If I am a musical thinker,

Talk

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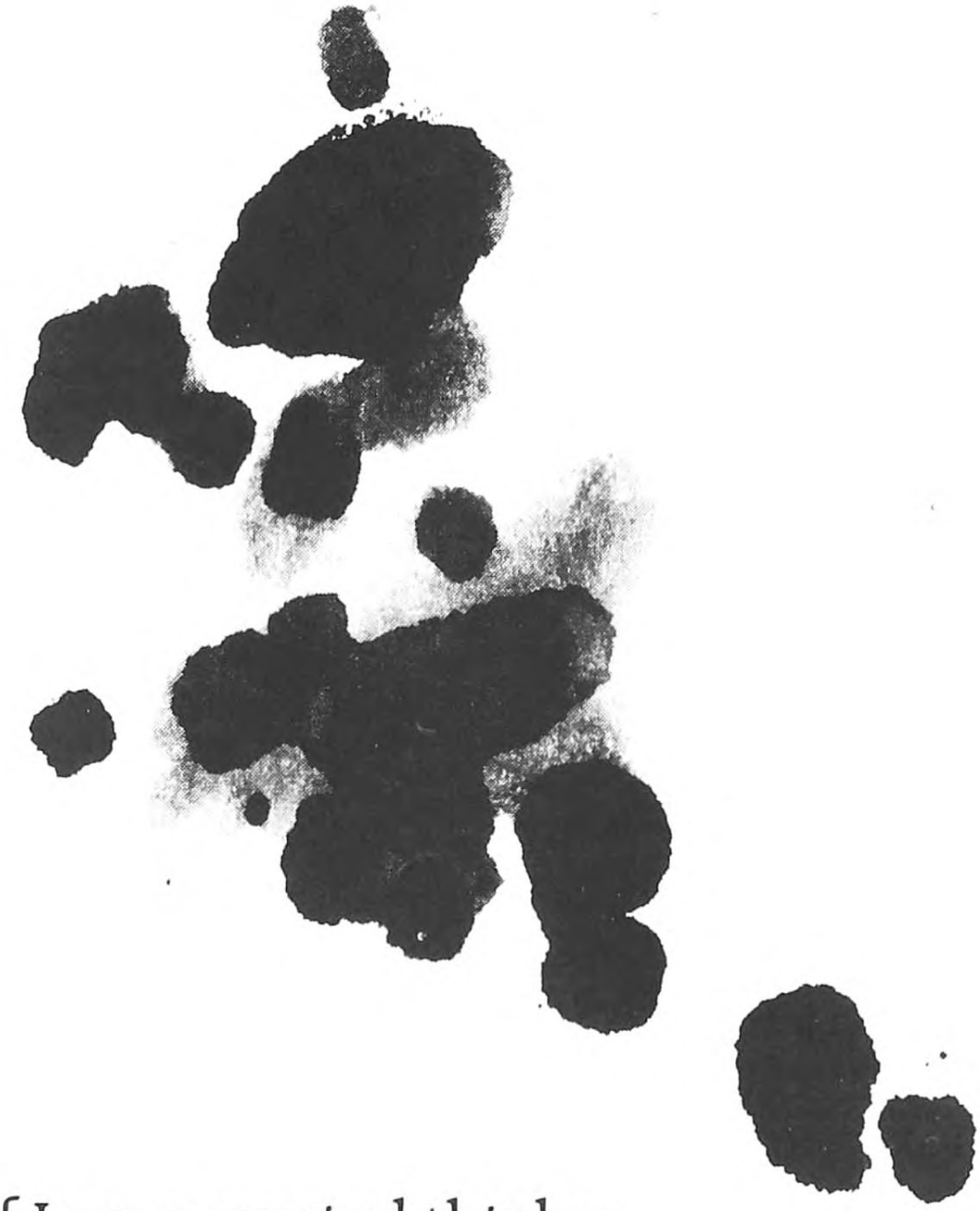
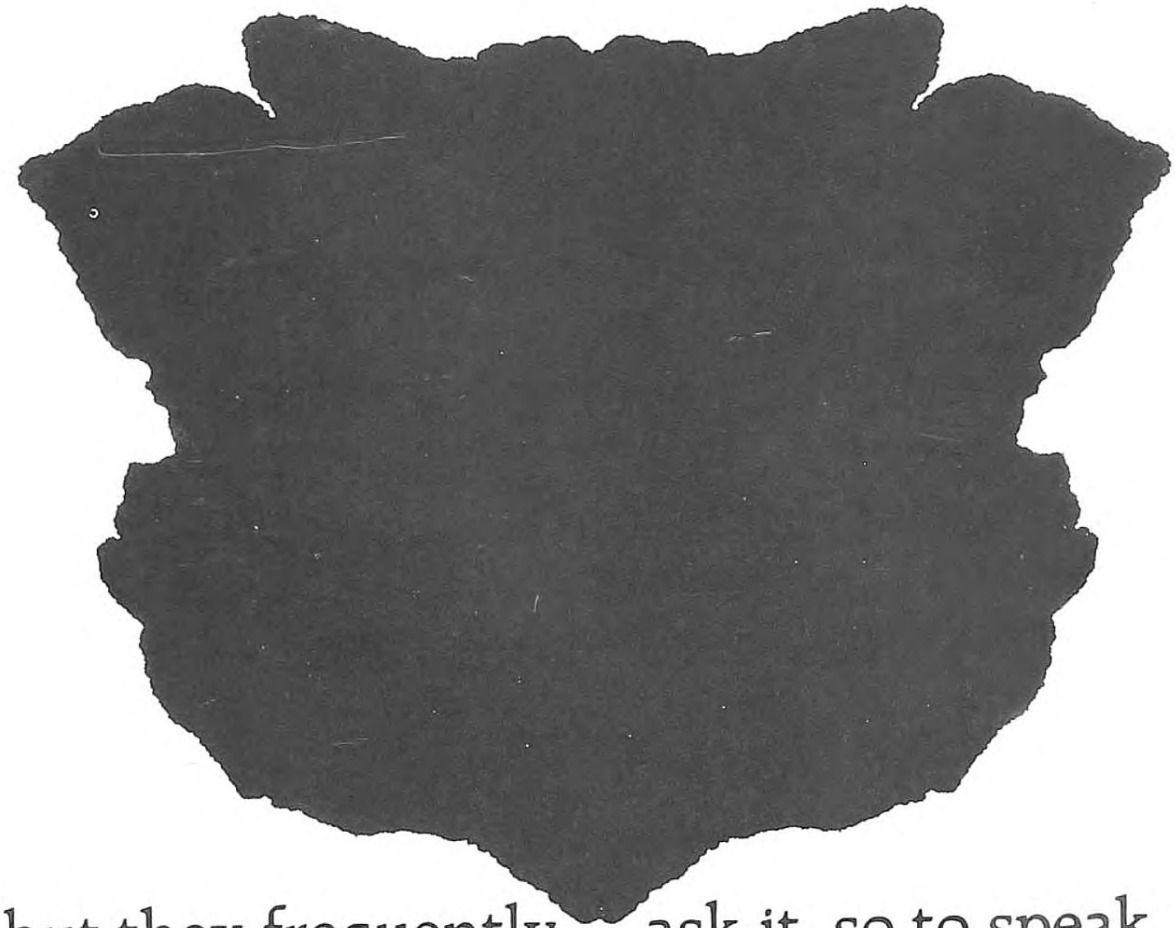


If I am a musical thinker,

I want to know what it is I'm thinking about, and in the hope of what outcome.

People are always asking

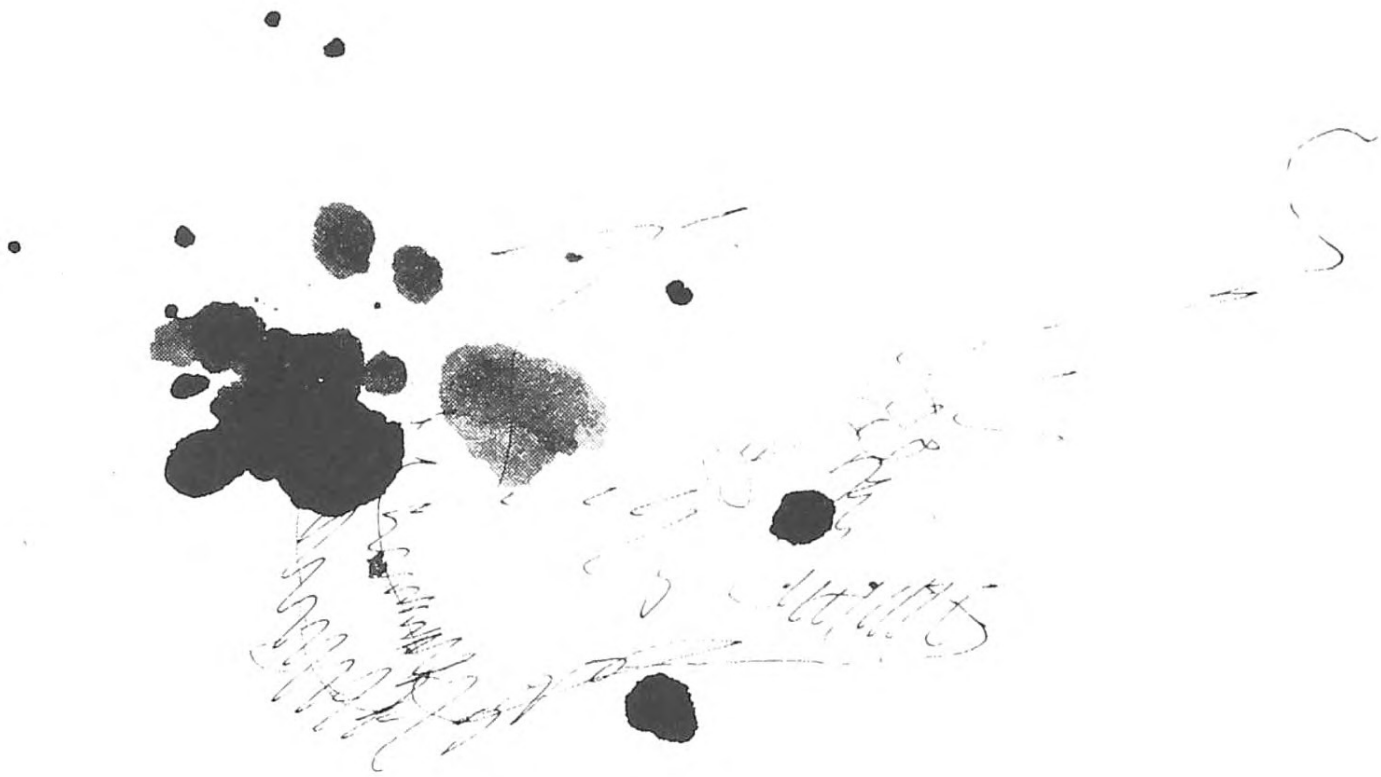
what music expresses;



