

Twelve-Tone Identity:
Adorno Reading Schoenberg through Kant

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Abstract

Theodor Adorno's view of Arnold Schoenberg can be seen in light of his criticism of Immanuel Kant. Critiquing Kant's concept of Enlightenment and his dualist philosophy, Adorno also critiques common misconceptions about Kant's work in bourgeois society. Similarly, in Schoenberg's oeuvre Adorno finds radical musical creation but also a reversion to formulaic composition in its reception by Richard Hill among others. In both Kant and Schoenberg, Adorno identifies a tripartite movement: (1) A radical work (philosophical or musical) is created by a member of bourgeois society. (2) The work adopts the function of a societal critique. (3) However, bourgeois society is incapable of understanding the work as critique and erases its radical nature. Seen in light of Adorno's thought, the thesis explores the transactional nature of idea production and reception in society.

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Introduction

Throughout his many writings on Schoenberg and his compositional method, Adorno rarely refers to Schoenberg's writings in quotation. And yet, in the opening of his *Philosophy of New Music*, he chooses to center on a quote from the foreword to Schoenberg's *Three Satires for Mixed Chorus*, Op. 28: "The middle road is the only one which does not lead to Rome."¹ Bringing the reader's attention to the emergence of ideas out of opposing extremes, Adorno is seeking to justify the juxtaposition between Schoenberg and Stravinsky that he creates in the volume. All the while, throughout Adorno's works on music it becomes evident that, to the philosopher, Schoenberg himself represented an opposition of extremes – between bourgeois naiveté and modernist radicalism. Schoenberg is not taking the middle road, but rather weaving his way between two divergent ones. Thus he creates a process which "from opposing extremes, and from the apparent excesses of development, permits the emergence of the configuration of an idea," as Adorno characterizes it.²

A similar duality is to be found in Adorno's reception of Kant. Adorno's debt to Kant is undoubted and is particularly evident in his adoption of Kant's ideas on antinomies and juxtaposition. Throughout a series of lectures given in 1959 at the Frankfurt University, now published under the title *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Adorno expresses the importance of Kant's work to his philosophy and to the discipline overall, while critiquing Kant's schematic

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

thinking and his philosophy's ambivalence toward society.³ In Kant, Adorno sees a juxtaposition of extremes just as strong as in Schoenberg.

By connecting those two juxtapositions, I seek to explore the way in which Adorno understands the creation and reception of idea –as a constant collision between contradiction and uniformity, but never through a well-defined middle road. I frame this issue in the disagreement between Schoenberg and Adorno, particularly the problems Adorno finds in the construction of the dodecaphonic method itself. Adorno takes issue with Schoenberg's notion of the twelve-tone method as an organic progression. He sees free atonality as more natural: it breaks free from all bonds. He also finds the repetition of the tone row as preventive of development and takes issue with the creation of the tone row prior to the composition of the piece itself, which he relates to a division of labour.

This clash between Adorno and Schoenberg can be framed in terms of the ideas each man borrowed from Kant. While considering the logical problems Adorno found in Schoenberg's method, I shall, at the same time, justify the Kantian idealism behind them. This approach provides both insight into the argument between Adorno and Schoenberg and an account of their varying interpretations of Kant's work.

Literature review

The connections between Schoenberg and Kant have been explored notably by Patricia Carpenter and Rose Rosengard Subotnik.⁴ Those between Schoenberg and Adorno have been

³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge UK: Polity, 2002).

⁴ Patricia Carpenter, "Musical Form and Musical Idea: Reflections on a Theme of Schoenberg, Hanslick, and Kant," in *Music and Civilization: Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang*, ed. Edmond Strainchamps and Maria Rika Maniates (New York: Norton, 1984), 394-427; Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

studied by a multitude of scholars – Murray Dineen and Richard Leppert, among others.⁵ The presence of these links is not to be doubted in the slightest: Adorno directly comments on Kant (particularly in his series of lectures entitled *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*) and, as a philosopher, borrows a number of terms and concepts from him.⁶ While Schoenberg rarely mentions his debt to Kant explicitly in writing, it is known that he read his works, and the presence of Kantian notions in his work is beyond question. Studies linking Adorno, Schoenberg and Kant in an in-depth manner are, however, rarer. As such, this study will be drawing on a number of sources on each man individually and some sources which make connections between a pair of them.

As the modern composer with the most well-defined composition method, but also possibly with the greatest output of prose, Schoenberg's ideas have generated interest in a multitude of scholars. Among these, the most relevant to my thesis are Walter Frisch, Ethan Haimo and Patricia Carpenter.

Although not directly pertaining to Schoenberg, Walter Frisch's book *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* helps to better understand Schoenberg's thought and influence.⁷ The term *developing variation* was coined by Schoenberg and thus it is impossible to discuss the concept of developing variation without bringing Schoenberg's ideas to the mix. In fact, Frisch's text is really a look back on Brahms' music through Schoenberg's lens. In that manner, Frisch explores the philosophical ideas behind the organicist notion of varying pre-existing material and thus creating progress. This concept is often addressed in Adorno's works.

⁵ Murray Dineen, *Friendly Reminders: Essays in Music Criticism after Adorno* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et. al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002).

⁶ Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁷ Walter Frisch, *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984).

Additionally it becomes relevant in the “style and idea” debate as the practice of “developing variation” is strongly linked to the classical period which posits it as a prevailing idea in music.

The idea of “developing variation” is equally important to Ethan Haimo in his book *Schoenberg’s Transformation of Musical Language*, as he seeks to understand the way in which the composer set out to create coherence in his musical works and the manner in which that changed throughout his oeuvre.⁸ Haimo’s focus is on Schoenberg’s early works, those written prior to the *Harmonielehre* of 1910, but by discussing the change in compositional method between pieces in that period he paints a picture of the composer’s overall musical thought in evolution. Haimo rejects the notion of “atonal music” and sees the evolution of twelve-tone music as incremental, with seedlings of it growing throughout the earlier works. This sheds light onto Schoenberg’s thought and thus sets the scene for a discussion of his later compositions. Adorno greatly admired Schoenberg’s use of atonality and often describes the serialist system as more restrictive and thus almost a regression. Therefore, Haimo’s text helps illuminate, first of all, what Adorno saw as Schoenberg’s true potential (breaking free from the constraints of tonality and even chromaticism) and, secondly, the criticisms he had of his serialist method in opposition to his earlier, atonal works.

Patricia Carpenter’s research on Schoenberg largely centers on the concept of the musical idea and the manner in which musical works are created (according to Schoenberg) entirely from the idea. Her article “Musical Form and Musical Idea: Reflections on a Theme of Schoenberg, Hanslick, and Kant” presents the strongest connection between Kant and Schoenberg.⁹ Kant, Schoenberg and Hanslick are taken up in a discussion of the artwork as two-sided – as viewed separately by the composer and by the listener. The link drawn between Hanslick, Schoenberg

⁸ Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg’s Transformation of Musical Language* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁹ Carpenter, “Musical Form and Musical Idea.”

and Kant by Carpenter is vital to this thesis, as it helps establish the framework of Schoenberg's idealist thinking. Carpenter's work is also invaluable through her edition of and commentary, along with Severine Neff, on Schoenberg's manuscript *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*. Carpenter and Neff trace a number of Schoenberg's thoughts, for instance coherence, unity and the musical idea, to their philosophical and compositional origins.¹⁰

Adorno's oeuvre, which addresses many subjects while bringing to bear a variety of philosophical influences, has made him the subject of much scholarly interest. Early English-language treatments of his work date from the 1970s. Such studies are central to understanding the larger scope of Adorno's thought. These include writings by Susan Buck-Morss and Gillian Rose.

An early volume of scholarly work on Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss' *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* serves two purposes.¹¹ Buck-Morss has as her goal to explain much of Adorno's thinking as influenced by Walter Benjamin (as opposed to the frequent importance given to Max Horkheimer). As Adorno's work was relatively new to the United States at the time of publication of this monograph, Buck-Morss sets out to clearly identify the core tenets of his theory and to explain a number of the terms recurrent in his philosophy, particularly in the book *Negative Dialectics*. Additionally, she explains the development of Adorno's oeuvre in biographical order and covers a number of writings published prior to *Negative Dialectics*, thus aiding the reader in penetrating Adorno's sometimes idiosyncratic oeuvre.

¹⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, ed. and trans. and with commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

¹¹ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1977).

In contrast to Buck-Morss, Gillian Rose, in her book *The Melancholy Science* reads Adorno's writings in a more traditional manner – as connected to Kant, Hegel, Marx and Lukács.¹² The title of the book comes from an inversion of Nietzsche's *The Joyful Science* and is meant to highlight Adorno's attraction to the always-shifting and his avoidance of the static through his philosophy of contradictions, namely his negative dialectics. Rose reads Adorno's works as an attempt to save theory from becoming merely a tool and therefore falling into dogmatism. She touches on Adorno's musical writings, on Adorno's Marxist thoughts on music and on Schoenberg's presentation of social issues in his music. This, along with Rose's clear and concise definitions of a number of concepts from *Negative Dialectics*, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and other works by Adorno, makes this source very useful to my argument.

Later treatments of Adorno's thought, such as the works of Brian O'Connor and J. M. Bernstein, absolved of the onerous task of introducing Adorno's oeuvre to their public, have the liberty to more fully address individual aspects of his thought.

Brian O'Connor delves into Adorno's negative dialectics by situating it in the epistemological tradition of philosophers, mainly Kant, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger.¹³ O'Connor characterizes Adorno's brand of critical theory as one which draws on the idealism and the subject-object relations of Kant and Hegel and the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. O'Connor finds that Adorno's work is characterized both by aspects of epistemological pure philosophy and of socialist critique. He discusses the connection between pure philosophy and experience as a duality present in Adorno's thought. O'Connor's focus on Kant and the emphasis on Adorno's

¹² Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

¹³ Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2004).

influences make his volume invaluable to this study as it aids in mapping out Adorno's reaction to Kant (as further support to Adorno's own lectures *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*).

J.M. Bernstein's book *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* is a rethinking of Adorno's critical theory as a moral philosophy.¹⁴ Bernstein argues that the rationalization of modern life has led to disenchantment in the individual, and thus he addresses the thought of Marx and Nietzsche on the problems of modernity, all the while referring to Adorno's works, particularly *Minima Moralia* and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.¹⁵ Bernstein explores the manner in which not only Adorno, but also Kant reacted to disenchantment and the concept of enlightened reason. Disenchantment, an effect of enlightenment, affects the way modern society interacts with objects of knowledge, Bernstein holds. It transforms *which* objects are valued and *how* they are valued. This sort of disenchantment can be read in bourgeois receptions of both Kant and Schoenberg and as such this volume is central to my argument.

The musicological writings of Adorno have been addressed by Richard Leppert, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, Lydia Goehr, Max Paddison, and Murray Dineen. Richard Leppert is the editor of perhaps the most comprehensive collection extant of Adorno's essays on music.¹⁶ Although the essays speak in Adorno's voice, Leppert's commentary throughout weaves its own narrative of the construction of the philosopher's thought – situating each essay in its context and providing numerous references to secondary literature.

Rose Rosengard Subotnik, in two collections of her own articles, draws on the relation between Kant and Adorno in a musical context. *Developing Variations* discusses the way in

¹⁴ J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974); Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1991).

¹⁶ Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert.

which musical thoughts have developed and recurred in time.¹⁷ This theme is continued in *Deconstructive Variations*, but with a turn towards a type of deconstruction founded on binary opposition, one in which these oppositions can be read as a critique of Enlightenment. In “Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno and Stravinsky,” Subotnik centers on the notion of structural listening – listening for overall form in works of music, with reference to Adorno’s *Philosophy of New Music* as well as to Schoenberg’s writings. She argues that this type of listening is flawed because structure is just one of the meanings that a musical works can have. Therefore, this essay is an argument for a subjective listening – one in which a variety of meanings can be exposed. When compared to her praise for Kant’s subjective turn in “Kant, Adorno, and the Self-Critique of Reason,” this essay can be used to read the relations between Kant, Schoenberg and Adorno.

Max Paddison’s *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* is the most comprehensive source of secondary literature on Adorno’s musical writings.¹⁸ The volume serves to situate Adorno in context, providing the reader with Paddison’s own interpretation of the philosopher’s thought, but at the same time serving as a companion to Adorno’s writings, this time with a focus on Marx and Freud and an in-depth discussion of notions of the *Philosophy of New Music*. Paddison covers almost all of Adorno’s writings on music. He also discusses philosophical notions important to Adorno’s thoughts on music – the notions of mediation and distinction between form and material, among others. Used along with *Philosophy of New Music* and *Essays on Music*, this book serves to inform an in-depth understanding of Adorno’s views on music.

Murray Dineen’s 2011 book *Friendly Remainders: Essays in Musical Criticism after Adorno*, explores aspects of Adorno’s negative dialectics in relation to a variety of musical works and

¹⁷ Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations*, 57-86; Idem, *Deconstructive Variations Music and Reason in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 148-176.

¹⁸ Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

styles, from Beethoven to Frank Zappa.¹⁹ Of particular relevance to this study is the opening chapter in which Dineen explores the notion of the ‘remainder’ in identity thinking (the term is taken from the E.B. Ashton translation of *Negative Dialectics*), that is, what is “left over” in considering the way in which the particular does not fit neatly into the general. In the chapter titled “Technique,” Dineen formulates the notion of Schoenberg’s naiveté, as expressed in Adorno’s *Prisms*. Dineen further pinpoints Adorno’s praise for Schoenberg’s music as independent of this naiveté. According to him, the success of Schoenberg’s music occurred “despite the best of intentions.”²⁰

Thus, the wealth of literature on Adorno’s oeuvre serves to not only elucidate his thought, but also to situate his thought in the realm of philosophers, providing an understanding of his Kantian influences and of those which gave his thought aspects opposed to Kant’s idealism. This further sheds light on the notions behind his criticism of Schoenberg’s method and compositions as well as on his admiration of many of his works.

Drawing on the above sources, among others, this study explores the connections between Adorno, Schoenberg and Kant in five parts. The first chapter outlines some of the core ideas in Schoenberg and Adorno’s respective oeuvres. In each man’s work, a single concept dominates. For Schoenberg, it is the notion of the musical idea: a purely musical entity, which governs the manner in which a piece is conceived, constructed and expressed. Throughout his writings, most notably the essays and notes compiled in *Style and Idea* and *The Musical Idea*, Schoenberg uses this concept to discuss a number of other issues, notably the opposition between style and idea, the unification of musical space, and the way in which a piece becomes comprehensible and

¹⁹ Dineen, *Friendly Remainders*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

coherent.²¹ In Adorno's works, on the other hand, the concept that predominates is that of the negative dialectic, in opposition to earlier positive dialectics such as Hegel's. Out of this negative dialectic, Adorno spins his philosophy of contradictions, which he sees as the only way of understanding a contradictory world in which nothing is ever fully resolved or liquidated. In all of his writings, not least those on music, Adorno develops and expresses concepts related to negative dialectics – negation, identity and non-identity thinking, among others. This first chapter therefore serves as a discussion of these concepts in light of Schoenberg and Adorno's dispute over the twelve-tone method and in light of their respective receptions of Kant.

The second chapter endeavours to more precisely develop Adorno's relations to both Schoenberg and Kant through two of his works: *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* and *Philosophy of New Music*.²² Adorno saw both men in a somewhat similar light: He admired their genius, all while rejecting the very notion of genius and criticising them for the rigid and schematic aspects in their thought. The type of bourgeois idealist thinking of which Adorno accused Schoenberg also underlies his criticisms of Kant. A connection between the two allows for the Kantian reading of the dispute present throughout this thesis.

The third chapter further explores the link between Kant and Schoenberg in Adorno's thought by drawing a parallel to two specific quotes – one from *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* and one from Adorno's essay "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg."²³ In both instances Adorno is detailing what he sees as a tripartite manner of developing works. (1) A work is created by a member of bourgeois society, in this case Kant or Schoenberg. Because of the creator's bourgeois influence, he does not recognize the contradictory or "non-identical" aspects of his

²¹ Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Idem., *The Musical Idea*.

²² Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*; Idem., *Philosophy of New Music*.

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie, et. al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002).

work. (2) All the while, the work exists as a non-identical entity which critiques society. (3) However, the society which is being critiqued is incapable of understanding the non-identical aspect of the work and the work interpreted as identical and schematic. This three-part movement is central to Adorno's ideas on Kant, but also to the discrepancy he sees between Schoenberg as a composer and his compositions. The discrepancy between composer and production materialises itself throughout Adorno's 1955 essay "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg." This chapter therefore largely consists of a close reading of Adorno's essay with reference to a number of terms: identity and non-identity, contradiction, "pre-critical and critical," self-referential and structural, musical criticism and musical analysis, Schoenberg's naïveté, cutaneous and subcutaneous, and ornaments and functionalism. Throughout the close reading, connections are made to *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* with the goal of creating a clear parallel in the way Adorno saw Kant and Schoenberg relating to capitalist society and its modes of thought.

The opening of the fourth chapter momentarily moves away from Adorno to focus on a debate between Richard S. Hill and Schoenberg as presented in Hill's article in *The Musical Quarterly* and the composer's subsequent rebuttal compiled in *Style and Idea*.²⁴ Hill finds that Schoenberg's method "seems to contain within itself potentialities for future development into a rich and varied functionally organized system," and yet criticises it as not systematic enough at the moment.²⁵ Conversely, in his response to Hill's essay, Schoenberg defends the unity of his works, all the while rejecting Hill's definition of a "system." The only goal of his twelve tone method is, Schoenberg states, "to explain understandably and thoroughly the idea."²⁶ This

²⁴ Richard S. Hill, "Schoenberg's Tone-Rows and the Tonal System of the Future" in *Musical Quarterly* 22:1 (January 1936), 14-37; Arnold Schoenberg, "Schoenberg's Tone Rows," in *Style and Idea*, 213-214.

²⁵ Hill, "Schoenberg's Tone-Rows," 14.

²⁶ Schoenberg, "Schoenberg's Tone-Rows," 214.

response underlines Schoenberg's Kantian idealism, or rather his bourgeois interpretation of Kant, as Adorno understood it. Adorno's writings, specifically on dodecaphonic music, speak to the notion of unity as a symptom of bourgeois identity thinking and in doing so they shed light on his general criticisms of Schoenberg. Through an analysis of passages from Adorno's writings on systems and wholeness, this chapter interprets Adorno and Schoenberg's views on unity as hinging on their respective receptions of Kant.

In the final chapter, I summarize the ideas presented in the thesis and establish a context in which Adorno's ideas on Kant and Schoenberg make statements about the manner in which bourgeois society treats ideas. In both the case of Kant and that of Schoenberg, ideas were produced by people who Adorno saw as prone to identity thinking, but who produced non-identical, radical ideas. However, these non-identical ideas have become misinterpreted by bourgeois society and have become enshrined and therefore institutionalized, thus bringing them back to identity thinking. The conclusion thus looks more broadly at the assimilation of radical practices in society – the appropriation of the twelve-tone technique by the total serialists as well as a case outside of music – the institutionalization of abstract art with particular reference to art commissions in the CIA headquarters during the Cold War. As a result, the conclusion seeks to solidify the argument made throughout the thesis about the manner in which ideas are both generated and received in bourgeois society.

CHAPTER 1

Concepts in Adorno and Schoenberg

Although both Schoenberg and Adorno's thought often weaves itself in a manner which resists precise delineation, some working definitions can provide a basis for the connection between the two of them. Further, concepts that dominate each of their respective oeuvres – the musical idea in Schoenberg and negative dialectics in Adorno – reveal strong links to Kant.

