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CHAPTER ONE

T. W. ADORNO; OR, HISTORICAL TROPES

To WHOM CAN one present a writer whose principal subject is the disappearance of the public? What serious justification can be made for an attempt to summarize, simplify, make more widely accessible a work which insists relentlessly on the need for modern art and thought to be difficult, to guard their truth and freshness by the austere demands they make on the powers of concentration of their participants, by their refusal of all habitual response in their attempt to reawaken numb thinking and deadened perception to a raw, wholly unfamiliar real world?

It is as though everything in the life work of T. W. Adorno were designed to arouse and exacerbate the very socio-economic phenomenon that it denounces: the division of labor, the fragmentation of intellectual energies into a host of seemingly unrelated specialized disciplines. So it is that Adorno's critique of modern culture, one of the most thoroughgoing and pessimistic that we possess, cannot be conveniently scanned in a passing hour between appointments. Indeed, for reasons which we will fully appreciate only later on, it is unavailable as a separate thesis of a general nature, for it is at one with Adorno's detailed working through of the technical specifics of his various preoccupations: those of the professional philosopher, the Hegelian critic of phenomenology and existentialism; of the composer and theoretician of music, "musical adviser" to Thomas Mann during the writing of *Doctor Faustus*; of the occasional but lifelong literary critic; and finally, of the practicing sociologist, who ranged from a pioneering investigation of anti-Semitism in the monumental *Authoritarian Personal-*

ity to a dissection of the "culture industry" (the term is his) and of so-called popular music.

But although these various and distinct fields of study have their own structures and laws, their own independent traditions, their own precise technical terminology, although they are to be thought of as something more and other than the epiphenomena, the false consciousness, that we associate with the word ideology, they nonetheless share an uneasy existence, an uncertain status, as objects afloat in the realm of culture.

Adorno's treatment of these cultural phenomena—musical styles as well as philosophical systems, the hit parade along with the nineteenth-century novel—makes it clear that they are to be understood in the context of what Marxism calls the *superstructure*. Such thinking thus recognizes an obligation to transcend the limits of specialized analysis at the same time that it respects the object's integrity as an independent entity. It presupposes a movement from the intrinsic to the extrinsic in its very structure, from the individual fact or work toward some larger socio-economic reality behind it. To put it another way, the very term superstructure already carries its own opposite within itself as an implied comparison, and through its own construction sets the problem of the relationship to the socio-economic base or *infrastructure* as the precondition for its completeness as a thought.

The sociology of culture is therefore first and foremost, I would like to suggest, a *form*: no matter what the philosophical postulates called upon to justify it, as practice and as a conceptual operation it always involves the jumping of a spark between two poles, the coming into contact of two unequal terms, of two apparently unrelated modes of being. Thus in the realm of literary criticism the sociological approach necessarily juxtaposes the individual work of art with some vaster form of social reality which is seen in one

way or another as its source or ontological ground, its Gestalt field, and of which the work itself comes to be thought of as a *reflection* or a *symptom*, a characteristic *manifestation* or a simple *by-product*, a *coming to consciousness* or an imaginary or symbolic *resolution*, to mention only a few of the ways in which this problematic central relationship has been conceived.

Clearly, then, a sociology of literature has its origins in the Romantic era along with the invention of history itself, for it depends on some prior theorization about the unity of the cultural field: whether the latter is thought of in terms of political regimes (the character of monarchic, as opposed to despotic or republican, society), historical periods (the classic, the medieval, the modern-romantic), the organic language of national character (the English, French, or German temperament), or in the more recent language of cultural personality or socio-economic situation (the postindustrial, the industrializing, the underdeveloped). At first, of course, this type of thinking about the arts, this dawning historicity in the realm of taste, was the property of Right and Left alike, for it has its existential origins in the very convulsions of the revolutionary period itself, and royalists like Chateaubriand were as profoundly aware of the relativity of cultures and the historicity of human experience as was Madame de Stael, whose *Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions* (1800) may stand, after Vico and Montesquieu, as the first full-blown treatise on the subject. Indeed, we shall have to concern ourselves later on in this book with the problem of distinguishing a sociological, "value-free" approach to literature, which counts the Romantics among its ancestors, from the specifically Marxist form of literary analysis to be presented here.

Once some such notion of cultural unity has been acquired, however, the two essential elements of the socio-

logical operation—work and background—begin to interact in dialectical and indeed almost chemical fashion, and this fact of sheer interrelationship is prior to any of the conceptual categories, such as causality, reflection, or analogy, subsequently evolved to explain it. Such categories may therefore be seen as the various logical permutations or combinations of the initial model, or as the alternating visual possibilities of the Gestalt into which it is organized: the attempts of the mind, after the fact, to account for its ability to subsume two such disparate terms within the framework of a single thought.

In this context, it becomes possible to place the vexed question of determinism by social being, or by "race, moment, milieu," between parentheses, and such issues as those which seemed to oppose Marxism and the Weberians turn out to be optical illusions. For from this point of view, the Marxist analysis of a phenomenon such as Puritanism—that it is one of the ideologies of early capitalism, or in other words that it reflects and is determined by its social context—and that of Max Weber, for whom Puritanism is precisely one of the *causes* or contributing factors in the development of capitalism in the West, are essentially variations on the same model, and have far more in common with each other as *ideograms*—in which a form of consciousness is superposed against the pattern of a collective and institutional organization—than with what we may call the two-dimensional treatments of the separate elements involved, such as works on the theology of the reformers, or on changes in the structure of sixteenth-century commerce.

