

Quasi una Fantasia

instrumental music from the outset, above all in the idea of timbral melody [*Klangfarbenmelodie*].

Thus the new music has two extreme tendencies. On the one hand, it is emancipated expressiveness; on the other, there is electronic music whose material laws seem to preclude the subjective intervention of the composer, just as they preclude that of the interpreter. The fact that these extremes actually meet confirms the objective trend towards unity. In the final analysis it leads to the liquidation of the concept of new music. This is not because the new music is simply absorbed into a larger *musica perennis*, but because music in general will be absorbed into the new music. The latter brings to fulfilment the idea contained in all traditional music. It is for this reason that the new music is obsolete as a particular category; it is a suspect subheading. The concept has become irrelevant because by the side of the new music all other music production has become impossible. It has degenerated into kitsch. The distinction between new music and music in general becomes the distinction between good and bad music as such.

(1960)

Vers une musique informelle

In memory of Wolfgang Steinecke

Dire cela, sans savoir quoi.
Beckett, *L'Innommable*

| Anyone of my age and experience who is both a musician and who thinks about music finds himself in a difficult quandary. One side of it consists in the attitude 'so far and no further'. In other words, it consists in clinging to one's youth as if modernity were one's own private monopoly. This means resisting at all costs everything which remains inaccessible to one's own experience or at least one's primary, basic reactions. This had once been the attitude of confirmed Wagnerians when confronted by Strauss, and the Straussians adopted it in their turn as a defence against the new music of the Schoenberg persuasion. We are perfectly modern ourselves; who are they to offer us tuition? Sometimes, of course, my narcissism, which asserts itself even though I can see through it, has a hard task persuading itself that the countless composers of music that can only be understood with the aid of diagrams and whose musical inspiration remains wholly invisible to me can really all be so much more musical, intelligent and progressive than myself. I frequently find myself unable to repress the thought that their system-driven music is not so very different from the false notes arbitrarily introduced into the neo-Classical concertos and wind ensembles of the music festivals of thirty or forty years ago. Musicians are usually truants from maths classes; it would be a terrible fate for them to end up in the hands of the maths teacher after all. The speculative artist above

all ought to cling to the vestiges of common sense which would remind him that music is not necessarily more advanced just because he has failed to comprehend it. It may indeed be so primitive and uninspired that he failed to consider it an option in the first place. This explains why the products of laborious mindlessness are sometimes not seen through at the outset. Because the musical material is intelligent in itself, it inspires the belief that mind must be at work, where in reality only the abdication of mind is being celebrated.

The other side of the dilemma becomes visible when we see how many members of the older generation feel compelled to go along with the latest trend in order to avoid being thrown on the scrapheap. The works they produce are greeted by the most part with well-earned disdain by the young. At best they are tolerated for their propaganda value. It is essential to overcome these equally unpalatable alternatives. They are too abstract and operate solely at the level of the subjective judge where nothing counts but the content of the judgement and the motives underlying it. Nor is the prehistory of musical judgement, the judge's own intellectual pedigree, decisive here, although that is undoubtedly an important factor in the formation of his thought. I would not wish to claim that my membership of Schoenberg's Viennese school confers any particular authority on me or to assert that as an initiate I had easy answers to these questions.

What we have to contend with in the development of music since 1945 did not simply appear from a clear blue sky. It can be seen to have been haunting everything that is included nowadays under the rather suspect title of 'classical' twelve-note technique. I have been very favourably impressed by works of the Kranichstein or Darmstadt School such as Stockhausen's *Zeitmaße*, *Gruppen*, *Kontakte*, and *Carré*, as well as Boulez's *Marteau sans maître*, his Second and Third Piano Sonatas and his Sonatina for Flute. I was also deeply moved by a single hearing of Cage's Piano Concerto played on Cologne Radio, though I would be hard put to define the effect with any precision. Even at the best of times precise definition is anything but straightforward with works of this kind.

4 Nevertheless, my reaction to most of these works is qualitatively different from my reaction to the whole tradition down to, and doubtless including, Webern's last works. My productive imagination does not reconstruct them all with equal success. I am not able to participate, as it were, in the process of composing them as I listen, as I still could with Webern's String Trio, which is anything but a simple piece. But what I am tempted at first to register as my own subjective inadequacy may turn out not to be that at all. It may well prove to be the case that 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. In traditional listening the music unfolds from the parts to the whole, in tune with the flow of time itself. This flow – that is to say, the parallel between the temporal succession of musical events and the pure flow of time itself – has become problematical and presents itself within the work as a task to be thought through and mastered.

5 It is no accident that in his theoretical essay 'How time passes'¹ – easily the most important one on this topic – Stockhausen should have dealt with the central issue of how to achieve unified parameters of pitch and duration in the context of partition, that is to say, from top to bottom rather than from bottom to top. My first reaction to *Zeitmaße*, in which I relied exclusively on my ears, involved me in a strange interaction with his theory of a static music which arises from a universal dynamics as well as with his theory of cadences. Actual acoustic listening may not provide the ultimate in musical criteria, but it is certainly superior to the far-fetched and idiotic commentaries with which scores are often provided nowadays – the more fulsomely, the less they contain that stands in need of commentary.

6 In the best modern works there is a unity of theory and practice. Listening to actual performances is likely to be the best way of determining whether a musician whose own assumptions lie some way behind the latest developments will thereby be debarred from an adequate appreciation. The recognition of

1. *Die Reihe*, no. 3, 1957, p. 13. [Adorno's note.]

frontiers implies the possibility of crossing them. It is just as urgent for musical theory to reflect on its own procedures as it is for music itself. It is the bitter fate of any theory worthy of the name that it is able to think beyond its own limitations, to reach further than the end of its nose. To do this is almost the distinguishing mark of any authentic thinking. It is in this spirit that these pages, which are not the product of the most recent ideas, venture to speak of one of the most advanced concepts – namely, that of an informal or, to use Metzger's term, an *a-serial* music.

Given the prestissimo of recent years, the time is perhaps not unfavourable for such an attempt. The developmental lines of composition themselves seem to converge with the postulate of musical emancipation which I find so appealing. I have coined the French term *musique informelle* as a small token of gratitude towards the nation for whom the tradition of the avant-garde is synonymous with the courage to produce manifestoes. In contrast to the stuffy aversion to 'isms' in art, I believe slogans are as desirable now as they were in Apollinaire's day. *Musique informelle* resists definition in the botanical terms of the positivists. If there is a tendency, an actual trend, which the word serves to bring into focus, it is one which mocks all efforts at definition, just as Nietzsche, no bad authority on musical matters, once remarked that every historical phenomenon eluded semiotic attempts at definition.

I am not able to provide any programmes for athematic music or any statistical law governing the incidence of marks on the writing paper, or anything of the sort that might clarify my vision of informal music. Nevertheless, I should like at least to attempt to stake out the parameters of the concept. What is meant is a type of music which has discarded all forms which are external or abstract or which confront it in an inflexible way. At the same time, although such music should be completely free of anything irreducibly alien to itself or superimposed on it, it should nevertheless constitute itself in an objectively compelling way, in the musical substance itself, and not in terms of external laws. Moreover, wherever this can be achieved without running the

risk of a new form of oppression, such an emancipation should also strive to do away with the system of musical co-ordinates which have crystallized out in the innermost recesses of the musical substance itself.

9 Of course this gives rise to the difficulty that in the absence of such residual forms, musical coherence appears to be quite inconceivable, while their survival as foreign bodies inhibits the integrated elaboration of musical events. This contradiction highlights most clearly the problems facing music at a stage when an unconstrained musical nominalism, the rebellion against any general musical form, becomes conscious of its own limitations. Just as in dialectical logic, so here too in aesthetics the universal and the particular do not constitute mutually exclusive opposites. If informal music dispenses with abstract forms – in other words, with the musically bad universal forms of internal compositional categories – then these universal forms will surface again in the innermost recesses of the particular event and set them alight. This was the greatness of Webern's music.² However, a universality and cohesion achieved by means of specificity must be as hostile towards the same qualities as borrowed from the tradition, as it would be towards a pure mathematics of objective reality which remains neutral towards individual phenomena.

10 Such informal music had been a real possibility once before, around 1910. The date is not irrelevant, since it provides a demarcation line, dividing the age from the vastly overrated twenties. The beginnings can be seen in the period when Schoenberg wrote *Erwartung*, *Die glückliche Hand* and *Herzgewächse*, and Stravinsky the *Three Poems from the Japanese*. But this age, the age of synthetic Cubism, soon drifted into other directions. Quite early on, in *Die glückliche Hand*, we find Schoenberg making use of all too palpable surface structures, together with a sort of recapitulation – a notable contrast to *Erwartung*, although doubtless with good reason. These surface

2. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Der getreue Korrepetitor. Lehrschriften zur musikalischen Praxis*, Frankfurt am Main 1963, *passim*, especially pp. 102 and 129. [See also *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15, Frankfurt am Main 1976, pp. 252 and 179.] [Adorno's note.]

structures contribute greatly to the articulation of the work as drama, but represent a regression when compared to the ideal achieved in *Erwartung*, in which everything strives forward to a coda without a recapitulation. And the *Pierrot Lunaire*, above all, cites a myriad of traditional individual forms, albeit with irony. Looking back on it today we can see that Schoenberg comes quite close to Stravinsky. The *Pierrot Lunaire* became a so-called popular work because of these unmodified basic forms and the familiar configurations they gave rise to, configurations which contrasted markedly with *Erwartung*, the song with celesta and also the Four Orchestral Songs, Opus 22. As with the twelve-note technique later on, Schoenberg is running for cover.

What stopped the development of the 'free musical style', as Alois Haba termed it over thirty years ago, was not anything inherent in the music, as Schoenberg may well have imagined, but sociological and ideological factors. We have to link the revisionism in musical structure with such statements by Schoenberg as the one contained in a letter he wrote to Richard Dehmelt in 1912, asking whether he would be willing to provide the text for 'a work that would fill a whole evening':

I have long wanted to write an oratorio on the following subject: modern man, having passed through materialism, socialism and anarchism, having been an atheist, but still retaining the vestiges of his ancient faith (in the form of superstition), wrestles with God (see also Strindberg's *Jacob Wrestling*). He finally manages to find God and become religious. He learns to pray.³

In this naive quotation the need to return to theological authority is combined with the renunciation of political radicalism. But in an artist like Schoenberg such a change in attitude had to have repercussions in his music. The element of violence and rupture in the transition from the experiences of free atonality to the systematization of twelve-note technique, and the conception of religiosity as return, together with the finger-

3. Arnold Schoenberg, *Briefe*, selected and edited by Erwin Stein, Mainz 1958, p. 31. [Adorno's note.]

wagging admonition about learning to pray, all come together, not just historically, but also in terms of musical substance. In both dimensions order is derived from the need for order and not from the truth of the matter. The vulgar notion that twelve-note technique has its origins in the longing for order does contain a grain of truth, however, despite its blindness towards the role played in its emergence by the logic of music itself. In the light of the pretended objectivization of music the task is to resume the process which Schoenberg throttled at the very moment when his brilliant innovation appeared to give it fresh impetus.

