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Mosaics of a Broken World: Hermann Grab's Social Science, Literature and Music

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Abstract: This study focuses on the broken world that the Prague German writer and musician Hermann Grab (1903–1949) first encountered in 1924 with his study of sociology at Heidelberg. While Grab initially sought to comprehend the new world and make an impact from a sociological perspective, he later embraced literature and music as a means of expressing a way forward. This text highlights Grab's exploration of the dynamics of change in the modern world and their implications for a reformed approach to musical education. His work as a writer and music teacher is emblematic of Prague, where many authors uniquely integrated art and science. Alongside new forms of literary writing, he reflected on a renewal of music education as a reaction to the dissolution of values noted by others at the time, most famously by Hermann Broch. Building on this premise, Grab's doctoral thesis, his novel, and one of his short stories, as well as his views on music education, are brought to bear in order to show how Grab turns the pieces of a fractured world into mosaic tiles whose combination in different art forms points to something beyond this dissolution of values.

Keywords: sociology; interwar Prague; Max Weber; Prague literature; Max Brod; music education; dissolution of values; disenchantment; antisemitism; Jewish studies; Hermann Grab

1. Introduction

The son of a Jewish family of wealthy textile entrepreneurs, Hermann Grab (1903–1949) witnessed the birth of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. That same year, his parents had him baptized, probably as a sign of loyalty to the new republic. In the interwar years, the city's theatres became the place where the young Grab could track social upheavals. At the same time, he developed an interest in a variety of art forms, including music and literature. As a student in the 1920s, Grab experienced the establishment of sociology as an academic discipline and met the later members of the Frankfurt School. Among these was Theodor W. Adorno, with whom he maintained a friendly dialogue for more than twenty years until Grab's death. In the 1920s, in Heidelberg, Grab had access to the intellectual circle of Jewish students and wrote one of the first comprehensive critiques of Max Weber's sociology. Grab read Weber's formula of disenchantment (Entzauberung der Welt)[1] as resignation to the progressive rationalization of all areas of life, and thus made a connection to the dissolution of values noted by others at the time, most famously by Hermann Broch.[2] His dissertation was intended to argue against this, but faced with an academic impasse, he returned to Prague, where he continued his sociological studies in literary texts and his work on reforming music education.

Hermann Grab's time as a student in Heidelberg in 1924/25 was marked by a double impossibility. On the one hand, he grew to know the futility of expressing immanent criticism due to the disciplinary rigidity present even in young academic fields. On the other hand, his path is exemplary of how rare it was, even in the Weimar Republic, for academics of Jewish origin to be able to pursue an academic career. In the early 1930s, Grab finally found himself becoming a central figure of German-language literature in Prague, while the city also became one of the first hubs of intellectual exile. Importantly, Grab tried to maintain the cultural connections between the different communities. Max Brod

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temporarily convinced Grab to join the circle around the cultural Zionist magazine *Die Selbstwehr* (Jaeger 2005); for his older colleague, Grab was destined to become the leader of the next generation of Prague's literary cosmos. But mercilessly expanding fascism in Europe put an end to what Brod later called the Prague German Circle (Brod [1966] 2016). In the cultural Zionist context, Grab was one of the first to address Jewish topics in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* in a public lecture in October 1933, which *en passant* led to his own literary and journalistic work.[3]

In 1939/40, Hermann Grab was in Paris and doing his part to support Europe on the piano by playing music for the troops of the Czechoslovakian exile army in France. After a period of unproductivity in his writing, during which he expressed disillusionment with the German language, he wrote a short story titled *Ruhe auf der Flucht* (Peace on the Road to Exile, (Grab 1957, pp. 50–77)) about the refugee communities in Lisbon when the Portuguese capital was among the last free ports in Europe. Grab portrayed his own experience in exile, highlighting the differences between solidarity and ruthlessness. This resulted in a series of short stories thematizing fascism, fleeing, and exile, most of which were published postmortem.[4] In an article written in memoriam to Grab, Adorno later referred to these writings as "planvoll beschädigte Novellen" (deliberately damaged novellas, (Adorno 1949, p. 594)).[5] In 1941, after making his way to the U.S., Grab established a music school near New York's Central Park, where musical exiles and American musicians came together. Towards the end of his life, he also returned to the time period before the First World War in three literary texts, one fragment (Cramer 1994, pp. 481–99) and two titled *Die Mondnacht* (The Moonlit Night, Grab 1957, pp. 11–24) and *Der Hausball* (The Private Ball, Grab 1957, pp. 78–89). Thus, he explored the social causes of the European catastrophe in a manner reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's childhood reflections written between 1932 and 1938 and first published posthumously as *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (Berlin Childhood around 1900, Benjamin 2019) in 1950. Grab's stories and a surviving fragment of a novel bring together different periods, articulating the trauma of the world wars in a unique literary style.

Ever attuned to the important influence of music, Hermann Grab had acknowledged the hazards of Richard Wagner's music, such as *Die Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods), as early as Arnold Schoenberg's advancements in music theory and practice. In his debut novel, *Der Stadtpark* (The Town Park, Grab 1935)[6], as well as in his writings during his exile in France and later in New York, Grab consistently challenged literary traditions, developing and rethinking them in the context of historical and personal upheavals. The central theme of his work is the socially impactful potential of the arts, particularly literature and music. Despite his early engagement in ongoing literary and cultural debates and his discussions with influential figures such as Gottfried Salomon-Delatour, Max Scheler, Alfred Weber, Richard Strauss, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and the Mann family, his contributions to literary and musical education remain largely unrecognized. His role as a dialogue partner and his influence in the field have not yet been widely acknowledged.[7]

