PRAELUDIUM

On 26 March 1964 a discussion between Rudolph Stephan and the present author [Theodor Adorno] was recorded, broadcasted on 16 November of the same year. The conversation was less a dispute than a first attempt at an exposition of critical thoughts which both mutually agreed on; it was instigated by the present author and therefore he takes full responsibility. This needs to be emphasised because the practical consequences of the outrage that initiated at the same time had to be braced by Stephan, who was a private lecturer in Göttingen at that present moment, rather than him [the present author]. A half-underlying murmur became detectable; it would have been threatening if one could have been locked up in a concentration camp for intellectualism again. Disapproval emerged obviously from having criticised the German musicus laureatus himself, rather than the specific content of what was said. Additionally, Hindemith held an honorary doctorate of the faculty the present author belongs to. The present author was unaware of this circumstance; when Hindemith was bestowed this honour the emigrated author still lived in the United States. At the University of Frankfurt he should have voted against it out of protest against the Hindemith-Ideology: for an honorary doctorate a unanimous vote is required. Under no circumstance would he have spoken more carefully on the radio. For if the term ‘professor’ should not simply be understood in an institutional way, then an independent judgement would have needed to be sought in public regardless of any prevalent group opinion.

As the radio discussion could only touch single critical issues without being able to explain the critique in full, the present author has decided to present his views about Hindemith in a chronological documentation. Normally he prefers to give his conclusions outright and not to explain the thought process that led to them. This is how he would like to continue. However, he cannot conceal from himself that some of his readers claim these conclusions without following the mostly self-critical process. Dogmatism develops easily from that. In order to gently counteract this the present author uses the chronologically distant texts to make the steps of terminological movement forced by a certain item more visible. What changed in his regard of Hindemith reacts simultaneously to Hindemith’s personal development. Of course it also includes the evaluation of his earlier works. Only by means of the documentation the tangled mess which the present author had to cope with in his youth becomes apparent; as well as the experience that motivated the dialogue with Stephan. It also proves that he has always connected innate musical considerations with aesthetical and sociological ones, although it took him several years to articulate the relationships of these moments successfully. The first essay derives from the present author’s earliest youth, before his studies with Alban Berg; the second, from 1926, gives already a sense of where Hindemith was leading.

Closer contact with Hindemith happened in 1920, when the Rebner-Quartet, whose viola player Hindemith was, gave a private performance of six rather childish quartets of the present author. Then he saw Hindemith more frequently, in the music shop Bernhard Firnberg in Frankfurt, which at the
time had some kind of music café, and in Hindemith’s apartment in Leerbachstraße, often together with Reinhold Merten. As repetiteur of the Frankfurt Oper Merten had a strong influence on Hindemith; the present author was also impressed by the incarnation of radical New Objectivity. The present author continued to show his compositional attempts occasionally to Hindemith, who advised him in an astutely and friendly manner. The present author remembers Hindemith’s encouraging reaction to a string quartet in four movements written in 1921, which the present author dismissed soon after. Hindemith’s own criticism of an essay about himself was regarded as justified. There has never been a dispute or break up; also true friendship never developed. Once in Finberg’s shop we talked about Schoenberg and Hindemith deprecatingly said that this was ‘Jewish music’. That prompted the present author to withdraw his feels; however, simple loyalty demands to point out that Hindemith later emigrated from Hitler’s Reich with his half-Jewish wife, daughter of the unforgettable conductor Ludwig Rottenberg. Hindemith and the present author met once more in an extensive way at the Kasseler Musikfest in 1923. A jeered comment by Hindemith about Schreker’s ‘Fernem Klang’ engraved itself on the present author’s memory: ‘One could have written such beautiful brothel music to that.’ Such raffish remarks made an impression on the present author. He probably met Hindemith in Kassel for the last time; at least he cannot recall any other dialogue after his time in Vienna. He does not know either whether Hindemith, after the Second War read his theoretical works and how he thought about them. The differences had become so precipitous long before that it would have been impossible to communicate.

For sake of documentary loyalty the essays are presented without alterations, apart from obvious print errors which were corrected. Also repetitions remained. The present author even resisted the temptation to correct where some things might today be unbearable; frequently he finds that through inadequate execution intentions become biased and he held on to them, however, he hopes he could face them better at a later stage. Essay III [not included in this translation] was called ‘Kritik des Musikanten’ in the Frankfurter Zeitung. It was meant as a polemic against the youth music movement. Whilst it does not concern Hindemith directly, though he is mentioned, it meant to show in principal and for the first time the position of the present author against Neoclassicism.

1967

I

The by now 26-year-old student of Bernhard Sekles and Arnold Mendelssohn came from Brahms and chamber music. Himself a violinist in his profile he feels at home in string compositions and therefore closer to colour and timbre also in the orchestra than the many pianist-listeners. He was acclaimed for a String Quartet in C-Major, a neatly composed piece with academic appeal. At the age of 19 he was musical director at the Frankfurter Oper.

