masculinism to be found in percussion can also be found in the work of Rebecca Lloyd-Jones, Louise Devenish, and Jennifer Torrence. Russell Hartenberger, 'Learning to Feel the Time: Reflections of a Percussionist', in *Synchrony and Temporal Flow in Music and Dance*, ed. Clemens Wöllner and Justin London (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 349; Nutt, 'The Collegiate Percussion Ensemble', 12; see also Rebecca Lloyd-Jones, 'In Search of a Sonic Democracy: Tracing Feminist Genealogies through the Percussion Works of Lucia Dlugoszewski, Maryanne Amacher, and Eleanor Hovda' (DMA diss., University of California, San Diego, 2024), and Louise Devenish and Jennifer Torrence, 'Virtuosity, Post-Instrumental Practice, and Collapse: A Correspondence', in *Contemporary Musical Virtuosities*, ed. Louise Devenish and Cat Hope (New York: Routledge, 2024).

41 Catherine Parsons Smith goes so far as to argue that 'misogyny became an essential feature of American modernism after it developed after 1918'. Catherine Parsons Smith. 'A Distinguishing Virility: Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music', in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Art and Music*, ed. Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 90.

42 Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*.

43 Aguilar, 'Not Knowing, the Cart Got in Front', 4 (italics in original).

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writing that 'product has come to trump process',[44] which Perry Anderson may recognize as 'the charisma of technique' becoming mere 'routine', and thus losing its 'magnetic powers for art'.[45] This ideal 'process' he alludes to is the frontier-like attitude composers cultivated with the medium: uncharted sonic and aesthetic territory to explore, manipulate, and appropriate.[46] In a surprising turn, Aguilar proceeds to personalize this perceived failure. 'It was not that the "new avant-garde" compositions performed on that day had been failures', he writes. 'Rather, it was I coming to terms with the realization that . . . I would have no choice but to dwell—to be in a state of forgetting, unmarking, undoing, and unbecoming—even if doing so meant that I, myself, would be a failure within the context of a profession that I cherished.'[47] Aguilar makes a rhetorical and affective shift from the failure being a characteristic of the art form to being one that he *himself* is characterized by.[48] Aguilar's understanding of modernism's failure to deliver on its promises leads him to double down on the negational power of modernism's values. He surrenders the hope and optimism that I will demonstrate lies at the heart of a reparative mapping of modernism's affects.

In his own offering to the volume, Steven Schick writes worryingly of 'The Plan', a template laid out by senior percussion academics that young students now dutifully perpetuate. He writes that 'the aging academic establishment has decided that we've already had enough conversation and that there's no reason to revisit things. We've had the conversation and made our plan. Now all that remains for young percussionists is to execute it . . . and as efficiently as possible.'[49] Schick is concerned with the intergenerational relationships that manifest between percussionists around shared repertoire. The idea that the unruly modernist experiments that make up much early percussion repertoire have all been solved and now exist only to be executed on conservatory recitals rubs against Schick's ethos. Elsewhere he writes that 'the very beauty of [Karlheinz Stockhausen's] *Zyklus*, [Iannis Xenakis's] *Psappha*, and [Morton Feldman's] *King of Denmark* is that they are not in fact fixed as unalterable performance practice. Any percussionist who learns this great music is invited to reinvent performance practice to suit the intellectual, emotional, and technical demands of his or her point of view.'[50] Schick seems to be asking what is left of modernism when it falls into stasis

44 Aguilar, 'Not Knowing, the Cart Got in Front', 4.

45 Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 87.

46 Samuel Solomon, percussion faculty at the Boston Conservatory, writes in a similar (I assume unknowingly) colonialist-imperialist tenor when he likens modernist composers to 'treasure hunters' who brought instruments 'from all corners of the globe to play together in a new, revolutionary music'. Solomon, *How to Write for Percussion*, 1.

47 Aguilar, 'Not Knowing, the Cart Got in Front', 14.

48 Aguilar invokes failure as understood though the work of queer theorist Jack Halberstam. Indeed, failure as a concept is one that is central to queer modernism. The failure of conforming to heteronormativity can be generative of new modes of expression, as many queer and otherwise marginalized modernists discovered. Indeed, Heather Love goes so far as to argue that despite the image of modernism as heroic, there exists a 'strain of failure in all modernism'. Heather K. Love, 'Forced Exile: Walter Pater's Queer Modernism', in *Bad Modernism*, ed. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 25.

49 Schick, 'Meandering', 204.

50 Schick, *The Percussionist's Art*, xvii.

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and reproduction, when it has become 'commodified and integrated into the circuits of post-war capital', as Anderson puts it.[51] Where does a practice's generative energy come from if it is denied experimentation in favour of pristine execution? As mentioned at the outset of this article, Schick notes that many of his students at the time came to him depressed, burned out, or otherwise cynical about their own practices. He writes that his students are 'not saying they don't love music or that they are rejecting standard percussion repertory. They're saying that they don't like the fact that they missed the conversation where we all got to decide what percussion was going to be. And they're not just a little irritated; they're genuinely, deeply—and rightfully—pissed off.'[52] Schick identifies that these students felt as though they missed out on the question of what percussion *could* be, and instead have inherited an art form that they are merely expected to perpetuate *ad infinitum*.

