The musical universe of the 20th and 21st centuries is a force-field in which styles, instruments, personalities and stories can be found that are ascribable to conceptual frameworks that may differ greatly one from another. Such complexity cannot be traced back to single theories or all-encompassing interpretations, but may be tackled, philosophically, starting from certain characteristics. This book identifies nine such characteristics: namely, Extremes, Noise, Silence, Technology, Audience, Listening, Freedom, Disintegration, and New Media. Each of these permits us to open up unforeseen philosophical-cultural paths and interpret, in its multifarious variety, the developments of contemporary music, profoundly interwoven with the history of thought, culture and society.

Giacomo Fronzi graduated in Philosophy and in Musicology, and holds a PhD in Ethics and Philosophical Anthropology and a diploma in Pianoforte. He has published extensively on contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of music. He is currently teaching Philosophy and History in Italian secondary schools.

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To My Family

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PREFACE

It has never been easy to find one's way through the dense thicket of problems posed by 20th century music. Today, by now in the new century, it may be hoped that music and the arts generally can be judged with a greater critical detachment, and hence with greater clarity than in the 20th century, when we were still immersed in that fluid reality. Upon closer inspection, however, in the present time the problems seem not to have been simplified and made clearer by distance, but evermore emerge in their extreme complexity. Venturing into this territory is no easy matter and Giacomo Fronzi, in this sweeping essay, has sought precisely to return, with a critical perspective, to the key problems posed by the musical experience of the 20th century.

Twentieth century music, in the vast range and multiplicity of its aspects, raises a series of questions of various kinds, which demand of the critic an unusual ability to keep track of the threads of a discourse that becomes increasingly complex and intricate as it is examined more deeply. Musical experience must be considered from many angles: relations with the culture of its time, above all; production and reception; the relationship with technics and more generally with today's technology of the means of sound production; the relationship with contemporary society and many other problems, including those of a typically philosophical nature. We may say unhesitatingly that Giacomo Fronzi, in tackling the exacting, risky task of outlining so vast a territory, has emerged victorious.

This wide-ranging study, the culmination of many years' experience working in the field of exploration of 20th century musical thought, is a vast, profound, articulate outline of all the main problems posed by 20th century music, and the author extends his view to the whole aura surrounding musical experience in the broad sense. This book is offered to the reader as a *sonata* in many movements, each of which is a little like one of the possible approaches to the central theme of his work in its various angles.

Although many topics are dealt with in the book, one in particular seems to dominate the research: namely, the value and significance of technics as a key element, that has determined not only epoch-making changes in the production, listening and reception of contemporary music, but also in the way we think about music, interpreting its possible *meanings* in our world and our society. One figure dominates in the

volume, sometimes openly recalled, sometimes in the shadows, but always present: Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, the philosopher and musicologist to whom Fronzi had already devoted much attention in the past. Nonetheless, this presence as an important, central point of critical reference does not lessen the importance and scope of references to an immense range of critical, philosophical, aesthetic and musicological literature present in the book, which is certainly one of the merits.

Recalling to mind so many critics, philosophers, musicologists and sociologists as important, indeed essential reference points for finding one's way through the multitude of problems raised by 20th century music–this is certainly a richness of the text. Browsing these dense pages, the reader can quickly understand how many intellectual stimuli have emerged from reflection on music in the past few decades. Yet the wide range of references does not compromise the originality of Giacomo Fronzi's thinking: he most readily clarifies his own position with regard to the many problems that emerge from these reflections. Awareness of the complexity of the problems, however, imposes judgments and cautious, above all never categorical, stances. Fronzi, who knows very well the vats, multiple musical panorama, especially of the second half of the 20th century, quite rightly has this to say at the beginning of his study, precisely in order to justify his prudent approach:

> Starting from the post-World War II period, the landscape of contemporary music underwent a fragmentation and ramification never before seen in the history of music. The development of the musical material, of extra or super-serial compositional techniques, the use of electric and electronic instruments, algorithmic works, soundscapes, random music, silent music, neo-melodic works, etc. are all possible gateways opening on to universes that are often mutually distant (18).