A ‘Sinfonietta’, defined in its programme through Christian Morgenstern’s “Galgenlustigkeit”, showed in gobbling woodwind parts already the impressions of malevolent, fatal humour that jump out of later scores. With his Lieder he conquers the Strauss-Orchestra. He joins in with the war, the concussion throws the foundations of his skills to his head. In String Quartet op. 10 and Sonatas op. 11 a transformation takes place, humanly, in the commitment. Contemporary music has an effect on him, in particular Bartók, more so than Schoenberg whose tragic consciousness is often cast aside by the youngling. People outside Germany enter his field of vision: he looks for the non-presupposition and thinks he has found it in the barbaric gesture, without realising that the West and the Russians
are particularly far behind. He knows indeed very little but he is not late or behind. He gets hold of the
heirs of Debussy, who with their brutal rhythms eat up the well-maintained sound quality of the
French. He falls in love with Stravinsky, studies Casella, Lord Berners. There are still echoes of Tristan
in the opera ‘Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen’ (op. 12) whereas the piano suite ‘Aus einer Nacht’ tosses
the rags – not just good ones – and foxtrot and fugue are put on the top of one another. Of course
this is part of external manufacture and stays literary, pour épater le bourgeois. However, the new
dances seriously attracted him when he discovered Stravinsky’s rag; like everything in the dance music
circle around the publisher Chester he only found his own way presupposed and did not follow the
decadent snobs out of a romantic whim. He is not someone for bemusing experiments on a small scale.
Already in String Quartet C-Major op. 16 no style glitches and consternations can be felt. He has
regained a strict form-regime, creates far-reaching, very polyphone phrases, draws consequences
from the new harmony in a factual way, refrains from all wild gestures and finds his full warmth and
prudish intimacy in the Adagio. Although in the Finale fifths and time changes run riot the convulsion
has given way, he has created a distance to himself and resounding laughter. This piece of work
provided his first victory at the chamber music festival in Donaueschingen in 1921. Soon after followed
the premiere in Stuttgart of ‘Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen’ and ‘Nusch-Nuschi’ op. 20. These operas
were succeeded by ‘Sancta Susanna’ op. 21 in Frankfurt soon after.

In a poetic sense the lyrics are not honourable. Kokoschka’s ‘Strindbergiade’, the stuttered ‘Auch’-
exclamation of a strong painter, Franz Bleis ‘Nusch-Nuschi’ at least a funny and clever ribaldry, August
Stramm’s ‘Sancta Susanna’ an embarrassing private affair from Miss Julien’s world. It may also be
remarked that the music means as little sexual impotence as the redeemer’s waistcloth, as both items
are too rationally framed to gain from them the irrational width of musical backgrounds. However
Paul Hindemith who despises all musical drama and useful symbolism at least knew all of this. He
neither wrote these operas for little girls nor the Privy Council. His music is not erotic – if one
understands erotic music as the kind that uses its tonal sensations for the listeners not in human
tonality but in pure psycho-physical gender; who does not make the gender tension a material reason
for the formation but its final aim. Although his music dares to dance again; but more the delight of
the otherworldliness and beings dances from it than the sexual instinct and even in the lustful Jappen
in ‘Nusch-Nuschi’ there is tonal evidence of a delight of playing of a character who subjugates to the
most swashbuckling and extrinsic endeavours and eventually ends up laughing about his yoke and the
affair because he has enough meekness to realise that the weighty depth of the world is more
important than his little ego. This selflessness is the root of Hindemith’s humour only sometimes it
turns into a latent questioning melancholia. – What however pulled him towards expressionistic
phallus cults was the following: that he could not find anywhere a poetry that was so strongly
predominated musically, so far from dialectic of terms or rationally structured pictures. The poetic
need becomes his musical virtue. As when from germinating cells of dull and desire-driven sexuality
the only plant-like poetic organism of these non-drams oozes out, likewise plant-like, only following
their own drive Hindemith’s musical works spread out. Only that the positions towards form and
therefore an aesthetic claim of both differ. Because whilst expressionistic drama proclaims the non-
form and therewith the roots of all art, he particularly gains from the innate drive of the allegation of
his form elements. A symphonication of the opera is initiated, differently to Wagner’s. Opera is
conceived as a large musical form. Psychological ‘Leitmotivik’ vanishes; instead the whole construction
develops from the previously explained drive-oriented sense from thematic ‘Ur’-cells.

