Review

J. Reising, ed. *'Speak to me': the legacy of Pink Floyd's The Dark Side of the Moon*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. xv + 251 pp. ISBN 0-7546-4018-3 (hbk), 0-7546-4019-1 (pbk).

J. Tate, ed. *The music and art of Radiohead*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. xx + 210 pp. ISBN 0-7546-3979-7 (hbk), 0-7546-3980-0 (pbk).

'Progressive' tendencies in rock music invite comparisons with 'modernist' tendencies in 'classical music'. The dialectical tension between conformist convention and eccentric experimentation, between profitable pragmatism and admirable authenticity, between the 'heard it before' and the 'never heard anything like it' remains a dynamic force in the developmental trajectories of both popular and classical repertoires. Just as the ghost of bourgeois subjectivity haunts—and taunts—its postmodern denial, so the Romantic quest for the transcendent and the modernist pursuit of the new continually battle the knowing steady-state world of postmodern mundanity. The modernist disavowal of the 'popular' is re-inscribed within the popular itself. The very ideology that parses music into the high and low returns to rend the low itself. With Adornian acuity, every high has its low and every low its high—a condition highlighted by the titles of the books under review. The very title of Reising's volume (with its reference to 'the legacy of Pink Floyd') confirms—or, perhaps, assumes—their role as one of a select few whose fate it is to lead, Beethoven-like, where others merely follow; and talk of Radiohead's *art* implies their belonging, if not in the hallowed hall, then at least the sheltered portico, of high(er) culture, a last bastion of creative propriety in a world engulfed by the manufactured and the mediocre. Both groups have been described at various times as 'progressive'; or even, in the case of Radiohead, as 'neo-progressive' or 'post-progressive'. While the 'progressive' tag remains a double-edged sword, an epithet as laudatory as it is dismissive and a label nearly always rejected as meaningless by those who yet feel compelled to use it, nevertheless it signals a fundamental orientation. 'Progressive' tendencies become properly manifest in the handling of musical material and in the application of constructive principles. Progressive rock 'transgresses' the generic formulae of conventional rock; it aspires, through rock, to become something

more than rock. To put it another way: it is music whose significance is significantly musical.

As such, one might expect that some considerable attention would be paid to the music. Oddly, where the collections under review are concerned, this proves not to be the case. The Radiohead volume includes only two contributions that can be said realistically to do so; and Tate prefaces them, almost apologetically, as 'firmly grounded in musicology'. Likewise, the Pink Floyd volume includes only four essays of this type. Perhaps for the comfort and safety of the unsuspecting reader, three of them are enclosed within a section entitled 'Musical and Structural Discussions' (discussions of structure are seemingly not musical). Reising describes them, in an almost cautionary tone, as 'musicological'—by which he means analytical. Yet, arguably, these are among the most illuminating essays in either collection. While no doubt a little 'dry' for the increasingly exotic proclivities of the contemporary disciplinary palate—Deleuze and Levinas are just two of the 'big names' utilized in other contributions—these 'musicological' efforts reveal something about the music that no amount of context can better. They find new things to say, where the remainder tend mostly to find new ways of saying things already said. Anwar Ibrahim and Allan Moore, for example, set out to identify Radiohead's 'idiolect'. For them, an idiolect is a defining subsidiary of an encompassing style—a kind of musical spectrograph. The first part of their essay examines, in notable detail, the artists and tracks that have influenced Radiohead's sound—The Pixies are important here—while the second part considers issues of 'form'. The fundamental, and plausible, conclusion is that 'while Radiohead progresses, it is not progressive' (152). Tightly-argued and thoroughly researched—it weighs in with ninety-three endnote references—it is a 'musicological' article in the best and most illuminating sense. Where Pink Floyd are concerned, Kevin Holm-Hudson draws on film theory in order to analyse the use of segues between the tracks of *Dark Side*, while Ger Tillekens examines the use of key and modulation across the same album. By some distance, Shaugn O'Donnell's essay, 'On the Path: Tracing Tonal Coherence in The Dark Side of the Moon', is the most analytically complex—and probably the one with which a non-musicological readership will have the most difficulty. Interestingly, it also depends upon notions of teleology and structural unity that have come under increasing challenge even among those who still practise, and argue about, the analysis of 'classical' music. O'Donnell's claim that 'a tonal and motivic coherence unites the musical structure of this modern song cycle' could be a prefatory remark to a Schenkerian reduction of a Schumann song-cycle; and O'Donnell's analysis of *Dark Side* is indeed centred on a series of quasi-Schenkerian voice-leading reductions. The piece is carefully argued, mostly plausible and, if nothing else, oddly refreshing in its unapologetic focus on technical structure. It

