

Avant-garde and Trauma

20th-Century Music and the Experiences from the World Wars

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What kind of traces did the immense suffering of both world wars leave in music?

How does music react if the whole of society is traumatized?

Music may cope with a single person's fate as it dared to approach the creation of extreme situations in the beginning of the century. Is Elektra, the heroin of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's and Richard Strauss' opera traumatized? The scene of her father's murder is evoked during the daily memorial, on every occasion it is actualized: "How are you lifting your hands? Father lifted his hands like this, then the hatchet went down ..." ¹ she said to her sister. Let's move away from the clinical aspects – if we look at the unity of poetry and music, the following image appears: Elektra can express her feelings, she is ardent with all her hate, and in hoping for revenge she has a goal which gives her life meaning. She is not so severely traumatized that she were unable to show feelings and to tell the story. The music can attend her rough gestures, has moments of freezing in dissonances, but always stays expressive, keeps finding its flow. With all its discontinuity on single occasions, it is capable of organizing time and creating a coherent whole.

On the other hand, extreme traumatization as it is often found in veterans shows stronger symptoms: "Traumatic memory is not narrative. (...) Severe trauma explodes the coheresion of consciousness" says Jonathan Shay (1995, 172ff). "For combat soldiers, the temporal horizon shrinks as much as the moral and social horizon. Only getting through now has any existence." (Shay 1995, 176) "Alterations in time sense begin with the obliteration of the future but eventually progress to the obliteration of the past." Judith Herman (1998, 89) writes. Further symptoms of those who live with unprocessed trauma, who have to live with it, are: "machinelike functioning which is not accompanied by affect..." (Wirtz 1989, 199), "persistence of numbing", and the "feeling of meaninglessness" (Shay 1995, 173).

If we allow ourselves to anticipate, it becomes clear that this, with only slight changes of wording, results in a description of some movements of musical avant-garde after 1950: "Perception of single, scattered, isolated events ... prevents the telling of stories. Time is divided and cut into pieces; fragments, shreds, bits of time are brought into new and different contexts to allow for the experience of disconnection

¹ The sources for this and all other quotations except the one by Herman, Shay, and Scrutton are in German but have been translated to English as cited here.

again and again” (Houben 1996, 210) so it is written – by the way without any critique – in a book about New Listening by Eva-Maria Houben.

The 20th-century music might have faced the following problem: To what extent can it attend to extreme conditions of the psyche without losing its integrity, or is it drawn so far into these conditions that music itself reproduces symptoms of traumatization? If music reacts with lack of emotions, distancing, abstraction, coldness, and separation from its physical and sensual dimensions, if its timing breaks, and if it becomes unable to make connections and a meaningful, understandable succession: if it fragments and cannot tell anymore, and if it cannot find any instance responsible for the coherence of sounds, then emotional numbness, obliteration of time, and dissociation of the ego take a grip on music itself.

Let us go back to the beginning of the 20th century. For Elektra the traumatizing scene was in the past. Arnold Schönberg moves beyond that in his monodram *Expectation*, here it is in the present. A woman strays through the forest at night looking for her lover, finally finding him killed. The music very accurately describes her sensations: fear, shock, numbing, hope, happy memories, jealousy, pain, and despair. She fearfully tumbles through that from moment to moment. There are no themes and motives anymore which might be able to create a continuation of time; there are only isolated gestures, shocks, and outbursts. Time collapses into the present. The sounds are dissonant, strained, as if the music would breathe only shallowly and tensely together with the woman; with the nuanced and dissolved rhythm, the meter can hardly be sensed as if the music would withdraw from the body. But still: Through an ingenious tightrope act Schönberg manages to shape a long suspense in the dramaturgy of expression. Even though the music attends to the extreme situations, it stays organic and – despite all tension – can be physically felt. And above all: The music lives in sometimes expensive lines, protects the space of the inner world, and has a wide spectrum of expression – it is not drawn into the traumatic situation yet.

Schönberg's *Expectation* was written in 1909; a great caesura in his work was World War I, when he finished hardly any piece. This might have been due to external reasons – Schönberg was called up for the army in 1915, but he was discharged already in 1917. Till 1920 he developed the Twelve-Tone Technique. Schönberg was very involved in the change of style in the beginning of the 20s by searching for order in a kind of music that conveys coldness, toughness, and distance rather than

sensitivity and vulnerability. Should World War I not have contributed to that? Even if in Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* World War I does not appear – remarkable for a thinker who addresses the connection between music and society – we have to ask this question.

After the unbelievable cruelties of World War II, those of World War I are often underestimated. In addition to the battle of material, the use of poison gas at the front line, the hunger, and the privations in the whole country, there was the grief for the killed soldiers, and the sight of many handicapped and crippled persons. "World War I left us with an army of blind, amputated, and mentally and physically smashed persons as no war did before." Bruno Schrep (2004, 58) wrote. This had to influence the state of the whole society; especially as in Germany and Austria societal changes due to the end of the monarchies, and the humiliating awareness of having lost the war were added.

