

exclusive to what we concede to be great music, but are even also found firmly rooted in music that is more insubstantial and passively subjected to commercial trends. Proust warned us of this in a beautiful text entitled *In Praise of Bad Music*. For such music is often — in its barren simplicity, pretentious sentimentality or coarseness, and despite its lack of those values or qualities which we would regard as inherently musical — the preferred vehicle for the most genuine feelings and emotions of both men and women, and as such it rightly deserves our affection; this is so even in the face of the conspicuous, and often brutal, technological depersonalization imposed by contemporary mass culture, one that has been battered by the winds of postmodern mystifications. It may be appropriate to detest bad music, warns the great writer, but we should never disregard it.

This does not prevent us from stating unhesitatingly that it is the music which we term artistic, for its greater cognitive depth and potential for aesthetic internalization, not to mention its sensual and entertaining aspects, which comes to form a privileged medium of the learned ideal; one, therefore, that serves the autonomy and dignity of human beings as free subjects, expressing the entire range of the living reality of their being in the world, from the barest suffering to the most exultant jubilation, and reaching into every last corner of what we have come to call *humanity*: within our own western culture we have gone from the Notre Dame School to Bach, from Ockeghem to Stravinsky, from Monteverdi to the Romantic composers, from classical Vienna to Debussy, from the Second Vienna School to Ligeti, 'yet we know we must also include all those illustrious artistic expressions to be found in other musics of the world, those which are ever more present in our own society as a ferment of hope in a world that is increasingly globalized — here, used in perhaps its most noble sense, the term seems apt, in that which unites all the world's peoples beyond the chains which so often drag so many innocent and defenseless beings into shadowy seas of hate and lack of understanding, poverty and pain.

At this point we should return to the question posed at the beginning. Why does music have such a powerful effect on the human soul, why does it move us, change —our pulse rate however unconsciously, draw our attention even in the face of our passivity, perhaps involuntarily? One particularly insightful response to this question is that of Hegel, who pointed out that one of its specific features is the fact that musical discourse and the stream of human consciousness become inextricably bound together in a single *reality*. And it is this internalized dimension which undoubtedly

gives this reality its charm, even a devilish one. Thus, seen from this perspective, music is an attempt to capture the most valuable of man's possessions: time, made from a myriad of fleeting moments which are consumed in the very flash of light which marks their birth, and that we are only able to recreate through the active and complicit aid of memory.

Is this not the supreme aspiration of truly great art: to capture time, to fight against its inexorable fleetingness, to fix its blind and vertiginous course, to resist its cruel and unrelenting flow? An aspiration so often commented on — from Vermeer to Proust, from Rilke to Balthus, from Klee to Joyce — and which survives and addresses us in the radiant fullness of the masterpiece, in its perennial present. The ultimate ambition of all artistic expression, this longing finds in music (through its very condition of time *lived*, for its ubiquitous presence) its beloved vehicle, lying in wait for *epiphanic* light, the felicitous realization of those *real presences* evoked by Steiner, of the moment of trance which Nabokov defines as a *fissure in time* that liminal space where, according to Borges, we would become one with God himself. This deep longing, whose magnitude is irrefutably revealed to us, and which music, in which temporality and self-awareness crystallize in a unique non-transferable experience, seeks to fulfil by challenging, through a triumphant creation, the inexorability of death. And it is because music is awareness of time, of what is both ephemeral and enduring in time, that it seeps so deeply into the soul of man, his life being peeled away at the same pace with which the clepsydra wearily, but ineluctably, gives up each atom of its precious substance. Lichtenberg expressed all this with the ingenious levity and pointedness of an aphorism: "Hourglasses do not only recall the rapid flight of time, but also the dust which we will one day become." It is therefore no surprise that the best music — like the most exhilarating art — always borders on the elegiac, until it becomes, in accordance with its transitory nature, the greatest emblem of the *memento mori*. But alongside this, music will always occupy a kind of utopian, and therefore progressive, dimension, one that zealously and enthusiastically drives it toward ever new experiences, toward the innermost depths of our human condition.