15 A *musique informelle* would have to take up the challenge posed by the idea of an unrevised, unrestricted freedom. But not a repeat of the style of 1910. It is not possible to carry on composing undeterred in the manner of the most daring works of that period, Schoenberg's most productive one. It is no doubt true that the phrase about the irreversible nature of history, the wheel of time which cannot be turned back, says everything and nothing. The psychologists are familiar with the alacrity with which people hold time responsible for matters which they do not wish to examine too closely or for which they want to disclaim all responsibility. But the impossibility of a revolutionary restoration is a concrete reality. Once the new principles of construction have crystallized out, they entail total and pure consequentiality, even when the principles themselves are subject to dramatic change. Hangovers from the past, such as chromatic relationships within free atonality, can no longer be tolerated as they were at a time when the immanent requirements of the musical means had not yet made themselves fully felt. Valéry has noted that anyone who looks at the achievements of the avant-gardes of the past – and the musical avant-garde of 1910 is now fifty years old – will be constantly struck by their timidity. Or, as Cocteau put it, although they went too far, one is astonished to see by how little they did so. But in fact this timidity is more apparent than real. Every art contains elements which appear natural and self-evident at the moment it is brought into being. Only the course of further developments makes clear that

they have come into being and are therefore transitory, so that their naturalness stands revealed as a 'second nature'.

But this discovery changes everything. It is to Stockhausen that we owe the insight that in a certain sense the whole rhythmical and metrical structure of music, including atonal and twelve-note music, has remained within the bounds of tonality. This insight can no longer be forgotten; the contradiction it points to can no longer be tolerated. The fact that since then the relationships between all the dimensions of musical composition have been thoroughly ploughed over, that each one inevitably affects the others, has now become as deeply pervasive as any compositional technique of the past. Even thematic work, in the broadest sense, nowadays displays a tonal aspect, if the word is taken in its truest sense. Admittedly, the significance and the greatness of the works composed just before the First World War can no longer be divorced from their own illogicality. Their effects were so profound simply because of the friction produced by their interaction with something they still felt to be alien, something with which they had not become identical. But even friction coefficients cannot be preserved artificially.

Over the last fifty years there has been a huge growth in the productive forces of music, that is to say, in technique, in the simple ability to exercise control over right and wrong. This does not imply that a stubborn belief in progress should lead us to ascribe a higher value to what is written now than to the products of the past. The point is rather that the advances in control over the material of music cannot now be reversed, even though the results, the actual compositions, do not show the same progress. This is one of the paradoxes of the history of art. No consciousness can assume a greater innocence than it actually possesses. Any attempt to ignore recent developments and to become fixated on the musical modes of the past in the belief that the technically less advanced is capable of achieving a higher quality, is doomed to failure.

The most powerful argument in favour of the authenticity of the historical development is provided by the compelling immediacy, despite all actual mediations of the differences in

quality of the most recent compositions when presented in live performance. In general this immediacy is all the greater, the more rigorously the logic of the construction is followed through. Laxer methods, such as can be seen, for example, in electronic music, are recognizable by their liking for 'attractive sonorities' [*Klangreiz*], to use an old-fashioned Impressionist word, and they are betrayed by their peculiarly ineffectual speculativeness, which seems both cunning and stupid at the same time.⁴

17 The dilemma of a situation which calls for a truly informal music can be summarized in the recognition that, on the one hand, the more urgently the structural arrangements insist through their own shape on their own necessity, the more they become guilty of acquiring contingent matter, external to the composing subject; while, on the other hand, the composer who strives to resist this paradox sinks to the level of the ephemeral and the arbitrary, even though the rules he is confronted with are administrative prescriptions. Almost inevitably new music's supposed freedom of scope is forced back to that condition which was the starting point for the entire movement. Here too we become conscious of an acute antinomy.

18 Up to now every composer who has insisted on his own integrity and refused to compose in any way other than that suggested by his own spontaneous reactions, or who has rebelled against the constraints of the principles of construction, has failed miserably in his attempt to break fresh ground. Instead,

4. The false emphasis on the idea of sonority [*Klang*] in the new music is the sign of the dilettante and of those people who place arbitrary interpretations on what they have failed to understand. The dimension of sonority is perhaps the most prominent element in the new music, having been liberated by it and, though newly discovered, it is less in conflict with older listening habits than anything else. However, in works which count it is never an end in itself, but instead is both functional in the context of the work and also provides an element of fermentation. Schoenberg always stressed that sonority [*Klang*] was a means to achieve the adequate representation of the musical idea. If the new music is at all incompatible with what preceded it, it is in the absence of sonic attractiveness [*Klangreiz*] as a categorical concept. This is still the most popular way into mis-hearing it. This has been confirmed by the most recent development, in which sonority has been integrated into the overall construction as one of its parameters. [Adorno's note.]

without suspecting it, he simply repeats the attitudes of those contemporaries of free atonality who proudly claimed not to be snobs, but who only succeeded in producing rubbish instead of works that were unmistakably their own. If, on the other hand, a composer wilfully ignores the pattern of his own reactions and succumbs to the illusion that he can roll up his sleeves and labour away at the material to hand he will find that he has surrendered to the philistinism of reified consciousness. The strategic task facing an informal music would be to break out of this double bind.

In his actual practice Schoenberg himself never committed himself fully to the idea of the totality of relationships, of panthematic composition. From his Opus 10 on his entire production oscillated between the extremes of the totally thematic and the athematic. With an iron nerve he refused to seek a compromise, but instead held the two modes apart in sharp opposition to each other. In the third movement of the Quartet in F-sharp minor, the variations, he uses tonal means to bring about a concentration of the thematic and motivic relationships in a way that does not recur until his serial compositions. The last movement of the same work, however, comes close to non-thematic music, despite the presence of rather vague motivic reminiscences and a drastic articulation following the recitative-like and arioso-like codas, both of which are repeated. The sequence of Schoenberg's revolutionary works forms a rhythmic alternation between freedom and organization, like that between a concentrated breathing in and out.

The Three Pieces for Piano, Opus 11 move in the direction of the athematic; the final one actually achieves it, while in the second a developing variation shrivels into the bald reiteration of motifs and segments. As if by way of compensation, the large-scale architectonics are traditionalist in the first piece, a three-part song-form, with a repetition of the first section [m 53] which is disguised by its rhetoric and hence difficult to hear. In the second piece the outlines of an extended recapitulation are unmistakable. The majority of the Five Orchestral Pieces, Opus 16, on the other hand, are thematic; the dense orchestral texture sets up thematic relationships between the different parts almost

involuntarily. Here too there is a compensatory element. The forms are altogether freer: in the first piece, thanks to the *ostinato* idea which exercises an almost magnetic attraction on the direction of the piece; the second, because of the consistent use of the prosaic principle. In the middle pieces three-part forms are also evoked, in the rapid fourth, for example, the scherzo is reconceived in terms of the moment of eruption. Then the following work, the monodrama *Erwartung*, is again athematic, like a premonition of automatic writing, while the *Pierrot* is thematic and the Wind Quintet takes thematicism to an extreme. Lastly, the String Trio leans once again towards the athematic, at least in its rhythmic articulation: coherent or even comprehensible themes are scarcely attempted. Schoenberg's conception of a fully constructed totality overlaps with the opposing impulse. He rebels against the principle which he himself established, perhaps just because it is established, and he longs simply to let himself go.

21 Today this tension would have to be released in each individual work. It is by no means the case that the expression of the subject, which alternates in Schoenberg with constructivity, has made way for a musical order of existence, an ontology. It is doubtless true that serial and post-serial music and the radical Western experiments of the young Stravinsky and Varèse have rendered the Expressionist ideal irretrievably obsolete. In the case of the latter, however, the discontent with expression can be reinterpreted as the positive wish-fulfilment of a musical cosmos in which the individual subjects who are expressing themselves are balanced against each other to the point where the individual's power to express himself becomes unnecessary and irrelevant. The contemporary rebellion against subjectivity has nothing in common with the reactionary anti-subjectivity which has been under way for over forty years, apart from the conviction which has received the seal of approval from official ideology that man no longer stands in the centre of creation.⁵ But this loss is not glorified as a new, higher stage of development.

5. A reference to Hans Sedlmayr's *Verlust der Mitte* [The Loss of the Centre] 1957, which popularized this thesis.

The new rebellion sacrifices no nuance, but in tendency at least, it raises each nuance from the realm of expression onto a less malleable technological plane. It retains a firm hold on the achievements of subjectivity; its exponents all maintain the tradition of the Schoenberg School rather than that of neo-Classicism. It is worlds away from the recuperation of the pristine, and hence from any tendency to make a cult of its objectivity. But it does represent a response to the progressive expropriation of the individual to the point where it threatens to overwhelm the totality with catastrophe. Because of this recent history has reacted by coating every direct expression of subjectivity with a layer of vanity, inauthenticity and ideology.

In the tradition of Western nominalism art had always imagined that it could locate its enduring core and substance in the subject. This subject now stands exposed as ephemeral. While it behaves as if it were the creator of the world, the ground of reality, it turns out to be what the English call a 'fake', the mere trappings of someone who gives himself airs, sets himself up as something special, while scarcely retaining any reality at all. The events that have taken place in the world, which are repeated daily and can get even worse, have contributed effectively to the undermining of art in which subjectivity asserts itself as a positive good, just as they have devalued every would-be pious community art. Impossible though it be to conceive of music, or indeed any art, as bereft of the element of subjectivity, it must nevertheless bid farewell to that subjectivity which is mirrored in expression and hence is always affirmative, a form of subjectivity which Expressionism inherited directly from neo-Romanticism. To that extent the situation is irreconcilable with the position of classical Expressionism in which expression and the individual were unproblematic features of music.

With the increasing mastery of the material the events at the subjective pole of music inevitably unsettle the opposite pole, the musical material itself. Misunderstandings arise because of the tenacious resistance of the concept to any abstract designation. But this resistance is historical in form. The sound material available is different at different times and it is not possible to

overlook these differences in considering the concrete shape of the work. Material cannot be thought of except as the stuff with which the composer operates and in which he works. And this in turn is nothing less than the objectified and critically reflected state of the technical productive forces of an age with which any given composer is inevitably confronted. The physical and historical dimensions mutually interact.

In Viennese Classicism, for example, the material comprises not just tonality, the tempered tuning system, the possibility of modulation through the complete circle of fifths. It also includes countless idiomatic components which add up to the musical language of the age. One might say that music operates *within* that language, rather than *with* it. Even typical forms such as the sonata, the rondo, the character variation, or syntactic forms like those of the antecedent and consequent, were largely a priori givens, rather than forms actively chosen.

What Schenker calls the fundamental line [*Urfinie*] is in reality probably the essence of that idiom expressed as a norm. When he reproaches Wagner with having destroyed the fundamental line, he speaks no more than the truth in the sense that in Wagner for the first time the form-creating function of musical idiom was being eroded by the process of evolution of the musical material.

Schenker's lasting achievement as an analyst is and remains the fact that he was the first to demonstrate the constitutive importance of tonal relationships, as understood in the widest sense, for the concrete shape of a composition – an achievement which stands in curious contrast to his cult of genius. Imprisoned in his dogmatic approach, however, he failed to perceive the countervailing force. This was the fact that the tonal idiom does not just 'compose' of its own volition, but that it actually obstructs the specific conception of the composer as soon as the moment of the classical unity of both elements has vanished. Dazzled by the idiom, he hypostatized it and, notwithstanding insights into structure which have affinities with Schoenberg's practice, he strove to establish for a reactionary aesthetics a solid foundation in musical logic which tallied all too well with his loathsome political views.

