

Between Prehistory and Postmodernism

Jointly sponsored by Nuova Consonanza and the Goethe-Institut in Rome, a conference was held in the Italian capital November 6-7, 1986 on poetic and linguistic multiplicity in contemporary music with numerous participants, including—in addition to Lombardi—Enrico Fubini, Sergio Miceli, Renzo Cresti, Karl Aage Rasmussen, and Daniela Tortora. The symposium proceedings were subsequently published. The ensuing debate that was stirred up through Lombardi's contribution led the author to defend and refine his position in various additional statements that were attached to the original lecture as prefaces or postscripts.

A Postscript as Preface

The following text was written in October 1986 in Italian (see note 9). I have changed a few things here and there for its publication in German, but without desperately eliminating contradictions. The text is only a way station. Tomorrow—hopefully—I will see things differently, i.e., discover aspects that have remained hidden to me. Whoever has a closed system at his disposal may throw the first stone (preferably on the system itself). Since contradiction is the engine of any progress, it is right with me if the text not only contains contradictions but also provokes them. Thus, we may be able to advance jointly one more step. The Italian version of the text (meanwhile it also appeared in Danish under the title “Mellem prae-historie og post-moderne” in *Dansk Musik Tidsskrift* 6, 1986/87) has indeed resulted in some protests (see note 15). I was not surprised about the echo, but I was surprised about the surprise, especially among friends, that my new positions engendered. New? I am not sure. The positions reflect experiences I have had in recent years in musical, philosophical, and political areas. I do not consider them as a retraction of earlier positions but as their development. I may have been surprised about the surprise (perhaps unjustly), but I was disappointed (and I believe with some justification) that some people were unable to accept as valid any other positions but their own, especially those that shatter the consensus of a more or less homogenous group. I do not want to convince anybody who does not want to be convinced, but I also do not want to have to renounce my own convictions. Nobody has a monopoly on the truth (especially since there is no truth). I think we need to learn, especially at a time of paradigm changes, to listen to those who have different opinions. Sometimes different opinions are criticized and rejected not for objective reasons, but because they “aid the enemy.” This is a dangerous argument, and we should have the courage to abolish it. Thinking in terms of friends and enemies, thinking in polar opposites is unfortunately widespread and shows disastrous results in all fields, especially in the political realm. Accusing someone of objectively helping the counterrevolution was a favorite rationale to liquidate Stalin's opponents. Traces of such Manichaeian thinking are evident also in the relatively innocent field of music (even though today nobody—really nobody?—would maintain that, in principle, Schoenberg is good because of his atonal idiom and Stravinsky bad because he composes tonally). The musical discourse of modernism has been informed for too long a time by ideology and preconceived notions. Let us approach music without ideological eye-wear. Theory must follow music, not the other way around. This yardstick also applies to me: What I do in music may contradict my theoretical thinking. Theory is an attempt to understand in retrospect what I have done. At any moment it can be verified or rendered as erroneous by the music itself.

(November 1987)

The crisis of contemporary music is a crisis of both technology and ideas. The situation is paradoxical—an enormous expansion of technical possibilities goes hand in hand with a degeneration of spiritual motivation of music and its social function in general. Contemporary music exists at the fringes. It becomes increasingly more difficult to give a reasonable answer to the question of why one writes music. The process of secularization that stands at the beginning of modern art has reached an extreme point. It does not seem possible any longer to continue in this

direction. Indeed, there seems to be a paradigm change that will result in a rethinking of the fundamental motivation of music. Granted, the meaning of making music cannot be separated today from the meaning of the totality of our activities as human beings. But this activity appears increasingly void of meaning and the world comes across as a wonderful yet frightening absurdity.

A drop of water is a world, and our world a drop of water in the universe. We cannot grasp the proportions, the origin, and the purpose of this world. We cannot grasp the meaning of those living beings who have called themselves humans. Until recently they lived like other animals and now have grown into the most powerful species on earth; they have erected powerful systems of thought and now toy with the idea whether to blow up this little speck in the universe called earth or not; nobody in the universe would notice—everything would continue as it has continued from times immemorial.

Those who do not find support in the crutches provided by faith, whether religious or secular, must feel dizzy.

It is ridiculous to think that our life proceeds according to a divine plan. It may be ridiculous, but it helps one to live.

It is ridiculous to believe that humans could build a society that realizes freedom and justice and thereby represents an alternative to paradise. It may be ridiculous, but this kind of faith, too, helps one to live.

But what if one does not believe? What if one questions the “narratives” that characterize the modern era?