There are not many sources about the composers' experiences of the war. But also those who were not wounded can be traumatized due to life-threatening situations or due to witnessing. And many people cannot or do not want to talk about traumatizing experiences. Even though composers were not directly afflicted, they often picked up the atmosphere, the different way of reacting, and the way of dealing with grief, pain, and hurt from the surrounding society. "Unhealed combat trauma blights not only the life of the veteran but the life of the family and community. In some instances, such as in the Weimar Republic in Germany after World War I, it can substantially weaken the society as a whole." (Shay 1995, 195)

What kind of resources does a society have to cope with traumatic experiences? Looking at the preceding one-hundred years shows that the conditions for coping with the war traumas were most adverse.

Walter Benjamin in *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire* [On some motives by Baudelaire] found that next to isolation, the experience of shocks are essential to people living in cities. He writes about a story by Poe translated by Baudelaire: "His by-passers behave as if they, similar to machines, could only express themselves automatically. Their behavior is a reaction to shocks [Choks]." (Benjamin 1955, 223)

This already sounds like a description of New Realism-Art of the 20s. For the integration of traumatic experiences a humane environment is crucial, so that the traumatized person can learn to trust again. He needs people who empathically and without condemning accompany his efforts of telling his story and reconstructing his

fragmented memories, and who allow him to reconnect with his feelings and with his grief. Also a religious or spiritual environment can be helpful for coping with trauma. It is obvious that those conditions were not sufficiently present anymore in a rather secularized society that emphasizes individuation. People were referred back to themselves, and so the second problem besides the trauma itself might have been the impossibility of finding a place for coping with it. In this respect the situation after World War I might have differed from that after other great wars, and maybe that is why the traumas of both World Wars left clear traces in the arts.

Important impulses for music also came from the changed perceptions in cities. Anselm Gerhard citing Benjamin describes in *The Urbanization of Opera* how “Meyerbeer’s opera (*The Huguenots*) speaks about the close connection between the figure of the Chok and his contact with the masses of people of the cities already two decades before Baudelaire’s poetry.” (Gerhard 1992, 179f) It is the way of using contrasts and surprises, the co-existence of liturgy and gypsy’s dance, of petitionary choral and impending massacre, which brings the Grand Opera close to collage-like techniques.

Berlioz transferred this even more than Meyerbeer to his instrumental music and his imaginary stages. Gerhard assumes the following reason for this drive to modernization: “The shocking changes due to the revolution had sensitized people to the perception of the *choc inopinés*, and so it was just a question of time before these new impressions were depicted by the arts, especially as the artistic sublimation of the experience in its conjuration allowed for the domestication of the epochal shock.” (Gerhard 1992, 52f) These experiences challenged the integrative capacities of the musical language, but did not destroy it. Ultimately they added to the musical ways of expression and maybe reinforced already present developmental tendencies. Could there even be a possibility for growth in this concussion?

Schönberg’s *Expectation* is about an isolated person and her psyche. One can see this piece as the final point of a development that started in romanticism when artists became interested in the shadow-sides of life, in fears, the repressed, or even in madness. This listening into one’s soul can be called the discovery of the “personal unconscious”. In contrast to that, there is a movement that searches back into history to the musical shaping of the archaic levels of the psyche, of a “collective unconscious”. Here belongs the collective inheritance of humankind, not personal experience or the individual history. The most poignant work of this movement is Igor

Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* which evokes images from pagan, archaic Russia where a young woman is sacrificed for the Great Mother Earth, so that spring can come again.

In the *Sacre* time dissociates due to other reasons than in Schönberg's *Expectation* where the music in shock tumbles from one gesture to the next. In the Rite of Spring music imagines an archaic world prior to the development of a stable ego-consciousness and prior to experiencing a linear development of time. This leads to a series of circling melodic forms without development, and to flat parts. Changes and accentuations are surprising and unanticipated, and they stay without consequences, so that the music stays in the present moment without memories or expectations. The concentration on the personal unconscious as well as on archaic levels comes with the dissociation of time. The ego and the consciousness, the parts of the personality where traumatic experiences could be integrated, are weakened. Aaron Antonovsky (1997) calls the sense of coherence, which includes the presence of a time-frame and the ability to think beyond the present situation, the most important condition for the coping with extreme situations. If both of those movements in the beginning of the 20th century lead to the dissociation of time, music of that time is already wounded at its core – the war traumas affected the music which was already vulnerable.