is of course true that the application of analytical methods to progressive rock has often had in its sights more than an illuminating explication of the music's structure. Just as progressive rock has been used to argue that Schenker, too, knows how to rock (so to speak), so the apparent receptiveness of progressive rock to a technical and analytical elucidation of its 'purely musical' features has served as a pretext to annex at least one small corner of the popular terrain for the domain of 'art'. Nevertheless, there is more than one analytical way to skin the musical cat and one cannot help but feel that both the 'legacy' of Pink Floyd and the 'art' of Radiohead would have been better served by more talk of *musical* legacy and *musical* art.

In other words, the majority of contributions in both collections are 'contextual'—at least in the sense that context, rather than (musical) text, serves as the primary focus. The most coherent group comprises the first five essays in the Radiohead volume. In its own way each deals more or less explicitly with the issue of 'authenticity'. In the first and least convincing disquisition on this issue, Curtis White seeks to read *Kid A* as a rock realization of Adorno's demand that 'art' lay bare the dialectical tension between universal and particular. In effect, the 'theatre' of rock is to stage a play previously reserved for the avant-garde embers of the classical tradition. This is no small claim for the power of Radiohead's music; and there is something in it, the glimmer of a better argument even, yet these few pages can do little to develop the idea beyond restating it. Moreover, when White then pitches his own misappropriation of Adorno against a review of *Kid A* by the novelist Nick Hornby, it is a manoeuvre as abstruse as it is ultimately unsatisfying. Adorno's (aesthetic) dialectic of autonomy is too simplistically conflated with his (historical) dialectic of Enlightenment; and, as for actual reference to Adorno's works, White depends entirely on *Aesthetic Theory* (albeit failing to cite the page numbers for the passages he quotes—an elementary omission, and one that should have been noticed). In sum, the piece reads like the transcript of a round-table ad-lib and would have been better expanded—or excised altogether. By contrast, and treading a fine stylistic line between the exhilarating and the indulgent, Davis Schneiderman deploys the longest essay in the collection in order to dissect the common conceit of commercial 'autonomy'. In an essay that starts brightly, is never less than engaging in tone throughout, but rather loses its way towards the end, Schneiderman proposes that Radiohead's music—variously described as 'alterna-rock', 'anti-rock' or experimental rock—may 'not be as radical as it seems' (17), albeit he appears to hold out a hope that Radiohead's music may play a part in establishing 'a resistance strategy worthy of its intent' (36). This is partly due to the fact that 'the band invites a "higher" level of discussion due to the explicit content of its work, the intriguing music from *Kid A* and

Amnesiac to the present...' (36)—a claim as promising as it is frustrating, since the 'intriguing music' is intriguingly omitted from discussion. Still, together with the contributions by Jones and Hainge, these opening essays make logical discursive bedfellows and should be read together.