but they frequently ask it, so to speak,

in the third person;

that is, they speculate on expression from a point of view exterior to the organism's felt need for expression, and exterior to anyone in particular's experience of expression.



So if I want to know
what music expresses,
and if I want to know why
I think about music,
I have to introspect
my own experience,
my experience of my own needs
and my experience
of how,
and which, and in what way,
needs are being fulfilled or engaged
in the transaction of musical activity.

Primally, I need identity — as much of it as I can amass; for my need for identity is mutually articulated with my terror of annihilation.

And identity is sought through expression;

the media of expression are what I find

to texture and realize my expressive needs;

and the effectiveness of a medium, of

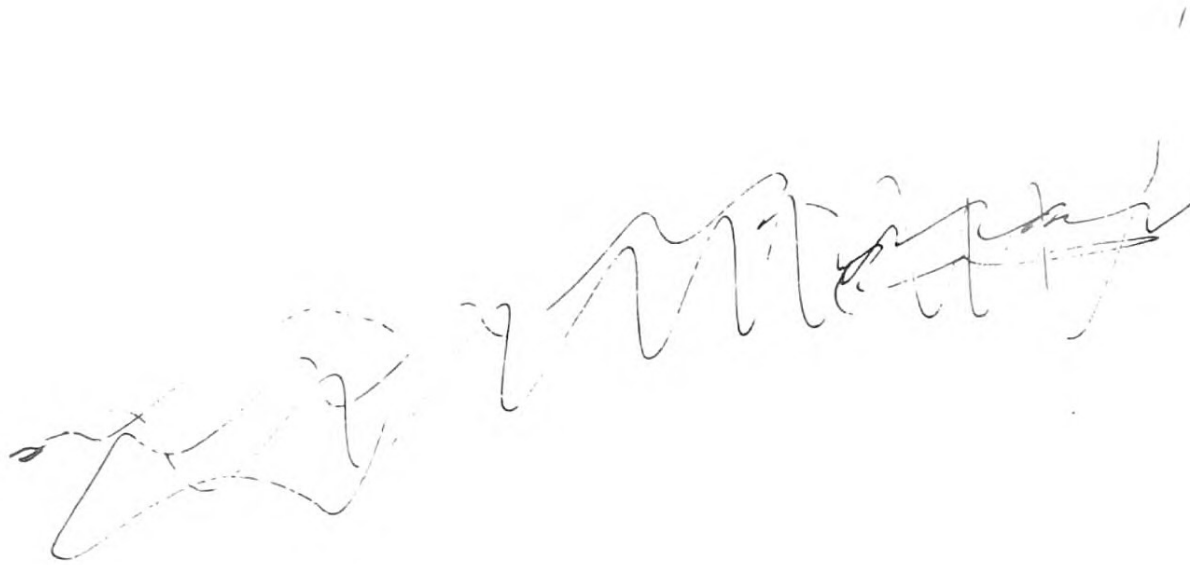
my media, in drawing out from me

an adequate depth and breadth of expression

will determine, ultimately, what —

and how much — I can be for myself.

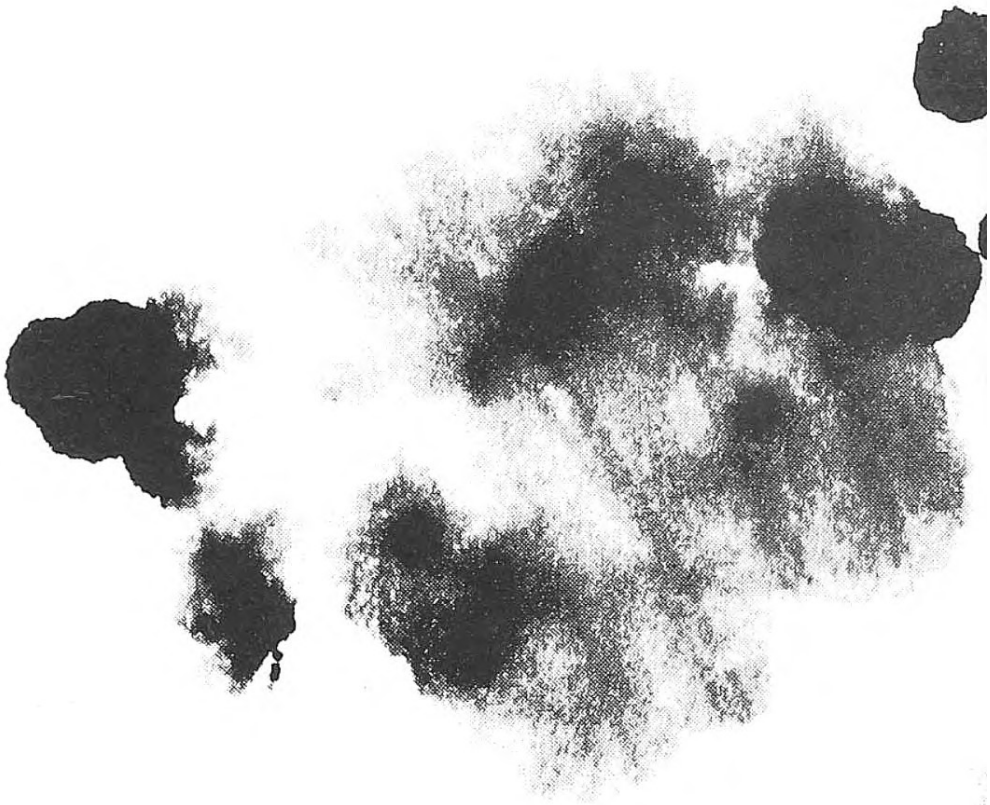
It is in the media of expression, then, that I fulfill – or try to fulfill – my identity. And it is as experience alone that I can realize, in expression, the fulfillment of the identity I need. And so not only is thought itself expressive, articulated in media of expression, verbal, external, or meditative, internal, but our thought about our other expressive media is crucial to our need to optimize our expression by inventing and optimizing our media of expression, to understand ourselves in relation to them, and through them, so we may understand how we are unfulfilled, and why, and so that we may authentically perceive our own true interests and needs and pursue their fulfillment with the full benefit of our intellectual power.



As long as I view the objects of thought and the processes of music as exterior to myself and exterior to the interactions of people, as something other than the palpable emanations of intense human identity-seeking expressive activity, the authentic perception that I need of my real needs, of my real interest in the

activities I pursue, of the real nature of the expressive objects, intellectual and musical, that I create and experience, will be unavailable to me; and I will be obscured from a clear understanding and an authentic consciousness regarding the nature of these objects, and the essential thrust of these matters.