The ‘Mörder’ score was dominated by such an ‘Ur’-theme – diatonic ascending and descending scale
within the range of a small third – but it had some contrasting themes included in the symphonic
weave. In ‘Sancta Susanna’ one can find the final consequences of this way of composing. Because
here everything that at all happens musically develops from one theme, a theme whose musical
powers are not dedicated to one individual, not a mood, but more so count for the irrational, fundamental plot of this opera. It is remarkable how Hindemith here in his most mature of his works for the stage simultaneously gains a sensually feasible concreteness as this fundamental power that emerged to be the symbol of the innate drive within the thematic push of the orchestra stream and the far flung phrases of the vocal melodies, the sultriness of a night in spring and the vehemence of the catastrophe. The problem of form that is central point here has also an effect on Hindemith’s following instrumental compositions. Homophone elements require their musical right alongside. In the fourth String Quartet op. 22, a piece of much simpler structure, Hindemith abandons the Sonata-form. Already the first movement presents a surprisingly secure synthesis of fugato and three-part Lied form; as well as sweeping rondo forms and free formations on top of developed harmony. He may have realised that through these elements a strict unity of the quartet-style is endangered and he relinquishes this unity by setting out his work in five movements, keeping it open in a suite-like sense. Therewith he moves it to the level of playfulness, provides it with the appeal of uniqueness and practices clever self-modesty. – In his newest composition Chamber Music No 1 (op. 24) the sonata form is equally askew, however, the formal unity preserved more strictly; the orchestra sounds adventurous.

It may suggest itself an accusation of extensity and psychically far-too easy production towards a man who writes so much with such diversity. Surely he has not composed equivalent pieces, has submitted no temptations and is not free from artism and some re-sentiments. It is also difficult to put him into one category. He is not what one may call, a performing musician [Musikant], he is also not problem-aware in an over-technical sense, his way is more complex than complicated. Nevertheless and maybe therefore he is a specific figure. He has dullness and mother-tongue-in-cheek of close rootedness, he has panache and unrestrainedness in his objectives. He conjures something like a new impossibilité – machine art, he says with a questionable expression of George Grosz. But within this determination is a core of deep artistry. He refers most intimately to the relation towards reality, a reality that in music lost more and more of its dignity and innate rules; be it that it sank to the abyss of subjective introvertedness with Brahms; be it that it like with Strauss presents its materiality removed from the Ego through psychological analogies; be it that it like in Debussy is tangible as simple reflex of the Ego. For Hindemith, however, it signalises an aspiration of working reality into the awareness context as valid component. This is the essence of meekness, its twirling laughter, its arduous shock, it pulls towards drive and dance; this also places its humanity within the intellectual movement of our time.

1922

II

To grasp Hindemith’s new tone, the archaic-classicistic, appropriately one has to rethink the development which the music of the thirty-year-old went through. The questions to which nowadays conscious answers are paramount, already grew, worryingly, in the compositional practice. When his drive, directed towards the memorised, became more intense through the unopposed pace of time, the parable of civilised life unfolds itself; when his self lugubriously found shelter between the concrete walls of emptied objectivity, technology met his technique above all. Most significantly accentuated for him were metric and rhythmic: consequently marginalising melodic sculpture and harmonic control. Issues with form hardly moved into his problem focus, be it that he took certain forms for granted, with competent respect, only with the sharpness of his secure colouring newly lit;
be it, that drastic solutions came to him offhandedly by the day; be it finally, that in his best works he maintained a lyrical sphere which fully subordinate to him appeared densely isolated from general issues of musical form. The quartet op. 16, the first chamber music, the “Junge Magd” for example represent in typically clear fashion, how surely the name of the musikantisch [musical performance] spirit kept the bursting demands at bay, without revealing themselves to timeliness. Still those demands remain; history demands their acknowledgement. If the private randomness of composition even of historically objective character (its historical configuration) is transparent, it may not suffice to be blindly protecting oneself from the power of the situation which coined its small space in the first place. Indeed the composer may see his complete work displaced of the dialectic that reigns harshly between nature and the realisation of history. Then however it assails him in technical detail and confines internally the plan whose contours thanks to history-less naturalness should have remained unimpaired.

The mechanic objectivity was Hindemith’s guarantor for his Musikantentum. Within this the vital drive was allowed to settle without deteriorating on its own; simultaneously it was allowed to believe its suitability for current reality. At first it used metric as a means, a metric of repetition, the true one through chromatic sequences or the cumulative compendious. Metric repetition moved the melismatic individual into blank context; it cut off the lyrical consequence of the melos, whose mere individuality it negotiated and bar all constructive efforts, as in a dance adequately structured, too, the music acquiesced to large movements. However, not coherently the smaller part merged with it. The inherent harmonic of the themes, often even cells of tonal motives, went against the prevalent attribution; the chords sounded too uniquely-expressive in order to be arbitrarily transposed in steps and repeated, aimed at a different direction was the motor energy of the ideas as the symmetry allowed to impact; nowhere could the superior objectivity catch the subjective tension authoritatively. The pretence of the solutions was already revealed by them.

