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„... as if the shame before the victims would be offended“
– Adorno’s verdict on Arnold Schoenberg’s
A survivor from Warsaw

by
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I Introduction

In the present paper I will be discussing the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno's radical interpretation of Arnold Schoenberg's seminal composition *A survivor from Warsaw*, completed in 1946. To this end, I attempt to examine Schoenberg's intention in composing a piece directly related to the memory of the Shoah as well as to highlight the purpose of Adorno's criticism of the work both within his thinking on the relation between art and genocide and his aesthetic theory in general. Thus, in what follows, I will first present some details of the composition in question, then shed some light on the relation between the musical material used in the piece and Schoenberg's idea how to represent the memory of Jewish survival, and finally I will analyze Adorno's approach to Schoenberg and his concepts directly related to the questions if and how to represent the Shoah in art. In all this, the focus of my analytical labor will be the question if there are elements of Adorno's interpretation of art relating to genocide – developed mainly between the 1940's and the 1960's – that are still relevant for us contemporaries of the 21st Century.

Other than in literature and the fine arts, the history of modern classical music after 1945 does not contain many works directly related to the memory of the Shoah. The more important ones are Luigi Nono's composition for audio tape *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* from 1956 and Krzysztof Penderecki's *Dies Irae – Oratory in Commemoration of the Auschwitz victims* from 1967. More recent pieces include Steve

Reich's *Different Trains* from 1988¹ and John Zorn's *Kristallnacht*, released four years later. While very few pieces are directly related to the memory of survivors, most of the works use poems or otherwise already artistically arranged material as a point of reference. In the latter context, the poems of Paul Celan, a Chernowitz-born Jewish author, and one of the major German-language poets of the post-World War II era, are a primary source.² Often, the problem of the so-called aestheticization of the Shoah is made responsible for this state of affairs, given that music is being considered self-referential, abstract and highly subjective. Under these circumstances, *A Survivor from Warsaw* can be considered a pioneering composition, meeting advanced claims for authenticity, expressivity and technical consolidation.

II *A Survivor from Warsaw*: material, compositional structure, context

For those who are not familiar with the so-called *Second Viennese School* and with the piece of music in question, I offer a short description of the work. Op. 46 is a cantata for narrator, men's chorus, and orchestra. It is a singular piece in Schoenberg's oeuvre for its unique combination of historical, religious and political aspects. *A Survivor from Warsaw* was initially inspired by the Russian dancer Corinne Chochem who wanted a composition to pay tribute to the Holocaust victims under National Socialism. While the collaboration between Chochem and Schoenberg did not come to fruition, the composer continued to develop the idea independently. When he received a letter from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation with a commission for an orchestral work, Schoenberg decided to bring his sketches into a final form. He accomplished *A Survivor from Warsaw* in just two weeks in August of 1947, although his poor eyesight forced him to noteate only a short score, relying on René Leibowitz, the most important patron of dodec-

¹ For a detailed analysis of *Different Trains* see Frieder von Ammon: "Züge des Lebens, Züge des Todes: Die Darstellung des Holocaust in Steve Reichs Komposition *Different Trains*", in: Matías Martínez (ed.): *Der Holocaust und die Künste: Medialität und Authentizität von Holocaust-Darstellungen in Literatur, Film, Video, Malerei, Denkmälern, Comic und Musik*, Bielefeld: Aisthesis 2004, 23-50.

² Examples for the use of Celan's poems in music are Aribert Reimann's *Kumi Ori* from 1999 and Peter Ruzicka's *Recherche (- im Innersten)* from 2000, see Mathias Lehmann: "Musik über den Holocaust: Zu einem Seitenthema der deutschen Musikgeschichte nach 1945", in: Villigster Forschungsforum zu Nationalsozialismus, Rassismus und Antisemitismus (ed.): *Das Unbehagen in der „dritten Generation“: Reflexionen des Holocaust, Antisemitismus und Nationalsozialismus*, Münster: LIT 2004, 44-56.

aphonic music in France, to copy out the full orchestration.³ The piece was premiered at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque in November of 1948 with an audience of 1800 demanding a repeat performance. The German premiere took place in August 1950 at the *Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music*.⁴ A detail of this performance offers a remarkable example of the Shoah memory's repression in post-war Germany, as the organizers of the courses changed the text of the narrator when quoting the SS-sergeant "In one minute I want to know how many people I have to hand over to the gas chamber" to the less incriminating version "In one minute I want to know how many I can hand over."⁵

