Difficulties

I. IN COMPOSING

In 1934, Brecht wrote a text with the title "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth."[1] I am going against my habit of not attaching myself to other people's titles, although I would not be able to count the difficulties that today stand in the way of composing. But probably the difficulties that Brecht described in his essay, which has become famous, are those not only of the writer but of the musician as well—the degeneration of so-called cultural production into ideology. He described accurately an experience that is not restricted to a single medium, namely that today there is something about all art that causes consternation. You feel the earth quake beneath your feet, and it is no longer possible to hold forth in your medium as naïvely as an admittedly dubious legend would have had artists do in happier days. However, the ideological moments that are reflected in the various arts are by no means only of a material kind; rather, they extend to the aesthetic construction of the thing itself. This should justify, to some extent, the application of Brecht's theme to music, independent of him. Obviously, the questions are posed here in an essentially different way than in literature. Music is not an object and not conceptual; hence some concrete ideological references are lacking. The intellectual *[das Geistige]* is certainly not exhausted in such references, nor in the representation of some social interests or other, independent of its own truth or legitimacy. Otherwise, the theory with which Brecht, too, identified himself would not be possible. The intellectual—art and thought alike—has an immanent lawfulness that has its own specifically determined relation to truth content. Moreover, the situation has changed fundamentally compared to that which prevailed thirty years ago, when Brecht wrote this text. The political

opportunities that he regarded as immediately present or soon-to-be-realized, and against which he measured everything, no longer exist in that way. The political realm that seemed to him to be the guarantor of truth, that of the East, has itself meanwhile become thoroughly overgrown with ideological matter. There, as is well known, people take the concept of ideology, which was originally meant critically, as a positive claim, as if everything intellectual *[alles Geistige]*, including theory, were ultimately only a means of imposing authority. I retain only this much of Brecht's conception: that, like writing, composition is also linked to objective difficulties the likes of which were scarcely known before; that these difficulties have to do essentially with the position of art in society; and that one cannot escape them by ignoring them.

There is one statement in the Brecht text, at any rate, that I would like to take as an immediate point of departure. It refers to naïve artists and intellectuals. Of them he says, "Undeterred by the powerful, but also not deterred by the screams of the violated, they daub away at their images. The senselessness of their behavior generates a 'profound' pessimism within them, which fetches a good price and to which other people might more justifiably lay claim, given these Masters and these sales. Meanwhile, it is not easy to discern that their truths are of the sort that apply to chairs or the rain; ordinarily they sound quite different, like truths about important things. For the creation of artistic form, after all, consists precisely in lending importance to a thing. It is only on close examination that one realizes they are merely saying, 'A chair is a chair,' and, 'No one can do anything about the fact that rain falls downward.'" Something of these statements, which are meant sardonically, and with which Brecht tries to denounce artists and intellectuals who are not directly politically engaged, also applies to music.[2] If we musicians, undeterred, behave intransigently, or, as Brecht says maliciously, "daub away at" our compositions as if nothing had transpired, then music threatens to become indifferent. The sorrow and senselessness that it still expresses is in danger of becoming inconsequential, of itself turning into a kind of ornament, as Brecht prophesies in these statements. However, the implied optimism that lurks behind his critique of this aspect is utterly groundless. The artist has as little cause to be optimistic toward the world as the state of the world justifies such optimism. If one turns Brecht's malice against himself, there is a piece of conformism in the very fact that he pokes fun at pessimism. Along with the negative, the critical aspects are already as muffled as in the official ideology of the Soviet empire. If there is something that is ideology, then [it is] the official optimism, the cult of the positive. Only art that stands

up to what is dark and threatening has any chance at all of telling the truth. But if it, particularly music, were to try to intervene, as Brecht expected it to do in these theses concerning the writer, it finds itself blocked. Music as such cannot intervene immediately. Even if you put it to work for purposes of haranguing,[3] the effect remains uncertain. It is no accident that it then attaches itself to some political texts or other. Nor, in my opinion, is it an accident that certain compositions written more than thirty years ago by the late, highly gifted Hanns Eisler, which served aggressive political propaganda in ways that were extremely intensive and considered, including their tone and their character—that these compositions, so far as I know, are no longer performed even in the East. Probably, they would fall victim over there to the verdict of corrosive cultural Bolshevism.