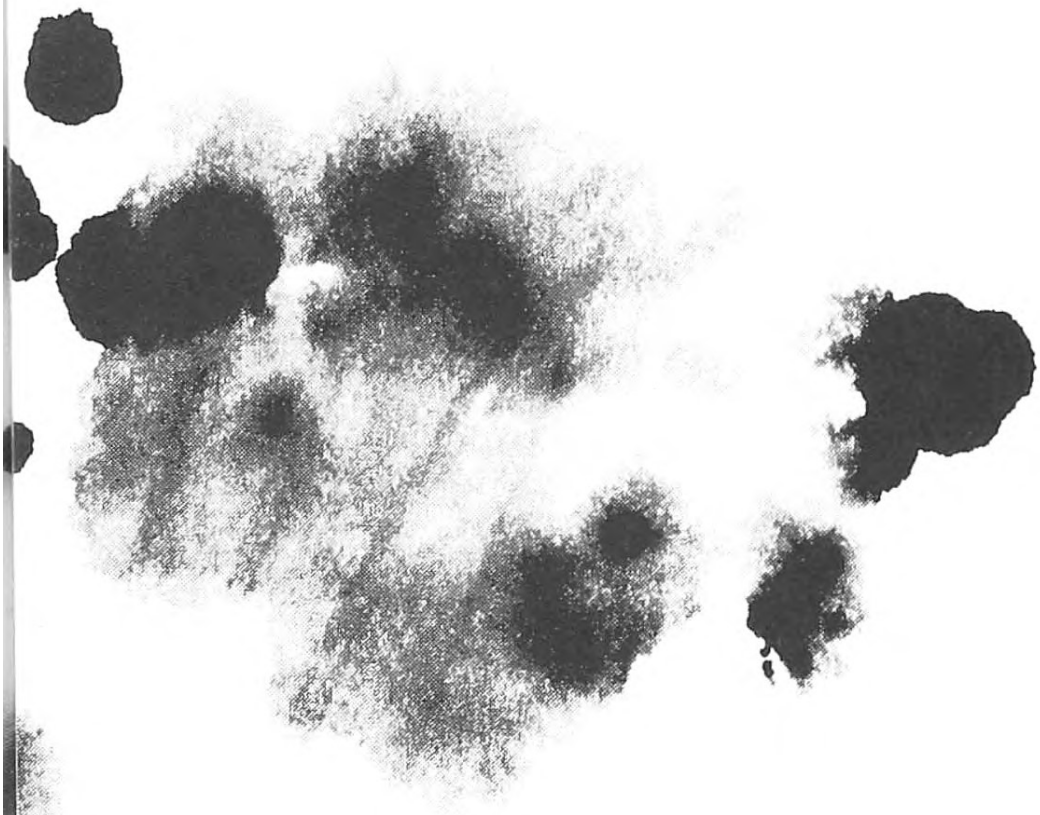
Our media are crucial:



for the primal expressive energy

does not fulfill us

by mere, raw, evacuation.

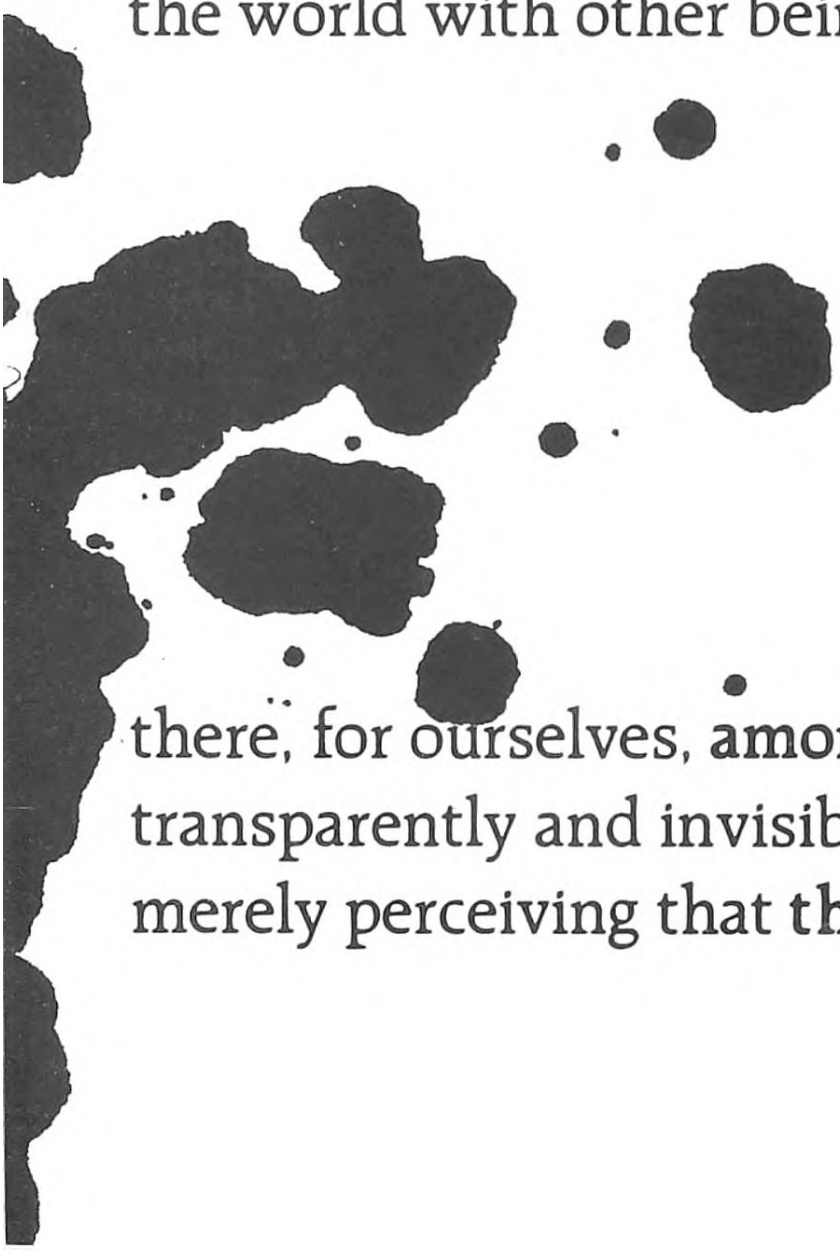


On the contrary, it is an energy that needs release into purpose —

— for the linkage of expression with identity means that the expressive energy needs to be released just so that it can create articulate **form** —

— it is built up internally precisely **as** an articulate-form-creation-needing energy —

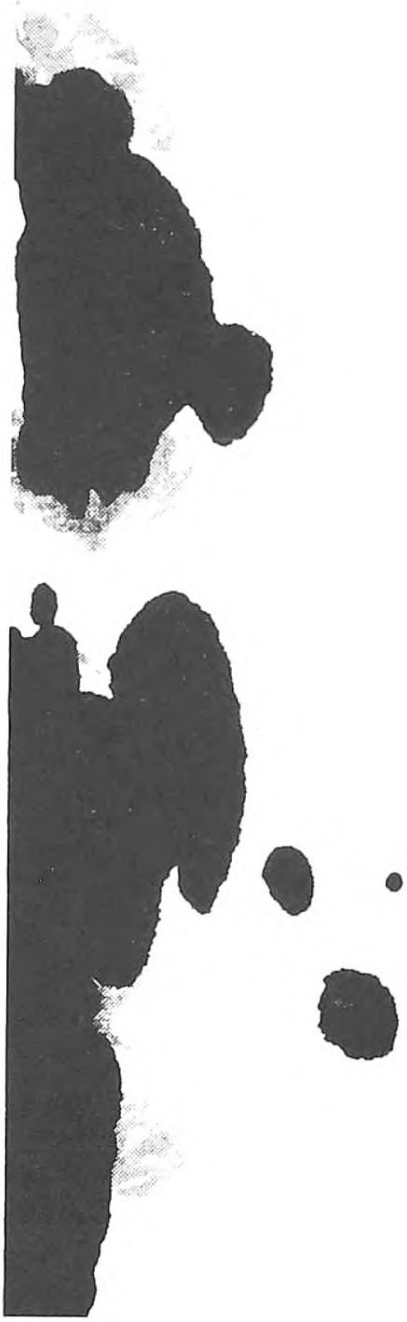
— to fulfill itself by creating palpable realizations shaped and contoured and articulated to return to us, from without, the sense of being, the sense of being something in particular, the sense of being something significant, the sense of being in the world, the sense of being in the world with other beings —



— and **being** there, for ourselves, **among** them, even transparently and invisibly, but still not merely perceiving that **they** are there.

And it is
the identity-seeking
nature of
the expressive
energy
that renders
vacuous,
unshaped, untextured,
unmediated
expressive release
unfulfilling –
such release expresses
the primal energy
without engaging
its primal purpose –
and so exhausts,
rather than energizes,
represses rather than fulfills,
frustrates rather than
relieves.

To shout
in an
anechoic chamber
is an
immediate
experience
of this
nature –
energy
is released
but not resonated:
thus in the
deepest
psychic
– and therefore
artistic
– and therefore
musical
–
sense,
no **sound**
has happened.



For, as every composer knows, sounds happen not when they are sounded, but in their resonant afterspace of silence and responsive, prolonging, and resonating successive sound.

The silence we preserve after an experience is a space, created for us as the space of the experience, within which, and on which, we dwell, prolonging the experience, extending it, culminating it, in order to **have** it, progressively, in more significant degree.