The project of modernism has been guided by grand theoretical systems or, as Jean-François Lyotard puts it, by grand narratives.¹ Truth, justice, freedom, universal brotherhood—these are concepts on which the legitimacy or the critique of ideas and actions are founded. The lack of faith in the narratives and meta-narratives (philosophies of history), according to Lyotard, is what characterizes the postmodern era.

And yet, does not postmodernism itself become a meta-narrative precisely at the moment when it pretends to provide an interpretive key? In addition, even though it is developing in Western societies, postmodernism denies, implicitly and explicitly, the predominance of the cultures of Western Europe over other cultures, but it really reinforces Western culture by declaring a theory as universally valid that has its roots in post-industrial societies. What sense does it make to talk about postmodernism in Africa, India, or Latin America?

I mean Postmodernism in the sense that everything and nothing is okay, that everything and nothing is possible exceeds the critique of reason and becomes a confirmation of the cynical. There is no argument against cynicism, except an argument that appears stronger the weaker it seems to be. Weak in that it is not propped up by an external authority, strong in that it is supported by the only authority that counts for human beings—their history. Human history is the attempt to give meaning to what has no meaning. It is a forced and futile attempt, because the meaning of history seems to be that it has no meaning, certainly not a meaning in the metaphysical sense. The metaphysical meaning is replaced by the strenuous effort to construct historical rationality—a Promethean task indeed. But Sisyphus rather than Prometheus comes to mind in this context. Camus distinguished between metaphysical and historical absurdity. We cannot do anything against the former. The meaninglessness of the world, illness and death are inalienable constituents of human existence. But historical absurdity—injustice, lack of freedom, war—can and must be opposed by humans, if they want to overcome their prehistory. According to Marx, human beings

¹ See Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).

are still occupied by their prehistory.² The history of the twentieth century can only confirm this verdict. In spite of 1917—and we can add 1949 and 1961—the cruelty of human beings has in no way lessened in comparison with earlier epochs, those epochs we consider the dark ages. Light—disregarding the light produced by bombs in the sky—was rare. Heiner Müller is justified in the way he puts it: The sun of torture, as seen by Antonin Artaud, is the only sun shedding light on all continents of our planet simultaneously.³ A New Man has not been sighted anywhere, only transformations of the wolf that man has been to his fellow-man since time immemorial. The ideals of 1789 are still utopian. Blood is the true symbol of the twentieth century, whose progress can also be measured in the manufacture of increasingly more and increasingly faster killing tools. The finale of Beethoven's Ninth has proven to be a tragic mockery in the form of background music to drown out the screams of human beings murdered in the gas chambers.

In view of the failure of the project “modernism” its conditions are criticized. But the risk here is to fall from one extreme into another, if the renunciation of a linear and mechanical metaphysical idea of freedom also implies an abandonment of fighting historical absurdity. In reality, the critique of modernism is an inseparable aspect of the project “that we call “modernism”—certainly ever since Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. More recently, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Jürgen Habermas have shown that it is possible, even necessary, to critique aspects of modernism without giving up an articulated idea of rationality. The crisis of reason cannot be overcome by opting for irrationality. On the contrary, it calls for a greater degree of rationality derived from a more diverse and differentiated concept of reason. As in Kant's time, philosophy today needs a critique of reason by way of reason, not through its renunciation.

Many of us have looked at an anthill and thought that our activities as humans—seen from a different perspective—indeed resemble the activities of ants. Unlike ants, we have the ability to conceptualize our situation and see ourselves from a different perspective. For short moments at least, we can become observers of ourselves and thereby become aware of the irrelevancy and triviality of many of our greatest problems. Thus, we see in perspective what appears to us as the most important issues of life and gain an awareness of the absurdity of life. In the long run, however, we have to return to our everyday perspective; if we do not want to become insane, if we reject suicide,⁴ we must return to the anthill and tackle our problems, which immediately will appear to us again as big, important, difficult, and often insurmountable. But we should get accustomed to the mental exercise of seeing ourselves from a bird's-eye perspective. We would notice that the importance of our ideas and our actions become relative with the change of perspective. Just a small change of viewpoint, and things can be seen in a completely different light. This also applies to the field of music. A view from the top or simply from a different perspective reveals that the problems that occupy contemporary music are nothing but a storm in the teapot and that the world of contemporary music, in comparison to the real world, is absolutely marginal. It is important that we keep these considerations in mind, before we turn, with appropriate energy, to the problems of contemporary music and make them the focal point of our interest.