On the other hand, the statement that most of the images only say that a chair is a chair and rain falls downward also applies to most music. To the extent that music is made in an unreflected way, to the extent that it does not, itself, recognize its difficulties as preconditions and incorporate them, it degenerates into the mere repetition of things that have already been said a hundred times, a kind of tautology of the world. Moreover, it surrounds things with an aura and in the best case affirms sorrowfulness as something that is unalterable and possibly obliged to be such *[So-sein Sollendes]*.[4] In this sense, one can say of music, too, that it is infected by the increasing character of ideology. The possibility of escaping the difficulties by relying on the tried and true and simply continuing on as before is excluded.

I could imagine some of you interjecting, "If this business of composing is such a frightfully precarious and difficult thing that you have to make a special trip here to lecture us about it, and throw up your hands and exclaim, 'God, is this difficult, is this difficult!' then why do all of you even bother? Why don't you stay home and earn an honest living and make music more or less according to the accepted models that, after all, still make many of us happy?" This trivial argument must be taken seriously, at least to the extent that it cannot be dismissed with a vague gesture that says "anyone who thinks like that is out of step with the times." For this reason, I would like at least to suggest why attempts to go on speaking the traditional language of music are stricken with impotence. I refer you to Jean Sibelius. He wanted something of this kind. Nowhere did he go beyond the limits of the existing, traditional tonal means. In spite of which—this much must be conceded—he found something like an individual style. But individual style, by itself, is not yet a blessing or an

achievement; one must look to see what is realized in it. As an aside, it is absolutely never permissible to judge works of art starting from their so-called style, but always and exclusively according to what they crystallize out within themselves, *"on their own merit",* as they would say in England. But in a demonstrable technical sense—one, at any rate, that can be demonstrated among musicians—all of Sibelius's works turned out so brittle, so inadequate, that his attempt should be regarded as precisely what people are otherwise all too eager to criticize in modern music—as an experiment with a negative outcome. One should jettison the opinion that new music is a matter of what its opponents call fashion, or what the wild men among them refer to as a straitjacket—that the composers have accommodated themselves to whatever happens to be *"up to date"* at the moment, or, to use the favorite phrase, that they are mere fellow travelers. The impossibility of continuing to move musically within the tradition is objectively set. It is not based on a lack of talents that are capable of making proper use of the traditional methods; although it is striking that, for the most part, composers who today still compose traditionalistically are no longer even capable of doing so correctly according to the traditional standard, but fail in this regard at every turn. The traditional means, and above all the forms of coherence that they create, are affected, altered by the subsequently discovered means and forms of musical form-creation. Every triad that a composer still utilizes today already sounds like a negation of the dissonances that have meanwhile been set free. It no longer has the immediacy that it once had and that is asserted by its contemporary usage; rather, it is historically mediated. It contains its own antithesis. When this antithesis, this negation, remains silent, every such triad, every traditionalistic turn toward the positive lie, with its forced and frantic affirmation, becomes the equivalent to the talk of a *heile Welt,* an undamaged world, that is quite common in other cultural spheres. There is no primal meaning to be recreated in music. About thirty years ago, Ernst Krenek, after wild, atonal outbursts, tried to write tonally again. His theory was that this primal meaning was immanent in tonality, and that it should be reestablished. Krenek recognized—a great aesthetic-moral accomplishment—the impossibility of this attempt and gave it up after several years of passionate effort; and once again took as his starting point the radical intentions that he pursued in his first compositional period. The explanation for such phenomena is probably that even the tonal means, which he at times regarded as natural, primal givens and wanted to reestablish, were not such original givens at all, but themselves something historically emergent, evolved, developed, and hence also transitory.

The methods that are linked to the traditional language of music have become retrospectively problematic as a result of those that were discovered later—namely, they have become schematic. One hears, through what is newer, weaknesses of the old that were once hidden. There are very many things that sound stereotyped that were not stereotyped at the time. Richard Wagner, who was very *alert** in these matters, already registered this. Disrespectfully, but forthrightly, he said that in some of Mozart's pieces he could hear the dishes clatter on the table—*Tafelmusik*, even where it was by no means intended as such. It was possible to follow this schema as long as it was not evident as such, as long as it was still of a piece with the self-evident preconditions of composing. But once composing, and the relationship of the composer to the schemas, has lost its virginity, then the schemas not only emerge baldly and annoyingly, but lead in many places to anomalies, contradict the moments that have meanwhile been emancipated. Even Richard Strauss, in his purportedly unique, so-called personal style, failed, approximately from the time of the *Alpine* Symphony and the *Frau ohne Schatten*, as a result of the fact that he no longer took any notice of the objective tendencies of the music of his era. The person who commits himself to what is older only out of despair at the difficulties of the new is not comforted, but becomes the victim of his helpless nostalgia for a better era that, finally, never actually existed.