In outlining a possible coherent *historical* picture of this period, troubled from all points of view, he is clearly aware of dealing with a time when art, society and culture in the broad sense had continually fluctuated between modern and post-modern, concepts that are far from clearly defined. This topic too is dealt with in large measure here, and contributes to enrich the book's intellectual and cultural substance. We may say that much of musical experiences in the post-WWII period–though the roots of the problem go back some decades earlier, with Schönberg, Webern and the Second School of Vienna–move dangerously between these two uncertainly defined domains of the modern and post-modern. As Fronzi writes:

> The new committed, Utopian currents of the early 20th century swept away not the art of the past, but its axioms, renewing expressive languages, opening unimagined perspectives of research, in close connection too with technical and technological developments. The idea of experimentation went beyond the confines of scientific research and–not always to good purpose–invaded the territories of art, creating new paths that were at once fascinating and destabilising. For instance, composers such as Cage … cherished the hope that the rule of harmony might be brought definitively to an end, centring the musical discourse and the activity of composition on new foundations, structured starting from elements that might on each separate occasion be musical, extra-musical, random or numerical (20-1).

The crisis of the traditional concept of *expression* is liberally present in post-WWII music, as the author well knows. Centring his attention on the problem of technology and of so-called electroacoustic music must be seen in relation to the partial, but perhaps not definitive, eclipse of the very idea of expression and the possible importance of the *subject* in music.

Perhaps the profound meaning of this work is to be found in the concluding words, from which clearly emerge the author's position and his lucid awareness of the complexity of problems posed by the development of music in the 20th century. Starting from these questions, the book outlines a dense, enlightening picture, one that opens up cultural, philosophical, aesthetic horizons that go far beyond music: the marked quantity of information on what is commonly called the literature on the subject is united to the writer's particular ability to carry out a summary that can provide a very broad picture whose lines he directs with assurance, maturity of judgment and a rare balance.

Torino, September 2016

Enrico Fubini

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The acknowledgments at the beginning of a book may make us somewhat uncomfortable. At times we would prefer to elude this pleasant custom, not out of intellectual and emotional meanness, but because a research work is the fruit of a complex path, in which there are mingled traces of experiences (professional, formative, cultural, social, family, affective) and encounters, to which the author is indebted. This is why I shall limit myself to thanking (in addition to my translator, R.A. Henderson) only Professor Enrico Fubini, who has bestowed on me the honour of his friendship for many years now, for following this book from its first beginnings and for writing the Preface.

Parts of Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 are the development of ideas and concepts suggested in previous publications, namely: "Senso, consenso e dissenso. Su alcuni 'estremi' della (post)modernità musicale," in Mauro Protti and Nino Salamone, eds., *Prima modernità. Teoria e storia* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), 177-200; *Electrosound. Storia ed estetica della musica elettroacustica* (Torino: EDT, 2013); *Risuonanze 2014*, edited by Stefano Procaccioli (Pasian di Prato: L'Orto della Cultura, 2014), 51-62; *Risuonanze 2015*, edited by Stefano Procaccioli (Pasian di Prato: L'Orto della Cultura, 2014), 37-44; "Thelonious Monk. Ritratto di un eremita?," in *Il rasoio di Occam-MicroMega* (02.02.2015, online).

INTRODUCTION

Taking this book into your hands, you might think: "Ah, a book on the philosophy of music", thus expressing a certain value judgment too. This might mean, substantially, judging the book useful or useless. But regarding what? The development of the debate within philosophy or within music? Probably–at least, this is the optimistic wish–within both ambits: philosophy and music. The premise to this optimistic approach is acceptance of the following condition: "Philosophy must abandon any superiority complex and accept an equalitarian relationship with music"[1].

