

# BOLT

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PATRICK CULLINAN

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# Madagascar

*For Chris and Lee Hope*

I am walking by the sea,  
The sun is hot enough:  
It warms the sand,  
The wind blows along.

A black man is fishing  
From a rock. The fish  
At his feet are dead.  
Today is not different.

A bamboo stem  
Is running gripped by  
A dog's jaw. The legs  
Are moving.

Nothing is said as things  
Are done. This is  
The natural way  
Things go on.

Two butterflies before me  
Fly up and down.  
They are gold or red.  
Two or three steps  
Then the wind takes them;  
They drift in air and light  
Toward the surf.

It is clear  
They'll never make it  
To Madagascar.

# The Idea of a Critical Sociology of Music

*"We are beyond the stage of reverence for works of art as divine and objects deserving our worship. The impression they produce is one of a more reflective kind, and the emotions they arouse require a higher test and a further verification . . . A science of art is therefore a far more urgent necessity in our days than in times in which art as art sufficed by itself to give complete satisfaction."*

*Hegel in 1820*

## I

### THE AIMS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF MUSIC.

"In what calls itself philosophy of art," Friedrich Schlegel once remarked "one of the two elements is usually missing: either the philosophy or the art." So it is with the sociology of music. If this seemingly more specific enquiry has evoked little enthusiasm amongst either sociologists or artists, and less consensus, it is largely because the investigation has so far failed to provide a secure methodological basis on which to integrate the two spheres. Neither artists nor sociologists have cause to feel satisfaction with

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\*This is a slightly abridged version of a paper given at a Colloquium on 'Society and the Arts' in the University of the Witwatersrand in August 1974. The paper was designed to be heard rather than read. I have nonetheless chosen to publish it in its original form in the hope that the thrust of the argument will emerge more clearly when unimpeded by the weight of scholarly apparatus and detailed evidence and example which would, of necessity, be of a highly technical nature. Only a minimal number of footnotes and references have been given. Readers familiar with the literature will of course recognise the decisive influence of the orientation and methodology of the 'Frankfurt school'. My especial indebtedness to the pioneering studies in the sociology of music of Theodor Adorno is reflected in the volume of quotation from his works, but I hope that in this, the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Frankfurt Institut für Sozialforschung, my study redeems something of the debt I owe to the school as a whole.

the present state of the discipline. Despite the undoubted success of certain specialized objective and comparative studies – particularly those which attempt empirical study of the effects of certain overtly commercial kinds of music – the promised illumination of the processes of interaction of musical work and society has largely remained unredeemed. I believe that the basic reason for this is a certain timidity on the part of those who have written on the sociology of music. A comparatively recent discipline – hardly in fact more than 50 years old since it may be said to have begun with the publication of Max Weber's study *Die Rationalen und Soziologischen Grundlagen der Musik*<sup>1</sup> – it has shied away from the general speculative features of European philosophising on music and has sought primarily to deal with those questions which, concerned with the reception of music rather than with its production, permit a measure of quantification. The method employed in the attempt to measure and codify effects is that of empirical sociology, and the consequence has been to turn away from the problematic nature and status of musical works as such and towards the more easily managed sphere of their reception. The aim of gauging the effects of various kinds of music on, for example radio audiences, by doing quantitative analyses of who listens to what, when and how, with the aim of establishing correlations between the functional effects of music and specific social groups and contexts, is a perfectly legitimate one. Some of the work done is quite sophisticated<sup>2</sup> and interesting conclusions have been drawn about the patterns of listening behaviour and the oral capacities of listeners. However the problematic feature of this kind of enquiry is that it tends to operate in terms of the category “**the musical experience**” – clearly a problematic category because, amongst other reasons, it does not permit of quantifiable determination but refers inexorably back to the **quality** of the art work that is perceived. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the intention of such investigations coincides closely with the manipulative interest of market research. The results may assist record manufacturers and radio station administrators, but unless the enquiry raises the qualitative issue of what is perceived in the music and whether the reception is adequate to the aesthetic object, whether the internal dynamic of the art is grasped in its cogency and logic or whether what is heard is pure decoration, the enquiry has no critical status. If a sociology of music is to amount to more than a manipulative technique it must not content itself with quantitative establishments of relations of dependency but must investigate them qualitatively, which means analysing the way in which the work functions externally and **internally**.

I am not, of course, proposing that the sociology of music fall back into the posing of such idealist questions as “**What is the essence of music?**” The key concept of sociological investigation is that of function, but the enquiry must be directed towards answering not merely the question as to how the musical work functions **in** society but also how society functions **within** the musical work – for ex-

ample in the formation of its language, in the shaping of its forms, (as a reflection of social structure and antagonisms), in its affirmative or negative tone and so on. The sociologist of music recognises that the relationships which he is investigating are crystallised in the works themselves and in showing the dialectical interaction between social categories and compositional procedures illuminates both. Critical musical sociology does not bracket out the question of aesthetic quality – on the contrary, its dialectic procedures do greater justice to the problem of evaluating aesthetic quality than does any purely aesthetic approach, because they relate the aesthetic dimension to the totality of human experience, and thus the sphere of beauty to that of truth. Arnold Schönberg used to insist that “**music is not to be decorative: it is to be true**” and in this conviction critical sociology of music places the problem of the truth or untruth of the art work at the centre of its enquiry. There is no reason why it should disregard what Stravinsky demands of aesthetic analysis – the questioning “**of the rightness of the artisan’s work**”.<sup>3</sup> This is a wholly legitimate moment of the enquiry. But, heir to the insight of late Idealist thought that art is a special kind of knowledge and that the category of the beautiful is linked to the Idea of truth, critical sociology of art keeps the problem of truth in the centre of its enquiry. But the idea of truth must be de-mythologised. Critical sociology maintains Hegel’s principle that “the whole is the true”, but it interprets the whole materialistically. The task is to relate the art work to “the whole man in the totality of his social world” as Lukács puts it. What an art work reveals is not something transcendental but an aspect of man’s concrete experience. It is, again to use Lukács’ terminology, a ‘particular’ evocation of the totality, in that it frees relations previously locked up in immediate individuality and shows their universal connexion.<sup>4</sup> Thus art and the sociology of art awaken our historical self-consciousness and keep it awake. The method of enquiry – the analysis of the dynamic interaction between the art work, its reception and the conceptualization of the mediating, social and historical substance in which this process is embedded is a concrete one in the sense that it keeps the totality in view and does not fall into one sided or particularist analyses: – such as the hypostatization of technique in positivism, or the escape into empty Idealist categories.

The value of a sociology of music must ultimately be measured in terms of its capacity to interpret and to judge specific musical works, not exclusively in terms of intra-musical criteria where the success of the artist’s solution to the problems of *techné*, narrowly conceived, is the sole criterion; but rather in terms of the totality of human experience where *techné* is understood as a form of cognition. Specifically musical qualities are thus put into a broader context and ‘sublated’ in the Hegelian sense, i.e. made evident but transcended in the attainment of a broader perception. The aim of analysis is nothing less than to situate the art work within the totality of human experience. Manifestly this can never be attained concretely. Steps taken toward it are always revealed as partial

summations of an untotizable antagonistic totality.<sup>5</sup> The Idealist intention of attaining 'Absolute Knowledge' must of course be abandoned as a viable programme. But the insight into the relationships of knowledge – from partial to greater totalities – forms the foundation stone of a procedure which attempts to render transparent the co-ordination between artistic intention and social relations. The sociological analysis of the mode in which the musical work makes transparent, in its dialectic of mind and sensuous form, an aspect of historically constituted reality is such a totalization. The intentional consciousness within which the musical object is grasped does not 'reflect' an allegedly 'objective' reality but through interaction constitutes its meaning. The meaning constituted may be called 'true' if it objectivises, through expression, the actuality of the experience of the composer and of the listener. The mode of emotion, the logic of formal structure, the style and tone of a musical composition are the expression of a particular human situation, particular in the sense that it is determined by a specific historical constellation – which includes socio-economic constraints on production and reproduction of the work and specific challenges on the level of technique. It is in trying to uncover these determinants that critical sociology 'unpacks' the totality and in doing so attains a standpoint from which to judge whether a work is 'true' as a coherent functioning totalization and expression of the determinations discovered. What makes a work 'untrue' in this perspective is the judgment that, whether consciously or unconsciously, it fails to achieve an adequate totalization and thus projects a partial vision at one level or another. It might, for example, respond inadequately to the level of musical technique attained and sedimented in the historical situation and to which the composer must respond if he is to achieve true originality of expression. "Untruth" considered in this perspective is the result of a failure to respond to these multiple demands. In functional terms it becomes clear that untruth is the consequence of ideology; – the authenticity of the art work is limited by being tied to a specific interest or perspective which consciously conceals or unconsciously renders invisible vital aspects of reality. The manner in which 'pop' music, in its insistence on a constantly affirmative tone is consciously ideological is analysed in the second part of this paper. Since, however, 'truth' and 'ideology' are categories in use, which cannot be given a fixed conceptual definition, but whose power to clarify emerges only in their actual functioning, it may be helpful at this point to give the outlines of an example in the field of autonomous or 'serious' music.

Consider the music of Richard Strauss. Strauss, consciously the last great composer of the bourgeoisie, fearing for his popularity, turned his back on the implications of the harmonic language of 'Elektra' and designed a complex but treacherous tonal language in which chromaticism and dissonance lost their power and merely served to lend a certain aura of spiciness and surface gloss to works which invoked as intact a social order which was in fact in ruins (Rosen-

kavalier, Arabella), and glorified the self-sufficient individual (Don Juan, Ein Heldenleben) at the precise moment when the demands of monopoly capitalism were reducing the individual to a cypher. The artistic intention in Strauss is born of the claims of the market and the musical language mannered and manipulated. This music consciously adopts the standpoint of a particular interest – that of the upper bourgeoisie in a time of crisis. It is demonstrably partial and ideological in its service to a particular interest. Its technical virtuosity cannot conceal the fact that it consciously turns its back on reality and profits (in every sense of the word) from the exploitation of nostalgia. But musical logic cannot be so easily betrayed, as the hollow ring of Strauss' work demonstrates. The man 'who chose to write 'Capriccio' in Nazi Germany could not infuse the music, elegant and cleverly wrought as it is, with life. It remains cold, empty, inauthentic – and its untruth makes it eminently suitable, in its innocuous sentimentality, as a mask for the social reality of its time.

These remarks on Strauss, schematic and fragmentary as they are, serve the purpose at this early stage in my argument, of pinpointing the need to develop criteria of interpretation and judgement through the analysis of the dynamic interaction of the intentions and achievements of the composer of the musical work on the one hand, and the mode of reception of the audience to which it is directed on the other. Even so brief a glance at a body of musical work indicates the necessity of a differentiated account of the needs and constraints operating on both composer and audience and ultimately embodied in the work. Musical works are not splinters of Being, they are specific creations made in a specific historical context. The judgment on the truth or untruth of compositions must refer to this context and proceed in terms of an analysis aimed at establishing a correlation between musical quality and social determinants, i.e. between the logic and coherence of the musical language and social function and thus ultimately the quality of the musical experience. It is vital to note that these are operational categories of relation, and that they are speculative, though not, of course, in an Idealist sense. They are not hypo-statizations, but materialist categories in use, to be won in the process of specific dialectical analysis. The imperatives of a dialectical procedure become immediately obvious when we consider the most basic of all the categories we must employ that of 'society' itself. The structures and pressures of society cannot be analytically codified since social reality is not an object for intentional consciousness. It is undefinable at any given point and yet omnipresent. As Adorno puts it – **"While the notion of society may not be deduced from any individual facts, nor on the other hand be apprehended as an individual fact itself, there is none the less no social fact which is not determined by society as a whole."**<sup>6</sup> Hence it is necessary to operate in terms of an incessant movement between the areas which are open, at least in part, to empirical analysis so that the pressures and features of



the untotalizable totality called 'society' may appear. In the sociology of music these primary spheres are the forces of production (composition, performance etc.) on the one hand, and the relations of production (modes of distribution, institutions etc.) on the other. But what connects them and makes possible a coherent and qualitative determination of the totality are the central speculative categories, the products of dialectic analysis. The value of the sociology of music depends entirely upon the amount of information derived from analysis of the material that is encoded within them and their consequent power to conceptualise the totality. They are not timeless categories of universal significance but conceptualizations which both constitute reality and make it transparent. Their validity depends also on the extent to which they capture the musical object's qualitative moments, and thus fix themselves to their object, never allowing it to evaporate into generalized super-concepts. These are materialist categories fulfilling the demands of the thesis of the primacy of being over consciousness. They are not Idealist because they are not abstract and they are not positivist because they are not formed in accordance with the demand for pragmatic and expedient features. Rather they capture and express the dynamic tendencies of reality in the formation and movement of their own being.

In the diagram on page 8, what I believe to be the main conceptual categories are given in the central column. Thus their centrality and mediating function is emphasized. Without them dialectical investigation is impossible; primacy will inevitably be assigned to one or other sphere which will be treated as autonomous, as has been the case in the empirical sociology of music which, concerned primarily with the determinants arising from the relations of production and distribution (i.e. with the functional life of music) has had to bracket out the problem of quality. Primary emphasis on the relations of production leads to hypostatization of the musical work and rules out any analysis of the internal dynamics and thus of the crucial question of how it encapsulates social information. Primary concern with the musical work as such, on the other hand, tends to absolutize it and thus conceal the degree to which it is an historical artifact born of specific social pressures and answering specific social needs. This latter distortion is perhaps the more insidious and damaging, and parallels a deep seated motive of bourgeois culture – the fetishization of the art work. So-called 'classical' works are given a fetishized, absolutized status by large numbers of listeners and even performers. This idolization of the work has the effect of turning it into a cultural monument with the inevitable consequence that it is consumed as a good. In fetishized hearing of the 'classic' a yawning discrepancy arises between the aesthetic ensemble and its reception. As goods, the 'classic' works draw affects towards them without their specific qualities being grasped in the listeners consciousness. The critical sociology of music has as a primary task the laying bare of such fetishization. It is precisely the establishment of the relationship between the unique musical work and the features of the historical constellation in which it

**EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF:****DIALECTICAL AND CONCEPTUAL SOCIETAL CATEGORIES:****EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF:****FORCES OF PRODUCTION**

Producers - Performers  
in specific socio/economic contexts.

**SOCIETY**

*structure and features of mediating social substance*

**RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION**

Modes of distribution to, and reception by, listeners/consumers  
musical institutions  
general social status of music/composer/performer  
social class and attitude of listener.

**TRADITION AND INNOVATION**

Response to demands of technique, historical context of innovation i.e. organization of material and formal structure - emancipation of hitherto hidden or suppressed material

Reasons for definitive break in 20th Century with pre-established harmony between general and particular guaranteed by major/minor tonality.

Status and social attitude of artists.

**'LANGUAGE'**

*specific nature and effects of musical entities and autonomous works.*

**RECEPTION AND TRANSMISSION**

Modes of reception and distribution. Preponderance of communications industry

Context of hearing: widespread sedimentation of tonal elements  
Socio/economic modification of modes of hearing in transition from liberal market to monopolistic, and state social capitalism.