Such thinking is therefore marked by the will to link together in a single figure two incommensurable realities, two independent codes or systems of signs, two heterogeneous and asymmetrical terms: spirit and matter, the data of individual experience and the vaster forms of institutional society, the language of existence and that of his-

tory. Let the following passage from Adorno's *Philosophy of the New Music* stand, therefore, not so much as an implied philosophical proposition, or as a novel reinterpretation of the historical phenomena in question, but rather as a metaphorical composition, a kind of stylistic or rhetorical trope through which the new historical and dialectical consciousness, shattering the syntactic conventions of older analytical or static thought, comes to its truth in the language of events:

> It is hardly an accident that mathematical techniques in music as well as logical positivism originated in Vienna. The fondness for number games is as peculiar to the Viennese mind as the game of chess in the coffee house. There are social reasons for it. All the while intellectually productive forces in Austria were rising to the technical level characteristic of high capitalism, material forces lagged behind. The resultant unused capacity for figures became the symbolic fulfillment of the Viennese intellectual. If he wanted to take part in the actual process of material production, he had to look for a position in Imperial Germany. If he stayed home, he became a doctor or a lawyer or clung to number games as a mirage of financial power. Such is the way the Viennese intellectual tries to prove something to himself, and—bitte schön!—to everyone else as well.[1]

Psychoanalysis of the Austrian character? Object lesson in the way society resolves in the *imaginary* realm those contradictions which it cannot overcome in the real? Stylistic juxtaposition of music, symbolic logic, and financial sheets? The text under consideration is all of these things, but it is first and foremost a complete thing, I am tempted to say a poetic object. For its most characteristic connectives ("it is

[1] T. W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Frankfurt, 1958), pp. 62-63.

no accident that") are less signs of some syllogistic operation to perform than they are equivalents of the "just as . . . so" of the heroic simile.

Nor does the sudden exchange of energy involved really tell us anything new about either of the elements juxtaposed: indeed, we must already know what each of them is, in its own specificity, to appreciate their unexpected connection with each other. What happens is rather that for a fleeting instant we catch a glimpse of a unified world, of a universe in which discontinuous realities are nonetheless somehow implicated with each other and intertwined, no matter how remote they may at first have seemed; in which the reign of chance briefly refocuses into a network of cross-relationships wherever the eye can reach, contingency temporarily transmuted into necessity.

It is not too much to say that through such a historical form there is momentarily effected a kind of reconciliation between the realm of matter and that of spirit. For in its framework the essentially abstract character of the ideological phenomenon suddenly touches earth, takes on something of the density and significance of an act in the real world of things and material production; while there flashes across the material dimension itself a kind of transfiguration, and what had only an instant before seemed inertia and the resistance of matter, the sheer meaninglessness of historical accident—in the determining factors in Austrian development, the chance agents of geography or foreign influence—now finds itself unexpectedly spiritualized by the ideality of the objects with which it has been associated, reorganizing itself, under the pull of those mathematical systems which are its end product, into a constellation of unforeseen uniformities, into a socio-economic style which can be *named*. Thus the mind incarnates itself in order to know reality, and in return finds itself in a place of heightened intelligibility.

It is, however, one of the most basic lessons of dialectical method that the potentialities for development of a given mode of thought lie predetermined and, as it were, foreordained within the very structure of the initial terms themselves, and reflect the characteristics of its point of departure. The limits on any large-scale projection of the sociological figure here described are therefore implicit in the nature of the objects synthesized. Like wit, the Adorno trope drew its force from the instantaneity of the perception involved,[2] and it is only too clear that to juxtapose against its historical background a cultural item understood in an isolated, atomistic way—whether it be an individual work, a new technique or theory, even something as vast as a new movement understood as a separate entity, or a period style detached from its historical continuum—is to ensure the construction of a model that cannot but be static.

Thus the full-scale study of superstructures, the construc-

[2] This should not, however, be taken as evidence for the presence of two alternating and imperfectly assimilated modes of dialectical thought in Adorno's own work. There, on the contrary, an almost physical cause may be said to account for the structural peculiarity of the text in question, which is neither more nor less than a complete *footnote*: and the abundance, as well as the stylistic and philosophical quality, of the footnotes to *Philosophie der neuen Musik* is itself "no accident" and has symptomatic value. The footnote in this context may indeed be thought of as a small but autonomous *form*, with its own inner laws and conventions and its own determinate relationship to the larger form which governs it—something on the order of the moral of a fable or the various types of digressions which flourished within the nineteenth-century novel. In the present instance, the footnote as a lyrical form allows Adorno a momentary release from the inexorable logic of the material under study in the main text, permitting him to shift to other dimensions, to the infrastructure as well as to the wider horizons of historical speculation. The very limits of the footnote (it must be short, it must be complete) allow the release of intellectual energies, in that they serve as a check on a speculative tendency that might otherwise run wild, on what we will later describe as the proliferation of "theories of history." The footnote as such, therefore, designates a moment in which systematic philosophizing and the empirical study of concrete phenomena are both false in themselves; in which living thought, squeezed out from between them, pursues its fitful existence in the small print at the bottom of the page.

tion of the historical trope, not to lyrical but rather to extended and epic proportions, presupposes a transcendence of the atomistic nature of the cultural term: it is essentially the difference between the juxtaposition of an individual novel against its socio-economic background, and the *history* of the novel seen against this same background. In effect, at this point a relationship which was that of form to background, of point to field, gives place to the superposition of two fields, two series, two continua; the language of causality gives way to that of analogy or homology, of parallelism. Now the construction of the microcosm, of the cultural continuum—whether it be the formal history of costume or of religious movements, the fate of stylistic conventions or the rise and fall of epistemology as a philosophical issue—will include the analogy with the socio-economic macrocosm or infrastructure as an implied comparison in its very structure, permitting us to transfer the terminology of the latter to the former in ways that are often very revealing. Thus it turns out that as a marketable commodity on the spiritual level, the nineteenth-century novel may also be said to have known its version of a stage of "primitive accumulation of capital": the names of Scott and Balzac may be associated with this initial stockpiling of social and anecdotal raw material for processing and ultimate transformation into marketable, that is to say *narratable*, shapes and forms.