By approaching the discourse in this way, we would probably lose sight of the brilliant line from Friedrich Schlegel, who said, that in what we call philosophy of art, one of the two is usually missing: either philosophy or art. Taking from his words, we may say that in the case of philosophy of music, the risk is the absence of either philosophy or music. We should ask ourselves if it is always so, or if there really is an imbalance and a prevalence of one dimension over the other. In fact, this balance is unlikely, although it may be considered useful. Let me explain. A book on philosophy is a book on philosophy and not on music. Similarly, a book on music is a book on music and not on philosophy. Every book has its own clear identity: this is a book on the philosophy (or aesthetics) of music. This means that the perspective from which certain topics are dealt with is of a philosophical, not musical, nature. However, it is clear that music cannot disappear from the scene. Indeed, it remains the uncontested protagonist. What, then, may we say? We may say that a book like this, on the philosophy of music, has an *object*, namely contemporary music, and *instruments* with which to attempt to analyse it, these being primarily theoretical and philosophical.

Nonetheless, we are a long way today from the great theoretical undertakings of the man who is still the most important 20th century philosopher of music: Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno. This writer, to whom reference is often made in the pages that follow, gave a rather clear identity to what we might mean by 'philosophy of music' (which always means philosophy of modern music). To understand this, it is necessary to link the *philosophy-music* relationship with the *critical theory-aesthetic theory* relationship. At the basis of this double relationship is the conviction that art (when we speak of 'art' in relation to Adorno's thinking,

we are actually referring to 'music': "Perhaps the pure, strict concept of art can be derived only from music"[2]) and the historico-social context in which it is fulfilled are not in extrinsic relationship. Art is *fait social*, which means that the artistic phenomenon is directly dropped into the dense web of social (hence cultural, economic and political) relations within which it sees the light. The collective nature typical of any social fact belongs also to art, and is at the basis of both its production and its reception: it is not the single individual, the empirical subject, that is the true producer of the work of art, but a historical, 'collective' subject.

At the same time, art has its own autonomy, deriving from its being the dimension in which there is still a truth content. As Antonio Serravezza has written,

> the truth of musical works–a key notion in *Philosophy of Modern Music* as in all Adorno's other writings on art–is charged with values that come from its reactive, claim-staking character: it is opposed to the falsification of the ideologies, breaks through its surface and in this way restores to the subject–cognitive and ethical–the dignity of its autonomy[3].

In Adorno's philosophy of music, works express a subversive charge that cannot be separated from their truth content. This truth content is strictly connected to history, to socio-economic developments, and also takes us back to the tasks of the arts in contemporary society: to identify and defend a residual space of freedom and give a positive meaning to the process of *Aufklärung* ('clarification', 'enlightenment') of western reason. Art is the only escape route from the deception and oppression of existence in late-capitalist (and post-capitalist) society.

There is another fundamental aspect that characterises art, namely its gnoseological character: "Responsible art adjusts itself to criteria which approximate judgments: the harmonious and the inharmonious, the correct and the incorrect"[4]. Art is a figure of knowledge, so it is not to be enjoyed or consumed, but studied, analysed, penetrated and understood. This is much closer to philosophical reflection than to what we might call 'aesthetic pleasure'.

But, apart from the analysis of Adorno's writings, how much of all this might today be theoretically tenable? Does contemporary music take part in the great historico-political and social movements? Does it still have a special relationship with freedom and conscience? Is it ethically and cognitively substantial? Does it maintain those characteristics that lead to its being the object of philosophers' attention?

I believe there is not a single answer, because that would mean unifying the whole galaxy of contemporary music in a single figure. In the

arts, none other than music has the characteristics of diversification, mutability, dynamism, continual transformation. Thus in some cases the distance from the ethical and cognitive sphere will be greater, in others lesser; in some cases civic engagement will be guaranteed and intentional, in others it will be kept at due distance.