**INTRA-MUSICAL ORGANISATION**

Organisation of material: tonal, atonal (pantonal), serial, aleatoric principles

Function of form - intensity of integration

Modes of integration of harmonic and colouristic elements.

**'FUNCTION'**

*(a) of popular (Market orientated) repression and (b) autonomous (non-market orientated) - emancipation*

**DISTRIBUTION AND ORGANISATION**

Domination of communications industry in industrial society  
commercial function of music producing tendency to destruction of autonomous music  
Transmission of information not aura  
emphasis on sedimented fragmented musical elements: regression of hearing/deconcentrated hearing.  
Constant emphasis on affirmative in 'pop' and in presentation of autonomous music.



Artistic intentionality of musician in basic 'tone' of composition reflects attitude to society - e.g. critique of illusion and 'Spieß' in atonal music.

**QUALITY OF MUSICAL EXPERIENCE**

- (1) *Conflict of advanced musical language and broad social reception; adequacy of reception to aesthetic process.*
- (2) *Truth and Ideology in musical works.*

*Adequate reflection on social characteristics of epoch.*

Cultural industry places work in context of ideological affirmation.

fetishism of material  
Speculative typology of types of listener (by T.W. Adorno):  
(1) expert; (2) good listener  
(3) culture consumer (4) emotional hearer (5) pop 'fan' (6) 'entertainment' seeker (7) indifferent and anti-musical.

was created which makes possible an authentic approach to the work – i.e. one which understands it in its own context, not in an imposed mode of apperception. A true perspective is attained. The knowledge that the work is an artifact not an ontological revelation de-mystifies hearing, enabling the listener to grasp its specificity, its ‘particularity’ in Lukács’ terminology – i.e. both its uniqueness in purely musical terms and its broader intelligibility as the expression of a historical constellation. In a word the task at this level is to achieve a genuine understanding of tradition: for tradition is the dialectic of the specific and the ensemble of determinants.

The destruction of the ideology of the quasi-ontological status imposed upon musical and other artistic productions in bourgeois culture thus raises the concrete question of how musical language is formed and transmitted. In investigating this we should begin by emphasizing that music is an absolutely historical art in the sense that all the specific characteristics of musical language are the codification of musical invention – they do not lie inherent in the material itself. There is no natural music, no chord has a specific psychological effect in itself – it acquires effect only in a specific context which in turn reflects the total state of technique. The cogency (or lack of it) of musical language – the loss or gain of functionality of specific harmonic progressions, for example – can only be explained by historical mediation. As A. Salazar’s interesting work *La Musica como proceso historico de su invención* – argues, music is the history of its invention. Therefore the problem of tradition is essentially the problem of the nature of the evolution in transmission of musical language, and the manner in which information sediments itself in the aural consciousness. What is the nature of those processes of social mediation which make intelligible to large numbers of people the advancing language of autonomous musical works? It is important to show that the problem of tradition is connected as much with reception as it is with supposedly autonomous invention. For the composer, tradition is a technical category. As Herbert Read has pointed out, “**a tradition in art is not a body of beliefs it is a knowledge of techniques**”; Whatever new elements he brings to the language of music acquire their value as a response to questions which have arisen during the evolution of musical thought. For the listener, on the other hand, tradition is primarily a historical category: he is bound by a history of sedimented aural information and modes of musical organisation which are mediated, not primarily by the autonomous substance of musical works, but by the social mode of their distribution and performance. Thus the two aspects of tradition, considered analytically, might appear to be quite distinct. In fact they are dynamically interrelated, the context and manner of hearing in society strikes back at the production of music and diminishes its autonomy and freedom. It is clear that an adequate answer to the problem “how is musical spontaneity possible?” involves an assess-

ment of both the demands of advanced technique in autonomous music **and** of the general nature of aural awareness in the culture under consideration. With regard to the first question it is clear that no composer can start from scratch, from autonomous sounds. He is responding to the language, style and intentions of his predecessors. Thus spontaneity has its limits: on the one hand it is intelligible only in a context, on the other it sublates those aspects of the tradition which have hardened into clichés. Spontaneity is thus a social category, and a key one. If the autonomous musical work derives its effect from its apparently spontaneous extension of the language of the time, then the clear implication is that it is in opposition, it is critical – even subversive. And to be in opposition, to be critical it is essential that it adequately grasp the forces which it opposes – that it be historically conscious and aim at emancipation. The extension of technique (which is the emancipation of sound), is the expression of a broader drive to freedom – including social freedom.

The progressive moment in music is that which proclaims the autonomy and rights of the subject against a constricting social reality. We should never forget that music has its roots in the collective practises of cult and dance and that its sensory base is therefore essentially social. As Adorno insists in his **“Philosophie der neuen Musik”**<sup>7</sup> collective perception is the basis of musical objectification . . . (and) . . . the ideal collectivity is still contained within music, even though it has lost its relationship to the empirical collectivity”. Thus the idea of a free art is grounded in the idea of a free society. Music functions both psychically and socially to emancipate the individual from repressive anxiety and intimates the possibility of a society without domination. In the emancipation of the moment of subjective freedom, music points to the utopia of sociality without constraint: the very opposite, it may be noted, of the paradigmatic Utopia of the West, Plato’s ‘Republic’, where the immutable order defeats time and the differentiation of ego which is the innate promise of music.

But the organization of culture necessarily compromises this ideal. The fundamental division of labour, a necessary precondition for the development of culture is also its stigma, for it divides men, stressing not their common humanity but their fragmentation into classes. Art, especially in the bourgeois epoch, is bedevilled by this fragmentation and functions increasingly more blatantly to conceal or transmogrify the reality. When the attainment of the promised goal of the unity of mankind made in the bourgeois revolution remained unfulfilled, the affirmation of freedom was sounded more shrilly in art, which increasingly hypostatized itself as a world of freedom in contrast to what was happening in the real world – a situation emphasized by its growing elitism and its exclusion of the lower classes. Herbert Marcuse in a profound study of the increasingly ideological character of bourgeois culture<sup>8</sup> characterises the situation as follows:

“Culture is supposed to assume concern for the individual’s claim to happiness. But the social antagonisms at the root of culture let it admit this claim only in an internalized and rationalized form. In a society that reproduces itself through economic competition the mere demand for a happier social existence constitutes rebellion . . .”

In this situation, he argues, the transfigurative aspect of art assumes a repressive function:

“By exhibiting the beautiful as present, art pacifies rebellious desires. Together with the other cultural areas, it has contributed to the great educational achievement of so disciplining the liberated individual, for whom the new freedom has brought a new form of bondage, that he tolerates the freedom of social existence. . . . Beauty gives the ideal the character of the charming, the gladdening, the gratifying, — of happiness. It (thus) perfects the illusion of art.”

This pinpoints, I think, the context and manner in which art becomes ideological. Since the ending of the heroic period of the bourgeoisie, art has kept faith with real universality only by straining to keep itself uncontaminated by ideology and false affirmation. In a world marked by the cumulative reification of the individual the art work can attain authenticity only as a statement of protest. Music achieves power and autonomy only when its oppositional potential does not allow its degradation to a mere accompanying affirmation of the deficient status quo and thus to an object which can be socially consumed without friction. Accompanying affirmation is the very essence of pop music and the basic threat to autonomous music. An examination of this social matrix will enable us to identify the modes of affirmative and negatory functioning, as a basic key to the features of modern music.

## 2●

### THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF TWENTIETH CENTURY MUSIC

As I hope by now to have shown, any attempt to situate sociologically the aims of modern music and the constraints under which it is composed must consider the problems of reception simultaneously with the problems of autonomous innovation. It has become a critical commonplace to speak of the great divide between ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ music as if these were in fact autonomous entities. In fact they are two sides of the same coin. Since no later than ‘Die Zauberflöte’ light art has been the shadow, the social bad conscience, of serious art. When, after Beethoven, art music became increasingly complex and progressively compromised by ideology, a new music, affirmative and undemanding, patched together from the sedimented clichés of art music has grown up and been

furthered by the extension of the market. 'Light' music is in fact nothing but market orientated music and functions as an instrument of repression. Therefore the very distinction between 'popular' and 'serious' music is misleading. There has been no genuinely popular music – (except in lands peripheral to the centres of industrial development such as pre-war Spain and Hungary) – since the dawn of the bourgeois epoch. The real distinction is between music which is market orientated and affirmative and that which is autonomous, negatory, and increasingly marked by a tone of ominousness, forboding and violence.

The principal feature of market oriented music is its suppression of musical spontaneity. The music presents itself as immediately apprehensible and assimilable. Its primitive language emphasises colouristic elements and short periods as a means of directing attention away from coherent musical argument and towards untroubling sensual stimulation. This has resulted in a diminution of the autonomy of hearing which has assumed catastrophic proportions in the 20th century. In the modern industrial world it is literally impossible to escape subjection to debased sounds. From the aeroplane, to the supermarket, to the bookshop which is open all night the manipulated non-individual of mass civilization is aurally tranquillised and psychologically repressed. The endless flow of simple motives, of harmonies and colouristic elements developed in great music and torn out of their context becoming reduced to mere surface stimuli is inescapable. All musical integrity and function is lost: but not all social function. The wide-spread distribution of these musical fragments and entities has a precise function in late industrial society. The repetition of dissociated elements which refer to the musical material sedimented in the hearer's mind, censors intellectual autonomy and, through the reassuring process of identification, produces a submissiveness and acceptance which parallels the economic and social lack of autonomy which the individual actually does suffer in the age of monopolistic and manipulative capitalism. The reduction of perceived stimuli to schemas of the most limited kind is synchronous with the imposed schemas of behaviour in consumer society. In his important essay **Ueber den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens**<sup>9</sup>, Theodor Adorno has attempted a demonstration of a general regression of hearing capacity by which he does not mean a falling back of the individual hearer to an earlier phase of his development, but rather the situation in which the contemporary listener is forcibly maintained at an infantile level which undermines ego autonomy and reduces patterns of behaviour to a mimetic acting out by an externally conditioned ego. This primitivity in late industrial capitalism is not that of under-development but of forcible repression.

Manifestly this situation does not leave untouched the freedom of the composer of autonomous music not designed to be fed into the mill of the communications industry. What is regressed from is

precisely the intimation of the possibility of freedom and autonomy. The regressed hearer makes his peace with the unfreedom of the society by capitulating to the material which is thrust upon him: he makes the modes of deconcentration and atomism his own, and thus lives without conflict – on an infantile plane. He becomes accustomed to affirmation and thus the promise of autonomous art – the moment of the emancipation of the subject from repressive anxiety and the evocation of a utopia of sociality without domination or constraint – is lost. The music assists the individual to extinguish his subjectivity. It is in the context of mass manipulation that we must first approach the analysis of the autonomous music of this century. It is, in the first place, a desperate attempt to preserve the integrity of the subject. Defiance of society necessitates defiance of its language and so the autonomous musician has to break through the progressive disintegration of tonal music in the composite agglomerations of the culture industry. Inexorably autonomous music has been forced into the role of protest – its signum is non affirmation – and therefore it is denied the possibility of broad social acceptance. It is crucial to note that the tone of radical music, its ominousness, its foreboding, its violence and sense of strain, is not the individual tone of a particular emotional state. It is a registration by the seismographic ear of the artist of the violence which is daily being done to the individual in late industrial capitalism. The final liberation of dissonance, the wilful ‘ugliness’ of this work is a desperate attempt to capture and to protest against the reification of man in a language alienated enough to mirror this reification. \*

The point is that any positive accent in modern art is ideological. Consider the break with tonality inaugurated just before the first world war by the so-called ‘second Viennese school’ of Schönberg, Berg and Webern. The creation of ‘Erwartung’ signifies a shift in the function of music which is probably the most radical since the harmonic revolution of the 16th Century. Together with its social function music suddenly emerges here as changed within its innermost being: it is entirely non-affirmatory. The music of the triumphant bourgeois epoch had about it, even in its supreme achievements, something of the decorative. Behind the predominantly pleasing surface order – (the expression of a happy synthesis of sensual attractiveness and expression) – lay the affirmation of the Idea of humanity. It is true that the Idea weakens as the 19th Century wears on and becomes rank ideology in, for example, the

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\* There are, inevitably, people who cannot see the terror behind the language of modern art, who think that Kafka's stories are charming fairy tales, Picasso's *Guernica* a wonderfully mythic painting, and the music of Schönberg ‘exciting and ‘liberating’. Let them reflect on the answer of Schönberg, who when asked in Hollywood by a film mogul for ‘more of your lovely music’ replied evenly ‘my music is not lovely’ and of Picasso's answer to the Gestapo officer who picked up some sketches for *Guernica* and asked contemptuously ‘Did you do this?’ – ‘No you did.’

symphonic works of Brahms. But it is rejected absolutely in radical music – either sadistically and mockingly as in Stravinsky's 'le Sacre du Printemps' or with profound horror by Schönberg in music which has rightly been called the expression of trauma. In Schönberg's music the rejection of the affirmative reaches into the nuanced sublimations of musical articulation and expresses the loneliness of the individual in the context of the on-going process of the erosion of the autonomous ego as the individual submits to the objective manipulation essential to the total organization of the economy, and achieved by the assaults of advertising, market research and psychological conditioning.

Autonomous music is not exempt from this – it too is deeply implicated in the processes which extinguish human subjectivity in late bourgeois commercial and cultural life. As Adorno has written, **"the liquidation of the individual is the particular signature of the new musical situation."** But everything depends on how this fact is reflected in compositional procedures. It has become clear to all except academic conservatives of the type of Hindemith (and to Stravinsky in his neo-classical phase which pretended an aesthetic integration out of the disintegration of the subject) – that atonality is a judgment on the impotence of tonal music to give expression to present situation. Tonality is now ideology, and the reconciliations which it involves are spurious and untrue. The freedom which the basic tonal order guaranteed for the elaboration of subjective expression cannot function where there is no autonomy. This is the antinomy of modern music and the point of its connection with modern society. In all its diverse styles, from atonality through serialism to aleatoria, autonomous music struggles against the debasement of commercial sound on the one hand, and the weakening of the ego on the other. Its sphere is defined by what it struggles against and it ultimately develops as a kind of mirror image of the age in a point by point correlation in which it has gradually lost the power of protest and, like pop music, sunk to the mythical justification of the status quo. The history of modern autonomous music is the history of the progressive loss of that moment of protest against domination which, I have argued, is a fundamental impulse of music. It is a history of the extinction of the compositional will. The original impulse of early atonal music – to free music from the pre-given reconciliations of tonality and thus to allow sound, as John Cage was later to put it "to come into its own" reflected, as yet unconsciously and still quite weakly, the desire to be delivered from the ego. But in the second Viennese school the liberation of sound was also the expression of anxiety. The struggle with formal problems in serialism was the struggle to capture the expression of protest of the individual in a musical logic which could not be assimilated by the market. In the end the attempt shattered on the absolute rationality of serialism, which in its submission to the logical structuring of the acoustic material chosen for the composition, annulled the ego. Nonetheless the attempt was an expression of a



true insight into the mutilation of the human subject in late industrial society. It was born of the understanding that the assumption of intact identity was ideological and that artistic projection asserting identity presumes premature reconciliation. In 'Negative Dialektik', Theodor Adorno writes:<sup>10</sup>

"The subject is the lie, because for the sake of its own absolute rule it will deny its own objective definitions. Only he who would refrain from such lies – who would have used his own strength, which he owes to identity, to cast off the facade of identity – would truly be a subject."