In contrast to his formulae, whose sterility is not eliminated by his habit of pointing to them as if to a sublime and unalterable norm, the composer's relationship to those features of the tonal idiom which have freed themselves from their original context has resulted in egregious difficulties whose effects are still with us. In *Kranichstein* I once accused a composition, which in intention at least had managed to unify all possible parameters, of vagueness in its musical language. Where, I asked, was the antecedent, and where the consequent? This criticism has to be modified. Contemporary music cannot be forced into such apparently universal categories as 'antecedent' and 'consequent', as if they were unalterable. It is nowhere laid down that modern music must a priori contain such elements of the tradition as tension and resolution, continuation, development, contrast and reassertion; all the less since memories of all that are the frequent cause of crude inconsistencies in the new material and the need to correct these is itself a motive force in modern music.

Of course musical categories are probably indispensable to achieve articulation, even if they have to be wholly transformed, unless we are going to rest content with an undifferentiated jumble of sounds. The problem, however, is not to restore the traditional categories, but to develop equivalents to suit the new materials, so that it will become possible to perform in a transparent manner the tasks which were formerly carried out in an irrational and ultimately inadequate way. This would be the prime task of the material theory which I am envisaging here.⁶ But if the materials of music are not static, and if to work with the available materials is to mean more than contenting oneself with a craftsmanlike approach which aims at no more than the skilful manipulation of the means available, then materials themselves will be modified by the act of composition. The materials will emerge from every successful work they enter, as if newly born. The secret of composition is the energy which moulds the

6. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler. Eine musikalische Physiognomie*, Frankfurt am Main 1960, pp. 124 ff. [Now also in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 13, *The Musical Monographs*, second edn, Frankfurt am Main 1977, pp. 239ff. [Adorno's note.]

material in a process of progressively greater appropriateness. Anyone who refuses to take cognizance of such a dialectic will fall victim to the sterility of the New Sobriety [*neue Sachlichkeit*]. This transferred to music requirements which were already encountering resistance in architecture from where they originated, even though they had a greater justification in the practical exigencies of architecture than in music.

30 The risk I am alluding to manifests itself in what I have heretically termed the loss of tension. The real social emasculation of the individual, which everyone feels, does not leave the artist unscathed. It is scarcely imaginable that in an age when the individual is so diminished and is conscious of his impotence and apathy, he should feel the same compulsion to produce as did individuals in more heroic epochs. Given the anthropology of the present age, the call for a non-revisionist music is to expect too much. Composers tend to react to it by renouncing any control of their music by their ego. They prefer to drift and to refrain from intervening, in the hope that, as in Cage's *bon mot*, it will be not Webern speaking, but the music itself. Their aim is to transform psychological ego weakness into aesthetic strength.

31 Something of the sort may be said to have been anticipated by their antipode, integral twelve-note technique, if we view it as the attempt to free the ear from the obligation of ubiquitous immediacy, permanent presence, by normalizing and institutionalizing that obligation. But the very relief this brought resulted in an important shift, a quite concrete and specific shift of emphasis in the material itself. I mention just one example. One of the crucial impulses of twelve-note technique, one recently confirmed in Webern's posthumously published lectures, was the prohibition on repeating any one note before all the others had appeared. A work like Webern's *Bagatelles for String Quartet*, Opus 9, which does not yet embody the principles of dodecaphony, obeys this injunction more purely and more rigorously than anything that came later. One argument in favour of the thesis that systematization brings about a qualitative change, is that the moment the four basic row shapes were fixed, music abandoned the experience which gave rise to them. If a

composer writes less ascetically than Webern in the period of the works from Opus 9 to Opus 11 – if, in other words, he uses more notes, and if he attempts, legitimately, to create not just intensive, but also more detailed music – he will find himself violating the prohibition on repeating notes. The combination of different row transformations, the use of a second basic shape to accompany a melodic row, merging rows harmonically or combining them contrapuntally – all these are incompatible with that requirement. Such methods easily result in that fatal preponderance of an individual note which triggered off the original dodecaphonic rebellion. The entire situation is a textbook model of musical dialectics.⁷

Illuminating for the present controversy is the confrontation of a possibly apocryphal statement of Schoenberg's with utterances of very different musicians like Eimert and Cage. When Darius Milhaud visited Schoenberg in Brentwood after the Second World War and told him of the universal triumph of twelve-note technique, Schoenberg is said to have been less than delighted, a reaction with which it is easy to sympathize. Instead, he asked, 'Indeed, and do they actually compose with it?' This tallies with the cumbersome, but stubbornly defended description he gave of twelve-note technique, namely, 'composition with twelve notes related only to one another'. Everything in him resisted the idea that the notes somehow composed themselves,

7. The sensitivity towards repetition which, according to *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, is one of the motivating forces of twelve-note technique, is less ambiguous when viewed from a distance than when it was discussed there. Its dialectic is one of the architectonic features of music as such. As a developmental structure music is an absolute negation of repetition, in accordance with Heraclitus' assertion that no one ever steps into the same river twice. On the other hand, it is only able to develop by virtue of repetition. Thematic work, the principle which concretizes the abstract passage of time in terms of musical substance, is never more than the dissimilarity of the similar. A development which leads to something new can only do so thanks to its relationship to the old which is assumed a priori in such a relation and is repeated in however sublimated and unrecognizable a form. There can be no articulated music in the absence of this highly formal constituent of similarity; identity in non-identity is its lifeblood. In serial music this dialectic is taken to extremes. Absolutely nothing may be repeated and, as the derivative of One thing, absolutely everything is repetition. The task of informal music would be to rethink this dialectic and incorporate it into its own organizational structure. [Adorno's note.]

or even that their pure essence is the meaning of music and must manifest itself in the composition: they were there to be composed with. In contrast to this Eimert, in his essay 'The Composer's Freedom of Decision' (in the third issue of *Die Reihe*), asserts very succinctly, 'The notes' – the context is Messiaen's celebrated short piano composition *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* – 'do not function, they exist. Not that psychology in music is to give way to physics. The sums don't work out as neatly as that. The acoustic process is the product of the intercourse between perception and the state of the object.'

33 The contrast here is profound. Schoenberg's 'Indeed, and do they actually compose with it?' contains in the 'with it' a residue of unresolved externality. Composition is understood in a traditional sense; the composer composes with raw material which he works on thematically, establishing motivic connections which in Webern, thanks to their extremely condensed nature, develop into an all-embracing canonic system. Material and composition remain alien, opposed to each other. Ways of mediating between them have not been worked out. This alienness becomes manifest in the decline of the element of idiom. Previously the problem of reconciling composition and material was not the least of its tasks. But the more complete the composer's control of his material and the more vigorous his rejection of established musical categories as conventional, then the more abrasive his encounter with his material tends to become.

34 In consequence the composer's traditional way of making use of the notes becomes tinged with something anti-traditional, something comparable to an industrial form of production: a ruthlessness in the treatment of the material which was inconceivable when the musical subject was in its prime. Nor is the situation affected by the fact that the composer's material, the row, is preformed – or, as many would not hesitate to assert, manipulated by him. The twelve-note row is treated far more uninhibitedly than was earlier the case with interval successions, chords and the idiomatic elements of tonality, without any great concern being shown about the connections between *what* is composed and the *materials* of composition. But the objection to

twelve-note practice is no less problematic. This approach simply accepts as realities in themselves what are actually a subjective set of sound materials which have been preformed by history. The note is hypostatized, as it were. This is the basis of the concept of the parameter. According to this concept all musical dimensions of the entire piece of music should be deducible from the properties of individual notes.

In a strange way this leads here, and not only here, to a resurgence of certain motifs of *Jugendstil*. Following the demise of aesthetic Victorianism, with its obsession with copying other styles, *Jugendstil* hoped that it would be possible to create a new formal idiom solely from a pre-existing set of materials. The result was that plethora of refined and spiritual structures which were still causing such mischief in 1920 in such activities as rhythmic gymnastics, expressive dancing and the arts and crafts. The confusion here lay in the idea that the purely subjective work could be avoided by fetishizing the subject matter, as if it were as pure as the driven snow. Absolute qualities were attributed to it in the hope that they would speak. But these materials, the idea of the world as a precious jewel, only become what they are by virtue of their relationships, if not to the individual subject, then at least to the collective subject that negotiates with them. It is doubtless true that the idea of the selfhood and absolute identity of the material used in advanced music has been purified of *kitschig* associations. It would not occur to any half-way intelligent theoretician of Serialism to talk of noble sounds in the way people used to talk of rough or unsmoothed material, and so forth.

But there is an echo of that ideology in the credo that the raw material, the note in itself is more than simply just there and actually enjoys a real existence. If this ideology is eradicated from the whole conception, then nothing remains of the much-vaunted material to which the composer submits, except for natural, physical qualities. As such, however, they are pre-artistic, crudely factual and incapable of guaranteeing anything of aesthetic worth. Whatever you do you get it wrong. The first task is to establish an awareness of the limitations. Schoenberg's dictum, 'Indeed, and do they actually compose with it?' opens the

door to the abuse of operating with the twelve notes as if they still belonged within the scheme of tonality. But the hypothesis that the note 'exists' rather than 'functions' is either ideological or else a misplaced positivism. Cage, for example, perhaps because of his involvement with Zen Buddhism, appears to ascribe metaphysical powers to the note once it has been liberated from all supposed superstructural baggage. This destruction of the superstructure is conceived along botanical lines, in the sense that either the tone's basic acoustic material is scooped out from it, or else the composer relies on chance, placing his trust in probability theory.

37 Eimert underscores the distinction between science and the work of art, but as far as I can see, even he has failed to take the distinction to its logical conclusion and follow through its physical and aesthetic implications. He postulates that 'the musical calculus must harmonize with the fundamental musical material'. Less mathematically, and couched in the language of Hegelian philosophy, this would become the ideal of a musical subject-object. The only question is whether such a harmony is possible. Does not such an a priori requirement beg the question of the identity of subject matter and 'manipulation'? And does that not imply that the subject, which has only been removed after huge efforts, will now return by virtue of the preformation of the musical material? Or alternatively, does it not entail the ascription of an occult quality which mysteriously creates an objective musical meaning to an already prepared material to which the composer has only to adjust himself? In the absence of such explanations an adequate relationship would be nothing but the miracle of a pre-established harmony. Adherents of communication theory will find that hard to swallow.

38 Conversely, the fundamental material – and Eimert is in the right on this point – is not simply the subject in its own right; it also contains the element of what is alien to the subject, the element of otherness. Every musician who comes into contact with physically pure sounds is aware of the shock he experiences. But if what Eimert calls the fundamental material [*Grundstoff*] really cannot be reduced to the subject, then there can be no

identity between it and the 'musical calculus' or the process of composition. In that event, however, it would correspond to the idea of doing justice to the material; to the efforts of art really and truly to be what it is, without the ideological pretence of being something else. Or rather, to admit frankly the fact of non-identity and to follow through its logic instead of covering it up by an appeal to the almost Romantic concept of a seamless identity.

This might well be the way in which Stockhausen would see the matter. At least, it says quite literally in his essay 'How Time Passes' '... should he not' (the composer, that is) 'accept the contradiction and resolve to compose from out of the dialectical relationship, since it frequently appears more fruitful to start from a contradiction than from the definition $2 + 2 = 4$ '. Yet the context in which this sentence occurs is so difficult that I hesitate to appeal to it without further qualification. Nevertheless, he too refers to the antinomy of material and composed music. Stockhausen becomes conscious of it in the context of the problem of the relationship between physically measurable and authentically musical time.