On the other hand, one should not dispense with reactionary objections in the manner of an apologist, but should learn the measure of correct insights that they offer, which so frequently give them the advantage over moderate, progressive cultural liberalism. The objective development of the musical material and of musical methods—one could say the level of development of the technical productive forces of music—has unquestionably outrun the subjective forces of production, i.e., the form of the response of the composers themselves. The invention of many technical principles and systems of the last forty years could be understood, from a certain distance, as an attempt to balance the disproportion between the objective development of music and what I, speaking casually, would like to call subjective musicality. In the process, something occurs that very much resembles society as a whole, where, indeed, glaringly unequal relations have emerged between the development of the technical forces of production and the human responses, the capacity to use, control, and make sensible use of these techniques. That human beings, on the one hand, are conquering space, while on the other they are regressing psychologically to an absurd extent, becoming infantile, is the most blatant expression of this state of affairs. But it also extends to artistic practice,

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down to its most subtle details. As early as the generation of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Bartók, inaccurately dubbed modern classicists, there were composers who in their own manner of responding were not able to cope with their innovations and hence somehow put a brake on themselves. I will name one of the greatest talents, with the greatest integrity—Béla Bartók. Any thought of him having accommodated himself to the market or watered his wine for the sake of the public is out of the question. Bartók once told me in a radio conversation that we had for the municipal station in New York that he was unable to get away from tonality; that this was self-evident in an artist who, like himself, had his roots in folk music. You may take my word for it that Bartók, who, out of protest against Fascism, had gone into emigration and poverty, did not allow himself to be infected by any *Blut-und-Boden* ideology.[5] But under the compulsion of origin and tradition, which ultimately proved more powerful than his own productively musical achievement, he had evidently lost contact with what he had dared in his boldest works, for example the two sonatas for violin and piano. The issue is a more general one. Even Richard Strauss, who boasted that in *Elektra* he had gone to the outer limit of tonality, later nevertheless said that tonality was a natural law that one must, in principle, not infringe upon. There is even a statement already attributed to Richard Wagner to the effect that at one time, in *Tristan*, he had committed unique extravagances that should be neither repeated nor imitated by others. In other words, this breach between the direction in which the subconscious drives the composers and the language in which they emerged dates back at least one hundred years. Most recently, it has been bleakly documented in the self-revocation of Hindemith, who either no longer acknowledged his best works or rewrote them in a very moderate sense, as if under censorship. Even in the boldest and most consequential composer of the period, in Schoenberg, there are at least symptoms of this breach to be observed. Again and again, he played with the material of tonality, and it was by no means only secondary works that he wrote tonally, but, even among his late works, such significant ones as the Second Chamber Symphony or the *Kol nidre*. In an essay that bears the title *"On revient toujours"*—namely *à ses premiers amours*—he attempted to justify this theoretically, more or less admitted that he actually felt drawn back to the thing from which he had launched himself.[6]

Today, the discrepancy between the subjective state of composition and the technical development that is identified by catchwords like integral composition and electronics has grown infinite. Compositional subject and compositional objectivity face each other across an abyss. This often leads

to an opposite result compared to the previous generation. Composers frequently capitulate to the means, which they must utilize without really composing with them. Hence the first difficulty would be to achieve an appropriate relationship to the state of technique, either by the composers utilizing and forming the latter in accordance with the state of their own consciousness, or by their pushing their self-criticism so far that they catch up with the state of technique. How this should be done is something for which there are no general rules. I only mention the difficulty in order to focus attention on it, instead of repressing it. Naturally this is much easier said than done. Technique has its own specific gravity; every attempt to meld it with subjective experience threatens to water it down. All composers who are worth anything—really all—have, then, also been overtaken by profound insecurity in the face of the difficulty. Perhaps the answer to this would be that security is absolutely no ideal. Possibly such insecurity provides better preconditions for legitimate art than a feeling of security that is guaranteed by nothing in external or internal reality.