At the same time, inasmuch as the cultural is far less complex than the economic, it may serve as a useful introduction to the real on a reduced, simplified scale. Thus Engels spoke of Balzac's "complete history of French society from which, even in economic details (for instance, the rearrangement of real and personal property after the Revolution) I have learned more than from all the professed historians, economists, and statisticians of the period to-

gether."[3] Traditionally, indeed, Marxist literary criticism has furnished a convenient introduction both to the subtleties of the dialectical method and to the complexities of Marxist social and economic doctrine. But what Engels learned from the content, a modern Marxist literary criticism ought to be able to demonstrate at work within the form itself: so it is the model that now helps us to read the bewildering and massive substance of the real of which it began by being the projection.

I

THE IDEAL material for a full-scale demonstration of such historical models would no doubt be drawn from spheres as distant from everyday life as possible: non-Euclidean geometry, for example, or the various logical worlds of science fiction, in which our own universe is reduplicated at an experimental level. Illustrations derived from the history of the visual arts or from the development of mathematics are thus more useful for our purposes than the more representational modes of literature or philosophy. For in dialectical treatments of the latter, there tends to take place a kind of slippage from form into content which cannot but blur the methodological points to be made.

Thus our characterization of Balzac's primitive accumulation of raw material above was intended to function on a formal level, to underscore a parallel between two formal processes. Yet the analogy is complicated by the fact that Balzac's raw material, his *content*, happens to be precisely that primitive accumulation of capital with which we compared the form: for the origins of the first businesses and the first fortunes are among the archetypal stories he has to tell. As a model, therefore, literature is not so useful as the

[3] Marx and Engels, *Über Kunst und Literatur* (Berlin, 1953), p. 122.

more abstract arts, and the parallels with developments in the novel will in what follows be underlined as *analogies* to the central model to be presented, rather than as historical projections in their own right.

Yet even the specialized is sometimes taken for granted, even highly sophisticated techniques can come to seem natural in the general indistinction of everyday life. So it turns out that to assess the full originality of Adorno's historical vision, we must try to bring a new unfamiliarity to some of the social phenomena we are accustomed to take for granted: to stare, for instance, with the eyes of a foreigner at the row upon row of people in formal clothing, seated without stirring within their armchairs, each seemingly without contact with his neighbors, yet at the same time strangely divorced from any immediate visual spectacle, the eyes occasionally closed as in powerful concentration, occasionally scanning with idle distraction the distant cornices of the hall itself. For such a spectator it is not at once clear that there is any meaningful relationship between this peculiar behavior and the bewildering tissue of instrumental noises that seems to provide a kind of background for it, like Arab musicians playing behind their curtain. What is taken for granted by us is not apparent to such an outsider, namely that the event around which the concert hall is itself established consists precisely of attention to that stream of sound patterns entering in at the ear, to the organized and meaningful succession of a nonverbal sign-system, as to a kind of purely instrumental speech.

For Western polyphonic music is "unnatural" precisely to the degree to which it has no institutional equivalent in any other culture. Though it has its origins in ritual, though its earliest forms are not essentially distinct from the dance and chant, the pure monody of other cultures, Western music in its most characteristic forms has severed its ties with those primitive musical activities in which the musical

substance, still involved in concrete life and social reality, may be said to have remained representational, to have preserved something like a content. There is no longer a mere difference in degree, but rather an absolute one in kind, between the older, functional music and this, which has developed an autonomy of its own, has acquired the status of an event in its own right, and requires its participants to suspend their other activities in the exercise of some alert but nonverbal mental capacity which had never been used before, with the conviction that something real is taking place during fifteen or twenty minutes of practical immobility. It is as if a new sense had been invented (for the active, interpretive concentration which marks such listening is as distinct from ordinary hearing as is mathematical language from ordinary speech), as if a new organ had been developed, a new type of perception formed. What is particularly noteworthy is the poverty of the materials from which such new perception has been fashioned; for the ear is the most archaic of the senses, and instrumental sounds are far more abstract and inexpressive than words or visual symbols. Yet in one of those paradoxical reversals that characterize the dialectical process, it is precisely this primitive, *regressive* starting point that determines the development of the most complex of the arts.

Finally, we must observe that inasmuch as Western music is not natural but historical, inasmuch as its development depends so intensely upon the history and development of our own culture, it is mortal as well, and has it in it to die as a genuine activity, to vanish when it has served its purpose and when that social need which it once answered has ceased to exist. The fact that the production of so-called classical records has become a big business in the present day should not make us lose sight of the privileged relationship between the golden age of Western music and a Central Europe in which a significant proportion of the

collectivity performed music and knew it from the inside, in a qualitatively different fashion from the passive consumers of our own time. In much the same way such a genre as the epistolary novel loses its very reason for being and its social as well as linguistic basis in a period when letter writing is no longer an important everyday activity and an institutionalized form of communication. So also certain types of lyric poetry vanish from cultures in which conversation and verbal expression are colorless and without life, lacking in any capacity for those twin forms of expansion which are eloquence or figuration.