2. The Dissolution of Values and the Dead End of Academia

This study focuses on the mosaics of a broken world that Hermann Grab first encountered around 1924, that is, after the end of the First World War, the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, and the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic. It examines how Grab initially sought to comprehend this changing order of the world from a sociological perspective in order to make an impact on it and then how he expressed these changes through literature. Grab had observed that values, hierarchies, and certainties that had previously been taken for granted were disappearing in all areas of society. He thus explored the dynamics of change and the implications that these changes had for literature and a reformed approach to musical education. Grab's work as a writer and music teacher is emblematic of Prague, where many authors uniquely integrated art and science. Also, the notion of value was pervasive in modernist Prague.[8] This fusion resulted in a relatively small body of work in which Grab, through his literary, essayistic, and music-theoretical

pursuits, engaged with the instability of values in a shifting world. Building on this premise, I delve into Grab's doctoral thesis, his novel, as well as one of his short stories, and his views on music education.

When Hermann Grab enrolled in sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy of Heidelberg University in April 1924, he was in the fifth semester of study (because he had already completed four semesters in Vienna and Berlin); he was not yet the designated "leader of the next generation" of German-language literary figures in Prague, a designation accorded him in 1966 by Max Brod in his *Der Prager Kreis* (The Prague Circle, Brod [1966] 2016, p. 310).[9] In Heidelberg, Grab was eager to understand the changing world through science and studied at the river Neckar with Max Weber's brother Alfred Weber and others. Alfred Weber was especially supportive of Jewish students, many of whom had come to the Weimar Republic from abroad. While in Heidelberg, Grab got to know Theodor W. Adorno as well as Gottfried Salomon, who later became an important advisor for his doctoral thesis. In 1927, Grab finally published the paper entitled *Der Begriff des Rationalen in der Soziologie Max Webers. Ein Beitrag zu den Problemen der philosophischen Grundlegung der Sozialwissenschaft* (The Concept of the Rational in Max Weber's Sociology. A Contribution to the Problems of the Philosophical Foundations of the Social Sciences). It was one of the earliest critiques of Max Weber's sociology and is both the culmination and conclusion of Grab's academic work. In his argument, he proposed to reform academic sociology by criticizing its clear shift away from social reality. In his view, sociology was not concerned with its main task: to analyze society and then change it for the better. Grab thus realized that this attempt to reform was a dead end. With his personal background and scientific intentions, he was an outsider in Weimar's academies. Faced with this academic impasse, he then returned to Prague and began a literary writing endeavor that translated his social science into literature and music education. Alongside new forms of literary writing, he reflected on a renewal of music education as a reaction to the dissolution of values he had observed.

In connection with Grab's dissertation, it is worth mentioning that, after completing his graduation examinations in Prague in 1921 and initially studying in Vienna and Berlin, Hermann Grab found three places and contacts that were particularly influential in his intellectual development. Firstly, Max Weber and, after he died in 1920, his brother Alfred Weber had a significant impact on the development of the young academic discipline of sociology since the end of the 19th century. Following the First World War and the establishment of the Weimar Republic, the first chairs of sociology were established. This was in response to the experiences of the war and the subsequent economic, political, social, and cultural conflicts. Many sociological institutes and journals were founded during this period. Sociology, as a new discipline, promised an understanding of reality and access to the possibilities of changing it. In addition to being connected to reality, sociology interested Grab mainly because it offered the prospect of understanding his experiences of interwar Prague, encompassing art, culture, and politics. Secondly, his intellectual journey was enriched by his interactions with Max Scheler in Cologne. Scheler, a university professor of philosophy and sociology, had been actively engaged in scholarly debates with the field of social science in Heidelberg and rationalist science since 1919 (Acham and Moebius 2022). Grab's dissertation was then significantly influenced by Scheler. Thirdly, Grab was involved in an ongoing intellectual exchange with the practice of sociology in Frankfurt am Main; despite evident differences, there were noticeable similarities between Frankfurt and Cologne (Coomann 2021). In Frankfurt, he met Adorno and the sociologist Gottfried Salomon. Salomon, born into a German–French and Jewish–Protestant family, had completed his doctorate under Georg Simmel in 1915. He then worked at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Frankfurt, where he taught the history of ideas and historical sociology. Salomon was particularly interested in the French labor movement and the development of socialism and historical materialism (Henning 2006). Grab shared more than just Jewish origins with the mostly bourgeois and non-politically organized representatives of the later Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, including Adorno. Both

developed a sensitivity to conflict in their youth, witnessing the various crises in bourgeois society. Their discomfort with the culture of expanding capitalism demanded alternatives. Their connection led to frequent philosophical and personal discussions. Adorno, who was just beginning his career as a music critic, was also interested in contemporary music, wanted to be part of Arnold Schoenberg's circle, and was keen on expressing himself in the fields of philosophy, literature, and sociology (Spitz 2017).