That identity, the congruence of the composition and its pre-formed material, was also the ideal of classical twelve-note technique. Musical totality should also be at one with the set of internal musical relationships. But the problematic nature of that ideal makes it necessary to go beyond the dodecaphonic, as well as beyond the old tonality. Webern called on composers to establish as many interconnections as possible. Alban Berg, and Schoenberg too for that matter, would have agreed. This postulate can scarcely pass unchallenged today. I may perhaps be allowed to reminisce. When one comes across such things as a very young and somewhat naive man, one occasionally gains insights which are easily overlooked because they seem all too obvious, once a certain familiarity with a subject has been attained. When I was not yet twenty, I heard Webern's Five Movements for Strings, Opus 5, for the first time at a music festival, and studied the score. I then wrote an essay on it for the Leipzig *Zeitschrift für Musik*, which published my first pieces of music criticism.

41 In this essay I contrasted Webern with Schoenberg, especially the Schoenberg of Opus 19 and Opus 11. My reservations about Webern would perhaps take a different form nowadays from what they were even ten years ago. I maintained that tendencies which in Schoenberg derived from the need for self-expression and which arose spontaneously and, as it were, irrationally, were given a rationalized and systematic form in Webern. This was already evident in the exhaustive motivic development of the Five Movements, Opus 5. Compared to the unprotected openness of Schoenberg which I so greatly admired, I found the Webern reactionary. I scented reification in his postulate of a maximum of interconnections. It was comparable to what happened later on, in classical twelve-note technique, where the density of organization was intended to make good the loss of the tonal system of relations. In this respect Webern was to be classified among the exponents of traditional, that is, thematic music. Eimert points out that although 'he was the first to abandon the merely linear dimension of the row, he did not do so by integrating the row within a three-dimensional sound world', but that he had gained 'space by splitting up the row into motivic particles and by inserting, as it were, the flat surfaces into each other, thus creating a relief-like network set fast in the sound material, a structure whose material nature and modes of interlocking have only recently become fully transparent'.

42 In an analogous way, in 1957, I interpreted the function of counterpoint as a device for reconstructing the musical space that had been lost. There can be no doubt that that too was what was meant later on by the totality of the relationships distilled from the individual note. Webern did not think in parameters; what he did was to intensify motivic and thematic music in a way that surpassed Schoenberg and he did so in order to eliminate what may be thought of as the fortuitous residues which survived into both atonality and twelve-note technique. But we should add that this greater concentration of the relationships and the tightening up of technique does not necessarily make the musical end-product, the composition, denser and more compelling.

43 There is quite a simple explanation for this. As an instance of

this canon-like interlocking of the row shapes, Webern's Concerto for Nine Instruments is undoubtedly one of his most authentic works. However, the last movement has nothing like the intensive and compelling effect to be expected from his musical method. It resembles a joyful conclusion. The traditional march accompanies the departure of the nine musicians; it is almost consciously archaic in fact. Instead of the universality of the serial relationships putting their stamp on the material, we find ourselves reminded rather of eighteenth-century cassations, which are scarcely in keeping with the times. There is a wide chasm between the means and the end result.

This calls for closer scrutiny, not in order to find fault with Webern, but because of its aesthetic and technical implications. How many relationships should be looked for depends on the character of the work, the nature of what is to be composed, the simplicity or otherwise of what is to be represented in the composition. The totality of relationships as such, their profusion or absence, are not indispensable features of the work's truth-content. They have no merit in themselves, nor do they automatically provide guarantees of musical meaning.

The realization that this is so has made itself felt in the counter-reaction against the totality of relations as expressed in the aleatoric principle. In the *Lichtspiel* music, Opus 34, a relatively straightforward piece which, incidentally, Schoenberg himself undervalued, we find the work pointing away from the ideal of density of texture. All the serial relations are treated in a consciously primitive fashion, whereas in an ambitious work of paradigmatic importance, the Variations for Orchestra, Opus 31, they are gathered together in an extreme of concentration. Contemporary constructivism, likewise, has a graduated scale, according to the aim of the composition, much as there used to be a continuum between sonata and fantasy from which the composer might make his choice.

It is on such choices that the importance of the concept of coherence [*Verbindlichkeit*] may be said to depend. Not everything need be equally coherent, nor need everything aspire to the same kind of coherence. The antinomy of freedom and coherence

cannot be overcome by consigning coherence to the realm of mere method and striving for what is traditionally called 'lawfulness', without reference to content. Compared to the new material, the old thematic work and many of its derivatives were external in the extreme, but the same could be said of conformity to the laws of physics and that fantasy of the *Ding an sich* in art.

47 The misunderstandings about the relationship between coherence and freedom in art date back to Erwin Stein's celebrated essay of 1924 on the new principles of form, which Schoenberg had authorized. He justifies twelve-note technique by arguing that the methods of free atonality did not permit the construction of the large-scale forms of absolute music. They would have stood in need of the text as a crutch, and they only became possible once more with the advent of twelve-note music. Large-scale atonal works, however, existed much earlier.⁸ The oldest, boldest and most important stems from Schoenberg himself, namely the last Orchestral Piece from Opus 16. In this work there is no thematic unity in the usual sense. Instead, symphonic unity is established by a completely different method: the migration of the main line from one voice to the next. Here already the technique of putting things together comes to determine the form. This is only one of the infinite number of organizing principles which can be read out of the conception of the piece and which render superfluous any appeal to systems external to the work.

48 I have never understood the so-called need for order which has led, if not to the invention of twelve-note technique, at least to the current apologies for it. It is also worth reflecting on the reasons which lead people, no sooner have they reached open ground, to create the feeling that it's time for order to be restored, instead of breathing a sigh of relief that such works as *Erwartung* and even the *Elektra* could be written, works which are incomparably closer to the actual conscious and subconscious of contemporary listeners than any artificially imposed style. Scarcely any artistic movement has escaped the toils of such

8. Cf. p. 182 above. [Adorno's note.]

impositions. Even the development from Fauvism to neo-Classicism confirms this, as is borne out by Cocteau's slogan 'L'ordre après le désordre'. I am unable to discern any guarantee of truth in this eternal recurrence of the need for an order based on known systems; on the contrary, they seem rather to be the symbols of perennial weakness. They internalize the social compulsion oppressing them in their supposed kingdom of freedom, the realm of artistic production, and on top of that they confuse it with the innate vocation of art.

The immanent, transparent laws that spring from freedom and the capitulation to an invoked order are mutually incompatible. The contradiction between the power of order and the impotence of human beings cuts them off from their own yearnings, yearnings for which art could assume responsibility. For all the oppressiveness of the actual and spiritual world, they do not really want things to change. They continually reproduce the authoritarian mechanisms within themselves, in the belief that you cannot dispense with the conventions, even when their validity has long since been exposed and even though culture fails to generate anything remotely similar to them any more. This is the dark secret of the Classical ideal, the authentic formalism. In Stravinsky this attitude is atoned for to a certain extent, because he lets the cat out of the bag, naming the conventions for what they are, instead of claiming any musical substantiality for them by false pretences. It is where that is done that the rot sets in.

Categories like order should be scrutinized under the microscope so as to destroy the illusion of their unity. It is illuminating that after the collapse of the tonal schemata, which fell apart because they were unable to create the form which was their *raison d'être*, music should stand in need of organizing powers so as not to lapse into chaos. But the fear of chaos is excessive, in music as in social psychology. It results in the same short-circuiting as is found in the schools of neo-Classicism and twelve-note technique, which in this respect are not all that far apart from each other. Order simply has to be imposed on freedom, the latter must be reined in – so the argument goes –

whereas the situation is rather that freedom should organize itself in such a way that it need bow to no alien yardstick which mutilates everything that strives to shape itself in freedom. Perhaps one day people will be astonished at music's failure to rejoice in its own freedom and at its short-sighted commitment to ideas that were disastrous philosophically, as well as in other respects. People will be astonished, in short, at music's masochism.

51 The discomfort shown by emancipated music when faced by a situation in which anything goes, is handed down from one generation to the next, like the violent order of the world itself. The shadow of that order weighs on all musical construction, all structured composition, to this day. From the standpoint of the composing subject informal music would be music which liberates itself from fear of reflecting it and radiating it back, instead of being governed by it. It would learn how to distinguish between chaos, which in reality never was such a great threat, and the bad conscience of freedom, in which unfreedom can blossom and thrive. Concepts like logic and even causality, which the passion for order necessarily avails itself of, but which even the conception of *musique informelle* cannot entirely dispense with, do not operate literally in works of art, but only in a modified way.

52 To the extent to which works of art share some of the features of reality, logic and causality also intervene, but only in the way in which they function in dreams. If someone invents novel techniques and attempts to justify them, he can easily fall into the trap of naturalizing them, treating them as if they were directly subject to the laws of the phenomenal world. This is demonstrated as much by the pride with which Schoenberg imagined that the twelve-note technique established a lasting control over the material of music, as by the most recent enthusiasm about the supposed origin of sound. It is as important to explode the illusion of naturalness in art as it is to dismiss the superstitious belief in the unambiguous aesthetic necessity which is grounded in that illusion.

53 In works of art there is no such thing as natural causality. When compared with causality in nature, causality in art bears an

extra layer of subjective mediation. The illusion [*Schein*] that art is thus and cannot be otherwise must always be refuted by what art actually is. If works of art exaggerate their fictive necessity and convert it into a literal one, then their 'realistic' attitude will have led them to violate their own reality. The category of correctness, which has been used to supplant that of similarity in art, is no more suitable than the latter to serve as a philosopher's stone. Whatever is observably correct in art can all too easily turn into the false.

The benefits of emancipating aesthetic necessity from the literal variety can be profitably studied at an earlier stage of control of the material of music, namely in *Erwartung*. In this and other closely related works Schoenberg evidently felt that motivic, thematic work was somehow alien to the spontaneous flow of the music. That it was, in short, a form of manipulation, in much the same way as serial determinism appears to be today. Hence the athematic thread in Schoenberg's monodrama. However, it does not simply surrender to chance, but elevates [*aufhebt*] the spirit of motivic, thematic work in a positive assimilation. This brings about a change in the latter; it expands it. From now on this concept subsumes all music (including Webern's middle period) which integrates partial complexes of relative autonomy into a relationship which manifests itself cogently through its characters and their reactions to each other, without its being generally possible to point to motivic similarities and variations. Such things are not rigorously precluded; indeed they are discreetly hinted at on occasion. The impulses and characteristic relations of such music do not presuppose any system laid down in advance or superimposed, not even a principle like the theme.

Instead, they produce interconnections of themselves. To that extent they are the descendants of themes, although themes are not processed in them, or at most only in a rudimentary way, never repeated at intervals. Serial composition, in contrast, makes use on the one hand of the note and all its characteristics and, on the other, of the totality which is derived from it and before which all notes – and rests – are equals. Differentiation and integration are reduced to the same formula and the

composition contains nothing qualitatively different to set against them. A thematic composition, however, is one in which the totality consists of autonomous elements which would be nothing without the totality and without which the totality would not exist.⁹ Despite this serial music should not just be regarded as the antithesis of motivic, thematic composition. In actual fact serial music arose from the totality of motivic, thematic music – that is to say, from the extension of that principle to include time and colour. Both methods aim at total organization. The difference between them could perhaps be stated as follows. In serial composition as a whole unity is regarded as a fact, as an immediate reality. In thematic, motivic music, on the other hand, unity is always defined as becoming and thus as a process of revelation.