Schoenberg and the Musical Idea

Schoenberg's writings are most strongly characterized by the concept of the "musical idea" which permeates all of his thinking and gives rise to such notions as space, unity, coherence and developing variation, and the opposition between style and idea. Nearly every thought expressed by him in writing can be related to the concept of musical idea. The most direct explanation of this concept comes from his essay *New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea* in which he says: "I myself consider the totality of a piece as the idea [*den Gedanken*]: the idea which its creator wanted to present"¹. Thus, he introduces the musical idea not as some sort of theme or rhythm or thing overtly expressed in music, but rather as a cognitive entity that exists primarily in the mind of the artist.

¹ Arnold Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 123.

As a governing principle, the idea organically generates all aspects of a musical work. Thus, the idea creates ‘a whole’ or a sense of unity and coherence to the piece. Schoenberg is concerned with the whole and with the unity of artworks; he remarks that “we do not believe enough in the whole thing, in the great thing, but demand irrefutable details.”² This organicist view is further supported in the *Musical Idea* manuscript as Schoenberg compares composition to architecture. Each starts with a vision of the whole and then adds details: “the vision that shows [the musician or artist] the whole guides him in every detail to do what makes sense and is meaningful, logical.”³ Even in the very title he gave his dodecaphonic model, “Method of Composing with Twelve Tones Which Are Only Related With One Another,” Schoenberg expresses this idea of unity: the tones are related with one another within the piece; the piece exists solely in its own universe, and therefore its laws are its own laws. At the same time, all these tones are related to one another, giving the musical work unity.

When discussing this concept Schoenberg uses three words interchangeably - *Idee*, *Gedanke*, and *Einfall*. In the introduction to *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique and Art of Its Presentation* Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff have clarified the differing connotations of these three German terms: *Idee* refers to a philosophic idea, *Gedanke*, to a concrete thought, and *Einfall* to inspiration.⁴ The concepts of *Idee* and *Gedanke* had already been combined in reference to music before Schoenberg’s time. Carpenter and Neff remark that “by conflating *Gedanke* and *Einfall* Schoenberg transformed the traditional concept.”⁵ Nevertheless there is more to this point: The transformations come rather from his taking back of his role as a musical creator.

² Arnold Schoenberg, “Gustav Mahler” in *Style and Idea*, 449.

³ Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, ed. and trans. and with commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 120.

⁴ Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff, commentary to *The Musical Idea* by Arnold Schoenberg, 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*

It is not surprising that, being a composer, Schoenberg was drawn by the possibility of inspiration, however indefinable that concept may be. It is only by combining the ephemeral quality of inspiration with concrete thought that it becomes much more easily grasped. *Einfall* thus can refer to the entirely immaterial manifestation of the musical idea, while in *Gedanke* it begins to be transformed to the concrete and material.

The concept of idea stands in opposition to that of style, which Schoenberg considers to be “the quality of a work and is based on natural conditions, expressing him who produced it.”⁶ He criticises other composers of the modern day for being more concerned with style rather than idea, and he emphasizes that, at least in its conception, a work of art should be primarily concerned with the idea it seeks to express. Thus, style is a superficial quality and is only secondary to idea. Style is more closely linked to the time and space in which the music was composed. Whereas an idea is immortal (Schoenberg says as much: “An idea can never perish”), style is fleeting and somewhat shallow: “The tool itself may fall into disuse, but the idea behind it can never become obsolete.”⁷

As noted, an important concept in Schoenberg’s oeuvre is that of the developing variation, a term he coined himself. He believed the origin of this type of music to be in the Classical period in pieces where “repetition, control of variation, delimitation and subdivision regulate the organization of a piece in its entirety as well as in its smaller units.”⁸ This once again stems from Schoenberg’s organicist view that the idea as one thing controls the entire piece. The term ‘idea’ can be taken on its usual abstract organicist level, but also on a concrete level: it is the musical

⁶ Schoenberg, “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea,” 121.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 58.

idea explored in each piece of music. For Schoenberg, this is made evident in *Die Jakobsleiter* in which everything is derived from one basic *Grundgestalt*.

Out of Schoenberg's desire to create a coherent whole in his works comes his concept of musical space, more specifically of its unification. He remarks that in music there is vertical space (i.e. the chord sounding at any given time) and horizontal space (the way subsequent chords relate to one another). For him, the diatonic scale is a manner of creating horizontal space such that everything in the piece or passage relates to a fundamental tone. In his twelve-tone method he wanted to unify the horizontal and vertical. Everything is derived from the *Grundgestalt*. In his music he tried to create a "two or more dimensional space in which musical ideas are presented as a unit."⁹ However, the idea is not presented according to the space it is in, but rather the space arises out of the composer's desire to express a coherent idea.

This governing concept in Schoenberg – the musical idea – can be related to concepts expressed in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, particularly the notions of "agreeable art" and "fine art."¹⁰ To Kant, agreeable art creates pleasure in the senses, whereas fine art is "a mode of representation which is purposive for itself and which, though devoid of an end, has the effect of advancing the culture or the mental powers in the interests of social communication."¹¹ Kant holds that it is genius that creates fine art: "the author of a product for which he is indebted to his genius does not himself know how he has come by his Ideas."¹² While this is not precisely the artistic or musical idea that Schoenberg is concerned with, if we conflate the ideas of *Einfall* and *Gedanke*, we arrive at a thing not exactly easy to grasp by the human mind. Since style is, in great part, imitation and falseness, Kant's assertion that genius does not come from imitation

⁹ Arnold Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones (I)," in *Style and Idea*, 220.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. John Henry Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

holds true for Schoenberg's thought. Agreeable art is of the type that only expresses style, while fine art is conceived by genius with an idea in mind.

Adorno and Negative Dialectics

The terms central to Adorno's thinking: *identity* and *non-identity* come out of his treatise *Negative Dialectics* in which he both explores the dominant and flawed modes of thinking current in philosophy and society, and postulates radical alternative modes of thought. Based on subject-object relations, Adorno separates thinking into three categories: identity thinking, rational identity thinking, and non-identity thinking.

Identity thinking holds that a strong correlation can be made between the universal and the particular, that there can be complete unity between subject and object. Max Paddison characterizes identity thinking as "the traditional philosophical definition of truth as 'the identity of the concept with the object of cognition'."¹³ Therefore, in identity thinking, an overall idea is used to find and frame otherwise divergent particulars in an object.

Identity thinking creates a logical fallacy by using a concept as representative of an individual, where in truth the individual does not come under any such concept. While being the dominant mode of thought in the capitalist world, it is also the dominant mode of limiting progress. Brian O'Connor states that "Adorno sees identity thinking as a form of behaviour which cuts the subject's experience of the object down to one of the supposedly all-encompassing concepts or categories supplied by the subject"¹⁴ Therefore, the object is reduced, categorized and stripped of its full meaning.

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno further admonishes the negative consequences of this type of thinking: "Ideology's power of resistance to enlightenment is owed to its complicity with

¹³ Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60.

¹⁴ Brian O'Connor, *Adorno*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 76.

identifying thought, or indeed with thought at large.”¹⁵ Identity thinking limits progress because it makes everything fall under a schema and does not look for meaning in the object, but rather just classification.

In rational identity thinking, the object is idealized and is thought to subsume the concept. Gillian Rose explains this by stating that “for the concept to identify its object in this sense the particular object would have to have all the properties of its ideal state.”¹⁶ Therefore in rational identity thinking, the subject and object are still in union. In fact, the object here holds no specifics: It is just as idealized as the concept. For instance, this occurs in an exchange relation in which the object being exchanged is stripped of what Marx would call its “congealed labour” and thought to be identical with the idealized idea of that object. If the ideological bounds holding society were to break down, identical thinking would not be possible, but rational identical thinking would be true. “If no man had part of his labor withheld from him any more, rational identity would be a fact, and society would have transcended the identifying mode of thinking.”¹⁷ Therefore, rational identity thinking, while not a viable mode for current society, would be admissible otherwise.

Non-identity thinking, on the other hand, is concerned with the indelible differences between subject and object. It acknowledges the disparity between the ideal and the actual. In establishing this term in his *Negative Dialectics* Adorno remarks that “[the cognition of non-identity] seeks to say what something is, while identarian thinking says what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself.”¹⁸ As such, non-identity thinking

¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 148.

¹⁶ Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 44.

¹⁷ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 147.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

seeks to express meaning and to understand the individual object and not merely categorize it, as is done in identity thinking.

We can liken Adorno's idea of non-identity to a hotel with key cards. Identity thinking would posit that all the cards are the same, because they represent the same concept: a card that can open a door. All such cards are thus "identical," and can be subsumed under the identity concept "generic key card." Once a particular card is programmed to open a specific room, however, that identity dissolves. The card in question can no longer be subsumed under the "generic key cards" concept and therefore is non-identical both to the concept and to the other cards in the hotel. In order to unlock a specific door, the hotel card must be made to negate its identity as a "generic key card."

Non-identity thinking flows directly from Adorno's negative dialectic. While in positive dialectics, the two dialectic elements are brought together completely to produce a new identity, in negative dialectics, no such complete fusion is possible. That is to say, the negative dialectic synthesis produces in addition an extra element, a dialectic product that cannot be anticipated. This product or result, since it lies beyond anticipation or even conception, lies beyond identity, beyond dialectic identity. It is, in this respect, non-identity. Murray Dineen calls this, after Adorno's translator E.B. Ashton, a *negative-dialectic remainder*.¹⁹ The remainder is what is non-identical, "the residue left over when two things are otherwise identical."²⁰ Therefore, the remainder is what gives objects their particularities and their uniqueness and keeps them from becoming generalities.

¹⁹ Murray Dineen, *Friendly Reminders: Essays in Music Criticism after Adorno* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 10. The first mention of the "remainder" in Ashton's translation of *Negative Dialectics* is on page 5: "The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder."

²⁰ Dineen, *Friendly Reminders*, 13.

Kant's connection to negative dialectics and non-identity thinking is a slightly more oblique than his link to Schoenberg's notion of musical idea. After all, *Negative Dialectics* contains an extensive Kant-critique in which Adorno largely places the philosopher in the realm of identity thinkers. All the while, in his lectures on Kant, Adorno demonstrates Kant's tendency toward non-identity thinking. The paradox in Kant, as compared with Schoenberg's similarly dual relation to the categories of identity and non-identity, will be further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Adorno: Looking at Kant, Looking at Schoenberg

In order to develop Adorno's connections to both Kant and Schoenberg, it would be worthwhile to now center our attention on two texts: The lectures collected in the volume *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* provide insight into Adorno's understanding of Kant, while his seminal work on music, *The Philosophy of New Music*, expresses his thoughts – both praises and criticisms – on Schoenberg's work. A comparison of the ideas expressed in both texts then reveals a striking similarity in the way Adorno viewed both men.

Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: A Critique of Alienation

A collection of lectures given by Adorno in 1959 at the Frankfurt University, the volume *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* gives just as much, if not more, insight into Adorno's negative dialectics as it does into Kant's own philosophy.¹ In any philosophical borrowing, there is always a 'pick and choose' aspect present. What Adorno is doing here is crystallizing exactly this sort of 'pick and choose' approach he takes with Kant: he finds some tenets more relevant than others, which he rejects as idealist and flawed. Therefore, the lectures lead to a greater understanding of the manner in which Kant shaped Adorno's work: we see Kant through Adorno's lens, but equally we can turn the tables and see Adorno through a Kantian lens. This

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. R. Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge UK: Polity, 2002).

sort of task is not as easily accomplished in Adorno's more canonical works, where he has as his main goal discussing the core tenets of his philosophy and citing the wide variety of thinkers who contributed to his view. Therefore, in such writings, the enormous debt his thinking owes to Kant can remain somewhat clouded. In the lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, this connection is much clearer as Adorno offers a dialectical reading of Kant, or, as he himself puts it, "a dialectical mode of thinking whose elements [he tries] to elucidate...through a discussion of Kant."²

It is important to note that many of the criticisms Adorno seems to raise against Kant's theory throughout these lectures are not only criticisms of Kant, but also of popular contemporary bourgeois understandings of his philosophy, of "what the wicked bourgeois have done to Kant."³ He challenges his audience to dispense assumptions they have about Kant's work and to demythologize it. However, as we are concerned here with exactly the way that the bourgeois (and Schoenberg, as a mostly bourgeois thinker) interpret Kant, these criticisms are of the utmost importance: They are the types of criticisms Adorno would have against Schoenberg's understanding (or misunderstanding, as he would likely hold) of Kant.

Throughout the lectures, Adorno sets up as problematic the idealist manner in which Kant deals with human reason. Stepping away from David Hume's scepticism and from the belief that all that is beyond experience is unknowable, that everything is a posteriori, Kant maintains that there is an objective reality which exists. However, reason cannot understand the true nature of things: there is a metaphysical thing-in-itself [*Ding an sich*] which no mind can know. Because of that the mind can only observe the phenomenal manifestation of real noumena. Despite this shortcoming, reason is far from powerless: its role is to make judgments on reason itself and thus

² Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 233.

³ *Ibid.*, 179.

can be dependent on itself for knowledge. By understanding itself, the mind becomes a “supreme touchstone of truth.”⁴ The recognition of this power, Kant maintains, is what leads an individual to enlightenment.

Adorno’s struggle with this term, ‘enlightenment’, is documented throughout his oeuvre. It rears its head in a major way in his collaboration with Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where the two philosophers take on the idealist aspects of the term as used by a number of thinkers, including Kant. In the lectures discussed here, Adorno makes a point of further deconstructing Kant’s usage of this term and then remarking on a few of the key issues he takes with that usage. He cannot accept such a static absolute, even inside an individual mind. As a Marxist, he finds the concept of individual enlightenment to act in ignorance of the social mechanisms around us and the way that they constantly interact with the individual in a dialectic manner, therefore leaving nothing as static as it is in Kant. If enlightenment is something that a mind can achieve on its own, what about all the ways in which a person functions in society? Can one only be enlightened as a private being or can one achieve enlightenment while fulfilling a social role? Adorno’s admonition is that Kant’s definition of enlightenment “is restricted to the way the individual behaves within the world of his own thoughts” with no concern for the way society affects the individual.⁵ In the sixth lecture, to further explore the way Kant’s philosophy has engendered a focus away from societal ideas, Adorno uses a quote from Rudolph Eisler’s Kant lexicon: “For enlightenment nothing is required but the freedom ‘to make *public use* of one’s reason in all matter’, both as writer and scholar, not however as servant of the state, who as

⁴ Immanuel Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking?,” in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B Nisbet, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 249

⁵ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 62

such may not reason.”⁶ Adorno here connects this interpretation to the division of labour by positing that:

This predicative use of ‘as’ signals a restricting of reason in line with the division of labour in which human beings find themselves involved; the restriction imposed on enlightenment here is in fact a matter of the division of labour. The purely theoretical human being...is free to be enlightened in a radical sense. The moment he has a particular function...all reasoning is at an end.⁷

This leads to Adorno’s view of enlightenment as solely theoretical and not action-oriented.⁸ Just as in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno defines the original role of enlightenment as one of demythologization and disenchantment. All the while, because of its upholding of ultimate truths, the Enlightenment has in and of itself become mythology, dogmatism.⁹ In Kant’s dual way of seeing the world, the mind can only be critical of itself and not of “the structures of objective spirit.”¹⁰ If enlightenment is solely achieved in the mind, this says little about the actions one needs to take to achieve social enlightenment. Therefore, a critique of society becomes unattainable. For someone as schooled in Marxist thought and concerned with labour as Adorno is, this illusory, unattainable enlightenment in Kant becomes problematic.

Strongly related to the issues taken with Kant’s concept of enlightenment is what Adorno identifies as the cornerstone of Kantian thinking – a notion he terms the “Kantian block.” This block is a symptom of Kant’s dualist philosophy: his differentiation between the subjective and the objective as two completely separate worlds. Because of this divide between the two, the subject cannot fully know the object - it is blocked from doing so. Adorno further identifies this block as arising out of “the attempt to give an account of the totality, while simultaneously

⁶ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 63. The source being referenced is Rudolf Eisler’s, *Kant-Lexicon*, a companion to Kant’s collected writings: *Kants Sämliche Schriften, Briefe, und handschriftlicher Nachlaß* [Kant’s Complete Writings, Letters and Posthumous Unpublished Writings], ed. Rudolf Eisler (Hildesheim, 1964).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1991), viii.

¹⁰ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 62.

conceding that this totality is no such thing, that subject and object do not seamlessly fit together.”¹¹ In his philosophy, Kant is simultaneously trying to create an identity between various kinds of reason and recognizing the non-identity between them: He is trying to conceive of a world in which there is an absolute, identical truth, but recognizing that the human mind cannot access it. Therefore, to Kant, identity thinking would be as false as it is in Adorno, not because absolute truths do not exist, but because the mind cannot access them.

Adorno further clarifies his understanding of the block in lecture sixteen. He explains that “this Kantian block can be understood as a form of unmediated Cartesian dualism that is reflexive, that reflects upon itself. It is a dualism in which a great chasm yawns between inner and outer, a chasm that can never be bridged”¹² He relates this chasm to the solitary aspect of Kant’s theory discussed earlier, by giving a social interpretation of block: The Kantian “I” is blocked from the social “we.” By putting limits on the ends of knowledge, Kant isolates his subject. This divide between subjective freedom and objective reality (and with it the non-identity of subject-object relations) is central to Adorno’s thought. However, rather than outright rejecting Kant’s idealism, Adorno reinterpreted it to show the subject-object relations he was diagnosing in capitalist society.

In addition to the overall dualist aspect of Kant’s theory, Adorno takes up another one of its major issues: the bourgeois demands placed on philosophy. He cautions:

In reality what we see [in Kant and Fichte] in this entire clamour for a philosophy without preconceptions is something I have described, somewhat disrespectfully as the mania for foundations [*Fundierungswahn*]. This is the belief that everything which exists must be derived from something else, something older or more primordial.¹³

¹¹ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 178.

¹² *Ibid.*, 174.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

To Adorno, this expectation that every philosophy will begin at the start and will stand discretely from all other philosophies is flawed and it is unnatural to expect a thing like that from a philosopher. However, this problem is created in Kant's philosophy itself. By placing every mind in isolation, Kant has created a society which clamours for discrete philosophies, once again a source of alienation in his philosophy.

Because of Adorno's strong Hegelian influence as well as Hegel's own debt to Kant, Hegel cannot remain unaddressed in such a volume. Adorno addresses the timelessness of Kant in comparison to the treatment of time in Hegel. The Hegelian conception is found in sentences such as the following:

Like all intellectual phenomena, a philosophy does not stand outside time; it exists within time – not merely in the sense that it can be forgotten, or subject to different interpretations, but rather in the sense that its own meaning unfolds in time, forming a variety of configurations that release meanings that were not remotely considered at its inception.¹⁴

Adorno owes to Hegel his conception of an ever-changing philosophy rather than the static absoluteness of Kant. Hegel's dialectics create an effect opposite to the alienation present in Kant. Many of Adorno's criticisms of those alienating aspects of Kant's work stem from his readings of Hegel (in addition, of course, to his readings of Marx). Adorno is seeking a philosophy that is less temporally discrete, that allows for more dialectical interaction between subject and object and between various ideas. If the subject and object are blocked from each other, as in Kant, they cannot be constantly interacting with each other and therefore creating change.

