

Drawing Distinctions Links Contradictions

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I shall tell what I think while remembering Arnold Schoenberg, rather than tell what he thought while predicting us. Where he was right, we should be deeply ashamed, and where he was in error, I, at least, will not gloat. I can hear and understand the music he desired to compose, and while writing the following pages I thought, not only, but in particular, of his *Trio*.

DRAWING

Arnold Schoenberg, just as Karl Kraus and Charles Ives, knew and expressed how passionately dedicated he was to the society which, as he understood it, he could not stand, and which, as it understood him, could not stand him. His life and letters and prose and poetry and theory and composition demonstrate how he tried to distinguish himself in and from this society. Both. To draw both distinctions at once was his theme and subject matter, even though this meant courting blatant contradiction while dealing, apparently, with mere conflicts.

To the understandable horror of all believers in consistency, coherence, communication, perfect models, and other such comfort-providing, distinction-removing paradigms, he successfully drew this distinction; is successfully drawing it.

DISTINCTIONS

Not many people know how passionately dedicated they are to the society which they can not stand. Unaware of their living in contradiction they live in conflict.

Not many people know how passionately dedicated they are to the society which can not stand them. Unaware of their living in conflict they live in contradiction.

Nobody can stand not being stood.

Nobody wishes to admit that.

Everybody, therefore, searching for an admissible degree of relative comfort resorts to proper English and falsifies the issue, thus: It is difficult to understand why one is not understood.

This proper English falsification underlies the prose and poetry written about Arnold Schoenberg by those of his friends and followers who, once his apologetic avowers, today, equally apologetically, disavow him. It is an underlie, because it is not at all difficult to understand why one is not understood, and that one is not stood because one is understood, and that one can not stand that which one understands precisely because one does.

Not many people know that a discovered contradiction needs to be protected against apologetic explanations reducing it to mere conflict.

Even fewer people know that conflicts can be resolved within the system in which they are said to be conflicts, and that contradictions can not.

To turn contradictions into conflicts is the concern of the reformer who criticizes the flaws in a desired system.

To turn conflicts into contradictions is the concern of the revolutionary who criticizes the flawlessness of an undesired system.

LINKS

Anticommunication is an attempt, not a refusal.

The object is its name when called upon to manifest nothing but its mere existence.

Monologues are lonely dialogues.
Response prevents monologues.

Listeners are called upon to manifest more than their mere existence.
Composers are called upon to manifest more than their mere existence.
Nor is music in performance an object.

Anyone can call that, to which one refuses to respond, a monologue.
Anyone can respond to that which one refuses to call a monologue.

Nobody can call upon anything to manifest nothing but the caller's mere existence.
Anyone can call upon anything to manifest nothing but its mere existence.

Just name it and call it its name.

It is just a matter of disposition.

So disposed, and disposed of, it will leave you alone.
Alone? You do not want to be left alone?

That, then, is a matter of composition.

Our subject is our name when called upon to manifest anything but our mere existence.

Anticommunication is the attempt at protecting a message of contemporary relevance and significance from the unconditional surrender to the addressed receiver.

Every desire can be transformed into a statement which wants to become “true”.

Whenever the maintenance of a system is rated more important than the maintenance of its elements, then the system will solve the problems which assail it and perpetuate the problems which maintain it.

Perpetuated problems generate the desire for a change of system. The opposition to change calls these problems unsolvable in order to reject the fulfillment of desires.

The Composer’s Music solves the problems which maintain it, and perpetuates the problems that assail it.

To learn how to compose is to learn how to construct systems wherein deliberately stipulated premises, statements of desires, become “true”.

Given a thesis or statement which intends to condemn present day reality and facts:

Could you argue for this thesis without using present day reality and facts?

If used as an argument, present day reality and facts will condemn any thesis which condemns them.

Furthermore, an argument which supports a thesis will in turn appear supported by the thesis.

Thus it may happen that you support that which you intend to condemn.

How could you, without using present day reality and facts as an argument, argue for this thesis without becoming a composer?

In the system which perpetuates it, an unsolvable problem is just that.