When Hindemith found out about the danger of his beginnings – already years ago Adolf Weissmann pointed out the shortcomings of metric repetition which at the same time brought easy success to the composer – he did not have the freedom to return to the technical ground of inhomogeneity of whole and part, to the motivic form in itself, and to follow its constructive power into the unknown. Not just his whole musical attitude was too broadly established in order to allow for a radical change. His originary intention moreover was opposed to such change. Necessarily this change would have distraught the picture of natural life that is provided by Hindemith’s music. The unscrupulous musical performance would have been thwarted by technical reflection, spiritually broken and yet: it should have had to carry this breaking. Too unconfirmed, however, it is nowadays within itself and therefore frozen to an ideological centre for Hindemith which keeps criticism at bay also because it got into contradiction with its own reification. Objectivism, which underpinned by repetition metric, has been aesthetically redeemed yet remains cultural-politically fixed. Its inner-compositional correlate collapsed: anti-romanticism became romanticism. In the leap between ideology and concretion the need for a disposition becomes intelligibly apparent, a disposition that as mere disposition means aesthetic objectivity but in reality does not mean it. When loopholes become blocked it consequently becomes a virtue. In polemic strictness Hindemith expects of himself hurried mechanical objectivity; its contradiction is the origin of the concrete work that he imputes to it. What else could the composer, who was inclined towards succinct procedures, than conciliate the conflict of postulates in an apparent propitiation through better more confirmed objectivity, hoping its light will elucidate a relevant spot to the individual? Hindemith strives towards a form apriority, which is supposed to be objective, purported, without demanding killing repetition, however without also endangering the organic-natural vitality of the musikantisch execution.
In quartet op. 22, the fugato especially, and in the “Marienlieder” whose choice of text does not seem as random anymore as three years ago, the change signalised itself. In the quartet op. 32 it was established. Acutely significant is the construction of the first movement, which dabbles at a synthesis of double fugato and sonata. The first theme in the fugato is broadly stretched; it is arranged in a concise motive and a long-winded, clearly now parodistic group of sequences and is composed with some freedom. The second, little three-dimensional one, has side-movement-character; the skillfully introduced combination part stands for the sonata composition, the – note-by-note identical – repetition of the introduction of the first fugato group stands for the reprise. The fugal principal wants to regulate the repetition of the motifs instead of letting the repetition be the recipe; the repetition which Hindemith cannot avoid in order to maintain the musikantische programme. At the same time the fugue dominates in a literary fashion; the brilliancy of its reference, which vanished, is cited and the historical memory of the bygone power wants to conciliate the ongoing contradiction between the existing theme and the whole piece. It becomes evident in the appeal to the sonata: the position-determining force of the fugue does not quite prove its worth insofar as the themes were settled in it, the themes crowd out of it and would like to build form by themselves, for which they – the themes of the fugue – are lacking the ability to expand. Issues of former works have changed; but they were not obliterated. – In the second movement Hindemith’s reception of Bach becomes directly apparent for the first time; the intention suffers from melodic weakness. The subsequent “Kleiner Marsch” counts among the most successful virtuoso-works, which was lifted out by Hindemith’s perky grasp of the possibilities of the sound of string instruments. The passacaglia then, intellectually and thematically related to the first movement, approaches surprisingly but understandably so the Busoni-school; instrumental knowledge protects it in time against learnedness.

Even more resolute in the new tone is the String-Trio op. 34. The introductory toccata alters a not very well chosen theme in the steely rage of a perpetuum mobile; truly of a perpetuum mobile whose movement emerges from nothingness and makes three instruments roar like a full orchestra. The slow movement copies this with archaistic rigidity, happy of the lack of harmony, Bach’s trio style; the intended sparseness admittedly must not be confused with the paltry measure of abundance. The genre-intermezzo, here forced from the pizzicato, is equal to the “Kleiner Marsch” in the quartet; in contrast the final fugue is below Hindemith’s standard; its correction happened before in other works of the present author.

Extreme in its archaic attitude is the “Kleine Kantate nach romantischen Texten für Sopran, Oboe, Bratsche und Violoncello” and “Die Serenaden” op. 35. Extreme yes, but only in their attitude, not in the intention of the composition like the works for strings. Whilst those are romantic, these are merely called romantic; what over there was heavily evoked, is used over here as frame of occasional masquerade. No considerable music occurs within this frame: however, fleeting charm, fleeting grief, lyrics of hollow feelings, whose pretentiousless ease one wilfully follows.