Our prehistorical and postmodern epoch is determined by the awareness of multi-culturalism, within a given society as well as on the global level.⁵

A few years ago, I wanted to buy a present for my wife in San Francisco and asked a friend, also a

² Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Preface (Berlin: Dietz, 1971), 16.

³ Heiner Müller, “Vortragstext zu einer Diskussion über den Postmodernismus” (New York: 1978).

⁴ Baudelaire, a defender of modernism, called suicide the “passion particulière de la modern vie.” For Baudelaire suicide is the seal signifying a heroic will that, according to Benjamin, does not concede anything to hostile forces. “This kind of suicide is not renunciation but a heroic passion. It is the conquest of modernity in the realm of passions.” See Benjamin, “Die Moderne,” in *Das Argument*, X (no.46), 50. Today, in an era that does no longer believe in narratives, the meaning of suicide has changed.

⁵ Luca Lombardi, “Konstruktion der Freiheit: Versuch einer musikalischen Topographie,” in *Europäische Gegenwartsmusik: Einflüsse und Wandlungen*, ed. Elisabeth Haselauer and Karl-Josef Müller (Mainz: Schott, 1984).

composer, for advice: “I would like to give her something typically American.” “Give her a kimono,” was his response. “Really,” I questioned him, “a kimono does not seem to be something typically American.” “Why not? The Japanese culture is an integral part of our culture,” he insisted, and he told me that the school he attended as a child had more Japanese than Americans and that Japanese culture was as familiar to him as the American, even though he never had been in Japan.

Kimono, cowboy hat, Neapolitan pizza, hot dog, *Dallas* and *The Name of the Rose*, rock music and minimalism: Everything is offered on the supermarket represented by the world. The attitude of my friend, who grew up in close touch with Japanese culture and works at IRCAM, is a postmodern attitude.

It is the same attitude which another composer and friend of mine—he was born as the son of Polish parents in the United States, lives in Rome, teaches in Liège, Belgium, and has a Japanese publisher⁶—exhibited when he told me a few years ago that it seemed to him that he lived in one city, whose Western borders were in Los Angeles and Eastern borders in Berlin. More and more we are getting used to the simultaneity of manifoldness, to the overlapping of different temporal layers, to the polyphony of different cultures, in short: to the “multiversum” (as different from a compact “universum”), as Ernst Bloch called it borrowing this beautiful term from William James.⁷

This situation, of course, applies also to music. Shortly before the end of the century we know that the music of the century, now fading away behind us, is not only characterized by a stream that picks up the heritage of the great German-Austrian tradition (Schoenberg and his school are the main representatives) and finds an extension in the serial music of the fifties, but also by the invasion into Western music of the most diverse musical cultures. The byways have gained in significance to such a degree that the distinction between main route and byways can no longer be maintained; instead, there are many routes to be discovered and found. Janáček, Bartók, Ives, Varèse, Weill, Shostakovitch, Eisler, Cage, Partch, Nancarrow, Scelsi—these are all musicians who have enriched the stream of modern music with the most diverse experiences. Some of them took from the rich store of folk music—a kind of tunnel below the vagaries of history, a storage place that has preserved much of what has been destroyed by war, revolutions, and a civilization turned reckless; others enriched modern music by observing the “natural” and material-like quality of sound; or picked up ideas of Eastern modes of thinking; and others decided not to abandon the structure-establishing qualities of tonality (despite the storm that had shaken it in the twentieth century). Now we are in a situation in which culture is described not in chronological but in spatial (geographical) terms, in which the history of culture is more and more replaced by the geography of culture. In comparison with the more or less linear evolution of Western culture, we face today the simultaneity of cultures that develop along different lines, including chronologically different lines. This situation, which has been experienced more or less consciously, has indeed been overwhelming in the last few years and thereby contributed to a progressive erosion of the concept of avant-garde. With the necessary adjustments, the theory of relativity formulated at the beginning of the century applies also to the musical situation.

The multiplicity of cultures, traditions, and projects can be confusing and lead to anarchy. Granted, anarchy is vital for art, but in an institutionalized form it turns into its own contradiction—it becomes disorderly and arbitrary.

In view of the changed cultural situation, many a composer feels justified in maintaining that everything is allowed. Nothing could be more wrong. Dilettantism is never justified. There is a German proverb: “Art derives from ability” (“Kunst kommt von Können”); revealing his completely idealistic position, Schoenberg modified the adage to “Art derives from necessity”

⁶ [The unnamed friend is Frederic Rzewski.]

⁷ Remo Bodei, *Multiversum: Tempo e storie in Ernst Bloch* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1982).

