

Music since 1945 and Oral Culture

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I consider myself part of a literate musical culture. As a composer and performer, much of my time is obviously spent listening, but I receive most new musical information by reading: I study scores I am to perform and construct from them an aural and an emotional image of the music through a process of abstraction and imagination. As a composer of instrumental music, I rely on a complex interaction with the visual impression of the score I am writing for inspiration as to how to compose the next phrases. As a composer of electroacoustic music, much as I love the world of sound into which I can immerse myself, I frequently miss the help which my sketches and the written score give me in instrumental music. I know that my whole vision of music as a combination of abstract structure and sounding reality depends on a “literate” view of the world, or at least a “literate” view of the activities of the mind.

This text contends that contemporary music is becoming more and more an oral culture. The written trace of musical activity, both scores themselves and writing about music, has much diminished in importance in the last 50 years. The analytical language for describing music of the last half-century is much less well developed than that for describing earlier music. Some of the most active areas of music today, especially improvisation and electroacoustic music, exist without scores and virtually without any written text. Ever since the development of simple and sophisticated systems of musical notation around the thirteenth century, most music has been dependent upon, and has been enriched by, the tension between sounding reality and its written representation. This situation of fruitful tension, which seems so natural both for the performance and for the study of music, is now changing very significantly. This text will attempt to describe some aspects of music’s transformation to an “oral culture” and to discern some of the roots and origins of this transformation. I shall argue that an important feature of the music since 1945 is the difficulty and often impossibility of its analysis and hence abstraction. I shall further argue that certain kinds of compositional relationships are difficult to establish without a vocabulary of abstraction. I shall use the example of electroacoustic music to

speak about consequences of this new oral culture, and finally I shall suggest that the shift to an oral culture is more general than one might expect.

At the outset, a word about the expression “oral culture”. I readily admit that this may not be the best way to describe the changes I wish to speak about, but the expression seemed to me the appropriate opposition to a culture which is transmitted by reading and writing. I have become aware of a change in the way our culture thinks about and makes music largely thanks to my work with students, for like most composers, I spend much of my time teaching. I am often struck by the differences between my teaching of traditional composition on the one hand and my teaching of electroacoustic music on the other. In working with a young instrumental composer, I spend much of the time analyzing music of the 20th century. Teaching electroacoustic music is quite different. Here I sit down next to my pupil in the studio, and we work through a problem together at the computer. There are no scores I can recommend he study, and although I can suggest he listen to certain pieces, I usually know very little about how they were made, and so I cannot generalize about the musical situation and its compositional realization as I can with earlier music. I feel as though I am sitting at a tribal fire, passing on to the younger generation the lore of the ancients, primarily me, by word of mouth. That is why I speak of “oral culture”. While teaching, I can fall back on no established vocabulary, on no convention of notation, on no stylistic tradition. The only music I can speak of with confidence is my own, the only technical knowledge I can transmit is that which I have derived myself. How much richer the transmission of experience and knowledge in the literate culture, where the musical score and the written word allow such intimate observation of the compositional process of other composers.

One of the very important characteristics of oral culture is that the music it produces often cannot be analyzed in a traditional sense. There are various reasons for this. Sometimes the music is composed to exclude relationships of the kind analysis traditionally uncovers, such as pitch or temporal relationships, ordered similarity and contrast, etc. (This is the case with most of the music of John Cage.) Sometimes the music reflects relationships which are intuitively clear but which do not lend themselves to analytic description, as in the music of Charles Ives. Sometimes composers invent complex mechanisms of derivation, as if to encode their music, hoping to render it impervious to analysis, as when Yannis Xenakis draws his music or Pierre Boulez elaborates serial structures. Sometimes, on the other hand, the music is of such lapidary simplicity that there remains nothing for analysis to discover (the music of Arvo

Pärt seems to me exemplary here). Sometimes, finally, there is simply no sufficiently abstract representation of the music to allow analysis. This is true of almost all electroacoustic music. In this case, the fact that the music cannot be analysed may be accidental, so to speak; the musical structure may be perfectly amenable to analysis, but with only the sound to work with, it is often impossible, or at best impracticable, to derive the music's basic materials and to describe their elaboration.