Twelve-Tone Music and Neoclassicism

Fischer & Riedesser (1999) state in their *Lehrbuch der Psychotraumatologie [Manual of Psychotraumatology]*: "Recreation of traumatic experiences of alarming proportion could be observed in Europe between the World Wars. (...) World War I left many soldiers and civilians with massive traumatizations. (...) The cult of strength and denial of personal weakness and vulnerability came along with the contempt and ostracizing of 'the weak', 'the hereditary inferior', and even with their physical extermination. In a 'trauma-compensatory' undertaking of gigantic extent, Germany at the same time rushes into World War II, ultimately a war against the 'whole world'." (p. 153f) So it is not surprising that also in the music there was hardly a place for shared grieving, but a strong need for order forged ahead.

Order makes life predictable, builds dams against feelings, and forms a shield against hurt. Ultimately this was about not having to feel the pain and the continuing fear anymore. The price for this was high: People inclined towards an attitude of

coldness and lack of emotions, towards the illusion of superiority and invincibility, and this came along with a dramatic depreciation of the psyche and the individual expression – because this makes one vulnerable.

But the “order” that appeared in the 20s was quite different from the order of a fugue by Bach or a symphony by Mozart. Bach’s and Mozart’s orders were audible; even the counterpoint of a fugue by Bach can be traced by hearing. Mozart’s music is cohered by an underlying correspondence of shaded cadences and levels of tonality, and in all tonal music, structures are built through audible relationships of consonances and dissonances. It is a “soft” order that does not harm any detail but grows out of melody and harmony.

Unlike the order developed in the 20s. It does not come from the life of the details, but rather an “aura” of order is composed: One can feel restraint, coercion, and harshness in the music, and one can sense the fear and chaos against which the order is established. This underlying fear appears as “subtext” which at times superimposes or mingles with the expression intended by the composer.

The Twelve-tone technique developed by Schönberg is a good example. It was presented as the solution for the compositional problems of “free atonality” in those pieces composed prior to World War I. In fact it did not solve any of those problems, but created a number of new ones. The development of Twelve-tone technique becomes understandable not in relation to composition techniques but to the traumas of the post-war period. Due to the compulsion of the tone row, neither harmony nor melody can unfold, which gives this music a peculiar rigidity. The difference between consonance and dissonance becomes quite irrelevant; while in “free atonality” dissonances were used consciously and expressively, here they appear as seemingly neutral sound-material. “Dissonances were created as expression of tension, contradiction, and pain. They sedimented and became ‘material’. They are no longer a medium of subjective expression. But they still do not deny their origin.” Adorno (1976, 84f) writes in the *Philosophy of New Music*.

The expression of fear and pains becomes “subtext”. This unmaskes the idea as an illusion that with the Twelve-tone technique one could have all areas of expression at one’s disposition, and could even compose an opera buffa (what Schönberg tried to do in *Von heute auf morgen [Overnight]*). Gerhard Scheit (1995) writes: “During these years Schönberg obviously tried to semantically neutralize the Twelve-tone music, to present it as any other music: as if it would not have special meaning, as if it were not

the result of a certain time period – a time period that owes to itself the destroyed cities...” (p. 326) Behind the façade of Twelve-tone sonatas and rondos, variations and Baroque dance-forms lurks the expression of fear and pain.

With the Twelve-tone technique, form and shaping of time become problems. Every detail is derived from the tone row. “As soon as everything is likewise absorbed in variation, no ‘theme’ remains, and all musical appearances determine themselves indifferently as permutations of the tone row, nothing changes anymore in the universality of change.” (Adorno 1976, 99) Development is hardly possible, and so it comes to the “end of a musical experience of time” and to a “musical state of no history” (Adorno 1976, 81). Even though all traditional forms in Schönberg’s music seem to be right on the surface, underneath all the symptoms are perceptible, that are known from traumatized persons: suppressed fear behind a rigid façade of order and coldness, and a dissociated perception of time. Adorno (1976) goes even further: “The new order of Twelve-tone technique virtually extinguishes the individual.” (p. 70) This kind of losing individuality corresponds with the experience of traumatized persons who cannot create their own lives anymore.

If we now – following Adorno’s method of *Philosophy of New Music* – turn towards Stravinsky, who then was seen as Schönberg’s antipode, the problems appear to be similar – in some ways more subtle and hidden because he kept (the surface of) tonality as ordering system, in other ways more overtly, because he consciously kept up a cool and distant attitude and denied that music could express anything at all. In the 20s, Schönberg was experienced as successor of romanticism and expressionism (maybe the term “frozen” expressionism would describe his attitude well), while Stravinsky with Paul Hindemith and the *Groupe des Six* (the late Erik Satie, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and others) was seen as the real new movement – the avant-garde.