As in all of Adorno's oeuvre, his style reflects his philosophical ideas as much as the content of the work does, so it cannot be overlooked in an examination of the Kant volume. This is true

¹⁴ Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 178.

in a peculiar manner in these lectures. Because spoken word is less sticky, less definite and absolute than writing is, the ‘casual’ style employed by Adorno separates him from the definitiveness of Kant’s text: he does not seek to make the text an object. This intent of Adorno’s is suggested in the afterword by editor Rolf Tiedemann: “In his lectures Adorno sought to make a virtue of a necessity by relinquishing the practice of speaking didactically and reading from an already fixed text that had been fully thought through and formulated in advance”¹⁵ Adorno himself discusses the fact that these lectures cannot be taken to be absolute and should be seen more like musings on the subject by starting off with a disclaimer that one should not view Kant’s *Critique* as a God-given text and that any assertion that it is will “smack of the impotence and hollowness implicit in any such concept of unchanging, eternal values.”¹⁶ It is as if Adorno wants to protect his thought not just from becoming absolute like Kant’s writings, but also from being appropriated and misinterpreted by bourgeois culture.

Philosophy of New Music: Modernism and Historicity

Adorno’s *Philosophy of New Music*, written in 1947 while Adorno was exiled in the United States, provides a dialectical treatment of music focusing on the works of Schoenberg and Stravinsky.¹⁷ Setting up the two as diametrical opposites, Adorno juxtaposes the two throughout the work and is thus able to define two extremes of currents in modern music and in contemporary society. More than anything, the *Philosophy of New Music* is a definition of modernism (in that way, perhaps the earlier title *Philosophy of Modern Music* was more

¹⁵ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 283.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

appropriate), a rejection of mass culture and an appraisal and critique of the way music acts within both spheres.

Adorno finds that the opposition between Schoenberg and Stravinsky was mirrored in a politico-cultural manner in the ideas governing Europe in the early to mid-20th century. He addresses the connection music bears to society in the preface by stating that “the obstinate artistic disputes...often enough appear as if they directly address a reality that is uninterested in them.”¹⁸ Although daily life had become disinterested with high culture in particular, societal issues continued to be played out in music and in its reception. Adorno’s view on modernism reflects this connection. He finds modernism to be bound by the prevalence of suffering and struggle as well as with the control the culture industry wields on both listener and composer. For this reason it is not surprising that he favours music which expresses this struggle and resists commodification as much as possible: music which breaks free from the demands that society exerts on it and therefore expresses truth.

In the introduction, Adorno lays out certain concepts that define modern music and will later on mark the distinction between Schonberg and Stravinsky, notably his concern for historicity. If a musical work is composed in a certain period it must reflect the social character of that period. For this reason, various stylistic features exist. Composers do not have to their disposal the full palette of musical harmonies and textures. If a piece uses sounds that are outdated, it breaks its connection to society. Thus, he rejects modern tonal works as false:

There are modern compositions that occasionally intersperse tonal sounds in their own nexus. In these instances it is the triads that are cacophonous, not the dissonances. As proxy for the dissonances these triads may sometimes be justified. But it is not merely the stylistic impurity that is responsible for their falsity. Rather, today, the technical horizon against which the tonal sounds detestably obtrude encompasses the whole of music.¹⁹

¹⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

Thus, to Adorno, the use of a temporally-inappropriate, anachronistic gesture in a work of music renders it disconnected from its surroundings. In stating that “each chord bears in itself the whole, indeed the whole of history,” he strengthens the connection made between music and society.²⁰ Out of this insistence on historical aesthetics arises Adorno’s discussion on Schoenberg in the first chapter – “Schoenberg and Progress.” Adorno staunchly defends Schoenberg’s method, proclaiming that it reflects the modern condition and the decline of subjectivity, while at the same time providing strong arguments against the twelve-tone method.

To Adorno, dissonances in modern music are paramount: they are the only true way to express the suffering of modernity.²¹ Therefore, he admires Schoenberg for emancipating the dissonance, particularly in his earlier works, giving them historical appropriateness. He agrees that Schoenberg’s music is “representative of the most advanced aesthetic consciousness”, and places his music in diametrical opposition to the dominant culture, utilizing the instrumental rationality of modernity against itself.²²

Adorno also finds historical appropriateness in Schoenberg’s use of the natural progression towards atonality. In a way, Schoenberg does agree with Adorno by seeing himself as the continuation of the great Germanic line of composers. However, historicity in Schoenberg is not simple: it does not arise out of the musical material alone, but is governed by the composer’s overall thinking.

In his essay “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea”, Schoenberg discusses a similar issue – the tendency of composers of different periods to use contextually relevant musical material, but at the same time he holds that there is an eternal, almost God-given idea that

²⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11

²² *Ibid.*, 94.

governs composition.²³ Adorno does not engage with this work directly, but would certainly find this proposition problematic due to its individualistic, absolute character and therefore its divorce from society.

In *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno takes particular issue with two aspects of Schoenberg's music. The first and perhaps superficial argument critiques Schoenberg's use of pre-critical forms (forms which belong to the Classical or Romantic periods) in his work, which creates a rift in historicity. Schoenberg is taking the emancipated dissonance and making it subordinate to a form that reflects a different time period that is not characterized by aspects of suffering as modernity is. Adorno's second and more substantial criticism is, of course, aimed at of the twelve-tone method, in which one finds regressive tendencies: a return to rules which govern over both composer and listener. Schoenberg's method, originally intended to be revolutionary, has become reactionary. While imposing new rules on the composer, the twelve-tone method does not give the listener sufficient material to create context. As Adorno puts it, "the row, valid for one work only, does not possess the comprehensive universality that would, on the basis of schema, assign a function to the repeated event, which as a reiterated individual phenomenon it does not have."²⁴ Therefore, far from a system, the twelve-tone method creates isolated works. Furthermore, the use of the twelve-tone row and its different forms creates a work of music which is characterized by repetition and therefore tautology.

These issues are further taken up in the second chapter, which serves equally as a critique of Stravinsky's works and method and as a reconsideration of Schoenberg. The chapter allows for a better understanding of what exactly Adorno approved of in Schoenberg and of the ways in which he found his music to be an adequate expression of modernism. In opposition to the

²³ Arnold Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 123.

²⁴ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 73.

historical appropriateness of free dissonance, Adorno places Stravinsky's reactive music – both his earlier period works such as *The Rite of Spring* as well as his later neoclassical period works. Stravinsky's earlier avant-garde works are, to Adorno, marred by their connections to dance and body movement. He finds that Stravinsky capitalized on the bourgeois desire for a return to nature and purity. From this desire, Stravinsky created a false music of fake shock and barbarism in a different sense than was considered by early reviewers.

On the other hand, late Stravinsky works, by reverting to a classical aesthetic, are accused of being too much about style, of using style as decoration rather than as a historical attribute. The music of a certain period is meant to reflect all that is around it in society. By borrowing an earlier style in a manner so fully and so uncritically, Stravinsky broke the connection of style to the social structures of the time. Because of this uncritical borrowing, Adorno accuses Stravinsky of reifying style and of writing “music about music” instead of having music emerge organically out of the piece.²⁵ In the 20th century, this makes his music temporally inappropriate for the modern condition of suffering; Adorno accuses it of identifying “not with the victim but with the annihilating authority.”²⁶

Adorno's musings on style in Stravinsky bring us back to issues of style and idea in Schoenberg's “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea.” The whole *Philosophy of New Music* can be seen through those two notions of Schoenberg's: style as something dialectically interacting with the social ideas of the time and idea as something eternal. However, to Adorno, eternal does not mean unchanging; both notions would be connected – “idea” perhaps being seen as the plural form of “style.” A style is a single instance of appropriate historicity. The

²⁵ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 182.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

Schoenbergian musical idea is a style that has developed through time in a Hegelian manner through dialectical interactions both with society and with other musical works.

From these two works – *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* and *Philosophy of New Music* – a similarity between Adorno's treatment of Kant and Schoenberg emerges. In both Adorno admires his subjects (Kant and Schoenberg) and their abilities to break down existing modes of thought and creation. Those abilities, however, are spurned by a society which does not know how to receive them – a society in which Kant's theories have come to be viewed as absolute and antiquated, and a society which has rejected Schoenberg's works as a timely vehicle for social critique.

In Adorno, the ideas of Kant and Schoenberg then exist as “non-identities,” to borrow a phrase from Murray Dineen, “despite the best of intentions.”²⁷ Society seems on one hand to pull them back to identity schematization, but on the other hand to help them express their radical aspects by doing so. Kant's ideas are misconstrued, reified and reduced to formulae. This closes them off to society even more than they already are, thus demonstrating clearly, for Adorno, the limits of bourgeois society. Schoenberg represents a similar paradox to Adorno. His music, as Richard Leppert comments, engages “one moment to the next with history as history itself unfolds”²⁸ He is “the dialectical composer” who is at one with his work and fully engages with the negative aspects of his music. He is also, however, a bourgeois composer who wants his music to be apprehended as identical to the tradition of the “great masters” before him. Thus Schoenberg, in his attitude to his music, demonstrates clearly his bourgeois conception as

²⁷ Murray Dineen, *Friendly Reminders: Essays in Music Criticism after Adorno* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 101.

²⁸ Richard Leppert, commentary to *Essays on Music*, by Theodor Adorno, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et. al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), 112.

reactionary, the very antipode to his revolutionary music.

The reasoning for both Kant and Schoenberg's "success despite the best of intentions" in Adorno's eyes has been suggested by Max Paddison. In the following passage Paddison is discussing music, but his thought can be easily applied to the creation of any kind of work – artistic or philosophical:

It is irrelevant whether composers are aware of 'social tendencies' or not – Schoenberg's fractious comment: 'Music has no more to do with society than a game of chess' comes to mind here – as both they and the musical material at their disposal, so he argues, are socially and historically mediated anyway.²⁹

The fact that Kant and Schoenberg were bourgeois idealists was irrelevant to the way their ideas were created and perceived by society. The social relations of their works were inevitable regardless of their intentions. This, ultimately, is Adorno's critique.

²⁹ Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 189.

CHAPTER 3

The Dialectic between the Pre-Critical and the Critical

In the introduction of *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, Max Paddison writes that, to Adorno, music is “condemned to meaning, whatever the intentions of its creators.”¹ The term “condemned to meaning” is taken from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which he discusses the way all human actions are inevitably tied to history. Merleau-Ponty states: “Because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning, and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history.”² It follows from that that any action that we undertake, while inevitably remaining tied to us, has its own course and will elicit a reaction from society that is beyond our control.

By drawing this parallel between Merleau-Ponty and Adorno, Paddison turns our attention not only to Adorno’s emphasis on historicity and social relations in art, but also to the way in which he interprets the composer’s relation to the artwork. The concepts of historicity and social relations are ones recurring throughout *Philosophy of New Music*. A musical work’s inevitable relation to society cannot be denied by the composer. This idea of Adorno’s runs counter to the modernist concept of the composer as creator and owner of ideas. This notion of personal responsibility for creativity depends largely upon Kant’s writing (chiefly in the *Critique of*

¹ Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), xix.

Judgment) and was adopted by Schoenberg, among other composers. This idea of the “creator” led to a situation in which, as Hilde Hein remarks, “the autonomous individual, glorified in the person of the artist and secondarily in the created object, transcends the public, whose emancipatory benefit is vicarious and derivative.”³ In countering this view, Adorno creates a situation in which art transcends not the public, but its creator.

A musical work cannot necessarily be detached from its creator who put labour into the composition and therefore made his imprint into it. However, to Adorno, compositions often function in a way apart from the composer, or at least in a way in which the composer did not intend them to. This sort of semi-detachment of musical works from their creators is an idea which runs throughout his writings on Schoenberg.

Adorno frequently makes a distinction between Schoenberg as a composer and Schoenberg’s music. It is undoubted that he saw most of Schoenberg’s music as dialectical, as music that could be “understood from reversal to reversal and from extreme to extreme as a dialectical process between the elements of expression and construction.”⁴ On Adorno’s account, Schoenberg’s compositions attempted to break through the traditional schema of tonality and therefore to preclude ideological, systematic elements from music. Adorno, however, thought that Schoenberg – the person and composer – was too closely bound to the bourgeois mode of identity thinking to realise the dialectical contradictions in his music.

Adorno saw a similar dichotomy in Kant. To him Kant was “not ashamed of his bourgeois attitudes, but gave them expression and...thereby expressed something of their truth.”⁵ He

³ Hilde Hein, “What is Public Art?: Time, Space and Meaning,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 54:1 (Winter, 1996): 1.

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 77.

⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge UK: Polity, 2002), 26.

expressed their truth, however, not because he sought to do so, but because his ideas were inevitably “condemned” to interact with society. Adorno found Kant’s tendency toward bourgeois thinking to be documented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which he termed a capitalist text, because of its emphasis on monetary metaphors and exchange relations.⁶ Adorno linked Kant’s desire to solve philosophical contradictions to the process of exchange relations. In an exchange relation, as viewed by bourgeois society, a payment cancels out the goods or services rendered and the two parties may part ways with a clear conscience, having erased any connection to each other. Of course to a Marxist, even an atypical one like Adorno, this would be untrue: The service or good rendered would hold within it a congealed labour of which neither the object, nor the labourer, nor the buyer would be free. Kant’s bourgeois frame of mind does not allow him to see that.

Out of this Kantian desire to eliminate contradictions arises another issue that Adorno takes with Kant’s work, namely his desire to categorize and schematize ideas. Because in Kant’s view unifying reason is the sole tool for evaluating objects, it evaluates them the same way constantly and in doing so aims to avoid contradictions.⁷ For Adorno, however, because of the block between “knowing subject” and “object known”, objects as the mind perceives them cannot be fully identical to objects as they truly are. This contradiction is clearly expressed in the second of Adorno’s lectures in *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, wherein he uses the term “block” (the idea that reason, in Kant, is blocked from true knowledge) to express:

We might even say that in a sense the vital nerve of Kant’s philosophy as a whole lies in the conflict between these two aspects, the impulse toward system, unity and reason, and, on the other hand, consciousness of the heterogeneous, the block,

⁶ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 26-27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

the limit. These two elements are in a state of constant friction and he is always being brought up short by this block.⁸

The pull between structure or system, on one hand, and the particular or the unlike in objects, on the other, is one which Adorno also identifies in Schoenberg's thought. With the above passage on Kant in mind, we may read the following quote from Adorno's 1955 essay "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg" and find a familiar ring:

At every level in Schoenberg, forces of a polar nature are at work - the forces of unrestrained, emancipated, authentic expression; and the force of a through-construction that attracts to itself even the last detail, the fleeting tremor.⁹

Adorno has identified in both Kant and Schoenberg this struggle between schematic and radical thinking, a struggle which neither is cognizant of. Being thus ignorant, they create ideas which are "condemned to meaning" beyond their intentions and which achieve at least a certain degree of an unmeasured radicalism despite their creators' desire to schematize them.

All the while, the radicalism of both Kant and Schoenberg's thought is lost, to a certain degree, on a society which values structure and sameness. Adorno's discussion of the way that both the work of Kant and the music of Schoenberg have been received once again draws strong parallels between the two of them.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the lectures published as *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* are Adorno's attempt to clarify common misunderstandings of Kant's work – misunderstandings occurring because of the influence of a capitalist mode of thought in the reception of Kant's philosophy. For Adorno, these lectures document the ways in which Kant's thought was misunderstood and the manner in which it had become enshrined and therefore carried with it many misconceptions. In the very opening lecture Adorno states that "the formulae to which

⁸ Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 18.

⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et. al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), 627-643.

philosophies are commonly reduced tend to reify the actual writings, to sum them up in a rigid fashion and thus to make a genuine interactions with them a lot harder.”¹⁰ As a result, Kant’s thought is doubly “condemned”: once, by Kant’s tendency towards schemas and systems, and a second time by society’s attempt to reduce it to categories and aphorisms and therefore misconstrue it.

This is a process that Adorno identifies in Schoenberg’s work as well, albeit in a slightly different manner. The early atonal works and their tepid reception outside of a select audience emphasized the conceptual bareness of modern society. Schoenberg’s music was isolated on two accounts. First of all it was isolated because of its social content: As music which focused on the dissonance, it called forward the ugly social reality of the modern world and thus exposed the falseness of bourgeois music. Edward Said identifies the aspect of this music that Adorno admired: “Standing apart from society with a uniquely brooding severity and a remorseless self-control, the new music’s loneliness pitilessly showed how all other art had become kitsch.”¹¹ Secondly, Schoenberg’s twelve-tone works have been misconstrued by their audience, which saw in them only a system of composing rather than an expression of social content. Because of that Schoenberg was “degraded to the inventor of a system that was more or less convenient to operate, a stimulating companion for like-thinking hobbyists.”¹² Therefore, to Adorno, Schoenberg’s music was misconstrued by many and read as being nothing more than the scheme it was written in.

¹⁰ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 1.

¹¹ Edward Said, “Traveling Theory Reconsidered,” in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 441.

¹² Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 628.

This discrepancy between composer, production and reception materialises itself throughout Adorno's 1955 essay "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg."¹³ Written after Schoenberg's death, the essay is paying tribute to his achievements, and at the same time discussing the circumstances that led to what Adorno sees as his shortcomings, "what the structure of existence denied to him."¹⁴ It is an exploration of Schoenberg's interactions with the societal aspects of music and of his (flawed, as Adorno would argue) desire to remove his music from these aspects.

In this chapter, I shall examine Adorno's 1955 essay. Before doing so, several key terms need to be defined. The following section, then, comprises definitions of the following terms and ideas, many of them oppositional pairs: identity and non-identity, contradiction, "pre-critical" and "critical," self-referential and structural, musical criticism and musical analysis, Schoenberg's naïveté, cutaneous and subcutaneous, and ornaments and functionalism.

Identity and Non-Identity

The terms *identity* and *non-identity* were taken up in the first chapter of this study. However, the notion that particulars do not neatly fit into their concepts as an identarian mode of thought would suggest is worth revisiting as it materializes itself many times throughout "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg."

The notions of identity made concrete in categories and schemas are easily applied to music, particularly to serialism. Paddison remarks that "for Adorno, truth lies in the particular, which evades the universalizing tendency of conceptual thought."¹⁵ Yet, serialism, with its attempt to impose a system on music, tended toward identity. This is most clearly expressed in Adorno's essay "The Aging of New Music," in which he takes issue with the total serialism of Boulez and

¹³ Adorno, "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg," 628.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 15.

his contemporaries. Total serialism takes to extremes the identity schematization of music. To Adorno, this is identity thinking. He argues:

The basis of this serialism is a static idea of music: the precise correspondences and equivalences that total rationalization requires are founded on the presupposition that the identical element that recurs in music is indeed actually equivalent, as it would be in a schematic spatial representation.¹⁶

By bringing music into a total schema, Boulez is erasing the radical, non-identity aspect of modern music. He is saying that music is equivalent to the schema it is composed in and therefore identifying the music with its schema. There is, therefore, no process, no transformation, no negative-dialectic supplement. Everything is equivalent and therefore an identity.

This is true to a lesser degree in Schoenberg's serialism. Schoenberg, after all, was content merely to serialize pitches. But in it Adorno still sees the seedlings of what will later develop into the total identity of total serialism. This is one of the main ways Schoenberg's music was "condemned" by society. Its ideas were taken and further schematized in a manner he did not predict.

Contradiction

Throughout *Negative Dialectics* Adorno is, to a certain extent, categorising ways of thinking. Such categorization runs the risk of itself becoming an apparatus of identity thinking: of looking for instances in which one can categorize something as being identity or non-identity thinking without necessarily considering what makes it particular, of what the "remainder" might be when that type of thought is fully considered. To reiterate, Adorno's philosophy manages to avoid this descent into categorization largely through his emphasis on contradictions.

¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Aging of New Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et. al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), 188.

Adorno's philosophy of contradictions arises from Hegel, but is reinterpreted to accord with negative dialectics. Susan Buck-Morss pinpoints the difference between Hegel and Adorno's takes on contradictions. Dialectics in Hegel arrive at complete synthesis. In Adorno, no such complete synthesis is possible; something is always leftover when concept and its opposite are brought together:

Whereas Hegel saw negativity, the movement of the concept toward its "other" as merely a moment in a larger process toward systematic completion, Adorno saw no possibility of an argument coming to rest in unequivocal synthesis.¹⁷

Gerhard Richter also speaks about the way in which Adorno distinguished himself from Hegel:

While Adorno's touchstone is Hegel, his own dialectic, as a *negative* dialectic, differs from Hegel's in that it refuses to yield the mediation of subject and object, or the identical and nonidentical, to a final moment of identity, a synthetic sublation within thought itself. His thought refuses to assimilate, into the absolute of identity, the irreducible difference that traverses even the concept of difference. While Hegel's dialectical model, in Adorno's reading, works to co-opt into its system even those moments of difference and object to otherness that remain absolutely other to it, Adorno's thinking self-consciously wishes to remain responsible to what cannot be subsumed, even dialectically, under the concept, the system, the absolute or totality itself.¹⁸

Adorno never finds complete reconciliation between contradictions, because that would result in the notions being contradicted becoming identical. This view is partially due to the influence of Kant and his concept of antinomies. To Adorno, the bourgeois interpretation of Kant dictates that we should eliminate all contradictions and therefore view his ideas as identical. But to Adorno, the core concept of Kant's theory, the *block* between pure existence and existent beings is founded on contradiction.¹⁹ Adorno interprets Kant as a source of contradiction:

The profundity of a philosophy...is not a matter of its capacity for resolving contradictions, but rather of its ability to bring to the surface contradictions that are

¹⁷ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1977), 63.

¹⁸ Gerhard Richter, *Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 13.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 87.

deeply embedded in the subject under investigation, to raise such contradictions to the level of consciousness, and at the same time, to understand the necessity for them; that is, to understand their meaning.²⁰

To Adorno, Kant's exercise, whether or not he realizes it, is to expose contradictions and to demonstrate fallacies in bourgeois thought. This is at the very core of the paradox of his thought, a paradox which arises from what Adorno calls the "block" between the "knowing subject" and "object known." At the time of Adorno's lectures, the common view of Kant's philosophy saw it as thought free of contradictions; Kant himself certainly placed emphasis on unity and on resolving contradictions. However, Adorno sees it as a comment on society even when it avoids being such a comment.

To Adorno, the block is not created by the mind, but rather by society. Since Adorno, given his idiosyncratic Marxism, thought that works of art should express the inadequacy of society and of thought, it is the role of any artwork, including a musical one, to present contradictions. In *Prisms*, he states that "a successful work...is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure."²¹ Therefore, if a work of art is not going to submit to the identity ideology of the culture industry, it must be made up of contradictions.

Pre-Critical and Critical

A work of art having submitted to the culture industry appears to be free of contradictions. For Adorno, such appearances stem from a pre-critical view of art. On the pre-critical account, the work is not criticising society around it, nor is it making statements about itself; it is isolated in

²⁰ Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 82.

²¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 32.

its identity. This type of absolute and self-contained artwork adheres to a schema – the schema of self-containment – and, as such, is a product of identity thinking.

Adorno finds the idea of a work being isolated in such a way to be problematic. As a Marxist, everything to him is linked with capitalist society. In “Sociology and Empirical Research,” he states that “[Theory] must transform the concepts which it, as it were, brings in from outside into those which the object has by itself, into that which the object would like to be and confront it with what it is.”²² If we look at things positivistically in isolation, according to an identity theory built upon concepts of autonomy, we look at them in a non-critical manner. As Gillian Rose clarifies, “the object can be known independently of theoretical concepts” in a bourgeois frame of reference.²³ Those bourgeois theoretical concepts, however, do not define the object.

If an object, on the other hand, is viewed as breaking through its theoretical framework it becomes non-identical with it. For Adorno, this allows for a critical view of the work: one which lets it interact with its surroundings. Early on in *Negative Dialectics*, where he introduces the notions of negation and of the non-conceptuality of concepts, Adorno states that “to change the direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward non-identity, is the hinge of negative dialectics.”²⁴ A notion contains in itself both conceptuality and non-conceptuality. So does an object, in this case a musical work. It can contain both a general, all-encompassing theoretical framework, alongside specific and particular aspects of itself.

To Adorno a concept cannot exist solely through identical, positive thoughts: it needs non-conceptuality to prove itself. Therefore, Adorno would like an artwork to contain both schematic

²² Theodor W. Adorno, “Sociology and Empirical Research,” in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adley and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), 68.

²³ Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 11.

aspects and radical ones. That would allow music to be self-critical: to comment not necessarily on some larger finite category, but rather on itself as a thing exceeding categories.

Structural Reasoning and Regressive Reasoning

This division between identity and non-identity is reflected in Adorno's discussions on musical listening. In *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* he outlines eight different styles of listeners, from "expert" listeners on one end of the scale to "musically indifferent" on the other.²⁵ For functionality's sake Max Paddison aptly sorts these eight types into two main categories – adequate listeners and regressive listeners.²⁶

Adequate listeners are self-reflective and follow the music as a whole, not just its individual moments. They perform a complex act of constantly accounting for what has passed and relating it to, what Paddison refers to as "a context made up of past, present and future moments which constitute the musical work as it unfolds through time."²⁷ Such listeners are attuned to the structural content of a musical work, where such a structure includes elements of contradiction and negative dialectics. In this regard, they could be said to be "self-referential," concerned with their individuality as the negative-dialectic product of contradiction.

Regressive listeners, on the other hand, only enjoy the 'now' of music and are unconcerned with musical structure as it arises from criticism. They perceive music as an identity object of enjoyment – as an object whose identity is readily discerned. Doing so, they fetishize it. In describing music as a fetishized object, Adorno is borrowing a term from Marx, which he then uses to describe the identity conscience of the bourgeois who see in a commodity only the thing

²⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1989), 4.

²⁶ Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 210.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

itself and not its inextricable relationship with labour. This type of listener, explored at length in Adorno's essay *On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening*, is one who is often produced by the culture industry with its focus on capitalist production.

Although the term "regressive listener" might call to mind a person heavily influenced by the culture industry, regressive listening is not necessarily confined to such people. Involved here is a very different kind of autonomy than that of the culture industry. In the latter case, the artwork exists as a commodity devoid of relation to society – to the exploitation of labour in particular. For Adorno, a work is autonomous where it avoids being subsumed under an identity conception. Accordingly, its structure is non-identity, the structural element of the work that will not allow it to be subsumed under some identity concept. Let us call this "structural reasoning," the process or reasoning an adequate listener brings to listening, which allows such a listener to see through identity fetishes and perceive the essential contradictions in a musical work as its structure.

If structural reasoning is what is looked for when listening to a piece of music, then to Adorno music appears to thrive by being an organism in and of itself. It does this by being critically self-referential – referring to itself as a vehicle of criticism. Rose Rosengard-Subotnik broaches this notion in her famous essay "Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening" by stating that to Adorno music can be autonomous and can therefore become meaningful in an entirely self-referential way.²⁸ This is a form of autonomy completely the opposite of the pre- or non-critical autonomy of identity thinking and the bourgeois commodity fetish. The artwork becomes autonomous in its own sense after rejecting the bourgeois idea of autonomy that separates artworks from material life.

²⁸ Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening" in *Deconstructive Variations Music and Reason in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 169.

If the musical work is self-referential, it seems to be analogous to Adorno's critical revision of the pre-critical Kantian mind: isolated from (and with respect to) some sort of thing-in-itself. Although never directly stated by Adorno, the way he sees music seems to at times be a metaphor for the Kantian human condition in its self-containment – in its ability to be both pre-critical and critical, identity and non-identity. We shall return to Kant shortly.

Musical Criticism, Musical Analysis

Despite this fascination with internal correlations in music, Adorno keeps returning to a desire to see music realize itself as a critical model at work in a social arena. If music is critically self-referential and if its most salient aspect is contained in its inner temporal connections, that would seem to suggest that it is unable to comment on something larger. However, that is certainly not the case in Adorno who sees music as a mirror of society and the vehicle for a social analysis.

This social element in music is evidenced in his emphasis on historicism in *Philosophy of New Music*. Adorno's subject is non-identity thinking and musical form. Form needs to hold in itself the concept of form as identity, but also its opposite, that form might not correspond to any historical generic conception of form but instead to a historically particular conception proper to a given piece. The brunt of Adorno's critique here is Schoenberg's use of "classical" forms in his twelve-tone works, which seem to evoke generic classical forms rather than address the specific formal structures of twelve-tone works in their own time. To create a form which does not recognize this historical contradiction would be identity thinking.

True form would be therefore critically analytical. Analysis would involve determining its structure in terms of contradiction. Criticism would place such a negatively-dialectical structure in terms of its social background. Thus the work's ability to be critical would hinge on its

analytical aspects. This sort of paradox recalls Georg Lukács' theory that the bourgeoisie would be realized only in the moment in which it becomes obsolete.²⁹ Similarly, to Adorno, musical form needs to realize itself formalistically and, once that is accomplished, then become critical. It is in the constant interplay between synthesis and contradiction of analysis and criticism that music creates itself and becomes socially relevant.

Naiveté

Although Adorno sees this interplay between synthesis and contradiction in Schoenberg's music, as a product of bourgeois culture Schoenberg's main mode of thinking was an identarian one. He sought to create identary systems and unities in which to express his works. By trying, for example, to use eighteenth- and nineteenth-century forms in the twentieth century, he was composing naively. He was using an idea out of context and therefore fetishizing it, applying only its identary generality to his music and leaving its particularities. This issue has been explored at length by Murray Dineen in *Friendly Reminders: Essays in Musical Criticism after Adorno*. Dineen explains:

For Adorno, Schoenberg was not completely responsible for his accomplishment. Barely conscious of the true importance of his work, a naïve Schoenberg was guided by a tide of involuntary intuition which rendered his music capable of inflicting deadly blows. Despite the best of intentions, his music succeeded heroically.³⁰

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, Schoenberg was succeeding *in spite* of himself, and on this account we need to draw a distinction between Schoenberg and his music. While Schoenberg is often conforming to a pre-critical mode of identity thinking (using classical forms anachronistically, for example), his works in themselves are usually critical and therefore non-

²⁹ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectic*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971) 53-4, 181, and 225.

³⁰ Murray Dineen, *Friendly Reminders: Essays in Music Criticism after Adorno* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 10.

identical with the forms that they are created out of. Dineen explains this issue in Schoenberg's music, particularly in his use of pre-critical forms:

Schoenberg's solution was fatally flawed... In the middle-period Beethoven, the narrative of developing variation is expressed entirely within the work through the manipulation of the work's own motivic and thematic content. A twelve-tone composition, however, develops a row through its row forms, all of which are predetermined externally to the composition of the actual work.³¹

As a composer, Schoenberg is taking an old model and naïvely applying it to a modernist work.

Schoenberg's thinking largely stems from the (for Adorno) false bourgeois notion that high culture and materialism are unlinked. Martin Jay pinpoints this separation as "the root of the dialectic of enlightenment."³² A parallel can be drawn to his notions of style and idea. The idea can be linked to culture, which looks down on material life and its utilitarian personification of style. In placing style over idea, however, Schoenberg is not seeing the labour inherent in his work and is privileging something that he considers "high culture"

This distinction can be seen in the very words that Schoenberg uses to describe the two terms. Style, as a "tool," is linked to the craftsman.³³ The idea, on the other hand is linked with a creator; it is eternal and quasi-deistic. Schoenberg states: "the tool itself may fall into disuse, but the idea behind it can never become obsolete."³⁴ Using the plot of *Die glückliche Hand* as a starting point, Joseph Auner remarks that "the polarity between a craftsman's repetitive labor and the miraculous creation of genius reflects Schoenberg's conviction that a work of art must be created fully formed, not assembled from component parts."³⁵ In that difference between

³¹ Dineen, *Friendly Reminders*, 96.

³² Martin Jay, *Adorno*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 114.

³³ For the distinction between creation and craftsmanship see Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 7-17.

³⁴ Arnold Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 123.

³⁵ Joseph Auner, "Heart and Brain in Music: The Genesis of Schoenberg's *Die glückliche Hand*," in *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture*, ed. Christopher Hailey and Juliane Brand (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 114.

“repetitive labor” and “miraculous creation” Schoenberg parallels the opposition between high culture and material life. Style, the product of labour, is linked to everyday life, while the idea, as something that belongs to a creator, is linked to culture and therefore has a higher status in Schoenberg’s eyes.

Adorno rejects this placement of style over idea. Following Marx, he sees the style and form of a piece of music as linked to its mode of production. Style and form, therefore, cannot be treated lightly. Although they are not necessarily what gives a piece of music its particularities, they are an inextricable part of the piece. This is what leads Adorno to his main criticism of the manner in twelve-tone compositions are executed: If the row is worked out before the piece itself is, it becomes a sort of labouring a priori; the work and the labour used to produce it are divorced in conception (precisely the thing Marx criticizes by means of the concept of commodity fetish). However, Schoenberg, who is more concerned with creating a musical thing-in-itself under the guise of the musical idea, is unable to see the fetish aspect of the mode of production implicit of his works. On this account, he is therefore, to Adorno, naïve.

Cutaneous and Subcutaneous

The categories of style and idea link, although not entirely, to the notions of cutaneous and subcutaneous. Following Schoenberg, Adorno defines the cutaneous as superficial, as that which we immediately grasp when we perceive an object. The subcutaneous, on the other hand, is only understood after a critical examination of the work, after analysis and criticism in the sense described above. In his essay on Schoenberg in *Prisms*, Adorno speaks about the composer’s distinction between the two terms:

What he designated as the ‘subcutaneous’ – the fabric of individual musical events, grasped as the ineluctable moments of an internally coherent totality – breaks

through the surface, becomes visible and manifests itself independently of all stereotyped forms. The inward dimension moves outward.³⁶

The source for Schoenberg's definition for the subcutaneous seems to be his 1912 essay "The Relationship to the Text" where he discusses the musical work as an organism: "When one cuts into any part of the human body, the same thing always comes out – blood. When one hears a verse of a poem, a measure of a composition, one is in a position to comprehend the whole."³⁷ This definition would seem to link the cutaneous and subcutaneous into a conceptual whole. To Adorno, however, this would be, first of all, identity thinking in its unqualified synthesis of two opposites.

Additionally, however, he would find the emphasis on the subcutaneous in Schoenberg's thought to be naïve. Since the subcutaneous aligns with "Idea" in *Style and Idea*, music without Idea is mere style, not really profound. However, in the capitalist world, the subcutaneous would not be able to exist without the presence of the cutaneous. The idea would not be able to be expressed without a style. For Adorno, both the cutaneous and the subcutaneous work together, albeit in constant opposition. Although the cutaneous is surface, it is still present even after the first cursory listening further reinterpretations of the work. It is not suppressed when the "inward" moves "outward."

Ornamentation and Functionalism

Largely on the basis of subcutaneous and cutaneous, Adorno sets up a correlation between Schoenberg and the architect Adolf Loos, a contemporary and friend of Schoenberg's. As a part of the Functionalist [*Sachlichkeit*] movement, Loos rejected sheer ornamentation for

³⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951," in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 152.

³⁷ Arnold Schoenberg, "The Relationship to the Text," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 144.

ornamentation's sake and championed radical structure. He therefore tried to destroy an identity, an identarian unity between style and idea created through false facades and styles.

Instead, Loos brought the subcutaneous, the function of the building, out in confrontation with style. Like Loos' architecture, Schoenberg's music turned things "inside out," so as to forbid recourse to false styles, false facades. Schoenberg's music, then, treats "external musical structures" – external in the sense of false, as external schema, not internal – as anathema. Like Loos, his music tries to do away with formulae and schemes; all that remains is the interior, the functionally necessary, brought forward in lieu of an identarian style. Only then does it become "audible" to the adequate listener, the real listener who can understand the dialectics and negation.³⁸

However, this rejection of schemas largely escapes Schoenberg's thought, both in his theoretical writings and in his compositions. This interaction between unwitting creator, non-identical work and largely regressive audience underlies Adorno's criticisms of Schoenberg, as well as his discussions of Kant as we shall see shortly.

Adorno's "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg"

We will now turn to a detailed examination of "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg" bearing in mind the concepts discussed above. The essay reveals Adorno's view on Schoenberg and, when compared to parts of his *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, provides an interesting parallel to his views on Kant.

³⁸ In a 1965 lecture called "Functionalism Today," Adorno once again took up the topic of Loos and Schoenberg. To him, Loos did not reject the ornamentation present in earlier architecture. He simply found that in the modern day, ornamentation was not historically appropriate. "Criticism of ornament means no more than criticism of that which has lost its functional and symbolic signification." In the twentieth century, ornamentation lulls the viewer and gives the impression of a peaceful unity between a thing and its reality. The lecture appears reprinted in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (New York: Routledge, 1997), 6-19.

Schoenberg the Pre-Critical

As in many of his other writings on Schoenberg, Adorno is returning to the notion that Schoenberg, while thinking in a pre-critical manner, was able to produce critical works of art. He begins by outlining Schoenberg's pre-critical organicist tendencies and the manner in which they affected his compositions, particularly the unfinished *Moses und Aron* and *Die Jakobsleiter*. The composer's constant evasion of those two works suggests to Adorno the impossibility of the tasks he had set himself in them, namely to create works as integral wholes. Because he saw himself as the continuation of great Germanic masters, Schoenberg thought on the one hand that he could "musically shape a comprehensive totality of meaning," while on the other that he was an integral whole who can produce music solely from within himself.³⁹ As a creator, he thought himself unaffected by social conditions.

Although Adorno does not make direct reference to Kant here, Schoenberg's notion of the composer as an integral whole can be read as a symptom of his Kantianism. Much as Kant would suggest that the mind exists in isolation from society, so does music to Schoenberg: mind and music are idealised objects and as such are independent of social conditions.

Such a point of view is espoused in the opening of his 1941 lecture "Composition with Twelve Tones."⁴⁰ Schoenberg compares artistic creation to the Divine creation of Earth: "it is one thing to envision in a creative instant of inspiration and it is another thing to materialize one's vision by painstakingly connecting details until they fuse into a kind of organism."⁴¹ Although he acknowledges the work that the artist needs to put into creation (i.e. this is not

³⁹ Adorno, "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg," 627.

⁴⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones (I)," *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 214.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

something that just appears in a genius mind) Schoenberg is convinced that there is such a thing as a musical work as espoused in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*:

Genius is the talent (or natural gift) which gives the rule to Art. Since talent, as the innate productive faculty of the artist, belongs itself to Nature, we may express the matter thus: *Genius* is the innate mental disposition (*ingenium*) through which Nature gives the rule to Art.⁴²

To Kant, "beautiful art," that is, fine art can only be the product of a genius creator. Schoenberg agreed in that he believed that musical rows and even entire compositions could be conceived subconsciously, despite the material work that needed to be put into realizing a musical composition.⁴³

To Adorno, statements like that betray Schoenberg's pre-critical way of viewing composition. Schoenberg saw himself as an integral whole free of contradictions and so he thought that he could create music which was also an integral whole free of contradictions. Music, in the form of the musical idea, would come down to him in a quasi-divine way. "From my experience," he writes "I know that [the idea] can also be a subconsciously received gift from the Supreme Commander."⁴⁴

In commenting on this same passage, and Adorno's reception of such ideas, Dineen remarks:

When Schoenberg thinks of himself as the vehicle for some absolute compositional force – his 'Supreme Commander' – this is simply naïve. He is, instead, the vehicle of a musical intuition that penetrates to the very essence of music in Late Capitalism, doing so without any awareness of itself.⁴⁵

To Adorno, Schoenberg's thinking on the matter is flawed. Musical ideas may indeed be coming to him through what Auner calls "miraculous creation."⁴⁶ However, that intuition is created not because Schoenberg belongs to some high strata of creators along with Bach, Beethoven and

⁴² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. John Henry Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), 112, §46.