Composers write music which is not amenable to analysis in order to guide listeners' attention away from directionality, in order to signal the futility of applying to their listening traditional models of expectation and fulfilment (or non-fulfilment) and in order to suggest a listening mode which is "intuitive". (It is difficult to avoid using vague words to describe some of the phenomena I wish to mention; it is equally difficult to avoid setting them in quotation marks to show their inadequacy.) Perhaps the first important composition which allows of virtually no analysis in the traditional sense is *Erwartung* by Arnold Schoenberg. *Erwartung*, composed in 1909 for soprano and immense orchestra, sets to music a text by Marie Pappenheim which describes the rapidly changing emotions of a woman waiting to meet her lover in a park at night. The music has neither motives nor themes and there is no formal movement except the seismographic illustration of the woman's emotional state. By avoiding all repetition (at the level of motive, phrase and formal section), Schoenberg urges the listener early on in the piece to adopt a mode of listening more closely akin to the condition of the woman than to more abstract modes usually used when listening to a concert. *Erwartung* is not really "oral" because there is a precisely written score. The score, however, is only a tabulature of the sonic realization; it is "opaque": We cannot analyze it or use it to think further about the piece. In this sense, *Erwartung* is one of the earliest precursors of music in an oral culture.

Another example of music from the first part of the century which resists serious analysis is that of Edgard Varèse. In the most characteristic works, for example *Hyperprism* or *Octandre* (both composed in 1923), it is difficult to explain wherein the resistance to analysis lies. There are in both works, after all, clear repetition and obvious development; there is even (in *Octandre*) a fugue. But both repetition and development are largely local, employed as a way of moving from one measure to the next. At the next higher level of morphology, there are everywhere strange ruptures, seeming non-sequiturs, mysterious veerings-off in unanticipated directions, thoughts introduced which are not followed up. Analysis seems to have no vocabulary to deal with these anomalies. In addition, the pitch material itself is often so primary, like unworked

rock (for instance the descending chromatic scale of the opening oboe melody in *Octandre* or the insistent use of chords of notes which make up part of a chromatic scale), so that it is difficult to discover relationships between melodies or chords. Or perhaps our urge to analyze is thwarted by the fact that these relationships are straightforward and simplistic: most of the pitch material has the same intervallic structure, namely notes making up part of a chromatic scale. Significantly, when, later in his life, Varèse speaks about his music and specifically about *Hyperprism*, he uses images from crystallography and geometry, as though the imagery from outside music might in some magic way give rise to music obeying other laws than those of traditional music. As with Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, there is in all Varèse's music (with the exception of *Poème Electronique* and the tape parts of *Déserts*) a score in the traditional sense, but the resistance of his music to analysis makes *Hyperprism*, like *Erwartung*, a precursor to the oral culture of our century.

The serial music of the 1950's introduced another aspect to the question of whether a composition can be analyzed or not. By its very nature and principles, serial music should be amenable to analysis. In reality, most serial pieces are so complex that it is impossible to trace their arborescences back to some combination of primal elements without a great deal of help from the composer himself. Serial composers created works as elaborate labyrinths, often taking great pains to disguise entrances and exits. The aesthetics of the decade eschewed straightforward formal contours and easily recognizable linear development. Serial techniques attempted to extend the chromaticism of the twelve-tone row to many of the other aspects of music. Although there was a great flowering of technical literature during the 1950's, it seems unlikely that anyone seriously thought that essential qualities of the music were being addressed by speaking more or less candidly about what in retrospect takes on the character of recipes shared by a group of justifiably self-confident cooks. Behind the technical self-confidence, however, lurked a shyness and a reticence to speak about darker, more secret aspects of the music they wrote. Today it is possible to read the wordy program notes and cheerfully informative articles of the 1950's as a vade-mecum for a descent into regions of consciousness one could not otherwise address. The serial decade, 1950-1960, was a strangely dichotic time: communication by written word, but also by lecture and through teaching, was genuine and important. The younger generation of composers, I among them, learned a great deal from the musical writings of the decade. At the same time, the music of those years encouraged a quite different kind of listening: non-analytical, "intuitive".