In contrast to Stravinsky’s pieces from the “Russian period” (from *Petrushka* to *Les Noces*, i.e. till the changes in style around 1920) which easily can be analyzed and their techniques of composition can be duplicated, his pieces composed after 1920 cannot be understood analytically. Maybe a comprehensible order was not important for Stravinsky, but an “aura” of order, the fact that the music radiates restraint, rigor, distance, and coldness – qualities linked with classicism. At places where Stravinsky uses diatonic tonality one can describe how he deadlocks the harmonic forces by hooking chords into each other, which actually would strive towards one another, for

ex. placing tonic and dominant on top of each other, so that the dominant's striving towards the tonic becomes neutralized. It is difficult to explain his way of deliberately using chromatic tones that appear "wrong", of changing and telescoping tonal fields; all of this can hardly be understood in its logic – maybe there is none. The result is music that appears constructed but cannot really be duplicated, and so only radiates the "aura" of rigor and order. This impression is supported by an often motorial, flowing rhythm which does not breathe but sometimes stumbles. All of this, his "objectivity" and his turning away from the principle of expression, make it understandable why Stravinsky and the neoclassicism were so successful in the 20s: They fulfilled the need of not having to feel pain and fear better than the school of Schönberg whose "traumatic subtext" kept referring to wounds.

Adorno showed that the suppression of subjectivity and expression does not lead to Stravinsky's longed for "objectivity": "The objectivism is a matter of façade because there is nothing that could be objectified, because it does not work on anything whatsoever, an illusion of power and lightheartedness." (Adorno 1976, 183) In this manner the form of his music loses substance and also the ability to organize time: "Ruins of memory are lined up, instead of unfolding immediate musical material on its own resources. The composition does not realize itself through development but through the tears which furrow it. (...) Through that the musical time continuum dissociates itself." (Adorno 1976, 171)

Even though Schönberg and Stravinsky differ in their relationships towards expression, even though they create "order" or the illusion of order in different ways – they are similar in their defense against the organic, in their deadlocking or avoiding of melodic and harmonic forces, in their difficulties creating developments or big forms, in the dissociation of musical time, and in the imminent loss of individuality. Adorno (1976) assumes "that Stravinsky's estranged, assembled tonal chords and the rows of Twelve-tone sounds whose connecting cables are cut at the order of the system will not sound as differently as they look today." (p. 71) Both seeming antipodes are marked by their time.

For many people Alban Berg is the greatest composer of the Schönberg-school because his music shows less signs of freezing and remained expressive as he was always staying close to tonality, and his music flows in a livelier way – and because he gave a voice to the suffering human being in his operas. Adorno (1976) accused him: "The implacability of the late Schönberg ... is superior to Berg's premature

reconciliation; the inhuman coldness is superior to the magnanimous warmth.” (p. 105) One should argue that Berg succeeded in creating the balance of confronting himself with the traumatic experiences (he, too, was a soldier in the war) and at the same time saving his music from freezing and saving his ability to speak and to express. Also Béla Bartók and Maurice Ravel absorbed the experiences of their time, but Ravel’s way of handling bitonality is more alive and dynamic than Stravinsky’s, it allows for development, transitions, and bridges to tradition; Bartók always kept the possibility of authentic expression and of creating bigger, fuller forms, even though his music sometimes shows rigor.

Helmuth Lethen developed a physiognomy of the 20s in his book *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte – Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen* [Behavior Theories of Coldness – Experiments of Living between the Wars]. In its center is the “cold persona” (Lethen 1994, 10) in which a new theory of personality concentrates, marked by hyper-alertness, distance, and emotional coldness. There is a “chronic state of alarm” (Lethen 1994, 115) with the underlying fear banned from consciousness; the ego appears armored; it puts on an “armor of coldness” to “dam in the pain”; it observes clearly and is always alert; it avoids relationships and stays at a distance; it should appear as superior and invincible as possible; everything belonging to the soul, the emotions and their expressions is devalued. It is easy to recognize behaviors that soldiers had to learn for survival and that are now, after the war shaping civil life – and art. Jonathan Shay (1995) describes the following symptoms of war-related posttraumatic stress disorder:

- “Persistent mobilization of the body and the mind for lethal danger
- Persistence and activation of combat survival skills in civilian life;
- Persistent expectation of betrayal and exploitation; destruction of the capacity for social trust”. (p. xx)

The “cold persona” as described by Lethen (1994) seems to be the prototype of the 20s wounded by war-traumas. The description would be incomplete without the shadow of the “cold persona”, that which was called “creature” (Lethen 1994, 11) then: all of the inferior, vulnerable people who were unable to put the necessary armor of coldness on, who often were unable to survive (like Wozzeck in Berg’s opera), all of the crippled and traumatized who were met with contempt. All of the weakness the “cold persona” notices and hates in itself is projected onto the “creature” and is expelled. To give this “creature” a musical voice would have been a

chance for breaking the rejection and the armor. But what did Adorno say? “The inhumanity of art must surpass that of the world for the sake of humanity.” (Adorno 1976, 125)