Among other things, as one of the difficulties of writing the truth, Brecht mentioned the art of making the truth practicable, of bringing it to the people as a weapon, so to speak. If one wanted to express this in a more or less illusionary way, the sentence applies musically to the phenomenon that there is no longer any such thing as a securely established space for composing, in which music would have its place. What Paul Valéry wrote many years ago about sculpture, that as a result of the loss of its relation to architecture it had become homeless, problematic, is true both literally and figuratively of music as well.[7] This is not, by any means, to warm up the humbug about the incomprehensibility of modernism. I mean something deeper, the position of music *per se* in contemporary society, the position of its spirit in relation to the objective one of the epoch. The chaotic situation of the contemporary concert within official musical life, for example, where a piece of music is performed without anyone—neither the composer, nor the conductor, nor the presenter—having a proper idea where it belongs, why it is being played in this particular place together with these other pieces, what it is actually supposed to do for the listener—this chaotic, museum-like situation of the concert business is the most striking expression of this. The anonymity of the concert, its anarchic element, is not the guarantor of freedom, as one might suppose, but instead introduces the work of art into emptiness and arbitrariness. The lack of functionality communicates itself to the work of art as the consciousness of something chaotic and as disorientation. This has nothing to do with music's serving some heteronymous practical purpose, with making an

audience wax enthusiastic or disciplining it—luckily for it, music has divested itself of teleological relations. What is shattered, instead, is the adequacy between music and its place in society. What has become uncertain is what it means for the experience of the people to whom it is displayed. At the same time, music is no longer capable of absorbing that human experience in any way. If I said that composing feels the earth quake beneath its feet, then this is probably the explanation. Voltaire's statement "Où il n'y a pas le vrai besoin il n'y a pas le vrai plaisir" [Where there is no real need there is no real pleasure] is certainly also true of art. Where a thing no longer has within itself an objective social need—by which I mean not that it satisfies an external need, but rather that it reflects one within itself—the thing itself becomes hollow. What the opponents of the new music like to term its experimental character is generally the effort to come to terms with this situation of being hollowed out, as a result of owning up to the situation of the quaking earth and, if possible, trying to objectify it precisely by means of the work of art.

Permit me to say a few words about this concept of the experimental, which will be discomfiting to some of you with regard to so many things about new and newest music. It would be superficial to think that the experimental is the uncertain, is what is built on air and can be destroyed tomorrow; and to take the non-experimental for what is certain. It is precisely that which does *not* experiment, which keeps right on going as if it were still possible to do so, which continues to compose as if the old preconditions were still secure, that is consigned, with apodictic certainty, to downfall and oblivion. The experimenter still has more chances to last and to survive than the man who steers clear of experiment and behaves like a saver in an inflationary period who puts his wealth into gilt-edged stocks and bonds that are then inevitably devalued. However, this is not true in reverse. The experimental is not automatically within the truth, but can equally well end in failure; otherwise the concept of the experiment would have no sensible meaning at all. It is undeniable that many so-called experiments already discount, in themselves, the possibility of their failure, present themselves from the outset as if they didn't quite believe in themselves and were giving the game up for lost before the first move is made. Experimental, in the legitimate sense, means nothing other than art's self-conscious power of resistance against what is conventionally forced upon it from the outside, by consensus.^ The conclusion from all this would not

A. In light of the most recent developments this may be qualified. Lately, compositional methods are frequently specifically termed experimental whose own

be that one should, for example, set up nature preserves for the experimental in musical life and leave everything else, as always, to traditional music. Rather, both should be granted the same organizational preconditions, so that modern, radical music does not in fact become relegated to the specialty that its enemies then denounce.

Speaking immanently, in a musical sense, the lack of a pre-existing and embracing musical space now appears as the loss of objectively pre-existing musical *language*. The paradoxical difficulty of all music today is that every music that is written is subject to the compulsion to create its own language for itself, while language, as something that by virtue of its very concept exists beyond and outside of composition, as something that carries it, cannot be created purely by the will of the individual. The paradox defines concretely the difficulty with which one has to deal. I attempted to grasp the phenomenon many years ago, in *Philosophy of New Music*, by citing one of Kafka's parables in which he tells of a theater director who, himself, not only has to lead his ensemble and paint his scenery, but also actually has to beget his actors so that some day they will act and behave the way he has in mind. This Kafkaesque parable has meanwhile been revealed as the objective precondition of all composing.[8]

There has been no lack of attempts to come to terms with this difficulty by trying to restore music to its place in society. All of them have failed; it is time to admit this failure without reservation, without illusions. That all composers worth considering no longer make use of any but the most radical musical possibilities; that there is probably no longer any seriously gifted composer who would commit himself to the ominous moderate modernism is related to this. As proof of this failure I cite the entire realm of the sing-and-play movement, of young people's music; but also what is taking place following the official line of the Eastern Bloc. It is not the affair of art to make a social place for itself. It finds itself within the structure of social reality, but is unable on its own to influence the latter in any essential way. Up until the threshold of the present, art presupposed what in Hegel is called the Substantial, objective like-mindedness *[Gleichsinnigkeit]*. Even now, the structure of a society must still be able to be connected with the composers' consciousness and subconscious, even if under extreme tension. Beethoven did not accommodate himself to the ideology of the often-cited rising bourgeoisie of the era of 1789 or 1800; he partook of its spirit. Hence his unsurpassed achievement, even though already dur-