The agonizing dialectic of will and material in the music of Schönberg, Berg, Webern, Skalkottas reflects the situation of the fractured subject attempting to fulfil the condition of freedom; – viz. that identity be foresworn. The music of Cage and the later Stockhausen on the other hand, is identitarian in the most facile mode: the evocation of the material as nature leads away from freedom into myth.

In the last part of this paper, I wish to explicate this thesis. Before doing so, however, it is necessary that we review briefly what the disintegration of tonality – the precondition of all modern music – implies. This investigation of the language of modern music will I hope exemplify, as a working model, the methodological procedures I have outlined: the dialectical movement of thought between the historical facts of the world of artistic practice and the conceptual categories through which this procedure is perceived and reflected. The conceptualization of the determinate social movement embodied in the dynamic of the art work and its reception also intends the illumination of the unconceptualizable totality – the concrete social situation itself.

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE LANGUAGE OF MODERN MUSIC

The era of major/minor tonality extends from the middle of the 17th Century to the first decade of the 20th, and its basic characteristic – the harmonisation of the particular and the general – paralleled the classical liberal model of society. In the epoch in which Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' was supposed to bring about a harmonization between the individual efforts of the citizen and the good of the collective, the tonal system sought for the harmonization and integration of the moments of individual spontaneity. The reality, it need hardly be said, never fitted this model which always had about it the odium of ideology. What Hegel called the 'cunning of reason' concealed the reality of social domination. Similarly the element of manipulation has never been entirely absent from tonal music. In retrospect it has become clear

that the essential principle of bourgeois music of the heroic period – its drive towards the differentiation of the material within an organic unity – always had to overcome a basic inertia, a clandestine and regressive desire for the security of a dominant and lawful unity, or for compulsive repetition in the Freudian sense. Hence the aura of the mechanical which can often be detected even when the music appears to claim total organicity and the development of each moment out of the previous one. Tonality, as an objective language preformed and organized the material: its strength lay in its capacity to absorb the almost limitless possibilities of combinations which expressed the individual and particular and to sublimate them in the general order. It thus had the character of objective mind, and in retrospect we can see how dominating it was. In an interesting study Rudolf Kolisch has shown how few the basic schemas of the 19th Century compositions were: the mechanical use of basic forms, tempi and tonal schemas is far more striking than the originality and inventiveness which cultural propaganda ascribes to Viennese classicism and beyond. The objective bourgeois consciousness of the age was always concerned, following the model of manufacture, to spin the greatest possible volume from the minimum of basic material. The tonal law governing even the most advanced compositional solutions to the problem of musical identity and change (in Beethoven's last piano sonatas for example) in terms of which the extension of the material into remote emotional areas (technically, keys), was made feasible by the guarantee of the return to the tonal centre and thus of submission to a preformed order. The musical principle is a transmutation of the law of equivalence of market society. The increasing insecurity of tonality as an organizational principle is to be understood as reflecting the growing differentiation and disorder of maturing capitalist society and the consequent weakening of the ideology of the sovereign individual on whom that society was supposed to rest and whose interests it allegedly served. The tonal order can hardly be said to have functioned well after the middle of the nineteenth century: vide Wagner's chromaticism and the dismemberment of strict form which it entailed. With the shrewd eye of real hatred Stravinsky has pointed out that Wagner's music is more improvised than constructed. **"Its brilliant improvisation inflated the symphony beyond all proportion,"** he writes, **"and gave it increasingly less real substance and invention"**. The leitmotif – which Stravinsky maliciously calls "the material embodiment of the musical city directory" – rather than the basic key became the constructional principle because the tonal centre could no longer hold. Stravinsky is certainly right that this was not an extension of musical logic but a capitulation to the unavowed regressive longing for repetition referred to earlier. Wagner's music, with its gigantic world-embracing mien apparently proclaiming the new dawn, was in reality the cypher of the decline of capitalist civilization which the new age of European imperialism unwittingly inaugurated. Hence its strange blend of urgency and power with overripeness, its fusion of exultation with pessimism. The chro-

matic intensity of 'Tristan and Isolde' which appeared, in the middle of the nineteenth century, to make the work an obelisk of modernity, covertly lent the most subtle and insidious allure to the nihilistic ecstasy of the drama satisfying the deep seated impulse towards regression. And the gods of 'Götterdämmerung' really are, as anguished late bourgeois from Shaw to Thomas Mann duly noted, the representatives of heavy industry.

The tension inherent in all this had become unbearable in the period before the first world war. Hence the shove given by Schönberg. The idea of balanced tension, the basis of tonal harmony, became intolerable when the social reality no longer guaranteed to the individual that which the ideological individualism of market society promised. Aesthetic unity is a lie when social unity disintegrates into antagonisms. Thus the final collapse of tonality was, on every level, a protest against the facade of order and stability. It exposed raw nerves. Here was an entirely new attitude towards the sovereign individuality of the composer and towards subjective expression. The expressionistic aesthetic of early atonalism is certainly born of the desire to retain individual integrity as pure expression. But it is no longer the expression of triumphant subjective will; the works are rather the expression of anxiety. The extraordinary urgency and density of the works of Schönberg, Webern and Berg, their unremitting seriousness and their absolute liquidation of all surface charm and of the drawing out of consequences and implications of the material which, since Schiller, has been known to aesthetics as 'Spiel', is born of the desire to retain individual integrity as pure expression. This music is an attempt to break through the facade of coherence which major/minor tonality had lent to musical works. The early (i.e. pre-Serial) language of the second Viennese school is nominalistic — every sound has to function on its own, as a thing in itself. The music (a good example is Schönberg's settings of the George poems in his 'Buch der Hängenden Gärten Op. 15) is what it says: it does not rely on making specific emotional statements in the context of a generalized language. We have noted that the specificity of expression in Western music is validated by being encompassed in a codified language which secured the totality of the form and gave order to the specific musical figures and their correlation. In Schönberg's early music this general order is entirely expended. As Adorno puts it:

“The actual revolutionary moment for him is the change in function of musical expression. Passions are no longer simulated, but rather genuine emotions of the unconscious — of shock, of trauma — are registered without disguise through the medium of music. The emotions attack the taboos of form because these taboos subject emotions to their own censure, rationalizing them and transforming them into images. Schönberg's formal innovations were closely related to the change in the context of ex-

pression. These innovations serve the breakthrough of the reality of this content. The first atonal works are case studies in the sense of psychoanalytical case studies.”

But these studies, which record the eruption of repressed anxiety, have to be totally organized if their language is to remain entirely pure, unvitiated by aesthetic conventions implicit in the tonal conventions. Schönberg's compositions aim at total organization and complete integration – a state in which nothing within them could be different. It is the execution of this desire for absolute authenticity and functionality, which negates illusion and play. This aim is already evident in such seminal works as the still tonal second string quartet Op. 10 (1908). The last movement, though it still belongs nominally to the realm of F-sharp minor has no key signature and by alteration the tetrad chords evolve harmonies entirely new and free from any dependence upon tonality. The music is of strenuous urgency and brevity and above all of great density. As Egon Wellesz has said, here **“every thematic idea is invented complete with all its counter-parts”**, in a totally integrated structure. In musical terms it is the dispensing with tonality which enables Schönberg to achieve such density. Emotionally this quartet, and the first atonal works such as ‘Erwartung’ (Op. 17 of 1910) and ‘Pierrot lunaire’ (Op. 21 of 1912), register unmitigated suffering and raise musical art to the plane of knowledge. The rationality of the compositional procedures expels myth along with any hope of reconciliation with the antagonistic social totality. These works announce nothing less than an abrogation of music's social contract. The expression of absolute opposition to the extant order in a totally organized and rational language finally emancipates music from its dependence on ritual and thus on affirmation. In the criticism of illusion music breaks definitively the tie with cult and magic which was its original use value. Its coherence becomes a purely rational coherence – the ear is not flattered, much less soothed. The sound functions as the transmitter of shock expressing the untransfigured suffering of man. Thus music preserves its truth in isolation from society. The ever tighter structural and tonal organization acts as a defence mechanism against the general regression of music to ideological decoration of the status quo. In evolving a language inaccessible to the market place it protects itself against exploitation; – for only what cannot be assimilated by the culture industry has meaning.

Recognition of this situation brings us face to face with the central dilemma of modern music which is this: music has come into deadly conflict with its language. The more progressive, the more coherent a composition judged by the criteria of internal logic and cogency, the more impenetrable does it become to aural perception and the resulting diminution in accessibility necessarily limits its broad social impact; – whatever gain might be achieved intensively. The better the music the narrower the circle of its reception

and the more rarified its effect. This extraordinary situation cannot be explained only in terms of the drive for greater coherency in compositional procedures: this is not a matter of aesthetic choice. The liquidation of the element of *Spiel*, of playfulness, elegance and joy from art is not the result of wilfulness on the part of artists – they are constrained to do so and the dense technical language is the means.

This can be verified by a glance at the development of technical features of modern music. Consequential musical language has veered under its own weight towards total organization. The authenticity and freedom of the early atonal works, achieved through the abolition of general linguistic context, could only last a moment because it did not guarantee the impossibility of regressive re-evocation of the past. The drive towards rationalization which had become identified with the drive towards authenticity demanded of free atonal music a binding principle of integration. The need to avoid an accidental consonance or a tonal chord, even the fear that the repetition of a single note would insidiously come to function as a new tonal centre, drove the pan-tonal school to codify procedures which would secure the emancipation from bondage to tonality. Hence the birth of serialism. The tone now replaces the scale and each work functions within the limits of the row devised for it alone. The domination by the row is achieved by not repeating any one note until all of the other eleven have been touched on. But the rationalization does not end even here. The serial principle means that everything tonal which enters the composition is rationally pre-formed, and thus all traces of the old tonality and its emotional world are eliminated. But rhythm, metre, timbre are not yet entirely organized. As Stockhausen penetratingly notes, the musical language of Schönberg's serialism is therefore still of the world of tonality. The immanent demands of serialism are not entirely fulfilled. Serial composition proceeds from the thesis that, since all musical phenomena, including pitch and timbre, are in the last instance the result of a lawful order of temporal relations, the root principle of compositional order is time. The elaboration of the idea theoretically and in composition occupied the young Stockhausen.<sup>13</sup> From the given basic material (which, of course, should be as dense as possible) of a row, every element of composition – pitch, time elapsing between notes, duration, timbre – should be determinable.

This is not the place to pursue this problem at the level of compositional technique: more interesting is the fact that these procedures have reduced the power of autonomous music to play a social role almost to vanishing point. In a distressed and bewildered little article the former director of the publishing company 'Boosey and Hawkes', Ernst Roth, asks: 'Is Music Still a Great Art?'<sup>14</sup> and concludes that "... it has become a small art, an art of complicated structures for their own sake." and that "the lofty purpose of the Golden Age has been lost."<sup>14</sup> Indeed it has but this

is because, contrary to what Herr Roth appears to believe, the visible circumstances of life which could maintain and justify a golden art have vanished. The estrangement of modern music from the ego reflects the extinguishing of the individual's autonomy in manipulated late industrial society. Music is absolutely, in all its forms, at odds with coherent individual expression. There is no music which escapes the antinomical tension between order and expression. I want to argue, with the greatest possible vehemence, that this impasse is not merely that of the serial school. It is perfectly true that in such advanced serial works as Boulez's 'Le marteau sans maître' the absolute reification of the material has resulted in the extinguishing of the possibility of active participatory hearing – what one might call active or constitutive hearing – and that the result, whilst mathematically perfect on paper threatens to destroy, in its estrangement from the ego, the living coherence of work. It is virtually impossible to perceive aurally the absolute compositional logic – the perfection of which thus has no effect in performance. The work falls into disparate sensual stimuli. (Stravinsky's remark that the duetting xyloimba and pizzicato viola passages and those between plucked viola and guitar suggest nothing so strongly as ice-cubes chinking in cocktail glasses, is close to the bone.)

Thus it may be argued that serial technique has led to an impasse. But it is manifest that attempts to escape from the restrictions of total organization have resulted in failure no less great. If the demands of serialism result in the inhibition of ego impulses, simply to shrug off this order results in an even more serious regression. As an example I would cite the music of a figure of a great integrity – John Cage. The leap out of total determinism, the repudiation of the drive to intensified rationality which Cage undertook under the name 'aleatoric' music, enshrining absolute chance as its compositional principle resulted only in work which is a remote from the ego as serial composition and which furthermore fails to make any coherent statement on paper or otherwise. The abandonment of rationalized technique does not emancipate the subject and confer artistic freedom – it merely testifies to the enfeeblement of the ego under the pressures of our age. Cage's defence of the physical material, his insistence that 'sound must once more come into its own' parallels exactly the early technical intention of the atonalists – but with the significant difference that whereas their aims were the liberation of the material for the purposes of individualised expression, Cage's procedures dumbly register human defeat at the hands of the material. The ultimate irony is that the immanent logics of both serialism and aleatoria ultimately co-incide at the outer limits of meaninglessness. As György Ligeti has remarked, the effects of absolute determination and absolute chance are in the end identical. Both end in the extinction of the compositional will. If the total organizational principle reflects, however unwillingly, the systematization of the world extinguishing the free impulses of the individual ego in an absolute 'planification', the dice throwing of Cage gives expression to the deliverance to the powers of fate.

This is its insidious and enervating ideological moment. Much of Cage's best work – for example the 'Concerto for Prepared Piano' – has considerable force but is not, as Cage thinks, a force of freedom and open receptivity to the 'cosmic forces' about which he writes in his quirky theoretical works. Its effect (which, incidentally is achieved largely through the structural coherence gained by the arithmetically arranged periods of silence), is that of naked violence and terror. This is the ultimate music of catastrophe. As such it is true, not ideological. It does not conceal but triumphantly announces the liquidation of the individual subject albeit in the naive belief that the extinction of self-consciousness will prepare the way for the reception of divine influences. Objective truth is not however to be attained by merely annulling the subject. The positive accent in Cage's theory is ideological and false and it is belied by the negativity of his music. But the danger in this entanglement of music and myth is that the latter will triumph. In Cage's work, as in much of the music of the later Stockhausen, freedom is blocked in the submission to heteronomous, extra-individual powers. What these composers see as freedom is in reality myth – the belief that spirit exists only as a natural power, as immersed in nature. After passing through the holocaust of Fascism we know that the greatest danger which mankind faces is the mimetic submission to nature – making a "rite of spring". In the perspective given us by Fascism there is something frightening in the use of advanced technology in an effort to blast open a road back to nature and to freedom. Computerized calculation is not integral to the human as the extension of techne; – man is here no longer metron in the sense of being a focal point for the integration of the totality, he is merely the measurer of measurements. The instrumental, manipulative reason employed in the production of ordered sounds by Stockhausen and Cage does not lead away from domination but straight back into it – into an insidious synthesis of instrumental reason and nature which was the core of Nazism and which continues to threaten freedom today. The ideological odium of this music is that of the ontological: the impulse is to obscure the separation between man and nature in a hermetic unity. Such an enterprise is deeply reactionary and narcissistic – a tacit admission of bankruptcy, and of the inability to say anything of meaning to the miserable and disinherited victims of our dying civilization. Frantz Fanon diagnoses the situation from the vantage point of one not caught up in the strip tease of European humanism:<sup>15</sup>

"All European thought has unfolded in places which were increasingly more deserted and more encircled by precipices; and thus it was that the custom grew up in those places of meeting man very seldom. An incessant dialogue with oneself and in increasingly obscene narcissism never ceased to prepare the way for a half delirious state, where intellectual work became suffering and the reality was not at all that of a living

man, but rather words, different combinations of words, and the tensions springing from the meanings contained in words.”