Op. 46 is a fictional representation of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and uses musical and textual elements to depict the labor of traumatic memory. It was the composer himself who wrote the libretto, in which a Shoah survivor struggles to recall an experience from the Warsaw Ghetto. Schoenberg mentions that it is based on a report from a real survivor from the Ghetto that he learned about. The score published by Bomart in 1949 is thus prefaced with a declaration by the composer that refers to the narrator's text: "This text is based partly upon reports which I have received directly or indirectly."⁶ To shed more light on the origin of these reports, Schoenberg's biographer, Willi Reich, refers to a "German newspaper" interview with René Leibowitz from November 15th 1949 where the story of the real survivor is being quoted as follows:

I cannot remember everything, I must have been unconscious most of the time; I remember only the grandiose moment when they all started to sing the old prayer. The day began as usual. Reveille when it still was dark - we were assembled and brutally treated. People got killed. The sergeant shouted that the dead should be counted, so that he knew how many he had to deliver to the gas chamber. The counting started slowly, irregularly. Then it began

³ See Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt: *Schoenberg: Leben, Umwelt, Werk*, Munich: Piper 1989, 441. In an interview, Schoenberg once said: "I compose and paint instinctively [...] I see the work as a whole first. Then I compose the details." (José Rodrigues: "Conversation With a Legend", in: Merle Armitage (ed.): *Schoenberg*, Freeport/New York: Books for Libraries Press 1937/reprint 1971, 145, 147.

⁴ For more details of the early reception history of the piece see Michael Strasser: "A Survivor from Warsaw as Personal Parable", in: *Music & Letters* LXXVI (1995), 52-63.

⁵ See the recording of the concert on the CD Deutscher Musikrat (ed.): *Musik in Deutschland 1950-2000. Konzertmusik [a]: Musik für Orchester. Rückkehr aus dem Exil*, BMG Classics 2000.

⁶ Arnold Schoenberg: *A Survivor from Warsaw*, Wien/London: Universal Edition 1979.

again: one, two, three, faster and faster, so that it sounded like a stampede of wild horses, and - all of a sudden - they began singing the *Shema Yisrael*.⁷

Comparing the text to the libretto one recognizes that Schoenberg closely follows this story. The work concludes, as indicated in the text, with the victims singing the *Shema Yisrael* (the Jewish profession of faith). Singing this prayer can be understood as a means of musical resistance against the Nazi captors. The *Shema*, drawn from the Torah, is one of the most sacred prayers in Judaism. Its first verse encapsulates the essence of Jewish belief, the idea of monotheism, and tells the believer to open his senses so as to experience the unity of G'd. Hence, the singing of the *Shema* within the general context of the drama of *A Survivor from Warsaw* represents a kind of reassertion of the Jewish identity in the middle of the chaos, the violence and the annihilation of the European Jewry. On the other hand, although Schoenberg sets several verses after the traditionally sung *Shema* prayer, he does not follow a traditional Jewish style of composition.

(Audio Sample, 4:15 to 5:55)

In what follows, I will attempt to shed some light on the technique Schoenberg uses in his music.⁸ The musical material is organized in a dodecaphonic manner, which means that the whole composition is in fact based on one single line that makes use of all twelve tones on the chromatic scale before variations of that line occur. Thus, all 12 notes are given more or less equal importance, and the music avoids being in a key.⁹ In this way, the work complies with one of the main conditions Schoenberg demands for compositions in general: its formal properties have to be based on a rational, self-sufficient structure and rules of organization. At the same time, the piece is profoundly characterized by the contrast between the narrator's emphatic voice (speaking Eng-

⁷ Willi Reich: *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*, London: Longman Group Ltd. 1971, 222.

⁸ A more detailed musicological interpretation of *A Survivor* provides Mark Feezell: "The Lord Our God Is One: Form, Technique, And Spirituality in Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor From Warsaw*, Op. 46", available from <http://www.drfeezell.com/melodrama/schoenbergsurvivorfromwarsawweb.pdf> (accessed 12.09.2012); and Ilya Y. Rostovtsev: "Expression of the Eternal: Analysis of Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* op. 46", available from http://berkeley.academia.edu/ilzxc/Papers/129484/Expression_of_the_Eternal_Analysis_of_Schoenbergs_A_Survivor_From_Warsaw_Op._46 (accessed 11.09.2012).