In the early 1960's music came from Eastern Europe which was technically in great opposition to that of the serial decade: shimmering sheets of sound replaced intense, nervous hyperactivity, slow, linear development replaced formal chromaticism, simplicity, at least in outer lineaments, replaced labyrinthine complexity. In this music, analysis is not so much impossible as irrelevant. *Atmosphères* (1961) by Györgi Ligeti, which had an immense impact when it was first played at Donaueschingen in 1961, is a good example of a work whose score at one level reveals so unabashedly how the piece is made and at another allows so little insight into what is actually going on. Every aspect of the composition—the undifferentiated clusters of the harmonic structure, the clear linear movement of the sound masses, the very simple progressions of dynamics and what Pierre Schaeffer spoke of as allure to delineate formal grouping—signals to the listener that there is nothing here to analyze, that other perceptual modes should be called upon to grasp the piece and, more important, that other considerations were decisive for the work's composition.

The opposition of extremes so clearly formulated early in the second half of our century: on the one hand highly structured music whose very complexity leads one to other modes of listening, on the other music whose relatively straightforward scores seem to hide no secrets, is still valid at the end of the century. Obviously, this description is a gross simplification, but one can imagine the extremes by comparing the somewhat anachronistically labyrinthine music of Brian Ferneyhough with the pristinely isolated notes and chords of Morton Feldman, or the ebulliently eloquent music of Elliott Carter with the embarrassingly bare pieces of Arvo Pärt. But almost all pieces along the continuum between these two end points share one quality in common: analysis is able to reveal little of real musical relevance about them. The importance of the music, its “message”, so to speak, resides in other dimensions than those to which analysis has access

Why is it important whether or not a work can be analyzed? Of course, if one is concerned with listening and taking pleasure from music, it is of little importance whether analytical techniques can be employed fruitfully or not in relation to a particular work. On the other hand, where observation outside the flow of musical time and involvement does not succeed in bringing insight into the music beyond what the ear knows, one can draw conclusions about the musical thought forming and shaping the work. At the very least, one can conclude that the composer is not interested in eliciting a listening mode familiar from and adequate for the music of the last several hundred years up to and including that of the Second Viennese school (and of course for much music composed after

1945 as well), where typically an idea is presented, developed or otherwise commented upon, contrasted, possibly returned to, etc. Compare, for example, a page from *Oiseaux exotiques* by Olivier Messiaën with a page from the *Marteau sans maître* by Pierre Boulez, composed at about the same time. Even in its most complex passages (the long polyphonic middle section), the music of Messiaën remains discursive, developing a new phrase from the last, moving logically from one thought to another, often using symmetry as a technique for organizing larger structures. Complexity arises from the superposition of several polyphonic voices, each of which, however, is relatively straightforwardly organized. A page of the *Marteau*, however, seems much less tightly organized: the music hardly seems discursive, the movement from one idea to the next seems often arbitrary, there is no repetition and ideas appear full-blown on the page, without previous development. (I am describing, not criticizing the *Marteau sans maître*, which I consider one of the few great works of its decade.) Boulez's work appears impervious to analysis (although the extraordinarily diligent work of Lev Koblyakov proves that the piece is merely exceptionally difficult but not impossible to analyze), while *Oiseaux exotiques* clearly can be analyzed, if one is willing to take the time. As a result, I can think about the organization and structure of *Oiseaux exotiques*; I can even adapt techniques I discover in the score to my own writing, if I care to. But the *Marteau sans maître* reveals almost nothing of its secrets to me (a less patient observer than Koblyakov). It presents itself solely as sound, enigmatic in its structure as in its expression, requiring of me a mode of listening very different from the mode of composition. The listener is not expected to follow the compositional thought, but to admire the dazzling product to which the thought led. Obviously the sensual reality and emotional power of a musical work are not impaired by our not being able to analyze the music itself, but when we lose the ability to represent the work in any other terms than those of its sounding reality and of our memory thereof, we lose the ability to think abstractly about the work.