Fanon might have been writing specifically of the reactionary dead-lock of modern European music. In so many of its key works, music in our time – from Stravinsky’s ‘Le Sacre du Printemps’ to Stockhausen’s ‘Telemusik’ – pretends to speak of nature and freedom and in fact conjures up domination and terror. The denigration of the Idea of humanity finds its expression in the aesthetic potentiation of the ornamental over the human and thus in the capitulation to myth.

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## NOTES

1. Originally published as an appendix to Weber’s “**Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft**” (Mohr Tübingen 1922) and subsequently issued separately. English translation: ‘**The Rational and Social Foundations of Music.**’ Trans. D. Martindale. (Southern Illinois U.P. 1958).
2. See, for example, various studies of P. Lazarsfeld.s and J.L. Mueller – ‘**Trends in Musical Taste**’. (Indiana U.P. Bloomington 1942).
3. I. Stravinsky – ‘Poetics of Music : in the form of six lessons’. Edition in English from the Charles Eliot Norton lectures delivered in Harvard 1939/40. (p. 48) (Vintage Books N.Y. 1956).
4. G. Lukács – ‘**Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen: Ästhetik Teil I**’ (Luchterhand. Neuwied 1936.) Vol. ii 247/8. Cf further, for Lukács’ insistence that there is no fixed and timeless essence of art i. 24; for his rebuttal of the idea that art should have immediately useful social effect ii. 676 and i. 655; on the category of totality esp. ii. 231, 233; on the mediation of the three basic categories – individual, special and universal ii. 196, 202, 204).
5. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre – ‘The Question of Method’. English translation of the prefatory essay of Sartre’s ‘**Critique de la Raison Dialectique**’ 1960 (Methuen London n.d.)



6. T.W. Adorno – ‘**Society**’. In: ‘**The Legacy of the German Refugee Intellectuals**’ pp. 144-153. Ed. R. Boyers. (Schocken Books N.Y. 1972).
7. T.W. Adorno – ‘**Philosophie der Neuen Musik**’. (Europäischen Verlagsanstalt 1958) English translation – ‘**Philosophy of Modern Music**’ Trans. A.C. Mitchell & W.V. Blomster. p. 18 (The Seabury Press N.Y. 1973)
8. H. Marcuse – ‘**The Affirmative Character of Culture**’ originally published in the ‘*Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*’ in 1937. English translation in H. Marcuse ‘**Negations: Essays in Critical Theory**’ pp. 88-133. Trans. J.J. Shapiro (Penguin Books. London 1972).
9. Printed in T.W. Adorno ‘**Dissonanzen: Musik in der verwalteten Welt**’ pp. 9-45 (Vandenheock & Ruprecht. Göttingen 1956).
10. English translation: ‘**Negative Dialectics**’ pp. 277 (The Seabury Press N.Y. 1972).
11. Stravinsky Op. cit. p. 64.
12. Adorno – ‘**Philosophy of Modern Music**’ p. 39.
13. Cf. Karlheinz Stockhausen – ‘**Die Einheit der musikalischen Zeit**’. In: ‘**Zeugnisse**’ – Theodor W. Adorno zum sechzigsten Geburtstag’. Hrsg. Max Horkheimer pp. 365-376 (Europäische Verlagsanstalt. Frankfurt A/M 1963).
14. E. Roth – ‘**The Business of Music**’ pp. 66-67 (Cassell. London 1969).
15. F. Fanon – ‘**Les damnés de la terre**’ (Maspero. Paris 1961). The English translation by Constance Farrington ‘**The Wretched on the Earth**’. (Penguin 1967) is banned in South Africa. This has resulted in the grotesque situation of my having to furnish an English translation from the German translation which is not banned.

## TWO POEMS

### FERRYMAN

I am childless Tulele  
An old man and the last of this trade.  
I take my green boat  
Settle a salt oar in a hollow salt palm  
And criss-cross this water.

Aloes make a bitter medicine.

When a man thinks of what is to come,  
He stares in the sky, but I,  
When the hills grunt, and the bushes shake,  
And the engines rip a road towards us,  
I walk with my head down.

Aloes make a bitter medicine.

We will, at first, be prosperous,  
Bartering the pigs and vegetables with travellers,  
And fetching in a good exchange  
For them, and also our labour.  
But with the coming of wealth, watch  
Us find ourselves short of everything.  
And my own children, bred upon this bank,  
And playmates of the fishes  
That doze down stream,  
Will call their pleasures cracked milk  
And spurn the gales  
And drenching sunlight for a road,

We met him walking, at noon,  
A shrike in the bush where the road curves,  
Sun in splinters on the brown river  
And said, Where do you stand, Where  
Do you stand this time? Not a word  
In reply, just the glint of a truck  
Faintly crossing the distant kloof,  
While the dust we had stirred in walking  
Idled past us as we watched him  
Row away in an indistinct boat.  
He is the wraith that vanishes  
When we turn around to touch it,  
Image of the hope that somewhere  
Someone of an ancient tribe  
Would evaluate all our beliefs  
And proffer us his wisdom.  
But name me the secrets a ferryman holds.  
They all die with him and we  
We have our own, dozing  
In the current of another river,  
Or under the arch of another bridge.

Aloes make a bitter medicine  
But sometimes we must drink  
And drink it all before we dine.

A road which brings them somewhere further on,  
They say, and a bridge  
Which straddles the currents rooted in the poles.

Aloes make a bitter medicine.

What can an old man do but warn?  
My river is no jackal  
Though men who make no bones about it  
Think wind across it has a jackal's breath.  
I tell my time by the tides, and name  
The season by what it carries,  
Cobs, husks, and rinds for one, mangoes green mielies  
And loquats for another, and the sea  
The sea which mothered them  
Gathers them back to their birth.

I scold my children daily, saying  
Their road contains impatience, and their clocks  
Will teach them what it is to be late.  
They yawn, and mock me.  
I will wrench awake one night, they say,  
And in my bedding, find wet sand.

Aloes make a bitter medicine  
But sometimes we must drink.

## PHOTOGRAPH OF A BUSHMAN

All but the hunter have their heads down,  
The panting dogs in a ragged circle  
And the bushbuck, coughing, its horns  
Lower than its knees in the empty veld.  
The image moves out of my hands.  
A ravenous wife, somewhere under  
The same sun, can only offer thorns  
For her sugarbirds to sip from,  
And strum a reed, to quieten them.  
Where does this silence come from?  
Crouched, one arm cocked with steel  
Higher than my head, the other flickering  
From shoulder to nail with eagerness,  
Pointing, steadily, to balance it.  
Where does this silence come from?  
Thump, a leap sideways, dust flying.  
Get it! Get it! Look at my dogs  
Look at all my little lions rage  
To lick a scarlet sugarbird.  
Why does this silence increase?

## SILENE

*This is going to be more of a hate story than a love story, but I want to put it down to try to spit away some of the hate. To explain where the hate began, though, I'll have to put down about the love. They filled us up with a lot about love – Love, I mean – their great word for everything they do, sent us out sucking it like a green jube-jube. There's a bad sweet taste in my mouth sometimes, even now, and maybe it's that that I need to spit away, the aftertaste of love, nothing you can bite through or swallow down. But I'll have to begin back where it was still clean and good.*

We sat on the edge of the rush-pool with our feet hanging in the green water. It had taken us ten days to build, working slowly and enjoying ourselves doing it, and we were feeling cool-skinned after our first swim in it. The water was so clear you could see each piece of rush where we had laid it, criss-crossed like the inside of a bird's nest must be. There were a lot of birds there, twangling above us in the trees, not singing as I'd thought they would, but making weird clanging and whistling sounds that had startled us at first. We were glad the birds hadn't been frightened away by our activities – they hadn't minded the digging and the rush-cutting, and although the transparent pool-shape seemed to scare them when we first blew it up, they were back after an hour or two, lively as ever. We had hoped to see monkeys, and Dan said he thought he had heard a troop of them early on our first morning. But we had no spare food to leave out to tempt them, as we hadn't yet got our project far enough to have the food-distribution carriers come round, so we gathered some smooth orange fruits from a tree, and left them in a pile hoping the monkeys might be attracted by them. But we never saw any.

Dan had his hand on my knee as we sat there, pressing the bone and wiggling my knee-cap so that I laughed. "Are you glad you came?" he asked. I'd been thinking about my knees and my legs, how I'd always hated them, especially at the Training-Centre where they were always taking pictures of us, which came out with me looking taller and knobbier than any of the other girls. Still, I thought, these same legs had got me around a lot, and I'd probably not have been selected for the Young Explorers if I hadn't been strong. When I pulled my thoughts back to what Dan was saying I answered, "Yes," but it was Dan, as much as

our project, that I was glad about. If it hadn't been for him, I would still have been seeing my legs only as useful stalks for plunging through marshes. He'd changed that, especially since we'd come to Silene and had long hours after the day's work, to explore each other. We'd been sent out as partners of course, and we would even be having children when the time came, but somehow between the Training Centre and the Leisure Compound and the Model Marina you're never together, just the two of you, for long. Still, they take good care to see you're properly suited before they send you out together, and I'd had time to be amazed at just how well we had been matched. We had been through the basic Sexual Alignment and Compatibility programme, and done our practicals, but there were new things now that struck me about him – small details like the shape of his feet and the way his hair sprang dark and soft from his brow – all exactly what I would have liked and chosen for myself, if I had been doing the choosing.

So, as we sat there by our pool, though my hands were sore from working with rushes, and my back ached and the scratches on my legs pricked, I felt contented and grateful, and the odd fears I'd had during training seemed to have been puffed away. It was like having happiness as real as an apple-tree with all the fruit hanging on it, just waiting to be picked, more than you could ever eat. I loved Dan, I loved Silene, I loved us out for sending us out together. The sun was going down behind great purple blotches of cloud, and a peachy light subdued the fiery day we'd worked through.

Then Dan said, "Mina, what if we leave out a day on our schedule, just don't report it, and take it for ourselves?" "Why, what do you want to do with it?" I asked. "I don't know quite," he said, "but the sea's not far away, we could get there in an hour." "How do you know?" I asked. "I managed to get a map," he replied, "I found out as much as I could before we came." I was taken aback – we were not supposed to know too much about the geography of the place, just to get on with what we were told to do wherever we were placed. "We could swim there," Dan went on, "and have a look around, and come back before it's dark." "But what about the report?" I asked, "what'll you put down?" "Fatigue?" he suggested, "or rain? No, fatigue would be better, they could check on the rain. And anyway, I am fatigued, aren't you?" "Yes I am," I admitted, but not so as I couldn't go on after a night's rest." "What makes you think I'll let you have a night's rest?" he said, laughing, and putting his arms around me so sweetly that I felt my hips rounding towards him and my mouth squaring with hungry zeal. He slid his arms under my knees then, and carried me into the hut we'd built. We didn't rest much, we slept conscious of each other's breathing, and woke to each other, and slept again, and swam when the first

greenish light slanted across our pool. I washed my legs that were slippery from him, and he pulled me to the bank and slipperied them again. The last time I didn't wash, just pulled my shirt and shorts on, and got some food and drink in packs, and we set off towards the sea. We hadn't talked again about going, we just went.

It was further than Dan thought, and though there was a line of white dunes always to be seen in the distance, we found unexpected marshes on the way. They had looked like a grassy plain, and we had been talking about growing rice there, when we found we were at the edge of a broad pool with bright blue waterlilies lying flat all over the surface. We walked around that, only to find that the grassy-looking strips had black mud, knee deep, underneath them. Finally there was a lagoon of still warm water that we had to swim across. Our packs got wet and very heavy. On the other side there were sharp-pointed rushes of a kind we had not seen before, and then a tangle of thick bush growing up the lower part of the white hills. We were so sticky and tired that we sat down under the last of the bushes before climbing the steep-soft sand. It was terribly hot there, with no wind, Dan put his hand on my neck — I was sweating all over as well as being damp from the lagoon. “Do you think we'll make it there and back in one day?” I asked. “Could if we tried,” he answered. “We must,” I told him, “you aren't thinking of staying any longer, are you?” “Not exactly staying,” he said, “but why don't we go on until we feel like going back?” I couldn't help feeling angry. “And what are you going to report?” I demanded, “a whole week's fatigue? They'd take us straight off the project. Don't you want to get on to the next stage?” “What next stage?” said Dan, standing up, “you don't really think we're going to have grateful Sileneans flocking round doing the gentle-eyed villager bit and gazing in grateful wonder at what we've come to teach them, do you?” I hardly knew what to say, but eventually asked him. “Well what do you think we're going to do? What do you think we're here for?” “Look, Mina,” Dan said, picking up a dry stick and breaking it in small pieces as he spoke, “I know quite well what we're meant to do, and what we undertook to do, but I don't really believe it can be done, and I'm not at all sure I even want to try. I'd like to see the people, and find what they've made of their lives here, but I don't believe our Marina Project is going to be of much use to them. I don't even believe that that is the real reason why we've been sent out here.” “Oh!” I cried, nearly in sweaty tears, “why did you come then? You can't have been through all the training, and take everything you've been given, and then say you just don't feel like going on!” “It's not ‘just not feeling like it’” he said quickly, “you aren't listening. Look, tell me why you came here.” “Do I need to explain?” I said, exasperated. “Yes,” he said deliberately, “you do.” “But you know it all as well as I do.” “Tell me anyway,” he said.