Thus, roughly between 1924 and 1928, Hermann Grab was a young researcher in Heidelberg, Cologne, and Frankfurt at a time when these three cities formed a scientific triangle. Grab participated in discussions in Heidelberg in the early 1920s alongside influential figures such as Adorno, Siegfried Kracauer, Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and others. The discussions were centered on how social sciences could affect reality, and it was also a time when the capital of sociology and social research in the Weimar Republic was determined among these three places (Voller 2022). After his brother's death, Alfred Weber established an independent *Institut für Sozial- und Staatswissenschaften* (Institute for Social and Political Sciences) at the river Neckar. It was viewed as an 'institute of outsiders', attracting a higher-than-average number of Jewish, left-liberal, and socialist students (Demm and Suchoples 2011). Additionally, the institute emphasized a holistic approach to the historical, social, and cultural sciences, in contrast to the growing specialization in individual sciences at the time (Hübinger 2022). In retrospect, you could claim that the dissolution of values was most effectively analyzed in this way. Researchers from all over Europe came to Heidelberg to also escape the impasses in their home countries, but many of them, like Grab, found new dead ends. Likely, Grab's dissertation in Heidelberg was overseen by Alfred Weber, although Weber himself did not recall this in his later years. However, it was Grab's interaction with Gottfried Salomon in Frankfurt that proved to be more influential for his sociological work, as their unpublished correspondence reveals.[10]

But how did Grab, who was raised in the industrial bourgeoisie, come to be interested in sociology in Prague and then at these other institutions? His first motivation was obviously linked to observations he had made in Prague's theatre and music business as well as to his family's textile business. By his final years at school, at the latest, he had developed an uneasy relationship with both. Now, he wanted to theoretically understand his growing aversion to the bureaucratic world of business and the hierarchical nature of class structure in society. He had been irritated by the forced friendships and superficiality of society, especially of his parent's generation. Although Grab, as the eldest son, was supposed to do so, he probably did not want to take over the family business because he did not agree with the production conditions based on competition and constant growth. He also disapproved of the fact that, after the social upheavals of the First World War and the failure of the revolutionary movements, there was no social order in place to deal with the changed world situation. However, he could not yet pinpoint the source of his unease, and it was hardly possible for him to theorize his observations. The study of social sciences and the then-already prominent writings of Max Weber seemed to offer a way of approaching these issues. Grab complemented his curriculum with research on socialism and Marxism, which was common among his generation and also the proponents of the later Frankfurt School. They closely observed the various socialist movements that emerged after the war, promising a social awakening. Above all, recent events, like the emergence of Czechoslovak democracy, the end of Russian tsarism, and the failure of the socialist Soviet Republic in Munich in 1919, attracted their attention. Grab, along with his companions Adorno and Salomon, discussed the necessity of abandoning previous conventions, including social scientific ones, and drawing conclusions from their observations. However, Weber's work alone did not provide Grab with sufficient concepts or a theory that aligned with his beliefs about the pressing social and economic issues. Grab could not find in Weber's analysis the potential for change. For Grab, Weber did articulate an accurate analysis but did not criticize it. And that was—by contrast—the concern and self-imposed task of Grab, Adorno, Salomon, and many others.

Hermann Grab's dissertation thus responded to the conditions of a society that had extended the rationalization of the economy to all areas of social life. For this reason, he criticized the forms and representatives of the current sociology because they did not deliver the alternatives they had promised. In this context, Grab elaborated on how to reform contemporary sociology as a discipline in the academies of social science. In this regard, Max Weber's concept of the rational was the most advanced, but it was still not sufficient. The title of Grab's study, *Der Begriff des Rationalen in der Soziologie Max Webers* (The Concept of the Rational in Max Weber's Sociology), hardly sounds like a comprehensive refutation or a general reformation of the discipline, though it is clear that the author wanted to problematize Weber's concept of rationality. The subtitle of the dissertation, however, conveys the author's ambition: With his "Contribution to the Problems of the Philosophical Foundations of the Social Sciences", Grab is attributing a philosophical foundation to sociology that had not yet been established. When Grab's work appeared in print, readers would have recognized that the author sought to criticize Max Weber's conceptual apparatus from a philosophical perspective, and this in Heidelberg, the very place where Weber's sociology was centered.

Grab's dissertation did not have an immediate impact beyond a few reviews. But in retrospect, it indicates how his intellectual development is related to his position as a scholar of Jewish origin from Prague trying to work in an academic setting where foreign-born Jews rarely achieved success. On the scale of the history of knowledge, his participation in social science and the ongoing debates seem characteristic of the conditions of existence in the Jewish diaspora, in which established disciplines and traditional academic practices were determined by the majority in a non-Jewish society. For this reason, professionals like Grab broke down individual disciplinary boundaries, like those between sociology and philosophy. Efficacy necessitated the exploration of in-between spaces, such as Alfred Weber's institute, hitherto overlooked topics of philosophical social science, and new links between science and society. The historian Shulamit Volkov has demonstrated that, due to antisemitism in Germany, Jews became involved in new academic disciplines such as sociology because it was easier to establish themselves outside of the traditional disciplines (Volkov 1990). Looking back, it seems that this was also the case for Grab's career. Though it was a relatively new field, sociology, in particular, gained prominence during the interwar period, and Grab's studies in Heidelberg reflect the interplay of his own critique of Weber's sociology and the challenges he faced as a scholar of Jewish origin from Prague. His intellectual career was likely inhibited under these conditions, even if he may not have been aware of it at the time.

Thus, Grab's confrontation with a dead end in academia is also part of his intellectual development and, thus, part of the history of Jewish existence in the Weimar Republic. Grab attempted to change sociological practices because, in his view, social scientists had only analyzed the dissolution of values without using gained insights to improve social conditions. Grab's dissertation—and the context in which it was written—offers a critical perspective on the academic world of the time and provides a broader view of the debates between the schools of social science in Heidelberg, Cologne, and Frankfurt am Main. In addition, Grab's dissertation itself, as well as letters from those years, ultimately document the impossibility of making a social impact in and through sociology and, consequently, Grab's gradual turning away from academic practices. An examination of these touchstones reveals how his path to becoming a writer was prepared in Heidelberg and explains the extent to which social science issues were to remain present in his literary and essayistic work.