Thus far we have begun to introduce music, with its characteristics and historical developments. What of the philosopher? What must be her/his relationship with music to be able to speak of it? Indubitably, among the various arts, it is music that resists most to the comprehension and penetration of those who do not know its language, much less its history. This is basically the same paradox that has marked the destiny of the reception of music, always and everywhere: music is one of the most present things in our lives (in any form: from the ringing of the alarm clock to a Mahler symphony, from the background music of an advertisement to the car radio, etc.) and at the same time one of the things we know least about. The philosopher is a person too, and so has to do with music, but may not know it. Is this an insuperable limit for theory? It has been said that Hegel was the last philosopher who could permit himself the luxury of talking about art without knowing it. In fact, the problem remains of the correct distance that there should be between the philosopher and the object of her/his research: neither excessively close nor excessively far off, neither passive adherence nor a solitary, detached reflection. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his famous *Éloge de la Philosophie*, writes:

> Philosophy cannot be a tête-à-tête of the philosopher with the true. It cannot be a judgment given from on high on life, the world, history, as if the philosopher *was not part of it*–nor can it subordinate the internally recognized truth to any exterior instance of it. It must go beyond this alternative[5].

These remarks are also valid within the specific 'philosophies', including the philosophy of music. Borrowing Merleau-Ponty's words, we might say that the philosopher of music can not utter a judgment on music from on high, from outside, which means penetrating the object with a suitable 'toolbox'. But in search of what? Truth? "There is no *place of truth*"[6], says Merleau-Ponty, quoting Bergson. The demands of philosophy when it makes its approach to contemporary music should perhaps be led back to a more practicable path, one that, while less ambitious, is however no less complex. There are two reasons for this.

The first regards philosophy today. This discipline does not seem to be in the best of health, for the past hundred years exhausted by attacks on the

part, above all, of those scientific, mathematical and economic fringes that consider philosophy a substantial waste of time. Obviously, we arrive at a superficial summary judgment like this if we see philosophy as non-applied knowledge. This, however, is a great misinterpretation: philosophy *is* an applied knowledge, though not directly and immediately. Think of a doctor: before arriving at a treatment, s/he must necessarily pass through the stage of diagnosis. Philosophy is at this–so to speak–'diagnostic' level of relationship with reality, with its manifestations and degenerations. As Merleau-Ponty said more than fifty years ago, so we may perhaps say of our own time that it rejects philosophy and is witnessing the retreat of thought, turning in on itself:

> Having passed a certain point of tension, ideas cease to develop and live. They fall to the level of justifications and pretexts, relics of the past, points of honor; and what one pompously calls the movement of ideas is reduced to the sum of our nostalgias, our grudges, our timidities, and our phobias[7].

In the case of philosophy of music, the question is still more complicated, since it refers to a nebulous, faded, opaque dimension, at a level of experience that is neither clear nor reassuring. Aesthetic ambition arises from a "tragic non-fulfilment"[8], and this tragic accent is not only typical of art at primary level, but remains up to its results. Diffidence in the face of the philosophy of music may, then, be still greater than for philosophy *tout court*. On the other hand, it is the philosophy of music that must itself make every effort to be recognised as useful, as an instrument for reading and analysis of the contemporary musical reality. That adjective 'contemporary' is of great importance. Alessandro Arbo has rightly stressed that

> To reflect (or reflecting) upon music nowadays does not mean, at least in regards to a grand part of the contemporary philosophical discussion, to reflect upon today's music[9].

In fact, the tendency is for the philosophy of music to give inadequate attention to contemporary music, by virtue of choices (historical, personal, of a musical genre, etc.) that risk making the theoretical effort ineffective.