Other authors in the volume cast their concerns in political terms. Allen Otte laments a percussion culture in 2014 that is permeated by celebrity and commodification. He writes disparagingly of the contemporary culture of percussion that is sustained through percussionists composing flashy, virtuosic material for other percussionists, which he characterizes as 'drummers standing at the marimba and improvising idiomatic licks into mediocre movie soundtracks, vomiting all over the keyboard in D-flat major, which are then supposed to pass for degree recitals and even professional material—really?'[53] Composer-percussionist Stuart Saunders Smith describes this same music as 'nineteenth century parlor music', 'of no interest', and 'reactionary and . . . politically a waste of time'.[54] As a result of the 'tsunami' of popular cultural influences and what they see as the general instantaneity and disconnection of contemporary media culture (e.g., YouTube performances, Skype/Zoom masterclasses) both Otte and Smith are concerned that percussion has lost its sense of mission and purpose. Addressing the issue of percussion's future, Otte appears to be at a loss. He writes:

> So, following Cage, our proper business is then, what? Revolution? I'm afraid Cage was quintessentially a 'modernist,' quaintly and antiquatedly so: the idea that percussion music is revolution, that by changing music we change ourselves, and by changing ourselves we change society. But here we stand, staring down the tsunamis, both percussive ones and those of the values of the society in which we must function, with the rent and health insurance premiums due.[55]

Though Otte ends this reflection with a note towards the economic viability of the art form, the concern with percussion's 'proper business' betrays itself in his writings to be one of a spiritual nature just as much as one of occupation. The values Otte set out to espouse in the beginning of his career have been left behind, and no compelling alternative (to him) has emerged

51 Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 80.

52 Schick, 'Meandering', 203. It is worth noting that Gustavo Aguilar was himself a student of Schick's.

53 Otte, 'Letter to a Young Percussionist', 284.

54 Stuart Saunders Smith, quoted in Bill Sallak, 'On the Nature of Percussion Masterworks', in *The Modern Percussion Revolution*, ed. Aguilar and Lewis, 194.

55 Otte, 'Letter to a Young Percussionist', 285–6.

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to replace it. In terms of the percussionist subjectivity, we see the dark side of Brodsky's cycle of inevitable but impossible revolution. As Otte notes, the revolution that modernist percussion was supposed to bring did not happen and seemingly *cannot* happen.

These venerable percussionists address an affective current that could perhaps be best understood as the malaise of the 'end of history': an ending of the twentieth century's period of 'ideological violence' (and the progressive futures this violence promised) which gives way to what Francis Fukuyama infamously termed the 'the universal homogenous state', or what Anderson more nuancedly marks as 'the monotone steady-state of the post-war Atlantic order'.[56] Fukuyama characterizes this 'post-historical' period as one in which there can be 'neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history', a diagnosis diametrically opposed to the modernist ethos expressed by Aguilar, Schick, and Otte.[57] The waning of support for modernism's aesthetic-political projects now places modernist percussionists in a place of disfavour even within their own practice. These percussionists arrive at a number of painful conclusions, from Aguilar's invocation of failure, to Otte's grieving of the percussion project, to Schick's observation that having 'a lifetime protection from conformity' as a result of percussion's modernist origins could not be 'further from the truth'.[58] I take the position that modernist percussionists in the United States are now facing a crisis, and one that drives them into a 'depressive' melancholia, as Flatley terms it, which inhibits the reforming of percussion's political horizon, and obfuscates what avant-garde repertoire still offers such a project.[59]

An ungenerous reading of the aforementioned authors could paint them as simply a group of older, white professors who are mourning the days of their work's cultural prime. This is not how I read it, however. Instead, I see in the above a genuine concern for the future of an artistic community and discipline which no longer seems to care about its problems – the same problems which in any case seem immune to the exhausted tools of the twentieth century. Given the typical gender profile of both percussion and modernism, I believe it is somewhat ironic that feminism, and particularly the site of feminist embodiment, will rescue these percussionists from their difficult attachments to modernism. Feminist epistemologies, which understand knowledge as embodied, situated, and affective rather than disinterested and masterful, may help percussionists to once more speculate about what modernism may offer the art form in the contemporary moment. In the face of this crisis, I argue that modernist percussionists are being presented with the opportunity to take stock of what the object of modernism is and what mode of attachment to this object the contemporary moment calls for. Modernist assumptions have become a type of 'natural attitude' for the percussionist. Just as phenomenologists in the twentieth century sought the truth of Being by bracketing off cultural conditioning, modernist percussionists must re-approach modernism with fresh eyes in order to find new ways to attach themselves to it. Rather than jettisoning modernism for its

56 Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 82.

57 Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), 18.

58 Schick, 'Meandering', 210.

59 Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 2.

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flaws, I argue that percussionists, other practitioners, and scholars of modernism must perhaps get *closer* to modernism, but do so on their own terms and in the spirit of repair rather than its usual iconoclasm.