3. The Dissolution of a Child's World

In his post-dissertation fictional writings, Grab clearly strives to integrate his sociological ideas into his storytelling. The main theme of *Der Stadtpark* (The Town Park) is the adult world, which the twelve-year-old protagonist Renato doesn't fully understand, and the impossibility of meeting its expectations. The third-person narrator of the novel takes on a

childlike, naive perspective that observes society and its norms and explores the resulting changes in the perception and emotions of those coming of age. From Renato's point of view, the book describes how he feels isolated in this complex situation, dealing with a series of misunderstandings and complications. In about 189 pages spanning four chapters, Grab evokes the war years 1915 and 1916.

The depiction of the characters, environment, and time period in *Der Stadtpark* could be categorized as impressionist, typical of the late 19th century, rather than the more prevalent expressionist style of the 1930s. Thus, the novel, published in 1935, as well as other stories written by Grab during the Prague period, may seem outdated when considering other literary developments. After all, the grotesque, coarse, and libidinous books such as Ludwig Winder's *Die jüdische Orgel* (The Jewish Organ, Winder 1922) or Hermann Ungar's *Die Verstümmelten* (The Maimed, Ungar 1923) had already been published more than ten years earlier. In terms of content, Grab's book is closer to works such as the already mentioned trilogy by Hermann Broch *Die Schlafwandler* (The Sleepwalkers, Broch [1930/32] 1978), although the decay of social values is, of course, much more explicit there. Grab's novel could also be read together with *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války* (The Good Soldier Švejk, Hašek [1921–1923] 1996) by Jaroslav Hašek.[11]

It is immediately clear that the main ideas from Grab's dissertation, for example, the rigid social hierarchies and the missed insights into a changing world, especially among the generation of the protagonist's parents, are at the center of his novel. The titular park is an urban space in which tradition and new beginnings overlap during the war. In this setting, individuals pursue personal happiness while also adhering to social conventions. The protagonist, Renato, experiences his first sense of community as a child, meeting others under the supervision of caregivers. These gatherings serve as a testing ground for individuality within the community, allowing for both socialization and resistance to societal norms. The park sees a mix of people from different social classes. Along the quiet pathways near the park's edge, people from the middle class go for leisurely walks, both reflecting a cultural tradition dating back to the 19th century and appearing somewhat outdated in the present day. Because of the nearby train station, the war returnees also move through the park and, in an understated manner, belie the seeming normalcy. The subtle comments by the narrator suggest that, with a war raging outside the city, even those who live there are complicit because of their complacent bourgeois nature. They do not take action to stop it. In Grab's own words, this is summarized in an image at the end of the novel, when the protagonist, Renato, takes a final stroll through the park with his maid:

> Miß Florence hatte einen neuen kleinen Weg entdeckt, der neben der Mittelallee an ein paar Birkenstämmen vorbeiführte. "Schau", sagte sie, "die Krokusse kommen schon". Sie denkt, daß man sich darüber freuen muß, meinte Renato bei sich selbst. Sie denkt es, so wie es im deutschen Lesebuch geschrieben steht. Die Menschen wissen nicht, was es Schönes gibt. Vielleicht, so meinte er, hat jemand einmal gesagt, daß der Frühling etwas Schönes ist, und seither sprechen sie es nach und schreiben es in den Büchern.
>
> (Miss Florence had discovered a new little path, which led past a few birch trees on one side of the central avenue. "Look", she said, "the crocuses are already coming up." "She thinks one has to be happy about it", Renato said to himself. "That's what she thinks, just as it's written in the German reading book. People don't know what's beautiful. Perhaps", he said, "somebody once said that spring was a beautiful thing, and since then they go on repeating it and they write it in books.", (Grab 1985, p. 84; translated by Hoare in Grab 1988, p. 98)).

In my opinion, the aphorism that "people don't know what's beautiful", encapsulates the content of the entire novel, capturing the rigidity of society in a few words and commenting on it almost nostalgically while converting Grab's sociological ideas into literature. Thus, this sentence is also a reminder of the dissolution of values, which in

this case manifests itself in the stagnation, inflexibility, and unwillingness of society to re-examine values.

When Grab was asked about his poetic principles by the *Prager Montagsblatt* shortly before the publication, he had explained that he had made an effort

> ein Stück Leben darzustellen und nichts mehr als das. [. . .] Geschichtsphilosophisch gesehen, scheint mir trotz aller äußeren Brutalität historischer Tatbestände dennoch ein linearer Prozeß der Psychisierung, der immer wachsenden Differenzierung des inneren Lebens gegeben. Eines inneren Lebens, das vielleicht gerade im Zusammenhang seiner zunehmenden Sukzivität [sic] äußerlich immer weniger Raum einzunehmen vermag, das aber zu jeder Zeit den einzigen Ansatzpunkt für dichterische Gestaltung bedeuten konnte. Die Erlebniswelt eines reagiblen, frühreifen Knaben gab mir nun den besten Anlaß, mich um die Gestaltung einer in unserem Sinne differenzierten psychischen Realität zu bemühen.
>
> (to represent a piece of life and nothing more than that. [. . .] From the point of view of the philosophy of history, it seems to me, in spite of all the external brutality of historical facts, that there is nevertheless a linear process of psychization, of the ever-growing differentiation of inner life. An inner life that is perhaps able to take up less and less space externally precisely in the context of its increasing successiveness [Sukzivität], but which could at any time be the only starting point for poetic writing. The world of experience of a sensitive, precocious boy now gave me the best reason to strive to create a psychological reality that was differentiated in our sense, Prager Montagsblatt vom 28. Januar 1935, (Cramer 1994, p. 413)).