"It's sort of us and them." I began after a moment, feeling stupid "them blasted out twenty years ago, and us knowing we did it – even though there was no other way at the time – and them being just victims now, no longer aggressors, and . . . well I won't simply repeat what they taught us – this is more my interpretation of it. We feel we should help, because we caused their suffering and don't want it to go on and on forever, and we want the survivors to understand what happened, and help them to develop so that it won't ever happen the same again. We want them now to make a better life for themselves, to become independent, by showing them what they could do with Silene. The Marinas are only part of what we'll show them, their economy will develop through an increase in tourism; we'll be offering them all we know of food-production techniques as well, and social re-organisation schemes. Oh I seem to keep on bringing in all the words they taught us, but I suppose that's because I do really believe in Love as the motivation of all we're doing here." "Yes, you do, don't you," Dan smiled, "but look at it like this. Aren't the Sileneans already independent? Would they be alive at all if they weren't?" "But that's not what I mean," I went on. "Think what it must be like for them, having to spend their whole lives just managing to keep alive, and probably having half their babies die." "More than half," said Dan. "All right, more than half . . . but how do you know that?" "Well how do you know so much about what you say they need?" he asked. "We've been shown it," I insisted, "by the reconnaissance teams. Think of all those photographs they showed us of how the Sileneans were living, without proper clothes, most of them diseased . . . you can't want to leave them like that forever." "But what's so terrible about that?" Dan asked. Then I really got mad. "Tell me why you came, then," I cried, "and don't say it was because of me, because I wouldn't believe you, and would despise you if I did." "I'll have to think of a better reason then," he said, with a smile. Then he was serious again. "Quite honestly, Mina, the main reason I got into Young Explorers was that I couldn't stand the idea of staying in the city and going on working in Central Computers, which was where they'd placed me on aptitude results. It wasn't easy to get in, because my personality reports weren't very good. But I can't see that what we're supposed to bring the people here is what they like or want or need. And anyway I don't believe that we are sent here for the good of the people at all. There's been far too much spent on Silene for me to believe it's all been done out of generosity or love. It's a rich country, it always has been, it's got mineral resources like nowhere else in the world now." "But what use are minerals to people who can barely keep themselves alive?" I said angrily. "Quite so," he said, "but they're of use to countries which haven't got them. Like us. Oh Mina, I'm not sure of any of what I've said, they don't tell us anything they don't want us to hear, but if we could just get a bit further on



our own, see what else is being done here besides our type of project – we wouldn't be able to stop anything, but at least we could know what's being done – in the name of Love." I felt scared suddenly. "Don't you like it as it is?" I asked, "I've never thought about whether there's anything else going on besides what they've told us. But our life here – our pool and the place we've made, and maybe when the people come to us, we could be of some use to them surely? Don't forget they'll be setting up clinics, and food-production estates, as well as the Marinas for tourists." "It's no good," Dan said soberly, "it won't help them at all in the long run." "I don't care about the long run," I shouted at him, "it's us here and now, and their wretched miserable lives I care about. You can't help them at all by telling them who's using up mineral resources that they've got no use for anyway. You can't eat minerals. And we can't go trailing around on our own without them finding us the very next day. I've been so happy here, and it's meant so much to me thinking how we're going to help them . . ." "Sob," said Dan cruelly. "I think you're mad." I burst out, "you don't believe that anyone can be engaged in anything good and worthwhile, you don't know how people can learn from their mistakes, and want to help others." "Come on," said Dan abruptly. "Where to?" I wailed, as he started up the hill. "Don't worry," he said, "I won't lead you into anything you can't take." I didn't know what to say, so I picked up my things and followed him. He turned round and took my pack from me, and carried it for me up the hot white sand.

There was some more bush to go through just over the top of the hill, and we had to creep low to get under thorny branches that jagged our faces and arms. The sand was dry and brown there, crumbly with leaf-mould. At last we came out to where we could see the sea, long bright lines of surf rearing in slowly, and a fresh breeze cooling our stomachs where our shirts flapped open. Dan gave a shout of pleasure and ran downwards, jumping over clumps of creepers on the dunes, leaving me at the top feeling puzzled and distressed, picking leaves out of my hair. I watched him throw off his clothes and run into the water before I started down. The sand burned my feet, and I couldn't help wondering why Dan wanted to go on anywhere else, when it was so beautiful here, and why he had said so many strange things. Dan waved when he saw me coming, and I suddenly felt frightened that he might swim away and leave me alone, to find my own way back without him.

I took my clothes off too, but only walked a little way into the water. The beach was so steep, and the water so big, but it was light with bubbles and very clear. I splashed myself cool, then walked along the sand, keeping opposite Dan, who was swimming down with the current. At some distance I could see a clump of scraggy trees, and I thought I would take our things with me and put them there to keep cool, and sit in the shade myself. There

were rocks there too, forming a little bay where the swimming looked safer. But as I walked into the clearing under the trees, I noticed a heap of dry shells on the ground, then some sticks in a pile, the the ashes of a fire by some stones. It was the last thing I'd expected, and it frightened me. Someone lives here, I thought, and then saw that the smaller bushes under the trees had been bent and woven with rushes into a hut, very much like the one we'd made. There was nobody there, at least I couldn't see anyone and didn't want to start hunting for whoever it was lived there. I ran as fast as I could to the water's edge and waved to Dan, trying to call him out without making any noise.

He came at once, but when I told him what I'd found he didn't seem in the least surprised. "Who do you think it is?" I asked him. "One of the Sileneans," he said. "What should we do?" "Nothing," he replied, "what would you want to do? Take him back with us and teach him about Marinas?" He was joking, but I couldn't see it as a joke myself. "Why's he here all on his own?" I asked, "we were told they all lived in some kind of villages in the forests." "Probably he likes it better here," Dan said. "I'm scared," I told him, "I don't want him to see us. We haven't got anything with us to protect ourselves in case he starts trouble. We haven't got our translator machine, we're all alone here." "We're all alone in our camp too," Dan pointed out. "Yes, but at least we've been sent there, we know what we have to do there, when the people come." "Oh do we indeed!" Dan said, then he pulled me by the hand – "why don't you come into the water?" I shook my hand free. He ran off, still sparkling wet, into the sea again, while I walked away, carrying our things, and sat down on the sand out of sight of the hut. Perhaps I was being silly after all. The Sileneans were not known to be violent people, and it must have been Dan's talk that had made me nervous. If anyone approached us on the beach we would be able to see him coming.

Eventually Dan came out to where I was sitting. He was buffed red from the strong waves, and when he got to me he took out a bottle of fruitdrink from our pack, and offered it to me to drink from first. I shook my head. He drank more than half the bottle. "Aren't you going to swim?" he asked. I didn't answer, just sat trickling handfuls of the endless warm sand through my fingers. At last Dan held the bottle out to me, "Drink," he said, "you need something. It's hot here." I drank what was left. The rim was sticky from his mouth. Then I turned on my belly and lay looking at the sand in front of my eyes. At the Marina there used to be lovely coloured sand that they'd brought specially, made of tiny quartz grains that looked like minutely shattered emeralds and diamonds and rubies, but this sand was just white, with greyish specks, utterly dry. I hated it.

I did swim at last. I suppose I couldn't not have, with the sun so hot, and the waves rising so cool and green. I knew it was a steep beach, so I set out to swim in the shelter of the rock curve, but Dan called out, "Watch the currents!" as I went in. With all he had said biting my mind, the water seemed so placid in its cool rhythms that I felt like swimming for hours, and only coming back when it had washed me calm. There's a way of swimming in deep water, keeping your mouth just below its level, and your eyes just above, not splashing or racing, catching the sun-glitters in your wet eyelashes and letting it rock you into a sort of rapture, and I was letting myself be carried out like that, submerging all the grim ruzzles of worry Dan had caused. But when I turned to swim back, the shore, with Dan sitting on it, was terribly far away. Line after line of rising waves divided me from it. The waves were rolling past me, inwards, but a current like a river under me was bearing me backwards. The rocks were big and close now, I could see cutty shells on them, and thought I would have to let myself be washed on to them, and cling there, scraped and hammered, until I could pull myself clear. If I didn't reach them in time I would be carried right out beyond them. I saw Dan get up and run along the beach till he was opposite me, then leaping across the rocks, waving his arms and shouting. He was very near, I could hear every word as he shouted, "Sideways! Get over sideways!" But he couldn't reach me to give me any help, and I didn't want him to. "Don't come in!" I yelled, and my voice seemed to pipe thinly out through my ears. He shouted again, "Sideways!" and I pulled with all my strength against the powerful skeins of water, forcing myself to kick in spite of terror which flaked my bones, battling and snorting through my teeth to get air to go on with. Struggling on as he told me, I managed to make some headway towards the beach, horribly near the rocks, at last feeling sand under my feet, and dragging myself in to where I could collapse to my knees in shallow water, grunting, little waves licking me still.

Dan was with me by then, lifting me and helping me stagger up to where the sand was warm. He wouldn't leave me alone, but kept hugging me and tormenting me with kisses I couldn't return, and making me lie flat when I wanted to sit up to get the water out of my pounding head. His eyes were beady and sweat drained down his temples. I should have felt thankful, I suppose, to have got back safely, but all I would feel was loathing of the beach and its treacherous currents and parched sand. There was nothing to cool us there, only cunning salt water and its boring crash of sound. If only we could have been back at our quiet forest-pool, knowing what we were doing, obedient and at peace.

The sun was getting fiercer all the time, though it was still before noon, and I asked if I couldn't at least get up and sit in the shade. But under the bushes ants crawled up our legs and bit our sticky

thighs, so we had to keep pinching them off. It wasn't cool even there, the bushes were prickly, and the dry earth a sawdusty mixture of leaf-grime and ant-chewed twigs. I wondered with irritation why ants had to put sand on everything they ate, and why they had to bite us when they couldn't possibly find anything to eat on us. Then a really big one bit me, a great fiery-spittled creature as long as my toe, with a hard-horned nut of a head whose jaws went on champing even when I'd twisted its body right off.

Dan thought we should eat some of our food, and kept asking me if I felt all right. "No!" I shouted finally, after telling him several times I felt fine. "I hate it here. I want to go back to our place." "We can't go in this heat," he said, "we'll have to wait until it's afternoon, and a bit cooler." "All right, then," I said, "I'll wait." "I'd still rather stay," he said quietly. "So you expect me to go on my own?" I demanded. Then he was angry. "If you don't want to stay with me, yes. Go back." I felt furious. "I will then," I shouted, "but remember if anything happens to me it was you who told me to go all the way on my own. But what do you want to stay for, anyway?" "I've told you," he replied, "I want to look further, to see if there's any sign of what else is being done here besides our project. I'd like to wait for the man who lives in that hut to come back. I want to see if he knows anything." "But you'd never be able to talk to him," I protested, "you don't know enough of their language to speak to him without your translator thing." "Actually I do," Dan said, "I don't know it all, but enough to get along. I spent a good deal of time learning it before we came. Won't you stay with me?" "I've told you. I hate it here." "Maybe you'll hate it back there too." "Of course I won't," I said, "it's what we came for." I felt quite ill with exasperation, and didn't want to talk any more.

We said nothing for a long time. Early afternoon burned us through the branches. Dan went to swim again, and I lay uncomfortably on my side and slept, and woke up feeling empty and sad, longing to make things gentle between us again. When Dan came back, his hair spiked black and wet, and sat down beside me, I put both my hands on his shoulders and tried to say I was sorry, and that if he would only come with me it would all be all right again. He didn't listen to what I said, just pulled me down under the bushes, on my back, with a kind of eager rage. Thorns pricked me and I pushed him off, loathing his crude peremptory forcing, and feeling bricked-in with cold disgust. "I'm going," I said, and picked up my pack. "I suppose you'll follow when it suits you." He didn't answer, but his eyes were saying — please stay. There was no staying for me, in that dry burning place. Things could happen as they would when we got together again.

At the top of the dunes I looked back, thinking he might have come after me, or even that I might run and beg him to come with me, but he had gone to swim again and was not looking.

The way back was very long, and I was worried about losing myself, but didn't. At last there was our pool, cool and round under the trees. Some leaves and rushes had blown in, but I was too tired to do anything.

All night I slept hard, though once I woke thinking I heard Dan calling me through the dark. It was nothing. All morning I waited for him, sweeping the place out with green branches. He didn't come. For two days I waited, swinging between vexation and fear, unwilling to go back and look for him, yet wondering whether he was all right, whether he had stayed in the sun too long and was lying fevered and ill, or even drowned. On the third morning I would have gone to find him, but felt exhausted suddenly, unable to walk that far, and decided to radio for help, thinking that even if there was trouble it would be better than nothing. As I sat waiting for them to come, I wished I hadn't called them, but knew there was no other way.

The helicopter boiled bossily down into the clearing. Two field officers jumped out, both men. I wondered vaguely why they hadn't sent a woman as well. They looked very neat in their belted brown overalls, and gave their names neatly – Mick and Ans. They seemed much more interested in finding out about Dan than in hearing about my feelings. I found it difficult to explain why he had stayed on the beach. I didn't want to tell them what he'd said about the project, yet couldn't very well say he'd just wanted to go on swimming either. They were so much sterner about it all than I'd expected – I mean, I asked for help, only to find they were shooting questions at me, reading our report book, snapping it shut, then ordering me into the helicopter with them. I had to try and point out which way we'd gone. The clump of scraggy trees was my landmark on the beach, and I told them about the hut because my idea was that we should land to see if Dan was inside, sleeping or taking shelter there, as he was nowhere in sight. They didn't land. Suddenly I felt frantic with worry, and begged them to go out to sea to look for him, in case he had been washed out. They didn't answer, but Mick said to Ans, "It's what we thought." Ans nodded. "What do you mean?" I asked. "Don't worry." Mick said. "But what do you mean," I pleaded, "how do you know where he is?" "I suppose we might as well tell you," said Ans. His voice was deeper than Mick's, a slow throbbing

sort of voice. "You won't be staying on here anyway," he added. "Why not?" I asked, astounded. "Because we're looking after you now," Ans said. Mick at the controls turned to speak to me, while Ans looked steadily out of the bubble window. "Have you ever heard of Subtropo?" Mick said. He was talking loud, we all had to talk loud, above the noise of the engine, but I thought I had heard wrong. "Of what?" I asked, stupidly. "Subtropo," he dinned at me. "No," I answered, "what is it?" "We'll show you," he said, "you'll see your friend on his way there. He'll be a couple of miles from it now." I stopped asking questions.

They took the helicopter rapidly up the coast for about twenty-five miles, then slowed, both of them watching ahead. Some distance away we could see two specks on the beach. As we approached they elongated and turned into Dan and a dark-skinned man, plodding slowly. "Don't go close," said Ans. Mick said, "We want clear verification and if possible identification of the other party." "Don't be stupid, you'll scare them off." "Not a chance, they're both nuts. They'll go right ahead and take what's coming to them. I know this kind."

By this time I could see Dan clearly, and had a horrible feeling I was spying on him. He didn't look round at us, though it seemed he said something to his companion. He was badly sunburned, and the other man looked a great deal stronger than he did. He looked pitifully tired. "See your friend?" said Mick. He sounded amused. I didn't answer. What I wanted to do was ask them to put me down to join Dan and go with him wherever he was going. I knew they wouldn't let me, but couldn't help trying. "Let me down here," I begged. "You just stay with us," Ans said. We whirred over their heads and then speeded up. A few miles on the beach was cut across by a wall that ran back up the hill into the bush. It was the nearest side of a huge enclosure, all trees cleared out of it. There were large buildings inside it, all of them low and flat. The outer wall was high by comparison. There were gated openings, none of them standing open, and a landing place for boats. "What is it?" I said, astonished — I had thought this part of Silene was completely wild, with just a few project groups like ours, apart from the main Field Centre. "This is what your friend's come to see," said Mick. "Tel her," said Ans. Mick stared down at it and said, "Subtropo." "What?" I asked, feeling suddenly thin-voiced and white inside. "Subtropo," Mick repeated. "But what is it really, what is it for?" I asked quaveringly. "It's the first Rehabilitation Centre," said Ans. "No," said Mick, with a slight laugh, "more what you'd call an old age home." "For who?" "Anyone who needs it," replied Mick. "But who? Us, or the Sileneans, or what?" "A lot of people," said Ans, and by then I could see down into the enclosure, and there were people, a lot. They were all gathered into a smaller section of the enclosure, sitting on the sand floor. They looked odd, tired, and two officers

in brown uniforms, like Mick and Ans had on, stood near the barricade, looking tired too. "What are they doing?" I asked, "they don't look like old people to me." "It's not only old people who need rehabilitation," Ans replied. "But there are children there!" I cried, "whose are they?" "They belong," Mick returned. "To WHO?" "Where they are." "They're all very well cared for," Ans said gently but firmly, "no-one could do more for them than we're doing. You see, they're not capable . . ." "Cut it," Mick interrupted him.