Attachment, affect, and embodiment within the modernist work

Eve Sedgwick's seminal article on paranoid and reparative reading, now nearly thirty years old, in some ways has served as inaugural text in a heated discussion of critique and the post-critical impulses in the humanities.[60] To Sedgwick, a reparative reading of a text is one that 'is additive and accretive' to its object. It seeks to 'confer plenitude' that can in turn nurture an 'inchoate self'.[61] She situates this against what was at the time the dominant strain of theory in the humanities: a kind of detached, paranoid unmasking of objects which were believed to conceal ideologies, power structures, and political impulses. Reparative reading thus offers a model of analysis and critique that seeks to be constructive, imaginative, and hopeful. It seeks to maintain 'ethically crucial possibilities' that the 'past . . . could have happened differently from the way it actually did'.[62]

Other feminist authors, in equal parts, express sympathy and disagreement with Sedgwick, have since picked up the issue of the 'reparative' or 'post-critical' turn. Robyn Wiegman writes that, for all of reparative reading's attention to the object of knowledge that affection is being conferred upon, the act of reparative reading is in many ways more about the subject trying to rehabilitate *themselves*. When discussing the stakes of queer feminism's reparative turn, Wiegman wonders 'what it means to confer love on an object as a tactical strategy in rescuing oneself from condemnation'.[63] Wiegman concludes that the reparative turn is in many ways less about the objects themselves but instead about the rehabilitation of the act of interpretation itself: 'an empathetic attachment to *interpretation* as a self and world enhancing ability'.[64] Similarly, Lauren Berlant writes 'how would we know when the "repair" we intend is not another form of narcissism or control? Just because we sense it to be so?'[65] Heather Love also offers a critique of the view of reparative reading as a kind of rose-coloured-glasses view of the world. She writes that though in reparative reading the critic is permitted to love their object of study, that 'there is risk in love, including the risk of antagonism, aggression, irritation, contempt, anger—love means trying to destroy the object as well as trying to repair it'.[66] Love insists that any act of reparative reading must in turn open oneself up to

60 In particular, see the anthology *Critique and Post-Critique*, eds. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham, NC: Duke University, Press, 2017), and Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004), among many others.

61 Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 149.

62 Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 146.

63 Robyn Wiegman, 'The Times We're In: Queer Feminist Criticism and the Reparative "Turn"', *Feminist Theory* 15/1 (2014), 12.

64 Wiegman, 'The Times We're In', 19.

65 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 124.

66 Heather Love, 'Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading', *Criticism* 52/2 (2010), 239.

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paranoia as well, and that these affects go hand in hand. The act of repair then, is a complex, multivalent one. It is equal parts about the object itself as well as the interpreting subject.

The situation does not get simpler when one considers a complex object of repair such as 'modernism'. The reason for this is twofold. First, modernism, as established earlier, is not a single object but a complex assemblage of works, authors, performances, and institutions that have developed and changed over the course of more than a century. Second, modernism itself is an object that from an ideological standpoint has no need of repair because it is always *already in the act* of repair: of a disenchanted world, of a totalitarian order, of a society beset by the vapidities of the culture industry, and so on. It is these grand metanarratives that made modernist works such ripe targets for the 'paranoid' critical style that rose to prominence in the rise of postmodernist reading. Modernism seems to have no need of repair, but its self-insistence has seemed to contribute to its own disqualification from political relevance in the twenty-first century.

As we have just read, this leaves the performers of modernist works and those invested in modernist institutions in a strange, affectively fraught position. On the one hand, the complaints of older, white, male academicians about the waning of relevance is something to contest. On the other, there remains what I believe to be ethical and political potential in the work of modernism, even to (and perhaps especially to) younger generations looking to imagine horizons beyond the postmodern steady-state. There is perhaps here a case of what has been termed the 'metamodern', an oscillating affective state between the modernist utopian longings for new worlds and the postmodern recognition that such horizons are already foreclosed.[67] In such a position nostalgia and utopian longing is a powerful, though frustrated and unfocused impulse. It is one that points out, as Nicola Sayers does, that in a search for authenticity, sincerity, wonder, and belief, 'the importance of loving things . . . is almost more important than the question of whether the thing you love is a worthy object'.[68]

Ultimately, then, what needs repair is not modernism itself or any of its specific works, but instead the individual's affective attachment to them. Attachment is central to the work of both Rita Felski and Lauren Berlant. To Felski, attachment offers a lens through which to analyse works of art, and understand how they motivate actors within complex networks. Attachments 'are made and unmade over time, intensify and fade away, are oriented to the future as well as the past, can assume new forms and point in surprising directions'.[69] Attachments, while creative and world-building, however, are not always positive. Berlant identifies an affective phenomenon that she terms 'cruel optimism'. 'An optimistic attachment', Berlant writes, 'is invested in one's own or the world's continuity, but might *feel* any number of ways'.[70] These attachments to futurity (or its absence) become cruel 'when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the

67 For more on the theory of metamodernism, see *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism*, eds. Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).

68 Nicola Sayers, *The Promise of Nostalgia: Reminiscence, Longing, and Hope in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 117.

69 Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), ix.

70 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 13.

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expansive transformation' one reaches for. It is similarly cruel when this affective frustration provides the person or people with a sustaining pleasure, 'such that a person . . . finds itself bound to a profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming'.[71] This form of attachment manifests doubly in the percussionists cited earlier: percussionists suffer under attachment to modernism's impossible futures, and yet take a certain holier-than-thou satisfaction in situating themselves as countercultural in this regard. In order for modernism to be a positive object of attachment for percussionists, both of these difficulties must be resolved in the orientations of percussion's practitioners and institutions.