These thoughts also reveal Grab's sociological and philosophical concerns. His observation of the ongoing differentiation and exploration of human psychology, despite or perhaps even because of the increasing but often unrecognized rigidities of social conditions and the simultaneously increasing perception of one's own inner life. The literary depiction of these dynamics constitutes a continuation of considerations addressed in his sociological work. In this sense, the student Grab is incorporated into Renato, whose voice and perception remain that of a child, as it were. The fact that he is "precocious", as Grab claims, creates a representation of childhood that expresses connections that adults have already forgotten how to think.

4. Dissolution in the Real World as Disarray in the Spectre Kingdom

Four short stories written by Hermann Grab between 1932 and 1938 in Prague are easily distinguishable from his novel in terms of content and form. The titles are *Der Taxichauffeur* (The Taxi-driver), *Der Mörder* (The Murderer), *Unordnung im Gespensterreich* (Disarray in the Spectre Kingdom), and *Gespräch eines Toten* (What the Dead Man Said). They are not exactly datable and are only a few pages long. Grab highlights the disorder that already existed in the novel but has now shifted into the world of the dead and ghosts. In comparison to *Der Stadtpark* (The Town Park), these stories have a completely new tone and a changed atmosphere. Despite their brevity, the stories explore similar or evolving motifs. Grab successfully juxtaposes his role models, Marcel Proust and Franz Kafka, with something uniquely his own: Throughout his novel and short stories, Grab conducts stylistic experiments that refine and condense literary language. The narratives also reflect the dramatization of disenfranchisement and persecution of social groups during the 1930s in Prague, with a particular focus on the increasing threat to the Jewish population. This theme is a permanent presence in the stories, conveyed by a sense of alienation and the omnipresence of death.

The story *Unordnung im Gespensterreich* (Disarray in the Spectre Kingdom) briefly touches upon the world depicted in the novel, but now it appears to have become silent and gloomy. The first two sentences describe this atmosphere and evoke the famous golden roofs of Prague: "Friedlich liegen jetzt die Paläste. In der Sonne sind ihre Flächen scharf

abgegrenzt, gegen Abend ziehen sie sich zusammen, und später noch scheint hinter einem Fenster eine kleine Lampe, klingt ein dünner Glockenton vereinzelt durch die Nacht." (The palatial buildings lie in peace now. In sunlight their surfaces are outlined sharply, towards evening they huddle a little closer together and later still a small lamp burns behind a window and the faint sound of a bell occasionally peals out through the night, (Grab 1985, p. 87; translated by Hoare in Grab 1988, p. 117)). This two-page text then depicts a girl practicing the piano in her home. Figures like palaces and nobility still exist in the outside world, but according to the narrator's suggestion, they may soon disappear completely. The people, much like the girl at the piano, are troubled by specters haunting their rooms:

> Plötzlich tritt es durch den Plüschvorhang ins Zimmer und das Gespenst steht da. Es ist der Großvater, klein und dick, im dunklen Lüsterrock und mit dem weißen Spitzbart. So tritt er langsam ans Klavier heran und sieht von hinten in den Notenband. Das Kind springt auf, schreit laut und läuft in die andere Ecke. Inzwischen ist freilich alles längst verschwunden
>
> (But suddenly it steps through the plush curtains into the room and there stands the spectre. It is her grandfather, small and fat, in his dark lustre jacket and with his white goatee. He steps slowly across to the piano and looks over her shoulder at the music book. The child leaps up, screams loudly and runs into the far corner. Meanwhile, of course, all has long since vanished, (Grab 1985, p. 87; translated by Hoare in Grab 1988, pp. 117–18)).

Grab thus illustrates an atmosphere in which the old world has faded away, leaving only specters behind and allowing disarray to take hold. While the characters and settings may be reminiscent of the past, the narrative world is now dominated by dreams and illusions, with glimpses of reality only occasionally breaking through while being compromised by specters at the same moment. In the novel discussed above, Renato's emotions and fears materialize in fleeting moments, but then he retreats to his inner self, where he finds comfort. However, in this story, it seems that the balance shifts, with outside reality taking precedence over inner life and illusion. The narrator's matter-of-fact tone towards the specters suggests the self-evident disarray of her world. The narrative style in some passages of *Der Stadtpark* (The Town Park) is more radical than others, shifting from a childish naivety to a tone that reflects Renato's refusal to conform to conventions as he contemplates the absurdity of his circumstances. Here, in the specter kingdom, this absurdity becomes inescapable, as the perception is no longer relativized by any authority as mere imagination. Dreams and illusions are no longer dismissed as such. Instead, the ghosts and the desolation that comes with them seem inevitable and fatal. Thus, "wer es also ertragen konnte, einem dieser armen Wesen [einem Geist, MS] ins Gesicht zu sehen, der hat für immer alle Hoffnung aufgegeben." (anyone who could thus bear to look one of those poor creatures [a specter, MS] in the face, that person has abandoned all hope for ever, (Grab 1985, p. 88; translated by Hoare in Grab 1988, p. 119)). If the specters are the representative of an outdated society, this description of perception once again comments pointedly on the dissolution of values to express that no resistance remains. Beyond that, the events in the story can be seen as a parable with clear parallels to the context of its contemporary history: The specters symbolize the situation in Prague not long after the First World War but also, in retrospect, reflect the late 1930s, during which National Socialist tendencies were gaining ground, encroaching upon the private sphere.[12]

