The newer music offers a divergence, however, from Schoenberg's practice in its consistent preoccupation with nondifferentiated counterpoint, a style of writing in which all the voices have equal obligations of expressivity and identical rights in rhetoric. The dramatizing of counterpoint into melody, bass, countermelody, and accompaniment is abolished in this style for an equalized texture that recalls the music of the pre-Renaissance period. There are advantages here to intimacy of expression, since the composer can speak in this technique as personally through a vocal or string ensemble as through a solo instrument. The disadvantage of it is that it is not easily applicable to diversified ensembles, where variety of timbre and technique imposes a certain differentiation of melodic style from one voice to another.

The new music, therefore, is mostly homophonic [homogeneous] in sound, or instrumentation. It is personal in expression, too, and contrapuntal in texture. Its counterpoint is secundal and generally chromatic. If it were not the latter, it would resemble more closely than it does official, or neoclassic, modernism. It can appear tonal or nontonal when examined closely; and it can follow or not Schoenberg's twelve-tone syntax, which this composer himself does not always follow. But its chromaticism invariably approaches atonality. This last, let us remember, is not a precise or easily attainable end. It is rather an ultimate state toward which chromaticism has always tended. Its attractiveness to our century comes, I think, from its equalization of harmonic tensions. We like equalized tensions. They are the basis of streamlining and of all those other surface unifications that in art, as in engineering, make a work recognizable as belonging to our time and to no other.

Virgil Thomson, "Modernism Today," in *Music Reviewed 1940–1954* (New York: Random House, 1967), 195–98. Reprinted by permission of the author.

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New Developments in Serialism

Pierre Boulez achieved his first notoriety in 1952 as a result of a shockingly provocative attack on what he perceived as the incongruity between the just-deceased Schoenberg's great discovery of the "series" and the traditional structural, textural, and rhythmic language he continued to employ to the end of his life. Webern is cited as the fountainhead of a truly integrated serial music, in which structure and texture proceed from the implications of the new ordering principle. Boulez's uncompromising stance and his pugnacious tone ("since the Viennese discovery, every composer outside the serial experiments has been *useless*") immediately made him a spokesman for his generation and a focal point of controversy. Later, Boulez mellowed to the point where he became for six years the conductor of the New York Philharmonic (1969–75).

To take a stand regarding Schoenberg?

To do so is urgently necessary, certainly; it is nonetheless an elusive problem, defying wisdom, perhaps a search without satisfactory result.

It would be vain to deny it: the Schoenberg "case" is irritating, above all because of its freight of flagrant incompatibilities.

For with Schoenberg we attend one of the most important revolutions that has ever affected the musical language. The material, properly speaking, does not change at all: the twelve semitones. But the structural organization is altered: from tonal organization we pass to serial organization. How did the idea of the series materialize? At what exact moment in Schoenberg's oeuvre did it occur?

Suspension of the tonal system is achieved effectively in the Three Pieces for Piano, op. 11. Thereafter, the experiments become more and more penetratingly acute and lead to the renowned *Pierrot lunaire* [op. 21 (1912)]. I note three remarkable phenomena in the writing of these scores: the principle of constant variation, or nonrepetition; the preponderance of "anarchic" intervals—presenting the greatest tension relative to the tonal world—and progressive elimination of the octave, the tonal world par excellence; [finally,] a manifest attempt to construct contrapuntally.

His exploration of the dodecaphonic realm may be bitterly held against Schoenberg, for it went off in the wrong direction so persistently that it would be hard to find an equally mistaken perspective in the entire history of music.

In Schoenberg's serial works, the confusion between "theme" and "series" is explicit enough to show his impotence to foresee the sound-world that the series demands. Dodecaphonism consists only of a rigorous law for controlling chromatic writing; playing [in his works] only the role of regulating instrument, the serial phenomenon itself was not, so to speak, perceived by Schoenberg.