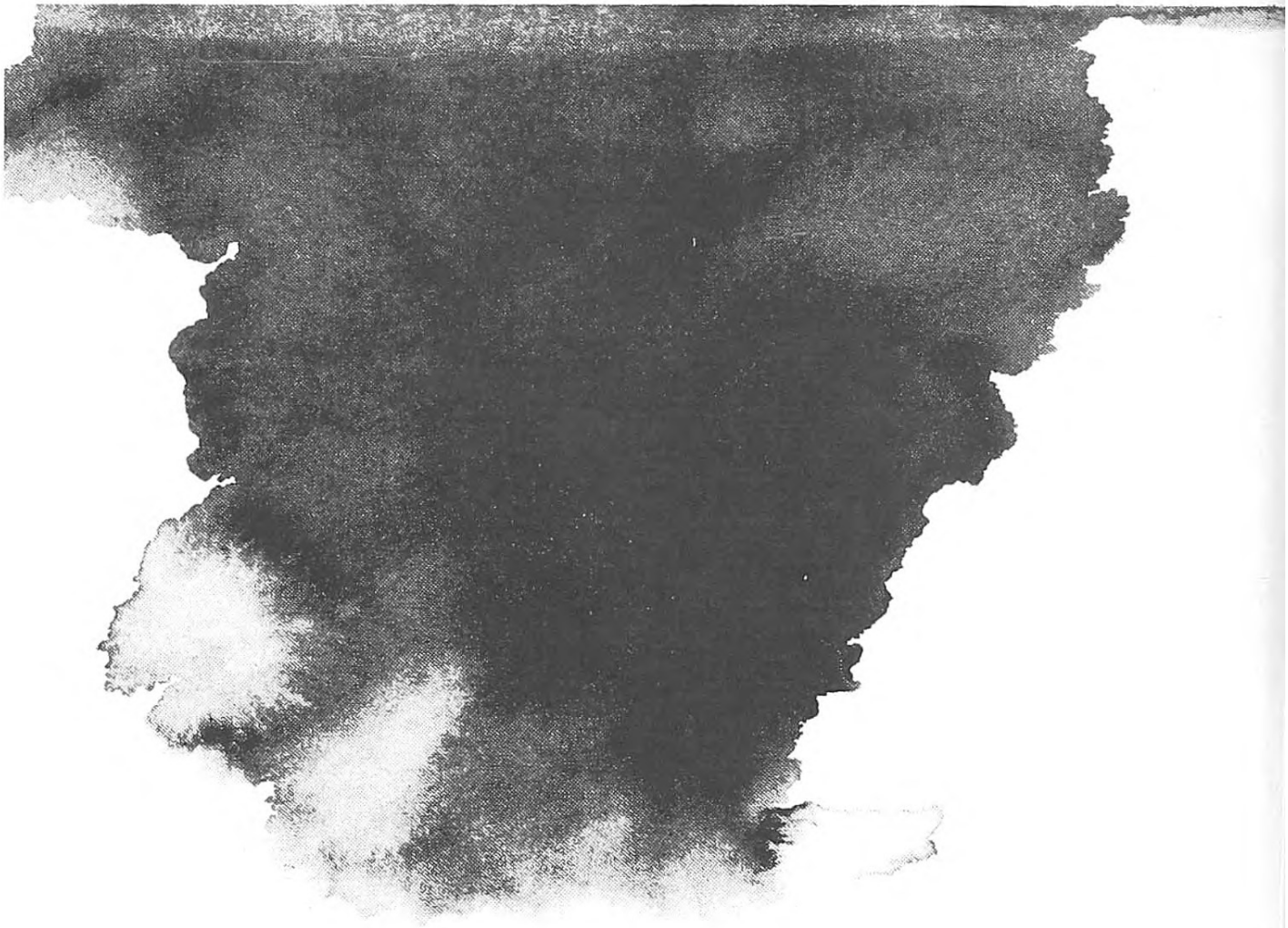
Our meta-experiential conversation is like the sound after a sound, in music, which amplifies the silence-resonant aftersound space to extend, to cumulate, to cultivate, to – yet further – **have** the experience our conversation is trying to keep us alive within.

And discourse extends the effort to retain and protract experience to a maximum frontier of time, space, and awareness.

But sound can also annihilate sound;

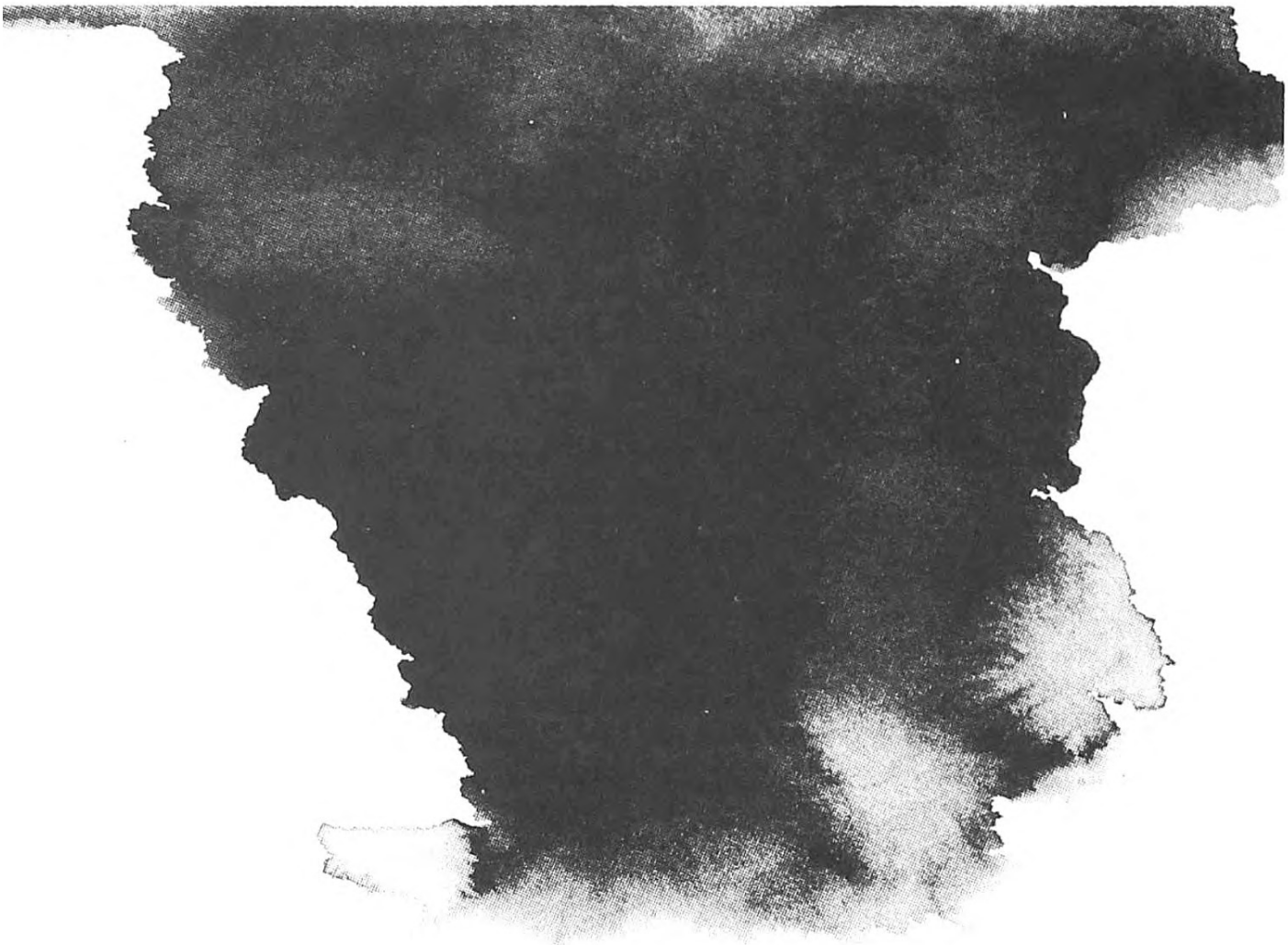
conversation can also annihilate its
antecedent experience;

thought can be an

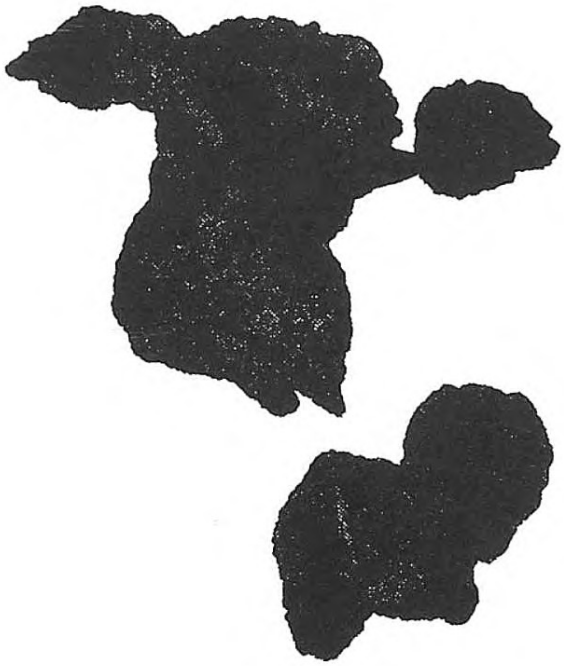


anechoic chamber for its objects;

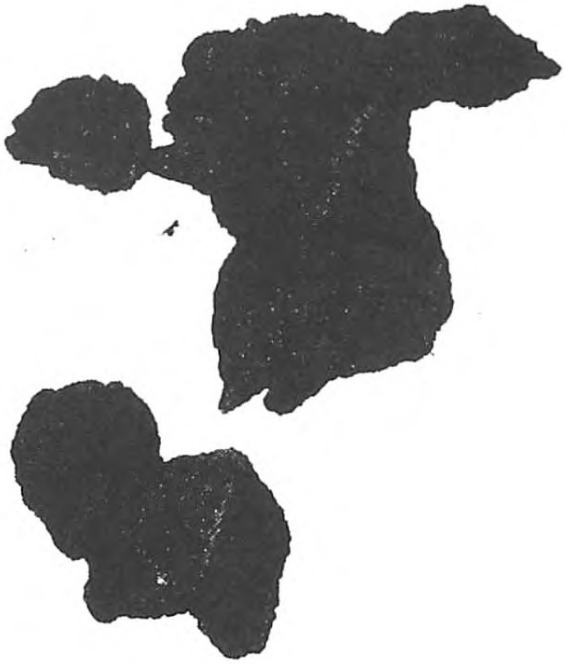
discourse can remove us from the
scene of our attention altogether.