5. The Rationalization of Society and the Dissolution of Music Education

In the 1930s, Hermann Grab not only published his first novel and drafted the aforementioned short stories, but he also published more than 200 newspaper articles for the *Prager Montagsblatt* [Prague Monday Paper]. With these activities, he consistently emphasized the commonalities among social and political groups, as well as many emigrants, a stance that was not yet commonly at odds with the atmosphere in 1930s Prague. He also argued for the value of music education for a more humane society and as an antidote to

the pure expedience of education and the rationalization of everyday life, which was also part of his diagnosis of the dissolution of values. In this way, it is evident how Grab brings his sociological insights from Heidelberg to the musical sphere in Prague, highlighting now his belief in the transformative capacity of music. During this period, Grab produced 16 radio features for the German radio station in Prague, in which he would introduce the upcoming musical radio program and enthusiastically announce international musical novelties. He emphasized the mastery of Prague composers in program previews, highlighting a German-speaking music and cultural scene in Czechoslovakia. That sphere was not yet subject to nationalizing tendencies, and Grab mentioned Prague composers such as Josef Bohuslav Foerster, Jaroslav Řídký, Fidelio Finke, Rudolph von Procházka, or Josef Suk, who is still well known today and was already recognized by Grab as one of the most important representatives of Czech music. Additionally, he presented contributions, introducing musical works that he then played on the piano or clavichord, as Adorno or Leonard Bernstein later did.[13]

This panorama evokes the atmosphere of Grab's upbringing, in which the blending of the German-speaking and Czech cultural scenes had already become commonplace, at least in principle. Despite the nationalization efforts in Germany after 1933, which were gradually felt in Prague due to vigorous discussions about the German minority's affiliation in the Sudetenland and other parts of the Czech lands, Grab's commitment to maintaining cultural connections is evident. While it is true that only a small portion of the population had previously visited theaters representing different cultural groups and mainly engaged with works from their own cultural sphere, in the 1930s, an increasing number of German-speaking individuals only attended the New German Theatre in Prague and were never seen in the counterpart. However, Grab continued to cover not only the city's German stages but frequented Czech theaters as well. Also, in the German orchestra pit, many Czech musicians came together, while in the Czech National Theatre, Germans played together with Czech musicians. The competition across cultural lines was highly valued and often considered beneficial. A first look at some of Grab's German-language articles shows how closely connected the cultural spheres in Prague were: *Zdenka Ziková, Tschechische Philharmonie unter Zemlinksy* (The Czech Philharmonic under Zemlinsky), *Špalíček* (a ballet by Bohuslav Martinů) among several others, as well as the reviews of composers such as Hans Kraša.[14] On the one hand, this suggests that the space of German culture in Prague was still not as isolated as it was often previously described for the period before the first Czechoslovak Republic (Prague as "dreifaches Ghetto", or three-fold ghetto, Eisner 1933). Grab's articles demonstrate his perseverance by continuing to report on Prague's cultural wealth in the 1930s despite the increasing cultural and political pressure of nationalism coming from Germany and also the German national chauvinist areas in the Czechoslovak Republic. Grab pursued cultural mediation, similar to Max Brod and others (Nekula 2017, pp. 81–82).

In addition to writing articles for the *Montagsblatt* and broadcasting on the radio, Grab, who rarely performed at concerts due to rheumatism in his hand, conducted a series of music education and theory lectures in Prague (1933–1939).[15] Through these lectures, Grab emphasized the potential of music as an educational opportunity for society, especially for young people. However, he believed that this potential could only be realized through pedagogical reform. Grab applied his sociological and poetic ideas to music, suggesting that, in an era of increasing rationalization, music lessons were mistakenly considered useless. While in exile in New York, he even addressed the question of how music education could help to restore the knowledge and education lost during the time of fascism. He believed that engaging in activities that were not tied to any immediate, pragmatic purpose was essential for human coexistence. In 1937, in a lecture on music education he stated programmatically: "In dieser Herrschaft der Mittel über die Zwecke, in dieser Funktionalisierung des Einzelnen, dieser Entseelung des Menschen, der aufhört, ein Mensch zu sein, haben wir das böse Erbe einer mechanistischen Zeit." (In this domination of means over ends, in this functionalization of the individual, in this de-souling of the

human being who ceases to be a human being, we have the evil legacy of a mechanistic age, Hermann Grab, without title quoted in (Cramer 1994, p. 436)). For Grab, music was part of a counterinitiative to dehumanization.

In his lecture *Mechanische Musik im Spiegel der Kultursituation* (Mechanical Music in the Mirror of the Cultural Situation, 1933/34), given in the house of a record collector, Grab connects the widespread use of records and the phenomenon of collecting with Max Weber's concept of the disenchantment, again demonstrating a clear link to his sociological and literary writings. In his contemplation of the "mechanization" of life and culture, Grab's portrayal of the interplay between progress and regression in modern mechanization also echoes Walter Benjamin's essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction), which Benjamin first wrote in 1935 and later revised while in exile in Paris, a city to which Grab would also relocate four years later. As Grab suggests in letters from Paris to Adorno in late 1939 and 1940, the two have discussed this and other topics.[16] As early as 1934, Grab wrote about the cultural impoverishment that could be considered a result of technical development:

> Man wird von der modernen Massivierung des Lebens sprechen, von der Mechanisierung auch in dem Verhältnis zu unseren höchsten Kulturgütern, von dem allgemeinen Behagen an einem allseitigen mittleren Niveau (soweit ein solches ökonomisch noch in Frage kommt), und von diesem Standpunkt gesehen erscheint die Schallplatte nur als banalstes Bestandstück des Filmidylls des Weekendtraums, wenn wenige Meter abseits von der Chaussee ein Kofferapparat den Schlager spielt, der so schnell überholt ist, wie die Grammophonplatte zerbrochen und vielleicht auch das Glück, welches das Lied auf sich bezogen hat.
>
> (One will speak of the modern massification of life, of mechanization also in relation to our highest cultural assets, of the general comfort of an all-round middle level (as far as such an average level is still economically possible), and seen from this point of view, the record appears only as the most banal component of the film idyll of the weekend dream, when a suitcase plays the hit a few meters away from the highway, which is as quickly outdated as the gramophone record is broken and perhaps also the happiness that the song is referring to, Hermann Grab, *Mechanische Musik im Spiegel der Kultursituation* quoted in (Cramer 1994, p. 379)).