And there, it seems, you have what led to the decrepitude of the larger part of his serial oeuvre. The preclassic or classic forms ruling most of the architectures have no historical link to the dodecaphonic discovery; thus an inadmissible dichotomy arises between infrastructures related to the tonal phenomenon and a language in which one again perceives the laws of organization summarized above. These architectures annihilate the possibilities of organization inherent in the new language. The two worlds are incompatible, and Schoenberg attempted to justify one by the other.

One cannot call such a procedure valid, and it produced results that could have been anticipated: the worst sort of misunderstanding. A warped "romantico-classicism" in which the good intentions are not the least unattractive element. One certainly gave no great credit to the serial organization by not allowing it its own modes of development, but substituting other, apparently surer ones.

The persistence of accompanied melody, for example; of counterpoint based upon a principal part and secondary parts. Nor is it only in the limited conceptions, but equally in the writing itself, that I see reminiscences of a dead world. Under Schoenberg's pen there abounded the clichés of the most ostentatious and obsolete romanticism. I refer to those constant anticipations, with expressive leaning on the key note; I mean those false appoggiaturas; or, again, those formulas of arpeggios, of devices, of repetitions, which sound so terribly hollow. Finally, I refer to the disagreeable use of a contemptibly poor—call it ugly—treatment of rhythm.

At the very beginning, perhaps one should dissociate the serial phenomenon from Schoenberg's oeuvre. It is easy to forget that a certain Webern also labored. Perhaps, like that certain Webern, one could pursue the sound-EVIDENCE by trying to derive the structure from the material. Perhaps one could enlarge the serial domain with intervals other than the semitone. Perhaps one could generalize the serial principle to the four sound-constituents: pitch, duration, intensity and attack, timbre. Perhaps ... perhaps ...

one could demand from a composer some imagination, a certain degree of asceticism, even a little intelligence, and, finally, a sensibility that will not be toppled by the least breeze.

We must keep ourselves from considering Schoenberg as a sort of Moses who died in view of the Promised Land after having brought down the Tables of the Law from a Sinai that some people obstinately want to confuse with Valhalla. [These are mocking references to Schoenberg's opera *Moses und Aron.*] We certainly owe him *Pierrot lunaire* ... and some other very enviable works.

Nonetheless, it has become necessary that we demolish a misunderstanding that is so full of ambiguity and contradictions: it is time to neutralize the setback. Therefore I do not hesitate to write, not out of any desire to provoke a stupid scandal, but equally without bashful hypocrisy and pointless melancholy:

SCHOENBERG IS DEAD.

Pierre Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship,* trans. Herbert Weinstock (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 268–76, slightly modified. Copyright © 1968 by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and John Calder (Publishers) Ltd., London.

One of the earliest rejoinders to Boulez's intransigent stance came from Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno (1903–69), a German philosopher and sociologist who had studied composition with Alban Berg and who saw the main significance of modernist music in social rather than purely technical terms. That significance, Adorno asserted, lay in the resistance modernist music offered to the homogenizing and dehumanizing effects of the overly rationalized and instrumentalized conditions of modern life. (By *instrumentalized,* Adorno and the other members of the so-called Frankfurt School of sociologists meant the subjection of all human thought and activity to material and pragmatic concerns at the expense of individual growth.) Totalitarianism had been one manifestation or consequence of hyper-rationalization and instrumentalism, whereby human individuals had been turned into the mere means through which the state, a non-human entity, achieved its ends. Advanced capitalist society, working through its cultural institutions (or, in Frankfurt-speak, the "culture industry," whose primary product was popular music), was another agent of dehumanizing instrumentalism. Adorno deemed the great virtue of Schoenberg's atonal (pre-dodecaphonic) music to lie in its most controversial aspect, namely its notorious arbitrariness, in which Adorno saw the triumph of human subjectivity over the many forces that conspired to constrain it, including the demand that it make ordinary or "natural" sense. The rigorous systematization of Schoenberg's achievements that Boulez now proposed in the name of progress, and for which Webern rather than Schoenberg provided the pertinent model, was in Adorno's eyes a regression into the very rationalization and instrumentalism that Schoenberg's expressionist music had implicitly, and heroically, opposed. (The surprising news that emerged in the 1980s, that Webern had been a supporter of the Nazi regime, has been seen by some as corroboration of Adorno's position.) Needless to say, Adorno's claim that social meanings are immanent—inherent and objectively discernable—in musical texts and techniques has been hotly debated from the moment of its first assertion, with no end in sight. The text below is an abridgment of "The Aging of the New Music," a talk Adorno gave in 1954 at a new-music festival in Stuttgart, several years after returning to Germany from wartime exile in Great Britain and America. It was published the next year in *Der Monat,* the German-language organ of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (see p. 457). Adorno's literary style requires comment. Seemingly a parody of German philosophical prose in its near-impenetrability (somewhat mitigated in our version, admittedly against his intentions), it was a deliberate tactic invoked—as he believed it was in the music he advocated—to ward off the possibility of appropriation by popularizers who threatened its freedom of uncompromising dissent. To limit one's thinking and mode of expression for the sake of easy communication was to sacrifice one's personal autonomy to the dictates of social convention. His highly moralistic tone (despite his explicit—inadvertently comical—disclaimer) is another aspect of his work that jars against normal "artistic" discourse and has reminded some readers of the totalitarian writers—e.g., Ziegler (pp. 429–33)—he so passionately opposed.