So we need to think sensitively and introspectively and consciously – like expressive people – about our thought, our silence, our sound in music and talk; to **compose** our intellectual-social behavior so that it actually strives to be shaped to do for us what we, primally, need it for.



We cannot afford to deprive ourselves of our own expression by conventionalizing or institutionalizing our talk, or our thought, or our music; not because that is wicked, but because it deprives us of what we most need from those outlets, what we lusted after in the first place so as to find ourselves energetically engaged, for life, with them.



Listening is the primal expressive act; listening

rimal composition; the music we hear, the sound

we hear, moves us to the core not because of th

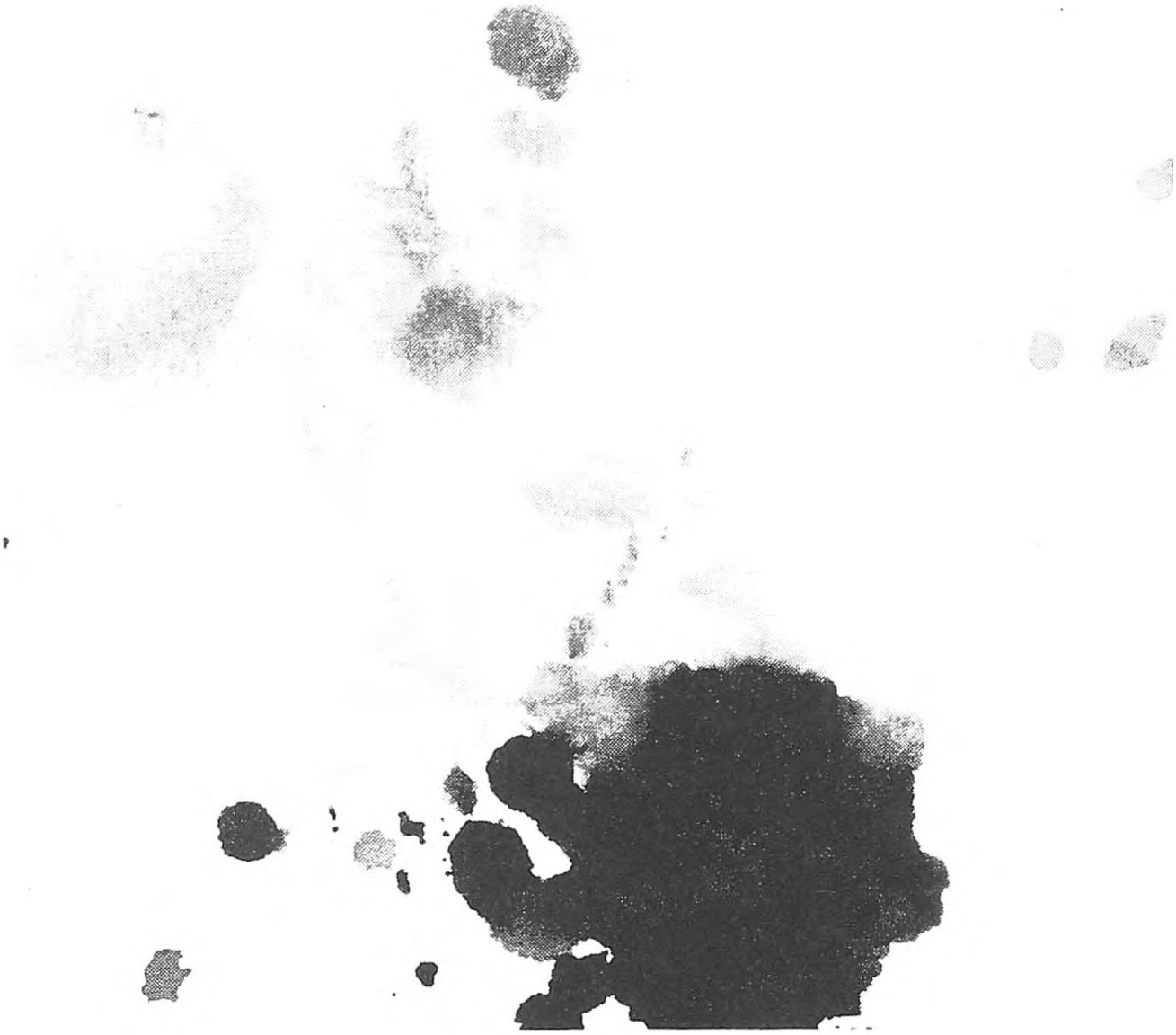
ernal things or persons it expresses, but exactly

insofar as it expresses us, ourselves, the listeners

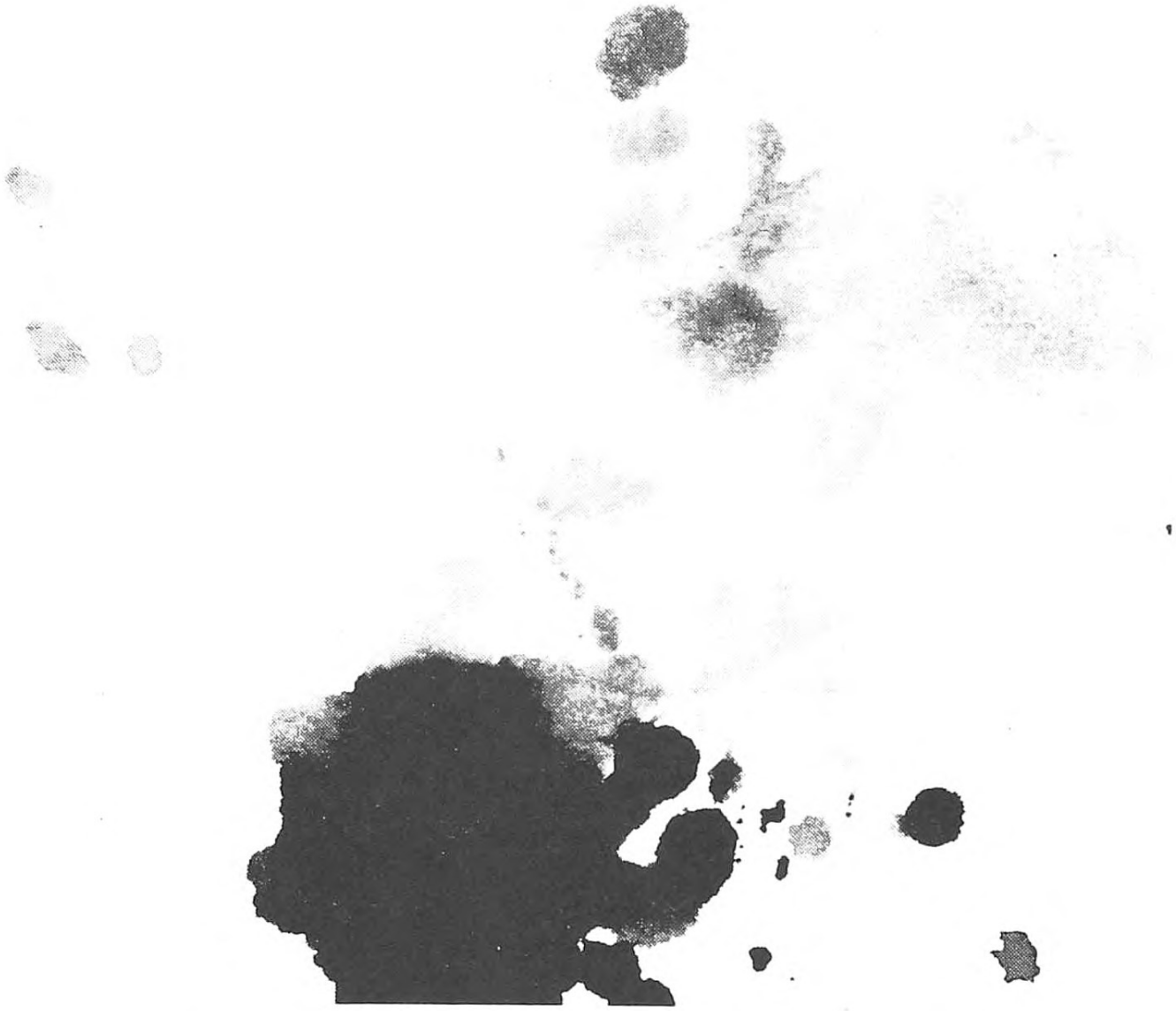
To listen tangibly is to be mobilized, as a total