⁴³ Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones (I)," 223.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Dineen, *Friendly Remainers*, 84-85.

⁴⁶ Auner, "Heart and Brain in Music," 114.

Brahms, but rather because their ideas have become idealized and enshrined in bourgeois culture and have therefore become an entrenched way of thinking for composers such as Schoenberg.

To return to “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” Adorno remarks on the matter of Schoenberg’s idea of creation by stating that he wrote “as if the genius of History were making up in the sphere of aesthetics, in the substance of the individual, for what it withholds from society in its reality.”⁴⁷ But it is exactly this reality – in effect a social reality – that must be acknowledged in art, rather than “the genius of History.”

Autonomy and Tautology

Thinking of art in isolation from reality is inadmissible to Adorno. Composition must involve a dialectical interaction – complete with contradiction and negation – between the composer, the music, and the society that both exist in. Adorno summarizes: “the artist’s accomplishment is not, as genius theory teaches, within his power, but instead depends largely on the objective conditions of the form and content of the work.”⁴⁸ For the composer to think otherwise, to believe in their unlimited powers of creativity, is identity thinking, the very height of subjectivity.

For Adorno, Schoenberg as a composer was not an integral whole. He was just as dependent on objective conditions – a relation to society – as any other person, artist or otherwise. Thinking of oneself let alone one’s music as an integral whole is to Adorno identity thinking, which he calls ideology. He states: “Music is ideology insofar as it asserts itself as an ontological being-in-itself, beyond society’s tensions.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 627.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 628.

⁴⁹ Adorno. *Philosophy of New Music*, 100.

Here Adorno is picking up an idea that he had expressed earlier, in *Philosophy of New Music*, the idea of tautology. He states that works of art cannot be fully autonomous without being tautological. Art “cannot escape the delusive web to which it belongs socially. In its blindness, the radically alienated, absolute artwork tautologically refers exclusively to itself.”⁵⁰

This tautology of isolation Adorno finds addressed in Kant and he, in turn, discusses it in his lectures on the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If the mind is a self-serving entity, there is a tautological problem within that mind, or “if everything that is known is basically nothing but a knowing reason, what we have is no real knowledge but only a kind of reflection of reason.”⁵¹ This sort of tautology is at the core of identity theory. A thing which is isolated has only itself as a frame of reference and therefore cannot make anything other than analytical, and therefore tautological judgments about itself.

While this is decidedly the case in Schoenberg’s self-understanding, it is not so in his music, a music in which “the questions...are hardly ever answered in calm progression, but instead with catastrophes”, in which “the answer destroys the question and the material from which it emerged,” a music in which negation predominates.⁵² This radical and dissonant aspect of Schoenberg’s music both relates it to society and further contributes to Schoenberg’s isolation.

Isolation

Adorno does not place the blame for Schoenberg’s naïve thinking entirely on the composer himself. Schoenberg was a victim of bourgeois society and its culture industries. As such,

⁵⁰ Adorno. *Philosophy of New Music*, 40.

⁵¹ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 69.

⁵² Adorno, “The Dialectical Composer,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie, et. al. (Berkeley, California : University of California Press, 2002), 204.

Schoenberg bears the brunt of Adorno's critique "not for what [he] failed to accomplish, but for what the structure of existence denied to him."⁵³

Just as Schoenberg cannot be critiqued in isolation from the society in which he existed, Schoenberg's music too cannot be considered in isolation. Despite its radical nature, it is nonetheless bourgeois music, as all forms of music must be in bourgeois society. Adorno says as much in *Philosophy of New Music*: "In the given order of things, the existence of other than bourgeois music is dubious."⁵⁴ By its very nature, however, Schoenberg's music tried to break through the bounds of bourgeois music. But the society it existed in did not allow it to do so.

The bounds of society manifested themselves most strongly in the manner in which Schoenberg's music was received by listeners. His audience, for Adorno, was made up of largely pre-critical thinkers who could listen to music only fetishistically, by identifying it with the schema in which it was produced.

Tonal music, because it adheres to a schema, could be more easily interpreted (or rather, misinterpreted fetishistically) by those listeners. Schoenberg's music, on the other hand, is more difficult to absorb. Its dissonances and lack of tonal closure failed to reflect the reconciliation that the bourgeois audience sought in music.

As a result, Schoenberg's music was isolated on two accounts. First of all, because of its social content: as non-identary music, it showed by example the identary falseness of bourgeois music; it "[preserved] its social truth through the isolation resulting from its antithesis to society."⁵⁵ Secondly, it was misunderstood in an identary fashion by its audience which saw in it

⁵³ Adorno, "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg," 628.

⁵⁴ Adorno. *Philosophy of New Music*, 100.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21

only a system of composing rather than its social content and thus made it no more than “a companion for like-thinking hobbyists.”⁵⁶

Labour and the Twelve-Tone Method

Such an understanding of Schoenberg’s music rings false to Adorno. The schema (for example the twelve-tone system) in which a work of art is composed is a way of making the work of art “stick” to reality, but it is not the composition itself. This recalls Adorno’s description of the twelve-tone method in *Philosophy of New Music* that “the composition begins when the disposition of the tones is finished.”⁵⁷ Here Adorno refers not only to the division of labour inherent in twelve-tone composition. In twelve-tone composition, he argues that:

The dissonances become what Hindemith in his *Craft of Composition* designated with the execrable expression “labor material”: mere quantity, without quality, undifferentiated and therefore adaptable everywhere according to the demands of the schema.

Adorno's critique of twelve-tone composition is that the row is achieved before the work: thus a twelve-tone composer relies upon something “already achieved.” This is an identity because the pitch content of the work is identical with the tone row and its derivatives. Instead, Adorno would prefer to see the pitch content of the work arising spontaneously at the instant the work is being created, and from the internal and particular needs of the work itself. It also speaks to the fact that the musical work is much more than the schema that it is composed in.

Schoenberg’s mode of composing with twelve tones betrayed to Adorno a naïveté similar to that of his listeners. He thought that his twelve-tone musical schema expressed the content of the piece. In his lecture “Composition with Twelve Tones,” he stated that “music is not merely another kind of amusement, but a musical poet’s a musical thinker’s representation of musical

⁵⁶ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 628.

⁵⁷ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 50.

ideas; these musical ideas must correspond to the laws of human logic; they are a part of what man can apperceive, reason and express.”⁵⁸ Adorno would have agreed with the first part of that statement no doubt. However, in the second part of the passage, Schoenberg is exposing the exact kind of naiveté that Adorno admonishes him for.

Schoenberg sees his twelve-tone schema as one which is identical with the musical idea of his works. Despite his best intentions about creating more than a system, his tendency towards pre-critical identity thinking still comes through. In “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg” Adorno returns to this notion by remarking that “Schoenberg's music...wants to be apprehended spontaneously as an organic structural complex of sounds.”⁵⁹ Schoenberg wants his music to be understood as easily as tonal Classical and Romantic works. At the same time, neither his early atonal works nor his serialist compositions are composed in a traditional schema. His music does not fit a pre-conceived generality and is therefore non-identical.

Non-Identity Listening

Adorno turns to discuss the ways in which Schoenberg's music presents challenges to the listener. Two conflicting factors – on the one hand, the non-identical character of this music, on the other Schoenberg's search for schematic unity in his works -- affect the listener. Music is no longer listened to only with a pre-critical ear. Despite its attempts at cohesive unity, this music does not dictate to the listener, but rather works against him. In Schoenberg's music, the listener has to work for his leisure: “Traditional music listened for the listener. This, precisely is over and done with in Schoenberg”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones (I),” 220.

⁵⁹ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 629.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 630.

As Adorno puts it: “In [Schoenberg's] music, the only thing that still matters is the particular, the now and here of the musical events, their own inner logic.”⁶¹ Because Schoenberg’s music organizes itself as non-identity, it is much more difficult to grasp to the listener who is searching for identity.

Adorno maintains that if the listener were to reject this search for identity and not try to impose a traditional schema upon Schoenberg’s music, his task would become much easier. Because the work’s identity, to Adorno, does not lie in the larger schema, there is a much greater emphasis placed on the particular. This is reflected in the temporality of the piece: “The listener must not just receive [individual chords] as mere tonal stimuli, but must listen into them.”⁶² Merely listening for the row and trying to construct a large-scale temporal sketch of the piece reflects a pre-critical understanding of the piece, a desire to subsume the piece to an indentarian unity. However, Schoenberg’s music is not one of unity. Rather, it is formed by dialectic development through opposites. As Adorno puts it: “Schoenberg leaves nothing unformed; every tone is developed from within the law of motion of the thing itself.”⁶³ If one wants to understand Schoenberg’s music, one needs to be unconcerned with counting rows and “should let the twelve-tone rows be straight or crooked and focus first on the shape whose immediacy and spontaneity will not allow any thought of a system to arise.”⁶⁴ In these terms, Adorno describes critical listening.

This is reflected later in the essay when Adorno states that “the ear that does not want to be helplessly left behind must voluntarily perform the entire work of composition once again,

⁶¹ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 630.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 631.

independently.”⁶⁵ The first time a work is listened to, listening is pre-critical. If the listener is “adequate”, he can then reinterpret the work critically. This plays with time. The music exists both in real time and in extended time in the listener’s mind where he can go back and listen to it critically, while the music itself is not actually transpiring.

Schoenberg the Naïve

Adorno turns to Schoenberg’s naïveté. “Schoenberg, whose intellectualism is legend, was, as a type, a naïve artist.”⁶⁶ This is not necessarily to say that Schoenberg as a thinker was entirely uncritical, but rather that he was naïve; he did not realize what he was doing. As Adorno states later, Schoenberg was composing dialectically “almost against his will.”⁶⁷

Adorno then pinpoints this duality in Schoenberg’s music: “On the one hand it is tied into a system, the system of triads, keys, and their relationships. On the other hand, the subject is trying to express itself in it; instead of every norm that is merely imposed externally, it wants to generate the regularities from within.”⁶⁸ Music here makes a transition from object to subject, due to Schoenberg’s dialectical interaction with it. In a pre-critical mode, music would be viewed as a “work” and therefore an object. However, in Schoenberg we do not have “finished structures that can be gazed on now and forever in the museums of the opera and concert hall.”⁶⁹ It is critical music which engages with society. It has something to say and therefore becomes a subject.

⁶⁵ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 632.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 631.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 632 .

⁶⁸ Ibid., 633.

⁶⁹ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 31.

Adorno states: “Tonality evolved ever more over the course of the centuries as a result to the subject's need of expression.”⁷⁰ Tonality can be viewed as an identity, because it is a normative schema. At the same time, the subject of the music works can't be identically subsumed. It repeatedly redefines “regularity” in a non-identical way. That is how tonality (or any schema) evolves, through a “balance between the schema and the uniqueness of each work of through-composed music.”⁷¹ Great composers, Adorno states, are cognizant of this tension. They are by definition composers of non-identical music, because they seek to break the bounds of identity: “The great composers, in particular, have always felt dissatisfaction with the external, compulsory moment in music, which imposed constraints on what they themselves wanted.”⁷² This allows them to create a non-identarian autonomy in musical form.

Schoenberg, while undoubtedly a great composer to Adorno, is not entirely cognizant of this tension between the schema and originality. It is present in his music to a high degree, due to the opposition between expressionism and serialism. In his writings on style and idea, however, something like this distinction appears: style can be seen as schema and the idea as “uniqueness.” Schoenberg sees style as subservient to idea: The idea is not necessarily critical, because it doesn't interact dialectically with the style.

Style and Idea, Centripetal and Centrifugal, Kant

Schoenberg would like style and idea to be congruent if not essentially identical: Schoenberg would like style to do justice to the composer's idea. But Schoenberg's naïveté shields him from understanding how the two interact in reality. As Adorno describes the manner in which the two interact in Schoenberg's music, the result is a peculiar duality in the structure.

⁷⁰ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 633.

⁷¹ Ibid., 634.

⁷² Ibid., 633.

One part is on the surface. This is the part that is reached by the usual analyses based on the *basso continuo* schema and the theories of modulation and musical forms, and that is fully expressed in the general relations of tonality. But underneath this there is the second part, which Schoenberg called subcutaneous, a structure under the skin, which derives the whole from the very specific germ cells and which first generates the more profound, true unity.⁷³

To fully comprehend this notion, we need to bring Kant back in. The notion of subcutaneous and cutaneous could be likened to a Kantian duality. The cutaneous (pre-critical) is that which is easily accessible. The subcutaneous (critical), on the other hand, can be likened to some sort of thing-in-itself. This can be seen when Adorno characterizes the Kantian duality as a distinction between “form and matter.”⁷⁴ However, in Kant, the cutaneous and subcutaneous remain largely isolated from each other. Adorno’s idea, in this case, is therefore more strongly linked to Hegel. In Hegel, the mind starts by only knowing the phenomenological representation of a thing, as in Kant. However, through time, the mind can get closer and closer to the true essence of that thing.⁷⁵ This is what Adorno seems to be addressing here. At first, the listener hears the cutaneous, the surface. All the while, as time passes, the adequate listener is able to reach the subcutaneous. The cutaneous and subcutaneous then inform each other in a dialectical way, rather than being isolated as in Kant.

The reaching of the subcutaneous to Schoenberg seems require some sort of transcendental knowledge. In “The Relationship to the Text,” Schoenberg notes that music is a language “which the reason does not understand.”⁷⁶ Reason is looking for something cutaneous: schematic structures. However, what music seeks to express is subcutaneous and cannot be understood at a first glance.

⁷³ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 634.

⁷⁴ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 128.

⁷⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 478.

⁷⁶ Arnold Schoenberg, “Relationship to the Text,” *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 142.

Writing in “Guidelines for a Ministry of Art,” a collection edited by Adolf Loos, Schoenberg states: “One does not know music after hearing it once.”⁷⁷ After a first listening, the subcutaneous is not yet grasped, so one does not “know” music. Schoenberg notes that on this topic he is disagreeing with Loos. However, the distinction here lies not in the importance of the subcutaneous, but rather the ability of the listener to grasp the subcutaneous on a first listening. Loos, as an architect, would have had a different view of what one can easily glean when looking at a creation. The relation between Loos and Schoenberg materializes itself as Adorno discusses the two of them in “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg”:

That Schoenberg’s music was turned inside out means above all that everything decorative, ornamental, not purely of the thing itself, was unbearable for him, as, for example, in the architecture of his friend Adolf Loos, who coined the first slogans for what is today known as Functionalism [*Sachlichkeit*]. Schoenberg literally experiences the external musical structure as a false façade, and it has to fall, in order for what is functionally necessary to become audible.⁷⁸

As noted above, Loos brought the subcutaneous out in his buildings. In architecture, structure is function and therefore it is the subcutaneous. Moreover, structure, and therefore the subcutaneous are the building’s purpose. “While an artwork need not appeal to anyone, a house is responsible to each and everyone,” Adorno states.⁷⁹ A building has a direct purpose and Loos is able to reject the cutaneous and ornamental by simply expressing this purpose.

Music, on the other hand, embodies what Kant referred to as “purposiveness without a purpose” [*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*]. Therefore, the removal of the ornamental does not involve, as in Loos’ work, a return to purpose. In Schoenberg’s music, a different type of stripping needs to occur in order for the subcutaneous to be reached. The false façade that needs to fall is structure itself. Structure is what creates a false identifying relationship between the

⁷⁷ Schoenberg, “Guidelines for a Ministry of Art,” in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 372.

⁷⁸ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 635.

⁷⁹ Adorno, “Functionalism Today,” 6.

particular and the universal. Schoenberg's atonal music – such as the *Three Piano Pieces*, Op. 11 – does away with structure. Adorno says the loss of structure in such works entails a consequent loss of:

The consoling aspect of music, the feeling of security derived from its embracing structure, an all-enveloping, integral architecture created by formal construction and thematic work, by mutual responsiveness of all its parts, the relationship among the totality of elements.⁸⁰

This “consoling aspect of music” is something which Schoenberg sought to avoid and which led to his complete abandonment of tonality. Because of his tendency toward schematic composition in the heavy romantic style of the early works, he could not continue to compose in these frameworks. Otherwise, the works would become identities, identical with a schematic style. This led to Schoenberg's constant tweaking of style, a constant progress to what he saw as more and more radical music. This constant incremental progress has been remarked on by Ethan Haimo.⁸¹ In terms of stylistic innovation, Schoenberg's music never relied on what he had already achieved.

However, in this essay, Adorno is talking about a different kind of achievement inherent in the expressionist contrast in Schoenberg's works as well as in the constant process of dialectical transformation. Schoenberg's music is created by negating everything before it, by denying all schemata. It opposes itself to the identity of all previous music. This leads Adorno to define Schoenberg's music and the way it is constituted:

At every level in Schoenberg, forces of a polar nature are at work - the forces of unrestrained, emancipated, authentic expression; and the force of a through-construction that attracts to itself even the last detail, the fleeting tremor.⁸²

⁸⁰ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 638.

⁸¹ Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Transformation of Musical Language* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸² Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 639.

To understand this quotation, we must understand Schoenberg's notion of centrifugal and centripetal forces. This structural and analytic character is most evident in his writings on tonal music. In his late volume *Structural Functions of Harmony*, he posits that music is created through the opposition of *centrifugal* and *centripetal* forces.⁸³ Centrifugal forces are ones that expand the work and centripetal forces are ones that bring it back together: "The centripetal function of progressions is exerted by stopping centrifugal tendencies, i.e. by establishing a tonality through the conquest of its contradictory elements"⁸⁴

This musical duality in Schoenberg's thought has been explained by Patricia Carpenter. She describes a Hegelian synthesis of centrifugal and centripetal forces, which creates music to Schoenberg.⁸⁵ Michael Cherlin classifies this as one of many dialectical oppositions in Schoenberg's thought.⁸⁶ Schoenberg characterizes a I-IV-V-I progression, for instance, as "statement, challenge, contradiction and confirmation."⁸⁷

Thus Schoenberg would like the centripetal and centrifugal forces in his music to interact in a falsely dialectic fashion: the two finally "confirming" each other and becoming identical. To him, a piece is created through the sum of centrifugal and centripetal forces – the two cancelling each other out. However, in a real dialectic situation, the opposing forces are continually at war. This is what Adorno sees in Schoenberg's music (all the while distinguishing the naïve Schoenberg from his dialectical music).

Let us interpret this as follows: It seems that in every piece of music there is something related to time and something timeless. The centrifugal forces create the timelessness of the idea

⁸³ Arnold Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, ed. Leonard Stein (New York, Norton, 1969), 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Patricia Carpenter "Grundgestalt as Tonal Function," *Music Theory Spectrum* 5 (Spring 1983), 15-38.

⁸⁶ Michael Cherlin, *Schoenberg's Musical Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60.