56 In each case this implies a different attitude towards dynamics and statics. The way in which music is encoded points to a contradiction it shares with literature. Both are dynamic – as the continuum of syntactic clauses, as mental process and as the temporal succession of mutually conditioning elements. Even in Stravinsky's stylized static constructs, the model cube at the start could not simply change places with one of its subsequent distortions; for in that event those constructs would sacrifice their own punctilious claims. An experiment with the opening march in *Raynard* demonstrates this quite clearly.

57 On the other hand, music and literature alike are reduced to immobility by writing. The spatial, graphic system of signs holds successive events spellbound in simultaneity, in stasis. In neither case is the contradiction superficial. The factor that defines music as a process – namely, the knitting together of themes so that one follows from another – only becomes possible thanks to the fixed pattern of notes. The complex forms by means of which succession is internally organized as such would be inadequate for any improvised, non-written music-making. In the age of

9. I owe the formulation of this distinction to a conversation with Rudolf Kolisch. [Adorno's note.] Kolisch, a prominent interpreter of the views of the Schoenberg Circle, taught Adorno the violin.

obligato composition¹⁰ improvisation quickly died out, and memories of an improvising practice in many of the Fantasies from the age of Viennese Classicism are actually defined by the absence of motivic, thematic dynamics, using the term not in the sense of intensity, needless to say, but in the sense of musical development.

But in the contradiction between its congealed written state and the fluid state it signifies, music shares in the ambiguity [*Scheincharakter*] of developed art, even though it does not pretend to offer any other reality than its own – or if it does, then only intermittently. What is fixed in the sign and is really there, appears in terms of its meaning, as process. The language of words shares something of this quality. Just as all new art rebels against illusion [*Schein*], music rebels against this particular version of it. Looked at from this point of view, its most recent development should be seen as the attempt to discard fictive dynamism, that is to say, to make itself as static in its acoustic form as it always was in its written form. Aleatory music, in which successive sounds can be interchangeable, does in fact go as far as this. Conversely, the loosening of the notation to vanishing point envisages a music which really achieves a stasis to which it could only aspire in the past. This reduction to object status refuses to pretend to be process when in fact all is decided by the notation in advance. It is therefore left with the choice of either ruthlessly realizing the decision taken in advance by downgrading what follows, or else of transforming itself into an authentic process.

However, such a reduction still remains an abstract negation. The static nature of notation is only one side of the problem. The other side is what is heard, the temporal event. Unthinkable though this be without script, the latter is no less unthinkable without the former. Notes are of course more than just directions for performance; they are music objectified as text. This is why they exert a gravitational pull towards being read silently. But what makes a text a text which coincides with its immanent

10. This term was introduced by Eric Doflein. [Adorno's note.]

meaning and which requires no performance is something which unfolds in time.

60 This fact condemns a thoroughgoing static music once more to the status of illusion [*Schein*]. The illusion is that a succession of pure sounds can in reality stand outside time, while what the notes signify in space is nevertheless to be deciphered in temporal sequence, however far the notation may have strayed from measuring time. A succession in time that denies its own progressivity sabotages the obligations of becoming, of process; it fails to motivate why this should follow that and not anything else. But in music nothing has the right to follow something else unless it has been determined by what precedes it or conversely, unless it reveals *ex post facto* that what has preceded it was, in reality, its own precondition.

61 For otherwise the concrete temporal unity of music and its abstract temporal form will break asunder. What demands to appear just now, neither sooner nor later, feeds parasitically on time, since it automatically enters the chain of succession. If a *musique informelle* is expected to absorb thematic, motivic composition into itself, despite its rejection of it, this only means that music should resolve the dilemma of how to reconcile temporal form and musical content. Paradoxically, however, for this to happen recourse must be had to relatively static segments which alone make it possible to generate some dynamism. For an absolute undifferentiated dynamism would of course lapse once more into the static. It is true that the congealed time contained in musical texts can be actualized in every performance or reading, and hence is not identical with empirical time, but is deemed to be distinguished from it. In this respect too the innermost essence of music as a temporal art participates in the aesthetic illusion. But even while distinguishing it from non-aesthetic time, it retains the character of time within itself, although modified by its general inclusion in the category of art. As soon as the notation is actualized – that is to say, the piece is played – it merges with empirical time and possesses chronological duration, even while appearing simultaneously to belong to another order of time, namely that of the work which is

immortalized, as it were, by being written down. One is reminded of Kant's point that numbers, which are thoughts devoid of all intuition [*Anschaung*], must necessarily progress through time and that in consequence logic and intuition must be linked after all.¹¹ Considerations of this kind should not be dismissed as belonging to the realm of philosophical aesthetics. They are rather a part of that direct process of accounting for its own preconditions which the most recent music aims to provide and on which it is based. They have not yet entered into its actual procedures, although they could well protect them from naturalistic misapprehensions.

The quarrel between motivic-thematic and serial music is resolved essentially by the concept of relation, which has undeniably been neglected in thinking about music over the past few years. The reduction to the note had its negative truth. It had obliterated the intentions of the subject which had threatened to atrophy because they were artificially inserted into the work. It pensioned off the entire range of established and worn-out configurations on the grounds that they were disruptive, stylistically impure and inconsistent,¹² although it could not prevent new ones from coming into being uninvited. But it would be wrong to believe in the critical function of the note as opposed to the configuration [*Gestalt*], as if it were an immediate good, as opposed to a superstructure, and to imagine that the note from which all meaning had been removed, could nevertheless supply its own meaning.

The bare note is a transitional element in the critical process of music's reflection on itself, an anti-ideological marginal value. For it to become music, it must needs have recourse to those configurations which it cannot discover within itself. Music is not composed simply of elements purified of larger structures. The idea, still widely prevalent among young composers, that the

11. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Newly edited by Raymund Schmidt on the basis of the first and second original editions, Hamburg 1952, p. 201 (A 142). [Adorno's note.]

12. In actual fact the terms style and stylistic purity do play a certain role in Stockhausen. [Adorno's note.]

basic givens of a single note could determine the totality of a piece of music, come into the category of what Stockhausen has scornfully called *Quanteln*.¹³ Such an idea forgets something which is itself incapable of further reduction, namely relationships. This is the fact that music consists not just of notes, but of the relations between them and that the one cannot exist without the other. But this in turn makes necessary the transition to a *musique informelle*. As an aesthetic ideology the idea of elementary particles was criticized scathingly by Metzger in *Die Reihe*, no. 5.

64 However, the practice of serial music hitherto has consisted of stripping everything right down to the parameter of the individual note and then – the word bears witness against the thing – building the totality up from scratch. Informal music would signal a departure from this practice. Whatever manifests itself in music as immediate, ultimate, as the fundamental given, will turn out, according to the insights of dialectical logic, to be already mediated or postulated. This holds good for the individual note. No doubt, a certain immediacy is undeniable in such elements, as is the fact of a spontaneous, specifically musical experience. Of undoubted significance for music theory is Hegel's insight that although all immediacy is mediated and dependent on its opposite, the concept of an unmediated thing – that is, of something which has become or has been set free – is not wholly engulfed by mediation.

65 Reduced to an element of music the unmediated is not the individual note, but the individual configuration [*Gestalt*]; it should be seen as relatively flexible and distinct from contrast and progress. In comparison, in the actual piece of music, the notes are abstract; they would only be thought of as primary in an acoustic sense, not in the realm of composition. *Ce n'est pas le ton qui fait la musique*. Music is not simply an agglomeration of notes. We are reminded here of the trivial example from gestalt theory whose importance for music has recently been emphasized by Henri Pousseur: the universal possibility of transposition.

13. 'To quantle', i.e., to treat notes as individually valid particles rather than as components of a higher structure. [Note by Eric Graebner.]

Beyond that, it confirms the musical relevance of pitch relationships, since it makes clear that within limits, configurations retain their identity even when their overall pitch level is altered.

Underlying this is the fact uncovered by the unjustly forgotten Ernst Kurth, that notes in music are not physical or even psychological data, but that they possess a unique suppleness, 'elasticity'.¹⁴ Every note that comes within the compass of music is always more than a note, even though it is not possible to say precisely what that 'more' amounts to. In the first place, it must be whatever the note becomes in relation to others. In the terminology of Christian van Ehrenfels from the early days of gestalt psychology, this was called 'gestalt' quality. Musical notes do not form a quasi-physiological continuum, but at best one for which Kurth chose the rather unfortunate and easily misconstrued expression 'psychology'. It is misleading because the continuum of notes is not at the mercy of the whims of the individual psyche, but becomes crystallized in a second objectivity after being mediated by the subjective mind. And it is misleading above all because the elements that enter into that continuum include the non-emotive lifeless, acoustic elements just as much as the emotionally charged [*beseelt*] acts of the subject, and neither the one nor the other can be wholly separated out. The purely acoustic element becomes emotionally charged, whether it will or not, as soon as it is absorbed into the composition; even the unexpressive participates in expression, namely as its negation.

The emotive, however, cannot become music without acoustic support. Not even the subject of musical composition is identical with the psychological subject. The subjectivity at work in art is not the adventitious empirical individual, not the composer. His technical forces of production are the immanent function of the material; only by following the latter's lead does he gain any power over it. By means of such a process of exteriorization, however, it receives back a universality which goes beyond the individuation of the particular producer. Valid labour on the

14. Cf. Ernst Kurth, *Musikpsychologie*, Berlin 1931, Section I, especially pp. 10ff. [Adorno's note.]

work of art is always social labour. It is this that legitimates the talk of artistic rationality. Where there are grounds for asserting that a composer has composed well such universal subjectivity will have proved itself, as will reason as a positive, a logic that goes beyond the particular by satisfying its desiderata. Such reason tends rather to be obscured by the psychological subject that leaves its imprint on the music.

⁶⁹ The site of all musicality is a priori an interior space¹⁵ and only here does it become constituted as an objective reality. It is to be numbered among those things for which over forty years ago a gestalt psychologist coined the rather unattractive name 'psychic object-world'. It is precisely the most subjective aspects of music, the imaginative, associative element, the idea content and the historical substance that is present in all music that point back to externals, to the real world. Music negates psychology dialectically. It is doubtless enacted in an interior space, in the imagination, and to that extent in the subjective mind. But by objectifying itself through its own logic, and becoming a formed gestalt, it also exteriorizes itself at the same time, becoming an objective reality raised to the second degree, and even a quasi-spatial reality. In it the external objectivity returns as the objectivity of the subject itself.¹⁶

⁶⁹ This is why relations in their turn, as the incarnation of the subjective dimension, cannot be regarded as the primal material of music: there are no notes without relations, no relations without notes. Deception is the primary phenomenon. The hypostatizing of relations would be the victim of exactly the same myth of origins as the reduction to the naked note, but in reverse. Even that definition of twelve-note technique as 'a composition with twelve notes only related to one another' resists that reduction to primal elements. It contains both the concept of notes and the dimension of relations: each is to be strictly defined in terms of the other. Schoenberg's idiosyncratic use of language

15. Cf. *ibid.* pp. 116ff. [Adorno's note.]

16. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler, op. cit.*, pp. 98ff. (Also *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 13, pp. 218ff.) [Adorno's note.]

is a little in advance of contemporary developments. The latter no longer rest content with the straightforward alternative between the serial principle – the absolute note – and the motivic–thematic principle as the incarnation of the relational dimension. In the latter it is the subject that predominates; in the individual note what dominates is the opposing principle. This is then actualized in the tension between composition and material. Subjectivity is not just injected into the material or imitated by it. The post-Schoenberg development has exploded the familiar equation between subjectivity and expressiveness. The latter only stood out where the composition failed, temporarily, to match up to its material.