The “Kammermusik Nr. 2” (piano concerto) op. 36, no. 1 must have been fairly disappointing already at its premiere; the notes, which at times rather hide than reveal Hindemith’s best part, a sensual ability of realisation, do not present the work in a better light. The 5/8 motif of the first movement is not consistent enough to carry a longer musical composition on its own and the dull fourth movement with the obligatory fugato is not worth it till the end. Their remain, as bonus, the pieces in the middle; the adagio, that conveys something of the other Hindemith, the darker more latent one, who nearly conceals himself, the more agile part contains a far-flung strangeness of colour. The “Kleine Potpourri” keeps itself impishly delightful. However, the through and through imitational two-voice piano score that is supposed to clean the instrument from the rudimentary magic of sustain pedal sounds, offers
too few contrasts in order to remain concertante; it may count occasionally as orchestral colour and
tends noticeably towards a classicistic music box.

The classicistic end grows out of the classicistic origin: the freed objectivity, which does not match
with historical truth and therefore also does not match with the subjective concreteness over which
it stretches. The works from Hindemith’s classicistic epoch present themselves with the ambition to
play within forms, yet they effectively merely play with the forms. Therefore he only has the choice
between given forms, because no form – as little as to anyone else – is given to him. This inequality
between aesthetic reality and true performance of the aesthetic had to encourage criticism. It is far
from judging Hindemith’s intentions; what fails in the realm of intentions fails the intentions
themselves. That he himself unmistakably follows his intention within its boundaries; that his nature
in the apparent manifold disguise playfully asserts itself, how it demands – that goes without saying.

1926

III

[Not translated]

[This essay addresses Adorno’s dispute between performed, functional music and absolute music.
Hindemith is only mentioned in a side note on his use of brass sections.]

IV

There is nothing innocuous anymore. An attempt at writing a method of composition that defines
sensible rules for contemporary practice; which is neither satisfied by simply recording what is used
in composition today, nor preserves the outdated laws of the school disciplines of harmony and
counterpoint, is corporately neutral. However, this objectivity in itself is a political issue. Hindemith
calls his new manuscript meticulously-biedermännisch [honest-manly] ‘The Craft of Musical
Composition’. He exposes the submersion of the craftsman, who creates his good pieces of work,
unaware of time passings. This simple withdrawal from the world is a deception and an illusion. It will
be punished, when it falls in the ban of those it does not want to deal with.

Hindemith’s untimely ideal of craftsmanship produces the cult of adroitness whose simplicity relies on
its innocent communication alone and not on traditional substance. The old masters have become
brave: “Artistry can never be great enough, even the most accomplished artist will be able to learn
more.” (25) Only the affiliation with the guild is strictly adhered to. To the term artistry or adroitness
one may add expert: “What by acknowledging personal idiosyncrasies in the broadest terms is not
accessible to the comprehension of the expert can impossibly appear more convincing to the fatuitous
listener.” (16) Yet he is himself fatuitous enough, the master, “who spots the naturally binding
subfonts of his work or at least feels them.” (16) This is how the cultural opposition writes it nowadays
in Germany. The same applies to their word-artistry as to Hindemith’s musical composition, “that an
easy handling of these constructs is guaranteed.” (121) The neo-Gothic expert would like “to create
the most daring harmonic tensions and cross-phrasing, without having to rely on the constant practice
of audio-trial of timbre.” (137) He is an aesthetic administrative technician. His ‘ordo’ is his routine.
Eventually it is important for him to classify: “The result of acoustic definition after the method
prescribed here is a phenomenology of all chords. There is no compilation of intervals that do not fit
into one section of the system. Harmonies a theorist would only analyse in nightmares and a counterpoint theory book would not tolerate on its pages, may be now explained in a simple way.” (120) He applies an ordinal scheme of all encountered harmonies. Nothing is explained, at the most a historical reference is provided.

Nothing is explained apart from where nothing needs to be explained. The “believing musicus” (72) is transformed into an angry rationalist, as soon as he is faced with chords or simply with intervals in which historical experience is reflected: those that carry the trace of historical pain. They have to, at all costs, be proven through pure principles, even when they have been socially anchored for a long time so that they are accepted as second nature and do not require an effort of the former. More than a quarter of the book, called ‘der Werkstoff’ [the working matter], is concerned with conjuring the twelve notes of the chromatic scale from the overtone series. Of course this does not correspond with nature; Hindemith can cope with the “destruction of pure octaves” (43) by means of exclusive use of pure intervals as little as his predecessors. However he is too much of a craftsman to realise the rationalisation of the physical sounds through tempered tuning as conscious intervention in natural material which historically had become a hindrance to the production of music. If the actual working matter is not correct, then rather inappropriate physics provide insights which could threaten the image of the “working matter” itself. Apparently even Max Weber has turned subversive.