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results, the composed work itself, cannot be predicted either in the process of composing or in the imagination of the composer.

ing his lifetime this achievement, the inner coincidence with society, was by no means simply identical with external reception. But where the inner coincidence is lacking and is imposed by force or fiat, the result is merely conformity on the part of the composer, in other words something heteronomous. This is regularly at the expense of musical quality, of the music's stature. The music becomes foolish. By giving in to a state of humanity that does not keep pace with its own development, music at once commits itself to the regressive tendencies of society, to the steadily increasing liquidation of the individual in a world that, due to the concentration of ever greater power complexes, is moving toward total administration. Everything that in music attributes to itself the ethos of community inclines toward totalitarian forms of society. The difficulties of composing can be mastered, not by casting sidelong glances at a social space, as even Brecht still did, but, if at all, then only by proceeding from the thing itself—by giving the compositions themselves such a compelling quality that as a result they acquire an objectivity that would also, ultimately, partake of social meaning after all. Without this trust, as problematic as it may be, it is no longer possible to write a single note.

But this does not put an end to the difficulties. The general insight is a frame; it orients the composers to some extent, but by no means gives them comfort. It is just as difficult, purely from the point of view of the individual who is composing without preconceptions, to achieve objectivity in fact, as it would be bad and untruthful for the composer to accept an external source of responsibility. One is in a desperate situation: better to analyze it than to avoid it by stubborn naïveté. The only thing that today can provide any starting point for artists is their subjective capacity for response. For to be musical, in a higher sense, is not a merely subjective characteristic, but is precisely the capacity to innervate something of music's objective compulsions, in which, ultimately, the social compulsions are also contained. That is the reasonable foundation of the trust about which I spoke. If we say of a person that he is musical, we are not thinking just of a talent that is more or less natural and cannot be pursued beyond that point, but rather of his capacity to perceive the objectivity of music, its structural context. Even in the intellectualized notion of musicality, this is retained. But this very capacity for response by the subject became problematic. The individual is not something that exists purely in itself, but is always also mediated, always also a piece of social illusion and no last thing *[kein Letztes]*. The tendency of the times, indeed, has so weakened the ego that in many instances it is no longer quite master of its own responses. Today, what the breaches between subjective musical responses and objec-

tive technological conditions often conceal is merely the weakness of the subject. The composer who intones, "I am no snob, I don't go along with these fashions; I rely on my own instinct and do what I wish and can and nothing else"—this composer will, in general, probably be no snob, to the extent that it is an achievement not to be one. Instead, he will simply reproduce the residues of the conventions of the past and will think he hears his own voice in what is only a triply refracted echo.

If one examines the musical development since, say, 1920, as a whole from the perspective that I have identified here, the developments that are to be taken seriously are almost exclusively efforts to develop, out of the form of musical objectivity, i.e., from the material, idiom, and technique, methods of proceeding that *relieve [entlasten]* the subject, which no longer has confidence in itself alone, because it is bent over and crushed by all those difficulties. The musical history of the past forty years seems to me to be in large part a history of attempts at musical relief. Allow me to clarify this briefly for you.

The concept of relief *[Entlastung]*, as some spokesmen for the musical youth movement, for instance Wilhelm Ehmann, have adopted it, together with some twelve-tone musicians in America, quite innocently, and as Arnold Gehlen uses it, in a principled way and with great positive emphasis, in his anthropological sociology,[9] is not consistent with the idea of the through-composed work of art toward which, on the other hand, all of these techniques ultimately strive. The decrease in effort, the relief, always means a preponderance of dead matter, of elements that have not passed through the subject, that are externally thing-like and ultimately alien to art. Still, the attempts at relief have their sound reason—precisely that the difficulties of composing out of pure freedom, out of a kind of all-sided actuality of hearing, are now scarcely surmountable. That was possible, evidently, only during the short period of the explosion, during the heroic period of the new music, as it comprises the middle works of Schoenberg, from the Piano Pieces op. 11 to the Lieder op. 22, and the contemporaneous creations of the young Webern and the young Alban Berg. These three composers are classic composers of modernism only because at the time they were not classicists—because they got by without externally imposed rules, purely with the compositional form of response, with the way their immediate imagination worked. This could be demonstrated even in the origin of some of the works of this phase. Schoenberg composed his boldest and most advanced work, the monodrama *Erwartung*, in two weeks, evidently in a kind of trance, not so very differently from the way the automatic writing of the surrealists would later be in-

