

a Redgum song protesting against Coca-colonisation. This is based on *Surfin' USA*, an early Beach Boys' single by Brian Wilson, and open borrowing of the tune and rhythm of Chuck Berry's *Sweet Little Sixteen*.⁷

Backgrounding any one of these tunes makes it clear that Australian political protest songs have deep roots in other cultures and other times. Digging into what lies behind Fahey's collection could be a journey of genuine musicological discovery, one likely to raise awareness of how much that we think of as Australian and local is in fact a re-fashioning of sources already much travelled. How they came to be here is still a mystery. Warren Fahey has gone some way to providing the right clues to its solving, but his interest is more in the reading of song words as history rather than as musical genealogy. Nonetheless, his long engagement with song collecting and his meticulous transmission of verses set in an illuminating text, as evidenced here, deserves applause.

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⁷ Gammond, *Popular Music*.

Thomas Reiner, *Semiotics of Musical Time*
Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics Vol.43
New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
ISBN 0 8204 4525 8, 250pp., bibl., hb.

We all feel as if we possess an intimate understanding of time. This intuitive, common-sense assumption has no equivalent in physics, however. Scientists struggle to find a description of what the 'passing of time' might mean other than as a feature of our mutual, and privileged, experience. Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart recently summarised the issue: 'quantum mechanics describes what a system might do in the future, whereas classical mechanics describes what it has done in the past...Moreover, the present, where our consciousness resides, is a moving boundary at which the context changes—a travelling catastrophe in paradigm space.'¹ No better description would seem to be possible in our present state of knowledge. *Present state of knowledge*: the issue is a particularly complex one, as the subject of the investigation is itself the frame within which the investigation is conducted.

Brave, then, of Thomas Reiner to attempt a serious study of musical time and its semiotics. Some years ago, Reiner presented me with a copy of his bibliography of works relating to musical time; he commented, plausibly, that the bibliography is the most complete ever assembled, doubtless a necessary preparation for writing *Semiotics of Musical Time*. It is no surprise that the book is both long and detailed. At the core of the reasoning is the standard semiological tripartition suggested by Nattiez: a process from composer to score to performance to listener articulated by the three core concepts of *poiesis*, *trace*, and *esthesis*. Not that Reiner accepts this description as adequate; he is careful to clarify the ways in which both *poiesis* and *esthesis* are involved at several points along the source-to-receiver trajectory—in a footnote to Chapter 3, he points out that Nattiez identifies sixteen such steps—and the versions arising from different musical traditions.

¹ Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart, *The Collapse of Chaos* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

It is almost immediately apparent that this book is *not* a musicological work. Despite the references to composers and musical contexts, it is designed to appeal more to semioticians and philosophers than musicians, and might well have the laudable effect of making a case in such circles for music as a body of knowledge—something increasingly lost in our modern homogenising culture. The argument that Reiner advances is cast in an unswervingly logical mould (one is only infrequently refreshed by a digressive aside), making the book fatiguing reading. The intellectual clarity and thoroughness that are necessary to construct the chain of logic whereby Reiner makes his case, result in an almost mesmerically repetitive texture to his writing. The reader thus demands regular pauses in order to avoid the risk of auto-hypnosis: 'Non-semiotic concepts are non-semiotic only in the sense that they combine non-semiotic objects into a class. Beyond their non-semiotic content they are as susceptible to semiosis as any other concept' (p.230). The exegesis proper stretches over 230 pages of close argument, broken into seven chapters, of which the first three are expository, the second three developmental, and the last abbreviatedly recapitulatory—a thesis in sonata form, no less. This architecture results, however, in a fair degree of repetition, as Reiner understandably feels it necessary at every stage in his thinking to remind us of the previous demonstrations on which each new insight is built; to some extent this offsets the annoying lack of an index. By contrast, each chapter ends with exhaustive footnotes, which makes searching easier, if not easy; Reiner has clearly exiled most of his stimulating digression to these notes.

Gregory Bateson invented a literary form, the *metalogue*, which is a dialogue that exemplifies its own meaning. Reiner's book can certainly be seen in this light, as a self-revealing discourse. The painfully slow unfolding of the argument, required by the character of the text as an all-inclusive document, results in a sense of literary time directly analogous to that of musical time of which he writes, and the book can be seen as a *sign of literary time*. The lack of an index indeed obliges the reader to a linear progress through the text; sampling of the argument is unproductive. In fact, Reiner's reasoning could conceivably be generalised to any of the time-binding arts, plastic or performance.

The book begins by providing descriptions of the three component parts of the argument: music, time, and musical time. Reiner both begins and concludes that 'the term *musical time* must be recognised as having the potential to denote any aspect of time associated with music, any aspect of music associated with time, and any particular concept of musical time' (p.11). Chapter two incrementally pieces together the components of Reiner's argument; he begins by citing Saussure, Peirce, and Molino and Nattiez as the source of the semiotic principles he is drawing on, and proceeds to offer basic descriptions of signs, interpretants, traces, *poiesis* and *esthesis*. In explaining the interrelationships between these various tools, Reiner provides a very useful basic overview of the semiotic schema, and its limitations: 'there is as yet no such area as neuro-semiotics' (p.36). Chapter three then draws all the preceding points together into a closely reasoned, and exhaustive, application of the semiotic toolbox to musical time, with the clear intent that, by the end of the chapter, we will have intuited from his argument exactly what he means by *musical time*.