To speak of the aging of the New Music seems paradoxical. Yet music that has its essence in the refusal to go along with things as they are, and has its justification in giving shape to what the superficial conventions of daily life hid and what is otherwise condemned to silence by the culture industry—which threatens to acquire New Music as a wholly owned subsidiary—precisely this music has begun to show symptoms of false satisfaction. The malicious objection of reactionaries that scholasticism has crept into modernism and is spreading can only be met by the critical reflection sedimented in the works themselves. The concept of New Music is incompatible with an affirmative sound, the confirmation of what is. When music for the first time came to completely doubt all that, it became New Music. The shock it dealt to its audience in its heroic period—at the time of the first performance of the *Altenberg* Songs of Alban Berg or the first performance of the *Sacre du printemps* of Stravinsky in Paris—cannot simply be attributed to unfamiliarity and strangeness, as the good-natured apology would have it; rather it is the result of something actually distressing and confused. Whoever denies this and claims that the new art is as beautiful as the traditional one does it a real disservice; he praises in it what this music rejects so long as it unflinchingly follows its own impulse.

The aging of the New Music means nothing else than that this critical impulse is ebbing away. It is falling into contradiction with its own idea, the price of which is its own aesthetic substance and coherence. The "stabilization of music," the danger of the dangerless, became even stronger after the world catastrophe. Indeed, on no account, as another cliché would have it, has the fermenting mash clarified into ripe, sweet wine. No valid accomplishment, no rounded masterpiece, took the place of the excesses of Storm and Stress. This striving for masterpieces is part of that conformism renounced by New Music. One could hardly claim that the creations of the mid-twentieth century are superior to Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* or *Erwartung,* Berg's *Wozzeck,* the lyrics of Webern or the early outbursts of Stravinsky and Bartók. Even if in the meantime the raw material of composition was purified of slag and unhomogeneous vestiges of the past, and if somehow the possibility developed of a rigorous new musical phase, it is still questionable whether such a purification of all disturbing intrusions would be of service to the cause of music, and not simply to a technocratic attitude, in whose eager concern for consistency something entirely too binding, violent, and unartistic announces itself. In any case, advances in the material have hardly benefited the quality of the works that use them. A blind belief in progress is required not to notice how little progress has been made since the early twenties, how much has been lost, how tame and in many respects how impoverished most music has become. This must be pointed out without

hesitation by whoever keeps faith with New Music and hopes to help it better than by accommodation to the *Zeitgeist*, to the servile acknowledgement of the status quo.

The symptoms have worked their way into the compositions of the most gifted and, according to their own principles, most uncompromising composers. Cases like those of Stravinsky and Hindemith, who more or less explicitly abjured what filled their youth, what in them was once so fascinating, are not at issue here. But even Béla Bartók, from whom such inclinations were very distant, began at a certain point to separate himself from his own past. In a speech given in New York, he explained that a composer like him, whose roots were in folk music, could ultimately not do without tonality—an astounding statement for the Bartók who unhesitatingly resisted all populist temptations and chose exile and poverty when the shadow of Fascism passed over Europe.