What was objected to as experimental in the formative phase of the new music was essentially its criticism of this discrepancy: particularly of the way in which idiom had degenerated into a sort of padding between material and composition. What was profoundly shocking was the fact that this very idiom had received its marching orders. This shock was rationalized away with the argument that whatever deviated from the established language and whenever the composer ventured too far into the unknown, the resulting music would be more prone to failure and more likely to be consigned to oblivion than would be true of the so-called tried-and-proven tradition.

In the upshot the music that has been forgotten was the music that played safe and hence simply reproduced the same thing over and over again. If anything has any prospects of survival, then it will only be music that is not concerned with safety. This has led to a shift in the meaning of the experimental. The need for security today, unfreedom and heteronomy, exhausts itself in tone-row and serial productions which conserve the timbre and the harmonics of the experiments of yesterday. It is imagined that whatever we have in black and white by way of contract and factually provable material will be ours to take away and call our own. But thanks to the discrepancy between the methods of proof and what is actually proved, it is precisely this that is lost at the outset.

The avant-garde therefore calls for a music which takes the

composer by surprise, much as a chemist can be surprised by the new substance in his test-tube. In future, experimental music should not just confine itself to refusing to deal in the current coin; it should also be music whose end cannot be foreseen in the course of production. In genuine experiments there has always been something of a surplus of that objectivity over the production process.

73 The idea that the composer was able to imagine every last detail in advance is a legend which every composer finds refuted when he hears his own orchestrated sounds for the first time. Schoenberg, who always insisted on the primacy of the imagination and whose own imagination was quite unique, nevertheless admitted that this was a possibility when he made it known that he had had to interrupt work on the Variations for Orchestra, Opus 31, for a long time because some jottings about some of the rows had been mislaid and he was 'merely a constructor' by nature. The tension between what is imagined and what cannot be foreseen is itself a vital component of the new music. But it is no more than a vital element, not an equation which can be resolved in one direction or the other.

74 Highly complex atonal or twelve-note scores have presumably always eluded a fully adequate formulation in the imagination, whereas important composers have always known from experience that the relevant passages would sound right, as they say, and would be able to judge in advance whether the sound would fulfil its proper function. To that extent the element of chance was already incorporated teleologically into the very music from which aleatory music occasionally distances itself. But productive though it is for the composition to adopt on principle the phenomenon that had previously taken place against its will, namely the surprise experienced by the ear when it first hears the sound actually produced, this does not mean that the composer's ability to imagine has been made redundant. The element of the unforeseen in its new and emphatic sense must not be allowed to escape. From this point of view *musique informelle* would be the idea [*Vorstellung*] of something not fully imagined [*vorgestellt*]. It would be the integration by the composer's subjective ear of what

simply cannot be imagined at the level of each individual note, as can be seen from Stockhausen's 'note clusters' [*Tontrauben*]. The frontier between a meaningless objectification which the composer gapes at with open mouth and closed ears, and a composition which fulfils the imagination by transcending it, is not one that can be drawn according to any abstract rule. To make this distinction in each individual case would not be the least insignificant of the tasks facing any informal composition.

The intention is not to reinstate thematic-motivic composition as an indispensable prerequisite of informal music. The notion that the relational aspect, which exists only between notes and has no independent existence, should not be hypostatized corresponds to the composer's suspicion that thematic interconnections might act as the rudiments of tonality. Just as the note, when turned into an absolute, tends to degenerate into pre-artistic physical sound, the absolutizing of tonal relations leads to a mechanical clattering. It is as if once the relationships were established, the whole composition would be cut and dried. The reprehensible thing here is the need for security as such. The clattering of pure relationships probably stems from the fact that they do not have to prove themselves through any friction with something other, something unintentioned: they give shape, but nothing shaped results. If in certain phases of twelve-note technique the only themes have been rhythmic – that is to say, relations independent of tones and pitch – these rhythms soon degenerated into 'patterns',¹⁷ abstract schemata.

In fetishism there is a convergence between the hostile extremes of faith in the material and absolute organization. A *musique informelle* rebels against both. The late Erich Itor Kahn has coined the expression 'robot music'. It is directed against reification; against art which from a hatred of intellectual falseness goes to the other extreme of pure factuality, and ends by submitting to the spell of what actually exists, just like any ideology. Needless to say, this is not the inevitable fate of serial practice; the qualitative distinctions to be made here are those

17. Adorno used the English word.

between music and robotics. Anyone who fails to perceive them should be reminded that the marks of the mechanical which cause such irritation to those monopolists of creativity who stroll in the forest by themselves and find things that have been found there for the past 150 years¹⁸ – that these marks really have been deeply etched into traditional music.

77 *Musique informelle* is not cultural neutralism, but a critique of the past. It is probably true that the art of the authentic composers of earlier times, that is to say, up to the threshold of the new music, had a greater ability to make the listener forget the pre-fabricated forms, or else to breathe new meaning into them, than to escape from their clutches. Up to now all composition was a struggle against something alienated; music has hardly ever been at one with its own systems, but has instead celebrated its triumph in the illusion [*Schein*] of such unity. Eimert's astonishment at how much sensible music there is today, despite the proliferation of mechanical recipes, could be extended to traditional music. In Bach all this is a matter of record; the same holds good for Mozart and Beethoven. They all made use of mechanical topoi down to the most intimate inflection.

79 In many ways the process of composition of the classical type resembled a jigsaw puzzle. Its greatness lay in its powers of self-reflexivity which liberated the mechanical from its inflexibility and transformed the trivial. The idea of the robot makes explicit something that had been implicit throughout the bourgeois musical tradition – an element of reified rationality in general. This now desires to atone by refusing to conceal itself any longer behind the semblance [*Schein*] of the organic. This is why the integral constructivists might do well to adopt the term 'robot music' and turn it from a word of abuse into a positive slogan, much as had been done earlier with the 'atonal'. If the rational and mechanical principle that pervades the entire history of Western music is made explicit, it parts company with

18. An allusion to a poem by Goethe, *Ich ging im Walde / So für mich hin, / Und nichts zu suchen, / Das war mein Sinn*. (I was just strolling in the forest by myself, without any idea of looking for anything.)

the ideology of the unconscious. But only when that is done does it become possible to free itself from the mechanical spell that is secretly allied with that ideology. Today, in the presence of the culture industry, the age of topoi is over.

Like all antinomies in aesthetics, the antinomy of the organic, which turned the ideology of the unconscious into an idol, can no longer be concealed behind the façade of the work of art. Art as an organized object, quite literally resembles the organism in the relationship which obtains between the parts and the whole. But with the growing similarity to the living organism, it gradually distances itself from the artefact which, after all, it must remain. The virtually total organization, in which every feature serves the whole and the whole on its side is constituted as the sum of the parts, points to an ideal which cannot be that of a work of art – that is to say, the ideal of a self-contained thing in itself. It comes increasingly to appear to be something which it can never become, precisely because of its axiomatic character as semblance [*Schein*]. The more perfect it is as an artefact, the less it claims to be one. The new music falls victim to this antinomy as soon as it tries to escape it. For the new music – an artefact – to carry off the illusion of the organic, it would be necessary to eliminate quite unsentimentally every vestige of the organic that does not originate in its principle of artifice, its thoroughgoing organization.

But in large measure this illusion of the organic would be the creation of the traditional language of music, with a chromatic emphasis. The minimal, as it were effortless, transition of semitone steps is regularly associated with the idea of growing plants, since it appears not to have been manufactured, but seems as if it were growing towards its final purpose without the intervention of the subject. The very thing which ever since *Tristan* has seemed with good reason to embody the subjectivizing process of music, is an objective reality from the point of view of the language of music: it is the semblance of the organic as mediated by this language. With incomparable genius, Wagner succeeded in creating in *Tristan* an almost perfect unity between the subjective work, the specific musical achievement, and the

objectivity of the musical idiom of chromaticism. This was the musical site of the phantasmagoria. What has been postulated and created, claims to be natural.¹⁹ Young composers react quite allergically to this. But following the liquidation of the organic language of music, music once again, thanks to its immanent organization, has become the very image of the organic. There is an analogy here to certain striking thematic tendencies in contemporary painters like Schultze and Ness.

81 For music the organic ideal would be nothing but a rejection of the mechanical. It would be the concrete process of a growing unity of parts and whole and not their subsumption under a supreme abstract concept, together with the juxtaposition of the parts. But that concretizing process can never be guaranteed by the material alone. Proceeding from the material one cannot get beyond the subsumption of the details; that is not the route to a true process on the basis of the musical content. A synthesis of that kind is achieved by work on the different elements, since these will not synthesize of their own volition. But if the musical substance is to develop organically, the intervention of the subject is required, or rather, the subject must become an integral part of the organism, something which the organism itself calls for. If appearances do not deceive, it is upon this that the future of music depends.

82 For the subject is the only component of art that is non-mechanical, truly alive. Nowhere else can composers discover anything that will lead them to the living reality. Music may not resemble the subject – for as an objectification it has become qualitatively different from any subject, even a transcendental one. But by the same token, it may not become totally unlike it: for in that case it would become a wholly alienated thing without any *raison d'être*. It can only serve as a simile of such absolute alienation because ultimately its form makes it diverge from it. The ancient epistemological controversy about whether like can be known by like has its relevance for art. In both cases it must be

19. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, Berlin/Frankfurt 1952, pp. 107ff. [See also *In Search of Wagner*, New Left Books 1981, pp. 85ff.]

resolved dialectically. Works of art move towards a neutral zone between things that exist in themselves and those which exist for us, because this 'for us' is a constitutive element of their existence in themselves. This also affects the relationships of works of art to language from which they distance themselves.²⁰ The more completely the work is organized, the more eloquent it is, since the idea of complete organization refers to the content of the organic and not to mathematical necessity. In its pure form the latter is always a compositional defect – as has been most reliably shown by Stockhausen. Anything which only seems right everywhere, cannot be right anywhere, particularly in its proportions. This is signalled by the need of the integral construct for the assisting subject.

Even the most gifted and advanced composers scarcely rise to the situation. Under the spell of serialism they commonly confine the intervention of the subject to retrospective corrections and to sounding out the determinate structure to test its legitimacy as a living work. Aleatory literary texts, such as those generated by cybernetic machines, behave in a similar fashion. The author attempts to establish something like a meaning or some sort of order through retrospective interventions. In music too such retouching operations seem to be indispensable. It would be pedantic to object to them. In art the way a work is produced is a matter of indifference. Hölderlin wrote prose sketches for even his most powerful hymns. What can be said, however, is that such methods do not appear to be wholly compatible with the aleatory principle. The latter hopes that something like organization will result from the strict operations of chance. If it breaks free of chance, it denies itself and the entire procedure, together with its meaning, becomes self-defeating. It should be recalled that in statistical surveys the results will only be valid if the random selection of the sample has been strictly adhered to. If art allows itself such departures, it may not at the same time grant itself a dispensation from the scientific discipline from which it has borrowed, whether justifiably or not, its ideal of objectivity.