By contrast, the opening essays in Reising's Pink Floyd volume are rather more eclectic, although, as one might expect where *Dark Side* is concerned, technology, visuals and aesthetics provide the dominant and recurring themes. Kimi Kärki's entry provides a reasonable overview of the circumstances surrounding, and the technology utilized for, the *Dark Side* live tour, although the more tantalising sections are the brief—all too brief—references to phantasmagoria (34) and spectacle (38). Lee Barron's and Ian Inglis's contribution assesses the Internet disseminated 'urban legend' that *Dark Side* was written as a musical accompaniment to *The Wizard of Oz*. Again, as diverting as this essay may be, especially as a kind of curiosity piece, it is not really an essay about Pink Floyd, or their music, or even their legacy—it is really an analysis of the role of the Internet in disseminating (musical) conspiracy theories. Given that *Dark Side* affords more scope for interpretive and analytical work than almost any other album in the history of popular music, it seems an ill-considered piece to include. Still, the pick of this first section is probably Matthew Bannister's 'Dark Side of the Men', a critical deconstruction of white masculinity in (progressive) rock. Whether or not one entirely agrees with his forceful claim that 'art'—and, by extension, progressive rock—is inherently patriarchal, Bannister weaves together existing theories of gender and ideology in order to provide an original and plausible interpretation of one aspect of Pink Floyd and *Dark Side*. He ties authorship, technology and patriarchy to those Romantic and modernist conceptions of 'high art' often associated with 'progressive' subgenres. The theoretical underpinning is assured and the range of reference thorough. Bannister's more impressive effort rather serves to highlight the uneven quality of one or two less satisfying contributions. As an aside, and although not its primary intention, Bannister's argument also offers one explanation as to why progressive rock has received comparatively little attention in popular musicology: feminist or gender-oriented scholarship has focused either on women's rock or on overtly masculine genres such as 'cock rock' and heavy metal; ethnographic and subcultural approaches have tended to focus either on minority subgenres or on explicitly oppositional musics.

An edited collection is, or should be, more than a mere conglomerations of parts. The editor has an important role in imposing, or rendering clear, some sense of order. The latter is mostly lacking in the Pink Floyd collection. To be fair, one cannot deny Reising's own level of personal investment in the music; Pink Floyd's *Dark Side* is clearly a defining moment in a musical—and perhaps even personal—

development. The same can probably be said of most of the authors, as evidenced by the cosy, autobiographical guide to the contributors. The 'fan's gaze' impacts Reising's writing the most. This becomes clear in the introduction (1–11)—which fuses anecdotal background with 'memory-lane' musing—and also in his own 'contribution proper', 'On the Waxing and Waning', where his language has a tendency to veer towards the acclamatory and his argument assumes accolades like 'greatness' as simple givens. The gradual erosion of a belief in (the possibility of) scholarly objectivity and the increasing emphasis on the 'subject' and the 'listener' will undoubtedly encourage a more personal engagement with music and a greater willingness or freedom explicitly to draw on that engagement—and, of course, such a style of authorship may help extend the book's appeal beyond a conventional scholarly readership. Nevertheless, there is a distinction to be maintained, at least in principle, between 'journalism, autobiography and diary', on the one hand, and academic scholarship, on the other. One or two essays in Reising's collection, including his own, risk blurring that distinction. They are also rather short. The Pink Floyd contributions average 15 pages in length (including notes), barely reference one another, and the collection as a whole lacks the kind of framing introduction or conclusion that might seek to tease out connections. In that light, it is probably best conceived as a 'dip-in' resource, a collection of disparate items organized by approximate methodological logic. One might charitably view it as what historiography used to call 'thick description'—an ensemble or constellation of observations and interpretations that, eschewing notions of overarching narratives or unifying explanations, simply describe an object from as many perspectives as is possible. In that sense, the book demonstrates both the attraction of, and the problems posed by, an interdisciplinary and pluralistically-conceived discourse. The range of perspectives is undeniable—one cannot help but be intrigued by a book which deals with a single album and includes observations such as 'the Phrygian, or natural, scale-degree 2 sounds simultaneously in the harmony, merely displaced into an inner voice' (89) as well as lines like 'in Levinas's conception, alterity implies a state of being apprehended, a state of absolute and infinite otherness' (178). Adding to the pot-pourri feel, the final two 'chapters' are transcripts of interviews, with Mike Gordon of Phish and Michael Goldwasser of Easy Star Records respectively. These have some interest, but the selection seems randomly opportunistic—and one wonders why Shelia Whiteley's short contribution on 'The Great Gig in the Sky', which also includes an abridged transcript of her own interview with Clare Torry, was not included here; or why those later interviews were not similarly used as a stimulus or adjunct to additional comment.