Concerning the tempered scale in itself Hindemith is no ‘pelagser’ but a moderate modernist. The malicious scepticism against the Fortschrittsglauben [believe in progression] is rather commensurate with the acceptance of every progress that stays within existing boundaries. Initially the tempered scale is so rigorously criticised, as if for the tender ears of the expert not just the enharmonic of Tristan but already Beethoven’s orchestra sounds unbearably wrong. However he is far too sensible to prohibit any of this. In order to correct he employs choral singing as it might have been practised in the ‘bündische Jugend’. The ‘bündische Jugend’ is banned nowadays.

Hindemith’s tolerance against the past progress does not hinder his eagerness to develop a natural “ranking list of tonal relations” (72). It presents the mediation between the “greatest natural phenomena; simple and overwhelming like the rain, the ice and the wind” (39) and the art of cooking. Intervals and chords are added to taste, as if they came from the spices’ cupboard. Newer ones are called “überpfeffert” [overpeppert]. Some are supposed to be stronger, others weaker: “the quint g1 – c1 has a stronger harmonic effect than the quart e1 – a1, whose tonal value is then again greater than the third c1-e1 or the second a1 – g1.” (100) What is meant by ‘strong’ remains ambiguous: it could also mean that the interval calculated by Hindemith occupies an earlier and therefore better place in his table than the weaker one, and therefore is represented more prominently – which should not be decided in general but only in specific contexts. The ranking list also takes possession of chords. In this context the term “valuable” is used. Every decided and explicit harmonic effect, in Hindemith’s conception is quietly specified as the better one as if not in the artwork effects of suspension outweigh those of bare progress at least. The chordal ranking list begins like an aesthetics of painting which prefers the “pretty” colours to the “ugly” under consideration of the painting. The composer of the aggressive “Nusch-Nuschi” and the blasphemic “Sancta Susanna”, purged as solicitor of “positive sensations”(39) instructs: “in a composition the triad or its immediate augmentations can only be avoided short term if the listener is not supposed to be caught in complete confusion.” (39) The composer is already taken; otherwise he would not proclaim ideas which he ridiculed himself. The degree of confusion is technically definable. Hindemith can see that the rules of harmony theory, which quantifies chords ‘functionally’ after their position in a cadence and its augmentations, do not agree with compositional practice anymore. Therefore he is also prepared to relinquish terms like consonance and dissonance. However he attempts to salvage those antiquated norms by
emancipating them from any context and attaches them to isolated single harmonic events. If, however, the position in the cadence does not decide over right or wrong of the chord, then the single chord resists even more a quantitative hierarchy. Surely in every composition one may decide over ‘rightness’ and ‘wrongness’ of its moments, yet by employing no other method than the defined and unique context in which those elements come together in the composition. In this one a single moment is historical and not a product of nature. A triad in a sequence of polytonal chords does indeed sound wrong. The practice of moderate modernism, provided by Hindemith’s ideology, consists of, however exactly, breaking the teeth of the dismissed atonality and twelve-note technique, by means of interrupting the, over a long period freely tolerant, music with triads, as a hold for listeners and to the detriment of the music. Wrong is moderate modernism in itself.

The attempt at a harmonic theory which scales the available material today through general rules is absurd. There had not been a proprietary art of instrumentation until a hundred years ago. That a normative ‘instrumentation doctrine’ did not develop but a mere descriptive ‘instrumentology’ is down to a good reason: the discovery of the instrumental dimension falls into the epoch in which music still contained the concrete logic of movement of each individual work and no longer the abstract pattern. However what is right for the instrumentation is cheap for progressive harmonic tendencies. Not just by coincidence particularly Schoenberg’s harmony theory limits itself to the traditional chord material: it utilises it merely in a pedagogic sense to instil a consciousness which is strong in itself and therefore can emerge from every schema. Of this historical tendency is Hindemith’s book, against his own will, a testimony, because it endeavours to generate these ordinal schemes. Reactionary it becomes in the moment of declaring these ordinal schemes a norm. Its prohibitions are manacles of productivity: through poor auxiliary constructions it is orientated at the convention, restricted composition experience fluffed up to ontology. Nothing is supposed to exist which has not been there before: which is not sufficient to merely reproduce existing conventions. One speculates for a regressive conscience which only knows the wish to be released from the responsibility of self-awareness and follows the obligatory yet non-revealing and practical directions of the administration in an objective manner. It is the objectivity of the ‘Führerprinzip’ [principle of leadership]¹: against freedom but within this adamant.