20. Cf. above, pp. 5–6. [Adorno's note.]

84 To tackle the problem from a different point of view is prohibitively difficult because there can be no reliance on the subject as an organic consciousness – on his hearing or his musicality. The superannuated language of music has built up layers of sediment to a degree which cannot be overestimated. As early as Schoenberg the burden of this language was a major source of difficulty. He dealt with it with the aid of a peculiar polarity in the rhythm of his production. It swings between the extreme organic, as in *Erwartung*, and the anti-organic, such as the Suite for Piano, Opus 25. At the same time it was perhaps not yet possible to see how one could be transformed into the other without inconsistency. This possibility is only explored, if at all, in the late instrumental works, like the string trio and the Phantasy for Violin and Piano, Opus 47.

85 There is an ambivalent relationship between Schoenberg's twelve-note technique and the organic ideal. In this respect, too, it is a turning point. The organic aspect, which was still the idea behind Schoenberg's concept of the instinctual life of sounds in free atonality, referred to the close contact between different musical complexes, just as in tonality. Only what comes into direct contact gives the impression that it is growing organically. On the age-old model of the leading note the organic relationship was always conceived as that of two successive, neighbouring events, which merge without break. Wagner's doctrine of the art of transition is the aesthetics of the organic ideal.

That contact between neighbours was already severed in twelve-note technique. Subjectively, Schoenberg strengthened this tendency with his dislike of 'animal warmth'.²¹ The challenge of the first twelve-note composition to ears schooled in free atonality lay in the way that it strictly related successive musical complexes to each other, without one terminating in the other as if that were its rightful goal. To that extent the element of chance, which is intensified with the growing tendency towards integral constructivity, is undoubtedly implicit in twelve-note technique. Initially it is the individual successions that sound

21. See p. 231 [Adorno's note.]

accidental. They are deprived of the necessity that once bound them together. This is ceded to the determinants from above, the totality, and returned by these to the individual successions, which as the manifest derivatives of the totality fit into each other without joins, but by the same token, without their former instinctual vitality.

In music, as elsewhere, isolation, atomization was associated with integration from the outset. This brought with it the potential for stasis. At the micro-level temporal sequence remains external to the sounds. The concrete musical composition of individual events makes itself independent of time. In Schoenberg the compositional methods retained from tonality, thematic articulation, and especially the 'developing variation', carry the listener over these hurdles. But their contradiction to the virtual isolation of the micro-complexes from each other, could not remain hidden. The radicalized constructivists that go beyond Schoenberg draw the logical consequence from this when they lose all interest in drive-like relations at the level of detail, and even resist them, not unlike the way in which free atonality recoiled from the false sound of any triad it discovered in itself. For preference they would like to do away with everything covered by the term 'tendency' in musical *peinture*, that is to say, the idea that a musical expression left to itself would like to proceed to the next and go on from there.

This may well explain the overall static complexion: the image of a music essentially alien to time. It attempts to make do without strong categories. But, against its own intentions, this just deprives it of objectivity and makes it incompatible with the medium of time to which as music it inevitably belongs. To neglect time means nothing less than that music is failing to concern itself with one of its specific material preconditions. This raises the question about the nature of a form of music whose concrete elements move towards each other, or collide with each other, like monadic cells, without becoming infected by the residues of organic idiom. And this affects not just its micro-cells, but also the overall form right up to and including the large-scale architecture. The latter can no longer be erected above the

individual events on the basis of an abstract plan, nor can it be deduced from parameters which leave matters to a chance succession from one sound to the next.

87 This throws some light on the category which had a normative significance for the later Schoenberg, that of equilibrium, the generation of tensions and their resolution through the total form. This norm was the apotheosis of the traditional notion of the organic. In Schoenberg the totality becomes for the last time what the pure particularity of the dominant-tonic succession once was. In this strict sense it may really be claimed that Schoenberg is classical music, much as Einstein may be said to be classical physics in relation to quantum theory as a whole. A composition as a whole creates tension and resolution, just as used to happen in the tonal idiom with its primal model, the cadence. This shift to the totality, however, has stripped the parts of their power. In order to become equal to the task, then, which at present remains hidden, it would be necessary to construct down to the last detail the entire texture of the composition, as Schoenberg did in his day with larger forms, like the sonata and the variation, trusting that construction at the level of detail would be carried out by the twelve-note technique. Relationships have to be established between events which succeed each other directly and indirectly – and this applies to events within simultaneous complexes – relationships which themselves provide the necessary stringency.

89 A premonition of the limitless possibilities of this was supplied by free atonality. They were the possibilities of something organic which did not let itself be seduced into imitating the organisms of life which in actuality just disguise reification. If we wished to provide examples with one eye to the larger structures of free atonality, then informal music would be a third way between the jungle of *Erwartung*, on the one hand, and the tectonics of *Die glückliche Hand*, on the other. However, the sections should no longer just be juxtaposed, as is commonly done nowadays to the point of monotony; they must be placed in a dynamic relationship, comparable to the relationship of subordinate clauses and main clause in grammar. Boulez's work

with so-called parentheses, an idea that goes back to Schumann, probably points in this direction. The reification of structural types of composition today takes the form of involuntary clichés at the very point where the rational creation of something completely unforeseeable would like to prevent them. An instance of such a cliché was the use of pointillist methods, which have now fallen into disuse; one of the most recent consists of sound surfaces organized in patches and separated from each other with exaggerated tidiness. These unified sounds and the pieces that deploy them are all as alike as two peas.

Such defects have their roots in the limitations of serial composition. The most obtrusive among them arises from the way in which pitch and duration have been merged under the general heading of time. Stockhausen, who took this identity more seriously than any other serial composer, was also the first to express his doubts about it. The objective time-factor in all parameters and the living experiential time of the phenomenon are by no means identical. Duration and pitch belong to different musical realms, even if in acoustics they come under the same heading. In the controversy on this point the concept of time is used equivocally. It covers both *temps espace* and *temps durée*, physically measurable, quasi-spatial time and experiential time. Bergson's insight into their incompatibility cannot be erased.

Long before him, even traditional epistemology, which he called causal-mechanical theory, made a distinction between phenomenal and thing-like time. But in experienced time like is not like. Logarithmic concepts do not suffice to calculate such likenesses. With the Weber-Fechner law experimental psychology has ascertained that the relationships between basic stimuli – that is to say, objective physical events and the subjective reactions to them – were only relative, and that there was no direct equivalence. This law was concerned with experiences that are far more primitive than those of music; it was concerned simply with the intensity of sensations. The pre-eminent complexity of music as music renders even such conjectures impossible. There is little prospect of deducing musical time and concrete music from objective physical data, even though music

cannot be said to be the summation of psychological reactions either. For if it could, we would be unable to think of musical objectivity by virtue of which music is art and not an agglomeration of sensuous modes of behaviour.

92 In the context of these thoughts about time, current practice reveals signs of discrepancies which make a reversal of these procedures an urgent matter. Sick of the pointillist translations of Weberian patterns into chamber works in which there is no tangible connection between the different attacks, some of the most gifted young composers have returned to the large-scale orchestra. And in general a growing need has been felt for broader, internally coherent areas of sound, in contrast to the austerity of dissociated ones. In sound these pieces often strikingly resemble the flamboyant style for which Boulez had earlier criticized Schoenberg and Berg. Many of these compositions display great mastery of the orchestra; but they are lacking in the representation of sculptured compositional events such as the luminosity and density of sound might suggest. But neither does an orchestral style working with a spatula tolerate the Impressionist primacy of sound-events as such. The emphatic nature of the sound-image calls for something substantial, which would merit such emphasis, instead of the sound constituting the musical content in itself.

93 The sound offers itself up to musical interpretation in a direct way; but what is usually present, the texture, remains bereft of such immediacy, an incomprehensible inference from the system which sets the parameters. Sound and music diverge. Through its autonomy the sound regains a culinary quality which is irreconcilable with the constructive principle. The density of material and colour has done nothing to modify the dissociative character of the structure, which remains external. Dynamism remains as elusive a goal as it had done previously when the fashion was for an unconnected succession of jumpy staccato notes or segments simply strung up in sequence. This is the objection that should be levelled at the so-called neo-Impressionist features of the most recent music. If music is to liberate itself from the Stravinskian imitation of painting, a reshaping of

composition as such is essential. Music must acquire a theme-like force, on the lines of the opening bars of *Le marteau sans maître*, without restricting the thematic to the melodic. The thematic can be articulated at any level. However, the pure course of events must perform what was once done by thematic work, even if its methods – identity, variation, surface connections between motifs – are ruthlessly cut away. Only with musical postulates which are as vivid as the configurations of thematic music once were, will it be possible to create that tension in which the musical consciousness of time can actualize itself.

The aspirations of Cage and his school have eradicated all topoi, without going into mourning for a subjective, organic ideal in which they suspect the topoi of maintaining an after-life. This is why to dismiss anti-art as pretentious cabaret and humour would be as great an error as to celebrate it. But such aspirations do not yet amount to a *musique informelle*. As a joke they hurl culture into people's faces, a fate which both culture and people richly deserve. They do this not as a barbaric gesture, but to demonstrate what they have made of each other. The joke only turns sour when it appeals to an exotic, arty-crafty metaphysics and ends up with an exaggerated version of the very positivism which it set out to denounce. This helps to explain why the joke, which I respect, has been neutralized in contemporary society. The latter defends itself ideologically by swallowing everything. A *musique informelle* should also take good care to protect itself against revivals of *Die Aktion* and Dadaism, against Alexandrian anarchy.²²

However, in the last analysis nothing slips through the net of the de-individualized society; it integrates everything, even its polar opposite. This is why we do not need to worry overmuch about art's social effect and can devote ourselves uninterruptedly to the matter in hand or, if the word is preferred, to culture. One feels moved to say musically whatever comes into one's head; the

22. *Die Aktion*, edited by Hans Pfemfert from 1911 to 1932, was one of the leading Expressionist magazines. It was notable for its extreme revolutionary attitudes in both art and politics.

only limitations would be those of one's own head. At all events, Cage's work does approach that of an informal music in one respect: as a protest against the dogged complicity of music with the domination of nature.²³ He does not yield to the terrorism of the phenomenon which has come to be known by the phrase 'the technological age', an age which people fear may leave them behind. But just as art is unable to retreat from the tendencies of the age into enclaves of sensitive souls, so too it may not behave as if it could take the bull by the horns and escape from reification directly into a non-existent immediacy. Cage, and doubtless many of his disciples, content themselves with abstract negation in seances with overtones of [Rudolph] Steiner, eurythmics and healthy-living sects.²⁴ What is astonishing is their ability to translate the apparently vague signs in a decisive manner and the collective acceptance of irrational modes of behaviour. It is easier to ridicule the element of folly than to recognize the utopia for which the provocation to the senses provides a refuge, namely the hope of escaping from the lie of everything meaningful, where meaning is merely subjectively postulated.