At this point I would like to focus the discussion on electroacoustic music, because I think that the lack of tools of abstraction manifests itself even more strongly in electroacoustic than in instrumental music and that for this reason the situation of electroacoustic music can serve as a more clearly articulated paradigm of the situation of music in general at the end of the century.

In general, electroacoustic music has no score in the traditional sense of an abstract conventional representation of musical thought to be turned into sound by one or more performers. (Two important exceptions are the so-called "mixed" electroacoustic music, where instruments are ac-

accompanied by tape or other fixed medium, and live electroacoustic music, where scores coordinate both acoustic and electroacoustic instruments. However, in the former case, the score is often merely a visual representation of the electroacoustic music realized after the composition, while in the latter case the score is typically little more than instructions for playing the electroacoustic instruments.) That there is no score seems to me quite natural for electroacoustic music, since in most cases the composer also fulfils the role of performer, shaping each phrase with the same care as an instrumentalist would. On the other hand, the lack of an intermediary level between composition and interpretation makes it even more difficult to imagine electroacoustic music in abstract terms. Because of this difficulty, most composers in the field compose in a largely intuitive, “experimental” manner, which means that the ear, and not some more abstract consideration, is responsible for most compositional decisions. As a result, electroacoustic music often has an immediately seductive sensuous character, and listeners often report that its emotional impact is much stronger than that of instrumental music in a conventional concert setting. This sensuous immediacy is one aspect of what I mean when I say that electroacoustic music is an “oral art”. While direct appeal to the senses can hardly be considered a bad thing in art, other aspects of the “oral culture” of electroacoustic music seem to me more problematic. For instance, there is very little written documentation of compositional practice (as opposed to technical practice, which is at least minimally documented). As a composer, one relies on one’s personal memory of heard music, and of the reactions and thoughts that music provoked, when imagining how a new piece might sound. Composers who were trained in the instrumental domain certainly sense the newness of this oral culture more strongly than those who have worked exclusively in the electroacoustic domain. Drawing from my own experience, I would like to suggest four ways in which working in an oral culture affects the practice of composition most strongly. I should emphasize again that while I am speaking only of electroacoustic music here, I consider the situations I speak of to be paradigmatic for contemporary music in general.

To begin with, the difficulty of thinking in abstract terms about electroacoustic music and the lack of analytical vocabulary mean that it is very difficult to conceive of compositional models which have validity beyond one’s own personal experience. In the past, concepts like “dissonance–consonance”, “harmonize”, “modulate” or “motivic development” were understood by all and could be used to help imagine compositional procedures. Of course, literature about electroacoustic music, and presumably composers themselves, do use compositional models in describing what is going on in a piece of music (“the music’s texture be-

comes denser” or “the tessitura becomes very narrow”), but the models are usually very simple ones, hardly related to the actual musical material itself in the way the relatively precise idea of modulation is related to pitches. Needless to say, the use of such models does not insure that one will write good music, nor, equally obviously, are conceptual models necessary to make good music. I suggest however that such conceptual models have always aided and enriched the task of composing, allowing composers to think about their work in more complex ways than would have been possible otherwise. An interesting and perhaps slightly less obvious example of the role of abstraction is the process of sketching on score paper. We know from the copious surviving sketches by Beethoven how much his music owes to his having been able to write down his first, often quite banal, ideas so he could continue to work on them, changing and polishing until they met his satisfaction. Sketches were so important for Beethoven not because he had a bad memory or because his powers of imagination were weak—of course neither was the case—but because putting an idea on paper served to objectify and render abstract what had originally presented itself acoustically. It is as though, by bringing the idea outside himself, so to speak, Beethoven was able to work on it more easily.