So it is that Western music at the very outset marks itself off from the culture as a whole, reconstitutes itself as a self-contained and autonomous sphere at distance from the everyday social life of the period and developing, as it were, parallel to it. Not only does music thereby acquire an internal history of its own, but it also begins to duplicate on a smaller scale all the structures and levels of the social and economic macrocosm itself, and displays its own internal dialectic, its own producers and consumers, its own infrastructure.

In it, for instance, as in the larger world of business and industry, we find a tiny history of inventions and machines, what might be called the engineering dimension of musical history: that of the instruments themselves, which stand in the same ambiguous relationship of cause and effect to the development of the works and forms as do their technological equivalents (the steam engine) in the world of history at large (the industrial revolution). They arrive on the scene with a kind of symbolic fitness: "it is not for nothing that the newly soulful tone of the violin counts among the great innovations of the age of Descartes."[4] Throughout its long ascendancy, indeed, the violin preserves this close identification with the emergence of individual subjectivity

[4] T. W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (Frankfurt, 1952), p. 8.

on the stage of philosophical thought. It remains a privileged medium for the expression of the emotions and demands of the lyrical subject, and the violin concerto, much like the *Bildungsroman*, stands as the vehicle for individual lyric heroics, while in other forms the massed orchestral strings conventionally represent the welling up of subjective feeling and of protest against the necessities of the objective universe. By the same token, when composers begin to suppress the singing violin tone and to orchestrate without strings or to transform the stringed instrument into a plucked, almost percussive device (as in the "ugly" pizzicati, the strummings and "weird" falsetto effects of Schoenberg), what happens to the violin is to be taken as a sign of the determination to express what crushes the individual, to pass from the sentimentalization of individual distress to a new, postindividualistic framework.

In a similar way, the rise of the saxophone, in that commercial music which replaces the older folk art of the masses, has symbolic value: for with it vibration, the oscillation back and forth in place, supersedes the soaring of the violin as an embodiment of subjective excitement in the modern age, and a metallic sound, all pipes and valves, yet "sexually ambivalent" to the degree to which it "mediates between brass and woodwinds" ("being materially related to the former, while it remains woodwind in its mode of performance"),[5] replaces the living warmth of the older instrument, which expressed life, where the newer one merely simulates it.

And if musical forms evolve in response to their public (church and salon music being little by little supplanted by middle-class spectator forms), so also they are influenced by the changing social functions of their performers as well. Wagner, himself a great conductor, for the first time undertakes to compose music in which the role of the virtuoso

[5] T. W. Adorno, *Moments musicaux* (Frankfurt, 1964), p. 123.

conductor is foreseen and built into the structure of the score. As in parliamentary demagoguery, the listening masses submit to the conductor with a kind of hypnotized fascination. The quality of their listening deteriorates; they lose that autonomy of judgment and intensity of concentration which the earlier generations of the triumphant middle class brought to their practice of the art. Thus they are increasingly unable to follow anything as thoroughly organized as a Beethoven sonata, and instead of the theme and variations with its development and resolution in time, Wagner offers them something cruder and easier to grasp: the repetition of easily recognizable themes not unlike advertising slogans, "fatefully" underlined for the listener's benefit by the dictatorial gesture of the conductor.

At the same time, the development of the leitmotif must be understood in terms of the autonomous dialectic of the musical tradition itself, as one of the stages in that slow working out of musical laws and of the possibilities inherent in the musical raw material. From this point of view, the Wagnerian theme, with its rigidity and its nondeveloping character, must be seen as a regression from the themes of Beethoven, which were functionally inseparable from their context. If there is for music something like a "heresy of paraphrase"—in the brutal wrenching of melody or theme from a texture in which alone it has its reason for being—then it must be added that such a practice finds its initial stimulus not so much in the caprice or formal ignorance of the individual listener as in the deeper equivalence—or cleavage—between form and content in the very structure of the work itself.

For Beethoven the sonata represented a complex solution to the problem of musical identity and musical change. The characteristics of the form—the dispatching of the theme to the most distant and unexpected keys (in order that it may return, this time with a kind of finality, to its point of

origin), the thoroughgoing metamorphoses it is made to undergo in variation after variation (in order to demonstrate the more surely its identity with itself)—are at one with the very establishment of the tonal system itself, for they amount to a concrete reenactment before the listener of tonality as a self-evident law, reconfirmed through the form.

For Wagner, however, the problem is that of setting up a relationship between leitmotifs which cannot be varied in the old sense, for it is now the leitmotif rather than the basic key of the composition which is the element of permanence. To make a virtue of necessity: the expression fixes the very essence of the dialectical process at the same time that it defines Wagner's freedom with respect to the historical situation. In order to devise a constructional principle capable of dealing with the archaic and cumbersome phenomenon of static repetition, Wagner finds himself obliged to invent something which bears in itself the seeds of the most advanced and progressive of future musical techniques. To be sure, the manner in which the sheer vertical sonority of the Wagnerian orchestra edges up or down the half-tones separating the various leitmotifs from each other must ultimately complete the destruction of the sonata form and of the tonality on which it is based. Yet at the same time this new *chromaticism* points, even beyond atonality, toward the future resystematization of the twelve-tone row, and may thus serve as an object lesson in the way in which the historically new is generated out of the contradictions of a particular situation and moment, and as an illustration of the function, in dialectical analyses, of such terms as *progressive* and *regressive*, by means of which elements of a given complex are distinguished only in order to reidentify them the more surely in their inseparability and to make possible a differential perception of the place of a given moment in the historical continuum.