The second reason has to do with the conditions of existence of contemporary music today–these conditions being concerned with both the productive and the receptive dimension. Twentieth century music is in a totally different position from the preceding centuries. It is not only a matter of the great variety of aims, genres, styles, paths, forms, but also of very important novelties in terms of the technical tools, the places, the

contexts. The modalities of production, diffusion and listening to music at the turn of the millennium underwent an unprecedented revolution. As a result, the picture is complex, articulate and hard to interpret[10]. The tesserae that make up the mosaic of contemporary music (and of the contemporary position of that music) are so various that at times they lead to evaluations and analyses that move in opposite directions. This means that it is not possible to identify one single thought of contemporary music, nor to outline one single philosophy of contemporary music that could cast light on the many phenomena that are silhouetted on the horizon. To this must be added the by now legendary difficulty of assimilation of contemporary music by an audience other than the distinguished names of critics, composers, interpreters or experts. The distance created between the composers and the audience, from the dodecaphonic turnaround on, seems to be remaining in all its gravity. Despite all efforts, difficulty of understanding seems to be an obstacle hard to surmount for an untrained and–perhaps–uninterested ear. This situation is all the more significant if we note that in the last few decades music criticism has not always warmly welcomed the novelties that gradually emerged in the 20th century. Two examples will suffice.

In the early 1960s, Adorno did not conceal his unease at finding himself in a musical situation that posed and imposed an onerous alternative: take either the attitude 'thus far and no further', or the attitude of one who is desperately trying to jump on the train of the latest novelties, determined not to be considered a diehard. This kind of alternative, said Adorno in 1961, must be overcome because it is too abstract. Among the various charges brought against Adorno over the years is the accusation that he failed to understand the potential of the new research carried out by composers who had grown up in the tracks and cult of Webern. But Adorno was of another time, another musical-theoretical dimension. This is no small detail. Indeed, it explains the fact that his productive imagination–as he himself said with great honesty–could not understand works like Stockhausen's *Gruppen*, *Kontakte* or *Zeitmasse* in the same way in which it understood the later works of Webern. The reason for this difficulty lies in the fact that–as Adorno carefully states–serial and post-serial music "is founded on a quite different mode of apperception, in so far as music can be said to be based on apperception at all"[11].

The second example is from the Italian tradition. In 1948, Alfredo Parente wrote:

> The greatest discredit is brought upon the arts when, as frequently happens, the mere search for new means of expression, with the specious appearance of technical innovations and revolutions, with the tenacity of what has not

> yet been done, is passed off as creative art. … We see paintings and hear music that have no merit unless that of offering a new spatial solution, a hitherto never experienced way of dismantling, upsetting, dissolving and remaking the figure of an object, an unheard harmonic relationship, a novel timbric hotchpotch. If there is drama in all this, it is the drama of gratuitous striving, of invention as a competitive or sporting fact. The search remains in the strictly optical or acoustic ambit, and the results may cause external gratification, cold admiration, since their value is ingeniousness, skill in excogitation, the rarity of what is novel, and for the rest they communicate no thrill, remaining in the merely cerebral or sensorial[12].

This lengthy quotation makes two aspects perfectly clear: a) even music criticism may express great perplexity regarding some directions taken by contemporary music; b) despite his forcefully expressed diffidence, Parente identifies two poles around which, shortly afterwards, much contemporary–above all technological–music (in this book they will be called, without differentiation, 'technological music' and 'electroacoustic music') was to congeal: the 'cerebral' and the 'sensorial'.

It seems very clear that if there are problems of reception in the world of the experts, it may easily be attested, always supposing this is necessary, how difficult the process of reception of contemporary music is for a wider audience. In part, this problem is attenuated by the great amount of music offered by the Internet and by the many computer-based and digital solutions available to us. This is undoubtedly another characteristic of the present time.

But let us move on to the book.

The text is developed around nine words: 'Extremes', 'Noise', 'Silence', 'Technology', 'Audience', 'Listening', 'Freedom', 'Disintegration' and 'New media', to each of which a chapter is devoted. The chapters, in their turn, are organised in three movements with an intermezzo between the second and third movements, almost recalling a sort of musical form. Starting from the idea that the diversity and complexity of the landscape can in some way be brought back to nine topics, in each chapter I aim to give a possible reading of the way contemporary music and contemporaneity are placed with regard to this topic. It is not a matter only of reflecting on contemporary music and the features it displays, but also of opening the debate as far as possible. With this in mind, I offer the 'Intermezzo' devoted to jazz, and specifically to Thelonious Monk. I believe it is necessary to clarify how the philosophy of music (hence both philosophy and music) must be constantly opened to the plurality of voices emerging from the musical panorama. The categories of interpretation are subject to change, adjustment and variation. Some will be more suited to