⁸⁷ Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff, commentary to *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, by Arnold Schoenberg ed. and trans. and with commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 120.

while the centripetal forces bring in the time-bound nature of structure. Therefore in each piece of music there is a battle between time and timelessness, and through this a musical structure is created, confirmed as the unitary resolution of two opposing forces.

This dialectical opposition in Schoenberg is one of the two forces cancelling each other out, rather than constantly contradicting each other, as Adorno would like to see. It is with the unitary “confirmation” aspect of this progression that Adorno takes issue.

Conclusion

The essay “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg” enlarges on Adorno’s main idea in *Philosophy of New Music*: Despite its composer’s pre-critical thinking, his music produced critical results. Adorno believes that Schoenberg “had to forget what he knew how to do in order to be able to do it truthfully.”⁸⁸ Schoenberg’s pre-critical naiveté (“what he knew”) is contrasted to his dialectic music (“truthfully”). He thought pre-critically, but produced a critical result.

This critical result is exemplified in the last movement of the *Third String Quartet*, Op. 30 discussed in *Philosophy of New Music* as well.⁸⁹ Adorno again picks up on the fact that the piece uses pre-critical forms. Doing so, Schoenberg neglects the historical implications of those forms and, because twelve-tone music “refuses to abide the impulse of the whole,” Schoenberg thus creates a contradiction between the twelve-tone schema the works are composed in and the classical forms they use.⁹⁰

Adorno recognizes this as follows: “This results in certain contradictions, since, after all, the traditional forms referred implicitly to the very tonality whose trace is extinguished by the

⁸⁸ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 641.

⁸⁹ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 76.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

twelve-tone organization of the material”⁹¹ There is a critical contradiction in Schoenberg’s music, then, between on the one hand the creation of an identity scheme and on the other the radical breaking apart of the scheme of tonality (and the composition of music which is non-identical to a scheme). This contradiction acknowledges the reality in which Schoenberg and his music exist – pre-critical conception, but critical effect.

At the end of the essay, Adorno turns to a defence of Schoenberg. Despite his bourgeois thinking, despite all that “the structure of existence denied to him,” Schoenberg was able to produce socially conscious music.⁹² Adorno formulates this ability of Schoenberg’s in the final sentence of the essay:

That Schoenberg, at a time in which the possibility of art itself, in its very essence, became questionable, still composed music that does not seem impotent and vain in light of the reality, confirms, in the end, what he once began.⁹³

This is a more succinct reformulation of the final section of *Philosophy of New Music*, the fact that Schoenberg’s music, despite his naïveté and despite its operation in a world unreceptive to this type of music, was able to shed light on reality in some way. It was not an idealised object in its own right.

“Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg” moreover crystalizes the relations between Kant and Schoenberg, as seen by Adorno. Kant, among others, led Schoenberg to the false bourgeois idea of the Genius creator. However, Adorno finds non-identity in Kant’s “block” between the “knowing subject” and “object known” and thus reads his philosophy as one founded on contradictions. Therefore Kant, again among others, leads Adorno to the idea that art should exist by embodying contradictions. Adorno sees this embodiment in Schoenberg’s music, but at the same time sees that Schoenberg’s bourgeois identarian manner of thought prevents him from

⁹¹ Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” 641.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 628.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 642.

fully grasping the contradictions in his music and therefore denies him the full realisation of dialectics in music.

Schoenberg, while undoubtedly a great composer to Adorno, was not entirely cognizant of this tension between the schema and originality present in his music to a high degree, due to the opposition between expressionism and serialism. Similarly, Kant's desire to rid his philosophy of contradictions is symptomatic of his tendency toward identity thinking, brought on by the bourgeois society he inhabited.

According to Adorno's reception of the work of both Kant and Schoenberg, ideas are created in a capitalist society after the following script: A work is created by a member of bourgeois society, let us say a Schoenberg, but because of the creator's bourgeois consciousness, he does not recognize the non-identical aspects of his work. All the while (particularly when it is the work of someone of great intelligence), the work exists as a non-identical entity, one that critiques bourgeois society. However, the bourgeois society which is being critiqued is incapable of understanding the non-identical aspect of the work and instead interprets the work as identical and schematic. This three-part movement from identity to non-identity and back is central to the discrepancy that Adorno sees between a truly radical form of creation and the way its creator and society view it. Thus, to Adorno, the similarity between Kant and Schoenberg lies in the fact that both epitomize this tripartite mode of idea production and reception in bourgeois society.

CHAPTER 4

Systems and Musical Structure

In his 1941 lecture “Composition with Twelve Tones,” Schoenberg equates his compositional process to that of a divine creator and at the same time concedes to the fact that his works are created on earth and therefore must obey worldly laws: “In Divine Creation, there were no details to be carried out later: ‘There was Light’ at once and in its ultimate perfection.”¹ Schoenberg goes on to talk about “poor human beings” who cannot approach divine power. At the same time, he characterizes the creator as “one of the better minds,” a genius (as expressed in Kant) who “has the power to bring his vision to life.”² Schoenberg thus positions artistic creators in a middle-ground between the divine and the worldly.

Most of Schoenberg’s theoretical writings are an attempt to reconcile his position in this middle-ground. He struggles to find ways in which he can at the same time be in the realm of the divine – as a vessel for all-governing ideas born out of inspiration – and in the realm of the worldly – as a creator of a comprehensible musical form through which the idea is mediated. This struggle leads him to view the way musical works are put together in a curious manner.

¹ Arnold Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones,” in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 215.

² *Ibid.*

John Covach has stated that that “for Schoenberg real music...was concerned with more than projecting musical structures.”³ However, his numerous theoretical writings do seem to suggest a strong concern with just that – structure. And it is also true that the overemphasis on structure is at the root of most of Adorno’s criticisms, as we saw in the previous chapter. Therefore, an exploration of the way in which Schoenberg understood this concept helps illuminate Adorno’s criticisms.

For this purpose, we shall now turn to a piece of early criticism against Schoenberg’s method by Richard S. Hill. This article serves as a background against which are developed Schoenberg and Adorno’s conflicting views on systems and musical structure.

Richard S. Hill: Systems

Among the most detailed early commentaries made by non-composers about twelve-tone music is Richard S. Hill’s 1936 article “Schoenberg’s Twelve-Tone Rows and the Tonal System of the Future.”⁴ The article is an examination of pre-Schoenbergian dodecaphonic methods as well as a critique of Schoenberg’s own model. Hill concedes that with the dissolution of tonality, a twelve-tone method of composition is the next logical step: Just as the pentatonic scale was expanded by two notes to create the diatonic one, so too can the tonal model be fused with the remaining five notes to create some sort of mode or modes involving all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. Hill’s main concern, therefore, is not the validity of dodecaphonic composition in general, but the validity of Schoenberg’s method in particular.

After detailing early attempts by composers of the likes of Eimert and Hauer to create such models, Hill offers an extensive critique of Schoenberg, who he believes has found the most

³ John Covach, “The Sources of Schoenberg’s ‘Aesthetic Theology’,” *19th Century Music* 19/3 (Spring 1996): 253.

⁴ Richard S. Hill, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows and the Tonal System of the Future” in *Musical Quarterly* 22:1 (January 1936): 14.

effective method to date, one which “seems to contain within itself potentialities for future development into a rich and varied functionally organized system.”⁵ While praising Schoenberg’s dodecaphonic method as a natural progression resulting from the dissolution of tonality, he also criticises it for its limitations, namely the absence of relations between tones and therefore the lack of unity it creates in composition. At the core of Hill’s paper is the desire to find his own answer to the question that Berg had posed twelve years earlier: “Why is Schoenberg’s music so hard to understand?”⁶

A closer look at Hill’s writing can help shed light on the debate between Adorno and Schoenberg by providing a context for their disagreement. Hill’s understanding of Schoenberg’s music toes a line between that of an able listener, according to Adorno’s categories in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, and the bourgeois superficial understanding of Schoenberg’s music criticised in Adorno throughout *Philosophy of New Music*.⁷ His deep interest and knowledge of new music do not allow him to have an entirely superficial understanding of that music: He is, after all, looking to understand the way in which Schoenberg’s music is constructed rather than apprehending it as a sensory pastime and falling back into regressive listening. His criticisms are ones which stem from his desire to be an active listener, one “who tends to miss nothing and at the same time, at each moment, accounts to himself for what he has heard.”⁸ On the other hand, Hill’s writing betrays a kind of thinking about music, which Adorno would find just as naïve as Schoenberg’s: the idea of defining music as a system. He is equating music to the system that it is composed in and therefore fetishizing it.

⁵ Hill, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows,” 14.

⁶ Alban Berg, “Why is Schoenberg’s Music so Hard to Understand?,” in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. E. Schwartz et al. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), 59-71.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1989), 4.

He is looking for a false kind of unity in composition, rather than embracing Schoenberg's music. Because of that, he comes closer to another of Adorno's categories of listening: the "resentment" listener, for whom, according to Murray Dineen, "the ideational structure of music is correctness, a hard-won, rational correctness."⁹

This peculiarity in Hill's understanding of music causes him to create two identities in his article. First, he identifies Schoenberg's music with the manner in which it is composed: the twelve-tone system. Second, he identifies twelve-tone music with a generality of systems: he believes that it should work in a manner similar to other systems. As we shall see, Schoenberg was not entirely in accord with Hill: He drew a marked distinction between the manner of composition and the actual composition itself, and he claimed an aversion to composing according to systems. I shall review Schoenberg's position shortly, noting that despite this opposition, he is in accord with Hill to a certain extent on the second identity, due to his reliance upon the notion of an immutable musical idea, which in its application can be seen to resemble a system.

The First Identity: The equivalence between music composed in the twelve-tone method and the twelve-tone method itself is established from the very outset. Hill opens: "If modern music were stripped to its barest essentials, its most salient characteristic would undoubtedly be found in its preoccupation with new systems of tones."¹⁰ He characterizes that as a new obsession quite distinct from what he sees as universal concerns in all eras – for instance, expressing meaning in music. Throughout his article, Hill reveals his view of music as one hinging on systematization, on the fact that it must be an integral whole functioning on its own. It is with this frame of mind that he approaches Schoenberg's music.

⁹ Murray Dineen, "Adorno and Schoenberg's Unanswered Question," *Musical Quarterly* 77:3 (Autumn, 1993): 420.

¹⁰ Hill, "Schoenberg's Twelve-Tone Rows," 14.

Hill praises Schoenberg for his main goal: to unify music and “to mould the various pertinent elements into a more compact unit.”¹¹ He further credits him with “contributing the most important element to the concept of the ‘row’ and with systematizing the undigested early notions into a formal technique.”¹² The fact that Hill credits these among Schoenberg’s main achievements demonstrates that he views the goal of this music as being a systematic one. Even in his discussions of the early “atonal” works (namely “Nacht” from *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21), Hill identifies Schoenberg’s concern for motivic development as a primary characteristic.

However, Hill believes that Schoenberg’s method stops short of allowing music to develop unity. Although the twelve-tone system logically grew out of the diatonic scale (being created through the “fusion of the seven regular and five auxiliary tones of the diatonic scale and was therefore the logical successor to that system”), as a system it is inherently flawed to Hill.¹³ He cites two reasons for this lack of unity: (1) the fact that a tone row must be used each time in the same order to completion and (2) the fact that, regardless of the manner in which a row is expressed – harmonically or melodically – it is considered as a valid manifestation. This, Hill argues, prevents the listener from accurately identifying the row while listening, which in turn makes the row “totally meaningless as either a harmonic or melodic structure.”¹⁴ There are meaningful relations in dodecaphonic music, but they are lost. The ear cannot latch onto the row unless the listener has perfect pitch.¹⁵ Therefore, the listener cannot fully comprehend the functional relations in the piece and cannot perceive it as an organism.

For these two problems, Hill proposes two possible “solutions.” According to the first one the composer would use the tone row as a functional, but not an organizational element. Therefore,

¹¹ Hill, “Schoenberg’s Twelve-Tone Rows,” 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

all twelve-notes could be used throughout a piece, but the music would be organized otherwise, thus allowing the listener to perceive musical organization even on the first listen. This would result in a type of twelve-tone music which is not serial, but rather motival. The second solution would be to develop modes out of existing tone rows. Most music, Hill argues, is composed with reference to a mode and therefore it follows that if new music should be comprehensible, it needs to create a variety of modes. Hill underlines the lack of modes in the twelve-tone method is can be attributed to its relative newness and that as time goes on, it will most likely develop functional modes.

The Second Identity: With this notion of mode, Hill adds on to the concept of a system, which he sees as a unifying force for music. He turns to history and takes up the development of systems in general. In their early stages, not yet perfected systems are fluid. They prescribe very little and therefore the pieces composed in such systems are not as clearly unified – both internally and in terms of their connections to other pieces. As systems become more developed, they become more rigid and formulaic. Hill expands on this idea:

When the system is new and untried, a number of modes are likely to be in use. As the potentialities of the system become more clear, effort is concentrated on a limited number. Twelve-tone composers...would at first manufacture their own rows or functional modes – as they, in fact, are now doing. As time went on, a body of these modes would come to be recognized as superior to the rest. These in turn would probably be whittled down until finally only a chief and a couple of subsidiary modes would be left.¹⁶

Here, Hill expresses his thoughts on the general and the particular. Motives are things that should vary with each piece; modes must stay fairly constant and therefore be generalities which make up a system.

¹⁶ Hill, "Schoenberg's Tone-Rows," 33.

The emphasis on systematization reveals less about Schoenberg's music itself or about new music in general and more about Hill's bourgeois understanding thereof. Hill's idealism is betrayed by the fact that he sees a system as a sort of Platonic idea which manifests itself in various guises or forms in different pieces, but is ultimately the same. Thus, he assumes that all twelve-tone works seek to be related through modes instead of expressing individuality in their forms.

That Schoenberg was interested in creating a system in which to organize tones is certain. He was developing this from work to work in what Ethan Haimo calls "incremental innovation."¹⁷ Yet, that innovation was not meant to lead to a well-developed system. To Schoenberg, as we shall see shortly, the twelve-tone method was a means to an end and not an end in itself.

However, the fact that Hill specifically centers on this aspect of Schoenberg's music and the way in which he does so both reveal a point of view which illuminates the ideas of Schoenberg and Adorno. Hill's treatment of dodecaphonic music is reminiscent of the passage from "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg", wherein Adorno states that Schoenberg was "degraded to the inventor of a system that was more or less convenient to operate."¹⁸ Although Hill wishes to see something more come out of Schoenberg's music, at many points during the article he falls back into identifying Schoenberg's music with its system.

In order to solve this problem, Hill turns to the idea that twelve-tone music will develop in a manner similar to the way past systems have developed. He not only surveys the development of twelve-tone and atonal music prior to Schoenberg's method, but also takes a brief look at the manner in which the tonal system developed as an indication of the way in which the twelve-tone

¹⁷ Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Transformation of Musical Language* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23.

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie, et. al. (Berkeley, California : University of California Press, 2002), 628.

system will. Here he creates the second identity mentioned earlier: that between the twelve-tone “system” and earlier ones. Although he is studying the particularities of the twelve-tone method, he is doing so against a schematic backdrop. By assuming that the twelve-tone system should or will develop in relation to other systems, he is subsuming it under the category of “organizational system” and not considering its particularities. He does concede that no twelve-tone model should inherit the functions of the diatonic scale, but still discusses the way in which the system will develop as hinging on the manner in which tonality developed.

In developing this identity, Hill departs from Joseph Yasser’s book *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* in which the author differentiates between “regular” and “auxiliary” tones in any musical system.¹⁹ Yasser’s claim that the diatonic scale was created through fusion of the five regular and two auxiliary tones in the pentatonic scale is extended to the dodecaphonic method where the seven regular and five, now frequently used, auxiliary tones fuse together to form a new system. “It is hardly possible to stress too much the logic and naturalness of this development,” states Hill.²⁰ The word “naturalness” in this sentence further connects the twelve-tone and the tonal models. Hill thus cuts out the argument about whether or not tonal music is more natural than atonal or dodecaphonic music in order to concentrate on the connections between the two systems and the way that they interact with each other.

Having discussed tonality, Hill remains with an eye clearly fixed on history, but turns to the more recent development of Josef Matthias Hauer’s *Tropen*.²¹ He establishes this model as a fairly limited one because of the bounds placed on melodic development and its reliance on “the persistence with which the composer keeps the whole cluster of twelve tones circling

¹⁹ Joseph Yasser, *A Theory of Evolving Tonality*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972). The original edition is from 1932.

²⁰ Hill, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows,” 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

continuously.”²² Hill concludes that although in such early dodecaphonic music words such as “complex” and “*Klangzentrum*,” (Zofja Lissa’s term meaning a nucleus of tones) sound like they do speak to unity, they differ from the tonal method in that they invoke simultaneity: “all twelve tones are to hover as a harmonic unit in that unexplored part of the mind in which concepts, models, patterns and the like wait to be used.”²³ If any remove part of the “complex” is removed it does not make sense without the centre.

Hill thinks that the new systems are developing as a revolt against the “differentiation” of functional harmony and in that, new composers are seeking to create an “undifferentiated” system. He criticizes the developers of such system for elevating “the amorphous nature of the glomerate into a position of cardinal importance for their method – a position it cannot well sustain.”²⁴ The position cannot be sustained for two reasons. First of all, the human brain, according to Hill, craves organization for both physical and psychological reasons. He holds that although the diatonic system is not necessarily something “natural,” it is a way in which humans have come to organize tones and for that it is worthwhile. This is similar, he states, to the manner in which the human eye comes to perceive discrete colours in a rainbow rather than a complete spectrum: we seek organization and segmentation even when there is one. Out of this comes the second problem with the “amorphous nature of the glomerate”– the fact that the row and its various forms cannot be recognized by those without perfect pitch and that consequence in the tone row does not speak to function. In tonal music, the ear is led by the two half-steps present, whereas in dodecaphonic music where all intervals are possible, the listener becomes disoriented and cannot follow the line:

²² Hill, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows,” 18

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

The significance – even the importance – of the row as an abstract concept is easy to appreciate, but the utter disregard with which Schoenberg at times twists it about renders it totally meaningless as either a harmonic or melodic structure. Tones, after all, cannot be arbitrarily related. A natural melodic movement is achieved only by obeying fundamental psychological laws – laws which, although unformulated at present, are doubtless analogous to those of “perceptual motion” in recent psychological theories of vision – and Schoenberg, unconsciously or driven by the exigencies of his system, is constantly disregarding them. When Schoenberg sets the ear the task of following such complicated patterns, the ear simply pays no attention.²⁵

All in all, both of Hill’s identities lead him to the same criticism. Schoenberg’s music lacks comprehensibility because of the system it is composed in lacks it as well. The system, in turn, lacks comprehensibility because it is in the early stages of its genesis. As time goes on, music composed in this method will begin adhering more closely to a schema through the development of modes. Schoenberg and Adorno’s relation to Hill can be seen in light of that: while Schoenberg would disagree with the identification of his music to its system, he would also identify the way in which his music functions to the way in which historical systems function. Adorno, on the other hand, would disagree with both of those identities. I shall first turn to Schoenberg’s interaction with these two identities and then to Adorno’s.

Schoenberg: Response/Style vs. idea/Art vs. Science

Shortly after the publication of Hill’s article, Schoenberg penned a short, but revelatory response.²⁶ Therein, after glibly praising Hill for his “astonishing amount and research based on much ability and knowledge,” Schoenberg brushes off his efforts as ones that are “applied in the wrong place.”²⁷ Schoenberg states that his music is not “about” counting of rows: he is a

²⁵ Hill, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows,” 31

²⁶ Arnold Schoenberg, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows,” in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 213-214.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

composer, not a theorist. He therefore refuses to identify his music with the model which he uses to compose: A piece, to him, is more than the sum of its rows.