The second way in which the oral culture of electroacoustic music influences compositional practice is also related to the lack of an abstract conceptual framework. When this framework is missing, it is natural that most composers of electroacoustic music turn their attention to the sound itself, upon whose structure, synthesis, treatment, etc. they lavish great attention, rather than upon the shapes the sound makes or the relationships into which it enters with other aspects of a particular composition. This attention is the source of the sensual quality of electroacoustic music, which attracts (and sometimes repels) so many listeners and composers. I believe that the sensuous quality of electroacoustic music causes one to listen to it in a largely associative manner. Pierre Schaeffer, the great pioneer of electroacoustic music, realized this when he wrote his *Traité d'objets musicaux*, which I interpret as an immense effort to render conscious and to define in encyclopaedic fashion the associations a listener has with regard to a large number of sonorous, if not necessarily musical, situations. Throughout the history of our musical culture, much great music has resulted from the meeting of sensuous seduction on the one hand and abstract ordering which is independent of, and even at times detrimental to, the sound itself on the other. Often the tension between sensuous directness and structural speculation is extraordinarily expressive. Many examples come to mind: medieval organum with its struggle to subjugate magnificently prolific melodies to simple ruses of consonance and rhythmic pattern, the

great isorhythmic motets of Machaut and Dufay, Bach's *Kunst der Fuge*, where the euphony often has to yield to higher contrapuntal exigencies, late Beethoven, Schoenberg, Xenakis, to name but a very few.

Electroacoustic music has no opposing force with which to counterbalance the seductive power of sound. Older music moderated the directness of the sound itself by imposing upon it a non-sonorous pattern: large, complex, repeated temporal structures in isorhythmic music, with Bach immensely difficult contrapuntal tasks placing great strain on the balance of linear and vertical requirements. In situations like these, the musical material resists the abstract structure which attempts to impose itself. This struggle is always an important part of the expressive value of the music, presumably because of the metaphoric quality of the conflict. In electroacoustic music, and in general in the music since 1945, where none of the abstract concepts of older music—harmony, counterpoint, formal constraints, all understood in the broadest possible manner—has authority anymore, it is difficult to imagine what could be enlisted to check the force of sound itself. A post-modernist age will reproach me for such a sentimental cliché, but I believe that throughout the last millennium the most interesting music has always expressed the opposition between the sensuality of sound itself and the structured order of speculative abstraction. I also believe that this opposition is very difficult to achieve when one is not able to interpose a layer of abstraction between oneself and the sounding music, as I find to be the case today.

The third way in which electroacoustic music's oral nature influences composers concerns the historical context in which composers see themselves and their compositions. Because electroacoustic music exists only as sound, and not in some more abstract representation like that of a score, it exists only in the present; it has no past. When we listen to the repertory of electroacoustic music, and this seems to me very true for the instrumental music of the last 30 years or so as well, individual pieces seem approximately equidistant from us: we may like some pieces more than others, we may be able to identify certain stylistic fashions and occasionally even influences of earlier music upon later pieces, but for the most part pieces seem to be written without knowledge of each other and without reference to a shared internal history. It is difficult to judge whether this absence of a past plays an important role in the everyday lives of composers of electroacoustic music or not. Probably not; very little creative activity goes on while looking back over one's shoulder. Besides, we clearly live in an age whose immediate present is so rich that the past is seldom summoned for advice or guidance. However, the absence of a past, or rather, the absence of tools with which to construct a past, does have an important consequence for the field of

electroacoustic music. I believe that it is at least partially responsible for a diminished sense of the importance of electroacoustic music, and to a somewhat lesser extent of contemporary music in general, in the intellectual landscape of the present. The diminished sense of the importance of the field has important political consequences. Electroacoustic music is not an attractive area of work for musicologists, whose thinking and writing is so important in establishing lasting written traces of what one has done, because there is virtually no material, other than the sounding music itself, with which to work. At the very least, to be the object of intense musicological interest renders one's work respectable in the public eye, regardless of what the composer concerned may think about the attention she or he receives. Without this respectability, electroacoustic music will never play a politically sufficiently important role to obtain the conditions of creation, performance and diffusion it deserves. Contemporary instrumental music does not suffer from quite the same degree of neglect from academia as does electroacoustic music, although the tendency is quite the same: where the score is too complex to be analyzed, or where the score reveals few secrets about the music, musicologists lose interest. We composers may hope that musicology will evolve tools to elucidate and objectify the techniques and aesthetics of the music we compose, but it is probably utopian to expect that such tools will be ready—if in fact they are even being thought of by musicology—in time to be of any use to us.