Then they would tell me no more. Mick was clearly irritated by my presence and questions, and though Ans was perhaps a shade more sympathetic to my distress, Mick had shut him up, prevented him from explaining. I felt sick with alarm, not knowing what had brought Dan to this place far out in a wild country, nor what would happen to him. Mick and Ans had a sealed air now, seeming to know exactly what was going on, and what they had to do. They wanted me to forget what I had seen, Ans said so, quite gently, but there was no forgetting. Those people were all Sileneans, I could see it from their dark-caramel skins, but they'd all been slack-limbed and tired, not even lifting their stalk-necks to watch us as we flew over. But as we'd flown directly above them I'd seen it all – there was something odd about each one of them – they all had a strange tightness of dull skin, a patchiness of colour, and their limbs were twists or knobs of flesh that stuck to them like rotting ropes, but there were differences, some had no arms, some no feet, some seemed half-eaten away in the middle, and some were nothing but crouching trunks. They sat because they couldn't stand; they didn't look up because they knew who we were. Had they been born like that, or was it a disease that had spread after the war?

I think I went on and on asking these questions of Mick and Ans; all I remember is that my questions turned into a gurgling shout, a bobbing of throaty hiccups and wrangling shrieks. Mick suddenly clipped me on the head, twice, chop chop. I sat still and silent then. He said, "Look, consider yourself lucky to be out of it. It would have been much worse if he'd taken you along. He knows what he's doing, and so do we. We'll be telling Subtropo to expect him, and they'll take care of him there." Ans took up the same line – "You'd have been in bad trouble, you know, if you hadn't called us in. You must just forget the whole thing now; we'll look after you. Don't worry any more about it."

I sat silent the rest of the way to the Field Centre. I think I've been silent ever since, in a way. I've never been able to talk to anyone about it, and anyway, everyone who has any say in where I go or what I do seems to know all about it. I don't want them to sit me down and tell me what Subtropo is all about, because I know. But why didn't they tell us, why did they let us go out

thinking as we did about the nature of our work, believing in it so much? They could have told us, I might even have accepted the idea – after all, some place has to be found for the Sileneans who can't fit into the main plans for the country. But such walls, such hopeless sitting in the sun? I don't know.

I never saw Dan again, and never managed to find out anything about what happened to him. Oh, I thought of trying, I thought of shouting and rushing up to people at their desks, even sobbing as I did in the helicopter. But the maps, the pamphlets and graphs and anthropological relics always did me in, pronounced me stupid and knobby and scared. Why didn't Dan tell me more about what he was going to do? I might even have gone with him. I don't know. Perhaps he didn't know about Subtropo at all until the man in the hut told him. And who was that man, anyway?

I'm finished as far as field work goes, in spite of my long strong legs. No matter how hard I try to get sent out again, there's always some difficulty. It wasn't my fault, they know it wasn't. Still, maybe they're right – I could never feel the same about Silene again after what I saw. I know it sounds awful, but I hate Dan now, hate him for having let me feel so much for him, for not making me go with him. But I hate everything else too. Every day I go to the Organisation Office where they've placed me, and sit putting cards into slots, and sorting out reports, even reading them when there's nothing else to do. They let me know I should keep what I saw to myself, but who is there to talk to?

Yesterday I was called up and told my name had been submitted on a list of applicants for teaching posts at the Training Centre. I should have told them I was a bad risk. But if I get the job I won't endanger their plans. I won't give subversive lectures or ever mention Subtropo. What I'm going to do is tell them a few things about Love. It doesn't work like they say it does, not mine, not Dan's; and theirs, that they do everything in the name of, it's the worst of all.



# TWO POEMS

## THE BOOKSHOP

Here I is  
Too literate to reads comics and the Bible  
I walks into a bookshop a newspapers in one armpit  
I spots my favourite magazines  
Fortune, Esquire, Times, New Yorker etc  
They are priced beyond my likes  
I doesn't care much  
Like others I flip thru'  
Here and here my eye catch something to reads  
I proceeds  
The likes of me can be excused for being literate  
Besides a good sight is a literate me  
I was lapping up some pages  
Same as a dog do  
S'true's living God  
One, two hours goes by  
I discovers I'm right in town  
There's a train to catch  
I starts out of the bookshop  
Making sure the guy at the till see me go  
I grins  
Same as a hyena do  
For sure now I smiles  
Outside, here and here is sounds of music, pop sort  
I doesn't mean to waste time  
Not having a particular knowledge of trains  
I proceeds  
The likes of me can be excused hurrying to the station  
Trains doesn't run by the minute  
Suddenly I hear: 'Excuse me please? '  
Strangers leaves me dumb  
I sees this one grab my newspaper  
'Can I see what you have there? '  
'Sure! I never had anything to hide! '  
Not a moment later: 'Excuse me but  
One lady inside said you had taken all sorts of things.'  
'Not the first time! ' I answers.  
And I proceeds.

## THE APPLICANT

*Ja Maneer* I qualify  
I was born in a reserve  
Sometimes called a Location  
Or an area of sorts  
For a certain type of person  
I received inoculations at six months  
To minimise contamination  
By yellow-fever and red-pox  
At least until the age of 16.

*Ja Maneer* I admit  
There's a fair spread  
Almost epidemic, I'd say  
Of our special kind of red-pox  
For which blame lies squarely  
On unpatriotic elements  
And/or overseas influences  
Coming in as they do  
Through the improved Jan Smuts Airport

*Ja Maneer* I agree  
Findings by the English press disturb  
For lately my blood content  
Has shown a preponderance  
Of black corpuscles  
Luckily these should be tolerable  
Being far removed from bloody red  
I'm damned by white corpuscles as you know  
Making me more susceptible to white leprosy

*Ja Maneer* I submit  
These findings should be heartening  
The very first documentation  
Of a racial mutation  
In the right direction  
With a bit of luck soon  
I shall go completely black  
At which stage surely  
I'll cease to be invisible.

*Ja Maneer* I confess  
My examination was quite an experience  
Though I have yet to be certified clear  
I was taken up Strydom Tower  
Then deep down a gold mine  
To measure my *swart-gevaar*  
And my tolerance rating  
Has been declared above average  
By the S.A. Bureau of Standards.

*Ja Maneer* I qualify  
You don't have to take my word  
Many statutory agencies exist  
To verify my claim  
Besides you know very well  
I boast a shadow at all times  
Which ensures my mail is sealed properly  
My friends are well hand-picked  
And my thinking is coming up fine!

## On Seeing Umabatha

UMA UMA BAAAATA ma ma barter – you like me, I like you.  
In the colosseum of Johannesburg it was stim, stim all late.  
Ting . . . .

“The drums were lost in the woods though,” I might get lost,  
“that was at Maynardville where I saw the show last. Among  
the trees.” Pseudo natural. “But just imagine how weird, how  
much more suitable.” No. “But the drums got lost.” The moon  
ran away with the cow.

“How’s your Zulu? ” That was at interval, but why did they  
come if they didn’t understand the language? Shakespeare,  
the felt life, or transcendence along a blood carpet.

The gala premiere for Johannesburg took place on February 4th  
1974, about a year after it roused Britain. Outside then in –  
upside-down, inside out.

Two ladies with bouffant hairdoes had brought opera glasses to  
what wasn’t an opera, or was it? How absurd. How absurd to  
bring your opera glasses to the 23rd row of a converted cinema.  
Could have left their hair behind. Details important my dear.  
Did you see her tits bounce? sh, quickly let me look, don’t  
disturb, shhh: she must have written to god and asked him  
for nipples. The lady has discovered that the nanny’s got boobs.  
Mm Aa boob. Pom pom pompom, pom pom pompom,  
tiddledeedee. Whoopee.

RIDDLE – the manager is near the red carpet. Who is he?  
Such a handsome man, you can’t miss him, he’s wearing a  
bow tie. Which is he? Excuse me sir are you the manager –  
you have complimentary tickets for me. The tie was purple.  
Looked like a boxer. 50c for a programme; and a donation  
for SANTA, that is why you are here and we. ‘God save the  
people’.

The black man shows me into a parking place. If I don’t give  
him a tip he will scratch my car. It is a new car.

I have an itch says my son who is only three. Sob, a sore says  
my daughter, twelve. I have a wound – and that’s my nephew  
at sixteen. No scab. Hyperchondriacs! I have a gold tooth.  
You see this watch on my arm is like the one in the advertisement  
on the programme. My darling husband gave it to me for my  
last birthday. The time? I can’t tell you how valuable it is.

For dinner we had sole and almonds. The other night at the Jamie Uys film, the gala premier, we had champagne and caviare and you'd think that they'd have it here because, I mean, it's just as important . . . Giving out free cigarettes just doesn't seem to be enough. What do you think? After all, they put out a red carpet. We came in the side door.

It was Santa that brought us performers here, not that we didn't want to come but we were tied up. Santa fanta father christ. They find a lot of tb amongst the Af.'s you know.

The bell tolls. Curse these people that are late. I've heard so much about it. I get so excited about these things. – they didn't have to open the curtain because it was open when we came in and the lights were on.

I don't want to appear ridiculous but what did Shakespeare say the sound and the fury signified? I know Faulkner used it. I remember that from varsity. Was it Lady Macbeth who said it, Macduff, one of the others? Perhaps the witches? They say it's not really a rehash of Macbeth. I'm just trying to remember and it might help you know. After all we are not going to hear English. Maybe we should read the programme for a better understanding before we go in. "Out damned spot," of course, is the commonest quote. That one knows before one has even read the play.

But there was nothing of that. Only a touchstone theme, and emotion. They cry. Feel upon an historic theme madam. But when do I laugh? Don't tell me! When the man staggers with the calabash – hee hee.

And clap, I know when.

I clap because I can see they have a fine . . . hush. (rhythm) Nobody said it but someone winked. "Seems, Madam, I know not seems." The great white fathers watched the great, great dancers. Only at the end was it revealed that those warriors were linked behind shield. The collective. A drum and a thud and a harmony, a gymnastic formation admirable in the extreme. Clap clap to the beat of a drum. Clap clap clap clap trying to keep time.

They were black, they seemed brown with a touch of the light. But it could have been the sun. The king died but they found another. They killed a tyrant. Something to do with Shaka.

The mad scene: that was superb. Something light about it – no melodrama. Haven't seen it bettered. The dame was touched as she snuffled in her breastpiece (what else could you call it). It was like a tassled collar without a shirt and she snuffled and tickled herself beserk. They didn't wear much you know. Kept

it primitive. Quite right. Like in the old days. The war dances were quite frightening in their way but what a beat! I mean, in the end the audience was clapping to keep time.

Pity that poor guy over there for he's wearing horns. Don't look now. 'Bout time, she was always the one before. The show advertisement is a bit garish, fluttering up there like a false eyelash. I suppose it received so much advance publicity they don't need to bother now. Still, it doesn't need to be taudry. Would you like something to drink, an ice cream?

Boy am I going to tell my husband when he gets back from his trip that I've seen something before he has.

Critic, critic, how are you going to judge this one? I mean, in your position, you know what I mean, you could never slam it. But then, of course, no one with all his faculties would . . . There's feeling it's good. Criteria. Why don't you sneak a Zulu in for another opinion. Don't be ridic . . . how's your coffee?

They tried to keep time. In the end a couple of warriors did somersaults and the creator's son was presented with a tricycle. To go home.

All whores. Love me. Love you. Love we, they.

The cauldron bubbled over, the smoke rasping the guts of everyone there. The victor was supposed to plunge his spear into the floorboards (that was in the script) but instead he flung it to the heart of the nearest armchair, blood carpet fissing in a spume. With white fluffy plumes they cried and spilled over from wood, drum warriors beat in the auditorium. They that had laughed when they heard the witches hiss to bring forth spirits had thought it was a sneeze. Now they dribbled with fear because someone had locked the exit doors. They were pulped by the beat of the drumdideedum to blood and gold.

That morning I drove over the trousers of a black man. That is, his trousers and twisted his ankle. His socks were diamond blue and gold. I screamed at him when he caught me trying to cheat the parking garage computer. (I screamed at the white man who came to his rescue.) He was in a little cubicle collecting tickets, acting under orders. He came to talk to me above the hooting queue. I reversed, braking to see his pants under my tyre's grip. Silent. I said I'm sorry I didn't mean to hurt you, forgive me. I forgive you without a look. I'll bake him some scones. That's what African women do don't they? Cook.

A man shields his face with his hand if a woman bitches at him.

## FOUR POEMS

### PERSIAN FABLES

*We will speak to the poor man  
hoeing among the date palms –  
there is nothing like  
the grain of knowledge  
sown in the fertile bed of a man's heart  
to bring about wise acts . . . .*

So spake the kings  
and called upon men to tell their stories  
in the villages –  
tales of the lion and the wolf and the ass  
where wisdom is embroidered  
by the splendours of narration  
with its flowered words  
the nail of familiarity  
is thrust through the skirt  
and delight comes in the satisfying defeat  
of the stupid crowning each tale . . . .

Thus did the kings attempt to show  
right from wrong –  
until the carpet  
of their existence was rolled together  
and the bright jewel of their life  
the prince  
came to sit upon the throne –  
whose ears were deafened  
by the councils of the  
ill-intentioned –  
but these young men  
knew the gardens of words that were the fables  
had they not heard them sung and told  
on scented evenings

and was not  
the nail of familiarity  
thrust through the skirt?

The king is like the refulgent sun  
while his people are but as lighted lamps  
and wisdom has many faces.

*The sun's stark circle . . . .*

The sun's stark circle  
old on the horizon  
is crutched  
in the sticks  
of last year's trees . . . .

fish curl  
in the close weed beds  
or snap the ephemeral fly . . . .

the broken  
blood-pool in the water  
shrinks into stillness –  
a hollow red eye  
to observe the fisherman  
casting a crisp line  
into the mirror  
of the fish's sky . . . .

two blacksmith plovers  
speckle the edge of the dam  
and the tired winter grass  
stands waiting  
drained to a gaunt white . . . .

and the old hen  
egg-bound and burdened  
is unhooked  
to be hit on a rock . . . .