The ranking list of intervals and chords is in service of an elite, may this elite be as shabby as the eternal triads. He says of the intervals: “The tritone does not build a pair with any other interval, it is placed to the right of every pair of intervals as an antagonist of the octave which occupies an isolated corner at the left wing of the sequence. The octave as the most exclusive interval does not mix with the crowd; the most distant relative, the queer fellow, the half-real tritone stays as distant to the pairs as Loki to the gods.” (96f) Furthermore the administrative chord table services higher aims: “Subgroup III in group A encompasses chords with arbitrary notes which can be augmented with seconds and sevenths. They are a crude and little noble family... in subgroup IV one can find a weird species of exaggerated, colourful, unrefined harmonies.” (118) Apparently over there are proletarians and here intellectuals. By means of its defamation the old harmony theory returns through the back door. The theoretician Hindemith wants to know even less of dissonances than the practitioner. He is positivistic. He learned something from his ‘Marienleben’: “That the work is composed to honour the highest being and therefore is sure of its support, we feel among many composers yet seldom so vividly as in Bach, for whom the ‘Jesu iuva’ in his scores was not an empty formula” (27). When nowadays the support is not so sure anymore it might be down to the empty formulae of some scores.

¹ Note of the translator: I suspect this is a reference to Adolf Hitler.
One has to organise by oneself. “Our business works in a different way. It has an unequally higher number of workers at its disposal whose work is differing in value for the whole. From the specialist of highest performance to the non-able, from the most hard-working man to the laziest we have people of all levels of performance available. One can place at every point a man with appropriate knowledge who can do the tasks faster, better and more reliably than a, through his multi-skills inhibited, worker. On the other hand it is unnecessary to waste the potential of the able in areas where lay and non-able people can be used.” (122) Directives out of a leaflet of a Cathedral A.-G. whose workers are allocated from a workforce service of volunteers.

The employer moans in admittedly a different context: “the revolution came too soon.” (65) It has come too late. Otherwise the leaflet would not have been written.

1939

V

At first I want to say, that I have written many critiques before but never considered myself a professional critic. Those of my works that fall under this category are thanks to the match of philosophic-theoretical and hands-on musical interest, than they could claim any judgemental entitlement that a critique has to register when it becomes fully autonomous as the format it unquestionably is. The difference in my works is that I wanted to deal with experiences and communicate with them; there was always an element of experimental value. Therefore it is not easy for me to find an example that prompts me by pater peccavi to say with a good conscience as if I simply trusted my high intellect.

However, I can remember one thing. It is sure enough forty years ago; an essay about Paul Hindemith which I published in Frankfurt in 1922 in the now long since lost ‘Neue Blätter für Kunst und Literatur’. There is hardly anything I approve of in this essay nowadays: if I was presented with such a piece of work by one of my students that student would not have much to laugh about. The essay, probably one of the first written about this composer is a mix of adept bravery and provincial, well-informed frowst of which I cannot imagine I would bring that down to paper these days; if my memory does not deceive me, Hindemith did not like it and quite rightly so. Apparently one has to have intellectual behaviour that you push off energetically one time and the other time a polemic pathos turns against within one’s self to learn to misprize it. Among the motives of my later writings, as far as I count them, I do not deny my shame, I was probably precocious over what I did with this essay and others at the age of nineteen. A panic shock overcame me when some time ago a friendly gentleman had the idea to reprint one of those early essays of mine.

Most disturbing for me in this Hindemith-essay is that it somewhat unhesitatingly merges undivided enthusiasm for an erupting talent, vague discomfort with this and the gesture of superior instruction. I noticed already in Hindemith’s youth-works, which still behaved in a radical way, that something was not right and that the overthrowing statement could not be trusted. However I was not up to dealing with what I felt. In terms of a concern I registered against Hindemith in bourgeois-fashion that he wanted to épater le bourgeois, I even reproached his scandalous libretti. I did not discover behind these works what psychoanalysis calls an oedipal character, a kind of hidden protest against a fatherly authority. Close behind this wild demeanour lurks the identification with the issue that is protested against: the excess proclaims simultaneously the necessity of proportion and order that this should finally finish; chaos is prepared for its own defamation. Consequently Hindemith did change promptly when a contemporary critique threatened him by pointing the ethical finger, he composed Rilke’s
applied art poems ‘Mariengedichte’; since then any clarification was decided whose victims eventually became the dissonant leftovers from the ‘Marienleben’. When their first version was released my ears pricked up. However, what Hindemith had composed before I was very impressed with; I was only irritated by a derogatory remark concerning Schoenberg, about whose rank I was not mistaken at the time. It was the one, when I still studied with Sekles, who had also been Hindemith’s teacher; so before I went to Berlin to Alban Berg. The subjective reason for my foolishness was a lack of metier. I had not yet understood what constraints towards followed-through composition, towards renunciation of blank superficial contexts derive from new ways of composing, how oppositional in their own sense they are to Hindemith’s essentially traditional idea of music. With words like polyphone I was unnecessarily generous, without realising that despite all voice-clashes for example the Hindemith’s famous Donaueschinger C-Major Quartet is in truth a motor-homophone piece. Instead of describing the compositional problems of his work bindingly with compositional terminology, I was satisfied with a vague impression. The issues that have definable reasons I without hesitation accounted to the mere artistic naturell, Hindemith’s multi-skilled recklessness. In real terms I had nothing to oppose. The randomness of mere taste was the reason of my fluctuating agreement with his art which at the same time I found contrary to what I imagined to be proper music. The embarrassing spirit of this essay might have derived from that I wanted to sedate this ambiguity and support myself in the belief. The best from the early Hindemith, what also secretly enticed me, was the insubordinate manner, cynically non-conformist, and with that I thought I should agree with precociously; what I convulsively praised in him were those properties of his music that would not catch my attention at a later stage. However I would not have praised them if I had not been secretly in love with “Junge Magd”, the provocative “Nusch-Nuschi” and the opera with the exposed libretto by Stramm; I would quite like to know if Hindemith allows performances of “Bleische Burleske” and “Sancta Susanna” these days. A certain clumsiness, non-segmentedness of his music displeased me from the first day onwards as a matter of fact, also the far-too-realistic demeanour of the orchestra practitioner; but I was too weak to resist public opinion which was that this was healthy yet a more courageous approach ill. Only the Vienna School cured me also in theoretical terms from the dominating musical clichés; in that Hindemith essay the word musikantisch appears positive. That I was impressed by his genius is no big deal in a time of Hindemith’s strong rise and his impressive skills. But whilst I praised the modern talent, I swam with the current and I boasted in him the non-modern. This element itself I probably perceived correctly and his development confirmed it but simultaneously it refuted my agreement through its decreasing quality. The modern moments in Hindemith meanwhile, which I at least intended to mimic in my inappropriate brisk style of this essay, he eliminated in a transferential and literal sense, made a nobilissima visione out of “Sancta Susanna”.