To discover newer, invigorating ways of attaching oneself to modernism, we must thread a needle between both the revolutionary manifestoes of the modernists and the deconstructive and unmasking polemics of their critics. To do so, I argue that discussions and analyses of musical modernism must centre the experiences of the performers who remain attached to it. These performers, in turn, bear the responsibility of resisting the orienting conditions that encourage them to consider themselves as somehow exceptional or at the front of a political vanguard. They must affectively map out their attachments, turning to their melancholic energies with an intention to first understand them, and then to refashion them into a 'way to be interested in the world'.[72] I would add that affective mapping can go beyond being interested, but could build collective and political engagement for the sake of different futures. Rita Felski might term this a kind of 'neophenomenology': a 'sustained attention to the sheer range and complexity of aesthetic experiences', which may include the expected moments of modernist shock and rupture, but may also solicit affects and experiences which run counter to modernism's own narratives.[73] A percussionist performer-scholar, by analysing their own attachments and embodying them through performance, may be the ideal figure to comb through the 'gold-bearing rubble' of modernism for fresh aesthetic and political innervation.[74]

A critical phenomenology of *Kontakte*

In this final section I turn from theory to practice. I have demonstrated the need for an alternative reading and treatment of modernist literature and aesthetic values by its percussionist practitioners. This final section serves as a case study of this type of embodiment and attachment based on a piece of paradigmatic modernist repertoire that I myself have performed, namely Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Kontakte* (1958–60). I begin with a treatment of the piece through Brodsky's discussions of modernist fantasy and desire in order to establish its theoretical and aesthetic contours before turning to my own treatment of the piece as one of its performers. Thus, my work is situated in phenomenology in much the same way as the accounts of the preceding percussionists. However, I consider my own phenomenology as a *critical* phenomenology in that it aims to draw 'attention to the multiple ways in which

71 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2.

72 Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 2.

73 Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 191.

74 Sayers, *The Promise of Nostalgia*, 65. 'Gold-bearing rubble' is a term taken from the work of Ernst Bloch.

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power moves through our bodies and our lives'.[75] Modernism's values and habits, the way they have shaped percussion practice and orientation, is one such movement of power. Performer-based knowledge and experience can be a way of intervening in these currents of power. As Ellie Hisama puts it in her feminist reading of female modernist composers: 'composers do not always provide the most convincing interpretations of their music, nor are they necessarily cognizant of the analytical implications of their music'.[76] I argue that, when it comes to understanding a musical work as an object of knowledge, an embodied, affective performer knowledge is essential to such an object's epistemology. Even the most paradigmatic high modernist works, such as *Kontakte*, benefit from feminist forms of knowing. Modernist percussion is thus an interesting phenomenological site: the percussionist must remain critical of the ways in which their consciousness and bodies are shaped by disciplinary training, and yet remain post-critical in their affective attachments and ability to confer plenitude.

Kontakte's conception is conditioned by a number of modernist assumptions and ideological aims, buoyed along primarily by Stockhausen's writings and scholars' reception of his work. It, and other pieces from Stockhausen at the time, introduces a central concept to Stockhausen's oeuvre: moment form. In his 1960 article, 'Momentform', Stockhausen asserts that rather than conceiving of musical time as a linear succession of events for the listener to retain and organize, he is more interested in a type of musical composition that points to 'Eternity', which he defines as 'a state of timelessness' that 'does not begin at the end of time, but which is attainable in each moment'.[77] This conception manifests in the performance of the piece through stark, rapid changes of texture and energy guided by the tape, seeking to give the impression that the previous music carries on in some unheard dimension, and that the audible music had been going long before the listener's arrival. According to Stockhausen's conceptualization each incision between performer and tape is by design a new beginning ruptured from what came before and separate from what comes next.

Reception and scholarship surrounding the piece has largely co-signed Stockhausen's description. Jonathan Kramer writes that 'a proper moment form will give the impression of starting in the midst of previously unheard music, and it will break off without reaching any structural cadence, as if the music goes on, inaudibly in some other space or time after the close of the performance'.[78] Jonathan Harvey endorses a performance of the work by Christoph Caskell and Aloys Kontarsky as achieving this goal, writing that their performance is 'so sensitive' and the variety of textures and timbres so great that 'one must live for the moment alone, for the vivid *aperçu* – it is not particularly enriching to recall what has come before or what is yet to come by way of comparison'.[79] This preoccupation with newness and autonomy is something that continues on into Stockhausen's late life when he writes that

75 Weiss et al., 'Introduction: Transformative Descriptions', xiv.

76 Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism*, 10.

77 Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Momentform', in *Texte zur elektronische und instrumentalen Musik*, *Volume 1* (Cologne: Verlag M. Dumont Schauberg, 1964), 199.