Serial Music and the Conception of Material

Can “inhumanity” serve humanity? Is it not just another face of “self-anesthesia” (Sebald 2001) of German society after World War II, of the “inability to mourn” (Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich 1967)? Instead of getting the chance to work through the traumas of World War I, people again became victims of severe traumatization through World War II, through the defeat, through guilt, expulsion and flight. Hannah Arendt (1993) reports from Germany in 1949: “... in no other place this nightmare of destruction and horror is felt less and talked about less than in Germany. Everywhere it is apparent that there is no reaction to what has happened, but it is difficult to say if this is a conscious refusal to grieve or a real inability to feel.” (p. 24) Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich (1967) talk about the “strikingly frozen feelings in response to the piles of corpses in the concentration camps, the disappearance of German armies in captivity, the news about the millions of murders of Jews, Poles, Russians, and the murders of German political antagonists.” (p. 40)

It is obvious but not inevitable that these frozen feelings encroach on the music. Schönberg responds with *A Survivor from Warsaw* where the Twelve-tone technique goes back to its roots of creating and putting an order to fear and despair. Karl Amadeus Hartmann manages to transform the experiences of the war and post-war time into highly expressive music, in which he – and this is not unimportant – resigns from Twelve-tone technique. He had difficulties with his expressive music as it did not fit into the mainstream of avant-garde after 1950 which used extremely constructional music without emotions.

Twelve-tone technique appeared after World War I, “serial music” after World War II. After 1948 the conception of avant-garde changed its point of reference. Up to then, Stravinsky, Hindemith and the French Groupe des Six with their cool and distanced classicism were the embodiment of “avant-garde”. Hans Werner Henze (1996) reports about his concertino for piano with wind instruments as “markedly soulless like Mrs. Fashion in the person of the Radio-Music-Director from Baden-Baden, Strobel dictated it then. One was wearing the cold inhumanity-look ... However, this fashion disappeared already in 1948 when the French composer René Leibowitz

came to Darmstadt and taught us the ideas of Schönberg's tone rows ..." (p. 87f) However, not only Schönberg was discovered, but also Webern who used Twelve-tone technique with the possibility of being free from Schönberg's and Berg's diction reminiscent of Romanticism. The crystalline constructivism of his Twelve-tone music became the starting point of serial music, which served the need for cold and emotionless art better than Neoclassicism – so this was avant-garde now.

"The rigidity showed the emotional averting; history becomes unreal by withdrawing all pleasurable and unpleasant interest in it, it dreamingly sinks down" Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich (1967, 40) write. And when Pierre Boulez (1977) says: "I wanted to question everything, make tabula rasa from the inheritance, and start again at point zero" (p. 62) (from *Wille und Zufall [Will and Coincidence]*) one should not forget that this new beginning had a terrible price as it was just the other side of "a deeply rooted, persistent, and brutal refusal to confront oneself with reality and come to terms with it." (Arendt 1993, 25) So the composers around Stockhausen and Boulez started to construct music from the single tone and its physical qualities, cleared from all historical and semantic relationships. Pitch and length of tone, volume and sometimes even timbre are ruled by principles of the row, which tended to kill any internal flow and any life. The single tones do not form a *Gestalt*, and the tone, determined by its abstract and calculated value and length, does not relate to its neighboring tones anymore. The composer's scope for creation is highly diminished – a withdrawal maybe analog to trauma victims' feeling of helplessness and lack of control as described by Herman (1998). Besides this phenomenon of loss of the individual and self, there is also disconnection from the body: "Survivors feel unsafe in their bodies" (Herman 1998, 160) because all feelings are dissociated and repressed from consciousness. As there is no perceivable measure, no pulse, no meter anymore, serial music appears peculiarly bodiless. And it is very abstract, cut off from the world of images, from bodily gestures and from all emotions – this can also be found in traumatized persons: To protect themselves, they try to disregard themselves and prefer an impersonal language. Of course, also time is dissociated to a previously unknown extend; in trauma research one sometimes finds the term of "frozen time" (Herman 1998, 195). What remains is "pure material": music that does not mean anything and does not want to express anything anymore.

Regarding similar phenomena in visual arts, pure Formalism and Abstract Expressionism, Jean Claire (1998) wrote: "One was well advised to forget the

individual because it became guilty. And as the individual was lost in an artwork whose meaning was dissolved, it was not possible to just enjoy pure play with forms and colors which are not reminiscent of anything. In this way decontaminated, whitewashed, purified, and freed from any trace of humanity, humorless, without a trace of blood and tears, the piece of art reconfirms its triumphant autonomy as an object.” (p. 79)

When Adorno (1976) writes about the musical material: “All of their specific traits are marks of a historical process” (p. 38) he might be even more right than he assumes. He just never had reflected on the connection between musical material, and experiences and traumas of war, and still they are the foundation of the prohibitions formulated by him and his followers after 1950. In the traumatic context it is impossible to speak, the memories stay fragmented, time shrinks into the Now, feelings cannot be expressed, splinters do not form a whole anymore, and the ego stays dissociated. As this connection did not become conscious, a conception of material void of any content became a veil over any expression that once created this material.