The Wagnerian invention of chromaticism, therefore, as an example of development within an autonomous system, offers a small-scale model of the changes we might expect to find in the macrocosm of socio-economic history itself. So it is, for instance, that the economic backwardness of nineteenth-century Germany was responsible for the failure of the attempts to develop parliamentary government which isisued from the Revolution of 1848, and led to that notorious and fateful separation between German nationalism and the more progressive Western-style democratic aspirations of the middle classes. Thus socio-economic backwardness resulted in political authoritarianism; yet inasmuch as the latter was able to stimulate industrial development far more effectively than parliamentary regimes elsewhere, the initial lag ultimately results in a dialectical leap which leaves Germany abreast of its greatest rival in production by the end of the nineteenth century, and in possession of the newest industrial plant in Europe.

And what obtains in the infrastructure yields an analogy for developments in the other arts as well. I choose more or less at random from the history of the novel the example of Proust, where an initial predilection for the essay as a mode of discourse combines with an initial predisposition to the long static scene as an existential experience of the present to produce an unexpected organizational innovation: for Proust expands his formal scene to the point where the essay-style digressions and disquisitions may be intercalated in succession with as little disruption as might be produced by the change of subject or of conversation partner in the course of a long afternoon reception. Meanwhile the scenes themselves, as immense as they are, are now reconnected by *topic*, in much the same static fashion in which the essay preselected its subject matter: by means of the hours of the day or the stops on a train, or ultimately indeed, by the very geographical identity of the Swann and

Guermantes ways themselves. Yet the result of this rather static organization, initially determined by a storytelling *deficiency* in the Proustian imagination, is a more complex rendering of the passage of time than had hitherto been possible in conventional linear narration.

For Adorno, therefore, the names of the artists stand as so many moments in the history of the form, as so many lived unities between situation and invention, between contradiction and that determinate resolution from which new contradictions spring. A whole vision of the movement of modern history is built implicitly into the lens through which we watch the progression of music from Beethoven to Schoenberg and Stravinsky. In particular, these two final figures illustrate what is for Adorno an exemplary, archetypal opposition, standing as the twin symbolic possibilities of twentieth-century creation—as the very prototypes, indeed, above and beyond art itself, of the alternatives remaining to thought and action in a henceforth totalitarian universe. It is therefore to his influential and seminal study of these two figures, under the title of *Philosophy of the New Music*, that we now turn.

II

IT HAS often been pointed out that the increasing tempo of artistic change since Romanticism and the conquest of power by the middle classes involves a modification of the functional value of the new within the artistic process.[6] Novelty is now felt to be not a relatively secondary and *natural* by-product, but rather an end to be pursued in its own right. Now knowledge of the innovations of the past furnishes a new kind of stimulus for the construction of the individual works themselves, so that technical revolutions

[6] See, for example, Renato Poggioli's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).

such as that of Schoenberg must henceforth be read on two levels: not only as one more moment in that gradual and autonomous evolution of material which has characterized the whole history of music, but also, and above all, as an object lesson in a peculiarly modern phenomenon: the attempt to think your way, through sheer formal invention, into the very future of history itself.

The evolution of musical sound may therefore initially be understood against the background of the aging of musical effects in general, which have as it were their own inner life, know their moment of maturation, and suffer debility and ultimately a kind of natural death. The common triad, for instance, struck the ear of its earliest listeners with an intensity which it will never again possess; and for us such sounds, which were originally heard in the context of a polyphonic system and as the triumph of tonal harmony over it, are henceforth nothing but insipid consonance in a world in which the cause of harmony has long since been won and its initial audacities long since become commonplace.

In much the same way we can speak of something like a progress in the history of writing: one which, however, is less a matter of individual stylistic innovation than of the habits of the reading public, to be gauged against the sheer quantity of words with which a given historical environment is saturated. It is clear, for instance, that a few bare names and plain nouns, a minimum of description, had a suggestive value for the readers of earlier centuries that they now no longer possess in that overexposure to language which is characteristic of our own time. Thus style resembles the Red Queen, developing ever more complicated mechanisms in order to sustain the power to say the same thing; and in the commercial universe of late capitalism the serious writer is obliged to reawaken the reader's numbed sense of the concrete through the administration

of linguistic shocks, by restructuring the overfamiliar or by appealing to those deeper layers of the physiological which alone retain a kind of fitful *unnamed* intensity.

In the musical realm, of course, the problem of the intensity of effects at a given historical moment may be described in positive or negative terms, inasmuch as the continuing value of a given system of consonance is at one with the effects of the dissonances that obtain within it as well. Yet these effects, as Adorno shows us, largely transcend the musical scheme of things, to the degree to which dissonance as such has symbolic social value, comparable to "the role which the concept of the unconscious plays throughout the history of middle-class *ratio*." The transgression of the consonant therefore functions "from the very outset as the disguised representation of everything that has had to be sacrificed to the taboo of order. It substitutes for the censored instinctual drive, and includes, as tension, a libidinal moment as well, in its lament over enforced renunciation."[7] Thus the Wagnerian diminished seventh at its inception expressed unresolved pain and sexual longing, the yearning for ultimate release as well as the refusal to be reabsorbed into bland order; yet having grown familiar and tolerable over the years, it now stands as a mere period sign of feeling or emotiveness, as a manner rather than a concrete experience of negation.