tended; really by means of an explosion of the subconscious.[10] The extraordinarily rapid emergence of such works corresponds to the brevity of the phase during which people composed in this way. Afterwards, Schoenberg experienced a very long, seven-year hiatus in his creative output. In Berg's case, something similar is indicated by the fact that the quantum of his production remained so small. There has scarcely ever been a musician of comparable stature who left behind as few works as he did. Already beginning with *Wozzeck*, he no longer added any more opus numbers, because, as he told me once, he was embarrassed that the opus numbers of the more than forty-year-old composer were so low. In Webern's case, the miniature formats testify to something analogous. Evidently he could bear the boundless inner tension without relief only by renouncing the possibility of musical articulation over long stretches of time, although the longing for long, composed-out time never relinquished its lifelong hold on him. Even Schoenberg could not hold out with purely spontaneous, unrelieved, purely self-reliant composition. Here, it may also be a factor that the unexampled spontaneity of such works cannot be preserved over time, and also that his critical consciousness became aware of a series of illogical and anomalous elements in the freely created works that he did not feel he could correct critically except by a certain process of rationalization. Under this last aspect, one should have a look at the Four Piano Pieces of my friend René Leibowitz,[11] which apply this kind of rationalization to the model of the pieces in Schoenberg's op. 23 [Five Piano Pieces], which with the exception of the last are not yet twelve-tone. They transpose, as it were, the ideas of these pieces into twelve-tone technique; a noteworthy attempt. Examining it, one can confirm both the progress through the system of relief, the greater consistency, continuity, and also the price that had to be paid for it, the loss of the immediacy of those middle works by Schoenberg. In fact, the first great phenomenon of relief was the twelve-tone technique. My recently deceased teacher Eduard Steuermann[12] once expressed this very simply with the statement that the row procedure should help to accomplish what the ear could not achieve at every moment. The transition to this point took place early in the heroic period of free atonality. Webern reported that in the Bagatelles op. 9, one of his most significant and successful works, he wrote down the notes that had already come up in these very brief works, in order to avoid them and in their place to use others that were still unutilized: in other words, to avoid repeated notes. This occurred in approximately 1909, but already implies the idea, if not yet the systematic development, of the twelve-tone technique, derived simply from the naïve practice of the composer. Almost

impossible to say where the immanent achievement of the ear ends and the external relief begins. Who would dare to begrudge the composer Webern that innocent list of already-used notes? But one must assume something like a threshold phenomenon, a transformation of quantity into quality—that the necessity of such rationalization suddenly becomes alienated from itself, that it confronts the composer and his hearing as something external. Then the music is forcibly subjected to order; the order no longer follows purely from the musical events. By rationalizing the latter, from among which, after all, it is simultaneously emerging, the order is also imposed on them. It is no accident that in the early period of the twelve-tone technique so many older forms were pressed into service, despite their obvious lack of congruence with the atonal material; and that right down to the micro structure so many things resurfaced at that time that were still forbidden, with good reason, for example in the use of sequences, retained rhythmic patterns, and the like.

One can interpret the serial development that set in with such vehemence after Schoenberg's death as a critique of those illogical elements. The serial principle, from the perspective of twelve-tone music, means that everything that projected heterogeneously into what was composed and pre-formed by twelve-tone-ness—everything independent of the twelve-tone technique, all the material and structural traces of the old tonal idiom, are removed. Stockhausen formulated this accurately and strikingly when he said that in terms of his musical language Schoenberg, despite all the innovations, was actually still tonal. The serial school wanted to radicalize the twelve-tone principle, which they regarded, in a sense, as a merely partial reordering of the materials. They wanted to extend it to all the musical dimensions, to elevate it to totality. Absolutely everything is to be determined, even the dimensions of rhythm, meter, tonal color, and overall form, which in Schoenberg had still been free. In doing so, the serial composers took as their starting point the thesis that because all musical phenomena, including pitch and tonal color, are, in their acoustical regularity, ultimately temporal relations, they must all be able to be reduced compositionally to a single common denominator—time. From a series's given, original material, which should be as brief as possible, everything—every note, every rest, duration, pitch, color should strictly follow. It may remain open whether the equation actually works; whether one can simply identify objective physical time, according to the rate of vibration and overtone relations, with musical time, the feeling of musical duration, which is essentially subjectively mediated. The serial composers encountered this problem a long time ago. The most advanced among