“Today one can no more ...” is not a question of material supplies; the conception of material is rather that cool and distanced mask that the avant-garde needs to forget its origin in the pains of the World Wars. The influence of the two World Wars and the traumas originating from them is the blind spot on aesthetic discussions building on Adorno. It was never discussed why the development of material always proceeded in crucial ways in the aftermath of a World War. Adorno developed his philosophy on the basis of “survivors’ guilt”, but obviously Auschwitz blinded him in regard to the other traumatizing experiences. As the traumas did not become explicit, there was no perspective for healing either – this makes Adorno’s philosophy so depressingly hopeless.

Also claims like “New Music must have a bewildering effect” or “New Music must hurt” only make sense in connection with unresolved traumatic experiences, because an unresolved trauma often becomes an obsession to pass on wounds, to reenact violence in everyday life – and in art. This also explains the proximity of avant-garde and violence and terror, as for example in André Breton’s *Second Surreal Manifest*: “The simplest surreal act is to go onto the street with guns in the hands and shoot blindly into the masses as long as one possibly can.” (Bürger 2000, 26)

It is striking to what degree violence is reenacted in the Happening movement since 1960. There an “almost obsessive pleasure in destruction becomes apparent” as Marianne Kesting wrote in *Melos* in 1969 (p. 314). Wolf Vostell reports: “I experienced my first Happenings when I was eight or nine years old. During an air alert, we all had to run one kilometer from the school into the open landscape, and each child, left to his own resources, had to hide alone under a tree.” (Kesting 1969, 317) Marianne Kesting (1969) proceeds: “For Happenings he [Wolf Vostell] had a special liking for composing car accidents. In terms of destruction, he corresponds to the musician Nam June Paik who became known if not famous for his systematic destruction of musical instruments, the chopping up of pianos, the sawing to pieces or breaking of violins ...” (p. 314) She was right when she saw “a conscious provocation which at times could have terrorist traits” (Kesting 1969, 314) in it. Also Stockhausen’s remarks about the attacks of September 11 are in the avant-garde tradition of reenacting and passing on of traumatic violence: “So, what happened there is, of course ... the greatest work of art that ever existed.” (Stockhausen 2001, 76)

It would be a good idea to look at personal experiences of some composers from this time. Karel Goeyvaerts, one of Stockhausen’s companions, admitted in his autobiography “that the rational fixation of structure during the early 50s was a reaction to the post-war fears” (Wilson 2003, 55). Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1998) reports about life-threatening situations as a soldier in Russia in his diary (August 23, 1941): “On the 21st around lunch time the Russians shelled awfully at us with artillery fire for ten hours ... The shell-splinters were whizzing around our heads tremendously.” (p. 22f) Stockhausen experienced horrible things; he did not only lose his parents in the war, he also was in life-threatening situations several times: “When I was 16, I saw thousands of people who were dying. Death became something completely relative for me. I often was in life-threatening situations – I am very sure: The missiles from the aircrafts were hitting the ground all around me ...” (Stockhausen 1978, 589) Later he worked at a base hospital behind the Western front-line: “The heads of most of them were like foam rubber, and often I tried to find a path to the mouth with a straw to give some liquid to such a person who was still moving, to nurture him – but there only was a yellow, round mass without a sign of a face.” (Stockhausen 1978, 589)

Maybe the most heart-wrenching is how Stockhausen interrupted the question of an interviewer: “... does one have to all these ordeals and these horrors of war, all these

horrible things you were talking about ...” – “I am not sure if they really are that horrible.” (Stockhausen 1978, 591)

To recall this, does not mean to trace the development of music after 1945 back to individual pathologies of their protagonists. All of society suffered from the traumas of war, defeat, guilt, flight, and expulsion. An individual composer does not have to suffer from the symptoms, which his music picks up from the society around him; at the same time it is striking that Stockhausen who actually was affected by it, became the most outstanding exponent of New Music. Peter Niklas Wilson (2003) wrote:

“Only music that refrained from all involvements with the traditional, as was said by the opinion leaders of the serial avant-garde, was allowed to claim to be the embodiment of the new.” (p. 54) It is not by chance that Stockhausen went farthest with that: “In the case of Stockhausen the furor of deconstruction soon went so far as to not only negate the historical and semantic conventions of music, but in bold strike even to unhinge and coordinate anew the physiological prerequisites of listening.” (Wilson 2003, 55)