*Where have you been, you innocent? . . . .*

Where have you been you innocent?  
Still with your hand in Christ's  
and blind eyes? As though the world  
held no more than the fields  
of Gallilee and flagons of miraculous  
wine – you who have remained  
in that remote century  
shine with innocent hope  
give yourself in charity  
and wear faith wreathed  
about your head like some  
undying Olympian garland.  
You must be dissembling –  
and yet the simplicity you bear  
like a gorgeous robe  
makes you rich in a sordid world –  
you who know not the bitterness  
of having what I have – and all  
that *nothing more* . . . .

*Hard the ancient winter comes . . . .*

Hard the ancient winter comes  
with crack and groan of living thing  
freezing the weedy shallows where  
the hoar bank's granite rises –  
Turn with a slow eye to the wind  
that flings from its hollow mouth the scream  
of blood in the abandoned woods –  
Keep close the flesh of generation  
about the fire – and wrapt in savage  
sweat remember the long histories  
of tradition – sing of the hero and the deed,  
of conquest, birth and kingly prowess  
while the cold blight stills the land  
and the light in pale reflection  
lies on a sea-green sky – pricked  
by the barren branch and far above  
some god's star eye.

# A VIEW FROM<sup>1</sup> WITHOUT

translated by JONATHAN CREWE

*A few introductory remarks*

It seems as if this week each of us must take a turn to speak, or rather to preach. Mine is going to be a funeral oration. An extremely extremist funeral oration – you must please bear with me. But I'm the hell in with death. Especially when the young Sestiger-corpse<sup>2</sup> is still warm in places. So please will you overlook it if too much feeling spills over, or runs on to the paper. Feeling is always excessive; never knows its proper limits. Presumably, too, you have not come here expecting a cool analysis from me . . .

The other evening André Brink hinted that our Lazaruses might rise up again; not that there was ever any uprising in the first place. I wonder. It sounds dismal doesn't it – all this talk of a motley funeral. The very thing I want to ask tonight is whether we have a spark of life in us still, or whether our parochialism has killed us off? I mean, are we so attached to our hire-purchase lives – those lives which we must pay off over a lifetime – that we have to ask the insurance man's permission every time we draw a breath or let loose a fart? Are we to be afraid of life right up to the moment of death?

According to the definition given by a leader of the people the other day – I mean a leader of the white people, not a kraal politician<sup>3</sup> – I must be one of those 'agents of spiritual and moral pollution who work like a pestilence in the dark and have already brought the Western world to its knees; one of the spineless louts with the hair of Samson, but not his strength.'

It's curious, that predilection for pestilence, for darkness, for whatever is black and unmentionable, for the terrifying unknown, for the night in which, like Samson of old, we can let loose and grasp each other's bodies – what a heavenly pestilence! – before daylight betrays us. But still, we carry the night around inside us. What we can see from the outside is day – the dimension here, inside us, is night; is limitlessness.

Lucky for us, then, that we find ourselves in Africa where the sun is always shining, and not in the Western world. And it's in Africa that I want to speak in passing. My little talk here tonight will be regarded as 'political'. And it is unavoidable that it should be so. Like the work of art that is 'political' when it deals with a reality in which the public is involved. All talk in this dismal, bitter, funereal country is political – whether it is talking in whispers, talking shit, spitting into the wind, or simply conversing. It's not a choice the writer has; it's not a question of using or abusing poetic freedom (and why should the clown have more freedom than the factory worker?); no, it's in the nature of communication itself. All of us together, as blindly and industriously as ants, have dragged this country to the final abyss before hell. Now let us talk, and talk so loudly that we can't distinguish the crackling of the flames from the chattering of our teeth.

I said I don't want it to seem that I intend to be objective. I might dare to say I'm 'objective' because every issue has two sides, an inside and an outside, and I have some insight into both possibilities. But the only 'objectivity' belongs to the skeleton in the ground. And then you still have the ghost to reckon with . . . To come back to what I was saying: some of us are already castrated, objective. Others kick up a bit of dust. White dust, naturally. On a separate beach, under a separate sun!

I am partisan. I take sides. Because for me it's a question of whether liveable conditions come into being in our community. Because for me it's a question of finding the key into a community in which each of us and *every* one of us can have his rightful share; in which we can assume responsibility for one another *on the same footing*. Because for me it is a matter of combating those authorities and structures and myths and prejudices and untruths and insensitivities and selfishnesses and urges to self-destruction and common stupidities which make such a community unattainable. *That is my loyalty. That is the content of my South Africanism.*

The title of my talk is *A View from Without*<sup>4</sup>. It is tempting to say: it's only from the outside that one can hear how much noise an empty tin makes. In one of his poems Hart Crane uses a nice image in referring to someone – probably an impenetrable yokel like myself – who stands in the rural darkness holding a tin can with the open end to his eye to get a view of the moon shining far above him.

I'm glad I don't have to speak about a view from above. There are few things I find more obnoxious than élitism – thinking in terms of the small group of the elect – those who wear 'authorship' or 'being a poet' like a mark of grace; those who plunge down into the hot, swarming multitude – for 'material' – only to surface again for a breath of fresh air. Sooner or later their hands drop off from sheer purity.

A view from below, with the Southeaster blowing up the street, might certainly be interesting; a view from within is, alas, no longer possible for me. Therefore I should like to shift my gaze and try to say how I interpret this title: it is an attempt to indicate how the Sestiger monstrosity – our own Frankenstein – looks from the outside; an attempt to place it against the background of South Africa and the South African cultures, of which ours is only a small, a very small, part. That backdrop, you will probably agree with me, is one of countervailing cultural tendencies, of political stink, of social unrest, of discrimination and restriction and censorship. In a word, a seething cauldron. But also one of strife.

When I speak of ‘us’ tonight, then it is as a whitish or off-white South African to his own kind – allowing for a few acknowledged and unrepresentative exceptions. What exists in this country has been done in our – in my – name, in our – in *my* – language. Therefore, although I am the representative of no one but myself and my own fleas, I can’t and don’t want to set myself at a distance from this mess.

I am convinced that the salvation of this country – if so evangelical a word is permissible – lies almost exclusively in the hands of my black and brown compatriots. The die has been re-cast, and now it is we who are the half-castes. As a group we have had our chance, and, babbling all the while, we have let it slip – as it were, with martini in hand, gazing out at the melancholy sunset over the Karoo, on the lookout for the imperishable . . . Now only they can improve our communal lot, by first freeing themselves. And just as I honour the black man who tries to improve the condition of his people, so I believe the black man will respect me only to the extent that I am prepared to work for the transformation of my own community – and not if I try to prescribe to him what he should do.

In other words, from the opening address onwards, this symposium has, for me, been concerned with the acts, and especially the omissions, of a number of youngish writers who write in the language of the clan in authority, the power group, the rulers – and who therefore bear a peculiar responsibility; who, like all Afrikaans writers, occupy a privileged but unenviable position in the clan, even if it is just a trumped-up position, because so many aspirations of the clan pass for cultural aspirations; because the so-called Afrikaner’s identity was originally a linguistic identity. At the same time, it seems to me that it concerns the work of a number of writers who began to call in question certain propositions on which the vested interests of the Afrikaner clan are based. This questioning kicked up so much dust precisely because any tampering with the institutions and taboos of the clan threatens to disrupt the existing order of things. Lay hold of the Afrikaner and you lay hold of the state. Let our high priests say what they

like, nobody can exist in isolation. The continued existence of the Afrikaner as he is defined by those in authority and those who guard the taboos of the clan can be ensured only on condition that we do not acknowledge our South Africanism in word and deed.

Naturally, within limits a certain amount of rebelliousness will be tolerated from the longhairs and/or eggheads; it even contributes to that suppleness which ensures a living glow of health. And we confused that toleration with freedom.

It's good, they say, that you want to concern yourself with the freedom of the Afrikaner. But to want to concern yourself with human freedom, with individual freedom – which will necessitate a revolution in the social structure – that, as the saying goes, is a horse of another colour. It's subversive. It's alien. And it's not realistic. You're dreaming. Come back, sonny, to the hard realities of the African scene. And so we engage each other under the banner of 'reality'.

What they are actually saying is: don't prevent us from jumping into the sea.

I remain convinced that I can be free only to the extent that my fellow-man is free.

You may now say that I am giving too much credit to the communal responsibility of the writer, considering the easy publicity that we – petty authors – derive from the pulpits and the news media, especially the judicious yellow press in this country of ours, which is perpetually nosing out sensations, or wanting to cry wolf! They're too frightened to think for themselves, unless it's full of bravado in the bar or the sitting room, so they make cynical use of what others say, with the implication that possibly, at certain times, they might think the same thing. Perhaps you are right. But part of my intention tonight is to indicate, using the perspective you have conceded to me, that the 'absurdities' from which the writer profits in the realm of publicity are inherent in the ordering of affairs here. And that the 'absurdities' which plunge us – the Afrikaans hack writers – into existential anguish, but which are a harsh daily humiliation and denial of fulfilment to five-sixths of the population, do not exist to the same extent anywhere else that I know of.

We are a bastard people with a bastard language. Our nature is bastardy. Well and good. We must be the compost, decomposing in order to recompose in different forms. Only, we have walked into the trap set for the bastard who comes to power. In that part of our blood that came from Europe we carried the curse of superiority. We want to justify our power. And to do that, we

have to solidify our clan-identity. We had to fence off, oppose, constrict. We had to entrench our singularity, and at the same time maintain our conquests. We made our 'otherness' the norm, the standard – and the ideal. And because our singularity is maintained *at the expense* of our fellow South Africans – and of our South Africanism – we felt threatened. We built walls. Not cities, but city walls. And like all bastards – uncertain of their identity – we began to clutch at the notion of purity. That is apartheid. *Apartheid is the law of the bastard*. But to introduce a bit of play into our 'otherness', to safeguard the material privileges we enjoy, we had to give a bit of ground; we decided that others could also acquire dignity, could also taste of the sweetness of life – as and when we granted it to them. Therefore we first of all determined the nature of their modes of existence and their aspirations, and then prescribed their future for them, from here to eternity. That is what we grandiosely call the policy of – please note, not development, but separate development. That is what we call the allocation – please note, not of freedom, but of similar freedoms. So then we are not only realistic, but magnanimous and Christian to boot. So much for the black man, except that to him we remain *baas, BOSS, master, meneer, moroeti, sir*. But when we consider the lot of our lowly shadows, the Coloureds, we are left scratching our heads.

And these walls, this Apartheid, this 'purity' and aloofness, this constriction, constitute the blueprint for our suicide, our self-annihilation, our death. We are going under, and it would appear that in going under we are prepared to drag the whole of South Africa, with all its people, along with us.

Nothing I say here tonight will sound new or strange to you. We all know it. What I discover for myself means nothing. What we realise as a group, as a community, is important because it's a shared possession; it's valuable because it is on the road to the truth. All of us together are involved in this tragedy. It certainly won't help to bury our heads in Literature.

And we writers, then? What has happened in the meantime, here on the inside? Our jaws still flap; shortly we are going to protest once more against new and more potent censorship laws; we will grow sour and then once again apply the treacle-brush all round; We remain in motion – not with that steady motion and sound which is love, but with the spasmodic racket made here this week, the noise of the living dead. We helped build the walls, we maintain them; now they have become the walls of our prison. Now and then we climb the walls to see if the night still hasn't ended. One moment we think our literature is comparable with 'the best in the world'. The next moment we are slinking around with both our tails between our legs, tearing our own breasts, because everywhere we are rejected and abused. We squat in Africa and we are

not Africans. We go to Holland, to France, and then suddenly realise they lied to us. We are not Europeans. We go to England and then we discover that we are Boers trying to live like Englishmen here under the Southern Cross. Against whom can we measure ourselves? From whom do we write our twisted, pretentious, *nouveau riche* works, except for a few university friends who will grant that work the right to exist by prescribing it? We are stark naked, and we don't even realise it. We try to weave ourselves blankets of grand words and still grander concepts which have grown out of other cultures, and of which, in any case, we don't understand a damned thing. What do we know of the rest of South Africa? Have we any knowledge other than the anxious knowledge of the boss? Does it ever occur to us that our country is irrevocably attached to Africa? Isn't it astounding that the blossoming-time of Sestig, – that period during which we garnered in our nice, fat prizes, and when we wanted to fight to the death about who should get the Herzog Prize, – coincided with a period in which more and more writers were banned? Have you also got that nasty flavour of shame in your mouth? And then we foregather here to look back a trifle complacently over the bugger-all that we have done. And we are proud of it.

I want to suggest that our literature, clever though it may sometimes be, is largely a product of our rigidity and alienation, and that, considering the framework in which it originates, it can be nothing else.

Have we alternatives? Are we as writers simply the shock-absorbers, the watchdogs, of the white establishment?

The day is going to come when we, the present generation, will be hated by our descendants because we have frittered away their birthright, have sunk it into the mines. Because they will have to live under the yoke of alienation that we are now busy creating. Because through our agency the legitimate birthright is being denied to our fellow-citizens, here, today. Call it the sin of the forefathers . . . call it *karma* if you prefer to. It makes no odds.

A young girl, one of those already being nurtured at our high-schools, being schooled in anxiety and the accompanying hatred, wrote this appalling thing in a letter addressed to *Die Burger* the other day: 'We have sown apartheid and we will reap a white man's land.' What tragic blindness! It's true, we *have* sown apartheid, or let it be sown; yes, and what germinates is fear, despair, insensitivity, hypocrisy, superficiality, terror, perversion, intolerance. And blood.

We are already in that situation, here and now. *Do* we know it? We inherit our own sins. The black man wants less and less to do with us, doesn't he? He no longer makes his plea for dignity like a 'responsible' convert, does he? He seeks allies and weapons,

doesn't he? How on earth did it last so long! Why only now? Is there anyone who believes this process of coming to consciousness can ever be arrested again? How long did we bear the yoke of British Imperialism, and what did we do then? Or have they less reason? Are they less human? Do we think enough time can be bought, somewhere in the outside world?

Time to do what? To carve up the country still further?

And in the night into which we are now advancing, the Nationalistic flames will be fanned; will blaze ever brighter and more destructively. It will be said that it's 'us' or 'them' – without our knowing who we are, without our knowing them. That choosing of a side – is it going to be a conscious choice, or a desperate choice of the clan? Will we even have a choice? It will be expected that something will be defended. What? A Western civilisation? What Western civilisation, and whose? The sole right of the white man to exercise power? The white skin? Only the skin of death is spotlessly white. Afrikaans? Whose Afrikaans?

It's here that the future of each of us will be decided: is already decided. If we would stick our heads above the wall we'd see, if I may say so, that we don't know our arse from our elbow.

One wanted to believe in a miracle. One wanted to believe that in this country it might be possible to write as a person, about people, for people. But the poison of racialism flows so deeply in our veins. Even in our language, our beautiful language, our miraculous vehicle. We speak of man and woman, boy and girls. And if they're not quite pale enough? *Kaffer, hotnot, koelie, houtkop, outa, aia, jong, meid, klong, skepsel*<sup>5</sup> – yes, one of our leading Sestigers speaks of 'skepsels' in his most recent work, though to his eternal credit let it be said that he refrains from speaking of 'skepselwyfies' or 'skepselooie'. We have renounced some of these terms under the pressure of growing consciousness, but will we ever accept the entire, self-evident humanity of the 'others'? Now we have come to rest at a self-satisfied *Bantu* and *Coloured*. In besmirching others we foul ourselves. Then our language becomes filthy jargon. Is it so very difficult to address others in the terms they use to describe themselves?