them, Boulez and Stockhausen, are laboring at it with great intensity. What is of greater concern to me is the idea of total determination as such. It is already implicit in the twelve-tone technique, to the extent that it is not clear why this and that dimension should be strictly determined in it, and others not. Accordingly, one may perhaps say that the serialists did not arbitrarily concoct mathematicizations of music, but confirmed a development that Max Weber, in the sociology of music,[13] identified as the overall tendency of more recent musical history—the progressive rationalization of music. It is said to have reached its fulfillment in integral construction. If from a given basic material absolutely everything else, in fact, were to follow, then this would be the greatest relief of the composer that can possibly be imagined. He would then only have to obey what is contained in his series, and would be delivered from all cares.

But this does not leave one with a good feeling. The reification that is already perceptible in the twelve-tone technique, the disempowerment of the living, listening act as the authentic constituent of music, is so intensified that it threatens to destroy all meaningful context. I recall a young composer who brought me a composition in Darmstadt, perhaps as much as fourteen years ago, that appeared to me as the craziest gibberish.[14] You couldn't make out any up and down, front and back, logic and setting—no articulation of the phenomenon at all that you could grasp. When I asked him how everything related to everything else, what the musical meaning of a phrase was, where it ended and began, and other such elementary questions about structure, the young man demonstrated to me that some number of pages later there was a pause that corresponded to a single note in a particular place, and so on in that vein. He had truly, as Philistine enemies envision it, reduced the whole thing to a mathematical example, which may even have been correct—it was too boring for me to figure it out—but which absolutely no longer translated into any recognizable and compelling musical context. The subject, on which music is thrown back in the absence of a social space, and which was supposed to be relieved by all these machinations, is not only relieved but virtually eliminated. But along with it also the control that it exercises and that helps to constitute musical objectivity. If it were seriously just a matter of composing out what a series like this contains within it, then—the joke is as cheap as the thing itself—one could compose better with an electronic computer than by troubling a composer. The help he is offered threatens to overwhelm him. He is subjected to a set of laws that are alien to him and that he can scarcely catch up with. The resulting music, however, becomes something deaf and vacant. What I forecast years ago as the aging

of new music is literally occurring. At the time, some of my Kranichstein[15] colleagues were angry with me; today I can say that the best of them, at any rate, are largely of one mind with me in this diagnosis.

Into this situation of serialism barged John Cage; it explains the extraordinary effect that he had. His principle of chance, which is familiar to you under the name of aleatory music, wants to break out of the total determinism, the integral, obligatory musical ideal of the serial school. He, the American, was not pressured in the same way, not compelled by the same historical necessity as the musicians of the European tradition, who exist within the context of the obligatory style, the general onward march of the rationalization of music. But even the principle of indeterminacy that Cage introduced remained as alien to the ego as its apparent opposite, serialism. It, too, belongs in the category of relief for the weakened ego. Pure chance, it is true, breaks stolid, inescapable necessity, but is as external to living hearing as the latter. Cage once formulated it very logically, saying than when one hears Webern, one always only hears Webern, but in truth what one wants to hear is not him, but the sound. With this, he, similarly, argues for an almost physical, thing-like objectivity, such as serial music was. This, by the way, also explains the fact that so many serial composers went over without a hitch to the principle of indeterminacy. The Hungarian composer György Ligeti, who is as perceptive as he is truly original and significant, observed correctly that in their effect the extremes of absolute determination and absolute chance coincide. Statistical generality becomes the law of composition, a law that is alien to the ego. Certainly the absolute indeterminacy of Cage and his school is not exhausted in it. It has a polemical meaning; it comes close to the dadaist and surrealist actions of the past. But their "*happenings**," in keeping with the political situation, no longer have any politically demolishing content and hence tend to take on a sectarian, séance-like quality—while everyone believes they have participated in something uncanny, nothing at all happens, no ghost appears. It is Cage's contribution, which cannot be exaggerated, to have sown doubts regarding the extremes of musical logic, the blind ideal of complete domination over nature in music; hardly uninfluenced by "*action painting**." What he himself offers in his most radical works is nevertheless not as different as one might suppose from studying the program, even if his best pieces, like the piano Concerto, still emit an extraordinary shock that stubbornly resists all neutralization. Hardly any other composer of our time has achieved that. But the most serious difficulty is that despite everything there is no going back. If, in contrast to the twelve-tone technique, the serial principle, and aleatory music, one simply sought to get a

fresh grasp on substantive freedom, i.e., free atonality in the sense of Schoenberg's expectation, one would almost necessarily capitulate to reaction.