(“Kunst kommt von Müssen”).⁸ Today many think that art derives neither from ability nor necessity but from wanting. That’s a dilettante’s position. The postmodern dilettante differs from his modern counterpart: The latter wanted to do it but couldn’t; the former can’t do it but is satisfied wanting to.

That way art is what one wants art to be. The dilettantism I have in mind is not necessarily defined by a lack of craftsmanship; it manifests itself not in the way something is made but in its intellectual underpinnings. Dilettantism can come across as academic slickness. This is evident in the majority of today’s compositional production in Italy. As Armando Gentilucci put it recently, “to write a combinatorial composition today has the same meaning as jotting down a fugue according to the method of Théodore Dubois.”⁹ Whether composed with the combinatorial method or not, the results frequently come across as if they are school assignments, the application of a recipe from a cookbook.

Unconnected to the specific Italian situation is a phenomenon that has been quite noticeable in the last fifteen or twenty years—I mean the renaissance of tonality in various forms. George Rochberg, a Schoenberg follower and friend of Dallapiccola returned already during the early 1960s to a most innocuous form of tonality. Bernd Alois Zimmermann integrated different historical styles, including tonality, in his grand project of musical pluralism, finding its most ambitious realization in the opera *Die Soldaten*, composed between 1958 and 1960. Shortly thereafter Pousseur—in his *Votre Faust*—tackled the problem of integrating [stylistic] elements of the past. Stockhausen’s *Hymnen* of 1967 and Berio’s *Sinfonia* of 1968 are other examples. The repetitive and minimalist music, a North American phenomenon, began to gain ground after 1970.

I remember how Ligeti introduced Riley’s *In C* in Darmstadt in 1969. Even composers in the Soviet Union, who had participated in the Western avant-garde, made a neo-tonal turn, e.g., Schnittke. In the mid-1970s there emerged a group of composers in West Germany that are summed up with the label “New Simplicity.” The term really was used for the first time in the context of a concert series by WDR (West German Radio) devoted to North American minimalists and their German counterparts. Indeed, the repetitive and minimalist music of La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steven Reich, and, in part, also of Rzewski is simple and new; but it was a mistake to use the same term for several German composers who wanted to re-introduce the structures and ensembles of late Romanticism by way of tonality (a language they often approximated without really commanding it). It was basically a restorative attitude, which some have already overcome by taking more productive paths. The position may have been sterile, but, like the other phenomena mentioned above, it was symptomatic for the time. To understand where we are and where we want to go we must interpret the most divergent symptoms, and certainly not just those we like. This applies also to that Italian trend known under the homemade label “neo-romanticism”—clearly an absurd term to the extent that the term “Romantic” refers to the complex historical and cultural movement [around 1800]. The term is used here in its vulgar form: a romantic walk, a romantic evening, a romantic dinner with candle light—very little is needed to achieve the “romantic” state of mind. Such a caricature of Romanticism is close to a style in music I labeled “neo-gallant” a few years ago—not in any eighteenth-century meaning, but “gallant” in a general sense: elegant, pleasant, salon-like, superficial.

Both trends, implicitly or explicitly, reject the Second Viennese School and the Darmstadt tradition and take their point of departure by returning to French experiences: impressionism in one case, the *Groupe des Six* in the other.

The neo-romanticists (I call them that way for a lack of a better term, even though they are really

⁸ [Arnold Schoenberg, *Schöpferische Konfessionen*, ed. Willi Reich (Zürich: Arche, 1964), 37. The complete wording is: “Ich glaube: Kunst kommt nicht von Können, sondern von Müssen.“ From: “Probleme des Kunstunterrichts“ (1911).]

⁹ Armando Gentilucci, “La musica contemporanea a cavallo tra due decenni: 1970-1980,” *Musica/Realtà* 20, p.67.

non-definable) also toy, in a coquettish way, with rock music and engage in a Puccini cult. But what really makes the production of these composers a nuisance is their technical inadequacy. Tonality is not a slogan but a musical language that developed over centuries; even in its simplest application it requires considerable skills of invention and construction, especially if one wants to use it again today. The Beatles knew how to use it, the non-definable composers do not. Here, art has nothing to do with necessity nor with intention, and even less with ability. Art is what one cannot do. Even though I take a dim view of this trend, I believe we need to take it into account; it is a symptom that can be analyzed. A new position can become manifest as intolerance toward old positions, and it can appear initially in an unpolished form.¹⁰