Such absorption and accommodation of repressed material has of course always been one of the social functions of art; yet at the time of Wagner it undergoes a modification not unrelated to the shift in the role of innovation described above. For where in the past dissonance had existed only in order to confirm and ratify more strongly the positive tonal order on which it depended, now its character as "self-glorifying subjectivity" and as protest "against the social instance and its normative laws" tends

[7] *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, p. 147.

to become an end in itself. "All energy is now invested in dissonance; by comparison the individual resolutions become ever thinner, mere optional decor or restorative asseveration. Tension becomes the fundamental organizing principle to the degree that the negation of the negation, the utter canceling out of the debt of each dissonance, is as in some gigantic credit system indefinitely postponed."[8] In a later chapter, we shall see that this phenomenon is to be seen against the background of that vaster repression of the negative in present-day society of which Adorno's colleague Herbert Marcuse is the leading theoretician. It manifests itself in the literary realm by the increasingly antisocial character of the greatest works, and by the accompanying attempt on the part of society to reabsorb and neutralize the impulses they release. Thus in *Beyond Culture* Lionel Trilling has underscored the contradiction between the institutionalization of such modern "classics" by the American university and the profoundly subversive spirit of the works themselves, which originate in a refusal and a negation of just such institutionalization in the first place.

That the work of Schoenberg is deeply marked by this situation may be judged by the disproportionate place of both positive and negative in it: absolute freedom, violent liberation from harmonic constraint in what may be called his expressionistic or atonal period; and renewed order, the self-imposed rigidities of the twelve-tone system, which involves compulsions far beyond anything dreamed of in that tonal order which Schoenberg first abolished and then replaced. Yet both moments can in the long run be understood only in the context of the concrete historical situation: in the light of that regression of hearing in the modern world in general, where, bathed in the very element of debased sound and canned music from one corner to the other of the civilized universe, we tend to adjust our perceptions

[8] *Versuch über Wagner*, p. 67.

to the level of their object, with the resultant deterioration in that ability to listen with which the composer must work.

So it is that we now hear not the notes themselves, but only their atmosphere, which becomes itself symbolic for us: the soothing or piquant character of the music, its blueness or sweetness, is felt as a signal for the release of the appropriate conventionalized reactions. The musical composition becomes mere psychological stimulus or conditioning, as in those airports or supermarkets where the customer is aurally tranquilized. The musical accompaniment has moreover become intimately linked in our minds with the advertising of products, and continues, in both "popular" and "classical" music alike, to function as such long after the advertisement is over: at this point the sounds *advertise* composer or performer and stand as *signs* for the pleasure about to be derived from the product, so that the work of art sinks to the level of consumers' goods in general. Compare in this regard the subliminal role of music in the movies, as a means of guiding our "consumption" of the plot, with the relationship of score to narrative in opera as an art form. And when, after this, we recall the high technical quality of present-day commercial composition in general, we begin to understand the destructive effect of such background music on the inherited concert repertoire, vast portions of which are eroded and emptied of their intrinsic vitality without our so much as realizing that it had ever been otherwise.

In this situation, therefore, the new in the older sense is not enough: art no longer has to do with a change in taste resulting from the succession of the generations alone, but with one intensified and raised to the second power by a new commercial exploitation of artistic techniques in every facet of our culture. The new music must come to terms not only with our hearing, as did the old, but with our nonhearing as well. Hence concrete music, which seeks to

transform the unconscious contents of our daily perceptual life, the unheard aural stress of the industrial city, into a conscious object of perception. Hence the willed "ugliness" of modern music in general, as if, in this state of pathological hebetude and insensibility, only the painful remained as a spur to perception.

The parallel with language is only too clear, and it is enough to evoke the fad for rapid reading and the habitual conscious or unconscious skimming of newspaper and advertising slogans, for us to understand the deeper social reasons for the stubborn insistence of modern poetry on the materiality and density of language, on words felt not as transparency but rather as things in themselves. So also in the realm of philosophy the bristling jargon of seemingly private languages is to be evaluated against the advertising copybook recommendations of "clarity" as the essence of "good writing": whereas the latter seeks to hurry the reader past his own received ideas, difficulty is inscribed in the former as the sign of the effort which must be made to think real thoughts.

It is not only our hearing that is affected, but also the works themselves. In strict correlation with our own fitful attention, our lowered capacity for concentration, our absentmindedness and general distraction, the work of art suffers distortion, is broken down and fetishized. The whole comes to be replaced by the part, and instead of perceiving music as an organized structure, we are content to hear it while doing something else just as long as we can salute the principal melodies and themes in passing. What was once a complete and continuous discourse has become an indistinguishable blur intermittently illuminated by vulgar theme songs, motifs that have crystallized into objects and tokens, like clichés in speech. Our emotion comes to be magically invested in these entities: they are the source of a purely subjective pathos which has nothing to do with the

original, integral work itself, but which is rather a result of its disintegration and of the absence of any whole response. No wonder, therefore, that modern music is so unmelodious, so resolutely unlyrical, so suspicious of the illusions of individual subjectivity and of the song in which it is supposed to affirm itself.

It is this breakdown of extended form in general to which the expressionistic music of Schoenberg is a memorial: a reaction against the idea of the completed work of art, a refusal of the very possibility of the self-sufficient masterpiece existing in and for itself. With the disappearance of the organizational value of the form as a whole the surface of the work is shattered and no longer presents an unbroken and homogeneous appearance (*Schein*), no longer stands complete and suspended, as it were, over against the world, but rather falls into it, becoming one object among others. Thus the musical work loses its most fundamental precondition: that autonomous time in which the themes live as in an element of their own, in which they were able to develop according to their own internal laws in that thorough interaction with each other, that leisurely drawing out of all the formal consequences known to aesthetics as *Spiel*. The shattering of the tonal framework frees the individual notes themselves from whatever had previously given them meaning; for the note, essentially a neutral and nonsignifying element like the phoneme in speech, derived its functional value as an intention—whether as consonance or dissonance, continuation in a given key or modulation toward some new one—from the overall system itself. So in tonality the mind held a kind of musical past and future together, whereas in the new atonal universe the note exists only insofar as it is part and parcel of a musical statement in the present. The new form must remain almost physically in touch with all of its components at any given moment: atonality is a kind of musical nominalism.