But Grab does not leave it at this observation about the short-lived nature of trends in the culture industry. Rather, it is clear to him that

> die Anschauung, die in einem heutigen äußeren Artefakt einer Fabrik, einem Bahnhof, einer Wolkenkratzergruppe etwas anderes als bloße Zweckdienlichkeit sieht [...], und die in diesen Dingen einen neuen Zauber, eine neue Romantik sucht, sie [diese Anschauung, MS] hat ihren falschen Zauber längst entschleiert.
>
> (the assumption, that sees in today's external artifact of a factory, a train station, a group of skyscrapers something other than mere expediency [...], and which seeks in these things a new magic, a new romanticism, it [this assumption, MS] has long since unveiled its false magic, Hermann Grab, *Mechanische Musik im Spiegel der Kultursituation* quoted in (Cramer 1994, p. 380)).

In the act of recognizing that the aforementioned new artifacts do not in themselves improve societies, Grab perceived the potential for positive change: realizing what is wrong as the first step towards changing it. On a more individual level, the mechanical musical instrument reflects the clash between mass society and the individual psyche, symbolizing the human condition in the modern age as the atomized self. Grab shares similar views on the illusion and superficiality of modern life in his—here only briefly mentioned—lecture on Marcel Proust, given in October 1933.[17] According to Grab, the depth in music also disappears when hearing a record because the technical reproduction does not enable differentiation between the instruments, as the notes and tones are no

longer produced with different instruments. They are uniformly conveyed to the listener from the gramophone as if it were just one single instrument.

In many of his other lectures on music education, Grab also addresses the question of how music is conveyed and in what context in order to highlight the necessity of its reform. He viewed contemporary music education as still being stuck in the nineteenth century and not adapting to modern life, a parallel to the criticism in his dissertation that sociology does not aim to reform society, just analyze it. In contemporary society, learning an instrument is often seen as unnecessary, while a culture of idolizing composers and performers has developed instead. According to Grab, outstanding music-making had become an end in itself, reducing music to individual benefit and social advancement. In contrast, Grab advocated for a music education that focuses on the positive impact of music on human character. According to him, pupils do not have to strive for perfect implementation of the score; instead, they should develop a sense of the composition's structure, which enables them to learn to measure and order beyond music. He believed that only such a music education can claim to benefit society as a whole.

In 1936, as part of the *Internationale Gesellschaft für Neue Musik* (International Society for Contemporary Music), founded by Arnold Schoenberg and others, Grab emphasizes in another lecture *Zur historischen Situation des privaten Musikunterrichts* (The Historical Situation of Private Music Lessons) that, since Beethoven, a focus on individuality and a singular personality had become influential in music, because "Freiheit heißt freie Konkurrenz, Kampf und schließlich Sieg des Einzelnen." (Freedom means free competition, struggle and finally the triumph of the individual, Hermann Grab, *Zur historischen Situation des privaten Musikunterrichts* quoted in (Cramer 1994, p. 383)). This expectation placed on the individual forces personal achievement in order to stand out in society. To counter this development, it was important to convey not only the musical structure of a piece but also the historical context of the work. Grab embraces an idea similar to one propagated by Schoenberg's *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen* (Association for Private Musical Performances), where the goal was to convey the essence of the musical works rather than focusing on the virtuosity of interpretation (Gervink 2018, p. 238). Again, Grab traced the individuation beginning with Beethoven and the numerous specializations in music to the development of a virtuosity that ultimately led to this "triumph of the individual". Despite these developments, Grab believed he was witnessing the beginnings of a new community spirit in music: According to him, the situation was approaching the Zeitgeist, which existed before Beethoven and the eighteenth century and which had fostered harmony and coexistence through music-making. The increased complexity of modern life needs to be taken into account to create new methods of music education that are able to meet the challenges of both developments.

To promote the sorely needed new methods of music education, Grab wanted to establish a music committee or even an institute for music education. Grab's engagement in this regard on the radio and in the press, as well as a combination of concerts with lectures, was intended to implement reforms. Grab was thus already pushing this project forward from 1936 onwards. In addition to his friend Adorno, Grab wanted to win over the composer and music theorist Ernst Krenek. Much like Grab, Krenek pointed to the specialization of music-making at the time and criticized the declining interest in pedagogy and that of young people in creating and dealing with new music.[18] Both criticized the idea of a work's perfect re-enactment, something which, in their view, paradoxically prevented a deep understanding of it. However, Grab's project could not be implemented in Prague; it was only in exile in New York that he was able to establish his own music school. The music industry in America then posed other challenges.[19]

6. Lingering Hopes

Hermann Grab's works on music education and his writings develop an understanding of the changing perception of them and the relationship of this change to a hierarchy of values from the 1920s until the late 1940s, from Prague and Heidelberg to New York.

Already evident in his dissertation, Grab critically examined his environment and identified the potential for improving social coexistence. For Grab, art, as such, should play a significant role; literature and music, in particular, should preserve and reinstate a humane coexistence. His search for "wahre Harmonie" (true harmony, Schönwiese 1958, p. 265),[20] as his late publisher Ernst Schönwiese admiringly put it, and even more Grab's general belief in artistic practice as a reflection on social upheaval, is remarkable to this day, at a time when the social (trans-)formative power of literature and music, as well as scientific research into these topics, is being increasingly called into question by contemporary neoliberal society. In the highly appreciative memorial to his dear friend, the profoundly saddened Adorno highlighted Grab's exceptional talent and regretted that "daß er starb, ohne zu vollenden was ihm möglich gewesen wäre, bezeugt etwas von der Ohnmacht des Geistes selber". (that he died without completing what would have been possible for him testifies to something of the faint of the mind itself (Adorno 1949, p. 594)). Reading Grab's stories, articles, and essays today cannot put together the mosaics in this broken world, and it does not aim to. But, it can help readers understand individual mosaics of a broken world; in other words, the events that led Europe to its deadliest war. Thus, reading Grab today could help to empower one's mind and recognize a disintegrating value system in its beginning stages.