consciousness, to be present to an occasion of sour

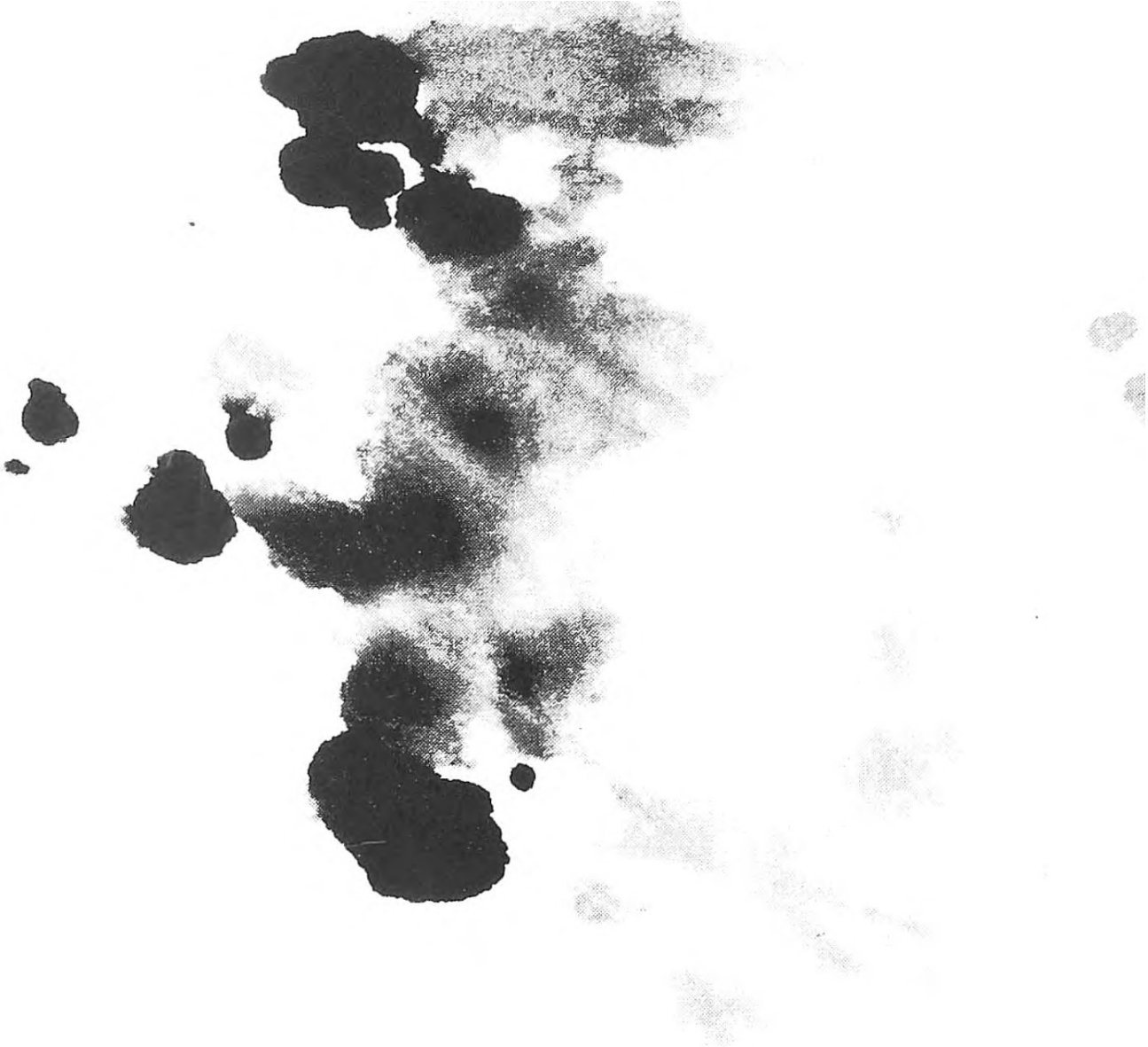
:perience. Listening is primal composition.



We need to compose not **what** we hear,
but that we may hear;



our need to make music in order to hear
extends from our need
to make sound in order to be;



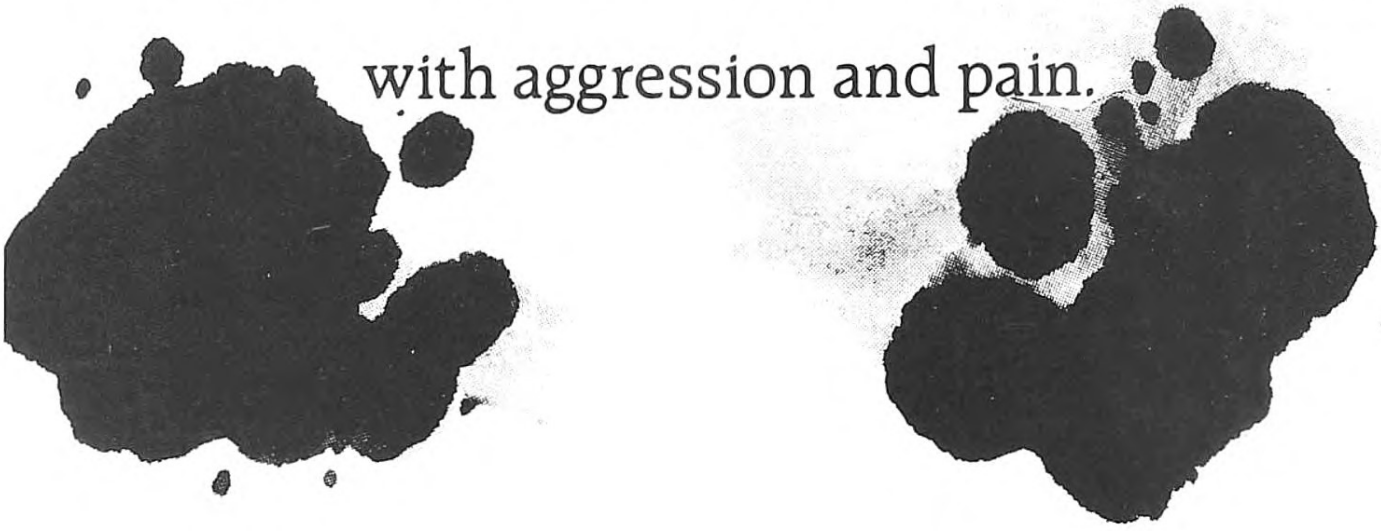
hence composing, as we know it, is
oddly located as a speculative notational act
prior, and abstractly general in its relation,
to the actual musical act itself
of realization in sound, performance.

Thus the ontological unit of musical awareness is not, properly, the piece, but the occasion; thus the ontological unit of musical conception is not, properly, the work, but the activity.

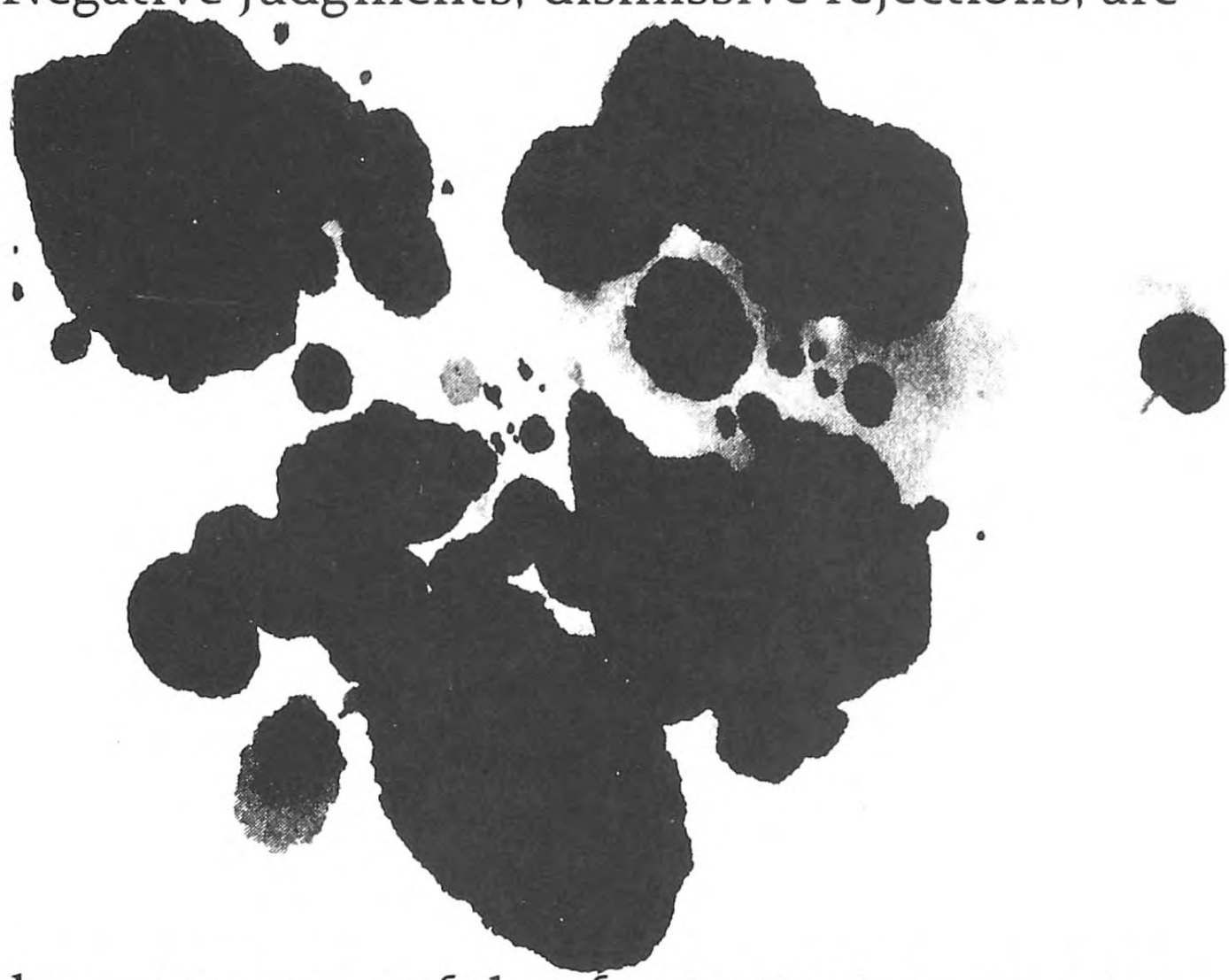
What we call a work of art
is experientially existent only as
an episode of expression.