Do we want it to be said later on that in this land of sunshine there were two species of *homo sapiens* – man, and the white man?

A community without an historical sense, without the stability of tradition; man, with an a-historical identity, living for the immediacy of the present moment – if the above is humanly conceivable then it means that tonight we are celebrating the death of



memory here; and worse, that of all hope. It depends on us. I said all talk is political. In just the same way all conflict is, in my opinion, ultimately class conflict. And there is no 'culture'; there is only class culture.

As Pasolini put it: 'When you deny the social implications of a work you lock yourself up in a romantic-idealistic edifice which no longer interests us, and it's even futile to consider, or demolish, such an attitude. Just as futile as it would be to be angry with the dead.'

And Roman Jakobson: 'In language no private property exists. Every work of art becomes social when it comes into contact with the public.'

I don't like the terms 'work of art' or 'art'. When making poems becomes 'poetic art' its teeth have been drawn. The poem becomes an aesthetic object which has reference only to itself and to other works of literature. We put it on the shelf in a comfortable jacket, where it can no longer bite, and then it's food for the bookworms, academic and otherwise. It's no longer a threat to the existing order, not a tool or a weapon.

I wish to testify with Godard: 'The middle class system manufactures art which propagates a bourgeois ideology and values: ininvolvement, political ignorance, and passivity . . . . Today's laws require that we omit the poetry and write only the slogan on the wall, and it must grow out of a social *praxis*.'

To write is to communicate, to eat together, to enter into community, a communion, the blood of all of us, the flesh of all of us. We are people, we write *for* people *about* people, and therefore about relationships between people. Our first dimension is man – in his multiplicity and in his unity; in his humanity. When something is seeking expression the enlargement in the language which is necessary for the expression of that something will occur. And conversely a language, a channel, will evoke the ideas it can carry. Such is the dialectic between concept and language. Where those channels exist – in spite of those water bailiffs, the censors – sooner or later the water will flow. We have work to do.

As far as I'm concerned, I want to try and write for the here and now. In my work I want to come as close as possible to the transient – not the eternal; *that* has always been there. And the eternal says nothing. It's the transient that hurts; the proximate.

I think that by taking cognisance of the nature of the struggle in which we are involved and in which we have a share; by clarifying

that struggle; and furthermore, by taking up a position based on that knowledge, we extend our humanity and our language.

Then we will not longer be trapped in the snares of Aparthaans, but will be able to speak Afrikaans; one of the many languages of Africa!

#### NOTES

1. Translation from the Afrikaans of *'n Blik van Buite*, issued as a pamphlet by the Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of Cape Town.
2. The 'Sestiger' ('Sixties') movement in Afrikaans literature was the subject of a week-long symposium held at the University of Cape Town Summer School, in February 1973. Most of the writers associated with the movement, among them Breytenbach, Etienne Leroux, Adam Small and André Brink, were present.
3. An untranslatable pun here: 'volk' means both 'people' and 'coloured people'. 'Kraal politician' is a rather clumsy substitution, but the phrase has been used in public controversy.
4. The whole sense of this paragraph – and certain allusions elsewhere – depends on the fact that 'blik' denotes both 'tin' and 'view' in Afrikaans. The punning cannot be reproduced in English.
5. Some of these words, all of which are used to denote 'non-white' people, are untranslatable, while others have easily recognisable English equivalents. A distinction is made in Afrikaans between 'mense' (people) and 'skepsels' (creatures), the former denoting 'white people' and the latter 'non-white people'. 'Skepselwyfies' and 'skepselooie' refer to 'non-white' women – their sense is roughly 'the dams and ewes of the creatures'.

# With My Father In the Bar at Naboomspruit

From dead bone in Naboomspruit  
the I-Am-All speaks out of Africa:  
trophied in a bar with glass and eyes,  
indivisible in unction,  
dead Calvin's dead god articulates this ambience.

*The thing came out of the dark  
and stood there in the headlights:  
I had time to get my gun.*

My father orders brandy and water  
and I order brandy and water:  
the afternoon turns to brandy and water.  
My drinking grows  
though it lacks the stature of the horned thing  
in my headlights.  
I am also a trophy.

*We made biltong  
and gave the skin to the kaffirs.*  
(Calvin burned the children in Geneva.  
Here too:  
put on the skin and look out.)

Brandy and water is a skin  
over  
the church the hotel the bakery the location.

*You go on to Potgietersrust  
and then to Pietersburg  
and then to Duiwelskloof  
and then to Tzaneen  
and then to Klonkieskraal.*  
A journey with my father  
has no end.

A journey with Our Father  
has an end:  
bone nailed on a wall  
speaking the unutterable.

# j.m. coetzee's DUSKLANDS

Ravan Press R1,80

Reading *Dusklands* is a bitter, often troubling but finally exhilarating experience. It is certainly the best novel from a South African in English since (say) Dan Jacobson's early works. It is also without qualification the most avowedly literary and intellectual work in South African fiction. Its ancestors are not South African at all. Eugene Dawn has **Herzog** and **Voss** on his motel bedside table and one can speculate that the pile on J.M. Coetzee's desk includes beside these two, the novels of Barth, Pynchon, Nabokov, and Borges. I imagine that it would be hard to find anywhere close at hand the great liberal-humanist novels; Dickens, George Eliot, Lawrence. They would be likely to be on some dusty shelf far out of reach.

Realism as the faithful history of the interpenetration of man and situation seen from within and without, and judged from a single central point of view, is abandoned. And about time too. Coetzee has solved one of the crucial problems of the South African novel – the persona of the novelist. That character who has struggled for so long to be virtuous, fair, just, sympathetic, admonitory, “fully human” as he records the barbarities of the South African scene has gone. Thank God, he had become an old bore, slack in the mouth, whining, posturing and barren.

Coetzee inhabits a space between the two novellas. The invisible novelist. The underground technician who launches the missiles. The first shows the trajectory but the second carries the fire-power.

Eugene Dawn's narrative is built to a conventional design. I would guess that Saul Bellow drew the original plans although they have been extensively modified. The marriage is the least interesting part. I don't care what Dawn feels for Marilyn or for his son although the registration of general sterility and failure is carried well enough through specific images. But when Dawn concentrates his mind on the ethnographic project and on the Vietnamese it is another thing. In these parts Coetzee's imaginative power begins to show. We cannot help being drawn into the theatre of Dawn's imagination although there is no ease or comfort there. Dawn is a horror but he cannot be rejected. We are bound to him so tightly that even in his madness we sympathise.

Nevertheless I can't escape the impression that the first narrative chiefly serves to give the contemporary, "international" reference points to a map of consciousness. The real exploration of the terrain comes in the second, South African, narrative. When we enter that, we do so with some essential equipment. We have some experience of our relationship with the author, we know that we are dealing with conditions of consciousness and realize soon enough that it is the psychic bonds and breaches between the white world and the black that exercise the author's imagination.

The prose of the Coetzee passage is masterly. The world we enter there, less bleak than Dawn's, is simultaneously the specific landscape of the Northern Cape and the mental world of Jacobus Coetzee the 18th Century farmer, colonist, explorer and philosopher. Both realities are marvellously present and real to us. Predelictions, assumptions, emotions and visions are as immediately and directly there as the oxen and wagon of the trek.

The simultaneity of the two worlds is the technical key that unlocks the wealth of the book. As we proceed we begin to correlate the external measure of the given world and our own internal measure of the consciousness that gives it to us. That correlation generates a steady process of transformation. The Bushmen, shown to us as wily animals to be hunted, transform themselves, as we come to know the rhythms of the narrative, into impressively resourceful human figures battling against hopeless odds. The treachery of the Hottentot servants inverts itself into the recovery of something like human self respect. Loyalty turns into servility.

This process of transformation is never directly given in the narrative but takes place as if by secret collusion between the author and the reader. It is one of the many striking things in the book, and it seems that in this facet the author has caught exactly the rhythms in the nerves of modern South Africa. Today a terrorist, tomorrow a freedom fighter is the cartoon cliché but it goes deep.

**Savages do not have guns. This is the effective meaning of savagery, which we may define as enslavement to space, as one speaks obversely of the explorer's mastery of space. The relation of master and savage is a spatial relation. The African highland is flat, the approach of the savage across space continuous. From the fringes of the horizon he approaches, growing to manhood beneath my eyes until he reaches the verge of that precarious zone in which, invulnerable to his weapons, I command his life. Across tuis annulus I behold him approach bearing the wilderness in his heart. On the far side he is nothing to me and I probably nothing to him. On**

the near side mutual fear will drive us to our little comedies of man and man, prospector and guide, benefactor and beneficiary, victim and assassin, teacher and pupil, father and child. He crosses it, however in none of these characters but as representative of that out there which my eye once enfolded and ingested and which now promises to enfold, ingest and project me as a speck on a field which we may call annihilation or alternatively history. He threatens to have a history in which I shall be a term.

The thrust and penetration of this statement into our dreads and anxieties cannot be missed. The “comedies of man and man” are approaching their finale and ‘he’ does more than threaten to have a history – he has it already.

Yet the author does not rest with the consequential ironies flowing from the vision of a particular and limited consciousness. His aim is the morphology of the consciousness itself.

Jacobus Coetzee is a version of Western empirical man. He is the enumerator, the maker of orchards out of the wilderness, the breaker of the life flux, the ordering mind. But he is also, like Dawn, Western man at a limit, alone in the wilderness seeking meaning. There are choices for him there. He is either of the wilderness or he is at a distance from it. It can penetrate him or he can make it his. Both alternatives involve redemption and destruction. The anguish of his journey into the land of the Namaqua lies in the dramatic tension between these possibilities.

The resolution is seen only in its consequences and not in its processes. After struggling back to the settlement at the Cape Coetzee eventually joins an extermination raid on the Namaqua. The gun – his instrument for assuring himself of the distance between himself and the wilderness proves the “victory” of the ordering mind. From one point of view this is redemption – his European, colonizer mind ‘saves’ him from the wilderness. From another it is damnation. There is no meaning for him beyond the limits of his own known world.

Jacobus Coetzee is the reverse of the eccentric or abnormal figure. Scrupulous in both matters of conscience and affairs of the world he explicitly acts in the name of his countrymen:

**“No more than any other man do I enjoy killing but I have taken it upon myself to pull the trigger, performing this sacrifice for myself and my countrymen, who exist, and committing on the dark folk the murders we all have wished.”**

Like Dawn he is impossible to reject. We live with him and in him and those countrymen for whom he performs the sacrifice are us.

The afterword to the Coetzee narrative which purports to be a lecture delivered at Stellenbosch by the author's father adds one more layer to the ironies implied in the victory of the ordering mind. The gun is superseded by the lecture as instrument of order. Victory indeed.

But when all the points for the novel have been made (and there are many more than are referred to here) are there not still some serious difficulties in it?

I am unhappy about the idea of the "wilderness" - not as it occurs in Coetzee's thinking nor perhaps as Dawn ruminates on Vietnam but in the significance which the fugitive author wishes to attach to it in the terms of the modern South African consciousness. No doubt he is approaching the fact of the "foreignness" of "outside" cultures and he is obviously right to reject the liberal illusion that such "foreignness" does not exist or can be overcome with tact and good feeling. Further he is probably right to see all cultures as only having character in relation to each other. But, and here is my problem, doesn't the novel amount finally to the most sophisticated special pleading on behalf of Western positivism. All the horrors, even to genocide, are granted, admitted and charted but with the ultimate payoff that any other culture also holds its horrors. A narrative from inside the Namaqua consciousness would also reveal a life as anguished and brutal as Coetzee's? Perhaps. They are still to come.

Are we really adrift among a whole galaxy of competing self-enclosed systems none of which can be decisively judged as better or worse than any other?

Another related point that leaves me disturbed is the fact that the essential crime of both Dawn and Coetzee is never fully grasped in the novel. The "dark folk" are not there as the theatre for the drama of white consciousness. The novel would seem to imply that the drive of the positivist mind into the wilderness is inevitable given the culture which forms it. That seems to me false. The registering of the world by the Western mind is the consequence of an endlessly reaffirmed choice. Both Dawn and Coetzee can only imagine salvation as a breaking through to a beyond. They simply do not see containment within a stable equilibrium inside Western culture as a possibility. It is onward or death.

# **EARTH-GODDESSES :** **there will be three** **of them**

## MOTTLED GRANITE

### 1.

We might at any rate try to remember  
The man's directness —  
When his hand closed over it on the river bed.

Heavy, but slender, sliver of rock.

Shuttle shaped it seemed, and might quiver like a  
Compass at the points It is such  
With balance, he said  
As to sing in the hand like a knife.

But in the middle bulging like a fist

### 2.

It is a stone under many aspects, he said,  
And it might be a knuckle-duster or a knife:  
But while I have Her tangible,  
Sure I'll make the Mother out of it.

### 3.

He saw the Mother in the rock,  
But that was mostly the shape of it.  
The Mother was in the chemistry:  
How did he make the movement — and the chemistry — fit?



Carving away is multiplication of attributes.  
The stone grows breasts.  
It would be truer to say he released  
What was once granite – a three-fold force  
A molecular intensity  
Into a stepped and staged event.

Breasts curled by storm, a belly charged  
With lightning muscularity and white,  
A river out of a force-fielded earth  
Of tremors let loose from trance  
To lash out magnetic currents  
Of its course and pulse.

Woman's body like a blood-filled pillar  
Of shape organic, and excited.

4.

Let us praise again  
The man's directness  
That for his neck and collar-bone  
Saw only the polished, tilted cone  
Of ready-to-use stone.

5.

Nor place too far from a man's grasp  
That which he needs as weapon  
That fits his palm  
And wills to make decisions  
In shaping of an antler-bone.

### BLACK OBSIDIAN

How regally you bear  
Your belly and your buttocks,  
Still, shining, black Queen.

They show you to us  
Only in profile, and thus you crown  
The handle of a sharp obsidian knife,

A bulge each side of the blade.  
How I like the tilt of your head!  
You were some camel-prince's favourite.

He stuck you in the sand beside him while he played  
An intricate game of pebbled dice, partly because  
You clarified the mathematics of each throw,

Partly for reasons of self-defence.  
I might have loved you, only-in-profile,  
Arab mathematics, black and shiny from the sand of your sheath.

## WHITE BONE

You cannot  
Kill with it,  
Beat with it,  
Cut with it,  
Carve with it; all you can do is  
Hold it in front of you like a crucifix.  
Or let it fall on your breast.  
In such ways  
It forms a defence.

It doesn't take  
Too much searching  
To find the Mother still in it  
Yet here she is abstracted  
Almost to vanishing point.

Only a pattern of rings or moons:  
Moons filled with moons,  
Moons intersected  
By moons, gravely  
Consecutive, lead the eye down the front  
Of this subtly curved torso; light-coloured, light.

You cannot  
Exactly  
Magic with it,  
Charm with it,  
Enchant with it, yet  
Its Grace is a stretch of the intellect  
To stars as distant  
As the invisibility of this tribe's flying foot.

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