Is one doing Stockhausen’s *Gruppen* [Groups] wrong by perceiving the echo of the catastrophe in the acme? By startling at the sudden breaks of continuity? Here, too, the unwanted expression can sneak in as “traumatic subtext”, but the composers defended themselves against it – the subtext had to be repressed from consciousness. In the “New Listening”, one should perceive the sounds as pure material; expectations of musical connections and meanings should not even be roused. Hans Zender (1991) says that the New Music “negates time. It avoids connections by developing strategies that hinder creation of form in the traditional sense.” (p. 21f) And Eva-Maria Houben (1996) writes: “In the composition, the material is atomized so that it can be used as a building block, so that it is purified from the wastes of its origin, its meaning, its message.” (p. 11) In the “New Listening” the listener should not expect any connections and meanings, he should not perceive fragmentation and incoherence as expression of traumatically dissociated time and as inability of coherent narrative; he should not be allowed to hear the dissonances, the wild gestures, and the discontinuing structure as screams, and as expression of fear and bewilderment; in short: The “New Listening” should prevent one from deciphering the subtext as a mirror of a traumatized consciousness.

Even though these views are still taken today, more and more composers freed themselves from this rigid attitude and came in contact with feelings. Bernd Alois

Zimmermann looks for understanding of the experiences of war in his opera *The Soldiers*. His music seems to be under enormous pressure, and extreme expression with big leaps of intervals, sharp dissonances, and harsh sounds are omnipresent, even in places where dramaturgically it would not have been necessary. So a – maybe unintended – expression of fear and panic pervades the piece, everything is penetrated by “traumatic subtext”, and maybe this is why the opera is such an authentic expression of its time.

The penetration of the intended expression by “traumatic subtext” seems to be the problem of many composers of the post-war period. Roger Scruton (1997) writes in his aesthetics of music: “Atonal music ... expresses states of mind that are always partly negative: every lyrical passage is shot through with anxiety; each loving gesture is also a gesture of betrayal; there is no affirmation of life that does not mask a will to deny it. It is as though anxiety were programmed into this music and can never be wholly eliminated.” (p. 306) This common feeling of insecurity should also present itself in composers like Henze who could come off the serial numbness; it is in accordance with the basic feeling of that time from which nobody really could get away as it was the time of Cold War, where one had to live with the threat of a new war.

When György Ligeti and Krzysztof Penderecki appeared in the 60s their pieces with tones frozen to clusters still fit well into their time. But they were not constructed serially, and especially in Ligeti's *Atmosphères* one can see how the ability to speak came back into the music, because despite all the coldness and reserve, the piece develops a coherent dramaturgy of sounds. Eventually lines and characteristic structures began to crack the cold façade in Ligeti's music, and it became more alive. That led him – and even more so Penderecki who incorporated more and more tonality and a virtually “romantic” language – to the point where he was accused of “betrayal of the avant-garde”. But what could be better for the avant-garde than “betrayal”? Finally it means finding the way back to liveliness, to feelings, the awakening from the numbness of the traumatic shock.

Ligeti and Henze opposed each in his own way a *Musica Impura* to the avant-garde's purity cult. They wanted to reintroduce expression and meaning – often called “re-semanticizing” music. Working with citations and collage-techniques like Zimmermann is another sign of the wish to break the armor, to allow feelings again – but at the same time it is a sign of the inability of making space for a rich, authentic

scale of expression within his own musical language. Citations provide for distance from emotions, they put them in quotation-marks – the connection with them is not really reestablished yet. Collages can hurt if the cited material is forcefully assembled into a different context. Looking at the development in the GDR may prove that, with Paul Dessau in his *Einstein*-opera creating a coldness with extremely harsh sounds and distorted citations, which is in no way inferior to the Western avant-garde, even though it rather reconnects with the music of the “cold persona” of the 20s.

“Postmodernism” with its aesthetic of breaks is much closer to avant-garde than it may have intended – for example the shambles of stylistic citations in Hans-Jürgen von Bose’s opera *Schlachthof 5* [Slaughter-House 5] dealing with the destruction of Dresden, with war traumas and dissociated time.

Post-avant-garde – Return of the Banned

With Hans-Jürgen von Bose the “second generation” came on stage: the children of those people who had experienced the time of National Socialism and the war. After the war, the “second generation” grew up in the silence of the 50s and 60s.

Even though the parents might not have been either perpetrators or victims, the global social situation must very much have influenced the “second generation”, too. By now, psychology (among others Jürgen Müller-Hohagen) knows about the trans-generational influences of trauma, how fears and behaviors acquired through traumatic learning are passed on to the children, and especially how the silenced guilt and entanglements burden the children.