Communication uses the order and the law that is meant to be recognized by the receiver as the receiver's own; anticomcommunication creates the order and the law that is meant to be discovered by the receiver for the first time.

The music you hear is, among other things, also the music composed by the composer. While you hear what you want to hear, you also hear what the composer wants you to hear, provided your listening neither starts too late nor stops too early. Otherwise you will hear what is, at least according to the composition, the wrong piece. If it matters to a composer that you listen to the right piece, the composer will side with the composition and not permit the listeners to think that it does not matter.

The living organism needs food. When we want to eat, this want follows the instruction of a need. Nobody, however, needs to be either a composer or a listener unless that person wants to. Here the want generates the need and the need for music follows the instruction of a want. Want is the meaningful relation between needs and music. In one case want is a consequence, in the other the cause. To disregard and to belittle want in either case is to gloat over the needy, is to pride oneself on needing nothing.

Spontaneity, at its very best, generates intuitive responses to instructions received. Even the most brilliant improvisation only embellishes obedience to what is wanted from, not by, the musician.

Composers, on the other hand, articulate what they want. Not the mere fact that they want something, but that they articulate it as an instruction, gives music its function in society and, sometimes, renders music immune to the insidious flatteries of commercial absorption.

Nobody will be free from want by just hiding it.

Anticommunication offers more or less decorative garbage to the receiver who wants to understand, but it explodes or condenses into intended messages to the receiver who wants to understand.

Composers bring about that which without them cannot happen.

The present brings about that which can happen without composers.

The future leaves no traces.

The past is traces left.

The present is traced in passing and left.

The environment is traces left in passing and left.

The environment is past present.

It can happen without the composer.

The environment happens within but without the composer.

The composer happens within but without the environment.

Composers bring about that which cannot happen without them.

The composer composes the future so that the composition leave the traces of the future which the future won't leave.

The future cannot happen.

Left to the future it would never happen, not with and not without composers.

Therefore composers bring about that which with and without them cannot happen.

Music for instants and, for instance, poetry.

Communication appeals to the individual owners of personal properties like taste, repertory, language, a past, privileges, beliefs, etc., and problems. Anticommunication is the problem inviting the attack of all who are intelligently tired of the unconditional surrender of long since conditioned messages to ultimately adjusted receivers.

Music wants listeners whether listeners want music or not:

if listeners want music, listeners will react to and interact with whatever listeners think listeners have heard;

if listeners do not want music, listeners cease being listeners and will react to and interact with whatever listeners neither think nor hear.

As soon as the reader has conveyed to each word in this statement the meaning which will allow the statement to appear as a “true” statement, the reader has understood the content of the statement.

Readers who, without thus understanding it, reject the statement as being “false”, fail, in fact, to reject the written statement. They reject only the readers’ reading.

Readers who understand the content of the statement by discovering the conditions under which it becomes “true” and, then, reject the statement as being “false”, fail to reject only the written statement. They also reject the discovered conditions.

Listeners never accept or reject the music. Listeners sometimes accept only, and sometimes reject only, what they think they have heard and, if they know and understand what they have heard, also the composition by which and in which the music has been and, now, is being generated.

Where listeners consume music, both disappear. Where both appear, the listener is consumed by the music. Ready to further either and both, appearances and disappearances, almost all music almost always has been experimental. So have almost all listeners.

If the organization of a system in disorder is attempted with the aim to know all about the system and to render this information communicable, then it may be considered a “scientific” project. Here the system does not only offer the means, but also the contents of communication. It speaks for and about itself.

With a slyly embarrassed, but utterly unapologetic wink of complicity in the general direction of the sciences:

Uncertainty and ambivalence in a communication system betray, more than anything else, the presence of its only justification of existence, namely the presence of information. To lose this is the goal of the system under the inhuman and ruthless dictates of nature. We can but retard this process or gleefully promote it.

The gleeful promoter is the conservative who reads reality by the flickering light emanating from putrid communication systems that have grown sadly safe and certain, hiding nothing, not the slightest bit of information, and who hopes to bask delightedly and soon among the lifeless residuals of today’s unanswered questions.