⁹ For a closer technical analysis of the composition see Christian Martin Schmidt: "Schönbergs Kantate ‚Ein Überlebender aus Warschau‘", in: *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 33 (1976), 177-179; and: Sabine Feisst: *Schoenberg's New World: The American Years*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2011, 105-108.

lish), the quotations of a Prussian sergeant (in German) – which represent the spoken part of the composition – and the choir of the Jewish inmates singing the *Shema Yisrael*. From this perspective, it could be estimated as a composition comparable to the composer's one-act opera "Erwartung" (expectation) from 1909, thus establishing an immediate connection with his early pre-dodecaphonic, expressionist phase. Every measure of the piece contrasts the dignity of the Jews and the cruelty of the Nazis. So, most importantly for what follows in our analysis is the fact that the musical material Schoenberg uses is organized in the most rational, independent and coherent manner, while at the same time it is able to represent an expressivity quite appropriate to the exceptionalism of the subject. Hence, *A Survivor from Warsaw* is regarded as a landmark composition in music history post-Second World War. It is considered a piece fully representing the consequences of Schoenberg's paradigmatic changes from tonality via atonality to the dodecaphonic system, changes that nowadays are being considered watersheds in the development of modern music. Although the development of compositional techniques after Schoenberg continued to advance, passing serial, aleatory, minimal and electronic music, dodecaphony remains a point of reference for modern composition.

III Schoenberg, music, and politics

Now, we all know that music – and art in general – is an autonomous system within the broader context of modern societies, i.e. that artistic expression is independent from political, social and religious claims and constraints. Schoenberg himself never tired of pointing out the self-determination and unity of art and the musical sphere.¹⁰ Therefore, he conceives the paradigmatic change from tonality to dodecaphony as a consequence of the emancipation of the dissonance and the general idea of progress of knowledge and technology.¹¹ On the other hand, Schoenberg shows with the choir in *A Survivor* that music can be used to express political and existential resistance. Besides, he him-

¹⁰ See Arnold Schoenberg: "Composition with Twelve Tones (1)", in: ibid., *Style and Idea. Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. by Leonard Stein, Berkeley: University of California Press 1984, 214-245; and ibid.: "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea", in: ibid., 113-124.

¹¹ Arnold Schoenberg: Composition with Twelve Tones, 116ff. For a discussion of Schoenberg's idea of compositional progress see Golan Gur: "Arnold Schoenberg and the Ideology of Progress in Twentieth-Century Musical Thinking", in: *Search: Journal for New Music and Culture*, summer 2009, issue 5, online journal (accessed 13.09.2012).

self was the opposite of an apolitical, esoteric artist. Already in 1938, he expressed his political opinions in the context of Jewish identity, publishing the essay *The Four-Point Program for Jewry*, in which he called for the creation of an independent Jewish state and unanimity in Jewry as a defense against anti-Semitic aggression.¹² Hence, it seems as if structural self-sufficiency, the idea of technological and epistemological progress, and the ambition to freely express individual imagination combined with moral implications did not necessarily conflict with each other in Schoenberg's aesthetic thinking. There is no other way to explain how Schoenberg could use such a sophisticated technique that he considered representing social and cultural progress to express a historical event commonly regarded the utmost outcome of barbarism. Surely, *A Survivor from Warsaw* also stands for the memory of the victims, but, at the same time, it is meant to stand for the sheer meaninglessness of the annihilation of a people, thus creating a kind of formal contradiction in the aesthetic representation of the event. It seems as if for Schoenberg the last resort and ultimate authority in creating a work of art is the artist himself with his imagination as to how to balance rational organization, moral approach and intuitive expression. His claim is to work an idea into the existing aesthetic material in such a way that general cultural and spiritual concepts are reflected and the ethical and moral standpoints of the author are truly represented. Thus, Schoenberg once summarized his convictions in the following statement: "I myself consider the totality of a piece as the idea: the idea which its creator wanted to present."¹³