78 Jonathan Kramer, 'Moment Form in Twentieth Century Music', *The Musical Quarterly* 64/2 (1978), 180.

79 Jonathan Harvey, *The Music of Stockhausen* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), 89.

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the most important aims of his work are to form music in 'absolute freedom, independent of any exterior rules, regulations and restrictive forces, free from the limitations of music styles and ideologies' and 'to create, with every piece, something *new*, unique, unmistakable, original, something hitherto unheard of: an individual living being'.[80] Moment form and its execution in *Kontakte* then may serve as a paradigmatic modernist event, one that is dedicated to newness, autonomy, and as Seth Brodsky notes, a perpetual cycle of rupture and suturing.[81]

With Brodsky's analysis in mind, I argue here that moment form and the technocratic elements of *Kontakte* constitute a type of modernist fantasy. In Brodsky's psychoanalytical framework, 'fantasy' is not a derogatory term used to ridicule those who are not in touch with reality, but is instead a highly technical and theoretical concept. Fantasy here refers to content and desire that lies outside of a given formal structure while still animating the content of that structure. Brodsky explains that a fantasy 'can at any time liberate the instrument, the will, the technique' from their constraints, and that it allows 'autonomy to materialize . . . fantasy is what turns technical facility and inventive prowess themselves into a kind of performance'.[82] The fantasy becomes a passageway for the occluded self to emerge through performance. Modernist fantasy in particular is a kind of meta-fantasy, entailing 'the repeated use of fantasy to patch up a break that [modernists] themselves were celebrating'.[83] In modernist fantasy, the subject seeks to create a rupture that only they themselves can close. *Kontakte* is a fantasy that is seeking to solve a kind of linear time through radical rupture, while simultaneously offering its own solution to this rupture in the compositional concept of moment form. Stockhausen saw in music prior to modernism an inability to escape the past and was motivated by the fantasy of finally breaking free into absolute autonomy.

Performer knowledge quickly encounters the failings of this modernist fantasy, and I suspect has done so since the piece's composition. Indeed, in advocating for performer knowledge of modernist works, I am sure that I am not discovering anything new with regards to a performer's lived experience performing this music. I argue instead that these situated and embodied epistemologies be integrated into modernism's often formalist and technocratic discourses, an inclusion dependent on performers' ability to map their knowledges and articulate them without falling back onto ideological tropes.[84] *Kontakte* is a uniquely strange experience to practice, for while it is technically a duo for piano and percussion, it is conducted by the pacing of the fixed tape. Through their rehearsed synchronicity, the performers must sharpen their timings and make it sound as though the tape is responding to them, not the other way around. They must take pre-rehearsed fragments of the piece and then recreate

80 Günter Peters and Mark Schreiber, '. . . How Creation is Composed', *Perspectives of New Music* 37/1 (1999), 95.

81 Brodsky, *From 1989*, 53.

82 Brodsky, *From 1989*, 38.

83 Brodsky, *From 1989*, 62.

84 Thomas Kernan notes a similar absence of performer perspective in the historiography of the art form, where instead emphasis is put on the great composers and works of percussion. I argue that this absence has not just historiographic implication, but also epistemological ones. See Thomas J. Kernan, 'What of the Performers? The Case of the Percussion Group Cincinnati and the Need to Reconsider Percussion Chamber Music Historiography', in *The Modern Percussion Revolution*, ed. Aguilar and Lewis.

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it in dialogue within the bounds of the tape. The tape itself is fixed and will never make a mistake, a product of the total control that Stockhausen was seeking in his electronic works of that period.[85] In order to match this consistency, many parts of the piece, due to their difficulty and complexity, must be memorized. The moment of performance is the product of this intense preparation. In this sense, the live aspect of the performance, the pianist and percussionist's collaboration, is very much a lived and contingent time compared to the veiled eternity that moment form outlines. A performer's critical phenomenology lays bare a number of modernist assumptions about performance and execution: there can be no execution of a piece structured on radical beginning without countless prior instances of such beginning in rehearsal.

To further articulate how a critical phenomenology of percussion practice unmasks this fantasy, I turn to two specific moments of the piece. The first I refer to as 'the storm' – a moment about two-thirds through the piece where its tension explodes into a flurry of notes across the piano and percussion set-up, eventually settling down into an ensuing stillness (Figure 1). To Stockhausen and his sympathetic critics, this moment is a beginning that negates what comes before it, and is then negated by what follows. It is a moment that beckons to an eternal time that persists, endless, behind whatever is perceived in real time. To the performer, however, it is the moment that is laden with greatest temporal baggage. Because of the layout of the percussion set-up and the speed of the passage (only a few seconds long in total), the percussionist's part must be memorized (Figure 2). Furthermore, because it is strewn across the instruments, its memorization process is one of slowly learning each note one at a time, grouping them into phrases, and then speeding the repetitions up until one can fly around the set-up and keep up with the tape. This moment that is meant to be a rupturing and suturing within a context of total control is thus overflowing with repetitions from days, weeks, and months of preparation.

The second moment I draw attention to comes at the very end of the piece. As the tape spirals upwards amid bell-like sounds, the pianist and percussionist sonically pass their own bells back and forth, following both each other and the tape (Figure 3). At this point in the piece, the performers are both using a similar collection of instruments. In addition to the piano, the pianist has a set of small Indian bells, a set of bamboo chimes, a cymbal, a pair of hi-hat cymbals, and a number of crotales: all instruments that are mirrored in the percussionist's set-up.[86] They are played by similar implements (brushes and plastic mallets) to boot. To the percussionist, unless they are working with a particularly multifaceted pianist or one who has played the piece before, rehearsing the end of the work is somewhat pedagogical. The percussionist must help their pianist gain a sense of control over basic percussion techniques in order to match their own. In the moment of performance not only do the players have to dial in their practising and rehearsals but must guide each other and react to each

85 See Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'The Concept of Unity in Electronic Music', *Perspectives of New Music* 1/1 (1962), 39.