The fourth way in which the oral nature of electroacoustic music affects contemporary music concerns pedagogy. In my experience, the lack of analytical tools and of a vocabulary of abstractions plays a particularly important, and a particularly detrimental, role in the teaching of composition. I think of myself as a composer, but I spend more of my life teaching than composing. I teach both traditional music theory and courses in computer music, and although the human relationships are usually closer and richer with computer music students, I believe that my teaching of traditional theory is far more efficient. I teach traditional music theory by studying the score of a piece with students, examining it carefully to learn as much as possible about its composition and then thinking about the meaning and significance of what we have discovered. In these analyses the reasonably objective score allows one to learn a great deal about how the piece was composed. At the same time, the distance of the score from the sounding reality of the music encourages abstraction when thinking about the music's structure and about the relationships between individual compositional aspects. I teach computer music by lecturing about theory, by playing and discussing music with the students and by spending a great deal of time with the students at the computer, listening to and commenting on their work. However,

I can do much less analysis than I would like, because the equivalent of a score is missing. Neither can I show the students in detail how a piece was composed (unless the composer has made materials publicly available, as is the case for a few important pieces, among them *Inharmonique* by Jean-Claude Risset and *Mortuos plango, vivos voco* by Jonathan Harvey), nor can I train them to work at a level of abstraction which seems to me appropriate to composition. For this reason, teaching computer music seems to me much more arbitrary and subjective than teaching instrumental analysis and composition. Not only is it next to impossible to speak seriously about the craft of composition without a literature which can be analyzed, it is equally difficult to do any kind of serious aesthetic education. Without models one can examine soberly, away from the bright lights of performance (in this regard I consider performance simply listening to a piece straight through and in its true tempo), it is difficult to isolate, let alone to formulate arguments for and against, particular aesthetic decisions. My students are typically so overwhelmed by the sensuous reality of the music they make that it is difficult to speak with them about structural and aesthetic matters. I consider this a great disadvantage.

I have described these four characteristics—the difficulty of formulating compositional models, the primacy of sound itself, the lack of a past and the inefficiency of pedagogy—in terms of electroacoustic music, because I think their cause and effect can be traced more easily there. However difficult it may be to trace their effects, their cause seems easy to discern: it lies in the loss of the ability to render abstract music's sounding reality. I cannot emphasize enough, however, that this loss of abstraction affects contemporary instrumental and vocal music nearly as strongly as it does electroacoustic music. The more or less traditional scores of instrumental music may seem to represent, as they did still in older contemporary music, a level of abstraction mediating between the compositional idea and the directness of interpretation, but in fact their analysis often reveals little which the perceptive listener cannot grasp. They frequently are hardly more than tabulatures for the sounding music; they often contain no important information about the music in another modality than that of sound. Old habits die slowly, and many composers who grew up in the literate culture still work with the tools of the literate culture. Because there are no scores and no conventional notation in electroacoustic music, it provides the simpler paradigm for the loss of the tools of abstraction, but the difference in this regard between electroacoustic music and instrumental music is one of degree only.