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Notes

1 In his 1917 lecture *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, Max Weber used his concept of the "Entzauberung der Welt" (disenchantment) to explain the development of science towards the rationalization of all areas of knowledge and religion of life as a whole. According to Weber, everything in the modern age was subordinated to measurability and functionalization (Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (1917/1919). In (Baier et al. 1992, p. 87)).

2 The term of the dissolution of values (Zerfall der Werte) was coined by Hermann Broch, who was known to Grab and became a central concept in the period after the First World War. In the third volume of *Die Schlafwandler* titled *1918—Huguenau oder die Sachlichkeit*, Broch repeatedly inserts individual essayistic-philosophical sections between the narrative chapters, which bear the common title *Der Zerfall der Werte* and accompany the events as an excursus or a kind of indirect commentary (Broch [1930/32] 1978, pp. 383–718). See also (Schönwiese 1959, p. 12).

3 See for deeper insights into Hermann Grab's German-language lecture on Proust (published in Cramer 1994, pp. 465–79) and his self-understanding as an author (Spitz 2021).

4 After the Austrian publisher Ernst Schönwiese published some of Grab's stories in his magazine *Wort in der Zeit* in the late 1940s, he compiled a volume of Grab's stories in 1957, eight years after the latter's death (Grab 1957). The most complete edition of Grab's work in German to date was published by Fischer in 1985 (Grab 1985).

5 All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

6 *Der Stadtpark* was first translated into English by Quintin Hoare and published by Verso in 1988 (Grab 1988).

7 Much of the biographical information in this paragraph is based on the work of Karl Hobi (Hobi 1969) and Doortje Cramer (Cramer 1994). The emphases and theses, however, are my own.

8 The research project *Communities of Dialogue. Russian and Ukrainian Émigrés in Modernist Prague* in Fribourg (Switzerland) currently explores the notion of value in Prague and therefore deals not only with German-language literature but also integrates Czech, Russian, and Ukrainian authors. Abstracts available online: https://comdial.sdvigpress.org/post-767 (accessed on 1 July 2024).

9 For Brod, Grab had already achieved amazing accomplishments with his first book. He had learned from Kafka and Proust and thus created his own delicate, noble style and had a fine sense of composition (Brod [1966] 2016, p. 304).

10 The correspondence is located in the Salomon-Delatour estate in Amsterdam (Delatour Papers, International Institute of Social History Amsterdam (IISH), 392/1-11). It contains ten letters (seven handwritten by Hermann Grab and three typewritten by Gottfried Salomon) and a postcard from Grab, all written between 1924 and around 1928.

11 In this very well-known picaresque novel (which Max Brod and Hans Reimann adapted for the stage in 1927 and thus conveyed to a German-speaking audience), the authority of an outdated social order is also revealed as corrupt through supposed naivety and adaptation. The result was a hugely popular novel both in Czech and in German translation. Max Brod did not only promote

Hermann Grab and, most prominently, Franz Kafka. He was, in general, one of the most important mediators between German and Czech circles in Prague. He was fluent and worked in both languages (Vassogne 2009).

[12] Peter Staengle and Ernst Schönwiese have already pointed out the "Zeitbezogenheit" (time-relatedness, Staengle in (Grab 1985, p. 204)) of the stories to the 1930s—even more that of *Der Mörder* (The Murderer)—and also that *Unordnung im Gespensterreich* (Disarray in the Spectre Kingdom) symbolizes the dissolution of values diagnosed by Hermann Broch (Schönwiese 1958, p. 260).

[13] Hermann Grab's radio features have not been preserved, but Eckhard Jirgens was able to find 16 features in the Prague radio archives and four program previews that document Grab's work for German music broadcasts on Czechoslovakian radio (Jirgens 2017).

[14] For the full list of Grab's texts see (Cramer 1994, pp. 327–37).

[15] These manuscripts are published in (Cramer 1994, pp. 379–448). See for more on these lectures (Spitz 2024).

[16] The correspondence between Hermann Grab and Theodor W. Adorno has not been published and is located in the Theodor W. Adorno Archive, Akademie der Künste Berlin (497/1-59). It contains 41 letters written between 1926 and around 1949.

[17] I am currently preparing the publication of my dissertation on Hermann Grab, in which this and other topics are described in more detail.

[18] See Ernst Krenek, Was erwartet der Komponist von der Musikerziehung? Referat auf dem 1. Internationalen Kongreß für Musikerziehung, Prag, 8. April 1936 in (Maurer Zenck 2020, pp. 398–99).

[19] In some of his letters to Adorno from the late 1940s, as well as in his last story, An einen befreundeten Komponisten (To a Composer Friend, Cramer 1994, pp. 388–92) from 1948, Grab elaborates on how the competitive drive in America was even intensified in his perception.

[20] Ernst Schönwiese also uses the concept of "Harmonie" (harmony, Schönwiese 1959, p. 13) in his aforementioned essay from 1959, in which he elaborates on the dissolution of values based on the works of Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, and Franz Kafka, and shows how they counter the dissolution in their literature. Implicitly, through his two essays, Schönwiese includes Hermann Grab among his far more prominent examples.

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