All the more urgent is it therefore to understand the present situation of what now attracts the disgruntled and rebellious: twelve-tone technique. Schoenberg's own misgivings are enlightening for anyone who is no more pleased by the popularity of twelve-tone technique—as historically necessary as ever—than say, by the popularity of Franz Kafka's works. Twelve-tone technique has its justification only in the presentation of complex musical contents, which cannot otherwise be organized. Separated from this function, it degenerates into a deluded system. Schoenberg himself consistently refused to teach what the music marketplace had falsified into a system. Twelve-tone technique is the inexorable clamp that holds together what no less powerfully strives to break apart. If it is employed without being tested against such contrary forces, if it is employed where there is nothing counteracting it to be organized, then it is simply a waste of energy. Judgment is passed over innumerable contemporary twelve-tone compositions by the fact that in them relatively simple musical occurrences stand in a relatively simple musical interrelation, the establishment of which by no means demanded serial technique in the first place.

Yet among the intransigent, who would as far as possible like to pursue consequentiality beyond Schoenberg, one meets a remarkable mixture of sectarianism and academicism. Among the major exponents of the New Music, including Schoenberg himself, it is not difficult to uncover traditional elements, particularly in its musical language, that is, in its expressive character and the inner construction of the music, in contrast to the entirely transformed musical material itself. The available materials, right up to the present, have all grown out of the soil of tonality. When they are transferred to non-tonal material, certain inconsistencies result, a kind of break between musical subject-matter and the forming of the music. The very concept of a transition, for example, presupposes various harmonic levels of modulation; stripped of its harmonic task it withers up all too easily into a formal reminiscence. Even the central category—the theme—is difficult to maintain when, as in twelve-tone technique, every tone is equally determined, equally thematic; in twelve-tone compositions themes persist largely as rudiments of an older period. On the other hand, it is only by means of these and related traditional categories that the coherence of the music, its sense, the authentic composition, in so far as it is more than mere arrangement, has been preserved in the midst of twelve-tone technique. Schoenberg's conservatism in this respect is not attributable to a lack of consistency, but to his fear that composition would otherwise be sacrificed to the prefabrication of the material. His most recent followers blithely short-circuit the antinomy that he rightly tried to deal with. They are intentionally indifferent to whether the music makes sense and is articulated—a consideration that caused Schoenberg's hesitations—and believe that the preparation of

tones is already composition as soon as one has dismissed from composition everything by which it actually becomes a composition. They never get further than abstract negation, and take off on an empty, high-spirited trip, through thinkably complex scores, in which nothing actually happens; this seems to authorize them to write one score after another, without any constraints at all.

This development already set in with Schoenberg's pupil, Anton von Webern. His later works attempt to organize the musical-linguistic means so entirely in accordance with the new subject-matter, the twelve-tone rows, that he occasionally comes very close to renouncing the musical material altogether and reducing music to naked processes in the material, to the fate of the rows as such, though admittedly without ever completely sacrificing musical meaning entirely. Recently a group of composers have pursued this direction further. At their head stands Pierre Boulez, pupil of Olivier Messiaen and René Leibowitz, a highly cultured and exceptionally gifted musician, with the highest sense of form and with a power that is communicated even where he disavows subjectivity altogether. He and his disciples aspire to dispose of every "compositional freedom" as pure caprice, along with every vestige of traditional musical idiom: in fact, every subjective impulse is in music at the same time an impulse of musical language. These composers have above all attempted to bring rhythm under the strict domination of twelve-tone procedure, and ultimately to replace composition altogether with an objective-calculatory ordering of intervals, pitches, long and short durations, degrees of loudness; an integral rationalization such as has never before been envisaged in music. The capriciousness of this legalism, however, the mere semblance of objectivity in a system that has simply been decreed, becomes apparent in the inappropriateness of its rules to the structural interrelations of the music as it develops, relations that rules cannot do away with. The merely thought up is always also too little thought out.