All these symptoms signal with ever greater clarity the crisis and the niche-character of contemporary music, its inability to capture people's interest and its separation from life. They are indicative of the fact that tonality, switched off by high culture as a force of gravity, emerges again in the long run and that it emphatically insists on its rights. This is confirmed by the kind of music most popular among audiences and therefore able to penetrate the media of mass communication. Regardless of its real value, it is music that in one way or another takes into account tonal polarity. The feeling for tonality seems to be part of human nature (in an anthropological or archetypal sense) to such a degree that human beings sometimes prefer a modest tonal piece to a good atonal one. Otherwise, it cannot be explained that Hindemith, even though he has disappeared by and large from the critical discourse, continues to be one of the most frequently performed German composers. The same applies to Respighi who, outside of Italy, is the most frequently performed Italian composer. By no means do I want to engage in cheap polemics against these composers, who could make the latter-day non-definable composers blush, if these non-definable folks weren't already anemic. Otherwise it cannot be explained that Stravinsky (to speak of a much more full-blooded musician) is more frequently performed than Schoenberg, and Bartók more often than Varèse. Not to mention the world of entertainment music, which, even though it manifests itself in degenerate forms, is founded on a kind of communal feeling for tonality. One cannot blame everything on the perfidious machinations of the market or multinational corporations or the mass media. Granted, never before has so much music of the past been available as in our era—a fact that has made the reception of new music objectively more difficult. Granted, music education—at least in Italy—is practically non-existent. But this does not explain everything. It is also true that not everything can please everybody and that mass societies lead to a massive accumulation of bad taste. But even this cannot explain everything. I personally would gladly exchange several tons of neo-tonal music for Schoenberg's atonal *Fünf Orchesterstücke*. But I believe that the absence of tonality cannot constitute the normal condition of music. Now that we have almost reached the end of this century of accomplishments but also of fear and misery (which often are the flipside of accomplishments), it is necessary to reverse the trend. More and more I have come to the conclusion that the grandiose era of the emancipation of the dissonance and of atonality is itself a big dissonance that must be resolved. Resolved into a new consonance to use the wonderful term that constitutes the name of the association to which I have the honor of speaking.¹¹ I do not need to point out that, when I speak of consonance and tonal elements, I do not refer to the musical system as it has evolved historically since the Renaissance. I refer to polarities as they have existed in music of all times—polarities that, in the final analysis, are based on objective premises like the subdivision of a monochord or the overtone series.

At this point the question about the relationship between music and nature arises, which, in turn, is part of the larger problem of the relationship between nature and culture. Gianbattista Vico puts it this way: "The nature of things is nothing but their origin within a definite time and in a definite manner."¹² Culture is nature humanized. It can become second nature. But it also can direct itself

¹⁰ Hanns Eisler intelligently addressed this problem in Hans Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht: Hanns Eisler im Gespräch* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1970), 268-69.

¹¹ The text is a slightly revised version of a lecture given in Rome on November 6, 1986 for a convention organized by the musical association "Nuova Consonanza" in the Goethe Institute. The convention's topic was "The multiplicity of poetics and languages in music today."

¹² Gianbattista Vico, *Scienza Nuova* 147, in Vico, *Autobiografia, Poesie, Scienza Nuova*, (Milano: Garzanti, n.d.), 248.

against the “reason” of nature, as is evident from the conditions, hostile to life, of today’s metropolitan areas, such as pollution and nuclear energy. Humans live according to physiological mechanisms whose origin gets lost in the darkness of ages. The most recent history of humans, which is just a few thousand years old, does not know of anthropological mutations. Despite the natural ease with which we take advantage of the most complicated technologies of progress, our behavior still resembles that of our oldest ancestors. Below the patina of historical transformations, the structure that connects us to the larger (and not always beautiful) family of animals and plants remains practically unchanged. As much as it may be mediated, our relation to nature constitutes an umbilical chord that we cannot sever, unless we want to destroy ourselves. There is no shortage of evidence for a more or less conscious drive to self-destruction. But these indications call forth activities to counter that drive: the intolerance toward a life that more and more depends on the death of nature, the movement to protect the environment, the politics of ecology. In our century of horrors, the most authentic art has captured these horrors. It captured these horrors not only in a programmatic sense but by means of its own structure, through the “unnaturalness” of its means. Not everything natural is good, as not everything artificial is bad. To kill animals for eating them seems to be natural. The musical language of Webern—artificial, even though influenced by Goethe’s reflections about nature—is one of the remarkable achievements of human thought. But is not any kind of language artificial, especially music? Yes, but it is based on a foundation that is natural in the final analysis. Natural—not in the reactionary interpretation of Rameau, for whom harmonic tonality was based on natural phenomena, and also not in Hindemith’s mode of thinking. Rather, I am thinking of Busoni who hypothesized overcoming tonality by changing (not by opposing) the relations to the natural foundations of music. In his *Essay on a New Aesthetic of Music* he wrote: “We divided the octave into twelve equal spaces, because we somehow had to help ourselves... Keyboard instruments, especially, have impressed our ear to such a degree that all tones outside the twelve semitones appear to us as impure. But nature has created an indefinite—indeed, an indefinite—division.”¹³ Busoni wrote this as early as 1906. During the eighty years that have passed since, music has fulfilled many of Busoni’s prognoses and thus shown, as music history has shown in general, that observing the natural foundations of music does not narrow the field of action, but—on the contrary—expands it to the most diverse musical systems. Only the system that loses its connection with those natural foundations proves itself sterile in the long run.