It is the retarders, on the other hand, who regret that life abandons passing things and configurations, who eagerly learn and study nature’s laws so that they may protect all and themselves against these laws as long as possible, so that information may live a little longer before the communicative pit swallows it, before the digestive system of learned understanding will mutilate meaning for the production of meanings.

All adjectives and adverbs may be removed.

Not removable is the distinction between the conservative who conspires with nature, and the composer who resists its seduction to decay.

If the organization of a system in disorder is attempted with the aim of mobilizing the means for the communication of thoughts which transcend the definition of the system, then it may be considered a “creative” project. Here the system offers the means but not the contents of communication. It speaks for but not about itself.

Whenever I am wanted, I am defined.
Whenever a connection I want wants establishing,
I am wanted.
Thence: rather “whither the statements?” than
“whence?”

*Not one of these statements is thought to be true.
If these statements were thought to be true, the consequences of such thinking would be desirable.
Thus these statements need to be thought of as becoming true.
A program.*

CONTRADICTIONS

Composers wish to bring about that which without them and without human intent would not happen. In particular, they wish to construct systems, contents, stipulated universes, wherein selected objects and statements manifest not only more than their mere existence but have a function or value or sense or meaning which without the composers' constructions they would not have.

Occasionally composers bring about that which without them and without human intent could not have happened.

It was certainly not Schoenberg's wish to bring about that, which without "those who applauded his wish" and without "their intentions" would not happen. As soon as the applause had subsided, as soon as the difference between his intentions and "theirs" became clear, "their" voices rose protesting that not one of them would have committed Schoenberg's error by fulfilling Schoenberg's wish and his intentions as Schoenberg had done. This obvious truism has been used ever since as if it were some kind of contemporary criticism, but has never yet been recognized for the supreme expression of respect that it is, by confirming that indeed Schoenberg had brought about that which without him, and with them, and without his intentions, and with theirs, could not have happened.

Many successful works of art reflect present day reality and facts. Affirmative output of our society. They are successful in that they allow us to see our society, as it is embellished and affirmed by the artists and composers whom it favors.

Some successful works of art reflect the problems which maintain the system wherein they are conflicts. Indignantly contrite output of our society. They are successful in that they allow us to see our society, as it is heavily armed against change, under a thin coat of free thought accorded the artists and composers whom it favors.

A few successful works of art reflect the problems which assail the system wherein they are contradictions. Affront as input to our society. They are successful in that they allow us to see our society as if it were also another, different, society and, rather than its future, that of the artists and composers who favor it.

Even fewer successful works of art reflect the desire for, and the rejection of, our society as tomorrow's reality and facts. Utopia as input to our society. They are successful in that they allow us to see our society as it prevents itself from becoming what it wants to be, to see another society which helps itself to what it wants to be, and its future rather than that of the artists and composers who favor it.

No work of art necessarily fits only one of these descriptions. Every work of art, however, tells composers and their audiences, whether they admit it or not, to which combination of descriptions it best fits.

No description of a work of art necessarily heeds all of the composer's intentions. Most of the composer's intentions, however, may be quite irrelevant for any description of the composition.

No composer necessarily plans to have the composition fit any particular combination of descriptions. Every composer does, however, have a share in the responsibility for that combination of descriptions which fits the composition.

Thus, Arnold Schoenberg is responsible for what he did and said and claimed in his own name, as well as for what was done, said, claimed in his name by others. This does not, however, allow us to confuse him with others. If the claims that were made in his name are now being withdrawn by those who either initially had, or even had not, made them, then I wish to redraw the distinction between the statement, musical or otherwise, made by a composer, and all statements made about this statement by his audience. And if the others remind me of the evidence which shows that the accurate meaning of every statement is powerless against its once enthusiastic, now disavowing, and in many cases inaccurate, interpretations, then I shall change the evidence rather than live in that mental universe in which others, according to their evidence, are right.

I can not and will not remember Arnold Schoenberg in anyone's name but mine.