Schoenberg then zeroes in on the term “system,” used throughout Hill’s article. Of the twelve-tone model he says: “I did not call it a ‘system’ but a ‘method’, and considered it as a tool of composition, but not as a theory.”²⁸ To Schoenberg, the twelve-tone method is to be used only as a means of organizing a piece and is not to represent the piece. It is “a means to fortify the logic,” but is not the logic itself.²⁹ This word “tool” is inevitably reminiscent of Schoenberg’s description of a “style” (in opposition to an idea) in his essay “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea”: “The tool itself may fall into disuse, but the idea behind it can never become obsolete.”³⁰ Thus, the twelve-tone model is linked to “style.” It is a means of representing a musical idea, but cannot be fully identified with the musical idea or with the piece.

In the last paragraph of his rebuttal, Schoenberg touches on the opposition between art and science as he sees it. He chooses to rightly divorce his compositions from science, stating that, unlike science which searches to present all its ideas without omission, “art presents only a certain number of *interesting* cases and strives for perfection by manner of presentation.”³¹ Thus, he defends the unity of his works, all the while rejecting Hill’s definition of a “system.” An artwork is unified, to Schoenberg, not by its system, but by something else: the idea.

Therefore, the only goal of the twelve tone method is, Schoenberg states, “to explain understandably and thoroughly the idea.”³² As a governing principle, the idea organically generates all aspects of a musical work. It creates ‘a whole’ or a sense of unity and coherence to

²⁸ Schoenberg, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows,” 213.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

³⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea,” in *Style and Idea*, 113-124.

³¹ Schoenberg, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows,” 214.

³² Arnold Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones (I),” in *Style and Idea*, 214-245.

the piece. It is “the totality of a piece... the idea which its creator wanted to present.”³³ Thus, to Schoenberg, the musical idea is not some sort of theme or rhythm or thing overtly expressed in music, but rather a cognitive entity that exists primarily in the mind of the artist. As a *musical* idea, it is a musical entity, but it is not a motive or anything expressible in a literal manner.

What Hill sees as the unifying organizing principle of works – the twelve tone system is something which helps express Schoenberg’s musical idea, but is not the idea itself. It is not at the core of the musical work and, to Schoenberg, it is nothing more than surface. What Schoenberg sees as the unifying principle of works is something which originates in him as a creator. Therefore, to him, Hill is misidentifying the main goal of his works – the expression of the idea. Schoenberg’s concept of ideas made manifest in the particularities of musical works thus distinguishes his thought from Hill’s systematic approach to composition with twelve tones. Such a distinction, however, is not sufficient to invalidate Adorno’s critique of system in the twelve-tone method, as we shall see shortly.

Form and Comprehensibility

Schoenberg’s opposition to Hill can be understood in light of his attitude toward the notion of form. The manner in which both link to the musical idea is at the core of his rebuttal toward Hill’s article: Schoenberg believes that Hill is misrepresenting the manner in which form and comprehensibility are created in his works.

The musical idea, the content of a work, originates in the mind of a composer. In order to be transmitted to a listener, however, this musical idea needs to be manifested in some way. This is the role of form: to be a material manifestation of the musical idea created by the composer. That is not to say, however, that form is merely a superficial representation of the content of a musical

³³ Schoenberg, “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea,” 123.

work. Rather, form and idea are indelibly linked to each other: the form is part of the idea just as much as it is representative of it

Patricia Carpenter picks up on this relation between form and idea in her article “Musical Form and Musical Idea: Reflections on a Theme of Schoenberg, Hanslick, and Kant.”³⁴ In order to demonstrate the strong connectedness of musical form to the idea that it represents, Carpenter contrasts the relations between form and idea in music with those present in language.³⁵ She states that in language, syntax (the mode of representation) and concept (what is being represented) are quite distinct from each other. Spoken or written language is merely a tool by which ideas are able to be transmitted between people. In music, however, that is not the case: “because the musical idea is sheerly musical, there is no separation of form and content.”³⁶

This desired fusion of form and content is present in Schoenberg’s writings on twelve-tone music, but is most clearly seen in his attitude toward tonal music. Severine Neff remarks that “Schoenberg conceived of tonality itself as analogous to a centrally controlled organism, a *body* called monotony.”³⁷ Thus, although tonal music cannot be assumed to be equivalent to tonality, the body of a musical work is conceived in a way in which it is an organism centering around a tonal centre. It is not entirely made up of tonality, but at the same time it is at one with tonality.

In extending this toward the twelve-tone method, we may turn toward J. Peter Burkholder’s statement: “Schoenberg has created with his twelve-tone tools a plastic, living, newly grown form that shows the same organic relationship of form and material as in the music of those for

³⁴ Patricia Carpenter, “Musical Form and Musical Idea: Reflections on a Theme of Schoenberg, Hanslick, and Kant,” in *Music and Civilization: Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang*, ed. Edmond Strainchamps and Maria Rika Maniates (New York: Norton, 1984), 394-427

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 396.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Severine Neff, “Development and Homophonic Music,” in *Schoenberg and his World*, ed. Walter Frisch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 57.

whom the sonata principle was still a method or idea rather than a mold or pattern.”³⁸ In trying to present his musical ideas in a new form, Schoenberg is not trying to fit them into a stale model or mould, but is rather trying to do the reverse: to express the particular musical idea that has come to him in a particular form.

In order to understand the connectedness between form and content in music as Schoenberg saw it, it is important to distinguish between “form” and “style.” Both are material representations of a musical concept. All the while, they differ in the way in which they relate to that concept. A style, as was discussed in previous chapters, is a temporary tool, a surface-level way of representing an idea. A form, on the other hand, is the manner in which an idea is rendered comprehensible, in which the piece is made to function like an organism. While appearing at the surface of the piece, it is tied to the idea in such a way in that it is inseparable from it. Both form and style are surface. However, form is a type of surface which is connected to the inner like a skin, while style is ornamental, like a varnish.

As a varnish, style becomes ornamental. Schoenberg’s rejection of ornamentation, discussed in the previous chapter, does not allow him to place importance on that varnish. Form, on the other hand, is far from ornamental. It is distinguished from style in that it helps give comprehensibility to a musical idea. In fact, Schoenberg uses much of the same language to discuss form and musical idea. In “Composition with Twelve Tones” he speaks of “a subconsciously functioning *sense of form* which [gives] a real composer an almost somnambulistic sense of security in creating, with utmost precision the most delicate distinctions of formal elements.”³⁹ He concedes that most composers often seek ways of consciously controlling the musical material and look for logic and rules in their music. All the while, it

³⁸ J. Peter Burkholder, “Schoenberg the Reactionary,” in *Schoenberg and his World*, 185.

³⁹ Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones (I),” 218.

seems as if he is talking about a process through which one captures lightning in a bottle. The form and the logic of the piece exists in the universe, just like the musical idea does and it is the composer's role to look for it and to channel it.

The connectedness of form and idea is certain: one cannot exist without the other. Without form, an idea resides solely in the artist's imagination and thus is not fully realized and justified. Similarly, without an idea, form will perish. Neff and Carpenter have remarked that to Schoenberg "[a musical work] is worthless – a homunculus or a robot – unless it points itself to something immaterial, to a 'comprehensible message,' an idea."⁴⁰

In the latter impossibility lies the issue that Schoenberg seems to be taking with Hill's reading of his works. Hill is reading music as "a homunculus" and identifying Schoenberg's works with a system, the material, all the while ignoring the immaterial to which that music points. This, to Schoenberg, is the problem with theoretical understandings of music – they look for only part of what is present in a musical work. They see form as equivalent to the musical work and at the same time underestimate its importance by apprehending it as general and oftentimes prescriptive. In the manuscript to *The Musical Idea* he admonishes theorists for the way they see musical form:

Theorists see in existent forms something given, whereas in reality something so resistant as a given...which one can grasp complete and in itself, never has been or will be given [in music]. Rather, musical form is something coming-into-being [*Entstehendes*]...at every time newly coming into being, and never except in the finished artwork itself something at hand, that can be transmitted and further utilized.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff, commentary to *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, by Arnold Schoenberg ed. and trans. and with commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 22.

⁴¹ Text to an unpublished manuscript for *Die Musikalische Gedanke*. Appears in Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, ed. and trans. and with commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 305-306 in original German. A translation of this passage is found in the commentary of the same volume on page 45.

It seems that this is the crux of the matter with Hill. He is taking the rows and the manner in which they are manipulated as a given, as a generality rather than looking at every piece as unique. Therefore, he is identifying both the form of a work and the style or method it is composed in with the work itself. Schoenberg's very different outlook on form, idea and their links is therefore the cause of his rebuttal against Hill.

Schoenberg's "System": the Musical Idea and the Universal

Despite his resistance towards Hill's first identity – the equivalence between music and the method that is used to compose it – Schoenberg is to a certain degree in agreement with Hill on the second identity – that between new music and music of the past, particularly tonal music. It could be said that, for Schoenberg, the evolution of music constitutes a system, one governed by immutable musical ideas that are made manifest in concrete and individual instances of musical style.

This is seen in his concept of the musical idea, as something eternal, present in any period of time. Murray Dineen has characterized Schoenberg's musical idea as "immutable, eternal in a Platonic sense and not susceptible to 'changes in historical forms' or historical variation."⁴²

Although he strove to create something new, Schoenberg saw the concept of the new as also being eternal:

There is no great work of art which does not convey a new message to humanity; there is no great artist who fails in this respect. This is the code of honour of all the great in art and consequently in all great works of the great we will find that newness which never perishes, whether it be of Josquin des Prés, of Bach, or Haydn, or of any other great master.⁴³

⁴² Dineen, "Adorno and Schoenberg's Unanswered Question," 415.

⁴³ Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea," 114-115.

In his view of history repeating itself, Schoenberg espouses much of the same view as Hill does when he compares the evolution of the dodecaphonic model to that of tonality. Through the concept of the musical idea, he creates an identity between all musical compositions. Although they are all particular in their own ways, they are also all expressions of musical ideas and all have a similar goal: to express those musical ideas as clearly as possible.

This is surely a kind of temporal system. Music evolves into individual forms and instances. But all the while it serves the same immutable goal – to “convey a new message to humanity.” The notion of system, however, is not confined in Schoenberg’s thought to a merely temporal dimension. Instead it extends to cover aesthetics.

Such clear expressions of musical ideas are at the centre of the utmost importance to Schoenberg who equates the relaxation one feels at understanding a piece of music and at following its main and subordinate ideas to “a feeling of beauty.”⁴⁴ Patricia Carpenter has linked the relaxation one feels at being able to follow a musical idea in Schoenberg to the notion of cognitive harmony and pleasure derived from beauty in Kant. Therefore, form as the material representation of idea can be linked to logic, while the idea itself can be linked to the sensations of pleasure or pain.

It is in Kant that we find the roots of Schoenberg’s view on universality in music. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant equates judgments of taste, such as we make while listening to music, to disinterested judgments. That is to say that aesthetic judgments are divorced from material life and therefore, although the object may please us, our appreciation thereof is universal. In order to understand a musical work, we pretend that our aesthetic judgment thereof is objective through form. Form is objective, while content is subjective. As Carpenter explains

⁴⁴ Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones (I),” 215.

“Beauty is not that which gratifies in sensation but that which pleases by means of its form alone.”⁴⁵

Form is therefore the means through which concepts are transported to the listener. “A natural beauty is a *beautiful thing*; artificial beauty is a *beautiful representation* of a thing.”⁴⁶ Music is not necessarily representative of a physical object as other arts are, but is representative of an *idea*. When one perceives nature, according to Kant, one can appreciate it on its own – its very form calls forward in the subject a positive feeling. When one perceives an artwork, however, “there must be at bottom in the first instance a concept of what the thing is to be.”⁴⁷ Form is not sufficient. It must refer to something else, a concept, an idea.

This referential aspect of aesthetic experience is systematic, and herein lies the link to Schoenberg’s systematic thought. Much as individual instances of music must be linked to a system of evolving music through time, so too Kantian beauty – artificial beauty – is representative of and thus must be linked to a system of the idea. As I said above, “form is therefore the means through which concepts are transported to the listener.” These concepts, however, are not unorganized; they form a system to which Kant applies his critique.

Adorno on Systems

Adorno’s concern for the particular and for fluidity in thought causes him to be critical of systems, both Schoenbergian and Kantian. In *Minima Moralia* he writes “the whole is the false”⁴⁸ as an inversion of Hegel’s “the whole is the true.”⁴⁹ Wholeness creates an illusion and is

⁴⁵ Carpenter, “Musical Form and Musical Idea,” 404.

⁴⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. John Henry Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), 48/115.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 50.

⁴⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11.

the product of ideology. It equates a thing with its organization and therefore subsumes it under a schema. Adorno therefore identifies systems as closed, restrictive and general: All in all, a tool for identifying thought. Brian O'Connor discusses Adorno's opposition to systems: "A system imposes an identity upon its parts. It turns individuals into moments of itself."⁵⁰ If we view music as systematic we state that it is no more than the sum of its parts and thereby fetishize it.

Adorno differentiates the terms "system" and "organism." In an organism, individual parts function on their own, with their own purposes. A greater whole is achieved, but that is only a by-product, something like the "unintentional truth" of artworks discussed by Dineen.⁵¹ Conversely, in a system, truth and order are prescribed. O'Connor clarifies: "A system, Adorno argues, actually divides individuals from each other. It divides them even as it pushes them into a common behaviour."⁵²

Adorno's critique of systems extends to cover a grand classification in Kant, between "so-called *positive* sections of the *Critique of Pure Reason*" and the "negative side."⁵³ Referring to the part of the *Critique* that concludes with the "System of all Principles," he says this part "is in fact nothing other than the systematic arrangement of the synthetic *a priori* judgements ... in short, the categories."⁵⁴ And then he turns to the negative: "In contrast to all this the Second Division, that is, the Transcendental Dialectic, is the negative side. It is the part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that concerns itself with the contradictions in which reason necessarily becomes entangled."⁵⁵ Although he later disavows the simplicity of the division, it lies at the heart of his

⁵⁰ Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2004), 36.

⁵¹ Murray Dineen, *Friendly Reminders: Essays in Music Criticism after Adorno* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 19.

⁵² O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic*, 37.

⁵³ Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 35-36.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Kant critique. Systems attempt to eliminate contradiction. Adorno critique is aimed at the postulate of identity thinking – that thought might eliminate contradiction – which is implicit in system, be it metaphysical or musical. To understand this fully in terms of Adorno’s Schoenberg critique, we must conclude this chapter with a discussion of comprehensibility and temporality.

Comprehensibility and Temporality

If pleasure in music is to be derived from being able to follow the musical idea’s course, it is not surprising that Schoenberg places comprehensibility (as well as coherence) as paramount in his theory. He defines comprehensibility as the ability to answer the question “What is this doing here?”⁵⁶ The comprehensibility of a musical work is therefore a responsibility the composer has toward the listener and the music itself. Patricia Carpenter aptly defines this relation between form, idea, and coherence: “For Schoenberg the musical idea is central to the being of the musical work and the ground for its coherence: the composer envisions and materializes the idea; the listener apprehends it. Musical form articulates it.”⁵⁷

In the *Gedanke* manuscripts are found a number of writings on comprehensibility. Of particular interest here are the notes titled “Laws of Comprehensibility.”⁵⁸ Therein, Schoenberg discusses concerns for comprehensibility which stem out of the fact that music is a temporal process. As Carpenter and Neff remark in their commentary on the manuscripts, “a listener, unlike a reader or viewer of a painting cannot dwell on ideas and problems.”⁵⁹ Therefore, to Schoenberg, a composer’s role is to be as clear as possible, as to not obscure the construction of his musical idea. This is strongly tied up to the idea of temporality: “Understanding is based on

⁵⁶ Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, ed. and trans. and with commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 112.

⁵⁷ Carpenter, “Musical Form and Musical Idea,” 394.

⁵⁸ Schoenberg, “Laws of Comprehensibility,” in *The Musical Idea*, 111-117.

⁵⁹ Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff, commentary to *The Musical Idea* by Arnold Schoenberg, 22.

remembering,” states Schoenberg.⁶⁰ The more often repeated ideas emerge as more important as they are better remembered by the listener. Thus, comprehensibility is indelibly linked to time and to quantity. Michael Cherlin says that “at the end, the Schoenbergian *Grundgestalt* is a cipher – a mysterious encoding of contraries and unity which can be revealed only through the work’s unfolding in time.”⁶¹ Therefore, unity and form become a comment on temporality.

Time

This connection between comprehensibility and time is at the heart of Schoenberg Adorno’s disagreement over Hill’s second identity. In order to discuss this disagreement, we must first consider Adorno and Schoenberg’s differing understanding of the category of time, by way of Kant.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant identifies time, along with space, as an a priori condition.⁶² Although, or rather, because it an inseparable part of human experience, it is not learned or proved through experience, it just *is*. No statement made by the mind will prove the existence of time because any such statement will be a tautology. That would be using a tool to prove the tool itself: a logical conflict of interest. For instance, although we may think that coexistence or succession are experiences that prove time (thus making it a posteriori), they are in fact experiences that are *dependent* on time. Therefore the mind is trying to prove that time exists with something that exists because of it, creating a sort of circular logic.

Kant additionally holds that time lies “at the foundation of all our intuitions”: i.e. we cannot conceive any phenomena without it.⁶³ Conversely, time would exist even if it had no phenomena

⁶⁰ Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea*, 110.

⁶¹ Michael Cherlin, *Schoenberg’s Musical Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60.

⁶² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London : Macmillan, 1968), 28.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

to act on: it is at the basis of existence. Time's infinity is what makes it so basic and therefore a priori. That is not to say that time is some sort of thing-in-itself which happens to be reachable to the mind. To Kant, time and the mind are almost synonymous. It is the mind that structures experiences consequently and thus creates time. Therefore, time is a priori, but it is also subjective.

This view of time is a symptom of Kant's idealism: If time is subjective or epistemological, it follows that it will not act on the thing-in-itself. Time exists only in the mind, while the thing-in-itself exists outside of it and therefore is eternal and unchanging.

In his lectures on Kant, Adorno demonstrates that to him these assertions are flawed.⁶⁴ Kant's definition presupposes that time cannot be defined in terms outside itself, that any statement about it is a tautology. However, Kant also ultimately places the following distinction between space and time – space is “outer” to the being and time is “inner.” This ability of the concept of time to be reduced to a simpler concept suggests to Adorno that judgments about time can indeed be made.

Adorno also challenges Kant's claim that time cannot be learned by experience. He gives the example of a child who, at birth, has only the most basic concept of time. As the child ages, he or she learns the skill of abstraction and is able to better differentiate the passage of time (as well as differentiating objects in space). Therefore, experience has taught the child that time exists.

Finally, Adorno takes to task Kant's proposition that one can imagine time without the existence of any phenomena for it to act on, that time is so basic that it is just in the mind and

⁶⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge UK: Polity, 2002), 223.

does not need an outer world to act on. To Adorno, the mind cannot imagine time without giving it something to act on, i.e. without something to act on time is reduced to nothingness.⁶⁵

Adorno's view is informed by Hegel's ontological view of time. In Hegel time is not only real: it plays a part in the manner in which the mind relates things – things as the mind perceives them and things-in-themselves. The mind starts by only knowing the phenomenological representation of a thing, as in Kant. However, through time, the mind can get closer and closer to the true essence of that thing. To Hegel, time could theoretically cease existing, but it would only do so at the end of knowledge: "Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not grasped its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled Time."⁶⁶ Because things and concepts will always relate to each other in a dialectical fashion and have constant effects on each other, the end of knowledge will not be reached and time will not be annulled. Therefore, as in Kant, mind and time are strongly linked. The difference here lies in the effect that time has on ideas – it is changing, whereas Kant's philosophy suggests it is static.