I cite another segment from Busoni’s *Essay*: “Every motive ... contains the kernel of its development like a seed. Different seeds generate different plants, which differ from each other in terms of form, foliage, blossoms, fruits, growth and colors. Even the same plant grows differently in each specimen in terms of evolution, appearance, and power. By the same token, each motive contains its perfect shape, given *a priori*; each individual theme must develop differently, but each follows the necessity of eternal harmony. This form remains indestructible and yet never stays the same.”¹⁴ Here, too, Busoni refers to nature by picking up a thought from Goethe: He does not want to stifle human creativity according to rules that are independent of the conditions of time and place; on the contrary, he wants to free it from the constraints of a single, uniform cultural development. Busoni’s thoughts can contribute to a discussion of the problem of form—a problem that must be considered one of the least settled issues of contemporary music, which frequently moves back and forth between formlessness and schematic patterns. Language and form are inseparably connected with each other. Form, which manifests itself each time in a different way, cannot exist independently of the language being used. For both form and language, Busoni (who was a devotee of form) invokes the infinite diversity that unfolds in nature from a unified principle. Today, we know that the secret of life, from single-cell bacteria to human beings, is contained in a molecule that all living organisms have in their chromosomes, namely DNA.

I do not want to confuse art and nature, the principle of organic life and the construction of human thinking. But there is a difference between confusing both areas and denying, explicitly and factually, any kind of relation between both. Man—created to walk on two legs—has invented

¹³ Ferruccio Busoni, *Entwurf einer Neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1954), 35.

¹⁴ Busoni, *Entwurf*, 46

machines to move faster on land, through water, and in the air. He can even escape the forces of gravitation and leave the atmosphere of the earth. But sooner or later he must return to earth, put his feet on the ground and use his natural means of transportation. This also applies to music. The tonal forces of gravitation (understood in the widest sense) can be excluded for periods of varying lengths. The explorations conducted in a state of weightlessness can be particularly appealing. But sooner or later tonality will insist on its due, and force humans to take it into consideration.

In addition to solving the problem of the separation between life and art, and between art and nature, future generations will face the task of overcoming the rupture between man and nature. Marx called this solution communism. Naturalism, in its most complete sense, incorporates humanism, the study of man. In his economic and political writings Marx considered communism the true solution of the conflict between man and nature as well as the conflict between humans. Unfortunately, I no longer have the naivety to believe that this utopian goal can be realized on the basis of a metaphysical conception of historical dialectic, and I do not believe that it is allowed to turn ourselves over to the project of saving societies that practice tyranny in the name of freedom. And yet, this utopian goal—stripped of its teleological, messianic, and idealistic character—remains the driving force that allows us to overcome the deception of metaphysical absurdity by fighting against historical absurdity. For Marx the pre-communist society is synonymous with the prehistory of mankind. In this context I recall a statement attributed to Heinz Klaus Metzger: “Everybody speaks of the end of history; I am still waiting for history to finally begin.” Are we living in a pre-historical or postmodern period? Or rather in a postmodern prehistory?

The crisis or, as has been said, the opacity of the current situation has its origin, on the one hand, in the crisis of the European model of society that functioned as the foundation for the bourgeois and modern society, and, on the other hand, the arrival of other cultures with different norms on the world stage and in the consciousness of people. The West stands for growth, development, dynamism, dialectic, time, history; the East stands for repetition, inertia, space, nature, eternity. Granted, this is a schematic simplification, which however is not entirely without justification. A comparison of European music with the traditions of Arab, Indian and Chinese music is instructive.

East and West have never been strictly separated regions. Mutual influences can be observed in many areas from religion to philosophy to art.