Against the techniques of relief, one should hold fast to the ideal of something that Heinz-Klaus Metzger called a-serialism, and for which I suggested the term informal music. Mindful of the impossibility of painting a picture of the so-called positive anywhere, I will forego describing it in detail, particularly since if you are interested you can learn about my ideas on the subject from the essay "Vers une musique informelle," which may be found at the end of *Quasi una fantasia*.[16] However, I shall at least identify models of the difficulties that also confront the ideal of the informal. In the most advanced and acoustically sensitive compositions today there is a yawning discrepancy between the blocks that have been joined together, layered, so to speak, and are often astonishingly through-composed in themselves, and the overall structure. It is as if there were no mediation connecting the unprecedented articulation of the details with the equally magnificently through-composed totality; as if the two things were joined together according to principles of construction, but as if these principles of construction were not capable of realization in living phenomena. Mediation is lacking in the banal, as well as in the strict sense. In the banal sense, links are lacking between the individual sounds, in which everything is concentrated. In the strict sense, the events in themselves do not want to transcend themselves; the structure remains largely abstract in relation to them. Until now, integration frequently has become impoverishment. One can observe, along with an extreme increase in compositional means, a kind of regression to homophony. As I described this, borrowing an expression of Boulez's, blocks are being added together, rather than lines being drawn. Hardly any harmonic tensions are created; hardly any complementary harmonies; hardly any monodic, much less polyphonic lines. This shrinkage is out of all proportion to the compositional expenditure of means and construction. It may have something to do with what one can call the preponderance of extras, of the extra-musical in the most recent music, which Schnebel identified as one of the most characteristic phenomena of its development. It is as if music, by using noise, bruitistic effects, and then optical, especially mimetic ones, wanted to make up part of what it is temporarily blocked from achieving in the way of immanent unfolding.[17] Those actions, however, frequently have something aimless about them. Dada turns into *l'art pour l'art*, and this is hard to reconcile with the idea of dada. Frequently a music is assembled that actually doesn't want to go anywhere. Against this it is argued, above

all by electronic composers, that it is a matter of providing materials. If I once said that electronic compositions sounded like Webern on a Wurlitzer,[18] that is unquestionably out of date. But on the other side there is always some primitiveness of results that remains unmistakable in relation to the technical effort. In general, it is probably difficult to develop means independent of the purpose, the quality of what is composed with them. I would like to mention at least one symptom that struck me recently and that perhaps also has something to do with the complex of difficulties—the phenomenon of the restraining of impulses; that music is constantly moving, wanting to develop, but breaks off again as if under a spell. Whether this spell expresses the one that we live under, whether it, too, is a symptom of ego-weakness or compositional inadequacy, is something on which I would not like to pass judgment.

I only wanted to make you aware of all this; not to prophesy or postulate anything. Music today sees itself faced with an alternative, that between the fetishism of the material and the process, on the one hand, and unfettered chance, on the other. A statement by Christian Dietrich Grabbe occurred to me that once greatly impressed me: "For nothing but despair alone can save us."[19] Everything lies with spontaneity, i.e., the involuntary reaction of the compositional ear, *quand même*. But if one composes in deadly earnest, one must ultimately ask whether it is not all becoming ideological nowadays. Therefore, one must confront the possibility of its falling silent non-metaphorically and without the consolation that it cannot go on that way. What Beckett expresses in his dramas, and above all in his novels, which sometimes babble like music, has its truth for music itself. Perhaps only that music is still possible which measures itself against this greatest extreme, its own falling silent.

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II. IN UNDERSTANDING NEW MUSIC

For H. H. Stuckenschmidt on the occasion of his 65th birthday

In the chapter "Instructions for Listening to New Music," in the book *Der getreue Korrepetitor*,[20] I had essentially confined myself, in the interest of practical musical aims, to purely technical matters that create difficulties in understanding new music. By comparison, I had de-emphasized the sociological aspect. Without question, it cannot be separated from the immanently musical aspect, as I should like to emphasize in opposition to some currently virulent tendencies in the sociology of music. Specifically musical problems cannot be avoided, unless the sociology of music wants