In the second section, chapter four, Reiner turns his attention to music *per se*, from what constitutes the physiognomy of the performance/sonic trace, via a discussion of the musico-temporal aspects of the plainchant *Puer natus est nobis* and Cage's 4'33", and in chapter five to

consideration of other writers' views on musical time, in particular Stravinsky, and Stockhausen. These two chapters are likely to be the focus of attention for musicians, treating as they do of the approaches of both composers and performers (in particular the pianist Herbert Henck) to the complexities of musical time. These two chapters represent an examination of the *poietic*, and 'trace' stages in the Nattiez tripartition respectively, and as Reiner makes clear, these are less easily disentangled than the *esthetic*, to which he turns his attention in chapter six.

It is in this chapter, concerned as it is with the *reception* of music, that I find myself suspending my total agreement with Reiner. He utilises a concept of the *present* that derives from E.R. Clay's terminology of the *specious present*, defined by William James as 'the short duration of which we are immediately and incessantly sensible.' Through a deeply researched and authoritative series of discussions of the often conflicting ideas of Levi-Strauss (synchronic totality), Husserl (the *Zeithof*), Roederer, James J. Gibson, Thomas Clifton, and a number of others, Reiner settles on a version of the *present* that has a duration: 'the fact that consciousness is not fixed on an instant but extends over a period of time' (p.224). But, I have to ask, does *your* perception of *now* feel like that? Mine certainly does not—it better fits the description by Cohen and Stewart cited above.

In chapter seven, Reiner draws together the whole series of connected arguments from the previous two hundred pages and summarises them in order to finalise his case. This last chapter is an amazing *tour-de-force* of reasoning and, quibbles notwithstanding, provides a clear and unambiguous statement of the semiology of time, and as distinct, *musical time*. Note, however, that I have not made any attempt to provide a gloss of Reiner's argument. In a text of such low redundancy there is very little that one can abbreviate as a summary, and to do so would trivialise the achievement: Reiner's book is itself a summary, and his bibliography reveals just how much he has excluded. Certainly, anyone wishing to get a flavour of the book need only read the last chapter; their reaction to that will allow an assessment of whether the previous six chapters will repay the investment of grappling with them.

If Reiner's unfolding thesis has a weakness, it is the cumulative sense one gets of the argument as a process of finessing meanings until much of the descriptive power is leached from them; the text could be described as fractal, in that whatever level of the argument you focus on, there is always a distinction being drawn, on which distinction later arguments hang. Some readers may well condemn the whole undertaking as a futile exercise in logical hair-splitting, and be reminded of John Ralston Saul's remark that 'our élites ... are reminiscent of the schoolmen of the late Middle Ages whose profession was to tie down debate in minutiae as a way of making themselves relevant to power.'² Take, for example, Reiner's critique of Suzanne Langer's 'assertion that music symbolizes experiential time' (p.74):

one can assert that something functions as a symbol by virtue of the act of recognising an analogical relation between signifier and signified... . Langer is consistent in so far as there is no reason why a symbol of experiential time should lead to a conceptual awareness of something that is already given to direct intuition. Nevertheless, one could question such a symbol's *raison d'être*. If the symbol of existential time does not give rise to an awareness of that which is symbolised, because that which is symbolised is already given to direct intuition, then *this symbol does not function as a symbol* [my italics].

² John Ralston Saul, *Unconscious Civilisation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997).

Such nuances of distinction drive much of Reiner's argument. It is not that his argument is unconvincing, it is simply that the domain in which the reasoning takes place is so abstruse as sometimes to irritate.

'Anyone who is concerned with the complex interrelationship among music, meaning, and temporality must read this book,' says a testimonial from Jonathan D Kramer on the back cover. It may be an endurance test, requiring an extremely close reading of all two hundred-odd pages to fully grasp his argument, but that is the inevitable nature of so thorough an investigation, and as an object-lesson in closely argued logic it could not be bettered.

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Ross Laird, *Sound Beginnings: The Early Record Industry in Australia*

Sydney: Currency Press, 1999

ISBN: 0 86819 579 0. xvi + 368 pp., pb.

We are beginning to realise the richness of the surviving archives of the record industry for the history of music in the twentieth century. The publication of Peter Martland's sumptuously produced, illustrated history of EMI,¹ and in a similar format, Anthony Pollard's wide-ranging and gorgeously illustrated history of the first seventy-five years of *Gramophone* magazine,² have alerted us to previously unexplored archives relating to the record industry, and to the fact that, in some cases, the key players are still alive. Pollard's history of *Gramophone* magazine, for example, is doubly important now that the Pollard family has relinquished control of the magazine after three-quarters of a century. These are major additions to the literature of the history of sound recording; they will doubtless lead on to further, more academic, studies. From the point of view of the present review, the most interesting fact is that neither of them mentions Australia, other than as the birthplace of Dawson and Melba. Now, Ross Laird, drawing on material surviving in Australia and London, has demonstrated what a rich vein record company history is for the economic and cultural history of music in Australia.

The hundred-year world history of the recording industry relates a series of short-term financial successes, driven by technical innovation, and ended by further change or economic or political events. Possibly the key change that allowed the industry to grow, and recordings to be taken seriously by leading performers, was the development of electrical recording, introduced in 1925. This account of the early Australian record industry from 1924 to 1934 starts from that first great technical development, and encompasses the crash of 1929. In the words of the blurb for Ross Laird's book, it was a tumultuous decade 'which moved from prosperity to bankruptcy with dizzy speed.' In his introduction, Laird describes the years 1924 to 1934 as 'without question the most significant decade in the history of the Australian record industry; seventy years later the events of those years are still echoing in our musical culture' (p.xi).

¹ Peter Martland, *Since Records Began: EMI, The First 100 years* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1997).

² Anthony Pollard, *Gramophone: The First 75 years* (Harrow: Gramophone Publications Ltd, 1998).