Today, the Western model has become a dead end. The desolate character of our cities and our societies makes it necessary to rethink the foundation of our lives in all areas. But, even once we admit that our model is neither the only one nor the best, we cannot simply imitate models that have originated in different cultural contexts. Eastern cultures (or at least some of them) adopt aspects typical of the Western capitalist society without abandoning the heritage of their respective traditions. One of the characteristics of the post-modern era is getting used to coexistence—kimono and cowboy hat, Islam and socialism, prehistory and utopia. The physicist Niels Bohr maintained that a fundamental truth is characterized by having its opposite also to be a fundamental truth. And when he was asked “What is the opposite of truth?”, he responded: “Not a lie, but clarity!”¹⁵

Having observed the arrival of Napoleon in Jena, Hegel could maintain that he had seen the universal spirit (*Weltgeist*) on horseback. Today we cannot equate the universal spirit with Reagan (whether he is wearing a cowboy hat and sitting on a horse or not), but also not with Gorbachev, Deng Xiao Ping, Khomeini, or Gaddafi. It is impossible to exchange one absolute truth for another. On the contrary, we have to recognize the complex pluralism of truths, as fundamental as they may be. Recognition does not mean acceptance. We can and must make a choice. The choice will take place neither because of fear of the last judgment nor because of an illusory hope to establish a paradise on earth; the choice will, of necessity, have something to do with our history. In the maze of threads that make up the fragile and grandiose spider web that humans have woven over thousands of years of history, man will pick up those threads that can contribute to better define

¹⁵ Cited after Eugenio Barba, “Leoni impazziti nel deserto,” in *Oxyrhymus Evangeliet*, Holstebro (Denmark): 1986.

what it is worth to be called human.

The new situation for humans on earth will also lead in the realm of art to a different order. But this new state of order—a new identity of art—cannot evolve from a willfully constructed system. Also in the musical realm, the history of our century confirms the arbitrariness of systems such as dodecaphony and total serialism, which prematurely drew conclusions from the entropy of tonality by advocating a willful return to order. Tonality has developed on the basis of several “objective” criteria in a gradual process to what we understand by it today.

By the same token, the new rules of musical metabolism will evolve gradually on the basis of the theoretical reflection and compositional practice of those working in different cultural situations. I am convinced that theoretical reflection and compositional practice must take into account what I have called “inclusive” music in another essay.¹⁶ By that I understand a music that is based on the awareness of the pluralism of traditions, languages, materials, and techniques. I think this is one of the big questions facing a composer in the next decades. And indeed: As the different manifestations for a return to tonal polarity are indicative of a change of paradigm, there are signs of a growing awareness of the necessity to take into account the different musical realities.

There are already numerous and many-faceted examples for the perviousness of cultural and linguistic codes: from Ives to Zimmermann, from Stockhausen and Berio to mutual influences between Western and Eastern traditions, between rock music and art music. They have to be understood as symptoms of a changing situation that will continue to undergo changes in the future.

The other big issue (already hinted at) concerns a new relation to nature. Nature is understood here not as an ideal, abstract and immovable reality but as the foundation of the totality of our behavior, which affects also musical behavior. It is the issue of the ecology of music. A distorted idea of development and progress has led to a world that is close to collective suicide. The distorted idea of development and progress has contaminated also the realm of art and music.

Thus far I have used the term “trend reversal” (*Tendenzwende*). Now I would like to replace it with the expression “change of direction” (*Kurswechsel*) in order to avoid the misunderstanding that I am advocating a turn around. Even if any kind of turn-around is impossible, it is clear that not everything remains during the course of history. There are green branches and dead ones; the dead branches may have been important when they were still green. We have to distinguish between what today is green and what is dead.

The concept of ecology could lead to another kind of misunderstanding. As the ecological movement does not renounce the instruments of technological progress by simplistically invoking a return to nature, guiding music back to its natural foundation can perfectly well involve the use of electronic instruments and the computer, not just “acoustic” ones such as the violin or clarinet.

The results of a kind of music that is supported by its natural foundation will be infinite, just as the possible forms in nature are infinite. Nature responds depending on how we ask the questions. I am not advocating as a solution—and I would like to stress this—a particular organization of the musical material, but point to an approach of a more general kind. If it is valid for the small realm of music, it would have even greater justification for other areas of human activity, namely the necessity to find a more harmonic relation to what constitutes in the final analysis the natural foundations of life.¹⁷ The intention to bridge the gap between music and nature will have a positive

¹⁶ “Construction of Freedom.” [Published in this volume.]