To sum up, the work *A Survivor from Warsaw* can be considered a confirmation not only of the survival of resistance in the Ghetto of Warsaw, but also of advanced aesthetic and expressive tendencies, tendencies banned as "*Entartete Kunst*" (degenerate art) by the cultural policy of the Nazis but surviving in the works of the exiled artists. It is this idea that makes Schoenberg highlight the intentions of the work:

"Now, what the text of the *Survivor* means to me: it means at first a warning to all Jews, never to forget what has been done to us, never to forget that even people who did not do it themselves, agreed with them and many of them found it necessary to treat us this way. We should never forget this, even if such things have not been done in the

¹² Arnold Schoenberg: "A Four-Point Program for Jewry," in: *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*, Volume III, No. 1 (March 1979), 49-67.

¹³ Arnold Schoenberg: *New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea*, 122.

manner in which I describe in the *Survivor*. This does not matter. The main thing is that I saw it in my imagination.”¹⁴

IV Adorno, the arts, and the Shoah

In what follows, I invite you to analyze the parallels and disaccords between Schoenberg and Theodor W. Adorno, one of the leading members of the so-called Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and a specialist in aesthetics and music theory. Adorno published several essays on the work of Schoenberg and his compositional technique. The most prominent is probably the first part of his book *Philosophy of New Music: “Schoenberg and Progress”*.¹⁵ Concerning style, his writing can be compared to Schoenberg’s compositions: both resist naïve appropriation and exploitation by unreflective modes of thought or listening, both believe in the material’s inherent drive that forces the author to apply major changes in his method. But Adorno’s aesthetic theory claims that art – and especially music, Adorno’s main reference – has to be the most radical (and that means: negative, unredeemed) representation of the experience and the effects of the Shoah. Thus, the philosopher is probably best known for his severely provoking verdict published in an essay on cultural criticism in 1951: “The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today.”¹⁶ With this statement, we have Adorno’s idea of dialectical movement in a nutshell. It expresses that although art is autonomous it is able to express social truth. On the other hand, its truth is not self-conscious, it needs philosophical knowledge to be lifted to awareness. Yet, although this knowledge raises barbarism to awareness, it is itself affected by its subject. Hence, it uncovers an antagonistic movement in modern art in general and music in particular: while one strives after total consistency and liberty in structure to achieve all-encompassing unity, the alienation of this structure to its object is inescapable. In the

¹⁴ Letter from Schoenberg to Kurt List, 1 November 1948, as quoted in *Arnold Schoenberg Self-Portrait: A Collection of Articles, Program Notes, and Letters by the Composer about his own Works*, ed. Nuria Schoenberg Nono (Pacific Palisades, CA: Belmont Music Publishers, 1988), 105.

¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno: *Philosophy of New Music*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press 2006, 16.

¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno: “Cultural Criticism and Society” in: ibid.: *Prisms*, Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press., 1984, 34.

preface to *Philosophy of New Music*, written in 1948, Adorno emphasizes this constellation explaining his approach to Schoenberg and Stravinsky in the context of recent political and social events:

"The author has no wish to disguise the provocative features of his study. It must appear cynical after what has happened in Europe, and what continues to threaten, to lavish time and mental energy on the deciphering of esoteric questions on the technique of modern composition [...] This is only music; how must a world be made in which even questions of counterpoint bear witness to irreconcilable conflicts? How fundamentally disturbed life is today if its trembling and its rigidity are reflected even where no empirical need reaches, in a sphere that people suppose provides sanctuary from the pressures of the harrowing norm [...]"¹⁷

The foregoing shows clearly that Adorno's thinking is thoroughly dialectical. As he demands from works of art to bring together the antagonism in the aesthetic elements it is using, so he applies this method of confronting social contradictions and extremes to his own philosophical approach. Is there but the faintest hint of conciliatoriness in art, of glossing over this antagonism, Adorno inerrably detects and unmasks it. Thus, in an interview in 1968, asked about the quality of popular music referring to the horrors of Vietnam, Adorno answers:

"I believe, in fact, that attempts to bring political protest together with popular music – i.e., with entertainment music – are for the following reason doomed from the start: The entire sphere of popular music, even where it dresses itself up in modernist guise, is to such a degree inseparable from commodity, from the cross-eyed transfixion with amusement, that attempts to outfit it with a new function remain entirely superficial. And I have to say that when somebody sets himself up, and for whatever reason accompanies sentimental music by singing something or other about Vietnam being unbearable I find, in fact, this song unbearable, in that by taking the horrendous and making it somehow consumable, it ends up wringing something like consumption-qualities out of it."¹⁸

¹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno: *Philosophy of New Music*, 4f.