I would not bother the public with such memories, if there were not a few instructive things to learn from it beyond my own private case; there may be critics who in their exalted position do not do anything other than me in my pubertal style exercise. Behind an eager verification, however, in how many pieces critics got it wrong at all times, is often only the superstitiousness for the apparent creativity, which has priority over the evil reflection. This was created by Wagner’s denunciating invention ‘Beckmesser’ and culminated in the national-socialistic ban of art criticism. The unadmitted extent of such an attitude is the success. One has the choice, what is more antipathic: the know-it-all of the critic with indefeasible benchmarks from the junk room, or the eagerness, to justify intellectually what is swimming on top anyway publicly. Behind the belated indignation over the bigoted critic the ambition to hold it with the stronger battalions is often concealed. Wagner gave Hanslick over to ridiculousness without, in view of Beckmesser’s theft, contemning even the poorest imaginations of intellectual property of the petty bourgeois; but the text “Vom musikalisch Schönem” is in no way merely the manifesto of a blinkered formalist, who Hanslick surely was as well. It had,
against the stream of an into programme music degraded romanticism, held on to its moment of inherent musical logic which then eventually emerged from the historical movement of expressionism in a self-forced fashion. The process between Wagner and Hanslick is not decided in the way Wagner would have liked, yet certainly not so much against him as many in the age of integral constructivism might think. Rather their conflict is coined with an exemplified relationship of tension which gave life to the music in itself.

When I spoke for Hindemith, I committed an outrage in those days, however it was the opposite of the “Beckmesser”-issue. I sinned through the lack of critical perspective. Nevertheless there is something to point out about my misapprehension and in the end exactly the procreativity that can be discovered among critical misapprehensions. With the Hindemith of those days it could have all gone in a different way. There was a Dadaist in him, someone who was revolted to join in with culture. Like Stravinsky, who was his example for many years, did not need to become a neo-classicist when he wrote “Renard” and “Histoire du soldat”. It would not be difficult to demonstrate in Hindemith’s best works of those years what would have needed to carry on in order to donate a radical musical style that went beyond the expressionistic generation instead of the academic bridges he built towards the behind. The idea of criticism however – its task as well as its only legitimation – is to become aware of artistic phenomena and their potentials; what they merely are to perceive as what they could be. The injustice that criticism, be it positive or negative, sometimes does to the work as fact there and then becomes just when it facilitates the potential to speak from behind the current performance. It is essential to artistic experience to be open to forms of reaction essentially different to one’s own, and often this repulsion allows for the possibility to reveal something that was not there. The skewness and labour of my out of inexperience overly skilled essay had its origins in the drive to such extensions and that is why I am not just ashamed of what I should be ashamed of.

1962

POSTLUDIUM

[Not translated]

[“Hindemith was the composer prototype of a currently widely-spread sociological phenomenon: swooning pseudo-activity.” Adorno 1968]

DECLARATION OF TRANSLATOR

This translation is produced to the best of knowledge of the translator. The intention was to keep the text as true as possible to the German original, only where English grammar demands slight changes in sentence structure have been applied.

DATE AND PLACE

24 December 2015, Hull

SIGNATURE OF TRANSLATOR

Daniela Fountain