86 While the percussionist and pianist both play *almglocken* and crotales, I would like to clarify that the specific pitches of the instruments are not shared.

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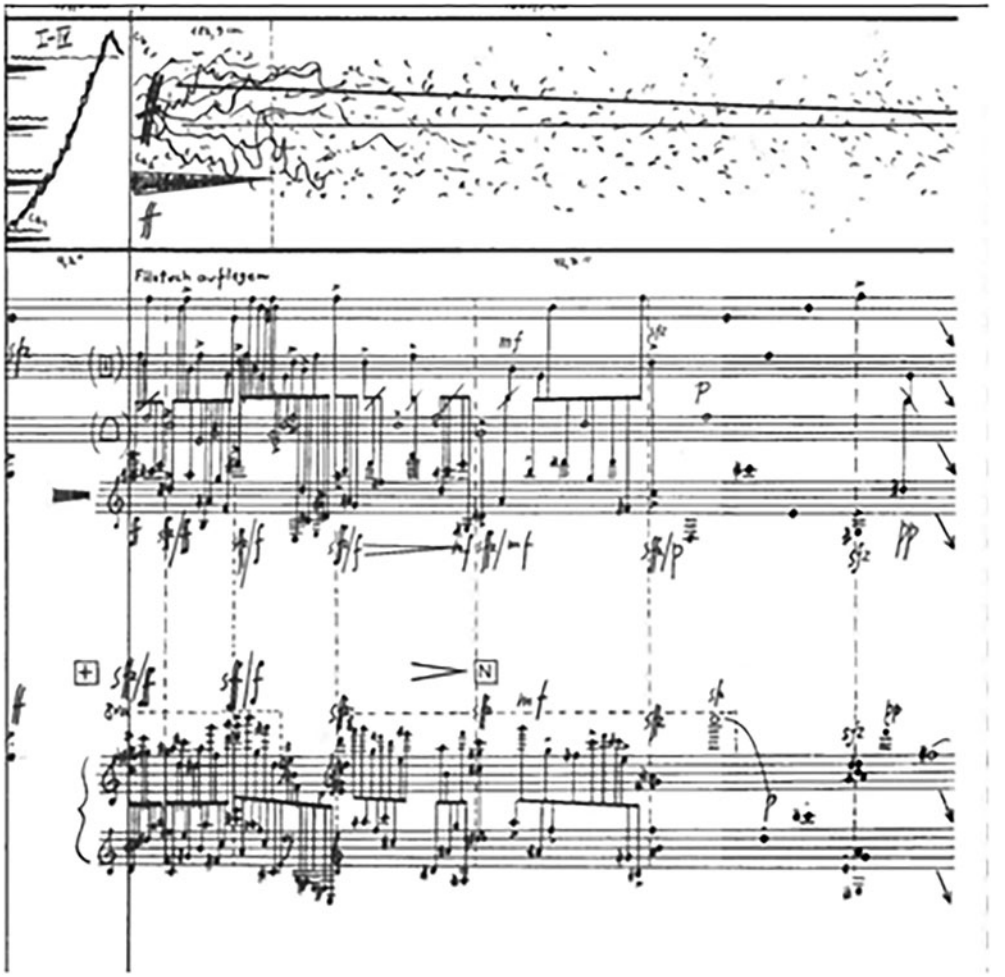

Figure 1 Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Kontakte* (1958–60) for percussion, piano, and tape, page 30. YouTube timestamp 27:11. © Stockhausen-Stiftung für Musik, Kürten, Germany (www.karlheinzstockhausen.org).

other's sounds across a technical and pedagogical gap. A work whose ethos is all about disconnection and disjunction relies on an intimate layer of dialogue, trust, and generosity.

A critical phenomenological investigation of *Kontakte*, one that sets aside modernist biases, conceptions, and approaches, reveals new pathways of attachment to be made. The unknown pitfalls of such a process of repair are worth the risk when faced with the anxiety of modernist impossibility and failure that many percussionists face. *Kontakte*, for instance, remains a demanding, and at times, frustrating piece to play. However, a certain attachment style takes this frustration as a generative source for meaning rather than a conclusion of failure. The days, weeks, and months of preparation cease to be aimed at executing high-minded modernist aesthetic concepts and instead are filled with dialogue with a collaborator, mutual adjustment to a shared experience of the piece, and a rigorous rehearsal process aimed towards performance. Only after all these hours of preparation can the actual performance

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Figure 2 The author's set-up for Stockhausen's *Kontakte*, spring 2021.