¹⁸ Available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xd7Fhaji8ow> (accessed 10.09.2012).

It is therefore only the most radical, in its negativity uncompromising art like the works of Samuel Beckett and Schoenberg that, for Adorno, live up to his expectations of social and aesthetic awareness.

Now, how does Adorno judge Schoenberg's approach to the history of European music in general and to the memory of the Shoah in particular? In the first place, and in total conformity with the composer, he conceives serious art as using the most advanced technique available to express the imagination of the artist. Therefore, in his essay "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg" he characterizes Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositions as the attempt to synthesize "[...] two fundamental intentions, the explosively anti-conventional one and the cohesively constructive one, into one and the same method of proceeding."¹⁹ And in an essay about the baroque, he leaves no space for misunderstanding when it comes to the function of technique in art, affirming that the place of the spirit in artworks is their technical realization while the concept of style was suspicious to composers as Schoenberg and philosophers likewise.²⁰

These quotes clearly expose the motivating force behind Adorno's analytical work: the desire to debunk the relation between autonomous compositions and their socio-political context, which he argues is inherent to the musical material itself. Thus, if modern societies are haunted by antinomies that undermine central categories like experience, perception and communication, these antinomies can be recognized in music too, albeit in a different form and with a different expressivity.

V Verdicts in dialectical movement: Adorno's interpretation of *A Survivor from Warsaw*

Now, what does this mean for a dialectical understanding of *A Survivor from Warsaw*? We will see that Adorno, although acclaiming the musical genius and the radical nature of the cantata, mercilessly condemns the work as conciliatory in the face of the Warsaw Ghetto's sheer brutality.

¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno: "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg", in: ibid.: *Essays on Music: Selected, with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Richard Leppert*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2002, 640.

²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno: "Der missbrauchte Barock", in: ibid.: *Ohne Leitbild: Parva Aesthetica*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1967, 149 (my translation, R.B.).

Most of Adorno's quotes related to Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* are following his general verdict on the history of 20th century music and the idea of progress. If music is indirectly related to social reality, and the Shoah is the most extreme outcome of the self-destructive tendencies in modern societies, then actually only the most technically advanced and self-conscious music is able to truly represent what had happened. Thus, Adorno states that in *A Survivor from Warsaw*, Schoenberg

"[...] made the impossible possible, standing up to the contemporary horror in its most extreme form, the murder of the Jews, in art. This alone would be enough to earn him every right to the thanks of a generation that scorns him, not least because in his music that inexpressible thing quivers that no one any longer wants to know about. If music is to escape from the nullity that threatens it [...], then it can only hope to do so if it accomplishes what Schoenberg accomplished in the Survivor from Warsaw - if it confronts the utter negativity, the most extreme, by which the entire complexion of reality is made manifest."²¹

In another passage, the philosopher praises the combination of expressivity and form in the piece, comparing it to Picasso's painting *Guernica* and affirming that both were the only works of art capable of unflinchingly approaching the most extreme horror and, yet, being aesthetically compelling.²² As we see, Adorno certainly singles out Schoenberg's composition, highlighting its consistency in uncompromisingly following the consequences of modern art, i.e. to drive the aesthetic material to its most radical form and expression. Nevertheless, if he wants to remain true to his dialectical principle, the Frankfurt based philosopher cannot content himself with this state of affairs. He has to excavate the conciliatory moment in his object of analysis. Consequently, in a later essay Adorno mercilessly condemns the transfiguration of brutality in the choir because it wrongs the experience of the victims:

Something embarrassing joins Schoenberg's composition [...] The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of those who were beaten to the ground by rifle butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. [...] Through the aesthetic principle of stylization, and even more through the solemn prayer of the chorus, the unthinkable fate appears as if it had some meaning: it is being transfigured, something of its horror is

²¹ Theodor W. Adorno: "The Relationship of Philosophy and Music", in: ibid.: *Essays on Music*, 149f.