When time passes by, the influence of trauma may diminish. Serialism in its strict form did not last very long, but its cold, emotionless constructivism seems to be an attractive “archetype” of radically modern music – one might think about *New Complexity* of the circle around Brian Ferneyhough. Many composers after 1970 felt at home in a kind of new expressionism which took up the musical themes of the early 20th century: loneliness, fear, exploring the unconscious including the realms of madness on the one hand and the archaic realms on the other hand. Wolfgang Rihm might be an example of the first with his chamber-opera *Lenz* and for the second with his Mexico-pieces *Tutuguri* and *Die Eroberung von Mexiko* [The Conquest of Mexico]. Many composers seemingly feel bound to these themes and hardly get beyond them for reasons unknown to themselves – this is even true for representatives of the “third generation” like Matthias Pintscher and Jörg Widmann.

Their music – not at all emotionless, but showing discontinuity, and being in love with detail, on the other hand often musically interesting in its details, dissonant, and startling in its gestures, including tonal music only indirectly in citations – toys with the fragmented and seems to have difficulties with filled time and shape.

Even though it might be possible again to express the whole spectrum of feelings authentically and without ironic breaks or distance through citations in music, to be free for a new way of dealing with melody and tonality, it is hard to believe that 21st century's music would resume directly from the 19th century leaving out the problematic 20th century. We should not lose sight of the crucial differentiation: The discovery of the unconscious levels, the “personal unconscious” in Schönberg's expressionism and the “collective unconscious” in Stravinsky's archaic Russian period, was an important step for music, a kind of investigation into the self of people within the medium of sounds. This can be very fertile. So the expression of loneliness, pain, and despair, the scream are not problematic, but the freezing, coldness, and distance, the disappearance of feelings behind an opaque construction.

Transferring the ideas of trauma therapy onto music, the music again should be able to have an organic flow, to get in contact with the body, the breath, and the emotions, and to build a time-continuum. Trauma-healing in psychology usually needs the following prerequisites: In a safe place with empathic persons who are not judgmental, the traumatized person is led up to fragmented and sometimes lost memories, the time-continuum is reconstructed, and the person learns to speak again. Through that, he reconnects with his feelings and gets the ability to grieve – and to trust. “Virtually all treatment methods direct the survivor to construct a personal narrative at some time in his or her recovery.” (Shay 1995, 187) For the individual, speaking means “socializing the trauma”, and to achieve that the feelings of the listeners have to be touched. And still: nothing will be the same as before. “In the sense of regaining lost innocence, combat PTSD is definitely incurable.” (Shay 1995, 186) “Forgetting combat trauma is not a legitimate goal of treatment.” (Shay 1995, 192)) Also for traumatic experiences that influence the whole of society, it is not possible to regain the state before the trauma. The experiences of the 20th century, the World Wars, and the Holocaust must not be forgotten, and also in music the memories will leave their traces forever.

Would it have been possible for an artist to not be touched by the experiences of the 20th century, or at least to resist the freezing? The former is most unlikely without losing integrity and without paying the price of inner damage which can be perceived in the music of many tradition-bound composers. In this aspect the conservative cultural criticism runs short, which confronts the Twelve-tone music and the avant-garde after 1950 with good, principally correct arguments, and still did not understand the logic of the development, because especially these critics never went into the discussion of war traumas. Maybe Adorno (1976) is not that wrong when he writes about New Music: "It took all the darkness and guilt of the world upon itself." (p. 126) Well, guilt? But darkness definitely, which should not prevent New Music to search for the light again.

In psychology the phenomenon of posttraumatic growth is known, the – rare – experience that people after severe traumatizations not only become viable in society again, but grow beyond their pre-trauma state, often into spiritual dimensions; in this realm one finds *The Spiritual Dimension of Trauma Therapy*, which is the title of an essay by Ursula Wirtz (2003).

The destruction of a fixed worldview, the dissociation of the ego, the opening of the conscious into the unconscious with all its demons, the stepping-out of normal time-frames – all of this also holds potential for growth. "Traumatized persons have to reemerge from the underworld, from the realm of the dead and become alive again after deadening numbness ..." (Wirtz 2003, 7) In the best possible case persons emerge from trauma healing or trauma transformation who – knowing about their vulnerability – find empathy and humor, who – knowing about fragility of the ego – open up beyond the ego and towards spiritual growth and transpersonal experiences, who see their personal suffering as "part of a bigger suffering which is shared by all beings" (Wirtz 2003, 10), who out of the experience of a collapsed time-continuum think beyond time and integrate timelessness in the spiritual sense into their lives, but still keep the experience of time in every-day life.

The future will show if this is a potential for the music's development into new directions. Reflecting about the entanglement with the traumatic experiences of the 20th century might break the impasse for the numbed avant-garde and open the way for a contemporary music beyond avant-garde without having to forget the avant-garde.

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