certain genres and authors, and quite unsuited to other genres and authors. What can never be missing, however, is openness (insatiable openness, I would say) to all the forms of music that characterise our present time. In this book I concentrate especially on so-called 'cultivated music', but there are ventures (with Monk, for instance) into various territories, and in any case I consider them a legitimate object of extra-musical and philosophical analysis.

In conclusion, I want to clarify what might be called the 'methodological' choice of the words used as starting points for the single studies. This choice–as will probably be immediately clear to many readers–was inspired by Italo Calvino's texts for the Charles Eliot Norton Poetry Lectures, which he was supposed to give in 1985-1986 academic year at the University of Harvard; he passed away, however, on the 19th of September 1985, at the beginning of the academic year. The texts of five of the six lectures[13] were subsequently published under the title *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. As we know, each lecture had a topic: "Lightness", "Quickness", "Exactitude", "Visibility" and "Multiplicity". Introducing them, Calvino explains his choice as follows:

> I would therefore like to devote these lectures to certain values, qualities, or peculiarities of literature that are very close to my heart, trying to situate them within the perspective of the new millennium[14].

In some sense, the nine words chosen here also refer to values, qualities or specific aspects of contemporary music (its production and reception), and clearly mark the passage from the second to the third millennium. It is hard to imagine what the future holds for us, but, starting from what history tells us, the challenge is always the same: to imagine it, in order to better face and experience it.

Lecce, September 2016

Notes

[1] Elio Matassi, *Musica* (Napoli: Guida, 2004), 10. Unless otherwise specified translations are mine.

[2] Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, fragments and texts edited by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 7; orig. ed. *Beethoven. Philosophie der Musik*, Hg. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1993).

[3] Antonio Serravezza, "Introduzione" to Theodor W. Adorno, *Filosofia della musica moderna* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), XII-XIII; orig. ed. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1949); english ed. *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (London-New York: Continuum, 2007).

[4] I do not believe this English translation completely and most clearly renders the thesis Adorno expressed. He used the German "*Stimmigen*" and "*Unstimmigen*", "*Richtigen*" and "*Falschen*", which I believe referred to the cognitive (exact-inexact) and ethical (right-wrong) sphere.

[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy*, trans. John Wild and James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 30; orig. ed. *Éloge de la Philosophie. Leçon inaugurale faite au Collège de France, le jeudi 15 janvier 1953* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953).

[6] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy*, 31.

[7] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy*, 41.

[8] Thomas Harrison, "Filosofia dell'arte, filosofia della morte," in *Filosofia '95*, edited by Gianni Vattimo (Bari: Laterza, 1996), 7.

[9] Alessandro Arbo, "Ton ou son? Réfléchir sur la musique (d')aujourd'hui," in *Archéologie de l'écoute. Essais d'esthétique musicale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), 334.

[10] Not that there was absolute unity of style in the preceding centuries, but certainly there was not such a plurality of voices as has characterised the contemporary age. To this regard, as Charles Rosen wrote in *Sonatas Forms* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), there is a tendency to overvalue the stylistic unity of the late 18th century. In that historical period there were not conflicts like those of the present age (like that, for example, between Gian Carlo Menotti and John Cage, at least to which there is common reference). Nevertheless, Rosen goes on to say, that in the 1780s there were composers whose styles were more different from Haydn's than Benjamin Britten's differed from Stravinskij's.

[11] Theodor W. Adorno, "Vers une musique informelle," in *Quasi una fantasia. Essay on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London-New York: Verso, 1992), 271.

[12] Alfredo Parente, "La crisi del linguaggio come crisi morale," in *Castità della musica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1961 [1948]), 52.