¹⁷ My presentation has led the music critic Dino Villatico to claim that I was advocating a “return to nature.” In turn, Villatico and I have had a useful discussion by mail that currently continues (February 1987). In this context I wrote to him in a letter of January 5, 1987: “It seems to me that you have summarized my lecture well, namely that modern music has been derailed by an erroneous concept of progress and that it is necessary to rethink the function of those points of reference that affected the musical cultures (or just our Western culture) in the course of history. The comparison with other areas of human activity in which progress-oriented thinking led to serious problems may

effect on a third important issue, namely the function of music, or rather the lack of a social function and, therefore, the marginality of contemporary music. This is a problem that cannot be solved willfully, even less so than the others, but it is a problem that no doubt is one of the main reasons for the insanity of the current situation.

One of the images that have impressed me most in my life is the beginning of a film by Jean Luc Godard that I saw twenty years ago. Initially the eye believes it sees part of the universe with solar systems and galaxies spinning around, but, once the camera moves slowly from close-up to the full picture, one recognizes that these are movements caused by a spoon in a cup of coffee. In presenting the thoughts in the essay at hand, I also wanted to move back and forth between close-up and full picture. It seems useful to change layers and look at things from different perspectives. It is all right to discuss the problems of contemporary music and treat them, as if they are the most important thing in the world, with all necessary seriousness. And this is certainly the case for us who work in the field. But precisely because we want to tackle those problems with the proper seriousness and rigor, they should be looked at sometimes as if from a distance. Only awareness of the irrationality of the great world-game allows us to dedicate us without reservations to our glass bead-games. The Hungarian composer György Kurtág prefaced his composition *Omaggio a Luigi Nono* with a statement by Mikhail Lermontov: “If you look around with disinterested attention, life is an empty and silly joke.” Nietzsche quotes Plato in aphorism 628 of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*: “Overall, all human activity is not worth the great seriousness; nevertheless...”¹⁸ It is the word “nevertheless” that makes life worth living and music worth composing.

[Source: “Nachträgliche Vorbemerkung” (by Lombardi in German) and “Zwischen Prähistorie und Postmoderne” (trans. Wolfgang Korb), typescripts, undated. The essay (without the “Vorbemerkung” but with a postscript or *Efterskrift*) appeared in Danish as “Mellem prae-historie og post-moderne” (translation: Karl Aage Rasmussen), *Dansk Tidsskrift* 6 (1986-87), 314-19, and in Italian (with neither preface nor postscript) as “Tra preistoria e postmoderno,” *Molteplicità de poetiche e linguaggi nella musica d’oggi*, ed. Daniela Tortora (Milano, Unicopli, 1988), 27-42. A German publication did not materialize.]

have been forced. Granted air pollution is different from the uselessness and ugliness of some music written today (which however can also be harmful), but, aside from any polemical exaggeration, I really believe (I may err here, but I do not think so) that music, for better or worse, participates in the general orientation of thought in a given historical period; therefore, in music as well as other areas the question arises whether we are content with what we are doing or whether it is time to give our work (and our lives) a direction that not only takes into account what has shaped our culture thus far but also what is characteristic of our physical and psychological nature. It is clear that the progress of humankind (a progress that I do not want to deny) also meant an increasing liberation from the shackles of nature. (To give a trivial example: I am pleased that we know how to protect ourselves pretty well against earthquakes.) But, apart from the fact that the path described is still very long, there are conditions we cannot escape and cannot ignore—even though we ignore them in the sense that we know very little about how our brain functions—as we cannot jump over our own shadow. Perhaps all our lectures on rationality and emotionalism, and perhaps most of our aesthetic concepts, are amateurish in reality, because they do not take into account the neuro-physiological processes that determine our reactions of pleasure and displeasure beyond all our aesthetic constructs.

“Granted, I have dealt decisively in my text with problems that really would need to be approached with great caution. But I have the feeling, even though not everything is clear for me, that I have moved in the right direction. A certain confirmation for my position are the results of linguists such as Chomsky who was able to prove that the sentence structures of different languages (disregarding their specific properties) show common features that hint at universal laws; these laws probably are connected to the structure and working method of the human brain.

“True, this insight does not prevent the existence of immense diversity of languages, but it can help to explain why these different languages have common structural properties, or, expressed differently, why languages with a completely atypical structure did not gain acceptance (...).”

[The letter is cited in the postscript or *Efterskrift* of the Danish version of the essay.]

¹⁸ [“Alles Menschliche insgesamt ist des großen Ernstes nicht wert; trotzdem ...“. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke II*, ed. Nietzsche-Archiv (Leipzig: Kröner, n.d.), 346.]