Let us return to the presupposition that music might act as a slight analogy for the human mind as seen in Kant. Taking that, and an a priori aspect of time, time is then a priori to a musical piece; each piece of music has its own conception of time and plays with it accordingly. All the while, in music, time exists in a two-fold manner – in the short-term in which the music unfolds, but also in the long-term historical progression of music. This, in turn, colours Adorno and Schoenberg's ideas about time.

⁶⁵ Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 224-228

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 478.

Adorno on Musical Time: *Dialectical Time*

Adorno's writings do not often explicitly address musical time in and of itself. In his *Philosophy of New Music* he devotes no full section to that subject. However, time does not escape his discussions. Rather, it weaves itself throughout the tome and is never far from what Adorno is discussing, especially when he is speaking about musical structure.

Adorno broaches time in a particularly interesting fashion early in *Philosophy of New Music*, in the section titled "Total Development." He discusses the peculiar problems that the twelve-tone method creates when it comes to developing musical material. In a tonal work, particularly one of the classical period, a theme is presented and deconstructed through developing variations throughout the piece. This is in a way also true of a twelve-tone work. However, because in a fully dodecaphonic work everything is based on the original row, a sort of perpetual variation is created.

To Adorno, this creates the following paradox: if everything in a piece of music is varied, it is all the same, and thus, in that way, there is no variation. Let us call this *dialectical time*: one set of attributes of time (the twelve-tone work of music is being varied *through* time) are contradicted by another set of attributes (the twelve-tone work of music depends upon a twelve-tone system that is *independent* of time). The two are incommensurable – they cannot coexist in one and the same instance – and thus produce dialectically a third, critical attribute – that the twelve-tone system and its application in composition is philosophically problematic. This, let us say, is the essence of Adorno's Schoenberg critique from which he draws the conclusion that Schoenberg is naïve – not philosophically in full understanding of what he is doing, although he succeeds nonetheless.

Conversely, Schoenberg holds that in a dodecaphonic work, the row exists “only in relation to the possibility of the whole.”⁶⁷ This presumes a direct relation with the atemporal row and its forms. At the same time, however, because of constant variation, music’s relationship to time has changed – the transformations that time exerts on music make it a part of time. This conundrum leads to something new: a new critical perspective. As Adorno puts it, “by virtue of this non-identity of identity, music achieves an absolutely new relationship to the time within which each work transpires.” Let us say that for Adorno, this critical perspective implies the transformation of time. For Adorno, music that is varied through time “is no longer indifferent to time, for in time it is no longer arbitrarily repeated; rather, it is transformed.”⁶⁸

The possibility of something being “indifferent to time” suggests a Kantian thing-in-itself, the only “thing” unaltered by time. In Hegel’s conception, time is present only as long as there is a transformation of ideas going on. In considering Schoenberg’s twelve-tone work in relation to the twelve-tone system, Adorno is suggesting that music (or thought itself) which is not transformed in time is ‘indifferent’ to it. In essence, time is essential to the experience of the mind, but tautological thought, temporal recursion in particular, does not properly function in the mind. It leads to identity thinking.

For Adorno, music needs to exist not only in so called ‘real time,’ but also in a dialectical sort of time: it needs to call for the constant transformation of ideas. Reconfiguring the Kantian “thing in itself” so as to avoid any association with an immutable atemporal system, Adorno suggests that “music is only able to ward off the empty dominion of time as long as development is not total, only as long as something not all together subjected to development, a – Kantian as it

⁶⁷ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 46.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 47

were – musical thing-in-itself, is given a priori.”⁶⁹ This is where the twelve-tone method falls into a trap: it has created a system in which nothing exists a priori, although it creates the illusion that there is such a thing.

This appears to stem from the idea of unity with which Schoenberg was greatly concerned, evident in the very title he gave his dodecaphonic model, “Method of Composing with Twelve Tones, which are only Related with One Another”: the tones are related to one another within the piece, but only to each other. The piece exists solely in its own universe.⁷⁰ Therefore, there is no overarching structure, which is given a priori. The piece is, in a way, only ‘provable’ by experience. Without an a priori to govern the piece, it loses its dialectical connections. This brings back Adorno’s assertion that if everything is varied, nothing is: by not leaving anything untransformed, not giving anything a priori, the musical work is unable to participate in dialectical time and therefore in the transformation of ideas. This kind of musical work is in essence uncritical.

Conclusion

Schoenberg’s writings pick up on this idea of twofold time but eventually invalidate the distinction by prioritizing the notion of idea. This can be seen in his conception of musical idea (as opposed to style, noted above): *Idee*, *Gedanke*, and *Einfall*. The *Idee*, being a philosophic idea passed down in a quasi-deistic manner, is a timeless concept. *Einfall*, or inspiration, is similarly timeless. The *Gedanke*, a concrete thought, can be somewhat bound to time.

Schoenberg thinks that the idea is something eternal instead of something transformed in time. In an unpublished *Gedanke* manuscript he writes “the idea can wait since it has no time.”

⁶⁹ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

To Schoenberg, the idea exists outside time: Time exists, as if in Kant, only in the mind, and the idea is something God-given and passed between genius minds.⁷¹ The case is still such that no mind can conceive of the idea without time and time is still given a priori. However, time is subjective and the idea is something ‘absolute’, a sort of ‘thing in itself’.

The notion of dialectical time does exist to a certain extent in Schoenberg’s thought in the opposition between style and idea. However, Schoenberg sees style as subservient of idea instead of two things which are constantly interacting with each other dialectically.

The organizational structure of a work of music relies, of course, not only on its temporal connections, but also on its compositional method. Tonal music allowed the sort of linear progression needed to compose a sonata form. Therefore, tonal works can be said in their form to function in real time. On the other hand, the twelve-tone method produced no forms of its own. Instead, in Adorno’s critique, Schoenberg was forced to return to the extant and anachronistic forms of classical music, as we noted above. Adorno posits: “That it has in no way achieved major forms unique to itself is the immanent but hardly accidental revenge of the forgotten critical phase.”⁷² So, having no forms of its own, twelve-tone works often revert to using ‘pre-critical’ forms. All the while, the way in which Adorno sees musical analysis reveals reasons for his interest in this music despite its lack of own forms.

To Adorno, any musical analysis should be trying to get some sort of inner truth that the work expresses. He labels that music’s “truth content” [*Wahrheitsgestalt*]: “what decides whether the

⁷¹ Text to an unpublished manuscript for *Die Musikalische Gedanke*. Appears in Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, ed. and trans. and with commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 303 in original German. A translation of this passage is found in the commentary of the same volume on page 16.

⁷²Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 76.

work in itself is true or false.”⁷³ This may seem like a rather cut and dry concept for Adorno, who always eludes absolutes. After all, how can it be said that a work is either entirely true or entirely false or that some aspect of a work makes it entirely true or entirely false? Here, however, Adorno also escapes absolutes by speaking of a *negative* truth. Max Paddison states: “For Adorno, the ‘truth’ of art appear to lie in this ‘bringing to speech’ of nature – a nature, however, which is itself the projection of that which has been repressed and rejected by society.”⁷⁴ Therefore, the truth expressed is not a universal, but is rather an expression of the struggles of society. In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno states:

If art were to free itself from the once perceived illusion of duration, were to internalize its own transience in sympathy with the ephemeral life, it would approximate an idea of truth conceived not as something abstractly enduring but in consciousness of its temporal essence.⁷⁵

Truth, thus, is not to be found in wholeness, but rather in contradiction: “The truth of modern society, for Adorno, was its falseness through and through.”⁷⁶ And this truth is created through time. Truth is created only in the negation of untruth. Murray Dineen identifies this as an *unintentional* truth, which is “produced as a remainder [spelling] after the intended truths are exhausted.”⁷⁷

This view of the truth content of works is at the basis of what Adorno sees as musical analysis. Max Paddison has sorted Adorno’s model of music in three ‘levels’: immanent analysis, sociological critique and philosophical-historical interpretation.

⁷³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. G. Adorno and R. Tiedemann, trans Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 130.

⁷⁴ Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 57.

⁷⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 36-37.

⁷⁶ Richard Leppert, commentary to *Essays on Music*, by Theodor Adorno, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et. al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), 32.

⁷⁷ Dineen, *Friendly Reminders*, 19.

Immanent analysis deals with the technical structure of the work, its inner consistency [*Stimmigkeit*]. Just stating the way a piece is put together, however, does not make for truthful immanent analysis; a technical analysis proceeding to the details is requisite. In *Philosophy of New Music* Adorno states: “Technical analysis is at every point presupposed and often presented but it requires in addition the interpretation of the most minute detail if it is to go beyond the characteristic cultural inventorying of the humanities and express the relation of the object to truth.”⁷⁸

It should be noted here that such a technical analysis deals with the particular. In agreement with Schoenberg in his critique of Hill, the analysis of the twelve-tone work should consider the particular at the expense of the system. Such a technical analysis, it follows, is particular to the work, not in least because of its divorcing from society. In this regard it could be said to be a positive analysis, perhaps even an identity analysis that focuses on the work as a thing in its own right.

Sociological critique of music, on the other hand, deals with the way in which society inserts itself in works of art. Works of art contain elements of society, principally the modes of expression or conception current in a particular society, let us say a bourgeois society in Adorno and Schoenberg’s time. Here, negative aspects emerge: the composer is not always aware of these social elements, and thus thinks he is composing without reference to society. This type of analysis explores the contradictions of autonomous music to social reality.⁷⁹ It is critical; that is to say, it tries to frame what appears as natural, as unframed. Adorno’s critique of Schoenberg’s twelve-tone compositions operates on this level, where he accuses the composer of naivety and shows how the twelve-tone works are contradictory in nature.

⁷⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 24.

⁷⁹ Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, 61.

Finally, *philosophical-historical interpretation* explores the conflicts “between individual and social totality, and between Subject and Object”⁸⁰ Moreover, as it relates to the historicity of an artwork, it involves the philosophy of music history. Thus for Adorno, Schoenberg’s music is a useful vehicle for understanding identity thinking in music. Adorno does not reject it per se, but rather values it and its composer as a means of understanding philosophically music history and indeed history in general.

This social notion of a system is extended to philosophical systems by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁸¹ In the falsifying of enlightenment, thought becomes relegated to systems. These systems are just as prescriptive and general as myths were in the past. Such systems negate the individual. “In advance, the Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity: its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows.”⁸² This fallacy in Enlightenment Adorno and Horkheimer hold, comes from art’s attempt to adhere to the tenets of positivist science:

Science, in its neopositivist interpretation, becomes aestheticism, a system of isolated signs devoid of any intention transcending the system; it becomes the game which mathematicians have long since proudly declared their activity to be. Meanwhile, art as integral replication has pledged itself to positivist science, even in its specific techniques.⁸³

Thus, Horkheimer and Adorno proclaim total systems as false, “isolated signs,” all the while echoing Schoenberg’s differentiation between art and science.⁸⁴

In conclusion, Adorno sees the claims to truth made by totalizing systems, whether as philosophical systems, political systems, or art works (such as Schoenberg’s twelve-tone works)

⁸⁰ Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, 62.

⁸¹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1991).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁴ Schoenberg, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Rows,” 214.

as ideological. And he does so through technical analysis. Thus Schoenberg's work is to be read not only like a philosophical text. It is to be read in properly musical terms – in terms of the traditional Classical forms employed to express and materialize the twelve-tone content. In expressing the twelve-tone form, they go well beyond the technical and even the sociological to express a philosophical-historical interpretation of Schoenberg as Adorno understands him.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 19.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have explored parallels between Adorno's reception of Kant and his criticisms of Schoenberg. I have discussed the manner in which both Schoenberg's concept of the musical idea and Adorno's negative dialectics bear a connection to Kant. I have also examined the identical/non-identical duality in both Schoenberg and Kant's thought. Throughout this study, this duality has enabled a discussion about the production and reception of ideas in society as seen by Adorno.

The production of ideas has received particular attention throughout this study, particularly when it comes to Schoenberg. Schoenberg's reception of Kant could be called bourgeois, in the sense that Adorno criticises throughout his lectures *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. The composer does not understand the non-identity inherent in Kant's "block," but rather focuses on the absolute and asocial in his theory. Thus, he comes to see himself as an unequivocal producer of ideas, in accord with Kant's theory of genius. His own abilities, according to Adorno, allow him to create fully revolutionary, non-identical works. And yet, in his approach to these works, one finds a naiveté which I have referenced throughout this study.

By way of conclusion, I would like to expand my discussion on the way of artistic ideas interact with society. To do so, I turn to two cases in which radical ideas have been received into society by being enshrined and stripped of their radical power. The first case comes directly out of Adorno's writings, particularly his essay "The Aging of the New Music," in which he discusses the way serialist music, once a symbol of modernism, became rationalized and

neutralized.¹ The second case concerns itself with art commissions by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Departing from the realm of music and from ideas explicitly discussed by Adorno, I seek to discuss more broadly what happens when radical ideas become depoliticized (paradoxically in this case, due to the involvement of the CIA) in their reception. This is, I think, the core of Adorno's criticism of both Kant and of Schoenberg: the fact that their ideas, while often radical in and of themselves, lent themselves too easily to misinterpretation and reversion to schemas, identity and bourgeois modes of thought.

Total Serialism

Adorno's concern for the "legacy" of Schoenberg's method is articulated with greatest clarity in his 1954 essay "The Aging of the New Music," wherein he takes to task "new music" for having become but a category of the culture industry. Listeners thus know what to expect of new music, while composers adhere to those expectations. Serial music has long stopped expressing the fractured nature of society or criticising the falseness of bourgeois art. On the contrary, it has become part of this false bourgeois art – a fetishized object. In this essay, Adorno rejects what Richard Leppert terms "the general disintegration of twelve-tone technique into a system, in effect, a menu for what counted as new music."²

According to Adorno, Schoenberg conceived his twelve-tone technique in order to overcome the gap between tonal and atonal music. His method, although not ideal, was necessary for its time. As a result his compositions are a working out of an antinomy between the old and the

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Aging of the New Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie, et. al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), 181-202.

² Richard Leppert, commentary to *Essays on Music*, by Theodor Adorno, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et. al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), 107.

new. However, when the traditional elements in Schoenberg were transposed to total serialism, Schoenberg's method has become misinterpreted:

Unfamiliar with the real accomplishments of the Schoenberg School and in possession only of the rules of twelve-tone composition, which have become apocryphal through separation from its accomplishments, these young people amuse themselves with the juggling of tone rows as a substitute for tonality, without really composing at all.³

Adorno admonishes total serialists who “blithely short-circuit the antinomy that he rightly tried to deal with.”⁴ They compose in an ahistorical manner – taking Schoenberg's method, in which he was trying to deal with the new and radical, and making it a way around creating new historically relevant forms that reflect the material of their music. This makes new music static. It is not “new” anymore as it is not engaging with society, but merely reverting to modes created by earlier composers (in this case Schoenberg).

Adorno identifies this even in Webern's late works where the rows are manipulated with mathematical perfection. This, according to him, betrays the material: all is manipulation and development instead of expression of content. In these works, and even more strongly in the works of total serialists like Boulez, Adorno sees the main goal as an over-rationalization of music. Their main goal is “to replace composition altogether with an objective-calculatory ordering of intervals, pitches, long and short duration, degrees of loudness.”⁵

The subject of music is therefore no longer free to be expressed. Adorno states: “The concept of progress loses its justification...when the subject, whose freedom is the precondition of all advanced art, is driven out.”⁶ Of equal concern is the fact that composers have prevented even

³ Theodor W. Adorno, “The Aging of the New Music,” 196.

⁴ Adorno, “The Aging of the New Music,” 187.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 196.

themselves from being free. Thus, Schoenberg's ideas, once radical rejections of the status quo in art, have become the status quo themselves.

CIA Art Commissions

This normalization of radical ideas, of course does not happen in a vacuum and is not effectuated solely by composers or artists blindly adopting earlier formulae, as Adorno considered in total serialism. The case of the 1987 art commissions by United States Central Intelligence Agency provides an interesting parallel to Adorno's concerns about the depoliticization of music.⁷

The commissions in question were for the CIA's new headquarters in Langley, Virginia, a complex which would become the workplace of thousands for whom the CIA set out to create "an aesthetically pleasing work environment."⁸ Aside from the concerns for misappropriation of public funds (the project was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts), this commission raised concerns about many about the redefinition and reappropriation of modernist art ideals into a government ideal. Not a new idea in the slightest, this use of new art for political purposes mirrors the CIA's earlier attempts to use abstract expressionist art as propaganda during the Cold War. These tactics have been detailed by Serge Guilbaut in his book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*. Guilbaut explains the neutralization of abstract art under the hands of the CIA and other government institutions: "abstract expressionism had become the American 'style' par excellence. In the process, of course, the art suffered tremendously – to the point where paintings by Mark Rothko lost their intended mystical quality to become colourful pieces of decoration in the modern home as shown in *Vogue*."⁹

⁷ This commission is discussed in detail in Elizabeth Hess, "Art of the State," *Village Voice* (February 16, 1988) 39-41.

⁸ *Ibid.* 39.

⁹ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 204.

The decorative aspect of art sought out by the CIA is seen in the very directive that was given to the panel responsible for selecting the winners of the competition:

This art should reflect life in all its positive aspects (e.g. truth, justice, courage, liberty, etc.). It should engender feelings of well being, hope, promise and such. It should not produce or reflect negative attitudes, political expressions, or feelings of futility. The art should respect the sensitivities against sexual, sexist, race, ethnic or other related slurs...It should be forceful in style and manner; and be breathtaking in its beauty.¹⁰

The contradictory nature of this commission – the demand for an art which expresses truth, while not reflecting negative attitudes, which is “forceful in style and manner,” while not expressing political ideas – reflects a reality anticipated by Adorno. This is what happens when art becomes formulaic and is pulled away from the societal truths that it is meant to express. Statements from panelists reflect further contradictions: One of the panelists, Jack Cowart stated that “Any artist who would feel uncomfortable, or [would feel] that this was politicising his work wasn’t desirable” to the committee.

The CIA commission reflects Merleau-Ponty’s concept of people, and by extension, ideas being “condemned to meaning” in society.¹¹ Even as abstract art is being depoliticized in this case, it remains political in a negative manner: the fact that this art is being misconstrued by a government agency affirms its political aspect.

Final Words

With the brief survey of these two cases, I have sought to elucidate Adorno’s theory of the way in which ideas interact with society. To Adorno, as a Marxist, the essence of any creation lies in its production. Thus, it is apt that he should criticise both Kant and Schoenberg for naively

¹⁰ Cited in Elizabeth Hess, “Art of the State,” 39.

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), xix.

creating ideas that lend themselves to formulization, to a mode of production that stifles all revolutionary potential. All the while, his criticism is not always necessarily of Kant or of Schoenberg, but of “what the structure of society denied to [them].”¹² The appropriation of revolutionary ideas in both the case of total serialism and in that of the CIA art commissions suggests that there is an aspect of self-fulfilling prophecy at work. These ideas are meant to walk the line between the identical and the non-identical, to be disagreeable to no one and thus agreeable to none.

¹² Adorno, “Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie, et. al. (Berkeley, California : University of California Press, 2002), 628.

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