[13] As Esther Calvino explains, Italo Calvino wrote five lectures before leaving for the US. The sixth, entitled "Consistency", had been written at Harvard and so was not found on his desk, in the folder in which the lectures were carefully collected.

[14] Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1; orig. ed. *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milano: Garzanti, 1988).

FIRST MOVEMENT

HISTORY AND TECHNICS

CHAPTER ONE

EXTREMES: CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND ITS 'CONTRADICTIONS'

1. Modern, Post-modern or Contemporary?

There is a first, preliminary problem that appears as soon as we begin to talk of so-called 'contemporary music'. The fact is that there are at least three adjectives available to define music composed from the beginning of the 20th century to our own days: modern, post-modern and contemporary. Why should we prefer one rather than another of these adjectives? How should the music of our own time be considered? And what attributes should it have in order to fit one of these three definitions? It is my belief that in order to approach the most intricate, but also the most interesting questions at the heart of the debate on music since the early 20th century, it is necessary to establish the subject of the relationship between music, modernity, post-modernity and contemporaneity, starting specifically from the modern/post-modern problem. In fact, to speak of contemporary music (which I shall do in the course of this book) is not only to place something within a chronologically defined period, but to attribute to it certain characteristics which may properly be spoken of as contemporary. To this end, the starting point is, as I have said, the relationship between music and modernity.

It is particularly complicated to interpret certain stages of the history of music in the light of categories, historical coordinates, transversal periodisations that are held to be valid in fields other than the philosophico- or sociologico-musical. The concepts of modernity and post-modernity, though clearly expressed and constantly rethinkable, can in any case be brought back to theoretical contexts and perspectives that have provided, and still provide, tools useful to the social scientist or philosopher for the interpretation of the real. If modernity, in its various

expressions, is a compact symbolic, albeit problematic, universe, post-modernity may be said to represent the negation/surpassing of this universe, which has now been fragmented into a dense network of possible micro-universes.

The term post-modern especially appears in all its complexity and contradiction. That it is of a basically contradictory nature is the conviction of various theoreticians, such as Donald Kuspit, according to whom "The term 'post-modernism' reflects the uncertain destiny of criticality in contemporary society and culture"[1]. From this point of view, post-modernism is seen as a very versatile category, a sort of passkey that can be used to open all doors: culture, society, the arts, politics, philosophy and so on. To this characterisation another can be added, according to which:

> Post-modernism is more of a program developed by theorists than the common reality of contemporary society and culture. Post-modernism is a rhapsodic, elusive, exhilarating concept, used with license, because the hopes and fears–anxious ambitions?–of theorists are riding on it. I suggest that the term "post-modernism" is deliberately kept flexible and enchanting–so rich with connotations that it dissolves on direct contact with reality–as a pretentious, pseudo-autonomous display of theory's critical power in its bourgeois situation of social impotence[2].

Kuspit's is a very interesting viewpoint, which, here, must be adapted with reference to our approach. Hence, respective of the historico-cultural succession of modernity and post-modernity, where does the musical phenomenon fit in? I believe that its position is decidedly anomalous, one might almost say 'dangerous'. If we were to see post-modernity as beginning with the crisis of man, as revealed at the turn of the 19th-20th century, it might be thought that, in parallel and contextually, this loss of the 'centre' was attested and declined in music too. Traditionally (though already in Bach there are cases of criticism of tonality[3] which, analogously with Giotto's intuitive perspective, prefigure certain later developments), it is to Richard Wagner, with his famous "*Tristan-Akkord*" in *Tristan und Isolde*, that the beginning is traced of what was to be the atonal, dodecaphonic revolution. Traditional harmony, unfolded melody, lovely, well-defined forms revert to ingredients of out-of-date sound structures, to threadbare formants, limited and limiting. The radical turnaround brought about by the Second School of Vienna (Arnold Schönberg, Anton Webern and Alban Berg) meant the end of the great structural 'forms' that constituted the development of western music, the annihilation of the