The tone of the preceding pages has been rather one-sided: I have spo-

ken as though composers are helpless victims of technical and aesthetic developments taking place around them. This is nonsense. Schoenberg was not forced to write *Erwartung* as he did, nor is the music of Varèse that of a victim. The relationship between individual vision and general cultural milieu is far too complex that I as a composer, experiencing the cultural tensions of our time so vividly in my own life and work, could begin to sort out cause and effect. I have tried to describe changes in the inner landscape of a middle-aged composer, hence the one-sided tone. Although I have only spoken about the situation of composition, I have over the years heard observations from colleagues, particularly from those who have been teaching instrumental music to children for at least a generation, which indicate to me that the shift from a literate to an oral musical culture is both a real phenomenon and of far greater generality than I experience in composition. All colleagues report that children today read music with less facility than did children a generation ago, but that in compensation they accomplish tasks requiring aural memory and imagination, like playing by heart and improvising, with much greater ease. This is hardly surprising, considering how much more music most children listen to nowadays, compared to thirty or forty years ago. Portable, high-quality storage of sound (cassettes, compact discs), unavailable 40 years ago, has certainly contributed importantly to the shift towards an aural musical culture. Probably in our world in which the electronic media play such an important role, all children read less than children did 40 years ago, but interestingly enough, some colleagues report that even children and young people who clearly have to read a great deal to succeed in the good schools they attend often have difficulty keeping their eyes trained on one or, for keyboard instruments, two lines of music without jumping to other places on the page. The breakdown of the linearity of perception (and hence, thought) about which Marshall McLuhan wrote 30 years ago can be observed in the music lessons of today's children. Some colleagues even report an increase in the incidence of at least mild dyslexia (and associated difficulties, like those of spatial orientation) in children wanting to learn a musical instrument. Dyslexia and the related learning problems obviously manifest themselves most strongly in instruments requiring independence of the hands like keyboard instruments, but some of the same colleagues report that after a year or two of piano lessons, much of the latent dyslexia seems to have disappeared. Although dyslexic tendencies in children wanting to learn the piano may seem far removed from the loss of abstract frameworks in which to imagine and compose music today, I suggest that both are in fact related and can be read as indicators of important, complex and only imperfectly visible changes in the cultural world we live in.

Analyses like the one I have tried to make are characteristically followed

by exhortations to action, usually to stem a rising tide of pernicious influence threatening to inundate so well-established and well-functioning tradition. I have no such exhortation to make. I do feel strongly that the analytical tools available today for both instrumental music and electroacoustic music are totally inadequate, and I certainly hope that the fields of music theory and musicology will take seriously the task of devising new ones, for I am convinced that the existence of metaphorical systems of abstraction are essential for all artistic and intellectual activity, in fact, for all activity of the mind whatsoever. (My reading of current music theory hardly gives cause for optimism in regard to the elaboration of analytical tools for contemporary music.) But while I hope for a renewal of a framework of abstraction for contemporary musical thought, at the same time I sense that my work, and the work of all composers at the end of the twentieth century, is being shaped by, or at least is being shaped in response to, forces going far beyond music itself. I was speaking to a student recently who considers himself a member of the oral culture, although he is a professionally trained musician with a university degree who both reads voraciously and writes very well. It took my breath away to hear him say of his generation: “We don’t have the big picture”. There was no regret here and no guilty conscience as there would have been had my generation said something similar (the more modest of my generation would have said: “We don’t yet have the big picture”), rather pride and self-assurance. I think he meant: We know there is no big picture, and we are neither naive enough to believe there is one, nor dull enough to spend our lives rushing after its shadow. But I “have the big picture”. Or rather, I obviously do not have it, but a deep, in these post-modern times often unacknowledged part of me believes unquestioningly in the “big picture”. I wrote earlier in this text that I believe that interesting music in our culture has always expressed the opposition between the sensuality of sound itself and the structured order of speculative abstraction. Without the “big picture” such an idea is utter nonsense, of course. And, if there is no “big picture”, then obviously there will in the future be very different music from that of which I dream. I am no different from any composer of my years in a fast-moving age in one regard: With every note I write, I feel the untimeliness of my music. As a hopelessly unreconstructed denizen of the literate culture, I have attempted here to delineate some of the more interesting aspects of this untimeliness and to describe how the tension between my inner and outer worlds may offer a paradigm for developments in music of the second half of our century.

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