Now, therefore, the part has become the whole, and the themes become the music itself, which is over when they are over; so that the works shrink alarmingly and the revolutionary piano pieces that make up Opus 23 last only a few seconds apiece, each contained in a scant page of sheet music. (And in this context, the next step would seem to be single notes, and then silence: thus Webern may be seen as the logical completion of this tendency in early Schoenberg.) Hence the term expressionism, for where the motifs involved no longer find a formal justification within the larger relational system of the work itself they are obliged to be somehow *self-justifying*: pure expression, as autonomous and intelligible as a cry, an instant bounded by the limits of the mind's capacity to hold a single thought together. Such a situation places new stress on both listener and composer alike: for each of these works reinvents all of music within itself, like a speech each sentence of which would involve the simultaneous recreation of a new grammar to govern it.

And what holds for the form is visible on the level of *content* as well. One of the most striking features of Schoenberg's early music is undoubtedly that *fin de siècle* neurosis style which he shares with the other Austrian artists of his period, and through which his world seems so profoundly akin to that of Freud. The thinly disguised sexual longing of *Verklaerte Nacht* or *Gurre-Lieder*, the monodrama of female hysteria (*Erwartung*), lead little by little to a new flood of unconscious material. "This is no longer the mimesis of passions, but rather the undisguised registration through the musical medium of bodily impulses from the unconscious, of shocks and traumas which assault the taboos of the form inasmuch as the latter attempt to impose their censorship on such impulses, to rationalize them and to transpose them into images. Thus Schoenberg's formal innovations were intimately related to the changes in the

things expressed, and helped the new reality of the latter to break through to consciousness. The first atonal works are transcripts, in the sense of the dream transcripts of psychoanalysis. . . . The scars of such a revolution in expression are, however, those blots and specks which as emissaries of the id resist the conscious will of the artist in both painting and music alike, which mar the surface and can as little be cleansed away by later conscious correction as the blood-stains in fairy tales. Real suffering has left them behind in the work of art as a sign that it no longer recognizes the latter's autonomy."[9]

Thus the work of art, during the expressionistic period, would seem to be reduced to the status of testimony and symptom, of charts, graphs, X-ray plates. Yet what if the Freudian raw material (now thought of not so much as the elements of theory or scientific hypothesis, but rather as a peculiar type of content in its own right: dreams, slips of the tongue, fixations, traumas, the Oedipal situation, the death wish) were itself but a sign or symptom of some vaster historical transformation? In this context, the Freudian topology of the mental functions may be seen as the return of a new type of allegorical vision and as the disintegration of the autonomous subject, of the cogito or self-governing consciousness in Western middle-class society. Now such characteristically Freudian phenomena are no longer seen as permanent mental functions awaiting throughout human history their discovery and revelation by Freud, but rather as new *events* of which Freud was at once contemporary and theorist. They mark, indeed, the gradual alienation of social relations and the transformation of the latter into autonomous and self-regulating mechanisms in terms of which the individual or independent personality is little by little reduced to a mere component part and, as it were, a locus of strains and taboos, a receiving

[9] *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, pp. 42-43.

apparatus for injunctions from all levels of the system itself. The former subject no longer thinks, he "is thought," and his conscious experience, which used to correspond to the concept of *reason* in middle-class philosophy, becomes little more than a matter of registering signals from zones outside itself, either those that come from within and "below," as in the drives and bodily and psychic automatisms, or from the outer circles of interlocking social institutions of all kinds. At the same time, the surviving remnant of the ego now falls victim to the illusion of its own continuing centrality: that which no longer is "in itself" continues to exist "for itself," and the subject wrongly continues to assume that there exists some correspondence between its inner monadic experience and that purely external network of circumstances (economic, historical, social) which determines and manipulates it through mechanisms beyond the horizon of individual experience.

(It is at this point, of course, that the novel, as a meaningful identification between the individual and social dimensions, begins to come apart at the seams as a form. Now that individual experience has ceased to coincide with social reality, the novel is menaced by twin contingencies. If it holds to the purely existential, to the truth of subjectivity, it risks turning into ungeneralizable psychological observation, with all the validity of mere case history. If, on the other hand, it attempts to master the objective structure of the social realm, it tends to be governed more and more by categories of abstract knowledge rather than concrete experience, and consequently to sink to the level of thesis and illustration, hypothesis and example.)

Yet atonality, however much it may testify to the loss of rational control in modern society, at the same time carries within itself the elements of a new kind of control, the requirements of a new order as yet still only latent in the historical moment. For whatever the will toward total free-

dom, the atonal composer still works in a world of stale tonality and must take his precautions with regard to the past. He must, for example, avoid the kind of consonance or tonal chord which would be likely to reawaken older listening habits, and to reorganize the music into noise or wrong notes. Yet this very danger is enough to awaken in atonality the first principle of a new law or order. For the taboo against accidentally tonal chords carries with it the corollary that the composer should avoid any exaggerated repetition of a single note, for fear such an insistence would ultimately tend to function as a new kind of tonal center for the ear. It is necessary only to pose the problem of avoiding such repetition in a more formal way for the entire twelve-tone system to show itself upon the horizon. For ultimately the only logical solution is that of not repeating a given note until all of the other eleven notes of the scale have first been touched on, and with this the twelve-tone "row" is born and replaces tonality. Henceforth, each work shall be composed not in a key but "in" a particular and unique row, or arrangement of all twelve notes of the scale, devised for it alone, so that in a sense the twelve-tone work is "nothing more" than an immense theme and variations with the individual row as theme, a repetition over and over again of the same series of twelve notes, but this time in either the horizontal or the vertical dimension.