And configured thus,
composing-performing is part of, extends, confirms, crystallizes the occasion, the activity, of hearing itself.

But listening, when frustrated as hearing, turns upon the sounding text as the object of unrequited expressive yearning, turns upon it with aggression and pain.

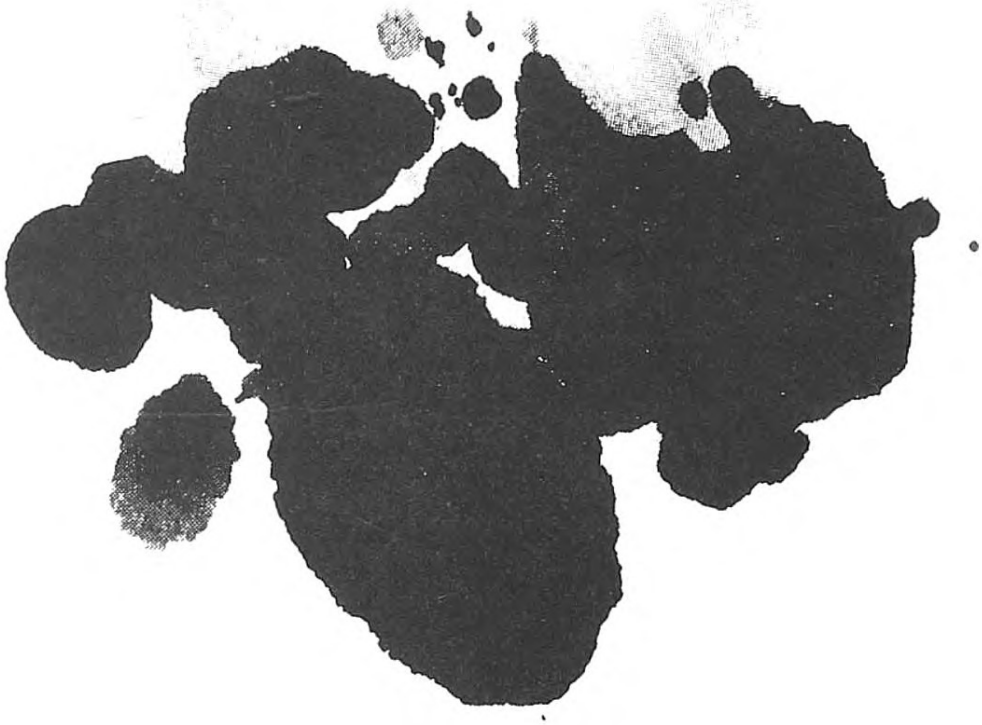


There ensues the phenomenon of judgment; and the motivation for detachment in audition, discourse, and interpersonal activity (such as teaching, composing, organizing musical life, ——) finds its origin in this frustration. Negative judgments, dismissive rejections, are



the expressions of that frustration's aggression, the backlash of the failure to be able to be mobilized to be present to an occasion

of fulfilling expression, so intensely sought,
so desperately needed.

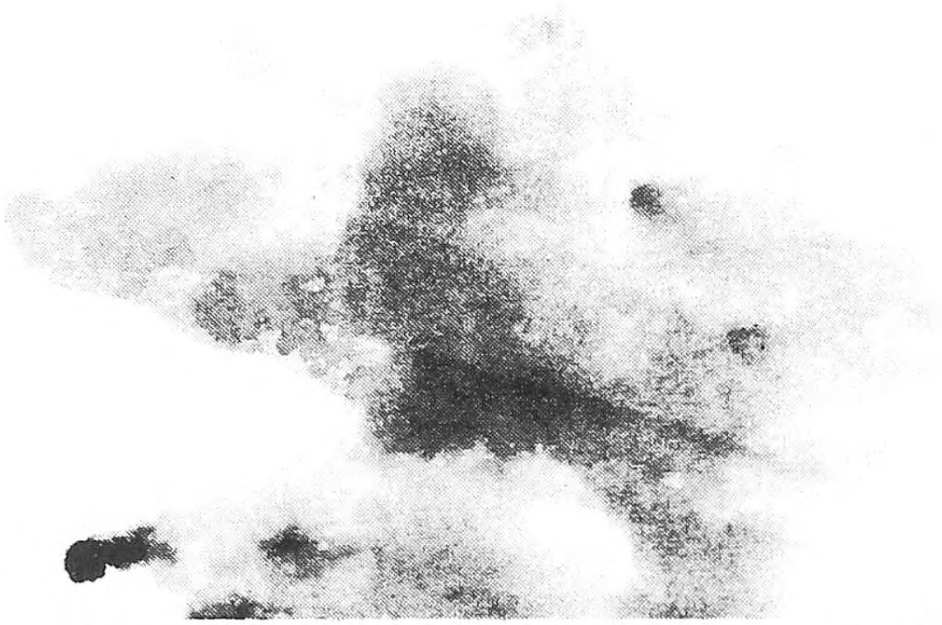


The reification of competence and skill enables us to substitute the visible tokens approval, admiration, and status for the non-negotiable needs interest and expression.

Defensively, the issue of frustrated
non-presence is evaded,
the possibility of primal-need-touching
experience traded in, for safety's sake

— the horrors of frustration
loom as the spectre of the
annihilation of identity —

traded in for objectified conventions of
ritual, formalized, filtered,
institutional stand-ins for fulfillment.



Status replaces identity, erudition replaces experience, technique replaces awareness.

Discipline replaces engagement.

Knowing replaces searching.

Self-congratulation replaces self-fulfillment — and in the end it must be that cynicism replaces yearning.

For the primal energy is unappeased

by these devices, and, frustrated,

aggressively turns upon the

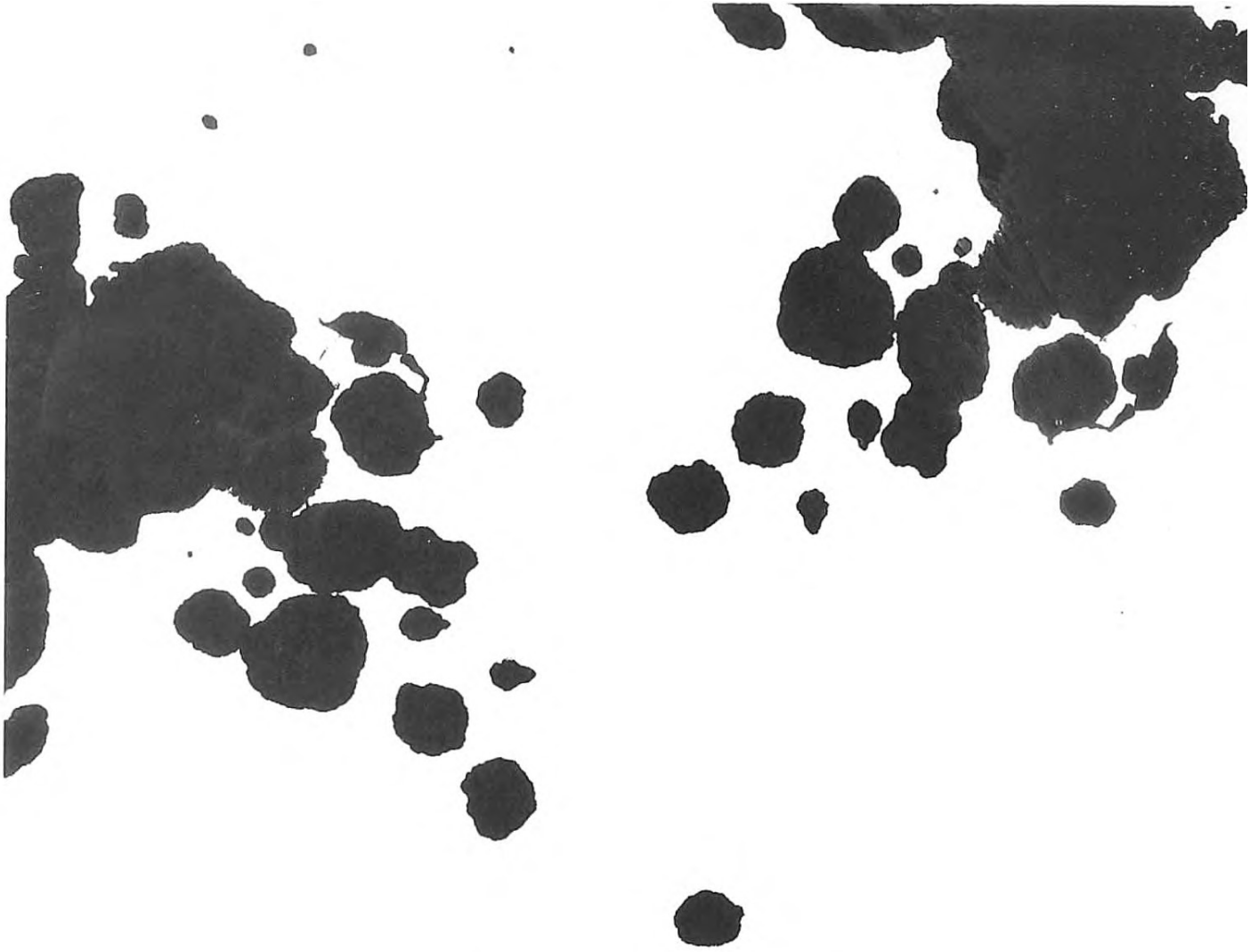
instruments of frustration,

which are us.