Hence, the Pink Floyd book is the converse of the album which serves as its object—the whole is somehow less than the sum of its parts. The contributions

are of variable quality and each tends to plough its own methodological and interpretive furrow. The effect is refractory rather than coherent; the multiplicity of perspective is obtained through juxtaposition rather than the exploration of commonalities and tensions. Perhaps this is inevitably the case where multiple contributions are concerned. Then again, perhaps some firmer 'before and after' editorial direction might have moulded the various parts into a more coherent whole. Indeed, the fact that the editor felt compelled to contribute three chapters of his own in addition to his introduction, and to include another chapter by a 19-year-old family member or friend—who is 'majoring in neuroscience'—points towards a struggle for material. One or two essays would have benefited from a further re-write. By contrast, the 12 contributions in Tate's book hang together more convincingly. There is greater consistency of tone and approach, despite the diversity of critical frameworks adopted; and a number of coherent, if sensibly unstated, groupings do emerge. Tate's Radiohead volume contains the greater number of quality contributions and benefits from more assured and coherent editorial selection.

Whatever the obvious differences between them and whatever the dangers of anachronistic category-error, Pink Floyd—especially in *Dark Side*—and Radiohead—especially in *OK Computer*—nevertheless have enough things in common to merit comparison. In particular, *Dark Side* and *OK Computer* encapsulate the paradox of the 'manageably new'; both present the accessible, and 'acceptable', face of progressive tendencies. They are experimental, multi-layered works that nevertheless enjoyed considerable success. Neither are 'off the wall'—Pink Floyd are no King Crimson. In both *Dark Side* and *OK Computer* the intensity of execution, the delicacy of construction and the experimental frisson are tempered by memorable melodies, flashes of anthemic resonance and a reassuring referencing of traditional rock conventions. At the same time, one cannot ignore their historical dislocation: Radiohead are to 'neo-' or 'post-prog' what Pink Floyd were to 'prog' proper. Radiohead are on the 'other side' of the 'great schism'; they can never entirely escape the complex machinations of post-punk cynicism. This is probably why they are sometimes cited as a 'postmodern' group. In truth, they are better understood as an experimental, progressively-minded rock group operating in a (self-proclaimed) postmodern world. Oddly, neither volume pays much attention to the notion of 'progressive rock' and its 'neo-prog' or 'post-prog' progeny, nor does either explore the similarities and differences that might obtain between the two. The only essay in either volume to do so is Ben Schleifer's rather forced attempt to find similarities between various pairs of tracks on *Dark Side* and *OK Computer*. Hence, both collections miss a number of opportunities productively to explore issues of real relevance to our understanding of progressive tendencies.

In several respects, these two volumes say as much about the study of (popular) music as they do about the music under discussion. While it is fair to say that both do justice to the interdisciplinary milieu that so defines contemporary study in the arts and humanities, that both map out the multiplicity of disciplinary and methodological avenues now available, it does seem remarkable that of the twenty-seven essays (in the two volumes combined) only five, or possibly six, deal explicitly with 'the music'; and it does seem equally perplexing that of the 27 contributors (to the two volumes combined) only nine are nominally musicologists. This may in part be explained by the fact that the editors are (or were), respectively, a Professor of American Literature and a doctoral candidate in English. Nevertheless, given that the volumes are devoted to the music of Pink Floyd and Radiohead, and given that both appear in the *Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series*, whose aim, according to its general editor, is to present 'the best research in the field [of popular musicology]', some might consider the latter field a little 'under-represented'. It is difficult to imagine an edited collection on, say, the 'art and literature of Günter Grass' or the 'legacy of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*' including only a handful of contributions from scholars of literature, or for that matter a dozen contributions from musicologists. Nevertheless, progressive rock deserves more attention and both volumes at least begin to address that deficit—by virtue of intent, if not always by virtue of content. There are some very good individual efforts here. The discerning reader will need to identify the 'hits' among the 'album fillers'.

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