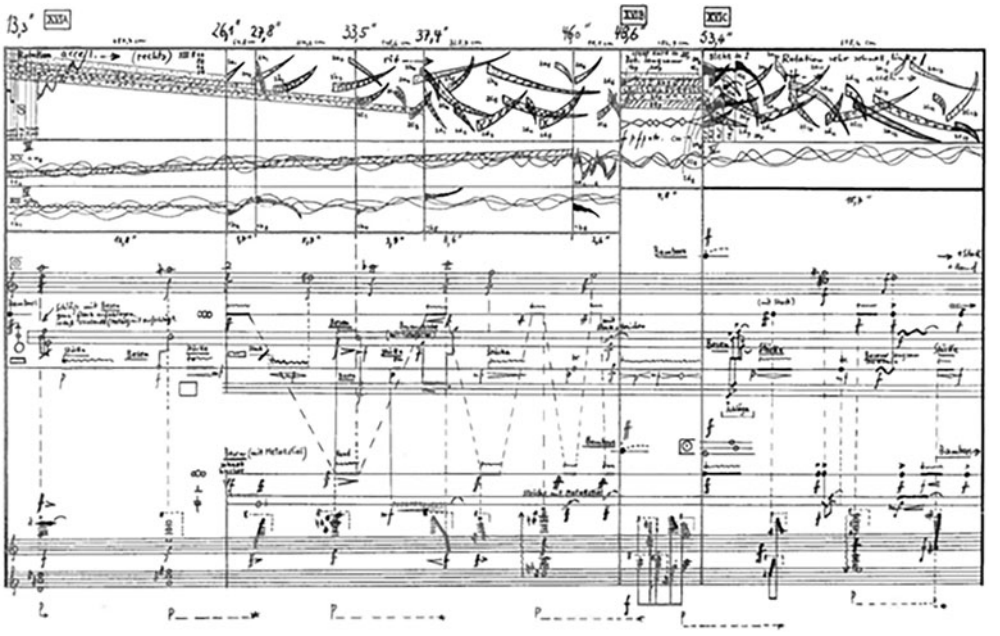

Figure 3 Stockhausen, *Kontakte* (1958–60), page 36. YouTube timestamp 32:23. © Stockhausen-Stiftung für Musik, Kürten, Germany (www.karlheinzstockhausen.org).

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of the moment be euphoric and joyful. Phenomenologist Alfred Schutz calls this the 'mutual tuning-in relationship', where performers come closest to touching their partner's experience of inner time.[87] The wealth of *Kontakte*'s conception of temporality is not in an autonomous eternity but instead one that is laden with all the frustrations and joys of its unique demands: demands that are rehearsed and shared human-to-instrument, human-to-tape, and human-to-human. With this in mind the title of Stockhausen's work takes a new aspect: it is not only about modernist conceptions of abstract sound, its constituent parts, and how they shape and mould each other. The 'contacts' of *Kontakte* now include the touching of performer to instrument, the brushing of lived time up against the tape's fixed time, and the tuning of performers' experiences to each other.

When a performer steps into a piece such as *Kontakte*, they step into a history and world with certain affective and political structures. They assume the technocracy of Stockhausen's work in the 1960s: its concepts of moment form and total control. They also step into the history of modernist percussion, with its instruments appropriated from around the world for the sake of construction of an abstract, sonic totality. A percussionist can choose to adopt these narratives and attempt to situate themselves as the part of a modernist vanguard. However, such an anachronistic political orientation contributes to the formation of a subjectivity with a proclivity towards a harmful attachment to modernism – both for themselves and for their students. It constitutes a cruel optimism that becomes the bedrock of percussion institutions and pedagogy. Furthermore, it is a political orientation that in some ways inhibits the apprehension of the aesthetic object of *Kontakte* by telling us what we *should* focus on and how we *should* feel about it. I was lucky enough to be largely ignorant of Stockhausen the first time I saw *Kontakte* performed, and I credit this ignorance in part to the affective vulnerability I felt before the piece. It was this affective experience that made me want to perform the work in the first place, to invest myself into its history and networks. It stood in stark contrast to the conventional, market-driven percussion works I had largely been exposed to up until that point. As a performer-scholar, my contemporary affective remapping of the work is the result of holding on tightly to the experience of this first hearing, which Ryan Dohoney might term a 'modernist conversion'.[88]

Dohoney's work is cast in religious terms, but even secularly understood I think he touches upon something important. Modernism, because of its idiosyncrasies, difficulties, and novelties, is a rich vein of experiences that brings a subject face to face with an unassimilable alterity. This alterity exists with regards both to a work's sonic content and to its material facticity (the objects on stage), intersubjectivity (the collaborator at the piano), and conceptual schema. Affective remapping with a spirit of repair points the performer-scholar towards a rich, yet thorny network through which new affective attachments can form. These attachments, I will conclude, are central to the construction of new musical ecologies that can survive and resist the unrelenting contingencies of modernity. Furthermore, understanding

87 Alfred Schutz, 'Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship', in *Collected Papers*. Vol. 2: *Studies in Social Theory* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 173.

88 Dohoney, *Saving Abstraction*, 90–1.

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modernism more broadly – and especially in the present moment – must include an understanding of individual and communal attachment to it.

Conclusion

The project of modernist percussion in the twentieth century was fundamentally an optimistic one. The language of its genesis points to this: 'frontiers', 'liberation', and 'revolution' were the watchwords. Despite the now agonizingly colonialist and imperialist tenor of this language, modernism remained in many ways a resistance to the processes of modernization that perpetrated such horrors. To T. J. Clark, modernism was about reckoning with the contingency of modernization: an aesthetic gambit to turn the contingency of modernity 'back to a bedrock of World/Nature/Sensation/Subjectivity which the to and fro of capitalism had all but destroyed'.[89] The project of twentieth-century percussion was thus ambivalent from the start: it sought to resist the whims of bourgeois modernization by in turn modernizing instruments and cultures seen as primitive. It sought to construct a new whole within a world of constantly changing 'progress'.