And turns destructive to ourselves in the form of destroying the value of others, and of the expressions of others, in our eyes, to mask the pain of our own inability to be present to, and mobilized by, the episodes of expression which we witness but frequently cannot experience.

Where this is the case, our thinking, which could be our most powerful self-liberating resource, may be our most powerful self-administered poison.

That web of structures which we erect for our own protection may be strangulating us.



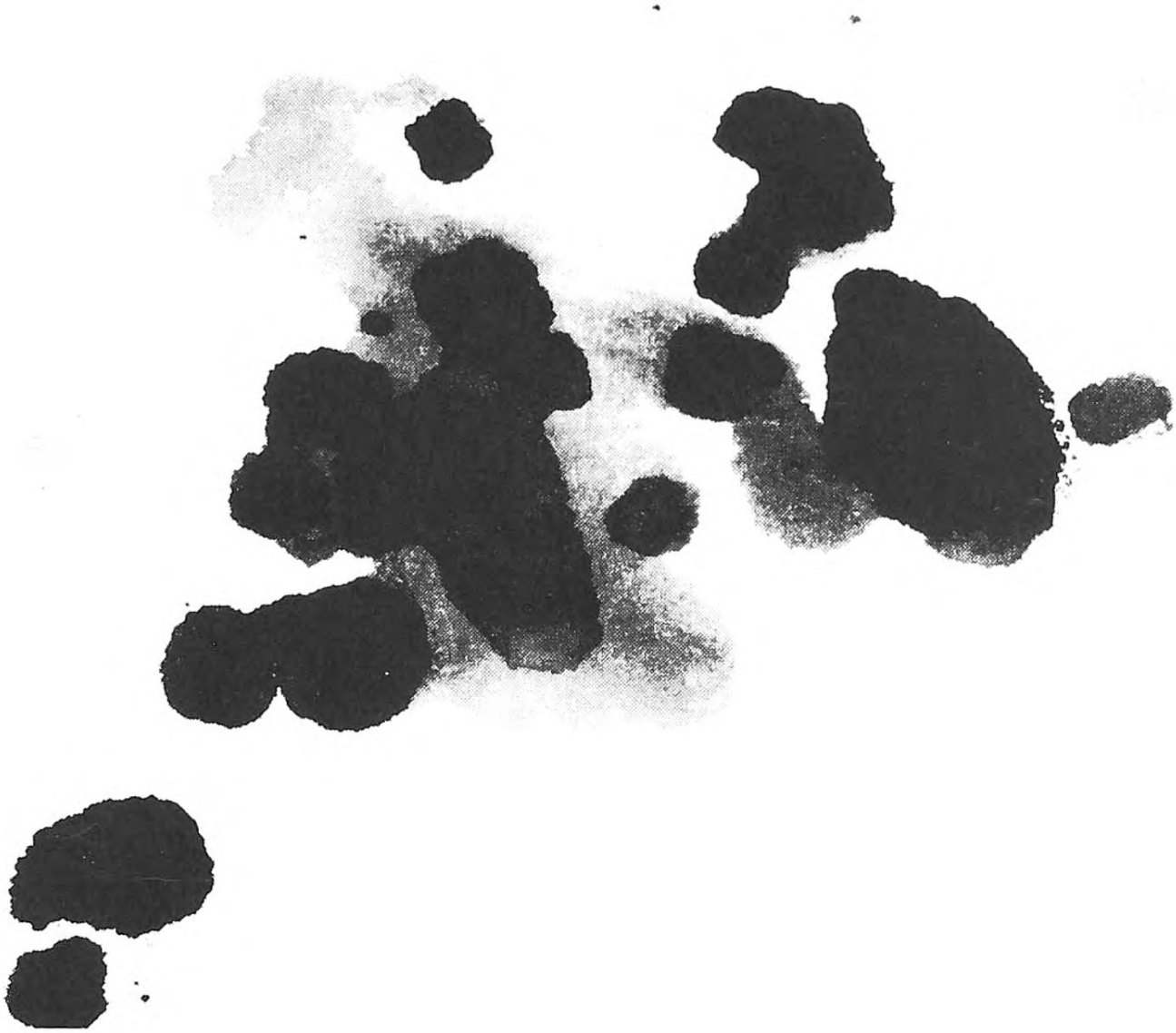
We need to think about our thought

to salvage our expression; for we

need our expression for our salvation.

People are always asking what music expresses.

They do not so often ask what language expresses.



But they both express the same thing;

the whole person, the whole group of people

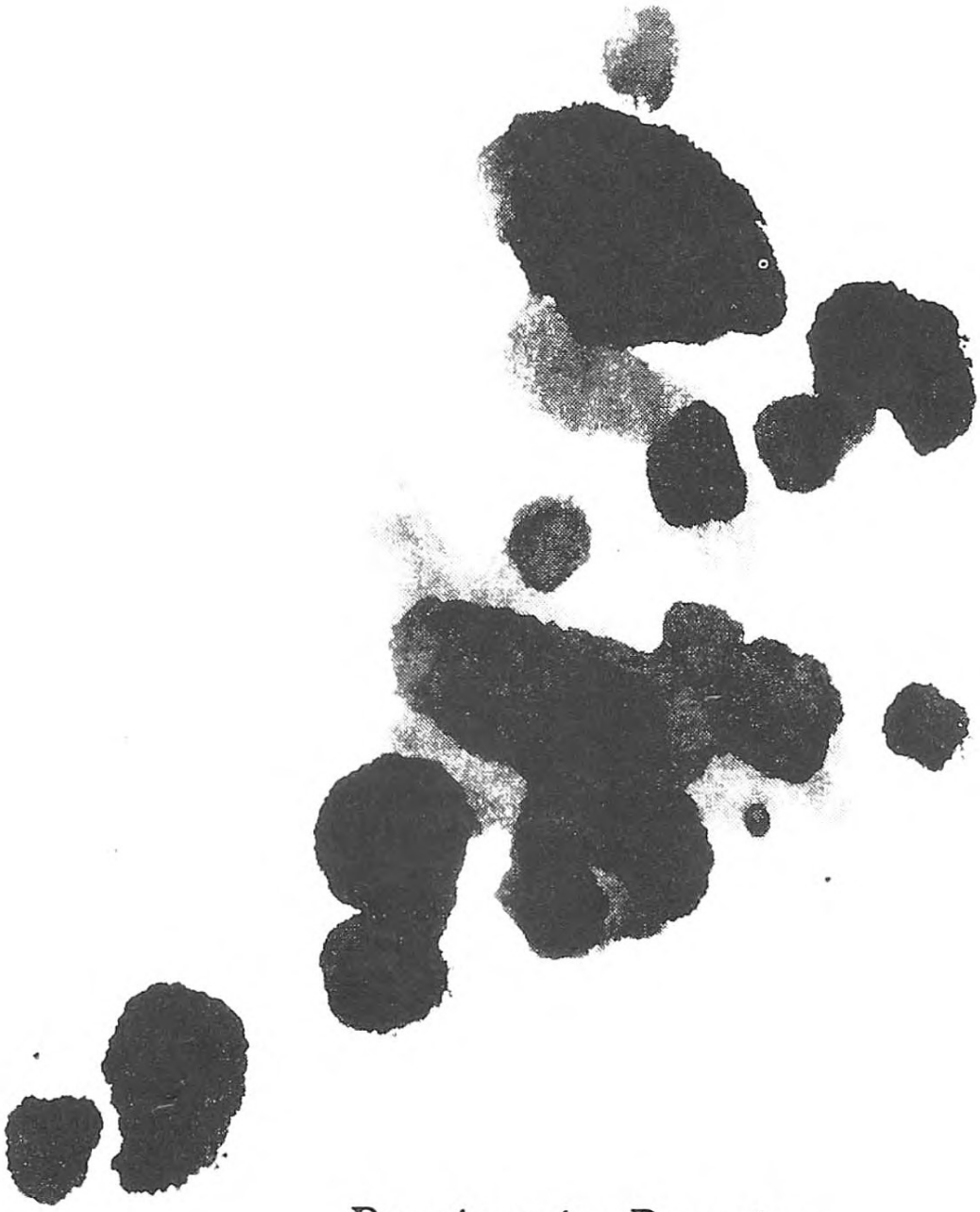
— warped this way, filtered that way,

focussed so, angled thus ... the raging

against extinction of ourselves as persons,

shaped to a fine point of articulation

for ourselves, for each other.



Benjamin Boretz

?ARE YOU SERIOUS?

TO SOME PEOPLE I HAVEN'T MET YET

KENNETH MAUE
FRANETTA MCMILLIAN
CATHERINE SCHIEVE
JOHN D. VANDER WEG

AND ALL THE USUAL SUSPECTS

J. K. Randall