Something in the total rationalization of music seems to appeal strongly to young people. They find their own reflection in the new widespread allergy toward every kind of expression, an allergy that the iconoclastic exponents of "pointillist" music share with their conservative opponents, as with the historicist interpreters of Bach or the collectivist camp followers of the youth movement. Yet it is not expression as such that must be exorcised from music, like an evil demon—otherwise nothing would be left except the designs of [what Eduard Hanslick (see p. 326) called] "sounding forms in motion"—rather the element of transfiguration, the ideological element of expression, has grown threadbare. This ideological element is to be recognized in what fails to become substantial in musical form, what remains ornament and empty gesture. This touches on one of the decisive anthropological grounds for the aging of New Music: young people no longer trust in their youth. Anxiety and pain have grown to an extreme degree, and can no longer be controlled by the individual psyche. Repression becomes a necessity, and this repression, not the positiveness of some higher state of modesty and self-discipline, stands behind the idiosyncratic rejection of expression, which is itself one with suffering. Every impulse not already comprehended under collective schemata necessarily brings to mind what cannot be admitted to consciousness, and is therefore itself forbidden. The belief that through the rationalization of its materials music enters a new scientific stage is naïve, as if with progressive rationalization art would change into science and take part in its triumph; it is one of those hypotheses by which artists undertake to justify, in an amateurishly intellectual way, what they have already begun to do.

These inner aesthetic tendencies accord precisely with those of society as a whole, although the mediation between the two realms is not at every point transparent.

Society not only influences artists externally, not only supervises them—although there is enough of that—it also forms the artist's own essence. Objectivism, which is so vain about its lack of vanity, and so facilely considers itself morally superior, self-righteously puts a premium on the deficiencies of its exponents. But the overcoming of a non-existent self is an all-too-comfortable course. The symptoms of the aging of the New Music are in social terms those of the contraction of freedom, the collapse of individuality that helpless and disintegrated individuals confirm, approve, and re-enact. In this there is a fatal resemblance between the radicals—who turn themselves over to what they mistakenly consider to be the inner law of the material and enthusiastically subtract themselves from the picture—and those who have crawled away into the ruins of a bygone tradition. Nobody really takes a chance any more; all are looking for shelter. The brutal measures taken by the totalitarian states, measures that over-control music and attack all deviation as decadent and subversive, give tangible evidence of what happens less visibly in non-totalitarian countries, of what transpires, indeed, in the interior of art as well as within most human beings. In the face of such profound damage, nothing would be more foolish than to moralize. The simple fact of the matter cannot be kept silent, that today, the alienation between music and the public has so rebounded against music that the material existence of serious musicians is seriously threatened.

The current paralysis of musical forces represents the paralysis of all free initiative in this over-managed world, which will not tolerate anything that would remain outside of it or at least not be integrated as an element of opposition. All this must be brought unsparingly to consciousness, for the sake of the possibility of something better. Whether it will do any good is highly questionable; for the foundation of music, as of every art, the very possibility of taking the aesthetic seriously has been deeply shaken. Since the European catastrophe, culture hangs on like houses in the cities accidentally spared by bombs or indifferently patched together. Nobody really believes in "culture" any more, the backbone of spirit has been broken, and anyone who pays no attention to this and acts as though nothing had happened, must crawl like an insect, not walk upright. The only authentic artworks produced today are those that in their inner organization measure themselves by the fullest experience of horror, and there is scarcely anyone, except Schoenberg or Picasso, who can depend on himself to have the power to do this. Though today all art has and must have a bad conscience to the extent that it does not make itself stupid, nevertheless its abolishment would be false in a world in which what dominates needs art as its corrective: the contradiction between what is and the true; between the management of life and humanity. The possibility of winning back the power of artistic resistance depends on not shrinking from the fact that what is objectively, socially required is now preserved exclusively in hopeless isolation. Only one who was prepared to work in isolation, to support himself by no delusive laws and necessities, would perhaps be granted something more than mirroring the helplessly solitary.

Theodor W. Adorno, "Das Altern der neuen Musik" (1955), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, in T. W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 181–88, 191–92, 199–200.