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To what does music owe its undeniable proximity to human beings, those who are moved to their innermost depths, its impact not always being conscious or premeditated, but ever real and often profound and disturbing? There is no doubt that music, whose universal nature transcends geography, eras, language, ideologies and cultures, has always been closely linked to the life experience of man, its ubiquitous omnipresence providing an accompaniment to the evolution of highly diverse societies, celebrating the relationship between the individual and the community, and fulfilling no small number of roles, needs and purposes, to the point of embracing in its totality all those facets which define man's existence in the world.

Thus does music become entwined with the passing of life itself, its joys and sorrows, its suffering and its hope, going beyond — although not denying — the mere play of sounds and sensory pleasure in order to become a path to knowledge. Music that organizes time, and also space; music which, for Schopenhauer and the Romantics, is born out of the same matter as desire, a balm or nervous stimulus of emotional response, being both an obliging form of escape and a transgressive instrument — music subjugates desires but can also elevate them. It may become a gentle narcotic, as Baudelaire noted in referring to Wagner, only then to transform itself into a crucible of exaltation and ecstasy; alternatively, its dissonances may serve to reveal the truth of human suffering and the irreparable fractures of society; or through irony — for it is also capable of this register — it may point out the radical aporia of absolute knowledge or offer itself to the undying ambition of mystical clairvoyance. Almost without exception all the great thinkers and humanists have turned their attention to music, realizing the central place held by the most immaterial of artistic disciplines, one that, in the life and existence of man, is a mixture of magic, myth, language and science. As on many occasions it was that great demiurge Shakespeare who put it better than anyone, with his categorical warning about the dangerousness of any man whose spirit is unable to find room for

music, to vibrate empathically in time to a few simple notes. This idea was taken up later by Kandinsky, who quoted Goethe: "Musical sound has a direct path to the soul. There it immediately finds a resonance because man 'carries music within himself'."

But music, that language of gelid geometries pregnant with unutterable meaning which is nonetheless able to provoke a trembling emotion, pays a high price for its ability to cast a spell, an ability which resides in the singular ambiguity of its semantic rules — these being one of the features that most confers upon it its unique specificity. Steiner has often stressed this aspect, highlighting the paradoxical dimension which presides over the very being of music, its most intimate nature, determined by its essential, irreducible ambivalence; although its level of internal articulation has the reliable precision of language, we are not given to deducing unequivocally the meaning of its syntax and form, apart from inane appeals to analogue images which rarely avoid the verbosity of metanarrative discourse. And if the task of all art is that which Goethe wisely assigned it, to act as a mediator of the ineffable, its pure materiality revealing its irreducible, and therefore visionary, condition, the ability to extend the range of our perceptions and therefore the creations of the universe itself, then music proves to be a particularly suitable medium for doing so; for it carries its emotional charge to the threshold between feeling and that most ethereal, abstract and ungraspable matter: time.

Yet with respect to meaning there is a fissure in which all its grandeur is likely to be found, but also, undoubtedly, its dangers; those dangers, perceived since classical antiquity, regarding its capacity to undermine desires, the surrender to affected siren songs, all of which results in our gradually relinquishing control. And finally, as Mendelssohn perceived with utmost clarity, an ambiguity exists that stems not from a supposed vagueness of expression, but from its precision, even though any subsequent attempt to illustrate this leads only to the inability to string even two meaningful phrases together. For Green, music must express that *other inexpressible thing*, leading us to contemplate it silently on the very threshold of the great mystery. And if Nietzsche subtly described music as the "art of the night", one that was therefore especially attentive in listening secretly to internal reality, it was Adorno who corroborated this association, discovering within it, as in the ineffable beauty of twilight and the unfathomable depth of night, signs of a beauty "that has not been absorbed into the sphere of meaning". A radical ambiguity, perhaps, that explains why these qualities — and their opposites — are not