What I have chronicled here is the affective reaction to the death of modernist percussion, the final defeat of a hope of totality, and thus of the modernist percussion project writ large. At the very least, I have chronicled the death of a certain *kind* of modernism, for the contingency and disenchantment that the modernists battled against in the twentieth century remain with us, and in many cases have intensified. The question of 'totality' and 'wholeness', thought to have been done away with the advent of postmodernism, now rears its head in the oncoming climate catastrophe. Similarly, we live in a political situation where the rise of global fascism cannot help but conjure images of the past century. As Clark writes: 'The disenchantment of the world is horrible, intolerable. Any mass movement or cult figure that promises a way out of it will be clung to like grim death. Better even fascism than technocracy: there is a social id in most of us that goes on being tempted by this proposition.'[90] Modernism was once the means of resistance towards this proposition, but it can no longer serve this purpose understood on its twentieth-century terms.

The importance of modernism to our current era remains under debate. Dohoney writes that 'to some extent all modernisms are bad modernisms. Our attachments are bad attachments and implicated to some degree in the crimes of history.'[91] What we have learned from the history of modernist percussion is that the 'badness' of these attachments and our understandings of them can change over time. What was once a world-building practice can at the same time be totalitarian and exploitative.[92] Modernisms that at one point seemed innovating can become stale, and our collective and personal attachments to them can fester.

89 T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 9–10.

90 Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 7.

91 Dohoney, *Saving Abstraction*, 224.

92 Bill Solomon writes fascinatingly of the dialectic between early queer US composers such as John Cage, Henry Cowell, and Lou Harrison who appropriated Asian materials in their percussion works in order to construct an 'imagined world . . . that would validate their non-normative sexual lives and cultural production'. Bill Solomon, 'Queering

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As practitioners we remain trapped in the 'broken middle' between modernist salvation and damnation.[93] Attachment and the stewardship of its objects is then always something in process, to be taken up and refined by subsequent generations with the hope that some modernisms can be better than others; further yet that certain modernisms can be *made better*.

Brodsky positions modernism as 'the stubborn tinnitus of history's inner ear'.[94] Modernism's solutions never arrive, but their propositions can always call into question assumptions of the present historical moment. They provide a certain methodology that asks whether things could be/have been different than they are/were. In a similar vein, the melancholia of modernism may yet offer tools through which to see the world anew. There is a frightening condition in the persistence (and intensification) of modernity without a critical, aesthetic counter such as modernism. As Nathan Brown writes, though modernism has waned, modernity and its contradictions continue to surge forwards. Brown periodizes our culture within a condition of 'being-after-yet-within' modernity, and thus we cannot push *past* modernity and capitalism until we identify in which ways we are still entangled *within* their ongoing processes.[95] With Flatley, I have turned to affective attachment as a site of analysis for reinvigorating modernist percussion with the hopes of giving it a new project. The first step in this project is to shift the aesthetic understanding of musical modernism away from its formalism (though this too still plays a role) and towards the affective, embodied experiences of its performers. The risk here is falling victim to a kind of avant-garde quietism: a 'melancholy retreat' from mainstream affairs that presents 'a barrier to the collective action that would be necessary for the transformation of the conditions creating despondency in the first place'.[96] We see this retreat most viscerally in the accounts of the percussionists of *The Modern Percussion Revolution*, and it is this retreat that I situate my own position against. In a world becoming increasingly technocratic, totalitarian, and environmentally precarious, reshaping the tools of modernism to create new aesthetic and political collectives seems at its most urgent. Only by turning to the bodies of performers and their inhabiting of the affective maps of modernism can we conceive of such refashioning.[97] Only by considering attachment as central to modernism can we understand what it was, what it is, and what it could be.

Each neo-modernist project will in some ways need to confront the legacies of its historical situation. I think of Schick's students: so angry, 'pissed off', and despondent at the perception that their historical project has been taken from them; that they have been robbed of their contribution to the 'modern percussion revolution'. And yet, do we need to be more modern? Is this not the same technocracy we see gripping our nation-states, cities, and universities?

Musical Chrononormativity: Percussion Works of the West Coast Group', in *Queer Ear: Remaking Music Theory*, ed. Gavin S. K. Lee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 206.

93 Dohoney, *Saving Abstraction*, 224.

94 Brodsky, *From 1989*, 259.

95 Nathan Brown, 'Postmodernity, Not Yet: Towards a New Periodisation', *Radical Philosophy* 201 (February 2018), 21.

96 Brown, 'Postmodernity, Not Yet', 38

97 Rita Felski presents one such collective as a 'work-net': a 'cluster of relations that most directly impact aesthetic experience'. Felski see work-nets forming around certain works through individual attachments, social contexts, and material mediations. See Felski, *Hooked*, 144.

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Bruno Latour writes convincingly that 'Between modernizing and ecologizing, we have to choose.'[98] The project of ecologizing, which practitioners of modernism must adopt, means taking the works of modernism – in all their sensuousness, difficulty, and conflicting conceptual and material components – and building new collectives, institutions, and futures out of their ruins.

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98 Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 8.

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