For the new system has the merit of abolishing one of the most ancient and fundamental contradictions in music, that between harmony and counterpoint, between the vertical and the horizontal, between the traditions of a massive orchestral sonority, on the one hand, and those which appeal back to a rather archaic polyphony, with its fugues and canons, on the other. Hitherto, it is as though there had existed mutually exclusive vertical and horizontal types of perception, which had alternated in a kind of Gestaltlike interference with each other, obliging the listener to choose

between two hearings of a given superposition of sounds, either as a momentary intersection of voices in movement or as the massive intertwining of harmonic levels in a chord structure. Now, in the seething texture of Schoenberg's mature works, this opposition is abolished, and the row, which may at first have resembled an intricate, lengthy, highly articulated theme or melody, also serves, like some elaborate and complex molecule, as the building block for the vertical dimension of the score.

Thus the twelve-tone system serves as a kind of unified field theory for music, in which the data of harmony and that of counterpoint can now be translated back and forth into each other. And with this, other inherited dilemmas are solved as well: henceforth no element is too small to require its place in the overall scheme of things, no detail too insignificant to be made to furnish its credentials and to embody a meaning. Such relatively traditional matters as instrumentation are, for example, now codified, so that in the notion of *Klangfarbenmelodie* a given succession of instrumental timbres (such as the sequence violin, trumpet, piano) takes on the functional value of a sequence of notes in a melody. Thus there is carried to completion in the musical realm that basic tendency of all modern art in general toward a kind of absolute *overdetermination* of all of its elements, toward an abolition of chance, a kind of total absorption of the last remnants of sheer contingency in the raw material, which are henceforth painfully assimilated into the structure of the work itself.

(In the form of the novel this evolution follows a rigorous and exemplary internal logic: the earliest realistic novels justify their contingent elements—descriptions, historical background, choice of a particular subject such as the life of a soap manufacturer or a doctor—on the purely empirical grounds that such phenomena already exist in the world around us, and that they therefore need no justifica-

tion. With Zola, however, this empirical, purely descriptive motivation is joined by a second one, which rises oddly behind it like the symptom-formation of a repressed impulse: this is the tendency to turn such facts, which seem to have no intrinsic self-justifying meaning in themselves, into symbols or grossly materialized pictures of meanings. Thus it is as if the mind, unable to bear the sheer contingency of this empirical reality, instinctively reckoned into such phenomena that unconscious, mythical, symbolic dimension which it denied them on the conscious level. Finally, with Joyce's *Ulysses*, which seemed at the time so naturalistic and conclusive a slice of life, this impulse has become a conscious intention, and the literary materials lead a double life on two separate levels, that of empirical existence and that of a total relational scheme not unlike the twelve-tone system itself, where each empirical fact is integrated into the whole, each chapter dominated by some basic symbolic complex, the motifs of the work related to each other by complicated charts and cross-references, and so forth.)

Thus, in a situation where subjective and objective have begun to split apart, Schoenberg's originality was to have driven the subjective and expressionistic to its outer limit, to the point at which the nerve-pictures and traumata of the latter slowly veer, under the pressure of their own internal logic, into the new objectivity, the more total order, of the twelve-tone system. The specificity of this solution may be better gauged against the diametrically opposed one of Stravinsky, who may be thought of as having worked out from the other, *objective* pole of the modern dilemma.

For already the privileged form in which Stravinsky works, the ballet, may be seen as a kind of applied music, which even more drastically than the "program music" that is contemporary with it reinvents a kind of distance between content and form within a medium that is otherwise nonrepresentational. Thus it is able to avoid the problems

of self-justification and self-determination faced by pure music and resolved by Schoenberg in the way described above: for its musical practice is, as it were, already justified by the visual tableau itself, and after the fact by the physical movements of the dancers, which ratify it and of which it comes to seem the *accompaniment.*

And what happens to the form of these works is reproduced on the level of the content itself, particularly in the Russian ballets. Both *Petrouchka* and the *Rite of Spring* dramatize the sacrifice of individual subjectivity to an inhuman collectivity, and their deliberate primitivism (with its appeal to folk culture in *Petrouchka* or *L'Histoire du soldat,* and with its elemental, archaic, well-nigh prehistoric rhythms in the *Rite of Spring*) solicit the regression of their sophisticated listener/spectator toward a kind of sacrifice of the intellect in the sheer emotionalism of mass response. This ultrasophisticated primitivism or musical demagoguery (Adorno will go so far as to compare it as a phenomenon to Fascism) is inscribed in the technique of the works themselves, which, as opposed to the total organizational principles of Schoenberg, favors a kind of massive and discontinuous verticality. Its ritualistic beats and repetitions are broken by lapses and silences which create a syncopation with the returning shock waves of the listener's bodily reactions. Unlike Schoenberg, Stravinsky organizes the elements involved according to categories extrinsic to the musical structure, such as the isolated colors or qualities of the instruments themselves, or the psychological effects of their oppositions (loud and soft, piercing or massive).

To be sure, Stravinsky, and particularly the Stravinsky of the early ballets, is as influential and primal a musical phenomenon as Schoenberg himself; but it is instructive to compare the respective historical situations from which the innovations of each composer derived, and in particular

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