²² Theodor W. Adorno: Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg, 642.

being removed. This alone does injustice to the victims, while no art that tries to evade them could stand up to justice.²³

One might take offence at this interpretation, because the authentic story of the survivor quoted in the libretto states that the singing of the Shema Yisroel had actually taken place in the Warsaw Ghetto, thus talk about stylization seems inappropriate. However, taken to its logical consequence, Adorno's criticism could even be applied to the chorus of the inmates who sang in the Ghetto, for they tried to sugarcoat their real circumstances. On the other hand, why wouldn't it be legitimate to understand the choir as an expression of resistance and not as representing the meaninglessness of annihilation of the European Jewry? Anyway, the pivotal question seems to be how we shall conceive and judge Adorno's interpretation of Schoenberg after more than half a century since it was first conceived.

VI Conclusion: Considering the context dependency of the Shoah's memory

I would like to propose the following answer to this question: on the one hand, Adorno's criticism of popular music and his sometimes exaggerated interpretation of new music have themselves been criticized since his death and gave way to a broad discussion of his legacy. Carl Dahlhaus, Albrecht Wellmer and Peter Bürger have detected flaws in Adorno's aesthetics, highlighting the obsolescence of certain interpretations of the European avant-garde movements in his construction of modernity.²⁴ Moreover, they point to the fact that today's modes of listening to music are less ideologically suspicious, enabling listeners to contextualize music styles and forms of expression within their respective traditions and social contexts. Correspondingly, the idea of the most advanced state of compositional techniques as an ineluctable reference for acceptable music, shared by Adorno and Schoenberg, has become obsolete, as the German musicologist Tobias Plebuch states:

We have lost belief in a historically defined and definable state of musical material, at least when it comes to the 20th and 21st Century. This concept fails as a barometer for general artistic progress. The question what material is beyond being raw acoustic phenomena will be

²³ Theodor W. Adorno: Engagement, 425f. (my translation, R.B.).

²⁴ See Peter Bürger: "Der Anti-Avantgardismus in der Ästhetik Adornos", in: ibid.: *Das Altern der Moderne*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2001, 31-47; Carl Dahlhaus: „Vom Altern einer Philosophie“, in: *Adorno-Konferenz 1983*, Ludwig v. Friedeburg/Jürgen Habermas (eds.), Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1983, 133 ff.

decided in alternating contexts and by listeners whose educational differences are not being defined by the scale of 'high' and 'low'.²⁵

On the other hand, to do justice to both, Schoenberg and Adorno, I propose to discuss the following considerations involving the relation between art and the memory of the Shoah. As long as the artist's imagination of the unimaginable is involved and how most truthfully to express it, we should believe in his/her ability to find a conceivable form for this imagination, provided that the artist shows total command of the available techniques. In this case the question of the Shoah's presentability is being addressed to the wrong institution. However, when questions of the general epistemological or aesthetic conditions for the representation of the Shoah are raised, the critical discourse seems to be the adequate institution to point out the limits every single work of art has to accept. Thus, authors like Adorno make us aware of the fact that a universally valid form for total destruction has yet to be uncovered. On the other hand, aesthetic conditions and modes of musical reception today are highly complex and context-sensitive, thus precluding general conclusions with regard to the appropriateness of an artwork to its topic.

It is quite probable that the choir might best serve to express a solution to the problem of context dependency as well as an acceptable perception of the Shoah. While the real choir, sung and received in Warsaw, was an act of resistance in a moment of existential oppression, Schoenberg's choir is a formal expression of the memory of that resistance. And finally, the second or third generations' hearing is already charged with such an overwhelming number of images, documents and narratives, that questions about stylization and agency are inescapable. Only the synopsis of all those aspects, as a combination of experience, memory and its transformation into a multitude of aesthetic forms, is able to take account of all possibilities, realities and forms of resistance in the context of the Shoah's remembrance. Neither music nor dialectical thinking on their own could possibly grasp the horror of the extermination camps, but together both might be able to give us an idea of a universally valid solidarity against it ever being repeated.

²⁵ Tobias Plebuch: "Musikhören nach Adorno", in: *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, Heft 8, vol. 56, August 2002, 679 (my translation, R.B.).