A *musique informelle* will find it as hard to avoid an element of abstruseness, as it would to consciously plan for it. Wholly organized and transparent music eternalizes the compulsion of form. So while even an informal music cannot dispense with the abstruse, it becomes a warning against its own dubiousness. It is the blind spot in which it conceals the uncultured element of musical culture. In free atonality such blind spots can no more be eradicated than the white spots on the coat of Pierrot Lunaire. They even appear in the most uncompromising twelve-note constructions, such as the intermezzo of the Suite for Piano, Opus 25. Perhaps the reason for this most recent abstruseness is

23. Cf. Cage's aphorisms from the *Darmstädter Beiträge* 1959, p. 52; and on this point see Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, second edition, Frankfurt am Main 1958, pp. 195ff. [Also in *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, Sheed & Ward, p. 67.] [Adorno's note.]

24. Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was the founder of anthroposophy, a mystical creed based on Goethe's ideas on education and on theosophy. He founded schools to promote a more organic style of education.

that in contrast to its Dadaist grandparents it degenerates at once into culture, and it cannot remain unaffected by this. The assaults of Dadaism could not be accused of abstruseness because they were both conceived and interpreted as hostile to art and culture. Abstruseness degenerates into ideology and to a vacuous craft where its actions remain on the aesthetic plane and thereby submit to the very criterion of meaning – and culture is for good or ill the embodiment of meaning – which they have challenged. However, this is dictated by the impossibility today of that politics on which Dadaism still relied. 'Action painting', 'action composing'²⁵ are cryptograms of the direct action that has now been ruled out; they have arisen in an age in which every such action is either forestalled by technology or recuperated by an administered world. This indicates the extent to which political practice influences aesthetic modes and it does so precisely at the point where the latter are at their most intransigent and at their furthest remove from normal cultural practice. The limitations of art proclaim the limits of politics.

As long as criticism concerning the subject in music does nothing to promote the reactionary cult of 'bonds',²⁶ it stands in opposition to aesthetic illusion. The moment where the latter becomes visible is that of the crisis of musical meaning. What is held to be meaning in traditional music is often nothing of the sort; it is simply an established idiom or at best the reflection of the subject who articulates it. Neither sustains anything anymore and this is why meaning has collapsed. No metaphysical meaning is laid down, nor is there any pre-existing meaning for art to imitate. This explains why art and especially music have placed a taboo on every likeness.

But meaning is inescapable insofar as it imposes itself on works of art against their will. This importunate, quasi-alien meaning, should not be left to itself, but should instead be recuperated

25. In English in the original.

26. *Bindungen* means ties or bonds and has close associations with extreme right-wing and Nazi thought since its connotations are those of family ties or commitment to the soil, a region or one's country. It stands opposed to deracinated, cosmopolitan city-dwellers.

from the subject so as to reconcile it. The meaning of the work of art is something which has to be produced, rather than just copied. It is what it is only by becoming itself. This is the element of action in informal music. The concept of a *métier* which contemporary theory cannot dispense with – it is of cardinal importance in Boulez – is its representative in the work of art. It is activity as long as it is realized convincingly. The idea of a *métier* calls a halt to the collapse of meaning.

99 The aesthetic illusion cannot be eradicated from art. Even art without illusion would not be directly identical with empirical reality. The illusion survives even when it no longer wishes to appear to be anything other than it is. The element of unreality in art is not identical with illusion and deception in the bad sense. In other words, even negated meaning is still meaning. It is not translatable into facts, for every work of art is always more than itself. This is confirmed by the fact that even works in which all interconnections have been as rigorously eliminated as in Cage's Piano Concerto, nevertheless create new meanings by virtue of that very rigour. Nothing could be further removed from traditional music. But even here there is no absence of affinities: the prohibitions of harmonic theory have long since been annulled where prohibited forms occur not just once, without consequences, but are immediately repeated – or at least emphasized as specific effects. The best-known example of this are the parallel fifths in Puccini,²⁷ which have been legitimized by persistent use.

100 On the matter of excessive factuality, the objectified elements of art, those which have, as it were, congealed into things, point back to the subject as to their objective correlative: subjective mediation appears to be an inextinguishable component of aesthetic objectification. Art as a spiritual phenomenon is neither the last bulwark of a faded intellectual history, nor the playground of an ad hoc metaphysic of art. What Kandinsky called 'the spiritual in art'²⁸ is not superstructure, but paradoxically, an

27. Adorno may be thinking of the start of Act II of *La Bohème*. [Note by Eric Graebner.]

28. Wassili Kandinsky's book *On the Spiritual in Art* appeared in 1912.

actual state of affairs. Its non-factuality is its principal fact. In Schoenberg as in Kandinsky, this fact has developed from something subcutaneous to something visible to all. It was this that gave rise to that credulity about facts, that positivistic penchant of the artistic consciousness which is the object of criticism today.

Schoenberg wrote a number of introductions to his chamber music for a series of programmes by Kolisch in Madison. In the note on the Second String Quartet the composer observes without a trace of irony that the George poem in the last movement, *Entrückung* (Rapture) – Schoenberg never surpassed the genius and freedom of this work – anticipated or foretold space travel. The violence done to the George poem by this description is unimaginable if we confuse the ecstasy it expresses with the very modest experiences of automatically guided astronauts. Nothing could be more 'down to earth'²⁹ than the impressive but measurable distance from it. The composer throws his own imagination to the unimaginative as a sop. The task of an informal music and a consciousness appropriate to it would be to rid itself of such contaminations in its own relationship with technology. It should be enough to recollect that there is no atmosphere in the cosmos and hence no air from the other planets, such as is felt so powerfully in Schoenberg's finale.³⁰

Nevertheless, if art really desires to revoke the domination of nature, and if it is concerned with a situation in which men abandon their efforts to exercise control through their intellect, it can only achieve this through the domination of nature. Only music which is in control of itself would be in control of its own freedom from every compulsion, even its own. This would be on the analogy with the argument that only in a rationally organized society would the elimination of scarcity lead to the disappearance of organization as a form of oppression. In a *musique*

29. In English in the original.

30. Adorno alludes here to the first line of George's poem, 'I feel the air from another planet', a statement which he often cites, since it formulates his view of the effect of all authentic art.

informelle the deformation of rationalism which exists today would be abolished and converted to a true rationality. Only what is fully articulated in art provides the image of an undeformed and hence free humanity. The work of art which is fully articulated, thanks to its maximum control of its material, and which therefore finds itself at the furthest possible remove from mere organic existence, is also as close to the organic as is at all possible.

103 It is only now that we are in a position to appreciate fully the truth contained in the edifice of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which was constructed from a theory of art and a doctrine of living organisms, theories which are as antagonistic to each other as they are similar. It is not the case that the call for the control of artistic material, that is to say, the full working out of the composition – literally its organization – should make way for a laxer procedure. But as a reflex of the composing ear, control over the material must intensify itself self-critically until it ceases to rub up against any alien matter. It must become the ear's form of reaction that passively appropriates what might be termed the tendency inherent in the material. The logic of artistic technique is always authentic control and as such it is also its opposite, the education of the subjective sensibility to respond to the impulses of whatever is not the subject. It is comparable to the assertion that someone has mastered a language, an assertion which only possesses a meaning worthy of mankind if he has the strength to allow himself to be mastered by that language. In this respect music today is close to Karl Kraus's philosophy of language.

104 *Musique informelle* would be music in which the ear can hear live from the material what has become of it. Because what it has become includes and culminates in the rationalization process, this process is preserved. At the same time, however, it is deprived of the element of violence it contained, thanks to the non-arbitrary nature of the subjective reaction. If the subject was the embodiment of rationality, it is now both negated and salvaged. It renounces its surplus over the composition. It ceases to mould the material, nor does it furnish it with arbitrary intentions. But the acts in terms of which all this takes place remain those of a spontaneous listening. This would be the

threshold of an informal music, marking it off from a thing-like alienated music, as well as from so-called communication.

The structure of musical objectivity *through* the subject and not *towards* the subject sets it off sharply from communication. This latter concept properly belongs in the culture industry, which calculates questions of artistic effects, as well as in applied market research, which tells us what intellectual products must be like if they are to find purchasers. To this informal music is intransigently opposed. It is concerned instead with the representation of a truth content and with a true consciousness, not with adapting to a false one. Within the all-embracing blindness and delusion the only things which inhabit their rightful place in society are those which have broken with communication, instead of seeking to discover its genuine or supposed laws. If communication, that is to say the intervention of art into the realm of the non-artistic, is desirable today, it would be necessary to fly in the face of communication and to flout its rules. This was what was meant by Kolisch's apology for paper music. The norm of possible effects is as false as the norms of abstract mathematical or physical correctness.

The concept of the musical subject should be differentiated. It has absolutely nothing to do with potential listeners, and everything to do with the human right to what Hegel termed 'being there' [*Dabeisein*]. It is the right of subjectivity to be present in the music itself, as the power of its immediate performance, instead of being excluded from it once it has been launched. This right does not involve the hubris, the superstition, that the subject can create the music on his own and can reproduce it in himself, while in reality it is brought into being at every moment by the music to which the subject is at his most obedient when he most exerts himself. The musicality which a *musique informelle* would require for this would both carry the constituents of the old music in itself, but would also recoil from the demands of the conventions. In this it would resemble the musicality of the performer whose views and structural insights purify the score of that sullied layer of tradition, to trust in which passes for the seal of musicality.

107 In the course of such a process the concept of musicality undergoes a profound change. It would emancipate itself both from projections which are purely subjective and from thing-like objectifications. It would legitimate itself in terms of its adequacy to its own material if the most progressive ears could respond to it at every moment as if it answered their own desires. All of this appeals to aesthetic theory as a reaction to the plight of the actual experience of artists; a conversation with Boulez showed that we agreed on this. The contempt for aesthetics, whose spokesman was Schoenberg himself, had its day as long as aesthetics lagged behind actual developments to which it had remained external, and as long as it loudly proclaimed false, static rules. Neither these nor its purified taste, nor its eternal laws are capable of being restored now. A true aesthetics would have to start where all that fell silent. It can neither be inferred from philosophy, nor can it be an empirical descriptive science of art. Its medium would be the reflection of musical experience upon itself, but in such a way that it would present itself not as an object to be described, but as a force-field to be decoded. Its immanent dynamics contains the latent pointer to what is musically right here and now.

108 The trend that can now be felt everywhere is the renunciation of a false reliance on both an alien necessity and an alien chance, the surrogate for freedom. If the time is really ripe for this, then the old peasant's question about the toad he had eaten does call for an answer: why was this really necessary? However, the problem is not whether to repudiate these experiments, but how to bring them into line with living musical experience; much as the rules of counterpoint were appropriated and modified by contrapuntal practice. For example, one of the most plausible criticisms of classical twelve-note technique is that the rhythmic and metrical structure still remained tonal in the broadest sense even after the abolition of tonality. It is essential to the ideal of an informal music that this should become part of the composer's experience. Similarly, the spontaneous ear, conscious of itself, should resist not just tonal symmetry, but also its most sublime derivatives – the predominance of an abstractly

maintained pulse, the strong beat, and its negative retention in syncopation.

Informal music could augment rhythmic flexibility to a degree as yet undreamt of. In this, as in all other respects, it would be the image of freedom. What the musician longs for, because it would be the fulfilment of music, has not yet proved capable of achievement. Impossible as it has been to discover what music authentically is, it has been no less impossible to bring wholly authentic music into being. It is better to admit this than to bar the way to it by choosing one type or the other and claiming that it embodies the ominously positive musical ideal. Informal music is a little like Kant's eternal peace. Kant himself thought of this as an actual, concrete possibility which is capable of realization and yet is nevertheless just an idea. The aim of every artistic utopia today is to make things in ignorance of what they are.

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